

# LIME TREE CAN'T BEAR ORANGE

by Amanda Smyth

## AUTHOR Q & A



- 1. In *Lime Tree Can't Bear Orange*, the description of the sights and smells of Trinidad and Tobago are so evocative, the reader feels transported to the Caribbean. What sounds, tastes, smells, etc. make you feel transported to that region?**

When I was writing *Lime Tree Can't Bear Orange*, I had a pinboard above my desk with photographs—showing a particular light or a rise in the sea or an image from my childhood. There was one in particular of myself and my cousin. We were standing next to an airplane, which for some reason had been abandoned. We'd been climbing inside it all afternoon pretending to be stewardesses. There was something about that photograph that reminded me of childhood in a way that I felt I could dive into Celia's world. It's hard to explain. Also Peter Doig's paintings were strongly affecting; their haunting, almost mystical qualities were very helpful. I printed out copies of several of his Trinidad paintings and stuck them on my wall. Visual aids were really useful. I also listened a lot to old Caribbean calypso music—the Trinidad greats: Sparrow, Kitchener, Calypso Rose...I found them very powerful.

- 2. At heart, this is a novel about the meaning of family. How did your family shape the story and the writing process? How do they feel about the book?**

Story telling is a natural part of everyday life in Trinidad. Every afternoon when the sun is slipping away, we gather on the veranda to take a drink and talk about this and that. As a child, I remember sitting there, too; sometimes just long enough to catch my breath before running outside into the yard again, where my brother and my two cousins played catch or climbed guava trees or hunted for lizards.

I remember hearing about all kinds of things: an uncle who dreamed of buried treasure and how he would travel to a patch under a particular lime tree or a spot near the little school—and how he would dig all day in the hot sun for treasure; of course, he never found anything. I remember hearing about the hallway clock that stopped when a sister died faraway in Africa; a whispering ghost in a house down the islands; the pregnant scorpion that almost killed Aunt Isabella Fifita, and how she was carried by donkey to Port of Spain where an English doctor saved her life; I heard about the storm that nearly took the roof away the night my grandmother was born; the tiny dark lady from Madeira, who

couldn't speak a word of English when she married a giant Scotsman with red hair.

And then there was the story of my great grandfather—a fearless, lion of a man, loved by many—who was shot on his way to Tamana.

My mother remembered, as a small child, seeing my great grandfather's body laid out and looking for the bullet hole. The family was destroyed, like a cyclone had passed amongst them. The murderers were never found. To this day, his death remains an unsolved case in Trinidad.

It is true to say that *Lime Tree* was inspired by this event. But not only this event. In writing the novel, I found myself remembering many of the stories and half stories I'd heard in the veranda over the years.

Without knowing it, the stories had become my own buried treasure. My grandmother has not yet read the novel.

- 3. How much of the novel is based on personal experience?**

In terms of actual personal experience: I think the central character, Celia, is searching for her identity and her place in the world. I can relate to this, when I was much younger, at least. My family lived in Trinidad, and I lived in the UK. It was difficult. There was a point I realized that I had to build my own foundations. This is something Celia comes to realize.

- 4. The oral storytelling tradition is strong in Trinidad and Tobago, and the power of myth, fable, and story are evident in the shape of the novel. Did you think about these cultural touchstones as you were writing? If so, which ones?**

Please see answer number 2!

- 5. What aspect/character/moment in your book do you think book groups and other readers will talk about the most?**

This is a difficult question. One aspect could be Celia's motivation. What is she looking for? Does she love Dr. Rodriguez? How is she changed by the end of the novel?

