



Edna Manley

MR. CHANCELLOR, as a mark of our esteem I call upon you to welcome into the academic fellowship of the University of the West Indies, Edna Manley, artist, humanist and animateur for two generations of Caribbean creative talent.

Few would need to be told who Edna Manley is. She is a sculptor of high international repute, the widow of Jamaica's first Premier and founding father. She is the mother of this island's fourth Prime Minister who is himself already recognised as a foremost leader of the Third World. She is, as well, the mother of another Minister of Government which makes her at least twice and a bit responsible for much that is the political life of the nation she has helped to mould. For she has been at the birth, has attended many a burial, has witnessed the resurrection and shared in the exaltation of many an idea and dream and hope that have informed the development of Jamaica from the middle nineteen-thirties to this very day. Yet she was no passive observer of events on a passing scene. She was activist, innovator, passionate advocate for the liberation of what became her Jamaica and she carried a deeply emotional attachment to the cause of nationhood and the centrality of the creative arts to this life-giving process of human growth and development. If, as she once said, that as the wife and mother of men in politics she was not only married to troubles but the mother of troubles, then mankind should be grateful to her for having taken the trouble to give us such troubles.

She was to be the founder-editor of Jamaica's first literary journal *Focus*, and a founding editor of the nationalist weekly *Public Opinion*. Then in 1937 she was to give the island's first major one-man exhibition of sculpture and was to befriend, teach and arrange financial support for the young, many of whom have since become recognised as Jamaica's leading artists and writers. She was to lay the foundations for what is now the Jamaica School of Art and to bring to the nationalism of her husband's political party the *force vitale* of the creative spirit and the sensibility of the artist — tempering power with compassion and leavening anxiety with fervent hope.

But above all she created. And she created with the commitment of the artist not so self-possessed as to feel no need for others and not so self-indulgent as to miss the rich and vital forces engulfing her Jamaica of the thirties. (She was already making 'the Negro the serious subject of serious sculpture at a time when not only the practice of art but the notion of the Negro as fit subject for art still evoked derision from a great many Jamaicans'. *Negro Aroused* was prophetic and insightful, casting shadows of things that were to come in the struggle for liberation from dependency and self-contempt and recording in sculpted intensity two centuries' yearning for a new reality. The piece was masterly and enjoys its pride of place among such other masterpieces as *Eve* which preceded it, *The Prophet*, *Strike*, *Market Women*, *Diggers*, *Tomorrow*, *Moon*, *The Angel*, *Phoenix*, *The Faun*, *Journey* and the great *Horse of the Morning*.)

That horse, like all other horses, does reflect something of Edna Manley, the Piscean child – gentle, sensitive, obstinate, combative, and fully aware of the need for friends and loved ones. The sensitivity and obstinacy gave us great art from Edna Manley; the combativeness gave us the will to agree to disagree agreeably but, above all, to disagree if we must. It was no spineless creature that took R. G. Collingwood, the philosopher to task on his theories about art, religion, science and history in his *Speculum Mentis*. The philosopher had to reply to Edna Manley, the inquiring, stubborn thinker and courageous artist. The need for the loyalty and confidence of friends and loved ones produced in turn much love and friendship. Love and friendship she showered on a family, reared to distinction and to service. Love and friendship she showered on those who wished to create and share in the liberating, if awesome task of rendering in wood, stone, bronze or cement fondue the eloquence of the human spirit and the inner stirrings of the human soul. “Sculpture is the art of the archetype,” she once wrote, “it springs from the collective experience of the past”.)

This ancestral vision was source for that sense of process, with its contradictions, unity in diversity, harmony in chaos, hope in tragedy, life in death. The vision was to invest the entire artistic movement of Jamaica with a sense of purpose, true perspective, respect for constancy and disciplined work, a striving after excellence and a belief in self. They are values that sought to inform an entire ethos and values long cherished by communities of scholars everywhere.

And as scholars everywhere, she valued freedom without which the artist, creating out of wood, paint, sound or words like the scholar ordering sense and meaning out of human thought and action, cannot live. (In clear and lucid prose she affirms that “. . . deep in the heart of it all, the artist knows that whether his art carries the burden of a philosophy . . . or just sheer technique . . . it is himself he is expressing. And the load of responsibility that he carries to society, whether a growing or a dying one, is the validity of his own being.”) This is the stuff of freedom and not just what dreams are made of.

So Mr. Chancellor, I invite you to recognise in Edna Manley the inventiveness of the artist, the spirit of youth, the wisdom of age, the obstinate curiosity of the scholar, the adventure of the discoverer, the passionate loyalty of the committed and the intuitive instincts of a woman, and in so doing receive her by the authority of Council and Senate into the membership of our community with the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.