



George Lamming: The Vocation of Writing and his Critical Social Engagement¹

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ARTICLE



ABSTRACT

This essay examines the way George Lamming combines his commitment to the creative writing process, to his ethical devotion to social justice for the people ‘from down below.’ It maps the relationships that he has forged with the writers of his generation, while cultivating crucial intellectual and political networks with the leading Caribbean academics, politicians, and political activists. These social networks place George Lamming at the center of Caribbean literary, intellectual, and cultural history. In short, the paper reveals the organic link between the aesthetic and the political in the creative imagination of one of the Caribbean leading novelists and public intellectuals

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KEYWORDS:

democracy; story; creative imagination; social engagement; political

TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Lewis, L F. 2022 George Lamming: The Vocation of Writing and his Critical Social Engagement. *Anthurium*, 18(1): 2, 1-17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33596/anth.385>

For some, becoming a writer is a yearning, a call that some people feel compelled to answer. Of course, not all those who respond endure the challenges, the solitary nature of the vocation, or the many rejections that litter the terrain of such an aspiration. There are those, such as George Lamming, who persevere. The Indian writer [Arundhati Roy](#) cautions us about the vocation of writing, which we sometimes misconstrue, namely, who is in control of the narrative?

Writers imagine that they cull stories from the world. I'm beginning to believe that vanity makes them think so. That it's actually the other way around. Stories cull writers from the world. Stories reveal themselves to us. The public narrative, the private narrative—they colonize us. They commission us. They insist on being told.

With respect to George Lamming, however, there was another issue involved, one that was perhaps even more pressing. Lamming had to come to terms with writing as an appropriate vocation in the context of his native Barbados and the Caribbean.

Writing, you know, has never really been regarded as a particularly respectable activity in the area until recently. The writers who are respected are to a large extent respected because of their reputations outside of the Caribbean.

One of the important contributions that this particular generation of writers—Naipaul, Selvon and so on—has made is that they have made writing an honorable occupation. It is no longer a crazy thing for a young chap to say, “I think I would like to be a writer.” When I was fifteen or sixteen, that would not only have been crazy, but he would have been frowned on, because what he probably meant was that he had no intention of getting a job, or something like that. (*Kas-Kas; Interviews with Three Caribbean Writers in Texas: George Lamming, C. L. R. James and Wilson Harris* 18)

Placing the writer George Lamming in context, is a more difficult project than one might imagine. 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.³ In recent years Barbadians have become more familiar with the historic contributions of such political activists as Clement Payne, Ulric Grant, Menzies Chase, Brian Alleyne and Mortimer Skeete.⁴ The story of the life and political engagement of Chris Braithwaite, the Barbadian seaman and trade unionist, who lived and worked in the United States and England,⁵ is one that is still largely unknown both in Barbados and in the Barbadian Diaspora. However, 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

¹ This essay is a revised version of a lecture delivered at the 8th Annual George Lamming Distinguished Lecture Series, at the Walcott Warner Theatre of the Errol Barrow Centre for Creative Imagination, University of the West Indies, Barbados, Wednesday, November 28, 2018.

² Part of this section draws on a much earlier draft, published as “The Politics of Lamming-tations: Exploring the Relationship Between The Aesthetic and the Political.” *Bim: Arts for the 21st Century*, vol. 1, no. 1, November, 2007, pp. 31-50.

³ Wynter A. Crawford was a leading radical labor leader and anti-colonial activist, who also championed the cause of civil rights during the 1940s in Barbados. Charles Duncan O'Neale was one of Barbados' foremost political leaders of the early twentieth century. He 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. A.E.S 'TT' Lewis was a white working class radical labour leader and socialist who sacrificed much in the interest of the advancement of the broad masses of Barbadian workers.

⁴ Ulric Grant, Menzies Chase, Brian Alleyne and Mortimer Skeete, were the comrades-in-arms of the radical labour leader, Clement Payne, a Barbados National Hero. They were the chief architects of the 1930s labour riots in Barbados.

⁵ For a good introduction to Braithwaite, see [Høgsbjerg](#).

and the fetishisation of stability, and often very proud of both feats.⁶ Lamming identifies himself with the ideas of Karl Marx, which immediately brings his observations and musings under great scrutiny in a society with little appetite for radical thought and critical thinking. Such scrutiny is hardly exerted on the work of other Barbadian and Caribbean writers. Whether intended or not, Lamming has a tendency, in similar fashion to Bob Marley's declared intention in his song *Bad Card*, 'to disturb his neighbour', to disturb the peace. Lamming is unequivocal about his understanding of the vocation of writing:

I don't shy away from the term political and this is my difficulty with a certain school of Caribbean critics. I am very opposed to the notion that politics and the political is a polluting factor when it is brought into the novel. There is a whole view about this and it comes out of a certain kind of school which says that this something called a text has to be looked at in relation to whatever the laws governing this particular form. I don't believe this. (*Caribbean Reasonings: The George Lamming Reader, The Aesthetics of Decolonisation* 228)

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. (4)

A central focus of George Lamming's work is the experience and legacy of colonialism in the Caribbean. Indeed, in *The Pleasures of Exile*, he warns: "The myth of colonialism is difficult to shake, it may be modified or reshaped, but it is most difficult to dislodge. At its worst, it is the soil from which the perfect lackey is born." (26) Time and again he returns to this theme. In a Guardian newspaper article Lamming recalled that the colonial experience of his generation was one without much physical violence, but in essence, "It was a terror of the mind; a daily exercise in self-mutilation" ("*Sea of Stories*").

Perhaps understanding the complexities of his native Barbadian society, in addition to the experience of his own period of exile, Lamming 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" (*Pleasures of Exile* 46.) Almost sounding a response to George Lamming's observation, the late [Austin 'Tom' Clarke](#), the Canadian-based, Barbadian writer had the following to say about Lamming's presence in the society. Delivering the inaugural Earl Warner Memorial Lecture in March 2003, the novelist opined:

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!

6 For an extended discussion of this phenomenon see Lewis's "The Contestation of Race in Barbadian Society and the Camouflage of Conservatism."



George Lamming and Linden F. Lewis at the Atlantis Hotel, Bathseba, St. Joseph, Barbados. Picture taken by S nami Lewis, 2012.

The annual public lecture series in George Lamming’s honour, is perhaps some indication of an effort to ensure his legacy.

However, understanding the country from which Lamming comes is no simple task. Few places in the Caribbean are as misrepresented, misunderstood and maligned for the commission of no greater sin than the way its people speak, comport themselves or preoccupy themselves with mundane matters of efficiency and the rule of law. In a rather puzzling piece of reflexive ethnography, the Jamaican writer John Hearne declared that he found the Trinidadian exhilarating, and the Guyanese likeable and gentle, but the Barbadian, he concluded, was a “problem,” which of course begs the question that consumed the consciousness of *W. E. B. Du Bois* over a century ago, namely: “How does it feel to be a problem?” (8). Being a problem is indeed a strange experience, even for one who is used to being so described. It is this type of prevailing thinking about Barbadians therefore that makes George Lamming appear so different and unique. He is a fierce champion of Caribbean regionalism, an independent and progressive thinker, and an exponent of the idea that democracy in the region begins with the expression of struggle by the dispossessed.

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 its own great man of letters, who could hold his own with the Caribbean’s literary giants: Wilson Harris, Martin Carter and Denis Williams of Guyana; V.S. Naipaul, Samuel Selvon and Earl Lovelace of Trinidad and Tobago; Andrew Salkey, Claude McKay and Sylvia Wynter of Jamaica; Maryse Cond , Myriam Warner Vieyra and Simone Schwartz-Bart of Guadeloupe; Nancy Morej n, Nicol s Guill n and Alejo Carpentier of Cuba; Jacques Roumain and Edwidge Danticat of Haiti, among others. Such a list of celebrated writers would also include two other Barbadian writers, Austin ‘Tom’ Clarke and the poet/historian Kamau Brathwaite. The political authorities and the middle class intelligentsia are often troubled by Lamming’s politics and his critical reflections.

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 important, as an intellectual and genuine democrat, he views critique as the life-blood, or as he might say, “the oxygen,” of participatory democracy. His critique of Barbadian society could, at times, be biting. He probably would agree with the Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Adiche,

who recently said: “My responsibility as an artist is to my art. My responsibility as a citizen is to the truth and to justice” (*Kehinde*). Lamming 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 novels and in his public lectures and pronouncements. *C. L. R. James* was cognisant of Lamming’s perspicacity when he remarked: “Barbados is the West Indian territory where there is the clearest and sharpest social differentiation. George Lamming’s novels are permeated by the sense of the role of different classes in West Indian society. His work is an expression of Barbados”(170). For these reasons, 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 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, or as George once described it, to be a native foreigner. The native foreigner is one who is native to the country, but whose views, whose politics, alienate him or her from the body politic.

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. In addition, it is here, in exile, that a remarkable phenomenon occurs. “It is here that one can see 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 foreign territory” (*Pleasures of Exile* 214). Lamming further elaborates: “In this sense, most West Indians of my generation were born in England.” The observation resonates with a similar argument made much later by *V. Y. Mudimbe* about the idea of Africa being formed, not in Africa but in the African Diaspora. Perhaps also, the consciousness of being West Indian comes from the fact that England, never quite becomes home for the immigrant. This realization dawns on Tornado in *The Emigrants*: “You ain’t home, chum. You in the land o’ the enemy ... Behin’ that smile, boy, the teeth they show does bite. An’ they won’t leave you till they get rid o’ you, chase you out they country or suck yuh blood like a blasted jumbee” (69).

In a relatively underdeveloped intellectual infrastructure such as the Caribbean at the time (circa 1950), the pursuit of a life of letters, which Lamming and a few others had embarked upon, was indeed a daunting task to pursue. 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.

LAMMING’S WRITINGS

George Lamming always seemed to have had a bigger intellectual project in mind. He has seemingly 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” (*What is Literature* 21). Lamming understands also as Sartre reminds us, that to speak is to act (*What is Literature* 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”(What is Literature 23). George Lamming understood what *Franz Fanon* meant when in *Black Skin, White Masks*, he argues that “mastery of language affords remarkable power” (18). Language is a site of power. It is the power to name, to marginalize, to deride. *C. L. R. James* goes even further when he claims that language affirms our humanity, it is not merely a tool, “the being of man is founded in language” (169). Lamming uses his writing to confront and engage this power of language. He is what Sartre described as an “engaged writer”. Mary Chamberlain notes that for Lamming:

Language has been reinvented as praxis, requiring new interpretative forms to read the semiotics of movement. In his writing we witness the embodiment of language. It derives from an old language, indigenous to the Caribbean, embodied in every insolent

look of the slave, in every act of feigned stupidity, in every act of suicide, in every way by which the regime of slavery was resisted. (191)

His engagement is not purely an exercise in literary tutelage. His engagement is also with the intellectual and cultural workers in Grenada during the Grenadian Revolution, with the workers of The Oilfield Workers' Trade Union in Trinidad and Tobago, and the Barbados Workers' Union, and with the Non-Governmental Organizations in St. Vincent.

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*, *Of Age and Innocence*, 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" (*What is Literature* 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 subject, of their suffering, their struggles and their demands for freedom. Indeed, *In the Castle of my Skin* is described rather perceptively by the Kenyan writer, Ngugi Wa Thiong'o as a "colonial revolt" (110). Wa Thiong'o himself was greatly influenced by Lamming and considers the latter to be a mentor. It should be noted according to George Lamming that *In the Castle of My Skin* was not allowed in any of the libraries in the Caribbean for about ten years, and that one man lost his job in Jamaica for bringing the novel into his sixth form ("*Conversation III: A Rap Session with George Lamming*"). 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 language—the language in common use and exchange—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 198). In fashioning this recurrent theme, Lamming makes no distinction between the aesthetic and the political. This remark in some ways aligns with Arundhati Roy's recent declaration: "I have never felt that my fiction and nonfiction were warring factions battling for suzerainty" ("*Literature Provides Shelter. That's Why We Need It*"). Lamming ruminates in this regard:

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 181)

Chimamanda Adiche was perhaps a bit more succinct when she said: "Art can illuminate politics. Art can humanise politics, but sometimes that is not enough. Sometimes, politics must be engaged with as politics and this could not be more urgent today" (Kehinde).

In a 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" ("*Conversation III: A Rap Session with George Lamming*").⁷ 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

⁷ Personal transcript of the author.

not do the work of writing a book, or even a long magazine article, if it were not also an aesthetic experience. (8)

Sandra Pouchet Paquet, one of the earliest literary critics of Lamming's oeuvre, 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"(1).

The question of aesthetics has, of course, been approached in various ways by different writers, artists and philosophers. 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 labourers, 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. ("Politics and culture" 78)

In a 1971 recorded conversation between James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni, Baldwin argued persuasively that a writer, whether conscious or unconscious of so doing, has to return to the source of knowledge, to his or her origin. It is this replenishment that shapes what, and how, he or she writes. This keen sense of origin is present in *In the Castle of My Skin*, 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 residence, 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" (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.

From very early in his life therefore, the knowledge of social class is a concrete and pivotal part of Lamming's lived experience. He notes for example: "So when I hear people discussing class, I did not discover that in Marx. I lived it, from the age of ten lived with class" (Scott 26). Social class is not an abstract, academic concept without a material content for the author. 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 pervade Lamming's novels. These are the types of penetrating observations and insights that the reader encounters 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.

In *Castle*, Lamming exposes the aura of respectability, the smug privilege of whiteness, and the disarticulating effect of working class scorn, in a scene that takes place in Bellville, an area, which at the time, was mostly populated by whites and near whites. Miss Foster in conversation with Bob's mother recounts the following incident in which Gordon, in need of money, tried to sell a rooster.

Well, he see a white gentleman standing at Bellville corner waiting for the bus, and he go up to the gentleman to ask if he would buy the fowlcock. Mind you, the white gentl'man dress for work, white suit, hat, shirt and shoe to match. Nat'tally, the

gentl'man get vex, put his head in the air and say to Gordon, "Does you expect me to take a rooster to work?" Gordon ain't pay him no attention, he just hold up the fowlcock, saying look, what a pretty comb. Then he turn the fowlcock round and round in the air till the bird backside was staring in the white man face.

There was the fowlock backside in the white man face, and before you say the word, before you could say the word the fowlock had mess in the gentl'man face, It went on the helmet, and splatter over the suit.' (12-3)

This incident ended with other little boys singing: "Look, look, what the fowlcock do," and reporting to the police, who had been summoned that "the gentl'man had mess his pants and had to run home for shame" (13).

Perhaps Lamming's ability to discern the masks that middle class people wear 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, accompanied by public opprobrium. However, embedded in the name Slime, is Sartre's existential formulation of slime as revealing itself as essentially "ambiguous because its fluidity exists in slow motion," (*Being and Nothingness* 774) revealing itself not immediately but later as embodied in Lamming's character Mr. Slime. As Wa Thiong'o notes, it is from the social stratum of the people from below that emerges the leaders of the colonial revolt, "precisely because they are better placed to articulate their desires and discontent" (118). Wa Thiong'o sees the character of Mr. Slime as directing the collective consciousness of the village and acting as a catalyst for social change (118). It was 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 behaviour 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 humour to make his point. In *Season of Adventure*, Lamming spends some time describing the behaviour 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 behaviour 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?' (110)

It is clear that the cat represents an extension of the Piggott family, but more important, its behaviour 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 [Gordon Rohlehr](#) in an analysis of *Season of Adventure* notes:

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. (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 Sartrean existentialism, a knowledge which he brought with him from Trinidad" (15).

Lamming was clearly familiar with the writings of Jean-Paul Sartre as alluded to earlier. He had read and internalized *What is Literature?* by Sartre, twice by his own admission, which is why 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. (Scott 111-2)

As Butler argues, a failure to recognize these existential underpinnings in his writing is to miss perhaps the single most "urgent ethic underlying his works" (15).

Lamming surmises, "Colonialism is the very base and structure of the West Indian cultural awareness" (*The Pleasures of Exile* 35). Moreover, in the neo-colonial context, Lamming sees the Caribbean writer as being challenged to negotiate the creative and political terrain of the region. He argues: "Every writer in the Caribbean carries the weight of the pressure of history" ("*Damming Lamming*"). He had very early indicated what he considered to be a profound contribution of the Caribbean writer when he observes:

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. (*The Pleasures of Exile* 34)

Here then Lamming, in addition to his own convictions, is also affirming the political philosophy of C. L. R. James, whose legacy he describes as identifying the hero as a man from down below. James elaborates that throughout the corpus of his work, and according to Lamming: "... this theme will be affirmed to engage the collective energies of the world down below is the first and only certain path toward the liberation of person and community" ("*CLR James Evangelist*" 15).

At the level of the political philosophy, Lamming would no doubt agree with Louis Althusser, the French philosopher, when he stresses: "Every work of art is born of a project both aesthetic and ideological" (24). 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. (*Pleasures of Exile* 29)

For Lamming, what is important is the journey through which the individual travels to arrive at a deeper consciousness, a keener sense of knowing, which is the education of feeling. He is curious about the circumstances under which such heightened awareness emerges, and is sustained. According to Lamming then: “The education of feeling must be at the heart of any struggle for liberation” (*Caribbean Reasonings: The George Lamming Reader* 22).

The aesthetic and the political also merge at the conjuncture of gender and power. As has been maintained throughout this essay, art is not created in a vacuum, it is rooted in what Baldwin calls the source of knowledge that imposes itself on what is written, sung, played. 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 the criticism is not without merit, what has been largely overlooked is the process of development of the author who, like many other men, 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 his very first novel Lamming provides us with some interesting observations of motherhood and fatherhood. [Supriya 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 (139). Indeed, the close relationship between the character G and his mother does not go unnoticed among Caribbean literary critics. [Margaret Gill](#) points to 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. (216)

In contrast, Nair faults Lamming for presenting a singular image of mothers who are “highly domestic figures, often overpoweringly nurturing and protective” (139). His treatment of fathers and fatherhood, when they are addressed, is more developed, however. The sense of establishing a responsible future in their children is transmitted, particularly to their sons as conveyed in the exchange between the shoemaker, the overseer’s brother and Mr. Foster in *Castle*:

‘Tis true,’ said Mr. Foster ‘men for one thing, women for a next.’ An’ ‘tis the fathers who got to get up an’ get,’ the shoemaker said, ‘nobody ain’t goin’ do it for us.’ He was very excited as the words spilled. ‘You have to think ‘bout the children,’ Bob’s father said. ‘They can’t grow up in they father shoes. What’s sauce for us isn’t sauce for them.’

‘That’s it,’ the shoemaker insisted. ‘Tis your children you got to think ‘bout. Don’t let them run wild like stray dogs as if they ain’t got no owners. They ain’t got no chance to go to high school an’ get the sort of job decent, respectable people gets, but you can give them something as good. A good trade and some facts ‘bout the world.’

‘Tis what I tell my boy,’ the overseer’s brother said; ‘I tell Trumper day in day out he gotta think ‘bout the future. Playin’ cricket morning, noon an’ night, and goin’ to the sea in the holidays for the whole God blessed day ain’t goin’ to make a man of him.’ (94)

One of the boys in *Castle* asserts: “Yuh father is a sort of watchman for the house” (37). 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” (37). 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” (38). 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?" (39). 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, postcoloniality 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 crewmembers 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. 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.

In the end, it is the Lady of the House, in *Natives of my Person* who delivers one of the most compelling lines of the novel: "We are the future they must learn" ("[Politics and Culture](#)" 345). Lamming later reflected: "The suggestion there is that men would really have to reorganize their emotions regarding women." ("[A Future They Must Learn: An Interview by George Kent](#)" 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. (88)

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 were 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. In this regard therefore, Lamming's gender politics seemed to be evolving in terms of what he attempts in *Natives of my Person* and *Season of Adventure*.

GEORGE LAMMING'S CRITICAL SOCIAL ENGAGEMENT IN THE CARIBBEAN

Whenever a complete and accurate intellectual history of the Caribbean is written, the name George Lamming has to appear at the very centre of the intersection of all the main intellectual and political currents of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. His significance is due not only to his writing, but to the kind of social engagement he has had in the Caribbean. His contact, associations, and friendship with other writers and intellectuals are critical not just for locating him in the collective memory of the region, but also for understanding some of the historiography of the Caribbean. Lamming, from time to time in various interviews and in his own reflections, has provided us with insights into the lives of fellow writers Edgar Mittelholzer, Frank Collymore, Andrew Salkey, Samuel Selvon, Nicolás Gullén, and the poet Martin Carter, among others. Along the way also, Lamming's relationships with C.L.R. James, Rex Nettleford and Walter Rodney

represent important bridges between the artist and the academic. These connective tissues are at the heart of his social engagement.

It was Frank Collymore who nurtured the creative imagination of Lamming at Combermere School, one of the leading high schools in Barbados. It is at Combermere that Collymore provided him with intellectual nurturing and in the process, perhaps even influencing him to pursue this life of the mind. It was in Frank Collymore's personal library and in his classes that the young Lamming became conscious of a world beyond his childhood area of Carrington Village. It is in Collymore's library that he first encounters the works of H. G. Well's *Outline of History*. It is here also that he discovers Joseph Conrad, Thomas Hardy and Jane Austen. "The gift that Collymore made to me, which has remained with me, was the gift of reading. I discovered that reading opened a world, a universe, to you" (Scott 83). As an adult, Lamming would visit Collymore's home, where there were more books and many people visiting the teacher and writer. For Lamming, Frank Collymore had created a world in that house" (Scott 84). Later, it was through Collymore's involvement with BIM, the literary magazine, and Lamming's efforts to recruit writers for the publication in Barbados and subsequently in Trinidad, that his own literary passions were further ignited.

Lamming's interests and admiration for his own cohort of writers is evident at a number of levels. He was earnest about his admiration of Edgar Mittelholzer in "But Alas Edgar." Theirs was no great friendship, as few people ever got that close to Mittelholzer; but Lamming admired him as a person who had fiercely guarded his individuality and one who had a sense of style. More important, what a young Lamming saw in Mittelholzer was a passionate commitment to his chosen vocation.

How I admired that man can only be grasped by those who know what it is to be summoned by the future to create a personal style of living. It was the sheer courage of Mittelholzer, the uncompromising nakedness of the man before the spiritual squalor, the atrocious lack of heart that characterised Port of Spain, that ordered me to the one essential duty that would be my life. ("An Afternoon with George Lamming")

On one occasion, in a personal conversation with the author, Lamming recounted the very low-keyed funeral ceremony for Egar Mittelholzer, which had so few people in attendance, and was so basic a ceremony, that the whole event ended before he and Andrew Salkey could get to the cemetery to pay their last respects. It was no accident that it would be Andrew Salkey who would accompany Lamming to Mittelholzer's funeral. Salkey and Lamming were close friends, but beyond that fact, it was the former, who kept in touch with all of the Caribbean writers in England. Lamming often spoke of how Salkey was the conduit of information about the other Caribbean writers' whereabouts in London. Salkey knew who had moved from one part of London to another, or who was engaged in what current professional activity. Andrew Salkey was an amiable man, whom Lamming praised for his nuanced approach to the sexual politics of the 1960s in his novel, *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*.

Samuel Selvon and Lamming were also very good friends, traveling to England together in 1950, and becoming much closer subsequent to their arrival. The two even shared Selvon's Imperial typewriter (Chamberlain 175).⁸ It was Selvon's friend, the man with his pulse on the whole of London, who met Lamming and him when they docked in the British harbour. Lamming and Selvon also renewed their friendship in the Caribbean when they toured the region and lectured at schools and to various social groups. Lamming once described Selvon as the least political of Caribbean writers, and the shyest about intellectual engagement, except in the company of friends. Perhaps in some contexts this may have been true, but Selvon's *Plains of Caroni* is a decidedly political novel, recalling the struggles of sugar cane workers in the south of Trinidad, who felt threatened by the introduction of technology—the cane harvester. The novel chronicles the workers' resistance to the perceived displacement of labour by technology. Samuel Selvon was arguably the finest Caribbean humourist, a point that is borne out through the character of the impecunious and inventive Caribbean migrant, Galahad, in *The Lonely Londoners*. Lamming notes

8 The Imperial typewriter was manufactured by the Imperial Typewriter Company, based in Leicester, England. The company went out of business in 1975.

however, that Galahad was not an entirely fictitious character, but an actual, living, Trinidadian, whom he [Lamming] met, and who complained bitterly about not being given any recognition in Selvon's work, and of not receiving any remuneration for what he felt was the narrative of his life recorded in *The Lonely Londoners*. It is not clear whether George Lamming ever addressed this topic about Galahad with his friend Selvon.

Lamming's relationship to the Guyanese poet Martin Carter—"the poems man," as he was once labelled—was also a significant relationship. The two writers met in 1955 when Lamming visited Guyana for the first time. They had forged a bond around their progressive and principled political positions. Lamming and Carter also collaborated in editing the Guyana Independence Issue for *New World Quarterly*. About Martin Carter George Lamming observed: "Carter has a stature in the collective consciousness of Guyana that is quite unique among writers in the English speaking Caribbean. I mean in Guyana the name Martin Carter had a resonance as something authentically Guyanese, as one of the Guyanese institutions, one of the institutions of which they are most proud" (*Conversation with Stewart Brown* 215). As *Rupert Roopnaraine* noted of Martin Carter: "No one spoke of him with anything but love and respect" (167). Lamming recognized the artistry in the poet, who was Martin Carter, but he also recognized the politics in his poetry, which bled into Carter's political activism.

In his essay on George Lamming's politics, Brian Meeks argues that Lamming perhaps had the greatest intellectual affinity with, the Guyanese historian, Walter Rodney, and for reasons similar to his admiration to that of C. L. R. James. Lamming's profound consciousness of the social, the preoccupation with the process of humanisation, the transformation of the landscape through labour, the passion for genuine democracy; are important themes in Lamming's body of work. He managed to pull them altogether 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 well-known text written by *Cheddi Jagan* [*The West on Trial*]—observed: "For Guyana had become a land of horrors. Democracy was no longer on trial here. The question was whether it would survive this official crucifixion" (*Rodney 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. It is arguable whether any other person could have made the statements George Lamming made in his eulogy for Walter Rodney. Andaiye, the Guyanese activist and member of Red Threat, the women's organisation, said that it was the first time in her life that she had ever seen a eulogy receive a standing ovation. Lamming understood his role in the circumstances and made a political decision to intervene, to become socially engaged, as he had done on so many other occasions in the Caribbean.

In Barranquilla, Colombia in 1997 at the Caribbean Studies Conference, George Lamming told the audience how in some ways it was Martin Carter who ensured a safe passage for him out of Guyana and back to Barbados, after delivering the eulogy at Walter Rodney's funeral. The eulogy was highly critical of the Forbes Burnham regime. Given Rodney's fate in 1980, there is no telling what could have happened to a meddling Barbadian writer who chose to be frank and honest on the home turf of a political autocrat. The next morning Carter took Lamming to several rum shops and introduced him to people therein, making sure that there was a record of his presence among the living, thus guaranteeing that he did not become part of the disappeared. If you understood 'the terror and the time,'⁹ then one would be able to appreciate that this was a supreme, political gesture of friendship, but also one of ensuring the survival of George Lamming.

It was not only the writers with whom Lamming had an organic link, but the academics, activists, and politicians as well. Not many would make the connection between George Lamming and Eric

9 *The Terror and the Time*, is a documentary, made in 1976, which chronicled the first general election in then British Guiana (now Guyana) in 1953. It was directed by *Rupert Roopnaraine*, and featured Martin Carter reading some of his poems which were, at the time, banned and confiscated.

Williams,¹⁰ but there was in fact a profound connection. “I got to Trinidad in ’46 and Williams arrived I think about 1948 for the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission and we used to meet as young people” (*Caribbean Reasonings: The George Lamming Reader* 193). Lamming elaborates: “He [Eric Williams] had asked me to speak and I spoke in Woodford Square on the night that he was introducing the candidates to the first election” (125). Lamming argues: “No other West Indian politician has exposed himself so consistently to the gravest of all political risks: the risk of refusing to talk down to an electorate” (“*The Legacy of Eric Williams*” 731). Lamming’s sensitivity to the people from below is also captured in his description of Williams as pedagogue of Woodford Square: “This was an example, probably the first of its kind in our part of the world, of the teacher, in the noblest sense of teacher, turned politician, and of the politician, in the truly moral sense of politician, turned teacher” (“*The Legacy of Eric Williams*” 731). Lamming in his own rumination admits that from 1948 when Eric Williams returned to Trinidad, “his influence on me and my generation was profound and enduring” (“*The Legacy of Eric Williams*” 732). Beyond this impact of Williams on Lamming, there is an even more compelling example of the former’s influence: “Remember Williams was the first person who introduced to me the names of Nicolás Guillén and Aimé Césaire. And he told me if you were going to be a writer, a writer of this region you will have to know the works of these two writers” (*Caribbean Reasonings: The George Lamming Reader* 193). In this context one may arrive at a deeper appreciation of the regional orientation and the historical sensitivity of George Lamming’s novels and his public lectures. The acknowledgement of Williams’ influence is therefore worthy of note: “It is the regional thrust and character of his mission as a historian and intellectual that put me forever in his debt. Every novel of mine carries some trace of his research” (“*The Legacy of Eric Williams*” 733).

Maurice Merleau-Ponty once noted: “There will always be two kinds of men, those who live through history and those who make it” (132). To this maxim, could be added, there will always be men and women, who are acutely conscious of the importance of history. George Lamming is one such person. In addition to Eric Williams, there was another Trinidadian intellectual and historian, who influenced him, but with whom he had a closer relationship, that was C. L. R. James, who was in fact Eric Williams’ teacher, in more ways than one. Lamming’s assessment of James is illuminating: “there was no British intellectual of the ‘thirties who had a finer mind than James” (*The Pleasures of Exile* 47). Lamming recalled a chance encounter with C. L. R. James on Charing Cross Road, in London (Scott 136). The friendship matured later, complete with extended dialogues on a range of topics from art, writing, philosophy and politics. He notes of James, that there was always this feeling about him, that he was in “the presence of a man, whatever his faults and limitations, who had chosen the life of the mind” (*The Pleasures of Exile* 164). It was this historical consciousness, that drew Lamming to the work of Williams and to a friendship with James. It is therefore no surprise that Lamming spent so much time in *Pleasures of Exile* talking about *Black Jacobins* and James’ history of the Haitian Revolution. He offers a huge homage to James when he concludes: “*Black Jacobins* should be Bible-reading for every boy [girl] who would be acquainted with the period in question” (*The Pleasures of Exile* 119). It was quite telling for example that it was George Lamming, who introduced C. L. R. James, the man who wrote the definitive book on West Indian cricket – *Beyond a Boundary* – to Frank Worrell, the first black captain of the team and one of the most respected, erudite, and successful West Indian cricketers.¹¹ Worrell and Lamming were classmates at Combermere in Barbados. Lamming recently reminded this author,¹² that both he and James were living close to Kensington Oval in London at the time, the year was 1950. He encouraged James to accompany him to see the West Indian cricket team practice. Everyone was interested in seeing Frank Worrell, he was one of the most outstanding batsmen, and all-round solid player. Lamming was not sure that Worrell would remember him, they had not maintained any contact since their school days. Lamming waved to Worrell as he completed his practice and

10 Premier Caribbean historian, former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, and Father of Independence of the twin-island republic.

11 It was largely through the agitation of C.L.R. James that the racial dominance of white cricket captains of the West Indies team was broken, to make Frank Worrell the first black captain.

12 Conversation with George Lamming at his home in Rendezvous Ridge, Christ Church, Barbados, November 27, 2018.

was coming off of the cricket field, heading to the pavilion. Worrell, returned the greeting, and came over to where George and James were standing. It was at this point that George Lamming introduced C.L.R. James to Frank Worrell. From this point, these two men quickly established a productive and historic relationship.¹³ This relationship between the writer, George Lamming, and the political philosopher and historian, C. L. R. James, and the game of cricket, extends even further.

Not only did Lamming connect James to a key figure of the game of cricket at the time, but he also played an important part in the history of the publication of the book, *Beyond a Boundary*—the classic socio-political text on Caribbean cricket. C. L. R. James, on completion of the manuscript, had given it to John Arlott, the doyen of cricket commentators from around the world. Arlott seemed unable to source a publisher for James's book. After some time James then turned to his friend George Lamming to see if he could assist in getting the manuscript published.

Lamming then proceeded to contact Robert Lusty (later Sir Robert Lusty), the journalist and publisher, who had moved to Hutchison, one of the oldest publishers in the United Kingdom. Hutchinson had recently published *In The Castle of My Skin*, hence Lamming was drawing on the currency he had already established with the publisher. It was therefore on the strength of Lamming's recommendation that *Beyond a Boundary* was eventually published. Lamming also recounted that he had suggested the title for the book, which was supposed to be *Beyond the Boundary*, but somewhere along the production process the definite article was changed.

But it [the title] was with a definite article not the indefinite. And I don't know at what point someone changed it. But it was incorrect because it should have been "the." Because if you said "a," you'd deconcretize what we're talking about. But if you say "the" and "beyond," you have both the concrete and the movement beyond the concrete.
(Scott 110)

Beyond a Boundary, the semi-autobiographical memoir on cricket, is regarded as important for its early deconstruction of race, class, and empire. Interestingly, upon the publication of the book, John Arlott, reviewing the publication for Wisden Almanac in 1963, described *Beyond a Boundary*, "as the finest book written about the game of cricket" (S. James). Nevertheless, Lamming had a final observation about the politics of the publication, he opined: "Now what to me was quite astonishing—I didn't go into it with him [James]—I found it very difficult to understand how a man in Arlott's position within the context of that world (I mean he was the leading cricket commentator and also in the public) how he had difficulty in persuading a publisher to take it. I have a problem with that" (Scott 110). This episode in the history of a particular publication points to the intellectual bond between James and Lamming, the respect and connection that the latter had already established in the literary world, and his willingness to intervene in the particular vocation of writing and the circulation of ideas.

There are of course other connections and engagements with academics, activists and writers in Lamming's social network. For example, he indicates an engagement with Rex Nettleford's writing, particularly his emphasis on culture, but also his contribution to dance and the arts. Lamming also had close personal relationship with Lloyd Best, the Trinidadian and Caribbean intellectual, economist, political commentator, advisor to regional governments, and editor. On the occasion of his passing, Lamming noted: "Lloyd and I shared a friendship which survived the sharpest of disagreements, but disagreement deepened my respect for his integrity" (Singh). Lamming went on to describe Best's contribution to the Caribbean: "For more than 40 years he put his formidable intellect in the service of one singular cause—*independent thought and Caribbean freedom*" (Singh). Lamming also talks about his familiarity with, and appreciation for, Sylvia Wynter's dance. He is also in praise of her early writing and insights, which were published in the *Jamaica Journal*. Along the way, Lamming is engaged in conversation and contact with Nancy Morejón and her poetry, as well as with her work in the promotion of the arts and the culture of the Caribbean through Casa de las Américas. Lamming had also been in solidarity with Andaiye's commitment to the political engagement, especially through the Working People's Alliance, and her relentless struggle for gender equality and social justice in Guyana. George Lamming also had a close

13 See C.L.R. James, *Beyond A Boundary* and "Frank Worrell Must Captain."

and ongoing relationship with the trade union movement in the Caribbean. There was a solid connection between Lamming and Sir Frank Walcott, the leader of the most powerful trade union in Barbados. His association with George Weeks of the Oilfield Workers' Trade Union of Trinidad was equally strong. For Lamming, it is precisely from the base of the rank and file members of the trade union that he would have invested much hope for social transformation. This connection would have been consistent with his politics about the people from below embodying the potential for liberation. Indeed, Chamberlain said it best: "In the cultural history of the region, there is a direct connection between labour and literature" (177).

Brian Meeks, in his essay notes, said that Lamming has been a fierce defender of the Cuban Revolution for many years, and became a strong supporter of the Grenadian Revolution, and close ally to Maurice Bishop (Meeks).

These then are some of the tentacles of engagement that expand throughout the Caribbean, and which place George Lamming at the centre of intellectual discourse in the region and gives him the force of authority to speak about the expressions of democracy from below. Indeed, it is reasonable to conclude that this network of relations among academics, activists, politicians, trade union members, writers, poets, artists and dancers, places George Lamming in a uniquely special category of persons, who operates at all levels of society.

George Lamming's vocation of writing is the lens through which he interprets the society in which he lives, the region of the Caribbean, and the world. It is also the modality which he uses to affect change, and to generate new, critical discourses in society. This is however, no mere effort to protect the word, but to engage the dialectic between the world of ideas, and the world of lived experiences. It is this relationship that explains, at least in part, his continuous engagement in social and political activism.

COMPETING INTERESTS

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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TO CITE THIS ARTICLE:

Lewis, L F. 2022 George Lamming: The Vocation of Writing and his Critical Social Engagement. *Anthurium*, 18(1): 2, 1–17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33596/anth.385>

Published: 23 May 2022

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