



The Butterflies' Coat

Ronald Williams

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This engrossing and highly readable book focuses on characters, relationships, and the Caribbean's changing culture.

The Butterflies' Coat blends together rich characters, inspiring conversation, and intriguing political backroom deal-making in a story paced like a pleasant day on the beach. Ronald Williams uses his extensive knowledge of the Caribbean to craft a realistic and moving narrative about friendship, personal reinvention, and power struggles.

The novel is set on the fictional Caribbean island of Saint Euribus, a tropical paradise rich with culture and booming from the tourist trade and emerging industry. Navigating this new social landscape is a group of old friends from across the economic spectrum, some with political ties.

The friends' familiarity is comforting, but that doesn't stop them from wrestling with complicated and fascinating issues. Williams uses their interactions and conversations to examine the vestiges of colonialism in the Caribbean, how racism still pervades daily life, and how class and sexuality bubble just under the surface. Many of these talks are tinged with a hint of nostalgia as the friends reflect on how their island is different than it was in their youth.

Though the women delight in afternoon cocktails, gossip, and chasing handsome men on the beach, they cannot ignore how their country is changing. With a mysterious murder linked to the town's under-construction, government-funded factory, politics becomes difficult to ignore. Is it just more evidence of the changing times, or is there something sinister at work?

Deep caring and camaraderie lie beneath the often cutting jokes. The women are particularly concerned about Anis, who lost a breast to cancer five years ago. The man-chasing and vibrant girl they once knew has been replaced by an introspective and gloomy shade of herself. Williams does a remarkable job of subtly weaving together the women's micro and macro concerns, sometimes focusing on the national and societal issues, while other times showing the world through Anis's grief-stricken eyes.

The dialogue between the women is a highlight of the novel, and really brings the characters to life. Each has a unique personality, and their interactions as a group are realistic and rich. However, since much of the dialogue is filled with colloquial expressions and regional slang, it can often be difficult to interpret for those not familiar with the patois. In most cases, though, this enhances the setting, and the author does an excellent job of subtly explaining thick slang or unfamiliar concepts. While the personal interactions are fascinating, Williams spends a great deal of time in the first quarter of the book relating long conversations, which means that the larger-scale political plot hinted at on the cover is slow to develop.

Overall, *The Butterflies' Coat* is an engrossing and highly readable book, and is recommended for those who appreciate stories that emphasize characters and ideas over fast-moving drama.

ERIC ANDERSON (December 3, 2014)

Disclosure: This article is not an endorsement, but a review. The publisher of this book provided free copies of the book and paid a small fee to

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