

Version 2 - an interior journey

Born in Guyana, four score years ago
a creole mix
great grandson of a slave,
entangled in Scots kilts and Asian saris
slave master, indentured labourer
ancestral pawns on the
chess-board of colonial liaisons

Voluntarily exiled, a wanderer,
seeking identity:
triangular circuit in reverse
from Carib mainland
to America, Europe, Africa
home of Pyramids, Pharaohs
of Ogun, god of iron and of war

Fought for mother country
a strange aberration
But in time of war
anyone can be fodder
Not least an officer
navigator of a Lancaster
blasting the Nazi scourge

shot down,
this 'member of the Royal Air Force
of unbeknown race'
taken prisoner; the POW camp, his university

Later, called to the bar
member of the Middle Temple
there was this other bar;
barrister without a brief
No entry to these Courts
a situation beyond belief

All the world's a stage
we too can do the lindy-hop, the soft shoe,
enact the drama of the dispossessed
in an acceptable manner -
that existential dilemma
a black man cast only in 'black' roles

Ironically, asked to play the Noble Moor,
province of blacked-up minstrels;
then panned for imitating the master,
himself lambasted
for making an entrance red rose between white teeth,
and that stereotypical swagger
like this phoney upstart or Belafonte

Was the poor bastard indoctrinated
whilst carrying a spear
in Larry O's elite Festival of Britain's
Cleopatras at the St James, now defunct,
and the Ziegfeld, downtown New York?

In Sea Wife, for Twentieth Century Fox
played Number Four, the outsider;
classic of racial bigotry

Other roles were to follow
always the one with the dark face
Ellison's invisible man
a black hole in space

Later sung songs of protest
in Concert (Queen Elizabeth Hall)
calypso, in cabaret
(The Savoy, Quaglino's,
Esmeralda's Barn)
and the news
Tonight and every night
on BBC TV

And his own radio and TV series
records for world record club
psalms for the Grail
and, another Aesop fable?
the Lord's prayer
for an obscure label

Then, turning a corner on the road to himself
stumbled upon himself, saw his reflection
in unsuspecting mirror.

began to write black poetry,
'In the Black', 'Black Words'
set up Drum, a black arts centre.
the case for a black theatre workshop

a case of false identity, a black trap?

With Aimé Césaire, returned to his native land
a platform at the national
upstairs at the Royal Court
and on tour for two and a half years

paraphrased the Tao Te Ching,
broadcast on the World Service of the BBC
meditated with the maharishi
as well as proficient in Tai Chi

And so to Concord Festivals
multicultural arts
celebrating diversity

A paper, negritude revisited
for a Dartington Conference
'what future for the arts'
negritude reappraised,
Soyinka's tigritude
at long last making sense
rediscovery of great speech
of great burning,
Africa, the mitochondrial Eve
the black Madonna.

Black, too, is beautiful
no more anger,
no hatred of other races
new values for a new man

And a future for the arts
arts and life not separate
except in a pauperised State

Wrote this book on pan to the chagrin
of Trinis - dis is we ting, man
an exploration into the metaphysics of sound
and the symbolic, esoteric nature
of a twentieth-century
musical phenomenon

Now... dreaming this book
a lifetime journey, the unity of all life
"Blackness and the Dreaming Soul"
de racination of man and nature
how we got there
empiricism, scientism, separation
domination, racism
all de isms
all religions
all de schisms.

'All ah we..
(in Reality).. is One'