

## Lambchops with Sally Goodman

### The Selected Poems of Paul St. Vincent and Sally Goodman

Poet, novelist and short-story writer, E.A. Markham was born on the Caribbean island of Montserrat in 1939 and has lived mainly in Britain (and France) since 1956. A graduate of English and Philosophy he has had writing residencies & fellowships and held academic posts in universities in Britain; built and restored houses with a *cooperative* in France (1972–74; 1987–88); directed the *Caribbean Theatre Workshop* in the Eastern Caribbean (1970–71) and worked as a Media Coordinator in Papua New Guinea (1983–85).

Since 1991 Markham has been head of the Creative Writing Programme at Sheffield City Polytechnic/Sheffield Hallam University, introduced (with Robert Miles) the MA in Writing there, as well as the biennial Hallam Literature Festival. He has edited various literary magazines, including *Artrage* (London); *Enga Nius* (PNG); *Writing Ulster* (Coleraine) and *Sheffield Thursday* (Sheffield).

In 1997 E.A. Markham was awarded the Certificate of Honour by the Government of Montserrat. He is Professor of Creative Writing at Sheffield Hallam University and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

#### *The characters:*

PAUL ST. VINCENT, born in Antigua, 1944, spent early youth in St. Vincent, and came to England when he was 8. Since then, has had many schools and more jobs. Experienced sheet-metal-worker. Parts of 'Lambchops' have appeared in *Omens*, *Matrix*, *Orbis*, *Green Lines*, *London Magazine*, *The Honest Ulsterman*, *The Spoon River Quarterly*, *Limestone* and the *L.W.M. Caribbean Anthology*. A pamphlet, *Lambchops*, will be brought out by *Omens* in 1976.

[from the *Bluefoot Traveller* note, 1976]

SALLY GOODMAN is Welsh, an Embassy child educated all over Europe. She is now 29, fully recovered from marriage, and bringing up a child. She's had poems in *Poetry Wales*, *The Little Word Machine*, *Titmouse Review* and other magazines. Her first pamphlet will be published in 1978.

[note in *Panjandrum* 6/7, 1978]

Also by E.A. Markham

### Poetry

*Human Rites* (Anvil, 1984)

*Living in Disguise* (Anvil, 1986)

*Towards the End of a Century* (Anvil, 1989)

*Letter from Ulster & The Hugo Poems* (Littlewood Arc, 1993)

*Misapprehensions* (Anvil, 1995)

*A Rough Climate* (Anvil, 2002)

*John Lewis & Co.* (Anvil, 2003)

### Fiction

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*Marking Time* (Peepal Tree, 1999) (a novel)

*Taking the Drawing-room Through Customs* (Peepal Tree, 2002)  
(selected stories)

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*A Papua New Guinea Sojourn: More Pleasures of Exile* (Carc Janet, 1998)

### Editor

*Merely a Matter of Colour* (with Arnold Kingston, 'Q' Books, 1973)

*Hugo Versus Montserrat* (with Howard A. Fergus, Linda Lee Books, 1989)

*The Bloodaxe Book of West Indian Poetry* (1989)

*The Penguin Book of Caribbean Short Stories* (1996)

*Plant Care: A Festschrift for Mimi Khalvati* (Linda Lee Books, 2004)

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THE SELECTED POEMS OF PAUL ST. VINCENT  
AND SALLY GOODMAN

E.A. MARKHAM

*Introduction by Paula Burnett*



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## Preface

### LAMBCHOPS FOR THE '80S

Among the more satisfying illusions is, I think, a sense of achievement. Far better than the *fact* of achievement, as one is less likely to be disappointed. (Whether achievement is itself an illusion, doesn't concern me here.) One of my own illusions was living in a country called the '60s for rather more than ten years, and taking with me at the end, the very same name with which I entered it. There were those who said that E.A. Markham was not a name, but an affliction (And how right they were!)—an affliction contracted under some insidious Victorian dispensation and that my situation—that is, my relative lack of prospects—urgently called for something less comic, less colonial. Archie X was suggested and discarded, for X had by then—the mid-'60s—become a popular name, a sort of alternative Smith. So as not to add to the confusion (So many look-alikes, everywhere) I decided temporarily to hang on to the old one. (You will understand that to do something temporarily, as a West Indian abroad, is not necessarily to do it for a short period of time, but to do it without conviction, without concentrating one's full attention on it: thus, have West Indians lived in Britain for thirty years, temporarily.)

I tried to bear this in mind—that is, the difficulty of finding replacement names for embarrassing originals—when I emigrated from the '60s, and returned to the Caribbean to make theatre. Many people shared my illusion that the remote village (remote from London, I suppose?) on a small island which was our starting-point, was the microcosm of all that the '60s had enlarged and coarsened. Together, we would write a play with Characters who had rediscov-

ered the ways of the *folk*; and their names would be a key to their authenticity. Black Englishmen belonged, if anywhere, in England. And Africans? For over a decade they had aided us and lent us their names; but now it was time to be independent of Quamina and Mustapha—and Ali. We were left with indigenous (near-indigenous) favourites like Breadfruit and Sugarcake, Biscuit and Salt Fish. But our play wasn't a documentary, we could take liberties in the name of Art; and by the time it took shape, Breadfruit had been refined into, well, Breadcrumb. A potential Breadcrumb, a younger son turned actor, objected to the *-crumb* part of it, as he thought the association might be taken literally, and come to hurt him. So *crumb* was dropped as indelicate: it put one in the wrong relationship to the table, and made vulgar assumptions about conditions in what some people are pleased to call the Third World. (Biscuit was discarded for similar reasons, as the village was a long way from where biscuits were made, and by the time they got there, they tended to be broken.) And so, one by one, the old favourites were eliminated.

Fortunately, we had no arms and couldn't fight battles over our new names. I had under-estimated the strength of the clerical lobby and had dismissed early suggestions that a play representing a not yet post-Christian community should advertise itself as such, in the names of its characters: Shadrach Mesrach and Abed-nego Coderington seemed a pretty heavy illustration of that particular tendency. But it was I who was out of touch, and the aforementioned gentleman—for they were *one* person—lent his name to our leading Character. When, later, we tried to split Shadrach, Mesrach and Abed-nego into three comic turns, the ambitious actor of that name resisted. He was a non-conformist lay preacher and so had no sense of the ridiculous. He insisted that audiences would respond as favourably as his congregation had done, to the authority, the grandeur—and resonance of this particular labelling. He had visions of the big time. He saw the church as the only multi-national in which a small-islander like himself could make it to the top. Already, he was practicing his lines in a North American accent. In spite of that, we survived our first night. And it was on to the next island to repeat the process—same play, new names.

Our last performance in the Eastern Caribbean was on an island that had just had its revolution, so we adjusted to the fresh, ‘of-the-people’ atmosphere and reverted to calling our main Character BREAD. Bread was both wholesome and slangy; and in *dough* suggested something peasant and cottagey, like health food. But, like health food, not coming cheaply. And yet again, *Bread* had under-world resonances, which, in the context, we could call counter-revolutionary. We were walking a bit of a tightrope here—adventure and danger—like taking a Bible to Albania, perhaps, or having a second home in Wales.

After the failure of *Bread*, some of us returned to England.

There were efforts to mount the play here. But the ethnic thing had too blanket an impact. To most people, Cricket Pitch, Grafted Mango and Sugarapple were of the same ethnic family as German Eddie and Screaming Fuzz. (German Eddie was someone we knew: he had been an apprentice to a Butcher’s in Shephards Bush, and was now a performance poet, hitting audiences with his name . . .)

‘Now—would you believe it?—someone has revived our play. And they’ve been very clever. they must have done some market research. The main Character, man of the ’80s, is to be called Lambchops. And this is how they tell it. Lamb chops are good to eat, unless you happen to be vegetarian. Even then the waste doesn’t seem as great as that of a steak, say—either on the plate or in the field. And lamb chops are classless, like the old mini was said to be: both the Swiss and the Albanians eat lamb chops. Where do you put lambchops in the North-South divide? We can conceive of a fat man as well as of a thin man tucking into a lamb chop. Aesthetically too, lamb chops are about right—somewhere between the Diner’s Card and the bread-fruit. Lambchops can be a singular thing when you want to be alone; lamb chops can be plural when you are lucky to have company, etc.

They are hard-headed people, this lot, without illusions; and they plan to last a decade.

First broadcast on *BBC Radio Three*, September 17th 1981

E.A. MARKHAM

SALLY GOODMAN

The Sally Goodman poems were produced mainly in the 1970s. They grew out of the author's close contact (and empathy) with groups of women writers and performers in New England and in Köln. Part of the interest was trying to create work which, though not alien to the individual consciousness generating it, nevertheless didn't go out of its way to confirm the usual biological prejudices. We were concerned that the tendencies (both academic and popular) to colonize tracts of contemporary writing, subjecting them to fairly arbitrary rule as 'Jewish', 'Black', 'Women', etc. territories, was causing (bound to cause?) them to develop literary constitutions (and politics) unhealthily dependent on the aid of an *adjective*. It was good still to bear in mind that, say, Collette's young men, or for that matter, Emma Bovary or Madame Ranyevskaia, etc., didn't demand a gender change by their respective authors. And besides, it was fun.

Acknowledgements to Ginette (Ashkenazy), whose Maida Vale Flat, for some years, housed Sally; to Margaret (Armstrong), whose photo occasionally accompanied the poems; and to Diana (Von Hallett) who didn't object.

First published in *Living in Disguise*, Anvil, 1986  
E.A. MARKHAM

## Dedication and acknowledgements

To the many who encouraged and supported the work of Paul St. Vincent in the 1970s and '80s, the magazine editors John Wickham (*Bim*, Barbados), John Martin (*Omens*), Nick Toczec (*LWM*), Peter Mortimer (*Iron*), Ed Tork (*Urbane Gorilla*), Roger Mitchell (*The Minnesota Review*, USA), Marvin Malone (*The Wormwood Review*, USA) and *The Massachusetts Review*, etc. And to those who brought out the pamphlets: John Martin (again), Ken Edwards (*Share Publications*) and Joyclin Precious (*Curlew Press*).

And for Sally Goodman, in addition to Nick Toczec and John Martin, grateful thanks to Carol Burns (*Matrix*), J.P. Ward (*Poetry Wales*), Alan Ross (*London Magazine*), Fraser Sutherland (*Northern Journey*, Canada), Scott Rollins (*Dremples*, Amsterdam), Dennis Koran (*Panjandrum*) and many more.



## Introduction

*by Paula Burnett*

I well remember my surprise when Archie Markham told me about twenty years ago that he also wrote under the pseudonym of Paul St. Vincent, author of the “Lambchops” poems. When he added with a twinkle a few moments later that he also published under the name of Sally Goodman I was highly amused and delighted. It seemed so much in keeping with Archie’s versatility, style, and wit, and enhanced his image in my eyes. There was something subversive about it which really appealed, and it made me more aware of the subversive in his work as a whole. I would never have guessed it, but as soon as I knew, it seemed almost obvious that Archie would do something like that. His love of language and his impassioned commitment to it would never have been satisfied with a single authorial persona. Acutely aware of voice, as he is, he would never have wished or been able to confine himself to just one. The pseudonyms were never about deception. They were about staging, about performance. What language promises the writer is that he or she can be who he or she wishes through that fine structure, the house of words. Like a house of cards it must be delicately balanced if it is to stand, and Archie is a master builder of such structures, as the poems in this volume attest.

We often talk about the role of poetry in the theatre but tend not to pay much attention to the role of theatre in poetry. This book is a gratifying reminder that good poetry can be highly dramatic, with a tone and a context which are informed in complex ways by the dynamics of voice. The poems here may have first met their readers under the names of Paul St. Vincent and Sally Goodman but they are

distinctively Archie's, recognisable for that use of a theatrical voice, and form an important part of his oeuvre as a whole. Before anything else it was drama that drew Archie's eye and pen. A friend of the early years writes of his dedicated tussling with the craft of the playwright, but it is evident that ever since those days the marriage of language to drama has informed everything he has written. The poems in this volume speak and move. They unfold like athletes on asymmetric bars, defying gravity, constantly provoking a shout of hilarity with their surprising twists and turns, and leaving the watcher breathless and thoughtful at the beautifully controlled dismount. In a way, Archie has never stopped writing plays. His poems work like snatches of dialogue, with the pitch of spoken language. The thought in them is often demanding, keeping us on our toes as readers, but the tone is always fresh and colloquial, never pompous or using that tone which Derek Walcott refers to disparagingly as the voice on a pedestal. They draw us through an experience which so often leaves us slightly breathless with its unexpected developments, its intricate logic and its taut observation.

The poems here may have been penned more than two decades ago, but the ink is still wet. They deal with human situations which are as urgently of the moment, of now, as they ever were. Occasionally there are references which remind us of the time when they were written—allusions to the "Leader," for instance, clearly imply Mrs Thatcher—and there are one or two other contemporary political references, but they can be updated all too readily to modern equivalents. The years Archie spent in Papua New Guinea are reflected here too, but again, the politics of neo-colonial "development" are now stronger than ever, and the portraits of young workers on the "projects" still ring true. The race politics of twenty years ago are evident in some of these poems, often wickedly anti-establishment and non-p.c., as we have come to call it, but it is with a grimace that one realises how little things have really changed. It would also be a mistake to characterise the Lambchops poems as somehow "blacker" or more "political" than the main E. A. Markham work. Themes arising from a racially unjust world are present throughout Archie's work, but he is never pious or propagandist about it. Whatever the received wisdom, Archie, like a jester, will see

its feet of clay and pierce its hollowness. With all his personas, he writes like a fencer with a rapier, taut and elegant, but devastatingly sharp. Even with Sally Goodman—and what a name to choose – we find a compassionate regard for the female perspective expressed with force and sauce. The difficulties of personal relationships are tackled by both Paul and Sally, and have changed little, it seems. The absurdity of human behaviour, but the touching aspiration and innocence which drive much of it at its silliest, are shown in close-up, no holds barred. The poems do not shy away from the physical. Who else would have written about a focus group, groping towards new age communion, but succeeding only in farting together quietly?

Archie Markham is a man of letters, a member of that increasingly rare species endangered by the populist/mercantilist approach to matters of art. For more decades than one would think, to look at him, he has dedicated his seemingly inexhaustible energies and his manifestly inexhaustible creativity to literature, his own and 'others', through thick and thin. He is an admirable editor, encourager, stimulant and teacher, as well as, first and last, a poet. But this is a poet in the classical sense, before literature fell to the hacksaw of generic classification and gobbets drifted off down the tide of history separately as poetry, drama, and prose. Archie has used all the forms. Though he has principally chosen verse, all of his writing comes under the heading of poetry in the fullest sense. It is as a poet that he inhabits language, walks about in its rooms with his own inimitable gait. This book represents one of those rooms, collecting together a section of his work which is itself in a special way – for all its variousness it is nonetheless unmistakably his, a proud part of a now extensive and unfailingly impressive oeuvre. For all the long literary tradition of the pseudonym, it takes courage, and modesty, to seek publication under new names, as the correspondence with editors to whom the poems were sent makes clear. There is, of course, a long Caribbean tradition of performance in which the poet assumes a persona and develops it through a number of individual works, whether written or spoken. As Louise Bennett created her Miss Lou persona, Archie gives us Paul St. Vincent with his Lambchops, and Sally Goodman. Others, since, have continued the tradition, for instance Fred D'Aguiar with his Mama Dot poems. There is some-

thing carnivalesque about it. It is a form of masquerade, and like carnival it is fundamentally festive. It is so with Archie too, though he is no easy optimist, indeed is often close to despair; yet as these poems demonstrate, he grasps the sharp nettle of needling wit, taking on the world through irony rather than giving in to its recalcitrant cruelty and injustice. Only someone with a transcendent belief in the power of language can do that.

## Part One: Lambchops



## A Chorus

Lambchops is ugly  
Lambchops is bad  
But he makes out OK  
In the white lady's pad.

## Lambchops Alienated

. . . finding himself under a flyover  
admiring the strong ribs of concrete  
jostled by determined let-me-throughers,  
Lambchops feels his head split with the heat  
of loudspeakers on fire: crisp  
battle orders.

Certainly, this act of war,  
this brutal foreign language  
leaves one alien stunned. Landlocked,  
Lambchops fishes for his pocket  
and comes up naked.

## A Mugger's Game

Chase him down the alley  
put him behind bars

in a basement and charge him rent.

Lambchops has potential  
for violence. He's faking,

says the Pig in the wig,

make him an example  
of our collective self-defence.

Black them here stop them there

before they get too cheeky  
too second-generation aware

and ape us over take us

queueing up for houses  
they claim their fathers built.

They're a problem so he's a problem

a potential mugger  
on a quiet English street,

so smash him smash him

or soon he'll flash an education  
and leave you crumpled in a heap.

## Lambchops Has a Problem

Culturally deprived and cannot be helped;  
for against his name there are no

past convictions, no clashes  
with the enemy whom he calls (strange

lad, letting the side down) Policemen  
instead of Pigs. The lad (ESN? indifferent

to sport?) must be helped: have you not,  
the headshrinker asks,

been deprived of the right to mug  
out of greed/daring/nastiness instead

of raised group-consciousness? have you  
been assured of your minority strife?

Lambchops, adrift in his Social Science  
porridge, spreads his fingers in what

the Guru sees as threat. Then sign, lad,  
sign with the fingerprints.

But Lambchops is part of a disqualified  
minority and knows it. Fact is,

he pleads, it has to do with  
the parents: they (simple folk, bless them)

have always been married to each other  
and never divorced. Wilfully,

they have refused to break up his home  
and give him a loser's chance.

## Yet Another Father

I

Beating's out, says Mum, that's  
for the real First-timer.

You've got to learn  
from his escape: that's where

you're ahead  
with the ready-made family.

We can pool our experience,  
pick the man out

of his accident and keep  
him together long enough

to transplant, my dear. Roots,  
we'll supply from our

stock, and props to keep  
him vertical: bit of a strain

on the spine, but a man—  
a man must just learn his manners.

II

The family are proud  
of its success. We let

him out of sight as much  
as he likes; and now, says Mum

(always ahead, thinking  
of her home) now his apprenticeship

is over, he can have the good-  
conduct badge, the return ticket.

## Racial Prejudice Day

Makes you proud, yes,  
to be of this company.

We're not a thinking people,  
admit it. Or a feeling

people: we take things  
as they come. Perhaps, you'll say,

we're dead. that's a joke  
we can live with. You see

we've got this great asset  
(and it's truly national:

the polls agree) of recognizing  
the foreigner; the skin,

y'know, helps. We don't like  
him: what to do, what to do?

We can say the contrary  
and hope to be disbelieved.

But there's a thing of honour,  
our word. To keep our word,

then, and be true to instinct  
we must put to the vote

this decline into pigment.  
Takes the mind off Economic

gloom, and old farts drowning  
in their tepid morals pool. Yes,

we've carved a useful handle  
out of this race thing.

## Death in the Family

Lambchops turns up to work  
in a hired suit

and a taxi. he tiptoes  
to the clock past Alf

to dramatize this is no  
ordinary lateness. I hear,

says Bert, twinkling, changing  
the saw-blade, there's been

a death in the family.  
Shhh. Lambchops concedes

a man of Bert's racism. Bert  
and his clan have long 'eliminated

the impact of death  
on the community'. Yes, they have

their poets, too. Then youknowwho  
turned up and in their mentally-

unstable way confused funerals  
with parties. Death in the family, he says,

disowning the distant cousin  
so many non-letter-writing miles

away—but always good  
for an emergency. Well, one less

to bother about: he's gone  
home now. Impossible to know if Bert

hears above the shriek of his saw.  
At tea-break, the mood

is reflective: Bert plays down  
his points victory and Lambchops

anxiously adds up the cost  
of his funeral suit and taxi.

## Lambchops Has Black Thoughts

for the university is here  
and here tonight and most nights

after midnight at this vandalized  
bus-stop, this gutted telephone-

box; the trail of black thoughts  
singe and tear a path for him

flattening enemy barricades, old  
white elephants that obstruct.

Yet, forerunners failed  
in everything but to predict

him, trapped like this, a hurricane  
with due warning. Next morning

he traces a black path  
(was there fire, too?) backwards

from murder, from suicide; he tries  
to bully the black mood into

comedy; he rinses the black film  
from his countenance and looking

towards the light, becomes a negative.  
The storm has been eliminated.