ALTHEA PRINCE: WRITING WHAT SHE INTUITS

By Joanne C. Hillhouse

“So much more story to tell you, Sayshelle child,”¹

– Reevah to daughter Sayshelle, Loving This Man

In both Antiguan author Althea Prince’s adult work Loving This Man and her children’s book How the East Pond Got Its Flowers, elders use ‘Story’ not only to entertain, but to facilitate inter-generational bonding, knowledge transference, individual journeying, and community continuity. This is not unlike the character Medouze’s ‘Story’-telling to the young boy, Jose, in Euzhan Palcy’s Sugar Cane Alley – a Martinique film which I learned is a favourite of Prince’s. It’s a role that Prince herself, as storyteller, also embraces.

Certainly, and I must declare this bias upfront, as one of my literary elders (more big sister than mother), it’s a role she has played both through her writing and her mentoring: like Jamaica Kincaid (author of Annie John), clearing a literary path, and like D. Gisele Isaac (author of Considering Venus) literally showing how the path can cut in different directions. Like Isaac, both on the page and in life, she’s helped nudge certainly this Antiguan writer along the way. I like, too, that for all the deeper messages sewn into the fabric of her narratives, it is Story, first, second and third with Prince. So that when she said in a 2007 Daily Observer interview “I

¹ Althea Prince, Loving This Man (Canada: Insomniac Press, 2001), 25.
would love to be able to say that it is *noblesse oblige* that makes me write; however, I write because I have to write,”² I easily related.

That said; neither her fiction nor non-fiction is fluff, informed as it is by her journeying. “I write about my preoccupations and obsessions as do most authors,”³ Prince said. What’s more she embraces in her exploration of these preoccupations and obsessions the need to probe at her own innards, and to not censor herself in so doing. “I firmly believe,” Prince once said, “that a writer has to be free to write from the heart because the ‘real’ is inside, not outside the self. The dictates of the heart are all that ought to matter to the writer.”⁴

For this writer, novelist, essayist, professor, sociologist, editor, mother, mentor that journeying began in Antigua as part of the artistic Prince family that yielded the likes of writer Ralph, author of *Jewels of the Sun*, and renowned jazz guitarist and keyboardist Roland. “Our parents provided an environment that was conducive to artistic and intellectual growth,”⁵ Prince said of the grounding that bred such creativity. She added her own chapters to the tale through her years in Canada, after migrating there in the mid-1960s, and elsewhere, including a few years back in Antigua in the mid-1980s. In the years since, since about the early 1990s, she has proven to be one of Antigua’s most prolific: published works including the aforementioned *Loving* and *East Pond*, also Children’s Book Centre award winner *How the Starfish Got To the Sea, Ladies of the Night and Other Stories, Being Black, Feminisms and Womanisms: A Women’s Studies Reader*, and *The Politics of Black Women’s Hair*.

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⁴ ‘Q & A’, *Observer*, 12.  
The titles alone make clear that blackness and the feminine – how they exist, how they intersect with each other and with the societies in which they find themselves – recur in Prince’s writing. She indicates as much in her 2001 collection of essays on *Being Black*: “I write from my heart as an African woman...I write from the experience of living in these societies [the Caribbean, Canada, the United States of America] as an African woman, carrying the whole race on my shoulders.”

They are not the only themes in her varied and layered library, but they do dominate. They dominate because of, perhaps fuelled by, her defiance in the face of the submissiveness demanded of them. So, you’ll find the term “cultural hegemony” peppering Prince’s work; the sociologist in her mixed up even in the fiction. As she’s acknowledged, “…it is a hop, a skip and a jump for me to move that training into the creation of ‘story’.”

Therefore, her writings repeatedly confront “cultural hegemony”, a term coined by philosopher Antonio Gramsci, which speaks, in simplest terms, to the dominance of one social group – as much through cultural as physical coercion – over another; the ideas of the dominant group taken to be the norm. Prince writes in *Being Black*, for example, “…the fact that the history of African peoples is hardly included in school curricular is an example of how cultural hegemony operates in the Canadian school system.”

Counterpoint to this, she’s actively worked to engage black youth – via the Black Education project, an after school tutoring programme, for instance. She told the Daily Observer, in 2007, “I also do motivational speaking to Black youth; that brings me the highest satisfaction of all...I will go anywhere, at any time, to speak to groups of black youth in Canada; it is a really high priority with me.”

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7 ‘Q & A’, Observer, 12.
8 Prince, *Being Black*, 69.
9 ‘Q & A’, Observer, 12.
In her writing, meanwhile, Prince continues her rebellion against cultural, racial, and gender domination. She does so not by butting heads with the ‘norm’ but through ‘Story’ that reinforces the authenticity of the culture from which she springs. Incidentally, Prince’s doctoral thesis was entitled ‘African-Caribbean Perspectives of World View: C. L. R. James Explores the Authentic Voice’, which she indicated in correspondence with me shows her focus on writing to shift hegemony. Prince, therefore, though a writer at heart, writing because she has to, has instinctively married her literary and academic personas, and in so doing has fully embraced the larger role of ‘Story’ in her community, as more than just entertainment. Yet, hers is not the sometimes dry prose of academia, even when it’s non-fiction; perhaps because as she said, “I allow myself to write whatever feels good ... it is a bonus if it resonates in some useful and/or enjoyable way with someone else.”

“History=their history. That is the historical interpretation of the dominant group.”

– Althea Prince, Being Black.

One of the ways in which Prince’s writing resonates – with this reader – is in her exploration of blackness, how it’s presented and how certain perceptions are internalized. Discussing her latest, The Politics of Black Women’s Hair, she said, in an interview with me that among her reasons for writing the book was to debunk the notion – more than a notion really

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10 ‘No Labels’, Observer, 14.
11 Prince, Being Black, 70.
rooted as it is in both history and popular culture – that hair had to be straight and long to be beautiful.

Very relatable for little black girls like me who know what it was to dread the hair combing and hot comb, to put a towel on her head and swing her ‘hair’ this way and that; and who now proudly owns her own-hair. It is a journey through self-rejection to self-acceptance in the face of cultural hegemony, in which “the black woman’s natural hair falls low on the scale of beauty”\textsuperscript{12} part of a beauty paradigm in which the ‘norm’ is “European facial features, light or white skin, and straight hair”\textsuperscript{13} even in a predominantly black society. As Prince achingly details, she has personal experience with the painful journey to hair acceptance. “The pain worked its way all the way down my body, and seemed to settle in my navel,”\textsuperscript{14} she wrote after the first of many torturous hair combing experiences.

In \textit{Being Black}, meanwhile, I found a twin to my own sentiments in the essay entitled \textit{Stop Calling Us ‘Slaves’}, which speaks to how external branding can influence self-definition and how important it is for us all to know, to internalize, that we, blacks, were not slaves but rather were enslaved. Like her, I’m convinced that this distinction is an important one to make. I feel this even more strongly after a recent word association session with children from the reading club with which I volunteer, the Cushion Club, which saw them making instinctive connections between black and slaves, Africa and slavery etc.

\textit{Also thought-provoking, in that same collection, was Black History Month, Or, Have Black-History-Month-Kit-Will-Travel and Writing Thru Race: The Conference} – both of which

\textsuperscript{12} Althea Prince, \textit{The Politics of Black Women’s Hair} (Canada: Insomniac Press, 2009), 15.
\textsuperscript{13} Prince, \textit{Politics}, 15.
\textsuperscript{14} Prince, \textit{Politics}, 33.
speak to the right to claim space for the Community to explore issues unique to that Community, not as defined or prescribed by others but as determined by that Community.

**How The East Pond Got Its Flowers** was born, meanwhile, of Prince’s particular desire for a story that she could tell to her daughter, or so she related at the first Antigua and Barbuda International Literary Festival – then the Caribbean International Literary Festival – in 2006. Prince was, at the time, on a panel with Verna Wilkins, a Caribbean born children’s author and founder of Tamarind Publishers in the United Kingdom, who similarly told of her desire to help black children to see themselves. At another installment of the annual festival, two teenage Antiguan writers spoke of not seeing themselves in books and in popular art as they came of age in Antigua.

Antigua, though in possession of a black majority has a British colonial history and modern reality of American cultural penetration, some would say imperialism, impacting identity. One of the aforementioned teens confessed that the earliest characters in her writing were white; white was the norm.

Consider, as well, Prince’s own musing during a CBC radio discussion of *The Politics of Black Women’s Hair*, speaking on her childhood in Antigua, that “what I wanted was straight hair, because that was beautiful hair. I grew up in a predominantly black society but the hegemonic structure was pretty much the same as if I were living in a society where white was the dominant culture...I needed to have straight hair in order to be pretty at 15.”

This point about ‘good hair’ is reinforced in a Daily Observer interview coinciding with the launch of *Politics*: “I knew this in my belly. A little black girl thinks and says that hair is good or not good,

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not because of manageability but because it is what she has come to recognize as a signifier of beauty.”

Paradoxically, I must note that elsewhere in her writings, Prince suggests that West Indians, because they are not immersed in a white world, do not have the same identity issues as blacks, say in Canada or the U.S. For instance, in Loving This Man, Prince’s Sayshelle notes, after migrating to Canada, “In Antigua, there had been white people and there had been all of us. I never knew that I was Black...my head and heart had to stretch to accommodate this new group identification.” And in Being Black, Prince writes of her mother, “...she had not immigrated to Canada as I had. She had not had to define herself within the cultural hegemony of the Other, as I was in the process of doing.”

However, Prince’s own writing, as shown, bears out that blackness and related identity issues exist in the Caribbean as surely as they do ‘Up North’, merely as a different, perhaps subtler, strain of the same infection; the Northern experience perhaps demanding a more active engagement. As Prince pointed out, “I felt that if you were Black in Toronto, you just could not live life in a casual way.” But that is not to say that these issues did not touch the Caribbean. In the very same Being Black, for instance, in a discussion of Jamaica Kincaid’s Lucy, she writes of the character’s “anger at the British cultural hegemony” and of how “her strong resentment, rather than her continued acceptance of this imposition, is the character’s first step toward reclaiming the self.”

17 Prince, Loving, 126.
18 Prince, Being Black, 45.
19 Prince, Loving, 146.
20 Prince, Being Black, 102.
21 Prince, Being Black, 102.
“Me ah warn yuh, my people don’t have no big ‘S’ on them forehead an’ me nar go leave that one till them stop call us ‘slave’.”\(^{22}\)

– Althea Prince, *Being Black*.

As noted, *East Pond* – like several other Prince works – was part of that reclaiming; but especially so, it was for a mother, part of the process of giving the daughter a ‘self’ to whom she could relate. What I liked about it as well was that contrary to so many of my history books, much like Alex Haley’s *Roots* or, to a degree, Keithlyn Smith’s *To Shoot Hard Labour*, was the way it was angled. It wasn’t the colonizer’s perspective on the slave experience, it was life as experienced by black people within the context of enslavement, that enslavement neither completely defining nor limiting them. For, as Prince noted, “It is only to their oppressors that they were ‘the slaves’. To themselves, they were and are African people.”\(^{23}\) She makes a point of writing them as such. So, though, in *East Pond*, whippings and bondage were there, shadowing the story, it was not the heart of the matter. Rather, at the heart of it was people making life through planting and growing, birth and death, the sharing of knowledge and the acceptance of a rare gift. It was an author’s rebellion in the face of cultural hegemony. It was a mother’s gift of love. At any rate, that’s how I think of it, and why I bought it for my niece years ago; because the world of children’s books for black children needs more colour. Ashley Bryan, a celebrated children’s author with Antiguan parentage, author of *Beautiful Blackbird* and other books drawing from African and African-American folklore, referenced Nancy Larrick’s

\(^{22}\) Prince, *Being Black*, 130.

\(^{23}\) Prince, *Being Black*, 75.
groundbreaking 1965 article in the Saturday Review of Books The All White World of Children’s Books, highlighting the underserved African American market. The article, Bryan told me in a 2009 interview, helped jump start the publishing of books for the black demographic, opening up opportunities for authors and artists like him. In Bryan books like The Dancing Granny then you’ll find the trickster Anansi and the music of the island. Even with the strides, however, there’s still room for improvement.

Discussing her forays into children’s fiction with East Pond and Starfish, it became clear that for Prince it was important not only that black children see themselves in books but how they see themselves. After all, on reflection, my childhood favourite Enid Blyton’s main black characters, golliwogs, were “often rude, mischievous, elfin villains”\(^{24}\), her depiction of this sole black character “by contemporary standards, racially insensitive”\(^{25}\) at best. As a sidebar, on the subject of popular authors and depictions of race as relate to children, let’s not forget Agatha Christie’s bestselling And Then There were None, published in the UK as Ten Little Niggers, which references a children’s nursery rhyme of the same name – you know it, as children we sang this version: “ten little Indians”.

Prince’s children’s book stand in stark contrast to these depictions, and though already strong reaffirming works, she plans to reissue improved versions – keeping in mind her deeper understanding of how black children tend to be portrayed and how it impacts them.

Prince writes in Being Black: “Children are in the process of ‘becoming’. If we accept this, we understand that to facilitate that process, education and educators have a

\(^{24}\) http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/golliwog
\(^{25}\) http://www.ferris.edu/jimcrow/golliwog
responsibility to provide whole concepts and not partial concepts, whole ‘stories’ and not one-dimensional ‘stories’, whole history and not partial history.”

She clearly understands though that given the history, it’s not only children who need the whole ‘Story’ nor, for that matter, just people of colour. Children’s author, Geoffery Philp, a Jamaican, reposted Nigerian author Chimamanda Adichie’s well-circulated internet lecture on the ‘Danger of A Single Story’. This, to me is the central point of Adichie’s riveting speech, found online at TED.com: “…it is impossible to engage properly with a place or a person without engaging with all of the stories of that place and that person. The consequence of the single story is this: It robs people of dignity. It makes our recognition of our equal humanity difficult. It emphasizes how we are different rather than how we are similar.”

Picking up on this, Philp asks whether or not the Caribbean has a single story, and “who benefits from the telling of the ‘single story’? who doesn’t?” among other questions.

Well, one single story that has legs, I suppose, is the story of Anansi. Prince recalled in Being Black being invited to speak at a school in Canada and being ‘helpfully’ advised by the librarian that instead of reading East Pond she might want to read an Anansi story instead – not unlike the white character in Loving This Man who insisted Sayshelle “do something” with her hair. In both cases, it’s about trying to contain expression, narrowing it to what one – one being in this case part of the dominant culture – deems acceptable. “Even Black History Month receives censorship, for its truth is not always palatable to the dominant group,”

Prince, Being Black, 71.


Prince, Loving, 146.

Prince, Being Black, 73.
reflected. It’s telling how she dealt with this encounter, by the way, politely ignoring the helpful advice and proceeding to read her planned story. It’s what she seems to do through her writing as well, just tell the ‘Story’ and, much like the children in the class mentioned, readers may well find they like it whether they – or someone attempting to think for them – deems them ready for it or not. Now, I like Anansi and know from experience that Prince tells engaging Anansi tales, but that’s not the point. A single story – whether it be of Africans as slaves, Africans as Kings or Queens, or Africans as trickster – does a disservice to the listener. Service comes in giving the full ‘Story’.

This brings to mind an unpublished manuscript referenced by Prince, in a 2007 interview. It’s the fictionalized account of a young woman in 19th century Antigua who was sold away from one estate to another, but who returned three times for her baby until eventually a judge ordered them to return the child to her. This woman is listed in the Archives as ‘a slave woman’. Prince named her Asha.

“Any discussion of wholeness and authenticity clearly demands the inclusion of women.”

– Althea Prince, Being Black

Women feature prominently in Prince’s work. In fact, in Being Black, she challenges usually revered Caribbean intellectual, C. L. R. James, for what she sees as a great oversight. “James searched diligently among male Caribbean writers and calypsonians for what exists quite abundantly in the work of Caribbean women writers and women calypsonians... by
excluding them his discussion of authenticity and wholeness begins with a part of the equation missing,”³¹ Prince wrote.

As “an African Woman”³², there is no such oversight in Prince’s writing. Rather, like Zora Neale Hurston in Their Eyes Were Watching God or Alice Walker in The Colour Purple, before her, she tells their ‘stories, sidestepping any inclination to pen them in with ‘a single story’. Acknowledging the limitations placed on women in relationships and in the Black Power Movement, Prince’s Sayshelle in Loving This Man, notes, “I wanted Black women’s feelings to be recognized as valid, so that it was understood that we were vulnerable like everyone else; we needed care and nurturing like everyone else...we had feelings, and we would protest our roles in the struggle, and in our relationships as well.”³³

Prince’s penchant for protesting the enslavement of hegemony by re-writing the ‘Story’ comes through in Ladies of the Night, which barefacedly showcases women’s differences and gives them permission to be themselves, even if that self is an unapologetic whore. As noted, in the book’s foreword, Prince has “strong appreciation for women who talk their story, no matter how it makes some people wince.”³⁴ She doesn’t romanticize their existence. One woman, shrugging off her husband’s infidelity, said, matter-of-factly, “If he don’t even come, I don’t really mind. You know why? I weary give him wife, Vuy, weary, weary, weary. I fifty-two years come July – you don’t think is time for me to get some rest”³⁵ – both women laughing heartily at this. But there’s a caul of sadness/longsuffering over their existence: From a forgotten mother to a tortured wife croops-croops-croopsing another woman’s fluids from her husband’s

³¹ Prince, Being Black, 103.
³² Prince, Being Black, 39.
³³ Prince, Loving, 196.
³⁵ Prince, Ladies, 169.
underwear, theirs are not necessarily happy lives, but they are real and familiar, and capture well the bold-faced contradictions of island living. “Every man in this island have a woman...that don’t mean anything, Cintie. You still my queen. You so nice. I wouldn’t leave you. Me love you like me love meself. When you going understand that? Stop worrying over stupidness,”36 one husband in Ladies argued in his own defense to the woman who had done all she’d been taught to please her man and who was “miserable all the time,”37 as he accused, because it had not brought her the expected happily ever after.

“Sayshelle, what’s wrong child?”38

– Reevah to daughter, Sayshelle, Loving This Man

The take on Female-Male relationships seen, to varying degrees, in Ladies of the Night and Loving This Man, and other Prince works, highlights how it can unhinge, especially so for the woman. Just ask Sage who lost herself and her children to ‘love’ and liquor in Loving This Man. In this sense, love is a kind of poison. “He would move way up, deep and so sweet inside her; and Sage would wait in ecstacy for the passion to explode between them. She would feel his tenderness toward her then; and she grew devoted to him completely, but not wisely.”39

Soon enough, “after those early days of sweetness...she cried one night, feeling him hurting her

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36 Prince, Ladies, 46.
37 Prince, Ladies, 52.
38 Prince, Loving, 200.
39 Prince, Loving, 52.
inside.”\textsuperscript{40} The anticipation of the bull-pestle Rommel bought to beat her with might have been what woke Sage up, but the relationship had never been right, and she knew it.

But then can it ever be right? Equal, and balanced, and unhurting; this is a question that lingers after reading Prince’s writing – even the epic and magical bonding of Clifford and Juniper Berry in \textbf{Loving This Man}. It’s Juniper who says to Sayshelle, “Loving this man must not be a hard thing to do. Loving this man must be an easy thing to do; so easy, that you just love him and don’t mind that it takes a lot of hard work for a woman to love a man.”\textsuperscript{41} That kind of loving proves rare. Even when Sayshelle, who has migrated to Canada, thinks she has found some version of it, it soon proves itself to be a lie. “I had fought white racism, but had succumbed to black male oppression in the guise of sweet love.”\textsuperscript{42}

The romantic in Prince, however, the belief in love’s potential, sneaks out; notably, at the end of \textbf{Loving This Man} as a broken and re-forged Sayshelle prepares to re-engage: “I braced my shoulders to leap on a single thread of faith, into the new arms of love.”\textsuperscript{43}

\textit{“Were it not for Aunt Helen, those first immigrant-months in Canada would have been like living Seleena’s life, a life lived away from love.”}\textsuperscript{44}

– Sayshelle, \textbf{Loving This Man}

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\textsuperscript{40} Prince, Loving. 52. \\
\textsuperscript{41} Prince, Loving. 98. \\
\textsuperscript{42} Prince, Loving. 163. \\
\textsuperscript{43} Prince, Loving. 214. \\
\textsuperscript{44} Prince, Loving. 128.
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It’s noteworthy that community – returning to the womb from which she came – helped Sayshelle heal. Community is very important in Prince’s writing; both the ways people lean away from and the ways they cleave to each other.

The condition of separateness within community is felt most keenly in the Canadian setting. “In this-here space, in this-here place and in this-here time, I struggled to breathe, and I walked my own ground with my head held down, my chin on my chest,”45 Sayshelle mused, having found her independence and simultaneously an unfamiliar state of aloneness in this bigger world. Eventually, she also finds community, community linked primarily to her blackness, something she has never had to consciously contemplate in Antigua.

As noted, this is not to say that issues of race did not taint the Antiguan community as well, but separateness under the island sun was more class driven, colour being only one part of it. Notwithstanding, for instance, that her second daughter’s father, Rogain Demetrius, had raped her, “Sage was proud of the second child because her father was a light skinned man from a good family.”46 So, it wasn’t strictly black and white, but shades of brownness – along with wealth, family name, legitimacy/illegitimacy, and other factors – that kept this sector of the community separate from that. When the ‘illegitimate’ child of Rogain Demetrius found herself at private school “Her place in society was established by the fact that she wore the light-blue school uniform, instead of the navy blue tunic designed for the dark-skinned girls.”47

An interesting twist on point of view for me – coming from the dark-skinned, working class community of Antiguans – is the way Prince stirs sympathy for Sage’s daughter, the ‘tragic

45 Prince, Loving, 132.
46 Prince, Loving, 47.
47 Prince, Loving, 56.
mulatto, who insists on calling herself Romain-Demetrius-Child. On going to private school and catching a glimpse, for the first time, of someone who looked like her, “she dreamed of meeting him again, this replica of herself. She wished that she could touch his hair to see if it felt like hers. She remembered this now with a confused pull in her heart. She wanted so badly to feel that she belonged somewhere.”

That said, as it did on the plantation, communities found ways to thrive; and Prince’s writing affectionately acknowledges certain markers of community. For one, there’s the role of ‘Story’ and, not separate from this, the role of the elders in ensuring that values and knowledge are passed on. Prince noted, in Being Black, “In my own series of children’s stories, I seek to release the voice of the Elder woman and the Elder man as major sources of African ‘survival’ wisdom.”

For the Antiguan reader, the greatest reminder that this is community, their community – black, Antiguan, female - is the jolt of recognition when reading; whether of the pain of hair ‘care’ for the black child, the early morning noises of people going to the stand pipe for water; the rejoinder that in order to snag a man you have to know how to turn fungee; the superstitions; the politics; the language; and on and on.

“Everybody knew everybody else who lived on the street; and everyone knew everyone else’s business. Sometimes that knowing would slide into malice and then harsh voices spilled out onto the street. There was love, too, with neighbours helping neighbours; the elderly cared

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49 The ‘Tragic Mulatto’ as a literary character dates back to Lydia Maria Child’s “The Quadroons” in 1842. Throughout other writings and films like 1959’s Imitation of Life, the ‘tragic mulatto’ has been defined by self-hatred, depression, and suicide attempts, finding peace only in death, much like Seleena in Prince’s Loving This Man. Reference: http://www.ferris.edu/JIMCROW/mulatto

49 Prince, Loving, 56.

50 Prince, Being Black, 95.
for and the young nourished and love. It was comfortable, not idyllic, life, but it was the doing of life as the people knew it.” As we read, we remember it well because it is our life. And, if it isn’t, Prince imbues her work with such a deep sense of place that, without independent verification, I’d venture that even the non-Antiguan feels well like they know “the dog grumbling at lizards in the backyard...the curtains drawn to close out the light, the radio playing softly, the kerosene lamp lit for softness.”

“Language is everything.”

– Being Black

Prince is a gifted craftswoman. It shows through, as I said, in the way she creates community on the page, in the way she weaves grand and difficult themes into very entertaining fiction and very accessible non-fiction.

So, I’d be remiss if I did not touch on her authoritative use of language. For one thing, she understands well the power of words. I’ve come to believe for instance that her consistent writing of black people with a capital ‘B’ is not idle. Note the following (all bolds mine): “It was impossible not to notice that Black women were second class citizens twice: in the white world and in the Black world.” Prince asserts – not inserts – Black so persistently that I have this image of her going through the work with her editor’s pen, writing over every small ‘b’ that dares insinuate itself into the conversation when she’s talking of her people.

51 Prince, Loving, 24.
52 Prince, Being Black, 47.
This is the flipside of her rejection of the derogation ‘slave’ to describe Black people. Prince declared, “When I write stories about African children in Antigua which are set during slavery-days, I do not call the children ‘slaves’ or worse yet, ‘slave-children’. This is not because I seek to deny the historical moment of slavery, but because my concern is with the children’s dreams, hopes, fears, and joys as human beings. I am concerned to present the lived experiences of African human beings, albeit located within the objective realities of the condition of slavery. The condition of slavery is the thing that they transcend in my stories, in order to connect with their humanity and their African and Antiguan selves.” Prince understands that language is part of socialization; that words can imprint on the psyche negatively – “slave” – and positively – “Black”, African. Her use of language is consistent in this regard and such is her conviction that the reader can’t help but be swayed. “When I reclaim my race by name, I embrace much more than the name: I reclaim the real Africa in me, connected to those who went before me, those who enabled me being here.” So, even in the way she uses words, Prince is rebelling against hegemony.

Prince’s use of language also reinforces community. One notable way is, even within the English standard required for international publication, the way her narrative is peppered with the Antiguan vernacular. For example there is the repetition of words for emphasis where instead of saying something is, very sweet, we might say it sweet-sweet. Prince uses it liberally in her stories set in Antigua, which she writes with a familiarity that suggests that she never left

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53 Prince, Being Black, 47.
54 Prince, Being Black, 43.
or that she took home with her: “...just when she was all wound up tight-tight in her head, wanting to love somebody bad-bad.”

On the point of Prince’s language, I have to agree with a January Magazine review of Loving This Man which while critical of the plot, noted that she “writes with such sensuality and grace that it creates a heady spell, drawing the readers into the center of the story.” There are numerous examples from which to choose.

From,

“When the sweetness between them came, she was ready for it. She held on to Emmanuel and buried her face in his brown-brown-colour-of-cinnamon neck that smelled of Old Spice cologne.”

To,

“My heart song strums my life. Precious drops of wet still cling to the words as they move out of my mouth. I taste the wet on my tongue, but I do not swallow. I want everything to go out from me. There is no room for them in the bath-pan under my bed.”

Like poetry isn’t it – in its use of figurative tools like imagery and metaphor, and in its lyrical flow? Or maybe like music? ...Like music that “contained my story and my journeying and

55 Prince, Loving, 22.
56 http://januarmagazine.com/fiction/lovingthisman.html
57 Prince, Loving, 23.
58 Prince, Loving, 213.
my feelings and my heart’s desires and just about everything! It contained my scream. It spoke my passion. It lit up the pain in my heart and replaced it with joy and hope and peace.”

That’s from a passage describing John Coltrane’s music in Loving This Man, but it readily captures art that connects deeply with the receiver of that art – which Prince’s writing in all its eloquence and authority, its authenticity and poetry certainly does.

One final point that should be made about Prince’s writing is that, like the women she writes, she doesn’t flinch from the truth. Writing on reinventing blackness, she opined, “...it is not necessary that we create myths to dispel the first myths. All that is necessary is that we decide to take the heart and the time to tell the recorded truth.” That said, Prince’s affection for her characters and home and the process of ‘Story’ makes this not the dry, impartial, unemotional truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Rather it is the truth allowed all of its well-earned nuance; its ironies and contradictions, its heartbreak and passion, its imperfections and strivings. It’s not the “sweet-sweet and soft-soft” lightness of fantasy but the fullness of complexity.

Prince once wrote that ‘...lives lived by example have great impact.” By writing not only plentiful but plenty-plenty of who we are beyond skin and bones and the condition that landed us here, by rebelling with polite but persistent resolve against the hegemony that would box us in, by writing with heart and hardiness, with poetry and compassion, by nudging writers like myself to trust what we intuit, Prince continues to be an example to Antiguan writers yet

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59 Prince, Loving, 122.
60 Prince, Being Black, 48.
61 Prince, Loving, 132.
62 Prince, Being Black, 142.
becoming. She seems to always have a million projects in the works. I look forward to reading them all.

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