

JOHN ROBERT LEE

Four Poems

Harbour Log (Castries, August 1955)

“statio haud malefida carinis”

(old Badge of St. Lucia: “a safe anchorage for ships”)

In Port yesterday:

Schooners: Augustus B. Compton,

Acadius, Adalina,

Columbia, Enterprise,

S. Enid, Rebecca E. Mitchell.

Steamer: Electra.

Sloop: Lady Edwards.

Motor Vessels: Biscaya, Privateer, Nanin, Wanderer.

Yacht: Phenix.

Arrivals:

Motor Vessel Lady Stedfast, 87 tons, under capt. L.A. Marks, from St. Vincent,
consigned to Peter & Co.

Departures:

Schooner Grenville Lass to Martinique.

Motor Vessel Fernwood to Barbados.

Expected:

Motor Vessel Nina on August 11.

H.M.S. Burghead Bay on August 24.

Meanwhile:

Sylvestre JnBaptiste, alias Master,

Seaman of Mary Ann Street, Castries,

was found guilty by the Magistrate in the First District Court,

on a charge of unlawfully assaulting and beating

Dorothy Drayton, Laundress of Brazil Street, Castries,

on July 23.

Rain

We'll never see the sky again.

The sun is dead under that slate shroud roped to buried horizons.

And the water tearing off the roofs is not funny anymore.

The merchants' curses chase their bazaars down pouring thoroughfares.

Already, already, fretworked gables are clinging to their astounded
citizens.

From here (no Ararat, just a simple morne) under bedraggled cedars, I

see him gone,

my Shem, my gone Shem, pacing the breaking fountains of the deep in

his terrible barge—

and we, we and our proud bird-soaked hills, to the flushing of the vortex,
a drowned heap.

Babel

Then we clambered down the mountains of the East into a plain of
Shinar.

By the river, we set our flocks, and our songs were one lip, one pleasing.

But Nimrod, black and dread Cushite, against the elders,
cursing the curse, pitched the gate of his lion god, and baked brick for
the climbing tower of Marduk.

So the Lord God of Shem set confusion in our ears in that place,
and the splitting tongues of His fire scattered us far,
with utterance unspeakable.

Then I came to Ur,
the holy testaments of Eden stuttering under my scorched lips.

Contract

And turning some Castries corner so familiar I don't even notice it,
on some day so unremarkable I don't recall it cool or hot—
distracted then by some matter of expenditure or composition or was it
passing lust,

I won't remember which. In any case, at leisure or in haste,
shall I turn the anonymous corner, on that day still to be lost,

to meet—the Lord Assassin—with my name in the barrel of his fist?
Forget the avatar. Forget the extras diving under sidewalk trays.
Today, your death will die. The Contract is paid. Selah.