

Edgar O. Lake

WALCOTT READS TO BRODSKY'S GOD-MOTHER



Over on Fifty-Third Street, across from The Modern
an airy building named Donnell, a city-library branch
and friendly sanitarium of plate-glass window inmates
Old city-dreamers, ignored by Monet-watchers,
snooze in safety, avenged from a silver-badge guard
who sits on a stool by a lectern, guarding an elevator-door
You'd need a pass to go upstairs and read the "Foreigns"
"You never quite leave the Soviet Union," an old man mutters
Besides, the City must protect the very young, the guard says
The toddlers' reading room – a giant padded cell – is also there
Melted snow, lost pratfalls on the sidewalk claimed by Spring
Pigeons mimic pedestrians' hurried walk: strut and canter
Street-peddlers selling poster art from Gaughin's Martinique
perch their wares on subway grids that send up ticker-tape
Walcott arrives surreptitiously, his tweed Welsh coalminer's hat
pulled down over his Ben Franklins, the signature moustache
A library-aide hurries him to the auditorium, expecting an audience
Instead, the room's empty; blue wall-paper traces a single person
Walcott shows no surprise, traveling from Brooklyn
He reaches for his poems, curled in a coat-pocket – and begins to read
The lady shifts her weight, and clamps her feet about her bags
Walcott's caught his breath and leapfrogs to another page
He's accustomed to this silence, pigeons caught in eaves
Some Simile, once winged, and now fretting for the rhyme
Walcott, litany-voiced, free-verses about sea-grapes
The subway rattles beneath the stage; he stands, looks down
and pauses, and in this rail-screaming minute his audience
grows: two aspiring souls – younger, with more earnest baggage
He's on to something troubling, something about "half a Nigger"

The bag lady fidgets, just as Saint Patrick's bell-tower tolls
Remembering it is time for evening prayers, fishes for her rosary
She falls asleep again, between Walcott's chanting of Another Life
Dreaming with her head bowed on her chest, her opening palm
accepts the wafer of his poem about his Brooklyn Aunt
When he finishes, there is no applause; no questions from the seats
The library-aide whispers something kindly, grips his arm, hurrying
past the library's shrinking liability insurance
Across the street, a distant roar escapes: Ivan the Terrible has fallen
The "RR" local pulls The Modern's soundtrack into Walcott's room
Brodsky's God-mother stirs, a smile wafts over her thawing lips
Walcott's line trails off: An Inner Life, her Autumn in Norenskaia

Calabash

A JOURNAL OF CARIBBEAN ARTS AND LETTERS

Volume 4, Number 2 / Spring-Summer 2007

Information about this work:

WALCOTT READS TO BRODSKY'S GOD-MOTHER

By: Edgar O. Lake

Start Page: 70

URL: <http://www.nyu.edu/calabash/vol4no2/0402070.pdf>

Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters is an international literary journal dedicated to publishing works encompassing, but not limited to, the Anglophone, Francophone, Hispanophone and Dutch-speaking Caribbean. The Journal is especially dedicated to presenting the arts and letters of those communities that have long been under-represented within the creative discourse of the region, among them: Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles, Maroon societies, and the Asian and Amerindian societies of the region. Calabash has a strong visual arts component.

Calabash is published by New York University. Please contact the publisher for further permissions regarding the use of this work. Publisher information may be obtained at: <http://www.nyu.edu/calabash/about.html>

Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters
© 2007 New York University