

## A Casualty of Caribbean Decolonization: The Poet Eric Roach

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When the British colonies of the Caribbean made their journey to independence in the mid-twentieth century, there was a short detour enroute. The original plan, enthusiastically supported both in Britain and in the colonies, was for the territories of the English-speaking Caribbean to be consolidated into a single independent nation, the Federation of the West Indies. The Federation was actually established in 1958 and functioned for a few years. There were problems from the beginning, however, even on such matters as the question which island should have the honor of hosting the federal capital. Trinidad won that battle, but the site chosen was a former United States military base in Chaguaramas—not very auspicious symbolism for a newly independent nation. As I will explain in more detail shortly, the federal experiment was terminated in 1962, and the only alternative for British policy was the opposite of federalism, a kind of micro-nationalism: individual independence for nearly all the island colonies, even some with populations of only 200,000 people.

Federation had had strong supporters among Caribbean intellectuals since before the beginning of the century. In the 1950s one of its most eloquent and visionary advocates was the poet Eric Roach. He had been born in 1915 in Tobago, a small rural island administratively linked to its larger neighbor Trinidad in colonial times; the two were unified into a single independent nation still usually referred to as “Trinidad,” though the official name is “Trinidad and Tobago.” His parents were peasant farmers: a fact which made him unique among major Anglophone Caribbean poets, nearly all of middle class origins. He published impressive and admired poems from 1938 until his death in 1974, and a number of the poems from the 1950s and early 1960s are concerned with the politics and especially the cultural politics of Federation. Had the Federation flourished, Roach was positioned to be celebrated as its national poet. When instead the process of Federation failed, he produced no poetry for several years, and eventually committed suicide in 1974.

This essay sheds light on this particular instance of the process of decolonization by bringing together two related poems, one written before Federation and the other after its failure. “Caribbean Calypso,” which Roach published in 1965, is a heavily revised version of an earlier poem entitled “Caribbean Coronation Verse” (1953).<sup>1</sup> A comparison of the two texts provides a stark indication of how deeply those events affected Roach both as a poet and as a political person.

“Caribbean Coronation Verse” is addressed directly to Elizabeth II on the occasion of her

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<sup>1</sup> Texts of the poems are cited from E. M. Roach, *The Flowering Rock: Collected Poems 1938–1974*, Kenneth Ramchand, ed. (Peepal Tree Press, 1992).

coronation in 1953. In the first four stanzas the poet develops a parallel between her island and his own. He begins by harking back to the "rough ways" of Elizabethan England, at the very start of British colonization in the Caribbean, and then suggests a resemblance between that volatile society and the condition of the present-day Caribbean. Though it is not his main concern, Roach incidentally invites the inference that the West Indies may have a future as glorious as England's past, and much more specifically that great writers may emerge in the one as they did in the other, carrying on the heritage of "Shakespeare's tongue." Shakespeare and Marlowe, however, soon yield place to the pirates Drake and Hawkins. Roach's rich language at this point acknowledges something grand in the scope of their crimes even as it condemns them; especially in the fourth stanza the complexity of expression ("Their lustre shone and starred their fall on frantic frontiers") reminds us of the multiple valences of "adventuring" in Roach's work. Thus in "The Fighters" (1953) the example of oppressors not unlike Hawkins inspires the boxers, who strive to contend with them on their own terms, and in so doing make themselves into similar monsters of violence, at once fascinating and repellent. In fact, the particular relation between the terms "arrogance" and "pride" which lies behind the progression of this poem is precisely that established in "The Fighters."

After the first Elizabeth, another queen, Victoria, "graced the realm / While her great clock rang arrogant noonday round / Her subject world." It was her empire upon which the sun never set, hers where the wireless brought the bell of Big Ben (and Greenwich mean time) to the world at large, yet Roach envisions during her reign an amelioration of Britain's relation to her subject peoples, thanks to the "freedom-minded heirs" of the original conquerors. Britain is entitled to be "prouder" as that relation becomes progressively "kinder." Having established this context, Roach in the final two stanzas presents a challenging compliment to Elizabeth II on her accession to the throne:

. . . now my nigger voice from the slave islands  
Proclaims her majesty in Shakespeare's tongue  
To queen a commonwealth of flowering freedoms.  
Advance Britannia. The prouder empire waits  
The valiant spirit's pioneering faith.  
In charity to every lesser hope  
Democracy be large; be critical  
With proper parliaments; crown justice sovereign  
As the queen, as evident as suns,  
Impersonal and equal each meridian.

The political values asserted are clear enough: Roach urges the new queen to bring about the final stage of the advance already underway, by establishing a commonwealth of representative governments ("with proper parliaments") for what had been individual "slave islands." Explicit verbal effects reinforce the poem's myth of progress. Thus "commonwealth" in the concluding

passage contrasts with and supersedes the “private fief” of the opening, and other echoes in the poem’s language make the same point. Similarly, Elizabeth I is described at the outset as “royal and arrogant”, “personal as love, desirable as gold”; in the new “prouder empire” of this century, the real sovereign is to be justice, not a royal personage, and this sovereignty will be by contrast “impersonal” and “equal” across the world.

This is an overtly political poem, but more significant than the message is the delivery of it. The poem’s high diction sustains and justifies a statement so direct that it would be impudent if it were not so confident. Roach exploits his occasion to demonstrate (wishfully perhaps) a role for the poet of the islands in the larger forum. “Coronation Verse” is a most public and exposed poem, the work of one who conceives the poet in extraordinary proximity to power. To speak in terms of the poem’s own Renaissance setting, Francis Bacon or Ben Jonson would seem to serve as the functional model here for the poet’s political role and stature: the jester, praise singer, adviser, griot, calypsonian. Such a position is, we should recall, not at all implausible in a small, stratified society such as Trinidad. Oxaal’s characterization is apt: “The fact that Trinidad was really a very small place in which every individual enjoyed some, often ambiguous, degree of acquaintance with a relatively large percentage of the members of his milieu or class always threatened to make a fiction of the belief that public institutions were organized mainly along impersonal, bureaucratic lines.”<sup>2)</sup> As a journalist with strong political affiliations, Roach could expect both official and unofficial access to the highest local circles. The crucial communication gap, for intellectuals and politicians alike, was that between the colony and England. One of the hopes for Federation was that its “proper parliament” might go a long way toward finally bridging that gap.

Unfortunately for such hopes, the Federation of the West Indies never really got off the ground. From Roach’s point of view, the cynicism of Eric Williams is at the heart of this failure. Williams was a respected scholar, leader of the dominant political party, the PNM, and eventually (in effect) prime minister for life. Certainly Williams was adroit in juggling British and American fears of communism, Trinidadian feelings about the huge American military base leased at Chaguaramas, and an array of opinions about Independence and Federation. Even in bare summary his orchestration of the dismantling of the Federation is impressive. The call to arms was first sounded by the PNM party weekly *The Nation* (Mar 11, 1960) in an article entitled, “The Road to Independence Leads through Chaguaramas.”<sup>3)</sup> The next step was a massive PNM demonstration for independence on Apr 22, 1960, the so-called “March in the Rain” to “reclaim” the base at Chaguaramas, at which there was a public burning of the documents referred to as “The Seven Deadly Sins of Colonialism,” including the constitutions of both Trinidad and the Federation, along with the Lease agreement.<sup>4)</sup> Having thus caught the attention of the great powers, Williams in a speech of May 1960 disavowed the apparent flirtation

<sup>2)</sup> Ivar Oxaal, *Black Intellectuals and the Dilemmas of Race and Class in Trinidad* (Cambridge, Mass.: Schenkman, 1982), 144.

<sup>3)</sup> Scott MacDonald, *Trinidad and Tobago: Democracy and Development in the Caribbean* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 125.

with “Communism,” a flirtation which he seems to have staged with the intention of destabilizing the relationships with England and the USA in order to make room for his political maneuvering (the larger context included the “Red Scare” in Guyana and the resulting suspension of the constitution there by the British in 1953). A few months later, in October 1960, C. L. R. James, Williams’ surrogate voice for “leftist” opinions, was accused of “mismanagement,” removed from the editorship of *The Nation*, and subsequently expelled from the PNM.<sup>5)</sup> The powers were moved to negotiate, the base issue was favorably resolved by agreements of 1961, and new elections in that year resulted in a major victory for the PNM against the Democratic Labour Party (DLP), the predominantly East Indian party.

Meanwhile, in Sept 1961, a popular referendum in Jamaica voted against Federation membership. By this assertion of distinctively national identity, Jamaicans dashed the hopes even of their own Prime Minister Norman Manley (an outspoken advocate of federation). For Roach himself, this was more than a shock to his political ideals; the referendum also called into question his longstanding assumption—fundamental to his work and to his sense of himself—that his roots in the peasantry of Tobago qualified him to speak for the Anglophone Caribbean at large. For all practical purposes, the Jamaican vote dissolved the Federation. A stop-gap proposal for a Federation of the remaining states—in effect, the eastern Caribbean alone—was considered at a meeting of General Council of the PNM on Jan 14, 1962, and the conclusion was predictable: “Trinidad and Tobago reject unequivocally any participation in a federation of the eastern Caribbean, and proceed forthwith to National Independence” (the DLP leadership was not consulted in this decision—a sign of things to come).<sup>6)</sup> Trinidad and Tobago became an independent nation later that year. Roach was close to these events. He had moved to Trinidad in 1961, and worked for the PNM’s weekly *The Nation* in 1962–3. It cannot be coincidental that his decade-long hiatus as a publishing poet begins at the moment of Independence.

In the midst of these developments came an unexpected commission from England. The Poetry Book Society asked Roach to contribute to a commonwealth arts festival by providing a poem for presentation at a “festival of poetry” to be held at the Royal Court Theatre in 1965 and for publication in *Verse and Voice*.<sup>7)</sup> It was in several respects a significant commission. Only twenty-five poets from the entire Commonwealth were invited to send their work (eventually eighteen came through with finished poems).<sup>8)</sup> The readings assembled under the rubric “Commonwealth Poetry Today” were important not only for encouraging the writers themselves, but for recognizing this work at a very early point. *Verse and Voice* advertises, among other commonwealth publications, the very first issue of the *Journal of Commonwealth*

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<sup>4)</sup> Oxaal, 133.

<sup>5)</sup> MacDonald, 128.

<sup>6)</sup> MacDonald, 137.

<sup>7)</sup> Roach did not himself participate in the festival, but as it happens his performance of this poem on the Caedmon LP “Poets of the West Indies” (TC 1379; 1971) appears to be the only recording of his own reading of his work.

<sup>8)</sup> *Verse and Voice* (London: Westerham, 1965), 38.

*Literature*, and Anne Walmsley describes the joint reading by Canadian and West Indian poets, as the “first corporate public reading” by West Indian poets resident in London.<sup>9)</sup> The event served as a catalyst for the very active West Indian literary scene in London during the late 1960s. For West Indian writers living in England, these readings, discussions, and publications effectively took over the role of the now-defunct “Caribbean Voices” program—but they were of little use to writers who remained at home. The termination of the BBC program in 1958, however appropriate with respect to imminent independence, was a disaster for Roach (and for others in anything like his position); the sense (even if illusory) that one could indeed address the wide world, the tradition itself, was shattered. Recourse to the round of local periodicals, and even to metropolitan print anthologies, seemed an inadequate substitute for the voice that was carried on the air for anyone to hear. Several West Indian writers associated radio broadcast with the immediacy and democracy of Shakespeare’s public theatre,<sup>10)</sup> and that association is echoed in the Elizabethan milieu of “Coronation Verse,” a poem which imagines for itself a very public hearing. Roach’s contribution to the festival, “Caribbean Calypso,” actually gained access to a public audience in the metropolis, though it was a smaller one than “Coronation Verse” imagined, more circumscribed by the old structures of power, and in a way more condescending, despite the best intentions. Some sense of imperial pageantry seems to underlie the organizers’ advice that “there was no limitation of subject, but *it was suggested that each poem might reflect the landscape or the way of life of a particular country* [emphasis added]”<sup>11)</sup>—how exotic and colorful are these fish left gasping on the beach by the withdrawing tide of empire!

For all its local color, Roach’s poem successfully resists such condescension. The first three stanzas, which together comprise the first of five sections, are drawn directly from the earlier poem, except that nearly all the lines about the queen have been removed. This seems a simple revision, since the occasion for the first poem, the coronation, had long passed. As a result, however, the emphasis is now on the privateering heroes, on Drake and Hawkins, and the poet’s orientation toward their adventures is quite transformed. The stanza about subduing glittering dynasties is now deleted, and three of the lines about Hawkins are also gone. What remains is strikingly altered. Originally Roach wrote that Hawkins had “bartered and sold / and sailed home sinking with rich merchandise,” and for his trouble was acclaimed by the queen. In “Caribbean Calypso” the queen has been eliminated at this point too, and the line just quoted is expanded in two ways: Roach inserts a catalogue of commodities, and amid the commodities, inserts himself: “. . . bartered, sold *me* / for indigo, molasses, cotton, spice.” This is the only

<sup>9)</sup> The readers were George Lamming, Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite, Pauline Henriquez, John Figueroa, Errol John, Evan Jones. They read their own work, as well as poems by Roach, Derek Walcott, Frank Collymore, and Mervyn Morris. Louise Bennett participated in the event, but as a folk-singer (Walmsley *The Caribbean Artists Movement: 1966–1972* [London: New Beacon, 1992], 60).

<sup>10)</sup> Geoffrey Holder’s account of a West Indian crowd listening to the broadcast of a Walcott play is perhaps the most famous instance (*Bim* 14 [June 1951], 142).

<sup>11)</sup> *Verse and Voice*, 11.

first person singular pronoun in the poem (first person plurals occur in sections III and IV), and it has a force equivalent to that of the phrase “nigger voice” in “Coronation.” But the force is exerted to very different ends. The nigger voice that can speak to a queen in the accents of the language’s greatest poet is a voice that has overcome racial prejudice without abandoning identity. The commodified “me” of “Calypso” introduces that poem’s emphasis on slavery, rather than race; it locates the poet not within earshot of power, but among the people whose bondage persists, the “prisoners of history our skin and circumstance.” At just that point, the end of section I, when the poet is discovered among the merchandise, the poem swerves away from its model, abandons blank verse (the three middle sections use shorter lines touched with rhyme and slant-rhyme), and takes up new themes: the consequences of slavery, the failure (in Roach’s eyes, the sabotaging) of the Federation, and the West Indian’s ambivalent love for his own place.

In one of Roach’s fiercest earlier poems, “Something Seen” (1952), the peasants, “beaten down and buried” by drudgery, are grotesquely “resurrected” into a zombified life of ill-paid labor. Here in Part II of “Calypso” Roach makes an effort at redemption: the peasants “buried living in the clay” are now “resurrected to the sun” thanks to their own resources (“hardihood and prayer and song”). This passage follows almost verbatim the corresponding part of another poem, “World on Islands” of three years earlier, in which West Indians similarly were said to “repaint the tragic mask” so that “the shattered man sewn [i.e. “sown”] in the rock / arises smiling like the surf.” The result of this redemptive effort is a simple, almost archetypal, vision in Part IV of “Caribbean Calypso,” the whole poem’s center of gravity:

The drummer and the drum  
 Sprung of an ancient womb  
 Crouch at the tree’s root  
 And are her flower and fruit.

The centrality of this image is highlighted by the most overt and consistent rhyming in the poem, and by the extensive affiliations of its imagery. On the largest scale of this poem’s imagery, the moon is identified as a drum, and the Trade Winds as guitars (to some extent this echoes the very end of a famous Roach poem, “I am the Archipelago” of 1957). On the human scale, Roach assimilates the musicians to the laborers: the physical action of the “hoeman,” kneading corn into bread, associates him with the drummer, and when “reapers pluck rum from a ripe stalk” the verb “pluck” associates them with the guitars. Roach’s intention is plain: musicians, and likewise poets, are like other workers in the village, and verse is an integral part of life. When the hoeman is described as kneading bread “to the fierce rime of need” Roach mobilizes a pun which appears also in “Lady by the Sea,” and at the same time very economically makes it difficult to avoid hearing “rime” as if what it actually meant was “rhythm.” This musical imagery of drum, guitars and dancer looks back to “World on Islands” (1962), and to “Letter to Lamming” (1952) before it, and the unfolding of this poem might best be

understood as an elaboration of these concluding lines from “World on Islands”:

The drummer with his father's knuckles  
 Knocks the torrid drum of the sun;  
 The dancer shakes her castanet the moon  
 To the loud rhyme of love, calling:  
 Come, come, I am the phoenix Eve,  
 The mingled wine of the world's grapes;  
 I am the supple rhythm of the seas;  
 I recreate the world on islands.

But the idea is developed most fully here, where it functions as the main theme. From that perspective, section I functions as a prologue, while section III (on the failure of the Federation) and the opening of V (on a kind of nationalism) stand as episodes that color the main theme's development.

One function of these episodes is to make it clear that the poem's apparently naive central image of rooted village musicians has been arrived at through much meditation on the failure of the experiment with federalism. Roach is left starting back at ground zero, the enclosed world of the village, but without the same hopes for the representativeness of his village and its homogeneity with others throughout the region. Thus the expectations are less lofty here than in “Letter to Lamming” or “World on Islands.” Section III begins like a compressed version of “Love Overgrows a Rock” (1955); it pathetically celebrates how the “imprisoning sea” *would* have been overcome by the federating “seine” net that *could* have gathered the archipelago into one state. But that “sweet blood brotherhood,” which would have linked parish to parish across the sea, was betrayed by politicians: “asses brayed / And the brittle dream shattered / To shards of cays and shoals.” For Roach federation had seemed the way out of bondage, confinement, isolation; in the wake of failed federation, West Indians are left prisoners of history, race, and narrow place. Confinement on one's own island, that “shard of land defiant of the sea,” has been confirmed by events as the Caribbean condition. Roach's odd retrospective characterization in 1968 of his most famous poem, “Homestead” as a “hut to shelter my nakedness” enacts the same rearguard action: it is a *re*-interpretation of the poem in the light of Roach's enforced retrenchment from federalism to the confines of his own “shard” of space.

Like Part III, the opening of Part V—set apart from the rest by its longer lines—functions as an intrusion. The effect is to darken the implications of the final stanza. In “Beyond” (1950), Roach had written of soaring out beyond all horizons; “Love Overgrows a Rock” (1955), on the way to its optimistic expansionism, had regretted that “every dream is drowned in the shore water.” In this passage he writes that, while dreams go out easily over the sea, they eventually come back home. In particular, he anticipates Kamau Brathwaite's *Masks* by concluding that the pilgrimage to “ancestral sources” in Africa ends by finding home nowhere beyond these islands. The return from bold dreams to the “thin shard of land” is ineluctable here, and while

the progression of this argument reiterates that of the early poem "Transition" (1950), there is a new sense of loss (completely absent from the earlier poem) which even the vividly realized lines about Odysseus' return to his island cannot assuage. Roach has learned the hard lesson of Federation's failure: each island is a culture unto itself, and these cultures do not travel well:

In laboratories of islands, the sun  
Compounds chemicals of cultures, colours, tongues  
Strange everywhere but in their hothouse homes.

The reference to compounds of color acknowledges the notion of an essentially mulatto Caribbean which in Roach's work (despite a few poems that celebrate creole identity such as "She" (1949) and "For A. A. Cipriani" (1959)) always has to assert itself against his more usual insistence on the pervasive "blood brotherhood" of black villages. Even in the face of the Federation experience, however, Roach still searches for a way to preserve some version of his vision of homogeneous peasantry as the foundation for West Indian identity throughout the region. Thus after the opening episode of Part V, the poem concludes by returning to the ideas and even the form of Part IV almost as if there had been no interruption. The final lines move somewhat closer to the corresponding passage in "Coronation Verse," but of course the main subject of the earlier poem—the blessings of Federation—has no place here, except in sublimated form. What remains from the previous version is a reduced claim: the region can be united not by politics, or by geography, or even by a shared culture, but specifically by *song*. While the title "Caribbean Coronation Verse" identifies the nature of that poem, the same is not true of the title of the revision. It seems very unlikely that "Caribbean Calypso" is supposed to *be* a calypso. Roach frequently uses musical terminology very loosely, but even so nothing here suggests the form: there are not enough rhymes, and of the three distinct rhythms in the poem (Part I, opening of Part V, and the rest), none is typical of calypso. Lloyd Brown, reasonably enough, therefore treats this as a poem about calypso (though it should be said that to situate calypso in a rural rather than an urban setting is unusual). In the early 1960s calypso was the one characteristically West Indian musical form (reggae had not yet emerged as a contender), and Brown rightly suggests that Roach embraces the syncretic power of that form as a kind of metaphorical substitute for the Federation, capable of forging into "one melodic line" the very thing that had torpedoed Federation, the cultural variety of the separate islands.<sup>12</sup> Roach picks up from "Coronation Verse" the theme of the Caribbean poet's

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<sup>12</sup> *West Indian Poetry*, revised edition, (London: Heinemann, 1984), 79. Brown's interpretation seems to move too far beyond what the text actually presents when he goes on to write in the same place that the poem "notes the calypso as the manifestation of a will to create form and life in the midst of discordance and decay. . . . [T]he calypsonian's art resembles and re-enacts that intellectual and spiritual process which enables the West Indian to reclaim a vital identity and an identifiable culture from the history of the Middle Passage. . . . [T]he calypsonian's art is identical to the poetic imagination itself."

relation to “Shakespeare’s tongue,” but in this later version the point is the *transformation* of that heritage, not its acquisition: “here the songsmith tunes / The stiff Shakespearean rime / to the lilt of Cancer’s seas.”<sup>13)</sup> To the extent that the ‘common’ language inherited from Shakespeare embodies such shared experience as there is, the shared history of colonization, this poem focuses not on the content of such language, but on the medium. There is no lofty advice here, just the assertion of this music, its authenticity and so its power (however local and circumscribed). This may be a post-federation poem, but its vision is still archipelagic. Bereft of the political apparatus he had hoped for, Roach is here retooling his ideals, investing such faith as remained to him in the musical vision of West Indian identity first proposed in “Letter to Lamming” (“old men goatskin drumming, . . . the wine excitement of our island women”). In that instance it is a response to the pull of migration; it is invoked again, in the face of even more profoundly centrifugal forces, in his last published poem, “Verse in August” (1973).

Considerable pathos attaches to the appearance “Caribbean Calypso” in the context of a Commonwealth Arts Festival. We can see all too clearly how a hopeful and even demanding poem about federation had to be rewritten in response to the failure of that hope and what Roach regarded as the booby-prize of independence. Solicitation to publish in England ought to have been empowering for Roach, but when the poem appeared in print he attached a despairing autobiographical note:

Now a newspaperman in Port of Spain, Trinidad. He has been a soldier, teacher, civil servant and failed writer. Born nearly fifty years ago in the tiny, little known island of Tobago where his family are peasants, Roach hoped to become a poet, but his talent for verse did not develop beyond his native dooryard, and after a few years he abandoned the writing of verse. He has never left the West Indies, and is now living and working in Trinidad. None of his verse has been published except in small regional magazines. In the fifties he used to be a contributor to B. B. C.’s ‘Caribbean Voices’.<sup>14)</sup>

It is especially painful to encounter that abjuration of poetry amid the occasion’s very British atmosphere of earnest good cheer, and the irony extends further: now that he had ceased publishing new poems, Roach finally achieved metropolitan recognition. This year saw his first appearance in a British periodical (*London Magazine*) and a British anthology (*Young Commonwealth Poets ’65*); his poems began to be reprinted frequently in anthologies on both sides of the Atlantic during these years, and his only “chapbook,” a fugitive pamphlet entitled *A Collection of Poems by a Poet of Tobago E. M. Roach*, was put together for the Conference of Heads of Caribbean Universities in April, 1967.<sup>15)</sup>

<sup>13)</sup> The spelling “rime” perhaps calls up associations with frost; but Roach uses this spelling elsewhere (earlier in this same poem, and in the contemporaneous “Fugue for Federation”) with no such intention.

<sup>14)</sup> *Verse and Voice*, 113.

When "Caribbean Calypso" appeared in 1965 Roach had already been silent as a poet for three years. Thereafter Roach published only one "new" poem (a revision of "Homestead") until 1970. Confronted with an era of mass action, social fragmentation, repression and cynical betrayal, Roach then published poems wherein the putatively heroic figures are political (and fail) and the village disperses into mass anonymity. These are bitter poems of political disenchantment and personal grief; the role of the poet as witness becomes central, but his testimony is heavily inflected with tropes of renunciation and palinode. The revisions examined here show Roach struggling to make sense of the disasters around him—his dashed hopes for the Federation, his compounded disillusionment with the PNM, with Eric Williams, and indeed with himself. His commitment to Federation had rested upon an assumption of political and cultural homogeneity throughout the region. Events dispelled that illusion. "Caribbean Calypso" still invests in a belief that poetry is a kind of music and a kind of labor, a universal activity essential to life, but from this point on Roach sees little hope for West Indians or for their poets. In this and later poems he sees nothing less than the force of history itself as the enemy of his life-long effort to articulate a vision wider than the horizon of his own island.

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<sup>15)</sup> This irony still reverberates. David Dabydeen and Nana Wilson-Tagee mention Roach only once (*A Reader's Guide to West Indian and Black British Literature*, 19). Moreover, they characterize him as a poet of the 1960s! They are presumably—and revealingly—responding to his visibility in *metropolitan* anthologies of that otherwise unproductive decade.