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**Caribbean Symbols in Selected Works by Olive Senior**

Master's Thesis

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## **Prohlášení**

Prohlašuji, že jsem tuto práci vypracovala samostatně a uvedla úplný seznam citované a použité literatury.

V Olomouci dne

Podpis ..... Dagmar Janoušková

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## Introduction

It is generally acknowledged that male Caribbean writers were dominant on the literary scene throughout history. Female writers became visible only in the last few decades when their works were finally accepted, although many times it happened belatedly.<sup>1</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century, the Jamaican author, Olive Senior, became visible in the literary discourse. She became an accomplished black women writer of both fiction, and poetry. Her works are mainly centred around the Caribbean culture and history, with a special focus on Jamaican heritage.

The main issues addressed in this thesis are the Caribbean symbols occurring in selected poems in three poetry collections written by this author, namely in *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994), *Over the Roofs of the World* (2005), and *Shell* (2007). The primary intention is to unravel the hidden meanings of the presented poems to help readers who are not familiar with the Caribbean history, culture, and practices to understand the messages carried out by Olive Senior. To successfully reach this aim, the thesis of this paper has been organised into four main parts: the first three having the goal to build up a general knowledge about the author and the Caribbean history, culture, and literature with a special focus on Jamaica, and the fourth part to present the selected poems and some of their possible interpretations.

The first part of the thesis deals with the biography of Olive Senior and introduces the author, providing the main information about her life and works which can help to draw a picture of her main focus and the reasons behind the topics in her poems.

The second part begins by touching lightly on the geographical location of the Caribbean island and continues by laying out the history of the Caribbean from the settlement of the first inhabitants up to the present day. It recounts the discovery of the Caribbean as the “New World” by Christopher Columbus and outlines the colonization process, especially in Jamaica, which is the homeland of Olive Senior. A greater portion of this chapter is dedicated to the topic of slavery and the Slave trade which explains the arrival of the other ethnicities to the Caribbean, especially of African inhabitants who form the ancestry of Olive Senior.

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<sup>1</sup> Denise deCaires Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women's poetry*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2002), vii.

Words cannot describe the cruelty and injustice of the masters committed on the other people whom they treated as their property. Therefore, it is not surprising that history recorded slave uprisings and fights of the slaves for liberation in many Caribbean islands, some of which are also briefly mentioned in this chapter. The thesis describes the relationship between masters and slaves, as well as addresses the topic of racism. In the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century, fate turned in favour for the enslaved when the abolition of slavery came into force. Thus, the last part of this chapter provides a discussion about life after slavery and the changes it brought. It is focused especially on the education of former slaves and people in the Caribbean under the supremacy of the colonizers and explains the way Olive Senior received her education. Ultimately, the nature of life after enslavement in the Caribbean, and following two world wars, is examined.

Chapter three is concerned with the literary context, describing the literary beginnings in the Caribbean, since the times of slavery, and providing a list of some famous writers, especially in Jamaica. Finally, the chapter introduces female writers on the literary scene, such as Louise Bennet, who also played a part in influencing the style and works of Olive Senior. The topic of female writers goes hand in hand with the topic of feminism, which is also briefly discussed in the third chapter. However, the most important part is the last part of this chapter, as it explains, in-depth, the writing style of Olive Senior and themes she uses in her works, such as the question of Creolization. For instance, it also explains why some of the poems seem to be written with grammatical errors.

The final chapter draws upon the entire thesis, tying up the various theoretical strands presented previously. The main focus is centred on the poetry collection *Gardening in the Tropics*; however, the meanings of the symbols are backed up by using collections from *Over the Roofs of the World* and *Shell*. Among other interesting works and essays, one of the main sources for deciphering the symbols in this thesis was another work by Olive Senior called *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*. It provides a vast number of different terms connected to the Caribbean, and particularly to Jamaica. Another valuable resource was a work by Denise deCaires Narain *Olive Senior*. The chapter provides an explanation of symbols concerning history, cultural practices, myths and legends of the Caribbean people.

# 1. Life and works of Olive Senior

I think you become a writer because you can't help it. It's not a choice that you make, you are chosen.<sup>2</sup>

A daughter of Jamaican peasant farmers, Olive Marjorie Senior, with her countless poems and short stories belongs to a category of accomplished artists. She was born December 23, 1941, in Troy, a small village deep in the middle of Jamaica. She is the seventh out of ten children. Even at a young age, she recalls she was a spontaneous child who was determined to become an artist or a writer. To her, reading meant a way to escape from reality to her imaginative world where she made the rules and was the authority. Hoping to give her bigger opportunities than her parents' limited resources could provide, they sent Olive to live with her wealthy relatives. Although it was hard for her to leave her parental home, this shift opened doors for Olive to receive a better education. There is no doubt that the contrast of her two childhood worlds, the poor one and the wealthy one, is significantly shown in her later works.

Olive won a scholarship to Montego High School for girls where she experienced racism and exclusion for the first time. Although their teachers put major effort into reshaping the behaviour of their students into an English ideal of a school girl, Olive showed her individualism. She was a good student who even founded a school magazine. At the age of nineteen, she started working at The Daily Gleaner, which is Jamaica's major newspaper, where they eventually published a few of her earlier works. After that, she studied in Cardiff and at Carleton University in Ottawa. It was at the university where Senior took a course on creative writing. During the 1960s and 1970s, she wrote and published her works in various journals and newspapers without calling any unnecessary attention to herself. It is interesting to point out that this time corresponds to the publishing era of several other Caribbean authors who resided in New York, Toronto, and London, such as Samuel Selvon, Austin Clarke, and Paule Marshall.

Olive Senior published her first collection in 1986, called *Sumer Lightning and Other Stories*, which was an immediate success.<sup>3</sup> She became a so-called pioneer of

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<sup>2</sup> Dolace McClean and Jacqueline Bishop, "Of Hearts Revealed: An Interview with Olive Senior," *Calabash*, 2:2 summer/fall 2003, accessed January 19, 2021, <http://library.nyu.edu/calabash/vol2iss2/0202003.pdf>, 5.

<sup>3</sup> The Poetry Archive, accessed January 19, 2021, <http://www.poetryarchive.org>.

Caribbean literature in the modern world. It is not surprising that she was recognized for her efforts and, subsequently, received two major awards: a Musgrave Gold Medal from the Institute of Jamaica and the Norman Washington Manley Foundation Award for Excellence. In 1993 she moved to Toronto, but she continued to visit Jamaica often. Senior taught at several international universities about Caribbean culture and writing and, to this day, actively publishes works that are always closely connected to her Caribbean heritage.<sup>4</sup> She claims about her life in Canada:

Well, the fact that I moved out of the Caribbean is really accidental. I sort of left for a year because I needed a break and the year became two and three. And you know now it's become ten. But everything I write is about the Caribbean. I've never written another word about anywhere else.<sup>5</sup>

When she was once asked if she minded writing about a country where she no longer lives, she responded:

Well to me, personally, it doesn't matter where I live because most of what happens to me, happens in my head. I live inside my head. And I spend a lot of time in Jamaica, so it is not that I am so far away. I don't think I have to sit in Jamaica in order to write. And I didn't leave because I could not write there. It's accidental that I left. I didn't leave to leave. I'm still very much engaged with Jamaica and what's going on there.<sup>6</sup>

In contrary to her other contemporary colleagues who write about the Caribbean environment from the point of people living outside of the Caribbean, Senior “is using her creative imagination to bring to life often neglected experiences centred *in* the Caribbean and the Americas: the origins of these societies; the centuries-old encounters and negotiations between the different peoples and cultures that now comprise the matrix of New World societies; and ongoing changes—social, cultural, economic, and political—taking place in the region.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Olive Senior, “Olive Senior,” Olive Senior, accessed January 19, 2021, <http://www.olivesenior.com/author/index.html>.

<sup>5</sup> McClean and Bishop, “Of Hearts Revealed,” 6.

<sup>6</sup> McClean and Bishop, “Of Hearts Revealed,” 6.

<sup>7</sup> Hyacinth M. Simpson, “Olive Senior’s Gardening in the Tropics,” Ryerson University, accessed January 20, 2021, <https://www.ryerson.ca/olivesenior/author.html>.



There is no doubt that Senior's upbringing had an impact on her works. Velma Pollard supports this view:

Both poetry and prose bring the country paths of Senior's childhood and the urban experiences of her young womanhood into focus. The themes of both concern the experiences of people in these environments who represent different points along a scale of social and financial privilege.<sup>8</sup>

As well as one particular occupation, as an editor of a prestigious Jamaican journal, helped her to stay closer to her roots and brought her inspiration. As a result, several of her published works are an example of a depiction of life in Jamaica, to name a few: *The A-Z of Jamaican Heritage* (1984), *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean* (1991), and the *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage* (2003).<sup>9</sup> When she was asked who she is writing her works for, she responded that when she writes, she does not have any particular group of people in mind. Senior claimed: "I'm willing to touch anyone who is willing to be touched by it."<sup>10</sup> Moreover, she writes about whatever theme she finds interesting:

My attitude is that I'm recording everything as I go through life. And that is what happens. The fiction or poetry are products of all my life experiences, and you know that life experiences are not just existential, but it's what you've read, it's what you've heard, it's everything.<sup>11</sup>

Above all, her topics often touch real human conditions, and this evidence only highlights her popularity among the readers. The most notable works of Olive Senior are her poem collections *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994), *Over the Roofs of the World* (2005), *Shell* (2007), some of which will be discussed later on in this thesis.

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<sup>8</sup> Velma Pollard, "An Introduction to The Poetry and Fiction of Olive Senior," *Callaloo*, no. 36 (1988), accessed March 4, 202, doi:10.2307/2931531, 540-45.

<sup>9</sup> Simpson, "Olive Senior's Gardening in the Tropics."

<sup>10</sup> McClean and Bishop, "Of Hearts Revealed," 9.

<sup>11</sup> McClean and Bishop, "Of Hearts Revealed," 11.

## 2. Caribbean heritage

To better understand the cultural message carried out by Olive Senior in her works, one must have at least a marginal knowledge of Caribbean history. The following chapter is going to give a brief introduction to Caribbean culture and some of its main characteristics. The aim is to bring readers closer to the exotic world and to aid them to have a deeper experience while they read Senior's works.

The islands of the Caribbean, which vary in size and shape, create about a 3000 km long chain that creates a notional bridge between North and South America on a map.<sup>12</sup> From a historical point of view, it was on a Caribbean island where on 1492 Christopher Columbus first set his foot and also where the Spanish built their first colonies. The size of the islands and their accessibility made them a lucrative place for economical exploitation. Due to the low cost of sea transport, it was easier to ship goods across the sea rather than to ship the same amount of goods across the country. However, one major issue in the early colonization period was that the accessibility from the sea and the size of the islands allowed power thirsty colonizers to attack and overpower their rivals. Ultimately, all this led to changes of loyalty with the result of affecting culture, trade, and governance. Therefore, this could be one of the major factors, along with the uncostly sea transport, which economically encouraged involuntary movement of slaves in the modern period. As a result, many people were brought to Caribbean islands, especially forcibly from Africa.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.1. The original inhabitants

Traditionally, it has been argued that the first settlers came to Caribbean islands in several waves. Approximately 15 000 BC first people came to the islands as a part of the great migration that started from Asia across the Bering Sea. However, migration into the Caribbean started not earlier than 7000 years ago. The movement of those settlers and eventual settlement depended mostly on the climate. For instance, mountain areas in Jamaica and Puerto Rico experienced regular heavy rains, whereas other areas of the same lands, although the same in size, had much fewer rains. Those factors were

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<sup>12</sup> Asann Ridvan, *A Brief History of the Caribbean*, Revised Edition (New York: Facts On File, 1999), 2.

<sup>13</sup> B. W. Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean* (New York: Cambridge University press, 2011), 1-4.

determining the question of where settlers would best establish their new homes. At the end of the age of glaciers, people were able to settle and practice agriculture, which led to the establishment of great empires, such as those created by the civilization of Maya. In the second wave of migration, approximately 2500 BC, began another influx of immigrants into the Caribbean, however, it was late in comparison with other parts of the world. This time the settlers were from Central America and their arrival played an important role in the History of the Caribbean before Columbus' arrival in 1492.<sup>14</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this study to examine each Caribbean island in depth. However, aligning with the main interest of this study, Olive Senior, and her works an in-depth discussion, mainly the history of her native island, Jamaica or Xamayca, will follow. The name of the island was given by the Taínos, a society who inhabited this island before the arrival of colonizers.<sup>15</sup>

To describe, in detail, the origins of human settlements in the homeland of Olive Senior, it has commonly been assumed that Jamaica was not settled until 600 AD. There are assumptions of some early tribes who might have lived there before, however, there is not any satisfactory evidence to support this claim.<sup>16</sup> A likely explanation for such late arrival is the distance of this island from the others. This circumstance is a possible explanation of the diversity of Jamaica. The first more complex society who came to inhabit Jamaica brought knowledge of agriculture, as well as plants, and they were also familiar with animals, such as dogs, which they considered useful. The population was called Taínos, and besides Jamaica, they inhabited most parts of Caribbean islands.<sup>17</sup>

## 2.2. Colonization of Jamaica and other Caribbean islands

Although the first mentions of the original inhabitants in the Caribbean island cannot be dated exactly, what history knows exactly is the arrival of modern European settlers. As I have mentioned earlier in this thesis the name Christopher Columbus, it was because he plays a big role in this matter, as his discovery was one of the most important events of the fifteenth century. There is a consensus among historians that the exact date when he sailed to the first Caribbean island was 3 August 1492, claiming it to

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<sup>14</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 9–22.

<sup>15</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 33.

<sup>16</sup> Glenn Woodley, "The Taino of Jamaica," *Jamaicans.com*, 2001, accessed January 27, 2021, <https://web.archive.org/web/20090416013904/http://www.jamaicans.com/articles/primearticles/taino.shtml>.

<sup>17</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 32.

be from now on a colony under the Spanish flag. They found a society called Taínos there and made sure to let them know of their superiority over them. However, the lack of mutual knowledge of their cultures, as well as the lack of the same language to provide better communication, led to the establishment of uneasy relationships between Spaniards and Taínos. The idea of Columbus was to bring Christianity to those people and in return, he was hoping to take back to Europe spices and other goods, gold included, which he thought to find there. However, it is interesting to note that he did not bring any priests with him on the first voyage. The relationship between Taínos and Europeans did not develop very well. An example can be found in the history of an island called La Navidad, where there was a massacre between the colonizers and Taínos with the result of Guacanagarí town being burnt to the ground.

In 1494 Columbus entered Jamaica, looking for golden nuggets. He found Taínos there, of whom he mistakenly thought were vicious, but he was not successful in finding any gold. As in other islands, they established small settlements in Jamaica and claimed it to be under the Spanish rule.<sup>18</sup> However, Spaniards were not the only nation with a desire to conquer the New World. Englishmen decided to have their own colonies, even at the price of many lives of their men. To please Oliver Cromwell, and to show him that they can be successful after failures to overpower Hispaniola, British colonizers sailed in 1655 to Jamaica. The Spanish forces were weak at the time and, as a result, The English were able to take over this island. Later on, this act showed to be very strategic. Due to its size, the English had a higher probability of a successful defense if the Spaniards wanted revenge. However, when Englishmen took possession of the island, they found it in quite a deplorable situation. There were no signs of industrial or agricultural development and almost all Taínos were dead. The peaceful nation had been all but wiped out by the previous settlers, which left the population on the island to consist of only around 1500 Spaniards and almost the same number of Negro slaves.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 55–80.

<sup>19</sup> Cyril Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean* (London: The Trinity Press, 1972), 68–70.

### 2.3. Exploitation and slavery

Overall, the arrival of colonizers seemed to be rather unwelcomed in the eyes of the native inhabitants. Not only they brought different illnesses, but they also wanted to take away Taínos' traditions and faith. The Spanish colonizers eventually forced them to be subjugated to the Christian state of Castile. Nonetheless, it had certain advantages for the Taíno. For instance, they could not be legally enslaved according to laws called *Las Leyes Nuevas* (New Laws), which were issued by the Spanish crown. However, to what extent these laws were kept by the colonizers is yet another story.<sup>20</sup>

Notwithstanding, shortly after the Columbus arrival, colonizers started violently bringing Africans to the Caribbean islands as slaves. They classified Africans as "outsiders."<sup>21</sup> This term was perceived to mark a difference between Europeans and Africans, and it was not a question of race, as the race was not defined as such till the eighteenth century. Instead, it marked the difference in physical appearance. The history of slavery is rather pitiful. The slave trade started in 1518, which is a mark point for the first sailed ship with Africans to Caribbean shores. There were attempts to stop the flow of Africans to the Caribbean in the next century, however, this attempt was not successful for the next 300 years.<sup>22</sup> The biggest expansion of the slave trade was in 17th -19th century. It is believed that at this period there were about two million African slaves brought and about half of them died before they could reach the shores of Caribbean islands or did not survive the first years in the new countries.<sup>23</sup>

The Europeans believed that the black skin of Africans was for some reason a curse for their moral failures. Thus, this was their justification of why enslavement of Africans was not against European Christian morals.<sup>24</sup> One of the main reasons for the slave trade was to gain profit, another reason for slavery was to have cheap human labour in new expanding colonies, especially at an increasing number of sugar cane plantations. Slaves were traded for goods from the colonies and their new masters could do with them as they pleased. For instance, it was more profitable for the masters to work their slaves to death, and then buy a new slave, rather than to take good care of their "human property." In the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the slave trade was

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<sup>20</sup> Tomešová Gabriela, "Novodobé otroctví v rozvojových zemích se zaměřením na Latinskou Ameriku a Karibik," Master's Thesis, (Olomouc: Palacký University Olomouc, 2016), 21–22.

<sup>21</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 78.

<sup>22</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 78–79.

<sup>23</sup> Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean*, 126.

<sup>24</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 79.

mostly controlled by the Spanish and Portugal colonizers, nevertheless, in the eighteenth century, Great Britain took over the lead and became the biggest slave trader country in the world.<sup>25</sup> It is worth noting that besides black slaves, especially for the British colonizers, it was commonplace to bring white “free laborers.”<sup>26</sup> They were usually people who wanted to settle in new colonies and obtain a piece of land there. They had a contract with their masters for three to nine years and their masters treated them as their chattels. They worked six days a week and had only one day to take care of their own little land. Later on, Cromwell sent war prisoners to work on plantations as slaves as well. White and negro slaves worked together on plantations, however, this practice disappeared in the seventeenth century and the white slaves, or free laborers, were slowly replaced by mulatto slaves.<sup>27</sup>

The increasing popularity of the slave trade also led to an increasing number of Africans on the island. A child born to a slave mother was considered to be a slave from birth. African slaves were more treasured for their masters, because they belonged to them for the rest of their life, in comparison with the white free laborers, who were in their power only for a few years. Likewise, the negro slaves were more resilient to sicknesses and were better built for the tropical climate.<sup>28</sup>

At the beginning of the slave trade, there were not any regulations about how to treat the slaves, however, in the middle of the seventeenth century, there were exact regulations stating what kind of treatment is acceptable and what is not. For instance, in Jamaica in 1735 a slave-murder became a capital offense. To keep the slaves under control, the worst penalties were put into place for any kind of transgression against their masters. There can be no doubt that poor treatment of white free laborers and negro slaves led to many attempts of slave uprisings.<sup>29</sup> However, the enslaved people took almost any opportunity to rebel against their circumstances. B.W. Higman in his book *A Concise History of the Caribbean* explains:

Some committed suicide rather than live in slavery.  
Individual enslaved workers on sugar plantations found  
numerous less self- destructive ways of fighting back:

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<sup>25</sup> Tomešová, “Novodobé otroctví,” 21–22.

<sup>26</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 122.

<sup>27</sup> Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean*, 94–95.

<sup>28</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 124.

<sup>29</sup> Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean*, 131–132.

temporary or long-term escape, sabotage, destruction of property, arson, and the murder of their masters.<sup>30</sup>

If those attempts were discovered, the usual procedure was to hang the transgressors or to put their head on metal spikes<sup>31</sup> as a deterrent example for other slaves.<sup>32</sup> Another cruel punishment was, for instance, whipping, rubbing salt or lime in open wounds, forcing slaves to swallow piss, or in the worst-case scenario, their masters chopped off their limbs.<sup>33</sup> This cruel treatment by slave masters only fuelled the innate human desire for freedom. It also inspired the motto “death to all whites,”<sup>34</sup> which spurred the enslaved forward in the fight for their freedom.

Some successful, large-scale attempts at freedom recorded in history. For example, in 1804 negro slaves took over Haiti, which was a French colony at the time, and declared its independence as the first black republic.<sup>35</sup> Although it was a very unusual way for that time for slavery to meet its end, the liberation was not a sudden act. It took about 13 years of fighting and rebellions for the liberation in Haiti to succeed.<sup>36</sup> It is almost certain that the story about a victorious insurrection in Haiti spread quickly. This sparked hope for the possibility of freedom so, naturally, other countries soon experienced rebellions from their own enslaved people. Although not many white men were killed during these uprisings, slaves were always extremely punished for their audacity to rebel. Luckily, the slaves were not entirely alone in the fight for their freedom. Abolitionists, who fought for the rights of the enslaved people, were despised by the colonizers. Among them were, for instance, Baptist missionaries who were notably active in Jamaica.<sup>37</sup> In the middle of the nineteenth century, another 16 countries which used to be Spanish colonies, succeeded in the fight for liberation.<sup>38</sup>

However, Higman explains that uprising in Haiti was unusual in many ways. For instance, it was a common procedure that there was a certain period between the abolition of the Atlantic trade and the abolition of slavery as a formal institution. That being said, the owners of slaves were forced to improve the living and working

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<sup>30</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 142.

<sup>31</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 143.

<sup>32</sup> Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean*, 131–132.

<sup>33</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 143.

<sup>34</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 153.

<sup>35</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 151.

<sup>36</sup> Tomešová, “Novodobé otroctví,” 22.

<sup>37</sup> Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean*, 146–147.

<sup>38</sup> Tomešová, “Novodobé otroctví,” 22.

conditions of their workers. Additionally, many complaints of slave owners claiming enslaved people to be their property began to ask for compensation when they were forced to release slaves from the bondage. The revolution in Haiti also meant that the French initially strong colony was weakened which other colonies strategically took advantage of. For instance, in 1804 Jamaica became the largest exporter of sugar in the world, later on, it became the biggest exporter of coffee and developed a livestock industry, producing animals fitted for hard work, such as cattle, horses, and mules.

In 1787 the Society for the Abolition was established, and ideas such as free labour, free trade principles, basic rights, and political freedom were carried out. Nevertheless, the slave trade continued. Some superpowers, such as France, abandoned it for a while, only to rejoin the trade when it seemed advantageous. In fact, slaves were brought to French colonies up until the 1850s. Not to be outshined, Spain continued with the trade until 1867 when it signed a treaty with Britain.<sup>39</sup> Unfortunately for the colonies, as a response to the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade there was a new approach to the slave trade. Instead of bringing people in from the outside world, the colonies started to trade slaves within the Caribbean islands.<sup>40</sup>

Ultimately, Britain approved new legislation with royal consent and thus, the Abolition Slavery Act was carried out in 1834, which was supposed to end slavery in British colonies. This act granted an apprenticeship system, which meant that the former slaves had to work without any payment for their former masters. The length of their service varied from four to six years, and their former masters had to clothe and feed them. In their “free time” the workers could work for minimum wages to save up means for buying their freedom earlier.<sup>41</sup> Additionally, there was a considerable amount of money paid to the slave masters as compensation for the loss of their “property.” For instance, Jamaica, with the biggest number of slaves, which was about 311 070, received compensation of £6,000,000.<sup>42</sup>

To sum up, there were two different approaches to the slave trade. The first was called the Atlantic slave trade, which meant that slaves were brought to the Caribbean across the Atlantic, usually from Africa, the second approach of slave trade was inside of the Caribbean colonies. The latter meant that slaves were shifted from one colony to

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<sup>39</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 166.

<sup>40</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 155–158.

<sup>41</sup> Juanita De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina, 2014), 19.

<sup>42</sup> Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean*, 146–149.



another until there was complete abolition of slavery. Due to the economic benefit of slaves to slave masters and the economic loss to the governments that came with abolition, the fight for freedom of the enslaved was a long, drawn-out, multi-step process. There was usually a period of time between the abolitions which depended on the colony and on who was in power to decide what would happen. What is most important is the fact that slavery was eventually prohibited at all levels.<sup>43</sup>

#### 2.4. Life after slavery

The abolition of slavery in Jamaica came into force in 1838, in the same year when the apprenticeship system ended. Although it was not at the same time as in Haiti, the consequences of abolition in Jamaica were very similar to those in Haiti. After the abolition, former masters wanted to compel their former slaves to stay at their plantations to keep working for them for minimum wages. Some of them used this opportunity, as they desired to live close to their families and relatives. Nevertheless, there were also those former slaves, who ran away as soon as they were free and joined other free workers in so-called “free villages.”<sup>44</sup> These villages were founded by churches, which bought land from planters who were hesitant to sell it to now free Negroes. After that, the former slaves had an opportunity to work on small pieces of land. Higman points out that across the Caribbean people remained faithful to their agricultural lifestyle.<sup>45</sup> The number of plantations was quite dramatically reduced by 1870. All of this resulted in a new distribution of land in Jamaica. It also meant a new distribution of wealth.<sup>46</sup>

There were several problems that the former slaves had to deal with. De Barros explains: “The lack of sufficient hygiene habits led to an increasing number of sicknesses, especially of cholera, that hit the Caribbean several times in the 1830s, 1850s, and 1860s. This sickness affected especially the poor inhabitants, as they lived in small overcrowded areas.”<sup>47</sup> Besides this unpleasant circumstance, another problem that the Negroes had to face was the discontent of their former masters. They complained that their now free workers do not perform as much work as before when enslaved, and

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<sup>43</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 156–157.

<sup>44</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 168.

<sup>45</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 168–169, 174.

<sup>46</sup> Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean*, 150.

<sup>47</sup> De Barros. *Reproducing the British Caribbean*, 30–32.

they even called them to be idle. Nevertheless, when John Candler, who was a Quaker, visited Jamaica in 1850 observed:

...Who can call them idle people? I have seen them, men, women, and children, loaded with provisions and fruits which they carry on their heads...weights which no European would ever encounter, and sweating under the heavy toil yet all labouring cheerfully because they were free.<sup>48</sup>

Although the abolition of slavery certainly brought more freedom to the enslaved people, it did not ensure them higher positions at the social rank. Thus, former black slaves with their children and grandchildren remained at the bottom of the social pyramid. On the contrary, at the top of this pyramid was a white elite, who consisted of people either born in Europe or who had white European ancestry. Nevertheless, there were also enormous differences between white and black skin-coloured former slaves. The bitter reality was that white men, even if they were in a minority, or were poor, thought about themselves to be superior over the black men and expected to be treated differently or to have milder consequences for their transgressions against the law. The same applied in the relationship between the white and creole people.<sup>49</sup>

Bridget Brereton et al. in her work *General History of the Caribbean* concludes that: “Certainly colonialism was at the core of the problem of racial injustice so that the struggle against colonialism was a natural extension of the struggle for basic human rights for Africans.”<sup>50</sup> The social pyramid was there to ensure that everyone knew their social position. For Africans, however, it meant almost no chance to climb up the social ladder.<sup>51</sup> “The Creole, as a second-class citizen, was entrusted only with spheres of money-making agriculture and cattle-raising, the exercise of professions and trades, and the minor duties that colonial society held out.”<sup>52</sup>

The question of identity in the new Caribbean world had a different meaning than in the rest of the world. In 2019, Aaron Kamushiga published a paper in which he described the complicated nature of the Caribbean identity: “The issue of “roots” and “origins” as one of the primary means to affirm cultural identity became complicated

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<sup>48</sup> Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean*, 161.

<sup>49</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 181.

<sup>50</sup> Bridget Brereton, *General History of the Caribbean* (London: Macmillan Publishers Ltd, 2004), 228.

<sup>51</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 181.

<sup>52</sup> Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey et al., *Caribbean Literature and the Environment* (USA: The University of Virginia Press, 2005), 39.

since it is difficult to locate a Caribbean “origin” for the regions’ people, with the genocide suffered by many of the indigenous people of the region and the transplanting of persons from all over the Old World to the Caribbean.”<sup>53</sup> There were communities created during the period of slavery, who become a part of new “Caribbean African ethnicity,”<sup>54</sup> even though they were typical for only certain specific geographical areas. Such as those were, for instance, Maroons. Edward Kamau Brathwaite in his essay mentions: “In Jamaica, Maroons quickly established themselves in five independent towns in the inaccessible Blue Mountains and Cockpit country, fighting the British almost to a standstill in two highly organized guerrilla wars during the eighteenth century.”<sup>55</sup> Those communities became a part of the new African ethnicity and lasted until the twentieth century. Developing journalism was one of the ways to support African consciousness. Kamushiga in his essay explains:

Creolization, for a number of writers, represented a theoretical advance over previous understandings of Caribbean societies, which stressed their “plural” or “stratified” nature. Both what we might term the “social stratification” and the “creolization” schools of thought have an intimate connection to debates about the anthropology of the African diaspora in the Western Hemisphere.<sup>56</sup>

Although the editors were not particularly active in politics; they were active to fight against racism and strived to support social change. African consciousness was also supported through cultural practices of the former slaves, for instance, they were faithful to their faith, or art of drumming, which they taught one generation to another. Unfortunately, these practices were despised by some other members of the society, and some of them were eventually prohibited by the law.<sup>57</sup> The government was very conscious about anything that would seem to be attacking the system. To illustrate, there were Carnivals held to entertain the society. This was the only time in times of slavery when the slaves could feel a little bit of freedom, as they were allowed to dress

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<sup>53</sup> Aaron Kamugisha, “Creole Discourse and Racism in the Caribbean,” in *Beyond Coloniality: Citizenship and Freedom in the Caribbean Intellectual Tradition*, (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2019), accessed February 5, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvc77nhb.6>, 4.

<sup>54</sup> Brereton, *General History of the Caribbean*, 229.

<sup>55</sup> Edward Kamau Brathwaite, “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature,” *Daedalus* 103, no. 2 (1974), accessed February 18, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20024205>, 73–109.

<sup>56</sup> Kamugisha, “Creole Discourse and Racism in the Caribbean,” 4.

<sup>57</sup> Brereton, *General History of the Caribbean*, 229–234.

up and make fun of their social status. Men were allowed to wear women's costumes and vice versa, white people dressed up as slaves, the poor appeared to be rich for a couple of days, etc. When the rebellions and revolutions started to take place throughout the Caribbean, the government sent their military forces to ensure order during such festivities. Generally, the forces were only marginal observers of the situation, but in 1831 in Jamaica, there was a rural rebellion during Christmas celebrations, that needed their intervention.<sup>58</sup>

However, the rebellion in Jamaica was not the only one recorded in history. Brereton in *General History of the Caribbean* points out that to support African consciousness many movements were created. They were used as a tool to prompt a social change, or in better case, to agitate a political reform. Among many, one of the most influential movements was UNIA (the acronym denotes Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League) founded in 1914 in Jamaica by Marcus Garvey. Garvey travelled among the people of the Caribbean and was horrified by the "universal suffering of the race."<sup>59</sup> His ultimate desire was to scatter the dispersed African race and to unite it in order to claim back African homeland. Overall, there was an immense impact of Garvey's ideology on the whole Greater Caribbean area. It touched every social class, and he found many sympathizers.<sup>60</sup>

#### 2.4.1. Education after slavery

One important topic that emerged after abolition was the education of the former slaves. The schooling had been very informal in times of slavery. The scholars agree that there was almost no formal education during that period and that intellectual life was neglected. There were several free schools run by churches, for example, in Barbados, or Jamaica.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, children were taught mainly by their parents, because slave owners did not feel any urge to educate their slaves and many job positions of the enslaved people did not require them to be literate. However, Higman points out that literacy was a great advantage especially among the leaders of rebellions, such as, for Sam Sharpe who was a leader of the mentioned rebellion in Jamaica

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<sup>58</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 179–181.

<sup>59</sup> Brereton, *General History of the Caribbean*, 236.

<sup>60</sup> Brereton, *General History of the Caribbean*, 236–240.

<sup>61</sup> Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean*, 109.

in 1831. There were also some slaves, who were brought to the Caribbean with a knowledge of languages unknown to European colonists, such as the Arabic language. Slaves used these languages when they wanted to have secret communication.

However, the conclusion was that at abolition many people remained uneducated. There were two different branches of opinions about this matter. On one hand, some planters wanted education for black people to be strictly focused on “the teaching of practical agricultural knowledge, attitudes of civil obedience, and acceptance of a social order in which black people were destined to perform manual labour on plantations.”<sup>62</sup> On the other hand, there were governments and churches that wanted to establish schools and provide opportunities for former slaves to learn how to read, write and count basic mathematical operations. The reason for this was simple; the government desired to rule over people who would give up their African savage identity, and their ultimate aim was to produce colonial Britons who would be loyal to the Queen. Edward Kamau Brathwaite in his essay observes:

Depending on who owned the territory, the ex-slaves were to be molded into the British or the French or the Spanish system. They began to learn to read and write so that they were diverted from the oral tradition of their inheritance; they became literate in a language which was foreign to them, "liberated" into a culture which was not theirs....At the same time, there was no countervailing influence to help them learn about their own tradition.<sup>63</sup>

To obtain first hand testimony about this way of education, there is presented a poem by Olive Senior, who reflected upon her colonial education:

Borrowed images  
willed our skins pale  
muffled our laughter  
lowered our voices  
let out our hems  
dekinked our hair  
denied our sex in gym tunics and bloomers  
harnessed our voices to madrigals

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<sup>62</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 185.

<sup>63</sup> Brathwaite, “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature,” 74.

and genteel airs  
yoked our minds to declensions in Latin  
and the language of Shakespeare  
...  
Told us nothing about ourselves  
There was nothing about us at all.<sup>64</sup>

In this poem she confirms that the students were not allowed to show their true selves. They were taught in a different language and about a different culture, which was strange to them.

The central idea was to teach the language of the imperial masters and to teach from their books. People were not supposed to use a Creole language that is “a hybrid language created under the impact of a divisive colonial regime in which Africans brought to the West Indies as slave-labour for the plantations were forced to communicate using the master’s tongue- English.”<sup>65</sup> However, this common “hybrid language” was so general among the community that there could not be another outcome other than the emergence of bilingualism. Unfortunately, it had its drawbacks because people from different islands were not able to understand each other. Thus, it is possible to speak about a main division of the Caribbean into two parts—the English-speaking Caribbean, and Francophone Caribbean.

The education process was also different according to the organization which was in charge of the teaching process. The government strived towards secular education, whereas churches oriented their teachings toward their own religious practices, which differed according to which church the tutors belonged. As a result, the state decided to fund more secular oriented schools with religion completely erased from the school curriculums. Such classes were then taught only in English. The secondary schools since the 1830s were almost exclusively for the higher classes in the society. They were also run by churches or governments.<sup>66</sup>

De Barros explains that the education also secured better employment opportunities for those who could afford it. These positions were usually for non-manual work, such as the clerk or civil servant. The first university in the West Indies

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<sup>64</sup> Olive Senior, *Talking of Trees*, Kingston (Jamaica: Calabash, 1985), 26.

<sup>65</sup> Denise deCaires Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women’s poetry* (Oxon: Routledge, 2002), 65.

<sup>66</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 185–186.

was founded in 1946 in Jamaica. It provided studies of arts, natural science, social science, and medicine.<sup>67</sup> Those, who matched the selection criteria and had means to study in the United Kingdom or in North America at university later worked as lawyers or doctors.<sup>68</sup> The most successful country concerning education was Barbados, which reduced illiteracy to only nine per cent, Jamaica had approximately eighteen per cent.<sup>69</sup>

In the first decades of the twentieth century arose a question of women's right for education. There were established several societies, for instance, Women's Self Help Society of Lady Musgrave, formed in Jamaica. The central demand of such organizations was to allow women of all social classes to receive education. As a result, several schools and training centres were established, to name a few: "vocational training schools, night schools for working-class women, or a housecraft training centre in Jamaica for working-class girls."<sup>70</sup> The improved education of women was seen as "a means to ensure the fulfilment of their moral responsibilities to society."<sup>71</sup> However, especially in the second half of the twentieth century, many private schools were established to provide education for more children. Brereton suggests that one of the main purposes of these private schools was to "bring girls out of the shade of domesticity into the glare of academic competition."<sup>72</sup> As a result, it is nowadays common throughout the Caribbean islands to see women in important positions, such as secondary and university teachers, or managers, comparable to the men.<sup>73</sup>

To sum up, the topic of the importance of education arose for the first time after abolition. During slavery, there were not many slaves who could afford it or who would consider it important. The two main institutions in charge of education were the state and church. Their curriculums were different according to their main purposes, that is, the state curriculum was rather secular, focusing on bringing up good colonial citizens, whereas church curriculums were focused on religious teachings and practices. In the twentieth century education opened up opportunities for girls to study. Nowadays, the school system provides education for both sexes, and women are seen in work positions alongside men.

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<sup>67</sup> Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean*, 219.

<sup>68</sup> De Barros, *Reproducing the British Caribbean*, 122.

<sup>69</sup> Hamshere, *The British in the Caribbean*, 219.

<sup>70</sup> Brereton, *General History of the Caribbean*, 470–471.

<sup>71</sup> Brereton, *General History of the Caribbean*, 470–471.

<sup>72</sup> Brereton, *General History of the Caribbean*, 624.

<sup>73</sup> Brereton, *General History of the Caribbean*, 625.

## 2.5. The Caribbean since 1945<sup>74</sup>

After the end of World War II, independent states were still fairly uncommon in the Caribbean. Many countries remained as a part of colonies or were in a dependent relationship. However, this has largely changed several years later, and by 1975, most of the states were independent. One of the eminent events in this period was the Cuban Revolution, which influenced, either directly or indirectly, development in other countries. Fortunately, the process of decolonization in the Caribbean was more or less peaceful without much bloodshed, especially within British colonies.<sup>75</sup>

The number of the population immensely increased during this period. Higman holds the view that the reason for this was caused because “the islands became suppliers of labour to other places.”<sup>76</sup> A possible explanation for this might be that people of all social classes became mobile, and thus, it led to a lot of movement with the result of an increasing number of inhabitants. For instance, the number of inhabitants in Jamaica doubled between 1945-2010 from 1.3 to 1.8 million. However, the migration of people outside their own region helped to stabilize the increasing number of the population from being even greater. It is important to note that migration was happening mainly within the Caribbean. Migration from the outside world decreased in popularity. Another explanation could be the increased number of fertility and decrease in mortality due to improved health care systems and hygiene.<sup>77</sup>

However, in general, the Caribbean was still considered a poor territory even though the distribution of wealth was more equal after 1945. Another change brought in the second half of the twentieth century was concerning women’s rights and greater equality with men. Feminist movements were significantly more popular, although they had different influences and duration in different islands. For instance, in Cuba after the Cuban Revolution women had a higher chance to marry and to divorce. Moreover, they were encouraged to join a labour party and their education helped them to strive for a career in the medical field, or politics. On the other hand, the numbers of women who did pursue this path in Cuba were limited. In Haiti and other islands, women had slightly higher chances, especially in politics, during 1990. The first woman prime minister in Jamaica was appointed in 2006.

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<sup>74</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 251.

<sup>75</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 251–267.

<sup>76</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 275.

<sup>77</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 275–279.



The school education served as a means to teach this equality. There was even greater emphasis on schooling children and decreasing illiteracy after World War II. It was still not very popular to teach in creole, although it was typical to hear this language in the streets and schoolyards. After 1948, the first Universities were established in the Caribbean. It became more popular to send students to study abroad on the basis of scholarships. However, this opportunity was more available to the higher classes.<sup>78</sup>

The difference between classes was shown also by appearance. Especially rich people tend to dye their hair and lighten their skin colour. Their grooming was more eccentric than those from the low classes. On the other hand, the poor people wore conservative clothes, mostly combined with different pieces they found. One of the well-known contributions of the Caribbean fashion to the world is undeniably the dreadlocks, which appeared in Jamaica in the 1930s, worn usually by members of a religious movement called Rastafarianism.<sup>79</sup>

A language served as one means, by which people identified their island identity in the second half of the twentieth century. The spread of the English language was enormous, and at that time, English was spoken throughout all social classes and in almost all places, including in rural areas. English was taught at school and Universities and was spoken especially by young people who looked up to North American culture and watched television in English. Contrarily, the Creole was a little bit oppressed. There were cultural nationalists on some islands, who wanted to support radio broadcasts and television in creole, some of them even strived to make Creole an official language. Overall, except in a few places, the English language prevailed.<sup>80</sup>

Taken together, this part of the thesis has gone some way towards enhancing the understanding of Caribbean history. It is focused mainly on the inhabitants of the Caribbean islands and their transformation. Whether the people came to the Caribbean voluntarily as immigrants or they were brought by force, it is obvious, and Higman agrees to this, that they “remained connected...psychologically and spiritually...to their continental roots.”<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 302–306.

<sup>79</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 313–314.

<sup>80</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 319–320.

<sup>81</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 332.

### 3. Literary Context

To help understand the literary style and themes presented in the works of Olive Senior, this part of the thesis aims to provide a discussion about the literary context in the Caribbean in general, as well as in Senior's homeland of Jamaica. Part of the discussion in this section will focus on the appearance of black women writers on the literary scene and part of it will describe in more detail some of the main topics in Olive Senior's works.

During the period of slavery in the Caribbean, there were not created almost any written works of literature among the people on plantations. Oral tradition was preferred along with other cultural practices, such as carnivals, the arts, and music.<sup>82</sup> One of the main reasons for this could have been the illiteracy of the slave workers, as discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. However, the fight for the abolition of slavery opened up new opportunities for literature, and a new literary genre emerged, called "slave narratives."<sup>83</sup> Their main purpose was to speak up for the oppressed Caribbean inhabitants.

Those "slave narratives" were also often published overseas in the original countries of colonizers, such as in Spain or England, to stir the consciousness about the importance of abolition. As has been mentioned before, newspapers played a big role as a means to promote African consciousness and also to support freedom. However, in the beginning, the planter class held a monopoly over the newspapers and did not allow the island population to have access to it. This unfortunate act lasted at least until the beginning of the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, this was overcome in the time of abolition, with the spread of literacy.<sup>84</sup>

Raphael Dalleo, in his work *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere*, comments:

With the end of slavery bringing increases in literacy and access to publication for greater portions of the Caribbean populace, a local literary public sphere able to debate and

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<sup>82</sup> Raphael Dalleo, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere* (USA: University of Virginia Press, 2011), 21.

<sup>83</sup> Dalleo, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere*, 43.

<sup>84</sup> Dalleo, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere*, 44

critique the state began to come into existence during the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>85</sup>

The increase of literacy also led to the fact that many coloured inhabitants became printers and editors. Edward Kamau Brathwaite in his essay called *The African Presence in the Caribbean Literature* states that during emancipation several books appeared that depicted the original culture of the enslaved people. To illustrate, he describes that the first book ever written about this topic was called *Hamel the Obeah Man* (1827), which for the first time described a slave “as a complex human being.”<sup>86</sup>

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, writers appeared who sympathized with enslaved people. To name a few, Victor Schoelcher, who was a French abolitionist to visit Haiti, a mulatto Cyrille Bissette, who played a prominent role in France’s abolishment of slavery in 1848 or freed slave Juan Francisco Manzano who published a slave narrative from Spanish- America.<sup>87</sup> In the late nineteenth century, with the spread of literacy and freedom of writing with no control by the upper classes, “literature became a more popular form of expression.”<sup>88</sup> However, some authors had to go to exile and write from there, for instance, José Martí. Although he belonged to the group of white writers, Martí, along with other authors, became a symbol of anticolonial writing.<sup>89</sup>

The name of a Jamaican black writer, Claude McKay, is connected with the literature of the early twentieth century. McKay is considered to be one of the forefathers of Caribbean literature in this era and played a key role in “the establishment of a literary public sphere.”<sup>90</sup> Dalleo notes that “the emphasis on literature becomes a part of the critique of colonial society, in which creativity is set up against bureaucracy, beauty against materialism, the literary intellectuals against the technocratic elite of professionals and civil servants.”<sup>91</sup> Generally, the Caribbean literature of male writers of the later twentieth century was very often connected to topics such as politics, expatriation, and exile.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Dalleo, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere*, 44.

<sup>86</sup> Brathwaite, “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature,” 74.

<sup>87</sup> Dalleo, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere*, 23–26, 30.

<sup>88</sup> Dalleo, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere*, 71.

<sup>89</sup> Dalleo, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere*, 96.

<sup>90</sup> Dalleo, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere*, 98.

<sup>91</sup> Dalleo, *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere*, 109.

<sup>92</sup> Higman, *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, 320.

### 3.1. Jamaican Literature

In the history of the development of arts in Jamaica, literature has been thought of as essential in preserving the oral tradition and transforming it to a written one, employing Creole dialect as well as the authors' knowledge of English language. It is worthwhile to note that the Jamaican language received recognition in the 1960s.<sup>93</sup> In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in "self-perception" of the authors, which led them to create works, which freed them from the influence of Britain literature. Olive Senior in her *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage* states:

The writers who were often closely affiliated with the political movement began to explore more fully the question of what it meant to be Jamaican in a manner that was no longer a copy of the English model in diction or sensibility.<sup>94</sup>

Among the most popular genres in Jamaica can be found "written poetry, dub poetry, and song lyrics, plays and dramatic poetry; short stories, folk tales and novels."<sup>95</sup> To clarify, dub poetry is a form of poetry, which is shaped by reggae music rhythms. It appeared on the Jamaican literary scene in the 1970s, and it is performed mostly by young poets. It has a large oral tradition, however, later it appeared also in a written form. Among the well-known dub poets are, for instance, Oku Onuora or Michael Smith.<sup>96</sup>

Olive Senior in her encyclopaedia about Jamaican heritage concludes that the biggest problem for Jamaican literature nowadays is not that the authors would be silenced or censored like in the past, but the literature cannot always find respective ways to get published. In one of her interviews, she explained:

In Jamaica, there is generally an absence of outlets for our work, including periodicals. There are no grants, prizes, etc., offered. So to stay at home and write is a considerable act of faith. None of us can devote our full creative energies

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<sup>93</sup> Olive Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage* (Jamaica: Twin Guinep Publishers Ltd, 2003), 289.

<sup>94</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 285.

<sup>95</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 285, 289.

<sup>96</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 290.

to writing because we all have to earn a living by other means.<sup>97</sup>

However, since the 1950s, many Jamaican authors have moved out and continue to publish “expatriate literature,” that is, literature about Jamaican and Caribbean culture from different parts of the world.<sup>98</sup> The main author of this thesis, Olive Senior, belongs to this group. She lives in Canada and publishes from there, as was indicated at the beginning of this thesis.

### 3.2. Black Caribbean Women Writers

Although it is not possible to mention all important names in this thesis, from the brief general overview above, it is apparent that, in the beginning, men dominated the Caribbean literary field. Denise deCaires Narain in her book *Olive Senior* explains: “Gender relations also remained an area of contention...men occupied outside/ public spaces, associated with reputation, while women occupied inside/domestic spaces, associated with respectability.”<sup>99</sup> Therefore, it comes as no surprise that literary writers in the 1950s were generally men. There were also women who were writing when Caribbean literature first appeared, such as Louise Bennet, Una Marson, or Phyllis Shand Allfrey, nevertheless, they received little attention in their time and were recognized belatedly.<sup>100</sup>

Take, for instance, Louise Bennet. Her works weren’t fully recognized until the 1980s, although she had been an active writer since the 1940s.<sup>101</sup> Bennet was known as “Miss Lou” and her other nickname was “Jamaica’s First Lady of comedy”. She was an inspiration for many, among others to Olive Senior because Bennet’s main purpose was to spread Jamaican heritage, and particularly the Jamaican dialect, called Jamaican Creole.<sup>102</sup> Olive Senior at one interview said about Bennet’s impact on her: “All of us, I think, have been influenced by Louise Bennet, who was a pioneer in writing Creole and

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<sup>97</sup> Charles H. Rowell, “An Interview with Olive Senior.” *Callaloo*, no. 36 (1988), accessed February 22, 2021, doi:10.2307/2931520, 8.

<sup>98</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 285.

<sup>99</sup> Denise deCaires Narain, *Olive Senior* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2011), 3–4.

<sup>100</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 4.

<sup>101</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 8.

<sup>102</sup> Mervyn Morris, *Miss Lou: Louise Bennet and Jamaican Culture* (Oxford: Signal Books Limited, 2014), xi.

speaking it – because it was something revolutionary.”<sup>103</sup> Bennet’s influence is apparent in Senior’s short stories, with the presence of Jamaican Creole language, as well as other cultural elements, such as folk.<sup>104</sup> Likewise, Una Marson was a black, feminist writer who wrote plays and poems describing the destiny of black women. On top of that, she broadcasted Caribbean literature on the BBC programme, called “Caribbean Voices” in the late 1940s.<sup>105</sup>

At last, towards the end of the twentieth-century women writers were finally more visible on the literary scene.<sup>106</sup> Along with a number of other authors, Olive Senior came to the literary scene in the 1970s. Narain explains: “The interventions of women writers and critics became more visible as global feminist movements grew and challenged nationalist orthodoxies.”<sup>107</sup> Caribbean texts published by female writers, especially in the 1980s contained topics concerning “mother/daughter relationships, child-bearing and rearing; the restrictive and constrictive socialization of girls; sexuality and the female body.”<sup>108</sup>

To focus on feminism in Jamaica, the home island of Olive Senior, its beginnings can be traced to the end of the nineteenth century. There were several leaders who strived for more equality for women, such as to obtain the same wages for women as for men for the same kind of work. Several authors agree that there were stereotypes that women were too weak for heavy work, so this point of view had to be refuted.<sup>109</sup> Also, those leaders were inspired by suffrage movements in Britain and they strived to educate creole women about their rights and to secure them with better job positions, such as to become teachers.

Jamaican women also found support in newspapers called *The Jamaican Times*, which fearlessly published poems and short works written by women.<sup>110</sup> Leah Rosenberg states in her essay “The New Woman and ‘The Dusky Strand’”:

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<sup>103</sup> Marlies Glaser and Marion Pausch, *Caribbean Writers: Between Orality and Writing*. In Denise deCaires Narain, *Olive Senior* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2011), 8.

<sup>104</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 9.

<sup>105</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 287.

<sup>106</sup> Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry*, vii.

<sup>107</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 7.

<sup>108</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 11.

<sup>109</sup> Olive Senior, *Working Miracles: Women’s Lives in the English-Speaking Caribbean* (London: Villiers Publication, 1991), 110.

<sup>110</sup> Leah Rosenberg, “The New Woman and ‘The Dusky Strand’: The Place of Feminism and Women’s Literature in Early Jamaican Nationalism” (*Feminist Review*, no. 95, 2010), accessed February 20, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40928109>, 1–7.

Women writers shaped Jamaican national literature in two further ways: they consistently challenged the stereotype of elite creole women, particularly white women depicted in British literature. They also subtly opened up the category of elite heroines to include middle-class Afro-Jamaicans.<sup>111</sup>

With the growth of feminism in the late 1990s, the topics of ethnicity and sexuality were brought up more, something which had been inadmissible in the past.<sup>112</sup>

There were several movements that were created in connection with the perception of black women and their beauty. Perhaps the most famous movement was called “Black is beautiful” which started in Harlem in 1963. The first one to popularize this collocation was a black photographer Kwame Brathwaite, who was a master of preserving colours in photographs, so that black skin popped out with unbelievable vividness. Brathwaite explained: “We’ve got to do something to make women feel proud of their hair, proud of their blackness.”<sup>113</sup> In other words, he wanted to support positivity in African consciousness and self-perception among African women. The concept of “a body” had always been presented by women writers throughout Caribbean literature. Several authors have agreed that this theme can be seen even as one of the central themes to better understand Caribbean writing.<sup>114</sup>

In the middle sixties, another movement emerged in America, called the Black Power. It was connected with the oppression of the black people in the society and with “division and race” in general. Gordon Rohlehr comes to the conclusion that: “the revolution of self-perception has always been taking place, and it continues, growing increasingly more complex and multi-faceted. It embraces now both the notion of ethnic heritages and their competition and confrontation in the contemporary post-independence Caribbean.”<sup>115</sup>

Percy Hintzen in his essay “Race and Creole Ethnicity in the Caribbean” explains that to speak about Caribbean identity, it equals to speak about being “Creole.” He explains that for someone to be called the Caribbean means that they find

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<sup>111</sup> Rosenberg, *The New Woman and ‘The Dusky Strand,’* 14.

<sup>112</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 13.

<sup>113</sup> Tanisha C. Ford, *Kwame Brathwaite Black Is Beautiful*, *Aperture*, no. 228 (2017), accessed February 24, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44404782>, 46–53.

<sup>114</sup> Narain, *Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry*, 149.

<sup>115</sup> Gordon Rohlehr, *Articulating a Caribbean Aesthetic: The Revolution of Self-Perception in Yanique Hume and Aaron Kamushiga*, *Caribbean Cultural Thought* (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2013), 384.

themselves between two poles of “hierarchical hybridized Creole space,” between being civilized or being considered to be a savage. The Creole discourse, however, is considered to be a bonding agent of society in the Caribbean. In other words, it could be claimed that the Creole society consists of a mixture of different races and ethnicities with their cultural backgrounds that have been brought together to create a Creole culture.<sup>116</sup> To illustrate, Olive Senior centres her works to discuss the question of “legacy of colonialism, Creole culture, and Creole hybridity.”<sup>117</sup> Olive Senior in her works focuses on Caribbean culture in general, without pinpointing any particular ethnicity with a tendency to engage multiple and “diverse range of Caribbean cultures.”<sup>118</sup>

De Nairan in her book *Olive Senior* summarizes that Senior’s works, such as poems and short stories, deal with light skin and good hair with the connection of a higher social status. Velma Pollard in her work “An introduction to the Poetry and Fiction of olive Senior” also comments that Olive Senior has the talent to express compassion to ordinary rural human conditions.<sup>119</sup>

Senior’s work “is populated by characters seeking to deny or enhance aspects of their ethnicity in ways that fracture family and community and unsettle ideas of any easy embrace of hybridity, exposing the painful personal choices and consequences that result from deeply ingrained attitudes to race.”<sup>120</sup> However, at one interview, Senior also explained:

But, also, I write because as a human being, as a Jamaican with a strong commitment to my homeland, I want to reaffirm those parts of our heritage that have been misplaced, misappropriated, subsumed, submerged, never acknowledged fully as the source of our strength; I want people to know that “literature” can be created out of the fabric of our everyday lives, that our stories are as worth telling as those of Shakespeare, or the creators of Dallas.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>116</sup>Percy Hintzen, *Race and Creole Ethnicity in the Caribbean* in Yanique Hume and Aaron Kamushiga, *Caribbean Cultural Thought* (Jamaica: Ian Randle Publishers, 2013), 62–63.

<sup>117</sup>Narain, *Olive Senior*, 11–15.

<sup>118</sup>Narain, *Olive Senior*, 13.

<sup>119</sup>Pollard, “An Introduction to The Poetry and Fiction of Olive Senior,” 2.

<sup>120</sup>Narain, *Olive Senior*, 15.

<sup>121</sup>Rowell, “An Interview with Olive Senior,” 484.



Olive Senior strives to keep Caribbean and Jamaican culture alive, although her works are more intimate for those who are already familiar with the practices and traditions of the Caribbean or Jamaica. For those not familiar with it, there are sometimes bits and pieces explained, however, to fully understand the message of Senior's works, one must fully emerge to "the textual world."<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 133.

## 4. Caribbean Symbols in the Selected Works

There are a number of different definitions for symbols and symbolism, for instance, in a *Dictionary of Symbols* according to the Hindu philosopher Ananda K. Coomaraswamy symbolism is “the art of thinking in images.” A psychologist Paul Diel thinks of a symbol as “a precise and crystallized means of expression” that corresponds in essence to the inner life, and Marc Saunier prefers to express the definition in rather literary and “pseudo mystical” style. He states that symbols are “the synthesizing expressions of a marvellous science, now forgotten by men” that “show us all that has been and will be, in one immutable form.”<sup>123</sup> As it has been mentioned earlier, Olive Senior focuses her works on the Caribbean and Jamaican culture and weaves different symbols concerning her culture and people all through her stories. Juan Eduardo Cirlot in his *Dictionary of Symbols* comments:

Symbolism adds a new value to an object or an act, without thereby violating its immediate or “historical” validity. Once it is brought to bear, it turns the object or action into an “open” event: symbolic thought opens the door on to immediate reality for us, but without weakening or invalidating it; seen in this light the universe is no longer sealed off, nothing is isolated inside its own existence: everything is linked by a system of correspondences and assimilations.<sup>124</sup>

Therefore, the main purpose of this part is going to be to decipher those symbols and help bring some of Senior’s poetic works closer to those who are not familiar with Caribbean culture.

There was a strong oral tradition in the Caribbean in the past, especially among the slaves, who did not receive any formal education but, in lieu of that, they passed stories from one generation to another. In tandem with many other forms of suppression of slavery, enslaved individuals were not allowed to use their own language but were forced to speak the language of their masters. In the poem called *Meditation on Yellow* Olive Senior gives a description of such a situation:

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<sup>123</sup> Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), xxix-xxx.

<sup>124</sup> Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, xiv.

you cannot tear my song  
from my throat

you cannot erase the memory  
of my story

you cannot catch  
my rhythm

(for you have to born  
with that)

you cannot comprehend  
the magic<sup>125</sup>

...

This excerpt describes the feelings of slaves towards their masters. Their history and culture were transmitted and preserved, mainly through songs and dances. This unwillingness to fully give up their identity was perceived by the ruling powers as almost an act of rebellion. This preservation of history and culture helped the people suffering through slavery to have a sense of belonging. Even nowadays, folk songs and radio remain main sources for communicating information in poor communities.<sup>126</sup>

Olive Senior explained in one of her talks she gave several years ago:

To be a writer in a culture that elevates the oral is humbling, provocative, and challenging since writer is not a recognized profession or activity. Often in Jamaica, when I tell people I am a writer, the response is likely to be, "Yes, but what do you do?"<sup>127</sup>

She used to think that people were mocking her, however, later she discovered that she is the one who had to change her attitude. She also added that she likes to leave her

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<sup>125</sup> Olive Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics* (Canada: Insomniac Press, 2004), 17.

<sup>126</sup> Olive Senior, "The Poem as Gardening, the Story as Su-Su: Finding a Literary Voice: The Twelfth Annual Philip Sherlock Lecture," *Journal of West Indian Literature* 14, no. 1/2 (2005), accessed March 2, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23020010>, 8.

<sup>127</sup> Senior, "The Poem as Gardening, the Story as Su-Su," 13.

stories with an open end, just to provoke her readers' thoughts, and gives them space to find their own interpretation.<sup>128</sup>

The names of Olive Senior's poetry collections are almost all connected to the natural world. The poetry collections discussed in this thesis will be mainly *Gardening in the Tropics*, complemented with selected poems from poetry collections called *Over the Top of the World* (2005), and *Shell* (2007). Just from their names, it is possible to see hints of her focus on nature and cultural practices in the Caribbean as well as observing the "nature" of men in the New World.<sup>129</sup>

#### 4.1. Symbols of Gardening

Gardening in the Tropics, you never know  
what you'll turn up.<sup>130</sup>

In general, nature in the Caribbean was largely devastated and transformed as a consequence of interventions of colonizers. Several authors, namely Narain and DeLoughrey, came to the conclusion that the Caribbean belongs to the category of regions most radically marked by the human hand. The changes were mainly due to "human and botanic migration, transplantation, and human settlement."<sup>131</sup>

The poetry collection *Gardening in the Tropics* was first published in Canada in 1994.<sup>132</sup> The name, itself, chosen by Senior is worth noticing because it is a metaphor full of symbols. In an essay called *Gardening in the diaspora: Place and Identity in Olive Senior's Poetry* Jordan Stouck explains: "As a metaphor, gardening works both in relation to postcolonial theories of hybridity, diaspora and dissemination, and in relation to colonial histories of conquest and the desire for pure origins."<sup>133</sup> Other study has also considered the relationship of "gardening" with the history of the Caribbean. Patricia Joan Saunders in her essay called "Gardening in the Garrisons, You Never Know What You Will Find" commented that Olive Senior's work helps to stir up critical thinking

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<sup>128</sup> Senior, "The Poem as Gardening, the Story as Su-Su," 13.

<sup>129</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 67.

<sup>130</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics*, 85.

<sup>131</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 67.

<sup>132</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics*, 4.

<sup>133</sup> Jordan Stouck, "Gardening in the Diaspora: Place and Identity in Olive Senior's Poetry," *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 38, no. 4 (2005), accessed March 3, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44030089>, 1.

about the history of the Caribbean while using a metaphor of the garden “in order to highlight the historical lessons that are buried in Caribbean flora and fauna, making the garden a curiously pedagogical space.”<sup>134</sup>

If one thinks of a garden, he or she can imagine a place with soil that belongs to a particular owner or group of owners. There are usually different kinds of fauna, trees and flowers of various shapes and colours. It is not necessary or even desirable to have only one kind of plant in there in order to have a beautiful garden, usually it is the variety which makes it unique and whole. To compare the analogy above to the themes of Olive Senior, the different flowers and plants in the garden can equal to the different ethnicities in the Caribbean, who came from different parts of the world and eventually merged and created one civilization. The following account can serve to back up the analogy described above. Olive Senior in one of her talks explains:

[We were] privileged to have two literary models: on the one hand, the English literary canon, the whole of Western civilization in fact; and, on the other, that new canon that has been formed out of our grounding in our own soil. Here we have learned the principles of gardening in the tropics: digging, planting, cultivating, and making the best of what we have, for the soil is ours. And it is from this soil that we extract our own and growing knowledge of those other great civilizations that have shaped us: of Africa and the East, and of the ones that were here before us, the Native Americans.<sup>135</sup>

The new Caribbean inhabitants had to learn how to adjust to their captive life in what would become a new homeland, and how to combine their own cultural heritage with others around them. Another likely explanation of her statement is that Senior wanted to point out her education and forced opportunity to learn “the European” ways because that helped her to realize more the need to learn about her own culture and stirred up the need to share it with others. The process of gardening helps to cultivate and to keep the garden beautiful. According to Jordan Stoucks “gardening” can symbolize “a concept of identity as a process.”<sup>136</sup> In the case of the Senior’s collection it confirms her search for

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<sup>134</sup> Patricia Joan Saunders, “Gardening in the Garrisons, You Never Know What You Will Find: (Un)Visibility in the Works of Ebony G. Patterson,” *Feminist Studies* 42, no. 1 (2016), accessed March 26, 2021, doi:10.15767/feministstudies.42.1.98, 98-137.

<sup>135</sup> Senior, “The Poem as Gardening, the Story as Su-Su,” 38.

<sup>136</sup> Stouck, “Gardening in the Diaspora,” 106.

her own culture and identity, as well as show the hybridity of the Caribbean culture, as implied by the following lines:

Gardening in the Tropics,  
you'll find things that don't  
belong together often intertwine  
all mixed up in this amazing fecundity.  
We grow as convoluted as the vine.  
Or wis. And just as quickly!<sup>137</sup>

In accordance with the presented passage, Narain has demonstrated that on this Senior in her works also “celebrates the hybridizing impulses of the natural.”<sup>138</sup>

Thus, as “gardening” inevitably has a hidden deeper meaning, “tropics” represents the environment of the Caribbean culture and, first of all, directs us toward a specific geography. As a matter of fact, Jordan Stoucks suggests that the word “tropics” points towards colonial territories as a “colonial demarcator.” However, she continues by explaining that Olive Senior’s title, according to her, expresses “negotiation with imperial history and with the stereotypes that imperialism produced.”<sup>139</sup>

The collection falls under four subheadings, each suggesting the main themes of individual poems. The first part is called Traveller’s tales, the second Nature studies, the third bears the same name as the whole collection, Gardening in the Tropics, and finally, the last one is called Mystery. Before readers can fully emerge into the individual sections, they are welcomed by a first opening poem called *Gourd*. The poem itself is full of symbols, as an introduction for what awaits on the following pages. Moreover, to add to the whole Caribbean atmosphere, the poem is also written in the shape of a gourd. The original name of this typical Jamaican fruit given it by Taínos is *giiera*, other names for it are *calabash*, *packy* or *took-took*, depending on its different purposes. It was used in everyday lives, such as a container for carrying water (thus the name of took-took, according to the sound of the water within, when used as a vessel) or for dishes, storage spaces or for simple musical instruments called Maracca. Many of these names are mentioned in the poem to introduce the Caribbean culture. However,

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<sup>137</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics*, 88.

<sup>138</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 87.

<sup>139</sup> Stouck, “Gardening in the Diaspora,” 105-106.

even more interesting is the symbolic meaning of the calabash. For the Caribbean people it is “a metaphor for something hidden.”<sup>140</sup> The opening few lines of the first stanza in this poem reads as follows:

Hollowed dried  
calabash humble took-took  
how simple you look. But what  
lies beneath that crusty interior?  
Such stories to tell!<sup>141</sup>

There is no coincidence that these are the first few lines that serve as a launch to the rest of the collection. Thus, this metaphorical gourd is a precursor of the rest of the stories in the whole *Gardening in the Tropics*.

#### 4. 2. Symbol of the Travellers

The first section in *Gardening in the tropics* called “Traveller’s Tales” bears its name quite conveniently. First of all, readers can be compared to travellers, who discover the history and some traditions of the Caribbean by reading the collection. The first poem called *Meditation on Yellow* serves as an example of that. In general, the poem talks about the history of the Caribbean from the time of Columbus, through the eyes of the “coloured” slaves.

“Yellow” in this poem is very symbolic and can be interpreted in several ways. First of all, it can be understood as a symbol for “coloured” people who were enslaved. Another name that referred to the skin colour of slaves was also “mulatto” or “brown.” The poem talks about the fate of not only indigenous people but also about African people, as in the following passage:<sup>142</sup>

At some hotel  
overlooking the sea  
you can take tea  
at three in the afternoon

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<sup>140</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 91.

<sup>141</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics*, 7.

<sup>142</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 125.

served by me  
skin burnt black as toast  
(for which management apologizes)<sup>143</sup>

However, Senior chose the designation of yellow in her poem because of the double entendre for another symbol which the colour conveys, that is of gold.<sup>144</sup>

But it was gold  
on your mind  
gold the light  
in your eyes  
gold the crown  
of the Queen of Spain<sup>145</sup>

...

As I have mentioned earlier in this thesis, and Senior points at it in her poem as well, one of the treasures Columbus and other colonizers sought to find in the New World was gold. In general, the poem talks about the history of the Caribbean from the times of Columbus, and skips through centuries all the way to the present day. It can help readers who have no way of knowing about the history of the Caribbean to gain at least a basic understanding. For those who are a little bit familiar with its history this poem can provide interesting insights about the feelings of the “coloured” inhabitants of the Caribbean. The reason for this is because the whole poem is told through their eyes. The point of view changes from native Indian inhabitants in the first part of the poem to enslaved Black inhabitants in the second part.<sup>146</sup> The transition is apparent in the following lines: “We were not golden/ We were a shade too brown.”<sup>147</sup> The main speakers in the poem represent the Caribbean peoples. Narain comments that Senior changes the register of the main speaker to establish a Creole register and to underline Creole identity.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics*, 14.

<sup>144</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 125.

<sup>145</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics*, 13.

<sup>146</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 71.

<sup>147</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics*, 13.

<sup>148</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 74.



A second interpretation of the term “travellers” can be perceived as the white colonizers who came and settled into the Caribbean, but who unfortunately never fully embraced the Caribbean culture. Moreover, they thought about themselves as superior to the Native inhabitants and took away from them what they pleased. The reason for this claim, according to Olive Senior, can be found in the following rhymes:

but we were peaceful then  
child-like in the yellow dawn of our innocence  
so in exchange for a string of islands  
and two continents  
you gave us a string of beads  
and some hawk’s bells  
...  
But they still want more<sup>149</sup>  
...

In the lines above Senior shows the peaceful attitude of the native inhabitants in comparison with the attitude of the colonizers, who came to gain riches, conquest, and rule in the New World, and who still “want more”. It is necessary to point out two more important symbols in this passage. The line saying that the native inhabitants received from the colonizers a string of beads and hawk’s bells. The latter is a reference to trade between Columbus and Taínos, when he landed on the Caribbean soil as a “hawk’s bell” was “a tiny bell tied to a leg of a trained hunting bird in Europe.”<sup>150</sup> Beads have a special meaning for the Taínos and, therefore, the colonizers used this to their advantage and used it as a symbol of currency for the exchange of goods.<sup>151</sup>

The theme of discovering the New World by Columbus can also be found in another poem collection by Olive Senior called *Over the roofs of the World*. The collection adopted its name from a poem by Walt Whitman “Song of Myself”: “I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable,/ I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the

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<sup>149</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropics*, 11, 15.

<sup>150</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 126.

<sup>151</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 126.

world.”<sup>152</sup> The opening poem in this collection “The Pull of Birds” describes Columbus’ journey on the sea and his misconception of the destination of his voyage:

Colón, son and grand- son of weavers  
Rejected that calling but did not  
Neglect craft (keeping two sets of books),  
On his first set of voyage, landfall receding  
(where was Japan?) he sailed on<sup>153</sup>

The individual stanzas of the poem in a printed version are written in a shape of what can remind one of a prow of a boat which helps to create an association with sea travel. Unlike in the “Meditation of Yellow” in “The Pull of Birds” poem the readers learn only about the idea of colonizers to find new lands and about their journey, not about the history after 1942. However, in both collections there is a depiction of the colonization from the point of view of the people of the Caribbean which gives the poems a rather sharp tone. As the two different collections are compared, it is apparent that the theme of the colonizers as travellers appears across Olive Senior’s works.

The third meaning of the expression “travellers” can be related to the topic of migration, and especially immigration, of the Caribbean inhabitants outside of the Caribbean, particularly to America. They did not hesitate to travel illegally and their desire to move out to find a better life is shown in the poem “Stowaway”:

There’s this much space between me and  
discovery  
a hairline fracture getting wider with  
each wave  
...  
I’ll dangle  
on a single hope: that my eyes

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<sup>152</sup> Walt Whitman, “*Leaves of Grass*,” Poetry Foundation, accessed March 1, 2021, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/45477/song-of-myself-1892-version>.

<sup>153</sup> Olive Senior, *Over the roofs of the World*, (Canada: Insomniac Press, 2005), 9.

be blinded  
only by the promised land.<sup>154</sup>

However, the narrator of the poem also describes that the migration also usually had its price:

If I never make this uncharted  
passage  
one way or another, never tell  
my children  
their insolvent eyes set me  
sailing.<sup>155</sup>

In this excerpt from the poem called “Illegal immigrant” Olive Senior shows the uneasy process of departing from their captivity and actually opens another theme about the impact which immigration had on the whole family, both on those who were leaving as well as on those who stayed behind on the islands. As a matter of fact, Olive Senior also uses the theme of migration in her poem collection *Shell* where she also touched upon the uneasy feelings brought by immigration in a poem called “Hurricanes”:

Winds that are born out of thin air beyond the Gulf  
bring other heartaches than hurricanes.<sup>156</sup>

As suggested in this poem those “heartaches” are a symbol of sadness as consequences of people moving across the ocean.

Most likely, it is no coincidence that the last section of traveller stories in *Gardening in the Tropics* is concluded with a series of poems similarly called “Hurricane stories.” These poems are in fact associated with the hurricanes that happened in the Caribbean during the years 1903, 1944, 1951, and 1988.<sup>157</sup> Thus, the cross reference is evident with the hurricanes in the poem of the same name in the collection *Shell*.

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<sup>154</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 45.

<sup>155</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 44.

<sup>156</sup> Olive Senior, *Shell* (Canada: Insomniac Press, 2007), 26.

<sup>157</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 103.

The last mentioned hurricane that came in 1988 was especially devastating. It left almost fifty people dead and most of the inhabitants without shelter. In its wake, the hurricane also left a vast amount of crops destroyed which added to the food shortage already present after the Second World war. Therefore, it could be one of the factors why Olive Senior wanted to draw attention to this unfortunate tragedy, and how people reacted to it.

The Caribbean people knew that it is extremely important to get ready for the possibility of hurricanes hitting their islands.<sup>158</sup> Senior describes this attitude in the “Hurricane story 1903”:

Time and time again, Grandmother plucked  
bits of fowl coop from the penguin fence.  
Grandfather drained his fields, shored up  
their lives against improvidence.<sup>159</sup>

Anyone who did want to survive the “hurricane season” that usually occurs during the month of September, had to make food storage to be able to survive the possible catastrophe, as did the grandparents in the poem. People in the Caribbean even have a little riddle to remind listeners of the importance of being cautious:

June- too soon  
July- standy by  
September- remember  
October- all over.<sup>160</sup>

Narain comments: “The daily necessity of dealing with a harsh natural environment is presented here as instilling a matter-of-fact survivalism as well as respect for the elements.”<sup>161</sup> The demonstration can be made on the following part in the poem “Hurricane story 1903”:

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<sup>158</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 239.

<sup>159</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 19.

<sup>160</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 239.

<sup>161</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 99.

But he was the seventh son  
of a seventh son and could read signs  
and interpret wonders so when the swallows  
flew below the roof line, when the sky  
took on a special peach glow, when flocks  
of birds sailed west over the hill,  
when clouds banked at the far side and the air  
was still, he knew it was time to batten down.<sup>162</sup>

The grandfather in the poem is described as someone who grew up in a family where they were educated for generations about all the signs which nature provides to warn people about the coming hurricanes, and thus he knew that it was time to prepare his family and make sure that they are going to be alright during the hurricane season.

On the whole, the poems about hurricanes also symbolize several points of view that these natural disasters had on the lives of the Caribbean people. First of all, they portray the fight of man against nature in the Caribbean as it has been discussed. Second, these poems show the impact of migration on the families, as has also been touched upon in the previous poems above. Third, they point towards the strength of Caribbean women, who had to deal with the list of problems above and who many times had to take over the lead in their families and to be the main providers.

To demonstrate the impact of the migration on the families in more depth, Olive Senior offers the poem "Hurricane story, 1951." It talks about a young family who had a son. Right after the hurricane in the year 1951 they lost almost everything "they ended up suck-ing salt, same as everybody else."<sup>163</sup> Narain explains that this story is a prototypical migration story, which can serve as an example of what was happening in the Caribbean. The mother of the family decided to go to England to be a nurse: "plenty people going to England now/ plenty women going in for nursing/ let me go."<sup>164</sup> The father of the family also left to America "to be a farm worker/ every year he went/ to pick oranges,"<sup>165</sup> and so they left their boy with his grandma. However, the reality turned out to be different from what the family hoped for. Mother became a charlady, father remarried in America and the boy was left neglected in the islands: "after a while

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<sup>162</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 20.

<sup>163</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 35.

<sup>164</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 35.

<sup>165</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 36.

he also stopped speaking.”<sup>166</sup> The end of the poem shows the tragic reality of unhappiness and total breakup of the family and, thus, stands as a symbol of all those afflicted families who came through similar experiences.

A similar characteristic story from the lives of the Caribbean people dealing with the consequences of hurricanes is presented in the poem “Hurricane Story 1944.” However, this time it compares migration to a movement up and down the social class,<sup>167</sup> and touches on the strength of women. The poem starts with a description of a man who worked as an assistant and apparently climbed up high on a social ladder: “he rode off to work at Solomon’s Drygoods and Haberdashery/ where he was assistant (white-collar class).”<sup>168</sup> Eventually, he married and started a family with a woman of dark skin from a rural background, and by doing so he gained disapproval from his own mother “she going to cause him to turn down/ again.”<sup>169</sup> This proved to be a baseless fear, for “through her/ they got a house.”<sup>170</sup> Nevertheless, the real tragedy came in 1944 when the hurricane hit the Island and caused many companies to close down, including the one of the father’s boss, Mr Solomon: “for Mr Solomon lost his shop/ and laughingly retired on his insurance.”<sup>171</sup> The father lost his job and because of his pride and shame he did not want to return to the rural way of living:

No job he could find  
worthy of a man of his abilities  
(his mother agreed)  
couldn’t turn back to the muck  
when his hands had been clean for so long  
something bound to turn up<sup>172</sup>

The mother had to take over to become a head of the household and to become a provider to financially secure her family. One of the main messages that Olive Senior wanted to carry out in the rest of this poem is about the moral and physical strength of the women. Narain notes: “The matter-of-fact tone of delivery here conveys the

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<sup>166</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 37.

<sup>167</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 100.

<sup>168</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 24.

<sup>169</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 25.

<sup>170</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 25.

<sup>171</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 26.

<sup>172</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 27.

repetitiveness of the cycle of the drudgery of the mother's life and parallels her matter-of-fact response in taking on the role of breadwinner for the household and the punishment for doing so."<sup>173</sup> The rest of the poem symbolizes it. The wife had to step up and provide for their family:

Monday Tuesday Wednesday our mother worked in the  
fields  
Thursday Friday she went to market  
Saturday she left him money on the dresser  
he took it and went to Unity Bar and Grocery got drunk  
came home and beat her  
Sunday she went to church and sang<sup>174</sup>

Pitifully, she was not recognized for her hard work by her husband. On the contrary, she was beaten by him. The mother also had to have two low-status jobs. Olive Senior in her work *Working Miracles* points out:

Female household heads on the whole are poor, black, uneducated and in the worst-paid and lowest-status jobs. It is these women who are truly working miracles in ensuring at least the survival, and sometimes the advancement, of their families.<sup>175</sup>

She also explained that although nowadays it is more common throughout the Caribbean to have female heads of households, due to economic factors and inability of fathers to be providers, in reality it means that these households are poor and disadvantaged.<sup>176</sup>

The last comment I would like to make about the poem above is about a symbol that is present in the last paragraph. It is written in a way to coincide with the children's rhyme "Solomon Grundy" and shows this rhyme in a new light, from the point of view of the routine of the family.<sup>177</sup> Moreover, the name of the company owner, the father's

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<sup>173</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 100.

<sup>174</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 27.

<sup>175</sup> Senior, *Working Miracles*, 102.

<sup>176</sup> Senior, *Working Miracles*, 100.

<sup>177</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 100.

boss, in the poem was Mr Solomon, serving as a cross reference to the rhyme. It can thus be seen that Olive Senior in her works likes to mention different Caribbean children's games and traditions and nods to them throughout her works. To exemplify this, the last poem discussed from the first part of the collection *Gardening in the Tropics* is called "The Moonshine Dolly." This poem talks about an old African habit that was popular especially among the children.<sup>178</sup> The opening lines of the poem describe very thoroughly the process of making moonshine dolls. It can therefore be assumed that Olive Senior through this poem wanted to point at the African tradition brought into Caribbean. As well as to present it to the readers, who are strangers and "travellers," getting more acquainted with the Caribbean culture:

Each full moon  
I lay flat on the ground  
with outstretched limbs  
while you outlined my body  
with bits of glass, mirrors  
stones.<sup>179</sup>

The passage describes how a child laid down on a beach and other children would put around them different shining objects. Then they rose and left the newly created moonshine doll, or moonshine baby, as they also called it, on the beach. This practice was taken from the old African habit, and originally served for scaring passersby. Later on, there were competitions made between different villages, serving as a way of amusement.<sup>180</sup> Hence, it could conceivably be hypothesised that this poem was added to this section, yet again, as a representation of Caribbean identity for someone who is not familiar with their practices.

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<sup>178</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 327.

<sup>179</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 23.

<sup>180</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 237.



### 4.3. Symbols in Nature

Plants are deceptive. You see them there  
looking as if once rooted they know  
their places; not like animals like us  
always running around, leaving traces.<sup>181</sup>

If one pictures an image of a garden, plants are inevitably part of it. The second section in *The Gardening in the Tropics* is mostly concerned with poems about different Caribbean plants and flowers. There is always a symbolic meaning in these works and in the following pages, their hidden meaning will be discussed. Narain comments that in this section Olive Senior “questions the idea that “plant identity” itself is exclusively one of the “rootedness” and fixity.<sup>182</sup> I argue that the “plant identity” is a metaphor for the Caribbean identity and the culture associated with it. Olive Senior confirms this claim:

In the section *Nature Studies*, I had a lot of fun with these plants. In my poetry I do a lot of what is called personification where I treat an inanimate object as if it were human. I not only talk to these plants but they talk back to us. Also [...] in writing these poems about plants I’m using a lot of the mythology and folklore of the Caribbean. There’s a lot more than simply descriptions of the plants; it’s going inside the plants to reveal more than just what we associate with them, that is, as plants that produce fruit, or trees, or whatever... These plants are very much an integral part of who we are as a people. They are part of our stories and mythologies.<sup>183</sup>

There are various kinds of plants mentioned in this section. Most of them have their origins in the Caribbean, such as anatto and guinep, and they were used for different things as it is described in this first stanza from the poem of the same name “Anatto and Guinep”:<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 63.

<sup>182</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 88.

<sup>183</sup> Hyacinth M. Simpson, “Olive Senior’s Gardening in the Tropics,” Ryerson University, accessed March 15, 2021, <https://www.ryerson.ca/olivesenior/poems/bamboo.html>.

<sup>184</sup> Stouck, “Gardening in the Diaspora,” 114.

No one today regards annatto and guinep as anything special...  
Well, with the Arawaks and others who were here before us  
it wasn't so. Nothing could happen without annatto paste or guinep stain to paint their bodies with.<sup>185</sup>

Jordan Stouck comments: "Anatto and guinep signify multivalently, recalling a lost indigenous past that valued the plants, as well as a present in which the non-commercial crop is denigrated as backward and (literally) distasteful."<sup>186</sup>

It is my claim therefore that original Caribbean plants carry symbols of different cultural practices, traditions, folklore, and superstitions, especially in the work of Olive Senior. Therefore, by uncovering the hidden meaning of them, the reader or "traveller" can learn more about the Caribbean identity. Among the first poems in this section is one called "Pineapple":

With yayama  
fruit of the Antilles,  
we welcomed you  
to our shores  
not knowing in  
your language  
"house warming"  
meant "to take  
possession of"  
and "host"  
could so easily  
turn hostage.<sup>187</sup>

The beginning of the poem yet again talks about the beginning of colonization history. The speaker in the poem represents the native inhabitants, claiming that when the

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<sup>185</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 76.

<sup>186</sup> Stouck, "Gardening in the Diaspora," 118.

<sup>187</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 66.

colonizers came, the native inhabitants had almost no idea about what was waiting for them. They came to welcome the colonizers, however, much later they discovered their true intentions, which is commented on in the second part of the stanza.

The pineapple or in Taíno-Creole called *yayama* is an original fruit from the Caribbean that was a symbol of the hospitality of the Taínos. Its name pineapple is derived from the word “pine” as its shape reminded Europeans of a pine cone.<sup>188</sup> The second stanza, although it describes a sweet fruit, which a pineapple without a doubt is, is ironically very bitter and full of spite from the side of the narrator of the poem who represents the native inhabitants:

Oblivious  
of irony,  
you now claim  
our symbol  
of hospitality  
as your own  
never suspecting  
the retribution  
incarnate  
in that sweet  
flesh.<sup>189</sup>

Senior explains that Europeans borrowed the custom of pineapples as a symbol of hospitality and also brought pineapples to Europe. Later, this fruit also became a favourite motif in art, and in Jamaica it also appeared on money watermark and on stamps.<sup>190</sup> One can understand the message carried out by this poem that the colonizers were not hesitant to take from the native inhabitants only some of their habits but they also took their land and freedom, which left the natives bitter inside. Therefore, the name of the poem, which indicates a sweet fruit actually uncovers to its readers a bitter topic of lost trust towards the colonizers. However, it also carries a message of

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<sup>188</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 386–7.

<sup>189</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 66.

<sup>190</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 386–7.

the natural hospitality of the original Caribbean inhabitants who are depicted as victims of the process of colonization.

To touch upon the folklore of the Caribbean, there are several poems connected with myths and superstitions of the Caribbean people in *Gardening in the Tropics*. To continue on a similar topic to the previous poem, which is about trust, the next discussed poem is called “Starapple.” The poem talks about the nature of the starapple tree:

Two-sided starapple leaf  
can't be trusted as a guide.  
Without force, starapple  
won't let go of its fruit.<sup>191</sup>

The starapple is a big fruit tree, whose fruits when cut crossways show a star-shaped pattern. The reason why the poem says that starapple cannot be trusted is because in Taíno folklore the two-sided leaves are a symbol of deception. The tree itself is referred to as “mean” or “cubbittch” in Taíno because it is not easy to get its fruit due to its height.<sup>192</sup> Therefore, metaphorically speaking, the poem serves as a warning not to be deceived by people who are liars, hypocrites, and deceitful.

The next poem introduces to its reader an old Caribbean superstition:

everybody likes pawpaw  
but some don't like it planted  
too near the house<sup>193</sup>

The Taíno original name for what is nowadays more common under the label papaya is found all over Jamaica, growing in gardens of the Caribbean inhabitants for various purposes. Its ripe fruit can be eaten and all parts of the pawpaw can be used for medical purposes.<sup>194</sup> If this fruit is therefore beneficial, the question is why does the speaker

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<sup>191</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 65.

<sup>192</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 457.

<sup>193</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 78.

<sup>194</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 374.

warn not to plant it close to one's house that "it's better to plant it /the far side of the fence."<sup>195</sup> The speaker does not wait too long with an explanation:

I know for a fact  
that the tree will sap your strength  
waste your muscle  
draw you down  
to skin and bone.<sup>196</sup>

As it has been indicated earlier in this thesis, the Caribbean inhabitants have various legends, myths, and superstitions. One of them is that one pirate sought shelter under the pawpaw tree where he fell asleep covered with pawpaw leaves. All that was left of him were metal parts on his clothing, buckles from his shoes, and his weapon. The Caribbean people not only avoid planting the pawpaw tree close to their house but they also do not even let their dogs be tied to this tree.<sup>197</sup> The fact that the speaker of the poem justifies "an ol'lady/ told me that"<sup>198</sup> is a demonstration that the idea of the pawpaw tree taking strength from people has been going around for a long time. However, the speaker backs up his claim by inviting to an experiment all unbelievers:

But if you want proof  
just wrap pawpaw leaf  
round a tough piece of beef  
or mutton and wait  
and see<sup>199</sup>

...

Olive Senior in her *Encyclopedia* explains that in real life people use pawpaw leaves to tender tough meat before they cook it because pawpaw contains special enzymes that allow it.<sup>200</sup> This might be one of the scientific explanations why such superstitions were created. However, more than the real explanation is the fact that points at the Caribbean

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<sup>195</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 78.

<sup>196</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 78.

<sup>197</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 374.

<sup>198</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 78.

<sup>199</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 78.

<sup>200</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 375.

identity and superstitions that were presented by Olive Senior in this poem. Not only does she describe one of their traditions, she also incorporated the Taíno creole language, such as “pawpaw” to indulge the authenticity of the poem.

#### 4.4. Tropical symbols of Labour

The last section from *Gardening in the Tropics* that is going to be discussed bears the same name as the whole collection. It is apparent that in this part Olive Senior returns to the motif of a garden. In the opening poem of this section, the main speaker utters: “Mine is only/ a kitchen garden”<sup>201</sup> which implies something more private rather than a huge garden for thousands of visitors. Also, the word “tropics” is a permanent concept occurring across this section, so it can be assumed that the readers will learn more about history, and the lives of people in the Caribbean. Jordan Stouck observes:

As a metaphor for identity positions and processes, the Caribbean garden encompasses both colonial definitions and hierarchies and an alternative history of slave resistance. Gardening in the Caribbean diaspora has developed therefore as a doubly ambivalent situation: a clearly located, grounded identity, originating from the cultivation of indigenous plants and slave gardens, is necessary for migrant women writers to situate themselves materially and historically, yet such fixed identity categories also carry a legacy of colonial oppression.<sup>202</sup>

What Olive Senior did in her work was to describe ideas of cultivating the tropical land using “literal and metaphorical expressions.”<sup>203</sup> Moreover, she touched once again on the colonial and postcolonial Caribbean history chronologically from 1942 up until contemporary Jamaican culture, exactly as Stouck claims. “To demonstrate that, many poems are written in colloquial speech and humble registers.”<sup>204</sup> For instance, the poem called “My Father’s Blue Plantation” is a demonstration of colonial history and comparison of the times past and present:

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<sup>201</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 85.

<sup>202</sup> Stouck, “Gardening in the Diaspora,” 107.

<sup>203</sup> Stouck, “Gardening in the Diaspora,” 107.

<sup>204</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 79.

Gardening in the Tropics we revel in  
Hot Tropical Colours. My father's land  
was blue. In his prime, his banana  
plantation came right to our doorstep.  
We lived deep in this forest of leaves  
made blue by the treatment against  
Leaf Spot Disease which he humped around  
the fields in a battered spray-pan.<sup>205</sup>

The poem opens up with the first stanza reflecting the times of slavery on plantations with the reference of bananas because their origin was in Asia and they were brought to the Caribbean by Spanish colonizers. Jordan Stouck in his essay *Gardening in the Diaspora* comments on the symbolic meanings of bananas: "Moreover, as a rhizomatic plant, the banana can be read as a figure for the concept of rootedness within the larger and ambivalent dynamics of transnational exchange."<sup>206</sup>

In the nineteenth century, there was a boom in the banana industry in Jamaica and the banana trade had begun. That brought prosperity to many people across the island. The poem describes just that with its part "plantation came right to our doorstep." The demand for this ripe "green gold" increased and the sea captains were urging peasants to take part in this growing business. Jordan Stouck explains: "However, bananas were also cultivated on independent farms during the post-slavery period and for many African Caribbeans, such as the speaker's father in Senior's poem, represented a means to economic self-sufficiency."<sup>207</sup> The next part of the poem describes a competition between planters so that they could provide at least for the basic needs of their families because sometimes the plantations were their only way of income.<sup>208</sup>

We fervently prayed ours would find  
acceptance in the sight of the Inspector

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<sup>205</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 86.

<sup>206</sup> Stouck, "Gardening in the Diaspora," 114.

<sup>207</sup> Stouck, "Gardening in the Diaspora," 114.

<sup>208</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 38–41.

for every bunch was earmarked to pay for  
something.<sup>209</sup>

It can be assumed that this poem is narrated from the girl's point of view because it was usually women who took care of the selling part of the bananas.<sup>210</sup> If their bananas were chosen to be sold, they received a wage that would allow them to buy the most essential things:

Sometimes it was shoes. We  
didn't choose those in Hot Tropical Colours  
since each child could have only one pair  
(for school and chapel) and we were taught  
only black or white would find favour  
in His sight.<sup>211</sup>

The lines above reveal that the people with newly, hard-won freedoms did not have too many opportunities during this period. They were allowed to own only one pair of shoes and only for "important events," such as school or worship. In this line, the narrator touched on the topic of races as she mentioned the universal basic distinction between white and black coloured skin people. However, in the Caribbean, it has become commonplace to distinguish also different grades of colour. It usually depended on the union between white and black people and also on the mix that followed with their posterity. It has also been recorded that some women sought to marry men with lighter complexion than theirs, in order to provide a higher social status for themselves.<sup>212</sup>

The last stanza of the poem is a contrast of the past described in the first part of the poem:

But all this was ages ago.  
We children fled the blue for northern  
light where we buy up all the shoes  
in sight. My closet is filled – finally –

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<sup>209</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 86.

<sup>210</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 40.

<sup>211</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 86.

<sup>212</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 125.



with a rainbow of shoes in Hot Tropical  
Colours (which look marvellous against  
the snow).<sup>213</sup>

The speaker reveals the truth of what is happening even nowadays in the Caribbean. When children grow up, they seek to find for themselves better life conditions in North America. They leave their home islands, particularly to live in Canada, as the poem hints with “northern light and snow.” Such an example is Olive Senior herself. In the poem, the main speaker left her father and plantation behind to move to Canada where she found better economic conditions and now, she can afford to fill her closet with many different pairs of shoes. However, such a decision to leave the homeland also leaves consequences, as described in the last stanza, where it is apparent that the speaker is not in touch with her father anymore and hears about him only from the other people: “My father/ I ‘m told.”<sup>214</sup> Therefore, there is a big contrast apparent between strong bound family relations in the first part of the poem and the second part where the family is all over the continent. At the end of the poem, the father is left alone on his plantation. Olive Senior, in this poem, again combined several topics closely related to the Caribbean heritage: slavery, the economic situation of families, and migration.

In the poem collection *Shell*, there is a poem that describes what life was like on the plantation during the times of slavery. The poem called “Cane Gang” is narrated through the eyes of slaves and, therefore, shows slavery and colonization from a different point of view than is touched on in the previously discussed poem:

Torn from the vine from another world  
to tame the wildness of the juice, assigned  
with bill and hoe to field or factory, chained  
by the voracious hunger of the cane<sup>215</sup>

The first stanza describes the involuntary coming of the slaves as “black specks”<sup>216</sup> to the Caribbean to work on the sugar cane fields for their masters. In the *Encyclopedia* Olive Senior explains that the sugar cane was brought to the Caribbean with the arrival

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<sup>213</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 86.

<sup>214</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 86.

<sup>215</sup> Senior, *Shell*, 51.

<sup>216</sup> Senior, *Shell*, 51.

of Columbus. It became an important crop for sustaining the economy in the islands, especially in Jamaica, where the biggest sugar plantations were. The demand for workers on those plantations grew bigger and, as a response, slavery trade grew also.<sup>217</sup>

Colonial gardens were not, however, the only cultivating force present in the Caribbean. Undeveloped indigenous territory and slave allotments afforded the horticultural equivalent of resistance in the Caribbean. In this sense, gardening in the Caribbean experience has always been, and continues to be, both a way of establishing local community and a means to global domination.<sup>218</sup>

During slavery, slaves were divided into several groups called “gangs,” according to their age and strength. There were three main gangs, the first one made out of the strongest individuals who were exactly those typically working on the sugar plantations. They were usually valued the most. Those gangs were separated into smaller groups, each of them having a supervisor.<sup>219</sup> The last stanza of the poem describes how the slaves were called to gather together:

At shell blow assembled the broken-down  
bodies, the job-lots scrambled into gangs  
like beads on a string...<sup>220</sup>

The blow on the conch shell was a signal for everyone on the plantations. It signalled to “mark the division of the time units and a call to prayer.”<sup>221</sup> On more general occasions, it announced births and deaths or other important events.<sup>222</sup> I assume that Olive Senior included the shell blow into her poem to better explain the meaning of the name of the poetry collection *Shell*. As it was explained, the shell blow was used to inform its hearers. Thus, the collection *Shell* can serve to inform its readers about the history of the Caribbean. Narain, with her commentary on the subject, seems to have a similar point of view: “[Senior] extends the conch’s repertoire as a medium of communication by

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<sup>217</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 468–470.

<sup>218</sup> Stouck, “Gardening in the Diaspora,” 107.

<sup>219</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 207.

<sup>220</sup> Senior, *Shell*, 51–2.

<sup>221</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 97.

<sup>222</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 97.

invoking it as a repository of History of stories which need to be disseminated and passed on.”<sup>223</sup>

#### 4.5. Symbols of Birds and Myths

To return back to *Gardening in the Tropics*, the motif of tropical colours and the question of ethnicity appeared also in a poem called “The Colours of Birds”:

Gardening in the Tropics, part of the ambience  
derives from the presence of Rare Tropical Birds.<sup>224</sup>

The speaker in the poem mentions several species that are typical for Jamaica: “the Macaw, the Hummingbirds, the Parrots.”<sup>225</sup> In general, there are four different kinds of parrot family found in Jamaica. A beautiful colourful Macaw parrot “such a show-off, you’d never believe”<sup>226</sup> used to be found in Jamaica, however, nowadays it is gone. The Parakeet and Parrotlet are the most common.<sup>227</sup> Hummingbirds are considered to be a national bird of Jamaica and they are connected with symbols of healing. Taínos believed that hummingbirds had magical powers and that they were a “reincarnation of dead souls.”<sup>228</sup>

Generally, birds in Caribbean folklore are connected to departed souls or represent spirit messengers. Also, their feathers were valued by the Taínos because it is argued that for them it meant power and authority. For instance, when Columbus arrived in Jamaica, he was greeted by a chief of the indigenous tribe, who was wearing a cloak made of various coloured feathers. In art, the depicted birds symbolized “rain and fertility.”<sup>229</sup> Some of the birds were also kept as pets, such as parrots because they were believed to have spiritual powers.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 97.

<sup>224</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 90.

<sup>225</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 90.

<sup>226</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 90.

<sup>227</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 376–7.

<sup>228</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 238.

<sup>229</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 59.

<sup>230</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 59.

The poem talks about an old Taíno myth<sup>231</sup> about how birds got their different colours—by slaying an Anaconda Monster and bathing in its remains. The story is told from the perspective of parakeets who were so foolish “dancing, making faces and laughing/ so that by the time they came to the senses it was done” and they remained monochromatic.<sup>232</sup>

However, it seems that the poem has a deeper meaning and offers more than just a bird story. It is apparent from the following lines that express how birds like to talk among themselves:

The old ones (for  
moral edification and with malicious intent love  
to tell a story about humans<sup>233</sup>

These lines are pointing at the fact that their main topics to talk about are humans and their always present issue of the colour of their skin. There is a comparison between the excitement of birds to be colourful “so proud/ of their assorted strain and their varicoloured plumage”<sup>234</sup> versus the distaste of people to have different skin colour: “so when it/ comes to the colour of skin, pigmentation is not yet in.”<sup>235</sup>

I agree with the conclusion of Jennifer Rahim in her essay “From Archaeology to Iconology” where she says: “The poem penetrates the heart of the “monster” race and colour prejudice which has a specific New World relevance as well as a general global appeal.”<sup>236</sup>

The motif of birds is also a huge concern in the poetry collection *Over the Roofs of the World* as the individual poems either bear names of different birds that could be found in the Caribbean or are linked with themes connected with birds, such as flying. There are four poems dedicated to parrots that can demonstrate the popularity of those birds among the people of the Caribbean. “The Secret of Capturing Parrot” and “The Secret of Taming Parrot” have a very similar theme of catching this bird by using

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<sup>231</sup> Jennifer Rahim, “From Archaeology to Iconology: Representations Of The Tropics In Senior’s “Gardening In The Tropics And In Goodison’s To Us, All Flowers Are Roses”,” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 8, no. 2 (1999), accessed March 26, 2021, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23019792>, 68–82.

<sup>232</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 90.

<sup>233</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 91.

<sup>234</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 92.

<sup>235</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 92.

<sup>236</sup> Rahim, “From Archaeology to Iconology,” 74.

smoke that the captors blew over the parrot's beak or under the tree where the parrots were sitting. The captors would "sit and wait till Parrot is stunned enough to drop."<sup>237</sup> The usage of tobacco and "pimento wood and resin"<sup>238</sup> is a symbol of the Taínos rituals and the natural heritage of the Caribbean. The other indigenous way of capturing a parrot was that the young Taíno boys climbed on a tree with a "male parrot on his head" while the rest of the hunters waited beneath the tree covered with leaves. The boy made a bird cry and attracted parrots to come to him, caught a parrot, choked it, and threw it to the hunters below.<sup>239</sup> The fact that in the poem the captors wanted to catch parrots alive and that they wanted to make them speak because "coughing unleashes parrot's tongue"<sup>240</sup> leads to a conclusion that they wanted to keep them as pets or to sell them. The line "speech comes only when spoken to"<sup>241</sup> could refer to the way of colonial education when the children were "parroting" only what their colonial masters taught them. Having said that, I believe that the two poems, in fact, describe the act of colonizing indigenous inhabitants who could be compared to the parrots. As the captors wanted the parrots to speak so they could be of use to them, so did the colonizers want to teach the inhabitants their language so that they could have dominion over them. This claim comes from the fact that Olive Senior compared birds to humans also in another poem called "Thirteen Ways of Looking at Blackbird" where she describes the process of slavery and how the black slaves were treated:

The ship  
Trips  
into sight of island. Blackbird  
is all eyes. Vows nothing but sunlight  
Will ever hold him now.<sup>242</sup>

From the first stanza, it is still not quite clear to see whom the narrator is talking about. However, there are hints of ships coming from afar. The following stanza brings a clearer explanation of the metaphorical comparison:

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<sup>237</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 13.

<sup>238</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 13.

<sup>239</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 377.

<sup>240</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 13.

<sup>241</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 13.

<sup>242</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 47.

Blackbird no longer knows  
if he is man or woman or bird or simply is.  
Or if among the sugar cane he is  
sprouting.<sup>243</sup>

It describes a loss of identity, and it is clear that now the narrator of the poem talks about humans. Moreover, he or she talks about slaves who worked hard on cane fields. The rest of the poem is written by the same token, revealing feelings of the slaves and their unfortunate fate. Therefore, it is my decryption of the metaphorical usage of the birds as the Taíno and black slaves.

The third poem about parrots called “The Secret of Turning Green Parrot Yellow” describes a process of how to change a feather of the parrot by using a toad’s blood: “Defeathered and rubbed with Toad’s blood,/ Green Parrot/ grows new feathers.”<sup>244</sup> This change only stresses the mythical meaning of the parrots which, according to the poem, are supposedly able to change their colour from the inside out. However, the moral of this poem is found in the end where it claims that for people it is not that easy to undergo such change:

Humans use Parrot feathers  
to transform themselves  
from the outside in.<sup>245</sup>

Therefore, this poem can be interpreted as the reflection of the process of creolization and hybridity. As it has been previously discussed, some people were obsessed with the colour of their skin, striving to have as light-coloured skin as possible. Even if people could change their appearance, however, the poem teaches that true change can come only when it is from the inside out because “the secret of that outward transformation/ comes/ from within.”<sup>246</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 47.

<sup>244</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 15.

<sup>245</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 15.

<sup>246</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 15.

“The Secret of Crusoe’s Parrot” on the other hand provides “a sustained exploration of parrot’s historical association with narratives of island castaways that have in various ways powerfully impacted Caribbean literature”:<sup>247</sup>

Parrot through heavily- lidded eyes, watches as the new  
invader arrives. Friend or foe? Parrot doesn’t care. Parrot  
is ruler of air.  
this kingdom was Parrot’s from time immemorial,  
before invaders, departures, of many such as he.<sup>248</sup>

This poem creates intertextuality with *Robinson Crusoe* by Dafoe and there can also be found similar lines from Shakespeare’s *Tempest* presented in the two stanzas where it corresponds with the characters of Caliban in *Tempest* and parrot Pol from *Crusoe*.<sup>249</sup> Therefore, this fourth poem connected with parrots shows the wit of Olive Senior and her knowledge of the European authors, which closes the circle of signs of colonial education in her parrot poems.

The last poem with the topic of a bird to be discussed is called “Woodpecker” where Olive Senior returned to the traditional indigenous legends:

O Miss Yellow-Skin Plum, Miss Prune-face,  
Miss Disdainful One. Rejecting all suitors,  
Still waiting for that magnificent descent  
of Woodpeckers!<sup>250</sup>

There is an old Taíno legend that women were created by a woodpecker, using its strong beak to carve them from the yellow-skin plum.<sup>251</sup> The first stanza of the poem is almost seductive, however, it introduces the fact that the woodpecker is the only one who can provide the desired transformation. The following stanza is provoking and almost rude, insulting the newly created women:

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<sup>247</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 91.

<sup>248</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 18.

<sup>249</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 92.

<sup>250</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 28.

<sup>251</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 518.

Plumb-tree woman, O my dumb one,

...

No virgins anymore anywhere.

Woodpecker doesn't care.

He's got what he wanted.<sup>252</sup>

It shows the woodpecker in a new light that is not pleasant and suddenly turns him into a careless creature lusting to get what he wants, not caring about the trees. The last stanza provides a suggestion "You hear that? You'd better start/ transforming yourself"<sup>253</sup> prompting trees to be independent of the woodpecker. This suggests a slight touch of the author upon the topic of sexuality and feminism.

Olive Senior touched upon the topic of mythology and women also in her collection *Gardening in the Tropics* in a poem called "Amazon Women." Alas in the poem "Woodpecker," where women were described as silly creatures, in this poem she portrayed the strength of women:

Gardening in the Tropics, sometimes  
you come across these strong Amazon  
women striding across our lands –  
like Toeyza who founded the Wori-  
shiana nation of female warriors  
in the mountains of Parima<sup>254</sup>

The first stanza of the poem names some of the famous mythical Taíno and Maroon women warriors.<sup>255</sup> The Amazon women belonged to a legendary nation of warriors and this myth was brought to the New World by Columbus and his associates. There is also a Taíno myth of a legendary island in the Caribbean which is inhabited only by women:

So somebody – like Cristobal Colón  
or Sir Walter Raleigh – could have  
come along and heard these (marvellous)

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<sup>252</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 28.

<sup>253</sup> Senior, *Over the Roofs of the World*, 28.

<sup>254</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 97.

<sup>255</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 85.



tales of (fabulous) lands full of  
(pure) gold and fierce (untamed,  
exotic) women.<sup>256</sup>

Thus, by combining these two legends people in the past were determined to find that land. Sir Walter Raleigh had actually claimed “to have found it,” which is why he is mentioned in the poem, however, it was never proven. For that reason, people kept looking and eventually found a mighty river in the middle of South America, which they called “Amazon” for they believed that this nation dwelled there.<sup>257</sup>

Nevertheless, this poem also highlights the strength and courage of women in the Caribbean when their husbands had to leave to war and they had to provide for themselves:

women who kept the gardens going  
and sometimes if the men were not  
heard from again (as occasionally  
happened) they banded together and  
took up arms to defend the territory.<sup>258</sup>

Therefore, the speaker in the poem compares mythical creatures with ordinary contemporary Caribbean women and draws attention to their ability to provide for themselves, showing their courage and resilience in the face of an adversary.<sup>259</sup> Accordingly, it can be concluded that although Olive Senior did not focus her works mainly on feminism, this topic now and then occurs in her poetic works, cleverly intertwining with the myths of the Caribbean inhabitants. By pointing out the strength and courage of the Caribbean women she highlighted the importance of women who kept their gardens cultivated. That can be compared to the women writers who strived to be heard and who wrote about their Caribbean heritage, Olive Senior included.

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<sup>256</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 97.

<sup>257</sup> Senior, *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage*, 15.

<sup>258</sup> Senior, *Gardening in the Tropic*, 97.

<sup>259</sup> Narain, *Olive Senior*, 85.

## Conclusion

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this thesis is that Olive Senior is a valuable black women author who loves her Caribbean heritage and who wants to share it with the rest of the world. Although she resides in Canada now, she continues to publish works concerned with the history and culture of her ancestors. The purpose of the current thesis was to discuss poems in her three selected poem collections *Gardening in the Tropics*, *Over the Roofs of the World*, and *Shell*. More importantly, it was to provide a work which offers together both the theoretical background of the history and the culture of the Caribbean, and consequently presents meanings of the symbols that reflect that rich history and culture. However, the current thesis has only examined selected poems from the works of Olive Senior, therefore it leaves an opportunity for further research regarding the role of symbols in Olive Senior's works.

In the first chapter of this thesis, the life of Olive Senior is presented, including her upbringing. In my opinion, her early life served as one of the key factors for her decision to become a writer dedicated to the topic of her cultural heritage. Her determination to write about what was or what is happening around her and her concern with ordinary people who become "everyday heroes" in her poems and stories gained Olive Senior great popularity among her readers.

The second chapter argued that in order to understand the cultural message in the works of Olive Senior, it is necessary to have at least peripheral knowledge of the history and sociocultural development of the Caribbean throughout history. This chapter touched on the first settlements in the Caribbean and discussed the consequences of the colonization process on the Caribbean islands. Accordingly, the topic of slavery was examined and detailed the arrival of African inhabitants to the Caribbean isles which served as a brief insight into the ancestry of Olive Senior. After the abolition of slavery was discussed, this chapter provided an overview of the life of the former slaves and their changing conditions, mainly concerning their education and work opportunities. At this point, the European colonization educational system that was also applied during the childhood of Olive Senior comes into play. Thus, there is no doubt that her knowledge of European authors and works is due to this system. Though it served a purpose, this system was not popular with many Caribbean students, Olive Senior included, because it suppressed the freedom to learn about their own cultural heritage.

The third chapter has provided literary context that presented the writing style of Olive Senior and helped to create an image of the situation on the literary scene in the Caribbean, especially since the beginning of slavery. It introduced important black Caribbean women writers who came to the literary scene and who also influenced Olive Senior's style of writing, namely using the Creole language which explains why there are unfamiliar words in her poems or something that seems to be an ungrammatical syntax. Subsequently, the topics of feminism and Creolization were touched upon, the latter being one of the central topics of Olive Senior's works. Moreover, the writing style and themes of this author are discussed which leads to a conclusion that Olive Senior wants to present her culture in the best light possible, while working on correcting ethical or cultural misunderstandings that might have been created over the years by a lack of representation. That being said, there is still a need to learn about the Caribbean history and traditions in order to fully understand those messages. Therefore, the first three chapters served as a predecessor for the last section to prepare the "ground" for the final chapter.

Finally, part four of this thesis presented selected poems from three poetry collections *Gardening in the Tropics*, *Over the Roofs of the World*, and *Shell*. The first subsection discussed the symbol of *gardening*, which is a convenient name for the whole collection *Gardening in the Tropics*. It was shown that it means a process of finding one's identity, and the variety of ethnicities living in the Caribbean. The second subsection provided an explanation of the symbol of *travellers*. I argue that there are at least three interpretations for this symbol. First of all, all readers of these poems can be considered travellers who learn about the history and culture of the Caribbean as they read. Second, the travellers can represent the colonizers who came to conquer the New World. The third meaning can be interpreted as the immigrants who were leaving the Caribbean to find a better life across the ocean. This subchapter also touched upon the symbols of hurricanes that are not only connected with the natural disasters but also serve as a symbol for the pain caused by immigration. The last symbols are connected with a traditional children game which opens the door for the following section.

There are symbols all around us, and especially in nature. The Caribbean people have wonderful myths and stories tied up with various plants and, to many of them, those plants were attributed with special powers. The section that followed described fauna of the Caribbean and its hidden messages in several poems. The pre-last subsection moves back to the social sphere as it returns to the topic of slavery and work

on plantations. There were two poems presented with a message of the Caribbean in the past, and in more recent times. As the symbolic name of the collection *Shell* was explained in part of this section, it can be concluded that Olive Senior wanted the readers to “hear” about the history of the Caribbean inhabitants once again. The last subsection *Symbols of Birds and Myths*, discussed in this thesis, was concerning myths and ethnicity, as well as gender and identity. Almost each individual bird has a special meaning in the world of the native Caribbean inhabitants called Taínos, and those meanings were in the presented poems uncovered and explained.

The very last poem was concerning the courage and strength of women. The myth of the Amazon women, sought by so many explorers, only stresses the courage of all Caribbean women, Olive Senior included. Her works are full of legends and different symbols that show her Jamaican heritage and celebrate Caribbean history. Olive Senior decided to be a voice for the Caribbean people and the courage with which she still does so is why I believe she deserves all her accomplishments.

## Resumé

Karibská literární scéna je z historického hlediska spjata s muži. Ženy jako spisovatelky začaly být uznávány až v nedávné minulosti. Mezi uznávané autorky se řadí i Olive Senior. Ve svých dílech se věnuje zejména karibské tematice se zvláštním zaměřením na svůj rodný ostrov Jamajku. Jejím cílem je skrze svá díla předávat nezkrácené informace o historii a kultuře obyvatel Karibiku, a to jak z dob minulých, tak z dob současných.

Hlavním cílem této diplomové práce je umožnit čtenářům najít v díle Olive Senior vysvětlení symbolů, které se skrývají v textech vybraných básní z jejích tří básnických sbírek *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994), *Over the Roofs of the World* (2005) a *Shell* (2007). Práce obsahuje celkem čtyři kapitoly.

První kapitola seznamuje s životem Olive Senior a jejím stylem psaní. Druhá kapitola pojednává o prvních obyvatelích Karibiku a o historickém vývoji v sociální a literární sféře. Zde jsou rozebírány například otázky dobývání Nového světa Kryštofem Kolumbem včetně toho, jaké důsledky pro původní indiánské obyvatele mělo následné osídlování Karibských ostrovů kolonizátory. Třetí kapitola je zaměřena na problematiku otroctví, které způsobilo příliv dalších etnických menšin do Karibiku, zejména afrických obyvatel. Následně jsou zde popisovány změny, které pro otroky nastaly po zrušení otroctví, obzvláště v otázce možnosti vzdělávání. V neposlední řadě je také část třetí kapitoly věnována vývoji karibské literatury a zabývá se otázkami feminismu, hybridity a otázkou kreolity.

Tyto tři kapitoly si kladou za cíl posloužit jako základní stavební kameny pro prohloubení znalostí o karibské historii a kultuře. Zároveň také slouží k tomu, aby „připravily půdu“ k porozumění symbolům, které jsou probírány v poslední části této diplomové práce. Čtvrtá, poslední kapitola je zaměřena na vybrané básně z výše uvedených sbírek, zejména se však opírá o sbírku *Gardening in the Tropics*. Zde lze uplatnit nasbírané vědomosti z předchozích kapitol a naskýtá se příležitost dozvědět se, jaká poselství tyto básně skrývají. Tato kapitola je rozdělena do pěti podkapitol, které se věnují jednotlivým symbolům např.: „gardening“ (práce na zahradě), symboly cestovatelů, symbolům, které skrývá karibská příroda, jak ve fauně, tak i ve flóře, atd. Celá kapitola je uzavřena rozborem básně o mýtech, která popisuje odvahu a odhodlání karibských žen přirovnané k bájným Amazonkám. Podtrhuje tím výjimečnost Olive Senior, která se skrze svá díla snaží oslavit své kulturní dědictví.

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## Anotace

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Olive Senior je představitelkou černošských karibských spisovatelek, jež zasvětila svůj život psaní děl o svém kulturním dědictví. Kromě jiných děl se Olive Senior proslavila svými sbírkami *Gardening in the Tropics*, *Over the Roofs of the World* a *Shell*. Jejím cílem je představit karibskou kulturu, karibskou historii a karibskou současnost. Olive Senior používá slangové výrazy a hovorovou kreolštinu obyčejných lidí, čímž oslovila mnoho čtenářů. Používá symboly, které jsou spojeny s karibským dědictvím. Čtenářům, kteří nejsou s karibskou kulturou a historií obeznámeni, nebude patrně význam těchto symbolů vždy zřejmý. Hlavním cílem diplomové práce je interpretovat tyto symboly z vybraných básní z výše uvedených sbírek, což může umožnit čtenáři intenzivnější zážitek při čtení poezie této výjimečné autorky.

## Abstract

**Author:** Dagmar Janoušková

**Title of Thesis:** Caribbean Symbols in Selected Works by Olive Senior

**Supervisor:** doc. Mgr. Pavlína Flajšarová, Ph.D.

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**Keywords:** Caribbean Literature, Caribbean Culture, Jamaican Heritage, symbols, poetry, Olive Senior

Olive Senior represents the black Caribbean women writers who dedicated her life to writing about her cultural heritage. Among her other works, she is famous for her poetry collections *Gardening in the Tropics*, *Over the Roofs of the World*, and *Shell*. Her goal is to present Caribbean culture, history, and presence. She uses a colloquial Creole language of ordinary people which has appealed to many readers. Most importantly, she uses symbols connected with the Caribbean heritage which may not always be obvious for those not familiar with the Caribbean culture and history. Therefore, the main aim of this thesis is to interpret those symbols in selected poems from the above mentioned collections and thus allow the readers to have a more profound experience with the poetry of this remarkable author.