

POETRY AS A PERFORMING ART IN THE ENGLISH-SPEAKING CARIBBEAN

by

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The thesis is dedicated to Mikey Smith and all the creative strugglers of the Caribbean.

## SUMMARY

This thesis seeks to demonstrate that there is a direct relationship between the emergence of poetry as a performing art in the English-speaking Caribbean and phases of nationalist agitation from the uprisings against unemployment, low pay and colonial neglect during 1937-8 to the present. Though the poetry has many variations in scope, ranging from light-hearted entertainment, its principal momentum has been one of protest, nationalism and revolutionary sentiment. The thesis seeks to relate tone, style and content both to specific periods and cultural contexts, and to the degree of engagement of the individual artist in the political struggle against oppression.

Frequently theatrical, the poetry has commanded a stage and a popular audience. Though urban in style, it is rooted in older, rural traditions. Creole, the vernacular of the masses, is a vital common denominator. The poetry is aurally stimulating, and often highly rhythmic. The popular music of the day has played an integral part, and formative role in terms of composition.

The fundamental historical dynamic of the English-speaking Caribbean has been one of violent imperialist imposition on the one hand, and resistance by the black masses on the other. Creole language, with its strong residuum of African grammatical constructs, concepts and vocabulary, has been a central vehicle of resistance. It is a low-status language in relation to the officially-endorsed Standard English. The thesis argues that artists' assertion of Creole, and total identification with it through their own voice, is a significant act of defiance and patriotism.

Periods of heightened agitation in the recent past have each led to the emergence of a distinctive form of performance poetry. Chapter two examines the role of Louise Bennett as a mouthpiece of black pride and nationalist sentiment largely in the period preceding independence. Her principal aim is the affirmation of the black Jamaican's fundamental humanity. She uses laughter both as a curative emotional release and as an expression of mental freedom. She lays the foundations of a comic tradition which does not fundamentally challenge the contradictions of the post-independence period.

Chapter three relates the emergence of the Dub Poets of Jamaica to the development of Rastafarianism into a mass post-independence nationalist revival, and to the contribution of intellectuals, most symbolically Walter Rodney, to the process of decolonization. Reggae music, the principal creative response to the dynamics of the period both in terms of lyrics and rhythmic tension, infuses the work of Michael Smith, Oku Onuora, Mutabaruka and Erian Meeks examined in this study.

Chapter four illustrates the development of performed poetry in the context of periods of insurrection and revolution in the East Caribbean. It examines the Black Power movement as a stimulus to cultural nationalism and revolutionary sentiment, and its transcendence to internationalism and socialism in the context of the Grenada Revolution. Abdul Malik straddles and exemplifies the creative dynamic which exists between urban, industrial Trinidad and its tiny, rural and poor neighbour, Grenada.

The highly sophisticated work of Edward Kamau Brathwaite is compared and contrasted with the other performance poets in chapter five. His theoretical contributions on the role of language and sound in Caribbean cultural expression, and the ways in which he puts theory into practice in his own work, are assessed.

A persistent concern throughout the study is the nature of orality - the experience of language as sound tied to a particular context and point in time - as opposed to literacy - the perception of words as objects which can be seen. The comparative media approaches of McLuhan and Ong have been seminal in this respect. Reflecting the language situation of the region, performance poetry occupies an intermediate role between oral and scribal modes. The critical approaches of Brathwaite and Rohlehr, who highlight the literary significance of popular and oral traditions in the context of history have been inspirational. Studies of popular culture helped to locate symbols and styles. In the absence of a given set of appropriate critical tools, a synthesis of approaches from oral studies - folkloric, ethnological and linguistic - has been attempted, combined wherever useful with more orthodox (text-oriented) analysis.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACLALS	Association for Comparative Language and Literature Studies
CAM	Caribbean Artists' Movement
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
DT	Dread Talk
EDR	East Dry River
GBSS	Grenada Boys' Secondary School
GUT	Grenada Union of Teachers
IMF	International Monetary Fund
JC	Jamaican Creole
JLP	Jamaica Labour Party
NJAC	National Joint Action Committee
NJM	New Jewel Movement
OWTU	Oilfield Workers' Trade Union
PNP	Peoples National Party
T&TEC	Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Company
UWI	University of the West Indies
WPJ	Workers' Party of Jamaica

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

i) Performance Poetry: the parameters

Travelling through the Caribbean, if one asked the question, 'Do you like poetry?', a common response would be, 'Poetry for them intellectuals up at UWI'. Teachers, even of English, often seemed to regard poetry as a chore, something that was difficult and had little to do with them. And yet if one asked, 'Do you enjoy a "dialect", or dub poetry?', the question was often greeted with pleased amusement, relaxed acknowledgement. Almost every West Indian enjoys "a dialect". Pleasure is taken in hearing or seeing natural speech idioms portrayed. A performance of this kind of poetry is associated with recreation, with laughter and entertainment. Alternatively, delivered in a sterner form, dub and other kinds of vernacular poetry provide a focus of identification, an expression of militant nationalism, or a channel of protest for the poor and alienated youth. Despite first appearances, therefore, poetry exists as a vibrant part of the popular culture of the region.

Performance poetry, as we shall call it, properly has its beginnings in 1938, when Louise Bennett emerged into the public arena with stage performances of her 'dialect poetry'. It is fundamentally an urban development and thrives in a context of modern technology; amplification, lights, media, etc. Creole, or 'dialect' is almost invariably the language medium. The language identifies the poet with a mass audience and helps make the poetry accessible to them. It also imposes certain qualities and constraints on delivery. Poems tend to be highly rhythmic and immediate in their impact.

Performance poetry can be seen in a very wide range of venues and is

highly varied in its range of presentation. At one end of the scale is the little-known dub poet, performing at a local meeting, or humble open-air free concert. There will probably be some kind of staging, and the only prop will be a microphone. The poet will need arresting phrases, a good voice and powerful message in order to command the audience's attention. Somewhat more elaborate will be presentations (often a single performance) put on by cultural and political groups, usually to mark a special day, or to honour someone. These will take place in a hall or community centre. The cultural programme will consist of a number of items including music, especially drumming, and probably dance. Being in an enclosed space, the focus on artists will be more intense. The poet may have musical accompaniment. The politically oriented performance poet may provide a welcome relief from/complement to speeches at a rally. Established dub poets have often performed at major open air reggae music festivals in front of thousands of people. Here they will have all the benefits of modern sound technology, including the special effects associated with reggae and dub music, accompaniment by live or recorded music, lights if it is at night, and all the glamour and excitement attached to a major commercial 'gig'.

Theatricality, to a greater or lesser degree, is associated with performance poetry in the Caribbean. Some performers of poetry are very minor poets but are adept in theatre skills. Some have received extensive drama training. Some perform the poetry of others, and combine it with jokes, narratives, songs and dance. Such performances often take place in established theatres, are regarded as popular forms of entertainment, and may tour the region. Some poets conceive of their own work within an extended theatre setting. In Trinidad elaborate performances with sets, a full steel orchestra, or band or choir have taken place quite frequently. The poet may take on the entire responsibility for raising the necessary

finances, administration and artistic direction, and still put on virtually a 'one-person-show'. At its most theatrical, poetry can form part of a variety show, framed by a proscenium arch, in which changing sets, costumes, makeup and orchestra play an integral part.

Despite strong opposition amongst conservatives of all kinds, performance poetry has been increasingly recognised for its educational and cultural value. Many of the poets are regular visitors to schools, institutes and community centres, where they use their poetry to provoke discussion and debate around language, cultural and social issues. They seek to make young people more conscious of their history and cultural heritage. In Jamaica reforms within the penal system led to the emergence of poetry as a channel for protest and creative expression in the prisons. In the context of the annual Jamaica Festival, performance of poetry by members of the community is encouraged. Workshops are established around the country for training and an anthology of 'set poems' is produced. Heats and then a final are held in order to judge the best performances. Amongst the most popular choices for many years now have been poems by Louise Bennett and, more recently, by several dub poets. The ability to 'do a dialect' well is a popular skill.

Acceptance within some educational institutions followed acceptance and praise by established artists and intellectuals. An historic performance took place in 1977 when Orlando Wong (Oku Onuora), at the time an inmate of St. Catherine's Prison, delivered his poems at the headquarters of Jamaica's Library Service to the Jamaican section of P.E.N. International. A campaign by some of the country's best-known artists later secured his release. Grass roots and established poets deliver their work side by side on university campuses and select cultural centres.

Louise Bennett, as the major entertainment personality in Jamaica

outside the reggae field, has played a significant and formative part in Jamaican radio, particularly the shift in accents from 'BBC' to the entire range of Jamaican speech styles which can be heard today. She also has a weekly television programme for children. Paul Keens-Douglas, commanding a comparable, although less deep-rooted, position in Trinidad, is also a regular radio and television personality. All the well-established performance poets have made records, some with, some without musical accompaniment. Some have held their own within the reggae market. Much of this poetry exists in print, in book or pamphlet form. Very few people can afford to buy books of any kind, however, hence the importance of other media.

Some of the most popular and commercially successful entertainers in the English-speaking Caribbean are poets, even if this does not constitute the whole or major part of their appeal. Because of the popular nature of 'dialect' poetry, wide sections of the population are encouraged to try their hand. It is a highly participatory form. As Mutabaruka, an established dub poet, commented: "Poetry pass a elite stage."

#### ii) Forms and sources

There are three main types of performance poets in the English-speaking Caribbean: a) the Bennett tradition b) academics and c) grassroots activists and revolutionaries. Louise Bennett begins the whole tradition of performance poetry, and in this sense she is an inspiration to all who follow her. However, we can distinguish strong Bennett characteristics in terms of philosophy and style which some have followed more nearly than others. Although the urban milieu has been vital to Louise Bennett's development and success, her work is embedded in rural, more purely oral, traditions. She comes from a line of strong Jamaican

women who were very proud of their heritage. One of Bennett's most formative influences as a child was her grandmother's storytelling. They were Anancy stories, which had originally travelled with captives brought from what is modern-day Ghana. Anancy, the trickster hero, always triumphs over friend and foe alike because he is sharp-witted and knows what he is about. A great deal of humour and charm is embodied in this all-too-human character (who most often manifests as a spider). The moral order remains complex; the ultimate triumph is that the slaves who bore the stories handed down the secret of laughter as a means of maintaining mental freedom and sanity. To Bennett, laughter is sacrosanct; it is the root of her independence and pride of self. Satire is also a powerful inherited weapon which she directs against colonial bureaucracy and the false values regarding colour and national identity which are a legacy of colonialism. The Anancy story is full of sharply-delineated characters; all animals, but clearly representing human types with very obvious weaknesses. They are all 'little people', like those who told the stories, and are consequently handled with affection. Bennett's poems are full of such characters.

The habit of relieving sorrow through laughter is maintained in rural Jamaica through a kind of wake called a Dinkie Minnie. The aim is to console the bereaved by maintaining absolute cheerfulness. Laughter, music and dancing carry on all night. The calypso is in the tradition of greeting negative situations with laughter (in this case satirical). Bennett frequently points to this approach with approval. Her position is one of resistance to all negating forces and a positive assertion of identity. Her vision is not escapist, but the emotions of anger or despair do not dominate her work.

In terms of finding a form her principle model was Claude McKay, an earlier composer of 'dialect verse', who in turn got his formal

inspiration from Robert Burns. McKay wrote mainly in ballad quatrains. Bennett may also have been influenced by Slim and Sam, a pair of 'Wayside Minstrels' who roamed Jamaica singing topical ballads and selling printed versions on coloured pieces of paper. Like Slim and Sam, she uses her ballad quatrains to make topical comments. She was also thoroughly exposed to English ballads while at school (Morris in Bennett 1982, Nettleford in Bennett 1966).

The story-telling tradition is dying out (Rohlehr in Keens-Douglas 1979, p. v) and Louise Bennett has become a repository of inspiration for younger artists. In the post-independence period, pride in the spoken idiom became more pronounced, and many individuals sought to adapt or imitate this aspect of her work as well as, in many cases, its comic tone. Bennett was also highly skilled in terms of theatre, having been trained at RADA and now a veteran of variety performance, repertory and the annual Jamaican Pantomime, and many writer/actors looked to the kind of performance possibilities she had opened up. Amongst these were the Guyanese group based at the Theatre Guild in Georgetown, including Ken Corsbie, Marc Matthews, John Agard and Henry Muttoo. During the late 1960's and early 1970's they toured variously as 'He-one', 'Dem Two' and 'All Ah We'. There was also the 'Is We' group formed by Christopher Laird in Trinidad. At this stage most of the members were stronger on performance than on composition, and presented material by authors from all over the region, thus helping to popularise the general concept of performance poetry. Paul Keens-Douglas was Bennett's closest disciple in terms of composition and performance.

The Bennett tradition specializes in the dramatic monologue. The performer assumes a character or persona, who is often gently mocked in the course of the performance, while there may well be some wider object of satire also. The character is often in the middle of some highly

dramatic incident, or in an emotionally-charged state narrating a vivid experience, which allows for a high degree of body movement, use of space and facial expression. Exaggeration and hamming are a temptation for the less skilled.

The Bennett tradition has been maintained by actors and poets who have never espoused revolutionary sentiments or politics. Their strongest responses have been to Bennett's nationalism and humanism.

The work of Edward Kamau Brathwaite (now Professor of Social and Cultural History at U.W.I.) differs profoundly in terms of style and content from that of any of the other poets in this study. The majority of his work is in standard English (though the proportion is constantly diminishing). It is learned in scope and quite often opaque or dense in meaning, by no means giving up all its possible riches at a single hearing. However, that percentage of his work which is directly in the performance tradition (i.e. written in Creole, or nation language, as he prefers to call it, and with its own compelling rhythmic impetus) has had an immense impact on the development of performance poetry as a whole. Between 1967 and 1973 Brathwaite's reading of his long trilogy, The Arrivants came out on Argo Records. These and live readings caused unprecedented excitement, as he had achieved a breakthrough not only in terms of his comprehensive portrayal of the Caribbean complexity but in terms of his capture of music and speech rhythms and idioms. He had also once and for all released Creole poetry from the need to be funny (he was not the first, but he was the most comprehensively successful, particularly in his portrayal of peasant manners and philosophy in 'The Dust'). The impact also went way beyond the usual circle of poetry lovers. The mood of Black Power was sweeping the Caribbean and for many the trilogy was an entry into much-needed understanding about Africa, about slavery, about Black America.

Brathwaite has been an important modernist influence on Caribbean poetry. From his youth he was attracted to the poetry of North Americans, both black and white - Eliot, Pound, Hughes - and to jazz and other forms of Afro-American music, in revolt against the English tradition in which he had been thoroughly tutored. Langston Hughes' vivid capture of the mood, rhythms and ambiance of jazz and blues, his quotes from song, use of black idiom, and skill at encapsulating and releasing energy within the line through line-breaks and by repetition have had a powerful influence on Brathwaite's style; likewise Pound's typographical experiments and elements of Eliot's philosophy. Brathwaite's experimental approach offered many alternatives to the ballad quatrain and formal metre in general. He helped to democratize poetry in the region, encouraging many who had been alienated by the old-fashioned, excessively formal, Eurocentric approach to poetry followed in schools (see Searle 1972). It became possible to search for one's own forms, one's own voice. None of those who followed the Bennett tradition in terms of dramatic approach and philosophy adopted her use of ballad form.

For many the trilogy was a first introduction to African history, philosophical outlooks and elements of language. It was an endorsement of performance and a communal approach to poetry from a different perspective. It gave the use of Creole a new dignity. The wide geographical and historical distances and general complexity of themes in The Arrivants demanded epic form, an ancient oral poetry form. It is the first time that a poetic work of such magnitude has been attempted in the English-speaking Caribbean.

Even if the poetry is more complex than that of the other performance poets, it requires performance to be fully appreciated. Brathwaite has reciprocally drawn from the early Rastafarian poets like Bongo Jerry, whom he helped to inspire. Many of his techniques,

especially his improvisational response to the phonology of individual words, have been inspired by Rastafarianism. In spirit he remains very close to the other performance poets. He has campaigned and propagandized ceaselessly on behalf of performance poetry and the oral tradition, and has had to pay certain penalties. For years he has been regarded by many academics as unacceptably unorthodox and eccentric.

Bruce St. John, a fellow Barbadian, is Professor of Spanish at the Cave Hill campus of U.W.I. He trained as a singer in the operatic tradition and frequently sings in public. He was stirred into writing in the Barbadian Creole when Stokely Carmichael was prevented from speaking in Barbados. He clearly felt the need to answer what he felt to be a manifest absence of black and national pride at government level. His Creole verse is widely appreciated in the East Caribbean as authentic in detail and spirit. On the whole composition has been accompanied by careful and self-conscious analysis. He is a traditionalist. Unlike Brathwaite he has not been at all experimental in form. Like Bennett, he employs the dramatic monologue, or dialogue. Almost invariably his personae are old people ( a touch of realism since it is only the elderly who still speak Creole in Barbados). On several occasions he has used the antiphonal qualities of grassroots church worship (call and response) as a basic form in his poetry. His tone is whimsical or heavily satirical in contrast to the humanist comedy of Louise Bennett. St. John, like Brathwaite, reads his poetry sitting down, or at a lectern. We could say that the academics differ from the other performance poets in the degree of self-consciousness they bring to their work.

Grassroots activists and revolutionaries constitute by far the largest category of performer poets. All in fact espouse a revolutionary vision; the distinction is simply made in terms of the degree to which they have a clear model or programme by which they hope to achieve the

desired end. Their first motivation is the unacceptability for them of present circumstances. In many cases the first poems begin as howls of protest, or growls of anger, with little consideration given to form and presentation. The inspiration to write poetry at all came from American Black Power poets like Nikki Giovanni, Le Roi Jones and Don L. Lee whose poems were appearing in West Indian radical newspapers and magazines in the late 1960's. Poetry became an urgent and popular medium for protest.

The most distinctive group of grassroots activist poets are the Dub Poets of Jamaica. Several have become internationally known, but they have continued to function actively within their communities. This involves a high element of risk as their views are hardly popular with the present ultra-conservative government, and political violence is a brutal everyday occurrence in Jamaica (Pearn 1983a, Koslofsky and Wilson 1980). Michael Smith paid the ultimate penalty, being stoned to death in 1983 after heckling a politician at a meeting.

The Dub Poets are linked together more by their style and stance than by formal similarities in their poetry. Early influences were Louise Bennett in terms of use of Creole, Brathwaite in terms of black consciousness and rhythm, and above all the American Black Power poets from whom both Oku Onuora and Mutabaruka probably developed the short line and a tendency to minimal expression. This side of their poetry is somewhat page-oriented. Both poets have written a good number of intense, reflective lyric poems. On the other hand, and more fundamentally, the Dub Poets were steeped in reggae music as it developed in the ghettos, and the Rastafarian philosophy which increasingly influenced the music. Two major figures of inspiration were Bob Marley and Peter Tosh of The Wailers. Both brought into their music a Rastafarian and Garveyite consciousness of history; slavery and the African heritage. Their lyrics also expressed identification with African national liberation struggles,

and generalized revolutionary sentiments:

Slave driver, the table has turned  
Catch a fire, so you can get burned  
(Wailers, Catch A Fire, 1973a)

In terms of developing a more expansive and relaxed approach to performance, the D.J.'s who improvised between and through records to bring more excitement to the outdoor sound system dances were influential. In order to keep their verbal rhythms and rhymes going, they would clutch at any material that came to mind, including nursery rhymes and children's clapping games. As performance opportunities increased, the Dub Poets developed the ability to produce powerful rallying phrases which, repeated, were both rhythmic and significant. The poems became longer, line-length increased and the rhythmic refrain became an important factor. Reggae rhythms were also consciously or unconsciously incorporated in the poetry.

The revolutionary poets can be viewed in two categories; visionary and pragmatist. Abdul Malik from Trinidad is an example of a visionary. He uses concrete examples of revolution, particularly Cuba, in detailing his vision. He was a founding member of the Black Panthers in Trinidad and is a former member of NJAC, a national Black Power coalition. However, for at least ten years he has not been involved in party politics. He sees his role as to invoke, praise, envision and describe revolution and liberation of the masses. As a poet he drew inspiration from Brathwaite, both in terms of historical vision and attention to detail on the printed page. Like Brathwaite, he employs word-breaks to emphasise internal contradictions in words, or puns. His work is meditative and grand. His poems are often long, including an epic sequence in praise of the steel pan. His poetry is filled with a sense of the grandeur of two grassroot impulses; the steelband and labour movements (which are not exclusive of each other). In performance, at

moments of heightened emotion and tension, his movements, voice tone and rhythms are reminiscent of an inspired preacher.

The pragmatists have all been engaged with the Grenada Revolution and are/were members of the New Jewel Movement, a revolutionary party. In the pre-revolutionary situation the poetry is direct and agitational, anticipating the victory of the working class over the dictatorship of Eric Gairy and the implementation of a socialist programme. It is also rather clumsy, as poets struggle with archaic vocabulary, rhymes and traditional English metre. There was clearly little modernist influence in Grenada before the revolution, illustrating the widely-held view of it as a neo-colonial 'backwater'. During the revolution, the use of Creole encouraged a general freeing of expression. Poetry became highly functional as a means of education and encouragement, and the demands of performance determined that rhythms became more aligned with natural speech. There was very probable inspiration in terms of imagery and philosophy from the revolutionary poems of Mozambique and Central America. Subsequent to the defeat of the revolution, most Grenadian poets mentioned in this study are either in prison in Grenada, or in exile.

### iii) History, literary form and content

Literary content and form is not an arbitrary choice by the artist, it is determined by the artist's place in history. It would be as impossible for a modern writer to write about politics in the manner of Edmund Spenser as it would have been for Spenser to write science fiction. The novel could not have developed without industrialization, which both gave birth to a large and literate middle class and furnished the technological capacity to fill their leisure hours with a literature which in turn reflected the upheavals in perception occasioned by massive economic and imperialist expansion.

Capitalism and slavery by Eric Williams details the high degree to which that expansion was directly built on the suffering and exploitation of the West Indian slave. Selwyn Cudjoe (1980) writes that all of Caribbean history, from 1500 to the present day, has been "characterised by violence perpetrated against Caribbean peoples and their political resistance" (p.19). In this statement he includes the genocidal wars against Caribs and Arawaks, the enslavement and forced labour of millions of Africans, Maroon wars throughout the region, the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865 and its brutal suppression by Governor Eyre, the wave of riots which swept the British West Indies in 1937-8, the Cuban Revolution of 1959, and successive United States attempts to reverse it (ibid. pp.7-55). In the British Caribbean, there was no development of bourgeois nationalism, as in Cuba during the nineteenth century (Brathwaite 1970a, Lewis 1983). In a context of unmitigated violence and aggression, perpetrated not only from without but by the almost all white and brown ruling class within, a black identity has been a vital focus of resistance in the Caribbean, and culture has been a constant manifestation of that resistance. From a Black North American perspective, Stephen Henderson (1973) writes: "the great overarching movement of consciousness for Black people must be called, in contemporary parlance, the idea of Liberation..." (p.18). The will to freedom, as Brathwaite has noted (1967/8, 1984) can be heard in the 'breaks' of jazz music, the powerful 'engine' of gospel singing. Only rarely do circumstances allow resistance to take a revolutionary form (Haiti 1791, Cuba 1959). In the English-speaking Caribbean, the struggle by the black masses to throw off all forms of imperialist control reached its high point to date in the Grenada Revolution (1979-83).

Caribbean literature is deeply embedded in this historical dynamic. Reinhard Sander has observed: "the preoccupation with the underprivileged

West Indian, whether city-dweller or peasant, is a continuing feature of West Indian literature" (1978, p.9). This has been true even of writers like V.S. Naipaul, who rejects the concept of Caribbean resistance, cultural or political ("History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies." 1969a, p.29). A House for Mr. Biswas portrays the comic but heroic struggle of the Indo-Trinidadian protagonist out of the ignorance, poverty and drudgery of the Caroni canefields to a (precarious) position of identity, creativity and self-respect as writer and property-owner. George Lamming (1960) identifies the West Indian novel as an essentially peasant creation. Samuel Selvon (again, Indo-Trinidadian) and V.S. Reid (particularly in New Day) are, he says, employing "the people's speech, the organic music of the earth." This irresistible tendency in West Indian literature is an illustration of what Amilcar Cabral has called the "return to the source" (1973, p.63), when the petit-bourgeois artist is compelled to turn from the culture of the colonizer to that of his dominated people "by the inescapable contradiction between the colonized society and the colonial power" (ibid.). The "source" is a more complex issue in the Caribbean than in West Africa, because the people are of more diverse origins. Brathwaite has acknowledged and struggled with this factor in his Contradictory Omens (1974a). However, "the people's speech" is to a large degree rooted in the peasant experience of all the non-white peoples of the Caribbean. Jan Carew, of Guyana, maintains that many Indo-Guyanese workers in the rural areas speak more authentic 'black English' than the urban Afro-Guyanese because they have maintained the language their ancestors learned on the plantations (Searle 1984, p.241). The overwhelming African cultural presence as a determining factor in the development of national consciousness in resistance to colonial domination should never be underplayed.

Nationalist or anti-colonial feeling has frequently been associated with the assertion of Creole. J.J. Thomas, a proud Trinidadian nationalist, refuted the Oxford historian Anthony Froude's condescending arguments for increasing the Imperial grip on the West Indian territories (Froude 1888) in Froudacity (1889). Thomas had published the first major linguistic study, The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar, in 1869. The very title illustrates the positive attitude Thomas had towards a language form which was generally dismissed as 'bad English'. Donald Wood writes, "To discern order and internal logic in a type of speech that most Trinidadians then - as some indeed still do - dismissed contemptuously as a degenerate patois was a fine intellectual advance." (in Thomas, 1969 edn., p.13).

In 1912 two volumes of dialect verse appeared in Jamaica, Songs of Jamaica and Constab Ballads, written by Claude McKay, a young well-educated policeman of peasant background. The poems extolled peasant farming methods over European ones ('King Banana'), expressed a sense of delight in a black skin ('Sukee river', 'My pretty Dan'), and a rooted love of Jamaica:

Jamaica is de nigger's place,  
No mind whe' some declare;  
Aldough dem call we "no land race",  
I know we home is here.

You give me life an' nourishment,  
No udder land I know;  
My lub I neber can repent,  
For all to you I owe.

('My native land, my home', Songs of Jamaica, pp.84-5)

In strong contrast were the patriotic poems composed by members of the Poetry League of Jamaica during the 1920's and 30's which celebrated Jamaica's 'membership' of the British Empire in verse reflecting the worst of Victorian hymnody. The Poetry League was numerically dominated by white Creoles and expatriates.

V.S. Reid's New Day (1949) was inspired by the establishment of a Parliamentary system in Jamaica in 1944, the first stage towards self-rule, which was finally completely achieved in 1962. The novel looked back to the Morant Bay rebellion of 1865; a nationalist and anti-colonialist uprising by the black masses provoked by oppressive taxation and landlessness. New Day was written in the aftermath of the riots which shook the entire West Indies during 1937-8, reflecting the seething discontent within the islands one hundred years after Emancipation. Reid, looking back from one semi-revolutionary situation to another, and forward to independence and constitutional government, which he sees as the antidote to riot and rebellion, celebrated the dawn of the 'new day', composing his entire narrative in a stylized form of Creole.

Lanning himself captured the dynamic relationship between the slave plantation past, the riots of 1937-8 and the evolution of a national consciousness in his first novel, In the Castle of my Skin (1953), in which Creole played a central role as the medium of consciousness. The novel also examines the forces impelling the emergent scholar to leave the islands for the metropole. The novels of the 1950's were essentially a literature of exile, through which artists and intellectuals sought primarily to explain themselves to themselves and to a metropolitan readership. The novel was not the best medium through which to make contact with the masses. The identification was not total. Even though several of the writers had become 'middle class' through education and had quite humble origins, the lower sections of society were being written about rather than to.

It is Louise Bennett who makes that breakthrough in the modern period by performing in Creole. Writing in the language is one thing; adopting it as part of oneself through the voice is another. As Bennett herself has said:

When I went on there, I was that person, ha ha! I wasn't going on and taking off anybody. I was just being natural ... 'But this is what we are', you know. (1982b)

Louise Bennett reflects the stage which national consciousness, at least at one level of the society, had reached. Her emergence onto the stage coincided with the region-wide riots against unemployment and colonial neglect. One outcome of the rebellion was the establishment of a modern trade union movement, which formed the basis for anti-colonial agitation. At the heart of this renewed militancy was Marcus Garvey. Richard Hart (1965) writes:

Garvey gave to the down-trodden and dispirited Negro in the western world the encouragement and the will to respect himself as a man at a time when he had come to believe that he was an inferior being. After the millions had heard Garvey's eloquent and inspiring oratory, they were no longer ashamed to be black. And it is only upon this foundation of racial self-respect that any militancy and determination to improve their conditions has been possible. (p.28)

One of the objects of this thesis is to demonstrate that the development of performance poetry has been integrally related to periods of heightened agitation and struggle in recent Caribbean history. Fanon (1967) writes:

...the progress of national consciousness among the people modifies and gives precision to the literary utterances of the native intellectual...the native writer progressively takes on the habit of addressing his own people... On another level, the oral tradition - stories, epics and songs of the people - which formerly were filed away as set pieces are now beginning to change. (pp.192-3)

Brathwaite and the early Rastafarian poets are inspired by, and infuse, the agitation sparked off by the exclusion of Walter Rodney from Jamaica in 1969. Abdul Malik is a central actor in the 1970 Black Power insurrection in Trinidad, and writes some of his major poems in, or in the aftermath of, prison. The Dub Poets articulate the hunger of the Jamaican masses for social justice which stumbled towards a degree of progress under the Manley government (1972-80). In Grenada, poetry of any quality at all is born in the context of the revolution which, with its

promise of a new dawn, drew poetry from unexpected quarters.

The more purely grassroots poets draw their main inspiration from indigenous and popular forms - riddles and games, proverbs, Biblical imagery and Rastafarian metaphor, the oratory of preachers and labour mobilizers, the tense but affirmative rhythms of reggae music. In so doing they reinterpret popular tradition itself and bring a revolutionary impetus to the development of Caribbean poetry as a whole. The performance poets draw wide audiences because their work is authentic and relevant to them.

Directness is a general quality which is more marked the more intensely the poet is engaged in struggle. (Cudjoe 1980). Louise Bennett is clearly established in the mainstream of modern Jamaican nationalism. She speaks directly to the masses through her language and idiom, but the objects of her satire are relatively diffuse and her tone is goodhumoured and conciliatory. Brathwaite has not chosen an easy path, but he does enjoy the security of international acclaim and academic status. He is thus freed to take a more metaphysical approach to the concept of liberation than the poets facing daily pressure on the street. He also engages in a far higher degree of aesthetic and formal experiment. Abdul Malik, on the other hand, while not lacking a metaphysical, meditative dimension, is more explicit in terms of the objects of protest and his allegiances. The Grenadian revolutionary poets saw their work in entirely functional, organic terms. Poetry was only worthwhile if it contributed to the revolution. Poems praised the CPE (adult education), exhorted people to take pride in working the land, or sought to raise consciousness on issues like women's liberation.

Implicit in the work of the dub poets is the idea that creative art is crushed out of existence in the context of human deprivation and injustice. Thus Oku Onuora maintains his poems can only be "cries" from

the ghetto. A recurrent theme in Third World literature is the abandonment or murder of babies by their mothers, driven to despair by poverty, alienation and abuse. Such desperate acts are the ultimate indicator of social sterility; the antithesis of life and creativity. Wanja, the central female character in Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Petals of Blood (1977), murders her new-born child, product of unprincipled seduction by her father's wealthy friend (pp.38-41), in a latrine (pp.291-2). Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali, the black South African poet, writes of "scavenging dogs/ draped in red bandannas of blood" as they "fought fiercely/ for a squirming bundle" ('An abandoned bundle' in Royston (ed.) 1973 p.85). Malik has his own version of the story:

and motherhood knows  
a touch of madness  
as babies are thrown  
into cesspits

('Fire flies ...for Beverly', Revo p.24)

This coincidence of theme is not the result of literary influence but the pervasive and predictable real-life consequences of dispossession, urbanization, unemployment and official indifference or repression.

Bearing witness to such horrors has convinced many Third World writers that their commitment to creativity must be a commitment to revolution. Ngugi wa Thiong'o of Kenya writes (1981): "...free unfettered human intercourse is impossible within capitalistic structures and imperialism...true humanism is not possible without the subjection of the economy...to the total ownership and control of the people...for as long as there are classes...a truly human contact in love, joy, laughter, creative fulfilment in labour, will never be possible." Alex La Guma of South Africa, in an essay, 'Culture and liberation' (1979), maintains that "art cannot be separated from the desire for liberation", and must play an integral part in the "struggle to reach higher levels of civilization, of social, economic and cultural status." Ousmane Sembene

(of Senegal) and Ngugi are amongst the writers who have reached this conclusion. They have sought to communicate widely with their people by revolutionizing the form as well as the content of their work - Sembene through film and Ngugi through community theatre. Because their success challenges the status quo by raising consciousness and encouraging the open voicing of discontent, both have faced constant harrassment from their governments. Ngugi has finally been forced into exile after a term of imprisonment. Neo-colonial governments constantly reveal themselves in opposition to indigenous and popular creativity because so often it threatens to disturb existing relations with the metropoles upon which they are dependent for their survival. The Haitian government represses popular theatre in Creole, for example (Rajab 1979, Walmsley 1984); while the theatre developed by Ngugi with peasants and workers from Kamiriithu Community Educational and Cultural Centre in Limuru was forcibly closed by government authorities and all future theatre activities banned (Ngugi 1983, p.83).

iv) Creole and cultural resistance

According to Cassidy (1961), Jamaican Creole (and this would go for all Caribbean English creoles) is "an English learned incompletely in slave days, with a strong infusion of African influences, and continued traditionally in much the same form down to the present." (p.2). The exact sequence of the development of creole languages in the Caribbean is a matter of considerable debate (Hymes (ed) 1971). Sidney Mintz speculates: "One may suppose that, initially, pidginization of the master's language would be part of the process of mutual adjustment necessary to carry on plantation operations. In some cases...pidgin languages must have evolved into creole languages." (ibid. p.484). His emphasis is that the Standard English model is "the master's language"

and that interaction took place under "the unhampered use of force" by the slave masters. That a rigid caste system is necessary to the maintenance of a creole language is illustrated by the fact that in the Spanish-speaking islands, where Spanish settlers quickly identified themselves as Cubans or Puerto Ricans, there is no creole. In the French and British islands, the reverse situation applied (Brathwaite 1970, Lewis 1983). This has a distinct bearing on the issues both of national consciousness and language. Mintz argues that "the more a Cuban slave were to identify with his master, the more Cuban he became; whereas the more a Jamaican slave were to identify with his master, the less Jamaican he would become." (Hymes (ed) 1971, p.488). The standard language is associated with status, and is an essential requisite for career success. Conversely, Creole has been despised, called 'bungo talk' and associated negatively with Africa, poverty and ignorance (Cassidy 1961, p.18).

The school system has played an important part in the development of values around language. Cassidy (1961) writes of the "nervous conformity" of the "parvenu in education" (p.3). It has also been the instrument of Imperial indoctrination (as Lamming detailed graphically in In the Castle of my Skin, 1953). Fanon (1967) writes: "Colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it." (p.169). As Brathwaite says: "...we never mentioned the word [Africa] in our ten years of schooling." (Perrier 1973, p.18). We get a clear picture of the view of evolution that was being promoted around 1912 through this poem of Claude McKay's:

Talk 'bouten Africa, we would be deh till now,  
Maybe same half-naked - all day dribe buccra cow,  
An' tearin' t'rough de bush wid all de monkey dem  
Wile an' uncibilise', an' neber comin' tame.  
( 'Cudjoe fresh from de lecture' )

Cudjoe has learned he must be grateful for slavery, because at least it rescued him from 'uncivilized' Africa. This poem is full of ironies, not least because the poem is in Creole, one of the areas where the African heritage persisted most strongly. As Cassidy says, Creole became so firmly established that it functioned adequately "even in defiance of" British English (Hymes (ed) 1971, p.205). Walter Jekyll (1907) recounted correcting his plantation workers' (mis)pronunciations, only to find that, though they demonstrated they could accurately reproduce the standard version, they immediately went back to their own, preferred, version.

Standard English has historically been associated with the imposition of European domination over the black, African-originated population of the West Indies. Its manner of transmission in the schools has been authoritarian; beatings for speaking Creole have been a frequent occurrence. Jean Creary, a Jamaican linguist, wrote:

in areas of great stress West Indians either revert to dialect, or find themselves without a language for the situation. Their use of Standard English is formal and non-emotional. It is external to their deepest feeling and thinking... (James 1968, p.18).

Louise Bennett also points to the authenticity and lack of constraint of Creole when she describes it as "a manner of speaking unhampered by the rules of (Standard English) grammar, a free expression..." (Bennett 1949). Marc Matthews, actor/poet from Guyana, has spoken of the creative significance for him of adopting "the language I spoke in the schoolyard and not in the schoolroom" (Matthews 1984).

Cassidy (1961) demonstrates that the African input into Jamaican Creole (JC) is strong and pervasive. As Louise Bennett cried exuberantly in a London performance: "De basic thing we derive from is Africahn - koo yah poopah!" (1983). Cassidy observes how fundamentally intonation varies from Standard English, with far greater variation of pitch, which

accentuates individual syllables. He also notes that in some cases homonyms are entirely dependent (like West African tonal languages) on intonation to fix meaning (pp.26-30). In addition, as in "a typical language of the West African coast", the syllable after a stress is pitched high, rather than on the stress as in Standard English (p.32). Some English words are 'Africanized' by adding a vowel; e.g. rata for rat; rakatuon for rock-stone (p.47). The most fundamental influences from African languages are in the grammar. As with some Niger-Congo languages, a demonstrative is used to indicate a plural; de gal dem - the girls. In Twi, one language of the Akan peoples, the first person singular pronoun is me. This "was surely a factor in the preference for me over I in Jamaican folk speech." (Cassidy 1961, p.54). Unu, the JC second person plural pronoun, has an Igbo equivalent. Sentence structure becomes condensed in line with the Niger-Congo languages: 'De man owe me money gone a Cuba' - 'The man who owes me money has gone to Cuba'. (See Dalphinis 1985, pp.88-9, 160-161). Fe is used to form an infinitive: 'Me come fe see you!'. This, says Cassidy, could be an abbreviation of archaic English, 'I've come for to see you', or from the Twi and Yoruba fa which forms an infinitive with another verb. Where English and African forms parallel one another, their function is reinforced (p.67). Distinctive to JC is the possessive form fe me/my; fe im/his, her; fe we/our.

Iteration is typical of Niger-Congo language structure (p.64). One example is the anticipation and then repetition of a verb for emphasis: 'Is gone I gone". There are about 250 pure African words in the JC lexicon. Some take an iterative form. It is sometimes said that the dominant and warlike character of the Akan ('Koromanti') peoples is responsible for the preponderance of Twi words in JC. Leonard Barrett (1976, pp.17-24) and Cassidy (1961, p.70) detail a number of iterative JC

words with their Twi equivalents. These include kaskas, JC 'an argument'/ kasakasa, Twi 'to dispute'; puttaputta, JC 'mud'/ potopoto, Twi 'muddy'; susu, JC 'whisper'/ susuw, Twi 'utter a suspicion'. Many food names are identical in JC and Twi (Barrett 1976, pp.21-24). The word nyam - JC for food or eat - comes from the Twi e-nam. Barrett demonstrates that many Jamaican proverbs are a direct translation of Akan proverbs (pp.35-37). He also informs us that the Twi custom of assigning names to children according to the day on which they are born still persists, although it is dying out (p.18). The Jamaican and their Twi equivalents are as follows:

	JC		TWI	
	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Female</u>
Sunday	Quashie	Quasheba	Kwesi	Esi
Monday	Cudjoe	Juba	Kodjo	Adwoa
Tuesday	Cubannah	(Beneba)	Yaw/Ebow	Yaa
Wednesday	(Quaco)	(Cuba)	Kweku	Ekua
Thursday	(Quao)	Abba	Ekow	Abena/Iaba
Friday	Cuffy	Pheba/Efi	Kofi	Efua
Saturday	(Quamin)	(Mimba)	Kwame/ Kwamena	Ama

JC names in brackets are given by Long (1774), quoted in Patterson (1967) p.174. Others are quoted by Barrett (1976) as still current. Comparative studies, such as those done by Abrahams (1983) illustrate the strong parallels in linguistic practice amongst all Afro-Americans, arguing that this is conclusive proof of underlying African structures (which would extend to many areas of behaviour and thought). The retention of tradition, in other words resistance to imposition, has probably been as vital to the survival of black people in the New World as their adaptability.

The language situation is usually represented as a continuum between the most Africanized forms of Creole, the basilect, and Standard English. In pure linguistic terms, it is only this basilect which is 'true Creole'. However, as Bailey (in Hymes (ed) 1971, p.342) concedes, applying the word Creole "to the entire language spectrum as it exists in

Jamaica, including even the form of Standard English peculiar to the island" does make sociolinguistic sense. For the purposes of this study, Creole will be used for all distinctively Caribbean speech forms, excluding West Indian Standard English. Maureen Warner Lewis (1979) refers to the terms basilect, mesolect and acrolect to mark the two extreme and median points of the West Indian language continuum. The term basilect will be used to refer to those variants furthest away from Standard English.

Two firmly-established language systems have co-existed and symbolically interacted in a context of struggle. R.D. Abrahams (1983) gives us many examples throughout the Caribbean of ritualized dramatizations of the bilingual situation, such as the tea meeting and other speech-making events. At such occasions there is a contest between two different kinds of language and language skills. On the one hand there are the speech makers, who are judged for their eloquence and their elaborate use of long, latinate words. This language and delivery Abrahams designates 'performance H' (using terms originated by Ferguson, 1959). On the other are hecklers within the audience who seek to undermine the poise and authority of the speech maker. They specialize in wit and derision, and their medium is Creole. Their integral contribution to the proceedings is 'performance L'. Creole is therefore identified with rebellion against decorum and authority. The ritual is one which embraces complexity, however. Abrahams writes:

The ascendancy of H...should not be read as total acceptance of H values and norms. Rather, the existence of both codes is attested to, the strengths and weaknesses of both systems fully demonstrated. These oratorical contests, then, are not simply demonstrations of the ability of the community members to speak performance H effectively. It is a community celebration of speech of all sorts, a revelry of talk in which the entire range of speaking acts and events are put on view and enjoyed. (p.38)

Brathwaite's concept of nation language is rooted in the sense of two

language systems, with all their historical implications, in conflict. In a lecture delivered at Yale University (1979, published 1984 as History of the voice) he connected nation language to Dante's argument in De vulgari eloquentia (1304) in favour of the Tuscan vernacular (his nation language) to replace the colonial language, Latin. Brathwaite's conception of nation language implies submergence under colonial domination; survival; and increasingly assertive re-emergence. It is the "natural patrimony", the "recovery of our selves through our voices: of our voices through the discovery of ourselves" (Brathwaite 1978b). The concept of nation is drawn from a close identification with the North American Black Power movement. 'The Nation' was a rallying call to all Blacks to unite under a single African identity. This in turn comes from one of Garvey's slogans: 'One nation; one destiny'. Imamu Amiri Baraka (Le Roi Jones), for example, brought out a pamphlet of poems called It's nation time (1970). In the title poem he exorts:

Time to get  
together  
time to be one strong fast black enrgy [sic] space  
one pulsating positive magnetism, rising

Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton (1968) perceived the black American population as colonized within their own country, beseiged by the white majority. In the Caribbean during the same period a sense of seige, if not numerically, then culturally and economically, manifested itself in the Black Power upheavals of 1968 and 1970. The common roots of identification in slavery and dispossession are overwhelmingly clear. A problem with making the parallels too absolute was illustrated when Carmichael visited Guyana in 1969 and deeply offended the Indo-Guyanese population by what they saw as his racist attitude. Brathwaite's term is resonant and potentially inclusive, embodying a powerful sense of cultural resistance and nascent 'national' identity. However, it is important that that potential be made explicit. Defining the nation

remains a central Caribbean problem.

Language in the Caribbean is rooted in the context of struggle; a struggle between a language forged in blood, sweat and tears on the land, infused with African sensibility and idiom, and "the language of the master". For the East Indian, Creole is the language of belonging. Mr. Biswas and Shama gain a foothold in the society not only through their house but through their adoption of the English idiom of Port of Spain. (Naipaul 1969b). In other words, they become 'creolized'. Finally, perhaps, we must return to Lamming's concept of Creole as "the people's speech".

#### v) Performance in the Caribbean

Performance holds a central place in the traditional rural societies of the Caribbean. As Abrahams (1983) writes, it plays a central functional role "in the stylization of individual and group relationships" (p.45). In his study of performance roles within the La Rose society of St. Lucia, Douglas K. Midgett (1977) illustrates how performance both emphasises loyalty to the group and at the same time reflects public approval of kare (flash), "evidenced in highly individualistic, flamboyant behaviour" (p.69). Both Midgett and Abrahams illustrate the degree to which performers earn high prestige in their societies through their eloquence, their inventiveness, and other performance skills.

Storytelling involves a high performance component, requiring characterization with different voices, sound effects and intermittent songs, as well as an overall sense of timing, dramatic suspense, and so on. Tea meetings frequently include variety concerts, as well as the speechmaking events referred to in the previous section. Brathwaite quotes a Reverend G.W. Bridges who, writing in 1827, observed a highly-

developed oral art in the sermons of black Jamaican preachers. "Every good speaker, independently of the softness of his tones, raises and lowers them in strict musical intervals" (1970, p.238). Bridges noted that their congregations were "naturally most extraordinary judges" of this art. Because the sermon persists and thrives as an art form in the New World, we may safely assume that an acute ear for tonality and phrasing continues to exist also.

Preaching, or speechmaking at tea-meetings, wakes, weddings etc. belong to the realm of 'decorum'. At the other end of the scale is 'talking bad or broad'. A form of ritual abuse known in the United States as playing the dozens is known as rhyming in the Caribbean (Abrahams 1983, pp.60-73). It is a verbal improvisation in which adolescent boys try to outdo the obscenity of the last, mainly about each other's mother. Wit, verbal agility and a repertoire of rhymes are requisites. The sans humanite calypso is an improvised contest in which two or more calypsonians try to put each other down through satire, called picong, or insults (giving fatigue), and by outwitting their opponents so that they stumble (bust or burst) over a rhyme. Out of the reggae tradition has come a contest between D.J.'s who seek to outdo each other, not only through wild flights of verbal improvisation but also through their ability to select music to challenge and overshadow the previous selection.

Abrahams in his important study (1983) concentrates exclusively on male-dominated areas of performance. He has even coined a phrase, 'man-of-words', to connote the recognised oral performer. While it may be true that the majority of performers are men (this study of performance poets will confirm that), his exclusive orientation to the male domain distorts the total reality of oral traditions in the Caribbean, where women have played a vital role. He identifies play-and-performance with "the male

street-corner way of life" and contrasts work and respectability as the domain of the female-dominated household (p.51). That would identify women entirely with the realm of decorum (if they performed at all) and not at all with the realm of talking bad or foolishness. The truth is nowhere near so simple. Louise Bennett, with her choice of language, personae and use of satire and derision, cannot be a model of decorum. On the other hand, she totally rules out "forty shilling words" (swear words) or any other form of obscenity. The mainly female chantouelles of St. Lucia maintain oral traditions and reinforce a sense of cohesion as well as relaying the local gossip. There have been memorable women who have carved out an identity for themselves in the male domain of play. Bodicea was a famous calypsonian of the nineteenth century in Trinidad, and a leader of the 'disreputable' jamette carnival. Calypso as a vehicle of wit and topical commentary continues to thrive at the centre of many people's lives in Trinidad and the East Caribbean. For most of this century it has been monopolized by men, but since the nineteen-seventies women have been a growing presence in the tents. (Warner 1982, pp.105-6).

vi) Orality and literacy

Marshall McLuhan (1964) pointed out that the impact of writing as a medium on human consciousness only came to be examined as it was beginning to be challenged by electronic media. Up until then, and to a large degree still, writing was regarded as the norm, with a tendency to look down on oral societies as 'pre-literate' (Ong 1982). It is possible to examine the significance of literacy now that we are moving into a condition of "secondary orality" (ibid.). "Because of its action in extending our central nervous system, electric technology seems to favour the inclusive and participational spoken word over the specialist written word." (McLuhan 1964 p.82). McLuhan argues that literacy made it possible

to organize more efficiently; particularly in terms of military effectiveness. The possession of literacy therefore brought power over others. He also maintains that the literate person drew away from the clan, became more of an individualist. Writing allows for the enormous expansion of vocabulary; the subsequent "grapholect" is able to superimpose its status over other, oral, dialects (Ong 1982, p.8). McLuhan (1964) argues on the other hand that the phonetic alphabet had a particularly alienating effect. It "sacrifices worlds of meaning and perception that were secured by forms like the hieroglyph and the Chinese ideogram" (p.82). Perception is conditioned by "the cool and uniform visual medium" (ibid.).

Ong, however, illustrates how an "oral mind-set" stubbornly persists (1982, pp.93-101). In Renaissance Europe, few people were aware of the year's date, or that anyone had assigned one for that matter. Time for most people was either the perpetual present, the remembered past, or the realm of tradition. In the Caribbean oral modes of consciousness are prevalent, despite widespread literacy and schooling. Interestingly, a lively 'residual-primary' orality, drawn from non-literate traditions, co-exists with and informs the "secondary orality" born of electronic media. Traditionally the mass of the people get much of their information from sermons, political speeches and calypso or other topical songs. The Dub D.J.'s have continued this tradition. The radio is the most powerful modern medium, with the radio phone-in performing a vital function in Jamaica as a source of information, advice and reassurance. There is also a close interrelationship between orality and literacy. Amongst Rastafarian groups, for example, biblical texts act as a starting point for extended and elaborate reasoning.

Ong suggests that the distinction often made between 'western' and other perspectives is fundamentally the difference "between deeply

interiorized literacy and more or less residually oral states of consciousness" (1982, p.29). In an oral culture a word is a sound which takes place at a particular time in a particular context. According to Ong (p.31) it is an occurrence or event. He points out that the Hebrew for 'the word', dabar, also means event. By contrast, in a literate culture, words are things that can be 'looked up' (ibid.). "Oral folk have no sense of a name as a tag, for they have no idea of a name as something that can be seen." (ibid., p.33). In oral cultures, therefore, there is a much closer identification between the name and the thing named. Oral utterance is dynamic; the sounded word is "power-driven" (ibid. p.32). Edward Kamau Brathwaite, deeply impressed by eight years' experience in Ghana, was drawn to explanation of the spoken word and its power by the oral philosopher Ogotommelli from Mali quoted by Jahn (1961); the concept of nommo. The life force is water and heat together. The word and the breath are one. The word/breath issues from the mouth as a water vapour, water and heat. The word is therefore the life force itself (p.124). The dynamic quality of the spoken word has an important bearing on the meaning and impact of performance.

Ulli Beier, quoted by Jahn, points to a feature of the Yoruba language which illustrates that it is strongly embedded in orality. Individual words, Beier says, are fluid in meaning because significance is attached to each phoneme, which can be a word in itself. (Jahn 1961, p.152). Thus the word does not have a fixed, abstract meaning. It finds its particular nuances of meaning in context, in utterance. This is further demonstration of the word as event in an oral culture, as opposed to a fixed visual entity, which can be seen ahead, or considered retrospectively.

The spoken word has an enveloping, inclusive quality. The sound proceeds from one human interior to other human interiors, and this

creates a sense of relationship. Ong gives a graphic example:

When a speaker is addressing an audience, the members of the audience normally become a unity, with themselves and with the speaker. If the speaker asks the audience to read a handout provided for them, as each reader enters into his or her own private reading world, the unity of the audience is shattered, to be re-established only when oral speech begins again (1982, p.74).

Writing breaks down the "dense continuum of experience" into "meaningful segments" (Ong 1982, p.104). This is vital of course for the development of abstract thinking or scientific analysis. It encourages detachment and introspection. A writer's audience must be imaginary, not immediate. Writing has been an essential tool in the development of human understanding and consciousness, but not without losses (ibid. p.14).

The performance poets are dotted along the scale between orality and deeply interiorized literacy. Michael Smith's poetry is towards the oral extreme, with Brathwaite at the opposite end. However, all engage in abstraction and introspection. All draw to a greater or lesser extent on written material. But all regard oral delivery to a live audience as of paramount importance.

vii) The aesthetics of oral performance

The most important criterion in evaluating a performance must be the quality of the relationship between artist and audience. The artist aims to win the support and approval of the audience, creating an envelope of unity in which all are at some level participating. Caribbean audiences feel little sense of duty to be polite to an artist who is not commanding their involvement (Midgett 1977, p.62). Arresting delivery, the interest of the theme, ingenuity in composition are of vital importance. Body movements may help to set up rhythms to which the audience can respond (Scheub 1977). Oral performances are emotionally charged. Facial and body movements help to invoke laughter, or graphically illustrate anguish.

McLuhan (1964) comments:

Many a page of prose and many a narrative has been devoted to expressing what was, in effect, a sob, a moan, a laugh, or a piercing scream. The written words spell out in sequence what is quick and implicit in the spoken word (p.80).

An element of trust may be vital. Audiences frequently surrender their emotional reserve to Louise Bennett, for example, who takes them through a cathartic experience of curative laughter. In African and Afro-American tradition, a rhythmic relationship is established between artist and audience (soloist and chorus) through call and answer. This pattern is marked in the grassroots churches. Bennett establishes this dynamic by throwing questions at her audience, picking on things she hears, or pretends she hears, and engaging the audience in song and chorus in a traditional manner.

The image of the artist is significant, both as a fellow human being, and as a particular human being. The image of the Caribbean performance poets is to some degree an adopted persona. Most of the well-known poets are extremely striking in appearance, and convey information about what they represent through the way they look. Louise Bennett has always been large, and projected a motherly image. A nationalist who has dedicated her life to nurturing pride in blackness and in a Creole identity with African roots, she has always performed in traditional Creole dress; head-tie, large hooped earrings, long frilled or flounced skirt in check or plaid. Mutabaruka, the picture of vitality and good health, projects his Rastafarian philosophy of natural living through going barefoot at all times and wearing minimal clothing. By contrast Michael Smith, his gaunt angularity emphasised by a jerky limp, epitomized the pain and deprivation of which he invariably spoke. The exceptionally tall and bearded Abdul Malik embodies both the prophetic zeal and revolutionary rage of his poems. Paul Keens-Douglas, on the other hand, conveys agility; like Anansi, he suggests not the conquering

hero, but an 'average kind of fella'. Brathwaite's thick hornrimmed glasses and beard convey learning, while the dashiki and knitted cap he habitually wears suggest identification with the youth and the ghetto.

The degree to which the artist can manifest identification with the material also has some bearing on the quality of the relationship with the audience. In the case of performance poetry, detachment is rare. Even when the poet takes on a dramatic persona, s/he 'becomes' that person, in many cases exhibiting an even greater intensity of involvement. Oku emphasises that his poems are not individual creations. He is just 'a voice, echoing the people's wailing'. The character of the audience will determine the impact which this identification with the poor and oppressed may have. It will increase the engagement of a ghetto audience, but possibly make a 'middle class' audience decidedly uncomfortable.

The quality and suitability of the setting is also important in determining impact. An enclosed space is sometimes preferable to the open air, but a good political rally may provide the electric atmosphere on which the radical performance poets thrive. Louise Bennett thrived and made her name in variety concerts, while Mikey Smith's agonised intensity floundered in the lighthearted and superficial atmosphere of a student talent night. The more complex the setting, the more important becomes the technical quality of sound, lights, and musical accompaniment. The relationship of poets to musicians is also vitally important. For music to work well with the poetry it needs to be the product of a close understanding, carefully worked out.

The degree to which the audience identifies with the poet's themes is important in determining the quality of the performance. The poet will invariably give more of him/herself if s/he senses sympathy and recognition. It is important therefore that the themes reflect common experiences and preoccupations. Themes are given extended consideration

in the body of this study for what they reveal of the concerns and sensibility of the creative West Indian masses. For a high quality of engagement, it is vital that the poet should encapsulate an area of experience in an intense and arresting way which the audience responds to deeply. A presentation from Mother Poem by Brathwaite (Warwicks, England 1980) clearly moved many, particularly the black women in the audience, both because of its sensitive exploration of the Caribbean woman's experience, and the kinetic energy evoked by elements of the delivery. A pungent phrase will delight a Caribbean audience. The best dub poems contain a phrase or refrain which is redolent with significance and lends itself to a rhythmic and dramatic delivery. The repetition of these phrases will engage the continuing participation of the audience.

Voice quality is also a significant attribute. Michael Smith had a particularly fine, musical intonation and good command of volume and pitch. Mutabaruka, Brathwaite and Malik also have voices which it is a distinct pleasure to listen to. The sounds which Louise Bennett makes are rarely sweet but suggest freedom, a total lack of inhibition. Her hoots of laughter and the dissonance of her 'market woman talk' bear some relation to the unrestrained and experimental sounds of jazz music. Merle Collins of Grenada delivers in a dynamic chant with a high degree of pitch variation.

Kinetic energy can also be created by the use of multiple rhymes, a technique used by Brathwaite throughout The Arrivants. D.J.'s provide a grassroots example of the practice:

Your life depends on how yu corporate...Dam right...You always ever make things great yu pop on thru the gate...True true...Pay the musical rate an take a pop on thru de gate with a smile upon your face...Heh heh... Das what I appreciate yeah... (Michigan an Smiley, 'Nice up the dance', 1979, quoted in Davis & Simon 1983, p.111).

The D.J.'s were in turn inspired by the signifying style adopted by their United States counterparts, and epitomised by H. Rap Brown:

Man, you just don't know who I am.  
I'm sweet peeter jeeter the womb beater  
The baby maker the cradle shaker  
The deerslayer the buckbinder the women finder  
( 'Rap's poem', Henderson 1973, p.187)

Assonance and alliteration are also liberally used by Brathwaite to enhance the semantic meaning. Okpewho (1979) demonstrates the high degree to which African oral poets enjoy sound for its own sake. For example, he singles out Akoma Mba (Awona 1965/6) for its use of ideophones (onomatopoeic, or sound-symbolic words): "The sound Yaaaaannng is frequently used in denoting the infinite stretch of a scene or an object in motion" (p.223). In Kambili (Bird, Kortia, Soumaoro, 1974), clumsiness of movement is illustrated thus: "A little old lady came forward, gwilligwologo" (ibid.). Okpewho also expresses approval for J.P. Clark's translation of this following phrase in The Ozidi saga (Clark 1977) which, he says, conveys the evocative quality of the original:

Endoubo wo,wo, wo... kene yereke yereke  
Her bosom was full and large, all yearning and yielding  
(quoted in Okpewho 1979, p.222)

Brathwaite has pointed out that in the poem as performance; "...the noise that it makes is part of the meaning." (1984, p. 17). Examples of noise in performance poetry would include Louise Bennett bawling her favourite abuse word "boogooyagga" (low-down), or laughing entirely without restraint. Both sounds come straight from the belly. Brathwaite points also to the "decorative S90 noise", "lawwwwwwwd" which Michael Smith employed in his two best-known poems, 'Mi cyaan believe it' and 'Roots'. (1984, p.46). A vibratory groan, again emitted from the belly, Brathwaite identified it with the sound of the Honda S90, a small but prestigious motorbike in Jamaica.

The pun is a common feature of oral delivery. This is because of the potential ambivalence surrounding homonyms. The ambivalence is not present to nearly the same degree in the written word, because most

homonyms are spelled differently. Ambivalence of meaning makes possible association by sound rather than sequential logic, and this expands the possibilities for the poetic imagination. We have, for example, Brathwaite's use of the eye/I ambivalence, which is of deep significance to the Rastafari:

hump-  
backs out of the eye  
lands, my is-  
lands

('Dawn' from Islands, Arrivants p.236)

Distance is indicated by the fact that the islands stretch "out of the eye", reinforced by the repetition of "lands". The same phrase simultaneously conveys an 'inscape': "my is-/lands" (my I-/lands). The close relationship between seeing and inner being is played upon here. Malik and Louise Bennett are also prolific users of the pun.

Music is frequently incorporated in performance poetry. Such density of experience is embodied in most black music that this introduces vibrant new dimensions of its own. When Michael Smith performed for the first time in London, he framed his entire performance with verses from Marley's 'Redemption Song', and entered, dragging himself by a scarf knotted round his neck to symbolize bondage. Thus he placed all his work within the context of the struggle against the dehumanizing heritage of slavery. Malik evokes a sense of the grandeur of working class and black struggle through his use of the steel band. Brathwaite has used train rhythms and the train-based boogie woogie to evoke the great will for freedom which has one of its profoundest symbols in the Underground Railway which bore escaped slaves to the northern United States. Sometimes the rhythms and melodies are conveyed on the printed page but more often their presence is dependent on performance. Music is a traditional part of oral performance in the Caribbean. The stories in Jekyll's Jamaican song and story (1907) all had their special songs, and

frequently contained other musical interjections, while for Claude McKay composition in Creole was inconceivable at first without melody. Many of Malik's poems have tunes.

Writing increasingly brought with it an appreciation of novelty over tradition. The permanence of writing made the need to recall through repetition redundant. Habitual phrases are described negatively as cliches. In oral cultures, on the other hand, the familiar and traditional are marks of authenticity. An oral consciousness is sufficiently pervasive in the Caribbean that the repetition of certain words or phrases can cause continual delight, or evoke a deep response of recognition. Rex Nettleford (1978) has pointed to the power and aptness of the Rastafarian word-symbols; words which have accrued a complex of significances, which are never diminished, no matter how many times the words are used. In fact, repetition in different contexts increases significance and complexity. Henderson (1972) gives us a hint that such word-usage may be a pattern of Afro-American culture. He identifies certain words like "rock", "roll", "jelly", "bubber", "jook" as carrying "an inordinate charge of emotional and psychological weight" which seems "to go back to our earliest grappling with the English language in a strange and hostile land". He calls these words "mascon" words, by which he means "a massive concentration of Black experiential energy" (p.44, Henderson's emphasis). The ability to evoke such concentrations of experiential energy is one of the highest achievements attainable by the performance poet. The dub poets concern themselves little with personal novelty, their object is representativeness. Their poems are full of meaningful (and less meaningful) fragments which have become a part of the collective consciousness.

The fact that performance poems are generally written down means that the words have a fixed form. Only very rarely does a poet make any

alteration to this form once it is fixed on paper or in performance. There remain many variables within actual performance, however, such as have been outlined above. Emotion or dramatic tension may demand a greater number of repetitions than indicated by the printed page. They may be an interjection of grunts, cries, hoots of laughter, or a rhythmic pulse beaten by the poet. The comic poets are inclined to improvise interjections to underline jokes, according to audience response.

The functions of performance poetry are variable. A performance always gives a sense of unleashing what is often suppressed: the Creole language; the experience, attitudes, aspirations, creativity of the non-privileged; unrestrained, instinctive behaviour. In this respect it performs a cathartic function for the audience. It is also a medium of protest for the oppressed; an opportunity to gain a public hearing for a representative voice from the ghetto. It may be celebratory, aiming principally to induce laughter and pleasure. Or it can be revolutionary; sometimes agitational, seeking to arouse indignation to the point where action will be taken, or educational, offering new perspectives on a situation. In the context of the Grenada revolution, performance poetry was often both agitational and celebratory.

#### viii) Performance poems as texts

We return to the fact that writing is the essential tool for analysis, and analysis is the activity in which we are presently engaged. This study is to a large degree dependent on the existence of performance poems as texts. At one end of the scale, E.K. Brathwaite's work appears at regular intervals, published by one of the most prestigious multinationals; at the other, Michael Smith's poems were written down by hand "for documentational purposes", with no fixed form so far as the page was concerned. As Michael's prestige grew, particularly in Europe,

the demand for a published collection of his poems became more pressing. Mervyn Morris, an established poet and university lecturer in English, was working with him on satisfactory printed versions at the time of his murder (Morris 1985).

Morris has been actively interested in performance poetry for more than twenty years now - from a largely text-oriented perspective. His argument, from his first analysis of Louise Bennett's art (1964, 1967), has been that a performance poet, to be taken seriously, should be accorded the same kind of attention as an established, recognised writer poet. There was a legitimate argument in the case of Miss Bennett, who has published her written work throughout her career, and always sought recognition on that basis as well as her performance skills. On the other hand the approach co-operated with the generally imperialist tendencies of writing (Ong 1982), which has grown out of orality, yet denies any value to orality on its own terms. When the same kind of attention is accorded the performance poet as the print-oriented poet, the performance poetry may stand up to scrutiny on the basis of imagery, wit, technique and so on, but whole dimensions of the poetry are left out. Nevertheless, the power of writing cannot be denied, nor the significance of writing and publishing poetry in Creole with a strong performance orientation. Print accords prestige in a way that oral performance still does not.

An interest in Creole in print is likely to be accompanied by an interest in orthography. Morris has emphasised the importance of easy readability, has rejected the use of apostrophes (present in Bennett's poetry, not in that of the younger poets) and argued for the use of standard spelling where the pronunciation is Caribbean, but not radically different from the standard (Bennett 1982). Most of the performance poets, on the other hand, use a densely non-standard orthography, amongst other things to signal resistance to the standard form. On the whole

Morris' approach makes good sense for the reader with less intimate knowledge of the poems and poets. His versions of Smith's poems are without doubt the best which have appeared.

Books of performance poems apparently sell well, especially in the wake of a performance. Often, therefore, the reader is recapturing an actually witnessed performance. Alternatively the reader will require a good knowledge of "the oral and other cultural contexts the words imply" (Morris in Bennett 1982, p.xi) in order to recreate an ideal performance in the imagination. Both approaches have been used in the course of this study.

ix) Critics and issues of Caribbean identity

The majority of important critical analyses of West Indian literature have come from Caribbean creative writers. From within the Caribbean perhaps only Kenneth Ramchand, Gordon Rohlehr, Edward Baugh and Mark McWatt have made a substantial contribution almost exclusively as critics. The critical debate has been polemical, and deeply bound up with personal, racial and class identities. This was an inevitable consequence of the colonial legacy, which, particularly at its more 'cultured' end (the University College of the West Indies) had promoted an artificial sense of cool consensus, bound up with the supposed humanism of the Western tradition. West Indian scholars were encouraged to think of themselves as 'citizens of the world', which was progressive-sounding, but which was based on the virtual smothering of the Caribbean's particular history.

The Islands in Between (1968), edited by British critic Louis James, was the first book-length published work of criticism of Anglophone Caribbean literature. About half the contributors were from the Caribbean. It met with an almost unanimously hostile response from the

Caribbean itself (Baugh 1968, Wynter 1968/9, Brathwaite 1969). It was felt that "West Indian literature was being rapidly annexed to English literature" (Allis 1982) and that, in critical method little consideration was being taken of the Caribbean's particularity. Brathwaite commented that, in order to truly assess the Caribbean writers' artistic skill and significance, the critics needed to consider "not only their authors' use of European elements, but their use and transformation of their own material." He continued, "It is not what Mais got from Turgenev or Conrad that is finally important, but what he got from the people of Kingston and the way he was able to use it." (1969, p.7). However, West Indian literary criticism was at a very early stage, and The Islands in Between provided 'grist to the mill' of several Caribbean critics, provoking important statements on Caribbean culture from Wynter and Brathwaite. More Caribbean critics set about the task of describing and defining the Caribbean cultural matrix. There was general concurrence with Brathwaite's view of West Indian artists "exploring the communal nature of their environment, attempting in doing so, to liberate the consciousness of the submerged folk." (ibid.). Kenneth Ramchand (1968) offered some insights into different states of consciousness reflected in variations of language use by Caribbean writers and noted particular qualities of Creole which required analysis from an aesthetic perspective: "improvisation in syntax and lexis; direct and pithy expression; a strong tendency towards the use of image especially of the personification type; and various kinds of repetition of syntactic structure and lexis combining with the spoken voice to produce highly rhythmic effects" (p.36). Ramchand's The West Indian Novel and its Background (1970) placed initial emphasis on the wider social and historical context, with significant space devoted to the development of Creole in the context of slavery, and the role of British colonial

education. Gordon Rohlehr, the only contributor to The Islands in Between to escape censure at home, was delivering a lecture entitled 'Sparrow and the language of calypso' (published 1970) in which he sought to demonstrate the rhythmic flexibility with which the calypsonian used English, and argued that the established poets had much to learn from the calypso. Brathwaite in response (Brathwaite/ Rohlehr 1968) maintained that the critics had not caught up with what the artists were already doing.

Meanwhile Brathwaite established the journal Savacou, which combined creative and critical work with historical and social analysis. The third issue (1971), an anthology of creative writing, provoked another major controversy in West Indian criticism. The anthology reflected the upsurge of grassroots creativity stimulated by the Black Power and Rastafari movements and the rapid development of reggae music as a powerful new focus of Caribbean identity. The work of Anthony McNeill reflected a strong attraction to and sympathy with the Rastafari, while the poems of Walcott which were included revealed a tragic and angry sense of the pitiful waste of poverty, and an increasingly flexible use of speech idioms. It was the work of two Rastafarian poets, Bongo Jerry and Ras Dizzy which provoked the outrage of an older poet, Eric Roach from Tobago. Bongo Jerry's poems are expansive, full of violent energy, flashes of arresting insight, and imagery drawn from reggae and a Rastafarian sense of Apocalypse. The poems were a foretaste of much that was to come. To Roach, who had no contact with the Jamaican popular traditions from which they emerged, they were "claptrap". Roach resented the new poetry because it challenged the coolness and order of the particular English tradition in which he had been schooled. He also reveals the attitudes towards his African heritage which such a tradition had instilled in him:

Colour, trumpeted on so many pages, gives the impression that one is listening to 'Air on the nigger string', or to the monstrous thumping of a mad shango drummer on his drum 'in sybilline frenzy blind'. (Trinidad Guardian 14/7/71).

This was a remarkable outburst from a poet whose sensibilities had always been closely tied to the Caribbean 'folk'. Gordon Rohlehr responded with 'West Indian Poetry: some Problems of Assessment' (1972), the first extended attempt to relate the new poetry to developments in Caribbean popular culture and popular consciousness. Rohlehr also pointed out that Europe (reflecting on the barbarisms of slavery, colonialism and nazism) was less unanimously certain than Roach in its appraisal of culture as 'the best that has been thought, said or done'. He maintained that Caribbean criticism was suffering from naivete.

Derek Walcott responded negatively to the militant postures and angry tones of the new, consciously black poetry. In 'What the Twilight Says: an Overture' (1970), Walcott defended his sense of identity as a "neither proud nor ashamed bastard" (p.10) and hit out against "reactionaries in dashikis" (p.27). Four years later in 'The Muse of History' (1974), he voices a suspicion that the warm response from the "liberal" (presumably white critics in Britain or the United States) to the "speech of the ghetto" (in Brathwaite's poetry particularly) is simply a patronizing new form of apartheid (pp. 18-19). The implication is that the use of Creole in poetry could only reinforce racist ideas of black people, "the old separate-but-equal argument". Walcott, both of whose grandfathers were white, and who "belonged to the brown bourgeoisie" (Baugh 1978b, p.9) not only failed to identify with the 'raucous' protest coming from the black lower levels of the society, but felt profoundly threatened by it.

The bitter exchanges which characterised this period have undoubtedly left their scars, but the entrenched 'either/or' dichotomy has since mellowed into a more creatively fluid situation. We find

Brathwaite (1984) praising Walcott for his fine "nation language" poem, 'The schooner Flight'. Edward Baugh (1982) surveyed the "important and growing body" of Brathwaite's literary criticism. He speaks of Brathwaite's strong emphasis on the African roots of Caribbean culture as a "corrective imbalance" in response to the former neglect and ignorance of the African heritage. He nevertheless remains critical of "Brathwaite's relatively clear line between categories of black/African/folk/jazz/oral/communal etc. on the one hand, and white/European/elite/scribal/individualistic on the other". (p.70). The question of class, which might mix these categories up quite considerably, rarely enters into West Indian literary criticism as a tool of analysis. Baugh particularly appreciates Brathwaite's perspective for "his faith in the role of literature to body forth imaginative models of community" (p.69), in which he has shown remarkable consistency. His critical work has a "seminal quality as an imaginative construct in its own right" (p.74).

Work towards developing an aesthetic relevant to the performance tradition in the West Indies is still at an early stage. Brathwaite's 'The love axe/1: developing a Caribbean aesthetic' moved away almost entirely from the discussion of 'texts' to detail the history of mass turbulence and the parallel intellectual movements of 1968-72; an "implosion" which, he says, "brought us ... to our senses" (1977/8, part 3, p.185). He emphasises the value of contributions like Sylvia Wynter's 'Jonkonnu in Jamaica' (1970), which focussed on the process of "indigenization" at a folk level, and Marina Maxwell's yard theatre which sought to bring together university and grassroots intellectuals in a yard setting. Brathwaite has offered the first exploratory book (1984), with an extensive discography. Gordon Rohlehr has applied scholarly methods to researching the history, themes and significance of calypso as

oral poetry (1970, 1971), as well as unearthing the musical background to Brathwaite's trilogy, The Arrivants (1981). Maureen Warner-Lewis, a linguist and literary critic who has lived in Nigeria, has combined her skills in two disciplines to offer important insights into features of oral performance common to West Africa and the Caribbean and these characteristics as they appear in Brathwaite's poetry (1973, 1977, 1979). Velma Pollard, a linguist and poet has likewise concentrated on Brathwaite's language use rather than, exclusively, his thematic concerns. She has also produced two original and insightful papers on the verbal creativity and implicit perspectives of the Rastafari movement (1980, 1983a), and another which suggests that JC speakers make regular use of metaphor constructed fundamentally out of riddles (1983b). Mervyn Morris made a seminal contribution to the field with his 'On reading Louise Bennett, seriously' (1964, republished 1967), which first made the suggestion that Bennett was one of Jamaica's better poets. He has subsequently offered the first extended consideration of dub poetry as a form (1983) and edited a selection of Louise Bennett's poetry (1982), which contains much of his thinking on the poems as texts. Keith Warner's study of the calypso as oral literature (1982) and Kole Omotoso's study of the development of West Indian theatre (1982) are also valuable contributions.

x) Selection and research methods

The distinctness of each island's popular traditions means that each requires detailed knowledge and understanding. For this reason the thesis only covers material produced in islands visited by the writer. Extended stays which permitted the gathering of information on the broader cultural context as well as specific material and observation on performance poetry were made in Jamaica, Trinidad and Grenada. This was a

limited field, but it was found to be representative and coherent. A natural connection between Jamaica and Trinidad exists through the comic work of Louise Bennett and Paul Keens-Douglas. The three islands were also linked by the chain of events sparked off by the Walter Rodney Affair (1968) in Jamaica, leading to Black Power revolts in Trinidad and Grenada (1970) which had far-reaching political implications and also precipitated the emergence of grassroots poets and cultural activists. The histories, economic and cultural life of Trinidad and Grenada are inseparably bound, while two of the major poets considered in this study have dual Trinidadian/Grenadian identity. Finally, Grenada has a mountainous terrain which is like Jamaica in miniature. Both countries have small but strong pockets of vestigial African culture, established either by escaped slaves (maroons) or slave communities abandoned to their own cultural devices by absentee landlords. These factors may have contributed to a common resourcefulness and rebelliousness.

The limits of fieldwork were also reinforced by the availability of material in Britain. Barbados was also visited, but during Carifesta, a 'feast' of pan-Caribbean culture. There was little opportunity to identify much of the distinct Barbadian cultural heritage with so much untypical activity going on in the island. Bruce St. John, whose dialect poems made a great impact during the late 1960's and early 1970's has thus unfortunately been excluded from this study for the reasons cited above. In the case of Brathwaite, although his Barbadian context is vitally important, so too are his Jamaican, European and African contexts. In his case there is also a good deal more biographical and critical material to draw on, while Brathwaite himself has commented articulately on his own relation to the submerged oral traditions of Barbados. The decision was also made to confine discussion to those poets who had a substantial body of known work rather than attempt a survey of

the entire field. This emphasis on prominent individuals obscures the fact that there are poetry collectives and other groups developing arresting and popular work in Barbados, Trinidad, Jamaica, and undoubtedly throughout the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean.

Preparation was undertaken, formally and informally, over a number of years. Talking with friends from the Caribbean was a constant learning process, which stimulated the reading of works of literature, history, language studies and cultural analysis. Caribbean writers who were resident in Britain were consulted and had a seminal influence on the direction of studies followed. Performances by Caribbean artists visiting or resident in Britain were observed as often as possible. These included performances during 1979-82 of Louise Bennett at the Rainbow Theatre, Finsbury Park; the Mighty Sparrow at the Commonwealth Institute; John Agard at The Hub, Sheffield; John Agard, Henry Muttoo and others at the Commonwealth Institute; Christopher Laird and company at the Africa Centre; Paul Keens-Douglas in Brixton; Oku Onuora in London, Huddersfield and Sheffield; Michael Smith in London and Sheffield. Presentations by Edward Brathwaite were observed at St. Matthews Meeting Place, Brixton, Warwick University and the Guildhall, Leicester.

During 1981/2 a six-month field trip to the Caribbean was undertaken. Three weeks each were spent in Barbados and Grenada, seven weeks in Trinidad and three months in Jamaica. Different living-bases - sometimes on a university campus, sometimes in someone's home - gave an opportunity both for reading and information-gathering and for informal learning about attitudes and values, cultural information that was not available in books, and a general sense of context. Every attempt was made to move as widely and into as many different kinds of environment as possible. Interviews, some taped, were carried out with poets, musicians, calypsonians, cultural analysts, librarians, disc jockeys, academics in

literature, linguistics and sociology, actors, directors, Rastafarians, teachers and students. Classes held by Professor Brathwaite were regularly attended as well as lectures by Mervyn Morris, Gordon Rohlehr and other members of the UWI English staff at Mona. Much of the cultural history is still only recorded on fragments of paper, such as show programmes, and wherever possible these were noted or collected. Tapes of performances, kindly lent from personal collections, or available at the Radio Unit, Mona or the African-Caribbean Institute of Jamaica, were listened to. Live performances, both of well-known and virtually unknown artists, were observed and recorded whenever possible. These included performances on several occasions by Michael Smith and Mutabaruka; a delivery by Chris DeRiggs in a Workers' Parish Council Meeting; a show by Cheryl Byron; Paul Keens-Douglas and Abdul Malik in rehearsal; Louise Bennett on her television programme, Ring ding; a Carifesta poetry reading which included deliveries by Paul Keens-Douglas, Michael Smith, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Robin Dobru, Abdul Malik; a recording session by Mutabaruka; several free concerts in Kingston; a 'D.J. Blastoff' at Halfway Tree, Kingston, featuring Brigadier Jerry, Toyan and Yellowman.

Traditional bele (belair) dancing and parang music were observed in the context of a large public festival in Port of Spain. The Dimanche Gras contest for Calypso Monarch and much of the Grenada Carnival was witnessed and participated in. Every opportunity was taken to attend plays and observe audience reactions - at Carifesta, in Trinidad and Jamaica. Particularly significant were the finals of the Jamaica Schools drama festival, a performance of Trevor Rhone's Old story time, and QPH, a production by Sistren, a unique women's theatre collective which originally evolved out a crash employment scheme initiated by the RNP government, and which now represents a powerful self-sustaining force, both for lower-class women and for grassroots performance as a whole.

After returning to Britain further performances of Caribbean artists were observed, including Abdul Malik at Lambeth Town Hall. An investigation was made of the tape recordings and non-commercial discs relating to Caribbean culture held at the National Sound Archive (Pearn 1983b). Further interviews were carried out with visiting and resident Caribbean performers.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CATHARTIC FUNCTION OF LAUGHTER

PART ONE: LOUISE BENNETT

Louise Bennett is one of the most successful performers the English-speaking Caribbean has known. In Jamaica she has become an important symbol of national identity. She is regarded by all generations with love and respect. Despite her strong Jamaican identity and use of the broad Jamaican Creole which even other West Indian islanders have some difficulty getting used to, she attracts capacity audiences all over the Caribbean, as well as among the expatriate Caribbean communities of Canada, the United States and Britain. She is regarded primarily as a comic and an entertainer, but much of her material is poetry. She began her career writing Creole poetry at a prolific rate and this output has been available over the years through the newspaper and numerous publications. She has also produced a number of records. In the last twenty years her major contribution to Jamaican literature has been increasingly recognised. All the younger generation of performing poets acknowledge "Miss Lou" as a principal inspiration. Apart from Jean 'Binta' Breeze, a female Dub Poet who emerged into prominence too recently to be included in this study, she is the only woman performing poet of any stature, and in her skill, personality, experience and popularity, she towers above everyone else in her field.

Section one: the Bennett persona

Louise Bennett's exuberance and self-confidence took her performances into realms not previously developed by Jamaican poets, actors and entertainers. Self-acceptance is the absolute core of Louise Bennett's commitment, of her importance as an artist, and the deep affection in which she is held. On stage, she created no distance between

herself and the characters she portrayed, who were above all characterised by their blackness and ordinariness. Louise Bennett invited participation, drawing her audiences into sharing a culture they held in common, which was as yet unacknowledged in the public domain of the theatre. When she first began singing traditional songs, she was met with silence, with audiences reluctant to show they knew these songs, which were not regarded as dignified or respectable. But her irrepressible manner soon broke down such tensions. Earlier performers in Creole had made it clear they were adopting a mask. The audience was thus distanced from the Creole-speaking character, who was always comic. This approach reflected the prevailing snobberies of colonial Jamaica both within and beyond the theatre, which in turn were imported from Europe. George Brandt, writing about 'classic' perceptions of drama, in which comic characters were drawn from 'rustic, or low city life', while tragic characters must be kings or princes, points out that this is fundamentally a class-based view:

This strict genre distinction reflects not just social stratification as such but a consciousness of, a belief in, this stratification. Kings and nobles were held to be creatures different in kind from the common herd. The ordinary citizen, at least as stage figure, was inevitably mean and ridiculous. (Howarth (ed) 1978, p.167)

Such values take on a complex significance when the ruling class is exclusively white, the ordinary citizens all black or brown, and this superimposition of class and race has its roots in the brutalizing experiences of the slave plantation. The hierarchical view of theatre in Jamaica held that both blackness and ordinariness were intrinsically funny or ridiculous.

Even as a young woman Louise Bennett had a matronly figure, which helped to give her a motherly image, and consequently an authority and reassuring quality rooted in Caribbean tradition. Mothers are traditionally greatly respected by their children because poorer

communities have tended to be held together by a network of female household heads (Clarke, 1957). Fennett's warmth of personality encourages a two-way flow of feeling, and hence audience identification with her and the perspective she promotes. She has been referred to as 'the mother of us all'.

She presents an image of stability because her feet are planted firmly at the bottom of Jamaican society. She perceived colonial values as insubstantial and pretentious, and placed her faith in the qualities of ordinary black Jamaicans. She recognized a "wonderful sanity" in "our people", and committed herself to celebrating "the wonderful things that people say in dialect". (Fennett, 1968).

Miss Lou credits her mother with teaching her the necessity to "undignify yourself". Human dignity, she felt, did not reside in particular social strata. "You can't just look at a person, or at a whole group of people, and decide that those are low and those are not, you know." (Fennett, 1982b). In recent years she has been accorded a number of titles, but 'The Honourable Mrs. Louise Fennett-Coverley M.E.E.' still makes audiences scream with delight at the broadness of her Creole and the showers of colourful and elaborate abuse which her characters sometimes heap upon each other: "Yuh an yuh boogooyagga fren/ Dem tink me afraid o' yuh?"; "Yuh lip dem heng dung lacka wen/ Mule kean meck up him mine" [You and your low-class friends think I'm afraid of you?; Your lips are hanging down, like when a mule can't make up his mind.] ('Cuss-cuss'). Respectable people tried to "behave white" (Fennett, 1982b); Fennett's characters on the other hand, decidedly 'behave black'. According to Abrahams' scheme (1983), Fennett is stepping outside the female domain of performance behaviour. In 'talking bad' and acting undeniably 'black', she is adopting the tone of derision. While the 'sweet talking' model of decorum is not always physically present in her

poems, it is always a mental model against which the 'bad talking' Bennett persona is pitted.

Louise Bennett both drew from and reinforced the central role which laughter plays in Jamaican theatre. In an interview with Dennis Scott (1968) she affirms her belief in laughter, in the important role it has played in black people's survival under adverse conditions, and her belief that "the nature of the Jamaican dialect is the nature of comedy". She also makes it clear that this laughter has nothing to do with a careless or carefree attitude to life; that laughter in the Caribbean is often complex and double-edged.

I have found a medium through which I can pretend to be laughing. Most of the time when we laugh it is so that we may not weep. Isn't that so? (Bennett, 1968)

A prime example of this is the Anancy story. During the dark days of slavery the stories flourished. They were full of whimsy and verbal wit, of funny voices, songs and rhymes. The consistent triumph of the puny spider through his sharp wit and imagination over powerful adversaries was also profoundly affirmative. Laughter, from the foundations of post-Columbian Caribbean society, has been associated with survival and the will to freedom.

Ivy Baxter commented that the "theater of humour" connects more directly with a Caribbean audience than the "theater of realism". She observes a widespread resistance to "the open and mass display of emotions on a tragic or serious note", and pointed to the common reaction in the cinema "of shrieks of laughter at the most serious and the saddest parts" (Baxter, 1970, pp.266-7).

Louise Bennett herself reflects this tendency in conversation. She laughed loudest over things that angered or hurt her:

You didn't have to be white, you didn't have to look white, but you had to behave white. White was a certain behaviour. Holding your mouth in a certain way...your hards, uh. Ha ha HA! Lawks, I am telling you, that was the biggest joke to me. You know. This was the whole thing, this business, uh. Ha Ha Ha! (Fennett, 1982b)

Ivy Baxter comments: "In folk culture, the lowering of the spirit is counteracted by prescribed ritual acts. Folk theater in Jamaica employs the remedial catharsis of laughter to the same end." It is surely significant that St. Mary's parish, birthplace of Louise Fennett's mother and grandmother, is the home of the Dinkie Minnie. This is a kind of wake which takes the form of a joyous celebration, with singing, dancing, stories and ring games designed to console the family of the dead. Miss Lou refers to the Dinkie as underlying the whole spirit of Jamaican theatre: "...you must keep joyfulness going" (talk at Jamaica Institute, n.d.).

Because of the particular qualities of the Fennett persona, the catharsis attained through her performance is a profound one. Firstly, the feelings between performer and audience are reciprocal; there is a sense of shared self-recognition. Secondly, she provides the stability and reassurance of a mother-figure. Thirdly, her womanhood gives her a certain licence to show her emotions freely: she bawls and whoops and laughs with abandon. In this way she airs sensitive subjects without her audience becoming threatened by an impending sense of tragedy. Her preparedness to "undignify" herself is reflected positively in the authenticity of her language. Louise Fennett on stage became what was most unacceptable and despised according to the prevailing but alien 'norms' of the society, and, almost ritually, accepted that despised self through her phenomenal laughter. Laughter became the emotional channel to the authentic self.

The uninhibited sounds that Louise Fennett makes in performance are inseparable from the language she uses. Her complete delight in the

Jamaican language makes it another expression of her freedom from the crippling negative attitudes towards black culture imposed by the plantation society. Far from accepting such distortions, Pennett finds Creole a more powerful medium of expression than standard English: "As it is used by the people to express their feelings, the dialect is very adaptable. You can twist it, you can express yourself so much more strongly and vividly than in standard English." (1968 p.97). She was inspired to begin writing in Creole by "the wonderful things that people say" (ibid. p.99). Not everyone agrees with her, however. Early on in her career a performance at the Carib Theatre was interrupted by a man who called out disgustedly: "Is dat yuh mother send yuh go a school fah?" In 1981 a prominent right-wing politician was quoted as saying he had had enough of the "washerwoman image of Jamaica".

Durrenmatt (1966, in Fowarth, 1978) asserted: "Man's freedom manifests itself in laughter..." Through the medium of laughter, Louise Pennett helped to make creole language a sound signalling intellectual and psychological freedom. Dennis Scott, in discussion with Pennett, suggested that the "inability to be serious without being funny as well" was characteristic of New World black people. He identifies this quality in blues and jazz. "Even when you are closest to tears there is a bit of an ironic twist in your expression - there is a joy as well." Frathwaite commented, with considerable insight, that jazz "is the emancipated Negro's music: hence its brash brass colouring, the bravado, its parade of syncopation, its emphasis on improvisation, its swing." (Frathwaite 1967/8 pt.1, p.275). He noted the improvisational qualities of Pennett's 'Pedestrian crosses' but concentrated on more formal and (then) more recognised writers in whose novels he identified authentic reflections of West Indian speech as 'jazz features'. "Jazz ...is played in an Africanized manner on European instruments." (ibid. p.278). Pennett

writes within the European constraints of the ballad quatrain, but her Creole cadences and unrestrained laughter suggest she does not accept the existence of fetters.

#### Section two: background and development

Louise Bennett is both a very exceptional woman and a product of her time and environment. How did she emerge onto the stage in the form that she did, and how did she come to have such a totally positive image of herself as a black woman when so many black Jamaicans felt ashamed of their African origins and colour? She was born on 7th September 1919 in North Street, downtown Kingston. Her stability and sense of self-worth owe much to the love and security she got from her mother and her maternal grandmother. Her environment was also culturally rich. The urban stimulus was very important to her, but she also had strong emotional links through her mother and grandmother with rural Jamaica, although she did not visit the country until she was ten years old. Her maternal grandfather was "quite well off", and owned a farm in the rural parish of St. Mary's. When Louise was seven years old, her father died, having lost all his money in an unlucky bakery business. Her mother, Kerene, subsequently struggled to earn a living as a dressmaker, joined by her mother, Mimi, now also widowed, who helped in the upbringing of Louise.

Mimi was a treasurehouse of Nancy stories, riddles, proverbs and other folk traditions. Bedtime was always a treat for Louise, when her grandmother would relate a familiar story. The characters would all be dramatized and each story had its own special songs. The little girl drifted off to sleep to the "lullaby" of these songs.

Other early memories were of her mother's constant hard work, and of poverty:

the machine was another one of my lullabies. I'd go to bed with the sound of the machine and wake in the morning to the sound of the machine, you know. And she worked so hard, night and day at this machine and at the cutting table... (Fennett, 1982b).

The sewing parlour, as it was called, had a very formative influence on Louise's development. It was, as she put it, a common ground where women met and talked freely. It was in this environment that the young girl absorbed the different potentials of the Jamaican vernacular, including discussion, narration, insults, wit, and broad humour. Louise was taught by her mother to respect all her customers: "...everybody was a lady - the fish lady, the yam lady, the store lady, the teacher lady..." (Bennett, 1976).

When Louise was not quite ten, Mimi determined to return to St. Mary's. Louise cried until she was allowed to accompany her grandmother. After one month the grandmother died; mother and daughter stayed on for some time in St. Mary's. Louise soon became familiar with the country which had been the subject of all her mother's stories. Louise Fennett has always maintained a rural idiom in her poetry.

Louise began her formal education at Calabar Elementary School. At fourteen she gained the all-important scholarship to secondary school, and entered St. Simons College. Throughout her school years her talents for creative writing, for performance and mimicry were encouraged. At the age of eight or nine one of her teachers gave her a collection of poems in Creole by Claude McKay. Her grandmother was "quite taken with it". This was extremely important, because generally Creole was considered a completely unsuitable idiom for poetry. Louise Fennett, on the other hand, early in her life received a model for her later writing in Creole, which was endorsed by her grandmother, a major authority in the young girl's world. This was yet another reason why Louise Fennett had an unusually positive attitude towards the language she heard all around her.

During the time that Louise was growing up, Kingston was a lively performance environment. Much was going on in the streets themselves. Louise would often come home with songs she had picked up from workmen, and all street sellers had their own distinctive cries. Very popular in Kingston during this period was the Mock Trial. This was a participatory form of drama which could be almost completely spontaneous. Alternatively, a time and venue would be advertised in advance. People would crowd into a hall or other suitable space. A judge, who had already been appointed, would then call on members of the audience to play the accused, a policeman, members of the jury, and so on. The public, for one reason or another, were only too familiar with courts. There was plenty of opportunity for comedy; the pompous tones of the judge and lawyers would be imitated, while the defendant probably spoke in Creole.

Grand events were also the order of the day. Marcus Garvey created his own setting, Edelweiss Park in Kingston, where he staged nightly rallies, offering a platform to local grassroots entertainers. Between 1930 and 1932 he wrote and staged four pageants, with casts of up to 120. Ranny Williams, a comedian and raconteur who was to team up with Louise Bennett in a partnership which dominated theatre and radio entertainment for about thirty years, made his first public performances at Edelweiss Park. The Garvey rallies showed that cultural performance could be a focus for national and racial identity. Bennett grew up in an environment infused with Garveyite black pride.

Ernest Cupidon, the first Jamaican to gain a national reputation (and even some international fame) in the theatre, made his debut doing comic sketches in the Christmas Morning Concert. This annual event had begun informally at the beginning of the twentieth century. It was still the custom then to hold a grand market in Kingston on Christmas Day, and everyone would dress up and promenade in the main streets. All the shops

were open, including Cowen's music shop on King Street, where people would gather to sing, play instruments and offer other entertainment. This became so popular that the venue was moved to the Ward Theatre and became a public concert.

Cupidon wrote his own sketches. Often he played a market woman, who carried a basket on her head and carried a clay pipe. During the 1930's he dramatized several of H.G. de Lisser's novels, including Susan Proudleigh and Jane's career. He played the lead female role in these plays, so convincingly that many members of the audience were confused as to which character was being played by Cupidon, especially as he would double up in male roles. Cupidon was the first artist respected by all classes to bring Jamaican Creole to the stage. Another thing which was significant about his comic performances was that he did not play in 'black face' (a grotesque 'white' parody of the black person's features) as was the custom among many comedians and entertainers of the period, including the 'Cudjoe Minstrels'. The Cudjoe Minstrels were a group of upper-class or near-white Jamaicans. (Erathwaite, A, 1979). They 'blacked up' crudely with charcoal. They began the tradition of 'cleaning up' traditional songs and making them more refined. The distance between their true identity and the one they were portraying was a message in itself. "It was supposed to be a take-off of a type of person that you wouldn't really want to be." (Eennett, 1982b).

The Christmas Morning Concert became one of the most important annual cultural events under the promotion of impresario Eric Coverley. He had his own act, called 'Chalk Talk', which consisted of rapid drawing accompanied by a light-hearted patter. He was also a very successful 'talent scout', being the first to give Louise Eennett a professional booking. Under Coverley's management, the Christmas Variety Concert hosted a very wide variety of cultural performers and was so popular that

there were often two simultaneous venues - one at Coke Town Memorial Hall, the other at the Ward Theatre.

Louise Bennett gives her mother the credit for the complete ease, confidence and natural pride with which she expresses herself in Creole. Kerene herself was unselfconscious in her use of language. Miss Bennett wonders whether her mother realised she was "bi-lingual". She certainly had no 'hang up' about Creole.

Her mother always encouraged Louise to develop her talents, but never betrayed impatience or overambition for her daughter. When Louise was about eleven or twelve years old, she was in an end of term performance which happened to be seen by Cupidon. He called later, asking Kerene whether she would allow Louise to perform in a play of his. The mother's response was that the time was not right; that later Louise must choose for herself whether she wanted to go on the stage. Miss Bennett now recalls much of her mother's advice and decisions and endorses their wisdom.

Before she left school, Bennett's destiny as a performing artist was determined, however. Again she was in an end of term concert when her performance was witnessed by Eric Coverley. He asked her to perform in one of his Christmas Concerts. At this concert in 1938 she received her first professional fee, of one guinea.

During her school years, Louise Bennett was already writing prolifically. At first she had written in standard English, with frequently a final line or two in Creole. But the vivid quality of the Jamaican language and the memorability of many phrases created by people in their everyday discourse impinged deeply on Bennett's creative consciousness. One event in her adolescence brought forth a phrase which determined her future as a writer of dialect verse. Dressed up to go to the cinema one day, she climbed onto a tramcar. Market women and others

with big baskets were required to sit at the back of the trams. They tended to regard it as 'their' terrain and would resent it if other passengers joined them in the back, forcing them to 'small up'. So as Louise boarded, looking, as she said "well developed" (Fennett, 1968), one country woman called out, "Pread out yuhself, one dress-cman a ccme". This became the inspiration for Fennett's first dialect poem 'On a tramcar':

Pread out yuhself deh Liza, one  
Dress-cman dah look like seh  
She see de li space sidc-a we  
An waan foce harsel' een deh  
(Fennett 1949, pp.150-1)

Louise was doing regular (unpaid) performances at this time for the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission. She had submitted poems to the Daily Gleaner, in the hope of getting them published, but at this stage to no avail. Her poems were however published in (Jamaica) Dialect verses, compiled and edited by George F. Bowen, in 1942. In 1943, as a result of a Fennett poem played on the radio, she was invited to recite at the dinner party of a wealthy man, Forace Myers. Self-assured from the start, she asked him to send a car for her. Among the guests was the managing editor of the Cleaner, Michael de Cordova, who had previously rejected her work. He acted as if he had never seen her before, and at the end of the performance asked her to bring in some of her poems to the office. When she did so he offered her a column in the Sunday Cleaner for half a guinea. Louise accepted these terms, but soon was getting a reasonable fee as the sudden boost in sales which took place was connected with her column.

In 1943 she began a course in social work at Friends' College. The popularity of her work was spreading, and she was frequently being called on by village festivals to judge dramatizations of her poems. Village festivals had become established annual events in Jamaica following

Emancipation. Louise Bennett's contact with these festivals deepened her awareness of popular traditions and her sense of responsibility towards the people who called upon her. She began researching into cultural traditions and became an authority on the Maroons, and on the customs of rural Jamaica.

In 1943 Bennett played in the first Pantomime to have a Jamaican theme, Soliday and the wicked bird, written by Jamaican poet, Vera Bell, based on a story found in Walter Jekyll's Jamaican Song and Story (first pubd. 1907). Pantomime was initially the creation of the Little Theatre Movement, founded by Greta Fowler. It began in pure British tradition, with a dame, a female playing the male lead and themes drawn from European fairy tales. Soliday began the process of transforming the British Pantomime into a Jamaican folk musical. Soliday was a mixture of the two, as Louise Bennett remembers with some amusement. It was produced by an English woman who, she feels, did not really understand the material she was working with. A rumbustious chorus of "Na warra, Nancrow da come" and "one torrid rhumba dance" (Bennett, 1982b) were followed for no particular reason by a solemn rendition of 'Jerusalem'.

After the success of Soliday Louise Bennett began to feel the need for more formal training as a performer. In 1943 a new governor-general, Sir John Huggins, was appointed. Lady Huggins was the first governor-general's wife ever to 'mix with the people'. She helped to establish the Jamaican Women's Federation. Her good intentions were generally accepted, even though she was naive about the realities of life for the Jamaican majority. She had read Bennett's work and asked her if she would be prepared to work in some way for the Federation. Louise Bennett expressed willingness but explained that she wanted to go away to do some drama training. As a result of their conversations, Louise was persuaded to apply for a British Council Scholarship. She was awarded one of the three

scholarships given to Jamaica and obtained a place at the Foyal Academy of Dramatic Art in London in 1945.

Her self-confidence and ebullience buoyed her up, even in the impersonal environment of London. She was soon a regular contributor to the Caribbean section of the BBC World Service, and had a programme of her own. She returned to Jamaica in 1947, having done very well at RADA.

When I went away to Britain to do some drama...a lot of people thought, 'Now ah! she's gone', you know. 'She ent gon' to bother come back. And as for writing in the dialect - no no no!' Well, I mean, I came straight back, because this was my career. I wasn't really interested in anything else, and I knew that Jamaica was where I wanted to work. (Fennett, 1982b)

After teaching for some time at her old school, Excelsior, she joined forces with Noel Vaz of the Little Theatre Movement to co-write the first thoroughly Jamaican Pantomime, Pusha Bluebeard, staged in 1949.

Money was scarce, so in 1950 she returned to England to work for the BBC again and perform in repertory theatre. In 1952 she went to join her aunt in New York, but found it difficult to get theatre work. Eric Coverley joined her, and finally they made a breakthrough with their jointly-directed folk musical called Day in Jamaica. This included what were to become the regular components of a Fennett performance - traditional songs, stories and her own poems - together with 'Chalk Talk' routines by Coverley. The show travelled from Harlem to New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. She and Eric married in New York in May 1954 and returned to Jamaica in 1955.

Louise Fennett then worked as Drama Officer for the Jamaica Social Welfare Commission from 1955, becoming a director in 1959. In this capacity she continued her research into oral traditions and folk customs and supported drama groups and Village Festivals. She lectured on drama and Jamaican traditions for the Extra Mural Department of the University of the West Indies, also in Britain and the United States. In 1972 she received the Norman Manley Award for Excellence, which included

recognition of her research work. Frederic Cassidy, (1961) used her poetry as an important resource, pronouncing it "truest to both the spirit and the letter of the folk speech" (p.viii).

In partnership for nearly thirty years with Fanny Williams, Louise Bennett made the annual Jamaican Pantomime a focus of national cultural identity. It continues to play to packed audiences of a wide social spectrum at the Ward Theatre, Kingston for three months in every year. Miss Bennett's favourite Queenie's daughter, first performed in 1963, played for three years because of popular acclaim.

In 1962 Louise Bennett's work was included in the Independence anthology of Jamaican literature but not, significantly, in the poetry section. Instead she was consigned to the back of the book under the heading "Humour", "keeping company with the hard-working jocosity of Mr. A.E.T. Henry" (Morris 1967, p.70). It was the prevailing view that anything composed in 'the dialect' could not be taken seriously as art. She continued to publish her poems in the Sunday Cleaner. In 1966 a collection of 128 Bennett poems, Jamaica Labrish, was compiled by the author and Rex Nettleford, whose introduction reaffirmed Dennis Scott's view of Miss Bennett as the "only poet who has really hit the truth about the society through its own language" (Footnote 2, Bennett 1966, p.9).

From the early 1970's Louise Bennett turned towards prose performance, with the three times weekly radio slot, Miss Lou's views, although the rhythmic delivery, use of alliteration, imagery and wit, and the inclusion of songs and rhymes give the deliveries a strongly poetic quality. They were topical commentaries with opinions expressed largely through the fictional character of 'Auntie Foachie', who had strong, commonsense, though not necessarily very well-informed views on every conceivable subject. Miss Bennett regularly hosted a TV programme for children on Saturday mornings called Ping Ding. In Britain she was one of

the hosts of the Channel 4 programme Black on black in 1983/4. She has toured regularly in the Caribbean, the United States and Canada. She made a theatre tour in Britain between 12-20 October 1978, with an amalgam of sketches, songs and dances mainly from past Pantomimes, called Come home to Jamaica. In 1982 another selection of her poems by Mervyn Morris, drawn from her early publications, Jamaica Labrish and some unpublished work appeared (Louise Fennett: selected poems). This contained a detailed biography. In 1983 a record album of a live performance at the Lyric Theatre, London, was released.

### Section three: oral elements of the work

While all Louise Fennett's poems exist in writing and print, they are conceived in a form which is fundamentally oral in its origins and embodies perceptions distinct from those of a literate medium. Louise Fennett's level of education and training, and her wide travel give her experience and forms of expression far outside the bounds of the oral tradition, and yet she achieves excellence and authenticity in an oral mode. Not only does she use the ballad form, she uses it according to some of its most important functions within oral tradition. Rooted in everyday reality, a substantial body of her poems are either topical commentaries or narratives involving an exceptional person or event. She is very conscious of the way that people perceive words from an oral perspective - as sounds which they do not see and do not spell. Much use is consequently made of the pun, the ambivalence of the homonym. She also makes use, as a comic artist, of her audiences' self-consciousness about language. The so-called 'malapropism' is a frequent occurrence in Jamaican Creole speech. Sometimes it is an extravagance, a defiance of Standard English; sometimes it is a mistake. Whatever the motive, an audience will find the idiosyncratic version a source of amusement.

Bennett also draws continuously on her rich knowledge of oral tradition. She makes constant use of proverbs, which root her satire and derision in sound common sense. Her performances include songs, narratives, sketches and dialogue with the audience. Her work ranges from pure comedy - characters and situations which are comic without any pointed comment - to quite biting satire. Her topicality has resulted in a tremendous range of subject matter.

Her commitment is rooted in her attitude to the language of the unlettered and unprivileged, which she admires and enjoys. It is not a language she has learned, but her first language; the language in which she came to first consciousness of herself; the language which surrounded her as a girl at home. "I think in the dialect" she says (Bennett, 1968 p.97). She has always pointed out that it was impossible to regard a language as "bad" when nearly all the good people she knew spoke it (Norris in Bennett 1982, pp.iii-iv).

Since the beginning of the century, commentators have been noting a deliberate tendency towards malapropism, adaptation and original coinages in Creole speech. (Abrahams 1983, Cassidy 1961, Jekyll, 1907). Fettleford comments on a "penchant for sonority" (Bennett 1966, p.12) and affirms the authenticity of Bennett's coinage "independentniss", adding "The language indeed lends itself to such spontaneous excesses" (p.13). Prathwaite (1971) offered some insight into the politics underlying the attitude of the black peasant to the English language: "It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master; and it was in his (mis-)use of it that he most effectively rebelled." (p.237). The term malapropism is a superficial and negative one, which is clearly inadequate to describe the process that Prathwaite is talking about.

'Married' contains an example of this linguistic complexity. On one

level, the (mis-)use of the word "majestic" suggests that the narrator is unlearned. The topic of the poem is the spate of marriages which resulted from the provision of allowances for legally married wives of men volunteering for military service in World War Two.

For she sign up bans o' paper  
An dem put her name pon lis',  
An' every mont' she gwine get cheque  
Pon majestic service  
(*'Married'*, 1966, p.90)

On another level the word suggests an extravagant attitude on the part of the subject, as she imagines the life of luxury she is going to lead. On a third level, the phrase, 'Pon majestic service' embodies an irreverent attitude towards the colonial administration and its "majestic" figurehead. The poem underlines the much more urgent concern of getting some kind of regular income.

Creole speakers can be very conscious of comic aspects within the language itself. Many Creole speakers have a propensity for the fantastic, particularly when feeling angry or aggressive. Bennett is adept at capturing the quality of the creative insult. 'Candy seller' (1966, p.28) achieves an alternating rhythm between the wheedling tones of the road-side trader as she hopes to make a sale, followed by instant abuse as it becomes clear once more she will not. One woman is told to pull her child away. A moment before he was a "pretty lickle bwoy"; now she transforms him verbally into a grotesque:

Koo pon him nose hole,  
Him y'eye dem a-tare out like him want  
Hickmatize me candy-bole.  
[Look at his nostrils.  
His eyes stare out  
like he wants to hypnotize  
my candy bowl]

The deeply-stressed sounds of 'nose-hole' 'yeye' and 'a-tare' (in contrast with the standard 'nostril' 'eye' and 'stare') exaggerate the child's expression into a hideous caricature; and the crowning glory is

delivered with the resonant and dramatic 'malapropism', "hickmatize".

The aural perception of words leads to a high propensity for puns and a creatively playful approach to language. 'Perplex' (1966, p.81), written during the Second World War, reflected a widespread lack of serious concern about a war between imperialists. The imagination of the speaker in the poem is gripped by the phonological implications of names which, though now familiar, remain exotic. The name of the Russian people (Rush-in) assures them victory, assuming they have 'head and foot and hand', while the Finns are severely handicapped:

For de Russia people name Fussian  
So dem noh boun fe win  
Ef dem have head an foot an han?  
All Finlan' have is fin!

The speaker is in no doubt about the racist dimensions of Nazism, and hence where she stands with regard to Hitler:

De ongle trut' him talk is wen  
Him call himself "Naasy" #  
[The only truth he speaks is when  
he calls himself "Nasty/Nazi"]

The naive speaker bases her disdain of the German people on the fact they are foolish enough to let Hitler call them "Naasy" too.

In 'Big wuds' (1966, p.164), the speaker fears that someone's jawbone is going to break, the way people are having to twist them round long words in all the discussion about Federation. The poem contains a gentle self-mockery, a warning that any growing sense of national importance, rather than being grounded in power and responsibility, may be based on the phantasma of long (and therefore highly suspect) words:

Missis we movin fas, we pon  
De "up word trenc" me chile

The context ensures that any hint of formal or elaborate language is automatically the subject of derision.

Louise Bennett's commonsense perspective is strongly rooted in proverbs. She has a personal collection of over seven hundred (Morris in

Bennett 1982, p.xv). Proverbs are used to crystallize the meaning of a poem and frequently undermine the overtly comic intention. 'Recruit' (1966, p.92) points to the fact that, while the war has provided employment opportunities in America for "Ebery lickle boogooyaggæ bwoy" (every little low-class boy/man), no such chances have come the way of women. The speaker finds consolation in a proverb which urges resignation at the same time as it ironically illustrates the extremities of destitution:

But 'posen mawgæ dog don't dead?  
Crow haffe nyam green grass.  
So me naw gi up hopes, for  
Ooman day wi come at las'  
[But suppose the emaciated dog doesn't die?  
The vulture has to eat green grass.  
So I don't give up hope, for  
woman's day will come at last.]

The proverb accurately illustrates the tenuous hierarchy of dependence which operates on the bottommost levels of survival.

In a poem celebrating the fall of fascist Italy, Bennett points out that the Italians would have done well to observe a piece of traditional Jamaican wisdom:

...ef yuh fly wid John Crow, yuh  
wi haffe nyam dead meat!  
[...if you fly with the vulture, you  
will have to eat carrion]

In other words, with the friends they chose, they deserve their fate.

In 'A Merica' (1966, p.180; 1982a, p.109) Bennett's use of a proverbial expression serves to undermine pretensions:

Every seckey got him jeggeh,  
Every puppy got him flea,  
An yuh no smaddy ef yuh no  
Got family cversea  
[Every beggar has his little bundle of wood  
Every puppy has his fleas  
And you're nobody if you don't have  
Family overseas]

Everyone, in other words, makes their claim to status. Drawing her imagery from poverty, Bennett effectively deflates any vicarious sense of

importance to be drawn from having relatives abroad.

In 'Seeking a job' (1966, p.191), a proverb neatly brings about a reversal of the expected. A woman seeking work as a domestic servant feels that she has considerable leverage over her potential employer now that she has joined "Eusta Union" (the Eustamante Industrial Trade Union). Bennett gets a laugh from a malapropism: "I don't have no ceremonials" (testimonials). The speaker emphasizes, however, that her previous (female) employer had no complaints, but finally began 'taking liberties', so she felt obliged to leave. According to the prevailing class-based values of the period, it is the domestic worker who is taking gigantic liberties. It is from this strong sense of incongruity that Bennett draws the humour. The speaker clinches it with a proverb which invariably refers to an 'inferior' or a junior: "yuh play/wid dawg dem lick yuh mout'" [If you play with dogs they lick your mouth]; in other words, her former employer was too 'low class' for her taste. Those members of the audience not in the employer category would identify with, and warmly applaud, the speaker for her 'cheek'.

'Body beautiful' (1966, p.67) makes use of a feature of Creole which frequently embodies a quality of whimsy or deliberately comic exaggeration; the free transformation of a noun or adjective into a verb. Making liberal use of this form or variations of it, Louise Bennett captures the exaggerated seriousness and concentration of proceedings at a male beauty contest: "Dem muscle up dem muscle, hump/ Dem back an pose dem pose...Dem serious up dem face like is/ A case o' life an deat'". This is a clear example of derision; in this case, women are having a laugh at men's expense.

The African-derived characteristic of repetition for emphasis is used by Bennett for simultaneously comic and more heavily satirical effect. 'Overflow' (1966, p.45) expresses the frustration of one woman

who has been prevented from watering her garden through a long drought and, now everything is awash with heavy rains, hears through the newspaper that she is once more permitted to water, because the dam is overflowing. Significantly a young relative is reading the report to her, suggesting that she may not be literate. Though she is spluttering with rage, there is no doubt that she has more sense than the officials giving out the message. As she points out, the dam is always dry when people need water, and overflowing when everything else is overflowing. She tells the girl to write to the newspaper on her behalf:

Tell dem sey I sey fe sey is not  
De Dam one overflow!  
[Tell them that I told you to say it's not  
just the Dam that's overflowing!]

The same form of words is almost exactly repeated later in the poem, giving it focus as a humorous device:

An doan feget fe tell dem sey  
I sey fe tell dem sey  
[And don't forget to tell them that  
I say to tell them that...]

Cassidy (1961) writes of the clear definition which is given to each syllable in Jamaican Creole. He notes that when a speaker is agitated this tendency becomes more exaggerated, so that speech becomes like a continuous and regular drum beat (p.29). The repetition of words helps to create this effect. This sign of emotionality will automatically induce laughter. Verbally aggressive women are a common source of comedy in Bennett's poems. The Creole form, 'tell dem sey', uses a Twi (Akan) word 'se', which can often be translated 'that', and is used like inverted commas (Cassidy 1961, p.63). The speaker uses a distinctly African, basilectal form to summon the authority of orally-based commonsense to her side against the literate nonsense of the newspaper and water authority.

Section five: Performance versus text? A discussion of the views of Louise Fennett and some of her critics on her work as an oral and scribal medium

There can be little doubt that what has motivated Louise Fennett most strongly has been her abiding love of 'the dialect', the oral medium of Jamaica. She has defined it as "a manner of speaking unhampered by the rules of (Standard English) grammar, a free expression." (Intro., Mis Lulu Sez, Kingston 1949). Within it she has found a means of self-expression, untrammelled by views of "correctness" which, deep down, she perceived as externally, colonially imposed. It is in this sense that she probably experiences it as "adaptable" (Fennett, 1968). It allows for individual or collective creativity, to adapt or create a word or phrase when the situation demands it or when the perception lies outside the norms of received correctness. Her attitude towards language and her moral framework reinforce one another.

The Jamaican peasant who speaks the dialect - not only the peasant, for we all speak the dialect to some extent - he is an extremely self-aware and perceptive individual and expresses his awareness of the society...in colourful and accurate terms. (ibid.)

She aligns her perceptions very closely with those she identifies in the Jamaican peasant. Throughout her work she affirms a traditional world-view, embodied above all in proverbs, as a source of sound good sense and decency against officially accepted codes which, among other things, superimposed colonial power and literacy. All too often, the word in print during the colonial period embodied colonial perspectives or bureaucracy. In a period of growing nationalism, 'the dialect' embodied for Fennett the democratic aspirations of the body of the people. In her poems, standard English is always used in a satirical context by distant and often inept symbols of authority, or insecure individuals who deny the reality of their heritage and indulge in absurd Eurocentric

pretensions.

Bennett has at the same time been strongly motivated by her desire to celebrate the oral mode in a written craft. "...I persisted writing in dialect in spite of all the opposition...because nobody else was doing so and there was such rich material in the dialect that I felt I wanted to put on paper some of the wonderful things that people say..." (Bennett, 1968). She was writing before she began performing publicly, although her propensity for mimicry and performance inevitably had a fundamental structural influence on her composition. She has undoubtedly seen her work on one level as a mission to gain greater acceptance for Creole and consequently had a great desire to gain acceptance herself as a writer. Significantly, as she said herself (ibid., p.98) she was set apart by other writers because of the language she spoke.

From the beginning nobody ever recognised me as a writer. "Well, she is 'doing' dialect", it wasn't even writing you know. Up to now a lot of people don't even think I write. They say "Oh you just stand up and say these things!" (ibid.)

In fact, Louise Bennett was making an enormous contribution to the understanding and appreciation of the real language situation in the English-speaking Caribbean. She made the oral medium an acceptable currency by fashioning it into an art form that could be exhibited, appreciated and treasured within the public arena. As Nettleford puts it: "...she has carved designs out of the shapeless and unruly substance that is the Jamaican dialect..." The shape she chose was the ballad quatrain, but she works the language so naturally within it that one is rarely aware of an awkward rhyme or awkward structure. When she began writing, the only models she knew were English poets. She says that she was most interested in their rhythms and techniques (Bennett, 1968, p.99). She was attracted to the ballad form rather than more modern poetry because it was rooted in oral tradition, albeit British. This was not altogether a matter of choice. Nettleford points out that most Jamaicans of Bennett's

generation were "saturated" (through school, of course) with 'Sir Patrick Spens' and 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner'. Morris also suggests that a stanza of Bennett's 'Independence Dignity':

Not a stone was fling, not a samfie sting  
Not a soul gwan bad an lowrated  
Not a fight bruck out,  
Not a bad-wud shout  
As Independence was celebrated

is a parody of Charles Wolfe's 'The Burial of Sir John Moore at Corunna', "a British piece much recited by Jamaican schoolchildren in the colonial period" which begins:

Not a drum was heard, not a funeral note  
As his corse to the rampart we hurried

(Morris in Bennett 1982, pp.161-2). Much has been made of Louise Bennett's use of the iambic quatrain. Nettleford maintains that Bennett's stanzas have a "conventional structure of iambic quatrains" but argues, "even the iambic rhythms are natural to the Jamaican crawl" (in Bennett 1966, p.11). E.K. Erathwaite would strongly disagree with this latter statement, having campaigned vigorously against the iambic pentameter, which he considers to have exercised a tyranny over the Caribbean poetic sensibility. We should also remember Cassidy's point about the marked individuation of each syllable in Jamaican Creole. Morris, on the other hand, states: "It is, I think, unhelpful to relate her prosody to an iambic stress pattern we can hardly ever find in her work." A random check of thirty poems in Jamaica Labrish revealed that about 70% began with colloquial phrases (often exclamations) which in no way followed an iambic pattern. Even when a regular iambic rhythm is maintained (in some of the more strictly narrative poems, as with 'Rollin Calf' - 1966, p.195; 1982a, p.36), it is rare to find no idiomatic 'aberrations'.

Nettleford points to the British technique of music hall comedy as having a structural influence on the poetry. Her deliveries are frequently punctuated by audience laughter because of a joke at the end

of a stanza (a punch-line).

Bennett's contribution to the development of a lay orthography has been considerable. While Mervyn Morris has been critical of her use of unorthodox spellings for standard words simply spoken with Jamaican intonation because, he says, this makes the poems unnecessarily difficult to read, her orthography has remained remarkably consistent throughout her work.

The comments on Louise Bennett by Fettleford and Morris have formed a constructive, intermittent dialogue. Mervyn Morris was the first critic to give serious and extended consideration to Louise Bennett's work, with his essay, 'On reading Louise Bennett, seriously'. As the title suggests, Morris set out to give Bennett the same kind of attention he would pay any other poet. According to the assumptions of the time, it would have been extraordinary if he had been thinking about oral poetry. Morris thought in terms of elevating Bennett onto the same plane as other well-regarded poets by giving serious consideration to the texts of her poems. On this basis he judges her "a better poet than most other Jamaican writers." (Morris 1967, p.70).

She does not offer her readers any great insight into the nature of life or human experience, but she recreates human experience vividly, delightfully and intelligently. She is rarely pretentious - the most common fault in West Indian poetry; she is not derived from other poets - she has her own interesting voice; and she is invariably sane.

He made the point that much of her verse was journalism, and the topical interest of some poems was less lasting than that of others. He commented: "It would be a service to her readers if Miss Bennett would present a Collected Poems, dropping all the ephemera and choosing the best of the others." (ibid. p.73). Amongst the ephemera, he named poems about new governors, pantomimes, a Test victory, Paul Robeson's visit.

When a collected poems of Louise Bennett (Jamaica Labrish) did appear in 1966, the selection paid little heed to Morris' advice; in fact

was full of poems about new Governors, Test matches and visitors to Jamaica. Rex Nettleford, who supplied notes and wrote the introduction, strongly defended this, making reference to Morris' essay. He wrote that while some valued Fennett as a poet, others saw her first as an entertainer and comedienne, and others again valued her poems as social documents. Jamaica Labrish was intended to satisfy all these perspectives. He also maintained that too little was known about the oral medium to make valid aesthetic judgements, suggesting that Morris had "betrayed some unfamiliarity with the idiosyncracies of the language" (p.12) when he had dismissed certain words and expressions as inauthentic. He was certain that a "rigid application of criteria born of a tradition of English literary criticism" (ibid. p.10) would probably disqualify many of the poems, but implied that it was the literary criteria which were at fault rather than the poems. He goes on to make certain suggestions regarding appropriate criteria. He points the reader in the direction of the oral tradition "where people...possess, almost to a fault, a high propensity for words...The Fible, the Sankey hymnal, the folksong and the memory gems form the background to these propensities." (ibid. p.11). He seems to be suggesting that a creative freedom with words is one of the key pleasures to be derived, almost regardless of subject.

He emphasises Fennett's highly-developed craft, but puts equal emphasis on her skills as writer and performer. He maintains that the fact that some of her poems require a Fennett performance in order to be fully appreciated is not a weakness because she belongs to the oral tradition. He does not, however, explain what is the purpose of putting such poems in a book. It could however be argued that the printed version will enable those who have seen it to 'relive' a much-enjoyed performance. Nettleford refers to Morris's citation of 'sanity' and

'generosity' as two of Louise Bennett's principal qualities. He argues that these qualities are the inevitable consequence of her type of artistry: "For as a poet of utterance, she has had to be sane and generous for the nightly confrontation which a live and living audience demands of any performing artist. The safe distance of the published writer she has never enjoyed." He emphasises too the close inter-relationship in Jamaica between literacy and orality, giving as an example the fact that a Bennett poem printed in a newspaper might be read to all the occupants of a yard by one literate person. Here we have an example of interaction between the word in the oral mode as an event and in the literate mode as a thing.

Lloyd W. Brown in the chapter 'The oral tradition: Sparrow and Louise Bennett' in his West Indian Poetry (1978) tends to put Louise Bennett in her role as performer first. He is being somewhat inaccurate, however, in suggesting that publication was "an afterthought, of sorts, in terms of her function and achievement as an artist in an oral medium." He puts forward an interesting perception of Louise Bennett's interaction between orality and literacy, showing how she frequently subverts "the hallowed world of print" from an alternative perspective positively rooted in the oral milieu. He cites the poem 'Overflow', where the non-literate speaker mocks the 'advice' being read to her from the newspaper that, after months of drought and constraint, she may now water her garden when it is awash already after heavy rains. Commonsense speaks in the oral idiom while the newspaper, the 'voice' of authority, conveys manifest nonsense.

Brown points out that Bennett challenged a "middle class" view of appropriate language which was simply not adequate to the complex realities of the Caribbean. She questioned "the general usefulness of a narrowly standard application of English to a society that is as hybrid

in its sources and structure as is Jamaica." (ibid., p.109).

Mervyn Morris returned to the discussion with his introduction to Selected Poems (Pennett, 1982a). First of all, he indirectly contrasts the role of his new selection with that of Jamaica Labrish, saying it is "unashamedly, a collection of poems, chosen primarily for their literary merit". Since it has been acknowledged by Nettleford, Brown and others that Pennett's output is variable, his assertion that "approval extended equally to all her work is a dubious homage" is very persuasive. He agrees with Nettleford about the need to apply appropriate criteria of judgement, but argues that judgement might as well be based on the text as on its performance. He asks, rhetorically, "Might not Louise Pennett's poems, like dramatic literature, be available both in performance and in the study?" (Pennett 1982a, p.xi). We must query, however, the degree to which dramatic literature is truly "available" in the study. Certainly the most grave distortions can come about when plays are considered out of the context of production. Reading Shakespearian tragedies as if they were novels led to an obsessive concern with 'psychological motivation' and 'character', which sometimes entirely lost sight of the structure and mechanics of the play. But although Morris' "notes, commentary and teaching questions...direct attention to the words on the page" these words "represent sounds, they sometimes imply movement" (ibid., p.xii). Moreover, "...the poem in print is ... fully available only when readers are in touch with the oral and other cultural contexts the words imply" (ibid. p.xi). Thus it seems that the reader must 'hear' an ideal performance (preferably with the voice and intonation of Louise Pennett) in order to fully receive the poem. Again we return to the conclusion that a Pennett poem involves a constant interaction between the oral and literate modes.

Finally, Louise Pennett's popular success can be related to her

capacity to straddle the oral and literate modes of perception and expression. Her 'matrilineal' links, through her mother and grandmother to a rural tradition gave her a total confidence and authority in the oral culture. On the other hand, as a well-educated city girl she gained access (with great difficulty) to the major mass medium of the day - the newspaper, and consequently developed a mass audience with whom a more immediate relation was established primarily through the pantomime and secondarily through radio, television and, to some extent, the recording industry. In her, the traditional and modern worlds meet; she has harnessed and combined powerful factors from both.

#### Section six: themes

Louise Bennett has played an important role as a chronicler of her own period, often reflecting attitudes widely held by the masses rather than the learned. A good deal of Louise Bennett's poetry was produced according to the requirements of her Sunday Gleaner half-column. In one sense, she was a journalist, producing regular copy for a very welcome wage. As a result her output has been prolific and has ranged widely over topical issues. Some of the poems remain simply occasional pieces, their impact lost with the memory of their context. Others have concerns and aesthetic qualities which endow them with a lasting appeal. Many of the poems about World War II seem irredeemably dated, and some of the occasional poems about governor's wives and visiting dignitaries betray a sense of duty in their lack of the usually ironic edge.

Some topical poems may even go in and out of fashion. The poem 'Dead man' (1966, p.61; 1982a, p.56), for example, took on renewed significance with the production of Jamaica's most internationally successful feature film: The Harder they Come. Phyllis, the woman who forms the subject of the poem, was the real life model for the character played by Jimmy

Cliffe. Rhygin, even in death, still has the power to terrorize - the narrator wonders what would happen to the photographer taking a picture of the corpse in the morgue if Rhygin's ghost said 'boo!'. The poem contrasts this last public photograph with the first, published in the Gleaner, in which he posed as a hero of the Wild West: "Cun dem ready, blazin load!" This pose has again become a legendary image, promoted widely through the film distributors' publicity.

Other topical poems deal with weightier historical matters. "Dear departed Federation" (1966, p.168) is a valediction to the ill-fated attempt at unifying the British Caribbean as a single federated state. In 1960, three years after its formation, Alexander Bustamante's Jamaica Labour Party came out against the Federation, fomenting a controversy which led the Prime Minister, Norman Manley (People's National Party), to call a referendum. The result, which was negative, dealt a death blow to the Federation. "Dear departed Federation" captures a public mood of guilt, defensiveness and relief at the outcome. A sense is created of a literal sacrifice which has not left the people redeemed or fulfilled. They have committed "Referendum murderation" and "utilation", but it is not until they take a step back that "Quashie start to contemplate!" (Quashie, originally a Twi day-name, came to mean a simple peasant, an ordinary person). The poet, as representative, seeks to explain to their victim (the Federation) that the whole experience was just too much of a burden. The pile-up of 'big wuds' ending in '-tion' helps us to feel the weight the people found impossible to shoulder - boderation, federation, constitution, contribution. By linguistic contrast, the speaker offers an endearingly simple explanation of their decision: "a fearful mek we careful" (fear made us cautious). The doubts remain to the end of the poem. The poet appeals through the Federation to other countries "Who done quarrel and unite" to pray for the West Indies; suggesting that

unity is the desirable goal, and if other diverse nations have achieved it, so too might the West Indies.

Other topical poems were written just for fun, such as 'Pedestrian crosses' (1966, p.74; 1982a, p.30) which commemorated the introduction of pedestrian crossings in Kingston in 1949. Pennett portrays a motorist, completely frustrated by the new power of the pedestrian:

Dis crossin a stop we from pass meck dem cross  
But nutten dah stop dem from cross meck we pass  
Dem yah crossin is crosses fi true!  
[This crossing stops us from passing to let them cross,  
But nothing stops them crossing to let us pass.  
These crossings are certainly a trial]

The fun comes from the multiple use of the word cross, and the repetition through the poem of the phrase "cross meck we pass" which graphically evokes the criss-cross struggle between pedestrians and traffic in the busy city centre.

Mervyn Morris (in Pennett 1982, p.xvi) identifies two kinds of laughter in Louise Pennett's poems, "the laughter of sympathetic comedy and the laughter of satire." The laughter of sympathetic comedy is invariably associated with 'little people', who are enjoyed and celebrated for their idiosyncracies, their extravagances in confrontation, or as they are perceived by others in close communities. The laughter of satire, on the other hand, is reserved for the powerful, or for the pretentious.

'Uriah preach' (1966, p.203; 1982a, p.60) is an example of sympathetic comedy. The narrator is Uriah's proud and rather belligerent mother, who begins by announcing "Fi-mi fambly is no peaw-peaw" - my family isn't inferior. Her use of the African-derived iterative 'peaw-peaw' is a signal that she is 'talking bad'. In terms of character it seems to be a case of 'like mother like son'. Both derive the same delight from revenge over their neighbours. Uriah gets his opportunity on a Sunday when pelting rain keeps the preacher at home. He stands up in

the pulpit and berates the congregation, including the butcher, reknowned for his scrappy meat:

'Thou shalt not give they neighbours  
Flooloooops to eat!'

The mother resolves that in future, if anyone upsets her, she will keep quiet and wait for the next time Uriah gets a chance to 'preach'. Apart from the situational and verbal comedy, the incongruous pride which the mother takes in her son's abuse of the license afforded by the pulpit, and the simple justice thereby achieved, are important elements of the humour.

Some of the comic situations portrayed in Pennett poems have a highly graphic element. 'Cuss-cuss' (cursing match, abusive argument - 1966, p.108; 1982a, p.85) is a dialogue between two village women. Abuse has traditionally been a great stimulant to verbal creativity in the Caribbean (Abrahams 1983). One woman begins to wind herself up by announcing that there will be no constraints on her language or behaviour:

Fi-mi han no jine chuch, an me naw  
Pay licen fi me mout  
[My hand hasn't joined a church, and I don't  
have to pay for a license on my mouth.]

The other woman responds with physical insults:

Yuh foot shapeless an lang  
Like smaddy stan far fling dem awn  
An meck dem hang awn wrang!  
[Your feet are shapeless and long,  
as if somebody stood far back and flung them on,  
making them hang on wrong]

The spectacle of the two women slogging it out will be enhanced by the distinctive rattling quality of Creole when expressing anger or excitement, which is an instant trigger to laughter. (The poem, as Mervyn Morris points out in his note, p.151, can be performed by two people, or one using different voices.) The pair do, in a sense, achieve a certain magnificence of scale through the extravagance of their language.

Bennett's sympathetic comedy consists of comic portrayals of plausible and familiar incidents in everyday life. The unpredictability of Kingston's trams was a regular talking point in the 1940's, and so the situation developed in 'Rough ridin tram' (1966, p.47; 1982a, p.32) would have found a ready response. The narrator of this dramatic monologue is an elderly woman. She begins complaining about the lateness, and then the slowness of the tram. She lives to regret it. Having lightheartedly called on the driver to speed up, she begins to enjoy herself:

Yes bwoy!  
Dis is de way tram-car fi drive  
Yuh feel de cool breeze? Whai!

The last exclamation suggests an abrupt change of state. The lady's composure has disappeared as she is thrown backwards by the violent acceleration of the tram. Her anger soon turns to panic as the "madman" refuses, or is unable, to slow down or stop, even when the emergency cord is pulled. Her responses are extravagant and melodramatic; she asks her companion to:

Stretch me out an tie me jaw an  
Holler tell him seh me dead!

However, when the tram does finally grind to a halt, she recovers as quickly as she panicked, finding the resources to deliver some full-blooded abuse at the driver, pointing at his "buck-buck [protruding] forehead" and "koo-roo-koo-roo [bony] face". She has not finished yet; she attains even greater heights of rage, threatening him with curses and oaths: "Ah gwine beat me mumma grave fi yuh" [I'm going to beat my mother's grave for you] and "Ah gwine fi meck yuh swell an bus/ Like Sam craven goat-kid!" [I'm going to make you swell and burst like Sam's greedy kid goat]. The driver will not live to terrify another innocent passenger! The poem combines a larger-than-life (but still recognizable) comic character with a broad and action-packed humorous situation based on a familiar aspect of everyday life. For these reasons it is a very

successful piece of theatre and verbal comedy.

Louise Bennett's comic writing is never escapist, however lighthearted. Many of her poems deal directly with poverty and powerlessness. 'Roast Turkey' (1966, p.199; 1982a, p.74) is a mischievous poem which makes fun out of an objectively ugly situation. Even within a poor community some individuals are economically more viable than others, which can create divisions and jealousies. In this community, 'Miss Marie' seems to have advantages over the others, illustrated by her proud ownership of a turkey. 'Kate', on the other hand, has a "half-starved dog", suggesting she has little enough to feed herself. When the dog kills the turkey, Miss Marie is distraught, refusing to share in the inevitable feast, while the rest of the village suppress their glee with difficulty:

Me must start sympathise wid her  
An tell her seh she right,  
But hear me heart: 'Teng Cad! Fi-me  
Belly gwine bus tonight!  
[My mouth began sympathising with her,  
telling her she was right (to be angry and upset)  
But listen to my heart: Thank God! My  
Belly's going to burst tonight!]

The narrator has taken charge of the cooking. The fact that she has to send her children to beg for coconut oil and seasoning and stale bread for stuffing shows that they are not used to eating like this. The sheer joy at this unexpected stroke of good fortune is infectious, and the rough justice is confirmed by Bennett with a couple of Jamaican proverbs: 'When horse dead cow fat' and 'Puss laugh when pear tree fall'.

One of Miss Bennett's best-known poems, 'Dutty tough' (1966, p.120; 1982a, p.25) makes little pretense at humour. The poem is framed by the almost identical first and last stanzas which each contain the internal balance typical of proverbial utterance:

Sun a shine but tings no bright;  
Doah pot a bwile, bickle no nuff;  
River flood but water scarce, yaw;  
Rain a fall but dutty tough.  
[The sun is shining, but things are not bright;  
Though the pot's boiling, there's not enough food;  
The river floods but water's scarce  
Rain falls, but the earth is hard]

The contrasts contained within each statement illustrate the potential for things to be different, while the proverbial form suggests endless patience, even resignation. The shortage of water is a situation which has continued to frustrate citizens of Kingston in a country whose luxuriant natural vegetation attests to its more than adequate rainfall. In this sense, 'Dutty tough' has a 'timeless' quality. In its particular details of contemporary hardship, on the other hand, it expresses a very specific form of protest. Bennett identifies very directly with the struggles of the working people: "We dah-fight, Hard Time a-beat we". Though they win a one-pound wage rise, "ten poun gawn on pon we food/ An ten poun pon we rent". The history of slavery bears heavily on contemporary deprivation. As Morris points out in his 'Questions' (1982a, p.130), Hard Time is personified. Hard Time is "eena we shut" (penetrates our shirts) and "beat we"; is, in other words, a slave master, lashing the backs of the poor.

While 'Dutty Tough' reflects the most sombre tone to be found in Louise Bennett's poetry, it would be quite out of character if there were no hints of humour breaking through. Making reference to her own bigness, she assumes mock indignation at those "marga smaddy" (skinny people) who insult her by professing that "fat is sin". Now that dumplings are about all there is to eat, she feels she has her revenge.

The foregoing poems, no matter how bitter-sweet, all fall into the realm of Bennett's sympathetic comedy. The sympathy and understanding which she extended to 'little people' who are characterised by straightforwardness does not extend to the pretentious or the powerful. A

deeply-felt nationalism provides the 'tough backbone' to Louise Bennett's poems, and in the poems where this is expressed we find a high degree of ideological consistency. Within the nationalist poems there is always an object of attack, consequently they invariably take a satirical form.

Bennett often turned her satire on those Jamaicans who adopted the affected tones of what they took to be 'Oxford English'. 'Dry-Foot Bwoy' (1966, p.205; 1982a, p.1) portrays a community's consternation at the behaviour of Mary's son, whom they knew of old as a "dry-foot bwoy" - shoeless and unsophisticated - who has just returned from England speaking a strange kind of language which sounds like he "ketch bad foreign ccle (cold)". When the narrator finally loses her temper and tells him to "kirout", that she is tired of him speaking with a "rot pittata" in his mouth, he stands up, stunned:

'How silley!  
I don't think that I really  
Understand you, actually.'

She is not having any of it, however. She is too familiar with his old self, and the "sweet Jamaica/ Joke [he] use fe pop" [the sweet Jamaican jokes he used to tell]. His name, Cudjoe Scoop, is a reminder of his 'embarrassing' African roots - Cudjoe being a Twi day-name - and his traditional rural Jamaican background. The narrator reminds Cudjoe how he used to visit "Mama" (another Twi word commonly used in Jamaica, meaning grandparent or elder) and entertain everybody for a bowl of gungoo soup. The author here is affirming a direct connection between unpretentiousness and good sense with appreciation of Jamaican Creole and the African heritage. It is also significant that the young Cudjoe was a good performer and entertainer. He has returned from England, not so much 'improved' as deculturalized - awkward, self-conscious and uncreative.

This situation is humorously reversed in 'No Lickle Twang' (1966, p.209; 1982a, p.2) when a mother is deeply distressed by a son who "spen

six mont a foreign, an/ Come back ugly same way" [spent six months abroad (in America) and has come back just as 'ugly' i.e. has not absorbed any foreign 'sophistication']. He is so stubbornly unchanged that she is afraid her neighbours will think she has been lying, and that her son has really spent the last six months in "Mocho", the 'back of beyond'. She implores him:

Not even lickle language, bwoy?

The joke is that she is a Creole speaker herself and has very little idea of the language she would like him to reflect. The best she can suggest is that, when his father comes in, the boy should not call him 'Pa', as usual, but 'Poo'.

'Po Muffeena' (1966, p.89; 1982a, p.81) satirizes the behaviour of May, an insecure individual whose desire to get a job leads her to be anything but herself. Clearly someone of little means, she borrows all her friends' few bits of finery to make an impression up at Mona, where a wartime refugee camp had opened up job opportunities for local people. May completely overdoes her dressing up. Where she cannot borrow, she improvises, as with Mary's green and yellow table cloth, which she uses as a turban. Worst of all, she straightens her hair; a process which was laborious, often painful and could, as in May's case, result in catarrh. As a result of all her efforts to 'improve' her appearance, she looks absolutely ridiculous, and it is no surprise that she is turned down. Furious, she decides to return the following day looking really 'low-class'. This includes washing out the straightening and plaiting her hair, and wearing a torn up frock. This time she is rejected for being too scruffy. May returns, beside herself:

When she ketch home she cuss white man  
Cuss Hitler an de war;  
She cuss straighten head - but wus of all  
You shoulda hear her cuss catarrh.

The fact that May is saddled with catarrh when all her efforts have come

to nothing is presented as a fitting irony. The hair-straightening epitomizes May's association of a 'classy' appearance with 'white' attributes. The irony is underlined, ostensibly unconsciously, by the narrator, "a po black bud" [a poor black bird], who opens and closes the poem with self-deprecation and a declaration that she has no comment to make on May's behaviour. The title of the poem, 'Po Muffeena' ("a poor, ineffectual person for whom nothing turns out well and who is resigned to paltriness" - Dictionary of Jamaican English) turns our attention onto the narrator, who portrays herself as poor and black. We contrast her self-portrayal with May's. While she claims, "Me no business eena people business", she has in fact delivered a devastating exposé of her friend's pretensions.

Because Louise Bennett has been so thoroughly accepted on her own flamboyant terms, there was little to provoke her into self-conscious feminism. She has from time to time used Jamaican stereotypes of women to laugh at her subjects' expense (such as the verbally and physically aggressive domestic servant who intimidates and 'exploits' her housewife boss in 'Me Fredda', (1966, p.190; 1982a, p.18) and a frequent portrayal of women and not men as gossiping and quarrelsome). Nevertheless, her constant self-projection as a natural black woman and the countless positive and amusing female personas she has created have generally been strongly affirmative of black womanhood.

From time to time male chauvinism has been the butt of her satire. The title of the poem 'Tan-up Seat' [Stand up Seat] contains a comic contradiction characteristic of Jamaican Creole. A 'tan-up seat' on a tram is, of course, no seat at all. Louise Bennett uses a typical situation in a crowded tram to poke fun at men's double standards.

Wen dem want show-off  
Dem say ooman is "weaker sex",  
An ooman frail and sof'.

But when they get on a tram they leave "Dem manna's a dem yard" [their manners behind at home] and make out that women are "cruff an rough an hard!" The men are often made to feel embarrassed for their attitude;

An sidung-man kean look straight eena  
Tan-up ooman y'eye!  
[And a sat-down man can't look  
a stood-up woman straight in the eye]

although clearly the embarrassment is not sufficient to change their behaviour. The narrator can only seek consolation in the fact that every 'sidung smaddy's tan-up day' [every sit-down person's stand-up day] must come.

Louise Bennett became involved in the Jamaica Federation of Women, founded by Lady Huggins, governor's wife, in 1944. Bennett gave her support to the Federation's campaign for greater paternal responsibility. As usual, when she wants to show the natural justice of a case, she turns to proverbs. In 'Registration' (1966, p. 42; 1982a, p.57), she expresses her view that men's time of reckoning has come:

Every sore foot got him blue-stone  
Every tief got him las' deal,  
Noh care how smaddy dah-gwane bad  
Sinting deh fe spokes him wheel  
[There's a rough remedy for every foot with bad sores  
Every thief comes to his last deal  
No matter how bad a character somebody is  
There's always something to put a spoke in his wheel]

These images put men in the light of unsavory characters. The narrator says she is glad the women who are pushing for legislation to register fathers are already married, because they are going to be so unpopular with men that they would never get married now. But whatever the abuse coming from men like "long-chin James", who claims "coman a debil-mamma" [woman is the devil's mother], she is clear where she stands:

Me dah-tan up fe me sex,  
Me say "registrate all fada!"  
An me doan care who want fe bex  
[I'm standing up for my sex  
I say "Register all fathers"  
and I don't care who wants to get mad]

Louise Bennett has produced very few poems in recent years, having concentrated largely on prose performances, but one recent poem is 'Jamaica Oman' (1982a, p.21). It celebrates the strength and resourcefulness that Jamaican women have always shown. The particular conditions of their history never gave them a dependent role.

Look how long dem liberated  
An de man dem never know!

One of the important points of the poem is to draw a distinction between the experiences and aspirations of Caribbean women and Western bourgeois feminism (although she would not put it like that). Caribbean women have not been fighting the constraints of the nuclear family; on the contrary, it was women who commonly forged the most stable communal bonds amongst themselves. Women have had to do the same heavy manual jobs as men (invariably for less pay), so do not feel the need to assert their physical strength and capability.

Jamaica oman know she strong  
She know she tallawah,  
Eut she no want her pickney-dem  
Fi start call her 'Puppa'.  
[The Jamaican woman knows she's strong,  
She knows she's stalwart,  
But she doesn't want her children  
To start calling her 'Dad']

Bennett is making the point, as she had in the earlier poem, 'Registration', that women have had enough of 'fathering' their children.

Their object has always been partnership with men:

Some backa man a push, some side-a  
Man a hole him han,  
Some a lick sense eena man head  
Some a guide him pon him plan!  
[Some push from behind, some stand beside a man  
and hold his hand, some beat sense into a man's head  
Some guide him towards his object]

'White Pickney' (1966, p.111; 1982a, p.98) expresses some of the sharpest and bitterest tones to be found in a Louise Bennett poem. Heavy sarcasm is provoked by reports that British women are sending their own babies fathered by black American servicemen 'back' to America, claiming the children would not fit in because they are black. Apart from the racism involved, the unnatural attitude of mothers so willing to be parted from their children is profoundly shocking to West Indians, who tend to regard children as a blessing, even if circumstances do make their bringing-up difficult. Bennett ridicules the racism by pursuing its logic. If a baby born to a white mother and a black father takes its father's colour and country, then it follows that a baby born to a black mother and a white father should likewise follow its father; in other words, it is white. A sense of incongruity is a very common source of humour. The distance here revealed between official logic and reality brings about a particularly charged sense of absurdity. Bennett uses a technique similar to Swift's in 'A modest proposal', where he denounces the inhumane indifference of the English ruling class towards Irish misery by sarcastically pursuing their heartless pragmatism to a 'final solution'. Her narrator is consumed by the same 'logic' as the reported British mothers and goes about with gusto encouraging her friends to package up their children; for plenty have been fathered by British servicemen.

Yuh pack him up now-now, yaw gal!  
Mi wi len yuh a grip  
Yuh gwine miss him, but meck hase  
Meck him ketch de soones ship  
[Pack him up right this minute, you hear me, girl!  
I will lend you a case.  
You'll miss him, but hurry up,  
Let him catch the first ship]

All the qualms of the mother are dismissed in the narrator's relentless enthusiasm for the project. When the mother protests that her child knows nothing about England, this is regarded as of no consequence; after all,

the English black babies know nothing about America. Continuing her mission, the speaker rushes off to find "Miss Fan" and get her to round up her seven children to "ship dem all weh a Englan". The idea of being packed off like so much cargo also bears a hint of slavery and the Middle Passage, again reflecting on the true nature of 'British civilization'. Implicit in the poem is a sense that black Jamaican values are superior, being more natural.

So far the satirical poems illustrated have been concerned with issues which affect people's lives on a personal basis and about which they are in a position to make some kind of personal choice - such as whether to try to "behave white", for example. 'Problem' (1966, p.43; 1982a, p.93) shows that the question of self-acceptance is not an individual so much as a social issue. The poem responds to the feelings of outrage expressed by some (probably well-off) Jamaicans over an English documentary film on 'Jamaican problems' made in 1947. Without seeing the film, it is impossible to say whether outrage was justified, but according to Fennett's account the indignation came from those who felt ashamed of the visible deprivation portrayed (even though Britain was responsible for the state of the colony) and would have preferred a highly unrepresentative display of Jamaican affluence. She compares this failure of honesty and realism with an absurdly futile attempt by a brown Jamaican to deny his black grandmother by hiding her picture, while putting his white grandfather's portraits on display. She says people may not see the old lady in the parlour, "Put dem see her eena yuh!" Here we see how absolutely concepts of class and colour are superimposed. The exposure of the black grandmother is identified with the exposure of poverty. Both are widely regarded with shame. Fennett connects the 'middleclass' shame about problems with a lack of determination to tackle them.

Yuh no see is time we stop fool up  
Weself, stop 'save we face',  
Stop neglec we problem-dem so till  
Dem tun eena disgrace

Just as she felt the need for individuals to "undignify" themselves, so pretentiousness, colour prejudice, snobbery and false pride would have to be rejected by the society as barriers to genuine progress.

Caribbean identity in general, and Jamaican pride in particular, have always been at the centre of Louise Bennett's concerns. We have noted the evident regret she experienced over the failure of the West Indies Federation. Very soon afterwards, Miss Lou was expressing an irrepressible excitement and pride over Jamaican independence, which came about as a direct result of the failure of the Federation. As Lloyd W. Brown remarks, there is an apparent contradiction here, which he resolves as follows:

If there is an inconsistency or puzzling lack of clarity in her voice, if she seems to move from one position to another (on the issue of Jamaican nationhood versus West Indian federalism, for example), her audience always needs to remember that her voice has been subordinated to the personality that it describes; and that in this regard her art comes as close as art ever can to a kind of objectified reality. (Brown 1978, p.116)

Consistent messages of faith in the common people, a nationalistic pride in Jamaica and a generally irreverent attitude towards authority can be found throughout Bennett's work. There are however some dutiful items on governors' wives and visiting dignitaries as well as some expressing the rather oldfashioned grace of finding good things to say about a person on their departure, but their lack of originality and vivacity betray them as remote from the author's own personality. Brown is right in noting Bennett's ability to immerse herself in an adopted persona. She also responds deeply to popular feelings she identifies as coming from the heart of 'true Jamaicans'. It would have been totally out of character for Louise Bennett to have stood aloof from the popular excitement and

optimism at Jamaica's political independence in 1962. What she does do is employ her usual irony and inject a sense of earthy realism into the general euphoria.

First of all, she points out the suddenness with which independence has come about:

Biff, Referendum! Puff, Election!  
Baps, Independence drop pon we!  
(*"Jamaica Elevate"*, 1966, p.174; 1982a, p.113)

The referendum referred to rejected Jamaica's continuing membership of the Federation. As Morris points out, the word "drop" suggests that Independence was something that happened to Jamaica rather than something achieved (1982a, p.160). The onomatopoeic sounds, biff, buff, baps reinforces this sense of accident. Fennett satirizes a rather bloated sense of importance and power which has arisen. Noting that Jamaica has formally, and predictably announced its alignments in terms of world politics:

We tell Russia we don't like dem  
We tell Englan we naw beg dem,  
An we meck Merica know  
We is behine dem

She says the world should take heed, no country Jamaica sides with need fret, for Jamaica has its special defences:

We got we broken bottle  
An we cococmacca stick

The poems where she asserts that 'Jamaica is best' are not expressions of island chauvinism, but a sense of Caribbean pride in the face of the economic draw and cultural power of the metropolises. 'My Dream' (1966, p.155; 1982a, p.112) is an allegory in which the speaker washing the clothes of her cousin Fose represents Jamaica serving the needs of Britain. The poem indicates the growing anger, frustration and destructive violence that had built up in Jamaica by 1939. Nettleford writes:

A strong Jamaican nationalism was setting in and there was a feeling among many that Britain was doing little to help encourage the movement towards self-government (1966, p.155).

Because of the speaker's role as washerwoman, she knows the intimate secrets of Cousin Fose:

Me dream me wasa wash one big  
Tub-full a dutty clothes  
An de wussis dutties one-dem  
Belongs to me cousin Fose!  
[I dreamt I was washing a big  
tubful of dirty clothes  
and the worst and dirtiest of them  
belonged to my cousin Fose!]

Although she feels deep resentment at the contempt of her cousin, which makes her feel "like a bug een a/ Eig pool a D.D.T.", she has the complete conviction that, deep down, Fose is no better than she. Her close and emotional ties with her powerful and heartless cousin make her position particularly painful and complex.

When Louise Bennett urges "Tan a yuh yard an satisfy - / Lef Merica alone" [stay at home and be satisfied - leave America alone] she is warning that all is not so wonderful in the United States as some have been led to believe, despite the attraction of higher wages. She reminds her audience:

Koo how some a de man-dem  
Run back like foreigner  
Dis set bad dog pon dem!  
[Look how some of the men run back here  
as if the foreigners set bad dogs onto them]

and points out the recent news that two Jamaican farm labourers have been killed.

She sees the 'Back to Africa' movement as part of the same syndrome of regarding 'a foreign' [abroad] as better than 'a yard' [home]. By all means go abroad to seek your fortune, she says, but do not claim you are seeking your homeland:

For a right deh so yuh deh!  
[Because it's right here, so you're there!]  
( 'Eack to Africa', 1966, p.214; 1982a, p.104 )

Migration is, however, a fact, whose principle motivation is economic rather than idealistic. It was to Britain, which was recruiting labour for post-war reconstruction, rather than to Africa that large numbers of West Indians were transported in the 1950's. Bennett wrote a poem identifying a funny or ironic side to the massive Caribbean migration. She perceived it as a great reversal of history; the mass movement of slave-descendants into the heart of the 'mother' itself:

What a joyful news, Miss Mattie,  
Ah feel like me heart gwine bus -  
Jamaica people colonizin  
Englan in reverse  
( 'Colonization in Reverse' 1966, p.179; 1982a, p.106 )

Knowing more about the British character than many British people, she wonders how they will square their view of themselves with the new reality they are facing:

What a devilment a Englan!  
Dem face war an brave de worse;  
Eut ah worderin how dem gwin stan  
Colonizin in reverse

British people had shown great fortitude against Hitler's challenge to Britain's supremacy. Ironically, the cost of victory has been the relinquishing of world leadership. The migrant workforce is a reminder of the costs of war, and their acceptance (however reluctant) a symbol of a new, humbler status. Realistically, the poet recognises that British people are going to find this very hard to swallow indeed.

A firm value system can be perceived in the poems of Louise Bennett. She has responded to the topical, from the trivial to the momentous. Throughout her work we see a powerful scepticism towards the pretensions of others, in which she finds a principle source of laughter or derision. Her poems have a satirical edge rooted in nationalism in the face of British colonial arrogance or indifference. Her perspectives are grounded

in rural peasant values, and the oral milieu which is their expression.

#### PART TWO: PAUL KEENS-DOUGLAS AND THE FENNETT TRADITION

The Fennett tradition has been maintained by a younger generation of performing poets, who do not express a revolutionary perspective. This characteristic distinguishes them from the dub poets, or the Trinidadian and Grenadian poets to be considered in chapter four. Characteristics of the Fennett tradition are:

- a) nationalism; a love of country and region which makes a broad identification with 'the people'.
- b) a single-minded commitment to Creole as a medium of artistic communication
- c) a desire to entertain, sustain and amuse

These principles formed the basis for very popular shows made up of established and original material performed by actors, musicians and poets.

The outstanding exponent of the Fennett tradition is Paul Keens-Douglas, who is happy to acknowledge the influence of Miss Lou on his own development as a performer and poet. He has become an enormously popular and skilled artist in his own right.

#### Section one: biography

Paul Keens-Douglas was born in September 1942 in San Juan, Trinidad, but in his early childhood moved with his family to the small neighbouring island of Grenada, where he grew up. He was involved in dance and drama from a young age under the tutelage of Thelma Phillips, who ran the Fee Vee Ballet Group. She was also a story-teller who drew for her themes on the African roots of the culture, evidenced by Keens-Douglas' adaptation of her 'Shango Trouble', which he renamed 'Kao'. Many of Keens-Douglas' narratives which are based in Grenada have elements of the traditional folklore, particularly legends about supernatural beings.

It was probably his Grenadian background which gave him a sense of the ritual surrounding storytelling, such as the use of the French patois phrase, "tim tim bois seche" to punctuate the telling of a tale.

He attended the Sir George Williams University at Montreal in Canada to study sociology. He was there at a dramatic period which was to have major repercussions on Trinidad's political life. Upheavals took place in 1969 over an issue of racism which involved a number of Trinidadian students. The 'Sir George Williams Affair' culminated in the wrecking of the university's computer centre. It is described in more detail in chapter 4. While Keens-Douglas has never spoken of any active involvement in the affair, it is clear that the intensity of debate around the suppression of black people, including black culture and language forms, was a direct trigger to his development and emergence as a performing artist of Creole. While in Canada he was also impressed by the performances of Barbara Jones, a Trinidadian poet who was a strong exponent of black consciousness and vehemently denounced white racism. (Her collection of poems, Among the Potatoes, was published in 1967.) Throughout the period he was in Canada he was active in black drama productions. In 1972 he registered for a postgraduate degree in sociology at the Mona campus in Jamaica of the University of the West Indies. There were strong drama traditions on the campus. Keens-Douglas was encouraged by performances of E.K. Erathwaite's poetry, such as those staged by Noel Vaz, director of the Creative Arts Centre, and Marina Maxwell's Yard Theatre, based down the road in unsalubrious August Town. Keens-Douglas' performing talent and his particular gift for comedy came into its own during this period. The high point of his theatrical career in Jamaica was his performance with Fenny Williams and Cliver Samuel in the Jamaican Pantomime 'Hail Columbus'. He was formatively inspired in his composition of comic Creole pieces by the performances of Louise Pennett, the only

artist he will admit to having influenced his work.

In 1974, he returned to Trinidad, with the aim of continuing his M.A. He soon became involved in radio and television work. He produced a radio series, Creola, which consisted of poems and stories in the Trinidadian vernacular. The group who were involved in presenting the programme played a supporting role in his first production of his own material, Tim Tim at the Little Carib Theatre in Port of Spain. Tim Tim has subsequently become an annual event. He also developed the 'Is We' theatre group, which collectively performed poems, songs and stories.

Paul Keens-Douglas has always put an emphasis on economic self-sufficiency, which makes sense in a country which does little to support its artists. His four books of poetry (When moon shine 1975, Tim Tim 1976, Tell me again 1979 and Is town say so! 1981) have been published by the author, and his four LP discs (Tim Tim, Savannah ghost, One to one and Fedon's flute) have all been produced on his own label. He earns his 'bread and butter' by working in advertising. He sees no contradiction between this and his work as an artist; on the contrary, he finds outlets for his creative talents in the commercial world. He sees the two roles as related ways of selling talent. He accepts the reality under capitalism that art is a marketable product. He argues against a "beggar syndrome" which he perceives in fellow artists. He also maintains that quality is related to marketability; "If it's not good, it will not sell" (Carifesta seminar on literature and culture, August 1981). While some of his arguments are attractive in that they attack aesthetic snobbery and emphasise the democratic aspects of the public taste, they studiously ignore the potential of the media to manipulate that taste. They imply that there is no need of a political will to support culture, that market forces are in themselves fair, and that good art will always financially sustain the artist. Many of his fellow-artists disagree, and seek to

improve conditions through a Writers' Union. Keens-Douglas supported the idea in principle, and was elected first president. However, he became impatient with a general lack of discipline and resigned.

He has performed throughout the Caribbean, in the USA, Canada and Britain, in live and media shows. He has represented Trinidad and Tobago at Carifesta in Jamaica in 1976 and in Barbados in 1981. In 1982 Louise Bennett and Abdul Malik co-starred in his Tim Tim show. After the great calypsonians, he remains Trinidad's most popular performer.

#### Section two: the nature of Paul Keens-Douglas' art

Of all the artists under consideration, Paul Keens-Douglas is the only one for whom the appellation 'poet' has sometimes been queried. There is no doubt that he has contributed much to a revival of interest in the oral tradition in the East Caribbean, and also represents a modern development of that tradition. As Gordon Fohlehr points out in his introduction to Tell me again, "Although the traditional folk tale is gradually disappearing, the phenomenon of performance, dramatized conversation and storytelling is not" (Keens-Douglas 1979, p.v). With Keens-Douglas clearly in mind, he asserts that "The gap between short story, dramatic monologue, one-act play and poem has narrowed." (ibid. p.vi). This is not strictly true. This study is concerned with the emergence of a significant number of poets (identified by themselves as such) developing out of the confluence of oral and written traditions but maintaining allegiance to the oral tradition. This represents a certain tendency towards specialization and a conscious distinction of form. 'The poem' did not have separate existence within Caribbean folk tradition but emerged as song, proverb, repeated rhymes within stories and the heightened, rhythmic oratory of the preacher, speechmaker or storyteller. Poetry permeated every traditional form. Because of this absence in the

oral tradition of definable poems (as distinct from the lyrics of songs), when the first attempts at writing poetry in Caribbean English Creole appeared ('Quow' (McTurk) of Guyana, Cordle of Barbados, McKay of Jamaica) they were modelled as much on examples of dialect in print from other traditions (such as the poems of Robert Burns) as they were on local patterns of speech. Again Fohlehr comments, "...while in most other societies poetry has developed from a definable oral tradition of song, lyric, antiphon hymn and rhetoric, in the Caribbean poetry has been largely divorced from its most natural base." (Keens-Douglas 1979, p.vii). He suggests that this situation has led to a limited concept of poetry, based on "the relatively simple metres of conventional English poetry."

There is no doubt that convention plays a very powerful part in our concept of what 'sounds like' poetry. Ruth Finnegan, in Oral poetry points out that, while rhythm or metre may be a "useful test" in defining what is poetry, "the concept and manifestation of 'rhythm' is a relative thing, and depends partly on culturally defined perceptions; it cannot be an absolute or universally applied criterion." (Finnegan 1977, p.25). She suggests that poetry may be identified by the presence of a number of stylistic and formal features, including heightened language, metaphor, repetitions (like refrains) which lend shape, musical form, the use of distinctive sound patterns like alliteration and rhyme, and rhythm. She concludes that no one of these features must be present, but a combination of some (ibid.).

Keens-Douglas is a creative user of 'Trinagonian'/Grenadian forms of English, and delights audiences with the way he highlights peculiarities and special qualities. Fohlehr has suggested that Trinidadian English has an inbuilt syncopation which has lent itself naturally to the calypso. (Erathwaite/Fohlehr 1968). Undoubtedly the central role of the calypso in

Trinidadian society both reflects and contributes to a high level of word-consciousness and wit in the society. F.D. Abrahams in his research on performance in Caribbean oral tradition has found that there is a greater propensity towards improvisation amongst the populations of Trinidad and Tobago than elsewhere in the region (1983, p.xvi). "Trinis" are particularly famous in the Caribbean for their witty and entertaining speech. Keens-Douglas draws all these qualities into a highly crafted art form.

He has taken selected elements from the calypso tradition. His sense of comedy draws occasionally from the elaborate conceits of Spoiler, a calypsonian of the 1950's, and a general sense of farce which can be found in calypsos by the Mighty Sparrow. His work is however without the sexual innuendo which has been so relentlessly pursued by calypsonians, sometimes wittily, sometimes not, and the cruder types of misogyny which pervade the form (mothers always excepted).

His comedy and presentation have probably been equally influenced by American comics. He spent several years in North America. The influence of Bob Newhart is particularly evident. 'Ah fire de wuk' draws deeply in terms of conception on 'The driving instructor', though it is nevertheless witty in its use of local idioms. It would be surprising if such an influential and popular black comedian as Dick Gregory had not made an impact. The style is conversational, mundane, intimate, informal, prosaic. We find that in performance, Keens-Douglas adds even more conversational asides, tending more towards the prosaic, and further away from the deliberately artificial or, as Finnegan puts it, "set apart" language and presentation we associate with poetry (1977, p.25). Some is unarguably 'pure poetry'; much is prose narrative with poetic sections and features. In his most recent publication, Is town say so! (1981) the author has typographically reflected his growing emphasis on the comic

prose narrative. It should be pointed out that the question of where Keens-Douglas' work 'makes the grade' as poetry is irrelevant to its author and the vast majority of his audience. Nevertheless, identifying the poetry in Keens-Douglas' work is an important aspect of recognising his craft, and essential in terms of aligning him with the other poets under consideration in this study, who have consciously made poetry their medium.

Section three: the range of Paul Keens-Douglas' art

Paul Keens-Douglas is first and foremost a humorist. He presents situational comedy in an extended dramatic monologue, vividly recreating the scene and giving the impression of a number of participants. He presents us with scenes and situations highly familiar to Trinidadian (and sometimes Grenadian) society. Situations which include an absurd or farcical element are invariably confined to Port of Spain. A classic of this form is his 'Tanti at the Oval' in which he recreates a familiar scene - a cricket match between Trinidad and the 'Small (Leeward) Islands' - an occasion for 'the boys' especially, whom the narrator typifies in his view of ideal personal freedom:

With me money in me side-pocket,  
An petit-quart in me back pocket  
An' me two hand swingin' free  
(1976, p.27)

Into this conventional scenario, the narrator injects Tanti Merle, his exasperatingly stubborn aunt. She insists he take her to the Oval because it is her birthday and she, a native of St. Vincent, wants to support "the Islands". He is embarrassed enough at being seen with her and she compounds this by involving him with two excruciatingly feminine and 'motherly' encumbrances - a pink parasol and an enormous picnic basket full of food. The farce reaches a climax, however, when Tanti Merle reverses all conventional expectations. She becomes the rowdiest

supporter in the whole arena. She moves right down to the front and, as the last balls are bowled and a possible 'Islands' victory is in sight, Tanti is up on her seat, being cautioned by a policeman. Cut on the pitch, in the mistaken belief that they have won:

Ah whole heap of small Island people, an Tanti in de middle,  
An Tanti parasol only goin' up an' down, up an' down, up an' down

Though absurd, 'Tanti at the Oval' is an affectionate celebration of the perceived forcefulness of older Trinidadian women. Tanti Merle reappears as an unwelcome guest at a party who ends up totally entering its anarchic spirit, and again at Carnival as a pugnacious vendor of sugarcake, who chases outraged after a friend of the narrator's because he has helped himself to some of her "drapes" in order to improvise a costume. Thus Tanti Merle has become an established and somewhat stock comic 'character'.

'Wukhand' is another case of comic reversal, in which the speaker spends a good deal of time and energy trying to persuade a man to employ him because he imagines he is the owner of the large house outside which he is standing. When it finally emerges that the man is simply waiting for a bus, the speaker is furious about the time he has wasted, and threatens to do him violence. In this case, however, it is not the comic situation which makes the poem memorable so much as the speaker's absurd concentration on the qualities of his 'Wukhand' to the extent that it acquires a separate personality.

Ah know is joke yu jokin sah,  
Eut dis hand could take a jcke  
(1976, p.11)

'Wukhand', 'Fish' (in which the speaker is a fish vendor) and 'De Band Passin' are untypical in that the narrative voice is a distinctive 'character'. In this respect, Keens-Douglas' approach to comedy differs considerably from Louise Bennett's. Typically, Keens-Douglas' comic narrators are blandly 'representative' and sufficiently conventional that

they can be appalled or 'scandalized' by the unseemly behaviour going on around them. They seem to be youngish to middle-aged, and neither particularly well off nor extremely poor. These characteristics combine to form Keens-Douglas' stage persona. We do not therefore get the ironic self-revelation of character that is typical of Bennett's dramatic monologues, where the audience perceives things which remain hidden to the narrator. We tend to get a more two-dimensional view of things, where comedy remains at the level of farce, or verbal wit.

Keens-Douglas does not show the commitment, evident in Bennett's work, to represent the viewpoint of the very poor. The divisions which he sees as key within the society are those between country people and town people, and between small and big islanders. In 'Dis is Frederick Street?' Keens-Douglas reveals both the vitality and some of the negative aspects of Port of Spain through the eyes of a 'country bumpkin'. A joke is made at his expense; he is so ignorant about geography that, on hailing a taxi to go to P'areval, a district of Port of Spain, he requests that it "Make ah pass by de Fitch Lake", which is right down in the south of Trinidad. At the same time, his straightforwardness shows up negatively some dishonest street sale techniques which are a feature of the urban environment. He also naïvely notices "how much apple an' pear in de place", a situation which should be the subject of scandal in Trinidad; a fertile country with its own (ailing and neglected) tropical agriculture, which nevertheless accepts the replacement of its own produce by these alien imports. Thus the rural dweller becomes the voice of clear sightedness and a reminder of how far the urban society has drifted from his simple values.

Keens-Douglas, particularly in his early work, identified very strongly as a small-islander. He revived some of the traditions about the supernatural which were beginning to die in Trinidad. One of his few

poems about past history, 'Storm coming' (about Hurricane Janet) is located in Grenada and narrated by a Grenadian. Two of his most vivid characters, Tanti Merle and the fisherman in 'Fish', are small islanders. In his traditional role, the fisherman has an authority and confidence which is absent in the urban dwellers. He can afford to 'cuss' every customer in sight. He can parade his superior knowledge. When a little girl comes and asks for the "silverish" fish, he declares grandly to all who care to listen:

Allyu ehn find ah should charge de government  
For teachin' de damn nation 'bout fish...?  
(1975, p.47)

Keens-Douglas' complex sense of national identity is not an unusual one. Because of Trinidad's relatively intense industrial development, large numbers of 'small-islanders', especially Grenadians, have been attracted to find work. There is in addition a high level of mobility between islands of the East Caribbean; traditionally by boat, and nowadays by the relatively cheap LJAT (Leeward Islands Air Transport) air service. A high percentage of Trinidadians therefore have 'small island' connections. Keens-Douglas' nationalism has three levels; as a Grenadian (more rural, traditional) occasionally; as a Trinidadian (urbane, self-satirizing, sharp) most of the time; and more generally as a West Indian. This latter is expressed in his serious commitment to the language styles which embody a Caribbean identity. Keens-Douglas does a good deal of work in the region's schools, exhibiting through his work the creative potential of the children's first language.

There is a strong contrast between his approach to the politics of Grenada and of Trinidad. The emphasis on the rural storytelling style when the context is Grenada extends even to 'Fidon's flute', Keens-Douglas' (cautious) celebration of the Revolution. The main emphasis of the story is on the spirit of the island as embodied in its creatures and

physical environment more than its people. Stress is also placed on a broad span of history through the symbolic figure of Jules Fedon, a mulatto rebel inspired by the French Revolution who fought and held out with his army against the British for two years (1795-6). Fedon's spirit pervades the island once more in the form of echoes from his legendary flute. The actual seizure of power by members of the New Jewel Movement is observed and endorsed by the animals and plants:

Meantime Black Ant climb top coconut tree,  
Shout out, 'Don't mind he, hear me,  
An' what I could tell from where I be,  
Is like Jewel boys I see.  
An' if allyu would only take yu time  
An' listen carefully,  
You would hear de same tings dat I hear  
Dey say Grenada free.

( 'Fedon's flute', 1979, p.115)

The whole emphasis is on reassurance; that the events which are taking place are not an aberration, but are in harmony with the history and spirit of Grenada. Typical of the tendency also noted in Louise Bennett's poetry, Keens-Douglas finds humour in this most serious drama. As the fighting between the New Jewel revolutionaries and Prime Minister Eric Gairy's soldiers is taking place over True Blue barracks, the animals' response provides a paradoxically comic spectacle:

Cow say if he didr't duck  
Bullet sure catch him in he heart.

...  
An' Owl shout out loud an' clear,  
'Is revolution, watch yu arse!'

(p.113)

'Fedon's flute' has a quaint quality untypical of poems inspired by the revolution.

When Keens-Douglas writes in a Trinidadian context, his poems have a harder edge, whether they are comic or contain serious political comment. Here the anger of the Black Power consciousness, so vibrant in Trinidad in the early 1970's, emerges. Where this consciousness touches the work of Keens-Douglas we see a major break from the spirit of Louise Bennett.

'Savannah ghost' is without doubt one of Keens-Douglas' most powerful and successful poems, especially in performance. It is a critique on several levels of Trinidadian society. It gives the lie to the commonly-held perception of Trinidad as a 'carnival society' in which all conflicts can be resolved in a massive annual flamboyant collective exorcism. The narrator begins one by one to query a number of cliches. Jaded by non-stop partying in the previous days, he is finding it hard to rally the appropriate spirit as he sits in Port of Spain's Savannah at 5 o'clock on Jouvert morning (Monday, the 'opening' of carnival). In the tradition of Trinidadian machismo the speaker should be revelling in the prospect of 'grabbing a girl by the waist' and 'jumping up' to the band, unencumbered by anything but a half-bottle of rum in his back pocket. In actual fact his feelings are getting in the way. He is disturbed that his girl, Myrtle, has refused to come out with him, and he is missing her. He even admits to himself that he loves her. In this mood he begins to question everything:

Yu know someting?  
Ah don't tink ah really like rum, yu know?  
Ah mean, it don't really taste nice  
(*'Savannah ghost'*, 1976, p.45)

Forcing himself to get lifted along by the rum, the music and the masqueraders, the more sombre messages present in some of the calypsoes penetrate his consciousness. The Mighty Sparrow is singing about "diggin horrors" every time he sees the news, because "all ah readin' 'bout/ Is guerillas, more laws and wars". The narrator feels negatively overwhelmed by everything around him, including the "multinational bad-breath". In this state of crisis he feels himself propelled upwards until he is looking down from a great height. Suddenly he sees the revellers and Trinidad from an intensely new historical and geographical perspective.

Comin' up Frederick St. is Africa,  
Black people toilin' in sugar,  
Dat mean life should be sweet, but not so.  
Caroni cane wavin' like flag in de sky,  
An' when de cane part, ah boat, de Fatel Razack,  
Is India come to Trinidad.

Here he parallels the experiences of the African and Indian people who have sweated in the canefields and together make up the population of Trinidad. The Fatel Rozack is one of the boats which brought Indian indentured labourers. Caroni is in the heart of the sugar belt, now almost entirely populated by people of Indian descent. He also realises for the first time that Port of Spain is not the beginning and end of Trinidad, that Trinidad is "ah big place, an' so much people/ But all goin' in ah different direction". The narrator expresses a profound exasperation, militant in tone, which suggests Carnival may simply disguise some fundamental problems:

An' yu say is only once ah year dey have carnival?  
Everybody could jump in time, but tell dem march,  
All man have a different drum.....

Trinidad's history, from the narrator's lofty perspective, has been one of "Blood and betrayal". Even the history of the steel pan "will break your heart", in the words of a calypso by Lord Kitchener, quoted in the poem. Here the inference is to the struggles and the poverty which were the lot of the early creators of pan. Feeling he has seen enough, the narrator descends through the "jungle" of bodies. He feels isolated by the revelation he has experienced. He can no longer join the mainstream of the revellers, but he feels stronger than them. Standing stock still in the crowd, he is "like ah rock in de river". Finally they pass him by, leaving him alone to the "Savannah ghosts". Softened by his experience and in meditative mood, he decides to leave the 'baccanal' and go home to Myrtle.

Keens-Douglas also sometimes expresses a more personal sense of frustration against Trinidad, which he feels "Suckin' de guts from de

few/ Who care to try" ('Ah bitter frustration', 1979, p.56). In 'Tell me again', he reiterates countless cliches he has heard which seek to explain Trinidad's problems by turning them into a joke.

Tell me again  
...  
how he goin' by plane  
an' she goin' by boat  
an' we goin' by guess  
tell me again  
(1979, p.28)

Such 'smart' plays on words, which are in effect an escapist mechanism, are quite typical of Trinidad dialogue. The underlying motivation for his individualist philosophy can be sought in this frustration, the sense that he is "Treading water" and can find no "firm ground". He concludes that he can only rely on himself. Sometimes this is expressed in quite an extreme form:

So I don't care too much 'bout you,  
An' wha' you tink 'bout me,  
Cause I do de tings I have to do  
An' dat's enough for me.  
( 'Is me alone', 1979, p.28)

There are also a few poems about relationships with women, loving and otherwise. They are, with one exception, significantly in standard English. One might expect a poet who habitually uses Creole in his work to employ this most natural medium for expressions of intimacy. Victor Questel, the Trinidadian poet and critic, who wrote the introduction to Keens-Douglas' first collection, When moon shine, clearly found the six standard English poems contained there the least authentic and original.

Whatever might be Keens-Douglas' position, the dialect poems, to my mind, are much more rewarding, and this seems to suggest that it is here that Keens-Douglas' future as a poet lies.  
(p.i).

Reflecting a prevailing male sentiment which is constantly reiterated in calypsoes, Keens-Douglas' most deeply-felt words of love are reserved for his mother ('A woman'). While "not looking back" and "eager to be gone", he nevertheless fears losing "the force which gave me speed", the

strength he has inherited from his mother. The image at the end of the poem gives her a traditional and mythic grandeur:

My mother stands a lonely bridge  
That spans the gap, my life to death  
And she awaits me at both ends  
With understanding...

Keens-Douglas here expresses a cyclic view of life strongly reminiscent of the African heritage.

In his later collection, Tell me again, Keens-Douglas frankly acknowledges a sense of alienation from "woman" ('You are not... my woman'). The terms in which he tries and discards concepts of woman are significant; slave woman, free woman, Caribbean woman, mother, sister, daughter. Never companion or friend. Indeed his friends are clearly identified as the men he asks for advice, who are predictably as confused about women as he is. Significantly, the poem in which he expresses a broad feeling of contentment which tells him he "could love again" is written in Creole ('Love again', 1979, p.63). Love poems represent a minor but interesting element of Keens-Douglas' output. There is plenty of scope in Caribbean poetry for more reflection about love, and sometimes the lack of it, between men and women.

Finally, there are one or two more recent poems which are light-hearted celebrations of aspects of Caribbean culture. These included a praise-song to Louise Fennett, the strongly rhythmic 'Pan rap', which invites the audience to join in with a repeated chorus of "C' Yea!"; and a poem in praise of 'Cucoc Village', a food stall in Pelican Village, an area of Bridgetown, Barbados, which Keens-Douglas discovered during Carifesta, the pan-Caribbean festival of the arts held there in 1981. Barbados is well-known for its good food, and cucoc is a characteristic favourite - a seasoned cormeal paste beaten up with stewed ochres and turned out as a smooth mound from a greased pudding bowl. The poem is largely a monologue composed in rhymed stanzas characteristic of Louise

Bennett. Interspersed between the monologue of the vendor proudly and generously offering her wares is a chorus taken from a radio advertisement:

Yes, is Cucco Village on de air  
De bes' in Pajan [F Barbadian] food,  
Yu don't have to take my word for it,  
But it really tastin' good

The simplicity of expression appropriately reflects warm appreciation of a little-recognised but important local contribution to the Barbados Carifesta.

#### Section four: the poetry in Paul Keens-Douglas' work

Much of Paul Keens-Douglas' work has a prosaic, informal quality. His interest in rapport with an audience encourages this. His frequent asides and interjections, often improvised in performance, tend to reduce the poetic tension of the language. If Ruth Finnegan is right about poetic language being in certain identifiable senses "set apart" from the everyday, Keens-Douglas' performing instincts work against this. At the same time he has a lively appreciation of poetic qualities (a heightening of intensity) within the spoken idioms of the East Caribbean. He is also happy to employ the artificial devices traditionally used to shape both prose narrative and poetry but generally recognised as poetic: repetition, rhyme, regular stress patterns, similes and metaphor.

In 'Tanti at de Oval', the phrase 'Well is who tell she (he) say dat' (Well, who told her (him) to say that?) is repeated with emphasis, slowing the pace of the narrative dramatically on two occasions before unleashing the torrent of Tanti's 'history of St. Vincent', which would not sound nearly so unreasonable if our response had not been carefully prepared. The phrase forms a key shaping device in the whole narrative. Other effective uses of repetition in the same piece reflect the rhythmic qualities of certain sights and situations. There is the mechanical

efficiency of the men on the turnstiles coping with the crowds streaming into the Oval:

Is just de hand de money an' de ticket,  
De hand de money an' de ticket  
De hand de money an' de ticket

and, at the end of the game, the sight of Tanti's jubilant pink parasol going "up an' down, up an' down, up an' down". 'Tanti at de Oval' also provides us with an example of rhyme being used to evoke an atmosphere of heightened tension after the much more loosely-structured narrative which has preceded it:

Islands have runs to make  
Trinidad have wickets to take  
Time runnin' out an' is excitement in de Oval,  
If Islands win dey get de shield  
Tension in de place like steel

The more formal atmosphere induced encourages intense concentration, reflecting the response of the fictional audience within the narrative.

Keens-Douglas uses a number of similes which sound completely natural and conversational and at the same time are often strikingly and pleasingly apt. As with so many poetic qualities of his narrative, he is simply accurately observing and reporting 'what comes naturally' to many Trinidadians, whose conversations have a tendency to turn into spontaneous performances. 'Ah fire de wuk' is the hysterical outpouring of a male driving instructor whose life has just been in the manic hands of an archetypal 'bad woman driver'. He describes her expression as she maintained her suicidal course:

She mouth did set like ten rat trap  
(1976, p.55)

This formula is used on other occasions, but never with quite such a felicitous effect. Kao, for example, the Shango man, "did bad [was bad]/ like ten bag a snake, wutless [worthless] for sc". (1976, p.88).

A steel band in the distance sounds "Like piano playin' 'pon mountain top" ('De band passin', 1975, p.39). A Grenadian "Tanti" watches

a lively scene as people take advantage of a bright moonlit night to enjoy extra hours of outside activity. Though they are unobtrusive, she sees the shadows of two young lovers, "Two dat look like one" under the mango tree. Giving a sense of depth of character and long experience, the poet likens Tanti to the moon shining above - "she silent, but she see". The excitement building up towards Christmas is conveyed in 'Dat was Christmas' (1975 p.53): "Even de darkness like it want to talk". And Keens-Douglas expresses a frustrated love for his haphazard island of Trinidad thus:

De wayward planet of God universe  
Boundin' thru' de heavens like ah blasted orphan  
( 'Ah love yu Islan', 1979, p.106)

The combination of cosmic imagery and a typically colloquial Trinidadian tone is simultaneously comic and imbued with passion.

Sometimes the poet imagines a fantastic situation or concept and pursues it until he has our acceptance, if not our belief. The source for this humorous device is undoubtedly the calypsonian, Spoiler, whose reputation was built on his fanciful imagination and ability to extend absurd situations. One of his calypsoes has a judge arresting and trying himself for speeding. He even accuses himself of lying! In another, the calypsonian imagines all the fun he would have if he reincarnated as a bed bug. 'I ball' shows us cricket from the viewpoint of the ball. This ball feels very important because, as it forcefully points out, it is at the centre of everything:

When is catch - I in dat  
When is bowl-cut - I in dat  
When is run-out - I in dat  
When is stump-cut - I in dat  
When is L.E.W. - I in dat  
(1979, p.38)

From this premise, the ball goes on to persuade us that it is really it controlling the whole game: "Is me docs make dem bowlers look good" (p.40). The original source of this idea is revealed in the quotes from

cricket commentators, who make remarks like, "Ah clever ball pitched outside de off-stump!". When a certain four pulls up unexpectedly short it is because the ball has stopped to talk to some red-ants "Dat does live off 'Square leg'".

Another instance of the extension of a fanciful idea can be found in 'Wukhand' (1976, p.9-11). As the speaker focusses on the virtues of his working hand, it acquires a personality all of its own. The same hand has cut bananas, thrown a fishnet and is "tired pullin' car out ah ditch". He then waxes lyrical:

An' dis hand sah, have touch,  
Crack ah egg, pick a flower  
Caress ah woman, ahhhh, sah  
As gentle as de mornin' sun  
Growin' fierce, but not destroyin'

The speaker mentions one skill and then seems instantly to regret it; he can pull an ace from any part of the pack. He immediately feels the need to emphasise his honesty, and here the personification of the hand reaches a climax of absurdity. He gives it full credit for handing in two hundred dollars found lying in the street:

Yes sah, dis hand make headline,  
De paper call me de 'honest hand'

As in 'I ball', Keens-Douglas is playing on the dafter literal implications of some media clichés.

#### Section five: 'Sugar George' - a fine performance poem

'Sugar George' (1975, pp.34-7) achieves what is ideally aimed at in performance poetry; an authentic demotic and profundity of expression. It does this by reflecting faithfully a ritual sense which is strong within popular oral tradition. The sense of occasion brought about by a great man's death induces dignified but unpretentious language. The fictional subject of this elegy, Sugar George, the first great tenor pan player, is given a mythic dimension as his life is reviewed in terms of rites of

passage. Sugar is recognised by his community, of whom the narrator is one, as an embodiment of the cultural and spiritual life of Trinidad. Significantly his life is passed in utter poverty, demonstrating the wider society's inability to recognise the potential within its midst. The performance recorded on Tim Tim (APCC1, 1975) complements the verbal qualities of the poem. It is punctuated by a startlingly apt and beautiful rendition of Bach's Toccata in D minor performed by the Gay Desperadoes, a Laventille band with its own legendary part in the history of this musical form, which illustrates the capacity of artistry to transform even discarded rubbish (the oil drum) into an instrument of grandeur and nobility.

The poem opens with the burial of Sugar George. It is inauspicious; the words are thoughtful but ordinary. Sugar ironically inherits his first and last piece of property; "Six foot of hard, dry Trinidad soil". Immediately the pans, which played on the night of his funeral, are brought in, the language becomes poetic and legends of the man begin to emerge; all befitting a wake and subsequent accounts of the remembered event.

De pans was playin'  
When George dead dat nite  
Featin' de dark wit' notes so sweet  
Dat de dead man dead twice dey say,  
He close he eye, he breathe he last,  
People say "Ch God, George gone,"  
But den de pan hit a high,  
He open he eye, say 'Pan fadder!'  
Den dead to hell an' gore away

The spirit of George, drawn back by the pan to challenge death, is regarded with awe, recognised as both heroic and blasphemous. What do the words brought back from the dead mean? Is he claiming to be the father of pan, or exclaiming that he has now laid eyes on "Pan father"? That George 'died and went to hell' is neither literal nor permanent, as the celestial echoes of his pan later indicate. It rather suggests an

absolute and defiant will. The lines of this section have a regular and formal quality, with a strong sense of internal balance within each line ("...de dead man dead [died] twice dey say/ He close he eye, he breathe he last/ People say "Ch Cod, George gone "). Alliteration helps to emphasise the stresses, giving a slow and dignified pace.

The narrative then moves straight back to Sugar's birth, about which a joke told has a legendary quality:

Dey say Sugar cut he navel string  
On ah Esso drum dat still had oil

The image is completely colloquial and believable. Nevertheless it surrounds his origins with a ritual significance. He is united by blood to the steel pan. The "Esso drum dat still had oil" indicates Trinidad's natural mineral wealth and a foreign company which controls its extraction. The navel string (umbilical cord) is given great significance in West African and traditional Caribbean cultures. Here it suggests the pan and Sugar George draw sustenance from each other. The image also suggests his birth into a harsh environment characterised by debris. Accounts of the child growing up combine to create an image of his determination. His unchildlike qualities are embodied in the appellation "Mr. Sugar". A humorous reminder of his physical size emphasises his exceptional character:

All yu could ah see was de pan back  
An' two dry foot stickin' out

Repetition is used to reflect his consistency:

Eut while de rest ah dem was drinkin'  
Mr. Sugar was beatin'  
An' while de rest ah dem was feteir',  
Mr. Sugar was beatin'...etc.

A legend grew up that the panyard was haunted because the sound could be heard at strange hours when nobody was to be seen.

Through the pan Sugar has his initiation into manhood. Again, this is ritualistic but, far from being artificially introduced by the author,

it is the direct reflection of real-life rituals on the streets of Port of Spain. During the 1950's supporters of different bands would "clash" and violent fights would ensue:

Sugar learn to fight  
There was no one to pull a blade  
As fast as Sugar George;  
He cut an' he get cut too

The balance of meaning and rhythm in the last line quoted here suggests a sense of order and significance, and also reflects the control of Sugar George, who always wrapped up his pan "like ah baby" before getting involved in any fight.

The promise comes to fulfilment in Sugar's first legendary performance in Port of Spain's Savannah. The language and imagery emphasise that it is a 'heavenly' experience, conceived in both religious and more material frames of reference. The authority of Sugar's tenor leading his band creates a 'theatre'. The previously noisy crowd becomes hushed, "Like de whole Savannah hold it breath". As in 'Fedor's flute', this personification of the land is used to suggest the 'essence' of the place, which embodies but is bigger and more mysterious than the people. There is a grandeur of scale. The tenor is perceived playing "up dey in de sky". A joke about the gateman standing with his mouth open while "about five thousand people get in free" brings a sense of realism to the scene but only serves to emphasise the exceptional quality of the event.

A pattern of insistent stresses in this section helps to bring it to a crescendo:

Pend over he pan like a statue ah stone,  
He eh hearin', he eh seeir', he eh feelir',  
De world for he was de sweet tenor in he hand,  
An' he beat, an' he beat, an' he beat,  
An' de savannah fall in love with Sugar dat nite.

Consistent with the sense of religious ecstasy, the preacher's techniques of repetition and rhythmic stress to raise the emotions are effectively employed here. The crowd's response is as a congregation:

Ah fella say 'Lord, Jesus, Africa',  
Ah woman say 'Uhh Fuh'

They respond to an intuited 'African', as well as Christian, dimension to the experience. After the climax the narrative returns directly to Sugar George's death, "As poor as de day he born". This fact serves to emphasise his passage through life as a kind of spiritual force. There is a perception that Sugar embodied the aspirations and dimly-understood longings of the people:

He was part of a plan  
Dat we eh even begin to understand,  
Where we people goin'?  
Where all ah we goin'?

The participants in the drama wish to pay respects to Sugar's passing, but their language has no artificial smoothness:

De boys wanted to be quiet for Sugar,  
But before he dead he say  
'None a dat stupidity, beat pan.'

So Sugar passes away to the glorious sounds of his beloved steel pan music. One final ritual is again expressed in gruff and mundane terms: "we make for de rumshop/ To fire a last one on Sugar head". In other words, they are offering a libation, to ease his passage into the spirit world. As they do so, the narrator swears he hears confirmation that Sugar's spirit lives on; the sound of his laughter and the pan "playin' softly, softly". He calls out to the heavens: "Where yu dey, Sugar boy?/ Where yu dey?"

This poem is finely sustained in terms of its structure. It remains consistently within the idioms and belief patterns of the people who give its language life. Its dynamics of crescendo and diminuendo, the use of rhythmic and other sound patterns, the insertion of jokes to undermine any tendency towards pretentiousness, all contribute to making this a powerful performance piece. When performed with music it attains real grandeur.

CHAPTER THREE: GARVEY, FOUNDATION AND THE POETS OF THE GHETTO

Section one: the context

In this chapter we are seeking to explore and explain a phenomenon which was both a natural development of the suppressed cultural expression of the poor Jamaican masses and a sudden flowering which took a particular form because of a particular conjunction of circumstances. This phenomenon was the emergence of a significant number of poets springing largely from the ghetto, generally unaware or dismissive of any written poetry tradition preceding them (except in some cases a small amount of radical Black American poetry). They emerged at a time of crisis in Jamaican society, articulating the experiences, feelings and general positions of a profoundly dissatisfied population. Their tone was angry and serious. Their language was imbued with metaphorical significance created within the Rastafari movement in which they, as sufferers, naturally found their place. They were being shaped and influenced by the lyrics and musical character of the burgeoning range of reggae music, which was the most comprehensive expression of the creative turbulence which was taking place.

Garveyism and the development of the Rastafari movement

The emergence in the late 1970's of the dub poets, with whom this chapter is mainly concerned, was the culmination of a process which 'began' with the transition of the Rastafari movement from an isolated group of social outcasts into a focus of mass resistance to the established, and still very colonial, order. The seeds of this movement were deeply and widely sown in the 1920's and 30's by Marcus Garvey. Garvey's message of pride in being black, and repatriation to an independent Africa under black rule resonated in the hearts of millions

of black people all over the world. "A weaver of dreams, he translated into a fantastic reality the gaudy strands of the vicarious desires of the submerged members of the Negro race." (McKay 1968). His exceptional abilities as a mobilizer gave black people an idea of their potential power, as huge crowds witnessed visionary pageants and assemblies in Harlem and Eidelweiss Park, Kingston, Jamaica. (Cronon 1962). Unlike the more intellectual Pan-African Movement, Garveyism was characterised by "aggressive, concerted independent action" (Lynch, intro. in Jacques-Garvey (ed.) 1980, p.vii). It made its appeal directly to the masses, and Garveyism continued to be cherished as an ideal, even though the practical plans failed to come to fruition.

Garvey is regarded as a prophet by the Rastafarian movement, and is credited with having said, "Look to Africa, when a black king shall be crowned, for the day of deliverance is near." In November 1930, Ras Tafari was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia. His titles, King of Kings, Lord of Lords and Conquering Lion of Judah, convinced many Jamaicans consulting their Bibles (Revelation 5:2,5) that his coronation was the fulfilment of a prophecy. There was a strong current of resistance amongst these descendants of slaves to reconciliation with their unchosen and harsh homeland. Identification with the Israelites in Babylonian captivity was strong. Many took renewed hope from the coronation that their hour of redemption was near; they would soon be released out of bondage and returned to the African motherland.

In 1935 Italy under the fascist leadership of Mussolini attacked Ethiopia, using poison gas and bombs against civilians and an army defending itself with rifles, bare hands and ancient swords (Greenfield 1965, pp.191-223). This outrage, symbolized in the lonely figure of the Emperor Haile Selassie appealing for help at the League of Nations, united black people all over the world (ibid. p.189). Twenty years later,

in recognition of the support received from New World Blacks, the Emperor, long restored to his throne, made a grant of 500 acres of fertile land in an area called Shashemane for all those who wished to repatriate.

The Rastafarian movement, which developed in response to these international events, was democratic and heterogeneous. There was no single leader who could claim to speak for the movement, and its doctrines were open to quite wide personal interpretation (Owens, 1976, p.2). The use of marijuana, or ganja, to assist meditation brought the movement into constant confrontation with the police. In May 1959 the police made a violent and sustained attack on Back a Wall, the Rastafarian stronghold in Kingston. Harsh, exemplary punishments were meted out on the many Rastafari brought to court. The bitterness thus caused led to the spread of revolutionary sentiment (Smith et. al. 1960, p.16). Some Rastafari began identifying with the triumph of the Cuban guerrillas in that year. The authorities viewed the developing situation with alarm. The University College of the West Indies responded to a request by certain Rastafarian leaders that it should help in relaying factual information about the movement and its demands. As a result of the recommendations made in the report, The Rastafari Movement in Kingston, Jamaica by M.G. Smith, Roy Augier and Rex Nettleford, published 1960, a delegation, including Rastafarian leaders, went to Ethiopia with a view to facilitating repatriation in 1961 (Owens, 1976, p.21). The report also drew attention to the appalling conditions in the ghetto (a term referring generally to the poor urban areas of Kingston) where the most basic facilities were lacking, and made practical suggestions such as a low-cost housing programme and improvement of community provision in poor areas. (Smith et. al., 1960, p.37).

The mass nature of the movement was only fully revealed to all

levels of Jamaican society, however, by the visit of Emperor Haile Selassie in April 1966 when 10,000 Rastafarians gathered at Norman Washington Manley Airport to greet him. The authorities were unable to handle the situation, and the Emperor refused to leave the aircraft. Mortimo Planno, a Rastafarian leader, came forward to control the crowd and persuaded him it was safe to do so (Davis & Simon 1979, p.77). Many do not regard it as a coincidence that in July 1966, Back a Wall was summarily bulldozed to the ground. This had the effect of spreading the movement even more widely. 1966 saw the beginning of rock steady music - a deliberate slowing of the popular music beat and increasingly direct social criticism in the lyrics - reflecting a growing consciousness and sense of resistance amongst the ghetto population. (Davis & Simon 1983, p.71).

#### Walter Rodney and the Black Power movement

This period coincided with the immense turbulence in Black America occasioned by the assassination of Martin Luther King, the political teachings of Malcolm X and the revolutionary activities of the Black Panther Party. Black Power formed a common ideological ground between many West Indian intellectuals and the Rastafari movement. Creative exchange increasingly took place between the ghetto and the university campus. Scholarships for secondary school places were introduced in the 1950's. All of the young ghetto poets received a secondary education, the first vital step to social mobility and personal expression. Increased educational opportunities for the poor did not see much reflection in increased job opportunities. There were large numbers of relatively well-educated and articulate persons living in the ghetto, who tended to become leaders and organisers.

In January 1968 the Guyanese historian, Walter Rodney, took up a

teaching appointment at the University. He had a Ph.D. in West African history, and came from an appointment at the university of Dar-Es-Salaam, Tanzania. Political independence in 1962 had done little to change the colonial and completely Eurocentric character of education. The information Rodney imparted about the ancient civilizations of Africa, the impact of slavery and the contemporary African situation had a sensational impact in Jamaica. Many intellectuals and progressive professionals recognized that the Rastafarian and other Garveyite movements had cherished a very positive view of their African heritage, whilst their education had given them a colonial orientation. Rodney spoke to groups everywhere, in the urban ghettos, rural villages, and the uptown suburbs. U.W.I. social and political scientists were also playing a prominent role in the process of intellectual decolonization. From 1966 Trevor Monroe had been encouraging Rastafarians to come up on to the campus to reason with the students. A Garveyite journal entitled Bongo Man, edited by Rupert Lewis, had been making a considerable impact since its appearance in 1967. Within the space of two terms, Rodney's influence was being considered by the authorities a threat to the stability of the island. On October 13, 1968 Rodney addressed the Congress of Black Writers in Montreal on the topic 'African History in the Service of Black Revolution'. On October 15 he was banned from re-entering Jamaica. A peaceful student demonstration through Kingston was met by teargas and police violence (Gonsalves 1979). This provoked a widespread response from the sufferer population of the city including the burning of vehicles, damage of buildings and looting (ibid.). Forced back on to the campus, students held debates and demonstrations while printing presses produced a stream of pamphlets and broadsheets. The university campus was under seige by the police and military for six weeks, equipped with armoured vehicles and machine guns.

Despite the reimposition of quiet and the elimination of Rodney from the scene, radical activity continued to flourish. Rasta camps promoted discussion about liberation struggles in Africa and Latin America and activists began to organize in different ways within their communities. The Abeng newspaper which succeeded Bongo Man - a professional production with a Black Power and Socialist perspective - swiftly increased its distribution island-wide.

#### A change of government and a new cultural policy

Deep-rooted dissatisfaction with the performance of the ruling Jamaica Labour Party led to an electoral victory for the People's National Party, led by Michael Manley in 1972. Because of the degree of suppression of grassroots expression, there was a wide consensus that cultural decolonization was a central aspect of the changes that needed to take place. Plans had been drawn up and work begun on a new complex called the Cultural Training Centre under the J.L.P. government. It was only after Manley came to power that cultural policy began to be seriously reconsidered when an Exploratory Committee on the Arts and Culture was set up in 1972. A UNESCO report of 1977, Cultural Policy in Jamaica, comments that the emphasis in the Jamaica School of Music (set up as a limited company with government subsidy in 1961) had been almost entirely on European classical music. "In the atmosphere generated by colonial cultural values which still strongly prevailed in 1972, the temperate call of the Exploratory Committee for 'the expansion and integration' of (but not giving central place to) research into the musical heritage of the majority of the Jamaican people, was nothing short of revolutionary." (UNESCO, 1977). Clearly the "distinguished leaders in the arts and culture" who made up the Committee had heard the subterranean cries of 1968-9.

The Cultural Training Centre (C.T.C.) was completed in 1976, just in time for the Caribbean Festival of Arts (CARIFESTA), hosted by Jamaica in that year. The emphasis from the beginning was on providing opportunities for the non-privileged and also providing creative stimulus within the community. Within the School of Drama, part-time evening courses were a significant part of the programme, and also the training of cultural officers working in community projects. Through such approaches, the School of Drama strengthened its ties with the community. The School of Drama was to act as an important base and springboard for several of the ghetto poets. Michael Smith, Odu Onuora and Claudette Richardson were all awarded scholarships to the School on the basis of their poetry and performing talents. Michael Smith's power on stage owed much to the skills he had learned there. The individuals who formed the poetry performance group, 'Poets in Unity' met and came together through the Drama School.

The School also provided an important venue through which to exhibit all kinds of performance ideas. Thus Odu worked on a 'choreo-poetry drama' based around his poems, while Michael produced his own play, 'The Yard'.

#### Conscience and reform

Another significant factor about this era was that it saw the introduction of much-needed prison reform. While the cultural policy of the Manley era was enlightened, it did little to attack the structural forms of inequality and injustice which were (and are) so glaring in Jamaican society. The inhabitants of the prisons were almost exclusively from the poorest strata, and there was particular prejudice against Rastafarians. Conditions in the prisons were brutal, inhumanely spartan, squalid and corrupt (Hector, 1984). It was not until the inmates of Death Row in St. Catherine's District Prison took desperate action in 1974,

seizing a warder as hostage and demanding an audience with the Prime Minister, that any changes began to be introduced. A Commission of Enquiry, headed by Dr. Lloyd Barnett was duly set up and as a result of its recommendations a number of reforms were instituted (ibid., p.105). Oku Onuora, who was serving a ten year sentence for robbery, played his part in organising support for the rebels. He gave the name to the organization which spread from prison to prison; the Prisoners' United Liberation League, or PULL (ibid., p.88). As a result of agitation by PULL, an education programme for prisoners was set up. In addition, a Prisoners' Development Week, during which the crafts of prisoners were to be displayed and their creative writing publicly performed, was introduced. Prisoners had the opportunity to go outside and speak at schools and other gatherings, and "events took place on both sides of the wall" (ibid., p.105). It was in this increasingly liberal climate that Oku Onuora, whose poetry performances had aroused immense feeling inside the prison, was granted permission to perform to the public under the auspices of P.E.N. International on 15th February 1977. That performance caused such a sensation that an intense campaign got under way to secure his release. In an unprecedented decision in 1977, Oku was granted a pardon.

Contradiction and paradox characterise this whole area of Jamaican life during the Manley period. In an attempt to stem the flood of guns pouring in from Miami with a view to destabilizing the socialist government (Beckford & Witter, 1982, p125) and the consequent eruption of violence, Manley imposed a rule of 'Heavy Manners' (officially adopted as the re-election slogan of 1976). In 1974 legislation was introduced which made mere possession of a gun punishable by a life sentence. A special Gun Court executed summary justice and became an object of profound dread for the ghetto youth, who were most likely to end up within its confines.

Yet here too the cultural programme went ahead. Michael Smith was a regular visitor to the Gun Court, where he organized drama sessions. The Gun Court Cultural Movement won several awards with its plays (including Jamaica struggle (1978), The Messiah (1979) and Cudjoe (1980)) entered in the drama section of the annual Jamaica Festival. It is made up entirely of young people serving life sentences. (Omotoso 1982, p.85).

#### Ghetto culture takes a lead

Some of the profoundest statements about the society were being made through reggae music. The music in itself contained a powerful drive and tension. The lyrics increasingly combined the Rastafarian sense of history and mystical sense of self-worth with radical political sentiments inspired by the liberation struggles in Africa and, more indirectly, the Cuban revolution. The Wailers, i.e. Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Bunny Livingstone, brought together this combination most powerfully, set against their harsh personal experiences of living in Trench Town (part of the West Kingston ghetto) and expressed in a new, much heavier rhythm (Catch A Fire, 1973). It was from this time that reggae music began to gain international recognition as the power of both lyrics and music came to be almost universally appreciated. International recognition brought a new source of national pride, and naturally gave reggae artists authority and influence.

The ghetto poets, like all their peers, were steeped in reggae music. They had grown up with it in their communities, from the early days of the sound systems: large, mobile record and speaker systems designed for outdoor dances. D.J.'s became local stars in their own right, striving to attract people to their sound by broadcasting their own styles of verbal improvisation across the neighbourhood. The early D.J.'s specialised in rhythmical rhymes which appealed primarily to the

ear. Their verbal displays were one of the major influences on the ghetto poets. Some D.J.'s began reflecting the serious philosophical and political tone encouraged by Rastafarianism. One such, Big Youth, was particularly respected as a performer and commentator.

Count Ossie, a Rastafarian leader whose drumming orchestra formed the core of the legendary musicians' group called Mystic Revelation of Rastafari (MRR), was deeply revered. He established a precedent of setting up a camp, at 31 Aadastra Road in East Kingston, around the group. People were welcome to listen or join in with drumming or other musical sessions.

Brethren still reminisce fondly on those early days when university intellectuals and handcart pushers, musical novices and virtuosos, holy men and charlatans, men of professions and men of questionable employment met and interacted under a banner of mutual respect and peace. This was the way Count Ossie ran his camp. (A.P.I., n.d.)

It formed an important centre for cultural events, as well as providing a focus and support for the community. Some reggae musicians who became successful were to do likewise. Third World, a reggae band which appealed to a very wide section of the international market, established a centre called Zinc Fence on the edge of New Kingston. This provided an important grassroots cultural venue. Third World or Cedric 'Im' Brookes' United Africa would provide accompaniment to a number of top reggae artists, and poets performed with or without music. They were democratic affairs, in which humble artists performed alongside the famous. Often there was an entrance fee of \$5, but sometimes concerts were free. Cedric Brookes, mentioned above, has also played a significant role as a 'bridge' between the ghetto and more established cultures. He has played as a session musician with reggae artists since 1962, is an accomplished jazz saxophone player, and a master drummer. He teaches African and Caribbean traditions at the School of Music. His horn section joined with Count Ossie's drums to form the MRR. He has his own centre in East Kingston,

which is another lively venue for roots cultural events.

During this time the ghetto poets were earning little money. More often than not performers were expected to give their services free. As the poets increasingly worked with reggae music, their commercial potential grew. Oku Onuora claims to be the first poet actually billed to perform at a big reggae concert. In 1978 he performed on the same stage as Bob Marley and Peter Tosh at the One Love Peace Concert. Performing to mass audiences was a means to a "handsome fee" (Onuora, 1982). He coined the expression Dub Poet which immediately provided an attractive, reggae-associated image. In 1979 his first record was released, and sold well. Mutabaruka (another poet from the ghetto who had enjoyed considerable recognition in the early 1970's, and then spent some years in a rural retreat) and Michael Smith also made records. Michael Smith's 'Mi Cyan Believe It' was probably the first to be heard in Britain in any numbers. The market in Europe was ripe. The comparable work of Linton Kwesi Johnson (based in Britain) was enjoying so much popularity in Britain, France, Holland and Jamaica that he had established his own record label and was in a position to help promote other poets from the Caribbean. There was an enthusiastic response to Jamaican dub poetry from Holland and France.

#### The post-Manley, post-Marley era

The opening up of commercial possibilities and wider audiences abroad coincided with a drastic change of political climate at home. In November 1980, after the most violent campaign in Jamaica's history during which over 750 people died (Manley, 1982 p.194), Michael Manley's P.N.P. was electorally defeated. The new J.L.P. government formed by Edward Seaga was strongly pro-American, pro-free enterprise, and prepared to make many concessions to secure the friendship of the United

States. (Beckford & Witter, 1982, pp. 125, 132). The climate was not conducive to poets with messages of revolution and protest. The population was disillusioned by the fact that P.N.P. performance had rarely measured up to promises and rhetoric. In addition, Seaga had powerful financial backers.

Another demoralizing factor was the tragic, untimely death of Bob Marley, also in 1980. The mass of the population was in deep mourning for over a year. Increasingly Marley was spoken of as 'The Prophet', his posthumously-released 'Redemption Song' regarded as a last life-line in a situation of increasing hopelessness. The loss of Marley was soon reflected in reggae music. The political and mystical themes gave way to the lewd lyrics (dismissed by Rastafarians and radicals as slackness) of D.J.'s like Yellowman, who clearly oriented his material to commercial success.

Venues for poetry performance were less available. Zinc Fence was closed for long months, with Third World out of the country. The only major outlet at home was the annual 'Reggae Sunsplash' festival, held at Montego Bay. Meanwhile, opportunities were opening up in Europe. The way forward for survival was clear; tours in Europe, and the marketing of poetry on record. With opportunities for live performance severely curtailed at home the identity of the Dub Poet became more closely aligned with the recording industry.

#### Section two: what do we mean by Dub Poetry?

It was Cku Onuora who originally promoted the term Dub Poetry early in 1979 (Morris, 1983a). It was a recognition of common characteristics in the work of young poets who had emerged into public notice in the late 1970's. They were integrally part of Kingston's youth culture, which embraced reggae music, the Rastafarian philosophy, way of life and mode

of speech, and a political perspective dominated by black nationalism and/or socialism. Oku Onuora has described Dub Poetry thus: it "is not merely putting a piece of poem pon a reggae rhythm; it is a poem that has a built-in reggae rhythm." So even when the poem is performed without any reggae music accompaniment, "one can distinctly hear the reggae rhythm, coming out of the poem". (ibid., p.189).

Some of the poets who have been linked under this term have raised objections, feeling that it limited public perceptions of their work. Mutabaruka expressed this opinion in an interview with Paul Bradshaw (NME 30.10.82). Onuora, however, feels that the term adequately encompasses his range.

When we talk about dub poetry we're talking about a specific kind of Jamaican poetry. A Jamaican poetry utilizing the popular rhythm, the popular speech of the people now. (Onuora, 1981a).

By juxtaposing the phrases "the popular rhythm" and "the popular speech of the people now", Oku suggests that the contemporary rhythms and style of speech are inseparable from the rhythms of reggae music, which constitutes the most obvious form of "popular rhythm". Many of Oku's poems are composed in standard English, yet their content and style evoke the special tension which is embodied in reggae music. This is almost inevitable given the degree to which the music permeates the consciousness of ghetto youth.

Dramatization is a central factor in the poets' delivery. Three originators of the concept, Onuora, Michael Smith and Noel Walcott, all trained at the School of Drama. All of them have spent time on increasing the overall stage (and recording studio) impact of their work. Mervyn Morris has commented:

Dub poetry on the page is often little more than the script for a performer already familiar with his own material. Since the arrangement of lines does not often guide us into the rhythms, it is often difficult to receive the poem before one has heard it well delivered. (1983a, p.190).

In seeking to grasp the fullness of the poets' meaning, we do them a disservice if we simply consider text separate from its performance context.

Dub Poetry is almost invariably protest poetry, concerned with the miserable conditions of Jamaica's poor. Rastafarianism has brought the themes of black pride, persistent 'slavery', and a nostalgia for the African heritage. The songs of Bob Marley and Peter Tosh have inspired a revolutionary perspective which strongly identifies with the African national liberation struggles.

Improvisations or toasts by dub D.J.'s like U-Roy were a principle source of inspiration for the new poets. U-Roy was, according to Carl Gayle, a "true original" (Davis & Simon 1983, p.114). Distinctive for the speed of his deliveries, and his wild shrieks and interjections, U-Roy brought a new 'edge' to rock-steady music in the late 1960's:

Ooh Aah Flashin my whip, flashin my whip  
You gotta move, you gotta move  
I'm here to seperate a soul from the wax (Good God)  
So you can go to the wicket people an get yourself a ticket  
Smile a while an give your face a rest  
Raise your arms to the ones you love best, maybe I can do the rest

Towards the end of 1965 a number of records were released which had rhythm tracks only. This was purely accidental, the result of a horn soloist failing to turn up at the recording session (Clarke, 1980). These riddim solos became a popular basis for the D.J's toasts. Experimentation led to the 'dubbing in' of extra guitar rhythms and percussion and the use of echo, reverberation and fade-outs to enhance the basic material. The bass line became ever more powerful and dominant. It became convention to release a dub version as the 'B' side of every instrumental or vocal single. (Clarke, 1980, ch.6, Davis & Simon pp.111 ff., 1983).

The poetry of Michael Smith and Mutabaruka contains linguistic and rhythmic elements which are not derived from the ghetto youth. Smith is sensitive to older, rural traditions and reflects the speech styles of other generations with attitudes different from his own. Mutabaruka has often used standard English, and an urbane, sceptical tone suggesting detachment. He has said quite categorically that he does not wish to simply write "ghetto and ghetto and ghetto" (1980b). He is attracted more to the realms of mysticism and philosophy than are the other poets. We can see elements in their work which link Michael Smith to the tradition of Louise Bennett, and Mutabaruka to the more established realm of contemporary Caribbean poetry. The work of Oku Onuora, Mutabaruka and Brian Meeks is more page-oriented than that of Michael Smith. Oku and Muta show a tendency to minimalism in their earlier work, reflecting Black American influences; some work by Sonia Sanchez, for example. Other Black American poets read by the Dub Poets include Nikki Giovanni, LeRoi Jones and Don L. Lee. At the School of Drama, Smith, Onuora and Walcott studied Langston Hughes' use of jazz and blues, and began consciously to incorporate musical ideas into their composition. Onuora's use of word-breaks to create multiple meaning suggests the influence of Brathwaite.

Dub Poetry has developed mainly from two urban oral traditions; the D.J., who used formulaic structures as a basis for verbal improvisation, and the more melodic articulators of Rastafarian philosophy like Bob Marley and Peter Tosh. Both traditions are styles of reggae music. Garth White, a respected authority on reggae and Jamaican popular culture, emphasises this connection through his terms singer-poet, referring to artists like Bob Marley and Big Youth, and drama-poet, describing the heightened deliveries of Oku Onuora, Michael Smith and others. Dramatic delivery is a distinctive feature of Jamaican dub poetry. The dread image of the poets is significant, as is their distinctive urban Creole, which

is identified by Velma Pollard (1980) as Dread Talk. Like so many terms referring to 'schools' of art, Dub Poetry is a useful shorthand, so long as we do not allow it to obscure the diversity of the poets which it embraces, and of their work.

### Section three: Dread Talk

The language used by the dub poets employs a wide spectrum of Caribbean usage, but is distinctively characterized by Dread Talk (DT), as defined by Velma Pollard (1980, 1983). She describes it as "a comparatively recent adjustment of the lexicon of Jamaica Creole to reflect the religious, political and philosophical positions of the believers in Rastafari" (1983). The adoption of Dread Talk represents a radical shift in perspective from the received values of Jamaican society. Pollard describes this shift as "the forceful creative turn of words against English, the language used by the oppressor to 'increase confusion'." (ibid) The Rastafarian attitude, profoundly suspicious of anything European, has upended the view of Creole as 'bad English', expressing confidence in that language which is closest to the African heritage, and which resists the "lies and deceits" of the slavemaster's tongue.

Rastafarians are extremely creative, in music, painting, crafts; but their highest creative achievement has been in the extension and modification of a language, transforming it into a powerful vehicle for expression of their experience and philosophy. The Word is perceived as power. Words must therefore be used with care and awareness. The emphasis is on sound rather than the written word. A word must have phonological, as well as semantic, truth. Thus, international is regarded as a phonological contradiction; the true word should be outernational. Oppress, similarly, is adjusted to downpress. As Pollard comments,

"...the man who is making the words is a man looking up from under."  
(1980, p.32).

To understand the significance of Dread Talk, one must understand the concept and experience of Dread. Dread is the most pervasive, ambiguous and powerful of the Rastafarians' "small but pointedly relevant lexicon of normative-descriptive word-symbols" (Nettleford, 1978, p.201). Word-symbol is an apt term, because expressions such as dread, Haile Selassie-I and all the other I-words (Nettleford, *ibid.*) symbolize a cluster of meanings which have developed out of years of collective reasoning and meditation. Gordon Rohlehr described Dread thus:

...that quality which defines the static fear-bound relationship between the "have-gots" and the "have-nots". It is the historic tension between slaver and slave, between the cruel ineptitude of power on the part of the rulers, and introspective menace and dream of Apocalypse on the part of the down-trodden. This is why Dread remains a constant quality in Jamaica's creative life. (1972, pt.2, p.139).

When Rastafarians were first seen in Kingston, their wild appearance and long, knotty hair evoked feelings of profound dread in many citizens. The official response was to persecute them ruthlessly, but this only increased their sense of righteousness. Identifying with Haile Selassie as 'the conquering lion of Judah', they wore their locks with pride, as a lion's mane, in defiance of the contemporary scorn for Negroid 'bad hair'.

The language of Dread Talk is apocalyptic (Smith et. al. 1960, p.27). The Bible forms the central text of the movement, and is constantly studied. Rastafarian biblical interpretations are rooted in the history and experiences of New World Blacks, and a strong propensity for metaphor has developed. The experience of the black diaspora is identified with the fate of the Children of Israel. The sojourn of black people in the West is captivity in Babylon. Babylon is another word-symbol, meaning at its most specific the police and army, but also

describing alternatively, anyone who is identified with 'the system'; international White Power; the capitalist system; any form of materialism, generally dismissed as vanity. The Rastafari movement draws mainly on the Old Testament and Revelation for its symbolism. Rastafarians respond particularly to the prophecies of the destruction of Babylon and all evil empires, and the redemption of the poor and righteous.

All this significance (historical and contemporary) must be absorbed if we are to understand the full weight of Michael Smith's words:

Babylon on I right  
Babylon on I lef  
Babylon in front of I  
an Babylon behine I  
an I an I alone  
inna di middle  
like a Goliath with a sling shot  
('Goliath')

Through the fusion of David and Goliath, the poet simultaneously conveys vulnerability and strength, which characterizes dread.

I-words are the most characteristic and original aspect of Dread Talk. The use of the I as the first person pronoun (unchanging in every case) distinguishes DT from Jamaica Creole, where the first person pronoun is usually mi. Owens (1976) comments:

The Rastas...would seem to perceive this creole pronoun 'me' as expressive of subservience, as representative of the self-degradation that was expected of the slaves by their masters. It makes persons into objects, not subjects. (p.65).

This reasonable interpretation suggests that the conscious Rastafarian adoption of the I represents an assertion of the innate worth of the individual. The expression I an I ('we') generally refers only to Dreads. It is a sense of the collective which pointedly accords each member equal value as 'another I'. Sometimes I an I is used as a first person singular.

Given the importance attached to the I, the Roman numeral sometimes

attached to the Ethiopian Emperor's title was interpreted as Haile Selassie-I. This title confirmed that their God was a man just like them, and what is more, was one and the same with each one of them. I was equated with eye, with vision. It was noted that Se-las-sie began and ended with see. The Rastafari does not express opinions; he/she sees (or, more characteristically, sight) the truth. When looking for assent, the Rasta asks, seen? Many words have their first syllable changed to I to denote their association with dread culture. Thus we have I-shence and I-llie (incense and collie) both being words for ganja, or marijuana. Ethiopia is often referred to as I-thiopia, while the last syllable of Rastafari is always pronounced like the first person pronoun. Because of the non-aspirated 'h' common in Jamaica Creole, I can also mean high, as in 'the most high'. Haile, pronounced 'Iley', signifies highly (Owens, p.67). Through ganja and meditation, the Rastafari can attain the 'I-est Ites'. All these qualities of Dread Talk form an essential part of the meaning of dub poetry.

#### Section four: the work of the Dub Poets

##### MICHAEL SMITH

#### Part one: biographical background

Michael Smith was born on September 4th 1954 in Woodford Park, Kingston. He grew up in Jones Town, West Kingston. His mother was a domestic worker, his father a mason. He attended many schools (Jones Town, Denham Town Primary, Kingston College, St. Georges Extension, Lincoln College) but felt he learned more from the street than he did in a classroom:

Me no too love school still...Me really did learn more amongst me own bredren them, because we used to sit-in and reason and read whole heap, whole heap, whole heap, from me just small... (Smith, 1981a)

It seems he was a bit of a 'handful' as a young boy and was sent to his grandparents in the country to "cool out". It was from such experience that his sensitivity to older traditions, the different rhythms of country life and people, and a respect and affection for old people developed. All through his youth, the ear of this essentially oral poet was being 'educated' and, as his talent reached fruition, fragments of his aural life were channelled and fashioned into performance poems which ranged widely over Jamaican experience.

Michael had a compulsion to write from an early age. By the time he was fourteen he had an exercise book full of his poems. His father opposed his writing, on the grounds that he would never earn a living by it, and burned the exercise book. This did not discourage his son from writing poetry, but only convinced him of the value of memorizing perfectly everything he composed.

The first poem which brought him any recognition was composed in anger provoked by a newspaper headline: 'Ian Smith Says No to Majority Rule'. He performed the poem at his local community centre in Golden Spring, Kingston, and it was received with considerable excitement. Dennis Scott, one of Jamaica's leading poets and dramatists, and principal of the Jamaica School of Drama, came to Golden Spring. Though Michael was much in awe of this man, with his "bal' head, bare foot", who had just won the Commonwealth prize for literature, he was persuaded to show him a poem he had in his pocket. Tom Cross, Scott's deputy, was there too, and continued to visit the centre, watching Michael perform, and giving him occasional advice.

Michael Smith entered a workshop competition for a Social Development Commission scholarship, held at Jones Town. He won, and as a

result earned a place at the Jamaica School of Drama in 1975. No money was eventually forthcoming, so he was obliged to find work - at one time as a gardener - and attend on a part-time basis. In any case, he said, Dennis Scott and Carroll Dawes (former Director of School of Drama) "were cool about the money", illustrating the liberal climate of the times.

At drama school, Michael Smith learned techniques relating to use of the voice, body movement and characterization, all of which became integral parts of his poetry composition and performance. Honor Forde-Smith, one of his tutors, said: "Mikey used to work for hours on his voice, you know. He used to practise, he used to do all his voice exercises, very seriously...As well as he used to work on the rhythmic potential of his poetry..." (quoted in Morris 1985, p.51). He gained practice in improvisation, play-writing and direction. He produced his own play, The Yard in 1979 (Gleaner 29.11.79, 5.12.79, Daily News 21.11.79). His subject, as ever, was the trials and struggles of the Jamaican oppressed.

In 1977 he composed the poem which was to bring him national (and ultimately international) recognition: 'Mi Cyaan Believe It'. This poem, probably above any other, found an echo in the hearts of politically-conscious Jamaicans during this period. He became one of the most representative voices of the social and political challenge from the ghetto, expressing both its contradictions and revolutionary aspirations. Poets and politicians frequently shared the same platform. Michael was drawn into the sphere of political activism, becoming a member of the Communist Workers' Party of Jamaica (W.P.J.). He was very conscious that his work often evoked a warmer response from audiences than the speeches of politicians. This view combined a degree of egoism with a sensitive awareness that popular consciousness could best be touched by being one with it. He had ambitions as an artist and had difficulty reconciling

these with the constraints of party discipline. Eventually he was to resign his membership of the WPJ. In 1978 he performed as part of Jamaica's delegation at the 11th World Festival of Youth, held in Cuba.

Although he had achieved a considerable level of popular success, there was small financial reward and survival continued to be a struggle. He associated closely with musicians including Cedric Brookes and the band Third World, which was internationally successful. Michael hoped for such an escape from the constant threat of going hungry. In August 1981, while in Barbados as a member of the Jamaican artists' delegation to Carifesta, he met Linton Kwesi Johnson, who had developed a comparable form of poetry in Britain and was well-established in the media, with his own record company. The BBC was making a film about Kwesi Johnson and Carifesta, and Michael was asked to perform 'Mi Cyaan Believe It'. The performance created a considerable impact among those who saw it in Britain. As a result of this meeting, tentative plans were made for Michael to visit Britain the following year.

Johnson was true to his word, and the following March Michael Smith's first performance in London was one of the highlights of an international poetry reading that also included Edward Kamau Brathwaite, Jack Mapanje and Okot p'Bitek. (First International Fair of Radical, Black and Third World Books; poetry reading held at Camden Town Hall, 30.3.82). In the next two months, Smith performed at cultural and community centres all over England, recorded an album of his poetry (Mi Cyaan Believe It, 1982) with the reggae musician, Dennis Bovell (who is also closely associated with Johnson's work) and received coverage on radio and TV. He performed for UNESCO in Paris in November 1982. Later he toured in Britain with Gregory Isaacs, one of Jamaica's most popular reggae singers, and did further concerts in Amsterdam and Milan.

On August 17 1983, not quite 29 years old, Michael Smith met a

tragic and shocking death. On the evening of August 16 he attended a political meeting near his home addressed by the Minister of Education, Mavis Gilmour. He is said to have heckled her. The following morning he was in the same area and passed the constituency offices of the ruling party, the Jamaica Labour Party (J.L.P.). Four men picked an argument with him and began stoning him. He received two fatal blows; one to the forehead and one on the side of the head. At the arrival of two cars, the assailants fled, into the J.L.P. offices. There can be little doubt that it was a political killing. Morris comments: "...nothing I have so far read or heard supports the notion that Mikey Smith was killed because he wrote poetry, or because of the poetry he wrote." (1985, p.49). The ultimate cause was institutionalized political violence, for which the government has a responsibility.

The nature of Michael Smith's death inevitably casts a new significance on his life and work. We might compare the posthumous significance of the poetry of Roque Dalton, killed in the revolutionary struggle in El Salvador, or that of Christopher Okigbo, who died fighting in the Biafran war. Their words, in retrospect, produce prophetic reverberations, as here at the end of Smith's simple poem of dedication:

i  
shal not die  
a natural death  
but  
fighting

Mervyn Morris has stressed the "liberal humanist responses" (1983, p.190) in Smith's work. An examination of his themes and conclusions will confirm the general accuracy of this assessment. In Michael Smith's case it is form as much as content which carries a revolutionary, message. Careful consideration will therefore be given to the image the poet embodied in his total being as projected in performance; the way emotive devices were employed to direct audiences' responses; and the extent to

which context transformed the poet from commentator to active agent.

Part two: meanings beyond the text

A concentration on themes or on texts only partially conveys the significance of a Michael Smith poem. Of all the poets under consideration, Smith gave least attention to the form of words on the page. He conceptualized and practised composition more in musical than in literary terms. Many extra verbal and non-verbal messages were projected by the author in performance, and it was the combination of all these which constituted the meaning. These included his own physical appearance and the personal images he projected, his choice of language, his general stage presence, and the styles in which he delivered the poems.

In the first case, the question of who the poet was is extremely significant. There can be little question of separating text from author and regarding it as an autonomous object. The poet himself was very resistant to this idea.

One of my reasons for really saying my own poems is because I usually doubt that anybody could do it as good as how I do it. So if I write a poem and give it to somebody to read it, right, I'd be very impatient with them and say, "You not catching that...or you must let the word twist like this, and you must carry it out back like that...And I never yet found anyone with tolerance to really sit down and go through that. So I like read my poem myself. I don't like read other people's poems. And that's not out of selfishness, because I don't think I can do it like how they want do it. (Smith 1981c).

The person of the poet is an inseparable component of the poem and its correct interpretation. As with the other Dub Poets, it is significant in terms of his poetry's meaning that Mikey Smith was numbered among the non-privileged majority. He may have known more family security than many, but he was familiar with poverty. His extreme thinness emphasised his role as a sufferer. Like the majority of Kingston youth, he espoused the culture of street and yard, which included the smoking of marijuana and saturation in reggae music, and projected himself as a Dread. This

included (by 1981) locksing his hair and wearing a tam, a loose knitted cap with the Ethiopian colours of red, green and gold.

To be identified as a Dread often implies a secular orientation. However, Mikey became quite angry if it was ever suggested that he considered himself apart from the Rastafari movement. He would simply say, "Me an Rasta is very close." His instinct as a sufferer was alerted against any suggestion of division amongst them.

In the context of performance, the image becomes formalized as a persona, who can comment upon, and then bring to life, the sufferings of others. The author is simultaneously above the situation, in being able to present it as a piece of art, and yet completely identified with it. It was evident both in performance and in conversation that Mikey was acutely sensitive to other people's distress:

...me does not say, 'Boy, a me-one a feel aware.' Me feel seh anything me feel, any, everybody feel it too...Ca' me feel hungry tonight, me know seh a next man out there a feel hungry tonight...Me know seh anybody one out there feel it, so me feel it too. (Smith 1981a)

This sensitivity to a collective experience is the source of a degree of passion exhibited on stage which is not captured in the printed word. In the last months of his life, Mikey was receiving treatment from the psychiatrist, Freddie Hickling. It was the almost inevitable outcome of being extremely 'thin-skinned' in a harsh and tragic environment. Such stresses moved his performances to an electric intensity. At the same time he worked with a light touch, making frequent changes of pitch, rhythm and tone, while he moved about the stage with natural ease (despite a disability stemming from a childhood accident). His words derived additional authority from the professionalism he had gained from his drama school training.

Of all the performance poets, Mikey is the most representative of the oral street culture. His composition owed little to formal education.

He wrote poems down, but with little idea of formal arrangement. In a sense, he felt he was 'not qualified' to arrange his words formally on paper:

I write poems and I put it out and what have you. After that the process is finished. I can't do any more. I give it to somebody who's professional and know the stuff, like Mr. Morris, who know what he's doing and who take it on from there and carry it to another stage. But I don't mess with that. That is real trespassing, you know. (Smith, 1981c).

Mikey did not even rely on the written version of his poems as 'memory-jerkers'. The experience of his father burning his adolescent poems had served to reinforce a common grass-roots attitude to the written word, as being far less permanent than words that are committed to memory. Thus I was told that although the police had ransacked and bulldozed the Rastafarian stronghold of Back a Wall in Kingston they could do no harm to the faith, because the bredrin had committed all the dogma to memory. Mikey reflected the same principal when he said that to destroy his poems, "you got to smash the finger, you got to smash the head" (1981c).

Mikey's method of composition also located him firmly in the oral tradition. He enjoyed and listened carefully to the speech and the human and non-human rhythms of street and bus. The process of composition usually began with a rhythmic phrase. In the case of 'Mi Cyaan Believe It', Mikey picked up the title phrase on the streets and identified it as a general expression of people's anxiety and helplessness in the face of a visibly deteriorating situation.

In other cases, a rhythm came first, and various words were tried out until a phrase which embodied the mood and sentiment both semantically and musically was found.

...sometimes a rhythm come to me first (clicks finger). You know, is a rhythm. An me say, Dem make me feel nice, you know, feel nice. An then you try remember the rhythm, an one time me go home, an me say, 'Bwoy, cyaan take it inna Babylon, da da da, Cyaan take it inna Babylon', an then you build on to 'that, build on to that, build on to that, and catch more breaks and the bridges. Just like how a musician would work out... (1981a)

The consciousness embodied in Dread Talk communicated widely in the society and provided symbols around which the youth could find a common identity. Michael Smith handles it with a light touch - a few distinctive words and phrases within constructions which are largely traditional Jamaica Creole. DT 'stretches' JC in the sense that it is oriented towards philosophical discourse. On the other hand, JC is more flexible in tone, accommodating a wide range of emotions, including humour, for example. While DT has developed to communicate perceptions largely identified with the youth, JC does not limit the discourse to any generation or group. Thus JC is the code which Michael naturally adopts as he seeks to convey the multitude of voices of the Jamaican masses.

Smith expresses his affection for older Jamaicans in his adoption of their idioms. He goes so far as to express sentiments which he does not share. He respects his mother's view because of who she is, and expresses it in her terms:

She never business bout Africa  
much less fi go like Rasta  
an she woulda wuk night an day  
meck sacrifice an pray

He consciously appreciated the language of older people, especially in the country, where the imagery is richest. One phrase he cherished was the description of a woman's face as "flat like a broad-ankle market woman" (1981c). It was not so much any precise image that was conjured up but the graphic extension of the insult which he enjoyed.

Once Jamaica Creole is the vehicle of expression, it takes little to trigger off laughter in a Jamaican audience. It is a conventional expectation. Mikey consciously took his audience through a range of emotions in his poems and used laughter as a release, but not one which would reduce the impact of his protest. For example:

Mi daughter boyfren name is Sailor  
an im pass through de port like a ship

is witty, and inevitably brings forth a burst of laughter, but the force of the message is not lost, in fact may be reinforced by the memorability of the phrase. Smith himself commented: "...an them realize, them realize and them laugh. But them think, them think whole heap." (1981b). Thus he uses conventional responses, but to his own purposes.

His very receptive ear, and his conscious desire to reflect a multitude of voices made him a repository of oral tradition. His sources were eclectic. "The black bud" (bird), for example, features in rural tradition as a symbolic representation of poor black folk. In this poem - despite its urban vision - economy, balance and traditional imagery lend a proverbial quality:

clot, clot a wrap wi	[cloth, cloth bandages our wounds
cry-cry pickney	tearful children are still crying,
still a cry	the black bird
black	is a tough and clever bird -
bud	hard to kill]
a	
cunny bud	
hard	
fi	
dead	

Smith used a children's tradition surrounding first teeth to create a powerful image of loss, and expectation betrayed:

For the teacher man know it  
But im nah tell de sheep  
Dat Ratta Ratta no bring back new teet'

The poem ('Say Natty Natty') is principally about a 'Dread' who is prepared to sell out his culture to tourism. The teacher can be equated with the imperialist countries, especially the United States, which sends down tourists in their thousands to Jamaican resorts. The students, or 'sheep' are unconscious Jamaicans who accept what the more dominant and calculating society gives or withholds. The message that "Ratta no bring back new teet'" means that what has been lost will not be replaced. When

children lose a milk tooth, they throw it over a roof top and call on 'Ratta' (a character commonly found in Anansi stories) to replace the tooth. The dominant culture (the teacher) is conscious that the undefended culture (the sheep) will be destroyed, but is indifferent. This is an extremely inventive reworking, using a child's vehicle chosen for its imagery and urgent rhythm and fusing it with a sophisticated understanding of the relationships between culture and power. The teacher image and the use of nursery rhymes in a rhythmic chant were part of the style of a D.J. called AlCapone:

Teacher, teacher I beg yu ring de bell  
teach the children teach dem how to spell  
...r-a-t rat, m-a-t mat, c-a-t cat...  
(Davis & Simon 1983, p.115)

These uninteresting lyrics were nevertheless rhythmically exciting and may have inspired Smith's much more elaborate (and strongly rhythmic) concept.

Mikey Smith spoke with a slight irony that was not apology of "our infantileness", by which he referred to the inclination to "rally round the repetition of a phrase." (1981c). Delight in sound for its own sake is probably the major key to his popularity. The sound that emitted deep from his belly, usually represented as "LAAAWWWD..." in the poem 'Roots', was claimed by Edward Kamau Brathwaite to have been inspired by the Honda S90 motorbike so popular with the more affluent Dreads! (Brathwaite, 1984, p.46). But even where sound is enjoyed for its own sake, it is never devoid of meaning:

bap si kaisico she pregnant again  
bap si kaisico she pregnant again

The 'nonsense words' are from a children's game ('bap si kaisico, pinda shell'). It suggests the suddenness and easiness with which tragedy can befall ('baps' meaning as suddenly as a blow or collision), and ironically surrounds the event in frivolity. The carefree associations of

the child's game are contrasted with the reality of an unwanted pregnancy.

The use of music determined the nature of a performance. Mikey Smith used music sparingly. His only regular musical accompaniment was a Congo drum in his performance of 'Roots'. His own voice quality, and the variation of rhythm, pace and pitch which he employed, made his performances intrinsically musical. Mikey had worked with the band Third World on developing an instrumental dimension to his poetry, which promised to further enhance the work - words and music complementing each other. Because of Smith's irregular use of rhythm, the music needed the same fluidity of structure. This was beginning to be achieved - the result of a close sympathy between the artists. However, Michael's essays into performance with music sometimes resulted in the tyrannical domination of a regular rhythm, into which he attempted to squeeze and shape his phrases. By and large, the overall impact, both in terms of intelligibility and of meaning conveyed through sound, was reduced by the introduction of instrumentation. This is even the case, to some extent, with his one recorded album.

Context is another significant factor in determining the meaning of a poem in performance, and the nature of the performance. During the Manley period, the Dub Poets' work had a specifically political context, and Smith, like Cku Onuora and Brian Meeks, performed an overtly political role. In the 1980's, that role had been rejected, or had been denied him by changed political circumstances. A performance for a community audience in Montego Bay (1981) was starkly dramatic, involving a good deal of movement. Smith, dressed in a West African indigo-printed dashiki, used his gaunt body to stalk, spider-like, or to freeze into angular attitudes which signalled both pain and challenge. A spotlight emphasised the starkness, while his use of the hand-held microphone

suggested an easy and professional showmanship. The audience was small, but engaged, and it was clear that no energy was being spared by Smith in this performance. By contrast, a Sunday morning reading at the university was a very quiet affair. Mikey leaned against a post and recited the poems almost as if in a trance. In between poems, he established an easy rapport with the almost entirely female audience, gently mocking the situation and his own sense of discomfort in it:

(The performance depends on) the mood of the audience. Like, this audience now is a nice little ah...I'd be very easy...If it was a different audience it would be a different reading. It wouldn't be the same, I can tell you. (1981c).

The audience, initially apprehensive, relaxed and became more receptive, as their subsequent engagement in questions and discussion showed.

An international context again re-determined the impact and significance of Michael Smith's work. The response of the British Black audience at his first performance in London was rapturous. He was bringing experiences from 'back a yard' (*home*) in an intense and undiluted form. There were cries of recognition and delight. The audience responded instantly to the humour, tragedy and anger in his work. After this success, he subsequently became the subject of a BBC2 Arena programme 'Upon Westminster Bridge' (23.11.82), and performed on the John Peel Programme (BBC Radio One, 13.7.82). He began working on the record album with Dennis Bovell and Linton Kwesi Johnson. He was invited to perform in Paris by UNESCO. Suddenly, he had an enormously expanded audience. This had a new kind of political significance. Once again Michael Smith was able to move large numbers of people. This time it was not as a member of a mass movement, but as an individual, isolated by recognition, and separated from his Jamaican context. This change of circumstances was undoubtedly traumatic for him and may have contributed to his subsequent psychological illness. He was a voice exposing oppression and corruption in Jamaica on the international stage. To a

government deeply concerned with Jamaica's 'good image', this must have been embarrassing and unacceptable.

### Part three: Themes

#### a) Partisan politics

One of Smith's major areas of attack is the Jamaican political system, for which he adopts the popular cynical term "partisan pally-trix", suggesting that the system is shored up by corruption and deception. Certainly Jamaica's two-party system has served to create violent division within the oppressed classes.

Before the 1939-45 war, the Jamaican masses were united in their demands for radical changes from the British colonial administration. Differences amongst the 'brown' petit bourgeoisie were personified in the split between the two cousins, Alexander Bustamante and Norman Manley, who had jointly formed and led the People's National Party from 1938. After wartime internment, Bustamante left the PNP (probably with British prompting - Beckford & Witter 1980, p.62), taking with him the mass base, the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union. He established the conservative Jamaica Labour Party. The PNP, with Norman Manley now leader, had to find new areas of recruitment, and its active left wing made inroads amongst skilled industrial workers. Thus was created the basis for the debilitating sectarian divisions within the Jamaican working class.

Political power was based on a system of patronage. For poor supporters of either party the possibility of some job and housing in a government yard depended on having their leaders in power. (Koslovsky & Wilson, 1980). Districts within all urban areas became strictly associated with one or other party, and in the last decade have become no-go areas, at election time, for anyone of the opposition party, on

pain of death.

One very common theme in Michael Smith's work is his rejection of this political system. In 'Long Time', he characterizes underprivileged, non-partisan individuals as "dutty putty". 'Dutty' is the Creole word for earth. 'Dutty putty' suggests a low-status and easily manipulated person. Party activists persuade "dutty putty" that he is not "worthy"; joining their party will make him so. But joining a party creates divisions between neighbours. "Cause di next man/ Pon de odder side/ A de fence/ Join anodder party." The two neighbours are now pitched in battle against each other, and both ironically return to "dutty"; in other words end up dead.

An de bote a wi a chunky	[And both of us chuck it
Yuh auh si wi nuh lucky	Don't you see, we aren't lucky
Cause we bote bite de dutty	'Cos we both bite the dust]

This section is delivered at high speed, with only the end rhymes emerging clearly, suggesting the totally confused context in which the neighbours die. Smith's delivery frequently evoked laughter - the language and graphically frantic pace invited it. The poem ridiculed the predicament of the two neighbours, with a serious intent.

In the poem 'Mi Cyaan Believe It', one individual is deluded into thinking he has gained power and prestige through joining one of the major parties: "One likkle bwoy come blow im orn". But the poet looks on him "wid scorn":

an mi realize ow mi fine bwoy pickney	[and I realised how my fine
was a victim of de trix	lad was a victim of the tricks
dem call partisan pally-trix	they call partisan poli-tricks]

Posited against deprivation and in-fighting is the "yard/ pan de hill" (the 'yard on the hill', the secluded residence of the privileged). Forced to seek employment there, the man from the ghetto is called "bwoy" and told to "clean up de dawg shit". The clarity of the class consciousness in this poem, written in 1977, reflects the influence of

the WPJ and the PNP radicals, which was riding high in the wake of Michael Manley's re-election on a socialist programme in 1976.

A later poem, 'Goliath', composed in 1981, reflects a cynicism about socialist rhetoric which was prevalent in the period immediately succeeding Manley's electoral defeat in November 1980. A direct reference to Manley as "Joshua" (stemming from the singing of Revival hymns at political rallies, and the ascription of Biblical names to leading politicians - Sewell, 1979) condemns the failure of his government to fulfill the first priority for poor people: food in their bellies.

Joshua say oonu fi draw oonu belt tight  
Which belt when mi tripe did a come through mi mouth!

The belt has already been drawn so tight through hunger that it threatens to squeeze the guts out of the speaker's mouth. When, in the same poem, a woman is asked whether she believes in socialism, bitter with the experience of broken promises she replies, "NO SAH MI BELIEVE IN SOCIAL LIVING". In the prevailing talk of 1981, socialism was often dismissed as another of the "isms and schisms" which were perceived of as dividing the society.

If the social-ism of Joshua is rejected, so equally is the capitalism championed by Edward Seaga (of the JLP) who succeeded Manley as Prime Minister. Seaga promised that by establishing close ties with Washington he would be able to "deliver" the goods, that there would be money "jingling in people's pockets". In the grandiose, biblical terms characteristic of Jamaican politics, he promised the people Deliverance. In the same poem, 'Goliath', quoted above, a taunt is thrown at an impoverished JLP supporter:

Hi sah yuh get deliver?  
Wah happen yuh cahn answer?

The memorable image is then drawn of a potentially mighty force (Goliath) giving (with a sling shot) a deceptive impression of powerlessness:

An I an I alone inna di middle  
like a Goliath with a sling shot

Because I an I can be singular or plural, the meaning is ambiguous. It expresses the poet's simultaneous sense of isolation and identification with the oppressed; both 'I alone', and 'we together, alone'.

b) Pressure on the youth

A communal dance to dub music and a smoke of 'collie' (marijuana) provide the only respite for the ghetto youth from the eternal grind of hunger and insecurity. Yet they are breaking the law, and the state bears down on them heavily for seeking such relief. One minute they are comfortable in the context of a familiar, group-generated cultural setting, enjoying the DJ who is performing his own version (verbal improvisation) to a pre-recorded dub track, and the next, victims of a police raid, they are in custody:

One draw an wi shout  
Version  
Next ting wi know  
Dat we land in a station

One of the major indictments of the poet against the state is that "youthfull life/ Pay de penalty for politician/ Irresponsibility".

Many of Smith's poems are infused with a sense of Dread. This is expressed as a wariness in the youth - a deceptive impression of languor.

It was seven past nine  
daylight saving time  
when I decide fe step  
pon a corner  
smoke a spliff  
for de times a run stiff

The precision about the time, in a society little governed by the clock, gives the setting a surreal, fixed-in-time quality. It evokes the contained tension embodied by the observer as he smokes. This distancing of the self is the very opposite of peace. The reality Smith portrays is

of youth engulfed in an obscenity of urban poverty, reduced to competing with stray dogs for scraps ('Mi feel it').

c) Poverty in closeup

Michael Smith's imagery is not beautiful, but has the required impact. A man whose stomach "stretch out like a hammock" is forced, like he did as a child, to "henka pon im old lady frock" ('Mi feel it'). In another case, Smith describes the inhabitants of a yard:

ben up like exercise book      [bent up like exercise books  
sidung a wonder wha fe cook      sitting down wondering what to cook]

What makes these images powerful is that they are drawn from the meagre materials of ghetto life. Apart from ganja (marijuana), one other form of temporary solace is available to the poor and hungry; to "mek love pon hungry belly jus fi figet dis moment of poverty" (Goliath). But the consequences are pregnancy and the "calamity" of another mouth to feed. For urban lower-class women, successive pregnancies have been a certain route to drudgery, yet they have generally sought the temporary support of a man by 'making baby for him'. The experience of reproducing life thus becomes another of the traumas which relentlessly grip the poor. Yet a mother's love remains, an abiding positive in a scenario of horrors:

An if yuh no sleep  
Yuh muma no sleep  
An if yuh go die  
She beg God, let she die too  
('Say, Natty Natty')

Circumstances of unemployment and uncertainty about where the next meal is coming from lead sometimes to an attitude of aimlessness and passivity. A sense of going "no wey" grips the individual, who increasingly seeks oblivion, through ganja, sex, or in the last resort, suicide:

man a walk in a  
middle  
road fi mek car lick im  
doug so dat Government  
can tek him body

A common phrase, 'Government/ can tem him body' has many bitter implications. Here the man concerned is making a protest as he escapes from life. He is asserting his existence as an individual, demanding the government's recognition of him and of its responsibility, even if it is only to dispose of his body.

d) Redemptive vision

It is because he was close to the conditions he describes that Michael Smith conveys them so sharply. Nevertheless he used his poetry to express his defiance of those circumstances which oppressed him too. He finds reserves within his people and heritage with which to kindle resistance.

One of Smith's most popular poems, 'Roots', emphasises the importance of a sense of continuity. On the one hand this takes a personal level, which involved making cultural choices to develop a sense of ease or pride in the African heritage, such as learning to play drums, or wearing the clothes and natural hair styles which signify an 'African' orientation. On the other hand, an intellectual understanding of past and present "through science" is equally a part of the search for roots. Whatever the 'route', the common aim is to outgrow concepts of a "Wild/ Barbarian/ Savage/ Inhuman" past in order "T'accept dem blackness.../ An/ others/ as they are".

Yet all around him the poet sees people denying their culture. Delivered in one of his memorable rhythmic chants, he throws out a sarcastic challenge:



Most people think Great God will come from the sky  
Take away everything and make everybody feel high  
But if you know what life is worth, you will look for yours on earth  
And now you see the light, stand up for your right.

(The Wailers, 'Get Up, Stand Up', 1973b)

Smith concludes that violence is the inevitable consequence of oppression. He prophesies that a change will come about in the object of violence. In the past, the majority of victims have been poor people, striving amongst themselves for political patronage. Now, however, Michael Smith turns on the privileged and powerful and warns, "It goen go tek yuh." ('It a come'). And when revolution does break out, it will be both terrible and liberating. It will be the very reverse of the anarchy wreaked by the partizan hit-men on the ghetto:

An dem going badder	[And they'll be tougher
Dan dem gun man	Than the gun men
Dat a drive fear ina we	That drive fear into us
Few cripple	To cripple us]
I man	

"...badder/ dan dem gun man" is delivered with the pace and tone of a machine gun rattle. "I man" represents Smith and all the people he identifies with. Up to now they have been crippled by the fear of anarchic violence. Revolution for Smith represents the achieved "vision of tomorrow" (which in an early poem he had equated with the Cuban revolution):

Some a guh call it awareness  
An wi a guh celebrate it  
With firmness while others  
A guh call it Revolution  
But I prefer liberation  
Fi di oppress and dis-possess  
( 'It a come' )

"Awareness" (raised consciousness) and liberation of the oppressed are thus seen as essential correlatives of any revolution. As Mervyn Morris points out (Davis & Simon 1983, p.190), the vision is fundamentally rooted in humanitarian concerns:

if we waan say roots any at all  
we haffi stop wi muma from movin  
from yard to yard

In other words, before we can lay any claim to our heritage and history (roots), we have to achieve security for our loved ones.

Part four: an analysis of 'Mi cyaan believe it', based on a number of observations of the poem in live performance

'Mi Cyaan Believe It' brought Mikey Smith fame, and is widely regarded as one of the best examples of recent performance poetry. It is certainly one of the best-known. Its popularity rests as much on its aural qualities as its verbal content, enhanced by the poet's voice, and manipulation of tone and pitch.

Smith pointed to the tendency of Jamaicans to "rally round the repetition of a phrase" (Smith 1981c). This is a common tendency in oral traditions. European ballads employ refrains to give a sense of structural firmness and enable audience participation. E.A. Rosenberg (1970a, 1970b) has pointed to Black American preachers' use of regularly repeated phrases to serve a similar purpose. Rhythmically, Smith's poem begins on an up-beat, with a rallying triplet:

Me seh me cyaan believe it  
Me seh me cyaan believe it

Syllable length has been indicated in the traditional manner, with heavy accents indicated by bold type. The rhythm throws emphasis on the Creole cyaan (can't), and consequently on the kind of language the poet is using. This unequivocal announcement that the Creole is going to be broad has its own piquance. The result is a strongly stressed chant delivered with considerable volume and intensity. The words of the chant, as we have observed, were a phrase commonly heard by Smith. The rhythm and distinctive style of delivery which he brought to it created an

expression whose repetition was particularly satisfying to audiences.

The poem is largely an organization of fragments gleaned eclectically from oral sources. These sources include children's games and nursery rhymes, situational clichés, street talk, jokes and traditional song. The use of borrowed phrases - traditional and contemporary - emphasises that these are experiences widely shared through Jamaican history. It is a representative rather than personal statement. What is personal is the style in which it is delivered.

The poem in performance is highly rhythmic, but not regularly so. Reflecting the pattern of the verbal content, the rhythms are fragmentary, echoing song and rollicking nursery rhymes - with a slightly syncopated beat:

an me realize ow me fine bwoy pickney  
was a victim of de tricks  
dem call partizan pally-trix  
an me ban me belly  
an me bawl

Rhyme is also used as a cohesive component, but again, not regularly. The poem contains a tension throughout between the shaping and constraining effects of rhyme and metre, and eruptions into freeform dramatic sketches when the poet fully exercised his performing skills.

The opening of the poem is tightly packed with familiar oral fragments. It reflects, for example, the fashion initiated by the Jamaican D.J.'s who drew on nursery rhymes purely for their rhythmic quality in their verbal improvisations. Smith's poem, like Sparrow's 'Dan is the man in the van', uses the nursery rhyme to illustrate false consciousness:

... me naw go sidung pan igh wall like Humpty Dumpty  
me a face me reality

An individual who has found new self-importance in the party political machinery is described dismissively through the same kind of 'alien' imagery: "one lickle bwoy come blow im orn".

By contrast, the poet expresses his recognition that "all are involved!/ all are consumed!" (Martin Carter 1979, p.44) through a proverb which is clearly indigenous and has its origins in a tough environment: "waan good nose haffi run" - which roughly translated means, you have to risk a bloody nose if you want to achieve good. Quotation from a traditional song serves to illustrate that economic hardship and hunger are no modern and temporary condition:

what a night  
what a plight an we cyaan get a bite

The effect of placing an allusion to the pretty folk tune 'Linstead Market' in the context of a protest poem is to sharpen awareness to the full implications of its lyrics, which may have become blunted through familiarity.

After a return to the refrain, "an me cyaan believe it", there is a shift of rhythm and pace. A second major section oscillates between dramatic sketches and tightly-rhymed and metred sections which each time resolve back into the refrain. This exactly reflects Smith's musical analogy with bridges (structured links) and breaks (free improvisation). The first sketch (or break) introduces a new mood. The poet presents himself as a participant in a street-scene:

me hear one voice seh  
"who dat"  
Me seh "A who dat?"  
"A who dat a seh who dat when me a seh who dat?"

It is an old joke, and its intention is clearly to make the audience laugh. But it also suggests the wariness and uncertainty of ghetto life. Shrouded in darkness, presumably, the two protagonists in this vignette

signal threats while attempting to probe the identity of the other.

A second vignette takes the poet to the scene of a smart establishment in the hills. Again, the scene calls forth laughter, but this is partly in response to the harsh terms in which an exploitative and humiliating relationship is portrayed:

me hear "Hi, bwoy!"  
"Yes, Mam?" "Hi, bwoy!"  
"Yes, Mam?" "Yuh clean up de dawg shit?"  
"Yes, Mam."

Here, a colonial-type relationship is seen to persist. Even though the female speaker is probably a brown Jamaican she uses the term 'boy', used by the British to deny a common humanity with their black servants. The rhythmic 'reply' (in terms of the poem's dynamic) to this section reinforces the scenario of class exploitation. A domestic worker's job insecurity is compounded by sexual abuse:

Doris a moder a four	[Doris, a mother of four,
get wuk as a domestic	Got work as a servant
boss man move in	The boss moved in
<u>an bap si kaisico she pregnant again</u>	And...]

The innocence evoked by the rhythmic sound of the children's clapping game renders more painful the prospect of an unwanted pregnancy. (Asked why he often seemed to call his women characters Doris, Smith replied that it was a common name given to a donkey, suggesting that there was a parallel in the way both were used.)

The third and final sketch brings the poem to a dramatic climax in terms of sound and pitch as Smith evoked the panic and confusion of a fire outbreak (a common occurrence in urban areas):

who dead? You  
dead?  
Who dead? Me dead?

He ends in a wail, "Wooooeeteeeee." The horror of this incident is compounded by reference to the historic and terrible Orange Street fire of 1976, a politically-motivated act of arson. (Manley, 1982,p.138).

Anguish resolves back into the refrain, which offers hollow comfort in its evasion of reality - "me cyaan believe it".

The poem then winds towards the conclusion. The words suggest weariness and resignation, while the rhymes crowd one another, like the circumstances described:

Lawd, de oppress an di dispossess	[Lord, the oppressed and
cyaan get no res	dispossessed get no rest
what nex?	what next?]

This is followed by images of madness and disintegration ("Tek twelve from a dozen/ An see mi muma in heaven") before a return to the refrain, which now offers the only 'shape'.

Finally, the poet turns on the audience, accusing them for the mirth they have displayed during the performance:

Yuh believe it?  
How yuh fi believe it  
when yuh laugh  
an yuh blind yuh eye to it?

The poem is largely an arrangement of familiar phrases and fragments. The truths it contains should therefore be self-evident. One of the ironies being explored in the poem is that Jamaican audiences tend to respond to any portrayal of poverty (after all a majority experience) with laughter. Smith deliberately manipulates the conditioned response and then turns it into part of his meaning: that people's disbelief of what is in front of their eyes is part of the problem. His response to this situation is a groan - Lawwwwwwwd - emitted from the belly which evokes a well of weariness and strain as he states his communion with, and compassion for, the audience in their (hopefully) sharpened awareness: "me know yuh believe it".

OKU ONUORA

Part one: Biography

Oku Onuora adopted his present name during the late nineteen-seventies. It is based on two Igbo words. Onuora means 'the voice of the people', while Oku means 'fire', a nickname by which he was also known, reflecting friends' perception of him as a 'wild character'. He was formerly known as Orlando Wong. Born in Kingston on March 9th, 1952, Orlando was not yet five when his Chinese father left Jamaica. Oku has always spoken with the deepest respect and affection for his mother, who was a pillar of strength throughout his boyhood and youth. He attended Camperdown Extension and St. Georges Extension schools. A bright student, he was acutely aware of the gross disparities existing in Jamaican society. A rebellious personality is revealed by the fact that he was expelled three times during his school career. He left school in 1969 at the age of seventeen.

There would have been no problem about 'getting on in the world'. He worked for a time with the Bank of Jamaica (regarded as a very desirable job). In an interview he pointed out that his light skin colour was a potential asset in a society still bound by a colour-based hierarchy (May, 1981). However, this was not the route Oku chose.

Long before he left school he had been drawn to the Rastafari movement, particularly through the influence of a Rastafarian leader called Negus. Negus adhered to the religious tenets of the movement, but at the same time was actively involved in local community politics and took a keen interest in the liberation struggles of Mozambique, Angola and South Africa. Oku said,

"My introduction to the Rastafari movement came through my desire to be politically conscious" (1982). Before he left school he was attending Rasta camps where he was acquiring an international political perspective

which embraced Cuba, the struggles in Latin America and the ideas of Marx and Lenin as well as issues of African liberation. Oku worked closely with Negus. Together they established the Tafari school in the shanty town of Dunkirk, East Kingston. The school's purpose was to supplement the inadequate education which children were receiving in poor areas. They became the focus of political activity in their area. Oku was one of the riders who helped deliver the socialist and black nationalist newspaper Abeng to the communities.

In retrospect, he called it "a period of revolutionary adventurism for I." (Morris 1983c). He tired of demonstrations and painting wall slogans. He decided on a 'Robin Hood' course of robbery with the aim of channelling the money thus gained into his community. In 1971 he was arrested for the robbery of Rollington Town Post Office. He managed to escape twice, being shot on the second occasion. He only received hospital treatment shortly before his trial. In addition to the criminal charges, he was accused of being a Communist, a subversive, and an associate of Walter Rodney. He was sentenced to 10 years and 2 strokes of the tamarind switch. He said, "I always regarded myself as a political prisoner" (May, 1981).

He spent two and a half years in the dreaded St. Catherine District Prison (home of the gallows), and was the only inmate on his block who had not been condemned to death. He described it as having a "gruesome vibration" (Morris 1983c). In such circumstances, Ocuora demonstrated resilience and strength of mind:

..I had two choices; either to survive with my dignity, my consciousness intact, or be swallowed up in the shit, be broken - because that's basically what prison in most, all, societies are for. (1982).

His responses to the situation were two-fold. There was a growing level of militancy amongst the younger prisoners (Hector, 1984), and Oku played a part in the formation of the Prisoners' United Liberation League, or

PULL in 1974. An historic revolt took place inside St. Catherine during that period. Prime Minister Michael Manley responded to the prisoners' demand that he should visit the prison to hear their grievances. Among other prisoners, Onuora gave evidence to the Barnett Commission which was consequently set up. Following on the recommendations of the Barnett Commission, a parole system was established for the first time in Jamaica in 1976, and Prisoners' Councils were set up as a channel for communication between prisoners and staff. These were major achievements, which have created challenging contradictions within the prison system.

Oku's other means of keeping his sanity was through the writing of poetry. He began writing consistently during his first year of imprisonment. At first he was simply concerned to express his feelings about "the conditions that affected 90% of the people in Jamaica, especially the youths." He was more concerned with writing about the oppression within Jamaica as a whole than he was with the immediate confines of the jail. Poetry "was a way of escaping the ugly reality of the place, a way of occupying myself." (May, 1981). The poems were smuggled out to his mother, and friends including Barbara Gloudon, a journalist with the Sunday Gleaner, whose support "kept him sane" (Morris, 1983). Leonie Forbes, one of Jamaica's best-known actresses, read some of Oku's material on the radio, and passed it on to Mervyn Morris. In 1976 and 1977, his poems won three bronze medals and three certificates of merit in the prestigious Jamaica Literary Festival. His work achieved instant impact and popularity at the same time as its high literary merit was being recognized.

On the 15th February 1977 Oku Onuora was invited to read at the Jamaica centre of P.E.N. International (International Association of Poets, Playwrights, Editors, Essayists and Novelists). This was his third reading outside prison. His play, Confrontation, had been produced by

Charles Hyatt of J.B.C. Radio Theatre and broadcast. He was granted several visits to the studio to advise on the production, and was receiving relatively privileged treatment inside the prison. He arrived at the centre (Kingston Public Library) under guard. Mervyn Morris, introducing the reading, described Onuora as "already one of the most significant of Jamaican poets", and gave a list of journals where his work had been published: the Sunday Gleaner, the Poor People's Law Journal and the Creative Arts Centre's Arts Review. His poems were already with the publisher, Sangsters, and were due for publication as a book entitled Echo. The reading had an immense impact. The question of pressuring for his release was raised and given strong support. After serving 6 years, Oku Onuora was released on parole in September 1977, and was granted a scholarship to enter the Drama School.

In 1978 he participated with Michael Smith in the 11th World Festival of Youth in Cuba, as a "poet/dramatist" (Erathwaite, 1979). The same year, Michael Manley stepped up his campaign against violence, which was heightening instability and feeding a US press campaign arguing that Jamaica was too dangerous either for tourism or investment. The One Love Peace Concert, sponsored by the Rastafarian organization Twelve Tribes of Israel, at the National Stadium brought together major figures of reggae, including Bob Marley, to take a stand against political violence. Both leaders of the two main parties, Manley and Edward Seaga were there, and the climax of the concert came when Bob Marley clasped their hands together above his head. Peter Tosh participated, but bravely used the occasion to point an accusing finger at the leaders of what he called the "shitstem". (Davis 1979, p.268). Onuora participated, but shared Tosh's cynicism about the possibilities of a lasting peace. This became the subject of his poem 'Reflections in Red', where, echoing the words of Peter Tosh he declared:

dere can be  
no peace  
no peace  
until/until  
dere's equal rites  
equal rites an  
justice...tice...tice...tice...

After long years of imprisonment, Cku found it impossible to conform, even within the liberal atmosphere of the drama school. He was constantly involved in confrontations with the authorities (Smith 1981a). He 'dropped out' after one year. During his time there he was very creative. His collection, Echo, was produced as a "choreo-poetry drama" entitled Reggae Teata. He was also involved in the School of Drama's production of Journey, which dealt with experiences inside a prison. From the time he was freed, Cku performed at rallies and pop concerts with famous names of the reggae 'scene'.

In 1979 his first record, 'Reflections in Red', was released on the Tuff Gong label. In 1980 he went to Europe for the first time, performing at the One World Poetry Festival in Holland, and with Linton Kwesi Johnson in Britain. He made good use of the time to study the commercial possibilities for Dub Poetry which Johnson had developed. On returning to Jamaica, he established his own company, the Progressiv Aatis Muvmant, and brought out another record, 'Wat a Situashan' on his own Kuya label. Returning to Europe in September 1981, he divided most of his time again between Holland, where the Cultural Media Collective (based in Amsterdam) republished the Echo collection, and Britain. He remained to perform at the First International Bookfair of Radical, Black and Third World Books in March 1982, and toured centres up and down the country with Michael Smith over the next few months. His intention on returning was to transform the Progressiv Aatis Muvmant into a co-operative and to enter the realm of publishing.

Part two: Attitudes towards poetry

One of Onuora's major preoccupations has been how to communicate his political consciousness, and to stir a response. He discovered in prison that his poems, written initially for personal solace, had a very moving effect on fellow-prisoners. His success, in terms of communication, can be measured by the fact that he earned his release from prison, in the words of E. K. Erathwaite, "largely on the power, beauty and truth of his voice." (1979). He has always taken the position that he is not speaking with a personal voice. He had this to say at the poetry reading to the P.E.N. Club in February 1977:

Poetry is the most effective form of literature. It moves one's emotions, and stimulates one's thoughts quicker than prose. Thus it should be used to revive, stir, make one conscious of the state of the people. It should echo the people's thought, laughter, cry, sigh. That's what I personally believe poetry should do. I personally believe poetry should be functional. It should serve a useful purpose. Most people believe that poetry should speak of the finer things of life, but I don't really see it so. I believe that poetry should reflect the state of the people. We should use poetry to move people to really act, to change the way of life today. (Wong, 1977b).

Poetry could 'move one's emotions and stimulate one's thoughts quicker than prose' because it becomes a highly accessible medium when orally performed. (The accessibility of the novel, for example, is limited by the ability and willingness to buy, and the extent of literacy - highly significant factors in Caribbean society.) In addition he feels that there are particular qualities in poetry which make it for him the most effective means of communication:

It's really compressed emotions - it's like a spring that you squeeze between your hands, just waiting to be released. Once released, it just snaps out. It's explosive. It's like a bomb just waiting to be released. It's not the size but the effect, the impact it creates. And I do believe that poetry does this more than prose. The best prose, the prose that has the most impact, is really prose-poetry, written in that poetic vein. (1982).

Onuora's poetry at this stage was often very spare, sometimes almost abstract. It succeeds in maintaining a fine balance between appeal to the

intellect and appeal to the emotions. Like the other dub poets, he has never claimed that poetry in itself can effect change. Nevertheless, he has regarded it principally as a tool for popular communication, a means of informing people, and making them more aware of issues.

Oku has always taken the position that he is not speaking with a personal voice. Many of his poems are extremely personal statements, stimulated by, and addressed to, particular individuals who have had a major impact on his life. These include fellow-prisoners, artists and musicians, and several women who have touched him in different ways. But this is not the aspect of his work he would seek to stress.

For Oku Cnuora, poetry in the first instance had been simply a means of personal survival, a way of holding on to sanity and integrity in the dehumanising conditions of *St. Catherine District Prison*:

When I started to write seriously in 1971-72 in prison, although I had been writing on a helter skelter basis, I didn't have any hopes...of having my work published...I was doing this to vent my feelings, how I felt as an individual. They were personal observations and feeling. (1982).

So the discovery that his poems communicated powerfully to others came at a later stage, when "the brothers in prison were the people I gauged my work off" (May, 1981, p.25). Out of this communication came the recognition that his personal voice was also representative of all those either side of the 'thin line between freedom and jail' ('Tin Line', Wong 1977a, p.17). Relatively few of the poems dealt specifically with conditions directly inside the prison. Many more looked beyond to the deplorable conditions of the ghetto. Oku related a sense in his first new experiences of 'freedom' that little had really changed by being the other side of the bars; "Once oppression exist, one live in a prison." (Wong, 1977b). Images of beauty and love (prevalent in the poems) are the product of a strong inner sense of self refusing to be overwhelmed by ugliness and inhumanity.

Long years of confinement and isolation provided plenty of time for polishing his craft. Oku's poems can be enjoyed and thoroughly appreciated from the printed page without ever having been heard. He has continued to work at words that "carry a certain amount of sound within the written poetry and, at the same time, maintain that same flavour and feel within the oral tradition." (1981a).

Part three: themes.

Page references to poems can be found in Wong (1977a) and Onuora (1981d).

a) Reflections and echoes of the ghetto

The image of himself which Oku Onuora had most constantly promoted is as a mere voice echoing the experiences of the ghetto. Many of the poem titles express this; 'Reflection', 'Reflections in Red', 'Echo', 'A Slum Dweller Declares', 'A Message'. Sometimes images are self-consciously crafted and 'frozen' in quite a formal way. In 'Reflection' (p.2) this reinforces a nightmare quality:

Burnt-out houses  
tell tales  
of terrible nights  
mirrored in blood-  
shot eyes

The words evoke multiple meanings. The division of the word 'blood-shot' gives us "mirrored in blood", suggesting pools of blood in which the scene is reflected. That the 'blood-/shot eyes' merely "mirror" the scene suggests sightlessness, either through shock or, more literally, because they have been shot out. The sense of sightlessness is also mirrored in the "burnt out houses" which "tell tales" by their very vacancy.

'Retrospect' uses words even more sparsely. The poem divides into two halves of four lines each. Its beginning evokes elegance and beauty

perched on a branch  
of a leafless tree  
etched against  
a cloudless sky  
(p.7)

The reader is lulled into false complacency by the static quality and poetic diction. The second half rebounds with ferocity, signalled by a change in the language; use of the Creole term for vulture, johncrow, the non-standard "waitin", and Onuora's own powerful coinage, "humanscavenger":

a johncrow  
waitin  
for the humanscavenger  
to leave

Oku Onuora often succeeds in focussing our attention acutely on the extremities of urban poverty by using an element of surprise; raising our expectations in one way, and then demolishing them. The first two lines of 'His Daily Journey' suggest the security of a routine. It is only at line five that we understand we are observing the methodical behaviour of a man maddened by slow starvation and his own awareness.

his daily journey  
through the city  
is punctuated  
by pauses  
at garbage heaps

In a manner typical of the treatment of 'mad' people in Caribbean poetry ('Theophilus Jones Walks Naked Down King Street', Heather Royes; 'The Mad Woman of Papine', Slade Hopkinson; 'A Sit Dung Pon de Wall', Mutabaruka), Onuora suggests this character's behaviour is uniquely sane amidst pervasive social madness. The poem ends:

people laugh  
when he shouts:  
"look pon de mad  
mad world"

b) Awakened Consciousness

Cnuora has always been motivated by the desire to communicate with people from his own social background. His aim is to awaken in others the same kind of political understanding he had gained himself. In 'We Will Keep On' (p.37), Cnuora affirmed that the identity of the Caribbean black person was bound up with struggle. It was a destiny imposed by history:

ever-since  
our feet touched  
these shores  
We have been struggling  
brother man

He affirms, "we will keep on/ struggling...until we are free." His term 'brother man' is addressed outwards. It welcomes in those who have yet to be persuaded and conveys a moral superiority over the opposition in its vision of a 'brotherhood of man'. The images of slavery which Cnuora retains are those of resistance. For him, "the gentle lap of the sea" contains "freedom songs" sung by ancestors "who leapt from the slavers". He asks, when listening to the sea, "...do you hear/ a freedom song beating/ in your head?" ('Freedom Song' p.42).

In 'Yesterday/Today/Tomorrow' (p.38), Cnuora not only asserts a revolutionary ideology, but claims it is only those who have been struggling "ever-since" who have maintained one consistently. Noting that in the 1970's it had become fashionable for the 'middle classes' to espouse Rastafari and talk about revolution, the poet speaks as a representative voice of the ghetto, reminding the newcomers that they formerly rejected the ghetto people and their grassroots heroes and symbols:

Yesterday  
you said:  
                    bongo man  
                    congo man  
primitiveness  
    dread  
outrageous  
    I

ignorant  
roots  
          foolishness  
Garvey  
no big thing

Now he hears middle-class people saying that Garvey is "the greatest", exclaiming "dread/I/Rastafari", and using phrases like "liberation from neo-colonialism and capitalism". The poet simply states that he has been saying the same thing all along, and will continue to do so. He concludes by asking his audience, simply:

tomorrow  
will you say what you said today  
or what you said yesterday.....?

In 'I a Tell' (Morris (ed) 1983b, p.105) he cries out against the hypocrisy of politicians who talk about 'Human rights' when "...all i site/ is few/ is few/ is few-/ man rights." Finally he outlines the first necessary stages of resistance. First, it is necessary to "free self"; emancipate oneself from "mental slavery" (Marley). Next, discipline and unity are required before anything effective can be achieved:

step a step  
as one  
step a step  
as one  
fi mash  
dis system  
of oppression

The rhythm of this section echoes a military drum, bringing to mind the discipline of a marching army. While Onuora also tells his audience that they must "make a plan", he is not, as yet, any more specific about achieving the revolution he would clearly love to see.

c) Liberation, creativity and love.

In many poems, Odu Onuora explores what it means to "free self".

The principle areas of personal liberation with which he is concerned are: a positive view of blackness, and the development of loving and

creative relationships between black people.

In 'Change yes change', the poet looks at a "soul/ful/ fingersnappin handclappin/ shouting laughin/ blackchild", fearful of the future in store. Change is inevitable, the child must grow to maturity. The poet prays that the child will not succumb to external pressures by becoming either a "puppet/ jumping to the snap/ of the establishment" or "a storm/ lashing out/ blindly". Instead he urges her or him to "change into a sun-/ clad God". He sees the beauty of the child, and hopes that the potential for beauty (spiritual rather than physical) in adulthood may be fulfilled. The vocabulary, short lines, word-breaks and general tone suggest Black American influence.

'Beat yu drums' (pp.31-34) is a tribute to the Mystic Revelation of Rastafari, which began as a drum orchestra, founded by Count Ossie in 1949. They drew on and developed the rhythms beaten by the Niyabinghi Rastafari brethren who were founded during the 1930's. With their music MRR formed a channel by which the nostalgia for continental Africa and tragic sense of continuing estrangement which had been sustained in the grass-root cultural traditions came to be more widely and publicly acknowledged. They were an expression of Black and African pride. Oku Onuora celebrates the sound of the Rasta drums as a liberating force that will "touch art" (heart) and "quake taught" (thought); in other words, stir both emotions and intellect. The refrain contains much energy and urgency:

beat yu drums  
Rasta Man  
beat dem loud an lang  
beat dem  
beat dem mek dem  
rekindle de fire inna de people  
dem soul

Prime Minister Smith's defence of white minority rule in Rhodesia provoked deep anger in Jamaica, and strong support for the guerrilla

fighters. Bob Marley's composition, simply entitled 'Zimbabwe' (1979), expressed total identification with the liberation struggle: "Africans a liberate Zimbabwe/ I an I a liberate Zimbabwe" (In other words, 'we Africans have freed Zimbabwe'.) When Oku Onuora wrote 'One Morning' (1977, p.35), the country was officially still called Rhodesia and ruled by the white minority, yet he refers to it by its African name, and expresses confidence in the ultimate victory.

I vision a black wave heaving  
gathering momentum

One morning  
sun will rise  
trailing  
a banner proclaiming  
liberty

As with Marley, this identification is also an expression of self-identification, as a black man and an African.

Another aspect of affirming pride in blackness was a celebration of the black woman, and of love between black people. Onuora has written many poems dedicated to women, most of them of a more spiritual than erotic nature; to friends, to his mother, to lovers. 'Black spectacle' (p.24) speaks to an individual, but is at the same time in general praise of black woman:

i exclaim inly  
in wonderment  
at your sight...

pain and pride  
finger my soul  
when i gaze  
upon your face...

On a personal level, the poem probably expresses the intense and painful emotions brought about between two people as a result of the poet's imprisonment. The disturbing image of conflicting feelings 'fingering' the soul suggests a displaced desire to finger the beloved face. In fact, the constant emphasis on 'spectacle', 'gazing', 'sight', suggests that

physical contact is denied. Nevertheless, the tone of the poem is as cool as the image of the woman described:

woman  
as black  
and cool...and  
beautiful  
as a star jewelled  
night...

Perhaps she is after all seen "inly" - a composite of the poet's imagination. There is a tendency in most of Onuora's poems addressed to individual women to make a general political point affirming a positive pride in blackness and the beauty of black womanhood.

Oku Onuora does not use a very wide range of images in his poetry. However, certain elemental symbols recur significantly and with great effect. Their use is always related to concepts of oppression and liberation. The colour red is emphasised in several poems. Red in Dread Talk means high on ganja, or angry. In 'Dread Times' (p.5) he writes, "de whole scene red". The first idea that comes to mind is a red sky and pervasive red light cast by a blazing fire. The sky could be both literal or metaphorical. In the poem 'Scene' (p.26), Onuora paints a minimal picture of "blue/ sky/ white/ clouds/ green/ trees". At this stage imperceptibly the next anticipated colour is preceded by "earth", which is then qualified:

red  
blood red

Jamaican earth is pervasively red, because of bauxite deposits, but here the redness is given another interpretation. It is seen as blood-soaked. We can add this second connotation to our understanding of Onuora's use of the colour red. A reggae beat runs unmistakeably throughout 'Reflections in red' (1981b, disc), so that we are inevitably drawn to ideas of music as we consider the title. Here, violence and rage are suggested. The poem begins:

an di beat,  
wel red

The music itself has a 'red' beat. References to blood and fire follow almost immediately, suggesting that both these products of violence are actually embodied in the reggae rhythm.

Fire used as a symbol suggests something more positive than the primary red. In 'Niyabingi', the Rasta man smokes his herb: "man yearn/ fire burn". We imagine the communal fire around which the Niyabinghi sit, and the glow of the spliff or chalice as the marijuana is inhaled. They yearn for "the land/ where the gods love to be". The fire also represents the longing for freedom which slavery and colonialism never killed. The 'Angolan woman' (p.36) likewise has "eyes flashin fire" and is "headin for the sun". The "eyes flashin fire" suggest an inner refusal to be cowed, which manifests itself in the fight for "the sun" - for personal and political liberation. In 'The painter' (p.27), Cnuora expresses his admiration for the artist, who is not interested in making decorative objects, but paints: "abstracts/ that kindle fire/ and liberate". Sun and moon are also recurrent images. A rare glimpse of the moon from a prison window suggests not romance but "a man with a load on his back". Sun is generally more positive. In 'Change yes change' we have the vision of the black child turning into a "sun-/ clad God". In 'Tomorrow', the fact that the sun always rises to light another day is used to draw strength from the depths of degradation. Night casts a temporary shield over the ugly scenes of the ghetto. Anticipating the sun, the poet asks: "will it rise/ to witness/ me writhing/ in vomit?" Certain only that the sun will rise tomorrow, he asks, "will the/ wretched of the eart/ rise?". Affirming yet again that the sun will rise, he finds the strength to announce "i will rise". Thus sun is used to represent transcendence and hope.

The concept of sunset brings in a negative connotation, however. 'Sunset' is one of Oku's minimal poems. It begins "blood/ smell/ of blood" and ends:

sun  
set  
in  
blood

The few words evoke a claustrophobic atmosphere of heat and rank smells at the end of the day. This is compounded with a consciousness of bloodshed. The sun is tainted; the sunset becomes equated with coagulated blood. The sun is associated with squalor and cruelty even if simultaneously it symbolizes transcendence from them.

Onuora sees freedom from oppression as a fundamental prerequisite for artistic creativity. Thus political and personal liberation are inextricably bound together. He poses a paradox; destruction must precede creation. The poet aims to use his creative skills to:

...kindle  
a burning desire  
in man  
to destroy exploitation  
("I want to write a poem", p.1)

Again we have the fire imagery, combining the will to tear down what is "antipeople" ('Change yes change') with a creative, life-loving alternative vision. When Onuora was in prison, a warder asked him why he wrote so much about "sufferation", why he didn't write about 'love, birds, flowers, that kind of thing'. In the circumstances it was an obscene question. The poet responded with a poem, 'I write about' (p.44), which ended: "I write about love -/ love for destruction/ of oppression". He envisions a landscape of "bloody mud", result of a "holocaust" of violence, before "the last vestige/ of oppression" is swept away. Then and only then, he can promise his "beloved":

we can lie  
upon the grass  
make love  
and create.

( 'Then beloved', p.25)

Part four: popular rhythms

It is important we bear in mind that no performance poetry realises its full life and significance on the printed page. Oku Cnuora declaims his poems in strong, 'dread' tones. He does not use the wide range of pace and pitch which was employed by Michael Smith. One of the principal performance aspects of his poetry is his use of musical and speech rhythms.

The expanding possibilities of performing in popular music venues, often alongside reggae artists, and the existence of a market for dub poetry records were factors which very probably encouraged Oku to compose poems containing an inbuilt and overt reggae beat. Three of these, 'Reflections in red' (1981b) 'Wat a situashan' (1981c) and 'I a tell' (?1982), were released with a reggae music accompaniment as singles in Kingston. The poems are longer than most of his earlier work, a little less dense, but with a very clear and powerful message. The tones of delivery have tended to be more menacing. Oku's performances have always been emotive, occasionally verging on melodrama. 'Reflections in Red' begins:

an di beat  
wel red  
an di scene  
wel dred

The repetition of the words 'an di' continues throughout the poem. They form two unstressed short syllables which are always followed by one or more stressed, long syllables. This gives the effect of an up-beat of quavers (roughly - more syncopated in fact), followed by the heavy 'drop' which is a feature of reggae music. The overall rhythmic framework of the

poem is thus strongly influenced by instrumental characteristics. Other features are introduced; for example, the more rhythmically free vocal, which cuts across the regular instrumental rhythms: "an fi a lang/ lang time/ di man peta/ waila wailin/ in di wilderness". The alliteration of the 'w' helps to give special stress to certain syllables, reflecting a manner used by DJ's, such as U-Roy and Big Youth. On the commercial recording, the effect is enhanced by the use of echo. In the lines immediately following, another feature of dub music, the 'reverb', is written into the text: "dere can be/ no peace..."

until/ until  
dere's equal rites  
equal rites an  
justice ... tice ... tice ...  
tice ... tice ...

The effect of the fading echo emphasised the loneliness of the figure (Peter Tosh) crying from the wilderness. A more subtle echo, again reflecting a typical feature of reggae vocals, can be heard in: "fram di crack/ a dawn/ a dance/ a dance/ wid death" which has a mournful quality beyond the literal meaning of the words.

Finally, in this poem, there is a build-up of rhymes reflecting the D.J.'s toast, emphasising the musical qualities: "it's ritten/ on di wall/ babilan/ Kingdum/ must fall/ natty dred bawl". Oku was developing this feature of his poetry before he left prison in 1977. 'Sketches', which is included in the first collection entitled Echo, contains a DJ chant, which has the same menacing and repetitive quality: "blood dungtung/ an blood uptung/ blood all over jamdung" [blood uptown/ and blood downtown/ blood all over Jamaica].

Many of those poems which do not have such an overt reggae influence still reflect the experiences and sensibilities which infuse the music. The music of Bob Marley and others was a far greater influence on Oku's generation of Jamaican poets than printed works. A common effect of

reggae is a sense of spaces; one is listening for sounds which have been left out. For considerable stretches of the music there may be only minimal musical interjections, although the drum and bass always remain constant. This often evokes a very menacing, or Dread, feeling. The same spare quality is very much a feature of Onuora's work, which has a tendency towards abstraction and minimalism:

man bruk  
man waan wuk  
man a fret  
man don't know wey  
de next meal a come from yet  
...  
de whole scene red  
time dred

We have already discussed the implications of the word 'red' in Onuora's work. The directness and stark simplicity are messages in themselves. The final phrases are distinctly ominous.

Despite the fact that 'Retrospect' is largely in standard English (with significant exceptions), Cku's delivery gives the opening words a strong reggae accent, using the same two sharp up-beats employed in

'Reflections in Red':

perched on a branch  
of a leafless tree

The understatement of the second half of the poem, and the inevitable pauses, reflect the significant sparseness which we have mentioned as a feature of the music: "a johncrow/ waitin/ for the humanscavenger/ to leave".

When Cku spoke of 'popular rhythms' in an interview with Mervyn Morris (Onuora 1981a), he did not only mean reggae rhythms, although these were an integral part of his meaning. He was also talking about the rhythms of "people speech", which influences and is influenced by reggae lyrics and music. 'Bwoy!' won a Certificate of Merit in the 1976 Literary Competition of the Jamaica Festival. Perhaps one of the qualities which

brought it to the judge's attention was the way it captured popular phrases with a passion which embodied exactly what it was: a cry straight from the ghetto:

when mi look an si  
de ole heapa mad people  
wey a roam de street  
an de olda head dem  
pon side walk a beg  
an de amount of youth  
inna de prison dem

The phrases are sharp and rhythmic. The poet balances them in a controlled build-up to the passionate denunciation

a wey dis ya society ya a defen?

The Creole use of 'ya' either side of 'society' heightens the opprobrium which is heaped upon it. 'Society' implies politeness and order. 'Ya' is a snarl of anger and contempt from those masses whom the society so manifestly fails to protect.

### MUTABARUKA

#### Part one: biography

Mutabaruka was formerly known as Allan Hope. He began to use his present name around 1969. It is taken from a Rwandan poet, and means "medicine man". He was born on 26th December 1952 in Rae Town, Kingston. After attending Wesley Primary school, he majored in electronics at Kingston Technical High School, which he attended for four years. During his teens he began reading books that were frowned on, like Eldridge Cleaver's Soul On Ice, or actually banned in Jamaica, like The Autobiography of Malcolm X. He also read some black American poetry. He became a political activist, involving himself with local youth programmes. He worked as an electrician. His second job on leaving the technical school was for the Jamaica Telephone Company Ltd. He was in a solid trade, and on the way to a reasonably secure conventional future,

if he wanted it. However, he said that he found the telephone company "reactionary to my way of thinking" (1980b). During the period of working there, he was drawn to the Rastafari movement, which in his view was more radical than the secular politics he had been involved in.

Brought up a Roman Catholic, a spiritually-centred viewpoint remained vital for him, although he rejected, and has continued to reject, institutional religion, going so far as to denounce Christianity as "the most devilish thing on the earth now" (ibid.). He took his conversion to Rastafari extremely seriously. He started growing dreadlocks, and gave up eating any animal products while still working for the telephone company.

He began writing poems in 1969. In 1971 'Festival Seventy-one' was his first poem to be published, in Swing magazine, a Kingston-based pop music journal. There was an enthusiastic response from readers. For two years Muta's poems appeared "almost in consecutive issues" of Swing, according to John A.L. Golding Jr., in his introduction to Muta's second published collection, Cutory (1973). This, and his first collection, simply entitled 24 Poems (1972), were both published by Swing. Muta continued to write after leaving the telephone company, and made his living by cooking and selling 'ital' food on the streets of downtown Kingston. (Ital food is prepared according to Rastafarian rules - without salt, and generally completely vegetarian.) His work was quite widely known and supported some years before the other Dub Poets gained recognition. Mervyn Morris comments, "I can still vividly recall the pleasure of hearing Muta read at the Creative Arts Centre in the early 1970's" (Introduction, Mutabaruka, 1980a). He also recited poems on the Jamaica Information Service television programme.

Mutabaruka has tended to express his philosophy, which is well thought out and expounded with conviction, through interpersonal

relationships and lifestyle rather than public actions. His relationship with Yvonne, his companion and mother of his children, is evidently based on principles which are in the best spirit of the Rastafari movement, enriched through the mutual sharing of ideas and work. They left Kingston in 1974 for the peace of the rural district of Potosi. They first built a bamboo shelter because they could afford nothing else. Over the years they have built a solid wooden house, one room at a time, and dug steps down the hillside to where it sits at the bottom of a valley. It is simple, orderly and attractive. Many natural objects are used, such as calabashes, which serve as food vessels and carriers. Water comes from a spring, and there is no electricity.

Mutabaruka was not writing poems during this period. For four years he and Yvonne sold knitted crafts at Negril Beach Village. Negril was promoted by the Manley government. The idea was to encourage a different kind of tourism, which would alter the consumer-service relationship to one of more equal exchange. More contact with local people was encouraged, so that tourists would recognise that 'We're more than a beach, we're a country' (Tourist Board poster). The popularity of Bob Marley in the United States encouraged a shift in tourist expectations. Rastafarians were sought after as exotic children of nature. There were many elements in common (the most important being the smoking of marijuana) between the Rastafarian and hippy lifestyles. Muta spent a lot of time talking to foreign visitors and felt he had greatly enriched his understanding. After some time, Muta was actually employed in this role by Frank Rance, then manager of Negril Beach Village Hotel. His earnings went towards building his house. When it was completed, he stopped visiting the hotel.

In 1976 Muta published his third collection of poems jointly with the female poet Faybienne Miranda in a book entitled Sun and Moon. His

poems were not included in the Savacou anthology, New Poets from Jamaica, published in 1979. This was because he was still living in relative obscurity. (Many of his friends in Kingston thought he had gone to prison.)

Later in 1979, Mutabaruka re-emerged on the public scene with an appearance at the International Year of the Rasta Child concert held at Kingston's National Arena. His poems appeared in a smart paperback entitled Mutabaruka: the First Poems, with an introduction by Mervyn Morris, in 1980. The publisher was a local businessman called Paul Issa, member of one of the most powerful Jamaican families. After performing at a concert with the reggae singer, Jimmy Cliff, Mutabaruka was approached by Earl "Chinna" Smith, one of Jamaica's leading reggae guitarists, who has his own record label and record store, both called 'High Times'. The first single, also produced in 1980, was called 'Everytime A Ear De Soun', which was loosely based on an earlier, very popular poem. It was quite a hit, especially in Montego Bay. Other singles followed: 'Naw Give Up' (1981), and 'Hard Times Love' (1982). He has also produced an album entitled Check It (1983) on the High Times label. Michael Smith had to wait until he came to London to produce an album. There has been markedly more preparedness from local enterprise to back Mutabaruka than the other dub poets. This suggests that he has been the most commercially successful on home territory.

In 1982 he made a visit to Cuba with Jimmy Cliff, and later that year toured Nigeria with Steel Pulse. In March 1984 he was invited to Britain to perform at the Third International Bookfair of Radical, Black and Third World Books, and gave many live and television performances during his visit.

Part two: attitudes toward life and poetry

Mutabaruka's philosophy and general approach to life have two central aspects. In the first place, they are grounded in pragmatism. Secondly, without any sense of contradiction, all aspects of his life are explored and explained in terms of the spiritual. These two threads were clearly evident in the context of Tuff Gong (Bob Marley's) recording studio. Muta, in a direct and unabashed way, was aiming at commercial success with the two tracks being cut. The T-shirt he was wearing was emblazoned across the back with the title of one of them: 'Dem Invade Angola Agen'. The second was a 'seasonal' item, designed to catch the Christmas sales, called 'Mek We Postpone Chrismus Dis Year'. Muta was completely at home with the technology and atmosphere of the studio. On the other hand, he had the air of a rustic, completely cut off from urban taste and fashion. While the 'inner circle' (exclusively male) exuded a combination of self-conscious dignity and mystic reverence in this shrine to "the late, great Bob", Muta shambled about barefoot, some spare belongings contained in a large calabash, drinking warm fruit juice brought in from the country in a screw-top jar. In contravention of Tuff Gong custom, he imposed a ban on smoking of the 'holy weed' during his session because it made his throat sore.

Mutabaruka clearly enjoyed recognition on the streets. Despite a manifest lack of interest in personal possessions, he recognises the need for financial backing in order to promote and develop his own productions, and pursues this object with energy and thoroughness. On the other hand, he is very purist about living out his philosophy. He didn't "really care" about missing out on the Savacou anthology "because I really prefer to be where I is, in the hills there, beca' a lot a development take place". His diet is extremely rigorous. He eats no animal products, and no cooked food (not even herb teas). Cooked food is

"dead food".

Thou shalt not kill means thou shalt not kill period...If you eat live food you don't kill it, you become one with it."  
(Mutabaruka 1980b).

He perceived a conspiracy by the rich (white) and powerful to make poor Jamaicans eat bad food. His contacts with Americans who like him were preoccupied with an uncontaminated, non-processed vegetarian diet, confirmed this. They were rich and "they knew" wholefood was the best food, while the U.S. dumped 'chicken back' and other poor quality food on Jamaica. What is more, wholefoods were freely and cheaply available in the United States, while expensive and virtually impossible to obtain in Jamaica.

Mutabaruka dismisses the Roman Catholic church, in which he was brought up, as "a fraud". He is opposed to all institutional religion. He rejects, like all Rastafarians, the notion of any 'god in the sky'. Divinity rests within every individual. In his view, it is only in this sense that Haile Selassie is divine:

Haile Selassie is historically there, representing a history that was lost... Haile Selassie to I is a symbol, representing that awareness, then, but Haile Selassie is the same as I. I and Haile Selassie is one...

He speaks at length about 'the system', and suggests he has a revolutionary perspective. To the extent that he is consciously political, it is from a Garveyite, black nationalist point of view:

I is not a politician. I'm not a Marxist or a capitalist. I feel that black people can't use another man's ideology to free themselves. African people must use African influences to free themselves. (Pradshaw, 1982).

Many of his poems deal with nostalgia for Africa, but there is very little detail of contemporary Africa in them. As with Garvey, there is a tendency to accept the validity of a white racist point of view. His poem 'It No Good to Stay in a White Man Country Too Long' advises Blacks to leave Britain because Enoch Powell is telling them to, contrasting

strongly with Linton Kwesi Johnson's poem 'It Dread Inna Ingran', embodying the slogan, 'Come what may, we are here to stay' (Johnson 1980, p.14).

Muta says that he doesn't like reading poetry; that he has never read a whole poetry book - not even his own. He started writing poetry in reaction against the English verse he was taught at school. He wanted to produce the sort of poetry he could relate to. He was also influenced by the black American poetry he had read. "Poetry was part of the radicalism of that time." (1980b). He hoped it would "make people wake", but he does not simply write about "ghetto and ghetto and ghetto" (ibid.). He writes on a wide range of subjects, using a range of 'voices' and language. A high proportion of his poems are in Standard English. He always composes his poems straight onto a typewriter. They are written at one attempt. He is prepared to make changes, however, for the sake of relevance - if he is performing, for example, in a place where certain references will not be understood.

He sees his poetry as an important educational tool. The important thing is to reach people, and the most effective way of doing that is over the radio.

You see, the thing is that most people in Jamaica they don't read, but they listen, and the airwaves is what they hear. So for a poet like me to stick in a book, like the message you want to say out there to the people, it not going to reach them, beca' how much people can go in a book store and buy a book for eight dollars? And furthermore, the mass of the people don't go in a book store unless it's comic them going to read, but they listen to the radio every day ... (1981)

It is for this reason that recording the poems with reggae music is so important. This gives the poet the possibility of regular air play. The music helps break down the barriers most audiences put up at the idea of poetry. Eventually the listener may identify with the message of the poem, and seek out the book in order to read more. In this way, Muta hopes he is encouraging new people to "extend themself" (ibid.)

The music is not simply a new gimmick, however. Muta used all kinds of musical accompaniment to his poems from his very early days of performing. He worked with percussionist Larry McDonald, who subsequently played with the band Taj Mahal and Black American 'rap' poet, Gill Scott Heron. The use of music forms part of an interest he has in experimenting with and broadening methods of presentation. He was also talking about using video and slides to develop a more dramatic stage presentation. (1981).

From early in his poetry career, he was reading at the prestigious established cultural venues, such as the Creative Arts Centre on the university campus, and the Drama School. About these audiences he said,

...them is just a nice little people who want to hear some poetry read with their rum punch glass in their hands on a Sunday afternoon. They don't have anything else to do... so when the poetry reading finished, them finished too. (ibid.).

The Creative Arts Centre gave him his "first society audience". He performed there with Mervyn Morris, Slade Hopkinson and Dennis Scott. Later he made appearances at the Little Theatre and Ward Theatre, Kingston's two major theatres. On the other hand, he performs widely in schools, and increasingly with live reggae shows. Muta is particularly willing to perform in free concerts held in the street. "Dem call we street poet. We want to carry the poetry to the people... poetry pass a elite stage" (ibid.). He feels these performances encourage other youths to develop their own talents. His favourite audience, and the one from which he felt the greatest understanding and response was at Belle Vue, Kingston's psychiatric hospital.

Is only the insane would make a neutron bomb, and only the insane woulda bring guns inna this island yah for young people dem kill off one another. So me don't see dem people as insane...(ibid.)

He has in recent years written a number of poems highlighting the predicament and the relative sanity of so-called 'mad' people in Jamaican

society.

Mutabaruka is articulate on the poet's relation to economics. Without economic independence it was difficult for an artist to preserve integrity:

...if I call upon the Ministry of Culture or A.P.I. [Agency for Public Information], or even the university, them going to want to show me how is certain runnings. Now, if I have the money, I just go do it, seen? (ibid.)

For Muta, artistic independence was only possible if you had backative (drive), and a source of finance. The fact that he has received more local promotion than the other 'dub poets' does not appear to have resulted in any ideological compromise, but then it may be that his political attitudes were in the first place more acceptable. One benefit is that he has produced an album with local musicians, unlike Mikey Smith. In terms of getting music to harmonise with poetry, this is clearly an advantage:

Well, you see, there's certain musicians ... beyond them grounds, just away (pointing), and them feel yuh poetry, beca' them read them, seen? An true yuh know seh every man inna de same position, 'ca' it not really no Philharmonic Orchestra inside deh - a some ghetto youth, like me same way ... trying to be musician ... so the experience, when you read the poetry to them, them feel it too. (ibid.)

There was no doubt that Muta was widely known on the streets, and his records had sold well - well enough, Muta claimed, to be "chartable". Nevertheless, neither his nor any of the other dub poets' work got much air play. He felt there was a general conspiracy against all reggae which expressed protest. He complained that the radio simply played the worst DJ dub, which dealt in slackness (lewd, anti-women lyrics) and gimmicry. (Bradshaw, 1982).

### Part three: themes

Mutabaruka's most consistent concern is the heightening of Black Consciousness. He plays a great deal on the word 'Negro': a word invented

by white society, which represents a denial of any identity beyond skin colour and other aspects of physical appearance. He contrasts this 'negro' identity, epitomising a state of dispossession, with the continuing reference to West Indians of Indian (subcontinent) and Chinese descent according to their regions of ancestral origin. In 'Weh Mi Belang?' (1980, p.21) he affects ignorance and simplicity in order to underline this fundamental difference in identities. The Chinese relate back to China, the Indians to India. Can the Negro then relate back to a place called 'Negroland'? (See Nettleford 1970, p.41). He also draws attention to the insultingly arbitrary nature of the term 'West Indian', historical product of a white man's blunder, which set the tone for the entire foundations of Caribbean society:

west yes  
but i nu indian  
den a which country i belong?

By way of contrast, Mutabaruka poses specific African identities. These are introduced as the awakened ancestral memories of the formerly puzzled 'Negro':

a remember a land  
weh man ack like man  
dem use fe call wi  
NIGERIAN  
GHAMANIAN (sic)  
ETHIOPIAN

Even the sound of his former name, Allen Hope, is a constant reminder that his identity is a product of slavery. His ancestors were denied their African names, having imposed on them instead, like the brand so many of them also received, the imprint of their slave master. So, every time he hears the sound, "the sound that is not my name", it echoes in his mind as a series of racist insults and injuries:

everytime i hear the sound  
the sound that sounds like  
remember nigger remember  
the sound that sounds like  
the whelps on your back  
the sound that sounds like  
the chains round your neck...  
the sound that sounds like  
who built nations from nigger sweat nigger gold  
the sound that sounds like  
remember nigger remember  
you're no aethiopian  
you're a negro  
i named you a negro

('White sound', 1980a, p.20)

Much of the power of this poem, apart from the brutality it expresses, comes from the repetition of a phrase and the cumulative intensification of bitterness and anger in the alternating 'responses'.

The upholding of a white image of God is identified at the centre of the black person's self-negation. In a simple poem entitled 'The change' (1980a, p.29), Muta "takes stock" of the fact that God and good are associated with whiteness, evil with blackness. Recognising this, he "changed". The meaning is left deliberately ambiguous. We know that he could not change his black skin, so we assume that he changed his religion to one which would endorse him as a black man.

Mutabaruka has also written several dramatic monologues which re-enter the slave past. Three of them have the words "I, the slave" in their title, emphasising the identification of the poet with the moment in which the poem is set. This identification is of course also embodied in the act of performance. 'The Lament of "I, the Slave"' (1980a, p.31) portrays an individual constantly drawn to the seashore, hoping against all logic that he may see Africa again. Despite constant beatings as a result of his inattentiveness to orders, he retains a grain of hope until one day his reality is harshly brought home to him. Seeing a ship, he at first thinks God has answered his prayer and is providing the means for him to return home. He does not remain under this illusion for long:

bu-bu-buh but ...	[but...
a wha dis mi si?	what's this I see?
O Lawd....!	O Lord...
anada ship wid	another ship with
more	more
a	of
mi	me]

Here we see the poet in deep sympathy with those early experiences which underlie the continuing longing for a 'return' to Africa embodied in the Rastafarian movement.

The liberation which Mutabaruka speaks of is primarily a cultural liberation from collective self-contempt, towards a positive sense of unity. The primary medium for this cultural liberation in his poems is the drum, together with associated ritual readily identifiable with Africa. 'Drum Song' (1980a, p.34) is full of the kind of paradox commonly found in oracular statements and prophecies. The drum 'speaks of':

deaths that start livins  
i enslave to set free  
i breed  
    among you i breed  
                        yourself  
only you will know it  
i speak to free you from yourself

A certain kind of death is a necessary prelude to a new life. The black person will be freed from 'slavery' (to an alien consciousness) only if he or she becomes a 'slave' of the drum. The drum releases the true 'self' and yet ultimate freedom is 'freedom from self'. The drum therefore brings liberation in the form of a spiritual experience.

Muta turns to Africa to find a focal point for meditation. Resisting divisions symptomatic of collective self-negation, images of unity and harmony become Africa-shaped:

God one man	[God and man one
heart to heart	heart to heart
shapin map of Africa	forming a map of Africa
"nuh more piece-a-piece, yah,	"no more fragments, you hear,
sight up JAH"	find faith in JAH"]
('Oneness', 1980a, p.19)	

This poem may be based on a Rastafarian painting or drawing. Jah becomes

the spiritual embodiment of a healed collective black consciousness.

His philosophy of life embraces a total commitment to pacifism. For Mutabaruka, every aspect of nature is a revelation of the Divine Plan. In nature he finds a purity and simplicity, frequently violated by human intervention. Even engaging in an act so 'natural' as washing in a river, he finds himself guilty of such violation. He pollutes the water, and crowds the space of a fish:

today i stepped into your world  
"I'm sorry if i did wrong"  
( 'To The Fish That Passed By', 1980a p.50)

By contrast, Mutabaruka finds little spirituality in churches. They are associated in his mind with violence and death. The preacher in his pulpit is "pulpin out your mind... crucifyin u", while the marble statues "rape your soul" ('Church I', 1980a p.52). For him essentially a church is "Void of people", with the central image a cross "depicting death" ('Church II', 1980a p.53) . He also criticises the Roman Catholic emphasis on Confession as an empty and hypocritical gesture:

u have just saved yourself - again  
u have just repeated your week's sins - again  
( 'Church I' )

His use of non-standard orthography has a particularly harsh and excluding quality (c.f. Sonia Sanchez (1969, p.12):

don't u know  
where u at when  
u call me nigger?  
( 'nigger' )

in contrast to the warm and inclusive significance of the Rastafarian 'I an I'.

A very major preoccupation in the work of Mutabaruka is the question of what it is worth writing about. Poetry has very negative connotations for him and yet he is caught in the paradoxical situation of being a poet (despite his protestation 'Call Me No Poet or Nothing Like That' 1980a, p.16). A poem has little interest for him unless its intention is to

liberate:

i shall not never  
write for lovers or  
dream makers  
    lillies  
and moonshine romance  
                    never  
unless they are me  
free

(ibid.)

The poem must 'be' the black poet (as a representative of black people); it must speak with his tongue, echo his thoughts. The piling up of negatives is a deliberate violation of 'correct' English grammar and an expression of the absolute defensiveness and frustration the poet feels in the face of "lillies/ and moon shine romance". Such images are an insult, he reminds the reader, in the face of the realities his people still have to endure. The poets of the Great English Tradition are a threat to the integrity of his own mind:

shakespeare/milton/chaucer  
still drenchin  
the souls of black folks  
tryin to integrate  
in my life your life  
poems poems poems  
and we're still shitin in pit toilets  
                    (ibid.)

Like the other dub poets, he emphasises the impossibility of writing pretty lyrics in a context of violence and oppression. He is also aware of what an intangible thing poetry is, and how easily corruptible. His response to an 'intellectual' audience is an ambiguous one. There is a hint of contempt, of enjoying pretentiousness exposed:

in your mind  
i see you  
havin an orgasm  
    trying to put my poem together  
('My poem your mind', 1980a p.59)

There is also a realistic version of the process taking place when a poem is 'interpreted':

there is everything  
already in my poem  
that is in your  
mind...  
(ibid.)

An audience which 'appreciates poetry' can undermine a poem's original purpose, if it was written with revolutionary intent. A poem can be 'appropriated', a poet 'absorbed':

revolutionary poets  
'ave all gone to the  
creative art centre  
to watch  
the sufferin  
of the people  
bein dram at ized by the  
oppressors  
in their  
revolutionary  
poems  
( 'Revolutionary poets', 1980a, p.64)

The Dub Poets have all been faced with this dilemma. Acceptance at any level of the establishment is a threat to their identity, yet without it survival is far from certain. There has always been a thinly-veiled rivalry between them; an inevitable product of their extremely precarious social standing, and the individual temptations which are proffered.

Part four: performance persona, changes in style, response to popular pressure.

Mutabaruka's physical presence is impressive, and forms an important aspect of his performance persona. Mervyn Morris has noted his "resonant baritone voice" (1983a, p.191). He is well-built, and this, together with the voice, gives an impression of strength. Thick Rastafarian locks, with an arresting white streak, over a young and open face, give him an air of great distinction. A dry wit and relaxed manner complete his authoritative image. He employs a considerable range of voice tone. He also exhibits a command over a wide range of English usage. Thus his impact on a fairly intimate audience is extremely powerful. These

qualities may help to explain the high degree of acceptance he enjoyed in literary circles in the early 1970's.

On stage, under lights, the figure remains impressive, although the subtleties of voice are lost under amplification. With the added dimension of space, his performance becomes less electric than that of Michael Smith. In one observed performance (Montego Bay High School, 13.11.81), he made use of the stage space, but his movements were repetitive and added little to the delivery. The single mood suggested was compounded by an unvarying basic reggae rhythm, generally referred to as 'Studio One' (after the studio owned by Clement Coxsone Dodds, one of the early 'dubmasters'). The response from the audience was extremely warm, however.

On record, Muta again comes into his own. The listener's attention is concentrated on voice quality. His sardonic humour re-emerges strongly, and the listener becomes aware of the powerful effect to which he puts pauses in order to amplify significance in his delivery. His records have been successful, both in terms of sales, and artistically. Some of this could be put down to the quality of relationships he has with musicians and recording technicians. He has built up a longterm working relationship with Earl 'Chinna' Smith, who fosters musicians from the ghetto.

Mutabaruka emphasises continuities in his poetry rather than changes over the years. He says that he has "always used all kinds of music" with his poetry (1981). He appeared to underplay any developments, or responses to changed circumstances, which have taken place. According to other dub poets, however, performing with a reggae band was a development which took place towards the end of the 1970's, when poets began performing at music festivals and big concerts. All communities can provide a band, and now Mutabaruka invariably performs with reggae

accompaniment, whether at a free street concert, or international music festival.

The changing circumstances in which Mutabaruka has found acceptance have clearly had an impact on his composition. Literary references, whether jibes at the 'Great Tradition', or allusions to black American writings, which must have gone down well in the Creative Arts Centre (see 'Call Me No Poet or Nothing Like That'), have given way to much more direct, verbally simpler and more repetitive expressions suitable for a commercial recording and mass audience. About the only literary reference on Muta's album Check It is the repetition of a line from one of his own earlier poems, 'White Sound': "Every time a ear de sound...". In addition to the repetition of the phrase, the poet repeats, "the sound, the sound, the sound", in imitation of a DJ's 'reverb'. Like Mikey Smith with 'Mi Cyaan Believe It', Muta had, with this highly successful dub poem, come up with a phrase which large numbers of people found satisfying, both in terms of sound and of multiple meaning. Some would know the former meaning of the 'sound' - Muta's previous 'slave' name - of which a small reminder remains in the later poem: "The sound dat is not my name". The second more obvious meaning is made clear by the sound of machine gun fire with which the piece opens. Through the means of allusion, Mutabaruka thus merges an old historical hurt with one of the most modern manifestations of oppression - the hired gunmen who terrorise the urban population. This writer can testify to the impact the phrase had had. On seeing Muta in the street, people would call it out by way of recognition and greeting.

Other more recent poems have created a 'character' - a (so-called) 'mad man'. 'Butta-pan' and 'A sit dung pon de Wall' exploit the appealing sound qualities of Jamaica Creole to create sympathetic portraits of these pariahs of Jamaican society. The humorous effect of the repetition

in the refrain of 'A sit dung pon de wall':

is lang lang time a sit dung pon de wall  
a watch im a watch me

creates an impression of precarious balance as two men, one well-dressed and materially secure, the other (with whom the poet identifies) dishevelled and rejected, circumspectly size one another up over a period of time. The advantage lies with the 'mad' man who unnerves the other one day by changing his habitual position and sitting down on the sidewalk. The well-dressed man, to avoid him, hurries to cross the road, where he is knocked down by a car. The 'mad' man has the last laugh, through his witty language and superior sense of poise.

Mutabaruka's more recent compositions have become oriented to a broader and more dramatic kind of performance, exploiting the appealing aural qualities of Creole, the audience's enjoyment of repeated phrases which for them are redolent with meaning, and the creation of humorous or surprising stage personae.

#### BRIAN MEEKS

##### Part one: Biography

Brian Meeks was born in Montreal in 1953. His mother was from Trinidad, his father from Jamaica. This is significant, as the recent political history of the two islands was to have a fundamental impact on the poet's development. He grew up in Jamaica from the age of three, attending Jamaica College, one of the island's leading secondary schools. Unlike the other dub poets, he came from a materially secure background. He was already something of a rebel and politically active while still at school. He went to the Trinidad Campus of the University of the West Indies in 1971 to study for a degree in economics. Trinidad was still reverberating with the impact of the Black Power upheavals - the 'February Revolution' - of the previous year (see chapter four). Many

activists were still in prison on charges of sedition. The black nationalist and socialist-oriented National Joint Action Committee (NJAC) continued to have a radicalizing influence among students, the unemployed and many sections of the working class. On his return to Jamaica in 1974, Brian Meeks registered for an MSc under the supervision of Dr. Trevor Monroe, head of politics at the Jamaican campus, and a prominent Marxist intellectual and politician. The title of his thesis was: 'The Development of the 1970 Revolution in Trinidad and Tobago', completed in 1976.

He worked in the Public Affairs Department of the Jamaica Broadcasting Corporation, presenting a current affairs programme called 'Sunday Report'. By this time a member of the Workers' Party of Jamaica (WPJ - of which Dr. Monroe is General Secretary), Brian Meeks was presenting a radical view of national and international affairs which was broadly supportive of the PNP programme under the leadership of Michael Manley. Nevertheless, he was seriously critical of the Manley regime, as is evident in his poetry. Almost immediately after Manley's electoral defeat in November 1980, Meeks and many other media workers were sacked to give way to appointees more sympathetic to the pro-American views of the new prime minister, Edward Seaga. He subsequently spent some time as a media worker in Grenada under the People's Revolutionary Government.

Brian Meeks performed his work at PNP and WPJ rallies and meetings during Michael Manley's prime ministership. He helped organise CARIFESTA '76, held in Jamaica, and participated in the 11th World Festival of Youth, held in Cuba in 1978. Political work has taken precedence over poetry performance, so he is less widely known than the other dub poets. He is, however, generally regarded no differently from the others:

That his work feels equally authentic may be partly due to his political identification with the oppressed and his profound engagement with Jamaican popular music. (Morris, 1983a, p.191).

Nine of his poems are published in E.K. Brathwaite (ed.) New Poets from Jamaica (pp.60-70).

Part two: sources and context

Though a university-educated intellectual, Brian Meeks as poet has generally expressed himself through the dread idiom of Kingston's dispossessed youth. While drawing inspiration from the Russian, Cuban and African revolutions, he, like the youth, locates an indigenous revolutionary consciousness within the Rastafarian-influenced reggae music tradition and in the rebellious attitudes and frustrated hopes of its followers.

'Mendeville Boomtown: Elues and Resolution' begins in a conventionally modern tone, in Standard English except for one dropped 'g', setting a scene of contrasts between the sweltering devastation of a bauxite mine and the suburban opulence which has grown out of it, nestling in the breezy hills above. Then the poem launches into dialogue as dramatic as any of Michael Smith's. The vitality of verbal exchange sharpens the aural impact immediately. The bitterness of the vision is intensified by wit.

johannesburg in jamaica!  
sout' africa in dis yah  
babylan quarta?  
          yes ista  
down a mendeville  
...  
dem ave one place  
de people call wha? johannesburg  
johannesburg?

While the black workers sweat below, the exclusive residential area is 'whites only', apart from the two 'token Blacks' the residents felt it wiser to admit after the Black Power upheavals in "sixtynine". This area

is so exclusive that the wealthy Beverly Hills suburb of Kingston (its aspirations evident from its name) is nothing in comparison. The image of South Africa persists as we are told a black man cannot walk through this area without a kind of 'pass':

an natral de man know	[and naturally you know
who compulsory cyaah	who is forbidden
walk pass de gate widdout	to walk past the gate unless
im fork an pickaxe	he has a fork and pickaxe.
is true site? wha yu seh	It's true, isn't it?
iyah?	What you say then?]

(ibid.)

The bitter commentator is clearly identified as a Dread by his vocabulary. He refers to Jamaica as "dis yah/babylan quarte", and to his partner in dialogue as "ista" (an I-word), rather than "mista". He turns for confirmation, asking, "is true site?"; in the Rastafarian manner replacing the concept of agreement (opinion) with having seen and understood the truth. The irony of this passage will be strongly felt by a Jamaican audience, because official policy so strongly promotes the image of a racially egalitarian society.

In 'Is Culcha Weapon?' the sounds of reggae music are concretized as sights of the ghetto life from which it has sprung:

will  
  jamrock rock  
walk naked  
  ...  
.... shake  
out his  
lion dread  
faint businessmen  
outside sheraton  
fart freely?

'Jamrock' is Jamaica (often referred to as 'the Fock'); "jamrock rock" is reggae music. The music is personified in the ghetto man who has nothing (not even any clothes to speak of) but his "lion dread", his dreadlocks. Yet even in his poverty his aspect is so terrifying to the businessmen standing outside the Sheraton Hotel that they "fart freely": Throughout, the power of reggae music is related to the potential of the oppressed

masses to rise up and:

        piss  
    upon the  
    green baize desk.

The last stanza draws on phrases from the Wailers' classics. The "weepin an a wailin" music of the masses ('Burning and Looting', 1973b) should bring the privileged no comfort, for it "doesn't/ want to see/ you dance". The oppressed will continue to "swing de/ small axe" ('Small Axe', 1973b) until the big tree of Eabylon is chopped down.

'March 9 1976' expresses most perfectly the poet's passionate involvement with reggae music. The lines describing a dance hall powerfully convey the dense crowded atmosphere, the air filled with the smell of marijuana and the heavy bass sounds of the dub music:

    an' de muted  
    dub want to  
    eat itself  
        ...  
    an de bass note  
    alone  
    stop de idrens from  
    flyin'

The phrase suggesting that the music "want to eat itself" expresses organic strength and completeness. The music anchors down the stoned dance hall crowd, illustrating the almost concrete function it fulfills within the ghetto society. Music is one of the only things which 'keeps people in one piece'. The poem also draws on a harsher kind of street language:

    .. machine gun  
    mentalities  
    centred on tripes  
    everyone check  
    when de clappers  
    firs' start

The slang words 'tripes' (guts) and 'clappers' (machine guns) give the scene of violence an appropriate level of brutality. A dance hall setting for machine gun killings is a common subject in reggae dub music, because

it is an accurate reflection of life. The killing in this poem is, as so often the case, politically motivated. The poet places the blame on the CIA. The language towards the end of the poem takes on a new tone, that of lament. It has a lyrical quality, remaining within the same Dread idiom: "cryin i sight/ brown grass/ of a city/ trying to out/ dry flames/ with i tears".

Part three: other themes

Brian Meeks' political position is clear. He considers Jamaica's biggest problem to be North American imperialism, manifested most obviously by the multinational companies like Alcan and Kaiser, and more subtly by the activities of the CIA. Alcan and Kaiser both mine bauxite, which is Jamaica's major foreign currency earner. They thus have tremendous power in relation to the Jamaican economy (Fearce 1982, pp.76-78, 94-96). Bauxite is extracted from the earth, which is a characteristic red colour. The process leaves a scene of devastation in its wake which has been described by more than one poet (see e.g. 'Red hills', by Wayne Brown, 1972) as a gash or wound. The literal scene of bauxite mining becomes an image for the social and economic damage done by multi-national companies:

a bloody  
alcan bauxite  
gash  
bleeds red mud  
oozes out a clotted future  
( 'Mendeville boomtown' )

Local business finds itself in a contradictory position. In many ways threatened by foreign economic domination, it finds common cause with these companies in resistance to the aspirations of the workers and unemployed. One of the reasons Michael Manley's government comes in for criticism in these poems is because of the degree to which local business interests were allowed to influence policy in direct contradiction to the

socialist platform on which the PNP had been elected (Beckford & Witter 1982, pp 93,96,99). This coalition comes in for particularly biting satire:

well coiffed  
afroes  
image of the  
new jamaica  
the firs bizness  
labour coa  
lition in the  
whole wide  
world

('The Trenchtown Assault Case')

External interference is blamed for much of the urban violence. The murder which takes place in a dance hall is just a "number" to a "crew cut accountant", who "closes/ the doors/ on a stars and/ stripes file". 'The Coup-Clock Clicks' details Meeks' conviction that, amidst a scene of increasing economic crisis, violence and confusion throughout Manley's second term, the way is being paved for a Chile-style coup:

confusion reigns  
reaction smiles  
and files  
its blade

(ibid.)

"Reaction" is personified in the image of the street gangster, frequently the agent of politically-organized crime. That he should smile as he files his murderous knife enhances the sense of a particularly sinister and cruel environment. At the other end of this destructive violence is another force, symbolized as "wall street/ john crows" (vultures). As the crisis deepens, they "take a closer/ perch/ prepare/ to pick the/ pieces out". This probably refers to the increasing stranglehold of the IMF in the effort to safeguard investments (Manley 1982, pp 183-4, Beckford & Witter 1982, pp 94-5). The combination of violence, IMF-imposed constraints and economic sabotage finally exhausted the Jamaican people, who duly voted in the pro-US Edward Seaga in November 1980 (Manley 1982, p208, Beckford & Witter, pp125, 128-9).

Like Oku Onuora, Brian Meeks exhibits a strong internationalism in his poems. Meeks grounds his view more explicitly in the sense of a common workers' struggle against the might of the international corporations, and of solidarity with the socialist countries, particularly Cuba and the Soviet Union. During the mid to late 1970's, a majority of Jamaican people supported a non-aligned policy. In this climate, Michael Manley pursued friendly relations with Cuba. Although Cuba is only 90 miles from Jamaica, to most Jamaicans it seemed infinitely more alien than Barbados, a thousand miles away, or the United States. Meeks expresses this perception of an alien neighbour in 'Cuba One' in which he begins by describing himself as a young boy, sighting Cuba for the first time through a spyglass:

thought i'd see  
a dull grey line  
tinged with red  
and barbed around

In fact what he sees is "Caribbean green", just like his own island. That first visual shock is enough to start him questioning the stereotypes he had received about Cuba. The poem celebrates a shift in the views of many Jamaicans as they experience their first tangible contacts with this unknown place. Cheap milk, he says, "meant more/ than years of twisted,/ tailored lies" (ibid.). Like 'The coup-clock clicks', this poem anticipates the shattering of these tentative new bonds, and the defeat of the rising pressure for radical change coming from the bottom of the society. Nevertheless, he considers that visions of alternative possibilities have been glimpsed, and cannot be taken away.

the blinds begin to  
blow away  
for Garvey's scattered  
offspring waiting,  
waking in the  
wings.

'Angola Poem' is an optimistic poem, celebrating the success of the

liberation struggle in Angola, describing it as "the/baby of/new Africa". Meeks portrays the triumph as a reversal of previous popular defeats all over the world: "Spaniard/ Indonesian,/ Chilean/ comrades/ rise again". The overthrow of repressive dictatorships throughout the 1970's (eg Vietnam, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Angola, Iran, Grenada, Nicaragua) led to a sense that the tide was turning on a world scale in favour of the poor and oppressed. It is in this spirit that the poem concludes:

back weh  
Sout' Africa!  
back weh  
America!  
Angola is  
the baby of  
new Africa

next stop  
JOHANNESBURG

Meeks is expressing here the intense desire of almost every black person (and many others too) to see the bastion of apartheid crumble.

#### Part four: performance

The writer unfortunately has never seen Erian Meeks perform, apart from three poems kindly recited into her tape recorder. The only written description of Meeks' performance style is by Mervyn Morris:

Erian Meeks, when he performs in public, sometimes plays the flute and is nearer in style to Linton (Kwesi Johnson) than to the more mobile three (Michael Smith, Cku Cnuora, Mutabaruka). (Morris 1982, p.12).

Immediately preceding this, he writes in relation to Linton Kwesi Johnson:

...the comparative stillness of Linton Johnson serves to focus attention on the word itself and the music in it or behind. (ibid.)

Thus we can infer that Meeks does not employ body movement and dramatic gesture as an integral part of performance. Like Johnson, his words are invariably sharply directed and specific, often introducing new ideas or

new information to an audience. Expansive body movement would therefore be a distraction. Meeks and Johnson both demand a more disciplined attention from their audiences; it is a part of their distinctive political messages. They are asking their audiences to take a more analytical look at the society in which they live.

In a radio performance Meeks linked the poems either with flute improvisations, which were plaintive, meditative or abrasive by turn, or by fading in Wailers songs, which expressed a collective, urban, vital energy. Meeks' poems can be fully appreciated from the printed page by anyone reasonably familiar with Jamaican Creole and Dread Talk. Performance is therefore for him primarily for the purpose of communication (especially of ideas) rather than a vehicle for self-expression.

CHAPTER FOUR: REVO! POETRY AND STRUGGLE IN THE EAST CARIBBEAN

Section one: context

A number of poets in Trinidad and Grenada emerged out of the Black Power movement. Events came to a first dramatic climax during the upheavals of 1970 in Trinidad which came to be known as 'the February Revolution'. In Trinidad the uprising was successfully defeated, but in Grenada the movement gained in momentum, undergoing continuous political development until it transformed into the revolutionary New Jewel Movement which successfully overthrew Eric Cairy in 1979.

A National Joint Action Committee ('N-JAC') was formed in Trinidad and Tobago in 1967 under the leadership of UWI students Geddes Grainger and Dave Darbeau. It was a coalition of black militants, student and youth groups, radical trade unions, and cultural organizations, all of whom felt the need for a political challenge to the Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams and his party, the People's National Movement (PNM), who had held power continuously in Trinidad since 1956. A skilled orator, Williams dazzled the population with his learning and ran rings round his political opposition. However, it became increasingly clear in the years which followed independence (1962) that Williams' ability to articulate the aspirations of the masses was not matched by political action. There was very little change in the distribution of wealth and power. Above all, the raised black consciousness that was percolating down from North America increased awareness that these remained to a significant degree in the hands of white people. A 1971 study of the ethnic distribution of economic power in Trinidad and Tobago, 'Who owns Trinidad and Tobago' (Camejo, Tapia 29/8/71), was to demonstrate this clearly. It found that 51% of the local business elite was white, 24% "off-white", 10% mixed, 9% Indian and 4% African. Afro-Caribbeans, the largest racial group, were at

the bottom of the pile, with the majority of Indo-Caribbeans in a comparable position. Prestigious jobs, such as work with banks and airlines, were reserved for the fair-skinned.

The incident which sparked off mass demonstrations and disturbances took place not in Trinidad but in Canada, at the Sir George Williams University, Montreal in February 1969. A number of Trinidadian students became involved in a dispute with a professor of biology whom they accused of practising racial discrimination in his marking of examination papers. When the university authorities came to the protection of the professor, the situation exploded. First of all there was an occupation of the computer centre and then, as resentments boiled over, the computer was smashed and the place set alight. The students were held on charges of conspiracy by the Canadian authorities. The Trinidadian government retained a low profile over the incident, although they did provide legal, diplomatic and financial help for the students (Ryan 1972, p.454). The incident raised awareness of the extent of Canadian economic interests in Trinidad, and there was talk for the first time of "Canadian imperialism". During 1969 Stokely Carmichael, a Trinidadian who had become a leading spokesperson of the American Black Power movement, was banned by the government from entering the island of his birth.

Warnings of a state of extreme discontent amongst the low-paid and unemployed emerged clearly during the 1970 Carnival, held in February. A band calling itself 'Pinetoppers Inc.' coming from the poor east side of Port of Spain portrayed 'The Truth about Blacks', which protested the continuing low status of the black majority. Pinetoppers continued to play an important role in the protest movement which subsequently developed. (Craig 1982). Grassroots support for a students' demonstration, which began with a rally outside the Royal Bank of Canada on February 26, 1970, developed into more general demands for Black

Power, for an end to foreign economic exploitation and all forms of inequality. Demonstrators later entered the Roman Catholic Cathedral, also identified as a bastion of white dominance, draped a black shirt over the statue of St. Peter, and hung a sign over the 'keys to Heaven' saying 'Freedom Now'. (Craig 1982, p.392). Subsequent protests attracted thousands, who marched into the shanty areas of East Dry River and assembled and debated in the central Woodford Square, which they renamed the 'People's Parliament'. Dr. Williams had made Woodford Square symbolic of popular protest in the 1950's when he declared it the "University of Woodford Square" and lectured the people on the evils of colonialism. For two months "the pounding feet of thousands of black marchers were heard all over Trinidad and Tobago" (Ryan 1972, p.455). The reaction from the authorities was aggressive. The leaders were imprisoned without bail, and horses, guns, sticks and teargas were used to disperse the crowds. This only intensified the mood of resentment, and the number of groups sympathetic to the demonstrators.

On March 12th 1970 the NJAC led a march into the all-Indian sugar belt, appealing to all Africans and Indians to unite. Massive demonstrations continued in Port of Spain during which one demonstrator, Basil Davis, was shot dead by the police on April 6th. His funeral marked a high point of intense emotion and anti-government feeling (Fohlehr 1970/71, 18-19). It was well-known that many junior officers and privates in the defence force were sympathetic to the protestors. On March 25th, George Weekes, president of the Cilfield Workers Trade Union, in an address to the 'People's Parliament' in Woodford Square, aligned powerful sections of the labour movement with the protests. On April 22nd there was to be a general strike which would unite workers in sugar, in oil, in the utilities and in transport. On the night of April 20th, however, a State of Emergency was declared and the leaders were rounded up. The

following day, there was a massive demonstration in Port of Spain, and a section of the army rebelled and began to march towards the city (Oxal 1971). However, their route was cut off by shells fired from a Coast Guard which blocked the road, while the demonstration, deprived of its leadership, petered out in aimless destruction. Eighty-seven soldiers and fifty-four civilian activists were arrested, among them the poet Abdul Malik, later to be charged with desecration and sedition.

The political movement was paralleled by cultural developments. The post-independence period witnessed the first flowering of literary creativity inside Trinidad since the 1930's (also a period of political turbulence), which both influenced and was influenced by the new nationalism. V.S. Naipaul and Samuel Selvon had both chosen exile in London in the 1950's because neither found the Caribbean environment conducive to creativity. Owing much to the exceptional talent and commitment of Derek Walcott, theatre provided an early break with this tendency. Migrating from his native St. Lucia, he had established the Trinidad Theatre Workshop in 1959 and with Errol Hill founded a tradition of excellent modern theatre in the East Caribbean. Michael Anthony was foremost among the new novelists who elected to stay at home, publishing The games were coming in 1963, The year in San Fernando in 1965 and Green days by the river in 1967. Earl Lovelace, based within Trinidad's non-privileged community, published While gods are falling in 1965 and The schoolmaster in 1968. Lovelace's prose is characterised by an easy and unselfconscious use of Trinidadian idiom from which he draws a strongly poetic and lyrical quality. A sense of self-satire, so strongly evident in Naipaul's early work and to a lesser extent in Selvon's, is replaced in Lovelace by a much more radical challenging of the society's official premises. Voices, edited by Clifford Sealy, marked the re-emergence of the little magazine in 1964.

In response to the increased political and cultural agitation triggered by the Rodney and Sir George Williams affairs, a number of new periodicals appeared, including Tapia, produced by Lloyd Best's Tapia House Group, New Voices, edited by Anson Gonzalez, and Kairi, edited by Christopher Laird. New Voices was, and continues to be, a literary small magazine, containing poems, stories, reviews and critical articles. Kairi is less specialist in its approach, including more discussion of popular culture. Tapia contained a stimulating mixture of political, cultural and literary analysis. Much of the critical work of Gordon Rohlehr appeared for the first time in Tapia, or Trinidad and Tobago Review, as it was renamed. Rohlehr was radicalised by the events of this period. He was a member of the Pivot group, a number of writers, secondary school and university graduates who held regular meetings during 1968 and 1969 to share their poems and prose and engaged in intensive discussion about the role of culture in Trinidadian society (Gonzalez 1974b). The need to write in language which echoed local speech idioms and reflected the rhythms of indigenous musical and speech forms was given a high priority. Pivot also attracted militants like Dave Darbeau who was subsequently to become a leader of NJAC. Intellectuals and artists became increasingly concerned to make their work more relevant to the mass of the people. Other members of the group were Victor Questel, Anson Gonzalez, and Cheryl Eyron, who braved the male-dominated calypso tents with her visually spectacular chanted deliveries and became a performing artist of some popularity. Victor Questel endeavoured to evolve a critical vocabulary more appropriate to the Caribbean cultural matrix. In 1972 Gonzalez and Questel jointly published a collection of their poems, entitled Score. Rohlehr comments, "Since 1970 the volume of published writing has swollen beyond all measure" (1976, p.2).

At a more grassroots level, many participants in the unrest and

members of 'N-JAC' were writing and performing poetry themselves. Throughout 1971 and 1972 NJAC was organising all-day cultural events aimed at consolidating Black Consciousness and emphasizing the African heritage. Rohlehr (ibid.) describes them as "a mixture of variety concert and political protest". Abdul Malik, Lasana Kwesi, Chetswayo Murai and others were performing their poems at community and trade union centres with certain calypsonians like Valentino, Elack Stalin and Chalkdust who identified themselves with the movement.

NJAC community activists produced an agitational paper called East Dry River speaks, which also contained poetry. The Dry River is the dry bed of a diverted river that once flowed through Port of Spain. It separates 'respectable' Port of Spain from the shanty town to the east. East Dry River was largely abandoned to the jurisdiction of the badjohns who received patronage and local power in return for services rendered to the PNM (Howe and Rennie 1982). During this period, more genuinely representative members of the community took a lead, bringing East Dry River to the centre of radical political concern. However, the E.D.R. community's lack of a structural relationship to the means of production (because few were workers) resulted in a very vague sense of how to exert pressure in order to achieve demands (Howe and Rennie 1982).

Brian Meeks in his thesis, 'The development of the 1970 revolution in Trinidad and Tobago' (1976) points out that there was a tendency to retreat into 'culturalism' after the political defeat of the Black Power movement. Rohlehr suggests that many of the same youth who had participated in the Black Power uprising, were by August 1970, "now dressed in the wierdo outfits of Woodstock" celebrating Independence "by a 16-hour long soul session at the Perseverance Club". He continues:

For the rest of 1970 these sessions were encouraged by the establishment as a means of channelling dissent, and by 1971, all the various aspects of folk, urban and youth cultures were employed as election gimmicks. There were free concerts advertised full-page in both dailies, and sponsored by various business firms. These went on until just after the elections when they ceased. Since that time the youth have expressed no mass political loyalties... (1976, p.8).

Strongly influenced by developments in Trinidad, a Black Power movement emerged in Grenada. In May 1970 there were Black Power demonstrations in sympathy with the upheavals in Trinidad and Tobago. Underlying the racial issue was a demand for economic and social justice with the slogan "More jobs now". Aroused black consciousness was however a significant spur to action. The analyses of Jacobs and Jacobs (1980, p.94) and Searle (1983, pp.14-15) both point out that the large numbers of Grenadian students receiving education abroad had a significant effect on consciousness in Grenada itself.

As a direct result of the unrest, a new group called Forum, in which a young lawyer, Maurice Bishop, played an active part, was formed with the aim of establishing a newspaper to act as the focus for a new political movement. In November 1970 about thirty hospital nurses peacefully marched through the streets of St. Georges, protesting about the lack of medicines, basic equipment and appalling working conditions. The Prime Minister Eric Gairy penalised them harshly, threatening some with dismissal. His response to the nurses' just demands aroused anger amongst broad sections of the community and a large demonstration formed on December 15th, protesting against Gairy's corrupt and authoritarian rule. The crowd was tear-gassed and thirty people, including Bishop and Unison Whiteman were arrested and tried on serious charges, all finally to be acquitted seven months later. By now Gairy had formed his notorious secret police, the Mongoose Gang, many of them, on Gairy's admission, criminals released from prison for the purpose. (Jacobs and Jacobs 1980, p.96).

Eric Gairy had bitterly disappointed the expectations Grenadians had of him. As a trade union leader in 1951, he had led the agricultural workers in strikes and crop burnings which had finally culminated in a 30% wage rise. Despite the fact that he made a deal with the British authorities to squash what looked like turning into a revolution (EPICA 1982, p.37), the wage rise gave him the popular base on which he built his political career. From that time on he seemed to think of little but his own personal advancement (Hart, introd. in Eishop 1984 p.xi). Corruption and neglect characterised all areas of Grenadian life by the 1970's. Gairy totally discredited the Westminster parliamentary system in the eyes of Grenadians by abusing his power and privileges and rigging electoral registers (Jacobs and Jacobs 1980 p. 64, and pp. 113-5).

In 1973 an organised radical political opposition began to emerge. The Movement for Assemblies of the People (MAP) led by Maurice Eishop, and the Joint Endeavour for Welfare, Education and Liberation (JEWEL) founded by Unison Whiteman joined forces as the New Jewel Movement (NJM) within months of their separate formation. Meanwhile, Gairy was engaged in independence negotiations. Gairy's opponents were not against genuine independence, but feared that he would use the handover to further consolidate his power. They demanded a referendum, which was stipulated in the Constitution as a necessary precondition to independence. When he refused, a People's Congress organised by the NJM in November 1973 attracted 10,000 people (10% of Grenada's population). The Congress demanded that Gairy resign within two weeks or face a general strike. On the day appointed for the strike, which was, strangely, a Sunday, (November 18, 1973), six NJM leaders were rounded up by Mongose members, who bludgeoned them into unconsciousness with sticks and shaved their heads with bits of broken glass. They were weeks in hospital, recovering. The day came to be known as 'Bloody Sunday'. This event finally convinced

'moderate' Grenadians, including the church and business sectors, that Gairy had to go, and a 'Committee of 22' was formed to achieve this. The dockworkers went on strike, and school students were constantly demonstrating. On 21 January 1974, in one of the demonstrations, Rupert Bishop, father of Maurice, was killed, trying to protect schoolchildren from Gairy's troops (Searle 1983a, p.22). Despite these criminal abuses of power, independence was granted to Grenada with Gairy as Prime Minister in 1974, with aid from Britain and loans from Jamaica, Trinidad and Guyana.

Cultural life was profoundly affected by the political and economic situation. For years Grenadians with artistic talents were tempted to leave for oil-rich Trinidad. They were part of a wave of Grenadian migration to that country and further afield, searching for better conditions. An education certificate was generally regarded as a passport for escape. The wittiest, most inventive, prolific, enduring and famous 'Trinidadian' calypsonian of all time - the Mighty Sparrow - comes in fact from Grenada. Abdul Malik, the major poet to be discussed in this chapter, was born and spent many childhood years in Grenada. Paul Keens-Douglas grew up in Grenada. They are three of the dominant figures of the Trinidadian cultural scene.

The Black Power movement had a strongly cultural orientation. The movement not only gave a stimulus to political organisation but helped to revive cultural activity in the island. Poetry and drumming were characteristic forms, and in this context a young poet, Chris 'Kojo' de Riggs was gaining respect and popularity. Calypsonians had gradually gained in prestige, from being buffoons and mere imitators of the songs coming out of Trinidad, to being recognised as 'people's commentators'. In 1977 a calypsonian of radical views, Cecil Eelfon, known as the 'Flying Turkey', helped to set up a calypso 'tent' in the parish of St.

Pauls. They called it 'We Tent' to establish its identity with the people and independence from government interference. Maurice Bishop, by now MP for St. Pauls, became closely associated with the 'tent'. Once more, one of the principle traditions of calypso, as a vehicle for political satire and subversive comment, was given an opportunity to flourish. 'We Tent' quickly became more popular than its rivals (Searle 1983b, p.50). Every device was used to suppress this popularity. We Tent's calypsoes were never played on the radio, and the group were prevented from using loudspeakers, the main means of advertising events in Grenada.

Flying Turkey's calypsoes of this period emphasized patriotism, pride in one's roots and the better times to come after the bitter days ahead. He says that he escaped the violence which befell many of the more critical calypsonians because of his 'respectable' position as a worker in a bank. The dictatorship could get away with beating up a "lumpen artiste" simply by claiming he was smoking ganja, and there would be no questions asked. "Quite a few artistes had a bitter experience, some getting bad licks and having microphones torn away from their hands" (ibid. p. 53).

The NJM consolidated its strength within the anti-Gairy unions, notably the teachers' union (G.U.T.) and the newly-formed Bank and General Workers Union. It enjoyed the mass support of school students, who bore much of the brunt of Gairy's brutality. Increasingly isolated internationally, Gairy consolidated ties with General Pinochet of Chile (Jacobs and Jacobs 1980 p.110) and shamed his people by taking his obsession with Unidentified Flying Objects to the United Nations Assembly. When Gairy left for a visit to the United States in March 1979, leaders of the New Jewel Movement decided to attempt to seize power. Repression under Gairy had led to the necessity for operating clandestinely, and by now the N.J.M. was a tight-knit and disciplined

organization. In the early hours of March 13th a group of about 40 were involved in an operation to take over the True Blue barracks, to seize the radio station and ensure the surrender of the police stations. After a brief engagement at the barracks, the soldiers surrendered with one fatality. Morale amongst them was extremely low. The radio station was taken with little difficulty and one policeman who, unlike his colleagues, put up a resistance, was killed.

Cecil Eelfon was among the NJM cadres who responded to Bishop's broadcast appeal to come and take up arms to defend the radio station. From that time on he became a soldier, although he continued his role as a calypsonian and later worked in the media. This combination of soldier and revolutionary artist was not unique. Revolution and a release of cultural creativity were two sides of a coin in the Grenadian experience. Chris de Riggs, already referred to, who became a leading poet of the revolution, and a minister in the government, also earned his position as a military official through his role in the events of March 13th 1979.

The majority of the population, having lived for years under the terror of the Mongcose Gang, gave a determined response to Bishop's broadcast message that Gairy's regime was at an end. They poured out into the streets in a spontaneous island-wide demonstration, and marched to the police stations, which were flying white flags, to confiscate arms. Volunteers set up watches and patrols to guard against any counter-revolutionary activity, while telephone workers blocked all overseas calls. There was little serious internal opposition (EPICA 1982, p.55).

The following four and a half years saw the first whole-hearted attempt in the English-speaking Caribbean to break free of neo-colonial dependency. Manley's experiment in 'democratic socialism' had been inspirational to the New Jewel Movement, and some programmes, particularly the literacy programme, were emulated. Nevertheless, Manley

and the P.N.P. had in fact followed a 'zig zag' course, oscillating between grass-roots demands and the dictates of the I.M.F. The commitment of the N.J.M. to education, to health provision, increased production and organisation especially in agriculture, and to equal rights for women, was backed up with thorough planning and organisation, and substantial advances were made in each area (EPICA 1982, pp. 74-93; Payne et. al. 1984, pp. 24-31). Grenadians experienced a complete reversal in self-image. Under Cairy development had lagged far behind other islands. After the revolution, Grenada was regularly receiving foreign delegations, including visits from African presidents Samora Machel and Kenneth Kaunda, and speakers like Angela Davis from the United States. The Prime Minister, Maurice Bishop, was an internationally renowned leader, respected for his stance. As Merle Collins, one of Grenada's best and most popular poets, puts it:

When de man ask  
Way you from?  
  
No more  
Playin' you doh hear  
Or sayin' some shit like  
A...  
A...  
A island  
Near by Trinidad  
Or  
A...  
A few mile  
Cff Venezuela  
But out  
Loud an' bole  
Like you make de name  
Grenada

The development of public forums, whether the major public rallies held in St. Georges, the capital, the councils which formed channels for popular consultation and debate or the activities and meetings of the women's and youth organizations, provided many openings for cultural performance. Cultural liberation was an important item on the agenda for

Grenadians as it was for all Afro-Caribbeans who had suffered centuries of repression of their language, their identity and their fundamental cultural forms (Searle 1984). The environment was conducive to the production of poetry, calypso and drama. New artists were to emerge. Much of the work expressed and celebrated a new sense of potential, of liberation. The People's Revolutionary Government made a commitment to cultural revolution within a wider context of economic and social revolution (Bishop, 1982). Grenada was the first country in the English-speaking Caribbean where teachers were being encouraged to see Creole as a valid medium, equal with standard English, and to use it in education, particularly as a creative medium.

#### Section two: Abdul Malik: biography

Abdul Malik was originally named Delano de Coteau. He was born in 1940 in St. Georges, Grenada and lived there until he was two, when he was brought by his parents to Laventille, the slum quarter of Port of Spain, Trinidad. There, he says, his memories begin (Malik, 1976). He developed a deep-rooted attachment to Laventille, which was to remain with him. When he was eight, his mother decided it was becoming too bad an area for children to grow up in, so the family returned to Grenada. He first attended the Morris (primary) school. He was in Grenada and eleven years old at the time of the 'Sky Red' uprising which convulsed the island, and out of which Eric Gairy emerged as charismatic leader. His grandmother, Louise Murray, was a member of Carvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and a supporter of West Indian Federation. His early experiences and education in Grenada were to have a profound impact on his political development. He went on to Presentation College where he was expelled "for some reason" (ibid.) after two years. He returned briefly to Trinidad, and then back again to the Grenada Boys Secondary

School (G.E.S.S.), which he left of his own accord at the age of seventeen. He describes himself as having been "insecure and very uncertain of where (he) was as a person" (ibid.). He felt out of place in Grenada; the only place he could relate to at all was Laventille. He began reading Caribbean novels, but his own creative talent went largely unrecognized. His parents joined his teachers in regarding him as somewhat "worthless". Somehow, however, his mother must have recognized his talent with words, as she always cherished the hope he might become a preacher. In terms of his political awareness, one of his fellow-students at G.E.S.S., Fernando, an Afro-Venezuelan, was to make an impact. Malik remembers "...the positive faith he Fernando expressed in the Cuban guerilla Fidel Castro...He [Malik] has often wondered about Fernando since this was in '57 some two years before the revolution and since Fernando besides having definite anti-American views was also in the habit of coming to school with his .38." (V.C.W. p.96).

After leaving school, Malik headed back to Laventille, where he has lived, with occasional visits to Grenada, ever since. One of the main fascinations of Laventille was the panyards, where the steel pan players gathered, lived and practised. He "continued the learning process in the streets and public libraries of Port-of-Spain and St. Georges" (Malik, 1975). He took intermittent jobs but spent most of the time scrunting - surviving precariously without employment. He first became politically active "after digesting the autobiography of Malcolm X" (Malik, 1975) in 1967. He helped to found the Black Panther Organisation in Trinidad in the same year, which soon merged with other groups to form 'N-JAC', also formed in 1967. He was regularly to be found on the drag - Frederick Street, the main street of Port of Spain - selling militant black newspapers.

He remembers being moved and being involved in everything that moved, left, and hitting 'the drag'...He remembers scattering words like seeds and seeing faces multiply, seeing limbs glisten, and joining hands...shaking hands with other Islands other continents - on the street - on the way - exchanging letters with the heirs of Malcolm under seige... (V.O.W. p.98).

He became a Muslim in 1968. There was already a sizeable Indo-Caribbean Muslim community in Trinidad. The Imam lectured him on the errors of "Black Muslimism" when he said his chosen name was Shabazz (after Malcolm X) and named him Abdul Malik instead. Malik puts the fact that there was a constant emphasis on moving away from black politics down to the close relationship the Muslim community had with the P.N.M. (Islam is noted for its lack of race consciousness in practice. Malcolm X, after years of advocating Black separatism, was profoundly moved by his own journey to Mecca where, in the context of Islam he recognised a genuine brotherhood (word used advisedly) of different races. (Little 1968, 478-80).) Whatever the motivations of the Trinidad Muslim hierarchy, Malik experienced a conflict between his political beliefs and the emphasis of the religious teaching, so he ceased to practise in an orthodox way. It is also probable that he found the strict personal code demanded by Islam impossible to practise. In 1976 he maintained: "I remain a Moslem, however, in my total self; in my inner being." (Malik 1976).

He played a prominent role in the uprising of 1970. With other NJAC founders, he led the protest marches. After the defeat of the uprising, he was arrested and tried. For some time the possibility of a death sentence hung over the detainees. First of all they were imprisoned on Nelson Island. Malik has only made reference to the experience once in a poem, 'Motto Vision'. In the interview with Bruce Paddington, he described it as "mental torture":

on EXILE island  
wid machine guns  
covering we  
black backs  
hunched wid tension  
locked back in  
before sunset,  
salt crystals fine now  
like gelignite  
in mih mind

('Motto Vision', BU p.34)

Later he was transferred to the Royal Gaol, and it was there that Malik's most intense period of poetry composition began. He was released after nine months detention. A collection of twenty-three poems, many of them long and widely inclusive in scope, entitled Elack up, was published in 1972. All had been inspired by his involvement in the Elack Power movement. A few were written in the two years prior to the 1970 uprising. The majority were written in the prison and deal directly with the experience, revealing a deepening of thought and conviction. The others were written on his release, and show an increasing sureness of touch and clarity as he works out the implications of his tumultuous experiences.

In the aftermath of the 'February Revolution' there was a high level of cultural activity. Besides the business-backed, 'Woodstock' style events, NJAC continued to be a source of new political and cultural action, and held regular rallies and other events. NJAC dominated the 'People's Parliament', which has become a permanent feature of Woodford Square. In all these settings, Malik found a platform. He was also invited, no doubt as something of an enfant terrible, to "occasional literary gatherings" (programme note, The Ead Poet, Nov. 1975). By 1975 he was being called "Trinidad's major poet of the time" (ibid.) and was poised for acceptance by the more radical intelligentsia and artistic elements of the petit-bourgeoisie. On November 6th, 7th and 8th, Malik's show, The Ead Poet, first delivered as a NJAC event on 18th October 1975, came to Port of Spain's major theatre, the Little Carib. The show was an

ambitious and highly dramatic event, bringing together on stage the Trinidad Scherzando, "the only one of the major steelbands to be community sponsored and a band that has placed itself right in the vanguard of steelband evolution" (ibid.), and the New World Performers who provided chorus and vocals. It was sponsored by the Kairi group, which produced the magazine of the same name and played a major role in supporting and promoting Trinidad theatre (Rohlehr 1976, p.2). 'Bad' in Trinidad is used to mean tough and hard, with positive implications. It can in fact mean its straight opposite, good. It is in this sense that it is used in the title. It also implies a rejection of bourgeois standards of good poetry.

Malik also produced his second volume of poetry, entitled Revo in 1975. During the 1970's he was working as a labourer for the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Company (T&TEC), and was active as a member of the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union (O.W.T.U.). The experience informs the work of this collection, which contains many references to the working class and trade union leaders like the Grenadian Uriah 'Buzz' Butler, who founded the Trinidadian trade union movement, and George Weekes, then leader of the C.W.T.U. Revo marks a move away from a narrowly-defined black politics. In his interview with Eruce Paddington in 1976 Malik said, "...from the '70 period I realised that there are limitations in labelling yourself a Black poet...I realised that what I had to do was try and see things from different angles and not look in one direction." (p.115). This development marked a slight distancing from NJAC which remained firmly and exclusively black nationalist. However, he "maintain(ed) brotherhood with N.J.A.C. and the cause in particular" (Malik, 1975). In no sense did he relinquish the cause of black people and the legacy of Carvey. He did, however, thoroughly embrace the Cuban revolution, regarded by some black nationalists as "white", and opened

his eyes to the implications of international class struggle and the national liberation movements. He stated his commitment, in the foreword to Revo, to "nothing less than total revolution". During these years, he had witnessed much that could have led him to despair. He had seen the movement for democracy and human rights in Grenada met with increasing brutality, including 'Bloody Sunday' (1973) and the death of Rupert Bishop in 1974. After the defeat of the Black Power uprising in Trinidad, a group of young idealists went to the hills with the aim of establishing a guerilla movement. During 1974 they were picked off one by one and gunned down by the police. Revo contains poems dedicated to two of them. The collection inevitably contains a strong sense of grief, buoyed up by a conviction that the legacy of struggle, with heroes like Garvey, Harryshow, Butler, Fidel Castro and Malcolm X (whose mother was Grenadian), is moving the people of the Caribbean inevitably towards their own liberation.

In 1976 Malik's performances included an appearance in Cheryl Byron's show entitled Fusion of Vibes at the Little Carib on 15th June. 'Fusion Part 1 - The Whirlwind' was directed by Malik and combined his own work with the poetry of Lasana Kweisi, Chetwayo Murai and Kasi Senghor. Supporting artists were musician Andre Tanker, calypsonian Valentino, female poet Chioneso Kaur. The Trinidad Scherzando steel orchestra were an integral part of the show. It was first put on at Port of Spain's Town Hall in July 1977, and was subsequently repeated at the Little Carib, and various venues throughout Trinidad. As with most productions in Trinidad, finances and other resources had to be found by the artists themselves. The show played to "elated and appreciative" packed audiences (Cxley 1977) "at a particularly low point in the cultural and political life of Trinago." (V.C.W. P.115). A reviewer commented that it was "a much needed reminder of the '1970' mood." (Kairi

'78, p.68). Visioneerer was first staged at the Little Carib in 1978 and then in June 1979 at Port of Spain Public Library. The 1979 Visioneerer performances included a celebration of the recent NJM takeover in Grenada and autobiographical accounts of Malik's life which were to form part of his prose-and-poetry work V.C.W. (Voice of the Whirlwind). In January 1980 Malik was invited to Cuba, to the International Writers' Festival. He regarded this invitation as "the high point of his career...total acceptance of his work" (Oxley 1980). His visit meant that he regretfully turned down an invitation to 'read' in Trinidad with Mark Strand, Joseph Brodsky and Derek Walcott. Malik also visited Jamaica for the first time. These islands, one the birthplace of Garvey, the other of Marti and Castro, held much symbolic meaning for him, which subsequently emerged in new prose and poetry. The significance seemed almost overwhelming in view of the recent triumph of the New Jewel Movement.

On October 24th and 25th 1980, Malik gave a new presentation, Overview at the Little Carib. It consisted of a fusion of autobiographical prose-poetry from V.C.W. (as yet unpublished), and poetry, both sung and spoken, in which he sought to express his sense of being driven, as a lone voice, to celebrate past heroes, like Eutler, to praise the revolutions of Cuba and Grenada, and the spirit of Garvey in Jamaica. Throughout the years of the People's Revolutionary Government, Malik paid regular visits to Grenada, where he was tremendously popular.

In July 1981 he formed part of the Trinidad contingent at Carifesta in Barbados. At the end of October the same year he teamed up with Paul Keens-Douglas for the first week of Keens-Douglas' annual show at the Little Carib, which was entitled Twice upon a time. In the second week, Louise Bennett joined the show (Trinidad Guardian 29/10/81).

In March 1982, a record album of some of Malik's poetry linked by sections of the score he had composed for a T&TEC film was released under

the title More power...to the people: the poetry & music of Malik. Malik composed this extended piece without being able to play an instrument or read music. Apparently, because he was working with musicians he had associated with closely for years, they were able to reproduce his ideas satisfactorily. The music consists of a dialogue between acoustic guitar, steel pan and piano and is suggestive of different phases of Caribbean history. The combination of poem extracts is obviously the result of careful thought, and an ambitious overall idea. In March 1983 and March 1985 Malik came to England to take part in the International Bookfair of Radical, Black and Third World Books.

Section three: the poetry in performance

a) Methods of composition

Malik works through entire poems in his head, repeating sections to himself and to friends and reworking them until he is satisfied before they are committed to paper. By this time they are fully memorized, so that paper becomes more a medium of transmission than of recording; a necessary stage in getting the work published. This oral method of composition has apparently been increasingly employed, especially with the chant-like poems of the recent period.

In the second collection, Revo, it is clear, however, that Malik made a number of typographical experiments, so that composition was probably affected as it went down on paper. In the case of 'X'd', which is written in the shape of an X in honour of Malcolm X, typographical demands almost override those of meaning. Such an approach is untypical; a form of experimentation that did not last long. However, Malik has from his early days paid close attention to the appearances of the poem on the printed page and the additional nuances that can be signalled by the

arrangement of words or parts of words. For this particular approach to words, he owed a great deal to E.K. Brathwaite.

Two examples of this are: in 'Sea Blues', the rearrangement (and adjusted spelling) of 'flagellation' to read:

... flag-  
elation

to express the complex impact of a fraudulent independence day; and a set of paradoxical juxtapositions in 'Eblack womb/ movements':

we are  
not still  
  born  
we move  
we are  
still moving  
  on

The arrangement of words places emphasis on 'we are', 'we move', 'not still', 'still moving'. The first usage of still, meaning motionless, carries over to the second occurrence of the word (meaning 'as yet') and vice versa, so that despite the syntactic assertion of movement there is some ambiguity. We have 'still' and 'moving' placed side by side, which creates a sense of tension and mystery. While taken out of context these may seem like simply cerebral forms of word-play, in context they attract the eye and generate the excitement often associated with ambiguity in literature. We shall moreover see that both these poems are fully realized as oral performances, and such textual play (which may be reflected in performance) is an additional pleasure to someone who has already enjoyed them aurally, rather than a feature on which appreciation of the poems hinges.

Malik's poems have become increasingly orally-based but rarely less complex. In Revo, many of the poems are songs or have sung choruses, or are spoken against a background of song. The poems which are a part of V.O.W. are either songs, like 'Wuh de mountain say' and 'Discovery', or chants like 'Steady as she blows', 'The display' and 'The whirlwind'.

Repetition is constantly used, but it is a progressive rather than 'static' repetition. Thus in 'Steady as she blows' (a celebration of the revolutionary take-over in Grenada), new elements of imagery or rhythm are introduced up to two-thirds of the way through the poem, and then all of these are reworked to build to a crescendo. The metaphor of taking over the ship, for example:

we done take the wheel  
we done change the course  
we on full control

is made more explicit two stanzas later:

we done arm weself  
we done free weself  
we on full control

While the weary-sounding:

we can't stand no more  
we can't take no more

is answered by the urgent rhythm and meaning of:

we tired lose  
now we boun to win  
we tired sink  
so we start to swim  
we tired crawl  
now we walkin tall

The repetition of form reflects a great effort of will, and the enormity of the task ahead. This builds to a climax before the author steps back to enjoy a moment of calm and satisfaction at the achievement so far. He contemplates the N.J.M. "like jewel specks of diamonds/ shining now in mih mind/ dem men make me feel good man/ dem men make me feel so good." The pace slows, and these last four lines lengthen, their novel introduction right at the end heightening the sense of repose and pleasure.

His method of composition is akin to music. Often his poems have tunes or are conceived of within presentations which are fundamentally musical. As he plays no instrument, Malik has to maintain his ideas in

his head and communicate them by humming. At a rehearsal witnessed in Trinidad, a new chorus to accompany 'Pan run' was communicated to a choir in this way and clearly posed few problems for all concerned. Later instrumental parts were added in the same way. While Malik never tinkers with the words of his poems once they are completed, he likes to experiment with presentation, developing new arrangements, like a composer of music.

b) The presence on stage

Malik has an astonishing impact on stage. He is about six feet four inches tall and dark, with a rather fearsome-looking bearded face. His voice is very fine and resonant. A critic, Jeremy Taylor, wrote of his first performance at the Little Carib in 1975:

Some of his poems are songs, some are a dialogue between his voice and the musicians, some are spoken with a quiet drum backing, some are straight poems. He speaks them well, not chanting, not hypnotised by the sound of his own lines, as poets tend to be; he acknowledges with every breath that for him the poem is the meaning, the political message, the expression of his own suffering and frustration, and not just a literary form. In between he talks, very quiet and dry, in a throwaway style; there is power there, but it is kept in, the movements are languid, the voice very controlled, as if everything emerged from a terrifying weariness of spirit, rising only rarely to vigour. (Express 12/11/75 p.9)

Malik is haunted and driven by the words he composes; in many cases they seem to frighten him. He ponders, years after they were written, over words which acquire revealing or disturbing new significance with time. He does not like the word "performance". Presentations of his poems are rare events, not only because it is difficult to get the material support to put a show together, but also because the poet clearly regards them as acts of ritual intensity, takes a perfectionist approach to presentation, and is completely drained of energy in the process. Alvin Massey ('Mauby') commented, 'An actor who had not tasted prison life would be hard put to it to convey the desolation as Malik did with muted

simplicity in 'No Tears'. (Trinidad Guardian 14/11/75, p.4).

Steel pan has always been an integral part of presentation. In 1975 and 1977, Malik appeared with a full steel band, Scherzando. Performances of his 'Pan run' sequence (1972, pp.42-50) must have been breathtaking. It has remained the most popular item in the repertoire ever since. Words and music are complementary. The music enhances the rather noble epic structure and helps to explain the passion embodied in the expression, while the explosion of violence, obscenity, desperation, suffering and conviction which the words by turns represent root the beautiful music in its true context and history. "The importance he himself attributes to his music as an intrinsic part of the poetry showed in the urgency of his hands marking the rhythm, in the almost unbridled force with which his phrases snatched at the beat even ahead of the musicians... His calypso heritage became increasingly apparent..." (Massey *ibid.*).

'Africindia' (1972, pp.36-9) is accompanied by an ominous and urgent drum, representing both the "shango drum" (Africa) and the "tassa drum" (India), and a symbol of underlying common ground. 'Africindia' expresses a deep sense of anger, heard also in the sound of the drum and the voice, which at times raises almost to a shout. The drum is used likewise in 'Black up' to emphasize the warning of a rising tide of rebellion.

At the beginning of Revo, 'A note from the author' ends with the words, "The complete work, poem and tune together is called "Revolution". This is a play on words. The 'complete work' is not only the slim booklet, but the job in hand for humanity. Revolution is the object of "poem and tune together". Malik's vision of revolution is of a fundamentally creative process. The words do, however, also refer to the book, and we do understand that Revo too is "poem and tune together". 'Litany' (1975, pp.6-8), a tribute to Malik's mother, is a 'spoken poem, but has been performed against a chorus of the spiritual, 'Soon I shall

be done with the troubles of this world'. 'Sea blues' (1975, pp.14-15) has a sung chorus:

ALL HAIL ALL HELL  
in the Caribbean  
the Motto-Visioned eye  
is closed

ALL HAIL ALL HELL  
Rastafar-I  
the Motto-Visioned eye  
is closed

'Revo' (1975, pp.17-19), a praise-poem to his comrades in the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Company (T&TEC), and to the West Indian working class in general, is spoken against a sung drone of "Never free never free never free..." The central image is of a team of workers raising electricity poles. A call-and-response refrain:

lancing (call) pole (reponse)  
one more (call) time (reponse)

co-ordinates the effort (Questel 1978b, p.53). The use of rhythmic work-call places this labour squarely in African and Caribbean tradition. It contains both tonal and rhythmic tension. The call is pitched higher, quicker, more assertively; while the response is pitched low and is drawn out, embodying the strain and effort of the action. The whole piece relies on constant changes of rhythm and pitch.

'Black womb/movements' (1975, pp.20-21) also uses pitch, rhythm and onomatopoeic sound in an extremely dramatic way. It begins, "U -HOO-ROO!" (uhuru), transformed into an eerie wolf's cry. The strangeness is enhanced by alternating two-tone drones played on a bass pan. The onomatopoeia is carried through into the name Chaka, which is repeated nine times at increasing volume and intensity, imitating the sound of the chac-chac, or maraccas:

SH-SH-SHAAKA SH-SH-SHAAKA SH-SH-SHAAKA etc.

A flourish of the chac-chac, suggestive of the rattle snake or hot tropical nights, introduces some stanzas. The cry 'U-HOO-ROO!' is repeated, being both a war cry and a plaintive sound of desolation and displacement.

'Fire flies...for Beverly' (1975, pp.24-25) has a harsh and ugly subject (a young woman shot "to ribbons") which is transformed into an affirmation of life and innocence through the language of the poem and the sense of tenderness which pervades it. The second half of the poem is a sung lament. Its mood is extremely soft and gentle, enhancing the final statement of faith:

Love is redeemed  
with fireflies  
fireflies  
fireflies

In performance, the first, more bitter half of the poem is spoken against the sung second portion, which is then repeated alone. The mood is of the dying day, of going to sleep, or being laid to rest.

Malik has written two calypsoes, 'Tenor girl' and 'Discovery', both inspired by the steel pan. 'Tenor girl', in the best(?) tradition of calypso, has an erotic double meaning. The identities of the girl being addressed and of the tenor pan are confused. Playing pan is an erotic experience; the experience of sex is related to the thrill and fulfilment of playing pan. 'Tenor girl' (1975, pp.30-31) is very popular, partly because it has a very pleasant, classic calypso tune, and partly because of its 'naughty' ending. Throughout the poem Malik asserts "Is time - is time" to take the tenor girl. He concludes:

an when we roll  
we have to roll  
in time - in time  
an when we come  
we have to .....

inviting the audience to finish the verse. 'Tenor girl' is hardly one of

Malik's strongest poems, but it is an authentic use of the calypso form.

'Discovery' is a much later calypso, forming part of V.O.W. Again it has an attractive 'classic' calypso melody, but this time is heavily tinged with irony - not against the form itself, but against official public attitudes to the creators of calypso and steel band music. The title 'Discovery' is heavily ironic. It refers to the fact that Winston 'Spree' Simon had recently been placed on a pedestal and celebrated as the originator of the steel pan. In his life he was never recognised by officialdom and was only a hero to those around who were as poor as him.

Yuh think yuh could fool me  
with yuh recent discovery  
but Spree Simon dead  
in poverty

This calypso is firmly within another tradition of the form; that of the barbed social comment.

'The Bad Poet', staged at the Little Carib in 1975, had a striking set designed by Judith Laird. The stage for 'Fusion part 1 - the Whirlwind' (1977) depicted a windblown plantation yard, in a setting of sugarcane, bamboo and tangled vines. Drums and "unpainted and crude-looking" pans were a functional part of the set. The tickets were cheap, and Port of Spain Town Hall was packed, demonstrating "that the revolutionary poet can stand as a medium of communication to a much wider spectrum of people." (Oxley 1977).

Malik's range as a performing artist has continued to develop. Rhythm and melody have been used with increasing skill to create a wide range of moods from lighthearted narrative to violent intensity. In the process he has rooted himself more and more firmly in the oral tradition.

Section four: Malik's themes

a) Black power: the beginnings

Some of Malik's early poems recreate vivid flashes of the growing momentum of activities generated by the Black Power movement during 1969 and 1970. There is the picture of Malik himself, in Frederick Street:

- GET THIS REVOLUTIONARY  
PAPER -- THINK BLACK -- I shout  
( 'Hot P-aper on a street corner', BU, p.13)

and of the marches which took place up and down the country. 'March!' recounts the intensity of the silence in which they marched, and the dramatic sight of the "BLACK - GREEN - RED" flags they carried. The poem also describes the reckless bravado of a confrontation with security forces:

The anger -- the urgency  
in our blood  
SHOOT! SHOOT!  
as we dared  
these lost men armed  
to kill their own people  
(BU, p.14)

'Black Up' (1969) includes within its notion of black the Vietnamese revolutionaries and Fidel Castro. As in later poems, 'Black Up' contains a pervasive sense of groundswell, which is evoked through images both of nature ("thunder on every shore") and humanity ("tidal thought waves").

b) The racial/sexual schema

Malik's poems in Black up are harshly anti-white, and this sentiment is invariably associated with sexual imagery. His perspective develops and changes from the tense and frustrated tones of the poems written prior to and during imprisonment, to the more reflective sense of the later ones.

In one of his major poems, 'Africindia' (post-prison) he writes of:

...the awful  
thrust of history  
that cracked open  
Africa's womb  
of humanity  
and held to ransom  
India's price less  
loss of people  
(EU, p.36)

The image expresses an underlying unity of common historical experience beneath the disparity of Trinidad's two major racial groups. The 'marriage' is, however,

a frigid lie  
in a hot bed-  
lam of sugar  
cane and oil

Both African and Indian workers have known slavery to 'King Sugar' and now the oil belts run through the cane fields. What they have in common is a parallel experience of 'rape' by the white slavers/ property owners. Now tourism brings in another form of destructive penetration. The young Indian girl becomes a symbol of innocence abused. Her blood, "washed away", is lost to the "flushed red" tourists. They thrive on her meaningless sacrifice. Such experiences have determined a world view which emphasizes the north-south division between white Europe/America and the 'non-white Third World'. The wholesale penetration by the white north in successive phases of mercantilism, slave trade, plantation economy, indenture, colonialism and dependent capitalism is seen in terms of a global rape, with the north representing a masculine, aggressive principle, and the south representing a feminine, defensive principle. A contrast is drawn here in the poem between the fecundity of Africa and India, and the death-dealing force which ruptures them.

The penetration, whether military, economic or cultural, is personified at every phase as white and male. The abuse of young Indian girls becomes a symbol for the experiences of the whole of Trinidad:

The holy whores  
now marketing flesh  
I N D U S T R I A L     INTAKE!  
feeling the white  
weight screwing  
from behind, below, bending before  
(p.37)

This image of sodomy suggests that none, male or female, escape humiliation. Women, past and present, have been held up for sale, whether as slave or prostitute. The modern history of Trinidad has included an occupation by U.S. troops during World War II. Dollars were plentiful, which had a degenerating effect on a generally poor society. The calypso 'Rum and Coca Cola', which was a great hit in the United States performed by the Andrews Sisters, tells of:

Mother and daughter  
working for the Yankee dollar

Many Trinidadian men participated in this process as pimps ('sweet men'), or looked on resentfully, driven to the sidelines by poverty, unemployment and political impotence. Throughout Trinidad's post-Columbian history, the power of the white male has been prevalent, and associated in the popular consciousness with sexual humiliation and exploitation.

The experience originates in slavery. For an enslaved African woman consigned to the auction block, "dimensions of her worth" became synonymous with "the/ contours of her hips" ('Art Projection', 1972, p.51). Ownership of her body by a white male meant that the black woman was subjected to constant licensed rape. In 'The Ear', the poet describes himself as:

... the addicted  
advocate of love  
and war against  
the castrators  
and defilers  
of our minds  
and bodies

These oppressors are left undefined, but the images go back to the

experiences of slavery. Treated in many ways like cattle (or worse), strong black males were often used as 'studs' on the plantation. The white male was to become fixated by his own creation. Having reduced the black male to a purely sexual function, he became obsessed with the black man's imagined superhuman prowess (Fanon 1970, 111-124). Neglecting his white wife for black and brown 'concubines', he became morbidly preoccupied with the possibility of liaisons between the white woman and black man. The solution the white male found to his angst was castration. In 'The Zebra' (1972, p. 27), the poet speaks of "the anger rooted/ in my balls".

The economic motive behind these brutal and traumatic experiences is clearly identified by the poet. Out of the enslaved woman's negation come:

... the base inhuman birth  
cries of Capitalist Culture  
( 'Art Projection', 1972, p.31)

It did not help the self-esteem of the modern-day Trinidadian male, therefore, to see 'his' women enslaved once more, to the power of the "Yankee dollar". Bitterness often spilled over against the women themselves, and revenge is seen in terms of 'taking over' their prostituted sisters from the white man:

If you catch them broke, you can get them all for nothing  
Don't make a row -  
Yankees gone and Sparrow take over now  
( 'Jean and Dinah', The Mighty Sparrow)

Several studies have been made of the latent misogyny in many Trinidadian calypsoes (Elder 1968, Austin 1976, Warner 1982, pp. 95-110).

It may be consciousness of a common historical experience of sexual abuse which leads to occasional images identifying quite closely with female body functions. 'Pan run' (parts 1 and 2) was inspired by a drawing on Malik's cell wall of a woman giving birth to a steel pan. Despite the fact that it was men who created the pan, images of procreation, of birth, blood, motherhood, the umbilical cord abound

throughout the sequence. The parman, whose voice is the poem, is "de blood" that the authorities have been "raising/ fuh 10 years" of a jail sentence. The umbilical cord still joins him to his "Mudder", which is Africa:

an mih blood  
never stop running  
cross mih middle passage

However, the "addicated advocate of love" can also be a pornographer. The poems of this early period veer between a conscious restitution of the dignity of the black woman ('No Tears', 'Art Projection') and sexist self-display ('Love & Sex'). In 'Love & Sex' the image of "my sister's/ road", with its implications of use by various 'traffic', is distasteful. The poem throughout celebrates the power of the male ("I am your warrior") and the weakness and dependency of the female (she bathes his chest in tears). 'Pan run', undoubtedly a brilliant sequence, also poses certain problems. The two parts of the poem remain entirely within the developing consciousness of the pan man. The first part portrays him as violent, prejudiced against people from other islands, and abusive of women. In the second part, after a sentence of "10 years and 12 strokes", he is a man with a consciousness of his history, a pride in his people's traditions, and an attitude towards women which revolves around motherhood and love. However, the first part is frequently performed without the second, and its popularity may well be in part due to the scatology which pervades it. The positive female imagery of part 2 is hard put to override the excitement of:

Take she wallet!  
Prick she  
good horse to ride  
in de yard  
Poonche! Poonche!  
Come quick!

which draws the audience into identification through its sheer rhythmic vitality. The association of sinking the pan (to create the required

surface tension), by setting a fire under it and beating it with a sledgehammer, with the sex act:

bun de pan!  
bun it! bun it!  
bun she cunt!

is vicious and sadistic. There is no possible positive implication of "cunt" here, such as Lawrence claimed for it. The word, usually swallowed by Malik in performance, bears amoral witness to women's abuse.

'Pan run' part 2 belongs to the post-prison, more reflective period. In this and 'Art projection' there is a much more sensitive consciousness of the experience of women. 'Art projection' also examines the damage done to the male psyche during slavery which in turn has often negatively affected relationships with women. The absolute power of slave ownership led to a cult of male supremacy in which both white and black males play distorted roles:

black studs  
of stars created  
by the Master  
mind of slavery

The image, a painting of a woman on the auction block, provokes rage, but it is not now simply directed at 'Whitey'. The perpetrators of the original evil are clearly identified, but there is also recognition that the continued negation of the black woman is a process in which the black man plays a part. There is 'a void' in him, a legacy of the past, which turns him into an oppressor too, if he is not consciously fighting it:

a-  
void  
in  
us  
the impotence  
of our urge  
to rape her

In other words, unlike the calypsonian, he does not seek to "take over" where the white man left off. The rape of the black woman is not only seen in terms of physical assault. Within the context of "Capitalist

Culture" she is once again reduced to "vital statistics/ on parade". She is reified ("DOLL-arised") and de-culturized ("white washed"). Men too, while they continue to be dazzled by this false show, are left materially and spiritually impoverished:

broken down  
to nothing  
in our manhood  
and nothing  
drawn for us  
but the fraudulence  
of this Capitalist Culture

By this point Malik had moved beyond a simple black/white plantation paradigm. He recognized that oppression could operate on many levels perpetrated by all those who had (or thought they had) a vested interest in the prevailing order of things. It became inadequate to dismiss every black co-operator with the existing system as having a "white mind", as the Black Power philosophy was wont to do. It became important to explain and understand these responses. Brian Meeks, in his thesis on the 'February Revolution', recognized the "revolutionary, democratic and anti-imperialist" nature of Black Power, but pronounced it incapable of resolving "the neo-colonialist impasse" (p.ii). The reason he gives is that Black Power as a theory:

cannot tell us why different groups, the middle strata, the petty bourgeois, the working class, reacted differently and in predictable ways in the course of the revolutionary struggle in spite of the fact that they were of the same colour. (Meeks, 1976, p.39 - author's emphasis).

In his later poems, Malik was to develop a strong identification with the Caribbean working class.

c) The subterranean popular voice

Although he had read Caribbean fiction widely, Malik only began reading poetry seriously after becoming well-established as a poet. (Malik, 1976, p.117). His main poetic influences have come, rather, from

the oral traditions of calypso, masquerade, prayer-meeting and street-lime. These influences, rhetorical and musical, have helped to create a poetry at one with Trinidad popular consciousness.

Laventille, the district of Port of Spain in which Malik has lived most of his life, has its own identity and cultural traditions. In 1838, after the period of so-called 'apprenticeship', ex-slaves were free to leave the plantations. Settlement began almost immediately on the hills of Laventille, east of the Dry River. It has remained largely an area of concentrated poverty with extremely high levels of unemployment. It has a tradition of rebelliousness. It was the source of the jamette carnival, which was considered so low class that there were constant bans. The steel pan also originated in Laventille, emerging in full force during the celebrations at the end of World War II. Drums had long been banned from carnival as the authorities regarded them as tending to incite riot (Hill 1972). Consequently the people were always looking for substitutes. Pre-war, the rhythms for Carnival had been provided by the tambo-bambo bands, who beat various lengths and thicknesses of bamboo, providing additional rhythms from metallic objects such as car wheel hubs, spoons, dustbins or oil drums. During the war, experimenters discovered that a range of notes could be achieved through depressing sections of different sizes on the upper surface of an oil drum. The potential for combining percussion and melody inspired a very rapid development of this new instrument, which soon had its range of trebles, tenors, altos and basses and began to aspire to big band proportions. In 1951, a steel band was a very popular feature at the Festival of Britain (Hill 1972, p.51). It was the first time a steel band had toured outside the West Indies.

Amongst the unemployed and underemployed of Port of Spain it became extremely prestigious to be associated with the steelband movement, either as a maker of pans or as a musician. Each band had its group of

passionate supporters. Throughout the 1950's and 60's violent clashes took place on the streets of Port of Spain during Carnival, when one band would come face to face with another, and both would refuse to give ground. The situation had become so violent by 1956 that Eric Williams, newly-elected as the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, intervened personally, establishing dialogue between warring bands. He set up a Crash Programme of employment, which was allocated on the basis of allegiance to the P.N.M. (Howe and Rennie 1982). "Steelbandmen became the unofficial 'army' of the P.N.M. in 1956." (Craig 1982, p.391). To the population of Laventille the pan men were heroes - it was a mark of status to have two sticks for beating pan in one's back pocket. The battles on the streets and the striving for innovation and ever greater achievement in the music both contributed to a heroic mythology around the movement. A Steelband Association, which campaigned for recognition, was established in 1949. Now the steel band is promoted with pride as a symbol of native creativity and national identity. Many of the early pan men died neglected and in poverty, however.

Unemployment is so pervasive that particular cultural styles have developed out of it. Scrunting is a way of life. (See Earl Lovelace, The dragon can't dance (1979)). Men who gather at street corners, entertaining each other with witty or extravagant dialogue, and watching the world, particularly women, go by, are called limers. The styles of Malik's poetry are drawn directly from this environment. Some of his closest associates are steel band musicians, and he has been deeply involved in the development of the steel band movement. He has said that people around him expected him to become a calypsonian (ibid. p.117). Some of his poems are in fact calypsoes ('Tenor Girl', 'Spree Simon') and it is probably for these, along with his epic performance poems, 'Pan run' parts 1 and 2, that he is most popular.

In the 'Pan run' poems, Malik epitomizes his capacity to express the 'subterranean voice' of Trinidad's urban poor. The two poems express a growth of perception, which seems to develop under its own dynamic rather than through self-conscious intervention by the author. The narrator of the poem is a persona, that of a steel band man, who has his share of all the prejudices and aggressions of his community, but who attains a coherence of vision through his passionate commitment to pan, and his firm sense of identity, aroused in the context of struggle. Rohlehr comments:

By letting us hear the unrestrained voice of an insider, Malik creates a voice which is itself the testimony of the entire city. (Rohlehr 1976, p.28)

The referent points of a world-view developing within a significant set of historical events are established through fragments and allusion. The tone of 'Pan run 1' is combative, the rhythms stacatto, reminiscent of 'robber talk' (developed by a carnival character, the Midnight Robber, who told elaborate tales of his daring and heartless deeds, using carefully memorized strings of long words). The pan player is in his element in the hectic and anarchic atmosphere prior to and just after the wartime Yankee occupation. A calypso phrase, cynically bent to reveal a certain reality:

- Mary Ann - all day  
all night she doing it

blends with the sharp rhythms of the macho street fighter:

dis is mih pan  
carn leave she!  
buss up de marn [man]  
fe she get buss  
up fe she

('Pan run 1', 1972, p.45)

As the steel band movement gathers strength, the pan man throws himself with gusto into the gang warfare which was associated with it:

an all ah we blood  
crawling cross de City  
like de dry river

As Rohlehr points out, Malik indicated the background to the pan man's imprisonment: the increasing co-option of the steelband movement by the P.N.M. "The national movement appropriated the wit of the calypsonians and the violent energies of steelband gangs - particularly Desperadoes and Marabuntas - who, encouraged by the partiality of the Police ensured that the rural based and increasingly East Indian dominated (opposition) party could not conduct meetings peacefully in the city." (Rohlehr 1976, p.31). This situation was particularly acute during the West Indies Federal elections of 1958, says Rohlehr, when, as Malik puts it, "de Shango man" (Afro-Trinidadian) "beat de Babu man" (Indo-Trinidadian) "out ah town". Although he helps the nationalist politician achieve his end, his efforts are rewarded with jail - presumably on charges of riot, breach of the peace and so on. As he receives his sentence of "10 years and 12 strokes", he repeats with disbelief and cynicism the slogan on which Williams carried Trinidad to independence: "MASSA DAY DONE!" (Williams 1961). The aspirations for liberation, which the pan man has channelled through his music, and which carried the black politician to power, have been dashed. In fact, the "manhole" to which the pan man is consigned, and the lashes which scar his back, tell him that he has never escaped slavery.

The perspective of the pan man in 'Pan run' part 2 is totally altered. He screams out his sentence at intervals through the poem as an accusation against the leaders who have used and betrayed him.

The catch phrases of popular culture are present in 'Pan run' part 2 as in the first poem, but are expressed with a cynicism that recognises their inadequacy. Thus the title of the Audie Murphy film, To hell and back, a popular theme for Carnival masquerade, is used to capture the pan

man's experience of prison and eventual 'release':

To hell an back  
to hell  
behind de bridge  
( 'Pan run' part 2, 1972, p.46)

The "hell behind de bridge" refers to East Dry River, the 'wrong' side of Port of Spain's social divide.

For the "saga boys", the calypso 'Jean and Dinah', which appeared alongside the P.N.M. in 1956, promised as much as Williams' declaration that 'Massa day done'. As the politician's promise rings hollow, so the emptiness of the calypsonian's boast is revealed.

Not all the heroes are made of straw, however. The names of the early creators of pan do not become tarnished. While calypsonians have reflected, and politicians exploited, corruption, the pan men have developed something genuinely original, creative and inspiring:

sound sound sound  
breaking the hell

Malik has infused his own commitment to the steel band into the persona of the pan man. This is perhaps only fully evident in performance, when the essential presence of steel pans form not background sound, but an integral part of an intensely-felt and above all musical celebration. The anarchic energy of gang fights and public sex is not judged; it is portrayed because it existed. That same energy is also portrayed as an inseparable aspect of the development of pan. Malik celebrates the creative potential of the people caught up in this turbulence, while passionately condemning its extremities of squalor, violence and stress.

'Pan run' part 2 illustrates the conviction that repression which seeks to obliterate the 'subterranean voice', while undeniably causing acute distress, only serves in the long term to focus resistance. The repetitive pattern of the pan man's suffering teaches him a lot about his history. Thus the 'pit' of the local cinema, which separates "Kobo

(corbeaux, vultures) black like we" from the middle class in 'house' and the bourgeoisie up in the balcony, is understood and experienced as a "dark/stinking manhole" just like his former cell. The scars etched on his back, as the image of the pan is etched on his cell wall, unite him with:

...all mih Mudder  
children bawling  
an drowning in  
deh own blood  
(p.47)

Just as blood flows continually through the city as a result of gang violence, so it continues figuratively to flow across the umbilical cord which unites the pan man with his "Mudder" Africa. The link is both a historical sense of the middle passage and a contemporary perception of common suffering humanity. Intensity of perception and intensity of suffering are simultaneous, so the pan man screams his pain "in God ears" as he raises his beautiful music, forged:

...from de Iron  
cradle of Benin an Ife!  
(p.50)

Knowledge of past African greatness, in contrast to the "amnesiac blow" (Walcott, 'Laventille', The Castaway p.32) delivered by the missions and other agents of cultural imperialism, had been cherished in the consciousness of the people through the teachings of Marcus Garvey. The influence of Garvey and of Uriah Buzz Butler, both products and representative voices of the working class, is evident in the pan man's assertion of his own political significance:

I'se a runner  
on dis fucking  
project  
(p.49)

The inevitable antagonistic relation to the power structure in which most black people of the diaspora have lived since the enslavement and transportation of their ancestors, combined with their conscious

possession of an alternative and subversive cultural matrix leads to the conclusion that they have a historical destiny to fulfill. The very pressure exerted on all sides only increases the pan man's conviction that he is fixed on an inevitable path. Rooting his beginnings in Benin (i.e. in creativity, not deprivation), he places himself and fellow-travellers centrally in history:

WE IN - SINCE THEN  
(p.50)

Rohlehr notes, in reference to another poem, 'The Zebra' (pp.26-8), "a certain confidence on the part of the rooted man" when, rather than looking to the middle class for leadership he invites participation on the basis of a shared identity. When crisis erupted in 1970, middle-class intellectuals sensed the need for self-justification, while the initiative passed temporarily out of their hands.

Mainly for reasons of ideological weakness outlined by Meeks, the alliance of organized workers and unemployed was unable to sustain this initiative. However, the unifying strength of the call for Black Power, based for all Afro-Trinidadians on the sense of common roots, and for most of the population in a common sense of economic and political oppression, plus the rebellious energy it released, revealed the presence of a revolutionary potential. The parallel development of the steelband movement, which came into formal alliance with N.J.A.C. in 1970 (Meeks 1976, p.216), represented the cultural dimension of a deeply-forged sense of nation at odds with the neo-colonial superstructure. It was around this issue of defining the nation that the intelligentsia probably felt most challenged by the oppressed classes.

d)Class struggle and patriotism: the Trinidad/Grenada dynamic

The level of industrialization and subsequent 'proletarian development is higher in Trinidad than elsewhere in the English-speaking

Caribbean. The island's economy was dramatically transformed by the discovery of oil in 1910. By 1936, 13,237,030 barrels were being produced per year, making Trinidad "the leading Empire producer of oil" (Williams 1964b, p.229). Despite the generally poor conditions of work, Trinidad attracted large numbers of immigrant workers from smaller islands of the East Caribbean, especially Grenada. Those islands depending exclusively on agriculture were having a particularly bad time during the world recession precipitated by the Wall Street collapse in 1929. Fyzabad, a village on the edge of the oilfields, by 1937 had a population which was 40% Grenadian. As its name indicated, Fyzabad's origins as a community were with the East Indian indentured sugar workers.

Labour relations in the oilfields were extremely poor. There were a significant number of white South Africans employed in managerial and supervisory positions, and their crude racist attitudes were bitterly resented by the black workforce. There was no trade union, and no machinery for consultation between workforce and management.

It was, significantly, a Grenadian, Uriah Tubal 'Buzz' Butler, who emerged to articulate and mobilize the frustration of Trinidad's workers and unemployed. He led a strike of oil field workers, and a hunger march in 1935. Widespread riots and strikes were sparked off on June 19th 1937 after the police attempted to arrest Butler who was addressing a meeting in Fyzabad called during a one-day strike in protest against a 17% rise in the cost of living. The incensed crowd turned on the police and one particularly-hated plain clothes detective, Corporal Charlie King, was burned to death (Calder-Marshall 1939, pp. 164-5; Rennie, 1973, p. 92). Butler escaped, and was hidden and protected by his own people until he voluntarily emerged to give evidence to the Moyne Commission (established in response to the outbreak of riots in Trinidad and Barbados), whereupon he was immediately arrested (O.W.T.U. 1977, p. 19). During the

disturbances there was co-ordination between the agricultural and industrial workers of the sugar and oil belts and the urban workers of Port of Spain. Butler's deputy, Rienzi, was an East Indian, and leader of the sugar workers. An All-Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers' Union of which Rienzi became first president was formed soon after the formation of the Oilfield Workers Trade Union. The well-established Negro Welfare and Cultural Association, a working-class Marxist organisation, played a major part in organising protest action in Port of Spain (Rennie 1974, p. 60, 93-4). During the 1930's a group of radical intellectuals was to emerge, who were profoundly influenced by the events of this period. These included C.L.R. James, Ralph de Boissier and Alfred Mendes who, with the support of the maverick Albert Gomes, produced the radical Beacon magazine, which concerned itself both with politics and culture (Sander 1978). C.L.R. James became closely associated with the O.W.T.U., which brought him into head-on collision with his former student, Prime Minister Eric Williams (O.W.T.U. 1977, p. 30).

Abdul Malik is one of the only West Indian poets to have considered the experience of the industrial worker. 'Oui Papa' (1975, p.9) is a dedication to the workers who were involved in the 1937 uprising, and to his own father:

... he open dese eyes  
an make me wise yes  
he say SON  
is lil people sweat  
make up big pappy gain

The patriarchal system is acknowledged in the person of the "big pappy". The strong, good "M - A - N" who speaks through the poem understands the system he works under well, but sees no end to his life of poverty. 'Routine' characterizes the labourer as a mechanical cog, bound in a new form of slavery:

is centuries now  
I in hey! (here)  
all dem hours now  
I in hey!  
slaverin an  
labarin since  
marnin since  
marnin

Both possible meanings of "slaverin" suggest the dehumanization of the worker. These poems protest at the exploitative nature of the relationship in which the worker is bound. Others draw on traditions established between Grenada and Trinidad to fundamentally challenge this relationship.

One element of the vision comes from the experience of migration. Arthur Lewis, writing about the Caribbean-wide disturbances of 1937-8 points to the significance of migrant workers returning from Cuba and Santo Domingo, their "Minds widened by travel" (Lewis, 1977, p.33), who were far less prepared to accept the conditions laid down by their employers.

The migrant experience is explored in several dimensions in Malik's poem, 'Motto vision' (1972, pp.30-36). Grenada, being desperately poor, has exported a large proportion of its population, and many families have depended on remittances from relatives overseas to survive. From St. Georges harbour, the poet has witnessed constant human movement:

and de lambie shell  
Toot out loud  
an sad  
for all dem people going  
on dem big steamers

Though their destinations are unspecified, and their routes may be inter-Caribbean or trans-Atlantic, the cause of their displacement is located in the metropolises where, the poet notes ironically, the major Caribbean heroes of black revolution have died:

An I know  
Toussaint dead  
in France  
an Garvey dead  
in England  
an Fanon dead  
in America

Migration is a symptom of economic imbalance. The powerful metropolises exercise a magnetic attraction; they have also 'swallowed up' those who led resistance against them.

Imbalances of power also exist amongst the Caribbean islands themselves. The short history of the West Indian Federation (established 1958) witnessed a constant struggle for domination between Trinidad and Jamaica, paralleled by a fear that the two islands might be 'swamped' by small-islanders. When Jamaica took the option of 'going it alone' in 1962, Eric Williams, declaring that 'One from ten leaves nought', led Trinidad on the same course. Such an option had appeared inconceivable to the smaller islands, which was probably the reason for the federal idea taking deeper root in them. The first politician to actively campaign for a Caribbean Federation was T. Albert Marryshow of Grenada. He founded a pro-federation Newspaper, significantly named The West Indian, which emphasised its pan-Caribbean concerns. In 1932, a West Indian National League was established, with headquarters in Grenada. The 'Motto-Vision' to which Malik's poem addresses itself is the slogan of Marryshow's paper, 'The West Indies must be West Indian'. 'Motto vision' celebrates the dream of unity while observing the utter fragmentation that Grenada in 1971 represented. The very opening lines of the poem implicate the poet in the whole process:

I born  
from  
a force  
ripe  
small  
island

The phrase "born/from" has a dual meaning: the poet was actually given

birth to by the "force/ripe" island, and almost immediately he is borne away to Trinidad. Not only himself, but "all dem boys/ drift far too". "Dem boys" would reappear in a later poem to celebrate the Grenada Revolution as the leaders of the N.J.M. Maurice Eishop, Bernard Coard and other promising young intellectuals were in London, making a considerable impact within the black community there. The poem is dedicated to Pat Emmanuel, a lecturer at the Cave Hill (Barbados) campus of U.W.I., "and other EXILES". Malik appeals to all exiles to return, so that the words of Marrayshow can be transformed into reality. He notes that the words of Enoch Powell in Britain, "SEND DEM BACK" are being echoed by politicians "BLACK LIKE ME" in Trinidad. The widespread prejudice against small islanders is shown to be grounded in a view of them as 'scabs' and undercutters of wages, as expressed by the pan man in 'Pan run 1':

dem fucking bajan [Barbadian]  
Grenajan small island  
people choopid [stupid]  
- wuk an ded - [work and dead]  
...  
not fucking me man

Grenada is "force ripe" both because of the extra pressure its people have undergone, outside its boundaries and within, and because of the high level of Grenadian involvement in industry, forming the core of the working—class revolt in Trinidad.

Given the record of Sir Eric Gairy, the prospect of independence was accompanied by cynicism from much of the population, especially the young. The class-conscious Grenadian is aware that political independence will essentially change very little:

...an de UP CLASS  
cutting dong [down] an  
bleeding WE  
eversince molasses  
was black blood  
an sugar was  
bitter  
bitter vomit

Meanwhile, it is "sweet sailing/ fuh dem tourist/ Havens". Grenada had become a very popular yachting resort, offering gambling casinos, which were illegal in the other English-speaking islands, and prostitution, as well as some of the most beautiful scenery in the Caribbean.

'Sea Elues', from the second collection, Revo, was written in 1974, the day after Grenada achieved independence. It refers back to 'Motto vision' with an expression of despair: the vision of Marryshow has been finally snuffed out:

Yesterday  
the nutmeg blossomed  
in full flagellation  
the Motto-Visioned eye  
is closed

The nutmeg is Grenada's principal crop, and appeared as a symbol on the new flag. The word flagellation is also a pun on 'flag' and 'elation' (as is made explicit in the following stanza) suggesting a falsely drummed up excitement. In reality, the brutal excesses of Gairy's Mongoose Gang, in particular the recent events of Bloody Sunday and the murder of Rupert Bishop, dominate proceedings.

Yet despite moments of intense despair, occasioned by the popular defeats both in Grenada and Trinidad, Malik's writing continues in a prophetic and affirmative vein throughout his second collection, Revo, published 1975. Malik's work as a labourer with the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Company (T&TEC) gave him membership of the C.W.T.U., founded by Butler in 1937. 'Revo', the title poem, expresses Malik's sense of involvement in the workers' movement. The poem is a long way from the scatological expletive of the early work, and demonstrates a positive sense of black history rooted in working class struggle.

The central image of the poem, of a team of workers raising electricity poles, is a metaphor for political struggle, illustrating the need for unity, perseverance and the maintenance of tension:

is ah long way we come but  
is a long way to go

The suggestion is that, despite the long history of struggle, to let up for a minute would bring all the achievements crashing down, like the pole. In this context, the well-worn slogan "united we stand/divided we fall" recovers its original significance and urgency. Alternatively, Trinidadian wit seizes on the moribund national motto, 'Together we aspire, together we achieve' and gives it a vitality based in experience: "Togedda we perspire/ togedda we perceive". Here we have echoes of the "force ripe" idea. Beneath the joke is the serious proposition that sharpened understanding develops through increased pressure.

In response, the oppressive politician's style of delivery has the same stacatto, menacing quality as the pan man's in 'Pan run' 1:

who beg fuh work shant get  
an who ent beg doan want

He tries slogan after popular slogan, but the worker is under no illusion now. His reply, by contrast, is a series of proverbs, redolent of a traditional, pragmatic wisdom: "wuh sweet in goat mouth sour by he tail". His heroes do not take up empty, rhetorical poses. Their lives have an enduring reality and grandeur as symbols and expression of an historical and organic movement. The tone of Malik's praise is both rhapsodic and melancholy:

an de working class  
heroes never dead never dead  
some just fade away  
like Buzz  
some stay holding  
de Fort like George

"Buzz" is Buzz Butler, "George" is George Weekes, president of the O.W.T.U. The capital letter of "Fort" takes the mind to Fort George in Grenada (renamed Fort Rupert after Rupert Bishop during the revolution). The poem has prophetic qualities. Firstly, its title, 'Revo', became the name by which the revolutionary process in Grenada was popularly known.

Secondly, the vision of a Caribbean and working-class unity, found often in Malik's poems and echoed with particular intensity here was to find a considerable degree of fulfillment in the revolution before coming crashing down after four years in a sudden, devastating rupture with these fundamental principles.

e) Revolution and creativity

In the tradition of Fanon (1967), Malik shares with Ngugi and Sembene a perspective on revolution as a healing process, a means of uniting past traditions with the present and mending the rupture brought about by slavery and/or colonialism. Ngugi (1977, pp.115-6, 123, 276) and Sembene (1970, pp.287-8, 291, 298-9) show independent-minded traditionalist elders having much in common with younger revolutionaries. Malik grounds his perspective in the precedents of Caribbean heroes like Garvey, Marrayshow and Butler who have challenged the suppression and exploitation of his people. This is the basis of his assertion,

Tradition is my trade  
( 'The bad poet' . Revo p.3)

Malik seeks for symbols of life in the very images of destruction he is impelled to record. Thus the glow of the bullets flying through the darkness which kill the guerilla Beverly Jones is likened to a mass of fireflies. In the midst of his grief, the poet affirms:

life glows  
life glows  
like fireflies  
( 'Fire flies...for Beverly' , Revo p.25)

He makes use of the power of words to transform perceptions of reality. Beverly's flesh cut "to ribbons" leads the poet's mind to an image of childhood and innocence:

Fireflies  
a rag doll  
red ribbons  
in your hair  
(ibid.)

Words encompass the painful present, but at the same time become, in the poetic imagination, bearers of an alternative, strongly positive vision. Throughout the poem, the different ways in which women's lives are wasted is contrasted with the life-abundant potential of childhood.

hop-skotching virgins  
become gum chewing  
whores  
in the twinkling  
of an eye  
shadow

Responsibility for this waste of potential is laid at society's door. In each case, not only was "Motherhood...murdered", but "Manhood stained". All are implicated in the different kinds of death portrayed. "Love", says the poet, will only be "redeemed" with "fireflies". "Fireflies" we have already seen associated with gunfire, but the word simultaneously suggests the creative sparks of revolutionary vision.

A redemptive view of death for "the cause" is further developed in 'Black womb/ movements'. The sense that a revolutionary purpose is the logical fulfillment of history and tradition is summed up in the phrase "The cause/ is rooted". The name of the Zulu hero, Chaka, as one 'root', evokes the image of the chac/chac, a gourd full of seeds played as a percussion instrument. The image of the hard shell containing a mass of seeds suggests the toughness required of a revolutionary, who nevertheless must contain the capacity to generate new creativity and growth, and the selflessness to make the final sacrifice:

...all deaths for life's sake  
is the hardened shell  
of being  
( 'Black womb/ movements', 1975, p.20)

The seeds of Chaka (the past) interact with "the seeds/ of our efforts"

(the products of our own striving). Together they create an insistent pulse as they:

stir and seethe  
seethe and stir  
us  
onward

(ibid.)

The movement can only be forwards: although deeply conscious of his African roots, the poet concludes, "O Africa/ we can/ not re-/ turn" (ibid.). There is, as ever in the poetry, a touch of lament here, but no suggestion of despair in the poet's view of Caribbean reality:

we are  
not still  
born  
we move  
we are  
still moving  
on

(ibid.)

The emphasis on "we are", and "we move" gives these words a strongly affirmative tone. They express a faith which has been tested through harsh experience; a voice expressing not optimism but a sense of inexorable destiny.

#### f)The aftermath of revolution

Malik's faith was vindicated by the events of March 1979 when the New Jewel Movement seized power and established a Peoples Revolutionary Government in Grenada. Writing soon after, Malik captures the waves of elation which spread from Grenada to socialists and nationalists throughout the Caribbean and black communities in North America and Britain. The words express a Grenadian's sense of recovered self-respect and pride. The perspective is consistent with pre-revolutionary poems which assert that intensity of suffering and abuse will ultimately force people to liberate themselves. New Jewel Movement leaders were frequently referred to as the "Jewel boys", or simply "dem boys" (despite the fact

that two leading members of the party and ministers in the government - Phyllis Coard and Jacqueline Creft - were women).

Dem boys say  
Enough is enough  
we can't crawl no more  
we can't sleep no more

Throughout the poem, Malik develops the metaphor of a ship being seized and its course redirected:

We done take de wheel  
We done change de course  
We on full control

Through the image of the ship, Malik makes links with past history and draws connections between different islands of the Caribbean:

Dem boys say  
Steady as she blows, skipper  
Dem boys say  
steady as she blows, Havana

In subsequent verses, Jamaica, Guyana and the whole West Indies are invoked. The archaic phrase "steady as she blows" evokes the European buccaneers who plundered the region, and the schooners which still offer a romantic journey between islands and have inspired many Caribbean poets, most notably Derek Walcott. The fact that the "Jewel boys" have finally succeeded the European "on full control" marks a new stage in the unfolding of modern Caribbean history. The phrase "Steady as she blows" embodies a sense of elation and liberty such as experienced on the open sea.

Malik sometimes makes references back to earlier poems, drawing out images or phrases and developing their significance. A passing reference to "dem boys" to encompass exiled Grenadian radicals and intellectuals in 'Motto Vision' is developed here as a clarion call of triumph; "dem boys" did indeed return home to fulfill their destiny. Another phrase from 'Motto Vision' describing the salt drying "on black backs", shining in the sun "like specks of diamonds/ in mi mind" takes on a new

significance now as it relates to the name of the New Jewel Movement:

Like Jewel specks of diamonds  
Shining now in mih mind  
Dem men make me feel good man  
Dem men make me feel so good.

One of the great events of Malik's life has clearly been his visit to Cuba in 1979. In 'The Display' he writes a fullsome praise poem to the revolution and its achievements. His visit is described as various stages in a pilgrimage; he comes with a pilgrim's humility:

I came to touch the hand  
the hand of Nicholas Guillen

Nicholas Guillen was celebrating his Yoruba heritage in the 1930's. His poems were a landmark in the development of black consciousness in Caribbean literature and the introduction of black music rhythms to poetry (Dawes 1977). He was greatly admired by the black American poet, Langston Hughes. He is also a member of the Cuban Communist Party and Cuba's first national poet. For Malik he provides a symbolic bridge between the Garveyite assertion of a black nation and the much-admired Cuban revolution grounded in the Marxist concept of class struggle.

His visit to Cuba reassures him. In V.O.W. he writes of his relief that he finds Cuba a culturally lively and above all "sexy" place, dispelling all lingering fears that he might find grey, utilitarian uniformity. He pays homage to the achievements in art, not only in the person of Guillen, but of Alicia Allonzo, Cuba's prima ballerina. Together they represent an achieved harmony between Africa and Europe. He recognises the fundamental humanity of the place, without which the achievements in art would be meaningless:

I came to visit  
the retarded and the sick  
I came to see  
a land a people  
cared for  
a land a people  
caring, sharing working  
working for the Revolution

Forming the focal point of the poem is a visit to the Museum of the Revolution in which he sees "a nation's vision/ on display." The experience broadens his already inclusive sense of nation. In addition to the faces of Jose Marti, Toussaint L'Ouverture and Marcus Mosiah Garvey - three Caribbean heroes - he also comes to see "un continente", the American continent. Not the intrusive domineering continent of North America, but, in Cuban parlance, "our America", the subordinate continent of Latin America of which the Caribbean geographically, historically and economically forms a part. Culturally, however, colonialism has ensured the complete fragmentation of the Caribbean, language until now forming an insuperable barrier. He returns to Garvey, "the father of my vision". In his mind, Garvey encompasses all that he has seen:

the fathers of a Nation's vision  
on display

The Nation, Malik maintains, will be determined by "the whirlwind", as prophesied by Garvey. His poem of the same name takes on an apocalyptic character, prophesying an immense upheaval, which is already under way:

Blown by the Wind  
we leave the ground  
becoming sooth sayers

It is a major change of mood from the ebullience of 'Dem Boys Say' and gratification of 'The Display'. There is a strong sense of foreboding:

What trouble is this my Lord  
What trouble is this

and a powerful element of mysticism which had rarely been so prominent in previous poems. After Cuba, Malik visited Jamaica, and was then clearly preoccupied with Garvey's prophecy "Look for me in the whirlwind". He may well have applied it to the clouds gathering over Manley's attempts to build some form of socialism. In a lighthearted sung poem he recounts a meeting with a Jamaican girl, who persistently asks him, "Stranger, wey

you from?" to which he answers, by turns, from Grenada, from Trinidad and from Cuba. His final reply to her question, "...from Marcus Garvey's whirlwind", draws from her a traditional expression of amazement, "Rain a fall, breeze a blow!" which is both appropriately witty and adequate to the bizarre circumstances.

Whether it was the Jamaican experience or events nearer home which determined the change of mood, it was marked nonetheless. From celebrant, Malik became prophet of a great and violent purge that would leave none unscathed. It is within the violence of the whirlwind that "the Faithful" are moulded and "Our Number" identified. The Nation will consist only of "the Mindful" for it will consume "All Barriers", leading to Garvey's promised "One Destiny". Images of slavery return at the moment of liberation to be destroyed once and for all:

Bustin' Chains  
Breakin' new ground  
Scattering leaves

The poem relies strongly on the preacher tradition; it is close to prophecies of fire and brimstone. Rooting the poem more firmly to the ground, however, is the tangible vision embodied in the cry:

VIVA FIDEL  
VIVA FIDEL

which still inhabits the whirlwind.

#### Section five: the poets of Grenada

Grenada's underdevelopment and reactionary political climate until 1979 was not conducive to the emergence of major artistic personalities on home soil. Besides the Mighty Sparrow, other gifted Grenadians had been drawn to Trinidad in order to develop their skills and to find a sizeable audience. Calypsonians included Small Island Pride, Valentino (who enjoys great prestige as a radical commentator), and the Black

Wizzard. Grenadians seeking an academic education were forced to emigrate. Therefore two major stimuli of literary production - energetic grassroots popular traditions and opportunities for study and advanced knowledge - were non-existent or severely impoverished.

This is not to deny a reservoir of rich cultural tradition within the country. Carriacou, a tiny island which forms part of the Grenadian state, has maintained strong African traditions, associated with its Big Drum dance. Songs within the Big Drum tradition include laments for Africa and celebrations of legendary African figures (Searle 1984, p.12). Within Grenada itself the mountainous terrain had enabled escaped slaves to survive as maroons. E.K. Brathwaite pointed to the significance of maronage - a tradition shared by both Grenada and Jamaica because of their common mountainous terrain - in developing inward-looking but culturally independent communities. Speaking of Grenada, he said, "These mountains, and this inward-lookingness at the same time, nurture self-reliance and an alternative to imperial and metropolitan cultures, which is a rare commodity in my view." (Brathwaite in Searle 1984, p.238). A maroon culture still survives amongst some old people, with its strong nostalgia for Africa (Searle 1984, p.10, Brathwaite 1967/8 pt.2, p.41).

There is also a pervasive folklore, still expressed in French patois which until the 1940's was spoken quite widely as a first language. Much of the folklore revolves around fearsome supernatural beings, such as La Diablesse, Moko Jumbie and Soucouyant. It was a strong element in Grenadian cultural tradition which Eric Gairy was able to play on to his own advantage. He gained political loyalty amongst the illiterate and poor by worshipping with religious sects who incorporated a good deal of this folklore into their faith. He is reported to have practised obeah. He exploited the more irrational fears of his followers, claiming he was "appointed by God to lead Grenada" (Jacobs & Jacobs 1980, p.107).

a) Poetry during Gairy's last years

The period of resistance to Gairy's rule generated quite a lot of poetry. Cultural organisation had been one way of expressing critical attitudes, though even this sometimes brought down violent reprisals. Leon Cornwall, Caldwell 'Kwame' Taylor, Chris De Riggs and Ian St. Bernard, all of whom were, or were to become, Central Committee members of the New Jewel Movement, were writing poetry during this period. It is clearly the work of political activists, designed primarily to educate and agitate. In Grenada, modern forms of poetry seem to have made virtually no impact until the emergence of Black Power poets like Sonia Sanchez, Don L. Lee, Le Roi Jones and Nicki Giovanni. Much of the poetry of the 1970's retains remnants of trite, rhymed versification in archaic standard English, legacy of a backward colonial education.

P.A. Robertson, writing from outside Grenada, infused the imaginary landscape with the general ambiance of the late Gairy years:

Tree and plants in the sun drooping  
Too weak to keep on struggling  
The very life sap gone from their being  
Not a bird in the air flying  
All seem to be avoiding  
This parched and earth-cracked setting  
( 'Scrutning scene - economic nothing', p8)

The repeated present participle, which recurs throughout the poem, heightens a sense of lethargy, of no progress. Everything is simply in a very negative state of 'being'.

Leon Cornwall's 'Who say' is an articulate expression of a socialist's anger at the inequalities and suffering which persist under capitalism. He twists a liberal statement commonly made in 'defence' of the poor and unemployed:

Who say being UNEMPLOYED is not a crime  
It is a crime committed by the capitalist and them  
Them want to blow me mind  
But the working class go deal with them in time.

This formulation is repeated throughout the poem, using other examples of poverty, hunger and malnutrition. The continued assertion that the "working class go deal with them" is powerfully emphatic. However, the poem is marred by some halting rhythms and unconvincing phrases brought about by the felt need to find a rhyme. In the last stanza, Cornwall gives up on rhyme altogether, with more satisfactory results.

In 'My country', Caldwell Taylor, who was at the time a teacher in St. Andrews Secondary School, evokes a tormented limbo. The poem ends:

Cease-fire tension  
Barbaric insobriety  
In the inferiority of smallness  
In a roulette of UNDEVELOPNESS

These four lines bring together the constant fear of violence, the decadence of Gairy's life style, the shame felt by Grenadians at their own identity, and the desperate helplessness of small, poor countries in the face of world market forces and power struggles. The roulette image encompasses the prostitution of the island and the uncertainty of its destiny caught in the grip of international capitalism. "UNDEVELOPNESS" suggests illiteracy, another element of weakness. The emphasis on the word sounds fiercely frustrated.

Rosemary S. Charles, a housewife and retired teacher, wrote a spirited and successful poem in Creole called 'Is strike'. It sets a tone of uncompromising challenge and direct confrontation. Interestingly, and quite characteristically, it comes from a woman, and one who is not young in years:

Is no use tell we notin [anything]  
De time is now too late  
Is no mo runnin up dem step  
No matter is who call  
We en [aren't] takin no more chupitness [stupidness]  
From nobody ataall

The use of the word "chupitness" is contemptuous, while the emphasis on "ataall" is absolutely final. What is significant about this strike, apart from the message that Gairy has reached the end of his rope, is that there is no ambiguity about its object: it is unequivocally a political act:

Is strike we strike  
You hay [hear] we?  
Is strike, an no fe pay!

The emphatic form "Is strike we strike" underlines the serious conviction behind the words. At the end of the poem, Rosemary Charles says that the workers are "well-collapse!" While the word literally means 'caved in', the spelling and hyphenation suggest a state which is powerful and assertive, as if caving in is merely a prelude to springing right out again.

b) Poems of the revolution

The contrast in the tone of poems written after March 13th 1979 is dramatic. Poems quoted hereafter in this chapter are from the anthology Freedom has no price (Grenada, 1980), unless otherwise indicated. A very real change came about in Grenadian people's perceptions of themselves in relation to the outside world. As Gillian Gordon, a school student, put it:

Grenada was turning Crapo pool  
[Grenada was turning into a frog pond]  
While Gairy sit down forming the fool.  
But now it seems to be growing bigger,  
With our new Revolutionary leader  
(p.63)

Mrs. Iona Braveboy, then sixty-two years old, was also moved to write about March 13th. Her poem was a tribute to the N.J.M. members involved in the seizure of power. It tells how a call was put out over the radio, urging people to "come out to fight for liberty".

The call was answered quick and fast,  
The call was answered free at last.  
Together they fought with hearts and hands,  
Together they were in full command.

(p.46)

Reactions to the event amongst older people are at first mixed. After many years of Gairy, some are nervous and confused. Speaking as an older woman herself, she encourages older people to recognise what has been achieved on their behalf by their own children:

Some laugh, some clap, some leap for joy,  
While others stand and look around  
They did not realize  
Their sons and daughters risk their lives.

(ibid.)

Now, she points out, the "heroic struggle" involving all the people has just begun: "To defend the Revolution/ And to build a better Nation".

The revolution brought out poetry in many people. Words of pure joy, especially from older people, recorded in the first year of the revolution, are beautiful and highly poetic. This is a seventy-two year old woman: "When we hear news of the Revolution that morning, it was joy come out in the morning! Joy come out in the morning! As if I lifted up that morning! I lifted up above the sky that morning." (Searle and Hodge 1981). And another: "Women is real, real out now, you know. Before they had no say, no privilege, no stand in Grenada. Women was the lowest. But now we pushing on, pushing on. We feeling more confident. We heart is open now."

Helena Joseph, a trainee teacher and member of the People's Revolutionary Militia, had never written a poem before she composed 'I militia', a poem of considerable power and control which, like some of Michael Smith's poems, contained in its title a phrase and a concept from which her audience derived immense satisfaction. It became one of the most popular poems of 1981 (Searle 1984, p.161) and was performed on many public platforms, among them the launching of Primary Health Care in the

Parish of St. Davids, and a conference of the National Women's Organisation. "But I think the most significant time was when I read it to my Militia comrades at the Julien Fedon Manoeuvre" (a one-day manoeuvre involving the entire militia in August 1981) (ibid. p.163). Then it had a tumultuous reception. She was subsequently hailed in the street by people she did not know, shouting 'I militia!'. She recognised the significance of herself, as a young woman, projecting such a forceful role (ibid.). Her experience of liberation as a woman within the revolution and as a member of the militia, was integrally related to her ability to compose and perform a poem that would fire thousands of others with pleasure and enthusiasm.

The use of 'I' in a Creole poem instantly signals Dread Talk, which was widely identified with the revolution by Grenada's youth. On the mini-buses which provide the majority of public transportation, reggae music is at least as commonly played as calypso. Bob Marley was deeply revered. A large percentage of the youth wore headgear which was intermediate between a Rasta tam and a military beret, bearing the colours red, green and gold - which are both Rasta colours and the colours of Grenada. The poem 'I militia' expressed links forged between the Dread and revolutionary cultures. Helen Joseph herself said, "The kind of language of 'I Militia', I think, makes the people want to hear the message of the poem and so it could get through to them clearly." (ibid. p.163).

I Militia  
I conscious Militia  
You Mr. Exploiter  
No way brother  
Keeping down the worker  
Saving your dollar  
Making you richer  
Ah say, is them labour  
Not you sir

The assertiveness of such phrases as "No way brother" do give this young

woman an air of cool authority in the face of her former oppressor. In a way, it is a microcosm of what was happening to the whole of Grenada. Each line distinctly ends in an 'a' sound, giving the whole a gathering momentum, but also helping to separate each line for consideration. The image of the slight young woman fearlessly taking on Mr. Exploiter becomes increasingly dramatic towards the end of the poem:

Is the heavy roller for you, Mr. Exploiter  
Ah pick up me A.K., oppressor  
To fight you counter  
To free the worker  
To build Grenada  
I militia will never surrender!

The A.K. is a gun. A counter is a counter-revolutionary. Such language joined other strands of the colloquial idiom amongst active supporters of the revolution. The combination of Dread Talk, socialist ideology and revolutionary military style created a formidable impact.

Garvin Nantambu Stuart was fifteen in 1979. Before that he had regularly distributed Fight, the N.J.M. youth paper, amongst fellow students at Grenada Boys Secondary School, and was involved in a youth group which put on an anti-Gairy play called Outcry. A large section of resistance to Gairy had been based within the secondary schools. Even though so young, Stuart's serious commitment to the revolution is very clear.

Freedom has no price  
Fighting for freedom  
Is dutiful sacrifice  
A demand from humanity  
A task to save mankind

These words obviously made a great impression, as they gave the title to the first anthology of poems of the Grenada Revolution: Freedom has no price. Nantambu Stuart is another example of an individual who experienced a considerable release of creativity as a result of the revolution.

It was inconceivable in this period for poets to be writing about anything unrelated to the revolution. Renalph Gebon, for example, who has been writing poetry and stories for over 35 years, threw himself enthusiastically into the revolutionary process. This is not surprising, however, when one knows that, like Louise Bennett, he had been actively promoting the dialect and traditional custom in his work, strongly emphasising their African roots. Under the revolution, his work was given far more support and far more exposure. The revolution was a process which encouraged individuals to participate in collective activity, and afforded poets and other creative artists an extremely important role. Rather than being marginalized individuals receiving little support, either material or moral from the society, poets exercised considerable influence, and bore reciprocal responsibility.

There is no one in Grenada whose primary role is that of a poet. Yet a number of individuals who were occupied with many other tasks emerged with particular authority as poets during the period of the revolution. They too struggled to transform the language legacy, an uncomfortable co-existence of colonial mental straitjacket and African-based resistance, into metaphors which expressed their perceptions of decolonization and liberation.

Chris Kojo De Riggs, at the age of twenty-four, was appointed Director of Culture soon after the revolution. His youth was not unusual. Many of those who achieved positions of responsibility were extremely young. He held the rank of major in the Peoples Revolutionary Army, and was appointed Minister of Health in 1981. At the time of the revolution he was a member of Cvi Foute Action Theatre, and led the Grenada delegation to Carifesta '79, which was held in Cuba. Had the revolution not occurred, there would certainly have been no Grenadian representatives in Cuba. He is the author of a play, 'King Mongoose'.

De Riggs reveals in his poetry a lively appreciation of Creole, and of the stories and anecdotes which he has heard from childhood. His work often has a strong element of humour. His poems were appreciated at the popular forums where they were performed, because they presented ideas as self-evident truth in a form which was familiar to all. His tone is heroic, and encompasses the ordinary responses of ordinary people.

Like all the Grenadian poets, he has seen his work as a tool of the revolution, but is emphatic that this does not mean inferior poetry. Poetry has an important role as a medium of education; it has a social function. "No amount of praise for the beauty of the sun or our waterfalls will liberate the people." However, "this does not mean that we are going to sacrifice form or simply make crude political statements and call them poems." (De Riggs in Searle 1984, p.129).

One of the duties of the poet, he felt, was to call people "to focus on concrete images of their development and fears" (ibid.). The people had made many images of their fears in the supernatural characters which inhabit their folklore. In two of his poems, 'Mercenaries' and 'Stand up dey', De Riggs 'raises these ghosts' and gives them real life identities, arguing that when the concrete bases for fear are understood, it is much easier to deal with them. He also uses laughter and ridicule to diminish the capacity of these real-life enemies to terrorize and incapacitate. Throughout the Grenada revolution there was a constant fear of invasion, although it was believed that it would be a mercenary attack, on the lines of the Bay of Pigs attempted invasion in Cuba. In 'Mercenaries', De Riggs places these characters in the context of a terrifying tale of the supernatural:

Monsters rising up in de horizon  
Wid murder and bloodshed in dey mind  
Screaming like sirens and  
Rising a scent like Macawel [a kind of snake]

He then deflates them as old familiars, the stuff of childhood.

nightmares:

Look at dem  
The same ole devils  
Who been after we skin  
Since Moses was a little boy

The reference to Moses as a little boy evokes the listener's and reader's own childhood. It also identifies 'we' as ordinary people everywhere, throughout history, who have been preyed on by dimly-understood forces. De Riggs' account of "General Moko Jumbie leading the assault/ Followed by Lieutenant Soucouyant" drew laughter from his audiences because the figures remain very much alive from childhood imagination. It is a liberating experience to laugh at one's irrational fears. Here we see De Riggs working in a curative way which relates to the Louise Bennett tradition. The laughter develops into mockery as President Reagan and his mercenary supporters are characterized as the genuine ghouls:

They come, an army of the bewitched  
The haunted, the depraved  
Servants of President Neutron  
The most wicked and evil vampire  
The world has ever known

The aim of the poem is to release people from superstitious fears, thereby serving a liberating function, while at the same time alerting them to very real potential and actual horrors in the world.

'Jookootoo I' is De Riggs' most popular poem and provoked the appreciative laughter of self-recognition. Jookootoo is translated as "unschooled agricultural labourer" (De Riggs 1984). He is a Grenadian Everyman; ex-slave, rebel, exploited worker. The title phrase, 'Jookootoo I' invoked the Dread idiom, thereby emphasising the rebel element. Nevertheless, the fact is that Jookootoo is far from heroic, most of the time. By using the first person, the poet identifies himself closely with his protagonist's sufferings and shortcomings. The intention of this poem is an inclusive and welcoming one. Jookootoo I has "walked four hundred years/ Through time and history and sang God Save the Queen." He

witnesses the pillage of Africa and slavery, then scratches a living as a peasant, "Living in a juper on de mountainside". Juper is an Amerindian term for shelter, giving a hint of the former indigenous inhabitants. He has experienced any number of indignities:

Was me who used to throw out poe for Lord Brownlow  
A 'poe' is a chamber pot. Lord Brownlow is a relatively contemporary figure; an English Lord resident in Grenada who provoked indignation by cutting off access to the beach adjoining his palatial house to local people in 1973. A demonstration led to a spontaneous People's Parliament which declared Lord Brownlow's prohibition illegal. Pressure of public opinion led Brownlow to leave the island, and the house and beach were taken over as a popular picnicking area. Lord Brownlow remained a symbol of British colonialism; his defeat a major blow for genuine independence. Yet in World War II, Jookootoo I had gone "to fight and die for King and Country". He had not understood too well the messages of Butler and Marrayshow, but recognised that they were against the Empire and that in all his centuries of experience of life on the plantation, it "was like donkey pee on we".

In 1951 Jookootoo I swallows "hook line and sinker" the promise of deliverance preached by the 'little man from the East', Eric Gairy, or as Jookootoo now calls him, "de beast from de east". Gairy's appeal is an anti-colonial one: "We cuss the Guv'ner in bout ten different language". The loyalty inspired by the 1951 wage rise was enough amongst conservative rural workers to last a life time. One of the primary purposes of this poem is to identify with former Gairy supporters, recognising that he channelled genuine aspirations for decolonization and social justice. The poem was originally inspired by a meeting with an agricultural labourer, a former Gairyite, who said to De Riggs:

De Revo run me Fadder, is true  
But me Godfadder treating me better

the lines with which the poem ends. In other words, 'the revolution has pushed out Gairy, but I am getting a better life under the new government'.

...is two years since the Revo come  
an ah could still drink me rum  
Dey en close de church  
Dey en take one sheep  
ah ha me wuk  
an ah still could sleep  
Me son gone and study engineer  
ah getting free milk an house repair...  
[...it's two years since the revolution came  
and I can still drink my rum  
They haven't closed the church  
They haven't taken one sheep  
I have my work  
And I still can sleep  
My son has gone to study to be an engineer  
I'm getting free milk and assistance to repair my house]

Rather than simply being propaganda for the revolution, a principal aim is to reassure those who didn't immediately hail it as a liberation, but, like Jookootoo I:

...wet me pants March 13th '79  
and hide like hell for days  
Singing Cur Fader, Haily Mary  
Lord oh Lord please bring back Gairy

Now many were sufficiently free of their fear that they were able to laugh. The poem was for many a cathartic experience.

Jacob Ross was born the son of agricultural workers in the sugar cane area of Hope Vale, South St. Georges. He did well at school and eventually achieved a university place in France, where he studied linguistics. He returned to Grenada in 1980, and was appointed Director of Culture in the Ministry of Education in 1981. He had been writing poetry whilst away, but on his return reassessed it as "self-righteous and self-centred outpourings". (Searle 1984, p.135) He was encouraged, as a poet, to read his material on public platforms, as had become common practice, but found this thoroughly challenged his notions of what poetry

should be; "...was that kind of poetry adequate? What could I tell them?" (ibid.). As with other poets, he found the Revolution "liberated the language inside me!" Gradually he developed confidence as a writer and performer in Creole, using metaphors derived from proverbs or simple images of the landscape.

'I prefer' draws Ross back into the experience of his own childhood, of his parents as workers on the land. The heritage of slavery still determines their economic relationship to the land (they are 'chained' to it) and inevitably their response to the environment:

Ah did wuk like a moo-moo [fool]  
Life was harder dan groo-groo [(hard nut kernel)  
an' de sun  
was a whip  
on my back  
cutting deep

No tourist paradise for them. Now the poet recognises that it was not only the labour in the fierce sunshine which was so killing. Satisfaction comes with rights and ownership; then the produce of one's labour becomes sweet:

I prefer what my sweat an' labour  
tell me is mine

'A stone's throw' is an ambitious extended metaphor celebrating the impact and momentum of revolution in the region. It begins:

Swing me high, sah  
Fling me hard, sah  
Like I's stone  
In di back yard  
A' de monstah

As Chris Searle wrote, "The historic stone thrown by the Grenadian people in March 1979 began to cause a wave of ideas and words which are irrepressible." (Searle 1984, p.xxii). It is hard, it can travel, it is small but has the potential to do all kinds of damage in the United States' self-proclaimed "back yard". The use of "sah" does not suggest deference, but rather a note of challenge. It suggests the perky tone of

a very ordinary person. The "sah" addressed is a god-like mighty force which can:

Plant yuh foot like tree  
in Cuba  
An swing yuh han' like branch  
Full a fruit

So the stone is not dead but bears fruit, scattered as far away as Nicaragua, Jamaica and even El Salvador. Returning to the 'back yard' image, the stone of revolution breaks a "million glass window/ Da decorate di shame a'/ Nations". Glass here is an image for the gloss of luxury which may obscure a nation's inhumanity. The stone has a mission to "break an' burn" through the injustice and corruption of the region:

(Haiti squirms like a worm  
Under the heel a' de monster)  
(Chile still eatin she children)  
(Puerto Rico pukin' from spikes in she guts)  
(Trinidad starving she people on oil)

Finally, when the stone comes to rest, the voice becomes clearly identified with that of the poet, affirming his desire for usefulness:

An' when I done  
Use me, dis stone, to build!

The energy required to deliver this poem effectively makes it a major statement of 'throwing himself into the revolution' on the part of Ross himself.

Merle Collins is a quiet person who generates an astonishing electricity when she performs her work on stage. Searle writes of "the joyous reception at Zonal Councils given to such poems as Callaloo" (1984, p.135). She attended St. Joseph's Convent in St. Georges and then left to study English and Spanish at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica. After a brief period back in Grenada working as a secondary school teacher she went to study International Relations at Georgetown University, Washington. She returned to Grenada to support the revolution and worked at the Latin American and Caribbean Department of the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs. She was writing poetry before in Washington. "...I wrote mainly about feeling closed in, about not wanting to be there." (Searle 1984, p.144). After returning, her work was transformed. She saw the flowering of poetry as an inevitable consequence of the revolution:

People now in Grenada are freed, they're less timid about expressing themselves, and since poetry is an overflow of feeling and there is so much feeling and thought and analysing and questioning because of the revolutionary process, then it just has to come out, it just has to be written in poetry. (ibid. p.146)

Merle Collins uses straightforward language and simple structures in order to express complex feelings and ideas. Her poems are quite extended, and unravel gradually. She speaks the words in a lilting, sing-song voice, reflecting in her intonation the short lines in which the poems are reproduced in print.

'Callaloo' is a thick and nourishing green soup made from the leaves of the dasheen plant. If it is really good it is highly seasoned, and mixed with coconut, dumplings and other things: "As de taste may be/ As de pocket may be". Likewise, the revolution is nourishing its people (literally and figuratively), giving them strength, and also adding spice and variety to their lives. Callaloo at the same time is the food of poor people. It is good, simple and cheap.

The poet finds evidence of the strength and comfort she has drawn from the revolution when travelling. In the passport queue there is no more hiding behind the person in front "Like little Janet/ Behin' she mudder skirt". When the man asks "Way you from", you don't mutter excuses but announce:

Loud an' bole  
Like you make de name  
Grenada!

And the "silent scream" which the passport man perhaps hears, because he looks up sharply, says:

Dat mean  
A country  
In de Caribbean  
In Latin America  
In de Americas  
In de struggle  
In de world

Reflecting an exercise which almost every literate child undertakes to establish their exact location in the universe, Collins expresses the extraordinary change of perspective and scale which the revolution had brought about - from being a tiny, inward-looking speck on a map to being a significant part in a world movement for liberation.

This gives the poet an exciting sense of a world "mix up/ Like callaloo" with an accompanying wariness - "An yet/ So not like Callaloo" - because things are so unevenly and so unfairly distributed. But at least in Grenada she has tasted the sweet and strong flavour of "change/ An' de promise of change".

Like Chris De Riggs, Merle Collins shows a strong sense of empathy with people who may be less 'conscious' than herself. In 'The lesson' she portrays her grandmother as an extremely bright woman with a strong memory for the 'facts' she was taught at school. It is no criticism of the woman herself that all she was taught related to the cold north and not at all to the country and region of her birth. It is an indictment of the colonial ideology implicit in her education. She instructed her granddaughter in all the geography and history she knew. There was:

No Carib chief  
No Ashanti king  
For Grannie  
Fedon never existed  
Toussaint  
Was a  
Whispered curse

Later her granddaughter, poring over an atlas, discovered all the names she had taught her as faultlessly correct and in painstaking detail:

But de geography  
Straight  
like a arrow  
Tip focussing  
On de  
Arctic Ocean

As she identifies name after name as recounted by her grannie, she is "Unaccountably feeling/ the cold grip of the Arctic". This is a powerful image, illustrating how education has been one of the sharp prongs of the colonial process and one of its most pervasively effective weapons; and at the same time its general indifference to human need, and mind-numbing effect on creativity. It is also a mysterious and alien force; cold being virtually unknown to the Caribbean people. It was an education aimed at "slaves / And their children/ And their children's/ children".

The revolution had put the rewriting of history firmly on the agenda. This poem, with its actual real-life example of the harm done by an education which negates Caribbean identity, must have stimulated much discussion around the issue:

In this beginning  
We  
Will rewrite  
De History books  
Put William [the Conqueror]  
On de back page  
Make Morgan [the pirate]  
A footnote

The Eurocentric colonial view of the Caribbean had continued to promote 'buccaneers' as romantic rascals of some historical significance rather than the sordid and brutal petty tyrants they were in reality. Now they would be properly consigned to the footnotes of history: "We/ Will recall with pride/ Our own."

'The butterfly born' celebrates the emergence of women as a prominent force in the society for the first time. Again, it does not go in for heroics, for noble images of emancipated womanhood. The whole poem emphasises the negative factors against women asserting themselves,

thereby underlining how remarkable is the change taking place: "You tink it easy?". Merle Collins draws on her observations and her own experiences as a child to illustrate the contradictions of a girl's upbringing. Even though small, scared and tired, poverty would force the oldest girl into the position of "woman-child", protector and provider for the other children: "A strong, premature/ premature/ nine year-old mother". Yet after stretching her resources in this way to the limit, she would then be commanded by her own mother:

Allez assise amba table-la!  
Zuh fonteh trop!  
Go an' siddown under de table  
You too fas'!

Thus she learned to be both weak and strong: "De strength inherited/ De weakness taught". The poet gives an example from her own childhood of a visit of her Aunty Iona from England. Aunty Iona asks her questions but she dares not answer because children, especially girls, were to be 'seen and not heard'. She is riveted with fascination as she tries to shrink behind the blind. Her very presence is enough to enrage her mother, however, who explodes and orders her outside: "Mother/ Teaching/ As she was taught". The mother succeeds so well that later the poet finds herself grieving because:

I couldn't find Eve  
who  
In times past  
Had shouted  
When told to whisper

Eve too is redeemed, no longer the archetypal root of women's 'natural' inferiority but a positive model of assertiveness and independent thinking.

Women particularly experienced benefits from the revolution. With 45% of households headed by women they were the major beneficiaries of all the social welfare programmes. They also for the first time got equal pay for equal work. In demonstrations and rallies, women were the most

ardent supporters of the revolution. They were also being called on to fill non-traditional roles in construction, driving, and in the army and militia. They were encouraged to speak publicly and take on leadership positions. They emerged to fulfill these roles competently, because the potential was always there:

not so easy ting  
But de strength was dey  
De weakness imposed  
De adventure was dey  
De spirit just hushed

No longer was the woman under the table but right out in the open, "Demanding equal/ recognition".

Throughout the poem, two motifs are used. One is the rhyme encompassing the 'good luck' symbols worn by a bride, 'Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue'. This is symbolic of the inappropriate and irrelevant, as a relatively small proportion of Grenadians ever marry. It is in itself 'borrowed' from the European tradition. Fragments of the rhyme recur, giving different resonances. For example, when the little girl is expelled by her mother, the negative nature of the woman's inculcated response is emphasised by the fragment:

Something borrowed  
Something  
blue

The changes brought about in women by the revolution are echoed in the words:

something new  
something true

The other motif is of the butterfly emerging out of the death of the caterpillar, symbolizing the beauty of the new woman's liberated identity as she sheds the old, ugly, repressed one. And one process is seen to be as natural and inevitable as the other. Just as the caterpillar has all it takes to become a butterfly, so the retiring, unrecognised Grenadian woman has the capacity to become an inspirer, a mobilizer and a leader..

From under the table, it is "Woman/ Step forward":

The caterpillar dead  
The butterfly born.

CHAPTER FIVE: EDWARD KAMAU BRATHWAITE: PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

Section One: Biography

Lawson Edward Brathwaite was born in Barbados on 11th May 1930. His childhood was spent between the "urban village", coastal environment of his parents' home, and the inland "country" where his grandfather's home was located. As a child the low-lying coral island, fifteen miles wide and twenty miles long, seemed a very large place. In his (on one level) autobiographical Sun Poem (1982) he writes of the mystique which the as yet unseen western Atlantic coast held for him and his friends, separated as it was from their world by a 'mountain' of 1000 feet: Mount Hillaby.

and the sea over there was a giant of iron  
a rasta of water with rumbelling muscles and turrible  
turrible hair  
(1982, p. 42)

Though not well off, his parents were of a "'middle class' orientation" (Brathwaite, 1970, p. 36). He was encouraged at school, and gained a place at Harrison College, a prestigious institution closely modelled on the English public school.

Despite this colonial environment and the legendary conservatism of Barbados, Brathwaite developed a non-conformist approach to life. He had from a young age, for example, a consuming passion for avant garde jazz. He managed to persuade Michael Laing, manager of the local radio station, to allow himself and a few friends to put on a series of six jazz programmes, including some avant garde material. The series only lasted for two programmes, however, due to the vehement negative response of listeners: "The first one I did; and even as I was on the air people were phoning in, asking what was going on..." (Personal communication from Brathwaite to Gordon Rohlehr, 30/4/74. Rohlehr 1981, p.5).

On entering the sixth form, he had applied to do Modern Studies (history and English), a syllabus which none of the teachers felt qualified to teach. With about four others he was allowed to study the subject virtually without supervision. "(T)o everyone's surprise" he won "one of the Island Scholarships that traditionally took the ex-planters' sons 'home' to Oxbridge or London." (Brathwaite, 1970, p. 37). He arrived at Pembroke College, Cambridge to read History in 1950, in his own words "a potential Afro-Saxon". (ibid.). His whole formal education had aimed at precisely this:

Africa did not mean anything to anyone in Barbados; we never mentioned the word in our ten years of schooling...There was a question that we started at school about what is West Indian culture. But the answers we got were very vague. (Brathwaite in Perrier 1973, p. 18).

Throughout his time at Cambridge, Brathwaite was writing poetry and getting it published in Caribbean journals (Rohlehr 1981, p.4). From his first published poem ('Shadow Suite', Bim no. 12, June 1950) he shows a desire to use jazz and other musical forms as structural models, developing a theme through a number of 'variations'. He also responded to "the 'colonial' breakthrough...achieved by Eliot, Pound and Joyce" (Brathwaite, 1967/8, pt. 2, p. 39) which he saw as as powerful indicators for a specifically Caribbean "alternative. to the English Romantic/Victorian tradition which still operates among and on us." (ibid.) He saw himself at this stage as the "universal man"; to be West Indian "meant you were being parochial." (Brathwaite in Perrier 1973, p. 37).

I read Keats, Conrad, Kafka. I was a man of Kulture. But the Cambridge magazines didn't take my poems. Or rather, they only took those which had a West Indian - to me, 'exotic' - flavour. I felt rejected and misunderstood. (Brathwaite, 1970, p. 37)

Graduating in 1953, he remained to take a Certificate in Education, and then began to search, anywhere in the world, for a job..It was the period of the Emigrant writer, as Brathwaite writes in 1970 (p. 37). Laming's

In the castle of my skin, the first evocation in novel form of the Barbadian cultural, historical and physical environment, published in 1953, had a profound effect. Sam Selvon, V.S. Naipaul and Wilson Harris were also enjoying international success writing Caribbean novels in exile. Brathwaite likewise felt no need to return:

Accepting my rootlessness, I applied for work in London, Cambridge, Ceylon, New Delhi, Cairo, Kano, Khartoum, Sierra Leone, Caracassone, a monastery in Jerusalem. I was a West Indian, roofless man of the world. (1970 p. 38).

As it happened, in 1955 he went to Ghana, as he says "by accident" (Perrier, 1973, p.18), having been offered a job as Education Officer for the Ministry of Education. He was there during a deeply significant period in Ghana's history, in the years immediately preceding and following Independence (1957). He returned to the Caribbean in 1962. Ghana was the first colonized Black African country to gain independence, representing the culmination of the dreams and activities of the Panafrikan movement and a focus for the growing international political consciousness of black people everywhere. There was no sense in which Brathwaite went to Africa to 'find himself', and the political and cultural ferment of the time in Ghana could not fail to make an impression on him. He absorbed his new environment in a fairly unconscious way. His job in primary education kept him in the rural areas where he participated as a matter of course in activities which were traditional and relatively unaffected by overt European influences.

Nevertheless, it is clear from poems written during Brathwaite's long stay that the adjustment was not altogether an easy one, and that he experienced strong feelings of insecurity and separation from his environment. 'The Pawpaw' (one of three 'Poems from Ghana', Bim no. 27, Jul-Dec. 1958, p. 139) portrays four little boys coming to the poet's house with a pawpaw as a gift. Beforehand they wash it with great ceremony. The poet is at a loss as to how to respond to this gesture; he

describes the fruit alternatively as "Like a bomb", and "Like a nugget of gold". Clearly uncertain of his place in the community, he responds with caution and suspicion:

A mocking sign of the doom of all flesh?  
Or the purest gold in the kingdom?

Another poem 'South' (1973, p. 57-8), written during this period but included later in Rights of Passage, expresses a sense of felt reproach from a stable, certain community for West Indian "lack of endeavour and purpose". The shadows of the forest "oppress" him. Homesickness is evident in the poet's "recapture" of his own islands where, in his imagination, "small urchins" salute and a fisherman, standing up in his boat, "halloos us". He speaks here as one who has wandered far and wide, and still found no resting place. He identifies with all exiles in his use of the plural first person throughout the poem.

After a year as a teacher at Takoradi Government Secondary School, Brathwaite was seconded in 1956 to work for the United Nations on a Plebiscite being held in Togoland. In 1960 he was stationed at Saltpond as an employee of the Textbooks and Syllabus Section of the Ministry of Education. At Saltpond he established a Children's Theatre, for which he wrote an number of plays, including Four plays for primary schools (pbd. 1964), Odele's choice (an Africanised adaptation of Antigone, pbd. 1967), Pageant of Ghana and Edina.

He formed during this period a close friendship with Efua Sutherland, playwright and promoter of culture, who was associated with the nationalist spectacular cultural events of the Nkrumah period. Her urban coastal upbringing had left her alienated from traditional Akan culture and she shared a common experience with the West Indian in her need to recover her ancestral past. She was energetic and prolific.

Between 1958 and 1961 she developed the Experimental Theatre and the Ghana Drama Studio in Accra. She encouraged cultural fusions. She was preoccupied with Ananse and other creations of Akan folklore and mythology, and at the same time encouraged the use of the English language and interwoven Biblical themes. Rohlehr (1981, p. 115) suggests that Brathwaite's plays were strongly influenced by Sutherland's preoccupations with traditional poetry forms and styles of dramatization and traditional forms of prayer, praise and lament. The appearance of an anthology, Voices of Ghana, edited by Henry Swanzy, which Brathwaite reviewed for Eim in 1960 helped him to absorb Akan perceptions and styles of expression, which he put to good use in Masks. He became friends with Kwabena Nketia, a scholar of traditional music, oral literary forms, and of the talking drum, or atumpan. Brathwaite therefore participated with a pioneering group of artists and intellectuals who were consciously striving to recover and repossess their cultural heritage.

The era which ushered in independence for most African nations was accompanied by a spirit of development in Africa-centred scholarship. Basil Davidson's Old Africa rediscovered (1959) was the first book in any language to make available to the public at large knowledge of the ancient history of Africa based on archaeological findings, including the existence of many highly developed civilizations. For the first time outside the select inner circles of African scholarship, the mass migrations of African peoples southwestwards across the Sahara and the savanna grasslands to the forest regions of West Africa were made known. This new perspective helped Brathwaite to find reconciliation with the restless African present (on the continent and in the diaspora), identifying it as an ancient condition, far older than the first contact with the white slavers. In 1961 the English translation of Janheinz Jahn's Muntu: an outline of Neo-African Culture appeared. This was an

audacious attempt by a non-African writer to demonstrate the existence of a single and unique system encompassing African modes of thought, existence and African sensibilities. The work of a passionate enthusiast rather than 'scholar', it evoked scepticism in some quarters, but fired creative imaginations with its originality. Jahn's primary objective was to counter the European myth that Africa had no developed philosophical systems of its own, and was devoid of 'civilization'. Through his translations, Jahn also made much of the Francophone Negritude writing available to English-speaking audiences for the first time. An intellectual framework was being presented in which African culture, history and tradition might be discussed.

In 1960 Brathwaite married Doris Monica Welcome. They have a son, Michael Kwesi. In 1962 they made the journey back to the Caribbean where Brathwaite was appointed a tutor in the University of the West Indies Extra Mural Department in St. Lucia. A profound development had taken place almost imperceptibly during his sojourn in Ghana. Its significance only became fully evident to him on his return. "And I came home to find that I had not really left. That it was still Africa in the Caribbean." (1970, p.38). The following year he took up a post as lecturer in history at the Mona, Jamaica campus of the U.W.I. He says his poetry was "tightened by (his) contact with Jamaican society with its black consciousness and its controlled rage and implosive violence" (1970, p. 41). In 1965 he went to the University of Sussex to research for his Ph.D. (gained 1968), which was later revised and published as The development of creole society in Jamaica, 1770-1820 by Oxford University Press in 1971. He was writing poetry prolifically during this period in England. It was a time of great creativity amongst the exiled West Indian artists. In 1966, he co-founded, with John La Rose and Andrew Salkey, the Caribbean Artists' Movement (CAM). Artists who would have been isolated

by great distances in the Caribbean thrived on the contact and exchange of ideas in London. A sizeable West Indian student population supported CAM events - there were almost monthly poetry readings. The West Indian Students' Centre became CAM headquarters. Work by Caribbean artists ("never seen collectively before", 1970, p. 41) was exhibited at the Students' Centre, the Theatre Royal, the Universities of Kent and Sussex, the House of Commons and in Birmingham. Novelists Wilson Harris, Michael Anthony, John Hearne, Andrew Salkey and Orlando Patterson, artists Aubrey Williams, Jerry Craig, Clifton Campbell and Errol Lloyd, poets Brathwaite, La Rose, Salkey and the promising young Linton Kwesi Johnson communed, argued and shared their work. Marina Maxwell was apparently the only woman to make an impact, with her exposee of racism in British schools 'Violence in the Toilets' (1969) and experimentations in drama. John La Rose established his New Beacon bookshop and publishing company during this period.

In 1967, Brathwaite's first major work, Rights of Passage, was published by Oxford University Press. It was the first part of a trilogy, and was followed by Masks in 1968 and Islands in 1969. These three long sequences encompassed the rich and varied experience of Brathwaite's travelling years and the insights gained thereby. His historian's perspective and the experience of communal life and culture in Ghana had combined to develop a collective vision of the entire black diaspora through long epochs of its history. It was an ambitious project (see Rohlehr 1981 for a full exegesis), later published as one volume, The Arrivants: a new world trilogy, in 1973. It was nevertheless immediately accessible in its parts and received fairly instantaneous popular acclaim. He had faced certain difficulties with his publishers, who had recommended the deletion of 'The Dust', a poem of considerable perfection in its use of the Barbadian dialect, on the grounds of its

"unintelligibility" (Brathwaite 1978b). However, as soon as it was heard, even British critics began to catch the excitement. Brathwaite received an Arts Council bursary and a Camden Arts Festival prize for Rights of Passage in 1967. Brathwaite's deliveries of his own work are authoritative, kinetically exciting, aurally varied, and intellectually stimulating. The British Council arranged for the trilogy to be recorded, and it was put out, on five discs in all, by Argo between 1968 and 1973. The trilogy emerged at the height of the Black Power Movement's influence and its African and Caribbean folk orientation perfectly coincided with the contemporary mood.

He returned to a very turbulent Caribbean in 1968. In October 1968 Walter Rodney was refused re-entry to Jamaica, and students protesting were met with a violent response from riot police. The university was "ringed with steel for weeks" (Brathwaite 1977/8 pt. 1, p 56). The Rodney Affair was the trigger to eruptions of anger and frustration against the persistence of colonial attitudes and rigid, colour-based social structures throughout the West Indian archipelago. The channels between university and sufferer, developed dramatically by Rodney, led to challenging new forms of creativity on and near the campus, including Marina Maxwell's Yard Theatre in August Town, where Rasta poets and musicians performed, and the production of Bongo Man: journal of African youth, succeeded by Abeng in October 1969. As in Britain, the timing of the publication of Brathwaite's trilogy was perfect. In 1967 Rights of Passage inspired one of many performances in Jamaica, on this occasion against a background of blues and jazz (Rohlehr 1981, p. 68). Brathwaite was endorsed by the Rasta poets as a soul brother. Mortimo Planno, one of the Rastafarian leaders who went on the delegation to Ethiopia following the recommendations of the Smith et. al. report (1960) and who was the only figure with enough authority to control the crowds at Kingston

Airport come to greet Emperor Haile Selassie in 1966, delivered 'Wings of a Dove' "against an explosive background of drums" as part of an arrangement by Brathwaite of Rights of Passage performed at the ACLALS conference held in Jamaica in January 1971 (Rohlehr, *ibid.*).

The university establishment responded very little to all this turbulence. The failure of the Creative Arts Centre, based on the campus, to 'West Indianize' its cultural expression resulted in an occupation by students in February 1970. The upheaval in Trinidad triggered by the Sir George Williams incident in Canada (and of course the world-wide student revolt in general) in many ways inspired the occupation (one militant suggested seizing the computer centre) but the grievances were specific and deeply-felt. The occupation lasted two months. It was a period of intense debate and heartsearching. The authorities were outraged, although the issue was resolved without calling in police and troops this time. Brathwaite felt he was held responsible for the occupation even though he was not in Jamaica at the time.

In 1970 Brathwaite, in association with the Caribbean Artists Movement, established Savacou magazine, which has continued to publish innovative creative work and cultural debate. The inclusion of Rasta poets like Bongo Jerry and a strongly 'black' emphasis in Savacou no. 3 led to a major controversy, in which Eric Roach, a poet from Tobago who had always celebrated and respected the African-derived folk culture, took great exception to the "tribe boys". (Trinidad Guardian 14/7/71).

In 1972-3 Brathwaite was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, which enabled him to devote a year to writing. At the beginning of his sabbatical (he was still lecturing in history at U.W.I.) he went to Guyana for "the miracle of Carifesta" (1977/8, pt.3, p. 181). Carifesta was a visionary event, first devised and staged in Guyana. It brought together artists from all over the Caribbean. It was a first opportunity

for many artists from the anglophone Caribbean to get a full grasp of the Caribbean cultural matrix. The Haitians, especially, with their thriving African traditions of drumming and dance, had a particularly profound impact. Brathwaite maintains that it was "one of the most important events to have happened in the Caribbean since Emancipation." (ibid., p. 191).

He spent the rest of the year in Barbados, where he composed Mother poem and sketched out the other two parts of what was to become a second trilogy. It was perhaps his final homecoming. Brathwaite is extremely articulate about the ways Barbados differs from other West Indian islands. (Brathwaite 1979b). While the others are mountainous and volcanic, Barbados is a coral island which has risen out of the sea. It is lowlying and flat. Brathwaite sees the fact that maronage was almost physically impossible in Barbados (there was nowhere to hide) as being responsible for the virtual non-existence of visible African traditions. Rather than rejecting Barbados for the drama of Jamaican kumina and Haitian vodoun, Brathwaite sought to discover what has necessarily been submerged in the Barbadian consciousness. Mother poem is also a tribute to his own mother and an entry (truly remarkable for a male writer) into the agonies and struggles endured by Caribbean women, who have been more oppressed than the men. During the same year, Brathwaite received a City of Nairobi Fellowship (1972) and the Eussa Award (1973) of the Yoruba Yard, a remarkable development in Barbados. Yoruba Yard was a cultural centre formed to recover African tradition. Master drummers from Ghana were invited to Barbados to teach their art. There can be little doubt that Brathwaite's example was an inspiration. Yoruba Yard also functioned as a publishing centre and a calypso 'tent'. Barbados had tended to 'consume' calypso produced in Trinidad. During the 1970's its own artists began to emerge, and now the radical Mighty Gabby has become one of the

most popular calypsonians throughout the islands. The Bussa Award is named after the leader of Barbados' one great slave rebellion (1816), which was brutally put down and taught Barbadians a cruel lesson. 'Little England' had come a long way. Now the firmly-established Rastafari movement causes many older heads to shake in dismay.

In 1976 Brathwaite was made a Reader in History at Mona. In the same year he also received the Cuban Casa de las Americas prize for his collection of poems Black + blues. Mother poem was published in 1977. He continues to write and publish socio-cultural analysis, such as Contradictory omens (1974), 'The Love Axe/1' (1977-8), and to travel to Europe and America, giving lectures and presentations of his poems. In 1981 he was presenting very little of his work in the Caribbean. When interviewed, he expressed a sense of bitterness at not getting enough support from the community. He was not asked, for example, to give a reading of Mother poem after it was published, although a dramatized production devised by Honor Forde-Smith at the university was very warmly received. A Barbadian multi-media production of Mother poem was taken to the 1979 Carifesta in Cuba, where the response was "almost hysterical" (Brathwaite, 1980 reading, Warwick). He has continued to support other artists by publishing their work. Savacou 14/15 of 1979 was an important development, presenting the work of the dub poets and the many impressive new Jamaican women poets.

At Carifesta '81, staged in Barbados, Brathwaite was conspicuous by his absence. George Lamming, Barbados' other most celebrated writer was feted widely and given substantial air time to advocate revolution in sonorous tones. Enquiries of officials as to the reason for Brathwaite's absence only brought forth tight-lipped silence. It appears that the organisers had expected him to pay his own travelling expenses. Brathwaite appeared at that time to be becoming isolated at home;

regarded as uncomfortably eccentric by the university authorities and a bit too academic and 'difficult' by some of the dub poets. More recently he seems to have once more found a spiritual home, and is working again in the realm of poetry performance. In 1983 his contributions to Caribbean thought were recognised in his appointment as the first Professor of Social and Cultural History at the University of the West Indies.

Section two: notes on the structure and broad concerns of Brathwaite's major works.

Brathwaite's mature work has been conceived on a grand scale. The Arrivants: a New World Trilogy (1973) consists of three books: Rights of Passage (first published 1967), Masks (1968) and Islands (1969). Two books of a second trilogy, Mother Poem (1977) and Sun Poem (1982) have appeared, and there is a third trilogy planned. A collection of poems written about or in Europe, Other Exiles, was published in 1975. The Cuban publishing house, Casa de las Americas, awarded a prize for and brought out Black + Blues (1976), which was concerned very specifically with the Caribbean and had a marked political perspective. Much of the collection was republished in Third World Poems (1983).

The Arrivants is Brathwaite's best-known work. The three books explore three interrelated foci of the author's, as representative of the Caribbean, reality. Rights of Passage is concerned essentially with dispossession. It begins by briefly touching on the migrations of African peoples through the continent before introducing the process of dispossession which changed the world; the transportation of millions of captive Africans to the so-called New World. The rootless children of slavery are subsequently followed in their wanderings northward to New York, Chicago, and to Europe. Protest in the form of negritude and the

creativity of jazz and the Harlem Renaissance are related themes which also dominate the style of delivery. Masks is an exploration of the poet's re-entry into Africa, which is physical, spiritual and intellectual. It explores the pain of recognising the distance between the West Indian and Africa, and the long, slow process of understanding forgotten cultural symbols, of absorbing different concepts of time, life and death. Masks is also a celebration of the rediscovery of African history, and a consideration of developments leading to slavery from an African point of view. A kind of peace is also found in connecting the West Indian dispossession to an African history of constant movement, discovering a sense of "the continuum" (Perrier 1973, p.22). Brathwaite also develops a richer concept of his role as poet through his understanding of the griot as historian and priest within a community. Masks makes extensive use of Akan prayers, poems and songs, both in the original language and in translation. It has a formal, ritualistic quality.

Islands is a representation of homecoming, physical and spiritual. Brathwaite recognises much of the common life of the Caribbean as having an African origin, but often crippled in form, its meaning distorted or forgotten. Islands explores the dynamics and symbols of grassroots religion, celebrates all manifestations of resistance to colonial imposition, and commits the poet to discovering the meaning of his people's ravaged history and landscape.

Mother Poem represents a coming to terms with Brathwaite's first source; his mother, and his mother island, Barbados. The geological reality of Barbados as a coral island of porous limestone, watered by underground rivers becomes a metaphor for the history and spiritual life of Caribbean women. They are celebrated as guardians of African forms of cultural and spiritual life, as the principle protectors of their

children, and for the depths of their capacity to endure. That their qualities are often submerged is recognised as being a consequence of their extreme oppression.

Sun Poem is rooted in the male experience of Barbados. The central figure, Adam, is in some senses autobiographical, but also representative. The poem explores resistance from a male perspective; in terms of confrontation and physical struggle. It is also a lament for the degree to which men are broken by the harshness of the "plantation", which in essence the Caribbean remains to this day. Sun Poem contains a wealth of concrete detail of the life of a young boy growing into adolescence and self-realisation through his physical engagement with the natural life of the island, with his sister, his boy mates, and a first sexual awakening. Many of these episodes are represented in the form of prose-poetry.

Throughout the works there are constant cross-references. Symbols such as the sun used in later poems gained much of their significance through their exploration in the African context of Masks. Ambivalence and contradiction are constant features of Brathwaite's work. Links and coherence are often suddenly created through echoes of sound, providing an overall sense of richness and complexity.

### Section three: Brathwaite's relationship to the other performance traditions

Brathwaite's academic, or learned, approach can be differentiated in a number of ways from the other performing traditions. It is clear from his biography that Brathwaite's development distinguishes him considerably from other performance poets. He was flung far from his roots; through education and through travel. His efforts simply to rediscover his own home have constituted a major spiritual journey. Of

course, after travelling so far away, both intellectually and physically, he could not return to exactly where and what he had been. His experience of conscious homecoming has inevitably given him a firmly-formulated view of the Caribbean entity. His long stay in Africa made him realise that his home could be nowhere but the Caribbean. There are certain parallels here with Louise Bennett's commitment after studying abroad, although she, remarkably, never seemed to have any doubts about her identity. Brathwaite's reappraisal of those elements which distinguish Caribbean culture has been very self-conscious. As a crafter of words he has displayed a consistency of attention to detail while constantly striving for new effects from his experimentation with language. Brathwaite's poetry is thus distinguished by a heightened consciousness of the Caribbean milieu in all its diversity and a self-conscious, studied approach to his art.

It is unlikely that any of the roots poets were ever so deeply alienated from their environment and origins. Nevertheless, as Nettleford (1970) points out, a substantial proportion of West Indians from every social stratum express a rejection of present identity, whether it be in dreams of a return to Africa or aspirations to migrate to Europe or North America. It is clear from Mutabaruka's early poetry (c1971) that black pride was a liberating new discovery. Brathwaite's input was probably influential here. Michael Smith acknowledged that the roots poets were indebted to Brathwaite in terms of black consciousness, although in terms of language and style he saw little influence. On the other hand, Brathwaite's use of onomatopoeia and pure sound, as for example, the scissors going shhhaaaaa (through a piece of cloth) in 'Angel/Engine' (1977a, p.102), has much in common with Michael Smith, or even Louise Bennett (see 'Hard Time', 1966, p.119). Oku Onuora, whose work reflects a more conscious interest in experimentation on the page, was more emphatic

than Smith about Brathwaite's contribution. Both he and Malik have adapted Brathwaite's short lines and word divisions which emphasize puns or suggest multiple meanings. Rohlehr also suggests that Malik's successful use of the preacher style (as in 'Pan Run' parts 1 and 2) was inspired by Brathwaite (1976).

Brathwaite does not put on a show in quite the sense of the roots performing poets. He does not memorize his poems, but reads them. He has, however, like them, performed to an accompaniment of drums. His works have been dramatized with solo voices, chorus and visual effects by Noel Vaz, Honor Forde-Smith and Yoruba Yard (see Rohlehr 1981, p. 68). Brathwaite is particularly appreciated for his demonstrations, a combination of informative and insightful lecture, presentation of poems and elucidation. Such a presentation of Mother poem at the University of Warwick in 1980 was warmly and enthusiastically received. The impact is a combination of the scholarly and the dramatic.

In common with other performance poets, Brathwaite's composition is influenced constantly by aural demands. He completed his first version of Rights of Passage in September 1964, but had little hope of getting it published. Apart from a few 'exotic' poems in the Cambridge magazines, no-one had published his work except Frank Collymore in Eim.

Then I started to read it onto tape: and spent from October '64 right thru to my departure for England (about June/July/August '65), getting a good reading version of it, and changing the text under pressure from the voice version. At least I relied on the ear to tell me how it should go: and this applied not only to lines and words, but to structure, order of sequences, contrasts, that sort of thing. (Brathwaite, letter to Rohlehr, Rohlehr 1981, p. 63).

Brathwaite's lively awareness of the pun is a result of his reliance on sound as a determinant of composition. Both Michael Smith and Malik have developed strongly aural methods of composition, but without the use of tape recorder, simply working and reworking whole poems or large fragments until they have achieved a satisfying harmonization of sound

and meaning before writing them down.

At the same time, Brathwaite pays particular attention to the effect of the words on the page. Sometimes the arrangement of words helps to highlight sound qualities in the work. Maureen Warner Lewis, in her excellent Notes to Masks (1977), points out that some of the word divisions, which are a distinctive characteristic of Brathwaite's poetry, help to emphasize internal and irregular rhymes. She cites, for example,

stalking the sun-  
light, the dun-  
geon unbars

(Masks, 1973, p. 132)

and

...news  
of ripples reach the awakened Zu-  
lus

(Masks, 1973, p. 90)

In his degree of page-orientation Brathwaite differs markedly from the other poets in this study. Sometimes the impact on the eye may be distinctly different from that achieved in sound. A dual meaning may be obvious on the page but not in oral presentation. This, Brathwaite seemed to be conscious, was the case in 'Nametracks' (Mother poem pp. 56 - 64) where he uses the Rastafarian duality of I/eye to contrast the egotistical brutality of the white baas O'Grady ('I') and the submerged spirituality of the slave ('eye'). At the Warwick University reading in 1980, when reading:

say  
i  
not

eye

he felt the need to spell out "e-y-e" to emphasize the distinction. On the other hand, "aei" as a cry of pain could be quite explicitly conveyed.

Brathwaite has singlemindedly pursued the role of poet from a position of considerable advantage in relation to Malik and the Dub Poets, although he would certainly maintain that he has come up against many a brick wall (Brathwaite 1974 pp. 66-7), especially with regard to getting published. He has known periods when he could write without interruption, and has been free of the fear of hunger or homelessness. His work has greater scope and more dimensions than that of other performance poets. It has greater diversities of style and perspectives and reflects an unfettered access to history, philosophy and other literature. The material which encourages people to link Brathwaite with the performance poets is only one dimension of his work. Much of his poetry is in Standard English, and is the dense product of research and/or long reflection. It is not necessarily possible to apprehend Brathwaite's meaning without considering the written text.

On the other hand, much of his poetry cannot be fully appreciated until it is heard. Many of the allusions are aural; references to music of many kinds, and the history and people associated with it; celebrations of different kinds of Black English, Caribbean and American, and perspectives embodied in distinctive phrases, humour etc.; illustrations of the central significance of rhythm as a source of energy, hope, release and unity. Kinesis is the key principle in the work which is enjoyed as sound-poetry. Through rhythm and counter-rhythm, a sense of energy which is generated through motion is built up. Often the poems end in a sense of climax or release (e.g. 'Wings of a dove', 'The stone sermon', 'Caliban', 'Nametracks', 'Angel/Engine').

#### Section four: sound poetry: theory and practice

'Sound poetry' is a term coined by Brathwaite to encapsulate all Caribbean poetry which is fully realised only in performance and which

draws on many oral traditions for its inspiration. He emphasizes at the same time that it is part of a world-wide and ancient tradition:

The tradition is as old as the European court jester and the travelling troubadour; as ingrained within our instincts as the West African griots style and the oracles of Ifa divination. (Brathwaite 1978b).

He was bearing witness to the irreversible trend of poetry in the English-speaking Caribbean towards speech rhythms, and the sounds of Caribbean speech and music. It was the result of the increasingly confident assertion of the oral traditions, for which Louise Bennett can take much of the credit.

Coming from the more formal, literary end of the poetry spectrum, Brathwaite has striven throughout his career to break free of the impositions, constraints and alien emphases of the British poetry tradition. The most powerful straitjacket, in his view, was the iambic pentameter.

...the pentameter remained, and it carries with it a certain kind of experience, which is not the experience of the hurricane. The hurricane does not roar in pentameters. And that's the problem: how do you get a rhythm which approximates the natural experience, the environmental experience? (Brathwaite, 1984, p. 10).

Northrop Frye (1971) suggests, however, that in much English poetry, stress patterns do not conform to the pentameter. He maintains that the "iambic pentameter provides a field of syncopation in which stress and metre can to some extent neutralize one another." (p.251). Rohlehr, commenting on Derek Walcott's use of the sonnet form with Creole idiom ('Poopa da was a fete'), noted, "The ear accustomed to traditional English rhythms (and many WI ears are) is continually surprised by the rush and lightness of the movement of Walcott's poem which seems, but only seems, to ignore the martial rigidity of the heroic metre, where stresses are fairly predictable, as in a quick-step or fox-trot." (Brathwaite/Rohlehr 1968, p.93). The essence of both critics' remarks is

that, however much the poet works against it, the model of the pentameter remains. Brathwaite was, from early on, conscious of these formal constraints as a problem of imperialism. The natural stresses of Standard English are not the same as those of Creole, or of many other English variants. He was thus able to identify the challenges posed by Eliot, Pound and Joyce to the established structures, rhythms and even construction of poetic language as a "'colonial' breakthrough" (Brathwaite, 1967/8 pt.2, p. 39). Later he would acknowledge the influence of another 'colonial' writer, Dylan Thomas, and underlined the point by noting that the Welsh Arts Council had given Derek Walcott a special award in 1980 in recognition of common struggles with English language and ideological imposition (Brathwaite, University of Warwick, 1980). The real problem, he felt, was "the English Romantic/Victorian cultural tradition", (1967/8 pt.2, p. 39), but in order to break the tyranny of the pentameter, it was necessary to look to the time before Chaucer if English models were to be used at all. Probably influential on his first trilogy, The Arrivants, was the alliterative style of Langland and (possibly) the anonymous author of Sir Gawain and the green knight. (See Brathwaite 1984, p.9).

In the search for alternative rhythms, Brathwaite explored the transposition of different musical rhythms, from the Caribbean, Black America and Africa. Calypso has had a strong influence. He points out that the principle rhythm of the calypso, as with many of the Hispanic and Amerindian names which characterize the region is dactylic, not iambic (Brathwaite 1984, p.17). He uses his own 'Calypso' (1973, p.48) as an example:

curved stone hissed into reef  
white teeth fanged into clay  
Bathsheba Montego Bay

The regularity of the dactyl, however, is a poor indicator of the syncopated calypso rhythm, or Brathwaite's use of it.

The 'colonial' writers to whom the young Brathwaite felt himself drawn emphasized oral traditions in their work. Black American writer Ralph Ellison wrote: "...writers like Eliot and Joyce made me conscious of the literary value of my folk inheritance." (quoted by Rohlehr 1981, p.67).

What T.S. Eliot did for Caribbean poetry and Caribbean literature was to introduce the notion of the speaking voice, the conversational tone (Brathwaite 1984, p.30).

American vernaculars had been strongly influenced by Black America, both its language and music. Mark Twain, the first writer to confidently establish an American-English 'voice', was from Missouri, and grew up by the great Mississippi River. Writing again about Eliot, also born in Missouri, Brathwaite commented:

In that dry deadpan delivery, the riddims of St. Louis (though we didn't know the source then) were stark and clear for those of us who at the same time were listening to the dislocations of Bird, Dizzy and Klook. (Brathwaite 1984, p.31, footnote.)

Pound related to the risky explorations of jazz in his attack on traditional structures and constant quest for the new. Joyce and Thomas discovered in their respective oral traditions, beyond lyricism, an anarchic or subversive license in native use of the imperialist tongue, English. Joyce increasingly freely coined his own words, while Thomas composed heady combinations which relied on association and underlying syntax to convey meaning.

While all these influences can be discerned in Brathwaite's poetry, it is precisely because, for him, they help to highlight characteristics of his own oral traditions. We have, for example, explored the Rastafarian 'reappropriation' of English as Dread Talk, now imbued with its 'true meaning'. Brathwaite, throughout his mature career, has been responding creatively to the Rasta challenge. In turn, the Rastafarian

approach is a modern variant of older Creole traditions. F.G. Cassidy, for example, in his study Jamaica Talk (1961) writes of "the cheerful defiance of traditional English grammar, the salty idioms, the wonderfully compressed proverbs, the pungent imagery of nicknames and epithets..." (p.1). "Defiance" is a significant choice of word here. Cassidy has recorded, and Louise Bennett has celebrated, the creative licence with which Creole speakers use English. A plantation song is recorded by Jekyll lamenting a "Great trevelation" (1966, p.236); a highly expressive word-blend because, in the West Indian experience, the Bible's "revelation" was inseparably bound with great "tribulation". In the West Indies it is not uncommon to hear the biblical Revelation 'confused' with Revolution. Cassidy points out that word-blends are a common source of new words in Jamaican Creole. (1961, p.5).

Brathwaite was first drawn to the oral end of the poetry spectrum by his experience and observations in Ghana. He rooted his philosophical rationale in the concept of nommo, an essentially oral perception of the word as life force, which he came across for the first time in Janheinz Jahn's Muntu (1961). The concept was expounded by an oral philosopher Ogotomméli, from Mali:

'The Nommo', says Ogotomméli, 'is water and heat. The vital force that carries the word issues from the mouth in a water vapour which is both water and word. (Jahn 1961, p. 124)

The philosophy expanded in Muntu challenged many Biblical concepts, particularly regarding the nature of God, and reinforced others, such as the first statement, "In the beginning was the Word". Ancient Hebrew tradition, in common with traditional African philosophy, accorded humanity a controlling role over the world through the power of the word. Nothing truly exists before it is named. By being named it is brought into being. Brathwaite combined this idea with his concept of two languages in struggle - a colonial language which denied the West Indian

a history and cultural worth, and the Creole language born of the slave plantation, which poets were struggling to use meaningfully. The task of the Caribbean poet, as he saw it, was to find the words which would bring the Caribbean reality (not mediated through the colonial perspective) into being. In Islands, he expresses the concept of nommo literally:

The tree must be named  
This gives it fruit  
issues its juices

Nation language is a term coined by Edward Brathwaite which is gaining increasing currency in discussion of Caribbean performance poetry. One of its first appearances in print seems to be in his article 'Explosion of Caribbean 'sound poetry'' (1978b) which reviewed the development of performance poetry in general and the release of a long-playing record, Marc-up, by Guyanese actor/poet Marc Matthews in particular. From the very beginning he emphasises the importance of sound. Nation language, to be fully apprehended, must be heard, hence the appellation sound poetry. He points out that for many years it was inconceivable to the broadcasting authorities that Louise Bennett's voice, "that subversive element", should be put out over the air. While the pervasive presence of Creole was patronisingly acknowledged, it would not do to in any way encourage or confirm it. Nation language is the emergent language of the colonized. Dante's Tuscan vernacular was his nation language which he asserted in preference to Latin, the colonial language. (Brathwaite, 1984). Qualitatively, sound poetry is "kinetic, demanding dramatisation" (1978b). It implies communal relationships and dialogue. It resides firmly within the oral tradition.

The oral tradition...demands not only the griot but the audience to complete the community: the noise and sounds that the maker makes are responded to by the audience and are returned to him. Hence we have the creation of a continuum where meaning truly resides. (1984, p.19).

Existing within the oral mode, nation language has resources within its

command which are outside the scribal realm. "The noise that it makes is part of the meaning" (ibid., p.17). Anger or excitement might be expressed like the clatter of a machine gun, grief like the wind or a wave (ibid. p.13). This dimension is particularly evident in the poetry of Louise Bennett and Michael Smith, probably the poets closest to what Brathwaite calls fundamental nation (ibid. p.43). In other words, they are the most firmly rooted in the oral tradition.

Fundamental nation is what linguists would call the basilect (Warner Lewis in Crahan and Knight (eds.) 1979, pp. 101-123); Creole forms of speech which are remotest from the European lexical model and which contain a high proportion of African words and/or syntax. The meaning of nation language is however quite fluid in Brathwaite's usage and is determined not so much by grammar and syntax as by how and for what the language is used. In his 1978 article, he put forward the term as a more positive equivalent for the widely-used "dialect". In 1984, however, he makes a distinction between nation, which we could equate with basilect, and creole, which he places much closer to standard English (p.5). He is somewhat ambiguous on this point, however, as he later identifies Derek Walcott's 'The schooner 'Flight'' as a nation language poem (p.10), and even a standard English sequence from Tony McNeill's Credences at the altar of cloud (p.50). Presumably in both cases he is responding to the intent of each poet, and the noises that they make. As ever in Brathwaite's work there is the contradiction which he finds confronting him from every angle in Caribbean society. On the one hand, "folk forms continue to be uniquely, vitally and creatively African in form, rhythm and soul" (Brathwaite 1979b, p.40); on the other, the evident diversity of the Caribbean demands inclusiveness, not exclusiveness (Brathwaite 1974).

Rohlehr points out that Brathwaite's aural approach brought several

new elements into his poetry. "Rhetoric, song, word-play, allusiveness, ambiguity and rhythmic syncopation became the fundamentals of his new poetry in a way they were not in his earlier writing." (1981, p.63). Ambiguity pervades the philosophical perspective of The Arrivants, reflecting African views symbolized in images of the circle, representing the containment of opposites (Warner Lewis 1973, p. 53). The specific type of ambiguity to which Rohlehr refers is the multiple potential meanings evoked by a particular sound (e.g. the sun/son ambiguity explored in Sun poem). It is an interesting insight of Rohlehr's which suggests a relationship between a traditional philosophical ambiguity and a characteristic of language in the oral medium.

Thus we gradually begin to build up a picture of the aural emphases which characterise Brathwaite's work. In addition to the musical quotations and allusions, he was concerned to make music with the words themselves. He employs an intensity of assonance and consonance that has only rarely been encountered in poetry in English (in the poetry of Hopkins and Dylan Thomas, for example) since the fourteenth century. It is unlikely that this should be so if Brathwaite had not identified these same features in African oral poetry. The reason for the common occurrence of this phenomenon in oral poetry is easily appreciated in performance. The accumulated sounds create semi-musical effects which often help to reinforce or illustrate the semantic meaning of the verse. In addition Brathwaite uses a wealth of rhyme and internal rhyme. All these features help to give a strong sense of movement and energy.

Near the opening of Rights of passage Brathwaite introduces a series of enigmatic, tinkling sounds associated with images of fragility and impermanence:

Here clay  
cool coal clings  
to glass, creates  
clinks, silica glitters,  
children of stars (1973, p.5)

During the constant migrations through Africa portrayed in the trilogy, water gives a prophetic "clink" (1973, p.109) but the wanderers are unable to interpret the warning until its meaning is upon them:

and we filed down the path  
linked in a new  
clinked silence of iron (p.11)

The connection made through sound between running water (a constant source of hope) and the slave's chains underlines the irony behind the historic south-westward migration within Africa. Searching constantly for a more amenable environment, the people arrive to be confronted by the slaver's gun. Rohlehr uses this passage convincingly to illustrate improvisation in the form of playing on "skeins of sound" in Brathwaite's work (1981, p.74). The links made through sound are a subtle way of making links of meaning.

Dispossessed in the New World by the traumas of slavery and the continuing injustice which followed it, the pattern of migration becomes completely aimless. This is reflected here in both the sounds and the meaning of the words:

O weak  
the flame  
bitter  
the flower-  
blossoms blown  
in the blind  
path (1973, p.14)

The fl- and bl- sounds have an imprecise quality which emphasizes the sense of being tossed about. A similar effect is achieved in Mother poem where this time the scene is a completely contemporary one. The image of blossoms attached a sense of fragility, beauty and preciousness to the wanderers of the New World. Here the prevailing image is of a city's

effluence, with little by way of beauty to redeem it:

the children of life here  
are brambles: bright eyed like lizards or birds  
as quick and as hungry as twittered to wind as the trashes

the garbage has stretched its thick lips from the city  
it kisses the village with litter  
it whispers (1977a p.41)

The sense of nervous movement is embodied in the meaning of words like lizard, quick and twittered and reinforced by the sharp, short vowel sound. In the second stanza quoted, the same vowel persists, but is lengthened and emphasised through its more intense repetition, and given a cloying, lingering sense through the meaning of thick lips, kisses, whispers. So the garbage is both threatening in its persistence and at the same time reflects the fragility of the people's lives.

In 'Atumpan' from Masks, the second book of the trilogy, Brathwaite celebrates the talking drums of Ashanti in Ghana, beating out a traditional early morning 'awakening'. Drawing on traditional Twi (the language of Ashanti) phrases embodied in the drum rhythms, Brathwaite uses consonance and onomatopoeia to evoke the image of the cock crowing and also the sense of a renewed burst of energy at daybreak:

like akoko the cock  
like akoko the cock who clucks  
who crows in the morning  
who crows in the morning

we are addressing you  
ye re kyere wo  
(1973, p.99)

In this extract we get a sense of the drum being beaten by the curved "quick sticks" snapped for the purpose from a special tree (p.96). Different drum beats echo throughout the trilogy. A more resonant tone is heard marking the migration from the wide horizons of the savannah grasslands to the enclosed world of the tropical forest:

...and then the dense, the  
dark green tops, bright  
shining standing trunks:  
wawa, dahoma, esa and  
odum; the doom  
of the thick stretching green

...

... This  
was the pistil journey in-  
to moistened gloom  
(1973, p.112)

The African names of different woods have a soft, intimate quality. 'Odum' is immediately reinforced by 'doom' and later by 'gloom' to echo the sound of a deep drum.

Brathwaite uses rhyme to create a sense of high drama in 'The Dust', a dialogue between a group of Barbadian peasant women which centres around the volcanic explosion of Mt. Pelee in Martinique in 1902, which was so violent that all the islands of the archipelago were covered in a blanket of dust.

Eut it black black black  
from that mountain back  
in yuh face, in yuh food

in yuh eye. In fac'  
Granny say, in de broad  
day light, even de white

o' she skylight went out.  
An' if you hear people shout! (p.66)

The triple repetition of 'black' is a Creole form of the superlative, commonly found also in West African languages. Its insistence helps create a sense of urgency. The energetic narrative is reinforced through the rhythm of "in yuh face, in yuh food/ in yuh eye". "(W)hite" is a noun coined from an adjective, stimulated by the rhyming "light". The 'white' and 'light' rhymes are counterposed against 'black', 'back', and 'fac'', reflecting the struggle between darkness and light.

Rhymes with 'black' are used very frequently throughout The Arrivants. Roger Mais' novel, Brother Man impressed Brathwaite deeply,

both because of the sensibility it revealed and its 'musical structure', with its 'overture', chorus and counterposed sets of duets (Brathwaite 1967/8 pt. 3). The 'overture' of Brother Man begins with the "clack-clack" of gossiping tongues in the yard (1954, pp.7-9). For Brathwaite, the sound embodied the harsh and spare quality of the Caribbean urban landscape:

And black black black  
the black birds clack  
in the shak shak tree  
  
the slack  
wing'd gaulin swings  
through the fishnet air  
(1973, p.175)

The shak shak is a seed pod which is shaken as a musical instrument. The pods on the tree rattle in the breeze. The black birds are the corbeau of the East Caribbean and the John Crow of Jamaica, both being kinds of vulture and harbingers of death. The gaulin is a shark. "Slack" is a word used on more than one occasion, usually associated with the white man, for example: "slack Ewana/ Columbus rides out of the jungle's den" (p.162), which is a reference not only to Columbus, but also the white proprietor and patrons of Harlem jazz clubs like the Cotton Club. In Jamaica 'slackness' is Dread Talk for vulgarity or decadence.

Harsh, clacking sounds are present in the Rastaman's angry longing to go:

back back  
to the black  
man lan'  
back back  
to Af-  
rica.  
(1973, p.43)

These rhymes coalesce to reinforce the significance of black, particularly its association with pain and dispossession. Words are given significance in their association through rhyme. As they recur in different contexts throughout the trilogy, they accumulate a high

intensity of meaning in a manner which bears a relationship to Rastafarian word-symbols, and Henderson's mascon words (1973, p.44). Another associated rhyme which Brathwaite continues to use significantly in his poetry is 'crack' (e.g. 1973, p. 176), which relates to a sense of barrenness, a lack of life-giving sap or, on the other hand, a sudden spark.

Arguments about whether or not there was, or could be, a distinctive black aesthetic, were vehement in Black America, Africa and the Caribbean throughout the late 1960's and 1970's (see the Savacou (1971) and Transition (48 - Chinweizu et. al., Soyinka) debates, Henderson 1971). Brathwaite is one of those writers who has sought to identify and practise within such an aesthetic. He perceives an underlying unity in the musical forms of the black diaspora, which he has explored most thoroughly through the medium of jazz. Throughout his writing career, he has sought to reflect the sensibilities expressed in African-Creole music, the structural patterns of jazz and the principle of improvisation in composition.

Brathwaite first tried to establish his theory of a black aesthetic in a paper, 'Jazz and the West Indian Novel' published in three parts in Bim magazine (1967/8). As an alienated intellectual who had travelled far, learned much, and 'rediscovered' himself, Brathwaite returned to the Caribbean with much to protest about; the rape of Africa, slavery, racism in Europe and North America, poverty and injustice at home. He identified in jazz "that original shout of joy, mixed with the disappointment and the growl of protest of the liberated, urbanized Negro of the United States coming into contact with a new, exciting, mixed and mixed-up society of Latin and Anglo-Saxon influences...which was now receiving and rejecting him" (1967/8 pt.1, p.275). He identifies similar tones and features in black writing successfully reflecting black speech styles; a

tone of protest combined with celebration, and a strong sense of rhythm. Where his argument falls down at this stage is in his rather too narrow definition of the model musical form. In the United States context, he could have included the sounds of soul, gospel and blues. He can find no urban West Indian equivalent of jazz, because calypso and ska "are concerned with protest only incidentally" (ibid. p.277). A few years later he could not have said this. Jamaican Revival hymns and the Rastafarian chants which developed out of them, which drew on imagery from the Old Testament and Revelation calling for justice and retribution for the poor, infused reggae music with a powerful element of protest. The heavy downbeat (the stressed first and third beats of a 4/4 bar) and deep, loud bass produced the "growl" he had heard in jazz, while the upful counterrhythms (often more complex, played on the second and fourth beats) expressed a positive assertion of hope and vitality. He does indeed find some of his most authentic examples of improvisation within the folk traditions of the Caribbean (1967/8 pt.2, pp.41-3) and also cites Louise Bennett's 'Pedestrian Crosses' for its variations on the use of the word 'cross' (pp.43-4). His argument is most convincing with material which is most firmly within the oral mode. In fact, Rights of Passage (published 1967) illustrates clearly that Prathwaite was thinking along all these lines, as it includes successful evocations of worksongs, boogiewoogie, calypso and Rastafarian drums as well as the lyrical and brilliant 'performance' of Barbadian folk speech in 'The Dust' and fragments of Jamaican (1973, pp.42-45) and Afro-American speech idiom (1973, pp. 20,29,31,39).

Gordon Rohlehr in his long and detailed study, Pathfinder: black awakening in The Arrivants of Edward Kamau Prathwaite, has created an invaluable resource in terms of the musical background to the trilogy and numerous allusions which would only be obvious to a jazz enthusiast. Much

of this material was originally published in Tapia, later renamed the Trinidad and Tobago Review. He also includes some enlightening discussion about the way in which the form of the worksong is incorporated into the trilogy (1981, pp.78-80). This is an antiphonal form in which a soloist, or chantwell, improvises a 'call', while the work gang 'respond' with an emphatic chorus during which there is a strenuous expense of energy, such as hauling or chopping. It is a means of making long hours of heavy toil tolerable. As Rohlehr points out, the form of the worksong is hidden in the trilogy but nevertheless clearly identifiable. Two voices emerge, one making a statement, the other responding. The 'chorus' is identified by the heavy emphasis on the one-word response:

(Call) for we who have achieved nothing  
(Response) work  
(Call) who have not built  
(Response) dream  
(Call) who have forgotten all  
(Response) dance... (1973, p.13)

(Rohlehr's identifiers in brackets)

Rohlehr (p. 78) illustrates the way that Brathwaite uses refrain as, two pages on, the same words and form are echoed and elaborated:

So I who have created  
nothing but these worthless  
weeds, these need-  
less seeds, work;  
who have built  
but on silt, but on sand,  
but on luckless salt  
dream;  
who have forgotten all  
mouth 'Massa, yes  
Massa, yes  
Boss, yes  
Baas' (p.15)

Rohlehr's examples of the simple worksong form and its elaborated 'refrain' illustrate Brathwaite's equivalent of a jazz 'riff'; the repetition of a 'theme' (Brathwaite 1967/8 pt.2, p.47). Because in his terms, words become the equivalent of notes, repetition of 'theme' must involve repetition of all or some words. Thinking of words as notes also

opened Brathwaite's mind to the suggestiveness of words as sound, bringing new possibilities of meaning through association. As we have noted, Brathwaite identified jazz essentially as sounds of freedom; "the emancipated Negro's music" (1967/8, pt1, p.275). He contrasts this with the worksong and blues, as characterising the conditions of slavery. A key element of the jazz performance is improvisation; a quality shared with much oral poetry of Africa (see, for example Nketia 1955), with African-Creole story-telling and other oral traditions (Brathwaite 1967/8 pt.2) and, in fact, with many aspects of folk performance throughout the world. While much folk improvisation is heavily formulaic, however, jazz is much less predictable; "the jazz listener is perpetually faced with an unknown future" (see Brathwaite 1967/8 pt.2, p.43). It is in this respect that jazz is more essentially bound up with the notion of freedom. Association primarily by sound is a characteristic of the oral mode. Brathwaite has developed a method of improvisation on the individual word through sound association which offers new possibilities for thought and ideas. In breaking down more traditional sequences of thought he is composing in a way which has much in common with jazz.

In order to illustrate his approach, we shall examine his improvisations on the multiple meanings suggested by the sound 'sun' in his latest work, Sun Poem. Besides the shining ball in the sky, the sound most obviously means son, the male offspring. The whole sequence is on one level a study of the male experience in the island of the poet's birth. Sometimes it is autobiographical and relates to the poet's experiences as a son and as a father to his own son. A poem much concerned with youth, it emphasizes that son/suns rise (often catastrophically) and inevitably die. The following extract occurs in a poem about the death of the poet's grandfather, 'Indigone'. The son/sun's rise and fall has been reflected through the sequence of the rainbow

(dawn/birth being red; darkness/death, indigo etc.):

but suns don't know when they die  
they never give up  
hope heart or articule

gases gathered far back before they were born  
before their fathers dived down the shore of the dawn  
  
storing up their megalleons of light  
colliding with each other, hissing their white sperms of  
power  
and continue to steam, issue heat, long after their tropic  
is over (p.93)

Couched in the cosmic imagery is the British Empire 'on which the sun never set' and, by implication, the other colonial powers. The coinage "megalleons" spans history from the 'voyages of discovery' to the megatons of destructive power of the newest missiles. The optimistic rising suns of the Caribbean cannot conceive the dangerousness to them of this dying flame-ball, still "hissing ... white sperms of power".

The poem is a song. A son is a Cuban folk form on which Nicholas Guillen has often modelled his poems. The entire song/poem sequence rises and falls like the sun. It ends on an optimistic but finally muted note with promise of a new dawn:

and my thrill-  
dren are coming up coming up coming up coming up  
and the sun

new (p.97)

In the bathos we hear a distinctly 'blue' note, a deliberately introduced 'flatness'. (Rohlehr 1981, p.77)

The child Adam, who is also the author, grows up in the elements of sun and water, which make the rainbow. Under water, the sun assumes dramatic but familiar forms:

when adam opened his eyes he saw the white sand coming to meet  
him through the huge sun

flowers that the light in the water made; so he bent his body out  
of the dive and gilded along near the sand

and the sprats about them like buzzless bees

he knew he wouldn't lose time nor his way  
which was lighted and bright like a road on a moonlight night  
(p.13)

The sun, however, is harsh and cruel, like every aspect of life on the  
'slave plantation' which the Caribbean remains for so many:

the sun is a curved glass that smokes  
that bores holes in leaf and paper (p.55)

Too many sons that try their chances on the plantation, working for "the  
man who possesses us all" (1977a p.54) are destroyed in the effort:

...something squeezin i head like a  
sorringe. uh drink it an dry. is de sun dyein out of i vision. no man  
i never did own it. cause a man cyan be

faddah to faddah if e nevvah get chance to be son/light

Maturity from most "suns" brings disillusionment and hopelessness. Some  
settle for a brief moment of brilliance at the expense of women and their  
neighbourhood as gun-toting rapists and gangsters. The fate of such a man  
is inevitable:

his afternoon of sunsets bleeding in the gutter dries swiftly with  
the stain of voices of his victims children (p.69)

It is difficult for the poet to recognise in this cruel sun the Akan  
Supreme Being, Nyame, the shining one. In Masks, Brathwaite developed the  
image of the sun in relationship to gold as a symbol of the glory and  
strength of the Ashanti kingdom. The life force is however embodied in  
the sun of the New World and emerges in brilliant if agonised form:

sun who has clothed aretha's voice in dark gospel  
who works on the railroad tracks  
who gave jesse owens his engine  
who blue coltranes crippled train  
(p.53)

Here the sun (also conceived of as sunsum, the soul) breaks out in song;  
sometimes blues, sometimes jazz and sometimes the powerful 'engine' of  
gospel music. There are many more variations on this one 'note'. What is  
remarkable is that there is no sense of anarchy. The result is a tight,  
coherent and complex whole (or "hool" p.3).

Earlier examples of Brathwaite's improvisation on words through association can be found in an image of Haiti, with its:

deep mourning waters under the mornes (1973, p.232)

'Morne' is the word used in the French-speaking islands for mountain. In oral delivery, the words would have simultaneously the sense of morning and mourning, and the sight of the mountain. The ambivalence is evocative of the complex combination of beauty, inspiration, suffering and negativity which Haiti represents.

In the same poem we also have "Bogle's legs swinging steep from their steeple of pain". This improvisation establishes a dissonant, jarring (also very energetic) tone which is characteristic of much jazz. Often Brathwaite builds up a dissonant passage in a deliberate attack on poetry as 'sweet sound':

It is not enough  
to tinkle to work on a bicycle bell  
when hell  
crackles and burns in the fourteen-inch screen of the Jap  
of the Jap of the Japanese-constructed  
United-Fruit-Company-imported  
hard sell, tell tale, tele-  
vision set, rhinocerosly knobbed, cancerously tubed  
( 'Negus', 1973, p.223)

To always produce harmonious, lyrical sounds when depravities and suffering press for our attention through the wonders of telecommunication would be "to tinkle to work on a bicycle bell". A more appropriate response is thunderous discord. The language here is deliberately clumsy (the hyphenated, multiword adjectives), hard-edged (the snapped repetition of the wartime epithet, "the Jap"; aggressive rhythms of advertising, "hard sell, tell tale") and spiky ("crackles", "knobbed", "tubed").

Brathwaite achieves a triumph of ugliness and discord in his evocation of a Chicago abattoir:

cries calls clanks butchers' halls' bulls' knives stretch-  
ing up: pulling down ('Miss Own', 1977a p.36)

The onomatopoeia of "cries calls clanks" successfully conjures up a high level of mechanical, metallic, human and animal noise. The clumsiness of the accumulated 's' ' form and the pull on the tongue of the repeated 'll' sound plus the slowing-up effect of all those monosyllables evokes clashing shrieks of animal and metal, the creatures' lumbering movements and the laboured death-throes.

Rohlehr, noting the feature of discordance in Brathwaite's work, quotes O.M. Walton (1972):

[One time during his period at the Cotton Club, Duke Ellington] registered a protest against the prevailing attempts at racial exploitation. Playing a typically dissonant chord, the Duke once pointed out, "That's the Negro life, hear that chord. That's us..." (See Rohlehr 1981, p. 76).

Rohlehr, however, does not pursue this idea very far, confining himself to examination of an early poem (1960) which describes a performance by a jazz pianist, clearly illustrating Brathwaite's view that "It is not romantic". It can be argued, however, that there is a relationship between Brathwaite's use of word-breaks and puns and the prevalence of dissonant chords and 'blue notes' in jazz music (Pearn 1980, pp. 77-81).

'Blue' notes are deliberately flattened, and are not only played on brass and wind instruments, but can even "be found in all the cracks between the keys of the piano. (Keil, 1966, p.16). Rohlehr comments with regard to the poetry: "...the concept of "flatness" is often associated with words such as "cracked", and with the cracking of the note as the jazz musician tries to play what he is hearing in the subliminal ear. This effect of cracking the note is termed in jazz "vocalisation". (1981, p.77). There is a sense of searching out something which is not immediately manifest. Rohlehr writes that they "were the result of Black musicians hearing ancestral scales under the superimposed and well-tempered Western one, and tunnelling back to the ancient non-diatonic

scales of West Africa." (ibid.). The 'blue' note is common to all types of neo-African music (Keil 1966, p.16).

The concept of the crack, representing both the dislocation of the West Indian self-image as a consequence of the traumatic past (Brathwaite 1963, p.10) and the sudden possibility that what was previously hidden will manifest is central to all Brathwaite's poetry. Brathwaite's word-breaks often reflect this simultaneous fragmentation and sense of discovering something new. Increasingly these breaks suggesting alternative meanings are not simply visual, but can be heard in performance. In Barbados, the common usage 'cutlash' for cutlas is not a 'mispronunciation' but a subliminal 'correction' which highlights the history associated with this particular tool. Brathwaite emphasizes this perception through a word-division:

the canefields of pain must be cut-  
lashed away (1976, p.82)

Bussa, leader of the one major slave rebellion to take place in Barbados, is portrayed in Sun poem:

gorbli he cud crack yuh cuss words like a cur  
nul yuh hear (p.56)

There is first of all the subversive image of the British colonel, whose most distinctive quality is his ability to swear. Immediately preceding is an image of Bussa "leapin ahead a de governor dogs" (ibid.). Now he has turned the tables completely and is snapping back like one of those same "curs". This word suggests the potential viciousness of a neglected and abused creature and also the degraded status of slavery. The desperate dangerousness of the 'cur' is reinforced by the alliteration. The image of Barbados youth:

...gettin arrest/ed for ganja or molotoff cock  
tail (1982, p.68)

underlines two points. Firstly, we are drawn up over the word "arrest" to think of a total stop, like 'arrested development'. Too many young people's lives are completely ruined by a harsh penal system. The division of "cock/tail" points to a common association between revolutionary postures and macho sexuality.

Like these word-breaks, Brathwaite's constant puns can cause irritation, excitement and/or enlightenment. Rohlehr points to the most famous pun associated with jazz music; Fats Waller's "What did I do to be so black and blue?". The pain behind the surface joke creates a distinct 'dissonance'. In The Arrivants the poet briefly assumes the voice of a Quaker slaver:

slaying,  
My bright whip ripping a new soil  
of scars

buying  
a new world of negroes, soil-  
ing the stars

('Litoral', 1973, p.172)

'New world' applies as much to the creative input brought by the African slaves as the European colonization, but the arresting pun is around the word 'soil'. The blood and sweat of black labour is a fertile force in terms of the land, of the slavers' coffers, and of cultural developments across the world. At the same time slavery is a moral blot on the universe.

A pun in the form of a joke relies on another Barbadian (mis)pronunciation - using empire for umpire in cricket. In this context it is pleasingly subversive: the tension was so great, the ground was so quiet that you:

"

"

"

could'a hear  
if de empire fart  
( 'Rites', 1973, p.202)

In conversation, wisecracking puns create the equivalent of frisson or dissonance. Of this type is Brathwaite's description of a "woe-/man" whose attentions are demanded by her husband daily "as if/ she were maid for the job". (1977a p.20). Brathwaite's reproduction of 'failures' as "fearlures" (1977a p.112) may set up a similar degree of abrasion. In fact he is reflecting a typical Creole pronunciation of the word (especially in Jamaica) which happens to 'reveal' the true relationship of a woman to the traditional comforts of religion and a little respectable furniture.

...my mother rails against the fearlures of these comforts

Brathwaite has increasingly freely coined new words, usually based for their impact on sound quality, and often formed, in time-honoured Caribbean tradition, by a blend of two or more already existent words. His preferred form 'skeleton' (1977a p.17) enhances the impact of an existent word. Superficial 'flash' is conveyed and undermined by reference to "fashion blouses" (1977a p.27) and the "ring on that twinkeling fling/er" (1982 p.67). The shimmer on the sea in the brilliant light is expressed as "glistance" (1982 p.29). The philistinism and racism of slavers and planters is ridiculed in the form of some advice on how to deal with Africans.

ignore their songs their manimal membranes resounding with the  
sounds of their godderel  
and don't try to learn their langridge: teach them spanglish  
preach them rum (1982 p.49)

The fusion "spanglish" illustrates the view of the colonists' language as an imposition which was used to hide the truth; "godderel" is a contemptuous reference to 'heathen practices'. "Manimal" first appeared in Mother poem as a bitter, woman's cry against the betrayals of men:

man, manwart, manimal (1977a p. 81)

Other musical forms which Brathwaite uses in his poetry express a bid for freedom. The sound of the train was imprinted on early Chicago blues because relative 'freedom' in the north had almost invariably been gained by a desperate and dangerous train ride. The power behind the machine, its exciting and purposeful rhythms, and the liberty associated with its destination penetrated the Afro-American imagination profoundly. The boogie-woogie was a major form based on train rhythms.

rat tat tat  
on the flat-  
out whispering rails  
on the quick  
click  
boogie woogie  
hooeee.... ('Folkways', 1973, p.33)

The onomatopoeia forces the reader to vocalise the words, thereby entering the experience of the fugitive. The mournful cry/ train siren, "hooeee...", suggests past pain and future disillusionment. By relating the boogie woogie rhythm to its source, Brathwaite illustrates the fact that musical (and other) expression is inseparable from experience. As he says himself of Rights of passage (and this might be extended to all his work), "The rhythms, in a sense, convey a great deal of the meaning of the poem." (sleevenotes to recording (record one) of Rights of passage). The rhythms establish connections ("bridges of sound" - 1973, p.162) between experiences across the whole diaspora. Thus the Barbadian woman who takes up "wid de zion" is also borne on a train: "bub-a-dups/ bub-a-dups/ bub-a-dups/ huh" (1977a p.102).

Brathwaite maintains that the sound of the train can be heard through all gospel music; that the kinetic power of the singing is the reproduction of a mighty engine. He also says that, under possession, the Yoruba god Shango frequently manifests in the form of a train (Brathwaite, Warwick, 1980).

Brathwaite's eight years' stay in Ghana influenced his overall poetic vision, his view of time, of history, of ritual and spiritual meaning, and enabled him to see how pervasive was 'Africa' in the Caribbean, how much it formed the 'solid ground' of Caribbean culture. Living in rural areas for most of the time, he observed traditional rituals and celebrations. Brathwaite's adaptations of Akan oral forms, versions of which he would have read in Nketia's work (1955) and Rattray's study Ashanti 1923), are not therefore mere decorations but form an integrated and legitimate part of the overall design of The Arrivants. African critics Ama Ata Aidoo (1968), K. Senenu (1969) and Samuel Omo Asein (1971) were fulsome in their praise of this aspect of his work. Asein went so far as to say:

In Masks, at least, many African critics were genuinely fascinated by the success of the experiment and the commendable elevation of styles and forms of the oral tradition which, with very few exceptions, have never before been so profitably incorporated into contemporary African poetry.

(1971, p.10)

Maureen Warner Lewis, a Trinidadian linguist and literary critic who spent several years in Nigeria, and to date has written some of the most illuminating commentary on Masks, wrote:

Edward Brathwaite does not create either a mother figure or a fantasy world out of Africa. Africa springs alive in his poetry through everyday customs, religious rituals, specific locations, mannerisms of speech, and historical and mythological references. (1977, p.9)

The theme of migration which unifies the trilogy is found in Akan and Ewe oral tradition. Kofi Awoonor (1971) and Ayi Kwei Armah (1973, 1978) are two contemporary Ghanaian writers who have drawn on this theme. Likewise, constant failure, destruction and the need to rebuild, echoed throughout the trilogy, and the poet's statement that:

"

"

"

you  
must mix spittle  
with dirt, dung  
to saliva and  
sweat (1973, p.5)

are in the spirit of the traditional Akan outlook as expressed here in  
this funeral dirge:

Ananse the spider has toiled in vain  
Nyaakotia started to make a farm but could not complete it  
Ananse the spider has toiled in vain  
Nyaakotia of the Mausoleum, receive condolences and proceed.  
(Nketia, 1955, p.121)

The dead man's journey is not ended; though disappointed in his earthly  
ambitions, he must still "proceed".

Masks is much more formal than the other two books of the trilogy.  
It echoes the tones and words of such forms as the invocation, the  
praise-poem, the lament, the dirge, the litany. It begins with an  
invocation of the spirits who inform the materials of the drum and other  
instruments, proceeds through a series of initiations and a chronicle of  
Ashanti history to the poet's solemn dedication to his homeland at its  
end.

The concept of improvisation is still appropriate to Masks, however.  
For example, Erathwaite takes certain concepts and phrases from Nketia's  
translation of 'The Awakening' (beaten out by the talking drums from four  
in the morning of the day of the Aday festival) and elaborates them into  
two separate poetry sequences; 'The making of the drum' and 'Atumpan'. He  
thus seeks to highlight that drumming is an act of worship. The first  
sequence illustrates the reverence and care with which each constituent  
material of the drum is chosen, prepared and incorporated into the  
instrument:

You dumb adom wood  
will be bent  
will be solemnly bent, belly  
rounded with fire, wound-  
ed with tools

that will shape you.  
You will bleed,  
cedar dark,  
when we cut you;  
speak, when we touch you (1973, p.95)

The spirits of the wood must be invoked, its carving must be recognised as a sacrifice, if the gods are to speak through the drum. Before this ritual, it is "dumb"; although of course, this wood, its name "adom" and even the sound of its "wound" suggest the resonance of the drum. The second sequence evokes the celebratory performance of the ntunpan, the talking drums. Twi, one Akan language, is tonal; meaning depends to a high degree on intonation and pitch. Speech can therefore be closely imitated through the use of two drums, pitched high and low. In his recorded performance of this poem, Brathwaite imitates the tonal differences of the drums and of the Twi language. The pace is fast; high is indicated '/' and low '\'.

\ / \ / \ /  
Funtumi Akore  
\ \ / / \ / \ /  
Tweneboa Akore  
/ / \ \ / /  
Spirit of the Cedar  
/ / \ \ / / \ /  
Spirit of the Cedar Tree  
(1973, p.98)

The tonal differences are maintained through the English 'translations' to generate a sense of considerable kinetic energy:

\ / \ / \ / \ /  
like akoko the cock  
\ / \ / \ / \ / \ / \ /  
like akoko the cock who clucks  
\ / \ / \ / \ /  
who crows in the morning  
\ / \ / \ / \ /  
who crows in the morning

The West African habit of repetition for emphasis and rhythmic energy is reflected here.

In another 'improvisation', Brathwaite elaborates on a line of a funeral dirge which illustrates the Akan view of life and death as a

continuous cycle. The mourner cries out her own fear and desolation to the newly-departed, whom she envisages encountering souls journeying in the opposite direction back into life.

When someone is coming this way, send help  
Brathwaite, who is trying to find his own place within this framework, hopes that a forgotten ancestor will hear his plea:

If you should see someone  
coming this way  
send help, send help, send help  
for I am up to my eyes in fear  
( 'The New Ships', 1973, p.126)

He takes up the same theme, but gives it a new dimension - the panic of the lost stranger from the New World. In 'Tano', he borrows a phrase damirifa due, meaning 'condolences', frequently recurring in the funeral dirge, and 'plays' on it to create a drum effect:

dam  
dam  
damirifa due  
damirifa due  
damirifa due  
due  
due  
due (1973, p.151)

The first two monosyllables are emphatic and percussive. The three central lines are very fast and energetic. The last three words give a sense of sliding pitch and gradually fade into silence. In sound and rhythm it is a highly evocative representation of a distinct drum sequence, which can be quite vividly 'heard' in the imagination.

In 'The Golden Stool', Brathwaite uses the call-and-response form of a litany between priest and people:

Chiefs and people of the Asantehene  
let all be well

All is well

Chiefs and people of the Asantehene  
let all be well

We are listening (1973, p. 143)

Through such forms of dramatization, the poet helps to create the sense of a large number of solo and communal voices throughout the sequence.

In Mother poem, Brathwaite transfers an African form of curse, an invocation of negativity, into a Caribbean setting. It is a moment of intense tragedy, when the woman, strongest guardian of the African traditions in Caribbean society, seeks to bring down, in her despair, all communal values. Her violation is complete.

let unhappiness come  
let unhappiness come  
work not for your mother

cry not for your father  
let unhappiness come  
may you steal crusts of bread

may you nibble your neighbour's meat  
curdle his milk  
melt his oxen hoof down to glue

if you join a circle: break it (1977a p.48)

Echoes of the African drum are also heard in a Caribbean setting; appropriately in a Pukkumina ritual, a form of religious ritual involving spirit possession. It sounds the same as it did in an African setting, but the voices of the gods do not at first 'speak' through it:

dumb  
dumb  
dumb

('Shepherd', 1973, p.185)

It is only at the moment of possession, in this case by a slave ancestor, that finally:

the dumb speaks (p.185)

Other 'black sounds' which Brathwaite incorporates into his 'performance' are the rhythms of the calypso. These in fact emerge as the most positively assertive Caribbean rhythms in The Arrivants. They form a part of the slave Caliban's struggle against "drowning" during the middle passage. The limbo is said to have been invented by captive Africans as a necessary form of exercise in the cramped conditions of the slave hulks. Sandwiched between the decks, it is only the syncopated rhythm which enables Caliban to survive:

long dark deck and the water surrounding me  
long dark deck and the water surrounding me

limbo  
limbo like me

stick is the whip  
and the dark deck is slavery

In performance, Brathwaite sings the calypso refrain.

The trilogy ends with the percussive, resonant sounds of the steelpan, which are "making/ with their/ rhythms some-/thing torn/ and new" (p.270).

bambalulá    bambulai  
bambalulá    bambulai

Brathwaite was one of the first poets to successfully encapsulate the significance of the steel pan, although others had attempted it (Knolly La Fortune, Ian McDonald). Afro-Caribbeans, their ancestors tossed up on an unwelcoming shore which still offered them next to nothing for their suffering and labour, had created a beautiful instrument out of the discarded rubbish of the plantation/capitalist system. It was an achievement to be celebrated. Abdul Malik, after Brathwaite, drew on the history of Africa, of slavery and the sufferings and struggles of the Caribbean people to produce a praise poem to steel pan ('Pan run') which has found a permanent place in the hearts of Trinidadian people.

Particular speech styles and rhythms associated with different forms of Afro-Caribbean worship are successfully evoked in the trilogy. In fact, 'Wings of a dove', 'Shepherd' and 'The stone sermon' are some of the most vibrant sections, each achieving high climaxes of kinetic energy. At Brathwaite's Warwick reading in 1980 he received a warm and excited response to his evocation, in 'Angel/Engine', of a woman's possession by Shango in the form of a train.

'Wings of a dove' projects a more angry and vengeful image of a Rastafarian than the usual emphasis on peace and love would suggest. Nevertheless the Rastafari do fervently look forward to the destruction of Babylon, as prophesied in Revelation. In Brathwaite's recorded performance, the emphatic rhythms of the Rasta drum (long long short short (pause)) emerge distinctively:

```

-      -
down  down
  v
white
  v  ^  v
man,  con
  v  ^  v
man,  brown
  v  ^  -
man,  down
-      v
down  full          -      v
white black
  v  ^  v          v  ^  v
man,  frown-      man  that
  v  ^  v          v  ^  v
ing  fat          lives in
  v  ^  -          v  -
man,  that        the town
```

In 'The stone sermon' (1973, p.254), Biblical imagery and emotive oratory evoke the rising excitement of a fundamentalist sermon:

Wheat an' tears  
Sistren an' Brethren  
we comin' home

Sistren an' Brethren  
we comin' home  
Sistren an' Brethren

coal

coal  
coal

Sistren an' Brethren  
heat an' tares  
Sistren an' Brethren

The 'mix up' of tears and tares reminds us that they are pronounced identically in many English Creoles, allowing a frisson of ambiguity. We see here what an effective rhythmic device repetition can be. Gradually the preacher "warms" to his theme as he begins to invoke hellfire. It is at this point that he reaches his climax of kinetic energy and approaches the possibility, Brathwaite suggests, of a true revelation of the African gods:

we burnin'  
Sistren an' Brethren  
the black crack crackle into gold

The "crack" here represents that moment of the suddenly possible. The "gold" is the life-force embodied in the sun as perceived in the Akan world-view. At this very moment, the preacher puts down the shutter of orthodoxy:

hole it (hold it)  
halleluja

and so the "eye" remains "dumb".

In 'Angel/Engine' (1977a p.97), however, the momentum (the 'engine') of worship mounts until the god indeed manifests, although the woman central to the poem is unable to pronounce his name fully. She begins trumping - hyperventilating - a stage that precedes possession.

who hant me  
huh

who haunt me  
huh

my head is a cross  
is a cross-

road (p.101)

She is at a turning point. She makes the transition from the cross, borne

along by the momentum of the train-god, Shango:

bub-a-dups  
bub-a-dups  
bub-a-dups

hah

Finally the train 'comes in': sssssssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhh

Section five: Nametracks: an exploration of the meaning and function of  
nation language

Creole speech forms have increasingly been perceived amongst many West Indian artists and intellectuals as a form of resistance to European modes of thinking and cultural domination. In other words, 'bad English' has made the transition to 'nation language'. Cultural resistance has a strong historical base in the West Indies. Continuing in the West African tradition, song quickly became established amongst slaves as a vehicle for satire, as in the following, quoted by Brathwaite (1971, p.223):

New-come buckra (white man)  
He get sick  
He tak fever  
He be die...

The tradition persisted into the modern calypso; many calypsonians have been imprisoned for their criticism of British rule and, since independence, of indigenous politicians and other prominent figures. In Jamaica, Anancy is a central symbol of resistance. In stories he had a distinctive way of talking which is usually called "tie-tongue" but is in fact, as Cassidy shows, "Bungo talk", or basilect (1961, p.42). Anancy, the trickster hero, is the perfect symbol of the subversive slave, who had to "play fool fe ketch wise". It is interesting that although Africanisms were officially disparaged, even at a folk level, at a more secret level the idea of African retention and resistance to domination were inseparable. In kumina, the most African cult to emerge out of the Great Revival of 1861 (which had many nationalist aspects): "They sing

songs which they say are in Bongo language" (Cassidy 1961, p.159).

In 'Nametracks' (1977a pp.56-64), Brathwaite dramatizes the linguistic struggle between O'Grady the slave owner and representative of "cultural imperial control" (1977a p.121) who uses language as an instrument of violence and control, and a young African slave's semi-articulate resistance. This struggle is central to Brathwaite's concept of nation language. The style is a further development of that of 'Negus' (1973, pp.222-4) where, in a similar manner the speaker stammers in suppressed and almost inexpressible rage. The words as they become 'more articulate' (as they approximate English more closely) seem to explode. Speaking of his mother regarding O'Grady, the young boy says:

she is wa/ wa/ wash she is watch e (p.56)

and later:

an she te an she teach an she teach muh (p.59)

The slave's sense of identity centres around two sound clusters; firstly, muh, me, mud, muddah, man, mandingo (which seem to represent his blood, fleshly, earthly identity); and nam, nyam, name, main, mane (which represent his "soul-source", spiritual self). Brathwaite is drawing on, and fusing a number of sources here. "Me" as used throughout is the Twi first person nominative. The significance of the other words in this first sound cluster is fairly obvious. Nam, says Brathwaite, is "secret name, soul source, connected with nyam (eat), yam (root food), nyame (name of god). Nam is the heart of our nation-language..." (1977a p.121). 'Nyam' is both Twi and Jamaican Creole for eat. 'Mane' is drawn from Rastafarian symbolism. The dreadlocks of the Rastaman are a mane, worn in identification with the Lion of Judah. At a guess, 'main' draws a parallel with an electricity mains, being the central supply of energy. The slave child, prompted by the whisperings of his mother (who is also Africa), clings on to these sounds as holding the secret of his core of

being, against the verbal onslaughts of O'Grady, with his arsenal of 'sick, stick, good, god, whip, ship, lock, kill.'

The highly dramatic, excitingly kinetic battle of sound and meaning embodies a series of related struggles on the slave plantation. The struggle for the possession of the soul centres around the naming of the person. Because of the sacred significance of the nam, the imposition by force of a European name - a label denoting slavery - was the most complete negation possible of the slave as person. The master not only sought to dominate the body but the mind of the slave also:

i  
am your world (p.58)

O'Grady not only names the slave; he lames and maims too.

A battle also takes place over the use of 'I' or 'me' as the self-describing pronoun. The African and Creole 'me' (e.g. me gone = I am going) was, officially, a betrayal of 'uncivilized, African' origins. Generations of teachers have attempted to beat it out of children, but it has stubbornly persisted. Then, with the development of the Rastafari movement, the 'I' (always present, but far less commonly used than 'me') took a dominant place as part of the Creole lexicon, transforming the significance of many words. This 'I' was in many ways an original creation and maintained the resistance to O'Grady's domination. In 'Nametracks', Brathwaite portrays both the battle over 'me' and 'I', and the later appropriation of the 'I'.

O'Grady's 'I' is an assertion of ego and power, and an instrument of torture. 'I' becomes the slave's cry of pain; aei. The sound 'I' to the Rastafarian transmits the meaning 'eye', with all the possible elaborations of vision, understanding and inspiration which it could imply. This sense of the word-sound is vigorously resisted by O'Grady:

not me  
not man  
not muddah

i

say  
i  
ograzy says

say  
i  
not

eye

globe  
seeing word  
blue priest  
green voodoo doctor

say

i  
am your world (p.58)

The slave learns O'Grady's terminology, but (mis-) uses it in defiance and retaliation. When O'Grady yells "say kill/not keel" and "say ship/...not sheep", the slave eventually turns menacingly:

so i keel you (ograzy)  
i diggin you coffin blox black in de brown  
an i livvin you dead in de grounn (p.63)

It is the desperate defiance of one whose back is against the wall. The last-quoted line contains two alternative meanings; "I'm leaving you dead", or "I'm living, you're dead". It illustrates the possibilities of multiple meaning when working primarily in an oral medium.

In total contrast to O'Grady's barks and barbs are the tender blandishments of the mother:

she cum to me years like de yess off a leaf  
an she issper...  
she lisper to me dat me name what me name  
dat me name is me main an it am is me own an lion eye mane...  
so mandingo she yessper you nam (p.62)

Here we see Erathwaite drawing on many of the language resources he identifies as nation. There is the freedom to make new coinages, like

"issper" and "yessper" (the second being a characteristic word-blend to form an expressive new meaning). There are possibilities for word-play, 'me ears' in Creole pronunciation sounding closer to 'me years', as it is reproduced here. All the symbols accumulated here are 'yesses'; they are all positive symbols of self-identity. Brathwaite brings together Dread images of pride (the lion eye mane), with invocation of an African tribe (Mandingo) known for its resistance to slavery, and the concept of nam. The danger of slipping into a private language is averted by the persuasive force of the rhythms, driving the listener/reader to accept and grasp the word 'nam' without necessarily knowing its source.

The poem ends with a pyrrhic victory for O'Grady. He remains firmly in control. In the guise of a priest, he:

nomminit  
nomminit  
nomminit

(echoing 'in nomine patri, filii, et spiritu sanctu'), gobbling up everything in his path. The slave is "dun dung dead in de grounn..." but O'Grady "nevver nyam what me mane". Nyam is fundamental nation for eat. According to West African spiritual values this means conscious participation in the continuing life-cycle. O'Grady excludes himself; he may gobble, but he cannot partake. The spirit of resistance lives on in rhythm and song:

back to back belly to belly  
uh doan give a damn

uh dun dead a'ready

back to back belly to belly  
dun dung dead in de grounn...

'Back to back, belly to belly' is a reference to the appalling conditions on the slave hulks. It is also the refrain of a famous calypso of the fifties: 'Jumby Jamboree'.

'Nametracks' is Brathwaite's most sustained effort to represent

nation language, not only in form but also by illustrating function and significance in the context of a continuing struggle in which language has become a powerful symbol on both sides. Using the considerable licence with language for which traditional Creole offers a powerful precedent, Brathwaite seeks to reveal through rhythm and syllabic suggestion a sound which is common to all the islands; a distinctly non-European underlanguage which he identifies as nation.

The spirit of Brathwaite's work is in absolute sympathy with that of the grassroots poetry tradition explored in this study. His perspective is grounded in cultural resistance manifested above all in language and the impetus of a mass will to liberation. His poetry is more difficult than the other poets' because rather than expressing a part, he seeks to embody the whole. The scope of his dramatization of the black experience and the range of black idiom, verbal and musical, encompassed in his work represents a major literary achievement.

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

Popular poetry has emerged as a phenomenon of increasing significance in the English-speaking Caribbean. The first source of its appeal is the language, Creole, in which it is composed. Creole is appreciated as the language of the innermost feelings and the language of the masses, in contrast to the formality of Standard English, which has been associated with authority and alien imposition since slavery. Secondly, the poetry is popular because it is performed, making it widely accessible in every sense. Its range is considerable, from comedy and satire through protest to the most explicit preaching and celebration of revolution. Its tone has been modified by its period of composition and its distinctive cultural context (the cultural matrix of Trinidad being radically different from that of Jamaica, for example). Popular music has played a fundamental formative role.

The emergence of performance poetry is rooted in the historical contradictions of colonialism, and the subsequent struggle for liberation. Political independence in fact was a trigger to the development of protest movements and popular protest poetry, because it promised a fundamental change in who got what, but in practice did little to alter the position of the black majority at the bottom of the society. Periods of heightened turbulence, such as the Walter Rodney protests, the 1970 'February Revolution', the Manley era of reform and the Grenada Revolution have seen the emergence of vigorous and distinctive forms of poetry which have had a significant function in the society.

The English-speaking Caribbean has rich oral traditions within which the African heritage remains a powerful component. Communal forms of verbal display and cultural celebration have persisted into the present period, adapting to an urban environment and modern media. Despite widespread literacy, an oral consciousness is strongly evident, in verbal

creativity and its appreciation. The sounds of words have a deep significance; words are related one to another as much by sound as by meaning. Rhythm and tonal variation are vital to the successful delivery of performance poetry. Oral delivery creates a community between artist and audience.

Louise Bennett was the originator of performance poetry as a modern, urban form when she emerged onto the stage in 1938. She represents a breakthrough (with Ranny Williams) from earlier performers in Creole because she creates no distance between herself and her performance persona. Through the voice, through utterance, she identifies absolutely with the masses and the traditional oral culture. This is an act of great significance because officially orality (non-literacy), blackness and poverty were regarded as a source of shame. Her persona is characterised by a sense of self-worth and a lack of inhibition.

Bennett adopted an ancient (British) formal model, the ballad. Partly this was the influence of schooling, but it was also the conscious adoption of an oral mode. Bennett never appears to have been inhibited by the ballad quatrain; on the contrary, she has infused into it a new, natural speech rhythm.

Her medium has always been comedy, but with a serious intent. Firstly, even where most lighthearted, she has used comedy to celebrate distinctively Jamaican qualities and behaviour because she loves and seeks to affirm grassroots culture. Secondly, she has used laughter as a way of dealing with painful issues. Her motherly image and her direct, inclusive approach to the audience established an atmosphere of trust in which a kind of catharsis could take place; feelings of shame or insecurity, the legacy of slavery, could be laughed at, and laughed out. Bennett affirmed the positive worth of the African roots. Thirdly, she has used satire to posit Jamaican peasant values against personal

pretensions and elite hypocrisy.

Another important breakthrough by Bennett was her harnessing of the media to an oral performance mode. She became 'an institution' in the newspaper and radio, and was an early performer on record. Stressing equally her roles as writer and performer, she straddles the area between orality and literacy, and her work is a constant dramatization of interaction between the two.

Following in the Bennett comic tradition have been a number of talented younger performers. They are identified by their nationalism, rooted in the distinctive language and oral traditions of the region. They have engaged in a conscious revival of folklore, and tend to emphasise its lighthearted elements. The Bennett tradition has been strongly inclined towards the presentation of complete variety shows. There is a tendency towards 'showbiz' and the inevitable blunting of the satirical edge which commercial demands often impose.

The period when Creole ceased to be exclusively a comic medium in terms of poetry coincided with the Black Power movement in the Caribbean. The north American movement gave added impetus to the Rastafari movement, an indigenous expression of black nationalism. The disappointments of Independence were followed by a rising tide of anger regarding slavery and colonialism, as well as demands for employment and an end to racial discrimination. Casting off shame about African origins was superseded by the militant assertion of African roots. Inspired by the material coming out of north America, poetry became an important channel of militant expression. The return of Edward Kamau Brathwaite from Ghana to the Caribbean was extremely timely. His experience gave him perspectives and knowledge which were effectively buried or lost in the West Indies, and he had an increasingly receptive audience. He and the Rastafarian poets drew inspiration from each other.

The Manley era in Jamaica (1972-80) saw the emergence of a phenomenon now called Dub Poetry. During this period, Jamaica was a "conscience stricken" society with a great deal of reformist zeal. It was also the time when reggae music, under the artistry of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and others, developed to a high point, both in terms of musical intensity and lyrical profundity. The contact between established artists and intellectuals and talented ghetto youths increased dramatically. Ghetto poets received considerable support and encouragement. The Rastafari movement gained further in authority through the international reputation of Bob Marley, and Rastafarian perspectives permeated reggae music. The image of the Dub Poets, and the content and stylistic qualities of their work were profoundly influenced by the movement and the music. The themes of African liberation and revolution entered from this source.

Some of the Dub Poets were influenced by the minimalist and cryptic content and the typographic and orthographic experimentation of Black American poets like Sonia Sanchez, Imamu Amiri Baraka and Nikki Giovanni. Others, like Mikey Smith, were barely influenced by a poem on a page. Increasingly the form of the poetry responded to the demands of performance. The incorporation of reggae rhythms became increasingly self-conscious. One of the Dub Poets' major successful innovations has been the development of highly rhythmic and evocative phrases or refrains which are repeated at intervals throughout the poem. Sometimes they take the form of a chant. Audiences respond deeply to these if they are redolent with significance, for example, if they vividly evoke black history, contain Rastafarian metaphor, or bring up taboo subjects like madness. There is a high degree of theatricality in a Dub Poetry performance.

Dub Poets have become increasingly associated with the media,

especially the recording industry, and with reggae music. Several perform and record with musicians. This has generally led to the composition of longer and more repetitive poems. This development has not diluted the intensity of their work, however, and the commercial success of even the best-known has been modest.

Poetry and Black Power militancy are inseparably linked in the East Caribbean. Several of the leading figures in the 1970 insurrection in Trinidad were well-known in the streets as poets. In politics and poetry they were directly inspired by Black Power in the United States. Grenadian socialist militancy which finally made possible the Revolution in 1979 also had its roots in the Black Power movement.

Dramatic historical events transformed poetry in the region. Malik, the poet who sustained and developed his craft most consistently, made profound transitions both in philosophy and commitment whilst in prison for his part in the 1970 upheavals. A developed historical sense, based on local heroes, popular victories and tragic defeats has given his work a grandeur of vision. The change was most dramatic in Grenada, where poetry had been extremely stilted before the revolution. Subsequently, the prospect of unbounded potential (which the revolution symbolically offered, whether or not a tiny, poor island could deliver it) inspired many to create poetry for the first time. A number of women emerged into prominence as poets. Personal history as a means of self-evaluation gained validity in their work. Grenadians who had formerly been poets were challenged by the revolution to compose poetry which would give inspiration and support to the masses. Imagery was directly inspired by experiences of the revolution. Successful communication required Creole and a familiar and popular frame of reference. The transformed language and idiom and the demands of performance led to a greater freedom and increasingly natural creativity in expression. Poetry became functional

rather than decorative.

There is a strong sense of nationalist history in the East Caribbean, which has been a principal source of inspiration for the new militant poetry. The traditions of Jules Fedon, the Jacobin rebel, Marcus Garvey, and labour leader Uriah 'Buzz' Butler are celebrated. Another source of inspiration has been the grassroots creative achievement of the steelband; so symbolic of Caribbean resistance as a thing of beauty created out of the discarded rubbish of imperialism. The verbal creativity rooted principally in the calypso - its picong (satirical wit), its rhythmic agility, its topicality - has had a clear influence on style and content. The Grenadian poets, coming from a more rural milieu, have drawn on the island's folklore, its French patois, and local history and legend.

Brathwaite, the scholar and traveller, has been far away from his roots in Barbados. At Cambridge he became the 'universal man' for whom what was distinctly Caribbean in his poetry had an 'exotic' quality. His eight years subsequently spent in Ghana were a gradual learning process in which his view of himself and his place in the world, his entire philosophy, were transformed. He returned to the Caribbean with a knowledge of African history and culture which were virtually non-existent amongst the West Indian intelligentsia. Where he did find vestiges of this knowledge, and even practice, was amongst the peasantry and urban poor. His return to the Caribbean was both a physical and spiritual homecoming. He had "completed the triangular trade of his origins" and in physically retracing the steps of history had come to a new level of self-knowledge. He concluded that finding an expression for his authentic self would involve adopting the idioms and perspectives which remained closest to the African heritage - the Creole, or nation language. In West Africa, he had also witnessed the significant and

functional role of oral poetry, which he sought to re-establish in the Caribbean.

Brathwaite has been responsible for the democratization of West Indian poetry in many ways. His appreciation of, and preparedness to publish and perform with, grassroots poets gave many a first prominence they might not otherwise have had. Influences from North American poets both black and white had led to a high degree of experimentation in his work, and a radical philosophical revolt from traditional English poetics. This formal freedom and emphasis on oral delivery were an encouragement to many talented individuals who had been totally alienated by the classroom approach to poetry. His experimentation with different black speech idioms and his quotes, many with tunes or syncopated rhythms, from black music of many kinds stimulated composition in those idioms by people who would have been disinclined or unable to write in Standard English.

Brathwaite has had a life-long love of jazz music. It has permeated his poetry from his earliest published compositions. He has sought to reflect the sense of freedom implicit in jazz, its improvisational qualities, in his poetry. This has been enhanced by his increasing tendency to respond to the word first as sound, and to allow the sound to make associations in his mind. Consequently the pun has a high profile in his work, relating him closely to the oral traditions on which Louise Bennett draws. The pun often sets up a dissonance in the literate mind and functions in Brathwaite's poetry as a verbal equivalent of dissonance in jazz music. Other qualities common in oral poetry, a high incidence of assonance and alliteration, and a proliferation of rhymes and internal rhymes are also distinctive features of his work.

Brathwaite has made a self-conscious return to the practice of the other performance poets. He has intellectualized the process; producing

in his critical writing important contributions towards the development of an aesthetics of "sound poetry" as he has called it. His academic status and international prestige have gone a long way towards endorsing performance poetry, but he has also had to pay penalties for his association with a low status art, as anything in the oral medium tends to be.

Recent history in the Caribbean has both created and transformed poets. The new poets in their turn have transformed poetry, finding new forms appropriate to new needs. The quality of communication in performance has become a prime concern. The engagement of artist and audience must ideally be an intense and lively one. The principle of kinesis, the establishment of a rhythmic relationship between artist and audience, is often aimed at. The role of the artist is transformed. Rather than being an isolated individual speaking only to other poets and relatively small numbers of self-acknowledged poetry-lovers, the artist becomes a highly representative voice whose highest achievement is to embody widely-held views and experience in a way which will be widely acknowledged as meaningful, true and moving. Words and metaphor which have become significant in the popular consciousness are drawn on and developed. Many forms of black music, with their powerful resonances of history are frequently an integral complement to the word.

In Caribbean performance poetry, we see a meeting of the ancient with the new. Ironically, those most in touch with age-old oral traditions which have much in common all over the world are particularly well-equipped to make creative use of the electronic technology by means of which we have entered an era of "secondary orality".

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