

Letter to Derek Walcott

(for Jack Healy)

This January night in Ottawa
is bitterly cold;
believe me when I tell you I have made
a special effort to be here: nowhere else —
to hear you fashion a tale once more
of Mighty Spoiler returning from the dead
and watching over our islands —
in you the Tiresias-eye,
perhaps “still poisoned by the blood of both,”
enamoured of this language that you love so much.

Here, distantly recalling the region’s calypso
or carnival; or thinking of my own growing up
with the affectation of words —
being able to understand that dreams
are made more solid from afar: that in our kingdoms
there are also falsifiers. We continue —
in this travesty of selves; or try reshaping myth
with Cutteridge’s cow still jumping over the moon
at odd moments in coldest winter:
as much as in warmer weather:
despite Time’s slavery and indenture.

Now your first time in this capital city:
place of embassies, bureaucracy; here with
its Third World Players and my own *Shapely Fire*
on a changing Canadian landscape —
our continuing to be proud of high art;

and Spoiler is palpably here also
with the semblance of royalty; your words
etched among professors and graduate
students of Commonwealth Literature,
evoking more than star-apple kingdoms
in a green night

 echoing monkey mountain or jungle
— take your pick.

Yes, we might even see you again,
tired as you seem now upon reading
three nights in a row, after Toronto: and your talking
to the Indian girls from Guyana (or is it Trinidad?),
despite your quarrel with "V.S. Nightfall";
telling me next of Sangster, or better yet
expressing greetings to Hosein — your being
away from Brodsky's Boston.

 Maybe you are
too anxious to reveal much else,
relaxed as you are with Gordon, Stanford,
and Walters, all Players — their saying how glad
they are to meet you (again); and it's as if
they're truly surprised
by your measured tones;
your former shyness or the dialect
that's always best — though not the accustomed
tones of "after the hot-gospeller. . . ."
Still pulsating with language,
your own fires brighter here on the Carleton
University campus — your tropics in our winter,
applause is never too much.

(20 January 1989)

CYRIL DABYDEEN