

ERROL LLOYD: DLitt

Chancellor Dharker,

Errol Lloyd, whom we are honouring today, is a man of many talents. He modestly alludes to this in an interview with Professor Karen Sands-O'Connor, British Academy Global Professor of Children's Literature, where he reflects that, "it always creates a kind of crisis when I'm asked to define myself, because I tend to have a number of hats that I wear." Artist, sculptor, illustrator, author, activist; he wears all of his hats with distinction and throughout his long and successful career has striven to promote, share and celebrate Black British Art and Culture.

Born in Lucea, Jamaica, in 1943, Errol is the third of four brothers, all of whom were educated at Munro College, a boarding school for boys in St Elizabeth. It was here that he first discovered his talent for art. Errol recalls that one of his teachers, a Yorkshireman called Alan Hatfield had some terracotta heads in his sitting room, which he had sculpted. When Errol expressed an interest in them, Alan invited him to try his hand and it soon became apparent that he had an innate talent for this medium. Errol went on to study A level art, winning the school art prize in his final sixth form exams. He also excelled at sport, particularly football, gymnastics and sprinting.

His father was a Civil Servant in the Jamaican Court System so Errol was accustomed to legal folk visiting the family home. There were always law books about the place, which he read and found interesting. Even for someone as talented as Errol, art was considered too precarious a profession from which to make a decent living. Thus when he came to London in 1963, aged 20, it was to embark upon a career in Law at the Council of Legal Education. To help prepare himself for the shock of the English climate, he recalls reading John Keats' poem, "The Eve of St Agnes". The references to frosted breath, numbed fingers and bitter chill are indeed evocative of an English Winter, but the world described in

this romantic tale of medieval chivalry and magic was a far cry from the reality of London in the early sixties. Errol recalls being the only black person in the neighbourhood. “That was very strange – simply not seeing any black people around at all. “

Soon after arriving in London, Errol joined the newly established Caribbean Artists Movement, a collaborative venture where artists could exchange ideas and find ways to celebrate and showcase Caribbean Art. By 1974, he had completed his legal training and qualified as a barrister, but concedes that this was largely to please his parents. Legal Chambers in England were very exclusive, and having concluded that he would have to return to Jamaica to practise law, Errol decided to focus on his creative work. Throughout the early seventies, he worked with pioneering Black British Publishing Houses, New Beacon and Bogle L’Ouverture, for whom he illustrated some of the first children’s books for about and black children. These included Petronella Breinburg’s, “My Brother Sean,” for which he provided the illustrations. This was the first mainstream children’s picture book by a Black British artist to feature a contemporary Black British boy on the cover. It remains the only book by a Black British artist to be runner up for a Kate Greenaway medal for illustration.

When Errol began to write and illustrate his own children’s books, he wanted to make them appealing to all children, whilst ensuring that Black readers could always find people like themselves in the books. It is extremely difficult to select from such a rich collection, but I’d like to mention two that I particularly enjoyed reading. “Nini at Carnival”, which Errol told me is also a personal favourite, tells the story of Nini who is unhappy because she doesn’t have a costume to wear to the Carnival. Her fairy godmother arrives from the East with a beautiful piece of cloth, covered in a glorious Afro-Caribbean print, which, when draped sari-like around Nini, transforms into a beautiful costume. Nini becomes the Queen of the Carnival and has a wonderful time. The book works on so many levels – the illustrations are vibrantly colourful, and whilst it has echoes of the traditional Cinderella story and celebrates the kindness of friends and fairy godmothers, it is also a gentle reminder that events such as

the Notting Hill Carnival, which at the time were perceived by some as being rife with criminal activity and were consequently heavily policed, can and should be a joyous community celebration, which everyone can enjoy. Errol's 1995 novel, "Many Rivers to Cross", for which he was nominated for the prestigious Carnegie Medal, is written for a teenage audience and tells the story of twelve-year old Sandra, who travels from Jamaica to join her parents and younger siblings for a new life in England. The book charts her struggle to adapt to the cold climate, alien culture and a hostile new school. Throughout her many travails, Sandra is buoyed up by encouraging letters from her beloved Granny in Barbados and the book ultimately concludes with a message of hope and reconciliation.

Whilst both his art and sculpture have been exhibited internationally, sculpture remains Errol's preferred artistic form of expression. He vividly remembers being taken by his mother to visit the studio of the renowned African American Sculptor Richmond Barthé, who resided for a time in Jamaica. At the time, Barthé was working on a sculpture called, "The Awakening of Africa". Seeing this powerful and evocative piece left a lasting impression on Errol, who told me it was the first sculpture he had seen that had both a social and political context. His own sculptural output includes busts of renowned West Indian figures such as the writer CLR James, the cricketer Sir Garfield Sobers and former Jamaican Prime Minister, Sir Alexander Bustamente.

In addition to his literary and artistic talents, Errol has what he described to me in a typically understated manner as , "a passing interest" in music. He plays piano, flute and chromatic harmonica, noting that the latter is quite a tricky instrument to learn to play as an adult. He would love to play piano with a full orchestra, and feels the collaborative nature of playing as part of an ensemble would be incredibly rewarding. I do hope that ambition comes to fruition.

Chancellor Dharker, for his empowering and inclusive representation of Caribbean culture, and the many ways in which he has used his creative talents to celebrate and share positive stories about Black British community and identity, which resonate with the values and commitments of this University, I am proud to present Errol Lloyd, for the award of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*.

Jill Taylor-Roe

Senior Public Orator.