Test Match Sabina Park

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Proudly wearing the rosette of my skin

Analysis: The metaphor "rosette of my skin" is central to the entire poem. A rosette is a badge of honour, a prize — so the persona's white skin is presented as a mark of distinction and privilege he wears with pride. The word "proudly" immediately establishes his arrogance and sense of racial superiority before he has even entered the ground.

I strut into Sabina

Analysis: The diction "strut" conveys arrogance in the persona's walk — he does not simply enter Sabina Park, he parades in. This word does important work in establishing the contrast with how he leaves at the end of the poem.

England boycotting excitement bravely

something badly amiss.

Analysis: These lines operate on two levels. On the surface, they are sarcastic — the English team is "boycotting excitement bravely" as though abstaining from thrilling play is an act of courage. The word "badly amiss" signals that something is deeply wrong. On a second level, this is a pun: the poet embeds the names of two actual England cricketers — Geoff Boycott and Dennis Amiss — into the line, directly ridiculing the two players responsible for the slow, defensive batting.

Cricket. Not the game they play at Lords,

Analysis: The abrupt, one-word opening "Cricket." creates a pause that signals contrast. What follows is the persona's recognition that this is a fundamentally different experience from the cricket he knows at Lord's — the prestigious English home of the sport, associated with restraint, formality, and quiet spectatorship.

The crowd- whoever saw a crowd

At a cricket match? –

Analysis: The rhetorical question is cutting in its irony. In England, cricket grounds are famously sparse and subdued. The persona's disbelief at seeing a genuine crowd reveals just how different the atmosphere at Sabina Park is — and how little he expected it.

are caged

vociferous partisans, quick to take offence.

Analysis: The diction "caged" suggests the crowd is kept behind barriers, but also carries a dehumanising undertone — these passionate supporters are described as though they are contained animals. "Vociferous partisans" means intensely noisy and fiercely biased supporters. The persona's language here reveals his condescension toward the West Indian crowd even as he is clearly unsettled by them.

England sixty eight for none at lunch.

'What sort o battin dat man?

Dem kaaan play cricket again,

praps dem should-a-borrow Lawrence Rowe!'

Analysis: The dialect of the Jamaican spectator is introduced here in sharp contrast to the persona's standard English, immediately establishing two distinct voices in the poem. The truncated words, phonetic spelling, and omitted letters of the Jamaican dialect dismiss and mock the Queen's English just as the speaker mocks the English team. The allusion to Lawrence Rowe — a prolific and celebrated West Indian batsman — deepens the insult: the crowd is suggesting England borrow a Caribbean player just to make the game watchable. The rhetorical question "What sort o battin dat man?" captures the general frustration of the crowd at the painfully slow score.

And on it goes, the wicket slow

as the batting and the crowd restless.

Analysis: The repetition of slowness — "wicket slow," "batting" slow — creates a sense of inertia and mounting tension. The crowd's restlessness is a pressure building throughout the poem.

'Eh white bwoy, how you brudders dem

does sen we sleep so? Me pay me monies

fe watch dis foolishness? Cho!'

Analysis: The crowd's frustration has now escalated and become personal. The address "white bwoy" is significant — the persona's "rosette," his proud badge of whiteness, earns him no respect here. He is simply grouped with "you brudders," made responsible for his countrymen's poor performance. The rhetorical questions "how you brudders dem does sen we sleep so?" and "Me pay me monies fe watch dis foolishness?" show the crowd's anger reaching its peak. "Cho!" is a Jamaican exclamation of disgust, a dismissal — the crowd has no patience left.

So I try to explain in my Hampshire drawl

about conditions in Kent,

about sticky wickets and muggy days

and the monsoon season in Manchester

Analysis: The irony here is multilayered. The persona retreats into the language of English cricket — "conditions," "sticky wickets," "muggy days" — as though weather can excuse the performance. The mention of "the monsoon season in Manchester" is absurd: monsoons are a South Asian weather phenomenon and do not occur in England. The persona is grasping desperately for an explanation, perhaps assuming his audience would not know the difference. "Sticky wickets" is also a double meaning — a cricket term for a difficult pitch, but also an idiom for a difficult, awkward situation, which is precisely what the persona is now in.

but fail to convince even himself.

Analysis: This short, deflating line is the poem's quiet turning point. The persona cannot even sustain his own excuses. His authority — intellectual, racial, national — has begun to collapse.

The crowd's loud 'busin drives me out

Analysis: "'Busin" (abusing) is the persona's adoption of West Indian dialect — a subtle but telling detail. Just as the English cricketers have been defeated on the field, the English language has lost ground in the stands. The crowd's verbal force physically expels him from the ground.

skulking behind a tarnished rosette

Analysis: The contrast with the opening is complete. "Strut" has become "skulking" — a word that implies cowardice and shame. The "rosette of my skin," once a proud badge, is now "tarnished" — dull, discoloured, stripped of its former lustre. His whiteness, once a source of pride, is now a mark of embarrassment that makes him conspicuous rather than distinguished.

somewhat frayed now but unable, quite,

to conceal a blushing nationality.

Analysis: "Frayed" continues the deterioration of the rosette — it is coming apart. "Blushing nationality" is a powerful closing image: his skin, reddened now not with pride but with shame, exposes him entirely. The contrast between "proudly wearing" at the start and "unable to conceal a blushing nationality" at the end captures the complete arc of the persona's humiliation.

About the poem

Author: Stewart Brown (b. 1951)

Context: Set at Sabina Park, Jamaica's historic cricket ground; reflects on race, colonial attitudes, and the reversal of power dynamics in a post-colonial Caribbean setting

Core idea: A white Englishman's racial pride is systematically dismantled by the energy of the West Indian crowd and the failure of his cricket team, exposing the fragility of colonial arrogance when stripped of its usual context.

- **Main themes**
- Race and racial pride
- Discrimination and colonial attitudes
- Culture clash
- Sport as a site of national identity
- Pride and humiliation
- Appearance vs. reality
- **Mood:** Tense and increasingly uncomfortable, ending in deflation and embarrassment
- **Tone:** Initially arrogant; shifts to defensive, then deeply ironic and humbled
- **Two distinct voices:** The Englishman speaks in formal standard English; the West Indian crowd speaks in Jamaican dialect — this contrast is central to the poem's meaning

🧠 **Remember**

- The poem moves from **pride ’discomfort ’defensiveness ’humiliation**
- The **rosette** is the poem's controlling symbol — track how it changes from stanza to stanza
- "Strut" ’"skulking" is the key **contrast** that bookends the poem; everything in between explains how the persona got there
- The **pun on Boycott and Amiss** is both humorous and pointed — the very names of the players become a critique
- The **Jamaican dialect** is not just flavour — it actively overpowers the persona's standard English, mirroring the power shift on the field
- "Monsoon season in Manchester" reveals the persona's condescension — and his desperation
- The poem is as much about **race** as it is about cricket — Sabina Park is a place where white privilege simply does not apply