Gillian M. E. ALBAN,
Istanbul Kultur University, Istanbul, Turkey

THE INDOMITABLE SAFIYA SINCLAIR CAUGHT BETWEEN A NARROW PATERNITY AND A LOVING MOTHER IN *HOW TO SAY BABYLON*

DOI: http://doi.org/10.35219/lexic.2025.1-2.08

Prologue

Safiya Sinclair's moving memoir, *How to Say Babylon*, is a powerfully expressive testimony to a girl's survival against the challenges thrown before her in a patriarchal, religious environment. Just as Hélène Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa" encourages women to write their story and express themselves with every pore of their body and soul, this compelling memoir demonstrates precisely how Safiya Sinclair achieves this feat, candidly expressing her indomitable spirit in her struggle against paternal pressure and the undermining of female worth, rooted in patriarchal Rastafarianism within a post-colonial situation. She takes her reader on her painful journey through poverty in Jamaica, brought up between two powerfully self-assertive parents. Her mother nurtures her into self-expression with unconditional support, in her joy at managing to have children when she thought she was barren, "no matter the cost, for her or her daughters" (42). Her father extends emotional and intellectual support to his family on his own terms, which he circumscribes for his three daughters, driven by his own purpose, which causes him to nurture them into ideal helpmates for their Rastafarian bredren rather than encouraging them to gain their full potential and realize their dreams. We observe Safiya's increasing struggle to survive intersectional oppression against discrimination more than poverty not just within her society, but also inside her own home.

A crisis occurs when Safiya is nineteen, after finishing her high school education but before being launched into a fulfilling career. Struggling against her father's strictures, Safiya finally bursts out against the man who had always protected and loved her, but is now impeding her progress by placing stumbling blocks in her way. After this furious crisis blows up between them, as Safiya's rebellious attitude forces him to leave the house,

she surveys the darkness of her homeland; on the one side her mind reaches toward the sea which her mother claimed was able to fix anything; on the other side she looks across the hills and countryside belonging to her father. This was where his people, Black Jamaicans and particularly his fellow Rastafarians, had fought for their racial, national and religious identity against the white oppressors, while also having to face the forces of law and order which threatened to wipe out the entire Rastafarian sect in persecuting them to death.

At this turning point she has a vision of a shadowy grey girl hovering outside her home, oppressed with heavy dreadlocks and borne down by her restricted possibilities into frustration and unhappiness. Standing on her dark veranda, looking out into the bush, she gazes into the eyes of this woman appearing like a birdcatcher spider, who seems to mirror her own future to her. Dressed in white, her dreadlocks wrapped in a scarf atop her head, her head bowed, she walks under the gaze of a Rastaman. She appears the image of a good, humble, obedient woman, with no other aim than to work, cook, clean and bring girlchild after girlchild into the world to perpetuate the cycle of women who serve and defer to her Rastaman. The realization overwhelms Safiya that this woman: "Ordinary and unselfed. Her voice and vices not her own" (2), represents what could so easily become her future in the life her father was building for her, and she determines her imperative need "to cut that woman's throat. […] to chop her down, right out of me" (2). Just as Virginia Woolf determines that she needs to kill the Angel in the House if she is to be able to live a full life on her own terms (Woolf 203), so Safiya becomes aware that she must kill this version of her future, representing her devotion, submissiveness and assumed purity, if she is to have a chance of carving out a significant life of her own. Rejecting any such future, she rejects the cage she was born into and the nets that enmesh her, circumscribing her freedom. She determines to release herself from her cage, unlike the butterfly that emerged from the cocooned caterpillar the children had kept for too long in a jar, only to watch it turn into a sickly mess without the ability to fly or even to move (162). Just as the protagonist of Angela Carter's "Erl King" observes his caged birds in the forest, appreciating that this will be her own fate if she is not vigilant enough to assert herself against her loving oppressor, she strangles the Erl King with his own hair, and then opens the cages and lets all the birds free (Carter 104), so Safiya determines that she will face her father with the savage

determination to forge her own path, no longer permitting him to assert control over her life.

She evaluates the paths that have brought her to this juncture, and how her father has so frequently crushed her independence. He is revealed to her as a mass of contradictions; a carnal man, while suppressing and refusing any expression of carnality for his own women (162). He insists on keeping his daughters absolutely pure by isolation and brute force, frequent use of a red leather belt, alongside verbal defamation of the girls who "fall to ruin" (156). Only in coming to understand that "he too was only a man" (163) and seeing what lay beneath his excessive control of his family, is she able to appreciate his attitude to her and her sisters. This enables her to break free of his oppression in reaching toward her own womanhood and independence. She notes how her own Black people had asserted themselves against captivity beneath the white man and the powers of history, while creating a system that operated significantly for the benefit of one half of their people. In their just fury against the colonial oppressors, they had carved out a route to freedom and success. But while enabling their men to forge ahead against all restraints, they had perpetuated a tradition of separating the identity and destiny of men and women, using woman as a mere helpmate for their partner. This practice is one that has long been reinforced by the religious heritage emerging from two accounts of creation. One story shows God creating the male and female in his or her own image, "in the image of God created he them; male and female created he them" (Genesis 1, 27), with man and woman both expressing the identity of God. This indicates, in the term used by Joseph Campbell, that God is the original androgyne, equally presenting both sexes in himself or herself (Campbell 54). The other mythic account related in Genesis shows the man as God's gardener who becomes bored living alone and feels the need for companionship. God puts him to sleep in order to form a helpmeet in the shape of woman from his own rib, with this fable offered to us in contradiction to the laws of biology and physiology, since, as stated in the same text, it is not the man but the woman who is the source of all life and "the mother of all living" (Genesis 3, 20); the suggestion that the woman was made from the man's rib is confusing as well as diminishing. As Anna Lensky states in D. H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*, "It is impudence to say that Woman was made out of Man's body, when every man is born of woman. What impudence men have, what arrogance" (Lawrence 174). Being offered

these two versions of the creation of humanity, one version of this myth is emphasized socially, while the other is ignored and scarcely remembered, lulling us to sleep over the issue of the creation of men and women for many eons. It is time for women to wake up and assert their rights as creatures equally embodying the image and likeness of God, rejecting this confusing, contradictory story which stands in the way of the independent progress of any self-respecting woman, in her need to assert her capacity as a human being reflecting the image of the deity as fully as her father, brother or son.

The Rastafarian Struggle against Babylon

Safiya places her struggle to grow up in Jamaica as emerging through the forces of history, within the context of her father's support and teaching which, with one exception, inspires him to educate his family to a high degree, without appreciating the double bind he creates for the female members of his family. Both parents nurture their children into highly intelligent and enlightened people, whom their father undoubtedly loves. He passionately follows the Rastafarian sect, aspiring to support the historical struggles of the Black man against the white oppressor. Yet we observe that in championing the cause of the Black man, the cause becomes just that; one exclusively of the Black man. The roots of their father Howard Sinclair's somewhat solitary mission go back to 1933, when a street preacher named Leonard Percival Howell observed Marcus Garvey's appeal to "Look to Africa for the crowning of a Black King, he shall be the Redeemer" (6). Howell presented Ras Tafari Makonnen as the reincarnation of God, with Ras Tafari taking the emperor Haile Selassie as his inspiration in throwing off the shackles of colonialism to unite the African diaspora. Selassie was chosen as a suitable role model for the Black people since Ethiopia was the only African nation to have escaped colonization. Ras Tafari Makonnen and the Rasta bredren of Montpelier followed, adhering to the precepts of Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X, forming a cult in adulation of Haile Selassie in their hopes of achieving Black liberation. This movement underwent savage and bloody defeat in Jamaica, even as some groups continued to protest against the oppressions of Babylon, in this word which is used as shorthand for the ills of white civilization, as they created a spearhead for liberation. Their reading of the Old Testament led them to empathize with the downtrodden Jewish people who had been persecuted by their ancient enemies of Babylon, their enslavers who stood for

"the sinister and violent forces of western ideology, colonialism and Christianity that led to the centuries-long enslavement and oppression of Black people" (10).

Ostensibly a non-violent movement, the Rastafari were crushed under attack into becoming the black sheep of the Jamaican nation; landless and homeless, unemployed and unemployable. Hounded and attacked, they constantly ran into trouble with the state, which imprisoned them and shaved off their dreadlocks. Events in Jamaica came to a head in 1963 when they refused to relinquish their lands to government seizure, as the white prime minister, Alexander Bustamante, gave the order: "Bring in all Rastas, dead or alive" (9). This resulted in a weekend of military terror and mayhem, as over 150 Rastas were dragged into the prisons to be tortured, with an undetermined number being killed. The Rasta became the traditional boogeyman, or even madman, named the "monstrous Blackheart Man" (39). As they desperately attempted to resist state violence against them, the bloodthirsty reputation they gained was magnified in order to keep children scared of them, leading at times to them being turned away from their own homes.

When Haile Selassie visited the island in April 1966, every Rastafarian of Jamaica crowded into the airport zone, their welcoming banners including the impressive: "Jah Come to Break Downpression to Set the Captive Free" (8), Jah being the Rastafarian name of the Almighty and Downpression a word created as part of their verbal ammunition to graphically express their being crushed under demeaning, savage treatment. The entire royal visit became mythically embellished, with the Emperor's plane emerging from the cloud after seven white doves appeared at the tip of the plane, as the torrential rainstorm dramatically ceased before the plane's insignia of the Lion of Judah. The seventy-four-year-old Selassie in trepidation kept the huge, tumultuous crowd waiting forty-five minutes before he plucked up the courage to leave the plane, finally emerging weeping to face a jubilant crowd. He was latter reputed to have nodded to Rita Marley, who glimpsed the black stigmata in his palm, informing her husband Bob of their need to spread the word through their reggae music.

In the aftermath of this enthusiastic outburst, Safia's father Howard became caught up in this movement as an exponent of reggae music and a worshipper of the emperor, whose portrait embellished every home they inhabited. Safiya reports:

> "His flame burned alive in [her] father, who was god of [their] whole dominion, who slept with one watchful eye on [her] purity and one hand on his black machete, ready to chop down Babylon, if it ever crept close" (13).

Each family aimed to create their own "living godhead, the king of his own secluded temple" (40) in their home. Her family were nurtured largely according to a strict form of this religion, the Mansion of Nyabioghi, under the inspiration of Bob Marley and his wife Rita, forming a cult in adulation of the emperor Haile Selassie, with the aim of achieving Black liberation under the slogan: Black man time now. Despite savage and bloody attempts to crush this movement, they were among the groups that survived to protest against the oppressions of Babylon and the ills of white civilization, in the march to achieve Black liberation.

Their father worked as a reggae artist singing in touristic hotels, struggling to promote his own music while creating the band "Future Wind" under his chosen name of Djani or king, aspiring to become a celebrated musician in promoting his own music rather than merely playing the more famous and popular works of Bob Marley. His opportunities were confined by their manager, who enriched himself from their creative efforts, deceiving the band members in keeping the profits for himself. This pattern is repeated later, as, completing two promotional trips to Japan, he returned from the first laden with goods, while from the second he returned shell-shocked, his aspirations defeated, his plans to promote his own music having failed, once again being tricked out of his profits. He thus suffered his career efforts turning to dust and ashes in his hands, his skills and ventures benefitting others, while he remained in increasing poverty in a hand-to-mouth existence with his family of four children. He becomes increasing bitter in trying to survive, let alone achieve fame and fortune, retreating into a defensive, dogmatically religious stance toward life, feeling that the only thing under his control was his family and his lifestyle or livity (35). Safiya writes that their mother "wanted to let them loose like bright sparrows upon the world, [while] our father wished to squeeze us back into our eggs, overgrown and silent in his nest" (102). This parallels the myth of Gaia, Mother Earth, who promotes and protects all her offspring, however apparently monstrous, while Uranus and Cronus simply crush them back into the earth or swallow them as soon as they are born.

The Men of Her Family Grew Mighty While the Women Shrunk

In their narrowly religious environment, the men are able to enjoy a modicum of freedom, living out their convictions, while the women are crushed under unequal life conditions and endless, onerous duties. Safiya notes how the faces of all the sistren look drawn and exhausted, under endless domestic duties, while the men are able to chat and joke. She once observed a young wife in their Rastafarian community who had been told of her impurity as a menstruating woman, regarded as 'unclean' and isolated during her monthlies. This custom of women's fertility being stigmatized and separated from the community goes back to Jewish Levitical law, as explained by Julia Kristeva, in a practice which emerged in opposition to the surrounding maternal cults of the people of Canaan (Kristeva 94). Once regarded as the wellspring of life, women were crushed under the rules and taboos of patriarchy, while their husbands would polygamously take lovers. Although her father had not initially been so 'strict' about menstrual laws, he had always taken lovers, expecting his common-law wife to be faithful to him.

Dreadful gossip circulates in their neighbourhood regarding unchaste girls, including a little girl of eleven who is described as being loose with her body in dancing the lambada and having "bruk out" (61). Another such little girl is taken and defiled by construction workers, thereby lost to Babylon and "unfit to be with a Rastaman" (61). This is the fate worse than death which hovers over every girl, one which engulfs Safiya's school friend, Cassandra. Of the two Cassandras at school, Cassie shares with Safiya the distinction of achieving the highest grades, while the other Cassandra never becomes close to Safiya. When she stops coming to school, Safiya learns that she has been expelled; she is pariah through becoming pregnant, and her name must never be mentioned at home again. This had actually been the story of her father's own mother, a brilliant scholarship girl who went astray and fell pregnant at the age of fourteen, thereby losing her chance of education and travel and ruining her life, becoming a cautionary tale for the entire village (142). She is blamed for spreading her legs, which made her son "a bastard doomed to be burned, beaten and mistreated" (143); a social outcast. The aunt who raised him, actually his grandmother who forbade him to use that name for her, threw him into a barbed wire fence as a boy, leaving him scarred both physically and psychically, as he grew up a bastard, without knowing his father, under the weight of his mother's terrible Mistake (144),

thus furnishing his cause against the loose living of women. Their mother only learns that she is motherless when riding home on a man's bicycle, as he informs her that her mother is dead while sliding his hand into her underwear. When she resists him, evading the fate worse than death, he throws her off the bike onto the ground. No one considers the behaviour of the men who bring about the ruin of such young, inexperienced girls; on the contrary, the gossip around Bill Clinton's affairs merely constitutes proof of nature that a man is not made for monogamy, thus enabling a man to have as many sexual partners as he desires (168).

In this hostile environment, the three sister's lives hang on a moral thread and they walk on eggshells (146), as their father increasingly isolates his family, keeping away even from their fellow religionists, whom he derides for being too decadent or too tolerant regarding women's morals. As a result, the children grow up isolated in an extreme Rastafarian lifestyle with their father as their sole godhead, king of the roost. This enables him to assert extreme pressure on his women, emphasizing their duty to serve male bredren, which leads to the virtual enslavement of the entire family. She observes that the more he fails in his singing projects, in a climate with girls around them failing morally, the more he creates an isolated life in defense against the world, through which he subjugates his daughters, ostensibly for their own good. One evening Safiya snoops on her father watching television, with naked Black bodies gyrating around a pole as they touch themselves intimately, listening to him enthuse over these bodies, while also cursing them as despicable, unacceptable for his own family. She feels something sever between them as she observes the lie he has created (163), realizing that "he was only a man collapsing under his carnal and banal desires, like every other man" (163). He exercises his own freedom as a man and the god of the family, while oppressing the women under his control, in a false double standard. She also acknowledges how he is caught between despising the pleasures of Babylon while also longing for its trappings (141). Looking around at their Rastafarian companions before they gradually lose contact with them all, Safiya can only see exhausted sistren, under the goal of making a Rastaman and supporting him in his struggle to survive the slings and arrows of life's oppressions, leaving the girls unable to live a fulfilling life of their own or achieve any of their personal goals. She also notes in their isolation how the failure of her father's career has created a negative force which he projects onto his family, mirroring his own

frustrations back onto them in frustrated, ruthless savagery, leaving his family to reap the repercussions of his personal failures. As a child her father had fondly given her the name Budgie, but she cites Franz Kafka saying: "a cage went in search of a bird."

Passing Through a Dark Underworld of Pain

Safiya's memoir starts with the story of her near drowning. While playing on the beach, she is drawn in fascination towards something in the vibrant sea water, which her mother had told her was the source of all bounty. Throwing herself into this treacherous element, she struggles to breathe as her body sinks beneath the water. Her heavily pregnant mother sees her daughter falling into the waves, as she runs barefoot across the beach, slicing her foot on a shard of glass and rushing into the ocean to save her precious daughter. Engulfing her in the swirling red of the blood from her foot, she repeatedly pleads her: "Are you OK? Are you OK" (20). Having been forbidden by her father to go near the sea, this incident remains a secret between the two of them for many years. This early memory affords a metaphor of Safiya's life in a nutshell, as her mother offers her boundless support in all her efforts to launch herself into social, educational and literary projects beyond her depth, while her father restrains her and prevents her progress or activity, in an ostensible show of love. She writes that while "mother saved me from the waves and gave me breath; my father tried to save me only by suffocation" (50). Under the "ever-increasing strictures" surrounding her (50), she sees how both her parents "had wanted better for me, but only one of them protected me in the end (50), while her father's belief that "Bettah must come" (51) was an aspiration for only some of them.

Their mother launches them on exciting home classes, engaging in thrilling quizzes and demanding vocabulary games while other children are still out playing. This playful learning enables the children to break through educational and social barriers and outstrip their peers from the moment they start school, eventually enabling them to gain scholarships to good schools and prizes on both a local and national level. As a child she enjoys tree climbing and rough games outside their home, but at the age of nine she is forbidden to wear jeans and encased in long skirts, to become the perfect "dawta" (107) and live as Jah intended; she is also told to keep a holy silence, speak when spoken to, to be humble and without vanity, keeping her mind empty and helping her mother. Strikingly, this family never go out to perform menial labour for the whites; they suffer poverty rather than

working in demeaning jobs. While playing rough with her brother, his hand knocks her jaw against a wall, breaking a front tooth, as her father shockingly tells his son to "Leave. Woman. Frocktail. Alone" (109). More even than this devastating injury, which leaves Safiya covering her face and unable to smile through her broken tooth for many years, she becomes alienated from her brother, who had been her closest friend, a soul mate sharing her thoughts, as this gender binary divides them. She gradually understands that "what he was being groomed to become had nothing at all to do with me" (110), causing her to "harden into an impenetrable pearl around a grain of sand" (110). She becomes aware that despite all his ostensible love of his family, while embracing a dogmatic Rasta fulfilment for men, her father assumed that his women would renounce all their rights and freedoms to serve him. This double standard is reinforced as her beloved brother is able to circulate the island freely on his bicycle, while the girls in cumbersome dresses lack the freedom to leave the house other than for classes.

A girl she had approached in friendship sends her a message that she "dont want Rasta for a friend" (112). In helpless self-despite, Safiya steps on a nail and forces it deep into her foot, her dreadful pain bursting out through this self-inflicted injury. Writing under the title of Medusa, she expresses her feeling of monstrosity, as if she will turn all she looks on to stone, with her broken tooth, her dreadlocks replacing Medusa's snakes. The words of Keats provide her epigraph: "Do you not see how necessary a world of pains and troubles is to school an intelligence and make it a soul" (125). So many dreadful events bring her down into a dark underworld, the haunt of Persephone, kidnapped and raped by Hades, kept away from the bounty and fruitfulness of the earth and the sunlit world of her mother above, or the grieving Niobe, who is reduced to a weeping rock when she loses all those whom she holds precious. She is particularly Eurydice, with her fate still uncertain: "delivered to the light by an orphic savior, or doomed for eternity to its river of silence" (126), her fate still hanging in the balance, with the constant fear of being submerged in a dark tomb when Orpheus turns his head. She has no name; she lives only her father's "losses, his livity, his god" (127), and his song becomes her song, for she is not thought worthy. At school she is blamed for having a henna design on her leg, like a tattoo, and told she cannot protest for the sake of losing her scholarship, while her father, for one last time, lies beside her and listens to her school exploits and tales of her companions, in a never-to-be-repeated experience.

When she wins a scholarship to an excellent school, her penniless mother miraculously manages to deliver her lunch each day, while she is also educating herself to gain a teaching post and enable the education of the younger children. She sets up her own school system, originating from their shed, under the slogan of S.P.I.C., a Stimulation Program for the IQ raising of Children (57). But even as these exceptionally bright children progress, their father is unable to assuage his bitterness at his professional and economic failure. He first uses the red leather belt when they gorge themselves on green cherries, as he furiously accuses them of making themselves sick on unripe fruit while he cannot possibly pay for a doctor. He beats them all, building up to the climax of Safiya as the oldest child who should have known better, turning them to stone under his punishments. He cherishes her with the nickname Budgie, but she forgot that "he loved birds as much as he loved shooting them from the trees with his slingshot. I was so busy being the budgerigar that I hadn't noticed the stone" (151). This belt he never wears again; instead it is hung up behind the bedroom door as a ready sign of punishment. Safiya explicitly connects her father's bitterness to his professional failure, which causes him to crush his daughters, blinding him to the qualities of those he holds dearest. Retreating further away from the outside world, he appears as Dr. Jekyll in the world, smiling while engaging with people, ignoring the beatings and screams of their young neighbour, while at home he becomes Mr. Hyde, a brutal taskmaster, punishing any infringements against his will with the red belt. Safiya's mother is also daunted and helpless in standing up to her husband and his hypocritical life, cheating on her with other women. He does not allow Safiya to share the news of her starting to menstruate with him, shooing her away like the unclean, abject thing he believes her to be, telling her to wait for her mother's return.

She relates how he has a veritable procession of young women as lovers entering and leaving their world, sometimes enabling them to swim at smart clubs and beaches. When he asks the older siblings to consider his latest girlfriend Primrose as their second mother, they return him an adamant No, No, followed by: "We already have a mother" (171). But clearly attempting to put this plan into operation with his wife, a week later he bursts in on them, telling them: "She gone. Come tell her to stay" (172), as they watch the pitiful sight of their mother walking away down the road, a couple of dresses thrown into a plastic bag. As the children run out into the

street to plead with her to return, Safiya sees her mother's "face so wrenched in rage it was nearly unrecognizable" (172), and admires her for having gained the fury and courage to leave her husband and walk away to freedom, yet she also pities this helpless woman with nowhere to go, having spent her last penny on them, reserving nothing to enable her to live independently of them. Even as she wills her mother's freedom, noting the power she exerts while walking away, she wonders—where will she go? How will she survive? as their father begs her not to desert him. Silently urging her mother: "Go! Don't look back," at the same time she determines: "that woman will never be me" (173).

Safiya's beatings continue for three years, causing her to pass "Through the Fire" (183). When she turns up her nose at the sneakers her mother buys her for school, her father beats her to within an inch of her life, taunting her about her pride, who does she think she is, why are the shoes not good enough for her, as the red belt brings welts up across her back. The intimidated children hover in the safety of the next room, as Safiya appeals to her mother, who this time refuses her, holding up her hand in a silent No, forcing her back into the room with her father who is appeasing his wrath in beating her. Finally sated, his ego mollified, she asks her mother to help her put on her bra, actually to show her wounds, but her mother remains insensible to this appeal. They have both become helpless, with "love and hurt hatched from the same egg, sisters in crime" (182). By this time Safiya is truly broken and alone, and she gives up on everything; her family, her school life, her hopes, succumbing to her father's brute force and becoming passive at home and school, where she had once been vibrant in participating and learning. When her teacher asks her why she had vandalized the yearbook by drawing a broken tooth on her photo, she denies doing this. Her teacher patiently encourages her to express her grief and anger, and as the tears spill over her face, she relates how she hates herself, she hates her dreadlocks, she hates her broken tooth, she hates being a girl, brokenly expressing a catalogue of grief and oppression, with all her successes useless against her father's cruelty, sexual disparity an anchor that oppresses and drags her down. When her teacher finally asks her what she hopes to do, she asserts "I want to grab the bull by the horns and stitch my name to its tongue" (187); a goal which she may one day achieve.

Through this period of dark depression and brutalization which Safiya scarcely survives, her mother finally responds to her latent appeal and

intervenes to prevent her husband's cruelty. She makes a plan to replace her tooth, and she puts an end to the violent attacks on Safiya, enabling her to emerge from her dark depression and engage with life again. Sharing with her a book of poetry, she suggests this escape from the cruelties of life, as mother and daughter grow stronger and more resilient against the father's savagery. Safiya leaves a candle burning and narrowly escapes burning while she sleeps, as her sister narrowly saves her. A school friend suggests a way to slit her wrists while she is reading the beautiful poetry of Sylvia Plath, reflecting on "Daddy" with pain. Her father calls her worthless and she picks up a shard of glass to slit her wrists, down her veins, as recommended by her friend: "Down the highway, not across the street" (192). But gradually, imagining her family finding her dead, she turns away from such a destiny, and determines to save herself from the fate of Eurydice as she emerges from the underworld, finding a unique voice for herself in poetry: "Silver flows through my veins" (200). Her poetry gradually reaches a wide audience, releasing her voice and bringing her purpose and fame in life. This powerful memoir offers at times a terrifying view of a close-knit, poor family, who grow up to achieve success far exceeding their limited means. Safiya's exceptional linguistic skill, her clear honestly and her visionary determination drive her forward on her painful journey towards the powerful expression of her identity as a poet who achieves her personal song through her sparkling poetic muse.

REFERENCES:

Campbell, Joseph, *The Power of Myth*. New York: Doubleday, 1988.

Carter, Angela, "The Erl-King," *The Bloody Chamber*. Gollancz, 1979.

Cixous, Hélène, "The Laugh of the Medusa," trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Signs*, 1/4, p. 875-893, 1976.

Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Rondiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982.

Larkin, Philip, "This Be The Verse", 1971.

Lawrence, D. H., *The Rainbow*, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1915.

Sinclair, Safiya, *How to Say Babylon: A Memoir*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2023.

The Holy Bible, London: Cambridge University Press, 1611.

Woolf, Virginia, "Professions for Women," *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*. Penguin, 1931.

THE INDOMITABLE SAFIYA SINCLAIR CAUGHT BETWEEN A NARROW PATERNITY AND A LOVING MOTHER IN *HOW TO SAY BABYLON*

Abstract: In this powerfully compelling memoir, Safiya Sinclair candidly presents her extraordinary struggle to survive paternal pressure and the undermining of female worth in her own home, within a family rooted in patriarchal Rastafarianism and post-colonialism. The reader travels alongside her on her painful journey as she matures into a highly articulate and educated woman through maternal support and paternal belief in the family. Socially isolated through an extreme religious sect and repeated house moves, the children grow up under the powerful force of their father as a virtual godhead figure, while the mother is their daily, vibrant wellspring of life. Yet the father's career struggles, initially gaining success in his reggae career, before all his efforts crash into failure, bring financial and emotional distress, while his religious belief and racial passion never founder. Retreating into religious fundamentalism affords him a rationale to circumscribe the women of his family while asserting his own authority against them, giving him security in a precarious life. The mother's support extends a protective shield over her children throughout, although even she is traumatized into isolating her daughter when her father's bullying drives a wedge between them. The contradictions of their situation emerge, as an intelligent family succeeding despite the intersectional challenges of colonialism, race, class and poverty stacked against them, while the girls are dragged back psychologically and physically under the mixed messages of the importance of educating themselves balanced against the imperative need to sustain their moral and physical purity. After many years Safiya acknowledges that despite their father's undoubted love for them, she and her sisters are subjugated as females, regarded as less worthy to fulfil their dreams and suitable only for second track achievements. Her father's mind is locked into the paradox of nurturing and protecting his family against the racial, social and religious forces stacked against a poor Black family in a Jamaican community, while emphasizing the restraints limiting women. She comes to appreciate how his career frustrations and failure to gain fame as a reggae artist become a negative force which he projects back onto his family in savage defense against his own loss of worth, hammering a nail into the coffin of their precarious survival. Throughout this memoir, Sinclair's exceptional linguistic skills, her honestly and visionary determination drive her along on her painful journey towards expressing her powerful personality in a uniquely poetic voice, enabling her ultimately to win through to success and fame against all the odds.

Keywords: *paternal oppression, subjugation, maternal love, indomitable spirit, survival.*