1958

Aberration

Barbara Haupt

Denison University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

Recommended Citation

Available at: http://digitalcommons.denison.edu/exile/vol4/iss2/8

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the English at Denison Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Exile by an authorized editor of Denison Digital Commons.
on the field across the road from the Emporium. Small boys and older men played together.

Within yourselves you have a wonderful oneness. That’s why I envy you. Why, I tell myself, that I am spiritually one of you. Yet I am as guilty as others of flaunting superiority. I felt very brave about my embarkation this morning, and thought of how you might have taken advantage of me. Yet, I have only used you to reinforce that imagined superiority.

The pitcher bowled the ball. The batter swung on it so that it was tipped backwards. A small boy ran to get it as it rolled near Benedicta. She was acutely aware of her own youth, the sun burnishing her light red hair, and the transparency of her tan that had hitherto made her an islander. The elements were supposed to have made her one of them.

A half hour or more had passed before Benedicta noticed that the sun was going down. When the game was finally ended, and all conjecture aired as to the possibility of the West Indies winning at Lord’s Saturday, night had fallen.

Night! night! Make me one of yours and one of them. Enfold me, cover me.

She followed the crowd to a dimly lit, shelf-bedecked cafe. A group of people were clustered together in the dingy room. How many times had she passed and longed to be one of the laughing crowd? Someone pushed a plate of fish, ackee and plantain towards her. A bowl of rice and peas was circulated around the table. Benedicta was caught up in the earthy congeniality.

Last night, and unaccountable other nights, I sat on the porch of our house and listened to this calypso, this song of the island. Now I am in it, and part of it. She had half-eaten her plate of food before the fly-infested kettle on the stove in the back of the room caught her eye. She saw a hundred un-washed brown hands. They raked their fingers through grimy black hair, and then tended the stove. She turned from the food and concentrated on the music.

Somewhere she was turned out with the foggy, brimming crowd into the night air. Near the market place a religious-calypso ceremony was going on. Pokomino, or white magic. She turned her head.

Give me good old fashioned myal. Honest black magic.

They were all in the square, the Chinamen from one of the small shops, the slanty-eyed Indian boys that all looked like Kims, and the natives. It had turned out to be a sort of ethnic sorcery session. Benedicta reeled sleepily.

How am I representing the white race?

There was a fury in the air, and a deep rhythmic beat of life. All that is memorable in the warm night was there, with a certain intensity and purpose added. Weird and candle-flickering, the night became strangely devastating. Benedicta decided that it must be completely simple to be initiated.

Grant and Eddy stood on either side of her, Grant with a cigarette hanging on his lower lip, and his khaki cap pushed back on his head. Occasionally one of the men would strut in an impromptu dance with one of the village girls, inspired by the insistence of the drum and the magic of the guitar. People crowded and milled. Benedicta stumbled in the press of damp bodies. As she lurched forward to regain her balance, she became aware of Grant’s arm supporting her. She nodded and smiled, and edged from the crowd.

She woke up the next morning in her own room. Everything was in its place, even to the delicate edge of the Pointsianna bush showing through the window. Once she was dressed she wandered out onto the porch with a half-peeled banana in hand, put her free arm around one of the columns and rotated slowly. Her glance took in the familiar fauna of the garden, the lemon trees, and Hannah, the yard dog, stretched out in the sun.

She caught sight of Grant, sitting in the walnut tree. She continued her circle around the column, then met his look and said as politely as she could,

“Good morning, Grant.” And then to herself, “I don’t think I’m extra good or extra bad. Just one of the petite bourgeoisie, and that simply means tempted.”

ABERRATION

BY BARBARA HAUPT

What expectation, unsuspected
Till a cloud passed,
Transforms a butterfly
Beyond the borders of a meadow-day?
And then whose flitting
From an instantly indifferent daisy
Forsakes a revelation
Someone might have lived with?
Who's away?