

# OBEAH IN OUR FIFTY YEARS

## THE EYE FROM GONZALES, EAST DRY RIVER



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**T**his essay, OBEAH INTRO, became a signifying one, shifting a little the gravity of negativity it has hitherto attracted. Eye dare say that there has been a revival in the interest of OBEAH in our “FIFTY YEARS”... My Art and my Writing are vested in that concept.

*Psychological phenomena are experienced directly and, having enormous potential force, pass into physical phenomena and into manifestation of life. We know that at the basis of our procreative force lies desire i.e. a psychological state or a phenomenon of consciousness. Desire has a tremendous potential force. A whole people may be produced by the combined desire of a man and a woman. At the basis of the active, constructive, creative force of man, capable of altering the course of rivers, joining oceans, carving mountains, lies desire, i.e. again psychological phenomena possess a still greater combining power in relation to physical phenomena than do the phenomena of life. (P.D. Ouspensky)*

If only for the trees that crowned the hills, Gonzales was Paradise to me as a boy. Off from where Eye stood on the verandah of the house where Eye lived, the green, caught in a current of wind, rendered the fullness of a dreaming heart. Palmiste palms reached endlessly upwards – columns that made heaven visible and real, if only Eye could climb that high! And under it, made voluminous by an undulating light, the pulsing promise, breasting mango trees! But, amongst them all, the mythical Silk Cotton tree with a grandness that was both mystical and majestic.

A track, as if specifically etched into the hillside, burnished by faithful feet in a dance of backward-forward moments that held the foreboding of an intermingling of life and death, appeared suspended in that raw vegetable air. The atmosphere was alchemical. Its reputation spelled-out in whispers: candles, ribbons,

cloths, staffs, tools; rum, honey, rice, sugar, salt, beads, each in a correspondence of colour to fit a handshake with any ancestor or god!

On entering, one’s senses are always thrown into a quandary, strangely confounded by a sublimity of happenings for which our learned compass has no answer. At any hour, day or night, the air is the embrace of a supernatural force. A silk woven vapour elevates the mind to communicate in moods that become intercessory among the sentient ferment of dream worlds!

And, we who are touched deeply enough have caught the “Power!” We ride or are ridden by “Ours” across a bridge of transparencies. In that manner, as is often with the circumstances of making Art, “De Seers and De Knowers” are made. Made, visible tangents to our “Yes an’ No!”

The Silk Cotton tree was centre-posted, reaching into the skies of “Nations’ Flags.” The plum-mitan that plumbed centuries! One was easily imagining its roots – an imperative of sound intuitive power, reified and wholesome, reaching deep but, deeper into the centre of the earth! And, it is to this altar founded in the fossil of memory; to this gateway, to which we must return and, with unrelenting effort plod towards self-discovery.

In the mid-seventies while Eye was revisiting the conceptual space of our folklore that Eye began to engage the question of Obeah. Gonzales, East Dry River, Port of Spain, where Eye was born was notorious for Obeah. Really, for the bias that revelled in the stigma of that side where the potential to practice is evil doing! Virtually forgotten is the other aspect of it that is in complete opposition, absolutely pronounced in the goodwill of humanity: peace, justice, good fortune, health, freedom of the imagination!

Generally, we would know aught else, unless we had the strength to take the history that was loaded into our heads to task, and, with severe analysis that will re-outline the intention of

Opposite:  
LeRoy Clarke,  
“The Brotherhood”

those who use every tool to suppress and to eliminate the positive side of Obeah from the psyche of African people, invest anew, emboldened to re-chart the ruin of our humanity and to recreate the means, vital to its communication and its communion.

With my one Eye lasered to pry at the very nature of Being, Eye am often touched by meaningful moments that never seem to occur ordinarily, nor do they leave much by which their presence could be described. Yet, with meditation, Eye can imagine a marriage of faith with faith and, be caught as if Eye were the very element of their pure embrace! Christopher Okigbo, in his vertiginous poem *Distances* says:

*From flesh into phantom on the horizontal stone I was the sole witness to my homecoming.*

When I was just a boy, Eye found a row of glowing copper pennies in the bushes at the far end of our own yard. Eye salted my hands and gathered that treasure along with my expectations – all those sweets and cakes it could buy! Where did the information come from, that took me through a ritual of cleansing my find? Fire, salt, soap, and water and my head, lifted to God in prayer prepared me before Eye parceled it in brown paper knotted with coarse twine and hid it way under the house, in a dark corner where fowls went to lay their eggs and hatched their brood! And, it would remain, how many days – nine, before Eye began spending my prize!

Those gestures, intertwined, may make that moment appear insignificant to the casual eye but, it may lead the discerning one to

be launched in a light where novel engagements are spawned by concrete intentions that constitute experience, and which may elicit forms of the given, drawn forth from a unification of faiths.

Those moments, Eye have come to believe, because of their vividness, charged me with the Husserlian view that “Every concrete lived experience is a unity of becoming and is constituted as an object in internal consciousness in the form of the temporality.” (Experience and Judgement)

Jokes played on Obeah, tragic as they may be, prove futile, for we are talking about the immanence of African psyche that, among a constellation of others, is, like all others, individually distinguished and charged. Alike but apart, it is an essential human, spiritual organism, a power that houses cosmic principles that are peculiar to its authentic space or logos.

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**Obeah is Power. Power is central to any concept. Fundamentally, there are two quite distinct images by which it can be made manifest in order to be grasped or understood**

LeRoy Clarke,  
"De Meeting"



Its identity is indestructible despite distorted appearances in substance and in the spirit brought forward by a suppressive system of peripheral anancies or imperial agency bent to historicise things in its own image and likeness.

Coming from the narrowest perspectives they would deign see nor admit Obeah as a relative term in any discourse on “Quantum Theory”, on the “Tantra” or on “Tao Physics”, on “Christianity” that invite us to the open utterance of associations that are fundamental to universal thought. Nevertheless, it is an egoism that has its groundation in the “primordial law of things” that constantly manifests itself as if it were the scrutiny in the reality of its own meaning and justness as all others are!

Eye see Obeah as a chorus of faith, the art and apotheosis of one’s “yes”, one’s “no”! – A fatalism that is rooted deeply in a people’s psyche and that which promised them the wherewith to their wellbeing. In that manner, Obeah is authentic technique, a human technology, but more at a humanism that, when properly invested, allows access to phenomena that can

cause will to confront itself and, at least “posit conditions for power-preservation and power-enhancement” of its people’s affirmation in the myriad conceptualisations that surround them.

Obeah is no simple thing when we consider its phenomenal scope within psychological states. It is, as it were, the single wellspring of humanity – an indistinguishable source of power – from which the particular principle of the one, as well as that of the other is immanently rooted. We may admit to the idea or not, but Obeah is with us and proves a vital function in the enhancement of the way we adopt for ourselves. Obeah is universal. It takes on many forms of expressions suitable to the ways of individuals, communities and their traditions.

Obeah is Power. Power is central to any concept. Fundamentally, there are two quite distinct images by which it can be made manifest in order to be grasped or understood.

This good on the one hand; that evil on the other. Though mysteriously combined to form one personality, both are thoroughly extreme in their discipline and, without the surveillance of the one on the other, either unchecked, will lead to chaos. It is with that surveillance that equilibrium arrives - the mover of harmonies!

Obeah of African being, not unlike that of others, is naturally endowed with its own, essential individuation of sensibilities which has its rootedness in the one, all-encompassing matrix of world-will that provides everyone with a specific entitlement to the wherewithal of their space and time. If we see the light, Obeah is the power of humanism, that one that in essence is common to all peoples in its natural intent to harmonise itself in the first with its potent and secondly to answer the question posed by the shared aim to cohabit in a world of terrifyingly disparate and diverse trajectories of philosophies.

Again, everyone, every people has his natural space, his logos, his word and his spirit where all

concerning him are not only founded but, where there is self-perpetuity or the unfathomable spell of creation giving renewed form to itself. This amalgam of energies works as a spirit-organic medium for power-preservation and power-enhancement, first for itself, subsequently for all humanity. It is a force that, in its own being, pursues itself!

It is in that inscrutable “momenting” or fomenting, which is common to all existence, a shared equilibrium is possible that can supersede all chaos. It is there, in shared immanence we can all be made capable of the in-dwelling of a single human goal and global unity, while being rooted in our specific activity of generating individual essence and nature, poised in the humility and grace of reciprocal conduct.

And, each one in his striving to maintain his own integrity or conservation of his deepest and most intimate powers must go up constantly against the natures of both his other and “the others” in order to give his utterance its peculiar brand, evoking rhythm where that pendulumic swing through Past-Present-Future becomes, at once, a framed and a boundless moment of art in which his being is held secured and ever present.

From here his single work or Obeah is to relate him to himself firstly, then himself to his other and to others! One to one, embodied, he arises from the furious fecundity of a universal drama played out by constellations of “Obeahs” in the style that planets hold to their own axes; their orbits creating a single universe in the artistic hand of cosmos.

The relentless assaults on African psyche have had ongoing tragic consequences on the quality of African life and its world. Deeper wounds are now made on it by re-invented Africans themselves – our black men and black women – who, as painters, musicians, intellectuals et al, ascribe to the propaganda that nothing is pure or can be pure anymore, particularly in their own race.

What rubbish it is to invest trust in such

aborted-sightedness that can only relish gossip, mischief and superstition, bringing increased woe down on our heads, while making it impossible to house the phenomenal experiment that in itself, is life, – our life; there, where nothing becomes extinct but rather returns to the whereabouts of a vertiginous turning that conceals as much as it reveals in the constant that renews!

And, who may navigate that compass-less cape of beginnings! We may learn to read its incipient imageries backwards, with our eyes turned inward. Where we are deaf to the sound of the waves that deign to reshape our ear; we become open to our own invitation to self-empowerment! Indeed, Obeah is a distinct Performance in the Faith of signifying Being in unfolding Becoming.

In the attempt to make of the African idea a relic that possesses no real meaning of its own; it seems for the while, an advantage to those who beleaguer it by surreptitiously attaching evil to the Practice of Obeah in every form.

No other people in the history of mankind

**Pernicious views are legendary, rock-like formulations; myopic in a deed designed to continue at all cost the corruption of the imagination and creativity**

LeRoy Clarke,  
“Weavers of De Dust”



Some moments can be quite apocalyptic, bringing with them vistas of foreboding that demand of us new composure in order to gather energies from our finest specimens and stimuli of grandest feelings to emerge from wholesomeness, imbued with tolerance – our Obeah!

has had to endure such an exclusive, imperial system – geared to vanquish all elements of their nature – that long, to survive as Africans do today, even when they themselves bring down the mimicry of their oppressors on the heads of their own.

Pernicious views are legendary, rock-like formulations; myopic in a deed designed to continue at all cost the corruption of the imagination and creativity, through the distortion of ideas on religion and on the sciences of peoples who are the authors that inform the Being of a whole continent – Africa. It is because of that understanding of the deviousness and divisiveness of “official history” that Eye prefer to course the tangential, quartz-lit path to Dreams.

The real task for us is the where and how we begin. Perhaps to the far, where our courage can, behind the zero of mere existence! While it may have served some incomprehensible thing to enter a respite as long as we have, this must end now! And, the way to this end must be attended with alertness to the open field that is Obeah. Africa in us must awake to that single idea we must take if we are to “re-invent” our compass, so to speak.

With new tools of imagination and assessment, delve where self is revealed as a conscious work of art created, brought to full centre, accordingly justified as the voice in one’s own stories. Which, as self, is centred; not, as with marginalised objects in subordination but, as authors; Pointers, who grasp the structures of Obeah, its parable as a signification or as a signifier whose textual authority undergoes continuous shifts in self-determined imperatives.

Some moments can be quite apocalyptic, bringing with them vistas of foreboding that demand of us new composure in order to gather energies from our finest specimens and stimuli of grandest feelings to emerge from wholesomeness, imbued with tolerance – our Obeah!

Eye tell you: Earth’s memory jealously holds our

Obeah to her breasts intact, at the end of centuries’ genuine effort. Charged by a flawless instinct and boundless intuition, our indefatigable hearts open, we shall offer up a New World!

Being mindful that nothing increases forever and unbroken, yet some phenomena in the mysteries of their eternality prove the contradiction by their undaunted untransferability. A people’s or a race’s Obeah can be viewed as that which is the core-essential, resilient factor of organising and enhancing their way of life.

African people world over, need be confident that their Obeah is set, fixed, no matter the onslaught of external pressures from peripheral anancies that for centuries have attempted to lay waste our original style – it has only been tampered with!

The practice of obeah at this time for Africans must therefore be taken seriously, to the altars of their beginnings – a difficulty in itself of tremendous proportions which would not feign demand not only utmost gifts for discipline and alertness for the magical appearances of faith but, for that solidarity base which denominates creation itself – patience and its solitude!

This type of recharting of ruins is no mere regurgitation of lengths of tradition, no, it is of the gruelling tests, trials brought to bear on those forms by way of meditation and critical analysis in order to extract from them the pure, original, gemlike moments that would have constituted the unique glory of our past; ready to re-launch into future.

Should we barely understand the phenomenon that is Obeah, its patience, its positive and mysterious way in the “arting” or the all inclusive Performance of self, we could not ignore it! And, how steadfast would we become to the self-ennobling process that should prove us in the world-arena of globalisation! How “wholly absorbed in the enigma of our existence” we would become! ■