

# MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER

Roger Mais Collection

(Jamaica)

Ref N°2010-80

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## PART A – ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

### 1 SUMMARY

Roger Mais, novelist, journalist, political activist and painter, belongs to the group of Jamaican and West Indian writers whose development closely parallels the emergence of the anti-colonial struggles in the first half of the twentieth century. He has been recognised not only as a pioneer of Caribbean literature in English, which emerged as part of the anti-colonial struggles (1935-1950) but also as a political activist who contributed to the independence struggles.

The Roger Mais Collection consists of original typescripts of novels, short stories, poems, plays, editorials and opinion pieces, handwritten notebooks, personal and business correspondence, which were in his possession at the time of his death in 1955. The Collection embodies the entire corpus of his work and reflects the development of the writer from his fledgling steps into the literary world until publication of his three novels, which have been recognised as trailblazing contributions to the literature of the region. The Collection is not only « a record of one writer's struggle to come to grips with his art ... » but also a « portrayal of the artistic evolution of a major pioneering figure in West Indian literature ... and of literature out of a colonial experience ». (Morris, D.1980)

His political activism led to his involvement with *Public Opinion*, organ of the Peoples National Party and with its founder Norman Manley (Chief Minister, 1955 to 1959; Premier, 1959 to 1962).

During the Second World War this newspaper functioned as a forum for discussions on the role of colonial people. Mais's editorials, in particular the piece entitled « Now we know » that became the rallying cry for nationalists at the time, led to his incarceration for sedition. Mais's contribution to the political life of the country was recognised in a posthumous award, in 1978, of the *Order of Jamaica*, the country's fourth highest honour.

Except for the period 1952-1954, when he travelled to Europe, Mais spent all his creative life in the Caribbean unlike the other writers who emerged at this time, who were able to hone their skills in the metropole in proximity to publishers and the literary world. In this sense he is unique among first generation Caribbean writers.

### 2 DETAILS OF THE NOMINATOR

2.1 **Name:** Library, University of the West Indies (Mona)

2.2 **Relationship to the documentary heritage nominated:** Owner

2.3 **Contact person:** Mrs Norma Amenu Kpodo, Campus Librarian

2.4 Contact details: Main Library, University of the West Indies Mona, Kingston 7, Jamaica, West Indies. Tel: 876-935-8294; Fax: 876-927-1926; Email main.library@uwimona.edu.jm

### **3 *IDENTITY AND DESCRIPTION OF THE DOCUMENTARY HERITAGE***

#### **3.1 Name and identification details of the items being nominated**

Roger Mais Collection

#### **3.2 Description**

The Roger Mais Collection comprises both published and unpublished material. It is noted for its juxtaposition of literary and political writings reflecting Mais's twin interests. It includes virtually every literary genre – poetry, short stories, drama, novels as well as journalism pieces and pieces on his theory of fiction; in all over three hundred pieces. The Collection is made up of: 87 short stories, 19 plays, 17 radio plays, 7 novels (3 unpublished), 1 unfinished novel, and 1 folder with over 50 poems. Many of the typescripts have been annotated and corrected. In addition 21 handwritten notebooks constituting an important part of the Collection include drafts and fragments illustrating the development of his craft; journalism pieces, letters to newspaper editors, dealing with contemporary social and political events. The Collection also includes newspaper clippings, mainly of Mais's articles but including other pieces of interest to him; holographs in both pen and pencil; correspondence with overseas publishers, mainly from the United States; correspondence to his literary agents, and a few personal letters including letters to contemporary writers like John Hearne. As far as can be ascertained this Collection is the only complete collection of a writer of the period to be held in the English speaking Caribbean

(See Morris, Daphne. "Roger Mais Manuscripts in the UWI Library – A Portrait of the Writer in the making". *Jamaica Library Association Bulletin*. 1979-1980: 36-41.)

### **4 *JUSTIFICATION FOR INCLUSION/ ASSESSMENT AGAINST CRITERIA***

#### **4.1 Is authenticity established?**

Roger Mais worked from his home office in Kingston until his hospitalisation and subsequent death in 1955. On his death, the executrix, his sister Mrs Jesse Taylor, took possession of all his papers. Following a period of negotiations, she transferred all material to the University of the West Indies Mona Library in 1966. On acquisition by the Library, W.I. Carr, lecturer in the Department of English, UWI listed the Collection. The documents have been housed in the Rare Book Room of the Library and were listed and organised by Dr Daphne Morris in 1978-1979. No other papers have been located. According to Dr Morris (1980), the Collection spans Mais's entire creative period.

#### **4.2 Is world significance, uniqueness and irreplaceability established? (see 4.2.4)**

The items within the Collection are original working documents or creative writing that reflect the author's growth and development. They document the creative processes underpinning his creative imagination. These documents represent the author's output during the period 1935-1955, that is, twenty years of political activism and literary creativity unique to Mais and Jamaica.

The clippings, articles and published sources in the Collection reflect Mais's interests and demonstrate the ideas influencing his writings.

4.3 Is one *or more* of the criteria of (a) time (b) place (c) people (d) subject and theme (e) form and style (f) social, spiritual and community significance satisfied?

#### ***Time***

The period 1935 to 1955 was one of intellectual and political ferment in Jamaica and the wider Caribbean. It saw the birth of modern trade unionism and political parties in Jamaica. The nationalist movement, born out of the upheavals of 1938 labour riots, flourished. Agitation for self government and universal adult suffrage culminated in 1944. The Collection reflects Mais's participation in the movement.

#### ***Social Significance***

Mais, a member of the Jamaican middle class was involved in the struggle for the rights of the disenfranchised black working class. He is representative of intellectuals in the colonies who led the anti-colonial struggles, which took place in the British Empire beginning in the late 1930's and out of which the independence movements of the former colonies grew. These educated colonials were involved in the literary, intellectual and artistic awakening which culminated in the appearance of a post colonial literature, and national art and cultural movements. Mais was the first Jamaican novelist who presented the indigenous Rastafarian religious cult in a favourable light. His novel *Brother man* brought to the reading public a positive view of its followers who had been viewed as outcasts.

4.4 Are there issues of rarity, integrity, threat and management that relate to this nomination?

#### ***Rarity***

This collection is unique and irreplaceable. It represents all the documents in Roger Mais's possession at the time of his death and subsequently donated to the University of the West Indies by his executor. No other Collection exists. Copies of a small part of the Collection have been lodged at our sister campus at St Augustine, Trinidad for consultation by a researcher at that campus.

#### ***Management***

## **5 LEGAL INFORMATION**

5.1. Owner of the documentary heritage (name and contact details)

Library, University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston 7, Jamaica

5.2 Custodian of the documentary heritage (name and contact details, if different to owner)

Mrs. Norma Amenu-Kpodo, Campus Librarian

5.3 Legal status:

(a) Category of ownership: Gift

(b) Accessibility:

The Collection is accessible to graduate students, UWI faculty and approved researchers. Users must sign a declaration form indicating the purpose of their research

Digital copies are available via the Library's web site.

(c) Copyright status:

Published material is in the public domain. Manuscript items remain the property of the Estate

(d) Responsible administration:

West Indies and Special Collections  
Main Library  
University of the West Indies, Mona  
Kingston 7  
JAMAICA

(e) Other factors

## **6 MANAGEMENT PLAN**

6.1 Is there a management plan in existence for this documentary heritage? YES

The Collection is housed in a purpose built rare book room at the Main Library. The room is climate controlled, fire proofed and secure. A modern fire suppressing system has been installed. The material is stored in metal filing cabinets and individually stored in acid free envelopes and/or boxes.

In addition, the Collection has been digitized and is available online at <http://www.mona.uwi.edu/library/DigitalCollectionsMainPage.html>

The Library has on staff a conservation librarian and a comprehensive conservation/preservation plan is being developed for the Library.

## **7 CONSULTATION**

- 7.1 Provide details of consultation about this nomination with (a) the owner of the heritage (b) the custodian (c) your national or regional *Memory of the World* committee

The decision for nomination was made by the Jamaican Committee of the Memory of the World, UNESCO National Commission for UNESCO in 2008. The proposal was submitted to the regional committee and vetted at the Regional Workshop in July 2009.

## **PART B – SUBSIDIARY INFORMATION**

### **8 ASSESSMENT OF RISK**

- 8.1 Detail the nature and scope of threats to this documentary heritage (see 5.5)

The country is prone to natural disasters and insect infestation, but the Library has taken steps to mitigate the potential occurrence of damage to its Collections by undertaking treatment and maintaining an up to date disaster manual. This portfolio is the responsibility of the Preservation and Conservation Librarian who coordinates all of the activities

### **9 ASSESSMENT OF PRESERVATION**

- 9.1 Detail the preservation context of the documentary heritage (see 3.3)

The Library has a Preservation and Conservation Librarian whose responsibilities include management and assessment of the library's preservation programme. The programme covers all aspects of conservation and preservation as well as staff and user education, environment monitoring, collection treatment and disaster planning, preparedness and recovery.

The Preservation and conservation Librarian works closely with the Head of West Indies and Special Collections to develop goals and activities for the Special Collections which are the Library's first priority.

## **PART C - LODGEMENT**

This nomination is lodged by:

(Please print name).....

(Signature)..... (Date).....

