

## Preface

This volume brings together John Hearne's short stories in a single collection for the first time. Although most of the stories were previously published, they appeared in smaller journals and some anthologies between 1953 and 1994 and they are not easily available. In organizing this collection, I have for the most part followed a chronological order of when the stories were published, deviating from that only where I have evidence of the story being written earlier.

John Hearne left Jamaica in 1943 at the age of seventeen to enlist in the Royal Air Force. Following the Second World War, he remained in the United Kingdom to attend university, first the University of Edinburgh and then the University of London's Institute of Education. He returned briefly to Jamaica from 1950 to 1952 before leaving for England again, where he felt he would find a more culturally and creatively fulfilling life. (He was as much drawn by the significant people in his life who were in London: Leeta Hopkinson, the love of his life, whom he would later marry, and his dear friend Roger Mais.)<sup>1</sup>

Hearne was determined to be recognized internationally as a writer and the first signs of that recognition came soon after his return to London when his fable "The Mongoose Who Came to the City" appeared in the *New Statesman and Nation* (45, no. 1160 [30 May 1953]: 640).<sup>2</sup> This was his first published piece and a significant accomplishment for an unknown writer. (Two months later, his poem "Black Boy in a New World" appeared

in the *New Statesman* [46, no. 1165 (4 July 1953): 12]. “The Bridge” would appear the following year in a small literary journal, *Departure* (2, no. 6 [Winter 1954]: 7–12), but by early 1954 Hearne was growing frustrated by publishers’ lack of interest in the novel that would become *Voices under the Window*.

He moved between writing poetry and prose, reading widely all the while. In one creative phase in February 1954, he wrote three short stories: “A Village Tragedy”, “Ramon” and “The Haitian Admiral”. Of these, only “A Village Tragedy” was published (*Atlantic*, November 1958, 63–68).<sup>3</sup> I have never found manuscripts for “Ramon” or “The Haitian Admiral”.

By September 1954 Hearne’s first novel, *Voices under the Window*, had been accepted by Faber and Faber and it was published in September 1955. This was the recognition he had craved, but by the end of 1955 Hearne felt restless and ready for adventure. He had applied unsuccessfully for teaching positions at schools in Africa and India before recognizing that it was the Caribbean that he felt most drawn towards, and in March 1956 he was on a banana boat bound for Jamaica.

The two years that followed in Jamaica were remarkably fertile and fulfilling for Hearne. He returned to find a far more vibrant arts scene than he had left in 1952. His short story “Morning, Noon and Night” appeared in *Focus*, edited by Edna Manley (Kingston: Extra Mural Department, University College of the West Indies, 1956), and was likely written soon after his return to Jamaica in 1956.

Between 1956 and 1958, Hearne taught high school, lectured occasionally on literature, and wrote regularly for *Pagoda*, the *Daily Gleaner* and *Spotlight*. One assignment for *Spotlight* gave him the opportunity, for the first time, to travel widely in the Caribbean and explore the rest of the region. (See the appendix, “From a Journal”, for extracts from Hearne’s notes on his travels in the 1950s.) Guyana (at the time still British Guiana) in particular captivated him, and what is perhaps his strongest short story, “At the Stelling” (*Atlantic*, November 1960, 90–96), was written out of this period,<sup>4</sup> as was “The Lost Country” (*Atlantic*, September 1961, 64–69).

By mid-1958, however, Hearne was restless again and ready to return to England to take up a job teaching at Midhurst Grammar School. His novels *Stranger at the Gate* (1956) and *Faces of Love* (1957) had appeared in quick

succession, to enthusiastic reviews, and his fourth novel, *The Autumn Equinox*, would be published in 1959. He felt that in England, he could live off his writing alone. By 1960 this was in fact the case: he was writing teleplays and radio plays for ITV and the BBC and working on his fifth novel, *Land of the Living* (1961).

Despite his success in England he was beginning to find the place dull. Once again, Hearne felt his place was in the Caribbean, confirming “the intuition that has been nagging me for the last year: that there is no other place for me now, either as a citizen or an artist”.<sup>5</sup>

Although Hearne was never active in party politics, he had always been deeply engaged with the dynamics of political activity and loyalty, which we see “The Wind in This Corner” (*Atlantic*, May 1960, 53–59).<sup>6</sup> The pull of Jamaica was particularly strong on the eve of independence and when Norman Manley, leader of the People’s National Party and a close friend, asked Hearne to join the Jamaica Information Service he returned to Jamaica for the last time. His writing from then on was largely non-fiction.<sup>7</sup> It would take him close to twenty years to finish his last novel, *The Sure Salvation* (1981).

Hearne had left the Jamaica Information Service when the People’s National Party lost the 1962 elections, and from that point on Hearne taught at the University of the West Indies in the Department of Extra-Mural Studies and then from 1967 on as head of the newly established Creative Arts Centre (now the Philip Sherlock Centre for the Creative Arts). He also had steady work as a journalist, appearing as a commentator on radio and television, writing a regular column for the *Daily Gleaner*, and occasionally contributing articles to international publications.

Apart from two years, 1972 to 1974, spent working with the People’s National Party at the Agency for Public Information and the Office of the Prime Minister, Hearne would spend the rest of his career at the University of the West Indies, teaching creative writing and journalism until his retirement in 1992.

In the early 1990s, there was a flicker of overseas interest in Hearne’s work. “At the Stelling” was staged by an alternative theatre company in Los Angeles in early 1993 and later that year he was invited to submit a short story to the anthology *Fiery Spirits: Canadian Writers of African Descent*,<sup>8</sup>

edited by Ayanna Black (Toronto: HarperPerennial, 1994). That story was “Living Out the Winter”, written much earlier – likely in the late 1950s or early 1960s – and never published.

The only unpublished story in this collection is “Reckonings”. I found this typescript among his papers and the only element that dates it is that Guyana is referred to as such, rather than British Guiana, which would place it after Guyanese independence in 1966. There was a 1970 rejection letter from the *Atlantic*,<sup>9</sup> and an undated rejection letter from the *Spectator*, to whom Hearne had submitted the story under the odd pseudonym “Angela Saumarez”.

Finally, the non-fiction piece “From a Journal” (*Tamarack Review* 14 [Winter 1960]: 133–42) is included here as an appendix for the context it gives to the period in which these stories were written. It reflects Hearne’s burst of creative energy in his twenties and early thirties, his sense of wonder and his love of the arts. Also evident is his awareness of inhabiting a pivotal moment in Caribbean history and of the dynamics of race, class and politics that would be at the foundation of nation-building in the region. These dynamics are present in his fiction writing as well, and his short stories and novels capture a moment in twentieth-century Caribbean history that needs to be more fully understood as we navigate our postcolonial reality.

John Hearne is remembered today more as a journalist and for the influence he had on generations of writers, academics and students – as friend, colleague and teacher – than for his creative writing. But these connections were not the extent of his reach: his fiction must be included in any serious consideration of the region’s literature. In his writing, he was “alone on his own road // his prose rustling from a tall cedar”,<sup>10</sup> and that road without question cut through the heart of the Caribbean.

S.H.