

## Ireland

The following poem is from *Famine* by Desmond Egan (Goldsmith Press, 1997), reprinted here by kind permission of the author. Although written in standard English, the poem's voice recalls another margin: the oppressed and starving Ireland of the nineteenth century, and the progressive destruction of the Gaelic culture and language.

### I

the stink of famine  
hangs in the bushes still  
in the sad celtic hedges

you can catch it  
down the lines of our landscape  
get its taste on every meal  
listen there is famine in our music

famine behind our faces

it is only a field away  
has made us all immigrants  
guilty for having survived

has separated us from language  
cut us from our culture  
built blocks around belief

left us on our own  
ashamed to be seen  
walking out beauty so  
honoured by our ancestors

but fostered now to peasants  
the drivers of motorway diggers  
unearthing bones by accident  
under the disappearing hills

## Jamaica

The following text is a parable, or 'history' as its writer, Velma Pollard, prefers to call it. Starting off in an acrolect standard English it quickly turns into a very basilect Jamaican creole.

### *Friend*

*I was a stranger in the place  
stop there on the way to somewhere else  
because night catch me.*

*The morning I wake up<sup>1</sup> a man come  
up to me and say a<sup>2</sup> have something to show  
you that a been keeping years now to find  
somebody to show it to. Why is me him  
show?<sup>3</sup>*

*How him know say<sup>4</sup> me woulda un-  
derstand it?*

*Me read it and me laugh and me no  
think nothing more bout it.*

*Another time me go to foreign<sup>5</sup>. As me  
reach<sup>6</sup> me see the man. Nex day me hear  
say<sup>4</sup> them have something that everybody*

*shoulda try see but you have to drive car go  
there and you know me no drive a foreign<sup>7</sup>.  
The man come up to me and smile and  
hold on to me like me and him a fren so me  
say to him do me a favour noh*

*drive me and me fren dem<sup>7</sup> go look pon  
the something. Him say alright as long as  
him can carry fi him<sup>8</sup> fren dem too. So we  
go.*

*After that me no see the man fi<sup>9</sup> lang  
lang time till me go a<sup>10</sup> wan foreign<sup>11</sup> near  
to where fi him yaad de<sup>12</sup>. When me do see  
him him say him know say<sup>4</sup> me never in-  
tend fi me<sup>13</sup> him see me, for me no sen co-  
me tel<sup>14</sup> him say me a come<sup>15</sup>. Anyway*

him still talk to me and say me mus spen likkle<sup>16</sup> time with him. Me say alright. Him carry me a wan place me cant describe it how it pretty<sup>17</sup>. <sup>A</sup><sup>18</sup> pure gravel and rock and although <sup>a</sup><sup>18</sup> seaside<sup>19</sup> no sand no di<sup>20</sup> del<sup>20</sup>. And the rock dem<sup>7</sup> have pattern like batik and tie-dye. We sidung<sup>21</sup> and talk - mostly him talk and me listen bout some sad sad things what happen to him. And sometime we just keep quiet and consider. Me cant describe to nobody how it feel likesay<sup>22</sup> me know the man from me born<sup>17</sup> and me no know him you know.

The next time we meet, people see how me an him talk nice and them say something ina something but not a thing no in deh more than me and him just move easy like how Lorna say you have flour and somebody else have water and the two of unuh<sup>23</sup> coulda all make bread together but

<sup>a</sup><sup>18</sup> more like him have clay and me have water and we make a nice big yabba pot together.

Him say me woulda did like him if me did know him when him did young<sup>24</sup>. What you think him mean by that? Him mean him agree with me that we can just be friends good friends and thats that.

And me say give thanks for me no want fi know him bad ways how much woman him have how him beat him wife and how him foot big and dirty and maybe him no want fi know how me careless careless and nasty so it better we just gwaan<sup>25</sup> sidung a tree root and talk or sidung a seaside and gaze everytime we meet one another.

Velma Pollard

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[Editor's note: Most of the typical creole features of this very basilectal text (with a few standard 'acrolectal' features especially before the writer 'warms up') are noted below. Not commented on are the typical verb forms uninflected for tense, person, aspect, and the typical general pronoun forms (*mi*, *him*) for all case functions.

<sup>1</sup>'In the morning when I woke up'. <sup>2</sup>'I'. <sup>3</sup>'Why is (it) me he shows (it to)'. <sup>4</sup>complementiser: 'that'. <sup>5</sup>*a foreign* 'abroad'. <sup>6</sup>'arrived'. <sup>7</sup>*dem* associative plural marker. <sup>8</sup>*fi* optional possessive marker: *fi dem* 'his'. <sup>9</sup>'for'; can also mean 'to'. <sup>10</sup>'to'. <sup>11</sup>'a certain foreign country'. <sup>12</sup>*de* (also *dh*): locative 'be' so, 'where his home was'. <sup>13</sup>*fi mek* 'to let'. <sup>14</sup>*sen come tell him* 'send (a message) here to tell him'. <sup>15</sup>*say me a come* 'that I was coming' (*a* is progressive aspect marker). <sup>16</sup>'little'. <sup>17</sup>*how it pretty* 'how pretty it was': no copula. <sup>18</sup>here *a* has yet another function, that of copula 'be': '(it) was'. <sup>19</sup>'beach'. <sup>20</sup>*deh* 'there': 'no sand was there/(there) was no sand there'. <sup>21</sup>*sidung* 'sat down'. <sup>22</sup>*likesay* 'as though'. <sup>23</sup>*unuh* plural 'you' (of West African origin). <sup>24</sup>*did* is the completive aspect marker for verbs in the three cases (in the last one there is no copula with adjectives). <sup>25</sup>*gwaan* 'go'.]

## Guyana

Indentured laborers from India (also known as *bound coolies*) were taken to British Guiana from 1838 to 1917 to work on sugar plantations. Those from the Tamil region, known as *Madras coolies*, took with them their worship of the Hindu Mother Goddess in her regional form of Mariamma. This is referred to as *Madras religion* and is most commonly known as *Kalimai Puja* («Mother Kali worship»), perhaps because of contact with north Indians in Guyana as well as through association between Mari and Kali in Tamil Nadu