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THREE POEMS

Elaine Savory

1. the first stone

As I ran, I thought, I will live
 with Tia and I will be like her...
 When I was close I saw the stone in her
 hand but I did not see her throw it. I
 did not feel it either, only something wet,
 running down my face. I looked at her
 and I saw her face crumple up as she
 began to cry. We stared at each other,
 blood on my face, tears on hers. It
 was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking
 glass.

Jean Rhys

have you properly cried yet sister?
 i have not either, for we are no longer children.
 instead i miss you and consider our failure.

there was indeed a spaciousness of love,
 once, a house of shelters, odd and valued.
 it had to stand a long way out of the world,
 diverted from history, for you were questioned.
 i think we knew it was precarious sometimes,
 yet sturdy also, roofed by you saying, that last time
 don't forget that i love you.

despite all threats, despite my knowing
 you made me an exception, a special cause & case
 amongst a lost & despised people, despite my fears
 it bore walk with dangers until i stood up,
 choked with the fear of saying my own name,
 inept, & your eyes clouded with embarrassment.

& after, you called to say, tumbling the boards,
 the frail joints of companionship, about my ears:
 i don't want to talk about it.
 talk, though, our words, was always our foundation.

it has burned out now, our house of attachments.
 it is rubble in the battlefield of difference,
 one more human disaster amongst millions, one
 more failure of nerve, one more incandescent anger
 lit by careless words, leaping without breath
 to the job of eradication, denial, relieved retreat:
 just another expected sorrow in this divided country.
 nothing too surprising in this grim, razed moment,
 except that we ever built it, piece by piece,

that house of trust, where perhaps one day we might have
 potted and grown hibiscuses, old like any two friends
 from the same side of worldly, devastating wars;
 & that it was a refuge somehow, hands worn with writing
 side by side on the kitchen table as we talked.

what did i do to cause us this much pain, my love?
 i did not think my words had cutting edges.
 unshielded, scarcely fashioned, like a child's
 crass paper shapes, thick crayoned drawings
 shaping hurt memories, i shook them slowly
 out of the part of me i had conspired with you to omit.
 many more than three times over, we denied me whiteness:
 that which constructs me silent in your space
 this name i had to leave home to discover
 perhaps that is the stone which flung itself
 over a room and plucked me from the mirror.
 we know, don't we, words are the worst to fear.

why did it seem that day, (a lovely day)
 inevitable i find voice facing my race and history,
 casting sparks onto dry underbrush, even,
 unwary, carrying molten coals before you.
 but later the flames devoured indifferently,
 clasp the house, and as we watched, silent,
 wordless, each one separate, margined us helpless.

now we are silenced because we seem to have agreed
 to silence and politeness and the death of frankness.
 no further understanding if we cannot rebuild,
 destroy again, treasure surviving fragments.
 do you remember sister? sometimes, i see
 your dear face smiling, or i hear your voice:
 records on file, a cache of protected pleasure -
 & then the space again, & the wind blows
 heaps of broken discussions everywhere & on.

2. on forgetting dustbins

"Writing my poems I forgot the dust bins"
 Jean Rhys

sometimes
 the writing
 is because
 there are dustbins
 which ought to be forgotten:
 the walls of that
 which is considered life
 must be disordered
 into a new shape

but mainly
 one hand and one it is
 here i am mother
 here i turn again
 & must
 must write
 in between poems
 laugh and make soups
 and stack the garbage right

poems get left
 lie next to the warm stove
 rising and waiting
 for the next time
 when, emboldened by mastery
 of simple things
 the layers of a word
 can properly be faced

no fleeing
 to the page.

3. flame tree time

"If you are buried under a flamboyant tree,"
 I said, "your soul is lifted up when it
 flowers. Everyone wants that."

Jean Rhys

that vivacious red
 live
 just like the lights and shades of active fires
 & green
 putting the other trees to shame
 in these warm wet months
 brings me
 my love of the island

because when i see
 flame tree blossoms
 i see spirit:
 how to persist
 how to rise vivid
 out of a dry land
 & a severe beginning

they give
 the rare touch:
 love which has broken stones of hardship
 & come through

flame trees
 are death reversed:
 they stun your eyes
 on those blue days
 when the sea already makes you spin

their heat is the afterglow
 the fire of a people's dignified survival:
 those of the fight
 & powerful emotion
 who rise
 within these speaking wreaths
 and reach again

tell me
 who can know flame trees
 & not grow more brave?

"flame tree time" was originally published in *The Caribbean Writer*, vol. 1, no. 1, Spring 1987, and is also the title of the volume of poems just released by the Sandberry Press, Jamaica. "on forgetting dustbins" was first published in *Pathways*, vol. 4 no. 7, February 1987; "the first stone" appears for the first time

S S S

THE LOCKED HEART: THE CREOLE FAMILY ROMANCE OF *WIDE SARGASSO SEA* -
 AN HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS

Peter Hulme

It's my belief that you remember much more than you pretend to remember. (Grace Poole's words to Antoinette, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, p. 149)

1. Local knowledge

One case to be argued in defence of the term "post-colonial" would centre on its usefulness as a teaching tool, on how it quickly and not inaccurately marks out a terrain on which courses can be constructed in a way that both makes sense to students and puts onto the agenda questions of history, politics, and canonicity. The term simplifies (as does every single term), but it does not, carefully used, do violence to the texts it designates. However, serious problems do arise when the term is pressed into service as an analytical tool. In particular, the historical relationship supposedly suggested between "colonial" and "post-colonial" remains consistently undefined. *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a case in point: a novel published in 1966, at a time when the general decolonization of the British Empire was well under way but before Dominica, the island of Jean Rhys's birth, had gained independence; a novel written by, in her Indian terms, a member of the white colonial elite, yet somebody who always defined herself in opposition to the norms of metropolitan "Englishness"; a novel which deals with issues of race and slavery, yet is fundamentally sympathetic to the planter class ruined by Emancipation.