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Abstract

Mother Poem and Sun Poem are the first two poems in Edward Brathwaite's latest and as yet unfinished poetic trilogy. Both poems are set in the post-Emancipation period on the island of Barbados where Brathwaite was born and grew up. Like *Rights of Passage, Masks and Islands* — the poems of Brathwaite's first trilogy. *The Arrivants* — Mother Poem and Sun Poem are poems of multiple voices. Mother Poem traces the history of Barbados through the voices of working-class or folk women, a female slave, children and a debt collector, agent of the capitalist merchant; these voices are interspersed with the at times ideologically committed descriptive, at times directly protesting voice of the visionary poet, evaluating the folk women's uncritical consumption of white bourgeois materialism, religion and education (the last of these for their children), and the expedients associated with the socio-economic conditions imposed on working class married and family life by the plantation and its owner, the white mulatto merchant.

‘I only wondered. No ... nothing, I suppose.’

‘He did say that his daughter looked lovely as a bride. We all thought she did too.’

‘Yes,’ she agreed.

That night as she lay softly crying into her pillow near her sleeping mother, in their Santa Cruz flat, she suddenly felt very alone. Her mother and brother seemed very far away from her now. She couldn’t sleep the whole night, as her little fantasy fell to pieces around her.

In the early morning before dawn, she heard the roar of a plane as it flew over their building of flats, shattering the silence, and with it flew all her hope.

SUE THOMAS

Sexual Politics in Edward Brathwaite’s *Mother Poem* and *Sun Poem*

Mother Poem and *Sun Poem* are the first two poems in Edward Brathwaite’s latest and as yet unfinished poetic trilogy. Both poems are set in the post-Emancipation period on the island of Barbados where Brathwaite was born and grew up. Like *Rights of Passage*, *Masks* and *Islands* — the poems of Brathwaite’s first trilogy, *The Arrivants* — *Mother Poem* and *Sun Poem* are poems of multiple voices. *Mother Poem* traces the history of Barbados through the voices of working-class or folk women, a female slave, children and a debt collector, agent of the capitalist merchant; these voices are interspersed with the at times ideologically committed descriptive, at times directly protesting voice of the visionary poet, evaluating the folk women’s uncritical consumption of white bourgeois materialism, religion and education (the last of these for their children), and the

expedients associated with the socio-economic conditions imposed on working class married and family life by the plantation and its owner, the white mulatto merchant. The text is determined to give articulation to the often publicly silent dreaming of the folk woman, to 'slowly restore her silent gutters of word-fall' through the impersonations of art.¹ *Sun Poem* traces the history of Barbados through the loss or perversion of male dreaming. The voices of the poem are many: the voice of the rainbow; the inner and speaking voices of Adam, the archetypal folk boy; the voices of Adam's sister, male playfellows and childhood sweetheart; the voice of an emasculated black male; the historical voices of a slaver and a follower of the slave rebellion leader, Bussa; and the at times ideologically committed descriptive, at times directly protesting voice of the visionary poet and historian. The poem carries in itself and in its connections with *Mother Poem* the implication that the plantation, the merchant and female dreaming cause the loss or perversion of male dreaming and emasculation — as one male voice puts his dilemma in the poem: 'i gettin smaller ... is de sun dyein out of i vision.'² Both *Mother Poem* and *Sun Poem* close on a note of hope, with the rediscovery of the power of *nam*, the 'soul, secret name, soul-source, connected with *nyam* (eat), *yam* (root food), *nyame* (name of god)',³ a rediscovery which the text insists will enable the present generations of black Bajans to find their Afro-West Indian roots, their folk/maroon heritage, and so become '«the first potential parents»' to «contain the ancestral house»⁴ threatened and made insecure by lack of solid foundations in the soil of landscape and history.

My interest lies in the sexual politics of the ideology of the voice of the visionary poet inscribed in the text. Its sexual politics are very seldom made explicit in the sections of the poems it speaks: the voice is explicitly committed to a folk/maroon vision of history and the future embracing anti-imperialism and anti-materialism and to a decrying of the socio-economic conditions shaping the 'inner plantation'.⁵ The sexual politics of the voice of the visionary poet are implicit in the silences of the texts and in the selection of racial and sexual stereotypes for evocation, of voices for impersonation, and of some but not other parts of the discourses of impersonated voices for criticism and comment. I will be arguing that the failure of the voice of the visionary poet to critically examine the inadequacies and contradictions of its 'pro-family' patriarchal sexual political ideology is a source of limitation: the voice cannot achieve its project of offering a vision of exposure ('the uncurled bloom of light') and implosion ('firm but subtle feeding to the stem of origins'),⁶ and the invocation of the power of *nam* central to this vision

offers nothing more than a romanticised resolution of the sexual political problems of the inner plantation isolated in the texts.

The predominant racial sexual stereotypes Brathwaite, as he constructs himself in the voice of the visionary poet, evokes in *Mother Poem* and *Sun Poem* are the emasculated black husband and the matriarchal woman, known, the voice of the visionary poet states, 'soft only at the moment of generation/ but always hard with word with nag with shrew' (*SP*, p. 37). Each of these stereotypes, naturalised in the wake of the 1965 Moynihan report on the black family in the U.S.A., is accorded some West Indian socio-economic specificity. Several models of the emasculation of men are offered in the poems. In the first and most fully developed model the husband works in a warehouse yard and is intimidated by the merchant: his wife says of him, 'he does let de man boss e 'bout in de job/ like e got a dog in de corner' (*MP*, p. 6); his child calls him 'the merchant's prop/erty' (*MP*, p. 7), a pun which conveys the capitalist's attitude to the exploited worker and the way in which the father's fear of the merchant props up the authority of the capitalist. The husband has not been compensated for the industrial illness which has damaged his lungs so that in his wife's words 'he cud hardly breed' (*MP*, p. 13), a play by the impersonating voice on 'breathe' which suggests loss of virility. The stereotypical figure of the black matriarch merges with the cross-cultural patriarchal stereotype of the nagging woman whose salt of bitterness drives the husband frequently from the home ('you think i did mout too much?/ you think i did run im way?' (*MP*, p. 12)). The nagging is a product of her bitterness about the difficulties of realising her dreams of family life. She had envisioned her home as a 'step forward outa de dark/ outa de canefields uh come from', a place of domestic pastoral and lower middle-class gentility (tidy, clean tablecloths, scrubbed floors, a home to which the parson's children could come to play ludo) (*MP*, pp. 12-13). The meagre wages of her husband are not sufficient to provide for her dreams of home ownership and a solely domestic role: she is bitter that she must work to make ends meet. The husband's authority in her life and, through her influence, in family life, is usurped by the parson and the schoolteacher; her boy is the 'sun' she clutches to her bosom, her 'great light riding from the west', her dreams of western (European) acculturation being realised through the 'plantation' education to which she surrenders her son 'black hostage' (*MP*, pp. 23-24). Her attraction to the parson contains an element of forbidden sexuality.

Criticism of and commentary on this model is proffered in a number of ways: the pathos of the husband's situation (his voice being appropriately

silent); direct exposure of the limitations of the parson and schoolteacher in the descriptive voice of the visionary poet (*MP*, pp. 10-11, 19-24, 54); direct protest at the 'blasphemies' of plantation education in the angry voice of the visionary poet (*MP*, pp. 50-51; *SP*, pp. 53-55). Implicit contrast and imagery is also used. The woman of this first model is contrasted with a woman who, though she may work in a shop, dreams of an African heritage, of 'darkmeroë water lapping at the centre of the world', a dream she may own in silence even if she is 'trapped in within her rusting canepiece plot' by the plantation (*MP*, pp. 38-40). The imagery of water in this approved dream is significant, for the central problem of Barbados in *Mother Poem* is waterlessness, water being an element associated in many mythologies with the archetypal fertile maternal woman. The typical Bajan folk mother has become witch and shrew, identified with 'black sycorax', the literary mother of the archetypal dispossessed colonial male: the voice of the visionary poet says she can 'give the dry rot meaning', her music and curses being gathered from 'the sicknesses of the plantation' (*MP*, p. 47). This first model is implicitly and tartly criticised by the presentation of a pathetic realisation of the lower middle-class capitalist dream in the home of 'the secular bourgeois family man of the property owning class/ not much but enough' in *Sun Poem*. The manhood of the father needs the reassurance of 'merchant bank bal/ance health insurance premiums' and mistresses; husband and wife are joined in hope of capitalist recognition accorded their sons; the home is one of timid and fearful middle-class 'discreet ... moderatton'; and the wife is fat ('black puddin'), drunken ('house-spouse souse'), and devoid of sexual appeal and/or sexually repressed ('far from the temptations of eve') (*SP*, pp. 65-68).

The patriarchal tragic dimension of the emasculation of the Bajan male is invoked in a variation of this first model in the history of Adam, the archetypal folk boy, whose inner and speaking voices are extensively heard and very sympathetically presented in *Sun Poem*. There is a jarring immediate juxtaposition of a scene of playful courtship between Adam and his childhood sweetheart, Esse, and the scene of Adam's funeral, he having 'died in his testicles' (that is, I presume, of prostate cancer). Esse, whose thighs the adolescent Adam has thought of as a 'promised land', does not become the living symbol of his deliverance from captivity. Adam loses in his marriage his boyhood dreaming of invention and independence centred on 'breeding' underwater, yet another play by the voice of the visionary poet on breathing, through the agency of Esse, whose sibilant name and lisp cast her as the evil sexual temptress, and who, in her marriage, has become a nagging shrew. In the courtship

scene Esse has been slyly sexually provocative: significantly she lies in a tree as the snake does in representations of the fall of man in patriarchal Christian mythology.⁷ Adam's fall from the grace of childhood in which he has been growing 'down to the darker soil of himself' (*SP*, p. 37), hearing snatches of his African heritage, and using the 'language of beach bus and gutter/ scavenging utters that were always our own' (*SP*, p. 55) is not only a product of disruptive adult sexuality. It is also the fault of Bajan failure to educate children in the new world history Brathwaite as academic historian has exposed, pioneered and developed and the fault of contemporary Bajan men who offer no sound heroic role models to their sons, heroism being constructed in the poem as rebellion against coloniser and plantation. The condemnatory anger of the voice of the visionary poet in describing these last two agencies of fall and loss is harsh and usually unsympathetic. In 'Clips', a section of *Sun Poem* the title of which plays on eclipse, signalling a loss of power,⁸ the visionary poet looks at unheroic male role models. The sun, of course, is a symbol of male power and virility in many mythologies. The only unheroic male in 'Clips' to excite the sympathy of the visionary poet is the folk male emasculated by his need for woman as mother and wife, the materialism of his wife and the fencing in of his childhood yard. His is the only voice impersonated by the visionary poet in 'Clips'; the impersonation highlights his sense of loss — of the childhood space which used to be 'ablaze wid de rainbow of heaven'; of domestic life since his materialistic wife went out to work leaving him at home in the evening like a 'dry stick stickin up lonely', an image containing sexual reference; and of the opportunity to be 'son/light', the source of energy and enlightenment in his son's life.⁹

The image of the rainbow is an important one in *Sun Poem*, the rainbow being in many mythologies the symbol of a bridge between earth and heaven. The problem of Bajan men is imaged by the voice of the visionary poet as their being 'sons of earth', of a passive female element, having lost the dreaming which will restore them to their sexual political position in the domestic heaven as the sun. Dreaming of invention and independence is the rainbow bridge of sexual political hope. In the generalised depiction of the domestic life of unheroic Bajan men, wives are imagined as hard slave drivers cracking whips:

crack: it will be dolour

humph: it will be bread

hah: it will be banging bell and bottle

sweat: it will be gristle

blood: it will be hoom of ashes

tears: it will be guitar strings upon my father's skeleton

Brathwaite explains in his notes that 'hoom' means 'an empty home, memory of home'.¹⁰ In the plantation economy, too, these men are still enslaved 'in long rows/ in long chains/ in long queues'; they are 'the dregs of future glory' (*SP*, pp. 37-38). *Nam* and *sunsum* ('soul, origin of spiritual life',¹¹ passed from father to son¹²) are the rainbow signs to Brathwaite's black audience, perhaps a reminder of the slave's recreated Biblical prophecy which is epigraph to and closes James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*: 'God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time.'¹³ In the new creation myth in Afro-Cuban folk song form which closes *Sun Poem* the light (fire) of the male 'sun/new' grows out of 'i-/sis', the Egyptian universal mother whose crowning glory is often represented as a solar disc (Horus, her son). 'I-/sis' is also the sister, generic woman, of i, in Rastafarian thought 'the original African personality ... black essence ... black Becoming and Returning ... a sea of boundless (but trapped) energy' which 'knows itself only through growing, discovering and mobilizing this blocked-up energy'¹⁴ and i, the visionary poet. The 'thrill-/dren', a play on children, male in *Sun Poem*, come up in the new dawn towards the light of the sun out of the peril of water, the female element, which may entrap and drown (*SP*, pp. 95-97). In the epigraph to *Sun Poem* the visionary poet assents to the voice of Francis King asking: 'How could I, even if I chose/ Now let another swimmer drown?/ And how could I myself go down?'¹⁵ The bubbles of wondrous heroic dreaming which enable survival in the water element are a leitmotif in *Sun Poem*.

Bajan men are criticised implicitly and explicitly by the visionary poet for deserting or failing to return the love of mothers of their children and for the violence of rape. In these instances Bajan mothers are seen, at least in part, as victims rather than victimisers of the men in their lives. In 'Woo/Dove', part of *Mother Poem*, the father of Jess has left the waterless and captive 'desert' of Barbados to become a contract labourer in the metropolitan capitalist Canada, deserting his wife and daughter. With the death of a patron aunt who finances Jess's commercial education her mother lures/woos Jess, the innocent dove into cooing prostitution as providing an easy living. This section of the poem is followed by one in which the mothering earth of Barbados is described in terms suggesting it has been treacherously prostituted to tourist and commercial development and multinational companies and ravaged by these forces of the plantation economy. The implication of the immediate

juxtaposition of these aspects of prostitution is that such prostitution is a product of the demand of the plantation economy, male irresponsibility, lack of male authority resulting from desertion, and the influence of corrupting corrupted female authority searching for an easy living (*MP*, pp. 41-46). When a man fails to return the love of his wife she will, the visionary poet says in 'Cherries', 'curdle like milk ... become the mother of bastards'. In the course of this section of *Mother Poem* the visionary poet shifts from sentimentalisation of womanly love and devotion in its descriptive voice to impersonation of the rejected woman's chilling, angry and violent voice. The images of love she leaves at the doorstep of the man she no longer 'needs and loathes as 'manwart, manimal' are an aborted, dismembered and bloodied foetus described in graphic detail (*MP*, pp. 77-81). The daughter Christofene in 'Angel/Engine' is reduced to mindlessly and lifelessly rocking herself in a chair, she and her future having fallen victim to 'one two tree wutless men' who 'impose a pregnant pun she' and desert her. There is pathos for Christofene and anger for the worthless men in the voice of the describing woman (*MP*, pp. 97-98). In 'Clips' the angry voice of the visionary poet describes an irresponsible father who falsely imagines himself hero, adopting Rasta mannerisms and speech, using his penis as a weapon of violence in rape, seeing his children as 'feathers in a hat-/trick or medals upon// idi amins chest' (*SP*, p. 69).

One well-documented aspect of women's history as victim of men in the Caribbean on which the direct and impersonating voices of the visionary poet are silent is domestic violence.¹⁶ Representation of the domestic violence of some folk males would, of course, render them unsympathetic figures: this may, in part, explain this silence of the texts. The visionary poet of *Mother Poem* and *Sun Poem* recognises that the Bajan folk boy earns his spurs in his peer group by fighting and confers heroic stature on revolutionary rioters, a slave rebellion leader, and the anti-imperialist warrior, Hannibal,¹⁷ but does not give public recognition to the fact that the sense of virile manhood imparted by the dispensation of violence in a patriarchal society may later fuel an urge for demonstration of sexual political power in bullying domestic violence directed at physically weaker women. The only dispenser of domestic violence in *Mother Poem* and *Sun Poem* is not male, but a female slave-owner, Mistress Jackson, who brutally beats her young slave, Ann, when she refuses an order to feed an already fully fed puppy. This factually based story, which a folk voice tells in part through impersonation of Ann's voice, is, Brathwaite says in his Notes to *Mother Poem*, part of the black West Indian collective unconscious.

The Bajan folk man may recover his sexual political power, *Sun Poem* implies, through the recovery of *nam* or i-ness in the inspiration proffered by dreams of invention and independence or by heroic resistance to imperial power and middle-class capitalist values. The dreams and the resistance take place in spheres untroubled by disruptive death-dealing female sexuality or in which seductive death-dealing female sexuality is collectively resisted by men — the spheres of childhood, warfare and revolution. The heroic resistance leader Bussa is inspired by a liberating dream of peace, involving pipe, woman and freedom of movement (*SP*, p. 59); in the context of slavery in which families were so frequently separated by the plantation owner it would be churlish to describe the sexual political aspect of Bussa's dream as sentimentally patriarchal. Brathwaite as visionary poet suggests that Bajan husband and wife are still frequently separated by the socio-economic and seductive capitalist forces of the plantation economy. In a section of *Mother Poem* significantly titled 'Peace fire' a beautiful black woman decoyed and enslaved in the capitalist house of the merchant¹⁸ is exposed to revolutionary folk men as 'BABYLON THE GREAT MOTHER OF HARLOCKS AND ABOMINATIONS', with a snake on her belly and 'her bottom plumed with psychadelic fire'. At this exposure the folk men ask for deliverance, implicitly, given the allusions to *Revelation*,¹⁹ from sexual temptation, evil, and the power of the merchant whose trade supplies the woman's appetites.

The Bajan folk woman may recover the power of *nam* in several ways. The first is through resistance to O'Grady, a Prospero figure, imparting to her child the life affirming spiritual resources of Afro-West Indian identity, the knowledge 'dat me name is me main an it am is me own an lion eye mane' (*MP*, p. 62). In Rasta thought the lion 'symbolises the resurgence of Ancient African vibrations, ideals and definition of self. The lion becomes the emblem of that concrete spiritual Force which expresses itself as a consciousness of the «I» or of the African self.'²⁰ The Bajan woman may also rediscover her underground resources through pentecostal religions in which groundation of the gods occurs in possession of the worshipping body; through articulation of slave histories submerged in the collective unconscious; through generation of 'ancient' children; and through peaceful dreams of having given birth to suns, the guardian angels of the resurrection, to whom she may trust as providers and domestic protectors, sources of courageous inspiration which will return prodigal middle-class children home, and to whom she may entrust the secrets of herbs.²¹

Brathwaite's racial sexual stereotypes and sexual archetypes and symbols are drawn principally from the patriarchal black American protest tradition,²² and patriarchal, often imperialist, religious, mythical and literary traditions. Even though Brathwaite is sensitive to the sufferings of women, he accepts the patriarchal values of those traditions largely uncritically, not challenging, for instance, the misogyny of the Christian tradition as it deals with female sexuality, or the limiting culturally conditioned gender differentiations underlying the very notions of warfaring heroes, emasculation, or emasculating hard women. The voice of the visionary poet appropriates the voices of women for his own sexual political ideological purposes, conscious or unconscious. The sexual political ideology revealed implicitly in *Mother Poem* and *Sun Poem* is a patriarchal one, offering to Bajan folk men a vision of 'explosure' and 'implosure' which will, in restoring them to patriarchal power and prestige, subordinate women and deliver male children and men from the perceived moral authority of women. For Bajan folk women Brathwaite's patriarchal ideology seems to offer only a sexual political variant of 'exposure (colonial subordination to the light)' and 'imposure (imprint of the rule and ruler...)'²³ in which the husband supplants the colonising power, patriarchal dreams replace materialistic ones, and the wife trusts to the uncertain quality of benevolent patronage her husband's I-ness offers. Obviously my own sexual political ideological sympathies are at variance with Brathwaite's; Brathwaite's readers, however, and especially those inspired by his prophetic vision, should be aware of the patriarchal ideology inscribed in *Mother Poem* and *Sun Poem*.

NOTES

1. Edward Brathwaite, *Mother Poem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 117. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
2. Edward Brathwaite, *Sun Poem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 71. All further references are to this edition and are included in the text.
3. Notes, *Sun Poem*, p. 104.
4. Wilson Harris, *The Whole Armour*, quoted as part of the epigraph to *Mother Poem*, n.p.
5. Brathwaite's view of folk/maroon African cultural survival in the Caribbean is presented in his *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica* (London: New Beacon, 1970), *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), *Contradictory Omens* (Kingston: Savacou Publications, 1974) and in articles like 'Caribbean Man in Space and Time', *Savacou*, 11/12 (Sept. 1975), 1-15, and 'Kumina — the Spirit of African Survival in Jamaica', *Jamaica Journal*, 42 (Sept. 1978), 45-63. Brathwaite writes in 'Caribbean Man in Space and Time': 'Plantations were defined as tropical

territorial units set up by colonizing Europeans for mineral or crop exploitation, and the nexus and network of production was designated a plantation system.... «The mainstream of cultural continuity in the Caribbean derives from the functional requirements of the plantation society, past and present» (pp. 3-4).

6. *Contradictory Omens*, p. 61.
7. *Sun Poem*, pp. 78-85. The 'muse/ical tree' (p. 78) offers Adam a false muse.
8. Brathwaite draws attention to the pun in his Notes, *Sun Poem*, p. 101.
9. *Sun Poem*, pp. 70-71. The hickey, 'wooded gully wasteland behind villages' unpenetrated by middle-class manners and customs (Notes, *Sun Poem*, p. 98), and seashore inhabited by folk boys belongs to the world of the yard celebrated by Brathwaite in his 'Houses in the West Indian Novel', *Literary Half-Yearly*, 17, No 1 (1976), 111-121.
10. Notes, *Sun Poem*, p. 100.
11. Notes, *Sun Poem*, p. 98.
12. Capt. R.S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (1927; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1979), p. 318.
13. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (1963; rpt. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964), p. [7], p. 89.
14. Dennis Forsythe, 'West Indian Culture through the Prism of Rastafarianism', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 26, No 4 (1980), p. 78.
15. *Sun Poem*, p. [vi].
16. For instance, by Merle Hodge, 'The Shadow of the Whip: A Comment on Male-Female Relations in the Caribbean' in *Is Massa Day Dead? Black Moods in the Caribbean*, ed. Orde Coombs (Garden City, New York: Anchor, 1974), pp. 112-114. Hodge writes: 'The black man in the role of Dispenser of Violence is very likely a descendant of the white slave-overseer asserting an almost bottomless authority over the whipped. But there is one fundamental difference, for whereas the overseer beat and tortured his victim because he had power over him, the black man ill-treating his woman is expressing his desire for power, is betraying a dire insecurity vis-à-vis the female' (p. 114). Brathwaite's 'Timehri' appears in the same collection as Hodge's essay.
17. *Sun Poem*, p. 18; *Mother Poem*, pp. 105-107; *Sun Poem*, pp. 56-60; and *Sun Poem*, p. 63, respectively. Bussa is presented, in part, through the admiring voice of a follower (*Sun Poem*, pp. 56-60) and the rebels and prophets who speak from pulpits 'shame' their 'helpless' fathers who can only look away.
18. The woman is described as 'virginia of our dreams' (*Mother Poem*, p. 107), an allusion to the Roman plebeian beauty Virginia whose history is presented by Livy.
19. Revelation, Chapters 17-19 describe the mystery and judgement of Babylon. On her forehead is written 'MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH' (17.5), the judgement of Babylon is destruction by fire and the merchants who supply her appetites are mentioned in 18.11-15.
20. Forsythe, p. 73. Bussa's lion status is suggested by his follower's final comment '*e mane bussa*' (*Sun Poem*, p. 60).
21. *Mother Poem*; pp. 98-103; 67-76; 111; and 112-113, respectively.
22. In *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (London: Pluto Press, 1981) Bell Hooks argues that the black American protest tradition has 'righteously supported patriarchy' (p. 94). Her argument is convincingly documented. While initially rejecting Moynihan's model of emasculation, leaders of the black American protest

tradition have argued, she observes, 'that it is absolutely necessary for black men to relegate black women to a subordinate position both in the political sphere and in home life' (pp. 94-95). The voice of the visionary poet in *Mother Poem* and *Sun Poem* certainly does not use the patriarchal rhetoric of this tradition recorded by Hooks, which may be so closely identified with the sexual political rhetoric of the 'pro-family' New Right in the United States. The visionary poet's sexual political ideology is, as I have argued, more subtly inscribed in the texts. The visionary poet sees the black woman of upwardly mobile materialistic aspirations pressuring and nagging her husband as breadwinner and often resenting having to enter the workforce herself as a victim of the capitalist plantation economy; Hooks, the feminist historian has seen her, too, as a victim of internalised middle-class patriarchal expectations of man as provider (p. 92).

23. *Contradictory Omens*, p. 61.