

Pamela Mordecai and Mervyn Morris, eds. *Jamaica Woman: An Anthology of Poems*. (Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1982) xi, 110 pp., \$5.00.

The history of the Americas, one first of imperialism, second of slavery, is one of which we are aware. Whether accepted or rejected, the colonial heritage has had a hypnotizing effect on many writers in this hemisphere as is abundantly displayed in this anthology, *Jamaica Women*. The major part of the poetry here is social protest or "message" poetry as opposed to that involved in the structure of language, although we do find both in the surprising variety of subjects considered, some personal—love, family—others cultural and collective—nature, freedom, poverty, work, strength or lack of it. The best of these poems refrain from plunging into nostalgia for a non-existent history (Arawaks, Africa) or indulging in racial self-assertion, both of which undermine the very point to be made, that is, finding an identity unrestrained by race or class.

Olive Senior prays for her deceased father who spent his life working hard in the fields, a man who reminds us that although abolition came to Jamaica in the nineteenth century, slaves were freed only to become low-cost agricultural free labor. Yet she comes to terms with what today brings:

Now against the rhythms  
of subway trains my  
heartbeats still drum  
worksongs. Some wheels  
sing freedom, the others:  
home.  
Still, if I could balance  
water on my head I can  
juggle worlds  
on my shoulders.

We should not miss the subtlety here that brings us first to Jamaican culture, then reaches to things out there.

As one would expect and hope for in such an anthology, there are many poems about women. Again the absence of self-indulgence makes some poems better than others. It is life-giving to see, as Christine Craig does, the deference and pliancy of past generations of mothers and grandmothers as a "silent legacy," a compost set aside to nourish freedom for the present generation of women,

until we could speak out

...

loud enough to hear ourselves  
and believe our own words.

Some of the "women" poems in this anthology stop with a lamentation of powerlessness against males or "the system" and do not have for this reader the same strong effect.

The poems in this volume that make use of the Creole patois are extraordinarily effective. They seem almost an act of reverence, calling to mind the fact that this may have been the speech of many of these writers as they were growing up. Lorna Goodison's poem, "The Road of Dread," is so universally applicable that it could have been written in any language, yet with her particular use of superstition and mythology much would be lost in translation. This is an example of her use of patois at a point in the poem when the traveller rhetorically asks: "Den why I tread it brother?"

well mek I tell you bout the day dem  
when the father send some little bird  
that swallow flute fi trill me  
and when him instruct the sun fi smile pan me first.

and the sky calm like sea when it sleep  
and a breeze like a laugh follow mi.  
or the man find a stream that pure like baby mind  
and the water ease down yu throat  
and quiet yu inside.

and better still when yu meet another traveller  
who have flour and yu have water and man and man  
make bread together.

And dem time dey the road run straight and sure  
like a young horse that can't tire  
and yu catch a glimpse of the end  
through the water in yu eye  
I won't tell yu what I spy  
but is fi dat alone I tread the road.

In this poem, one true moment lessens the horrors of much of life. This is called hope. I cannot imagine the language here being improved upon.

As it turns out the poems written in Creole patois deal very often with the ghetto, bringing to our attention the huge gap between the left-overs of the colonial master class and the mass of people still living in the deepest poverty. Cyrene Tomlinson is particularly effective in "Foam Foment Ferment," "Dis Hypocrisy," and "Message from the Grave," all of which deal with those in Jamaica who are outside society and forgotten and what this condition will reap for the island as a whole.

While a Jamaican colonel is strolling around Grenada heading up yet another puppet "peace-keeping" force, these poets in *Jamaica Women* attest to a different force in Jamaica, one truer, we suspect, to the attitudes of the people on that island. These poets are, with few exceptions, associated with the University of the West Indies, a school as

new as 1948, in a country which even in the 1920s held that education should not be available to the populace for it would spoil them for work. If these women poets had been born earlier in the century they probably would not be in their present position of speaking for the many still unsung voices in Jamaica.

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**Ann Hodges Morgan and Rennard Strickland, eds. *Oklahoma Memories*. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1981) xii, 308 pp., \$12.95.**

Oklahoma looms large in the legends and imagination of westering Americans. Much more than one of the most northeastern of the Southwestern states, Oklahoma in the hearts and minds of many amounts to the fiction of Edna Ferber's *Cimarron* or John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. "Okies" assuredly have their own mystique if not their own stereotype. Anne Hodges Morgan and Rennard Strickland, the editors of *Oklahoma Memories*, seek to document that the "history" of Oklahoma, as recorded by people who have traveled across it and settled it from Indian Territory days to the present, is just as fascinating as its "story." And much of that fascination, as this collection of first-hand reminiscences and reporting shows, focuses on the various Native American peoples—generally the so-named Five Civilized Tribes—who have played every bit as large a part in defining Oklahoma as place, idea, and myth, as the oil derricks which stake the state and various and sundry millionaires wheeling and dealing in Tulsa.

Certainly Oklahoma's history, like that of the larger Southwest and nation, is multi-racial and multi-cultural. And this volume attests to that too. We find selections which portray—in terms that many will find rather too sentimental and cloying—the nostalgic regionalism of a Colonel native-son surviving the punishments of captivity as a prisoner of war in Vietnam because of fond thoughts of Thanksgiving at home. And we read the more or less random listings of first impressions by newcomers to Oklahoma City during the (for some reason) specific year of 1978—all of which sound as promotional as Sunbelt Chamber of Commerce or Welcome Wagon brochures.

Other selections from the more contemporary period which are every bit as human but more critical and convincing include accounts by the president of the University of Oklahoma during the 1970s concerning the