

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