

reached in modern society and the understanding of this by the whole population.

In the Hungarian revolution there was no divorce between immediate objectives and ultimate aims, between instinctive action and conscious purpose. Working, thinking, fighting, bleeding Hungary, never for a moment forgot that it was incubating a new society, not only for Hungary but for all mankind. In the midst of the organisation of battle, the workers' councils organised political discussions not only of the position of the particular plant in relation to the total struggle, but of the aims which the councils should achieve. They carried on incessant political activity to root out the political and organisational remnants of the old régime and work out new politics. They knew that the danger to the workers' councils lay, not in the middle classes outside the factory, but from the state, the communist party, and the trade-union bureaucrats, all trying to remove the power from the shop floor. At the very beginning of the revolution, the Gero government, recognising that the party and the unions had collapsed, called upon the party cadres in the plants to form councils and to mobilise them against the revolutionary population in the streets. The workers in the streets returned to the factories, threw out the party cadres and re-elected their own councils on the shop floor. Then they issued the announcement, "We have been elected by the workers and not by the government". They knew whence came their strength and the certainty of correct decision so crucial in the lightning speed of revolution. The trade unions instructed them to return to work and elect workers' councils. The workers replied, "We will elect our councils at our place of work but the strike will continue". Even during the most bitter street fighting, workers returned to their plants to take stock of the situation and delegate responsibility.

The final proof that the Hungarian people were conscious of their responsibility for building a new society is the role that was played by the youth in the revolution. In the plants the workers elected youth in the majority to the councils. Modern society has transformed the youth into displaced persons, rebels without a cause, angry men, juvenile delinquents. The youth, in the United States as in Russia, is in this condition of permanent crisis because it does not know where it has come from and where it is going. So confident were the Hungarian workers that the future belonged to them, so certain were they as to where they stood, that these adults could place upon the young people of the country the responsibility for driving the revolution forward.

The miracle of the Hungarian revolution lies not in the heroism of their struggle for freedom. It lies rather in the certainty, the completeness, and the confidence with which, in the midst of battle and on the shortest notice, they laid the basis of an entirely new society.

1958

1959

14

The Artist in the Caribbean

[In 1959 James was invited to give a lecture (subsequently published as a pamphlet) at the Mona, Jamaica, campus of the University of the West Indies. According to James, his intention was to demonstrate how "the analysis of the artist in the Caribbean, properly done, was a pointer to the general social and political problems there."]

This being a university audience, I shall take much for granted. The artist is a human being who uses usually one, sometimes more than one medium of communication with exceptional force and skill. I think that is as far as we need to go to begin with. There are such people in the Caribbean and our society has now reached a stage in which they have scope. How much exactly? To my mind it is the question of the medium which at the present time is crucial. It may be remote, as architecture on the grand scale or the human far more for the Caribbean than for the artist, who usually does the best that he can with what is to hand.

An artistic medium is a thoroughly artificial construction, through which an individual is able to see and to express the world around him. It may be very intimate, as the human voice, and material equipment at the disposal of the movie director. It may be subtle and complicated as the prose of the *Ulysses* of James Joyce or the overtones of Eliot's *Four Quartets*. Without being unsuitable, it can be bold and aggressive as the orchestration of Wagner or the early Stravinsky.

Yet despite this bewildering variety I think I have observed that exceptional mastery in the medium is intimately related to the natural surroundings in which the artist has grown up, to the society in which he lives, and his national or even regional ancestry; these may or may not be directly related to the specific artistic tradition which he has inherited or encounters in his search for a mode of expression, but they most often are. A few years ago I was wandering in the south of France and reading about Cézanne. I spent some time in the district to which he had returned for the last years of supreme achievement. I emerged finally with the impression of a man with generations of southern France behind him, who had studied in Paris and learned what the artists of his time had to teach him in technical knowledge and discovery, but who finally returned to the neighbourhood of his early youth and there found the new objective circumstances which enabled him to give a new direction to modern painting.

How long and in what form had these early impressions been a part of his artistic consciousness?

I am very much concerned this evening with the great artist. The period in which Shakespeare lived is the period in which the Bible was written. It is the period of the marriage of native English with the Latin incorporations which the developing civilisation needed. Nevertheless the impression that I now have of the greatest master of language with whom I am able to have acquaintance is this. He was an Englishman, of yeoman lineage, who was born and grew to manhood in the Midlands of Elizabethan England, for whom thought and feeling were always experienced in terms of nature, the physical responses of human beings and the elemental categories of life and labour. This is the basis of his incomparable vividness and facility of expression and the source of his universality. On Shakespeare's language Mr F. R. Leavis has written some illuminating pages.

Racine was at the opposite pole in verbal refinement and sophistication. No Englishman ever wrote like Racine. No Englishman could. Pascal and Racine gave the French language a form which moulded French thought (and therefore French life) for well over a century, until a great writer who heralded a great social revolution expanded the range and opened up new modes of feeling and expression for the French people, whence they spread to the rest of the world. That is how I think of Rousseau.

The question around which I am circling is this: is there any medium so native to the Caribbean, so rooted in the tight association which I have made between national surroundings, historical development and artistic tradition, is there any such medium in the Caribbean from which the artist can draw that strength which makes him a supreme practitioner? (We can for the time being sum up the whole under the term artistic tradition, which as you see I use in a very wide sense to include all that goes to making it. I may mention in passing that it is never more powerful than when the artist is consciously breaking with it or some important aspect of it.)

I shall not keep you in suspense. So far as I can see, there is nothing of the kind in the Caribbean and none in sight to the extent that I, at any rate, can say anything about it. So far as I can see in the plastic arts, in musical composition, as well as in literature, we are using forms which have been borrowed from other civilisations. Language for us is not a distillation of our past. *Robinson Crusoe*, *Paul et Virginie*, even Gauguin are only on the surface exotic. They have no roots among people like ourselves, nothing from which we can instinctively draw sustenance. For us and for people like us there is no continuous flow such as for instance the Bachs into Haydn into Mozart into Beethoven . . . ; or in literature, Shakespeare, Milton, the Augustans, the Romantics, the Victorians, the Georgians and the revolt against them all of T. S. Eliot. There is no *Donne* in our ancestry for us to rediscover and

stimulate the invention of new forms and new symbols. You will remember that to clarify his own style Eliot found it necessary to launch an assault upon Milton that nearly (but not quite) toppled that master from the throne on which he had sat unchallenged for 250 years. All that is not for us. It is by this lack that I think I can account for the astonishing barrenness (in the sense that I am speaking here) of the artistic production of Canada, of Australia, of New Zealand, of South Africa. The United States has overcome this defect in literature. In music, in painting, it is as poverty-stricken as the others. Where it has created in the arts, it has broken new ground, new and popular. We can console ourselves that in this matter of shallow origins which prevent our artistic talents from striking the deep roots which seem necessary to full development and towering efflorescence, we are not alone. Size has nothing to do with it. Look at Ibsen and Kierkegaard, and the Greek city-state.

I do not know that it is to be regretted. And before we draw the extreme lugubrious conclusions, we should remember (this is the only absolute in these remarks) that artistic production is essentially individual and the artistic individual is above all unpredictable. Who could have predicted Moussoorsky?

It may seem that I am laying an undue emphasis on the great, the master artist. I am not chasing masterpieces. I have made clear that in my view the great artist is the product of a long and deeply rooted national tradition. I go further. He appears at a moment of transition in national life with results which are recognised as having significance for the whole civilised world. By a combination of learning (in his own particular sphere), observation, imagination and creative logic, he can construct the personalities and relations of the future, rooting them in the past and the present. By that economy of means which is great art, he adds to the sum of knowledge of the world and in doing this, as a general rule, he adds new range and flexibility to the medium that he is using. But the universal artist is universal because he is above all national. Cézanne was the product of the French Impressionists of the French nineteenth century and of Poussin, a French master of two centuries before.

If it takes so much to produce them, the results are commensurate.

A supreme artist exercises an influence on the national consciousness which is incalculable. He is created by it but he himself illuminates and amplifies it, bringing the past up to date and charting the future. We tend to accept this in general. Few, particularly university men, will question the influence of Shakespeare on the intellectual, the psychological and even the social development of the English. Such a writer is a pole of reference in social judgement, a source of inspiration in concept, in language, in technique (not always beneficial), to succeeding generations of artists, intellectuals, journalists, and indirectly to ordinary citizens. That view is tradi-

tional in academic circles though they may not carry it to the extremes that I do. I, however, am concerned with something else.

The Greeks and the Florentines of the great period understood the direct, the immediate influence of the great artist upon the society in which he actually lived. But today in particular he is a tremendous force while he lives, and particularly to people like us, with our needs.

I do not think we appreciate the influence which Shakespeare and Burbage must have had on the shaping of Elizabethan London. Quite recently I spent six months in a small town in the south of Spain. I had little time to read, except *Don Quixote*, and we had with us a small volume containing reproductions by Gdya. Book and pictures seemed to us merely illustrations of what we saw all around us the moment we put our foot outside the house. If I could see it, surely men of that particular time must have seen it themselves and been affected by it in a manner quite impossible for us today. Read again Ben Jonson's tribute to Shakespeare. Nothing of the kind written since has ever exceeded it. And I am sure, though I cannot stay to prove it here, that the Shakespeare Ben Jonson saw was not the Shakespeare that we see today. We have certain advantages, I admit, but for Jonson and the masses of working people who were Shakespeare's fans, he was new and exciting, with an impact that he could never have for us who have already absorbed indirectly so much of what he brought into the world. The Mannerists were a school of painters who succeeded Michelangelo and have recently come into their own. The critics now tell us that they were not exaggerators of Michelangelo's "idiosyncracies". Their style was an independent style with its own values. Another master who came into his own only about half a century ago is Greco. When you go to the Vatican, ask for permission to see the last two paintings Michelangelo ever did; they are in a private chapel of the Pope's in the Capella Paolina. I shall not try to go into detail about them, but at first sight you will see a strange landscape recalling the paintings Greco did at Toledo, apart from the fact that we know that Greco had made contact with Angelo's work during a stay at Rome. Yet another modern critical discovery is a man named Michelangelo Caravaggio. I, who have spent much of such time that I could spare for these matters in studying and restudying the work of Michelangelo, am acutely conscious of the affinity of Caravaggio with the great master whose name he bore. We discover all these relations and affinities centuries after the works appeared. We do not know the half of what the men of that time felt and thought.

And now. Is everything historical, the whole history of art, against us of the Caribbean? I don't think so. You will have noticed the references I make to Greece, where the political form was the city-state; to Florence, to Rome, to Toledo. I state further concentrated in London. These were cities in which it was possible my belief that the influence of Shakespeare was most heavily con-

for the impact of the artist to be felt by a substantial number of the population. This world in little concentrated his own impressions and theirs. I believe that this was the environment which created more men of genius in a Greek or Florentine city of 50,000 citizens than in modern societies of 150 million. Michelangelo's Rome had only 40,000 people. Our situation in the Caribbean is very similar. Trinidad and Barbados are already very close in their demographic structure to the cities of ancient Greece or the Italian towns of the middle ages. There is an urban centre and agricultural areas closely related. I can only say that I believe this form of social existence will condition to a substantial degree the development of art in the Caribbean. In fact I think this advantage will ultimately outweigh all other disadvantages. Our world is small but it is (or soon will be) complete, and we can all see all of it.

But you may ask me: what about the artist in the Caribbean? I would not have come all this distance to deliver encomiums or disapprovals of West Indian writers and artists. If I emphasise what seem to me heights which today they cannot reach, it is because of my conviction that it is only when we are able to give them the concrete freedom of the conditions I have sketched that we shall get from them the best of which they are capable and, more important, get from them what at this stage of our existence we so much need. On our workers in the plastic arts, I have no judgements to pass. I have not the qualifications for doing so. But we have some very distinguished writers. I shall mention only three: Lamming the Barbadian, Naipaul the Trinidadian, and Vic Reid of *The Leopard* from Jamaica. These are very gifted men. I believe that Lamming is as gifted for literature as Garfield Sobers is for cricket, and I do not believe that in the whole history of the game (with which I am very familiar) there are more than half a dozen men who started with a physical and mental equipment superior to that of young Sobers. But Sobers was born into a tradition, into a medium which though transported was so well established that it has created a Caribbean tradition of its own. This is what I am talking about. There are no limits to what Sobers can achieve. Lamming I believe to be objectively circumscribed. Still more limited are our painters and musicians.

There are things we can do. If there were not I would not speak about this at all. In the age in which we live and in the present social and political stage of the underdeveloped countries, we cannot leave these (and other) matters to an empirical growth which took centuries to develop in other countries. We cannot force the growth of the artist. But we can force and accelerate the growth of the conditions in which he can make the best of the gifts that he has been fortunate enough to be born with. Of that I have no doubt whatever; but the details are mundane and will have to wait for the discussion.

Let me stick to the strictly artistic aspects. This is a university

and I expect this audience to have actual or psychological affinities with academic activities directed towards the Caribbean. Let me end with what I am thinking about at the present time since my return to Trinidad some eighteen months ago. The ideas that I have expressed here are, as I think should be obvious, the result of years of observation and reflection on art abroad. Since I have been living in Trinidad, I have observed what is going on there in the light of these general ideas. I have been much struck by the work, first, of Beryl McBurnie. You will no doubt have been delighted by the reception which she and her group received at an international festival in Canada not so long ago. Her success in my view is due to the fact that with the necessary training and experience abroad she has dug deep into the past history of the island, observed closely the life around her. Her inventions, the confidence from successes, the reconsiderations which failures bring, have been fed and have grown in the national tradition and under the scrutiny and responses of a national audience. That is the source of her strength.

There is another artist in Trinidad who performs in a medium that would be ranked not very high in the hierarchy of the arts, although I believe Shakespeare would have listened very carefully to him, and Aristophanes would have given him a job in his company. I refer of course to Sparrow. The importance of Sparrow for what I am saying this evening is that he uses a medium which has persisted in Trinidad, in spite of much official and moral discouragement, and has survived to become a world favourite. I am myself continually astonished and delighted at the way in which Sparrow uses the calypso tradition, the way in which he extends it, the way in which he makes it a vehicle for the most acute observations on the social life and political developments around him, for his genuine musicianship, his wit and his humour. I believe that in addition to his natural gifts, he is enormously helped by the fact that he is using a national form and that his audience is a national audience. This is the origin of what has made calypso so popular abroad. Local men playing for the local people. Every calypsonian who stays abroad too long loses the calypso's distinctive quality. When our local dramatists and artists can evoke the popular response of a Sparrow, the artists in the Caribbean will have arrived.

My conclusion, therefore, is this. At this stage of our existence our writers and our artists must be able to come home if they want to. It is inconceivable to me that a national artistic tradition, on which I lay so much stress as an environment in which the artist must begin, it is inconceivable to me that this can be established by writers and artists, however gifted, working for what is essentially a foreign audience. I think I could prove that already their work is adversely affected by it. They can live where they please. It is not for me to tell an artist how to direct his personal life; I would as soon try to tell him how to write or what to paint. But

their books should, I think, be printed at home. Kipling's finest work was first published in the India of some seventy-five years ago. The books most certainly must be published at home. I have no doubt in my own mind that they must be written and printed and published for the national audience. If I say this with such confidence it is because I know that the writers themselves are thinking in similar terms if not exactly for the same reasons. The finest piece of writing that to my knowledge had come from the West Indies is a poem which bears the significant title, *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal*. It is the desperate cry of a Europeanised West Indian poet for reintegration with his own people. The most successful evocation of the West Indian atmosphere that I know is a recent winner of the Prix Renaudot, *La Lézarde*, by a young Martiniquan, Edouard Glissant. Yet his style is more traditionally French than that of Césaire. He lives in Paris. I cannot believe that the last resources of West Indian artistic talent can be reached under these conditions.

That is what the nation needs at the present time, and that is what the artist needs, the creation of a national consciousness. Perhaps the most important thing I have to say this evening is that if the threads of a tradition can be discovered among us and made into a whole, if we are to be shocked into recognition of what we are, and what we are not, with the power that this will bring, it is the great artist who will do it. He may by fiction or drama set our minds at rest on the problem which intrigues so many of them: what is Africa to us? He may be a great historian. (His history might be denounced by professional historians and justly. It would not matter. It would have served the national need: look at the illusions most of these European nations have had of themselves.) But such work cannot be created under the conditions in which our artists work today.

These conditions can be changed. Lack of money is too facile an explanation. It is lack of that very national consciousness, lack of that sense of need; we lack that impulse towards a more advanced stage of existence which sees material obstacles in terms of how to overcome them. Today we can no longer compare ourselves in artistic (as well as in other) matters with the barrenness of twenty-five years ago. The time for that is past. Our sights now should be trained twenty-five years ahead. In the Caribbean there are many things that are denied to us and will be denied for a long time to come. But the production of a supreme artist and all that he or she can give to us (including what lesser artists will gain), that we need not despair of. The rapidity of all modern developments is on our side. Our native talent is astonishing—it continually astonishes me. And in these matters we never know. Life is continually causing us to revise our most carefully based judgments. Let us do what we can do. Let us create the conditions under which the artist can flourish. But to do that, we must have the consciousness that the nation which we are hoping to build, as

much as it needs the pooling of resources and industrialisation and a higher productivity of labour, needs also the supreme artist.

1959

15

The great calypsonian, discussed at the close of "The Artist in the Caribbean", was given a chapter to himself — reproduced here — in Party Politics in the West Indies, which was first published in Port of Spain in 1961. James has this to say of Sparrow: "I found Sparrow the most alert and the most intelligent person I met in the Caribbean. He had a great mastery of West Indian speech, and as for his music — I thought it was remarkable. I used to talk with him, and I even used to go and hear him record. . . . We were very friendly. I said once that they should have asked Sparrow to write the national anthem that Trinidad was going to have. He would have written a proper national anthem, in words and music. . . ."

The Mighty Sparrow is a very fine and wonderful song in a great W. I. musician.

For good approach on W.I. music — see 196/1 readable!

[The great calypsonian, discussed at the close of "The Artist in the Caribbean", was given a chapter to himself — reproduced here — in Party Politics in the West Indies, which was first published in Port of Spain in 1961. James has this to say of Sparrow: "I found Sparrow the most alert and the most intelligent person I met in the Caribbean. He had a great mastery of West Indian speech, and as for his music — I thought it was remarkable. I used to talk with him, and I even used to go and hear him record. . . . We were very friendly. I said once that they should have asked Sparrow to write the national anthem that Trinidad was going to have. He would have written a proper national anthem, in words and music. . . ."]

A native West Indian talent. Born and bred in the West Indies and nourished by the West Indies. What he lacks is what we lack, and if we see that he gets it, the whole nation will move forward with him: Francisco Slinger, otherwise known as the Mighty Sparrow, the most remarkable man I have met during four years in the West Indies.

Sparrow is a Grenadian who lived as a youth in Grenada. Obviously he was born with an exceptional gift for music, for words and for social observation. If he had gone to America he would have sung (and composed) American songs, like Brook Benton, Ben E. King, Sam Cooke and many others. Not one of them, not one, surpasses him in anything that he does. He came to Trinidad and found in Trinidad a medium, the calypso, in which his talents could have full play.

Where have we won creative national distinction in the past? In two spheres only, the writing of fiction, and cricket. Cricketers and novelists have added a new dimension, but to already established international organisations. Not so the Mighty Sparrow, and here he is indeed mighty. His talents were shaped by a West Indian medium; through this medium he expanded his capacities and the medium itself. He is financially maintained by the West Indian people who buy his records. The mass of people give him all the encouragement that an artist needs. Although the calypso is Trinidadian, Sparrow is hailed in all the islands and spontaneously acknowledged as a representative West Indian. Thus he is in every way a genuinely West Indian artist, the first and only one that I know. He is a living proof that there is a West Indian nation.

I do not propose any critical review of his music. This is work for a trained musician. There is only one quality which I wish to