

BEARING WITNESS

for Mervyn Morris

You search the still water of memory:
examine the life caught in the seine.

The first day you saw him
he was standing in your class:
no, you were sitting in his
– the man, who conjured a pond
in your exams:
no, he conjured that pond long before
but, as you were to come to know:
poetry stands
 travels far
burrows deeply –

so, the first day I saw him, I was in his class –
the man whose father died
and his mother cried, and her tears were his –
and my eyes opened wide.

His white beard would jab the corner
before his blue jeans, doctor's shirt
and the stars in his eyes seized the room
pinned by his baritone
that dipped to bass, like a bucket
plunged deep into the continent of Mervyn
then surfacing, brimming with laughter.

And the class, on the edge
would draw near, as
he led us down the dark
red lanes of Martin Carter;

sat with us around

the Singer sewing machine
Goodison identified with her mother:

and we eavesdropped with him
as he eavesdropped with Senior
gardening in the tropics.

He'd use Bay Rum
to clean the Mikey Smith cassette head
so we'd see the Legba-walking
Orange-Street-fire-talking man
dem kill wid a stone on Stony Hill.

An' him plug that radio stuck inna Jean
Binta Breeze head into fi wi

and walk wi on de street wid Oku
Linton, Muta, wid him patty pan.

And the class on the edge
would draw nearer, as he drew
nearer to Miss Lou
and we peered into the pool
of Caribbean poetry.

And it was Mervyn Morris who inflicted
the love pangs of John Donne
W.B Yeats upon us.

He brought life
pouring out from the depths of souls
to his class, that is not
and was never contained on the Mona Campus.

He was already Poet Laureate.

His progeny? Many.

And I, manuscript in hand
like the generations of others
negotiate the wet summer
the grass growing lush –
the paths to Mervyn Morris –
tennis-ball poem bouncer
Rhodes Scholar
wry
quicksilver
star-eye
Don Drummond fan
generous
magic-poem-man
fathomless –
the pond.

So, how do you bear witness?
You search the water
examine the life in the seine
recommit every detail
then slip them back in
then, roll your world back up to a scroll
unfold it
breathe, begin.

- Ann-Margaret Lim