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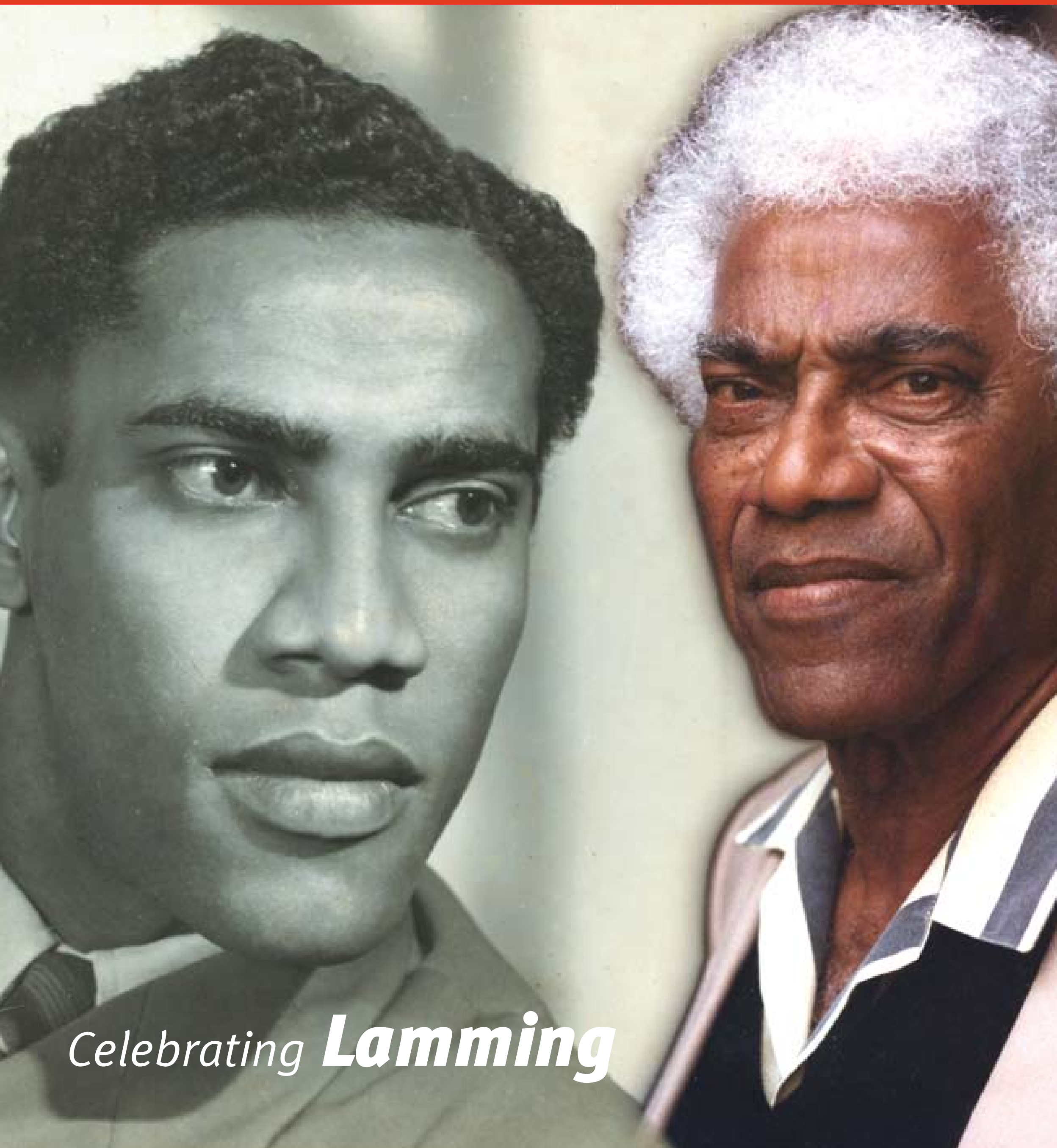
Bim

Special Edition

Arts For the 21st Century



Bim

CELEBRATING

LAMMING...

BIM: Arts for the 21st Century

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***BIM*: Arts for the 21st Century** is edited collaboratively by persons drawn from the literary community, who represent the creative, academic and developmental interests critical for the sustainability of the best Caribbean literature.

***BIM*: Arts for the 21st Century** is published by the Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination, The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, in collaboration with the Office of the Prime Minister, Government of Barbados.

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***BIM*: Arts for the 21st Century** will appear twice each year and will publish creative works, essays and critical expositions that meet the needs of the literary and artistic community. It accepts submissions that focus on literary, artistic and cultural phenomena within the Caribbean and its diaspora. *BIM* accepts and publishes academic articles that are of high quality, but which are not too heavy with jargon to the exclusion of the wider reading public. *BIM* accepts non-academic contributions of high quality, including book and other reviews, poetry, short fiction, photographs and cartoons. In future issues, it will also accept digital art, electronic sound and digital video files, and critical comments on these. In all cases submissions will be subject to scrutiny by the editorial committee.

Manuscripts should be forwarded in double-spaced format, preferably with an accompanying electronic text file in Microsoft Word format. Endnotes are preferred. Photos should, at a minimum, be 300 dpi in quality. Submissions should contain the name of the author and title of the contribution on a separate page, but the author's name should not appear on subsequent pages of the actual manuscript. Correspondence should be sent to: The Editor, ***BIM*: Arts for the 21st Century**, Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination, The University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, P. O. Box 64, Bridgetown BB11000, Barbados.

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MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

The Right Honourable Owen S. Arthur Prime Minister of Barbados

It is with a feeling of indescribable pleasure that I welcome this special edition of *BIM* Magazine.

As a young boy at Coleridge and Parry School, I remember the early *BIM* and the world of great writing and ideas that it opened up for us. We looked up to the great Caribbean writers and poets to whom we Barbadian youths were introduced as the paragons of great creative writing. Among them was Frank Appleton Collymore whose deathless verse, prose and "rhymed ruminations" in *BIM* thrilled us to the core. As a child in the parish of St. Peter, I responded with unreserved empathy to his poem which began:

Like all those who live on small islands
I must always be remembering the sea . . .

BIM was 'Colly', and through this magazine which appeared twice a year in my youth, Colly made words sing for us in Wordsworthian style. He was a supreme wordsmith who shared his love of literature with the students of Combermere School through his teaching at his alma mater for over 50 years. Through *BIM* Magazine he opened to us young Barbadians of humble birth the vast treasures of Caribbean literature created by those towering talents he helped to nurture.

I need only remind you of their names – George Lamming, Vidia S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, Edward 'Kamau' Brathwaite, Samuel Selvon, Roger Mais and Timothy Callender – to indicate what a treasure trove *BIM* was to us 'baby boomers' of Barbados and the wider English-speaking Caribbean.

I make bold to say that no other generation of Caribbean citizens has been so fortunate as mine for we grew up with *BIM* Magazine, which entertained, enlightened and educated us in a way no other reading material could because it was our own people speaking to us.

BIM Magazine has had its fair share of triumphs and challenges (like all of us born after the World War II). It has nurtured Nobel Prize winners, but it has had a precarious hold on life. It was a boon to *BIM* when John Wickham took up the challenge after Colly's death in 1980, but John's own passing created a void that we felt might never be filled.

Happily, however, after a hiatus of eleven years, I am pleased beyond measure to welcome this special new edition, which is being produced in honour of the incomparable Barbadian novelist George William Lamming who reached the venerable age of 80 this year 2007.

May this volume be the catalyst for a steady stream of literary gems from a new generation of talented fiction writers, poets, essayists, cartoonists, biographers and film critics. *BIM* Magazine has always signified creativity and, as you the editors re-launch this signature publication of the English-speaking Caribbean, I offer you my sincere best wishes and I hope that your tenure may be long and rewarding. You are reviving a Caribbean icon and you are honouring a writer who, we hope should soon be a recipient of the Nobel Prize for literature.

May your creative labour be crowned with unending success and I look forward to many more years of pleasurable reading of the new *BIM* Magazine.

GOD BLESS!

Owen S. Arthur

Prime Minister of Barbados

Bim

NON IMMEMOR
Reminiscences of Frank Collymore

INDENTURED SERVANTS IN BARBADOS
Jill Sheppard

POEMS
Stewart Brown
Frank Collymore
A. N. Forde
A. L. Hendriks
E. McG. Keane
Elton Mottley
Victor Questel
Bruce St.John
Don Thompson
Marguerite Wyke

SHORT STORIES
Timothy Callender
Earl Warner

REVIEW
Gerald Moore

FRONTISPIECE
Karl Broodhagen

EDITED BY JOHN WICKHAM, A. N. FORDE, EDWARD BRATHWAITE, E. L. COZIER.

Vol. 15 No. 57 March 1974

ONE DOLLAR AND TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.

Reprinted from BIM Vol 15 No. 57 (Nov 1974)

FOREWORD

During the decades when West Indian literature rose to international prominence, it was *BIM*, one of the seminal Caribbean journals, that gave support to this burgeoning of literary and cultural expression.

E. L. Cozier was the first editor of *BIM*, which was then taken over by teacher, writer and artist, Frank Appleton Collymore, who served as editor of *BIM* from its first year of publication in 1942 until 1974. *BIM* then appeared with unpredictable regularity over the decades and was last published in 1996. Throughout the decades of its publication *BIM* provided an avenue for expression, mainly to aspiring writers, but also to more established artists. Although the original *BIM* was predominantly a literary magazine, it was also engaged in a broader project. It created an avenue and a space for other artistic expressions from painting, to cartoons, to experimental writing.

The early editions of *BIM* tended to feature artists mainly from Barbados, but it soon evolved into a breeding ground for talented writers around the region who wanted to promote their own work, but who also wanted to offer critical commentary on Caribbean and related literature, arts and culture. It is significant that many of the established writers and critics on Caribbean literature appeared in *BIM*, from Edgar Mittelholzer, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Kamau Brathwaite, Derek Walcott, Roger Mais, Mervyn Morris, Edward Baugh, Gloria Escoffrey, to V.S. Naipaul, Austin Clarke, Shake Keane, Timothy Callender and Gordon Rohlehr. But lesser known writers also found a space, ensuring that decades afterwards we would appreciate the skillful writing of Anna Sealy, Karl Sealy and Elizabeth Walcott.

BIM responded to the demands of its constituents. Careful analysis of its growth reveals the ways *BIM* was able to keep pace with the times, whether through an embracing of a regional literary project, or through its more confident promotion of nation language, or even through adjustments to its very physical appearance and printed typeface. It evolved into a regional and international journal, which though foregrounding the literary, was very sensitive to the wider cultural milieu and the social space called “the Caribbean”. The featuring of photos and artwork, sculpture, cartoons, indeed the prominence of the commercial advertisement and the very visual nature of vintage *BIM*, seem to beg a reassessment of its core emphases and its cultural reach.

The present relaunch of *BIM* comes at a critical juncture in the development of Caribbean society. If the original *BIM* responded to the need for avenues of creative expression, this relaunched *BIM* also shares that fundamental vision. Still, any attempt to measure up against and capture the full essence of the vintage publication is bound to throw up differences, no matter how fervent the attempt to copy the original. Indeed, with the passing on of editorship after 1974, noticeable differences with the Collymore era emerged.

This new phase in the publication of *BIM* is a critical one. The current publication recognizes the contribution of the past, but it also recognizes the current realities of the Caribbean and its diaspora. If *BIM* as it evolved was more tightly linked to literature, this current publication broadens its focus and interest to support the artistic and cultural expressions of the Caribbean. The rationale for this embracing of a wider constituency of artistic works, expressions and ideas is therefore not beyond justifiable reason. Subsequent volumes (and their editorials) will call attention to the critical importance of their specific issue, giving even fuller perspective on the evolution of *BIM*.

Foundation *BIM* was a leader with respect to its vision of and for Caribbean society; it facilitated cutting-edge interventions into Caribbean critical discourse. This re-constituted publication also rescues that vision as it provides a facility for literary and cultural expression in the 21st Century. Future special issues will therefore, over time, open up an avenue for electronic publication and for a wider range of submissions including audio and video files, which though trendy among youths, nonetheless, can reflect the studied work of aspiring writers, critical thinkers and a new cadre of Caribbean intellectuals.

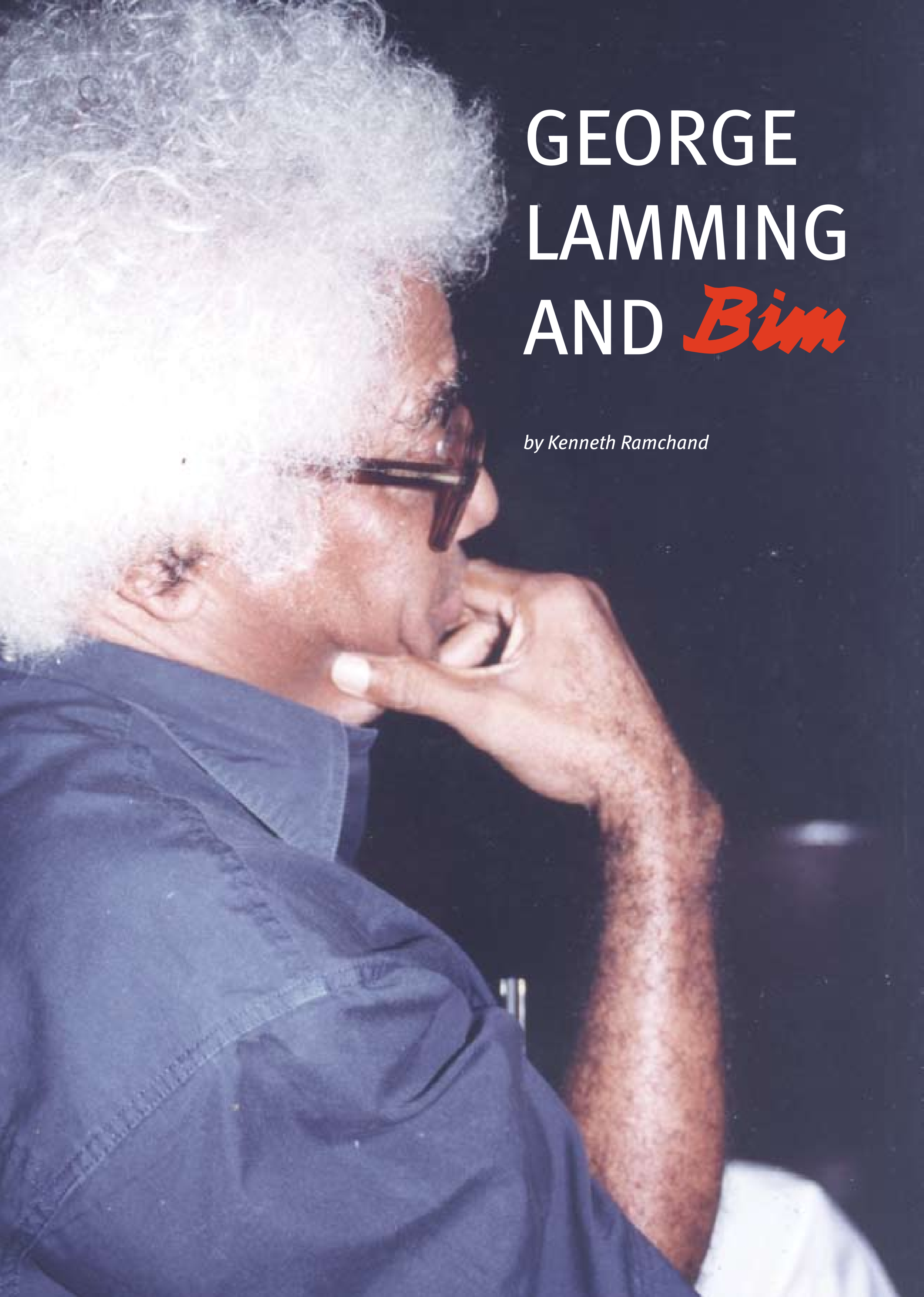
It is fortuitous and fitting that this special issue and re-launch of *BIM* should coincide with the occasion of the 80th birthday of the Hon. George Lamming. Lamming himself was a protégé of Collymore. Lamming found in *BIM* a space for testing his creative skill. *BIM* became a journal in which early installments of Lamming's work appeared, for example, extracts from what would later be *The Emigrants* featured in vol. 5 no.17.

This issue in celebration of Lamming is also twinned with the prized special issue in remembrance of Collymore, which will follow. This issue in honour of the Hon. George Lamming represents a fitting collection of creative works, poetry, prose, as well as critical appreciations, essays, and discourses by Lamming himself. Part of the thinking here is to provide some reflection on the contribution of Lamming to *BIM*, to Caribbean literature and critical theory in particular, and to Caribbean social, political and cultural development generally.

Kenneth Ramchand's contribution lucidly details Lamming's specific offerings over an eight-year period, while also discussing the state of Caribbean writing in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Lamming's early short story "Birds of a Feather" (1948) gives readers some perspective on Lamming's creative skill prior to his publication of the classic *In the Castle of My Skin*.

The young writer Mark Jason Welch explores the playing out of the past, present and future in his poem "The Truth About Oranges". Karl Sealy's "The Bargain" is also about the ironies of youthfulness and aging. Linden Lewis's essay considers the intersection of aesthetics and politics in the work of Lamming. The landscape is a powerful symbol in the poems by Esther Phillips and Dana Gilkes. These give way to an extract from Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*. Anthony Bogues provides an introduction to Lamming's compelling exposition on personal and collective freedom in *The Sovereignty of the*

Imagination. Linda Deane stirs the emotions in “The Blues, Differently”. Heather Russell-Andrade approaches *In the Castle of My Skin* as a jazz novel. Esther Phillips challenges our responses in the reflective piece “Lesson”. Curwen Best’s essay considers the impact and imprint of Lamming on past and emerging Barbadian intellectuals while Elizabeth Walcott’s short story and Margaret Gill’s essay reflect upon the role of gender in Caribbean cultural fashioning. The extract from *Conversations* presents Lamming’s comments on Caribbean creative artists and revolutionaries like Sparrow, Marley, Guillen and Fanon and the extract from *The Pleasures of Exile* asks Caribbean people to embrace a new vision in this world which no longer belongs to Prospero.



GEORGE LAMMING AND *Bim*

by Kenneth Ramchand

This article joins in the double celebration of BIM and George Lamming by looking at the beloved icon's contributions in the region's most important mid-wifing literary journal. It begins with his first entry, 'Images', a poem in Volume 2, Number 7 (1946); and stops with 'Extract from Second Book' (The Emigrants) in Volume V Number 1 (1953).

Lamming's contributions between 1946 and 1953 comprise thirteen poems, two short stories, and two extracts, namely 'Birthday Weather' Volume 4, Number 15, (Dec. 1951) and 'Extract from Second Book', Volume 5, Number 17 (Dec. 1952) taken from two manuscripts that were to be published later as *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) and *The Emigrants* (1954) respectively.

After the publication of the episode from *In the Castle of My Skin*, no more short stories or poems by Lamming appeared in *BIM*. He did not abandon the shorter forms altogether, but Lamming was turning novelist. Extracts from *Season of Adventure* appeared in Numbers 28 and 31; and a piece from *Natives of My Person* was published in Number 52. His work in *BIM* between 1946 and 1953 shows us the novelist's beginnings as a poet and short story writer.

Most of the West Indian writers who went to London in the 1950s and made that city the West Indian literary capital were practitioners in the shorter forms of writing, especially the poem and the short story. If you look through the back numbers of *BIM* you will see poems and short stories by a whole set of writers who turned novelists in the 1950s. The list includes Edgar Mittelholzer, Geoffrey Drayton, Sam Selvon and George Lamming. In the early literary magazines of Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad, and in the newspapers of all the islands, the evidence is also plain that our early novelists began as poets and short story writers.

A native tradition of writing in forms of English had begun in the newspapers and occasional magazines of the post-Emancipation period, and in the ephemeral publications of the literary and debating clubs that sprang up in all the islands in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. This was when the effects of primary education and the establishment of the early secondary schools began to tell, and political consciousness was not far behind.

There was not a buying public to support the publishing of novels, there was not a reading public for novels, and there were no publishers looking to make a living from the manufacture of books. The shorter forms—stories and poems—could be accommodated in newspapers and inexpensive pamphlets or magazines.

By and by, the short form, whose use was largely economically determined, became a preference and a congenial instrument for writers in a place that did not feel its wholeness, for people who had had an experience of separations and fragmentation.

The writing tradition in shorter forms included character sketches, descriptive sketches, dramatic court shorts, poems, and stories. It fed upon the content and the narrating procedures of the oral and performance traditions that existed among African people before Emancipation, and among Africans and Indians after Emancipation. The writing tradition absorbed as a convention the dynamic relationship that exists between audience and performer/narrator in the oral culture outside of what was being taught in the schools.

The poems and short stories in *Kyk-over-Al*, (Guyana) *Focus*, (Jamaica) *Trinidad* and *The Beacon*, (Trinidad) like those in *BIM*, reflect what this native tradition had evolved into on the eve of the emergence of the West Indian novel in the second half of the twentieth century.

The 'poetry' of many of the novels of the 1950s and 1960s was noticed at once by reviewers. It was also noticed that the novels were not exactly like English novels. It just had to be so. A short story writer who is asked to go the long distance of a novel might find that his way of seeing is the way of seeing of a short story writer. Under pressure to produce a novel before anyone would take a chance of investing in his short stories, he might devise ways of disguising a bundle of short stories in an extended prose fiction that resembles a novel.

Their authors' beginnings as practitioners in the shorter forms account not only for the poetic properties of the early West Indian novels but also for certain orally inspired ways of telling the story, for certain structural features, and for the episodic quality of many of the prose fictions of the 1950s and 1960s. In the extended prose fictions of all the émigré writers of the 1950s who published in *BIM* and elsewhere, we can see their practice as story writers having effects on content and purpose. I am suggesting that *BIM* is one of the most valuable sources for recognising some of the elements that make the West Indian novel of the 1950s and 1960s distinctive and West Indian.

There are other riches in the moment (1946-1953) we are describing. Lamming's early work was submitted to *BIM* at a time when the Barbados-based magazine found itself becoming a platform and haven for writers from all over the West Indies. Edgar Mittelholzer from Guyana appeared in *BIM* number 5 (1945) and was to become a fixture with something in the magazine in nearly every issue right up to 1961. But there were other swallows making West Indian summer in the Bajan skies.

In the Foreword to Number 9 December 1948, the Editors noted that '*BIM*' meant "an inhabitant of Barbados" (according to the Concise Oxford Dictionary), "But alas," they teased, "we are losing our insular self-sufficiency", for in this volume there were, in addition to the indefatigable Edgar Mittelholzer, five writers from Trinidad who had been making sounds on the BBC's Caribbean Voices programme. In spite of "this blow to our pride" the kicksy editors welcomed Harold Telemaque, Cecil Herbert, Ernest Carr, and Ruby Waithe. The five writers, included George Lamming who was then living in Trinidad, the "one ray of consolation" since "Mr. Lamming is by birth *BIM*."

Volume 10 June 1949 goes so far as to list the contributors on the front cover by country—Barbados, British Guiana, Trinidad, Jamaica and St Lucia. As if to remind readers of the magazine's freedom from the worst forms of nationalism, the Editors placed at the bottom, in a single line, without country of origin, the name of John Harrison "whose delightful frontispiece, 'Careenage, Bridgetown'. . . will demonstrate how very "*BIM*' he has become during his stay in the West Indies." They spread their Federal flag again in Number 13 when they were able to add, in another front cover listing, the names of Grenada, St Lucia, St Vincent and Tobago as places from which writings were coming.

The most significant event in Volume 10 however was Collymore's 'An Introduction to the Poetry of Derek Walcott' in which is celebrated the self-published collection *25 Poems* (1948) printed in Trinidad when the poet was eighteen years old. The poet was hardly more than a schoolboy and he was unknown, but Collymore as Editor had no hesitation in asking his audience at the Literary Society and the readers of *BIM* to get something and wave. The Introduction quotes lavishly from the poems, and points to the poet's gifts, his influences, and the difficulties his work sometimes poses. It ends hoping that "this significant voice in West Indian literature may continue to be heard often in the many years to come."

After 1949, it was West Indian time in *BIM*. Reinforced by its collaboration with the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* programme, items from which it regularly printed, it became a regional institution secure enough in itself to be open to people outside of the region who wanted respectfully to contribute.

In 'An Introduction' to Number 22, June 1955, Lamming understood this: "It is clear that *BIM* has its roots in a particular region, and that the change which has evolved and which has increased its range and significance, is a part of the changes which have come about in the West Indies during the last ten years [1945-1955]. The magazine has been a kind of barometer which registered through its writers the climate of feeling and opinion which occurred in a particular place at a particular time. In that sense it is a regional magazine, and it is precisely that fact which ensures its authenticity. "

The unprescriptive *BIM* responded to the subtext of its contributors and became West Indian in the blissful Federal-minded era. So too did George Lamming. For Lamming, however, the process was not un-watched. Though loving the island, he had left it. After a year in Trinidad in 1946 he visited Barbados and wrote a poem called 'The Rock' about outward loss and placelessness, and about creative resistance to denaturing tyranny.

In London where he met other writers trying to make their way in the world, he recognised a process and he claimed it as a starting point: "It is here that one sees a discovery actually taking shape. No Barbadian, no Trinidadian, no St. Lucian, no islander from the West Indies sees himself as a West Indian until he encounters another islander in a foreign territory. It was only when the Barbadian childhood, corresponded with the Grenadian or the Guyanese childhood in important details of folkore, that the

wider identification was arrived at. In this sense, most West Indians of my generation were born in England" (*The Pleasures of Exile* 1960, 214). So John Hearne invented a composite island called 'Cayuna', Lamming created 'San Cristobal' and Naipaul went for 'Isabella'.

It may not be fashionable today to be 'West Indian'. And later generations of islanders under the spell of 'post-modernism', the new globalism, and a version of it called 'diaspora' (as well as outsiders coming new and all too knowingly to the region's literature) may not be able to feel how liberating and empowering the process of "becoming West Indian" was to islanders living in the period 1945 into the 1960s. It was the most inclusive and the most native ideology that ever arose in our region. Its failure was the failure of our politics. But as the pages of *BIM* intimate, it created our art and literature.

Looking at George Lamming and *BIM* between 1946 and 1953 forces us to recognise a network of writers and writing, as well as painters, actors, sculptors, and musicians taken in by the magazine during the period under consideration. *BIM* reported regularly on art exhibitions, concerts and performances of plays and included photographs, reproductions and drawings. Lamming's short story 'Thorns and Thistles' appears in Number 10 along with Sam Selvon's 'The Baby,' an excerpt from a work that would be published as *A Brighter Sun*. Lamming's poem 'The Sculptor' is published in Number 11 in which the frontispiece is 'The Poet,' a head of George Lamming done by the sculptor Karl Broodhagen. Lamming's 'Birthday Poem' is a poem for Clifford Sealy, lonely champion of mind, art, and literature in Trinidad, year after discouraging year. Looking at George Lamming and *BIM* in the period 1946 to 1953 is being witness to a social, cultural and political ferment.

George Lamming's first contribution in *BIM* is a poem entitled 'Images', and Volume 2 Number 7 includes his poem in a bid to create an audience for poetry. Although there are five short stories, five 'Vignettes' and five items categorised as 'Humour', the Editors' 'Blurb' describes Number 7 as "a poetry number". There are sixteen poems and twelve poets including H. A. Vaughan, Frank Collymore, Geoffrey Drayton, Edgar Mittelholzer, Karl Sealy, A. J. Seymour and G. W. Lamming in the section called 'Little Anthology' (47-49) .

As usual, the Editors came to their theme "in a telepathic sort of way" but they were sufficiently aware of how to serve the cause of the poetry that they were championing in a seemingly offhand way ("We've put all the poems together so that they may be the more easily skipped"). They placed before the poetry section a still important article by Bryan King entitled 'What Poetry Means To Me'.

To King, poetry must have a personal appeal. He also wants West Indian subject matter and imagery, but "if I am to get West Indian poetry which will mean something to me (and I think it will mean more to me than any other kind of poetry) I must first and foremost seek out . . . West Indian poets." The West Indian poets will write "about what interests

them, and about their own experiences, not reproducing the emotions of other poets at second hand. They will write in forms and rhythms which come naturally to them." They can be patriotic, but they must be poets. If they are true poets and true West Indians, and true to themselves, they will produce "a poetry which has special meaning for us."

Lamming's 'Image' is a West Indian poem in setting, in imagery, in its subject matter, and in its having a special meaning for us. It can be read as a poem about a man and a woman and the bitter love that continues in spite of assertions of hate. But the physical landscape in the poem urges us to see it as an attempt (like 'The Rock') to come to terms with departure from the well-loved place, a poem about the love of the islander for his island in spite of the alienation that could drive him into exile or into the castle of his skin.

If we see intimations of the ending of *In the Castle of My Skin* here, it is because Lamming the poet is not essentially different from Lamming the short story writer or novelist. The beautifully orchestrated and direct 'Dedication From Afar: Song for Marian' (Number 13, December 1950) discovers the reality of his connection with Africa and the African-American experience. He repents of "the green folly" which had made him a mocker in his little colony, and identifies with the blues sung by Anderson. He is sustained by her soaring song which recovers "our crumbling faith" and he can turn to acknowledge the profound dilemma of his island and his self-hating people:

> *Where under the sun is our shelter?*
> *What meadow, stream or pool our ally?*
> *What clocks shall register our waiting,*
> *Or at midnight ripen our intention?*
>
> *Today I decorate this song in sackcloth*
> *For you and islands at anchor in the west,*
> *And contemplate our criminals' love commandment:*
> *Hate thy brother as thyself*

The grief and longing, and the sensing of connection expressed in this poem are treated differently in *In the Castle of My Skin* where the character Trumper returns from America with an assurance derived from his discovery of "The Race. My people", and plays a recording of Paul Robeson to his friend who had never left the island. The tutorial from Trumper launches the narrating character G into a search for identity that must include his experience in the island of his birth but which must also comprehend Africanity and the difference or uniqueness that this bestows. The movement referred to is subtle and nuanced, and is required reading even today. But the following lines from G's reflections suggest the importance of Lamming's novelistic formulation:

> Here in the village and even throughout the island we had known differences between the well-to-do Blacks and the simpler, less

> prosperous ones. I had known both. There was a difference between the village school and the High school. There was a difference between Trumper and Bob and the friends I knew later at the High school. But this difference revealed to Trumper was in another category. This was something vast like sea and sky all wrapped in one . . . To be part of something which you didn't know, and which if Trumper was right it was my duty to discover.

In 'Birthday Poem: For Clifford Sealy' (Number 14, June 1951) the poet in England identifies with Sealy's starting in life without a beginning, shares in his passion for the creation of a new world, and joins with him in the struggle until death, still hoping. Every social, cultural and political theme in Lamming's novels, down to his continuous engagement with the figure of the artist and the role of the artist, is implicit in this tender and angry poem:

> *We must suffer in patience whom life received*
> *On islands cramped with disease no economy can cure,*
> *Go with or without our lovers to the quiet shore*
> *Where the reticent water weaves its pattern*
> *And crabs crawl with a peculiar contemplation of the land,*
> *Move through the multitude's monotonous cry*
> *For freedom and politics at the price of blood,*
> *Yet live every moment in the soul's devouring flame,*
> *Until we fold with the folding earth,*
> *Erect our final farewell in tree or cloud,*
> *Hoping (if possible) for a people's new birth.*

The two short stories Lamming published in *BIM* between 1946 and 1953 are useful for describing the relationship between the West Indian short story and the West Indian novel. Before the emergence of the novel, our short stories did the work of the short story, as well as the work we think of as the work of the novel. They portrayed society and described landscape as if they had all the time and space that a novel had; and they explored broad social and political themes as if they were novels. This is clearly demonstrated in our earliest outstanding author collection E. Snod's *Maroon Medicine*, Kingston, (1905).

This kind of short story has continued after the emergence of the novel. There is nothing in Selvon's long short story 'Cane is Bitter' (*BIM* 13, December 1950) to suggest that he saw any difference in form, function or language between the short story and the novel. He did also write, however, the focused and intense 'What's the Use?' (*BIM* 11) and 'My Girl and the City' (*BIM* 25). There are elements of the tradition in stories like Olive Senior's 'Ballad' and Jean Rhys's 'Temps Perdi', to name two obvious examples.

Lamming's two stories in *BIM* are not long short stories. They are clearly stories written

by a poet ('Birds of a Feather' has its measure of obscurity), and they illustrate the social density and the social concerns of the West Indian short story before the emergence of the West Indian novel.

'Birds of a Feather', set in Trinidad at the close of the Second World War, is less a story than a slice of life exposing class, race and colour situations, satirising the colonial mentality, registering the impact of the American presence on the society, intimating the end of the old colonialism and pointing to the beginning of a new orientation to America. It reads as if it wants to be a novel.

'Thorns and Thistles' has more social density than it needs, and it has a curious connection with the five poems published under the heading 'Variations on a Theme' in *BIM* 9, December 1948, but it is decidedly a short story and not part of a novel, and it does not ask for time and place to be a novel. It observes the unities, and limits itself to three characters (three women). It focuses on the emotional currents between the three women: Angela Rose who brought her up during the years that her actual mother was living and working in another island and Mrs. Barton, the mother whose failing sight makes her almost an invalid. The story has a surprise ending, a revelation coming to Angela that resolves her conflict over the two women.

An examination of the volumes of *BIM* that appeared between 1946 and 1953, and an analysis of the poems and short stories of Lamming show *BIM* as crucible and cradle. It also supports the argument that the poetry in the West Indian novel of the 1950s and early 1960s, the themes, the episodic quality, and the immediacy of the voices in them (including the narrative voice) are a direct legacy of the circumstance that the novelists of that time started off as poets and short story writers.

BIRDS OF A FEATHER

by G. W. LAMMING

The silence was heavy and ominous as we waited for the strumming to continue. It came intermittently; a fine, wheezing sound like the blacksmith's pump in the distance, making us aware of our own existence. The dog gave a loud insistent bark outside, and was on the verge of repeating the noise when the wind came in a powerful gust, flooding his lungs and muffling all sound. Through the iron bars which reinforced the wails of the dungeon it streamed like a torrent, powerful and uninterrupted, driving out the foulness and falling on us cold and refreshing. It revived our efforts at self-recovery. When the strumming reached us again it seemed less hazy. It possessed rhythm and meaning this time. In fact, it was no longer a mere strumming. But our uncertainty was so general and unlimited that no one hazarded a guess as to the kind of instrument it might be. Perhaps no one could. The wind rose again, more powerfully, and the sound was hushed immediately.

Dalton began to cough, a thundering noise which issued its echo around the walls. There was no peace for him. It seemed that the wind had shattered his inside. He always slept with his mouth open; a very awkward thing to do we often told him, but that was unavoidable on this occasion. He couldn't avoid anything. Neither could we. Three were no better than one in that infernal dungeon where the wind came pelting like a cold, stinging shower and loitered for a moment before leaving us to the impenetrable blackness of the walls and the foul space which enveloped us. Poor Dalton! He was coughing continually and knocking his fists against the wall. We could hear the clamping sound over and again. He turned heavily on his chest and vomited profusely. I wanted to shout at him, but there was no strength left to make my voice audible. He vomited again before dropping his head on the pavement.

What was our misery and the hours it lasted no one could say for certain, but we were sensible enough to know that we had been huddled together and isolated, if not with care, at least with the conviction of our gaolers that we could no longer disturb the peace of our surroundings. What we did to justify the anguish we suffered loomed beyond the farthest bounds of our imaginings. It had to be endured until we had fully regained our senses. Dalton was in the worst shape. Sometimes I felt a vague fear that he would vomit up his life and spit it out, detested and unwanted, into the corner. It must have been his maiden voyage on the 'treacherously placid seas of liquor.' A young, robust American, born in the tumbling storm of life and gaiety, was not expected to accept that kind of defeat so effortlessly and shamelessly. His countryman, Hendrickson, was an example of

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Portrait of George Lamming by Dennis Williams reprinted from original first edition of *In the Castle of My Skin, 1953*

American toughness. Nothing seemed to affect him except the lingering sickliness of that overdose. He was silent and quiet, and had I not felt him easing his body now and again to render Dalton and me less uncomfortable, I would have thought him dead.

There were people whom I had always been taught to regard as different from the sweltering mass of my countrymen. Either by heritage or some other device of nature, they were marked as symbols of a certain way of living; and they set the standards by which those in lower layers of society were judged. Such were the Flennings. It wasn't unnatural therefore that I should feel uneasy in accompanying Dalton and Henrickson to their party. Moreover it must have been the cry on every lip which jabbered in those cliques pinned here and there around the dancing hall that I had found my way into company to which my calling and station of life could not grant me access. I knew it and I felt it very keenly. Dalton and Hendrickson didn't. And Americans were quite unmanageable when they were caught in a situation which, no matter how serious in its impact, made no impression on their minds. Their gaiety and exuberance of spirit seemed to contain an element of revolt to that delicate organism which is West Indian society. And you couldn't ask them to conform to the serenity and apparent feebleness which characterised our atmosphere. There were many who declared that they were bent on disrupting the foundations of a society which seemed to them too delicate and enfeebled for use. I thought otherwise. They made no conscious demands; they imposed no standards. The freedom and hilarity in which they were steeped proved intoxicating in the calm and sobriety of their new surroundings. That was how I always felt. But the Americans had quickly become a type which aroused fear or disdain or admiration according to the peculiar slant of the mind which judged him. And so I kept near to my companions this night, not because I needed their protection momently, but I found it amusing and consoling alternately to watch them.

There was, I remember, a fair exchange of oaths between Dalton and a young man who had taken objection to his dancing methods. The young man, a West Indian, was broad and muscular with long, curved hands which showed streaks of blue veins. His hair was cropped low in his neck, almost in line with his collar, and his eyes wrathful and pitiless measured Dalton at a glance. Dalton muttering a friendly oath, offered him a drink and was repaid with what seemed nothing short of an insult. Hendrickson seemed very uneasy, and thought that he should settle his nerves with another whiskey and soda. He drank two in quick succession and was ordering the third when Dalton tumbled his glass on the floor amid a series of muttered interjections. The West Indian asked him to tidy the room and, more politely, to find a type of company which would be less unprepared for his vulgarity.

"Your job," said Dalton with a sardonic smile, indicating the broken glass. He kicked the pieces from under his feet and ordered a brandy.

"And wha'll you have, ol' boy?" he said, turning to face the West Indian. Hendrickson smiled and moved nearer the two men. His face quickly became a blank, and his eyes, cold and unseeing, were set in the corners of his face like bits of glazed marble.

“What about you, ol’ bean?” Dalton asked him. “A straight one, I guess, old male as you are, always going straight, straight as a road. Why don’t you bend that back of yours sometimes?” Hendrickson looked at him through eyes which seemed to have lost all communication with the brain.

“Joe,” Dalton grinned, shoving me in the direction of the West Indian, “what?”

“Falernum and soda,” I shouted, pretending to be drunk.

“Tell it to the Bobby Soxers,” he screamed uproariously, “the Bobby Soxers’ll tell you what to do with that.”

“You won’t drink any more here,” the West Indian protested. “And look about getting out.”

‘Playing tough, I’ll say,” Dalton challenged, cracking a glass on the table. There was a rapid exchange of glances, sharp and incisive. Hendrickson stood firm, his teeth a faint glimmer of white beneath the pale, furrowed lips. He looked from Dalton to the West Indian, from the West Indian to Dalton, and if those eyes weren’t so lifeless, so void of expression, I would have said that he was smiling. And when Dalton and the West Indian in the agony of passion gripped, he burst an empty bottle against the latter’s head and walked quietly, unperturbed, into the dancing hall. That was the prelude to the final onslaught and our ultimate expulsion.

The incidents which led to and climaxed that demonstration were broken and disconnected, and no picture of the episode remains clear to my mind. Each of us buried in that cell suffered a vague feeling of dehumanization. There was no contact with life, and it might have been less disconcerting if the wind and that instrument with its lingering melody flowing from the richness of civilized life around us had not brought us a sense of estrangement and isolation. I felt that life was slipping away from me, and were it possible I would have acted traitor to Hendrickson and Dalton. They had nothing to fear, nothing to regret. Their security was something impervious to attacks from external forces. If they transgressed the law, they would be dealt with very carefully. Society had nothing to offer them but a scowl. They were Americans. That was their defence, their protection. That was all. I, on the other hand, was a native, and a native of little worth in the judgment of those who formed the elite of my countrymen. The services I rendered my community might be winked at, but my short-comings could not escape the searching eyes of those who held me in their Power. That was the unhappy plight of natives like me. Tradition! System! We lived under the awful shadow of those Gods. And then there was the war, and mingled with the gifts it brought to these parts was the treasure of the Americans. The Americans came and moved about our community like new brooms around a dust-laden room. And not a few were suffocated and choked and poisoned against them. None were ever fully convinced that it was the dust which had obscured the lives of the neglected natives which was blinding.

I wondered what the other two beside me were thinking, and I envied them. It was silly to recapitulate all the Americans had done. To linger on the brief past was useless.

What I had to achieve was a way of escape. The Americans could be left to confront their difficulties alone. We had to meet again, but treachery was nothing new to them. It was the outcome of fear, and fear is an emotion innate in each of us. My eyes opened and closed. The surface of the pavement on which I lay seemed rougher and harder. Time had slipped away slowly, very slowly, I thought, and opening my eyes again I caught the faint glimmer of an early sun peeping at us through the iron bars. For a moment it seemed to reveal the indecency and stupidity of the night's adventure, and fear, like sudden claps of thunder, shook me through and through. Outside the tall, slender willows stood solemn and unhappy in their silence. Not a breath of air to graze the placid dignity of their demeanour. I tottered on my feet for a while, and fully gaining my balance stood erect on the solid pavement. The room contained all the fear and despair of the dungeon I had hitherto thought it. For a moment, I felt more neglected and forlorn than the immobile willows. The melody of that instrument was straining to my ears again. Dalton sat up and shot a wondering glance at Hendrickson who lay smiling a deadly, unfeeling smile. Soon the sun was streaming down on us.

"I didn't expect it of either of you," I heard Mr. Waite remonstrating some days after. His voice was fine and clear, and leaked through every crevice of his office. I was sitting in an adjoining room sorting cards, and the continual ringing shriek was most disturbing. "Be gay, certainly, do what you like," he argued, "but keep your head on. Look out for the circle in which you are swinging. Move with the tide, you know what I mean. You've been living in this place long enough to know things for yourselves. Go ahead now."

I heard the jeep drive off, and when I reached the windows the vehicle was all but lost in the spiralling dust. Mr. Waite cleared his throat twice in quick succession, and soon I heard the door slam violently. From where I sat I could see his slim, angular body ambling along the gravelled path. Small puffs of smoke wafted over his shoulder, thinned out and melted quietly in the air. He was born in Texas, Mr. Waite, an accident which greatly facilitated his labours in these parts. The natives viewed him with awe, for the sons of Texas, it was alleged, were not to be trifled with. But he was not unjust or dictatorial. He had lived in New York for more than six years and in Europe for a similar period. It was during the first World War when he served in the Merchant Navy that he had gathered most of his experience. He professed a knowledge of men, their inconsistency and their indeterminateness, and his actions bore testimony to the veracity of his professions. Of course he had his prejudices and dislikes, but he always made an honest attempt to guard his judgment against their demands. His manner was firm and decisive, however, and that was what the natives on the base discussed among themselves. They did not like a firm and decisive manner.

A week passed before I saw Dalton and Hendrickson again. They had gone South, nearly a hundred miles from the base, in connection with the transportation of petrol from the Oil Refinery. They were as radiant as ever. Dalton always in exuberant spirits hailed me with a shout that sent a shiver to my spine. They were sitting at a small, round table in the Balalaika. The air was warm and moist, and the soft red light fell lightly on

their faces. An army man was pounding a Jerome Kerne tune on the piano, while people tripped to and fro in the crowded room. I looked at the two Americans sitting before me, and wondered what eternal spark within them gave their faces that glow of warmth and happiness.

"Hello, you prison rat," Dalton shouted and threw an empty cigarette box into my face. He shouted to the waiter and gave an order.

"So old Flenning was out for us," he remarked, squinting his eyes. "Sent a long, nasty letter to the boss. Thought all hands would have been fired."

"I guess so," I said.

"Prisoners must be pretty tough in these parts," Hendrickson observed.

'The place stinks," Dalton snarled. "How in the name of Christ can you put a man in this dug-out? Where are the law and the prophets this side?"

"Dead," Hendrickson said and drained his glass.

"Old Waite kicked hell," Dalton said. "Talked of the dignity and so and so of the American flag. The stars and stripes and stripes and stars. Waite's a good boy," he continued, sipping his drink, "he's got the real American spirit, a damned nasty spirit when it starts to pounce on you."

He passed an indolent hand through his dishevelled hair and dropped it heavily on the table. Hendrickson sneezed powerfully, and parted his lips in a derisive smile.

"A drink?"

Dalton looked at him out of furtive, questioning eyes. "The gaol's no blasted fun in these parts," he said and shouted to the waiter again.

"We are bound for New Jersey next week," Dalton said, patting me on the shoulder. "It's going to be fun."

"New Jersey," I exclaimed in genuine surprise.

"Yes, sir," Hendrickson said slowly.

"Probably old Flenning's letter had something to do with it," Dalton said irritably. He surveyed the room with longing eyes. Hendrickson sat in his chair, a silent, incalculable weight, weary of the world. Now and again he tapped his thick, hirsute fingers on the table. This world of men and women seemed so small and delicate for him. It was dangerous to join too freely in the trifles which diverted those around him. A drink was enough. He felt a secret, unexpressed pleasure in knocking his glass against another's and listening to the mellifluous jabbering of those uncontrollable tongues. But he could not descend from his pedestal for fear of crushing the little heads that bobbed around him.

"Say," he exclaimed, turning to Dalton, and for a moment seemed to struggle against the tide of emotion that surged within. "An old friend." Dalton looked round dreamily.

"Remember me?" he shouted, and his voice trailed above the confused sounds that mingled within the room. The young man turned friendly, understanding eyes on him, and smiled. It was the young West Indian we had met at the Flennings! He groped through the shifting, excited crowd, and drew a chair to our table. Dalton gave him an amicable slap on the shoulder and motioned to the waiter.

"So you let us have it wholesale," Dalton said, propping his hands on the table. The West Indian coloured, and gave Hendrickson a portentous glance. The silence that lingered between us had a greater impact than the noise around.

"Forget it," Dalton said and passed the drinks. "I'm Dalton, Joe Dalton," he muttered quickly, extending his right hand to the young man. Hendrickson eased himself from his chair and whispered his name.

"Dickson, Arty Dickson," the young man said, and sat down quickly.

"Had no trouble?" he asked.

"Forget it," said Dalton.

"The truth is," he began.

"Forget it I said," Dalton repeated.

It was warmer than ever at the Balalaika. I could feel my shirt slipping against my back when I moved in the chair. The Americans opened their shirts and let the water trickle through the wiry sprigs of hair that covered their chests. People were moving around, a seething mass, heedless of time or the depressing heat of the tropical weather. And as we talked, Dalton always energetic, Hendrickson, a silent, concentrated listener, the music wound its way through the senses, sometimes softly, often jarringly and in discord.

"New Jersey for us within a week," Dalton said.

"New Jersey by all that's wonderful," Hendrickson muttered.

Dickson lit a cigarette and made circles with the smoke. "Pity I didn't get to know you fellows better," he said.

'Pity," Hendrickson assured him, and I wondered what he meant. Dalton laughed, a hollow, empty sound.

"Of course, you'll remember this old place," the West Indian said smilingly. Dalton for a moment pensive, rolled his glass on the table. The waiter, a clean, fierce-looking Negro, looked at us out of eyes which held no meaning. The music came again, a slow, monotonous melody. The Balalaika grew vague and hazy within, and the couples traipsing like imbeciles to the languid rhythms became undistinguished shapes.

"The gaol, you mean," Hendrickson smiled, "of course we couldn't forget it."

It was two o'clock when we parted with life enough to take us twenty yards where the last jeep parked. Dickson, the young West Indian, sat on the pavement waiting for the driver to help him in the taxi, and the wind flowing along his face, warm and forceful, kept

his eyes open. He smiled, a painful contortion of the lips, and waved both hands at us. We saw him totter and fall, a dead, inflexible weight, in the car which belched its steam at us and drove away.

Our jeep moved lightly along the narrow, undulating road. The driver, silent and morose, glanced from us to a frail, crumpled figure that lay beside him. The moon shed its light, a haze of white on the pitched road, and the wind rushed against us in desperation. For a second I could hear the muffled croaking of the invisible frogs. Dalton and Hendrickson crouched on either side of me, and I could feel their breath, heavy and regular, along my face. Perhaps they were asleep, dreaming of New Jersey and the unique joy of meeting old acquaintances. It was sooner than we expected, but we were sure the time would come. They had been moving out gradually, and I dreaded the day they would all be gone. The time had come for Dalton and Hendrickson to go, and I felt it keenly. The base would be in the future a different place for me, as it had become different for those whose services it needed no longer. It was human to feel the loss of companions like Dalton and Hendrickson, but their departure had more serious implications. As had been the case with their arrival, it was going to strike the very foundations of my society. It was probably in the nature of our destiny that we, born in these parts, should know and feel the violence of these changes.

"No chick feed this time, ol' boy," was the triumphant cry from lips which had once been bloodless and dry. "Dish it out, dish the dough out, or do it yourself."

That was a dangerous symptom. I didn't belong to the land, it was true, but it wasn't going to be pleasant pounding at typewriters after what I had known and enjoyed. I knew it, and all those who shared my comfort and delight during the past few years knew it too. It seemed that there was nothing to hope for. Life would be much like the monotonous humming of the jeep along this smooth road. I was content to live the present to the fullest. I was going to look upon the drama of life in an hour of intoxication. I would extract its last ounce of sweetness, and while that sweetness remained, feel that it was all I knew and all I would ever grow to know. When all was gone, well, there would be memory, the memory of all I had known and felt. I hadn't lost the faculty of remembering, of reflecting, and feeling satisfied with all that rushed back to me in an odd moment. That was something to be thankful for. It would be the same in the future. I would have with me the memory of what I was before the Americans came, the memory of what they made me suffer no less than what they helped me to enjoy. And I would be all the wiser. I would have the memory of Hendrickson's inscrutable eyes and Dalton's ebullience. They were in themselves a well of life from which I could draw in the future. And there was Dickson, my own countryman, who would have meant nothing to me had we met under different circumstances. Under that cloak of hypocrisy in which he was vested by those to whom he had sworn social allegiance there was yet some fundamental goodness. He was the prototype of an army, a symbol of the age in which he lived. I was glad to know him. And that lifeless figure that crouched against the driver, lost to the world, insensible to the surrounding air, he, too, would be remembered. I would have liked to see his face,

but the incident was enough. And the old Balalaika would find its treasured spot in the memory. It served its purpose well. Let the Americans go if their work was done. All would be absorbed in the melting-pot to form another link in the chain of experience which would encircle my days.

The old Balalaika had set my imagination aflame and how much sense there was in all that had passed through my slumberous mind could not be assessed by one in my condition. The little wooden jeep increased its speed. I looked at my watch and was aware of nothing but its faltering tick. The driver kept his eyes fixed on the narrow road. The light of the moon revealed his long, slender fingers on the steering wheel, shivering like a delicate lily against a mild breeze. His body, lean and erect, held the sacredness of some hallowed spot on which one is forbidden to trespass, and for a moment he seemed to bear the awful responsibility of preserving the world from destruction.

The village of Assam lay before us like a sleeping child. Withdrawn from the din and bustle of city life, it seemed another world. The humility of its aspect and the dignity of its silence were like memories of the past. Encircled by a grey, undulating wall of precarious strength, the church of St. George nestled beneath a cluster of huge mahogany, and beyond it, I could see a plane soaring to the base. In the distance, it looked like a fixed light set against the pale sky. I closed my eyes and waited for Assam to pass by.

And then it happened; that terrible shriek which rent the stillness of the air and struck us senseless and dumb by its suddenness. Words will not portray the horror. I was thrown forward, my head clinched tightly between Dalton's legs, while Hendrickson lay heavily on top of us. The man who lay in the front was jerked from his seat into the open canal that bordered the road. The driver held his seat, firm but speechless. Seconds passed, and each seemed to wait for the other to reveal the mystery of our plight. I heard a voice, a brawling, gulping sound, nearby, but the words were indistinct. The driver stepped from the jeep, and I raised myself from the weight that pressed on me and followed him. Dalton and Hendrickson soon came, and we stared in silence at the figure which lay in the road within a yard of the vehicle. It was incredible.

"Bastards," the voice muttered; "Americans. . . drunken bastards. . . respect. . . no. . . respect. . . law. . . citizen. . . " Our driver raised the body and dragged it to the side of the road. It spat and kicked violently. "Law. . . no. . . days wonderful. . . dogs."

"Shut up," the driver shouted, and that seemed to bring him to his senses.

"Shut up," he droned; "you say. . . shut. . . up. I didn't tell you shut up," he said articulately. "I asked Waite to do that. Waite. . . old bitch. . . drunken bitch."

"Old Flenning !" Dalton exclaimed, bringing the man's head under the light. "Old Flenning, Hendrickson," Dalton repeated.

"Flenning," the man bawled, "old. . . drunk. . . Flenning. . . Tell Waite. . . write letters. . . Waite. . . drunk. . . Waite."

Hendrickson lifted him carefully and rested him in the canefield nearby, and for the first time we remembered the man who had driven with us from the Balalaika. He gave a painful groan and wriggled his body despairingly.

“Take care o’ him,” the driver snapped, and threw himself in the jeep.

“Dead drunk,” said Dalton, helping him to his feet, and for a moment, we could hear the stifled, disconnected words: “Bastards. . . American. . . Waite.”

It was a distressing scene which made the driver’s blood boil with anger. He sat, struggling defiantly against the tide of passion that wrestled within his breast.

“Nearly got it,” Dalton said, panting.

“Flenning’s in a bad way,” I said to Hendrickson, in the hope of hearing his comment.

“Serve him well right,” Dalton said quickly. “I could have crushed his guts out. And that’s what you get for saving him.”

“Lucky guy,” said Hendrickson, clearing his throat.

“Drunken fool,” Dalton answered hotly, and threw his head back.

“I can’t believe it,” I said with a great deal of feeling. “Over sixty miles from the city, and a man like Old Flenning, a man like him”.

“Shut up,” Dalton said, elbowing me in the ribs. “Do something for that dead one there in front, or sleep.”

The wings of the American clipper glinted in the moonlight as we moved across the expanse of land. The cluster of buildings glimmered faintly around us. We motored slowly into the open shed that sheltered the vehicles, and the driver, stepping lightly from his seat, left me unnoticed to the sleeping men.

THE TRUTH ABOUT ORANGES

by Mark Jason Welch

. . . sold oranges . . .
. . . peeled oranges . . .

For years
she has sold
peeled oranges,
 bagged in one's,
 three's, two's;
sold peeled oranges
 on various city corners.

I saw her mainly on afternoons,
always settled in the shade
of a building to avoid
the sting of the high, bright sunshine;
sunshine that coaxed a time for tired
teachers to ring bells and turn keys
in their cars and go home, while we,
thousands of us,
revelled in our fleeting freedom,
revelled on the city streets
scented with ackees, sno-cones, dunks,
sugar cakes, nut cakes, tamarind balls
and . . . and
oh yeah . . .
oranges;
peeled oranges.
But who wanted fruit when donuts,
thick rotis, chocolate Teatimes
and jam puffs to stuff our mouths with

could be obtained.
Even watermelon was pushing it
for me in my untucked shirt,
unlaced shoes,
unbuttoned epaulettes;
rocking with laughter
and energy enough to carry
two horses upon my back,
dead or alive.
She
with her trays of oranges
and her buckets with more oranges
and her clear plastic bags
to seal sold oranges

(salt set to one side);
her transistor sputtering
like an old man;
its broken antenna
like an unused penis
spouting news from a distant home
as she hustled
making change or
argued expatriate politics with
the lingering shark toothed taxi men
who simply could not understand
the travails of a single mother
without her own palm tree
to piss against
or hang a pot upon;
the effort
to fan a fire to feed a brood
who instinctively understood
the importance of education
while I
scurried around,
squandering my time on VCR's and
videogames;
learning nothing really.

I remember shelling green peas
with my grandmother for hours
or picking rice,
rich lessons in diligence.
But then she went away
and everything changed,
becoming cobwebby and inconsequential
until epiphanies like this awakened
sleeping syllables within my solar plexus.

Idling by the fountain,
my friends hollered my name and a few
obscenities,
unsure why I was taking so long.

I blinked,
bought an orange-
glimpsing a Caribbean symphony
thick with steel pan
and a Congo rhythm el Verno could not
best
behind the frames of her glasses
– said, 'Thank you'
like I had been taught to
and ran on to catch up.

THE BARGAIN

by Karl Sealy

We were about the same age, eleven turning into twelve. We were neighbors, or rather, our homes stood side by side. Nellie lived with her grandfather, and there was a woman who used to scrub and cook and clean for them. As for me, I lived with my mother and two sisters.

I crept cautiously through the dark house, down to the shed door that gave onto the yard, and noiselessly slipping the latch which I could just reach by stretching, passed out into the early dawn. Softly I closed the door behind me and stood still for a moment, savouring the fresh air, sweet with the delicious aroma of ripe mangoes. Then I ran across the narrow yard toward some loose boards in the shaky palings between the houses. In a few seconds I had reached and squeezed through the small aperture needed for the passage of my spare body, and was beneath old Bradshaw's big mango tree sampling the choicest of the fruit that had fallen during the night.

This was my usual morning ritual in the season of mangoes, and so careful was I in the disposal of all signs of my early feasts that I was never caught—except by—but I'll come to that later— never even suspected of my predatory missions by my elders.

This morning, as I held a luscious fruit in my mouth and tried to stack an over-sized one in the pocket of my pyjamas, I heard a light step behind me, and, turning, came face to face with Nellie Bradshaw.

We stood silently regarding each other in the brightening morning. Even then in my childish fear the lovable innocence of her small dark face struck me, and I smiled (the mango had dropped from my lips in the first shock of discovery), as something told me she would not tell. But the smile quickly died, for Nellie did not smile back.

"You steals," she challenged, accusingly, scornfully.

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"'Tain't," I lamely denied.

"Yes, you does," she reaffirmed. "I'll tell gran'dad an' you'll get—" she shook her head from side to side and licked her fingers together expressively.

"No," I whispered, beseechingly.

"Yes, I will," emphatically. She was doing a little dance of triumph. "We ain't frien's. You don't speak to me when you pass me going to school on your bicycle, nor you don't give me no rides, like Norma Kinch nor Patricia Forde. I'll tell."

I quaked in my pyjamas. The morning was ripening. The others would soon be awake. I had to be quick.

"Don't tell," I faltered. There must have been tears in my eyes. "Let's be–be frien's, an' I'll ride you to school if you wait roun' the corner this morning."

She weighed the proposition, looking my little, pyjamas-clad figure up and down. Womanlike, she wanted to make the most of the bargain.

"You'll let me ride, by my own, own self some ways?" she asked at last.

"Yes," I stammered. I would have agreed to anything then.

"Awright, I won't tell," she drove the bargain. "I'll wait by Crick's shop early early." Then she added, in her quick, frank way, "I like you."

I was considering how best to reply to this new confession when the old man saved me the trouble.

"Nellie, Nellie," he bellowed from inside the house, "where are you? Outside already, barefoot on the damp ground? Come in! Come in! Come in!"

Quick as thought, her lips touched my dirty, sticky cheeks and she was gone.

I threw the fruit I had gathered from me and fled through the palings, feverishly fixing the boards behind me. When the others called me, I was feeding the pigeons.

That was the beginning. We used to meet under the mango tree almost every dawn, eat mangoes when in season, and exchange scripts, written on little, dirty scraps of paper.

And now that Nellie is my wife and our oldest son is more than eleven, we still laugh over that first bargain under old Bradshaw's mango tree.

THE POLITICS OF LAMMING-TATIONS

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE AESTHETIC AND THE POLITICAL

by Linden Lewis

Any attempt to understand George Lamming as a writer, artist and public intellectual should take into consideration the context that produced and nurtured his talent initially. This context is of course Barbados, at least in Lamming's formative years. England as a destination and a place of intellectual maturing represented a later stage of this development. The question therefore becomes, what is there about the nature of Barbadian society that produces as sharp and as discerning a mind as that of George Lamming's? This is a useful point of departure as George Orwell so perceptively reminded us in 1946. Orwell did not think it possible to assess a writer's motives without knowing something of his early development.

> *His [the writer's] subject matter will be determined by the age he lives in —at least this is true of the tumultuous, revolutionary ages like our own— but before he ever begins to write he will have acquired an emotional attitude from which he will never completely escape (Orwell, 2004: 4).*

Lamming in fact reflects on this very point at the *Présence Africaine's* 1956 Congress of Black Writers and Artists when he mused: "In other words, he [the writer] is continually being shaped by the particular world which accommodates him, or if you like, refuses to do so, and at the same time he is shaping through his own desires, needs and idiosyncrasies, a world of his own" (1958:112). Given his own social and political context and the specific existential burden of the racial order of the day, Lamming saw the black writer as assuming a specific set of social responsibilities which he commented on in his address to the Congress of Black Writers cited above:

> *The Negro writer joins hands therefore not so much with a Negro audience as with every other writer whose work is a form of self enquiry, a clarification of his relations with other men, and a report on his own very highly subjective conception of the possible meaning of man's life (1958: 112).*

As it turns out, situating the writer George Lamming is a more difficult project than even Orwell might have imagined. Though Barbados has produced an impressive listing of academics and intellectuals, it does not have an established tradition of radical intellectual thinkers that extends much beyond Wynter A. Crawford, Charles Duncan O'neale, Richard B. Moore and A. E. S 'TT' Lewis[1]. The absence of a robust radical intellectual tradition therefore makes George Lamming a bit of an anomaly. He is a peculiar intellectual product of a society that is adept at camouflaging its real contradictions through conservatism and the fetishization of stability, and often is very proud of both feats[2]. Lamming captures this feature admirably in his rumination about the colonial condition:

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> *Three hundred years, more than the memory could hold, Big England had met and held Little England and Little England like a sensible child accepted. Three hundred years, and never in all that time did any other nation dare interfere with these two. Barbados or Little England was the oldest and purest of England's children, and may it always be so. The other islands had changed hands. Now they were French, now they were Spanish. But Little England remained steadfast and constant to Big England. Even to this day. Indeed, it was God's doing. The hand of the Lord played a great part in that union. And who knows? You could never tell. One day before time changed for eternity, Little England and Big England, God's anointed on earth, might hand-in-hand rule this earth. In the '14 war they went side by side together, and they would go again any time. Big England had the strongest navy, and Little England the best fishermen in this God's world. Together they were mistresses of the sea, and whenever, wherever, the two meet on the same side, war or peace, there was bound to be victory (Lamming, 1979: 37).*

Lamming's comment above is ironic of course, but it is more than that, it recognizes the asymmetry of power between metropole and colony. He alerts us to the false consciousness that is wrapped up in the pride of association that Little England feels toward Big England. Part of the focus of his work is the experience and legacy of colonialism in the Caribbean. Time and again he returns to this theme. In a recent *Guardian* newspaper article Lamming recalled that the colonial experience of his generation was one without much physical violence, but in essence "was a terror of the mind; a daily exercise in self-mutilation" (2002, *Guardian Unlimited*, internet edition).

Perhaps if Lamming had simply concentrated on his novels and had restricted his public pronouncements to the craft of writing, the pleasures of the text, and other aesthetic judgments, Barbadian society might have embraced and celebrated his accomplishments with more enthusiasm than they do currently. Speaking at the inaugural Earl Warner Memorial Lecture in March 2003, another internationally renowned Barbadian novelist, Austin 'Tom' Clarke, had this to say about Barbadian society's ambivalence toward George Lamming:

> *I find it brave on the part of Mr. George Lamming, who lives amongst you, is easily recognizable, but still remains invisible, so far as the consultation of his wisdom and his extraordinary literary (and political) acumen is concerned; and I ascribe this diminished attention and almost complete absence of a request to him to participate in the island's cultural affairs, to the disposition of the governors of this country, who are uneasy, it seems, about living so close to genius; and to the genius of Mr. Lamming's criticism of their governance. Perhaps Mr. Lamming has his reasons for keeping distance with social participation. Perhaps he prefers to be the Literary Hermit of Atlantis!* (2003: 4-5).

Austin Clarke of course knows of that which he writes, himself having run afoul of the governors of the country in 1975, when he was asked to resign his position as General Manager of the Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation in Barbados. Clarke later wrote of the political tensions that swirled around his management style, political attempts to influence creativity, and the daunting task of becoming a catalyst for change in a culture that at the time seemed unyielding. His account of these events is to be found in his memoir, *The Prime Minister*, published upon his return to Canada in 1977.

Perhaps understanding the complexities of his native Barbadian society, as well as the pleasures of his own exile, Lamming obviously envisioned that invisibility might be his fate at home. Even before returning to Barbados permanently he wrote: “They [Caribbean writers] are afraid of returning, in any permanent sense, because they feel that sooner or later they will be ignored in and by a society about which they have been at once articulate and authentic”(1984: 46). That such a fate has befallen him is at once prescient and ironic, given the perceptiveness of the foregoing comment.

Why then does Barbados exhibit this ambivalence about the writer? Part of the national psyche is proud of George Lamming’s accomplishments and international recognition. In a country once steeped in a Greek and Latin educational tradition, Barbadian intellectual pride is comforted by claims to having their own great man of letters, who could hold his own with the Caribbean’s literary giants: Wilson Harris and Denis Williams of Guyana, V.S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon and Earl Lovelace of Trinidad, Andrew Salkey, Claude McKay and Sylvia Wynter of Jamaica, Maryse Condé and Simone Schwartz-Bart of Guadeloupe, Nicolás Guillén and Alejo Carpentier of Cuba, Jacques Roumain of Haiti, among others. Conversely, the political authorities and the middle class intelligentsia are often troubled by Lamming’s didacticism. First, unlike many members of his class, Lamming is much more outspoken about his reflections on the place of his birth. He does not shy away from the controversial issues that face Barbados, but more importantly, as an intellectual and genuine democrat, he views critique as the life-blood, or as he might say, the oxygen, of participatory democratic practice. His critique of Barbadian society could be biting. He has wielded his pen to unmask the pretentiousness of the middle class, to reveal the unequal distribution of power in Barbados, to unsettle white privilege, and to contest the hierarchical arrangement of the island both in his books and in his public lectures and pronouncements. For these actions, the Barbadian society is still undecided as to whether to embrace this fierce critic or to maintain their distance from this guardian of the word. In the end, like the rest of the Caribbean, Barbadian society was and continues to be innocent of the notion of critique. To be critical of one’s society, however constructive one might be, is to betray national loyalty and sentiment, and therefore to court rebuke, marginalization and worse of all, indifference—it is ultimately, to inhabit a space outside of the nation.

The diminished attention which Austin Clarke addressed earlier, goes beyond the government of the country and reaches back into a whole bourgeois and petite bourgeois

class that find the ideas of this novelist destabilizing, for George Lamming does not come to anoint the afflicted but to afflict the anointed and the comforted. One can glean some insight into Lamming's political and social marginalization when he recalls his association with the Grenadian Revolution.

> *"I had a lot of problems from here because during that time I'm in Barbados and I am subject to all kinds of petty harassments. All my mail is opened. Somehow or other the telephones I use are tapped. So sometimes I would call Grenada and I would say directly, "Would you put me on to the comrade leader* [reference to Prime Minister, Maurice Bishop]*?" and I always spoke in a way that allowed the listener, wherever the listener was, to know that I have nothing to say that should be concealed, that I did not believe in any underground, hidden behavior. My support of, identification with that effort of transformation was made absolutely clear and above board. Nothing clandestine about it. But there was a kind of hysteria in Barbados about the Grenada Revolution and [there were] very unpleasant attacks, to put it mildly, both public and private, on the one or two people who articulated their support for them, especially Rickey Singh [well-known Caribbean journalist], whose defense I often had to come to* (see Scott, 2002: 185).

To return to Austin Clarke's comment for the moment, there is also much truth in his summary observation that "Barbados is not a derelict landscape. Barbados is derelict in its national duty and moral obligation to its artists" (2003: 9). The artist in Lamming's formative years, could not be expected to sustain or reproduce himself or herself adequately, purely through his or her art—be it music, painting, performance or writing. Hence self-imposed exile became, not an option but a necessity, for many of the earliest Caribbean artists. Moreover, in a relatively underdeveloped intellectual infrastructure such as the Caribbean at the time [circa 1950], the pursuit of a life of the mind, which Lamming and a few others had embarked on, was a task almost as daunting as that imposed on Sisyphus in Tartarus. In small, poor, economically dependent societies such as those found in the Caribbean, the weight of economic oppression and the struggle for daily survival take their toll and leave only limited scope for the pursuit of a life of the mind.

George Lamming's political views did not sit very comfortably among certain sections of the Barbadian society either. In 1996, Bucknell University at the suggestion of its Caribbean Studies Faculty, hosted George Lamming for a week as a scholar in residence. Preparatory to his arrival on campus, Glyne Griffith, Hilbourne Watson and I participated in a Brown Bag Lunch discussion entitled "Culture, Politics and Resistance in the Work of George Lamming". On that occasion I made the following remarks that I repeat here in light of the foregoing observation about Lamming's political views being unwelcome in his native country.

I had seen George Lamming at the then Center for Multi-Racial Studies, which at the time was attached to the University of the West Indies in Barbados. I was still in high school at the time but felt compelled to attend a reading by Lamming of his most recent work. This occasion did not leave a particularly strong impression on me. After this event I had no further encounter with George Lamming or his work until 1980 when the Cave Hill Campus of the University of the West Indies conferred an honorary doctorate of letters on him. I remember listening to the live radio broadcast of his keynote address at the Graduation ceremony and being struck by the following remarks:

> *This system of economic and cultural imperialism remains in profound conflict with the struggles of labour for an alternative society, a national dwelling place which would be the material reward and the spiritual symbol of that labour, how to transform production into creative forms of social living that derive from the free and informed choices of those whose labour makes our survival possible. But the power of the system prevails* (1992: 79).

Then Lamming made a remark that was to set off a firestorm of criticism in the days to follow:

> *You do not have to be a Marxist to recognize these truths, although, in my view, Marxist analysis provides us with the most penetrating insight into the formation of this system and the purpose which it serves. It is clear to me that no institution of learning, be it University or Labour College, in the modern world, especially in that vast area we name underdeveloped, and by which we mean exploited, can do its duty with honour and not come to terms with the fundamentals of Marxist thought* (1992: 79).

Lamming also posed these very poignant questions to that graduating class: "Whom does your labour serve? And towards what vision of mankind?" These were discomforting questions not just for the graduating class of 1980 but, for the politically conservative J.M.G.M. (Tom) Adams administration of the day, an administration that had had its hands full dealing with the political interventions of the young, radical, Vincentian political science lecturer at the University of the West Indies, Barbados campus, Dr. Ralph Gonsalves[3].

In the days following Lamming's address cited above, there was an outpouring of condemnation of the writer in the Barbadian newspapers by letter writers and columnists who could not understand how as intelligent a man as George Lamming, who had made such an outstanding literary contribution to his country and region, could align himself with Marxist philosophy. Tony Vanterpool, a contemporary of Lamming's, commented on how an English friend of his reacted to what turned out to be the controversial graduation address given by the novelist:

> *He attacked the rich Whites; he attacked the poor Whites; he attacked the planter; he attacked the merchants; he attacked the rich Black; he*

> *attacked the middle-class, he attacked the poor class; in other words he attacked everything* (1980: 18).

Given his own astute reading of Barbadian society and his knowledge and association with George Lamming, Vanterpool seemed much more sanguine about the critique offered by the esteemed writer than his English friend. Indeed his parting comment to her was an important coda: "Now, my English friend, I hope you realize why some of us are constantly on the attack. Maybe we are just a little bit afraid that if we ever stopped attacking, the hands of the clock might go anti-clockwise" (Vanterpool, 1980: 18). The observation here is an important one and compatible with the kind of argument that Lamming was making at the time. If Vanterpool seemed amenable to such progressive views however, other members of the Barbadian public were less congenial. One columnist subsequently framed his objection to Lamming's politics this way: "I think it would not be an overstatement to say that the Barbadian public at large has grown weary of Mr. Lamming's ideological position and ritualistically slavish attention to the holy text of Marxist dogma" (Jemmott, 1984:23). Jemmott expanded on this objection:

> *However whereas it is possible to give full praise to George Lamming the novelist, the imaginative raconteur of social history, the Barbadian public stands on guard against the fulminations of Lamming the would-be socio-political scientist. Facility of expression must not be allowed to cloud poverty of ideas, lack of objectivity and downright propaganda* (1984: 23).

Jemmott's remarks above are rather revealing. He normalizes his own conservative position while pathologizing Lamming's Marxist sympathies, without discerning any inconsistency in his argument. Anyone who knows George Lamming, however, would attest to the fact that he is not an ideologue and has never been one to follow Marxist doctrines slavishly.

Jemmott then summed up his astonishment with Lamming's continued allegiance to a political philosophy, which in his opinion was anathema to the full sovereignty of the imagination. He opined:

> *I have always found it difficult to understand how Mr. Lamming, a man of high seriousness with a strongly individualistic vision could speak so strongly in defence of a socio-political system which has historically sought to direct and blunt the independent creative impulse* (Jemmott, 1984: 23).

It was coming out of this controversy around Lamming's remarks, views and politics that I became curious about his work and his public pronouncements and the power of his ideas. I began to discern an explicitly political focus in what he was saying and writing.

George Lamming always seemed to have had a bigger intellectual project in mind. He has very deliberately responded to Jean-Paul Sartre's questions to the writer:

> *"What is your aim in writing? What undertakings are you engaged in, and why does it require you to have recourse to writing"* (1949: 21). *Lamming understands also as Sartre reminded us, that to speak is to act* (1949: 22). *Moreover, to act is to disclose, and as Sartre would have it, "to reveal is to change and that one can reveal only by planning to change"* (1949: 23).

George Lamming is what Sartre described as an "engaged writer". Sartre elaborates:

> *But from this point on we may conclude that the writer has chosen to reveal the world and particularly to reveal man to other men so that the latter may assume full responsibility before the object which has been thus laid bare* (1949: 24).

This issue of disclosing or laying bare the social forces at work is at the heart of what Lamming does as a writer; whether it is *In the Castle of my Skin*, *Seasons of Adventure* or *Natives of My Person*. Indeed, this act of revealing is consistent with what Jean-Paul Sartre says is a function of the writer:

> *Similarly, the function of the writer is to act in such a way that nobody can be ignorant of the world and that nobody may say that he is innocent of what it's all about. And since he has once engaged himself in the universe of language, he can never again pretend that he can not speak. Once you enter the universe of significations, there is nothing you can do to get out of it* (1949: 24).

The project of George Lamming's novels is always very clear. He seeks to engage readers in a process of discovery of the marginalized subjects, of their suffering, their struggles and their demands for freedom. Indeed, *In the Castle of My Skin* is described rather perceptively by Ngugi Wa Thiongo as a "colonial revolt" (1972: 110). It should be noted according to George Lamming that *In the Castle of My Skin* was not allowed in any of the libraries for about ten years, and that one man lost his job in Jamaica for bringing the novel into his sixth form (see Conversations III, [video recording] 1996). The literary establishment and the gatekeepers of 'proper' language use in the Caribbean High School system were apparently uncomfortable with the elevation of Barbadian creole speech—the language of the common folk—to a status of social acceptability in Lamming's novel. Indeed, Lamming sees what he does as sort of evangelical work. "I'm a preacher of some kind; I am a man bringing a message of some kind" (Scott, 2002: 198). In fashioning this leitmotiv, Lamming makes no distinction between the aesthetic and the political. Lamming ruminates, "I have difficulty isolating the writer from what seems to me the common responsibility of all citizens. When people question, for example, your involvement in or your attachment to politics, I always find that puzzling because it seems to me that it is inconceivable that the work which a writer is doing (which is so directly connected with trying to explore and even find his location within the social collectivity) could be done without being directly involved in processes which I would call political" (Scott, 2002: 181). In his 1946 essay "Why I Write", referred to

earlier in this chapter, George Orwell argues that this realm of the political to which Lamming alludes above, is one of the four great motives for writing.

> *Political purpose—using the word 'political' in the widest possible sense. Desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after. Once again, no book is genuinely free from political bias. The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude* (2004: 5).

In a recent workshop held at Bucknell University, Lamming reiterated, "There is always talk about authorial intervention. I believe in intervening! There was no way I could separate my subjectivity from the role it should play in what I write" (personal transcript of the author, 2003). It is precisely this sense of the relationship between the aesthetic and the political that Lamming shares with the sentiments expressed by George Orwell when the latter notes:

> *What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art. My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice. When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, 'I am going to produce a work of art.' I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing. But I could not do the work of writing a book, or even a long magazine article, if it were not also an aesthetic experience* (Orwell, 2004: 8)

Sandra Pouchet Paquet, one of the earliest literary critics of Lamming's œuvre, notes:

> *"He writes out of an acute social consciousness that is vitally concerned with politics and society, that is, with the function of power in a given society, and its effects on the moral, social, cultural, and even aesthetic values of the people in that society"* (1982: 1).

The question of aesthetics has of course, been approached in various ways by different writers, artists and philosophers. For Kant, aesthetics referred to a theory of beauty. For Hegel on the other hand, aesthetics was mainly the philosophy of the fine arts. Lamming's aesthetic is rooted in a materialist philosophy which sees art, in the broadest sense of that word and its reception, as produced by historical processes. His writing therefore revolves around the relations that connect people, places and time. George Lamming is undoubtedly part of what he is writing about. He is present in his writing in the form determined by the relations of his own experience. This position is clear from the way he describes his origin.

> *I was born in a small village where the women were mothers and servants. The men worked by chance—casual laborers, house painters, shoemakers, sharpeners of knives, and messengers for a great variety of occasions. And since the island was small and could be viewed as*

> *one large cane farm, we lived within the shadow of the plantation and at the rigorous mercy of the merchant. Our relation to bread, our relation to God, our relation to the courts of law were influenced daily by these demons. We were the children of an old and enduring servant class* (Lamming, 1992: 78).

This keen sense of origin is present also in Lamming's assessment of the social relations in which he is growing up at the time in Barbados. He is meticulous in his description and definition of his childhood village, Carrington Village—an area with such a bad reputation that when fights broke out there, the police did not respond immediately to calls for help because such a request engendered "a big argument in the [police] station as to who would go" (1992: 25). So notorious was the area that it was a source of embarrassment to be identified with the place and hence Lamming often concealed his real address.

Lamming tells of an episode in his early life about returning from his elite school one afternoon. This story provides considerable insight into his assessment of social relations that form such a central part of his novels.

> *. . . I saw my mother coming towards me—that was very serious—should I acknowledge her or not? And in those situations she just caught my eye and I caught hers and as we come nearer to each other we are both thinking about the same thing because I am not too sure that I want to be identified there. And in a curious kind of way she does not mind if I don't because of who I am with now—Dr. Somebody's son. So when I hear people discussing class, I did not discover that in Marx. I lived it, from the age of ten. I lived with class. Then much later, I had to try and understand what had happened to me. But I did not discover how class society deforms human relations from Marx. I lived it. And so I have developed an extraordinary nose. I can smell middle class people everywhere* (1992:26).

This reflection represents a remarkable sociological insight into Lamming's material conditions of existence. From very early in his life therefore, the knowledge of social class is a concrete and pivotal part of Lamming's lived experience. It is not an abstract, academic concept without a material content. Moreover, Lamming arrives at a sort of Fanonian realization. His social class background is central to his being. It is there, unarguable. It confronts, disturbs and perhaps even angers him. In a society long known for its class snobbery, such realization of social status is inevitable. This type of perspicacity and self-reflection pervades Lamming's novels. These are the types of penetrating observations and insights that we encounter through the reflections of such characters as "G" in *In The Castle of my Skin*, and in the brooding cynicism of Powell in *Seasons of Adventure* and in Pinteados, the pilot in *Natives of my Person*. It is this conflation of the lived experience and the creative imagination that is central to Lamming's work.

Perhaps that nose for discerning middle class people and their behavior is best at work in his characterization of Mr. Slime of *In the Castle of my Skin*. The name 'Slime' of course conjures cunning and deceitfulness of character, which Edward Baugh says must be linked symbolically to the preparation of the Barbadian national dish of cou-cou and flying fish (1977). The okras used in the making of the dish give it an initial slimy or slippery consistency, which is important to the texture and aesthetics of the successfully completed national delight. As Ngugi, notes it is from the social stratum of the people from below that emerge the leaders of the colonial revolt, "precisely because they are better placed to articulate their desires and discontent . . . " (1972: 118). Ngugi sees the character of Mr. Slime as directing the collective consciousness of the village and acting as a catalyst for social change (1972: 118). It is however Mr. Slime's political ambition that causes him to abuse the trust of his people; it is he who places them in a predicament and who ultimately betrays them. Lamming is in fact offering a very early critique of postcolonial reason and practice through the behavior of this character.

Lamming also seems dedicated to revealing the disingenuousness of the middle class at every level in his work. The reader becomes familiar with this strategy in a number of ways; often Lamming uses humor to make his point. In *Season of Adventure*, Lamming spends some time describing the behavior of the Piggotts' cat. The domestic helper, Therese, did not like the family cat but developed a grudging respect for its sense of style. Therese noted that the cat's manners were perfect, and she likened the animal's behavior to that of Fola's, the young protagonist in the novel, who also appeared to exude this sort of style.

> *But shortly after lunch, Therese had made the most astonishing discovery of her career with the Piggotts. The cat had relieved itself all over the dining table. Therese hadn't quite got over the shock it gave her. She tried to make the most unlikely excuses. Under the bed, Therese thought, or in one of Piggott's hats, or even in a corner of her kitchen. She might have understood this lapse of style. But the cat's choice of the dining table surpassed all reason. With shock and horror in every word she uttered, Therese had kept saying to herself: 'But why, he had to put his load up there?'* (1979: 110).

It is clear that the cat represents an extension of the Piggott family, but more importantly, its behavior was symbolic of the general façade of a middle class existence; superficially self-assured and in charge of its own destiny but at the core, riddled with contradictions. Commenting on this pretentiousness Rohlehr in an extended analysis of *Season of Adventure* notes:

> *The entire political hierarchy of the new republic referred to in the novel as 'the families' of Federal Drive—has been based on counterfeit. Counterfeit money is Lamming's metaphor of both the materialism and the fakedness of the new ex-colonial bourgeoisie. Lamming is the first West Indian novelist to have focused with such severity on the*

> *elite that came into power with Independence; and he did that before Independence. Season of Adventure then, is one of our great prophetic novels, whose thorough exploration of the pre-Independence present enabled it to project its enquiry accurately into the probable nature of the post-Independence future* (1992: 78).

Janet Butler raised a very important point some years ago when she indicated that it was not just his own material conditions that were present in his writing, but a very definite philosophical influence on Lamming's thinking:

> *Two elements conjoined to produce the political intent of his mature fiction. Coupled with the experience of minority racism, informing and illuminating it, was Lamming's familiarity with Sartrian existentialism, a knowledge which he brought with him from Trinidad* (1982: 15).

Lamming in his early years fully subscribed to Sartre's notion that existence precedes essence or as the French philosopher explained, that subjectivity must be the starting point (see Sartre, 1957). Perhaps the mature Lamming might frame this position in more Marxian terms—notwithstanding Sartre's own distancing from the same—in which his starting point may be more specially defined as the material base of existence.

Lamming was clearly influenced by the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre. He had read and internalized "What is Literature?" by Sartre, as alluded to earlier, and the concerns in much of his work revolve around existential questions of freedom, suffering, identity, power and agency.

> *So I think there is a way in which the Barbados experience is now being filtered through another kind of experience—another kind of intellectual experience takes that and processes it in a certain way. I am also reading voraciously. But I'm not reading English writers. They don't interest me very much. I am reading the French. I am interested in Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir and André Malraux. And I begin to make no separation between the man of culture and the man of public affairs, the man of letters and the man of action. I am absorbing this now from reading of the French writers. I would not have got that if I were concentrating on Waugh and Green. But I'm reading everything by Sartre, everything by Camus, everything by de Beauvoir, all of the debates going on [among] the French and that is having an influence on me at this time* (Interview with George Lamming, see Scott, 2002: 111-112).

As Butler argues, a failure to recognize the existential moorings in his work is to miss perhaps the single most "urgent ethic underlying his works" (1982: 15).

Reflecting on the political dimension of Lamming's work, Sandra Pouchet Paquet observes:

> *Lamming's novels can be termed political not only because the matter they investigate is of a political nature, but because they reflect his commitment to reorganize the imbalance in personal and social relationships engendered by a colonial history. The novels are intended as political acts. In his fiction, Lamming offers no easy solutions and no programme for government. What he offers is a careful evaluation of the social laws and values that perpetuate a colonial mentality, and also an evaluation of those elements in the society that contribute to the making of a new social order* (1982: 4).

Indeed, Lamming surmises that "colonialism is the very base and structure of the West Indian cultural awareness" (1984:35). In a reflection that resonates with some of the ideas earlier articulated by both Kwame Nkrumah and Frantz Fanon, Lamming distinguishes between what he calls the colonial experience and the colonial situation. For Lamming the chronological markers of the experience of colonialism and post-colonialism are not always as clear-cut as some would have us believe.

> *I mean, okay, the places have independence, etc. The colonial situation is a matter of historical record. What I'm saying is that the colonial experience is a living experience in the consciousness of these people. And just because the so-called colonial situation and its institutions may have been transferred into something else, it is a fallacy to think that the human-lived content of those situations are automatically transferred into something else, too. The experience is a continuing psychic experience that has to be dealt with and will have to be dealt with long after the actual colonial situation formally ends* (Interview conducted by George Kent, in Drayton & Andaiye, 1992: 100).

It is in this neo-colonial context that Lamming sees the Caribbean writer as being challenged to negotiate the creative and political terrain of the region. He had very early indicated what he considered to be a profound contribution of the Caribbean writer when he observed:

> *Unlike the previous governments and departments of education, unlike the business man importing commodities, the West Indian novelist did not look out across the sea to another source. He looked in and down at what had traditionally been ignored. For the first time the West Indian peasant became other than a cheap source of labour. He became, through the novelist's eye, a living existence, living in silence and joy and fear, involved in riot and carnival. It is the West Indian novel that has restored the West Indian peasant to his true and original status of personality* (1984: 39).

Also at the level of the political, Lamming would no doubt agree with Louis Althusser

when he stressed, "Every work of art is born of a project both aesthetic and ideological" (1971: 24):

> *Just as a great revolutionary philosopher, like a great revolutionary politician, takes into account his own thought the historical effects of his adoption of a position, even within the rigorous and objective system of his thought—so a great artist cannot fail to take into account in his work itself, in its disposition and internal economy, the ideological effects necessarily produced by its existence* (Althusser, 1971: 242).

Lamming is acutely aware of this role of art and the artist, and has articulated his understanding of the same in many places:

> *The work of art, be it theatre, music, novel, or poem is not seen primarily by the artist as a call to revolution, or a call to anything else nor as a celebration of victory. Artistic expression can do those things and in particular situations may regard or must regard this function as its priority. But the central and seminal value of the creative imagination is that it functions as a civilizing and a humanizing force in a process of struggle. It offers an experience through which feeling is educated. Through which feeling is deepened. Through which feeling can increase its capacity to accommodate a great variety of knowledge* (Lamming, 1992: 29).

This profound consciousness of the social, the preoccupation with the process of humanization, the transformation of the landscape through labour and the passion for genuine democracy are important themes in Lamming's body of work. He managed to pull them all together in the now memorable foreword he wrote to Walter Rodney's *A History of the Guyanese Working People 1881-1905*. Walter Rodney was assassinated in 1980 by the forces of reaction of the day. In that foreword, based on his eulogy at Rodney's funeral, Lamming—playing on the title of the famous text written by Cheddi Jagan [The West on Trial]—observed: "For Guyana had become a land of horrors. Democracy was no long on trial here. The question was whether it would survive this official crucifixion" (1981: xvii). Lamming was in a unique position on that occasion of being an artist and an "outsider", with sufficient influence even to be permitted to make such a statement at a time of great political tension in Guyana. He understood his role in all this and made a political decision to intervene, as he had done on so many other occasions in the Caribbean.

The aesthetic and the political also merge at the conjuncture of gender and power. As has been maintained throughout this article, art is not created in a vacuum. The perspectives, in this case of the writer, and those of his or her audience, are both refracted through the gaze of gender. The body as representation, and as a site of a variety of struggles over issues of gender, sexuality and power, cannot be ignored in the works of George Lamming. Indeed, Lamming has been criticized for his

underdevelopment of the discourse of gender in his novels. While I believe that the criticism is not without merit, I think that what has been largely overlooked is the process of development of the author who, like some of the rest of us, has over the years become increasingly more conscious and sensitive to the issue of gender. This process of development can be seen in Lamming's later works as well as in his public pronouncements. In addition, though the author has not been as attentive perhaps to his female characters, he has certainly articulated some important insights about the Caribbean male.

In his very first novel Lamming provides us with some interesting observations of motherhood and fatherhood. Nair in her assessment of Lamming's novels argues that one learns a lot from his discussion of mothers, their childrearing practices and the strength associated with having to manage everything on their own (1996: 139). Indeed, the close relationship between the character G and his mother does not go unnoticed among Caribbean literary critics. For example, Baugh observes: "The meal which G's mother prepares for him is also clearly, a ceremony of love, one which shows forth the deep and sustaining bond between them. And Lamming's awareness of the social and cultural significance of food is expressed not only in what the reader can see underneath the account of the meal, but also in the mother's own observations on the topic, as well as in comments by other characters elsewhere in the novel" (1977: 26). In a recent article Margaret Gill, moves beyond the preparation and consumption of food—the delectable Barbadian dish of cou cou to be exact—to pose questions about the centrality of this mother/son relationship as important to understanding Lamming's contribution:

> *Although we never get the name of "the Mother" in Castle, she like other women in the text, stands as a figure of strength and agency. The story in Castle is the boy G's, but the Mother is right there at the beginning of the story. Through her control of memory, she is the one holding the important key to the boy's past and his connections to family and community* (2003: 216).

Nair faults Lamming for presenting a singular image of mothers who are "highly domestic figures, often overpoweringly nurturing and protective" (1996: 139). His treatment of fathers and fatherhood, when they are addressed, is a bit more nuanced however. One of the boys in *Castle* asserts: "Yuh father is a sort of watchman for the house" (1979: 45). This comment contrasts sharply with a second boy who remarks: " 'Tis different with a mother. She sort of has better feelings. A mother's sort of very soft. Her feelings is soft" (1979: 45). Another boy declares: "My father couldn't hit me 'cause he don't support me. An' that's why I alright. My mother won't let him hit me 'cause he don't support me. An' the courthouse won't let him either. The law says a father can't flog if he don't feed. Thank God for the law" (1979:45). Perhaps the most perceptive sociological comment about the Caribbean family structure and the nature of domestic arrangements can be seen in yet another boy's observation: "I don't see

much of my father, but my second brother father is good. He don't make no difference between us, me and my brother, 'cause he says we is both our mother children. How many fathers you got in your family" (1979: 47). The above dialogue among the boys brilliantly captures the varied family forms that are practiced in the Caribbean right up to the present time, and the resulting heterogeneity associated with parental practice and types of parental responsibility.

In *Season of Adventure*, Lamming introduces the character Fola. Fola is young, vibrant and middle class. She is among some of the earliest female protagonists to appear in Caribbean literature. Through this character Lamming explores a variety of issues such as gender, national and cultural identity, post-coloniality and social class. At one level, Fola embodies the hopes, the frustrations, the contradictions of the newly independent Caribbean nation, wrestling with the issues of sovereignty and modernity, while being reminded of its roots in the culture of the folk tradition. Much of the creative imagination and the political find expression through Fola and other characters in the novel such as Chiki and Baako.

Perhaps his most ambitious effort to address the question of gender is present in *Natives of my Person*. This novel, among other things, really attempts to fashion a different course for relations between men and women. From the very outset one gets the impression that crew members of the Reconnaissance are all experiencing a heightened sense of manhood from the prospects of their voyage. The voyage itself offers freedom from constraints of personal histories they would prefer to forget or at least retain the right to change. Ngugi makes an interesting point when he notes that for Lamming, the Caribbean individual's alienation springs from his or her colonial relationship to England. Political freedom therefore becomes necessary before the Caribbean person could find himself or herself as one controlling spirit in Lamming's novels (see Ngugi, 1972: 142). Furthermore, there is certainly an understanding in *Natives of my Person* that this kind of European masculinity self-actualizes in the context of conquest, brutality, aggression and exploitation.

The main characters of *Natives of my Person* are men, who despite the estrangement of their relationships with their women, are unable to disentangle themselves either from the control or influence of the latter. Though there are times when women in this novel seem powerless or dependent, as with the melancholy loneliness of the Lady of the House, the humiliation Surgeon imposes on his wife, or the institutionalization of Steward's wife, they are never without agency. Lamming seems always to be pushing for the creation of a new kind of gender discourse, which in many ways foregrounds the kind of contemporary issues of gender politics in the Caribbean.

These women are also very perceptive about the crisis of gender relations in the Kingdom of Lime Stone. In this regard Surgeon's wife surmises: "Husband and wife in the role of whores? And the keepers of whores? How? How?" (Lamming, 1992: 344). To the question posed the Lady of the House replies: "Because their whoredom is also the

whoredom of the House of Trade and Justice. It is the national principle of the continent of Lime Stone. What safer consolation or protection can a citizen have than to know that his private vice is the nation's religion?" (1992: 344). Lamming, in similar fashion to the way he represents the family cat of the Piggotts' in *Season of Adventure*, is in effect exposing the hypocrisy of the House of Trade, whose primary concern about commerce outweighs any professed interest in justice. He is suggesting here that the ethos at the highest level of governmental operation of the Kingdom of Lime Stone is tantamount to prostitution. It is this pretense that the Lady of the House so clearly deconstructs in her comment above. In the end, it is the Lady of the House who delivers one of the most compelling lines of the novel: "We are the future they must learn" (Lamming, 1992: 345). Lamming later reflected: "The suggestion there is that men would really have to reorganize their emotions regarding women" (Interview with George Kent, in Drayton and Andaiye, 1992: 88). He continues:

> *Then there would be an experience of a new liberation. I do not suggest that it will in any way automatically lead to a facile notion of harmony, but that there would be a new liberation of spirit, and the future encounters between them would be an innovation, as distinct from a continuation, of the past they have known* (Interview with George Kent, in Drayton and Andaiye, 1992: 88).

Nair points out however:

> *"While the last line of the novel, "We are the future they must learn," suggests that the men cannot work productively with their current attitudes to women, the self-discovery of the women is undercut by their situation: they are left stranded on the island, unaware that the men they hope to share a future with have died a violent death some miles away* (1996: 45).

What really matters here is the increasing recognition of the gender question, the problematizing of the relations between men and women, and the fact that Lamming is sufficiently discerning to politicize this issue at a time that many men are not the least interested in addressing such matters. Moreover, it is this open-ended conclusion to the novel that creates the possibility of imagining an alternative to the existing politics of gender. If only for these reasons, Lamming deserves credit for what he attempts in *Natives of my Person* and *Season of Adventure*.

What remains consistent throughout the work of George Lamming is a commitment to the marriage of the aesthetic and the political, which he sees as fundamental to the role of the artist. For some writers and critics, what is external is irrelevant. This position is contrary to Lamming's philosophy, and therefore clearly sets him apart as a Caribbean writer. In many ways he has succeeded in accomplishing what George Orwell had set as a goal for himself, that is, "to make political writing into an art". One of the things he has said to this author repeatedly is that his politics are not the background

music to his novels, but that which is central to what he does. His politics are central to the organization of his narrative, and equally crucial to the articulation of his vision as a writer (see Conversations III [video recording], 1996). Lamming usually adds to the foregoing, that the critics have not really engaged his work on this point. I believe that the conference in his honor was ultimately very reassuring to George that the point is not lost on many of us.

Endnotes

[1] Wynter A. Crawford was a leading radical labour leader and anti-colonial activist. He also championed the cause of civil rights during the 1940s in Barbados. Crawford founded a radical newspaper called the *Barbados Observer*, which was devoted to politicising the issue of decolonisation and to the advocacy of socialist ideals. In this regard the paper functioned as a purveyor of ideas and views of the more radical Caribbean activists in the United States at the time who were equally committed to ridding the region of its colonial burden. Crawford was also a member of the Barbados Progressive League. Charles Duncan O'Neale was one of Barbados' foremost political leaders of the early twentieth century. O'Neale was a founding member of the Democratic League. He was influential in mobilising middle and working class support for political transformation in Barbados. In his day, O'Neale agitated for education, pension, tax and franchise reform in Barbados, and fought to end child labour. Richard B. Moore was perhaps the most radical member of this group of Barbadian intellectuals. He became one of the earliest black members of the Communist Party in the United States. Moore was a key figure of the radical intellectual movement in Harlem from the 1920s until the 1970s when he returned to Barbados shortly before his death in 1978. A.E.S. 'TT' Lewis was a white working class radical labour leader who had aligned himself with the Black Nationalist movement of Barbados, and who by virtue of his association was viewed as one of the most dangerous men on the island. He was considered a race traitor because of his principled position on the issue of race and class exploitation. Lewis was a socialist who sacrificed much in the interest of the advancement of the broad masses of Barbadian workers.

[2] For an extended discussion of this phenomenon see my "The Contestation of Race in Barbadian Society and the Camouflage of Conservatism, pp. 144-195, in *New Caribbean Thought: A Reader*, edited by Brian Meeks and Folke Lindahl. Kingston: The University of the West Indies Press. 2001.

[3] Ralph Gonsalves has long since shed his leftist persona, and was in fact elected Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 2001, thus achieving a life-long ambition to assume leadership over the highest political office in his native country. In his inaugural address to the Caribbean Community and

Common Market (CARICOM) Heads of Government conference in Guyana, Dr. Gonsalves relegated his earlier radicalism to "youthful exuberance" thereby formally signalling his new political incarnation to the wider Caribbean Community.

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ARRIVAL *by Esther Phillips*

Why now, why now this
evening time when, as you say,
your flag is flying at half-mast?
And Captain, O my Captain,
what is this cargo that you bring me?
stones of sapphire turning to stars
between your fingers?
rubies gleaned where the river bends
at Belle Vue, Sans Souci?

Such was the bounty you brought
another love, who counted with leaves
tender and green from the woods
in spring, your vows of homecoming.
I could have told her,
O, I could have told her, leaves
wither and glass houses splinter.

I too have gathered
stones on a faraway shore
where the hurricane's eye,
swollen, slept for a moment,
and I gathered stones to mark my praise.

And shall I tell you?
Will you believe me when I tell you?
that on that day I dreamt I found the pebble
you had hidden under the grape-leaf;
I saw it changed, crystallized
into W/word and into meaning.

If you would know this meaning,
come with me, not far along this shore
where grape trees cut a path
by the sand-bank. There you will
hear a voice ancient with knowing
that a man, weary from seeking,
may find at last what he once sought
in the arms of lovers,
in the wide ocean's heart,
in the pride of reason:

a pebble changed into a pearl.

And for this Pearl he trades
his other kingdoms.

TIDES

by Dana Gilkes

The ocean leaves and returns
laying gifts at my feet
of salt encrusted seaweed,
relic shells,
a smattering of stones.

A slice of glass –
smooth to the touch
bottle green of course –
instils in the sand
the cold hard light
of oceans.

That foliate light should come to this!

Some quiet nuance
assures me these
are the accessories of sight,
the fond petty-particulars
that snag
and lay waste
the meaning of our eyes.

I bring nothing to the water
but the thing
it already owns;
I take nothing from the water
but its allowance.

EXTRACT from

IN THE CASTLE OF MY SKIN

by George Lamming

[There] is a moment when a man's utterance cannot catch and convey the shape and shade of his thoughts and feelings. Language, it seems, has actually surrendered just when his need is greatest. It is then he requires this weapon of words to enter that hidden area of his consciousness and bring back with it, so to speak, the kind of picture which another's eye cannot conceive"

George Lamming, "The Negro Writer and his World", in Drayton & Andaiye, ibid., p. 41-42.

'You still can't tell,' Boy Blue said, 'you never know. You never know as you youself say when something go off pop in yuh head an' you ain't the same man you think you wus. You start to do an' say things which you know is true but it seem it ain't you doin' an' sayin' them. Who could have believe what would have happen 'Bambi—Bambi of all people. But something go off pop in yuh head, an' it turn out you ain't the same man you used to think you wus. An' 'twus the same with Jon. Chris', of all places a tree. Who the hell put it in his head to go up in a tree? You never can tell, as you youself know full well.'

'This sort of goin' in you head don't sound safe to me,' Tramper said.

'I wus sort of makin' joke. Not really makin' joke, but sort of tryin' to say what I mean without knowing the right words to say. An' I say goin' on in you head 'cause I ain't 'ave no bigger an' better word, but I don't like it at all, 'cause it could mean all sort of things. A thing go off in yuh head pop pop, an' you's a different man—You ain't the same sort of person you wus, an' the next thing you hear, you ain't the same sort of person everybody is. You start to feel you different from everybody else, an' if that sort of thing go on you'll feel that there's nobody like you. I don't mean that you'll get great, an' don't want to speak to anybody. I don't mean that at all. I mean you'll get the feeling there ain't no other man like yourself, that you is you, so to speak, an' there can't be any other you. An' that everybody else is different from you. You start to believe you see things nobody else see, an' you think things nobody else think, an' that sort of thing can take you far, far, far. When you hear the shout, nobody will want to see you, an' you youself won't want to see anybody, an' 'cause of something goin' off in yuh head pop, pop, an' you can't control it. Boy, you'll get so lonely 'twould be a shame. You'd be a sort of man on a rock with nobody else standin' near you, although there's plenty other people 'round, that's how you'll feel, 'cause it gone to yuh head that you is different from everybody else. If you really want to know what 'twould feel like, imagine youself the last man left in the village, everybody dead, dead, dead, an' you the only one left. That is what could happen if that feelin' of bein' sort of different go to yuh head.' It could happen, Boy Blue said curiously. I could imagine all of them dead, an' I the only one there. But this thing of feelin' different ain't the same thing. That could happen too as you say, but it take a big big change to make you so.'

INTRODUCTION TO THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE IMAGINATION

by Anthony Bogues

WHEN GEORGE LAMMING rose to speak at the final session of the conference in his honour hosted by the Centre for Caribbean Thought, he embodied many of our modern male ancestors. Here was a living link to C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, Martin Carter, Walter Rodney, Frantz Fanon, Edgar Mittelholzer, Alejo Carpentier and Nicolás Guillén. The hushed tones in which the audience received his speech of over two hours was in part the manner of its delivery; a manner in which in cricketing parlance a crowd absorbs and relishes an exquisite stroke play while on the pitch . . . 'not a man move'. But there was another reason for the hushed tones. Lamming was speaking against the backdrop of a pervading Caribbean sense that across the region the independence anticolonial projects had floundered and spun off into different directions. . . directions that oftentimes ran counter to the vast expectations of the ordinary Caribbean person. So here was an individual who began to write novels about the Caribbean in its final phases of formal constitutional decolonization; who had grown up under a colonial empire; here he was now speaking from a past but in a language that beckoned us to a different future. We were not watching the performance of orality, as his distinctive voice and clear Caribbean cadences moved through the audience. We were hushed because we knew that many of the ancestors' memories were being invoked.

The reader of this document will make her/his own decision about the critical points of this seminal speech. However, we know that the power of speech is different from that of voice. It is speech and language that allow us to construct our reflections and experiences of the world. George Lamming has always been preoccupied with two things: the character of what our language constructs and the ways in which these constructions foreclose freedom. It is why, for Lamming, speaking is so important. He says, "A speech does not work like a novel. It is a very different kind of language. The speeches are addressed to the mind; the speeches are given in what we would call a language of statements. But statements given and structured in such a way that makes the mind feel." [1]

In his 1956 speech to what is now conventionally referenced as the First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Paris, and four years after the publication of Frantz Fanon's *Black*

1 Cited in Andaiye, "The Public Task of George Lamming's Caribbean Speeches," in Richard Drayton & Andaiye, Conversations: George Lamming Essays, Addresses and Interviews 1953-1990 (London: Karia Press, 1992),

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Skin White Masks, Lamming draws our attention with the following statement: "For it is one of the mischievous powers of language, and particularly that aspect of language which relates to names.., language in this respect is intentional and the intention seems clearly part of the human will to power. *A name is an infinite source of control."* [2]

For Lamming, the power to name is not only a power to define, but also more importantly it opens the power to understand the Caribbean self and its social and historical realities within the Caribbean's own frames. In his 1960 novel *Season of Adventure,* the character Baako proclaims. "The main problem *was* language . . . *But* remember the order of the drum, he finished—for it is the language which every nation needs if its promises and myths are to become a fact." The *sovereignty of the imagination* gives us that capacity for language and therefore the ability to name and *establish* categories. But this is not just a literary capacity; it allows us to define freedom. George Lamming recognizes the centrality of the quest for freedom for the social group that he calls "this world of men and women from down below". Again referring to the novel *Season of Adventure,* we read the following dialogue about freedom between two of the novel's central figures, Powell and Crim. Powell says, "Independence ain't nothing till it free. . . " He continues, "Free is how you is from the start and when you movin' say that is a natural freedom make you move. You can't move to freedom Grim 'cause freedom is what you is, an' where you start, an' where you always got to stand." The dialogue represents both a deeply moving and profound enunciation of the human condition. It posits how the anticolonial struggle morphed into the denial of human freedom; how political independence of the postcolony became limited and expectant hopes dashed, The tight relationship between politics, knowledge, language and the spaces of freedom in Lamming's writings makes him one of the most important political novelists in Caribbean literature; one who also understands that the brutal histories of slavery and colonialism did not crush nor erase creativity.

Lamming's preoccupation with freedom is today very apropos since one feature of our contemporary world is the resurgence of a current of thought and action which heralds the 'virtues' of empire. Empire, today sometimes called by its advocates 'liberal imperialism', announces to the world that the real meanings of freedom are to be found in the values, creeds and myths of those who are powerful and have dominated the world for the last five hundred years. These so-called virtues of empire proclaim the end of history and hope to suck all humanity into its vortex. For Lamming, one terror of the old colonial empire was what he calls "the terror of the mind", a peculiar toxic form of hegemony which seeks to shape and bend the subject it rules. In the present world the dominant hegemony hopes to bend us to its will and shape our very desires. In such a context, the *sovereignty of the imagination* becomes one foundation for the imagining and desire for freedom. Lamming notes in a recent interview: "Freedom is where you are and where you start.., that is your original spiritual oxygen. . . And the struggle is to discover it and to discover its potential and to discover the ways in which potential can be made to exercise itself in a variety of ways. . . "[3]

What George Lamming beckons us towards is the constructive use of this potential in building Caribbean society. It is therefore entirely fitting that this speech marks the first publication of the Centre for Caribbean Thought.

2 George Lamming, "The Negro Writer and his World", in Drayton & Andaiye, ibid., p. 38.

3 See David Scott, "The Sovereignty of the Imagination: An Interview with George Lamming,' *Small Axe* Number 12 (September 2002). The title of Lamming's talk was taken from this interview.

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THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THE IMAGINATION

Lamming's speech at the final session of the conference in his honour hosted by The Centre for Caribbean Thought, UWI Mona, Jamaica 2003

I HAVE ALREADY made it known that I have had a long and very joyful association with Jamaica; and although some of the delights of previous visits may recur, it is most unlikely that the special honour and resonance of this occasion will happen again. I thank you for the generosity of attention and appreciation that you have bestowed on me.

With your permission I would like to share this moment, and offer my address as a tribute to two great friends who have passed away. I first came to Jamaica at the invitation of John and Dorothy Figueroa to spend Christmas 1955 and was made a member of that family for all the years they lived here on this campus at Gibraltar Road. Dorothy was, as the tourist brochure says, 'beyond imagination'; but it is to John I owe, on behalf of a generation of writers, a debt for the role he played (as a professor of education) in preparing graduate students for the Diploma of Education and making the literature of the Caribbean a central obligation in their teaching responsibilities.

John Figueroa prepared the ground for Professors Mervyn Morris and Kenneth Ramchand and Edward Baugh and the more rigorous scrutinisers of text who came later.

And I am sure it was at his initiative, with the spontaneous support of Phillip Sherlock, that I would have come in 1967 as the writer-in-residence at Mona.

And the second loss that I have experienced, and more recently, was the passing of Tim Hector who combined a magnificent and philosophical intelligence with the investigative skills of the journalist. These skills are aptly demonstrated in his lecture on West Indian cricket and Pan Africanism.

John and Tim were very distant poles apart in social formation as well as ideological orientation. One Catholic, the other Marxist and humanist. But they shared two passions which would qualify them to be in paradise this afternoon: the belief that there was no game ever created that could rival the virtues and educated discipline of cricket; and secondly, whatever their ideological divide, they believed in and were committed to the Caribbean, however negligible it might appear to strangers, as a unique corner of the earth whose resources of intellect and imagination it was their business to nurture and defend. My talk will rest on a dialogue with these important figures in Caribbean life.

At the historic trial of Fidel Castro after the unsuccessful raid on Moncada, Castro,

a lawyer by training, rested his defense on the spiritual guidance of José Martí. "We are proud of the history of our country," he told the judges. "We learned it in school. Céspedes, Maceo, Gomez and Martí were the first names engraved in our minds. We were taught for the guidance of Cuba's free citizens." The Apostle Martí wrote: "In the world there must be a certain degree of honour just as there must be a certain degree of light. When they are many men without honour, there are always others who bear in themselves the honour of many men. . . "

Addressing the Eighth Convocation Ceremony of the University of Guyana in 1974, Martin Carter said: "It is precisely in times of crisis that we must re-examine our lives and bring to that re-examination contempt for the trivial, and respect of the riskers—those who take the risk of going forward boldly to participate in the building of a free community of valid persons. . . "

These are two texts which I ask you to consider and alongside them the concept of honour and the free community of valid persons.

**

I was the child of a fundamentalist Christian home, which literally believed and lived by the precepts of the Sermon on the Mount. We were among the poor, the merciful, the meek, the peacemakers. Survival in the most adverse conditions had certainly made us, in some way, the salt of the earth; and I was persuaded by an ambitious mother that I would, by some miracle, become a light that would shine before men. There is some argument about this prediction, but my presence here may be some consolation that there has been illumination of some kind. The negative aspect of this legacy was just as powerful. Sin was not a word whose meanings invited argument. It was a kind of barometer that measured a great variety of activity, or intended action—which it was with me. I always suspect the means whereby the rich accumulate their wealth, and I am inclined to agree with Balzac that every great fortune begins with a crime.

My home forbade any form of betting, and although I have a great curiosity about the psychology of gamblers, I have retained to this day a strange, emotional block about gambling. There was, in the early Christianity of that house, a moral force that enabled me to see much later what was essentially right about the social thought of socialist philosophy. The poor as the key for change, the oppressed and exploited as the ultimate inheritors of the earth, the present as a battleground for the possessions of the future. Christians and socialists are inseparable on this emphasis on the human expectations of the earth. But Christianity never provided me with a critique of my relation to where I was born, or the social forces shaping my beliefs. My early education in Barbados was a total product of Christian indoctrination. I use the terms 'total' and 'indoctrination' because no one in the role of teacher had ever drawn our attention to the historical truth that Christianity was only one of several great religions, or that Christians then, as they do now, represented a minority of the world's population.

The fictional account in *In the Castle of My Skin* of boys' speculation on slavery and the

Garden of Eden may be a pretty accurate reflection of what was a genuine popular belief among the poor at the time. And I quote:

> *The Queen freed some of us because she made us feel the Empire was bigger than the Garden, That's what the woman meant—the Queen did free some of us in a kind of way. We started to think about the Empire more than we thought of the Garden, and then nothing mattered but the Empire. Well, they have put the two of them together now—Empire and Garden. We are to speak of them the same way—they belong to the same person; they both belong to God. The Garden is God's own garden and the Empire is God's own empire.*

The entire globe was the spiritual property of the Christian God. This religious proposition was supported by a secular doctrine that presented the British Empire as the political custodian of all human destiny. We were made aware of rival powers—French and German perhaps, but these did not exist as human entities in their own right. They were interlopers who represented a heretical challenge to what had been divinely ordained as the limits of human reality: the Christian God, as creator of the universe, and the British Empire as His temporal trustee.

In this respect, it is not an exaggeration to say that both church and school were agents of an intellectual and moral deception. I would not argue that it was their conscious intention to play this role; it is more likely that they were functioning as institutions which had been conditioned to reflect and support the prevailing values and demands of those who ruled the society. The religious functionary, irrespective of denomination, became associated in my mind as being an accomplice in the support and preservation of the existing status quo. And in Barbados that meant racism, economic exploitation, and a profound contempt for all that was black. Even amongst its ranks the Church refused to disturb this social arrangement, and found a sacred text to approve its conduct. Paul writing to the Romans, notes: "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, he who resists the authorities resists what God has appointed."

This cultural conviction can become toxic as you move from origins to unknown territory, territory which you assumed you had known. In 1950 when I went to England, migration was not a word I would have used to describe what I was doing. We simply thought that we were going to an England which had been planted in our childhood consciousness as a heritage and a place of welcome. It is the measure of our innocence that neither the claim of heritage nor the expectation of welcome would have been seriously doubted. England was not, for us, a country with classes and conflicts of interest like the island we had left. It was the name of a responsibility whose origin may have coincided with the beginning of time. This has happened elsewhere in peculiar ways; in Sierra Leone a colleague of mine asked a sixteen-year-old student: "What do you think the letters BBC stand for." And she replied, "Before the birth of Christ?"

Later I would shudder to think how a country so foreign to our instincts could have achieved the miracle of being called ‘mother’. It has made us pupils to its language, its institutions; baptized us in the same religion; schooled boys in the same game of cricket with its elaborated and meticulous etiquette of rivalry. Empire was not a very dirty word, and seemed to bear little relation to those forms of domination we call imperialist. The English themselves were not aware of the role they had played in the formation of these black strangers. The ruling class was serenely confident that any role of theirs must have been an act of supreme generosity, and like Prospero they had given us language and a way of naming our own reality. But the English working class was not aware they had played any role at all, and deeply resented our arrival. It had come about without any warning; no one had consulted them. Occasionally I was asked: “Do you belong to us, or to the French’.” I had been dissolved in the common view of worker and aristocrat. So even English workers could see themselves as architects of Empire.

Much of the substance of *In the Castle of My Skin* is an evocation of this tragic innocence. Nor was there at the time of writing any conscious effort on my part to emphasize the dimension of cruelty which had seduced or driven by force of need, an otherwise honourable black people, into such lasting bonds of illusion, such toxic forms of cultural conviction. For it was not a physical cruelty that we knew. Indeed the colonial experience of my generation was almost wholly without violence—no torture, no concentration camp, no mysterious disappearance of hostile natives, no army encamped with orders to kill. The Caribbean endured a different kind of subjugation: it was *a terror of the mind,* a daily exercise in self-mutilation. Black vs. black in a battle for self-improvement. This was the breeding ground for every uncertain self. But there was one area of ground where certainty had taken the form of the legend.

Contradictions

Now, I grew up as a boy with the legend that the greatest batsman in the world was George Headley, and there is some part of me which still believes that the greatest batsman in the world was George Headley—but I have never seen Headley bat. I have read about Headley, who nearly always made half the score on good wickets and bad wickets. And so when I returned to the Caribbean from England stopping at Jamaica, I had a friend who was very close to Headley—the novelist Neville Dawes—and I told him that one of my greatest ambitions would be to meet Headley. And he took me to meet Headley—a very small, very elegant and very gracious man. And I was asking him the sorts of questions that novices ask: I wanted to know whether the fast bowlers like Martindale and Francis were faster than Hall and Griffith and such people, and so on. It was very interesting—he never replied to the question in that way. He replied by saying what he thought was the difference between them, but he never got involved in who was faster than, or who was better than.

But I refer to him also because he mentioned the name Herman Griffith, and he

mentioned the name Herman Griffith with great respect. Now, you will realize that in the twenties and thirties there would have been great tension around race and colour in the West Indies cricket team. And Headley said that he was struck by the dignity of Griffith: that while others would whisper and complain, if there was ever an occasion of racial insult, he remembered Griffith not only for his tactical skills—he was a great bowler; he remembered him always for the extraordinary pride he had in the value of his skin and in the dignity of his person. Here I offer an example of the contradictions in certain political crusades.

Now, when I was about to leave Combermere, they had a tradition where you might become a schoolboy member of one of the leading clubs, and I was spotted and invited to join Empire. So I played a few games for Empire before leaving for Trinidad. There was a regulation that as a schoolboy member you did not pay any subs for a year. And one Saturday afternoon we were playing Wanderers—I remember it very well— I was fielding at cover point.

Harold Griffith, the son of Herman Griffith was bowling, and then Herman Griffith walked on to the field while Harold Griffith was running up, and he was walking towards me. Harold Griffith stopped and came over to find out what had happened, and it turned out that Herman Griffith had come to ask me about the subs. This is 2 o'clock in the afternoon, on Empire grounds, with an enormous crowd. Herman Griffith had come to remind me that the subs had not been paid and the eighteen months had passed. Harold told him that he had to leave the field because that could not be discussed at that time. I was very struck, thinking back on this—how the man Headley described and the man for whom I had the greatest admiration as I got to know him, how this man could have also created a record of having black-balled more people than probably all the clubs in Barbados. He was an emperor of Empire and you could not get into Empire if you had not gone at least to Combermere. You only have to think of the enormous giants of West Indies cricket who would not have made it into Empire: Weekes, Sobers, Haynes, Charlie Griffith.

And that is what I mean by our fundamental contradiction in every political crusade: on one hand, this audacious representative of a race, and on the other, the total insensitivity to the hurt, the pain, the alienation of causing social rejection. These two attributes lived side by side in the same man. The contradiction is to be found in a variety of citizens across the region. This region has been staggering slowly and painfully to resolve the contradiction of being at once independent and neocolonial, struggling through new definitions of itself to abandon the protection of being a frontier created by nature, a logistical basin serving some imperial necessity, struggling to move away from being a regional platform for alien enterprise to the status of being a region for itself, with the sovereign right to define its own reality and order its own priorities. Ordinary people continue to devise their own strategies for contact and communication, through a network of petty trading, which links Jamaica and Haiti, Barbados and St Lucia, Grenada and Trinidad, defying the constraints which are imposed by the region's highest councils

of government, immigration laws, work permits, the opportunistic hassle about who is and who is not a national from one territory to the next. And yet it is argued everywhere that these people are the critical motive force of the society. But it is a force which has too often been reduced to the dormant and abused status of electoral fodder. Every five years, they become visible and decisive in a tribal power game which concludes with their absence from any serious consultation about their future. It is a predicament of which the Prime Minister of Barbados must have been very aware, because in September 1999 he made the most extraordinary statement in Jamaica relating directly to this kind of situation. And I quote: "To realize its full potential," says Mr. Arthur,

> *the Caribbean needs to move to a new form of governance. No Caribbean society can succeed unless all of its resources are mobilized into support of national development. However, the unfortunate aspect of the Westminster model of governance we have inherited, is that it has encouraged a 'to the victims, the spoils' mentality. And that has ensured that at any time, almost half the population of any given Caribbean society is marginalized and alienated from participation in the development of their society. There has been too destructive a competition for political office, too heavy a concentration of power in the hands of ruling elites, an unhealthy preservation of anti-developmental party and tribal divisions, a focus on short-term partisan political concerns and a patronage spoils system which work against sound and progressive government.*

Mr. Arthur is in fact seriously questioning the dysfunctional nature of the existing political system.

And more than 50 years before, we hear Norman Manley say:

> *The mass of the population are the real*

people. Those who would not unite with them in all fundamental matters, are the real aliens in the land. And we believe that the people must believe in themselves and their own destiny and must do so with pride and with confidence and with determination to win equality with the rest of mankind, and equality in terms of humanity which, irrespective of power and wealth, can be measured by the growing values of civilization and culture.

It's more than half a century since Norman Manley made this statement. It was part of a wider plea for greater civic responsibility among the privileged classes and in public life. During that interval, we have seen the emergence of new class formations and the elevation of black people to high office and more elaborate styles of material comfort. But it does not appear that this change in fortune has made any substantial difference in the relationship between leadership and those who are led. The temptation to find the shortest route possible to wealth has increased. And so has the frustration of an idle and disenchanted youth. The rural population continues its decline; the cities grow more crowded and more dangerous. From Kingston to Port-of-Spain, the story is much the same. And immigration is a rescue which is only available to those who have had expensive training and whose skill ensures their survival elsewhere.

Political Parties and Trade Unionism

Now, in Caribbean history, as you know, the political party and the trade union movement have had a simultaneous birth—twin institutions which grew out of the same struggle of the 1930s. But there was already some element of distortion in this composition of party and trade union. The impulse to break out of colonial rule did not guarantee the necessary break away from colonial tutelage. These institutions, party and union, were native—a genuine creation of people's power—but their leadership retained a special loyalty to the old imperial guidelines. The Barbadian, Mr Lawrence Nurse, has written very perceptively on this. In an essay, "Organised Labour in the Caribbean Commonwealth", he says:

The 1930s represented an effective challenge which brought together sectional interests: proletariat, peasants and members of an emergent middle class. The proletariat and the peasants entered the struggle in protest against the social economic deprivation: the middle-class, though arguing for the franchise and right of political rights, was interested in political power for itself. Organised labour became the major force in the democratization of Caribbean societies. They challenged the insult of racial discrimination which retarded the progress of the black middle-class. They fought for the extension of the franchise until universal adult suffrage was achieved. They secured the legal rights of the trade union

> *in a series of constitutional reforms, which led ultimately to political independence.*

"But," continues Nurse, "all these forces served well the political interest of the middle-class. Political leaders gave their approval to a particular type of union, and institutionalized the Westminster two-party model of government in the region."

And so, what started as a radical response to the planter oligarchy of the day was gradually led into a series of compromises, which now make the victory of the 1930s seem less secure. Rex Nettleford, the Vice Chancellor of the University, who is a very prudent man, when reflecting on nation-building expresses this apprehension: "I have a deep concern" he says, "that trade unions are being pushed further and further on the periphery of all social and economic arrangements throughout the Caribbean region, for the convenience of the historical plantocracy, the enduring commission agency class, and the newly-arrived technocracy."

The last 60 years, since 1938, must be regarded therefore as a period of transition. We have seen the gradual erosion of an old social order, the political directorates have changed complexion, but they operate within the same basic institutions. There has been no great structural change in the patterns of ownership and control. And the new political directorates have never been a part of the old ruling planter and merchant class. They govern, but they do not rule. The transnational corporation assumed a novel dominance in all regional affairs. Domestic policy is determined by international lending agencies. Independence has not yet won the right to sovereignty.

If we go back to 1965, one of our greatest historians, Professor Elsa Goveia in her most extraordinary book, *Slave Society in the British Leeward Islands*, gave this warning:

> *Ever since the time of emancipation. . . we have been trying to combine opposite principles in our social system, but sooner or later we shall have to face the fact that we are courting defeat when we attempt to build a new heritage of freedom upon a structure of society which binds us all too closely to the old heritage of slavery. Liberty and equality are good consorts, for though their claims sometimes conflict, they rest upon a common basis which makes them reconcilable. But the most profound incompatibility necessarily results from the uneasy union which joins democracy with the accumulated remains of enslavement.*

We've had three alternative experiments to what Mr. Arthur was talking about, and each offers a lesson in failure. Grenada was both a heroic and tragic suicidal experience. During its brief period of four years, the Bishop administration provided an example of genuine commitment to change, and had made much progress in creating institutions which would ensure effective people's participation in self-management, or so it seemed. It was the only experiment of the three which had captured the imagination of the country's youth. Guyana emerges as the least worthy of respect. It is here the word 'socialist' was reduced to the language of blasphemy and lost its power to inspire. On

the other hand, Michael Manley never enjoyed the power and control which Bishop and Burnham, in different ways had appropriated. Manley was in fact the victim of external pressure in the form of national sabotage, which was the weapon the privileged classes of Jamaica used against his administration. But his failure must also be attributed to a serious lack of preparation. The experiment to place the mass of the population in a new and critical relation to power came up against a certain lack of comprehension on the part of those who were to benefit from the change. He himself, writing in 1985 in "Aspects of a Caribbean Development Strategy", concedes this weakness, which was a critical factor in his loss of power. He says:

> *It is now clear that as part of the political organization's response, political education in a profound sense has got to be the heart and stock of the political process. This political education begins by a process of internal educational dialogue; it looks at the social and political history that begins with simple, basic analysis of the nature of the society, the nature of the economy, the nature of its class structure.*

And I want to say that as far as I am aware, no political party in the Commonwealth Caribbean has ever shown much enthusiasm for carrying out in a systematic way, the kind of programme of political education which Manley acknowledges to be essential to any major change in popular consciousness.

For over half a century the leadership of both party and union from territory to territory have deliberately omitted this basic work from their programmes of mass organization. The omission could not have been casual and we must assume that many a leader, then and now, recognized that such political education at mass level, would inevitably alter the relation of leader to rank and file. It would have put an end to the uncritical adoration of the leader, as great tribal chief, infallible beyond reproach. For this has been a characteristic deformity of the political culture of the region, and it has persisted, whatever the ideological character of the leader.

The late Carl Stone, a social scientist, has made reference to this tendency to personalize power at the expense of institutional machinery. He goes further in identifying the cause of failure in these experiments in socialist transformation. He says:

> *In all three cases, efforts of transformation centred on political structures and the character of political power without sufficient attention to spelling out and articulating the new society and the new Caribbean man, that would have been the fundamental objective of the exercise, as well as the vehicle for achieving its objectives.*

Political strategies and objectives towards socialist change were often clearly articulated, but there was, I quote again "no commanding vision of the new society to be created". This is, I think, a just evaluation of the limitations at work among political activists at the time, but it assumes too much and it stops short of being a comprehensive critique of the society. For we should never assume that the political man is always

suitably equipped to articulate a commanding vision of a new society. The politician is overwhelmed by concrete tasks to be performed, decisions to be taken urgently, often without any pause or long reflection. He or she is haunted by the failure to deliver. Their working hours are spent in a permanent state of emergency. The shadow of parliamentary opposition, where it exists, blurs their sense of priorities. They live with intrigue and the constant threat of betrayal within their own ranks. It is, I suspect, a feverish atmosphere and hardly conducive to that state of reflective self-consciousness from which a vision of new society is born.

But it is possible that the political leader could not arrive at such a vision unless he enjoyed a certain measure of collaborative support from other modes of thought and perception, from the historian, the poet, the student of philosophy and the social sciences, the economist and the theatre director who recreates the cultural history of the nation. It is a collective dialogue between these different categories of sensibility which ultimately gives voice to a commanding vision of the new society. But it is precisely this voice which has often withdrawn its service from any form of political engagement. There is a large category of intellectual workers who view such involvement with misgivings. The risks are too great.

A novelist sets out to explore the history and the nature of an individual or personal relationship. But every personal relationship is a social fact, since the relationship is engaged with another, and is influenced by the others who may or may not be directly connected to the individuals. Boy meets girl, there is parent involvement, friend involvement. Boy seeks employment, may require medical report from a doctor he's never seen before, and so on. All our relations are experienced within a particular context of power and it is the characteristic of all power that it seeks to give its existence some moral or philosophical justification.

Men do not simply say, "We are in power because we feel we have a right to be and that's the end of that. There's nothing you can do about it." They never say that. They believe they represent and are the guardians of some social order, which is in the interest of all, and then they will hire a variety of intellectual mercenaries to argue that this is true. This social order is usually supportive of the material interest in the dominant ruling group and they translate these interests as being identical with the interest of the total society. But many other layers of the society recognize, through their own daily experience, that there is no such identity of interest. To assert this fact of their experience is to pose a conflict of contending interest. In other words, class—that is, categories of persons who are conscious of interests that are in opposition to the interests of other categories of persons; class, to one degree or another is an informing influence on the imagination of every serious writer who tries to record and interpret the content of an individual relationship.

Or to put it another way—a concept of people and places does not arise out of the blue. How you come to think of where you are, and how you come to think of your relation to where you are, is very dependent on what is the character and the nature of power,

Bust of George Lamming
by karl Broodhagen

where you are. You yourself do not at a certain stage decide who you are, and what your relationship to where you are should be. These relations are experienced within a specific context of power and this experience within a specific context poses always a fundamental question: to what extent have we been able to organize in the interest of our own welfare, to what extent can we/ have we been able to organize in the interest of our lives. Economists will frequently identify the problems of scarcity—which justifies their own professional expertise. Scarcity may be due to natural calamity; or scarcity may be manufactured. But the economists are reluctant to explore and reveal the nature of the exercise of the power which determines these things. If we are trying to think of concepts of islands and region, these concepts will undergo a certain change, they will differ according to the centres of power that are shaping them, according to the centres of resistance to that power.

Hegemony is the domination of one class over another or all others, and not necessarily through force but through a process of social, political and ideological indoctrination in order to achieve the consent of the dominated class. The dominant class will sometimes make concessions to the dominated, provided the long-term interests of the dominant group are not challenged or undermined. Its effect on the executive branch of the state and on civil society is considerable. And in civil society we group organizations such as the Boy Scouts, the Lions, the Lionesses, charity organizations, NGOs. The consensus in Barbados on the discourse on race (not to raise it) is the influence of that hegemonic power. A variety of reasons are given: it could wreck the tourist industry, and damage the economy of the nation; there is no place in a Christian society for race talk since all are equal in the sight of God. Therein the appeal to social stability and within the warning: Look at Trinidad! Look at Guyana!

Eric Williams and a Concept of University

In 1944 the British government announced the appointment of a commission to consider the needs of higher education in the colonies. You will note that we are just one year away from the end of Europe's second Civil War in the 20th century. I shall return a little later to the critical importance of those 31 years from 1914 to 1945 when European civilization committed itself to the slaughter of 187 million people. It is at this critical juncture when new definitions will have to be found to clarify the meaning of the word 'civilization' that the meetings to consider the creation of the University of the West Indies took place. The Chairman was Sir John Irvine of St Andrew's University; and it would appear from his own autobiographical account that Dr Williams, then a professor of political science at Howard University, requested an opportunity to give evidence before the commission which included Margery Perham of Oxford, Raymond Priestly of Birmingham, and two West Indians, the late Hugh Springer and Philip Sherlock. They met with Williams on May 29, 1944. It was not a very cordial encounter; but more important for us, it was the genesis of what would become a seminal document now known as

Education of the Negro in the British West Indies. In this document Williams outlines in great detail his conception of the kind of university that would be required for the West Indian people at that stage of their subjugation—in the sense of restricted knowledge.

Williams' central theme, articulated in a variety of ways, is stated in one sentence of startling lucidity. He says:

> *Education in the modern world is, more than anything else, education of the people themselves as to the necessity of viewing their own education as a part of their democratic privileges and their democratic responsibilities.*

And he will return again and again to this fundamental requirement that "from the very beginning the British West Indian masses should be educated as to the importance and necessity of the university; and through their popular and labour organizations, all should be made to feel that the university is an integral part of their own development. . . "

This was not a battle cry on behalf of masses but his own historical training had left him with the conviction that the university, now known as the UWI, should be regional in character. I quote:

> *The British West Indian University should, therefore, be a centre of culture of the entire Caribbean area, from Cuba to the Guianas. Regionalism should be its slogan; and the university should make it one of its various trends which have contributed to form the individual culture of the Caribbean.*

He envisaged the early stages of the curriculum as a concentration on the social and economic needs of the islands, their geographical location and the chief fields of employment available to graduates: agriculture, teaching, social work, public service, nursing and sanitation. And always in the formulation of stages of curriculum he would return to what seems to have struck him as a moral imperative: "The needs of the British West Indian masses," he writes, "should dictate the content of university education. Only to that degree is a modern university modern. . . "

We are hearing here—though some 30 years earlier—the radical voice and accent of George Beckford and Walter Rodney.

This emphasis on the category we call masses, in whom the potential for creative intellectual development is never in doubt—this emphasis is always linked to the regional obligations that should influence curriculum: "A general course in West Indian culture should be obligatory for all students in the freshman year, a broad course in West Indian agriculture, and two years of study of at least one language, and in French and Spanish civilization."

What he saw so clearly as urgent—and still from my observation remains a remote and vaguely desirable acquisition—was the need to promote and encourage a multilingual facility which would be essential for any serious comparative study of what we now call a Caribbean civilization. Pressed for space I once offered to give my old copies of

the Puerto Rican journal *Claridad* to a lecturer at the Institute of Social and Economic Research at Cave Hill. He breezily informed me: "I don't read Spanish and I don't know anybody around me who does. . . " There was no trace of regret in this claim to ignorance.

Williams had an incurable passion for all kinds of statistical detail, and he carried on (as his adversaries might say) about matters like the Jamaican diet and how many gallons of milk and how many eggs per person per annum made up the Jamaican diet.

These meetings of Williams and the Irvine commission could be interpreted as a genuine clash of principles between a convert and his original mentors. Remember, Williams was a double First Oxford product, and Howard was a long way from what Sir John Irvine would have thought he would want UWI to be. Williams understood this very well, and took maximum advantage of the privilege of those who, once categorized as objects of study, become the historical subjects who will redefine the terrain that is up for study. . .

If the curriculum requirements posed awkward questions; these were nothing compared to the turbulence created by his insistence that the university should be located in the heart of Kingston, the capital of Jamaica. I want to offer the full passage of his report because students of Williams' career will recognize these affirmations of 1945 as a preparation of the voice which will, some 12 years later, create the most extraordinary people's intellectual environment in what would become known as the university of Woodford Square:

> This unitary university should be located in Kingston, the capital of Jamaica. There are those who argue that the needs of future expansion require that the university be located in the suburbs. But a modern university cannot be detached from the centre of community life; it must be established in the city proper. The sheltered groves in which the students of Plato and Aristotle walked and discussed were admirably suited to the education of a leisured class. The medieval cloisters on the banks of the Isis were well adapted to the training of the British aristocracy. A university in the modern world, however, is a part of the endowment of a great city. If London, Columbia, New York and Chicago universities can find room for expansion, the overcrowding in Kingston need occasion no alarm. Such a university, located in Kingston will become the centre for the intellectual youth of the area. It would be a concrete step in the direction of integration.

The committee was not very impressed. The late Sir Hugh questioned the prudence of a university in the heart of Kingston and asked with characteristic anxiety: "What will become of our daughters?" Well, I don't know what became of the daughters of Mona. But when I was writer-in-residence here in 1967 I was approached by a very irate male student to intervene in rebuking the Warden of Seacole who had given permission for the ladies of Seacole to visit a German ship which was on some patrol in the Caribbean. . . "Seacole

ladies exposing themselves to German sailors until one and two in the morning!" He was absolutely scandalized.., and I was not unaffected since Seacole, exclusively female, had always been represented to me as "the impregnable fortress of the campus upper-class virgins". To escape, I asked what he thought would be the reaction if the German sailors were female, and the gentlemen of Chancellor had been invited as their guests.

It isn't Springer or the German ship that should detain us here, but the more formidable Sir John Irvine, the Chairman of the Commission. Williams thought that Irvine disliked him and he reciprocated the feeling. But Irvine had manoeuvred him into a private chat, and this is how, in Dr. Williams' version, it went:

Irvine: You are a West Indian, aren't you?

Williams: Yes.

Irvine: You would like to see the status of the West Indies improved, wouldn't you?

Williams: Yes.

Irvine: You agree therefore that the West Indies must have a university, don't you?

Williams: Yes.

Irvine: You agree that it must be a good university, don't you'?

Williams: Yes.

Irvine: Therefore, you agree that that West Indian university must be affiliated to a British university, don't you?

Williams: No. Definitely not. . .

He requested Irvine's permission to submit a formal memorandum giving in detail his conception of a university. And once this was granted, Williams then sought an interview with the formidable American philosopher, John Dewey, who was now in his 80s, and alert as ever on matters pertaining to educational theory. Williams then went about excavating the literature of every commission and committee on education that had ever met between 1900 and 1940, and hit upon a statement by Lord Haldane who was Head of the Royal Commission on university education in London in 1913. Haldane was advising London University to abandon once and for all the pernicious theory underlying its present practice that the kind of education it thinks best for its own students must be the best for all people who owe allegiance to the British flag. Long after the flags have changed, the psychic allegiance has remained a formidable obstacle to the liberation of the intellect. How else can we explain the melancholy nostalgia for the British Privy Council as the final court of appeal; the spineless rejection of a Caribbean Court; or the excessive caution which restrains Barbados from converting their allegiance from the archaic ornamentalism of monarchy to republican status although the country is, according to Professor McKintosh, already a republic in social and political practice?

McKintosh's approach has a philosophical dimension which for him as a professor of jurisprudence becomes a moral imperative.

"With independence," he argues,

> *We acquired the authority to define ourselves as a community. The hope is that with a Caribbean Court of Appeal, we would be forced to construct our discourse, to reshape our world, much in line with what our poets and novelists have already begun. A Caribbean Court of final Appeal must be the centre of any discursive advancement toward the development of a Caribbean jurisprudence. . .*
>
> *Constitutional adjudication is a fundamental conceptual debate about the way in which Caribbean political life is to be constituted, lived and justified. . . and such an important matter should not be left in the hands of a British institution.*

Which brings us to the question, even more overwhelming, posed by Sir Arthur Lewis and relating to the death of the Federation. Young men and women of my generation, nurtured on a strong regional orientation, were shattered by these events. I don't know if those of you, born after the Independence settlements of the 60s can quite understand this. But it was as though we had built a coffin for ourselves and were just waiting for whoever would come to negotiate the price of burial.

Lewis' question was brought to my attention by an article of Tim Hector's in a special Tim Hector issue of the *C. L. R. James Journal* (Vol. 8, No. 1). Lewis identifies the three major figures of that moment and begins by elaborating on their qualities.

"This is in itself odd," says Lewis,

> *since the three heads of government whose head-on collisions, despite their unquestioned allegiance to the cause, ultimately wrecked the Federation. Adams, Manley and Williams were all men of the highest quality on any definition of the word. Their talents were outstanding and their education the envy of mankind.*
>
> *They were men of immaculate integrity and selfless devotion to the public service. Each was at the top of his profession before entering public life, and gained neither prestige nor money from entering politics. Each would be recognized in any country in the world as a public servant of highest caliber. . .*

The question of questions posed by Sir Arthur was this: "How did these highly intelligent men, all devoted to Federation come to make so many errors in so short a period? Clearly the leadership of the Federation was awful."

Lewis' judgment carries weight, but it is possible that although he saw with great clarity the situation he describes and laments, he may have been looking in the wrong direction. The answer to his question, or some portion of that answer, may be found in

the cultural displacement of the men involved. They were the brilliant products of an epistemological formation which was in profound discord with the concrete and novel realities which now challenged the imagination. They were the casualties of an inherited tutelage which was colonial in essence and thereby placed an overwhelming constraint on the concept of liberation. It had happened before, and has been articulated with unsparing candour by the Argentinean thinker, Ezequiel Estrada, with reference to the crisis in leadership of Latin American liberation struggles that had in great agony won their release from the political domination of a colonizing European power.

"Neither here nor elsewhere," writes Estrada,

> *is there any public awareness of the fact that cultural emancipation is not any easier although it may be less bloody than political liberty; and a great part of the failure of our independence movements was due to the fact that our liberators were not liberated from themselves. Mentally free they were subconsciously in chains, because they continued to accept the structure of European cultures, changing only their forms and a small part of their content, in the same way they had done with their political institutions.*

George Beckford: Utopian Realism

George Beckford who symbolized a point of preparation for transcendence had this extraordinary conviction derived from acute observation and the sovereignty of the imagination that there existed in each territory and the region as a whole the capacity to provide for the basic needs of their population; that there was no objective reason why any citizen in Jamaica should go to sleep hungry. The strategy of this achievement he called self-reliance—which could meet the society's basic needs of food, shelter, clothing, health and education. But the major hurdle to the achievement of self-reliance was the question of consumer tastes. That was 1984. And what seemed a hurdle then has matured and gangrened into an irreversible delirium of consumption.

Let us pause and recall for a moment the positive side of his contention. G. Beck had just come back from the Far East and was struck by the fact that they were using bamboo for scaffolding in building construction. And suddenly he begins to think of Flat Bridge which now reveals itself as a miracle: the Flat Bridge crosses the Rio Cobre River. This bridge was built before the days of concrete and steel. And every time that river comes down and overflows the road, we find that when the water subsides. Flat Bridge is still standing there. There is something remarkable about that bridge, but none of the structural engineers at the time seemed to know what binding material was in it. They only said that the thing was so beautifully designed. "It is our ancestors who designed that building. They designed in such a way," the engineers say, "that it cuts the water,

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and therefore there is no force for the water to wash away. A marvellous construction—and yet we don't know the materials in it. We know it is built with local resources. Some people say it may be horse hair, guinea grass. . . !!"

It was this perspective of self-reliance which he brought to the role of the university in the national crisis of literacy. Beckford says:

> *The battle for eradicating functional literacy, in our view, is so urgent that consideration should be given to closing the university for one academic year, and diverting student and staff activity to a national campaign. . . In this connection, the urban to rural (and vice versa) movement would benefit the student-teacher whose knowledge of Jamaica's natural environment would be enhanced immeasurably. . .*

The context in which knowledge is produced, acquired and distributed has a decisive influence on the content and practice of such knowledge; and consequently this context gives a certain shape to the ways in which we see and feel what we know. I work from the assumption that a mode of perception is not autonomous. It evolves and matures within a specific context, and its function reflects the context from which it is inseparable. Everyone bears witness to his or her own experience and is therefore engaged in the process of knowledge production even when such knowledge is discovered to be in error. And knowledge is never passive. It is always intended to be put in the service of some specific intention. It may serve to protect and stabilize the dominant values of a particular context of social relations or it may serve to subvert and transcend those values. But whatever course it takes, the result always carries the signature of a context. Knowledge is therefore social in character. Critical theory and practice must therefore be seen as forms of social enquiry: tools of analysis and exposition which seek to identify, isolate and define the various components of a particular context. It may be a matter of fate where an existence first becomes aware of itself and its environment, or when and in what manner it is extinguished; but to be alive is to be in a process of enquiring how and to what purpose this existence may survive and reproduce itself. Even prayer, which assumes a history beyond time, is a form of enquiry. For the atheist, among the most religious of humans, prayer becomes a dialogue of defiance against the disabling charity of a divine transcendence.

The Practice of Literature Is Rooted in These Questions

Literature, Freedom and the Imagination

On the way to the tonelle in the novel *Season of Adventure* the drummers, Crim and Powell, are trying to work their way through the contradictions which the new Independence confronts them with.

> "So I put it to you as one man to a next."
> "Who say I's a man?" And Crim's voice meant what he had asked.

"Is you self say so."
"When?"
"The very day you born."
"But I couldn't make a note with words that day," Crim argued.
"Is words make a note with you," said Powell, "like how you
beat your drum til it shape a tune, words beat your brain til it language
your tongue."
"Is what that got to do with man?"
"Every everything. Til then you ain't nothin' but a beast."
"Some beasts does talk."
"But talk ain't nothing till it ask," said Powell. "Man is a question the
beast ask itself."
"All right, I's a man."

Or in a later contention over the nature and content of freedom: "I say it was a real freedom happen when the tourist army went away," Crim said. "It look like a real freedom they give San Cristobal." "It don't have that kind o' giving," said Powell, trying to restrain his anger. "Is wrong to say that, cause free is free an' it don't have no givin'. Free is how you is from the start, an' when it look different you got to move, just move, and when you moving say that is a natural freedom make you move. You can't move to freedom, Crim, cause freedom is what you is, an' where you start, an' where you always got to stand. . . If ever I give you freedom, Grim, then all your future is mine, 'cause whatever you do in freedom name is what I make happen. Seeing that way is a blindness from the start. . . "

In *The Pleasures of Exile* I had tried to construct a re-reading of *The Tempest* which would reveal the problem of learning as a treacherous form of giving in any colonial encounter. Education, meaning the possession of the Word—which was in the beginning or not at all—is the tool which Prospero had tried on the irredeemable nature of his savage and deformed slave Caliban. We are brought to the heart of the matter by the cantankerous assertion, spoken by Miranda, but obviously on the thought and vocabulary of her father:

MIRANDA: *Abhorred slave,*
Which any print of goodness will not take,
Being capable of all ill! I pitied thee,
Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour
One thing or the other: when thou didst not, savage,
Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
A thing most brutish, I endowed thy purposes
With words that made them known. But thy vile race,
Though thou didst learn, had that in't which good natures
Could not abide to be with; therefore wast thou
Deservedly confin'd into this rock,
Who hadst deserve more than a prison.

Caliban is the occasion for establishing a mode and continuity of thought which would exercise across many centuries an immense and toxic influence on the architecture of knowledge which came to be known as the humanities. This perception of a "vile race which good natures could not abide to be with", and which some of the finest minds of western culture could not wholly escape since history had bestowed on them a vertical location from which they could select and define whatever they thought worthy of serious scholarly attention.

It is interesting here to contrast the ways of seeing the same conjuncture of events by two great scholars who inherited that great divide initiated by the concept and device of race.

In his remarkable history of the 20th century, *The Age of Extremes,* Eric Hobsbawn writes:

> *Peace meant before 1914. In 1914 there had been no major war for a century, that is to say a war in which all, or even a majority of major powers had been involved. . . Between 1815 and 1914 no major power fought another outside its immediate region, although aggressive expeditions of imperial or would-be imperial powers against overseas enemies were, of course, common. . .*

The tone and texture of language here perplexes the African American scholar and writer, W.E.B. Dubois, who reflects on the same events in his book, *The World and Africa.* Major war, for Hobsbawn, is confined to war in which "major powers had been involved"; and the destruction of alien civilizations is comfortably defined, "of course, [by] aggressive expeditions of imperial powers against weaker oversees enemies". The contrast is startling when we engage the full text of Dubois' bewilderment about the peace movement of the 19th century. He writes:

> *The paradox of the peace movement of the nineteenth century is a baffling comment on European civilization. There was not a single year during the nineteenth century when the world was not at war. Chiefly but not entirely, these wars were waged to subjugate colonial peoples. They were carried on by Europeans, and at least one hundred and fifty wars can be counted during the heyday of the peace movement. What the peace movement really meant was peace in Europe and between Europeans, while for the conquest of the world and because of the suspicion which they held towards each other, every nation maintained a standing army. . .*

The world wars were Europe's civil wars. They only became world wars because, according to an African proverb, when the elephants fight the grass gets trampled. The world was Europe's grass.

A system which for two centuries or more has left the majority of human kind in a state of illiteracy, poverty and disease cannot be accepted as a model for the free, creative realization of the human spirit; nor the private property—and which can be interpreted as the freedom of corporate capitalism to encircle and consume the globe.

Miranda's theme of a "vile race/which good natures could not abide to be with" would later mature into a body of theory which the authority of the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, confirms by arguing for the inseparable bond between anthropology and geography.

"In hot countries," Kant reminds us,

> *the human matures earlier in all ways, but does not reach the perfection of the temperate zones. Humanity exists in its greatest perfection in a white race. The yellow Indians have a smaller amount of talent. The Negroes are lower. . . That which the sun implants in the skin of the Negro in Africa and thus that which is only accidental to him, must fall away in France and only the blackness will remain which is his by birth, and which he reproduces, and which alone can thus be used as a difference in class. . . "*

The influence of these pronouncements on future dictionaries is traceable even to this day. Thus *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* ascribes to the term 'black' the connotations: "outrageously wicked, a villain, dishonourable, indicating disgrace, connected with the Devil. . . ". On the other hand, 'white' carries such connotations as "free from blemish, moral stain or impunity, decent. . . In a fair upright manner, a sterling man".

This ideology was planted here the very first day the Admiral set foot on these shores. And in the concrete scenario of Trinidad & Tobago, and Guyana the question would arise: where is home and when does it begin? In the publication *Enterprise of the Indies,* the Indo-Trinidadian historian, Dr Kusha Haraksingh, draws attention to the predicament of the first generation of Indian indentured labourers whose contract carried the condition of return to India after five years. A choice had to be made; and it is Dr Haraksingh's contention that this choice to stay carried a symbolic significance which was deliberately ignored or lost on those who were not Indian:

> *"The decision to stay,"* he writes,
>
> *was often coupled with a residential move away from plantation to 'free' villages, which itself often involved the acquisition of title to property. This served as a major platform to belonging, an urge that soon became more evident in efforts to redesign the landscape. Thus the trees which were planted around emergent homesteads, including religious vegetation, constitute [s] a statement about belonging; so too did the temples and mosques which began to dot the landscape. And the rearing of animals which could not be abandoned; and the construction of ponds and tanks, and the diversion of watercourses; and the clearing of lands. When all this is put together it is hard to resist the conclusion that Indians had begun to think of Trinidad as their home long before general opinion in the country had awakened to that as a possibility.*

And there is evidence in many of our narratives of that perception of the Indian as alien and other, a problem to be contained after the departure of the imperial power. This has been a major part of the thought and feeling of West Indians of African descent, and a particularly stubborn conviction among the black middle classes of Trinidad and Guyana. Indian achievement in politics or business has been regarded as an example of an Indian strategy for conquest; and even where such achievement did not exist, there could still be heard the satirical assault on those Indians who appeared to identify too readily with a creolizing process. The calypsoes between 1946 and the 60s are the authentic examples of this.

But I believe that Labour and the social relations experienced in the process of labour constitute the foundations of culture. It is through work that men and women make nature a part of their own history. The way we see, the way we hear, our nurtured sense of touch and smell, the whole complex of feelings which we call sensibility, is influenced by the particular features of the landscape which has been humanized by our work; so there can be no history of Trinidad or Guyana that is not also a history of the humanization of those landscapes by African and Indian forces of labour.

This is at once the identity and the conflict of interests which engaged the deepest feeling of those indentured workers inscribing their signatures on a landscape that will be converted into home; and also the bitter taste of loss which the emancipated African experiences as he sees the same land become the symbol of his dispossession.

How to reconcile these contradictions with the past is for us, in these circumstances, not just an exercise in memory, in the retrieval of some rationale of consolation for our labour. The past became a weapon which ethnicity summoned as evidence of group solidarity. Politics would become an expression of ethnic grievance made rational and just by any evidence which the past could sanction.

And here was the burden of commitment which Walter Rodney assumed.

Conclusion

Walter Rodney as political activist and historian had sought to show that those Indians in that category of indentured labour had always waged heroic struggle against that condition (31 strikes in 1886, and 42 in 1888). This investment of labour and resistance had made them partners with their African brothers and sisters in a struggle to liberate a people and a region from the imperial encirclement of poverty, illiteracy, and self-contempt.

His scholarship sought to help dismantle a tradition which, before and after Independence, has used the device of race to obscure and sabotage the fundamental unity which married the destinies of Indian and African workers through their common experience of labour. A democratic future rested, above everything else, on the recognition of that historical fact, and the means whereby this could be absorbed and

experienced as the most important truth of their daily lives, the characteristic features of all their social relations. Difference in cultural heritage is not an objective obstacle to such an achievement. Indeed, this cultural difference can only be accepted, respected and cherished after the artificial conflict of race had been abolished by that unifying force which derives from their common experience of labour. It was this possibility which alarmed Rodney's executioners.

The colonization of the female by an arbitrary division of labour would in time give rise to a crusade in sexual politics which has become a major challenge to all established orthodoxy in the contemporary Caribbean; and the patriarchal character of Caribbean literature has been immensely enriched *by* the range and quality of women's writing. It's almost a certainty that one of the most fertile areas of its expansion will be occupied by what, previously and by traditional stereotype, was the most dormant of all voices: the voice of the Indo-Caribbean woman. Less than half a century of access to the school, and the swift migration from barrack room and cane patch into the professional citadels of the nations' workplaces, have now broken forever that curtain of silence and submission which we were made to believe was her chosen location. In the *Trinidad Express* special "Indian Arrival Supplement" of May 1992, Sita Bridgemohan offers this poignant statement of her claims on the Trinidad landscape: "My forefathers came from India to work in the canefields. They were Hindus. With sweat, tears, hard work and courage, they created a life in a different land, a land in which I was born. By right of birth, I have a place in this land and don't have to fight for it."

The concepts: race, nation, ethnicity constitute a family of constructs of largely European origins which served to influence the attitudes we should adopt to any encounter with difference. European racism was a form of ethnic nationalism that invested the colour line with a power of definition which neither Asian nor African could have escaped.

Difference in religion, difference in modes of cultural affirmation now require a new agenda of perspectives, a wholly new way of looking at the concept of nation, of finding a way to immunize sense and sensibility against the virus of ethnic nationalism (for the culture of an ethnic group is no more than the set of rules into which parents belonging to that ethnic group are pressured to socialize their children) and in order to educate feeling to respect the autonomy of the Other's difference, to negotiate the cultural spaces which are the legitimate claim of the Other, and to work toward an environment which could manage stability as a state of creative conflict. The challenge of diversity and the peculiar nature of our own diasporic adventure could be made a fertilizing soil and the crusading theme of political discourse. Indeed, this diversity has been an abundant blessing for cultural workers in all the arts in the Caribbean: Creative conflict is the dynamic which drives the Caribbean imagination.

In his Nobel Prize speech (1992) Derek Walcott reveals the paradox and the utopian character of a vision which keeps our faith alive. He says:

> *Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the ceiling of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the cracked heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars.*
>
> *This gathering of broken pieces is the care and pain of the Antilles, and if the pieces are disparate, ill-fitting, they contain more pain than their original sculpture, those icons and sacred vessels taken for granted in their ancestral places. Antillean art is the restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent.*

If language was a major instrument of empire, it is the very flexible and varying ranges of language, the subtle and explicit manipulations of native rhythms of speech which have won our writers a very special attention. If the metropole directed what is standard and required by the cultural establishment, it is at the periphery of colony or neo-colony that the imagination resists, destabilizes and transforms the status of the word in action. This is a mark of cultural sovereignty—the free definition and articulation of the collective self, whatever the rigour of external constraints.

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THE BLUES, *DIFFERENTLY*

by Linda Deane

Night brings solitude. Purple-heart louvres thrown wide but the breeze finds no saltwater upon my lips. Miles, uppermost layer in a day of heat and motion, gives way to the new coolness. But he's there, still. Sketching lament to the improvised rhythm of timber sighing and swaying after the day's swelter, and to the call of young men and dominoes on the street corner.

From across the road, the fixed streetlamp, the one that used to flick on/off with neon frenzy, spills its fluorescence over the tangled vine of passion fruit that frames the front porch. Amber cascades into woodwork, and the doorstep flows like a burnished river, a sultry first prize. And, for a moment, the glister beguiles, like last night. . .

And you, crashing the party, sending sound and light skidding, slamming to the background. Leaving only a solitary glow, and a pulse, somewhere, racing. You flashed cool brilliance and we shared a moment: lips parted in half-smile, eyebrows arched to a tease, the discreet drinking-in from head to toe, and a careless brush of fingers upon sleeve. But only for a moment, see, for you were not alone. And, noting this, we let the moment go. Called calm down upon our heads, into skin, nerve, gut and bone. Summoned back the bright faces, chink of wine glass and painted conversation—bade them reclaim foreground. And there was blood; it could be heard slowing in our veins. And there was song; it could be heard—the pierced notes, the dazzling imperfection blowing in from a far-off place.

Tonight there is no saltwater for the wind to chill. I could marvel at its absence. At the spill of amber on purple-heart. At beauty, upstaging sorrow—where it hides in layers, waiting.

An automobile spits and roars past the open window, skids on the corner, adding to the shklam of curses and domino. But this is miles away; all that registers is the distant horn.

"JAZZ IN THE CASTLE": GEORGE LAMMING'S REVOLUTION IN FORM.

by Heather Russell-Andrade

When I first read George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), I did not understand, then, its magnificence. I was a sophomore in university, toying with the idea of majoring in English, but not because of writers like Lamming, Sam Selvon, V.S. Reid, or even Toni Morrison, who was at that time just receiving unparalleled recognition from the white literary establishment for her "American" writerly genius. I was much more attracted to what I then considered to be the *undiluted* radicalism of the writings of Malcolm X, of Franz Fanon, of "Jimmie" Baldwin. I had always felt cheated out of the 1960s revolutionary movement, having been born, in my own estimation, *at least* a decade too late. . . Still, in 1988 South Africa was nevertheless suffering relentlessly under the stiff yoke of apartheid, and despite student and community activism in the Divestiture project, Mandela remained imprisoned. In cities all over the United States, young black men were under siege, caught in a web of crack cocaine, police brutality, guns and the socioeconomic residuals of Reaganomics. And too, the increasing hegemony of the neoliberalist agenda was producing ineffable and dire political, economic, social and material consequences throughout the Caribbean. Dire, dread, devastating changes—the optimism that textured civil, black nationalist, independence movements less than two decades before—dissipating.

It would not be until much later, thanks in part to the incumbencies of Graduate School in Literature, that I would realize the radical nature of Lamming's germinal text. It would

not, in fact, be until I became more widely read in western literary traditions, that I realized that *In the Castle of My Skin* was a radical text. That the rebellion *Castle* dared to launch in 1952 against the classical western bourgeois form of the novel was a revolution in its own right. That Lamming, visionary that he was, recognized that the conventional bildungsroman, or novel of development which privileged a kind of bourgeois individualism at the expense of community, social context, history—was inadequate to capture the complexities of emergent Caribbean subjectivities, particularly within the context of the nation-building project. That Lamming imagined in his text, through its form, the kind of democratic paradigm that would by necessity serve as a fundamental tenet of a newly emergent Caribbean democratic landscape, was at that time, above my head, or at the very least, below my radar. Such recognition warranted more nuanced submergence into the powers and privileges of discourse, discursive formations, western epistemologies and the like.

It would not be, in fact, until I discovered the brilliance of Earl Lovelace's novels and was first introduced to Kamau Brathwaite's "Jazz and the West Indian Novel," that I was able to re-see Lamming's work and recognize the visionary precedent he had inaugurated through his particular brand of aesthetic production. Of course it is in his germinal essay in that Brathwaite suggests that the improvisatory and participatory nature of "jazz" is an apt metaphor capturing the cadences of West Indian writers' formal imaginings:

> The *'jazz novel'* in the normal course of things, will hardly be an *'epic.'* Dealing with a specific, clearly-defined, folk-type community, it will try to express the essence of this community through its form. It will absorb its rhythms from the people of this community; and its concern will be with the community as a whole, its characters taking their place in that community of which they are felt and seen to be an integral part. The conflicts which give this kind of novel meaning will not be the Faustian conflicts of self-seeking knowledge or the Existentialist stoicism of alienation. (Brathwaite, 330-31, emphasis mine)

In the Castle of My Skin is a quintessentially *jazz novel*—a novel which through its form, through its straining against western classical conventions, through its creation of a space marked by polyphony, improvisation and the kind of artistic generosity that is a fundamental precept of jazz, captures something of the Caribbean yearning for freedom and democracy. A jazz metonymy, the narrative structure in *Castle*, reflects the utterance of myriad cross-inflected tales of existence, which emerge from and constitute an entire Barbadian community of Lamming's imaginary.

Although readers trace the contours of Lamming's main protagonist "G's" subject formation, the trajectory of his story is neither fundamentally linear, marked by the celebration of his attaining a kind of bourgeois subjectivity, nor is it isolationist. As noted Lamming critic Sandra Pouchet Paquet has argued:

> Both the self-discursive G. and the collective third person narrator repeatedly defer to a chorus of village voices *that name their own reality* in a language that is ostensibly of their own choosing (xxiii, emphasis mine).

In other words, G's story is inextricable from that of the community into which he is born, is shaped and impacted by; and as their stories unfold alongside his, we are asked to apprehend the classic novel of development in a fundamentally different way. Even more significantly, the conventionally privileged epistemological status of *neither* the first-person narrator "G" *nor* the anonymous third-person narrator *authorize, validate, or dominate* the communal utterances of the villagers in Lamming's text. As Lamming himself points out in his "Introduction" to the 1983 republication of *In the Castle of My Skin*,

> It is the collective human substance of the village which commands our attention. . . It [the village] is the dimension of energy, force, *a quickening capacity for survival*. . . in this method of narration, *where community*, and not person, *is the central character*. . . *things are never so tidy as the critics would like*. . . (xxxvi-xxxvii, emphasis mine).

Such is Lamming's unequivocal subversion of western classical conventions and radical rewriting of discursive power.

. . . I remember re-reading *In the Castle of My Skin* later. . . in preparation to teach

that text to *my* undergraduate course: *Major Caribbean Writers*. I remember returning time and again to *one line* that occurs towards the ending of the novel. Not offset. Not italicized. Nothing to call attention to that line on its own. But, it was a line that encapsulated for me, Lamming's politico-aesthetic project:

> *If they had all got together, each putting his bit with the other's, they might have been able to make a story, but they had to remain with the fragments*. . . (194, emphasis mine).

The narrative voice issues this proclamation after Bridgetown erupts into fighting—the workers are protesting, and the so-called riots are spreading to G's village. Lamming is here, of course, reimagining and restaging the 1937 workers' riots, which called for an end to the exploitation of black workers, the hegemony of white plantocratic culture and the unrelenting poverty which textured black Barbadian's lives. From the perspective of many historians, this interruptive, disruptive, intervention by the black working class inaugurated the modern movement towards building a more racially inclusive, socially reformist and just Barbadian nation-state.

As other critics have pointed out, this pivotal historical moment would have occurred when Lamming was about ten, the same age as 'G.' In the novel, each of the villagers relate different versions of the workers' revolt. Unable to cobble "a story" together, unable to put their stories "each bit" with "the other's," the villagers remain unsure about what to do next, about what this signal event means in the broader context of their lives and livelihoods. In the culminating textual moment capturing the significant national act of social protest, there is a confrontation between the villagers and their landlord. No one acts! Having been expecting the villagers to now play their part in the unfolding national drama, the reader is undoubtedly deflated. The subsequent chapter begins: "The years had changed nothing. The riots were not repeated. The landlord had remained" (209).

Why, I wondered then, would Lamming appear to undercut the revolutionary spirit of the workers' riots, by attributing to these villagers—the very group who by his own admission, embody in his novel, that "quickening capacity for survival,"—inaction? Why would he imagine them as failing to act against the symbol of their disenfranchisement and repression? Was such failure an inevitable consequence of their inability to collectively create a singular compelling narrative, "a story"? In other words, it would appear, at least from the third person narrator's perspective, that it is precisely the villagers' polyphony that interferes with their meaningful engagement in political action; they prove unable to produce the harmonious tale of national belonging that is perhaps in the text's imaginary, requisite for *acting* in concert. Why are they unable to put their stories together to make one story? Why would Lamming consign the villagers to "remain within the fragments?"

Notwithstanding graduate school immersion into theoretical domains that in the academy so frequently linked *fragmentation* to postmodernity, transnationalism, and

a kind of fluid or "unstable" notion of identity—in particular as these related to the postcolonial "condition," which itself was usually described as "anxiety-producing," and marked by alternating notions of belonging and alienation—I was not happy with Lamming's pronouncement of the villagers' fate. Could "remain[ing] with the fragments ever be an inherently liberating posture? By way of answer, I returned to the chapter in question.

The village men, we are told, disperse after the failed confrontation, "some of them pitched stones in the canals, or threw broken bottles in the wood. Others pocketed the weapons" (208), perhaps to be used another day. I am then reminded of the adage, "he who fights and runs away lives to fight another day," and as I re-read, it is the freedom fighter Bob Marley who is of course, singing those words! What I had forgotten before was that the villagers *know* that the police are on their way. The police arrive "three to a seat with the rifles protruding, and the bayonets shining dull and deadly in the late night. . . the night thick and heavy. . . [amidst] the terror and silence of the land" (208). In the face of state repression there are indeed material consequences for acting in concert.

I found myself forced to reframe my fundamental query: Do the villagers have to remain with the fragments because they can do no better? *Or* do their disparate, fragmented stories, their polyphonic soundings highlighting diverse yet mutually reinforcing versions, "bits" of truth, meaning and experience serve as a metaphor symbolizing how the society must proceed if they are, in truth, to forge a new and democratic nation? My musings led me back to Brathwaite.

For it is the fragmentary, polyphonous nature of jazz that is indeed its most salient, aesthetically pleasing and architectonically rich feature. More so, it is the polyphonous, even cacophonous and sometimes even discordant feature of jazz that renders it arguably *the most democratic* of musical forms. Each player has to step aside at one point or another to give the fellow players, room to blow, a place to jam. . . space to "speak," create, improvise, be.

Where I ended up on these matters, goes something like this: what Lamming perhaps simply *cannot* in that pre-Independence moment imagine thematically for his characters and for his nation—a moment that *we cannot* forget is painfully marked by colonial white hegemony and its attendant repressive consequences and encapsulated precisely in the villagers' foresight regarding the threat embodied by the advancing police—*Lamming achieves and imagines through form*. It is the form of *In the Castle of My Skin* that forecasts the emergence of a democratic nation state whose inherent and fundamental precept is polyphony: eloquent working class voices, placed on equal footing with the conventionally privileged sites of knowing and speaking, vested with the power and privilege to know when to speak, when to be silent, and when it is necessary to pocket their weapons for another day.

Endnotes

For more information on the history of the 1937 Workers' Riots, see Hilary Beckles, *Chattel House Blues.* Oxford and Kingston: James Currey and Ian Randle, 2004.

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LESSON *by Esther Phillips*

(For students: Melanie, Stacy-Ann and Shaniqua)

Not all noise and adolescent posturing,
or sentences derailed between full-stops,
or the eternal enmity of subject and verb—
Three students have come to place roses
on the grave of an old woman
they never knew; enough for them that she
was Ma'am's grand-mother whom she loved.

One in black trousers, long-sleeved shirt,
takes seriously-by her expression- this burden
of sympathy. The other, demure, holds
her skirt close, steps up to the grave, throws
her red rose. The last, so deeply
pensive, tears running.

This strange parody: young students
months away from Graduation stand
in silence, while just across from them,
a group all dressed in purple caps and gowns
burst into song, a slab of stone their platform—
and bridging these two, an open grave. . .

a flick of a page and Ophelia's casket closes
Blanche stays forever locked in Old World fantasies
Marx and all Theorists banished to shelf or book-bag. . .

But this September afternoon between sun and shadow,
the sound of stones falling on a wooden coffin,
a teacher is undone by grief for a grandmother
who was to her (as theirs to them, no doubt)
an anchor and a certain solace.

I place an arm around the young girl's shoulders
and ask, half guessing, "Who're you remembering?"
Between her sobs she answers,
"My boyfriend. . . killed. . . in June. . . "

And suddenly the evening slams hard
against the peaceful passing of an old woman
and all other assumptions.

Yes. Face it. This is their world
of anger, knives and guns; the bloody graffiti
of walls and pavements. Old age? A peaceful
death? Grandmother's God ensuring justice
against the wicked? Not for them. Not for them.

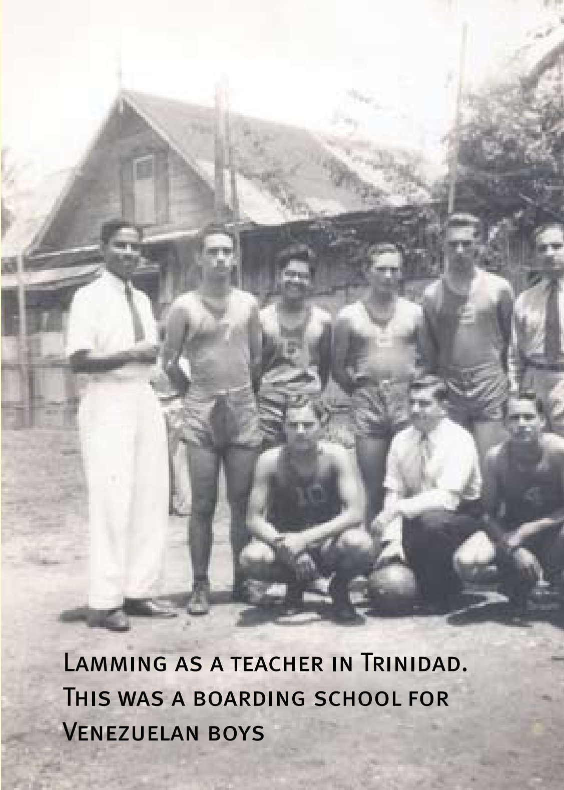
LOCATIONS OF LAMMING

GEORGE LAMMING AND BARBADIAN INTELLECTUAL AND EXPRESSIVE CULTURE

by Curwen Best

This paper considers the impact of George Lamming on contemporary Barbadian culture, and traces the influence of his work on established, new and emerging creative artists. I explore the ways in which the work of certain writers of fiction, poetry, calypso and popular song, as well as that of workers in theatre, film and visual culture, demonstrate an affiliation with his work, whether directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously. Lamming has been a major presence in Barbadian life for the past half century, and he continues to be so. In the way of such things, his legacy is a contested one. My purpose here is to open a dialogue between Lamming's generation of cultural workers, formed as young adults by the struggle for independence from colonialism, and a newer generation: in shorthand, one more cognizant of the USA rather than of Britain; more connected to a globalized electronic and virtual culture than to the medium of print; and for whom the politics of formal independence has always existed as an established fact, rather than an achievement which could properly be called 'ours'. Thus I explore Barbadian intellectual, expressive and popular culture *after* Lamming. But as I hope to show, the relations between 'the old' and 'the new' are complex, and shift back and forth; there is much that is new about the old, and old about the new. As I make clear, my inclinations are with the new; however, the resources of the past may yet remain potent.

In an interview in 1989 Lamming recounted the history of his own formation. At one point he looked back to the period just before he first left Barbados for Trinidad in 1946, indicating that 'I cannot recall that there was very much of a cultural movement in Barbados that was indigenous'.[1] Most of all this alludes to the continuing power of the British. But the statement might also reveal the limitations of its own perception. For all its truth, there *were* indigenous cultural forms which—half a century on—we now may be able to see in a sharper light. While Lamming goes on to talk about his experiences in Trinidad of the Little Carib Theatre, and of the steelband, it was at this very same moment that the tuk band, landship and calypso were also evident in his native Barbados.



Lamming as a teacher in Trinidad. This was a boarding school for Venezuelan boys

The fact that Lamming, and others of his generation, felt compelled to look outside the island for cultural and political inspiration is hardly surprising. He himself has spent much of his intellectual life exploring the impact of colonial power, in all its deepest forms. As he has conceded, his was a generation 'moulded by all the traditional figures of English Literature'.[2] Necessarily, their own conception of emancipation had to be worked through the intellectual culture which they had inherited from those who had colonized them. *The Pleasures of Exile*, for example, is a wonderful testament to the intelligence and daring such a project demanded. In a tribute to the Barbadian statesman, Errol Barrow, Lamming aptly describes the kind of political motivation that fuelled the ambitions of his generation:

> A product of Empire, he caught a glimpse of those who had made the rules by which his own childhood had been indoctrinated . . . He would become the colonial in revolt . . . The anti-colonial struggle was irreversible. London was the city and the intellectual training camp of many men who would become the dominant influence of the liberation struggles of their countries until independence was conceded . . .[3]

The culmination of the long struggle for independence, in the 1960s and into the early 1970s, coincided with a profound shift in the global, regional and local political cultures. The deepening influence of the United States combined with the opening up of Barbados to a wider global culture (tourism, mass media and the Internet), have relocated many of the older questions which predominated during the colonial epoch. Lamming, of course, is alert to these transformations. Commenting a number of years ago on the Caribbean Basin Initiative—a policy in which the interests of the State Department were clearly present—he pointed out, addressing his own Caribbean peoples, that 'you will have to suspend your own law to meet a request of the United States; and that what you call sovereignty is a status which the United States may or may not recognize as the United States sees fit'.[4] Yet if dependency is still a fact of life, its forms are quite new.

In Barbados itself there now exists an emergent generation of cultural workers for whom the new conditions of dependency operate as a fact of life, and to whom the influence of Americanized popular culture has become thoroughly naturalized. From the time of the communications and digital revolution of the middle 1990s, young people in the Caribbean, as elsewhere, have been pulled into the force-field of the new, globally constituted electronic cultures, and subject as well to their attendant commercial imperatives. Barbados, once the most provincial of the islands of the anglophone Caribbean, notorious as an agricultural backwater, has in effect been remade by the expansion of satellite technology, the impact of the World Wide Web, the growth of a whole variety of telecommunication networks, a transformation which itself is visible in its effects on the practices of everyday life: in changing habits of speech, dress, consumption and so on. The consequences are complex. This new arena of experience does not readily encode a field of confrontation in the traditional manner, as in earlier generations. Terms of cultural negotiation are not so readily drawn across the familiar divides of nations or classes or economic formations. That these social processes are still operative is undoubtedly the case. But they can become more invisible, or more displaced, in the experiences of everyday life. At the same time, new generations of cultural workers are located in such a way that they themselves must work towards defining what constitutes the field of their own interventions, and even where it is to be located. In this, Americanized popular culture has achieved a new salience, valorizing a high degree of individualism and self-fashioning, while at the same time inducing new patterns of conformity. It's difficult, through the lens of an inherited anti-colonialism, to get a focus on this. Too often it can look simply as if history is moving by its bad side alone. But these developments may be more contradictory than they first appear. A new conformity, wedded to an ever-more insistent drive for consumption, may be part of the story. Yet the cultural field itself also offers new opportunities and, as I shall argue, can work to release new political energies.

A core of new crossover Caribbean performance poets, dancehall artists, hip-hop creators and so on seek wealth and fame, as much as do popular artists in other parts of the once–colonized world. For black peoples of the modern age the escape from poverty, or from the humdrum existence of everyday wage–labour, has for long been accomplished through the vehicle of popular-musical performance. But whether subject to the imperatives of the market or not, an essential element in such ventures has comprised the struggle for recognition. *This* dimension of cultural practice needs to be emphasized in the contemporary moment. Being heard, being filmed, being aired on radio amount—amongst all else—to a quest for credibility and respect, in a new, speedily evolving cultural landscape. Lamming, in 1950, had no option but to make the journey from the Caribbean to London. Today, in a different historical moment, new resources lie closer to hand.

Access to the media is not always determined solely by economic power. In the contemporary Barbadian and Caribbean communications system, access is also shaped by a variety of factors: by social standing and affiliation, by work through interest groups,

through the institutions of friendly societies, political parties, schools and colleges, religious groupings. A complex social network has emerged of workers, within civil society, who are organic, in Gramsci's terms, to the newly evolving culture industries. Radio presenters, DJs, television celebrities, recording engineers: all can emerge as key points of contact between the aspirant artists on the ground, as it were, and the controllers and owners of the larger corporate organizations. The underground music culture of Barbados, for example, is nurtured within the sound systems that play on the privately-owned public transport vehicles. It is here that its predominating dynamic is to be found. This in turn feeds into the local radio culture, which—for all its globalized features—nonetheless remains identifiably *local*, reproducing the rhythms of (a new) Bajan life.

Militants of today's digital culture—in the genres of, say, post-dancehall, or post-soca—are improvising in much the same manner as Lamming himself when, shortly after his arrival in London, he recast the inherited novel form. The means by which they do this may be less self-consciously theoretical, or abstract. But they too are working in order to create an expressive culture which can bear the burden of their experience just as, half a century ago, Lamming worked to re-imagine the novel so that it could come to represent a Caribbean reality.

Intellectual and Cultural Workers

In his essay entitled 'Western education and the Caribbean intellectual' Lamming—the influence of Gramsci palpable—considers the various meanings attached to the idea of the intellectual. He highlights four particular usages. In the first instance he argues that an intellectual may be considered to be an individual who is

> primarily concerned with ideas—the origin and history of ideas, the ways in which ideas have influenced and directed social practice. . . These intellectuals begin with a specialized knowledge of some particular area of human activity, say history or the natural sciences, and then proceed to discover how this particular body of knowledge is related to other areas of human thought. [5]

The second usage is more open. It may refer to

> people who either as producers or instructors are engaged in work which requires a consistent intellectual activity. These may be artists in a variety of imaginative expression; teachers; technocrats or academics. [6]

In a third sense it can encompass

> a great variety of people whose tastes and interests favour, and even focus on, the products of a certain activity. That is, people who cultivate a love of music in its variety of forms, or the theatre, or have a passion for the visual arts, or for reading a kind of literature which is intended to

> cultivate the mind and enliven the sensibility; people who would regard the current rash of American television as being very destructive of the critical intelligence. . . [7]

Lamming suggests that in a fourth sense the term ‘intellectual’

> may be applied to all forms of labour which could not possibly be done without some exercise of the mind. In this sense the fisherman and the farmer may be regarded as cultural and intellectual workers in their own right. Social practice has provided them with a considerable body of knowledge and a capacity to make discriminating judgements. . . [8]

By engaging with these definitions he sought to call into question more traditional, conservative ways of defining who indeed are to be socially recognized as ‘intellectuals’. For, as he further explains of this last, fourth, category,

> If we do not regard them as cultural and intellectual workers, it is largely, I think, because of the social stratification which is created by the division of labour, and the legacy of an education system which was designed to reinforce such a division in our modes of perceiving social reality.[9]

It’s instructive that in making this claim Lamming invokes the figure of Walter Rodney. In citing the example of Rodney, he lauds the ability of the academic-activist to ‘break with the tradition he had been trained to serve’, while seeking greater knowledge from the social experience of the oppressed.[10] Only by heeding the forms of knowledge generated in popular life, he contends, can the intellectual stagnation of the Caribbean be overcome, thus sharing with Rodney the belief that ‘ordinary men and women should be intellectually equipped to liberate themselves from hostile forms of ownership’.[11]

This is a position I share too. But we need to ask how popular life, in the post-independence culture of the Caribbean, is constituted. Is it viable, today, to invoke the ‘peasant’ (to use the Bajan term) culture when, socially, the old agrarian structures of Barbadian life are fast diminishing? How the contemporary people of Barbados are constituted and represented is by no means obvious. But minimally, alongside the poets, novelists and playwrights, we need also to include those active in the plurality of contemporary dance and music cultures, as well as visual artists such as graffiti writers. Their location lies less in the printed word than in globally inflected electronic cultures, much of which bears the imprint of the regional, and world, superpower: the United States. How is this to be negotiated?

Those Barbadians most influenced by Lamming, and by literary intellectuals of his generation, tend to be artists who themselves had lived through the years of the early post independence era. Some of the more prominent creative artists in the literary and performance arena whose names come to mind include Gabby, Winston Farrell, Icil Phillips, Aja and Margaret Gill. The playwright Earl Warner, and leading actors like Cynthia Wilson, Cicely Spencer Cross, Victor Clifford, Clairmont Taitt and Tony Thompson, have all

either performed, or expressed their admiration for, the dramatic potential of Lamming's fiction. A list like this is by no means exhaustive. There are many others who have gone on record to express their debts to Lamming, or whose works reflect an influence. It is clear too that he is an intellectual of protean powers: although principally known for his literary works, for the generation of the great migration to Britain, who also struggled to make independence happen, in Barbados, and maybe even in the region as a whole, Lamming is in many ways the significant organic intellectual. In the field of sport, for example, one can detect his influences on figures such as the cricketer Frank Worrell and, more recently, cricketers who emerged during the 1980s. His popular influence has been widespread.

It's also important to realize that literary forms in the Caribbean have always been in close dialogue with oral and musical cultures. Timothy Callender, especially, has emphasized this in relation to Lamming's novels, pointing out the degree to which his fiction puts on the printed page an entire oral tradition of storytelling.[12] Indeed—as much as calypso—Lamming's writings have at various moments been derided by the local elites for their putative vulgarity and their subversion. It's not only that Lamming entered the popular culture of the independent nation, but also that the popular culture of the nation had entered, at the most profound level, his writings.

Film, Visual Arts, Graffiti

In 1999 the Bajan filmmaker Andrew Millington dedicated his first full-length feature film, *Guttaperc*, to George Lamming.[13] The themes of the film directly echo those of Lamming's *In The Castle of My Skin* fifty years earlier, tracing the experiences of a ten-year old Bajan boy who is looked after by his grandparents after his parents have migrated to the USA. In the film we witness a further moment in the break-up of the rural nation. The young boy, Eric, has to learn to make sense of the conflict between his grandfather, a socially mobile businessman, and Sister Pam, an old woman in the village who is located deeply in her own community—as the character of Ma is in *In The Castle of My Skin*. In *Guttaperc* the danger to local customs derives from the government initiative to displace the village by constructing a new tourist resort. We perceive these developments through the eyes of Eric, a device which allows Millington to explore the themes of innocence, agency and power.

A few years later, around 2004, a group of young Bajans, most of whom had studied literature at Cave Hill (the Barbados campus of the University of the West Indies), came to national recognition when they launched the Film Group of Barbados. They dedicated themselves to filming local subjects, and to raising explicitly political issues about national life.[14] Like Millington, the group is inspired by the work of Caribbean thinkers and visionaries like Lamming. They have already begun to sharpen their ideological focus through the 'rough' but revolutionary approach that they bring to video, narrative and film. Their filming of historical and traditional iconographic locations

reveals a Lammingesque preoccupation with history and social change. Yet the Group brings to these concerns, I think, a greater commitment to a cinematic avant-garde, which demarcates them significantly from an inherited literary tradition, and which distinguishes them, too, from the earlier work of Millington.

These concerns to bring together an appreciation of the texture of everyday experience with a larger political vision—a pre-eminent quality of *In The Castle of My Skin*—can be seen too in the work of recent visual artists. For example, in the oil on canvas *First Fruit*, which depicts a matriarch gathering provisions from the land, Ras Ishi describes his painting as 'an expression of our deepest instincts and emotion, whose end is to vitalize'.[15] Judy Layne's batik *Village Life* also seeks to capture various aspects of peasant life. Yet both offer an important political articulation which the manifest content of their pictures may belie. The politics is more explicit in Frank Taylor's *Murder, Discrimination*, an acrylic mixed media piece on canvas depicting a montage of images: a foreboding moon, the bust of an African in traditional wear, a stately gentleman holding a cigar pipe. It carries an apprehension of violence, reflecting on the unacknowledged history of the nation.

It is clear that in the formal appreciations of Barbadian culture, aesthetic concern is intimately tied into questions of the social acceptability, or unacceptability, of certain forms. While representation on a canvas falls within the conventions of acceptability, the craft of graffiti writing does not.[16] Yet graffiti is both a peculiarly improvised form, and one whose *raison d'être* is driven by a sense of public intervention. Graffiti writers/ taggers are essentially amateurs, part-timers, working more as symbolic guerrillas than accredited artist-intellectuals. The privately-owned buses that attract and transport many of Barbados's youth across the island have become significant targets for the taggers. Because of their overt political statements, as well as their allegiances to one or other of the several gangs and crews that now proliferate on the island, these are artists who necessarily are covert in their actions.[17] Their work is characteristically regarded, in official society, as an expression of social deviance. Aesthetically, the taggers borrow heavily from outside the given domains of painting and literature: from Hollywood, from hip hop, from an underground Caribbean culture. Theirs is a form of expression which is not mediated by the many layers of production, marketing and distribution which define official spheres of cultural exchange, whose purpose is to bring into the imaginary of everyday life the notion of a 'free' commodity.

Calypso and Folk

In all his public utterances Lamming has made it clear that he is driven by a radical politics, which draws from the classic positions of marxism. His commitments have been to the New Jewel Movement in Grenada, to Walter Rodney and the Working People's Alliance in Guyana and to the Barbados Workers' Union. Each of these organizations brought together socially accredited intellectuals and the common people. They were

to be distinguished, in Lamming's terms, from the 'colonized' left composed of the intellectuals (narrowly defined) alone. This 'colonized' left was, he says,

> invariably drawn from the middle class. . . people who had the text, who had the book . . . but who really had no organic connection or direct identification with the daily lives . . . . A lot of the behaviour was almost the living of a text. They had read the literature of the Left; they had read Marx. But it was not really the translation of the essence and spirit of meaning of that text.[18]

He has often emphasized the need to 'return people to the realities of their own concrete experiences and in their own concrete contexts . . . [19] His regard for the dignity of labour—as a transformative practice which lies at the heart of the social world—is impressive, and it is a theme he repeatedly returns to. But the terms of his own argument require us to investigate the domain of the popular itself.

There are a number of calypsonians who have been touched by Lamming, and who might see themselves as inheritors of his politics. Notable are Gabby, Black Pawn, Anthony Walrond, Colin Spencer and Observer. There is hardly any other single singing performer in Barbados whose work better reflects the influence of Lamming than leading calypsonian, folk singer and ringbang artist, Mighty Gabby. Gabby's oeuvre reflects the varied work of a craftsman. It is undoubtedly his overt politics that underlies his popular appeal. Gabby is Barbados' most accomplished performer of folk, calypso and ringbang music. He began performing at the national level in the mid-1960s. For a few years during the 1970s he migrated to New York where he was involved in theatre. In the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s he composed and performed some of the most stinging political and social commentary in the Caribbean region. His work caught the attention of *Time* magazine and since his affiliation with the international superstar Eddy Grant in the 1980s his songs have appeared in the soundtrack of a few big budget western films.[20]
In his 1985 song 'Culture' Gabby directly invokes Lamming to support his call for an active response to the dangers of cultural imperialism. In one verse he declares:

> *show we some 'Castle in my Skin'*
> *by George Lamming for my viewing*
> *or something hot*
> *By Derek Walcott*
> *Instead of that trash*
> *Like 'Sanford [and Son]' and 'Mash'*
> *Then we could stare in they face*
> *And show them we cultural base*

The first lines begin, 'all this talk 'bout culture/ it driving me mad/ I taking it hard . . . ' Like Lamming, Gabby insists here that culture concerns the cultivation of the entire body and mind, and goes to the heart of imagining a viable popular sovereignty. The song contributed to Gabby's success that year in winning the calypso-monarch crown.

His 'Riots in de Land' (c.1975) captures through song the turmoil of the 1937 riots that swept through Barbados. Gabby's words also evoke the pandemonium of the period, but his clear diction, his use of high registers in the near-frenzied chorus section on the song, and the inflective repetition of the musical phrase 'riots, riots, riots' altogether create an emotive tone that ignites the senses. The song ends with the warning that unless there is indeed meaningful social redress then 'we going to riot again'. And there are similar messages in his other songs like 'Massa Day Done' (c.1996), echoing the famous words of Eric Williams, 'West Indian Politician' (c.1985) and 'One Day Coming Soon' (1984). The latter makes direct reference to the 'mass population' as being in conflict with 'the ruling class':

Tell them I see a new day dawning
I giving them an early warning
'Cause in this final action
De people voices will all rise up as one
And if they continue to malfunction
I can see destruction on the horizon
And it will not be the mass population
Who will feel de blast
It will be de ruling class so fast.[21]

These indeed are sentiments close to those of Lamming.

Gabby's work, like Lamming's, is driven by a sharp sense of the opposition between a regional Caribbean culture, on the one hand, and the commodified products generated by the massified cultural institutions of the United States. 'Culture' closes with the refrain 'So now you see what I really mean/This is my true culture in *the Caribbean*'. This identification with the Caribbean constitutes one pole in the popular life of the region. Johnny Koieman's folk songs often capture the anguish and desires of Caribbean folk. In his composition, 'If you See de Landlord', he connects the hardships of life in the region to the economic power of the global institutions of capital.

We face devaluation; have we got a choice?
It don't look like we got none
I hearing bout World Bank and de Monetary Fund
Do they, the Third World man?[22]

We can see similar themes appearing in the work of Black Pawn who, as his sobriquet suggests, is a composer who speaks from the perspective of the downtrodden. Since the late 1970s he has consistently addressed the issues of local and regional sovereignty. Two numbers which can be read as companion texts to the work of Lamming are the songs 'Visions' and 'America'. In the latter Pawn calls attention to the Janus-faced nature of international politics when he chides the West for 'sell[ing] weapons to Iran and Iraq/ for them to kill each other'. But the song comes home when it advises the region to work towards 'self reliance'. Plastic Bag (RPB) is not known for his directly confrontational

politics, but has written some of the more thought-provoking, witty and playful lyrics on the condition of Caribbean societies in a world defined by new colonial relations: in, for example, his 'Blackman' (c.1985) and 'Sam' (c.2002). Calypso in this sense not only addresses regional themes: in *form* they are regional as well. But as the form evolves in the climate of globalization it is constantly faced with the dual challenge of maintaining its indigenous signature while also drawing from wider international and commercial influences. As much as the novel itself, the tradition of calypso remains one that is contested.

Performance Poetry

Since the eighties performance poetry in Barbados has become an established feature of the cultural scene, serving to bridge the separate practices of popular song-making with the 'literary' pursuit of poetry, in its conventional senses. Ricky Parris, Rashid Foster, Winston Farrell, Aja (formerly Mike Richards and late Adisa Andwele), Margaret Gill have all produced significant work. A work such as Farrell's 'De Meeting-turn' for instance, is a satirical, poignant exposition on the transactions within the African-Caribbean community savings institution (a theme readers will recall from *In The Castle of My Skin*), called a 'meeting-turn' or 'susu'. Farrell's poem reads:

> *trouble in de susu*
> *again*
> *somebody meetin' turn*
> *down de drain*
> *don't bother to fuss or fret*
> *i never hear nobody get lock up yet*
> *yuh could save 'til yuh lot come thru*
> *free-up de meetin' turn out de susu.*[23]

This first wave of creative performance poets was followed by younger emerging voices that have also taken on the fight for national and regional empowerment, such as Phelan Lowe, Kelly Chase, Sandra Morris-Sealy, Junior Campbell, Elisheba, as well as Yvonne Weekes and Rhonda Lewis. A writer like Sandra Brown, for instance, in the poems 'No Peace Beyond the Line' and 'In the Shadow of the Eagle' locates her discussion of the challenges faced by Caribbean society in the contemporary context of neo-colonialism.[24] In a veiled reference to the success of the Cuban revolution, Brown reflects on the power of the United States.

> *With a heightened intelligence that is central to its power*
> *The eagle regroups and resumes his attack*
> *But the bear summons aid from his grizzly big brother*
> *Who stops the wily eagle dead in its tracks.*[25]

It's amongst the performance poets in particular that new female voices have

flourished, most significantly in Elisheba's *Barbed Wire and Roses*, which works to uncover the innate tensions that divide the sexes. Her insistence on the centrality of the gendered transactions of Caribbean life offers a new, urgent dimension to the cultural politics of the region.

The performance poetry tradition is principally indebted to Kamau Brathwaite—though we shouldn't forget the importance of Lamming on Brathwaite's early literary imagination. Braithwaite describes Lamming as 'breathing to me from every pore of line and page'.[26] In *Barabajan Poems* Brathwaite elaborates the point by saying:

> *Castle* marked a great divide in our sense of Bajan –and Caribbean—literature & culture since abroad we tend to be far more 'federal' than insular and this was the first & in a sense still the only Bajan novel that gave us voice & story & after that it was possible for all of us (and again it went beyond 'Bajan') to *'access'* not simply *remember* our childhood and the various faces of our ancestors/ but hear them speak & let them speak to us.[27]

Indeed, as I've argued elsewhere, Lamming's influence continues to run through much of Brathwaite's work, despite the many aesthetic and political issues which divide them.[28] As Lamming himself has indicated, their respective interpretations of Africa—a matter of key significance—are quite different. 'I am more interested in the concrete realities of Africa', Lamming states, 'not in the cultural sense of a Brathwaite, but in the political sense . . . [29] While Brathwaite has been more concerned with discovering an African and Caribbean spirituality, Lamming has always been guarded in embracing anything which could be described as 'a general thing called African'.[30] Yet both Lamming and Brathwaite—Lamming in prose, Brathwaite in verse—have sought to cross the traditional boundaries of received literary genres. They have organized inherited literary forms for their own purposes, such that they could articulate the inner realities of Caribbean experience. As I see it, their commitment to experiment with new forms—albeit broadly within the literary field—*prefigures* the subversion of received cultural forms of a younger, hardcore, generation who have sought new modes of creation within *their* respective fields, of producing poetry and prose, of scribing characters and messages in an era of digital expression.

Radio

A new public in Barbados can be discerned in the popular radio call-in and talk programmes. The Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation first pioneered an interactive radio talk show programme, *Guttaperk*, back in the eighties. They have since become influential barometers of public life, at the same time as they have in effect fashioned a new popular dimension to the given structures of public life. Early in 2005 the Labour Party government began to express disquiet about the discontent aired by these programmes, and there is evidence that both the principal political parties have sought

to intervene at various times, and (less often) have also threatened to curb them.

It has been through this medium of popular radio, in particular, that a new kind of citizen—or, to continue with Lamming's formulations, a new kind of popular citizen–intellectual—can be detected. There is an element of theatricality here too, with imagined personas mixing with the given identifications of the everyday. Some of the older stalwarts, for example, have been named Mr. Submission, Mr. Economist, Cement Man, Mr. Regular, Pastor Willoughby, Pastor from Bay Street, Mr. Edwards, Mark and Mr. Schoolteacher. Regular callers acquire a certain reputation, even fame, propounding a particular political stance, or favoured social theme. Amongst the regulars are Vincent, Ras Amica, Jamaican lady, Trinidad lady, Mr. Logic, Mr. America, Mr. Philosopher. Denunciation of the economic dependency of the Caribbean co-exists with parochial complaints about local transport difficulties, or crime or declining public services, creating in sum a panoramic view of everyday life in contemporary Barbados based on the lived experience of the poor. Early in 2005 a sustained public debate took place on the airwaves, driven by the popular voice, about the fortunes of the Caribbean Single and Market Economy (CSME)—taking this essentially governmental issue and relocating it as a matter appropriate for popular talk.

The Pleasures of Virtual Exile

In May 2004 Lamming gave a public lecture entitled 'Culture and the Entertainment industry' in which he chided the sensationalism of contemporary popular culture.[31] While one can recognize the truth of much of what he was saying, his argument appeared to be based on the assumption that commercial cultures are necessarily inimical to any sort of radical sensibility. In part, I think, conceptions like this derive not only from a certain practical distancing between different sorts of intellectuals, drawn from different generations, but also from differing technical sensibilities. Whereas much of the most exciting contemporary Caribbean cultural expression is decidedly high-tech most of the region's cultural theory and criticism has been formed in an earlier epoch.

The Internet is of great interest in this regard. While on the one hand it is clearly a major construct which, in its very forms, promotes the mentalities of the neo-liberal social order, there is evidence of the degree to which, in dependent regions like the Caribbean, it can also be 'turned', and function as a local means to pursue a local sovereignty. Just as Lamming himself has argued that the Caribbean novel was created 'elsewhere', outside the region itself, so we might have to think in similarly open ways about the newer cultures which confront younger generations today. It is not only the category of the popular which is in need of re-examination, but so too the very idea of *location*. Prospero's magic takes on ever more inventive forms.

Evidence of this new thinking can be found in the work of the Barbadian-Canadian Robert Sandiford, for example, or of Glenville Lovell.[32] Use of the Internet has expanded the domain of a Caribbean aesthetic. Sandra E. Morris-Sealy imagines herself as a new

kind of Bajan griot, using the virtual resources of the web to re-imagine the realities of Barbados itself. 'I believe', she says, 'a writer is . . . the scribe-griot of his his/her nation. S/he has the power to incite, ignite, excite, pacify, edify, motivate and eliminate others with the slash of a pen, or the click of a mouse. Though coloured by time, class, age, geography, childhood and other factors, a writer cystallises a slice of his/her society's culture, mores and its dark and light truths. A writer makes everything real'.[33] Her ambition of making everything 'real', even through use of virtual technologies, speaks to the ambition and paradox inherent within the desires of contemporary creative artists and visionaries.

Aja is a good example of a grounded performance poet who has invested aesthetically in the Internet. Like other radical performers across the world, he has asserted the right to be heard by entering into cyberspace, which 'first-world' cultures have already effectively sought to colonize. Having recognized that the Internet provides a facility by which hegemonic institutions can be circumvented, some local artists in literature, reggae and post-dancehall have put their work on sites, like the hugely popular Internet Underground Music Archive (IUMA), where independent, unsigned artists of all genres and diverse art forms, distribute and promote their wares.[34] For example Aja's *Doing it Säf*—a ringbang-jazz collection of poetry—can be said to have created a new popular audience, and catapulted his denunciation of neo-colonization to the number one position of the spoken word charts at worldmusic.com in 2000-2001.[35]

These are, I argue, new and necessary locations. Emerging artists are contemplating the peril, the potential and pleasures of virtual exile.

Endnotes

[1] Banyan, "Transcript of an Inteview with George Lamming" 1989' http://www.pancaribbean/banyan/cumming.htm

[2] George Lamming, 'On West Indian Writing' *Review Inter Americana*, 5:2, 1975.

[3] George Lamming, 'Portrait of a Prime Minister' in Richard Drayton and Andaiye (eds), *Conversations. George Lamming. Essays, Addresses and Interviews, 1953-1990* (London: Karia Press, 1992), p. 179.

[4] George Lamming, 'Nationalism and Nation' in *Conversations*, p. 234.

[5] George Lamming 'Western Education and the Caribbean Intellectual' *Coming, Coming Home. Conversations II* (Philipsburg, St Martin: House of Nehesi, 2000), pp. 12-13.

[6] Lamming, 'Western Education', p. 13.

[7] Lamming, 'Western Education', p. 14.

[8] Lamming, 'Western Education', p. 19.

[9] Lamming, 'Western Education', p. 19.

[10] Lamming, 'Western Education', p. 21.

[11] Lamming, 'Western Education', p. 21.

[12] Timothy Callender, *The Elements of Art* (St. Michael: Timothy Callender, 1977), p. 7.

[13] Andrew Millington (director) *Guttaperc* (Shango Films, 1999).

[14] See information on one of their early films, *Beneath the Skin* (2003), at http://humanities.uwichill.edu.bb/filmfestival/2003/films/patel.htm

[15] See Ras Ishi's comments in the published booklet from the seminal art show titled 'Young Contemporaries' National Cultural Foundation' *Young Contemporaries* (St Michael : Caribbean Graphics, 1986), p . 3.

[16] See Alissandra Cummins et al (eds), *Art in Barbados* (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1999).

[17] See further elaborations on graffiti in the Barbadian context in Curwen Best, 'Reading Graffiti in the Caribbean Context' *Journal of Popular Culture*, 36:4, 2003.

[18] David Scott, 'The Sovereignty of the Imagination. An Interview with George Lamming' *Small Axe* 12, 2002, p. 176.

[19] Scott, 'Interview with Lamming', p.177.

[20] See more on Gabby in Curwen Best, *Barbadian Popular Music* (Vermont: Schenkman Books, 1999) and *Culture @ the Cutting Edge* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2005).

[21] Gabby 'One Day Coming Soon' on the album *One in de Eye* (ICE BGI 1001; 1986).

[22] Johnny Koieman 'If You See the Landlord' performed around 1990, not recorded.

[23] Winston Farrell 'De Meeting Turn' in *Tribute* (St Michael: Farcia, 1996) p. 4.

[24] Sandra Brown in Nailah Folami Imoja et al (eds), *Voices 1: An Anthology of Barbadian Writing Barbados*, (Christ Church: Voices Collective, 1999) pp. 40-45.

[25] Brown in *Voices 1*, p. 45.

[26] Kamau Brathwaite 'Timehri' in Orde Coombe (ed.), *Is Massa Day Dead* (New York: Anchor, 1974) p. 32.

[27] Kamau Brathwaite, *Barabajan Poems* (New York: Savacou North, 1994) pp. 46-47.

[28] Best, *Roots to Popular Culture*, p. 10.

[29] Scott, 'Interview with Lamming', p. 111.

[30] Scott, 'Interview with Lamming', p. 122.

[31] George Lamming, 'Culture And The Entertainment Industry', Earl Warner Memorial Lecture, May 2004.

[32] For Sandiford see http://www.progression.net/~prma1753/ZapSandiford.html and for Lovell see http://www.glenvillelovell.com

[33] See for example http://poets2000.com/cgi-bin/index.pl?sitename=sandraemo rris&item=home.

[34] http://iuma.com/iuma/bands/adisa_andwele/catalog.html

[35] In early 2005. Aja launched his first ebook "Don't Let Them Die"

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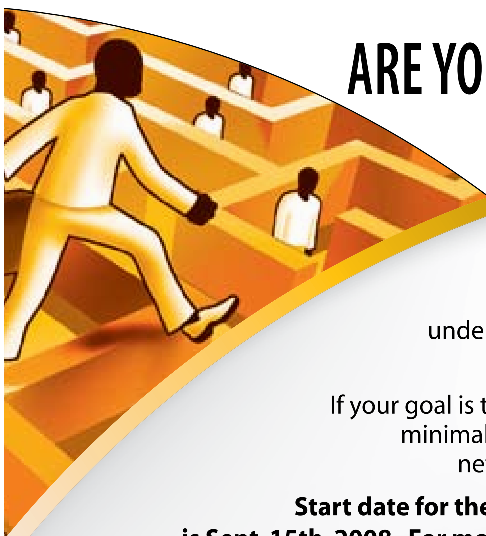

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PIG-MONEY

by Elizabeth Walcott

One of the first things Ianthe could remember was being given a galvanised pail to hold in one hand, and a few coppers wrapped in newspaper to be gripped tightly in the other, and told to go for the hog-food. Every morning early she did this, and again in the late afternoon. Sometimes she staggered back home with what was to her a heavy burden, sometimes she could swing the bucket on the return journey almost as easily as when she set out. It depended on how many of the homes were tenanted in the seaside village near which she lived.

Ianthe's home was a hut set high on a hill overlooking the white-washed, red-roofed houses dotted about on the green-and-brown pasture-land sloping down to the wide beach. Behind her home, the hill rose higher with casuarina groves here and there, and other shabby little houses scattered on its swelling bosom. In front was a vast expanse of ocean, shading from indigo-blue to emerald-green, and a serried line of breakers bursting over the reef on to the beige-coloured sand. The roar of the sea was in Ianthe's ears all day long, forming—had she but known it—part of Nature's rhapsody of hill, sea and sky. All around her was displayed a landscape—one of Nature's masterpieces—in glorious extravagant shades of green, blue and white.

But Ianthe cared nought for these things: her mind was too full of pressing daily needs. She must help her mother get water from the stand-pipe, and when the wind, scented with a species of wild verbena that grew profusely over the hillside, became boisterous, she thought, not of its salty fragrance, but of how to hold her own against it as she made her careful, toiling way up the hill with the bucket of water on her head, one small, thin hand upflung to steady it. She must go to the shop further up the hill, but as she went she saw nothing of the charming play of light and shade across the grass, she heard unmoved the mysterious whispering of the casuarinas: she was climbing, not for pleasure, but as part of

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the day's toil. And, chief task of all, she must go for the hog-food. Even when she grew big enough to go to school, this still remained part of her day's work. Off she would go, a small brown figure, swinging her bucket and singing cheerfully, if discordantly all the way to the bay-houses; then back she trudged, the sour reek of the bucket's contents proclaiming her task successfully accomplished.

"Poor little thing," some passer-by might say, but Ianthe would have been surprised, for she herself realised no need of pity. Must not "the hog" be fed? Would not the "pig-money" buy things for her mother and father, her brother Joe, and herself? And had not her mother only the other day explained that she must "care the hog good" for that was hers—Ianthe's—and the two sheep were Joe's?

With great delight, Ianthe planned what she would buy with the pig-money: chief among those things were a skipping-rope with red handles and a pencil-box with a pen, a rubber and a nice long pencil and a box of coloured chalks. Personal adornment did not as yet appeal to Ianthe, and she was happiest in the smelly old dress she wore when she fetched the hog's-food. She never noticed that the animal was always referred to as "the hog" when it came to tending or feeding him, but the profit expected from his sale was spoken of as "pig-money".

One day as Ianthe came in from an errand to the shop, and set down her basket in the little back shed which served as the kitchen, she heard excited discussion in the front room between her parents and Joe.

"But, Joe, how we goin' manage 'bout yuh clothes?" his mother was asking anxiously.

"Woman, de boy get de scholaship to Highfields and yuh talking' like if he ain' to tek it up," his father replied impatiently.

"I ain' said nothin' o' de sort," retorted his wife angrily. "All I axin' is how we goin'

buy clothes fuh he. He cahn go school widout proper clothes fuh de boys to laugh at he, nuh?"

There was a moment's silence, then: "Well," said the father, "we mus' sell one o' de sheep an' de hog."

"But I tell Ianthe de hog is her own," objected the mother.

"Cahn' help dat," argued the father. "It got to sell to buy de t'ings Joe need . . ."

He got no further. A whirlwind of fury swept into the room.

'He my hog, *my* hog!" shouted Ianthe. "I goin' buy a skippin' rope an' a pencil box wid de pig money, an' put down de res' to get clothes fuh me to go to de big school too."

Girrl, shut yuh mout'," ordered her father. "Yuh bruddah win a scholarship an' we got to fix him decent to go nex' term."

"Ianthe, I goin' buy another hog soon's I kin, chile," comforted her mother; "you ain' ready to go to big school yet."

Ianthe burst into tears. Between her sobs she shrieked: "'Tain' fair, 'tain' fair! I got to walk all de way up an' down de hill fuh de hog-food an' now I ain' gettin' none o' de pig-money."

"Girrl, stop dat noise, an' onderstan' dat yuh bruddah got brains, an' dey might bring him in de chance to go high. One day he might get in de House!"

All this time Joe said nothing. He regarded the scene with a mixture of pity and dismay: dismay, lest after all the precious pig-money might not be forthcoming; pity for Ianthe who had to be sacrificed for him. Timidly he approached his sister. "Ianthe . . ." he began; but she cried louder and pulled away from him.

Wearily the mother got up and left the room. She went into the back-shed and returned with the bucket. The resignation of ages was on her face and in her voice as she went over to Ianthe and said:

"'Tain' no use, chile; they ain' no otha way to get de money. And it time to go fuh de hog-food." She tried to push the bucket handle into the child's hand.

"Ain' goin' fuh no hog-food agin," stormed Ianthe, kicking the bucket out of her mother's hand. It clattered out on to the front step.

Her father went into action. "Now, none o' dat," he threatened, with uplifted hand. "You jes' pick up dat bucket an' go fuh dat hog-food.

Ianthe looked at him through her tears. If she refused, that heavy hand would descend upon her with a stinging blow. She glanced at her mother: her face was sad but stern. She looked at her brother: tears were streaming down his face. Ianthe had never heard the saying, "Men must work and women must weep," but at that that moment she accepted its purport with her inmost being.

Still crying loudly, she picked up the bucket and set out. Her hat had fallen off, and Joe now ran after her with it.

"Ianthe, here's your hat," he called, and placed it on her head. For a moment the two children looked into each other's tearful eyes.

"Ianthe," stammered the boy, "when I'm a man, I promise, I promise. . ." Words failed him.

"What yuh promise?" asked his sister curiously.

But the boy could find no words to express his intention—all he wanted to do for himself, for his parents, and above all, for Ianthe who had to give up her pig money to help him go to the big school.

All he could say was: "Yuh shan't have to go fuh no mo' hog-food."

Ianthe wiped her eyes with a corner of her dirty dress. "Yuh goin' do good at school, Joe? Yuh goin' be a great man like Pappie say?"

"Hope so, answered Joe.

"Well, I better go," said the girl picking up the bucket. "Somebody got to go fuh de hog-food."

Joe watched her until she reached the first house and disappeared behind it. Then he turned towards home, and as he went he kept on saying to himself: "Po' lil Ianthe, some day I'll mek up fuh dis."

But Ianthe, her moment of rebellion past, was at that moment knocking at the kitchen-door and calling meekly to the cook: "I come fuh de hog-food."

FEMINIST LITERARY THEORIES AND LITERARY DISCOURSE IN TWO GEORGE LAMMING TEXTS

IMAGES OF WOMEN

by Margaret Gill

Kate Millett (1970), Mary Ellmann (1968) and Germaine Greer (1970), proponents of the "images of women" trend, proposed a radical rereading of canonical texts that revealed the latter's fetishization of the word and of the phallus as representations of "the rule of the father". Ellmann exposed the phenomenon of sexual analogy: "All forms are subsumed by our concepts of male and female temperament. . . the hunter is always male, the prey female . . . all butterflies are taken to be frivolous and effeminate creatures . . . Thanks to Melville, all whales are more or less males simply because they are big enough to scare men" (1968, 8-9). Ellman argued that male writers, with their analyses grounded in biology, construct women within stereotypes connoting passivity, immanence, the magical and ultimately the lack of authority (Moi 1985, 34). As Moi underscores, Ellman further demonstrates how these stereotypes are self-destructive, encapsulating as they do extremes of the ideal at one end and total anathema at the other. For example, Ellman deconstructs the stereotype of the mother who can be described as both a "venerated idol" and a "castrating bitch" (Moi 1985, 37).

Millett argued that male writers disseminate the "sexual politics" of male domination of women through the word/the stereotype, which comes to have the force of creation. She went on to reveal the covert or open sexism in the works of D.H. Lawrence, Norman Mailer, Henry Miller and Jean Genet. In the latter's work in particular, she was able to show the "arbitrariness" of sex-role allocation, as it is "revealed as the category, *even the function of a nakedly oppressive social system"* (Millett 1970, 343; emphasis added). As sex roles are enacted among Genet's homosexual community, masculine and feminine "stand out as terms of praise and blame, authority and servitude, high and low, master and slave" (p. 343).

Images of women theorists pointed to Freud and psychoanalytic theory as prime agents of patriarchy. The main culprits they exposed were Freud's misogynistic theories of penis envy and female masochism, which hold men up as the desired standard and being and see woman's as a position of inferiority (Belsey and Moore 1989, 5).

Lamming's constructions of the woman in his text challenge the patriarchal representations identified by the images theorists so far, but they also challenge the theorists themselves. Take, for example, the case of the figure of the mother. Just as Ellman (and Woolf and de Beauvoir before her) does, Lamming locates the mother as an important site of social control. However, while the three feminists see mothering as a source of women's oppression, a critical site of their subordination, Lamming interrogates it as a source of power, and in this he is not far from the position taken by some black women novelists and theorists. The stereotype of the mother targeted so quickly by feminist literary theory is also one of the stereotypes of black women against which black female author-theorists first inveighed, though for somewhat different reasons.

In the southern United States and the Caribbean, as a strategy of slavery the black woman was the one perceived as the mother, the "mammy". Black theorists such as Barbara Christian (1985) and Hazel Carby (1987) argue that stereotyping black women as the mammy allowed white women to participate in the congruent stereotype of the pure,

innocent, fragile, ornamental romantic figure (Christian 1985, 2). The stereotype that was promulgated by both white and early black writers presents the mammy grossly fat, nurturing, fanatically religious, kind and strong, in the sense that she herself needs or demands little (Christian 1985, 2).

On the other hand, Lamming marks mothering as a space where women can achieve personal power even when they appear as a foil to a main character. Although we never get the name of "the Mother" in *Castle,* she, like other women in the text, stands as a figure of strength and agency. The story in *Castle* is the boy G's, but the Mother is right there at the beginning of the story. Through her control of memory, she is the one holding the important key to the boy's past and his connections to family and community.

Like "Pa", the old man who in his dream travels holds the key to the African past, the Mother has the capacity to provide meaning to the self through her control of memory of the past. And in her recounting of the family history in response to the boy's queries, it is significant that she states that the grandmother has gone to Panama to work on construction of the canal. Formal historiographies have yet to document the history of the women who went to Panama during the great West Indian migrations to the Canal Zone. It is also not accidental that the person who gives the boys the true story about Barbados's slave past is an old woman, a mother type. She is held in stark contrast to the teachers of authorized history at that site of imperial control, the school, who would have the boys forget their true past; a forgetting that leaves them with no authentic sense of the self.

Mothers, then, exist in the officially unsanctioned oral culture, one that many West Indian writers see as a realm of being and knowing that has great counter-discursive possibility. Women, particularly mothers, are linked with the culture as transmitters of orality, and male and female West Indian writers exploit the oral culture as a site where a distinctive counter-culture against colonialism is upheld and celebrated.[7] But the trope of the mother works in a complex way. Male and female protagonists are forced to see the mother in a dual fashion. She must be defined as in some ways collaborating in her own oppression (as her apparent acceptance of colonial religion and her problematic relation to the child-father[8] testify), in which case the protagonist separates from her as a necessary loss to enable maturation.

But then the mother, or the culture she represents and which represents her, must be re-envisioned and reintegrated into the psyche to be carried forward as a strategy of counter-discourse. In *Castle* the boy G goes through such a parting at the end of the novel. However, his interior monologue in the very last lines of novel and Lamming's formal presentation of it are testimony to the vision of the reintegrated mother, which G holds: "The village/mother/a boy among the boys/a man who knew his people won't feel alone / to be a different kind of creature" (1953, 303).

But apart from how he uses the mother figure, Lamming undermines the colonial and patriarchal complex by further widening the roles women perform. Mrs. Foster goes to the Landlord to get him to undertake his custodial role of fixing things after the flood. True, when she is so uncritical of the Landlord's definition of their relative status, she

enacts the role of the colonized who has internalized self-abasement. However, she takes as a right his responsibility for reparation after the flood, and so quite boldly makes the positive step to go to him and invoke his responsibility rather than passively await his decision to act.

We again see this agency in the case of the drunken old woman who goes to the city during the riots and returns to report to the villagers. It is true that her son's death at the hands of the riot police weighs heavily, but she sharply criticizes Mr Foster and the village men for not participating in the riots. "I jus from the city. . . while you a big stinkin' nigger man wrap up in yuh blasted bed I been in the city an 'tis men like you they want" (p. 197). The role of organizer that she takes in this speech is all the more significant in that she represents a figure that is so at odds with what is considered proper, in terms not only of colonial manners, but also the way that patriarchy would have women behave.

Another woman who plays a role that is self-directed and self-authorized is Ma. In reading her role it is important to understand that the community sees her, along with her husband, as a leader. In her interaction with the villagers who go to buy bread at the bread cart, they give way to her, leaving her a clear pathway ahead of them. More importantly, Ma is the only one who voices concern when Pa and the villagers would equate Mr. Slime, the ex-schoolteacher with his seemingly radical plans, with Moses, who delivers his people from their oppressors. She recommends that the village take a more sagacious look at Mr. Slime. He in fact betrays the whole village by literally selling them out, and Ma's caution proves prophetic.

The argument may be made that Lamming sets out to correct images of the colonized or of women—a criticism offered to the images of women theorists. The criticism is that in seeking to state what the "real" is like, these theorists fail to consider that the real is a contested construct, that literature is not simply a reflection of reality but a site of competing "truths" (Moi 1985, 45—46). In other words, there could be no one "real" woman.

However, despite the strong roles that Lamming gives his female characters, he does not leave women or mothers unproblematized. Mothers can be unreasonable or domineering, as sometimes are the Mother and Mrs. Foster. Mothers' relationships to fathers or to sexual partners may also be perceived in terms of their weakness and the men's strength, at least according to the boys in their discussion of the relative merits of absentee fathers. And often through their internalization of colonial values, as is the case of Ma's defense of the Landlord, women can be the staunchest defenders of critical aspects of the status quo.

EXTRACT from

Conversations

by George Lamming

An Extract from “Builders of our Caribbean House” taken from Conversations: Essays, Addresses and Interviews 1953-1990 (Drayton and Andaiye) Karia Press, London, 1992. This section of an opening address was given by Lamming on the occasion of the fourth celebration of the Caribbean Festival of Creative Arts in Barbados in 1981 when The Mighty Sparrow, Nicolas Guillen and Aime Cesaire, among others, were honoured.

I do not believe it is possible to find anywhere outside this region an example of creative, cultural work, where the imagination of individual artists is so completely dominated by the lives of people from down below. Whether it be literature, music, dance, or the visual arts, each form has derived its power from an involvement with the realities of the poor.

It would ordinarily be a presumption to draw the Mighty Sparrow to your attention, for he, as a total creation of the Caribbean people, is also, perhaps, the most complete of all Caribbean artists.

His art embraces all forms. He sings, he dances, he employs, in the telling of a story, all the narrative devices of a novelist. His act is visual. His themes, for all the laughter they provoke, are a source of great disturbance. Sociologists will never be able to formulate what his critical intelligence and quick perception so easily communicates.

Outcast
The slave
Congo man
Dan is the Man in the Van
Monica Doudou

Rose
Why, why, did you leave me?
Why did you deceive me?
Rose, you looking for blows.

The enslavement of our educational system, the chaos in our sexual relations, the political leader in the role of the "bad john". He offers us back our several humiliations.

But there is behind the extravagant vigour of this musical genius a persistent legacy of rage. For Sparrow was descended from a dangerous decade, before the steel bands got elevated to the status of national orchestra, and the streets of Carnival were ruled by warriors.

The sound was "Desperadoes", "Renegades", "Red Army", "Hell Yard", "Conquistadors". These are clearly not the names of patron saints in communion with a holy spirit. They are declarations of war on behalf of a turbulent folk who reminded all agents of power that space was not for sale.

This tradition of resistance is at the heart of Sparrow's art. And it is an inescapable Caribbean phenomenon whenever the artist goes seriously to work.

There has recently been universal mourning for the loss of Bob Marley.

Get up, stand up;
Stand up for your rights.

But to accept Marley is to accept the moral necessity of entering into battle against all those forces that would halt or extinguish the possibility of men and women becoming truly human.

It is to aid, by all means possible, that process of struggle against the racism of white power, the epidemic of class discrimination, nurtured in these neo-colonial cells, by a new breed of aspiring blacks, the assault on individual dignity by the personal abuse of official power.

Get up, stand up;
Stand up for your rights.

Behind those drums of steel, the agitation of Marley, and the joyful mockery of Sparrow, there was, across the water, an ancestor of the same faith whom we recognise and honour as a resident of this regional house: Comrade Nicolás Guillén.

Recording his witness to the Spanish Civil War of the 30s he could say:

So here we have this Cuban from Camaguey;
this West Indian from Cuba:
this American from the West Indies,
proclaiming to his brothers from Spain:

I who love freedom so simply.
As one loves a child, or the sun or the tree
planted in front one's house
I shout to you with the voice of a free man

that I shall match my step with yours,
Simply and happily,
Pure, serene and strong,
With my curly hair and brown body.

He created the greatest scandal among the ruling classes in Cuba when, in 1934, his book, *Motivos de Son* , drawing upon the African origins of a popular dance, the son, affirmed that there was no Cuba without Africa, that the fundamental blood of the Cuban flowed from that black continent.

There was no need, you might say, that a man of his
complexion should offer himself up as target
for such national vilification.

We have special reason to embrace him. At the age of 17 his father was murdered by the "democratic" government of the day. And for more than half a century Comrade Guillén has combined the gifts of a great poet with the heart of a man of conscience.

As he enters the eighth decade of his turbulent life, he is often heard rejoicing that the Cuban revolution was the greatest Caribbean poem written in his time. What does that poem say?

When I look at and touch myself,
I, John—only—yesterday—with—nothing
and John—with everything today,
With everything today,
I glance around, I look and see
and touch myself and wonder
how it could have happened.

I have, let's see;
I have the pleasure of walking my country,
the owner of all there is in it,
Examining at very close range what
I could not and did not have before.
I can say cane
I can say mountain,
I can say city,
I can say army,
Army say,
Now mine forever and yours, Ours,
And the vast splendour of
The sunbeam, the Star, the flower,

I have, let's see:
That I have learned to read,
To count,
I have that I have learnt to write,
And to think
And to laugh.

I have that now I have
A place to work
And earn
What I have to eat,
I have, let's see
I have what was coming to me!

This example of dream has never had a more urgent voice in contemporary literature than that of Aimé Césaire of Martinique. He is the product of a particular French intellectual tradition which knows ideology not as an epidemic to be controlled or exterminated, but as an example of theory and practice which all men, in different ways, bring to the conduct of their daily lives.

Of the humblest origins, where the house of his childhood could hardly boast a roof, his gifts have taken him into the academies of the world, through the ranks of the working people, and back to the original Africa which lent its heart to Martinique.

He was the teacher of Frantz Fanon: that Fanon who so abrasively warned:

> *Leave this Europe/America where they*
> *Are never done talking of man*
> *Yet murder men everywhere they find them,*
> *At the corner of their own streets,*
> *In all corners of the globe.*

Carifesta is not about spectacle, it is a celebration of work accomplished and work that is still in progress: and it is sometimes the work of men and women of whom it might be said:

> *We who tried to lay the*
> *foundations of friendliness,*
> *could not ourselves be friendly.*

If you plant a breadfruit tree, it is unreasonable to expect that it will bear pineapples. The tree is known by its fruit. In a similar way it might be said that a nation is made known to itself by the creative cultural work which grows out of the soil of that society.

Yet there is an important difference between the tree of man and the trees of nature. The history of a tree is fixed since it can only obey the laws of its own nature. But men do not only enter the world. They transform the world by their work. They alter the chemistry of their own soil, and they change in their perceptions and their needs with every radical change they bring about in the material conditions of their existence.

If some of our children find us strange, it is, perhaps, because they live, as a fact of experience, what we had only dreamt of as a vague possibility.

Just as many of us take for granted a measure of freedom which other men, at other times, beaten and enslaved, could only dream of as a distinct and achievable reward of struggle.

The dream is not an idle exercise. It is the very foundation of a future reality. And that is why it often carries the cost of an untimely death.

Let the voice of Césaire seal that dream:

For now we know in truth
that man's work is by no means complete
that we have not nothing to contribute to the world
that parasites we are not
that no more need we squat at the gate
but that man's work has only just begun
and that he has to release his energies and conquer
and that no single race has a monopoly of beauty
intelligence and creativity
and that there is room
for all to conquer.
And now we know that our land too
is within the orbit of the sun
which shines on the little plot we have willed
for ourselves;
that without constraint we are free to move heaven, earth
–and the stars . . .

EXTRACT from

The Pleasures of Exile

by George Lamming

. . . We cannot predict the shape
of this explosive resurrection of new needs
and new energies, but it is here,
your new landscape as well as mine.
The world from which our reciprocal ways of
seeing have sprung was once Prospero's world.
It is no longer his. Moreover, it will never be
his again. It is ours, the legacy of many
centuries, demanding of us a new kind of effort,
a new kind of sight for viewing the possible
horizons of our century. Let the future make
whatever judgments the errors of the future
will allow. But accept the fact that we are here,
seeing and being seen in a certain way.

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