

## Salt Fish and Ackee: An Interview with Pamela Mordecai

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### Biographical Introduction

Multi-talented and prize-winning author Pamela Mordecai, the focus of the following interview and scholarship, was born and raised in Jamaica and now lives in Toronto with her husband, Martin. Kamau Brathwaite<sup>1</sup> has said that Jamaican-Canadian author Mordecai is “one of the most brilliant and witty of our poets.” Mordecai, who also holds a PhD in English, has written articles on Caribbean literature and has edited and co-edited groundbreaking anthologies of Jamaican poetry and Caribbean women’s writing, among them *Jamaica Woman*, (1980, 1985, with Mervyn Morris); *From Our Yard: Jamaican Poetry since Independence* (1987); and *Her True-True Name* (1989, with Betty Wilson). Mordecai has also published textbooks, children’s books, four collections of poetry (*Journey Poem*, 1989; *de Man: a performance poem*, 1995; *Certifiable*, 2001; *The True Blue of Islands*, 2005), a collection of short fiction (*Pink Icing*, 2006) and a reference work (*Culture and Customs of Jamaica*, 2001, with her husband, Martin). Her play, *El Numero Uno*, had its world premiere at the Lorraine Kimsa Theatre for Young People in February 2010.

This interview focuses particularly on Mordecai’s *de Man: a performance poem*, a re-telling in Jamaican Creole of the crucifixion of Christ. Readers and listeners receive this well-known story through the eyes and voices of Samuel, a disabled carpenter, and Naomi, servant to Pilate’s wife. Telling the story of Jesus’s crucifixion in Creole and from the perspective of the disenfranchised, or “lower class,” Mordecai reminds one that the story of Jesus does not belong to any particular group or language and that it can be repeatedly told. Moreover, the beauty and strength of the verse found in *de Man* places Mordecai among the most distinguished Caribbean and Canadian poets. To date, *de Man* has

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<sup>1</sup> Such praise is significant. Known for a lifetime of producing poetry, criticism (literary and historical) and plays and also for coining the term “nation language” (*History of the Voice*) to reveal that the language of the Caribbean is not the result of imported colonial speech but that which has grown out of a survival of African languages, virtuoso Brathwaite (Barbadian born) has rightfully received significant international recognition (among his many awards is the 2006 Griffin Poetry Prize for his poetry collection *Born to Slow Horses*). His study *Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (1971) provided the foundation for much of the subsequent study of West Indian society.

received limited, though solid, critical attention, and we hope this interview will kindle further interest in this groundbreaking work.<sup>1</sup>

### Reasons for Interviewing Pamela Mordecai

As professors of literature in Newfoundland, an island which operates not only in “Standard” English but also numerous dialects, perhaps it is no small wonder that our eyes are turning ever more sharply these days to the Caribbean, composed of bi-dialectal, and, in some cases, multilectal regions. And perhaps it is also not surprising that we both have grown to consider Pamela Mordecai’s *de Man: a performance poem*—written in Jamaican Creole—a rich text to share with our students and colleagues as they negotiate their day-to-day lives somewhere along a continuum that includes “Standard English” (the international english of global exchange) and Newfoundland englishes.

*de Man* was taught in 2009 and again in 2010 at Grenfell campus, Memorial University, to satisfy one of the required readings for “English 3148: Canadian Poetry After 1949” (taught by professors S. McKenzie and S. Ganz respectively) a course which, interestingly, invokes a consideration of Newfoundland (which joined Confederation in 1949) before and above Canada. The student body here on the West coast of Newfoundland is fairly homogenous, composed mainly of students who were born and raised in Newfoundland, many of whom have not travelled outside the island. Once primed to understand Jamaican Creole as a language akin to a Newfoundland English, students were quick to appreciate and understand *de Man*, perhaps more so than would be the case if one were teaching in a large Canadian centre with a heterogeneous student body. This is not to suggest that the text does not stand on its own but, rather, that the sharing of linguistic sensibilities might be especially strong between Newfoundland and Jamaica.<sup>2</sup> In the fall of 2009, artist Angela Baker, former art instructor at Grenfell Campus and an award-winning artist who was born and raised in Jamaica, attended the class and read *de Man* from beginning to end so that the students could hear the language. Most students commented that they had little-to-no difficulty understanding the work (though Baker would occasionally stop and explain specific words and concepts).

As we continue to share pedagogical interests and experiences with one another, as well as research interests, we continue to think of *de Man* as an important—and beautiful—work of art that can also be compared to those Newfoundland works which employ Newfoundland English to tell their stories. Most notably, we have come to think there are rich connections to be made between Joel Hynes’ *Down to the Dirt* (the first novel in Newfoundland to be written entirely in Newfoundland English)

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<sup>2</sup> Savory notes the following in her article on Mordecai: “Mordecai . . . points out that *de Man* has been well received in Canada by audiences not familiar with Jamaica (though very familiar with the Christian story). She reports that people were brought to tears hearing the poem in church” (101).

and *de Man*. We hope that scholarly comparisons of *de Man* with this Newfoundland text and others will surface in the future.

When we approached Pamela Mordecai to conduct an interview with us about *de Man* and possible connections between this work and Newfoundland texts, Mordecai agreed to answer our questions. We are grateful that the following interview now exists and hope that it can be used to further studies of *de Man*, as well as spark interest in the worth of comparing texts written in Caribbean creoles and Newfoundland englishes.

“Salt fish and ackee,” the national dish of Jamaica, is a traditional Jamaican breakfast consisting of salted cod—originally imported from Newfoundland—and ackee—the national fruit of Jamaica. These foods complement each other and produce a succulent dish that is difficult to match. Small wonder that two islands once—and for a significant period—engaged in trading foodstuffs might also bear other likenesses, such as linguistic codes and realities which speak of fierce determination in the face of colonialism.

### Questions/Interview with Pamela Mordecai<sup>3</sup>

#### A Little Preamble (by Pamela Mordecai)

What is literature, really? Literature is poems and stories. If you act them out, these poems and stories, that acting-out, is called a play. Poems and plays and stories have work to do: make us laugh, cry, yell, shiver, tear our hair, put on sackcloth and ashes; help us remember; help us forget; teach us skills; give us knowledge; teach us how to treat one another; show us new worlds; preserve the old worlds; help us live; help us die; show us angels; show us God; and help us to write our own poems and plays and stories.

How remarkable, then, that at a time when we have more schools, colleges and universities than ever before, there are fewer and fewer persons who read poems and stories, who go to see plays.

I have no patience any more with constructions and deconstructions, taxonomies and theories. They have served us badly, cheated us of our songs and stories. I don't mean to be perverse, nor to suggest that talking about songs and stories is bad. (I, too, wrote a PhD thesis, in which I proposed a “theory” of my own and developed a new taxonomy of literary terms.) But somehow the conversation has come to involve fewer and fewer of us, and I think we all know why.<sup>4</sup> A child of eight says: “I like

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<sup>3</sup> In answering these interview questions, I made copious use of the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* online, as well as of the *Dictionary of Jamaican English* by F. G. Cassidy and R. B. LePage (UWI Press, 2002), the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* edited by Richard Allsopp (OUP, 1996), and *Culture and Customs of Jamaica* by Martin Mordecai and Pamela Mordecai (Greenwood Press, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> I took a break and went down to supper, where I found the following comment in an article in the *Globe and Mail*, Saturday, September 11, 2010, by Clifford Orwin, professor of political science at the University of Toronto. “An arid ‘postmodernist’

the poem—it's a happy poem," or "I like the rhymes," or "I like the jokes..." A child of twelve says, "I like the story okay." Pressed, she may say, "it's got some good jokes." A child of fourteen is impatient with metaphor, simile, personification, onomatopoeia, metonymy; themes and tropes; protagonists and plots; crises and climaxes and dénouements. When she leaves high school she will read genre fiction, *if we are lucky*, we who say we love literature.

*de Man* is a lucky work. People keep coming to see it performed, all kinds of people. Someone asked me if I'd been inspired by the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. I pointed out that the book was published in 1995.

In these terrible times, why are there no readers to take comfort from our songs and stories? Untold, unread, unsung, they will wither and die.

### The Questions

SM & SG: Did you deliberate about the language you would be using in *de Man: a performance poem*? That is, did you make a conscious choice to write in Jamaican English, or did this just come naturally?

PM: I didn't deliberate, but I did make a conscious choice, very quickly but not on the spur of the moment—on another spur. One of those rare things happened with this poem that happens to me once every ten years or so: about that often, a poem comes out all of a piece, needing little or no editing, like a baby who arrives, perfect, without the nine months' gestation or the labour pangs. It wasn't quite like that in this case, but what did happen was very special, very unusual. The story, which I'll retell, is told briefly in the acknowledgements in the book. Ollie Nickerson S.J., a literary man, was pastor at St Thomas Aquinas Church, the "university church" in Mona, Jamaica at the time. (Another St Thomas Aquinas Church pops up later in the story. They are two different churches, one in Kingston, one in Toronto, both university parishes, both

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scholasticism currently dominates much of the study of literature and has spread from it to other humanistic disciplines. What passes for excitement in this milieu is to pronounce a topic 'undertheorized' – and then proceed to 'theorize' it, dousing it in buckets of the stuff. The humanities so conceived don't raise the great human questions, nor do they turn to great thinkers or writers for guidance. These merely furnish the occasion for predetermined ideologically correct conclusions swathed in the latest fashionable jargon. The original text all but disappears beneath so much pseudo philosophy. Such professors 'theorize' their undergraduates right out the door. There are scholars who eschew these tendencies, of course, and some humanities departments offer more balanced approaches than others. The ailment is pervasive, however, and the prestige of the humanities has suffered. This is one problem for which academics have only themselves to blame. . . . The wounds of the humanities are largely self-inflicted." ("You're Getting the Universities You Want and Deserve," *Globe and Mail* September 11, 2010: A25)

part of the tale of the poem and the book.) We'd gone to Good Friday service (it was 1993, I think) and were outside talking afterwards, when Fr Ollie said to me, "Pam, why don't you write something for Good Friday?" I said okay, I would. A year passed. Lent came round again, and I hadn't written a word. But I like to keep my promises. I'd only just begun to think about what I would write when the first line came to me. "*Oonoo see mi dying trial!*" (*Oonoo see mi dying trial* is a complaint, a quarrel with life and *tings* that we make all the time in Jamaica when we run into *crosses*. Badly translated, it means something like, "Look, all of you, look at my tribulation, so oppressive it's likely to kill me!") The connections to the Jesus story are obvious: trial, dying, crosses.) I knew then that the whole poem would come, and quickly, and that it would be entirely in *patwa*, Jamaican Creole (JC after this). By Good Friday, I'd finished it, up to the twelfth station of the cross. I used the Stations of the Cross as underpinning, since I was writing it "for" Good Friday. Cowal Lyn and I read it for the first time at St Thomas Aquinas church, Mona, Jamaica, on Good Friday that year.

SM & SG: Did you have in mind old mystery plays or cycles when you wrote *de Man*?

PM: I can't say that they were to the front of my mind, but they may not have been too far back. I can enter easily into the enacting of those plays, to the appreciation of that tradition. For instance, I'm fascinated by the story of the origin of the Oberammergau passion play. Something so Old Testament about Oberammergau: God, behaving like a *Near God*, an African kind of God, closely engaged with his/her people, getting angry with them, exiling them, rescuing them. And the townspeople in Oberammergau, in terror and agitation—this is the Black Plague after all—begging God, then negotiating, haggling with Him, and ending up with a covenant undertaking, a *quid pro quo*, that he will keep the plague from their town if they honour this sacrificial offering of his Son by re-enacting his passion *for ever* afterwards, *till kingdom come*. It's a story that appeals to me, as a Jamaican.

SM & SG: Do you think of this text as a feminist text? A Marxist text? A postcolonial text?

PM: Like I tried to say in the preamble, I don't like labels. They're always problematic. They are only useful if they are tied to definitions, and definitions, to crib from Yeats, "cannot hold"—in fact, they probably *have* loosed anarchy upon the world! Capitalist, Socialist, Communist; left, right; Christian, Muslim, Jew; Democrat, Republican; Conservative, Liberal; have, have-not; white, black, coolie... And so on. I often refer to Gabriel Marcel's insight that it's easy to call a man a communist—and then kill him. A definition can perhaps be useful in science and math, and even there many excellent scientists will tell you its usefulness is limited.

Words resist being defined. It's a contradiction in terms, since words are by nature alive and unbounded. They point to, indicate a space of meaning that is always being filled in, always being qualified and qualified again. They don't set down tight boundaries: they can't, not if language is alive in people's mouths.

That said, since we've gone and built whole disciplines and discourses on labels, terms, jargon, lingo, we have to live with them and deal with them. We can avoid the dangers in that "dealing" if we understand that they're part of a game, part of a story. Anybody can make them up just as long as you keep the story gripping, and they can be useful if they lead to a better understanding of the *runnings*, the nature of things. It is my impression, however, that nowadays labels not only obfuscate, they are meant to.

So back to the question: I don't think of *de Man*, or any of my work(s), in classificatory terms, except in practical ways. I must know whether I'm about to write a play, poem, story, story-poem, very long story-poem (novel) or some kind of crossover. *de Man*, which is a verse play, intended for performance, is a crossover. And I paid close attention to it as poetry. I think about audience—children, young adults, adults—and about the response I want to evoke. Do I want the reader/hearer to laugh, or cry, or both, or be angry, outraged? Whatever. I think about language, too, since it needs to match my purpose: a work might be in creole, a mix of creole and English, or a *mashup*, in several languages. I've recently started writing mashups. My play for children, *El Numero Uno*, which recently had its world premiere in Toronto, is a mashup. It uses, in different proportions, *patwa*, English, Dread Talk, Spanish and French.

If other people want to label *de Man*, that's okay. But I do want to rattle sabres a little, to say we need to come back to basic ways of talking about and understanding literature if we are ever to restore our songs and stories to their proper place.

SM & SG: Is the choice of Jamaican English important in this re-telling of the story of the crucifixion?

PM: The choice of JC, which is for me what the Bible translators call, a "heart language," was crucial, anointed, inspired, as I've tried to explain. "Things" come to me more easily in creole. This doesn't mean that I have any difficulty writing English, or using it for any literary, or discursive, or other purpose. But *patwa* brings me to a particular, unique, liberating and liberated home space, a versatile, fluid space where language comes easy, switches and slides, and imagination is eager. Perhaps it's the space in which what Glissant calls "*Antillanité*" (my *Antillanité*, that is) lives? Where what I call "prismatic vision" in my dissertation thrives? (*Mea culpa* for the labels, but *we fi do?*) I don't know. There are for me two cultural spaces, and two worlds, and two ways of understanding the world, one of which I access with English, the other with creole. And yet it is the

same *actual* physical and sociological set of circumstances. The worlds overlap and interpenetrate at the same time that they remain distinct, like threads in a weave, or perhaps better in a *twist-up tanglement*: they are mixed up together, but if you tug on one, you can find, easily locate, where it is in the mix. I know I couldn't set about translating *de Man* into English. It wouldn't work. I could write another play, but it would be a different one. That's how it seems to me at the minute anyway.

What's also exciting and confirms my belief that this was something that I was meant to do, is that I discovered somewhere along the line that in Jesus's time, the language of the streets was Aramaic, while the language of official spaces like the temple was Hebrew. The languages stood in relation to each other much as JC stands in relation to "Standard" English. So Jesus was probably sentenced in the prestige language, but the crowd roared for his death in their creole.

SM & SG: Do you see any connections between Newfoundland English and Jamaican English?

PM: I don't know very much about Newfoundland English (NE after this), so my answer is going to be lacking, but I'll say the little I know.

Language isn't just words and structures; it's how they are made, what they are used to talk about, how they are deployed to talk about it, and what people think about them. A long time ago now, when I read David MacFarlane's *The Danger Tree*, I was struck by resemblances in the way the two island communities used language and in the similar ways of life of the two groups, never mind that one island was the 15<sup>th</sup> largest in the world, and temperate, and the other very small, and tropical. MacFarlane described the circularity of Newfoundland storytelling, for example, a tendency that I think we share; like Newfoundlanders, we find it hard to stick to speaking of any single thing, but pursue one thing into another, and another, and another.

There is also among ordinary folk in both places the issue of NE and JC being "non-standard." Linguists and other academics and teachers have struggled for a long time to change the notion of JC being non-standard, though not by any means with complete success. Indeed, there are Jamaicans who at the time of writing take issue with the Jamaican Bible Society's initiative to translate the Bible into JC, a venture that began in the nineties, of which I was briefly a part. At that time, a Canadian, the late Dr Harold Fehderau, translation Director for the Canadian Bible Society, was overseeing the project.<sup>5</sup> This kind of resistance at this time (2010) is alarming, for in the sixties and seventies, Jamaican Creole was fiercely defended as a language in its own right. Now, the linguists appear divided between this position, and an alternative that regards *patwa* as a

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.gameo.org/encyclopedia/contents/F45.html>. A JC or *patwa* version of the Gospel of Luke was launched in Jamaica and also at York University in Toronto late last year, 2010.

dialect of English, i.e., as Jamaican English rather than Jamaican Creole. (Presumably, as a dialect of English, some of the “standardness” of English would rub off on it?)

The position of ordinary folks with regard to NE seems similar: some like the Newfoundland englishes, some feel they fall short of the English standard. I am not aware of how linguists regard NE, however.

My own position with regard to JC is that it is a language in its own right operating at one extreme of a continuum, with “Standard English” at the other.

Both NE and JC share certain phonological features. Both change the order of sounds in words: in NE, *haps* for *hasp*; in JC, *deks* for *desk*. Both add or delete syllables in English words: in NE, *kellup* for *kelp* and *quite* for *quiet*; in JC, *sunake* for *snake* and *kyaan* for *can't*. Both drop and add initial *h*, and both pronounce *th* as *t* or *d*.

They also share word-making strategies. The word *bangbelly* (made up of the word *bang* = *explode* (?) and *belly* = *stomach*) is an example of the tendency both languages share to couple or yoke words in order to make new ones. Compare NE *a-back* meaning behind and JC *back-a*, also meaning behind. (Other examples are found in the *fairy+* and *duppy+* compounds that appear further on.)

In fact, *bangbelly* is a word found in both NE and JC, though it means different things in both languages. In NE, it refers to a particular kind of heavy pudding or cake; in JC, it refers to the distended abdomen, originally of a malnourished child, but by extension, to any big stomach. *Bucky* is another word in both languages: in NE it means “Of a young man, capable; aggressively self-confident” and in JC it means (an admittedly unsatisfactory translation) “dear, good, one of high rank”—significations not so dissimilar.

There are obvious connections between the two language communities deriving from the fact that (1) both are island cultures, and (2) some aspects of their history are shared, both being ex-colonies, both serving the same motherland for whom control of the seven seas, and, consequent on that, the role of islands, was important. Both island histories begin with the extinguishing of a native culture, which becomes to some degree prized in extinction: the Beothuks in the case of Newfoundland, the Taino in the case of Jamaica. Both these peoples died in the same way, through murder or ill-treatment by the foreign invaders, or because of diseases the invaders brought. Some Amerindian words survive in JC; no Beothuk words appear to have survived in NE, though at least one Taino word appears in the *DNE*, *tobacco*.

Whether on account of that early genocide or not, Newfoundlanders and Jamaicans share a lively belief in the spirit world. Newfoundlanders believe in *fairies*, not the imaginary sprites of legend, but spirits, ghosts, like our Jamaican *duppies*. In both cultures, each word has spawned a host of related terms. Some examples are, for NE: *fairy bun*, *fairy cap*, *fairy hand bar*, *fairy man*, *fairy bread*, *fairy path*, *fairy squall*; and for JC: *duppy-gun*, *duppy-cherry*, *duppy-pickney*, *duppy-parasol*, *duppy-riding-*



horse. (*Fairy cap* and *duppy-parasol* both mean mushroom.) In the case of both cultures, you are in a bad way if *duppy box you* or if you are *fairy struck*.

Finally, two examples of shared lexical items from the daily life of ordinary folk: the word *seine* does not appear in the *Cambridge Dictionary Online*. It appears in both the *Dictionary of Newfoundland English* and the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*, and it means much the same thing in each case: “A vertical net placed in position around a school of fish, the ‘foots’ drawn together to form a bag, and hauled at sea or in shallow water near the shore” (Definition from the *DNE*). And finally, there’s the word “evening,” which, according to the *Cambridge Dictionary Online*, means “the part of the day between the end of the afternoon and night” but which means for Newfoundlanders and Jamaicans anytime between noon and sunset.

SM & SG: Is this also a text about the power of stories and their ability to survive?

PM: I suppose the fact that *de Man* exists is certainly testimony to that, even as the fact of every narrative of the crucifixion down through time offers that same witness. It would of course be absurd for me or anyone to argue for the endurance of the original story of the passion, so I take it that your question has more to do, perhaps, with why new versions of old tales keep needing to be concocted? The answer to that seems easy enough: the human condition hasn’t much changed, so stories of murder and hate and hurtfulness remain relevant. Even amusing stories are based on what is distorted, out of proportion, and essentially sad. That keeps on being the same too. I suppose if we ever achieve anything like Eden again, we can look forward to truly new kinds of songs and stories...

It might also be worth saying—who knows when I’ll get a chance to say it again—that this particular version of the tale of Jesus’s crucifixion seems to have held its own, quite unknown to me. I know it’s been performed a few times in Jamaica: three or four times with me reading Naomi and Cowal Lyn or Orville Shields reading Samuel, on radio there by Mark Jones and Grace Barrett-Baston (so I’m told), and several times in Canada, in Toronto and in Calgary, where a remarkable Jamaican/Canadian, Howard Gallimore, has read Samuel to my Naomi on three occasions. (A bit odd, then, that it doesn’t even merit mention in Hugh Hodges’ work on religion in Jamaican poetry, entitled *Soon Come*.) I recently discovered that George Elliott Clarke has taught it at Duke University, McGill and the University of Toronto. Stephanie, you’ve taught it at Northern Michigan University in the US, and in Canada, at Memorial University of Newfoundland. One or two other scholars in both the US and Canada have taught it or written about it. And it’s been included in anthologies and journals and textbooks, most notably in *The*

*Echoing Years*, which you and Randall Maggs edited, Stephanie.<sup>6</sup> Barbara Lalla of UWI, St Augustine, has written a bit on it, but apart from her work, I think folks in the Caribbean have largely ignored it—except of course for the *churchical* folks who keep putting it on in Lent or on Good Friday. One nun told me she uses it in spiritual direction.

SM & SG: If one were to take out the overriding story of the crucifixion (the Christian story), would there be a dominant narrative left?

PM: The term “dominant narrative,” as you use it, is different from the current buzz label. If what you mean by the term is “big story, overarching narrative,” then what’s left if the Jesus story is taken out of *de Man*, is the *ole time story* about Naomi and Samuel. Their long-ago love that came to nothing because her family intervened and forbade the marriage is, in a way, the engine of *de Man*. The two stories are knit together, of course. Samuel’s retiring to Nazareth to lick his wounds after Naomi dumped him introduces him to Mary, Joseph and Jesus as a baby. That intimate acquaintance with the family prompts his lament for Mary, perhaps my favourite lines in the poem. In the course of the play, Samuel gets his hands back—something people seem not to notice, though it’s clearly marked in the text. So the Naomi-Samuel story is the second strain in the music.

SM & SG: Why did you gloss the Jamaican language?

PM: The editors and I agreed on it. Some people find it helpful, but not everyone. When I read *de Man* in Canada, people keep asking for a CD, because they find the creole challenging on the page, even with the glossary. That, I think, is perhaps more because once they’ve heard it read, people yearn to hear those voices, those sounds, that music, again.

SM & SG: The process of collaboration with your husband is incredibly interesting. In terms of the photography, what was the process like? How were the photos selected? How do you see them contributing to the story and message of *de Man*?

PM: Some of these photos were taken for the purpose; others came from Martin’s stock of negatives and prints. We chose them together. It’s quite usual for publishers to go to stock shops to find pictures for illustrating books, but we were lucky to be able to plunder this particular photo library. Martin and I have similar sensibilities and, though it was 15 years ago, we had 30 years of lived, shared experience even then. The photos and the book are very special to me, and I hope to him, for that reason.

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<sup>6</sup> See also G. E. Clarke’s *Eyeing the North Star: Directions in African-Canadian Literature* (63-73) which includes an excerpt from *de Man* (McKenzie, Ganz).

We lived in the country in Jamaica for a time, commuting to Kingston. The cover photo is a shot of the sun rising behind a tree we'd encounter on the way to town. Serendipity: sun/Son of God; tree/cross; burst of light/redemption-resurrection. That picture, and the ones on page 25 (flame-like blossom of the shrimp plant); page 65 (thorns, being in reality tips of the leaves of the soothing, medicinal aloe plant); page 70 (the "tomb" of an abandoned hut among the rocks up in the hills), and page 77 (Wag Water River) illustrate his major preoccupation as an artist, which is with the interplay of dark and light. Where shapes, design, faces, architecture may attract other photographers, he has always been preoccupied with this chiaroscuro. He works primarily in black and white for that reason, a choice that obviously lends itself to illustrating this grim story as well as its moments of tenderness (e.g., the flame-like glow of the shrimp blossom on page 25, a picture which introduces Samuel's recollection of Mary watching the boy Jesus grow up) and hope (cover photo, discussed above); and the final photo of the Wag Water River, representing the cleansing, redemption and wholeness achieved through the grace of the living water of baptism—as also, the particular ritual of baptism by immersion, common in rivers in Jamaica.

Of the 12 remaining pictures, six are of a clay mask, the work of our eldest child who is a fine potter, though he doesn't currently practice. That mask hung on the wall on the patio of the first house we owned in Jamaica, which was also the last house we lived in before we emigrated. It's de man's face, nobody's face and everybody's face; a face of yearning, a face of suffering, of endurance, of exhausted emptiness, of pure form, skin over skull. The eyes are haunting. In three of these shots, leaves are superimposed on this stark countenance, in one case, leaves with beads of water on them. The significances are clear: Jesus is the tree of life, the vine of which his followers are branches, the one who provides living water, for Catholics, *sprinkled* in baptism and in blessing. I think Martin did the superimpositions especially for the book.

The six taken-for-the-purpose shots are: one of a cement cross seen through bare winter branches, two of creeping vines on a wall, and three of iron spikes (or their shadow) on a wall with vines creeping over it. These come from parts of the U. of Toronto campus near to the Church of St Thomas Aquinas<sup>7</sup> where we worshipped at the time. We went together on assignment to take those. The food-and-life significance of the vine is a little different in these pictures, for these vines are either bare, or have borne fruit and are dry, sere, having given up the ghost. The spikes recall thorns and nails and spear. The photo of the cement cross perhaps represents the salvation story as it has found expression in art and architecture over time.

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<sup>7</sup> It is at the church of St Thomas Aquinas in Toronto that we first performed excerpts from the play in Canada: Dr Keith Lowe, Jamaican thespian and educator, read Samuel. I read Naomi.

## Note

i. See Kandaloft who, in her MA thesis, “argues that postcolonial narratives such as Pamela Mordecai’s *de Man* . . . and Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, represent Jesus Christ in unique ways that can best be analyzed and understood through the theories of Homi K. Bhabha” (“Abstract”); see also Lalla (University of the West Indies) who, speaking of “the evolving relevance of Creole linguistics to literary linguistics in the Caribbean and to Jamaican literary discourse in particular—especially in establishing ideological perspective” (53), notes that Mordecai’s *de Man* (as well as other texts) speaks of an “Expansion Phase” (67) in “the evolution of literary discourse in the Anglophone Caribbean” (53): as Lalla writes, “[t]his expansion does not necessarily mean ‘more Creole’; it means a fluid, often unflagged movement between Creole, local Standard and intermediate varieties” (67). Also see H.N. Thomas’s excellent interview with Mordecai, which focuses on the nature and purpose of writing and literature in general and in the Caribbean. Here, Mordecai notes that “[t]here was a point at which [she] recognized—it was probably when [she] was writing *de Man*—that in a real way, Creole gave [her] [her] writing voice” (188); see pages 190-91 for a discussion of *de Man*. As well, Elaine Savory’s “Pamela Mordecai: Jamaican Language, Local and ‘in Foreign’” is an excellent overview or summary of Mordecai’s various works, though there are only two substantial paragraphs devoted to *de Man* (pages 100-101). Savory provocatively notes that “[w]hen a Canadian audience embraces . . . *de Man*—a retelling of Christ’s suffering, death and resurrection in Jamaican Creole—Canada shifts a little towards redefining nation” (96).

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