

## TIME IN A WELL

*for Mervyn Morris & Hermoine Baptiste*

Down in that well, I could only look up. Water in the well, about my midsection. Beneath my feet, soggy sticks, rotting. To follow fashion, I'd followed my brother into the forbidden.

Our neighbour, Mr. Edgecombe, had given us permission to fetch water for our many goats and sheep, our pigs, our many chickens. There was a rope tied to the handle of a bucket to draw the water up. It would come up splashing. It was difficult to steady it. Whatever was left in it, we'd pour into our empty, waiting buckets.

As if this was not exciting enough, as if we hadn't enough to be grateful for, we had to descend into the well ourselves. It was Kevin's idea. He went down, came up and I followed.

When my bare feet were resting upon the well's very bottom, I was alone, Kevin had left. Immersed in the water in the well, almost up to my shoulders in it, my short pants and short-sleeved shirt as soaked as I was, I bent and drank. This done, it was time to ascend.

Small as I was, it was not at all easy. Everywhere I placed a hand or a foot, attempting to climb, I slipped. The soaked quarried sides of the well provided no place to grip, no way to climb. What Kevin had done easily enough, was impossible for me.

That he was bigger, stronger, more developed, I had not ever admitted to myself. I never even admitted to myself that he could beat me. And though he always did, I thought he only did because I'd let him.

I needed him now. I was unable to pitch like a frog or slither like a snake, prisoner in this circle in quarry, in this circle in earth.

I hollered. I cried out. I panicked.

Was I relieved to see him staring down with the sky as if about him. The blue sky looked like something he was wearing.

He instructed me where to place my hands, my feet and I obeyed like one having something to prepare with a recipe to follow and following every step not wanting what's being prepared to be

# *POETi*



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## INTRODUCTION

For several reasons, *Poui* No. 6 seems like a very special issue: there are contributions from 31 writers, more than we have had in any of the previous issues, and as a consequence, this issue runs to 132 pages, the biggest yet. I do not have the impression that there were more submissions this year than in the past, but there certainly was more material of a quality suitable for inclusion, and this is certainly very gratifying for the editors who have to read all the submissions. There is a nice balance, in this issue, of poetry and prose fiction, with ten items in the latter category, accounting for about 50 out of the 114 pages of submitted material published – almost half. In addition most of the prose pieces (by Velma Pollard, Chip Livingstone, Debra Providence, Krishna Ramsumair, Robert Schmid and George Sammy) are powerful and very moving. As in recent years, we must thank our regular and committed contributors for continuing to send us their work; it is these faithful contributors who keep the annual publication going, although the exposure of their work is not as great as we all would like – many copies of past issues remain piled in the departmental store-room and we would welcome ideas and suggestions about how the publication might be more widely and more effectively marketed. We also welcome the fair number of new voices heard in *Poui* for the first time this year: we hope you will continue to support the publication with your contributions in coming years.

Another reason why this issue is special is because we are privileged to include a recent poem by our own beloved Kamau Brathwaite, who has graciously served as Editorial Consultant to *Poui* from the first issue and who has kindly agreed to be our ‘Featured Poet’ in this issue. “This Sweet Windperson Poem” is a lovely breath of Barbadian air, charged with and hallowed by the memory and love of the poet as he writes about childhood and landscape and home and the changes that have altered the remembered past. It is a poem full of the Kamau magic of language and lore and lived experience that empower the reader to look anew at the Barbadian landscape and see the whole world. This item makes *Poui* No. 6 a very special issue indeed.

I must thank my fellow editors, Jane Bryce and Hazel Simmons-McDonald, for their patient help and hard work in putting this issue together.

Mark McWatt

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**David Acevedo:** was born in San Juan Puerto Rico, although he grew up in Hartford, Connecticut. Back in Puerto Rico, he has won several literary contests such as the Gloria “Picci” Alonso Prize (2000) and the ICPR Mayagüez (2003). His work has been published in magazines such as *Tonguas*, *El sótano 00931* and *Contornos*. His work is also featured in the poetry web page [www.enlaorilla.net](http://www.enlaorilla.net).

**Kamau Brathwaite:** our own beloved Kamau, is known to every reader, we’re sure, as one of Barbados’s and the region’s most celebrated poets, scholars and men-of-letters. Author of two towering trilogies of Barbadian/Caribbean poems, *The Arrivants (Rights of Passage, Masks, Islands)* and *Ancestors (Mother Poem, Sun Poem, X-Self)*, Kamau has also authored several other collections of poems, stories and numerous scholarly and critical articles in the areas of Caribbean Literature, History and Culture. *Poui* is privileged to have him as Consulting Editor and very pleased to feature recent work by him in this issue.

**Reuel Ben Lewi:** a writer of poetry and living in Guyana, South America.

**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 anthologised, and she has also received numerous writing awards.

**Linda Deane:** is a British-Barbadian writer and poet. A journalist for over 20 years, she now manages her own editorial & creative consultancy. Currently at work on a collection of poems and essays, she has performed locally and overseas, most recently at jazz and writers festivals in Ontario. She is co-founder of the Barbadian arts and cultural publication, *ArtsEtc*, and is a mother of two.

**Margaret D. Gill:** has been writing since childhood in her mother’s footsteps. Her mother wrote recitations for the children at Sunday school in the family Pentecostal church. Margaret is a published and performance poet who has won several awards for poetry since childhood. One of the earliest of these is second prize in the Chankar’s International Children’s Poetry Competition held in India in 1966. The most recent is the inaugural Barbados Frank Collymore Literary Endowment Award in 1998.

**Maggie Harris:** was born in Guyana and has lived in England since 1971. A teacher and reader-development worker, she also runs writing workshops for all age groups. She has won numerous awards, including a research award at UWI, Cave Hill, in 1999 to study contemporary poetry, and the Guyana Prize for Literature 2000 with her first collection, ‘Limbolands’ (Mango Publishing).

**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.

**Keshia James:** was born in 1975 in Nassau, Bahamas. She possesses a BA degree from Western Connecticut State University, located in Danbury, CT where she majored in Anthropology/Sociology. She plans on pursuing a dual Master's degree in Women's Studies and English Literature beginning in Fall 2005. Keshia is simply seeking to become a better writer of words that inspire, or cause readers of her work to go hmm!

**Chip Livingstone's:** poetry and fiction have been published recently in *The New York Quarterly*, *Barrow Street*, *Ploughshares*, *Brooklyn Review*, *Apalachee Review*, *Cimarron Review*, *Crazyhorse*, and *Stories from the Blue Moon Café*. He lives in New York City.

**Ian McDonald** was born in St. Augustine, Trinidad, in 1933, and educated at Queen's Royal College, Port-of-Spain, and Cambridge University. Since 1955 he has lived in Guyana and worked in the sugar industry, where he is now 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*. 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. He 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 his play 'The Tramping Man' is often staged. His award winning novel 'The Humming-Bird Tree' was first published in 1969; in 1992 it was made into a BBC film. Macmillan has recently published a new edition.

**Mark McWatt:** was born in Guyana and is currently Professor of West Indian Literature at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, where, in addition to literature courses, he teaches a course in Creative Writing (Poetry). He has been publishing poems in anthologies and periodicals for many years and has two published collections: 'Interiors' (1989) and 'The Language of Eldorado' (1994). He is working on a new volume of poetry and his first collection of short stories, 'Suspended Sentences', is published in March 2005.

**Lelawattee Manoo-Rahming:** was born in Trinidad in 1960, and now lives in Nassau, The Bahamas where she is a practicing 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 Bahamas, the Caribbean, USA and Europe. she has won poetry, essay and art awards in the Bahamas. Internationally, she has won 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 in 2000 by Peepal Tree Press, Leeds, England.

**Renuka Maraj:** is a History and Social Studies teacher at Waterloo High School in Trinidad. She is also pursuing a postgraduate degree in Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies. A short story competition held by the Hindu Women's Organization in 2001 prompted her to try this genre of writing. The result was rewarding. The



same story was submitted to The Cropper Foundation and she was given the opportunity to attend a three-week writers' workshop in Toco. 'Daddy's Girl' was written there.

**Mervyn Morris:** studied at Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar and is emeritus Professor of poetry at the Mona Campus, UWI. He was awarded a Silver Musgrave Medal for Poetry by the Institute of Jamaica and the Una Marson Award for Literature. He has been U.K. Arts Council Visiting Writer In Residence at the South Bank Centre in London; Poetry Workshop Director at the University of Miami; Co-director of one of the annual poetry workshops at Ty Newydd in North Wales. He has edited 'Selected Poems by Louise Bennett', 'It A Come' by Michael Smith and 'The Faber Book of Contemporary Caribbean Short Stories' (with Stewart Brown and John Wickham). He has authored a collection of critical essays entitled 'Is English We Speaking and other essays'. (1999). His published collections of poetry so far are as follows: 'The Pond', (1973), 'On Holy Week' (1976), 'Shadowboxing' (1979), 'Examination Centre' (1992) and 'Vestiges'.

**Philip Nanton:** is a Vincentian and lives between Barbados and Grenada, where he teaches at St. George's University. 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. He edited a book on the Barbadian Poet Frank Collymore, 'Remembering the Sea' which was published in 2004.

**Elly Niland:** born in Guyana, has lived in England since 1968. Her first collection of poetry 'In Retrospect' was published in 2002. Elly's dramatisation of the novel 'No Pain Like This Body', in collaboration with David Dabydeen, was broadcast on BBC Radio3 in 2003. Her second collection of poetry 'Cornerstones' was published in 2004. Her time is now divided between teaching and working on a third collection of poetry.

**Samuel Patterson:** was born in Saint Vincent. He grew up there and in New York City. He was educated in the USA and England. He divides his time between London and New York City (researching, lecturing and writing).

**Velma Pollard:** is a retired Senior Lecturer in Language Education at the UWI, Mona. She has published poems and stories in regional and international journals and anthologies as well as a novel, two collections of short fiction and three books of poetry.

**Debra Providence:** was born in St. Vincent and is a Graduate student at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill.

**Krishna Ramsumair:** was born in Trinidad and studied in the United States before returning to take up a position at UWI, St. Augustine. He is a teacher and medical researcher, and was awarded a fellowship for creative fiction by the Creative Arts Centre UWI/Cropper Foundation.

**Maria Soledad Rodriguez:** was born in Puerto Rico, studied there and in the United States, and lived in the South Pacific for a while. She teaches

women's, Caribbean and United States literature at the Rio Piedras campus of the University of Puerto Rico.

**George Sammy:** has been writing poems and short stories for the past 42 years (since age 9), and a number of his pieces have been published in the *New Voices Magazine* and *The Trinidad Express Newspaper*. His "day job" is Environmental Engineer, and he specializes in Environmental Impact Assessment. He is the father of three children, and an Elder at the Maracas Valley Presbyterian Church.

**Victoria Sarne's** 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 – 'this gloriously messy mixture we call life.'

**Robert Schmid:** received a BA in Literature, creative writing emphasis, 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 lived in the past. He is currently enrolled in the Master's Program in Literature at U.W.I in Barbados, where he lives with his wife and baby girl.

**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 *Umum Magazine*.

**Obediah Smith:** Bahamian author and Fish 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.

**Ian G. Strachan:** is a lecturer in English in the Bahamas. He has had a novel published entitled 'God's Angry Babies' (Lynne Reinner 1997) and his play 'No Seeds in Babylon' appears in the book *Contemporary Drama from the Caribbean (The Caribbean Writer 2000)*.

**Roger Watts:** is a teacher at a secondary school in Trinidad. This is his first publication in a literary journal. He has written and performed calypsoes.

**Yvonne Weekes:** originally from Montserrat, now lives in Barbados and teaches drama at the Barbados Community College. She has produced creative writing in all three genres: poetry, fiction and drama, and is the winner of the 2004 Frank Collymore Literary Competition, in which her novella *Volcano*, won First Prize.

**Nick Whittle:** started reading his poetry at VOICES in 1999 and has 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 a visual artist and exhibits regularly.

spoiled.

I was used to defying him, disobeying him, disrespecting him. Always as if to say: *Two years older than I was, who did he think he was.*

But he knew the way, the route to salvation. He had ascended from where I was. I was in deep water, way below. He was on earth. He seemed as far away from where I was as heaven was from earth.

Following his instructions, I climbed. I was amazed to find myself ascending. "Put your hand here and your foot there." And sure enough, within minutes my hand was in his and as effortlessly as he had hauled himself out, he hauled me out.

We were on the ground together. Buckets of water to return to the farm with was enough after all. I was relieved. I was happy. I was crying still. I was sobbing. He was scolding and laughing and elated to have been relied upon as he was and to have rescued me.

In the well in water, in fear, I'd begun to imagine I'd remain down there until Mr. Edgecombe came, or daddy or dark or death.

**R.H. CARR\***

I remembered  
how she looked  
abused  
by man and years.

Her only ambition  
was to hold us all  
landing at Timehri  
her only desire.

She cried like woman  
rain the day she kissed  
goodbye to those she  
had grown accustomed to love.

And for the last time  
at the river's bank  
not pregnant with man  
nor cargo.

We watched her in nostalgia  
dancing down Demerara river  
like ice on linoleum  
until she melted  
away.

\* The title refers to the name of the Demerara River Steamer that plied for years between Georgetown and the Bauxite mining town of MacKenzie - now Linden.

## TOASTING A MUSE

One man who came to dinner  
wouldn't eat,  
just focused on his hostess  
instant eloquent devotion.  
He'd stand and say, as if proposing  
a toast, "I speak this in your honour,  
ma'am, you are so beautiful,"  
then chant some passionate verse,  
and sit and drink some more  
until the spirit moved in him  
again, then stand and say  
"You are so beautiful" et cetera  
and do another item.  
Funny fellow. Poet. Mad as hell.

I been there, sort of.  
For in that ambience I too  
was smitten, by what seemed  
to me unusual radiance,  
beauty of spirit lighting up the place,  
but I kept quiet about it, made small talk,  
stayed sober, and enjoyed the food.