

□ Contemporary
Literary Criticism

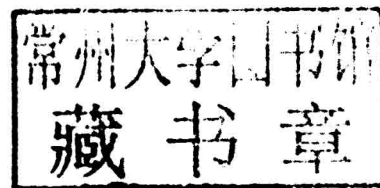
CLC 379

Volume 379

Contemporary Literary Criticism

Criticism of the Works
of Today's Novelists, Poets, Playwrights,
Short-Story Writers, Scriptwriters, and
Other Creative Writers

Lawrence J. Trudeau
EDITOR



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Preface

Named “one of the twenty-five most distinguished reference titles published during the past twenty-five years” by *Reference Quarterly*, the *Contemporary Literary Criticism (CLC)* series provides readers with critical commentary and general information on more than 3,000 authors from 91 countries now living or who died after December 31, 1999. Before the publication of the first volume of *CLC* in 1973, there was no ongoing digest monitoring scholarly and popular sources of critical opinion and explication of modern literature. *CLC*, therefore, has fulfilled an essential need, particularly since the complexity and variety of contemporary literature makes the function of criticism especially necessary to today’s reader.

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CLC is designed to serve as an introduction to authors of the twenty-first century. Volumes published from 1973 through 1999 covered authors who died after December 31, 1959. Since January 2000, the series has covered authors who are living or who died after December 31, 1999; those who died between 1959 and 2000 are now included in *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*. There is minimal duplication of content between series.

Authors are selected for inclusion for a variety of reasons, among them the publication or production of a critically acclaimed new work, the reception of a major literary award, revival of interest in past writings, or the adaptation of a literary work to film or television.

Attention is also given to several other groups of writers—authors of considerable public interest—about whose work criticism is often difficult to locate. These include mystery and science-fiction writers, literary and social critics, world authors, and authors who represent particular ethnic groups.

Each *CLC* volume contains individual essays and reviews selected from hundreds of review periodicals, general magazines, scholarly journals, monographs, and books. Entries include critical evaluations spanning an author’s career from its inception to current commentary. Interviews, feature articles, and other works that offer insight into the author’s works are also presented. Students, teachers, librarians, and researchers will find that the general critical and biographical material in *CLC* provides them with vital information required to write a term paper, analyze a poem, or lead a book discussion group. In addition, complete bibliographical citations note the original source and all of the information necessary for a term paper footnote or bibliography.

CLC is part of the survey of criticism and world literature that is contained in Gale’s *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism (TCLC)*, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism (NCLC)*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800 (LC)*, *Shakespearean Criticism (SC)*, and *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism (CMLC)*.

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A *CLC* entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parentheses on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the author’s name.

- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication information of each work is given. In the case of works not published in English, a translation of the title is provided as an aid to the reader; the translation is a published translated title or a free translation provided by the compiler of the entry. As a further aid to the reader, a list of **Principal English Translations** is provided for authors who did not publish in English; the list selects those translations most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, plays are dated by first performance, not first publication, and the location of the first performance is given, if known. Lists of **Representative Works** discussed in the entry appear with topic entries.
- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism. Citations conform to recommendations set forth in the Modern Language Association of America's *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 7th ed. (2009).
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- Whenever possible, a recent **Author Interview** accompanies each entry.
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Wesley, Marilyn C. "Anne Hébert: The Tragic Melodramas." *Canadian Women Writing Fiction*. Ed. Mickey Pearlman. Jackson: UP of Mississippi, 1993. 41-52. Rpt. in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*. Ed. Jeffrey W. Hunter. Vol. 246. Detroit: Gale, 2008. 276-82. Print.

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Erna Brodber

1940-

(Full name Erna May Brodber) Jamaican novelist, nonfiction writer, and short-story writer.

INTRODUCTION

Erna Brodber's fiction is informed by her work as a historian and sociologist, as well as by her coming-of-age in Jamaica in the years leading up to that country's independence. In Brodber's five novels, history is a source of pain and power for her Afro-Caribbean black female protagonists, who struggle to come to terms with the legacy of the transatlantic slave trade and centuries of racial oppression. Brodber's heroines are frequently constrained by their gender, and she explores the factors that define and circumscribe black West-Indian womanhood. Brodber emphasizes the healing power of the Jamaican community in the face of these struggles. Central to her exploration of Afro-Caribbean identity are her concepts of "kumbla," or spiritual retreat, and "blackspace," the conscious affirmation of black Caribbean identity and culture. The complex notion of the kumbla, which can both heal and restrict, has become an important critical concept in studies of Afro-Caribbean women's writing. In addition to her sociological work and fiction, Brodber has played an active role in her home village of Woodside, Jamaica, where she established a community site on her property dedicated to Jamaican history and culture.

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Brodber was born in 1940 in Woodside, a rural village in the parish of Saint Mary, Jamaica. Her father, Ernest Brodber, was a farmer, and her mother, Lucy Brodber, was a teacher. Both of Brodber's parents were involved in the community and culture of Woodside, and she was exposed at an early age to activism and the arts. She attended Excelsior High School and went on to pursue an extensive program of academic study. In 1963, one year after Jamaica won its independence, Brodber earned a BA in history from the University College of the West Indies. She did postgraduate work in social psychology at McGill University and in child psychology at the University of Washington. While studying abroad, Brodber was introduced to the black power and women's liberation movements, which shaped her political consciousness. In 1968, she returned to Jamaica and began working as a research assistant in the sociology department of the University of the West Indies. After earning her MA, Brodber worked at

the university as a lecturer in sociology until 1974. A decade later, she earned her PhD in history.

During the 1970s and 1980s, Brodber was a member of the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) in Mona, Jamaica. During her years with ISER, she facilitated the collection of oral histories throughout Jamaica and published several sociological studies on her native country, including *Abandonment of Children in Jamaica* (1974), *Perceptions of Caribbean Women* (1982), and *Reggae and Cultural Identity in Jamaica* (1988). Brodber began publishing fiction in the 1980s, when she was already an established academic writer and historian. *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (1980), was followed by *Myal* (1988), *Louisiana* (1994), *The Rainmaker's Mistake* (2007), and *Nothing's Mat* (2014). These novels draw extensively on perspectives gained from Brodber's personal and academic engagement with Jamaican communities.

In addition to teaching at the University of the West Indies, Brodber worked as a visiting professor at US institutions Randolph-Macon College, East Carolina University, Gettysburg College, and the University of California, Santa Cruz. In 1990, she was a Fulbright scholar-in-residence at Clark Atlanta University in Georgia. She was also writer-in-residence at the University of the West Indies for the academic year 2013-14. Brodber currently lives in her childhood home in Woodside. She describes her property—which is designated for community gatherings—as an example of her concept of blackspace, which aims at affirming pride in one's African ancestry. Brodber also founded the Emancipation summer school in Woodside, an institution devoted to educating young people about the village's history.

MAJOR WORKS

Brodber's first novel, *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*, portrays protagonist Nellie Richmond's struggles with her family history. Written in four parts and told from a variety of perspectives, the work details Nellie's childhood in rural Jamaica in the 1940s, her studies in the United States as a teenager, and her experiences as an adult in her mid-thirties living again in her home country. While Nellie's ancestors include African slaves and white colonial settlers, her middle-class family identifies with their white forebears, encouraging her to value her lighter skin tone and to speak in "proper" English instead of Jamaican Creole. She is also taught to hate and fear her female body. With the

help of her childhood friend Baba and her Aunt Alice, Nellie is able to break out of the kumbla—defined in the novel as an “eggshell,” a “transparent umbrella,” something that “protects without caring”—of her colonialized consciousness, communicate with her black ancestors, and appreciate her womanhood. The novel has an experimental structure, moving through time in nonlinear patterns and without clear specifications of time or place. It is also written in both Jamaican Creole and standard English, emphasizing the work’s central themes of linguistic duality and code-switching.

Set in rural Jamaica during the early decades of the twentieth century, *Myal* charts the spiritual redemption of Ella O’Grady, a mixed-race woman of Caribbean and Irish descent. The novel focuses on the experiences of Ella, who was born and raised in Jamaica but feels alienated by her lighter skin color, and her darker-skinned childhood friend, Anita. At fifteen years old, Anita is possessed by a village elder, Mass Levi, who seeks to recover his virility by stealing her youthful energy and beauty. It is here that the novel’s focus on myalism, a Jamaican religion with African and Christian roots, becomes apparent. Practitioners of myalism are concerned with combating the negative effects of obeah, a Caribbean form of folk magic. Although the two practices are similar, the novel associates obeah with individualism and retribution, and myalism with the healing power of community. The village’s myal woman, Miss Gatha, eventually succeeds in lifting the obeah curse from Anita, killing Mass Levi in the process. Meanwhile, Ella migrates to the United States and marries Selwyn Langley, a white American who exploits her and the stories of her ancestors in racist minstrel shows. Ella begins to suffer from an unexplained illness that appears to be psychosomatic. She returns to Jamaica, where a cure administered by a root doctor alleviates her illness and reconnects her with her heritage and community. Many critics have noted the ways in which *Myal* highlights the alienation and exploitation of diasporic Afro-Caribbean women.

Inspired in part by the life of anthropologist and author Zora Neale Hurston, *Louisiana* explores the experiences of Afro-Caribbean immigrants to the United States. The novel focuses on Ella Townsend, a young Jamaican American social scientist who is sent to Louisiana for an oral-history project. Here, she plans to interview Mrs. Sue Anne Grant King—referred to locally as Mammy King—about her experiences as a participant in or a witness to such events as Marcus Garvey’s Pan-African rallies and the Chicago Race Riot of 1919. King dies before the interview can be completed; however, she and her deceased Jamaican friend Louise Grant begin to communicate with Ella through a recording device. Ella’s spiritual communion with these women allows her to understand the struggles of blacks in the United States and the West Indies in the aftermath of colonialism and slavery. By coming into contact with her ancestral history, Ella experiences a “second birth” that

allows her to become a medium between the living and the dead and a bridge between the United States, the Caribbean, and Africa. *Louisiana* is also notable for promoting a Pan-African sense of history, rather than nationality, as the determiner of identity and for combining traditions of Christian and African spirituality.

The Rainmaker’s Mistake is noted for frequent shifts of narrative voice as well as elements of mystery and intrigue. Set in the British West Indies in 1938, the novel follows a group of slave laborers on a sugar plantation. The work’s primary narrator, Queenie, is a six-year-old girl who is eager to be incorporated into the “soon-to-be-pickney-gang” (or children’s gang) of workers. However, much to her disappointment and the astonishment of the majority of the adult laborers, plantation owner Mr. Charlie announces that the laborers have been emancipated. It is eventually revealed that the story’s characters have been the victims of a scientific experiment calculated to dramatically slow down the aging process, scramble their memories, and create a permanent labor force for the plantation. In 2012, Brodber published her first short-story collection, *The World Is a High Hill*. While the work resembles her novels in its focus on Jamaican women, it eschews post-modern literary techniques for a straightforward prose style. The protagonists represent all levels of society, and each grapples with the challenges particular to her social, cultural, familial, and personal circumstances. Brodber’s fifth novel, *Nothing’s Mat*, engages her interest in Caribbean family history and the lack of archival records or preserved family tales.

CRITICAL RECEPTION

Many critics have examined Brodber’s works in the context of twentieth-century literary and philosophical ideas. In her study of *Myal*, Collette Maximin (2000) analyzed Selwyn’s use of Ella’s roots and family history for entertainment as a form of “cultural negation,” wherein “[l]iving culture is made a commodity and turned into folklore.” She argued that Brodber’s portrayal of syncretic religion constitutes an important supplement to French philosopher Pierre Bourdieu’s interpretation of social stratification in the Caribbean. Maximin also characterized Brodber’s incorporation of English and Jamaican Creole in the novel as a demonstration and amplification of Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin’s analysis of the multivocal nature of literary texts.

Scholars have also considered the importance of history, memory, ancestry, and religion in Brodber’s fiction. Cynthia James (2001) identified *Louisiana* as a foundational work on Afro-Caribbean female consciousness, noting that the novel was distinguished in its time for focusing on the relationship between diasporic communities and the immigrant experience. Pin-chia Feng (2002; see Further

Reading) suggested that Brodber uses the Jamaican spiritual practices of myalism and obeah in *Myal* to represent the trauma of plantation slavery. Lisa K. Perdigao (2007) and Shirley Toland-Dix (2007) analyzed the role of death in *Louisiana*. Perdigao argued that the work “examines the act of remembering the dead and translating the nonnarratable into discourse,” while Toland-Dix drew attention to the connection between the work’s protagonist and Hurston, who published anthropological research on spirit possession in Haitian and Jamaican folklore. Suzanna Engman (2010) interpreted Brodber’s use of ghosts and ghostliness in *Louisiana* as expressions of the essential mystery of the past. In her analysis of sexuality and gender in Brodber’s works, Elina Valovirta (2008) interpreted the mystical asexuality of her heroines as a response to the stereotype of the hypersexual Afro-Caribbean woman.

Carina Saxon

PRINCIPAL WORKS

Abandonment of Children in Jamaica. St. Augustine: Inst. of Social and Economic Research, U of the West Indies, 1974. (Nonfiction)

Yards in the City of Kingston. Mona: Inst. of Social and Economic Research, U of the West Indies, 1975. (Nonfiction)

Jamaica 1907-1944: The Old People Speak; Life-Histories of 90 Jamaicans Born in the Early Twentieth Century. Inst. of Social and Economic Research, U of the West Indies, 1980. (Sound recording)

Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home. London: New Beacon, 1980. (Novel)

Perceptions of Caribbean Women: Towards a Documentation of Stereotypes. Cave Hill: Inst. of Social and Economic Research, U of the West Indies, 1982. (Nonfiction)

Rural-Urban Migration and the Jamaican Child. Santiago: UNESCO, Regional Office for Educ. in Latin America and the Caribbean, 1986. (Nonfiction)

Myal. London: New Beacon, 1988. (Novel)

Reggae and Cultural Identity in Jamaica. With J. Edward Greene. Mona: Inst. of Social and Economic Research, U of the West Indies, 1988. (Nonfiction)

“One Bubby Susan.” *Jamaica Journal* 22.4 (1989-90): 52-3. (Short story)

Louisiana. London: New Beacon, 1994. (Novel)

“Re-engineering Blackspace.” *Caribbean Quarterly* 43.1-2 (1997): 70-81. (Essay)

The Continent of Black Consciousness: On the History of the African Diaspora from Slavery to the Present Day. London: New Beacon, 2003. (Nonfiction)

Standing Tall: Affirmations of the Jamaican Male; 24 Self-Portraits. Mona: Inst. of Social and Economic Research, U of the West Indies, 2003. (Nonfiction)

The Second Generation of Freeman in Jamaica, 1907-1944. Gainesville: UP of Florida, 2004. (Nonfiction)

Woodside, Pear Tree Grove P.O. Kingston: U of the West Indies P, 2004. (Nonfiction)

The Rainmaker’s Mistake. London: New Beacon, 2007. (Novel)

The World Is a High Hill: Stories about Jamaican Women. Kingston: Randle, 2012. (Short stories)

Nothing’s Mat. Kingston: U of the West Indies P, 2014. (Novel)

CRITICISM

Velma Pollard (essay date 1997)

SOURCE: Pollard, Velma. “Blurring Cultural Boundaries: The Balm Yard in Olive Senior’s *Discerner of Hearts* and Erna Brodber’s *Myal*.” *Caribbean Quarterly* 43.4 (1997): 37-46. Print.

[In the following essay, Pollard offers a historical analysis of “the balm yard,” a place designated for healing rituals in several Caribbean cultures, and studies its portrayal in Olive Senior’s short story “*Discerner of Hearts*” and Brodber’s *Myal*. Pollard argues that both works subvert colonial authority “by writing in the perception of the suppressed within a discourse tradition formerly reserved for the suppressor.”]

Edward Brathwaite, discussing the fate of African culture in the post-emancipation Caribbean, described it as coming under attack from several quarters including the missionaries and the education process. Of the latter in relation to the ex-slaves he comments:

... They began to learn to read and write so that they were diverted from the oral tradition of their inheritance; they became literate in a language which was foreign to them.

(1974:75)

Thus a dichotomy was early established between the spoken word of the Afro/creole culture and the written word of the Anglo/creole culture reflecting the dichotomy between the public Eurocentric and the private Afrocentric worlds in which the ex-slaves functioned. Within the

cultural space of the Anglo/creole world, the received information with regard to African culture, was that Africans had lost it in the Middle Passage. The fact, in Brathwaite's (1974:73) words, was that; 'African culture not only crossed the Atlantic, it crossed, survived, and creatively adapted itself to its new environment.'

It is important to note the received information and to appreciate the extent to which the African culture was either denied or simply overlooked by the brokers of power in plantation societies. It helps to explain the conflict of cultures, certainly in the personality of the educated descendants of ex-slaves, and their ambivalence towards things African.

A century after Emancipation, Edward Baugh, West Indian man of letters and literary critic, would comment on that dichotomy, including in it considerations of colour. He refers to a clash in West Indian writers between the publicised European culture of the elite and the suppressed native, African culture of the underprivileged; between literature and history on the one hand and the oral tradition on the other. (1978:10) The creative literature gave implicit support to an improbable but politically real situation in which the language and culture of the numerically greater, was always less highly valued than that of the numerically smaller; the cultural artifacts of the minority considered mainstream, and those of the majority parochial. The critical literature eventually characterized it in the Prospero/Caliban dichotomy which became the commonplace for describing that reality.¹

But even in the acceptance of the Prospero/Caliban characterization there was a signal that the *status quo* could change. After all Caliban eventually learnt Prospero's language and was able to use it to his advantage.

The present paper isolates one significant location from the suppressed culture—the balm yard and examines it within two texts, Olive Senior's short story *Discerner of Hearts* and Erna Brodber's novel *Myal*. Its treatment in these texts is seen as an inversion of the received reality, subversion of the received texts, 'calibanizing' of what has been Prospero's domain. In both texts a cultural coup is achieved by writing in the perception of the suppressed within a discourse tradition formerly reserved for the suppressor. In both the Euro tradition becomes of "other" within deceptively ingenuous narrative and dialogue. Senior contrasts two views of the balmer and his balmyard in conversations which the audience overhears between the child whose socialization has been Euro/creole and the household helper whose socialization has been Afro/creole. In Brodber's work the comparison is less explicit, the centrality of the Afro culture taken more for granted. Some discussion on the yard in general, the Balm Yard in particular, and the Balmer/healer, is in order.

The yard, in the context of Caribbean poverty is an extension of the house. The house is small and used mainly for sleeping. Most other activities, of work as well as recreation, take place in the yard.

Anne Raver in an article in the *New York Times* compares the swept yards of Nigeria with those of Georgia in the south of the USA. The photographs accompanying that text could easily have been taken in the Caribbean. The clean swept yard, entirely bare of grass is represented in that article as part of 'the tradition that the ancestors (of slaves) brought from the Gold Coast.' (1993: 1)

The balm yard is clean swept like the yards of Nigeria and the American south. But it is more than just another yard. It is the residence of the man who heals. In English, "balm" is a noun that describes an ointment for soothing pain. In Jamaican it is, in addition, a verb describing the act of physical or spiritual healing. So the Balmer or Balm-man who operates in the Balmyard, balms the individual and makes him/her whole.

The *Dictionary of Jamaican English* (Cassidy and LePage 1980:22) defines the balm-yard as 'The headquarters and ritual site of a Balm-man . . .' It goes on to describe some of the ritual that may take place in a balm yard. In the further definition the balmer becomes a religious leader. This is interesting in the context of Afro/Caribbean culture. Brathwaite in the article referred to the above and makes some statements which might usefully be considered together here: '(E)veryone agrees that the focus of African culture in the Caribbean was religious . . .' (1974:73)

A study of African culture reveals almost without question that it is based upon religion—that, in fact, it is within the religious network that the entire culture resides

... (S)tarting from this particular religious focus, there is no separation between religion and philosophy, religion and society, religion and art. Religion is the form or kernel or core of the culture.

(1974:74)

The balmer is a religious man (though not necessarily a Christian man). The balm yard is the centre of operation of this person who represents what remains of a cultural whole which came through the crucible of the Middle Passage as fragments. His location is centre for one part of the society, the part that has largely ignored the invitation of the cultural west.

Olive Senior's short story, *Discerner of Hearts* uses Mr. Burnham (Father) the balmer and his balm yard as symbols of the powerless black majority which must function in the shadow of the powerful brown majority. She points also to the (doubtful) faith of that majority that things will, at some point, change. At the end of the first movement of the story Cissy, the helper in the house of the brown (mulatto) family,

reprimands her charges for their disrespectful attitude to Father Burnham:

... Yu can gwan run joke. Think Father is man to run joke bout? Father is serious man. But yu is just like yu father. Have no respect for people. Unless their skin turn and they live in big house and they drive up in big car. But one day, one day the world going spin the other way though. And then we will see.

(1995:7)

Divergent ways of seeing this man, as an illiterate trickster and as a great healer, supply the tension that informs this story. As with most of Senior's stories, the wisdom is given the reader by children. In this case the children know that Mr. Burnham is illiterate because he brings documents for their father to read. Their father also is the scribe who writes his letters.

Once a month Mr Burnham pays for his milk; always with bags of bright sixpences (an act which has a certain significance for those who know that spiritualists in Afro/Jamaica are paid in small silver coins). On occasion their father might laugh and quip 'You old reprobate' and Mr. Burnham would laugh as well and say 'Good day, Justice.' While "Justice" is a term used to address the Justice of the Peace, the local representative of the law in a small village, it is semantically significant here, poised against "reprobate." Prospero jokes with Caliban addressing him with a negatively valued word, Caliban jokes back using a positively valued word.

Cissy, representing the black majority, describes Mr. Burnham (Father) as a great man, a famous healer and says that people come from all over the world to have him read them. The literary artist works a major pun on the item "read." The illiterate Mr. Burnham "reads" people far and near. "Reading" here is about forecasting people's futures or telling them about past events he could not, under normal circumstances, know about. He is at worst a magician at best a seer. Finally he is a physical and psychological healer.

Note the following significant dialogue between Cissy and Theresa, one of her charges, the little heroine of the story:

"What's a balmyard, Cissy?"
 "Where people go for healing"
 "What is healing?"
 "What people need when they have sickness"
 "Why they don't go to Dr. Carter?"
 "There is sick and then again, there is sick."
 "But Mister Burnham isn't a doctor."
 "There is doctor and there is doctor."

(1995:3-4)

These views are so interesting to the inquisitive young mind that when at last the opportunity presents itself she visits Mr. Burnham's house which might have been described as a "lair" by those who call him "reprobate."

Senior takes the opportunity to describe the artifacts in the surroundings including calabashes perched on top of bamboo poles, doves full of birds, plants growing everywhere. What attracts her most however, is a building in an area like that described in Raver's article mentioned earlier. The authorial comment runs:

But what really drew her was the building right behind the house, separated from it by a clean swept yard. It was a rectangular structure, much bigger than the house itself. The narrow side nearest the house was walled in wattle-and-daub ...

(1995:21)

The artifacts she could see inside the room, suggested a world entirely outside of her experience

... every inch of the wall behind it including the door cut into it was covered with paintings. She recognized scenes from the Bible, Jesus and his disciples and signs and symbols like those in her church. But these didn't look quite like the religious scenes they got on their Sunday School picture cards. For one thing they all ran into one another with nothing to define each one, and they were much more colourful and lively. And all the people, Jesus included, were black ...

(1995:21)

The last sentence is of great cultural significance and must be read bearing in mind Cissy's reference to the colour of those people who are considered to be anybody, in contrast with her own colour. Note for example: 'Eh, just because *my skin black* people think I am idiot, eh. People think I fool. Just because I couldn't get to go to school like some *backra* people children.' (my emphases) (1995:4)

Mr. Burnham's qualifications, written on a large board near to a platform, are impressive:

Father Burnham. MHC, GMMW, DD, KRGD.

Bringer of Light

Professor of Peace

Restorer of Confidence

Discerner of Hearts

... and his service

Consultation and Advice.

(1995:22)

The story "Discerner of Hearts" is about a young woman, Cissy, and her striving for and eventually obtaining, with the help of Father Burnham, a child by a man she loves