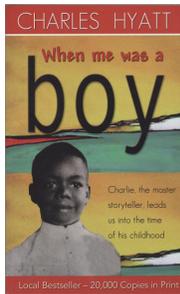


## Librarian's Review of Charles Hyatt's *When me Was a Boy*



There was a game that we boys use to play call 'lick a back'. Whenever yuh see a buggy glidin' an it already have one or two boys ketchin' a ride yuh sey, 'Lick a back!' The driver will then flash the whip roun the buggy an nine time outa ten him wi hit bull's eye (138) .

This book captures a hilariously poignant time in Colonial Jamaica [...readin' book and history book an geography book didn' have in anything 'bout Jamaica. Only 'bout England" (136)]. Still, it is not the government that is the subject of most anecdotes. Even when we read about "Busta's Day", "Coronation" and "Emancipation Day" one gets a sense mostly of respect and reverence for authority, rather than an apology for ideologies. Younger readers will burst into spontaneous laughter at the antics and experiences of this young Charlie, but the older readers might have a mixed response of nostalgia and, yes laughter. Both sets may very well cry, even though for entirely different reasons.

In the Foreword to the 1989 Edition, the late Trevor Rhone calls *When Me Was a Boy* , a "Discovery Channel to our past"(xii) . Noted history professor, Patrick Bryan in his Introduction, highlights the widespread absence of modern technology since the 1930s to early 1940s and underscores how this precipitates the humour, the pathos, and is also one of the most telling features between Jamaican life then and now.

It is a slower world, circumscribed in its activity, and by no means innocent.  
But there is also, only too obviously, a stronger sense of community (xvii) .

The language is sprightly and melodious, flavoured with internal rhymes, fascinating phrases and old Jamaican sayings and proverbs (as seen in the excerpt at the beginning of this article). In addition, the repetition of certain phrases like, "When me was a Boy - Likkle Boy," that begins each episode and concludes each with "when me was a boy," is reminiscent of the

story-teller himself and adds to the three dimensional quality mostly achieved in film or drama. These qualities are usually appealing to a wide cross-section of audience.

This book affords us the opportunity to value what is good and wholesome about our history and culture and to reflect on a provincial yet benign Jamaica where even ailments have to conform.

People never use to have cancer, them had 'groat' nor them never use to have ulcer, them had 'bad stomock' an at certain time in life it was expected that most people eye would 'get dark' (128).

In *When Me Was A Boy*, one may remember or capture the order and structure that characterize events as well as relationships, or be refreshed by the love and sense of community that seem to be central themes in each experience recounted. It was a time before the decay and debilitating effects of ghettos and inner-cities are known and my home town, Franklin Town is residential and epitomizes the idyllic city life, aspects of which I remember, growing up in the early seventies.

**Make this book a part of the feasting as we "Celebrate {ing} Jamaica" this month!**

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