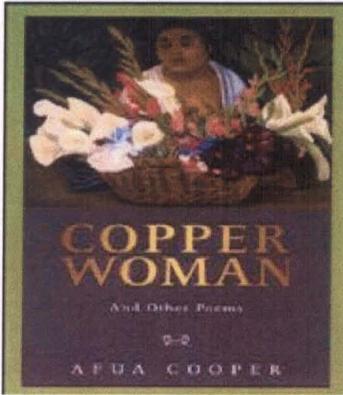


Jamaica Gleaner Online

Afua Cooper a fitting 'Copper Woman'

published: Friday | July 21, 2006

Mel Cooke, Freelance Writer



I WOULD like to think that Afua Cooper's Copper Woman And Other Poems is largely autobiographical. Not only in the sense of the life she has actually lived, but also the one she wished she had or did in a previous life.

Divided into five parts, 'Bird of Paradise', 'Copper Woman', 'Biography', 'Africa Wailin' and 'Black Madonna', family binds Copper Woman together even as it delves into individual topics such as the mindlessness of war ('Killed By "Friendly American Fire" in Afghanistan) and the futility of cementing over a sordid past in 'Negro Cemeteries, which speaks of "griots rising from graves/recounting the stories of their journeys".

MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

So the title poem of the 'Bird of Paradise' section says "when my mother's back and feet grow tired/so I anoint them with coconut oil/her feet a detailed map" in delving into the mother-daughter relationship. **Copper Woman** speaks to family of the mating kind, Cooper taking the role of a warrior's woman happy to see her man return as "the light illuminates the bracelets/on my wrists/copper and brass".

Biography is literally that, Cooper asking if someone will write her biography and then questioning what will be in it, including "that my father was a mechanic with gentle eyes". And those gentle eyes, as well as the "famous upper lip" Cooper refers to in 'Daily Bread are put to good effect in the author's picture.

FAMILY RULE

The '**Africa Wailin**' section is the exception to the family rule and, in exploring from the cruelty of the diamond trade in Diamond Is a Girl's Best Friend to the strategy used to ensure a visa is granted in Congo Wi Come From, it is also the most prosaic section of **Copper Woman**.

It is also the section where Cooper utilises patois most extensively, writing "an woman wid dem man rent a tile/body love for a while" in 'Africa Wailin' showing herself as adept at that approach as she is with English.

It is in the final Black Madonna section that Cooper shows herself to be very comfortable with matters of the physically intimate kind, describing "my love triangle/as hot and sweet as freshly baked cinnamon buns/red as hibiscus flower" in **Hibiscus** and finding herself "awake to the insistence of your lips on my skin/as you sip from the cup of my thousand-petalled lotus" in **Making Love In Lotus Pose**.

Heady stuff indeed.

THE LINE BETWEEN

And where does the writer cross the line between her real life and an imagined one? Is it in My Illusion ("it was in Portland by the Blue Lagoon/that I saw the brightest moon/rise from the black sea") or in Red Eyes ("you present me with a bracelet of pure copper/I tell you I cannot accept this gift/because I am thinking of another")?

It is a matter to consider, as soul-baring meets near erotica and powerful statement in Afua Cooper's **Copper Woman And Other Poems**.

Copyright Jamaica-Gleaner.com