

The Pleasures of Being an Outsider

Cave Hill, Barbados

*A man is always resident in the castle of his skin.
If the castle is deserted, then we know the Devil has
been at work.*

— GEORGE LAMMING

1

Not all of you just gives the tourist's due:
cash transactions. A gift-wrapped invasion
of feeling, some qualified point of view,
are gestures from choice, not obligation.
Tacit as a hand-shake, polite torpor
enjoys equality with friendliness.
Bajan joy and anger are not your lore,
nor their history your slave business.
Aloneness is sanctuary, place of play
like a cool courtyard pool on a hot day;
a skin of ripples where your past may float
revealed, free of mud, as you have made it:
where blood-stained petals of inheritance
and stamen swans of love drift forth their dance.

2

Sky and earth contest, a hawk arbitrates.
Here — tension of wings made hammock light — is
floating radiance . . . fraternity of water
(rain-riding rivers reaching oceans), fire's
cycle of cannibalism, of death and halos,
composts smouldering with life. Birth begins
with satiation in search of hunger;
the rest is mixture, rival ratios.
The predatory bird unites, anoints.
Fish feeds on fish to prepare your banquets.
Your polka-dot eyes scan the moon's strip-tease

in clouds, endless milky space, galaxies,
until your being trembles like thunder
pondering the torture of true wonder.

3

Itinerant exile on this sugar isle
of breezes (whose mantle is Ariel
set free to relish his rite of passage)
where Caliban's laureate lives at Hotel
Atlantis in the town of Bathsheba
(a rocks-and-beach stroll to Cattlewash but
a moon's throw from menstrual Africa),
has any man asked you into his hut?
Delight in clean sea-winds, wooden houses
painted to butterfly the crush of trees,
delight the sun dance in human voices,
surf drums from th'Atlantic's orchestra pit.
But remember, Visitor and Others,
face to face you may be futile mirrors.

4

You lounge upstairs, sipping fiction and rum;
some flamboyant Guyanese fiasco
set against savannahs of fatalism.
You sink in syrup of despair. Below,
professors normally quiet and slow
thump-jump the table with their dominoes,
the stakes high — rounds of beers and ego blows.
Nor book nor drink serve what you need to know.
Outside, the wave-shaped passion of the wind
in long grass, the durable shell of blue
sky, the cricket captain placing his field,
the sun and sport of pleasure's revenue,
all enrich the day, hail the rhythmical.
Why is such simple life so mystical?