

1992

Poems

Vincent O. Cooper

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Poems

Abstract

1733: ST. JOHN, DANISH WEST INDIES, MAHOGANY (I), MAHOGANY (II), MAHOGANY (III)

see the way they different ways of meaning on the line support what I wanting to say deep inside, an still leave space for the reader to create she own thing. Is so I move in to the poem as a ship I buy for meself. I plant my flag where I feel like. And I take it over.

Vincent O. Cooper

1733: ST. JOHN, DANISH WEST INDIES

A conch shell declares
Their destiny
Drummers echo crisp commands;
Two bussals and creoles blend
Thirty tongues
In martial orchestry,
Defying Babel's curse.

No confusion of African tongues here;
No blueprint of Popul Vuh.

Legba's supreme sorcery
Cheats Werewolf of his prey.

Ancestral
Drumbeat of Atsime
Dub-bl-talk of Assortor
Rap and rim of Hounto:
Open our ears;
May we hearken to Bilal's call to worship;
May we hear Askia's call to build ...

December, 1990

MAHOGANY (I)

For centuries
 My race has been
 discovered
 Cut up into colonies
 Trucked to riversides
 Fettered and floated downstream
 To labor on golden calves of Western Idolatry:
 Machine
 Computer
 Tank
 IMP policy;
 Yet my race stands tall like the ceiba
 Its sculptured roots
 Wedded to a destiny of soil

(1987)

MAHOGANY (II)

sins taim befuo
 dem a diskova aawi
 dem a kot up aawi
 ina kalani
 put pan dat
 dem a put aawi pan truck
 an a tek aawi a rivasaid
 an a cheen aawi
 to machiin
 to kompuuta
 to tank
 to IMP palisi
 to mek aawi swet
 an krai lang waata
 bot insted a dat
 aawi stan op street and stang laika CEIBA trii...

(Aug. 18, 1992)

MAHOGANY (III)

It have century
 moe still
 they discovering us
 cutting us up
 into colony
 moe still
 they trucking us
 to belize an demerara river
 fetter us
 to machine
 to computer
 to tank
 to IMF;
 we sweat all
 for dem and
 moe still
 in spite of that
 we uncurl we spine
 moe still
 we stand up
 tall like the Ceiba
 and look in sky face.

(Aug. 18, 1992)

Claire Harris and Vincent O. Cooper are joint authors of 'Mahogany (III)'.

CRY LONG WATA

Cry, Tegreman¹, cry long wata;
 You let Sir Thomas² tek way you daughta.
 Cry, Tegreman, whenever you in de mood;
 You let Vulture come and tek way you food.
 Bawl blue, bawl blood;
 Just like when Wingfield river³ flood.
 Ton Sukunya⁴; ton vampire;
 Suck the blood and set him pon hell fire.
 Whistle in de mountain;
 Babble in de brook;
 Rustle in de trees;
 And possess de bees.
 Sting and bite;
 Torture fo' spite
 Crawl in he bedroom;
 And into he bed,
 Nip him whenever he put dong he head.
 Haunt him by night.
 Harass him by day.
 Mek him know dat fo he sins he must pay.
 Cry, Tegreman, Cry long wata;
 You let Vulture come and tek way you Knife;
 You let Vulture come and tek way you Wife;
 You let Vulture come and tek way you Life!
 Cry, Tegreman, cry long wata;
 You sure meet you doom wid dat Man Warner.

NOTES

1. Tegreman - the Carib cacique living on St. Christopher/St. Kitts when the British colonists, led by Sir Thomas Warner arrived.
2. Sir Thomas Warner, first Governor of St Kitts, Marina Warner's ancestor.
3. Wingfield River - here poetically associated with the massacre at Bloody Ghut in which the last organized resistance effort of the Caribs was crushed.
4. Sukunya - local version of the legendary vampire figure.