

Poeti



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INTRODUCTION

We apologize that POUi No 8 is coming to you much later than usual: it seems to be a time of change for all three members of the editorial board. Hazel Simmons-McDonald is no longer dean of our faculty of Humanities and Education, but has been appointed PVC in charge of Distance learning (Principal of the UWI's 'virtual' campus), Jane Bryce has returned from sabbatical leave to assume the onerous duties of Head of the Department of Language, Linguistics and Literature and Mark McWatt has recently retired in order to focus more on his creative writing. Despite these changes, all three remain joint editors and committed to POUi, and will try to ensure that the next issue will appear on schedule.

We continue to receive many more submission that we can publish and, while this is obviously a good thing, it makes the task of selecting the contents more difficult. As usual we are happy to see that so many of our regular contributors continue to send us work, and I know at least one writer, Obediah Michael Smith from the Bahamas, who as had poems published in all 8 issues of the Journal. Congratulations to Obie and we know that he will continue to send work for consideration for future issues. POUi 8 also contains recent work from Maggie Harris, Esther Phillips, June Stout, Nick Whittle and Dee Horne, all of whom will be familiar to our readers from work published in previous issues. The first poem in this number is "Water Lilies", by Ellie Niland, who is to be congratulated for winning the most recent Guyana Prize for poetry, for her collection *Cornerstones*. She seems to be following in the footsteps of her brother, David Dabydeen.

This number features the work of 25 writers in all who have contributed 46 items, seven of which are prose pieces. It is good, as always, to find a number of new voices (at least new to POUi) among these. One such is Richard Allsopp, whose poem "Lost Lines" appears on page 100. Better known as a long serving academic at Cave Hill (now retired) and the region's foremost lexicographer, Richard edited *The Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, published by Oxford in 1996: an enormous achievement and published by a UWI professor. Readers of POUi who know the dictionary but are not acquainted with Richard Allsopp's wide and varied talents and interests, will be pleased to discover that he is also a thoughtful and sensitive poet.

Despite the delay, we trust that you will be happy with POUi No 8 and find much in it that is of interest. The journal remains an important outlet for new Caribbean creative writing and we are grateful for you continued interest and support. I would urge that you do whatever possible to make the journal better known and to improve sales: there are still far too many copies left on the shelves of the store-room in the department...

Mark McWatt

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Contributors

Gina Aimey-Moss was a student in the B.A., Literatures in English programme, at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus where she did the Creative Writing: Fiction Course.

S.R.R. Allsopp: is a retired, Honorary Professor of English Language and Linguistics, UWI, Cave Hill. After relinquishing active teaching in 1990 he has continued up to the present as Research Fellow in the Caribbean Lexicography, and published a *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (OUP, 1996). He was a founder member of the Cave Hill Campus in Barbados in 1963.

Deborah T. Callender: Has loved words, writing and reading all her life. She has been immigration Officer, Teacher, AIDS Information specialist, Property Manager and Manatee Researcher. She has participated in VOICES Barbados Writers' Collective, the NCF Read-in Programme, and more recently at Le Mot juste., and won several medals in the 2006 NIFCA Literary Arts Competition. In the same year, she made the 'short list' in the Frank Collymore Literary Endowment Awards with her collection *Fragments of Friction*.

Maggie Harris was born in New Amsterdam, Guyana and has lived in the U.K. since 1971. She has been working as an artist in the community since 1992, involved in many projects with children and adults. She has published in *Agenda*, *Wasafiri*, *Poui* and *Calabash* (UWI) and among other awards has won the Guyana Prize for Literature 2000 for her collection, *Limbolands*. A second collection *From Berbice to Broadstairs* will be published by Mango this year. She is currently writing a memoir, *The Conch Shell*, about her childhood in Guyana.

Krista Rebecca Henry was born in Montego Bay, Jamaica on April 19, 1985. A past student of the University of the West Indies, Henry graduated with first class honours in Literatures in English. She now works as an entertainment reporter with the *Gleaner Company* and the *Star* the leading newspapers of Jamaica.

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.

Deanna Kennedy: is a Barbadian who loves working with children and currently does storytelling at the public library, where she uses many of their 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.

Daisy Holder LaFond: born on St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands, studies Creative Writing and Magazine Journalism at Ryerson Polytechnic Institute in Toronto, Canada. Many of her poems and articles have appeared in various publications. She has been a newspaper editor

and columnist; owner and publisher of *The V.I. Voice* magazine; and worked for the V.I. government.

Hazel Simmons-McDonald: is Professor of Applied Linguistics at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, and Pro-Vice Chancellor and Principal of the UWI open Campus. She has published several English language texts for use at secondary and tertiary levels and, as part of the research programme on Creole Education, is preparing curriculum materials in French Creole for students from K to Grade VI. Her most recent publication, *Exploring the Boundaries of Caribbean Creole Languages* (Co-authored by Ian Robertson) appeared in 2006.

Mark McWatt: was born in Guyana and is recently retired as professor of West Indian Literature at the University of the West Indies Cave Hill, where, in addition to literature courses, he taught a course in Creative Writing (Poetry). He has two published collections of poetry: *Interiors* (1989) and *The Language of Eldorado* (1994). His collection of short fiction *Suspended Sentences*, (2005), won the Commonwealth Best Book, the Casa de las Americas Prize and the Guyana Prize.

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 were published in 2006.

Shani Oliphant: A Jamaican who did a Bachelor of Arts degree in English at the UWI Mona Campus, and currently works as a Quality Assurance Analysts with Mossel Jamaica Ltd. (Digicel).

Esther Phillips: author of poetry collection *When Ground Doves Fly* published by Ian Randle Publishers, Jamaica 2003. Her work has been published in various scholarly journals and magazines in England, USA and the Caribbean, including two anthologies of Caribbean women's writing. She has also just completed another collection of poems. Esther Phillips is Head of the Division of Liberal Arts of the Barbados Community College. She is founder of the group Barbados Writers Ink.

Keith Alton Russell: Born and live in the Bahamas. Has published *Passage of a Native Son* (collection of short stories); novels, *The Disappearance of J D Sinclair*, *When Doves Cry*, and *Hezekiah's independence*; and one play, *Let Freedom Ring*, performed in Freeport and New York. Is a lecturer and pastor educated in the U.S.A and England.

Victoria Sarne An Englishwoman far from home and far from youth, sometimes feeling like a little girl in too big shoes, I have discovered that my voice enables me to survive the good, the bad and the sad times.

A-dziko Samba: is a writer, performer and storyteller. She has most recently written for a year long radio serial drama, *Outta Road* currently broadcasting on Jamaica's RJR radio

station. A-dziko's CD, *Crazy lady Days*, features poems accompanied by Afrikan percussion and flutes.

Dorsía Smith Silva: is a doctoral student and teaches English at the University of Puerto Rico Piedras. Her forthcoming work includes articles in *Narrating the Past* and *La Torre*.

Hazra C. Medica: an Antigua who was a student at UWI, Cave Hill Campus, first as a Literature undergrad, then on the MA in Cultural Studies programme. She has been a regular participant in her nation's Independence Literary competition and has worked as a reporter for the *Antiguan Sun*, both as hard news and features reporter.

Obediah Michael Smith: has published ten books of poems, a short novel and a cassette recording of his poems. He has participated in writers' workshops at the University of Miami and University of the West Indies, Cave Hill. He has a B.A. in Dramatics and Speech from Frisk University, and has taught English Language and Literature in high schools on New Providence, on Grand Bahama and on Inagua.

June Stoute: (nee Dash), was born and educated in Barbados with roots in Antigua and Guyana. Her work has won several awards in NIFCA and she has also been successful in other National Cultural Foundation competitions. She is author of two children's books, *Would You Please Fetch Me a Pail?* (2006) and *Grant African Land Snails & Snail Facts* (2007).

Sarah Venable: Up until Sarah Venable began writing for local and regional magazines, she was better known as an artist. She finds it easier to express herself in those ways than in a bio. Normally, she keeps her poems to herself, but this may change.

Richard Marx Weinraub: Related to the Marx Brothers through his mother, Richard Marx Weinraub was born in New York City in 1949. He has been teaching literature and creative writing courses at the University of Puerto Rico since 1987. A book of his poetry, entitled *Wonder Bread Hill*, was published in 2002 by the University of Puerto Rico Press. His poetry has appeared in *The Paris Review*, *South Carolina Review*, *Green Mountains Review*, *North American Review*, *Sargasso*, *The Caribbean Writer*, and *Slate Magazine*.

Nick Whittle: started reading his poetry at VOICES in 1999 and had received NIFCA Bronze Awards in 1999, 2000 and 2001. He was featured in the CBC television series *Bajan Griots* in 2000 and participated in the UWI Poetry Summer Workshop led by Kendel Hippolyte in 2001. He is also visual artist and exhibits regularly.

Mohammed Fazloor Yasin: is a Guyanese university graduate who works as a manager. In 1999 his story, "Crabman", won an award in the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association's short story competition. In July 2011, he participated in a Cropper Foundation/UWI creative writing workshop in Trinidad. Since then four of his short stories and poems have been published in the *Guyana Annual*.

Victoria Braham Sarne

More Than Words

When I was growing up
In my family
Words were the weapons of choice
Hurled about by my parents.
Dangerous spears dealing
Glancing blows to me
As they hurtled towards
Their intended target.
These words although passionate
Were never paeons of love.
In the night
And out of sight
I lay and listened,
Awash in silent tears
And fears,
And waited for the storm below
To cease.

Words instead of touch
Defined our lives
And spelled out our relationships.
This tempestuous time gave me
A dangerous legacy of weaponry
To hurt or to heal
And I have done both.
I made a shelter out of words
And they protected me,
Stalwart warriors for my defence
Until I was released
From that entitlement.

A sometimes doubtful inheritance,

I now perceive it as a gift
And I coax the words
And stroke the words
And birth them into speech.
This divine gift is both a message
And a messenger from God.
So now I gather the words
Stoop and scoop them up
And complete the harvest -
Then scatter them
Across the seasons
And the reasons
For my life.

"Moon"

"This child cannot learn much in this school. She has to go to a special school in the city for children like her. At the school she will learn the skills to take care of herself later in life," the headmaster said.

The headmaster's gaze was fixed on Moonawattie as he spoke. She always listened carefully to big people, and she understood what the headmaster said. His attention shifted to her Papa: "Everything is free at the school, Mr. Singh....Think about it, and let me know of your decision."

She was sure Papa would never send her to the city across the big brown river. She could see the outlines of the city from her village, but she had never been there. Papa said it was a confusing place with telephones, plenty streets and cars, and bad things. Her village had one long dusty red road and a couple of smoky old cars. The only telephone she had ever seen was a heavy looking black one in the headmaster's office.

When she and Papa came home he told Mama what the headmaster had said. Papa screwed up his face. "That headmaster is an *educated ass*. Moon ain't going to no *special* school in no city! And from today she ain't going back to that stupid school either!" Only one or two times Moon had ever seen Papa real vex. Most of the time he had a big smile like the man in the Colgate toothpaste picture.

Mama said nothing.

Moon really, really wanted to do things right like other children. She wanted her teachers to smile at her and say: "Good work; keep it up!" But they hardly ever smiled at her, and they never praised her work. They moved her to higher classes year after year. "Promotion by age," she had heard one of her teachers say. Always they put her in

classes for what they said were "slow learners." Most students called them "dunces."

Some children at school jeered and called Moon "Chinee Eye," "Stupidee," "Stumpy," and "Fatso." One nasty big boy called her "retarded." But still she wanted to go to school. What would she do at home?

Moon could figure out lots of things, but she couldn't explain them. Anything she tried to say came out funny. Whenever she wrote or drew things, some people would smile and say: "She *knows* what she writing." Others would look at the paper, glance at her, and put it aside without saying a word. Her teachers would put one word—"Seen"—on her papers. Children her age simply giggled at her paper work.

Her uncles and aunts would say to Papa and Mama, "She got her *own* sense," but they never went on to explain what they meant. Their visits seemed awfully short, and they would never ask her over to their homes. Her cousins often refused to play with her.

Only her mother's parents were alive, and they lived alone. One day when she was spending time with them, she heard her grandfather tell her grandmother, "This girl only talking gibberish; she is —how much?—*ten*, and she still sound like a lil baby." From that day Moon never wanted to go back to her grandparents' home.

How could Moon let Papa and Mama know that she *needed* to go to that *special* school the headmaster had talked about?

After three weeks at home, she felt sad, sadder than she had ever been. She sat alone on her veranda and waited for Papa to come home. He would hug, and call her "*Me* little Moon, Moon; you's the light of this house." He often brought home sweets, juicy mangoes, or ripe guavas for her.

He always arrived on his old, screechy bicycle when the sun had turned a bright orange-red stain in the sky. But

the orange colour was gone, and the red had become kind of greyish.

The inside of Moon's head all of a sudden started to spin like a candy floss machine. Then the spinning stopped, and her Papa's dark round face came into her head. But he wasn't smiling. His eyes were shut and his chest went like the gills of a fish out of water.

Her heart thumped like a *tabla* drum. Somehow, she *had* to tell Mama, *somehow*...

Mama was cooking. Moon went into the hot kitchen and followed her around.

"Why you behind me all the time, girl? Oh, you hungry—All right, all right, the food got couple minutes more—you go eat just now if you can't wait till you father come."

Moon saw yellow plantains boiling and she smelled fried salt fish—her favourite food—but her mouth didn't water. She tugged at her mother's smudged up white dress and mumbled.

"What you babbling for? You didn't hear what I said? Is what wrong with you, girl, is so stupid you stupid, or what?"

Moon waddled to her room. She sat on the small iron bed and sobbed—but not for long.

Then she rubbed her eyes and made for the kitchen as fast as he could.

"You come in here again, girl? Just now I go dish out you food. You can't do nothing proper. I don't know what you fit for, and why God give me only you. You like a cross; since you born I can't even get more children—And you father ain't even come home yet—He not been eating or sleeping good lately."

"Ma—Ma—Mama," she said, "Pa—Pa—Papa th—thick—I—prayer—"

"What—you— you tawking! Papa *thick*? Oh, my God, you mean Papa *sick*!"

Mama turned off the kerosene stove, and said, "Come, let's go."

Bang! Bang! Bang!

Moon and Mama rushed to the veranda. Bhola was at the rusty zinc gate.

Bhola was Papa's helper on his vegetable garden, a long, long way down a bumpy mud dam. He had Papa's bicycle.

"Mistress! Mistress!"

"Oh, Lord, what happen Bhola?"

"Mistress, I had to carry boss to the Public Hospital!"

"Oh God, Bhola! What wrong? He okay?"

"Yes, Mistress, he go be okay. He just collapsed. He been working too hard and not eating. Something must be worrying he the doctor said."

"Thank God, thank God, Bhola! I going down to the hospital just now."

She then turned to Moon and, with her voice shaking like a person with bad fever, said: "After so long, you tawking *good* now! And how you know you Papa sick? And you pray too! You Papa go be happy, and I go tell him to send you to that *special* school."

Moon felt one, then two, warm drops on her forehead as Mama reached down and wrapped her bony brown arms around her. "You's real, *real*, special, you know."

She couldn't remember when last Mama had hugged her.

Dry Season

When all the tears have been shed
and still the hurt remains, dry,
stuck somewhere in your throat...
then you look at your hands, palms up,
and wonder at your own weakness:
the inability to wrench or shape solutions,
to wring happiness out of situations
that become impossible. And you shrug:
you always knew there were limits
to human endeavour but it aches to discover
that there are limits to hope. And then,
perhaps, you realize what death
is all about. Love, they say, cannot die,
and you like to believe that, but it hurts
to realize that undying love can kill,
so slow and so painfully... Perhaps it were better
if love could – if it did – die, before eyes
and heart and soul become so dry!

Hazel Simmons-McDonald

Burnt Offerings

How well the ancestors did this!
They mixed wine with oil
poured libations at the altar
quartered bulls, slaughtered rams
dipped wheat in wine, made wafer cakes,
cereal offerings, oil and incense-slaked
burnt food for God.

Smoke coiled round each rung of air
ascending,
pleasing smell
to cleanse all sin, all guilt.

Then He came
and in the sun's heat climbed this tree
bark stripped
flesh ripped
wine drip drop
ping from the vine
on scorched earth

Now we have
wafers dipped in wine
tears our libation
for hearts parched with love's absence.

Thus it has always been
endless cycle of sin and shame
repentance, love and
longing.

So it will be till
each gourd fills

till hearts' rivers brim
and flow
to green the earth.

I accept your gift
not bread, not wine
but Thee!
Seared in this long day's heat
my heart, burnt fragments of my life
I bring for your redemption.