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**EACLALS**

Benjamin Zephaniah’s poetry is reprinted from *Too Black, Too Strong* (Bloodaxe Books, Tarset, Northumberland, 2001) with Benjamin Zephaniah’s permission.

Front Cover: Agnes Hewitt (1857–1957), a Jamaican brown-skin gal. (Photograph courtesy of Beverley Noakes.)

*Kunapipi* refers to the Australian Aboriginal myth of the Rainbow Serpent which is the symbol of both creativity and regeneration. The journal’s emblem is to be found on an Aboriginal shield from the Roper River area of the Northern Territory of Australia.
EDITORIAL

But today I recapture the islands’
bright beaches: blue mist from the ocean
rolling into the fishermen’s houses.
By these shores I was born: sound of the sea
Came in at my window, life heaved and breathed in me then
With the strength of that turbulent soil
…

We who are born of the ocean can never seek solace
in rivers: their flowing runs on like our longing

Although born inland in Australia’s national capital, I spent a large part of my
childhood sleeping and waking to the sound of the sea. The road to the coast
from Canberra to Bateman’s Bay, Merry Beach, Bawley Point and Ulladulla,
was traversed every weekend and at the beginning and end of summer holidays
in a state of dreaming — in anticipation and longing for that turbulent soil.
Perhaps it was this sense of affinity with ocean that drew me to the language and
rhythms of Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s poetry. Here was the familiar made
exotic — the Caribbean never seen, but vividly imagined through the knowledge
of the other shore. I encountered Caribbean literature in the second year of my
undergraduate degree at the University of Queensland — George Lamming’s
Castle of My Skin, Jean Rhys’ Wide Sargasso Sea, V.S. Naipaul’s House for Mr.
Biswas, the poetry of Derek Walcott, Mervyn Morris and of course, once ‘Eddie’
now ‘Kamau’ Brathwaite.

I grew up with a love of English literature that described scenes never
encountered in Australia; the emerald green in my box of Derwent pencils that
might colour willow tree and verdant English pasture had no correspondence to
the yellow, olive and silver greens of drought and gum tree. I also grew up with
the poetry of Judith Wright. This was a poetry that spoke to my geography — the
‘lean, clean, hungry country’ of tree-cleared undulating hills silvered in the blaze
of summer heat. I understood as an Australian what Brathwaite meant when he
said, ‘The hurricane does not roar in pentameters’ — this was not an
understanding gained through knowledge of hurricane, but knowledge of
engishes, and a recognition of the imperative that a language speak its geography.

Hurricanes however were experienced only vicariously. They feature in Olive
Senior’s poetic remembrance of ‘Hurricane Story’ in Gardening in the Tropics:

Thatch blew about and whipped our faces,
Water seeped in, but on grandfather’s bed
We rode above it, everything holding
together. For my grandfather had learnt
from his father and his father before him
all the ways of orchestrating disaster.
It is with some sense of the surreal that this special issue on the Caribbean goes to press: while the images of hurricane Ivan's devastating path filled our television screens in Wollongong, the sub-editor formatted Elizabeth Walcott Hackshaw's essay on 'Cyclone Culture and the Paysage Pineaulien' and my request for the black and white sketches of Frank Collymore's 'Collybeasts' went unanswered as the Caribbean rode out the storm only to be confronted by another.

For the purposes of this special issue, 'the Caribbean' is understood to encompass English, French and Spanish Caribbean as well as the diasporic Caribbean — essays draw on the literature and culture of Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua, Dominica, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, Cuba, Colombia, Britain, Canada. Significantly, many speak to that sometimes silenced or denied history of the body and sexuality identified by Barry Higman in his review essay of Olive Senior's *Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage* as playing a central role in Caribbean culture, the inheritance of the body being 'the most basic of all concepts of heritage'. (244) But to speak of the body — its signs and enactments of desire — can place a writer in the destructive and malevolent path of a hurricane. Such is the recent history of Sharon Leach's story 'Lapdance', published in this issue. The story is written in a vernacular that is handled with an admirable competence — it is confronting but integrity lies in its authenticity; the theme of the story is neither unusual nor particularly confronting — at least that was my naïve assessment — until I was appraised of the context out of and into which the story was placed. A few days after accepting 'Lapdance' for publication I came across an article in the *Guardian Weekly* [Aug 13–19, 2004], captioned 'If you’re gay in Jamaica, you’re dead'. The piece begins with a reference to the murder of gay activist Brian Williamson in June of this year, and claims that, according to international human rights organisations, Jamaica is 'one of the most homophobic places in the world' in which gay relationships are necessarily largely conducted in secret for fear of abuse, torture and vigilante action. If, as Wole Soyinka claims, the man who remains silent in the face of tyranny dies, and to speak is also to die, then a safe place must be found in which man or woman can speak of the body and its desires without fear of reprisal. Ways of orchestrating disaster, ways of surviving and even celebrating are available to us — they lie with our willingness to tell our stories and to listen to the stories of others with sympathy.

Anne Collett

NOTES

The ‘Brown Skin Gal’ in Fact and Fiction

Around the figure of the ‘brown skin gal’ — the Caribbean woman of mixed race — float many associations, some flattering, some detrimental. Several of them are implicit in the innocent words of a popular song of the 1950s:

Brown skin gal, stay home and mind baby …
I’m going away in a sailing boat
And if I don’t come back
Stay home and mind baby.

This refrain takes certain things for granted: the brown girl’s sexual desirability, her volatility and inclination towards pleasure, and her possible fate as a deserted mother. It draws, no doubt unconsciously, upon aspects of two literary stereotypes: the ‘sensual mulatto’ and the ‘tragic mulatto’, both related to uncertainties about mulatto identity and assumptions about the role of the coloured woman in Caribbean social history.

This essay is primarily concerned with the fortunes of the ‘brown skin gal’ in Jamaica and the French Caribbean during the nineteenth and early- to mid-twentieth centuries, but it also touches on the development of Caribbean stereotypes of ‘brownness’ and makes some comparisons between their literary representation and social fact. The brown individual in the Caribbean arose from the sexual exploitation of black slave women by European men during the slave trade and the plantation era. The first mulattos were, like their mothers, primarily destined for the canefields, but as time went by (and further degrees of race mixing took place) lighter-skinned slaves tended to be favoured with less arduous work, often in the Great House. This granting of special privileges, perceived as unfair by less fortunate workers, together with the fact that female slaves were more likely than males to benefit from white favours, must have contributed to the contradictory pattern of admiration and resentment that is apparent in many early accounts of the brown woman.

The term ‘mulatto’ is itself an uncertain one, having gradually shifted from its original meaning of half-black, half-white. In Jamaica, it indicates ‘loosely, any person with light-brown or yellowish skin’, and is said to be ‘among negroes, not a favourable term’ (Dictionary of Jamaican English). In the French-speaking Caribbean, however, mulâtre is a social marker designating a light-skinned person usually of the middle class or, in the case of the grands mulâtres, of the upper class. This usage arose in Haiti, the country where mulattos first gained political and socio-economic power. Even before the Haitian Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century, free coloureds there had become a large, wealthy, and
sometimes landowner group. After the Revolution, mulattos took over the prestigious positions formerly occupied by the French. Hence the principal female deity of the vaudou religion, Ezili or Erzulie, powerful goddess of love and beauty, is portrayed by painters as a brown-skinned woman. She is, in fact, the archetypical ‘sensual mulatto’, discreetly sharing her favours between the gods of war and of the sea. With her taste for luxury and riches, she also represents the impossible social aspirations of the black peasantry, whose small gifts regularly adorn her shrines.

In other Caribbean countries where there was no parallel to the privileged mulatto class of Haiti, the brown population had to make its way through more difficult terrain. Interaction with dominant white society was limited, but initially women had more frequent contact with this group than men, and liaisons with white males helped to establish the ‘sensual mulatto’ stereotype. A brown woman could, if the opportunity arose, use her sexual appeal to a white man as a means of social advancement; but she was still uneasily situated between two extremes of the racial spectrum; and her relationships with black and brown men were likely to be fraught. Class and colour were long to remain tied together in colonial society, and derided as stateless hybrids. Black slaves on sugar estates reportedly taunted lighter-skinned slaves with being outsiders, lacking any national identity: ‘You brown man hab no country … only de neger and buckra hab country’ (Patterson 64). The stigma of hybridity, as a slur cast by blacks upon browns, has survived over centuries, and finds a modern echo in a satirical Jamaican poem (Patterson 64). The stigma of hybridity, as a slur cast by blacks upon browns, has survived over centuries, and finds a modern echo in a satirical Jamaican poem

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Beverley Ormerod Noakes

A weh yuh get dat deh head a hair

No nation gal is weh yuh
come from? My lawd!
A weh yuh get dat deh head a hair

My mother was a family affliction. We learnt early that to be white was desirable and to be black a misfortune. My mother considered it a feather in her cap that she had married a ‘good brown man’ and not someone darker or of the same colouring as herself, rather as another woman might applaud herself on managing to catch a rich husband... All around me there was evidence that colour and class were linked: black people were mostly poor and uneducated, the people of property and social and professional standing were mostly white or light-skinned. (Gladwell 23–24)

Colour, though to be assessed alongside education, money and respectability, was an inescapable gauge of status. As mixed-race people set about negotiating social barriers, they were often ridiculed for their perceived desire to ape white society, and derided as stateless hybrids. Black slaves on sugar estates reportedly taunted lighter-skinned slaves with being outsiders, lacking any national identity: ‘You brown man hab no country … only de neger and buckra hab country’ (Patterson 64). The stigma of hybridity, as a slur cast by blacks upon browns, has survived over centuries, and finds a modern echo in a satirical Jamaican poem where the ‘brown skin gal’ has become a ‘no nation gal’:

No nation gal is weh yuh
come from? My lawd!
A weh yuh get dat deh head a hair
British ladies, misled by her ‘somewhat duskier skin’, had failed to recognise Seacole as an independent healer during the Crimean War, she remained piqued that the woman from Jamaica’ (Black 161). Although she succeeded in establishing herself as a Scot, who was known, when she nursed cholera patients in Cuba, as ‘the yellow male, tending to shift the blame for his sexual behaviour to his coloured partner, sought justification in the myth of the promiscuous African female with her stereotype. Furthermore, the choice of an extramarital liaison with a white man often operated against the brown-skinned woman, maintaining her social and moral inferiority in white eyes as well as dividing her interests from those of the brown male.

Yet, driven by a like quest for upward social mobility, many coloured persons of both sexes acquiesced in white colonial society’s identification of blackness with ‘low class’ and cultural inferiority, and were united in their desire not to be identified with their African slave ancestors. This attitude may be detected in the indignation with which Mary Seacole, writing in the 1850s, described the rejection of her offer to join Florence Nightingale’s nurses in the Crimea. Nowadays sometimes referred to as ‘the black Florence Nightingale’, Mary Seacole was in fact a free coloured woman, the daughter of a Jamaican and a Scot, who was known, when she nursed cholera patients in Cuba, as ‘the yellow woman from Jamaica’ (Black 161). Although she succeeded in establishing herself as an independent healer during the Crimean War, she remained piqued that the British ladies, misled by her ‘somewhat dusker skin’, had failed to recognise
The negative associations of blackness were maintained not only by white colonial attitudes but via the printed word. In the 1940s, a brown schoolgirl was shocked to discover that the Encyclopaedia Britannica in her Jamaican school library asserted the inferiority of the negro, attributing his ‘arrest or even deterioration in mental development’ to his obsession with ‘sexual matters’; he was also depicted as vain, childlike, and capable of atrocities ‘but often exhibiting in the capacity of servant a dog-like fidelity’. The schoolgirl knew that what she had read was not supported by the evidence around her, but still ‘felt condemned’: ‘it became terribly important to me to demonstrate to myself and to other people that this was not true’ (Gladwell 53–54). Maryse Conde, a Guadeloupean novelist, shows how the educated black middle class in the Caribbean was in its turn affected by these negative stereotypes. She describes her family’s social group in the years just after World War II as a closed circle, its members confined in a self-protective state of cultural retreat, afraid of contamination from a variety of sources:

Of course we mustn’t speak to lower-class black people in the street. We mustn’t associate with mulattos because they were white people’s bastards. We mustn’t associate with white people, naturally. They were the enemy. We lived in isolation, and we showed a kind of scorn for everything that wasn’t us, a kind of arrogance which was one of my parents’ dominant features. (Condé 11)

With mulattos, resentment of European prejudice could coexist with a horror of things African and a tendency to give primacy to European values. Léon Damas was born into the French Guyanese brown bourgeoisie but radically dissociated himself from this class. In Pigments (1937), the first literary text of the Negritude movement, he satirises the social attitudes prevalent in his childhood through the figure of a brown mother nagging her son to observe French table manners, speak proper French, and imitate French culture:

I heard you skipped your vi-o-lin lesson again
A banjo
You say a banjo
You actually say a banjo
No sir
No banjos or guitars in this house
Mulattos don’t do that —
Leave that to the Negros. (Damas 36)

The interplay of class and colour in the Caribbean underpins the ‘sensual mulatto’ stereotype, as it later underpins the ‘tragic mulatto’ stereotype in literature. The romanticising of the mulatto girl chiefly occurs in the writing of middle-class males, who began by promoting an exotic vision of the coloured woman that hinted at the passionate African while carefully including European
traits. An example of this genre is the Jamaican novel *Psyche*, where the heroine is the offspring of a part-African, part-Arab slave mother and a white planter. She is beautiful, rich and clever, and her Africanness is discreetly minimised: ‘her nose was not aquiline like her mother’s, but straight with sensitive nostrils, as her father’s had been…. The lips were full, but not in the least sensual’ (deLisser 109–110). Exoticism could thus be enhanced by variations in skin shade and genetic composition. Early British observers had been fascinated by the diversity of complexion and physical features among mixed-race slaves, an interest evident in now outdated terms such as sambo, quadroon, octoroon or mustee. Similar French colonial terms included the griffe (a mulatto/black combination), the sacatra (a more European type) and the marabout (a ‘yellow’ girl). Some of these names were revived in early twentieth-century Haiti by nationalist poets who, in reaction against the racism of U.S. occupation forces, insisted on the beauty of the coloured woman and endowed her with succulent sensuality:

> Marabout of my heart with breasts like tangerines,  
> You taste better to me than crab-filled aubergines,  
> You are the tripe flavouring my callaloo,  
> The dumpling in my peas, my herb tea too… (Roumer 135)

Most of these racial definitions are no longer current in the francophone Caribbean, or at least seem mainly confined to a feminine application. Where both genders are commonly invoked, it is interesting that the masculine form is often pejorative (perhaps an echo of the white colonial prejudice against mulatto males), while the feminine is flattering. This is the case with the term *chabin*, for instance. The protagonist of a St Lucian narrative poem is dismissively presented as:

> a rusty head sailor with sea-green eyes  
> that they nickname Shabine, the patois for any red nigger (Walcott 4)

The Jamaican equivalent, ‘red’ (‘the combination of a light or yellowish skin with crinkly hair or other negro features’) is described in the *Dictionary of Jamaican English* as ‘often in derogatory use by negroes’. A Martinician of mixed Chinese/brown parentage recalls the typical insults hurled at him in his childhood: ‘You damn ugly little chabin! … freckled like a turkey! … spotted like a ripe banana! … Chabin is a bad race that the good Lord should never have put on the earth!’ (Confiant 1993 41). But in French Caribbean society, the *chabine* with her golden skin, kinky blond hair and light eyes is regarded as a sexual prize. Envied for her beauty, she is also assumed to be hot stuff in bed: the *Dictionnaire des expressions du créole guadeloupéen* illustrates the word *chabine* by the local saying *Yo di chabin ka móde zòréy* (‘They say chabine girls bite your ears’). A Guadeloupian woman novelist, maliciously describing a blatantly erotic display in a nightclub, attributes it to this stock figure of sensuality: ‘Her superb golden
One Jamaican brown woman bluntly refuses to be stereotyped in this fashion: to all you, white and black who eroticize mi light brown skin, who see me as different but never angry, who checking fi a hot pussy under dat deb skin, who see me as politically non-threatening because me blackness nuh apparent as real back off, mi tyad to dem all who define me as it suit dem interest, as anodda black sistah in solidarity, as a lover, or as a light skin ooman who cyaan be trusted tru mi have no race fi defend mi seh, kirot, define unnu self as a mix race gal ah me fi say who mi is. (Martin 158)

The ‘sensual mulatto’ is sometimes combined with the ‘tragic mulatto’ in romances about the mixed-race woman abandoned by a European lover. The semi-autobiographical novel Je suis martiniquaise (possibly ghost-written in part by a French lover [Arnold 148–66]) portrays a naïve brown-skinned girl growing up in Martinique just before World War II. She becomes the mistress of a white naval officer who, as in the ‘Brown Skin Gal’ song, sails away, abandoning her and her baby. Despite this rejection she still admires her lover, is proud of her fair-skinned child, and hopes to marry a Frenchman some day even though she fears that ‘a coloured woman is never quite respectable in the eyes of a white’ (Capécia 202). Frantz Fanon, the black Martinican psychiatrist and militant, was outraged by this apparently uncritical presentation of a racially alienated heroine, which he took as evidence of the persistence of the plantation colour hierarchy in Caribbean society: ‘What Mayotte wants is a kind of
lactification…. Whiten the race, save the race…. It is always essential to avoid falling back into the pit of niggerhood, and every woman in the Antilles, whether in a casual flirtation or in a serious affair, is determined to select the least black of the men’ (Fanon 47).

Racial alienation and/or class conflict are key factors in more subtle fiction about ‘tragic mulatto’. From Guadeloupe comes one intense exploration of mulatto neurosis in the novel Cajou, where the protagonist, a successful research scientist in Paris, is unable to accept her lack of resemblance to her white mother. Her perception of her ‘double’ self as physically ugly and undesirable (the very antithesis of the ‘sensual mulatto’) leads to a conviction of intellectual and moral unworthiness that no objective evidence can unseat. She is consumed by ‘a raging desire to be the Other, and also by hatred and the need to be judged by that Other’ (Lacroix 30). Avoiding mirrors, rejecting reassurance, seeking the shadows, she finally escapes herself through suicide. Although there are echoes of romanticism in Cajou with its solitary, misunderstood heroine, the novel’s dispassionate first-person narration lends it the tone of a case study. Cajou’s insecurity is connected with the ‘hybridity’ stigma and the ‘no nation’ status traditionally attributed to the mulatto: ‘For the brown man aspires to become white, and loathes anyone who reminds him of where he came from’ (Winkler 287).

However, in another novel exploring the intersection of sex, colour and class, the ‘tragic mulatto’ does not display this type of fatal passivity. The protagonist of The Faces of Love is a Jamaican journalist, Rachel Ascom, a woman of mixed black and German ancestry, unsentimentally portrayed as ‘coarsely handsome’, with the light grey-green eyes of a chabine but with dull brown hair and mahogany skin. An ambitious professional, she is barred from top promotion by her colour and class origins. Like the stereotypical ‘sensual mulatto’ she is willing to use sex to achieve social goals. Her hard, predatory nature is her chief weapon against the lighter-skinned middle class, and her displays of wealth are calculated moves in her pursuit of status: ‘I am nothing, you see. I came from nothing and none of you people will ever forget that when I make a mistake. Everything I become, I’ve got to show. That’s why I buy such good clothes’ (Hearne 59). Her tragedy arises from external circumstance, not from personal angst about her colour; she differs from the stereotypical ‘traitic mulatto’ in that she does not desire whiteness in itself, but rather the power and freedom that have been the traditional attributes of whiteness in Caribbean history. She sets out to claim social territory long denied to brown women, who once could hope only to be ‘housekeepers’, later perhaps dressmakers, hotel-keepers, primary school teachers, or owners of a small business (Senior 106); but remaining as Rachel refuses to remain — generally subordinate to men in public life. Dynamic where Cajou is despairing, Rachel’s attitude to life is still a response to the persistence of stereotypes linking the brown woman with social inferiority and dubious respectability.
Unstable, ambitious, sensual, insecure, stranded between white and black identities … would the ‘brown skin gals’ in my own family tree have recognised themselves in any of these stereotypes? Of my four brown great-grandmothers, two were mulatto women from the Jamaican countryside. What can one read into their lives, and those of their siblings or descendants? Their histories offer a piquant contrast in social evolution. One family fits into the pattern of mulatto upward social mobility. The great-grandmother from the northwest hills of Jamaica, child of a black mother and an English father, married a ‘red’ man, possibly descended from German peasant settlers in the area. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, she and her husband kept a shop; its small dark interior smelling of salt fish and old bullas must have held few charms for their offspring, who devoted much energy into escaping their place of origin. Marriage was one way for girls to achieve this. However, the brown girl could not necessarily find a partner in her own social circle, for if she was interested in raising her social status by finding a fairer-skinned spouse, so was the brown man. A black partner in those days would not achieve this goal and a white one might be out of reach. The respectable, educated brown spinster was a frequent figure in the living rooms of early twentieth-century Jamaica, and one of my great-aunts was among them; but her female siblings all took other paths. Two light-skinned sisters married ‘up’ skin-wise; their children became urban browns or ‘Jamaica whites’ and some even disappeared into white America. A darker-skinned sister’s descendants reached middle-class status one generation later. The youngest and brownest girl headed for New York, where she passed as a ‘Mexican’ and lived upward social mobility. The great-grandmother from the northwest hills of Jamaica, child of a black mother and an English father, married a ‘red’ man, possibly descended from German peasant settlers in the area. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, she and her husband kept a shop; its small dark interior smelling of salt fish and old bullas must have held few charms for their offspring, who devoted much energy into escaping their place of origin. Marriage was one way for girls to achieve this. However, the brown girl could not necessarily find a partner in her own social circle, for if she was interested in raising her social status by finding a fairer-skinned spouse, so was the brown man. A black partner in those days would not achieve this goal and a white one might be out of reach. The respectable, educated brown spinster was a frequent figure in the living rooms of early twentieth-century Jamaica, and one of my great-aunts was among them; but her female siblings all took other paths. Two light-skinned sisters married ‘up’ skin-wise; their children became urban browns or ‘Jamaica whites’ and some even disappeared into white America. A darker-skinned sister’s descendants reached middle-class status one generation later. The youngest and brownest girl headed for New York, where she passed as a ‘Mexican’ and lived an independent life, returning to Jamaica in old age to annoy her sisters with her often-expressed preference for the superior excitements of Abroad. For the women of this family, brown skin seems to have been regarded not as tragic hybridity but more in the light of a potential social obstacle which was a challenge to negotiate. And sensuality? The woman I knew best, my grandmother, had left home at 15 to become a postmistress at the other end of the island, and married in her twenties. How did she live in the years before she met her country doctor? A grave, self-educated woman with a passion for Victorian poetry, Anglican hymns and British radio serials, my grandmother’s manner did not encourage conjectures about her romantic past.

In that respect, the family tree of my other mulatto great-grandmother, born on a coffee property in southwest Jamaica, looks more promising. Her parents were an unusual couple for the middle of the nineteenth century: an English girl had married a skilled black tradesman on her father’s estate. The relationships of their six daughters with the opposite sex in a way reflect the decline in prosperity of the estate: the two older girls making middle-class marriages, the younger ones contracting informal unions (sometimes of a serial nature) with white, brown and black men in the district. Their descendants illustrate both downward and upward social mobility, represented today in the black peasantry of southern
The 'Brown Skin Gal' in Fact and Fiction

Jamaica as well as in the dark and light brown, working and middle classes of Kingston. My great-grandmother, who lived to be a centenarian, was a devout churchgoer and an energetic manager who looked after what remained of the property, brought up a son and five grandchildren single-handed, and later presided vigorously over batches of great-grandchildren sent for the school holidays. Her apparently unmarried status was a mystery that no Jamaican child six decades ago would have dared to ask about. Even when later confirmed, it never seemed quite credible, for although the family tree with its absence of male names is suggestive of a whole flotilla of sensual mulatto girls, it is belied by the family photo album that shows stiff-backed old ladies in long black skirts, their expressions forbidding, their hair flattened by hairnets and their broad-brimmed hats (to save their complexions) severely skewered with giant hatpins. These patently respectable old ladies were the 'fact' that we knew for certain: those wild brown skin gals were surely the 'fiction'.

If the respectability of old age masked their past sensuality, these 'brown skin gals' were also reticent with younger generations about their attitude towards their own racial identity. Growing up on a country property which had employed slave labour within their parents' lifetime, some of them, though not all, subscribed to the racial and social prejudices which were common in the nineteenth century. They never visualised an era in which colour and class might no longer be decisive factors in the relationships of their descendants, but did they experience that confusion about 'hybridity', or sense of marginality, that is so often portrayed in literature? One historian of the free coloureds suggests that, on the contrary, brown people developed a conscious sense of a distinct identity — different from that of blacks or whites — fuelled by the realisation that the Caribbean was their native region and they had nowhere else to go. They compensated for their exclusion from white society by vigorously pursuing their own civil rights and privileges (Sio 154). The world of fiction is the province of the 'tragic mulatto', exclusion from white society by vigorously pursuing their own civil rights and privileges (Sio 154). The world of fact tends to focus on adaptation and survival, in the pursuit of which laughter is an important resource. As the Afro-Indian "dougla" in another Caribbean song replies to those who would prefer a hybrid-free society:

You can send the Indians to India, And the Negroes back to Africa, But will somebody please tell me, Where they sending me, poor me? I'm neither one nor the other — Six of one, half a dozen of the other, If they serious 'bout sending back people in tru — They're going to have to split me in two. (Nettleford 10)
NOTES
All translations from French texts are my own.

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OLIVE SENIOR

WOODPECKER

Women were created from yellow-skin plum trees transformed by the action of the woodpecker — Amerindian myth.

O Miss Yellow-skin Plum, Miss Prune-face, Miss Disdainful One. Rejecting all suitors. Still waiting for that magnificent descent of Woodpeckers!

But times have changed, nuh? So wait on for the eternally absent, the incomparably selfish one. Or heed Woodpecker’s song, that barb-tipped tongue:

Plum-tree woman, O my dumb one. Your secret still sweet as when locked up tight. My pecker’s eternal drumming I cannot disguise, My need so intense, my greed so unsatisfied. Perversity my preference now: dead-wood to wooden bride.

No virgins anymore anywhere.

Woodpecker doesn’t care.

He’s got what he wanted: His bright red hair.

O Miss Yellow-skin Plum, Miss Prune-face, Miss Disdainful One, Miss Wait-a-Bit, You hear that? You’d better start transforming yourself.
The First House

Homeless, Deminan and his brothers orphaned and wandering forefathers blew hither and yon like Winds of the Four Quarters until Turtle Woman stopped them in their tracks: the first mating. Said: I am ready for nesting. Said: Build me a house. Untrained, but undaunted (in the way of such heroes) they each took a corner of the world, stood like pillars to anchor it and strained and puffed to lift high the roof of sky, which billowed out and in (they had a devil of a time controlling it) until it righted itself and domed into the model of Turtle Woman’s shell. And so we were born in the House of our Great Mother, our crabbed and comforting genitor, who still bears the world on her back.
TAINO GENESIS

We the people of Cacibajagua emerged from the cave the moment Sun’s longest leg splintered the horizon. All went well except that the sentry posted at the entrance at his first sight of Sun blinked. Unwary sentinels cannot go unpunished. With his eyes eclipsed who knows what could have slipped through his grasp? So our maker turned him into stone for his tardiness and there he stands still: Macoael — He-of-the-insomniac-eyes, our petrified eternal guardian. We filed out expectantly, each one trying not to cough and break the spell as Sun’s eye cracked open like guinep shell and released us. We emerged dressed in our naked best, not yet possessed of the feathers and beads or the red anotto paint, the gift of Sun Father, colour of worship and warrior, of Hummingbird’s iridescence. We would come into the world stained black with our sacred juice, guinep, colour of difficult passage and tumescence. We would bleach in the sun for nine days; then to the water to gather the sacred herb digo, for the washing to remove the last traces of our birth passage. Guinep stain running like rain till we reached again bare skin, our palette ready for our first painting. Oh! Before inscribing our names we should mention that there was another cave, that of Amayauna — the others, the people who do not matter (to our story). We were the Taino, the ones gifted with guinep or jagua. With sacred bixa: the herb anatto. The ones shelled out by Sun Father.
Mothers will understand this: The first ones I sent into the world did alright, turned out to be human. But this lot! Okay, perhaps I spoil them. Bearing them now not solitary and naked like the first but many together, gift-wrapped in silky down and swaddling clothes of papery layer. I’ve overdone it, perhaps, in the way of security and comfort. For can I get them to leave? Even when mature they continue to cling for dear life to me and — worse — to each other. Unwrapped, without the light of day, they know they are useless but are still so shy, they are prepared to die — together. To live, they must be forcibly undressed and separated. That’s where my human children come in. Skilled at brutality, they will cheerfully rip these children from me, strip off their clothing, pull them apart. Because I know it’s for their own good. I happily watch as each little one pops out like a pearl. Ivory. Golden. Milky. Not all will stay that way. Some will be dried, popped, parched, ground to be drunk or eaten. But I smile even as I am myself cut down as spent and useless, for I know enough of my progeny will be saved to be planted and nurtured. Become, in their turn, mothers proudly displaying their clinging children in their green array. The little ones still attached to their mother, still clinging to one another; undercover, in the dark. Scared of the single life. Yet dying for exposure. To grow up. To ripen the germ of Sun Father.
In this essay, I will consider the ways in which children — as the foci of race, class and gender specific processes in the family, as objects of regulation and enactment — reveal as operative in Jamaican society, and what modes of social critique they enact.

Critical appraisals of Olive Senior’s fiction seldom fail to highlight its preoccupation with childhood as a powerful trope through which to express the personal and social legacies of Jamaica’s colonial history. This is to be expected given that over two-thirds of the stories in her three published collections, *Summer Lightning* (1986), *Arrival of the Snake-Woman* (1989) and *Discerner of Hearts* (1995), focus on a child’s experience or perspective, or both, with a significant number of these being told, in whole or in part, by child narrators. Senior’s particular interest in the vicissitudes of childhood is most readily interpreted in terms of identity politics. Scholars argue, for example, that her evocative portraits of marginalised and displaced children exemplify the alienated subjects of creolisation (see Barratt 270–73; Patteson 19–21); that her child characters typically face crises of identification that impel choices between different adult role models representing the apparently separate worlds of Jamaica’s middle-class and folk cultures (Thieme 90–93); or that her fiction participates in a more broadly practised, Caribbean literary model in which the ‘omnipresence of the child narrator or protagonist points to the difficulties of establishing one’s own voice’ (Misrahi-Barak 71). Autobiographical aspects of Senior’s writing are often referenced in support of this identity motif as critics note rough parallels between the author’s Jamaican girlhood and her (female) characters’ specific situations. These interpretive paradigms are undoubtedly useful, not only because they illuminate what Senior herself has described in interviews as a key issue in her work — ‘the struggle of individuals to affirm themselves’, to create a sense of self amid ‘chaotic personal and social history’ (1988 482) — but also because they connect her fiction to an important body of Caribbean writing which has examined childhood experience as part of the imperative of postcolonial self-definition. I wonder, however, if the identity politics approach, with its ultimate referent being the adult subject who develops — or will develop — from the child depicted, obscures a more complex picture of what Senior’s representations of children/childhood potentially do; what kinds of symbolic management they reveal as operative in Jamaican society, and what modes of social critique they enact.

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development in school, as targets of religious indoctrination, as sites of social and sexual anxiety, and as symbols of the future and what is at stake in ongoing negotiations of cultural (rather than individual) identity — are pivotal in structuring the communities that Senior sketches. In skewing the focus away from representations of individual subjectivity, I am inspired by Senior’s stated sense of childhood as a time/space for making connections to a much larger system: ‘The kind of existence I lived as a child also made me aware that … individual life was infinitesimally small in a larger and incomprehensible universe, in the pull and push of history’ (1988 482). That larger context is recorded in clinical detail in Working Miracles (1991), Senior’s sociological survey of women’s lives in the English-speaking Caribbean, whereas her stories proffer a deliberately partial (in the sense of incomplete and biased) vision of Jamaican culture. My reading of these texts takes a lead from an article by Alison Donnell that explores the interface between the material bodies and cultural practices imaged in Senior’s fiction. Donnell is somewhat wary of analytical models that stress a celebratory rhetoric of plural, provisional, syncretic identities in constructing notions of Caribbeanness. She argues that Senior’s achievement is to show the cultural tensions and values which ‘remain unresolved’ at the level of the body ‘in theories of creolisation and hybridity’ (1996 40). This critical focus on corporeality has important implications for a discussion of childhood and the child-subject, which are categories almost always marked by some notion of physical or behavioural difference from an adult norm. As I will suggest, it is through the body of the child as a particularly malleable subject-in-formation that so many forms of social desire are tactfully negotiated. Senior’s child-centred stories collectively register and critique these negotiations while simultaneously raising questions about (Western) models of development, and how they might relate to narrativity itself in postcolonial contexts.

Some working definitions and a brief sense of the theoretical concepts underpinning my argument are necessary at this point. Following Jo-Ann Wallace, I treat ‘the child’ as a mobile subject-position rather than an identity determined by biological (im)maturity (1995 286). In working towards a theory of the child-subject Wallace postulates that the ‘category of “the child” remains caught in tension between what one might call the empty and the full, between lack (of personality, attributes, history) and excess (full natural presence’) (1995 291). Such a subject-position has been historically useful to a range of hegemonic discourses — evolutionary theory, humanism, rationalism and universalism, to name just a few — imbricated in Western imperial modernity. This is not to discount the materiality of real children, but to acknowledge the ideological aspects of the concept itself. It is important to note, in this respect, that the child as conceived in European post-enlightenment thought ‘has never been a subject-position available to all, or even most, children [though] it has frequently been a subject-position imposed upon colonized adults’ (Wallace 1995 286). The rhetoric of development comes into play here, with futurity being one of the key markers
of childhood’s value since the child is assumed to have the potential for progressive change — and to express that change in bodily ways. Wallace’s work, which cannot be adequately summarised here, includes research into the ways in which historical representations of childhood — and particular types of (unruly) children — in anthropology, philosophy and British literature were linked to imperialism through mid-Victorian discourses of development. With reference to widely-disseminated treatises on education and to texts used in the British school system, she demonstrates that ‘the child’ was an immensely flexible category, and one ‘which could be deployed to justify both the paternalistic subjection of women and working men at home and a specifically colonialist expansion abroad’ (1992 66). This kind of discursive freight, epitomised in Rousseau’s equation of the child with the ‘noble primitive’, forms part of the broad context in which Olive Senior’s fiction has been written and circulated. Working against colonial and neo-imperial concepts of childhood, her stories convey its ideological parameters in particular places at specific times. Ultimately, this insistence on specificity unsettles humanist conceptions of the child while also illuminating some of the processes by which this highly semiotised figure has been produced as transhistorical.

On reading Senior’s work, we are instantly made aware of the symbolic value attached to children in Jamaican culture and how this shapes gender norms and expectations. Stories such as ‘Discerner of Hearts’ (1995), ‘Zig-Zag’ (1995) and ‘Arrival of the Snake-Woman’ illustrate that fathering a child operates as one marker of ‘reputation’ (or social recognition) among men and that child-bearing adds significantly to a woman’s ascribed worth and status, even to the extent that it can sometimes mitigate the shame of teenage pregnancy. By registering the values attached to procreation, Senior shows how children, as assets, are harnessed in the instrumental management of women and their containment within roles that stress their biological function as mothers. This comes through most strongly in the author’s exposé of the intense social anxieties surrounding women who have no biological offspring. Such women, categorised as ‘mules’ and misfits by the gossips, are denied a space in the imagined community unless they take in relatives, orphans or ‘outside’ children to raise as their own. The stigma of childlessness cuts across social categories, though responses are shown to differ according to class affiliations. The (would-be) upper-class Mrs DaSilva in ‘Lily, Lily’ (1989) manages to mask her infertility by feigning pregnancy as part of an elaborate fiction by which she claims her niece, Lily, as her own child. While the townspeople never learn the truth about the child’s parentage, there remains a collective whirl of suspicion surrounding Mrs DaSilva, whose entrée into motherhood comes a little too late to normalise her maternal role. By contrast, Miss Rilla in ‘Ballad’ (1986a) chooses to accept her situation, reasoning that God wills her childlessness because ‘there is too much suffering children in the world already’ (1986a 113); yet, she cannot avoid being marginalised by the narrow-minded community in which she lives. Without any children or class
capital, she becomes the butt of malicious gossip that paints her as scandalous, sexually predatory and amoral, and she is easily cast as the scapegoat when one of her lovers, a well-liked young man, murders his rival with a machete. While Senior clearly has more sympathy for Miss Rilla than for Mrs DaSilva, both stories take pains to demonstrate that the valorisation of child-bearing has potentially deleterious effects on women because it sets up hierarchical relations between women and men, and among women themselves. Each story also presents female role models whose worth is not tied to child-bearing per se. Lily’s biological mother, the elder Lily, chooses not to reclaim her daughter when the opportunity arises but rather remains the worldly, unmarried ‘aunt’ — a suspiciously independent woman in Mr DaSilva’s eyes — who safeguards the child’s welfare; and Miss Rilla, despite her notoriety, emerges as a more caring ‘parent’ for the child narrator, Lenora, than either her biological mother or her stepmother, MejMe.

Many of Senior’s stories also suggest the ways in which children function as community capital in a narrative of futurity and modernisation in which the abstract idea of a child’s potentiality, consistently framed as normative (Castañeda 4), constitutes his/her premium value. In ‘Arrival of the Snake-Woman’ (1989), Biya, first-born child of the ‘exotic’ outsider, Miss Coolie, becomes a ‘natural’ conduit for change/progress and the mechanism by which his Indian mother can be (partly) integrated into the Afro-Caribbean community. As soon as Biya is born, the villagers begin to draw the so-called ‘snake-woman’ into their communal life in subtle but significant ways and their prejudices against her soften even further after Parson Bedlow, the colonial missionary, refuses the boy’s desperately needed medical aid because he has not been baptised. This specific incident causes a moral crisis among the village’s largely Christian population because Biya’s inherent value as a child directly contradicts his ascribed status, in the parson’s moral schema, as an expendable ‘heathen’. Parson Bedlow’s failure to recognise the symbolic currency of childhood in this instance proves to be his undoing as it precipitates his loss of authority among his parishioners and sets in motion their increasing secularisation. Much later, Biya’s worth as a community asset is affirmed when he becomes a lawyer and secures land titles for the villagers historically disenfranchised by the colonial system. By comparison, Ishmael, the story’s narrator, is haunted by his own failure to return the investment that his people made in him as a child by supporting his education and encouraging his aspirations towards a professional career. The teleological model of the child-subject in this text meshes with a narrative about cultural development, though the narrator remains ambivalent in his assessment of the benefits that modernisation has brought to his natal community, as indicated by the elegiac tone of his reminiscences.

Senior’s portraits of children positioned as material (and political) investments within societies on the cusp of change illustrate Sharon Stephens’s point that the
child-subject frequently ‘stand[s] at the crossroads of divergent cultural projects’ (23). In ‘The Two Grandmothers’ (1989), for instance, the conflicting imperatives for Caribbean communities to modernise (read Westernise) and maintain traditional practices are played out across the body of the unnamed girl narrator whose behaviour, speech, interests, choice of clothing and self-image progressively register the power of American hegemony. In a different but related context, Sadie, the main child character in ‘Zig-Zag’, functions as a highly charged site for the inscription of contesting value systems represented by her (not quite) white mother and her black nanny, Dertime. At the end of the story, Sadie’s recurring ‘black and white’ dream, in which she leaves her mother and tries to follow Dertime but becomes bogged in water hyacinths with their ‘invasive rootstalk and floating bladder-like stems’ (1995 218), crystallises a broader social conflict between the submerged energies of black culture and the privileges of whiteness.

If ‘Zig-Zag’ and ‘The Two Grandmothers’ dramatise the successful socialisation of the child-subject, they also portray relationships that suggest the radical instability of family structures conceived in the colonial mould. This characteristic is typical of Senior’s oeuvre, which encompasses numerous stories featuring children being reared by nannies, grandmothers, stepmothers, distant relatives, or admired adults while the biological mother (and/or father) is confined to the margins of the narrative or registered only as an absence. Such texts accurately depict the widespread child-shifting practices in the Caribbean region (see Senior 1991 12-18) but they aim to achieve more than simply a realist reflection. The shifted child (or outside child) does not merely present as an especially vulnerable figure in Senior’s fiction but also, in many cases, as a subject empowered to make or deny bonds with specific adults. Lenora in ‘Ballad’, Bekkha in ‘Do Angels Wear Brassieres?’ (1986a) and the boy protagonist in ‘Summer Lightning’ (1986a) are cases in point. What the trope of the shifted child does in these stories is show a family constituted more by a process of affiliation than filiation. This is an important concept in ideological terms since it challenges the primacy of the nuclear family as the structural unit in homogenised models of a culture’s social matrix. In turn, recognition of affiliative family structures prompts us to interpret child dispersal in Senior’s work as more than simply an index of colonial alienation.

Senior’s focus on the child’s experience within the family, however that social entity is constituted, also opens a window on the intricate connections between class mobility in the Caribbean and racial traits such as skin pigmentation and hair texture. Donnell delivers a comprehensive analysis of these connections, arguing that in the racist societies depicted, ‘the body as assumed racial artefact remains the priority marker through which identities are delineated’ (1996 41). What she neglects to consider is the astonishing purchase of childhood itself as a site for the projection (and frustration) of racial desire — the desire to become white, to resemble what Sylvia Wynter terms ‘the physiognomic other’.
In numerous Senior stories, the (girl) child is the repository of the mother’s hope to ‘raise colour’ and/or her fear of ‘turning down’. ‘Bright Thursdays’ (1986a) best illustrates the ways in which racial desire can be harnessed to the processual nature of the child-subject’s embodiment, and its imaginative potency as a means of change (see Castañeda 9). The racially mixed Laura, whose straight hair, soft skin and aquiline nose signal incipient whiteness to her mother, is carefully groomed from early childhood to enter the upper-class world of her paternal grandparents. To persuade them to adopt the child, her mother sends a photo designed to emphasise Laura’s rightful place in the racial/social hierarchy: The child was dressed in a frilly white dress trimmed with ribbons, much too long for her age. She wore long white nylon socks and white T-strap shoes. Her hair was done in perfect drop curls, with a part to the side and two front curls caught up with a large white bow. In the photograph, she stood quite straight with her feet together and her right hand stiffly bent to touch an artificial rose in a vase on a rattan table beside her. (1986a 42)

As Donnell argues, this image presents a body ‘constructed as a reflection of whiteness and as a cipher for eurocentric femininity’ (1996 43); yet Miss Christie, Laura’s grandmother, is scarcely fooled by the substitute identity packaged in the photograph. Rather, she seizes on the image of childhood, with its apparently infinite malleability, taking Laura into her home because she sees the child as ‘a lump of clay which held every promise of being moulded into something satisfactory’ (1986a 44).

The malleability of the child-subject equally undergirds fears that she/he is particularly susceptible to racial taint. In ‘Zig-Zag’, Senior communicates the pervasive anxiety that shadows middle/upper-class children whose observable physical features betray markers of blackness. Of the two sisters, Sadie is identified by her family as the one likely to ‘turn down’ since her hair is not straight like Muffet’s and her skin is a shade darker. Having internalised this anxiety herself, Sadie is initially ambivalent about her attachment to the servant’s daughter, Manuela, and then appalled by her own behaviour when she slaps Manuela for making fun of her ‘bad’ hair. Significantly, no adult is present to admonish Sadie for her actions at this climactic moment in the story; the reprimand comes from her sister and is all the more humiliating for that:

’Sadie! You should be ashamed of yourself’, she hissed. ‘Behaving so common. Behaving like a marketwoman. Letting this little black girl drag you down. As if you don’t know any better. You’re just as bad as she is.’

Sadie dropped her eyes and felt shame shoot right through her down to her toes. Down to her very footbottom. Muffet had said it. Said it was Manuela bringing out the badness in her. Bringing out the badness and causing her to act like cuffee. Like bungo. Like quashie. Like nayga. Like bongoyo gaga. Causing her to turn down. She stood up straight and cut her eye at that Manuela and vowed she would never, ever speak to her again. (1995 213)
This scene suggests very powerfully the ways in which children are interpellated by the racial ideologies of their society and, in turn, how they perpetuate its prejudices. Like Laura in ‘Bright Thursdays’, all three girls in ‘Zig-Zag’ understand the politics of the racial hierarchy, even if they are not always certain of their place within it. Both stories reveal that the child-subject functions as a potential site of evolving whiteness — and repressed blackness — precisely because it is always already embedded in a narrative of development, in this case from black origins to a whiter future. Such a trajectory exemplifies Wallace’s theoretical formulation of the child in Western discourse as both ‘the subject to come’ (and therefore not yet fully agential) and ‘the subject before now’, the primitive in need of reform (1995 297–98). Senior has many other ways of critiquing this desire for whiteness. One potent technique is to have an uncomprehending child narrator describe, in minute detail, the bodily rituals to which she is subjected to lighten her skin colour or straighten her natty hair. When these rituals fail, as they generally do, the stories remind us that theories about hybridity, as an enabling model for personal and cultural identity in the Caribbean, often ‘neglect the lived reality of certain individuals for whom subject positions are not voluntarily assumed but assigned by nature of their perceived bodily difference’ (Donnell 1996 47). Senior’s focus on the child-subject heightens awareness of this theoretical problem as children are less adept at moving between subject positions and more vulnerable to ascription by others.

In Senior’s fictional world, adult efforts to erase physical signifiers of blackness in their children go hand in hand with a determination to inculcate good manners as part of an aura of respectability. The author speaks candidly about this issue in interviews and cites the imperative to be respectable as distinctly gendered, a ‘crushing weight’ for girls of her era (1996 17). With its origins in a transported Victorian culture, respectability registered via external manifestations of dress, deportment and speech as well as by behaviour such as obedience and helpfulness. Its presence (or lack) in children was seen to reflect on their upbringing, thereby affecting their mother’s or minder’s social position, especially in lower-class communities where raising ‘good’ children was (and still is) one of the few avenues to higher status for women (see Senior 1991 32). Laura in ‘Bright Thursdays’ typifies the child weighed down by the forces of respectability. As she prepares to move to her grandmother’s elegant house, her mother exhorts her, ‘Don’t give Miss Christie no cause for complain and most of all, let them know you have brought upcy’ (1986a 36). Laura recalls this directive on a number of occasions as her grandmother inducts her into the behavioural patterns of the upper classes — correcting her speech, hygiene, clothes, table manners, posture and general conduct — and worries that her failure to be the model child will diminish her mother’s standing. The story’s memorable depiction of meal times in the ‘big house’ conveys the child’s anxiety as she muddles through the excruciating rituals that seem only tangentially to do with eating. For her part,
Whereas Laura mentally emancipates herself from the strictures of her upbringing, Bekkha in ‘Do Angels Wear Brassieres?’ appropriates broughtuptcy to serve mischievous ends, performing the perfect semblance of good manners in order to get an audience with the Archdeacon so that she can ‘best’ him with her knowledge of the Bible. In this story, Senior pits Christian respectability against the wily tricks of an eleven-year-old who, in bold Anancy style, unsettles the English church-man with her witty quiz on Biblical trivia, and then fatally disrupts Aunt Mary’s genteel tea party by asking the provocative question of what Angels wear. This exchange positions Bekkha as a knowing subject with agency to question — and ridicule — the doctrines she is taught, not as a passive vessel through which Christian beliefs and behaviours might be perpetuated. In effect, the entire story stages the spectacular failure of the adults’ version of broughtuptcy to elicit the wonted behaviour in the child, at the same time imbuing the creole term with some of the subversiveness it seems to suggest as a creative corruption of ‘upbringing’. When Bekkha asks her prudish aunt how worms reproduce, or when she dresses up and mimes doing the three ‘wickedest’ things

Miss Christie relishes the opportunity to ‘civilise’ her charge. Like Mrs Da Silva in ‘Lily, Lily’, whose self-appointed job is to regulate the ‘domestic manners and morals’ of young girls in her town (1989 113), she derives considerable symbolic capital from the trade in respectability. Senior’s satirical portraits of these two women as social reformers highlight not only the arbitrariness (and emptiness) of the bourgeois code of etiquette they espouse but also its insidious application. Their efforts to discipline the female body through particular child-rearing practices can be considered in terms of Bourdieu’s analysis of the ideological work done by regulations of seemingly insignificant details of bodily behaviour such as bearing, dress, and physical and verbal manners. In his formulation, this is to treat the body as memory, to ‘entrust to it in abbreviated and practical, ie mnemonic, form the fundamental principals of the arbitrary content of the culture’. Bourdieu maintains that ‘principles em-bodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit’ (94). Senior stresses the ways in which the child-subject is conditioned to embody her culture’s norms, but she uses the concept of ‘broughtuptcy’ (being brought up properly) to imply (contra Bourdieu) an acute cognisance of the relationship between manners and ideology. Laura follows the behavioural imperatives she is given precisely because she understands their ideological significance, if not in adult terms. She also realises that broughtuptcy is the only capital she can accrue in the big house, where she is acutely aware that she lacks the requisite signs of whiteness. Thus, at the end of the story, when she ‘orphans’ herself after her father makes it clear he will not acknowledge her as his (illegitimate) child, she is rejecting the racist value system inculcated in her by both sides of her family, albeit in different ways.

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a woman can do — going into a nightclub, taking a drink and dancing all night — she again flaunts her disregard for the dictates of respectability. That the town gossip, Miss Katie, reads Bekkha’s various acts of mischief as signs that she is ‘force-ripe’ suggests the anxiety surrounding childhood as a site where sexuality, and the sins it supposedly entails, threatens to surface prematurely.

In her detailed analysis of the ways in which sexuality and desire have functioned within European colonialism, Ann Laura Stoler argues that children’s sexuality was constructed as both ‘endangered’ and ‘dangerous’, at risk from exposure to the taint of adult sexuality (particularly of the racial and class Other) and dangerous by virtue of being unrestrained, savage, not yet sufficiently tutored by bourgeois morality (141). This observation can be brought to bear on several Senior stories that show parental, social, and religious anxieties intersecting on the terrain of the (female) child’s sexuality. ‘Lily, Lily’ amplifies the idea, set up in ‘Do Angels Wear Brassieres?’ and reiterated in ‘Ballad’ and ‘Zig-Zag’, that the myth of sexual innocence underpinning normative notions of the female child-subject functions instrumentally to position girls’ bodies as sites of surveillance. Ironically, it is precisely the lack of sexual knowledge (arising from prohibitions linked to ideas about children’s endangered sexuality) that leads to the elder Lily’s teenage pregnancy, despite Aunt Mercy’s vigilance in scrutinising her every move. For the younger Lily, innocence can offer no protection against sexual abuse; she is vulnerable to her father’s lascivious attentions until she understands enough about sex to communicate her trauma to a responsive adult.

Both girls, in their respective times, also function within their families/communities as sites of dangerous sexuality. The first Lily produces a miscegenetic child, thereby signalling the permeability of the sexual and social barriers instigated by British colonialism in the Caribbean, while her daughter, the young Lily, threatens the integrity of the family (as a unit of social organisation) by dint of her allegations against her adoptive father. That Mrs DaSilva refuses to believe Lily’s accusations, rationalising her sullen behaviour as a symptom of early sexual maturity, hints at the extent to which prohibited adult desires can be mediated through the child-subject’s contradictory sexuality. Overall, the two Lily characters trouble hegemonic theories of psychosexual development that posit a natural schism between childhood and adulthood, showing instead the individual and social investments that shape children’s positions as (a)sexual subjects.

The positioning of the child as a site of bodily interdictions vis-à-vis sexuality is fortified by his/her a priori status as an inherently unruly subject. Several of Senior’s stories reveal that the discursive construction of childhood as governed by irrational and pre-social urges has played a central role in the promulgation of a range of spiritual and occult beliefs and practices in Jamaican culture. Within Christianity, the author suggests, the myth of original sin works to situate the (black/coloured) child’s body as always already tainted with evil and,
consequently, as a target for strategic reform. ‘Arrival of the Snake-Woman’ illustrates this process when Parson Bedlow, projecting Miss Coolie’s apparent sexual deviance onto her child, demands that Biya be baptised to cleanse his body of sin. In a related manoeuvre, Miss Katie suspects the precocious Bekkha of being the devil’s own ‘pickney’ and therefore determines that the child should have been beaten from birth to correct her errant tendencies, especially her impertinence in asking questions about sexual matters. Senior likewise scrutinises folk religions in the Caribbean region, showing the ways in which they too instrumentalise the child’s body as a space in/through which forces of evil readily manifest. A number of her stories make reference to babies believed to be possessed by duppies or susceptible to illnesses caused by passing evil spirits who might suck their infant blood. By implying parallels between various practices or beliefs associated with folk religions. Theresa in ‘Discerner of Hearts’ is the paradigmatic example here: on visiting the feared Blackartman, the Blackartman/priest in ‘Discerner of Hearts’, and in descriptions of the similar spiritual work performed by Parson Bedlow, Mother Miracle, and Papa Dias in ‘Arrival of the Snake-Woman’ — Senior’s work emphasises that an investment in childhood as a ‘primitive’ and therefore amoral state cuts across cultural boundaries.

As a creative antidote to this kind of structural disempowerment, Senior forges child characters who consciously question, evade or resist the religious rituals and doctrines to which they are subjected. Whereas Bekkha subverts the textual authority of the Bible by asking if angels wear brassieres, Lenora, in ‘Ballad’, continually queries its doctrinal logic, reasoning that her beloved Miss Rilla won’t burn in the hell fires for unrepentant sinners because Saint Peter would ‘take her in just to brighten up Heaven’ (1986a 134). Even the timid child narrator of ‘Confirmation Day’ (1986a) manages to mediate the religious rites in which she unwillingly participates. Despite feeling oppressed by the clothes she must wear, the solemn liturgy and the dank, forbidding church, she gains agency through the ritual because she is able to see it as inconsequential, an ironic ‘confirmation’ that God no longer has the power to frighten her. Some of Senior’s fictional children are also able to critically examine beliefs and practices associated with folk religions. Theresa in ‘Discerner of Hearts’ is the paradigmatic example here: on visiting the feared Blackartman, she discerns that his magic works partly by suggestion, by the customer’s belief in his cures. Thus the child colludes in the myth of the man’s power in order to persuade Cissy, her nanny, to seek his treatment for the curse that seems to be paralysing her. At the same time, Theresa ignores Cissy’s more mundane superstitions and her injunctions not to upset the many and various spirits that might be lurking in their world. The story thus demystifies obeah by making its processes partly transparent to a shy child who gains in confidence through her role as go-between.

Alongside religion, formal education figures in Senior’s work as a mechanism by which the (resisting) child-subject is institutionally produced as a social being,
although the author is more equivocal in her critique of the school system than of the church and its proselytisers. Surprisingly, given her sustained interest in childhood, Senior rarely focuses on children’s experiences in the classroom or the playground, unlike writers such as Kincaid, whose withering accounts of colonial education and its particular forms of pedagogy in the Caribbean are well known. Senior’s fiction consistently references school as part of the child’s social matrix but generally in relation to issues arising at home or in the community. A number of her stories suggest that the race/class hierarchies operative in the family are extended by a process of gate-keeping, based on skin colour rather than scholastic ability, that streams children into specific schools where their development is tailored to fit their social expectations. ‘Zig-Zag’ is most explicit in its satire of this process as it affects young girls:

They were busily preparing to go to high school where their fathers would pay large fees so they could be turned into ladies who would straighten their hair and rub Ponds Vanishing Cream into their faces every night and wear 4711 toilet water and learn to squeeze their bodies into corsets and their feet into tiny shoes so they would have bunions for the rest of their lives. All the real ladies Sadie knew — like Mother Dear and her friends — had bunions, and she assumed it was a badge that came from their having attended The Best Schools. (1995 161)

Here, school is clearly another marker of brouthuprty, both in terms of the disciplinary work it does and its power to signify, in shorthand, a person’s social status. Yet, Senior’s child protagonists are never merely objects of the system. They understand its processes, at least in rudimentary terms, and are often able to mediate its effects. Ish, in ‘Arrival of the Snake-Woman’, for instance, recognises that religion and schooling are tradeable commodities in Parson Bedlow’s moral world; thus, he convinces Miss Coolie to have Biya baptised so the child will be allowed to attend school. Ish also learns to filter out the minister’s religious dogma and selectively absorb those parts of the curriculum germane to his career ambitions. Similarly, the young narrator of ‘The Case Against the Queen’ (1995) negotiates her way through various levels of the colonial education system but determines, from the outset, that she will never let it steal her heart as it has stolen her uncle’s. Bekkha, meanwhile, warms to the idea of being sent away to school because it will give her the opportunity to enthrall a bigger audience with her trickster antics, whereas Lily looks to boarding school as a way of escaping her father’s sexual overtures. Such stories imply that education, as a (neo)colonial process, is redolent with contradictions; for the child concerned, school can invoke an emancipatory promise as well as a disciplinary threat.

All these texts position children as consciously pragmatic, often more so than their adult counterparts. Against Western modernity’s view of childhood as ‘based on not-knowing’ (McDonnell 28), Senior posits a knowing child-subject with the agency to act in reasoned and even moral ways. Her images of children as agents through whom a different social order might be imagined destabilises
conventional lines of authority, as embedded in the prerogatives of adult power-knowledge. This is especially the case when a child narrator tells his/her own story. Nevertheless if, as Wallace claims, "the child" is everywhere in representation … but almost nowhere in public self-representation" (1995 293–94), the first-person narrative technique also poses a penetrating question: "What does it mean to speak for the child, through the voice of the child, as the child?" (Wallace 1994 171).

To demonstrate that Senior’s fiction supplies its own answer to this question, I will conclude by looking briefly at narrative voice in two of her longer stories: ‘Arrival of the Snake-Woman’ and ‘Ballad’. Each focuses on a woman, an outcast in her village, who comes to feature prominently in the narrator’s childhood as a much-admired friend and confidante. Both tales are told in several parts, cover different points in time and sketch their adult characters from the perspectives of prepubescent children who do not fully understand their communities’ prejudices. The crucial difference in terms of narrative voice is that Ish’s account of the snake-woman, though it registers his perceptions as a child, is always filtered through the consciousness of the adult he has become, whereas Lenora’s ballad to/for Miss Rilla communicates directly as a child’s story. By combining the child’s perspective with that of the adult looking back, Senior gives ‘Arrival of the Snake-Woman’ a teleological structure; Ish (as child) supplies the raw material while the adult Ishmael organises the details chronologically, fills in some of the missing pieces and editorialises about his gradual maturation. The emphasis on development, with its correlative valorisation of ‘progress’, becomes explicit towards the end of the text when Ishmael explains what drives his narrative: ‘I sometimes sit and write down the things that happened in the old days, so that my children will be able to see clearly where we are coming from, should they ever need signposts’ (1989 45). In this story, told in standard English, Senior subtly criticises her raconteur for his nostalgic construction of childhood in a narrative of modernisation that explains and contains the disruptive energies of the child’s voice.

By contrast, there is no sense of futurity or progress in Lenora’s story about Miss Rilla; the details are conveyed as the child makes sense of them, in the moment of narration, after the teacher tears up her written work because he deems Miss Rilla an unfit subject for a composition. As she constructs her ballad, Lenora assesses the available evidence on her friend’s character, incorporating into the story particulars she has observed directly, gossip she has heard while eavesdropping and snippets from conversations with Miss Rilla herself. The ballad is narrated in creole as an oral text2 and addressed to an audience comprised of listeners not readers. Lenora remains conscious of the gaps and absences in her account, attributing them to the fact that ‘big people have a habit of not telling children anything’ (1986a 129), and she is aware that her story evades the expected chronological structure. Notwithstanding Senior’s craft as the adult

35 ‘Let them know you have brought upcy’
author who has written this text, 'Ballad' communicates in the child's voice as her story, even while it gives space to the words of the (adult) tale-bearers whose opinions she relays. Effectively, this strategy eschews the teleology of development as the master narrative of childhood; like Lenora’s ballad, the child-subject is (re)constructed as ‘in process’ but without a clear beginning or end. In the broader field of Caribbean self-representation, this is an important tactic since ‘the image of development, with its hierarchy, directionality, purposiveness, and goal-orientation, not only embeds individual lives into different stages but cultures and nations as well’ into primitive, developing or advanced (Gupta 50).

Read in tandem, these two stories also comment on the idea of (good) manners in relation to narrativity. Ishmael’s constrained (masculinist) chronicle allows the reader to follow the innocent gaze of the young boy in parallel with the explanatory gaze of the adult storyteller, whereas Lenora’s chaotic (feminist) sketch, with its accusation that adults censor information crucial to the story, shows deliberate signs of a lack of brought-upcy. Crucially, it is this radical, ‘unmannered’ voice that best reveals childhood as a richly imaginative period, not just a site of social engineering, and that gives historical specificity to a category often ignored in theories of the subject. As Donnell argues, Senior’s major accomplishment is to treat the child’s perspective seriously so that it ‘does not merely function as an allegory of the national, or as a strategic domain through which the more blatantly politicised issues expected of postcolonial writing can be made digestible for the general reading public’ (1999 122). Without the burden of being representative, childhood becomes a more complex domain of practice, and one that presents greater opportunities for a politicised analysis.

NOTES
1 Texts that come to mind include V.S. Naipaul’s Miguel Street, Michael Anthony’s The Year in San Fernando, Merle Hodge’s Crick Crack, Monkey, George Lamming’s In the Castle of My Skin and Jamaica Kincaid’s Annie John.
2 Some of the particular areas of inquiry listed here derive in part from questions Sharon Stephens asks in her discussion of children and the politics of late capitalism (6).
3 Western conceptions of childhood, as a number of theorists have noted, are predicated upon ideas about dependence, segregation, delayed responsibility and (temporary) physical, moral and social incompetence (see Wallace 1992 75).
4 See Besson for a discussion of the ways in which ‘reputation’ (as examined by ethnologist Peter Wilson) structures male gender roles in Afro-Caribbean societies (352).
5 Interestingly, the elder Lily is infantilised by sexual ignorance that lasts well beyond her physical maturity, whereas the younger Lily is traumatically initiated into sexual activity while she is still a child by physical definitions of the term.
6 See Tiffin (1993) for extended analysis of the interpellative and disciplinary functions of the colonial education practices — notably oral recitation — by which Caribbean girls have been socialised.
7 Senior comments in interviews about the ways in which Caribbean oral traditions she experienced during her childhood have profoundly influenced her work and she
links this to her use of the first person narrative voice (1986b 19; 1988 40). This unmediated voice, she adds, allows a particular kind of language and rhythm to emerge (1996 22).

WORKS CITED
———, ‘Summer Lightning’, *Summer Lightning and Other Stories*, pp. 1–15.
———, ‘Bright Thursdays’, *Summer Lightning and Other Stories*, pp. 36–53.
———, ‘Do Angles Wear Brassieres?’, *Summer Lightning and Other Stories*, pp. 67–79.
———, ‘Confirmation Day’, *Summer Lightning and Other Stories*, pp. 80–84

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Jean Rhys’s Cardboard Doll’s Houses

In *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) one of Jean Rhys’s mordant figures for Rochester’s need to assimilate white Creole Antoinette Cosway Mason Rochester into a gendered middle-class Englishness is the ‘marionette’ (90, 92) or ‘doll’ (90, 93, 102, 103), the inert object of his desire and hatred. The others are the ‘grey wrapper’ rather than the red dress in which she is clothed at Thornfield Hall, and zombification (Rhys’s West Indian interpretation of what Rochester sees as a doll-like condition). In Rhys’s published and unpublished fiction of the 1930s — *Voyage in the Dark* (1934), and the typescript ‘The Cardboard Dolls’ House’ (1938 or 1939) — dolls of several kinds feature in narratives about assimilation, xenophobia and the racialisation of colonial difference. A later untitled extant version of ‘The Cardboard Dolls’ House’, beginning ‘MY GREAT-AUNT JEANNETTE LIVED IN her room’, was apparently projected at one time as part of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. Material from these typescripts informs Rhys’s representation of Aunt Cora and Antoinette’s relationship with her in *Wide Sargasso Sea*. The image of the doll’s house is brilliantly distilled in the final section of the novel. For Antoinette, Thornfield Hall is a ‘cardboard house’, a ‘cardboard world where everything is coloured brown or dark red or yellow that has no light in it’ (107). Tracing the genealogy of these figures in Rhys’s earlier fiction reveals layers of Rhys’s thinking about the place of women, a precise sense of historical context, and her considerations of artistry.

‘I wrote this book before!’ Rhys declared to Francis Wyndham in 1962, referring to the novel which would become *Wide Sargasso Sea*. She continues:

> Different setting — same idea. (It was called ‘Le revenant’ then). The MSS was lost when I was moving from somewhere to somewhere else and I wonder whether I haven’t been trying to get back to what I did…. I tried to rewrite ‘Le Revenant’ but could not — another title would have been found — however I discovered two chapters (in another suitcase) and have used them in this book. You will see perhaps. (Letters 213)

These two chapters might well be the stories ‘The Birthday’ and ‘The Cardboard Dolls’ House’. In 1938 Rhys remembered an experience of sexual trauma from her childhood, which began with an uninvited fondling of a breast by an English family friend Mr Howard. The autobiographical account, which is in her Black Exercise Book, contextualises the memory of trauma in a range of memories of growing up in Dominica. Rhys soon began to work on the possibility of using some of the memories as the basis for new stories. Incomplete fragments include ‘Mr Howard’s House. CREOLE’ (dated 4 December 1938) and ‘Fears’ (dated 6
Imperialism, a policy articulated by British Colonial Secretary Joseph Froude in the late 19th century with its ruinous present-day condition, Froude declared: 'The English adds political malaise to this picture. Comparing the Dominica of the previous turn of the twentieth century. The maternal family’s sugar plantation is called Canefield Estate, a generic sounding name, although there was a Canefield Estate on Dominica. It was renowned in anti-slavery circles in Britain for the ‘fewness of the births as well as the fearful number of deaths’ among slaves between 1817 and 1834 (Sturge and Harvey xvii). Rhys’s Canefield Estate now produces cocoa and lime-juice, but its name is a marker of the historical formation of the white Creole family. Sugar, as Ileana Rodríguez observes, ‘as regional representation, the product as island, is the seat of value of this social group; it is what makes white white …; it is the object of exchange that sustains lineage, ethnic biography, blood’ (121). In ‘The Cardboard Dolls’ House’ Great-aunt Jane tells stories of the ‘palmy times’ of the ‘slave days’, ‘when spice was sold for its weight in gold and a sugar estate was something really worth having’ (1). If, as Rodríguez suggests, sugar represents the protected mercantilism of a slave labour economy (121), the switch to cocoa and limes is a sign of the adjustment to more laissez-faire conditions and economic modernisation. As narrator, Phoebe marks the newness of this and its masculine sphere with the word ‘mysterious’ (2). By the 1890s cocoa and limes had replaced sugarcane and coffee as the principal produce of Dominica (Honychurch 154).

The period of the story is suggested, too, by historical markers related to the racialisation of whiteness in the tropics. Phoebe’s immediate family lives in a coastal town rather than on the cooler plantation. Phoebe’s Uncle James, who manages the ‘estates-works’, implies that the effect of this change in a plantocratic family is unhealthy, unnatural, and ‘uncomfortable’. He finds Phoebe ‘too pale and thin’, that ‘she moons about’ (3). Her name is even a poetic commonplace for the moon. His characterisation of Phoebe draws on a moral mapping of the relation between the coast and the interior integral to the economic modernisation of Dominica under the New Imperialism of administrator Hesketh Bell. In the late 1880s James Anthony Froude would characterise the very small white population of Dominica as prone to a degenerative drift into the ‘torpid content’ which was the general mood (145). David Livingstone has demonstrated how ‘regional climates have frequently been cast in moral idioms’ (413), with tropical climates being linked with racial degeneracy among white populations. Froude adds political malaise to this picture. Comparing the Dominica of the previous century with its ruinous present-day condition, Froude declared: ‘The English hand had struck the island with paralysis … Dominica had then been regarded as the choicest jewel in the necklace of the Antilles. For the last half-century we have left it to desolation, as a child leaves a toy that it is tired of’ (153). The New Imperialism, a policy articulated by British Colonial Secretary Joseph

December 1938. ‘The Birthday’ is Rhys’s first attempt to develop a story about sexual assault. Her published story about sexual assault is ‘Goodbye Marcus, Goodbye Rose’ (1976).

Both ‘The Birthday’ and ‘The Cardboard Dolls’ House’ feature rites of passage of a white Creole character, Phoebe, and are set in the West Indies around the turn of the twentieth century. The maternal family’s sugar plantation is called Canefield Estate, a generic sounding name, although there was a Canefield Estate on Dominica. It was renowned in anti-slavery circles in Britain for the ‘fewness of the births as well as the fearful number of deaths’ among slaves between 1817 and 1834 (Sturge and Harvey xvii). Rhys’s Canefield Estate now produces cocoa and lime-juice, but its name is a marker of the historical formation of the white Creole family. Sugar, as Ileana Rodríguez observes, ‘as regional representation, the product as island, is the seat of value of this social group; it is what makes white white …; it is the object of exchange that sustains lineage, ethnic biography, blood’ (121). In ‘The Cardboard Dolls’ House’ Great-aunt Jane tells stories of the ‘palmy times’ of the ‘slave days’, ‘when spice was sold for its weight in gold and a sugar estate was something really worth having’ (1). If, as Rodríguez suggests, sugar represents the protected mercantilism of a slave labour economy (121), the switch to cocoa and limes is a sign of the adjustment to more laissez-faire conditions and economic modernisation. As narrator, Phoebe marks the newness of this and its masculine sphere with the word ‘mysterious’ (2). By the 1890s cocoa and limes had replaced sugarcane and coffee as the principal produce of Dominica (Honychurch 154).

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Chamberlain, aimed to revitalise the economy of the island through the luring of investment and white settlers, and the consolidation of scientific agricultural and public hygiene initiatives. As Peter Hulme points out in his analysis of a letter Hesketh Bell wrote in 1899, Bell draws a distinction between the ‘wan and pallid’ white child growing up on the coast, and the ‘rosy and fresh’ white English child growing up on the cooler interior plateau. This was an area to which he hoped to attract new investment and white planters from Britain. Englishness functions as a sign of racial purity. ‘Since rosiness is the true ideological whiteness, it is therefore possible — Bell implies — to be dermatologically too white: wan and pallid like European children in the tropics’, Hulme writes. In noting Phoebe’s dreamy idleness, Uncle James places her through the ‘georgic’ aesthetic of ‘work and productivity’ which was, Hulme argues, to reproduce an English whiteness on the island under Bell’s administration.

‘The Cardboard Dolls’ House’ develops thematics around the place and socialisation of white Creole women through a first-person account of Phoebe’s relationship with her Creole great-aunt Jane. ‘The Birthday’ is narrated in the third person from Phoebe’s point of view. Phoebe has been in the habit of visiting Great-aunt Jane, Grannie and Uncle James biannually. This pattern of invitation is disrupted by a long illness of Great-aunt Jane’s when Phoebe is around twelve. Nearing fourteen, Phoebe visits her ailing aunt again when she is about to leave the island to continue her schooling in England — “[f]abulous England, where snow fell almost all the year round, and one learnt how to move quickly and to speak without a drawl” (4). Her aunt observes that she is ‘too big to play with dolls now’ (5). The mourfulness of the visit is short-lived for Phoebe is sustained by her emotional investment in an idea of ‘wonderful England, and the incredible adventures she would certainly have there’, and ‘[s]o, dreaming, she rode into a patch of sunlight and forgot Aunt Jane’ (6). Judith Raiskin talks of this kind of ‘myth of England’ as ‘cultural domination’ by ‘the imperial dream’ (146–47). Rhys writes that for Phoebe ‘growing-up’ has been ‘an absorbing business’ during the hiatus in visits (‘Cardboard’ 3). Rhys implies through Phoebe’s forgetting of Great-aunt Jane that she is like a loved toy discarded by the distracted adolescent.

In ‘The Birthday’ the character of the ‘absorbing business’ is detailed. ‘A wonderful creature, the English auntie’ has visited her brother’s family (2). Phoebe has been chaperoned on her walks by a servant, Tite Francine, after having been distressed by a black servant man telling her stories of slavery, and a Mr Howard mortifyingly fondled her breasts on her thirteenth birthday. He is ‘a very old friend of the family, an almost fabulous person’ (5) with a ‘Greek profile’ that is ‘clear cut, benevolent and relentless as that of some aged — and ageless — god’ (8). In Rhys’s oeuvre, childhood and adolescent colonial wonder at Englishness of the kind Phoebe exhibits characteristically give way to disenchantment.

The contrast between the aunts is starkly drawn. Great-aunt Jane ‘with her soft kindness and her dear, lazy West Indian drawl belonged to the garden’ at
Canefield Estate, a mix of English and tropical species, lovingly described and ‘lovely as a fairy-tale’ (1–2). As is typical in Rhys’s fiction, the mixed garden indicates the syncretism of white Creole culture, a blending of the tropical (treeferns, bamboo, hibiscus, crotons, oleanders, frangipanis) and the English (here roses and honeysuckle). Phoebe thinks Great-aunt Jane in the garden ‘entirely satisfying’ (3). A Scots heritage and a possible political reason for the family’s displacement from Britain is suggested by great-aunt Jane’s singing of the Jacobite song ‘Charlie over the water’. The unnamed English auntie’s cultural identity is grounded in xenophobia and a sense of superiority. Her disgust at Creole culture is made apparent in her disparagement of Phoebe’s wearing of a rose behind her ear on her birthday, a Creole custom. This implicitly highlights the absence of healthy rosiness in Phoebe’s cheeks. The auntie’s xenophobic language suggests that her brother’s marriage into a white Creole family with a Spanish heritage is a defilement of English blood. She is shown to derive much of her social confidence from a gendered performance of Englishness, seemingly secured by her sense of being favoured by divine providence. During Phoebe’s last visit great-aunt Jane declares that prayer is ‘no use … for the Lord has quite forgotten me’ (‘Cardboard’ 5); the English auntie, by contrast, maintains a ‘proper reverent whisper’ during the Church of England litany (‘Birthday’ 2). She has a ‘clear decided voice’ (2). The whiteness of her hands alongside Great-aunt Jane’s freckled ones suggests she is a member of a leisured class cloistered from the effects of the sun.

Rhys was herself sensitive to issues raised by the normalising disciplining of comportment and speech in an English schooling. Phoebe’s wonder at ‘[f]abulous England, where snow fell almost all the year round, and one learnt how to move quickly and to speak without a drawl’ is made ironic by the association of such discipline with coldness. Phoebe’s first-person English narrative accent in ‘The Cardboard Dolls’ House’ suggests a now Anglicised reminiscence about her childhood and about a comfortable syncretism in white Creole culture. Phoebe’s narrative voice differentiates her own standard English accent from the Anglophone West Indian accents of Great-aunt Jane and of Godfrey, the elderly black gardener. Great-aunt Jane’s ‘drawl’ is suggested in particular by her repeated use of the word ‘darlin’ (4–5), and Godfrey says to Phoebe, ‘Old massa — yo’ granddad — he had debbil of long ears’ (2). That Great-aunt Jane’s accent is a product of cultural contact with black people is indicated by Phoebe’s sense that ‘with … her dear, lazy West Indian drawl’ she ‘belonged to the garden’ which Godfrey tends. Dominica was at one time a French colony, and a French patois was the language of the black majority population in the period in which the story is set. Great-aunt Jane’s Anglophone West Indian accent, then, suggests her and her family’s cultural isolation from the larger black community. Only the parrot speaks in French.

The title ‘The Cardboard Dolls’ House’ refers to Great-aunt Jane’s expression of love for Phoebe through the making of a cardboard doll’s house ‘furnished
Cardboard dolls are not only artificial miniatures of human beings; they want depth. Rhys implies that the garden and what it represents gives depth to Great-aunt Jane. In Jane’s girlhood the domesticated femininity she is expected to perform is suggested by the fact that she is ‘laced tightly into her stays’ (‘Cardboard’). The ‘stays’ become metonymic of the circumscription of her social and educational horizons, and of the dependence of such performance on black labour. In her song ‘Over the Water to Charlie’ there is a gendering of the sacrifices singers promise to make for Prince Charles Edward Stuart: men offer lives, women their sons’ lives (South Riding Tune Book). Women’s toil is bearing and bringing up children. The cross-generational transmission of aspects of Great-aunt Jane’s femininity is negatively portrayed in ‘The Birthday’. There Phoebe is described as having ‘the weak creature’s instinct to please and placate’ (2). Great-aunt Jane’s white ringlets and the white bandages that swath her head during Phoebe’s final visit suggest the outmodedness and morbidity of her white femininity.

Katherine Mansfield wrote a story titled ‘The Doll’s House’, which, like ‘The Cardboard Dolls’ House’, is part of a set of stories about colonial family life and childhood. In both ‘The Doll’s House’ and ‘The Cardboard Dolls’ House’ the miniature house provides an ironic reflection on the status of girls and women within the colonial family. Mansfield’s family, the Burnells, feature in ‘Prelude’, ‘At the Bay’ and ‘The Doll’s House’. Rhys was familiar with Mansfield’s work, referring to her story ‘The Fly’ in a 1949 letter (Letters 68). Mansfield’s ‘The Doll’s House’ provides an ironic reflection on the status of girls and women within the colonial family, Mansfield’s family, the Burnells, feature in ‘Prelude’, ‘At the Bay’ and ‘The Doll’s House’. Rhys was familiar with Mansfield’s work, referring to her story ‘The Fly’ in a 1949 letter (Letters 68). Mansfield’s ‘The Doll’s House’ highlights the gendered and racialised social demarcations integral to the formation of upper-middle-class colonial consciousness, and viciously enforced even by children in the school ground. The Burnell children are permitted to display their new doll’s house to select school friends. The child Kezia admits the Kelveys, Lil and our Else, who as daughters of a washerwoman and a shadowy father rumoured to be in jail, are social outcasts at their school. The family name suggests possible Irish descent. The Kelvey children are rudely sent away by Aunt Beryl, who thinks of them as being of a different species: to be ‘shooed … out as if they were chickens’, ‘little rats’. They are placed beyond the
conventional doll’s status in Ibsen’s sense in the family home (453). That the gate is painted white highlights the artifice of the respectability and purity that it connotes. This racialisation is also apparent in ‘At the Bay’ in the family’s consciousness of the less securely middle-class Samuel Josephs and the servant Alice. Mansfield’s authorial voice marks their speech through pronunciation and grammar, as she does that of the Kelvey children, as being lower class. The status of Aunt Beryl, the spinster sister of Kezia’s mother Linda, financially dependent on Linda’s husband Stanley, is subjected to sharp ironic treatment through slangier connotations of the word ‘doll’: very pretty woman; mistress. In ‘At the Bay’ Beryl’s unfulfilled romantic and sexual longings focus on marriage as salvation for a ‘lovely fascinating girl’, as she thinks of herself (468). In ‘The Doll’s House’ her enforcement of social demarcations by expelling the Kelveys helps her manage to extricate herself from the ‘ghastly pressure’ exerted by her apparent lover, Willie Brent, whom she would not welcome at the front door of the Burnell home (505). In ‘At the Bay’ her sister Linda does experience a passing sense that her marriage to Stanley has produced in her a passivity in the face of Life, but generally she has a more conventional doll’s status in Ibsen’s sense in the family home (453).

Playing the doll in Ibsen’s drama is a sign of being a good daughter and ‘good wife’ in the eyes of father and husband respectively (Ibsen 81). In her fiction of the 1930s Rhys uses the word doll, like Mansfield, in slangier senses. In Voyage in the Dark (1934) white Creole Dominican expatriate Anna Morgan’s desire to be a doll (a very pretty woman) by wearing fashionable clothes well figures her relation to the commodity fetishism of European capitalist modernity before the First World War. By contrast, the cardboard doll’s house and dolls of Phoebe’s childhood are emblems of unworldliness and an older mode of cultural production. Dispossessed of her inheritance by her English stepmother Hester, she wants to turn herself into a marriageable object with classy sex appeal. Walter Benjamin would characterise this as ‘participation through fashion in the nature of commodities’—submission to fashion “to maintain … social status”, the impersonation of ‘commodities in order to attract a distracted public of potential buyers” (Buck-Morss 125). A record of the popular song Puppchen (dolly, you are the apple of my eye) is playing when Anna smashes the picture ‘Loyal Heart’ (137), which shows a ‘dog sitting up begging’ (127). Anna has by this time been spurned by Walter Jeffries, and is sharing a flat with Ethel, who has wanted to exploit trainee manicurist Anna’s sex appeal to promote her massage business. Anna has brought an anonymous man back to her room for sex. He has asked whether she owns a particular classical record, but she plays Puppchen. The smashing of the picture seems to be a rejection of the way she is hierarchically positioned in a transaction in which ‘sex has a machine-like character and attraction a commodity-like one’ (Buck-Morss 127). In the original version of the novel’s ending Anna’s current status as a doll was to have been juxtaposed with ‘white gate’ that functions as a metonym for the racialised social demarcations that sustain the Burnell world (505). That the gate is painted white highlights the artifice of the respectability and purity that it connotes. This racialisation is also apparent in ‘At the Bay’ in the family’s consciousness of the less securely middle-class Samuel Josephs and the servant Alice. Mansfield’s authorial voice marks their speech through pronunciation and grammar, as she does that of the Kelvey children, as being lower class. The status of Aunt Beryl, the spinster sister of Kezia’s mother Linda, financially dependent on Linda’s husband Stanley, is subjected to sharp ironic treatment through slangier connotations of the word ‘doll’: very pretty woman; mistress. In ‘At the Bay’ Beryl’s unfulfilled romantic and sexual longings focus on marriage as salvation for a ‘lovely fascinating girl’, as she thinks of herself (468). In ‘The Doll’s House’ her enforcement of social demarcations by expelling the Kelveys helps her manage to extricate herself from the ‘ghastly pressure’ exerted by her apparent lover, Willie Brent, whom she would not welcome at the front door of the Burnell home (505). In ‘At the Bay’ her sister Linda does experience a passing sense that her marriage to Stanley has produced in her a passivity in the face of Life, but generally she has a more conventional doll’s status in Ibsen’s sense in the family home (453).

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with a remembered image of herself as a child being photographed with a baby doll (Voyage IV 382). The baby doll is indicative of the more staid gender roles being inculcated within her family home in fin-de-siècle Dominica. The painted faces of the masks of black female masqueraders, remembered by Anna as a sign of their mockery of white femininity — ‘blue eyes’, ‘small straight nose’, ‘a little red heart-shaped mouth’, ‘under the mouth another slit so that they could put their tongues out at you [white onlookers]’ (Voyage 157) — prefigure the uncritically painted faces of Great-aunt Jane’s dolls.

In early draft material for the story, ‘Tigers Are Better-Looking’, in the Black Exercise Book the term doll is used in its modern sense of mistress. ‘[P]robably thinks she’s a person & not a doll. What cheek you’ll soon learn better’, thinks the character Mr Smith. The story is set in mid-1930s London.24 Doll here is for Mr Smith a sign of prostitution. The irony is that writer Mr Smith is disconcerted by having to compromise (prostitute) his scepticism about the smug nationalism occasioned by George V’s Silver Jubilee in covering a procession.

In a letter to Francis Wyndham on 14 April 1964 about the writing of Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys toyed with the idea of changing Rochester’s name: ‘Mr R’s name ought to be changed. Raworth? A Yorkshire name isn’t it? The sound is right’ (Letters 263). The poem ‘Obeah Night’ that accompanied the letter and which Rhys regarded as a breakthrough in her writing of the novel, is styled as being in the voice of ‘Edward Rochester or Raworth’ and ‘Written in Spring 1842’ (266). (Rochester’s patronym is withheld in the novel; implicitly he identifies himself as Charlotte Bronté’s character in Jane Eyre when he names Antoinette Bertha.) In the story fragment beginning ‘MY GREAT-AUNT JEANNETTE LIVED IN her room’ the unnamed first-person narrator visits her now senile aunt just before she is about to marry an Englishman, Mr Raworth. The fragment is set in the wake of slave emancipation. Her aunt warns her against the English:

In England … women with no money are as cheap as dirt, and they treat them like dirt too. So whatever you do keep hold of your money. That’s what my father always said. He always said he’d rather cut his daughter’s throat than see her married to an Englishman. And I think it broke his heart, the day his daughter married one. He didn’t like them, you see, on account of some old story I’ve forgotten now — something to do with passing his punch over the water bottle. And all his friends dead and gone, and betrayed too, he said, and to a German too. (3)

Her father has been displaced from Scotland in the wake of the failure of the Jacobite rebellion in 1746. His Jacobite sympathies (apparent in stock gestures like passing his glass over the water) ground his and Great-aunt Jeannette’s anti-Englishness. In her case it becomes a shadowy sign of romanticised and insular ethnic heritage sustained by the singing of songs like ‘Charlie is my darling’ and patriarchal curses. She does keep vases of roses by her bed, although their names, La France and Marshal (Maréchal) Niel, suggest they are French
cultivars. The great-niece, it seems, will be fated to live out the curse of
penlessness in marriage to an Englishman.

Great-aunt Jeannette is a Lady of Shalott figure living immersed in ‘her room
as she would have in a castle’. The narrator remembers that she ‘could do anything
with her hands’: she ‘stitched always at a patchwork’ of ‘dazzling … colours’, ‘every minging of colour’, and the cardboard doll’s house she made ‘was an
enchantment’ (1). The ‘bright and vivid’ colours of the tropical landscape feature
in her patchwork. That she imagined that the maid given to her as a sixteenth
birthday present by her father reciprocated her sisterly feeling for her is
symptomatic of her unworldliness. Great-aunt Jeannette asks the narrator to
read to her from Chapter 21 of Revelation. This is the chapter that St John
Rivers reads to his sisters Mary and Diana and to Jane Eyre in an implicit effort
to sermonise Jane about her recalcitrance in accepting his proposal of marriage
and a shared missionary vocation. The narrator of Rhys’s fragment reads a bit
selectively instead from Matthew 5.4, ‘Blessed are they that mourn, they shall
be comforted’ (2).

August Gering has argued that Rhys, who had Celtic (Scottish and Welsh)
forbears, envisions in Wide Sargasso Sea ‘a nineteenth-century Franco-Celtic
Creole-black Creole alliance against English colonialism’ (55). He reads Annette
as Franco-Irish on the strength of her Martinican birthplace and her ownership
of ‘a locket with a shamrock inside’ (Sargasso 16), the shamrock ‘being a national
symbol of Ireland — and metonym for Ireland’s Gaelic, Catholic alienness to
Anglo-Saxon, protestant England’ (Gering 43). He suggests, too, that
Antoinette’s paternal grandfather, Cora’s father is Scottish. Rhys does not,
however, indicate whether Cora is a maternal or paternal aunt. In Gering’s
reading, the Celtic is synonymous with anti-colonialism. ‘The Cardboard Dolls’
House’ and the fragment beginning ‘MY GREAT-AUNT JEANNETTE LIVED
IN her room’ suggest that Rhys had far more ambivalent feelings about a Scottish
Creole heritage than Gering suggests, especially in the way that heritage impacts
on and shapes the lives of women.

In Wide Sargasso Sea Rhys reworks aspects of her treatments of Great-aunt
Jane and Great-aunt Jeanette into the figure of Aunt Cora, although Aunt Cora’s
character is far feistier and worldlier. In an effort to secure safe passage, she
confronts one of the leaders of the black people who mill around the burning
estate house at Coulibri. She berates Richard Mason for his failure to secure his
stepsister Antoinette a marriage settlement to protect her financially, and offers
Antoinette a parting gift of two rings that she might be able to trade for money.
Her shows of strength, though, are based on her confidence that divine providence
is on her side, a trait she shares with the unnamed English auntie in ‘The
Birthday’. When Richard ignores her pleas she turns ‘her face to the wall. “The
Lord has forsaken us,” she said, and shut her eyes’ (69). Her comment reflects
her sense of the fate of the white Creole plantocracy, and especially its women.
Jean Rhys’s Cardboard Doll’s Houses

Aunt Cora’s reservations about the English are based on her personal experience of marriage to an Englishman who hated the West Indies; of living in England with him; and a family history of Jacobite sympathies intimated by Antoinette in a confrontation with Rochester. Great-aunt Jeannette recalls the sister who had married an Englishman saying, ‘If I had known what he was like I wouldn’t have married him if his bottom had been stuck with diamonds’ (3). Rochester remembers Antoinette recalling Aunt Cora having told her not to marry him, ‘Not if he were stuffed with diamonds’ (Sargasso 89). In Antoinette’s final dream, which Rhys implies will inspire her to set fire to Thornfield Hall, Antoinette remembers, among other mundane details of her life in the West Indies, ‘Aunt-Cora’s patchwork, all colours’ and her own ‘doll’s house’, but they are not identified as anyone’s handiwork (112). Rhys has Rochester articulate the view that white Creoles are ‘not English or European either’ (39), an attitude which seeds an increasing xenophobia.

In relation to Wide Sargasso Sea, quilting and making cardboard doll’s houses become for Rhys figures for her own and Charlotte Brontë’s art respectively. In a 1959 letter to Selma vars Dias, Rhys described her artistry in Wide Sargasso Sea as ‘a lot of cutting, joining up — all that patchwork’ (Letters 159). What she writes of Great-aunt Jeannette’s patchwork is apposite:

it was dazzling to see the colours — not only the pure colours, but every mingling of colour. The patchwork was made very elaborately, stitched on to tissue paper at the back. Only when the tissue paper was taken away did you see the beautiful work as it was meant to be. She liked bright and vivid colours best — red, purple, deep blue, sea blue, yellow, black — but she did not disdain the weaker ones — tender green, pale blue, grey and black and white. (1)

The analogy positions Rhys’s technique in a lineage of female art reaching back within her own family to her beloved great-aunt Jane Woodcock. Rhys mentions the ‘lovely colours’ of Jane Woodcock’s patchwork and her absorption in the craft of patchwork in her autobiography (Smile Please 35). In England Antoinette has a subjective sense that Thornfield Hall, the world of Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre and art into which she is transported, is a ‘cardboard house’. The ‘cardboard house’ is a sign of Antoinette’s disenchantment with her childhood myth of middle-class English domesticity and of her alienation and dispossession in ‘their world’. For her ‘everything’ there ‘is coloured brown or dark red or yellow that has no light in it’ (Sargasso 107). Rhys writes of her own ‘brood[ing]’ disenchantment with Jane Eyre produced by rereadings of the novel. Brontë’s ‘touch of genius’ had initially ‘swept’ her ‘along regardless’ (Letters 262). Grace Poole, by contrast with Antoinette, is comforted ‘above all’ by a subjective sense of Thornfield Hall as ‘the thick walls, keeping away all the things that you have fought till you can fight no more’. The solid walls are for her, as she ponders the reasons why she, Mrs Eff and Leah ‘all stay’, ‘a shelter from the world outside which, say what you like, can be a black and cruel world to a woman’ (Sargasso 106).
Rhys described herself in 1964 as having been ‘vexed’ at Brontë’s ‘portrait’ of the Creole Bertha Mason as a ‘“paper tiger” lunatic’ (Letters 262). Rhys’s description of Brontë’s Bertha is doubly suggestive. A ‘paper tiger’ is someone who ‘has the appearance of strength, power, or aggressiveness, but is in fact weak and ineffectual’ (Macquarie Dictionary 1253). Paper tiger, too, suggests a stylised cut-out figure, like the dolls in the cardboard doll’s houses in other pieces of Rhys’s fiction. It is an apt description of Brontë’s representation of Bertha as exotic animal in relation to the English humanity of Rochester and Jane.

In demanding that Antoinette becomes a doll/marionette (a diminutive of Mary) or Bertha, Rochester invokes a virgin/whore dichotomy, but the figure of the doll or marionette has a wider resonance. The puppet, as Tim Armstrong notes, is a compelling figure for modernist dramatists: ‘the puppet represents an actor freed from mediation and interiority, better able to represent the human by virtue of abstraction from the human’ (172). Rhys is determined to rescue Bertha’s humanity in telling Antoinette’s story and to criticise Rochester’s desire for a controllable and inert marionette, locating its origins in his inability to deal with his own experience of sexual pleasure with her (Thomas 1999 176–77). In his memories of farewelling Dominica his sense of loss and anger are apparent as he notices the doll-like changes in the traumatised Antoinette, which are represented as a kind of zombidom:

To invoke Rhys’s patchwork metaphor for her artistry in Wide Sargasso Sea, Rhys implicitly joins up Rochester’s desire for a doll wife in Antoinette with his attitude towards the betrothed Jane. At one point in Jane Eyre Jane feels that Rochester is treating her like a doll. He has taken Jane shopping for dresses in a silk warehouse in Millcote, wanting to outfit her according to his taste and as an object reflecting his social status and wealth (partly derived, of course, from Bertha Mason’s dowry). Jane refuses his positioning of her as desirably submissive and passive. Realising the importance of an inheritance in guaranteeing her ‘ever so small an independency’, she resolves to write to her Uncle John in Madeira, whom she now knows wants ‘to adopt’ her and ‘make’ her ‘his legatee’ (281). It is this letter about her marriage and her uncle’s connection to Richard Mason that will alert Richard to Rochester’s bigamous intent and lead to the disruption of Rochester and Jane’s wedding ceremony. In rejecting the role of…
doll Jane reaches out to a male relative for a measure of financial independence and Antoinette in her final dream calls out 'help me Christophine help me' and is 'helped' with a 'wall of fire' (Sargasso 112). Christophine, reputed Obeah woman, slave and emancipated servant in the Cosway family, a surrogate mother figure for Antoinette, has offered Antoinette a model of female empowerment: using 'spunks' to stand up for herself (69). In readings of Antoinette's condition at Thornfield Hall as that of a zombie (Emery 35–62, Drake 193–206, and Raiskin 129–43), 'Antoinette's red dress and the red flames in her last premonitionary dream of firing Thornfield Hall, mark an awakening from zombification'. Rhys suggests that Antoinette's redemptive independence is to be her dying dream of a horizon of spiritual release which conjoints Obeah, Amerindian, African Caribbean and Christian cosmology (Thomas 2002 95–96). As with Great-aunt Jane in 'The Cardboard Dolls' House', it is the syncretism of West Indian culture which offers an animating and satisfying depth of character.

Here in Wide Sargasso Sea, as in 'The Cardboard Dolls' House', and the fragment 'MY GREAT-AUNT JEANNETTE LIVED IN her room', Rhys's cardboard doll's house is metonymic of female artistry. In more ironic registers, Rhys uses them to comment on the gendered circumscriptions of the lives of white Creole girls and women in West Indian culture and in relation to the English and Englishness at specific historical moments. 'The Cardboard Dolls' House', too, suggests the influence of Henrik Ibsen and Katherine Mansfield on Rhys's earliest crystallisation of the image.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
Manuscript material by Jean Rhys has been quoted with the permission of Jean Rhys Ltd. and the Department of Special Collections at the University of Tulsa.

NOTES
2 I want to thank Peter Hulme for kindly inviting me to read his essay 'Undeveloped Estates' in draft form and for permission to quote from forthcoming material.
3 For a broader discussion of Rhys's use of horticultural tropes see Thomas, Worlding pp. 19–22.
4 The song, which features Scottish dialect, was officially banned during the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745–46, the aim of which was to restore Prince Charles Edward Stuart to the British throne. This information is drawn from a piece by Frank Kidson in Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians which is reproduced on the South Riding Tune Book website. The battle of Culloden on 17 April 1866 was to herald the rout of the Jacobite rebellion. It was followed by the 'butchery ... of many hundreds of stragglers and onlookers', 'the cold-blooded slaughter of wounded men', maltreatment and humiliation of prisoners, pillaging of Scottish farms, treason trials, executions, banishments and transportation to the colonies (Hook and Ross 115–23).
5 Rhys (Gwen Rees Williams) had earned praise in the Dominican press for her
performance at a 'dramatic and musical entertainment' at the local convent in 1905 (Dominican 31 Aug. 1905). She began study at The Academy of Dramatic Art in London in 1909. After two terms she withdrew. The Academy’s Administrator George Bancroft had advised her father that his ‘daughter is slow to improve with her accent which in my frank opinion would seriously affect her chances of success in Drama. I fear it would take her a considerable time to overcome this accent which in my judgement would only fit her for certain parts and those perhaps few and far between’ (qtd. in Angier 49). Rhys would always associate the Academy with snobbery; Angier notes that from her thirties onwards she would characteristically speak in a soft voice that was almost a whisper (50).

9 In 1859 Alice Landells provided detailed instructions for making cardboard doll’s houses and doll’s house furniture in Girl’s Own Toymaker and Book of Recreation, co-authored with her father E. Landells. In the Introduction the role of such craft in the reproduction of femininity is suggested:

‘The child who is instructed to make its own doll’s clothes, toy furniture, bedding etc. will soon take a pride in making them properly and will thus be acquiring knowledge of the most useful and practical character. Girls, a little older, will find much to entertain and amuse themselves. Nothing is more becoming than to see a home neatly and tastefully embellished by the handwork of its inmates; while the formation of habits of industry and usefulness are not only satisfactory in enabling young ladies to decorate their own homes by employing their leisure hours profitably, but also in furnishing the means of making suitable presents for their friends. (qtd. in King 280–81)

In her history of doll’s houses, Constance Eileen King she also describes and has a photograph of a doll’s house within Ann Sharp’s eighteenth-century Baby House, the term for a model house then. Ann Sharp was goddaughter of Princess Anne; later to become Queen (1702–1714). The doll’s house within a doll’s house is made of playing cards and currently ‘stands in the “attic” room’ (185). This resonates with Rhys’s biographer, Carole Angier, by contrast, reads ‘The Cardboard Dolls’ House’ as a thinly veiled celebratory autobiographical account of Rhys’s great-aunt Jane Woodcock and of the Lockhart family estate Geneva.

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8 ‘The Fly’, like ‘The Doll’s House’, was published in Mansfield’s posthumous collection The Dove’s Nest and Other Stories (1923).

9 Angela Smith notes that ‘the gate is a demarcation line’ separating ‘the well-regulated inside world’ of the Burnell home from ‘outsiders’, but does not analyse the whiteness of the gate as a racialised sign (41).

10 The children of the Samuel Josephs are described in ‘At the Bay’ as ‘leaping like savages on their lawn’ (448), and Beryl’s disgust at the servant Alice’s best clothes sense makes her think that ‘she had never seen such a girl. If Alice had only cleared her face with a cork before she started out, the picture would have been perfect’ (457).

11 In the autobiographical narrative in the Black Exercise Book Rhys also uses the word doll to describe the white Creole character Margaret Fernandez in Richard Hughes’s A High Wind in Jamaica (1929). She becomes the sexual plaything of sailors in the novel.

12 In quoting from this draft material I have inserted apostrophes in appropriate places.

13 The shamrock is the symbol of St Patrick, who is reputed to have converted the Druids of Ireland to Catholicism through ‘explaining the doctrine of the Trinity by
Jean Rhys’s Cardboard Doll’s Houses

reference to a shamrock’ (Jones 189). One might also read it, then, as a sign of religious imperialism.


15 Here one might also think of the disturbing ball-jointed dolls manipulated and photographed by surrealist Hans Bellmer. On Bellmer’s dolls see Hal Foster 101–22.

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Cloth and Self-Definition in Jamaica Kincaid’s *The Autobiography of My Mother*

Out of the 250 citations for Jamaica Kincaid in a database, apart from basic book reviews, most entries refer to flowers and plants, some to a creole voice, a few to mother-daughter relations, the obligatory pieces on Wordsworth and Milton in relation to *Lucy* and one or two to the female body. All these are perfectly reasonable pathways towards understanding Kincaid’s writing, but I want to look at another, clearly unexpected facet of her work. The slowly filling out photograph of a West Indian woman in her finery of patterned skirt, plain blouse, scarf and headscarf that provides the cover and chapter design in *The Autobiography of My Mother* indicates, as Kincaid’s story ‘Biography of a Dress’ suggests, that part of the quest for identity running through her work is figured in terms of clothing. This should not be surprising, since Kincaid was herself sent to work for the local dressmaker as a child (Ferguson), something reflected in sections of her earlier work, *At the Bottom of the River*: ‘Wash the white clothes on Monday and put them on the stone heap; wash the color clothes on Tuesday and put them on the clothesline to dry; … when buying cotton to make yourself a nice blouse, be sure that it doesn’t have gum on it, because that way it won’t hold up well after a wash’ (‘Girl’ 3); ‘so is my life to be like an apprenticeship in dressmaking, a thorny path to carefully follow or avoid?’ (‘Wingless’ 23).²

Cloth and clothing remain important motifs in Kincaid’s other work as well. In her paradoxical self-construction through autobiography that is also a ‘self-exorcism’ (Ferguson 162) of confession and self concealment in fictive distancing, the writer marks relationships with dress. In *Annie John*, the girl narrator has a trunk under her bed where her mother has stored all the embroidered covers and smocked dresses of her first few years (20). Later however, Annie finds a bright piece of cotton and suggests it would look good on both herself and her mother, but is told, ‘Oh no. You are getting too old for that…. You just cannot go around the rest of your life looking like a little me’ (26). She gets her dress, but her mother chooses another, and whenever either are worn, Annie feels ‘bitterness and hatred, directed not so much towards my mother as toward, I suppose, life in general’ (26). When Annie grows up and is about to leave Antigua for England, the last thing she does is dress; she changes from ‘an around-the-yard dress of my mother’s’ into a blue skirt and blouse (135).
If the void at the heart of personal relationships in Kincaid’s fiction echoes the ‘blankness’ of slavery history (132–33, 186), then the turn to material goods (in all senses of the word) may be compensation for a fragile selfhood haunted by an oppressive past. Externally shows of property provide immediate ways of asserting one’s worth and presence in provincial society stripped of alternative supports to self-esteem. When the narrator-protagonist in The Autobiography leaves her employ as a young woman, she observes: ‘I had four dresses, two pairs of shoes, a very nice straw hat, and the five guineas given to me by my father; it was not nothing’ (96). This is not merely the affectation of the poor black colonial: white plantation owners compensated for their nouveau riche class status and marginal colonial location by extravagant shows of dress. Drawing on historical records such as Lady Nugent’s journals in his novel Cambridge, Caryl Phillips echoes a genteel English horror of unseemly excess in the accounts of Jamaican society in the 1830s:

I was to be afforded the opportunity of witnessing the traditional West Indian dinner, where the table laboured under a burden of ostentatious and substantial dishes…. Among the merchants as distinct from the planters, it is incumbent upon each new host to outdo his predecessor. Furthermore, at the earliest opportunity, newly acquired diamonds and strings of pearls must always be prominently displayed…. This addiction to ornament, at the expense of convenience, is at present a strong characteristic of the West Indies, luxuries abounding where decencies are often found to be lacking. It appears that this is a common consequence of a young civilisation lacking the constraints of a polite tradition. (114–17)

Elsewhere in the novel, a young woman on a fact-finding tour of her father’s estates records her dismay at the extremes of slave dress — either shameless nudity or violent colourful display:

On Sundays and holidays, the negro will cap his festivities by indulging in a passion for dress, a love of which is curiously strong in these people. Male or female, they show the same predilection for exhibiting the finery of their wardrobes, and will generally adorn themselves in the following manner. The dandified males sport wide-brimmed hats and silk umbrellas, and promenade in windsor-grey trousers (which are generally embroidered about the seams with black cord). They complete the spectacle with white jackets and shirts with stiff high collars. The sable-belles are no less extravagantly modish in their ornamental silk dresses, gauze flounces and highly coloured petticoats which, though of the best quality, display patterns more commonly employed in England for window-curtains. Those who sport bonnets blend the fiercest shades in a close companionship with each other, so that these rainbow-hats dazzle one’s eyes at a mile’s distance. (66)

In Wide Sargasso Sea, Jean Rhys has Rochester complain similarly of the over-bright colours of the tropics (58–59) and the presumptuous affectation of freed Negroes such as the obeah woman Christophine:

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... she might hold her dress up. It must get very dirty, yards of it trailing on the floor’.
‘When they don’t hold their dress up it’s for respect…’.
‘Whatever the reason it is not a clean habit’.
‘It is. You don’t understand at all. They don’t care about getting a dress dirty because it shows it isn’t the only dress they have.’ (71)

These fictional observations around the time of Emancipation repeat displays going back much further. Slaves were expected to make their own clothes from rationed cloth and feed themselves from allocated plots of land. Economies on work clothes and sale of surplus produce allowed the purchase of ‘portable wealth’ used as self-expression in communal dances and religious groups (Higman 206; Walvin 76).

In the initial stages of plantation colonies, cotton print from India was used to trade with Africans, and then for clothing the slaves acquired through that contact. Bright checks from southern India became known to British merchants as ‘Guinea cloth’ (Dhamija; Lovejoy, 104), and once production from the US supplied Manchester mills, imitations of it kept the triangular trade of slavery operating (DuPlessis, Bailey 4; Higman 229). By 1815, when New England had begun its own textile manufacture, mills were advised to produce ‘large figures and lively colors as they are worn only by mulattoes and blacks and they are fond of anything that is dashing’ (Bailey 7).

Such show created social problems at an earlier point in Barbados society, and presumably elsewhere in the colonies, and no doubt this was exacerbated in the period immediately following the abolition of the slave trade. As Cecily Forde-Jones carefully demonstrates, dress was used as a means of policing the divide between white and black: plantation wives engaged in poor relief by donating finery to low-class immigrant white women so they would not fall below the standards of dress separating the races. In Jean Rhys’s Wide Sargasso Sea, the social standing of declassed whites after the cessation of the slave trade is measured by the quality of their dress, such that we see the desperate efforts of a widowed mother to keep up appearances. Her daughter, young Antoinette, is at her lowest when she is obliged to wear the cast-off frock of her black playmate, Tia (21–22).

In keeping with Jamaica Kincaid’s other rewritings of Wordsworth and Milton in Lucy, her Autobiography of My Mother can be read as a retort to Rhys, presenting life in the same places of Dominica from the point of view of a Black Tia rather than a Buckra Antoinette, a redressing, in fact, of the exotic red dress with which the exiled creole sustains memories of island life amid the gloom of her English imprisonment.

Kincaid, like Rhys, draws on the romance of self-realisation by one of society’s victims (Bronte’s Jane Eyre) to reveal the cold heart of survival in the lower ranks of West Indian life, where history has determined that others and elsewhere
will govern what is secure and true. Jane Eyre even when destitute, is buoyed up
by her sense of worth as a Christian Englishwoman, but for Kincaid’s Xuela,
Everything about us is held in doubt and we the defeated define all that is unreal, all
that is not human, all that is without love, all that is without mercy. Our experience
cannot be interpreted by us; we do not know the truth of it. (37)
This is not far from the emptiness and imitation outlined by V.S. Naipaul as
characteristic of the Caribbean, but Kincaid offers a kind of toughness as
counterbalance: at worst a social economy of stoic indiffERENCE and a hierarchy
of capacities to inflict pain on others (39), at best a defiant resistance wherein
self-possession is expressed through silence, stubbornness and small material
acquisitions — material (again) in both senses of the word.
In The Autobiography of My Mother, the narrator is deprived of her mother
at birth. Her ‘farming out’ to a stranger leaves her an alienated onlooker who
develops preternatural talents of language and observation. She remembers vivid
scenes, sounds, smells: the ‘feel of the cloth of my skirt and blouse — coarse
because it was new — a green skirt and beige blouse, a uniform’ (12). This
contrasts with the dress of the laundry woman who looks after her: ‘of thin,
badly woven cotton, the bodice of a color and pattern contrary to the skirt … dirt
had made it old, but dirt had made it new again by giving it shadings it did not
have before, and dirt would finally cause it to disintegrate altogether’ (10).
Clothing continues to be a marker of class, self-perception and differentiation
throughout the book. Xuela’s first teacher, as a Black colonial woman trained by
missionaries, wears her self-loathing ‘like an article of clothing’ (15), and it
transpires that the narrator’s father hides his mixed-race origins and maintains
his authority with a facade of the neatly washed and ironed shirts he collects
each week from his daughter’s surrogate mother. Significantly, when he comes
to ‘rescue’ her from her orphaned existence he arrives ‘wearing the uniform of a
jailer’ — his police uniform (22). Eventually, he grows into his clothes until
they ‘covered completely who he was’, and his son can only emulate his father
through wearing a white linen suit like him (53–54, 90). To protect herself from
her jealous stepmother, Xuela ‘tried to cloak [herself] in an atmosphere of apology’
(41). Xuela’s own mother, a Carib, had been placed on the steps of a convent as
a baby, wrapped in ‘pieces of clean old cloth’ with her name written on them in
indigo ink and grew up there ‘draped in blue sacks made from coarse cotton, a
uniform’ (80).
References to cloth and clothing therefore permeate the text, as both metaphors
and specific material references. Towards the end of the book, Xuela refers overtly
to the legacy of material and psychic dispossession left by slave history. Her
dislike of uniforms of any kind seems to arise out of a hyper-sensitivity founded
on the regimentation of natives and workers under colonialism and slavery. There
is surely an echo in her mother’s dress of the ‘blue sallampores of Coromandel’
favoured as clothing rations for slaves in the eighteenth century (Chaudhuri,
277), and with the shift to Lancashire mill goods, described as ‘blue naps’ and ‘Blue long ells’ (Higman 229).

But if her mother is swallowed up into the anonymity of a charity convent uniform, her daughter’s school uniform represents an escape route. Xuela is cut out from the crowd by her dress because her upwardly aspiring father atypically pushes his daughter into higher levels of education. Cloth marks identity throughout the text; it signals the younger Xuela’s transition to womanhood when she engages in an instinctive ritual of buying flourbags and turning them into menstrual pads (57–58). When she is farmed out to domestic service, she notes her mistress’s ‘white dress made of a coarse cloth with embroidery stitching of flowers and leaves; I noticed this because it was a dress people in Mahaut would have worn only to church on Sundays’ (63–64). Despite its good condition and cleanness, the poor fit of the dress reveals its wearer’s surrender to life’s disappointments. Madame seeks to take over Xuela’s person, using her to make good her own unfulfillable desires by passing her over to her husband as a sexual companion and potential bearer of a child for them. The means of entrapment is the gift of her old dresses:

One day, without any preparation, she gave me a beautiful dress that she no longer wore; it still fit her, but she no longer wore it. As I was trying on the dress I could hear her thoughts... I was standing in this room before her, my clothes coming off, my clothes going on, naked, clothed, but the vulnerability I felt was not of the body, it was of the spirit, the soul. To communicate so intimately with someone, to be spoken to so silently by someone and yet understand more clearly than if she had shouted at the top of her voice... was something I did not experience with anyone ever again in my life. I took the dress from her. I did not wear it, I would never wear it. I only took it and kept it for a while. (69)

She was stitching me a garment made from beautiful old cloths she had saved from the different times in her life;... how she wished to weave me into its seams, its many seams. How hard she tried; but with each click of the thimble striking the needle, I made an escape. (78)

A name in the islands, (the narrator’s is Xuela Claudette Desvarieux/ Richardson) ‘is at once [one’s]’ history recapitulated and abbreviated, and on declaring it, that person holds herself high or low, and the person hearing it holds the declarer high or low; it can fill one with despair and self-hatred (79). A dress, however, while it can also declare the fixity of social standing, can be a means of disguise, protection or change. At one point, for example, Xuela burns her work clothes to return to live with her father (104). Kincaid’s novel fixes on precise details about clothing but also ranges across a wide variety of cloth. When Xuela is taken from her adoptive mother, Eunice, her belongings are wrapped ‘in a muslin knapsack’ (24). Her stiff conversations with her father occur with her wearing a ‘white poplin dress’ (196) and her father changes from policeman-khaki to a civil servant dress uniform of ‘navy-blue serge pants and white cotton twill jacket with gold buttons’ (189). When

...
she returns to Monsieur and Madame La Batte after aborting her master’s child, the mistress ‘wore a new black dress with an old piece of crushed-up cloth pinned just above her left bosom. The color of the cloth was red, an old red that had only darkened with time’ (94). There is an economical message here of the fashionable ‘mum’ of an upper-class style now outmoded, an echo of Xuela’s dried blood as she lay on a bed of rags, and an allusion to Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter to emphasise that the shame is not Xuela’s and she refuses to mourn or feel guilt. The bed of rags is contrasted to the birth of her father’s new child ‘lying on a bed of clean rags’ perfumed to keep evil spirits at bay (108). Her stepsister rides to her seduction dressed to reflect her father’s wealth and respectability, in white Sunday cotton (121); later she marries in white silk: ‘it came from far away, it came from China, but it was said that she married in English silk’ (127).

Such colonial snobbery alongside a tacit recognition of trading history is matched by other moments in the text. As a labourer, Xuela wraps her lunch in a ‘knapsack made out of a tired piece of madras cloth’ (99). Here we find a link to the ‘guinea cloth’ once traded with Africa and the Caribbean. Edward Long noted that ‘well regulated’ plantations in eighteenth-century Jamaica extended the stipulated clothing allowance for slaves to include ‘a suit of warm woollen cloaths, hats, caps, checks, handkerchiefs etc.’. The checks and handkerchiefs were ‘guinea’ or ‘madras cloth’ which ‘creoles’ twisted into turbans to keep damp and cold from their heads (qtd in Ward, 152). Later, print checks from Lancashire mills were substituted and also distributed for children’s clothing (Higman 236).

Now I do not want to make out that textile history is a primary concern of the novel; questions such as ‘What makes the world turn?’ (131) and ‘what possibilities or consolations are there for vulnerable people in a small soulless community at the edges of imperial history?’ loom much larger. Nonetheless, it is possible to construct a reading in which such larger imponderables are worked out in terms of a tough, non-metaphysical alienated woman’s experience, through the indexical use of materials. This is not the kind of modernist poetic prose used by George Lamming to give the impression of speculative peasant boys in 1930s Barbados, nor is it the redemptive symbol of black feminist community such as we find in The Color Purple. If anything, The Autobiography of My Mother is closer to the hard lyricism of Toni Morrison’s Beloved. The latter book ends with the challenging, possibly ambiguous, claim, ‘This is not a story to pass on’. Darrell Pinkney’s comments on Kincaid’s work might well serve as a gloss on that: ‘Kincaid’s voice … turns the reader into a spectator. Her narrator will tell a story but will not surrender it… It can be witnessed but not shared’ (28). We might argue that Morrison’s work is far more passionate and seeks to draw the reader into its dramatic recreation of history, but both texts, I think also operate to resist any easy sentimental appropriation and containment of horrific and bleak tales of dispossession and the struggle to reclaim selfhood, reconstruct dignity.
While the Dominica of the novel is neither the world of *Beloved*, nor the Jamaica plantations that most historical studies focus on, the broad system of plantation management does allow generalised comparisons to be made. The slow cessation of slavery brought several related changes in fashion amongst Afro-Caribbeans. Slave plantations commonly issued coarse cloth to workers, frequently made up as pants, shirts and dresses — Osnaburg linen, Pennington flannel and serge (Higman 229) — supplemented with woollen goods for night work and work in the cooler months. Emancipated Islanders brought the importation of woolen cloth almost to a total halt, changed their tastes to lighter cottons and shifted to cloth lengths which they made up themselves (Ward 245–46). It is significant that Xuela’s stevedore lover steals for her not just cheap cotton lengths from the ships he unloads, but several coloured dress-lengths of ‘Irish linen’ (169, 172). The better status of linen and its colours are mentioned several times and this resonates against the fact that a common slave cloth was osnaburgh, ‘a coarse mostly grey linen’ (Ward 151; Higman 229). As Roland’s pilfering indicates, local finery is a rejection of the humiliations of the past, an appropriation of dignity, but it is also a continuation of economic dependency under a new form of small-scale cash economy and cheap machined cloth from Britain and the US. Islanders practice a kind of ‘bricolage’ that covers the nakedness of brute existence while it also reveals unspoken histories and ongoing conflicts.

Xuela’s earliest memories are of being visited by her father when he came to collect his washed clothes: ‘they were wrapped up like a gift in two pieces of clean nankeen cloth’ (6). Later, when she goes to work on a road gang, she buys a man’s ‘old nankeen drawers, his one old pair of khaki pants, his old shirt of some kind of cotton’ (98–99). Still later in the book, when she has a sexual encounter with her husband-to-be, she is ‘wearing a nightgown made from a piece of nankeen my father had given me’ (151). Her mother, she imagines growing up with the nuns in ‘a dress made of nankeen, a loose-fitting dress, a shroud … she wore a matching piece of cloth on her head that covered all of her beautiful hair completely’ (200).

A glance through the ironically named ‘Compact’ OED reveals that ‘nankeen’ is a cotton cloth originally from Kiangsu province in China favoured for its durability and natural yellow colour. Trousers were commonly made from it and in later times ordinary cotton was dyed to give it the same colour. The first historical citation of its use is from *Songs and Poems on Costume* in 1757, when it is described as ‘most like nature, most like skin’ (clearly an irony in the pigmentocracy of the colonial Caribbean). By 1842 it was being manufactured in Manchester and the type of cotton was grown in the US by at least 1865. A list of Lancashire textiles between 1775–1785 records nankeen as a heavy cloth, categorised with jeans and towelling as ‘fustian’. The word itself carries overtones of rusticity and poverty (Lemire 201).
Kincaid’s book gestures towards the poor person’s romance of ‘rags to riches’ (and possibly also to the self-improvement romance behind slave narratives). Xuela finally marries a white doctor and wears ‘pink faille silk’ to her wedding (214), but she rejects tidy love stories and sentimental illusions of memory and wealth. Her ‘Reader, I married him’ ending, redolent of Jane Eyre, is a sterile loveless one and she finds nothing to provide grounds for comfort or self-congratulation. There is not even the romantic desperation of Rhys’s version. Kincaid’s continuous references to nankeen serve in this context to counterpoint working routine and any Jane Eyre romantic outcome, and the several mentions of cloth being traded from other places carry the history of West Indies trading in people and labour in which Xuela locates herself. Kincaid’s story sets up Xuela as a subaltern voice speaking in silence. She is child (not adult), then woman (not lady, not man), and takes after her Carib mother instead of her half-Scots-half-African father. Orphaned, she has no connection with her mother’s people, whom she sees as lost (198). Alienated, she knows her condition, understands the fragile society of pretension she lives within, but cannot completely escape it or express it to anyone other than herself: ‘I own nothing, I survey nothing’ (132). ‘Xuela, am not in a position to make my feeling have any meaning’ (137). She refuses the ‘ambivalent reinscription’ of colonial discourse’s ‘sly civility’, seeing more what Homi Bhabha also recognises as the ‘incommensurability’ of subaltern and hegemonic experience (96, 152): the master cannot also be the friend (134), the owner knows about his workers/slaves but cannot empathise with them (135). Even she has no commonality with other oppressed figures: when she encounters the local gravedigger as fellow fringe-dweller, they can only grunt at each other: ‘The idea of him and me really hearing each other was out of the question’ (142). When she ‘marries up’ there is little communication either; her husband speaks to her in English and she to him in patois, she dresses him in pastels and wears black herself (218–19). Determined to live only in the present, she finds their relationship, like all things in the islands, haunted by the past (205, 223).

This haunting occurs in the silent stories of things. The rich man ‘sits in a chair made from a fabric that is very valuable because its origins are distant, obscure, and involve again the forced labor, the crippling, the early death of the unnamed many’ (135). His emulators in the colonies drink ‘English tea’ and ‘English cocoa’, though they are aware both products come from elsewhere (142). Xuela’s resistance lies in her passionless deployment of her body for her own satisfactions, which has the effect of controlling men through complicated acts of simultaneous assertion and submission. The marker of this exchange, this trading in survival, is the wearing and divesting of cloth. There is little gain in this, no triumphalist success. Clothing here serves as a fragile sign of subaltern text, at once a silent speaking, a temporary shield, a disguise, a borrowed signature: nankeen, that rough second skin, attests to nakedness ‘at once the bar
and bearer of difference’ (Bhabha 101). It is instructive that the story is a ‘biography of a dress’, not an autobiography of the wearer, and that the irritating succession of qualifying comments in parentheses from the adult narrating persona is explained by the child becoming conscious of a split in experience between experiencing self and the self observing the experience. The narrator (a second-level observer of both child-personae) says she relies on the observer as being an act of self-invention, but admits that this ‘true voice’ is to be trusted least because it throws up a ‘protective membrane which allows me to see but only feel as much as I can handle at any given moment’. In the autobiography/novel, the daughter-narrator says ‘And I learned, too, that no one can truly judge himself’ — honesty, integrity, penance appear to have their being in silence until someone else makes all the accusations without the forgiveness that self-confession carries with it (60). The play between subject and object, subjectivity and objectivity clearly relates to slaves, women, and people like Xuela’s Carib mother, being made into objects: ‘Bales of cotton, sacks of sugar’ or bolts of cloth (A Small Place 37). The narrator has to find a way of bringing faceless people-as-objects into story and history as experiencing human subjects without turning them into the falsely autonomous rounded individuals of Western auto/biography. It is a dilemma Wilson Harris detects in the West Indian novel, and one differently enunciated by the Subaltern Studies group. The person’s relationships with objects, then, is one way of addressing the problematic — ownership of things makes one a person, but can also dehumanise when that ownership and the production that makes it possible (the manufacture of textiles and furniture) means that owners oppress workers; things made elsewhere turn owners into consumers, an objectified subjectivity represented in the book by imposed uniforms (12, 80), but consumers can make the things they only partly own into their own things, as when turning bolts of cloth into dresses. Silenced by ‘living at the end of the world’ (213) and at the edge of slave pasts, left unclear of where things rest because the names of people are given and change, the names of places are unknown, imposed and erased, individuals seem to be moved around in a ‘haphazard mess’ by forces outside their control. The colonised subject finds affirmation and order in a silent relation to things — shoes, dresses, jewellery — and voices subjective presence through objective cataloguing of their ‘biographies’. Jamaica Kincaid says in interview that she wants her books to upset people (Kreilkamp 54). So it is perhaps consistent with her ‘Autobiography’ (which is disconcertingly not an autobiography, except in so far as nothing changes from the mother’s life to the daughter’s) to note that the slavery of the past and its turn to dress is counterpointed today by uncomfortable facts. Many of the women using dressmaking skills as a way out of slavery and poverty now ‘slave’ over
machines in clothing factories. Despite a rise in apparel exports from the Caribbean to the US to $3.6 billion in 1993, American employment in the region has fallen by 25%. Textile workers are reduced to sweatshop piecework, and young single women have been moved in to replace males. A database search under ‘cloth’ and ‘slavery’ these days produces articles not on the textile trade to sugar plantations, but on the globalised exploitation of textile workers. Kincaid’s mothers are still toiling in silence at the end of the world, even though the world has come to their doorstep.

NOTES

1 This autobiographical narrative, split between the adult narrator’s self-conscious ‘now’ and the two-year-old child-self’s ‘then’ is a meditation on a photo of the author in a dress made for a birthday photo by her mother, and the photo-based book design, though it does not declare it is an image of Kincaid’s mother, signals a clear link to the earlier piece. Another connection occurs when the novel’s narrator mentions a ‘skirt of the white poplin dress I was wearing, and the poplin itself was from somewhere far away from here’ (196). ‘Biography of a Dress’ begins with the narrator at two years of age, wearing ‘a yellow dress made of cotton poplin (a fabric with a slightly unsmooth texture first manufactured in the French town of Avignon and brought to England by the Huguenots, but I could not have known that at the time)’.

The woman in the novel’s photo appears to be wearing a white blouse with lace trim. This seems to indicate a French Caribbean origin and connects with the Dominican section of the book. However, the images of the narrator’s mother (which are not her memories, since the mother died at her birth) do not at all coincide with the cover illustration (200). They are more akin to the narrator in her happier moments and may well in fact be the author posing in one of her own compositions touched up to appear as an old snapshot (see sections of the thesis by Doepp on Kincaid’s self-representation/media representation). The division of chapters by parts of illustrations seems to be a ‘house style’ in Kincaid’s books, so the ‘presence’ of the photo is set against the ‘artfulness’ of the book design.

The text systematically performs and subverts its claims to authority and first-hand experience: autobiography on the front cover and fiction in the publisher’s category on the back. Kincaid’s work consistently engages in this play, her characters Lucy Josephine Potter and Xuela Devastarieux Richardson carrying traces of herself under her birth name, Elaine Potter Richardson, while Annie John is taken from her mother, Annie Potter. Kincaid’s grandmother was Carib (Ferguson). There is the question of whose mother’s autobiography this text represents: the grandmother’s cannot be told, since the daughter had no contact with her mother; the handwritten title and author’s name on the cover suggests it is Kincaid’s mother’s story, but even as a fiction that is impossible, since Xuela/Annie refuses to bear children (199).

Given the difficult relationship between Kincaid and her real mother, the work may be both an attempt to understand Annie and a writerly act of self-creation/self-effacement by denying the parent. 2 Annie John also ends with mention of her having been apprenticed to miss Dulcie the seamstress (138).
The short story has the same ‘cool’ analytic detachment from its subject as the later ‘autobiography’, both simulating and disturbing the idea of self-narrative as authentic because of objectivity. In Annie John, the clothes in the narrator’s trunk include dresses made for her first and second birthdays and a photo of her in the British Guiana earrings and dress of the short story (20). However, the first dress is yellow, while the one in the photo is pink. Here we have perhaps a mere lapse of memory, but also quite possibly another deliberate playing between documentary realism and realistic fiction.

I am aware that there were differences from island to island, especially between the English and French-controlled Antilles. Many of the historical analyses have worked with Jamaican material, and this will have shifts of nuance and trade history if we consider the novel’s setting of Dominica. However, the broad practices of slavery can perhaps be applied across the plantation system in the region.

DuPlessis explains this was a Scots manufacture specifically for the slave colonies and substituting for imported Central European cloth (36).

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Demystifying ‘Reality’ in Sistren’s Bellywoman Bangarang

Sistren Theatre Collective’s debut production *Bellywoman Bangarang* (1978) is considered a landmark in Caribbean theatre. When first staged twenty-six years ago in Kingston’s Barn Theatre, the play caused a stir among theatre-goers for its unmasking of social taboos surrounding sexuality, teenage pregnancy, and domestic violence. Based on the life stories of Sistren members, *Bellywoman Bangarang* explores the inequalities Jamaican girls face as they mature from childhood to adulthood. Through a series of flashbacks, Sistren members’ childhood experiences of growing up in rural communities in colonial Jamaica are told through the lives of four female characters: Didi, Yvonne, Gloria and Marie. The characters’ stories, like those of the women who formed Sistren, are intrinsically linked through the shared experiences of difficult mother/daughter relationships; violent encounters with men; having babies in their teens; and the suffocating, and often prejudiced, attitudes of the local community. Folk songs, children’s games, rituals, riddles and character ‘transformations’, described by Rhonda Cobham as ‘ritual frameworks’ (235), are used to preface episodic scenes in which the characters’ stories are enacted, and, like much Caribbean theatre, drumming sets the pace throughout the performance. During the creative process behind *Bellywoman Bangarang*, Sistren members were encouraged to re-visit their childhoods whilst participating in a series of drama games designed to elicit their personal testimonies. Trust between Sistren members was essential as each woman unburdened herself to the group in the process of creating a production that became ‘less a reflection of life than a demystification of it’ (Cobham and Ford-Smith xv). Thus, the workshop phase pre-production was, in many ways, more important for the women in Sistren than performing before an audience. However, the physical presence of the women’s bodies on stage was arguably more significant for Jamaican decolonisation than verbal disclosure behind closed doors. Sistren members, performing their own stories before mainly middle-class audiences, intervened in and contested oppressive discourses that naturalise hierarchies of power based on gender, race, and class. This essay, then, looks in detail at the sophisticated use of ‘ritual frameworks’ in *Bellywoman*, which operate as symbolic representations of naturalised hierarchies; as strategically placed disruptions which juxtapose the female characters’ ‘reality’ with its social construction; and as strategies of survival against neo/colonial control.
African-American feminist bell hooks, in her *Black Looks: Race and Representation*, suggests that the importance of challenging race, class and gender-based stereotypes is not just a question of critiquing the status quo. It is also about transforming the image, creating alternatives, asking ourselves questions about what types of images subvert, pose critical alternatives, and transform our worldviews and move us away from dualistic thinking about good and bad. Making a space for the transgressive image, the outlaw rebel vision, is essential to any effort to create a context for transformation. And even then little progress is made if we transform images without shifting paradigms, changing perspectives, ways of looking. (4)

Sistren’s *Bellywoman* subverts ‘ways of looking’ by destabilising categories, such as race, gender, and class, which are exposed in the performance as fluid, transformable, and impermanent constructions of identity. The performativity of gender, which Judith Butler suggests is ‘compelled by social sanction and taboo’ (271), is what *Bellywoman* strives to display through its use of anti-naturalistic staging devices, such as the ‘ritual frameworks’, which lay bare the insidious effect of social conditioning on the possibilities for working-class Jamaican women’s lives. Carole Boyce Davies in *Black Women Writing & Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, extends Butler’s formulation to include the category of Black woman, which she suggests ‘exists as multiple performances of gender and race and sexuality based on particular cultural, historical, geopolitical, class communities in which Black women exist’ (8–9). In *Bellywoman* gender is performed in accordance with Jamaican society’s taboos and social codes; the female characters are expected to conform to traditional sex-role stereotypes and to remain virgins until marriage despite double standards that sanction the sexual freedoms enjoyed by young Jamaican men. In many of the play’s scenes, the female characters challenge sex-role stereotypes by questioning their mothers’ authority or by simply refusing to be restricted by what their gender role dictates. Such resistance results in violence from mothers who cannot cope and tighter surveillance of the girls’ activities. In this way, *Bellywoman* portrays the regimentation of Jamaican girls’ lives within their local communities. The lives of the four characters revolve around the four areas of community life (the church, the school, the family, and the local shops), which assume responsibility for socialising the girls as well as closely monitoring their movements.

The staging of *Bellywoman* reflects the confined existence that many Jamaican girls endured. The backdrop depicts a yard in rural Jamaica complete with a bath, pots, pans and aprons; the only other props used were a few boxes. According to Sidney Mintz, the yard is traditionally a place where adult women carry out their domestic duties as well as participating in cultural and social activities (231). In view of this, the setting of the play functioned as a gendered space where the daily concerns of the girls were dealt with against the familiar backdrop of domestic life. Masks were hung on the fence giving the yard the dual function...
of both a domestic and performance space: the rich cultural and theatrical traditions of Jamaicans living in impoverished conditions are made known, as the yard is a meeting place for friends and family and, therefore, the most appropriate setting for testifying, story telling, singing, and dancing. However, in this context, the yard also represents the impoverished domesticity that many Jamaican women find themselves trapped in and, unconsciously, trap their daughters in as well. In *Bellywoman*, the yard serves as a form of imprisonment for the girls, for it is within the yard’s walls that their domestic training is carried out and where they are hidden from the dangers surrounding their developing sexuality. When they are permitted to leave the safety of the yard, they are restricted to visiting the four areas of community life, depicted by the ‘ritual frameworks’.

The ‘ritual frameworks’, which are interwoven between the play’s narrative sequences, emphasise the significance of the oral tradition in the socialisation of the four girls, and provide a transitional stage for fluid character ‘transformations’. The technique of ‘transformations’, made famous by New York’s Open Theatre in the 1960s, is used to demolish ‘established realities’ so that ‘the audience’s dependence on any fixed reality is called into question’ (Feldman qtd in Canning 54). The deployment of ‘transformations’ in *Bellywoman* destabilises the audience’s ‘way of looking’ at the very moment in which comfort is assumed. The actors metamorphose, in full view of the audience, from pregnant teenagers to mothers to men to doctors to crowds of onlookers to trains to streets and so on. Further, the actors’ bodies metamorphose to depict the development of the female body from childhood to adolescence to motherhood. The audience is confronted by the corporeality of the female body as it changes with the onset of puberty and pregnancy, and when it is battered and abused in violent encounters with Jamaican men. When *Bellywoman* was first staged, public discussion of women’s health and sexuality was taboo and, despite the ‘revolutionary’ ethos surrounding the Manley government, the issues addressed in the play were deemed ‘politically off-track’ (Cobham & Ford-Smith xiii). The ‘ritual frameworks’, particularly the game-playing and riddles, depict the social and political suppression of Jamaican women’s concerns, particularly the ambiguities surrounding sex education and the high incidence of sexual and domestic violence. Selected specifically for their relevance to the lives of Jamaican girls, the ‘ritual frameworks’ are strategically placed throughout the performance for two main reasons: to alert the audience to the insidious gendered messages that are transmitted through what appears to be harmless child’s play; and, perhaps more importantly, to emphasise the extent to which working-class Jamaican girls rely upon and find solace in Jamaica’s oral tradition in order to resist the domination of colonial models of education, religion and medicine, which are shown in *Bellywoman* to be sources of oppression, demoralisation, and control.

*Bellywoman* opens with the appearance of a larger-than-life masked figure, a Mother Woman, which is manipulated by three actors disguised beneath its robes.
The masked apparition represents a symbolic Mother figure from Jamaica’s oral tradition, whose purpose in the play is to heal and protect the pregnant girls (Hanson). Upon entering the stage, the Mother Woman imitates the actions of a midwife attending a birth before fracturing to reveal the actors hidden beneath its robe. The characters, to whom the Mother Woman has ‘given birth’, transform into the medical staff at a hospital; the actor playing the Doctor dons a white gown and stethoscope to signify Western and, by extension, ‘legitimate’ methods of healing. The audience is introduced to the four main characters — Didi, Yvonne, Gloria and Marie — who are admitted to the maternity ward of the hospital suffering severe labour pains; they each wear large cushions to signify their pregnancies. The nurses ignore the girls’ cries, treating with contempt their youth, status and situation. In fact, they chastise the girls for falling pregnant in their teens and attribute their pregnancies to the sexual antics of the working-class:

Marie: I don’t want to have a baby nurse.
Nurse 1: Next time you better be more careful when you’re dealing with a man.
Nurse 2: You girls are just too careless. Don’t you have any self respect? (1)

The actor dressed as a doctor, moves robotically from one girl to the next, her movements resembling a machine as each of the patients is treated in exactly the same way, allowing no room for individual differences. Without any display of emotion, the nurses read the chart notes for each girl as the doctor moves from one patient to the next. The doctor’s robotic actions are contrasted with the intimate details of each girl’s pre-natal condition, underscored by different drumming rhythms that denote the girls’ personal stories. By juxtaposing the nurturing practices of these representative models of ‘mothering’, Bellywoman makes explicit the polarities between Western and traditional methods of healing, and by extension, European- and African-derived cultural practices. The care and nurturing of the Mother Woman is contrasted with the callous contempt of the nurses and the robotic concern displayed by the doctor. The Mother Woman reappears throughout the play to help and protect the four female characters, most notably Marie, who, having been raped and battered by three men, experiences a particularly difficult labour. Ironically, Marie is the same character who the nurses, in the above excerpt, accuse of sexual promiscuity.

The interaction between the medical staff at the hospital and the four girls also portrays the socio-economic stratification of Jamaican society and the position of working-class pregnant teenagers within its ranks. The tensions between the nurses and the girls are made evident by Sistren’s use of language: the nurses speak in Standard English, which directly contrasts with the girls’ ‘patwah’. Moreover, this is the only section of the play where Standard English is used, and it is used to caricature the uncaring attitudes of the middle-classes towards the hardships suffered by working-class women. The masking of the voice, a
‘theatrical vocabulary’ explored by Elaine Savory (1999), is yet another form of ‘transformation’ in Bellywoman, which, unlike the Open Theatre’s productions, does not merely utilise improvisation to affect the actors’ metamorphosis, but also deploys masking, of both the voice and the face, costuming, and drag. The ease with which the actors switch between Jamaican Creole, Standard English and Dread Talk, which are used in Bellywoman to denote class and gender, questions the fixity of Jamaica’s social stratification, and illustrates the level of social mobility which such masking allows the actor off-stage. Rhonda Cobham and Honor Ford-Smith report that there were rumours circulating after Bellywoman’s opening night that ‘the actors were in fact university students masquerading as “the oppressed”’ (vii). Yet, the production that audience members witnessed in 1978 was performed in a Creole dialect that is situated at the bottom end of the Creole continuum: indecipherable to outsiders and rarely, if ever, spoken by middle-class Jamaicans.

The switch from Standard English to Creole in Bellywoman sets in motion a ‘ritual framework’ which marks the transition from present to past, and shifts the audience’s attention from the impersonal realm of the medical institution to the personal stories of the four girls. Halfway through reading Yvonne Scott’s chart notes, the nurse switches from scripted Standard English to a spontaneous joke in Creole which, understood and enjoyed by the pregnant girls, acts as a catalyst for their ‘transformation’ into children. The girls, joined by the nurses who have changed into school uniforms, remove their cushions and jump off their hospital beds to play a traditional children’s clapping game called ‘Hands of the 85’. The game, which links the names of girls with traditionally ‘female’ vocations, such as teaching, mothering and secretarial work, makes explicit the discursive construction of gender and the ‘naturalised’ link between biological sex and vocational orientation. The ritual framework ends with the actors transforming into the mothers of the children they have just portrayed, exiting the stage calling the names of their daughters and hunting for them within the audience. Whilst this ‘transformation’ operates as an ingenious scene-changing device, it sets the stage for a series of scenes between the girls and their mothers as well as pointing to the girls’ future role as teen-age mothers, as if that too is a natural progression.

The girls’ ignorance of puberty, used as a comic device to punctuate the fraught scenes between mothers and daughters, prompts them to gossip about sex whenever they are left unsupervised. The sound of Didi’s mother calling her daughter’s name is the cue for a ‘ritual framework’, which begins as the girls’ attempt to hide from parental detection by covering parts of their bodies with their hands or items of furniture. The girls explore the development of their bodies and their sexuality’ (2). The actors work in pairs; one actor transforms into a mirror by wearing a mask, while the other actor criticises her own reflection in the following way:
represent the four areas of community life. One actor from each station wears a
ballgame downstage centre, the rest of the company form ‘stations’ which
of escaping from the insidious control of social institutions. While the girls play
which theatricalises, through an elaborate game-playing sequence, the difficulty
freedoms, which pits mothers and daughters against each other in a battle of
complicity, self-destructive rage, hatred, and paralysing despair enter’ (4).
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reflect the internalisation of prescriptive standards of beauty, which circulate in
Jamaican society via the predominance of North American media. The
The Mirror game invokes the Lacanian concept of ‘the mirror stage’ in which
the child becomes a subject through interaction with its reflection in the mirror
(123). Unlike the child to whom Lacan refers, the girls’ subjectivity is already
socially determined prior to participating in the game. ‘Mirror mirror’, therefore,
serves to reinforce the fragmentation of the Black girl’s sense of self through her
desire to mimic the white Other. The desirable image (that is, the white woman)
is beyond the girl’s reach and therefore the reflection of herself in the faces of
members of the community is contaminated by the colonial denigration of
Blackness. Radhika Mohanram posits that ‘the colonised is always suspended in
the mirror stage, cohered by the master discourse of the coloniser’ (200). Whilst
the girls appear to criticise their own bodies, the existence of an actor playing
the mirror image works to heighten the girls’ sense of alienation as they are
actually commenting upon an/Other Black woman/actor’s body. Foremost on
the above list of criticisms is Black skin, the visible marker of Otherness, which
positions the body within Jamaica’s colour/class hierarchy. The girls’ ‘disavowal’
of their skin colour portrays the extent to which Black skinned Jamaicans have
been damaged psychologically by the denigration of racial difference under neo/
colonial regimes. The other criticisms, such as ugly hands and knock-knees,
reflect the internalisation of prescriptive standards of beauty, which circulate in
Jamaican society via the predominance of North American media. The
destructiveness of colonial/patriarchal representations of Blackness, according
to bell hooks, leave ‘gaps in our psyche that are the spaces where mindless
complicity, self-destructive rage, hatred, and paralysing despair enter’ (4).
With the onset of puberty comes the curtailment of the girls’ childhood freedoms, which pits mothers and daughters against each other in a battle of
wills. The regimentation of the girls’ lives is depicted in a ‘ritual framework’,
which theatricalises, through an elaborate game-playing sequence, the difficulty
of escaping from the insidious control of social institutions. While the girls play
a ballgame downstage centre, the rest of the company form ‘stations’ which
represent the four areas of community life. One actor from each station wears a
representative mask and adopts a representative action to denote ‘the mother’, ‘the parson’ etc., while the rest of the actors in the station intone representative chants, such as the lyrics to the famous hymn ‘When I Survey the Wondrous Cross’. The use of masking in this sequence distances the representative figures from their personification as members of the local community who, aside from being known to the four girls, are themselves indoctrinated by colonial/patriarchal ideologies, making them victims as well as un/witting co-conspirators in the oppression of the girls. The domination of colonial values pervades the lives of the four girls, theatricalised by the repetitive chanting of the masked figures and their constant interruption of the girls’ ballgame. The girls are not completely malleable — they do have agency — shown in their willingness to listen to two masked ‘temptations’ which emerge to dare them to defy their mothers and leave the confines of their safe existence:

Temptation 2: Gemini deh a loveshack tonight. You can come.
Gloria: Anywhere else man.
Temptation 2: Tell me something, you fraid a you madah?
Gloria: You know my mother don’t love when me go to dance.
Temptation 2: Well alright me a go tief a frock and gi you and betcha ah make you come… (18).

The girls are passed from one ‘station’ to the next, becoming the balls in their children’s game. The masked figures form a tight circle around the girls, a human pen from which there seems to be no escape. By drawing on the oral tradition of ring games, Sistren depict the girls’ struggles against the ideological control of the social institutions. For example, ‘Bull inna di pen an im can’t get out’ is a ring game played by Jamaican children. The participants stand in a circle, arms locked. One participant stands in the middle of the circle. The object of the game is for the person in the middle to break free by finding a space between the bodies through which to escape. The masked figures chant ‘An a bull inna di pen an im can’t get out’, while the girls, who are trapped inside, ask ‘An a who kind a pen dis? ’ to which the masked figures reply: ‘church pen’, ‘school pen’, ‘punishment pen’. The human pen engulfs the girls in a ring of bodies, which creates a visual image of their entrapment in a system that is perpetually re-created; a vicious cycle that thrives upon the complicity of the women ensnared.

However, life away from this safety zone results in rape, violence and verbal abuse. The Mother Woman appears at the end of this framework to protect two girls, who have managed to escape, as they travel from rural Jamaica to Kingston.
The presence of the Mother Woman contrasts with the threatening actions of the masked figures that encircle the two girls in a tightening ring of bodies. It is clear from the menacing actions of the masked figures that the community will not be sympathetic if the girls encounter problems whilst away from its suffocating embrace.

The human pen also represents what Paulo Freire describes as ‘a culture of silence’ among ‘the oppressed’ who internalise the opinion of the oppressors to the extent ‘they become convinced of their own unfitness’ (45). In the case of the female characters in Bellywoman, the mystification of sexuality, and the social codes that sanction sexual double standards, create ‘a culture of silence’ which, as Rhonda Cobham points out, ‘is as much an act of violence against [the girls] as the physical violation which many of them must endure’ (244). In fact, the cryptic warnings about sex issued by the older women in the community, warnings that imply the girls’ culpability for any unplanned pregnancy, create victims of the four female characters and serve to damage their sense of self-worth. In the following excerpt, Yvonne’s guardian, Goddy, is alarmed when she discovers her ward has started menstruating. The following explanation, indicative of sex education in colonial Jamaica, illustrates the level of obfuscation used by Jamaican women in discussions of sexuality and, by extension, the confusion and bewilderment experienced by pubescent girls:

Yvonne: Real, real, baby Goddy?
Goddy: Yes a real real baby. But you see yah now. I know what gwine happen you know. Because all the worries in the world gwine come down on me. But gal I have news for you, because you see if you go out on the street with you nasty self and make any of dem runted tail boy out dey trouble and give you di real baby, if you evah hitch up outa gate till one of dem do you something, den gal you goin puke!
Yvonne: Den is what dem goin do me fi mek me puke maam?
Goddy: Look here gal. Facety and fresh. Now you come on and let me show you how to fix up yourself before we go to church (Sistren Theatre Collective 1978, 12).

Jamaican playwright Pauline Mathie points out that slaves would speak in proverbs in order to communicate with each other in front of the plantation owners (Gilbert 23) and, as the entire second act of Bellywoman makes clear, Jamaican women have kept this tradition alive through their use of proverbs and riddles to educate their daughters about puberty and sexuality. Moreover, the mothers of the girls, afraid of social sanctions, punish their daughters when their pregnancies are revealed rather than acknowledge the girls’ sexual ignorance; all but one of the girls is thrown out of home. Although Yvonne confesses that she was lured into Miss Datty’s house, ambushed and raped by Teddy, Goddy tells her daughter to ‘pack up yuh tings’ (29). Didi’s mother is the exception: when she discovers Didi’s pregnancy she insists upon discussing the matter with the baby’s father, Dennis.
The male characters in *Bellywoman* are represented in two ways: as comic caricatures and nameless, faceless rapists. Dennis, embodied by a female actor in drag, is a caricature of a quasi-Rastafarian — described in the play as ‘slightly dread’ (24) — who works as a motor mechanic in Kingston. The female actor transforms herself into a male through the adoption of sub-cultural markers of masculinity associated with the 1970s Reggae music scene: Dread talk, ‘skanking’ gestures, and the use of a washcloth to wipe away sweat (Cobham and Ford-Smith xxxi). The actor impersonating Dennis is not masked, which, according to Cobham and Ford-Smith, is significant as ‘the the visual effect of the slighter, female figure playing this part without a mask creates a sense of shared vulnerability’ (xxxi). While the impersonation of Dennis triggered much hilarity among audiences in 1978, his alter ego, the nameless, faceless rapist, is frightening. In the scenes where the female characters are raped or battered, the male characters are either faceless or absent, a performative strategy that heightens the threat of aggressive male sexuality, which is sensed throughout the play, and the menacing presence of sexual predators in the community.

In the most violent ‘ritual framework’ in *Bellywoman*, Marie, the most naïve of the four female characters, is raped whilst babysitting for her friend, Cherry. Marie nurses a doll and sings a lullaby, echoed off-stage by the voices of the other actors, creating what Sistren describes as ‘a clichéd picture … of a Black Madonna’ (28). Three actors, whose faces are masked by stockings, disrupt the peaceful image of the ‘mother’ and child; one of the rapists is Cherry’s brother, Winston, whom Marie recognises despite the mask covering his face. The rapists grab Marie, lift her above their heads, tie her to the rafters of the theatre, and part her legs. One of the rapists moves slowly toward Marie, punching the air like a ‘mechanised boxer’ (Sistren Theatre Collective 28). His punches are aimed at her vagina. During this sequence, drumming quickens the speed and rhythm of the boxer’s movements, slowly building to a climax. The other rapists tie a cushion around Marie’s waist and throw her to the floor; they exit while she vomits on the floor. The rapists do not speak during the ‘ritual framework’; their actions and the discordant singing and crying of the rest of the company evoke the brutality of the attack. While the rape is enacted, the rest of the company surround the audience; they cover their faces with newspapers, which they rip to shreds, and bang on the theatre walls so that the building shakes. Boxing is an apt signifier of sexual violence as it is predicated on the violent domination of the weaker opponent and epiphanies, in this context, male physical and sexual prowess. In *Bellywoman*, the rape takes place on a circular dais (a metaphorical boxing-ring) positioned within the audience, which, due to their close proximity to the action, works to confront those watching the play with their complicity in upholding hierarchies of power that sanction such attacks. Cobham and Ford-Smith report that during *Bellywoman’s* second season in 1982, ‘the actors were threatened and pelted by men in the audience, who cheered on the rapists in the
demystifying ‘reality’

play’s starkest scene as a way of expressing their lack of sympathy with the play’s “message” (viii). In this meta-theatrical moment, the men in the audience enacted their complicity by lending support to ‘the gang’ that raped Marie. Following the rape, Marie drags herself back to the main stage where, despite her pleas for help, the masked social institutions taunt her with riddles and ritually entangle her in ropes, which signify the burdens society places on young women whose childhoods are abruptly halted by the brutality of rape, and later, the responsibilities of motherhood.

African forms of expression, such as riddles and tracing, are used throughout the second act of Bellywoman to depict the violence engendered by social taboos surrounding sexuality. Yvonne is also a victim of rape. However, it is her ignorance rather than the violation that is represented in the play. Goddy notices the changes in Yvonne’s body, evoked by a riddle that compares the young girls body with an exploding cupcake, and, despite the obvious presence of a cushion tied around Yvonne’s waist, forces her daughter to confess to her ‘wrong-doing’. The pregnant body in Bellywoman is, as Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins suggest, constructed ‘in terms of disorder and/or pathology rather than invoking traditional images of fruition’ (220), because the girls neither want nor understand the process of maturation. The violence against the girls is further illus...
removes the ropes that bind her. She then teaches Marie to walk independently and guides her to a bath prepared by the other actors (Sistren Theatre Collective 37). The presence of the Mother Woman is not only crucial for Marie’s survival; she represents the significance of the oral tradition in struggles against both imperial control and local hegemonies. The use of the oral tradition in theatrical performance is, as Elaine Savory suggests, ‘both inherently theatrical and inherently political, moving towards liberating a community from the fear which would assure their acquiescence to a brutal and hostile governing power’ (244). The Mother Woman empowers the four girls to overcome their fear of the masked institutions who are revealed at the end of the play as ordinary women. The girls hug them as old friends. The four girls — Didi, Yvonne, Gloria and Marie — are left on stage with their newly born babies as the play ends.

_Bellywoman_ does not construct working-class Jamaican women as passive victims of oppression; nor does it condemn them for playing into the hands of hierarchies of power. Yet, its unmasking of social taboos challenge and transform constructions of Black women’s subjectivity, thus re-imagining and expanding the possibilities for Jamaican working-class women’s lives. At the end of the play, the audience is left with some reassurance that the four female characters — Didi, Yvonne, Gloria, and Marie — will not reproduce the cycle of oppression within which their female role models were caught, and which they unwittingly perpetuated. In 1978, Sistren was not concerned so much with revolutionising women’s position in Jamaican society as they were with debunking stereotypes, changing ‘ways of looking’, and demystifying, using their own life experiences, the reasons behind their daily struggles. The importance of the play, therefore, lies not in its attempt to offer alternatives to the women ensnared in this oppressive cycle, but in its intervention in naturalised hierarchies of power, which underpin relationships between races, classes and genders in Jamaican society. Although _Bellywoman Bangarang_ has recently been published in _Contemporary Drama of the Caribbean_ (Waters and Edgecombe), it is still described by Sistren members as ‘a work in progress’ (Drusine), perhaps because it is still pertinent to the concerns of women in contemporary Jamaican society.

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Listen, it’s like some weird mating dance going on between me and this girl who’s taking her clothes off for me. We’re inside this strip club called Pussycats, a favourite haunt of mine. It’s a dive on a seamy little street in the East Village that’s cluttered with beauty supplies’ stores, specialty sex shops, delis, dirty bodegas and shambling gray buildings that host wild rave parties by night, and crawling with black-eyedliner’d club rats, trannies in fake Prada and Gucci trying to hustle $20-hand jobs on the corner, crack whores wanting like hell to hit the pipe and whacked-out bums jonesing for the next drink. It’s a grim night, you know, the way Village nights can be, with the smell of piss, degradation and fucked-up dreams radiating off the walls of every old building. Heaven on frigging earth, right? Sometimes I wonder why I bother, and what the hell am I even doing here. But, what can you do?

Anyway, so this chickie’s new, not one of the regulars. Usually I get Cheyenne or Lotsa Lovin’ or Freedom Chains. Those girls know me, know what I like and ain’t got no problems giving it to me. I don’t have to draw them a picture, if you get my meaning. I’ve been coming here for what, two years now. And, on account of the fact that they know I’m legit, I even get to touch them. But only barely though. You can never really tell the freaks just by looking, I suppose. But I ain’t no freak. They know this and that’s how come they let me get close.

So anyway, this new chick, Ambrosia, she’s my dancer for tonight. I grin at her so she’ll know I’m a nice guy. ‘Nice name,’ I say. ‘Do you know it means “food of the gods”?’

She smiles and nods. I like that. Makes me feel good, you know? She’s probably heard that same lame line hundreds of times from smartasses like me but she just acted like it was the first time. She’s got this thing about her that just kills me. This quiet shyness or something. No shit. And then it strikes me: the thing that’s different about this chick is that she doesn’t act like she’s just a slut. Maybe she’s new at this sort of thing but you can see right away that she takes pride in her job. In a strange way, this really turns me on.

She loosens my tie, unbuttons my shirtsleeves. I’m thinking if this was one of those Leave it to Beaver-type TV shows, maybe she’d get my slippers and a newspaper too. This is new, but I’m liking the fact that she’s treating me like a human being and not like some john who’s paying her for favours.

Then she starts to dance to a slow groove. I’m nursing a scotch-and-soda and feeling mellow as hell. She puts her little finger in her mouth and sucks it while she’s swinging her hips. She’s petite, not curvy like the other girls. Her jet-black
hair is short, pixyish. Like a boy’s. Normally I like long hair on a woman. You do a woman with short hair and it’s like you’re doing a guy, right? Hell, I’ll say it again — I ain’t no kind of queer. No, sir. But on this chick, the short hair is working.

She’s dressed in this glittery little nightdress kind of number, low-cut and sexy. I can see the tops of her breasts. They aren’t very big. But I can tell they’re firm — a neat little handful. She has on mesh stockings and high heels. This girl has no markings like the other girls: no tats, no piercings, no nothing. At least, none I can see. Usually, I like tats on a girl. It makes them look like bad asses. But this girl, well, she’s as pure as the driven snow. And all the while I’m watching her, thinking how she isn’t really my type, but she sure is making me feel real good. Then slowly, slowly, she comes up to me kicking out her long legs like she’s a can-can girl. Her black eyes are trained on me, deep and penetrating. I’m rock-hard and I’m trying hard to keep from jumping up and ramming myself into her.

So now she’s standing directly before me. Her little pink tongue slides out over her bottom lip. It’s almost like she’s moving in slow motion when she puts up one of her legs and swings it over mine. Then she puts it back down again and smiles at me. It’s like some weird foreplay parallel, I think, feeling myself getting angry. I don’t have the patience for that shit.

I have this friend, a Yank named Charlie, who tells me that I’m a woman-hater. That’s bullshit because I really dig chicks. Charlie’s this pussified white dude who believes in all the New Age psychobabble about ‘being in touch with his feminine side’. I mean, the guy thinks that by being a punk with women, he’s somehow better than me. Duh, no shit. Man, that loser’s my age and he’s already engaged to this hot-shot fashion model who I know is going out on him. Poor sap. He’s always asking me why I don’t have any friends who’re women. Why I screw every woman I know. I think Charlie is crazy if he doesn’t try to hit all the women he knows. What else are they there for?

Once, I really tried to make him see things my way, though. I said to him, ‘Hey, Charlie. Lighten up, man. Women are like an all-you-can-eat buffet’. But old Charlie just looked at me like I’d grown another head. Like I’d lost my mind or something. He’s just fine with standing around in malls, holding his girlfriend’s purse like a trained circus animal outside changing rooms of expensive clothes stores, while his manliness oozes through the door. Poor dumb-ass Charlie in his little faggotty Brooks’ Brothers suits and Bruno Maglis. He’d never understand why I’m a player, why I’m the fucking man. He can’t understand. How could I explain it to him? Hell if I even understand it myself.

Anyway, running along. Next thing I know this Ambrosia chick’s straddling me and when she leans forward, I smell her sweet girly smell and I think I’m going out of my mind for her. She’s looking at me with her dark eyes that are telling me a thousand ways that I can violate her and all I know is that the blood starts swooshing from my head, loud like a runaway train.

The first time I saw Yvette was at an office picnic. I’d just started working at Morrison and Findlay, a debt financing company in Manhattan. I’d recently left Georgia, where my moms and I had first migrated from Jamaica, and was new in town. It was my first job, entry-level, y’know, no big thing, but I’m not ashamed to say I saw myself moving up the totem pole real quick.

Then I met Yvette. The boss’s daughter. Man, I was scared she’d get me fired. She started coming on to me and letting me know she was up for anything.

She was sexy, too, though she looked like goddamned jailbait with her short-ass little pleated skirt, bobby socks and sneakers and blond hair tied in a ponytail.

The girl was a walking wet dream, all bubblegum pink lips and creamy skin. Sweet piece of tail, you know. A regular little pom-pom type that you see in nudie magazines frolicking butt-ass naked with a bunch of other coeds getting some hot lesbo action.

I was sitting in a corner kind of by myself while some of the guys were playing scrimmage a ways away, because, as I said, I didn’t know anybody yet. She walked over to me and scooped up some of my potato salad from off my plate with her finger. Just like that. Then she put it in my mouth. After the picnic, I went straight to her apartment. I stayed there all weekend.

But it soon got messed up because she wanted what every woman wants. The Big C. Commit-fucking-ment! So I had to let her go.

After that, I only made it with big girls. Big girls were just grateful that someone like me even gave them the time of day. They only want to walk the straight and narrow path with a man, they’re scared shi— of losing him. Fat girls were cool, man. I figure what happens is this: they can’t believe their luck when you pay attention to them. Check it. One time, I had this Spanish chick, Josephina. Really big, right? I guess she weighed about a ton. I ain’t tripping.

But she was pretty as hell, though. You know them Latin girls. Hair for miles and a space between her teeth that made me crazy. This girl was real, too, the first girl I’d met who showed an interest in doing it ‘that way’. I decided to take her on a trip. I had some friends who had a place in the Hamptons so I told her we could stay there for a weekend. On the Friday that we were supposed to leave, I met this other chick that I wanted to give the business to. So I told Josephina that something had come up at my job and I gave her the key to the house and told her I’d meet her there. I didn’t show up that weekend. I left the girl stranded.

It wasn’t one of my better moments, I will admit, and she was mad. I acted like a jerk-off but I wasn’t about to apologise for nothing. So I said, Fuck that. But by the next weekend she was calling me up, sending me candy and begging me to come see her. Shit, I’d never got that kind of treatment from a woman before. I mean, for real, though, I had it made in the shade with a glass of lemonade.


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So now I'm getting it on with this skinny Ambrosia chick and thinking about Yvette and Josephina and every girl I've made it with in the last couple of years, and I start to get excited, right? And I'm thinking that maybe this Ambrosia will come home with me. I mean, what the hey, right? It's been a while since I've had a woman in my bed; maybe this girl will come home with me. Why not? I'm a nice guy. Plus, it's payday. I've got money to burn.

Anyway, long story short: I guess I kind of forget that she's new and forget that there's a 'no-touching' policy here. And I'm thinking that maybe I'll sample the goods before I proposition her. But then two things happen. One: my fingers meet something lumpy where there shouldn't be. Two: Ambrosia lets out this hellcat scream that scares the snot out of me. What the hell?

I'm just trying to get my bearings from the shock, so I'm disoriented and slow. When her hand comes up to belt me one in the face, I'm caught off guard. She jumps off me and is screaming for the muscle in this weird male voice. It dawns on me that she hadn't spoken a word to me all along. 'Hands! Hands!' She's going like some freaked-out retard, clutching her chest and trembling. That's when I notice the faint shadow of an Adam's apple bobbing up and down in her throat. Shit. I swear I didn't notice it before. The bitch is a guy, a fairy! Frigging Queer Eye for this straight guy!

Then the door bursts open and sure as shit the Cavalry rushes in; the muscle named Smitty. 'What the hell is going on here?' he shouts, rushing in, looking from me to her.

He is a bald-headed black guy, huge like a wide receiver and just as mean-looking. The guy looks like he bench presses guys like me every day. He's holding a half-eaten burger in one hand, with a glob of mayonnaise at the corner of his fleshy mouth. There is a smudge of ketchup on his T-shirt which has the word FCUK printed on it. The shirt, which is way too tight, is stretched across his chest and looking like it's on life support. I almost laugh at how ridiculous he looks; but then I remember why I'm all p-o'd.

Smitty belches and the sound and stinky smell filter across the room. Right away I know he's got some serious gastrointestinal problems. He's an effing slob, if you want to know. Even so, you didn't want to mess with a guy like Smitty. I sure as hell didn't want to and I'm a big guy, myself. But what he had on me was density. Smitty was short and squat and looked like a mass of something I don't know. A train wreck, perhaps.

'What the hell's going on?' he repeats, the burger shaking in his giant paw. The Ambrosia chick is crying now and goes and stands behind him. 'He touched me,' she says in her weird man-woman voice, pointing shakily at me. 'Yeah, I touched her. Sue me!' I shout. But inside I'm Jell-O. I'm thinking, Man, I so don't want to get into it with Smitty.

Smitty looks at me, still clutching his burger. I can see he doesn't want to fight me. 'Hey, Jimmy,' he says quietly, taking a step toward me. 'You know the rules, man. No touching.'
I don’t want to get the other girls in trouble by letting on that they make me touch them so I don’t say anything about that. Instead I say, ‘Yeah, but you guys are taking my money under false pretences here. I paid for a dance with a woman. Instead, I get some sick Crying Game crap here!’

By this time, some of the other girls have heard the commotion and are crowding at the door looking in and whispering.

‘What you talking ’bout, Blood?’ Smitty goes, looking suspiciously at Ambrosia.

‘Are you fucking kidding me? This Ambrosia is a closet queen and nobody knows!’

‘Just look under her dress!’ I yell, feeling myself getting really p-o’d now. Meanwhile Ambrosia is hysterical crying and looking around at everybody. I mean there’s waterworks all over the place. Her mascara’s running down her cheeks and the dumb bitch has got a snot bubble in her nose and everything.

I look at her and she looks back at me like she just found out I killed her cat. Like I’m the one that let her down. She’s a real small dude, with small hands and wrists, and I can see how easy he can pass for a woman.

All this time Smitty’s watching us. He’s looking from me to her like a big dumb dog. A big dumb dog in a too-tight FCUK T-shirt. Like he doesn’t know what to do. Meanwhile, the tension in the room is thick, like, you could cut it with a knife.

Then this Ambrosia she starts wringing her hands and talking about how she’s doing this so she can save towards getting the other part of her operation. Her eyes are all wild and I can see that she’s scared. But all I want to do is beat the hell out of her. I want to beat her to a bloody pulp. I could just take her little body and crush it with my bare hands, squeeze her throat till I see her eyes roll over in her head. And all of a sudden I feel blind white rage and see my Uncle Sonny inside my head, the way he looked before he died, laughing at me and telling me I’m a queer.

And I’m thinking, I’m no faggot, man. I ain’t no fucking faggot.

That’s when all hell breaks loose. I slip past Smitty and lunge for Ambrosia. Smitty grabs my hand and I think he breaks all the bones in it. He twists it behind my back. Ambrosia takes the opportunity to make a dive for the doorway, bawling like a banshee. Then the girls start running all over the place. It’s like this really bad scene from a western, like a salon brawl gone bad.

Then something snaps inside me. I twist out of Smitty’s grasp and take a bite out of his hand. Just like that. Like it’s a big old hand sandwich. I hear my tooth loosen; it’s a big bite. Then I take a swing at him.

That’s how it is with me sometimes. I don’t think things out all the way through. The minute I take that swing though, I know I’ve made a mistake. His face gets purplish and his cheeks sort of puff out and he makes this noise, like a tiger growling. I try to make a dash for the door but I’m too slow. Smitty charges after me, swearing and telling me I’m dead. He headbutts me and I feel like all
the lights go off or I’ve gone blind. Then Smitty is lifting me up off my feet, holding me at my nuts, and next thing I know is I’m in the air above his head and he’s charging like a madman towards the back door.

The last thing I remember is sailing through the air before my skull connects with concrete. Then it’s darkness. Nothing.

Fade to black.

***

In the dream, Uncle Sonny is looking down at me lying there on my back, and laughing. Fucking Uncle Sonny! I haven’t thought about him in, like, a lifetime. But it’s the same old Sonny. His front tooth has the same chip from the time we fell out of a tree at the back of my grandmother’s house. I know it’s a dream in the same vague, unreal way you know you’re in the middle of a dream even though it seems so real. And this is for real, man. But it’s a dream ‘cause Sonny and me are kids again. He’s twelve and I’m eight. We’re like cousins, being so close in age and all. Like brothers.

So Sonny and me are here in this whacked-out concussed state. We’re on the roof at my grandmother’s house, a little one-room in a fucked-up part of town with a view of the city dump. When my old man ran out on my moms shortly after I was born, we moved in with her. That place could rival any of the projects and slums I’ve seen here in the States. All I know is once we got out on a plane and got the hell out of there we didn’t look back. The houses there were so close you could smell when the neighbour took a shit. My mother was working for scraps as a cashier in a patty shop downtown. The manager was fooling around with her but she had to just grin and take his crap. As it was, she could hardly keep food in our mouths, let alone clothes on our back. Sometimes she couldn’t even send me to school, which I didn’t mind because I hated those dumb kids at school anyway. She couldn’t get another job. No way could we have moved into a house of our own.

Those were some shitty days. Then my mother met the American and married him to get the green card. It was a long time ago but every now and again I think about those days. I don’t remember a whole lot. I was young, just a kid. But I can’t ever forget that house, Jack. It was real tiny, too. Even though there were only a few pieces of furniture — I remember a pea-green couch that was split with the stuffing overflowing, and a fold-up dining room table, a small fridge and a gas range — it always felt cluttered.

We used to love going up on my grandma’s roof, Sonny and me, especially at night. The house had a slab roof so it got real hot real quick. We’d go up there with the hose and wet down the roof. Then we’d just sit there in our pajamas feeling the air on our faces and listen to crickets and croaking lizards and shit and watch the smoke hovering like a film over the dump. Sometimes we’d sing songs. Songs we heard on the radio, but mostly songs we sang at church. We’d
I remember him singing: *In the sweet by and by we shall meet on that beautiful shore...* His voice was what I guess they’d call a tenor. It sounded like cold clear mountain water in a silver bucket. At least, that’s what I thought of anytime I heard him sing. That’s how good his voice was. He could have gone far with that talent, too. If we hadn’t been so damn poor. And he always made me feel like my voice was as good as his, too. ‘Sing up, Jimmy,’ he’d say. That’s what he’d say. But he was a liar, although I guess it was just his way of looking out for me.

Sonny didn’t have any friends. On account of him being funny in the head, I guess. People said it was because my grandmother had him too late in life. He was almost twenty years younger than my moms. They said he was a retard. But he wasn’t. He used to like that they thought he was an idiot. It was weird, but he did. I guess he wanted to be able to get away with stuff, you know?

Anyway, I didn’t give a rat’s ass about all the things they said. I mean if he didn’t have a problem with it, then it would have been kind of stupid for me to, right? We were buds. Best buds. It didn’t make no never-mind what the hell ignorant people said. They were always getting into our business, anyway. Always gossiping and spreading propaganda, as my grandmother would say. Dumb asses. Always saying things about Sonny to my grandmother. Now, how the hell are you going to criticise somebody’s kinfolk to them? That’s just plain ignorant. One thing the old lady always said: you have to ignore ignorance. She was right. Jamaican people were some of the small-mindedest people in the world. I know that as a fact cause I’ve met folks from all over. At least folks here in the States gossip about you but they have the sense to know to do it behind your damn back. They’ll be dragging you through the mud while they’re smiling at you and giving you apple pies over the fence.

So anyway, in the nights, Sonny and me would be up there on the roof, pretending we were kings and the stars in the sky were our kingdoms, our royal subjects, maybe, like in the storybooks. Whatever. I would always try to count them, the stars, I mean. Sonny would tell me that we couldn’t, then I’d bet him he could. We’d start off real good though, ’til Sonny started calling out arbitrary numbers so I would get confused and forget where I’d reached. Then we would sort of just fall back and laugh like we were big old fools. Sonny was all right, man. He was goofy, but he was all right.

So in the dream we’re in our pyjama bottoms on the roof, like we always were. Then, the weird shit happens. It’s like some freaky deja-vu thing happens and I’m living out something that feels like it happened to me before. In the distance, smoke from the city dump is trailing up into the sky. We start counting stars. All I know is I’m counting stars and Sonny’s calling out mixed-up random numbers trying to confuse me, you know, the way he’d always try to throw me off.

Stop, Sonny, I say and laugh.
Lapdance 85

But he doesn't stop. He just keeps on shouting out numbers while I'm counting. Then he leans over and starts tickling me. We start rolling around on the roof, shrieking with laughter. Sonny's tickling me so much I think I'm going to piss myself. But it feels good, that feeling that you get when somebody's tickling you relentlessly and you want them to stop and at the same time you kind of don't want them to.

Next thing is he's touching me. And he wasn't so all right anymore. I don't like it. I swear to God. It feels weird. It feels like something that's not supposed to happen. Something is wrong. I can feel it.

'Mama says no one's supposed to touch me, Sonny,' I say, feeling my mouth fill up with something bitter. I tell him. I tell him that. I tell him no, I know I do. But he only laughs.

'You're just a baby,' he says. His eyes are mean, meanest eyes I ever seen him with. Then he starts mimicking me. 'Mama says no one's supposed to touch me down there, Sonny.'

I feel like shit. The way I do when he double dares me to crawl over the Grahams' front gate at midnight and raid their mango tree and I know I can't because I'm afraid.

'Cry-cry baby,' he mocks. 'I'm not a baby,' I say. 'Take it back.'

'Make me,' Sonny says and shoves me. I can hear crickets chirping around us in the dark. The night has gone strangely cold. I can feel the hair on the back of my neck standing up.

Then I start to cry 'cause I hate it when Sonny doesn't love me. When my mom goes to work at night he stays with me. Sometimes he lets me play with his toy cars. I like that. I don't want him to get mad at me.

So I say, 'Okay'. He smiles. I watch my thing grow and feel afraid.

But it feels good, too.

Now it's your turn, he says when he's through. He pulls down his sip. It makes a quick squeaky sound in the dark.

Sonny's thing is big; in the dark I see it's bigger than mine is. When it's over he whispers, 'Good boy. This our little secret. You can't tell a soul, okay? Swear.'

And I swear. Because we're brothers. I never tell a soul.

***

The next thing I know is I'm waking up in the alley in the back of the club, with blood coming from my mouth and a gash, somewhere on my forehead, that's burning like a motherfucker. The night carries the stink of some nearby dumpsters. The sky is black with a patch of orange shining through. The temperature has fallen a couple of degrees and it's chilly. I look down at myself and see that I'm still in my jacket but my tie's missing. I'm lying in a heap, one

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of my legs is twisted in a kind of right angle and hurting like a son of a bitch, so I know it’s probably broken. I can’t move so I can’t look at my watch, but it feels late, like maybe one, two in the morning.

There is a sudden movement somewhere in the distance and my heart starts to beat fast. I hold my breath. Maybe that cunt Smitty is coming back. But it’s only a cat, scrounging around, sniffing an old take-out food box. It jumps down then stops frozen in its tracks to inspect me. In the darkness its animal eyes look like glass.

I try to sit up but I can’t move. Smitty really tap-danced all over my ass but all I can think about is how everything’s going to change after tonight. And I’m struggling, struggling, going under, man. The smell of rotting food from the nearest dumpster gets in my nose, in my throat, in my eyes. I swear to Christ I want to gag.

I don’t know how long I stay like that; it could be hours, it could be minutes. I don’t know. There’s this long, dreamlike quality to the night. And anyway, time doesn’t seem important now. It’s like I’m going to have nothing but time on my hands from here on out.

The cat mews, still staring at me. It doesn’t even consider running away, that’s how much of a joke I guess I seem to it, lying there like that. ‘Shoo,’ I hiss at it, wishing I could get my fingers around its neck and squeeze. It scampers off and I close my eyes and settle back against the hard, cold concrete. I think about Sonny, still living in my grandmother’s house thousands of miles away. I think about Ambrosia, trapped inside a body she didn’t even want, wanting to be something she wasn’t. And then I think about myself. What am I? I’m a joke. Everything in my fucked-up life has been a joke. A lie. And this is when the feeling of something crawling inside me starts — from my toes, up my legs, up my chest and over my heart, up, up — until not just every bone, but every tissue in my body hurts.

And then it hits me, whap! Right between the eyes. This is it right here, this is what it is. I got hard for a man.
New Jamaican Poets

In 1998 the Sunday edition of the Jamaica Observer launched its ‘Arts Section’, the first, and still the only, bona fide literary supplement in a Caribbean newspaper devoted to publishing indigenous poetry and fiction. It unearthed an unsuspected depth and breadth of home-grown talent; and, soon afterwards, the formation of the Observer Creative Writing Workshop brought most of these newly-surfaced Jamaican writers into continuing contact with one another. The combination of a ready outlet for their work and the ongoing creative exchanges of the Workshop resulted in an impressive growth in these writers’ confidence, seriousness, and sophistication of craft. Those represented in this anthology have all since been awardees in local literary competitions; two have had individual collections published (by the Jamaica Observer) and two more individual collections of poems are due out from Peepal Tree press (UK) later this year.

Despite coming together in the Workshop, these writers do not comprise a ‘school’. They range in age from 18 to 58, hail from the ‘deep country’ as well as the city, and — in the case of those not still attending university — work in fields as diverse as academia, song-writing and sales. The poets’ styles range from the formal sonnets of Gwyneth Barber Wood, to the pentameters of Frances Coke, Delores Gauntlett and Verna George, to the free verse of Andrew Miller, Neil Morgan, Andrew Stone, and ‘the baby’, Safiya Sinclair. And while rooted naturally (as opposed to wilfully) in the Jamaican reality and landscape, their themes are as various as life itself.

In difficult circumstances — since opportunities for employment as a creative writer are few and far between in Jamaica, and most of these writers earn their living with full-time jobs in other fields — they are dedicated artists. And, unwittingly, they have also become pioneers: submissions to the Observer Literary Arts Supplement provide ample evidence that their accomplished poems and stories — appearing regularly in a newspaper literary supplement which, a recent survey showed, attracts some 120,000 readers weekly — are already inspiring a new generation of creative writers among school-age Jamaicans.
GWYNETH BARBER WOOD
FOR RARA

Remember when we’d write each other in verse, how often, misreading words, I’d telephone because I imagined the sky’s bleak face, or worse? Now we drift like clouds under the same sky, alone, you, caught under the hoof-beat of a continent, me, set like a pirogue on a pulsing sea, not knowing what’s beneath, only what’s imminent — like catch before a fisherman sets them free.

Remember when we were children, how the night seemed longer even than the morning’s breath as we waited for the birdsong signalling light? Innocence takes all things for granted — like the earth after a sleep, bursting with pride in Spring’s new clothes. Unfaltering faith in what the heart already knows!
FRANCES COKE

A MOTHER'S PRAYERS

Their mother’s prayers lay folded
in unlikely places: next to common pins
this prayer seeks forgiveness for her sins;
on her sewing table, sacred words etched
in soiled Irish linen beside her children’s names,
rest among her coloured threads, scissors, needles,
twisted silver thimbles, and on the wall
a faded scroll declares her His alone.
This God of hers resembles
no one she has seen. Her children’s hearts
are hard against her unfamiliar saviour.
Their footsteps spurn the walkways
taking them from her to Him; their toys are
instruments of death, their playgrounds, killing fields.
Constant as the sunset, their mother whispers
details of their lives to Him, certain
He will turn her water into wine.
She gave her final words to God,
raising up her children for saving
one by one, with not a word to them.
They mourned her going with her eyes on Him
until her eyelids trembled into stillness
and a crumpled prayer slipped between
her loosening fingers. Their shoulders fell
into a silence pure as a river.
Now, between their ribs, old knots
that were unravelling all their lives grow tense.
The memory of my father lies
in the garden where the yam vines wound
at the foot of the hill; where he worked on his knees,
where he slipped into the silent hours,
as though into some place else,
discovering there were different ways to pray,
calling to attention his distracted soul;
where he took whatever still lived in the heart
of his World War II days into the moonlit dark
doing, to lay it down:
something, as in the dark space behind the moon,
that with as he pretended did not exist.
Beyond the garden gate the night moved disquietingly
until my fear rippled out into a fiction
I thought would stop anything bad happening.
Then morning streamed its latticework of shadows
onto the wall, as we recited the story
of Jesus carrying the cross uphill to save the world,
His brow bleeding from its crown of thorns.
Outside, the sound of dawn coming is the peenywally and the air resting atop things, 
the dew on grass blades tickling my feet as I run 
to catch the Blackie mango tree’s first fall. 
The quiet holds the pieces of morning like old women 
balancing water pails on head-wraps; 
the dogs yawn and scratch last night’s itch; 
my garden lies, for now, still. 
Mornings! 
A time to lift the blank veil and rush the thoughts 
of last night’s poems and stories of men going pale 
at the meaning of words like ‘budgetary’, words like ‘expenditure’. 
The soil in my side and the salty taste of ill luck mean 
the garden voices are calling, loud enough to capsize 
hummingbirds away from making love to a flower’s bloom. 
A summer pregnant with sunshine smiles 
while I crush roses, remembering what was love 
before night fell, with its cold touch. 
Night ushers in desperate cries from the city, 
cries of help answering other cries of help 
like a siren saying, Tonight there is more mayhem, 
more plunder, more baseless attrition; tonight, 
on the backsides of boys and girls too young 
to flaunt anything but that they’re young, 
more plunder ensues, 
while the sidelined voices rasp for more fire 
to heap onto the pile, more fire 
in the night — but will it burn the city down? 
Morning will come and blow on dreams’ suffering. 
Who slouches down from pedestals to intervene? 
I sift the soil in the garden, never mind 
its accelerating rotting.
That summer ground lizards gashed viridian
from sockets in the earth, or crackled
through dry aralia leaves
safe from the egrets and the sparrow hawks.
Long summer weeks … the school games …
‘I come to see Janey, where is she now?’
… playing her spectre, undaunted,
death as an abstraction!
Soft armfuls, the rabbits were never linked
to the stews mother urged on us, never savoured;
the pig rooting through the breadfruit peel
bore no connection to the leg of pork
dangling pale above the Caledonia stove.
When night’s marauding packs gutted the goat,
we re-christened her kids:
‘Faith’, ‘Hope’.
One rainy month, a man’s corpse fished from the river
bloated our imagination
for days; then, that, too, passed.
Everything had its season:
the canes springing up, viridescent
(though later came their gleam of armaments:
machete-leaves and silver-tasselled spears).
After the crop-over’s burnt sienna,
that wasteland, replanted, was verdant again.
I remember yellow dandelion, the Spanish needle,
gold and white, the cassia’s clusters in July,
pink boa feathers of the guango at summer’s swooning,
the otahitei flowers’ fuchsia finale,
flying ants shedding cellophane wings before the rains,
the ebony’s brief blossoms…
(‘Peel head John Crow,’ the children sang.
‘Sit down ‘pon tree top, pick out the blossom’) …
...frail kites nuzzling the milky sky, 
ribbon-tails twitching in elation, 
and the river, mahogany, that sank 
in the limestone of the Cockpit country, 
to emerge on its Trail of Tears 
slowed by tributaries, by the Great Morass, 
on its shining declension to the sea. 
I call to mind now differently 
those cycles 
of planting and reaping, coming and going, 
those seasons of loving, 
those seasons of loss.
ANDREW STONE

THE MARKET MUSE

It's a soggy morning in the market, slippery underfoot, my shoes streaked and spotted. The air is damp with a heady mixture of mud, sweat, fresh fruit, rotting garbage and freshly smoked herb. This poet walks through this wonderland of sound, searching, feeling for ripeness and texture, haggling with higglers, testing my skill. A mobile haberdasher glides through the chaos, his goods hanging from neck, waist, arms, wrists, while a voice strong and free tells his story: "Ten dollar store, no window, no door!" I drift through the morning with that clarion in my head, sidestepping the urgency of handcart men and smiling with market women displaying their wares. I am Saul met by Ananias, I am Osiris remembered, I am a proselyte in this temple of sound and motion. The day is warming up. I walk away, my bag full, and my heart is a store, no window, no door.
SAFIYA SINCLAIR

SILVER

Silver flows through my veins
Into my hands when I caress the strings of my guitar
Silver is the moon I swallowed
on a dry dreary night when I willed it so
Silver is the rain in May
wholesome and lithe and falling into me
Our springtime sarabande kisses me sodden
up then I’m happy
down then I’m sad
Silver I cry Silver

Silver encases my heart
like a drunk jeweller quenching a cigarette
Silver is my lips against ice
my tongue upon frost
my sweet staccato
my praline dress
my stuck umbrella on a sunshiny day
Silver is the witty wind
coaxing my eyes to sleep
upon the blurred pastel pages
of a slipshod butterfly
Silver is a legerdemain
legs like a leprechaun that feeds on leer and lemons
a quire of my deepest thoughts
the inkling of my most secret soul
It is the palsied web
of the crestfallen spider
the ugly dewdrop ring
that scars my finger like acid
dusk that brings the sidereal night
resting its echo upon the wing
of a firefly that drinks the silver from my eyes
96 Wayne Brown

Silver is my billowing meerschaum
the flicking goldfish fin in the silent sun
Silver are the wispy strands in my hair
lined silver spiralling through the universe
Silver chose me
like starlight to the naked eye
The words I bleed are silver
the time that dances minuets
upon my broken sylvan skin,
is silver in a lancer’s armour
When my stomach bursts
and I disgorge eternity
Silver stands beside me
fondling the viol
My ears are filled with a pixie’s dreams
like honey only silver
when the days of maiden’s trouble subside
silver peels away
My belly swells
and it’ll be a while
but I know more silver
is welling inside.

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ANDREW MILLER

RUM BAR STORY #5

She always wondered if the Tuesday jazz singer who dug clean purple notes out of cancers, really knew a place where ain’t nobody crying and ain’t nobody worried and ain’t no men coming in crusted with a day’s leftover of cement, calling her whichever name they chose to invent that day, men who ordered salt peanuts and whites, sitting for the next five hours drinking her with their eyes. She always hummed to the Tuesday jazz, moving behind the counter like coconut rum was in her waist, smoothing salt waves out from her dress. She wanted to be taken to this place where ain’t nobody crying and ain’t nobody worried and God willing, ain’t no men there at all.
Reflections on the French Caribbean Woman: The *Femme Matador* in Fact and Fiction

A recurrent image of women to emerge in the history and literature of the French Caribbean is that of the femme matador, or the fighting woman who courageously resists life’s trials. This gendered figure is frequently placed in opposition to the Caribbean male who flits about as carefree as a butterfly. A direct product of Martinique and Guadeloupe’s historical experiences under slavery, the femme matador developed out of the need to survive in a social system hostile to black slaves. While men in the French Caribbean reacted to the injustices of plantation society by retreating into patterns of irresponsibility (Condé 1979, 36), women assumed the role of pivot of the family and bravely battled to secure the future of their partner and children. As an outstanding example of female strength, the femme matador appears as a potential icon of the feminist movement. However, a brief overview of the history and sociology of the region, coupled with a consideration of the representation of these women in contemporary literature, reveals the harsh realities behind this enduring figure in French Caribbean culture. The various representations of the femme matador also intersect with contemporary shifts in gendered ideas of national community-building, demonstrating a renewed acceptance of the importance of women in the public realm as well as the private.

The powerful presence of the femme matador is nowhere more evident than in the integral role she plays in the family. While sociologists such as Raymond Smith and Diane Austin have demonstrated that a range of households exist in the Caribbean, including some with male heads, the majority remain matrifocal. A kaleidoscope of studies attests to the continuing prominence of women in the family, both in bringing up the children and in providing a regular income. Francesca Velayoudom Faithful maintains that women are traditionally the strongholds of the family and that the mother passes on the flame of responsibility to her daughter (112). In Le Couteau seul: *la condition féminine aux Antilles*, France Alibar and Pierrette Lembeye-Boy present the testimonies of a number of Guadeloupean women in their familial milieu. Typical recollections of a daughter towards her mother include those by Agathe, a 20-year-old woman, who says ‘our family was my mother’ and Gerty, a 28-year-old teacher, who remarks ‘she is really a woman who sacrificed everything for her family, her children and I...
think she succeeded’ (Alibar and Lembeye-Boy 27). In contrast to the strength and stability of the mother, many children remember the absence of their father and the irregularity of his involvement in the family. A further testimony comes from Georgette, a 62-year-old Guadeloupian agricultural worker, who remembers her father’s lack of involvement in her life: ‘My father? Well, my father didn’t acknowledge me… He never acknowledged any of his children and he had a lot of children: six to different mothers’ (Alibar and Lembeye-Boy 29). Novelist and theorist Patrick Chamoiseau has also remarked on this phenomenon, noting that ‘the culture of the family remains matrifocal. That is to say, the big, fundamental decisions are always made, initiated, carried out and organized by women in a more or less direct manner’ (Chamoiseau 2001). As these tributes highlight, the French Caribbean woman is at the centre of the family and she is the one who provides both the material and emotional needs of her children, partner and society.

There is an abundance of Creole proverbs that attest to the strength of French Caribbean women as opposed to men. Faithful includes a powerful example in her 1996 article ‘La Femme antillaise’ made famous in Simone Schwarz-Bart’s novel Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle (The Bridge of Beyond) to demonstrate the fortitude of Caribbean women: ‘One’s breasts are never too heavy for one’s chest’ (116). Drawing on an evocative maternal image, this proverb highlights the idea that no matter what difficulties there are in life, women always have the strength to cope with them. Celebrated writer Maryse Condé discusses another proverb, which makes a memorable distinction between women and men by likening women to chestnuts and men to breadfruit (Condé 1979, 4). Although these two trees closely resemble each other in physical appearance, there is an important difference in the way they drop their fruit. When the chestnut tree arrives at maturity, it releases a large number of small fruits with a hard skin designed to withstand different weather conditions. The breadfruit, by contrast, spreads itself out into a whitish purée that the sun quickly turns rotten. In Condé’s words, ‘it means that a woman is tough and resilient, while a man is soft, spattering on the ground like a breadfruit’ (Pfaff 103). This proverb pays tribute to woman’s capacity, her superior ability, to adapt to changing circumstances. As Cheryl Williams asserts, in her study of women in Caribbean culture, ‘[c]ombine the woman’s cultural role with her roles as peasant, labourer, trader, urban domestic and usually head of a matriarchal home and we understand why she is so often portrayed as the strong, survivalist Caribbean woman’ (109). These illustrations from the sociology and mythology of the French Caribbean indicate the potency and persistence of this image of female strength in Martinique and Guadeloupe.

The figure of the femme matador can be traced back to the time of slavery when female slaves were arguably able to gain some autonomy over their lives while male slaves remained stripped of all rights. While black field slaves were
firmly relegated to the bottom of the plantation’s social hierarchy, black female slaves suffered additional oppression because of their sex. Male slaves were valued only for the economic contribution they made to the plantation, yet women were expected to perform both sexual and economic tasks. These duties included sexual favours for white masters and, more importantly, childbearing, which was considered an economic event that signalled the arrival of a new slave. However, female slaves were able to transform their oppression into a means of autonomy by using their body as a bartering asset. By bearing a child to a white master or any other white person in authority, black female slaves could sometimes find themselves in easier working conditions than if they had only black children. These relationships with white men could also lead to a lighter workload and preferential treatment for their children.

Within the plantation system, social status was inextricably linked to skin colour and therefore mixed blood slaves enjoyed certain privileges not available to their black counterparts. A nineteenth-century Haitian proverb encapsulates the importance of colour in this region where a vicious system of exploitation pivots on the shade of one’s skin: ‘Every rich man is a mulatto; every poor man is a black’ (Leiris 31). An example of this racial prejudice is that mixed blood slaves often worked as artisans or house servants rather than doing the backbreaking work in the fields. Before emancipation, ‘brown’ men and women were freed as individuals more often than dark-skinned blacks and skin colour was clearly associated with the distribution of labour. Given the pervasive repercussions of skin colour, it is significant that female slaves had the opportunity of exceeding the limitations of this system through their reproductive capacity while male slaves did not. As Olive Senior asserts, ‘it is the Caribbean female who has in the past carried the burden of moving the family to higher status’ (27). Women were also able to gain a degree of autonomy with the opportunity to retain power over their children, a power denied to black slave fathers. By bearing a child to a white master or any other white person in authority, black female slaves could sometimes find themselves in easier working conditions. It can therefore be argued that women were in fact more valuable than men under slavery because they could offer both sexual and economic advantages for their masters while male slaves could only ever be work machines.

The plantation system eroded the possibility of slaves forming a coherent kinship system because of the uncertain status of the slave father who could be removed from his family at any time through death in the fields or by being sold to another master. As Edith Clarke explains, the master’s complete control over male slaves had serious repercussions for the family: ‘residential unit in the plantation system was formed by the mother and her children with the responsibility for their maintenance resting with the slave-owner. The father’s place in the family was never secure. He had no externally sanctioned authority over it and could at any time be physically removed from it’ (Clarke 19). In the
face of frequent paternal absence, the role of the Caribbean mother mother needed to expand and she became the one who provided strength and stability for her family, culminating in the phenomenon of the female-headed family. Smith has shown that the ‘theme of male “irresponsibility” in marriage and fatherhood is insistent and recurrent in modern West Indian social life’ (117), and this behavioural pattern contrasts dramatically with the connected and involved conduct of women within the family.

An examination of male and female attitudes to parenting reveals an important divergence that further contributes to the reduced function of the father figure. While bearing and raising children is considered a natural and desirable part of being a Caribbean woman, for men the importance lies more in the making of babies than in bringing them up: “fathering” a child — as opposed to parenting — [is seen] as the true sign of manhood’ (Senior 66). It is significant that children generally are perceived not as a joint responsibility in a family situation, but as ultimately the responsibility of their mothers. Livia Lesé suggests that this dominant maternal role has served as a self-fulfilling prophecy in which women actually exclude their partners from involvement with their children to the point where: ‘L’enfant, c’est l’affaire de la femme antillaise’ [children are the business of Caribbean women] (7). Caribbean women’s experience of mothering, however, comes across as a process of struggle, hardship and sacrifice. In the absence of reliable male support, whether financial or emotional, women have been required to assume the role of sole parent, often coupled with that of provider for the family.

A further contributor to the low rate of male participation in the family is the lack of positive definition of the male gender role. While potential female role models surround girls as they are growing up, the frequent absence of men in the family denies young boys this formative influence. ‘Boys are … growing up in situations where female gender identity is strong, and, where a father or other older male is absent, he might not be able to absorb notions of male status and identity through role modelling in the home. On whom does such a boy model himself?’ (Senior 38). The lack of direction in how to become a male in Caribbean society means that many young boys unconsciously absorb the notion that a man’s role is not within the family, but, rather, that of an irresponsible figure who flits from woman to woman and cannot maintain a steady job. Barry Chevannes further observes that ‘achieving and maintaining one’s masculinity may be less secure in cultures where women also appropriate the same symbols that men use as signifiers of male identity’ (219). While the dominant cultural expectation is for men to take up the leadership role in the home, the overwhelming pattern of female-headed households provides an additional challenge to the Caribbean man’s sense of masculinity. The frequent unavailability of positive male role models creates a vicious circle where men perpetuate patterns of unreliability by passing them onto their children through lack of involvement.
in their offspring’s lives. The enduring result of this familial situation is that women have come to embody great strength and the will to survive while men have tended to languish in behavioural patterns dominated by irresponsibility. The figure of the *femme matador* therefore has a firm grounding in the history of the French Caribbean.

Contemporary novelists from the two islands have frequently harnessed the figure of the *femme matador* as a way to underline the trying circumstances of Martinican and Guadeloupean womanhood and to demonstrate changing trends in the role of women in French Caribbean society. The representation of women in French Caribbean literature varies from an overwhelmingly positive depiction of Martinican and Guadeloupean womanhood and to demonstrate changing trends in the role of women in French Caribbean society. The representation of women in French Caribbean literature varies from an overwhelmingly positive depiction of the *femme matador* in books such as Schwarz-Bart’s *The Bridge of Beyond* and Chamoiseau’s *Texaco* to Conde’s more negative portrayal of the fighting woman in *The Last of the African Kings* and Chamoiseau’s sensitive and nuanced portrait in his novel *Solilo Magnificent*. These contrasting images attest to the complexities of the female condition in French Caribbean society, a state born of oppressive historical circumstances and enhanced by French Caribbean men’s abdication of many of their familial and financial responsibilities. They also highlight that women are increasingly taking on roles within the wider community, rather than confining their efforts to the domestic arena.

*The Bridge of Beyond* offers a heart-warming vision of female courage and tenacity presented through the luminous descriptions of the narrator, Télumée, and her female ancestors. Schwarz-Bart’s narrative style, with its focus on the transmission of knowledge and wisdom between four generations of women, mirrors the Caribbean tradition of history-making by telling stories and passing them down the family line. Patrice Proulx points out that the presence of female history in the novel, expressed through the author’s insistence on the Lougandor genealogy, bears witness to ‘the articulation of an original community of women’ (136) which helps to oppose the scattering of the Caribbean family imposed by slavery (Toureh 73). As a result of their firm grounding in their historical roots, the Lougandor women develop into characters who display strength and a resolve to survive that is not shared by the majority of men around them.

The first woman described in the Lougandor line is Télumée’s great-grandmother, Minerva, who is linked to the Roman goddess of wisdom through her mythical name. Despite her direct experience of the injustices of the plantation system, Minerva displays the quality that comes to characterise all of the women in the Lougandor family with her ‘unshakable faith in life’ (3). This courageous attitude towards the trials of existence represents the defining philosophy of Minerva and her descendants as they encounter times of great prosperity and others of deep suffering. What distinguishes the Lougandor women from those around them is their ability to maintain this approach to life in both the good times and the bad. Their refusal to idealise life or to minimise the impact of the pain that periodically encompasses them highlights a no-nonsense approach to

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we Lougandors are not pedigree cocks, we’re fighting cocks. We know the ring, the crowd, fighting, death. We know victory and eyes gouged out. And all that has never stopped us from living, relying neither on happiness nor on sorrow for existence, like tamarind leaves that close at night and open in the day. (80)

Toussine forms one of the central narrative interests in the novel and, together with Télumée, she emerges as a woman of great strength. Deeply loved and growing up in the secure domestic environment provided by her parents, Minerva and Xango, Toussine dominates the story with her mythical presence and her intimate link to the wisdom of the spirit world. However, in Schwarz-Bart’s portrayal of the image of the femme matador, these qualities must always be grounded in the highs and lows of everyday life. Schwarz-Bart reveals that it is principally as a result of her suffering that Toussine assumes her role as the voice of courage and wisdom throughout the novel. Happily married to Jérémie, she begins her life as a woman in profound happiness. However, her world falls to pieces when one of her daughters dies in a devastating house fire. Toussine falls into a deep depression lasting three years which leads to her and her family’s ruin. In a symbolic manner that highlights her link to nature, the house they live in becomes over-run by weeds and flimsy pieces of cardboard cover the windows. Shocking the people around her, Toussine languishes in sorrow until one day a man ‘announced that Toussine, the little stranded boat, the woman thought to be lost forever, had come out of her cardboard tower and was taking a little walk in the sun’ (14).

Beverley Ormerod draws attention to the metaphorical qualities of Toussine’s transformation, emphasising the way in which boats are able to withstand the forces of nature due to their sturdy construction in wood. Furthermore, ‘the boat is also an especially fitting symbol of the unpredictable course of human experience, with its quests, setbacks and sudden changes of fortune’ (109). Ormerod’s stress on the changeable nature of life reinforces the idea that strength is born both of hardship and of joy. Schwarz-Bart announces Toussine’s readiness to embrace the full experience of life and therefore to adopt her role as a femme matador by describing her renewed faith in nature. Toussine plants the pip of a hummingbird orange tree, the same tree that nourished both her daughters for their afternoon tea before Mérée’s premature death. Communion with nature thus becomes an empowering element and allows Toussine to face her tragedy from a position of strength rather than from one of overwhelming sorrow. The profound ramifications of this metamorphosis in consciousness surface in Schwarz-Bart’s description of Toussine as ‘a bit of the world, a whole country, a plume of a Negress, the ship, sail, and wind, for she had not made a habit of existence which is directed above all by the will to survive. Significantly, these women view both positive and negative experiences as the defining facets of life and accept, therefore, that both must be lived fully. In the words of Télumée’s grandmother, Toussine,

we Lougandors are not pedigree cocks, we’re fighting cocks. We know the ring, the crowd, fighting, death. We know victory and eyes gouged out. And all that has never stopped us from living, relying neither on happiness nor on sorrow for existence, like tamarind leaves that close at night and open in the day. (80)

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sorrow’ (14). The ultimate recognition of Toussine’s strength of character and reinvigorated zest for life occurs in the birth of her new daughter called Victoire and her crowning as ‘Reine Sans Nom’ [Queen Without a Name] by the villagers around her. Reine Sans Nom thus presents a shining image of the femme matador in her capacity to weave together the positive and negative threads of existence in her determined quest for survival. Schwarz-Bart’s book represents one of the most positive and clearly delineated examples of female strength in contemporary French Caribbean literature.

Two novels published in 1992, Chamoiseau’s Texaco and Condé’s The Last of the African Kings, reflect on the theme of the femme matador through their focus on two productive and community-minded women who forge a prominent place for themselves within their respective societies. Their important social role exemplifies the changing status of women within French Caribbean society with their proactive stance on community building and their passionate attempt to preserve their history and culture. However, Condé and Chamoiseau refuse an idealised picture of their female protagonists, revealing both positive and negative ways in which external circumstances shape their characters’ approach to life. Chamoiseau, for example, highlights the manner in which personal and social hardships foster Marie-Sophie Laborieux’s unwavering determination to face and conquer adversity. In The Last of the African Kings, by contrast, Condé depicts Debbie’s triumph over her surroundings, evident in her successful career and esteemed public status, but she underlines that this power arises at a cost to close relationships. Forming two faces of the femme matador, then, Marie-Sophie and Debbie illustrate the manner in which the environment can generate an attitude of positive determination in one character and a desire to control in the other.

Texaco’s main protagonist, Marie-Sophie, is the woman who takes on the task of fighting for and recording the history of Texaco, a real-life suburb on the margins of the Martinican capital, Fort-de-France. The choice of a woman as the storyteller of Texaco is not incidental given that it was founded in reality by a Madame Sico, (McCusker 730) but it also reflects the important position women occupy more generally in Caribbean society. In an interview with Maeve McCuks, Chamoiseau explains that Marie-Sophie is a mixture of Madame Sico and his mother. When asked if his novel serves to some extent as a eulogy to the Martinican woman, Chamoiseau replies in the affirmative: ‘the sociological reality in Martinique is that women are very present and they are strong women’ (730). Speaking more specifically about his mother as an example of a strong Caribbean woman, Chamoiseau states that she is ‘a woman with balls, a virile woman, and all Caribbean women are like that’ (730–31). While there is an element of romanticism to Chamoiseau’s classification of all women as femmes matador, he nonetheless draws attention to the prominent position women occupy in French Caribbean society and hints at the wider historical context of shifting
attitudes in gender transgression. While gender identity in French Caribbean literature frequently emerges in the opposition of the ‘strong woman’ and the ‘weak man’, more recent writers such as Gisèle Pineau have explored the fluid nature of gender and the way in which feminine and masculine qualities can flow between both sexes. Chamoiseau’s characterisation of his mother as ‘a woman with balls’ is an example of a woman who has appropriated the traits of virility and assertiveness that are traditionally associated with masculinity. Such literary embodiments of gender transgression are an important indicator of social change on a broader scale.

Through the course of her existence, Marie-Sophie draws strength from adversity and develops the outstanding vigour which allows her to take on single-handedly the role of fighting for Texaco when it falls under threat. ‘I had suddenly understood that it was I, around this table with this poor old rum, with my word for my only weapon, who had to wage — at my age — the decisive battle for Texaco’s survival’ (26–27). Marie-Sophie outlines her philosophy of a tenacious faith in life in an unambiguous manner: ‘life is not to be measured by the ell of its sorrows. For that reason, I, Marie-Sophie Laborieux … have always looked at the world in a good light’ (33). While those around her may bow before overwhelming pressures, she takes the experience as a challenge and seizes upon it as an opportunity to build her character. According to Citas Kemedjio, part of Marie-Sophie’s success in withstanding the difficulties of the war she wages for Texaco is her capacity for débrouillardise or the ability to survive and exploit the system that oppresses (qtd in Burton 468). Her determination to triumph over public and private distress marks her out as a strong Caribbean woman and emphasises the possibility of drawing strength from arduous external surroundings.

Condé provides an alternative image of the femme matador through the character of Debbie in The Last of the African Kings. While Marie-Sophie positively harnesses the challenges of her environment for society’s good, Debbie seeks to master it in what is frequently an oppressive manner. Condé’s depiction of Debbie aligns her with the femme matador in her determination and courage regarding the promotion of black culture and racial equality in her society. Driven, intellectual and ambitious, Debbie has a rigorously organised schedule which includes on an average Sunday, for example: ‘singing the psalms louder than anyone else … rubbing the hands or sponging the forehead of a believer gripped by the Holy Spirit … [and giving] inspired readings or [dealing] out forceful sermons to the few stubborn, sulky teenagers whose parents had managed to drag them to the house of the Lord’ (19). While the author celebrates the important social role Debbie undoubtedly performs, it is evident in this description that Condé’s portrayal of her character is steeped in irony and exaggeration.

Condé further challenges her character’s image as a femme matador with her progressive revelations about the motives behind Debbie’s impassioned battles
for social equality. Fuelled by the desire to possess a palpable link with her
cultural heritage, Debbie’s decision to marry Spéro pivots largely on her
knowledge of his African royal ancestry, a factor that to her outweighs his essential
weakness and ineptitude. Condé identifies the source of Debbie’s obsession with
historical roots as a product of her disappointment at her own genealogical
background. Since childhood Debbie has idealised her father, George Middleton,
a man known for his passionate dedication to the black cause. However, she
discovers as an adult that he is little more than a racist and she suffers greatly
from the discovery that her idol is a hypocrite. Given that “[r]evenance [is] her
religion’ (64), she quickly abandons her literary project and becomes heavily
involved in her quest for justice. When Spéro’s link with royalty proves
increasingly illusory, Debbie further intensifies her social campaigning and plays
out her resentment at the situation through her humiliating and distant treatment
of him. As Mildred Mortimer maintains, ‘[i]n effect, she parodies the racist
tactics she abhors; Debbie becomes responsible for “putting a Nigger in his place”’
(760). While Debbie draws on her considerable determination and courage to
strive for social equality, she also succeeds in destroying her relationship with
Spero and contributing to the erosion of her husband’s already wavering sense
of identity. Condé thereby ‘warns us against the danger of falling into the fictions
that we have created ourselves’ (Wilson 113), painting a less than ideal picture
of the femme matador.

Alongside this unflattering portrait of female strength, Condé depicts the
trying circumstances that men create for their partners as a way to explain the
development of the femme matador. For example, one of the behaviours Spéro
adopts in response to the magnification of Debbie’s character in his frequent
recourse to extramarital liaisons. Debbie’s reaction to her husband’s relationships
exemplifies a collective female disappointment at the unreliable conduct of their
partners, encapsulated in the parallels between Debbie and her mother-in-law.
‘Debbie was sitting slumped at the table, motionless, her head clutched between
her hands, immediately bringing to mind the picture he had of Marisia, his
maman, crying because of Justin’ (Condé 187–88). While it has been documented
that Caribbean girls grow up with clearly defined examples of strong female
behaviour due to the predominance of women in the family (Senior 38), it is
evident in the upbringing of Spéro and his ancestors that boys absorb reduced
images of masculinity as a result of their fathers’ failure to assume their parental
responsibilities. As they perceive the lack of male participation in the family, it
seems quite natural for boys to grow up and display these same gendered attitudes
towards women and their domestic obligations. Justin, Spéro’s father, for example,
is an unsuccessful musician who chases after women and dulls his mind with
rum, a pattern that Spéro unquestioningly repeats in his own adult life. Condé
thereby highlights the way in which many women have had to assume
responsibilities because of male unreliability and out of the sheer necessity to
Doudou-Ménar as an icon of female cultural resistance' (234), an identification amplified in Chamoiseau's description of her everyday life: Doudou-Ménar: ‘Her big breasts jumped up and down, but the fat woman ignored them (never burdensome for a chest, these things cannot fall, no)’ (Solibo 24). According to H. Adlai Murdoch, this intertextual reference ‘tacitly [inscribes] Doudou-Ménar as an icon of female cultural resistance’ (234), an identification amplified in Chamoiseau’s description of her everyday life:

[S]he drew upon the strength her long day had not been able to exhaust: getting up at sunrise to scald the grapefruit, sweep the house before waking up her son Gustave (a ne’er-do-well, my dear, who wears Pierre Cardin clothes and sings in Spanish in a band where other ne’er-do-wells pretend to be Latins), and sells candied fruit through the favor of the festivities, a way of dealing blows to her debts with the hard swing of a full purse. Her man, Gustave’s father, had vanished from the midst of life’s traffic, slumped in a festive stupor from which he emerged only after the Carnival, but with empty balls and the muscle all mushy. (24)

Doudou-Ménar’s struggle to survive in the absence of reliable male support highlights some of the hardships common to French Caribbean women. The lack of responsibility of her partner is evident in his collapse into a drunken stupor after the Carnival, a behaviour that overflows into other aspects of their shared life. His failure to provide an adequate role model for his son because of his own irresponsibility partially explains the perpetuation of such male patterns of unreliability in French Caribbean society. The immediate consequences for Doudou-Ménar are that she must assume almost complete responsibility for the running of the home and the family and therefore must foster qualities of resilience and tenacity in order to survive. In this light, she appears as a femme matador who must shoulder the consequences of male irresponsibility.

Whilst the portraits of these fighting women often attract admiration and idealisation from the writers who describe them, Chamoiseau reveals a more serious consequence of this female struggle to survive. It is evident that material and emotional necessity succeed in producing a warrior spirit in Doudou-Ménar...
which she draws on in her quest for survival in a hostile environment. However, the determination with which she clings to life grows to such an extent that she becomes prone to acts of violence: ‘In this woman, street champion, any threat, any gurgle in the stomach, launched a desire to massacre’ (26). Doudou-Ménar’s considerable physical strength and bold spirit, presented with comic exaggeration, make her a force to be reckoned with and a potential danger to anyone who crosses her path. Within this framework Doudou-Ménar appears as an excessively aggressive woman, although Chamoiseau emphasises that this warrior spirit arises as a specific result of the hardships dealt to women by men.

Chamoiseau parallels the harshness of Doudou-Ménar’s adult fighting spirit with his depiction of her as a naïve girl from the country. With his inclusion of a memorable love scene shared many years earlier with Bouaffesse, the Chief Sergeant in the investigation into Solibo’s death, Chamoiseau stresses the innocence and sweetness of a young female who has not yet encountered the realities of Caribbean womanhood. Although he satirises Doudou-Ménar’s naivety, he also shows how she is exploited. Indeed, in his poignant description of her disappointed expectation that Bouaffesse would remember her as he had promised all those years ago (36), Chamoiseau underlines her transition from the freshness of youth to the jaded and hardened woman who seeks help aggressively for Solibo. He draws further attention to Doudou-Ménar’s simplicity and fundamental goodness in a humorous but poignant way with his description of her full of pride when she travels to the crime scene in a police van. Brief vignettes such as these constitute a moving and subtle tribute to the women who suffer and pay the price of their daily bid for survival. Doudou-Ménar becomes, therefore, a model of the contradictions of the female experience in French Caribbean society.

As these excerpts from French Caribbean history, sociology and literature demonstrate, the femme matador remains a recurrent and persistent image of Martinican and Guadeloupean womanhood. With their ability to transform the difficulties of their surroundings into a potent means of survival, French Caribbean women have effectively empowered themselves in a situation of historical oppression. This embodiment of female strength has been thrown into greater relief by the pronounced weakness of French Caribbean men as revealed in both fictional and non-fictional works of the region. While relations between the sexes in Martinique and Guadeloupe are beginning to evolve in more modern times, the persistence of images of female strength and male weakness attest to the decisive role of history in influencing Caribbean gender roles. The femme matador thus exemplifies some of the realities and representations of the French Caribbean woman.
NOTES
1 See, for example, Raymond T. Smith, Kinship and Class in the West Indies: A Genealogical Study of Jamaica and Guyana.
3 Translations from French texts are my own unless otherwise indicated.

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In the opening pages of Gisèle Pineau’s, *L’Espérance–macadam*, the female narrator’s language is broken, fragmented, as the body of the text itself reflects the passing of a cyclone or, as it is called in the novel, ‘Le passage de La Bête’. There is a direct link between the violence and violation of the woman’s body by the ‘Beast’, which in the novel is both man and cyclone — man as cyclone — and the Guadeloupean landscape. This dual force not only razes the landscape, destroying vegetation and homes, but is used metaphorically to describe analogous acts of violence by men against the physical landscape of the female body. The novel begins and ends with a cyclone and it is within this seasonal, cyclical or what I would like to call cyclonic, structure that Pineau takes us into the community of Savane.

Pineau is preoccupied in *L’Espérance-macadam* with the violence and victimisation of the Antillean woman and, with few exceptions, there is a pathological comportment of the Antillean man, as unpredictable, indifferent, destructive and as apocalyptic a force as a cyclone. This is in no way a new theme in Antillean or even Caribbean literature but what sets Pineau apart is the link that she creates between cyclone, culture, metaphor and landscape. Her language both reveals and conceals voices but at the same time continues to suppress. This essay, as part of a longer work examining the treatment of the paysage antillais in the works of French Caribbean women writers, explores Pineau’s use of the cyclone metaphor and the manner in which it affects and effects a cultural landscape, creating a cyclone culture.

SAVANE’S CRIMES

The reader is taken into the community of Savane through several voices, but Pineau privileges the female voice and in particular that of Eliette. This widow who has survived two hurricanes and two husbands tells the story of Savane from its Edenic beginnings to its present cycle of destruction. A before and after scenario is presented: the natural earthly paradise of Savane in the time of Joab, Eliette’s stepfather, becomes the Savane after Joab — ‘a paradise lost’. Eliette for most of her life has closed herself off from the community in an attempt to block out and protect herself from the chaos and crimes committed in Savane. Pineau uses Eliette to explore and exploit the violent, complicit nature of Savane and its crime of silencing stories of violation.

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From the onset Eliette foregrounds natural devastation and Savane’s own violent nature, by exposing the reader to the effects of the brutal forces of the cyclone and to the man made forces of destruction. These atrocities, with multiple authors and victims, are piled like refuse in the opening pages of the novel and are scattered throughout it, along with images of broken tree branches, mattresses and sheets of galvanised iron.


(Blood spread on the grass along the path. A blue tongue pulled from the flowers of the mango tree. Gray eyes tied to the end of a rope. A small mangled body at the bottom of the Neefles bridge. Hortense chopped up with a cutlass. And those children having left for the mountains, never to return. And how many other acts too terrible to mention?)

Each crime will be recalled and listed by Eliette because she is aware of her dual role as both perpetrator and victim in this culture of \textit{Rien vu Rien entendu}.

Eliette’s first criminal experience was the crime committed against her by her father. At the age of eight during the passing of the famous cyclone of 1928, Eliette was brutally raped by him and her body was so ravaged that her mother literally had her resewn by a midwife. The memory of this incident is suppressed until she takes in a neighbour’s daughter, Angela, who has also been raped by her father during hurricane season. Eliette finally gets her wish to become a mother, a substitute mother, as she guides Angela, the way her own mother did, away from Savane to safety. For the first time Eliette engages in actions that set her apart from the community, becoming an agent of change.

The parallels configured by Pineau in the story of Eliette and Angela are crucial to the reading of the text and to the understanding of Savane’s culture. Although Eliette has, like the rest of her community refused to help so many other victims of rape, infanticide, murder and abuse, she chooses to act this time primarily because she recognises herself in Angela. By saving Angela there is also an opportunity for Eliette to save a lost self.

\textbf{THE CASE OF HERMENCIA, GLAWDYS AND OF CREOLE COMPLICITY}

The men in the novel are the main perpetrators of these crimes however the women are complicit in the crimes of crime of silence and inaction. This collective role as both perpetrator and victim in this culture of
criminal, ritualistic act is best represented in the novel by the rape of Hermanicia and the neglect of her daughter Glawdys. We are told every Friday afternoon seven men would take Hermancia, ‘une simplette’, to the abattoir where they would each take turns having sex with her.


(Every Friday afternoon, the seven men had barely finished slaughtering the animals when they moved onto Hermancia, with delicate gestures, and her flesh was as tender as the best loin.)

In the novel Pineau makes it clear that the community, particularly the women of Savane, are aware of this crime and yet they try their best to ignore it. This notion is reinforced by the ‘joyous song’ that Hermancia sings for all to hear describing her experience:

La joie tu m’as donnée
La paix sur la terre
Les hommes de bonne volonté
J’ai sourire, j’ai sourire
Et les sept rois mages sont descendus à l’abattoir.
Ils ont fermé les boeufs
Et le sang tigé tout-partout.
Oh Oh Oh Seigneur! (59)

(The joy that you have given me
Peace on earth
Good will to men
A smile on my face, a smile on my face
And the seven Wise Men came from the abattoir
They locked up the animals
And blood spurted everywhere, everywhere
Oh Oh Oh Lord!

A biblical theme is woven into the story by insisting on the community’s strong religious notions of sin, expiation and redemption, and using names like Joab, and numerous biblical allusions to Judas, God or the devil. Pineau portrays a Savane that combines the notion of Old Testament eye-for-an-eye justice with New Testament hope or espérance of deliverance. The irony in Hermancia’s song is obvious; she re-interprets her situation with a biblical reading, however, the brutality of the sacrifice in the form of a simplette’s song and the context of the abattoir reminds us of Pineau’s insistence on the ritualistic violence of this damned community that undermines any pretense of religious fervor. It is only when Hermancia becomes pregnant that her father brutally avenges his daughter with his cutlass. ‘Nègre, Indien, mulâtre, Blanc, chabin, Caraïbe et bata-coolie — ils étaient sept — pas un ne fut épargné’ (57). (Black, Indian, mulatto, White,
Pineau also emphasises the parenting responsibility of the society to its Creole society. By ensuring that each group plays a role in the violation of Hermancia wise men'. Each one represents a different racial identity in Savane's plural offspring of the village 'simplette', Hermancia, has been 'fathered' by the 'seven nature of Savane but extends her critique to racial, ethnic complicity and accuses religion, their beliefs remain mere allusions, never materialising into actions. In spite of the community's reference to their fans, stoves, even mattresses into a river that is now beyond pollution. Once visible for all to see, the inhabitants of Savane feel free to throw fridges, old rocks by the riverbed. Oddly, after Glawdys' baby and the smashed body is only to return years later with a baby. She tries to support herself and her child. She ties Glawdys inside her house like an animal and although the community, including Eliette, all hear Glawdy's 'jappements', they do nothing to free her. When Glawdys is finally freed from Eloise by a social worker she leaves Savane only to return years later with a baby. She tries to support herself and her child by selling christophines. The people of Savane as a result of their guilty feelings and their desire to make reparations for their earlier treatment of Glawdys buy the christophines, but they soon tire of their christophine dishes and leave Glawdys and her baby once again to fend for themselves. Glawdys, the strange, beautiful creole then commits the monstrous act of infanticide by throwing her baby onto the rocks by the riverbed. Oddly, after Glawdys' baby and the smashed body is visible for all to see, the inhabitants of Savane feel free to throw fridges, old fans, stoves, even mattresses into a river that is now beyond pollution. Once again Pineau places emphasis on unnatural actions against human nature and against the Antillian landscape. In spite of the community’s reference to their religion, their beliefs remain mere allusions, never materialising into actions.

Through the creation of a Glawdys, Pineau not only reinforces the complicitous nature of Savane culture by emphasising the multiple origins of Glawdys. She has a strange, ‘mervieilleuse beauté’ with the features of every father. She is the product of creolisation, her race undefinable:

Cer
diens disaient que les sept rois mages de l’abattoir avait mêlé leur sang pour qu’elle prenne une part égale de chacun, la meilleure. Négresse-noire à yeux verts, nez droit, épaisses lèvres pourpres et grands cheveux jaune paille bouclés, Glawdys déroulait tous ceux qui cherchaient à définir sa race. (61)

(Some people said that the seven Wise Men from the abattoir had mixed their blood so that she got the best part of each one. A dark skinned Negresse with green eyes, a straight nose, thick crimson lips, and long, curly straw-colored hair. Glawdys confused anyone who tried to define her race.)

The attention paid to the physical and ethnic composition of Glawdys is noteworthy since, for the most part, Pineau seldom emphasises racial features in her work but also because Glawdys is the only representation of racial creolisation in L’Espérance-macadam.

When Hermancia wanders away from Savane, the orphaned Glawdys is adopted by Eloise. ‘La Folle’, as Eloise is called, continues the cycle of abuse. She ties Glawdys inside her house like an animal and although the community, including Eliette, all hear Glawdy’s ‘jappements’, they do nothing to free her. When Glawdys is finally freed from Eloise by a social worker she leaves Savane only to return years later with a baby. She tries to support herself and her child by selling christophines. The people of Savane as a result of their guilty feelings and their desire to make reparations for their earlier treatment of Glawdys buy the christophines, but they soon tire of their christophine dishes and leave Glawdys and her baby once again to fend for themselves. Glawdys, the strange, beautiful creole then commits the monstrous act of infanticide by throwing her baby onto the rocks by the riverbed. Oddly, after Glawdys’ baby and the smashed body is visible for all to see, the inhabitants of Savane feel free to throw fridges, old fans, stoves, even mattresses into a river that is now beyond pollution. Once again Pineau places emphasis on unnatural actions against human nature and against the Antillian landscape. In spite of the community’s reference to their religion, their beliefs remain mere allusions, never materialising into actions.

Through the creation of a Glawdys, Pineau not only reinforces the complicitous nature of Savane but extends her critique to racial, ethnic complicity and accuses every possible race of participating in the collective violence. Glawdys, the offspring of the village ‘simplette’, Hermancia, has been ‘fathered’ by the ‘seven wise men’. Each one represents a different racial identity in Savane’s plural society. By ensuring that each group plays a role in the violation of Hermancia Pineau also emphasises the parenting responsibility of the society to its Creole
Cyclone Culture and the Paysage Pineaulien

child, Glawdys. By neglecting to assume responsibility for Glawdys they are not only witnesses, but participants in the crime. However, rather than representing the case of Glawdys as a negative reading of creolisation, Pineau is in fact proposing equity in responsibility in this plural societal landscape. No one group can claim innocence and no one group can be blamed. For Pineau the lesson lies in the need for Savane to nurture the symbol of their plurality.

THE CYCLONE METAPHOR AND THE COMMUNITY

The cyclone metaphor is effectively used to further penetrate the cultural landscape of Savane. The two cyclones in the novel are part of Guadeloupe’s history. Both the cyclone of 1928 and of 1981 had devastating effects on the island, and as several writers, including earlier writers like Sylviane Telchid,4 have examined and included the cyclones in their fiction, they have become historical marqueurs of destruction in francophone Caribbean narratives. Pineau also notes the passing of hurricanes in her earlier novels like La Grande Drive des esprits and Un Papillon dans la Cité,5 but in her work the cyclone is also a cultural marqueur in so much as it affects and effects cultural behaviour. The synchronic force of man, beast and cyclone embodies destructive, catalytic, and restorative properties. The physical destruction is clearly seen in the dismemberment of the community’s natural landscape and in the dis-memberment of mainly women’s bodies in the novel.

The psychological destruction takes place on several levels. Eliette loses her speech, ‘la parole,’ until Joab helps her to speak again, but the memory is still suppressed until another hurricane, coupled with Angela’s violation, brings back the memory. The suppression of memories and language are another form of self-imprisonment and a self-imposed silencing that is only released and restored by the passing of another hurricane. While the cyclone suppresses and imprisons language it also acts as a catalyst for change. For the people of Savane the cyclone is a real and ever-feared force whose presence brings back another cycle of fear and panic and whose absence still haunts the lives of the community. However the imminent passing of a cyclone, rather than further fragmenting the community, introduces a cycle of expiation and the hope of redemption that will pass only to resurface again with another hurricane season. Their fear and cowardice bring them together, if only temporarily, and foster goodwill and generosity in this time of reckoning. They recall all the crimes committed in Savane and their complicit policy of inaction.

Et ils pensaient aussi à tous les crimes de Savane, à toutes leurs lâchetés, tous ces moments où ils auraient pu témoigner d’un brin de bravoure, juste un brin. Seigneur! Ils songaient à leurs yeux délibérément fermés, à leurs regards détournés. Et toute l’énergie, qu’ils avaient déploée pour la haine, la jalousie, le mépris et la sorcellerie leur revenait aussi. Tant de forces gaspillées.... Et ils s’essayait à rénarrer frères et sœurs dans une solidarité nouvelle qui les étonnait, les bouleversait, oui. (262-63)
interrogation of violations of the female body in literature. The trauma of experiencing childhood incest is central to Pineau’s intervention of violations of the female body in L’Espérance-macadam. The cyclone metaphor explores female sexuality, violence and the relationship between the landscape of the female body and the text.

In ‘The Body of the Woman in the Body of the Text: The Novels of Ema Brodber’ Denise deCaires Narain asserts that the body of the text has implications in Brodber’s works for the focus on the body of the woman. Narain also argues that although Western feminists, particularly the French feminists, have been anxious to retrieve the woman’s body from limited roles which conflate her with nature and nurture, and to re-metaphorise the female body as a powerful site of multiple possibilities, and stress the woman’s diffuse and unbounded sexuality, black feminists argue differently. Narain cites Barbara Smith as an example:

Black women have traditionally been reluctant to talk about sex with their daughters. ‘Keep your dress down and your drawers up,’ is a homily for this reticence… Sexual repression, coupled with blatant sexual exploitation has contributed to a complex psychological mix. (qtd in Narain 98–99).

(They also thought about all of Savane’s crimes, about their cowardice, the times when they could have shown an ounce of bravery, just an ounce. My Lord! They thought about their eyes deliberately closed, looking away. And all the energy spent on hatred, jealousy, scorn, and oaths coming back to haunt them. All that wasted energy…. And they were trying to recreate themselves in a new found solidarity that surprised them, overwhelmed them, yes)

As the narrator states, Joab would have been proud of the people of Savane on this the 16th of September 1989, because his paradise is at least temporarily revived (263). United, they are emboldened and defiant taunting the cyclone with drums and songs, ‘Cyclone /Tu ne nous fais pas peur’ (264). (Hurricane you don’t scare us.) Eliette, who before this passing never wanted to understand or listen to the drumming or the ‘musique des nègres’, begins to dance like the ‘négresses’ she so despised, letting the music possess her entire body. It is one of the rare occasions where Eliette expresses herself in a sensuous manner. The cyclone releases liberating and restorative forces that temporarily foster a cycle of re-membering a fragmented community.

THE CYCLONE METAPHOR: BODY AND TEXTUALITY

According to Martinican writer, Raphael Confiant, Gisèle Pineau’s vision is ‘intérieure, révélatrice et révolutionnaire’ (qtd in Gyssels 176). Unlike earlier Guadeloupean writers such as Simone Schwarz-Bart and Maryse Condé, Pineau tackles questions of female sexuality and sexual violations against the female body in a more explicit, probing manner. Whereas Schwarz-Bart’s language remains suggestive on these subjects Pineau uses them as primary themes. Pineau also does not shy away from the taboo subject of incest, and in particular incest affecting children, a theme seldom explored or exposed in francophone Caribbean literature. The trauma of experiencing childhood incest is central to Pineau’s interrogation of violations of the female body in L’Espérance-macadam. The cyclone metaphor explores female sexuality, violence and the relationship between the landscape of the female body and the text.

Black women have traditionally been reluctant to talk about sex with their daughters. ‘Keep your dress down and your drawers up,’ is a homily for this reticence… Sexual repression, coupled with blatant sexual exploitation has contributed to a complex psychological mix. (qtd in Narain 98–99).
There is still very little in francophone Caribbean women’s fiction, according to Narain, that focuses explicitly on woman as a sexual being. This is also true for *L’Espérance-macadam*. In the novel Pineau uses the landscape of Savane to explore sexual exploitation rather than female sexuality. The natural landscape is feminised, reflecting the brutalised landscape of the female body. Direct identification is made between the female body and the *paysage antillais*. For example, when Angela describes the painful burning sensation that she endures during one of the rapes by her father she compares her own body to the Savane landscape claiming that her ‘petite coucoune violente’ was burning like ‘Savane en Carême’.

In patriarchal male gender discourse the natural landscape is also associated with that of the female in hegemonic terms. When Rosan tries to intimidate Angela, to silence her, he talks about possession, conquest and right. ‘J’ai le droit d’aller sur ma monture avant les autres! Je suis ton papa…. Alors, j’ouvre le chemin pour les autres’ (223) (I have the right to mount you before the others. I am your father…. I am clearing the path for the others.) Rosan’s words could easily be interpreted by postcolonial feminists as defining a ‘colonising mission’.

Smith’s notion of sexual exploitation coupled with sexual repression is also perpetuated in the female discourse. When Angela gets her period for the first time Rosette sits her down and tells her to be aware of a race of savage, monstrous animals who look like men. Ironically, unbeknownst to Rosette, Angela has met this race many times before, but it not surprising then that the metaphor Angela employs of the cyclone and the metamorphosis of her father as a Beast with long teeth is also part of the cultural definition and expectation of males in the society. The metaphor of man as a demonic force is not only seen in *L’Espérance-macadam* but also in Pineau’s 1998 novel, *L’Ame prêtrée aux oiseaux*, where during a sexual encounter the woman sees the man as releasing demons and monsters (193).

However, these metamorphoses of the male figure pose the problematic of what I would like to call description and deflection. Does the cyclone metaphor simply reflect and describe man’s actions or does it in fact deflect from his responsibility for these acts? Consider the troubling scene of Angela’s rape and the multiple metamorphoses of the father: cyclone, Beast, devil. Angela even prays to God for her father to be freed from the evil ‘bête’ that possesses his soul.

‘Non, c’était pas son papa Rosan, un démon, mon Dieu Seigneur, un démon…. De toute la force de sa jeune foi, elle récita un Je crois en Dieu mais la bête ne disparaissait pas …. Elle voulait crier encore une fois, mais elle avait perdu la parole. (214–15)

(No, it wasn’t her papa Rosan, it was a demon, my Lord God, a demon…. With all the force of her young faith she recited an ‘I believe in the father’ but the beast wouldn’t disappear… She wanted to cry once again but she couldn’t speak.)

As with Hermancia, religious interpretations perpetuate the transference of accountability for the heinous crimes, and promote suppression of speech,
expression and deflection from the metamorphosed perpetrator. Rosan’s transformations effect a distancing of his role in the act. The distancing is also enacted by the use of epithets like ‘coucoune’, ‘coco,’ throughout the novel, that reinforce a Caribbean cultural reality in which sexual body parts are designated in a figurative manner.

This system of reflection and deflection in Pineau’s use of the cyclone metaphor underlines the fact that sexual acts in L’Espérance-macadam are not about sexuality but rather about violation and oppression. This is Pineau’s preoccupation in L’Espérance-macadam. However, the manner in which even these very acts of violation are described may reflect a more revealing, explicit approach as compared to earlier writers, but the metaphoric medium at once reflects a Caribbean reality and at the same promotes deflection of accountability.

**METAPHOR AND CYCLONE CULTURE, SOME CONCLUSIONS**

The fathers’ metamorphoses as the cyclone-Beast undermines to a great extent the hope or espérance that is expressed at the end of the novel. In fact both rapes reinforce the cyclical, cyclonic or fragmented structure of uncontrollable forces of man and nature. If the body of the text is itself a metaphor for the destructive forces of man and cyclone which is mirrored in the language, the syntax, and the structure, then the body of the woman in Pineau is more a site of destruction than the more traditional site of rebirth and regeneration. Her language is a reflection as well as a product of this violation.

Kathleen Gyssels, in an article examining Pineau’s use of autobiography and exile, examines the manner in which the Pineaulien heroine attains self-awareness through her body. This privileging of body can be argued only in as far as Eliette experiences a sense of her physicality, through the drums. However, for the most part, Eliette’s self-image and repressed sexuality has not changed from the girl of sixteen who was afraid of everything and everyone, particularly of men and cyclones — ‘de leurs yeux mauvais’. Eliette does not move from a sense of dispossession, to one of self-possession and security. Although she attempts to re-assemble her fragmented narrative the notion of suppression and secrecy still haunt and hinder a complete restoration.

At the end of the novel when she finally arrives at Marraine Anoncia house, with Angela, Eliette is seeking both shelter from the hurricane and confirmation from Anoncia of what she already knows. ‘Eliette voulait entendre, de la bouche de marraine Anoncia, ce qu’elle savait déjà’ (273). (Eliette wanted to hear what she already knew from the mouth of her godmother Anoncia.) Although Marraine Anoncia tells the story of her brother, (Eliette’s father, known appropriately as ‘ti-cyclone’) and reveals the familial ties between Eliette and Angela, (Angela’s father and Eliette are half-brother and sister), Marraine Anoncia is only able to relate the story in a manner that is déroutante: ‘Anoncia serrait les dents sur son secret, prétendait l’oreille au vent, couvrait sa tête du drap, repossait, repoussait le moment des aveux. (296). (Anoncia kept her tightly closed teeth on her secret, pretended she had not heard, kept her head covered with the sheet, repossed, repulsed the moment of the confession).
guarded secret, listening to the wind, hiding her head underneath the sheets, pushing away, pushing away the moment of confession.) Direct confession and revelation is still too difficult. In fact Marraine Anoncia relies once again on biblical allusions to explain her brother’s actions, he remains metamorphosed as a devil, a demon, a diabolical figure, ‘un homme maudit’.

The threads of secrecy, guilt, denial, shame and complicity intertwine in Marraine Anoncia’s tale and recall defining characteristics of Savane itself, but the poetic phrasing, written in lyrical Pineaulien prose emphasises both the hope and the suffering. The cyclical, as well as the cyclonic, notion of destruction and restoration is reinforced. Cyclones cannot be stopped since acts of nature, acts of God, cannot be controlled, only endured. Therefore man as cyclone and the effects on the female landscape must also be endured. There will always be the cycle of cyclones or as Marraine Anoncia says, ‘c’est peut-être le même qui revient toujours’ (199). (It’s perhaps the same one that keeps coming back.) All that can be done is to rebuild and replant hope. Eliette believes that she can reconstruct with Angela, Joah’s paradise from downtrodden hopes — ‘au macadam des espérances’. She believes she can reconstruct a personal narrative. However the ability to rebuild and redefine the collective culture caught in a cycle of destruction and restoration seems as elusive as capturing the Beast. The Beast that in the end is Savane itself.

NOTES

1 All translations from Pineau’s texts are mine.
2 In fact, Rosette, Angela’s mother, will accuse her of being a Judas twice: in the first instance, when Rosette visits Sister Beloved in the Rastafarian settlement; and the second, when Angela tells her about the rape. The biblical reference reinforces both the theme of betrayal as well as the desire to suppress and repress la parole.
3 I have translated bata-coolie as Dougla, ‘bata’ is the French Creole for bastard. Dougla designates a person of mixed Indian and African descent.
5 The hurricane is a common trope in several of Pineau’s works. See La Grande Drive des esprits, p. 16; Un Papillon dans la Cité, pp. 27, 38, 45, 68; L’Exil selon Julia, p. 135.
6 According to Narain, ‘post-colonial feminists have also stressed the centrality of the woman’s body as symbolic fodder in inspiring the “colonising mission”, and, later in providing nationalist patriarchs with an eroticised and feminised landscape to “rescue” from the colonisers’ (99).

WORKS CITEd


MAXINE CLARK

breakfast

my mother ain’t off no cereal box
all housewife smiles
& wearing some flowered apron frock
all cleaning-cooking-cradling six-a-week
& hallelujah with a hat
on sunday
my mother played leap-frog / play-dough / hop-scotch
taught the crazy cadences of nina simone
jitterbugged & mamboed round our home
she kept no maids
& raised no maids
with every last cent she owned
strong black soul
with dread black locks
& so what
if she ain’t on no kellogs box
home

one half a thousand colours brown
now call the tottenham streets their home
& i
belong
with them
we're brixton beige
burnt carmine black
dark sepia & cream
speaking cockney-aussie-irie
oxymoron
from full lips
we've gone from black
to mixed
to coloured
there's a drumming in our ears that we suppress
bright cars
with reggae stereo
& crazy boom-box beats
modern Toasters
hip new griots
attitude
musty bookshelves
shelves aligned
with religion
nubian style
there's selassie
there's obeah
& there's christ
fat dumpling in the window
of the baker down the street
& waking up to fried banana
every day—
& in our minds
we see sahara in the city-scape around
we could go in search of freedom
but we don't
see / we may substitute a desert
we may never see the sun
we may hold on to chains & shackles
london may not be our mother
but she's home
i used to dance a lot:
the hip-hop tango
the boogie-bronx
funky-town
fox-trot
turn-around
mambo
at clubs
i put on quite a show
the pigeon-toed
harlem-found
shanty-town
girl from the ghetto
burning the floor with her
reggae-rock
samba-style
heel-toe
dancing loud
& bold
& proud
before the crowd
beneath my
black
baaad
afro
the eyes
& sighs
of all the guys
in tow
i was a diva
on show
i sit in corners now
camouflaged
incognito
a wall-flower dressed in black
sipping lemon lime & vodkas
on a stool near the back
i want a nat-king-dizzy-louie man
it's true
i want a miles
want him baaad
want him blue
i want a cleaver
want a jackson
want an X a-screamin blood
i want a lion
& a leader
& a thug
who wants to liberate my mind
by any means he can
i want a chain-breaking
rights-taking
man
don't want a luther
or a baldwin
or a dub e b dubois
with some college edukayshun pass
from white man's bar
ain't go for no black man
in a white man's suit
all a-buttoned to the jaw
& a salute
don't give me jungle bunny
funky monkey
honey-tipped sultana
be a lover
be a leader
be a father
& give me chocolate dipped
coffee-dripped
strong-hipped sex
i want it ripe
i want it real
i want the best
soil brother
land lover
earth mother's son
so sin sufferer
history's other
panther on the run
with a past
with a passion
with a gun
be a legend
be a menace
be a monster of a man
but be not afraid to say
i'm caliban
my caliban

show me
a young black man
who stands:
noise-maker
go-getter
shit-stirrer
dub-whirrer
flesh-tearing
meat-eating
jive-walking
tongue-talking caliban
who says: i am what i am
a dark-conscious
blues-breathing
soul shaking
love-wanter:
teeth-baring
dream-sharing
dread-wearing
black-loving
nubian world-watcher
show me my caliban
& i’ll be a black woman
who wanter a black man

my caliban

show me
a young black man
who stands:
noise-maker
go-getter
shit-stirrer
dub-whirrer
flesh-tearing
meat-eating
jive-walking
tongue-talking caliban
who says: i am what i am
a dark-conscious
blues-breathing
soul shaking
love-wanter:
teeth-baring
dream-sharing
dread-wearing
black-loving
nubian world-watcher
show me my caliban
& i’ll be a black woman
who wanter a black man
Dub poetry is usually taken to refer to a particular type of ‘performance poetry’, a brand of oral poetry performed to the accompaniment of reggae music. The term ‘dub poetry’ itself is thought to have been invented by the Jamaican poet Oku Onuora to describe a form of oral art that had been developing in Jamaica since the early 1970s. Oku Onuora defined the term in an interview conducted with the poet and critic Mervyn Morris in 1979. Oku said that a dub poem was ‘a poem that has a built-in reggae rhythm — hence when the poem is read without any reggae rhythm (so to speak) backing, one can distinctly hear the reggae rhythm coming out of the poem’ (qtd in Brown, 51). So a dub poem is a poem that relies on a reggae rhythm that can be felt or heard even when there is no musical accompaniment. Oku Onuora later extended that definition to cover all kinds of musical backing, so that dub poetry would include any type of music-influenced poetry.

The term ‘dub poetry’ has not always found favour with all the practitioners of the genre. For instance Linton Kwesi Johnson and Mutabaruka have consistently rejected it. In an interview conducted in 1994, Mutabaruka told me that he found the term too ‘limited’. Linton Kwesi Johnson has repeatedly stated that the term ‘dub poetry’ put poets ‘in a bag’ and defined only one facet of their work: ‘I just like to be regarded as a poet who writes a particular type of poetry. I think it’s dangerous to categorise you into this “dub poetry” bag’ (Steffens pp 25–27). By the mid-1980s, the term had obviously run its course and the Jamaican poet Jean Binta Breeze had pleaded, in her poem ‘Dubbed Out’, for a type of poetry that would not ‘break’ words but let them live:

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i
search
for words
moving
in their music
not
broken
by
the
beat (29)
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Thus 'dub poetry' may not after all be a valid term for the reggae-influenced poetry produced by the likes of Oku Onuora, Mutabaruka and Linton Kwesi Johnson, and maybe this term should be applied to the people it was originally meant to refer to, that is Jamaica's first deejays. Indeed, in a Race and Class article, Linton Kwesi Johnson himself had written about the 'dub lyricists' and had called them 'poets':

The dub lyricist is the dj turned poet. He intones his lyrics rather than sings them. Dub lyricism is a new form of (oral) music poetry, wherein the lyricist overdubs rhythmic phrases on to the rhythm background of a popular song. Dub lyricists include poets like Big Youth, I Roy, U Roy, Dillinger, Shorty the President, Prince Jazzbo and others. (qtd in Morris, 66)

So the dub poetry tag was originally meant to describe the art form of Jamaican 'toasting' or deejaying, a brand of popular poetry produced by and for the Jamaican masses. In fact a case could be made for the recognition of Jamaican deejaying as a form of oral poetry.

In her seminal study entitled Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context, Ruth Finnegan wrote that the 'mode of composition' was a very important yardstick to assess the orality of a poem (17). Finnegan referred to that mode of composition as 'composition in performance' (Finnegan 18), that is, composition that takes place during the very performance of the poem. 'Composition in performance' was first identified by the American scholar Milman Parry and his assistant Albert Lord when they set out to prove that Homer's Iliad and Odyssey were in fact oral poems which had been composed orally by stringing together well-known phrases and formulae from the oral tradition. This method of composition was called 'formulic' because it is based on the reshuffling and stringing together of 'formulic', that is, clichés and stock phrases that everybody had heard.

Parry took the further step of using this formulic style to prove that the Homeric poems were orally composed. It was the need of the oral poet, he argued, for fluent and uninterrupted delivery throughout a lengthy performance that made the formulic style both necessary and suitable. The poet had a store of ready-made diction already tailored to suit the metrical constraints of the hexameter line. By manipulating formulic elements from this story — the 'building blocks' — he could construct a poem based on traditional material which was still his own and personal composition.

(Finnegan 60)

Although I am not suggesting that the early Jamaican deejays produced masterpieces of the calibre of Homer's Odyssey, it must be said that there are striking similarities between the formulic style identified by Milman Parry and Jamaican deejays' own mode of composition in performance. Performance then can be said to be closely associated with composition as most of the early Jamaican deejays composed their lyrics on the spot at sound system dances.

Thus 'dub poetry' may not after all be a valid term for the reggae-influenced poetry produced by the likes of Oku Onuora, Mutabaruka and Linton Kwesi Johnson, and maybe this term should be applied to the people it was originally meant to refer to, that is Jamaica's first deejays. Indeed, in a Race and Class article, Linton Kwesi Johnson himself had written about the 'dub lyricists' and had called them 'poets':

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‘Sound systems’ are large mobile discotheques with huge amplifiers designed to produce the heavy bass sound that has defined Jamaican popular music since the 1960s. The first sound systems appeared in the 1950s and played American Rhythm and Blues or Jamaican imitations of them. Later, from the 1960s on, the sound systems started playing Ska — a Jamaican mixture of Mento, Rhythm and Blues and Jazz — and then Rock Steady and reggae when these musical forms developed in the late 1960s. However, the important point to remember about these early sound systems, is that they already had a ‘resident deejay’ who was supposed to play records, as any deejay is supposed to do, but also to fill the gaps between the records by grabbing the sound system’s patrons’ attention. The deejay usually managed to do that by improvising a set of catchphrases that would ease the transition to the next record. So the deejay was (and still is), to use Roger Abrahams’ phrase, a ‘man-of-words’ and he had to use words well in order to please the crowd. Indeed competition between the various sound systems was quite fierce, and patrons could always go to ‘check the next sound’ if they did not like what they were hearing. For instance, the late Count Machuki, who is considered to be the pioneer of Jamaican deejaying, remembers how he had to come up with a constant flow of catchphrases to catch the dancers’ attention at the sound system dances where he was deejaying:

I used these words to sell our local recordings: ‘French Canadian home-cooked musical biscuit’. And folks dig it, you know, and so I found myself preparing something new to say to the folks. I developed jives like ‘I’m hard to catch, I’m hard to hold’. I found that people go crazy, so, you know, I keep digging, digging, I came up with ‘Whether you be young or old, you just got to let the good times roll, my friend!’ (qtd in Howard and Pines 70)

The tradition that Machuki helped to develop was in fact based on the American ‘jiving’ tradition initiated by American disc-jockeys who played jazz and blues records. The early Jamaican deejays like Count Machuki, King Stitt and King Sporty were heavily influenced by the ‘live jive’ of American radio deejays, and the famous reggae producer Clement ‘Coxsone’ Dodd is reputed to have brought that tradition back to Jamaica:

It first started when Sir Coxsone went to the United States and heard those disc jockeys on the radio … they started to toast and slang, on the radio … then he carried back the idea to Jamaica and tell Winston Machuki: ‘this is how we want to do it on the mike’ … over the sound … and that’s where it started. Winston Machuki was the first man who started to toast on a mike on a sound system. (Duke Vin qtd in Barrow)

Count Machuki was soon joined by King Stitt and Sir Lord Comic, two deejays whose lyrics often consisted of catchphrases and wisecracks seamlessly strung together:

No matter what the people say
These sounds lead the way!
This is the order of the day
From your boss deejay
I, King Stitt!
Haul it from the top
to the very last drop! (qtd in Barrow)

The excerpt quoted above gives us a rough idea of the early deejays’ style as it contains one of the most popular and widely-used formulae in Jamaican deejaying (’Haul it from the top to the very last drop!’). This formula was used by a deejay in a live dancehall setting to signal to the selector that the record he was playing had to be stopped and started again to create more excitement and to react to the crowd’s enthusiasm for this record. Indeed stopping and starting a record after the first bars have been played is a device that has remained in use to the present day, even by deejays who do not work in a live setting (on a studio recording for example). The other lines from the excerpt quoted above can also be said to be formulaic and recur in countless deejay tunes from the 1970s. When used in studio recordings, these formulae are supposed to recreate the ’live’ dimension which is crucial to the deejay’s art as he is supposed to be a ’man of words’, a ’smoothie’ with a ’bag of lyrics’. But most of all, the deejay is supposed to entertain his audience and so his ’toasts’ are often witty. One of the wittiest early deejays was Sir Lord Comic who released ’Jack of my Trade’ in 1970:

What does it profit a man to gain the whole world
And suffer the loss of his own soul?
Like the farmer says to the potato
I’ll plant you now and I’ll dig you later!

…
Now, since you wake the town and tell the people
That the station rules the nation with version
But we love the conversion
We don’t play version: we play chapter
Calling U Roy, calling Count Machuki
Calling King Stitt, here is the man called
Lord Comic
The greatest record maker who lived in Jamaica!
Say Jack of my trade, baby, I’ve got it all made
I’m sharper than a razor blade!
Like the man Otis Redding says
These arms of mine will hold you tight, tight
Tight, ever so tight, wow! (qtd in Barrow)

This excerpt is a good illustration of composition in performance as the deejay strings together various catchphrases and popular sayings from the Bible (’What does it profit a man…’), the Jamaican oral tradition (’Like the farmer says to the potato…’) and American popular culture (Otis Redding’s ’These arms of mine’).
This is a Jamaican ‘boast song’, a song in which the deejay sings his own praises while acknowledging that he follows in the footsteps of Machuki and Stitt. Comic also refers to the popularity of U Roy who had at the time already established himself with such hits as ‘Wake the town and tell the people’ and ‘This station rules the nation with version’. So Comic actually mentions the names of his fellow-deejays to emphasise the fact that they are all part of the same tradition, the Jamaican oral tradition.

King Sporty is another unsung initiator of the Jamaican jiving and toasting tradition, who contributed to popularising deejaying in the late 1960s. His lyrics are a good example of the declamatory style favoured by many deejays in the late 1960s and early 1970s:

For your ever desire
I wanna set your soul on fire!
You’d better touch not this musical wire!
So it’s burning hotter, hotter fire;
I love not to brag, I love not to boast, sir!

This passage illustrates the rhetorical devices used by most deejays at the time, that is repetition (‘hotter, hotter fire’), continuous rhyming, syntactic parallelism (‘I love not to brag, I love not to boast’), and the use of proverbs or sayings from the oral tradition (‘grief comes to those that brag the most’). Indeed the excerpt from King Stitch’s ‘toast’ illustrates the importance of the proverb in deejay’s lyrics and in oral speech in general. Proverbs are part of the repertoire of ‘verbal techniques’ identified by Carolyn Cooper in her influential study of Jamaican oral art forms and constitute a vast body of oral literature. They are usually taken to embody the survival of the oral tradition in many cultures, and, as Walter Ong has pointed out, they are often characterised by their didactic and agonistic function: ‘Proverbs and riddles are not used simply to store knowledge but to engage others in verbal and intellectual combat; utterance of one proverb or riddle challenges hearers to top it with a more apposite or contradictory one’ (44). Indeed in many cultures, proverbs and sayings are used as powerful weapons to ridicule an opponent or to drive a point home. For instance, in the Caribbean, proverbs serve as teaching aids and are used to teach the youths some basic truths. Proverbs are characterised by a certain terseness and a certain allusiveness too. Gordon Rohler writes that proverbs and sayings were used for their ‘crystallised form’ (93). In Jamaica, proverbs are part of the oral tradition too and appear in countless folk songs and traditional songs.

The early ‘dub lyricists’ specialised in nonsense rhymes and jives, and their primary intention was to entertain the patrons of the sound system for which they were deejaying. Another frequent topic was also (and has remained) the rivalry between the various deejays competing for the record-buying public’s attention. King Stitt remembers recording the toast ‘King of Kings’ as a reply to...
U Roy’s popular ‘Rule the Nation’. U Roy’s lyrics went: ‘This station rules the nation with version!’ and King Stitt replied: ‘You say you rule the nation with version? I’m the King of Kings, I rule kingdoms!’ (Barrow and Dalton 115). Thus there were very few political or committed ‘toasts’ in the early days of Jamaican deejaying and the emphasis was more on entertaining and forging a bond with an audience in a live setting. Language was the instrument used to create that bond and to establish a relationship with the public.

Political or ‘cultural’ deejaying was to come later on, in the early 1970s, with the arrival on the scene of a new generation of deejays like Big Youth, I Roy, Dillinger and Prince Jazzbo among others. These deejays came under the influence of Rastafarianism and the Black Power ideology, and they took Jamaican deejaying in a different direction, but they continued to use reggae backing tracks over which they recited or ‘chanted’ their lyrics. In the 1970s these backing tracks were more likely to be dub reinterpretations of famous rock steady or early reggae tunes recorded at Studio One or at Treasure Isle studios in the late 1960s. Nevertheless it was the early deejays from the late 1960s and early 1970s who developed the art of the Jamaican ‘talkover’, an artform which recalls many of the forms of oral poetry identified and studied by Ruth Finnegan through the use of ‘composition in performance’. These early deejays can then lay claim to the title of ‘Jamaica’s first dub poets’.

NOTES

WORKS CITED
Benjamin Zephaniah

Benjamin Zephaniah was born in England (in Birmingham) in 1958. His father, a Barbadian immigrant, worked as a postman, and his mother, of Jamaican origin, was a nurse. His interest in reggae led him to become a deejay on the local sound system scene and his approach, based on the resort to sarcasm and biting social commentary, made him really popular. This encouraged him to write short poems and to recite them, but this time with no musical accompaniment. Zephaniah’s commentary, made him really popular. This encouraged him to write short poems and to recite them, but this time with no musical accompaniment. Zephaniah’s first collection of poems (Pen Rhythm) appeared in 1980, and in the following years he carved a remarkable reputation on the local poetry scene as a performer of hard-hitting, political pieces.

In 1985 his second collection (The Dread Affair) came out, and contributed to launching Akira Press, an independent black publishing house. Zephaniah’s other poetry collections include Rasta Time in Palestine, City Psalms, Talking Turkeys, School’s Out, and Too Black, Too Strong. The poet also released several spoken-word recordings and CDs to reach a broader audience (Free South Africa, Dub Ranting, Rasta, Us and Dem, Back to Roots and Overstanding). All these recordings make ample use of varied musical styles, from African percussions to reggae, dub and electronic music.

In 1987–1988 Zephaniah was short-listed for the post of ‘Creative Artist in Residence’ at Cambridge University, and then for the Chair of Professor of Poetry at Oxford, which triggered a controversy in academia over the value and literariness of Zephaniah’s art. Benjamin Zephaniah is also famous for his numerous appearances on television (Eastenders, Dread Poets’ Society, Crossing the Tracks) and on the radio (In Living Colour, Poetry Please, The Ranking Miss P) during which the poet reads/perform his poems or gives his views on various topics. Clearly Benjamin Zephaniah is a major player on the British literary and cultural scene. Known for his uncompromising stance on animal rights, race relations, women’s rights and the environment, he never fails to express his views in a frank and outspoken manner. For instance, in 1999, the poet left a think tank on education he had been asked to join by the Blair government, and stated that he did not want to be in any ‘talking shop’ that would only be a public relations exercise to boost the government’s popularity ratings.

More recently, in 2001, Zephaniah published a new book entitled Too Black, Too Strong (Bloodaxe Books) which can be seen as a return to the militancy and outspokenness that made him famous in the early 1980s. This collection contains many angry pieces like ‘Bought and Sold’ which begins with the lines:

Too Strong
Smart big awards and prize money
Is killing off black poetry
It’s not censors or dictators that are cutting up our art.
The lure of meeting royalty
And touching high society
Is damping creativity and eating at our heart.

In fact, this poem recently appeared in an article published in *The Guardian* in which the poet explained why he had turned down the O.B.E offered to him by Tony Blair’s government. Zephaniah explained that the word empire ‘reminds me of slavery, it reminds me of thousands of years of brutality, it reminds me of how my foremothers were raped and my forefathers were brutalised.’ The poet simply could not contemplate going to Buckingham Palace to meet the Queen, since she is the person who symbolises this empire. This anti-Establishment stance is sure to cause a stir, but this is precisely Zephaniah’s intention: his art is primarily a reaction to established values, colonialism and other -isms.

That said, *Too Black, Too Strong* is not ‘one big angry protest piece’ but contains many thoughtful poems on the new, multicultural Britain that Zephaniah symbolises. For instance, the poem entitled ‘Carnival Days’ is a beautiful meditation on the relationship between the old imperial centre and the margins:

On days like these the elders say
Astronauts can see us dance
Glittering like precious stones
On dis rocking British cultural crown

Other poems like ‘The London Breed’ and ‘The Big Bang’ celebrate the multicultural nature of today’s British society and they show that Zephaniah’s poetry is constantly changing and reflecting the society it grew out of. It is a living, moving poetry. Although originally recorded in 1996, this interview was updated in February 2003 and thus constitutes a fair representation of Zephaniah’s continued political and poetic stance.

NOTES
1 ‘Poet Quits Top Think Tank’, *The Voice*, April 12, 1999.
4 Zephaniah, *Too Black, Too Strong*, p. 46.
An interview with Benjamin Zephaniah

**ED** Could you first tell me about your background and where you come from? What was your childhood like? What was it like to grow up in England? Do you feel English, West Indian, both or neither?

**BZ** Well, I was born in England. I was born in the city of Birmingham. What was my childhood like? It was a very rough area; I remember many of the buildings, much of the area was still flattened because of the war. It wasn't an area that when I was young was a particularly black area. Every day you were reminded of your colour. That was it, really, I mean... The good thing about it was, because it was tough, because we always had to fight on our way home and things like this, it kinda toughened me up for the future.

Do I feel English, West Indian? I don’t know ... I don’t really have this problem about identity. Politically I’m British, you know. I’ve fought for my rights here. Culturally I feel as African as ever, but both of these things are irrelevant really, because by the nature of travelling the world, because of travelling the world, I’ve become a kind of internationalist, I could settle anywhere in the world. If I do go to a place, then I may tune in to the BBC to hear the news. If that makes me English, that makes me English, but I could never sit down with the English and drink tea... So, there you go.

**ED** When did you first get interested in poetry? At school? Through some friends?

**BZ** I got interested in poetry before I knew it was poetry. I thought it was words that sounded the same, words that meant something. I quickly understood the difference between words that conveyed anger, words that conveyed love. I didn’t particularly know what the words meant, but the kinds of emotion that they were trying to express, and I love rhyme! So there was a particular time when I would just say ‘I play with words’, ‘I have fun with words’. It wasn’t till I came across people who read poetry or who said ‘you know, that’s actually poetry’, but until then I was just playing with words, and I don’t remember the time when I started, I was just doing it all the time.

**ED** Would you say that your poetry is influenced by mainstream British poetry? Do you like this type of poetry?
Interview with Benjamin Zephaniah

BZ. I do like some of what you call ‘mainstream British poetry’. Shelley, for example, is one of my favourite poets, but I wouldn’t class Shelley as mainstream. He’s probably mainstream now, but in his time he wasn’t mainstream. No, my poetry is not influenced by mainstream British poetry in any way really. And I mean, I evolved as a poet not knowing any mainstream British poetry, not knowing any poetry really except for the poetry I heard on the streets.

ED. Do you consider yourself as a dub poet or is this label inappropriate? Linton Kwesi Johnson, Martin Glynn and Mutabaruka do not like that tag. What about you? Which of these poets do you feel closest to in terms of craft and creativity?

BZ. Well, I’m a rastafarian, and that doesn’t mean that I agree with all rastafarians; it means that I came to see God through Rastafari, and my vehicle into poetry was the form of dub poetry. And so, to a certain extent, I think that when these oral poets say, you know, ‘Don’t call me a dub poet! That’s not me!’, they’re almost denying their roots. I mean, I’ve done LPs and films and things which have nothing at all to do with the dub form, but if somebody called me a dub poet, it’s not the worst thing in the world: they’re just acknowledging my roots. Maybe it just happened that they haven’t kept up with me, and they haven’t heard my jazz poetry, or my funky poetry. But I wouldn’t deny my roots, I am essentially a performance poet, a dub poet. I mean, when you’re looking for terms, I think I can take on most of these terms, and I feel comfortable with them. It all depends on who’s saying it really.

ED. What about the influence of Dee-jay music and of reggae in general? Do you use reggae rhythms in your poems?

BZ. Most of the time I do use reggae rhythms consciously in my poetry. Again it can’t be helped. Do I have to sit down and go ‘Right! Let me deny all this heritage I have, all this music I grew up with. I mean I also deejayed on sound systems and told jokes. It would be silly for me to deny all of those things! But reggae is probably the strongest influence I have. And I’m happy with that.

ED. You often use the word ‘rant’ or ‘ranter’? What’s the difference between a deejay and a ranter?

BZ. Well, the term ‘ranting’ was popularised in the late 1970s-early 1980s by people like Attila the Stockbroker, and there was a poet from Yorkshire called Little Brother, even John Cooper Clarke. And it was, if you like, the white form of dub. It was poetry that you ranted out, it had a very
I think when it came to City Psalms, I started to think a lot more about the printed page. The Dread Affair, for example, was a good book, but it simply had my performance poems written down. The thing with City Psalms, the book after that, was that I did start to think about the page more. And Propa Propaganda was my pride and joy really because I thought a lot more about poetry on the page, and I do think that there is a performance poetry there, but you don’t have to have heard me to really appreciate the poetry. So more and more I am acknowledging the printed page but I have to say this: at the end of the day the people I want to reach are the people that don’t read books anyway, and I still care very much about performance poetry because it gets into the places where the books can’t reach.

Could you tell me about the current Black British poetry scene? Is it easier to get your work published today than it was ten or fifteen years ago?

It’s not easier to get your work published today. A lot of the publishing houses that were around ten or fifteen years ago did rely on grants. We had a lady who kinda ran the shop here called Mrs Thatcher and she really cut down on the grant system. But in many ways it showed that so many poets kinda had to rely on grants, and when the grants went, they went with the grants. If you like, the few of us who are surviving now are surviving despite the kind of market forces that we have to fight against. We’re kinda surviving in a commercial world. I mean I think I survive as a poet because I sell records and as performance poet I sell books. And as an actor, I act. At the moment I am scripting a film, but if a poet was gonna hang around and write for the shows to go on stage, that’s very difficult. We’re going back to an era when there are small community publishing houses that were around ten or fifteen years ago did rely on grants.
centres, and if you’re a performance poet and you’re good, you can get work and keep moving around the various centres. But unfortunately there’s not as many as there used to be.

**ED** Is Black British poetry a kind of ‘fringe poetry’ or is it slowly getting into the mainstream of British culture?

**BZ** I think it’s slowly getting into the mainstream of British culture ... I mean, every week [in 1996] I was on BBC Radio 4, Radio 1. I’ve had various programmes on mainstream TV. So slowly ‘Black British poetry’ is becoming main stream. That could be a good thing and a bad thing. I think it’s a bad thing if it kinda waters the poetry down, and you’re always fighting against that. I had a book that was number one on the children booksellers’ lists, and I felt it was getting a little bit too sloppy. So then I put out a hard-hitting album [Belly of the Beast released in 1996 on the Ariwa label] and a hard-hitting book called Propa Propaganda, just to let other people know that I am still against capitalism. But although I am an angry black poet, you know, I care about the environment and I can see beauty in all kinds of natural things. Basically there’s a lot of other elements in me. I don’t sit down all the time just cursing the government!

**ED** Your poetry seems to be characterised by a wide range of themes and subjects: race relations, police brutality, the environment, male chauvinism, the royal family, the oral tradition, etc. Would you say that this feature of your poetry reflects the evolution or Black British poetry or that it is just a characteristic of your own poetry? In other words, has Black British poetry broadened its horizons or its scope over the last fifteen years?

**BZ** I’ve got to have seemed to be plugging Radio 4 a lot here, but on Radio 4 there was a whole programme [in 1996] about black poetry and it was all about love poetry. I think fifteen years ago that would have been impossible: a reading by black people would have had to be about the police or about racism. Yes black people kinda all over the countries write in different forms. You know, I fall in love and I feel love as well. So I mean, I’ve written poems like ‘Kissing’, and ‘Food’, and ‘Animals’, and ‘Me’, and style and fashion and school, because they are things that I experience... And we have to let people know that the black experience is not one all the time of running away from the police! So it’s broadening; I think it has to, to survive.

**ED** Levi Tafari and Martin Glynn often use the word ‘griot’ to define their poetry. Do you consider yourself as a modern-day griot? Is a ‘ranter’ a modern-day griot?
BZ. Yes, a ranter is a modern-day griot. To a certain extent, I do consider myself as a modern-day griot. If you like, a ranter is a good English translation of a griot — someone who stands on the corner or moves around the town, doing poetry that’s kinda newscasting in a way.

ED. What is the role of the Black British poet today? Is it the same as it was fifteen years ago?

BZ. Yeah! To write poems! But, quite seriously, I mean, there are some issues that are very important to the black community which do not get aired in the mainstream media, and in the black community there’ll just be whispers that, you know, something has changed in the immigration law, or somebody has been killed in a police station. And then the poets really come into their own, because there were times, especially a few years ago, when we would be employed by the C.R.E (the Commission for Racial Equality) and people like this to go round and inform people what was happening, because we could not get no airtime on the various stations and that role still happens today. But I suppose now, we’ve got maybe a little easier access to the media, but there is still a need to kinda go out there as it is.

ED. The words ‘slogan poetry’ have been used to describe (or criticise) your poems? Do you consider yourself as a political poet or just as a poet?

BZ. I consider myself just as a poet really. I mean, I can pick up many poems of mine which are not political. The idea of slogan poetry … I mean, I think only white people can say that, or black people that are trying to act like white people, who have won literary prizes or things like that … I mean black people wanna be free, and I’m not scared to stand up on stage and say that. If somebody wants to say that’s a slogan, I don’t give a fuck until black people are free! I mean I kept saying ‘Free South Africa’, people were saying it was a slogan, but I didn’t care until South Africa was free. I don’t say it now, it doesn’t make sense now, but at the time it was important, and it was a line, a kind of sentence that people remembered, and, I mean, it was the poetry of demonstrations, and really the poetry of the people in that sense, because it was in the people’s minds. Some of these poems are never written down but they can remember them. So I’m not quite sure … I mean, ‘to be or not to be’ has become a bit of a slogan. That doesn’t mean it is kinda irrelevant. So I don’t really think we do ‘slogan poetry’. I mean, we may have a kind of call and response, and there may be a repetitive nature in our performing style, but, at the end of the day, when we have a people that are not being published widely, they have to make poems that capture the people’s imagination and if I
Interview with Benjamin Zephaniah

Is Benjamin Zephaniah a happy man?

Yeah! Benjamin Zephaniah is a bloody happy man! Yeah, well, I’m a happy man. Personally I can’t complain, but if I look at the state of Black British politics, I’m very unhappy and there’s a lot of work to do. I mean, we had the opportunity a few years ago of emigrating to South Africa and I really wanted to go, but there’s so much work to be done here politically. And, you know, I’m not happy about the way everything is becoming American, and greed taking over … and everybody in Britain nowadays wants to win the lottery and win a million pounds. I’m not happy about the fact that more black people are dying in police cells now than there was in the ’70s. How can I be happy about that? I mean, we live in the middle of an area [East Ham, in the East End of London] which is full of racial attacks all the time. I cannot possibly be happy about that at all! So, I’m happy to be here; I just want to change here.

ED

Your latest collection, Too Black, Too Strong, contains many hard-hitting pieces in the ‘protest’ mode. Is that book an attempt to go back to the radical dub poetry that made you famous?

BZ

I have enjoyed putting humour into my poetry, and I think, in Too Black, Too Strong, basically I was feeling very angry about the situation politically in Britain, and worldwide. I thought we were evolving into a world where we knew the price of everything and the value of nothing, where the word ‘terrorism’ has been corrupted, because it’s only terrorism when some people do it, and it’s not terrorism when other people do it. And I just wanted to make a very strong statement about how I felt. I don’t think radical dub poetry is devoid of humour. I don’t think that is the way to define it. As well as being very serious, humour is a part of it, but for me it was certainly an attempt to get back to the politics, get right down to the nitty gritty, and I think the title, Too Black, Too Strong, I chose because I thought that some people would be offended by it. I really wasn’t trying to be politically correct to anybody at all. This is exactly how I felt at the time, and I thought some poets as well would be offended by it. As I said earlier, a lot of poets were writing to win awards and not really dedicating themselves to the art and using their voice to speak.

ED

...demonstrates that the world is so different, and I really wanted to go, but there’s so much work to be done here politically. And, you know, I’m not happy about the way everything is becoming American, and greed taking over … and everybody in Britain nowadays wants to win the lottery and win a million pounds. I’m not happy about the fact that more black people are dying in police cells now than there was in the ’70s. How can I be happy about that? I mean, we live in the middle of an area [East Ham, in the East End of London] which is full of racial attacks all the time. I cannot possibly be happy about that at all! So, I’m happy to be here; I just want to change here.

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You wrote a number of poems about your Black British 'identity' (‘The London Breed’, ‘The Big Bang’). That theme seems to be important in your work.

I suppose so … I don’t sit down and think ‘I’m going to write lots of poems about identity’. There’s a poem I wrote called ‘Knowing Me’ in which I actually say ‘I don’t have an identity crisis’. And that’s what happens in Britain a lot of the time. People come up to me and say ‘Do you feel black? Or do you feel Jamaican? Or do you feel African? Or do you feel British?’ And, you know, I don’t sit at home thinking ‘Am I black, am I British?’ I happen to be black, I happen to be a Rastafarian, I happen to be British. If I have a political identity, it’s being part of the world community. It is real true globalisation. It’s not the kind of globalisation that multinationals want, but I want to be a citizen of the world. So you know, being black and all that, being British and all that stuff, it’s not really that important to me. I mean, it’s important, but the most important thing is being a human being, and if there’s a French person that’s suffering, they mean more to me than an English person that’s living okay, and I’m gonna be concerned about the person that’s suffering. I’m not gonna say ‘They’re in France and I’m in England’ because, to me, the important thing is being a humanitarian.

The poem entitled ‘Knowing Me’ reminds me of ‘The Angry Black Poet’, which appeared in Propa Propaganda. These two poems deal with the commercialisation of dub poetry and echo Mutabaruka’s ‘Revolutionary Poets Have Become Entertainers’. Do you sometimes feel that you’ve become an ‘act’, an entertainer?

Normally, when I’m going on stage, I’m very relaxed and very friendly with people, but there was one person that introduced me as an act, and I refused to go on. I waited for him to come up, and I almost beat him up. To a certain extent, when I perform on stage, there’s an entertainment element to it, but I don’t like to call it an ‘act’. An ‘act’ seems to imply that it’s made up, that it’s phoney, that it’s not true, and even when I’m on stage and I’m telling all kinds of jokes, all these things come from real life. But to a certain extent, some people are going out on a Saturday night, they may say ‘shall we go to the movies? Shall we go and watch a film?’ Shall we go clubbing or shall we go for a meal? Shall we go and listen to Benjamin Zephaniah? And they see it as a night of entertainment. Now I’m sure they don’t see it purely as entertainment because they know what Benjamin Zephaniah is gonna say to them, or they know what Benjamin Zephaniah is gonna talk about, and not all of it is gonna be entertaining. You know, when we are talking about racists putting
There are probably just as many venues for the performancing, but those venues have changed. Those venues used to be a lot of community centres and places like this. Now those venues will be pubs! And being somebody who doesn’t drink and doesn’t smoke, I find pubs strange — full of people who drink and smoke. But I haven’t performed in Britain, for a real tour, for about four or five years. I’ve been touring in South Africa, South America, Asia. I’ve just finished touring in South Korea. Before that, I was in Libya. Before that, I was in Argentina, and in China. I’m just leaving in two days’ time to go to Jamaica to make a radio programme, and after Jamaica, I have to go to Papua-New Guinea and then later in the year Australia. So I don’t really know that much about the current British scene.

ED Has the Black British poetry scene changed much since 1996?

BZ There are probably just as many venues for the performancing, but those venues have changed. Those venues used to be a lot of community centres and places like this. Now those venues will be pubs! And being somebody who doesn’t drink and doesn’t smoke, I find pubs strange — full of people who drink and smoke. But I haven’t performed in Britain, for a real tour, for about four or five years. I’ve been touring in South Africa, South America, Asia. I’ve just finished touring in South Korea. Before that, I was in Libya. Before that, I was in Argentina, and in China. I’m just leaving in two days’ time to go to Jamaica to make a radio programme, and after Jamaica, I have to go to Papua-New Guinea and then later in the year Australia. So I don’t really know that much about the current British scene.
An interesting development has happened in that America is becoming just as strong or even stronger an influence in Britain as Jamaica was. So a lot of the performance poetry is now taking on elements of rap. Some people would say I was doing that a long time ago, but my rap wasn’t inspired by America or American rhythms.

And there’s also a lot of Asian poetry now. One of the most interesting developments in the poetry scene in Britain is Asian women’s poetry — Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi women. And the reason I find them interesting is because theirs is a voice that hasn’t been heard. A lot of them have been behind the veil for a long time, and now they’re beginning to come out.

ED Is there anything you would like to add?

BZ I suppose I am still, in this age of technology and mass communication, I’m still very impressed by the fact that people still wanna come out and listen to poetry. And probably more so for me right now, because I don’t tour Britain that much. When I say I’m gonna do a tour of Britain, the venues are packed out on the whole! And that really impresses me: all these people wanna come and listen to a mad man like me just performing the words that he’s written in his living room! So that really impresses me and gives me hope.
I have learnt that equality
May not mean freedom,
And freedom
May not mean liberation,
You can vote my friend
And have no democracy,
Being together dear neighbour
May not mean unity,
Your oppressors may give you chances
But no opportunities,
And the state that you are in
May have its state security
Yet you may be stateless
Without protection.
You my friend do not have to follow your leader,
The government does not have to govern you,
I’m telling you Mom, you are greater than the law
If you are just when the law is not.
You see, once you are aware that new Labour
Does not care for the old workers
You may also know that change
May not mean revolution,
Once you realise that old conservatives
Are running out of things to conserve
You may also know that all politicians suck the same.
Babylon must burn,
Burn Babylon, burn.
Politics is like dis,
Life is like dis.
Intelligence may not mean intelligent,
The news may not be new.
From where we are
To be awake
May not mean
To be conscious.

I have learnt that equality
May not mean freedom,
And freedom
May not mean liberation,
You can vote my friend
And have no democracy,
Being together dear neighbour
May not mean unity,
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May not mean
To be conscious.
CARNIVAL DAYS

On days like these we dance to us,
With the drum beat of liberation
Under the close cover of European skies,
We dance like true survivors
We dance to the sounds of our dreams.
In the mirror we see
Rainbow people on the beat,
Everyday carnival folk like we.
Adorned in the colours of life
We let it be known that our costumes
Were not made by miracles,
We are the miracles
(And we are still here).
These giants were made by the fingers you see
(Too many to count)
Carried by these feet that dance
In accordance to the rhythms we weave.
On days like these we dance the moon.
On days like these we dance like freedom,
Like the freedom we carried in our hearts
When the slave driver was with his whip
When his whip was at our backs,
There is no carnival without us
And without carnival there is no us.
The colours of our stories joyful the eyes
And rhythm wise the body moves.
On days like these we dance the sun
We cannot make dis love indoors,
Or be restricted by the idea of a roof,
Dis soul, dis reggae, dis calypso,
Dis sweet one music we make
Is for all of us who work dis land
And cannot be contained by bricks and mortar,
It is we, the beat and the streets.
The passion has to be unleashed
To rave alone is not toay
Dis is a beautiful madness
Dis is a wonder full place.
So play Mas citizen
Be the immortal bird you want to be
Bring hope and truth and prophecy
Or meet the lover in your mind,
Let us take these colours
Let us take these sounds
And make ourselves a paradise.
On days like these we can.
On days like these the elders say
Astronauts can see us dance
Glittering like precious stones
On dis rocking British cultural crown,
When Rio’s eyes upon us gaze
And Africans are proud of us
With heads held high we say we are
The carnival, sweet carnival.
On days like these we dance to us,
On days like these we love ourselves.
According to de experts
I’m letting my side down,
Not playing the alienation game,
It seems I am too unfrustrated.
I have refused all counselling
I refuse to appear on daytime television
On night-time documentaries,
I’m not longing and yearning.
I don’t have an identity crisis.

As I drive on poetic missions
On roads past midnight
I am regularly stopped by officers of the law
Who ask me to identify myself.
At times like these I always look into the mirror
Point
And politely assure them that
What I see is me.
I don’t have an identity crisis.

I have never found the need
To workshop dis matter,
Or sit with fellow poets exorcising ghosts
Whilst searching for soulmates.
I don’t wonder what will become of me
If I don’t eat reggae food or dance to mango tunes,
Or think of myself as a victim of circumstance.
I’m a dark man, black man
With a brown dad, black man
Mommy is a red skin, black woman,
She don’t have an identity crisis.
Being black somewhere else
Is just being black everywhere,
I don’t have an identity crisis.

At least once a week I watch television
With my Jamaican hand on my Ethiopian heart
The African heart deep in my Brummie chest,
And I chant, Aston Villa, Aston Villa, Aston Villa,
Believe me I know my stuff.
I am not wandering drunk into the rootless future
Nor am I going back in time to find somewhere to live.
I just don’t want to live in a field with any past
Looking at blades of grass that look just like me, near a relic like me
Where the thunder is just like me, talking to someone just like me,
I don’t want to love me and only me; diversity is my pornography,
I want to make politically aware love with the rainbow.
Check dis Workshop Facilitator
Dis is me.
I don’t have an identity crisis.
I have reached the stage where I can recognise my shadow.
I’m quite pleased with myself.
When I’m sunbathing in Wales
I can see myself in India
As clearly as I see myself in Mexico.
I have now reached the stage
Where I am sick of people asking me if I feel British or West Indian,
African or Black, Dark and Lonely, Confused or Patriotic.
The thing is I don’t feel lost,
I didn’t even begin to look for myself until I met a social worker
And a writer looking for a subject
Nor do I write to impress poets.
Dis is not an emergency
I’m as kool as my imagination, I’m care more than your foreign policy.
I don’t have an identity crisis.
I don’t need an identity crisis to be creative,
I don’t need an identity crisis to be oppressed,
I need love warriors and free minds wherever they are,
I need go getters and wide awakers for rising and shining,
I need to know that I can walk into any temple
Rave at any rave
Or get the kind of justice that my folk can see is just.
I am not half a poet shivering in the cold
Waiting for a culture shock to warm my long lost drum rhythm,
I am here and now, I am all the Britain is about
I’m happening as we speak.
Honestly,
I don’t have an identity crisis.
Like many other narratives by Phillips, whether fiction or drama, *A Distant Shore* presents a white woman and a black man and focuses on their intense, yet flawed meeting. Dorothy Jones is a newly retired, divorced music teacher in her mid-fifties who has never left her native England; Solomon Bartholomew is a mid-fifties who has never left her native England; Solomon Bartholomew is a flawed meeting. Dorothy Jones is a newly retired, divorced music teacher in her mid-fifties who has never left her native England; Solomon Bartholomew is a

Interviewed about his novels in 2003, Caryl Phillips declared ‘These all seem to be the same book, part of a continuum’ (Morrison). Obviously, his seventh work of fiction, *A Distant Shore* (2003), does not disrupt this sense of great cohesion, also acknowledged by his commentators. Although the contemporary setting of *A Distant Shore* is unusual for a novelist who has occasionally been labelled a chronicler of the African Diaspora, this new book constitutes another memorable stage in Phillips’ subtle, yet dogged fictional exploration of the tension between attachment and detachment, between belonging and unbelonging that has been part of human life since the beginning of times, especially for the migrant. If this concern sticks to Phillips’ novels almost like a second skin, it is addressed more openly in his non-fiction, notably in his recent collection of essays *A New World Order* (2001). There, commenting on his own life, the author writes of the places that have made him — Africa, the Caribbean, Britain and the United States — in these almost incantatory words: ‘I recognise the place, I feel at home here, but I don’t belong. I am of, and not of, this place’ (1, 2, 3 & 4). Because the last section of this statement ‘captures the essence of Phillips’s work’ (Procter), it seems an appropriate guiding light in an analysis of his latest novel. My intention in what follows is therefore to attempt to demonstrate that an ambivalent combination of attachment and detachment similar to that contained in ‘of, and not of, this place’ suffuses all aspects of *A Distant Shore*, making it a singularly accomplished piece of fiction. Not only does this double, intrinsically contradictory move between closeness and remoteness inform the novel itself — its characterisation, title, themes and narrative technique — but at a further remove, this dialectic also applies to the way in which this book — at once realistic and allegorical, thus both faithful to and distant from the ‘real’ — positions itself in relation to generic definitions of the novel. By extension, *A Distant Shore* also raises questions about contemporary British fiction and what can be regarded as its enduring inability to mirror a society in flux.

Like many other narratives by Phillips, whether fiction or drama, *A Distant Shore* presents a white woman and a black man and focuses on their intense, yet flawed meeting. Dorothy Jones is a newly retired, divorced music teacher in her mid-fifties who has never left her native England; Solomon Bartholomew is a
30-year-old refugee recently arrived from Africa who lives and works as a ‘handyman-cum-night-watchman’ (14) in Stoneleigh, a new estate in Northern England where Dorothy has just settled. The novel provides a psychologically complex charting of these two newcomers’ unlikely friendship, seen in the perspective of their lives before their encounter. Everything keeps them apart — gender, race, age and lifestyle — yet deep down they are very much alike and feel instinctively at ease with each other. Both are haunted by a painful past, made up of rejection at the hands of men for Dorothy, whose ‘story contains the single word, abandonment’ (203), and of tribal violence for Solomon, ‘a man burdened with hidden history’ (300). In other words, they share an experience of loneliness, invisibility and exclusion, which culminates in Dorothy’s eventual madness and Solomon’s murder at the hands of local skinheads. Though denied by outward appearances, this sense of profound kindred is dramatically expressed by a mad Dorothy when, after Solomon’s death, she takes up his routine task of polishing the car and using her own jacket as a cloth. Dorothy’s act is one of solidarity with dead Solomon, aware as she is that ‘the circular motion of his right hand … [is] an attempt to erase a past that he no longer wishes to be reminded of’ (268). Solomon’s demise has finally brought home to her that she is as much a stranger as he is and that, like him, she cannot find refuge in the village community. This realisation causes her to jeopardise the sartorial pride that she wrongly expected to be a guarantee of civility, but also of social respectability and therefore integration.

However, Dorothy and Solomon should not be seen as mere victims of a semi rural society where many people, like Dorothy’s late father, are distrustful of ‘anything that lay outside the orbit of their home-town life’ (11), as Dorothy’s late father was. Admittedly, Weston is a place where otherness and difference are not welcome, as suggested by the story of Dr. Epstein, a Jewish female physician who tried to settle in the village with her family but did not manage to ‘blend in’ (9). Yet, with characteristic ambivalence, Phillips also presents his protagonists’ isolation as being either of their own making through their inability to communicate successfully or as the result of a particularly cruel fate. Both Dorothy and Solomon are ‘lone bird[s]’ (14), desperate for companionship. Still, very much as they hesitate to cross the threshold into the other’s house, they also seem reluctant to come too close to each other, as if afraid of the intimacy this would entail. Of course, this might be a reaction on their part to their experience of a world plagued by solitude where human interactions are distorted by the law: at one point Dorothy is accused of harassing a male colleague and Solomon is charged with raping a girl who fed him when he landed in England as an illegal immigrant. Both seem to see familiarity as a possible threat to their own and to the other’s integrity, which leads to somewhat contradictory behaviour. Thus after Dorothy visits Solomon at his home and he tells her about the hate mail he gets from local people, she decides to leave the village for a few days, because, as she puts it, ‘I don’t want [him] to become a problem in my life’ (45).
At the same time, a mentally deranged Dorothy justifies her departure as a means of attracting Solomon to her, thinking 'I wanted to keep him on his toes until he realised for himself that he really didn’t like it if I wasn’t around all of the time. Then he would want me' (70). Clearly she is unable to disentangle the knot of attachment and detachment that, much to her irritation, also characterises present day England where, she thinks, ‘it’s difficult to tell who’s from around here and who’s not. Who belongs and who’s a stranger’ (3). A Distant Shore does not attempt to unravel this knot — an impossible task — but presents it to us in all its rough complexity.

In addition to the bizarreness of human behaviour, destiny too plays a role in keeping people apart and brands human relationships with a tragic denial of consummation. Solomon’s tender friendship with his fellow illegal immigrant, Amma, aborts with her sudden disappearance from a refugee camp in France, while his attachment to Mike, the Irish lorry driver who rescues him and finds him a sanctuary with the Anderson family, ends when the Irishman dies in a car crash. Likewise, Dorothy’s reunion with her younger sister Sheila after years of estrangement occurs only when the latter is about to die of cancer, a death that Dorothy rejects by keeping Sheila alive in her mind. In A Distant Shore, as in the rest of Phillips’s fiction, togetherness is never very far from parting.

This pervasive, never-resolved interplay between attachment and detachment is contained in the title as well. The combination of ‘distant’ with ‘shore’ evokes a place — or person — that is far away, possibly out of reach, but can nonetheless represent a possibility of rescue for the individual who has lost all moorings. In other words, the phrase ‘distant shore’ encapsulates the simultaneous hopeful pull, yet inherent hopelessness, of the longing to belong. In A Distant Shore the fulfilment of such a desire is deferred, though not completely annihilated. The main characters’ eventual defeat, mental for Dorothy and physical for Solomon, conveys the notion of irretrievable separation, yet this cannot erase the bonds, all the stronger for remaining unspoken, that these two beings have woven in the course of their short-lived relationship. In other words, the death of Solomon which is announced early on in the novel (46), means that his budding friendship with Dorothy will not be allowed to blossom and that his hope of finding a new home in England will never come true. Yet because Solomon has been able to share his story through the novel, he is symbolically rescued from total oblivion and from remaining ‘a one-year-old man who walks with heavy steps’ (300). So even though the novel does not offer any concrete redemption, there is a sense of serenity which is evoked by Dorothy when she concludes ‘[m]y heart remains a desert, but I tried. I had a feeling that Solomon understood me’ (312). Solomon, too, tried hard to build bridges, and therein lies his, and Dorothy’s, ultimate dignity.

Unsurprisingly, proximity and distance also characterise the novel on a formal level, a possible echo of the ebb and flow of the sea that brings people like Solomon to the English shores. The novel’s five sections alternate between the

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two protagonists, who are in turn focused, absent, or present but only through the other’s consciousness. The whole narrative also fluctuates between present and past and, more importantly for this argument, between first and third person narratives, with varying zooming effects, as clearly illustrated in the first two sections. The opening one is a close-up first person narrative told from Dorothy’s perspective in an often informal language, but her growing mental confusion, which cannot be detected at first but becomes a certitude as the story unfolds, makes her account so unreliable that the readers cannot help distancing themselves, in the same way as the local population who are taken aback by Dorothy’s oddness. The second section is devoted to Solomon. With the exception of his stint as a rebel leader in an unnamed war-torn African country, told in a gripping first-person narrative, his excruciating experiences — the massacre of his whole family in his presence, his danger-ridden journey to Europe, and his detention in England — are all told in an apparently emotionless, occasionally report-like third-person account which may reflect Solomon’s wish to ‘banish all thoughts of his past existence. There can be no sentiment’ (94), but also the detached attitude of English people who ‘[look] through him as though he did not exist’ (172–73). Yet the very horror of the facts evoked and the obsessive repetition of ‘Gabriel’, Solomon’s former name, draw the readers in and make indifference impossible, thereby fully compensating for the dehumanising process in which the character is caught. This technique of oblique inclusion proves all the more efficient because Gabriel’s identity is only revealed at the end of this second section, thus the news of Solomon’s death in the first part does not have any deflating effect but leaves intact the suspense of the refugee’s obstacle course before reaching England.

As mentioned above, the tension between attachment and detachment also marks the novel’s relationship to reality. There is an undeniable realistic streak in *A Distant Shore*, much of which is clearly set in contemporary Weston, a village in the north of England, more than twenty years after Mrs Thatcher closed the pits (4). This country, one can imagine, has known the Stephen Lawrence1 case and experienced media-driven campaigns against asylum seekers. Moreover, there is a fastidiousness in the description of places and of the characters’ physical appearance and life stories, (unusual in Phillips’s later fiction) which leaves little doubt as to his intention to canonise today’s Britain directly. As he remarked in *The European Tribe* in 1987, there is in modern Britain ‘an unwillingness to deal with change in society, and by extension that society’s image of itself’ (122). Unlike his previous fictions, which always took place in a more or less distant past and whose present relevance could therefore be more easily overlooked, this novel might be regarded as a more straightforward attempt to make this nation look at itself in the mirror.

In other words, the setting and the characters of *A Distant Shore* make its topicality quite obvious, and the novel can indeed be read as a forceful comment

...
on Britain’s current situation, and as a nuanced, humane contribution to the debate on asylum seekers in that country and elsewhere in Europe. Yet, however accurate and well-researched, Phillips’s fictional depiction of life in today’s Britain, and in particular of the plight of refugees, should not be confused with a sociological or journalistic document. In this regard it is interesting to briefly compare the novel with an article on the Sangatte Red Cross refugee centre that Phillips wrote for The Guardian in November 2001. Entitled ‘Strangers in a Strange Land’, the piece is a piece of sensitive investigation into the reasons why people leave their country and attempt to reach England, often at the risk of their own lives. Such elements can be found in the novel too, but there are divergences between the two texts even though both emanate from a profound desire to understand human nature. One of the differences is that the presence of the author is made invisible in the work of fiction while in the Guardian piece Phillips comes openly to the fore, especially at the end when he writes: ‘Again I look […] to the stream of hunch-shouldered refugees walking with grim determination in the direction of the mouth of the tunnel. And I silently wish them all good luck.’ A sympathy pervades the novel but is never mentioned in an explicit way. More importantly, fiction deals with complex emotions and feelings, very often unconscious, whose surface can only be scratched at even in the best non-fiction. As much is suggested in the novel itself when Solomon is interviewed by his solicitor, Stewart Lewis, on the eve of the his trial for alleged rape. The young lawyer, who starts the interview by ‘carefully [writing] down the date and the time’ (112),2 pays attention only to facts, interested as he is in ‘trying to establish dates, not state of mind’ (113), which makes the refugee’s memory go blank. While the reader has access to Solomon’s intimate thoughts, it is not possible to make out exactly what happened between him and the girl, apart from the fact that ‘he did not force himself upon [her].’ He had done nothing wrong. He was guilty of nothing that would bring shame on his family name’ (189). While Phillips’s restrained expression conveys the impossibility, the futility even, of a strict attachment to specifics, it also manages to tactfully express the mix of disgust and pity that the girl inspires in Solomon.

In addition to denouncing the shallowness of a purely factual approach to human issues, A Distant Shore suggests the limitations of a naturalistic rendering of lives in yet another way: by showing how deceptive appearances can be. Dorothy’s seemingly ‘ordered existence’ (244) hides emotional chaos, very much as her father’s peacefulness — as suggested by his well-tended allotment with its ‘obedient rows’ (27) of vegetables — contrasts with his abusive behaviour towards her sister. So there is some irony in Dorothy’s obsession with decorum and good manners, which determines her likes and dislikes, for it is based entirely on semblance. Indeed, one cannot help thinking that Dorothy, whose conservative mentality is clearly that of ‘the anti-asylum voter’ (Harding 63), would never have been attracted to Solomon if his marginality had not been associated with
some outward sign of decency; for example, if he had become one of the homeless who are, according to Dorothy, ‘disgusting, dragging themselves and the country down like this’ (65).

As if to dramatise this mistrust of façades, *A Distant Shore* also begs to be read as an allegory; that is, it encourages its readers to look below the surface for some more general and deeper meaning, thus creating distance from mere facts. The topography of Weston is a good example of this. While it roots the village in the real, it also demands to be read figuratively, as if Stoneleigh stood for England as a whole, or even for the world in miniature. The hill on which the new development is built conveys the social superiority (real or imagined) of its new inhabitants, and is thus an image of the class divisions that are still rife today. The canal, ‘a murky strip of stagnant water’ (6), in which Solomon is found dead, represents the decay and lifelessness of a world that has a static view of itself, and refuses to see the flow of newcomers as a refreshing addition, as would be the case with a river or a sea. This absence of movement is also conveyed by the cul-de-sac in which Dorothy and Solomon live, where a black man still works to provide comfort and safety to a community of white people. With her common-sounding surname, Dorothy Jones, too, can be viewed as an allegory of her country; like England she finds it difficult to come to terms with the ageing and ‘decrepitude’ (208) that take possession of her body. There are more allegorical overtones in the fact that Solomon and his fellow immigrants are at one point depicted as ‘a band of pilgrims’ (122), and in Solomon’s nameless country, although this namelessness might also allude to the irrelevance of including references to a nation when dealing with extreme human suffering. But the novel’s most pervasive allegory may be provided by the numerous cups of tea that the English characters drink at any moment, especially in times of crisis. Not only does tea illustrate further the theme of deceptive appearances: in spite of being a quintessential symbol of Englishness, it originated in regions of the former British Empire. It is, in short, both of, and not of, England. Tea drinking also meaningfully reinforces the attachment and detachment motif. As an eminently trivial part of everyday life, it clearly belongs to the naturalistic realm, but at the same time it can be viewed allegorically as a ritual that allows the characters either to bond or to cope with the vicissitudes of existence — effectively, distance themselves from reality, as Dorothy does when she is confronted with her mother’s, then her sister’s death (24, 266).

This being said, there is in *A Distant Shore* a clear will to assert the presence of the ‘other’ in contemporary British society, to root the stranger and the disenfranchised in the national narrative. If this applies to Dorothy as a middle-aged, mentally vulnerable woman, it even more obviously relates to Solomon, who is seen by many as a national and racial outsider. In spite of black people’s visibility in a mostly white society, they have rarely been portrayed in so-called realistic, mainstream contemporary fiction, beyond being represented as foils or
as problems. There are only a handful of exceptions to this, for example Jill Dawson’s *Maggie* (1998) or Maggie Gee’s *The White Family* (2002). Similarly, in spite of their over-representation in the media, asylum seekers and refugees have not really made it into fiction except again in a couple of books written this time by writers from the former empire, such as Abdulrazak Gurnah’s *By the Sea* (2002), a novel about an elderly refugee from Zanzibar, or Benjamin Zephaniah’s *Refugee Boy* (2001), a novel for teenagers about a young boy from Ethiopia seeking refuge in England. By placing a refugee at the centre of his work, Caryl Phillips once again devotes fiction to those who have been under-represented in that medium, as he did in earlier novels with slaves, prisoners or mentally ill people. In this sense, therefore, Phillips’ new novel may be said to provide what Colin MacInnes called ‘A Taste of Reality’ when in 1959 he reviewed Shelagh Delaney’s *A Taste of Honey* and concluded, “[i]t is the first English play I’ve seen in which a coloured man, and a queer boy, are presented as natural characters, factually, without a nudge or shudder’ (205).”

Trivial as it may seem, this reference to MacInnes is interesting for several reasons. First of all, MacInnes is one of the first writers who, from the end of the fifties, commented on and actually represented in his fiction a changing English society on the way to becoming visibly multicultural. As early as 1956, for example, he wrote: ‘A coloured population — and this means a growing half-caste population — is now a stable element in British social life’ (MacInnes 20). Next, the allusion to MacInnes relates indirectly to Phillips’s source of inspiration for the title of this novel, and provides it with a political subtext all the more powerful for being hidden to the naked eye. Indeed, the piece on Delaney referred to above is included in a collection of MacInnes’ pioneering essays entitled *England, Half English*, an obvious reference to attachment and detachment in relation to identity, from which the English singer Billy Bragg borrowed the title for an album released in 2002. In his turn, Phillips took the title of his novel from a song on that album, ‘Distant Shore’, which is spoken in the voice of an asylum seeker who might well be Solomon:

Everyone knows that there’s no place like home  
But I’m just seeking refuge in a world full of storms  
Washed up on a distant shore, can’t go home anymore  
The natives are hostile whatever I say  
The thing they fear most is that I might want to stay  
By their side on a distant shore can’t go home anymore  
I escaped my tormentors by crossing the sea  
What I cannot escape is memory  
Washed up on a distant shore can’t go home anymore

This allusion to Bragg and, by extension to MacInnes, places Phillips in a chain of voices that have provided thoughtful comments on Englishness, and how it relates to race and class. Like him, both MacInnes and Bragg express in their
work ‘a malcontented engagement with English identity’ (Wood) even though the singer is clearly the most politically committed of the two. In the eighties, for example, Bragg took an active part in the protests following the ‘decimation of the mining communities’, an event which visibly affected the village of Weston where A Distant Shore is set. This indirect reference to MacInnes and Bragg makes the political agenda of A Distant Shore unquestionable. However, what remains after one has read the novel is not a sense of outcry at today’s injustices, but rather a profound sympathy with two wounded individuals who could have remained ‘strangers to one another’ (163), but are brought together by fiction, yet also separated by it. A Distant Shore can therefore be read as a renewed act of faith, on Phillips’ part, in a genre that, for him, ‘requires a great deal of generosity from the writer and the reader alike’ because ‘both have to imagine themselves in somebody who is not them’; in short they have to enact a simultaneous process of attachment and detachment. It is apposite that the reading of this novel should involve performing the very process that informs it.

NOTES
1 Stephen Lawrence was born in England of Jamaican parents. He was stabbed to death at a bus stop on 22 April 1993, when he was only 18 years old. The inquiry into his murder triggered a nationwide debate on the institutionalisation of racism in the UK.
2 This is reminiscent of the attitude of the slave-trader and of the slave auctioneer in Phillips’s Crossing the River who focus only on ‘the date, the place, the time’ (76), not on the slave’s state of mind.
3 Since this paper was first drafted, Caryl Phillips has published an article on the absence of black characters in British fiction and more generally on the politics of literary representation. In that article he refers to Colin MacInnes extensively (Phillips 2004).
4 ‘England, Half English’ is also the title of a song on the same album.
5 Caryl Phillips, correspondence, 14 August 2002.
7 Comments made by Caryl Phillips at a conference on ‘Revisiting Slave Narratives’, held in Montpellier on 5th April 2003.

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Frank A. Collymore: A Man of the Threshold

Frank A. Collymore of Barbados, 1893–1980, was perhaps best known as the editor of Bim, the regional literary magazine in the English-speaking Caribbean. He was also a poet, short story writer, eminent amateur actor, school-teacher and artist. Between 1944 and 1971 Collymore published five collections of poetry and an often reprinted study of ‘Barbadian dialect’. In 1991, a collection of his short stories was published posthumously. In his later years he was often described as a ‘literary genius’ and as ‘The Grand Old Man of West Indian literature’. He won honorary awards and wide recognition in the English-speaking region for his role in the development of Caribbean literature.

Bruce King’s biography, Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life, offers a detailed chronology of Walcott’s 70 years in all its complexity. In the preface to his book, King claims that it is ‘a story about important moments of West Indian culture but also about American and recent international culture’. He regards as misleading the approach to biography that organises a life by topics. He considers and rejects the presentation of ‘a chapter here on poetry, a chapter there on painting, another chapter on New York. The next biography can have the privilege of simplicity, selectivity and clarity, but it will be misleading. Lives are not clear unless you take the blood out of them and reduce them to ideas and illustrations’ (viii).

While King presents a unique and complex literary case study, the reader is no nearer to an understanding of, for example, the nature of the religious drive
in Walcott’s poetry or the extent to which this theme might be fundamental to an understanding of his poetry. Perhaps one reason for this is King’s claim that while he is an admirer of Walcott’s work ‘usually I have let the facts speak for themselves’ (ix). There are, however, important moments in his text when the facts do not speak for themselves. For example, in writing about the BBC World Service radio programme, *Caribbean Voices*, and Walcott’s involvement with what was his first paying market, King observes, ‘[n]oticeable in the letters of Swanzy (the producer of the programme) and others within England is a touch of amusement about things colonial’ (63). Whether this involved laughing with or laughing at the colonial Caribbean writers is important but unspecified.

In contrast, Antonio Benitez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Post Modern Perspective* offers the reader an approach to Caribbean culture that combines the unique complexities of the Caribbean in the form of paradox and disorder, with interpretation that also identifies common regularities in the multi-lingual Caribbean literature. He identifies a people who he claims ‘move in a certain kind of way’ (17). For Benitez-Rojo the element of repetition leads to an analysis of underlying rhythms of Caribbean literature. He suggests that the regularities in Caribbean culture are located in the public domain, in a word, in ‘performance’. Put simply, while King’s case study focuses on uniqueness Benitez-Rojo attempts to find common ground.

In the following analysis of the life and work of Frank Collymore I recognise both an element of uniqueness and Collymore’s commonality in this revisoning of Collymore’s life, but I draw more on Victor Turner’s notion of ‘liminality’. ‘Liminality’ in this context refers to a life somewhat at odds with the mainstream of society, a life lived on the edge of society in some form.

Victor Turner’s groundbreaking work arose out of his observation of the rites of passage of a traditional African society. According to him, traditional rites of passage (such as initiation, birth, marriage and death) involve a movement from one state to another, with a point in between that he called the ‘limen’ or ‘margin’, which, by its nature, is always temporary. People in this temporary state — ‘liminaries’ — are liberated from normal social constraints into a state of ecstatic oneness or unity of being, beyond structure, which he called ‘communitas’. This state, however, can only be fully realised in a traditional context. The greater complexity and diversity of options offered by modern industrial society — such as the separation of ‘work’ and ‘play’ and the relative amount of choice possible between them — precludes the attainment of full liminality. Instead, Turner proposed, modern society is characterised by modes of being which are ‘liminoid’ or quasi, rather than fully, liminal. He suggested that liminoid states typically develop outside of the central economic and political processes — in fact along their margins — and are often described as ‘plural’, ‘quirky’, ‘fragmentary’ and ‘subversive’ (Turner 1982). These states or modes of being often arise out of creative activities and open situations where anything can happen. Turner’s
definition of liminality, therefore involves paradox, marginality or in-betweenness, when ‘new combinations of cultural givens’ can be tested and formulated (1969 128). How might this definition apply to Frank Collymore and his writing?

Collymore’s work reveals numerous attributes of liminality. Several of his short stories are connected with children, who inhabit the threshold between dependency and adulthood. His manoeuvre of ‘Collybeast’ line drawings and paintings offer a prospect of further borderlines — ‘Strange quasi-Cubistic monsters, half ante-diluvian, half Fuselli-nightmare in appearance’, as described by Edgar Mittelholzer. His love of the stage may be construed as another mode of liminality, offering the possibility of identification with something or someone other than himself. I therefore propose to apply the notion to Collymore not in an orthodox anthropological way, so much as a metaphor for someone who is voluntarily set apart from the norms of social structure; one who both functions as the threshold (or gatekeeper) for others, while being himself on the threshold in a number of different ways.

Put simply, he is a ‘gatekeeper’— he plays the role of cultural mentor and artistic arbiter for a whole generation of emerging writers. An outstanding example of the recognition of his mentoring role is the edition of Savacon 7/8, January/June 1973 edited by Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite which was dedicated as a ‘Tribute to Frank Collymore’. Some fifty writers from across the Caribbean, Britain and Europe contributed, many of whom are today acknowledged as the builders of the West Indian canon, which testifies to his pivotal role in launching them, literally, across the waters. He provided introductions to Henry Swanzy and the BBC for aspiring writers on their way to England; in Barbados he afforded talented young people the opportunity to explore other worlds. As editor of Bin, he guarded the portals of one of the few avenues for publication in the 1940s and 1950s, with the power of bestowing recognition on unknown writers, and creating a dialogue between those already established.

In a traditional, non-industrialised society he might have been a shaman, a person living on the edge of society imbued with a store of other world knowledge and powers. In the conservative, evolving, urbanised Caribbean society of Barbados, he sought and found a space between its almost tangible social structures. These structures are patterned social arrangements consciously recognised and regularly operating in the society. In the Barbados of Collymore’s time these structures consisted of the white minority political power structure that was dominant in the early years of his life, but which as time went by was challenged and ultimately replaced by a new structure provided by a predominantly black political elite.

As a way of understanding just how Collymore attained a liminal status between these competing structures, I intend to look at the ways he described himself and what they reveal of his self-perception. For example, in his poem ‘Idleness’ this state becomes ‘that blessed condition’ (1959a 72) and in a letter
to Swanzy he describes himself as having been ‘born, I fear, a convinced idler’ (Swanzy Papers, 1952). In his autobiographical essay of his early years, ‘Non Immemor’, he again refers to himself as ‘being by nature lazy’ (85). A reference to his idleness appears also in his Rhymed Ruminations on the Fauna of Barbados, where he suggests that ‘Sluggards are advised to learn from the Ant/But since I’m especially sluggish, I shan’t’ (24). What might he, a dedicated teacher, actor and writer, have meant by this somewhat disingenuous claim? It may be read as a bid for liberation from the constraints of conventional society and a laying claim to an alternative space — one where his imagination and creativity could roam freely. One way that this attempt at liberation finds expression is in his desire to unite the conventionally separate notions of ‘work’ and ‘play’ in Western, non-traditional society. In his unpublished poem ‘Lesson for the Day’, written in 1944, he asks, ‘What have I learnt thus far from life?’ One answer that he gives to this question is ‘that work is only of value when/It can be converted into play’ (Barbados National Archive).

**Collymore the Gatekeeper**

*Bim* was born in December 1942. By the third issue Collymore had become the editor, and he produced in all 56 editions before handing the editorship on to John Wickham in 1974. Sonji Phillips alludes to this threshold or gatekeeper role that he played for Kamau Brathwaite. From her interview with Brathwaite, for example, it is apparent that he credits *Bim* and Collymore with providing access to a larger reading public; he recounts Collymore’s civility towards him and Collymore’s willingness to include the young Brathwaite in the local community of writers. Phillips records Brathwaite’s comment about his association with Collymore: ‘I was getting this wonderful energy and education at the same time’ (Phillips 2004).

Collymore’s relationship with Henry Swanzy, the producer of *Caribbean Voices* at the BBC, enhanced *Bim* and his role as editor. Swanzy identified and developed the potential of Caribbean literature for eight years 1947 – 1954 through this important radio programme. Apart from Mrs. Lindo, who was the official representative of the BBC in Jamaica (and who unofficially shared these duties with her husband), when Collymore returned to Barbados in 1947 from his British Council-funded visit to England, he became Swanzy’s main avenue for contacts and introductions to developing writers from the Eastern Caribbean. George Lamming, Sam Selvon, ‘Shake’ Keane and Edward (Kamau) Brathwaite were all provided with introductions to Swanzy as they made their way to London. Swanzy’s commentaries on the literary development of Caribbean authors and his access to other criticism and commentaries were willingly made available to Collymore who regularly included them in *Bim*.

In 1992, *Bim*’s jubilee year, one edition contained a letter from Swanzy reviewing the magazine’s considerable achievements and demonstrating the nature of Collymore’s gatekeeping role: ‘Looking back’, Swanzy wrote:

>...“Looking back”, Swanzy wrote: reviewing the magazine’s considerable achievements and demonstrating the nature of Collymore’s gatekeeping role: ‘Looking back’, Swanzy wrote:
I do not know which I admire the more, his tastes (which coincided with mine!) or his magnanimity. Unlike so many literary people, he was perfectly ready to pass on the names of unknown writers, for their sake, and not his. One recalls a Jesuit saying: it is surprising what good can be done, if no credit is claimed. So there was a two-way traffic between us: cash and publicity from the BBC office in Kingston, where Cedric Lindo played a key role, and credit and permanency from Bim. (1992 29)

Collymore was also the threshold to wider worlds of knowledge for gifted young people. During a seminar held at the University of West Indies, Cave Hill in 1999, Alfred Pragnell, the Barbadan actor, and the author, John Wickham, described the importance to their development of his accessibility and his private library of books that he would make available when they visited his home. George Lamming has also given an account of this influential role from his schooldays:

I sort of latched myself on to him. He had a tremendous library which I literally took over. I mean I was there every Saturday morning to collect books. When I was supposed to be studying school material I was reading books from Collymore’s library. H.G. Wells, Joseph Conrad and Thomas Hardy were influential authors. Then I was very interested in the fifth-century Athenian culture. Collymore’s library was full of all sorts of books on the Greeks. In my discoveries from there I began to make discoveries of writers on my own. (58)

For a number of writers and aspiring writers in Barbados, then, Collymore was the gateway to a world of books and ideas that fed directly into their own writing; but he was more than a mere gatekeeper. In Edward Baugh’s estimation,

Collymore’s service to other West Indian writers lies not only in having published their work, but also in the personal interest he takes in them. What is more, because he occupies, through Bim, such a central place in West Indian literature, he is known to all sorts of people all over the world who are interested in West Indian writing, and through these contacts he has been further able, in his unobtrusive way, to promote West Indian writing abroad. (1973 15)

In 1949, Collymore wrote to Swanzy to express his excitement at the discovery of "such a young talent". He stated:

Now: I think I have made an important discovery. Last Monday Harold Simmons of St. Lucia sent me a recently published volume of poems by young Derek Walcott. Have you ever heard of him? Walcott, who is nineteen years old tomorrow, writes with remarkable fervor. His literary forbears are obviously Hopkins, Auden and Dylan Thomas, especially the latter; but his work is obviously sincere and wonderfully mature. (Swanzy Papers, Collymore – Swanzy, 2:1:1949)

This gatekeeper activity involved more than simply passing on those who came to the door of his home claiming to be able to write, or the transitory encouragement of a secondary school teacher of English. As is apparent from the careers of those that he encouraged and from the letter to Swanzy about Walcott’s writing, in each instance it involved a talent of his own to be able to identify the real thing.
COLLMORE ON THE THRESHOLD

Collymore’s liminality is also apparent from his status as an apparently white person with artistic leanings in the Barbados society of early to mid-twentieth century. I propose to locate Collymore on the threshold by situating him at the social level, as a white creole in Barbadian society, and secondly, at the individual level, by highlighting the essential ambivalence of the white creole writer.

White creole society in Barbados has been diversified and stratified for a long time. Karl Watson has traced the lines of this division from the beginning of the eighteenth century between small hold landowners and the landed elite of the island. Although these divisions appear to have been patched up in the face of the challenge for full black political participation, an element of schizophrenia has resulted. From the abolition of slavery into the twentieth century, this has involved closing ranks and giving way to black political management of the island, diversifying the economic base from landholding into commercial interests, providing scope for the upward mobility of the white working-class population, while proclaiming an apparent national and emotional commitment to the island. The development of trade unions and the militant struggles of the 1930s by the predominantly black working-class population became an important challenge to white hegemony and also encouraged the closing of ranks. It is notoriously difficult, however, to provide a clear stratification of small island societies. This is complicated, in the case of Barbados during Collymore’s lifetime, by its developing service sector, increasing urbanisation and light manufacturing industry. The resulting pattern of stratification of the society appears to have modified the previously identifiable hierarchy of colour/class boundaries. (For the analysis of the intricacies of these developments in Barbados see Karch, 1981; Watson, 1988; Beckles, 1999.)

In terms of Barbados society, Collymore was white creole (though he would not necessarily have accepted this categorisation). Although his father was a public servant working in the island’s Customs Office, Collymore clearly had distant links with elite society of which he was proud and to which he alludes in his autobiography of his early years. The title of his autobiography, ‘Non Immemor’ for example, apparently without intended irony, is the motto of the family crest. John Wickham specifies his social class while demonstrating at the same time what an unlikely, almost unique, product he was in the light of the social milieu he inhabited. Collymore came, Wickham wrote,

not from the wealthy landed class but of that larger middle or middling class which 60 or so years ago provided the hard working core of the island’s community. It is a class noted for its careful husbandry, its narrow vision. You can see the houses it built in places like Belville and Fontabelle, along the Hastings and Worthing coasts — solid coral limestone dwellings, tidy villas, the gardens flanked by poinsettia or hibiscus hedges, beware-of-the-dog signs on the garden gates. It is a class notorious for its loyalty to Barbados, generally uncomfortable in any environment which calls for the use of imagination. (12)
From this perspective Collymore appears doubly marginalised. First, in terms of his attitude, which, as discussed earlier, he describes as one of ‘idleness’. Perhaps his class background offers a further clue to the meaning of the term ‘idleness’, in contrast with the conventional class role associated with business or money-making that one might have expected him to have played in Barbados society. Secondly, he is also marginalised as one of a handful of white creoles who are active creative artists and writers in the island and the region. Wickham makes the point that ‘[b]y all reason of his background in time and place, Colly is the last man one would expect to have identified himself with a literary magazine and made it the foremost contributor to the surgent spirit of West Indian writers in the last fifteen years’ (13).

Another element, which helps to identify Collymore as ‘marginal’ or on the threshold, is, in a strange way, his variety of successes. As his life progresses in education as a classroom teacher, as an actor and as an editor he is identified by his peers or colleagues as a unique specimen, a high achiever beyond categorisation, or, put another way, removed to a category of one. This status enables the collective claim of white creole association to fade into the background so that it becomes, on a day-to-day basis, apparently irrelevant. This would appear to have suited his liberal and artistic instincts, enabling him to move freely in the society without damaging his traditional, and probably more conservative, white creole associations. In a society that was becoming increasingly vocal about its colour/class lines as the twentieth century progressed, this unique chameleon and personable ability would be an essential part of his persona.

Collymore’s threshold existence as a white creole artist, which, in the Caribbean context, can be described as ‘the outsider’s voice’ or ‘otherness’, is a second important element of his liminality. Evelyn O’Callaghan has pointed out that, ‘[t]he outsider’s voice, (then,) constitutes an important thread in the fabric of any Caribbean literary tradition’ (78). Collymore’s poetry, for example, clearly lies outside what Brathwaite has called the ‘folk tradition’. For Brathwaite this tradition represents the basis of Caribbean culture. It has become a predominant feature of Caribbean writing as the twentieth century progressed. Collymore’s themes, styles, topics and observations place him outside this tradition. Not many Caribbean poets from the mid-twentieth century, for example, celebrate, as Collymore has done in his poetry, the nanny, (‘Amanda’), the plantocracy (‘Homage to Planters’) or the business of taking tea (‘Sparrows at Tea’). In his ‘Homage to Planters’, Collymore offers to planters the following recognition: ‘I salute with gratitude/the loving care which wrings/such beauty from the soil...’ This recognition elicits Brathwaite’s acerbic comment that Collymore’s ‘gratitude rings rather dissonantly in the face of all that he ignores — the whips and scorns of slavery’ (Brathwaite 1974 33). The ‘otherness’ of Collymore’s poetry has been identified more positively by Edward Baugh who, in his review of West Indian poetry 1900–1970, locates Collymore along with A.J. Seymour, as ‘transitional..."
figures between the poetry of the pioneers and the more progressive poetry of the 1940 period’ (1972 1).

His short story writing also locates him on the threshold. Aspects of white creole society are explored in his collection, *The Man Who Loved Attending Funerals and Other Stories*. In many of these stories a white creole perspective dominates. They offer a rare glimpse of early- to mid-twentieth-century polite Barbadian white or white creole upper class life in which servants, along with other luxuries, are taken for granted. His stories can be located as part of the ‘other’ tradition in Caribbean prose which stretches back to the nineteenth century and which provide an exploration of white creole Caribbean society. In the context of male writers these include the three volumes of E.L. Joseph’s *Warner-Arundell: The Adventures of a Creole* published in 1838, and the work of H.G. de Lisser (Jamaica), Ralph de Boissiere (Trinidad), Geoffrey Drayton (Barbados), Ian McDonald (Trinidad), Lawrence Scott (Trinidad). However, my readings of Collymore’s stories, as representations of powerlessness in different guises, brings his collection closer to the themes of insecurity explored by white creole female writers, particularly Jean Rhys and Phyllis Shand Allfrey, than to the sense of security and authority that Geoffrey Drayton or Ian McDonald ultimately offer in their novels.

Though Collymore’s stories dramatise it in different ways, the dominant tone is fatalistic. In stories where the protagonist attempts to exercise power, it is generally thwarted or shown to be ineffective: Cumberbatch (‘To Meet Her Mother’) is prevented from realising his ambitions by a prejudice against fat people. An unscrupulous foreigner deservedly dupes Mrs. Bush-Hall and daughter (‘RSVP Mrs. Bush-Hall’) out of their upward climb. A dying man saves a drowning kitten as a last act of human feeling, only for the kitten to be blamed (‘RSVP Mrs. Bush-Hall’) out of their upward climb. A dying man saves a drowning kitten as a last act of human feeling, only for the kitten to be blamed (‘RSVP Mrs. Bush-Hall’) out of their upward climb. A dying man saves a drowning kitten as a last act of human feeling, only for the kitten to be blamed. A dying man saves a drowning kitten as a last act of human feeling, only for the kitten to be blamed (‘RSVP Mrs. Bush-Hall’) out of their upward climb. A dying man saves a drowning kitten as a last act of human feeling, only for the kitten to be blamed (‘RSVP Mrs. Bush-Hall’) out of their upward climb. A dying man saves a drowning kitten as a last act of human feeling, only for the kitten to be blamed.

Another feature of Collymore on the threshold is represented by his ambivalent attitude to the metropolitan centre, England. His accounts of his visits in 1947, ‘Impressions of a Tour 1 and 2’ published in *Bim* in 1950, demonstrate these mixed feelings towards ‘the old country’. As one well versed in British and European culture and the arts, his reports are, not surprisingly, full of enthusiasm for museums, art galleries, and the theatre visits that he undertakes. His description of his opportunity to dine with the Dean and Faculty of Pembroke College, Cambridge contains an element of a rite of passage about it. He recollected:

As I sat there on the dais, and then afterwards in the panelled combination room by candlelight, sipping port and conversing, all the happenings of the evening assumed the nature of a sacrament, and I felt as though I had partaken of the very stuff of England. (1950 62)

Also in his travels around England, the countryside around Exeter was ‘to be gazed upon and worshipped’ (1950 165).
He both is and is not at home. Far from wishing to leave Barbados behind, reminders of the island are his constant sources for positive or negative comparison. He practices the small island attentiveness to faces, looking for reminders of friends in Barbados. In Derby he spends time looking 'at the various faces and figures, especially those of the waiters and waitresses, and finding resemblances in them to various friends and acquaintances at home' (1950a 168). The landscape of England also holds reminders: 'Most of the English countryside had reminded me forcefully of that of Barbados, the countryside of Barbados refined and subjected to a softer atmosphere and a longer spell of mellowing years' (1950a 70). At the theatre an actor's voice in *The Alchemist* convinces him of the 'authentic Englishly of our Barbadian tongue as it is spoken by some of our older planters today' (1950a 71). In a visit to the Zoo he sees, 'wonderful to relate, some goats, real Bajan goats' (1950a 71).

In contrast with these positive associations, he states what has now become the clichéd West Indian's disgust at the English bath instead of the shower. 'How people prefer to soak in the scum of soap lather and their discarded dirt I cannot imagine' (1950a 164). He finds the palm trees of Torquay unacceptable. They are 'small and straggly and had such an apologetic air' (1950a 166), and at the end of his tour, he is clearly more than ready and delighted to return to Barbados. He takes a boat back to Trinidad and on the return flight to Barbados the sight of the island is described as 'a very precious toyland spread out beneath' (1950a 170). Given the widespread rush from the English speaking Caribbean to Britain in the late 1940s and early 1950s, his mixture of feelings about England take on greater significance as a representation of his white creole ambivalence towards the centre. His responses to the visit suggest that he belongs both to the centre and the periphery. He remained sufficiently open to feel pride in the association with home and metropolitan culture.

Finally, Collymore is on the threshold in his attitude to language. Educated to speak and teach Standard English, Collymore’s approach to written English was to respect and encourage the formal tradition. His prose has been described as 'self-consciously fine — linguistically and grammatically correct, aspiring to a universal rather than a local character’ (Brown xix). He delighted in the use of formal and unexpected words and phrases. In the story ‘Shadows’ he describes how the moon ‘pale and gibbous shone through the bleak mullioned windows’ (11). In the same story, hatred held by a wife ‘typified the revolt of the woman, the odalesque’ (12), and a character’s pain was expressed in the sentence ‘She suffered in the deeps’ (12). In ‘The Snag’, wasteland is described as ‘situated in the hollow of an abrupt declivity’ (18).

At the same time, he is surrounded by other versions of English that, in the context of Barbados, were clearly different and constantly changing. Other writers were willing to respond to the language around them.¹ In an interview with Sonji Phillips, Brathwaite notes, ‘I was dealing with issues such as race. He
(Collymore) didn’t feel comfortable with the historical description of the racial trauma. She also notes that there was hardly any dialect in Bim till 1956 and suggests that a possible reason for the late change in attitude involved taking the lead from the metropolis following the successes that Sam Selvon had with The Lonely Londoners which was published that year in Britain (Phillips 2004).

There is here a tentativeness displayed by Collymore that suggests an element of fence sitting. From the perspective of liminality it is also his response to the day-to-day creative use of language around him that betrays his threshold status. Unwilling or unable to shift to the creolisation of written English in his own work, yet fascinated by the language around him, consciously or unconsciously, he chooses not to use Barbadian or regional English, neither is he willing (for a time) to encourage its use creatively through publication. Instead, he records it as an amateur lexicographer, publishing Notes for a Glossary of Words and Phrases of Barbadian Dialect in various editions of Bim, and finally in four editions, the first in 1955, and the fourth in 1970. A part of his quandary appears to have been that he was caught between local meanings and those laid down by the O.E.D. The problem is illustrated in the introduction to the fourth edition of the Notes for a Glossary. He writes there that if a Barbadian looks up certain words, for example, ‘gap’, ‘scotch’ or ‘tot’ in the dictionary:

he discovers that ‘gap’ is not an entrance or a driveway to a residence, that digging one’s heels in the earth is not scotching and that a ‘tot’ is not a drinking vessel made of tin. These words have carried these meanings for him all his life; his confidence is shaken. (1970 emphasis added)

This response to the local language, then, also places him on the threshold. He betrays his ambivalence to the creolisation of English by choosing, ultimately, to study the local language rather than to use it or indeed to encourage its use.

‘Literary genius’ and ‘grand old man of West Indian literature’ are two accolades often used to describe Collymore’s varied life and work. While they acknowledge his important place in Caribbean letters, by colluding in his iconic status they also inhibit closer analysis. The interpretation offered in this analysis reframes the many categories — artist, teacher, poet, story writer, editor — that he appears to inhabit, paying particular attention to Collymore the liminar, the man of the threshold.

As a gatekeeper he has a considerable role in influencing and encouraging many towards literature and the arts. He himself is also on the threshold. His writing suggests that he is a part of the ‘other’. His life and his writing give representation to Jean Rhys’ telling observation about the Caribbean: ‘There is always the other side, always’ (106). This ‘other’ side for Collymore comprises his ambivalence to the metropolitan centre, which he visits; to his place in the island, which he constantly negotiates to find space for his ‘idleness’; and to himself, shown most clearly in his response to what could have been, after all, ‘his’ language. In these ways he personified the ambivalence of white creole
culture in liminal form. Collymore is defined also by his position in society, that is a white creole artist coming to terms in his own way with a society that contains all the contradictions of a racialised, decolonising, conservative and hierarchical past.

NOTES
The author acknowledges that the research for this paper was kindly funded by the Central Bank of Barbados and supported by the Frank A. Collymore Literary Endowment Committee. Any errors or omissions in this essay are those of the author.

1 For example, Brathwaite has noted that Collymore was not always keen on the use of ‘nation language’, and Collymore withdrew his support for some parts of ‘Rights of Passage’ which he found ‘disturbing’ (Phillips 86).

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**LEOVSKI’S BLUES**

_Leovski Donov_ my brother called himself: a genuine Russian name as it sounded; and pleased with himself he was, as he drew a picture of Lenin with goatee and all; and the chin jutted out, reflecting the revolutionary’s iron will, he said. Next he started writing poems: none of your bourgeois preoccupation with self-reflection, or of pastoral nature which our local poets were good at. Leovski wrote poems that the workers wanted to hear, as he read them out loudly to me. He also wrote essays, extolling progressive forces the world over.

My brother also read Cuba’s _Granma_: all weighty parcels that the postman brought to our door, who’d seemed suspicious as he took off. More serious Leovski began to appear; and he hoped his essays on Marxism and Third World socialism would draw attention in America, in magazines such as _The Village Voice, Harper’s_, as he yet called himself _Leovski Donov._

And other people too changed their names, some taking genuine African ones in our district, if not the country as a whole, I reflected; and, indeed, strange many of these names were, all with the talk of a back-to-Africa movement and Marcus Garvey. For my brother though, being a Russian was all, despite our Indian family and background. No doubt he felt that Russia — the entire Soviet Union — was powerful. Now here, in our part of the world he was ready to bring about transformation.

I listened to him, and smiled.

My mother also listened, and maybe she sensed what was going through me. When later I saw Leovski leading a long line of workers, all ‘peasants and workers’, each waving a placard — and he being in the ‘vanguard’ — I became worried. I tried talking him out of his revolutionary zeal; but by now his name _Leovski Donov_ was being repeated everywhere, not without some awe. He also inspired jest … as I saw the name Leovski written down on culverts, cowpens: my brother’s popularity mixed with parody.

A couple more marches along the main road, and our entire family became worried. My mother asked where he got the name from, as she tried pronouncing it, unread or unlettered as she was. Then she wrung her hands and let out an audible moan.

My youngest brother smiled, and called out, ‘Le-ov-ski’; it sounded like a game being played. Others picked up on this, a refrain indeed, and jeered. _Leovski_ merely held out his chin, Lenin-like; he seemed a genuine Russian now. I laughed. He didn’t.
Solemnly, he said we must get rid of poverty once and for all; then he murmured about the difference between idealism and materialism as he struck an intellectual pose. By now he was reading constantly; he even played a tape-recorder, ‘practicing’ his speeches he would one day deliver to his ‘comrades.’

‘D’you really mean that, Leovski?’ I asked, sceptical.

He shrugged.

By now a few of the youngsters among us had been sent abroad by the ‘Party’; and when they came back after a few months, they were full of a fancy talk about ‘dialectical materialism’ and ‘scientific socialism,’ which would solve all our problems, to end Third World exploitation and poverty once and for all!

I imagined Leovski going abroad too, and when he returned he would indeed never be the same again. In Moscow, I saw him addressing everyone as tovarish (comrade), as he talked about social change in highfalutin’ terms. Russian hardliners listened to him with curiosity, I figured. Ah, they concluded, with Comrade Leovski Donov Third World socialism and the Communist International were on the right track. Leovski next showed them his essays — his articles — all written long hand. And with passion he talked about the workers’ plight: as if they were a special breed, not people who sometimes guffawed at the slightest joke or were sometimes roguish in our village.

Frowns from his Russian ‘comrades’, even as they repeated his name, Leovski Donov, then studied his unmistakeable Hindu features. They became more intrigued, even as my brother expatiated about the differences between pragmatism, idealism, and materialism. His voice rang with conviction.

My mother frowned. Leovski dared me to imagine more.

Then he said I must also call him ‘comrade’: we were a progressive family. He quoted Marx and emphasised that Marxism-Leninism wasn’t a dogma, but ‘a guide to action’. ‘Are you sure about that, Leovski?’ I challenged him.

He scoffed an answer.

‘We’re not in Russia, you know,’ I said, still baiting him. ‘We could be.’

I forced a smile.

‘Progressive forces will survive. International solidarity is all,’ he grated.

My mother again frowned, but was also puzzled. I figured I now had to steer my brother on the right path, if only for our mother’s sake: the latter urging me on to it quietly. Then she too began calling him by that name, not his real Hindu name, Doodnauth.

‘Leovski,’ I heard again.

Triumphant … it sounded.
I’d started making plans to come to Canada, mainly to attend university.

Leovski said that Canadian education was too bourgeois; it didn’t prepare one to bring about world revolution and liberation. Somehow I knew he’d say this.

He sneered next; but he was my brother, I reminded myself. And maybe he was glad I had ambition, my wanting to escape our poverty as I’d said.

Then Leovski turned away, to talk to the workers who came to consult him about something or the other; maybe to plan another long march to protest their working conditions. They would now seriously discuss ‘strategy and tactics’.

I eavesdropped, smiling. I watched Leovski become animated, even comical.

At once I recalled the time when we were seven or eight and had gone to visit our father’s relatives on the Corentyne; and how much they’d doted on him, he with his wavy hair, handsome as he looked. The relatives figured he’d become a film star one day, even end up in Bombay (Bollywood always on their minds).

Then I remembered our coming home from the Corentyne in the bus named Duke of Kent (another bus was called Lord Mountbatten), with the horn regularly blowing and deafening everyone. He started trembling when the live chicken the relatives had given us as gifts, seemed ready to fly out of his hands. Pandemonium among the passengers; a look of abject terror on my brother’s face, so overcome he was with anxiety.

I reminded Leovski about this, and he smiled. ‘That chicken,’ I prompted another time.

But now he was ready to make another speech to the ‘workers and peasants’, like a real firebrand politician. I watched him shaking his fist and quoting facts and figures; and where he got his information from I didn’t know; it was as if he had a full research team behind him. From time to time too, I watched him make notes with a vigorous hand, the numbers he kept copying down, then repeated to himself into the tape-recorder.

The postman came again, with another parcel from Havana. More Gramma … and other propaganda material, though Leovski never called it that. ‘You better be careful,’ I said to him, thinking he’d soon have the security police after him because of the government’s fear of ‘dissidents’.

He simply called me the ‘Canadian’ because I’d kept seriously thinking of coming to Canada.

Once more I joined a group of workers — to observe him in action, in a way admiring how forcefully he spoke and gesticulated. A nephew or niece sat next to me, as I nudged her to listen carefully. And more irrepressible Leovski seemed as he talked about the ‘dictatorship of the proletariat’ — the panacea for all the world’s political woes.

The workers and peasants applauded.

I raised a hand to ask a question, to challenge him about some point or the other: in a way testing him, even as I sensed he would dismiss me as the
‘Canadian’. Then I found myself applauding him. Oddly, the image of my brother in the bus holding on to the chicken for dear life’s sake as Duke of Kent thundered down the main road never left me. The chicken fluttered noisily, then jumped from seat to seat, from one passenger to another as everyone tried grabbing it!

‘We’ll soon be home,’ I tried to soothe him, as the bus trundled on.

‘Hold the hen down. It go bite!’ he cried, already being a nervous wreck.

‘No!’

Then he clamped the chicken down between his legs, mouth set tight; and maybe his activism began from then, I thought.

I wanted to tell his audience this, and listen to them laugh. Really laugh.

Leovski glared at me: he knew what was on my mind. Then his voice became measured, but calm. The one next to me gave me a nudge — wanting me to listen carefully to Leovski.

After the meeting, everyone congratulated my brother for a speech well delivered, his message was so powerful. Another pumped his hand as if he’d never stop. Once more I imagined my brother meeting one Communist leader after another in Moscow. Then Fidel Castro himself in Havana he met. And Comrade Fidel, with cigar and reeking of a foul fume from his bushy beard, also pumped his hand, calling him companero. Maybe Castro then whispered something about Che Guevara, as if they were all now on equal terms.

‘The Third World must never succumb to American imperialism,’ I imagined Castro saying as my brother nodded.

‘We must never allow ourselves to become like Grenada and Panama,’ Castro brandished his hands before my brother’s face.

My brother smiled.

I too smiled, the Canadian that I was.

*****

‘Leovski Donov,’ I muttered, whispering his name in the kitchen to myself, as my mother again frowned. It was dinner time, and my brother had come to join us in the kitchen of our small house, exhausted and hungry as he seemed after his last lengthy speech.

‘You want some food, Leovski?’ my mother asked.

‘Yes, hurry up,’ he commanded. My mother quickly dished out a heap of rice, as if he needed a special helping.

‘When is your next meeting, Leovski?’ I asked.

He didn’t answer.

‘When are you meeting the workers again?’

‘Soon.’ He looked away; something else was on his mind. Then he shrugged, but looked sternly at me, ready to quote some statistic or other.

Stuffing his mouth full of rice and biting into a wiri-wiri pepper, which can really make the tongue burn, he kept thinking. His Adam’s apple bulged. This
would be his last mouthful. Oddly, I imagined people being put in prison in Siberia under Stalin, as I continued watching him; and he didn’t appear like my brother any more. But he was, my mother seemed to say to me at the table.

Auntie, Grandmother, other relatives — they were all saying the same as they watched him covertly. Some smiled. Again I thought of the bus, and the chickens fluttering, everywhere.

Leovski suddenly laughed, no longer the revolutionary he seemed: and it was just like old times, as I wanted him to be, if only for our mother’s sake.

A sliver of onion stuck out of his left bicuspid. Then he muttered something about a large workers’ strike looming.

My mother’s eyes widened. And maybe right after the strike, Leovski would announce that he would leave—the Party would be sending him away.

Where?

He only smiled.

My mother looked at us, becoming more anxious.

Then I noticed that Leovski didn’t jut out his chin. He didn’t make any reference to Lenin too, when I tried to nettle him by saying that Stalin was the worst dictator the world has known. He squinted; and I imagined he was having second thoughts about the planned workers’ strike. Yet I dwelled on his talk about ploughing back the large profits made from sugar cane by the multinationals into establishing a Cadbury’s milk chocolate factory locally; and the sugar didn’t have to be sent all the way to England too! He used terms like ‘social infrastructure’ as he talked about health and educational development as if this would happen overnight. More facts, statistics, he spewed out, and in a way I was proud of him.

But he also seemed glum. ‘Hey, Leovski, what’s the matter?’ I said.

He didn’t answer.

I called him by his real name, and still he didn’t answer. I tried compañero, pretending to be Castro with a fat cigar hanging from my lips. Then, tovarish.

No answer.

I watched one or two of the workers calling on him, to talk about the labour strike. And they too weren’t sure about him. What was Leovski really thinking? Once or twice he murmured something about me being ‘the Canadian’: he’d been dwelling on this.

I sat in on the next strategy session planning the strike. Balram, one worker, said: ‘Now is the time to cripple the sugar industry. Let’s teach them a lesson.’

‘What kind of lesson?’ Leovski asked testily.

The other workers seemed immediately cowed, though one sniggered. For days after Leovski kept to himself, and all my efforts to engage him to defend socialism and communism seemed to no avail. I even tried aggression: saying socialism was merely a form of dictatorship; before, when I’d said that,
he railed at me and went into a long harangue about the American system: that it was only a democracy of the rich, the many millionaires and heads of corporations who ran the White House! Capitalism led to world-wide imperialism, didn’t I know?

‘Hey, Leovski, what’s the matter? I’m your brother — tell me!’ I nearly used the word ‘comrade’.

He shrugged.

‘Come on, Leovski … what is it?’ He sneered. ‘That name’s only for foreign people,’ he said.

I looked at him as his eyelids quivered.

‘The workers…?’ I tried.

He burst out: ‘Now what are you? The head of a multinational corporation?’ I waited.

Then, ‘I’m going to America,’ he said.

‘You are?’

He lifted his head, chin jutting out. ‘America … yes.’

‘What about Russia or Cuba?’

Maybe he’d had a row with the Party. Now he didn’t want to lead another march and to take strike action.

‘The workers — the exploited — they depend on you,’ I added. ‘That Balram, for instance…’

‘His wife’s pregnant again,’ Leovski moaned.

I asked about his going abroad, to America. But he didn’t want to say more. I figured the next day he’d be back to his old self, the true revolutionary. Another bus, Lord Mountbatten, passed by on the main road, not far from our house. Then the truck named Zapata, workers in it hailing as they saw him in our front yard, all in the spirit of true comradeship.

When I called him by his Russian name again, he said I shouldn’t. ‘Then what are you?’ I insisted, not letting him off the hook.

‘Che Guevara,’ he said, with a straight face.

‘So Che Guevara wants to go to America — to start a revolution?’ I laughed. The old fire in his eyes again. ‘Just like you’ll be doing in Canada, no?’ he taunted.

‘In Canada people have freedom,’ I argued. ‘In America … too.’

‘There the workers everywhere are exploited!’

‘Some people have made it from rags to …’ I still tried baiting him. And quickly I added, ‘Where in America are the oppressed who will want to join you in overthrowing …?’

‘The Blacks, they’re really oppressed.’ His eyes burned.

Ah, I figured he was genuinely wondering about me going to Canada, as much as I wondered about him going to America, soon.

‘Where will you get the money to go to America?’ I asked next. It was what my mother had also asked.

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He kept thinking.
‘Will the Party give you, Leovski?’
Another truck lumbered by, more workers hailing him. ‘Will they?’ I pointed at the ones with faces smeared with the soot from the burnt sugar cane after a long day in the fields. And they kept waving to him … Che Guevara!
Then he said: ‘You will give me the money’. His irony didn’t escape me.
The truck now gone down the winding road, a heavy blanket of smoke in its trail. ‘I will, eh?’
‘You’re my brother.’
I laughed. He too laughed.
‘Look here, Leovski — ’
‘Don’t call me by that name.’
‘Look here, Che Guevara — ’
‘Don’t call me that either.’
Now … his true name, which somehow didn’t sound like his name anymore: it was too mundane-sounding; I still wanted him to be Leovski Donov.
He grimaced. ‘The blacks in America are really the oppressed,’ he said. ‘In the streets of New York, Chicago, Alabama and the far south, they need to be liberated.’ Once more his strident tone, as he quoted African Americans like the Reverend Jessie Jackson. I’d heard him say some of this into his tape-recorder.
My mother came by, quietly listening.
Leovski began telling me next about how many blacks lived in the ghettoes, in the inner cities, and the drug addiction, crime, racism, AIDS: he knew it all. When I didn’t respond, he accused: ‘Don’t you care about them?’
His chin jutted out; and maybe he’d talk about life in Canada next, about the Native people. No, he left that for me.
‘What about the people here? The exploited … ?’ I countered.
He continued on about the Blacks in America, how they’d suffered long decades of slavery in the cotton plantations. His eyes seemed ablaze. I managed a reply: ‘So you think they will listen to you?’
‘Why wouldn’t they? They need organising.’ And he continued on about the Blacks in places like Toronto, Montreal, Halifax, which really surprised me.
Yes, police were shooting blacks too in Canada, not just in Los Angeles, didn’t I know?
I looked at him … expecting him to talk about the Native people’s plight next. But he vaguely muttered something about not understanding why the Eskimos wanted to live in cold weather up north. And I thought he laughed.
‘They are Canada’s first people,’ I said.
He didn’t answer; maybe he was only thinking of the cold weather.
My mother looked confused, because she’d never heard of people in America or Canada starving. She’d seen magazine pictures of everyone being well-dressed, including blacks, who rode in large fancy cars.
But my brother was impatient; he quickly dismissed her.
Then he looked at me again: he wasn’t getting far with me, he knew.

Then addressing our mother only, he said: ‘What are you cooking today?’ He was hungry again.

He swallowed emptily. Was he really thinking about Native people … in Canada? My mother managed a smile. Surprisingly she hummed, ‘In America, maybe you will eat all you want, son.’ It was her sense of irony, even implying gluttony. But maybe she said this because the situation now in our country was getting worse: everyone was talking of leaving the country. Where people got the gumption from … and money to make travel arrangements, and to obtain visas, I didn’t know. From time to time they’d ask my brother to assist them with spelling names of places correctly.

And he did, willingly.

*****

My mother started dishing out food for the hungry Leovski, even as she kept wondering if there were indeed poor and homeless people in America; I could tell this from her eyes.

And maybe a strange fear about America gripped her, there where Leovski would be going soon. And fear about Canada as well, because of the plight of the Native people … where I’d be going. A soiled-looking copy of Granma was on the table, which none of us had read, including Leovski. My mother’s eyes shifted to it.

And I kept thinking of people in America and Canada … many doing menial work in restaurants, hotels, factories: perhaps also planning a long protest march in order to improve their working conditions.

Another truck, painted pink almost, lumbered by, one without a name.
Leovski glanced at me, and he knew what I was thinking: about that nameless truck … as I quickly imagined it one day being called Leovski Donov.

‘When’s he leaving for America?’ Balram asked me soon after.
‘You mean Comrade Leovski?’ I impressed on him.

He nodded.

‘Is the Party still sending him away?’

Balram was deeply involved in Party work. ‘He’s really one of us, you know,’ he added, suspicious of me now.
Then he smiled; and I didn’t like the way he smiled; it was as if he was laughing at my brother, before he left for America.

My brother in the kitchen swallowed small mouthfuls, yet looked solemn. ‘I will remain here,’ he said. He now studied the dhal and rice — his favourite fare which my mother always prepared for him.
Then he ate quickly, shovelling the food into his mouth.

Strangely, I began seeing him interviewed by a TV crew as he headed a
protest march in New York; and the announcer saying: 'Mr Leovski Donov is deeply concerned about the plight of immigrants in the United States of America. Not just the Blacks and the Hispanics and people from Puerto Rico, but the illegal, undocumented immigrants also ... in New York, California, all across America!'

Pause.

'So Mr Leovski Donov,' asked the beautiful Hispanic female reporter, 'are you yourself an illegal alien?'

My brother’s jutting-out chin, Lenin-like once again.

Something about the word 'alien' troubled him. He looked confused ... as the picture slowly began fading from my mind.

Then I saw him again with hands punctuating the air before a large crowd. The nameless pink truck lumbered by again, the workers applauding him. 'Leovski Donov,' called out ... and the truck suddenly was no longer nameless.

My mother, alone — I figured — vaguely contemplated our fate; and she perhaps was unable to recognize us anymore ... as if we were already gone to America or Canada. The sounds of the truck lumbering by, seemed all.
Settling into ‘Unhomeliness’: Displacement in Selected Caribbean and Caribbean Canadian Women’s Writing

Faced with horrific daily evidence of the consequences of polarisation on the ‘grounds’ of difference (racial, ethnic, religious), I find myself increasingly emphasising culture contact and transculturation in my teaching practice. This is a reasonable enough focus in the Caribbean context, and it certainly is appropriate to my history as a product of such processes: my parents were born in two different countries, I was born in a third, brought up in a fourth and live and work in yet another; my children were born in one country, of parents born in two other countries, and they too will very likely end up living and working somewhere else; and so the cycle continues. Hence I am drawn to texts which feature migration journeys and the interculturation, painfully or positively depicted, which follows.

There is no shortage of this kind of writing: indeed Homi Bhabha has commented on ‘the deep stirring of the “unhomely”’ in current fiction (141). For him, the migration experience — that ‘estranging sense of relocation of the home’ (141) — is the paradigmatic post-colonial experience; and given its genesis in the history of migration, the (forced or voluntary) movement and contact of peoples and cultures has been a constant in the story which the Caribbean tells about itself. However, this is an open-ended story, for as Stuart Hall reminds us, the migration journey — then as now — was a two-way affair. Over the course of centuries of contact, conflict and creolisation amongst imported peoples, the Caribbean began to export a new set of cultural and racial ‘products’. So in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example Caribbean whites who travelled ‘back’ to the ancestral homeland discovered that they were no longer expatriate Europeans but something else: Barbadians or Jamaicans or Antiguans, or more generally, West Indian Creoles (Watson 30).

The exportation of peoples and cultures, then, as well as their importation, is inherent in the construction of Caribbean identity, so that in the former imperial centre (Britain) as well as in what many term the new imperial centre (North America), Caribbean peoples have established their presence, politely — or not so politely — but insistently. West Indians in London or Toronto or New York are acknowledged, recognised, even granted ‘nuff respect’. But are they ‘at home’, and if so, what constitutes this state? Again, one can look to the texts of migrant/
FRIEDA CASSIN: THE ‘TAINTED’ CREOLE

As Watson observes, white West Indian creoles became most aware of their distance from ‘their ancestral Europe’ in Europe itself, and many of their narratives speak of a deep longing for the Caribbean home. Within this early version of the Caribbean diaspora, then, white creoles saw themselves as different in many ways from the Europeans from whom they derived ancestry, and to the British, they certainly were strikingly different. However, much as they insisted upon their whiteness, or attempted to assimilate the knowledge and manners of the Mother Country, creoles never quite made it in British eyes, either at home or abroad. Frieda Cassin’s With Silent Tread: A West Indian Novel (c. 1890) is a case in point.

The plot deals with the lives of those infrequently mentioned in nineteenth-century histories of the region, ‘the lady-kind of the island’ (Cassin 77), as viewed by themselves and by their English counterparts. The two perspectives differ radically. Marion, a young English woman, travels to the West Indies to spend time with relatives, and becomes very fond of her fun-loving creole cousin, Morea, who is all colour, flying dark hair, with a ‘saucy, laughing face’ and an affectionate and open nature (25). If she displays rather too much of the imperious creole in shouting for her old nurse, she counters this by expressions of fierce devotion: ‘I love her with all my heart ... she is a most important member of the family’ (29).

Above all, Morea is described as childlike and displays a child’s passionate attachment to, her beautiful tropical landscape (110). By contrast, Marion is throughout constructed as ideally feminine, but sensible and rational. Cassin’s description is of an ‘unmistakably English’ young lady. Decorously attired in ‘a
quiet suit of navy serge’, she is ‘a woman who, one instinctively felt, would have a wholesome influence over all with whom she came in touch’ (13). The clear distinction between the sensibilities of the two young women, foreshadows the clash of metropolitan and colonial cultures and values which is the subtext of Cassin’s narrative.

When Morea travels abroad, she refers to ‘going home to England’ (106), but on arrival meets with English prescriptions of herself as a stereotypical creole, a different creature. The English Selwyn expects the Antiguan Morea to be short and yellow, ‘utterly incapable of helping herself’ without ‘six or seven black maids lolling about’, indolent, drawling and fond of giving orders (116). As far as he is concerned, she comes from a ‘topsy-turvey land’ (125) where English norms do not apply. Morea ‘refuses to fit into that niche’ (119). She continually compares West Indian and English customs, to the detriment of the latter, and takes pleasure (like Kincaid’s Lucy) in comparing the ‘sun at home’ with its English equivalent, a ‘poor watery thing’ (121). She insists she will continue to love her West Indian friends, including her black nurse, ‘quite as much as anybody in this muddy England’ (137), and even mocks pre-constructed notions of English manhood (120). ‘You are sadly in need of a little travel to enlarge your mind’ (125), she advises Selwyn, neatly turning the tables on the superior Englishman (to whom, of course, she is soon engaged to be married).

However, Morea’s kind of romantic passion does not suit a temperate English social climate. Selwyn’s practical older sister restores the voice of reason: ‘It’s so utterly absurd, it must not be allowed’, Elizabeth decides, aware of the folly of attempting to unite the worlds of the romantic (childish, uncivilised, tainted) creole woman and the English man destined for a sober future as a responsible doctor. Elizabeth is proved right. Days before the wedding, Morea’s features indicate something is amiss: ‘inflamed nostrils and swollen lips and a generally bloated and dissipated appearance’ (144). Her illness, as implied by these racialised symptoms, is a creole malady. In sickness, as in health, the discursive category which she shares with blacks in the Caribbean, set her apart from her English intended. Finally, an English medical specialist reveals the truth: ‘the
bride-elect is a leper' (149). Morea disappears, a ‘veiled hooded figure’ whisked away by the doctor at her own request, to a place ‘where I can do no harm to anyone, least of all to those I love’ (152).

Morea, the best that West Indian creole culture has produced, is tainted, and the taint is contagious. The loss of his child-bride eventually turns Selwyn into a more responsible adult: ‘he grew graver and quieter’ (154). It is as if the frivolous West Indian creole influence has been, as it must be, exchanged for a more suitable (if stereotypical) English sobriety. Three years later Selwyn proposes to the English Marion, a much safer choice in the circumstances. As in Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre, the implication is that the contaminated creole wife must die before the English hero is able to make the more sensible marriage to one of his own kind. The white creole remains undeniably ‘Other’ to those at home in England; a taboo remains on the transgression of boundaries between West Indian and English varieties of whiteness.

Intriguingly, of all texts mentioned below, the bleakest account of migration ‘back to centre’ in that of the white creole. Prefiguring Rhys, Cassin’s white Antiguan protagonist is rejected by the ‘Mother Country’ more absolutely than the brown Mary Seacole, the author of Wonderful Adventures of Mrs Seacole in Many Lands (1857). While for the white creole, the journey ‘home’ to the centre proves to be a voyage of alienation, isolation and death, the brown Seacole represents the migration journey as one of self-fulfilment not possible in the more limited Jamaican home space.

MARY SEACOLE: EXPLOITING DISPLACEMENT

Mary Seacole’s determined character is suggested at the outset of her narrative as she insists on the validity of her own voice: ‘unless I am allowed to tell the story of my life in my own way, I cannot tell it at all’ (185). Her narrative is less a comprehensive autobiography than precisely what the title proclaims: an account of wonderful adventures. Seacole was born in 1805 in Jamaica (then still a slave colony), the mixed-race daughter of a Scottish officer and a free black woman who owned and operated a successful boarding house-cum-nursing home for sick British officers. On her mother’s death, Seacole managed and expanded the business and formed a lasting relationship with the British military establishment, the metropolitan arm of which would offer her certain social and economic opportunities.

She also followed in her mother’s footsteps by advancing her skill as a ‘doctress’, and was in much demand at home and abroad during outbreaks of yellow fever, cholera and other epidemics. In addition, Seacole engaged in various business enterprises which necessitated much travelling, something she thoroughly enjoyed and indeed came to crave. She married, and was widowed soon after (the two events occur in the same paragraph in her text!). At the age of forty-five she journeyed to Central America, where she set up and ran several businesses, and then to England to offer her medical services in the Crimean
war effort. Official permission proving elusive, in 1854 she independently set up the British Hotel near Balaklava, combining the amenities of a hotel and a dispensary for the medicines she herself administered to the sick and wounded at the front. When the war ended abruptly, she had to close her operations at a loss and returned impoverished to England. In dire financial straits, she played on her reputation as Mother Seacole, minister to the troops, gaining in return recognition and gratitude and official sponsorship for her *Wonderful Adventures*, an exciting, witty, sometimes moving and often very funny account of her travels and wartime adventures. The book was a success. Honoured by the public and the military, even decorated, Seacole lived comfortably at the heart of Empire where she died in 1881.

Her West Indian affiliations are soon passed over. A brief sketch of her family, childhood and young womanhood in Jamaica takes up the first one and a half chapters and then, apart from an eight-month sojourn in the island in 1853, the entire narrative is set abroad. Sandra Pouchet Paquet observes that for Seacole the centre is ‘not located in a Jamaican social reality, but “at home” in post-Crimean England. Mary Seacole’s roots may be in Jamaica, but her narrative is rooted in England’ (656). Yet rather than resonating with the ‘unhomely’, Seacole’s narrative suggests an ability to be at home in both places. At times, she longs for ‘my pleasant home in Kingston’ (73) and avers that ‘our West Indian dishes’ are a match for those of Europe’s finest chef (187). On the other hand, the final section of her last chapter, titled ‘Home’, refers unambiguously to England. Seacole, like Morea, disingenuously elides the contradiction in claiming both: for her, to be Jamaican was also to be British. ‘Home’ is a shifting site, one where she can do what she does best and, like Morea in Cassin’s novel, Seacole positively relishes the new for the opportunities it offers.

Seacole’s race is not acknowledged as a problem: she affirms that ‘I have a few shades of deeper brown upon my skin which shows me related — and I am proud of the relationship — to those poor mortals whom you once held enslaved, and whose bodies America still owns’ (67), and absolutely repudiates the ‘lazy creole’ stereotype. Neither her gender nor her age are allowed as constraints to her positive self-promotion, as she constructs here identity as an adventurer, entrepreneur, and professional healer. Few women travel writers of the period can come close to Seacole in transgressing ‘proper’ female behaviour and appropriating a predominantly male vehicle for self-promotion of her heroic status. Seacole travels as ‘an unprotected female’ by choice — she is clear on this — through all kinds of hazardous situations. She conducts business in frontier territory, with a keen eye to profit; she manages servants, sometimes with the aid of a horsewhip (196); she attends to choler and yellow fever cases at home and abroad, even performing a covert autopsy to find out more about the pathology of disease; she treats knife and gunshot wounds, stitches on severed ears in Central America, and braves cannon fire and musket shot to tend the wounded on the battlefields of the Crimea.
At the same time, Seacole stresses her gentle heart and feminine nurturing qualities quite as much as her aggressively adventurous nature and cold-eyed business sense. She is insistent on her motherly qualities and the soothing nature of women’s hands which ‘are moulded for this work’ of healing (146). She is proud of her dress sense (66) and her decorum under trying conditions insisted upon, and her self-sacrificial virtues in the service of her sick or wounded ‘sons’ are frequently paraded: ‘I love to be of service to those who need a woman’s help’ (78). Remarriage, domesticity, children, are of little consequence in Seacole’s choice of a life of service, fame and profit. Yet for all her concern with financial advancement, Seacole insists on her status as a lady and her service as a motherly woman.

A proud creole Jamaican who will not tolerate racial denigration, a British subject who stresses her ‘yellow’ skin, she is complicately colonial. Her target audience is British, and the product she markets is her construction as a loyal British subject establishing herself in the ‘Mother Country’ and capitalising on her patriotic memoir of heroic service to the British army. For Seacole, the migration journey is an avenue to self-fulfilment — through adventure, career, fame and status, and financial gain. The West Indies, it appears, did not provide sufficient options, so she recreates herself to suit another ‘home’. For her, I suggest, the ‘unhomely’ becomes a site for exploring subject positions rarely available to women, far less black women. Like Jamaica Kincaid’s late twentieth-century novel, Lucy, Seacole’s narrative suggests the creative potential of the migration experience.

KINCAID’S “AT HOME WITH THE ‘UNHOMELY’”

Kincaid’s text also details the journey of the female migrant, but this time the new ‘home’ is the United States, where the young protagonist travels to work and study. Like all good colonials, Lucy already ‘knows’ the metropolitan environment; yet this knowledge turns out to be false. The long-desired famous buildings, important streets, spectacular bridges appear ‘ordinary, dirty, worn down from so many people entering and leaving them in real life’ (4). So Lucy begins to overlay this new world with the sights, sounds and smells of her West Indian island home. This is not simple immigrant nostalgia, for she has a profoundly ambivalent relationship with her motherland, yet she observes her new ‘home’ by filtering it through the cultural values of the old. Inevitably, the result of this multiply layered vision is continuous comparison, usually to the detriment of the United States.

Her dual consciousness is partly the result of a colonial education into imitation (of things English): as a ten-year-old girl at Queen Victoria Girl’s School at the age of ten ‘I was then at the height of my two-facedness … outside, I seemed one way, inside I was another; outside false, inside true’ (18). However, notions of true and false, appearance and reality are in fact not so simple, for the narrator’s consciousness, conditioned by an alternative Caribbean epistemological
framework is more inclusive: ‘I came from a place where there was no such thing as a “real” thing, because often what seemed to be one thing turned out to be altogether different’ (54). Lucy is referring here to the normal acceptance in Antigua of the paranormal — obeah, spirit possession, the appearance of the dead to the living. Highlighting the deceptive nature of appearances has the dual effect of relativising cultural practices and transcending binary oppositions inherent in Western metaphysics so that Lucy’s ‘simple’ narrative underscores the relativity of truth and the constructedness of perception.

However, the project founders. For Lucy sickens with disgust at the perpetration of a cycle inherently poisoned by colonial discourse, ‘a scene of conquered and conquests’ (30), within which she too is interpellated even as she tries to reverse its terms: ‘a scene of brutes masquerading as angels and angels portrayed as brutes’ (30). The thrust of Kincaid’s narrative is away from such a Manichean categorisation: Lucy refuses to be constructed as servant, but neither can she sustain the role of master. Having made a number of conquests (mainly, but not exclusively, sexual) and exploited both place and people for her own ends, Lucy comes to see that cultural contact is not necessarily synonymous with corruption, is not necessarily to be played by the master’s poisoned rules.

In fact, Lucy refuses all prescribed subject positions. She is determined to evade conventional gender roles in sexual relationships, her main concern is to evade ownership: ‘the moment he got the idea he possessed me in a certain way … was the moment I grew tired of him’ (155). She refuses to be a nurse, the nurturing female career mapped out for her; she refuses all that is ‘expected’ of her by her ladylike mother and ‘polite’ society. She rejects being placed, whether in terms of race or nationality, ‘from the islands’. The migrant condition — being unplanned, unknown, unbelonging — is necessary for the continual self construction which preoccupies Lucy; ‘I understood well that I was inventing myself’ (134). In Kincaid’s text then, Lucy finds the ‘unhomely’ moment positively empowering.

Like Seacole, Lucy comes to view her hyphenated status, the ‘betweeness’ of her situation between two worlds, as an asset. For her, the ‘unhomely’ represents
THE CANADIAN SCENE: DIONNE BRAND, SHANI MOOTOO, NALO HOPKINSON

a broader canvas on which to construct her future. Like Seacole, Lucy is centrally concerned with her own interests and is quite prepared to manipulate and exploit where necessary, as she reverses Columbus's journey in quest of the fulfillment of desire. Cynically knowing about the illusory nature of metropolitan 'superiority', Lucy nonetheless acknowledges that this journey 'back' to the centre can be potentially empowering. The reconfiguration of Caribbean women's migration stories as difficult, but ultimately liberating transformations, takes a new twist in narratives from another north American 'centre': Canada.

I conclude this survey with a few tentative remarks about the manner in which selected Caribbean-Canadian women address the issues noted in the earlier works. Do we recognise in their texts the representation of the migrant experience and the new Canadian home as a site of alienation or of potential empowerment, or indeed an amalgam of both? Of course, such a project is beset with pitfalls, for after all who constitutes 'the Caribbean-Canadian woman writer'? George Elliott Clarke's anthology, of 'African-Canadian Literature', for instance, includes writing by mixed race women who have lived most of their lives outside Canada (Olive Senior, Pamela Mordecai and Lorna Goodison), in whose work references to the new home occasionally surface, as well as by black writers such as Dionne Brand, who (like Kincaid) left the West Indies at seventeen and has been more or less resident in Canada since. Clarke himself admits the difficulty of such labels given the 'mosaic aspect of Canadian "blackness" [which] produces a palette of discourses' (xviii). The focus on Canadian 'blackness' itself presents difficulties. Writers like Brand, Claire Harris and Marlene Nourbese Philip, might be said to articulate a black nationalist perspective: as Carol Morell puts it, they all 'will assert that they speak "for" their history and "on behalf of" their people, especially women, however distant in time or place' (10). But where does this place a writer like Shani Mootoo, born in Ireland of Indo-Trinidadian parents, and raised in Trinidad before emigrating to Canada? Who are 'her' people and to what constituency should she address herself?

Leaving aside for the moment these questions of ascription, I am more interested in how such writers represent migration, cultural contact and interculturalization. Several do articulate the negative side of doubleness that is the corollary of the migration-to-centre journey. Charlotte Sturgess notes the complicated allegiances of a 'doubly displaced' post-colonial writer like Brand (201). In her collection of prose poems, No Language is Neutral, Brand 'explores the contrasting sensations and experiences of Trinidad and Toronto, nostalgia and longing to return home balanced by the realisation that now no place is home' (Morrell 22). As in Cassin's novel, several stories in Brand's collection, Sans Souci, articulate the migrant's experience of being stereotyped, marginalised, alienated and rejected. Unlike Seacole's delicate allusions to the English racism, Brand depicts the actuality of the simmering, unarticulated rage felt by the outsiders:
To the elevator. She would be safe among the other passengers. Finally, she met the elevator, then ‘Nigger whore!’ a rough voice behind yelled hoarsely. She kept walking, slightly stumbling onto the clicking stairs. ‘Whore! Nigger! Whore!’ His voice sounded as if her was cleaning phlegm from the bottom of his throat. ‘Nigger whore!’ She placed herself among the others, climbing the elevator. They were silent. She, trying to hide, to be invisible … she saw the crowd, some smiling at the obscene cough, others looking straight ahead. (‘Train to Montreal’ 27)

For Brand’s female narrators, the sense of unbelonging and the inability to connect to or in the new city is reminiscent of Kincaid’s Lucy and for both writers the strategy of overlaying Caribbean sounds, smells and tastes onto the northern present, conveys the peculiarly split consciousness of the unhomely migrant. Like Lucy, Brand’s protagonists experience the urban landscape of the centre as physically hostile and emotionally debilitating. As in the texts by Cassin and Kincaid, the migrant women counter it with hoarded memories of home, comparing the natural environment of the centre to the Caribbean home and assertively preferring the latter:

The city was claustrophobic. She felt land-locked. Particularly on humid days in the summer. She wanted to rush to the beach. But not the lake. It lay stagnant and saltless at the bottom of the city. She needed a place of water which led out, the vast ocean, salty and burning on the eyes. The feel of the salt, blue and moving water, rushing past her ears and jostling her body, cleaning it, coming up a different person every time she dove through a curling wave…. Suddenly every two years she felt like leaving, going to dive into the ocean just once. (‘No Rinsed Blue Sky, No Red Flower Fences’ 87)

The dysfunctional urban centre recurs in Nalo Hopkinson’s Brown Girl in the Ring. Another Trinidadian/Canadian, Hopkinson’s ‘speculative fiction’ imagines Toronto, ‘at the moment of inner-city break-down, when the streets have been left to their remaining (sub-culture) inhabitants, while everyone who is able to has moved to the suburbs … a futuristic scenario already being realised in the inner urban conditions of the present moment’ (Bryce n.p.).

Living in between has its price. In an interview with Frank Birbalsingh, Brand somewhat bleakly situates herself permanently between her old and new worlds: ‘I finally decided that I don’t live there [Trinidad], and in some ways I don’t live here [Toronto] either; so I live between here and there’ (122). Not all women can deal with this unhomeliness. Cassin’s Morea flies England to die in hiding; in the Canadian context, madness is another escape, as in Mordecai’s poetic evocation of an elderly black woman on a Toronto subway (‘Serafina’ 87)

It can silence the writer’s voice by confining her within barren stereotypes, as vitriolically explored in Goodison’s witty poem ‘Lush’:

Perhaps if you remain you will become civilised, detached, refined, your words pruned of lush.
Lush is an indictment in this lean place
By contrast, the lesbians of ‘Out on Main Street’, are very much ‘out’ in their Canadian context. What to do then with the bush and jungle sprouting from your pen? (91)

On the other hand, consider Kincaid’s admission in an interview (Birbalsingh): “When you are in America, you can invent yourself” (139). In Lucy as in Seacole’s Adventures, the migration journey can involve a creative component; can provide new sites for empowering self-constructions, the assumption of new — and multiple — subject positions. It is here in the new ‘home’ that Brand, too, rehearses other constructions of femininity. For Birbalsingh Brand’s portrayal of diaspora women is ‘new; it doesn’t exist in previous West Indian writing: the kind of women who drink, socialise openly and are completely frank about their sexuality’ (134). While Kincaid’s Lucy is quite open about her heterosexual conquests, what Brand explores is an alternative sexuality: ‘I felt the unordinary romance of women who love women for the first time’ (1997 124). Perhaps the more cosmopolitan climate of the metropole, allows such frank erotic language to be spoken? Within vociferously homophobic Caribbean societies, West Indian women writers have until recently tended to treat female sexuality with reticence and maintained a deafening silence on the issue of lesbianism. One can posit then that the encounter with the Canadian ‘centre’ both forces into being and enables awareness of the empowering potential of the multiple subject positions that Brand embraces as ‘a Trinidadian Canadian black lesbian feminist’ (Sturgess 202).

While Brand focuses on the connections between women of ‘African’ descent, Shani Mootoo’s collection of stories, Out on Main Street, deal with Indo-Caribbean women. Like the distinction in Cassin’s text between English people and Caribbean creoles of English descent, one of Mootoo’s themes is the cultural distance between Indians from the subcontinent and those who have been creolised in the West Indies. Several stories in this collection also highlight different attitudes to female sexuality in the West Indies and in Canada; compare for example, the title story and ‘Lemon Scent’. In the latter (intensely erotic) story, two Trinidadian women pursue a passionate love affair under the jealous eye of Kamini’s husband. Worried about his wife’s depression, the husband solicits Anita’s help, but Kamini’s sensual preparations for Anita’s visit alert his suspicions and he warns his wife: “ ‘You know, she might be one of those types who likes only women.’ … With his lips almost against hers he whispers, “If I ever find out that you two have slept together I will kill you both” ’ (28). Hence, even as they make love in a paradisal tropical setting, Kamini ‘always parts the branches and pensively looks over at the house’ (29); trapped by fear of violence intrinsic to the heterosexual marriage she dare not leave, Kamini must publicly disguise and deny this part of her life.

By contrast, the lesbians of ‘Out on Main Street’, are very much ‘out’ in their Canadian context:
The setting is explicitly Canadian urban and recognisably contemporary, but the spirits; and the CN Tower, where criminal drug lord Rudy rules by terror and Jeanne, the heroine's grandmother, performs her ceremonies of invocation of the balm-yard and Necropolis where Gros- of conventional religious references. The novel is set in a kind of post-apocalypse of Caribbean texts.2 'sci-fi' novels do not fit into any pre-existing patterns within the Caribbean literary tradition, although Hopkinson clearly signals her debt to oral and written speech style and the polyvocality that many critics have praised in the work of Caribbean-Canadian women writers. Nalo Hopkinson's work is an interesting example, in that it does not merely play with Caribbean language varieties, but casually breaks down all kinds of literary expectations and conventions. Her 'sci-fi' novels do not fit into any pre-existing patterns within the Caribbean literary tradition, although Hopkinson clearly signals her debt to oral and written Caribbean texts.3

In what amounts to a battle of good versus evil, the text refuses expectations of conventional religious references. The novel is set in a kind of post-apocalypse Toronto, with two centres of power: the balm-yard and Necropolis where Gros-Jeanne, the heroine's grandmother, performs her ceremonies of invocation of the spirits; and the CN Tower, where criminal drug lord Rudy rules by terror and draws power from sadistic rituals which are a sinister parody of the grandmother's. The setting is explicitly Canadian urban and recognisably contemporary, but the sense of lesbians who are instantly recognisable. Indeed, Mootoo highlights the deliberate cues given by these women to signify their difference: 'I recognised the shortness of hair, the breastlessness of shirt, the Birkenstocks and grey socks' which signal 'family' (113). Such recognition, in contrast to the West Indian silencing, prohibition and censure of alternative sexual preferences, is the main reason that a character gives for fleeing Trinidad — for choosing the migration journey:

she pack up and take off like a jet plane so she could live without people only shoo-shooing behind she back…. 'But A A! Yuh ain’t hear de goods 'bout John Mahase daughter, gyurl! … Everybody talking 'bout she. Hear dis, nah! Yuh ever see she wear a dress? Yes! Doh look at mih so. Yuh reading mih right!' (47)

I am suggesting then, that just as Seacole’s and Kincaid’s narratives explore the condition of exile in terms of new possibilities of fulfilment for women outside the restrictive gender and sexual roles ingrained in Caribbean mainstream and popular culture, so Canadian-Caribbean writers like Brand and Mootoo are able in their fictions to revel in unfixing sexual identities and so to find in the 'unhomy' a site of liberation.

Additionally, there is another kind of liberation at work here: the liberation of language and narrative from traditional forms and boundaries. The quotations from Mootoo suggest just a sample of the exciting experiments with ranges of speech style and the polyvocality that many critics have praised in the work of Caribbean-Canadian women writers. Nalo Hopkinson’s work is an interesting example, in that it does not merely play with Caribbean language varieties, but casually breaks down all kinds of literary expectations and conventions. Her 'sci-fi' novels do not fit into any pre-existing patterns within the Caribbean literary tradition, although Hopkinson clearly signals her debt to oral and written Caribbean texts.4

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Yuh see, Janet pretty fish so! And I doh like de way men does look at she, as if because she earing jeans and T-shirt and high-heel shoe and make-up and have long hair loose … dat she easy…. Dat kind a thing always make me want to put mih arm around she waist like, she is my woman, take you eyes off she! (48)

Despite social wariness about transgressions of dominant codes of femininity, these women are constructed as unabashed about their sexuality, and to some extent this confidence comes from solidarity in the metropole with a community of lesbians who are instantly recognisable. Indeed, Mootoo highlights the deliberate cues given by these women to signify their difference: 'I recognised the shortness of hair, the breastlessness of shirt, the Birkenstocks and grey socks' which signal 'family' (113). Such recognition, in contrast to the West Indian silencing, prohibition and censure of alternative sexual preferences, is the main reason that a character gives for fleeing Trinidad — for choosing the migration journey:

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spiritual belief system and iconography derive from the Caribbean. The landscape of the novel is the familiar Toronto space with all its landmarks, but the text undermines the ‘real’ — as in Kincaid’s *Lucy* — by dispensing with fixed boundaries between living and dead, body and spirit. What Hopkinson is doing here, in her own way, is what writers like Selvon did in *The Lonely Londoners* and Kincaid does in *Lucy*: overlaying West Indian cultural markers onto the northern landscape, a kind of creolisation of the inhospitable new home.

It seems almost trite to observe that patterns offered in narratives of our past can suggest guidelines for our more ‘global’ future. Mary Seacole, Frieda Cassin and, more recently, Jean Rhys, Jamaica Kincaid, Dionne Brand, Shani Mootoo and Nalo Hopkinson have all grappled in their texts with responses to the ‘unhomeliness’ of the migrant condition, the marginalisation and stereotyping of the new arrivant, and the different types of distrust and rejection she encounters. In most cases, the writer discovers new life possibilities for Caribbean women within the centre. Their work addresses still crucial issues such as the inclusive/exclusive nature of constructions of West Indian identity and belonging, and demonstrates how varied are the literary responses to women’s displacement and their desire to find a place of their own. Writers like Kincaid, Brand, Mootoo and Hopkinson offer new kinds of fiction and new ways of thinking about home and the unhomely. Belonging to the Caribbean in many ways, their exciting and increasingly sophisticated narratives also embrace India, England, the United States and Canada, and feature central characters who (continue to) refuse to be bound by borders.

### NOTES

1. Shani Mootoo’s *Cereus Blooms at Night*, and Patricia Powell’s *A Small Gathering of Bones*, provide chilling testimony. Significantly, both writers live and are published outside the West Indies.

2. The title of *Brown Girl in the Ring* comes from the refrain of a popular ring game, and the narrative blends traditional sayings (‘When horse dead, cow get fat’ 37), songs, call-and-response chant and popular mythology. Additionally, Hopkinson draws on Derek Walcott’s play, *Ti-Jean and His Brothers* (itself built around a well-known folktale) for the plot of the third and youngest child challenging and triumphing over a devilish opponent.

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Like many writers, Marlene Nourbese Philip is preoccupied with the limitations of language: how to make words convey the inexpressible, that which is beyond language. In her book *Looking For Livingstone* she writes of silence:

Single
Solitary
Unitary

is it?
this absence
of speech
Or legion—
wedged
In the between of words
A presence
absent the touch
the tarnish
in power
in conquest
Silence
Trappist
Celibate
seeking
The absolute
in Virgin
Whole (56)

T.S. Eliot describes the difficulties words pose for a writer.

Words stain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still. (1963a V, ll. 13–17)

Despite their unsatisfactoriness, however, writers depend on words to communicate. As Eliot’s character, Sweeny, declares: ‘I gotta use words when I talk to you’ (1963c 135). But, for Philip, a black woman raised in the Caribbean and currently living in Canada, the problem is greatly compounded. Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, has chosen to abandon English and write in his own
tongue, Gikuyu, but Philip has no such option. As part of the African diaspora, which violently displaced her ancestors into New World slavery, she has no language or culture to truly call her own. In her essay ‘A Long-Memoried Woman’ she writes:

The policy of all slave-holding nations was to wipe clean the mind of the African slave; how else prevent rebellion, ensure passive workers and guarantee good Christians? The effect of this policy was the separation, wherever possible, of African slaves from others of the same linguistic groups. Slave-owners prohibited and punished the expression of African culture, language, music, religion, or dress, thereby denying any validity to the African world view. (56)

In both her poetry and prose she describes how Africans ‘in the vortex of New World slavery’ re-shaped and restructured the new language forced upon them.

Nouns became strangers to verbs and vice versa; tonal accentuation took the place of several words at a time; rhythms held sway. Many of these ‘techniques’ are rooted in African languages; their collective impact on the English language would result in the latter being, at times unrecognizable as English. Bad English, Broken English. Patois. Dialect. (1985 17)

Such subversion of linguistic correctness, which also attracts official condemnation, represents a kind of triumph.

(jerk it
dove it
stew it
cook it
down
run it down slow
run it down tender
till it come to do the bid in
we
this chattel language
babu english
slave idiom
nigger vernacular
coolie pidgin
wog pronunciation
(I say old chap how goes it, what ho?)
this lingua franca
arrrrrrrrgot of a blasted soul. (1989 73)

For a writer, West Indian English is a vital resource, but it also involves issues of readership.

If you work entirely in nation language or the Caribbean demotic of English you do, to a large degree, restrict your audience to those familiar enough with it; if you move
to standard English you lose much of that audience and, along with loss, an understanding of many of the traditions, history and culture which contextualise your work. (1992 37)

In the same essay Philip imagines her inspiration and her readership embodied in two archetypal figures standing one behind each shoulder. John-from-Sussex — male, white and Oxford-educated — represents white colonial tradition and the education it imparted. The other archetype is an old black woman, Abiswa, about whom she knows too little but in whose wisdom she seeks to participate, symbolising the African-Caribbean context ignored in her colonial education.

While she aims to promote dialogue between these archetypal figures, Philip also demonstrates how oppression of women, Africans and other groups is built into the English language:

it bound the foot
sealed the vagina
excised the clitoris
set fire to the bride
the temple dance was no more
in the banish of magic
the witch burned. (1991 13)

Encoded within language, racial discrimination is constantly perpetuated.

mind and body concentrate
the confusion of centuries that passes
as the word
kinks hair
thickens lips
designs prognathous jaws
shrinks the brain
to unleash the promise
in ugly
the absent in image. (1989 78)

Paradoxically, this alien language of oppression is the only one available to celebrate African beauty, as Philip indicates in her poem ‘Meditations on the Declension of Beauty by the Girl with the Flying Cheek-bones’.

In whose language
Girl with the flying cheek-bones
She is
I am
Woman with the behind that drives men mad
And if not in yours
Where is the woman with a nose broad
As her strength
If not in yours
In whose language
Is the man with the full-moon lips
Carrying the midnight of colour
Split by the stars — a simile
If not in yours (1989 52)

While the same language can be used to exalt and liberate those it oppresses, it cannot be freed of its complicity with the cruelty and oppression of colonialism, an idea Philip explores through images of mother and father tongue.

English
is my mother tongue.
A mother tongue is not
not a foreign lan lan lang
language
— a foreign anguish.

English is my father tongue.
A father tongue is
a foreign language,
therefore English is
not a mother tongue.

What is my mother

— my mammy tongue
— my mummy tongue
— my momsy tongue
— my modder tongue
— my ma tongue? (1989 56)

Marlene Philip goes on to explore further the difficulties inherent in using language in her book *Looking For Livingstone*, which she herself refers to as a book of poetry, but which the blurb on one of her other books describes as a novel. *Looking For Livingstone* deliberately unsettles genres and genre expectations. Prose and poetry commingle, as in her earlier book, *She Tries Her Tongue*, and the narrative, which resembles a fable, also evokes books of travel exploration, particularly those of the nineteenth century where authors describe hazardous journeys in supposedly exotic regions and proclaim their so-called ‘discovery’ of landscape features and groups of people hitherto unknown to Europeans. As its subtitle, *An Odyssey of Silence*, suggests, Philip’s book, while quite brief, also has affinities with epic narrative. Sections of it are dated like journal entries, but the time-frame is enormous and fantastical. Entries are headed:

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THE FIRST AND LAST DAY OF THE MONTH OF NEW MOONS
(OTHERWISE KNOWN AS THE LAST AND FIRST MONTH) IN THE FIRST YEAR OF OUR WORD, 0300 HOURS’ (7) or ‘THE SIXTH DAY OF THE HUNDREDTH MONTH IN THE SIX BILLIONTH YEAR OF OUR WORD, 5000 HOURS’ (41). Time is portrayed as malleable since the standard ways of reckoning its passing become irrelevant when measuring the psychological and spiritual journey Philip chronicles here.

On her journey the Traveller meets and lives among different groups of people. Each group’s name is an anagram of the word silence, except for one, the CESLIENS, whose name represents the plural, silences. The first group, the ECNELIS, explains the paradoxical relationship between words and silences by outlining two sets of conflicting beliefs. One is that ‘God first created silence: whole, indivisible, complete’ and the Fall occurred when ‘man and woman lay down together and between them created the first word’ (11). God, much displeased, cursed the world with words so that human beings must continually struggle to return to silence. The other belief is that God’s first act was to create the word ‘primary and indispensable’ and its adherents accept the power of words ‘to live by and die, and more than anything else to banish silence’ (11). Every hundred years the ECNELIS go to war with a neighbouring people the SINCEEL, ‘those whose beliefs differ from ours about the primacy of words or silence’ and the loser is condemned for the next century to follow the winner’s beliefs: ‘where there was silence, the winner imposes the word; where the word, silence’ (12).

Unwilling to be involved in a war, the Traveller leaves to continue her journey after being told, rather bafflingly by the ECNELIS women, that she will recognise the goal of her journey as soon as she sees it.
Her next sojourn is with the LENSECI who live in an environment so harsh that all their energies are devoted to subsistence farming with no time to debate metaphysical questions: 'They were kind to me, but expected I would earn my keep, so every morning before the sun was up, I left with the women for the fields to return exhausted some twelve hours later' (14). While there, however, she sees a brief, ghostly vision of Dr Livingstone himself and recognises that he is the object of her quest. Although the apparition quickly fades, Livingstone continues to haunt the Traveller’s dreams. Philip represents him as an embodiment of British colonial agency and power, and given the man’s mythic status in his own lifetime and beyond, he fits most appropriately into the narrative fable she creates.

In his own day Livingstone generated a multitude of words through his books and those written about him. Many of the latter were close to hagiography for, in John MacKenzie’s words, ‘He became a Protestant saint whose cult operated at a variety of different levels, imperial, British and Scottish’ (25). To the British public, he was a hero of empire promising to open up new territories in Africa while arguing that Christianity must be yoked with commerce. ‘Commerce and Christianity he told numerous audiences, together become civilisation’, a doctrine highly comforting to British industrialists (Jeal 165). Livingstone was an indomitable traveller whose African journeys reveal astounding stamina and determination, though his claims to be the first European to undertake many of them are open to question, just as his missionary activities, from which his moral and spiritual authority derived, actually amounted to very little. He was a remarkable but deeply flawed human being. Tim Jeal, whose biography Livingstone Philip draws upon in writing her own book, sums up the man’s contradictions.

He failed as a conventional missionary, making but one convert, who subsequently lapsed. He failed as the promoter of other men’s missionary efforts (the two missions that went to Africa at his behest ended in fiasco and heavy loss of life). His first great journey across Africa from coast to coast was an outstanding achievement, but even this was partially marred by his discovery that Portuguese and Arab traders had already reached the centre of the continent. His subsequent return to the Zambesi, as the leader of a government-sponsored expedition, was disastrous…. Livingstone was considered by many to be the greatest geographer of his age, yet a series of miscalculations deceived him into believing that he had found the source of the Nile when he was in fact on the upper Congo. There were other failures too: failure as a husband and a father, failure to persuade the British Government to advance into Africa — yet, almost unbelievably, failures that did nothing to impair his influence, for Livingstone’s ideas, both original and inherited, were to change the way Europeans viewed Africans and Africa itself. (1–2)

The distrust of words shown by the Traveller in Marlene Philip’s Looking For Livingstone is thoroughly vindicated when one discovers how truth was...
massaged and manipulated in so much that was written by and about the historical Livingstone. Many who wrote about him were masters of ‘spin’. After Livingstone’s death, Horace Waller, an Anglican clergyman who had briefly been a fellow missionary in Africa, edited his last journals for publication in 1874, carefully selecting from the original material and even in some cases rewriting it. The explorer’s rancorous and paranoid comments were excised along with any criticisms of public figures, such as Prince Albert, to ensure ‘that it was the saintly figure who emerged from the journals rather than the weary traveller with the very human foibles’ (MacKenzie 28). Looking For Livingstone both draws on and unlocks a key feature of the Livingstone myth — the famous meeting at Uju in 1871 with Henry Morton Stanley who had been sent there by James Gordon Bennett, owner and editor of the New York Herald, to obtain what was to be the paper’s biggest scoop. In addition to newspaper articles, Stanley published his book, How I Found Livingstone, which was reprinted many times, with innumerable copies handed out over decades as Sunday School prizes. Philip aims to reveal Livingstone the flawed human being so long concealed by the hagiography of the saintly explorer.

Like Stanley, Philip’s Traveller also aims to discover and meet with the now dead Livingstone and record the meeting for future generations: ‘I’m off to the interior or perish, but I seem to be following you — in your footsteps — or is it you who follows me — each becoming a mirage of the other. I am determined to cure myself of you, Dr Livingstone’ (27). First, however, she must discover silence, her own silence in particular. After leaving the LENSECI she lives among the SCENILE who set her to transcribe books in their library and demand she answer a number of questions including ‘Why was Dr Livingstone buried at Westminster Abbey?’ (19) to which she replies, ‘He discovered silence — my silence — discovered it, owned, possessed it like it never was possessed before’ (20). Colonisation silenced Africans by attempting to subsume and possess their inner being, a process the traveller dreams about as a monstrous copulation: ‘I SILENCE’ (25). The next group she encounters are the CESLIENS who, although able to speak, refuse to do so. They instruct her in silence.

Nothing in nature is silent, they taught me, naturally silent, that is. Everything has its own sound, speech, or language, even if it is only the language of silence (there I go again — “even if”), and if you were willing to learn the sound of what appeared to be silence, you understood then that the word was but another sound — of silence. (35)

Travelling further, she arrives in the land of the CLEENIS who insist she spend time in the sweat lodge where all words leave her except three she has chosen before entering, ‘Birth’, ‘Death’ and ‘Silence’.

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"Looking For Livingstone" is a work of fiction. The names, characters, and events portrayed in the text are the author's creation and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or deceased, is entirely coincidental.
That was all I had — birth, death, and in between silence — all I could call my own — my birth, my death, and most of all, my silence. My words were not really mine — bought, owned and stolen as they were by others. But silence! — such devalued coinage to some — no one cared about it and it was all mine. (43)

The final territory the Traveller visits before encountering Livingstone is NEECLIS, a land of needlewomen and weavers highly skilled in all the arts of living: ‘The NEECLIS knew well how to feed and nourish the senses, all the senses; they had made an art of it, and willingly shared everything with me’ (48). Although enjoying the lush, opulent environment in this world of artists who ‘spend long hours discussing problems of aesthetics — debating designs and pattern, the weight of wool, the right colours of threads and yarns’ (48), the Traveller feels an inner stirring to resume her quest; but before she has a chance, the NEECLIS imprison her ‘in a huge room ablaze with coloured fabric and yarn’ (51), insisting she first weave a tapestry and piece together the quilt of her silence.

Learning that word and silence are two strands, each as important as the other, which, like warp and weft, must be separated in order to make anything of them, the Traveller first weaves a tapestry, then pieces together a quilt of her many silences ‘held together by the most invisible of stitches — the invisible but necessary word’ (55).

The editors of Out of the Kumbla, an anthology of Caribbean women’s writing, draw on textile metaphor to illuminate literary activity, observing that: ‘Caribbean women’s texts are also engaged in the process of radical quilted narrative, braided or woven’. They go on to explain that ‘quilted is posed as a revision of “fragmented” for those writers must piece together a new and distinctive vision’ (Davies and Fido 6). Although African American women proved highly skilled at the task, quilting, like the English language, was imposed on them by white oppressors. A quilt is literally a silent form of communication, but in Looking For Livingstone the Traveller’s quilt not only figures within the text Phillip writes, but the text is also the quilt’s equivalent. Just as the black quilter uses a process once imposed on her by white agency, so the writer must express her silence, her innermost self and vision of the world not only in words but through the language of the oppressor.

Carrying her quilt, the Traveller continues her quest and comes across the Museum of Silence ‘erected to house the many and varied silences of different peoples’ (57, among them some groups she has already visited. When she demands the silences be returned to their owners, the museum proprietors initial response...
is one of smiling incomprehension. The Traveller’s pleas become increasingly impassioned. The silence ‘was mine — ours — I challenged, to do with as we pleased — to destroy if we so wanted’ (57). The proprietors make the usual justifications, claiming they are preserving what they have gathered: ‘They told me the silences were best kept where they could be labelled, annotated, dated, catalogued…. It was all there in carefully regulated, climate-controlled rooms’ (57). The Traveller continues her argument: ‘Remove a thing — a person — from its source … from where it belongs naturally, and it will lose meaning — our silence has lost all meaning’ (58). However, the proprietors merely laugh as she condemns them to an eternity of ‘Words! Words! Words!’. Silence represents the state to which colonialism has reduced native peoples, as well as their essential inner being which colonisers have failed to recognise or understand. It is a pathway to each individual’s inner depths and a mode of resistance, that can never be mastered through linguistic dominance.

As I walked away I remembered the CESLIENS — they had kept and cherished their Silence — given up the word and kept their Silence. They were the richer for it. None of their silence was on display in the Museum of Silence. (58)

As her meeting with Livingstone approaches, the Traveller considers how to greet him. Stanley’s historical encounter was memorialised by his question, ‘Dr Livingstone, I presume?’ which, even in its own day, was considered somewhat ridiculous.

The words Stanley had hoped would lend dignity to a solemn occasion were later hailed with explosions of laughter and disbelief. They were used in music-hall burlesques; friends or strangers greeted other substituting their own names for Livingstone’s: ‘Dr Livingstone, I presume?’ one dummy asked of another in a fashion plate in the October 1872 issue of Tailor and Cutter. (Jeal 343)

Philip’s traveller rehearses a number of possible greetings.

‘Hello there, Mr Livingstone; ‘Good day to you, Sir’, ‘Well, fancy meeting you’; ‘Good to see you, you old bugger.’ — they all sounded forced. Would I be cool enough to give him a first rate black hand shake and say, ‘Yo there, Livy baby, my man, my main man!’? (60)

When they do finally meet, she asks, ‘You’re new here, aren’t you?’ (61), and keeps on addressing him as ‘Livingstone-I-presume’. As they converse, she cites examples of his presumption, reminding him that his geographical ‘discoveries’ were well known to people already living there and that his journeys throughout the continent were possible only because of the African guides and porters who accompanied him as servants. She particularly challenges Livingstone over the supposed ‘fact’ that he discovered and named Victoria Falls, pointing out that it already had a name, ‘Mosioaatunya or The Smoke That Thunders’, and that, “You and your supporters, your nation of liars, had the power to change a lie into a fact” (68).
The Livingstone whom the Traveller meets is a pathetic figure: ‘This old white man — tall, gaunt — my nemesis — half-blind, bronzed by the African sun, the indiscriminate African sun — malarial, sick or crazy — it was all the same’ (61); but, as the embodiment of white power, authority and supremacy imposed on Africa through imperialism, he is still a menace. The Traveller responds to his boast that he was called ‘the foe of darkness’ with ‘And what a foe you were’, explaining, ‘let’s say the darkness wasn’t all out there — in the “dark continent”. You and your kind carried their own dark continents within them’ (66). Nevertheless, the meeting between Livingstone and the Traveller proceeds fairly amicably. Over coffee and brandy they continue the debate about words and silence which forms the main theme of the book while sitting side by side on the Traveller’s quilt, photographed by one of Livingstone’s servants with a polaroid camera she has acquired on her journey. As darkness falls, Livingstone, though still present, becomes invisible and silence takes over.

I reached out my hand felt the evidence of SILENCE all around me original primal alpha and omega and forever through its blackness I touched something warm familiar like my own hand human something I could not see in the SILENCE reaching out through the SILENCE of space the SILENCE of time through the silence of SILENCE I touched it his hand held it his hand and the SILENCE. I surrendered to the SILENCE within. (75)

By creating a setting where some form of reconciliation might just be possible, darkness and silence obliterate the difference between white man and black woman. Only in the work of art Philip has created can these two figures, separated by history, race, colour and gender, take each other’s hand and engage meaningfully with one another. The quilt of the black woman’s silence, stitched together with words becomes the symbol of their meeting. Looking For Livingstone, however, ends with a rather wry epilogue entitled ‘Author’s Note’ which reads like a scholarly commentary.

A record of the documents and records of The Traveller, which form the basis of this work, are bound in two volumes, and on deposit at the Bodleian Library, Oxford University. The leather-bound books are burgundy coloured, hand-sewn and of legal size — 8 1/2 by 14 inches. Embossed in gold in the centre of each cover are the words: ‘Diary of a Traveller’. These words are repeated on the flyleaf in a round, strong hand in an ink which is quite faded. Also on each cover, some two inches above the lower edge, and also embossed in gold, are the words ‘Volume I’ and ‘Volume II’; these words appear on the spines of the books as well. (np)

The books’ physical appearance is considered more important than their content. We are told that the second volume contains three faded photographs one of which ‘is of two people, one white, the other black, both seated on what appears to be a colourful rug or blanket. A fire burns to their right … they are identified as Dr. David Livingstone and The Traveller’ (np). According to this official description, a note by the author on the last page of volume two states that these

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books are merely a facsimile and that she has given her original diaries and maps to the CESLIENS ‘since they were the only ones who kept their Silence’. But the voice of what is supposedly authoritative, male, white scholarship has the last word, appropriating the Traveller’s silence.

Contrary to the statement on the last page of Volume II, these volumes comprise the only and original copy of the Diary of a Traveller. — William D. Boyd, Chief Archivist and Librarian

This constitutes a warning which places literary conferences, and particularly anyone giving a paper on Marlene Nourbese Philip in a most invidious position, for which the only solution is silence.

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RHONA HAMMOND

Reappraising ‘Value Judgements on Art and the Question of Macho Attitudes: The Case of Derek Walcott’ by Elaine Savory Fido

It is as if woman has little reality in Walcott’s imagination, and that there is little between romanticism on the one hand and appalled rejection on the other in her treatment in his works. (Savory Fido 1986)

Elaine Savory Fido’s 1986 article entitled ‘Value Judgements on Art and the Question of Macho Attitudes: The Case of Derek Walcott’ which appeared in the Journal of Commonwealth Literature has cast a long shadow. Other critics had already remarked briefly on Walcott’s attitudes towards women but not as strongly or clearly or with as much supporting evidence as Savory Fido did in this article. Savory Fido argued that ‘not only is the work of Derek Walcott … inclusive of strong prejudices about women but that these are often associated with weakening of power in his writing’ (108). She went on to acknowledge that whilst Walcott writes about:

racism, colonialism and the situation of the poor masses with intelligence, anger and originality … his treatment of women is full of clichés, stereotypes and negativity. I shall seek to show how some of his worst writing is associated with these portraits of women…. (110)

Savory Fido’s position was, in essence, that if artists like Walcott displayed a negative attitude towards women in their poetry, then this would reinforce negative attitudes towards women in the wider community. She struck a balance, acknowledging Walcott’s achievements whilst arguing that this flaw diminished them to some extent. Savory Fido felt that although these attitudes may be widespread throughout the culture of the islands and reflective of the society from which Walcott comes, these views are particularly reinforced when a major talent such as Walcott repeats them. Since 1986, Walcott has become a Nobel Laureate and local hero. The main square in Castries has been named after him and an annual festival constituted in his honour. Walcott’s cultural authority has increased considerably.

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Savory Fido’s contention that the artist has a responsibility to resist the dominant thinking is a matter of concern because such an expectation imposes restrictions on Walcott’s treatment of the women of the Caribbean and dictates how they should be represented. This seems to be inherently dangerous territory, bordering on the intentional fallacy (wherein the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a literary work). Furthermore it raises the question of what should be expected of Walcott and what does he himself expect from his own writing. His views on the role of the poet as a politician or revolutionary have changed over time but he has certainly not claimed to be a feminist. Savory Fido partially acknowledges this flaw in her approach but she continues to insist that it is a reasonable requirement:

Racism, class prejudice, sexism and colonialist attitudes are endemic in so many cultures that it might seem unfair to ask that writers control/eliminate them in themselves, but that is indeed the issue as we continue to look to serious art for moral sensitivity and the expansion of our conceptual horizons. (110)

Savory Fido relied on the work of Hugo Meynell to provide her with a framework to link the aesthetic and the moral. Savory Fido said that: ‘What I suggest in this paper is that relative technical incompetence (or alternatively, aesthetic limitation, over-control or linguistic evasion) arises out of limitations of perception as much as of the artist’s talent and training’ (110–11). So in other words, Savory Fido is arguing that because Walcott fails to deeply engage with the lives and complexities of his female characters, he fails to appreciate them fully and this weakness is associated with technically inferior poetry.

Subsequent book length studies of Walcott — particularly those by Terada, Thieme and Hamner — have tended to provide general insights and have not adopted explicit feminist readings. Bruce King’s biography provided some of the clearest biographical evidence and comment on Walcott’s idealisation of his mother and his troubled relationships with women including the allegations of sexual harassment which have been levelled against him three times since the 1980s (414–16, 539, 594–96).

I would suggest that there are three main reasons why the question of Walcott’s representations of women have not been analysed as comprehensively as they might. Firstly, following the critical impact of Savory Fido’s articles (Fido 1985 and Savory Fido 1986), and as discussed by Dennis Walder, Walcott’s attitude towards women was assumed to be obvious and that ground was deemed to have been covered. Secondly, these are difficult subjects for those critics who admire his work if not his prejudices; and finally, most studies of Walcott’s work have adopted post-colonialism as their theoretical framework of choice and within those terms they have either mentioned gender only briefly or they have deliberately chosen to focus more heavily on race, class and the effects of colonial history.
Setting aside the dangerous question of intent and concentrating on the poetry and its potential effects, I wish to focus on Savory Fido’s approach and its implications for and relevance to more recent works by Walcott. Specifically, do his more recent poems display this ‘strong prejudice’ against women and is it associated with ‘weakened power’? Savory Fido dismissed the two collections that in 1986 were his most recent — The Fortunate Traveller (1982) and Midsummer (1984) — describing them as ‘disappointing’ (111). Instead she chose to focus on earlier Walcott poems. Although selectivity is generally necessary in a paper on Walcott because the body of work is so large, it is important when making a selection to be aware of changes in Walcott’s approach and circumstances and to contextualise his work as much as possible. Bearing in mind Savory Fido’s analysis and argument, this essay will concentrate on two of Walcott’s major publications since then — The Arkansas Testament (1987) and Omeros (1990) — and the comments of selected critics since 1986 in order to determine if Savory Fido’s diagnosis of ‘strong prejudice’ and ‘weakened power’ is appropriate.

A test for latent misogyny in the later works, for that is the essence of the charge made by Savory Fido, would be to establish whether or not his treatment of women is any more negative, stereotypical and clichéd than his handling of the fishermen, taxi/transport drivers and retired sergeant-majors of The Arkansas Testament and Omeros.

It is worth noting from the outset that despite the strong male characters described by Savory Fido, and several of her examples are drawn from Walcott’s drama, Walcott has never been particularly interested in the realistic representation of people. Savory Fido said that ‘his treatment of women is full of clichés, stereotypes and negativity’ (110) but this is also true of many of his male characters. There are several versions in his work of his own experiences as a poet and those immediately close to him such as Anna and Gregorias in Another Life (1973). When he writes his version of Michael Manley in ‘The Star-Apple Kingdom’ (Collected Poems 383–95) and his mother in ‘The Bounty’ (The Bounty 1997) the central characters are neither described in detail nor allowed to speak for themselves. Walcott’s local fishermen and foresters, like the ones in ‘The Whilk Gatherers’ (The Arkansas Testament 36), Achille and Hector and their friends from Omeros, quickly become clichéd and stereotypical. Limited actions and the sketched perceptions of the poet are enough for Walcott’s general portraits so it seems to be unreasonable to expect much more when he comes to discuss women specifically.

For example, Major Plunkett’s attack on the members of the local expatriate Club in Omeros is laden with stereotypes, clichés and negativity. In Omeros, Walcott’s longest work to date, a poem whose epic status has been widely debated, he describes a group of people living in and around a village on the coast of St Lucia. There are fishermen (Achille, Hector and Philoctete) and a beautiful local
woman called Helen. There are also the Plunketts, an elderly, retired couple. She is Irish and he is English and together they run a pig farm in the hills. Major Plunkett is a cliché himself, with his old army khaki shorts and his blustering manner of speech, but he is not so predictable as to feel at home in the club:

He had resigned from that haunt of middle-clarse farts, an old club with more pompous airs than any sea could find, a replica of the Raj, with gins-and-tonic from black, white-jacketed servitors whose sonic judgement couldn't distinguish a second-hand-car salesman from Manchester from the phony pukka tones of ex-patriates. 

... surprised by servants, outpricing their own value and their red-kneed wives with accents like cutlery spilled from a drawer… (25–6)

You could almost be reading Burmese Days by George Orwell. The target is an old one for Walcott; he has previously explored similar themes in ‘A Country Club Romance’ from the early collection In a Green Night (31–2) and that poem started life in public as ‘Margaret Verlieu Dies’ in Poems (1951.). The Major is a stereotype, his sense of alienation from a changing world is a cliché and although he is generally rendered in a positive light his prejudices and habits remain intact. The attacks on expatriate wives, mocking their accents and their pretension, are similarly stereotypical and class-driven as much as they are born out of race or gender prejudices. Major Plunkett is not very original and although Walcott is ultimately sympathetic to this character nevertheless Plunkett reveals prejudices against the white landowners on the island.

Another example of a deliberately stereotypical figure — deliberate in the sense that Walcott chooses to depict her in this manner — is the character of Catherine Weldon in Omeros which is set in North America around the time of the Ghost Dance in 1870 when the Native American tribes west of the Rockies experienced a religious ‘revival’ (Mooney).

Unlike the women of the island in Omeros who are not mentioned during the election campaign (which Walcott dismisses as an irrelevance anyway) and who do not pronounce their views, Catherine Weldon is a vocal political force. But in the foreword to the published texts of Walker and The Ghost Dance Walcott describes Catherine Weldon as a cinematic cliché: ‘The Ghost Dance had as its model a John Ford film with its usual stock characters — an Irish sergeant, a tough independent widow — and its standard setting of a fort’ (vii). Such a statement indicates that Walcott is quite comfortable with using short hand clichés

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and stereotypes to some extent, presumably if they offer him a method by which to establish a scene quickly and focus on the more interesting details and deviations. In the play these are provided by Major McLaughlin’s humanity towards the Native Americans and Lucy, the Christian convert who joins the dancers. In Omeros Catherine takes us through the events of the Ghost Dance and forms part of Walcott’s wider, American perspective. While the detour has not always been appreciated by critics and, as already noted, Catherine is a stereotype, nevertheless she is not portrayed in a prejudiced or negative light and the passages during which the climax of the Ghost Dance are described do not lack power (Omeros 215–16).

Catherine Weldon’s first person narratives and strong opinions are in contrast to the silence of the women characters in the poems of The Arkansas Testament which are particularly indicative of Walcott’s lack of interest in people, perhaps more so than the technical weaknesses which Savory Fido identified in earlier works. With age and practice, the technical lapses are better concealed and less frequent but the silence persists and is evident too in the personal, relationship poems in this collection such as ‘The Young Wife’ (91) and ‘Summer Elegies’ (93) or ‘A Propertius Quartet’ (97). However, a greater than usual level of maturity in his relationships with women can be detected in the tone and content of two very personal poems in the collection: ‘To Norline’ (17), which is later echoed in a section of Omeros (41–2), and ‘Winter Lamps’ (91). In these poems Walcott does not write comments for the woman or women described. He makes not attempt to balance his account with the other side of the story, for these poems are written purely from the poet’s perspective.

Similarly, towards the end of Omeros the poet’s climactic moment of self-awareness and self-acceptance, where he declares that there is no error in feeling the wrong love for the wrong person is, on the face of it, a further demonstration of a mature and balanced approach to relationships which have failed and lessons which have been learned. Walcott does resort, however, to the ‘female of the species is more deadly’ cliché with the qualifier that the male of the species can also be highly toxic:

\begin{quote}
And often, in the female, what may seem willful
Will seem like happiness, that spastic ecstasy
Which ejects the fatal acid, from which men fall
Like a desiccated leaf; and this natural history
Is not confined to the female of the species,
It all depends on who gains purchase, since the male,
Like the dung-beetle storing up its dry feces,
Can leave its exhausted mate hysterical, pale. (240)
\end{quote}

The lazy repetition in ‘wilfull/will’ and the loaded etymology of ‘hysterical’ with its origins in Greek medical theories about moving wombs causing female fainting fits supports Savory Fido’s contentions regarding weakened poetic power and stereotypes to some extent, presumably if they offer him a method by which to establish a scene quickly and focus on the more interesting details and deviations. In the play these are provided by Major McLaughlin’s humanity towards the Native Americans and Lucy, the Christian convert who joins the dancers. In Omeros Catherine takes us through the events of the Ghost Dance and forms part of Walcott’s wider, American perspective. While the detour has not always been appreciated by critics and, as already noted, Catherine is a stereotype, nevertheless she is not portrayed in a prejudiced or negative light and the passages during which the climax of the Ghost Dance are described do not lack power (Omeros 215–16).

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and strong prejudice, prejudice reinforced by cheap cliché. Even the use of the rare word ‘spasmic’, meaning spasmodic or convulsive, sounds like a nasty form of orgasmic1.

In the poems of The Arkansas Testament, Walcott’s portrayal of women is more neutral, using them purely to provide local colour and this is at once a weakness in his poetry whilst also reflecting the poet’s preferences. The people are merely figures in a landscape, the painter-poet being much more interested in the landscape itself than the depiction of either women or men. For example, in ‘The Three Musicians’ (23), ‘Elsewhere’ (66) and ‘Steam’ (68), Caribbean fishermen’s wives and European Jewish peasant women are used in this way; also ‘Central America’ (70) deploys old men and children for the same simplistic effect. This is the ‘flashcard-picture-of-a-famine-victim’ approach to poetic imagery. Walcott criticises it himself in Omeros when he describes the impact of tourism on the village:

…Its life adjusted to the lenses
of cameras that, perniciously elegiac,
took shots of passing things — Seven Seas and the dog
in the pharmacy’s shade, …

The village imitated the hotel brochure
With photogenic poverty, with atmosphere.
Those who were ‘people’ lovers also have
A snapshot of Philoctete showing you his shin, … (311)

Walcott also acknowledges the inherent falseness of his own approach to progress and his romanticising of the poor in Omeros:

… Didn’t I want the poor
to stay in the same light so that I could transfix
them in amber, the afterglow of an empire,
preparing a shed of palm-thatch with tilted sticks
to that blue bus-stop? ...
… Why hallow that pretence
of preserving what they left, the hypocrisy
of loving them from hotels …
Art is history’s nostalgia, …
… Who needed art in this place
where even the old women strode with stiff-backed spines,
and the fishermen had such adept thumbs, such grace
these people had … (227–29)

Nevertheless, he uses the snapshot technique repeatedly and resorts to stereotypical images of the men and women of the island. This suggests that Walcott is aware of their limitations and the clichés of honest and noble poverty which it perpetuates, and yet he still finds them useful as figures in his landscape.

The Arkansas Testament, which was Walcott’s last collection before he published Omeros, also includes poems which feature female characters in
Similarly clichéd but sympathetic roles, in particular 'The Villa Restaurant' (25) and 'Cul de Sac Valley' (9). 'Cul de Sac Valley' has become a critical favourite because of its lines '...your words is English / is a different tree' (lines 37–38).

In this poem Walcott chooses to feature a little girl and her mother as the spirits of the land and the language. He is appealing to the symbolic image of woman as Mother of the nation or, in this case, keeper of the language of the people. It is another cliché and once again a deliberate one and, as Susheila Nasta notes:

Although such female figures were represented as powerful symbolic forces, repositories of culture and creativity, they were essentially silent and silenced by the structures surrounding them. (xvi)

Relying on unoriginal imagery such as this ultimately damages Walcott’s poetry, more than limited representation of the characters, because he has proven to be capable of powerful descriptions and vital images that encapsulate meaning with particularity and force. For example, in ‘Salsa’ (72), where the woman’s black olive eyes and crow blue/black hair are neither original nor startling, the result is anti-climax. But then, every so often, a simple line describing ‘an old woman pinning white, surrendering sheets / on a line’ from Omeros (311) can take the reader beyond the ‘snapshot woman’ by linking the domestic act of washing sheets to the wars of colonialism which Major Plunkett has been researching and which are mentioned on the same page just a few lines later.

Having looked more generally at Walcott’s clichéd handling of men and women, it is interesting to compare ‘Menelaus’ from The Arkansas Testament to ‘Goats & Monkeys’ from The Castaway and Other Poems (1965) (Collected Poems 83), a key poem which Savory Fido considered in 1986. ‘Goats and Monkeys’ is a reworking of the story of Othello and Desdemona in which Savory Fido rightly identifies ‘images from the world of sexist prejudice and racial myth’ (111). Its style is both loose and intense. The poet describes the situation — it is not a dramatic monologue whereby he can use Othello as his mouthpiece. ‘Menelaus’ on the other hand (101) is an early sketch for the figure of Menelaus represented in The Odyssey: a Stage Version. This dramatic monologue is darker than the scene from the play. ‘Menelaus’ deploys the same worn images which Savory Fido objected to in Midsummer — Helen, woman as the sea, even an echo of the lifted skirt imagery (22) — cited by Savory Fido (119). However the ‘overblown emotional crudity’ (111) which Savory Fido detected in the earlier poem is not on display here. This is a tightly controlled poem written in four line rhymed stanzas. Menelaus speaks as a man who is bitterly resigned, more distressed by the death and destruction caused by the war than by his wife’s betrayal. Menelaus’ attacks on his wife are racist as well as sexist — she is white trash and a Romany gypsy as well as a whore. The ‘tightness of rhythm and unorthodoxy of word, image and idea’ (113) which Savory Fido admired is hinted at in the ‘gypsy constancy’ of Helen’s predictable unpredictability, but the poem similarly clichéd but sympathetic roles, in particular ‘The Villa Restaurant’ (25) and ‘Cul de Sac Valley’ (9). ‘Cul de Sac Valley’ has become a critical favourite because of its lines ‘...your words is English / is a different tree’ (lines 37–38).

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is ultimately about a bitter old man on the beach, another variation on the early Walcott treatments of the Crusoe theme.

In *Omeros*, the figure of Helen is a cliché that, like Catherine Weldon or the puffing pompous Major Plunkett, Walcott finds useful. She is only ever the blank canvas upon which he paints his version of events. Every other character in the poem comments on Helen but she herself prefers action to talk. This could be seen as a problem but in actual fact it becomes a test for careful reading and a lesson against expecting Walcott’s characters to make grand statements about their positions. The author, Maud, Dennis Plunkett, Achille, Hector, the other women in the village, even, indirectly, the tourists, all pass judgement on her, throw comments, mud and praise at her but she refuses to reply to them. The Helen of *Omeros* is described as many things by other people but when the poet poses the key question (271), why not see Helen for what she really is, the very fact that he answers this with another question — avoiding an answer — suggests that he does not have an answer or, perhaps, that he feels that ‘what she really is’ has been plain from the start if we pay attention to the way she has behaved.

Helen’s resistance to the subservience imposed on her by economic necessity and the tension of working for Maud manifests as backchat and mutterings and behaving as if she owns the house. These are slight actions compared to the violence of pre-emancipation struggles but they too can be read in the light of a long history of non-violent protest actions which historians such as Hilary McD. Beckles have shown were weapons in the covert war on slavery (137–57). Beckles also provides evidence of the problematic relationship between white woman slave owner/employer and black woman slave which is relevant for Walcott’s handling of Maud’s discomfort with Helen. In this way Helen may indeed be typical of women in her position but it is difficult to describe the treatment of this theme as negative and clichéd. Savory Fido’s phrase ‘limitations of perception’ could be applied to the careless reader’s response to the figure of Helen in *Omeros*. The trap that Walcott has set for the reader is that they will be tempted to accept the views and comments of every other perspective in the poem and overlook Helen’s actual actions and words. Two critics, in particular, have fallen for this temptation and their comments reveal little about Helen and much about the way that they have unhinkingly adopted the multiple negative, stereotypical and clichéd perspectives offered throughout the poem. Arguably, by doing this, Walcott is using the stereotypes as a method of critiquing the reader or critic’s casual acceptance of the opinions of others.

So, Julie Minckler accuses Helen of theft:

In addition to the yellow dress, Helen also steals a bracelet from Maud … but is caught in the act by Dennis Plunkett, who, bewitched by her spell, lets her take it… (275).
Helen actually replaces the bracelet, she is only trying it on. Minckler even quotes these words from the poem:

... he was fixed by her glance
in the armoire's full-length mirror, where, one long arm,
it's fist closed like a snake's head, slipped through a bracelet
from Maud's jewellery box, and, with eyes calm as Circe,
simply continued, and her smile said, "You will let
me try this", which he did. ... (Omeros 96)

The key line with Minckler ignores is the last line of the section which describes how, after Helen has left the room, Major Plunkett 'moved to the coiled bracelet, rubbing his dry hands' (Omeros 96) which shows that the bracelet is back in the jewellery box. Furthermore, the yellow dress is a disputed piece of property. Maud says that Helen stole the dress, but Helen says that Maud gave it to her. Theft is alleged but the poet does not confirm it for the reader, which is perhaps the closest thing to proof in a work of fiction.

Similarly, June Bobb provides a reading of the meeting between Maud and Helen in Maud's garden (Omeros 122–25) which is wildly at odds with the text:

Helen, who is pregnant, is forced to ask Maud for money to have an abortion. Her poverty chains her to dependency. The relationship between native and coloniser remains one of patronage. (209)

There is no suggestion that Helen is seeking an abortion and the five dollars which she asks to borrow would be unlikely to cover the cost. Moreover, it seems unlikely that Maud, the devout Irish Catholic, would be supportive of such a request.

These readings are very difficult to support. It is as if Minckler and Bobb want to cast Helen as a negative, stereotypical and clichéd figure — a thieving, dependent, unreliable maidservant. They have overlooked the details of the accusations of theft and the way in which Helen acts. When Maud queries her need for the money and only reluctantly agrees to lend or give it to her, Helen walks away. As with her refusal to accept harassment at the hands of the tourists in the restaurants, through her actions in the poem Walcott suggests that dignity and independence are more important to Helen than money.

The last time we see Helen she is once again working as a waitress, still pregnant (Omeros 322). She seems placid, perhaps subdued and tired by her pregnancy and the demands of earning a living. The poet offers no comment on this. She is still a blank canvas for the viewer but she seems 'too remote', like one who has completely detached herself from the role she is playing. This is a return to the mask imagery of the first appearance of Helen at a tourist resort (Omeros 23): 'As the carved lids of the unimaginable/ebony mask unwrapped from its cotton-wool cloud' (Omeros 24). Why unimaginable? Why does Helen wear a mask? Are these references to her mask, which recur throughout the
on the island. He is not a dancer himself so he chooses not to go to the
woman. Because the poet describes Achille's lonely musings on the beach just
and insecurity, his macho need to demonstrate his power by controlling 'his'
his description of the bays as woman. Achille's speech reflects his immaturity
like a woman, specifically, like Helen, with the result that Walcott has chosen to
criticise and utilise the imagery of submission and domination of the land almost
in the same breath. Once again this is a role and an image imposed upon her by
another character, in this case Achille. It does not mean that that is what she
really is.

One last example of clichéd, negative and stereotypical characterisation of
Helen by other characters in the poem/novel (the poet being one) which is
contradicted by Helen's actions arises when Achille verbally attacks Helen after
the blocko (Omeros 115). His words are sexist, clichéd and stereotypical, like
his description of the bays as woman. Achille's speech reflects his immaturity
and insecurity, his macho need to demonstrate his power by controlling 'his'
woman. Because the poet describes Achille's lonely musings on the beach just
before this explosion, the reader understands that Achille's anger is actually
born of many things outside Helen's control, particularly the impact of tourism
on the island. He is not a dancer himself so he chooses not to go to the blocko yet
he is unable to allow Helen to enjoy herself without him. Once more Helen is
rendered as a blank canvas for other characters to project their feelings on to but
her silent actions are deployed by Walcott to demonstrate that she is a woman of
her own painting who refuses to be their punching bag. Again, this is demonstrated
by actions rather than words. Helen says nothing in response to Achille but the
next day she leaves him.

In conclusion, Savory Fido's claim (as expressed in 1986) that Walcott's
treatment of women was clichéd, negative and stereotypical and therefore
misogynist is a valid but limited assessment when applied to his writings since
1986. Walcott's representation of people, both male and female, is weakened by
his deliberate use of clichés and worn imagery, and this is indicative of his
generally weak characterisation. Sometimes the clichés work to his advantage
by allowing him to establish his scene or setting quickly and easily so that he
can move on to look at interesting deviations or special features. However
moments such as 'the female of the species is more deadly than the male' passage
in Omeros (240) suggest that Savory Fido may have had a point. Furthermore,
careless reading, critical misrepresentations and unreasonable expectations only
serve to further the accepted criticism — that Walcott is a sexist writer — and
that criticism deserves to be tested more thoroughly.

poem, meant to remind the reader that Helen is playing the role she is expected
to play? This would fit with the many ways in which Walcott represents Helen
because she is rarely allowed to speak or act in the first person.
Helen's key role appears to be one of representing the island, to be a beautiful
female symbol of the nation and the land (Omeros 29–32 et passim) similar to
the model, strong Caribbean women described by Nasta. However, when Omeros
says that Helen's beauty cannot be claimed any more than the island can (288),
Walcott challenges the expected link between woman, land and colonial
possession. Shortly thereafter (301) bays are parting themselves under Achille
like a woman, specifically, like Helen, with the result that Walcott has chosen to
criticise and utilise the imagery of submission and domination of the land almost
in the same breath. Once again this is a role and an image imposed upon her by
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that criticism deserves to be tested more thoroughly.
NOTES
1. OED 2nd edn. vol. XVI, 129 cites Walt Whitman’s use in 1868 in poem 118 of *Chants Democratic: ‘The slender, spasmic blue-white jets’. Whitman seems to have been quite fond of the word — he also used it in ‘Election Day November 1884’ in relation to geysers. So even in a passage of the poem which seems simple, there may be an example of the American Mimicry which has Terada explored.

WORKS CITED


The Dream of an Order: Race and Gender and the Project of An-Other Caribbean History

The historical novel Yngermina or the Daughter of Calamar (1844) is Colombia’s first novel and one that illustrates the difficulties in conceptualising and representing women, natives and blacks in the nineteenth-century nation-making process. In Latin America, this period of national formation is linked to the idealism of the liberal elites, where the masses are romanticised and symbolically integrated into a homogeneous ‘imagined community’. Yngermina, a novel written and set in the Caribbean world navigates between two waters: while it seeks to give the indigenous peoples a voice it also relies on narrative strategies to conceal or even avoid the difference that women, blacks and natives embody; at the same time, it also criticises the abuse of power (typical of liberal idealism) and, contradictorily, celebrates the arrival of conquistadors bringing civilisation to the ‘savages’. In fact, Yngermina can be seen as an effort made by local letrado (writer/statesman) Juan José Nieto to delineate an ideal body politic modelled according to his view of civilisation and modernity. In this particular project, race and gender are tools by which the history of a marginalised region is rewritten as the locus of a civilisation that features strong utopian elements.

Juan José Nieto and the Project of An-Other History

Anyway, my friend, the deputies of this province that have gone to the Congress have disillusioned us. Through them we know that in legislature where there is an excessive majority over the deputies of this region, it is impossible to obtain anything in its favour, because there is a spirit of opposition that degenerates into insult; there runs aground every useful project proposed for the [Caribbean] coast if it is assumed that it affects the interest of the centre, even indirectly, while for [the centre], everything is obtained. (Nieto 1993: 23)

Juan José Nieto was born in 1804 under the shadow of a long conflict between the unlettered city of the coast, Cartagena, and the lettered city of the highland, Bogotá. He was born into a humble tri-ethnic family but ascended the social ladder through his two marriages to upper-class women (Fals Borda 37B). Nieto, a self-taught man, became a popular leader and a military person, as well as a member of the local intelligentsia, despite the initial rejection of Cartagena’s elite (Lemaitre 14). He wrote Colombia’s first regional geography, Geografía histórica, estadística y local de la provincial de Cartagena (1839), a ‘Mercantile
Dictionary', many political texts and three novels: Yengermina (1844), Los moriscos (1845) and Rosina o la prisión del Castillo de Chagres (1850). The first two were published during the author’s exile in Jamaica and the last one published in a regional newspaper, La Democracia (founded by Nieto in Cartagena). During his successful political career, Nieto occupied several positions: governor of the province of Cartagena (1851–1853) and president of the province of Bolívar (1859). In 1860 he declared its secession from the national territory and in 1861 Nieto declared himself president of the Republic of Nueva Granada and occupied the position until 1862 (Fals Borda, 146b). After that, Nieto returned to Cartagena and faced an insurrection, which ended in his fall from power (1864). He retired from public life and in 1866 died in the region whose history he sought to re-write.

As a novelist, Nieto has received very little critical attention. Published in Jamaica and focusing upon a regional theme, potential readership of Yengermina would have been small and its critical reception discouraging — qualified as ‘unattractive’ in an 1894 critical essay (Laverde 79), and labelled in the 1950s as an ‘embryo’ of a novel with no imaginative spirit (Cucurci Altamar 72). Nieto’s goal however was the literary representation (based on a study of archival colonial documents) of a significant episode in Caribbean regional history, that being the foundation of his fatherland, Cartagena.

In fact, a discussion of Juan José Nieto’s Yengermina is inseparable from the cultural history of the Colombian Caribbean coast and of the city of Cartagena from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Founded in 1533, Cartagena was the main colonial port of South America through which black slaves were trafficked. The city became a stronghold of African culture and mestizaje, producing a complex system of social stratification based on race and lineage.

The Inquisition was introduced in 1610, since Cartagena had become an important colonial port but one in which scant social control was seen to result in the proliferation of ‘crimes’ such as adultery and sorcery. The Church Fathers judged the colonial city to be the ‘most vicious and sinful in the Spanish Dominions, with the faith on the point of destruction’ (Lea qtd in Taussig 42). Blacks in particular were notorious for anti-Christian outbursts, resulting in the identification of slave folklore and religion with sorcery. In the late seventeenth century, runaway slave camps (palenques) began to appear, later including Indians and mestizos, who formed unsupervised tri-ethnic communities. In contrast to other important cities, Cartagena had become an overwhelmingly black and mulatto society from the early seventeenth century (Múnera 1995 96).

These distinctive social and ethno-cultural regional characteristics were to create disputes between the elite of the Coast and that of the Highland, a process that began in the early colonial period. The process of marginalisation of the Colombian Caribbean from the Highland, which was to become the signifier for the nation, is based on intertwining discourses of scientific determinism and on the presence of African slaves, who arrived there in the first half of the sixteenth
century. A text such as Alonso de Sandoval’s *De Instauranda Aethiopum Salute* (1627) articulated the ‘innate’ inferiority of Africans and was instrumental in the production of the institution of slavery, and its discursive substance remained active until the post-independence period (Maya 184–88). By the eighteenth century, an image of liminality and disorder arose and was reinforced by positivistic scientific discourse, of which the best examples are the writings of the prestigious Creole scientists Francisco José de Caldas and Pedro Fermín de Vargas. Caldas, for instance, wrote in his *Del influjo del clima en los seres organizados* (1808) that climate was a fundamental influence on the development of human beings, greatest development being seen in the inhabitants of the temperate regions — ‘Men in society, the peaceful planter of the Andes’. In contrast,

Moreover, blacks and mestizos posed serious threats to Creole bourgeois order, in 1811, a group of armed artisans imposed absolute independence from Spain on a horrified Creole junta. As historian Gabriel Jiménez Molinares stated: ‘the coercion of the armed mob over the organs of government reduced authority to a shadow: mutiny was the way in which all matters were solved’ (287). This picture of social anarchy was reinforced by the influential nineteenth-century historian José Manuel Restrepo: ‘since the common people were called from the beginning to take part so as to overthrow the royalist party, they became insolent; and the coloured people, who were numerous in the city, acquired a preponderance which came to be disastrous for public order’ (1942–1950 I 167). Such were the expressions of the feelings of the ruling class in general, menaced by a ‘low-other’ that hoped mainly for equality, as is evident in the 1812 Constitution of Cartagena (Múnera 1995 239). This first experiment in republican life lasted until 1815, when the Spaniards occupied Cartagena until 1821. It was the last important city of New Granada to be liberated, with its Creole, black and mulatto leaders dead, imprisoned or in exile. Consequently, the port entered a period of decadence and was unable to actively negotiate with Bogotá in the creation of the nation (Múnera 1998; 1996; Helg).
Alonso confesses his love despite expecting the rejection of their relationship by the patriarch of the colony, Pedro. Yngermina ends up falling for the Spaniard and forgetting her irksome Indian fiancé, Catarpa. Thus concealing all black elements. It is a reconstructive project in which Nieto’s attitudes toward issues of race and gender play a significant part.

The trope of romance works to fulfill the purpose of producing civilisation; it constructs a harmonious racial/cultural hierarchical order in which the Indian other is discursively constructed as having an inferior, feminine ‘nature’ which requires a European masculine ‘culture’. Biracial love plots, as Peter Hulme has argued in his research on colonial encounters in the Caribbean, serve to articulate ‘the ideal of cultural harmony through romance’ (141). Yngermina and Alonso’s trope of mutual love clearly falls into this category and also articulates the biopolitical project of the construction of a white and civilised Caribbean, in which the triumph of this relationship is its symbolic foundation.

Seemingly natural hierarchies mark this romance from the start: after Alonso falls in love with Yngermina, he is relieved to discover that ‘the young Calamareña descended from the sovereigns of the land — Pride of almost every Spaniard, who wants to be the son of someone [respectable]’ (21 emphasis added). The noble origin of Yngermina overcomes the first obstacle to the realisation of the relationship. Here, Nieto accurately alludes to the sixteenth-century idea that marrying into the Indian nobility was honourable, an idea that was out-moded by the nineteenth century. Other, less-menacing hindrances included illiteracy and paganism. Illiteracy is overcome by Alonso’s desire to personally ‘educate’ Yngermina, and paganism through baptism. Yngermina undertakes both projects without hesitation; she is (female) ‘nature’ in need of (male) ‘culture’. The otherness of women appears fully entwined with the otherness of the native culture. As Helen Carr insists, ‘women’s unknowable otherness can also be projected onto the non-European’ (49). When Alonso begins her education, Yngermina ends up falling for the Spaniard and forgetting her irksome Indian fiancé, Catarpa.

Despite Yngermina’s nobility and her newly acquired education, the couple expect the rejection of their relationship by the patriarch of the colony, Pedro. Alonso confesses his love despite the suspicion that Spanish pride could act upon him to persuade Alonso to desist from aspiring to a young Indian woman, that although a descendant of the country’s rulers, because of her condition of conquered and colonised, would find her unworthy of being the wife of a Castilian and brother of the Governor. (37)

Although noble, Yngermina is a feminine colonial subject, ‘conquered and colonised’, who occupies the subordinated side of the binary hierarchies that constructs a harmonious racial/cultural hierarchical order in which the Indian other is discursively constructed as having an inferior, feminine ‘nature’ which requires a European masculine ‘culture’. Biracial love plots, as Peter Hulme has argued in his research on colonial encounters in the Caribbean, serve to articulate ‘the ideal of cultural harmony through romance’ (141). Yngermina and Alonso’s trope of mutual love clearly falls into this category and also articulates the biopolitical project of the construction of a white and civilised Caribbean, in which the triumph of this relationship is its symbolic foundation.

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Seemingly natural hierarchies mark this romance from the start: after Alonso falls in love with Yngermina, he is relieved to discover that ‘the young Calamareña descended from the sovereigns of the land — Pride of almost every Spaniard, who wants to be the son of someone [respectable]’ (21 emphasis added). The noble origin of Yngermina overcomes the first obstacle to the realisation of the relationship. Here, Nieto accurately alludes to the sixteenth-century idea that marrying into the Indian nobility was honourable, an idea that was out-moded by the nineteenth century. Other, less-menacing hindrances included illiteracy and paganism. Illiteracy is overcome by Alonso’s desire to personally ‘educate’ Yngermina, and paganism through baptism. Yngermina undertakes both projects without hesitation; she is (female) ‘nature’ in need of (male) ‘culture’. The otherness of women appears fully entwined with the otherness of the native culture. As Helen Carr insists, ‘women’s unknowable otherness can also be projected onto the non-European’ (49). When Alonso begins her education, Yngermina ends up falling for the Spaniard and forgetting her irksome Indian fiancé, Catarpa.

Despite Yngermina’s nobility and her newly acquired education, the couple expect the rejection of their relationship by the patriarch of the colony, Pedro. Alonso confesses his love despite the suspicion that Spanish pride could act upon him to persuade Alonso to desist from aspiring to a young Indian woman, that although a descendant of the country’s rulers, because of her condition of conquered and colonised, would find her unworthy of being the wife of a Castilian and brother of the Governor. (37)
articulate the discourses of this text: male/female, culture/nature, active/passive, conqueror/colonised and European/native. Pedro disagrees with the idea of marriage; he sees it as potentially harmful to the social hierarchy. Even the priests criticised Alonso’s ‘intimate relationship with a pagan woman’ (26). Pedro states that it would be strange to:

see a Castilian united to an Indian woman with the lessening of his dignity: that the colonists with such unions believing themselves equal to their masters, would degenerate in the respect to which one should always accustom them; that these almost savage nations, destined by nature to submission and obedience to their conquerors, would slowly forget their humble condition, if by means of their domestic relations they would acquire confidence and friendship with their masters. (38)

This is a tangential comment on the population of the Caribbean coast by mestizos born of this archetypical couple. Nevertheless, Alonso cleverly directs the argument towards the control of the native population, revealing the biopolitical dimensions of the love plot. Michel Foucault has defined biopolitics as ‘a technology of power centred on life’ (10), that is, a ‘politics concerned with subjects as members of a population, in which issues of individual sexual and reproductive conduct interconnect with issues of national policy and power’ (Gordon 5). Hence, for Alonso, his marriage to Yngermina is a means by which obedience of the native population will be assured:

This wedding is of great usefulness to our own projects of conquest. Through it, the Indians will be persuaded of our good intentions, since we do not hesitate in forming unions with their daughters, as proof that even though they are colonised we do not try to humiliate or oppress them; and since my chosen one is a princess of her tribe, this very reason will make them respect the dominion to which they have been submitted … [these unions are] a very effective and subtle way to further attract and bind these natives to obedience. (38)

Alonso cites as examples of this ideal, the marriage of conquistador Francisco Pizarro to the Inca Atahualpa’s widow in order ‘to remain without difficulty absolute owner of that empire’ (39) and that of Pocahontas (fn. 39).

Interestingly, Pocahontas is the case chosen by Peter Hulme (1985) to discuss sexuality and mobility in early colonial discourse. Hulme introduces in his text the term ‘polytropic man’, taken from the epiph on Odysseus in the first line of the Odyssey. He claims that the term ‘polytropic’ has ‘at least three interconnected meanings: … “much travelled”, … “cunningly intelligent” or even “slippery and deceitful” … and “much given to troping, to the use of tropes”’ (20). Hence, the character of Alonso seems to fulfil the function of a ‘polytropic man’, just as John Smith did in the story of Pocahontas. As a conquistador and colonist, Alonso is ‘much travelled’ and although not deceitful, he defends his love of an Indian woman with the use of tropi, ‘common places’ or ‘recurrent motifs’ where it appears clear that Alonso, like Odysseus and Smith, ‘covet[ed] the land whose inhabitants they confront’ (22). Those tropes are: interfacial
marriage as a means of control; Spain’s providentialism in the civilising mission; and a humanitarian rejection of slavery:

Is it the Indians’ fault that providence made them be born in these regions? Do they cease for this reason to be God’s children or worthy like us of all His benefits? Who has given us the right to use as slaves men who are similar to us, only because of the coincidence of having discovered their countries? The glory that … we have as conquerors, consists in having the joy of doing good to the human species by rescuing the conquered from ignorance and idolatry in order to cultivate their understanding and bring them to the heart of the true religion; and not, like tyrants to hold enormous masses of men in the humiliating condition of slaves, against the laws of creation and humanity. (39–40).

‘Polytropic man’ embodies individualism and humanism in order to re-write a successful narrative — and ‘successful narratives can only be written backwards’ (Hulme 23). Therefore, the use of ‘polytropic man’ serves the function of constructing an allegory of male European cultural and technological sophistication in opposition to the passiveness of a feminine America in a way that is typical of early colonial discourse whose best examples can be perhaps found in visual discourses (for example van der Straat’s America, c. 1575–80) but which echoed well into the nineteenth century. Nieto fully acknowledges this discourse in order to articulate his narrative of the conquest of the Caribbean as one of a land in need of European power — ‘land’ and ‘women’ are interwoven in this text, and the construction is held in place via the trope of harmonious interracial love.

Yngermina is constructed textually as ‘respectful’, ‘modest’ but also, ‘noble’ and ‘elegant’ (46–47), a dignified, non-threatening female. As Ania Loomba has asserted, ‘the figure of the “other woman” haunts colonial imagination in ambivalent, often contradictory ways. She is an example of barbarism, but also encodes colonial fantasies of the perfect feminine behaviour’ (157). In the passage where she and Pedro meet, Yngermina is self-conscious of her ‘natural’ inferiority as an Indian woman and is thus afraid of causing ‘an unpleasant impression … since men of this character generally estrange themselves from having dealings with their subjects; such quality was more inherent to conquistadors, who considered Indians to be of an inferior condition to that of the rest of men’ (47–48). Pedro found Yngermina ‘beautiful, respectful without humiliation, of noble and modest look, with enough education to be able to make of her a worthy wife of a Castilian ruler’ (48). Appended to Pedro’s opinion is a footnote where Nieto offers the reader his personal appreciation on the physical features of the native women in these terms:

the author has met in the Darien coast young Indian women of very light complexion and beautiful features; and in the towns leeward of Cartagena, girls of this same race with interesting figures, that if adorned and introduced in high society, would very well play the roles of ladies; without mentioning the aborigines of the cold areas

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Indian women with the appropriate physical features (‘very light complexion’) can be allowed in high society, disciplined and re-fashioned into ‘ladies’, a project of which Yngermina is the prototype. She, however, is destined to the conquistador since she belongs to the Indian nobility, is beautiful, educated, baptised and therefore distinguishable from other native women: ‘Pedro noticed the personal difference between her and her compatriots: that she was closer to the European class than to the indigenous; and that her grace and kindness greatly increased could make proud the most sprightly daughter of the cheerful Andalusia’ (48–49).

Yngermina is, to use Homi Bhabha’s words, ‘a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite’ (126 emphasis added). Yngermina embodies the subject of a disciplinary, regulatory project: she is appropriated by the masculine, colonial gaze of the conquerors in a movement which entails both the representation of her difference and its disavowal at the same time (126). It is interesting to note how Nieto had described her earlier in the novel:

Her skin almost white and blushing highlighted by the curls of her black hair, her slender figure, her graceful ways, her well-proportioned features and beautiful black eyes reveal happiness and other gifts of her soul; made her the queen of love and the torment of more than one young man from Calamar that sighed for her without hope’. (16 emphasis added)

Yngermina’s proximity to whiteness is an instance of what Camilla Griggers calls the ‘despotic face’ of white femininity, defined as a redundant signifier ‘emptied of specific meaning and therefore excessive in its signification’ (8.9) whose function is to rationalise race and class distinction and modernisation. Yngermina’s ‘almost white face’ is what puts her beyond the reach of Indian men (except the prince of the tribe, Catarpa) and makes her the perfect counterpart for a white conquistador, after her complete fashioning according to modern Western standards of beauty and decorum. Later in the novel, in the second volume, the secret of Yngermina’s whiteness is revealed: her real father was not an Indian chief, but a shipwrecked Spaniard. By employing the trope of Yngermina’s original whiteness, she and Alonso are suddenly turned into a white couple: the social order in which whiteness/Europeanness is preponderant will not be transgressed, but rather reinforced and reproduced. Nieto’s project of biopolitics is totally secured: the Indian population is put firmly under control and the Caribbean will be populated by a white, Christian, civilised archetypal couple thus assuring that the social body has a pristine source.

So pristine is the social body produced in the text that violent conquest and slavery appear only fragmentarily. The topic of slavery, Indian or other, sets up
a conflict in the narrative since it disrupts the images of Spanish nobility and gentleness, or the seductive power of the Spanish culture being articulated. The text explicitly avoids the mention of the traffic or even the presence of black slaves, which is surprising for an account of the history of the main colonial port, through which around 150,000 slaves entered the viceroyalty (Gutiérrez 16). When confronted by historiographical sources available in Nieto’s time, Yngermina is found to be a text that wilfully ignores facts like Heredia’s importing of black slaves, brought to aid the looting of Indian burials along the coast (Friede 137). There is even documentation of the escape in 1533 of some of them (Palacios 337). Moreover, the historical Badillo introduced them in the region of Antioquia, and Juan de Castellanos mentions them in relation to the historical Heredia in his widely known chronicle:

- with the intention of stealing some jewel
- a clever black man owned by Heredia
- with the favour of his master took advantage
- and visited the neighbouring houses
- he saw an amphora
- covered with fine gold
- which he gave to his master in his own hands
- and it weighed four hundred castellanos (III 60).

The reluctance to acknowledge the African legacy of Cartagena might be founded on the discursive production of low-class blacks and mestizos not only as lacking culture and civilisation, or as evil-doers and Satanists, but also as a dangerous group, capable of disputing the political power of the elite (as happened in 1811) and penetrating the public sphere. In short, blacks, mulattos and zambos are grotesque, racialised ‘low others’. The blacks in particular were associated with savagery, since they came as slaves from Africa; a continent discursively constructed both for European and Creole imagination as ‘cultureless’ and ‘history-less’. Since the 1820s fear was employed as a general argument against manumission, where the ‘criminal nature’ of the black was constantly underscored by accusations of murder, infanticide, abortion and so forth (Bierck). By the time Yngermina was published (1844), slavery was not yet abolished in Nueva Granada (abolition came in 1851) and the emancipation debate was active (Jaramillo).

Nieto’s silence on the black heritage of the coast was a typical position for both coastal and highland elites as well as coastal popular sectors, the consequence of which was Colombia being increasingly depicted as a white, Andean nation; a nation that thus has continued to exclude vast sectors of its population (Helg 243; 245). Furthermore, the black heritage has no place in Nieto’s project; the Indian was useful to justify an original ancestry, which is rapidly neutralised by the supposed ethnic and cultural superiority of the coloniser. In this project, Indian subjectivities are fashioned as needy and then re-fashioned as mimic
whites, but the blackness and its attached signifiers do not fit the economy of signs of this social body. This version of the Caribbean is a utopian microcosm where a eugenic project has been installed; it is a closed world with practically no contact with the outer world, nurtured only by endogenous Caribbean migratory fluxes. Spain appears as a background, as a source, whilst the links with Africa have been severed in a clear Occidentalist stance in which relational stories are disaggregated, differences turned into hierarchies and naturalised.

This project, critical of Spanish abuse of power in some sections, also provides the region with a ‘sacralised’ historical version, tending towards homogenisation and even towards the negation of otherness (Bernd 86–87; 98), thus tracing the boundaries and identity of this imagined community and producing both social and historical silences.

NOTES
1 The local intelligentsia was also seen as inferior as compared to Bogotá’s elite in the late eighteenth century — Cartagena lacking higher educational institutions and newspapers (Múnera 1995 121–22).
2 On the regional connections between Cartagena and Jamaica, see Bell Lemus (1993).
3 Yngermina had a single edition for over a century, until 1998, although the introduction was published separately before this in 1990 and 1993. The entire novel was republished again in 2001.
4 Yngermina is nevertheless remarkable in that Nieto managed to publish it through sponsorship. Based on the fact that twelve sponsors financed the project, Williams calculated its readership between one and two hundred people (93).
5 The most renowned slave camp is San Basilio. To this day, it is inhabited by descendents of a maroon community, featuring a unique Creole language and memory of their ancestors (Wade 344).
6 Hulme usefully distinguishes here between ‘topos’, recurrent motif, and ‘trope’, which implies a turn in which the discourse is exercising power (28, ft. 14).
7 The discovery of the original whiteness (usually accompanied by wealth) of the heroine is an oft-used trope present in modern-day telenovelas (soap operas).
8 De Friedmann has argued that the contemporary negation of the African origins of the Negro in Colombia amounts to a de-historisation which is, in itself, a form of invisibility.

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During the nineteenth century international exhibitions and world fairs constituted an important apparatus of empire for European countries and the United States. Through the exhibitions these countries educated their masses on the merits of empire and industry while also trying to out-do each other by showing greater wealth and political power. One way of doing this was through the many displays of non-Western peoples usually under their imperial dominion. For European nations who controlled an empire, the showing of native villages placed hitherto unrelated peoples of different parts of the empire together, physically and psychologically, and it centred the empire on the controlling imperial nation. The public could see at a glance the extent of the imperial pickings and feel in a real sense that they belonged to them. More importantly, it ‘revealed’ the apparently degenerate state the conquered peoples lived in, making the conquest not only more acceptable but necessary for their moral rescue. (Greenhalgh 84)

Having arrived late to the spoils of empire, the United States was unable to boast its own imperial display until the Buffalo Pan American Fair of 1901 where Hawaiian, Filipino, and Cuban villages (Greenhalgh 101) celebrated its gains due partly to the Spanish-American War three years earlier.

Nevertheless, the United States had already initiated the genre of displaying non-Western villages, following the examples of France and England in particular, in its Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893. In this Exposition, seventeen villages of non-Western peoples were built including Dahomeyan, Chinese, Javanese, Soudanese, Alaskan, Arab, South Sea Islanders, Algerian and American Indians (Greenhalgh 97). These displays, according to Paul Greenhalgh, were similar to ‘freak shows’:

In Chicago displays of people suffered more than ever before from exaggeration and caricature. Each day, the people from the villages, accompanied by various Arab groups from other exhibits, were paraded up and down the Midway Plaisance [the entertainment area] before returning to their display areas to commence their day of public living. The humiliating racism of this spectacle, apart from fulfilling a propaganda role for the co-operating foreign nations, had a distinct purpose for reactionary elements within American society. (Greenhalgh 98)
The reactionary elements to which he refers were the population of Native Americans, and Negroes, not to mention the Spanish speaking minorities of the conquered Southwest, which presented grave problems to the organisers who promulgated freedom and democracy as the ideals of the Exposition, but gave no position of equality to these groups. Hence, the Chicago Columbian Exposition, commemorating Columbus’ arrival on (what became) American shores four centuries earlier, excluded the American Negroes from the 208 person national commission for the exhibition, although they worked on the construction site. The American Indians were exhibited as a primitive foreign race while Black women were denied any part in the Women’s Building, which, ironically, contained a fine collection of craftwork from women of all races (Greenhalgh 98–99). In light of these contradictions, this paper is concerned with issues of race and gender as represented by a Cuban woman, Aurelia Castillo de González, in her *Un paseo por América*, cartas de Méjico y de Chicago [*A Trip Through America, Letters from Mexico and Chicago*], an epistolary text written to inform the Cuban public about the Exposition.

Biographical information on Aurelia Castillo de González is limited since very little is known about her outside Cuba. She was born in 1842 and in 1870, at the beginning of the Ten Year War (Cuba’s first independence war) she married a Spanish military officer, José Francisco González, for which she was greatly criticised by her compatriots who saw this as a betrayal of the anti-colonial war effort. Nevertheless, because of his public protest of the execution of a Cuban patriot, both were exiled by the Spanish government and went to Europe in 1875 returning to Cuba at the end of the war. In 1891, she published her first travelogue, *Un paseo por Europa, cartas de Francia — Exposición de 1889 — de Italia y Suiza* [*A Trip Through Europe, Letters from France — Exposition of 1889 — from Italy and Switzerland*]. In 1893, Castillo de González travelled with her husband to the Chicago Columbian Exposition, via Mexico and two years later published *Un paseo por América*.

**Cuba’s Struggle for Independence**

The issue of race, given expression in Castillo de González’ text, is especially significant considering the historical situation of Cuba at the moment when she wrote her travelogue, a period in which various anti-colonial revolts went hand in hand with racial struggles. The Ten Years War, for example, was initially started by a handful of white male thinkers, but soon involved slaves and free men, both Black and mulatto, who not only fought as soldiers but who also held positions as captains, colonels and generals. The leader, Antonio Maceo, who became an icon of the wars for independence and a national hero, was, in fact, a mulatto whose racial origin had been largely ‘whitened’ in historical accounts (Stubbs 298).

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Furthermore, there is historical evidence that freed black women contributed to the independence effort through military service (Green-Williams 162), while other black and mulatto women tended the wounded, using their knowledge of traditional African medicine, and fed the soldiers (Stubbs 312). During this war, elite white women made an historical impact with their demands for equality in the new republic — equating their condition with that of the slave (Stubbs 1995, 310). This view had already been voiced as early as 1841 in the feminist, antislavery novel, *Saḥ*, by another prominent Cuban author, Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda.

At mid-nineteenth century, the enslaved and free people of colour in Cuba constituted the majority of the population (Benítez Rojo 18). The Spanish colony was ruled by a minority of white Creoles who controlled the sugar industry built on the labour of enslaved Africans. Cuba was one of the last colonial possessions of Spain in the New World since its ruling class had no desire for independence. The white Creoles were initially afraid that if the island severed bonds with Spain it would become, following Haiti, the hemisphere’s second black republic (Ferrer online) and, along with other privileges, they would lose all economic control. Although the Ten Years War did not succeed in obtaining independence from Spain, it was at least followed by the abolition of slavery in 1886.

The intellectual leader José Martí, a middle-class poet and journalist, who had established the Cuban Revolutionary Party while in exile in the United States, returned to the island in 1895 at the start of another armed struggle against Spain. Martí professed racial equality and was also against the annexation of Cuba by the United States, which already had enormous economic investment in the island. The final Cuban war for independence culminated in US intervention with the Spanish-American War of 1898, after which it appropriated Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippine Islands while Cuba became independent and impoverished.

The discourses of race and gender which circulate in Castillo de González’ text are a reflection of these historical events at a time when European and North American thinkers linked biology to progress and divided the world into superior and inferior races. In accordance with this thinking, the contemporaneous struggle for female emancipation initiated by the elite white women of these powerful nations was blind to the rights of women from all other races. It comes as no surprise then, that Castillo de González, an elite white Creole woman writing for the Creole public of her colonised land, represents the discourses of her social status and of her era.

**THE ADMIREDE ‘WHITE ANGLO-AMERICAN RACE’**

Castillo de González comments on three different racial groups in her text: the Indians (North American and Mexican), the Negro and the white Anglo-Americans. Upon crossing the Rio Grande and entering the United States, the...
The wooden handcrafts, which were probably sacred to the natives, are only toys to the author who emphasises their childishness. Additionally, the descriptions of the squatting position of the native woman and of the coarse canoe highlight their savagery. While the physical description of the natives of Vancouver — not very graceful, with big, pale, almost yellow faces — accentuates their ugliness (as ugly as the Mexican natives), the comment that they are the ‘same as’ the ones in the Eskimo village homogenises these people; to the author, they all look the same. Finally, Castillo de González creates a reason for the woman’s sadness in the imagined illness of her husband and does not consider the possibility that such sadness might be due to the degradation of being put on display. This part of the exposition seems to be of little interest to her since it is the only description of such a display and since she prefers to devote her descriptions to the machinery, the inventions and the wealth of the exhibits; in other words to ‘the progress of civilisation’.

Another comment on the Native American is her account of a Pottawatomi chief who was invited to ring the Liberty bell at the exposition’s Chicago Day celebration. Chief Pokagon, whose father had sold 1,000,000 acres at 3 cents each to the government of the United States seventy years earlier, was still waiting for payment (111). This was the land on which Chicago had been built and which, according to the author, had a value of up to $200,000 an acre at the time of her visit. On the day of the Chicago ceremony, the author recounts the speech of several natives of the islands were busy making wooden toys similar to the heraldic columns to sell. A woman squatting was rocking her son, whose crib was a coarse little canoe, and from time to time she would open the curtain of the bed behind her to talk to someone who was lying down and who I thought was her sick husband since she seemed very sad. These aborigines are not very graceful, with big faces and of pale colour, almost yellow. They are the same as the ones you see in the ‘Eskimo Village’. (104)

The wooden handcrafts, which were probably sacred to the natives, are only toys to the author who emphasises their childishness. Additionally, the descriptions of the squatting position of the native woman and of the coarse canoe highlight their savagery. While the physical description of the natives of Vancouver — not very graceful, with big, pale, almost yellow faces — accentuates their ugliness (as ugly as the Mexican natives), the comment that they are the ‘same as’ the ones in the Eskimo village homogenises these people; to the author, they all look the same. Finally, Castillo de González creates a reason for the woman’s sadness in the imagined illness of her husband and does not consider the possibility that such sadness might be due to the degradation of being put on display. This part of the exposition seems to be of little interest to her since it is the only description of such a display and since she prefers to devote her descriptions to the machinery, the inventions and the wealth of the exhibits; in other words to ‘the progress of civilisation’.

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given by the Indian chief in which he urged his people to forget resentment against whites, to abandon their ancient nomadic, hunting and fishing customs, and instead to work the fields and industry in order to live happily as citizens of the United States (112). This information, however, is quoted from the Chicago Daily Tribune since the author was unable to hear it directly because of the enormous mass of people who attended the exposition on that day (110–112, 116–117). Here, Castillo de González’s observation presents a fissure in her discourse; on one hand, she reveals the Native Americans’ betrayal by the government in the theft of their land, as well as their benevolent desire to forgive the white people. On the other hand, she portrays passive Native Americans willing to reject their cultural heritage for the sake of industry, peace, and, presumably, progress.

Despite apparent recognition of the incongruity of the Native American’s social condition, Castillo de González claims the United States is a ‘democratic’ country where all are equal. To prove her point, she mentions that all trains are required to have extra wagons for people of colour (65). What she highlights here is not the segregation of the Negros, but the fact that the wagons designated for them had to be as comfortable as those used by the rest of the people and that in Chicago and St. Louis this separation did not even exist (65). Apart from this, the only other references to Negros and to slavery are in her lengthy description of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, a text she compares to Manzoni’s The Betrothed and Cervantes’ Don Quixote (81).

The author asserts that Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel had greatly contributed to the abolition of slavery (81). Castillo de González denounces slavery because it separates families, and causes the abuse of young women, that often results in suicides and infanticides. It also provokes ignorance, vice and superstition in the plantations where each year ‘tons of black flesh had to be converted into piles of yellow coins’ (82). She describes, ‘la negrita Topsy’ [the little black woman Topsy], a character in Beecher Stowe’s novel, as a first rate creation, ‘destined to show the brutishness and insensibility’ of slavery which through the harshness of physical punishment obscures understanding and decays the soul (83). Thus for Castillo de González, the experience of the Afro-American is filtered through the eyes of Beecher Stowe, a white woman like herself, and the Negro becomes just a ‘character’ in a book. This facilitates her detachment from the issue of slavery so that racial tensions, particularly those of her homeland, are not mentioned in the travelogue. The only allusion to the issue of slavery in Cuba occurs when, after she has described the evils of slavery as shown in Beecher Stowe’s text, she claims authority for herself by stating that as a Cuban woman she has the ‘sad privilege of being an expert in the matter’ (83). Nevertheless, though she poses as an expert, she never raises the topic of race or of the Negro in Cuba. Her discussion of slavery is merely intended to praise Beecher Stowe as a woman writer and the United States as a model of democracy and progress.

Race and Gender 235

given by the Indian chief in which he urged his people to forget resentment against whites, to abandon their ancient nomadic, hunting and fishing customs, and instead to work the fields and industry in order to live happily as citizens of the United States (112). This information, however, is quoted from the Chicago Daily Tribune since the author was unable to hear it directly because of the enormous mass of people who attended the exposition on that day (110–112, 116–117). Here, Castillo de González’s observation presents a fissure in her discourse; on one hand, she reveals the Native Americans’ betrayal by the government in the theft of their land, as well as their benevolent desire to forgive the white people. On the other hand, she portrays passive Native Americans willing to reject their cultural heritage for the sake of industry, peace, and, presumably, progress.

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Another tension in Castillo de González’s discourse appears when she describes the much-admired ‘white Anglo-American race’. She is willing to forget any defects the race has because of its great qualities:

I know there is excessive ambition here; but the merchant does not cheat me in the price he asks, which is the same for all, nor in the goods he gives me. I know this race has greatly developed the spirit of monopoly and that it would not mind annexing the entire American continent but neither do I ignore that they govern and administrate well, and that the peoples who become part of the Union live happily and prosper rapidly. (65)

It is unclear from the text whether Castillo de González was in favour of Cuba’s annexation to the United States, a controversial debate among intellectuals of her island at the time. Nevertheless, her admiration for the ‘white skin’ leads her to thank Columbus for having brought it to the continent (125). She concludes that, although the conquest had been difficult, in general humanity had benefited from it because, ‘Completely happy peoples now inhabited America, without slaves, without kings, without a dominating theocracy … and many other peoples could also live like that if they modified their ethnic character and lived in peace’ (125). In other words, like Chief Pokagon’s exhortations to his people, if Negroes and Indigenous peoples would discard their ‘savage’ traditions and their ‘primitive’ way of life and, instead emulate the civilised white race, they could progress happily and prosper.

THE WOMEN’S BUILDING

In contrast to the constraints applied to the topic of race, González’ discussion of gender is voiced directly and quite strongly in the text. As a travelled and privileged white woman, Castillo de González aligns herself quite smoothly with the feminist agendas of her era. From the beginning of the text she constantly observes and comments on the situation of women — that is white women — wherever she goes. In Saint Louis (53) and Chicago (63), she notices how women walk the streets alone or how they drive their own carriages. She claims that, although equality in education means that women are no longer afforded male gallantry, it is worth the sacrifice since they are now prepared to confront all situations in their lives (64), including divorce, which she considers a wise recourse (125).

The author admires women who contest traditional gender-related restrictions; nevertheless she herself is still bound by certain gender limitations especially when it comes to her own writing. Typical of the travel-writing genre of the period, the female author apologises for lacking the authority to speak about certain topics that have been generally considered to belong to the realm of the masculine. By way of illustration, Castillo de González excuses herself for being unable to describe the exhibitions in such buildings as Machinery, Electricity, Anthropology, and Transportation, in technical terms (119). Writing of the natural
history collection, she also apologises for descriptions, which, she thinks, must sound strange to scientists (127). In the Machinery Building, she limits herself to describing those machines, such as the sewing machine (128), which she is capable of operating and which, according to her, have helped women in their emancipation from domestic labour (129).

Castillo de González’s discourse is underpinned by a gender-based categorization of writing — feminine writing is aligned with the domestic and masculine writing with the scientific. Further division along gender lines is revealed in the following description of Beecher Stowe. Castillo de González explains, ‘the irresistible eloquence which is born from the feminine heart of the author, passes through her entirely masculine brain and runs through the pages of her book’ (81 emphasis added). By referring to this woman’s ‘entirely masculine brain’, the author limits the faculty of reason to the male gender while the heart is identified as a feminine characteristic. Nevertheless, she declares Beecher Stowe a ‘prototype of what talented women will be like in the future of these countries which progress at great pace through the wide avenues of civilisation’ (85). To illustrate this point, she describes in great detail one of the novelties at the Chicago Columbian Exposition, a Women’s Building designed and organised entirely by women:

It is known that the design of the building was the work of a woman, that the collection, consignment and organisation of everything inside was done by committees of women and that they manage it entirely. Very well then! Women have achieved a superb feat. The building is beautiful, simple and elegant. The exhibit inside is rich in art and literature. The room for conferences, which are given by ladies, is extensive. There is another room for scholarly courses. The Catalogue of this particular exhibit is organised very intelligently. The restaurant in this building is one of the best served. Everything indicates that there is perfect order, expert management, the special care of those who wish to show that they deserve what they have so recently gained. (86)

No other exhibit is portrayed as extensively and with such praise as the Women’s Building (85–95). The author describes in detail the different objects representing women’s work from various nations including painting, sculpture, literature, music, scholarly studies, and scientific inventions (85–95). Her grandiose description of this building corroborates her ideas about the greatness of the ‘white Anglo-American race’ and of such a civilised nation that allows women to fulfil their talents. Aurelia Castillo de González was a feminist by the standards of her time and much concerned with the condition of women of her social class — white Creole women. In this sense, and in comparison to her compatriots, her views are radical, especially regarding divorce. However, she was unable to see the relation between the oppression of the Negro and the Indian and that of women, nor did she consider the plight of women from those racial groups. The author does not
move outside the discourses of her era and instead propagates them despite the incongruity apparent today. Analysis of *Un paseo por América*, a text that has been given scant scholarly attention, reveals the constraints and the tensions generated by questions of race and gender with which its female author had to grapple.

**NOTES**

1. First they travelled by sea to the port of Veracruz arriving on the 3rd July; then by land to Mexico city, where they stayed a few days; then Laredo, San Antonio in Texas, St. Louis in Missouri, arriving in Chicago on the 20th August.

2. At this time also, Europe begins to denounce the institution of slavery as an ‘evil’ to society, an institution from which it had already received enormous profit.

3. All references are from *Un paseo por América*, cartas de Méjico y de Chicago, and translations from the Spanish original are my own.

**WORKS CITED**


——— 1895, *Un paseo por América, cartas de Méjico y de Chicago*, Imprenta La Constancia, La Habana.


Jamaica is a land of old immigrants. Few modern Jamaicans can trace ancestral connections to the peoples who inhabited the island before the arrival of Columbus in 1494, and few can identify foreparents in the period of Spanish rule that lasted to 1655. Similarly, although the new peoples who have come to Jamaica over the last 200 years, mostly Indians and Chinese, had a significant cultural impact, their numbers have been relatively modest. The ancestors of most modern Jamaicans came to the island between 1670, when sugar took root, and 1808, when the British abolished the Atlantic slave trade. They came from Africa, carried away to captivity to satisfy the insatiable demands for labour generated by the ‘sugar revolution’ that made the island an economically important element of the British imperial enterprise. This great period of inspreading, concentrated into little more than a century, 1670–1808, occurred hand in hand with the system of exploitation that was slavery and sugar. Other ancestors came from the British Isles, most of them oppressors of the enslaved, single men who drifted in and out. Few of the Africans who arrived by 1808 ever left the island and their children were born there.

For most of its history Jamaica was a place in which few who were not born there chose to live. White people typically saw themselves as sojourners, hoping to leave the island before scythed by sickness, with the long term objective of extracting fortunes that would enable them to live as absentee proprietors. Eventually, Jamaica became a place that even free ‘born-yah’ people often chose to leave. The twentieth century saw a great outspreading of Jamaicans and Jamaican culture. Yet the island is a place painted by tourism as a kind of paradise, and it is a place about which expatriate Jamaicans are persistently passionate and determinedly nationalistic. The relative antiquity of the migration means that Jamaicans can think of themselves as effectively indigenous. Yet the notion of belonging is constantly contested by the history of alienation and the memory of slavery. The call of Africa, from Marcus Garvey to contemporary Rastafarianism, has been strong but systematically naturalised. In practice, most of the many modern economic and political emigrants from Jamaica have moved
to the North Atlantic world rather than to Africa. Wherever they went, many carried with them an intense nostalgia and a commitment to the dynamic maintenance of expressive culture, demonstrated broadly in the generational transmission of ways of talking and living, as well as music and literature.

What does this history have to do with the heritage of Jamaica and its old-immigrant culture? Caribbean scholars often find their analytical focus in the process of creolisation, as a means of explaining the creation of a world born in the island yet mothered and fathered by other peoples from other lands. In the eighteenth century, the idea of the creole was applied to all kinds of beings and things, from creole humans to creole cattle and creole architecture. In the twenty-first century, however, neither ‘creole’ nor ‘creolisation’ are part of everyday discourse, and it is probably fair to say that ‘creole’ has largely been displaced and replaced by ‘Jamaica’ and ‘Jamaican’ as the terms best indicating the local and unique. However considered, there is no doubt the conceptual richness, the playfulness and the underlying humour of modern Jamaican cultural life and language, and the physical representation of its components.

Language is the necessary starting point of any attempt to comprehend the totality of Jamaican culture, just as it is the core of creolisation. Here the benchmark remains the Dictionary of Jamaican English compiled by Frederic Cassidy and Robert Le Page, first published 1967 and in a second edition in 1980. Cassidy had earlier, in 1961, provided an interpretation in Jamaica Talk. This book was organised topically but had the twin objectives of seeking to distinguish the true Jamaicanisms from its borrowings and establishing the origins of the various linguistic elements. Significantly, Cassidy worried about the definition of Jamaicanisms, not the creole or the process of creolisation. These works of Cassidy and Le Page provided the basic materials for all later efforts to investigate Jamaican culture and heritage.

Three years after the appearance of the second edition of the Dictionary of Jamaican English, Olive Senior published the A–Z of Jamaican Heritage. Best known for her fiction and poetry, Senior had already established herself as a writer of histories, bringing together her interest in the oral and the written, memory and document. Indeed the introduction to the A–Z noted that, as well as her role as editor of the wonderful periodical Jamaica Journal, she had completed a book manuscript on Jamaican emigration to Panama. In its content and structure the A–Z established a new standard. My own copy was soon battered and dog-eared from frequent use. A second edition appeared in 1987, though the changes were few. Senior’s work was quickly emulated by the companion A–Z of Barbadian Heritage (1990).

Senior has now thoroughly revised and greatly expanded the A–Z, transforming it into an Encyclopedia of Jamaican Heritage. This is a major event in Jamaican publishing, produced by a local press, Twin Guinep. The Encyclopedia comes on the heels of a new topically organised work, Martin and Pamela Mordecai’s Culture and Customs of Jamaica (2001). The island is now
Senior’s *Encyclopedia* is one of those books we rely on to tell us things, to be looked up whenever a question comes to mind. Its success depends very much on the ease and success of that process. Many readers will find it stimulating and entertaining to browse through the volume alphabetically or at random, enjoying the serendipity, but it is the ability to find what we want that really counts. The chances of finding what we need depends on the scale and scope of the work as well as the keywords we have in mind when beginning our search.

Senior’s *Encyclopedia* is more than three times as big as the *A–Z* of 1983, with roughly 850 entries at almost two-thirds of a page on average. Some are substantially longer, surveying large subjects in one place rather than scattering connected material among more discrete entries. This approach has its advantages and disadvantages. Anyone seeking a broad introduction to Art, Language, Literature or Theatre in Jamaica, for example, can look under those headings. Senior is very successful in providing a coherent account of these subjects. The reader is offered a more integrated interpretation of a topic than can be achieved by a series of short entries.

Under Literature, a topic that did not appear as an entry in the *A–Z*, Senior traces the transition from the oral to the written and the emergence of ‘a distinct Jamaican literature in English’, connecting this development with broader social and political change. She introduces the reader to a large number of writers and their work, from the eighteenth century to the present, placing them in the context of expatriation, the economics of the publishing industry and the growth of scholarly literary criticism. She finds the emergence of performance poets the most striking development of the late twentieth century, linking back nicely to the work as well as the keywords we have in mind when beginning our search.

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Senior’s own position within the literary world of Jamaica might lead readers to look for more than is possible in that area. Literature is but a small part of the territory she seeks to cover. Her *Encyclopedia* must keep in mind a broad range of readers, from the specialist to the most poorly equipped, and must build from richly served by compendia and accessible interpretations of its culture and heritage.

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the very foundations in every subject area. As a work of synthesis, scope is equally constrained by the state of research and publication in a wide variety of areas. The scope of Senior’s work is defined by ‘heritage’ but this is itself a slippery term, subject to a variety of interpretations and expectations.

In the A–Z of 1983, Senior did not worry much about the meanings of heritage. She described her work as ‘a compendium of information about flora and fauna, people, places, historic events, cultural activities and beliefs’ (x). The principles of selection were primarily uniqueness and identification with Jamaica, superlatives, intrinsic interest (even if not unique to Jamaica), visibility, and historical and cultural significance. People, places and events jostled with plants, animals and ideas. The A–Z began with the Abeng, a cow horn blown by the Maroons to communicate when at war with the British in the eighteenth century and a continuing symbol of freedom, and ended with the Zemi, the spirit of the Arawak (now better known as Taino) and the artefact in which it resided.

In the *Encyclopedia* of 2003, Senior offers a much fuller and more reflective introduction to the scope of her task, beginning with the question ‘What do I mean by Heritage?’ (ix). Recognising the existence of a multiplicity of definitions, she gives her own view that ‘it is everything from the past (our inheritance) that shapes us and serves as pointers to who we are, both as individuals and a nation’. Every Jamaican knows a different package of these elements, she says, but their intersection has been vital in ‘the formulation of national identity’. Without using the term, Senior clearly recognises the process of creolisation, seeing the national heritage as ‘holistic’ and Jamaicans as ‘shaped by a unique set of circumstances that are intrinsic, even as we belong to distinctive racial or ethnic categories’. She distinguishes Jamaica from the ‘newly minted and fashionably “multicultural”’ communities by pointing to the long history of interaction that has been played out on the Jamaican stage and the ‘transforming genius of place’ that has enabled the remaking and naturalisation of culture. Four criteria are employed in deciding the entries: place, creative activity, history, and rituals and traditions. As to ‘history,’ Senior says that ‘Heritage is what we experience — our history, our heroes and heroic deeds, our charlatans and villains,’ and ‘what we achieve — in all fields of endeavour, over time’.

One reason why Senior offers this more extensively elaborated definition of the meanings of her work and the scope of ‘heritage’ is that over the two decades from 1983 to 2003 a great deal of attention has been given to the concept, both in the public and the scholarly arenas. Just two years after Senior’s A–Z there appeared David Lowenthal’s *The Past is a Foreign Country*, a book which quickly became one of the key texts in the critical study of heritage. Lowenthal did not cast his book in ‘heritage studies’ terms but saw it rather as a natural outgrowth of his developing scholarly interests, beginning in the 1940s with conservation in the natural world and moving on to attitudes to place and the built environment, and historic preservation. Lowenthal also became interested in the ‘celebration of ethnic and national roots’ and experience outside the United States led him to
to compare West Indian and Australian with North American orientations towards their pasts, as three New World realms where colonial and natural history had shaped distinctive ways of defining, vaunting, and rejecting various aspects of heritage' (xviii). Students of the Caribbean will know Lowenthal best for his various works on the region’s geography and politics, beginning in the 1950s. The West Indies appeared only occasionally in The Past is a Foreign Country, but stimulus from Lowenthal’s Caribbean studies played a vital role in the development of his ideas.

These ideas and developments quickly spilled over into the Caribbean, leading to the emergence of more critical approaches to heritage, its meanings and practices. In 1993 the Department of History at the University of the West Indies, Mona, introduced a postgraduate degree in Heritage Studies, which continues as a popular option and attracts more students than traditional programmes in History. The success of Heritage Studies has to do with the public face of heritage, expressed in museums, theme parks and cultural tourism, as well as changing attitudes to the preservation and the authenticity of folk life. Heritage is connected with collective and individual memory, the exploitation of a wider range of sources than has been typical of History, and the potential for bringing the past to a wider audience in a wider range of formats. The academic study of these developments and institutions shares the ambivalence common to many explorations of popular culture, in which critical approaches are counterbalanced or destabilised by an underlying nostalgia and by a desire to control or direct the ways in which the past is represented in the contemporary world, the formal task of the historian.

In The Past is a Foreign Country, Lowenthal saw his task as analytical, pointing out the ways in which the past exists in the present yet is itself transformed by the present, with fundamental implications for the meaning of preservation. He concluded that a dynamic attitude was essential, a recognition that the past is ‘assimilated in ourselves, and resurrected into an ever-changing present’ (412). This is an argument rooted in the philosophy of history, a truism perhaps but vital to the notion of historical knowledge. The only past we can know is the past that is preserved in our present, and it is only from the traces of the past that exist in the present that we can attempt to reconstruct the past. Because the principles that determine the survival of those traces are controlled by a wide range of physical, social and political factors, the past can only be known in a residual and partial form. The argument applies to heritage as much as history, and it supplies a useful way of thinking about the principles of inclusion and exclusion that might be applied to any survey or analysis of ‘heritage’.

Events, institutions and artefacts of the past that exist as traces in the present (as potential evidence for the making of histories) do not necessarily enter the realm of heritage. It seems necessary to demonstrate an active and evident role in contemporary culture, rather than assuming that the known existence of things
in the past must inevitably have consequences for our present. On this assumption, there are several entries in Senior’s Encyclopedia that might struggle to qualify as heritage. For example, Senior includes separate entries on each of the twelve principal Zemis of the Tainos, from Baibrama to Opiyel Guobirán, though it is unlikely any of them are known outside a narrow band of specialist archaeologists and it seems impossible to demonstrate a link with any aspect of contemporary culture. Similarly, the Camel gets an entry but has not been seen in Jamaica for more than 200 years and has no place in folklore. The Apprenticeship has much the same difficulties, as heritage, and might better have been included under the general entry for Slavery. Another problematic entry is that on the Colonial Church Union. This pro-slavery extremist group directed its energies to wiping out the mission stations of dissenters, particularly in the parish of St. Ann, in the months following the rebellion of the enslaved in 1831–32. The group included some colourful individuals, such as Hamilton Brown, the founder of Brown’s Town, and the Rev. George W. Bridges, but their continuing place in contemporary heritage is tenuous. These entries verge towards the antiquarian and esoteric but are intrinsically interesting and saved by the connections made by cross-referencing to other entries. In order to understand contemporary Jamaica, it might be useful to know about the Colonial Church Union and the Apprenticeship but the camels and the zemis (with several other entries on the Tainos) are little help. They do aid in pointing to the might-have-beens of Jamaican history but heritage does not deal in counterfactuals.

The Encyclopedia is a treasure trove for all concerned with Jamaica and the culture of the Caribbeans. Most often, a quick search will reveal the information hoped for and at the same time reveal a whole new set of questions and territories for exploration. Everyone will find something missing, perhaps, but it is a work in progress and a task never done. One omission does seem striking, the lack of general entries on the body and sexuality, though these clearly have a central role in the culture and have been studied, and indeed the inheritance contained in the body is the most basic of all concepts of heritage. The Mordecais seem similarly reluctant to enter this zone. The closest Senior comes is her entry on ‘coloureds but the discussion seems fixed in ‘the plantation era’ rather than connected with the people of the present. There are no entries for colour, race or ethnicity, for example, and the entry for Mongoose refers strictly to the animal without recognising its disparaging application to people. The rich variety of terms used by Jamaicans to classify grades of colour and the parts of the body, from foot-bottom to head-top, deserve a place in the Encyclopedia. As with all compilations, quibbles of this sort are inevitable. To expect the work to be truly comprehensive is to ask more of it than Senior would wish to claim.

How deep does the historical link need to be for something to qualify as ‘heritage’? Senior does include many of the more vital and exciting aspects of modern Jamaican culture but succeeds in demonstrating direct and substantial
connections to the past. For example, Dancehall emerged only in the 1980s as a term encompassing a form of popular music and its subculture. Senior explains that ‘dancehall’ defines ‘the music as well as the dances, dress, language and behaviour of this sub-culture,’ ruled over by a deejay and centred on sexuality (‘slackness’) and politics (‘culture’). The roots of this style are easily traced to the 1960s, reggae and dub, and could without much difficulty be followed back into the eighteenth century. Senior’s treatment of dancehall is up to date, though missing the bashment and the browning. It goes without saying that these terms are also missing from the Dictionary of Jamaican English, and the need for a revised edition of that vital tool is made all the more obvious by the richness of Senior’s work. New editions of the Encyclopedia will also be eagerly awaited but for the moment we give thanks for what she has done.

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CHARLES HAWKSLEY

The 2007 Cricket World Cup in the Caribbean: A Straight Drive to Regional Integration?

INTRODUCTION

For cricket purists, Test cricket is the only game to watch. An international contest between two teams lasts up to five days and requires skill, perseverance and grace in batting, while demanding endurance, tactics, skill and guile when bowling and fielding. For cricket aficionados, Test contests are rewarding and challenging as the balance of the game fluctuates over two innings a side, and the pressure of the event can expose as many frailties in individuals as it can reveal aspects of strong character. Watching a batsman play himself in and then build a big score can take all day, but it can be a very enjoyable one as a spectator, often seated in the outer ground or in the grandstand, preferably partaking of some liquid refreshment. There is the thrill of seeing a master batsman take a bowling attack to pieces or watching a fast bowler devastate opposing batsmen in short bursts. Equally enthralling can be a spinner weaving his magic on a final day turning pitch when the fielding side just needs those last two wickets to win the game, while spectators hope vainly that the no. 10 and no. 11 batsmen can hang on for an honourable draw in the final overs. But such cricketing delicacies take time, so it was perhaps inevitable that in the revolution of media and communications developed in the 1960s and 1970s, ‘extravagances’ such as a five-day game would be revised to fit with the demands of immediacy.

In 1963 the game of ‘limited overs’ cricket, known now as ‘one-day’ cricket, was introduced into the English county competition (Pollard 662). In this style of cricket two teams bat for one innings each on the same day for a limited number of overs. The game still takes about eight hours, but there are fewer long breaks and there are restrictions on field positions within the first 15 overs. Initially limited overs cricket was for 60 overs a side but the standard format has become 50 overs per side.1 At first such a break with tradition attracted enormous hostility. The new game was described by traditionalists as a ‘circus’ or ‘pyjama cricket’ owing to the colourful clothing adopted by national teams. Ironically, the very commercialisation of the game provided a lifeline to Test cricket, which was suffering from dwindling crowds and stale television coverage. The revenue gained from the more frequent one-day international competitions (or ‘ODI’ as they are now known), played usually before or after the Test series, assists national...
The biggest prize in one-day cricket is the quadrennial World Cup. This event was first held in 1975 and has been staged in England (1979, 1983, 1999), the subcontinent (1987 and 1996), Australia and New Zealand (1992), and South Africa (2003). It has grown in importance and has become financially lucrative for both winners and hosts. For the 2003 World Cup held in South Africa, with games also in Zimbabwe and Kenya, a total of US$5 million in prize-money was offered with a $2 million cheque to the winner and $800,000 for the runner up (CricketInfo, 2003a). Over 40,000 international tourists were expected to attend the 54 matches at 15 venues in the three countries (South Africa Info). In the end over 626,000 people watched the 52 matches and the opening ceremony (WCCOC), and the games had a television audience of an estimated 1.2 billion people (Illawarra Mercury).

The 2007 Cricket World Cup will be held in the West Indies, and estimates are that around 100,000 tourists will descend on the region (Best 3). International visitors require a variety of accommodation types, meals, tickets to the games, and nightclubs and bars in which to celebrate. Caribbean states are already well placed to handle such demand but could do more to streamline the movement of tourists between different islands. Integration of schedules and migration controls in airports may facilitate tourist travel, banking and other services, and may produce an unforgettable Caribbean experience for the many thousands of international cricket supporters who may desire to return later. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has the opportunity to use the event to work toward the full implementation of its planned Caribbean Single Market Economy (CSME). A World Cup in the Caribbean would also provide a significant cash injection to West Indian Cricket in the form of revenue from broadcasting rights, and the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) has reportedly already concluded broadcast rights with BSkyB for an undisclosed amount (BBC Sport, 2002a 2).

This article focuses on the preparations for the 2007 World Cup to explore some of the issues associated with increased regional integration in the Caribbean. The island and mainland states of the Caribbean world, as well as the West Indies cricket team, will need to focus on making the event both a sporting and an economic success. To maximise this opportunity Caribbean states need to push the CSME concept right to the boundary. Long after 2007, when the World Cup competition has receded into memory, the significant effects of increased integration on the economies of Caribbean states through the creation of a common market will remain.

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE WEST INDIES

The West Indies has a proud cricket history and is unique in that it is a 'national' team with players from more than one nation-state. The West Indies cricket teams to finance their tours, to develop new cricketing talent, and to pay elite players in an era of professionalism. For purists, the short version of the game has moved from an anathema to a necessary evil.

The West Indies has a proud cricket history and is unique in that it is a 'national' team with players from more than one nation-state. The West Indies...
was one of the first Test playing nations (1926), and from the mid 1970s to the early 1990s they were the undisputed Test cricket champions. Their rise to world dominance in the 1970s and 1980s was based on raw talent. Teams were built on a fearsome all-pace attack and were characterised by graceful, yet destructive, batting. Despite the Caribbean’s economic woes, the West Indies cricket team — often known as the ‘calypso kings’ or ‘The Windies’ — provided a focal point for Caribbean people and gave them enormous pride. The West Indies won the first two World Cup finals in 1975 and 1979, were runners-up in 1983, and set the standard in fielding that other teams sought to emulate. As in politics, however, staying at the top is difficult and any long-term period of domination becomes increasingly difficult to sustain, as rivals strive harder to take the top position. With player retirements in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the once mighty calypso kings became relative easy-beats and they went through a humiliating slump. Fortunately there are signs of a resurgence with some strong performances throughout 2003 and 2004.

The career of current Test Captain Brian Lara in some ways mirrors the fortunes of the West Indies cricket team during this recent period. The mercurial left-hander from Trinidad was first capped in the Third Test against Pakistan at Lahore in 1990, but he really set the international cricket public talking as the sun began to set on West Indies cricketing domination. With his 277 against Australia at the Sydney Cricket Ground in January 1993 Lara came of age (Baggy Green). The next year he set record Test and first class cricket scores — 375 for West Indies against England at St John’s, Antigua in April 1994 (Cricket Org 2003a), and 501 not out for Warwickshire against Durham in June of the same year (ECB). As a batsman he is much respected, but he alone can only do so much. After some indifferent form in the late 1990s, Lara led the way in the West Indies’ first World Cup game in 2003 against host country South Africa where he hit a stylish 116 from 134 balls as the West Indies scored 278 and bowled the hosts out to win by 3 runs (Sydney Morning Herald). Almost a decade after his Sydney double century he captained the young West Indies team against current Test and World Cup champions Australia in a spirited but ultimately lop-sided four test series in the Caribbean in April and May 2003. The Sir Frank Worrell Trophy was retained by Australia on the back of the 3-1 result, but the West Indies’ Fourth Test victory at St John’s, Antigua (admittedly a dead rubber) produced the highest successful fourth innings run chase in Test history when the West Indies scored 418 to win by 3 wickets (Miller, 2003a). Their good form was partly carried into the one day series where the West Indies came back from 4-0 down to end Australia’s unbeaten 21 game winning one-day streak, ultimately losing 4-3 (Miller, 2003b). At the ‘national’ level, the backbone of a strong Test and one day teams is emerging, and if the current players stay it will be a team that reflects the cultural diversity of the Caribbean. The 2003 West Indies Test squad against Australia involved the Guyanese Shivnarine Chanderpaul and
Ramnaresh Sarwan, the Jamaicans Marlon Samuels and Jermaine Lawson, Devon Smith from the Windward Islands, Ridley Jacobs from the Leeward Islands, Brian Lara, Mervyn Dillon and Darren Ganga from Trinidad and Tobago, and Vasbert Drakes, Pedro Collins and Tino Best from Barbados.

Lara has been in the team for the high points — including the last time Australia was beaten in a Test series at home (1994) — and for the low points, especially the one-day defeat by then cricketing minnows Kenya in a 1996 World Cup game in Sri Lanka, a loss that sent shock waves around the cricketing world. In the international market of competitive sport, a batsman as talented as Lara is much in demand, and for those fortunate enough to be blessed with cricketing talent, the ability to play at international level may lead to a secure financial future. The high remuneration offered by the English county cricket competition draws many of the best players from Test cricketing countries. West Indian cricketers of the calibre of Vivian Richards and Clive Lloyd made a decent income playing for English county teams, then for World Series Cricket, as well as stints in Australia’s state-based competition when it needed an injection of talent in the 1970s and 1980s.

There were, however, places where some West Indians would not go. In the days of white minority rule in South Africa, the cricket chairman (and 2003 World Cup organiser) Dr. Ali Bacher offered Vivian Richards a blank cheque to play in South Africa. Returning the cheque, the ‘Master Blaster’ (as Richards was called in the sports media) allegedly said, ‘Till the day comes when you people will recognize a man irrespective of the colour of his skin, I’ll not go to your country’ (Woolridge). These days however a rehabilitated South Africa is an acceptable place for West Indians to earn a living from cricket. Lara has played for Northern Transvaal, and in 2003 Jamaican Jimmy Adams, then recently retired from Test Cricket, was skipping the South African Free State side in the South African Provincial championship (Alfred). At an individual level cricket can provide select West Indians with opportunities to earn a relatively high income, if good enough, and with national selection comes opportunities for self-enrichment.

CRICKET, POLITICS AND THE 2003 WORLD CUP

Alone among Test cricket playing nations, the West Indies team does not represent a single nation-state. Test playing nations have national cricket boards that are independent of their governments, although they are often pressured to adopt the stance of the government on specific issues. In the Caribbean the game is administered by the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB), which functions as a board of control, and it is in the unusual position of having to balance the views of many independent governments, as well as the interests of the players. It therefore has difficulty in taking a political position on any matter, except perhaps player safety. As it has to be physically located somewhere, its offices are in St John’s Antigua (WICB 2004a). The WICB regulates the international fixtures,
selects the ‘national’ coach, appoints the selectors, and issues press releases.

The WICB website further provides up to date statistics and other information on Caribbean cricket competitions, cricketers, records and news.

An example of the difficulties facing the WICB in balancing player payments, player safety and security, as well as politics, came in the 2003 World Cup in South Africa. With each game a matter of potential earnings, maximising the opportunity to play generally makes political principle a thing for wealthy nations. South Africa as the host of the 2003 World Cup, and in its bid to ‘share the spirit’, scheduled some pool matches outside of its own territory. Six games were scheduled for Zimbabwe, three each in Harare and Bulawayo, and two for Kenya, both in Nairobi. In the lead-up to the start of the World Cup competition the political situation in Zimbabwe6 and the security situation in Kenya became central issues and the international cricket community found itself divided.

The move to boycott the Zimbabwe games was led by the governments of England and Australia. In doing so they found themselves at odds with other participating World Cup countries, their own cricket boards and the International Cricket Council (the ICC).

The security situation in the other East African host nation, Kenya, was also in the news. On 31 January 2003 New Zealand Cricket announced it did ‘not believe the International Cricket Council’s (ICC) decision to play in Nairobi was reasonable’ (ABC News Online), citing the ICC Security Delegation report which made it clear there was a ‘tangible terrorist threat in Nairobi’. The other team set to play in Kenya was the West Indies and during these dramas the West Indies Cricket Board (WICB) consistently refused to make any comment on safety in East Africa, on the ‘right’ or ‘wrongness’ of travelling to Zimbabwe, or on the positions adopted by other teams with respect to Zimbabwe or Kenya.

In mid January both the acting chief executive of the WI cricket board, Roger Braithwaite and opening batsman Wavell Hinds issued press releases to say that BBC quotes attributed to them about Zimbabwe which claimed they supported touring, were fabricated (BBC Sport).

In international relations, doing nothing can sometimes be a very important strategic move. WICB officials did not take a position on these issues, but given the difficulties of balancing the views of several national governments as well as player concerns about the possibility of lost payments and lost world cup points, this was not surprising. However there are other explanations for the apparent non-position. While playing in Kenya was perceived as a security risk by New Zealand, it is unlikely that the same risk was attached to a West Indies game. New Zealand is identified with Western interests and the cricketing ‘establishment’ of England and Australia, despite its refusal to support the ‘coalition of the willing’. On the other hand West Indies cricketers are seen as being supportive of Kenya and sharing a past of colonial domination with the other non-white Test nations.
Tourism would be the obvious winner. The silence of the WICB and their decision to play in Kenya was more than tacit support for the hosts. The ICC had already given its approval to the WICB’s bid to hold the 2007 World Cup in the Caribbean. The WICB’s policy of no comment also served to maximise potential future votes on the ICC membership board, comprised of the ten Test playing nations and three associate members, one of whom was Kenya ICC Executive Board. Playing the match in Kenya would help Kenyan cricket authorities, themselves pressing for full ICC membership and thus Test Match status. In this instance the WICB was able to help Kenya for both the interests of its own players and for itself. The 2003 World Cup had a television audience of approximately 1.2 billion people. A world cup in the Caribbean will no doubt similarly provide a significant cash injection in the form of broadcasting rights, and generate significant multiplier effects for several cricketing and non-cricketing Caribbean states alike. Tourism would be the obvious winner.

CARIBBEAN CRICKET

For the majority of Caribbean cricketers being selected for the national team will remain a goal, and the domestic competition is probably the farthest they will climb in world cricket. At the ‘domestic’ level, cricket is organised into first class and one day competitions. In the Caribbean the championship for the longer version of the game is named after the major sponsor, Carib Beer, and is comprised of six teams: Barbados, Guyana, Leeward Islands (the islands between Anguilla and Dominica), Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Windward Islands (the islands between Martinique and Grenada). In 2003 both a touring India A side and a West Indies B side participated in an effort to raise the skill level of the championship (Cricket Info 2003c). For the 2004 competition Kenya replaced India A as the international invitee, but with the winning cash prize of just US$10,000, and $150 for each man of the match award (WIBC 2004b), the incentive to play in the England county championship is still strong where contracts for established Test players are often in the region of £40,000-50,000 a season. For decades Caribbean cricketers were without structured support and hence entirely reliant on their individual talent and business acumen. Recently moves have been made to develop the best young local players. In 2001 the Shell Antilles and Guianas Ltd., a major petroleum supplier and shipping company, in a joint venture with the WICB, commenced its sponsorship of the Shell Cricket Academy, located at St George’s University, Grenada. The institution aims to train young cricketers not only in cricketing skills — such as shot selection, slips fielding techniques, running between wickets, and improving bowling action — but also computer and other literacy skills, and financial management (Nicholas 2002). Administrative and financial support is also firming at the international level. For the 2003 World Cup, the West Indies Player Association (WIPA) reached an agreement with the WICB to maintain the equal split of sponsorship moneys. In the 2003 World Cup, the West Indies Player Association (WIPA) reached an agreement with the WICB to maintain the equal split of sponsorship moneys. In

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addition, the West Indies’ major sponsor, the LNM Group, the Trinidad-based second largest steel producer in the world (Nicholas 2003), was to award the team incentives for reaching each stage of the World Cup (Reuters 2003a). The financial benefits for teams that win such prestigious championships are considerable. The Australian players who won the 2003 World Cup took home AUD $3.6 million (Reuters 2003b), or around AUS$224,000 each for the seventeen players who formed the squad, each. Such prize money in the Caribbean would go some way toward setting a player up for his retirement. West Indians playing full-time in the Caribbean are not as fortunate as the contracts and match payments are much less. On the whole individual and even team success in cricket can do little to ameliorate the larger problems of standards of living in the Caribbean, however, the 2007 World Cup has the potential to bring significant foreign exchange, infrastructure, construction and expansion in the service sector, particularly in tourist facilities. Hosting this major sporting event will be a challenge and Caribbean states will need to deepen their efforts at regional integration to make sure they receive the full economic benefit.

**The 2007 World Cup in the West Indies**

The governing body of the game of cricket is the International Cricket Council (ICC), composed of cricket playing nations and geographic areas from around the world. The World Cup tournament is allocated on a continental basis and all cricketing countries registered with the ICC are eligible to submit bids to host matches. The 2007 World Cup is actually allocated to the North American continent but the status of the West Indies as a Test nation — as well as the fact that West Indians understand, appreciate and support the game — dictates that the Caribbean host the event. However, the ICC is keen to expand the game globally and therefore invites bids from all cricketing nations, basing its decision to allocate games on the best possible financial returns and the interest of promoting cricket. The North American continent Canada has competed in several World Cups, most recently in South Africa, while the United States of America and Mexico are ICC Associate Members. All three countries have apparently expressed an interest in hosting World Cup games. The big threat to Caribbean cricket is the USA, which boasts over 10,000 domestic players but plans to increase this to 40,000 by 2006, and hopes to attain ODI status in the same year, guaranteeing it an automatic place in the 2007 World Cup. The USA has 37 separate cricket leagues and a stated objective of hosting one-day games between full members at various locations (USACA). Managing director and CEO of ‘Windies World Cup 2007’, Chris Dehring, claimed it was a ‘distinct possibility’ that some part of the tournament would be played in the USA. Disney World, in Orlando Florida, could perhaps be a venue (BBC Sport 2003b).
The ICC Executive has the power to allocate matches, and former WICB President Pat Rousseau claimed the ICC could take the event away from the West Indies if facilities were not adequate by 2005, although the ICC denied there was a deadline. It is likely that most, but perhaps not all, World Cup games will be played in the Caribbean in 2007. To secure the fixtures the WICB has made progress on venues and infrastructure, as well as undertaking a study tour of the 2003 World Cup in South Africa (AFP 2003a), Rousseau claimed that in 2002 only Grenada’s facilities were up to standard (BBC Sport 2002b), a fact confirmed by Dehring when he admitted at a July 2003 ICC meeting in London that ‘… the West Indies understood that the world expected international standard facilities, quality support services, enhanced security, efficient event management and commercial responsibility. … A team of dedicated professionals will be hired to help us deliver a truly world class event with Caribbean flavour’ (AFP 2003a).

While the event appears to have been secured, the WICB has not rested on its laurels and has announced the creation of a Cricket World Cup 2007 Board with 15 members. The new organisation includes Chris Dehring, several WICB nominees, as well as a representative from CARICOM, one from the Caribbean Tourism Organisation, business leaders, aviation and communications specialists, the St Lucian Minister of Foreign Affairs and a finance attorney (WICB 2003). The success of the World Cup depends to a large extent on streamlining travel between the various Caribbean islands and to Guyana. Pat Rousseau clearly understood this in 2002 when he stated ‘We cannot have 10 or 11 customs and immigrations to clear. It is nonsense’ (BBC Sport 2002b). To this extent the Cricket World Cup 2007 Board’s primary purpose dovetails well with the larger project of regional integration that is the basis of the CARICOM organisation. If the World Cup is a success, the region may be poised to enjoy the benefits of further regional cooperation.

REGIONAL COOPERATION IN THE CARIBBEAN
Historically regional cooperation between Caribbean states has been difficult to achieve. The attempt to bring the Caribbean together into a political or economic union between 1958 and 1961 to create the Caribbean Federation was not successful. This pre-independence system was intended to unite the thirteen English speaking colonies into a political federation that would then grant individual independence within a large federated Caribbean state after five years. When Jamaica withdrew, largely because of economic concerns about subsidising smaller Caribbean nations, the scheme was effectively finished (Manley 22-23). Independence did however come to the British Caribbean territories that desired it. From these new states came also a desire to have closer association, especially economic integration, and the signing of the Treaty of Chaguaramas in 1973 marked the formation of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM). The slow progress of CARICOM toward realising its goals was
recognised at the 1989 Heads of Government meeting in Grenada and identification of the areas that required increased cooperation began in earnest (Department for International Development (DFID) 1). That meeting identified nine areas where improvements in regional cooperation was desired: (i) institutional arrangements and procedures for critical decision making in CARICOM; (ii) the rights of establishment, provision of services and movement of capital in the community; (iii) industrial policy; (iv) trade policy; (v) agricultural policy; (vi) transport policy; (vii) disadvantaged countries, regions and sectors; (viii) competition policy; subsidies and dumping; (ix) disputes settlement (Ibid 2). On 5 July 2001 an amended treaty that sought to redefine the ‘objectives, organs and powers’ of CARICOM and to create the ‘Caribbean Community including the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME)’ was opened for signature. The revised Treaty of Chaguaramas (the CSME Treaty) requires states to sign up to Protocols I to IX, which form the basis of a plan of action for increased regional integration (CARICOM 2002a).

CARICOM aims to integrate Caribbean states into a single economic entity with uniform laws in key areas, a free flow of goods and services and the ability to bargain collectively with the outside world. One benefit of regional cooperation is that Caribbean states would no longer compete against each other for markets in which to sell similar products. When this point is reached CARICOM will cease to exist and will become CSME. CARICOM’s Terms of Reference: Caribbean Single Market and Economy (CSME) Assessment of Region’s Support Needs argued that a consultant was required to study and identify apparent problems preventing the implementation of the nine protocols. While monetary union and fiscal harmonisation were not originally on the agenda, the document noted that it was time to embrace such ideas and push toward a true common market (DFID 1).

The CSME goal will involve the abolition of protective tariffs under which such industries as exist in the Caribbean were created, so across the region progress toward integration has been uneven and has founded on the rock of state self-interest. In international relations, states frequently join organisations on the chance that the association will be beneficial, even if they are unsure about their real level of commitment. The hesitancy is often due to concerns by nations over their sovereignty, a concept that can be loosely understood as a state’s control over what goes on within its borders (Krasner 142). Involvement in regional organisations necessarily involves tradeoffs between the domestic and international spheres. The nine key areas of proposed action for CARICOM involve significant changes to the functioning of Caribbean states, and to some extent the creation of supra-state institutions such as a Caribbean Court of Justice. To an extent the CSME concept abrogates national sovereignty but, like the European Union, the idea is to create something closer to ‘pooled sovereignty’ where nations agree to create a body that can assist in regional governance, while states retain paramount importance in decision-making and within the...
institutional structures they have created (Kegley and Wittkopf 190-191). The positive effects need to outweigh the negative consequences before states enter into such agreements. As Paul Sutton (1993 9-10) notes, the reason that Caribbean states are involved in regional cooperation at all is so that they may increase their individual development.

Specific CARICOM policy goals have been the creation of a common market for goods and services, the furthering of social welfare in health and education infrastructure, articulated transport systems and a forum in which to attempt to develop coordinated foreign policy. Such moves are of benefit to all Caribbean states, so it is no surprise that the number of treaty signatories has expanded since 1973 when only four states — Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago — signed the original instrument (CARICOM 2004a). By September 2003 thirteen of the fifteen CARICOM states had signed the revised 2001 treaty that created the CSME— Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago — leaving only Montserrat to sign, yet only seven had ratified the instrument, and of these only Barbados and Suriname had enacted the treaty into their domestic law (CARICOM 2003a 1).

By late 2003 all member states had identified Ministries with responsibility for CARICOM Affairs (Ibid). Twelve member states have signed an agreement to create a Caribbean Court of Justice that may hear disputes arising from conflict between states, and ten have ratified the instrument (Ibid), which is sure progress from April 2003 when only Barbados, Guyana and Saint Lucia had ratified (CARICOM 2003b 2). Some progress has also been made on the important provision of the Free Movement of Goods, although most states retain discriminatory internal taxes or other fiscal charges on goods of community origin (CARICOM 2003a 2). CARICOM passports have not yet come into operation, nor have states taken action on the removal of barriers to the free movement of capital (Ibid 3-4).

In 2003 CARICOM celebrated its 30th birthday, however, the process of regional integration in the Caribbean is not yet complete. Despite significant achievements in identifying areas where efficiencies could be created and cooperation increased, further commitment to progress on economic integration and the creation of a single market is required. One of the main reasons that regional cooperation is desirable is because it is perhaps the best defence against the policies of neo-liberal economic globalisation that promote competition amongst nations and specialisation in production. Small states that first create a common market among their own members may be partially shielded from the economies of scale of larger developed states and form the fluctuation of global commodities markets. Regional cooperation thus provides one defence against the vulnerabilities felt by small nations. Colonial rule was largely responsible for the plantation economies in Caribbean states and the sectoral imbalances of production. The irony may be that the most enduring cultural trait of colonial
CONCLUSIONS

Thankfully for cricket purists the prospect of a World Cup final played at Disney World in Orlando Florida appears to be receding. This nightmare scenario for broadcast on television. If West Indies selectors and players have three years to build a strong team that will at least make it to the second round of the tournament. As 2003 World Cup hosts South Africa found to their detriment, it is important to do the sums right in cricket games, and Kenya showed that a non-Test playing team can reach the semi-finals if it can cause a few upsets and other results go their way. But the West Indies will need more than just correct mathematics and luck to reap the maximum benefit from this coming event. The 2007 World Cup will not solve the economic problems of Caribbean states, but CSME may well assist the lives of Caribbean people by creating a more stable economic structure, and closer interaction between states and peoples.

NOTES

1 While the first limited overs World Cup was held in 1975, the popularity of the modern one-day game owes much to the later rupture between the cricketing ‘establishment’ and 66 of the world’s best international players who from 1977 signed up for the new ‘World Series Cricket’ (WSC) competition sponsored by the Australian media magnate Kerry Packer. In essence the dispute concerned taking cricket from an amateur sport and making it a professional sport that could be made more suitable for broadcast on television.

2 Two of the planned 54 games were cancelled. England withdrew from their contest with Zimbabwe over security concerns and New Zealand did the same for their bout against Kenya (see note 16).

3 The idea of a Caribbean community has been around for some decades and is discussed later in this article.


5 The controversy over Zimbabwe concerns land, food, race and political control. Of the minority white population of around 250,000 in 1979, some 190,000 have now
left. The remaining 60,000 white Zimbabweans represent under half of one percent of the population of over 12,627,000 million. Nonetheless around 4,000 white farmers own about one third of the land in Zimbabwe, and the countries most productive farms. Supporters of President Robert Mugabe seized white farms, and the issue became central to the March 2002 election won by Mugabe’s Zimbabwe National African Union Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). The Commonwealth Chairpersons’ Committee on Zimbabwe — President Thabo Mbeki of South Africa, Nigerian President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and Prime Minister John Howard of Australia — examined the election results and concluded they were deeply flawed with widespread vote-rotting and intimidation. It then called for international agencies to assist Zimbabwe with food shortages, and for South Africa and Nigeria to work with Zimbabwe with an end to promote political reconciliation between the Mugabe government and its opponents, principally the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The Commonwealth then delivered its ultimate sanction — suspension — effective immediately for one year. ICC member nations who sought to play their fixtures in Zimbabwe would be doing so against the backdrop of Zimbabwe’s suspension from the Commonwealth.

Such fears stem from the bombing of the US Embassy in Nairobi on 7 August 1998 that killed at least 213 people, and possibly as high as 254, injuring between 4,500-5,000. On 28 November 2002 the Israeli-owned Paradise Hotel in the port city of Mombassa was bombed, killing thirteen people, three of whom were Israelis on holiday.

For their part the West Indies played in Kenya at the Kimberley ground in Nairobi on 4 March, and won.

The story allegedly claimed that Jamaican opener Wavell Hinds, wicket keeper Ridley Jacobs and WICB chief executive Roger Brathwaithe had argued against a boycott of Zimbabwe.

Figure is an educated guess as details of contracts are private. As an incentive to performance England in 2000 adopted an elite ‘central contract’ system for the main Test players, each worth around £250,000, for up to 20 players. This mirrors a system adopted in Australia and South Africa for the top players who represent their country (BBC Sport 2002c). England currently has around 12 players on similar central contracts.

LNM was not required to provide bonus payments as the West Indies game against Bangladesh was ‘washed out’ (cancelled due to rain); the points were shared, and the West Indies team did not progress to the ‘Super Six’ stage in South Africa.

LNM was not required to provide bonus payments as the West Indies game against Bangladesh was ‘washed out’ (cancelled due to rain), the points were shared, and the West Indies team did not progress to the ‘Super Six’ stage in South Africa.

Shane Warne was an original member of the Australian team but a positive test for banned substances forced him out of the World Cup campaign. Warne went to South Africa but he did not play a game and was later banned for one year and awarded a smaller share of the loot.

The ICC has 10 Full Members, 27 Associate Members and over 50 affiliate members. The ICC Executive Board works to fulfil the ICC objective of promoting cricket around the world and consists of the President, the Chief Executive Officer, the ten Full Members and three Associate Members — currently Kenya, Malaysia and Holland. The three non-Test playing positions are rotated among Associate members. Some of the lesser-known Affiliate member states where the game of cricket is played include Iran, Finland, Brazil, Vanuatu and, apparently, Afghanistan (ICC 2004).

Britain still controls Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Montserrat and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The Bahamas is a member of the Caribbean Community but not the Common Market.
19 South Africa miscalculated under the Duckworth-Lewis system employed to decide rain affected matches and drew their final Pool match with Sri Lanka. They required one more run to win but the South African batsman Mark Boucher, acting on instructions from captain Shaun Pollock who believed the score was enough, blocked the final ball. Pollock was later relieved of the captaincy and South Africa descended into a state of mourning as they failed to qualify for the tournament they were hosting. The incident shows how the local team doing well is important for local media coverage and enthusiasm when staging a large event.

WORKS CITED


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