

Fagin & Me

I encountered Fagin in a far place,
and asked, "You, what can you tell me?"

Imagining being Oliver Twist, and the book
I'd borrowed at the plantation library and

Read a dozen times over, and feared not returning
because of what the penalty might be.

So I talked to Mr. Bumble, the beadle,
and Bill Sykes, Nancy, and Mr Bronlow;

But it was Fagin who remained with me
day after day, as voices kept calling out—

"Stop thief! Stop thief!"—still coming at me
in my sleep with sugar-cane smells and molasses,

Amidst the factory's louder hum everywhere;
and I continued running along, sweltering—

Heaving in, or trying to withstand
the Artful Dodger somewhere far from England

Now without Dickens being present, contemplating ease
in the tropics and still yearning for a place

Like an irksome pick-pocket crew, or feeling
fear in my heart the more I continued to read

Loudly to myself, wanting to return to the library
with a kindhearted Mr Bronlow now next to me

He, being sentimental or benevolent; then, with the beadle
in a poorhouse—as someone yet still kept wagging

A finger at me, Fagin in a London prison,
while I continued to sleep more fitfully.

CYRIL DABYDEEN