

Sex and Drugs in the Caribbean: Ferry to Port Royal (1992)

From capital Kingston to an older drunk one sunk
Like Babylon in buccaneer, bounty days;
This dying splendour, is it really enough?
Scavenging the bay brown pelicans sort
The silver streak from greasy plastic,
Eject their shit on shore; tourists come
To Jamaica (the Tourist Board says) for sex and drugs;
Always did, for five hundred years.
“Columbus he lie, he lie, he lie,”
Says the calypso; for counter-discourse
This Jah Shaka turn-'em-round reggae
Is exemplary: look how in love they are
With names like Windsor Palace, Ugly River, Nanny Town.
Columbus and their Empires lied, revered more
An Old Dying than a New World
For one dollar down that mangrove cay
Is reached by the dead-pan poor, a dormitory
Of dreadtalk, the African Methodist Episcopal
Zion Church—talk of heaven Lord's on its way!
Now now, not today; sex and drugs we have
But Heaven He Delay . . . and their awful
Repercussions: rubble too large to sink again.
At the Historic Site where one-limbed Morgan, Nelson
Blew all other Europeans out, screwed
Their conquests to the flags, adjusted
By hurricane, quakes and flood, we land
On the stony palisades, a reef that stopped
Breathing a few months ago . . . and I know:
This has never been their place or mine:
Belongs to the deep redoubt and cannon-thrust.

“One Blood in One Beat,” says the painted
Crimson heart on the stall of another
Folk expression for my collection: Pearl’s
Hi-way Takeaway and Creamy Café:
Stack the cone double, chocolate . . .
Fan my sweatband, this melting handful
Coolly to fellate: my protest against
The radiant greenhouse effect. The hotel
Like a compound—scenic prison—has a pool
The colour and tiled consistency of any,
The chemicals have been flown in, so has
The fruit, the veg, the steak, the prawns:
Salkey has written that’s what independence
Meant: now even their white overproof rum
Is imported. All of this means:
For the small change that burdens
My money-bag those rickety children
Will dive deep and burst their tiny lungs,
After valueless coins these emaciates—
The tourist and the new slaves—we’re down to
Clasping through blue leaves . . . parting the water
After flicks of silver . . . money more than
Air, money more than oxygen . . .
The haemorrhage of sacs . . . tissue . . .
Which is what we’re down to: begging
For mere coins . . . under the sexy, druggy swell.

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