



NGC Bocas Lit Fest 2019
OCM Bocas Prize Ceremony
May 4th, 2019 | Old Fire Station, POS
Remarks by Mark Loquan, President, NGC

Good evening.

“Let me tell you a story.”

Have you ever noticed how immediately you can grab someone’s attention with those words? How bodies turn instinctively toward you and eyes widen in expectation? Why does the promise of a story elicit this reaction?

Perhaps it is born of curiosity, a love of intrigue, escapism, or a biological tendency toward vicarious learning. Whatever the science behind it, our gravitation to narratives and storytelling makes this medium a powerful and effective one for communication and instruction. Studies have shown that people listening to well-told stories experience brain activity in the same regions as those telling the stories. The implication is that a good story – whether truth or fiction, told through a novel, poetry or even an academic dissertation – can enable people with no connection to the subject matter to feel just as emotionally involved with it as the author. Stories can in this way build empathy, compassion and awareness around realities other than our own.

Ladies and gentlemen, you would agree that much of the discord in the world today can be overcome with more empathy, compassion and awareness.

If we grant that stories can open our minds and create bonds across the differences that divide us, then the people who tell those stories have the power to effect positive social change.

In this context, the NGC Bocas Lit Fest assumes great importance. Since its inception, this festival has been a platform for writers, poets, dramatists, historians and intellectuals to find an audience for their stories. By facilitating the exchange of experiences and ideas in this way, Bocas will have contributed to the enlightenment, sensitization and personal development of hundreds over the years, not to mention the opportunities it will have created for the

storytellers themselves. For this reason - for its impact - we at NGC are proud to be associated with the NGC Bocas Lit Fest and will continue to support the work of the Bocas team.

Of course, a story can only be effective if properly articulated, and for that we must recognise the genius of storytellers who can artfully instruct, engage and entertain with their narratives. That is why we are here tonight. I am pleased to join the celebration of three talented individuals, all with Trinbagonian roots, who are vying for the prestigious OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature - Danielle Boodoo-Fortuné, Dionne Brand and Kevin Adonis Browne. You are your category winners; your respective works have been received with acclaim because you are masters in your craft, and told compelling stories that resonated with your readers. Regardless of who cops the OCM Bocas Prize in the end, you have all achieved, and I am proud of the representation you have made for people of Trinbagonian heritage.

You should also feel extremely honoured that tonight, your work shares the stage with one of our country's most acclaimed and successful novels. The literary opus '*The Dragon Can't Dance*' by Earl Lovelace proves that a good story will never age and is a model for masterful storytelling. 40 years on, it remains a tour de force, interrogating themes that are still relevant to our society in this neocolonial age. I join the Bocas team in honoring this great man and his signature contribution to Caribbean literature. You, Mr. Lovelace, are an ingenious writer and an inspiration to all.

Ladies and gentlemen, the night belongs to books and storytellers, so let me give way. I look forward as you do to learning who has been adjudged the overall winner of the coveted OCM Bocas prize. I wish all the writers best of luck and reiterate that you already have much to celebrate. I want to take the opportunity to thank sponsors of this prize, One Caribbean Media, for partnering with us and for sharing NGC's belief in the Bocas cause. Your support is doing a tremendous service to our literary community, and for that, we thank you.

Finally, to the Bocas team, under the expert directorship of Marina Salandy-Brown, thank you for giving our stories a space to be heard and shared. Congratulations on every success you have achieved for this festival, and we wish you the very best as you seek to become more.

Ladies and gentlemen: thank you and do enjoy the evening.