

Tout Moun

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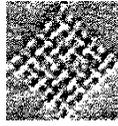
*I Dream to Change the World
Literature and Social Transformation*

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Sparrow Come Back
(with apologies to Derek Walcott)



Geoffrey Dunn

for Lord Superior & Dawad Philip

We sit high on this bridge in Laventille,
Near Terror's house, where time stands still,
And Bomber singing at this ungodly hour,
Joan and James playing games at the Picton tower.
Beetham smoke sweeps the horizon in dark disdain,
As the stench of scorched refuse settles over Port of Spain;
My ghost in khaki, jumbie beads rattling in my sack—
P.S. Newington and I observe as the Spoiler comes back.
Not so much a strut, as a crawl,
Spoils greets us with a feint 'Ah wanna fall.'
And now the three of us momentarily lament
The cyclical bacchanal of Trini government;
And the quality of kaiso in kaiso tents;
It seems the spiral is in perpetual descent.
But the mood passes quickly, Spoiler is delighted;
His finger gesticulating, his animation excited.
Spoiler says: 'I heard surely he dead last year
From consuming too much Yankee beer.'
Ah say, nah boy, that was an internet rumour,
He scorns, 'The internet makes me most ill-humoured!
I was sure I'd spy him somewhere in hell,
But I never heard that distinctive voice, pray tell.
Tonight I was hungry for chicken-foot souse,
And I heard the Bird as I pass by Kaiso House.'

Saltfish

Nothing in the world sweeter than

Saltfish

English cod or dih sweet Jamaican,

Saltfish

It's sweeter than meat

*When you want to eat
All saltfish sweet*

A momentary satisfaction envelops this trio of scribes
Reaching for some babaash to imbibe.
They concede a profound admiration,
Complete with double entendre and implication:
'De man he makes a hit with fish
Dat one eats out of a flesh-formed dish!
Aye! Come all of these fledgling considerations
Form the details of Spoiler's luminous observations:
'The Bird doh wine and strut the stage no more,
As if he fightin' some Hundred Years War;
But his eyes they still rage with ice and fire—
He was a skinny kid with a chip on his shoulder when I retired.
And dat voice, dat voice, it soars and sails,
It cries and sings and manipulates and wails;
It strikes deep and deeper into a nation's soul,
Viscerally, well beyond the point of self-control.
Despers still play de pan in perfect rhyme
And the Hammer plays to Laventille time;
I'm a Renegades man at the base of the hill,
In repose, but like a *true* kaisonian, *ah composing still.*
To which I respond, yes, hoss, that is true,
But music is more than a bit like Baby's callaloo.
Many ingredients make de ting,
And I contend it is the *way* he sings.
And the artistry extends beyond the rhymes of Joker—
He is an unmatched, unequaled interpreter;
And it's the *interpretation* that makes the song.
Who boof me up, padna, and prove me wrong?
I hear: *In this country
Is outrageous and insane
Ah mean the prices in Port of Spain
Seems like the merchants going out of their brain
And the working man only toiling in vain.*

Midway here, I make one thing clear to the malcontent—
That imitation is indeed the highest form of complement.
When it comes to poetry I intend no lyrical summation;
But I prefer Dawad Philip's *Invocations*.

He paints like Van Gogh unrehearsed
 A real-life canvas of King's Wharf in verse.
 Or I walk with Martin Carter's *Poems of Resistance*
 Into the nigger yard of political indifference.
 But I do concur with what Walmart so poetically scrawl
 Concerning the literary apostasy of V. S. Nightfall.
Ah wanna fall, ah wanna fall,
Ah wanna fall.

Yes, the shark still racing the shadow of the shark,
 But no more clear coral rocks do make dem dark;
 Crab nah climbing crab-back, in a crab-quarrel,
 That's just some academic bamboozle.
 Was that truly a premonition of the scene?
 Or simply the reality of the Caribbean?
 Oh, yeah, Spoils boy, tings bad—
 The Dark Ages are now spread way beyond Trinidad.
 The jagabats of Woodbrook worn
 Have been replaced by cyber porn;
 Dem douglas selling shark & bake and doubles,
 De ones dey tell me of all their personal troubles,
 Across the street from Smokey and Bunty,
 Where the young girls strut in bold effrontery,
 And step by sexualized step grind out memories
 Of colonial codes and Elizabethan mores.
 But what's the price of independence?
 Is it truly freedom or just artistic vengeance?
 Did Sugar Aloes really change sides?
 Of course, there's no way Rodney was a suicide.
 Was eye for an eye, a life for calculated life;
 Blood for blood, and knife for ragged-edged knife.
 It is not the cruor of the allegorical cascadura
 That stains the seawall of postcolonial Demerara.
 Linden was a cold and premeditated police rampage;
 State-sanctioned murder and institutionalized carnage.
 Is it true, Newington, what I hear about critical kaiso—
 That it is now banned by PPP on Georgetown radio?
 Tougher to run red thread through the eye of a needle
 Than to alter social norms and psychologies racial;
 No better here in terms of political *reification*;
It took Superior twenty-three years to get his radio station.

Marx was right: First time tragedy, second time farce;
 Parse your lips, Spoils, words are sparse.
 Yeah, same voices from the same slave ship,
 But now complacency takes the place of whip.
 The poor get poorer and the rich get rich,
 And the blood flows downhill into some ill-formed ditch.
 The intellectual economists call it stratification,
 But to the badjohns it is survival or indigestion.
 Ten to one is murder; six to one an imperial guise,
 Even if the free-trade liberals claim otherwise.
 As globalization is another word for economic suicide;
 And global warming a euphemism for mundicide.
 Fanon reminds us that it's the neo-imperial soucouyant
 Sucking the plasma from the wretched indigent.
Ah wanna fall, ah wanna fall,
Ah wanna fall.

The hackers hack, and they hack some more,
 Deluded by the fantasy of a Shakespearean cyber war;
 If dog eat dog, and cat eat proverbial cat,
 Who, one must ask, is left to eat the rat?
 I watch as the manicou slithers down the Belmont sewer;
 Death be death, Newington, but silence and distance both be crueler.
 Pepperpot is sweeter than saltfish sweet—
 These literary allusions be most discrete.
 The quartet crossing London Bridge a metaphorical illusion,
 Full of self-denial and self-delusion.
 A Prufrockian reference in the deep Caribbean blue—
 The mermaids sing de chorus: Ah sad, ah sad, ah sad so.
 The kaiso grows thin and thinner
 Like some shit-bucket KFC dinner.
 What's that I hear from the Queen's Park Savannah?
 The specters of Rosita, Clementina, Jean and Dinah:
 Spoils, you can bite dem old ladies harder,
 Than a hotdog or a McDonald's hamburger.
 'Mampees all,' Spoils retorts, 'and their bum-bums swag;
 Chipping and wining in their polka-dot bingo bags.'
 Come listen: *When the Yankees was in full swing*
Just imagine how I was suffering
Mavis told me straight to me face
How she find I too fast and out of place

*No, no, no, they would start to fret
 Money or not, poor Sparrow can't get
 Because with the Yankees they have it cool
 Calypsonians too hard to fool.*

Ay, ay, ay, bwoys, yuh got lots to get over; I say Carla, Avis,
 Sonja, Deborah, Amanda, Catherine form the new world order.
 Yeah, calypsonians may be too hard to fool,
 But what's good for the gander, good for the goose, too.
 Singing Sandra will die with her dignity intact;
 Gender equality is not a theory but a pillar of the social contract.
 Yuh heist a Road March from Calypso Rose—
 Patriarchal hegemony is now what decompose.
 Zami and bullerman haters will join in Lapeyrouse,
 Sharing a crypt with the vagrants, worms and morally obtuse.
 Valentino reminds us that life is a stage,
 Though we possess agency when we scroll each page.
 Dorothy waits and she waits some more,
 In the Big Yard for some apocryphal encore.
 Yeah, Stalin's right: oil money come and oil money go,
 But no amount of oil money can stop the show;
 The culture, it is stronger than the cash,
 Stronger than the nine millimeter or sharpened cutlass.
 Even as the murder rate spins hopelessly out of control,
 And violence an insouciant expression of repressed vitriol.
 If the heads keep rolling down Nelson Street,
 I pray the calypso gods my soul to keep.
*Sparrow, come back home—
 If you hear dem groan
 Sparrow, come back home—
 Doh leave we alone;
 Baby, tell me what's the cry?
 You never miss the water 'til the well run dry.*

The rum and ice all melt in hell,
 El Dorado replaced by a 3-Zero label;
 But the night is long and daylight short,
 And death some cruel colonial sport.
 Frederick Street may stink like a sewer drain,
 But, I say, *heaven* is a city like Port of Spain.
 Sure, the People's Mall burns hot and hotter

Because the hydrants had no water.
 But where in the hell would you rather be, than
 In Laventille with Spoiler, P.S. and me?
 Or with J'ouvert Gyul at 3Canal show—
 Talk yuh talk, guys, sing yuh eternal song so.
 Or listening to Regeneration Now perform 'Slippery Ann,'
 At D'Lime Inn limin' with Cathy & Lightnin'?
 With Gypsy issuing a stinging extempo; Or Crazy, Rio, Scrunter,
 Funny, Poser, Akil, Cro Cro, Shereen, Kizzie and Explainer?
 Hey, who's that I see coming up the hill quite spry?
 Preddie, Kitch, Lion, Striker, the Duke of Iron, Lady Iere,
 Growling Tiger, Mystic Prowler, Conqueror, Atilla, Houdini,
 Melody, Viking, Invader, Duke, Blakie and do re mi.
 Am I wrong, Spoils, or so it seems,
 A sweet, sweet chorus from *Calypso Dreams*?
 T.J.'s working on a column for the *Celestial Express*—
 Has plenty of Black Label and assorted opinions to coalesce;
 Brother Resistance is organizing the entire show,
 But I hear the money all winds up with Billboard Monroe.
 T.J. mumbles Prince David is the heir apparent,
 Under the Trees, his voice most lucidly ascendant;
 Superior, the wily Jack of Diamonds,
 Arrested on Wrightson Road to keep kaiso silent.
 Let us hoist some rum and whisky high in toast,
 As Shadow and Dub T arrive from the West Coast.
 Now who's that soaring over the Lady Young hill?
 Boys! Birdie cratchy cocoa with a U.S. twenty-dollar bill!
 Birdie cracks: 'Spoiler be nimble, P.S. be quick,
 You, boy, jump over Relator's candlestick;
 And, Melo, it wasn't anything personal...'
 'Doh Melo me, jackass, yuh wretched imbecile...'
 Bird laughs: 'Boys, as much as I'd like a little refreshment,
 I'm not ready yet for the undertaker's embellishment.
 I got songs to sing and a Grenadian intellect,
 And a few more paydays for Slinger to collect.
 So I convey to you with full assent:
 That I haven't sang in my last tent.'
Melda, oh, you making wedding plans
Carrying meh name to Obeah man
All you do, can't get through
Ah still ain't go marry to you....

'I'm not ready to wine with Mavis and Maria;
Ah nah back-back with Margarita and Teresa.
Take care of them, friends, in the depths of Hades,
Buy dem rum and cokes and hold dem steady—
Just make it clear, to one and to all:
That the Bird ent ready for his curtain call.'