

MARSON, Una Maud (1905-1965) Social Worker, poet, broadcaster, playwright, journalist, author, feminist and lecturer, this multi-faceted woman was born in 1905 at Santa Cruz, St. Elizabeth (Jamaica), the youngest daughter of the late Rev. Solomon Isaac Marson, Baptist Pastor and Ada Wilhelmina (nee Mullings) his wife and was educated at Hampton High School for Girls. After high school, she held several secretarial posts and was later attached to the editorial staffs of two local newspapers: "The Daily Gleaner" and "The Jamaican Standard". From 1929 - 1935 she branched out on her own and edited and published a monthly magazine - the first magazine to be edited and published in Jamaica by a Jamaican woman - "The Cosmopolitan". She also published a book of her poems in 1930 entitled Tropic Reveries and in 1931 another book of poems Heights and Depths.

She was awarded the Silver Musgrave Medal, by the governors of the Institute of Jamaica, for her literary work comprising poems previously published in the Cosmopolitan and the local newspapers.

In 1932 she wrote, her first play At What A Price, staged it the same year at the Ward Theatre in Kingston Jamaica and also staged it at the Sala Theatre, London, England in 1934.

Miss Marson migrated to England and identified herself with the League of Coloured People (London) 1933-35 and the feminist movement in that country and was chosen to be a delegate to the XIIth Congress "International Alliance of Women" held in Istanbul Turkey in April 1935. In 1934, while in London she had her play At What A Price, staged at the Sala Theatre, London.

Committed to the ideals of the League of Nations, she was a temporary collaborator to the League in September 1935 in Geneva, was attached to the Ethiopian Legation, London in 1936 and accompanied H.M. Haile Selassie to the League of Nations to deal with the Italo-- Ethiopian problems.

Somewhat disillusioned with the League, she returned to Jamaica and resumed her literary and social welfare preoccupations. While here, she founded the Readers & Writers Club in 1937, as an effort to mobilize the young intellectuals, as well as in the same year, the Kingston Dramatic Club. In 1937 also she published her third book of poems entitled "The Moth And The Stars" and her plays London Calling and Pocomania were both staged at the Ward Theatre in 1937 and 1938 respectively. In 1938 she helped to found and was instrumental in the running of the Jamaica Save the Children Fund, and between 1936-38 she contributed several articles to the Public Opinion, a weekly Jamaican newspaper.

Miss Marson returned to England and in 1938 worked with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) as a television script-writer and during the Second World War, she produced the popular West Indian programme, "Calling the West Indies", a programme which brought much cheer and comfort to West Indians waiting by their radios for news of what was happening abroad.

In 1945 she put out yet another collection of poems under the title Towards the Sun. Stars

Back home in Jamaica after the war, she secured the position, with the Gleaner Company, of Secretary and General Editor of the Pioneer Press, a publishing house venture of the Gleaner Company.

Leaving Jamaica once again, she resided for many years in Washington D.C. (USA) where she continued writing. She developed an interest in writing for children and between 1958 and 1960 attended courses in writing for children at the George Washington University. She also attended the Catholic University Drama School's summer course in writing for theatre and television. One of her children's stories, "Christmas on Poinsettia Island" was published in the American Junior Red Cross NEWS of December 1960. It was the head article of the issue and was illustrated by American artist James Potter with large bright poinsettias and a John Canoe band.

In 1960 she came back home to Jamaica and while here did much work with the Jamaica Save the Children Fund. But, she didn't stay long, for in 1964 she was again off, this time to Israel, on the invitation of that Government to attend a Seminar at the Mount Carmel International Training Centre for Community Service at Haifa. She also attended a Womens Peace Conference held in Jerusalem.

Miss Marson went to England to spend the Christmas and New Year holidays and while there she was invited to return to Haifa to work for 3 months. She took up this assignment in January 1965. In March of that year she was awarded a British Council-Research Grant and so paid another visit to London to make arrangements in connection with this grant. She subsequently returned to Haifa and while there took ill; whereupon, she decided to return home for a brief rest - which she did, at the St. Joseph's Hospital. Unfortunately her condition grew worse and three weeks later she died - May 5, 1965 - and was buried on 10th May at the Half-Way-Tree Parish Church cemetery.

Bibliography with brief critical comments from Forward and Introduction of the various texts.

1. Tropic Reveries, Poems., Kingston, Jamaica, Gleaner Company Ltd., 1930, 88p.

In Miss Marson's Preface to this work, she says of the poems: "they are the 'heart-throbs' of one who, from earliest childhood has worshipped at the Shrine of the muses and dwelt among the open spaces and the silent hills where the cadences of Nature's voice tempt one to answering song".

2. Heights and Depths, Poems, Kingston, Jamaica, Gleaner Company Ltd, 1931, 95p

In the Introduction by Sir William Morrison, Kt, this volume of poems is appraised as follows: "...with varying degrees of light and shade, she (Miss Marson) takes you up to dazzling heights, and then brings you down with startling rapidity to the lowest depths of dejection and despair. But there is a strong note running throughout which breathes a spirit of hope and confidence, and so the ultimate effect is to leave the Reader in a glad frame of mind, refreshed and invigorated by the inspiration he has received". Elements of her style are simplicity of language, "lift and tone which run so smoothly", the absence of "artificial striving after effect all of which produce a fine harmonious whole".

3. The Moth and the Star, Kingston, Jamaica, The Gleaner Company Ltd, 1937, 103p.

In his Introduction to this volume of poems, Philip M. Sherlock B.A. Hone. (London), Headmaster of Wolmer's High School (Ja), Says that her "Blues (poems) as well as the other dialect pieces are 'divinations and reports' of what passes in the minds of our people.

"A number of the poems in this section deal with the facts of race and colour... In some of these poems like "Black Burden" there is a bitter protest against the injustices that the Negro...suffers".

4. Towards the Stars, London, England, Hazell, Watson and Viney Ltd., University of London Press Ltd, 1945, 63p.

In the Forward to this volume, L.A.G. Strong says of the poems: "there is a spontaneity, a joy of living, which when it is married to simple and musical words can give, now and then, something which only the greatest artist can achieve consciously...Una Marson's verses should be spoken aloud". They contain "an integrity which is hard to define but breathes in these (those) pages as naturally as a perfume".

See also

Una Marson : Woman before her time

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