

MARK O'CONNOR

BANFIELD'S ISLAND

It was here he grew a presence so attuned
to all the breathings of the jungled slopes,
through slow month-long distillery of words
turning the moth-stirred incense-laden air
to a pattern of black curves on white; a king
of isles whose watery clangs and resonance
he'd learned in all the moods of storm and quiet
on an ocean flat as the end of the world
with strong skin binding the riplots taut.

Rich in the slow process of time, his books
are proof that we do not inhabit, only visit;
ill at ease as the baby black he rescued from the
law *This one oin lie down soon, me bin chuck out,*
rearing her English, till she fled to die
at her own people's hands.

Today his law remains. No bird
yet fears the gun. Less safe, his trees
now house a village and two airstrips, yield
to alien palms, gay crotons and hibiscus.
The grove he planted, greed and folly chopped.
His mangosteen, pole-propped, recalls the ignorant
grader crew; the bar and golf-course the mad hope
of bigness to amortize costs. The birds
are sparser now. Fruit pigeons flocking
home from mainland forests fringe
but no longer hide the sun. The pigs
a foolish farmer left root out the soil
to doom his hillside forests; and still
the fecund monster rumbles in the South. Much
is smashed, yet much remains. For one
who knew his kingdom lovely, fragile, doomed,
the times may seem less dreadful than he feared.