

Fred D'Aguiar Mama Dot

WINNER OF THE GUYANA PRIZE 1989

Mama Dot revolves around a character based on the poet's grandmother in Guyana, the challenges of the Guyanese diaspora in the UK, and the Guyanese landscape as sensual stimulus for artistic growth and expression. The image of Mama Dot is one of vitality and strength, and D'Aguiar gives this grandmother figure mythic and primordial qualities. Through her, links to the African diaspora in the Caribbean and Europe are forged. She becomes a goddess-like centre of a creation story who undertakes an Adamic task of creating and naming a new society away from, but fused with the memory of, Africa. In the person of Mama Dot many experiences are synthesised, and D'Aguiar employs her image to move from past to present to future, a future that in many cases means migration away from Guyana as a necessity for a family to survive.

D'Aguiar's poetry emphasizes that life in the diaspora means negotiating two strands of identity—one Guyanese, the other British—and not falling into the trap of essentialist notions of neglecting one part of his identity. He functions as a guide, recording instances and occurrences that many of the generation of Caribbean immigrant children growing up in Great Britain in the mid-1980s when *Mama Dot* was first published were not able to experience. What they are able to experience here in *Mama Dot* though are vivid images of reading and writing that D'Aguiar mixes with the sensuality of the Guyanese landscape.

ISBN 978-1-907493-22-5



The Caribbean Press

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