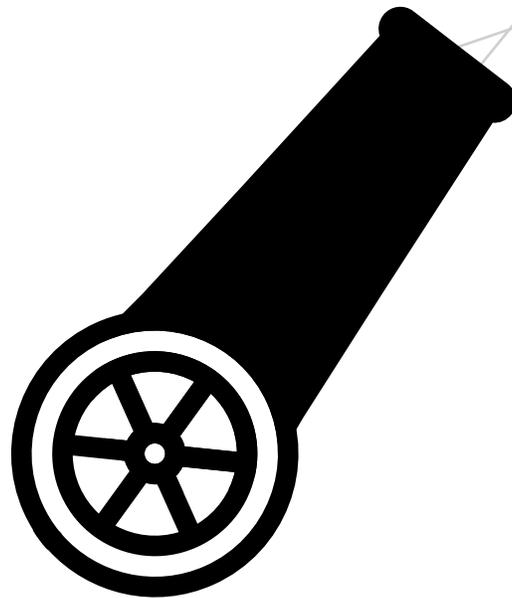


Moko

CARIBBEAN ARTS AND LETTERS

Special Issue November/December 2015



Moko

CARIBBEAN ARTS AND LETTERS

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Moko is a non-profit journal that publishes fiction, poetry, visual arts, and non-fiction essays that reflect a Caribbean heritage or experience. Our goal is to create networks with a Pan-Caribbean ethos in a way that is also sensitive to our location within the British and United States Virgin Islands. We embrace diversity of experience and self-expression.

Moko seeks submissions from both established and emerging writers, artists, and scholars. We are interested in work that encourages questioning of our societies and ourselves. We encourage you to submit your best work to us whether it be new visual art, fiction, poetry, reviews, interviews, or essays on any topic relevant to the Caribbean experience. We publish in March, July, and November.

www.mokomagazine.org

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FIRING THE CANON



Among the persistent contentions in Caribbean art and literature are questions of gatekeeping and the “Caribbeanness” of the works and their creators. Who polices the canon? Who gets recognised and even who is Caribbean enough? This special issue of Moko “Firing the Canon” is prompted by these concerns. We ask: Who’s left out? Who’s in? Responses to our questions take the form of nominations from writers and visual artists who have experienced a degree of exposure that moves them beyond the categorisation of “newcomer” in their respective fields. The content of this issue reflects a marshaling of their personal reactions to and endorsements of a range of emerging creative practitioners – individuals in the early stage of their careers.

– Ayanna Lloyd, Marsha Pearce and
Colin Robinson, Guest Editors

BMW



Arriving in the Art World

What does it mean to be an established artist? To be “mainstream” or prominent? To not only land on the shores of the art world but to truly “arrive” or achieve recognition in it? A politics of visibility undergirds any formulation of an answer. In the arena of visual arts, the *Kunstkompass* – created in 1970 by Willi Bongard – represents an indicator of recognition. The *Kunstkompass* is an annual ranking of the top 100 visual artists in the world. Points are awarded according to three criteria: 1) Solo exhibitions of the artist’s work in contemporary art galleries or museums. More points are granted if the institution is held in high esteem; 2) Significant group shows, such as biennales, mounted at notable venues/ art institutions and; 3) Reviews in leading art publications/press. German artist Gerhard Richter heads the *Kunstkompass* for 2015. It is his twelfth time holding the position. How do we measure “making it” and “arriving” for artists from the Caribbean and its Diaspora? Which spaces, venues and avenues (physical and virtual) do we recognise? Which artists immediately come to mind if we construct a list for the Caribbean? And, who would be on that list again and again? If we take the word “canon” to mean an “official list” or “recognised list,” then to fire it here, in the context of this special issue of *Moko*, is an effort to stir it up, to agitate it – while ever mindful that the presentation of the various artists and their work is a deliberate participation in a power play of being seen/being known.

In this issue, nominations come from the English, Spanish, French and Dutch-speaking islands with a view of works in a range of media and approaches including plaster, video animation, pencil drawings, found objects and installations. The artists’ ideas also reflect a diversity of concerns: from an examination of devastation to engagements with queer identity, mystical presence and the education system. The artists shared here also demonstrate a lifetime spectrum, which shows that visibility in the art world can be a factor for creative people at any age.

– Marsha Pearce, PhD

Harley Davelaar nominated by Tirzo Martha

Versia Harris nominated by Annalee Davis

Alex David Kelly nominated by Richard Mark Rawlins

Kelley-Ann Lindo nominated by Deborah Anzinger

Jean-Claude Saintilus nominated by André Eugène

Lionel Villahermosa nominated by Loretta Collins Klobah

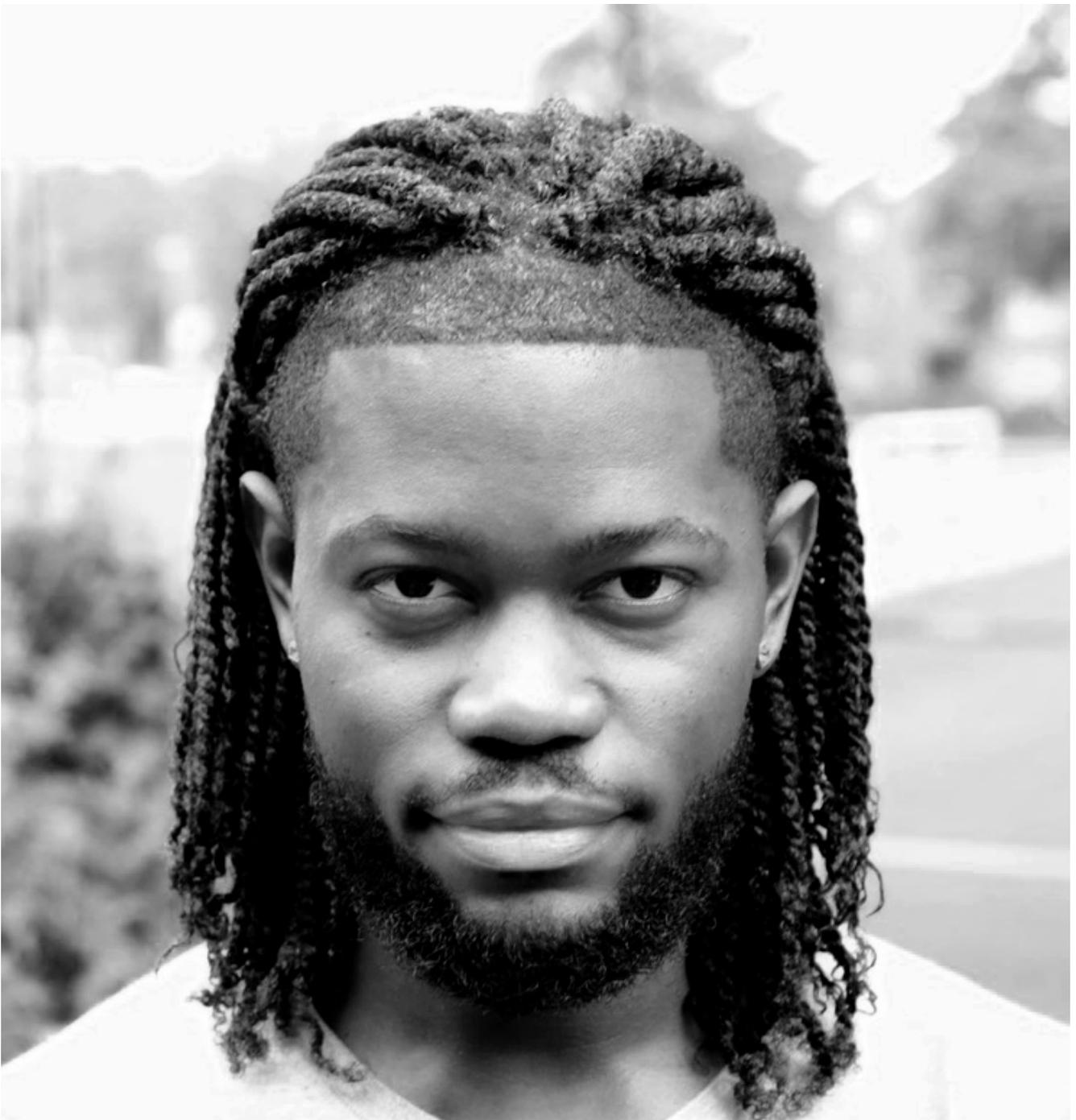


In the past nine years, a lot of young talent has passed through the preparation, training and guidance of the IBB (Instituto Buena Bista Curacao Center for Contemporary Art) before continuing their studies at the different art academies in The Netherlands. This guidance from the IBB does not end in Curacao. It continues during their studies at these academies. This is how we keep a tight relation with the students in order to follow and support their growth and also encourage them to come back to Curacao and contribute to the development of visual arts and culture. This is how I experienced Harley Davelaar (Curacao, 1993), developing his work from aluminum foil body parts and sculptures to his now big, plaster three-dimensional works and videos. Harley finished his art academy education in 2015 and is now working on a new series for different exhibitions and also as preparation for his follow-up study for a master's degree. I see a steady development in his work and a growth in his awareness of space, material and composition.

– **Tirzo Martha**
Introducing Harley Davelaar

TIRZO MARTHA | BIOGRAPHY

Tirzo Martha's (tirzomartha.com) urge to make art has its origin, not in his ability to be creative, but in his humanitarian and social engagement. The result is his work as an instigator of socio-cultural projects in neighbourhoods, schools and organisations. The encounter with young talent and the necessity to develop their qualities through these projects, led to his founding of the Instituto Buena Bista Curacao Center for Contemporary Art (institutobuenabista.com) in 2006, together with David Bade. Along with his activities at the IBB, Martha maintains an active professional practice as an artist. He has had several solo shows of his work including Afro-Victimize at the Patricia & Phillip Frost Art Museum Miami and Captain Caribbean: The Conquest of the Netherlands in Amsterdam. His art has also been featured in such group exhibitions as Bienal Del Sur, Panama (2013); Happy Island Aruba Biennial, Aruba (2012); Caribbean Crossroads of the World, Queens Museum of Art, New York (2012); the 16th Bienal de Cerveira, Portugal (2011) and Bienale de La Habana, Cuba (2009). Martha is also the recipient of a number of awards including the Cola Debrot Prize in Curacao and the Reed Foundation Award, New York.



Harley Davelaar

Curacao





Depend on Me.

Cast plaster, wood and chicken wire. 2015



Reality Chunder.

Plaster cast, wood, chicken wire and paint. 2015



O Mother Mine.
Plaster cast, wood, chicken wire and plastic. 2015



Inner Thoughts.
Plaster cast, wood and chicken wire. 2014

I met Versia Harris in 2010 at Barbados Community College while she was in the BFA programme and I was her tutor. I was initially drawn to how Versia interrupted the Barbadian landscape, demonstrating how generational shifts make it possible to relate to this environment in radically different ways. Her long necked swan with an awkward gait, riding a bicycle through the Bajan countryside, or the arid Curacao desert-like terrain, populated with Disney princesses and flower-headed characters, are images I didn't expect, but welcomed. I take delight in Versia's carefully rendered dreamscapes, and relish the intimacy of her drawings as well as the charge of her multi-screen projections.

– **Annalee Davis**
Introducing Versia Harris

ANNALEE DAVIS | BIOGRAPHY

Annalee Davis (www.annaleedavis.com) received a B.F.A from the Maryland Institute, College of Art and an M.F.A. from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey. Her studio, situated on a dairy farm (formerly a 17th century sugarcane plantation), is her site of investigation. Her current art practice mines white Creole family archives from the early 19th century, unpacking a Barbadian plantation from the ground up. She is using plantation ledger pages from the 1970s as a substrate for a suite of drawings of wild plants and roots. She is developing an interdisciplinary project with partners in archaeology and heritage studies based in the UK and the USA who are working collaboratively with her on the farm. Annalee is the director of a social practice project, The Fresh Milk Art Platform Inc. (freshmilkbarbados.com) inspired by the concept of phytoremediation to transform a plantation into a freely accessible platform supporting new modes of thinking. She is the co-founder of both Tilting Axis (tiltingaxis.org) and Caribbean Linked (caribbeanlinked.com) and works as a part-time tutor at the Barbados Community College.



Versia Harris

Barbados



Untitled.
Digital Image, 2013.



They Say You Can Dream A Thing More Than Once.
Animation Still. 2013

A Dream Is A Wish Your Heart Makes When You're Awake.
Animation. 2012
[Click here to view.](#)

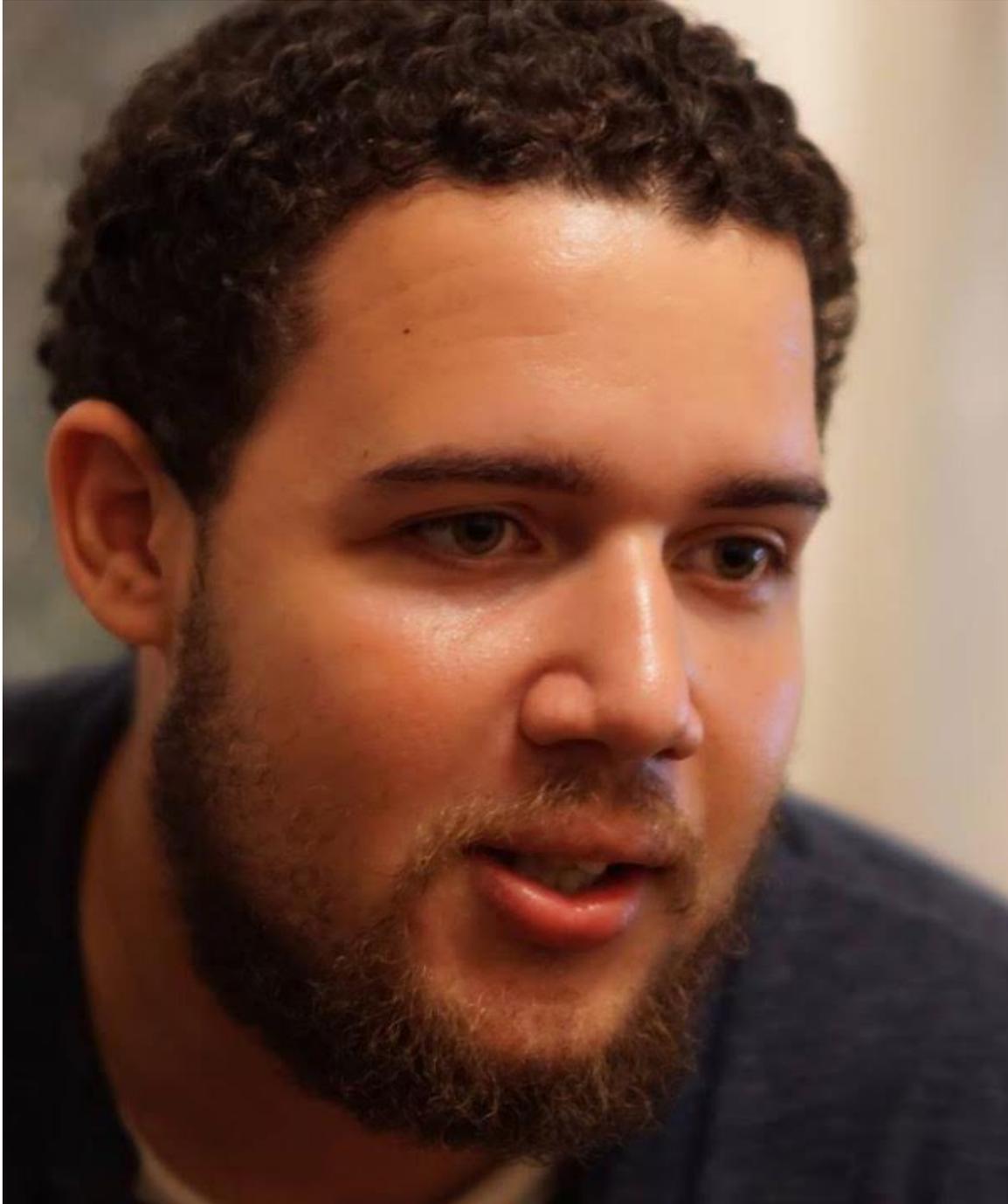
I first encountered Kelly’s work online and then later, in Granderson Lab, an affiliate of the Alice Yard art space initiative, where he has a studio space. What struck me immediately about his work is his draughtsmanship; his tight and crisp lines of graphite portraying the beginnings of a visual vocabulary that is coming together based on topics – the socio-cultural politics of the day – as read by him, and a technique/process that incorporates printmaking. There is also an interesting examination of the national education system and its expectations and frustrations for both the student and the system itself, that is evident in a particular series of his art. The work includes images of old oil drums, baby bottles and a mortar-board-clad university graduand, which suggest something may be missing or there is a disconnect

between being an oil-rich nation (albeit with dwindling reserves) and an expectation of better. I think that his formation of a visual vocabulary is still unresolved, exploratory and honest, especially when you consider that Kelly has recently graduated from the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Visual Arts Programme. That’s a good thing.

– **Richard Mark Rawlins**
Introducing Alex David Kelly

RICHARD MARK RAWLINS | BIOGRAPHY

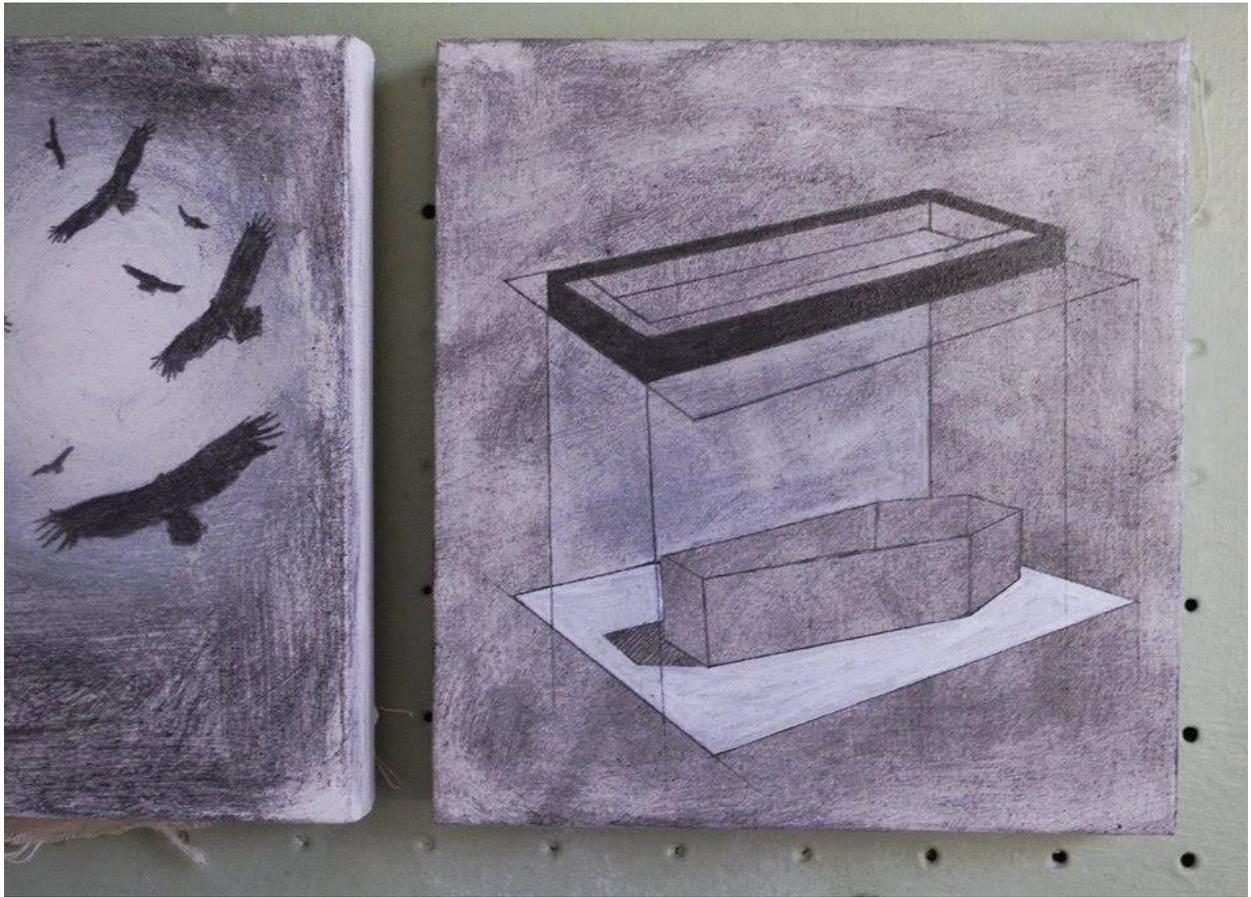
Richard Mark Rawlins (www.richardmarkrawlins.com) is a graphic designer and contemporary artist living and working in Trinidad and Tobago. He is the publisher of the online art magazine Draconian Switch (www.artzpub.com), a co-founder of Trinidad and Tobago’s Erotic Art Week exhibition, and collaborator in the Alice Yard contemporary art space initiative. Noted exhibitions include “Finding Black” Medulla Art Gallery, Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago; the “Bienal Internacional de Asuncion 2015” Centro Cultural de España Juan de Salazar, Paraguay; the “Jamaica Biennial 2014” National Gallery of Jamaica; “Season of Renewal” University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica; “The Global Africa Project” Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), New York, USA; “Who Was That Masked Man Anyway” Alice Yard, Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago; and “Steupps” Medulla Art Gallery, Port of Spain, Trinidad & Tobago. Rawlins has also participated in the Vermont Studio Center residency, and his work forms part of the Toronto-based Wedge Collection.



Alex David Kelly
Trinidad and Tobago



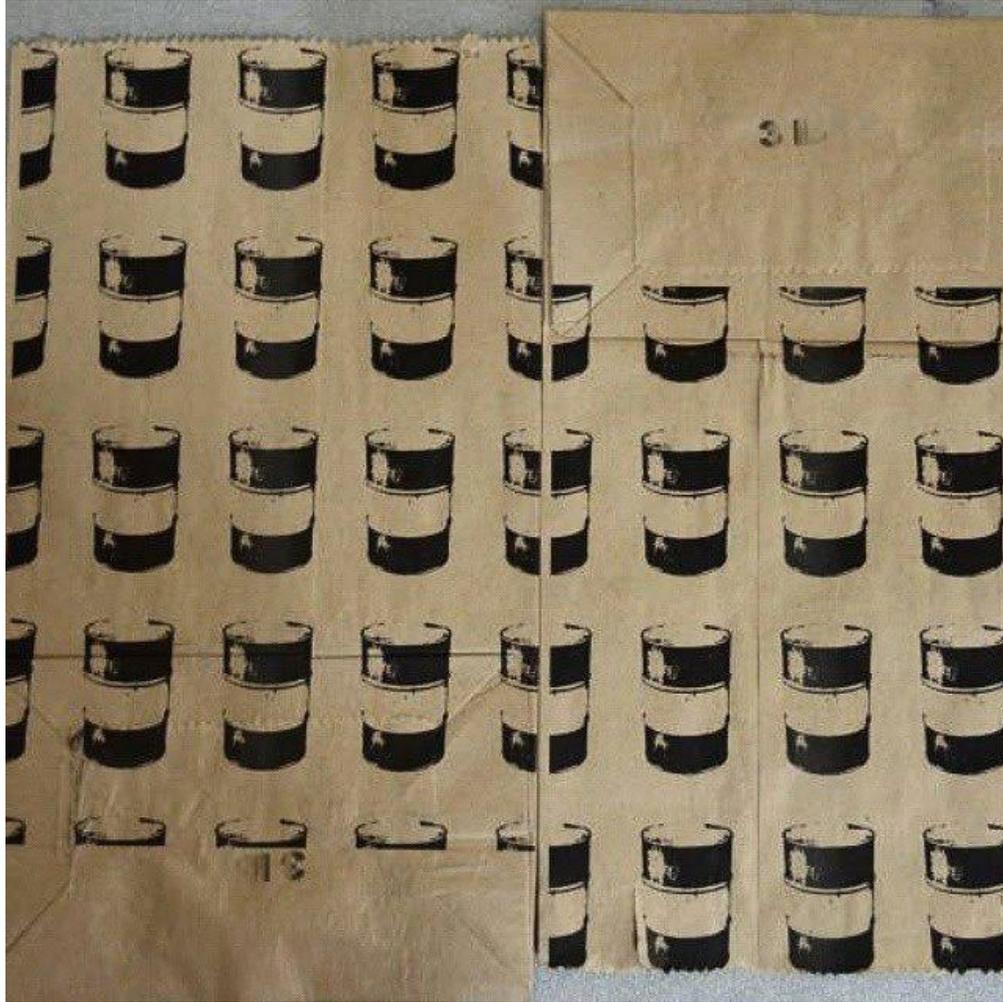
Untitled.
Graphite and acrylic on canvas. 2015



Untitled.
Graphite and acrylic on cotton. 2014



Untitled.
2015



Untitled.

Screen print on brown paper bags. 2015

I first met Kelley-Ann Lindo and her work in its preliminary stages at a portfolio review and open crit session at NLS earlier this year; then a few months later during her final year show at the Edna Manley College. Kelley had brought with her to the session, copies of destroyed memorabilia, studies and sketches of water damage and other artifacts of her personal experience of hurricane destruction. I remember during the discussion Kelley's main concern was to articulate the experience of this devastation and the implication for communities. There was a sense of tension around how representational she would decide to go. How would she depart from her research, source material and experience? Would she choose literal over visceral—information over gesture? So it was with curiosity that I ventured to find Kelley's installation during the Edna Manley College final year show.

Monumental structures trampling not only boundaries between painting, sculpture and video art, but also between collapse and creation, were what I found. The scale of her work evoked an almost oppressive, tactile

state of destruction. Yet the dynamism in the way she handled materials presented this destruction not as a static end but as source material for something new and exciting. I took pleasure in the work's physicality—and of course glimpsing the journey of its conception— but I'm most moved by her exploration into the potential of abstract art (formally and metaphorically) in a cultural space where the strictly figurative rules.

– **Deborah Anzinger**

Introducing Kelley-Ann Lindo

DEBORAH ANZINGER | BIOGRAPHY

Deborah Anzinger (www.deborahanzinger.com) is an artist based in Kingston, Jamaica where she founded the contemporary visual art organisation New Local Space Limited (NLS) in 2012. She makes paintings that are intended to catalyse opportunities for redefining, restructuring and broadening our personal understandings of the positions we occupy in relation to our surroundings. Her work has been featured in exhibitions at the National Gallery of Jamaica, the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Art (NY), the Trinidad and Tobago Film Festival, Popop (Nassau, Bahamas), Transformer (Washington, D.C.), Liquid Courage Gallery (Nassau, Bahamas), Arlington Art Center (Arlington, VA) and Civilian Art Projects (Washington, D.C.), and reviewed in the Washington Post, Jamaica Gleaner, Jamaica Observer and the New York Times.



Kelley-Ann Lindo
Jamaica



Untitled.
2015



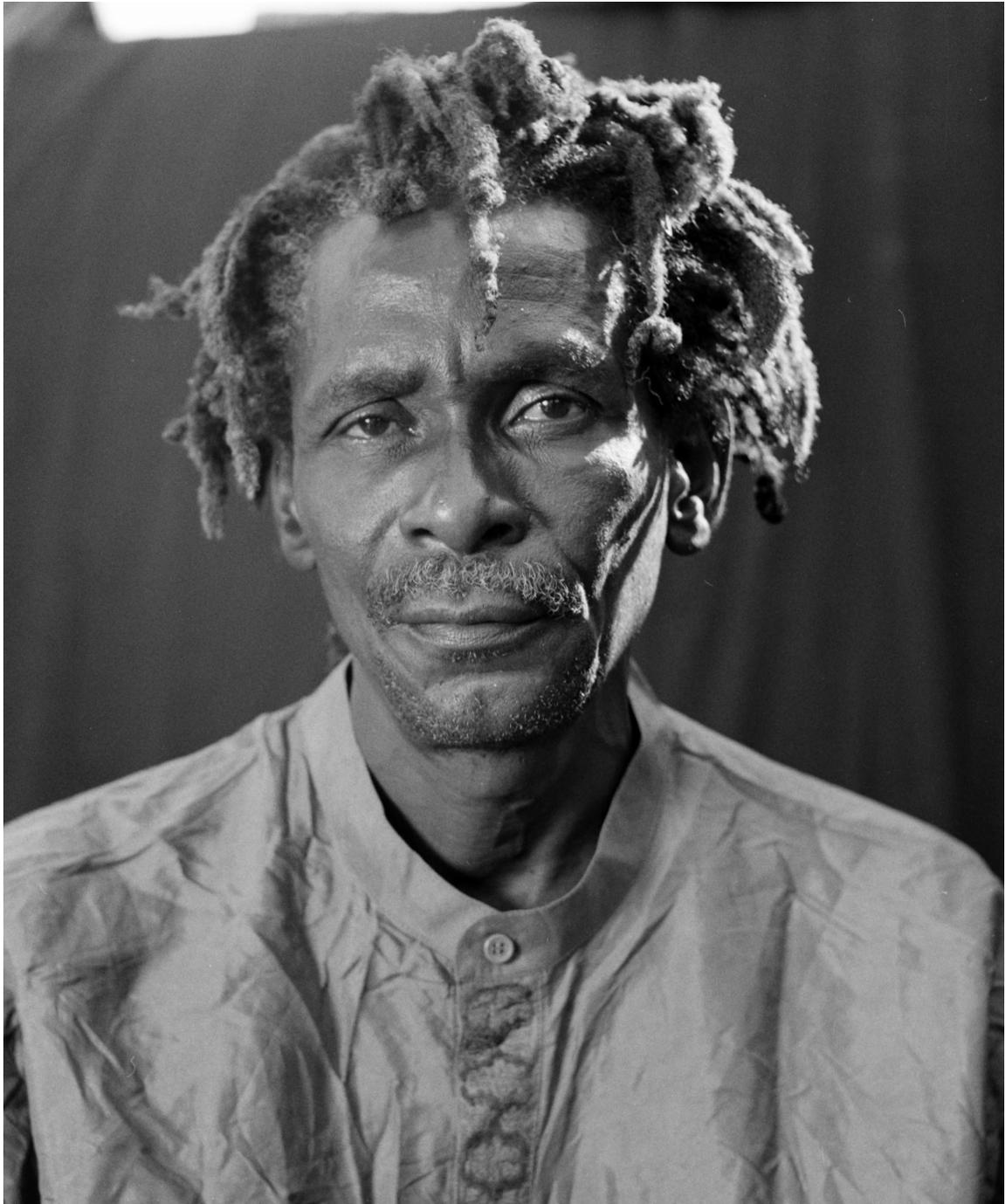
Jean-Claude Saintilus (aka Claude), born in 1960, lives near the Grand Rue on a parallel street called Rue du Magasin de l'Etat. Claude started working and training with me as an artist in the early 2000s and joined "Atis-Rezistans" in 2007. Most of his work is figurative and often memorialising passed friends and family. He has created an incredible structure dedicated to Gede in his yard, which is half altar and part art installation. He represents the strongest blurring of boundaries between religion and art, citing the spirits as his biggest influence and inspiration. According to him: "My whole family is mystical. I asked the spirits that I could do work with my mind and be creative. They told me to do work that is mystic and so I can better understand the mystic. The mystic is an absolute truth. It exists, so therefore I love it."

– **André Eugène**

Introducing Jean-Claude Saintilus

ANDRÉ EUGÈNE | BIOGRAPHY

André Eugène was born in downtown Port-au-Prince, Haiti in 1959. He is a leading figure in the artists' collective known as Atis Rezistans (www.atis-rezistans.com) and a broader movement known as the Sculptors of Grand Rue. In 2006 André Eugène contributed to a large-scale collective sculptural work, which is a permanent exhibit at the International Museum of Slavery in Liverpool. His work has been shown at the Museum of Ethnography, Geneva; at the Parc de la Villette, Paris; the Fowler Museum, UCLA, Los Angeles; Nottingham Contemporary, UK and at the Grand Palais, Paris. His work was included in the Haitian Pavilions at the 54th Venice Biennale. André Eugène is the co-director of the Ghetto Biennale (ghettobiennale.org), which has been held in Port-au-Prince since 2009.



Jean-Claude Saintilus

Haiti



A portrait of Claude's grandmother.

2009

Photograph by Leah Gordon



Saintilus has outfitted this sculpture of a preacher with an overcoat and cape and given him disproportionately large and expressive metal hands.

2009

Photograph by Leah Gordon



Skeleton with wig on fan base.

2009

Photograph by Leah Gordon



Sculpture in memory of a stunt man.

2011

Photograph by Leah Gordon



Sculpture of the Vodou spirit and member of the Gede family, Grann Brijit.
2009



Skeleton in a double-breasted jacket.

2009

Photograph by Leah Gordon

Lionel Villahermosa grew up in Santurce, Puerto Rico, one of the most artistically and musically important and vibrant areas of San Juan. Although he is beginning to have some local exposure for his visual art and performances, he is a multi-talented young artist who should be known in the larger Caribbean region and beyond. I have been particularly moved by his “heartical” and risk-taking approach to all of his projects, a short documentary that has been made about his connections to bomba dancing and his father (*El Hijo de Ruby*, directed by Gisela Rosario Ramos, Puerto Rico, 2014), his use of a traditional art form like bomba to claim a more expansive, fluid masculinity that incorporates elements of the feminine, and his drawing ability and probing imagination.

His approach differs from the “drag queen” performances of popular culture and nightlife of Puerto Rico. In 2012, he had his debut in a solo dance and theatrical work, titled “La falda bien puesta” (“The Well-Placed Skirt”) in the Beckett Theater of Río Piedras. In this project, Villahermosa used his formal training in the traditional dance. Though bomba involves much improvisation and dialogue

between dancer and drummers, it does have markedly distinctive dance styles and movements for men and women. However, Villahermosa has learned both male and female bomba expressions and blends them into his own dancing in order to reformulate this roots tradition and offer commentary on masculinity in folklore. In 2013, Villahermosa held his first one-day exhibition of pencil drawings at the cultural center Ruth Hernández in San Juan. In 2015, he has had two one-day exhibitions of his pencil drawings, “Cuatentena” and “Magestades” (“Majesties”).

– **Loretta Collins Klobah**
Introducing Lionel Villahermosa

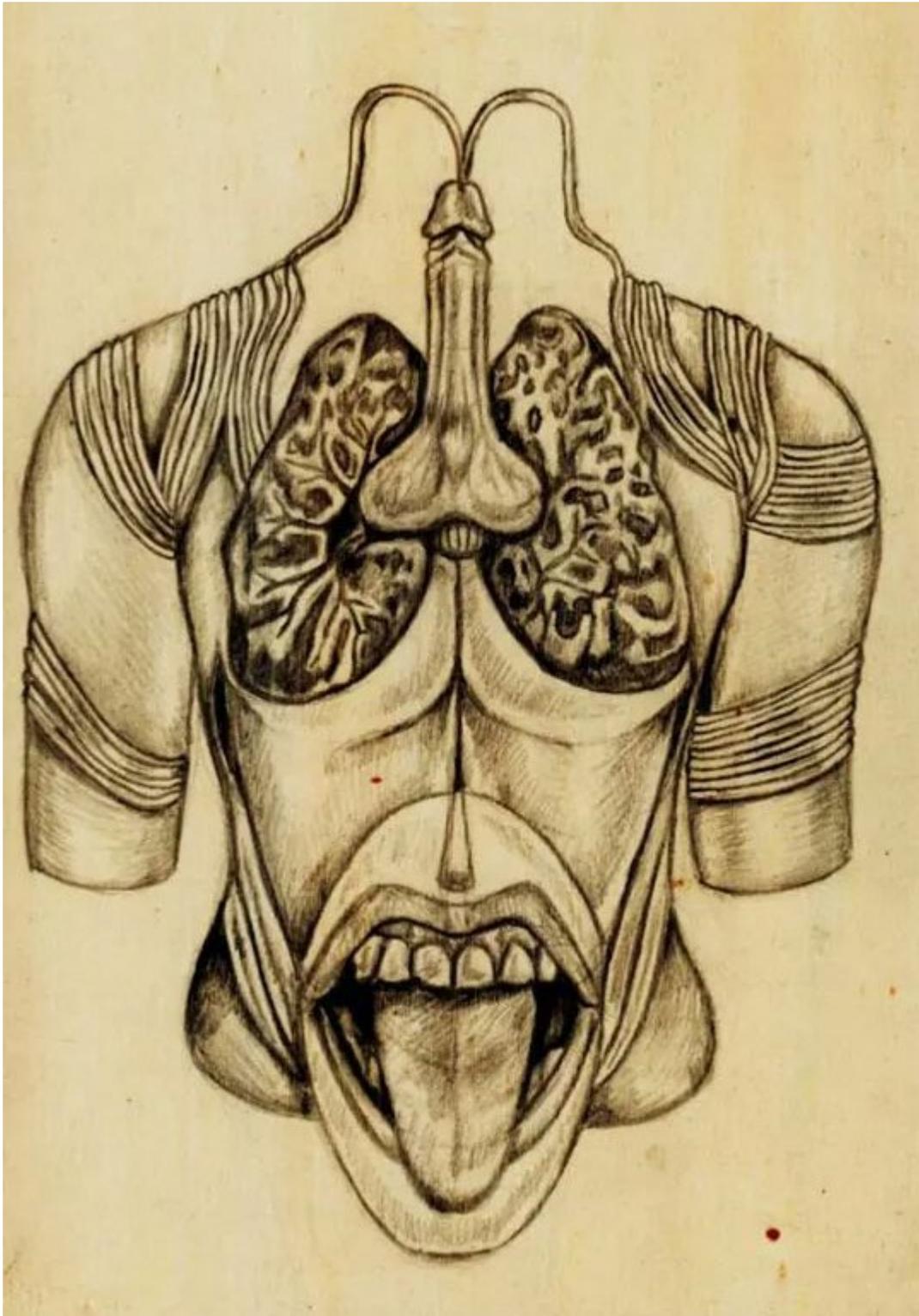
LORETTA COLLINS KLOBAH | BIOGRAPHY

Loretta Collins Klobah is a Full Professor of Caribbean Literature and creative writing at the University of Puerto Rico in San Juan. She has published or has poetry forthcoming in several journals, including *The Caribbean Writer*, *Bim*, *Poui*, *Caribbean Beat Magazine*, *The New Yorker*, *TriQuarterly Review*, *Black Warrior Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *Quarterly West*, *Cimarron Review*, and *The Missouri Review*. Her poetry collection, *The Twelve-Foot Neon Woman* (Leeds, Peepal Tree Press, 2011), received the 2012 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature in the category of poetry (Trinidad and Tobago). It was also one of five books short-listed for the 2012 Felix Dennis Prize for the Best First Collection, offered by Forward Arts Foundation in the UK. She has received a Pushcart Prize and the Earl Lyons Award from the American Academy of Poets. She was one of eight poets to be published in the anthology *New Caribbean Poetry* (Carcenet Press, 2007), edited by Kei Miller.



Lionel Villahermosa

Puerto Rico



Work from the series
Anatomía del deseo.
(Anatomy of Desire).
Pencil on wood. 5x7
inches. 2013



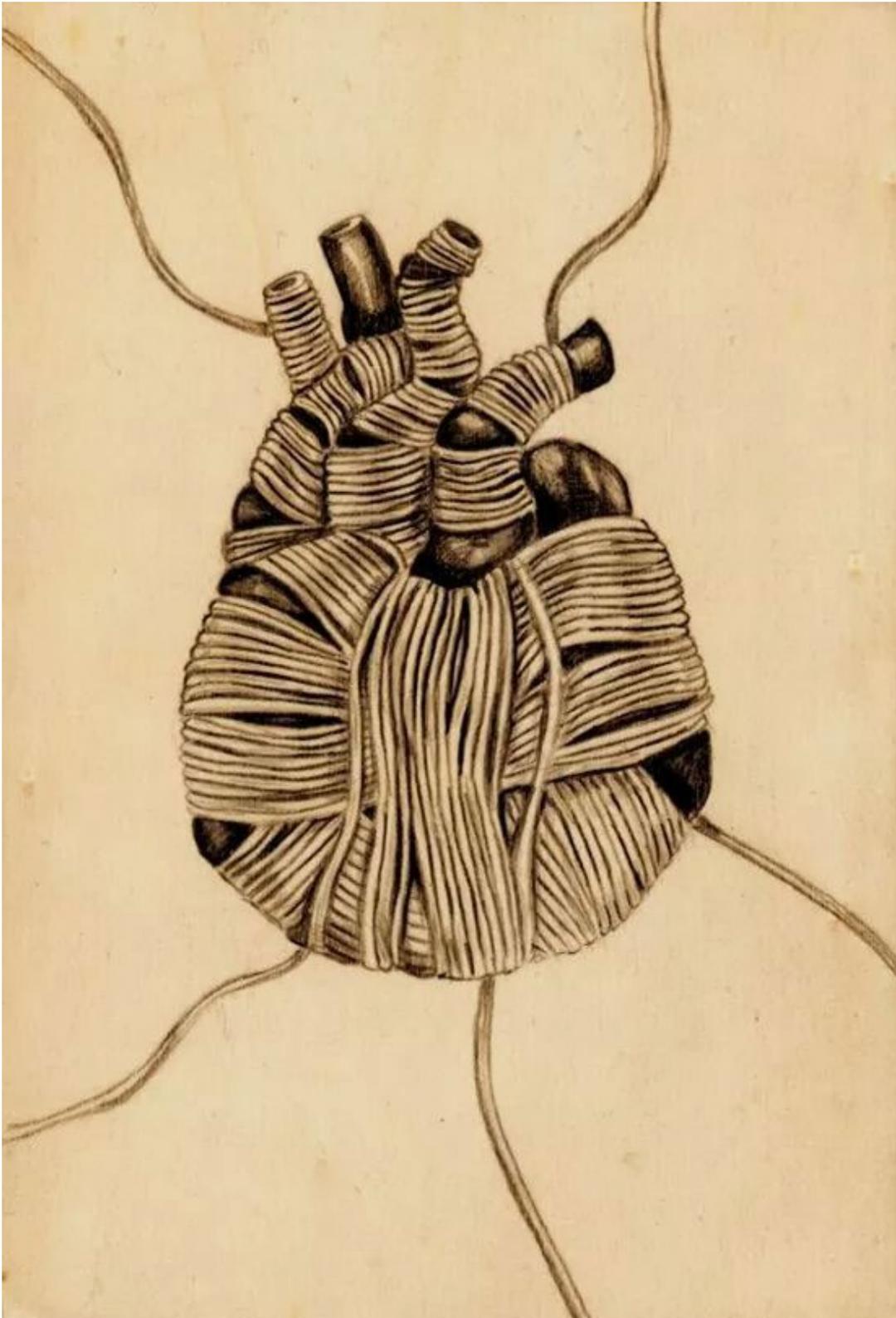
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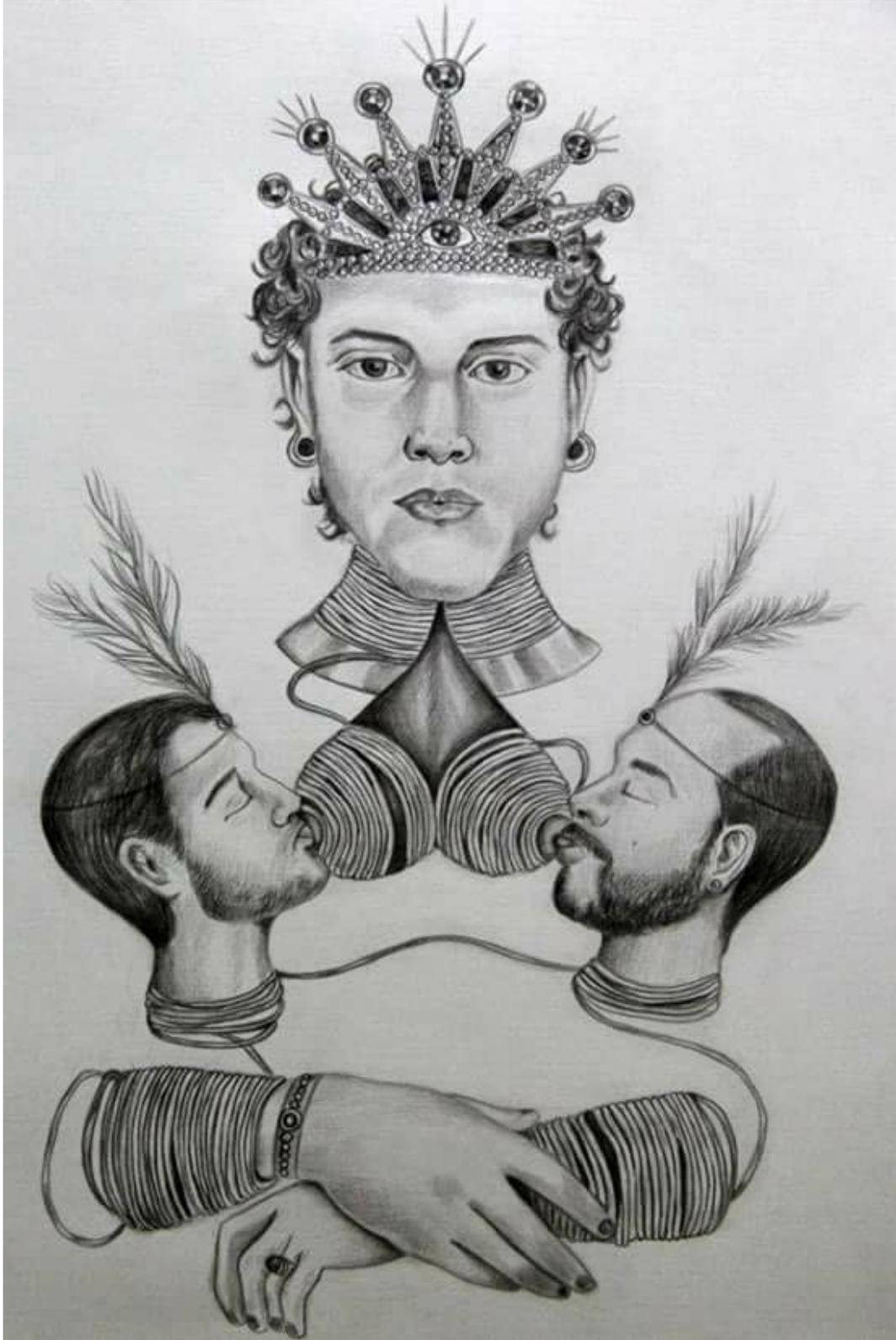
Work from the series
Anatomía del deseo.
(Anatomy of Desire).
Pencil on wood. 5x7
inches. 2013



Work from the series
Anatomía del deseo.
(Anatomy of Desire).
Pencil on wood. 5x7
inches. 2013



Dos veces pato (Doubly Queer). Pencil on wood. 5x7 inches. 2015



La Madonna. Pencil on paper. 11x17 inches. 2013



Inmaculada Belén. (Immaculate Virgin of Bethlehem). Pencil on paper. 11x17 inches. 2013



El Gay

This video was recorded in September, 2012. The bomba group drumming and singing is called “Los Rebuleadores de San Juan.” The man singing the lead, and the author of the song they are playing, “El Gay,” is the veteran bomba and plena player Jerry Ferrao. Lionel Villahermosa did not belong to the group, however, at these types of public bombazos, anyone can go in front of the drums and dance. Lionel was freely dancing one night at their public event. The chorus of the song says: “Un gay, un gay, lo llevaron ante la ley, por ponerse una falda para bailar bomba en el batey” (“a gay, a gay, they brought him before the law [magistrate], for putting on a skirt and dancing in the batey”). “Batey” is the Taino word for ball court. The word is used in Puerto Rico to refer to an inside or outside communal, traditional space of special gatherings. It signifies the respect for history, ancestors and traditional practices one should have while in the batey.

Click on the image to watch the video.

F



Holding Space

If the Western literary canon has been somewhat marked by homogeneity (Male, White, Cisgender), the Caribbean literary canon has been marked by heterogeneity of language, geography, gender, aesthetic and subject matter and it continues to reframe, destabilize and stabilize itself over and over again with new eyes on old works and with each generation of writers. Literary debates have been marked by questions about who is Caribbean enough to write Caribbean literature, suspicions about the dominance of Diaspora writers over writers residing in the Caribbean (especially when it comes to publishing opportunities) and whether there is indeed a ‘new wave’, a Brave New World of Caribbean writing that breaks with or expands upon the concerns of writers of the past.

We’ve attempted to add our voice to these debates and complicate them a bit further by asking established writers (read as those who have published full-length works or won literary prizes) to recommend new writers whose work moves them. Is asking the ‘gatekeepers’ to recommend those who should be allowed in inherently problematic? We’d like to think of it as creating dialogue between different voices - old and new - and encouraging a spirit of holding space, making space and paying it forward.

This special edition of Moko features works of fiction by women writers from Trinidad & Tobago, Antigua and Dominica. Some have had works published in journals, anthologies and magazines both in the region and abroad, and a few are brand new, exploring their voices at the University of the West Indies and workshops across the region. While not deliberate on our part, it is interesting that all these voices are women’s and it confirms an observable trend of diverse women in the region telling dynamic and complicated stories. Their work gives voice to a range of experiences – from the erotic supernatural and long lost love to hauntings by aborted babies and the failed adventures of a young man trying to find his way in the world. We are pleased to bring you these new voices, accompanied by introductions from the writers who have recommended them.

– Ayanna Gillian Lloyd

Alake Pilgrim, Kavita Gannes, Anna Levi and Ira Mathur nominated by Monique Roffey.

Brenda Lee Browne nominated by Joanne C. Hillhouse.

Gabrielle Bellot nominated by Stephen Narain.

Caroline de Verteuil, Lily Kwok and Lynette Hazel nominated by Sharon Millar.



Alake Pilgrim has been writing for some time now and her star is currently in the ascendant. Currently in her second year on an MFA in Creative Writing at Louisiana State University, Alake's stories have been published in several journals and magazines including: The Centre for Fiction's Literary Magazine, Small Axe Journal, Then and Now Awards 3: The Best Innovative Writing Series, and The Haunted Tropics: Caribbean Ghost Stories. (UWI Press) Alake has taken part in residences at the Community of Writers at Squaw Valley, Callaloo Journal's Creative Writing Workshop in Barbados and The Cropper Foundation Writer's Workshop in Trinidad. In 2013, she attended a workshop run by me in Grand Riviere, Trinidad, and in 2014 she attended my private workshops

in St James, Trinidad. Alake's stories have twice been awarded the Commonwealth Short Story's Regional Prize for Fiction. She has read at the BIM Festival in Barbados and the BOCAS Lit-fest in Trinidad in 2011. In this story, The Bees, we see Alake's mastery of poetic language, her keen sense of humour and her insights into the human condition. Definitely a writer to watch in the new crop of homegrown writers coming out of Trinidad, Alake Pilgrim is currently completing her first collection of short stories.

– **Monique Roffey**

Introducing Alake Pilgrim



MONIQUE ROFFEY | BIOGRAPHY

Monique spent her childhood in Trinidad, Papua New Guinea and Australia. She worked as a journalist, and for The British Council, Amnesty International, and was the Centre Director for the Arvon Foundation. Monique has an MA in creative writing from Lancaster, and was a Royal Literary Fund Fellow at Sussex and Chichester Universities. Monique's *The White Woman on the Green Bicycle* was shortlisted for the Orange Prize in 2010. *Archipelago* was awarded the OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature 2013. *House of Ashes* was longlisted for the OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature 2015.



Alake Pilgrim

Trinidad and Tobago

THE BEES

Before the bees, he had try felling trees for the saw mill, growing soy beans, raising goats, making clay pots, carpentry, a traveling magic show, and selling insurance. His pots leaked, shelves he built fell down at a ghost's whisper, and the rabbit disappeared permanently from its magic hat the same night Lallo, Rocky and the fellas had a wild meat cook outside Lee Him shop. The goats ate the soybean plants then graduated to Teacher Ross's plump tomatoes and Miss Meena's prize-winning double hibiscus. They were chowing down on Aripéro's half-closed, buttery-yellow pumpkin flowers when he, the old man, thin and silent as a blade, let go some buckshot and his six hungry Dobermans. That was the end of the goats and after that, Vishnu's attempts to sell farmer's insurance earned him nothing but two-three good cuss.

Two weeks later when the chain on his cart of logs break outside Ramdeen Saw Mill and they roll down and nearly crush Sammy Jr, the whole village was good and fed up. Sammy Jr aka Red Man aka Perro was a favorite among the women, with his caramel eyes and break-heart smile. In fact he was on his cell phone at the time of the incident, too busy switching calls between Suri and Adanna to notice just how close he was to Vishnu's cart and therefore to danger.

"Jus so jus so", he kept saying, his head shaking over a glass of hundred proof rum the fellas pushed on him after the fact. "Jus so I coulda dead."

"Just like his father," no one said aloud, knowing Sammy Jr was Miss Delia one son and the light of her eyes since her husband drown saving two children from a cold sea current, just as Queen Anne had threatened.

"But that was a different story," the fellas agreed loudly, after Sammy staggered home, "The men in Delia family bad-lucky for truth, but this time is Vishnu fault. That man is a blight."

Still, the bees was really the last straw.

After Ramdeen fire him, despite his mother Lila's pleas, Vishnu took to making long walks in the last little stretch of forest left close the village – in a section away from the felling and the noise of the men and their laughter and their tools and their talk. He'd walk for hours, stopping every so often to look up, just like his father had taught him. And that was how he saw it above the first layer of leaves: The hive nestled into the crook of a dead immortelle tree.

He turned and went straight home to make himself a beekeeper's suit from pictures he print off the internet.

The headpiece was make with old mosquito netting and one of his mother's many wide-brim hats. He already had the thick leather gloves and boots from logging. Lila saw her good hat going to ruin and said nothing, but she doubled up on her prayers, adding novenas to her morning puja, in hope that one of the many powers would see fit to throw some light on her son's path. Meanwhile, Vishnu found his dad's old watering can to carry the coals to make the smoke to calm the bees.

On YouTube it had a hundred and one videos called "Beekeeping for Beginners" and "How to Move a Wild Hive". Using their instructions, he built a bee vacuum from his mother's old dirt-sucker. But when it came time to build the boxes for the bees to live in, his carpentry days came back to haunt him. He still couldn't cut a straight line. So after a dozen or so false tries he went to Lee Him, who some people called Old Man Son in memory of Pa Lee Him. Pa was a man from Guangzhou who had come to Trinidad to work in oil and ended up falling in love with Julie, a Munapo woman with a little boy that he raise up as his own. Lee Him Junior ran the shop now and took pleasure in cussing strangers in Hakka and Cantonese whenever they took one look at the Black man with a Chinese name and dared to question his origins.

Now he shook his head Nononononono as soon as he see Vishnu walk through the door.

"Vishnu man, wha' you doing? Like you head make a stone o' what? You want me to start calling you V for Vaps? You cyah see the village growing? People squatting land here, they building up there. Allyuh almost finish cut down the forest! Where you finding the space to mind bees?"

But Vishnu just asked again for the information he needed, quiet as usual, his long ropy arms covered with sawdust and his eyes half-closed as if squinting into the light. His huge dark brown pouf of hair curled upward from his head in every direction, in defiance of order of any kind. Lee Him's Venezuelan wife Olivia leaned up on the counter smacking gum, heavy with their third child. She steupsed.

"Look, I give up oui," Lee Him sighed. "I givin' up. My life too short." He muttered something under his breath and gave Vishnu the name of his friend in the Agriculture Office in Rio Claro.

There, equipment of all kinds was gathering several layers of dust.

"Chive?" the tired Officer muttered, adjusting his belt below a belly like an overfilled sponge.

“No. HIVES,” Vishnu pronounced slowly.

“Alright alright,” the Officer rummaged around his rippling waist for his keys. “I looking deaf to you?”

He gave him several boxes from a backroom, evicting without notice a large family of painfully thin long-legged spiders.

Vishnu couldn’t stop smiling inside. “Thank you,” he said, but the Officer was already leaning back in his metal chair, eyes closed and hands clasped on top of his stomach. When he began to snore, Vishnu left.

The next day he went into the forest to move the hive. His mother begged him to watch out, be careful.

“What if the bees attack you?” Lila pleaded, the once plump dark skin of her face hanging in folds. Ever since her husband Sahat had slipped while putting up bamboo scaffolding for a furniture warehouse in Couva, and fallen four stories to his death, she had moved Vishnu to Munapo, to live in an empty half-breakdown house that used to belong to her old aunt Sita Mai. Lila took over Sita Mai’s business sewing school uniforms for the many children that kept being born despite the state of the world. But since they made the move, nothing seemed to be going right for her son. Vishnu had stopped playing cricket and become, well, this: Some kind of lost soul chasing failure after failure like a stray dog chasing wind. Still, she didn’t have the heart to tell him No. And when he came back that evening shining with sweat and the glow of victory, she reveled in his pride like it was hers.

“Yes Ma I did it. I move the bees to the box hives. I couldn’t find the queen, but it had larvae there about to hatch. They will make a new queen now.”

Everyone wondered how he never got stung.

“Bees don’t sting fools,” Teacher Ross schooled them from behind his grey locks.

“Hmm. But how he managing all that work by himself?” Old Aripero muttered to his sons, “Summin not right.”

Aripero remembered the news stories in the 70s about the arrival of a new type of bee in Trinidad. The bees were an Africanized kind that crossed with or wiped out the European colonies. The beekeepers had gone into a panic thinking it was the end of their industry until they realized that these bees that had flown in on the Trade Winds, worked harder and made honey that was sweeter than what they had harvested before.

Still, nobody took the chance to go into the forest to the clearing where Vishnu kept the hives.

“Them Africanist bees,” they said, “does sting hard.”

But when he started bringing back sweet sticky honeycomb to the village, melting off the wax and pressing the honey into green bottles his mother had washed, boiled and

labeled, people started to slowly change their tune. Lee Him, who had ordered the honeypress for him from a shopkeeper in Port of Spain, even offered him a contract to buy a certain number of bottles each month, as long as he could keep up the supply.

For one of the few times since his father had died, Vishnu, standing in front Lee Him shop, smiled his dimpleface smile of a once-fat boy.

“Yeah man, Lee Him,” he whispered, tossing and catching his gloves with one hand. “I could do that.”

“Space-man! Space-man! Space-man!” The village children chanted, singing behind Vishnu in the early morning light as he headed out to the hives. “Look the spaceman!” they called out in fear and delight, as he, all in white, wrists and ankles wrapped with silver ducttape, mosquito-netting hat in hand, strode into the forest.

“Steups,” Lee Him’s wife Olivia sucked her teeth, rubbing her aching belly, “Village of locos. Dey mus’ be mean ‘Lost een Space!’”

But she still helped Miss Lila box the empty bottles that the fellas were bringing in their numbers now from the rumshop. She even printed the labels that said “Wild Honey - Munapo Best” and helped Miss Lila stick them onto the newly clean bottles.

How the end came nobody knew. Maybe it was the endless logging. Or the new sand quarry a private company had started digging near the last strip of forest. Or maybe it was his father’s blight coming to find him. But one morning as Vishnu was about to suit up, ready to head out to the hives, he heard an incessant angry hum close in on the village.

Sammy Jr, sitting at his post outside the rumshop, leaned back from the broken-down cards table, slapped one bee on his pants leg only to see another crawling there, then another. He was about to open his mouth to cuss when he felt one crawling on his upper lip. He froze when he saw them crawling all over the bulge at the front of his pants. Lallo and Rocky came running when they heard his shouts. They would forever remember him spinning, slapping his neck and face hard, like a man trying to wake himself up from a terrible dream.

Soon the whole village was in an uproar. They could all hear it—the loud raging hummmmmmmmm—the bees a seething black clot bleeding into the sky.

Bees everywhere. In every nook and cranny, squirming through half-open windows, fuzzing curtains, leaking under doors, crawling across bare skin, creeping down into the dark depths of underpants.

The children who came out to greet Vishnu ran pell-mell through the streets, slipping, falling, crying, bouncing

into each other, eyes closed, arms flailing, their parents shouting, “Get inside Get inside now!” Slam! Slam! Slam! Too late. Everybody shoving newspapers into jalousies and the cracks around windows and under doors while the black cloud made the sky shudder with noise.

Once inside no one dared to press their eyes to even the smallest crevice, in case they were stung blind. So nobody but Queen Anne saw Vishnu go out stark naked, not even a jockey shorts on, his body thin and golden in the light as he looked up, waved his long bony arms and yelled, “Go! Go then! Go now! You want to go? Go!”

Although she was said to be half-blind, Queen Anne could see that he was crying. She kept whispering her prayers for compassion. Vishnu cursed the shivering air. The black eye rose up, reared for a second above him, vibrating even louder now. There was a sound like gunshots or applause. Someone had set fire to the empty hives and the blaze had spread to the surrounding grass, then trees, crunching its way through the last strip of forest. The flames were as loud as the sound of cracking bamboo when his father crashed from sky to earth.

Suddenly Vishnu stopped screaming. The swarm hung like a groan in the plucked air, hanging over him like a cloud. Then the bees leaked away and were gone.

Slowly villagers surrounded Vishnu, still naked as he was born, crouched down in front of his house. His mother came out, threw a sheet over him and stood between them and her son, but he did not look up. Someone shouted a word from the crowd. Lallo, Rocky and Sammy Jr limped to the front, nursing their swollen limbs—their faces shifting in green and darkness like the leaves of a deep forest tree. Lila saw a glint of light. Was it a cutlass or a gun? Vishnu could hear a high wind begin to whistle above the junction near his house. He stood up, moved his mother behind him. He could smell her fear, grey and ashy like coalsmoke. A potbellied, piebald dog rolled a baleful eye in his direction. He felt it coming.

“You is a effin blight!” Their voices rose to a highpitched drone as they crawled toward him.

Then they stopped, buzzing, hesitant. Queen Anne had come up to stand next to Vishnu and Lila. Ebony, tiny, and round. Everyone knew Queen Anne as midwife to every child born in the village. Some people went to her for healing, said she knew a lot about herbs and other things besides, whispered that she was descended in a straight line from Africa, a Guinea woman, still speaking her own language when the spirits take her, going to her ancestors for this or that advice, visiting the last silk cotton tree in the forest, deeper than Vishnu’s hives. Still others swore she was a woman from Paramin who came to the village

one morning with her clothes torn and one half-open suitcase held so tight in one hand that they knew it was all she had left. Who knows? She was one of them now, standing before them in her white Shouter dress, a red cloth tied around her waist, her head-tie blue as the sky.

Queen Anne said not a word to the crowd, but something in her face made them fall back. She turned to Vishnu who suddenly felt the blood run hot in his chest and a rusty taste under his tongue.

“Son,” Queen Anne tell him, “you not for here. Go and find out what it is you have to do.”

“The rest of allyuh,” she raised her voice slightly, turning to the villagers, “Go home now.” She took Lila’s hand, squeezed it once, met her eyes, then left with all the rest. Once inside, his mother, hiding the shaking of her wrinkled hands said, “Beta, I will call your uncle Raj. He will find a work for you in town.”

Vishnu was surprised at how easy it was to pack his things. How light they were in the end. Lee Him, who still remembered his father’s stories of what it was like to be an outsider in this place, offered to drive him to catch a maxi-taxi in Rio Claro.

“Doh worry Vaps. Wait a few months,” he told him. “They go forget everything and you go come back. I will bring this same truck for you.”

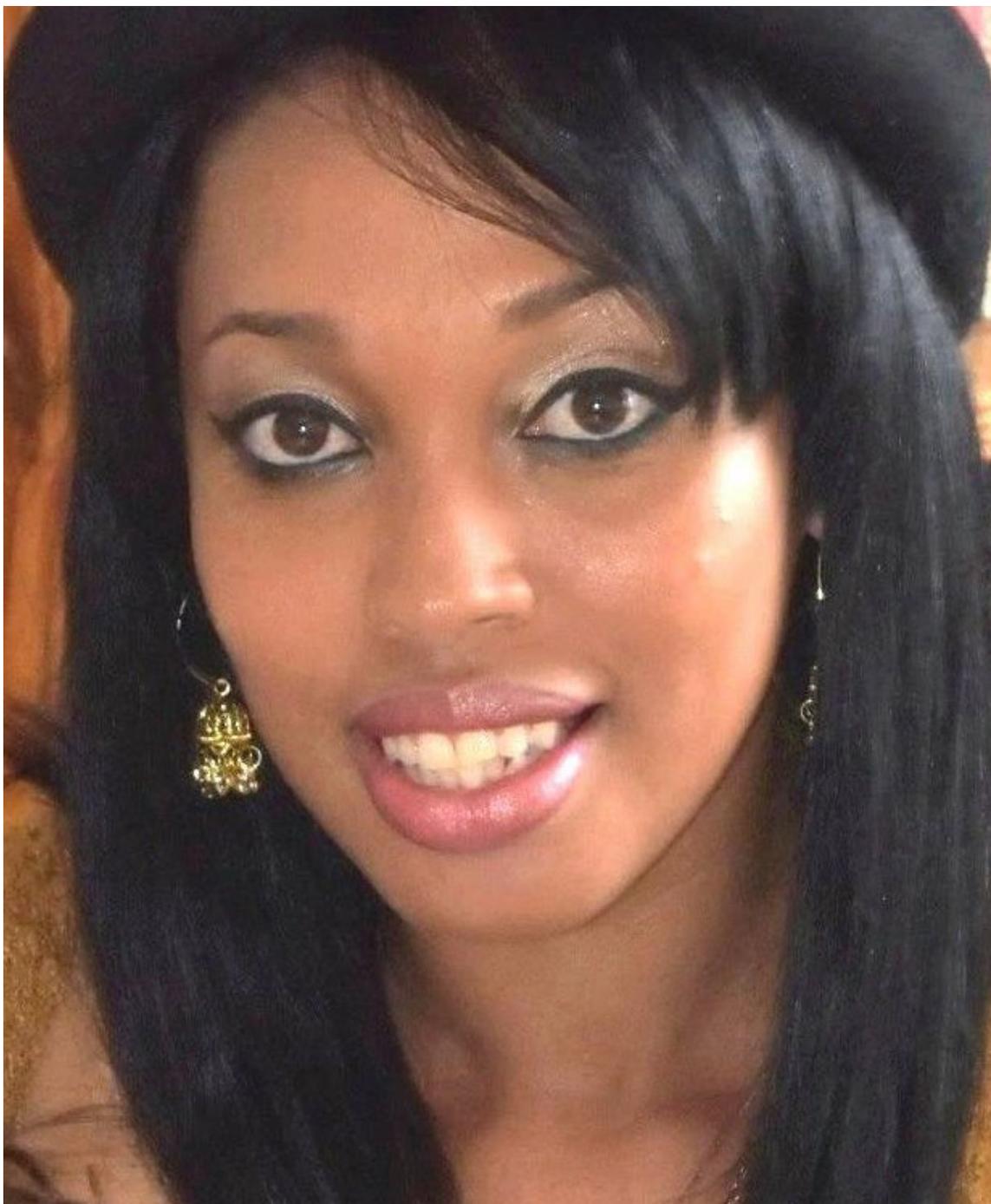
But Vishnu remembered what his father had told him about his great great grandfather wanting to take the boat back to India after he had finished his indenture to the British. He repeated it to himself now.

“It eh have no such thing as going back.”

I first met Anna Levi in 2009. Since then, I have known and workshopped with Anna and watched her pursue her first novel, *Madinah Girl*, (Karnak House) with dogged intent. She is an original, new talent to emerge on the literary scene in Trinidad, a natural writer, who's been writing stories since she was a child and winning prizes at primary school. *Madinah Girl*, published late 2015, shows that Harold Sonny Ladoo has a literary heiress, for this debut novel falls under the same physical geography, emotional territory and poetic sensitivity as Ladoo's work. A coming of age story, the novel follows the trials of a young girl growing up in rural Trinidad; told mostly from a child's POV, it deals with the complexities of race, domestic violence and the subjugation of women. Her characters cuss, shout, drink, beat each other and say the unsayable and the narrative crackles with bolface picong. This short extracts gives the reader a flavour of Anna Levi's gift for drama, dialogue, emotional honesty, and humour. Anna Levi has workshopped with Earl Lovelace and me, Monique Roffey in Port of Spain. She has a BA in Literature from

COSTAATT, and is currently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at UWI, St Augustine. She has read from her work at UWI, The University of Puerto Rico, the Grenada Writers Association and at BOCAS Litfest New Talent Showcase in 2014. Half-Trinidadian, half-Grenadian, Anna is now working on a second novel and a collection of poetry.

– **Monique Roffey**
Introducing Anna Levi



Anna Levi
Trinidad and Tobago

Coolie Rum is Puncheon

(Excerpt from Madinah Girl)

Neighbour Motilal, the first doubles vendor in Dinsley village, always hid a bottle of bay rum in a brown paper bag in the tool shed of his dilapidated tapia house. At five in the morning when Monkey the obeah woman woke to feed her crowing fowls and mark the newly pitched street with a chalk formula, salt and Orisha prayers, Motilal would disinfect the streets with jharay prayers and yellow puja flowers before riding off on his red bicycle, the box in front loaded with doubles, aloo pies, mango chutney and pepper sauce. He was a stumpy, bosie-backed, wrinkled, brown-skinned East Indian, with a whooping cough, who looked like seventy for years. Every afternoon at four, his Madras wife Drupatee, would stand waiting at the top of the street holding my hands with tears in her eyes. Every evening Motilal would come home drunk, the bottle of bay rum stuffed in his left pocket, abandoning his bicycle in a pile of cow shit in the middle of the street for Drupatee to pick up.

Motilal had a lot of things on his mind, which he often emptied when drunk. He always called my mother a nigger lover while admitting he had a crush on her. Daddy used to lock the doors to maco Motilal's staggering movements through the curtains, for fear of the cutlass Motilal carried for every nigger who messed with him on the street. Whenever Motilal started cussing his family, I'd run away from home to stand and listen.

He called me a nigger but I laughed and told him that his mother was a nigger too. One evening he called me a muddercunt, a jumbie Baptist and a force-ripe whore. He grabbed Drupatee by her skirt, and started to beat her with a bilna shouting,

"Go and cook roti yuh black bitch. All day yuh washing down gutter and telling dem niggers how much rum I does drink by Jagdath. Stay in yuh house, cook fuh yuh husband and doh meddle with them muddercunts. Yuh eh see dem is lazy black people. Yuh think I bring you from Mayaro to do nothing?"

"Mootie it have dhal, rice and bhagi. Ask yuh mother what I does do all day. Ask she Mootie, she under de hammock shelling peas," cried Drupatee falling to the ground, covering her cane field face and pruned breasts with her crossed hands. Bano, Motilal's last daughter, was sitting in silence near an old Singer sewing machine when Motilal instructed her to beg neighbor Ali for ice. "Ey, Bano, go and get some fucking ice and if they ask yuh about yuh mother, tell them she eh cook so ah give she

ah lil slap. Drupatee is ah lazy stinking liar!"

Stepping into the duck pen, Motilal saw his youngest son Vijay welding frames for the doubles bicycle. Vijay was 21, lean and black like Drupatee. Once he gave me a King James Version pocket bible and told me to hide it away from Drupatee and Motilal because he was a born Hindu who had secretly baptised into Christianity.

"Come son, come and drink some rum with yuh Pa," offered Motilal, chasing a duck into the gutter and sitting down next to a pile of duck shit.

"Pa, yuh know I don't drink rum and smoke black cigarette. I hear yuh beatin Ma," shouted Vijay, raising a piece of metal in his hand as if to hit Motilal.

"You know I selling doubles all fuckin day and I come home and she gossiping telling de neighbour that I does drink too much rum and doh bring home ah penny? Yuh know how much dat does hurt ah man who minding he family. So, I can't drink ah lil puncheon or bay rum to take away de pain? I must come home and do what? Mind fucking cow and go to bed like ah jackass?" roared Motilal. I was peeping behind a karivepila tree when Vijay struck Motilal with a hammer and Motilal rushed him with a big stone and burst Vijay's forehead just like that. Neighbour Ali, Bano and Drupatee scurried through the duck pond to see Vijay lying there, covering his eyes, bawling for Drupatee and cussing Motilal.

"Yuh muddercunt, yuh go dead in hell. Ma, Ma, Ah go fuckin kill pa and drink gramoxone!" cried Vijay.

Motilal couldn't contain himself so he picked up more stones and start mashing up things in the welding shed. When he finished with the shed he mashed up the galvanize over the duck pen.

"Motilal! Motilal! Put down them stones right now!" ordered Sergeant Major Neighbour Ali pushing Motilal to the ground, and hitting him a few slaps.

"Leh meh go, Ah say leh meh go! All ah allyuh is muddercunts up in here," gasped Motilal spluttering under a tambrin tree.

Later that same evening, Neighbor Ali and Motilal were drinking El Dorado rum and gambling their last money under the same tambrin tree near the duck pen where Vijay got his bust-head. I overheard Neighbor Ali admitting to Motilal that he too had beaten his Guyanese wife a few weeks ago for not putting enough pepper sauce in his dhal.

Motilal spotted me sitting with his mother Arji in a hammock. He gave me one hard bad eye and warned Arji

that I was too small to listen to big people talk.

“She eh have you to study Motilal. Ah telling she how to grind dhal to make dhalpourie. Drink yuh rum and hush yuh mouth nah son,” Arji replied spitting and kicking dirt to cover her gluey cold. Arji was a lazy imitation Punjabi who smoked endless cigarettes and ordered Drupatee to do this, that, and the other. I always thought she was ninety-nine years old but was surprised to discover come July, she’d turn eighty-nine. Although she attributed her longevity to her vegan lifestyle, many times I’d seen her stealing Drupatee’s curry duck and even some of Motilal’s white rum whenever they weren’t around.

“So, Maria, yuh like Indian people eh? But yuh father is a nigger,” said Ajji scratching lice from her hair and flinging them in the dirt.

“What is nigger Arji? Allyuh coolie always say that black-skin people is nigger and I can’t understand the rest,” I replied in confusion.

“Maria, nigger is what my mother used to say. If yuh hair not straight like mine, yuh is nothing else but ah nigger. Like yuh father nah. Just like he. He is not African. We say nigger among we Indian people,” she said with a mocking giggle, dragging her fingers through my hair with a pessimistic touch.

“But my mother is redder than you and she have straighter hair than you,” I replied perspicaciously.

“Yuh mother choose to forget she culture and take ah nigger. Look at you. You is dougla, bastard child. There is ah difference in Indian people from niggers. We know how to cook we food soft and tasty. Nigger does cook callaloo, we does make bhagi. Which does taste better?” she asked

“Bhagi does taste better, Arji,” I answered with a shitless frown.

Arji opened another pack of cigarettes and handed me a matchbox to give her a light. After burning my fingers in many failed attempts, she skinned her sultana face and scared me with her mossy teeth and lifeless tongue.

“Little girl, take ah smoke. Try it. It does taste like dry chocolate. One day yuh go tell me ah doh lie,” she said as I puffed the cigarette, feeling a sense of redemption.

Later that night, I asked my Daddy about the word bastard and he told me it was a child born out of wedlock. He admitted that he was a bastard child because when he was born, his red-skinned father didn’t accept him because Daddy was too black to be his child. So his father never married his mother because of that one black child, my Daddy.

“Daddy, wasn’t your daddy a nigger too?” I asked fretfully.

“Don’t ever say that word again child! You spend too much time with those sons of bitches across there. They are racist coolies and they want to bring down the black race. But I have changed that stigma. You are mixed and that is how the Lord gave me an ease up; to make it in life through my children. Life ain’t easy as a black man. Everybody despises us because we are too lazy to care for our own people. But I’m not, so I marry your mother to show them how black man can change a rotten reality” he ranted, pointing to himself with an egotistic smile of achievement.

“Daddy, I want to know what words mean, because what the coolies say has a different meaning from the what the niggers say and I want to know the true meaning.” I requested.

“Child we are poor, there is nothing in this house to read except the Bible. When you look at your father doing his spiritual work, the Lord will open your eyes. Your ancestors will open up the gates of wisdom, knowledge and understanding, and you will reap the benefits. You will learn to heal and destroy people and forces, all kinds. This is the material world where mankind is blind about their spirituality. I am rich in spirit but poor in pocket,” cried Daddy fervently.

Throughout the night into dawn, I searched the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, looking for race, ethnicity and religion but couldn’t find what I was searching for.

Madinah Girl was published by Karnak House while this issue was being edited.

Brenda, British-born to Antiguan parents and resident many years in Antigua, is no novice to the writing scene. Her work has been anthologized and she has long been a mentor to other writers in the Antiguan and Barbudan community – workshops, creative writing programme in the prison, helping the Independence literary competition and judging Wadadli Pen (<http://wadadlipen.wordpress.com>). London Rocks is her first book length project and it bridges the gap between the Caribbean of those who grew up a world apart (London, post-post-Windrush generation) and home (Antigua); and immerses the reader in the then-emerging dub/rave culture of London-Caribbean youth trying to carve out a space for themselves. It also introduces a compelling and complex young man (Dante) – trying

to find his voice and the narrative of his life through the violence and void of the space he inhabits, trying to be a good son and a good father, and a worthy lover. As I noted, when I had the opportunity to edit a draft of this work, it is a really good read with a nice rhythm to it; it's Dante's world, and after reading an excerpt you'll want to know it too and wonder why some enterprising publisher hasn't optioned it already.

– **Joanne C. Hillhouse**

Introducing Brenda Lee Browne



JOANNE C. HILLHOUSE | BIOGRAPHY

Joanne is the author of the novellas *The Boy from Willow Bend* and *Dancing Nude in the Moonlight*; the children's picture book *Fish Outta Water*; and the Strebtor/Atria/Simon & Schuster novel *Oh Gad!* Her young adult manuscript, "Musical Youth," placed second for the inaugural Burt Award for YA Caribbean Literature in 2014. Her writing has appeared in several Caribbean and international journals and anthologies including *Pepperpot: Best New Writing from the Caribbean*, *In the Black: New African Canadian Literature*, and others. She won a 2004 Honour award from UNESCO, the David Hough Literary Prize from the Caribbean Writer in 2011, and was shortlisted for the Small Axe fiction prize in 2012 and 2013.



Brenda Lee Browne
Antigua

London Rocks

(Excerpt)

Two weeks have passed since their first meeting. In that time he's learnt that she moves with a different crew and the blues had been an exception as she dances in hotel ballrooms, clubs and house parties. She does not drink more than ginger ale or a martini at a push. Nor does she smoke but doesn't comment, when he tells her that he smokes a little weed.

Marcia is going to college and working part time, studying to be a teacher or some course like that. In the two weeks he saves a few pounds and asks Marcia to the pictures; she agrees and they set the date, Friday night, 7:30; early enough for him to get to the set at some Insurance company staff 'do'. He is no longer a box boy, so he does not have to be there too early to set up.

Dante's mother asks if he is getting married as he smells as sweet as a bride and he had been getting ready since about 5pm - well since midday when he went to the barbers for a trim and a shape. He's ironed three shirts, chosen two pairs of slacks and a pair of jeans.

He changed twice – finally settling on suede fronted Gabicci zip front cardigan over a white vest, discarding the slacks for seamed and frayed-edged jeans. He finished the look with a pair of soft black moccasins.

He can hear his mother humming the wedding march as he comes down the stairs; he tries to keep a serious face, but, his mum's teasing makes him feel good.

"Mum, behave, I'm only going to the pictures."

Mum stops humming long enough to enquire if he is back with Sheila.

It is Dante's turn to start humming as he plants a kiss on her cheek.

The Palace is a 15-minute bus ride away. He thinks about walking; he would sweat too much. But he isn't going to chance waiting for a bus, nor can he spend any of the money he saved on a mini cab. So he calls Del. His gray Hillman Imp has a tape deck and had witnessed many a late-night fumble.

Del turns up, no questions asked, no real conversation and they pull up outside the Palace with ten minutes to spare. Dante stands in the foyer, checking out the patrons and the six movies on show – he is hoping for the action thriller or the comedy.

The smell of popcorn makes his stomach groan slightly. He had drunk a Guinness whilst at the barber's and a packet of custard creams. He has enough money for the

tickets, a couple of small popcorns and a few drinks. He just hopes she does not ask for the post-pictures burger dinner.

Dante stands with his hands in his pockets watching the doors. She arrives on time. They smile and Dante takes her hand. They end up in an action thriller, still holding hands and sharing a box of popcorn. She jumps a few times when blood splatters the screen and he laughs, teasing her softly that she has a weak heart and she playfully punches his arm.

Dante feels like a third-year student going out with a girl for the first time – he wants to giggle. The feeling continues as they make their way to a local burger bar where they share fries and two cups of tea. They don't talk much, do not need to and then Dante feels an urge to kiss her. The moment passes. As a soundman, his woman has to be above reproach – supportive and well dressed, and not demonstrative, not cool.

The moment's gone. Dante looks closely at her features. They're all wrong. His girls are light skin with almost white features – Sheila has green eyes and bone straight hair. The other beanies after her all had that look. And although he does not go out with white girls, Del often teases him that he is one step away and Dante always replies: "The slave could never really love the owner with a true heart."

Marcia's skin is dark and smooth and her eyes brown with flecks of gold; they hold your attention, yet they are closed off, like she is working you out. Her lips are pink and kissable, thick and inviting.

"Why are you staring at me?"

"I'm trying to work out how I got so lucky,"

Marcia looks at him through half closed eyes and then smiles slowly,

"You are not too hard on the eyes."

Dante laughs and taps the back of her hand – she is getting to him, hitting places he has buried under weed and hard lyrics. They sit and chit chat for another hour before he follows her to the bus stop and waits for her bus. It is here that they share their first kiss – lips and tongue, teasing and tasting. She misses the first bus and the second. She pulls herself away to catch the third.

He steps away from the bus stop, a smile dancing on his lips until he sees them, two police officers in a car. They watch him as he crosses the road and he feels them watching him as he bends to slightly adjust the tassels on his moccasins. He steadies his breathing and stands

up slowly and he walks easy as he knows he carries no weapon or any senismellia. He waits for the tap on the shoulder. It comes; he stands still and looks directly at the Policeman:

“Where are you going?”

“Home.”

“You live near here?”

“Yes.”

“Where are you coming from?”

Dante swallows and sucks his teeth:

“You watch me leave the burger bar, watch me with my girl at the bus stop and you watch me cross the road so why the 20 questions?”

“Less of your lip, sonny, and answer my question.”

“I live near here and went to the pictures.”

“Ok – I am sure you know what to do.”

Dante looks at the policeman and then at his truncheon and decides that the dance is more important than sparring with some Babylon. He raises his arms and the policeman begins scanning his body with his hands, paying close attention to Dante’s crotch and ankles – he is so close that Dante can smell the fish and chips he must have had for dinner accompanied by a slight musky scent.

Dante says nothing and once he gets the ‘be careful’ speech, he goes home to change.

That night he smokes two big heads and drinks several brews whilst chanting to a militant beat. He dances with a few girls – paying no mind to what their bodies promise.

Caroline's background as a translator adds a dimension to her work that is truly delightful. Her stories are sprinkled with French Creole references that pair well with her remarkable vocabulary. Her employment of a sentient natural world as an active participant in her stories provides a wonderful layer that pairs well with the sparks of magic realism. This combination shows a lineage not only to Gabrielle Garcia Marquez but also to French Antillean writers such as Gisele Pineau. However there is no doubt that this is a fresh new Trinidadian voice. Like Kwok and Herbert, the language and landscape are firmly anchored in Trinidad and Tobago. I look forward to reading more of this exciting new voice.

– **Sharon Millar**

Introducing Caroline de Verteuil



SHARON MILLAR | BIOGRAPHY

Sharon Millar was born and lives in Trinidad. The winner of the 2013 Commonwealth Short Story Prize and the 2012 Small Axe Short Fiction Award, her work has appeared in publications such as *Granta*, *The Manchester Review*, *Small Axe*, and *Susumba Book Bag*. She is the author of *The Whale House and Other Stories* and is a part time lecturer at The University of the West Indies, St Augustine, where she teaches Prose Fiction.



Caroline de Verteuil

Trinidad and Tobago

The Morning The Old Woman Died

On the morning the old woman died, a strong breeze began to blow.

It blew the rich violet blossoms off Miss Olive's prize-winning orchids and whipped Uncle Beddoe's curtains violently up into the air. It slammed the Blackmans' unlatched window shut, sending shards of shattered glass skidding across the living room floor. It disheveled poor Mr. Gopeesingh's meticulously placed comb-over just as he was leaving the house to meet his first granddaughter, and it blew whooping cough straight into the lungs of that very infant, giving her a wheezing rattle that would last the rest of her life.

Apart from the bellicose breeze, the morning carried no sign of ill portent. The clouds were not foreboding black rainclouds but gentle white wisps in a smooth expanse of the bluest blue. The branches of the trees were tranquil vignettes of leafy boughs weighed down by fat ripe fruits, noisy green parrots and phlegmatic, antediluvian iguanas. The sun did not mitigate her heat in prophetic anticipation of the old woman's death, but poured lemon-coloured sunlight through open windows and splattered skin with warm, buttery patches of sunshine.

Yet still, when the old man awoke to feel the strong breeze whooshing across his mole-dappled pate and howling in his hairy ears and spinning like a tornado up into his cavernous nostrils, he knew without the slightest doubt that the old woman had died and that the day was one of great misfortune.

He had not seen her in fifty-one years, not since she had disappeared from the city with no explanation and a spiteful virulence he could not understand. Heartbroken, but buoyed by his own pride and machismo, the old man (who had been very young at the time) made no attempt to pursue her, and resolved to forget the old woman (who had been even younger than he).

He'd married another woman, the neat and well-groomed daughter of his family pastor. Even though his wife had eventually died and his children had all left the island to live in cramped North American metropolises, still, he had never gone to visit the old woman or to re-establish the old tie that had once bound them so closely together. But he had thought of her every day of the fifty-one years they were apart, and not once did he forget that her skin smelled of bay leaves and that her tongue tasted of cinnamon, or that there was a cluster of freckles on the creamy white skin at the back of her left knee, or that the long, sand-coloured strands of her

hair would always find themselves in his clothes and in his toiletries bag and in the seats of his car, trailing him everywhere he went like tangible representations of the web she had woven all around him.

For years after he was married, he continued to find the golden strands in his clothes, car and home, even after he had had his first, second, third and fourth child. When he found one of the long blonde hairs wrapped around the hammy infantile fist of his last child, he wondered whether he should telephone the old woman to enquire after her health and ask if she'd ever gotten married and had children of her own. But he never did, nor did she ever write or call; and as no one ever spoke of the old woman to the old man, he never found out what had become of her after she had left the city.

The strong breeze raised a forlorn ripple of goose pimples on the bare skin of the old man's sagging chest, and a tear slid down his cheek as he thought of the old woman's death. He wondered whether he should lie back down and try to die too, but then thought it would be better to pay his final respects to the old woman before he let himself slip into that final slumber. He decided to die the next day instead and stood shakily to his feet, shuffling to the looming sepulchral armoire where his pressed black suit had been hanging untouched since his wife's funeral.

Although his suit was crisp and neat, the old man was disheartened to find that his white shirts were all crumpled on their hangers and smelled strongly of sour milk. He longed for his defunct wife with her immaculate titanium braids wound around her head, and her delicate cocoa-coloured hands that could iron and clean and cook and trim the hair that sprouted so prodigiously from his ears. She would have made him such a dapper sight. But his wife wasn't there, and the old man looked in the mirror with despair as he saw the stiff silver whiskers that grew untamed from his ears and the grey bags of curdled skin that sat beneath his watery eyes. Cheekbones that had once sat high beneath skin that gleamed like freshly oiled mahogany were now subsumed by a layer of fat, and age had dulled his complexion to a chalky, faded brown, speckled with little black skin tags that made the old man feel like a block of cheese growing mould.

He had never ironed a shirt in his life and could only gaze at the wrinkled white shirts longingly, wishing he knew how to get them to look as his wife had: sharp and exquisitely clean.

As the old man sifted through the rows of shirts

hanging in the armoire, the shrill wail of the telephone cut through the lachrymose morning. He paused for a moment, and then, knowing that it couldn't be the old woman on the other end of the line, decided not to answer. The breeze whistled through the room and rustled his shirts, making him shiver. There was no more time to waste. He pulled out a presentable-looking shirt in a garish shade of yellow. The creases were neat, the fabric smooth, and the scent fresh and cottony. The old man dressed himself in the bright yellow shirt and donned his black suit.

The telephone rang again, an insistent, metallic sound. The old man harrumphed and tied a navy blue tie with gnarled, unsteady fingers. He looked in the mirror, ignoring the tinny cacophony of the telephone, and tried in vain to stuff his ear hair back into his ear canals. Giving up, he tottered into the bathroom where he opened the medicine cabinet and took out a miniature bottle of cologne. His wife had hated when men wore fragrance, but the old woman had loved the artificial oak-and-spice smell when they were youths, so he had saved this one small bottle in the event that he should ever see her again, alive or not. He dabbed the cologne onto his wrists and neck generously, straightened his tie, and mentally went over the route to the old woman's house. He did not know whether she had moved from the place where she grew up, but with no other indication of where she could be, he prepared to set out for the secluded country home of the old woman's parents, whom he imagined were long deceased by now. As he shut the front door and left the house, the querulous, unanswered ringing of the telephone pursued him.

The breeze continued to blow while the old man drove his car uncertainly through the insalubrious city roads of Port of Spain, meandering as though inebriated and creeping along at a frightfully slow pace because his right leg simply didn't have the strength to press down hard on the accelerator.irate horns blared all around him and twice he was pulled over and breathalysed by police officers who advised him to return home and have a family member drive him about. But the old man was unshakeable in his determination to pay his respects to the deceased old woman, his ear hairs bristling as he shook his fist angrily at the horn-blowing drivers and barked at the police officers to leave him the hell alone.

By the time the car came to a halt on a driveway paved with white pebbles and lined with primly potted cacti, the midday sun was high overhead. Caught in the unceasing breeze, dry leaves swirled in dusty flurries, and the old man could vaguely hear the sound of a weed-whacker

in the distance amidst an argosy of birdcalls. The house was just as he remembered it, and when he stepped onto the bright bleached pebbles, he felt certain that he could smell bay leaves while the breeze playfully lifted the corners of his suit jacket. The house was plain with bluestone walls and open windows striped with white wrought-iron burglar proofing. The garden on either side of the driveway was sparse and dry with large patches of dirt glaring through bristles of crab grass, and the entire property felt solitary and abandoned, with no cars, bicycles or noises to suggest that anyone inhabited it.

The old man walked gingerly across the pebbles, afraid he would slip. The smell of bay leaves grew stronger and he lifted his head to sniff at the air. As he looked up to inhale the scented breeze, he saw a figure sitting on a wooden garden bench not twenty feet away from him. He felt as though he had been turned inside out, as if his entrails had rocketed up into his mouth. He was choking and fainting at the same time, clutching instinctively at his navy tie like a drowning man grabbing a rope. Was it the old woman? Was he wrong to think she had died that morning?

He squinted at the ethereal feminine outline perched on the bench and took another step closer, reaching his hands out toward the blurry silhouette as though feeling for something in the dark.

"Have you come to see my mother?"

The voice was a mellifluous tinkling sound that moved nimbly on the breeze, reaching the old man clearly and loudly.

"Your mother?"

"Yes, my mother."

The old man could hear the sadness now, souring the words and cutting through the sweetness of the voice like vinegar.

"Your mother's no longer with us, is she..."

It was a statement, not a question and the woman didn't respond. The old man shuffled closer to her, moving across the pebbles and onto the grass that shivered stiffly in the breeze and crackedled under his feet. The mistiness of his vision cleared as he drew nearer, and he saw before him a woman with an effulgence of wild silver-streaked curls spilling past her shoulders and overshadowing the rest of her small, avian frame. She looked up at him, tears streaking cheekbones that were as sharp and prominent as his had once been. Her ageing skin was creased honey-coloured satin and her mouth was the same distinctive bow the old man remembered from the old woman's heart-shaped face. He sat down beside the stranger, the daughter of his beloved old woman, and cautiously

rested a consoling hand on her shoulder.

“Your mother is in a better place now. You mustn’t cry.” She shook her head. “That’s not why I’m crying. My mother was very old and was sick for a long time. It’s a mercy she’s gone. But you see, she left me a letter when she died this morning, a long letter that explained so many things about my father...” She gulped back tears. “But I couldn’t reach him...”

The woman began to tremble as she gave into her emotions. The old man patted her shoulder, uncertain as to what he should do. He wanted to ask more about the old woman. He wanted to know when she’d married and had the child who was now this woman beside him, and when she had become sick and why she hadn’t survived her illness.

As he waited for the woman to gain control of her grief, a small slip of paper fell from her lap onto the ground. The old man bent over with great effort to pick it up. He brought it close to his face, squinting at the swooping penmanship that he recognised as the old woman’s handwriting. On the paper only one thing was written: a telephone number with a Port of Spain area code. The old man felt his lips begin to quiver as he read the number, and there was a queer tingling in his fingertips that crept up to the palms of his hands and into his forearms, as though they were crumbling into dust, as though he were evanescent, drying up under the glare of the noon sun to be blown across the coarse grass by the strong breeze that rushed around him with a sudden urgency.

He looked at the middle-aged woman again with newfound familiarity and rested his dark shrivelled hand onto hers, feeling the contrast of his rough dark fingertips against her soft copper skin.

They didn’t speak, but the old man thought of all the reasons someone could have for running away. He thought of anger, of resentment, but most of all, the fear of people’s judgement, fear so overwhelming that you would run away and hide from the man you loved for fifty-one years—until the day you brought him back to you and the daughter he never knew in a current of warm breeze that smelled of bay leaves and cinnamon.

In her essay “Flight of the Ruler,” published in *Guernica* this August, Gabrielle Bellot, now a graduate student in Florida, discusses coming out as a transgender woman in Dominica. “I cried so many nights—and still do,” she writes, “at the pain of knowing I could not just return home anymore, that simple words like ‘family’ and ‘past’ and ‘home’ had fractured.” In “Zami,” a rewriting of “Girl,” Jamaica Kincaid’s 1978 *New Yorker* story—Is it a story? A poem? Something in between?—Bellot focuses on the emotional terrain of this fracturing. Whereas “Girl” relates the litany of instructions a conservative West Indian mother sings to her daughter, “Zami” sings a different song: a mother is traumatized by the very vision of femininity lurking within her child’s body.

Like Kincaid, Bellot’s language can be at once angry and lyrical, incantatory and precise. Her turns of phrase unexpectedly slice, even as her broader vision of queerness is starry-eyed,

graceful. “There are many constellations in the star field of womanhood,” Bellot writes. “And I represent one of them.”

Bellot’s writing is confident, marked by a deep awareness of self and of the dialogue she participates in with her fellow shameless tribe of queer Caribbean wanderers—Cliff, Powell, Mootoo, Nimblett, Jackson, James. These writers, however scarred, are deeply aware that the counterpart to their queerness is their innovation, the counterpart to their sorrow, their joy. To fall to the ground in a small place can make you hungry—ravenous—to fly. “In exile, the only house is that of writing,” Theodor Adorno once observed.

Here’s hoping Bellot’s fierce, vital writing leads her home—wherever that may be.

– **Stephen Narain**

Introducing Caroline de Verteuil



STEPHEN NARAIN | BIOGRAPHY

Stephen Narain was raised in the Bahamas and holds Guyanese and American passports. In 2012, he was selected by Trinidad and Tobago’s Bocas Lit Fest as one of the Caribbean’s emerging literary voices. His stories and essays have appeared in the *Caribbean Review of Books* and *Small Axe: A Platform for Caribbean Criticism*. A graduate of Harvard University, he earned an MFA in fiction from the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, where he won a Paul and Daisy Soros Fellowship for New Americans. Stephen currently lives in Iowa City, where he teaches creative writing at the University of Iowa. He is at work on his first novel.



Gabrielle Bellot

Dominica

Zami

Do not breathe a word of this to anyone in your family or you can forget you have a mother. Polish your good black shoes the night before church. It is not proper for a man to have long hair. Stop playing with your hair like a girl. Check for the money I wired to help you pay tuition, the Western Union in Roseau is so slow, that girl behind the desk cannot do anything right, but I saw your cousin today working in his office, and I attached a photo of him, such a big, strong young man, hair cut nice and short, you know, everyone is so proud when I tell them you are in an American university, but then you tell me this nonsense on the phone and ruin my day, you must not let these American ideas corrupt you! Do not let the other boys influence you to make a mistake with a girl while you are still so young. You are not to watch that sick show on the television anymore, go take the trash out to the compost, how can they allow people to show women kissing, don't they know children might be watching. Why have you not found a wife as yet; your old chemistry teacher Mr. Soirhaindo asked me today if you had settled down with a family. Go out with Oscar in the mornings with your father's cutlass to learn how he trims the bushes and bring me back some limes for the kitchen when you're done. Wear a shirt that fits better so you don't look like a hooligan. Don't wear a shirt that tight. Sit upright in church. Do not be violent. This house is so silent now that you are gone, but I live for when you come back after the semester so I can say look, my son did that. Men are not supposed to have long hair because the texture of their hair is bad, look how frizzy yours is, *but this is just it on a bad day*. Do not speak back to your mother. Turn off that weird music you always listening to and come help your mother, I need a strong man for this job. I want you to learn how to use the new computer, so you can show me later. Delete all of those damned sick photos off of the computer. Give me a call later, do not forget your mother, I love you very much, *but you never call me by my name*, for shame, don't you know names hold power, I gave you yours, a good biblical name we said at your shower, now don't you bring up that nonsense about some woman's name to me again, eh, trying to make your mother's heart stop in her chest! Do not wear that stuff on your lips anymore, it makes them look like a woman's, where did you get that tube from, anyway, *something is wrong with me, so I live each day mainly in my head, you see there is a girl trapped in the castle of my skin and sometimes I sneak*

*down to the guava tree past the razor grass down our road and go all the way to the edge of the precipice to look down at the houses across on the mountain and think something must be wrong with me because this voice of a woman inside me will not stop calling out so maybe I should step off this edge silent without a shout to make things better but then I would go to hell you know well I know what is best for you. Polish your black shoes before you go to bed because you said the Brothers are taking the boys to church. I have always put you first in my heart, all these years, since you were a child, I know who you were, I know what it said on the birth certificate, I know the doctors told me you were a boy, you are a man, do not let these people at college pervert your thinking, do not humiliate me like this, how do you expect me to go anywhere if people find out you are this, I cannot say it, this way. Do not let me catch you speaking to Inelle at the party today. Do not ask me why. Do not move your hips like that faggot, that bitch you are so bent on becoming. Do not make me cry. Go talk to the boys over there, you not embarrassed to be sitting in a room with girls watching that show. They say things about Inelle, that is all, there are rumours, I cannot say the word, look, just don't go getting ideas from her, we don't want that in our family. What did you say to me, *but I didn't say anything, sometimes I just think out loud, I will keep my thoughts to myself, sorry*, as your mother, I know who you are. Do not brood. Go out with your cousins, you will learn not to live so isolated, sometimes I wonder if we did not raise you wrong by living up here in this mountain away from others. Do not leave home in those ugly tight pants. It is so quiet when you are gone. I cannot sleep at night; I think of those terrible images of you, how can you wear lipstick, that blue dress. Do not be deceived by false perceptions that American therapist has of the real you, the you I knew growing up until you told me this thing. When lights go, take the matches on top the fridge and light these four candles and, if you need, the hurricane lamps. Before a tropical front, pull the furniture inside. Before a hurricane, close all of the hurricane shutters, and prepare for the coming storm, the coming darkness. Go to the guava tree and pick some so I can bake the tarts for the party by Auntie Celia and remember to pack the towel I put on the bed. *I wonder how far I would I have to swim before I enter the arms of the sea-girls on the tide, how far before they pull me down to the place where the sharks swim and the surf is loud and then the blue fades to black*. Go pick some more for me. Can't you even pick fruit in the right*

clothes, not those tight things like that faggot you are so bent on becoming, *one day my cousin Geoff who is a real bad man though one time his brother Vaughan and I found mascara in his pants pockets and Vaughan laugh and say, Boy he is a damn buller, doh end up like him, eh, well yes one day Geoff told me he had a bottle of oil from a boa constrictor a Carib chop up, a real aphrodisiac you know, so if you use it it go make your dick hard and when he told me that and winked I pretended to smile but inside I winced because all I could truly imagine was myself as a woman with a woman's leg over mine, the two of us pressed with lip to lip, perfume of guava, bodies rocking gently like a boat out to sea, making zami as I heard my cousin call it when women get together, I imagined us drifting untethered out in a boat indeed towards Martinique and further towards simply an isle without name where it is easier to be someone like me and her without shame, where this girl inside no longer needs to be a half-formed thing, and I know again that something is not right in this vision of a schooner taking flight and I fear is hell for me. Pray to God. Keep God in your heart. Hell is not real, hell is on this Earth being this false person. Pray to God, damn it, pray to God. Do not use up the silence too quickly. You can forget about anything I left you in my will if you go through with this abomination. Please call later, do not forget me, but when I called you last time you said you didn't want to hear my voice sounding like that, so you will just abandon your mother because you want to be like that!*

Do not breathe a word of this to anyone please or you can forget you have a mother

Born in India, Ira Mathur is a well-known journalist and columnist in Trinidad. Her weekly column has been running in *The Trinidad Guardian* for the last twenty years. In 2012 and 2013, Ira was short-listed for The Arvon-Hollick Prize for both Fiction and Non-Fiction. She joined my writing group in 2013, and in 2015 attended Guardian/UEA Masterclasses in fiction writing in London. In 2015, she was selected by top UK agent Clare Alexander for a one-to-one session. Her novel, *17 Rest House Road*, is a long-term project currently approaching completion. The novel, set in India and Trinidad, demonstrates an accomplished lyrical and literary prose style. Her close observation of humanity and eye for detail makes this novel tragic, funny, psychological and urbane. It glitters with the sights and sounds of early 20th century India and modern day Port of Spain. Beautiful, angry Fairy is tricked into marriage and becomes the first of three generations of women to unleash their frustrations and pent up ambitions on themselves and those around them.

– **Monique Roffey**
Introducing Ira Mathur



Ira Mathur
Trinidad and Tobago

17 Rest Road

Sadrnunissa and her sisters and Lady Afsar were quieting Fairy when her uncles, Hamid and Osman, arrived at the door with the book where she was to sign her consent to the marriage. The young Nawab of Savanur had already signed.

They held the loudspeaker in front of her and said, “Meherban Nawab Khaleeq un-nisa Begum Sahiba, daughter of Brigadier Usman Yar ud-Daula Nawab Vilayat Ali Beg Vahdur, do you agree to marry Major Meherban Nawab ‘Abdu’l Majid Khan II Sahib Bahadul, Diler Jan, the Nawab of Savanur?”

Sadrnunissa, looking at Fairy’s face acted quickly. She grabbed a Persian rug from the floor and indicated to her brothers to turn the loudspeaker away from Fairy whose words were never heard by anybody other than the women present.

“No, I will not,” said Fairy.

They said, “You HAVE to marry him – the Maulvi is waiting. Sir Afsar and the bridegroom are sitting in full view of all of Hyderabad.”

She said, “I DONT care. Why should I marry a man I don’t know?”

Eventually Osman, followed by a furtive and perspiring Hamid, took the book back to General Sir Afsar. Osman whispered in his ear, “Papa, Fairy says she does not agree to the union. She refuses to sign.”

Sir Afsar told them, “Haan bolo, Haan bolo. Say yes, say yes,” and signed Fairy’s consent for her. Osman announced, “The couple have agreed, with God and two witnesses, to marry.”

While the closing blessings for the newlyweds were sounding on the loudspeaker, Fairy was surrounded by the women. They were touching her forehead, reciting verses of the Quran, stroking her face, and cracking their knuckles to keep away ill will. She opened her mouth to scream, but Sadrnunissa filled it with sweet sherbet asking the women to give her some air. “Let her breathe. Move away. Move away.” Fairy opened her mouth a second time, to breathe and felt it filled up with a buttery, crushed almond. She closed her eyes, and felt the sweetness mix with the salt in her throat. She understood. She was not allowed to cry.

She felt herself half carried, half pushed by the women along the corridors of the zenana. In the cool of Sadrnunissa’s bedroom, the tears that had only been allowed a trickle now gushed. Her face was wet from her nose and eyes.

She grabbed Sadrnunissa’s chiffon sari. “I’m not married am I?” Fairy tugged at her brocaded veil so hard that it sent pins scattering and pulled out strands of hair. She saw the answer in Sadrnunissa’s face.

“I’m not going to Savanur.”

“Shh darling,” said Sadrnunissa.

“I’m not, I’m not.”

Sadrnunissa took Fairy’s heavy wedding clothes off, and covered her in the softest muslin. “I’m not, I’m not, I’m not.” There was a knock at the door. Fairy heard Sadrnunissa saying, “Please thank doctor sahib for this. Should I mix it in milk or water?” She didn’t hear the response.

Her ayah, Mohadin bi, gently massaged her head while Sadrnunissa held a glass of milk to Fairy’s mouth till the glass was empty. Sadrnunissa then fed Fairy, in small mouthfuls – minced lamb and potato cutlets and cake with cardamom and cashews.

Sadrnunissa was humming something to soothe Fairy; no it was not a song, it was a ditty. Fairy knew the words. She had learned it at school, in Eastbourne. She heard the piano, girls’ voices. “So Molly married the marquis, what a thing to do, she tripped on her train and she got up again, and head over heels she flew, the MEN who hurried to help her, got stuck in her flowing train, oh do tear a pleat and let me get to my feet said Molly the Marchioness.”

Then what, then what? Molly decided to go to court; she ordered a train she meant to sport. What next, what next? Oh, the train was a twenty yar-der, but there was something about the neck and sleeves. What was it, what was it? Fairy was dreaming of riding, of galloping through woods, jumping over logs, of earth that felt like water, of soft rain on her face. She was remembering mushrooms in leaf mould when she smelled Sadrnunissa’s sharp freshly applied essence of roses. “Come darling. It’s time.”

Fairy was still limp, still seeing the light and dark of the woods, the sudden sunlight. She felt the fear of being on a ship, of wondering about icebergs, even though her grandfather assured her they were rapidly moving towards the warmth. She saw the officers gathered around the pianist, a woman wearing a silver dress and daring shoes. She saw the blue all around. She felt a dizzying fear. Water. She opened her eyes. Mohadin bi, her hands thin and veined, her black eyes like the currents Fairy loved, was holding a bowl in front of her. Sadrnunissa

flicked warm water on her face, and then wiped her body with a warm sandalwood scented cloth. The two women changed her underclothes and brushed her hair.

They put butter made from buffalo milk on her face, and gently dabbed it dry till it glowed. They dressed her in a pale pink and silver garara, covered in tiny pearls. They put a diamond star in her hair, gold bands on her arms, pearls around her neck.

Mohadin bi made her sip more water. One fair plump hand of her mother's and the reassuring dry one of her ayah held hers. Their free arms were propelling her forward. The women were waiting outside and carried her as if on a wave, and slipped her into a molten-coloured curtained palanquin. She felt Sadrunissa's hand slipping from her, and let out a cry that was lost in the chatter of the women, in the jangle of the bells around the feet of dancing girls, in chirruping frogs.

Through the deep crimson of the curtains, she saw flecks of light on the white marble of the steps leading from the veranda to the garden, flickers of the fountain, of lanterns, of the marble steps reflected in the swimming bath.

She felt a jolt as she was hoisted on to the shoulders of four eunuchs. They always carried the bride's palanquin. She was swaying this way and that as they made their way to the men's guest quarters, towards the man she did not marry. She let out a cry when one of the eunuchs tripped, and the jewel on her forehead, a semicircle of emeralds and pearls inlaid in platinum, flew up and snapped back hard on her soft skin. No one heard her. After a smaller jolt as they squeezed through a door, she felt herself being let down to the ground with a clatter.

The women were laughing as if she and the palanquin were a thing, like her grandfather's cheetahs. She heard her grandfather's voice speaking in his low stern tones to another man. She hoped it was Majid, that Sir Afsar was telling him to go away.

The titters of the girls faded away. Her mother's hand appeared, dropped a jade prayer necklace in her fingers, wrapped inside a scented handkerchief, groped its way to her wet face, touched it and withdrew.

She was alone again. She saw herself jumping out, tearing the 400-year-old brocade from her head and shoulders, and galloping across a forest in riding clothes, leaving the noise and bright colours.

A single note from a piano rose up to an owl on a tree. She saw the owl swallowing the note, and sending it to different birds until it found the hawk. She saw the bird swoop down towards her. She saw herself climb on the hawk's back. She was flying, flying. High overhead. She

swooped down. She could see the women around the palanquin, Mumtaz Mansion, the red clay, the mosques of the city, hundreds of men in uniform in one block, and the single note now emerged from the bird's mouth, and another and another until became part of an orchestra, part of the Brandenburg Concerto.

Yes, she was playing in Vienna, where her teacher in England had said she would. There was music, and pigeons and outdoor cafes. She heard her mother's voice. She started as if her mother had clashed steel close to her ears. In fact it was just a whisper, "Khuda Hafiz, my darling, may Allah be with you. It's for the best."

Her grandfather said, "Fairy darling, you are safe, and that's the main thing."

She heard him say, louder this time, "Majid, son, I am counting on you. Not a hair on Fairy's head must come to harm."

"Yes, Sir Afsar. No, Sir Afsar."

"Khuda Hafiz, son."

"Khuda Hafiz, Sir Afsar."

Then it was quiet. They had gone.

Fairy wanted to empty her bladder. She wanted to sleep in her bed. She couldn't cry. She felt her teeth clench as if a sharp object was scraping a boil that wouldn't budge. She saw a hand reach in. She stared at it for a long time. It was dark brown. Darker than any hand she'd ever held, not counting the servants. It was a large hand. The fingers were stubby. The arm on the hand was muscular, hairy. She could see a rolled up sleeve. She slapped it as hard as she could and stepped out.

Majid looked at her as if he had never seen anything like her. Fairy felt her anger turn into curiosity. She was repulsed at her body's reaction to him. She was repulsed by him. She had never been alone with a man in a room. He was almost as dark as a servant, but he carried his swarthy skin like a shield. His eyes were soft. His uniform was stiff. He smelled of sandalwood, His beard was neatly trimmed. She wanted to touch his belt. Pull off his turban.

"Don't touch me," she said.

"Don't worry," he said, "I won't."

He backed off to the furthest end of the room. They both looked at the marital bed, its canopy of roses and jasmines. She saw white sheets. She knew why they were white. Tomorrow, Sadrunissa would examine them for blood. Fairy felt nauseous. She went into the bathroom and threw up. When she came out, Majid was gone. She felt a queer disappointment. Would everybody leave her? Mohadin bi was waiting, to give her a bath, to put her in soft muslin, as she did every night. When she was clean,

she asked Mohadin bi to take down all the roses. All the jasmines. Mohadin bi did as she was told and left.

Ten minutes later Majid re-entered the room. He saw the flowers in a heap on the floor. Fairy drew the covers around her face. Majid said, "I've come to wish you goodnight. I will send Mohadin bi in now." He shut the door behind him. Good, there will be no blood on the sheets. This is not a marital bed. I did not marry that man. She did not know his sleeping arrangements for the night, nor did she care. She would have nothing to do with the man. She didn't marry him, her grandfather did. He would have to fix it. But would he? She never liked her mother. Her father was lily-livered she decided. He listened to her mother, who listened to her grandfather. But why did her grandfather marry her off to a villager?

There was nowhere to go. The Nizam didn't want her now she was married. Her parents and grandfather were sending her away, to villages with a strange man. She felt a hollow open up inside of her. She imagined someone was pouring a molten liquid into her heart to fill it up but it made no difference. She woke with a start Her face felt itchy. Dried salt. She didn't remember crying. Strange. Fairy was curled up in bed when her mother walked in. Her mother told her to get up. She had to examine the sheets. The sheets were white. She waited for her mother to say something to her, but her mother briskly asked Mohadinbi asked if Majid slept the night. Without waiting for an answer she told Mohadin bi that the Walima, the ceremonial celebrations that took place after the marriage was consummated, would take place anyway. Mohadin bi was to help get Fairy dressed for the grand reception.

Kavita has been writing since she was nine years old; her mother, a literature teacher, studied poetry while her daughter was in her womb. She describes herself as a visual and literary artist. I met her in early 2015, when she attended my private classes in Belmont, Port of Spain. Her stories often contain erotic scenarios between men and women, love triangles, trysts which backfire. Sex and erotica is rarely written so well; it demands a mixture of experience, imagination and bravery. In “Full Moon”, Lagahoo, the werewolf lover-trickster, seduces Rita and we get a sense of the supernatural and the fantastical in the everyday rational world. Kavita is presently pursuing an MFA in Creative Writing at UWI, St Augustine, and is a member of the Writer’s Union of Trinidad and Tobago. *Emerald Journey*, a collection of her poems, was published by the late Anson Gonzales. Other poems have been published in *Generation Lion Magazine*, *The Caribbean Review of Gender Studies*, *She Sex*, *Moko*, and *The Caribbean Writer*. She has worked with The Cropper Foundation, The Drawing Room project and Earl Lovelace.

– **Monique Roffey**
Introducing Kavita Ganness



Kavita Ganness

Trinidad and Tobago

Full Moon

A brown dog watched her from outside. Its head was turned to the side as if trying to make sense of what was happening in the kitchen. He looked eerie like some possessed creature that had dislocated its neck. His eyes were shiny and glinted like silver forks, and his tongue licked his lips as he panted. He looked like a well-kept dog and she wondered why she had never seen him before in the area. She thought of shouting, 'Shoo, dog – gone from here!' But it didn't seem like proper etiquette to bawl out these words in that moment.

Instead Rita adjusted her body on the kitchen counter while Adi fucked her. She was sandwiched between boxes of cereal and each had a different name. The tenants wrote their names on their stuff with capital letters. She sighed with pleasure in his arms, and tried to forget that she was fucking on people's cereal boxes.

Adi worked his handsome cock between her legs. He teased her with his quick movements. Back and forth he moved, like a bee to her puce lily and she glistened with passion for him. Adi fanned her heat with swift strikes, until she couldn't stifle her moans any more. Her back arched. Her yellow polka-dot bra and panties were moist with his saliva and sweat; and her long, dark hair cloaked her shoulders and stuck to her skin like the mesh of a black sea fan.

It was beautiful to fuck in the kitchen at two in the morning, while the other tenants slept. The risk of being discovered excited her. Her bra and panties were quite presentable, so she didn't mind being caught. They had to resort to this special place, for the tell-tale creaking of her bed made the tenants knock the walls with broomsticks and shout obscenities with exasperation. Indulging themselves on the floor was often too uncomfortable, and the silence of night and the creaky wood of the old floor magnified their every move.

Adi had been going for almost fifteen minutes, but she wasn't tired of him as yet. He was a beautiful, young man of East-Indian descent. She liked to watch the Cupid's bow of his upper lip, when it became moistened with perspiration. She liked the small mole on the left side of his neck, and the silence of his sex.

He was a quiet man who knew when to talk, when to listen and when to stop. But the sex was getting too predictable now – kiss, slam on kitchen counter, and eat. She tried to stifle a yawn as he did his enthusiastic movements. The moon was full outside. It was round like the white plate on the stove on which their vegetarian pastelles thawed.

Sex worked up an appetite and she always made sure her darling had something to eat before she sent him home.

The softness of her left palm pained a bit from keeping her panties pulled to the side, but she did not mind. She received his thorough thrusts with great satisfaction, while her other hand gripped the edge of the counter. She always enjoyed his rides, but now the sex was becoming too tame. Her mind wandered off as she let him have his way. He was so oblivious to her now; didn't he see her looking outside at the moon and yawning?

The moon was a pale voyeur in the sky and it made Rita excited. It was beautiful to fuck when the moon was full, she thought to herself. The night-breeze blew through the kitchen window and brought the warm scent of flamboyant flowers from the garden outside. Living in the city for many years made her appreciate the fresh air in Arima. She was still lost in her full-moon reverie, when she noticed the brown dog at the gate was fully erect.

His pink, cone-shaped penis jutted like the spadix of a pink anthurium. His tongue hung, his spittle drooled out of his open mouth and his hind legs trembled. Rita's eyes widened. He moved with a shaky grace as he held onto the bars. He was amazing. She watched as he fucked the empty air. The little pothound was all turned on and ready. He jammed his little penis through a hole in the metal gate and moved back forth like a canine seesaw. She wanted to laugh, but she couldn't. For at that moment, an orgasm began to pulse deep within her. She was surprised, Adi rarely hit that switch - and she gasped with the force of it.

She felt her pleasure wriggling up her spine. The tremors of satisfaction pumped in every vein of her ass. She bucked in Adi's arms, while her eyes focused on the frisky dog behind her lover. Her breath was a harsh sound in the kitchen. It matched the sound of the metal gate, as it creaked under the grip of the horny dog. She watched as his black nose pressed through the bars of the gate like the finger of a gorilla at a zoo.

The creaking gate and the freaky, seesaw dog were too much for her. She started to laugh. It blossomed in her throat like the whisper of a moan. Adi thought he heard another moment of satisfaction, so he covered her mouth with his and sucked on the laughter from her tongue. When he convulsed with his final jabs, Rita's eyes were closed and she didn't see when the brown dog disappeared.

It was one month afterwards when Rita met Jude. Jude was Adi's friend. He was an attractive man of mixed

descent but something about him made the hair on her body stand on end. She met him on the way to Adi's home, which was about a ten-minute walk from her place. He introduced himself to her. 'I know you are Rita, Adi always talks about you and I always see you walking this way to go check him...' He had a way of looking at her, with his face turned to the side as if he was confused. Jude was always in jeans, with a cap on his head and his hair in cornrows.

She often found him sitting beneath the shady almond tree in front of Adi's home, even though he lived across the road. Sometimes she felt he was waiting for her. She didn't see him regularly but when she did, his eyes glowed with a silver flame. He smoked his weed outside in the open and nobody told him anything when they passed.

Sometimes she would sit with Adi and him beneath that tree and smoke also. Sometimes they would laugh and make jokes until early morning. Rita loved how Jude looked at her. It was as if his glance pawed at her flesh. He had mad, wild eyes that always looked at her with great interest, and Adi was oblivious to this.

Rita felt Jude was flirting with her. He was always coming very close to her, and always bringing her stuff. She loved the way he smelled. His scent was earthy and natural like the scent of drizzle on hot earth. Once he brought them a pineapple that he picked from his yard. She thought he would give it to Adi to take home, but instead Jude broke off the prickly head of the pineapple and sucked the juicy pulp that hung from it. That day he sucked and watched her. His eyes devoured her mouth as his mouth sucked on that prickly head of the pineapple. 'That's the best part,' he said afterwards with a solemn seriousness. Rita then watched as he dug out all the eyes from the yellow pulp with his knife and sliced it. The speed of his hands at work made her mouth hang open with amazement.

Jude's aura of mystery tugged at her mind. Adi told her nothing about Jude. Rita thought that maybe he was a drug dealer, for cars came and parked in front of his home and always drove off after a half hour or a few minutes. But Adi never told her what he did, and Jude didn't speak at all about his job. Adi was a primary school teacher who only wanted to talk about his little students when they hung out together. In fact most of his conversations were packed with tidbits and anecdotes from work. These little kids were his life. Sometimes she didn't listen as his voice droned for hours talking about his little students and the stupid things they did. Sometimes he said the same story over and over. Sometimes she wished she could stick her fingers in her ears and cork

his voice out of her head.

Sometimes she found her eyes straying to Jude's strong, hardworking hands or to Jude's huge feet that peeped at her from his expensive, leather slippers. He had such nice toenails. He had such nice skin. He had such silvery, shiny eyes. Everything was nice about him. But Rita didn't want to hurt her boring boyfriend.

There were evenings when Rita waited for Adi by his place. To entertain herself, she watched Jude and his many visitors from Adi's window. He was a strange man. He often caught her watching him and she always hid behind the curtains. He would smile to himself as if remembering something funny.

One very warm evening, Rita took a long shower. Afterwards she lay naked on Adi's bed and fell asleep. It seemed like about an hour afterwards, when she felt the strange sensation of someone sniffing between her legs. Adi had returned early, she thought to herself and she smiled in the dark. She moved around to the center of the bed and he followed. She felt two small vents of hot air on her pussy and pulsing nostrils teased her clit to life. Adi was sniffing her, and breathing her so much she felt her clit stick to his warm nose. It excited her. Was he high? Did he lime with Jude? She smelled potent Kush in the air, the kind Jude liked to share on a Friday night, except it was a Wednesday night and Adi always came late on a Wednesday night, because he had to stay back late to play cricket with his kids at school.

She felt soft licking between her legs, and she moaned on the dark-blue sheets. She opened her legs wider. Between her legs she grew moist and slimy like mossy river-rocks. She felt an intense heat deep inside of her. It was slick and smooth like a long tongue. Quick hips moved against her. This was too good, she thought. She opened her eyes. A figure leaned over her. The curtains fluttered like banana leaves, and she saw that the moon was full outside, and wide like a big eye watching her from the sky. She heard a door slam. Adi shouted, 'Babe, are you awake?' She froze.

A tall, dark figure jumped off her bed. Silver-glinting eyes stared back at her. A lean man stood before her but the shadow of a dog reflected on the wall. She watched the creature as it rushed to the window and jumped out. She told herself it was a dream, though her pussy was all slick and slimy with drool. There was a familiar odor in Adi's room. Adi opened the door, and exclaimed, 'Rita, always remember to close de window, you don't know in this area we have Lagahoo? Them spirit and jumbies like to interfere with sexy ladies like you.' He sniffed the air. 'Darling, were you smoking again?'

I met Lily Kwok at UWI, St Augustine. Here was a young writer who was eager to explore crucial themes such as identity and feminism in bold new ways and keen to get her stories on the page. I was interested in her mining of personal material. Her story deftly explores the relationship between a Chinese mother and her creolized daughter, often mixing languages and code switching to illustrate the painful barriers that language can present between immigrant parents and their nationalized children. Immigrant experiences often follow familiar narratives but it was a pleasure to encounter one executed in such a highly personal and distinctively Trinidadian manner. Her work is not limited to this subject matter and she is not afraid to push past comfort points. Her work continues to explore and push past boundaries and I am excited to follow the progress of this bold and fearless voice.

– **Sharon Millar**
Introducing Lily Kwok



Lily Kwok
Trinidad and Tobago

Saying I Love You

In the 36 years of Lisa's existence, she has never been able to utter "I love you" to her mother. It isn't because Lisa doesn't love her mother. And it isn't because she doesn't want to say it. Lisa just simply can't bring herself to the physical actualization of these words. They get stuck in her throat, vibrating in her vocal cords and echoing back into her body, never to be released. "I love you" is like the chained Rottweiler she sees everyday on the way to work – 2 inches away from the gate, almost free... but not quite.

Lisa knows that she doesn't have to say it, and that it isn't expected of her. She knows that their love is unspoken, but felt, complicated, but sufficient. Still for some reason, she is compelled to one day enunciate these feelings. Lisa wants her mother to know for certain. She wants to be reassured that she knows. In case all the acts of patience, gift-giving and helping around the house failed to show her, at least she'd know that she told her. But the days are passing and time is running out. There is only one month left to say "I love you".

Today, Lisa is packing up her mother's sewing machine, ceramics and old linens. Chinese incense burns in the background next to the ancestral shrine and an old picture of *babba*. In it he is smiling his toothy, tobacco-stained grin, leaning against a tree at Fort George, Tobago. Lisa's mother rocks in her rocking chair, back and forth somberly, asking her about her day in a mishmash of Cantonese and English – "*Sik jaw fahn may?*", "You not hungry?", "How are your students?" Lisa replies in short *mhms* and *okays*, concentrating on the task before her. Yesterday, Lisa packed up all of her mother's photo albums, documents, files and the remainder of *babba's* books. Tomorrow she begins shifting through her mother's kitchenware – separating the things that will be shipped to Guangdong at the end of the month and bagging the rest to be thrown out or donated.

She moves the boxed sewing machine to the corner of the living room, sneezing from all the dust. Regaining her composure, she grabs a pink tissue off the coffee table and notices that it's already dark outside. She walks off to the kitchen to wash her hands and returns, slicking her hair back from her warm face. She picks up her handbag and walks over to her mother, gently squeezing her shoulder.

"I have to go now. Bye Mummy."

"Bye-bye." Her mother raises her hand to rest on Lisa's own.

Lisa walks toward the door, turning around once to wave, a closed smile on her face, and her mother picks up the remote to begin another episode of *Da Mo Yao*.

All the streetlights are on and David Rudder is playing. Lisa thinks about how rusty the sewing machine has gotten, how that sleek, black exterior is no more, as she drives down the highway. She remembers all the little nightgowns and dresses her mother sewed her and her sister and how she used to go to town, three children in tow, searching for fabrics at Yufe's and Jimmy Aboud – comparing floral patterns and textures, trying to bargain for a cheaper price per yard, and always leaving dissatisfied with the cost. Whilst her older sister, Anna, was complacent and her younger brother, Joe, was whiney about having to walk so much, 9-year-old Lisa was annoyed at her mother's "cheapness".

"If it was too expensive, why did you buy it, Mummy?" she would say.

In fact, growing up, Lisa said many things to her mother that wasn't "I love you". She had articulated the stinging "leave me alone" whilst slamming the bedroom door at 14 years of age, she had screamed the angst-ridden, teenage anthem – "I hate you", and she had even said – but only once – "go back to China".

To be fair, Lisa's mother had also never said "I love you" to her. It isn't because she doesn't love her and isn't because she doesn't want to say it. It's just not what Chinese parents do. Instead, Chinese parents speak love through the language of cooking meals, of sewing up bursting seams, and of never giving up on you – even after you have given up on yourself. But for Lisa Chen, fed on American sitcoms of family life and bathed in the Western ideals of maternal tenderness, understanding this language proved more difficult than understanding her mother's native Cantonese growing up. Lisa spent her teenage years being a mismatched puzzle piece to her mother – uncooperative and unyielding – for there was always something lost in translation.

Yet, after all the quarrelling, the yelling and misunderstandings – and with the aid of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* – Lisa finally, at the age of 19, trimmed and re-shaped her edges, finding a way to fit into her mother's unusual cove of affection. The white flag went up and, since then, Lisa has been trying to repair the battered bridge between them, trying to show her mother that she does, indeed, love her too.

Lisa pulls into her driveway. The scent of chunkay is emanating from the house. When she enters, Roger is meticulously cutting up a chicken in the kitchen.

“Hey,” Lisa greets him.

“Good evening, *doudou*.”

She goes over to kiss him on the cheek and, then, plops herself on the sofa.

“How was your day?” asks Roger, wiping his hands on a kitchen towel and getting ready to put the curry powder in the pot.

“Long. It’s that time of the semester when students never show up to class. I corrected some more assignments today, too. You know how it is. Mummy is doing okay. Joints not hurting so much.”

Lisa shifts her body, bringing her legs up on the sofa to lie down.

“You got packing done?”

“Yea. Remember the blue vase you always thought was ugly? Packed away for good now.”

Roger laughs. The symphony of chicken and seasoning sizzling joins him. Lisa, however, does not. She closes her eyes, silent and unresponsive.

“Roger...”

“Yea?”

“I can’t believe she’s leaving.”

After dinner, Lisa sits at the dining table with a stack of papers before her. The red pen in her hand moves back and forth, makes circles, pauses and, at times, finds itself between Lisa’s teeth as she cringes at another grammatical error. By the fifth essay, she is exasperated. She puts the pen down and presses her fingers into her temples.

The phone rings and Lisa is startled. Before she even thinks to get up to answer it, Roger bellows down the hallway, “It’s Joe!”

Lisa quickly gets the handset in the living room.

“Hello, baby brother.”

“Lisaaaaaa. How you going?”

“Tired.”

“You tired since you born, girl.” Lisa laughs softly. She misses him.

“I calling to check up on Mom. Everything in order?”

“Mhmm.”

“You sure? I could come back down and help if anything, you know.”

“It’s okay, Joe. Mummy doesn’t have a lot of things. After Daddy passed, we got rid of most of the junk, remember?”

“Alright. I know you could handle yourself, but if you need help, I on the next plane back to Trinidad, you understand?”

“Yes, Joe. I’ll be fine. Please don’t worry.”

“Alright, *jiejie*. Good night, then.”

“Good night, *daib dai*.”

Lisa returns to her stack of papers. She stares at it for two seconds and walks away. Tonight, this will not suffice in distracting her. She heads to the bedroom where Roger is sitting at his desk, his right index finger intently scrolling the mouse. He turns to look at her as she enters, “You should take a shower. Get some rest.” She comes up behind him and wraps her arms around his shoulders. Bringing her chin on top his head, she feigns interest in what’s on the screen before him – *New Theories in Computer Science Volume II*.

“Joe said he would come back down if I needed help.”

“Yea? That’s great. When is he coming?”

Lisa sighs and unwraps herself. She situates herself on the edge of their bed and Roger swizzles his chair around to face her.

“I don’t need Joe to come. I can help Mummy on my own.”

Roger doesn’t answer. Instead, he stares at her, his features soft except for the slight furrow in his eyebrows. Lisa cannot tell if he is concerned or confused. He gets up and sits next to her on the bed, bringing his arm around her and squeezing her shoulder the same way she did earlier with her own mother. It is at that point that Lisa decides to take her orders and goes off to take a shower. By 11, they’re both in bed, lights off and ceiling fan on.

In her university office, no bigger than a walk-in closet, Lisa Chen is flipping through Derek Walcott’s *The Prodigal*, preparing for her next lecture. It is the tenth time she is reading it, and the tenth time she is in awe. Like Walcott’s poetry that *saunters down bougainvillea sidewalks*, Lisa wishes she could weave tales and express her innermost feelings. That’s how it’s always been. Lisa reads, teaches and writes about Walcott... Selvon... Senior... but she has never been able to write her own emotions. The irony of it hits her harder than usual.

She decides that maybe it’s time to try again.

With each box she packs, and every phone call she helps her mother make to Guangdong, Lisa feels the weight of all the unsaid words inside her – stacking upon each other, creating a monument to the years of silence. Lisa

is desperate. If her vocal cords fail her, maybe her hands will not – surely writing has not failed Walcott. The alarm on her cellular phone goes off. It is time to head to her mother's house.

Lisa sits in traffic, not particularly bothered for once, staring out the window, observing, and thinking about what she will write to her mother. She notices the uniformed children waiting by the maxi-stand and the nuts vendor in his blacked-out shades. She eventually passes the Rottweiler, still chained behind the gate – like this morning, like every morning – lying on its stomach and gazing up at the passers-by. “I will hire someone to translate the letter into Chinese,” she thinks.

Congee is heating up on the stove and the shuffle of her mother's feet on the kitchen floor invites Lisa in.

“Sit down and eat some,” she says.

“I still don't eat pork, Mummy.”

“*Ai ya*, pork is good for you, Lisa. You must eat anything.”

She sends her mother into the living room with a single bowl and begins opening the cabinets, assessing its contents.

The tune of Celine Dion's “My Heart Will Go On”, accompanied by the high-pitched voice of a Chinese girl, creeps its way into the kitchen, disrupting Lisa from counting her mother's plastic containers.

“Lisa! Lisa! Come!”

Lisa gets up off the tiled floor with a groan.

“Yes, Mummy?”

Her mother is pointing at the screen; her smile pushes her cheeks into her eyes and deepens the wrinkles in her forehead.

“This girl looks like you!”

Lisa sees a girl no older than 6 years old. She has two stubby pigtails and clings to a mic with both hands. The camera shifts to the judges, wide-eyed in approval of this Mandarin rendition of Titanic's hit song.

“This girl does not look like me,” Lisa thinks as she nods in agreement with her mother.

She remembers when her father brought home the Toyota Carina – white and foreign-used. The family went for a drive down Chaguaramas, playing a cassette Uncle Ming made for them in celebration. It was the only cassette they ever played – Chinese versions of disco hits and ballads. Lisa and her siblings used to compete over who could sing ABBA's “Dancing Queen” the best on their way to school, never understanding a word they were saying. Always the designated judge, their mother would exclaim, “1st place for everybody!”

Lisa smiles, her cheeks pushing up into her eyes exposing

her crows-feet and she heads back to the kitchen.

Lisa's face glows blue from her laptop screen. The click-clack of the keyboard echoes throughout the house.

“You need to come to bed,” Roger says, leaning against the archway.

“When I'm finished,” replies Lisa, her pupils swimming from left to right, left to right, never stopping to look at him.

Roger goes to sleep alone.

Each time Lisa brakes, her mother's jade bangles clang in her lap along with the suitcases in the trunk. “Anna called last night. Canada hou dong ah,” her mother says, adjusting the shawl around her shoulders.

“How are Benji and Michael?” Roger asks.

“Good. Benji is in middle school now,” Lisa's mother says, turning her head around.

Roger nods in approval.

They continue to chat about Anna's children while Lisa stares out at the navy-blue horizon. Today, instead of making the first left after the traffic lights by Kaydonna, Lisa drives straight, passing the university, letting her mother look at it for the last time.

In the rearview mirror, Lisa sees the envelope poking out of her handbag, sitting next to Roger. Each time she glances at it, she thinks about how she will give it to her mother, causing a knot of nerves in her stomach – a feeling she has not felt since the days of writing school examinations. Inside the envelope are ten sheets – five typed in English and five written in neat characters by Li Zhang, the receptionist at the Chinese embassy. Li Zhang only charged \$200 for the work, returning the original and giving her translation to Lisa with a heavy look in her eyes. Both letters are faithfully signed by Lisa. Lisa drops her mother and Roger off at the entrance of *Departure* with the suitcases and drives off to look for an empty parking space. After meandering through the maze of cars, Lisa finds one in Section H. She gets her handbag from the backseat and begins trekking towards the terminal.

Inside, Lisa finds Roger and her mother drinking tea from paper cups in the food court.

“We have about an hour until she has to be by the gate,” Roger says.

Lisa slides into the booth, situating herself next to

Roger and across from her mother. A third paper cup of tea is waiting for her on the table.

“I can’t wait to see your *kau fu!*” Lisa’s mother suddenly exclaims. A smile spreads across her face. “I have not seen him in over... twenty years.”

Lisa’s mother slides her cold hands into Lisa’s on the table and they share an excited laugh. It’s the first time Lisa feels happy about her mother’s departure – realizing that she’s not just leaving, but returning to something as well.

Lisa knows that she should give her the letter at that moment. But she can’t let go of her mother’s hands nor look away from the joy in her eyes, as she listens to all the things her mother is going to do when she is back in her village.

“I am going to eat *bou dim sum ab!*”

“I’m taking Benji and Michael to see *Heong Gong* when they come in vacation.”

“You and Roger come too, okay?”

Lisa nods and smiles throughout the conversation, promising to visit at the end of the semester.

“It’s time to head to the gate, ma,” Roger chirps in.

Lisa lets go of her mother’s hands and looks at her watch. She hadn’t realized how much time had passed. The knotting feeling returns to her stomach.

They get out of the booth and make their way towards the security check point. Lisa’s cup of tea stays behind, cold and untouched.

“Have a safe flight. Call us when you reach, ma.”

“Thank you, Roger.”

Lisa’s eyes brim with tears. Before she can even reach into her handbag for the letter, her mother hugs her. Lisa surrenders to this unusual embrace – an act her mother has typically reserved for Westerners and their “strange ways of greeting”. Lisa’s mother, then, pulls away and holds onto Lisa’s arms with her hands.

“You have always been a good daughter,” she says.

Lisa’s face grows red and moist, and she begins choking on her tears.

“Bye-bye, Mummy,” she manages to utter.

“*Mow hamm*, Lisa! Don’t cry!”

She gives Lisa’s one, final squeeze on the shoulder and turns toward the security check point.

Roger brings his arm around Lisa as she stares out at her mother, slowly disappearing beyond the glass doors. At the top of the escalator, she becomes a speck and, finally, she is no more. Roger and Lisa head back to the car.

They drive down the highway with the radio off. This time, Lisa sits in the front passenger seat. She has ceased crying and looks out the window with her puffy eyes. It’s too early for the school children to be out by the maxi-stand. Suddenly, she yields Roger to pull over.

“What?”

“Just stop in front this house, please.” She blows her nose into a napkin.

“Why, Lisa?”

“Just do it, please. I’ll explain after. Hurry or you’ll pass it.”

Sighing, Roger turns on the indicator and pulls onto the shoulder, stopping in front the house Lisa is pointing to. Lisa immediately opens her door and gets out of the car. She wades through 2 meters of knee-length grass and climbs over the median separating the highway from the residential road. She walks up to the gate and looks through the wrought-iron bars. But the Rottweiler isn’t there. She comes closer, gripping the bars with her hands and pressing her face against the coolness of the iron. Her nose protrudes on the other side of the gate as she scans the front yard. Empty. She closes her eyes and listens to the cars passing-by, the car horns blaring, the dancehall trailing behind tinted Nissan B14s, and for a faint second, she think she hears the sound of paws falling against parched earth, coming from behind the house.

I first met Lynette Hazel at UWI St. Augustine and was immediately taken with her distinct voice and use of language. She has a remarkable ability to juxtapose words in a way that not only delights but also works to animate the narrative so that the story unfolds on the page in language that startles and sometimes shocks with its sheer inventiveness. It is this that gives Lynette her unique style and also firmly anchors her in the Tobagonian landscape. I look forward to her future work as she is very strongly rooted in her Tobagonian history and identity and it is a pleasure to be able to discover and explore narratives from the sister isle with this fresh new voice.

– **Sharon Millar**
Introducing Lynette Hazel



Lynette Hazel
Trinidad and Tobago

Sweet Broom

Demijohn's footfalls rush his frame sideways through the open bedroom doorway. Seeing Fern on the bed, he raises his heavily muscled arm in a quarrel with the growing dark, the palm at its end as wide as the moon. He brings it down resoundingly on her exposed cheek catching her entire head back and pressing her further into the mattress. Her eyes open into Demijohn's, his malice like some impish noisome thing, reaching out to touch her, chittering in glee. Scrambling off the bed, thrown sideways into the wall with a follow-up slap, Fern crumples there. Well seasoned to the head ringing, she brings her arms above her head and tucks her face into the cavern of her armpit to avoid bruising even though she well knows that, like her mother's, dark skin declares none.

Fern hadn't heard him call out and enter the house. Deep in an uneasy sleep, she'd missed his shouted "Helloooooooooo the house. You home, gyul?" followed by his steupse and kick to the front door.

She had arrived home later than normal, as seine, heaving with fish, took longer to pull today in Charlotteville's deepish bay. Since day-clean she'd been down in the market trading what she had grown on her inherited five acre plot. Then she headed home. Cradled in the crook of one arm was her gutted, cleaned and newspapered fish ready for dinner. She and the road struggled up Bark Hill towards the last of the day's sunlight. Ginger coloured dust shifted and fretted in the stiff north-easterly breeze. Two pairs of her grandmother's precious silver bracelets chinked on Fern's arms as she sweated her way in the leaden heat towards her home at the hill's top.

Shoulders square even as her still eyesome figure gently settled into a forgetting of its firmness, Fern paused, hand akimbo, tilting generous hips and upthrust of breast, to catch her breath and allow her stomach to settle, her baskets serene on her head. She felt old. She certainly wasn't as young as she used to be. Today was her fortieth birthday.

As the heat bore down, she'd fanned the front of her dress with her hands. Hearing the hustling of a motorcar she'd covered her nose and mouth with a white towel to protect against the coming dust. As the vehicle crested the hill, the driver geared down for the intense descent into Charlotteville proper. Even before she could see the passengers she recognized the vehicle as Danboy's. As the car passed, she and Mrs. Clement's eyes had made a furious four from her passenger seat and Danboy had

held his head straight. The three nodding children in the back seat never noticed her. She shook her head as her eyes prickled. Then she'd resumed her trudging.

Just so, she was fighting her rising gorge. Her mind skittered away from two missed menses. Instead she thought of yesterday's leftover callaloo she'd had for breakfast this morning and that hadn't seemed too right. As the nausea nagged, she turned into the gathering gloom of her home trail, fallen sugar apple and soursop wasting their sweetness on the ground.

The trail opened into a clearing where, hard by the cliff which flung itself down to the crashing sea, her mother's house sat close on the roots of a silk cotton tree. Those roots spared the house and land from plummeting, sheltered musky lady-of-the-night and man-tall maidenhair fern. Sweet broom with leaf-like knife and thorny shame-bush or 'ti-marie grew rampant across the small clearing her house shared with Mother Agnita's. Shame always wears a woman's name here where the backside of Charlotteville bent over to show itself brazenly to town. Waves grieved, hurled and souged as generations changed and visitors swept past these dregs into Charlotteville proper.

Accompanied by Mother Agnita's low humming, Fern's leaden legs carried her to the two long low steps of her wooden house. Head spinning and rushing like river water quarrelling over rocks, she hooked her hand in the house post and pulled herself up to the verandah, past the perching priest-garbed grackle. Sighing, she lowered her baskets into a corner, set her fish inside and kicked off her dusty slippers. In bare feet sandy almost to the knees, she plodded across the verandah's wooden floorboards and through the doorway. Threadbare clothing was shed like ants laying markers to home. Soon she was out of her skirt and past the room's only ornament: a wooden Jesus crucified. One who had presided over the lives of both her mother and grandmother.

She headed for her bedroom, not even lighting the pitch oil lamps to relieve the uneven gloom. There she crumpled to the bed, the high mahogany headboard slamming against the wall. She yearned for darkness to swallow her. Slipping under, the tears and moans slicked her surrender to a doze in the sea of the bed where her mother had toiled forty years ago, heaved and gave her silent screams to the headboard and rafters, groaning out a child who would suffer long.

She should have donned a cotton scarf across her eyes,

perhaps soaked with some Alcolado. But she could not now move. Her limbs felt nailed to the bed, her body as heavy as a newly uprooted mahogany, its own weight crushing as it crashed from its height to earth. Like when she was eight and told Mammie that someone had squeezed her body in the night, crushing her to the bed. Day in and day out Mother Agnita's humming lived in her ear as she tended those visitors in need. The cloy and clout of the Lady-of-the-Night's scent climbed in through the open jalousie, melding with the humming to drown her as an unusual heat clenched around her naked body. Strangely still, no freshening breeze, sweat salting as it wept from skin, the curtains muttered and shuddered and soured into disquiet. The gathering darkness moved across the floorboards toward her bare feet hanging over the bed's edge. She was the paper used to edge a table straight, force balance. Disposable. That should have been her name. Disposable.

So Demijohn Walker could now grab her by the neck and scream in her face, "I tired with this shit! How much time I have to tell you, make sure you organize for when I reach?"

Fern's bracelets chingled silverly as her hands flew to her neck to ease the pressure of his large fingers.

Demijohn had stayed for the past five months. Always lurking. As though each time he turned his head she would disappear like he had told her his mother had done, run off to Grenada on the banana boat. He claimed that he just wanted to assure himself that she had no one else skulking around.

He would mount her at night when she was sleeping and she would wake to tremulous breathing at her ear, his fisherman hard hands pawing at her breasts, still high and full, never having suckled, sliding with a grunt and leaving a vague used feeling between her legs when he took his sometime warmth with him back to his occasional side of the bed.

But at least he stayed. Even though sometimes the jabbing was often accompanied by sharp ringing slaps. He smiled after. He ran his finger lightly down her cheek, following his fingers' imprints. Glorifying in his markings. Asking for her special bacon and plantain sandwich to tide him over until either dinner was ready or he took himself off to his wife and children.

Those times, her lips forced themselves into a kind of smile, muscles twitching. Sometimes he would slap that smile off her face and she heard it crash and shatter on the gravelled path. And she would button up her anger.

Now, her eyes saucer as she recognises in his face every other gone before. She tries to avoid even whimpering.

She knows that she looks like the stray puppy her mother had once tossed down the cliff to the sea. In the knowing, she feels the resentment long buttoned up pressing for release.

Her fingers curl as she screams, mingling fear and entreaty, "Leave me alone, Demijohn. I not feeling well. I really not feeling well."

He starts to shake her.

She screamed high and long like taut kite thread rubbed with finger. Then she lowered her head, like Ma Bailey black-belly ram and head butt him. Stunned, he dropped her and staggered backward over the cornered Morris chair.

Bullish in his rage, he scrambled and heaved her into the wall with a well-placed kick. Fern feared that his booted foot had connected with the wall through her back. He overturned the dresser, shattering mirror and vase as the water coursed like blood across the wood of the floor.

"I done with this," he roared.

He spun on his heels.

"I done with you now, bitch," he threw over his shoulder. Fern had no breath left to scream. And, relieved, when the darkness rushed at her, she allowed herself to fall into it.

Fern drifts with the darkness into a blessed light. Welling in her mind are the faces of un-laughing children whose eyes she knew all too well having dreamed them so many times. Each of her longed-for children enters her space, crowding under the crucifix now. And now her heart cracks and her navel blooms open, resonating with each child-denied now standing in unmarred bodies. Reassembled. Trailing all that they could have been.

Limbs long in their ghostly procession, she looks to their eyes for condemnation. But they neither glare nor plead why she had denied them life. Their eyes are instead soft on her face, a gift of benediction to relieve the guilt of their transient connection to her body.

Yet still she felt guilt whet its blade in her. But their eyes sang of something else. She strained to them, shaking in an ague of fear towards the last one, the one with Danboy's long forehead and wide nose holes. The wrench from the scraping, the coldness as the midwife lay on her vulnerably spread thigh something jelly-like and told her that was the baby, grabbed her. Turning her face, her mind had slid away from it then. Such a little bit of a thing it had been. And she had garrotted it out of her life.

Here they all appeared, uncondemning. Yearning for her still. Urging her to share her pulse.

She teared harder. Her body wracked with pain and

anguish, thrummed.

The slanted greenish eyes of one recalled the village schoolmaster; another, the peculiar roseate skin of her mixed race cousin; yet another, the midnight dark of a fisherman lost at sea. She recognised them all in these faces. They all looked as they would have been had they been gifted true breath. Pieces of herself she herself had thrown away. Discarded many times over in back rooms. Anticipating condemnation, slain by its absence, the running chant I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry whirled and tilted across her mind's space of memoried years, the weight of their combined gaze chilling her skin. One. Three. Seven. Lives, which could have been, but were scoured from her womb. And the weight of that pain cracked her mind wide open.

In the end all these men had left her reeling, all those who had scalded her womb, forcing her to scour their seed from her body, each scouring thinning her self a little more. Dying an indifferent death.

In her mind, her body heaves, desiring to throw off the sense of being locked in place. She reaches for movement even in just her little finger. But all that would move were the tears down her cheeks wrapping around her neck, soaking into her long hair.

The wind was gathering outside, no longer slinking through the tall grass.

Light climbs outward from her babies' eyes embracing her despite never having known her kisses or games or hot chocolate tea, arguing with her guilt grown in shame's darkness. Silence continues murmuring and muttering, gibbering, with a faint gnashing from her mouth.

She feels the weight of eyes pushing past her eyelids, speaking expectations to her, their mouths never knowing speech blessing her in their silence. But, oh, their eyes. How their eyes entreat. Time no longer skylarked with the curtains. In that moment she admitted the wanting. Wanting to fill her empty arms with these pieces of herself she had left strewn across midwives' back rooms.

Fern doesn't hear Mother Agnita's barefoot tread across the verandah and creak down on unsteady knees to gather her up, and, surprisingly strong, take her to her home.

Fern could not feel the stares on her body, on the dark skin mottling into the darker purple.

Simeon, her frail husband, hobbles to help Mother up the rickety stairs to her own wide wooden verandah. He stabilises her frame, listing like a pirogue under heavy seas.

"Bring meh visiting basket quick. And plenty hot water, Simeon."

Mother takes Fern inside, lays her on the cushions

against the white burst of crochet doilies like flowers in bloom, and bustles to arrange her in what comfort she can make.

Mother drenches crisp white cotton diapers, only used when she was called to tend the sick or dying, and, with whisper-soft strokes, laves Fern's body much as a dog would. She cleans the runnels of blood from her face, bathing her chest as well, all the while crooning.

"No cry, child, all will be well with you."

And it is this tenderness, unsought and unexpected, that releases the weight on Fern's chest. She cries as though her insides are begging to come out through her mouth. Tears, thick and viscous, roll down her face taking with it that grief for the child and woman she could have been, for all the possibilities denied. She has neither strength to brush them away nor any thoughts of shame, naked as she was on the first day she drew breath outside the womb.

Mother Agnita washes her skin and Ferns feels like she is restoring to her some lost cherished thing that would break up this knotted pain inside. And she feels the rocks shatter into pebbles and the pebbles slide out of her eyes and mouth.

A fluttering in her stomach calls her hands to embrace the roundness that is not yet there. Fern caresses as the tiny swimmer flips at the pressure of her fingers. She keens. Mother Agnita twining her fingers atop her belly calls out to Simeon, "Bring sweet broom. Just a few leaf to drop in this hot water to cleanse and ease the air."

The smell sears new paths into Fern's mind, opening her up.

Uncertain whether she speaks aloud, Mother Agnita's eyes, bracketed by runic wrinkles, consoles Fern with, "Child, them can' keep following you 'til you lef' them go. Baggage make travel hard. Lef' them. You can' always fight with bird in mango season. You don' need them no more. This one here is to keep. Is time you stop give 'way y'self. Keep you own vin'yard good, gyal."

There was no water that could wash her totally clean she felt, no sacrament yet to sanctify this body. But she could start afresh. Falling away, following the voice baritoneing an old spiritual loud and clear as Baptist bells ringing on Market Square corner, "You are black and comely, O daughter of Jerusalem. Because I am black, because the sun hath burned me: my mother's sons made me the keeper of the vineyards; but mine own vineyard have I not kept. Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth, where thou feedest, where thou resteth at noon."

Simeon's tones slip into Fern's ear and open her heart with humming-bird flutter. She eases into restful sleep

with balmy eyes on her, weeping understanding and forgiveness. The unfurling in her womb like a flourish of petals. The life quickening within her awakens a seam of smile as she listens for the voice of the child-in-the-making. Her navel blooming.



The Merits of Generosity

I've written elsewhere of the University of the West Indies MFA student whose ambition was to write a novel that would become a Caribbean Examinations Council text. Even as we mark how Caribbean writing is increasingly honoured globally, who exactly in the region is reading Caribbean literature remains a vexing question—perhaps even more so Caribbean poetry.

Writers who responded to our call to nominate Caribbean poets for this volume were two men and two women, from four locations in the global Caribbean, who occupy roles as literary magazine editors, OCM Bocas Prize winners, directors of literary festivals, convenors of workshops.

Their work and generosity in expanding the development and readership of good Caribbean writing is precisely the spirit that this special issue sought to tap. Their five nominees cluster in the southeastern Caribbean—three in Trinidad & Tobago, one in Barbados, and the fifth a St. Lucian just returned from T&T. Perhaps this merely reflects that as an editor my conceit of a regional volume was more powerful than my craft. Or the wonderful surprise that more than one Northern Caribbean poet proposed to nominate a visual artist and not a fellow poet.

The microaggressions of writing culture are often legitimized by the triumph of meritocracy, the legendary accounts of prizewinners whose first manuscript was repeatedly rejected. For all its work at popularizing writing craft, spoken word remains embedded in a culture of competition. Generosity (of the kind Wayne Brown has come to iconify) in writing community, editorial leadership of the kind that drew us to *Moko*, good teachers, and mentors/patrons, all play very critical roles in developing or destroying good writers' self-confidence and readership—yet less honoured roles than struggle in our large narratives of writerliness. Some younger Firing the Canon writers were caught this past year in the crossfire of gendered and racialised battles over the Caribbean canon and the geopolitics of its markets. I long for such fights among senior writers to be over who can develop more and better writers—and readers.

- Colin Robinson

Shivane Ramlochan nominated by Nicholas Laughlin.

Ozzy King nominated by Vladimir Lucien.

Jannine Horsford & Gilberte O'Sullivan nominated by Monique Roffey.

Linda M Deane nominated by Esther Phillips.



When did I first encounter the poems of Shivanee Ramlochan? Ask me when did I first encounter fire, when did I tell my first lie, when did I first draw my own blood. There are poems that surprise you by somehow, by some unholy means, being both new and strange, and at the same time strangely familiar. Except not “familiar”: it is not that you feel you’ve read them before, but rather you feel they have alchemised into words some blood memory, some bloodline knowledge you didn’t recognise as yours until the event of the poem. It isn’t fair, feeling your brain stem larvaed into like this.

Why should you read Shivanee’s poems? Maybe you shouldn’t. Do you like the kind of wry poem that ends with the sigh of a comforting epiphany? Don’t read these poems. Do

you like the kind of poem that shows off its author’s enlightened sensibility? That gathers its readers into lyrical praise of human endurance? That lands on a punch-line? Don’t read these poems. Do you sleep well at night? *Why* should you read these poems? You expect me to answer that question with their grammars deep in my veins, their syllables lodged in my lungs, when my skull is in mid-trepan?

– **Nicholas Laughlin**

Introducing Shivanee Ramlochan



NICHOLAS LAUGHLIN | BIOGRAPHY

Nicholas is the Editor of the *Caribbean Review of Books* and the culture and travel magazine *Caribbean Beat*. He is the program director of the Bocas Lit Fest, Trinidad and Tobago’s annual literary festival, and a co-director of Alice Yard, a nonprofit contemporary art space in Port of Spain. Nicholas’ first collection of poetry *The Strange Years of My Life* was published in 2015 by Peepal Tree Press.



Shivaneer Ramlochan

Trinidad and Tobago

Shepherdess Boxcutter: One

Shepherdess Boxcutter,

I drove the north coast road for you. I saw women pull portents from the shore,
obeah them whole, salt them down and take them home, but you were nowhere.

A red flag chipped my tooth.

A red wave went from the pillar of my heart to the archery of my cunt.

I kept you everywhere but safe. I hoisted that flag into the sea, scooped our son out and dried him,
dangled turtleskull and tamarind knots over his sternum to keep him safe by night.

We invent the beasts that we breed.

We silence the night with the startle of our starvers.

So Salve me.

Seek me in the ruins of that old cave, find me flinging

red flags over eye and under fist to say what I haven't said, to let the pitch bind me.

Blind me.

Dredge me up from the wet rocks, salt me with something good,
take me home to our mother, who knows best how we are wed.

Shepherdess Boxcutter: Two

Shepherdess Boxcutter, this is how you open your mouth.

At seventeen I learned how to choke the rape out,
how to guard my house with small arms of casing, shells wet with grave rain.
The abacus of my bonework kept the hearth lit.

I lost an arm in the building of my house, and the morass claimed it.

Scout to the farthest split lip of the coast where I grew.

Dredge it out of the water.

Bring me home and watch me shake hands with my first hammer.

Listen. I've needed other men not you. I've breathed with other beasts, and called it clemency,
called it first communion, called it a gayelle full of buss mouth
on nights when your bois drops to the level of your split knuckles.

No one but you knows where my arm is buried.

I don't want to buss your mouth. I want to bless it.

Come closer. Come coastal on the unbruised lip between here,
hereafter, and the cutlass line of your last lover.

Come open your mouth.

Caracara

Your husband takes the bird home when you falter. He does not strip the body bare.
You return from the hunt to find it lain in the middle of your marriage bed.

Over fourteen days the flesh rots into cereus, chokes the bower with bloom.

Then comes the stripping. The dismantle of muscle makes you sick, sends you scalding
out your womb with harpsichord and harmonium – his grandfather's music, and yours.
Anything to keep the smell of cartography from the sheets.

I cannot bear it, you tell him. You watch him whittle, solving for pressed feathers,
sucking math from the broken truss. The bird's cold throat, red crest, the bird's ribs
splitting, salt marrow spread under your man's gums.

I cannot, you say, spitting him clean and starting over.
Still, the bird keeps on giving.

Your husband threads each splintered process into sharp jewellery, hooks the bone spurs
in your lobes for temple.

Dead as alive, devoured whole. He picks your teeth clean whilst he prays,
your shy falconer, hunting in the night, holding mass
for his friend in the flowers.

I first encountered Ozzy King's literary work while we attended University together at UWI in Trinidad; he pursuing a degree in sciences, while I was reading for my degree in Literature and Theatre. Ozzy, however, was at the time producing a prodigious body of work, experimenting while apprenticing himself to the work of the great philosophers and writers that Europe had produced. His work is profoundly influenced and driven by a fascination with mythologies matched only by a fervidity and, dare I say, belief in philosophy. The verse that emerges from these apprenticeships is clear-headed, disturbingly clinical, disinterring the bleak centre of things without degenerating entirely into a nihilistic worldview. It is not the puerile voice of the shrill, egocentric and vengeful iconoclast, but one that

has arrived at its conclusions more somberly. His voice is refreshing, especially in the Caribbean context, as it abstains from effusive celebration of or mere allegorical conscription of myth in facile didacticism (the Caribbean version of kitsch). Nor is he engaged in adaptation. His is a dedicated probing of myth for deep down structures that may illuminate something about us all, starting from the Europe of his structured education, moving rapidly outward into what is really the international sprawl of his curiosity and concern.

– **Vladimir Lucien**
Introducing Ozzy King



VLADIMIR LUCIEN | BIOGRAPHY

Vladimir Lucien is a poet, screenwriter and actor from St. Lucia. His work has been published in several journals including *The Caribbean Review of Books*, *Wasafiri*, *Small Axe*, *PN Review*, *BIM*, *Caribbean Beat* and in the anthology *Beyond Sangre Grande*. His first collection *Sounding Ground* is published by Peepal Tree Press and won the 2015 OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature.



Ozzy King
St. Lucia

Theme of the Returning God

Why hast thou come to hinder us? For thou hast come
to hinder us, and thou knowest that ...

– Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*

That man who goes idly
Under the coconuts,
Seawards,
In the whispering breeze;
Who will return stoned,
Fish-faced and dragging
Great fish from the sea
Is Lono-i-ka-Mahakiki.

That man who burns ships
And thunders commands
As if still beneath
The broken parapets of Troy,
Aflame with that
flame of conquest in his eyes
Is Quetzalcoatl,
Ranging the Yucatan.

That old pyromaniac who comes
Dispensing fire in a world
That has forgotten the myth of flame;
Who cannot even recall his name
(And was jailed for arson yesterday)
Is amnesiac Prometheus,
Let down from Caucasus.
That diprosopus boy, freak
Of the village, who now
Stands crying in a torrent of stones
Hurled by wicked boys,
Is actually Janus,
God of endings and beginnings,
Beginning, beginning.

That coy carpenter who lives next door to me,
And is always hammering, hammering;
Who shuns the village girls and
Has great dreams of dying on a cross
Is Christ, returned indeed like thief in night.

That man who turned his back
And left with promise to return
Was my father,
Eternally going, going.

Why do gods go with promise to return?

Why do gods go? Why do they return?

Why do gods go? Why bother to return?

In the Beginning...

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.
And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness
was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God
moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let
there be light: and there was light.

– Genesis 1:1-3

In the beginning, before life of any kind,
There was a fecund wind,
That whistled and moaned
Across a desolate landscape.
Then, this wind, now tired of bare landscapes,
Congealed into a bead of sweat
Which quenched the dry earth.
From this nourishment of the land, sprung the first trees,
And from these trees sprung the first men,
Like corn from the husk . . .

This is the story my grandfather told me about the beginning.
He was schizophrenic; the tale, no doubt, a product of his solitary madness.
I had always imagined that it took a society to furnish a cosmogony;
I realize, now, that it takes no more than a solitary madman.

The Myth of My Own Self

I have tried to express the idea that the café is the place
where one can ruin oneself, go mad, or commit a crime.
– Vincent van Gogh

I walk wrapped in darkness
Down a road I have walked a thousand times
But which night makes unfamiliar;
I smell a nearby sea and hear its lethargic dirge.
Headlights assault me
With the audacity of suns
And I begin to think myself a poet.

God has gone over,
But love still remains;
Once dutiful, like the love that Sofia fed to Rodion,
In small morsels, through the bars of Siberia,

This love has become
Like the love in the films of Wong Kar-wai:
Amnesiac, ineluctable, austere.

I too must go over.

Friends say I am a poet
But do not see the tragedy in that.

I pity the poet who does not know that
He is also a murderer;
The kind of murderer who, unable to wound society,
Turns upon himself
Like that painter in Arles who cuts off his ear
In small allegory of the violence he fashions for humanity.

He longs for the heavy lead. Tomorrow,
He will perish in immortal wheat
Beneath the embalming stare
Of scarecrows and become
Fixed in the canvas of his own myths.

I drink the silence in the air.
I race the approaching dawn for home.

The turned door handle,
The prayer hurled to Janus,
The image of Rosa,
The infinite resolve;
These are the final acts.

When I enter my house, it will be a tower.
There I will paint, with blood and brain,
The myth of my own self.

I first met Jannine in September 2013, during a writing retreat at Grand Riviere, Trinidad. Jannine then joined my private writing groups in St James in 2014 and Belmont in 2015. She writes poetry and prose; however over the last two years a collection of poems has been emerging. Jannine's poems are mostly about her experiences in the UK, though we also see mothers, ghosts, loaves of bread rising, portraits of men she once knew well. *Survivor* is a portrait and an elegy for a friend who died. It demonstrates Jannine's light touch and arresting juxtaposition of words and language. Jannine's poems are now being published in *Junoeseq*, *Moko* and *Susumba's Bookebag*. Jannine has completed an MA in Creative Writing at Plymouth University in the UK. She is also a student of the Cropper Foundation and The Drawing Room Project in Jamaica. She is an instructor at UWI and was co-ordinator for The Writing Centre at UWI.

– **Monique Roffey**
Introducing Jannine Horsford



Jannine Horstford

Trinidad and Tobago

Vitale

Vitale is an old gentle man
in a yet older suit. Plucked whole
from the pages of Senghor.

He wears a Parisian lacquer and
a wholly unmatched longing.
He smells of the musk of another century.

He is the old world that foils
Apollino's wildness – tells him:
Son, you cannot take your lady
to a house that is plunged in darkness.

Tells him:
If you do not marry Jannine,
Apollino, I marry 'er myself!

I will never know his last name,
but Vitale needs a last name
as much as this vintage city.

And his desolation fills
the streets of this city.

He has come a distance: Brum
via Paris
via Côte D'Ivoire.
His people marooned
at each port.

Now he finds refuge
in half-hour increments
at the computer terminals
on the fourth floor
of the Birmingham Library.

The floor that rustles with the voices
of the African exiles – the air wired
with their anxiety.

You can see the grey in Vitale's hairline,
and the bending (just beginning)
of the bones, and the brittle
of resolve.

Yet Appo swears Vitale is only
forty-something.
"Oh, it is just stress, Jannine. He
is missing his family."

Who knew that stress could do that
to a body?

Survivor

My friend says *I am a cancer survivor*.
10 months later she is dead.
We who were flesh together.

We
who were flesh
together pounding bread
and beating air into cakes.

Whose faces were flecked with flour
bodies drenched with the vinegar
of our shared sweat.

Who put our men in the mortar
and watched
how easy they turned
to dust.

Our dough though
was more than flour and water:
punched down, its sigh
stung our breasts.

And the floats, we sweet talked them
like children, urging them
to live up to
their names.

My friend placed her own stamp
at the bottom of bowls, jugs
measuring cups
in black marker: K.H.

But now K.H. is
an unrisen
loaf.

The night it happens
she calls out to me
in a dream.

I stand at the door and look in
on her blanketed
in white.

But I cannot enter the room.
I stand at the threshold
and am held there.

Yet I want to hurtle
into that room like rain.

I peer through the white smoke
that separates us.
Yet another year will pass
before I am told.

Even While She Is Saying It That First Day

Even while she is saying it that first day,
I am a length of rope bunched into knots.

I am thinking, Girl
– would you send your child: your eye's shining apple
into thundering rain beneath a sky scissored by fire?

This is what you should keep pressed
against that halved breast watered
with every thud of your heart.

So each day when you walk out in Curepe
with the heat of the earth searing your feet and your face
a full fruit turned upwards to catch the rays raining from the sky
what is held in that closed fist
is your miracle.

Girl, you never had an aunt?
Seems you never sat baking between the oven-warm thighs
of a grandmother who would tell you to keep secret even
the warm gush of your own pee.

The teacher gets up and prances around it but I
want to whisper *Hush*.
I see that this girl has released a nest of guepes. I already hear
their throaty notes – that sinister singing.

How can a woman who has just announced herself as Karma
not know that winged things will swarm from the furthest
corners around the sap of her confession. It is something
sweet.

As someone with a deep sense of rootedness to my land of birth, Barbados, I am intrigued by individuals who live with the sense of being in between different worlds. If the landscape provides connectedness and meaning, then how does a change of country and landscape affect one's mind and emotions; what kind of shape-shifting must occur? how does the writer's imagination make these accommodations? Here is rich soil for creativity and this is where Linda's work produces its best fruit. I like its rich evocations, the unsparing directness of images that convey a whole range of feeling and experience. I also like her experimentation with form and rhythm, a reflection of her love affair with Jazz. Linda's personality reflects the vibrancy passion and commitment seen in her work which I believe deserves greater recognition.

In 2006, Linda won first prize in Barbados' Frank Collymore Literary Endowment and received the Prime Minister's Award for the poetry collection, *Cutting Road Blues: A*

Narrative (in press). She is co-editor, with Robert Edison Sandiford, of *Shouts from the Outfield: The ArtsEtc Cricket Anthology*. Her poetry for children also appears in the Commonwealth Education Trust anthology *Give The Ball to the Poet* (2014). In August 2013, she represented Barbados in the literary arts at CARIFESTA XI in Suriname.

Linda tutors in creative writing in primary schools and communities, is a founding member of Writer's Ink, the group that stages the Bim Literary Festival, and has served as co-ordinator of the Bim Litfest Children's Fair. She is co-founding editor of ArtsEtc Inc., a cultural forum and independent publishing company in Barbados, a graduate of the University of Warwick's Comparative American Studies programme; and has worked as a journalist and in PR for over 25 years.

– **Esther Phillips**

Introducing Linda M. Deane



ESTHER PHILLIPS | BIOGRAPHY

Esther Phillips was born in Barbados where she continues to live and work. She heads the English Department at Barbados Community College. Her books include *When Ground Doves Fly* (Ian Randle, 2003) and *The Stone Gatherer* (Peepal Tree Press, 2008). Her work has appeared in various publications, including *Caribanthology* and *The Whistling Bird: Women Writers of the Caribbean*. She has won both the Alfred Boas Poetry Prize of the Academy of American Poets and the Frank Collymore Literary Award. Esther is the Editor of *BIM* and the Festival Director of the *BIM* Literary Festival.



Linda M. Deane
Barbados

The River Road Suite Pt. 1: Call and Response

*Guh'munt Hill, Two Mile Hill
Sin'-Barn'bus...*

*Straaanberry-pineapple
kini fruit-mango...*

*...Sky Mall-Haggatt Hall
Mapp Hill an' Dub-ash Valley*

*...juicy-ripe-ready-sliced-
in-a-bag-eat-as-you-go*

They work the fleshy sounds
between their teeth, such able bleats—
man with the van and the vendor dem,
tonguing the names of fruit and routes
til they spurt and begin to flow
like poetry. They leave the bone clean.
Homegrown and imported promises
slow the roll of heavy-laden women,
already impeded by grocery shopping
and plump, own-wayish behinds.

Yes, that *is* my ride and *sure*,
it's been a while since I sunk
tooth into something sweet,
but I here mekkin' haste—outward bound—
and nothing slowing me down.

Keep rolling wid a *yeah, breddah*,
on my way back, on my way back aroun',
thrown lightly over the shoulder.

Hand Me Down

When t'ings went sideways and de no good, wufless man trick and lef' she wid nuthin but de strings from de purse and t'ree chil'ren tuh feed, Sister Nicholls roll up she sleeves. Sister Nick, a dark-skinned reed with wire for she frame, spirit and tongue—yeah, dat one so, who would sting you eardrum, reserve she sweet talk fuh green and feathered and four-legged beings and God; who could heal, fix, grow anyt'ing, mek flower bed, kitchen garden spring up in the night; heal dog, fowl-cock, black belly sheep, kitten—yes, *dat* Sister Nick. When de man lef', she push up she mout' an' push up she sleeve and coerced make-belief blooms to life—fake fragile petals in pink-an-red-an-yella, crêpe-paper buds stretched, shaped by callouses fashioned from scrubbing floors; sepals and leaves and stalks loved into finest flattery of nature with a wire heart bent cultivating other folks' offspring behind tall picket fences, while her own babies roamed, raised themselves, hazy, in the distance. She filled baskets upon baskets of homespun stems, trusted the gods with her daughters who learned to make them too, and sold them. Sold them in town, back home for refills, *straight home, yuh bear? Yes, Ma, always*—never needing to ply beyond Broad Street, purse strung for another week.

Time and an ocean away, life sprouting on, a grandmother's garden still bears: *Come lemme show yuh, jus' for fun—jus' for fun, yuh understand'—what Ma taught me when I was young, younger than you all.* Enchanted by games masquerading as need, we bent tender, seedling fingers to the test, tasked at raising baskets upon baskets for an uncle's wedding table (marriage was doomed, alas). But what!? Those blooms—*what luxury!* And what yield—these handed-down lessons, dark, distant reeds.

Ghetto/Love Notes

I remember slipping past the low-rise brick and towering concrete...

Counting decapitated daffodils
Old settees with the springs exposed
Children screaming from the ground
To parents, soap-watching in the sky
Fake tree blossoms: non-biodegradable grey
Abandoned boots, strewn the obligatory six feet apart
across the path littered with fresh-mown grass.

I remember sipping tea at the window with the cool blinds tilted...

Noting the foolish expressions on the faces of mating dogs
Fish-and-chip wrappers clogging the gutter
The burnt-out shell where someone used to live
Washing, still on the line
Getting wet a second time
A television license detector van
And the long, sure stride of ghetto love
Tracking green in its path.

*I remember tripping out Saturday evening:
Taking in dinner from the Chinese place and a little street theatre:
Not a one-act play, more like long-running saga...*

Man smashing woman's head into post
Children (theirs?) look on, look off
From private hell made public
Audience, curtains twitch and fall.
Passers-by pass on by
Beat cops miss the show.

I remember the ticking way past midnight. Lying in a tangle of limbs, listening...

Sirens (hours late?)
Stray cats in bushes, losing lives.
Laughter. Silence. Skin kissed.
The sound of blues being chased
While through the too-thin ceiling
Upstairs couple cook up their own
Saturday night fever.

And I remember blinking, too early Sunday morning—sounds, cursing...

The ground-floor clatter of boys too big
for their skateboards. Girls on the top floor,
giant-stepping in mother's stilettos.
Diesel thrum. Taxi—impatient horn
(Trains in the distance)
Departure: the smack of a kiss in the curve of an ear.

Footsteps, respite, down the path tracking blues and muddied green. Remember...

Gilberte has been writing poems for a long time. She has been part of my ongoing creative writing workshops in Port of Spain for the last two years. In “On Learning to Trust Snakes”, which falls into five parts, we see Gilberte’s ability to blend narrative and poetic language. The lines are languid, the images are richly layered and contain the possibility of magic (if snakes could scream). Gilberte has been a features and arts writer for the *Trinidad Guardian* and other local publications. Two of her poems were published in the anthology *She Sex* in 2014. She was part of the Mentoring with the Masters scheme with Earl Lovelace in 2014, and recently chosen for a one-to-one close reading by top UK agent Clare Alexander. She has a BA in English Literature from Florida International University and is currently in the MFA in Fiction Writing at UWI-St Augustine.

– **Monique Roffey**
Introducing Jannine Horsford



Gilberte O'Sullivan

Trinidad and Tobago

April Poem

Rank with lochia, I leak breast milk
onto the vinyl ground where army ants gather
as to a tiny fount for their tea.
Perhaps fairies came in hoods, took what was beautiful and left
Me with another changeling, stillborn.
But the stench never goes away; now I am possessed of smells
that prove I am no longer nymph-like
no matter how many prayer candles burn for hovering souls,
or the stretch of pain from straining difficult hymns,
whole verses crossed out like botched stitches that will never heal right.
“Good for you and your sins”, old warriors say.
Amazons pledged one breast for the sake of their bows,
Agatha had hers rent from her chest, carried them on a salver,
Rita of lost causes, argued with her husband who beat her,
And lived after him.
Though I live by words that flagellate me, I am no saint,
But come back for the abuse.
With one sheafed bow, and arrow pen, I am hardly well armed
But stand to be crafted for battle, my milk turning to inky blood.

Sunstroke Lesson

You were coming soon,
I checked weather every day.
Even with the limits of my latitude
I knew how easily you could pluck
through grid lines, with your keen
understanding of co-ordinates.
“Wait until Summer” you wrote,
instead of goodbye.
And I listened to the wind.
An equinox passed,
a meridian of hours,
days stretched in lassitude.

We were lovers at the cineplex
Too young for the opera
We held hands, water pooled
between the branches of our palms,
cooled by ninety minutes imaginary winter.
Daylight burned your sockets
you never wore sunglasses
said you wanted the heat full on.

In the day, blondes brazen as sunlight
asked about your continental accent.
Their easy attention intrigued you
who came from a place of dank.
Unhitched from their families young,
they longed to shake wax from warm wings.

My father had left to explore imaginary lines
left us overexposed, nearing sunstroke.
Unseasoned, before I could acclimatize,
you came.

Equatorial, I sought warmth
And should have been more afraid of you
But I liked your winter balm,
your eyes half-turned down
half-earth in shadow
your thoughts always with summer
your trade-wind breath on my neck.

Driving home, equidistant
looking for direction, I knew I had
no right to pierce you with flags,
Unworldly, I wanted you here
but was too shaded to concede,
too green to cede
Too unschooled for this geography.

On Learning to Trust Snakes

i

The feeling is a leap without landing
At first sight of a snake on your porch.
You know it has startled the heliconias
Waving for help.

Then you lose the faculty of producing breaths,
Are near swooning.
The handsomest ones
are gemstones,
or kings,
or their armoury:
Corals, Cat-Eyes, Fer-de Lance,
So well guarded one may only wear the fiction
Coiled around one's neck,
Barely puncturing the breast.

Yet they are not named for their poison
That stuns small children
Or perishes a simple tree frog
Fallen to the razor grass, unawares,
With one vampire's prick.

ii.

At night when completely alone,
An imaginary boa inhabits your chest,
Sprawls to the base of your neck.
There is no bush-tea or sedative
Strong enough
To release its smother.
You awake to wonder
If this dream means you desire
The comfort of having
A Bushmaster of your own.

iii.

A solitary girl, a kisser of hissers, prayed for counsel
Snake-friend was going through a kind of depression
Probably the tropical sort dark sea dwellers conjure,
Right before the oceans spit like vipers against the land.
Waters as dangerous to houses and sanctity as venom to a child.
Pet-shop man had a feeling—
Pressed one of its dice-eyes and it birthed a dozen tiny wet eggs.
The snake was as grateful as gratefulness can go with snakes,
Relieved to return to its serpentarium ways.

Without complaint,
Wrapped his body's tourniquet
around his mistress's weekly mousy meal.

In a quieter room (for snakes cannot scream,
though they mime it so well),
a snake lay erect, measuring its owner,
But she looked for that
Having purposely laid him in her bed.
She only wanted it as a corset
When there was no one left
To slither a hand around her waist.
This revelation opened a whole
discourse on snake tendencies,
Snakewomen unsheathed
the stockings of their untouched skins,
Smiled through the ache of cracked ribs.

A charming python-lady suspected hers,
From how its eyes slit in the company of young ducks.
Snake skepticism is rampant,
Since the jaws of time opened and heaved an egg
From which all life, human and snake became.

iv.
They say snake makes a tasty plate.
Well cooked, it can satiate,
Nicer to your belly than eel.
Except snake is no delicacy.
Just common, ground level food.

Snake extends itself to the line of limbo flames,
Testing a reverse heaven and hell.
Heaven shrinking away, shorter and shorter
Lady becomes invertebrate, limbless.
Finally her legs must open wide, collapse.
She skids her way underneath, just having escaped.
Snake is the boundary; snake is the balance.

v.
The word for lover of snakes is a feminine sound:

Her-pet-ology.

If snakes could laugh, it would come from the belly
From which new life also abounds.
Yet they say she who talks to snakes has a violated mind,
But she pays their double-tined tongues no bother,
She knows
Snakes too have their purposes.



Moko

CARIBBEAN ARTS AND LETTERS