

# Cogitating

*For Sam Selvon (1923-94)*

That night, in Saskatoon, you drinking steadily almost;  
another Scotch in hand, and thinking about your invitation to me—  
resonances being also the words you ply, come to think of it.

After my reading you insist that you will need  
to sleep at the hotel, same room as mine.  
I immediately cringe because of my not being able  
to fulfill a request, which is also like closing one's eyes  
in half-wakefulness; you, really in the arms of Morpheus—  
mixing words, or this naturalness of dialect from a far island  
with a mountain range trinity-peaked in your vision . . .

Now in the heart of the prairie, a Calgarian's life  
is all you live by, muttering in your sleep with half-moans,  
even grunts that betray a shortcoming of Columbus's own . . .  
This too is telling me, us, about the real instinct  
to ferret out memory, though never born of Canada  
but always your own created Moses or Galahad—  
or another book about London's Blacks. Such perseverance  
in the early hours, or the paradox of immigrants  
who have exiled themselves for lack of shame,  
who betray origins in one long leap . . . Canada now awake,  
or you will always be lonely . . . but who is talking!

You, coming to Canada to be closer to the Americas, I hear—  
not just Champlain, or whoever else. Let them tell you  
in words ribbed with El Dorado's gold or silver—  
or glazed with the sun. Walter Raleigh's lankiness  
in you also; a page from *The Historie of the Worlde*.  
I write my own epitaphs, or hieroglyphs of history;  
the creole voice not always an East Indian's—  
or African, but constantly shaped by crossings . . .  
the pitch-lake at La Brea no less a longer stride  
without your ever being stuck!

So when you snored, I stirred—and heard you say, “Awake, man?”  
I called out, as if from afar, with waves at my eyelids,  
further memory really: maybe a captain yet with me, ahoy!  
The reading I did: images like swords still lunging in the dark,  
the sun's shaping weather while yet you stir, again.  
“Was I asleep? snoring?” I mutter a vague reply,  
akin to a cabin's darkness—the hotel's silence all, wavering across a  
littoral, glittering seas really . . .

Or peninsulas, the waves rocking high as the hours, and  
you fall asleep again; and once more, in the cabin-trunk of memory,  
you walk on water it seems, snoring loudly—as I am bound  
to take a separate way. I slowly get up and walk out to the lobby,  
then mutter to the desk clerk, “Do you have another room . . . ?”

At two o'clock in the morning, unbearable time, dreadfully asleep  
as you might be—waves lashing no less . . . I too tread on water,  
never like Christ, only salvaging more of memory  
before your departure the next morning in a plane's sudden  
but determined *ascending!*

CYRIL DABYDEEN