A Caribbean Visionary and His Literary Collection, Karlene Saundria Nelson

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Abstract
The voices of West Indian writers in the 1950s changed the landscape for Literature emerging out of the West Indies. These powerful literary voices were a means of creating and recording a facet of West Indian history and cultural heritage. West Indian writers wrote their stories through their own eyes. John Hearne was one of the most eloquent voices among them. He became a known voice in the West Indian literary world, using his recognition to facilitate the indigenous West Indian Literature genre’s development. He was also a prominent Jamaican political and social commentator. The John Hearne archive not only produced an important historical picture of the development of the West Indian Literature genre, but West Indian political history, and changes in the cultural and social fabric of the West Indian society, with special emphasis on Jamaica. This paper aims to present this archive as a fundamental body of primary resources for historical research.

Keywords
Caribbean literary collection, library special collections, John Hearne, special collections management, Caribbean library resources

Introduction
Literary works have been important shapers of West Indian national consciousness (Gonzalez and Dash, 2004). Prior to the 1950s, literary works from the West Indies had a more European flavour. According to Saakana (1987), this type of writing was not only external but also peripheral to West Indian society. There was an emergence of West Indian writers who embodied the Caribbean experience in the 1950s. Their writings aided the development of West Indian literature over time. According to Baugh (1995: 63),
novelists’ achievement in the 1950s established an ‘international presence of West Indian Literature as a distinct corpus’. In other words, West Indian Literature has given the West Indian people a voice. It has enabled West Indians to tell their own stories through imaginative interpretations.

This literature informs and defines who we are as Caribbean people (Paquet, 1995).

The legacies of writers, such as John Hearne, gave West Indian people an identity that cannot be denied (Ramchand, 2016). Hearne belonged amongst the early West Indian writers who have contributed to developing a West Indian Literature genre. Paquet (1995: 62) identified Hearne as being among those early West Indian writers ‘bound together as an identifiable community of artists by their common concern for the spiritual and social condition of West Indian people’.

Special collections such as the John Hearne collection assist people to know where they are coming from. They are ‘primary sources reflecting recent histories of peoples, countries, and creative works’ (Pritchard, 2009: 179). John Hearne had a distinguished career as a writer, journalist and political analyst. As a result, the John Hearne collection captures moments in time and tells stories about West Indian cultural, social and political histories that have evolved over a century.

**Biographical Sketch of John Hearne**

John Hearne was born in Montreal, Canada, in 1926. In a career spanning more than three decades, the legendary author has written 10 novels, edited several anthologies, and written radio and television plays. The British Broadcasting Corporation aired several of his radio plays. Three of his novels were written in collaboration with Morris Cargill1, a prominent Jamaican journalist. These novels were published under the pseudonym John Morris (Routledge, n.d.). In his works, John Hearne addressed social issues. ‘Voices under the Window’, published in 1955, and ‘Land of the Living’, published in 1961, are two of his best-known novels. Hearne received the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize and Silver Musgrave Medal from the Institute of Jamaica (Hearne, n.d.). Hearne’s appeal was universal, although he wrote fiction set in the mythical Caribbean landscape. His works have been translated into a number of languages. (Clarke, 2002). In the 1970s into the 1980s, he wrote a weekly column in the Jamaica Gleaner called ‘Your World and Mine’. Hearne wrote about a variety of topics that piqued his interest in this column. As a chronicler and commentator on many of the significant events and social issues of the 1970s and 1980s, John Hearne offered perspectives on everything from sports to politics to social and economic policies (The University of the West Indies Mona Library, 2012). He was a controversial and often misunderstood writer and journalist (The University of the West Indies Mona Library, 2014).

**Description of the John Hearne Collection**

The collection is divided into 12 series and is housed in over five archival boxes and several folders. The largest series consists of manuscripts for his newspaper column, which is organized by subject. Personal and biographical papers, manuscripts (books,
short stories and poems), correspondence, audio cassettes and photographs are among the other series. The Hearne family documents are one of the collection’s components. Birth certificates, baptismal certificates, school records, marriage certificates, divorce papers, death certificates and John Hearne’s last will and testament are included. Passports, a family tree and a list of family members buried at Jamaica’s St. Andrew Parish Church are also included. The family papers contain records from several generations of the Hearne family and provide information about John Hearne’s ancestors. Some Jamaican passports were issued during the British colonial rule, providing insight into changes in government policies. These documents also provide authoritative proof of Hearne’s family members’ names, ages, parents, gender, race and birthplace. Some of the major events in John Hearne’s life, such as his first and second marriages, the births of his children and the deaths of family members, could be pieced together from these documents. This section of the collection could serve as the starting point for a Hearne family genealogy search. In addition, the Hearne family’s burial records at St. Andrew Parish Church (Jamaica) are a valuable primary source. These records will contain information about the church’s history, early burial customs and local community history.

The collection also includes manuscript drafts of published and unpublished works. These offer insights into how John Hearne created his works. For his draft manuscripts, John Hearne used paperback school ruled notebooks and other hardcover composition notebooks. These are legibly handwritten in ink, with several editorial markings and revisions.

It is not unusual to see annotations in the margins; chunks of a paragraph crossed out; sentences that seem to be an after-thought, written between lines; or arrows indicating a thought that appeared way down on a page or even on a new page, should appear further up. Some manuscripts for John Hearne’s works have more than one handwritten or typewritten version.

The revision and publication process scope can be fully understood by comparing each level of the revision to the published text. The manuscripts provide a wealth of information about the creative effort and production that resulted in the early West Indian Literature genre.

In addition to writing popular novels, short stories, and poems, Hearne was interested in Jamaican societal issues. His Gleaner column ‘Your World and Mine’, which began around the 1970s, represented his observations and comments. These were written in spiral stenographer’s note pads in pencil. There are nearly 200 of these articles in this collection. They covered a wide range of topics, demonstrating Hearne’s interest in various topics, with a large number of them focussing on Jamaican politics. Articles written for the newspaper column ‘Your World and Mine’ are valuable social-historical material resources on a specific period in Caribbean history. They shape John Hearne’s perspectives on historical events. In several of his articles, Hearne questioned the urgent concerns of Jamaican politicians, law enforcement and society. He was a controversial Jamaican journalist and political analyst, and his writings reflect this. Many of the region’s and nation’s most historical events of the last four decades were included in John Hearne’s manuscripts for ‘Your World and Mine’, including the establishment of the Gun Court in Jamaica. Thus, this collection can help reconstruct Jamaica’s political history.
Correspondence is also part of the John Hearne Collection. Much of the correspondence was incoming mail from family members, friends, colleagues and literary agents. The correspondence reveals information about the business aspects of Hearne’s writing as well as evidence of literary connections and social networks. As a result, this collection includes letters from several prominent West Indian personalities and literary figures, including Roger Mais, Derek Walcott, Andrew Salkey and Edna Manley. Several letters were written while he was in England trying to establish himself as a West Indian writer. From the 1940s to the late 1960s, most of John Hearne’s correspondence took the form of air letters. The majority of these were handwritten on flimsy light blue paper. They mostly carried postage stamps that had been inked. Letters began to appear on flimsy white paper after the late 1960s; they were no longer handwritten but typed and placed in a standard white envelope or an airmail envelope. These letters also carried adhesive postage stamps. The fundamental change in paper quality in the 1970s is noteworthy. The correspondence was no longer printed on flimsy paper but sturdy white paper. These papers are now slightly discoloured. An examination of John Hearne’s correspondence will reveal details about his daily life. Many of his letters to family and friends discussed how he was adjusting to life as a West Indian writer in Europe. Contractual arrangements and royalties for his work were discussed in his correspondence with literary agents. This gives an idea of how much the West Indian writer profited financially from his work. This correspondence will provide an interesting backdrop into John Hearne’s life, as well as what was going on in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean at the time.

John Hearne’s scrapbooks are also included in the collection. These scrapbooks are elementary school students’ school scrapbooks. The contents were glued into place. Some items appeared to have been placed inside the scrapbooks rather than glued in. The contents are primarily press clippings from the Jamaica Gleaner between 1960 and 1970, selected by Hearne to reflect his interests. The majority of the items were from his column ‘Your World and Mine’, while others were references to him, articles on West Indian literature, articles on various art forms and journalism. Hearne’s scrapbooks can be used to create accounts of events that occurred during the period covered. Audio cassettes and photographs were also included in John Hearne’s collection. These, too, provided insight into John Hearne’s life and interests and placed a unique story about him into context.

The collection, as a whole, provides an understanding of John Hearne’s life and work. It traces Hearne’s career from his early years in Canada, his secondary schooling at Jamaica College, and his involvement in World War II and his long literary career. This collection provides original, first-hand insight into a variety of issues. It documents the economic, political, social and cultural history of the literary communities in the Caribbean and, more specifically, Jamaica. The areas of strength include literature, fiction, poetry and the political history of Jamaica.

Provenance

The John Hearne collection at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus represents an important part of the cultural wealth of the West Indian people. This collection first came into the custody of the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus Library in 1967.
when John Hearne gave the Library the entire collection of the original manuscripts for his Jay Monroe articles, which were a feature of the early Jamaican Sunday Gleaner. In a thank you letter to John Hearne, Gocking (1967), the then Campus Librarian noted that the ‘high literary quality and piquancy of the manuscripts were everywhere acknowledged and that the Library was deeply gratified to secure them by gift of an author whose creative writings have acquired an enviable reputation far beyond his native Jamaica’. Gocking, in his letter, also noted that John Hearne’s work was already a subject of study at the University of the West Indies and other universities. The Hearne family later gifted the rest of his papers to the Library in two instalments – 1997 and 2007.

**Significance of the John Hearne Collection**

John Hearne is considered a leader in the literary field, and his body of work is significant. John Hearne’s writings opened a window into the struggles and efforts of West Indian writers who successfully broke through the colonial mould to become noted indigenous West Indian tellers of West Indian stories. James (2004: 257) noted that ‘Hearne is significant, if a atypical figure, in the post-war development of the West Indian novel’. The commitment of the University of the West Indies Mona Library to develop distinctive holdings by acquiring unique materials focussed on regional topical areas has led it to collect and archive the John Hearne collection. Russell and Winkworth (2003: 1) noted that “Significance refers to the values and meanings that items and collections have for people and communities.” John Hearne’s work came at a time when ‘West Indian writers went to England to live, write and find a wider field for their talent’ (Abrahams, 1962: xi). As implied by Seaga (1962: ix), John Hearne laid the foundation for creative literature. Hearne’s importance to early West Indian textual culture is reflected in his tone and style. He created some of the most penetrating, vivid and long-lasting cultural commentaries of the time. This tone is reflected in some of his earliest and most well-known works, such as ‘voices under the window’. According to Abrahams (1962: xi), the publication of ‘Voices Under the Window’ by John Hearne signalled the emergence of one of, if not the, best craftsmen among West Indian writers. All his succeeding novels have attested to this skill. Regarding John Hearne’s works, Morris (1971: 53) said they are ‘carefully worked creations of a very conscious artist’. He further commented that Hearne’s novel ‘Voices under the Window’ promoted a political commitment to the black masses.

The John Hearne collection contains narratives that explain national history and social events. These tales can be found in his manuscripts and correspondence. Early aspects of Jamaican socio-cultural life can be found in stories written for the newspaper column ‘Your World and Mine’, as well as correspondence, poems, and other documents. These sources painted a picture of daily life for Jamaicans, particularly West Indian writers, from the early 1940s to the 1960s. Through the eyes of this collection, details of life and living and the social order that shaped Jamaican society can be seen.

The correspondence with literary agents demonstrates the role that these agents played in the production of literary works both then and now. The John Hearne collection, as a whole, encompasses the thinking and culture of the people of the West Indies and is a testament to the intellectual thinking of previous generations of West Indian writers. The
collection provides a unique opportunity to study early West Indian literary works. As such, the John Hearne collection at the University of the West Indies’ Mona Library is an important documentary cultural heritage of the West Indian people that should be preserved for future generations’ access and reference.

This collection is significant in terms of its scholarly research value. For social historians, John Hearne’s body of work is a rich anthropological and cultural resource. Scholars will find much to discover and interpret in this collection due to its breadth and depth. In addition, this collection demonstrates the extent and nature of John Hearne’s work as a fiction writer, poet, newspaper columnist, lecturer, journalist and political commentator. Thus, the cultural benefits of this collection for research, educational and creative use are significant and wide-reaching. This irreplaceable source of West Indian literary history must therefore be preserved. According to Ekwelem et al., 2011, cultural heritage preservation is central to protecting a sense of who we are, a meaningful reference in our culturally diverse world. The preservation of the John Hearne Collection is therefore important to protecting where we are coming from in terms of West Indian Literature and political history.

**Preservation of the John Hearne Collection**

According to Jimerson (2003), including a special collection in a library’s holdings necessitates a long-term commitment to many years of management. To promote their longevity and accessibility, a preservation program will be required. Therefore, preservation is one of the most fundamental aspects of special collection management (Hain, 2003). Additionally, a crucial element of preservation management is storage conditions. The University of the West Indies Mona Library is committed to preserving its special collections for current and future use. As a result, the Library has worked hard to ensure that the custody of the John Hearne Collection and other collections is well preserved. As a result, the John Hearne Collection is housed in an environmentally controlled area, and batches of material from the collection and material from other collections have been chemically treated. In addition, the John Hearne Collection materials are stored in acid-free boxes, and rusted fasteners and deteriorated items were photocopied during processing. These actions represent the breadth of the Library’s efforts to ensure the physical preservation of the John Hearne Collection.

**Access to the John Hearne Collection**

The matter of access, especially online access to special collections, has become an important issue for Libraries and, more particularly, over the last few years. The need to publicize libraries’ special collection holdings and make these holdings more widely accessible over the Internet has become essential. Neil and Hayden (2008) noted that creating online access through the online catalogue to special collections is essential to their research worth. Technology has provided an unprecedented opportunity to make these collections discoverable through online search engines, Web pages, and in many cases, digital surrogates (Goetsch, 2010: 49). Digital surrogates are online-browsable
digital versions of the original items. They enable greater user access and item preservation by reducing the handling of physical materials (Abbott, 2020: 183).

The University of the West Indies, Mona Library is committed to preserving the John Hearne Collection and making it accessible to future generations. A finding aid was therefore created for the John Hearne collection. Taylor (2007: 13) noted that finding aids are useful for a variety of reasons: ‘staff members may use them to provide reference assistance to patrons; patrons may use them to determine which collection items they would like to use, and potential researchers may use them to determine whether a trip to a specific repository is necessary’. The finding aid for the John Hearne collection outlines and provides details about the contents of the collection. It consists of a collection inventory list and includes the scope and content of collection items and a biographical/historical note. The finding aid provides detailed descriptions about the creation, historical context, arrangement and content of the collection, as well as information necessary for users to identify and request the portions relevant to their research. The finding aid has a table of contents. Each item in the table of contents links to the titled sections in the finding aid, thereby making it easier for researchers to navigate to a section of the finding aid.

Recognizing the importance of preserving this knowledge resource and making it accessible to scholars and researchers, the Library connects users to the John Hearne Collection via two search routes. UWIlinC (the Library’s information discovery portal) is the primary route. The other is the website of the UWI Mona Library, which houses the online archive for digital collections. These routes allow researchers to use the finding aid to search for and identify materials in the John Hearne Collection. The University of the West Indies Mona Library is keen on promoting awareness of the contents of its special collections by providing a brief description of its special collections on the Library’s website. The goal is to raise awareness of the collection among members of the University community and outside researchers. At the moment, the only online resources for the John Hearne Collection are a finding aid and a digital exhibition. Researchers must visit the Library to use items from the John Hearne collection.

**Future Directions**

The Library’s goal is to provide not only a finding aid but also digital content for the John Hearne collection. This aligns with one of the Library’s strategic goals for 2012–2017. According to the plan, the University of the West Indies Mona Library intends to promote research opportunities by emphasising its unique special collections. It intends to achieve this goal by increasing the digitization and accessibility of special collections content. In addition to increasing digitization, the Library intends to develop collaborative programs with academic departments to provide research opportunities for postgraduate students (The University of the West Indies Mona Library, 2013). As a result, the Library will look for ways to encourage university faculty and graduate students to use Special Collections resources in their teaching and learning. Digitisation of primary source material from the John Hearne Collection and other collections will aid in teaching and learning with special collections. Because it may be impractical for faculty to use original special collections items in large lectures, digitised content would be preferable.
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