

Upon Considering the Possibility  
of Friendship Between Tia and Antoinette

In the late 1990's and over the course of three issues of the journal *Wasafiri* (20, 22 & 23) there transpired a debate between Peter Hulme, cultural critic, and the poet scholar Kamau Brathwaite, the subject matter of which was Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and more particularly the childhood friendship between Antoinette, the white Creole protagonist, and Tia, an African Caribbean girl who lived on a plantation formerly owned by Antoinette's family. In the novel the friendship between the two girls comes to an end when Tia throws a stone at Antoinette, an act which reverberates down through the years and gives rise to several questions. Did that act end the friendship, or was the friendship fated to end from its inception, given the class and races positions of the girls in question?

In the ensuing debate between Hulme and Brathwaite, the former takes issue with comments made in a 1974 essay, "Contradictory Omens", written by the latter: "Brathwaite casts doubt upon the close but fraught relationship between Antoinette and Tia, whose name Antoinette calls out in her dream just before she jumps to her death: 'Tia was not and never could have been her friend. No matter what Jean Rhys might have made Antoinette think. Tia was historically separated from her...'" (36).

Brathwaite responds: "Nobody is denying that Antoinette and Tia had a 'childhood friendship'; what I'm saying is that it cd never have gone BEYOND that; so that although for A this friendship might have remained memory – & FIGMENT – it could never become FUTURE ...."

The following poem is my intervention in this historical stone-throwing incident which I believe continues to resonate to this day within the Caribbean and its diaspora.

---

## Upon Considering the Possibility of Friendship Between Tia and Antoinette

a cheek split  
in two wrongs can't  
make it right  
between history and  
a hair-splitting  
cheek-splitting  
truth

"the cheek of her  
taking my dress!"

undressing the theft  
the take and took  
in history

can't draw blood from  
a stone  
or a tear  
spill the causes  
of a cheek

white

split

by the hard in stone  
the me and she  
in black words  
on a white page  
where a stone lands

on a cheek  
split by the

hurl

pelt

the fling in stone  
in history

heals

not the heart  
smashed ground  
in the between of past  
and future

grindstones

---

exacting a finely  
powdered present  
to scatter wide

to the winds

Friends, you say?  
Only a stone's throw away