Writing the Empire Windrush **(critical thesis)**

and *Chan* **(poetry collection)**

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Abstract

This doctorate is comprised of a critical thesis (30%) and a creative submission of poetry (70%). The critical thesis examines representations of the arrival of the *Empire Windrush* at Tilbury on 22 June 1948, interrogating how it became symbolic shorthand for the beginnings of the post-war Caribbean diaspora to Britain, with a central place in the national historical imagination. Critics argue that the representation of the *Windrush* has undergone a dramatic transformation in its 65-year history, from its deployment in media discourses highlighting the problems of immigration, to its reclamation as a positive symbol of Black Britain at the turn of the century. The 1998 commemorations of the fiftieth anniversary were instrumental in this re-appropriation. This thesis examines depictions of the *Windrush* from the moment of its arrival to the present day, to argue that the ongoing centrality of the *Windrush* in the story of the Caribbean–British diaspora has obscured a longer, richer history of black presence in Britain while overlooking the imperial history which prompted the diasporic movements of Caribbean people to the imperial centre.

The critical work of Chapters One and Two provides the context for my poetry collection *Chan,* which is discussed in Chapter Three. The *Ormonde* sequence of *Chan* responds to my interrogation of the *Windrush* creatively, by reconstructing the 1947 voyage of its predecessor, the *Ormonde*. The remaining sections are thematically linked by their engagement with suppressed or unknown histories, writing from personal and public archives and their exploration of migration, diaspora and mixed-race identities.

Dedication

for Richard and Rory

Acknowledgements

My thanks to Bill Herbert and James Procter, my supervisors; Newcastle University; the University of the West Indies and the Chinese Benevolent Association, Jamaica

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Introduction

The critical component of this submission examines the representation of the 1948 voyage of *Empire Windrush*, which carried close to five hundred Caribbean migrants to Britain and is commonly considered to be the inaugural voyage of mass migration after the Second World War. My submission examines how the ship has featured in a range of discourses since its arrival, including its depiction in newspapers and government correspondence as well as its treatment in literary fiction and poetry. It concludes with a critical reflection on my own creative submission *Chan,* a collection of poetry which is thematically engaged with issues of migration, diasporic identities and mixed race, and which offers an alternative narrative of arrival.

My interest in the *Empire Windrush* has its genesis in the fact that my father, Ralph Lowe, was a member of what is now commonly called the "Windrush Generation", a term which denotes those who migrated to Britain from the Caribbean at this time. While the *Windrush* is commonly believed to be the first boat to have brought migrants to Britain, my father had in fact sailed on a ship called *Ormonde* over a year before, in March 1947. This voyage is detailed in a personal notebook he wrote about his early life. The disjunction between private knowledge and the public "fact" of the *Windrush*'s primacy stimulated my critical investigation into the broader ways in which the *Windrush* has been constructed on the British historical stage. This study contextualises my creative work, which seeks in part to disrupt the *Windrush* and other historical narratives and give voice to a variety of supressed histories.

1998 was the fiftieth anniversary of the *Windrush*'s arrival, and is crucial to this discussion because it marked the transformation of the *Windrush* into a "multimedia event" (Pirker 9) and the initiation of a public discussion about the ship's significance on an unprecedented scale. Mike and Trevor Phillips' *Windrush* documentary aired on BBC2 that year and made post-war Caribbean arrival household knowledge. This was reinforced at the time, and since, through the frequent retelling of the *Windrush* narrative on multiple platforms.

It is not only the moment of the ship's arrival that has become publicly historicised, but what happened to the migrants on board and those that were to follow in subsequent decades, now commonly known as the "Windrush Years". Although the dates of this period remain undefined, we might assume they encompass a period of time between the arrival of the first ships and up until 1962 when the doors to Commonwealth immigration were firmly shut by the

1962 Immigration Act.[1] Thus, in manifestations of *Windrush* history since 1998, there is a common intersection or transference from the very specific to the general – while the particular arrival of the *Windrush* has frequently been retold in fastidious detail, discussions of its legacy embrace the experiences of *all* those who made the journey in the period afterwards (or before), on hundreds of different ships, taking many different routes, which now all fall under the *Windrush* umbrella.

In terms of Black British history, a relatively new field of critical investigation dating back to the 1980s, the history of post-war Caribbean migration is arguably one of the first histories to have achieved such widespread and mainstream recognition, and has influenced the growth in representation of black history across national institutions in the intervening years.[2] To examine the ways in which the *Windrush* has been constructed is not to undermine its value to this developing field of enquiry, or its role as a shared point of historical identification for black communities, but to transparently interrogate how its symbolic status has developed and the political climate that has fostered it.

The *Windrush* and post-war migration

For many on the *Windrush, Ormonde* and numerous other ships, the voyage from the Caribbean to Britain would have been perceived as a homeward journey; a number of the Caribbean islands claimed membership of the British Empire and were familiar with life in the imperial centre through the colonial education system and social practices which encouraged a strong allegiance to Britain. The Nationality Act of 1948, which conferred the status of British citizen onto colonial subjects, was further encouragement to see Britain as the "mother country" of an inclusive Empire which would welcome them.

Poverty and lack of employment in the Caribbean at that time were parallel factors in making people want to leave. As well as the loss of many servicemen who fought on the side of the

[1] The Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1962 severely restricted the movement of Commonwealth peoples to Britain. Before the Act was passed, citizens of these countries had extensive rights to migrate to the UK. In response to a perceived heavy influx of immigrants, the Conservative government tightened the regulations, allowing only those with government-issued employment vouchers to come. The leader of the Labour Party at the time, Hugh Gaitskell, called the Act "cruel and brutal anti-colour legislation" ("Commonwealth Immigrants Act 1962").

[2] Pirker has surveyed these recent institutional interests in Black British history which include the National Portrait Gallery enlarging its collection to display portraits of important black figures; the Imperial War Museum's 2009 hosting of *From War to Windrush* which stressed the colonial contribution of African and Caribbean serviceman to the Second World War; and the National Maritime Museum's permanent exhibition on *Slave, Trade and Empire,* part of which highlights the various arrivals and settlement of black people to Britain from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries (10).

Allies in the war, the Caribbean had also suffered economically, because the war had directly affected the exportation of goods, a major source of its income. Migration offered an escape from difficult social circumstances and a tradition of Caribbean migrant labour was already well entrenched. David Dabydeen tells us that "Caribbeans have only ever travelled to work" (i), a statement which calls to mind previous economic migrations to the Panama Canal or the farm labour programmes in America, but also the first journeys of slave ships from Africa to work on the sugar plantations of the Caribbean. With this tradition in mind, post-war Caribbean migration may be read in contrary ways – on the one hand, as a real opportunity for material advancement for a disenfranchised people and on the other, "an extension of the 'Middle passage' with the migrants still merely economic cogs in the Imperial machine" (Brown 45). Inevitably, the motif of the ship is of great significance to the historic relationship between Britain and the Caribbean – from the British slave ships that carried enslaved Africans to the Caribbean islands, to the ships that hundreds of years later carried those slaves' descendants into the heart of the British Empire.

Whether positive or negative, ships are potent cultural symbols, which might in part account for the "success" of the *Windrush* metonym.[3] Photographs or newsreel footage of the ship and its passengers have also provided a visual archive that has augmented the retrospective evocation of this period. Images of post-war Caribbean arrival have in fact been in circulation since the first post-war migrants arrived, and were extensively deployed during and since the 1998 commemorations. The contemporary force of the *Windrush* metonym is apparent through two such photographs shown below, both of which appear in the top ten images using "Windrush" as a search term on Google:

[3] Paul Gilroy's 1993 *The Black Atlantic* has already propagated the ship as a powerful metaphor evoking several elements of the Black Atlantic - the specifics of the travelling beyond national boundaries, and also the Middle Passage of the slave trade that is needed to understand the experience of black transnational modernity: "I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point. The image of the ship — a living, microcultural, micro-political system in motion — is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons … Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activists as well as the movement of key cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs" (Gilroy 4).

Figure 1: *Empire Windrush* arriving at Tilbury 1948 (Credit: Daily Herald) Archive)

Figure 2: Caribbean immigrants arrive at Victoria Station from Southampton Docks 1956 (Credit: Haywood Magee)

While the left-hand photograph shows the actual *Windrush* docked at Tilbury in 1948, the right-hand photograph is unrelated to the actual *Windrush,* showing passengers arriving by boat-train to Victoria some years later, at the height of this period of migration in 1956. This tendency to subsume other arrivals under the *Windrush* narrative is typical, and will be further explored in this thesis.

The Britain to which these migrants arrived was still recovering from the war, a conflict which had forced the country to realise it could no longer hold on to the British Empire. India had been given its independence in 1947, marking the start of a slow dismantling of the Empire over the following decades. But the end of the Empire certainly didn't go hand in hand with the end of the racism that had allowed Britain to justify hundreds of years of colonial domination, clinging to the "illusory status symbol…white skin…and the immutable cultural difference that it seemed to signify" (Dawson 4). This sense of British cultural superiority was maintained long after the colonies were gone. Thus the group that first arrived in Britain from the Caribbean, and those who followed in their footsteps, were to be greatly disillusioned. Most intended to stay only long enough to prosper economically, then return home. But their expectations were at odds with the realities of post-war Britain and they were psychologically unprepared for racist rejection at the hands of the indigenous population (Davis-Gill 186). Most struggled to find adequate housing, an effort well documented in literature and photography showing the signs in boarding housings, "No Irish, no Blacks, no Dogs" (Selvon 1956, Gilroy 2007, Phillips and Phillips 1998). Institutional racism found many migrants de-skilled, only able to secure employment as poorly paid menial labourers, which made the possibility of returning much more

problematic.[4] The public and official hostility they discovered is neatly summarised by Stewart Brown who describes "the racism, the exploitation, the appalling ignorance of the realities of Imperial history on the part of the British people, the sense of loss and isolation and rootlessness" (45). The unofficial "colour bar" in the workplace and in housing had no official recourse and the increasing resentment towards black people, which led to violence and eventually murder, was left virtually unchecked by official channels such as the police and the government.[5]

It is only with hindsight that we can look back at this period of time and see the momentous shifts that have taken place politically and socially since the arrival of the *Windrush*. A distance of decades has witnessed the struggles against racism of these first migrants and their descendants, and the momentous change in Britain's identity as a nation that defined itself through its imperial superiority to one that has repositioned its view of the heritage of its Empire, championing instead the dynamic multiculturalism that burgeoned in the last half of the twentieth century. The struggle-to-success story of the *Windrush,* which has been claimed to mark the birth of this modern multiculturalism, fits neatly with this rhetoric. Yet there is a significant disparity between the rhetoric of politicians and institutions that continue to celebrate positive stories of black integration and the lived experience of many black people in Britain who still consider themselves marginalised in a range of practical and ideological ways.

Thus my reading of the *Windrush* is made through the lens of history, analysing its treatment along a trajectory of time from 1948 to the present moment. Chapter One considers how and why the *Windrush* achieved its eminence and metonymic function in the narrative of Black British arrival history, tracing its treatment through the historical archive of newspapers, government discourse and social histories, considering its dramatic augmentation in 1998 and its most recent depictions. Chapter Two traces the appearance of the *Windrush* in works of literature to consider, among other things, whether these representations corroborate the pre-eminence of the ship in other discourses. The works of several major Black British writers are considered, with a particular focus on the poetry collection *Windrush Songs* by James Berry (2007). The circumstances of the production of these texts also have a particular bearing, and will be

[4] Speaking of himself and his fellow Caribbean migrants, Eaton Christian says: "They expected to come here and find a job, find a home. And in about four or five years, they earn enough money to go back. But a lot of people said that – ninety-nine out of a hundred say that – but they never achieve that goal…because nobody gets rich in four or five years anyway…" (quoted in Phillips and Phillips 71).

[5] Kelso Cochrane, an Antiguan living and working in Britain as a carpenter, was stabbed to death by white men on 17 May 1959, in what is commonly considered the first racially motivated murder (Rowe).

considered alongside an analysis of the ship's representation. Finally, Chapter Three links my critical work to my critical submission, a poetry sequence of three sections, exploring similarities, such as the use of archival research, and drawing out the contrasts, such as that between the "authorial" narrative of the *Windrush* as frequently relayed in history books with the impetus for polyphony in *Chan*.

Chapter One: The *Empire Windrush*

…the reality of the ship has retreated to be replaced by the myth of the Windrush (Phillips and Phillips 2)

Scholarship that considers the constructed nature of the *Windrush* story and how and why it achieved its place in British history, and that challenges this central position, is only now emerging (Hesse 2000, Mead 2007, Korte and Pirker 2011, Kushner 2012). This chapter encompasses some of these relatively new critical positions but extends the analysis to consider a broader range of representations of the ship over time and on multiple platforms (in the media; in social, government and academic discourses; and in photography and newsreel).

The chapter begins by briefly establishing and problematising the contemporary popular perceptions of the *Windrush* since the fiftieth anniversary of its arrival, before taking a chronological approach to map its appearance in a range of discourses, from the moment it docked at Tilbury on 22 June 1948. Beginning with a detailed examination of primary archive material accessed through the British Newspaper Archive and National Archives (including the original newspaper and newsreel reports and the government correspondence concerning the ship's arrival), I then trace the depictions of the ship over the next five decades, predominantly in journalistic outputs. The chapter then returns its focus to the dramatic shift in the appraisal of the *Windrush* in the late 1990s which spurred a fundamental increase in its visibility in multiple modes of representation. Taken together these various and interlocking interpretations of the *Windrush* have produced a narrative, or narratives, around the ship of almost mythic proportions, the primacy of which has arguably suppressed other accounts of black arrival to, and settlement in, Britain. The last section of this chapter will consider some of the gaps and absences rendered by the *Windrush* story and ask what the consequences of such omissions are.

1.1 *Windrush* arrival: a "watershed" moment?

The fiftieth anniversary of the arrival of the *Windrush* to England marked a powerful shift in the perception of the ship's arrival and the dissemination of its history. Prior to this, the study of Black British history, of which the *Windrush* is a part, lay in the hands of a small group of historians and academics and local black community groups and researchers (Pirker 5).[6] Propelled by its anniversary celebrations, the *Windrush* story underwent a dramatic shift, moving

[6] The study (or recovery) of Black British history is a new critical field. Work published before the 1970s predominantly viewed the British experience "as an extension of Caribbean and African cultural expressions". The conception of black history on a British platform emerges from the work in the 1970s and 1980s of a "critical mass" of British-born black people (Pirker 5).

out of exclusive academic channels and into the historical mainstream. A wide range of commemorative events took place including museum exhibitions, education activities and the airing of *Windrush,* a four-part BBC2 documentary directed by Mike and Trevor Phillips, which attracted over 3 million viewers. In the years to follow, *Windrush* history has expanded in scale and is now popularly perceived to mark the beginning of Britain's multiculturalism. That it continues to hold a dominant position in contemporary British history is demonstrated by accounts such as this one from the website of the British Library, which features the following caption on its *Timeline: Sources from History* page, situated beside other key historical dates, including the Atom Bomb and the establishment of the NHS:[7]

> When the *Empire Windrush* passenger ship docked at Tilbury from Jamaica on 22 June 1948, it marked the start of the post-war immigration boom which was to change British society. Images of African-Caribbean passengers filing off the gangplank have become part of the country's social history ("Timeline")

Similar claims can be found on the BBC's web pages: "The arrival of the SS *Empire Windrush* in June 1948 at Tilbury Dock, Essex, in England, marked the beginning of post-war mass migration" (The Windrush Generation), and in numerous popular accounts of British history published in the last twenty years. Many of these employ the familiar terms Windrush Generation and Windrush Years to summarise the experiences of Caribbean migrants at this time, confirming how the ship has firmly assumed a metonymic function, symbolic of all post-war migration to Britain from the Caribbean and firmly entrenched on the British historical trajectory.[8]

Windrush is of course only one facet of Black British history which has come to be studied in recent years. The "newness" of this area of study means that many aspects of this history are yet to be discovered. That the *Windrush* has been discovered (or re-discovered), constructed and positioned on a historical timeline might suggest it holds a certain allure and/or meaning. Eva Pirker points out that the *Windrush* narrative has been "chosen" over far more traumatic histories of the black experience in Britain. She names the various forms of slavery and servitude, riots against black settlers and the history of black schoolchildren institutionally discriminated against

[7] The key dates for the 1940s on the British Library timeline are as follows: 1940 Dunkirk Evacuation; 1941 Dig for Victory; 1943 Make Do and Mend; 1944 Auschwitz Survivor; 1945 The Atom Bomb; 1947 India and Partition; 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights; 1948 NHS Established; 1948 Immigration from India; 1948 Post-war Immigration ("Timeline").

[8] For example, Andrew Marr's bestselling *A History of Modern Britain,* retells the *Windrush* story (193) as does Simon Jenkins popular *A Short History of England* (311)

in the 1960s and 1970s as examples of these traumas (6). In contrast, the *Windrush* story is a "narrative of formation, in which the collective protagonist, the black community, has undergone tribulations and tests but eventually established and successfully integrated into British society" (6).

The emotive quality of the *Windrush* narrative is augmented by the visual archive that seems to illustrate it. The photographs and film footage of Caribbean people arriving at ports and railway stations allow us to read the hopes and fears of the new arrivals into the images with the perspective of hindsight – they do not know of the hardships they will face, while we already know the story to come, of suffering and survival. *Windrush* history in fact has many attractive elements: the aforementioned visual archive to scrutinise; a powerful symbol – the ship – with which to allegorise; a date for memorialisation to focus on; and individuals within the community whose lives and accounts of survival can be recorded and celebrated – the persuasive rhetoric around the first immigrant generation's endurance and resistance in Britain, which paved the way for their children and future generations. All of these elements have been deployed and amplified in the making of *Windrush* history over the last fifteen years.

As such, there is no doubt that the 1998 fiftieth anniversary commemorations of the *Windrush*'s arrival were a watershed moment in the construction and celebration of Black British history, although the voyage and arrival in 1948 may not have marked a turning point in the way it has been claimed. What *is* apparent is the ship's power as a source of mythmaking and imaginary investment.[9] Hundreds of accounts of the *Windrush* now exist in books, media productions, education materials and other outputs, but many of these are imprecise, repeating the same misnomers verbatim. The passenger headcount, their origins and backgrounds and the route taken by the ship are often incorrectly related, despite the fact that a truer account of the ship can be easily deduced from an examination of the passenger list and shipping logs. Many accounts suggest that the ship had arrived directly from the Caribbean, but in fact Australia was its port of origin and it had taken a complex route between Trinidad, Jamaica, Mexico, Cuba and Bermuda, picking up and dropping off passengers – circumstances which remind us of the extent of migratory and other movement after the Second World War (Kushner 167).

[9] Sunder Katwala's 2013 open letter demanding an annual *Windrush* day self-reflexively acknowledges the ship as a source of mythologising: "Exploring the history of the *Windrush* can sometimes disrupt as well as illuminate some of the intuitions and narratives that are often now projected onto it."

As already mentioned in the Introduction, claims of the ship's primacy, on which its place on the historical stage is based, are also inaccurate since other ships brought a smaller number of Caribbean migrants to Britain in the post-war period before the *Windrush*. The assertion that the ship was a first is only true in the sense that it was the first to be met by government officials and journalists, and the first to sail after the passing of the 1948 British Nationality Act, which in awarding colonial subjects a new status – "Citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies" – increased their perceptions of themselves as British. It is likely that this in turn encouraged a large number to book their passage to Britain on the *Windrush*, buoyed by their new-found political identity.

But these large numbers were not to be sustained by the ships that directly followed. Only 180 passengers travelled aboard the subsequent ship *Orbita* in 1948, then 39 on the *Reina del Pacifico* in January 1949 and 253 on the *Georgic* in June 1949. This is one reason that the *Windrush*'s symbolic position is somewhat strange: its journey and arrival are *not* representative of post-war Caribbean migration, but exceptional, in terms of the circumstances of its journey, its complicated, multi-locational voyage and its atypical reception (Kushner 164). It was neither like the boats that immediately came after, which had much fewer migrants on board, or like those at the height of this period of migration in the 1950s when ships regularly sailed a direct route from the Caribbean to Britain and their passengers were left to fend for themselves on arrival.[10]

Few accounts of the *Windrush* mention the two ships that sailed before its voyage, carrying fewer but still significant numbers of migrants: the *Ormonde*, which docked in Liverpool in 1947 and the *Almanzora* which arrived in December of the same year. In fact these two earlier ships are virtually absent from the national historical memory of this period of migration.[11] The *Ormonde* is mentioned in a few lines in the *Evening Standard* concerning the trial in Liverpool of its eleven stowaways (Holman 3), while the *Almanzora* is not mentioned at all in the press at the time, a fact bemoaned retrospectively in 2008 by one of its passengers, Alan Wilmot, who stated that his arrival to Britain "wasn't like the Windrush: there was no publicity for us. It was a case of every man for himself" ("Britain's First Caribbean Immigrants").

[10] Tony Kushner's study of the *Windrush* elaborates on this, pointing out that ships such as the SS *Auriga* or SS *Castel Verde*, which "regularly sailed from Jamaica to the south/south western coastal ports of England in the 1950s" when the majority of post-war Caribbean migratory movement was taking place, are much more typical of these events than the *Windrush* and its passengers (164).

[11] 108 passengers arrived on the *Ormonde* and 150 passengers on the *Almanzora* (Board of Trade 26 1223 130; Board of Trade 26 1231 41).

Of the few recent accounts that do discuss these earlier voyages, Kathleen Paul's study of this period of migration mentions how the already established black community in Britain "received its first significant addition in the form of 108 passengers travelling aboard the *Ormonde* in late 1947" (114) while Robert Winder acknowledges that the *Windrush* was not "the first ship in this story", naming in his footnotes the *Ormonde* but not the *Almanzora* (347). Clive Harris's discussion of post-war migration in *Inside Babylon* describes the then Jamaican Governor's response to the scurry for passport applications in 1947, declaring that the *Ormonde* migrants were only the "'first columns' in a rush for such applications, numbering some 8000 in the last six weeks" (22). Most recently, Kushner's study of migrant journeys includes a discussion of these two ships, considering whether it is London's dominance in migration history that might account in part for the sustained focus on the *Windrush* over the *Ormonde* or *Almanzora* (180). The *Windrush* arrived in close proximity to London, while the *Ormonde* docked at Liverpool and the *Almanzora* at Southampton – both ports of equal or more significance regarding the numbers of ships docking at them, and in terms of importance to migration history, but certainly less discussed. Unlike the *Windrush*, the *Ormond*e and *Almanzora* arrived without ceremony to their respective ports. There was no assistance for their passengers, little media coverage and no photographs – and these arrivals have never been, nor are likely to be, commemorated in the same way as the *Windrush.*

But we should remember that the positive gloss placed on the *Windrush* in the late 1990s may be a turnaround from its treatment in the preceding decade. Barnor Hesse critiques the use of the ship in the British national consciousness during the period after its arrival, claiming that "for forty-nine years" the *Windrush* has stood for the alleged problems caused by immigration and "the problem of 'race' and the racialised other" (98). His claim is echoed less specifically by Mike and Trevor Phillips, who lament the way that images of ships such as the *Windrush* were often deployed in a negative race-relations narrative, in which for a time "every TV documentary about race or migration had to begin with the image of black men or women filing down the gangplank" (2).

I would argue that the period of time, defined by Hesse, of anti-immigration rhetoric might be slightly less than forty-nine years, since it took a few years for the government, the media and the British population to perceive colonial migration as a serious threat, as evidenced by the relatively neutral newspaper reporting of the ship's arrival in 1948. While it seems very possible that some of the inaccuracies of contemporary accounts of the *Windrush* may well stem from

these initial media reports, it is not possible to anticipate either the anti-immigration stance that began slightly later *or* how the ship would much later become an important milestone and site of celebration in British historical culture.

1.2 "Welcome Home!": first reports of the *Windrush*

With only one exception, the arrival of the *Windrush* did not make the front page of national newspapers, indicating that it was not a huge media or social event. The only paper to feature a major story about it was the *Evening Standard*, which on 21 June, as the ship sailed towards Tilbury, sent an aeroplane to survey and photograph it. The headline "Welcome Home! Evening Standard Plane Meets The 400 Sons of Empire", seems as much a boast about the newspaper's ownership of an aeroplane as it does a greeting to the group it characterises as exclusively male (despite the presence of a handful of Caribbean women migrants) and as patriotic members of the British Empire ("Welcome Home" 1).

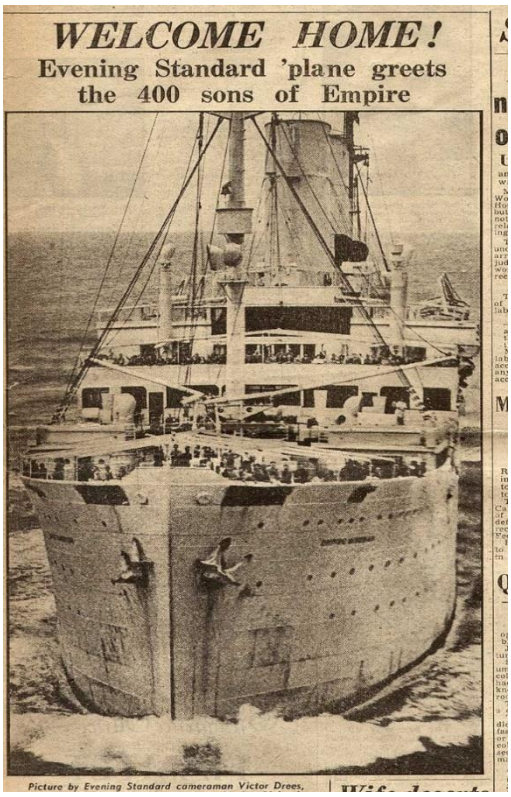
WELCOME HOME!
Evening Standard 'plane greets the 400 sons of Empire
Picture by Evening Standard cameraman Victor Drees.

Figure 3: Front page of the *Evening Standard* 21 June 1948 (Credit: Victor Drees)

Indeed, this headline and others which characterise the migrants as members of an inclusive Empire to be embraced and welcomed should be contextualised in regards to the Nationality

Act, the passing of which had been covered extensively by the print media. The headlines of other newspapers on 22 June 1948, when the ship docked, range from positive, such as the *Daily Mail*'s "Cheers For Men From Jamaica" (3) to scaremongering, like the *Evening Standard*'s "Double Guard On Men From Jamaica" (Holman 5*)*, an account which highlights the security issues surrounding the ship's arrival, without specifying exactly what authorities were concerned about. Similarly, the *Daily Telegraph* focuses on the threat of more migrants to follow – "Landing Checks On Jamaicans: 2000 More Ready To Sail" (3). Various newspapers also report on the fate of the small group of stowaways on board, presumably because of their newsworthiness.

Even in 2015, the *Windrush* is commonly perceived to have sailed from Jamaica and carried only Jamaican passengers, a misnomer which might well have its origins in the homogenising of them as Jamaican in that day's newspaper accounts, such as the *Manchester Guardian'*s "Jamaican Emigrants Arrive" (5) and the *Daily Worker*'s "Jamaica's Job-Seekers Are Here" (Fryer 3). This inaccuracy has become a staple of most narratives around the *Windrush*, despite the fact that around 20% of its Caribbean passengers were from other islands. The articles also unevenly report the numbers of passengers with an equally homogenising slant – "400 Jamaicans arrivals" ("Landing Checks" 3), "492 Jamaicans" ("Jamaican Emigrants" 5*)* and "nearly 500 Jamaican workers" (Holman 5). The passenger list in fact cites 492 passengers who embarked in the Caribbean, but the ship's total passenger count at Tilbury was well over a thousand, including Europeans and Australians, a fact only included in the *Daily Telegraph'*s report of the "1000 Service and civilian passengers" who disembarked at Tilbury ("Landing Checks" 3).

Work is given as the predominant reason for the arrival of the *Windrush* passengers to Britain in accounts both recent and historical, although in fact the motivations of the passengers were manifold. While work was certainly a key motivation, other emotive factors played a role in the journeys made by those on board. Many had already lived in Britain as wartime serviceman and had found return to the Caribbean difficult after the relative freedoms and adventures of life in Britain. Some had formed romantic attachments and were returning to pursue these. While the newspapers highlight the migrants' desire to find work in Britain – "Unemployment has driven these men from their homeland" (Fryer 3); "All were anxious for work" ("Landing Checks" 3) – few offer a more complicated picture or spare the discursive space for the migrants to represent themselves.

The *Evening Standard* is one of the few to quote the *Windrush*'s passengers – Sydney Sand, a welder – whose claim to Britishness chimes directly with the newly passed Nationality Act and the newspaper's patriotic welcome to the "Sons of Empire":

> In Jamaica, there are difficulties about getting work. We want to work so what is more natural than that we should come to England. We are British and we give our support to the Mother country and all that is British. (Holman 4)

Sand's declaration of his desire to work is somewhat contradicted by the reporter, Gordon Holman, whose descriptions of the passengers calls on the "lazy native" stereotype, characterising them as untroubled by the delays in their embarkation: They are "loose-limbed young men, in no way impatient to get ashore", who "strolled from their sleeping quarters…to the cafeteria". Sand's keenness to place his feet on British soil is also undermined by the reporter who claims that, despite the gathering of onlookers and well-wishers on Tilbury Docks, "the Jamaican workers showed surprisingly little curiosity" (4).

The minimal self-representation of the migrants in the newspapers is more noticeable because of the inclusion of interviews with three White British women who were married to Caribbean men. Holman reports that among the passengers is a small number of such wives, returning to England after a period of living in Jamaica. Both Mrs Joyce Baxter and Mrs Eileen Johnson name unemployment as one reason for their return, and express or infer their preference for life in England, contrasted with the strange and basic ways of the Caribbean. "Mrs Johnson said that she would not want to leave England again. 'It was hard to get used to things in Jamaica', she said. 'The food was different. Everything was sweet"'. Mrs Baxter, the "21 year old wife of a Jamaican formerly in the RAF" is reported as saying she'd had to wash the family's clothes in the river, along with the Caribbean women (4). The *Daily Worker*'s interview with a different English wife, "Mrs C.E Monroe, of Coventry" refers to the presence on board the *Windrush* of non-Caribbean passengers – in this case the "60 Polish women" who she alleges to have mistreated her: "'I have come up against a good deal of prejudice from the other white passengers, among whom are 60 Polish women,' she told me. Many people have cut me because they know my husband is coloured"' (Fryer 3).[12]

[12] There were 60 Polish female refugees aboard the *Windrush* whose route to Britain was multi-locational - from "Siberia, via India, Australia, New Zealand and Africa to Mexico" (Gallagher, 1).

The reporting of the English women's complaints no doubt added interest to the newspaper stories, but they also contributed to the continuing characterisation of this event as male in terms of its Caribbean headcount, since there is no word of the several Caribbean wives or single women who were also making the journey. The only Caribbean woman to be mentioned briefly in the same newspaper, and again presumably because of her newsworthiness, is Evelyn Wauchbe, "a coloured girl" and stowaway, reportedly saved by the mercy of her fellow passengers: "When it became too cold to sleep out at night, Miss Wauchbe had to give herself up. The news spread like wildfire. Someone took the hat round, and £48 was collected to pay for a first-class fare" (3).[13]

That the ship was met by government officials is also a well-documented element of its narrative and the presence of authorities in turn accounts for the attendance of journalists (Winder 347–348). Among the officials was Mr Ivor Cummings, a black civil servant sent by the government to reassure the migrants.[14] Reporting on this reception, many of the newspapers imply that Mr Cummings and his colleagues were needed to take control of a potentially chaotic situation. It was them who separated the passengers into groups with varying short-term plans, a division and further homogenisation reported in the *Manchester Guardian* and echoed in other accounts: "Fifty-two of the Jamaicans will volunteer for the RAF or the army; 204 have friends to who they can go with a prospect of employment, and 236 are without jobs" (5).

The fate of the migrants is tracked by a few newspapers over the following days. The *Evening Standard* of 23 June reported the efforts by the migrants to keep warm in the article "Jamaicans Have 6 Hour Ride In Tube". The report details the food and provisions offered at the deep shelter and the arrival of a number of previously "dispersed" men, unable to find the friends they had hoped to locate ("Jamaicans Have" 3). The reception of the British authorities is portrayed as being a welcome surprise to the migrants, with Winston Nelson reported as saying "'we booked as ordinary passengers and expected to have to find our own way around once we get there" (3).

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[13] Matthew Mead's analysis of the cultural memory of the *Windrush* argues that the attempt to recover "a more personal, less monumental history, buoyed by the authenticity of biographical detail" is undermined by the varying reports of Waucbe, whose very name is amorphous, alternatively reported to be Evelyn Wauchbe, Averilly Wauchope, Evelyn Wauchape, and Avril (142).

[14] Ivor Cummings's father was African, which meant Cummings was refused a military commission because the King's regulations insisted officers be of European descent. According to Robert Winder, this fact "perhaps allowed him to sympathise with the new arrivals more than most."(340) At the docks, he spoke to the migrants, saying: "I now want to address my friends who have nowhere to go and no plans whatsoever…I am afraid you will have many difficulties, but feel sure that with the right spirit and by cooperating as I have suggested, you will overcome them" (quoted in Winder 340).

Considering how frequently images of the ship's arrival have been distributed in more recent years, it is notable that, aside from the *Evening Standard*'s aerial photograph, only two other photographs are used in these accounts, a limitation suggesting the ship's slightness as a news story. The *Daily Mail* published an image of the passengers crowded on two decks of the ship to accompany a description of the visual encounter between British sightseers on the launches and the "Jamaicans" who "climbed the rails to wave and shout back" ("Cheers For The Men From Jamaica" 3). The *Evening Standard* again used a now iconic image of three young men posed on the landing platform at Tilbury, perhaps intended to evidence Holman's focus on the migrants' laidback aesthetic style, in their "comfortable loose jackets cut on long zoot suit lines or in shirt sleeves" (Holman 5).

Figure 4: Men aboard the *Empire Windrush*
(Credit: Douglas Miller)

Korte and Pirker suggest that the images of the *Windrush* have become so well-known precisely because there were so few of them, a point which again suggests a subdued media interest in the ship at the time of its arrival. It is also possible that something like the opposite is true – that the *Windrush* became renowned through and because of the visual archive surrounding it, albeit a small one. This included photographs of course, but also the newsreel footage recorded at Tilbury by Pathé news cameras.

Compared with the newspapers, the circulation of the short Pathé newsreels, which tended to focus on sports, news or entertainment features, was relatively small. They would have been exhibited across Britain in Pathé-owned cinemas in the pre-feature slot.[15] Immigration became a recurrent topic of these films as concerns over Commonwealth arrivals grew in the 1950s and 1960s. The *Windrush* film is thus the first in a series of newsreels on this theme, and like the photographs taken that day, the footage has also become iconic.[16]

Around a minute long, the footage was originally part of a newsreel package preceded with a report on the visit to England of the Swedish actress Ingrid Bergman. The footage of Bergman being interviewed at length by Alfred Hitchcock makes a notable contrast with that which follows, of the *Windrush* passengers. While the camera shows Bergman mainly in close-up, the camera work used in the *Windrush* clip has a distancing effect, beginning with an establishing shot of the *Windrush* in port, followed by long shots of the migrants lining the deck, looking down and waving at the camera, followed by mid shots of three men scouring a newspaper and a number of men standing on the gangplank. An English upper-middle class voiceover accompanies the footage, narrating the ship's arrival in reference to the newly passed Nationality Act: "Arrivals at Tilbury. The *Empire Windrush* brings to Britain 500 Jamaicans. Many are ex-serviceman who know England. They served this country well. In Jamaica they couldn't find work. Discouraged, but full of hope, they sailed for Britain. Citizens of the British Empire coming to the mother country with good intent." This type of voiceover was a convention of these newsreels which were made for a British audience and intended to reflect their concerns and attitudes. Despite the welcoming sentiments of the reporter, the sound and image combine to construct the ship and its passengers as something of an anomalous spectacle, reminding us of Hesse's contention that post-war Caribbean arrival has been constructed as the "intrusive object of the unreflexive white gaze". (2000 98)

Following this introduction, four short interviews are conducted by a white reporter. All have the distinct air of being rehearsed and all are framed by the reporter's questions and commentary.

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[15] Since the film's digitalisation and ease of access through the internet, it has been remediated in many other cultural products concerning Black British arrival. See Brunow, Dagmar

[16] By 1955, the slant of the Pathé newsreels had changed in response to the increased hostility to Caribbean migration and the alleged social problems it caused, reflected in newsreel titles such as "Our Jamaica Problem" (1955),"Racial Troubles in Notting Hill" (1959) and "Immigrants Beat Clock" (1962). Two of these films feature extended footage of black people at British ports. Though none of the newsreels feature the *Windrush* itself, the recycled image of black passengers disembarking certainly echoes the photographs and film footage of the *Windrush* at Tilbury, and substantiates both the Phillips' and Hesse's claim about the newsreel.

The first three interviewees are not named but are questioned about their reasons for coming to Britain. Despite the contrived nature of the interviews, the interviewees' sentiments give a complex picture of motivation, echoing the contention that some migrants, as well as seeking employment, wanted to return to the lives they had lived during the war. While one man tells the reporter how he wishes to find a job, "any type, as long as I get a good pay", the other two speak of their desires to return to wartime roles and locations – one to the RAF and the other to Scotland where he had previously been stationed. Finally the interviewer turns to the fourth interviewee, the calypso singer Lord Kitchener (real name Aldwyn Roberts).

Confirming the pre-arrangement of the interview, the reporter declares to Roberts "Now I am told that you are really *the* king of Calypso singers" before asking him to sing a calypso he has apparently written for the moment of arrival. Roberts replied, "Right now?" before breaking into the now famous calypso song "London Is The Place For Me" ("Pathé Reporter Meets"). The song's lyrics – "London is the place for me / London this lovely city" – declare a naive aspiration which speaks both of the entrenched colonial socialisation that fostered a pre-knowledge of London in the Caribbean migrants, and makes an uncomfortable irony with the realities of post-war London yet to be encountered.[17] In his account of this moment in the Phillips book, Kitchener recollects it in wistful terms – "when the boat had about four days to get to England, I get this kind of wonderful feeling that I'm going to land on the mother country. And I started composing this song" (66) – but this version of events contradicts Roberts' uneasy appearance in the film. He looks distinctly uncomfortable, "forced into a contrived performance of loyalty" (Kushner 178).[18]

[17] "*London is the place for me/ London this lovely city /You can go to France or America, India, Asia or Australia /But you must come back to London city. / Well believe me I am speaking broadmindedly, / I am glad to know my 'Mother Country', / I've been travelling to countries years ago, / But this is the place I wanted to know, / London that's the place for me. / To live in London you are really comfortable, / Because the English people are very much sociable, / They take you here and they take you there, / And they make you feel like a millionaire, / London that's the place for me. / At night when you have nothing to do, / You can take a walk down Shaftesbury Avenue, / There you will laugh and talk and enjoy the breeze, / And admire the beautiful scenery, / Of London that's the place for me"* (Lord Kitchener).

[18] Kushner suggests how this performance contrasts with the life experience and oeuvre of Lord Kitchener, who had considered America as a destination before boarding the *Empire Windrush.* Three years later Kitchener added some final lines to the recording of "London is the Place For Me". These lines, marked by the clear falsity, "expose the irony of the proceeding verses": *I cannot complain of the time have spent./I mean my life in London is really magnificent; /I have every comfort and every sport./And my residence is Hampton Court* (178).

1.3 "Their prospects are not good": government reception to the *Windrush*

The confidential government memorandums concerning the arrival of the *Windrush* provide a private counterpart to the public narrative that was produced by the media coverage. While the newspapers imply the smooth and ordered running of the government's reception, adopting a patriotic narrative of "return" to the mother country that strengthened the idea of Britain as an imperial hub, the government response reveals the anxiety about the *Windrush*'s unexpected arrival. Their reaction to the ship forms a complicated and contradictory rejection of the colonials, constructed on terms of imperialist ideology: by moving from the margins to the centre the migrants posed a threat to the old colonial order that structured itself on a strict hierarchy dependent on racial geographies – disenfranchised blacks in their colonial outposts, privileged whites at the imperial centre. Unlike previous colonials arriving in Britain, the *Windrush* passengers formed an unprompted migration that neither the colonial government of Jamaica nor the British government could prevent. They had not foreseen that people who wanted to leave the colonies could simply buy a ticket and board a ship.[19]

A flurry of other memos couched the arrival of the migrants in problematic terms, even before it had docked. One note from the Ministry of Labour reads "The disembarkation of 450 coloured men with little skill and meagre resources is bound to present considerable difficulties…their prospects are not good" (The National Archives (TNA): LAB 8/1499). The government's unpreparedness was exacerbated by its own redundancy. They understood that the migrants' newly conferred citizenship meant nothing could be done to prevent them from travelling. This is expressed with resignation in a memo dated 18 June from Arthur Creech Jones, the then Secretary of State for the Colonies, who called for "the ringleaders of this enterprise" to be discovered, while distancing himself from any involvement – the journey of the *Windrush* "was certainly not encouraged by the Colonial Office" (TNA: CAB 129/28/4). He implies the migrants are imprudent and foolhardy, having decided "to take the risk" of travel despite being actively discouraged by their own government, and made aware of "the difficulties that would beset them on their arrival in this country". In the same discourse, Creech Jones reassures the Cabinet that a similar arrival is unlikely to occur again "because the transport is unlikely to be available" (TNA: CAB 129/28/4), an argument backed up in the Home Office correspondence that pinpoints the "peculiar combination of circumstances… not likely to be repeated" of cheap

[19] In fact, a significant element of spontaneity did feature in these events, since it was an "enterprising skipper" who had the idea of advertising the passage to the UK, hoping to make some money on the return leg of a journey dropping back Caribbean troops (Winder 335).

passage being made available on a troopship and the fact of many passengers being ex-servicemen who "had money in their pockets from their gratuities" (TNA: HO 213 716).

The fates of the migrants in Britain become the focus of further correspondence. According to the then Minister of Labour, George Isaacs, their lack of "organised arrangements" would lead to "difficulty and disappointment" (quoted in Winder 338). These concerns were met with suggestions for the management of the situation, such as that from the Ministry of Labour, dated 19 June, petitioning for the colonials to be placed into small groups and dispersed, so as not to become "recognisable as a problem" (338). Creech Jones anticipated the passengers would have little money, having "spent most of their savings on buying their passage to England" and be homeless and jobless unless provisions were made for them" (TNA: CAB 129/28/4).

The practical arrangements made for the incoming *Windrush* passengers are detailed by Kathleen Paul's analysis of these discourses. She stresses that the language used to characterise them and the decision to make separate arrangements for them, outside of the realms of usual provision, frames the migrants as "alien and needy" from the outset, while accepting their right to claim British citizenship, "albeit a different version from their own" (116). She compares this treatment to that given to the European Volunteer Workers (EVWs) who were refugees of the Second World War and supported by the government in a range of ways, a duplicity the government acknowledged would cause problems if the colonials realised they were not receiving equal treatment.[20]

The agency of the colonial migrants is perceived as a threat, as suggested in a letter sent by a group of ten MPs to Clement Atlee on the day the ship docked. They express the concern that, unlike colonial serviceman, these passengers had not been "selected in respect to health, education, training, character, customs and above all, regardless of whether assimilation is possible or not" (TNA: HO 213/716). The meeting of the *Windrush* at Tilbury Docks by members of the Ministry of Labour and Colonial Office arose directly out of government concerns that disorder did not occur as a result of the presence of a large number of uninvited migrants on the streets, without work or shelter. It resulted in the grouping of the migrants by their short-term plans. Some were dispersed to find family and friends, while those without contacts were given ongoing transport to the temporary accommodation in the deep shelter on Clapham Common.

[20] According to Paul, "The government demonstrated its long term commitment to EVWs by negotiating deals with trade unions, arranging for the transport of dependents, and investing time and money in helping the Europeans adapt to the 'British way of life'" (118).

This hospitality was not really hospitality at all, but an attempt to control the migrants and dilute their intrusion into the British landscape. Others in authority, such as the Privy Council, opposed this assistance, urging that no "special efforts should be made to help these people", so as not to encourage more to come (quoted in Winder 338). And in fact, by the time the *Reino del Pacifico* arrived several months later, no further assistance was offered to the new arrivals, in the hope of discouraging more from following (Paul 119).

1.4 Have you heard about the *Windrush*? 1948–1998

The prevalence of the *Windrush* story in contemporary historical discourses might obscure that fact of its very recent augmentation into these channels. Prior to the late 1990s, little attention was paid to the ship, leading Korte and Pirker to claim that it had "practically slipped from Britain's historical consciousness" and to refute a widespread knowledge of the *Windrush* before this time. They offer the example of a fiftieth anniversary speech given by Prince Charles who acknowledged he had not heard of the *Windrush* until invited to mark the occasion (28).

In fact the ship appears in a handful of cultural and critical texts in the decades between its arrival and 1998, but its absence from many earlier writings about Caribbean migration during this time is equally notable. There is no mention of the ship in all but one of a number of early sociological studies of Caribbean migration and settlement including *London's Newcomers* (Ruth Glass 1960), *Dark Strangers: A Study of West Indians in London* (Sheila Patterson 1963), *Black British* (R.B. Davidson 1966), *Black British and White British* (Dilip Hiro 1971) *Black Britons* (Frank Field and Patricia Haikin 1971) or *Black Britain* (Chris Mullard 1973). The exception is Joyce Egginton's 1956 *They Seek a Living,* a study which details the social-economic conditions that compelled migration along with the specific details of the ship's passage, such as the news furore around its departure, the rush to purchase tickets and the British response.

It is clear that the *Windrush* 1948 voyage was not well known at the time Egginton was writing, because she names the 1954 voyage, when the *Windrush* foundered off the Algerian coast, as the moment "it was to become really famous". Her approach is to write the significance of the earlier *Windrush* voyage into history – "Windrush's journey to the West Indies and back in the first half of 1948 was also epic, although no one visualised the consequences" (55) – yet despite her efforts, there was no obvious uptake of the *Windrush*'s importance by other commentators of the time (Kushner 165). In fact, it was another ten years before a brief and incidental mention of the *Windrush* appeared in Donald Hinds 1966 memoir of arrival and settlement, *Journey to An*

Illusion: *The Caribbean in Britain.* Hinds collated the interviews of many migrants to Britain at this time, and the *Windrush* is mentioned by one ex-serviceman who described the frustrations of servicemen who had returned home after experiencing the relative freedoms and adventures of wartime Britain. It was this that motivated them to return, and when, in his words, "the ss *Empire Windrush* became a household word in the West Indies as ex-servicemen and their close relatives trekked north" (53).

A much more significant discussion of the ship featured in an 1968 article, "Voyage to the Promised Land", which featured in the *Sunday Times* colour supplement magazine. This was a special news story by Dick Adler to mark twenty years since the arrival of *Windrush* and more importantly, appeared at a time of increased racial friction, a few months after Enoch's Powell's "Rivers of Blood" speech. Powell's rhetoric, which criticised immigration from the Commonwealth and the anti-discrimination legislation that had been proposed in the United Kingdom, urged the repatriation of colonial migrants to their countries of origin. This must have provided a contextual framework for readers of Adler's feature, which traced a handful of the original *Windrush* migrants who had settled in the UK. In doing so, he foreshadowed the way in which the ship would be later mythologised by claiming that "immigration (to Britain)…began on that grey June morning at Tilbury" (10) and repeating the misnomer that all of the migrants were Jamaican.

The details of the ship's journey and arrival and the response in the media and House of Commons are also described in Adler's piece and are accompanied by several profiles of original *Windrush* passengers, who discuss their lives in Britain. Most are described as regretful and disappointed by their reception by the British: "...the people I talked with seemed genuinely sorry for England because she had not treated them better…the England of 1948 was a long way from the Victorian glories painted by schoolmasters and missionaries, and most people thought Jamaica was a place in Africa" (14). He claimed to have traced and spoken to around thirty of the original passengers, and said of those he had been unable to locate, "some have gone on to America or Canada or back to Jamaica. A few have died; others have disappeared from sight for a hundred reasons" (14). The feature's impetus is to trace and reveal the fates of the *Windrush* passengers, a notion which echoes Egginton's attempt at the "*rediscovery* of the *Empire Windrush* and its Caribbean passengers". But like Egginton's, Adler's text is an isolated journalistic account that did not give rise to further recovery work (Kushner 167).

The most significant account of the *Windrush* in this broad period is probably in Peter Fryer's *Staying Power* (1984), nearly two decades later. Fryer is likely to have played a key role in centralising the place of the *Windrush* in British history, making him, according to Matthew Mead, "enormously influential in the shaping of this history" (139). Fryer had been a journalist for the *Daily Worker* in 1948, present at Tilbury when the *Windrush* landed, and his report "Five Hundred Pairs of Willing Hands" focused on the conditions in Jamaica and the migrants' desire to find employment. He contributed a second equally sympathetic story to the *Daily Worker* three weeks later, "The Men from Jamaica are Settling Down", an update on the progress the migrants had made since arriving (3). Fryer went on to become a leading historian of Black Britain, and *Staying Power* is still considered an authoritative survey of Black British history. In its chapter on post-war immigration he retells his 1948 encounter with the *Windrush*, positioning it as the first of the ships to arrive from the Caribbean following the Second World War, then lists the names and dates of subsequent arrivals – the *Orbita* and *Reina del Pacifico* later in 1948 and the *Georgic* in 1949 (355). This threefold position as historian, journalist and witness with a personal memory of the *Windrush* imbues Fryer's account of events with great authority.

Only four years after Fryer's book, the fortieth anniversary of the ship's arrival saw the first publicly sanctioned effort made to memorialise the *Windrush* in celebrations organised by Lambeth Council and the publication of a booklet as a joint initiative between Onyekachi Wambu (the then editor of *The Voice* newspaper), Lambeth Council and the South London Press. Its title, *Forty Winters On,* was a direct reference to Arthur Creech Jones' claim in 1948 that he did not expect the migrants to "last one winter" (TNA: CAB 129/28/4). But while the publication certainly indicates the importance of the ship as a site of testimony in need of recovery, these collaborative efforts, according to Dominic Cavendish writing in 1998, "received almost no attention". He compares the lack of response to *Forty Winters On* with the serious critical reception given to Wambu's 1998 anthology *Empire Windrush: Fifty Years of Writing About Britain*, raising a question about the dramatic change in attention afforded to the ship during the intervening decade: "why is the significance of 22 June, 1948, only now being accorded due public recognition? ("Riding an Emotional Rollercoaster"). That the *Windrush* was largely unknown prior to its 1998 commemorations is also suggested in correspondence from that time. The contention that the *Windrush* was a *recovered* history was offered by the producers of the groundbreaking *Windrush* television series who promoted it to the BBC in or around 1998 "on the basis that it was exposing hidden history" (Kushner 165).

1.5 A very British story: the *Windrush* in 1998

How was it that the meanings attached to the *Windrush* shifted so dramatically in the late 1990s? We have already touched on the inspiring nature of the *Windrush* story as one reason for its augmentation into the British mainstream. It is by and large a positive and appealing story about migration, at a time when migration was (and still is) a fraught and contested topic. But there are a range of other possible and interlocking reasons for the popularity of the *Windrush* narrative. One of these concerns the specific role of organisations such as the Windrush Foundation, set up in 1996 to promote and champion the ship's arrival as a vital symbol to be commemorated fifty years on, and still working today to promote this and other significant events in Black British history.[21]

Yet while the work of the Foundation has certainly grown in profile, its goals and achievements might not have found such a broad public platform without a changing cultural and political landscape. Korte and Pirker suggest that the 1998 *Windrush* commemorations must be placed into the context of a changing culture in which "the consumption of history" has increased. This late twentieth-century "boom", refers to the ways in which history in multifarious forms has been made available to general audiences, rather than special interest ones, across a range of platforms – enabled in large part by the rise of information technology (11). History has become "a major entertainment source" accessed through the mediums of cinema, literature and theatre, themed environments and special events and exhibitions. While still delivered through the channels of education and museums, history is no longer bound to these as the only avenues through which a general public may access it (12). These new levels of consumption may be attributed to "unprecedented outbursts of national retrospection", caused by events such as the death of the Queen Mother, or the diminishing personal testimony to important periods in recent history because witnesses, such as those to the First World War, are dying out (Cannadine 1). Regarding the *Windrush,* Onyekachi Wambu suggests that the "groundswell of retrospection" around it has the same impetus. Reflecting on his 1988 endeavour with *Forty Winters On*, he says "what started back then was a realisation that many of the people who came over in the first wave were beginning to die off or return home. There was a changing of the guard to a certain extent, and we had to make sense of what happened" (quoted in Cavendish).

[21] The organisation's aim to play "the leading role in preserving the history of the arrival of the first post-war wave of Caribbean settlers at Tilbury Docks, Essex on 21 June 1948, and the celebration of their contribution to the making of modern Britain" clearly situates the ship as making the inaugural voyage, and it has been instrumental in promoting the ship's arrival as the start of Britain's multiculturalism ("Windrush Foundation History").

Yet the increased interest in Black British history in general at this time must be accounted for by a shift in the society and politics of Britain, allowing a history previously ignored or treated as external to Britain (belonging to Africa or the Caribbean instead) to become central to British historical culture. Kushner contextualises the "relatively muted" 1988 commemorations by stressing how Margaret Thatcher's government had a mono-cultural agenda which projected an "eternalised measure of an imperial national identity", considered to be under attack from any number of indefinite threats (167). Under her rule, British history privileged white upper class experience and rural locations, and peddled a number of essentialised notions of Britishness under the umbrella term "heritage" (Wright 3). Conversely, the agenda of the New Labour government that followed self-consciously embraced a new version of Britain as multicultural. The treatment of black history under this leadership marked a clear shift away from the previous construction of national identity, rethinking both the then present-day initiatives and the representations of the past. This new agenda claimed to acknowledge "a diversity of experiences in the past" and that "notions of British- or Englishness can no longer be conceived as purely white" (Korte and Pirker 20-21). The re-positioning of historical events such as the *Windrush* arrival responded accordingly to the need of an ethnically diverse society to form a "new view of national history and its relevance to the present" (20). Thus Black British history, which had not previously "fit" the earlier master narratives of British historical culture, moved from the peripheries of academic channels and work of community groups, firmly into the mainstream (24).

The *Windrush* documentary, which aired on prime-time television in the summer of 1998, certainly placed the subject of post-war Caribbean migration centre stage of British historical concerns. It was one of several televisual explorations of Black British history that year, including the BBC's four-month season of programmes celebrating black people's contributions to British life and Channel 4's own documentary *The Windrush Years*. Where the *Windrush* arrival and the experiences of its passengers had previously been narrated and controlled by white broadcasters (such as the Pathé newsreel of 1948), they were now under the control of black film-makers who ensured the migrants had the discursive space to represent themselves.

The scope of *Windrus*h proliferation also included a number of autobiographical and socio-historical accounts of post-war Caribbean migrants' experiences, including Tony Sewell's *Keep on Moving: The Windrush Legacy – The Black Experience in Britain from 1998* (1998) and Vivienne Francis' *With Hope In Their Eyes: Compelling Stories of the Windrush Generation* (1998). Museum

exhibitions were held in London, Leeds and elsewhere, alongside other memorialising acts such as the opening of Windrush Square in Brixton and of a commemorative rose garden in West Green, the broadcast of a *Windrush*-themed *Songs of Praise* from Southwark Cathedral, and the proposal of an annual "Windrush Day". A number of education projects were also set up, including the "Descendants of the Windrush Project" aimed at black Britons whose parents or grandparents had migrated from the Caribbean.

The photographs and newsreel which had allegedly demonised and objectified the immigrants in the decades previously were then employed as images to be observed and honoured, reflecting Hall's contention that all photography is already positioned and "deployed…with meaning" (83). Indeed, this potential for "celebratory commemoration" is identified as a characteristic of the types of histories selected to be lauded in the new historical agenda of the 1990s and after (Korte and Pirker 26). Both *Windrush* and the 2007 Bicentenary of the Abolition of Slavery (which has also been widely commemorated) offered an anniversary to be marked, provided distance between contemporary British attitudes and the misconduct(s) of the past, and offered available "images and figures to impress themselves on public memory" (26).[22]

For many in the Black British community, the *Windrush* celebrations signalled an important sea-change, as observances that allowed Black British history to be utilised positively. For the younger generation, the teaching of their own history may have been a validation of their lives and experiences, an important harnessing of roots and origins. For others, *Windrush* signalled a celebration of black political identities and strength through cohesion. The celebrations observed the significant history of resistance to the official and popular discrimination that has been at the centre of the Black British experience. According to Roshi Naidoo, the celebrations championed "the coming of age" of different black cultures in Britain: "the new political imagining, cultural styles and languages (that) open up the spaces where Britishness intersects with varied diasporic heritages, to create vibrant and resilient identities" (179).

[22] In the case of the bicentenary, figures such as Olaudah Equiano and William Wilberforce were celebrated, whereas with the *Windrush* it was the migrants themselves who found themselves applauded as "pioneers" whose reliance and strength in the face of great adversity could now be finally acknowledged. Several former *Windrush* passengers figured prominently in the commemorations and have become relatively high-profile figures. These include Oswald 'Columbus' Deniston, who ran a stall in Brixton Market for many years; Sam King, who went on to become the mayor of Southwark and write his autobiography; and Vince Reid, who was 13 when he left Jamaica and was the youngest Caribbean passenger.

1.6 All in the same boat? Beyond 1998

Critics in 1998, and since, have discussed the consequences of augmenting the *Windrush* story on the Black British historical trajectory. While some at the time saw the *Windrush* celebrations as an opportunity to commemorate all migrations from Britain's former colonies, others interrogated the parameters of the *Windrush* umbrella and whether it belonged to "all Caribbean people, African Caribbean people, those of Jamaican descent, or maybe only those directly related to the handful of people who docked at Tilbury fifty years ago?" (Naidoo 173).

The focus on the *Windrush* might conflate or exclude other immigrant journeys from nations that have quite distinct and separate histories from the Caribbean. Simultaneously the postcolonial emphasis of the *Windrush* further obscured the fact of other post-war migrations that were not postcolonial. The European "DPs" (displaced persons) for example came in significant numbers but their arrival in Britain has not been marked in anything like the same way. There was also the risk of the 1998 celebrations obscuring the realities of a Black Britain still suffering from ongoing racism at popular and institutional levels, racist violence and "Fortress Europe" anti-immigration policies that relied on an exclusive (white) definition of nation. Gail Lewis and Lola Young compared the *Windrush* celebrations and the long-awaited enquiry into the racist murder of Stephen Lawrence of the same year to illustrate the gap between the idealising impulses of national celebrations and the actual experiences of the black community (80).

Others, then and after, were also were cautious about the lauding of the *Windrush*'s arrival as a key moment on the trajectory of Black British history, especially from those involved in the recovery of pre-*Windush* histories of Black and Asian settlement in Britain. Hakim Adi, the then editor of the Black and Asian Studies Association (BASA), lamented that "work done to document the pre-1948 history has largely been ignored through the Windrush celebrations" (quoted in Kushner 173), while Lewis and Young warned that to interpret the *Windrush* as "a beginning in any simple sense" would only replay the same "inaccuracies and erasures which have been belied in recent years by historical work on black presence" (79). This earlier history was simultaneously highlighted and written out by the commemorations. While *Windrush* historians Tony Sewell and the Phillips brothers both acknowledged the pre-existing black communities of Britain in writing of slaves and seafarers present in Britain for centuries, they both also augmented the status of the *Windrush* to undermine these. Sewell claimed of the ship's arrival that "Britain would never be the same again" (1) while the whole premise of Phillips and Phillips' book was to position the *Windrush* as an inaugural point of the "*irresistible rise* of multi-

racial Britain" (my italics), the inevitable inference of which is that Britain before was not significantly multi-racial. Hesse claims that this construction obscures the existence of already settled Black British communities (2000 98), as did Cy Grant who spoke at the BASA conference in 1998, urging his audience not to forget "that black people were here long before Windrush":

> Our presence goes back to Roman times, as soldiers. From the 16th to 19th Century black people were here as seamen, servants, artisans, society pets and dandies, as well as musicians (quoted in Kushner 173)

While Grant reached far back into history to furnish his argument, Hesse cites the Liverpool race riots that took place two weeks before the *Windrush* docked as evidence of an obvious pre-existing black presence, arguing that the nation's imagined chronology of black history is characterised by omissions and "a desire to produce a national narrative" that is linear and deregionalised (80).

This urge for a simple narrative to account for the presence of black people in Britain might, according to Matthew Mead, account for the mythmaking around the *Windrush* and the continual repetition of inaccuracies surrounding it. He links this mythologising to critical discussions around the formation of nation states whose foundations rely on "atavistic apologues" but who also need to account for the influx and settlement of foreigners, a characteristic of almost all modern nations (140). The post-war period was a time of enormous cultural change, and anxiety around immigration called for a "neat" story of arrival – of 492 Jamaican work-seekers arriving at Tilbury – which could be repeated verbatim. (146). According to Mead, the significance does not lie with the repeated mistakes about the *Windrush* but that their continual repetition was "provoked by a nervousness about black immigration and then appropriated by the Caribbean community and sympathetic others" (146). By 1998, the British nation had a need for a different sort of story about its heritage, but rather than replacing the narrative of the *Windrush*, the emphasis it was given was changed, while the elements stayed the same. These elements, originally solidified through their repetition in white mainstream discourses, have since the late 1990s been frequently recycled by those who attribute to the *Windrush* a much more positive value.

But the use of this narrative is arguably still problematic, since it may position the migrants' arrival as sudden and almost unaccountable, as though the ship sailed through the mists at Tilbury to the surprise of both the British authorities and the British people themselves, and

forever changed the racial make-up of the nation. In doing so, this version of events obscures the traumatic colonial relations that accounted for post-war migration from the Caribbean and represses the centuries of Britain's racialised involvement with its colonies. It allows racism to be blamed on the migrants themselves, rather than on a pre-existing framework of perception on the part of the British, constructed through imperialism and invigorated by the increased contact with and representation of the black "other" within the borders of the British nation. In reality, many of the migrants had been serviceman in Britain and experienced a wartime tolerance on the part of the white population. In the post-war period, this tolerance of outsiders for the war effort was largely forgotten as the British closed ranks against the immigrants on all fronts.

1.7 The *Windrush* now

In 2015 the story of the *Windrush* is still incredibly potent and very much alive in social and media discourses. Although demands for an annual "Windrush Day" have not yet been met, the anniversary of its arrival is marked every five years, most recently in 2013 for the sixty-fifth anniversary. The 2013 commemorations were of a smaller scale than those of the fiftieth or sixtieth anniversaries, but still included a series of national celebrations that ran from 1 June and culminated in special musical events and an exhibition at the London Cruise Terminal at Tilbury where the *Windrus*h originally landed. The momentum to continue these memorialisations stems in part from an awareness of the advancing age of those surviving passengers. Speaking on the sixtieth anniversary, local councillor Patrick Vernon urged people to "acknowledge and preserve the legacy of those who came to Britain" while Sunder Katwala's open letter to *The Times* in 2013, entreating for an annual day of commemoration, called for further acknowledgement of the contributions of those who came. In 2015, the Southbank Centre held a public discussion around the *Windrush* as part of its *Changing Britain* festival, illustrating how the ship and its legacy are still the subjects of an ongoing public conversation.[23]

The *Windrush* continues to appear in recent cultural outputs. Many museums continue to offer the *Windrush* as a strand of British history in inventive ways. For example, The Museum of London offered primary school workshops on "Windrush and Cultural Change" in 2011, inviting children into discussions and role plays to explore this history of migration. Autobiographical accounts such as Sam King's *Climbing up the Rough Side of the Mountain* (2004)

[23] The *Changing Britain* festival included a series of panels and readings that looked back "at post-war Britain, from a country rebuilding itself after the war effort to a country on the brink of the new technological age." The Windrush Legacy panel, in which the author took part was billed as follows: "An exploration of the different narratives and legacies of the Windrush Generation. Panel includes historian Mike Phillips, Colin Grant, author of *Bageye At The Wheel*, and poet Hannah Lowe. Chaired by actor and director Burt Caesar."

have joined the social histories of the *Windrush* reflecting the desire for individual testimony in the narration of this history, alongside a number of creative accounts of the *Windrush* arrival and experience in literature, film, theatre and television. In 2013, the Olympic opening ceremony directed by Danny Boyle featured a visual evocation of the ship's arrival which drew attention to the role of the media in situating the boat – a model of the ship made to look like it was formed from newspapers of the time was accompanied across the Olympic arena by actors playing the ship's passengers.

Figure 5: Olympic opening ceremony (Credit: Mike King)

Other popular historical "products" aimed at broad audiences include texts such as the two-part BBC adaptation of Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* (2009), the musical *The Big Life* (2004), staged at the Theatre Royal Stratford East, and the West End Apollo Theatre's *A Dream Across the Ocean*, directed by Ray Shell, a gospel musical staged at the Hackney Empire in 2013. At the other end of the spectrum, an alternative visual representation of the *Windrush* is John Akomfrah's 2011 arthouse documentary *Nine Muses*, a film which interweaves archival footage of black and Asian people arriving, living and working in Britain with elliptical shots of an anonymous figure alone on the barren Alaskan coast. The film utilises quotes from a range of sources from *The Odyssey* to *The Waste Land* to suggest that postcolonial narratives "could just as easily be seen in existential or mythic terms", and invites the audience "to reflect on the labels by which history – especially diasporic history – is framed and categorised" (Sandhu). While independent film-making such as Akomfrah's might challenge the ways in which we perceive Commonwealth migration to Britain, many mainstream sources continue to peddle the same unvarying narrative around the *Windrush* which, in recycling the same elements, reinforce its

dominance. Other texts, such as Michael McMillan's play *After Windrush* (1998), a retelling of Romeo and Juliet, utilise the *Windrush* moniker, but do not address that specific history. BBC 1's "Windrush and Clinton visit" episode of *Real Lives Reunited* (2015) is a pertinent example of this recycling. The show, which focuses on "reuniting people who shared extraordinary moments together", aired an episode in May 2015 that brought together four of the original *Windrush* passengers and facilitated their "emotional return to the port of Tilbury where they docked all those years ago". The passengers were Sam King, a long time spokesperson for the black community in Britain and co-founder of the Windrush Foundation; Alford Gardener, a fellow Jamaican migrant; Dorinda Hulton, who had travelled as an eighteen-month-old child with her English family; and Peter Deakin, the ship's baker. The involvement of Hulton and Deakin is noteworthy since the *Windrush*'s fame relies on the fates of its Caribbean passengers, who are commonly assumed to be its only passengers. Neither Hulton nor Deakin have the same kind of stake in the ship's historical legacy, except for the incidence of their presence on board, but their involvement in the programme draws attention to the fact of other people aboard the ship, beyond the familiar 492.

In the same way as the British Library timeline centralised the *Windrush* on a British historical trajectory, the voiceover of the episode places the *Windrush* arrival among other key historical events of 1948: Burma's independence, the Big Bang Theory and Britain beginning to rebuild after the Second World War. Overlooking the centuries-old presence of non-white people in Britain, the ship's arrival is described as "a watershed moment in the history of Britain", changing forever "the ethnic and cultural make-up of the country". Towards the end of the episode, the visual potency of the *Windrush* sailing towards Tilbury is re-enacted by the playing of the original Pathé footage of the ship's arrival to the four guests, and inviting them to reminisce about the voyage. They are then transported physically to Tilbury and filmed sailing (albeit in a smaller boat) towards the docks, describing their memories of viewing England for the first time. Ironically it is Peter Deakin, the baker, who declares "we became part of history" and "I was part of it." Shots of the English coastline, Tilbury Docks and the Union Jack raised above the pier are orchestrated visual triggers to stimulate reminiscence and invite the guests to position themselves inside the mythic narrative.

Aired in 2015, *Real Lives Reunited* reminds us the *Windrush* is deeply entrenched in a larger British historical narrative. It is one example among many which retell its arrival as a formative moment.

From TV programmes to museum outputs, to stage productions to literature, *Windrush* history continues to be repackaged in all kinds of ways.

Chapter Two: *Empire Windrush* in Literature

This chapter begins by discussing the various ways in which the *Windrush* has been harnessed in critical discussions of Caribbean–British literature. It goes on to consider the treatment of the *Windrush* in literary expressions in both prose and poetry, focusing particularly on James Berry's poetry collection *Windrush Songs* (2007). Rather than discuss these writings by genre, I will treat them chronologically, since the circumstances of their production are arguably of more significance than their formal arrangement. My substantial concentration on the poetry of James Berry aims in part to address a prolonged critical neglect of this otherwise prominent literary figure, himself often historically grouped with writers of the so-called Windrush Generation. At the same time, I use his poetry as a bridge into the current generation and my own creative submission as part of this thesis, *Chan*.

2.1 Windrush in literary criticism

Windrush is ritually invoked in the Black British literary or cultural criticism that has emerged since the late 1990s, following the fiftieth anniversary of the *Windrush*'s arrival, but is notably absent from earlier critical writings about Black Britain such as Houston Baker's *Black British Cultural Studies* (1996) or essays such as Stuart Hall's 1984 essay "Reconstruction Work" which considers images of Caribbean post-war arrival.

Post-1998 literary criticism often retells the arrival of the *Windrush* as a straightforward contextualising strategy and some critics employ the metonymic construction of "Windrush writers" or "Windrush writing" to collectively describe those writers who migrated to Britain from the Caribbean in the post-war period and pursued literary careers (McLeod 2004, Stein 2004, Ball 2006, Dawson 2007). Among these are writers from Jamaica such as James Berry, Andrew Salkey and Stuart Hall; Barbadians George Lamming and Edward Kamau Brathwaite; Trinidadians Samuel Selvon, CLR James and VS Naipaul; and Guyanese writers such as Wilson Harris and Edgar Mittelholzer. Since the metonymic function of the *Windrush* has only been in common circulation since 1998, there is a disjunction in its application to these writers and writing produced many years earlier, before the augmentation of the *Windrush* narrative onto the historical stage. Simultaneously, the term provides critics with an easy shorthand, precisely because it has been so widely disseminated.

The introduction to Mark Stein's *Black British Literature: Novels of Transformation* defines the writing of this early generation as those who were born in the Caribbean, but migrated to Britain and whose writing "record(s)…a confrontation between their protagonists and Britain, its institutions, its people, and some of the strategies that were employed in that situation" (4). These writers and their body of work is distinguished by Stein from that of the following generations who may well have been born in Britain and/or began writing in the 1970s/80s and 1990s respectively, and who are the focus of his book.[24]

Dillon's Brown's *Migrant Modernism* (2013) focuses on the earlier group. He uses the *Windrush* term frequently to discuss this period, its writers and texts, using terms such as "Windrush era", "Windrush novelists" and "Windrush novels". Brown's discussion concerns how post-war London shaped this writing, exploring the emergence of an Anglophone Caribbean literature against the contested backdrop of Modernism, and how these writers were often silenced through antagonistic critical receptions. In his introduction describing the relationship of these writers to the writing establishment, Brown draws on the "heroic" language that has come to typify the characterisation of the *Windrush* migrants:

> Focusing on the *Windrush* novelists who first established a publishing foothold there, the book maintains that these pioneering figures, far from writing in splendid anti-colonial isolation, were necessarily enmeshed in the local politics of British literary production (20)

Similarly, the introduction to Ashley Dawson's *Mongrel Nation* (2007) draws on the archetypal iconography of the *Windrush* story in his retelling of its arrival as a foundational moment with which to frame his readings of Black British texts:

> Walking down the gangplank at Tilbury, many of these migrants from the Caribbean felt they were coming to collect their reward for their faithfulness as British subjects. Others, intent on helping to rebuild the devastated motherland, saw the voyage to Britain as a continuation of their wartime sacrifice (2)

[24] While Stein doesn't interrogate the *Windrush* narrative, he does problematise the notion of generations, questioning their parameters by asking whether it is age, place of birth, date of arrival or another factor that divides Black British writers along these lines (5). The linearity implied by the term generations (that a first generation with similar outlooks and concerns might spawn another with its own, possibly related, outlooks and concerns) is also questioned. The affiliations and connections, or lack thereof, between migrant writers might be particularly problematic because of their diverging backgrounds – the difference between those who "might be passing through Britain, or staying there, or…in fact born there, or (have) family... in residence for several generations" (6).

Dawson's particular focus is on the arrival of Lord Kitchener, arguably the ship's most famous passenger, whose appearance in the Pathé newsreel has already been discussed. Kitchener's arrival is also the focus of John McLeod's *Postcolonial London*, although at the end of his book McLeod also touches upon the 1998 *Windrush* commemorations, framing them and other celebratory events as "vital cultural rejoinders" against racialisation and discrimination (161).

Like McLeod, James Procter's *Dwelling Places* (2003) also discusses the significance of the 1998 *Windrush* commemorations as part of his critical consideration of the relationship between *diaspora*, as a theory of journeying and movement, and *dwelling*, in Black British writing. The book's final chapter discusses how the focus on *Windrush* and post-war Caribbean arrival in the late 1990s facilitated the (re)discovery of "a new archive of narratives and images depicting black arrival", many of which showed Caribbean migrants with their luggage at docks or train stations. These images were echoed by the spectacle of old battered suitcases (which may or may not have belonged to original *Windrush* passengers) put on display at the Museum of London in 1998, as visual, historicised evocations of arrival. Procter's evaluation of post-war Black British writing considers the tension in reading these suitcases over time. Seen 50 years later in their tattered state, they are a symbol of diaspora and journeying, but also a signal of the migrants' permanence in their adopted landscape – their connotations of "arrival, settlement, home" (207).

2.2 Windrush narratives

As already noted, there is a disjunction between the critical and literary deployments of the *Windrush*. While post-1998 critics use the term to group the early post-war writers of Caribbean origin, none of those writers mention the *Windrush* in their literary output. One might expect to find many more deployments of the *Windrush* in post-1998 literature, but in fact its appearance is surprisingly scant, featuring in only a handful of narratives – Jackie Kay's short story "Out of Hand" (1998), Andrea Levy's novel *Small Island* (2004) and Berry's *Windrush Songs* (2007), as well as short sequences or single poems by John Agard (1998), Benjamin Zephaniah (2002) and Lorna Goodison (2006).

Where other critics have used the *Windrush* term to denote early post-war writing, my approach is to closely examine how the ship has *actually* been written about in literature, revealing the infrequency of its depiction. Writers depicting Caribbean arrival to Britain have in fact often chosen to deploy other ship names, both real and fictional. For example, in early writings such as George Lamming's *The Emigrants* (1954), the passengers travel on the ironically titled *Golden*

Image, while in the opening of Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), the protagonist Moses Aloetta meets a fellow migrant from the SS *Hildebrand*. In later novels such as Caryl Philips' *The Final Passage* (1985), Leila and Michael travel aboard the SS *Winston Churchill*, while in Alex Wheatle's *Island Songs* (2006), Jenny and Hortense travel on the *Genovese Madonna*. The variety of these names reminds us of the imaginative freight of the ship in post-war Black British literature, as well as the historical fact that many ships other than the *Windrush* carried passengers during this period of migration.

My study reveals that the treatment of the *Windrush* in literature is often a departure point or springboard for a broader depiction of arrival: rarely is the *Windrush* itself a fixation. Exceptions to this are Kay's short story "Out of Hand" and Zephaniah's poem, "The Men from the Jamaica Are Settling Down", which along with the poems of John Agard are the earliest of these writings, all written in 1998 as commissions for the BBC. Creative responses to the *Windrush* narrative in the late 1990s were frequently instigated and authorised by the mainstream media at a time when widespread interest in Black British history, and the *Windrush* especially, was developing.[25] In my study, I consider works which actually feature the *Windrush* in some way, rather than use it as brief symbolic shorthand, such as in Khadija Ibrahim's poem "Come What May We're Here 2 Stay" (2014), which doesn't feature the ship or its history at all, but uses "(*After Windrush*)" as an epigraph.

To varying degrees, each of the writers below make an interjection into dominant accounts of *Windrush* history, either by shifting the (usually male) focus to a woman or child's experience, or in the case of Zephaniah, forcefully challenging the media reporting of the ship's arrival in 1948. But I suggest these efforts to address the absences of marginal presences in the *Windrush* narrative have the ironic effect of confirming its primacy.

2.2.1 *Jackie Kay*

The notion of the *Windrush*'s primacy is central to "Out of Hand" by Jackie Kay – a short story commissioned for the *Windrush* season on Radio 4. In 1998 Kay was already a well-known Black British writer, having won prizes for poetry and been awarded the Guardian First Book award for her novel *Trumpet* (1998). Although she has no personal connection to the *Windrush* or the Caribbean, being of Scottish and Nigerian descent, her profile would have made her a likely

[25] Although Zephaniah's poem was published in 2002, it was originally commissioned and written in 1998.

candidate for a commission such as this one.[26] "Out of Hand" was broadcast in the summer of 1998 and was also published in a special edition of the left-wing journal *Soundings* that year, thus reaching both a mainstream and niche academic audience.

The *Soundings* edition, entitled "Windrush Echoes", was in fact one of two journals that harnessed the *Windrush* commemorations as an opportunity to collate writings about black literature and culture. Many of the articles demonstrate a reflexive self-awareness in drawing out the contradictions inherent in the *Windrush* commemorations and interrogating the parameters of the *Windrush* umbrella and its position on a black historical trajectory.[27] Kay's story fits well with the edition because of its self-consciously intertextual engagement with the *Windrush* archive, specifically the Pathé newsreel and Peter Fryer's 1948 *Daily Worker* article "Five Hundred Pairs of Willing Hands", and her awareness of the constructed nature of *Windrush* history.

This awareness is illustrated through the story's protagonist Rose, who witnesses her own role as an agent of history when days after her arrival to Tilbury she sees herself in the (fictional version of the) Pathé newsreel on the cinema screen, standing aboard the *Windrush* as it sailed towards the docks. Kay's choice of a female protagonist reminds us that women were not a secondary or belated part of this diaspora, as they are often perceived, but were part of the first generation of migrants who came to Britain to find employment. Rose is employed as a nurse, but her life is traumatic because of the racism she encounters. As an older woman she reflects on the pride and naive optimism she felt at the moment of arrival, compared with the bitter realities she has endured over decades in England.

The story draws attention to its own construction by mixing fiction and factual information. This blurring, along with references to real headlines and other media representations of the ship, emphasise the *Windrush* as a media and mediated event. This mediation is also signalled by Rose's opening reflections which move us back in time to 1948, the moment of her arrival at Tilbury. Crowds have lined the dock to welcome the "willing hands" of the migrants, a moment Rose, as a personal agent in a critical historical event, "already felt…momentous as she was doing so"

[26] The BBC's W*indrush* season was a programme of television and radio productions aired between May and August 1998, including the Phillips and Phillips *Windrush* documentary, and other factual and fictional productions which charted "the journey from the West Indies to contemporary Britain as successive generations have re-defined what it means to be British" ("BBC Education: Windrush").

[27] The range of articles in *Soundings* is broad, including discussions of changing notions of Britishness; the spatial racialisation of British cities; immigration policies and the state; gender and black identities; and the literature of migration, as well as short stories.

(99). Yet her response makes us question her own "knowingness" within the world of the story since the *Windrush*, despite being a news item in 1948, wasn't at that time ascribed the value it achieved later.

Fryer's "Five Hundred Pairs of Willing Hands", which appeared in the *Daily Worker* on the day the *Windrush* docked, was one of the first interpretations of the ship and characterises the migrants in largely positive terms, drawing attention to work as the motivation for migration. In emphasising their "willing hands", the article contradicts the racial stereotypes of the migrants as lazy and unwilling to work that were to circulate soon after the ship's arrival. In "Out of Hand", Rose's observation of her hands as an old woman summons up a memory of her "willing hands" as a younger woman and her desire to work:

> …Fifty years ago, these were the hands that clapped and came to England. Willing."
> …"Twenty-six years old, they arrived, elegant, black, skilled, beautiful hands. Ready and willing. Ready was the left hand; willing was the right (97)

Hands are the central trope of the story, a metonym for work and deployed with a range of other meanings. The subheading of Fryer's article – "Five hundred pairs of willing hands grasped the rails of the *Empire Windrush* as she came alongside the landing stage at Tilbury early yesterday morning" (3) – is also echoed in Kay's description of Rose's hands, which "held onto the ship's cold rail full of their own sense of importance" (98). The use of the term "willing hands" links the media reporting of the *Windrush*'s arrival with an imagined account of the same event, but Kay employs the language ironically, critiquing Fryer's phrase, when Rose suggests that the willingness of her hands, that might once have had their own agency, is exploited through her migration. Her sentiment is emphasised by repetition: "…once they came to England they certainly had no life of their own. At all at all at all." (99). The story also emphasises the long relationship between Britain and the Caribbean prior to 1948, stressing Rose's long-felt allegiance to Britain. This is indicated by the description of the moment of her arrival – "Fifty years ago, hand over heart, Rose McGuire Roberts stepped off the *Windrush*" – her anticipation suggested when she grips to the ship's rails to "stop the trembling excitement" of her hands (97).

Rose is further excited when she witnesses herself on the Pathé newsreel at the cinema. The artificiality of the news production is emphasised by the discrepancy between Rose's "real" experience of arrival and the one on the screen. She has a personal knowledge of herself that no one in the cinema shares – she knows the real colours of her clothes: "She'd like to lean forward

to the people in the seat in front of her and shout, 'That's me, that's me. That hat is red, that dress is navy. I know the colours she is wearing. She is me!'" (102).[28]

Rose's reactions to the other cinema goers – wondering if she might be asked for her autograph – also emphasises the attitudes instilled in her by colonialism. She recalls practising her signature before coming to England, believing "people's handwriting in England will be very neat…Neat and elegant. English." (102). People do stare at Rose as they leave the screen, but "the stare is not friendly like you would expect" (101), a phrase which hints at a racial hostility that she does not yet imagine and therefore does not recognise – "the ingrained, embattled…racism you do not yet know…because it hasn't hit you between the eyes" (Hall 1984: 84). It takes two weeks for her to see prejudice, a revelation which unfolds slowly and uncertainly. Firstly, the only room she can find is "sad and unfriendly like the landlady" (101), then she is frequently given the unpleasant, menial tasks in her nursing job, wondering if she imagines the "sly satisfied look?" on her colleagues' faces (102). Her hesitance shifts to certainty when the outright hostility of the patients cannot be ignored. Kay uses well-rehearsed racist smears, typical of this post-war era in which the perceived exoticism/primitivism of the migrants was harnessed. One patient blames Rose for death and illness – "You there! It's all your fault. You've bought your strange diseases with you"; another accuses her of black magic; another tells her to "go back to the jungle" (101–102). Simultaneously, the institutional racism of her workplace dictates that Rose continues to be delegated the worst of the work and must react to these insults alone: "What is so awful is not the nutcase of a woman who is shouting at her, but the fact that her fellow nurses are smiling in the weak daylight. The fact that not one of them does a single thing to help" (101).

But return to the Caribbean as a solution is also problematised, and is generally absent from the *Windrush* narrative which in its characterisation of the *Windrush* migrants as always at the point of arrival, is unable to accommodate the notion that many would want to return.[29] Rose's reflections about her late husband Alexander lead her to conclude that he is "dead and buried in the wrong country", even though they "always talked…of going back" it "stayed just talk". The couple's discussion of return takes on an uneasy power – "the pair of them were just imagining

[28] Kay's description affirms Stuart Hall's contention that the images of migrants in the *Windrush* archive suggest a personal self-determination often overlooked in dominant white discourses (84). The "she" that Rose identifies as herself is brimming with excitement about her arrival in England, but she is also forthright and self-respecting

[29] The idea of return is also repeatedly problematised in non-fictional accounts of post-war Caribbean migration. Many migrants found their hopes of return diminished through a range of personal, social and economic circumstances and/or experienced problems in returning to the Caribbean after a long period of separation (Phillips and Phillips 63, 72)

their country. The images got so vivid maybe they were afraid to go back. If it was a disappointment – what then?" (98).

The fear that the Jamaica remembered by Rose and her husband is a fiction formulated in opposition to the difficult realities of post-war Britain has high stakes. If the Caribbean cannot tally with the couple's nostalgic imaginings of it, where do they belong? Rose's reflections emphasise the gap between the real and imagined because, over the years, their Caribbean home becomes a mediated space. Its fiction is kept alive and augmented by repeated, interlocking accounts of it, in the same way a fictional Britain was shaped and sustained in the classrooms and institutions of the colonial Caribbean. Likewise, the *Windrush* is a mediated space, reinforced by the repetition of its narrative.

Kay emphasises the damage these political and social manipulations do to the individual. The colonial duplicity that fosters Rose's loyalty to Britain and then refuses her as an equal citizen is deeply traumatising. A crisis in witnessing compounds the trauma. In old age she finds ironic solace in remembering her experiences of racism - "the more she dwells, the better she feels…Never tell people just to forget. She has got to remember" (103). Thus the story links neatly to the context of its production – a commission for the 1998 *Windrush* commemorations, when suddenly the experiences of the migrants became of political and social interest, and the real migrants were invited to remember their experiences on a range of public platforms.

The end of the story returns us to the visual archive of the *Windrush*, reminding us of the breach between the hopeful girl seen stepping from the ship and the traumatised woman who remembers her. Kay avoids a simple portrayal of victimhood through the forthright voice of Rose herself. Her reflections range in tone from humorous to despairing, to angry and vitriolic. There is defiance in Rose's description of herself arriving at Tilbury:

> She can see herself on the big screen. Red hat. Navy dress. Coming down off the *Windrush*. She could almost applaud. Was that some other girl? No it wasn't. It was herself. Rose McGuire Roberts coming off that huge fiction of a ship. Stepping. (103)

As with Rose's visit to the cinema, the act of stepping from the ship enacts control of the environment, an endeavour which later becomes fraught for Rose in an England that seeks to control and confine her. The description of the *Windrush* as a "huge fiction" not only suggests the false promise of migration but also foreshadows the misnomers and omissions in the memorialising of the ship in 1998 and beyond.

2.2.2 *John Agard*

Kay's focus on the demoralising experience of migration seems at odds with the jubilant tone of the 1998 commemorations emphasising the pioneering spirit of the migrants and the stories of their survival and successes. John Agard's poems, also commissioned by the BBC and other institutions, are more closely aligned with this celebratory tone. Like Kay, Agard was a relatively well-known black writer in Britain in 1998. Born the year after the *Windrush* sailed, Agard migrated from Guyana to Britain in 1977.[30] His high profile residency at the BBC in 1998 formed an integral part of BBC Education's *Windrush* season, and he was heavily involved in the programme of events around the commemorations.[31] His four poems related to the *Windrush* were written as part of the residency. Where Kay stresses the effects of racial prejudice faced by her protagonist, Agard is optimistic, promoting a positive transactional relationship between the Caribbean and Britain, and marking the *Windrush*'s arrival as a transformative moment in Black British history to be celebrated.

"Windrush Child" was allegedly written after Agard's meeting with Vince Reid who, at thirteen, was the youngest *Windrush* passenger of Caribbean origin.[32] The poem is addressed to a child about to board the *Windrush*, unaware that he is "stepping into history". Agard lists the vanishing elements of the Caribbean landscape, including the child's grandmother, a maternal symbol of rootedness, whom the child can only write to of his adventure. But the optimistic image of "the kite of your dreams / in an English sky" emphasises the hope of a celebratory cultural exchange and the translation of self at the heart of the migratory experience, comparing what has been left with what has been gained. The poem's last lines suggest the child's migration will engender a positive transaction – "a mind opening / meeting of snow and sun".

A similar positivity is petitioned in "Windrush Welcome" in which the narrator dismisses the old binaries of race: "Let the heart learn / To fly its banner / Without regard to colour". Language is deployed in a range of ways, from exalting terms of reference to describe the passengers –

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[30] Predominantly known as a performance poet, Agard's work has had relatively little critical engagement, despite his sanctioning by mainstream British literary culture – his work is regularly taught on the GCSE English syllabus and he was awarded the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry in 2012.

[31] Agard's residency provoked national media activity. Interviews and poems appeared in national newspapers and Agard took part at events in London and Tilbury, where a plaque was engraved with his poem, "as a lasting monument to the HMS Windrush" "(John Agard Making Waves at the BBC").

[32] Reid featured prominently in radio and television interviews during the 1998 celebrations and after. He also became one of the first teachers of Caribbean and African history, one of the two advisory lecturers who helped the former Inner London Education Authority inspectorate establish its multi-ethnic division ("Vince Read Obituary" *Guardian* 24 May 2011).

"pilgrims" and "pioneers", to a more surprising reworking of symbols. The "whip of the past" transforms into a tool "to navigate / not flagellate" while "diversity / shall sound its trumpet / outside the bigot's wall". Agard also references the media's role in creating a *Windrush* story with its own iconography and idioms: "One newspaper spoke of their dazzling ties / and said hope shone in their eyes" (256).

"Remember the Ship", which was commissioned especially for the Runnymede conference on Citizenship in 1998, also entreats for multi-racial harmony and a broadening of citizenship beyond racial barriers: "a call / to kinship / that knows / no boundary / of skin". An inclusive linguistic belonging is also claimed by the narrator's self-definition as a "citizen of the English tongue". The repeated imperative "remember / the ship / in citizenship" seems less a specific call to remember the *Windrush* than an appeal to recognise the entitlement of the migrants and their descendants to claim a place as British citizens. Agard's "baggage" of language might refer to the linguistic hierarchies of the Caribbean, or to the burden of definitions of belonging – the language which constructs individuals through their geographical, ethnic or citizenship status (258).

The impact and involvement of black Britons on British culture is a theme of Agard's shorter poem "Uncle Mo Steps Out". Uncle Mo is a sharply dressed "black gent" in "a Windrush zoot", "banana yellow tie" and "slanting Trilby" whose perambulations around London signify his command of a new environment and the imposition of migrant style and aesthetic – "him two flying fish feet / a chip down Oxford Street". Where the *Windrush* migrants have often been depicted as victims of British society's hostility in the post-war period, Uncle Mo has a flaneur-like command of the environment. His visibility and upfront style impacts on the London landscape – "Lawd, de man mek history / Him stop traffic" (257). This idea, of "making history" echoes the depiction of Rose in "Out of Hand", who witnesses herself as an agent of history at the cinema screening of the Pathé newsreel. But where Kay emphasises the sad disjunction between Rose's perception of herself, and that of her fellow cinema goers who notice only her racial difference, Agard positively signifies the influence and new meanings produced by black culture in the diaspora by calling Uncle Mo "A walking catalyst" – a spearhead of inevitable change (257).

2.2.3 *Benjamin Zephaniah*

The marked celebratory tone of Agard's work stands out against the rest of these literary texts which emphasise the struggles and obstructions faced by the post-war migrants in Britain. Benjamin Zephaniah's poem "The Men from Jamaica Are Settling Down" is focused on the collective experience of migration and the struggle against racism. Born in Handsworth in Birmingham in 1958, to parents who had migrated from the Caribbean, Zephaniah is known widely in Britain as a performance poet whose writing often takes the form of social commentary and is, according to Eric Doumerc, "steeped in the British tradition of doggerel and nonsense while paying homage to the Caribbean oral tradition in its various forms and guises." (195). The oral quality of Zephaniah's poems is often characterised by a use of refrain, rhyme, rhythm, anaphora and repetition, and many of the stanzas of this poem end with a variation of the refrain "the men from Jamaica are settling down" (37–40). This choice of a refrain is significant since so much discourse around the *Windrush* stresses *arrival*, not settlement, despite the six decades that have passed since the ship docked.

In fact, the resistance to racism of the Windrush Generation and their descendants over those years is one of the concerns of the poem, as well as with redressing the common mistakes in the newspaper reports, with regards to the numbers, origins and gendering of its passengers, and calling for black history to be responsibly authored. The poem was published in Zephaniah's 2002 collection *Too Black, Too Strong* with a contextualising note explaining the poem's genesis, a mediation which we should read as an authorial intervention aimed to influence our understanding of it. In the note we learn that the poem was originally commissioned by an independent television company "Crucial Films" on behalf of the BBC in 1998, who in the end rejected the poem because it was "too 'political' and too 'confrontational'" (1998). Of course, we cannot know what Crucial Films might have said about the poem, but the point of interest is Zephaniah's choice to frame the poem with this peripheral information.

The poem responds to Peter Fryer's headline "The Men From Jamaica Are Settling Down" (3) which, according to Zephaniah "like many of the press reports of the time … overlooked the fact that not all of the passengers on the *Windrush* were Jamaican, and not all were men." In the note, Zephaniah describes his personal relationship with Peter Fryer, who by 1998 was widely known and respected as a historian of Black Britain. Zephaniah takes his account as a starting point, and contradicts it:

> I have been fortunate enough to have become friends with Peter Fryer and when I made it known to him that I had used the title of his article as the title and the reference point for my poem on the Windrush, he said that we need as many people as possible keeping the memory of the Windrush alive, and that he welcomed a poetic eye on the subject (36)

Having already sought the approval of Fryer, Zephaniah's note ends by telling us how he also sent the poem to Arthur Torrington, the Secretary of the *Windrush* Foundation, "to check its accuracy and for general comment":

> I will not repeat what he wrote in reply, that would sound too much like self-praise, suffice to say that he and the foundation had no problems with the political tone or the attitude of the poem (36)

Zephaniah's note indicates his awareness of the contested nature of *Windrush* history and to some degree suggests his own need for the sanctioning of his literary representation, as a challenge to its rejection by Crucial Films. While the film company, as agents of a dominant (white) media institution, allegedly rejected the poem because it didn't fit with the triumphant tone being glossed onto Black British history at that time, the *Windrush* Foundation, a community group without the same agenda, allegedly approved the political thrust of the poem, which attempted to take the authorship of Black British history back into the hands of the Black British.

The need for black history to be authored "truthfully with de Black pen" (38) is powerfully asserted by Zephaniah who, elsewhere in his role as a political and social commentator, has criticised the dissemination of black history to black schoolchildren and mainstream British audiences, arguing that "the diet of slavery and deprivation" is only "half the story" and demanding that the types of black history taught should be broadened (quoted in Richardson). He makes the same assertion in the poem, entreating readers (assumed by Zephaniah to be a young black audience) to "relate" to the struggles and survival of their *Windrush* ancestors, whose "souls were titanic" (40).

The opening of the poem narrates the arrival of "the men" from the "land of wood an water", evoking a number of binaries – city versus country, "colourful Caribbean" versus the grey British skies – to contextualise the migrants' struggles: the racism encountered, lack of public support, economic hardship and homesickness (37). The poem makes a turn in direction by introducing another binary, between the discourses of authority that "played a false numbers game" and the

popular, collective knowledge of "de people" whom the narrator entreats "to put records straight" (38). This revised history should include a corrected headcount, since "there were more than eight stowaways", and women who were omitted from earlier accounts but "survived just as well as de men" (38). The manifold origins of migrants from "other lands" is another omission the poem addresses. The narrator implies that the newspapers, "de cameras" and "de movietone voice" are all complicit in distorting black history (39). Yet the poem is not without humour. The upper class narrator of the Pathé newsreel that narrated the arrival of the *Windrush* to Tilbury is parodied through Zephaniah's announcement that Britain was found to be "quite grand" by the migrants (39).

The poem's second half gives an abridged history of the race-relations and black-resistance struggles of the following decades, championing the political agency of the first generation who fought for their rights through unions and rioting, and who refused to have their racial and political identities suppressed: "The men from Jamaica were not turning white" (39). The legacy of this resistance is the "new generation", an idiom Zephaniah repeats in the last stanzas, who have continued the struggles and whose impact on Britain is wide-ranging, and who must recuperate the past as "a place that is ours for all time" (40). The poem's final lines suggest that black history is still "owned" by others and highlight the duplicity of the modern political climate that suggests things have changed more than they have: "But in-between line you'll still read in de paper / The men from Jamaica are settling down" (40).

The alleged rejection of the poem by Crucial Films as not "celebratory" enough is notable because the poem *does* praise the strength and resistance of the Windrush Generation against the "racists and fascists" and "Teddy boy violence", but in doing so reminds readers of the sustained history of racial tension and race riots in London and regionally (40). The poem stresses the implementation of racist immigration policies and colonial socialisation that fostered false perceptions of Britain in the Caribbean in order to maintain an image of superiority:

> The men from Jamaica were steadfast and growing
> Despite commonwealth immigration controls,
> They learnt a few lessons an soon they were knowing
> That there were no streets paved wid silver or gold (40)

The poem's rejection may suggest the mainstream media's desire to celebrate *Windrush* history as a narrative of success and survival, but found some components of this survival less palatable,

including Zephaniah's reference to later radical resistance efforts and the suggestion that these struggles are ongoing, through a new generation who "rose up from these fighters" and have "No Fear" (40).

2.2.4 *Andrea Levy*

The behaviour of "the racists and fascists" is in fact a specific feature of other texts considered in this chapter. While Kay's "Out of Hand" depicts the racism that Rose faces in her occupation as a nurse and in the street, Andrea Levy's *Small Island* portrays many memorable instances of racial discrimination against the Jamaican protagonists, Hortense and Gilbert. Like Rose, these characters are completely taken aback that Britain, whose superior and civilising image they have had installed in them since childhood, is so unwelcoming.

Both texts are set in the early post-war period (although Rose's narrative spans later years), reminding us of Korte and Pirker's assertion that *Windrush* history (or indeed other black histories lauded in the new historical agenda of the 1990s, such as the Bicentenary of the Abolition of Slavery) provides a necessary distance between contemporary British attitudes and the misconducts of the past (21). We can assume that most readers will view the instances of racism as historically specific and distance themselves from them, while identifying or sympathising with the protagonists who are its victims.

The novel is by far the most well-known of the texts I consider here, having been the focus of the 2007 National Reader Project and televised on BBC 1 in 2009.[33] Its genesis is well documented in interviews where Levy has spoken of her desire to tell her parents' story. Her father, Winston Levy, was a passenger on the *Windrush*, a fact that seems likely to account for the ship's appearance in the novel. This noted, the *Windrush* is in fact mentioned only once when Gilbert sees "a notice about a ship sailing to England. The *Empire Windrush* sailing 28 May. The cost of the passage on this retired troopship was only twenty-eight pounds and ten shillings." (99). The ship's appearance here could almost be incidental since no more is made of it, unlike in "Out of Hand", in which the specific ship is central to Kay's narrative.

[33] The Reader Project was intended to mark the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the slave trade and the choice of *Small Island* as a book "to encourage reading, discussion and possibly argument" invited readers to draw links between these two periods in history (Ward). 50 thousand free copies of *Small Island* were distributed in cities that had a link to the slave trade.

The biographical truth of Levy's relationship to the *Windrush* may well account for its appearance in her previous novels, where it is again mentioned in passing. Prior to *Small Island*, Levy's focus had been on the lives of the second generation, dislocated from their Caribbean heritage and struggling to exist in a Britain that excludes them through racism. In each of the earlier novels, the migration history of the protagonists' parents has an acute bearing on the protagonists' lives, but it is the lack of knowledge about their parents' experiences and more broadly their Caribbean ancestry, that impacts. For example, in *Every Light In The House Burnin'* (1995) the protagonist tells us her father "came to this country in 1948 on the *Empire Windrush* ship" but that he "never talked about his family or life in Jamaica. He seemed only to exist in one plane of time – the present." (3). In *Never Far From Nowhere* (1996) Vivienne and Olive also know little of the Caribbean, only that their parents travelled to England on "a ship in the fifties" (3). Levy hints that it is the traumas of migration that silence the parents, but in the last of these three novels, *Fruit of the Lemon* (1999), when the protagonist, Faith, suffers a similar crisis of identity, it is her mother who tells her "Child, everyone should know where they come from", before sending her to Jamaica, a trip that helps Faith reconcile her identity as a Black British woman (162).

The "silence" of those that experienced the arguably traumatic events of post-war migration to Britain is theorised in discussions of trauma literature which harnesses the concept of "belatedness". This is a hypothesis which hinges on the "crisis in witnessing" central to traumatic events such as the Holocaust and slavery. According to Laursen, belatedness indicates the ways in which it is often the members of the next generation who articulate the traumas of those who have gone before, whose voices may have been silenced by their own trauma, historical rupture and/or lack of platform on which to speak. There may be various impetuses for belatedly recounting or reconstructing these narratives – as an act of mourning, as a way to make sense of difficult events, or to create or reinforce a shared, contemporary cultural identity (55). Laursen applies the concept to Levy's *Small Island*, written after Levy "finally" persuaded her mother to discuss her traumatic experience of migration, as she herself describes:

> The way I remember it, neither she nor my dad ever seemed to want to talk about their lives in Jamaica, or about why in 1948 they made the momentous decision to leave that island to come to another. Whatever the truth, that silence was finally breached and my mother, reluctantly, began to speak to me about her life before I was born. I was gripped from the start as those two familiar parents of mine began to emerge as fully rounded human beings with an amazing story to tell (quoted in Mullen)

It is this instinct to return and reconstruct which Levy develops in *Small Island,* using narrators from both Jamaica and England, who are deeply affected, personally and ideologically, by their encounters with each other.

Like Kay, Levy also inserts a female character into her exploration of *Windrush* history, challenging the male bias. Where the *Windrush* narrative situates *work* as the primary reason for migration, *Small Island* emphasises the intense and complex colonial socialisation that went hand in hand with the fact of the British economic exploitation in the Caribbean. In Jamaica, Hortense is encouraged by the colonial system of shade hierarchy to see herself as superior because of her light skin. The values of this shadist social organisation are installed in her from childhood when she is taken from her dark-skinned birth mother and placed with the wealthy cousins of her (absent) father, to be made a lady. "With such a countenance, there was a chance of a golden life for I" (38), she declares, describing impassively how her young mother is dispatched to Cuba for work while her grandmother, Miss Jewell, goes into the service of the cousins (39). It is years later that Hortense offers to lend Gilbert the money for his passage on the *Windrush* in exchange for marriage and his promise to bring her to join him in England, which she has idealised. But her dream of England is dislocated from its reality, as is her sense of her own Englishness and belief that England will somehow allow her to transcend her personal circumstances. She wishes to be like the white women teachers she observes at school, whose "superiority encircled them like an aureole" (69), and believes England will allow own innate Englishness to flourish, unshackled by the mores and manners of Jamaican society, which, she has failed to realise, are a skewed reproduction of British society.

But Hortense's formal and antiquated spoken English is not understood by Queenie when she first arrives at Gilbert's lodgings, the first sign of the disparity between her imagined and real England(s). Her repeated questioning of Gilbert, "Is this the way the English live?" further suggests the distance between an imagined, mediated mother country and its realities, a trauma at the heart of the migratory experience. Hortense's awakening to British racial hostility is rendered across a number of incidents which lead her to declare towards the novel's end, "I have found this to be a very cold country" (466).

Hortense's narrative is also paralleled by Queenie's, the novel's white female character. The book's polyphonic narrative mode in fact destabilises the notion of the authoritative historical narrative. While "1948" is positioned as a defining moment in the novel, Levy uses the "Before"

sections to depict numerous earlier colonial encounters between British and Caribbean people in both England and in Jamaica. The claim that the *Windrush* marked the first appearance of black people in Britain is neatly defied by Levy's depictions of Queenie's three encounters with black men earlier in time – firstly when she meets the African man at the Empire exhibition in the 1920s, and later, her relationships with two black servicemen – Michael Roberts and Gilbert Joseph.

Through these characters Levy explores the pre-*Windrush* experience of Caribbean servicemen in Britain, stressing again the colonial allegiances felt by those such as her father and uncle who signed up to fight alongside Britain. Levy has also said she wrote the novel to respond to "the ignorance about the involvement of West Indian serviceman", an ignorance that she felt she had shared (quoted in Mullen). Michael becomes Queenie's lover and father to her child, but is killed in service before the child is born. Gilbert meets Queenie when he is stationed near her farm during the war, and becomes her lodger in London on his return in 1948. The novel's sustained focus on the issue of housing for Gilbert and his fellow migrants reflects the very real struggles to find accommodation at this time when many landlords would not accept black tenants.

By 2004, the year of the novel's publication, the *Windrush* had been firmly re-appropriated as a positive symbol of multicultural Britain, and many readers would have been familiar with the tenets of this history – the racism faced by migrants in employment and housing, the popular racist abuse and the long struggle to overcome these manifold difficulties. *Small Island* reached an audience already familiar with its metonymic function, and primed to the celebration of Black British experience and achievements. In this sense, the brief appearance of the *Windrush* in the novel and the fact Levy's father was a real passenger, may have added to an assumption of the story's historical authenticity and leant an additional sense of recognition to readers. Levy also uses 1948, the year the *Windrush* arrived, as a structuring principle in the book. "Before" and "1948" are the novel's recurrent section headings, positioning and stressing 1948, the year of Gilbert's arrival, as a watershed moment.

2.2.5 *Lorna Goodison*

The material conditions of poverty and poor housing, often illustrated through descriptions of the cramped and dilapidated accommodation, is fictionalised in many texts evoking this period, such as Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* (1956) and Phillips' *The Final Passage,* and Riley's *Waiting in the*

Twilight. Lorna Goodison's short poem "Windrush Sankey" also uses the image of "a cold room" where the narrator (who we presume is male) lacks "even a shilling for the gas meter" (27). He dreads his fate in England which feeds his reluctance to leave his Jamaican family "who would not let me die of hunger and cold" (27).

The poem's prayer-like tone aligns with its title – a "sankey" is a sacred song, named after the American gospel composer Ira Sankey. "Windrush" only appears in the poem's title and like others of the texts discussed here, is a departure point, rather than a focus. The poem works as both a monologue of individual experience and a collective poem, reflecting the common experience of all those who made the journey in this period, and reminding us of Edward Baugh's comment about Goodison's work, that "her voice, personal and unmistakable as it is, is increasingly, and whether she knows it or not, the voice of a people" (Baugh 21). The narrator's few good outfits, prepared for his departure by his family, suggest the cycle of economic deprivation – "my parents were born / and bound to die as canecutter" – that means he has to migrate even though he doesn't want to (27–28).

Names and titles are suggestive in the poem. The use of the ship's title aligns well with the poem's closing lines which describe the unhappy inevitability of leaving on "the great ship which / bore me across the wide water to this land / England, land I must now make my home" (28). The narrator's village, Albion, evokes places on both sides of the diaspora, as a real rural village in St Thomas in Jamaica and the oldest name for Great Britain. The narrator's mother sings "To Be a Pilgrim" as her son readies himself for leaving, reminding us of the significance of religious faith in the Caribbean, but also evoking the modern epithets, such as "pilgrim", ascribed to the *Windrush* migrants latterly. The suggestion of religious conviction also provides the only hope in the poem – the white rum the narrator sprinkles for the people he loves, and the likening of his clothes to "the big breastplate of righteousness". The narrator himself is nameless to the reader, as he believes he will be in England; surrounded by people, but ultimately solitary. The only comfort is that the family he leaves "know my full name", though he remains nameless to the reader.

2.2.6 *James Berry*

James Berry's *Windrush Songs* is the most recent of these literary expressions, published 59 years after the arrival of the *Windrush*. Born in 1924, Berry is significantly older than the other writers discussed in this chapter and the only one to have first-hand experience of this period of migration, as an original member of the Windrush Generation of writers. While many of Berry's contemporaries migrated to the Britain "looking for a more receptive literary culture", Berry was himself an economic migrant. Referring to Berry's working-class background, Ian Dieffenthaller calls him "the elder statesmen without a secondary education" (164), and Berry himself refers to his working class origins in the introduction to *Windrush Songs*, explaining the financial struggle to fund the journey:

> When the Windrush came along it was simply a godsend, but I wasn't able to get on that boat. I simply could not meet the expenses…It was some time before I was able to get myself together and sell the few pigs and goats I had, to gather up the money…I had to wait for the second ship to make the journey that year, the SS *Orbita* (10)

Like many Jamaican men, Berry had spent the wartime years on farm labouring programmes in America, travelling to Britain after the war, where he became a writer alongside his employment as a telephone engineer. He rose to prominence when he won the 1981 National Poetry Competition, the first black poet to do so, for his poem "Fantasy of an African Boy".[34] By this time he had already edited one anthology of Caribbean–British poetry, *Blue-Foot Traveller* (1976), and published a first collection, *Fractured Circles* (1979). Since then, Berry's oeuvre has grown to encompass poetry and fiction for children and adults and further anthologising including *News From Babylon* (1984), considered a landmark text because of its mainstream publication with Chatto and Windus. Berry has also been a major advocate for Caribbean–British poetry, a key member of the Caribbean Arts Movement (CAM) and keenly involved in young people's education.

Postcolonial critics (Patke 2006, Ramazani, 2009, Hena 2013) argue that writers such as Berry are the founders of a new poetic expression in Britain, a generation whose work might still be included in surveys of Caribbean poetry, but who became "part of the cultures and ethnic politics of the societies to which they have migrated", and who may explore race and postcoloniality from a dual perspective (Patke, 76). For Patke, the reality for the migrant writer in

[34] Published in *Chain of Days* (1985).

Britain has been one of unbelonging – an "interstitial" existence in an ambivalent relationship with the English literary canon and mainstream literary culture. Ramazani's view of the migrant writer's interstitial position is much more positive, embracing the idea and potential of a transnational poetics. For him, Black British poets "reimagine themselves as both 'rooted and routed' in and through London to Africa to the Caribbean – living and writing…between styles, between histories, between hemispheres" (2009 180). Similarly, Hena sees that these early poets such as Berry and later ones such as Patience Agbabi, Daljit Nagra, John Agard and Benjamin Zephaniah use their writing to "invent new models of Britishness" expressing "hybrid languages, hyphenated experiences, and multiple geographic attachments" (519).

It was Berry who early on coined the phrase "Caribbean British" which although never caught on, was his way of describing the creative output of "hyphenated experience" and the literary impact of British and Caribbean cultures on each another (Ramazani 2001 19). These synthesising poetics are explored by Dieffenthaller who suggests the "cultural base of this literature is continually shifting", allowing the audience "to trace and validate its various roots whilst denying the ability to ascribe any poem fully to one or another root" (1). This notion is corroborated by Berry who claims on behalf of himself and other black poets, "We are bringing to an entrenched literary culture, a new vitality, a strangeness, a difference" (Berry "An Interview").

An essential part of this new aesthetic is the function and play of language between the poet and the colonizer's language, out of which postcolonial poets have appropriated, re-evaluated and invigorated language through numerous strategies (Ramazani 13, Rushdie 64). From the outset, Berry employed various forms of creole, reasoning that "one of the cruellest things West Indians have suffered is the disqualification and put-down of our language: Creole, the language we developed for our needs" (Berry "An interview"). Stewart Brown considers Berry's use of non-standard language forms to be political in its resistance to standard English and to have a performative role in enunciating "what is true to the poet's experience" invoking "a whole culture's cadence" (48). All of Berry's collections use both standard and non-standard forms of English, evoking the experience of many in Jamaica, who operate along the "creole continuum" (Rickford, 1).[35] Some poems explore the language politics of Jamaica as a legacy of British

[35] Not all of Berry's critics have found his experimentations with language successful. Kei Miller names Berry's "off-sounding notes"("Sing Another One") while Faustin Charles finds his intermingling of English and nation language ineffectual (Dieffenthaler 181). But, as Dieffenthaler contends, even when Berry's experiments have not worked, they have still offered "important foundational material for the Caribbean British voice" (181).

colonial authority, making language both form and theme. More broadly, Berry's work has continually explored the politics and poetics of diaspora, his connectedness to Jamaica and its landscape and his changing conceptualisation of an African ancestry – from "psychic shame" and "ignorance of history" to embracement of Africa as a useful past (Dieffenthaller, 176).

Windrush Songs should be situated in this same cross-cultural paradigm. The collection embodies the notion of "roots and routes" by depicting the complexities of Jamaica as both the site of forced exile, colonial violence and exploitation, and as the familiar island home the subject is rooted to. The routes of the collection follow trajectories of travel in three directions – backwards to Jamaica and Africa, and forward to Britain. All are problematised and celebrated in a "this is how I got here" narrative of explication.

Windrush Songs is the last of Berry's five poetry collections, published when he was 84 and had been living in Britain for close to 60 years, and shortly after his diagnosis with Alzheimer's disease. Its writing and publication represent the necessity of memorialising and testimony for the diasporic subject, while its title illustrates the potency of the *Windrush* at the time of publication in 2007, as a culturally accepted symbol of this period of migration. Berry's choice to name the book after the *Windrush* might have been a commercially minded decision, or at least a strategic one to enable his readers to recognise the book's subject matter from the symbolic shorthand of its name. The title might seem to give the *Windrush* a certain primacy, but in fact the poems themselves do not mention the ship, and like other texts discussed here, *Windrush* is a departure point, not the focus. This obliqueness is in fact facilitated by the poetry itself, which continually returns to the motif of the ship through echoes, allusions and resonances.

Transcending the specific historic circumstances of the *Windrush* also suggests that *Windrush* is neither the beginning nor end of the story. In fact, for Berry, the origins of post-war Caribbean migration do not begin with any ship, but with slavery and colonial oppression, themes which recur in the collection.

The arrangement of the poems in sequences, a distinctive feature of poetry, allows Berry to include distinct texts that orientate around the same subject matter.[36] Their sequencing imbues

[36] Kevin Hart discusses the prevalence of the sequences in poetry, from the Elizabethan sonnets cycles such as Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* (1582) and Shakespeare's *Sonnets* (1609), to much more recent sequences such as Ted Berrigan's *The Sonnets* (1964) and John Berryman's *77 Dream Songs* (1964). The sequence, whilst not always in sonnet form, functions for Hart in different ways, often offering the possibility of "digression, repetition and imaginative

the poems with a sense of narrative development and physical movement, from empire outpost to metropolitan centre, as indicated through the titles of the sections: "Hating a Place You Love", "Let the Sea Be My Road" and the final section "New Days Arriving". The poems of the second section are divided into three further subsections – "Reasons for Leaving", "Reminiscence Voices" and "When I Get to England". The placing of the second subsection, which looks back at a left-behind Jamaica, before those included in "When I Get to England", which anticipate the excitement and opportunities of the mother country, suggests a double consciousness – of nostalgic longing for what is gone, and anticipation for what will come.[37]

Sequencing also puts the poems of *Windrush Songs* into dialogue. Although Berry's introduction hints at an autobiographical approach, this is not sustained by the poems, which are narrated by a range of speakers with different perspectives and desires, a technique which gives the overall narrative a sense of polyphony and destabilises the notion of authorial truth. Gavin Hudson's review of *Windrush Songs* discusses how the poems render the "complicated emotional journeys of those first immigrants", a plurality which is important, since often the *Windrush* in both its actual and metonymic forms is predominantly discussed as a collective and public odyssey, which overlooks the range of complex personal odysseys of which it was comprised.

Berry's engagement with the *Windrush* is also complex, simultaneously confirming its primacy in his choice of title and introduction and challenging it through the poems. For example, the word "Windrush", with its echoes of "gold-rush" and connotations of movement, is immediately problematised in the opening poem "Wind-rush", which disrupts the word itself through the use of a hyphen. The poem is not about a specific ship, but about the commonplace hurricanes in the Caribbean, which bring destitution, not riches:

> I won't miss how breezeblow madness
> Batter and beat the place up island-wide
> Knocking things over with sea raging and raging
> How island-wide bugle blow of wind
> Batter and mash-up the place (14)

variation"; and of "greater or fewer profiles of experience, even in different orders, without …losing its deep identity" (189). Both these possibilities are evident in *Windrush Songs* which explores the same subject using repetition and a range of variations contributing to the collection's impression of depth.

[37] This anticipation might well be typical of the migrant experience, although in the case of post-war Caribbean migration, a more common report has been of the great disillusionment felt by migrants encountering a Britain that did not match their expectations. But Berry's poems about the experience in Britain (aside from "Beginning in a City, 1948") are absent from this collection, and are instead found in earlier collections such as *Fractured Circles* (1979) and *Chain of Days* (1985).

The use of colloquial idioms and compound words helps create the world of Jamaica where widespread subsistence farming means people must depend on nature's good grace to survive. "Wind-rush" is then two things– the hurricane that causes social and economic destruction and the boat that in later poems offers salvation. In Berry's focus on this adversity, the poem places the beginnings of the *Windrush* story not at the point of arrival on British shores, but at a point significantly earlier within the Caribbean.

Like *Small Island, Windrush Songs* also explores the earlier history of imperialism which encouraged colonial subjects to revere Britain while indoctrinating them in the cultural inferiority of their own nation. "Hating a place you love", the title of the collection's opening sequence, is a consequence of this socialisation. In "Poverty Ketch Yu and Hol Yu", the speaker bemoans the humiliations of hardships that "holy u dere, naked!" and the impossibility of dismantling the colonial structures of power that deprive black people: "Yu ketch up ina poverty / Great house get yu fi servant / Great house dog keep u it servant" (24). The speaker here is both knowing and sardonic about the hierarchies of power that position even the "Great house dog" above him.[38]

Some poems are haunted by the earlier history of slavery's violence and trauma. Speaking in 1998, Berry criticised the historical amnesia about slavery in the Caribbean, specifically the suppression of its history in the colonial education system.[39] "In Sitting Up Past Midnight" a father sits in the doorway and smokes his pipe at night, reflecting on the economic shackles of subsistence farming and his painful and bewildering slave ancestry, a history of entrapment he "can't fill in" (17). Elsewhere in Berry's writing, this father figure is often characterised in a state of passivity or paralysis. He is a victim of the colonial structures that have disempowered him, but lacking the insight to resist or effect change – "sitting up past midnight" is a form of stasis. Similarly, in "I African They Say" the absence of knowledge of this history forms "a blank in mi head/like slave plantations – gone". The dislocation from an African ancestry is encapsulated in the refrain "I was always lost, at sea", referencing the sea journeys of slaves bought to the

[38] The poem resonates strongly with *Small Island* which draws a clear picture of Jamaica's social hierarchy. For example, Gilbert's futile experience as a honey farmer with Elwood, while being a humorous episode, nevertheless emphasises the bleak prospects of the struggling post-war island economy.

[39] Like many postcolonial poets, Berry is concerned with "recuperating" the past. His writing has explored both precolonial history of Africa and the Caribbean, as well as the more recent history of slavery: "Because we were made slaves…our past has remained hidden from your education syllabus as if we do not exist. We seem like aliens because so little is known about us, yet for five hundred years we have been as much a part of this culture as the Isle of Wight. We are no longer Africans and we're not European but we seem to be half of these two things and you can't cut half of history out of yourself" (Berry "An Interview").

Caribbean from Africa and foreshadowing the sea journeys of the *Windrush* migrants – reminding us of the symbolic potency of sea travel in the story of Caribbean movement and migration. The last stanza uses anaphoric repetition to assert a powerful reasoning for the speaker's denial of the one thing he does know about Africa – its complicity in slave trading:

> Africa threw ancestors to wild raging sea –
> Africa never gestured care to restore me –
> Just as Africa sold and abandoned me
> I can never consider Africa (19)

This pre-*Windrush* history is also explored in poems such as in "Old Slave Villages" in which the physical memory of slavery scars the island, forming a dialogue of presence and absence. Dieffenthaller claims that for Berry, "history is inextricably linked with the Jamaican landscape" (176) and in this poem the landscape's transformation – "great houses now derelict, / turned to school grounds – or hotels" – links the white profiteering of both slavery and contemporary tourism (22).

The traumas of slavery, colonial exploitation and continued economic deprivation are reasons for leaving, articulated across the poems, and offering a complex and nuanced version of migration. In "Villagers Talks Frustrations" a woman declares "Man – anywhere, let alone Englan, / Me would a-go anywhere blind", a sentiment repeated emphatically by others:

> *Man – you can't stay static*
> *you can't stay stuck*
> *you can't stay locked up or sunk*
> *you travel on, noh!*
> *Man – you can't stay fixed, frightened,*
> *hating a place you love.*
> *You travel on, noh!* (21)

The tone of despair is contrasted with the use of an emphatic imperative voice and exclamations which stress the agency of the speaker who will determinately "travel on", and whose migration may overturn the spatial and cultural apartheid that previously cemented colonial rule (Dawson, 4). But rootedness to the Jamaican landscape is a further contradiction suggested in "Wash of Sunlight" in which the narrator declares "Oh the sun has washed me / penetrated my skin, my body" (16) and in "Learning Beauty" where the speaker remembers the Caribbean landscape of his childhood. The sensual, physical language of these poems celebrates the relationship of a

child self to nature, and in Blakean fashion, intricately connects nature, childhood and social ritual.[40]

The complexity of migration, the lure of Britain and cultural exchange are examined in the collection's second part. The speakers of the first subsection are zealous in their optimism about Britain and full of false or askance expectation, while the ship and Britain itself are repeatedly inscribed as symbols of hope and salvation. For example, the sentiments of "Villagers Talk Frustrations" are echoed in "To Travel This Ship" in which the speaker names what he will give up in order to leave:

> I gladly strip mi name
> of a one-cow, two-goat an a boar pig
> an sell the land piece mi father lef
> to be on this ship and be a debtor (33)

Migration is symbolised by a light, seen even in the depths of the ship's hold: "Down in that hole I was / I see this lickle luck, man / I see this little light". The brutal transportation of slaves in the depths of slave ships are evoked, but this ship offers possibility and an opportunity the speaker cannot pass up: "Man, I follow this lickle light for change./I a-follow it, man!" (33)

Poverty is the theme in "Running on Empty" where its effects are suggested through metaphors of work and dehumanisation: "I was the bullcrow with eight legs"; "I was the mechanical beast"; "I was the rusty worn out machine". Poverty has paralysing effects and the speaker is unable to effect change: "I was a fixed area of midnight, / my sunburnt face provoked / indifference or just non-recognition". The opportunity of migration gives them hope that British national narratives can "look and be widened" to include non-white citizens, a perspective facilitated by the retrospective knowledge of the struggles of Britain's black population to be accepted and treated equally (32).

Innocence, knowledge and irony characterise the varied voices of these poems. In "A Dream of Leavin" Britain's power of salvation is espoused: "One day I would be Englan bound!/…Never see me coulda touch world of Englan –" while the source of Britain's wealth is "where all we prosperity end up"(34). This irony is echoed in "Away from Mi Little Ova-bodda Piece of Lan",

[40] Kei Miller suggests these poems are more "nostalgia than poignancy" but perhaps it is the nostalgic emphasis that illustrates the tie between Berry and the landscape of childhood and how fracturing the act of migration might be ("Sing Another One")

where the speaker travels to Britain "in hope / trusting a big hearty God, to work for proud people who lucky wid money" (36).

The speakers of these poems also long for cultural and intellectual freedom, such as in "Breaking Free" where the narrator bemoans his entrapment, a double layering of perspective in which he only knows enough to know he doesn't know enough: "Inside, longings twist me / for money / for songs, for paintings, / for knowledge / of what I should become" (35). Yearning for scholarly "civilisation" is also articulated in "A Woman's Dread of Layered Snow", in which the assumed voice of a woman reminds us, like Levy and Kay, that women also migrated in the early post-war period, and links back to Berry's earlier collection *Lucy's Letters*, which articulate the dilemmas of migration from a female perspective. Although the female speaker of this poem claims the English have "hearts of no-sunshine / and bleak inherited snow faces", the possibilities of "time to qualify" and "university for all my children" are positioned as a compensatory exchange (38).

The last poem in this section, "Work Control Me Fadda like a Mule", returns to the figure of Berry's father, a recurring symbol of the passive and dispirited condition of slavery's descendants. The narrator expresses frustration with the father's collusion in his own oppression, locked into a gruelling relationship with the landscape on which he depends. The determination of the speaker to break a cycle of poverty and ignorance is suggested in the baptismal equation of rain and water with change and possibility:

> *Rain storm drench me*
> *and sea-water wash me.*
>
> And now, sea a-carry me
> headlong to a little change (39)

The polyphony that characterises this poem sequence is sustained in the second subsection, "Reminiscence Voices" which fixes Jamaica in a backwards glance.[41] The simplest of these reminiscing poems lists what is missed from the natural landscape as well as the "oily-mout" dishes of island fish (47), and Joysie, the "rudest village girl", the thought of whom makes the speaker "wahn fly back instantly" (45). These wistful voices are contrasted with less sentimental ones such as the speaker in the "The Rock" who declares "Me not going back to dat hell

[41] This diasporic longing is expressed across the body of Berry's writing, particularly in the 1982 collection *Lucy's Letters and Loving*, in which he adopts the voice of Lucy who writes "back home" to her best friend Leila of all she misses. Berry draws heavily on the Caribbean oral strategy of "labrish" (gossip) in these poems.

Jamaica" where "hungry belly wahn me walk like skeleton". The poem's anti-colonial rhetoric – "Only white-man-dem - / user of mi mind an body – call Jamaica paradise" – claims the Caribbean has been ruined by European intrusion, but the speaker does not seem aware that the same colonial relationship shaped and enabled his escape, or of the continued exploitation of Caribbean people in Britain (44).

Other poems continue to define a pre-*Windrush* history through varied perspectives. In "Empire Day", a colonial upbringing is nostalgically remembered:

> At school, we have prayers. We recite
> poems about Englan and Empire. Each
> one of us get a likkle Union Jack
> and sweets with flags printed
> all over the tin. (49)

The diaspora perspective sustains an undisturbed version of the mother country of the speaker's imagination, despite his real experience of Britain. In "Childhood Mysteries" the colonial education that omitted Jamaica's own history and that kept the speaker "unaware of the burial grounds of slaves" is implicitly critiqued (50). Colonial authority is then openly mocked in "Old Slave Plantation Village Owner", which mocks the exploitative "grand lady" of the big house, "the rich white queen of our village", who refuses to assist with the education of local black children, but makes the speaker sit and listen to her play the piano, to satisfy her own vanity (52).

The experience of migration and living in Britain brings the speakers of later poems into a consciousness of an African ancestry previously submerged (Brown 53). In "Comparing Now with Ancestors' Travel From Africa" slavery's middle passage is contrasted with the sea journey of post-war migrants who travel "by choice, with hope, and with/ resolution for fulfilment" and "a look forward/ to a-share skills, wealth and recognition –/ determined to be humanly respected" (54). These affirmative lines echo Stuart Hall's claim that these migrants were not victims but agents of social change who "burnt their boats in the determination to carve out a better life for them and their children" (1984 84). It is journeying to the metropolitan centre that brings the speaker into understanding of his slave history: "some may yet a-travel / to write down them ancesta story".

Similar sentiments resound in the "The Story I am In" which re-enacts the moment of capture into slavery in Africa. The use of collective personal pronouns – "they tied us to walk with their

wagons" and "we sang sadly in chains" shows Berry's empathy and identification with his slave ancestry, a shift from the blinkered perspective of the father figure of earlier poems (56). Transcendence of the past is the appeal made in "A Talk to the Machete", where Berry transforms the tool of oppression, a "beatin-time stick" and "daily slave-maker", into a device of hybridity with which to "chop… through centuries / to make me African-Jamaican-British" (55).

The poems veer back and forth from the real *Windrush,* coming into close proximity again in "Whitehall Goin Turn We Back" which reworks a well-known *Windrush* anecdote concerning the rumour that the ship would be turned back by a troopship sent by the British government to prevent the migrants from landing.[42] The alternate tones of panic and confusion finish in resignation: "Man oh man / White people dohn wan black people in Englan. / Now, them gon sink we dead. / White people dohn want we / to mix with the world" (68). In "Eatin for Two Man" the speaker wants to fatten up so no one in Britain will realise his "hungry-belly history" (69) while in "Englan voice" the speaker religiously practises his standard English because he has internalised the value judgements about his own dialect: "patois talk is bushman talk" and its speakers "dam lazy".

The last poem of these poems, "White Suit and White Shoes" is humorous and subversive, trivialising the racist, ethnographic representations of black people, typical of the colonial era, which over-emphasise racial characteristics: "Yes, the White of my eyes and the White of my teeth! / And skin – the dark betrayer – must go in hidin." (71) These poems are interspersed with more serious ones, such as "How the Weak Manufactured Power for the Strong" which expresses a painful recognition that the speaker's migration to Britain will help the same economy that enslaved and exploited his own people: "I go to live with the unfeeling eaters / who digested the proceeds of my ancestors". Yet his determination to travel and to share the British experience is also foregrounded: "I go driven to fulfil sharing. / I go with bright smiles and awkward speech" (66).

The final section, "New Days Arriving" contains four poems which overlap with the five "Sea Songs" that close each previous section. Only one poem is specifically about Caribbean–British

[42] A version of this anecdote is relayed by Robert Winder in *Bloody Foreigners*: "Out at sea, a couple of Jamaican wireless operators set up their game of dominoes right outside the radio shack, so they could monitor the news. They heard that the *Windrush* was being shadowed by a warship, HMS *Sheffield*, which was under instructions to turn them back if they made any trouble" (338).

migration, further de-centring the actual *Windrush* from the poetic narrative. The poems are celebratory in tone, a quality often found in Berry's writing (Brown, 1998, Miller 2007, Dieffenthaller, 2009).[43] The opening couplet of "Beginning in a City, 1948" names the reasons for migrating: "Stirred by restlessness, pushed by history, / I found myself at the centre of Empire" (78). Securing a room and employment are the immediate concerns, and on finding himself in the queue of the Labour Exchange, the speaker declares "So, I had begun – begun in London", an optimistic declaration about a new life beginning.

Other poems speak more generally about journeying and change, an important gesture emphasising migration as a common event in human history and undermining the *Windrush*'s arrival as a foundational historic moment. In "In The Land and Sea Culture-crossed", Berry intimates that nationalism is only the "madness" of "self-love", which must make way for self-knowledge and acceptance as a form of "sanity" (77). These poems, which seemingly call for racial unity, also transcend race in the speakers' articulations of simple longings to be part of a human world. "Hymn to New Day Arriving", the final poem of the book, invites the reader to witness "this glorious world ship coming silently / on the old, old waterway", suggesting change and movement are common elements of the human condition which should be welcomed, rather than the cause for alarm: "Then remember / is only another day arriving / Coming with its new arousals"(80).

The "Sea Songs" interspersed throughout this collection move away from the social and material conditions of the colonial Caribbean to emphasise the universality of human migration. They challenge the insular desire to preserve homogenous national cultures over the invigoration of cultural exchange. The transporting role of the sea in history "from all the world's corners" is stressed in "Sea Song Three": "Earth's twin sister – old sea – / Carry me on your mother back / above unsteady bones…" (40). These poems effectively punctuate this collection that explores migration from multiple perspectives, emphasising the interconnectedness of the histories of slavery, colonialism and post-war arrival and settlement. The use of multiple voices, both conflicting and corroborating, in careful sequence, challenges any singular account of the *Windrush* journey, and reminds us of both the traumas and adventures of migration.

[43] Stewart Brown emphasises the triumphant quality of Berry's writing, arguing it does not undermine the potent commentary on racism and poverty (45). Ian Dieffenthaler names Berry's "legendary" capacity for celebration as strategic in not only rendering the betrayals and disappointments of post-war Caribbean–British migration, but also emphasising the pleasures and excitements of the migratory experience (177).

2.2.7 *Conclusion*

Given the *Windrush*'s primacy in contemporary social, media and historical discourses, as well as its frequent use in literary criticism, its absence from pre-1998 Black British literature, and scant appearance in post-1998 Black British literature, might come as a surprise. The *Windrush* has become so famous we might expect that fame to be echoed across a variety of cultural and artistic productions. Indeed, this may well have been the motivation behind the commissioning of works responding to *Windrush* in 1998 by institutions such as the BBC and Radio 4 – to produce literature that confirmed the legacy of the ship and cemented its arrival as a foundational moment in British history.

John Agard's poems, with their celebratory gesturing and politically mild entreaties for racial harmony, align well with the commemorative mood propagated by the liberal institutions that played a key role in making *Windrush* a household name. But this mood was not upheld by Benjamin Zephaniah's poem, and if we are to believe his account of events, was rejected by Crucial Films for this reason. While the television company expressed their need for something "more celebratory" – possibly along the lines of the struggle for survival narrative that Pirker claims the *Windrush* history embodies (6), Zephaniah offers a less palatable narrative that highlights how the struggle against racism is far from finished.

The 1998 *Windrush* moment relied on a glossing over of this continuity, and on the notion that contemporary social conditions had firmly shifted away from the institutional and popular bigotry of 50 years earlier. While *Windrush* migrants were invited to share their experiences of racism "back then" on a range of platforms, from television documentaries to social histories to museum websites, their testimonies were consistently framed as historical. Only critical journals such as *Soundings* explicitly discussed the ironies inherent in celebrating the end of a racism that hadn't gone away, but had morphed into new types of very real and alive discrimination (80). Even Jackie Kay's "Out of Hand", which is strident in its depiction of the ways in which racism can ruin lives, occupies a relatively safe space by not contemporising that racism to make it part of Rose's experience as an older woman.

Of those *Windrush* texts that were not commissions, Goodison's "Windrush Sankey" fits neatly into her collection *Goldengrove* which takes Caribbean journeying and return as a central theme. Poems about voyaging from freedom into slavery contrast with those about later voyages of

Caribbean migrants to Britain or America. Goodison herself lives between American and the Caribbean, and is the only one of these writers not to be writing in Britain, as the place of *Windrush* arrival and settlement. In contrast, Levy was born in Britain and Berry has lived most of his life here, both have a direct personal connection to the actual *Windrush* and have articulated their need to tell their *Windrush* story because of this. According to Berry, the *Windrush* was always a personal anchor, precisely because of his failure to board the ship, while Levy's discovery of her parents' migration story, including her father's journey on the *Windrush,* underpins the action of *Small Island.* Levy's father, Winston, made the journey to Britain with his twin brother, a fact echoed in the inclusion in her novel of twin brother characters, Winston and Kenneth, who share lodgings with Gilbert.

Chapter Two has argued that given its prominence, the *actual Windrush* features in relatively few texts, before analysing the specific ways in which writers who do name the ship have then narrativised it – from a close engagement with the historical facts of the ship's arrival, to a deconstruction of the ship's media representations, to its use as a loose departure point. Like the texts we have considered here, the history of the ship's arrival is a narrative itself, and the strength of the *Windrush* story reiterates the power of narrative in history. Mike Phillips' discussion of the making of the 1998 *Windrush* documentary, which was crucial to spreading knowledge about the ship widely, might well be amplified to apply to the way in which the whole of the *Windrush* story was constituted in and around 1998, and since:

> Before we created it, nobody had a coherent story. I made the story up. History is about fact, but it is also about narration. I created a narrative that had coherence. I didn't do it completely on my own, but it was a part of how we did it. This was a story, and this is its shape – it could have gone twenty different ways. (quoted in Pirker 2011 73)

The possibility of other versions of this narrative provokes us to imagine which of the elements of the *Windrush* story might have been different – our knowledge of the passengers, or the ship's route for example, or indeed whether it might ever have been possible for another ship – earlier or later – to have been crowned *instead* of the *Windrush*? Phillips' words remind us that, despite its widespread recognition as historical fact, the *Windrush* story is an ongoing construct – a process of selection, editing and omission.

Chapter Three: A Critical Reflection on *Chan*

This final chapter illustrates the links between my critical thesis and my creative submission, *Chan,* a collection of fifty poems in three sequences which orientate around my paternal family ancestry. *Chan* follows on from my first full collection *Chick* (2013), which is autobiographical in its explorations of family life and multicultural London and from *Long Time, No See* (2015) a partly fictionalised memoir which tells the contrasting narratives of my upbringing in England and that of my father in rural Jamaica, and his migrations to America and Britain. The title *Chan* is linked to *Chick,* as both were my father's nicknames.

In both the critical and creative submissions, I am engaged in understanding more about my father's life and my racial and cultural identity. He was part black Jamaican and part Chinese while my mother is white and English. My father died in 2002, four years after the *Windrush* commemorations, and was a member of that generation, having migrated from Jamaica in the post-war period. He had in fact arrived the year before the *Windrush* on the SS *Ormonde* – a name I found in a notebook he had kept, discovered some years after his death. *Ormonde* had docked at Liverpool in March 1947, a detail that interested me since my general knowledge of Caribbean migration was anchored to a passing knowledge of the *Windrush's* 1948 arrival. I sought to reconcile what seemed to be a historical anomaly, and in time this became the genesis of the critical investigation presented here. There is also a direct correlation between this discovery and my creative work, since my discovery of the *Ormonde's* omission from the historical records prompted me to recreate its voyage in poetry.

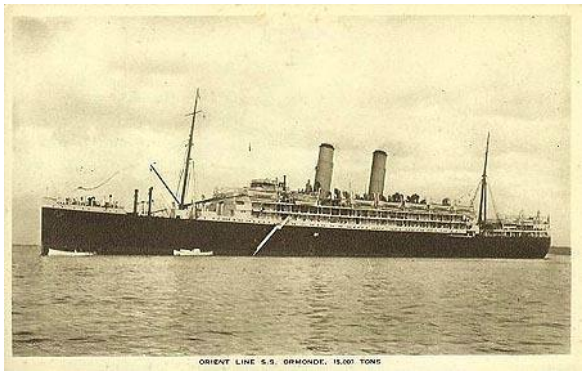


Figure 6: The SS *Ormonde*

In writing this collection, my own position as a diaspora descendant is critical. As a young woman growing up, I felt isolated from my mixed raceness – a dislocation enabled, if not

attributed to, my physical appearance – I am generally assumed to be white. My father's death compounded this sense of alienation, since it signalled not only the loss of his migration narrative, but also the loss of a continuity between myself and a more distant Chinese and black Jamaican ancestry. In the years since, writing has been instrumental in reconciling this personal dislocation. According to Ellis, Adams and Bochner (2011) writing has the potential to perform numerous functions for authors:

> Writing is a way of knowing, a method of inquiry (Richardson, 2000). Consequently, writing personal stories can be therapeutic for authors as we write to make sense of ourselves and our experiences (Kiesinger, 2002; Poulous, 2008), purge our burdens (Atkinson, 2007), and question canonical stories.

Writing both *Chick* and *Chan* have certainly helped me process complex ideas and feelings about my identity. It has enabled me to make discoveries through research and in doing so, to reconnect with my Jamaican family and with individuals and agencies who have shared knowledge and provided a network within which to develop my enquiry. Writing has also given me the opportunity to share ideas about racial and cultural identity at poetry readings, public debates and panel discussions over the course of my doctoral studies. All of these experiences have contributed to the discoveries made in my critical and creative work, as has the research trip I made to Jamaica in 2013, undertaken as part of the PhD. This visit is referred to in numerous poems in the collection.

While the obvious connection between my critical investigation and creative work is the parallel migration voyages of the *Windrush* and *Ormonde,* there are other nuanced and more subtle connections which this chapter will seek to illustrate. One of these is the notion of *belatedness,* already discussed in Chapter Two in relation to Andrea Levy's work, since I am belatedly engaged with retelling the traumatic life experiences of my father and other forebears in the same way Levy does of her parents. Unlike Levy, who was able to draw on her mother's experiences as relayed to her directly, the death of my father marks an absence of knowledge which I am compelled to fill in. Absence is then key to my understanding of and response to belatedness in the articulation of my narrative, and forms a theme in itself. Absence is both addressed and remedied in my creative work through writing in response to research. The use of a broad range of sources, including my father's notebook, wide reading, archive and location research and

interviews, offers me the direct possibility for imaginative reconstruction. The research itself has become a theme in my poetry.

The second important link between the creative and critical work is the *polyvocality* of *Chan,* which echoes that of Berry's *Windrush Songs* and Levy's *Small Island.* Like them, I also want to resist a dominant and singular account of post-war migration. The multiple voices in *Chan* are intended to both corroborate and collide with each other to avoid any one authorial "truth". The poems are narrated by, amongst others, the fictionalised voices of my parents, my paternal grandfather, a Jamaican beauty contestant, a slave owner, a jazz musician, and many of the passengers of the SS *Ormonde*. I hope the reader will perceive each poetic evocation as a nodal point in my search for "heritage".

The poems journey back in time and space, often allowing the narrator an entry point into a specific moment in history. This is sometimes signalled by the refrain "If You Believe", in titles and first lines, to introduce a range of imagined historical encounters – with jazz musician Joe Harriott, for example, and the card magician, Chan Canasta. That so many of the collection's characters are called Chan also draws attention to naming, another theme of this collection. Chan is a nickname of my father, but also refers to Chan Canasta and Chan Parker, the wife of the saxophonist Charlie Parker, and various imagined Chans – a device intended to draw attention to the multiple formations of identity.

I will discuss the *Ormonde* sequence first because it has the strongest link to my critical study, but it should be noted that this is the middle sequence in the poetry collection, placed between *What I Play Is Out the Window!* and the final sequence, *Borderliner*. The three sequences are in dialogue with each other and ordered deliberately to signal certain temporal, geographical and thematic shifts. The scope of this chapter does not allow me to discuss all the poems in the sequence, but instead to discuss the authorial intention of each section, illustrated through key poems.

What I Play Is Out the Window! opens on the jazz scene of post-war London where immigrant aesthetics are already impacting on contemporary culture. The Jamaican-born saxophonist Harriott is the central figure and represents how migrant creativity both flourished and was stunted at this time. The poems draw on archive research and interviews and are narrated in different voices to evoke Harriot's complex and multifaceted character, and highlight the mythologizing of his life since his untimely death in 1973.

Ormonde transports the reader back in time to reproduce the immigrant journey, from departure to arrival, and broadens out the focus from one man to many travellers. The format of this sequence is a clear echo of the polyphony of Berry's *Windrush Songs* since, as in his collection, a range of loosely fictionalised migrants articulate their reasons for leaving, hopes for arrival and longings for home.

The final sequence, *Borderliner*, is formally experimental and broadly focuses on racial intermixing in different social contexts. The shifts in time and place are intended to make the reader perceive the links between past and present ideologies of race in both Britain and the Caribbean, and to read each poem in this sequence as a building block in that dialogue.

Though neither of the first two sequences of the *Chan* are directly about me, they are certainly about me by proxy, since in writing about Joe Harriott, who was my father's cousin, and the *Ormonde,* I am claiming a family connection, and more broadly, claiming a lineage to Jamaica through my father and Harriott. It is my hope that in drawing together these areas of research, and creating multiple voices to explore ideas of migration, diaspora and mixed race, *Chan* marks a new departure in writing about these themes.

3.1 *Ormonde*

The mediation of history has already been discussed at length in my critical work which interrogates the place of the *Windrush* in the story of post-war Caribbean arrival. Once an unknown story, the *Windrush* has become *the* narrative of Caribbean arrival, an augmentation involving the efforts of black community groups and the sanctioning of liberal institutions in a receptive political climate. As stated in my introduction, my analysis is not intended to undermine the importance of the *Windrush*, but to draw attention to its construction and positioning on a historical trajectory and the political contexts that fostered its treatment. Hindsight allows me to interrogate the status of the *Windrush* both critically, as I do in Chapter One of this thesis, and creatively as in the *Ormonde* poem sequence.

Chapter Two also discusses the relationship of existing literature to the historical archive of the ship, such as the use of the historical media coverage of the *Windrush* arrival in Jackie Kay's story "Out of Hand" and Benjamin Zephaniah's poem "The Men From Jamaica are Settling Down". Their texts dismantle or challenge common knowledge about the *Windrush* to some degree, by drawing attention to the mediation of the ship. The poems in *Ormonde* are also a challenge to the

Windrush narrative, by providing an alternative account which reminds us that there were other ships that pre-date the *Windrush*, as already discussed in Chapter One, regarding the omission of *Ormonde* and *Almanzora* from national narratives. In the same way that I examined historical archives to see how the *Windrush* has been treated, I used archives to generate my poetic evocation of the journey of the *Ormonde*. Compared with *Windrush*, this is a much smaller collection of documents, but similarly the passenger list, advertisement for passage and the media coverage are the main sources.[44]

Unlike the *Windrush*, there is no film footage of the *Ormonde*'s arrival, an absence addressed by the title poem, "Ormonde" (24), in which I adopt the tone of the Pathé newsreel voiceover for parodic effect. The voice also echoes that of a ship's captain in its opening imperative: "Rewind, rewind the *Windrush*! Sail her back / three weeks across the water". This same newsreel tone, which Zephaniah calls the "movietone voice", is also mocked in the lines that introduce the ship's passengers (2002 40):

> Among the crowd, here's Gilbert Lowe, a tailor,
> strolling starboard with his wife and daughter,
> or staring out to sea alone most nights,
> here's Paul the Carpenter, the yellow moonlight
> and his battered playing cards for company (24)

Unlike the Pathé newsreel, which homogenises the passengers by not naming them, I choose here to name the migrants, to draw attention to their individual circumstances and in the case of Gilbert Lowe, to remind readers that whole families made this journey, not just young men.

The second poem of the sequence, "What I Know" (25), is a *glose* written in the voice of a fictionalised migrant, loosely based on my father, and explores the psychological impact of migration. The form, comprised of four ten-line stanzas, allows for temporal and spatial distance to be emphasised, since each stanza encompasses a different aspect – the thought of leaving, the plan to leave, the journey, arrival.[45] The poem will resonate with some in Berry's *Windrush Songs* and others discussed in Chapter Two, which often stress the reasons for migration – to escape

[44] My father is listed on this passenger log, travelling in Cabin Class, aged 23, a discovery I found to be remarkably potent as "official" discourse that corroborates the information in his notebook.
[45] The *Glosa* form uses a four-line stanza from another poem, known as the *texte* or *cabeza*. The remainder of the poem is made of four ten-line stanzas. The last line of each stanza is a line from the first stanza in consecutive order. The sixth and ninth lines of each stanza must rhyme with the tenth line. The main body of the poem (the ten line stanzas) are a *gloss on* (hence the name of the form) the opening four-line stanza.

poverty and natural disaster, for example – and lament the loss of family, friends, familiar landscape and lifestyle:

> At night, you find me at the oil-lamp, dice in hand.
> I say to myself, if I throw a pair of fives
> I'll give up this life – the hot slow days
> of hurricanes, sweet reek of banana rot,
> black fruit on the vine. I want another hand
> of chances. I grip the dice and blow
> a gust of luck into my fist. I'm dreaming
> of England, yes, work, yes, women, riches. (25)

The poem's use of a gambling metaphor to interpret the migrant experience is drawn from the legacy of gambling which exists in my family. In Jamaica and England, my father made his livelihood through playing poker and dice, a proclivity he may well have inherited from my grandfather, a profligate player of Mah Jong, the Chinese gambling game. As such, gambling seems a fitting metaphor for their migrations, symbolising the exchange of one life or "hand of cards" for another.

The last stanza of this poem reiterates the idea of exchange by reworking what has become a rehearsed cliché about post-war Caribbean migration – that the migrants expected to find the streets of England "paved with gold", a metaphor for opportunity and prosperity, but were bitterly disappointed to find themselves impoverished through popular and institutional racial discrimination. In his testimony in *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-racial Britain,* Alfred Harvey retells an anecdote about this misperception, relaying a conversation between himself and his friend Vinny:

> It happens one night we were coming from the West End, and I turned to him, I say "Vinny, where is this diamond pavement that you told us about?" It was raining and the light reflection looking down Bayswater Road, it seems as if the pavement, where they used to make it with broken glass or anything like that were in the concrete, so it glitters when the rain washed off. So he said, "There it is. Good question you asked. There's the diamond. Here, man." (104)

I adapt this story in the poem, returning to the gambling idiom:

> Some fellow swore there were diamonds
> on these streets. Look hard enough in rain
> you'll see them. I squint my eyes but what I see
> is sunshine on the dock, my mother's white gloves

waving me goodbye. There's no diamonds here,
or if there are, they're under this skin of snow.
Seems the whole world's gone white. I roll my dice
in basements below the English pavements (25)

These lines may resonate more broadly to suggest that for many post-war Caribbean migrants, life in England was not a "winning hand", but something much more ambiguous. Faced with a hostile world, "gone white", the poem's speaker seeks a literal and metaphorical home in an underground space where he can make a living illicitly.

The poems that follow also use the monologue form but move beyond the familial to offer a range of other migration narratives. "Boxer" (27), "Dressmaker" (28) and "Schoolboy" (29) all have their genesis in the *Ormonde* passenger list, since passengers embarking on the journey to England were required to list both destination addresses and employment role. Several of the ship's passengers listed "Dressmaker" as an occupation, drawing our attention to the primary role of women in this period of movement. The poem "Dressmaker" is in conversation with other literary texts discussed earlier which adopt a female perspective on migration, such as Berry's "A Woman's Dread of Layered Snow" and Jackie Kay's "Out of Hand". In writing in a woman's voice, I've also drawn on further reading beyond the scope of my critical thesis. Joan Riley's *Waiting in the Twilight* (1987), Caryl Phillips *The Final Passage* (1985) and Alex Wheatle's *Island Songs* (2005) for example, all feature female protagonists who migrate from the Caribbean – a notable literary trend which counters the omission of women's experience in many public discourses about this period of migration.

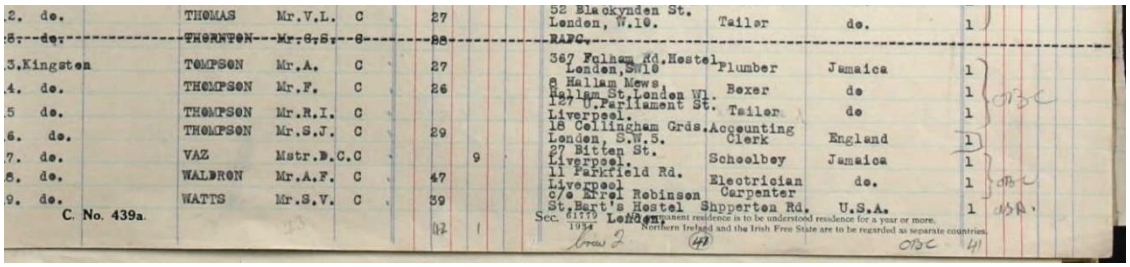
In my "Dressmaker" poem, I use the colour red to intertextually reference Kay's story, particularly the moment when Rose sees herself in black and white on the cinema screen and wishes to alert the (white, English) audience that she is wearing the colour red – "I know the colours she is wearing. She is me!'" (102). In my poem, I use red to stress the imperial imagery, disseminated through the colonial education system, which has already rehearsed the dressmaker for life in the empire centre. The colour fuels her imaginings and anticipation of arrival:

I dreamt myself – on a red bus passing Whitehall,
or walking on the Strand; there was a tea-room
where I wiled away my idle afternoons,
and in every scene I wore my dress, bright red
for pillar box and rose, the robins pictured
in my books at school. And now, at the ship's cold rail,
I am a dash of colour in the grey as we sail
still closer and closer, and finally I see

through a veil of cloud – England, my destiny. (28)

Although the dressmaker has been beguiled by the myth of Britain propagated in Jamaican society, she is also the agent of her own future, an act the sewing of the dress is meant to symbolise. Unlike Leila in *The Final Passage,* or Adella of *Waiting in the Twilight,* who both travel with husbands who later abandon them, the forthright dressmaker strikes out alone.

The poem "Schoolboy" draws on the details of Master D.C.C Vaz, a nine year old boy who travelled in the Cabin Class of the *Ormonde* and who had listed a specific destination address in England – 27 Bitten Street, Liverpool (rather than the Colonial Servicemen Club, which many others had), suggesting that he had familial connections in England. In my poem, I imagine that he has been sent away by his sick mother to extended family in England – a gentle echo of Joan Riley's *The Unbelonging* (1985) which also features an unaccompanied child, Hyacinth, who travels alone to England to join her father. The adult passengers adopt a paternal attitude to the child, taking care of him on the ship: "now it's sea sea sea/ they gimme jokes and mints / call me 27 bitten street (29)



2. do.	THOMAS	Mr.V.L.	C	27		52 Blackynden St. London, W.10.	Tailer	do.	1
3. do.	THORNTON	Mr.G.S.	C	28		RAFC.			
3.Kingston	TOMPSON	Mr.A.	C	27		367 Fulham Rd.Hostel London,S.W.10	Plumber	Jamaica	1
4. do.	THOMPSON	Mr.F.	C	26		8 Hallam Mews, Hallam St.London W1.	Boxer	do	1
5 do.	THOMPSON	Mr.R.I.	C			127 U.Parliament St. Liverpool.	Tailer	do	1
6. do.	THOMPSON	Mr.S.J.	C	29		18 Cellingham Grds. London, S.W.5.	Accounting Clerk	England	1
7. do.	VAZ	Mstr.D.C.	C		9	27 Bitten St. Liverpool.	Schoolboy	Jamaica	1
8. do.	WALDRON	Mr.A.F.	C	47		11 Parkfield Rd. Liverpool	Electrician	do.	1
9. do.	WATTS	Mr.S.V.	C	39		c/o Errol Robinson St.Bart's Hostel	Carpenter	U.S.A.	1
C. No. 439a.				07	1	Secc. 41(2) London 1934			

Figure 7: Extract from the *Ormonde* passenger list showing the entry for Master D. Vaz, aged 9, Schoolboy.

The voyage and moment of arrival are also described by the speaker of "Stowaway" (32), a later poem, whose voice contrasts with the Dressmaker's aspirational and slightly haughty tone. The Stowaway's story draws on the list of stowaways on the passenger list, as well as true accounts of stowaways who jumped overboard as post-war migrant ships neared England, and fictional accounts such as that in Wheatle's *Island Songs* of a Rastafarian who jumps overboard and swims ashore (243). The presence of stowaways reminds us that those who could afford passage on ships such as the *Ormonde* and *Windrush* often came from middle-class backgrounds and chimes with Berry's account of his struggle to raise the passage to travel to Britain. The speaker of my poem beseeches the reader to understand his plight: "… when at last the docks on England's rim / rose up, what choice had we but to jump and swim?" (32).

Both this poem and others in the sequence are written in iambic pentameter and rhyming couplets, formal choices made to reflect the traditional English poetry taught in the colonial classrooms of the Caribbean in which my father grew up. Voicing the stowaway's experience and those of other black working class subjects in these types of literary form is intended here as a democratization of "high" literary culture.

When writing these poems, it occurred to me that the real people whose identities I had drawn on, might still be alive, a possibility I felt needed to be addressed. I decided to send postcards to all the destination addresses listed by all those I had written about, including the Schoolboy, at the 27 Bitten Street address.[46] My reasons for doing this were manifold – partly to do with the intrigue of finding a *real* person who had taken that voyage, as though this might somehow further concretize my father's arrival, and partly because of my concern with the politics of my project and the fictionalising of the migration stories based on real people. I didn't hear back from anyone, but had several postcards returned to me marked "No Such Address" – a labelling which in fact seemed to evoke the disappearance of *Ormonde's* history and its passengers. I explore this idea of disappearance in the last stanza of the title poem, when the passengers "step from the ship / and through a coverlet of mist, then slip / like whispers into tenements and backstreets" (24).

Figure 8: Returned postcard sent to 27 Bitten Street

That I heard nothing from any of the passengers was disappointing, but having followed this particular course of action, I also felt a kind of relief – I did not have to be directly accountable

[46] This was not the first time I'd attempted to trace passengers of the *Ormonde's* 1947 voyage. In 2006, when I had first become interested in the ship, I had placed an advert in the *Liverpool Gazette*, asking for any passengers from its 1947 voyage to contact me, but heard nothing.

to those I was writing about. In hindsight, this is still an unresolved tension: what are the ethics of writing in the voices of real people? Or more specifically, about their particular, possibly traumatic experiences, experiences I haven't had?

I feel relatively confident in writing in the voice of my father, not because I feel he would have approved of this – I can't know this to be true – but because I think that readers will be accepting and comfortable with a poet writing in the voice of close family. In appropriating and recreating the voices of others, I am less confident of readers' judgements. I haven't resolved these dilemmas, and raise them here to show my awareness of them, as well as an awareness of the problems of challenging the *Windrush* narrative, in both the critical and creative work. As discussed in Chapter 1, the augmentation of *Windrush* lies in the sanctioning of the British state but also through the dedication of black community groups, such as the Windrush Foundation, and individuals such as Mike Phillips, who in claiming about *Windrush,* "we made it up", might well view challenges and interjections to that story to be problematic. Alternatively, they might accept that the evolving interest in this period of history inevitably leads to alternative or more nuanced accounts by second and third generation writers, such as Andrea Levy and indeed myself, who seek a lens through which to filter this history and our relationship to it.

My own desire to connect to my father's migration story is most explicitly evoked in the penultimate poem of this sequence, "Shipbreaking" (35), which uses the metaphor of shipbreaking to explore the project of reconstructing the *Ormonde* voyage. In wanting to know about the ship the poem's speaker googles "what I can", and to visualise the fate of the *Ormonde*, watches "old films of ship yards on the Clyde, / cranes ripping ships apart, their metal hides / peeled back by men in goggles wielding fire" (35).[47] The "rain" of artefacts and papers that fall from the ship in public in one YouTube video ("Ship Breakers Issue") remind the speaker of a "private" vessel which also contains an archive – the trunk my father bought with him from Jamaica. This was in fact a real trunk in the attic of my childhood home, but one that I never looked in and was rarely mentioned. I use it as a metaphor for my father's silence about the *Ormonde:*

> and I recall that old trunk in our attic –
> cracked leather, rusted clasps – *my box of tricks*
> you said, you said you'd lost the only key.
> Your home, the ship you sailed, those miles of sea

[47] The SS *Ormonde* was itself scrapped in Dalmuir, Scotland in 1952.

were locked inside…(35)

The poem ends with the picture of the "young man on the gangway", which echoes the now iconic photos of the arrival of these migrants and should illustrate how potent that archive might be to diaspora descendants, seeking to locate and understand their origins. The image is also meant to close the whole sequence optimistically, reflecting the sentiments of Stuart Hall's essay "Reconstruction Work". Analysing the photographic archive of Caribbean arrival to English ports and train stations, Hall argues against the prescribed innocence read into the figures of the new arrivals, opting instead to read their empowerment: "These folks were not the victims of migration…these folks mean to survive" (84). This quote is the epigraph to the poem and is also reflected in the final image of the poem, which references Agard's "Uncle Mo Steps Out", where the well-styled Uncle Mo strides the English streets as an act of ownership and a claim to belonging. In my poem, the same sharp style of dress and self-conscious movement announce my father's arrival and determination: "the young man on a gangway – / the trilby tilted, pocket hankie, his smartest gear / and his stride so well-rehearsed – it says *I'm here*" (35).

The final poem in this sequence, "Mishra's Blues" (36-38), moves forward in time to the period of post-war settlement, and dramatizes a conversation between two migrants – Chan, a Jamaican, and Mishra, an Indian – both disillusioned by their experiences in Britain. Their encounter draws on another statement by Stuart Hall, in which he discusses the important connections between Caribbean islanders who had migrated:

> I had met very few West Indian people other than Jamaicans before I came to London in 1951…Nothing could assuage that deep ache in the heart for the place one left behind which assails every migrant in the least expected moment. Meeting ordinary folks from the Caribbean in London was…to find "a presence", as if the "real" Caribbean I had never found there had come to meet me here (1998 190)

I wondered whether this same sense of community might have echoed in relationships between migrants from other places, such as South-East Asia, and use the voices of Mishra and Chan to explore this shared and different ground. It is also based on a personal memory, of my father's gambling associates, many of whom were Caribbean and Asian.

In the opening of the poem, Mishra speaks first, lamenting the immigrant condition, and Chan responds:

We are all sad men, with our one-pan meals –
my turmeric-sardines, your scotch-bonnet sardines!
Even the saffron stains on this counter
are a gasp for home. Chan, do you ever –

think to go back?
Sure, Mishra. Some days the city give me big adventure,
some days cold shoulder – so lonely
I cry at my own friendly face in the mirror. (36)

Both men are "gamblers" in the literal and metaphorical sense, having left their homes to seek new fates in Britain. As they settle down to play cards, they talk about their longings for home and their family histories. The story that Chan tells Mishra about Misir, a boyhood friend whom Chan thinks Mishra resembles is drawn directly from my father's notebook, which opens with a short story entitled "Slingshot".[48] I adapt the story to touch briefly on the history of indentured workers in the Caribbean, who were often misnamed by record keepers with "negligent pens", and to emphasise the roots of some of the ethnic plurality of the Caribbean. Both slavery and indenture are part of my family history, since my black grandmother had slave ancestry, and the presence in Jamaica of my Chinese grandfather is a legacy of 19th Century indenture. Both these histories are summoned when Chan remarks despondently to Mishra: "the big ship sail in all directions / dragging poor folk from one place to another" (37).

The sad tone of the poem reflects many of the first-person accounts of post-war migration that describe the bitter disappointment of finding an unwelcoming Britain. At the end of the migrant journey, both Chan and Mishra have found this hostility – a loneliness that leads Chan to cry at the sight of his own reflection. The end of the poem sees Mishra bemoan the passing of time that keeps him in exile – "the seven years / becoming twenty years" – while Chan expresses his desire for Mishra's chai tea because it reminds him of his grandmother and his childhood. Both men, in their anguish, seek anchors of home wherever they can find them (37).

What I Play is Out the Window!

The Jamaican-British saxophonist Joe Harriott was always a figure of intrigue to me as a child. The combination of his musicianship (we had his albums in the house), the vague knowledge he had been my mother's boyfriend before my father, and the fact that he was dead, all contributed to an ongoing fascination, which later morphed into a pride in his artistry and an augmentation

[48] Luther of the "Slingshot" story was a boy named Luther Bogle, allegedly the grandson of Paul Bogle, the rebel Baptist Preacher, who led the Morant Bay rebellion in 1865.

of him to a role model of sorts, as someone related to me who was also engaged in creative production. The poems in this sequence replicate that fascination, drawing on personal knowledge and hearsay about Harriott, as well as archive research.

The title of the sequence of poems, *What I Play Is Out the Window!*, is adapted from Harriott's response to the domination of the jazz world by American musicians. Himself a member of the Windrush Generation, Harriott arrived in Britain in 1952, and spent the rest of his musical career in the UK, despite the lure of America for musicians of his ability. In asserting his own identity and capacity as a *British* jazzman, he declared:

> I don't want to be equal. I want to be superior… All the others…they play inside the room, in here. What I play is out de window, out de window! (quoted in Moore 67)

During the 1950s and 1960s, Harriott worked as a session musician, band leader and soloist, but despite his large output of music, his critically acclaimed musicianship and formal inventiveness, he died in relative obscurity, a fact testified to in most accounts of his life.[49] It is only in recent years that Harriott has received more recognition for his music – not only his playing, but also his role as an originator of free jazz, a form of jazz that dismissed the conventional rules of composition in favour of improvisation. Harriott's neglect during his lifetime has in fact become part of the mythologising that surrounds him – some critics attributing his poor treatment to racism, while others name the conservatism of jazz during this period as a reason he was overlooked.

Some of these poems draw on public sources such as Alan Robertson's comprehensive biography of Harriott, *Fire in His Soul* (2011). I was fortunate to meet with Robertson and discuss Joe Harriott's life at length and have full access to his archive. I also investigated my familial connection to Harriott through an interview with my mother, whose recollections provide the content on the poem "Cherokee" (10). In line with the collection's polyphonic mode, many of

[49] This one, from the All About Jazz web forum, is typical of the mythologising that exists around Harriott, and foregrounds the discrepancy between fictionalising and "reality":
'Despite critical acclaim Joe Harriott's music went largely ignored in his life and he was never able to live comfortably. Neither could he afford to keep regular working bands together. It is a sad but familiar fixture in the history of jazz. The story of unrecognised genius, brave innovators ahead of their time who fell by the wayside, the lonely outsider left only with empty pockets and a restless energy to burn. This is a romantic distortion. Joe Harriott spent his remaining years freelancing around the UK with pick up bands, sleeping on locals' couches and floors. His closing years were a sad reflection of those of Charlie Parker; dying a lonely and tragic death of cancer in 1973. He was 44 (Heining).'

the poems are narrated in different voices, to evoke Harriot's complex and multifaceted character, and to highlight the mythologising of his life since his death in 1973. Others, such as "Pinewood Suite, unrecorded" (11) and "Ethology" (17) directly address Harriott, using a voice that is intended to be both knowing and sympathetic, reflecting my feelings towards him and my desire to claim him as a creative antecedent.

While the poems use a biographical account, they also interrogate the idea of biography and the possibility of recreating a man's life through archive sources and interviews. There are many competing stories about Joe Harriott's life, a tension that may well invite a playful approach to the "truth". Thus the opening poem "On Salmon Lane" uses the refrain "If you believe" to challenge the reader's response to the narrator's account:

> If you believe I saw Joe Harriott play in 1956
> and in my good blue dress, danced all night
> in that basement dive below Gerrard Street,
> Joe howling through his sax, white shirt
> sweat soaked and gleaming in the spotlight,
> you may as well believe any of the things
> I dream on, listening to his music – (7)

This address to the reader is both an invitation to participate in the fictionalising of Harriott, as well as a disclaimer of any attempt to replicate the truth. In writing an "I" persona into encounters with historical figures that the "real me" could not possibly have had, I also wanted to use the narrative and emotional power of the first-person address.

I have a number of other narrators speak to or about Harriott, including his fellow musicians, acknowledging that a range of voices is also a musical metaphor. In "Quintet at a Party" (12) for example, the anonymous fifth member of the Harriott quintet describes the band's confidential discussion of free form jazz principles. This poetic scene is intended to reflect the claims of Harriott's secretive nature – "He kicked the door shut. This was private" – and the scrutiny around the formation of Harriott's free jazz ideas – a contentious debate because some critics believe he may have devised these before his American contemporaries (12).[50] In "What Is and

[50] This is discussed in detail in Robertson's biography and in Hillary Moore's overview of British jazz, which reports of contradictory accounts and augments the mythologising of Harriott: "The exact date of Harriott's development of freeform is contested. The saxophonist told jazz journalist and photographer Val Wilmer that he "conceived the idea of free form while I was hospitalised for five weeks in early 1960." However, jazz writer and publisher Roger Cotterall remembers a phone conversation with Pat Smythe in which he was told of secretive rehearsals between Harriott and trumpeter Dizzie Reece as early as 1958. …this version of events is also supported by Harriott's friend Jack Cooke, who claimed the rehearsals "took place in Friday afternoons at the Marquee and involved Harriott,

Isn't Jazz?" (15) I use the found archival material from a 1961 edition of *Jazz News* music review to corroborate the idea that Harriott's free form experimentations were not welcomed by the jazz establishment.[51] The poem's speaker expresses his desire for Harriott to "stop crying /through your horn / and start playing again / please!" (15), lines intended to resonate with "Pinewood Suite, 1958" (11) which depicts how Harriott's lung disease prevented him from playing for months at a time, and gives a different meaning to the reviewer's appeal for Harriott to start "playing again" (Halperin 2).

The use of these "public" materials is complimented by my access to close personal witnesses to Harriott's life. My mother, Betony Lowe, was Joe Harriott's girlfriend for some years in the 1960s and her memories and anecdotes, gathered during interviews, inform "Cherokee" (10), a fictionalised monologue in her voice. The poem tells the story of their relationship and reflects my interest in the experiences of white women who had relationships with and married Caribbean men, often experiencing popular racist prejudice. For my mother, this racism originated with her mother, who was white and working class:

> He phoned me up, a party, would I go?
> My mum said *Joe who's Joe, a darkie, no!*
> *Not on your nelly, lady, no you won't you –*
> …
> And no, I couldn't bring him home for Christmas,
> *Not over my dead body, lady, no!*
> He came with flick-knife smile and lilac bath cubes
>
> and oh she sobbed into her mixing bowl! (10)

The "fear" my grandmother has of a black man entering her family is rendered through her vernacular and the "mixing bowl" which symbolises the threat of miscegenation in the domestic space.

Other poems combine real and recent experience with elements of the Harriott myth. "All the Bodies in the Foreign Ground 5000 Miles from Home" (20) combines my own research task of looking for Harriott's grave in Southampton, with a rather moving anecdote about his funeral, often retold in accounts of Harriott's life. The funeral was attended by many members of the

Reece and drummer Phil Seamen". When asked whether there were any tapes of these sessions, Cook answered "absolutely not. Joe wouldn't let anyone else in. These were secret sessions"(69).

[51] "Abstraction or Distraction" by Daniel Halperin

white music establishment, and one black woman who had never heard of the musician, but came to pay her respects as a fellow member of the Jamaican community: she "didn't even know him, never / listened to his music, no she'd only come / to be among the crowd, a face from home" (20).

The sequence closes with a short three line poem, "Coda" (21), intended to echo the melancholic idiom of blues music, and to remind readers that Harriott died in extreme poverty, effectively homeless.

> Travelling jazz man.
> That one good suit's
> no good no more. (121)

My tribute to Harriott extends beyond this sequence, since the title of "Mishra's Blues" (36) in the *Ormonde* sequence is borrowed from a 1969 collaboration between John Mayer and Harriott. and he also appears in the poems in the final *Borderliner* sequence, as my "favourite jazzman" (48).

3.3 *Borderliner*

This final section is more temporally and thematically various than the two that have preceded it, moving between the past and present and often allowing historical narratives to intrude into the present day. The sequence begins with "My Father's Notebook" (40), which uses found material taken from my father's handwritten journal containing a number of vignettes about his upbringing in 1930s Jamaica. Much of the notebook depicts the unstable and peripatetic existence he lived with his violent father in rural St Thomas.

The notebook is characterised by an uneasy mix of revelation and emotional restraint, a quality I try to capture in the poem by using my father's words directly and employing white space between each devastating revelation:

> Most nights he was nowhere to be found –
> I would walk the empty rooms
> crying for him, or go out into the road.
>
> Once a woman saw me on the bridge
> and brought me home.
> After, he tied me to my bed with rope (40)

The end of the poem describes a moment when my father had held a gun to his father's head while he was sleeping, a story not found in the notebook but told to me as a child. In writing about this and their very difficult relationship, I wish to provide a nuanced account of my father's migration, which may have been as much propelled by traumatic family relations as by the wider social and political circumstances that affected him.

The real notebook ends with a more orthodox description of his decision to leave Jamaica – naming a combination of increasing financial hardship and the opportunity to buy passage on a ship leaving for England.[52] As such, the notebook resonates closely with the autobiographical accounts collated for *Windrush* anniversary commemorations, and with Berry's *Windrush Songs*, which is based in part on Berry's personal reminiscences of the circumstances leading to his migration.[53]

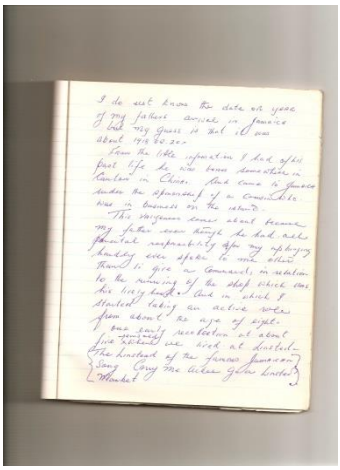


Figure 9: My father's notebook

That I have drawn on and edited my father's first-person account, as a second-generation descendent, returns us to the concept of "belatedness" and my desire to testify to my father's traumatic life experiences, both familial, social and political.

The poems which follow move beyond family to explore ideas about miscegenation and skin colour in the contexts of slavery and colonialism. Because of my own experience of having black

[52] The final page of the notebook details this combination of problem and opportunity: "My thoughts turned to immigration as a way out of my predicament. I had been hearing from people that it was easy to get to England, so I started to make inquires as to how I could get there. I soon found out that you could book a passage on ships bringing back servicemen who had fought in the Second World War. So I duly booked my passage on the SS Ormonde paying the princely sum of £28 to get to England."

[53] Autobiographical accounts of the post-war Caribbean migration are central to the way in which this history has been conveyed, collated in books (Phillips and Phillips 1998, Sewell 1998, Francis 1998) and broadcast in television productions about the *Windrush*, as discussed in Chapter One.

and Chinese heritage, but generally being presumed white, I am interested in historical antecedents of "passing" and skin shade distinctions in other more difficult contexts. In "Ran Away, My Mulatto Boy" (42) for example, I use the found text of runaway slave notices concerning slaves who could pass for white, while in "Out of Many" (44), I explore the 1951 Jamaican beauty contest "Out of Many – One", which featured ten contestants selected to represent their particular shade of skin, from Miss Ebony to Miss Apple Blossom (Rowe). The tone of the poem is supposed to pay tribute to the competition, which in the context of the time, was a radical challenge to traditional beauty pageants which rarely featured black women since constructions of beauty in the Caribbean were dominantly based on whiteness. Simultaneously it is intended to undermine shadist ideology that existed as a legacy of slavery, when the poem's speaker Miss Mahogany mentions the tactless naming of the contestants:" A shame we three /of darker hues were named for sturdy trees" (44). The poem is written in rhyming couplets and iambic pentameter, arguably a most traditional of poetic modes, and a formal choice intended here, as elsewhere in the collection, to contrast with the less orthodox subject matter.

Similar ideas are touched upon in other poems in this sequence, particularly in the sequence of poems I have called 'borderliners', which sustain the collection's polyphonic impetus in using dual narratives and bold and non-bold text to create a different and new reading experience. The form allows two poems placed side by side to be read separately, but also encourages a reading across the page to explore the different and perhaps more surprising meanings. The term "borderliner" itself is drawn from a list of terms for mixed-race people ("Terms Used"), and evokes not only racial mixing but also notions of geographical borders and human movement.[54]

In the "manifesto" poem of the sequence, "Borderliner", (45) I juxtapose the idea of territorial movement or transgression with ethnic/racial mixing or transgression. The layout of the poem, in which the un-bold text and bold text transverse into and towards each other (as opposed to being divided by a straight border) is intended to suggest the porosity of these borders, in both senses. People have always crossed geographical and racial borders despite varied forms of resistance – immigration policies intended to prevent or limit migration in the case of the former, or the many forms of social control which have stigmatised interracial mixing in the case of the latter. The poem's layout mimetically reproduces a ragged border between bold and non-bold text to separate these two meanings, and returns to the subject matter of "passing" over:

[54] The term "borderliner" is listed on the *Mixed-race Heritage* website under "Terms Used to Describe People of 'Mixed-Race': Past and Present (2009)", with a "D" in brackets to indicate "terms that are generally considered to be out-dated and offensive".

> I'm skirting the bold lines of the map **border-liner, might mean white girl**
> neither here nor there, but home in the border places **with corkscrew hair**
> Tijuana, where rich American boys slam tequila **or brown girl with flat hair**
> or controlled drugs, or down the fence **slipping from one side to the other**
> where a veiled woman clutches her baby **always looking for the right light**
> in the thin shadows **Passing, hoping the old world wouldn't catch her up** (45)

The other stylistic element of this form is the bold/non-bold typography, the meaning of which varies across the poems, but is sometimes intended to signal the tension between narratives that are well-known, seemingly objective and/or "historical", written in bold text, and those that are subjective, personal, unknown, silenced or suppressed, written in non-bold text. In the example above, the non-bold text announces its subjectivity in the first line through the first person address and the specificity of the experience conveyed. Meanwhile, the bold text is more distant, offering us the historical definition of the term "borderliner". This dichotomy is rarely strictly maintained in the poems, to indicate the permeability of the border, a notion echoed in the final lines in bold which shift to a first person address and to subjective experience when the narrator declares "I say it's only when you are standing / on the border that you are free / to look both ways." (45). The aesthetic effects of the bold/non-bold text may also offer a racial signal to the reader, where the non-bold text might be viewed as a replication of whiteness, and the bold text as a replication of blackness. This combined with the shape and two-half structure seems fitting to poems that are concerned with racial intermixture.

The double-voicing here and in other borderliners is intended to allow the meaning(s) and power of these poems to emerge through the conflict of their two parts. For example, "Scott Joplin Rag" (46) moves between a loose biography of Joplin and a first-person monologue about my own "racial desire", while "Mitchell/Mingus" (48) extend the collection's interest in jazz and blues music, and musical artists' crossing over of genres, ethnicities and cultures.

The "borderliners" are placed together to acknowledge the particular and perhaps more complex reading experience of these poems. The last four of them shift away from public figures to the more personal subject matter of my own family history and my 2013 visit to Jamaica. I was hoping to find out more about my Chinese grandfather (whom I knew only a little about through my father's notebook), but the fact that I was pregnant during the trip led me to reflect on the racial mix of my unborn child. One "half" of these poems is addressed to the child, while the other part interrogates a historical narrative of some kind. In "Genealogy" (49) this is the history of

Chinatown in Kingston for example, while in "High Yellow", it is the role of the Scots in slave trading. This is illustrated in these lines from the latter poem which juxtapose the retelling of my visit to Treasure Beach, with the myth of a shipwreck of red-haired Scotsman that is alleged to account for the unusual racial characteristics of some of the residents of the area. Again, the non-bold text signals the personal, subjective experience, while the bold text partially encompasses the well-known and obscurifying myth:

> Errol drives me to Treasure Beach **It's an old story, the terrible storm**
> swerving the dark country roads **the ship going down, half the sailors**
> I think about what you will be, your mix **drowned, half swimming the**
> White, black, Chinese and your father's **slate waves, spat hard on shore**
> Scottish-Englishness. We cross the Black River **Smashed crates, bodies**
> where they shipped cane sugar and molasses **choking on the grey sand**
>
> (50)

This myth is undermined by the truth that Scots slavers and overseers had children with the black slave population, a notion that the final right-hand lines addresses: "Or the other story – no storm / no wrecked ship. Just the miles / of cane-fields and mulatto children named / McDonald or McArthur for / their fathers, who owned them" (50). The alternative meanings offered by the borderliner poems arises through reading straight across the line rather than reading the separate bold/non-bold columns. In this poem, a more subversive possibility emerges in the line "two fishermen in torn denims, smoking **their fathers, who owned them"** which suggests a violent rebellion against enslavement.

The poem also reflects my own sometimes uneasy feelings about my research trip, questioning what claim I was making in visiting Jamaica, in making enquiries and claiming a Chinese and black identity. This unease is reflected when the fisherman ask at the end of the poem, "What you want here?" (50) and in the poem "Honey" when Uncle Ken responds to the narrator's questions, saying "Good God why you want to know?" (51).

The tension between the public history of Chinese people in Jamaica, all of whom come from the Hakka ethnic group, and my "private" knowledge of my grandfather's violent and neglectful character, is also explored in "Genealogy" when the speaker, having found the grave of the grandfather is told by the tour guide to pay "filial duty", a suggestion she doesn't feel she can challenge (49). I explore this tension more fully in "Yellow River, Milk River" (53) by contrasting the (bold text) "public" history of the Hakka with the (non-bold text) personal, anecdotal history of my grandfather. In Jamaica, I discussed Chinese–Jamaican history with members of the Chinese

Benevolent Association (CBA), who are engaged with memorialising their migration stories. I was repeatedly told of the strong community networks between Chinese–Jamaicans, particularly in and around Kingston. It seems my father and his shopkeeper father lived a more nomadic life in rural St Thomas, moving from shop to shop because my grandfather often went bankrupt with gambling debts.

This history was discovered in my father's notebook, in which my father writes about his father's violence in very restrained terms. For example, "my father, on the slightest pretext gave me the most severe beatings imaginable, for the most trivial reasons…on many occasions I was tied to a tree and beaten with a leather belt until I bled" (c1998). These shocking statements suggest a tension between the collective identity of the Hakka people and the specific characteristics of one individual, a binary I try to capture in the poem:

> **If you ask me about ancestors I'll tell you** He weighted codfish down with salt
> **about Hakka people, always moving, hounded down** sold weevilled cornflour
> **from the mountains, by knives** and turning milk, offered credit to the customers
> **and fire and blood** he robbed, his angry ticks and crosses in the yellowed ledger
> **to the Yellow River, to war** on the shop's back shelf. But the women in the salon
> **with the Punti** looked up when he passed by, believed his small bones made him
> ***hakka*, an insult spat until the Hakka took** tender, not a man to rope a child or
> **the word back; about tough land, bad water** stab a counter with a gutting knife
> (53)

Again, the poem offers two readings when the narrator responds to an implied question about ancestry with either a generic account of Hakka people – "**I'll tell you about Hakka people**" or more specific, private revelations of the grandfather's immoral conduct: "**I'll tell you** He weighted down with salt" (53).

This difficult relationship of father and son is further explored in "Eleven O'Clock Child" (55) which places two voices in juxtaposition to explore different derogatory terms for mixed race. Members of the CBA also explained to me the racism that some older members of the Chinese community in Jamaica felt towards their mixed-race offspring, calling them "ship yit tiam" which translates as "eleven o'clock child". This specific negative term for mixed Chinese and black people in Jamaica is defined in the *Routledge Handbook of the Chinese Diaspora* :

> The clock has been used as a metaphorical scale to assess the "purity" of the mixed-race Chinese; twelve o'clock represents "full" or "completeness". The number eleven signifies

> "not quite full" or "not twelve yet", reflecting the perception of the mixed-race as "lacking" Chinese blood, as opposed to "adding" foreign blood. (Shibata 369)

The form of my poem puts two voices physically in confrontation, allowing two "halves" to mimetically reproduce "halfness". The voices operate in different spheres of discourse – one voice is that of my grandfather, using the "ship yit tiam" term, while the other employs the language of racial classification I encountered as a child in the 1980s, when "half caste" existed as a legitimate and official descriptor of mixed race. The intention is to highlight the common prejudice towards racial intermixing in different contexts.

Eleven O'Clock Child

I said *half caste* at school
before *half caste* was banned
and the next words came in

I was never half anything
just running the asphalt with my friends
bloody knees and hands

Ship Yit Tiam

It's just a little heckle in the yard
Still love you, mule-child
mongrel of the shopkeeper and cook

Eleven o'clock child
you're not quite noon
not midnight
(55)

Echoing the "mild" intentions of these discriminatory terms, the grandfather–narrator uses them almost tenderly.

This casual racism is also evoked in the poem "What Charlie Said" (56), a monologue based on a real conversation I had as a child, and which links with the left-hand voice of "Eleven O'clock Child", in featuring another reductive definition of mixed race. The jumping around in time in this sequence is intentional, providing a contrast with the more homogenous preceding sequences, but also in highlighting the common intolerance towards racial mixing across time, society and culture. In this example, Charlie likens racial mixing to the cross-species mixing of dogs, which he believes is wrong – "It wouldn't be right, would it? I'm not a racist, but it's the same with humans" – claims which are intended to be laughed at by readers, and then undercut when Charlie conveys the reaction of my father to hearing his theory: "he sits there in his armchair, lights his fag and looks at me – like I'm a fool, like *I'm* a bleeding idiot!" (56).

The penultimate poem of the collection, "If You Believe: In the Smoke and the Light" (58) returns to my father as the point of departure for the whole thesis. The poem is intended to suggest a meeting between my father and me, as the "I" narrator, in an imaginary, possibly

religious setting, suggested through some of the quasi-religious images and language: "Eden Grove" and "golden skin", and the images of other people "shapes in the dark" who are "talking" in the same way as the father and daughter. This scene in the Victorian square, where many people are in simultaneous conversation, draws further attention to the collection's polyphonic impetus. The specific "talking", in which the father relays his life story "of mongoose and snake, / the Yallahs River, his father's store, / his father's belt, the ship that sailed him here" (58) is of course fictionalised – it is the conversation we didn't have and the genesis of my research and writing about him. That one of the collection's final poems ends with the image of the mother is intended to emphasise her importance in this research project, as the source of much of the information contained in the collection, but who is largely absent from the poems:

> And my father was sat in the smoke and the light,
> a woman at his side with dark eyes,
> her red lips split wide with laughter
> and I think she was my mother – (58)

The inclusion of my mother may signal her as a new focus for further writing that considers the impact of post-war Caribbean migration on the English population, particularly white women who had relationships with or married Caribbean men.

The final poem in the sequence, and collection, is "Old Daisy-Face" (59) which remains with the idea of motherhood. It is a sonnet about my now two-year-old son, the unborn child in earlier poems, himself mixed race. It is intended as a hopeful note to complete the poems by moving on in time, looking to the future and perhaps stepping away from some of the painful family ancestry. It returns to the positive family relations depicted in the opening poem "On Salmon Lane", in which an adult and child relationship is presented as nurturing.

This feels like the right tone with which to end *Chan,* and with the hope that the collection will expand the territory of existing narratives of migration, and join the developing field of writing about mixed race.

Chan (poetry collection)

Contents

What I Play Is Out The Window!

If You Believe: On Salmon Lane

If you believe I saw Joe Harriott play in 1956
and in my good blue dress, danced all night
in that basement dive below Gerrard Street,
Joe howling through his sax, white shirt
sweat soaked and gleaming in the spotlight,
you may as well believe any of the things
I dream on, listening to his music -
the way he smelt up close say (of cigarettes
and clove) when we took a corner table
at the *New Friends* on Salmon Lane, gnawing the ribs
he loved and in between chews just talking
to me in that fatherly way he had.
You may as well believe that sometimes
I put his records on and just start crying
and can't stop crying, don't even know
what I'm crying for – those decades in history
when men like Joe and my father were shadows
on English streets, or just the way
a melody can get you. I walk the small rooms
of my flat, light spilling through the skylights,
the treetops just in sight through the glass
and even with all these tears, I'm sort of happy.
Richard says be careful what you do in poems
to real people (*known* people), but surely this poem
shows its seams enough to let me wish
that Joe didn't start dying so young (at gigs
he couldn't even stand up straight to play),
that men he used to jam with didn't see
his broken body shuffling down the streets
and turn away, and those last morphine days,
the dog he saw barking at the window
of the third floor ward really wasn't there –
well, how could it be, if Joe and me just stepped
from the club into this winter night,
heading arm in arm down Brewer Street
to order steaming bowls of won ton soup?

Sax I

That gold horn hung out of you nightly
like a distended tongue – the fix you craved
at The Sunset Club or on The Blue Room's stage
or the 'generous' hours you played
in backroom jams, oh boy, you needed it.

Rajah, Theorist, Sire, the way you saw yourself,
that gold bone stuck out, perked up by hot white girls
on stools who lapped you up, but the sex that night
was solo, Joe, eyes closed, your throat wide open,
walking alone, the gold road to heaven.

Sax II

Joe, go down for Beaujolais, or send 'your woman' down.
The landlord knows that liquor's yours.
Now close the door. Now breathe, now drink.
Now lick the reed. Now flick it.

That white girl's riding buses back across the town.
Put down your cup. Lift up your baby from its velvet snug.
Bellyful of blood, now blow that gold, Joe blow it!
What you play is out the window, out the room.

Cherokee

I was playing with fire – Bet Lowe

He phoned me up, a party, would I go?
My mum said *Joe who's Joe, a darkie, no!*
Not on your nelly, lady, no you won't you –

Peach lipstick, lacquered beehive, Tweed Mist perfume.
I took the bus and 'course there was no party,
just a room with whiskey glasses on the bedside

and fag ash on the tangled sheets at dawn.
Oh Joe could play an ace – *The Akee Blues*
and *Cherokee,* dah da-da deeee dee!

He put his sax in hock to pay the rent,
said *Betty can you help me*, had a pound
off me on Sunday nights, he had it bad,

he'd not been with another girl in weeks
he said, and no, my mother didn't sleep
a wink, she sobbed into her mixing bowl!

Then off to Auntie Connie's caravan,
he wore his suit and wingtips on the dunes,
he said he loved me in the spinning teacups

then vanished in the night. He knew a tune
that bastard arsehole drunk –*You'll Never Know*
and *Cherokee* , dah da-da deeee dee!

And no, I couldn't bring him home for Christmas,
Not over my dead body, lady, no!
He came with flick-knife smile and lilac bath cubes

and oh she sobbed into her mixing bowl!
My father walked him to the tube, came home
and stank of whiskey, said, *he's just like any*
other fella, ain't he, Betty, ain't he?

Pinewood Suite, unrecorded, 1958

Joe Harriott, in bed above the pines!
You cannot blow a note now, splutter petals
all bloody in the sax's throat and bell.

No puff to poeticize or soar, no girls
to magnetise. Just pretty nurses padding
with rubber soles and clipboards, Savlon smiles,

their chin-wipe-keep-you-supine eyes, you're bed-bound
with a view of pines, deep green, so green you dream it
and that old sedition itching in your head –

you've only what the kinder matron brings you:
a red ink biro, ruler, cartridge paper,
your hand-drawn stave, ('Our Mr Harriott

is indisposed but *is* composing'). Hacking
through the weeks until you slip the ward, then home,
no puff for anything but cigarettes,

a woman in your rooms with tissues, pillows
tomato juice, and television re-runs –
Chan Canasta palming cards or reading minds,

your sax laid flat upon its back below
the bed where you are trussed in dressing gown,
a twitching hand that might not be your own

discharging notes that race like fire ants
across the page, up and down and round,
so wild and fast not even you can catch them –

Quintet at a Party, 1960

Upstairs, we were discussing rhythm and atonality.
Women floated
in beige chiffon
down the bright hall.
There were trays of tiny slips of toast
with single prawns, a snip of cress.

Joe said: *It's like painting sound.*
Think of the abstract expressionists.

He kicked the door shut. This was private.
Think of Hans Hofmann, he said, hands spread.
Coleridge shook his head
and I said *hmmm*,

my thoughts sliding through the door
and down the banisters
to where that black-haired
green-eyed woman stood,
her head thrown back.
Her teeth were white, her throat was white,
she wore a tight rope of chubby pearls.

I couldn't see through walls
but knew next door
Shake was at the bookcase,
swigging from his flask

and downstairs Phil was hidden in the pantry
with a giggling girl who held his sticks
and drummed the shelves;

he held an upturned spoon,
was crushing uppers for their soda –
baby pink, lavender, sky-blue.

Song for Shake

When I was born
my father gave to me
an angelhorn
with wings of melody
from 'Angel Horn' by Shake Keane

At six, he strutted with a polished trumpet
on the steps downtown, sunlight on his glasses.
Shake for the Shakespeare he loved
or the 'Chocolate Milkshake' song. At fourteen,
he led his brothers in a jive-band –
four rawbone boys hop-steppin' on the parched lawn
of the tenement, the bailiffs looking on.
Leaving, he stepped lightly – a notebook
for his poetry, his father's dented horn,
a history play. When I was born

they nearly called me Harriet for Joe -
another island man in England. On stage,
his saxophone manoeuvred around Shake's flugelhorn –
the way two neighbours one day gossip sweetly
at a garden fence, then next day argue fierce
about who earns the breadfruit tree
They licked those notes with something
of the islands – the syncopated breeze of soca,
mento, or the old calypso rhapsodies
I knew as gifts my father gave to me.

Shake played in every hazy dive in Soho –
the Feldman, the Flamingo, on ads for *Spam*,
a little bossa nova with the Hastings Girls' Choir;
came back from Europe *all played out*, his hip-flask
never empty. Went home to *gutsify* the island,
fix the *bodderation* – his swollen-belly laugh, a foghorn
blowing into Kingstown. What came to pass?
A notebook scrawled with angry satire
and crotchets spat like peppercorns
across the page. Still he played an angelhorn

and took it with him to New York, no visa,
just the easy warmth of Tiffany's Lounge
with its solitary drinkers, and Shake most afternoons
snug in the corner with poem-book, a newspaper.
Whichever fellow slammed his face
into a fire door one evening on Pulaski,
maybe didn't mean to wreck his embouchure.
Old snow-beard giant, there's sunshine through
the glass today, and on my stereo you play for me
your angelhorn, with wings of melody.

Partita, 1968

When the tabla and double bass are really moving,
the raga in full swing,
I think of when I used to run for hours, for miles

out of the door in my old bent trainers,
early winter nights, the streetlamps flickering on –
heel-toe, heel-toe –

through Clapham, Balham, and down the hill
to Tooting Bec,
men in white robes on the white temple steps

a child eating with her fingers
in a canteen strung in Diwali lights,
smell of cumin on the cold black air.

Sometimes I think Partita is the girl
on the album cover, and all the musicians
are in love with her.

Only Joe is really free, stood
at the Five-Note bar alone –
black suit, white shirt and saxophone.

When the trumpet plays, half-muted,
something like a fanfare, something like a party horn
(we called them twizzlers or fandoozles, flid whistlers)

I remember turning back on the Common
the houses lost from sight,
stumbling on tree-roots, listening

to help me see –
heel-toe, heel-toe –
past a man on a bench, smoking in the dark,

a freight train stalled on the bridge,
a dog, all shadow,
springing out across my path.

raga (Sanskrit) meaning literally "colour, hue" but also "beauty, melody"
Partita' is the first track on the 1968 album *Indo Jazz Fusions* I by Joe Harriott and John Mayer

What Is and Isn't Jazz?
found

Mr Harriott & his cohorts
are shaking everybody up

with what he calls his 'free form' pieces,
his 'abstract compositions'

but

I find myself at the end
of the shortest patience in these islands
with Mr Harriott.

Can something with form
really be free?

If it is 'abstract'
who could have
composed it?

To my ear, it is the woolly din
of a batch of sick sheep
squelching through a quagmire in hail

interspersed

with stretches

of drab boredom.

Mr Harriott's laboratory tests
are in the early stages

and though
he should be admired
(perhaps),

does jazz need constant broadening?
Are fresh kicks desired daily?

Mr Harriott, stop crying
through your horn
and start playing again,
please!

If You Believe: Old Paradise Street

If you believe I played with Phil Seamen in 1970,
a Sunday night, The Dog and Bone half empty,
Phil just keeping time with his sticks in one hand
and then, when the punters flocked in,
his hands a blur on the ghost notes and flams,
you may as well believe anything I dream of
looking at his old album covers –
how on the bus to gigs he'd beat a Yoruba groove
on his knees, or mine, while the passengers stared,
one knee the high-hat, one the snare
or how we drank the night down in the flat
on Old Paradise Street, his record player
spinning through Ghana, through Cuba,
Phil just tapping his feet or later, a fag spilt
from his half-moon heroin grin:
Don't you know at midnight I turn into a pumpkin?
Rack-thin in his old cardigan, drooped
in his chair, but what he knew about drumming
was like opening the door to let the sunshine in.
Or you might as well believe that last try
at getting clean, stood on the Burton canal
with his fishing pole or strolling the streets
where the boy he'd been had thrown
the windows wide and whacked his drums
over the backyards and washing lines,
had nearly set him right – 'Phil's Renaissance'
Melody Maker said of the gigs we played
if you could sugar-coat the sweats and sores, the sick.
Who'd guess a nap in his chair would be
the good long sleep? Worn heart, barbiturate-weak.
Goodnight Phil. There's a bright moon tonight
on Waterloo, and the hiss of vinyl on your turntable
spinning spinning the long night through –

Ethology

If alto sax players could ever have been genetically developed from some sort of amoeba millions of years ago, then Joe was that. He wasn't really a person – Shake Keane

Like green amoeba are always
green amoeba, or the cat
can't help herself chase sparrows

(in Skye, the pier at dusk,
that shivering mongrel, jumping
through the freezing water
every time we threw an empty can),

so Joe kept playing the shabby pubs
in seaside towns and working men's clubs
where he slumped and had to sit to play

and like the animal who disappears
to die alone, he packed his sax,
clean bandages, a tie, went limping
through the midnight terminal.

Mingus

Charles Mingus on the ward at midnight, come
through rain and hail in dripping gabardine
to matron, standing firm and handing him
a pen. *A note? Say what ma'm? Please. Goddam.*

Alpha Boy

Blind Lemon, Mojo, Fire-In-His-Soul-Joe,
back down the corridors to boy-in-shorts,
your hand in Sister Susan's hand, your mother
gone, your brother gone. Behind the gates
you learnt the Alpha Sisters' prayers and hymns,
their discipline – dawn bowls of hominy
for Bad Boys, Hellions, the Pitiful,
but listen!
Down the moonlit hall the sound
of clarinets and flugelhorns and through
a keyhole will I find you Joe? Horn raised
to below-blow, or cuddled low to make
the brass cry, sweet-sad din that made you good
at *something*. Lying in the cloistered cells
the Sisters knew their Alpha Boy could swing.

All The Bodies In The Foreign Ground, 5000 Miles From Home

for Richard

My forgotten second cousin lies at Bitterne –
antique stone church five miles beyond Southampton,
and Friday found us knelt and foraging
in roses (sweet of you to help me), looking
for his grave. He wasn't hidden on the fringes
in the end, not secreted in vines or grasses,
oh no, we saw him by the sunlit path,
a marble headstone with an epigraph:

Parker?
There's them over here
can play an ace or two.

I'm thinking of the woman who had read
about Joe's funeral, who came and stood
alone beside his grave, blue passion flowers
in her hands. She didn't even know him, never
listened to his music, no, she'd only come
to be among the crowd, a face from home.

Coda

Travelling jazz man?
That one good suit's
no good no more.

If You Believe: One Pale Eye

If you believe I met Chan Canasta in 1962
after hours in the cold at the stage door,
Canasta sweeping through in his long black coat
as I called out *Sir? Sir*? and he turned
and loomed above me like a vampire,
you may as well believe any of the things
I dream about, watching his old TV shows –
the way he handled a deck of cards up close
(they couldn't catch it with the camera)
like pulling a silk scarf through his fingers,
or the Slavic ghost in his voice, conducting
his guests to pick a card, or think of a card
but *please ladies and gentlemen, keep it secret*
or how he held them all in the corner
of one pale eye, and you knew somehow
he had read their minds. You may as well believe
that night we walked down by the canal
was the first of many times – the narrow boats
in their carnival colours moored in the mist,
the smell of tar, and Chan not looking at me
but talking, talking, as though I was the first person
to ever ask him – of the family in Cracow
lost in the war, of the shaded roof garden
in Jerusalem where he had read book
after book on occultism and mesmerism
and practised his experiments –
if you have talent you must polish it until it glitters
and how he remade himself in Britain –
pilot, magician, English-Polish gentleman.
Was it the first light coming up
brought silence? We sat by the lock,
Chan pulling his cards from his pocket
and holding each one up to his lighter
until the flame spread and the symbols
and faces cindered, and he flung them out
across the dark still water, like firebirds.

Ormonde

Ormonde

Rewind, rewind the *Windrush*! Raise the anchor
and sail her back, three weeks across the water
then let the travellers disembark, return them
to their silent beds at dawn, before the mayhem
of the docks at Kingston Town and Port of Spain –
they'll wake to see their islands' sun again.

Wind back the hours, the days and months, a year –
and out of fog, *Ormond*e sails, like a rumour
or a tale of how a disremembered thing
will rise again – light up, awaken engines
and swing her bow through half a century,
return a hundred drifters, lost at sea.

Among the crowd, here's Gilbert Lowe, a tailor,
strolling starboard with his wife and daughter
or staring out to sea alone most nights
here's Paul the Carpenter, the yellow moonlight
and his battered playing cards for company
or curled like woodlice in the canopy

of darkness under deck, those stowaways
who'll leap for Liverpool on landing day
and sprint a half a mile of stormy water
in suits and shoes, to climb the slimy timber
below the Albert Dock where policemen wait
to haul them off before the magistrate

and all the passengers step from the ship
and through a coverlet of mist, then slip
like whispers into tenements and backstreets
as Ormonde's deep horn bellows her retreat
and from this little piece of history
she slowly creaks her way back out to sea.

What I Know

This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.
What falls away is always. And is near.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.
I learn by going where I have to go. from 'The Waking' by Theodore Roethke

At night, you find me at the oil-lamp, dice in hand.
I say to myself, if I throw a pair of fives
I'll give up this life – the hot slow days
of hurricanes, sweet reek of banana rot,
black fruit on the vine. I want another hand
of chances. I grip the dice and blow
a gust of luck into my fist. I'm dreaming
of England, yes, work, yes, women, riches.
I shake these bone cubes hard, let go.
This shaking keeps me steady. I should know.

The radio fizzes news across the tenement yard –
dazed soldiers sailing home, a weekend parade,
monsoon time coming. I pass dead horses
in the field, dead mules. Men sag like slack suits
in the square. Talk of leaving starts like rain,
slow and spare, a rattle in a can. My tears
aren't for the ship, new places, strange people,
but the loss of my *always* faces – I mean,
my people, who I know, my places. My sister says
you carry them with you, don't fear.
What falls away is always, and is near.

The ship rocks steady across the ocean.
You ever look out to sea, and on every side
is sky and water, too much too blue?
Thoughts lap at me like waves against the bow,
not where am I, but why and who?
At night, we use our hours up, ten fellows
flocked to someone's sticky room. I roll the dice
or deal for chemmy, brag, pontoon.
We go till dawn, a huddle at the lamp turned low.
I wake to sleep, and take my waking slow.

Some fellow swore there were diamonds
on these streets. Look hard enough in rain
you'll see them. I squint my eyes but what I see
is sunshine on the dock, my mother's white gloves
waving me goodbye. There's no diamonds here,
or if there are, they're under this skin of snow.
Seems the whole world's gone white. I roll my dice
in basements below these English pavements.
I guess I'm learning what I need to know.
I learn by going where I have to go.

Passieras

We were losing memories already.
They slipped like fish into the blood-red water.
My daddy's limp, that crazy bougainvillea,
the savage rooster crowing on the fence.

A hot sea wind lulled us past Havana.
In the dark church below deck,
Hosco sang and strummed his banjo.
We danced calypso, samba, limbo,

swigged rum until a fire burnt
in every one, and we christened ourselves,
Passieras, Passieras, drifting
on the world's high curve.

We were frontiersmen, we said.
Our god was work. What use was memory?
Ships in the night blinked back our lights –
we glided on, eyes fixed to sea.

Boxer

brother, one week in
your footwork's
slippin'

let's do roadwork on deck
skip there too
keep jumpin'!

keep out the lounge
at sundown
those fellows don't

got the chances *we* got!
time for high-jinks
on the other side

Mr Alexander
paid our fare remember?
you best keep punchin'!

I've chalked a ring
the moon's our floodlight
I'll be running laps

come get me
when you ready
we'll go toe to toe

if you won't
spar with me
I'll fight my shadow

Dressmaker

At night, I made myself a dress for England.
All through the rainy months, I stitched by hand,
a silver thimble on my thumb. No more
my threadbare skirt or patched-up pinafore.
By candlelight, my pattern was a map
laid out across the bed, and as the rain's slow tap
became a lightning storm, my scissors traced
the pattern line – long sleeves, a gathered waist,
one tier of voile, one poplin, double-skinned
for England's winter time, and the cold sea wind.
It changed my shadowed figure on the wall.
I dreamt myself – on a red bus passing Whitehall,
or walking on the Strand; there was a tea-room
where I wiled away my idle afternoons,
and in every scene I wore my dress, bright red
for pillar box and rose, the robins pictured
in my books at school. And now, at the ship's cold rail,
I am a dash of colour in the grey as we sail
still closer and closer, and finally I see
through a veil of cloud – England, my destiny.

Schoolboy

didn't see her
when i said goodbye
no light she said *get going child*

gon buy a cricket bat
in england
shoes and school

but i don't care
she sold my pig
for the ticket

coughing in the yard
to rope him
nightie hanging off

franky walked me
to the harbour
shook my hand

now it's sea sea sea
they gimme jokes and mints
and call me 27 bitten street

because she sewed it
in my shirts in navy cotton
before – when she could sew

someone i never met
will look after me
in england

her voice whispering
from the corner
say please sit still be good

Gloves

My mother wore a thimble made of copper.
My mother was a seamstress or a chamber-maid,
or market-girl or nurse or cotton picker,
or a washerwoman, fingers blistered red
from strangling sheets in lime and washtub water.
She disappeared through linen on the line
and like a mocking bird, I heard her laughter –
a teaspoon on good china, lady-fine.

My mother was a photograph. Her name
was *Longing* or *Desire*. She stumbled south
along the Parish Road, barefoot and shamed
in dirty lace, gin bottle to her mouth.
My mother was a hand in a long white glove,
the moment before the glove was pulled off –

Distressed British Seamen

Moffatt: I knew black men at Tiger Bay – sea dogs
from Cape Verde, Somali skippers. Now this lot
quiz me: *England this or England that*? Some nights,
they light the deck with songs – my foot tap taps.
But other nights, I tell them let me rest.
I am a seaman and distressed.

Page: Of all the portside misses she was darkest.
She laid a trail of birdseed and I followed,
clambering up into the sweetest nest.
Oh seven days, bedridden frangipani!
Please sail me home, I've not a penny left.
I am a seaman and distressed.

Hooper: You shoulda seen the other chap! This shiner
ain't a patch on what I done to him. I'll go
a round with any boxer from Tobago
or Jamaica. I'm a British bulldog! I'm a –
I knocked the policeman out, I slugged the jailor!
I'm a seaman and distressed.

Wiles: What the wife will say? This pustule bubbles hotter
every day, and now my palm and soles
a'scratching like there's hungry ants inside,
a weepy rash across my back and chest.
I'll see an English doctor 'fore I'm dead!
I am a seaman and distressed.

Saeed I stewed a vat of *pulpo* on my stove,
the brine so lightly spiced with cumin, clove.
Saeed, they said, you are the best of chefs
before each sailor retched into the sea.
That's it for me, my spoon is laid to rest.
I am a seaman, and distressed.

Stowaway

A dirty neck. One shirt, each day more grey
might easily give men like us away
because we took our passage unencumbered –
no clothes, no coin. Eleven was our number,

eleven tucked into the *Ormonde's* hold,
and how compliantly the body buckled
if a crewman's footstep fell – we'd quickly twist
into a cask, we sad contortionists.

We couldn't bear the hopeless day-long yawn
of home, and had no gold or pearls to pawn,
no cow or goat to sell – but as we'd hands,
we'd work, and if a ship set sail for England,

so we would stow away. And we were fed
by kindness – serviettes of scrap, old bread,
some fleshy bones. One passenger bestowed
a laundered shirt on me for mine had yellowed

and when at last the docks on England's rim
rose up, what choice had we but to jump and swim?

Johnny Cakes – A Recipe

For tree-shadow lunch and labrish,
sunk-belly sleep, till you rise and pick

or for easy penny pickney-filler,
stuff your baby's cheeks, and quick

or if your son's a tall boy sailin' off
for England (your heart gone doughy-thick)

fry him johnny cakes with stewed tomato,
gungo peas, scotch bonnet kick

or wrap him johnny cakes in muslin
for the ship – a taste of home, last finger-lick

or if you are a just-come man
in Liverpool, alone alone and heartsick

in a dirty room, the windows steamed,
rain trickling down the naked brick

and all you do is dream of flying back
Well, grease your pan to stop it stick

and rub together flour, water, sugar, salt
a johnny cake may do the trick –

In

In Liverpool, you walk the dock for hours
In your bag, a box of dominoes, a pair of brogues
In the street, a little girl tut-tuts at you
In your belly, worry rising like the wind, but hold it boy, just hold it
In the tenement house, a bed you swap with other men
in shifts, you pass the afternoons
in dreams: the rooster on the fence, your sisters twisting hands, the smell of uh
In *England*, you're in England
In the shop, a rock of last week's bread you carry home
in snow, your slipping soles and god knows how the world went white like this
In the street, a woman frowning, crossing over
In your pockets, nothing but a letter, flimsy blue
In the labour queue, ten men ahead the same as you - you're in, you're
in, no, no, some other fellow's in, new worry rising like a wind
In the glass, a thinner picture of your face
In your dreams, a yukka moth, a shell, the sea
In the back room of a pub, a cheer, the pint glass clunks just hold it boy, just
In the makeshift ring, a shirtless man who looks like you, but *something*
in your pocket, *something* in your pocket
In the air, your bare fists flail, his bare fists crack on your cheeks, your lip split
in two, a glug of blood, your blood, oh
in that gloomy room, a single bulb above the ring, the arms you're sinking like a puppet
in

Ship-breaking

These folks were not the victims of migration…these folks mean to survive – Stuart Hall

I watch old films of ship yards on the Clyde:
cranes ripping ships apart, their metal hides
peeled back by men in goggles wielding fire.
The shock of innards: girders, joists and wires,
a rusted funnel toppling in slow motion.
Those open flanks rain down the cabin's foreign
detritus of flags and posters, turquoise charts
of distant oceans, photographs of sweethearts –

They tore the *Ormonde* up in '52
for scrap. I google what I can. If you
were here, you'd ask me why I care so much.
I'd say it's what we do these days, Dad – clutch
at history. I find old prints – three orphans
on a deckchair squinting at the sun; a crewman
with an arm around a girl, both smiling, windswept;
a stark compartment where you might have slept

and I recall that old trunk in our attic -
cracked leather, rusted clasps – *my box of tricks*
you said, you said you'd lost the only key.
Your home, the ship you sailed, those miles of sea
were locked inside. And now my mind replays
a ciné-film: the young man on a gangway –
the trilby tilted, pocket hankie, his smartest gear
and his stride so well-rehearsed – it says *I'm here.*

Mishra's Blues

We are all sad men, with our one-pan meals –
my turmeric-sardines, your scotch-bonnet sardines!
Even the saffron stains on my counter
are a gasp for home. Chan, do you ever –

think to go back?
Sure, Mishra. Some days the city give me big adventure,
some days cold shoulder – so lonely
I cry at my own friendly face in the mirror.
But Mishra, come, when you feel blue
what's worse than talk of home
or to read your granny's weep-weep letter?

She says my grandfather is sick with fever! She says –

Stir me some chai now, Mishra.
How 'bout the radio? Let's play a little hand
of Baccarat, warm our bones in here
while out there it snows and snows, and –

damn this British weather
keeping customer at home!

(*they play*)

II

You know Mishra, me never think to ask
but you have a cousin or some-such in Jamaica?
Name Misir? Like Mishra, give or take?
While I sit here watching you losing, the long face
getting longer, I remember Misir –

Misir? Who are you talking of Chan?

Misir! Is fifteen years since I saw him
on the path home from school
when that cruel boy Luther take the slingshot
Misir won from teacher –
boy Mishra, was Misir a good speller!
But Luther trap him under the mango
and hurl stones into the branches to rain
a storm of fruit on Misir head!
Him dancing, so skinny and fast
as the mango bust like stars on the dirt
til one hit him hard and down Misir went
and Luther thieved him!

Oh I can still see him face

so blue, with him slingshot gone
and your sad face just now remind me –
poor Misir look *just like you*!

Me? Are you flimflamming me Chan?
Play your card! See those tigers on my wall,
the elephants in green mirror?
Their eyes are fixed to your hands,
you sharpie, you swizzler!

Cool it Mishra! Just asking is all!

(*they play)*

III

Though, thinking a little more on it Chan,
some Mishras went a long time ago from Lakimpur
to Trinidad, Tobago. Seven-year cane cutters.
No cousin of mine, but great-great aunty and uncle,

married on the coolie ship! Mama had a photo –
two white robe oldies, holding hands
under a cane field tree, strangers to me,
their sad eyes staring somewhere far.

Chan, I fear things will come to pass
the same way here, seven years
becoming twenty years becoming –

one hundred years! Mishra, I know how it goes
and Trinidad not close, you know
but near enough to wonder how Misir turn up
with your face in Yallahs Bay, Jamaica.
Like the big ship sail in all directions
dragging poor folk from one place to another

And I too, Chan, am a good speller,
not like those plantation clerks
with their negligent pens!

how we end up here man?

me thinking your chai spice taste
like the sweet tea my own granny made me
when I was a boy with a bung nose and cough

and in England my body feel well
but still I drink this draft, and can't get enough

and now I read in a book the old tribe Maroon
up in the Blue Mountain had a spirit language

and say *chai* did mean 'carry'

(*they play)*

Borderliner

My Father's Notebook
found

I do not know the exact date of birth,
of arrival to the island.

He hardly ever spoke
except to give commands.

Most nights he was nowhere to be found –
I would walk the empty rooms
crying for him, or go out into the road.

Once a woman saw me on the bridge
and brought me home.
After, he tied me to my bed with rope.

He lost all his money three times, burnt down
our shop, the dogs trapped
below the galvanized roof.

He gave me an orange, and we drove off.

He had a cousin across the river.
A waterfall cascaded on the road
and my father carried me over.

He got married the first time in Mocho
but I cannot recall the lady's name,
only she was nearly white.

Her father was McCormack. They had a baby
and her name was Gloria.

He opened a new shop, bare shelves for months.
We slept in the back with Linda Bloomfield.

I heard them in the night,
I cannot recall if they were married.

He went to Kingston for days to play Mah Jong,
came home angry,
beat me with his belt.

I can still recall the heat and smell of him,
of sweetness and liquor.

He had children in villages all over.
He got married to Bernella.
I saw babies and never saw them again.

I held a baby called Zeta, my sister.

Last time I saw him
he begged me for money.

He was smaller.

The time before I'd held his gun
to his head while he slept

but I didn't pull the trigger.

He died in 1963 or 1964.
I can't remember.

Ran Away, My Mulatto Boy
found

Ran away, my mulatto boy GEORGE. Said George is six feet in height, a very light mulatto, brown curly hair, very intelligent, speaks handsomely, can read and write, will probably try to pass for a white man; is deeply scarred on his back and shoulders; is branded on his right with the letter H. Ran away the 27th February, a certain mulatto boy, 18 years old, **my heart is broken** named DAN. This certain boy **please dear god** appears nearly white, good strong teeth, **bring back to me** good countenance, fair curly hair, **my son** would nearly pass for a white person, has black eyes. Any person apprehending said boy and delivering him to me will receive a reward. Ran away, my mulatto boy FRED, an octoroon, fair complexion, though very sunburned, straight brown hair, grey eyes, a little crossed, about five feet four inches high, 22 years old. It is probable he has the marks of cupping or blisters on his breast and back, wears a size 7 shoe.

Topsy, Turvy

Turn me up and then turn me back
First I'm white and then I'm black

They in the museums now, in cool glass cases,
the dress rucked up, arms raised in horror-shock
by what's exposed: the black doll, head-scarf knotted
Mammy-style, the white doll with her gold wool hair
and sky-blue antebellum eyes. They lie
besides the stocks for runaways, iron cuffs,
a black scold's bride. The frills of blouses hide
their needling, waist to waist and Siamesey
or like birth, head flopping from the other's body.

The sign relates the misery – of a mother
in the quarters' rush-light, stitching effigies
from scrap. To teach her little daughters *early*,
the way they'll learn the night from day
or delight in their reflections in the well
how they'll be ripped – to milk and mollycoddle
in the old plantation house, and always have
two babies – one black, one white – and one must be
invisible when the other one's in sight.

Out of Many

That evening, I was Miss Mahogany,
between Miss Satinwood, Miss Ebony –
parading on the stage before the crowd,
my bust and waist and hip size read aloud,
skin polished as the venue's furniture –
old Bloomfield House, where May, my grandmother,
an octoroon, once scurried from her Master,
so close in looks, he must have been her brother!

Earlier we'd been gauged by tape measure
and shade chart, organised by skin colour.
Now that black was "in" and beautiful
(no more of counting teeth or mapping skulls)
we darker girls in tropical bikinis
could join our paler friends. Miss Ebony,
in every photograph, bookends the row,
the darkest band of colour in our rainbow

shimmering on stage. A shame we three
of darker hues were named for sturdy trees
whereas our lighter sisters down the line
were fruit and blooms: half-way along, Miss Jasmine
and Miss Lotus Flower (Hakka grand-daughters
of Lowe and Chan, indentured labourers)
and smiling at the end, Miss Apple Blossom,
her golden hair arranged on pallid bosom.

The final round saw all the lovely Misses
sashay and twirl in satin ball dresses
and crowns of orchids – none of us exotic
as Miss All-Spice, her hennaed fingers beaked
like birds of paradise, a waft of perfume
as she danced. Then, in the bright-lit dressing room
we scraped the sticky make-up from our faces,
still in line, of course. We knew our places.

Borderliner

I'm skirting the bold lines of the map **border-liner, might mean white girl**
neither here nor there, but home in the border places **with corkscrew hair**
Tijuana, where rich American boys slam tequila **or brown girl with flat hair**
or controlled drugs, or down the fence **slipping from one side to the other**
where a veiled woman clutches her baby **always looking for the right light**
in the thin shadows **Passing, hoping the old world wouldn't catch her up**
always waiting to cross **a *howdy do* or *hey girl* in the wrong hotel or store**
I've always loved sea-swimming **some fool too loud, not seeing the signs**
but sometimes these waves carry **That kind of stuff could put you back in**
make-shift rafts bobbing empty of their cargo **chains or end with the blade**
below my feet, the sea-bed **but ever notice how green eyes in yellow skin**
cross-hatched with bones **look so good, how some faces have no borders**
There were times when these borders had **no fixed abode? You can sketch**
no barbed wire, and even now not all borders are **a pretty rainbow diagram**
so hard. There are places nobody cares to pass **or use faux scientific words**
Think of that frozen mountain trail where only a tin sign **to classify, or slang**
tells one snowy Nordic edge from another, or miles **relating to nation states**
of rough green march-lands **chocolate bars or animals – mongrel or mule**
where I have wandered for days **But I say it's only when you are standing**
That I'm home on the border doesn't mean **on the border that you are free**
I don't think about who took the world and carved it up **to look both ways**

Scott Joplin Rag

Black boys swinging from the pylons When my mother played *Bethena*
when you trod the dust from Texarkana on Sunday afternoons, I stood
No one wants a nigro pee-anna man down here boy! outside the door
Except the brothels of Sedalia Rag-time waltz for your dead wife, deep-
where your left hand turned into a fat toad belly bass-line, the top line
jumping steady on the bass notes yearning. I wanted to learn the piano
right hand twinkling for a quiet syphilitic girl just to play your music
always smiling in her peacock feather head dress It took me a decade
yellow skin and black eyes I wanted ruby-light saloons and poverty and
Missouri, piss-pit of never enough, your baby old-time ghetto glamour
dead at three months old Years later, I seduced a man in the piano room
Heard your screams downtown. Then Freddie of my American college
sweet Chrysanthemum girl, ten weeks wed playing *Breeze From Alabama*
who dies of a cold? You left her waltzing We danced, until our dancing
in the bedroom, one two three one two three was kissing, hands picking
puffed-up eyes, that red throat burning over each other like crabs. After
You took your ruined heart to the asylum we lay on the cool stone floor
A thousand toads bounced on the walls with nothing to say. I leant up
Some days your right hand grabbed your left above him on one elbow
the only way to keep it still smoking, like a scene from a Hollywood film

Note by Note

Asleep, Bird's fingers played my arm,
a new song, untangling.

Happy?
Something like it –

Kim and Pree and Baird,
the last two by him.

Corny stuff. Ice-cream and magic tricks,
sweet melodies he wrote them.

They photographed us
at our dinner table,

their cold meal a prop –
our 'integrated family'.

Always made do for myself:
the Cotton Club coat-check

or dancing on Swing Street.
Not my kind of man

but something I couldn't resist in him.
Then Pree's heart gone,

our small girl,
and Bird killing himself

note by note.
I couldn't stay and watch.

Sincerely, Chan

Darling, my daughter's death
surprised me more than it did you.

Don't fulfil funeral proceedings
until I get there. I shall be the first one

to walk into our chapel. Forgive me
for not being there while

you were at the hospital. Yours most sincerely,
your husband, Charlie Parker.

My darling. For God's Sake,
hold onto yourself. Chas Parker.

Chan, help.
Charlie Parker.

My daughter is dead. I know it.
I will be there as quick

as I can. My name is Bird.
It is very nice out here. People have been

very nice to me out here.
I am coming in right away.

Take it easy. Let me be
the first one to approach you.

I am your husband.
Sincerely,

Charlie Parker

Mitchell/Mingus

What's your favourite Joni Mitchell album?

Everyone says *Blue,* but for me **My favourite jazz man? After Joe, I'd have to say**
it has to be *Don Juan's Reckless Daughter* **Charlie Mingus, as fat as the double bass**
two Jonis on the album cover, one in kimono and top hat **he played. Raised white**
one in drag, a blacked-up jazzster **until his mother said he was black and Chinese**
in a zoot suit and fedora. I stole it from a skate-boarding poet **Played cello the best**
in San Fran, my own reckless summer **but no room for black boys in the orchestra**
half drowned in the fat waves **Well if no one had his back, he'd back his own self**
of California or stewed on sours in the *Red Lagoon* **he'd shout his own damn name**
waking in whose room? I'd come home ***Baron Mingus, Mingus Ah Um, Mingus!***
drink coffee, play *Off Night Back Street* **Boasting of five wives, all those lovers, bad**
chords like car horns in the rain **temper conducting his fists, who knew America**
Didn't know music could be lyrical or dangerous like that **could hurt like this? When**
poor Jaco Pastorius staggering wildly down the bass **trouble came, his hands frozen**
'*It's been stinger to stinger darling'* **on the strings and one final album, *Mingus*, playing**
her voice in polyphonic layers **in his head, who'd he call? Joni, jazzster, she found**
sun-rays on the sheets of my small muddled bed **the words for him to say good-bye**

Genealogy

I carry you, a fleck, to Jamaica At the Chinese temple in Kingston
I am sick daily. At night Vincent leads me upstairs, says this floor
I hold the bed's rims was once full of beds where men off the boat
a raft on the rolling sea slept, ate, washed the sea-salt from their skin
You inside me, all this hope prayed at the jade altar with two lions
Sweet speck, what will you be? that too had shipped from China
Too soon to be anything We drive to the old cemetery, not before
I say nothing Vincent pays the wild-eyed boy who guards the truck
the way I stay silent He might hurt us, the vodka bottle he holds is
about my grandfather made from emerald glass. In 'New Superior'
who beat all his children I stand on my grandfather's wrecked grave
with a leather strap pen in hand. I am allowed to write his name on
The sun roasts the floor since it's been chiselled away, marble sold
I am woozy *Wow crazy day for you, huh?* Vincent smiles. *A real honour*
I don't know why I am here *to pay your filial duty to your Grandfather*?

High Yellow

Errol drives me to Treasure Beach **It's an old story – the terrible storm**
swerving the bleak country roads **the ship going down, half the sailors**
I think about what you will be, your mix **drowned, half swimming the**
White, black, Chinese and your father's **slate waves, spat hard on shore**
Scottish-Englishness. We cross the Black River **Smashed crates, bodies**
where they shipped cane sugar and molasses **choking on the dark sand**
upstream, past a sign **One man stands: *What is this place?* A woman**
for Lover's Leap. The air stinks of sulphur **in the trees, one hand raised**
Errol drops me at a blue gate. *Be safe* **This is how the Scottish men came**
Behind the house, the narrow beach **why the black people have red hair**
of dark sand, the seawater warm and grey **Or the other story – no storm**
I am deep before I know it, groundless **no wrecked ship. Just the miles**
The swell stops the sickness **of canefields and mulatto children named**
Under a crooked tree, perched on sea-rocks **McDonald or McArthur for**
two fishermen in torn denims, smoking **their fathers, who owned them**
I dry in sun. They pass, turn, come close **Nothing grows at Lover's Leap**
They've rust afros, gold faces splashed with freckles **where two runaways**
one edged in muscle, one with eyes **cornered by their master, held hands**
like razors. *What you want here* they say **and jumped down into the clouds**

Honey

There are no bananas in John Wong's **I've not seen my Uncle in twenty years**
and none in Kingston since **He meets me from the coach in his new red mini**
last year's hurricane flattened the plantations ***Yes man*** **he tells me** ***I done well***
In the supermarket **Uncle Ken is 79 and still working. We drive to a cove bar**
the shelves are stacked with Hershey's and Nestlé **He drinks cans of Red Stripe**
Only the mangoes are home grown **with Mr Alexander. I lounge on a sun-bed**
I walk Dominica Avenue **watching the rocks that look like giant green turtles**
with pineapple yoghurt **and Ken, who has tan skin and snow-white hair, same**
soothing my stomach **father as my father, but Ken's mother was Amerindian**
which stirs and lurches with you inside. **They call him Honey but I don't know**
I am lonely **why. I remember his house, high up on the hill at Discovery Bay**
in Kingston **the fat mangoes I picked from the ground and sucked, puppies**
even the yellow walled hotel pool **panting under a tin roof in the midday heat**
reminds me how alone I am ***I'm still there*** **Ken says** ***I build that damn house***
as I'm the only one who swims in it ***you think I'll ever leave?*** **We swerve back**
Uncle Ken said to go to **to the coach stop. Ken is drunk. Well that was March**
the back door of Lowe-Shu Supermarket, ask for Lee Chan **now it is December**
He'll tell me all about my grandfather but **An email says they found Ken's body**
Ken says *Good God, why you want to know?* **in his house, he had been murdered**

Brown Eyes Blue

Errol drives me to Red Hill. *Wild goose chase*, he says **Wally built the house himself**
but we find my Aunty Gloria behind rusted gates, lost **painted the walls lime green**
in a steep rock garden of tall clammy plants **He had thick yellow hair, oiled back**
She is child-sized, one spindly hand clamped on my arm **white shirt, bronzed skin**
blinking, *I know you? You know me? Wally dead, you hear?* **He liked old Country music**
Up in the house, the blinds ripped, books on the tiles **the back bedroom crammed**
a looking-glass leant on the door in two sharp parts **with his CDs. *Wha' you think***
and Andrew, appearing from shadow in an *Irie* T shirt ***Jamaicans only like reggae?***
tray of mango slices in his hand, wet yellow smiles **He laughed. *Don't tell me, you***
You came to live here with me, when? Gloria asks him ***think all Jamaican folk are black?***
whispering to me *to cook and clean, but he does none of them things* **He was half Lebanese**
Later he shines the big black car **half French. After dinner he disappeared to play**
she can't drive anymore ***Don't it Make My Brown Eyes Blue*** **over and over while**
She pulls me to a garden wall **we sat outside with Gloria, my dad's long-lost sister**
where purple flowers grow, big and spongy **They laughed and drank rum together**
nothing I'd seen before. **The air cooled and a purple storm came over. I watched.**
I used to know all the flowers, she tells me. *I can't remember any more* **The more they talked**
whispering again, wide-eyed. *Can you save me?* **the more they looked like one another**

Yellow River, Milk River

for Rory

If you ask me about ancestors I'll tell you He weighted codfish down with salt
about Hakka people, always moving, hounded down sold weevilled cornflour
from the mountains, by knives and turning milk, offered credit to the customers
and fire and blood he robbed, his angry ticks and crosses in the yellowed ledger
to the Yellow River, to war on the shop's back shelf. But the women in the salon
with the Punti looked up when he passed by, believed his small bones made him
***hakka*, an insult spat until the Hakka took** tender, not a man to rope a child or
the word back; about tough land, bad water stab a counter with a gutting knife
bad rice, moving on again: Guangdong, Fujian, Jiangxi He had an inventory
of fortress villages, and the ships of wives he withered in the country, fourteen
that carried the Hakka from the rim of hungry children spread from Milk River
China to Surinam and Taiwan to Yallahs Bay. The youngest boy, a bed-wetter
How *Hakka* became *guest worker* he gave a dollar to and dumped, hitch-hiked
to Austria and Spain and Jamaica to Kingston and survived. The only photo is
where my grandfather stepped off the boat of his body, suited on a bed of silk
of Hakka men asleep in the bright lights in the mahogany coffin he saved up
of the Chinese temple waiting for uncles and cousins years for. One daughter
new lives. About my name, which is your name too took it, for proof at last
from two ancestral villages, how there are eighty million Hakka people that
scattered throughout the world, how I found this all out for you he was dead.
.

Fifty Words of English

At night, we shared our words by oil-lamp.
Mother, sister, river, moon. Sleepless in our bunks
we swapped *sun* for *raincloud*, *work* for *home*.

On deck, we dropped our names into the sea,
took James or Sam, our careful tongues
performed the lines: y*es please Sir, good new life?*

Eleven O'clock Child

I said *half caste* at school
before *half caste* was banned
and the next words came in

I was never half anything
just running the asphalt with my friends
bloody knees and hands

saving money in a jar
buried on the field
to fly away to America

didn't know about one drop rule
counting teeth, *hexadecaroon*
marrano, mestizo

Dad said his father called him
ship yit tiam
eleven o'clock child

I thought it was kind
not another way
to say unclean

Ship Yit Tiam

It's just a little heckle in the yard
Still love you, mule-child
mongrel of the shopkeeper and cook

Eleven o'clock child
you're not quite noon
not midnight

stuck before
the clock's hands
reached the top

don't mean you
can't do maths
keep books

It's nothing
but a kink of hair
a lip poke

look of skin
cooked too long
not quite clean

What Charlie Said

Look, it's like this. You like dogs. You buy a dog. Let's say you buy an Alsatian. Huge ears, slobbering tongue, you know the deal. Let's say your neighbour's got a Chihuahua – poncy little dog, yap, cross-eyed. Now they're both dogs, right? But they're different breeds. They're different *species*. You're not gonna mate them. No way you're gonna mate them. Cos what would you get? Precisely! It wouldn't be right, would it? I'm not a racist, but it's the same with humans. We're from different species, different *civilisations*. Some of us need to be out in the sun, so we've got black skin. Others live where it's cold, like this poncing country, so we're white. Then you've got your Indians, your Pakistanis, job done. I don't mind 'em coming here, but we're not meant to mate, no way. I've read a book about it. I've *thought* about it. It's not about race, it's the same with dogs – we're just different breeds. Like your dog, Chloe, she's sweet but she's not pedigree. Not the best she could be, is she? Exactly! I've known your dad half my life but oh we've had some rows about this one. I told him 'Chan, look it's like dogs – no reason not to get on, just don't mate them!' But he sits there in his armchair, lights his fag and looks at me – like I'm a fool, like *I'm* a bleeding idiot!

What Do I Remember Of Sofia?

She came one Christmas day in a snow tiara
and we sunk into the sofa in a snarl of leggings
and leg warmers and laughter. In my room,
I showed her all my *care bear* stickers, played
Cyndi Lauper on the tape recorder, while she picked
at the edge of my wallpaper and gently ripped
each lemon rose, until the adults found us
and she blamed me

and in the winter garden
she wore my earmuffs, and pretended to skate
on the icy foot-path, and I thought shouldn't *I* look
like you, Sofia? Erica her mother was white
like mine, her father Jean was black like mine
and Sofia was the beautiful colour of toffees
I banged around my mouth until it bruised
and her hair was a golden poodle of curls

and we promised
to write each other letters, and I did write
and sent Sofia a tube of glitter, but never
had a letter back, and soon stopped thinking of her
or Geneva (where she lived in a wooden house
on the whitest hill among the alpine trees
and on blinding days of sun and sleet and snow
glided calmly out onto the frozen lake –)

If You Believe: In the Smoke and the Light

If you believe I met my father in 1964
at the hideaway on Eden Grove,
his hand on my arm as I walked through the door,
young man in a black shirt and tailored suit
and I knew his face of course
but we'd not met before, you may as well
believe anything I dream of,
searching through old photographs –
the way he looked up close say, still like a boy
with his bright skin and loose laugh,
tapping his foot to the band's brash sound
as we sat at the bar with the poets and crooks.
You may as well believe we danced a number
to a softer tune, a girl at the microphone,
her voice wrapped tight around the horn
and after, slipped out across the street
through the gates to a Victorian square,
so strange to be walking with my father
in the cool autumn air, his coat on my shoulders,
hand at my back, and just talking talking
of his life before – of mongoose and snake,
the Yallahs River, his father's store,
his father's belt, the ship that sailed him here.
There was an old clock, a cracked fountain,
and as we walked I saw people like us
on the benches, shapes in the dark,
heads bent close and talking talking
and back in that hot cellar dive, I danced all night
with the Ghanaians and Trinidadians
and a French man who spun me with great virtuosity
and I was as fast and wild as the child I'd been
at the community hall in my ballet shoes
dancing dancing, *pas de chat, girls, your feet are wings!*
And my father was sat in the smoke and the light,
a woman at his side with coaled eyes,
her red lips split wide with laughter
and I think she was my mother –

Old Daisy-Face

Old Daisy thinks the day breaks in the night,
wakes singing and waits for the blinds to lift
and the show to begin. I guess night-time's a gift
of riches: police lights in the street, a fox fight,
the flickering stars. Old Daisy-Face sings louder,
his hot little hands in the air – thinks he's stopping
the moon from falling down, a pale ball bopping
from hands to head, that big moon-keepy-upper.
Me and his daddy slog the long night through.
We sing, we pace, we rock and roll mad Daisy,
we try to feed him quiet. But that old crazy
just shuts his petals when he's ready to –
then it's show over, done, whole face sealed tight
and turned away to shun the morning light.

Notes on the poems

What is Play is Out the Window!

The late Joe Harriott was my father's first cousin, and also my mother's boyfriend for a time.

The title of this section, and the last line of Sax II are based on the following quote by Harriott: "I don't want to equal. I want to be superior. All the others…they play inside the room, in here. What I play is out de window, out de window!" found in Hilary Moore's *Inside British Jazz: Crossing Borders of Race, Nation and Class* (Ashgate, 2007).

Alan Robertson's biography of Harriott, *Fire in His Soul: The Joe Harriott Story,* (Northway, 2011) was invaluable to the writing of these poems.

What is and Isn't Jazz? Adapted from "Abstraction or Distraction" by Daniel Halperin, a review in in *Jazz News,* 1961.

Song for Shake loosely based on Philip Nanton's article "Real Keane" in *Caribbean Beat,* 2004.

Partita 'Partita' is the first track on the 1968 album *Indo Jazz Fusions* I by Joe Harriott and John Mayer.

Mingus Charles Mingus broke off his UK tour to travel to Southampton to visit Harriott in hospital. They had never met but Mingus arrived late in the night and was refused entry. Harriott died shortly afterwards.

Alpha Boy Joe Harriott was left at the Alpha Boy's Orphanage in Kingston, Jamaica when he was ten years old.

If You Believe: One Pale Eye Chan Canasta was the stage name of Chan Mifilew, a well-known television magician in the 1950s and 1960s. My father was nicknamed 'Chan' after Canasta, because of their shared dexterity with playing cards.

Ormonde

Many of these poems draw on the small archive (newspaper coverage, photographs and the passenger list) about the voyage of the SS *Ormonde*, which sailed from Jamaica to Liverpool in 1947, a year before the better known *Empire Windrush.*

Passieras The term 'passieras' is borrowed from Sam King's testimony in Mike and Trevor Phillips' *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (Harper Collins, 1998):

'We were Yard People, we didn't use the word Yardie, we used the word Passieras, we were going to club together and we were going to survive.'

Boxer, Dressmaker, Schoolboy and Stowaway have their genesis in the *Ormonde* passenger list, where passengers were required to list their occupations.

Distressed British Seamen The term 'Distressed British Seaman' refers to any seaman who find themselves without a ship in a foreign port.

Mishra's Blues The title is taken from the 1969 album *Indo Jazz Suite* by Joe Harriott and John Mayer. The story of Misir and Luther is adapted from a story in my father's notebook about his childhood friends.

Borderliner

"Borderliner" is a derogatory term for someone of a mixed-race background.

My Fathers Notebook Adapted from text of a notebook written by my father about his early life in Jamaica.

Ran Away, My Mulatto Boy The non-bold text is adapted from notices placed in newspapers seeking the return of runway slaves in Jamaica in the 19th Century.

Out of Many In 1955 the 'Out of Many, One' beauty contest was held in Jamaica. Its theme was 'Glorify the Jamaican Girl - Ten Types, One People', and featured ten winning girls from different racial backgrounds, classified by the shade of their skin.

Note by Note The right-hand side text is composed of the four telegrams Charlie Parker sent his wife, Chan, on learning on the death of their daughter.

Fifty Words of English Chinese immigrants arriving to Jamaica at the beginning of the 20th Century were required to pass a written test to demonstrate that they could write fifty words in three different languages.

Eleven O'clock Child 'Ship Yit Tiam' is a slang term for mixed Chinese and black Jamaican children, probably no longer in use.

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