

“Cords and Trunks”: An Interview with Melanie Schwapp and a Discussion of *Dew Angels*

Stephanie McKenzie
Memorial University, Grenfell Campus

Melanie Schwapp was born in Kingston, Jamaica. However, her short migrations at two key stages of her life opened her eyes to the cultural and social discriminations in society, and, thus, her quest for understanding through writing began. At the age of five, she moved to England with her family, where she was awakened to the nature of colour prejudice, and, then, during her late teens and early twenties she attended the University of South Carolina, where the subtle traits of discrimination cemented her interest in the social repercussions of these prejudices. Although Schwapp has written recreationally all her life, her first published work was a children's book, *Lally-May's Farm Suss* (2005), in which she revives a Jamaican myth and several cultural aspects through the eyes of a child. Her second publication was the novel *Dew Angels* in 2011 where she explores the hidden aspect of prejudice and other social handicaps in Jamaican society. Schwapp resides in Kingston with her husband and three children.

Plot Summary of *Dew Angels*

Dew Angels is the powerful and gripping story of Nola Chambers who is born to suffer her father's hatred and the hatred of others in a world which, as Hazel Campbell says on the book's back blurb, “prizes light skin colour.” Nola is “as black as that moonless night” (*Dew Angels* 16) and, as a result, suffers her father's beatings at home, as well as isolation, ridicule and persecution at school. Much happens in this sophisticated plot. Amongst other events, Nola escapes the clutches of her Papa and her town, Redding, and heads to Kingston where she stays with Aunt May (her former school teacher) and Aunt May's niece, Petra, the most broken of all women in *Dew Angels*. There, they and others will meet Eric McKenzie, the don of his own community and the aspiring don of Nola's new neighbourhood, Palm View Road, who will trap Nola and others. Inevitably, women who have been pitted against one another come together. Presiding over this world are the dew angels, who represent signs of hope and salvation in the novel. They inhabit Nola's universe because she has been told a story when young by her Grampy, whom she loves

very much and who loves her: “Grampy told her at dawn, while the world slept, the angels came down from heaven, perched the sun on the horizon, and washed the earth beneath the pale blue light” (14). Dew angels become associated with important people in Nola’s life who love her and lead her to recover from self-hatred.

The Questions

SM: Melanie, *Dew Angels* is your first novel, and you first wrote a children’s book, *Lally-May’s Farm Suss*. How long have you been writing and thinking about writing a novel?

MS: I have been writing for as long as I can remember. I was the eldest child and the only girl of three children, so I found that there were many issues in my life that my brothers could not relate to. Hence, I wrote—journals, poetry, stories . . . Writing became my outlet, my way of understanding myself, relating to my world and, subsequently, my second nature. Even today, if I need to express a feeling, I find that I am so much more eloquent with my pen than with my voice. In college, I studied mass communications and majored in creative writing, so that was a natural transition for me. I think I always knew that I was going to write a novel, but I started timidly with the children’s book and then got braver with the *Dew Angels* novel after the *Lally-May* publication.

SM: You said that you worked on *Dew Angels* for six years. Could you describe the writing process? I’m intrigued because of the complicated plot. What was the writing process like? Did you spend time mapping out the entire plot first, or did the plot and characters come to you as you wrote?

MS: Truth be told, I did begin the novel by mapping out a plot, but the plot that exists today in no way resembles the original one. I think that the characters in *Dew Angels* became so real, so alive to me, that, after a while, they began to lead the story. As they developed, I found that the things they said, the actions they took, did not fall in line with the plan I made, and the story took a turn that I had not intended. I liken the process to raising a child. You make all these plans for the baby based on your own dreams and aspirations, and then, as that child grows and becomes its own person, he/she takes on his/her own path which, most times, has nothing to do with yours. Some of the characters in the book were introduced “by the way,” and eventually became stronger than I had intended. Mad Aggie, for example, was just a street dweller when I introduced her, but the power in her would not be contained, and she became an integral part of the storyline.

SM: This is obviously a novel about racism and prejudices in Jamaican society. The main character, Nola, must suffer the discriminations people have about skin colour and often the higher value accorded to people of lighter skin colour. Can you talk about this a bit? Why did you choose this focus as the central concern of *Dew Angels*?

MS: When I was about five years old, my family moved to England for a couple of years. My first morning of school, I walked with my neighbour, but when it was time to go back home, my neighbour had been teased so much about being in the company of the “gollywog” that he ran home and left me. I remember panicking and grabbing onto passing parents’ hands, screaming for help, and those parents flashing my hands off with disgust. Well, my neighbour was eventually sent back to lead me home, but, from then on, my eyes were opened to the harsh reality of the fact that people did not like other people because of the colour of their skin. Like any traumatic childhood experience, the incident has left me ultra-sensitive. I am very aware of and angered by any type of discrimination, and when I came face to face with it in my own country, I was devastated. I think this novel was my way of turning the mirror around on my country, to expose a truth that is sometimes masked, sometimes ignored, but that is very much real and crippling our nation. The situation has created several pockets of cultures which co-exist in a small geographical landscape but with magnificent social discrepancies.

SM: I also see this novel as a strong feminist text. The women in this world are kept secluded from one another through the abuse they suffer at the hands of patriarchs and abusive men, and they lack power because they cannot come together. Do you see yourself as a feminist and/or *Dew Angels* as a feminist work? Of course, there are many ways in which feminism can be defined. How would you define feminism? And is there a feminism that can transcend cultural and national boundaries, or are the feminist positions in this work specifically Jamaican and/or Caribbean?

MS: I don’t think that I consciously intended for this book to be a feminist work, but I think that the motive I had for writing it definitely had a subconscious “feminist” purpose. I began to write *Dew Angels* as a sort of handbook for my two daughters. I knew that, as black females, there would be numerous adversities, many discriminations that they would have to face, and I wanted to give them the message that no matter how much life tried to grind them into the ground, they could rise above it with focus, self-control, strength, love, forgiveness. I don’t think the book is a radical definition of feminism where women are portrayed as beings who can exist emotionally independent (or otherwise) of men, but I think the theme is more in keeping with British suffragist Rebecca West’s definition—“feminism is the radical notion that women are people.” The women of *Dew Angels* are definitely survivors, rising powerfully above the roles that the men would have them play as “beating sticks,” sexual

objects and breeding machines. I think this type of strength, this type of self-actualization, this type of hope, speaks of a female empowerment that can definitely transcend cultural and national boundaries.

SM: At an early point in the novel, when Nola is beginning her friendship with Dahlia and Merlene, the third-person narrator says, “[t]he trouble was, all had a story to tell, and all told it at the same time” (72). Later, in the penultimate chapter Nola, now speaking in the first person, says, “[m]y name is Nola Chambers, and the story you have just read is my life” (370). It seems that *Dew Angels* underscores, amongst other things, the importance of telling one’s story and of being heard. What comment do you see this novel making about the importance of life stories?

MS: If there is one thing that a Jamaican loves to do, it is to tell a story, and how we tell them well! It is not satisfactory to merely sit and describe an event, but there is a degree of acting that has to go along with it. The humour of Jamaican folk is revealed blatantly in our stories, plays, poems, music, and many of our revered nationals were great storytellers—Louise Bennett made it her life’s work to relate our history and idiosyncrasies through humorous storytelling. Storytelling is not just a pleasurable pastime for Jamaicans but a valuable tool in controlling wayward children, with such tales as “Anansy,” and in passing on family and national histories. In essence, storytelling is an integral part of the Jamaican culture, and I tried to capture this throughout *Dew Angels* by the use of the myths passing through the generations and the various community gatherings in which relationships are forged through storytelling. This tool was a very important one in helping me to establish the nature of the Jamaican folk.

SM: In light of the last question, and in light of the very convincing portrayal of characters in this book, I’m also wondering if this work is based on people you know or knew or if it is an entirely fictional creation?

MS: I think that writing is like painting a picture from your imagination—no matter how you think you are creating something that you have never seen, something that has never existed before, there is usually something in that painting that relates to an image or experience that touched you. I think that was what happened with the characters in *Dew Angels*. I did not intentionally create them to represent people I knew, but friends and family who read the story consistently called me to say, “I recognize ‘so and so’ in Aunt May!” I guess that I could not escape adding traits or mannerisms from people who have touched me, and although all the characters are fictional, there seem to be a few of them who do resemble people who have passed through my life.

SM: I’m struck by the manner in which this work seems to address current social issues or situations in Kingston and perhaps wider Jamaica (as the

town in which Nola grew up, Redding, might be representative of various rural areas on the island). For instance, “Mad Aggie,” who will inevitably help Nola and become one of her dew angels, warns Nola when she is in Redding that “the villagers thought she was a ‘bad, bad gal’, and if they found her, they would send her to the home where all bad girls were sent” (123). Could you describe to me the schools you are writing about? Since readers know, too, that Nola is not a “bad” girl but an abused girl, is there a questioning here perhaps about these types of schools?

MS: Unfortunately, there are very few facilities in Jamaica which offer remedial help to youngsters, and these institutions are often treated as prisons rather than guidance/training centers. Teenagers who enter these facilities are often not armed with the necessary skills to face life outside as contributing citizens when they are released, and the cycle is one of repetitive doom. I think one of the biggest shocks to our nation was the fire at an institution called Armadale, a remedial facility for teenage girls.¹ When the smoke had cleared, and seven lives had been lost, the terrible conditions of the home were revealed to the public—of twenty-three girls cloistered in a space intended for five and of the cruel treatment of the residents. This issue of easily throwing our youngsters into facilities such as these without regard for their futures is a point I had hoped to raise by this frivolous threat to Nola.

SM: Aggie is an interesting character. Thought to be mad by the rest of the town, she has significant knowledge about healing and old healing properties. Is this knowledge intended to be representative of specific healing traditions or medicinal sources in Jamaica?

MS: Herbal medicine is a very strong part of Jamaican culture. Our island is rich with flora that has great healing properties, and many of our lower income nationals do not go to doctors unless it is a very last resort. This is not only because of the economic restraints of medical care but also because of the fact that these remedies still very much deem positive results. Even in the higher income homes, herbal remedies are still used to some extent—sour sop tea for nerves, cerassee tea for diabetes or menstrual cramps, lemongrass for colds . . .

SM: Women are taken down in so many ways in this work. Sometimes the abuse is overt and physical, as is the case with Nola and her mother, who suffer physical beatings by Nola’s Papa, and many women who suffer Eric’s blows. However, there is also the case of Petra, abandoned by her baby father. As Olive says to her, “Me say, them man round here worthless, you see! Every one of them! Them just love breed up the young girls, then them leave them with the pickney to raise while them gone to find another girl to breed!” (153). Olive’s words remind me of a message governing a play I saw here in Kingston at Christmastime, *The Politicians*. Despite all the political problems addressed in that play, the play turned at

the end to question why so many children were not being supported by fathers and why there were so many unplanned pregnancies. Do you see *Dew Angels* as suggesting an answer to this problem, or what sense do you think your novel tries to make of this situation?

MS: I wish I had an answer to this question, and I wish *Dew Angels* could really have given the solution. I believe that this problem of unplanned pregnancies and men not supporting their offspring is one of the most crippling problems in our society today. The situation is paradoxical, because Jamaican women are strong, often the sole breadwinners and the aggressive cleavers for their families' well-being, yet they are still very much weak in the aspect of birth control and economic subservience to their men (by which I mean that many hand over their salaries to their unemployed partners). I believe the answer will only come through unrelenting education of our youth. *Dew Angels* may not have an answer to the problem, but, again, I think the book serves as a mirror, reflecting a situation which, when viewed from the outside looking in, will spark some awareness and hopefully begin some changes in these issues.

SM: Petra suffers from depression and must be on medication to survive (and her survival is really only fleeting, as her suicide reveals). Is Petra's situation meant to reflect mental health issues in Jamaica? In your opinion, what is it like here for those suffering from mental health problems? Is treatment readily available? Is it difficult to find help? As you see it, how does the public at large perceive those who suffer from mental health issues?

MS: We have a slang word we use in Jamaica—"mad man." This refers to the people who wander the streets. As a nation, we have become so used to it that we merely ignore them as we go about our business. Now, these are not the typical "homeless" in the sense that they are on the street because they have no residence. These are, more often than not, people who are suffering some form of medical disorder. I once read where a psychiatrist from the University of the West Indies concluded that half of the Jamaican population suffers from some form of mental illness. Well, this is not surprising to me seeing the high levels of violence, stress, and drug and physical abuse that exist in many homes. However, mental illness is not something that is openly discussed in Jamaica. It is not an illness that is understood to be an affliction which is just as common and as curable as a physical one. The lower economic echelon are definitely more at the disadvantage since one, they are not educated about the signs and treatment of mental illness and two, they do not have the economic power to seek medical help. As such, the rate of teenage suicides (something new to Jamaica), and the damage done by these "mad men" (Jamaican name for these wanderers) to fellow members of the community are serious problems.

SM: Petra's daughter is born with Down's syndrome, and she tries for the longest while to hide her child from everyone. Eric, whose mother, Hopey, is "slow" (something he hides), and who, at this point in the novel has tricked others into believing he loves Petra, tries to have Petra's child placed in a home. Kendra, of course, thrives in her own home with the love of Petra's extended family. Did you intend for Kendra to be representative of the manner in which Down's syndrome individuals are treated? Based on your experience, what would you say the situation is like for those who have Down's syndrome in Jamaica?

MS: I think that Kendra's situation points to the same situation as those who are challenged by mental illness—it is not something openly discussed, and education and the facilities to deal with these issues are very limited. I think what we are lacking in Jamaica are the resources to deal with these challenged children in their older years, in terms of education and job and skill training. I wanted to use Kendra to show that these children have as much potential as any other children. They are not "freaks" who should be teased and hidden from society but, rather, can become valuable contributors once they are cared for with love and patience.

SM: Eric McKenzie could be understood as simply evil. Mean. He gives to others only so he can control them. He beats women. He beats his own mother. He is corrupt and is intent on owning full neighbourhoods. However, throughout *Dew Angels* there is a significant message that every person who is messed up is messed up for some reason. Is there any reason for Eric's behaviour? Where has he learned his ways? As well, I can't help thinking that Eric is representative of the "don" who protects areas but who does so through questionable means. Did you mean for this character to represent the "dons" in Kingston or to comment on them?

MS: I think Eric was messed up because of the whole issue of his violent conception—his mother was brutally raped. This brings to mind two factors: first, Eric's conscious acceptance of the violence surrounding his creation (he could have felt unwanted all his life, that his existence was one forced on his family) and second, the fact that genetics could have come into play and that he had inherited his father's evil streak that would have allowed for the act of rape. We are also forced to reflect on the treatment he might have received as a child from "Granny" and other members of the community who saw him as a constant reminder of the terrible act that had befallen Hopey (his mother). I do use Eric to represent the dons of Jamaica. I have always been curious as to how these men become so callous and cruel and how they rise so easily to power in these communities. I think I used Eric as a means of exploring the minds of these men and to show how the communities are basically helpless at their hands. We often judge these communities for their acceptance of these dons, but, as I always say, "if you tied a cord around a young tree trunk, as

the trunk matures, its bark grows hard and tough around that cord, swallowing it up as part of the tree.” That is my analogy of what has happened to these communities—they have grown around this “don mentality,” and their very survival now depends on them.

SM: Barry of the Palm View Road community is inevitably “bought” by Eric and begins working for him, betraying all those true friends, like Ab, the Rastafarian cook and food seller, with whom he has a significant history. His actions become despicable. And he is eventually murdered by Eric’s orders when he botches up a job. However, as Nola says later on when she has broken into Eric’s house and sees “wads of money fastened with elastic bands,” “Poor Barry. The temptation must have been irresistible” (261). What would you say is the relation between poverty and a movement towards a life of crime? Does *Dew Angels* inevitably try to understand such a relationship? What comment does it make about this relationship?

MS: I do not think the relationship that *Dew Angels* tries to establish is one between poverty and crime but, rather, between laziness and crime. Jamaica has always been a nation with the majority of its population in the lower income bracket, but never have we seen the crime as violent and organized as it is in recent time. What Barry represents is the mindset of many of the young men today—the “get-rich-quick-without-hard-work” mentality. They want the fine clothes and the expensive cars, but they do not want to embark on the industry that it requires to get there. The majority of the Jamaican work force is heading towards female domination, and seventy per cent of the graduates from the University of the West Indies are women. Many of our young men are the ones we see sitting on the street corners during the days while their women are out working. This is what Barry represents—the man who would be willing to ask a school girl like Nola for money rather than work for it himself. Barry is used to represent the trap that many of our women fall into—harbouring and supporting these men who remain unwilling to work.

SM: Nola seems governed by an innate sense of knowing. When she heads to Eric’s house dressed as a homeless person, she brings with her items which she senses she must bring: “She’d taken the paper and Aggie’s herbs from her drawer and she hadn’t known why, and it had turned out that she’d needed the herbs for Petra’s injuries” (268). Earlier, readers are also told “[s]he’d felt Barry’s death, and that night, her spirit had bade him farewell” (233). She tells no one, though, as the narrator indicates only “Mad” Aggie would have understood: “She told no one of this ‘feeling,’ of ‘knowing,’ for she was sure none would have believed her. None except for a cackling old woman miles away” (234). What type of “knowing” is this that governs Nola?

MS: This is something which Jamaicans are very familiar with, what we call a “gut feeling.” We pride ourselves on getting warnings from the spirit world about things that are going to happen, sometimes through dreams, sometimes through messages in things around us. This “gut feeling” is what Nola refers to, this connection with the spirits of the people who had touched her life. She refers to the feeling even when being told of her mother’s imminent death—“whatever Mama’s body had wanted in life was not what her spirit now wanted in the face of death.”

SM: One of the ways this novel suggests women can regain strength is through financial and economic independence. Val, for example, ends up inheriting (based on Eric’s errors) his supermarket and home when he is killed. Do you think economic independence is the most valuable resource for women in their attempts at freedom, or is it an equal mixture of emotional, spiritual, physical and economic freedom that gives women strength?

MS: I don’t think it is just economic independence that is the valued resource for women. This situation cannot be addressed without once again reviewing the relationship between Jamaican women and their menfolk—the great paradox. As I mentioned before, the majority of the lower income working population in Jamaica are women, yet there still exists the problem of domestic abuse, unplanned pregnancies and infidelity to these women—and women remain in these relationships! I think the best resources for our women are definitely emotional and spiritual freedom through education, where they are taught to value themselves above all else. Let us even look at Nola’s mother—she had great economic independence in the sense that she worked in her little business and saved her earnings, yet, in the long run, she had absolutely no control over the care of her family or even the earnings themselves. As Simone de Beauvoir (French writer and feminist) wrote, “when an individual . . . is kept in a situation of inferiority, the fact is that he is inferior” (37). Independence comes from breaking free of the mindset that we are worth whatever we get.

SM: Though this novel ends with a sense of hope, there is also a sense of despair here, too, as Kingston’s changes are revealed: “Things were changing in Kingston, and the pulse of the changes was occurring right around Palm View and Preston Roads . . . The faces were like giant mirrors, positioned on Palm View, but reflecting the cruelty and harshness of life in areas miles and miles away . . . The homeowners who’d once stood in their gardens, watering their plants and catching up with neighbours now remained behind tightly shut doors” (326-27). What is the time period in which this novel is set? Is this contemporary Kingston? Do you see these kinds of changes plaguing the city today? How does Kingston today compare with the Kingston you grew up in?

MS: The situation of Palm View is very much a real one for me. When I was a child, I attended my grandmother's preparatory school which was situated on the outskirts of Maxfield Avenue in Kingston. This was the area in which my mother grew up and was actually the family home that had been converted into a small school. The street was a beautiful one, bustling with families going about their business and tending their gardens, and I am filled with happy memories of accompanying my aunt to the shop down the road or walking to visit neighbours. However, by the time my own children were ready for school, I found that I was intimidated by the area surrounding the school of my own childhood. Many of the homes were in a state of disrepair, the original owners having moved elsewhere, and the crime level of the area had risen to the point where it was listed as a place to avoid. Unfortunately, there are many such areas in Jamaica where gangs claim their political turf and where residences are under siege of continued violent upsurges.

SM: Before the very last part of the book, "Redding 2," you insert Hymn 156 of the Church of St. Margaret's Hymnal, written by an unknown author in the twelfth century. Two lines in this hymn are connected to the title of your novel: "Heal our wounds; our strengths renew; / On our dryness pour thy dew" (344). Did the title of your work precede a recollection of this hymn, or was the title of your novel and the idea of the governing metaphors for this book—the dew angels—derived from this hymn?

MS: This hymn was actually one of the biggest coincidences of my life. I first heard it when I was in my fifth year of writing. It was introduced to me at a church service one morning, and I took it as a divine message that I was on the right track with the novel. It had almost every element of what I was trying to achieve with the whole concept of being refreshed and finding joy despite being wounded by life. I decided to include it in the manuscript.

SM: Nola realizes at the end of the novel that "she could not hate anymore" those who mistreated her—"Papa, Mrs. Spence, Clarice" (369). "They had been only doing what they had been made to do" (369). Here, this novel suggests that we are the products of our environment. It seems, though, that with the case of Nola, she is able to overcome her abuse and shine. What do you think this novel is saying with respect to these comments? Why are some individuals able to continue on, and why are some trapped in cycles of abuse?

MS: To quote Alan Cohen, "it takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power" (Alan Cohen).

I think this quote is the essence of *Dew Angels*—courage and hope create power. Abuse is a monster that seeks to prey on the weak and hopeless, and it is only when Nola begins to learn of her own strength that she is able to gain the courage to overcome. However, even after physically leaving Redding, the damage is still very much a part of her. It is only when she gains the power to forgive and release that she is truly free. I believe that those who face abuse often think they are alone. Many are ashamed, and many just hold on in the hope that things will soon get better. It is all about the courage to make the first step, to seek help instead of being silent, to not be afraid of the change.

SM: I would like to ask you now about the publication history of this book. This is a self-published work. Why is that? This is strong writing, and a gripping story, and it would seem that this work would not have a problem getting published. Can you describe the process behind your decision to self-publish?

MS: Thank you so much for such a positive review. The book was actually self-published because my synopsis had been rejected by most of the publishing houses that I had sent it to. The ones that did accept it did so with the proviso that I would fund the costs for printing, and, in the long run, I decided that if I were going to have to provide the funding, then I may as well have control of the publishing process. However, let me say that the novel was published with the help of Maxine McDonnough (editor) and Camille Parchment (layout and cover design), both of whom had years of experience working in the publishing industry. Their guidance was invaluable since I knew nothing of the industry myself.

SM: Did you seek foreign publishers as well as publishers in Jamaica? Did you consider Peepal Tree Press in England, for instance?

MS: I sought publishers in every nook and cranny of the world, but, to be honest, I became discouraged by the rejections and was very close to giving up ever having the novel published.

SM: How difficult is it to market your work on top of self-publishing?

MS: It is not too difficult in Jamaica since the use of the media is very effective, and the bookstores are very open to book readings and signings to promote the novel. However, international marketing is where the challenge lies, and I am now investigating several options on gaining some introduction into foreign bookstores.

SM: What was your print run for this publication, and how many books have you sold?

MS: I printed two thousand books, and, to date, I have one thousand in stores, with just over four hundred and fifty reported sales so far. I haven't received figures from the distribution company that I contracted to get the book circulated into the stores.

SM: What are the limits of the publishing industry in Jamaica and the Caribbean?

MS: I think that publishers are a little timid about taking on new authors. Let's face it, the world economy has seen better days, so I think investors are very wary of how they spend, and they are more accepting of the "tried and true."

SM: What have you learned from self-publishing *Dew Angels*?

MS: I have learned to quell the negative voice. Feedback on the novel has been so positive and inspiring that I shudder to think that I came so close to giving up. It has been challenging at times, but I think, like Nola, overcoming my fears and taking the first step has given me the strength to be more courageous even as it comes to the marketing of the book.

SM: Are you connected to the writing scene here in Jamaica? To other writers?

MS: I have become connected through book readings, book festivals and media interviews. I am so proud of the talent that I have come into contact with, and I actually see women becoming bolder through their written voices.

SM: I am aware that your book was reviewed by Dr. Mary Hanna in *The Observer*. Has it been reviewed elsewhere? Have you conducted interviews other than this one with me?

MS: It was also reviewed by Paula Ann Porter who has a book review feature on FAME 95.7 FM. I have done interviews on SMILE JAMAICA—a morning television program; a feature on local authors on the local cable channel, FLOW t.v.; HOT 102 FM radio; and RJR radio morning show.

SM: What are you working on at the moment?

MS: I have started my second novel, which I hope will not take as long as the first one to complete.

SM: During the scene at Eric McKenzie's home in *Dew Angels*, "Eric [chuckles] . . . , resting his chin on his hand as if watching a movie plot unfold" (312). I loved this line as, reading this novel, I couldn't help but

wonder if you had thought, or were thinking about, writing a screenplay based on this work. It would seem to make an incredible movie, especially with all the action and rich characters. Have you thought of turning *Dew Angels* into a movie?

MS: While I was writing the book, I was very aware that I wanted the reader to visualize everything. I wanted the images to be very real. I hadn't thought of it becoming a movie, but I certainly did want it to play out as a motion picture in my readers' minds. What is fantastic is that many of the readers have told me that the book should be made into a movie, so I guess I was successful in that effort.

SM: I want to thank you for taking the time to conduct this interview with me, and I'd like to ask if you'd like to make any further comments or if you have any questions.

MS: It was my absolute pleasure! I thank you for allowing me this opportunity to discuss *Dew Angels* in such depth.

Note

1. Jaevion Nelson, executive director of the Jamaica Youth Advocacy Network, contributed to *The Gleaner*, one of Jamaica's two national newspapers, on the third anniversary of the Armadale tragedy. Summarizing the tragedy, he also spoke of continued problems which beset the rights of youth: "On May 22, 2009, seven girls died from fire-related injuries at the Armadale facility in St Ann, which was a state-run juvenile centre meant to be a 'home' to 62 girls. These girls lived in substandard conditions in violation of the national building code, with insufficient safety measures. Those who made it out of Armadale alive suffered severe injuries as a result of the blaze. While the fire has long been put out in St Ann, the apathy surrounding the protection and promotion of children's rights in Jamaica is not yet extinguished. In fact, it has been burning for decades. The underlying problems continue: weak governing policies, lack of accountability for responsible adults, inherent flaws in the child-protection system, and lack of training and capacity building for those in charge of children in juvenile facilities" (*The Gleaner* Tuesday, May 22, 2012).

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