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*DREADNESS: The Mystic Power, Philosophy and
Performance of Shadow 1941-2021*

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ABYSSINIA COMING DOWN: DREAD RITUALS IN JUMBIE TIMESPACES



Yvonne Webber and Deborah Matthews

Just before The Shadow took to the 1994 Calypso Monarch semi-final stage at Skinner's Park¹, his alter ego Winston Bailey acquiesced to an impromptu interview in which he makes the following declaration:

“...the voice ah de people is de voice ah God. But now I am going there, and anything could happen. But the hard work happen arredy! We talking about one performance- after all the hard work! The nights, and the days taking de ting and putting it together... ah want to see a day when they eliminate dis ting and watch de ting when it happen and say: ‘You are! And, you just be!’”

(Bailey 00:00:03-00:00:25)

This short but fervent answer makes clear the connection between space, time and intent. Bailey is cognizant of, and impresses upon listeners, that over time an intensive process of preparation occurs before “de ting” can enter “dis ting”, with the former being the element which makes each performance unique. The competition space (“dis ting”) is not in the control of the performer, thus when his preparation enters it “anything could happen” in terms of his performance and to those who would engage with it: either to judge/ prove it, or to be swayed by the transference of energy as audience. Bailey wishes that this “there” or “dis ting” could be abolished in order for “de ting” to enter into its full potential; a fullness which is linked to the actualisation of the performer himself.

¹ Located in San Fernando, Trinidad & Tobago, Skinner's Park though primarily a sporting venue is also host to a myriad of cultural events. Gifted to the people of San Fernando by the Usine St. Madeline Sugar Factory in the 1930s, it was named after the then manager of the factory, Gilbert Chancery Skinner. It has been the venue for the National Calypso Monarch Competition's semi-final, Calypso Fiesta, for decades. Performing before a Skinner's Park audience is considered to be the proving ground for a calypsonian. (“Our Built Heritage”)

Likewise, the performances of Mikey Smith, a Jamaican dub poet “electrified audiences and stirred debates about activist art, orality and embodies performance and its relationship to literary poetic traditions (Ford-Smith 273). Smith had an understanding about the means through which power is performed in material ways in space, and the ways in which this can have corporeal effects, whether negative or positive. Our focus here is on performance, a medium which combines body, voice, and rhythm into its primary instrument. We propose to use Bailey’s quote to conceptually frame this essay in positing that “de ting” articulated by Bailey is “dreadness”: a lived experience that includes message, intention, and mystery as a means to navigate, contextualise, and ultimately challenge the shitstem. Additionally, we define the shitstem as the oppressive elements which only rewards those who do not (or cannot) struggle against its hegemonic impetus. “Shitstem” is itself a word from the dreadtalk of Rastafarianism which, in eliding two nouns, calls attention to how the shitstem operates. Dreadtalk and nation language work in tandem with calypso and dub-poetry as part of the linguistic cartography necessary to chart a course through this shitstem, while also being a conduit through which the self-consuming aspect of the questioning/poetic vision (Cooper 94) can be expressed.

Our interest in this topic emerges from a mutual curiosity as theatre practitioners in the ontological possibilities offered by dreadness which stand at the timespace of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, for story exchange between our positionalities as a Jamaican dramaturge, and a Trinbagonian theatre director. To facilitate this discussion, we offer a reflective exploration of selected works from both Smith and Bailey that depict dreadness as warning/prophecy, confrontation and exhortation; three of the sixteen functions of ancestor musics in relation to calypso (Rohlehr 1)² which we also apply here to dub-poetry. Though the use of performance modalities as a means of channeling insight is not new, exploring this channeling by juxtaposing dub poetry and calypso offers an opportunity to consider the use of lived experiences and memory as a means of

² “Calypso music today still performs most of the functions of its ancestor musics: celebration, censure, praise, blame, social control, worship, moralising, affirmation, confrontation, exhortation, warning, scandal-mongering, ridicule, the generation of slaughter, verbal warfare, satire” (Rohlehr 1).

prognostication, with the intent of shining a light of possibility and purpose. Memory can be used in this way because, rather than being fixed, it operates as a technique for retrieving, dismantling and (re) fashioning versions of the past (Harney and Moten 3). These three processes are necessary, not only for obvious liberatory and reparatory reasons, but as mechanisms to (re) build a sense of self whose locus is not the plantation (Gibbons 115). In many cultures with traditions of orality, techniques for working on lived experience and memory are crafted through the mnemonics of signifying practices which focus on movement, gesture, voice, and musicality as well as featuring the rhythm and lyricism also found in calypso and dub-poetry. Whilst the practice of these techniques open to all, there is often in such cultures groups who specialise in mastery of these techniques and use them in the medium of performance. Such performers work hard at their craft so that through and with entertainment they may point to links between past present and future. We maintain that performance as enacted by Shadow and Smith with their audience(s) creates a ritual space into which dreadness or “de ting” can enter.

Like the *jeli/jali* of the Mande, Shadow³ and Smith thematically critique the connections between past, present and future. Hoffman asserts that among the Mande, performances by *jeli* or *griots* are powerful because of the relationship between *nyama* and words (qtd. in Hale 119)⁴. *Nyama* is defined as “the mysterious life force or occult power that one must have in order to overcome *nyama* emerging from other sources, human or otherwise” (Hale 119). Smith’s performances drew on *nyama* as he refashioned African derived performance modalities to critique events in Jamaica during the 1970s and 80s. Smith’s discography is entangled with the conjuncture of that period. A period when Jamaica’s African descended majority their ongoing anti and decolonial struggles, pushed against the disillusionment of the yet to materialise post-independence Golden Age, In that conjuncture Jamaicans were finding that political shifts from the Right to

³ We make the distinction between Winston Bailey and his in-performance persona The Shadow. We assert that these are two separate and distinct personalities which cannot be used interchangeably.

⁴ Hale tells us that whilst the services of the Jeli are appreciated there is an ambivalence about their role. There is fear of the connection of words and *nyama*. *Nyama* being the mysterious life force or occult power that one must have in order to overcome *nyama* emerging from other sources, human or otherwise.” (207)

the democratic socialism of the People's National Party were not enough to align economic fault lines. Many of the singers of that period amplified those struggles. The line from Max Romeo's *No Joshua No*⁵ "friendly admonition to Joshua to "forward and start anew" resonates strongly with the lived experience of the personae in Mikey Smith's poems. Romeo and Smith both amplified the desire for genuine and radical change with a deep understanding of the complexity of Jamaica's spiritual roots/routes. In calypso and performance poetry, texts and the meanings of these texts are dependent on complex variables which stretch beyond the absolute control of the poet as maker (Cooper 70). Among these variables is a spiritual power which we connect with dreadness. In performance, aural, oral and kinaesthetic resources of voice, music and movement give both Smith and Shadow access to the supernatural entities with whom they commune and interpret the insight that they receive to their audience.

In the circum-Atlantic (Roach 1996) the most oppressive sources of human power as domination are extractive capitalism, colonialism, anti-Blackness. The 1960s to the 1980s was a time of political, social and economic change across the Caribbean. Jamaica was undergoing a time of political reform against the background of the Cold War and fiscal structural adjustment (Ford-Smith 282). Gordon Rohlehr tells us in *The Problem of the Problem of Form* that "particularly in Jamaica, writers have found their private worlds invaded by the intense violence of the world around them, and by the sound of the reggae voice exploding in testimony or complaint or violent protest" (10). Similarly, during this period in Trinidad & Tobago there was both longing and mobilisation for total revolution. Khafra Kambon⁶ wrote "Dear Editor: Basil Davis' 1970 funeral is historic, although we've lost hard-won gains" fifty years after the funeral for an

⁵ Max Romeo, himself a Rastafarian, was instrumental in the connections which the People's National Party (PNP) was able to make with Jamaican popular music of the time. His hit song *Let the Power Fall on I* (1972) was the theme song for the PNP in the lead up to the 1972 elections. "Joshua" was a sobriquet for Michael Manley, then leader of the PNP. This sobriquet tapped into the Old Testament narrative of diasporic liberation and redemption accessible to all Jamaicans and particularly relevant to Afro-Jamaicans. The PNP connected this narrative to its Democratic Socialist platform. By 1973 there was a sense that the ideals of this platform would not translate into financial stability for the average citizen. *No Joshua No* amplifies this.

⁶ In 2020 at the time of writing Kambon was the director of Pan-African Affairs at the Emancipation Support Committee of Trinidad and Tobago and a former central committee member of the National Joint Action Committee.

unarmed Basil Davis. He pleaded against the arrest of a “man (who) had mental problems but was well known and harmed no one”⁷ Kambon notes that the outpouring of disaffection with the status quo at Davis’ funeral:

“...was a cry for a new society, based on values of justice, morality and equity; a demand for economic independence with participatory structures for political and economic control; a challenge to the people to achieve racial harmony based on mutual respect and understanding...”⁸

In Trinidad and Tobago, where politicians have made much of the divisions between the descendants of enslaved Africans and the descendants of indentured East Indian labourers, it is important to note that Kambon’s letter is accompanied by a photograph of mourners at the funeral captioned “Mourners march to the sounds of African and Indian drums during the funeral procession”⁹. In his letter Kambon also notes that in his tribute to Basil Davis, The Mighty Duke recorded the mobilised people singing: “Power in the Hands of the People Now”. Though we focus here on Caribbean (re)workings of African practices which have contributed to dreadness, neither the rituals nor the jumbie timespaces which they open up are the sole preserve of Afro-Caribbean peoples.

Innate to the cosmologies which arrived in the New World with enslaved Africans is a recognition of energies which are more than human, some of which are divine. On the plantations Africans from different regions were often grouped together and over time adapted and melded their cosmologies, as well as incorporating some practices of European Christianity. Maureen Warner Lewis in “Yoruba Religion In Trinidad - Transfer and Reinterpretation” traces this continuing process of transfer and reinterpretation of African cosmologies and religious practices in the circum-Atlantic with specific reference to Yoruba traditions in Trinidad (1978), while Zora Neale Hurston gives detailed accounts of transfer and reinterpretation in ceremonies where

⁷ Kambon “Dear Editor”.

⁸Kambon “Dear Editor”.

⁹Kambon "Dear Editor”.

she was a participant observer during her fieldwork in Jamaica in the 1930s. Warner-Lewis and Hurston attest to an acceptance by the majority of peoples in both countries of energies which are supernatural. These energies form a pantheon consisting of three interconnected groups: a supreme divinity; lesser divinities, and; the dead. It is the supreme divinity which gives the vital principle to all and allows humans and non-humans to be and to recognise each other's being. The English word 'spirit' is a useful translation of this principle as it allows for both recognition and manifestation of the aforementioned vital principle. In Jamaica as in Trinidad and Tobago, to be "in the spirit" is to be attuned to energies which are more than human. Manifestation includes possession during and in which timespace, supernatural entities make their presence known by taking charge of and directing the voice and movements of the person being possessed. Further, Hurston speaks of Jamaicans' "...firm belief in survival after death, or rather that there is no death. Activities are merely changed from one condition to the other" (39). The spirit or shade of the departed is called a "duppy" in Jamaican nation language and a "jumbie" in Trinidad and Tobago. One informant explains to Hurston that for a dead body "the thing that gave power to these parts is no longer there. That is the duppy, and that is the most powerful part of any man" (Hurston 55). The Jamaican injunction to "walk good and good duppy walk with you" is a reminder that the spirit of the departed is never far from the living, and that their presence may be un/fortunate, for as Hurston's Jamaican informants explained there are rituals which can be performed to cause duppies to do the bidding of those who invoke them. That calling forth from another plane of existence may be beneficial to those for whom the duppy is invoked, or harmful to those against whom it is invoked (Hurston 40).

Mikey Smith forges responses to marginalised Jamaicans' experiences out of the resources offered to nation language by dreadtalk. Kamau Brathwaite explains nation language as "the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English (French, Spanish, Dutch to name others) now, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought in. So, we have that spectrum - that prism - of languages..." (Brathwaite 5-6). Brathwaite also states that this spectrum of languages is inclusive of other forms of speech that survived the experiences of Indigenous peoples, the enslaved and indentured labourers. All of these source

languages have contributed syntactic elements and paralinguistic modes, but what marks nation language most is oracy. The routes of this oracy in the linguistic admixtures which enslaved Africans made of the languages which survived the crossing of the Middle Passage and the languages forced upon them by colonisers have been well documented, traced and analysed (Brathwaite 7; Glissant 404), but despite being the *lingua franca* of most Caribbean people, nation languages are still associated with servility, the unschooled, and the non-human; civility is measured by proximity to the European metropole and its languages.¹⁰ The majority of the population struggles against this socio-cultural policing of “the actual rhythm and the syllables, the very software, in a way, of the language” (Brathwaite 9), and this struggle was particularly important for the creatives wanting to give voice to experience in and through the musicality of their natural speech that is saturated by their experiences. For the purposes of these wordsmiths, while vocabulary is not unimportant, the sonic and rhythmic aspects which kinaesthetically connect to the body to dreadness as a way to contend with the shitstem.

Dreadtalk draws on the musicality of Jamaican nation language and gives it a lexical and syntactic technique to confront the urban iterations of the plantation. More specifically, dreadtalk is staunch in its refusal to accept the subjection implicit in the first-person object pronoun. Where mainstream nation language shifts easily between “ah” /a/ and “mi” /mi/ (ah did tell him/ mi did tell him = I told him) it tends to reserve “me/ mi/” for more emphatic expression (is me did tell him! = it was I, and no one else, who told him). Dreadtalk uses only 1st person singular pronoun variants, “I man/I and I” are based on the English subject pronoun¹¹, and in dreadtalk certain words have multiple meanings and syntactic functions (Pollard 8). The word “dread” itself, when used in reference to the shitstem, names it as an untenable, truly awful, situation. When “dread”

¹⁰ In Jamaica, nation language was tolerable in ‘polite’ society only as entertainment. A shift in this way of thinking is due in no small part to the work of the poet Louise Bennet Coverly who in her poetry spoke with and to Jamaicans in the language of the majority.

¹¹ By way of explanation here are two uses of the first person ‘subject’ pronoun. First “‘I man/I and I’ don’t ‘fraid Babylon” would be glossed as, “I am not afraid of the forces of socio-political and economic evil”. Whereas “Babylon don’t frighten ‘I man/I and I’” would be glossed as, “The forces of socio-political and economic evil do not frighten me”.

is used in dreadtalk to refer to oneself it means I am to be feared. When a Rastafarian says, "I and I well dread", s/he means "there is power within me which is greater than the ways in which the shitstem tries to belittle me." In dreadtalk the speaker claims this power *within*, and voices it *against* oppression.

This is why Count Ossie, the noted Rastafarian band leader and drummer, postulates that "We (Rasta) were fighting colonialism and oppression but not with gun and bayonet, but wordically, culturally" (qtd. in Pollard p. 24). Count Ossie is naming the power of the spoken word to create change. In Jamaica dreadtalk is a medium for manifesting self-making or smadditising¹² for fashioning plural subjectivities within dreadful frameworks of subjection, whereas in Trinidad & Tobago dread/dreadness is linked to fear as feeling, and as elicitation, whether embodied or wielded. Shadow wields this elicited fear in judgment and condemnation (of the evil doers/judges/so-called angels for their alleged wrongdoing), and in the revelation of injustice meted out (to the poor/ oppressed in wider society, and to himself in competition spaces). We note "dreadness" in forms such as Robber Talk and other signifying genres (badjohnism/ heroic self-aggrandisement) as a retaliative, avenging power that is fuelled by a hunger for reparative justice, that stands as a warning before meteing out retribution, and this languaging is present in the works of both Smith and Shadow.

Calypso and dub-poetry are cultural forms that are situated within a definition of literacy which resides in semiotic intelligence (Irobi 910) and is linked to memory and recall. Calypso, in particular, performs a number of key functions of which the calypsonian is conscious, and which serve as motivation, although the motives of individual performers vary. The provision of entertainment and the proffering of oneself as a voice on behalf of the people have traditionally been paramount functions of calypso, regardless of the risk posed to the well-being of the performer. The 20th century

¹² The term 'smadditising' is a neologism of Tony Laing (22 July 1944 to 13 April 2013) a very influential Jamaican music producer to name processes of the recognition by Afro-Jamaicans' in the 1970s of their right to proclaim their African heritage. It based on the Jamaican term 'smaddi'. This is a creole transformation of the "English" word somebody to something more than moving up a social hierarchy. It is the 'non-persons' proclaiming their existence. This concept was further theorised by Mills and Nettleford "*To be Liberated from the Obscurity of Themselves*": *An Interview with Rex Nettleford* (2010).

scuffling of language acting as the medium of exploration and also the subject explored, uncovers an elusiveness of experience that is celebrated in an elusiveness of style and idea (Rohlehr, *The Problem of the Problem of Form* 8) perhaps ironically. Following this reasoning, we note that calypso becomes a communicative medium for delivering on the aforementioned responsibilities, but places numerous identity issues and challenges before the performers. When calypsonians perform, they exhibit their notions about identity and consciousness (Toussaint 139), and “a good calypso is usually remembered for one of two reasons: either the lyrics are outstanding, or the melody is infectious...the truly outstanding and unforgettable calypso is the one that manages to combine both these elements with success” (qtd. in Winer 113). Oku Onuora’s 1979 definition of dub-poetry has become archetypal: “[I]t is a poem that has a *built in reggae rhythm*¹³ hence when the poem is read without any reggae rhythm...one can distinctly hear the reggae rhythm coming out of the poem” (qtd. in McLeod n.p.). Yet any wordsmith who works at his/her craft as Oku does or Mikey Smith and Jean Binta Breeze did will play with rhythms. In *Words Unbroken by the Beat* Carolyn Cooper acknowledges the onomatopoeic drum resonance of the term ‘dub’, but cautions against the deadening effect of slavishly following a beat¹⁴. (68) A performer keenly observing and making trenchant commentary on his/her conjuncture is working for something more than doggerel.

Both calypso and dub-poetry not only make commentary on the dreadness of their society, but they also allow performers to claim and wield their dreadness; to speak against the shitstem’s rule by fear or force. There is dread in the righteous Dread: the power that comes from being part of a circuit of nature linking those here to those who have gone before. Mikey Smith began his 30th March 1982 performance with an a cappella performance of Bob Marley’s *Redemption Song*. Standing behind the podium with his locks under a knitted tam and with only his upper torso visible, Smith begins with a contained stillness which, coupled with the deliberate reflectiveness of his phrasing, invokes the loss and confinement of the Middle Passage. Then at “But my hand

¹³ Emphasis, ours.

¹⁴ The title of Cooper’s article is taken from Jean Binta Breeze’s poem which strongly critiques the rub-a-d-a-dum monotony in which the dub overrides meaning (68).

was made strong" (line 5) Smith raises his right hand and extends one end of the scarf along the lengths of his outstretched hand. In that gesture the line of the red green and gold¹⁵ fabric and the fist which holds it underscore the intentionality of the words "forward in dis generation triumphantly" (line 7). Smith also makes a slight pause after "generation" (line 8) and before "triumphantly" (line 8). Without raising the timbre of his voice, Smith shifts from the confinement of "the bottomless pit" (line 4) to the possibility of redemption. As the invitation to help the Marley persona sing *Redemption Song* fades, Smith slowly brings his outstretched hand down behind him so that his fist follows an arc that moves away from the audience. Then unexpectedly his fist punches forward and marks the change of tempo into *Say Natta Natty (It a Come 50-51)*. This poem is an exhortation to those who profess by their natty dreads to be either Rasta or Rasta sympathizer. The rapid insistent staccato of his voice drives the admonition "no bodder/ dash way you culture" (lines 1-5), for it is through 'culture' that redemption will come. Culture and its redemptive power are linked to Jamaica personified as mother, "Remember yard is yuh Mumma/pon groun you sleep, /a seh she teck yuh picni/ when yuh tired fi breed, /" (lines 16-19) The staccato makes way for a beat which almost trips up the triplet "if yuh no sleep" which signals the entry of the Mumma as a character in her own right as the performer lets her speak. In particular there is the elongated vowel in "Gawd" which echoes the pain yuh muma will feel if Natty-Natty dies. Women in this poem do not have many options. They may be the Mother/Earth/land of birth, the suitable mate "yuh gal a yard", though this mate "yuh daughter" can also be a gullible young woman seduced by the politician who fattens her up not only with food, but, in Jamaican nation language, also makes her fat/pregnant. Finally, she can be the foreigner only worthy of the sobriquet "time magazine" and like the self-serving politician she is a "cultural smuggler" (line 61,62) The poet can entreat Natty Natty "no border tek wi revolution, man/ so turn touris attraction!" (line 64-65). There is no guarantee the warning will be heeded, and the poet/prophet moves on to the stance of "I an I alone". This is a double stance, but it is not in itself protection from the oppressive capacity of the shitstem.

¹⁵ Red, green and gold are the colours of the Rasta flag adopted from the flag of Ethiopia and is (among other things) a symbol and an invocation of connection to Haile Selassie's kingship. Smith's allusion would probably not have been missed by most members of the audience.

Abyssinia, as incarnated by Herbert Nichols, is considered to be one of the greatest portrayals of devil mas¹⁶ in the history of Trinidad & Tobago's Carnival. He is immortalised in Shadow's *Pay The Devil*, as being heard and eliciting fear in bystanders before he was even seen: "Mama ah hear ah rumble! / Abyssinia coming down!" (lines 32-33). The pandemonium of striking the biscuit tin drums re-echoed in Shadow's onomatopoeic pac pac pac pac, the screams of the imps and frightened children, the sound dragging chains, are met by the kinaesthetic, celebratory response of the crowd: "Man start to free up/The spirits are high/ The crowd start to jump up/ Like they learning to fly" (lines 40 - 44). Paradoxically Shadow describes a terrifying scene that is at once an assault on the senses but is also electrifying the listener into moving along to the song's musicality. While being conscious of the danger presented by the dreadful Abyssinia entering public space, one is carried away by a melody towards the unknown. Sometimes, this musicality accompanies a clear threat; not to mask it, but it is part of "de ting" that Bailey committed himself to learning, a supernatural high science that those on the earthly plane could not fathom, nor understand well enough to judge his performances in competitions. Likewise in *Jump Judges Jump*, Shadow makes a distinction (in the same way that Bailey does at Skinner Park) between spaces, and what occurs in each space. While he is revered for his skill among audiences, when he goes "there" he is not taken seriously and his preparation, from the standpoint of the judges, is apparently all for nought:

Society mad here in Trinidad
They take it for fun pushing me around
The world know my music is solid like brick
The people enjoy it, they jump to the beat
But when it have competition the judges will swear
I am a comedian so I eh going back there.

¹⁶ "Devils have the several faces of meaning that both their portrayers *and their potential spectators* can provide. As such, the portrayal of devils by groups of disenfranchised, poor Afro-Trinidadians takes on a much more nuanced meaning that any strict appeal to European or 'pure' African antecedents allows' (Scher 114).

(lines 1-6)

He also tells us that his desires are contrary to what the shitstem expects of him, confessing that:

The school days I had, they say ah was bad
But when I break biche, myself I would teach
They want me to learn everything in science
I wanted to learn how to make people dance
Now I come to prove what I learn secretly
They bring me to judge me who have degrees in stupidity

I want to ketch them judges in hell to have them jumping
Just jumping
No stopping.
I want to wake them up with some blows and have them jumping
Just jumping
No fooling.
And when ah tell yuh jump
Yuh got tuh jump
And when ah tell yuh stop
Keep jumping up
And if ah ketch yuh jumping up slow
Ah buss yuh toe.

(lines 37 - 54)

In performance, Shadow's stony expression and rigid movements contradict the overt saccharinity of the songs' melodic structure, but still do not act as a deterrent to the audience. His iconic dance, the ritualistic, staccato, up and down movement that can hardly be termed a jump, is not the same movement that the music engenders in the audience. Instead, it is a dance of joy, release and forgetfulness of the earthly plane where oppression and suffering exist. If the lyrics are noted by those otherwise lost in the wild

abandon of the moment, then this joy is coupled with deep satisfaction at malefactors getting their just due. This jump action is also the eternal punishment that the judges will endure for eternity as retribution for their seemingly unfair adjudication of Bailey's music and Shadow's performance of it. Shadow does not send them to Hell; he meets them there. He is convinced that their treatment of him is enough to ensure their place among the damned, and with the balance of power now in his favour, he has the authority in this space to mete out penalties as he sees fit. The infectious groove of the musicality of the song entertains the masses while falsely soothing the judges into believing that they are not in the danger of the warning of the retaliatory violence of being dragged away by jumbies to Hell where they will face judgement. The jumping action is synchronously entertaining, celebratory, liberatory, and torturous.

Shadow also gives plain warning in *Dread Wizard* that his dreadness is embodied as part of his lived experience, that he possesses magical abilities (connotated by calling himself a wizard) to challenge the inequalities of the shitstem. A sleeping dragon should not be provoked, unless one wished to face swift and dire consequences:

So I dread!
Real dread!
I am the wizard who was born dread
Poverty dread!
Misery dread!
And I was born in dem-
So I must be dread!
...
So if yuh buss meh face
Ah go buss yuh face
If you make me cry
Go and learn to fly
Because I dread
Real dread
I am the wizard who was born dread

(lines 5 – 19)

This enactment in performance accompanied by a consistent reiteration of the evidence of his dreadness impresses upon the listener that this warning is not just posturing. Here he presents memory, identifies the shitsem, and then by laying claim to (sometimes supernatural) power and license he confronts the oppressive agents of the shitstem to challenge, to rebuke, and ultimately destroy them. By the same token Smith in his poem *Dread* makes a connection between the poet's ability to fully perceive a situation, and his/her being dread. The final stanza of Smith's poem *Dread* begins with the invocation "Lawd" (line 47) which is simultaneously an appeal to summon the divine, and an expression of the speaker's exasperation with the status quo. The three lines which follow this invocation allude to the nursery rhyme *Sing a Song of Sixpence*, but the Caliban¹⁷ alluded to here has got a subverted version of the song, and four and twenty blackbirds baked in a pie are replaced with the reality that:

dis-ya song of poverty
no have no ounce of generosity
to ease some of we calamity

(lines 49-50)

The end rhymes remain but there are no amusing, unexpected images, and both the rhyme scheme and the scansion resist the soothing predictability of the nursery rhyme's quatrain. In addition, the poem is not driven by the beat. Instead, the grouping of syllables makes it possible to give at least two performances of the rhythm both based on the musicality of Jamaican speech. In one possible delivery the syllables build like a wave rushing in, then they recede. In another possibility everything surges forward to our shared calamity, which is the meaning of "we". This flexibility is what leads Mervyn Morris to prefer the term performance poetry to dub poetry and suggests that

¹⁷ The writer here makes allusion to Shakespeare's character Caliban sometimes used as a trope for the 'non-personage' of those who are not Europeans. In a drunken state Caliban sings "'Ban, 'Ban, Cacaliban/Has a new master: get a new man." *Tempest* Act 2 Scene as he announces his intention to leave the slave master/magus, Prospero for the two new master the ship wrecked sailors who have gotten him drunk.

performance poetry is an acknowledgement that this form of poetry is not tied to Reggae's rhythms, (qtd. in Cooper, *Noises In the Blood* 80):

Dat's why
I dread inna I locks
but I hair nuh wax
(lines 51-53)

Faced with this downpression¹⁸ the poem's speaker manifests in his body a refusal to accept subjection, and his acceptance of the natural kinkiness of his hair is an outward sign of this refusal. A Rastafarian's dreadlocks are an outward symbol of a spirituality which is centred on the acknowledgement of a right to refuse any ontology which devalues non-European heritages. This refusal would eschew any products such as wax which would alter the naturalness of one's locks. The speaker does not need such products:

cause
blood inna mi eye
fire inna we bone
revolution inna mi head
(lines 54-57)

In addition to the righteous dread which flows through the locks there are other apocalyptic manifestations including dreadtalk's repurposing of nation language expressions such as 'blood and fire!'. In the dreadtalk of his poem Smith repurposes nation language's exclamation of surprise, 'blood and fire' as a challenge, a rebuke, or even an apocalyptic curse. All of these repurposings are much stronger than the term's original use in nation language. The speaker of this poem also moves past the metaphor "Ah see red" that many Jamaicans use when expressing their response to something that angers them. In the poem the speaker literally has "blood inna mi eye" (line 52). In line

¹⁸ "Downpression" is Rasta (dreadtalk) inversion of the English word "oppression" which subverts the word by replacing the 'up' alluded to by the sound /op/ at the start of the word with down and in so doing calls attention to how pressure works.z

56 “fire” is in our (we) bones but in line 57 it is the speaker alone whose thoughts are of revolutionary change. Line 58, “revolution inna mi head” returns the poem’s speaker to the role of a prophet who is “*I an I alone*” (27-30). It is the prophet who issues the poem, *Dread’s*, final line which is both promise and warning; the speaker is “well dread” (line 58). He has well and truly earthed/grounded the energy of dread. Confronted by this persona the audience hears and recognises the power in the mask.

For Mikey Smith and Shadow this ability to highlight the mechanisms used by the shitstem to perpetuate injustice is a way of reasoning that is grounded in traditions which view the corporeal and the spirit in continuous conversation. This conversation enables prophet-sight which can be transmitted through any medium. A prophet such as Alexander Bedward could through his voice, gesture, and presence, exhort his listeners to let the spirits lead them to rise up against anti-black racism and political injustice. Chevannes writes in *Rastafari and Other African-Caribbean Worldviews* that for Bedward and fellow revivalists, communication with God or properly speaking with the spirits takes place through direct possession in the course of which secrets are revealed, the possessed speaks with the authority of God, and becomes God (21). Ras Daniel asserts that Rastafari is careful of any contact with Spirit through practices which are unnatural, but possession could be seen as such:

“God is in man, and God man, because things are natural. We are a people that deal with naturality. We don’t deal with superstition about ‘God in sky’ and duppy and such thing.”

(qtd. in Owens148)

If that version of the place of spirit in Rasta were all there is then for Smith, who gets so much of his rhythmic forms and his vocabulary from Rasta’s dreadtalk, then where would be his spiritual point of contact with Bailey/Shadow/Abyssinia? Besson and Chevannes tells us that what we hear in the music of Rasta is a continuation, a development of Revivalism (217). This continuation of Rastafarian cosmology, as asserted above by Ras Daniel, can be adamant that it does not associate with superstition as in sky gods and lesser spirits, but rather claims the supreme spirit as a power which

is natural and indwelling. While Rastafari does not deal with jumbie/duppy, Rasta acknowledges a need to enter a spiritual space in order to centre and channel the energy needed to combat the forces of evil. The prophet needs meditative practices, chanting, drumming and the chalice to enable the spiritedness with which to be political and testify of truth to other humans; to wield the liberatory power of dreadness, and not be bound by oppressive power. Smith is able to do this by invoking the “I and I” of Rasta, while Bailey demonstrates his binding through his progression into the Shadow and Abyssina roles. This binding comes not as a trap, but rather as willingness to sacrifice mortality for what is deemed by the performer to be a greater prize. Besson & Chevannes in *The Continuity-Creativity Debate: The Case of Revival* write of the Rastafarian reference to “I and I” as transforming the possession found in Revivalism¹⁹ into a co-presence which allows for communication (211). This co-presence is but one of many manifestations of spiritedness and as such we maintain that this power is spirit/dreadness which gives the power to overstand²⁰ the shitstem.

Grounding is facilitated by Smith and Shadow’s use voice, rhythm, musicality and movement. The medium for such ceremonies is the liminal performance found in both theatre and ritual, yet theatre in the Caribbean, informed by colonial conventions, has sought to interpret folk enactments without acknowledging how the latter enriches the former (Hill 7). European and Euro-American theatre have for centuries used Black characters in subordinate positions (Hill 8) while folk theatre has centred them, ensuring the marginalised are represented in spaces that are at the same time empowering and accessible. Good theatre stands face to face with its audience (Read 6), and the site-specific (yard) performance, which facilitates folk theatre, provides an experience that is relatable to audience while immersing them in spaces that are familiar and non-threatening while erasing long-held, false suppositions of theatre. A fully embodied oral

¹⁹ In *Rastafari and other African-Caribbean Worldviews* Chevannes explains Revival/ism as growing out of Myal. Myal, which also has Christian elements, is a Pan-African syncretisation of the religious practices by enslaved Africans which during enslavement made intra-group collaboration easier. He distinguishes three interconnected features of Revival/ism: God, Spirits, and the Dead; Man, Nature and Magic, and; Ethical and Social Values (6-7). Possession is an important aspect of the second feature in which a spirit takes over a devotee.

²⁰ Overstand is another dreadtalk inversion of an English word. Rather than the subjection of being made to stand “under” a Rastafarian stands over a situation to analyse it.

performance coupled with the poet's interaction with an audience are essential to dub poetry. Debbie Young insists that:

The orality of dub poetry is necessary if it's going to stay true to itself. So in that respect, you need a performer/ griot. You need somebody to talk to people. You need to use the body as an instrument. You need to use your voice.

(qtd. in Gingell 22)

Whether in a dancehall, on a street corner or in a kaiso tent, performing is more than pretending, or suspending the 'true' self in order to portray an imagined identity. So then, not only does this involve using dreadness as a disguise, but in performance a mask demands its wearer projects a timespace in which his/her audience too is enraptured, for without this shared rapture the message is lost. Hollis Liverpool, himself a veteran performer, tells us that:

Masking suggests spirit-associated transformations whereby the wearers cancel or obliterate their personalities by changing into other human characters and supernatural spirits so that they are no longer themselves. By embodying spirits, African maskers bring the mysterious world of nature and the supernatural into the known and more predictable community of humans, so that the spirits may commune with the people and cause them to respond in various ways: dancing, drumming, praying, hand-clapping, offering and singing.

(33)

Performance is then more than delineating a character but rather is intimately connected to receiving messages and transmitting these messages to an audience, or even between realities. In *Jumbies* Bailey gives us a sense of this predicament where supernatural entities are drawn to him during his creative process while he is isolated:

I was alone

Away from home
Quite in Toco
Making calypso.
And in the middle of the night
Jumbies came out in the bright.
They heard the melody
And they come to jump with me

We want calypso!
Sing more calypso!
We love calypso!
Sing more calypso!

I try to run-
They tell me, don't run!
I try to beg!
They tie up meh leg!

We want calypso!
Sing more calypso!

We having fun
Till morning come!
And if you stop that jam-
We make you a jumbie man!

(lines 1-22)

The threat of transformation is enough to keep Bailey immersed in his creative process, and the moment he tries to escape, he is physically restrained by the entities and to the music.

This is indicative of a transformation of self through a transfer of energies which outstrips the personal, as it engenders the communal. Bailey does this on three fronts: 1) as himself, where he hears the voices of entities from another realm who urge him to take action, and though he is fearful, he is intrigued at the potential of his lyricism and aspects of his performances to exert powerful magic and influence; 2) as The Shadow, who actively communicates with these agents, does their bidding in terms of exerting his influence over audiences, issues threats and passes judgement where he sees fit with the assurance that he is empowered by these supernatural forces which he communes with regularly to do so, and; 3) as Abyssinia, a paranormal figure/jumbie; the potential final metamorphosis of Bailey. These personas are lodged in three spaces requisite to the aforementioned fronts: an outer and present reality, a liminal time/space straddled between earth and another supernatural realm which is accessed only through ritual. We illustrate this in Table 1 as:

Table 1

[Outside/ Reality]	[Liminal]	[Inside/ Supernatural]
Bailey	The Shadow	Abyssinia

Therefore, when Shadow declares that Abyssinia is “coming down” in *Pay the Devil* he is in fact anticipating the interior/ yet unrealised form that he will take if he is continually treated unfairly, despite his clear mastery of the calypso artform, by the agents of the shitstem who rule the competition space. Where Bailey makes use of dreadness as a means of warning/prophesying, Shadow brandishes it as a whip. By continuing to study the high sciences made available to him by the supernatural, Shadow courts becoming dreadness personified: an instrument of vengeance and retribution. It is not surprising that this final iteration of self is human metamorphosing into devil, nor that the dreadness that signals this inevitability can be categorised as warning (the price to pass must be paid in order to pass), as threat (the power and

influence held over those wishing to escape judgement), or as gatekeeper (the authority to choose who passes, and to determine how/ in what state they pass). Knowledge of “de ting” scared Bailey, but is craved by Shadow. He recognised that knowledge of the supernatural was key to his destiny, and he used dance as a ritual action of release, and dis-memory of reality. Shadow’s signature dance move was vertical, perhaps signifying a connection between Earth and Sky. This dance usually took one of two forms: a repeated rise and fall movement where he rose to his toes and then sharply dropped to his heels, or a quick jump where both his feet left the ground entirely. This movement is so recognisable as belonging to Shadow that other musicians have noted it as such, even using it as a theme in their songs²¹. We note that his dance, this jumping, didn’t lead every person to the same place. Rather, Shadow’s dance opened a portal in time and space that invigorated jumbies to dance to his music²², shepherded the audience to the edges of another plane of existence, but steered others to judgement. In *Pay the Devil* he relates that “Man start to free up/ The spirits are high/ The crowd start to jump up/ Like they learning to fly” (lines 40-43) showing that he could use dance and the rhythm of his music to lead an audience into a liminal space in which their uninhibited, patterned movements were chronotopes which marked the accessing of spirit. Also as judge, Shadow determines whether this jumping would lead to liberation from the shitstem through pandemonium, or to judgement for injustices meted out against him. This lines up with the devil/jab masquerade, which is a justice-based mas, meaning that it is not performed/portrayed with the meekness of many sections of the New Testament, but with an avenging presence familiar in the Old Testament, the apocalyptic vision or revelation, and syncretically with other deities` such as Shango and Ogun from the Orisa pantheon.

Errol Hill in arguing that audience recognition and participation are essential features which contribute to the efficacy of ritual enactment (Hill 5), is also adamant that Afro-

²¹ Two of the most notable songs which do this are *Bring Down The Rhythm & Iwer*, *Butterfly*, *Shadow*, *Wave* by Ajala and Colin Lucas respectively.

²² “I was alone/ Away from home/ Quite in Toco/ Making calypso/ And in the middle of the night/ Jumbies came out in the bright/ They heard the melody/ And they come to jump with me” (lines 1- 8), *Jumbies*.

Caribbean theatre which for the most part exists outside of professional halls, is deemed to be at the level of quaint folkways and not seen as sophisticated or belonging to a superior culture (Hill 6). One can argue that by performing in conventional spaces both Smith and Shadow are complicit in the same system that they condemn, but one way to reveal then dismantle an oppressive system is by infiltrating it in order to understand its inner workings, which Smith demonstrates this in the poem *Trainer*. The narrative voice of that poem declares his position as an outsider to the system who has kept his humanity intact and silently observes as he freely moves around. While trying to sleep next to a public convenience on a piece of old newspaper, he gives the impression of being a displaced person of little or no consequence. He is doused with water by a man who:

...mus did know is a human
Siddung deh a ketch a nap
Yet im dash a bucket a Jeye's water pon me
Widout even saying sorry at dat.

(lines 54 – 57)

The narrator's immediate response is to signal his presence, and his humanity, through dreadness manifesting as violence:

A teck out me ice-prick an a grab im
An same time a hear something seh, 'No jook im!'
An anodder ting seh
'Jook im inna im neck meck im run an fret!'
An a see a whole heap a blood
Just a circle round im. An a let im go
Siddung, an laugh. 'But look pon you, to rass!'

(lines 61 – 67)

Like Bailey, Smith's persona is able to hear voices from another plane of existence²³. He hears one voice which tells him to stay his hand from violence, and then another calling for reparative justice through violent behavior. At this moment Smith's first-person narrator is simultaneously victim, judge and executioner. The laugh the speaker of this poem emits is very different to the anguished "Lawwwwwwwwd" (line 99) of the speaker of *Mi Cyaan Believe It* but they both call into question the narrator's mental state. The final line of this interaction in *Trainer* is dreadness as a moment when as Bakhtin writes "time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible, likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and history" (84). The recounting of this memory for *Trainer*, and by extension his audience has a double temporality. The narrated story of the speaker, trying to find rest in public space interrupted by a quick, thoughtless action which is quickly matched with images of the drawing of blood which elicits a sense of time waxing and waning; and there is the process itself of telling. As Ricoeur says, "To put it another way, time becomes human to the extent that it is articulated through a narrative mode, and narrative attains its full meaning when it becomes a condition of temporal existence" (54). Smith and Bailey's processes of narration bring their audiences into direct contact with the social forces impacting on the timespaces of the stories they narrate in ways that question as settled acceptance of the relationship between past present and future are.

Space frames and defines performance. We go against the grain of Peter Brook's notion of performance space as being empty and waiting for an actor to walk across it while being monitored as the initiation of performance (Brook 7) and agree with Read's contention that the empty space in which theatre was said to happen has always had a population (vi). Smith and Bailey exemplify this overstanding²⁴ of performance as always occurring in spaces which are already occupied. In terms of the theatre and space, there must be no distinct division, but instead continuity between subject, its audience,

²⁰ We distinguish between the persona of the poem and the poet, but we acknowledge an artist's ability to draw on their life experiences. Smith's behaviour was at times erratic. Linton Kwesi Johnson who knew Smith well, and with whom Smith lived whilst in London in 1982, speaks of coming to realise that Smith's behaviour, which he at first thought was eccentricity, was linked to psychological difficulties: "He was diagnosed with schizophrenia, I think" (Taylor).

²⁴ Please see earlier note on dreadtalk's inversion of under-standing

and the space that facilitates this. Bailey and Smith are Caribbean refashionings of *djali* speaking in tongues of the old world that is entrenched in the shitstem, and of a new world of possibility. Dreadness is channeled in authentic voices, moves to its own rhythms, shapes its own images, and is able to captivate its own audiences. To sustain these goals, it must be grounded in its own traditions (Hill 11), in its own spaces and on its own terms. In allowing audiences to enter into familiar spaces of imaginative and experimental possibilities, Mikey Smith and Winston Bailey/ Shadow/ Abyssina make spaces that are modified to meet the needs of a group (Sharobeem 21). Their invocation of dreadness makes room to critique, survive, dismantle and transcend the shitstem. Dreadness, “de ting” which is simultaneously path and portal in their performances is the symbiotic interaction between performers and their commitment to recognise, reveal and challenge all aspects of the shitstem even if it means putting themselves in the path of danger. The theatre of these performers is grounded with people and their lived realities while giving due consideration to the spaces wherein these everyday marginalised voices are amplified, and through what channels their diminished bodies are afforded humanity and agency.

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