

INTERNATIONAL LITERARY CONFERENCE

LITCON 2020

The Literature of Trinidad & Tobago 1980–2020

September 21 – 24, 2020

Books as Companions and Passports

MISSION STATEMENT

This Conference aims to highlight the literature of Trinidad and Tobago since 1980 and to demonstrate the urgent need to expose the nation and the nation's children to the valuable store available to them. For this purpose, the Conference Committee has assembled a dynamic group of writers, both renowned and budding, who are making their mark on the literary landscape and whose works should be made available to students from primary to tertiary levels of education. An author's calendar is being constructed and will be made available online. The conference makes room for critical responses and also has specially built in important commentary from students and teachers and from officers attached to the Ministry of Education and others who have worked long in the field of educating the educators.

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Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION



THE UNIVERSITY
OF THE
WEST INDIES
ST. AUGUSTINE CAMPUS
TRINIDAD & TOBAGO
WEST INDIES



**NATIONAL
ARCHIVES**
OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO



CALENDAR OF EVENTS:

MONDAY 21ST SEPTEMBER, 2020

INTRODUCTION TO THE LITERARY LANDSCAPE OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Day Chair: **Dr. J. Vijay Maharaj**

8:00am - 8:45 am

OPENING THE FRONTIERS

Moderator: Dr. J. Vijay Maharaj

Welcome, HOD DLCCS: Professor Paula Morgan

Greetings by the Principal UWI STA:

The Humanities in the 21st Century- Professor Brian Copeland

Remarks from the Chairman, Friends of Mr Biswas

The Conference: Structure and Purpose – Professor Kenneth Ramchand

Feature Address by the Minister of Education:

Dr the Honourable Nyan Gadsby-Dolly

8:45am - 9:45am

THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Moderator: Professor Kenneth Ramchand

Presentation of the Annotated Bibliography:

Ms. Mariella Pilgrim, Alma Jordan Library UWI STA

Roundtable on the Role of the Library and Archives in the Development of Trinidad and Tobago Literature.

The Bibliography is the fundamental document of the Conference representing a body of work published over a 40-year period by Trinidad and Tobago authors, both resident and living abroad. It serves as an introduction to various papers being presented. This session will take the form of a presentation by Mariella Pilgrim from The Alma Jordan Library.

(AJL), The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine who spearheaded the compilation followed by a roundtable discussion. The roundtable discussion will include the Government Archivist, Ms Avril Belfon; the National Library and Information System Authority's (NALIS) Executive Director (Ag.), Ms Paula Greene and the co-authors of the annotated bibliography from the AJL namely Joy Smith, Arlene Dolabaille, Unika Omowale. The roundtable will focus on the role of libraries/archives in the production, dissemination, and comprehension of the literature of Trinidad and Tobago and the observations, challenges, and recommendations of the co-authors.

9:45am - 9:50am

9:50am - 11:20am

BREAK

THE CREATIVES SPEAK

Moderator: Claire Adam

Mid-morning Crescendo: 10-Min. Readings from Six Writers followed by a Roundtable Discussion on The State of the Literary Arts Now

- 1) Claire Adam - Moderator
- 2) Barbara Jenkins
- 3) Michael Cozier
- 4) Andre Bagoo
- 5) Ingrid Persaud
- 6) Breanne Mc Ivor

Today's panels are the springboard of the Conference as panelists talk about themselves as writers and "new writers." In their personal statements they will address questions such as the following: Why do I write? Who or What am I writing to? My writing process; the writer and society; and the writer and the world. Writers will also focus on the experience of writing a first novel, which is always special because skeletons in the cupboard can come tumbling out. A nation's history, issues of race, gender, and colour and the writer's participation in building a literary culture are also therefore inevitably part of the discussion here.

11:20am - 1:00pm

AN AFTERNOON HIGH: MORE FROM THE CREATIVES

Panel 1: Writing for Adults

- 1) Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw - Moderator
- 2) Monique Roffey
- 3) Elizabeth Nunez
- 4) Danielle Boodoo-Fortune
- 5) Kevin Baldeosingh

This panel covers writing fiction for adults. The writers will discuss what they are attempting to achieve with particular reference to their own works. They will tell us of their difficulties and triumphs and address the impact of prizes and avenues for publication on what and how they write. After all, although creativity and the writing in which it emerges may be altruistic activities, publishing is not generally oriented in this way. In addition, one of the challenges a writer must overcome is the definition of his /her audience. Writers will speak of how they managed these hurdles. The reality check and challenge to convey a vision to a disparate audience in Trinidad and Tobago, the rest of the Caribbean, the USA, UK and elsewhere is also a daunting task and writers will tell us how they manage it. In addition to the

insight into their own work, these panels and the preceding roundtable may provide material for a proposed Guide for aspiring writers to be included in the Conference Proceedings.

1:00pm - 2:30pm

CENTRIFUGAL TO THE LITERATURE

Panel 2: Literature and Film: Book, Audiobook, Film, Animation

Moderator: BC Pires

- 1) Michael Mooleedhar – Directing, Producing and Scripting Green Days by the River
- 2) Patricia Mohammed – Virtuosity: The Art of Reading and Seeing
- 3) Danielle Dieffenthaler and Mervyn de Goeas – Words of a dynamic duo in Trinidad and Tobago on film making and theatre experimentation
- 4) Camille Selvon-Abrahams – Writing “the Other” into the Script

This panel examines the role of poetry, storytelling and writing in animation and film making as well as the challenges of adapting previously told tales for film. These are timely discussions given the number of Caribbean films that are now based on the literature and the extent to which the literature informs film making especially in Trinidad and Tobago, including works such as Joebell goes to America and Green Days by the River. Audiobooks refer to the growing practice of major actors and good readers being involved in the making of unexpurgated readings of books that are purchasable by anybody. This may well turn out to be the most important development in Trinidad and Tobago literature going forward. Its potential link to radio broadcasting holds promise of wide dissemination of the literature. A man planting tomatoes could be listening to books, poems and stories at the same time. The panel will thus also address the possibility of developments in this direction and the logistics of production and dissemination required.

2:30pm- 4:00pm

YOUTHFUL CREATIVITY AND NEW CENTRES

Panel 3: Young Adult and Children’s Literature: Current Concerns, Trends and Ideas

Moderator: Stacy Lela

- 1) Jeanelle Frontin
- 2) Danielle Y.C. McClean
- 3) Lisa Allen-Agostini
- 4) Summer Edward

This panel explores the emotions and anxieties related to a writer’s mission to speak with their younger audiences in a language that they understand and to which they will respond. The writing must appeal to the children’s imagination and the concerns of young

adults. How does this interweave with the national context and the writer's perceived burden to convey the country's rich folklore and cultural heritage to the next generation?

Despite the challenges there have been filled numerous books which deliberately cater to children and young adults. The gems produced produced by the writers of Trinidad and Tobago include those by Jeanelle Frontin, Danielle YC McLean, Lisa Allen-Agostini and Summer Edward.

4:00pm - 5:30pm

ANCIENT LEGACIES REFORMULATED

Panel 4: Developments in Oral and Performance Literature

Moderator: J. Vijay Maharaj

- 1) Derron Sandy - The Triumphs and Challenges of Performance Poetry
- 2) Wendell Manwarren - The Work of Three Canal: Spoken Word and Drama and its Adaptation to Film (eg Ti Jean)
- 3) Sat Balkaransingh - An Indo-Caribbean Creative Legend: Champa Devi
- 4) Tina Ramnarine and Timothy Bally - "Chutney, Memory, Creativity"
- 5) Brother Resistance- 'Ah bring ah riddum to defend tradition'

Developments in oral and performance literature comprise one of the most dynamic areas of literary evolution in Trinidad and Tobago. Unlike the readers' presentations on the previous panels, the panelists and / or their selected performer(s) on this one will also do cameo presentations of the work as well as discuss the significance of what they are attempting to achieve as per the questions and comments underwriting other presentations on this first day of the conference. The panel celebrates past and contemporary artists who have kept alive a vibrantly rich intellectual and cultural scene in Trinidad and Tobago.

5:30pm - 7:00pm

OPEN HOUSE

Moderator: Darin Gibson

- 1) Paula Obè - "Remembering Her Brown Head-tie"
- 2) Krista Woods - "It always rains in my town"
- 3) Danielle Y.C. McClean - Readings from work in progress
- 4) Johnny Coomansingh - A Reading from Seven Years on Adventist Street
- 5) Kin Man Young Tai - Four sonnets
- 6) Dawad Phillip - A selection of readings

Through poetry and prose, this panel of writers presents a range of experiences that are, in different ways, inspired by recollections of childhood and family. From the Independence movement and the politics of religion

to folklore as a bridge between generations; from magic and spiritual awakening to the silences of sexual abuse, these writers explore the bonds and the ruptures generated within the family and within the self. The works ultimately reflect the oftentimes glaring struggles and the quiet triumphs of Trinbagonian life and culture.

TUESDAY 22ND SEPTEMBER 2020

CREATIVE BEGINNINGS

8:00am - 9:00am

READINGS FROM SIX WRITERS

Moderator: Tony Deyal

- 1) Tony Deyal - Moderator
- 2) Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw
- 3) Kevin Baldeosingh
- 4) Lisa Allen-Agostini
- 5) Monique Roffey
- 6) Niala Maharaj

9:00am - 10:45am

PROMINENT CRITICAL AND CULTURAL TOPICS TODAY: PERSPECTIVES ON RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

Panel 1: Creative Non-Fiction

Moderator: Aaron Eastley

- 1) Primnath Gooptar - On Writing Biographies in Trinidad and Tobago
- 2) Genevieve Phagoo - Making a Place Home: Barbara Lalla's Trinidad
- 3) Judy Raymond: Beryl Mc Burnie and The Colour of Shadows
- 4) Reginald Dumas: Writing Autobiographies
- 5) Aaron Eastley: The Epistolary Vitality of Vido and Pa

In recent years there has been an increase in the number of non-fictional works including biographies, autobiographies and other books around persons, travel writings, histories, and family histories. This panel will look at the many socio-cultural, political and theoretical issues involved in the interest in the field. The primary purpose of this panel is to draw attention to these developments and secondarily to discuss the possibility that some of them exhibit many of the stylistic and emotional qualities associated with "creative" writing, to such an extent that they might well be described as creative.

10:45am - 12:15pm

Panel 2: Whither Journalism

Moderator: Lasana Liburd

- 1) Sheila Rampersad – Investigative Journalism as Imaginative Inquiry'
- 2) Lasana Liburd – Sports, Social Values and Identity
- 3) Ira Mathur – The Raoul Pantin, Keith Smith and co effect on TT journalism
- 4) Mark Lyndersay – Journalists of Art and Culture in the Time of the Electronic Media
- 5) Whither Journalism: Lasana Liburd followed by Sheila Rampersad and Tony Deyal with contributions from other panelists and Q and A

This panel recognizes the old relationships that existed between journalism and society on the Trinidad writing scene up to the 1960s when the newspapers published the work of the journalists alongside the work of those writing poems and stories as well as articles on other aspects of the arts. In looking at journalism since 1980 the panel will consider topics like journalism and politics, journalism and national culture, journalism and the environment, investigative journalism, the emergence of women in journalism, journalism and sport, journalism and the secret life of the day-to-day, and other marks of specialisation including the emergence of 'the columnist'. The power/control of the owners and of governments and the credibility or the silencing of journalists will be discussed. The question hanging over journalism in the 2020s, however, is how it will adjust and shape itself to the new electronic forms and possibilities, and the presentations will reflect this. The strict focus of this panel is on 'Whither Journalism'. The consideration of journalism as "creative" or "literary" writing is included in the panel "Creative Non-Fiction".

12:15pm - 1:30pm

Panel 3: Trauma, Healing and Relationships

Moderator: Elizabeth Jackson

- 1) Nivedita Misra – "V.S. Naipaul's A Way in the World: Unwritten Stories of Naipaul's life"
- 2) Alfrena Jamie Pierre – "Seeking Healing in Lamming's Of Age and Innocence and Chen's Toulum: A House for Matilda"
- 3) Paula Morgan – WomanKind: Representing Crime in Trinidad and Tobago 1980-2020
- 4) Andre Bagoo – "Brotherly Hate"

This panel examines one of the most prominent themes in postcolonial literature as a whole and local literature specifically. Panelists will explore the literary concerns about uncanny relationships and their simultaneous

potential for wounding and healing. The papers explore how the writers they discuss represent relationships as crisscrossed by the intersectional categories of personhood in which we live and depict possibilities of transcending them or accommodating to them.

1:30pm - 2:45pm

Panel 4: Literary Developments and Popular Culture

Moderator: Sat Balkaransingh

- 1) Akhim Alexis – Cultural Confidence via the Rapso Revolution: The work of Brother Resistance and 3 Canal
- 2) Kumar Mahabir – The Poetics of Unsung Chutney Singer, Lakhan Kariya, of Trinidad
- 3) Serikha Singh – Cultural Memory and Trinidad and Tobago’s Ramayanic Performances
- 4) Angel Rochard – Performing the Nation: Cross Ethnic Perceptions of the Carnival Masquerade in Novels by Earl Lovelace, Joy Mahabir, Willi Chen and Lawrence Scott.

This panel attends to poetics inside and outside of academia, in the under examined spaces of cultural performances of many types including but not restricted to those of the steel band, the calypso, chutney music, carnival and the Ramayan. The panelists pay close attention to the incorporation of the literary in the popular and the popular within the literary landscape of the books. Multiple interpolations into an ever-forming and transforming tradition write the nation into being in myriad ways.

2:45pm - 4:00pm

Panel 5: Fantasy, Folklore, Science Fiction and Carnival

Moderator: Nivedita Misra

- 1) Amanda McIntyre - “Migration Myths and Mas”
- 2) Jarrel De Matas – “The Evolution of Blackness: Futuristic Visions of Becoming Black in Chaos”
- 3) Divia Sookdeo – “The Pan-Caribbean Ethos of Nalo Hopkinson’s Midnight Robber: Jamaica or Trinidad and Tobago?”

This panel is dedicated to an exploration of fantasy, folklore, science fiction and carnival in Caribbean literature. It expands the boundaries of literature to include the practitioners of art weaving the magic of storytelling through a web of associations that tells the social and cultural history of the region. The use of Carnival as a trope in literature is heavily marked as a Bakhtinian trope of escape and containment. But the integration of carnival as a national festival creates its own dynamics of creation and dissemination. The carnival is a place in itself and by itself. Its pan-Caribbean association with the mas and fantasy in the literature are explored by the panellists.

4:00pm – 5:15pm

Panel 6: The Aesthetics of a City: Port-of-Spain

Moderator: Stephen Stuempfle

- 1) Tony Deyal – Hot Time in the Old Town Tonight: A Tale of the City of Port-of-Spain
- 2) Kerry Ann Abdool Ramjattan – From Woodford Square to the Queen’s Park Savannah: The Spatial and Ethnic Politics of Port of Spain in the Works of Ismith Khan and Shiva Naipaul
- 3) J. Vijay Maharaj – V. S. Naipaul’s Love Affair with Port-of-Spain
- 4) Michael Cherrie – Port of Spain, Derek Walcott’s View

The multifaceted and ever-changing built environment and social life of Port of Spain have inspired a rich literature of memory and imagination. This panel begins with Tony Deyal’s recollections of growing up in the city; moves on to the mix of fiction and memoir characteristic of the works of Ismith Khan, Shiva Naipaul, and V.S. Naipaul; and concludes with the historical fiction of Elizabeth Nunez. Together, the presenters explore the literary city as a space for broader reflections on colonialism, cultural dynamics, and creative expression in Trinidad.

5:30pm – 6:00pm

Panel 7: Twenty First Century Poetic Developments

Moderator: Geraldine Skeete

- 1) Susan Dubay – “Teaching Poetics in Trinidad and Tobago: From a Narrative in School”
- 2) Jolie Wong – The Poetics of Trinidad and Tobago in the work of Danielle Boodoo- Fortune and others
- 3) Maxine Archer – Jennifer Rahim’s Poetry
- 4) Kenneth Ramchand – Discordant Harmonies

This panel looks at the development in the poetic genre in Trinidad and Tobago. A poem says more than a thousand words. Poems are repositories of personal and national memories, some sweeter than others. From reading poetry to helping students find ways for the expression of their emotions through poems, this panel explores the complex mythologies used to convey and overcome trauma in poetic works. Poetry brings the myths, landscape and people alive “closer to home” and are an integral part and parcel of life.

6:00pm – 8:00pm

OPEN HOUSE

Moderator: Danielle Skinner

- 1) Motilal Boodoosingh – “Lochan Mousa”
- 2) Gyancham Rayman
- 3) Kavita Ganness “The Catch” - new flash fiction
- 4) Mervyn Taylor

- 5) Kirk Budhooram
- 6) Yvonne Bobb-Smith

WEDNESDAY 23RD SEPTEMBER 2020

LITERATURE IN EDUCATION

8:00am - 9:15am

Panel 1: Literature and Theatre Arts in the Schools

Moderator: Nicha Selvon-Ramkissoon

- 1) Victor Edwards and Lezora Edwards - The Use of Drama Experiences to make Literature Appealing to lower secondary school Students
- 2) Janieka Tudor-Baptiste - Milwaz Productions - Bringing literature alive in the secondary school system
- 3) Darin Gibson - Taking Drama to Another Level - Radio plays and other translations and adaptations

Literature has been dissociated from the performing arts in recent years in the education system. As we engage with training the next generation, performing arts presents an underdeveloped area which can be put to immense use through student participation in music, song, speeches, dramatizations, elocution, and training in sound and stage management. This panel comprises a dynamic team of experts who will examine the various activities that have been organized to counter this trend and speculate on future developments to bridge the chasm that has developed.

9:15am - 10:30am

Panel 2: Students' Panel: Literature Experiences at Secondary Schools

Moderator: Angela Yatali, Curriculum Officer

- 1) Arima Central Secondary (Government)
- 2) St George's College (Government)
- 3) Lakshmi Girls' Hindu College (Denominational - Hindu)
- 4) ASJA Girls' College San Fernando (Denominational - Muslim)
- 5) Fatima College (Denominational - Catholic)

This panel gives voice to students' experiences of literature across the secondary school. Students will discuss the joys as well as challenges encountered as they navigate their assigned poetry, prose and drama texts. While some schools offer literature as a compulsory subject up to Form Five, many do not. It is hoped that the students' experience will offer insights into literature teaching and learning as well as issues related to the choice of subjects and the place of literature in their personal plans for further study and the schools' embrace of literature on the syllabus.

10:30am - 11:45am

Panel 3: Teachers' Panel: The Teaching of Literary Appreciation in Challenging Times

Moderator: Laurence Jaggassar, Curriculum Coordinator (Ag)

- 1) Leekeesha Duncan-George and Avinash Phagoo (Holy Faith Convent)
- 2) Meghan Cleghorn- (Belmont Secondary - with emphasis on the OJT experience and becoming a teacher)
- 3) Marin Gonzales (Malick Secondary)
- 4) Damien Lergerton (Toco Secondary)

Literature is central to the teaching of English Language Arts which is compulsory up to Form Three. This is articulated in the national Primary and Secondary Schools English Language Arts Curriculum which advocates all three genres: Drama, Poetry and Prose. Schools are free to select literature texts for study up to Form Three. The study of English Literature is guided by texts identified in the CSEC English and CAPE Literatures in English syllabi. The teaching of language and literature in the twenty-first century poses significant opportunities and challenges, some of which the panelists will explore. Teachers of English will share insights into their language and literature practice and their rationale for the literature programmes and texts offered to students.

12:00pm - 1:15pm

Panel 4: Curriculum Officer's Roles and Challenges: Monitoring and Supporting English Language Arts at Primary and Secondary Schools

Moderator: Theresa Neblett-Skinner, Curriculum Coordinator

- 1) Gillian Pilgrim (Port of Spain and Environs)
- 2) Ambika Isaac (North Eastern Education District)
- 3) Bernice Jacobs (St Patrick Education District)
- 4) Sharda Ramsajan (Victoria & South Eastern Education District)
- 5) Trumanne Guerin (St George East Education District)

The Curriculum Officers are qualified and experienced former teachers of primary and secondary schools. They are the developers of the English Language Arts curriculum who are deployed to monitor and support curriculum implementation across the seven education districts. Curriculum Officers (English/Reading) will share their school visit experiences along with performance data on national and regional English examinations. They will offer insights into language arts teaching, challenges encountered, and advice offered during their monitoring of English programmes across a variety of school types in the different school districts.

1:15pm - 2:30pm

Panel 5: The Tertiary Experience: Why Study Literature?

Moderator: SueAnn Rajbansie

- 1) Keshma Maharaj
- 2) Kimberly Joseph
- 3) Adil Dattoo
- 4) Danielle Skinner

This panel takes the discussion about how and why we read literature further. Reading literature can be a life-changing experience and the panelists will discuss their choice and its implications for how they envision their lives. The panel comprises one student who has recently completed his undergraduate programme, two MA students and one MPhil student who will discuss why they chose to do literary studies (or why it chose them) and about their journeys to this point and expectations for later.

2:30pm - 4:00pm

Panel 6: Education and the Politics of Literary Education in Trinidad and Tobago

Moderator: Mala Morton Gittens, Curriculum Coordinator, Curriculum Planning and Development MOE GORTT

- 1) Winford James
- 2) Nicha Selvon-Ramkissoon
- 3) Gaynelle Holdip - Former Director (Ag) of Curriculum Planning and Development

The four experienced educators on this panel will respond to the conference as a whole and to previous panels earlier on this day. They will also examine critical issues in the education and socio-cultural systems of Trinidad and Tobago and their interrelations with a literate adult population. In addition, the panel will address questions such as: Is there a sound literary education system in place in the schools? If not, why? What are barriers to graduation and employment of secondary school graduates? How can a literary education benefit the capacity for graduation and employment? The panelists will thus focus on a range of issues including the existence of sub-cultural groups like Emos and Goontahs which have internalized racialized stereotypes and manifest them. Panelists will discuss how the formal curriculum including the selection of literary texts for the classroom can accommodate their needs. Panelists will also share their thoughts on reading, writing and examining the literature of Trinidad and Tobago beyond 2020.

4:45pm - 6:00pm

OPEN HOUSE: LAST NIGHT JAM: POETRY SLAM

Derron Sandy and the Spoken Word Crew

THURSDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER 2020

A GRAND LITERARY REPUBLIC DAY: A CELEBRATION OF MICHAEL ANTHONY

Day Chair: **Sueann Rajbansie**

Moderator: Professor Paula Morgan

Presentation of a Token of Appreciation

9:00am - 10:00am

VERBAL LITERARY TOUR: FROM SAN FERNANDO TO MAYARO

The Michael Anthony Landscape: Roydon Salick

Roundtable Discussion: Roydon Salick, Brinsley Samaroo
and Ken Ramchand

10:30am - 11:30am

SCENES FROM GREEN DAYS BY THE RIVER:

THE FILM, THE BOOK, THE REALITY

Discourse delivered by Michael Mooleedhar

11:30am - 1:30pm

FILM SCREENING INTRODUCTION BY TERESA WHITE

Ian McDonald's The Humming-Bird Tree

Leader of Post-Screening Discussion: Teresa White

1:30pm - 1:45pm

VOTE OF THANKS

1:45pm - 2:00pm

CHAIR'S CLOSING REMARKS