

RAMBLING: MEANS TO AN END

Kobbe Montague, *The Night of the Rambler*. New York: Akashic Books.
2013. 252 pages, p.b. \$15.95

The Night of the Rambler is the story of a foiled revolution. A plan put into action on June 9 1967, by sixteen men from Anguilla who set sail on a thirty-five foot boat, the *Rambler*, to make the night journey to St. Kitts. Their intention was to carry out a coup d'état and install a new government sympathetic to their quest to separate Anguilla from the state of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla. While the plan failed, the main purpose of their mission, to advance Anguilla's struggle for self determination by dissociating itself from the newly formed state of St. Kitts-Nevis-Anguilla and to return to the British colonial fold, becomes more obvious and urgent.

At the heart of this novel, two of the characters, Alwyn Cooke and Rude Thompson are friends with divergent ideas. Although their approaches and philosophies were somewhat different, their ultimate goal was one and the same. Each wanted Anguilla's independence and separation from the newly formed state. In the end, they agreed that what needed to be done would have to be radical. There was no turning back. That sentiment echoes in Cooke's remarks:

"Bottom line, Al, bot' you an' me know Anguilla need change but no soul ain' goin' hear not'in we says, only if we go make one big mess dem go hear us, you know." (p.115)

"Ain' not'in goin' change, Al-- not'in at all: until we go break up good wit dem despots in St. Kitts." (p116)

The Night of the Rambler unfolds across the fifteen hours that lapse between the moment when the "rebels" board the boat that will take them to St. Kitts, and the break of dawn, the following day, when it becomes obvious that the mission would have to be aborted.

The novel consciously steps away from being truly historical. It purposely alters the sequence of "facts" narrated., mixing fully fictional episodes with vaguely accurate anecdotes and replaces the protagonists with fictional characters. At different points, it is full of drama and other points it is full of humor.

"A people cannot live without hope for long without erupting socially..." (p. 105) The righteousness of revolution is a recurring theme as the central idea of the need for change rang true in the novel.

An Ethiopian proverb says, “When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.” The efforts of the sixteen men in the scheme of this aborted coup illustrates the implications of this proverb. In those hours before daybreak, as the men come to terms with this rambling venture, literary themes of man versus man and man versus nature surfaces. With tremendous humanity and humor, the novel articulates these themes through the power of the relationships and the urgency each character demonstrates in this quest for self-determination.

The characters are presented clearly. Their individual role in this venture is in direct relation to the sum total of their own experiences in the politics of their island, Anguilla. From the title, the reader knows that this story relates something multi-layered and serious. The night journey, the foiled attempt all reinforce the title’s shadowy feel. Dictionary definitions of the word rambler denotes an activity that is changing and evolving as it proceeds and that it is out of the ordinary; however, a point that the events of the story convey is that the objective while it was foiled did not waver.

For an audience, not familiar with the politics of the Caribbean or the issues in Anguilla there might not be an appreciation for the plot and sub themes; however, if the reader brings his or her understanding of the circumstances and historical events that wove the political fabric surrounding Anguilla he or she becomes empathetic to the characters. Specific details arising from what is touted as St. Kitts’ domination of Anguilla in a way that left Anguilla undeveloped, poor and downtrodden is related through the dialogue which includes issues such as extensive unemployment, lack of industries, no electricity, no running water, no paved roads, no phones, no port facilities or services for health, sanitation and schools.

The 1950’s through the 1960’s was time when the Caribbean was changing and the focal point of many forms of rebellion. The methods used to prompt or force change varied. Some methods worked and some didn’t. People wanted and demanded self-determination. The decisions and actions of those committed to change brought it about, although not always immediately. Becoming immersed in this story provokes thoughts and emotions. The reader will be gently pushed to examine personal feelings and perspectives. Isn’t that what good writing should do?

Terry Butcher

St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands