

individuals. Instead of identification, Glover elevates a capacious notion of refusal: refusal on the part of women and queer beings to sacrifice their desires and bodies to communal norms, and refusal on the part of scholars to consolidate “their practices of refusal into newly constituted communities of activism or identity” (37).

This brings me to my chief concern with Glover’s disorderly ethics, but I take it that it is a concern which Glover shares and whose unresolvability profoundly motivates her work: given the necessity to refuse categorizations that exclude certain subjects, how do we cultivate queer and feminist disorderly notions of the human without accidentally enshrining yet more programmatic imperatives that risk further exclusions? But perhaps this is a theoretical question that overlooks Glover’s practical point: the disordering is always already happening in the world, enacted by the refusals of so many queer beings. To see that this is true, we must simply regard those subjects in the ways that they regard themselves, a practice that Glover says may leave us productively “disoriented” from our comfortable political identifications (223). *A Regarded Self* therefore serves as an invaluable example of a study in self-disorientation, in being nimbly reactive and empathetic against the ossifying tendencies of many identity-based politics, while simultaneously opening up a more inclusive discursive space for selfhood that refuses to exclude any desires, no matter how selfish they may seem.

Jake J. McGuirk

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Philip Nanton. *Riff: The Shake Keane Story*. Papillote, 2021. Pp. 157. £12.99.

Philip Nanton’s *Riff: The Shake Keane Story* constructs the first detailed look at the life and career of Shake Keane (1927–1997), a predominantly undervalued and overlooked St. Vincentian musician and poet. As Nanton demonstrates, to tell the story of Keane is to tell many other stories as well: that of post-Windrush Britain, the broader European jazz scene, post-independence politics in St. Vincent, and the difficulties and dissatisfactions of migration. Beyond offering a compelling narrative, *Riff* is a performance of and testament to what it is to remember a life.

In crafting this portrait of Keane, Nanton’s focus is celebratory but not entirely exculpatory: he describes a man whose personal life was often less extraordinary and commendable than his contributions to music and literature. Beginning the narrative with Keane’s childhood, Nanton positions Keane’s

musical aptitude as originating with his father's teachings and disciplinary strictness. Through eight chapters, Nanton charts Keane's early foray into poetry in St. Vincent, his migration to the United Kingdom in 1952, and his music career as a trumpeter and flugelhorn player that took him around Europe. He also describes Keane's return to St. Vincent in 1973 to take up a short-lived governmental position as the director of the Department of Culture and his eventual move to New York in 1981—what Nanton calls his "self-imposed exile" (123). Nanton's short narrative includes many fascinating details that set the scene for Keane's achievements and failures. With depictions of night clubs, like The Marquee and The Sunset Club, from 1950s and 1960s London, Nanton charts Keane's rise to prominence both as a member of the Joe Harriott Quintet and as a featured player in various other endeavours. Nevertheless, while Keane was well-known and well-respected in his time, the repeated trajectory of many of his life choices is towards disappointment. As such, Nanton's narrative takes on an overarching tone of lament that Keane's life was not what it could have been. Marriages and relationships that failed; children who did not really feel their father's presence; a triumphant return to St. Vincent destroyed by government upheaval; depression, loneliness, and dwindling hope: these are also Keane's stories. In the end, the quoted words of Keane's son serve as the moral of this biography: "Jazz is full of brilliant players who didn't make their mark as they might have" (47).

Nonetheless, Nanton has long worked to ensure that Keane's mark, particularly in the world of poetry, is indeed recognized. Nanton has largely been the singular champion of Keane's poetry. Although, as he notes, there is some mention of Keane's poetry in at least two dissertations (mine included), Nanton's two articles, "Shake Keane's Poetic Legacy" and "Shake Keane's 'Nonsense': An Alternative Approach to Caribbean Folk Culture," are the sole published critical readings of Keane's work. As such, besides offering a portrait of Keane's life and musical career, *Riff* initiates a much-needed discussion of Keane's poetry. Despite the fact that Keane won the Casa de las Américas Prize for *One a Week with Water* (1979), his body of work is out of print and therefore difficult to access. Nanton's discussion is thus one key point of entry for readers to come to know Keane's writing. With summative descriptions of *L'Oubli* (1950), *Ixion* (1952), and *The Volcano Suite* (1979), along with critical readings of *One a Week with Water* (1979) and poems from his posthumous collected poems *Angel Horn* (2005), *Riff* offers a taste of the playfulness and beauty of Keane's poetry that readers may not have the opportunity to experience otherwise. Not only are Keane's poems quoted at length in *Riff*, but the text also includes five full-length poems as appendices,

three of which are previously unpublished and were provided to Nanton by Keane's family and friends. Even a small discussion of Keane's triumphs and disappointments using an image from his 1946 "Barrouallie Dawn," which appears in *Angel Horn*, offers readers a glimpse of the depth of Keane's observations: "The best staircases are spiral. For to venture / Upward or downward is to venture in many directions" (qtd. in Nanton 78). Of course, not all of Keane's poetry is lyrical: playfulness with and disruption of language are crucial elements of his poetic form. Nanton's assessment of Keane's "jazz rule-breaking style" (81) as an embodiment of the "shapeshifting . . . nature of migration" (98) offers a particularly compelling treatment of Keane's poetry. Although not fully explored in *Riff*, the concept of shapeshifting is a provocative lens through which to consider not only Keane's poetry but also the poetry of other Caribbean poets, like Kamau Brathwaite, who express experiences of migration by troubling Standard English.

In addition to the compelling content of Nanton's text, one of its most engaging qualities is how it performs the act of remembering and memorializing. Although Nanton has clearly collated and consulted what sparse print and other media records exist concerning Shake Keane—obscure interviews, difficult to access documentaries and recordings, unpublished texts by Keane—much of *Riff* is formed out of the recollections of those who knew Keane personally. Quoting email correspondence and interviews with various key figures in Keane's life, Nanton makes overt his process of biographical construction; in doing so he suggests that we, and our legacies, are largely what others tell of us. By making his process explicit, Nanton preserves the gaps in the story, and uncertainty becomes a leitmotif throughout the text. Multiple versions of history sit side-by-side, with words and phrases like "Perhaps" (57), "I don't recall" (Jeremy Robson qtd. in Nanton 56), and "whatever the case" (68) expressing the shifting ground upon which Keane's story is built. Nanton himself frequently enters into the story, offering his own characterizations based on his acquaintance with Keane; he can "imagine" (57, 126) what Keane might have thought or felt because he knew him. Nevertheless, using the ending acknowledgements to address the fallibility of his memory and reveal himself to be a trickster who fictionalized elements of the text's opening scene, Nanton also makes apparent that this imagining can be at odds with so-called "fact." And yet, what this admission makes clear is that in crafting a biography, Nanton is also constructing a legend, and what Keane meant to those around him cannot necessarily be captured if restricted solely to what the historical record preserves.

While at times some of the preserved gaps and uncertainties lead to small lapses in clarity, *Riff: The Shake Keane Story* is an enjoyable read that

participates in the burgeoning field of Caribbean biography<sup>1</sup> and draws attention to an important figure whose contributions are ripe for further study.

Veronica Austen

**Note**

1 See, for instance, the recent Caribbean Biography Series published by the University of West Indies Press.

**Works Cited**

Nanton, Philip. "Shake Keane's 'Nonsense': An Alternative Approach to Caribbean Folk Culture." *Small Axe: A Journal of Criticism*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2003, pp. 71–92.  
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