

RACHEL MANLEY

From Drumbair: Memories of a Jamaican Childhood¹

Extracts from Chapter 13: "Each Frustrate Ghost"

She[Edna Manley

shavings. Every niche was sealed with a seam of clay, and its smell, damp and poignant as though from the secret folds of the ~~ground~~'s body, seeped up out of the cement....

Pardi was proud that she was recreating a moment of Jamaican history with the statue of Bogle. He knew this would one day stare down over the passing years from the steps of the Morant Bay courthouse. He was ~~indeed~~ again that the lens of the artist ~~laend~~(he)/ st wdd onede

When he entered the studio, Pardi stood for a while absorbing the progress of the clay figure before him, while Mardi dampened the rags over the small sink in the corner. She had done a good morning's work. She was always reluctant to leave the peace of her studio. She valued this small wooden haven even though its solitude and defiance were modest statements compared to her studio at Drumblair....

Things seemed to be falling into place. The house, though small, was manageable. Pardi was broke from his years of politics, but their debts had been paid by the sale of

This figure was astride, its arms extended like wings at shoulder height and bent at the elbows; the hands met at the centre of the chest and clutched the handle of a machete whose blade pointed towards the ground. She had worked on this only a few hours this morning, modelling clay with her thumbs and ~~wiped~~ tools.

“Well, yes. You see, I felt the other was maybe a bit too”—she seemed to both pull and press the edges of the form, the way one would straighten clothes on the shoulders of a small child—“too tentative, really. You see, when I was down at Stony Gut, where he was born, I met this old woman who knew Bogle’s son... she was fascinating. And I came away with one word she used... bold. ~~said~~ Bogle was a bold man.”

And she turned to look at Pardi as she said “bold,” blowing the word out of her small mouth as though setting a bubble adrift.

“I like the symmetry,” he said. “It’s bold. The figure looks planted.”

“He can’t be apologetic, can he? He has to be so very sure. It’s one of those moments, isn’t it?”

“Indeed,” he said and got up to circle the model stand. She stepped back, giving him room.

“I see you have almost transformed the machete into a ~~sword~~ symbol of the act. And the way he holds it... it’s more deliberate, more like a quest. I like that.”

“Bold. That’s what I want to capture. I was thinking, there are times when history cries out for a statement. Something irrevocable. Now Gordon, he was more a middle class voice, ~~was~~ he? I mean, he spoke on behalf of the masses with a national voice. That’s what we are still trying to do. Even Garvey... he was a psychological force. His

was a great stone rolling, calling down other stones. But this... this was just one brave moment, the sudden slamming down of a fist or a foot, saying, Enough! Stop! This was not conscious, but it expressed the will of the people. The blood of a dam that burst....”

She stopped and, in the ensuing silence, shrugged as if she was resigned to the certainty of detractors.

“One can say the act is just a bloody murder. I daresay a lot of people will feel that way. People say he’s overrated; he was a simple hero. But the world is mostly made of the simplest people. The workers, the uneducated or the poor. And at the hardest time finding their voice, expressing their feelings, but when they do there are an awful lot of them, and you’d better listen to what they have to say!”

“Deacons are not necessarily simple people,” Pardi said.

She looked sympathetically down at the figure and pressed some small bits of clay firmly but fondly onto its head. “He would have known that his life was over... he had done a terrible deed chopping up the Custos. But this was his great sacrifice to fight a terrible system.”

“The cross created by the arms aloft and the weapon perpendicular is reminiscent of the crucifixion,” Pardi said, sketching a small cross in the air before him.

“Yes. This is his sacrifice. But his head will be upright, looking at the future both his demise and his hope for change. This is what I told Ray... I said, look dear, he is a fighter, not a martyr. In his face you will see confrontation and the sort of bloody determination that is at the heart of human outrage. No other cheek to turn... no happy heaven of resurrection... no fairy tale. This is a man whose moment of truth is today. He has staked everything....”

“Yes.” Pardi looked at the piece as though he could see the features there already. “You mean ‘God’s angels in the path to see.’ It’s no use seeing them if you’re not prepared to wrestle with them.”

“That’s it! Not whether he’s done the deed or not done the deed. You’ve put it in a nutshell. He’s prepared to wrestle those angels.” She was lost in the hills of Stony Gut, fighting her way down treacherous winding paths towards a destiny in front of a country courthouse where the Custos of the parish would be slain.

And Pardi, letting himself be carried by the moment, fell into a long forgotten recital of Browning:

And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
 Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin,
 De-dah, dedah, dedah, dededah
 You of the virtue (we issue join)
 How strive you? De te, fibula!

“Or something like that,” he trailed off.

“Kid, that’s ‘The Statue and the Bust!’” She was full of them together, suddenly on with journey and road. “That was little David. And here we have the mighty empire looming over poor Bogle, like Goliath in the figure of the Custos, with all his pomp and ceremony. And the other day I heard that in addition to Mr. Bogle’s wife being a Jamaican, his great-grandfather was a shoemaker and tavernkeeper in Port Royal. How it all comes round full circle in this life!...”

