

Also by Kamau Brathwaite

P O E T R Y

The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy (Oxford University Press, 1973),
comprising:

Rights of Passage (OUP, 1967)

Masks (OUP, 1968)

Islands (OUP, 1969)

The second (Bajan) trilogy comprising:

Mother Poem (OUP, 1977)

Sun Poem (OUP, 1982)

X/Self (OUP, 1987)

Other Exiles (OUP, 1975)

Days & Nights (Caldwell Press, Mona, Jamaica, 1975)

Black + Blues (Casa de las Americas, Havana, Cuba, 1976)

Soweto (Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1979)

Word Making Man (Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1979)

Third World Poems (Longman, 1983)

Jah Music (Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1986)

Sappho Sakyi's Meditations (Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1990)

Shar/Hurricane Poem (Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1990)

Middle Passages (Bloodaxe Books, 1992)

P L A Y S

Four Plays for Primary Schools (Longman, 1964)

Odale's Choice (Evans, 1967)

O T H E R B O O K S

The People Who Come 1-3 (Longman, 1968-72; new edition 1990-92)

Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica (New Beacon, 1970)

The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820 (Clarendon Press, 1971)

Contradictory Omens (Savacou, Mona, Jamaica, 1974)

Our Ancestral Heritage (Carifesta, Kingston, Jamaica, 1976)

Wars of Respect (API, Kingston, Jamaica, 1977)

Jamaica Poetry: A Checklist 1686-1978 (Jamaica Library Service, Kingston, 1979)

Barbados Poetry: A Checklist (Savacou, Jamaica, 1979)

The Colonial Encounter: Language (University of Mysore, India, 1984)

*History of the Voice: The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone
Caribbean Poetry* (New Beacon, 1984)

Roots: essays in Caribbean literature (Casa de las Americas, Havana, Cuba,
1986; new edition, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1993)

The Zea Mexican Diary (University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, 1993)

KAMAU BRATHWAITE

MIDDLE PASSAGES



A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

Letter
Sycorax

forest Nzinga

1

Dear mamma

*i writin yu dis letter/wha?
guess what! pun a computer o/kay?
like i jine de mercantilists!*

well not quite!

*i mean de same way dem tieflin gun
power from sheena & taken we blues &*

gone

. . .

*say
wha? get on wid de same ole*

story?

*okay
okay
okay
okay*

*if yu cyaan beat prospero
whistle*

No mamma!

*is not one a dem pensive tings like ibm or
bang & ovid
nor anyting glori, ous like dat!*

*but is one a de bess tings since cicero o
kay?*

*it have key
board &*

evva

*ting. like dat ole
reminton yu have pun top de war. drobe up
there ketchin duss*

*only wid dis one yu na ave to benn dung over
to out out
de mistake dem wid white liquid paper. de
papyrus*

ribbid & soff

*before it drei up flakey &
crink. like yu was paintin yu house*

*um doan even nuse no paper yu does have to
roll
pun dat blk rollin pin like yu rollin dough pun
a flatten*

*& does go off ping pun de right hann wing a
de paper
when de clatterin words start to fly & fling
like a ping. wing*

*wid dis X now
long before yu cud say jackie robb
inson or rt-d2 or shout*

wre X

*dis ya obeah blo X
get a whole whole para
graph write up &*

*blink
pun a black
bird*

*like dat indonesian fella in star
trek
where dem is wear dem permanent wrinkle up
grey*

*& white flannel cost
ume like dem gettin ready to
jogg*

*but dem sittin dung dere in such silence a
rome*

*it not turn
in a hair pun dem wig/wam &*

*hack/in out hack/in hack/in all sorta back
up & read
out & fail*

*out & think &
it even have trash
can for garbage from all particles a de gal.*

a Xy

*&
mamma*

*a doan really know how pascal & co.
balt & apple & cogito ergo sum
come to h/invent all these tings since*

*de rice & fall a de roman empire
& how capitalism & slaveley like it putt
christianity
on ice*

*so dem cd always open dat cole
smokin door a hell when dem ready for ash or
a psalm
sangridge or*

choke

*Why i cyaan nuse me hann & crawl
up de white like i use
to?*

*since when i kin
type?*

*dats wat i tryin to tell
ya!*

*yu know me cyaan
neither flat
foot pun de key*

*boards like
say
charlie chap dance/in*

*far
less touch
tapp/in like bo.*

jangles

*walk/in down chauncery
lane*

yu hear/in me mwa?

*but i
mwangles!*

■

*a mean
a nat farwardin wid star
wars*

*nor sing
songin no bionicle
songs or like sputnik &*

*chips
goin bleep bleep bleep bleep bleep bleep bleep
into de peloponnesian wars*

*but i
mwangles*

X?

*a doan write.
ly know
but yes.
taday when a was tell.*

*in a ceratin girl
frenn about*

*it/she kinda look at i funn.
y like if*

she tink i has ~~Xer~~Xes or aids

*so she soffly soffly silk.
in i off like if i is sick.*

*ly or sorrow or
souse*

2

Why a callin it

*but is like what i try.
in to sen/seh &*

*seh about muse.
in computer*

*& mouse &
learn.*

*in prospero ling.
go*

*&
ting*

*not fe dem/not fe dem
de way caliban*

done

*but fe we
fe a-we*

*for nat one a we shd response if prospero get
curse
wid im own
curser*

*though um not like when covetous ride miss
praedial
mule*

*but is like we still start
where we start/in out start/in out start/in
out start/in*

*out
since menelek was a bwoy
& why is dat &*

*what is de bess way to say so/so it doan sounn
like*

*brigg
flatts or her. vokitz nor de*

*π.
san cantos nor de souf sea bible*

*nor like ink. le & yarico & de anglo sarXon
chronicles*

*&
mamma!*

*a fine
a cyaan get nutten*

*write
a cyaan get nutten really*

*rite
while a stannin up hey in me years & like me
inside a me shadow*

*like de mahn still mekkin mwe walk up de
slope dat e slide
in black down de whole long curve a de arch*

i

pell

a

go

*some
times smile.
in nice*

*some
times like e really laughin after we &
some
times like e helpin we up while e push.*

*in we black dung
again*

*like when yu rumbellin
dung
into de under*

grounn

*on one a dem move.
in stair
crace &*

*like yu fuh.
get like yu wallet or some
ting like*

*dat
& yu cyaan nevva turn
back*

*nor
walk back up
nor*

*even run back
up*

outta there

■

*cause de stair.
crace
crazy &*

*creak.
in & snake
skinn. in*

it

*down
down
down*

&

*how. ever
yu*

runnin up runnin up runnin up runnin up

it still

*goin down
goin down
goin down
goin down*

*like sa.
hell*

*like sy.
phyllis*

*like
the edges of the desert*

&

*guess who down dey at de top
a de line wid dante & dodo & julie &*

*nappo & nix & adolph
kaisermann be. havin like one a de boys*

*but idi & splash & pol
pot*

&

*a whole rash a economists pullin we up by we
boot*

*straps & smo. kin
pot
bellied ha/ha/ha/ha/havana cigars*

*& grand master sergeant doe &
brand new imperial corporals smilin of*

*cordite &
leather*

*strap & vd & vid.
eo*

&

*the
striped eyes of nigerian tigritude
& like what yu say happ.*

*enin inna
libraria*

*all a dem brooks of the dead
&*

mamma

*a know yu can plant lettice & nice but yu
cyaaann eat ikebana*

*Yet a sittin dung here in front a dis stone
face*

*eeee
lectrical mallet into me*

fist

*chipp/in dis poem onta dis tab.
let*

*chiss. ellin dark.
ness writin in light*

*like i is a some. is a some. is a some
body.*

Irae

for Jere

a **X**
pert or some

*thing like mooses or aaron or one a dem
dyaaam isra
light*

&
mamma!

Dies irae dreadful day
when the world shall pass away
so the priests & showmen say