



The University of the West Indies

**Mr. Lawrence Scott**

Degree of Doctor of Letters (DLitt)

**L**ike the semi-autobiographical character in his short story, *Ballad for the New World*, Lawrence Scott has spent a lifetime ‘telling the story of a time, a place, a people and a world’. The world he so beautifully explores is rooted in the entanglements of the plantation legacies that have shaped, and continue to shape, this region. As Benitez Rojo asserts in his seminal piece, *Three Words Towards Creolisation*, the plantation represents the big bang of Caribbean formation, and signifies the ‘bifurcated center that exists inside and outside at the same time, near to and distant from all things

that [we] understand as [our] own: race, nationality, language and religion' – in short, our identities as Caribbean citizens.

Born on a sugar cane estate in Petit Morne in 1943, where his father was employed as a manager for Tate and Lyle, Scott's memories of the fantastic menagerie of people, animals, landscapes and the narratives that emerged from there, underscores Benitez Rojo's assertion about Caribbean identities. After leaving Trinidad and Tobago in 1963, he discovered what he describes as his Caribbean Creole voice in England when he left the monastic life and took up work as a literature teacher at a secondary school, where many of his students were of West Indian origin. However, his writing life began in earnest after he returned to Trinidad and Tobago in the late 1970s. During this period, he started writing seriously about the things that troubled him, the things that he says, 'start with a lump in the throat'.

Chancellor, Lawrence Scott's writing is devoted to unpacking and distilling his memories and the many histories of Trinidad and Tobago, firstly as a mechanism 'to work things out in a personal way' and secondly to examine them in the larger socio-political context. His first four highly acclaimed novels, *Witchbroom* (1992), *Aelred's Sin* (1999), *Night Calypso* (2004) and *Light Falling on Bamboo* (2012) are set in, or inspired by, memories of Trinidad and Tobago. Indeed, they all lay bare the many contradictions and connections that make-up the tapestry of Caribbean life. Scott's mastery of the short story form is just as renowned. In his two collections and numerous contributions to anthologies, he lifts the veil from the everyday lives of ordinary folk, to reveal the reservoirs of courage and heroism they consistently summon up, to live with dignity. A

writer's writer, Scott has also devoted significant energy to academic endeavours, most notably through his teaching and commentaries on the work of other Caribbean writers, and has helped to build scholarship for and about the region.

His literary contributions have attracted many prestigious awards including the 1999 Commonwealth Writers' Prize for *Aelred's Sin*, the 1986 Tom-Gallon Award for his short story *The House of Funerals*, the 2012 Lifetime Literary Award from the NALIS and the 2019 recognition as Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

**Chancellor**, through his body of work, Lawrence Scott has employed the devices of remembering and erasure, to illuminate the myriad ways of being Caribbean in the world. He has done so with a deftness and subtlety that echoes a Caribbean yearning to belong, a sentiment that is poignantly expressed by Philip, in his story *King Sailor One Jouvert Morning* when he recognises that if given 'the space, he could do the dance.' Today we declare that Scott has successfully claimed this space and danced not only for himself, for society's marginalised, but for us all. Chancellor for his contribution to the Caribbean literary canon, I present Mr. Lawrence Scott and ask that by the authority vested in you by the Council and Senate of The University of the West Indies, you confer on him the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.

**St. Augustine Campus**

**October 2023**

**(Written and read by of the campus orator, Dr Suzanne Burke.)**

