

PoWi



Cave Hill
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Introduction

As we prepared this, the fifth edition of *Poui*, it became apparent that it has built up a loyal following amongst writers, both within the region and outside. The fact that there about four times as many submissions as we were able to use is a healthy state for a journal of creative writing. Poetry and fiction can only thrive where there's a community of writers and readers ready to experiment and to take risks. As a result, the issue represents, not just the 'best' of the submissions, but a wide range of the themes and styles, registers and voices. The writers, too, are a diverse lot, representing perspectives from Puerto Rico, Barbados, Bahamas, St. Vincent, Nigeria, the USA, Bermuda and Haiti, and sometimes more than one of these at a time. We are especially proud to welcome graduates of Cave Hill's creative writing workshop, both the degree courses and the summer workshop, and hope that more of you will come and participate in these. The summer workshop, in particular, started in 1998, has been very effective in bringing together writers from around the region, and providing a fruitful environment for dialogue and experimentation. The workshop leaders are well-known Caribbean writers, and have included Lorna Goodison, Grace Nichols and Kendal Hippolyte for poetry, and Olive Senior, Erna Brodber and Merle Collins for fiction. This year, we're pleased that the novelist Nalo Hopkinson (*Brown Girl in the Ring*, *Midnight Robber*) and the poet Mervyn Morris (*The Pond*, *On Holly Week*), have agreed to come and spend five weeks at Cave Hill in June/July 2004 to lead the workshops in fiction and poetry. We encourage you to take the opportunity to work with celebrated Caribbean writers such as these, and to write more work for future issues of *Poui*. Thank you for your support, and please help us be encouraging libraries, university departments and your friends and family to subscribe.

With best wishes,

Mark McWatt, Hazel Simmons-McDonald and Jane Bryce

The Editors, December 2003

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Loretta Collins: teaches Anglophone Caribbean studies and creative writing at the University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras. She edits the annual bilingual student creative writing journal *Tonguas*. Her poems have been widely published and anthologized, and she has also received numerous writing awards.

Katy-Eric Gash: a young Barbadian writer and currently Cultural Officer for Literary Arts with the National Cultural Foundation. Her short stories reflect the everyday experiences of Barbadians; over the past 5 years she has won several awards in national creative writing competitions.

Cecilee-Jayne Hilton: a young musician and poet from the Bahamas. She was first runner up in Miss Gospel Bahamas 1996, and has played saxophone with an acid-jazz/rock band in the UK. She is now finishing pre-law at the College of the Bahamas, and intends to pursue political journalism.

Philip Nanton: a Vincentian living in Barbados. His poetry has been published in a number of journals and Caribbean anthologies in Britain as well as *Poui*, and he has made radio programmes on aspects of Caribbean cultures for the BBC. He was guest editor of *Poui* 4.

Niyi Osundare: a Nigerian poet, playwright, essayists and scholar; author of numerous volumes of poetry and four plays; recipient of various prizes and awards, including the Commonwealth Poetry Prize and the Noma Award. A leading figure in the popularisation of written poem in Nigeria, he has also performed his poem elsewhere in Africa, and in Asia, Europe, Canada and the USA. In 2000, he came to Cave Hill as a Visiting Lecturer. Currently Professor of English, University of New Orleans, USA,

Nan Peacocke: Vincentian, born in Guyana, learned to speak, read and write in Trinidad, grew up in Jamaica, migrated to Canada, lived and worked in Barbados. She is currently studying in Canada.

Esther Phillips: Barbadian poet, whose work has appeared in publications including *Poui*, *Mangrove* (Miami), *Obsidian 111* (North Carolina), *Spillway* (California) and *The Whistling Bird: as Anthology of Caribbean Women Writers* (1998). Her latest work, a Collection of poems titled *When Ground Doves Fly*, was published by Ian Randle in 2003.

Debra Providence: born in St. Vincent, a Cave Hill student whose contributions were produced while she was doing the Poetry and Fiction creative writing

courses as part of her degree.

Maria Soledad Rodriguez: born in Puerto Rico, studied there and in the United States, and lived in the South Pacific. She teaches Caribbean and United States Literature at the Rio Piedras campus of the University of Puerto Rico.

Alan Smith: attended the writing workshop at the Cave Hill Campus in 1999. He is a Bermudian poet and he has been published in *In Our Own Words: A Generation Defining Itself*, *Under the Moon and Over The Sea: A Collection of Caribbean Poems*, *The Bermudian Magazine*, *The Bermuda Times* and *Umun Magazine*.

Obadiah Smith: Bahamian author and Fisk University drama graduate; has attended writers' workshops at UWI, Cave Hill and University of Miami. He has published 7 books of verse, a short novel and a recording of his poems. He now lives in New Providence where he conducts The Verse Place, a weekly poetry competition.

Katia Ulysses: is a graduate student at the College of Notre Dame in Maryland. Her work has appeared in *Peregrine MaComere*, *The Caribbean Writer*, *Calabash*, *Wadabagei*, and is anthologized in *The Butterfly's Way*, edited by Edwidge Danticat (Soho Press, 2000).

Niyi Osundare

FOR KAMAU BRATHWAITE ON HIS 60TH BIRTHDAY

Batakot ti koto ti koto ti koto
Bata koto to koto

Those who left
 have come
 have come

Those who left
 have re-
 turned

Their feet blue with Atlantic crossings
Voices red with sunsets of distant skies
On their lips Deep Songs

Rising Black and bold from the abyss
Of startled souls, from the tick-tock
Of nomadic epochs, sing-

Ing sand into sound, grief into grace
In their bags cowries of unspent tales
In their minds shadows of forgotten twilights

Deep-etched triangles, diaspora of (un)broken rings
The giant pod and its scattered seeds
And the dappled gathering at harvesttide

Whip to wand
Crysong to Laughsong
Memories longer than the sea's scurvy tail

Too Blues for its blue
Too long for its coral riffs
Too hard for its funereal jaws

Those who left
 have come

BIRD CATCHER

From my kitchen window
I watched the boys crouched low,
unmoving. Then a quick tug on a line
hidden in tall grass.

'Not one', I prayed, 'not one,
let them find honest work
and leave God's creatures alone.'

Till someone said,
'But what about those birds
in your poems?'
So ...I too...a Bird Catcher!

I caught a dove darkening the dawn
with her brooding,
grieving the loss of the cold ark.
I let her fly near the light
of the bright green lime tree,
the gleaming red hibiscus.
Now some days she leaves off
her mourning, and the song that she sings
from the healing olive tree
is her trilogy of peace.

Poor brown bird, making your way
over Lake Osceola,
for your dull feathers I gave you
bright metallic blue, and the sun,
taking no notice of you before,
startled itself into laughter:
how sudden your flight;
your sapphire streak on grey water!

I caught an egret flying westward
and it became a faithless heart,
(forgive me, winged creature!)
I watched it falter, beating only empty air.
I knew the egret's wings would fold at last
and rest the weary bird.
Rising again, he'd find his sure way homeward.

A cry broke free from a spectrum
of colour at sunset;
I shaped it to a memory of love.
It was the high-soaring seagull.
I gave my love to the flight of the bird,
the call of the air.
It would return a purer love some day.

These birds within my poems, friend,
that fly unhindered by my pen,
They're destined never to be trapped,
shot from the sky,
plundered for easy merchandise.

My lines I soften to the sibilance
of wind-song,
my metaphors too tenuous
to entangle wing-flight;
these hands allure with images,
imbue with tint of immortality...

If only in my cage of fantasy
you're caught, Dear Birds, you're free.

NIGHT CRICKET AT CARLTON CLUB, BARBADOS

The lines of silent vehicles suggest Sunday mornings with their owners all in church. The cars string themselves along the road. They poke their bonnets out of side streets and stand in unused driveways. They take up most of the pavement, tracing a path to the cricket ground; they make pedestrians walk in the road.

The route to the ground is up a side street. At the end of the street a wall begins. It is topped with razor wire; where there are holes in the wall they are patched with galvanized sheeting. From a distance you can hear the gathered crowd. They clap, sigh and intone in unison. You join a line and follow the wall. The queue of people, heads bowed from the sudden bright light of the one entrance, shuffle forward, constantly passing into the ground. At first the way in seems to be through a small hut but it turns out to be an alcove open at both ends. In the middle a man and a woman sit collecting money, filling a big biscuit tin. Heavies stand around in fluorescent waist-coats, proud to serve a good cause.

At the end of the hut, just before you join the throng, another server, more committed, intones, 'Only two dollars, get one now'. But he is really a soft spoken muezzin declaring, 'Come to cricket. Cricket is great.' On a table in front of him are large cardboard boxes full of programmes. Most people pay their two dollars and buy one. The programmes are left over from three years ago. No matter. In the middle is a folded sheet,

the night's order of service, the list of teams, from Walsh to Browne and Browne to Williams, Past and Present West Indies v Barbados, Under the Patronage of the Prime Minister (there in spirit). Attractive Door Prizes to be Won. The Children of Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean Thank You.

The stand is brightly lit and full. Adults sit in pews, lie in the dark outfield, or move around the bar greeting friends, buying drinks - 'you want what?' ... 'don't spill that' ... 'its precious' ... 'take this' ... Children spread themselves around the edge of the ground twitching restlessly; like cherubim everywhere always in flight. If they get too excited or encroach beyond an imaginary line, adults admonish them and they move back, reluctantly. After each over there is music, old scores blast out to feed the faithful. In the light, moths trace patterns in the sky against the black background of the night. Most eyes face forward. Ahead of them they see a bright green pitch glowing like a promised land.

In the middle of the park bats are twirled; leather hits wood; runs, like souls, are sometimes saved. People erupt from their seats, shout, sit down, mutter. Glove knocks glove. Generators whirr. Eventually, rain stops play. Refreshed, the congregation, some a little more upright than others, head for home. Forever and ever. Amen.

THE MISTRESS TO HER RESTAVÈK *

If I put you in school,
Marie-Therese said to her restavèk,
one day you'll know more than I do
you'll bring books
into this house and
read, read, read
when you should be cleaning
cooking, and fixing my children's things

If I take you to that schoolhouse today
tomorrow morning you'll think
you're better than I am,
better than my children
better than your own Manman
who left you with me

Now, quit talking about school
and wanting to write things down
go where I tell you
do what I say do, or else
I'll grind a *habanero* in your crotch
teach you a lesson so good
you'll pass all your classes
one after another

Wa pasé sèrtifika, reto, ak filo
Yonn dèyè lòt

** from 'reste-avec,' the phenomenon of forced domestic labour
by children in Haiti, which prevents them from going to school*