

Writers Explore New Directions in African and Caribbean Writing

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African writers should provide alternatives to the media's negative narrative on the continent, according to literary experts who converged at the University of Birmingham.

Writers, publishers and academics from the UK, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, the United States, Canada, Sierra Leone, the Bahamas, and Dominican Republic took part in the 2009 Cadbury Fellows Conference organised by the Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham.

The theme of the conference was 'New directions in African and Caribbean writing'.

Sierra Leonean writers Oumar Farouk Sesay and Syl Cheney-Coker discussed their roles in post-war Sierra Leonean literature.

Publishers Becky Ayebia Clarke, Jeremy Poynting and Bibi Bakare-Yusuf talked about the role of literary books and publishers in 21st century African and Caribbean literature.

Shola Adenekan, Tolu Ogunlesi, Muthoni Garland and Uchenna Izundu revealed how the internet is influencing new writers from Africa.

Caribbean poets Christian Campbell, Ian Dieffenthaler and Vahni Capildeo reflected on contemporary Caribbean poetry.

The 2009 Cadbury fellows at the Centre of West African Studies were Oumar Farouk Sesay, Tolu Ogunlesi and Christian Campbell.

Oumar Farouk Sesay was born in Sierra Leone. He studied philosophy and political science at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. In 2007, he published a collection of poetry *Salute To The Remains Of A Peasant*. Oumar has also written several plays for the theatre.

Christian Campbell, from the Bahamas, is a poet, cultural critic and journalist. He has presented his work in the Caribbean, the US, the UK and Switzerland. His works have been published in *Wasafiri*, *The Arts Journal*, and *Erotique Caribbean*. His collection of poems will be published by Peepal Tree Press in 2010.

Tolu Ogunlesi is a Nigerian writer and journalist. He is the author of the poetry collection *Listen to the Geckos Singing from a Balcony*. He has also been broadcast on the BBC. In 2007, Tolu won a Dorothy Sargent Rosenberg Prize. His novella, *Conquest and Conviviality* was published in 2008.

According to Ogunlesi, "it was a great privilege to be selected to be a 2009 Cadbury Visiting Fellow at the University of Birmingham's Center of West African Studies, and to participate in the Cadbury Conference, which had a unique mix of writers, scholars and publishers discussing the current state, as well as the future, of African and Caribbean literatures.

"These discussions were not only in terms of thematic and stylistic direction, but also against the background of the influence of new media (the internet) on emerging writing and writers. And there was an amazing and inspiring diversity of opinions and arguments and counter-arguments that I think could only have happened in the kind of eclectic setting that this year's Cadbury Conference provided."

The conference took place on 21 and 22 May, 2009.

-Ends-

Notes to Editor

- The Centre of West African Studies, University of Birmingham is the only university department in the world to concentrate specifically on West Africa. All staff of the Centre have lived and taught in Africa, and continue to carry out research there.
- Africa's long history of relations with Europe, the African Diaspora in the Caribbean and the continent's relationships with the Islamic world are also integral aspects of the programmes at the Centre.

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