POEi

Cave Hill Literary Annual

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Editorial Preface

Welcome to this, the seventh edition of *Poui*. As always, it has attracted contributors from around the region and further afield, twentyfour in all, either resident in or originating from Barbados. Puerto Rico, the Bahamas, Antigua, St Vincent, Bermuda, the U K, the US and Canada. Three of these hate done creative writing courses as undergraduates, at Case Hill, and three have attended summer creative writing workshops there. The editors wouldn't have known this during the selection process, however, as it's done blind and we only, find out afterwards who the writers are.

As a literary journal, part of Poui's role will always be the celebration of creativity for its own sake, but diversity of expression is its life-blood. This year we especially welcome verbal wit and gentle satire, the asking of 'd ifficult' questions and writing that looks at the world with an 'askance'. Can you be a Rasta if you like Country music? Can you be an African if you're white'? Can you belong if you're an immigrant'? When will the black man realize that 'no-one cares/that his thing, is bigger theirs'?

The tension between celebration and the darker side of the human psyche is nowhere more apparent than in file many contributions which deal with love. A poet recalls his sweetheart confessing. "I slept with the rain" and ponders his own guilty love for the river; another worships the 'sea-fashioning' of his love, like 'a mother seal with blubber', while a prose writer laments the intrusion of the baby which has come 'between the two of us'. A young blind man questions whether he can be 'normal' enough to fall in love, married woman mourns her female lover's departure, a predatory male goes on the prowl for 'spots' and meet his match in his own daughter, and child watches her mother having an affair as she plays in the river.

Themes of blindness, breakdown and destitution alternate with lyrical invocation to the orishas, hymns of praise for the survival of disasters—the flooding in Gonaives, hurricanes, Frances, and Ivan—songs of love to the sea, and stories of migration, revealing the invisible efforts of second generation immigrants to protect their parents from the realisation that their dreams are founded on illusion and the sacrifice of their children. There's also humour, summed up in the Rasta who, in place of ingratiating smile, terrorizes the hapless tourist by shouting 'I am the original black dog!' and sends him scuttling back to his bus.

The *Poui 7* writers offer us glimpses of secret lives, hidden feelings and forbidden desires, reminding us that we can't take anything for granted and hinting that there's more out there to be explored. Looking forward to *Poui 8*?

From the editors.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Jane Bryce: was born and brought up in Tanzania.She lectures at Cave Hill in African literature, film and creative writing. A short story collection, *Chameleon,* and an edited anthology, *Caribbean Dispatches*, are both forthcoming in 2006.

Dee Horne: writes fiction and poetry and lives in Prince George, British Columbia. She is Associate Professor in English at the University of Northern British Columbia. She has co-authored *Images of First Nations in Books Children Read* and written *Contemporary American Indian Literature: Unsettling Literature,* articles, interviews and book reviews.

Deanne Kennedy: is a Barbadian who loves working with children and currently does storytelling at the public library, where she uses many of her original stories and songs to encourage young ones to read and write. Since her schooldays she has won many NIFCA awards in Literary, Visual and Culinary Arts and was an awardee in the inaugural Frank Collymore Endowment Competition.

Loretta Collins Klobah: 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 anthologised, and she has also received numerous writing awards.

Reuel Ben Lewi: a poet living in Guyana, South America.

Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming: was born in Trinidad in 1960, and now lives in Nassau, the Bahamas where she is a practising mechanical/building services engineer. A poet, fiction and creative non-fiction writer and essayist, her poetry and stories have appeared in numerous publications in the Caribbean, USA and Europe. She has won poetry, essay and art awards in the Bahamas, the David Hough Literary Prize from *The Caribbean Writer* (2001) and the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association short story competition in 2001. Her first book of poetry, *Curry Flavour,* was published in 2000.

Renuka Maraj: was born in Trinidad in 1972 and now resides in Canada. She was educated at St. Augustine Girls' School and at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

Mark McWatt: was born in Guyana and is currently Professor of West Indian Literature at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, where he teaches literature and creative writing. He has two published collections of poetry: *Interiors* (1989) and *The Language of Eldorado* (1994). His collection of short stories, *Suspended Sentences* won the Casa de Las Americas Award and the Commonwealth Prize for Best First Book in Canada and the Caribbean in 2006.

Hazra C. Medica: a 22 year old national of Antigua and Barbuda, currently in her final year at Cave Hill. She has been a reporter with the*Antigua Sun,* and has published prose and poetry pieces in the Antiguan press and in the soon to be published *Independence Journal*.

Philip Nanton: is a Vincentian who now lives in Barbados. His poetry has been published in a number of journals and Caribbean anthologies in Britain, and he has made radio programmes on aspects of Caribbean culture for the BBC. His edited work on Barbadian poet Frank Collymore, *Remmbering the Sea*, was published in 2004. He is a contributor to Caribbean Dispatches (forthcoming with Macmillan).

Elly Niland: was born in Guyana and lives in England. Her first collection of poetry *In Retrospect* (2002) and her second collection *Cornerstones* (2005) were published by Dido Press. She was runner up for the Guyana Prize for Literature 2004. Elly's adaptation of the novel *No Pain Like This Body* was broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in March 2003, while a short story, 'The Fog', was broadcast on BBC 4 in 2005. A collection of short stories and a third poetry collection, sponsored by the Arts Council, will be published in 2006.

Uzoma Ogbonna is a 22 year old writer and painter in downtown Toronto. Her alter ego is a fourth year undergraduate student at University of Toronto where she is currently completing a double major in English, Ethics, Society and Law. Uzoma has written numerous short stories and poetry and is writing a novel.

Jina Ortiz: was born and raised in Harlem, New York City and now lives in Worcester, MA. She has been previously published in *Sahara* and *Afro-Hispanic Review* and is forthcoming in *Calabash* and *New Millennium Writings*. During spring 2005, she was a fellow in residence at the Virginia Center for the Creative Arts.

Sergio Ortiz: a retired English teacher living in San Juan, Puerto Rico, who has made the writing of poetry his fulltime job. He has published his poetry in *El Nuevo Dia* and *Claridas* and through the Centro de Estudios Poeticos in Madrid, Spain. His first book of poetry will be published in 2007. He has traveled extensively throughout Latin America and has lived in Mexico for ten years.

Robert Schmid: received a BA in Literature, with emphasis on creative writing, from the University of California at Santa Cruz in 2001. While at UCSC his focus was on Caribbean writing and he received a President's Grant to conduct research in Jamaica, where he has also lived in the past. He was on exchange at Cave Hill in 2003-2004.

Sandra Sealy is a Barbadian writer of fiction, poetry and drama, with work published in the region and beyond. Her poem, *Beauty Of The Bald Head*, written in 1998, moved from page to stage in 2005, via a CD single, to an award-winning music video. Her first volume of poetry, *Chronicles Of A Sea Woman*, is to be self-published in 2006.

Obediah Smith: Bahamian author and Fish University drama graduate; has attended writers' workshops at UWI, Cave Hill and University of Miami. He has published ten 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.

D.J. Smith Silva: is a doctoral student and professor of English at the University of Puerto Rico. Her work has recently appeared in *La Torre, Tonguas, The Encyclopedia of the African Diaspora,* and *The Encyclopedia of Ethnic American Literature.*

Dick Anthony Stoute was born in Guyana and has lived in St. Kitts, Barbados and Canada. He published *The Fear Factor* in 2000 and has several NIFCA Silver, Bronze and special awards for short stories. He also writes a column in the *Sunday Advocate*.

Katia Ulysse's: work has appeared in *Poui IV* and *V, The Caribbean Writer* vols. 16 & 17, *Peregrine, Macomere 5* (edited by Renee Shea), *Calabash, Wadabagei, Phoebe, Margin: Magical Realism; Haiti Progres*, and anthologized in *The Butterfly's Way* (edited by E. Danticat). She received her MA from the College of Notre Dame (MD), and teaches ESL at Anne Arundel Community College.

Kevin White: a Barbadian student who completed the Creative Writing course at theUniversity of the West Indies, Cave Hill and is in his final year of the B.A.degree in French.

Mohammed Yasin: is from Guyana. In 1999 his story, 'Crabman', won an award in the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association's short story competition. In July 2001, he participated in a Cropper Foundation/UWI creative writing workshop in Trinidad. Since then, four of his short stories and a poem have been published in the *Guyana Annual*.

Between the Two of Us

You promised it wouldn't change anything, except bond us even closer. It had taken only two minutes to fall in love, then enjoy two years of bliss before we satisfied our two families by making it legal. Two years later, baby makes three.

I tried to be adult about this, but from conception, 'politics of exclusion' seemed destined to divide us. I was excluded for nine months while gloved hands examined you behind iron-ringed curtains. Allowed in the delivery room, I was elbowed away while staff and students worked and took notes. They let me cut the cord, but you two remained joined. One cry and he tugs your chain, pulls you back like a leashed prisoner, while I can only stare between the bars at visiting time.

I've tried loving him, but he arches his tiny spine, stiffens and screams. I can't feed him - Mother Nature wins again. I tiptoe around, turn music down. I see imaginary DO NOT DISTURB signs everywhere, including on you. One day a strange woman in milk-stained robes, crooning tuneless lullabies to her young startled me. I had not recognised you.

Each night the crib lies smooth-sheeted, empty, while he lies asleep and I lie awake. I too am empty. I reach across the chasm. I know you feel me. You don't respond, while in the centre of the nest once built for two, he rests, warm, full, just between the two of us.

PHILIP NANTON

Country

The number 3 ZR rocks gently in the Cheapside terminal each time a passenger enters and sits down. One at a time we choose our own plastic-covered bench which eventually we are forced to share grudgingly with latecomers. The inside of the bus gives some shade from the afternoon sun. Red and black plastic padded foam on the ceiling like some upside down sofa appears to be held up there with big black buttons set at regular intervals. They run the length of the van. Near each window is a buzzer.

The back of the driver's football shirt is dark blue. On it you can see in capitals some letters VAN NESTEL forming an arc before they disappear into his seat. Just below the name is the top of what might be a figure 9. The passengers behind him can't see his face, but in matters of faith he appears to be keeping his options open. The woven hat on his head suggests a Rasta calling. Beads and a photo of the Virgin Mary that hang from the rear view mirror shout Catholic persuasion. Some tiny fairy lights around the sun shade above his head give a hint of Diwali. The soft music coming from the radio is pure gospel. CDs line the crack between ceiling and windscreen.

As the last seat is taken, suddenly, from nowhere,the conductor, no more than eighteen years old, appears. His jeans ride dangerously low on his bum. A sleeveless red t-shirt hides a black money belt. He shouts something that sounds like 'yo – bo', slams the sliding door and at the same time the driver starts the engine. The conductor, facing backwards, perches on the edge of the mounting that separates the driver's cab and the rest of the bus. Soon, we rock and roll through Bridgetown, heading for the suburbs.

Every seat is taken and so everyone is stuck tight. It's too late now to put a hand in a trouser pocket to get money out to pay for the ride. The scent of Christian Dior blends with Homme and armpit juice. After about the third stop the driver changes the music. He chooses country and western. A few bars into the first song a male passenger, wearing a blue shirt and who is sitting near the back, erupts.

'Rasta, done that nuh.' Another man next to him with a red and white box of Kentucky Fried Chicken on his lap says, 'Oh Gaad Rasta doan do dat to us. It hurt me head.' The driver changes gear and turns up the volume. Fete start. 'Gi we a break, Rasta,' Kentucky Fried says and then, 'You nat a real Bajan. We doan play dat kind of music.' Rasta rocks to the music and puts his foot down.

By now heads are starting to turn. Everybody catches somebody else's eye who is turning around. Some smile to themselves. We look away from one another. An old man next to me says to no-one in particular, 'Is he own van. He must play his music.' Then he shouts, 'YOU PLAY WHAT YOU WANT RASTA, DOAN MIND THEM.' Those who sit by a window study the roadside rushing by. Kentucky Fried, now he knows that he has an audience, says, 'Rasta, you putting me off me food, change de blasted music.' The conductor isn't saying anything. With the face of a poker player he's just stretching out his hand collecting fares around, in front, behind his head. He dispenses change like shelling peas.

When it's his turn to pay, Blue Shirt says to the conductor, 'I nat paying one cent if de driver doan change de music.' Kentucky Fried next to him agrees. This is too much for the driver. Caught between loosing two fares or his music he applies the brake and the van stops suddenly. As one we all lurch forward and then back. The music gets louder. We're not going anywhere now. 'Pay or out,' the driver says loudly to the windscreen without turning round. The conductor slides back the door. No one moves. 'I-say-pay-or-out,' the driver says again. We all sit looking from Blue Shirt to Kentucky Fried to the driver and back. The engine of the van is now turned off. The music seems really loud. Who's going to break? Seconds roll by. Then, some more. No one moves. The driver appears to have all afternoon to sit and enjoy his music.

Then everyone starts to talk at the same time, just like the old man before, to no one in particular.

'You play your music Rasta, don't is your own.'

'Doan listen to them.'

'Them two causing too much conconza.'

'Is them should get out.'

'Drive on driver, doan worry you head about them.'

'Them is nonsense and foolishness.'

An older man who is sitting near the door quietly gets out and walks slowly away. No one else moves. The talking stops. There is a lot of sighing. Then slowly, ever so slowly, Blue Shirt taps the person sitting in front of him and signals him to move. Kentucky Fried stirs. 'Anyway,' Blue Shirt says, as if continuing a conversation with his neighbour, 'I couldn' go any further with this noise,' and he dismounts from the bus. As Kentucky Fried nears the door he says, 'Rasta man, you ain't got no identity.'

The engine starts again.

ROBERT SCHMID

Blessings

Marie hesitated outside the shop before entering. As she pushed the door open, morning sunlight spilled into the room settling on its contents. Marie eyed the bulla cakes, spice buns, loaves of bread, packs of cookies, and bags of water biscuits displayed in the glass case on the counter in front of her. Behind the counter were dusty shelves, with as many empty spaces as there were items for sale on them. Marie's eyes raced past the bars of laundry soap, mosquito coils, packets of Panadol, worm medicine and meat seasonings. She focused on the cans of sardines, bully beef, vienna sausage, and mackerel in tomato sauce, the packets of Lasco and Milo, and the boxes of noodles.

As she scanned the items on the shelf, a tall man stooped through the doorway at the back of the shop that led to his cramped living quarters.

"Good mawnin' Mister Mac," she said cheerlessly.

"Good mawnin' Miss Marie," he returned in the same monotone.

McIntyre glanced at the woman across the counter from him, then he turned away and began rearranging items on the shelves.

"I hope you comin' here to pay me for them things you get pon trust," he said gruffly. After a long uncomfortable silence, he turned around.

The woman leaned against the counter, her head cast to the ground. McIntyre looked at her. She was still a young woman, though she seemed as worn as the threadbare dress that clung to her frail body.

"My God woman, is three times this month alone me let out things pon trust, wha' appen to unoo baby father?"

"Him gone sah, me nah sight him from long time now," Marie returned softly, her head still bowed.

Immediately, McIntyre snapped back, "Me can't afford to feed him pickney, you nah see how my shelf bare?"

Marie's eyes shot up from the ground and locked onto MacIntyre's

"Please sah, no mek me beg you, sah. Di pickney dem well hungry, dem bawlin' fi food, and me nah have nuttin' fi give dem. Mi did boil some bush tea, but it can't hold dem. Please sah, me can't tek dem bawlin." Her thin fingers gripped the lip of the counter tightly, her hands shaking like her voice.

McIntyre reached beneath the counter and grabbed several clear plastic bags filled with flour, cornmeal, brown sugar and salt fish. Next, he turned to the shelves behind him and pulled down envelopes of soup mix and Lasco, and a bottle of cooking oil. He stuffed them all into a black plastic bag and set them in front of Marie, she took the bag and held it to her side.

"I expect full payment for all this, you hear? Full payment. I am taking note of exactly what and what you been getting on trust."

Marie looked back to the dirt floor, "Yes sah, full payment, sah."

"Tek that and gwan, while I still have something leave in me shop."

"Yes sah," she replied meekly, then looked up at him again. "Bless you sah."

"Bless me, huh? No, Him nah bless me, otherwise people would come in my shop with cash, not story 'bout hungry belly pickney. No, Him nah bless me, come like Him nah like me none at all."