



UWI TODAY

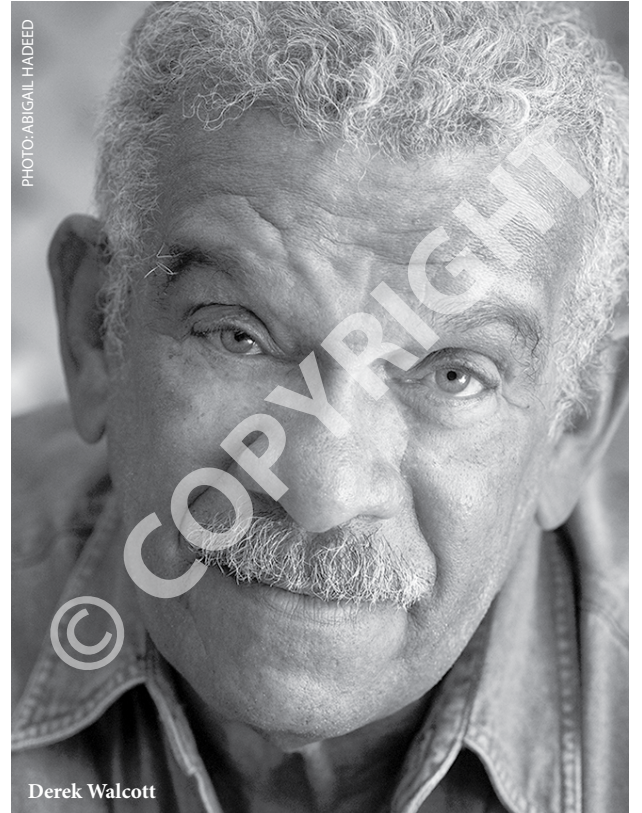
THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES · ST. AUGUSTINE CAMPUS

SUNDAY 27TH DECEMBER, 2009



Horses in the Meadow at Gros Islet, St. Lucia • Derek Walcott • Oil on board • Circa 2001

(COURTESY ANNA AND MARK HARDY, AND PHOTOGRAPHED BY MARLON ROUSE)



Derek Walcott

As part of its Caribbean Nobel Laureates celebrations, The UWI pays tribute to Derek Walcott with an academic conference titled *Interlocking Basins of a Globe*. Several aspects of the work of the 1992 Nobel Laureate will be discussed at the St Augustine Campus by various experts in January 2010.

The list of eminent international scholars who have confirmed their attendance includes such well-known names in Caribbean scholarship as Laurence Breiner, Paul Breslin, Kenneth Ramchand and Rhonda Cobham. The gathering will hear a keynote address delivered by Professor Emeritus Edward Baugh who, in 2007, edited Derek Walcott's *Selected Poems* and whose work on Walcott is legendary. Other featured speakers include Professor Emeritus Gordon Rohlehr and Dr Jean Antoine-Dunne whose work spans both literature and film.

Walcott, who was recently named professor of poetry at Essex University, will read from his work during the conference.

The Nobel Laureates series was conceived as a gift to the nation and thus the entire conference is free and open to the public. (See Page 5)

A Sense of Infinity

Interlocking Basins of a Globe celebrates Derek Walcott

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On Health and Happiness

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■ CAMPUS NEWS

PROJECT MANAGEMENT PRACTICES SEMINAR



Eng. Alvin Lutchman, Immediate Past Chairman of the IEEE Trinidad and Tobago Section, welcomed participants.

The Faculty of Engineering of The UWI hosted the fourth public seminar on 'Project Management Practices in the Caribbean' on November 21, 2009.

The Seminar sought to facilitate the region-wide awareness of research and development in Quality and Innovation Management Practices. In the two sessions, the following topics were discussed: "Electronic Government - Management and Applications," "Implementation of a Work-Out program using the General Electric approach," "The Health Care Professional and Project Management," and "Project Management for e-Learning in Trinidad."

It was organised in collaboration with the Technology Management Council (TMC) and Education Society (EdS) Chapters of the IEEE Trinidad and Tobago Section, The

Association of Professional Engineers of Trinidad and Tobago (APETT), and The Project Management Institute Southern Caribbean Chapter (PMISCC).

The Seminar was facilitated by **Professor Kit Fai Pun** of the Faculty of Engineering, UWI. Eng. **Alvin Lutchman**, the Immediate Past Chairman of the IEEE Trinidad and Tobago Section, welcomed participants.

The four invited speakers, **Ms Tracey N. Edwards** from The Ministry of Planning, Housing & The Environment, **Mr Andre Persad** of Svitzer Marine (Trinidad and Tobago) Ltd., **Dr Celia M. Poon King** of the Faculty of Medical Sciences, and **Dr Ruel L.A. Ellis** of the Faculty of Engineering, UWI, shared their experience on project management practices in the Caribbean context.



Professor Kit Fai Pun of the Faculty of Engineering presented an appreciation plaque to a guest speaker, Dr. Celia M. Poon King, at the seminar.

FROM THE PRINCIPAL

RAISING THE RESEARCH BAR



As moderator of a panel discussing current challenges for economic growth at the Business Forum that was part of last month's Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), I took the opportunity to emphasize the importance of developing knowledge-based economies.

Knowledge has taken on a more central role in modern approaches to economic development. Large payoffs from new knowledge, especially where there is patent protection, encourage entrepreneurs, industries and government agencies to invest in research and innovation, with intellectual leadership and technical support from universities and research centres.

Knowledge as a product is premised on an economic theory of abundance, rather than scarcity, as is the case with natural resources that can become depleted over time. In fact, information, knowledge, innovation and technology can be shared exponentially and further developed and grown through awareness and application. The concept of location can either be dispersed by using technology or reinforced with a deliberate strategy to intensify the concentration of knowledge via the creation of research centres, science and technology parks and business clusters.

My CHOGM message, while addressing the issues of knowledge, research and innovation at the macro level, was reinforced by my own commitment as Campus Principal, to advancing the research and innovation imperative for the St. Augustine Campus. With research and innovation as one of the core strategic areas in the 2007-2012 Strategic Plan of The University of the West Indies, we have begun reviewing our approach as we move towards increasing the relevance, impact and recognition of the work we do at all levels.

Clustering our research into a few, targeted multi-disciplinary areas will allow us to focus our expertise and resources in a concerted manner, and serve as an incubator for new ideas and knowledge that support policy formulation, innovation systems and development at all levels.

As a regional university, we are well positioned to lead in this area and will continue to enhance our research agenda, strengthen our research networks, and actively pursue research grants, which together will support vigorous research and scholarly activity, the cross fertilization of ideas and the development of innovation systems that are central to knowledge-based economies.

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Pro Vice Chancellor & Principal

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UWI Development & Endowment Fund

BY VICTOR COWAN, SECRETARY
UWI DEVELOPMENT AND ENDOWMENT FUND

The **Trinidad & Tobago Fund** was launched in April 1989 with its primary objective being the establishment of a Development & Endowment Fund which would enable the University to provide scholarships at the undergraduate and post graduate levels, to alleviate the financial hardship of deserving students and to facilitate student interchange between the campuses.

The Fund was also designed to help research in selected areas, to facilitate the endowment of Chairs and Lectureship in key disciplines, and to financially support capital projects.

Managed by a committee comprising a chairman and members representing business, the UWI Alumni and The University, the Fund has sought and obtained financial support from corporate Trinidad and Tobago, professional associations and through committee projects. That combination of resources has elevated the Fund to the position of major contributor of financial assistance to students on an annual basis.

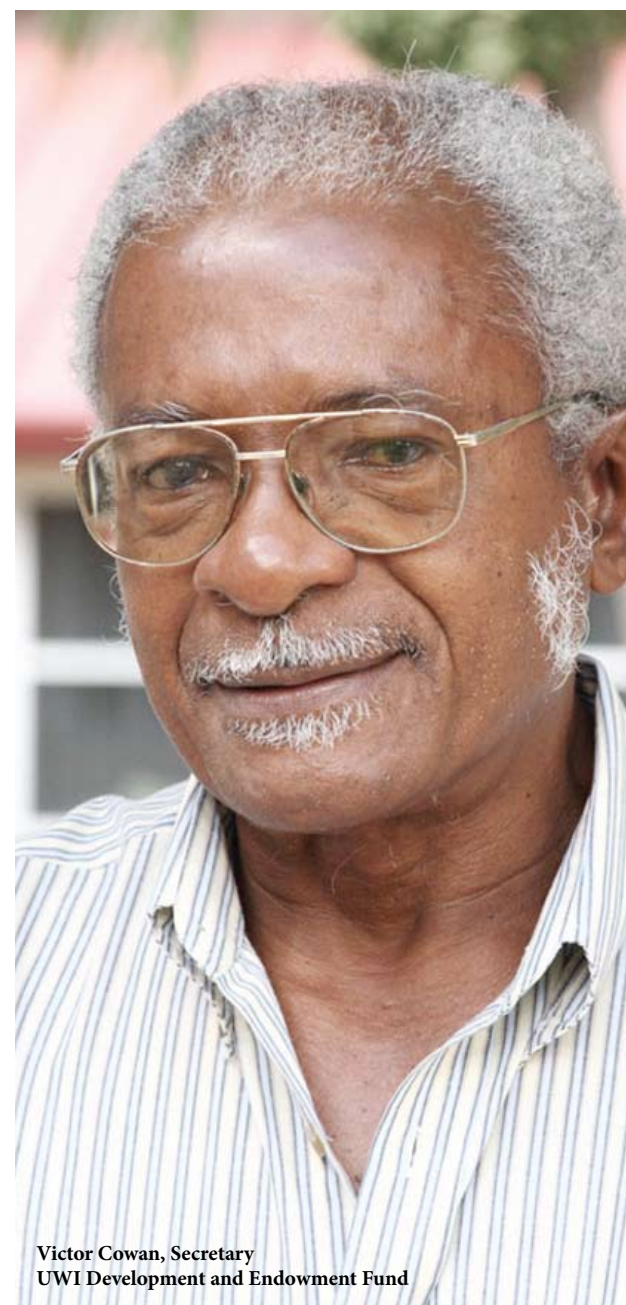
“The Fund was also designed to help research in selected areas, to facilitate the endowment of Chairs and Lectureship in key disciplines, and to financially support capital projects.”

Whereas donors identify their disciplines of choice for their scholarships and bursaries, students from all faculties are eligible for bursaries offered by the Fund and they recognise academic achievement as well as financial need. These bursaries complement the Government’s payment of fees and assist in accommodation, academic material, food and travel expenses.

When one compares the 15 bursaries offered in 1992 with the quantum leap to 160 currently on offer, it is clear that nineteen years of the UWI Fete and the five renewals of the UWI Golf Challenge have been very successful fund-raising vehicles. In addition, prudent management of funds under investment provides the assurance of sustainable funding as is to be expected from an endowment fund.

Though our main focus has been the provision of bursaries, we also take pride in having provided the seed money for the construction of the highly utilized UWI SPEC building and securing project funding for the Department of Chemistry as well as the School of Education.

What is in it for us? The Chairman and members give generously of their time and resources and derive satisfaction from the success of our initiatives but, occasionally, polite thanks from a grateful student or parent go to another plane. On one occasion, a student who had been awarded a bursary sent hand written “Thank You” cards to the entire Board. It was a poignant moment for us all.



Victor Cowan, Secretary
UWI Development and Endowment Fund



Prof Dawn M. Wesson

■ CORRECTION

In a feature carried in the **March 2009** issue of **UWI Today**, it was inaccurately stated that **Dr David Chadee** Senior Lecturer in the Department of Life Sciences, of The University of the West Indies, was the recipient of a TT\$1.5 million grant from the **Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation** for research in mosquito management. The grant from the Gates Foundation was not awarded to **Dr. David Chadee** but was, in fact, awarded to **Professor Dawn Wesson, Department of Tropical Medicine, School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine**, while **Dr David Chadee** was a sub-contractor of the project. We apologise for the error.



Interlocking Basins of a Globe

BY DR JEAN ANTOINE-DUNNE



At the gate, Petit Valley, Trinidad • Derek Walcott • Watercolour • Circa 1981 (courtesy Margaret Walcott)

Derek Walcott, Poet Laureate, essayist, dramatist, painter, journalist and filmmaker will be the focus of a celebratory academic conference in his honour from 12th to 15th January at The University of the West Indies, St Augustine. The academic conference entitled “Interlocking Basins of a Globe” has been scheduled to dovetail with St Lucia’s Nobel Laureate Week held every year during the week of the birthdays of Walcott and Arthur Lewis.

On January 23, Walcott marks his eightieth birthday, and the conference includes elements of the many facets of his work, including his pioneering contribution to

Caribbean drama. Professor Bridget Brereton will chair a special panel comprising long-standing members of the Trinidad Theatre Workshop, which he founded in 1959.

The list of eminent international scholars who have confirmed their attendance includes such well-known names in Caribbean scholarship as Laurence Breiner, Paul Breslin, Kenneth Ramchand and Rhonda Cobham.

The gathering will hear a keynote address delivered by Professor Emeritus Edward Baugh who, in 2007, edited Derek Walcott’s *Selected Poems* and whose work on Walcott is legendary. Other featured speakers include Professor

Emeritus Gordon Rohlehr and Dr Jean Antoine-Dunne whose work spans both literature and film.

Panellists will discuss topics such as “Walcott’s Ghosts and Confrères” and “History as Muse” and Walcott’s contribution to Caribbean intellectual thought. The dramatic works as well as the often-quoted Nobel speech, *The Antilles*, will be further illuminated through a repeat performance of the Department of Creative and Festival Arts’ production “Fragments” and there will be a special Secondary schools event on Friday 15th.



One of the unique inclusions in the multi pronged programme is a mini film festival of Walcott’s own films. *The Haytian Earth* made for television and produced by Timmy Mora and *The Rig* directed by Walcott and filmed by Christopher Laird as well as Yao Ramesar’s film, *The Saddhu of Couva*, which is narrated and directed by Walcott, will all be screened. These are works that are rarely shown and they should certainly give an added dimension to the proceedings.

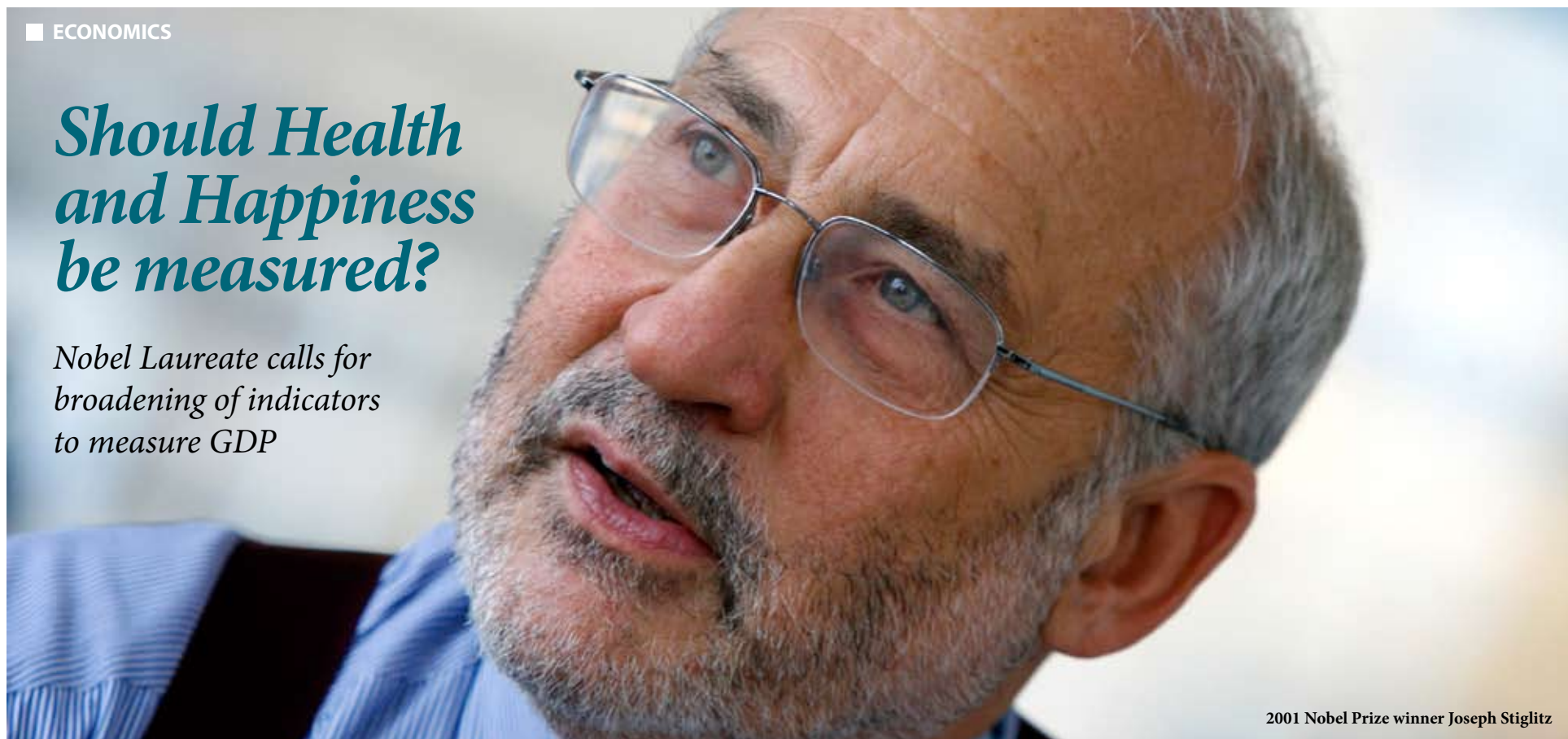
Walcott who now spends much of his time travelling through Europe and the Americas when not in St Lucia or Trinidad will be present. These journeys form the subject of his latest major poem, *The Prodigal* (2004), a work that also mourns the death of Walcott’s twin brother, Roddy. The movement between here and elsewhere is also one of the themes of the visually magnificent book *Tiepolo’s Hound* which celebrates the life and work of another Caribbean artist, Camille Pissarro, whose voluntary exile to Paris influenced the French Impressionist movement.

Walcott will read from his work during the conference.

ECONOMICS

Should Health and Happiness be measured?

Nobel Laureate calls for broadening of indicators to measure GDP



2001 Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz

BY ANNA WALCOTT-HARDY

Almost two weeks before world leaders converged on Copenhagen for the Climate Change Summit, 2001 Nobel Prize winner Joseph Stiglitz, spoke of the importance of broadening the indicators used to measure the growth and development of a country.

Throughout the Distinguished Open Lecture held at The UWI St Augustine Campus in November, the Columbia University Professor underscored the need for more efficient, transparent indicators, including measures of environmental and resource depletion, to reflect the well-being of a society.

A self-described “theorist”, the former World Bank Senior Vice President, held the attention of the audience in the standing-room-only Daaga Auditorium for over an hour; without power point slides, charts, or even a video clip.

Focusing on ‘Economic Performance and Social Well-Being’, Stiglitz underscored the constraints of using traditional statistical tools that focus on an average, in terms of income and production, but do not reflect “typical experiences and what people care about.”

He argued that national leadership had a responsibility to identify the key indices of economic activity, in keeping with the overall concerns of the population. In resource-rich countries like the USA and Trinidad and Tobago, where the natural resources are being depleted, he stressed that there was a need for a more comprehensive assessment of development.

“The measure...becoming poorer, should reflect that resource depletion and environmental degradation...It’s very important that the stats that we gather reflect what people care about.”

He gave a particularly striking example of the Gold Mining Industry in Papua New Guinea, where industry development led to a spike in the GDP and profits for foreign investors but negatively affected the population, with the pollution of the environment, including rivers, and the loss of income for locals, with a heavy impact on the fishing industry.

“If you don’t have good stats, it’s like driving blind: you don’t know where you’re going...If your stats don’t provide an accurate description of what’s going on, you can make some bad decisions.”

In his relaxed, conversational style, he made the topic of economics and accounting, not only interesting, but relevant. From Keynes to Bernanke, Reaganomics to the global economic crisis, his witty anecdotes distilled hard core theories into real-world situations that connected with the audience.

It seems that his views had connected with French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who appointed Stiglitz to head a Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress to look into the production of more relevant indicators of social progress. The Commission is chaired by Joseph Stiglitz and advised by Amartya Sen.

The Nobel Laureate may be lauded as being prophetic, for as far back as the 1990s, and even earlier, he predicted the rather rapid decline of the US economy. He reported that although many of the statistics may not have reflected this, more Americans were worse off in 2008 than in 2002—the rich were getting richer and the gap between middle and wealthy widening. Over time, accounting procedures were weakened, combined with poor risk management by financial institutions and more money being invested in a housing “bubble” than in healthcare, education and the environment.

In ‘Dealing with Debt: How to reform the Global Financial System’, an article published in the Harvard International Review (Volume 25, 2003) his call for reform was on target.

“Something is wrong with the global financial system. One might think the system would shift money from rich countries, where capital is in abundance, to those where it is scarce, while transferring risk from poor countries to rich ones, which are most able to bear it. A well-functioning global financial system would provide money to countries in their times of need, thereby contributing to global economic stability. Through an orderly bankruptcy procedure, a well-functioning global financial system would grant a fresh start to those who cannot meet their debt obligations, giving creditors an incentive to pursue good lending practices, while ensuring that borrowers able to repay loans do so. The current global financial system does none of these things.”

Having received his PhD from MIT in 1967 and having taught at MIT, Stanford, Yale and Oxford, then being awarded the Nobel for his work on the analyses of

markets with asymmetric information, his understanding of the global markets is not surprising. For Stiglitz the question was not whether the crisis would occur, but when and where.

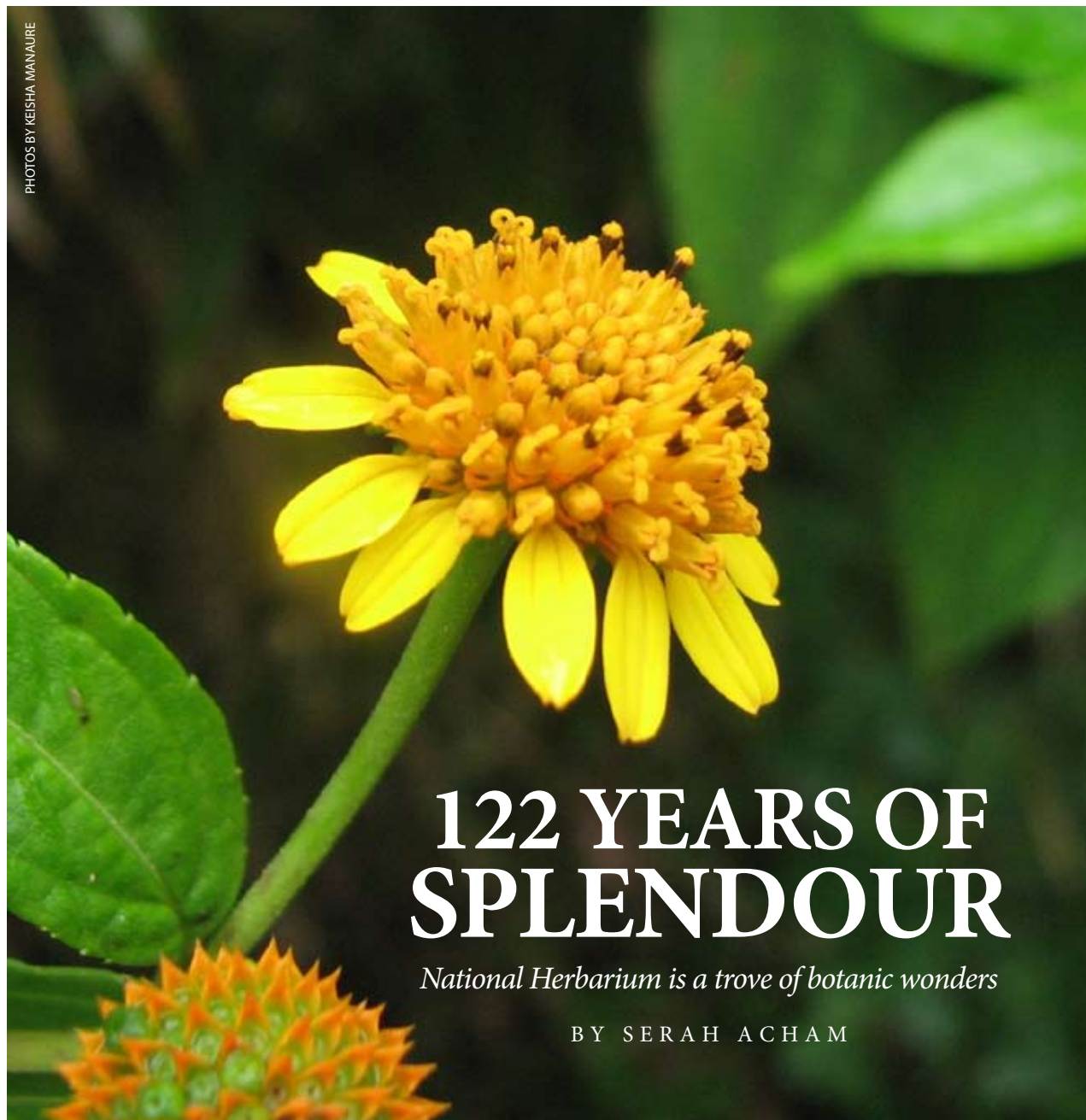
“Observers in the early 1990s, however, lauded the huge flows of private capital—at one point exceeding US\$300 billion—from developed to developing countries, heralding a new era in which the private sector would supplant the need for public assistance. But this was a hollow boast. Even then, it was clear that most of the money went to a few countries, most notably China, and virtually none to the countries that needed it most, such as those in sub-Saharan Africa. Nor was the money spent in desperately needed sectors like healthcare, education, and the environment. Developing countries could attract firms to extract their natural wealth—provided they gave it away cheaply enough. There was far less success in attracting investments that would create new jobs. Worse still, much of the money was speculative—hot money—coming in while the going was good, but fleeing the moment matters looked less rosy.”

A storyteller at heart, during the UWI lecture, Stiglitz turned to a somewhat politically incorrect scenario to underscore the point of the limitations of GDP. Two scenarios: the first is the story of a couple that stays at home, cooks dinner using crops from their very own vegetable garden and enjoys a quiet evening; high contentment or happiness factor, but low GDP levels. The second scenario is of a professional who eats dinner at a fancy restaurant etc., goes in search of (ahem) entertainment, then returns to another venue to enjoy a few drinks, has a car accident while driving home and ends up in the hospital; high GDP, but surely a much lower happiness factor and definitely lower on the scale of social well-being.

Stiglitz, who was key in the development of the 1995 Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, cited the UNDP’s Human Development Index (HDI) as one alternative to the GDP. He pointed out, “If you care about education and health, then the GDP doesn’t accurately measure what you care about.”

However, the question many ask is: how do we measure our happiness? This Stiglitz touched on briefly during the dynamic open forum hosted by Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Dr Hamid Ghany. But that’s another story.

HERITAGE



PHOTOS BY KEISHA MANAURE

122 YEARS OF SPLENDOUR

National Herbarium is a trove of botanic wonders

BY SERAH ACHAM

One Friday at the end of November, seven students stood at the head of a conference room and gave presentations on their work, marking the conclusion of their three-month internship with the National Herbarium of Trinidad and Tobago. This was the Herbarium's first attempt at hosting an internship and just one of its accomplishments this year.

Housed at The UWI's St Augustine Campus grounds since 1947 (even before the inception of The UWI), the Herbarium is, today, one of the University's treasures.

The Herbarium has its beginnings in the establishment of the Royal Botanic Gardens in 1818. Whoever held the post of Superintendent of the Royal Botanic Gardens collected specimens from the flora and put them into storage, but no one organized their collection so that it could be used. In 1887, John H. Hart became the fifth Superintendent and noticed his predecessors' collections "tied up in brown paper parcels, put into out-houses, bed-rooms, closets, with no arrangement, or catalogue to guide anyone as to their contents. As a result 90% of the specimens were destroyed by insects."

HERBARIUM

A herbarium is a collection of dried plant specimens mounted on sheets of acid free archival paper, labelled with the botanical name of the plant and other relevant information about it and filed systematically.

(Mrs. Baksh-Comeau, Curator National Herbarium of Trinidad and Tobago)

Outraged, he proceeded to preserve, poison, mount and catalogue the salvaged specimens, some from as early as 1844, in an Accession Book, which continues to be used by the Herbarium today. The specimens were then stored in specially designed cabinets. This led to the formal establishment of the Herbarium in October 1887—122 years ago.

Originally it was held at St. Clair, in the offices of the Department of Agriculture, where it provided botanical information to the nearby Royal Botanic Gardens, the Department of Agriculture and the Forestry Department. The Herbarium's clientele expanded with the institution of the Imperial College of Tropical Agriculture (ICTA) in 1924, when its collections were used by Professor of Botany, E.E. Cheesman, and his associates, W.G. Freeman and R.O. Williams of the Department of Agriculture, to compile a book, *Flora of Trinidad and Tobago*, published in 1928.

In July 1947, to facilitate expanding botanical research and publication, the Herbarium was transferred to ICTA in St. Augustine. The collections were held in the Plant Pathology Department until 1953, when the Herbarium was moved to its own purpose-built room in the newly constructed Sir Frank Stockdale building, where it still resides to this day.

In 1960, the University College of the West Indies took over the St. Augustine Campus and ICTA was incorporated as the Faculty of Agriculture. The task of managing and financing the Herbarium was allotted to the Department of Botany and Plant Pathology, headed by Professor of Botany, J.W. Purseglove, until 1967. During that time Professor Purseglove assigned members of his staff the duty of collecting plant specimens and maintaining the Herbarium's

collection. His staff also aided in producing several volumes of the *Flora of Trinidad and Tobago*.

Yet, the emergence of The UWI and the Faculty of Agriculture brought a change in focus, away from botany. Flora studies were discontinued and the value of the Herbarium declined. At that time, running the herbarium with no specific budget also proved to be an expense too hefty for the Department to continue. As a result, then Head of Department, F.W. Cope, proposed a financial takeover of the Herbarium by the government. In 1973, the Herbarium was declared a national asset and the collection was designated the "National Herbarium of Trinidad and Tobago" in an agreement with the Ministry of Planning and Development, where the Ministry would finance the National Herbarium indefinitely, while the University would administer the funds through the Bursary.

In 1976, Dr. Charles Dennis Adams joined The UWI Department of Botany and Plant Pathology as an ecologist and taxonomist. He successfully attempted to revive plant research in Trinidad and Tobago by employing a Graduate Curator for the Herbarium. In 1980 this post was approved by then Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture, Professor John Spence, and Yasmin S. Baksh was appointed to the post. This was the first and only time that the position has been filled as, 29 years later, the now Mrs. Yasmin S. Baksh-Comeau still holds her position as the Curator of the National Herbarium of Trinidad and Tobago.

More than a century later, what began as a register for local flora has expanded to include other regional plants. The National Herbarium also provides botanical information to scholars. Since 1980, the Herbarium has hosted around 15,000 new visitors and has answered requests for information about plants, plant identification and field assistance. Its staff has identified over 20,000 plant specimens and added 20,000 new accessions to the same Accession book begun in 1887 by the Herbarium's founder, John H. Hart. There are now over 70,000 specimens in the Herbarium's collection.





The Accession book began in 1887

Over the past 28 years, the Herbarium has served The UWI directly, by becoming a major resource for four PhDs and six Master's in Philosophy theses, with emphasis on Systematics, Ecology and Conservation of the flora in Trinidad and Tobago.

The National Herbarium has worked with globally recognised institutions, including the Royal Ontario Museum in Canada, with which it undertook a study of the vegetation history of Lever Pond, Lake Antoine and Grand Etang in Grenada. It has also held workshops and training sessions on plant identification, funded by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture (IICA), the Commonwealth Science Council (CSC) and the Organization of American States (OAS).

The Herbarium also benefits from exchanging and loaning specimens to Universities and herbaria abroad for

scholarly studies since these institutions, in turn, update specimen data and record it in any resulting publication. Thus, plant specimens from Trinidad and Tobago are spread all over the world, from Sweden and Germany, to The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew in England and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington D.C. The Herbarium is then provided with a copy of the publication for its library. It also receives scholarly books in exchange for specimens. Selections from the *Flora Neotropica* series were obtained from the New York Botanical Gardens. Books and periodicals have also been donated to the National Herbarium from the Smithsonian Institution, the Fairchild Tropical Garden in Florida and Michigan University.

Within the past five years, the National Herbarium's facilities have undergone a major renovation and expansion and its number of staff has increased. It has also taken on the task of digitising its entire collection. To date, between 20,000 and 23,000 specimens have been digitised.

In September 2005, the herbarium embarked on the Oxford/UWI Darwin Project with the University of Oxford in England. This project was funded £265,000 by the UK Darwin Initiative and endeavoured, according to a press release by the University of Oxford, to "create a detailed vegetation map of the islands and link the plant collections of Oxford and The UWI for the first time online." The National Herbarium's online plant database will also be linked to other collections around the world.

A small team, led by Mrs. Baksh-Comeau and including Oxford professors Dr. Nick Brown, Ecologist, Dr. Stephen Harris, Taxonomist, and Dr. William Hawthorne, Conservation and Forest Ecologist, made its way to Tobago where it began a national inventory of the flora on both islands. This project, aiming to develop a Biodiversity Monitoring System for Trinidad and Tobago, proved to be "a very comprehensive and extensive survey," Mrs. Baksh-Comeau said. Approximately 247 plots were explored and, though the team expected to uncover an estimated 10,000 new specimens, their search gave rise to 25,000 specimens between 2005 and 2008. The specimens were then taken to the herbarium, where 90 per cent of the species were identified, data-based and stored as voucher specimens.

Mrs. Baksh-Comeau said the Oxford/UWI Darwin Project opened up new areas for research, "particularly in the area of conservation of threatened and endangered species in our flora." She hopes to collaborate further with the University of Oxford, "to extend the project to the small island states in the Caribbean," she said.

In September of this year, an internship was established with the University of the Southern Caribbean and eight students set out on a three-month long journey with the National Herbarium. Their task was to mount 250 specimens each and within the first two months, each person had over 100 specimens mounted, with one person having already crossed the 250 benchmark. By the end of the internship, over 1600 specimens had been mounted.

On that Friday, as the interns gave their final presentations at the Herbarium in front of a small audience including Head of the Department of Life Sciences and Agriculture, Professor John Agard it was clear how much they had gained. Mrs. Baksh-Comeau said that she particularly noticed the vast improvement in their technical skills, transformed from "all thumbs, to all manipulative fingers."

"As a pioneering exercise, (the internship) was a success," she said. "It was very worth the adventure and risk that we took."

Now that some of its major endeavours have finished,

■ WATER COLOUR PAINTINGS

The National Herbarium of Trinidad and Tobago has also served as a repository for private collections. Among these, is a collection of 147 water-colour paintings of local wild flowers done by Major G.D. Gregson, which was donated to the Herbarium by his family in 1955.

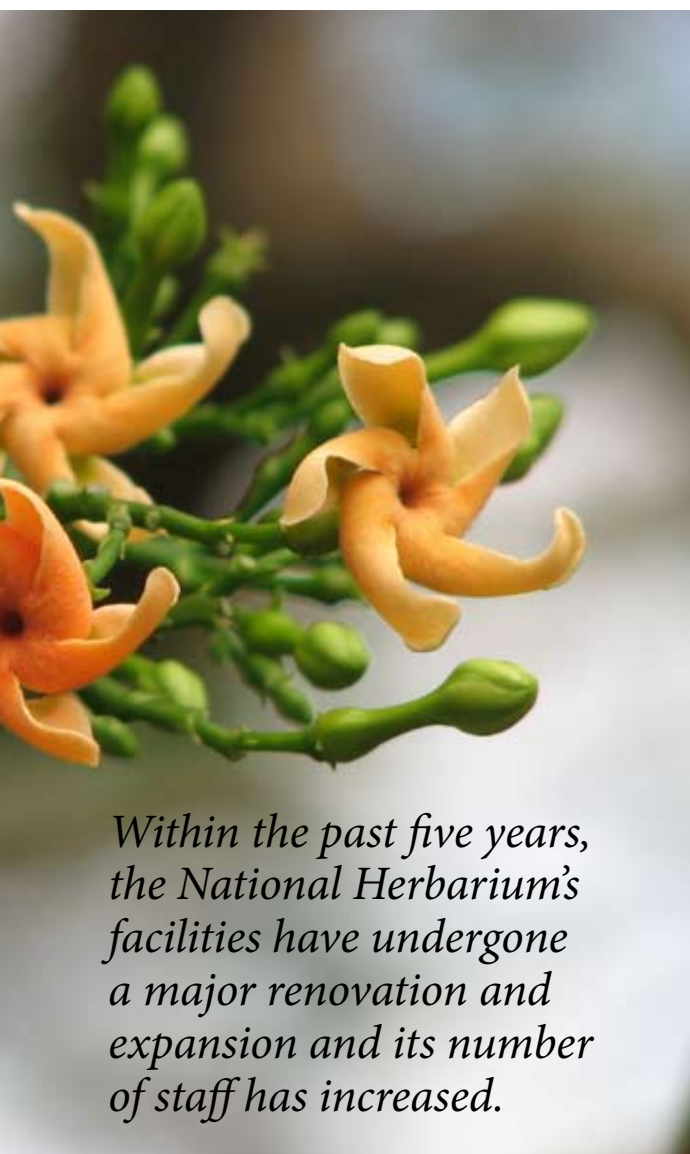
■ THE COLLECTION

For convenience the collection is divided into 4 groups. These are:

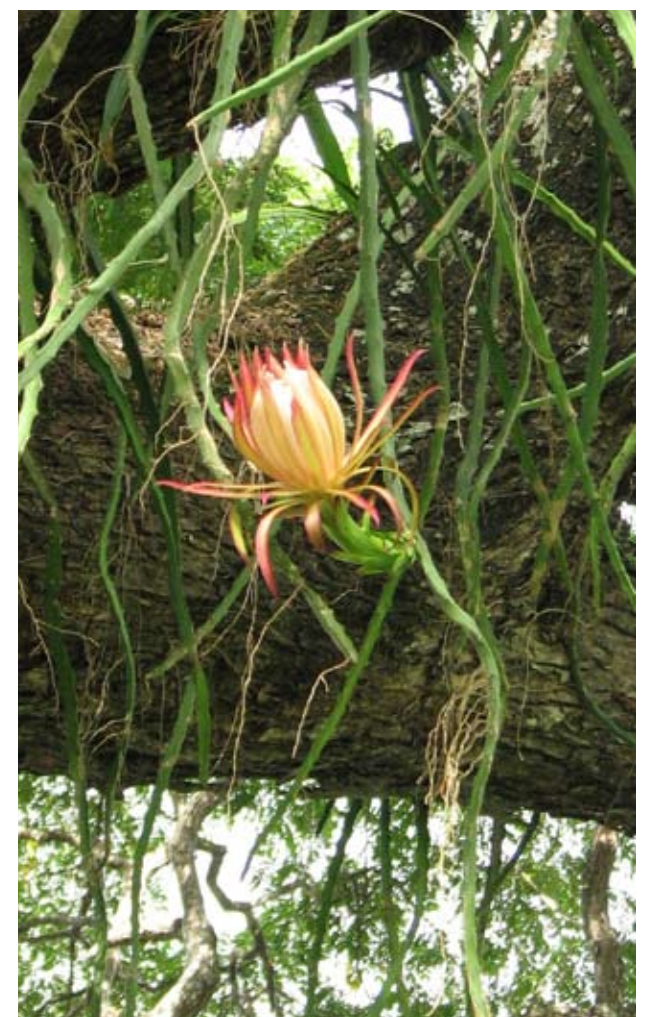
- The native flora, with samples from the major plant divisions -
 - Thallophyta (algae and fungi)
 - Bryophyta (liverworts and mosses)
 - Pteridophyta (ferns and fern allies)
 - Spermatophyta (gymnosperms and angiosperms)
- The plants introduced into the country as ornamentals or for cultivation, or by chance.
- The West Indian collection, which includes samples from Belize, Guyana and Suriname, as well as the islands of the Eastern Caribbean, most of which were acquired by exchange.
- The special collection of Theobroma and Herrania species, inherited from the Anglo-Columbian Cocoa Collecting Expedition of 1952-53 to the tributaries of the Amazon and Magdalena rivers in the Andes by staff from the ICTA Cocoa Research Scheme. This is the only collection of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere, and will be useful in relation to the cacao germplasm collection held at St. Augustine.

(National Herbarium of Trinidad and Tobago website: <http://sta.uwi.edu/herbarium/collect.asp>)

new adventures beckon. A study on lichen biodiversity in Trinidad has already begun and Mrs. Baksh-Comeau has her own list of plans. She remains hopeful about moving the facilities into a new purpose-built building and would like to see it upgraded to the status of a regional herbarium, particularly to benefit the SIDS (small island developing states) in the Caribbean. Also on her list is the development of a virtual field herbarium, the expansion of the reference collection and, in the near future, DNA barcoding of specimens for quick identification.



Within the past five years, the National Herbarium's facilities have undergone a major renovation and expansion and its number of staff has increased.



■ RESEARCH



Joining the BIOTECHNOLOGY RACE

The UWI is organising the first capacity building workshop on ‘Bioinformatics’ in collaboration with ICGEB in January, 2010.

The biotechnology revolution provides the opportunity to develop our strengths, conquer our weaknesses and grasp numerous opportunities. Genetics Professor Pathmanathan Umaharan asks: Are we up to the challenge?

Biotechnology is the use of biological organisms or biomolecular processes towards developing products and processes of scientific and/or commercial value. Interpreted in this broad sense, the definition covers a range of different technologies such as genomics, proteomics, genetic and protein engineering, genetic modifications, DNA typing, cloning of plants and animals, biopesticides, biofertilizers as well as fermentation technologies.

Biotechnology is regarded as one of the dominant general purpose technologies of the 21st century, just like printing and the steam engine were considered the general purpose technologies of the 19th century and the computer technology the general purpose technology of the 20th century. Biotechnology therefore represents a revolution with unprecedented ramifications for mankind. Biotechnology is already influencing every sphere of human activity - agriculture, human and animal health, conservation and environmental remediation, industrial applications and forensics. It is envisaged that biotechnology will yield an endless parade of products that can enhance existing industries or spawn new ones.

Simply put, there are two aspects to the biotechnology revolution. The first is the use of biotechnological applications to achieve competitiveness of existing strategic industries in a sustainable manner. The second is the creation of new knowledge industries through innovation and knowledge manipulation, which has to go hand in hand with intellectual property protection and licensing systems. This will be the higher end of the biotechnology revolution and many countries are diverting their resources into genomics and proteomics.

In small countries such as ours where resources are scarce, developing existing resources into marketable knowledge products is important. Costa Rica, for instance, has linked its biodiversity conservation efforts with biotechnology strategy so that biotechnology can be used to exploit the benefits of biodiversity and create wealth for the country. The biotechnology policy of Kenya outlines bio-resource development through indigenous bio-prospecting as an important strategy for development. Brazil has the strongest bio-resource development programme in the Latin America and Caribbean region, where the biological resources are being systematically screened for chemicals and genes. Genomics is also vigorously being pursued in strategically important areas. Many of these products are licensed to pharmaceutical, agricultural or other manufacturing companies for commercialization.

Trinidad and Tobago falls within an extremely biodiversity rich region. It is critical therefore that our resources are commercially exploited. Developing novel varieties using our biodiversity may provide an opportunity

to supply planting material throughout the tropical region, similar to the efforts of Thailand and Taiwan in orchids. Due to the multiethnic origin of the population in Trinidad and Tobago, there is an immense wealth of indigenous knowledge of plants and their medicinal uses. Developing the capacity to isolate the chemicals and genes from indigenous organisms (plants, animals and microbes) as well as to scientifically screen derived products for various pharmaceutical activities utilizing our traditional knowledge is one way of capitalizing on our strengths. We can develop new products and processes that can be patented and marketed. Knowledge development in strategic areas can lead to providing services to the entire region. Furthermore, developing the capacity to identify tropical pathogens in plants and animals or the diversity among tropical species using biotechnological approaches can lead to a testing service for the tropical region.

In an increasingly globalised economy, competitiveness is vital. Furthermore, in small island states like ours, the ecosystems are extremely vulnerable and hence development goals should be pursued in a sustainable manner, without compromising the resources for future generations. Biotechnology enables possibilities to achieve competitiveness in a sustainable manner in any sphere of human endeavour. It is critical that we develop strategic areas for development and pursue them vigorously—be it in agriculture and horticulture or in the manufacturing sector.

Developing a biotechnology industry requires the involvement of the state, the private sector, universities

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For biotechnology to flourish, a critical mass of scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs, capable of moving the country forward, should not only be trained, but also be provided space to work in a collaborative environment.

and research institutions and financial systems. Trinidad and Tobago is one of the region's forerunners in developing intellectual property legislation to facilitate innovation and creativity. Further, the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus and the University of Trinidad and Tobago have multidisciplinary research staff trained in a range of technologies. Yet, while these strengths exist, there is no science and technology policy that can provide focus and resources in strategic areas of research and development. Such a policy—through an appropriate resource provision mechanism—can bring the necessary players from the stakeholders together. A science and technology policy should be coupled with a biotechnology policy so that strategic development of industrial applications of biotechnology will be pursued through appropriate programmes and projects. At present the Caribbean is developing a biotechnology and biosafety policy and it is imperative that our local policy dovetails into the regional policy so that the region can function as a harmonised economic space. A Cabinet-appointed committee has also developed a draft biosafety policy, which is at present before the cabinet. A safe biotechnology environment is important to foster the growth of biotechnology and is a step in the right direction.

Present development models require that the private sector work alongside the University/research institutes in

industrial parks so that there is a close direct link between research and development. Such ventures require venture capital sources. The right tax environment should be created for the private sector and venture capitalists to become partners in biotechnology efforts.

The single most important weakness for biotechnology is in the area of human capacity development. For biotechnology to flourish, a critical mass of scientists, engineers and entrepreneurs, capable of moving the country forward, should not only be trained, but also be provided space to work in a collaborative environment. The technological gap between the developed world and the developing world has been identified as the single most constraint to biotechnology development, and is continuing to widen, as new biotechniques are developed at an enormous rate.

The United Nations Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO), recognizing the weakness of developing countries in this area established two international centres for genetic engineering and biotechnology (ICGEB) with the objective of transferring technologies to member countries. Trinidad and Tobago being the only member country in the CARICOM, is well poised to benefit from these programmes. The UWI is organising the first capacity building workshop on 'Bioinformatics' in collaboration with ICGEB in January, 2010. Many biodiversity-rich developing

countries have established bilateral collaborative efforts with developed countries to allow access to biodiversity in exchange for technology. Building a biodiversity centre and documentation system is important to create interest and facilitate negotiation. This can lead to a number of collaborative development projects. Other countries, recognizing the weakness of systems locally, have established collaborative institutes in the US, where local researchers work with their counterparts in the US, towards developing local products and processes, which will benefit the local economy. These are some of the alternative routes pursued by developing countries and we should find the best strategic path for Trinidad and Tobago.

The University of the West Indies offers an undergraduate programme in biology with a specialization in biotechnology, and is also developing an MSc programme in Biotechnology and biosafety. The University of Trinidad and Tobago also has a BSc programme on Biotechnology. The University of the West Indies has embarked on two ambitious research programmes in collaboration with stakeholder institutions towards utilizing our anthurium and hot pepper genetic resources towards developing elite varieties, so that we can not only become major suppliers of the product but also propagules of these crops, throughout the entire tropical world.



Professor Pathmanathan Umaharan is Professor in Genetics, Department of Life Sciences, The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine.

at home in exile

Funso Aiyejina was in Nigeria in July 2009 to deliver the CBAAC Annual Lecture. Olu Obafemi, a former school mate of his, posed a number of questions to him. This is an edited excerpt of the conversation.

Funso, without doubt, you are one of the very accomplished Nigerian writers in the Diaspora. What has been the major impetus for your writing? What stokes the fire of your creative imagination?

Personally, I think of myself as a minor writer. And I am not trying to be modest. True, my poetry has won a number of prizes, including the Association of Nigerian Authors Poetry prize and my fiction has won the Commonwealth Prize (Africa), but when you compare my productivity with some of the other writers of our generation, my harvest, while being qualitatively healthy, is meager.

Although I have been living away from Nigeria for the last 20 years, Nigeria continues to be the main impetus for my writing. I am very passionate about Nigeria. I carry Nigeria in my head wherever I go. I have developed rituals to ensure that this is the case: I listen compulsively to Nigerian music; I create near equivalents of Nigerian cuisine; my wardrobe is essentially Nigerian; and I consciously and subconsciously think in Nigerian languages and images. My writing continues to be a conversation with Nigeria either as the land I have always loved as the inspiration for what I am or as the land that I have grown to hate for failing to become the great country I think it has the potentials to become. Nigeria is the land of missed opportunity, the land of the always coming but never arriving nirvana. Nigeria is a culturally vibrant society, with many courageous citizens who, with the ideal climate, could achieve great things in life. Nigeria remains the home of the many people I call friends, people I went to school with, people who shared a hope of a better future

with me as children, adolescents and adults. Nigeria means the world to me and has remained the primary source of my creative materials. Even when I write about other places or topics that may be non-Nigerian, my informing vision is always Nigerian. The centrality of Nigeria to my imagination has now become even more obsessive. I am at that point in life when I feel that what I will do in the future is no longer as important as how I interpret the past I have lived and how that interpretation helps me to understand the quality of my lived life. You know you are growing old when you become

more interested in going to visit the landscapes of your past than in visiting new landscapes. I find myself doing a lot of that these days—anxious to visit my childhood landscapes either imaginatively or physically.

What has been your experience as a Nigerian writer living abroad, and in the West Indies in particular? What are your regrets and what added values does living abroad give to your creative enterprise?

Exile concentrates the mind on home. Exile accentuates the good, the bad and the ugly about home. I am constantly doing a comparative assessment of situations—placing situations abroad side by side with situations in Nigeria.

What are my regrets? First of all, because of the primary reason behind my relocation to the West Indies, I do not have too much of what one may call regrets. While my decision to relocate out of Nigeria was in part informed by the sociopolitical and economic mismanagement of Nigeria and the obvious fact of the harassment of dissident intellectuals by the military dictatorship which governed Nigeria, my choice of Trinidad and Tobago as a place of refuge was informed by the fact that my wife is from Trinidad and Tobago. Either way, one of us would have had to live away from his/her home country. She had lived in Nigeria for eight years before we relocated to Trinidad and Tobago so I did not see anything strange in my going to live in her country. What I find painful is that the choice was necessitated by the failure of Nigeria and was not an entirely voluntary choice. I do not



Nigeria means the world to me and has remained the *primary source* of my creative materials. Even when I write about other places or topics that may be non-Nigerian, my *informing vision* is always Nigerian. The centrality of Nigeria to my imagination has now become *even more obsessive*.



(From left) Nigerian sons: author Funso Aiyejina, playwright Olu Obafemi, and poet, Odia Ofeimun at the National Theatre, Lagos, Nigeria.

regret living in Trinidad and Tobago but I regret the fact that it was a choice dictated by the failure of Nigeria. One would have loved a situation in which one could split one's time between the two countries. My children have no relationship with Nigeria more so because their mental picture of Nigeria is influenced by my very unromantic assessment of Nigeria. I once asked if they would like to visit Nigeria and one of them said no thanks, not after all the things they had heard me say about Nigeria.

What do I miss most about Nigeria? I miss the writerly camaraderie that we had developed and that was driving our productivity in the '70s and the '80s. I miss the intellectual quarrels and the literary banter; I miss the dialogues that existed between Ibadan, Ife, Ilorin, Zaria, Nsukka, etc.

But the special aspect of my exile that has been a bonus for me is informed by the fact of my place of exile—the West Indies. Africa is very present in the West Indies and, as a result, I have a feeling of being at home there. My involvement in the culture of the West Indies has been very deep and that has made it easy for me to feel at home there. I am aware of the deep seated influence that West Indian

literature has had on my own writing. I am sure that if some scholar were to do a serious study of my work, they are likely to come up with an understanding that whatever depth there may be to it my work owes a lot to the combined influence of the best of African literature and culture and the best of Caribbean literature and culture.

What has been the general level of reception of you in the West Indies? Do you feel like an alien? Are you alienated?

As a person, I have been embraced by the Trinidad and Tobago society. I am a much favoured son-in-law. Much of that, if I may say so myself, has more to do with my own willingness to embrace and respect the society than the fact of my being Nigerian. I feel very much at home in Trinidad and Tobago. Not too many people know me as a writer in Trinidad and Tobago. I have to take some of the blame for that though. Friends have accused me of being too self-effacing. I think there is some truth to that assertion. Most people know me as a facilitator of creative writers. I am a co-facilitator of one of the region's major writers' workshops,

The Cropper Foundation Creative Writing Workshop which will be celebrating its 10th anniversary next year. Along the same tradition that I had started at Ife, I also introduced a tradition of public readings for Caribbean writers through a project called Campus Literature Week which has now run for 11 years and which led me to eventually introduce a postgraduate degree programme in fiction writing (Master of Fine Arts) which has already graduated a number of fiction writers. For Campus Literature Week, each year, a major writer is invited to come on campus as Writer-in-Residence for two months.

Long before you left Nigeria, you had been a socially committed artist, involved in the struggle for social justice within the academia. In fact, we both suffered detention as union leaders. What is the place of the creative writer in the political fortunes of his country? What should be the level of social and political commitment of the writer?

I believe that every human being should stand for something. What you stand for, however, will be dependent on your upbringing and the level of your personal courage and intellectual sophistication. I don't expect everyone to be a Wole Soyinka who can work effectively with groups or as a one-man army. But every one of us is capable of contributing something, no matter how small, to facilitate the demise of dictators and corrupt leaders. I am impatient with those who surrender their future to some external power. I believe in helping external powers, no matter how omnipotent, with realizing whatever miracles they have designed for us. I believe in plowing the land and planting the seeds at the appropriate time before kneeling to pray for good harvest. Of course, because of the writer's command of the means of verbal and literary communication, we would expect that he/she would speak for the voiceless and centre-stage the voices of those who have been consigned to the margins by our men and women of power and wealth.

Are you looking forward to a return home or is it exile forever?

Home for me is where my family is. In that sense I am very much at home in Trinidad and Tobago. Will I return to Nigeria to live on a permanent basis? I doubt very much. When I retire in about five years' time, I can see myself returning home for short stints to teach or run creative writing workshops, especially at Ife, a place with which I have deep seated connection.

GLIMPSES OF A VISTA

BY LOUIS REGIS

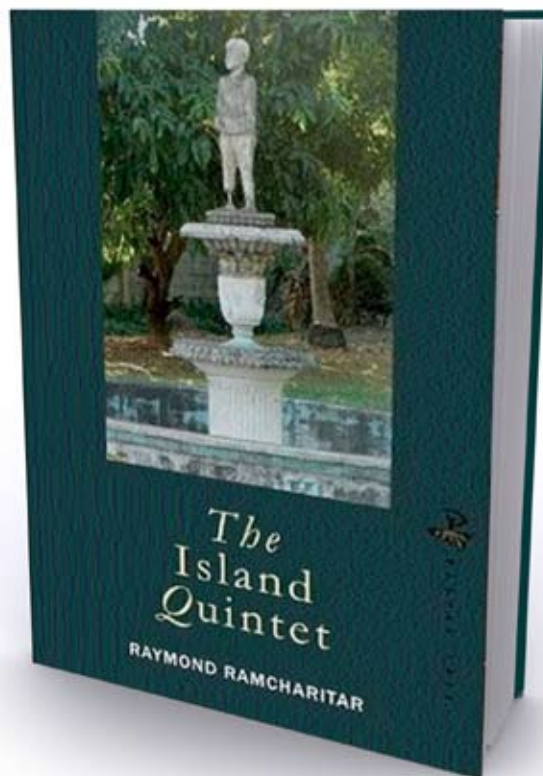
Raymond Ramcharitar's collection of stories is described in the blurb as having “a truth-telling honesty that does not disguise the compassion of a writer for whom the island still means a good deal.” Even before this, the blurb writer invites us to believe that “The tone of the collection ranges from the lyric—Trinidad as an island of great natural beauty—to an arresting grungy steaminess with dark comedy in between.” This beauty of landscape is obscured by the overwhelming degeneracy of the manscape. What the blurb describes as “an arresting grungy steaminess” is really an oppressive pervasive degeneracy of some elements and sectors of island life. Ramcharitar's island people, as perceived by the protagonists of the stories, are either the degenerate descendants of the French Creoles, white and black, or debauched expatriate women, or ignorant Africans or backward-looking conservative Indians. The grotesques, whom earlier writers have portrayed with a satirical reductivity, have now been exposed sans humanité as irredeemable degenerates or lost devotees of an incomprehensible religion and lifestyle.

The blurb understates the truth when it advertises “a collection much concerned with the flesh—often in transgressive forms, as if the characters are driven to test their boundaries—and with the capacity of its characters to reinvent themselves in manifold, and sometimes outrageous disguises.” Far from this, transgressive sexuality seems the order of the day in certain circles, according to *The Island Quintet*, which presents figures, some recognizable to me under their deliberately transparent masks. In its own way *The Island Quintet* purports to retail some of the island's recent political and social history, offering an account which culls details from the larger whole.

My major problem with the content of the collection is that the stories are smothered in the background. Too often a story stops as the author sketches in background information which is intended to explain characters, events and relationships in the story. Too often too the story is lost in the background and not developed as fully as it can be.

The first story “The Artist Dies” for example opens with the narrator's staring out over the faces of the handful of individuals who attend the ceremonies marking the death of the Artist. Each of these individuals has a past—generally one of transgressive sexuality—and a relationship to the Artist—one in which excessive or transgressive sexuality plays some part. Ramcharitar sketches these pasts and relationships at some cost to the flow of the story. I am not sure if the final statement, “This life is nothing but a sport and a pastime; when we wake, we remember nothing,” is a commentary on the lifestyle of the Artist and his chosen playmates or the author's commentary on life.

I am not sure of the conclusion to the story “The Blonde in the Garbo Dress” which features a confusion of mirrors. We are presented with a sense of pastness of the present and the presence of the past all blighted by the depravity—there is no better, indeed no other word of the white women past and present. I am not sure whether the simultaneous declarations of pregnancy by the two women signal parallelism or continuity.



“New York Story” presents the Colo family, Indo-Trinidadian peasants who, by trickery and luck, have relocated to New York where they perpetuate the wretched folkways of their past on the island. Patriarchy (including sodomy of a daughter-in-law), favoritism, ignorance and false sophistication are features of this lifestyle which it is implied is characteristic of some debased rural Hindus. The narrator, who in his own way, is as bad as the Colos, becomes the beneficiary of the generosity of a John Gotti type mafiosi whose life he saves. Safe now from the threat of deportation, the narrator imagines himself betraying his erstwhile hosts to the INS and exulting in their downfall, all save the much-abused Sarah and her child. Certainly the dark humour mentioned in the blurb is in evidence here, although the fiendish glee with which the narrator fantasizes the discomfiture of the Colos argues for something more sinister than dark humour.

“The Abduction of Sita” is a hopelessly bleak story. The presence of dual narrators and the interplay between them

and other characters makes for an interesting narrative technique but the inorganic ending featuring Sunil's sexual sadism and Maryse's sexual masochism overwhelm the literary technique. It is almost as if the author is saying that there is only one way in which characters like these can end.

“Froude's Arrow,” the last story, promises an arresting story centered on Froude, the mulatto who occupies a middle ground between white and black. In this story, however, the basic ethnic stereotyping and sexual transgressivity developed in other stories are present as the picturesque Asiatic comments detachedly on the supposed white and black liberals, the artistic community, the journalistic fraternity, the sex-starved female expatriates, the ignoramus painter Mokombo Cojo, the leading light in the Africanist movement and so on. While these are accepted as the core principles of the worldviews of the collection's protagonists, whether in Porto Spana, London or New York, the story focuses on Froude who engages his dividedness by engaging in a public polemic with himself by resurrecting to some extent the comments of James Anthony Froude and the response of JJ Thomas. Our Froude plays the role of the British historian and has his sister Jenny respond under the nom de plume JJ Thomas. This is an interesting way of presenting dividedness but the revelation that Froude is homosexual leaves me wondering if that socially unacceptable condition is ipso facto sufficient reason to discredit his perspective. Interestingly, Froude like the Artist of the first story thinks that the young Asiatic male he possesses and perhaps transforms is also homosexual. I am not sure if this is merely an example of the “dark humour in between” as described in the blurb.

As far as I can read, *The Island Quintet* offers only a few glimpses of the compassion advertised by the blurb. My own sympathies are with the parents of the Artist, with Sarah of “New York Story” and with Jenny, and with the parents of the protagonist in “Froude's Arrow,” all essentially good people caught up in a corruption which leaves them bewildered. I suspect that they need their own stories to offset the trauma that is presented as normalcy on the island.

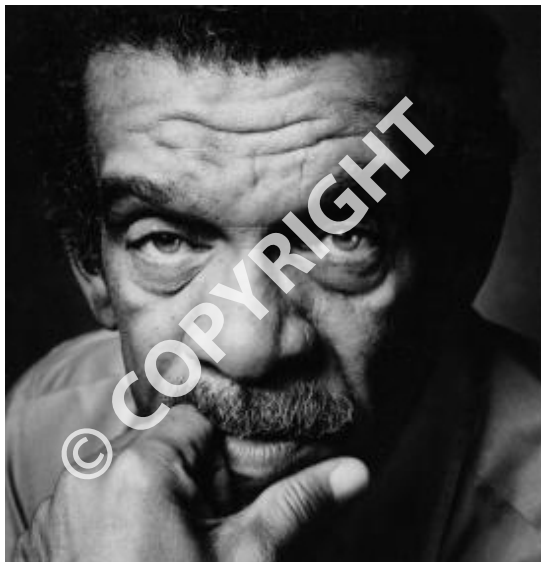
A brief review like this is inadequate for any judgement on the blurb declaration to the effect that, “In writing *The Island Quintet* Ramcharitar establishes himself as a truly significant Caribbean voice.”



Louis Regis is a graduate of *The UWI, St Augustine*, where he currently teaches *West Indian poetry and Elements of Drama*. He is also a calypso researcher who has published four books on the Calypso.

UWI CALENDAR of EVENTS

JANUARY 2010 - MARCH 2010



Interlocking Basins of a Globe
Conference honouring
Nobel Laureate Derek Walcott
 Tuesday 12 to Friday 15 January, 2010
 The Learning Resource Centre,
 UWI St Augustine

Poet, playwright, essayist, critic, dramatist and painter, Derek Walcott, is recognised as one of the world's greatest living writers. Among his many awards and honours is the 1992 Nobel Prize for Literature. The conference Interlocking Basins of a Globe will explore the multifaceted nature of Walcott's work. It invites reflections on his evolving thought and analyses of Caribbean civilization.

FEATURE SPEAKERS: Professor Edward Baugh, Dr Jean Antoine-Dunne and Professor Gordon Rohlehr.

Papers are on the following topics:

Literary Ghosts and Confrères
Here and Elsewhere: The Politics of Exile and Belonging
Myths and Histories
The Visual Imagination
Rethinking the Sublime
Time, Landscape and Myth
Walcott's Cities: A Babel like Heaven
Caribbean Contestations
Walcott as Critic, Commentator and Journalist

For further information, please contact Dr Jean Antoine-Dunne at Jean.Antoine@sta.uwi.edu, Professor Barbara Lalla at Barbara.Lalla@sta.uwi.edu, Dr Paula Morgan at Paula.Morgan@sta.uwi.edu, or Walcott.Conference@sta.uwi.edu

UWI Fete

Sunday 17 January, 2010
 Noon to 8pm
 St Augustine Campus, UWI.

It has been twenty years of awarding bursaries generated by the annual fete that has become one of the biggest social events on the Carnival season's calendar. The theme of this year's fete will be China. Tickets cost \$700.



For further information, please contact Alana Campbell-John, Administrative Assistant, Student Advisory Services UWI, Tel: 662-2002 Ext. 2326, or email: Alana.Campbell-John@sta.uwi.edu

The Legacy Continues

AFUWI's 13th Annual Awards Dinner
 Thursday 28 January, 2010
 The Pierre, New York City, USA

The American Foundation for The University of the West Indies (AFUWI), a not for profit entity that drives the fundraising efforts of The UWI in the United States, will host its 13th Annual "The Legacy Continues" Awards Dinner on Thursday 28th January, 2010, at the Pierre, New York City, New York, USA.

The Patron of the event is Dr. the Hon. Harry Belafonte OJ and Spike Lee will receive the AFUWI Bob Marley Award. Legacy Awards will be presented to the Hon. David J.H. Thompson, QC, Prime Minister of Barbados, Dr. the Hon. Dean O. Barrow, Prime Minister of Belize, the Hon. Tillman J. Thomas, Prime Minister of Grenada and Dr. the Hon. Patrick A. M. Manning, Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago.

This is a black tie event. Cocktails will begin at 6.30pm and dinner will be served at 7.30 pm. For further information, please contact annmariegrant@afuwi.org

UWI TODAY WANTS TO HEAR FROM YOU

UWI TODAY welcomes submissions by staff and students for publication in the paper. Please send your suggestions, comments, or articles for consideration to uwitoday@sta.uwi.edu.



World of Work (WOW) Career Fair
 January-March 2010
 St Augustine Campus, UWI

Registration:

27 January-3 February, 2010

Interview Preparation and Resume Writing Workshop:

4 February, 2010

Seminar:

6 February, 2010

Mock Interviews:

27 February and 6 March, 2010

Recruitment Fair

11-12 March, 2010

For further information, please contact Student Advisory Services at (868) 662-2002, Ext. 2360

UWI Benefit Gala

Saturday 27 February, 2010

6.30pm

Four Seasons Hotel,
 21 Avenue Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

The UWI Benefit Gala will take place on Saturday 27th February, 2010, at the Four Seasons Hotel, 21 Avenue Road, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, under the patronage of Dr. G. Raymond Chang, Chair of CI Financial (CI), one of Canada's three largest investment fund companies, and Chancellor of Ryerson University.

Held for the benefit of UWI's Scholarship Fund which provides scholarships for outstanding academic achievers, this gala will honour the recipients of the 2010 Luminary Award, the 2010 Chancellor's Award and the 2010 Vice Chancellor's Award.

The reception begins at 6.30pm and dinner starts at 7.30pm. Please note that this is a black tie event. To reserve your ticket, please call 416-214-7578, or email uwi@adriaansandassociates.com.

To find out more, visit the UWI Benefit Gala website at www.uwitorontogala.com