

VIC REID TELLS...

'How to write a novel ...my way'

WRITE WITH passion and with love." That's Vic Reid's prescription for writing a novel which you can be proud of.

At any rate, that's part of the process he has used in writing his own numerous novels and short stories. Reid revealed this to his audience in the New Arts Lecture Theatre, University of the West Indies, Mona, on May 1 during a talk which he entitled "How to write a novel — my way".

The talk was the penultimate one in the UWI's Caribbean Studies seminars series for 1986, the theme of which has been "Voices in Caribbean Literature." A panel discussion on that theme held on May 8 at the UWI was the final offering in the series.

Introduced by Dr. Michael Dash, Head of the Department of French and German, as "a novelist, biographer and prophet honoured in his own country" — Reid has received a number of national honours for his writing — the author said he thought writers were "the greatest people in the world". For the talk, he said, he would regard his audience as "writers in one form or another" who were interested in how he wrote his own work.

Language

Reid then spoke of the creation of his first published novel, "New Day", which "began taking form in 1942". The book was written with an "angry feeling", he said, for he intended to show in the book that Paul Bogle and George William Gordon "were not criminals." His research took him to old manuscripts in the library and later to Morant Bay. He spent a day in the Stony Gut area to "get a feel" of the place.

Being "slightly commercial in outlook" and "quite sensible", the author said, he decided to use the Jamaican dialect in such a fashion that it could be read all over the world. He wrote the work in a way to "keep the atmosphere and rhythm" of the Jamaican language.

"New Day" quickly "took hold of people's imagination", Reid said, and I was so delighted, I wrote 'Sixty-five' "which also deals with the Morant Bay rebellion. This he wrote "in an easier, gentler way."

Reid was editor of **Public Opinion** and living in Gordon Town, he said, when "along came the Mau-mau (in Kenya) and the foreign press deciding who were the good guys and the bad guys. I thought: 'How dare you call my ancestors so!'" He decided to write about the African situation, and the book "The Leopard" resulted.

He had not yet been to Africa, he said, but would watch the Gordon Town hills around his home for hours, would watch the action of the rain on the hillside, and imagine he was in Kenya. What he saw would do for the African setting, he decided.

'Each word a gem'

"New Day" was written in five to six months, he said, which was fast, considering "I wanted each word a gem" and of not more than two syllables.

The book, which was "quickly snapped up" by an English publisher, got "great reviews". Reid said that when **Time** magazine praised it, a local reviewer "who hadn't read it" telephoned him to congratulate him on writing a "great book". It was a long time, Reid said, before he got his Silver and (later) Gold Musgrave medals.

Because, the author said, there was a paucity of Jamaican books for children being used in schools, he next wrote a couple of books for children, "Young Warriors" and "Peter of Mount Ephraim". Reid said that in his children's books he never "writes down" to children; he writes them with as much "pain and suffering" as he writes his adult books.

Reid went on to talk of the writing of "The Jamaicans", which shows Jamaican history "from my point of view"; and two books on two National Heroes, Nanny and the Maroon, and Norman Washington

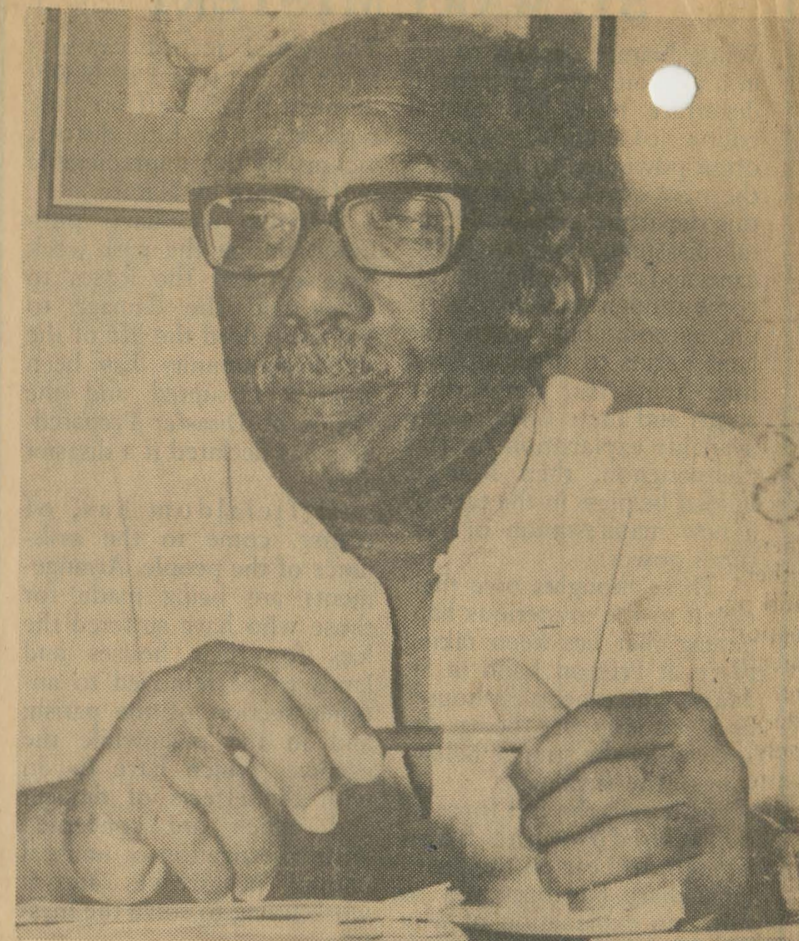
Manley. The book on Manley, a biography, Reid said he wrote because Maley had asked him to. Unfortunately, Reid said, within weeks of the two beginning to talk seriously about the work, Manley died.

The author spoke of his great admiration of Manley, who had long been a friend and who had encouraged him in the writing of "New Day". In the Manley biography, Reid said, he tried to "get inside" the National Hero, not simply write a superficial chronological history.

During the question and answer

session, the author told his audience that his research had informed him that the name Jamaica could not have been an Arawak word, for Jamaica was a district in Palestine during the time of Christ.

On the subject of language, Reid said that he thought there was nothing "more gorgeous" than the sound of Jamaican dialect — though Jamaicans have a problem reading it. And, he said, the English language has been ours for 450 years. "Let's keep it," he said. Let's do with it what we did with cricket — beat the teacher."



REID: writers "the greatest people in the world."

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