

Comets

Anthony Joseph

These men is comet —
the way they pass through
 this spatial time
 we carve and still sculpting
 into something
 that sound like we.

These men is
 lodestar,
 midnight robber,
 calypsonian,
 promoter
 on the microphone
 chanting
 masters of ceremony and nation
 toasting.
Griot with the trumpet bone
blowing.

Darcus mighta say:
 'Well, now we get
 to the heart-a-the-damn-thing self.

Now we get to this intricate thing
 they call poem.'

These men is comet.
Let us map the parabolae of their voices.
But first we need language.

 Mouth
 without
 language
cannot define
a halo or even a bicycle wheel.

 Ear
 without
 language
cannot hear
the steel

!drum

Nor the flick between pan-stick and wrist.
 Gesture
 without
 sign
 cannot write or rewrite history.
Especially since this very

syntax aim to imprison us
unless we twist the tongue of it
and creolise the verb.
Dyam fool, you dont know the wrong poem
coulda leggo terror upon that hill
where people squatting and rebuilding their lives
word by word?
Without language
the girl child would still be bathing
on a sheet of galvanise
 in the road.

So let these four man step outta yard
and build a three stone fire.
Bubble a pot.
Each can stir it. Each can govern as each can serve.
Never mind neck tie, nor the plastic
cockroach-killer brogues
the poet from Deptford pose in.
Or the gabardine bells
ringing round the rebel poet ankle.
Or how the gentleman who fly from Boston
articulate the inner life of words
then lean back in his chair and cross his leg.
Get him vex
and he will cuss an' tumble your cathedral
with Creole that swing back from people who live near the sea
and have to shout above the buzzing trees ... the fisheries ... Castries.

Linton coulda say —
 'Caribbean poetry
 is a revolutionist doctrine
 occurring
 when you juxtapose
 uptown sound
 to downbeat rhythm,
 the meter, we chant down the ruler
 and burn down plantation.
 But strong poems still find us
 between the beats.
 We flash as comet in darkness.
 We define what poetry is —
 one beat
 at a time.'

Look,
even Nelo neck in a polo neck quoting Keats.
He never condescend by saying
that the sentiment of the poet remains the same.

But in Mikey Smith, you eh find
the twing, the twang, the tongue
so different?

Comet, you pass like a bullet
and rip up the particulars of the thing.
You rob the altar at the Abbey.
Percy Bysshe Shelley coulda jump an' say,
'In an English time, in a form of
Republican clarity.
Perspicuous in the approbation
of empirical fact and duality...'
And we woulda laugh and rim back skull an' say — 'A-A,
a lot of these English tests
with their bardic quest
still tie up in implication.
Didn't they live and benefit
from the dreadest ruthless regime?
Some was rebel and socialist
who come to shell out immortal wheat.'

Mikey Smith say, 'Sure,
but they still can't speak for we.
Contemplation on the inner life
of Caribbean people
needs concentration dense
like dialect bush
and fluid like a painted river.'
The big man say, 'Yes,
but what language do you think in?'
Fred return it: 'Does thought even have language?'
And if not is it not then like fine wire stretched across the yard?
Tie one end on the lime, tie the next
to the hibiscus tree, where the leaves,
fulla white lice and aphid. And upon that line,
every doily or panty mammy hang to dry is like a feeling.
And from this metaphor,
when breeze blow, words come:

*... ah ... the authenticity of bees ...
the red pride
of the undignified
mango ...
... fruit is the song of trees ...
... rhythm is a unit of meaning ...*

And if language is a unit of feeling
then the intellectual sensibility of my grandfather
was decidedly poetic.
Spontaneously, he reach back from market an' say:
'Ai boy, what time you reach home this morning?

You take my house for some open sepulchre? Come.
Come down in the garden, let me break a branch
across your back.'

His poem was pitched between seduction and risk.
But the argument about whether what he utter
was a poem or not is not one Caribbean people engaging with.
The credits done roll upon authority and measure.
Trajectory of nuclei, coma and tail – these men is comet – they strike
with force
and blaze.