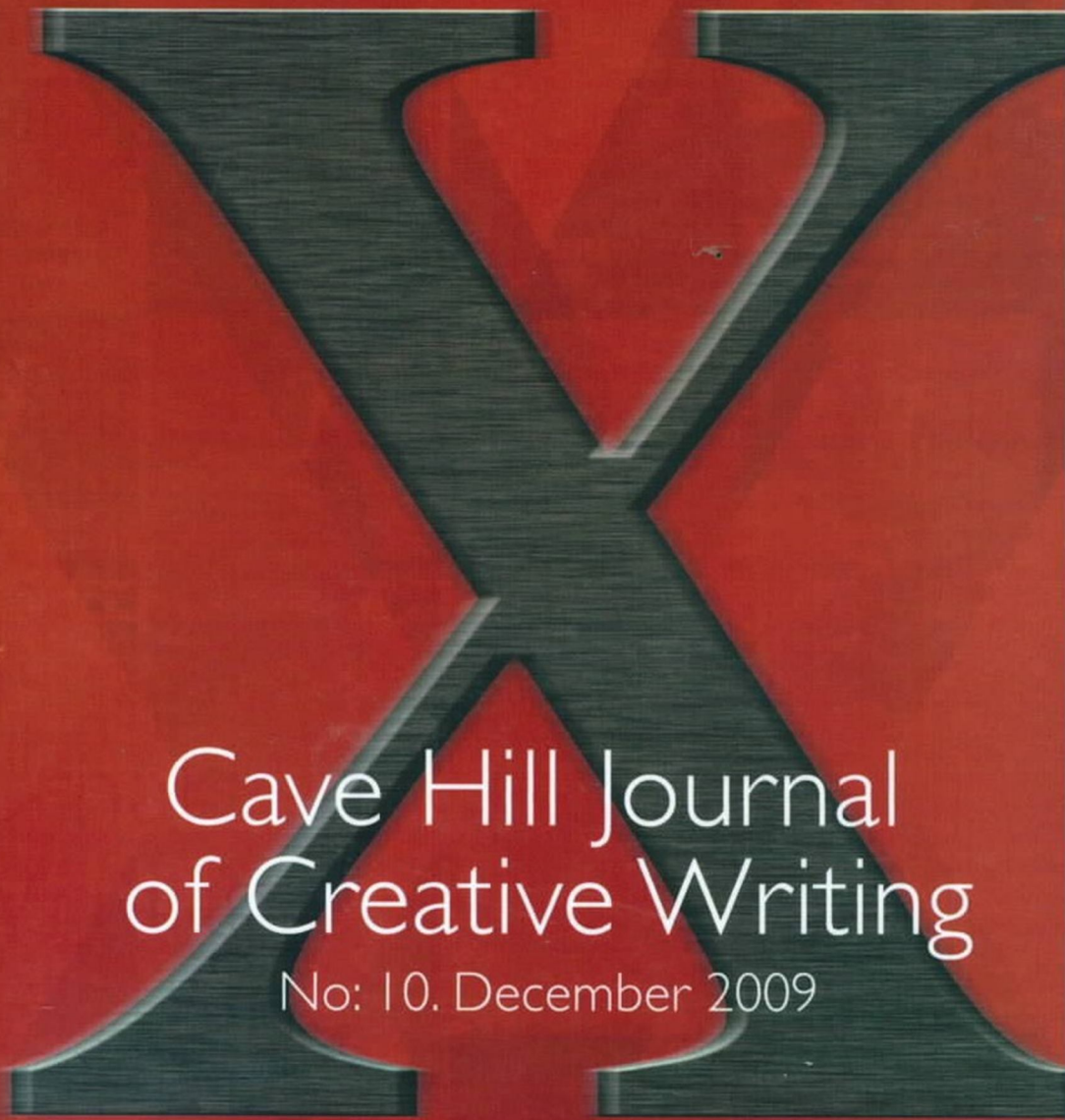


POUi



Cave Hill Journal  
of Creative Writing

No: 10. December 2009

## ***Poui X* – FROM THE EDITORS**

A tenth anniversary is a milestone and you are holding it in your hands. *Poui: Cave Hill Journal of Creative Writing* reaches its tenth issue as a leading journal for new writing from around the region and beyond. In 1999, Creative Writing, both Poetry and Fiction, was a new offering of the Department of Language, Linguistics and Literature (LLL) at Cave Hill, and *Poui* was seen as an outlet for some of the writing emerging from its courses and the summer workshops led by well-known Caribbean writers, whose contributions set a standard for the many aspiring writers *Poui* also published. Those workshop leaders included Lorna Goodison (Jamaica), whose poem 'Poui' is the frontispiece to every issue, Grace Nichols (Guyana), Erna Brodber (Jamaica), Kendal Hippolyte (St Lucia), Merle Collins (Grenada) and Olive Senior (Jamaica). Over time, *Poui* established itself as the natural successor to the small magazines which nurtured the early growth of Caribbean writing – *Bim*, *Kyk-over-al*, *The Beacon*, etc. – to the extent that Georgetown-based arts critic, Al Creighton, commented in the *Stabroek News* in 2007 that 'the best pieces in the collection define(d) *Poui* 7, lifting it to its place as a journal of high quality' and showed that it had come of age as a regional literary journal.

An occasional tradition *Poui* has maintained since issue 4 is that of Featured Writer, which allows us to turn the spotlight on a writer whose work deserves special attention. In issue 4, it was the Vincentian-born poet/jazz musician Shake Keane (1927 – 1997), who won the prestigious Cuban Casa de las Americas Prize for poetry in 1979 for his collection *One A Week With Water: Notes and Rhymes*. When he died in 1997 his most recent poems remained unpublished, so as Featured Writer of its fourth issue, *Poui* paid him the tribute of publishing some of them. Featured Writer in *Poui* 6 was our Consultant Editor, Kamau Brathwaite with 'This Sweet Windperson poem', and in *Poui* 9 it was editor, Mark McWatt, whose first work of prose fiction, *Suspended Sentences: A Collection of Short Fiction*, won the Commonwealth Prize for Best First Book, the Casa de las Americas Prize for best Caribbean book written in English or Creole, and the Guyana Prize, all in 2006. This year, we pay tribute to Zimbabwean writers, honouring their commitment to keeping creativity alive against all odds, by highlighting the work of Charles Mungoshi, a veteran of the Zimbabwean literary scene. We also feature a poem by the dynamic political performance poet, Comrade Fatso, a member of the younger generation of poets, and a tribute to the maverick prophet, Dambudzo Marechera, who foresaw so much of what is happening in Zimbabwe today.

Now retired, Mark McWatt is Professor Emeritus of West Indian Literature and one of the founding editors. The other two founding editors, Hazel Simmons-McDonald and Jane Bryce, are also published writers and all three are lecturers of LLL, Cave Hill.

They were joined from *Poui* 9 by Mark Jason Welch, an LLL graduate and talented young writer who won the Irving Burgie Award for Excellence in Literary and Creative Arts in 2006 and first prize in the Collymore Literary Endowment Award competition in 2007. Jason's influence can be seen in the redesigned layout and more contemporary look of *Poui* 9 and X.

Although *Poui: Cave Hill Journal of Creative Writing* is funded by the Department of LLL, it is independent and has no other agenda than that which is in its pages should make the hair stand up on the back of your neck – the infallible test of good writing. Those who have passed

the test and appear in the pages of *Poui X* include many names familiar from previous issues as well as writers who responded to our request for an anniversary contribution, such as 'Eddie' Baugh, Marie-Elena John, Stewart Brown and Ian McDonald. Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming and Obediah Smith have been with us since *Poui 1*, and Obediah has appeared in every single issue. In gratitude for his faithfulness in keeping step with us, we show him here, reading his *Poui 9* entry aloud in Cuba. Others in this issue who have been along for the ride are Philip Nanton since *Poui 2*, Dee Horne, A-dZiko Simba and Mark Jason Welch since *Poui 3* and Opal Palmer Adisa since *Poui 4*. But as always we're excited by the new, and *Poui X* also features several first-time contributors. Overall, the writers hail from various hyphenated combinations of Jamaica, Trinidad, The Bahamas, Guyana, Barbados, Belize, Puerto Rico, Antigua, St Vincent, St Lucia, the US, Canada, Britain, Ecuador and Zimbabwe. *Poui X* fulfils once again the mandate of the Goodison poem - 'She don't put out for just anyone' – but when she does, the result will stop you in your tracks.

Thanks to all of you who make *Poui* what it is, and please stay with us on the journey to what it will become!

The editors: Jane Bryce  
Hazel Simmons-McDonald  
Mark McWatt  
Mark Jason Welch

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**Opal Palmer Adisa:** is an award-winning poet and prose writer with eleven titles to her credit, including the novel, *It Begins With Tears* (1997), a motivational work for young adults. Dr. Adisa has lectured and performed throughout the United States and in South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Germany, England and the Czech Republic. Her work has been reviewed by Ishmael Reed, Al Young and Alice Walker, who described it as ‘solid, visceral, important stories written with integrity and love’.

**Thomas Armstrong:** Canadian by birth and Barbadian by marriage, he is author of a number of short stories. His first novel, *Of Water and Rock*, from which the excerpt, “Flying in God’s Face” is derived, won second prize in the 2008 Frank Collymore Literary Endowment Award and has recently been accepted for publication with an expected release in Spring, 2010. He has a particular interest in Caribbean literature and the supernatural, which intersect in a number of his works.

**Edward Baugh:** Professor Emeritus ‘Eddie’ Baugh taught at Cave Hill for three years (1965-1967) and at Mona for over thirty-three years (1968-2001), as well as holding many visiting appointments internationally. He was Public Orator at Mona (1985-2002), has figured prominently as a leader in national, regional, and international literary and academic associations, and has adjudicated literary competitions such as the Guyana Prize for Literature and the Commonwealth Writers Prize. He is a recognized expert on Derek Walcott and the author of several critical works. As a poet, he has published *A Tale from the Rainforest* (1988), and *It Was the Singing* (2000).

**Jacqueline Bishop:** author of two collections of poems: *Fauna* (2006) and *Snapshots from Istanbul* (2008); *My Mother Who Is Me: Life Stories from Jamaican Women in New York* (2006); *Writers Who Paint, Painters Who Write: Three Jamaican Artists* (2007); and a novel, *The River’s Song* (2007). She is also an accomplished visual artist and founding editor of *Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters*, and the recipient of a 2008-2009 Fulbright award to Morocco.

**Stewart Brown:** Reader in Caribbean Literature at the [Centre of West African Studies](#) University of Birmingham, anthologist of African and Caribbean writing, critic and poet, he is also a practising artist. BABEL, from which the images in this issue are drawn, was shown as part of the Birmingham Open exhibition in 2007, and at the Brunel gallery. In 2007, as Visiting Professor of Literatures in English at Cave Hill, he showed BABEL in the Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination Gallery. A selection of digital prints from the series was exhibited in the Staff House Gallery at Birmingham University in 2009.

**Jane Bryce:** born and brought up in Tanzania, and educated there, the UK and Nigeria, she is Professor of African Literature and Film at UWI, Cave Hill, where she also teaches Creative Writing: Fiction. She worked as a freelance editor and journalist before becoming an



academic, and still contributes to newspapers and journals. She has published a collection, *Chameleon and other stories* (2007), and an edited anthology, *Caribbean Dispatches: Beyond the Tourist Dream* (2006). She is working on a memoir, from which the piece in *Poui X* is taken.

**Rev. Gideon Cecil:** born 1968 in Rose Hall Town, Corentyne, Berbice, Guyana, he holds degrees in Divinity from Life Christian University, Tampa, Florida. He is a college lecturer and freelance journalist, and winner of several literary awards including: Offerings Poetry Award, Guyana 1997, the Editor's Choice Poetry Award from 1993-2008 from the International Library of Poetry in the USA and the Inter-American Press Association finalist Award for his essay on Press Freedom in 1998.

**Desiree Cox:** a Bahamian writer who is also a medical doctor, musician and visual artist. She was the first Bahamian and the first Caribbean woman Rhodes Scholar. She studied at McGill, Oxford and Cambridge, has been a weekly short-story columnist for *The Nassau Guardian* and was a 2008 winner of the Cropper Foundation Caribbean Writers Residency. Her art and poems have been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in The Bahamas, London and New York. Her first book, a collection of poems and paintings, is forthcoming in 2009.

**Ian Craig:** has taught Spanish at UWI, Cave Hill for the last ten years, having previously lived in Madrid and London. He has translated poetry from Spanish for the *Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse* and for *Caribbean Writing Today*, has published academic works primarily in the area of translation, and journalistic articles on boxing, travel and film. In June 2008, he attended the renowned poetry workshop in Provincetown, Massachusetts, and is keen to build on that experience.

**Denise deCaires Narain:** originally from Guyana, she is a Senior Lecturer in English, specialising in postcolonial and Caribbean literature, at the University of Sussex. She has also taught with the Open University and at UWI, Cave Hill. She has published widely on Caribbean women's writing, including *Caribbean Women's Poetry: Making Style*, and a book on Olive Senior is forthcoming.

**Sonia Farmer:** a Bahamian poet studying for her BFA in Writing in New York City. Her work has appeared in several issues of *Ubiquitous*, Pratt Institute's literary and arts magazine, and has been chosen by a Nassau Selection Committee for consideration in the *Carifesta X* Anthology.

**Comrade Fatso:** Samm Farai Monro, better known as Comrade Fatso, is one of the most explosive and controversial acts in Southern Africa today. He calls his poetry *Toy Toy Poetry* - radical street poetry that mixes Shona with English and mbira with hip hop, an art form that is an uprising against oppression. In 2008, Comrade Fatso and Chabvondoka launched their much-acclaimed album, *House of Hunger*, banned in Zimbabwe but praised as 'the most revolutionary album since Thomas Mapfumo's music in the 1970's' by Agence France Presse. Fatso and Chabvondoka have performed in the USA, France, the UK, Portugal, Holland, Reunion, Tanzania, Kenya, Botswana, Malawi, Swaziland, South Africa and, of course, Zimbabwe. Fatso's

poetry and music have appeared in print and broadcast media in over fifty countries and his poetry is studied at universities in the UK and South Africa. Find out more at [www.comradefatso.com](http://www.comradefatso.com)

**Patricia Glinton-Meicholas:** has written numerous essays on Bahamian culture and wrote and directed six historical television documentaries for Bahamas National Trust. Her books include *An Evening in Guanima*, short stories based on Bahamian folktale motifs; the novel, *A Shift in the Light*, and two volumes of poetry: *No Vacancy in Paradise* and *Robin's Song*. She co-wrote *Bahamian Art 1492 to 1992*. Her monograph on Bahamian folktales is published in the Inter-American Development Bank's Encuentros series. She contributed to the Macmillan *Dictionary of Art* and her story, 'The Gaulin Wife' appears in the Penguin anthology *Under the Storyteller's Spell*.

**Dee Horne:** is Professor and Chair of the English Department at the University of Northern British Columbia. A regular contributor to *Poui*, she has published over 30 poems and is the editor and publisher of Scroll Press (<http://scrollpress.com>) and Scroll in Space (<http://scrollinspace.com>).

**Marie Elena John:** an Antiguan writer, whose novel *Unburnable* (Amistad/HarperCollins, 2006), set in Washington DC and Dominica, was nominated for many awards, and won the 2008 Antigua and Barbuda International Literary Festival Award. She has worked as a development, human rights and women's rights specialist in Africa, Switzerland and the USA, and is now collaborating on adapting *Unburnable* for the screen. In 2008, she co-taught the International Creative Writing Workshop in Lagos with Chimamanda Adichie, Dave Eggers, and Binyavanga Wainaina, and led a creative writing workshop at City College of New York. In 2009, she led the first *Poui* Creative Writing Workshop at Cave Hill. She is working on a second novel set primarily in West Africa and Antigua.

**Kenneth Lewis:** an actor, dancer, drummer, choreographer, teacher and poet/writer who has been a part of many successful productions, including several Carifesta productions and international films, as well as *Sobie*, one of the National Heroes series of plays at Cave Hill in 2007, and Gale Theatre's *Macbeth* in 2008. He has an Associate Degree in performing arts from Barbados Community College and teaches visual and performing arts in Barbados.

**Richard Lynch:** Born 1981, he is a young man with many hats and much less shoes. The former Queen's College student studies Literatures in English at UWI, Cave Hill. The young man is perpetually depressed and just as determined. He enjoys tomfoolery and is pleasant to be around. He hopes you enjoy reading his work as much as he enjoyed writing it.

**Sheree Mack:** is studying for a PhD in creative writing at Newcastle University and is an active freelance writer/artist in the UK. She has been published in a variety of anthologies, literary magazines and websites (*The Rialto*, *Other Poetry*, *Aesthetica*). *Like the Wind Over a*

*Secret* (2009) is a limited edition pamphlet to mark the near completion of her PhD.

**Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming:** a Trinidadian who works as a mechanical engineer in Nassau, Bahamas. A poet, fiction and creative non-fiction writer and essayist, her poetry, stories and artwork have appeared in numerous publications in the Caribbean, the 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 2001 Short Story Competition. Her first book of poetry, *Curry Flavour*, was published by Peepal Tree in 2000.

**Renuka Maraj:** a graduate of UWI, St. Augustine, she has had her poems and short stories published in the Indo-Caribbean Cultural Council's magazine *Divali 2002*, *Poui* and *Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters*. Her work will also be in the *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* and two of Macmillan Caribbean's upcoming anthologies.

**Ian McDonald:** Born in Trinidad in 1933 and educated at Queen's Royal College, Port of Spain and Cambridge University. Since 1955, he has lived in Guyana where he is CEO of the Sugar Association of the Caribbean. A tennis champion, he captained Cambridge and subsequently Guyana and the West Indies in the Davis Cup and played at Wimbledon. In 1984 he became editor of *Kyk-Over-Al*, one of the 'small magazines' which created a platform for the growth of Caribbean literature. He was awarded the Guyana Prize for Literature in 1992 and an Honorary Doctorate of Letters from the University of the West Indies in 1997, and is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He has published short stories, four poetry collections (*Mercy Ward*, *Essequibo*, *Jaffo the Calpysonian* and *Between Silence And Silence*) and a play, *The Tramping Man*, which is often staged. His award winning novel *The Humming-Bird Tree*, first published in 1969, was made into a BBC film in 1992 and has been republished by Macmillan in a new edition.

**Mark McWatt:** Professor Emeritus of West Indian Literature at UWI, Cave Hill, where he taught for more than thirty years and still teaches Creative Writing: Poetry. He has two published collections of poetry: *Interiors* (1989) and *The Language of Eldorado* (1994), and a third collection, *The Journey to Le Repentir*, is forthcoming in 2009. His collection of short stories, *Suspended Sentences* won the Casa de Las Americas Award and the Commonwealth Prize for Best First Book in 2006.

**Charles Mungoshi:** Featured Writer – see page 51

**Philip Nanton:** Originally from St Vincent, he now lives in Barbados where he is a lecturer and freelance writer. Recent publications include contributions to *Caribbean Dispatches: Beyond the Tourist Dream* (2006) and he is a regular contributor to *Poui*. He has written and produced a number of BBC radio programmes on Caribbean artists and in 2008, he wrote and produced the Barbados-based spoken word CD, *Island Voices from St. Christopher & the Barracudas*. He is available for live performances of the CD.

**Elly Niland:** born in Guyana, she lives in England where she teaches English language and literature. Her first collection of poetry, *In Retrospect*, was runner up for the Guyana Prize 2004, and her second collection, *Cornerstones*, won in 2007. Both were published by Dido Press. Elly's adaptation of the novel, *No Pain Like This Body*, was first broadcast on BBC Radio 3 in 2003. Her short story, 'The Fog', was commissioned by BBC 4 for the 2005 Commonwealth Writers' series. A third poetry collection, *East of Centre*, sponsored by the Arts Council, appeared in 2008.

**Paula Obè:** a Trinidadian performance poet who has performed locally, regionally and internationally and published in Canada, England, the U.S.A, Venezuela and Trinidad. A poetry collection, *Passages*, was published by the New Voices of T & T in 1999, and her second collection, *Walking a Thin Line*, by Canadian Ride the Wind Publishers in 2001. She has also produced two poetry CD's. From 2000-2003, with Annessa Baksh she produced the Ten Sisters Show, which showcased some of the best female poets and singer songwriters in Trinidad.

**Sergio Ortiz:** grew up in Chicago, studied English literature at Inter-American University in San German, Puerto Rico, philosophy at World University and culinary art at The Restaurant School in Philadelphia. His work has been published in *Poui*, *Origami Condom*, *Poets Ink Review*, *Flutter*, *Silenced Press*. He has had work accepted by *Ascent Aspirations*, *Children, Churches and Daddies*, *Cause & Effect*, *Calliope Nerve*, *Burst*, *The Houston Literary Review*, *Kritya* and *Vagabondage Press*.

**J.H. Prince:** born in Toronto in 1978, he lived in Trinidad for a short time as a child and now lives in Ottawa, Ontario. Despite qualifying in accountancy and working as a finance officer, he has always enjoyed writing and is inspired by many things: interesting bits of history, lines from songs, popular culture and pure imagination. *Tribes* is a product of all of these.

**Eric Rose:** born in Nassau, The Bahamas, in 1974, he studied mass communications and journalism at The College of The Bahamas and print journalism at Clark Atlanta University. He received The Bahamas' National Youth Achievement Award in 1992 and the Caribfest Award for Excellence in Literature in 1994. He reads his poems on the media and at concerts and festivals, including Carifesta IX in 2006.

**James Sanchez:** is a poet, teacher and coach who lives in Florida and received his B.A. in English from Florida International University.

**Victoria Sarne:** My inner dialogue writes itself, I simply hold the pen and am no longer afraid to be seen or heard. 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.

**Cristian Avecillas Sigüenza:** A radio producer, songwriter, singer, writer and researcher. His book, *Ecce Homo II*, won the César Dávila Andrade National Poetry Prize in Ecuador in

2008. Other collections which have won praise in competitions include *La identidad femenina* (Female identity), *Todos los cadáveres soy yo* (Every corpse is me) and *Maquillaje para un muerto* (Make up for a death). *Abrazo entre caníbal y mujer enamorada* (Hug between a cannibal and a woman in love) was published by Don Quijote in Damascus, Syria. The play *Funeraria Travel* has been performed by La Cuarta Pared Theatre Company, La Plata, Argentina.

**A-dZiko Simba:** a writer, performer and storyteller who uses her talents to uplift Afrikan peoples in the Diaspora. She has most recently written for a year-long serial drama, *Outa Road*, for Jamaica's RJR radio station. Her CD *Crazy Lady Days* features poems accompanied by African percussion and flutes.

**Hazel Simmons-McDonald:** Professor of Applied Linguistics at Cave Hill and Pro-Vice Chancellor and Principal of the UWI Open Campus. She has published on various aspects of linguistics in a Caribbean context, including several English language texts for use at secondary and tertiary levels and is preparing curriculum materials in French Creole for the research programme on Creole Education. *Exploring the Boundaries of Caribbean Creole Languages* (co-authored with Ian Robertson) appeared in 2006. She also writes and publishes poetry and fiction.

**Obediah 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 UWI, Cave Hill. He has a B.A. in dramatics and speech from Fisk University, and has taught English language and literature in high schools in New Providence, on Grand Bahama and on Inagua. He has appeared in every issue of *Poui* and is our most regular contributor.

**Angela Smith-Callender:** an undergraduate at UWI, Cave Hill, she enjoys writing fiction and non-fiction and has won a number of NIFCA awards for her work.

**Barbara Southard:** a retired professor of history who was Chair of the History Department at the University of Puerto Rico, Río Piedras. She has published extensively in the field of women's history and gender studies, and is now writing historical fiction. A short story 'Heavy Downpour', set in the nineteen seventies, was published in *Calabash* (summer-fall 2008). She is working on a novel about women's lives in Puerto Rico in the nineteen nineties, exploring themes of identity, machismo and the price of political dissidence.

**Ordette Wade:** a child of Belize and Jamaica, she is a student of Literatures in English at Cave Hill. Ordette's fondness for the literary arts was fostered at a very early age whilst living in Wales. A novice writer, Ordette is inspired by the beauty of the mundane.

**Mark Jason Welch:** a Barbadian writer and actor, his work has appeared in the recently re-launched *Bim* and the Foundation Publishing anthologies *Winning Words* (2004), *From This Bridge I See* (2005) and *The Hole and Other Stories* (2006), as well as *Arts Etc* and the Writers

Ink anthology *Bazaar!* His BA in Literatures in English at Cave Hill was primarily sponsored by a Prime Minister's Scholarship, received in 2003. He also won the Irving Burgie Scholarship Award in 2006 and the Kamau Brathwaite Award for literary excellence in 2007. In January 2008, his poetry collection, *Ackee Season*, won the Frank Collymore Literary Endowment Award and is being prepared for publication. He is Literary Arts Officer at the National Cultural Foundation.

**Apologies:**

The Last issue of *POUI* ( No.9 December 2007) contained the poem “Her Journey”, written by Corene Cumberbatch. Please note that the author’s name is Corena Cumberbatch (and not Corene). The Editors of *POUI* apologize for this error and regret any embarrassment caused.

Eddie Baugh

### Memories Like Comfort Stones

Memories like comfort stones picked up on the beach,  
like a girl in a bathing suit astride a beach pony,  
and the man pulling on his jeans over wet trunks;  
like escoveitched parrot fish, and the little Empress,  
fine-boned Nubian, beauty self-possessed,  
selling mementos of Marcus and Bob,  
her abundance of locks wrapped in African cloth —  
like the brightness of the day, the shot-silk sea,  
like nearness, like promise, like thanks.

Jane Bryce

### **Bits and Pieces I Picked up and Pocketed (extract)**

[Dambudzo Marechera, 1952-1987, was the enfant terrible of Zimbabwean literature. Expelled from the University of Rhodesia for political activity, he got a scholarship to Oxford and was a student at New College from Sept 1974-March 1976, when he was again expelled. In 1982, two years after Independence, he returned to Zimbabwe, where he died of AIDS in 1987 at the age of 37. He is best known for his novella *House of Hunger*, which is also the most accessible of his works. Others - *The Black Insider*, *Black Sunshine*, *Mindblast* - are an iconoclastic melange of poetry, prose and drama, highly intertextual, scurrilous, violent, anti-nationalist, pornographic and above all, self-reflexive, populated by Dambudzo's many alter egos.

I graduated from Oxford a year before Dambudzo appeared there, but we both read English and were both from Africa. In the story from which this extract is taken, I imagine a scenario where Dambudzo and I actually coincided at Oxford. The title and most of the dialogue are direct quotation from Marechera's writing.]

### **Bits and pieces I picked up and pocketed (extract).**

Through the Africa Society, Cheikh arranged for Dambudzo to give a poetry reading in the JCR at New College. We put notices up on all the JCR notice boards, and there was a good crowd, even people standing at the back. All the leftist groups were represented, and there was a sprinkling of Africans interspersed with intense white students, some of whom I recognised from lectures. We had given Dambudzo the title of Revolutionary Poet, and he obliged us by looking the part. His hair had grown into small wiry spirals around his face, he was wearing fatigues and a pair of army boots he might have bought at one of those end of the line shops, and brandishing his manuscript like a weapon. It started quietly enough, Dambudzo reading in a low voice without the hint of a



stammer. At first he read poems expressing his feelings, I supposed, for Rhodesia, her granite breasts and the warmth of her arms, exile poems to which we all listened respectfully. Then he embarked on a long poem called 'The Struggle', full of martial images and lines like: 'Sharpen your spears for war/polish your knobkerries...' This got people's attention and they listened attentively at first, but gradually the atmosphere began to change. As modernist ambiguity began to dilute righteous anger, the images became less warlike and sounded more as if they belonged in *The Wasteland*. Then there was a section that sounded like the Senghor poem Cheikh had translated for me, about a dark continent with breasts of mountains, except that with Senghor it was all heroic and high-own romantic like an *ubi sunt* in an Old English poem. As Dambudzo read, his language became charged with images of sexual violence, something about a frenzy of mounting and the cock mounting his hen. The Socialist Workers' Party corner became restive, and Anti-Apartheid murmured something to SWAPO.

Then he came to the final section and we were back in Eliot territory. A rat gnawing at a bone, freezing sunlight and a lost couple waiting for a bus. I was a bit lost myself by now, but when he came to the last two lines, I had a flash of understanding. In the pub he was always saying things like that, things I paid no attention to because they didn't seem to invite a response, but which infused his conversation with its peculiar pungency, its edge of darkness. One time I happened to look directly at him and I caught something in his eyes which took me by surprise - something childlike and vulnerable. Call it innocence if you want. The lines he now read aloud: 'The feeling is always there/ that I am under a microscope,' were a private confession spoken in public, a moment of self-revelation which made me catch my breath. It was both audacious and risky and it opened him, I knew, to flak.

As soon as Dambudzo stopped reading, a man stood up and shouted, 'Individualist bullshit! That's not about the struggle, it's about your own self-pity.'

Heads turned. I recognised the man as a graduate student from St Anthony's who I had seen once or twice at Africa Society meetings. There was a general murmur of agreement, and the man continued: 'You can write that stuff from the safety of your Oxford room, but what's it doing for the comrades on the frontline? How will it help with decolonisation? Does it tell us anything about our history, or who we are today? It does not, my brother, and you should be ashamed.'

A slightly older man, a Kenyan who had been a lecturer at the University of Nairobi until he'd had to leave in a hurry, now stood up. 'Finely wrought language,' he began, 'cannot disguise the lack of attention to the great themes of our literature: the strength of traditional culture to withstand the assault of colonialism, the role of the artist as teacher and inspiration of his people. Pessimism and negativity are not luxuries we can afford at this stage of our development. If you continue in this direction, you will lose all clarity and disappear into the maze of western existentialism.'

I was watching Dambudzo, who had rolled up his manuscript and looked ready to fling it across the room. He wasn't tall, but the intensity of his expression made him look fiercer than I had ever seen him. 'I am astonished at your ignorance,' he almost spat. 'I did not expect such a low cultural level among you. Those who do not understand my work are simply illiterate. I will not tick all the orifices of political correctness and stimulate all the possible orgasms of brotherly love. Our so-called search for freedom has not included even the most elementary humanitarian justice. Am I supposed to identify with *Idi Amin*? To kiss *Bokassa's* ass, or masturbate at the thought of *Mobutu*? When literature becomes a vehicle for ideology the writer is nothing but a vampire sucking his own blood. If you expect me to be a writer for a specific nation or a specific race, then *fuck you!*'

He might as well have sprayed the room with bullets and left the audience bleeding on the floor. Amidst the pandemonium, I saw him pick up a

large pottery ashtray and hurl it at the plate-glass window that gave onto a smooth stretch of green quadrangle where a few gowned figures strolled with heads bent. The explosive crack that ripped across the still evening air stopped them dead in their tracks, while inside the room, glass sprayed and people screamed and fought for the exit. Cheikh and Martin more or less picked Dambudzo up by his elbows and shoving through the crowd, carried him bodily from the room. I stayed where I sat, frozen in shock, surrounded by shattered glass.

**FEATURED WRITER**

*Charles Mungoshi*





## Charles Mungoshi: Poui X Featured Writer.

The details of Charles Mungoshi's life and achievements are impressive enough. Born in 1947 in the Chivhu area of Zimbabwe, he has written novels and short stories in both Shona and English, as well as two collections of children's stories: *Stories from a Shona Childhood* and *One Day Long Ago* (Baobab Books, 1989 and 1991). The former won him the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa. He has also published a collection of poetry: *The Milkman Doesn't Only Deliver Milk* (Baobab Books, 1998). He has won the Commonwealth Writers' Prize (Africa region) twice, in 1988 and 1998, for two collections of short stories: *The Setting Sun and the Rolling World* (Heinemann, 1987) and *Walking Still* (Baobab Books, 1997). Two of his novels: *Waiting for the Rain* (Heinemann 1975) and *Ndiko kupindana kwa mazuva* (Mambo Press, 1975) received International PEN awards. The latter was also translated into French as *Et ainsi passent les jours*. In 1985-87 he was Writer in Residence at the University of Zimbabwe, since when he has worked as a free-lance writer, script writer and editor. He was awarded an honorary doctorate from the University of Zimbabwe in 2003.

What this narrative does not tell us is the cost of being a writer in a society where money has lost all value and even to eat is a daily struggle, where the writer inevitably carries the burden of bearing witness to the suffering laid upon his people and where imagination is circumscribed by a grotesque reality. In such circumstances, an artist is faced with a stark choice: to leave, and be disconnected from all that is happening at home, or to stay and share the suffering. And if you stay, to speak, or to be silent? And who are you speaking to when, 'Everyone you know (or knew) is gone, 'Everyone you thought you knew/you don't know anymore'?

Charles Mungoshi's poems in this issue embody this dilemma. At the same time, they are not protest poems, they do not scream but speak quietly, with compassion and fellow feeling, of a collective

trauma. They hold to the hope that there exists someone  
who feels just like you do  
and for a while  
there are just the two of you  
to frighten the darkness away

We are honoured that Charles Mungoshi has agreed to allow us,  
the *Poui* community of readers, to join him in frightening the  
darkness away.

*Charles Mungoshi*

### **Portrait of a Woman**

You should have remained  
hidden in the shadow of the tree  
your hand raised at half-mast  
(undecided whether to cover or not  
your face from the glare of the sun?)

You should have remained  
behind the half-open door  
your face half-hidden  
in the darkness beyond  
and your torn dress  
the colour of dirty earth  
and through the glaring holes –  
You: dirty torn forlorn.  
The moment you stepped out  
into the faithfulness of the light  
I turned and walked away.

### **A Kind of Drought**

In our land  
We found a bird  
that sings.  
A bird  
that will tell it all:  
We can't trust humans anymore:  
What if –  
What if we send  
What if we send  
What if the one we send  
What if the only one available

is the father of  
the mother of  
the uncle of  
the aunt of the sister of – ?

In our land

We – you – all – are alone.

Everyone you know (or knew) is gone!

Everyone you thought you knew  
you don't know anymore.

Only roads.

Only roads don't betray.

(Pot-holed though they may be.)

No, roads don't lie.

They always bring you

or someone like you

to bump into each other

round a corner.

Trees, as well.

Trees.

Only trees.

Yes, trees.

They remain

the same old faithful parents.

You can climb them.

You can hide behind them.

(Or go round and round and round  
behind, to the side, or in front of them).

You can chew their leaves for water.

You can chew the roots

to cool the pain in belly or limb

and, there is always, always, the fruit.

And, of course, out of the sun, the shade.

And, finally, you can safely die under a tree.

In our land

the trees can be trusted



and sometimes they hide someone  
who feels just like you do  
and for a while  
there are just the two of you  
to frighten the darkness away  
if only, only if,  
if only  
you can come to a river.

### After the May '98 Riots

Now there won't be any need  
to tell our children  
about the struggle history  
of our gallant people's fight  
to take back the land  
from the foreign usurper.  
Look around you –  
It's more or less the same:  
the broken windows  
the gaping doorways  
the splintered glass  
on the pavement  
the stench of the smoking streets  
and the scattered entrails  
of the looted shops

floating in their own blood –  
– all this.

All we have to do now  
is just point a finger at all this  
and tell them:  
this, too, our gallant forebearers did  
before they took to the bush  
to deliver us from the corrupt and rotten rule  
of a government that didn't know equal rights.

It wasn't wrong, then,  
and it wouldn't be *wrong, now*,  
if only, if only now, these were not  
our own brothers  
if only, if only we did not share  
the same painful memories:  
the landmines we left  
planted in the bush  
are still smouldering, unearthed  
sweet-potatoes of yesteryear?  
They are sprouting again  
in the rightful fullness  
of the turning season.