

HURRICANE HITS ENGLAND

AN ANTHOLOGY OF WRITING ABOUT BLACK BRITAIN

ONYEKACHI WAMBU, EDITOR

"Descending in the millions, they came in awe and in search of a missing part of themselves, which they believed had been stolen. Starting from the margins, they walked with a terrified boldness toward the center of the power that had held their imaginations enthralled, humiliated their bodies, taken over their economies, and captured their souls... When they finally arrived at the huge hall where the center of power lay, the first thing they discovered was that they had themselves changed beyond recognition."

from the introduction by Onyekachi Wambu

In June 1948, the *SS Empire Windrush* docked in Tilbury, England, carrying with it the hopes and dreams of hundreds of young men and women from the Caribbean. It was a moment of historic transformation: the beginning of the mass migration which was to have far-reaching effects on Britain over the next half-century. Here, in poetry, fiction, and essays, such prominent writers as Wole Soyinka, Ben Okri, Hanif Kureishi, and Salman Rushdie address themes of migration and exile, race and sexuality, as they struggle to come to terms with a new identity.

"Quite simply the best anthology of writing about the Black British experience to have appeared to date."

Times Higher Education Supplement

Cover design: Lundgren Graphics

CONTINUUM • NEW YORK

\$24.95



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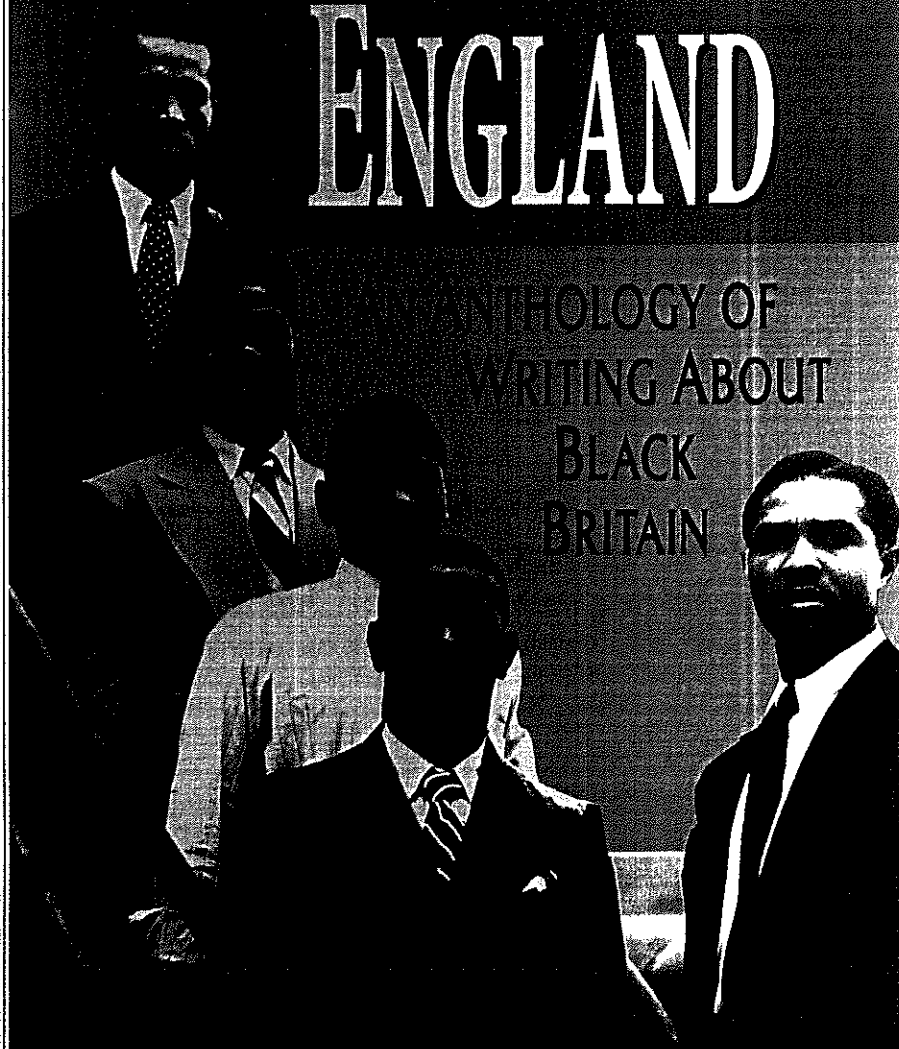
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Young passion burst and swept them so they didn't know really what they were doing. If Tiger had known that this powerful force was going to grip him so that he wouldn't be afraid, it would have been so easy for him to let himself die and switch on the force. Because afterwards he was aware that he of his own accord had taken no part in the thing. A great desire for his wife had come over him, possessing his brain.

Before they fell asleep in each other's arms he told himself that the next time he would just die and let the power do its work.

And the next morning they lay lazily on the bags on the floor, looking at each other with the wonder of the new knowledge.

And they did it again.

GEORGE LAMMING

George Lammig was born in Barbados. He was one of the leading lights of a generation of Caribbean writers who arrived in Britain in the early 1950s. *In the Castle of my Skin*, published in 1953, was his first novel. He followed this with *The Emigrants*, *Seasons of Adventure*, *Of Age and Innocence*, *The Pleasures of Exile*, *Water with Berries* and *Natives of My Person*. He has received numerous honours and now lives in the Caribbean.

In the Castle of my Skin is a classic novel about Caribbean adolescence, which marked an extraordinary debut. It captures beautifully colonial Caribbean society through the eyes of a bright boy. The following extracts look at the wider context of the lives of those living in a small village, and at the philosophical forces that shaped the world of the boy and his friend.

from *In the Castle of my Skin*

An estate where fields of sugar cane had once crept like an open secret across the land had been converted into a village that absorbed some three thousand people. An English landowner, Mr Creighton, had died, and the estate fell to his son through whom it passed to another son who in his turn died, surrendering it to yet another. Generations had lived and died in this remote corner of a small British colony, the oldest and least adulterated of British colonies: Barbados or Little England as it was called in the local school texts. To the east where the land rose gently to a hill, there was a large brick building surrounded by a wood and a high stone wall that bore bits of bottle along the top. The landlords lived there amidst the trees within the wall. Below and around it the land spread out into a flat unbroken monotony of small houses and white marl roads. From any point of the land one could see on a clear day the large brick house hoisted on the hill. When the weather wasn't too warm, tea was served on the wide, flat roof, and villagers catching sight through the trees of the shifting figures crept behind their fences, or stole through the wood away from the wall to see how it

was done. Pacing the roof, the landlord, accompanied by his friends, indicated in all directions the limits of the land. The friends were mainly planters whose estates in the country had remained agricultural; or otherwise there were English visitors who were absentee owners of estates which they had come to see. The landlord, one gathered, explained the layout of land, the customs of the villagers and the duties which he performed as caretaker of this estate. The villagers, enthralled by the thought of tea in the open air, looked on, unseen, open-mouthed.

The wood was thick and wild with tangled weed racing over and along the swollen black roots of the mahogany trees. Patrolling the land at all hours of the day were the village overseers. They were themselves villagers who were granted special favours like attending on the landlady, or owning after twenty years' tenure the spot of land on which their house was built. They were fierce, aggressive and strict. Theft was not unusual, and the landlords depended entirely on the overseers to scare away the more dangerous villagers. The overseers carried bunches of keys strung on wire which they chimed continually, partly to warn the villagers of their approach, and partly to satisfy themselves with the feel of authority. This seemed necessary since the average villager showed little respect for the overseer unless threatened or actually bullied. Many a day poverty, adventure or the threat of boredom would drive them into the woods where the landlady's hens lay and the rabbits nibbled the green weed. They would collect the eggs and set snares for the birds and animals. The landlord made a perennial complaint, and the overseers were given a full-time job. Occasionally the landlord would accuse the overseers of conniving, of slackening on the job, and the overseers who never risked defending themselves gave vent to their feelings on the villagers who they thought were envious and jealous and mean. Low-down nigger people was a special phrase the overseers had coined. The villagers were low-down nigger people since they couldn't bear to see one of their kind get along without feeling envy and hate. This had created a tense relationship between the overseer and the ordinary villager. Each represented for the other an image of the enemy. And the enemy was to be destroyed or placated. The overseer was either authoritarian or shrewd. The villager hostile or obsequious. The landlord's complaint heightened the image, gave it an edge that cut sharp and deep through every layer of the land. And this image, by continual assertion, had become a myth which

like a rumour drifted far beyond the village. Even the better educated who had one way or another gone to the island's best schools and later held responsible posts in the Government service, even these were affected by this image of the enemy which had had its origin in a layer from which many had sprung and through accidents of time and experience forgotten. The image of the enemy, and the enemy was My People. My people are low-down nigger people. My people don't like to see their people get on. The language of the overseer. The language of the civil servant. The myth had eaten through their consciousness like moths through the pages of ageing documents. Not taking chances with you people, my people. They always let you down. Make others say we're not responsible, we've no sense of duty. That's what the low-down nigger people do to us, their people. Then the others say we've no sense of duty. Like children under the threat of hellfire they accepted instinctively that the others, meaning the white, were superior, yet there was always the fear of realizing that it might be true. This world of the others' imagined perfection hung like a dead weight over their energy. If the low-down nigger people weren't what they are, the others couldn't say anything about us. Suspicion, distrust, hostility. These operated in every decision. You never can tell with my people. It was the language of the overseer, the language of the Government servant, and later the language of the lawyers and doctors who had returned stamped like an envelope with what they called the culture of the Mother Country.

The landlord was safe. The village was safe. That tension soaring at times to mutual bitterness had produced this image of the enemy, and later there emerged an attitude which the overseer wore like a uniform and which became his substitute for duty. Take no chances. Be on the look-out always, everywhere. Be fierce. Be strict. Be aggressive. That was duty. And the overseer was a shadow of the police constable who patrolled the village at night. He always arrived alert, ready, prepared. He did not come to explain, inform, interpret or share experience like other men in the ordinary run of social intercourse. He came to arrest. Something had to be wrong. The village might have been asleep, but floating somewhere about, around, perhaps within himself was the large, invisible threatening phantom, the image of the enemy. My people. Whenever the constable appeared there was apprehension. People who all the while were relaxed and composed became fidgety, began to suspect themselves. Sometimes

they slipped along the alley and over to the neighbouring road to warn the villagers there. The constable was around. Nothing seemed wrong, but something must have been. Something had to be wrong. Children hid behind fences or peeped through the jalousies, frightened, waiting.

Once a quarter, or after some calamity like the flood, the landlord with his family drove from road to road through the village. He inspected the damage, looking from one side of the road to the other. Those who were untidy scampered into hiding, much to his amusement, while the small boys who were caught unawares came to attention and saluted briskly. The landlord smiled and his wife beside him smiled too. The daughter seated in the back of the carriage looked down, haughty and contemptuous.

Two horses in an outfit of brilliant polished leather dragged the carriage from road to road through the village, stopping here and there as the fancy took the landlord. The survey lasted all morning, during which he had seen most of the extreme damage and made a rough estimate of the necessary repairs. In the case of floods the repairs were simple. The canals would be re-marked and the wreckage shovelled from the roads. This finished, cartloads of stone and pebbles would be strewn on as a new surface. These would be left for several weeks in their upturned state until vehicles and pedestrians treading upon them from day to day would flatten them out into an even white stretch. The road was new again.

When the carriage disappeared with the landlord and his family, small boys came out to rehearse the scene. Two took the part of the horses and trotted along to the fore, while another three arranged themselves behind as the landlord and his family had done. The boys would trot slowly from road to road pretending to make a similar survey, and discussing among themselves the plans they had for repairs. Earlier, when they had watched the landlord and his friends on the roof of the brick house, they reproduced the scene behind the fence in the open air. They made saucers and cups with a mixture of dirt and water and saliva, leaving them in the sun to bake dry. Then they served tea from the tap of a standing pipe nearby. The make-believe was impressive. The landlord. The overseer. The villager. The image of the enemy. The limb of the law, strict, fierce, aggressive. These had combined to produce an idea of the Great.

The world of authority existed somewhere along the fringe of the villagers' consciousness. Direct contact with the landlord might

have helped towards some understanding of what the others, meaning the white, were like, but the overseer who nominally was a mediator had functioned like a bridge which might be used, but not for crossing from one end to the other. The world ended somewhere along the bridge, and beyond was another plane of reality; beyond was the Great, which the landlord and the large brick house on the hill represented. At night the light poured down through the wood and the house looking down from the hill seemed to hold a quality of benevolent protection. It was a castle around which the land like a shabby back garden stretched. When the lights went out, and the wood was dark, the villagers took note. The landlord's light had been put out. The landlord had gone to bed. It was time they did the same. A custom had been established and later a value which, through continual application and a hardened habit of feeling, became an absolute standard of feeling. I don't feel the landlord would like this. If the overseer see, the landlord is bound to know. It operated in every activity. The obedient lived in the hope that the Great might not be offended, the uncertain in the fear it might have been.

...

I know what it is, one boy was saying, I know what it is. He spoke very well. The old woman isn't an old fool. She knew what she was saying. She was a slave. We're all slaves. The Queen freed some of us, but some of us are still slaves.

The boys listened intently as the buzzing soared in another corner. The head teacher sat quiet, his hands stuck against his forehead.

She wasn't a fool, that old woman. She has a good memory. When Lucifer, that is the devil, when the devil was sent from his garden, he carried with him a lot of angels. The angels who were on his side said they would go with him and they left heaven for the earth. That is where we are living now. It was a terrible sight the way they walked out of that garden. But they said they didn't care. They would get along all right without God. The boys listened. It was like a Sunday School lesson. They came down to earth, the boy went on, and they made a home here on the earth. But it didn't last long. They had got so used to the garden that they couldn't tear themselves away. They thought they could, but they were wrong. The garden was like something in the blood. When something is in the blood you can't get it out unless you take out the blood. They

couldn't manage very well on the earth because they couldn't get rid of the garden. The garden was in the back of their minds all the time. They tried to turn their backs against it, but they couldn't turn their memory. It was deep, deep in them. And then they got very sad. They couldn't stand one another. The sight of one another on the earth made them sick. And it wasn't long before they started to fight. That was the beginning of war. The angels of the devil who were the first men couldn't stand the sight of one another on the earth. They couldn't help themselves. It wasn't that they wanted to kill one another. It wasn't that at all. It was simply that they couldn't help themselves. And from that day war never stopped. They passed it on to us from generation to generation. And the older the earth became the more we got to hate the sight of one another. And the worse the fighting became. Some of the angels said they would go back to the garden. Others were ashamed. The devil said he would die first. He would die before he submitted to returning. But God wouldn't have them back. He said he wouldn't have them back until they had all repented. They had to say they were sorry. They had to become slaves in a sort of way. It was all right for those who didn't want to stay on the earth. They could do it so easily, but the others found it very difficult. They couldn't do it so easily. They were slaves. Soon they all became slaves. You see, they had it deep in them to get out of the garden. They did want to see something new, something different. But when they saw the something they couldn't stand that it gave them a kind of delight to know that there was something else. If ever God drove them out again they would have somewhere to go. But they were afraid. They couldn't stand being alone on the earth. They wanted something to hold on to. And they all agreed to go back. They say they would repent and go back. And they were terribly ashamed. They were ashamed because in a way they didn't want to repent. They feel they could manage. But it was the garden. They couldn't get the garden out of their minds. And the more they thought of the garden, the more ashamed they became. And the more they repented. They were all slaves. And they made us slaves too. The Queen freed some of us because she made us feel that the Empire was bigger than the garden. That's what the old woman meant. The Queen did free some of us in a kind of way. We started to think about the Empire more than we thought of the garden, and then nothing mattered but the Empire. But they have put the two of them together now. The Empire and the garden. We are to speak of

them the same way. They belong to the same person. They both belong to God. The garden is God's own garden and the Empire is God's only Empire. They work together for us. God save the King who will help us to see the garden again. That's all we have to think of now, the Empire and the garden. But the old woman wasn't wrong. We are slaves. We are still slaves of these two. The Empire and the garden. And we are happy to be slaves. It isn't the same as being a prisoner. Nobody wants to be a prisoner. You aren't free when you're a prisoner. But it is different when you are a slave. When you are a slave of the Empire and the garden at the same time, you can be free to belong to both. And you can be free to be ashamed of not thinking enough about them. The more you think of them, the more you are ashamed and also the less you think of them the more you are ashamed. My mother who is a Sunday School teacher has explained it well. There is nothing for us to do, she tells me, but rejoice in our bondage. That is what she calls it. She doesn't say slave. She says bondage. When the time comes we shall be taken out of the bondage by what she calls grace. That's not a girl she's talking about. It's something else. It's a sort of salvation. That's what she says sometimes. Salvation through grace. We're all going to the garden again, free again, and especially those who here on earth belonged to the Empire. We'll be free again. The others will perish. Those who refuse to go back to the garden because they are stubborn, they will perish. And not only through fire. My mother says it's loneliness. They will be lonely in a way they can't stand. The loneliness will make them giddy. Giddy and sick. Because they were stubborn. You can't live without God, my mother says, you can't unless you're prepared to be lonely and sick. And that's more than an ordinary man can stand. Those who choose the garden will find things different. They'll be slaves all right, as the old woman says. They will be slaves, but everything will be better and easier. Very much easier.

The boys had listened patiently. They knew the other's mother was a Sunday School teacher and they felt she spoke with some authority. They were a little afraid. They agreed that if things were as the boy said, it would be better to belong to the Empire and in the end get back to the garden. After all there was nothing to lose by belonging to the Empire. They were all very poor. And moreover the Empire made them put on things like parades. They enjoyed the parades and the flags and the speeches. It made them feel a little

more important than they were. Listening to a speech from the inspector! It gave you a feeling of being grown-up and when you marched and saluted you felt like a soldier. A real soldier. They would choose the Empire and the garden. There was nothing wrong with them. And they had everything in their favour. Flowers. Flags. Pennies.

WILSON HARRIS

Wilson Harris was born and educated in Guyana. He worked for the government as a surveyor, which enabled him to travel deep into the Guyanese interior where the majority of the country's Amerindian population live. He developed a fascination for their myths and stories, which have shaped his work. He arrived in Britain in 1958, and soon after published his first novel, *The Palace of the Peacock*, part of his four-book *Guyanese Quartet* series. He is also the author of *The Eye of the Scarecrow*, *Da Silva's Cultivated Wilderness*, *The Tree of the Sun*, *Angel at The Gate*, and the *Carnival Trilogy*. He has lived in Britain since 1958.

The Palace of the Peacock is an allegorical quest for the heart of Guyana. A group of men paddle upstream, into the interior of the country. Dream sequences merge with allusive fragments from Guyanese history and landscape, as illustrated by the following extract taken from the opening chapter of the book.

from *The Palace of the Peacock* Horseman, Pass By

A horseman appeared on the road coming at a breakneck stride. A shot rang out suddenly, near and yet far as if the wind had been stretched and torn and had started coiling and running in an instant. The horseman stiffened with a devil's smile, and the horse reared, grinning fiendishly and snapping at the reins. The horseman gave a bow to heaven like a hanging man to his executioner, and rolled from his saddle on to the ground.

The shot had pulled me up and stifled my own heart in heaven. I started walking suddenly and approached the man on the ground. His hair lay on his forehead. Someone was watching us from the trees and bushes that clustered the side of the road. Watching me as I bent down and looked at the man whose open eyes stared at the sky through his long hanging hair. The sun blinded and ruled