



## *In Conversation with Velma Pollard*

(Spring 2018)

by Simona Bertacco

VELMA POLLARD is a retired Senior Lecturer in Language Education in the Department of Educational Studies, Faculty of Arts and Education of the University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica. Her major research interests have been Creole Languages of the Anglophone Caribbean, The Language of Caribbean Literature and Caribbean Women's Writing. Articles in these areas appear in local and international journals. She has published a handbook: *From Jamaican Creole to Standard English: A Handbook for Teachers* (1993; 2003) and a monograph: *Dread Talk: The Language of Rastafari* (1994; 2000).

Pollard has published poems and stories in regional and international journals and anthologies. She has a novel, three collections of short fiction and five books of poetry on the market. Her novella *Karl* won the Casa de las Americas prize in 1992.

### THE MAKING OF A WRITER

**S. Bertacco:** I am interested in reconstructing the beginnings of a tradition of Caribbean Women writing. When and where did your writing begin? What and who made it happen? What and who enabled you to publish?

**V. Pollard:** It is difficult to say where my writing began. Certainly while I was still in elementary school for I remember winning a first prize for a poem beginning "Oh cruel



cruel death / Why do you take the breath" (If ever there was a forced rhyme!) I may have been seven years old. Publishing would be ages away unless you count the poem being posted on a wall in the school. So you can say I grew up in an environment that was favourable to writing. Real publishing had to wait another thirty years or so when my friend Jean D'Costa sent my story "My Mother" to *Jamaica Journal*, the flagship publication of the Institute of Jamaica, the major cultural institution in the island.

**S. Bertacco:** You and your sister Erna Brodber are both successful writers. This makes me very curious about your early upbringing. Would you talk about your family life as a child? Were there other siblings besides you and your sister Erna? Who was the biggest artistic influence within your family? What kinds of stories did you grow up with within your family?

**V. Pollard:** We grew up in deep rural Jamaica in a village called Woodside in the parish of St. Mary. Home, church, school, community were the influences. At home my mother was an elementary school teacher, my father a peasant farmer. Both had a healthy relationship with books. There was no library at Woodside but once per week a package would arrive in the mail from the Library at Port Maria, the parish capital, with a selection of books. My mother would send back a package with the books from the week before. The *Daily Gleaner* reached the Post Office by train to nearby Troja and by a postman on bus or bicycle to the Post Office every evening. The weeklies, *Jamaica Times* and *Public Opinion*, came on a Friday. *The Gleaner* had a section called "Children's Own" where children's letters were published.

My parents were both very involved in the politics of the day and my father was part of an amateur theatrical group that functioned three or four miles away. Their interests were part of our lives. So for example I remember my father dramatizing for us a scene from *Merchant of Venice* in a solo performance where change of personality was noted by change of location—"Stand forth Antonio," "Stand forth Bassanio"—and eventually mimicking a slow sweet gentle voice, "The quality of Mercy is not strain'd / It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven / Upon the place beneath [...]" (*MV* 4.1.2125-7).

Our birthday and Christmas gifts were books. I remember Lamb's *Tales from Shakespeare* and the *Life of Chopin* (Liszt). My mother loved music and would play classical pieces on the pedal organ in the living room. She also played from a Community Song Book and had us sing the different parts as if we were a real choir. Less exciting was the exercise of drawing musical notes on paper lined for that purpose.

The stories we grew up with were largely told by my father: Anancy Stories of how Brother Anancy, the trickster god from Ghana, got the better of a variety of colleagues although he was smaller than all of them. Narrative poems I remember being read to us by my mother particularly on rainy evenings when we could not go out to play: "Lord Ullin's Daughter" (Campbell), with its painful sea drama, "Lucy Gray" (Wordsworth), a solitary child and "Guilty, or Not Guilty?" with poor little Mary McGuire who stole three loaves of bread. I cannot say that I can identify any one artistic influence. I would say that I grew up in an environment at family, school and community levels that was by no means hostile to the Arts.



Other siblings beside my sister came much later. I was nine years old when the first of three brothers was born. They all went into the world of business but two also wrote: one publishing three novels and several collections of Bible Gleanings, the other winning a prize in a local competition, for a novel (in manuscript). I do not think my parents had the same time and energy for them as they had when they were younger and we were just my sister and myself.

**S. Bertacco:** Can you tell me about your relationship with the 'archive' of English literature? You were in school when Jamaica was still a British colony: which texts did you like? Which influenced your writing the most? Which did you resent, if any, as a young girl in elementary school? Was there any part of the school experience that you recall as particularly influential for you as an artist?

**V. Pollard:** My relationship with the British literary tradition must always have been positive. I remember reading Fielding's *Tom Jones* on my knees in a Spanish class and being spared punishment by the teacher because of the book that it was. His reaction would have been different had I been reading a comic book. I was blessed with well educated, interesting Literature teachers at high school. I do not know which writers influenced my style but I can say that at that level I enjoyed the Romantics very much and that by the time I finished university Shelley was my favourite among them. Other favourites in the canon were Samuel Coleridge, John Donne, Andrew Marvell and one who few people seem to remember, Walter Savage Landor. Donne and Coleridge are still special. I have not been able to part with their Complete Works.

The school experience as an influence on my artistic development? The fact that my high school offered a selection of extra-curricular activities and that I enjoyed singing, dance and drama in those years may well have influenced my development as a writer. I took part in several activities that I remember including the Schools Drama Festival, an annual competition between high schools, and I did earn a few prizes in the Annual Schools Elocution Contests in English and Caribbean Poetry and indeed in what was unusual then, Latin Verse.

I do not remember resenting any texts in elementary school. That came afterwards when I knew what to resent in them.

**S. Bertacco:** You studied, lived and worked outside of Jamaica for several years. You lived in Canada to complete your education and in the US. Can you tell me about those experiences of education and uprootedness? How was your experience of Canada and Montreal in particular? How did you adjust? And, conversely, how was your experience of the US? How different was it from your Canadian experience?

**V. Pollard:** I think my adjustment has to be seen against the background of my personal situation. I left university with a B.A. degree and a Teaching diploma, taught for a year in a boys' high school in Jamaica, got married and went to live and teach in Trinidad. I thought that was the end of my education. Five years and three children later my husband decided to do Postgraduate Law at McGill University in Montreal. I applied to do Postgraduate Education. In other words that was my second uprooting, although the first was to another Caribbean island. My adjustment was as much to a new and different culture as it was to a household without a live-in nanny for the



children and to the notion of day care. My days now began with getting three people ready to get on a bus to a day care facility run by a really nice German woman in the French section of Montreal and myself (in the first year) to a job in the Redpath Library.

The next year I began teaching English and Latin at McDonald High School which was on the same compound as the Faculty of Education of McGill. Now we moved to a house in a suburb from which I could have easy access to public transportation to St. Anne de Bellevue, several miles away from Montreal. McGill housed its Agriculture and Education faculties there. The children got on a bus to a new day care facility. I had started the MA in Education in the summer.

I was lucky. That job was a gift in terms of location. Most of the Postgraduate Education lectures at McGill were in the evening. Comparative Education was on the main campus in Montreal, on a Saturday. In the afternoon and evening of weekdays I was welcome in the Halls of Residence where my new friends chiefly from Eastern Nigeria lived. Their homeland was part of a bitter struggle for Independence: the Biafran War. These were interesting people with amazing stories. We studied together but far more time was spent talking about each other's countries. The downside of that experience was that sooner than I had planned I had to resign from my job. I was not satisfied with the response of the Guidance Counselor or of the Principal to a racist encounter I had with a student. I decided to return to Jamaica. Luckily I had finished enough courses to be able to prepare and defend a proposal for the M.A. thesis and do the research at home.

Again, I was lucky: the principal of a boarding school in Jamaica was in Ottawa interviewing for teachers including two teachers of English and I was hired. The job came with housing and kindergarten places for my children and I embarked, the next academic year, on an experience my children still consider the best in their lives. During the year there I was able to collect data for my thesis which was on Language in the Technical High Schools in Jamaica.

One of the things Montreal did for me was to increase my interest in all that was going on in Africa. I thought that since everyone took it for granted I was African, I had better find out as much as I could about the continent.

I did not have much free time in Montreal but I found it an interesting, beautiful and enjoyable city. A year after I left, I went back in the summer to finish the two courses I still owed the programme. I was alone this time, my family was already in New York. I spent a wonderful summer. Most of my friends were still there.

At the end of that summer I joined my family to settle in New York where my husband had moved to be a representative of Guyana at the United Nations. This move forced me into a series of interesting and instructive situations. As the wife of a diplomat I could not be hired for any job for which they could find an American. The apartment was comparatively small. I could get it clean and prepare the meals in a short time. The only child too young to go to school and myself soon got bored with the park and each other. As soon as he was five, I found a job in Harlem running a homework programme in a 'storefront' facility funded by a rich downtown church and using Hunter College students as the teachers. I enjoyed working with the young people and learning more about deprivation in a rich city than any book could teach me. Ironically, I would leave a comfortable apartment in the Upper East Side of Manhattan for a modest, poorly heated storefront in Harlem. I know that experience was important for my writing.



After a few months I saw an advertisement for teachers of English in an in-house programme at Consolidated Edison, the 'light' people of New York. It was the time of affirmative action and companies had to have a certain percentage of black and Hispanic employees. These young people worked in low-level jobs for half the day and were taught for the other half towards a High School Diploma. I was interacting with the same socio-economic group I had left in Harlem, but these were older. I was working in a comfortable space, was very well paid and was extending my experience of black and Hispanic people in New York, and I was adding to that the experience of white people who were my colleagues. This was in sharp contrast to the population I met at UN cocktail parties and at parents' meetings at the UN International School my children attended.

I left Con Edison to lecture at Hunter College, where I was paid far less but could spend all the vacations with my children. I left Con Edison, but the fourteenth street subway station stayed with me and turned up at the beginning of my much anthologized short story "My Mother."

I finished the McGill M.A. thesis and returned to St. Anne de Bellevue to hand it in. I was received warmly but missed my very thoughtful supervisor who had relocated to another university. I was done with the focus on curriculum in the high school. I applied to Columbia Teachers College to do the M.A. in TESOL (Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages). Most of the courses were in Linguistics which was new to me. For the practicum I was part of a group which had to teach English to an evening class of migrants from a number of different countries. It was an amazing experience. It took all my imagination to teach, for example, English prepositions to a group with such a variety of native languages.

**S. Bertacco:** How did the experience of distance affect your desire to write?

**V. Pollard:** Nothing changed with regard to myself and writing. I left Montreal with a large envelope of poems written on informal scraps of paper, in the kitchen, in the park while the children played and sometimes in a lecture. For some reason I wrote less in New York, but I did so much more! For one thing I was financially better off, for another I was living in a city with easy access to transportation. I took advantage of all the free or cheap opportunities for plays and films advertised in the *Village Voice*. The children were old enough for me to take them to children's plays and films and to the museums of the city.

The experiences in Montreal and New York would eventually become fodder for my fiction.

**S. Bertacco:** You are a linguist and have had a productive and long career in academia, but you have always written on the side. How has your academic scholarship fed your creative writing? Did you ever feel academic writing was an obstacle to your writing career? Was it a pragmatic, necessary choice, or was it what you wanted?

**V. Pollard:** I never considered a career in writing. I have always been a teacher who writes. It is ironic that since my retirement all my invitations have been because of my writing, though usually I am asked to give a lecture in some aspect of Language or Literature. Because I was always writing on the side, whenever I had a break





(fellowship or sabbatical) from the rigours of teaching I would put together a collection of short fiction or of poetry and submit it for publication.

I enjoyed teaching teachers to make Language and Literature interesting and only resented my job somewhat when I was forced into Administration as Head of Department and eventually as Dean of Faculty. The latter was especially demanding. I would rush home to the computer and a cup of tea the way others would rush to the swimming pool. I began a collection whose title story was to be "In spite of Miss Dean" and while that story has been published the other pieces are still in draft so many years later.

Outside of the years in Administration I always felt that the work I was doing in the classroom was important and necessary. The two books I published (*Dread Talk: The Language of Rastafari* and *From Jamaican Creole to Standard English: A Handbook for Teachers*) have been useful to specific high school and university populations. My regret in that regard is that I did not try to publish my thesis on *Past Time Expression in Jamaica Creole: Implications for Teaching English*.

## THE CARIBBEAN CANON AND CARIBBEAN WOMEN WRITING

**S. Bertacco:** When we, outsiders, approach Anglophone Caribbean literature, we tend to distinguish two main literary traditions within it: one gathering around Kamau Brathwaite and an intentional and crafty use of Creole and orality modes, and one around Derek Walcott, more aligned with the written English canon. Would this separation make sense for a Caribbean writer such as yourself who seems to be in dialogue with both? Which voices were most important to the development of your own writing?

**V. Pollard:** The Walcott/Brathwaite distinction is a common one in Caribbean criticism, but I have always felt that the difference in terms of their commitment to the Creole/Caribbean culture has been exaggerated. I see them as two great Caribbean writers/poets, one more inspired by history and music, the other more by literature and art. Perhaps I am simplifying things. I am not implying exclusivity in either case.

Brathwaite was an innovator. He brought something different to Caribbean poetry. His own words (final words in *Islands*, the last book of his trilogy) well describe what he was doing. He was "making" with his "rhythms some- / thing torn / and new" (*The Arrivants* 270). Those were the rhythms of Afro-American Jazz, of Caribbean speech and of African drum sounds. Meanwhile Walcott was taking the use of language to a fine perfection, in constant competition with himself, in constant pursuit of the finest line. You might want to say he was writing for the eyes, while Brathwaite was writing for the ears and illustrating the power of sound. Walcott was also using another medium. He was writing and producing plays even before his undergraduate days at Mona and continued with the now legendary Trinidad Theatre Workshop in Port of Spain, Trinidad.

I hope my essay on "The Dust" as a Creole poem underlines my appreciation of what Brathwaite was doing with the sounds of the Caribbean. Walcott's use of Creole, particularly the French Creole of St. Lucia, while not as dramatic as Brathwaite's, is selective and quietly forceful. You cannot want a finer exploitation of the St. Lucian



linguistic environment than his working of a rural woman's cry to the driver of a bus she wishes to take into the city in "The Light of the World": "Pas quittez moi à terre" (49), or his handling of Trinidad Anglophone Creole in "Spoiler's Return." I give some time to the former in the chapter (with David Whitley) "Understanding and teaching Walcott in two settings" in *Teaching Caribbean Poetry*, while Whitley treats the latter extensively.

Both giants have influenced my own development as a writer.

**S. Bertacco:** Let's talk about the strong women's writing tradition that has emerged—although it has not been as fully recognized—from the region. Which women writers were your most important models? Who holds a special place in your formation as an artist? And how has your relationship been with your fellow writers, along the years, both women and men? Who did you turn to for advice, mentoring, help?

**V. Pollard:** I really cannot say I thought of any of the writers as models. I have had a deep admiration for Paule Marshall who is claimed by both the Caribbean and the USA. I hope my paper on her *Praise Song for the Widow*, reprinted in the Lalla et al. volume ("Cultural Connections"), illustrates my appreciation of her craft. You must remember though that I am close in age to all the people you might want to think of as models for me. And I cannot say I turned to my fellow writers for advice. I can say I have received constant encouragement from them. Erna Brodber and Jean D'Costa have been important particularly when I first thought of publishing. In terms of poetry I can say that Brathwaite has looked at the occasional poem and, yes, offered advice and I have always been surprised at the difference a recommended small adjustment can make to a poem. Senior has given time to looking at and making suggestions with regard to my poetry. I have to thank her particularly for praising my voice in the volume *Leaving Traces* at a time when I was sure it was not saying anything new and need not be published. Ironically it has become my favourite collection. The relationship with men and women who write in the Caribbean has less to do with their art than with the circumstances of my life. I know people frequently ask about these relationships because most of us seem to know each other. The Caribbean is quite small. The sea divides the islands but institutions, in this case the University of the West Indies, unite them. While I was an undergraduate at Mona in the fifties the following were also on the campus: Baugh, D'Costa, Hopkinson, Morris, St. Omer, Walcott. Walcott had graduated but was very present not only in the Students' Union most nights but at the Dramatic Theatre rehearsing plays. I left Jamaica for Trinidad in 1960 and both Walcott and Hopkinson had already settled there and were very active in theatre. I got a job teaching on the same staff as Hopkinson. I returned to Jamaica in 1975 and Senior, who I had met when I visited before, introduced me to Goodison. Baugh, Morris and D'Costa were lecturing in the then Department of English and Brathwaite was lecturing in the History Department when I joined the School of Education. Pamela Mordecai was editor of the *Caribbean Journal of Education* and Senior of the *ISER Journal* (Institute of Social and Economic Research). I remember how excited Daryl Dance was when she first came to Mona and found out how easy it was to meet so many of us in one location.



**S. Bertacco:** Your generation made Caribbean literature as we know it today. It opened possibilities for younger writers that were not there when you were growing up. What is, in your view, the 'gift' you have given to the new generations of writers from the region?

**V. Pollard:** When I was growing up my parents were already reading Vic Reid's first novel *New Day* written in a version of Jamaican Creole and serialized in the *Gleaner*. By the time I came to write Louise Bennett had established her voice in Jamaican Creole. My generation continued along a path that had been cleared. In that way I suppose, we assured the next generation that writing was a good and necessary thing to do and that English was not the only possible medium.

**S. Bertacco:** Did you ever feel that you were writing the stories of the Caribbean that were left out by Lamming, Harris, Naipaul, etc.? Your stories and your poems are intensely about women and their experiences, and so many of those experiences are of pain, violence and systemic abuse. Was it your intention from the start to write back, through your own writing, to the male archive of Caribbean writing? Or did it develop as the field of Caribbean literature developed?

**V. Pollard:** No, I never felt I was writing back. I was exploring questions I had asked myself about the Caribbean and particularly about Jamaican society. I suspect we were all writing out of our experiences and the stories in our families. Perhaps our points of view were gendered but not in any sense a response, a writing back.

## COLLECTIVE HISTORY AND PERSONAL MEMORY

**S. Bertacco:** Can you talk a little about this poem "Women Poets (with your permission)," written in 1979, which opens the short story collection *Considering Woman I?*

the little man [who is he? The husband?]  
too early home today  
surprised me scribbling [not 'writing!']  
while the washer turned  
ahaa... I see you  
take your little write ["little" like the man?]  
well let me see your book...  
mhmm... mhmm... not bad not bad  
a little comma here [little, again]  
a period there  
that sentence can make sense...  
almost [ironic punchline]

your friend there scribbling too [writer friends, your community?]  
and Genie down the road  
well well how nice  
how triply nice  
not mad not mad... [the rhyme with "not bad not bad" above drives the undercurrent tension to the surface] (9)





**V. Pollard:** You know, Simona, I really think that the true text is what happens between the page and the reader. Having written, the writer releases the material. But since you ask, let me try to answer.

The little man is the husband who cannot imagine the wife doing anything but housework (hence the washer turning).

Scribbling is an inferior form of writing. "Little write" is different from "little man" in some ways. The man is not really inferior except in the sense that he is not able to think of the woman as somebody who writes, while "little write" is like scribbling, a lower form of writing.

"Almost" is the condescending word that parallels the notion that the sentence can (almost) make sense. "Your friend" etc. is indeed the community of female writers. And yes, the last two lines are meant to be sarcastic.

**S. Bertacco:** The grandmother is a huge figure in both your poems and in your stories. Were you fond of your grandmother? Are grandmothers still central in Caribbean family life as educators and caregivers for the children of working parents?

**V. Pollard:** I was VERY fond of my grandmother. My father's mother died when I was a year old, but my mother's mother was there for me all through my childhood and adulthood. In fact, my mother (who died at fifty) predeceased her. She identified me as the first child of her eldest child and that gave me a special place. She lived several miles from my family, but we were allowed to spend a week or two of the summer holidays with her and she visited us often.

She would find various ruses to keep us longer than we were meant to stay and filled us with wonderful fruits from trees that grew in her yard and goodies she baked in an oven house adjoining the kitchen. I hope I have immortalized her in my story "Gran" in *Considering Woman*. She was widowed when her first child was nine years old and her seventh and last nine months old. She managed her land and her sugar boiling house and sold 'wet sugar,' bread and buns to small shops in the community so that all those children got an education. For me she is the strong black woman who is the backbone of Jamaican society.

**S. Bertacco:** The history of colonialism is present, as a background, in much of your writing. It comes to the surface in some poems, like "Portobello," about the place in Panama where Francis Drake died, that try to connect the wounds of the history of the Caribbean with the present and "some satisfying end / conclusion to some things" (9). Can you talk a little about the power of memory, personal and collective, to alter the received history?

**V. Pollard:** I have often said that there is absolutely nothing in my society that is not part of the legacy of slavery and colonialism; every institution of church and state bears witness to that. The 'wounds of history' are everywhere. Drake is only one example of it, certainly in education, and I have no idea why I chose to hate him more than Hawkins or Lord Nelson (who with him is remembered in Dudley Clarke's remarkable dialogue/poem which I can still recite: "Come, tumble up, Lord Nelson, the British Fleet's a-looming! / Come, show a leg, Lord Nelson, the guns they are a-



booming!") I think that altering the received history has been a continuous process. I would have been very young when the notion that Sir Henry Morgan, one time governor of Jamaica, was a pirate struck me! How could the words 'governor' and 'pirate' describe the same man? It took me longer to wonder why, for example, once per year on Empire Day we, the children of slaves, sang verses and chorus of "Rule Britannia": "Britons never never never shall be slaves," or why as a guide I sang "Every girl guide likes an Irish stew" and not a "curry goat" or "stew peas" or to marvel at all the other missed chances to validate what was/is ours!!

#### YOUR POETICS, YOUR LANGUAGE, YOUR AUDIENCE

**S. Bertacco:** Tell us about your readers, in Jamaica and around the world. Have you always written for the same 'idea' of audience? Have you changed your mind about your readers?

**V. Pollard:** Regrettably as a writer, the reader has never been foremost in my mind. Those three indices you mention turn up in my life as a lecturer and a literary critic, in my writing and discussion about other writers. Only as I have become aware of critical responses to my work have I been able to feel the reader, especially the non-Caribbean reader. I first became aware of the distance between myself and the prospective foreign reader when a lecturer I met at a conference in Europe decided to try my novel *Homestretch* with an adult group of readers of English as a Foreign Language, in Switzerland. The pages of questions he sent as he prepared for the class frightened me. My next experience of a response was frightening in a more pleasant way. My then publishers sent me a book of study notes on the novel by a university lecturer in Kenya where it was on a high school reading list. What that alerted me to was how much history and sociology of my country was contained in a book I thought to be about migration. I was humbled by the number of names taken for granted in Jamaica that needed explanation, so much about landscape and culture that would have been new to those students!!

While I may not have changed my writing content and style, these experiences have forced an awareness in me, of a foreign readership and its demands.

**S. Bertacco:** As a sociolinguist and a writer, your relationship to language is complex, to say the least. Has the issue of the literary respect of your national language restricted you as a writer? This question goes back to the question about the double literary tradition in the Caribbean: to what extent do you need, even today, to make a language choice —Standard English or Jamaican Creole— prior to writing in order to secure an international readership? Have publishers changed their attitude to the use of Creole in your own experience?

**V. Pollard:** I have never been conscious of a choice. When I am writing creative material, I do not see myself as sociolinguist or more accurately language educator. I am a bi-lingual Jamaican as I think most of the writers of my generation are. I write as my characters would speak. So, my poetry ends up being mostly in English because my own speech is nearer the English than the Creole end of the continuum and



characters enter my prose fiction in the language they would normally speak which frequently is Jamaican Creole.

I think publishers have over time changed their attitude to the use of Creole, but the fact is that, by the time I came to write, Vic Reid had years before written *New Day* (1949; 2016) and put a version of Jamaican Creole on the page and Samuel Selvon had done the same in a series of novels using Trinidadian Creole.

In 1989 the publisher of *Considering Woman* raised questions about my representation of Jamaican Creole on the page. I offered to write a kind of explanation as an Afterword and did. Interestingly, a reviewer of the 2010 republished version *Considering Woman I & II* (Ledente) suggested that the Afterword should have been omitted since the readership of Caribbean writing had, in the years between, come to be aware of the language situation out which I write.

**S. Bertacco:** Your stories are mostly about women. What is your relationship with (Western) feminism? Many of your stories are harsh stories of abuse, violence, lack of support. They are clearly set against a precise historical and cultural background, but they also seem to speak to general and generalizable situations. Let's take, for an example, the "Cages" stories in your collection *Considering Woman I*: are those the cages of womanhood or of Jamaican womanhood? Hence the question, do you call yourself a 'feminist' writer?

**V. Pollard:** A definite NO to that one. Ironically, I read a response to my work where I was accused of favouring men! I suppose it just depends on which of my pieces you are reading. That reader was probably thinking of *Karl*. I respond to situations that move me. Because I am a woman, I see things from a woman's point of view more times than from a man's but that is as far as it goes. "Cages" I and II describe the woman's situation but surely "Cage III" includes the man's. I think my women's "Cages" speak to and of women everywhere, not just Jamaican or Caribbean women.

**S. Bertacco:** Thank you for taking the time to answer so many questions. You've been very generous in your answers and this interview has covered many topics, associations with other writers, and larger issues in Caribbean literature. Especially, you have re-created for us the vibrant intellectual and creative climate of several Caribbean islands that nurtured so many incredible writers of your generation. And you have corrected my mistaken assumptions, always with a smile.

Grazie mille, Velma!

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