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Caribbean Life in Literature

Shooting Star Review

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Shooting Star Productions, Inc.

Shooting Star Productions, Inc. exists to build awareness and appreciation for the Black experience via arts and cultural activities.

Shooting Star Productions, Inc. provides its services to all racial, ethnic, religious, age and economic populations, with its most specific and immediate work geared toward African-American youth and adults.

Shooting Star Productions, Inc.'s services include:

> Promoting the arts and artists (literary, visual and performing) whose work explores the Black experience; and
>
> Generating programs consistent with the Mission Statement that develop artistic capacity and cultural breadth. These programs can include production of a literary/cultural magazine, a system of Ceremonies, Commemorations and Conferences (such as Writers Conferences, Middle Passage Commemorations, Jubilee and Kwanzaa Celebrations and Literary Readings), and other arts activities and cultural events as opportunities arise.

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... language does really have a role to play here, certainly in the Caribbean. But it is an English which is not standard, imported, educated English, but that of the submerged, surrealist experience and sensibility, which has always been there and which is now increasingly coming to the surface and influencing the perception of contemporary Caribbean people.

History of the Voice

Edward Kamau Brathwaite
Barbados

brother wind

brother wind
talk
with
the air
tell her
not to
accept
pollution
tell her
to poison
all corruption
brother wind
please
give
the air
some
independence
so that
when,
when
my people
and
I
inhale
some
air
we can
also
inhale
...
some
independence.

Richard Hooi/Yeba Sehy
Willemstad, Curacao

Lessons and Memories of Caribbean Life in Literature

Issue 25 ★ Volume 7, Number 1

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PUBLISHER'S NOTE: This Caribbean Literature issue has been two years in waiting, and the collection of original work is wonderful! Dr. Brenda Berrian's efforts on the behalf of *Shooting Star Review's* readers and this opportunity to meet new writers from around the world are very much appreciated. Enjoy!

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ARTIST GUIDELINES

Sandra Gould Ford, Founder and Artistic Director, produced *Shooting Star Review's* first issue in the Spring of 1987. All visuals and literature are provided by free lance talent.

IMPORTANT

Include a cover letter and place artist's name with address and phone on every page. All text must be complete and typed (double space) on one side of plain, white, 8.5"x11" paper. Clear photocopies and computer printouts OK. Reprints and multiple submissions accepted.

Return envelopes with proper postage are required for responses. Do not send mail requiring signature.

FICTION: Up to 2,500 words. Fiction under 1,000 words encouraged. Up to three stories per quarter.

ESSAYS: Up to 2,500 words. Conversational voice preferred. Bibliographies accepted but no footnoting.

POETRY: Maximum 70 lines per poem. Up to six poems per quarter. One poem per page.

PAYMENT upon publication for 1st N.Amer. serial rights and as funds permit. Fiction and Essays: $30 to 1,000 words, $50 up to 2,500 words. Poetry: $10. Reprints are a third of standard rate. Artists also get 2 magazines (extras available at 40% discount). Visuals $8+.

RESPONSE TIME & RIGHTS: Response in 3 weeks on queries; 4 months on mss. Themes determine time to publication. All rights revert to author upon publication. If time permits, galleys are sent. Magazine is copyrighted.

Guest Editor

Dr. Brenda Berrian
Chair,
Department of Black Studies
University of Pittsburgh

Caribbean Literature

The oral and written literature of the Caribbean preserves the historical memories of a plantation system, colonialism, the fight for independence and the necessity of migration from one's island home. The language, whether it is Standard English or Creole, reflects the economic and political standings of the speakers and authors.

In "The Decision," Joan Riley of Jamaica speaks to the issue of male/female relationships within the context of employment in England and/or Canada. Through the medium of a letter the supportive network that exists among women is explored alongside the desire to maintain a long-term relationship with a man. At the end Bernice has to decide what is beneficial.

Jan Shinebourne of Guyana, author of "Hopscotch," depicts characters who are products of a socio-historical experience. The initial childhood friendship between Jackie and Carmen undergoes a strain when they are separated in London and Georgetown. Shinebourne is concerned about the consequences of migration upon the two friends. Each one misreads her actual situation and is unable to talk honestly about a lack of self-fulfillment in England and Guyana.

The strength of love for extended family members is the dominant theme of "Matelot," written by Ingrid Mundari of Trinidad. The child narrator recalls her summer stays at her

Great Aunt Mam's home in the fishing village of Matelot. Although Mam has died and the narrator has physically left the island, the summer memories of the village and her aunt sustain her.

Paul Palmer, author of "The Ocean Is the Shadow of the CottonTree" who has based his story in Jamaica, speaks to the issue of what constitutes manhood. Wray, the young boy, is told by his father that a man neither cries nor allows anyone to see his true internal feelings. Clinging to this belief, a tragedy occurs which leaves Wray wondering whether or not his father gave the proper advice and took the issue of machismo too far.

Richard Hooi, known also as Yeba Sehy of Curacao, Netherlands Antilles, writes in both Papiamentu and English with the rhythmical language of instruments. The poem "Brother Wind" looks at the possibility of independence. Merle Collins writes about the changing mood of the Grenadian people about Maurice Bishop and the New Jewel Movement in "Just Suddenly So."

Beryl Gilroy traveled to England from Guyana in the 1950s and proceeded to write about her adjustments in *Black Teacher*. In the essay "On Living the Third Age" she writes with great sensitivity and wit about the bodily changes that occur once a person is called a "senior citizen." To complete this issue, it was decided to review three books that were published in 1991 and 1992, the first by the Belizean writer, Zee Edgell; the second by the Trinidadian, Lawrence Scott:and the third by the Sint Maartener Lasana Sekou. *In Times Like These* is Edgell's second novel that examines the adjustment of returned migrant to Belizean society. *Witchbroom,* Lawrence Scott's first novel, is entrenched in Caribbean mythology and history before the independence of Trinidad & Tobago. Finally *Quimbe* is Lasana Sekou's third collection of poems which deplores the negative impact and exploitation of the islanders by multinational corporations at the expense of tourism.

I hope that you will enjoy this special issue on "Lessons and Memories of Caribbean Life in Literature."

★

The Ocean *is the Shadow of the* Cotton Tree

Paul Palmer
Jamaica

was crossing the street when I saw him, the lone cyclist in a sea of yellow cabs. He was dressed in typical cyclist gear - helmet, tight shorts and fingerless gloves. It was his leg that caught my attention, for he only had one. Yet there he stood in the ocean of yellow, seemingly oblivious to his handicap, his face a mask behind which he could pretend not to notice the stares and looks of pity that must frequently be directed at him. But his eyes betrayed him. They were bloodshot and weary, refractory pools of pain, seemingly haunted by the ghost of a leg and memories of unrestrained suffering from a not so distant, clouded past. He didn't know it, but he was my

brother. We were kindred spirits, related not by blood but by experience and a common, resilient misery.

He noticed me looking at him and for a moment our eyes connected. I thought I saw recognition but it was a mirage. He didn't understand. For in the brief moment of visual contact, his expression delivered the harsh rebuttal of a stranger whose space had been invaded:

"Shit, here we go again. Leave me alone. Don't look at me, I don't need your pity."

The light changed and he rode off.

It is never that easy for me. I can never ride off into the future. Invariably, I travel to the past, to revisit and to re-examine. Nor is it ever my choice to go back to this far away place, thousands of miles and many, many years away. This was a place of youth and innocence and fairy-tale happiness. But the youth, the innocence and the happiness were now a distant memory sustained only by an insistent, lingering pain, a ghost from the graveyard of my past whose sole intent was to ensure that misery and doubt would be my lifelong companions. In a dream-like trance,I relive the past, not to perform constructive analysis that may help rid me of my albatross, but merely to wallow in misery.

This time I ended up in the backyard, sitting under a mango tree laden with fruit of every hue. There were the small, green baby mangoes as well as yellow-red ripe mangoes trying at once to baskin the aging sunlight and avoid the unwanted attention and yes, affection, of varied parasites, including me.

It was late afternoon, 5 o'clock maybe. In the distance, across the valley, smoke spiraled from an outdoor logwood fire as somefarmer's wife tended to her family's evening meal. The air, too, was laden: with the smell of mango, the sweet aroma of burning logwood and the motion and songs of birds flying home to nest.

I turned to identify the approaching footsteps. My father sat down next to me and for a while we both said nothing. That morning he had shot our dog and now I didn't particularly care for his company.

I got up to leave but he put a restraining hand on my shoulder.

"Wait a minute." He paused as I sat down. "The dog was in a lot of pain, he was beginning to rot. I had to do it. This way he will never again feel pain and will sleep forever and ever. He was a great dog, and I am sorry I had to do it but it was for the best."

➠

"You didn't seem sorry, you didn't cry or anything."

"Wray." He called me by my name. Usually it was "Boy" or "Son." "Feeling sorry is a very personal thing. You don't have to wear your sorrow for others to see. I carry my sorrow inside where nobody can see it and when I am alone, if I want to, I can let it out, but only when I am alone."

"Why?"

"Because you should never let anyone see you bare, never let them know what's inside. I know this is hard for you to understand, but someday, when you are a man, you will. What's inside is your real strength, and you must never reveal how strong you really are."

I had heard that line before. He didn't like me playing with my friends either, for the same reason. To my father's way of thinking, the physical kind of play that I liked, served only to reveal your strength to people you were sure to one day fight, so why give them an edge.

"Would you like to go fishing?"

I did not answer immediately. This was a real treat. My father did not often ask me to go fishing, in fact, my father did not often ask me to do anything.

"Mr. Banzie is letting me borrow his boat and I would like to take you and Danny out past the lagoon." Danny was my older brother and my best friend. We often dreamed of going beyond the reefs of the lagoon to the deep ocean where the men went. Father always said we weren't old enough.

"Okay, I'll go."

I tried to get up and again he stopped me.

"Wray, I'm sorry O.K., I really am, and I want you to know that."

I nodded.

"So, can we shake on it?"

I grabbed my father's outstretched hand and, not daring to look him in the eye, quickly let go, got up and walked away.

We left the house at dusk with a pail of bait (worms), a flashlight, a bag of sandwiches and assorted fishing equipment.

"Take care of my sons" Mother said half-jokingly as we left.

Soon we arrived at the beach. Jah Banzie's (everyone but father called him by his rastafarian title) boat, a canoe, was painted red, with green and gold borders, and was

turned upside-down, on rollers, so it wouldn't collect water if it rained. The boat had been chiseled from the trunk of a silver-cotton tree, from which the very best canoes were made, over a period of about four weeks. Local fishermen took great pride in their ability to create canoes from solid wood and used no tar or glue or any other kind of water repellant on the boat, believing such precautionary action to be unnecessary as the wood was never less than three inches thick in any spot. Borrowing anything from anyone did not come easily to my father; borrowing from Jah Banzie must have been particularly galling as he did not hold that gentleman in high regard. It was his faith, his constant talk of being one with nature and his rejection of anything resembling modern technology. But he did it for me. Jah Banzie was the only fisherman he knew well enough, and he figured that taking me fishing was certain to change my mood and perhaps I might then forgive him.

It occurred to me that I could not remain angry with him much longer.

We turned the boat over and put our equipment in and pushed it to the water's edge. Father told me to sit in the middle and sent Danny to the front, with a paddle. He pushed off with a running jump, barely getting his feet wet as he expertly swung over the side.

Though Danny relished the thought of helping Father paddle, it was the thought that he liked and not the deed. Paddling was hard work and after a while he stopped and we talked about catching crayfish instead. We frequently caught crayfish in the river near our house by removing the rocks under which they lived with one hand while blocking their path and trapping them with the other. The trick was to avoid being bitten, as they had huge claws, the larger of the pair often as long as their bodies which, for a medium-sized crayfish, was about 3 inches long. Sometimes when they bit me, I would pull my hand away with such force that both claws would get ripped away from the crayfish's body. Fighting the tears brought on by the embedded pincers, I would watch the crayfish swim away and wonder how it would defend itself in a fight with other crayfish; and I would keep my hand in the water, my head down until the tears dried, so that Danny wouldn't notice and tell Dad, and quietly remove the claws from my hand.

We had both put our hands over the side, allowing the water to course through our fingers. Father told us to take our fingers out of the water; to a shark or barracuda ➠

attracted by the splashing sound, our fingers might seem like weakened prey, he said. We quickly obliged. Father told us that as young men, he and two or three friends would attract sharks by dragging the body of a freshly beheaded chicken in the water. The chicken would be held by hand and as the shark came up to feed, he would quickly let the chicken go. After swallowing the chicken, the shark would attempt to dive and in so doing would expose its tail for a few seconds. The idea was to grab the tail and keep the shark in a vertical position long enough for the shark to drown, anywhere from three to five minutes.

Danny and I listened in awe. Never had we imagined our father to be so brave. It was easy to picture him standing perfectly balanced in the small boat, holding the shark by its coarse tail,calm, unflinching, showing no more emotion than if he were steadying a firelog for chopping. I watched him as he resumed his stoic silence, paddling mechanically, expressionless. The moon was starting to come out, casting a silvery dye on the sea. There was no wind and all was quiet, even the sound the oars made was muffled.

"Are you boys having fun?"

"Yes, lots," we both replied.

The coastline had disappeared into the night. We were quite alone with nothing but the moon, a few stars and a still, eerily quiet ocean that seemed less like company than distant, indifferent spectators.

Danny was the first to notice.

"My feet are getting wet."

Sure enough, there was water on the floor of the canoe.

"Boys, empty the bait on the floor and use the pail to bail the water out."

Not much thought was given to where the water might have come from. We all assumed that Danny and I had inadvertently been the culprits. As the night progressed, Danny caught three Mullets, Dad three Snappers and two Mullets, and I caught one measly Jack. During that time, about two hours, we had bailed three times. Dad decided we should start heading home and began rowing.

"How do you know which direction to go in, Dad?"

"By watching the moon. On our way out it was to the west, so now we must head east."

Danny and I got up to exchange seats. As we maneuvered around each other within the narrow confines of the boat, I lost my balance and grabbed on to Danny. We fell heavily on the floor.

"Damn it you, this is a bloddy canoe. It will flip over. Both of you sit down and don't move again."

The water was coming in much faster now, faster than we could bail it out. The crack at the bottom was discernible and land was but a concept, an amorphous cloud of darkness in the eastern distance.

I could not see my father's face but I imagined it to be without expression. There would be no eye contact between us. He would expect me to be strong, expressionless. I would try. Danny said nothing but his face, blocked from Dad's vision by my head, was lined with worry.

When Father finally admitted to himself that the boat could not be saved, he jumped overboard and tried to flip it over, yelling at Danny and I to jump. It was too late though, the boat had too much water in it and slowly, without fanfare, sank with Danny and I still sitting quietly, me without expression.

I sat in the boat and watched the surface disappear. For awhile, I could see the moon and the brightly lit surface but soon I was completely enveloped in darkness as, together, the boat, Danny and I headed for the bottom. I was not at all concerned and found myself thinking, or dreaming, of the flowers in the courtyard of our church and singing in the choir.

There was a blur of motion and then Danny's seat was empty. Father must have rescued him. He wouldn't have known which one of us it was and he probably just grabbed the first body he touched.

"So this is it. Father can't possibly save both of us, and it is well that he saved Danny and not me. Danny was older, bright and had a great future. And everyone liked him."

There was another blur and I felt myself being lifted to the surface.

I thought my lungs would burst. I was coughing and choking at the same time, and looking all around for Danny.

"Where's Danny?" I said. "Where's Danny?"

"Wray, try to float, I have to go down again." He let me go and I promptly sank.

It felt like a minute before he found me and brought me back to the surface. This time I was too weak to cough and felt close to passing out. Father was screamin, "God, don't do this to me! Don't do this to me!" ➡

He flipped me over on my back, the crook of his arm below my chin and headed for the shore, all the while looking hopefully, desperately for some sign of Danny. At first he shouted Danny's name and "Don't do this to me" in alternate, intermittent bursts. In time the shouts became a plaintive whisper, sounding almost as though he were blaming Danny. "Danny. Don't do this to me. Danny don't..."

I could see the moon, the silvery sea, but no Danny. For a moment I felt as though we had been stalked, pounced upon and eaten alive by the beast that was the silvery sea, condemning us as it were, to a life in purgatory. And how the moon that had been a distant spectator now seemed calculating, and satisfied, like the eye of this menacing beast. But deep down, I knew that it wasn't true. The moon, the sea, they were still spectators, looking indifferently at the outcome of human error. The fault was properly my father's; he knew this and so did I. I also knew that the error would not have been made had father not been trying so hard to please me.

After a time, a long time, we reached the shore. Father walked along the beach, back and forth, staring into the ocean, hoping even then to trade his life for Danny's. Soon, looking up to the sky, he started screaming: "You could have taken me. Take me, give me back my son." He went on like this for about 10 minutes then collapsed like an empty sack, face down in the sand and, for the first time, I saw my father cry.

Time stopped on that beach. I watched as my poor father, heartbroken, wishing he could give his life for Danny's, was transformed. The scene evoked an image of tremendous loss, as a lifetime's effort at being a role model of strength and dignity above all else was reduced to a sobbing heap of helplessness and need. And, as before in the boat, I just sat there and watched him fade before my eyes.

My father died that year. Mother sold the house, and we moved to this country. We tried hard to live normal lives and put the past behind us. She never remarried or dated anyone. We never spoke about the sea, Danny or Dad. Danny, it turned out, was the luckiest of all. He was forever in a state of painlessness. And me? Well, for the rest of my life I would carry Danny's memory and how he died so that I might live; I would also carry a cloud of doubt and fear that Dad died not only because of the unbearable pain of

losing his first born, but also because the more he thought about Danny, or looked at me, the more he became convinced: that night in the water, he had made the wrong choice.

Every once in a while in the sanctuary of my room, in dream or in thought, I still see my father. And every time I see him I try to ask about my greatest fear of all, but I can't. So I tell him that I understand, that Danny does too. Then I tell him how I have tried to be like him, promising him that I will always make him proud; and I tell him that should I ever have a son, I will tell him about my father and what he had taught me about strength and courage. Who knows, maybe the ghost is my friend, the spirit of my father teaching me the rituals of manhood. Again and again I try to believe this, to accept it, hoping that with faith the misery and doubt will go away so that I, like the cyclist, can finally ride off into the future.

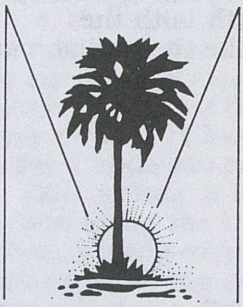
In Britain, Caribbean writers of my generation..., all have different degrees of attachment to the Caribbean. All of our branches have developed, and to some extent continue to develop and grow, in Britain, but our roots are in Caribbean soil.

"Living and Writing in the Caribbean: An Experiment"

Caryl Phillips
St. Kitts

Matelot

Ingrid Mundari
Trinidad & Tobago



am's dead."

I looked at my mother uncomprehendingly.

"I received a letter from Aunt Christine today. Mam's dead. She died about a week ago."

"What happened?"

"Chris said that she'd been sick for awhile, and they persuaded her to close up the house and go live with them in the city. When her condition worsened, she was moved to a hospital, but she refused to stay and she went back to Matelot."

"Who took care of her?"

"Dean and Angelica were at the house. They did what they could."

"What did she die of?"

My mother shook her head. "Old age I guess. They buried her in the churchyard at Matelot."

They would have had to. No other place would have been as fitting. It was many years since I had been to Matelot, or seen Mam for that matter. I tried to imagine the house shuttered, the weeds growing up around the front steps and through the cracks in the porch, the garden overgrown and tangled. The branches of the hibiscus tree that always needed pruning, must even now be covering the windows, shutting out the light in the room where I used to sleep.

Mam was my great aunt. Actually, she was my Aunt Christine's mother-in-law, and all my childhood summers were spent with her at Matelot. Matelot, the word in French means sailor, is a little fishing village on the northern tip of

our island. Sailors would stop there before continuing down the coast to the main portion the city, some 90 miles away.

From the leeward side of the island where the ships came in, the first thing one saw of Matelot was the church, built as it was upon a rocky crag, overlooking the ocean. Its spire was not very high, since it had been built more for sturdiness as a result of the winds that whipped around the bluff during the hurricane season. It gave the impression of tallness however, because of the way it gleamed whitely in the sun.

Every morning, just after first light, the priest administered a blessing to the fishermen before they set out for the day's catch. He would stand on the jetty and intone a prayer, whilst sprinkling them with holy water, as they sat heads bowed in the boats which were moored alongside. If I got up early enough to go to Mass with Mam I was able to see the ceremony, for we would stand a little way back from the sea wall against which the waves broke, scattering droplets of fine spray into the air, and watch as the blessing was administered. The water was always a clear, sparkling blue, and the hem of the priest's crisp, white robe would be soaked by the time he was finished. The fishermen would sit silently in their bobbing boats, and after the blessing, cast off one by one. I often wondered how they could tell the difference between the seaspray and the holy water, for it seemed that they got a great deal more of one than the other. I was not always lucky enough to see this because most of the time I preferred to sleep in and go to a later service if I went to weekday Mass at all.

Mam was always up at the earliest light, and she went around the house rousing the children so that they would go to Mass with her. My response to her "Get up or you'll be late for church,"was to burrow as deeply as I could under the covers. When I asked her why I couldn't just go to Mass on Sundays, she'd say, "Christ said to suffer the little children to come unto him. So get up, it's time to go to Christ." And with that she'd throw open the windows to the cool morning air, and go into my cousin Patrick's room to repeat the procedure.

The only alternative to this was to sleep at Tante Jane's house, which nestled in the hollow at the foot of the hill on which Mam's house stood. Tante Jane and Mam did not look much like sisters. Tante Jane was small and quick with lively, dark eyes. She was always ready with a joke or a playful comment, and would readily pinpoint the humor ➠

in any situation. Mam was taller, with a broad, stern face, gray eyes, and waist-length silver-white hair that she kept pinned in a neat bun at the back of her head, and which she would only loosen in the evenings before bed, when she would sit in her room brushing it out. The rare times that she allowed me to watch her I would marvel at its length and luster,for it seemed to have a life of its own. It would crackle as she passed the brush through in long even strokes. Then she would plait it into a single, thick braid, and put on her nightcap.

This was generally my cue to leave, because it signified she was getting ready for her evening prayers. I could have stayed if I wished, but Mam's prayers were long and involved and seemed to go on forever. The couple of times I did stay I fell asleep before she was finished, which irked her considerably. She told me I was just like the unworthy disciples who fell asleep during Christ's vigil in the Garden of Gethsemane. Was it asking too much, she wanted to know, to give the Lord a little of my time? So from then on to keep the peace, I left her room before she began her prayers.

In all the summers I stayed at Mam's, I only slept at Tante Jane's twice, and this was primarily because I found her house too full of noises. There was a thick copse of trees that gave way to a densely forested area directly in back of her house, and all kinds of rustlings, hootings and scratchings emanated from there throughout the night. I felt a lot safer on the hill at Mam's, where the only thing I heard before drifting off to sleep was the sound of waves crashing against the sea wall below.

Mam went to Mass every morning, and she would always walk the three miles to and from church. After she had her morning coffee, she would go into the garden and pick the freshest buds, still wet with dew, and take them to church to place on the altar. She'd set out, the flowers in a small, wicker basket, which she carried on her right arm, back straight, head slightly bowed, dressed in one of the long pleated skirts and short-sleeved cotton blouses she so favored. She walked with an even, unhurried step, and would soon be out of sight at the first bend in the road.

I once asked her why she went to church every day and she told me it was the duty of everyone left behind to pray for the souls of those who had died.

"But every day?" I persisted.

"Yes."

"But only people who were really bad need to have so much prayers said for them."

She looked at me appraisingly. "If by that you mean was your uncle a bad man, the answer is no. At least, not intentionally."

"But... ."

She cut me short with, "We're all weak vessels, and we need God's help to strengthen us."

This sparked my curiosity about my Great Uncle, for I never really knew him. At best, he was a shadowy figure made up of other people's recollections. He was reputed to have been a stern, proud man, who had come to our island from Europe around the turn of the century. There was a lot of land to be had back then, for those who were willing to invest the back-breaking labor necessary to turn virgin soil into farmland, and to fight the never-ending battle of encroachment against the rain forest.

At first, he lived in a little lean-to, working almost 18 hours a day, clearing out areas of the bush for cocoa and banana crops. Later on, he was able to hire a couple of men to help him prepare the land for planting. He married Mam and she helped him build their house, hauling brick and mortar up the incline to the top of the hill where the house now stood. They had eight children, one of whom died in infancy.

I once asked Mam how she'd come to marry my Great Uncle.

"We courted."

"Was he handsome?"

"Handsome is as handsome does."

I mulled this over. It didn't seem to be leading anywhere.

"Did he bring you chocolates and things when you were courting?"

She was kneeling in the vegetable garden where she had been digging up onions, a piece of cloth beneath her knees to protect her skirt. She transferred her attention from the onions to me. I shifted uncomfortably under her gaze.

"No." She said quietly, her eyes still on mine. "He didn't bring any chocolates."

She handed me a small wooden bowl full of onions.

"Take these to Angelica. She's in the kitchen."

I ran back to the house in a series of zig-zagging steps, ducking my head to avoid the overhanging branches of the mango and guava trees that lined the unpaved pathway to the kitchen door. There was a wasp's nest somewhere ➠

about, and I spent a lot of my time trying to keep out its way as much as possible. I hated insects, which everyone, even my cousin Pat who was also from the city, kept telling me was the sign of a city girl. I ran headlong into my Uncle Dean who was going down to the bay to see if the fishing boats had come in, and who promised to wait for me so that we could go down together.

Of all my uncles, Dean, and his brother Norris who was also my godfather, were my favorites. Norris was big and fair, with the same gray eyes as Mam, and had a deep, rumbling voice. Dean, however, was small and wiry. He had crisp, dark hair streaked red from the sun, laughing green eyes, and even white teeth. If a group of us went out for a stroll, I would be sure to walk beside him. When we went crabbing, I would hold his pail. If he were thirsty, I would happily run into the kitchen for the biggest, coldest glass of water I could find. I was often prepared to spend my summers fetching and carrying all day long if he'd wanted.

There was a huge coconut tree in front of the house, and some mornings Dean would climb it to get a few for breakfast. I would watch him from the porch as he hung amid the leafy fronds, seemingly suspended in mid-air, deftly wielding the cutlass so that the coconuts would come plopping down to the ground below. And then with effortless grace, he would shin back down the knobby trunk, landing with a barely perceptible thud.

I could talk to him about anything, and it was to him I put my question about my Great Uncle.

"What was your dad like? I mean, what were he and Mam like when they were young?"

"Well, we didn't get to see him much. He spent a lot of time up in the cocoa fields. He had a little house up there, you know the cocoa house where he did the drying, I've taken you up there before. He used to work very hard."

"When did he come home?"

"Oh, about three or four times a week. But most of the time it was late at night, and we'd already be asleep."

"Was he nice?"

"He'd wallop us a lot."

"That's not nice."

"You see, when he was home for a day or two, he'd hear about all the bad things we did during the time he wasn't there, and we'd get one general punishment for the whole week."

I frowned. "I'm glad I didn't know him."

"It wasn't that bad. But, I remember one time," he chuckled,"your godfather spent the whole day fishing up at Sands Point with some of his friends instead of going to school. Pa heard about it and Norris knew he was in a lot of trouble. When Pa got home the following night, he woke Norris up and told him to go outside."

"And he went?"

"There wasn't much else he could do. But," Dean was laughing, "he'd put on about five or six shirts under his nightshirt, so that when Pa hit him it didn't hurt as much."

I could imagine my godfather doing this, but I still didn't think it was very funny.

"Didn't Mam try to stop your dad?"

"She couldn't interfere."

"But didn't she do anything?" I demanded.

His face was expressionless when he replied. "She cried."

The boats had not yet come in when we got to the bay, so I went to paddle in the small estuary while Dean chatted with several other people on the beach. There was a small, swiftly flowing stream that formed a shallow pool where it merged with the sea, and at low tide this became a sandbar. But when the tide was in, it filled the slight depression at the mouth of the stream with cool limpid water, through which one could see bright orange and gray crawfish skimming along the grainy white sand on the bottom.

I loved going down to watch the boats come in. For a brief space the beach would be filled with people who came to make purchases from the boats. I would look over the fish with an air of knowledge that I hoped disguised my inability to recognize the difference between one type and another, and when Dean asked my advice, as he invariably did, I'd point to something that didn't look too glassy-eyed and then say, "But you choose. You know what Mam likes best."

Sometimes Mam would come down to the beach and make her way slowly from boat to boat, inspecting each catch before she settled on one particular offering. The fishermen would greet her respectfully as she approached. She knew them all by name, and would pause a while with each, asking about their families and their day's haul; commiserating if the catch was small, and congratulating if it had been a good one.

To those with whom I was unfamiliar, I was introduced as "Louisa's child, Christine's niece," and the looks of curiosity would turn to smiles of recognition. ➠

"I remember your mother," or "You should have seen your aunt the first summer she ever came up here. Skinny little thing, just like you. But the sea air and the good food fattened her up. You city people need to come down here more."

Since my aunt had always been small boned and rather delicate, I could never see where the fattening up had taken place, and I once said so. Mam waited until we got back to the house and then took me into the empty kitchen.

"There is no reason for you to be rude to your elders."

"I wasn't being rude. I was only..."

"It's rude when a child talks back like that to an older person, and you should break yourself of that habit as soon as possible."

I stared at the wasp hovering above her left shoulder. She gave no sign that she was even aware of its presence.

"Those people were just being kind, it's their way. You had no business talking to them the way you did."

She looked at me levelly. "Do you understand?"

I was getting fidgety. If the wasp flew over in my direction, I was prepared to bolt from the kitchen, no matter what the consequences.

I shifted my gaze to meet her eyes. "Yes Mam. May I go now?"

She inclined her head in the direction of the doorway and I sidled out, giving the wasp a wide berth. It was a hot drowsy afternoon and in an effort to keep out of Mam's way, at least temporarily, I went to my room and read for a while before falling asleep.

I was awakened by the sound of laughter and my Uncle Dean's voice coming from the back of the house. I stumbled sleepily to the porch and stood in the doorway watching the group of people sitting around in the yard. I stretched, yawning, and my right hand brushed against something that felt like rough cardboard. The next moment I was surrounded by a cloud of angry wasps. There was a nest tucked away just inside the upper-right-hand corner of the door jamb, where it had remained hidden from view. Until now.

I screamed, flailing about wildly. Dean rushed over, picked me up and ran down the hill into the sea, wading out until the water was shoulder high. I was sobbing uncontrollably. He soothed me, telling me to relax and immerse myself in the water, as it would cool the stinging and ease the throb. Then he brought me back into the

house, where for the next hour or so, he painstakingly removed the stingers from my arms, neck and shoulders. Then he got rid of the nest.

I went to bed early that evening and lay tossing and turning, feeling my skin hot against the coolness of the sheets. The door to my room opened slowly and Mam entered carrying one of the small oil lamps. She set it down on the night table, and from the pocket of her skirt produced a little white jar. She drew back the bedclothes and proceeded to gently rub some of the ointment on to my inflamed and broken skin. Her hands were cool and soft, and as she lightly moved them across my shoulders and down my arms, she crooned softly.

I fell asleep with the sound of her crooning and the crash of the waves below, mingling together in my head.

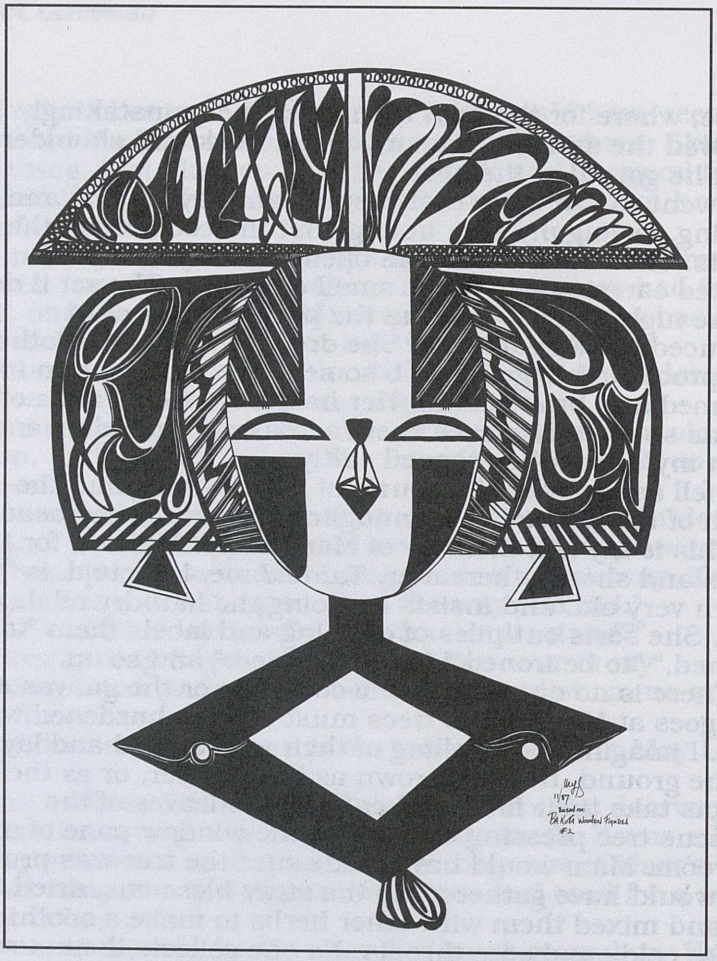
This is my last memory of Mam and of Matelot, for I left the island shortly thereafter. Tante Jane, I am told, is grown very old, and insists on doing the laundry all day long. She sorts out piles of clothing and labels them "to be washed," "to be ironed," "to be mended," and so on.

There is no one to pick the coconuts or the guavas and mangoes at Mam's. The trees must be over burdened with fruit. I imagine them falling of their own accord and laying on the ground, turning brown as they wither, or as the insects take their fill. And I can see the leaves of the hibiscus tree pressing up against the window pane of my old room. Mam would have made sure the tree was pruned. She would have gathered up the stray blossoms, dried them out and mixed them with other herbs to make a soothing tea for colds and sore throats. No one collects them now. There is no need to.

Like many migrants in Britain, my happiest memories of Jamaica override the cruelty of poverty, and the hostility of life in Britain. I hold onto the warm memories of belonging. The material poverty of my childhood has taught me many lessons: the value of having plenty (relatively) and the gift of sharing emotionally and physically... My childhood experiences provided me with the tools to overcome pain and develop as a whole person.

"Gal... You Come From Foreign"

Claudette Williams
Jamaica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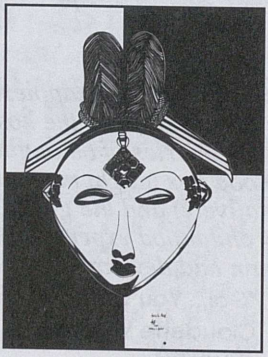
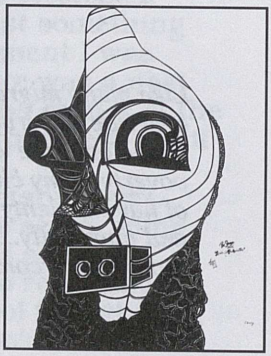


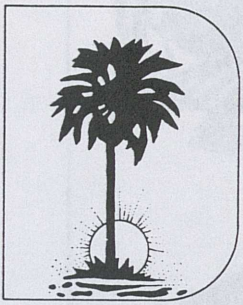


Marcia Spidell

Shooting Star Review is honored to present Marcia Spidell's art on these pages and the cover of the "Lessons and Memories of Caribbean Life in Literature" issue. Ms. Spidell was especially chosen by Dr. Berrian, this issue's Guest Editor, because the pen and ink abstract drawings capture bodily movements, the natural swaying of a palm tree, facial expressions, and the African construction of masks. What is abstract is her technique of utilizing the pen and ink. While doodling in a high school classroom, Ms. Spidell became entranced with the fact that one dot could develop into a major picture. A freelance artist, who has designed posters and flyers, Marcia Spidell's work has been selected by the jurors of Images IV-VI for the annual October exhibition of "Images from Pittsburgh Black Artists" held on the University of Pittsburgh campus.

The Decision

Joan Riley
Jamaica



Dear Meelie,

Thank you for your few lines regarding the shortages you having and sorry I don't have a blessed thing to send give you from things so hard up here too. I sorry to hear that bad-minded cousin of mine scandalizing my name all over Town but I will at least let you know the truth from you brother to ask the question.

It was May when I reached the decision. I suppose it was because of my birthday - you know the way it always panic me these days. All I can think of is how the years slipping past and I don't have one single achievement to show for it. The minute that month creep into double figures I start looking for a out, making resolutions - like when we were children back in Jamaica and would pick a hibiscus leaf, spit on one side and flip it over to see the new leaf really turn.

Last year I was feeling real bad. Tansy was quick to talk about mid-life crisis when I was fool enough to mention it. You know how that sister of mine so bad-minded. Not that she in any position to talk, she stub her toe on forty, years back, and would still be telling everybody she was twenty-one if her children never get wise to it and start to move her along. As I say, May is not my month for is just in the middle of it cousin Pearl decide to inflict herself on me. That is one woman can rile me without even trying. Just the first glimpse of the pink cotton frock, and the righteous set of her head and my teeth get on edge.

To think I manage to keep Cousin Pearl out of England for the ten years I living here, then one day she go win competition and the next thing I know she on my doorstep

insisting that I pay the taxi off, as the man won't take her money. Why me eh? Five sisters she have in England, and is me she land on.

You see how the woman wicked thought, is not train station she coming from. She take taxi come clear from Heathrow airport to my doorstep. Child a did embarrass! Is me neighbor a did have to borrow the forty-five pounds from, and clear till now a hiding in case she ask me for it back. Yes man Cousin Pearl...You would think somebody would warn her Jamaica money come in like toy paper once it step foot in a foreign.

If you did see the taximan face! You know a did have to tip him the way him vex.

Isn't money the very dickens though? I know I getting the fifty pounds from the social welfare, but you know how London price high, after a buy food and pay the bill them, is scarce enough leave for the laundry, and I can't do without my little smokes.

The only thing a did glad for, was that Carey was over by her auntie for the first two weeks Pearl visiting. A did forget just how into religion that woman always was. Man, I see church more in the weeks she was here, than in my full ten years in England. And if it wasn't that, it was the prayers. Five o'clock a morning the woman get up. You imagine that!

All the time she a pray for my soul, me good fe box her down. Is like hell come a my yard and settle in to stay.

I suppose that's why I did decide to do something drastic. That along with the Gypsy who knock on the door, and I let in to annoy cousin Pearl. You know how I don't have much time for them since that one hawk up a spit, right in my doorway when I was down in Brixton...just true I never buy her clothes peg them.

Well anyway, from she come in she get difficult, you know like how the higgler them stay, the one them that line the downtown plaza back home. From you notice them, you better buy or run and the way them curse; you too shame to lift your head.

In the end a decide to let her tell my fortune to get her out, and move that righteous **I told you so** look from Pearl the sooner.

A did nearly change my mind when the woman insist I cross her palm with five pounds.

Five pounds! You imagine that. Cousin Pearl she start sing **he leadeth me** -- and talk bout the devil's work; and the way the Gypsy woman eye up my carpet make me ➠

nervous seeing as I don't finish pay for it yet. The minute she start clear her throat I quick time take the money out of Carey's piggy bank, where a trying to save to pay the neighbor back. You can imagine how Pearl did go on!

Well a was a bit disappointed when all the Gypsy tell me for my big, big five pounds, was that a was to travel. A did want to ask for the money back, but a never want her to put curse on my head.

Then I got to thinking. Ten years I in this England and I don't go nowhere, and me always wanting to fly in aeroplane a next time.

Of course Pearl did had to spoil it. By this time she was clutching her Bible like she expecting the devil any minute. But you know how that woman faas. She can't let anything past by, till she look at every corner of it.

"Eem...you mean she going take Holiday or she going travel like when you eyebrow them meet?" she asked in that slow suspicious way she have when she not believing what she hearing.

"That I can't tell you love, it ain't clear you know, but I can say you've have a disappointment am I right..." Boy that Gypsy woman was sharp as nail, cause I swear she never understand a word cousin Pearl say.

I opened my mouth to reassure her, noticing the way she was looking at that unpaid carpet again, but Cousin Pearl was faster.

"But what bout this travel thing?" she kept insisting. I mean it was alright for her, she didn't have to break her back to meet the H.P. repayments. From she got the bit between her teeth, no way she was letting go until she was satisfied.

"A could give you a longer reading for ten pounds," the woman assured me, studiously ignoring Pearl's inquisitive face.

Well that was it for me, I realize time hard, but $10! Didn't this woman realize some of us live on Income Support. Cost of living going up for everybody not just she.

I just resign myself to clean that carpet; but she must a lose interest, cause she did leave without no trouble.

Pearl hardly gave me enough time to close the front door on the woman;

"You should a neva give her that five dollar," she just give me a bad look.

She'd been in England three weeks but refused to stop thinking dollars and cents. I would a tell her of course, but

one look at her face and I let that pass. Pearl in a crusading mood, is not a woman to cross.

"Why not?" I just risk that question, because I know it would be worst if I did play dumb.

"Yu don't see say she a tief you...she can't tell the future."

You should a see the way she look smug. There and then I decide, I going to travel care not what.

"You wrong man. Them Gypsy can see things for true."

You know how Pearl get me already. She did stay like that, from we was in grade school up Mountain District. If she feel say she right she come in like a one woman broadcasting corporation.

Pearl top lip curl right up, till it nearly meet her nose; you know like when white people come in like them smell something bad...God alone know which part she learn that from all the way down in country.

Hear her now, "What you going travel on. You can scarce find fare for the tube train, much less a go get on aeroplane." I tell you child the way she go on, you'd think aeroplane come in like bus to her...and is competition she win make her even see the inside once.

"Bruno asked me to come to the States and I said, 'yes.'"

Pearl's face was a picture, like she didn't know whether to laugh or call me a liar outright. I suppose you couldn't wrong her, after the way I always running down that long foot boy. I certainly wasn't telling her how a did laugh when him invite me to America; but a know Bruno and he would forgive me that if a change my mind.

"Things must a bad in England, or you must desperate." Trust Pearl to push me in a anger though you would a admire the way I keep that temper of mine from coming out.

"I happen to be in love." I told her with all my dignity and you know the woman bare face enough to laugh? She throw back her head and give one loud belly laugh.

"Is that what you call it?" she said, wiping her eyes on her sleeve, "Must be the big Doctor front a him name you love...cause that is where him start and finish and a wonder if him never make that up too."

I did have to tell meself is jealous Pearl jealous, "You have to have brains to get a doctorate," I did just keep insisting to spite her, "and is not as if I'm some little young girl, get dazzle by him qualification."

Pearl get serious then, though she never had to agree so quick; "You right, thirty-seven is really pushing it, a ➡

suppose you can't pick and choose from you getting desperate."

Then before I even get chance to answer she just turn that short body and move righteously toward the front room door by the way a painting it back this May, a mean a would like to see it varnish, but that stripper thing frighten me, from Mavis son sniff himself so sick the other day.

Well a wasn't letting her walk off and I don't get the last word. "Bruno is alright," I call out after her.

Pearl did just keep on walking; "A never say him wasn't, but when since you have time for him? If you never did a call him Jackfruit foot, you was talking bout him cocohead."

Girl a did feel well shame, but a follow her none the less," Bruno know is joke a making."

Pearl just kiss her teeth, "You think so? Him is a May Taurus just like Mikey, and them man well and grudgeful. Bernice, Mikey did alright too till him meet the foreign lady. Then **Baps** -- him a drag up what and what I call him going clear back to before my memory can tell you...but that is in the past, the children big now thank the lord, and a have little time to see the world."

You see how one plane ride swell her head. Now she did a talk bout the whole world, from she take one country, visit.

I guess is because I was so mad with cousin Pearl, that I was so nice to Bruno when he call and beg me reconsider come to America.

Mind you she wouldn't accept that, kept insisting it was because the Income support people catch me with the little cleaning job and kept saying a did have was to pay the whole thing back or they taking me to court.

All right, so the twenty-two thousand dollars and eight-five cents he was earning did sound real nice; but I'd have gone to him, even if he was down and out...just to spite that Pearl.

Of course once a come to the decision I had was to act before good sense or cousin Pearl had a chance to change my mind. I stayed around just long enough, to get my sister to move in and look after Carey, and bundle Pearl back to the Caribbean.

I got a return ticket, more because it work out cheaper than a single...and then again, if Bruno really was as dismal as everybody and my mind kept saying, it was best to have the ticket already.

The whole way over on the plane, all 19 hours, I keep telling myself, is love I love him. That him was never as bad as I remember. At least that is what I was doing when a wasn't grabbing onto the man next to me, and waiting for the plane to fall back out of the sky.

Bruno was waiting at the airport in Oregon and straight way my heart did sink. You know how him stand up, with him shoulder them hunch like him hiding him height, and the way him foot them so big, them a keep malice with their one another. Remember when we used to call him Lurch after that monster in the Addams family. Girl the name jump in my head and spring out my mouth before I could more than blink.

And you know something, a never feel a way about it. A just keep telling myself, twenty-two thousand dollars and eighty-five cents.

Cho! Twenty-two dollars what! All him did have was a room, and him even borrow me fare. But him did have job alright -- for me -- as maid in some white people house.

If I did want turn maid I could a do it right here, not go clear to America and put up with Bruno too beside. Me no know what him is doctor of, couldn't a nothing much if him illegal in America and a look maid work for me. I should have guessed a cocohead boy like that never could a change. I did so glad I did get that open return ticket, and first flight come up, I was right on it.

Funny thing you know, I see the Gypsy the other day, and I give her one bad look you see. Well just imagine no, the woman just duck her head and walk off fast. You know I don't decide if she knew bout America and fraid fe get the blame, or if is just shame how she rob me five pounds that time.

Anyway girl a closing now, Tansy carrying this over when she coming and a hope you can send up some mango and a Jackfruit alongside a bottle a rum when she reaching back this side.

Take care and walk good,

I remain your good friend,

Bernice

On Living *the Third Age*

Beryl Gilroy
Guyana

t is said that we spend a quarter of our lives growing up and three quarters growing old, i.e. reaching the Third Age, sixty plus.

I felt no tremors, nor the lick of fire at my feet, as I reached this age, and am happy to comment upon it as a time of life I enjoy. I do not subscribe to the view that life is linear and could be halved or quartered, each to represent a different age, each with its own agenda and momentum. Life to me is circular and its enjoyments ought to be continuous, each section flowing into the other for as long as health allows.

After retirement, the traumas and expectations, commitments and responsibilities of waged work can be stepped over in the approach of a more relaxed time. I had decided, when quite young, that I would work minimally if I was lucky - for the daily good, but I would not toil in the tradition of my race and ancestry. My goal was self-development rather than self projection. My schooling had been skills-based, and when I arrived in Britain more than 40 years ago as a student, my intention was to acquire a body of knowledge, in fact several, if time allowed.

My intellectual curiosity was unimpaired then, and still is, but my contemporaries, the war generation, have mostly pushed life aside, fulfilled by marriage, family and work if it was necessary. The "marrieds" delighted in territoriality. Father in the garden. Mother in the kitchen. Father bread-winner and mother handmaiden. The stresses of such a relationship were traditional, certain,understood and accepted. But how did the oncoming generation regard us?

My younger friends, viewing from a distance, saw the Third Age as our time of incoherence, confusion and forgetfulness. The "doddery" time, with old stories repeated again and again. Youth used buzzwords like "senile" and "hopeless" to describe some of us and pitied us for having so many unmet needs such as the loss of feminine potency, allure and glamour, and by missing, woe-upon-woe, the "mini-skirt" that showed, among other things, polychrome and seductive legs?

There is indeed physical change in the Third Age. The skin, the largest sensory organ, gives up its smoothness for wrinkles, and with other internal dramas between cells and blood, bones and muscle taking place, there is bound to be behavioral change. One of the fascinations of this Third Age is its mystery. Even the doctors who assess our bodies are unable to be certain of its genesis, and only offer such assurances as "You must expect that at your age." But does anyone feel differently with the dawn of each new birthday? I did not. I watched the numbers change. That was all. Now and again a twinge here or there reasserted the passing of my middle age and made me recall D. H. Lawrence's poem "Old Age":

It ought to be lovely to be old
to be full of the peace that comes from experience
And wrinkled, ripe fulfillment.
Soothing, old people should be - like apples
When one is tired.

Each time I read this poem, I disagree with it and wonder why it has been assumed that old age ought to be a "lovely" time of peace-based experiences. "Old age," for want of a better contextual world, should be the time to, "Tell it as it is, and say how it ought to have been".

But who would argue with a man that drew inspiration from a time when there was a universal conception of "old age," and a considered acceptance by relatives and friends of care and concern for members of the Third Age? I prefer Yeats' "Old Age" as it is much more reflective and contemplative. I feel reassured by it.

Today there is a radical change in the demography of the family. Single parents, divorced parents, separated couples and so on, living new styles of family life. People are more mobile- more selective in the use of that mobility and perceive their Third Age as too remote to consider.

Members of the Third Age are also not of much significance to Governments, since their contribution to the ➠

National wealth is minuscule. We see ourselves as dependent children, relying on an uncharitable, penny-pinching, hostile mother. As an aside, I hope I'm well away before state-induced euthanasia is used as a cost-cutting ploy! It is entirely possible.

There is now talk of permitting flexible retirement and at least some of us will finance our own ends.

Culture had long ago decided the outcomes for Third Agers of my generation. We were never urged to "join pension funds," but to buy war bonds that proved loss makers in the end. For me it was the "Mother country" mode all the way. Our generation is the product of the low-wage era, the era of reconstruction. We were taught it was patriotic to live on dandelions enriched with a little milk now and then. We were those the "rulers" viewed as "yesterday's breakfast," the people of the past - the have-nots who could never have.

There are several ways in which a country and its citizens think of the Third Age, and I have extracted thoughts from those that are in keeping with the current body of knowledge on aging.

The Third Age as Disengagement

This begins when a waged-worker of advancing years is encouraged to accept a body-environment dualism, given favorable financial compensation plus severance pay and in return must withdraw from the work culture. Redundancy and early retirement are forms of disengagement. The fact that a whole body of knowledge, in addition to skills and experience gained over a life time, are lost to future generations are of small concern to the status quo.

The Third Ager may continue to live in the society, but the new status will determine the quality of life. Slogans like, "Take it easy and live longer," subliminally entrap the person into pinpointing a single aspect of life - "living longer." The quality of life, as well as biological and cognitive change are overlooked and the importance of quiet self-preservation is emphasized. The person might become introspective. True, she has "lost the energy and the desire to do things." Yes, he does a little walking- a little reading, a little digging in the garden. Yes, I am by myself. But, "Cogito, ergo sum." The culture provides the language that fixes the attitude. People are "assumed to be happy"- "don't like crowds" and talk of "having had their life" and "being ready to go." The Irish say the world is a miserable place

but no one is eager to leave it, except the culturally brain-washed middle classes of course. Even when they finally give up, copycatting deceased Garbo with "I want to be alone," age-homogenous (sheltered housing is offered). Personal fulfillment, sense of curiosity, adventure, zest for life have all been systematically drained away. Some survive years of quiet living and die bit by bit in spite of the fact that they have unlearned the language of self-suicide.

The Third Age as Abandonment

Abandonment is usually, but not entirely, the plight of the indigent; adverse personality characteristics of Third Agers outside the indigent group can also bring about abandonment.

Abandonment occurs when care-givers, either from their own selfishness or continued rebuttal, abdicate all responsibility for the care of an aged group-member or relative.

In this arena the Third Ager, perhaps from depression, ennui, anxiety or repressed anger, refuses all help and is given up as a lost cause. Care-fatigue, self-interest, unconcern or sheer wickedness can also cause attitude change. Rich people who conceal their wealth from relatives could also be abandoned but are hastily and fervently reinstated when the facts of their bank balances become known. Abandoned to institutions, Third Agers rely on their care givers for affirmation and love. They are at the mercy of the care-givers and struggle to make sense of the institution culture. I was a frequent visitor of one such "home." Some of the women, in particular, stood their ground against ageism, but the men deteriorated because there was nothing to do except sit. Having been able throughout life to define themselves by work, trade, the services, etc. they gave up and died quietly and quickly, simply by losing the will to live. One mused, "All my life was work. My family and a beer on a Sat'day night in the pub. I lost both boys in the war. And now'ere I am wiv nofink to do 'cept sit and rock. Ain't it loverly!"

In some countries the old are abandoned to die in the wilderness from attack by wild beasts. We use the most unlikely of places for abandoning our elderly - hospital waiting rooms, football fields, railway stations and the like, much as children were abandoned in past centuries. It is easy to escape from the scene of the crime without discovery for this is the age of the "costed elderly" and the guiltless motor car with its driver, for whom the right thing is expedient

action. This is the age of unhealthy emotions and the inability to understand that Third Agers have had lives, interior and exterior lives. Not necessarily technological, but effective.

Some local authorities show great concern for Third Agers but some of us find accepting help impossible. In this culture, especially among people of my generation, "Help and cold charity" have been confused and charity must at all cost be resisted! We insist on using old values and old language to describe the present.

Yet before Third Agers can be abandoned by others, they must themselves begin the process. This is done when retirement proves too difficult to deal with. The routine is lost. Time is unstructured and hangs heavily. The day is passed in idleness and idleness results in lost of self-worth. It is not easy to lay aside years of routine without preparation for another set of realities.

The Third Age as "Activeness"

"Activeness" is activity with proviso. Selective activity combined with continuity and the desire for continuous coping. I subscribe to this view.

We do not strive to be eternally middle aged, to compete with youth, or to stretch too far beyond ourselves. We see life as a gift and critically monitor the use we make of it. New roles challenge us and we are far too busy to feel victimized, out-foxed or used by our children and even able to make love-relationships if we try. We celebrate moments, both past and present, and we encourage those dry places within ourselves to bloom again. Even thistles we see as growth! Like the abandoned and the disengaged, we feel loss of status, of self-worth, of loved ones and of income - but we enjoy reflecting upon both the past and the present. No Third Ager can be the eternal optimist for there is always the possibility of a visit from Thanatos, and he never discloses his hour. In spite of that, we proceed toward new surprises even if constrained by income. Third Agers do not need less, they need more. They need to savour the good life for this is no rehearsal but the real thing and the end is in sight. We are selective about memory and creatively dispose of those that might cause us pain for memory, if it is to stretch the past into the present, must change both form and shape and reinterpret experience.

Memory in The Third Age

Memory is itself a language of the viscera, of cognition, of the emotions and of the physical self. Memory begins before verbal expressiveness. In his autobiography "Father and Son," Edmund Goss recalls an occurrence that gives validity to this statement. Sitting in his high chair he watched as the table was being set for dinner. Suddenly a dog dashed in, seized the leg of lamb and made off into the large garden with it. Utter consternation followed. He had not yet learned to talk and the family joked that he had eaten the leg of lamb all by himself. Many years later, when the story once more surfaced, he was able to tell them what had happened to the meat. At last he had the words to express the memory he had kept within himself.

What is the site of the memory? Time? The brain? The body? Learned people try to tell us, but do they really know? Some people feel memories - often triggered by a scent, a tune, a word, a shape. Memory has sensory pathways and marks moments of consciousness that could be emotional, amusing, fearful or otherwise. Since World War II, the age of technology has fallen heavily upon us and has reduced memory to the level of a rudimentary computer from which data could be retrieved. Bergston writes "It isn't simply what we have inherited from our father and mother that walks in us. It is all kinds of dead ideas and all sorts of obsolete beliefs... and we can never get rid of them." Where is memory in all this?

The more unhappy we are, the more we return to the past, plucking and shredding or reconstructing, in our search for yesterday's truths. Memory preserves identity and holds parts of people together - the nice bits and the nasty bits, which are sometimes confused over time. Every handful of memory contains flints, shards or sand that could be used to build a castle in the past, or become a cancer in the present with pain, regret, loss and mourning. For me the most profound was partner-loss.

Partner-Loss

A seminal loss for Third Agers is partner-loss (widowhood). It is a difficult time - for many of us an inconsolable time. No one gets over grief. We come to terms with it. It is always there, but we cannot allow ourselves to be controlled by partners from the graveyard, up, down and through the years. Death is like life, a fact of nature. What I objected to most of all was the term "widow." I was happy with my categories all prefixed by black -- child, girl, ➠

woman, wife, mother, grandmother -- widow. Such a shuttered word simply to describe someone whose husband has died and who has not remarried. Would remarriage be a sinister deed? The term suggests it might be. There is so much "weeping" in the sound. Widows were expected, in this culture, to wear special clothes, in others they ate and still eat special food, and mortify and even kill themselves. In some cultures, to remarry was betrayal. In others, the woman as slave to custom went to his brother. Loved? Maybe. Respected? Perhaps. But the woman's identity as an autonomous human being came under attack.

Nothing much was expected of a widow in any society. In ours she is ideologically minimal and so must put her tick against "widow" on official forms. Feminists, bless their little cotton socks, have shed all categories. They are just "womyn." And God help the myn who cross them! The sun has gone down on my loss, to date. Yet my dreams remain:

They creep out of some distant time
In a march of vivid colours they come,
Cleansing my heart of shadows
Gilding my doubts so they mirror
my hopes, tedding them and spreading
them so clearly they are seen,
like flowers in a greening field.

They come in threads my dreams
dancing, gossamer shimmering threads
Revealing the emerald time of youth
And me again a rebel at play in life's water
A shoal of stars glowing at my feet.

And the radiance of that glow I hope will touch the lives of others. The past was an interlude. I live the present.

Crikey! I nearly forgot something. I have a bus pass, dark green this year. Very creative. Unlike the eye test, which is supposed to cost 10 but which, the optician's assistant says costs, "from 10 pounds, madam" and extracts another 4, my bus pass is free, paid for by the borough where I live and pay my poll tax. So I travel, standing of course, while sturdy 15 and 16 year-olds, noisy nubile and bubbly occupy the seats set aside for "elderly and handicapped." I feel great when the bus stops lurching and I can gasp "Are you old or handicapped?" And sometimes the glowering, slouching and chewing, gives away to laughter.

★

Just Suddenly So

All of a sudden
It not nice again
Jus' suddenly so
Wid a funny kind o'
Reasonless reason
De experience turn sour
Is not a adventure again
Mouse-trap smiles clang suddenly
Shut

The power wand waves sometimes
With a gentleness
Suspect because employed
And withdrawn at will
Smiles come and go
Kicks, kisses
Come, go
Fly, Live, Die

And I
Bewildered
Silently vow
To keep screaming
Low and loud
Not to be caught
By gentleness idly tossed
Idly withdrawn

To move
To grow
To live, to grow
To cry, to grow
To die and not to wilt
To shout
And insist on growing

from *Because the Dawn Breaks*

Merle Collins
Grenada

Hopscotch

Jan Shinebourne
Guyana

his was the first warm and sunny day of the year in London. There was no more snow, no more Gulf War.

Then the phone rings. She watched it ring, as people in the bush might an aeroplane or a motorboat -- a machine that has nothing to do with them. But it would not go away, not like a plane or motorboat, and she has to rise, go to the table near the window and answer it.

Days like this opened her memory like a book.

"Hello?"

"Jackie, I thought you mightn't be there. You took a long time to answer!"

"I was half asleep."

"I thought you would like to know that your good friend Carmen is here from Guyana."

"Carmen? Here? Where?"

"At International House."

"I will phone her straight away. Thanks for telling me."

"You and Carmen were always good friends. I thought I should tell you. One of my relatives came in from Guyana on the same plane with her, two weeks ago. I think she is leaving in a couple of days so you have to be quick if you want to catch her."

"Funny, I had a letter from her two weeks ago. She said nothing about coming to England."

She telephoned International House and asked for Carmen. The sound of Carmen's name on the lips of the switchboard operator was intensely comforting. It was the

sound of her two worlds coming together, an English voice pronouncing the Caribbean name of her old friend from Guyana.

"Hello?"

"Carmen?"

"Yes?"

"Jackie here."

"Jackie! Jackie! Oh but this is great! How come you knew I was here?"

"Susan Harris phoned to tell me. She said a relative of hers came in on the same plane with you."

"Lord, wherever Guyanese go, news travels so fast with them! I never got to tell you I was coming. It happened too fast. Anyway,when I'll see you?"

"Right away if you want."

"No no, come tomorrow after work. You are working?"

"I have some time off due. I will come anytime you want."

"You mean to say you will take time off for me?"

"Of course."

"No, don't do that. I have a busy schedule, plenty of research to finish, I am going home in two days."

"What about first thing in the morning, nine o'clock, before you start?"

"Good, that is good. See you at nine then."

Tomorrow at nine, if the freak weather kept up it would be like summer. She would take Carmen for a drive along the Thames embankment and pretend it was the sea wall in Guyana.

If this was Guyana they could have met at once. It was so easy to get from place to place there and meet without conversing on telephones and making appointments first.

At International House, the porter would not let her in but questioned her and asked whether she had a pass, then phoned Carmen to come down and meet her while he observed them. It spoiled the whole reunion. There was Carmen coming down the stairs, and just to see her was the best feeling in the world, but she felt angry with the porter for treating her suspiciously and told Carmen so right away.

"What do you expect?" Carmen said, "This is England. It is white people's country."

"Do you mean to say you accept how he behaves?"

"Of course, after all we are only guests in this country! ➠

They were leaving the building when Carmen declared, "I want a real English breakfast! You must know where to get one. And I want to go by bus, a red, double-decker English bus. Then I want to see Soho."

There was a cafe off Charring Cross Road, a bus ride away. An English breakfast was the last thing she expected to be providing Carmen with. When all their friends were emigrating from Guyana in the sixties, Carmen swore she could never leave Guyana to live in "white people country."

Maybe Carmen was right. Maybe she should not have come to England. The Gulf War had made her feel sick with revulsion at living here; made her wish she had never left home; made her remember how the British invaded Guyana twice in her lifetime; reminded her that she had been living on the wrong side all these years.

They talked non-stop all the way, and when they got off the bus, Carmen laughed and hugged her. "Girl you are looking so good. How many years we haven't seen each other?"

"Too many."

"Too right!"

Carmen ate her English breakfast with concentration. Time disappeared. She felt how ageless friendship was. They had known each other since they were girls in Guyana. Now she could remember herself as a girl; remember her family and old friends she had left at home; remember the taste of food she never ate any more; remember the fell of Caribbean sun and rain and breeze; walking barefoot on a hand-polished floorboard and sleeping under a mosquito net; and going to the market. She felt completely herself, her old self. It made her wonder who, what she had become in England. Even the sound of her own voice irritated her now because she spoke with an English lilt.

"Why you so quiet man?" Carmen was asking.

"I don't feel quiet."

"Well talk it out man! Don't be so English!"

"Nothing to do with being English."

"Well, to me that is really English."

"Don't call me English, and don't call me 'Man.' You realise that is what the old slave masters called the slaves because they didn'twant to use their names - 'Man' - like 'Man Friday'?"

"I am not a white slave master. When I use "Man" I could mean what I like by it. The trouble with you is you forget

what it is to be yourself. You -- **ARE** -- English now. English, English, English," Carmen taunted.

Carmen was determined to convince her she was English, and it was paining her very much, each time she used the word, uttered it with such scorn in her voice. She had heard too many stories of how, when second generation children of Caribbean parents grew up and returned to find their roots in the Caribbean, they were rejected because they were too "English." She couldn't believe Carmen was doing the same to her.

It began to sink in, that from the moment they met, there was tension between them, that Carmen had been criticising her one way or another. It was often the way, to take down "Foreign," the one who was living in "Foreign," a peg or two.

Carmen said quietly, "Some things don't change. You would always say nothing when you were vexed, like now. Maybe. You were always English, so polite, stiff upper lip." And with that, she got up and walked out of the restaurant, walked out on her, left her to pay the bill.

She did not know how long she sat in the cafe by herself. Only when she noticed that the cashier kept giving her long, impatient looks did she finally pay up and leave.

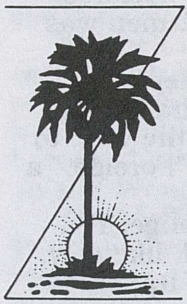
She walked aimlessly towards Soho. She crossed the road into Shaftesbury Avenue, and stood in the sheltered, empty arcade there. She wanted to go back to that moment yesterday when she woke up and found the sun shining for the first time in months, when the first sunny day of the year made her feel life was beginning again after the war, after sending him the divorce papers. It was a precious feeling, of beginning again. If Carmen knew what it was like to emerge from winter, the fear of war, and a failed marriage, she could not have done to her what she did to her.

Her feet dragged when she tried to walk again. This morning she had floated on air, coming to meet Carmen, feeling as light as a child. Now her forty years weighed on her like forty stones. The grief was draining into her legs. Someone who was a friend to you all your life and now wasn't - you couldn't put a wall up between you like that.

She stepped from one block of pavement to another, imagining it was a wall, that she was climbing it with each step. Then she began to see not a pavement, but hopscotch squares. As children they were always playing hopscotch, she and Carmen. *(continued on page 48)*

In Times Like These

by Zee Edgell
Heinemann Educational Books, Inc., 1991
Reviewed by Adele S. Newson
Florida International University



ee Edgell's second novel, contains a convincing mix of adventure, romance, and drama. Edgell herself calls the novel, "a simple story about a young woman with twins who returns to introduce them to their father." Set principally in Belize during a Spring 1981 uprising, the work examines the country's bid for independence from both British and Guatemalan claims, the preoccupation of the emigree attempting to readjust to Belizean society, the themes of abandonment and machismo, and the single mother's plight.

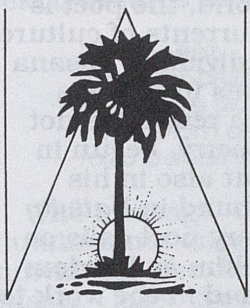
Pavana Leslie, a Creole Belizean, goes to England to enroll in a journalism program at Polytech. While in England, she encounters a native Belizean (Alex Abrams), who is himself a student reading law at a local university. Alex has an overabundance of political aspirations, charm, and rhetorical skills. He is looked upon by the West Indian student population as a demi-god. Sensing Pavana's displacement and discomfort in London, he befriends her, and ultimately the two become lovers.

At the start of the novel, Pavana is 21 years-old, pregnant, far from home, and considering abortion as a means of avoiding the cultural pattern of her country women -- single motherhood. Yet, motherhood seems to energize Pavana throughout the novel. It is the source from which Pavana draws her strength, motivation and convictions. She is the invincible mother who provides both the physical support and emotional direction for her children. Pavana is also the new mother, the mother of independence who refuses to accept victimization from either a man or a government that still believes in the notion of traditional male rights over women. She is one of the few qualified people who left the country in hopes of furthering her education to be of service to her country. She returns to the knowledge that victims are victims so long as they permit themselves to be.

Edgell's first novel, *Beka Lamb* (1982), achieved recognition as the first novel by a Belizean to reach an international audience. It is the story of Beka Lamb's growing to maturity as she struggles for educational excellence and attends to the demands of friendship and family during the birth of the Nationalist Movement in Belize. *Beka Lamb* and *In Times Like These*, when read as companion pieces, chart, in miniature, the development of Belize during the past 40 years. The works also, inevitably, address major themes and motifs of the Caribbean author including, multi-racial conflicts, education as leveler, the obeah woman, cultural dislocation, abandonment, and the Caribbean resident as sojourner.

Witchbroom

by Lawrence Scott
Allison and Busby, 1992
Reviewed by Patricia Joan Saunders
University of Pittsburgh



itchbroom, Lawrence Scott's first novel, transcends the boundaries of history while exploring the oral tradition in the West Indies. He reveals the history of the Caribbean with an intensity born out of the Carnival tradition. Scott, a French Creole Trinidadian, grew up on the sugar estates of pre-independence Trinidad and uses the richness and complexity of his heritage to create a potent voice that tells of conquest, slavery, the fall of plantocracy on the island of Kairi, and the story of the black female colonized subject.

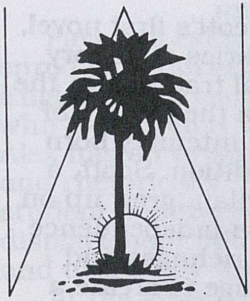
The influence of writers such as Nobel Prize winner Derek Walcott, C.L.R. James, Wilson Harris, and Earl Lovelace is apparent in the opening epigraph of the novel, "... history is a fiction subject to a fitful muse, memory... In time, every event becomes an exertion of memory and is thus subject to invention," which is taken from Walcott's "The Muse of History." *Witchbroom* opens with a host of voices, histories, and genres which, as the epigraph suggests, is all "subject to a fitful muse." In this case, the fitful muses are Josephine, a black "cook, housekeeper, servant, nanny, nurse, doer of all tasks, comforter in ➠

the darkness and in the hot stillness of noon," and Marie Elena, the mother of the storyteller, Lavren. The narrator, Lavren, travels through time, transcending history, geography, and most importantly gender, to tell her/his (story). The narrator, Lavren, is a hermaphrodite who tells his tales in the traditions of Trinidad's carnival tales and Anansi stories, showing the agility of the Moco Jumbie during carnival mass.

Witchbroom is a brilliant first novel filled with poignant narratives of conquest and liberation in the Caribbean. Lawrence Scott will undoubtedly be a unique and provocative new voice in Anglophone Caribbean literature.

Quimbe

by Lasana Sekou
St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, 1991
Reviewed by Jacqueline Brice-Finch
James Madison University



hether at home, in the community or traveling around the world, the poet is sensitive to the undercurrents of culture which impact on the individual. Lasana Mwanza Sekou continues to stress a political message, which resonates not only in his published poetry, begun in *Moods for Isis*, 1978, but also in his dramatic monologues found in *Nativity* (1988). This revolutionary poet calls on his countrymen to join him as freedom fighters in the protest and in the work to resolve the inequalities in the Caribbean isles, especially on his adopted isle of St. Martin/St. Maarten. He makes the revolutionary voices in the Caribbean a part of a global effort to end oppression wherever it is found.

In this latest collection of poems by Sekou, the obtrusive political division of the St. Maarten/St. Martin landscape and the economic policies imposed on the populace permeate the first section entitled "Home." In "Tidings," he portends an upheaval on the island. He tells the islanders "that we belong to the one heart of each other while the political systems on the island are,

> *what cuts, cowers you, colds you off*
> *french you up and dutch you down*
> *still claiming you for another.*

The people must achieve a unification of the island, eliminating French and Dutch rule. In another poignant poem, "Linkages," Sekou entreats his fellow countrymen to observe the adverse impact of tourism. The children are dropping out of school; the local businesses are being squeezed; and the politicians compromised.

Sekou softens his tone as he segues into the book's second section, "Garden Balsam," in which sensual personal relationships are explored. In "7" he reveals a man's vulnerability for adoring a picture, while, in "Promised One" and "Love Nest," erotic is the joyous lovemaking, a paean to a woman's power to affect the man's rejuvenation.

The issues of inequality become global concerns in the third section of *Quimbe* as Sekou cites internal disorder on several continents. In "Caracas," he notes that "there are streets up in the hills/with no names." The disillusioned bus rider "In Trinidad" bows to political corruption. In "A Holy War for Haiti," the past prescriptions for change over the decades have served to blight a proud, religious people. Sekou assures us that

> *Haiti needs*
> *no democrazy of elections*
> *to believe us in the mockery of nation where*
> *a hoodlum of rulers bend dung*
> *for a bandit of corporate raiders*

The message, though grim, is not without hope. Sekou illumines not only the unknown Caribbean heroes but also individuals like Joseph Chatoyer and Josephus Lambert Hassel. Collectively, they comprise a Caribbean manhood whose mission is to "make you grow up to damn well know/what is going on to save your life." Sekou also borrows from Amiri Baraka the Term *crossculturing* to describe intra- and intercontinental coalescence for change. He points to the Palestinian youth with his Mandela painted shirt, the Dostoyevsky-looking Christian woman in Moscow, and a Clarksdale, Mississippi Mama. In the climatic poem, "Movements," people everywhere -- in Tiananmen, Tbilisi, Trinidad, Monrovia, Port-Au-Prince, Baghdad, Bamako, Marigot and Moscow -- all strive to "raise up a glorious golden age." *Quimbe* is Sekou's singsong for this new day.

Hopscotch, continued from page 43

She took a felt pen from her pocket and drew the hopscotch pattern on the pavement.

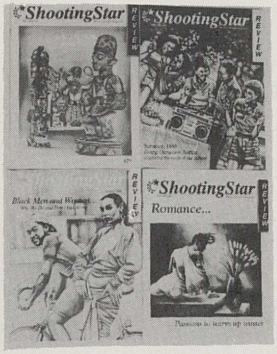
She turned the question she could not ask Carmen into an imaginary pebble then aimed and threw it into one of the squares and retrieved the answer for herself. Carmen, why didn't you phone instead of Susan? Carmen had been in London for two weeks and hadn't phoned. That was the first sign that something was different. Twenty years had passed. They were no longer friends. Yet all these years she had carried the memory of their friendship in her mind like a good luck charm.

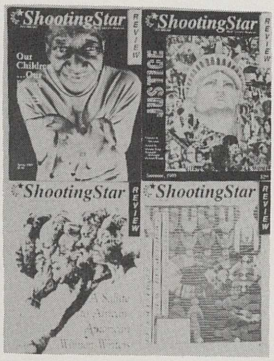
Now her feet felt so light as she walked across the hopscotch squares.

As a writer I feel strongly multicultural and very Caribbean... The Caribbean has one of the richest, most fascinating cultures one can hope to find anywhere: though this may sound like a cliche, for me it is true. It has its poverty and backwardness, but just thinking about all the different cross-influences and mixtures -- Amerindian, African, Asian, European -- gets me high.

"The Battle with Language"

Grace Nichols
Guyana





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When fiction draws upon our world, when it recreates our reality, it helps give validity to our world. It helps us to first make sense of our world, for it shows us underlying patterns and connections which give our reality a satisfying order. But also, in a way that is perhaps difficult to fully account for, fiction gives substance to reality.

"Challenges of the Struggle for Sovereignty."

Merle Hodge
Trinidad & Tobago

Lessons and Memories of