



# books

## The Night of the Rambler *by Montague Kobbé* *A Review by Rita Celestine Carty*

It is usually the case that we place the Anguilla Revolution at the end of a long linear journey that starts in 1825 when the people of this island were first forced into and first protested a union with fairly distant St. Kitts. It is not usually the case that we extrapolate and explore the interconnectedness of this local conflict with other events both regionally and further afield. Montague Kobbé, in his **The Night of the Rambler**, has the time, the interest and the talent to perform this role for us.

Expect to be momentarily thrown, though, by the list of characters in what is otherwise a familiar story. Alwyn Cooke, Rude Thompson, Solomon Carter, Gaynor Henderson, Aaron Lowell et al. will certainly have you scratching your head for some time as, unfortunately, they seem out of sync with the Anguillian landscape. After a few pointers, however, you'll be able to think of them by more familiar nomenclature. Part II of the book is most useful in this regard as this is where the narrator delves into the histories of each of the primaries on The Rambler. The Rambler, it must be explained, was the name of the boat that took several Anguillian revolutionaries to St. Kitts, in an attempt to forward their cause by toppling the government there.

Never again, though, will this reviewer believe the disclaimer heralding the pages of all works of fiction, including this one, that "all names, characters, places and incidents are a product of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to real events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental."

Parts I and III of Kobbé's book treat directly with the personages and events of June 9, 1967, while the lengthier middle section traces the personal and collective background that brought them all to that point. The historical facts and details can be corroborated by reference to Colville Petty's several volumes on the said happenings and will be more than you think.

In order to achieve his objective of making all things clear, the chapters of **The Night of the Rambler** include several asides which draw attention to themselves by the fact that they are unnumbered chapters. These help the writer to dwell on moments. Even outside these chapters he does this. In fact, some sentences and parts of sentences recur as refrains as the writer seeks to eke out the greater significance of every moment. Kobbé creates still shots for study as often as he presents the sequence of actions and reactions that readers associate with novels. This is particularly evidenced in Part II, Chapter IV where it takes Robert Llewelyn Bradshaw 5 pages (119-123) to descend two short steps from a little airplane and deliver a short speech to the Anguillian 'welcoming' party.

Sometimes, too, the narrative seems too self-conscious, talking about itself and even harking back to what was said on previous pages. Date references are repeated very often, belabouring the day perhaps to emphasize the uncanny within the ordinary. Notwithstanding, **The Night of the Rambler** is the work of a writer of considerable talent using a vocabulary that is often delightfully recherché. This author is definitely in love with words and is often even willing to linger on their sound and their origin.

The reader of this book will certainly come away learned because Kobbé takes the time to situate the local conflict of the Anguilla Revolution within the larger regional context, linking it not only to events in the wider British West Indies, but establishing 'stellar coincidence[s]' (p. 108) and other associations with events in Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Latin America. As such he provides historical insight making his work as much of a commentary as a creative opportunity to let the imagination run and at the same time stay true to all the known details of actual récents. Kobbé's imaginative brush strokes are used to highlight links as well as to conquer the improbable and show its plausibility. He unifies all the disparate elements to create a whole new picture.

## The Night of the Rambler

MONTAGUE KOBBE

A NOVEL



The author obviously loves the (his) story and seems to have been steeped in it. Indeed, the biographical notes of the blurb, the preface and the acknowledgements clearly show this. The author makes his presence clear in the narrative as there are some first person bits and the narrator sometimes seeks to converse directly with the reader at various points. In the end, the impression conveyed of the author/narrator is that of a perspicacious, even wise, would-be adventurer who would have loved to participate in the events on The Rambler.

Kobbé, in **The Night of the Rambler**, shows how you turn a bungled plot into a 252 page all-encompassing historical novel. He does not go to these lengths. But what has become clear to this reviewer, with a heightened sense of the uncanny nature of the Anguilla Revolution, is that, despite the fact that the other conflicts referenced might have been better planned and coordinated, it was the rambling (pun intended) plot by the relatively unschooled – in either political or military manoeuvres – that has been the most successful. Indeed, most of the other conflicts still continue in some form or the other, but the Anguillians won their day on May 30 and cemented it with the botched escapade on that night of The Rambler. Officialdom eventually caught up more than a decade later but the deed was already a *fait accompli* in the minds of the people.

Kobbé is to be praised and thanked for his take of that night on The Rambler.

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