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Bim

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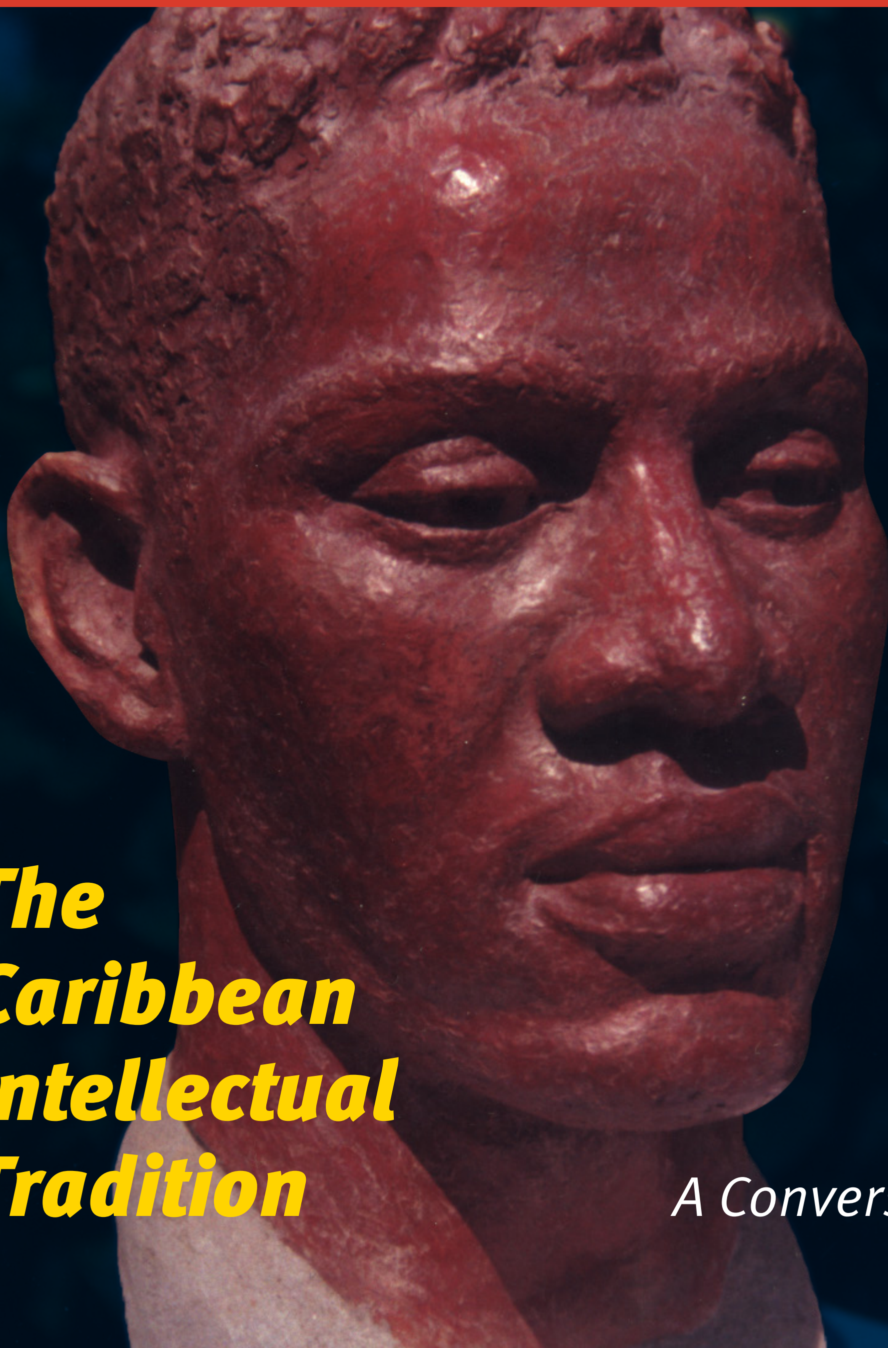
Arts for the 21st Century

BUST OF GEORGE LAMMING BY KARL BROODHAGEN



The Caribbean Intellectual Tradition

A Conversation

Bim

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***BIM:* Arts for the 21st Century** is produced annually and publishes creative works, essays and critical expositions that meet the needs of the literary and artistic community. It accepts submissions that focus on literary, artistic and cultural phenomena within the Caribbean and its Diaspora. *BIM* accepts and publishes academic articles that are of high quality, but which are not too heavy with jargon to the exclusion of the wider reading public. *BIM* accepts non-academic contributions of high quality, including book and other reviews, poetry, short fiction, photographs and cartoons. In future issues, it will also accept digital art, electronic sound and digital video files, and critical comments on these. In all cases submissions will be subject to scrutiny by the editorial committee.

Manuscripts should be forwarded in double-spaced format, preferably with an accompanying electronic text file in Microsoft Word format. Endnotes are preferred. Images should, at a minimum, be 300 dpi in quality. Submissions should contain the name of the author and title of the contribution on a separate page, but the author's name should not appear on subsequent pages of the actual manuscript.

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EDITORIAL

CONVERSATIONS WITHIN THE CARIBBEAN INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

A PERSPECTIVE

The Caribbean intellectual tradition is a complex configuration of thought and practices. The region was born and wrought within the cauldrons of racial slavery and various 15th-century European colonial projects. It was at the heart of the making of the modern world. In the 17th and 18th centuries, two of the richest colonies in the European colonial system were Barbados and then Saint-Domingue (now known as Haiti). To live and create a form of human life, the enslaved African navigated the historical catastrophe of being enslaved and what Aimé Césaire calls the "thingfication" process, which shaped these societies. Through practices of refusals, rebellions, and revolution in the colony of Saint-Domingue, the enslaved created genres of political thought which were catalysed by practices and notions of freedom. Their Afro-Caribbean religious practices created not only new gods and loas, but new cosmologies. Music, art, and performances became rituals in which the black body was self-fashioned and humanised. These are some of the grounds which shape the intellectual history of the Caribbean—a history of thought and practices from the "people below".

Caribbean subaltern thought begins in these forms: Afro-religious practices in Cuba, Jamaica, Trinidad, and, of course, Haiti and elsewhere reshaping the work of the spirits while creating specific contours of Caribbeaness. In the political domain by the 20th century, ideas of black nationalism took form, and, in some instances, elements of Ethiopianism lived alongside black nationalism as well as other conceptions of nationalism and socialism. The early 20th century witnessed forms of radical blackness from Afro-Cubanism in art; cultural, literary, and anthropological studies in Cuba; and the explosion of literary journals in the Anglophone Caribbean. This period of the 20th century also witnessed in Haiti the publication of Jean Price-Mars' *So Spoke the Uncle*, and the consolidation of modern Haitian art. These were seminal moments in the history of radical Caribbean thought.

Outside the region, the Caribbean diaspora, whether in London, New York, Paris, or Amsterdam, was engaged in deep conversations with each other and others from continental Africa, creating a network of conferences and cultural and political activities in the various colonial metropoles. Their names are too many to mention, but there was Otto Huiswoud and Anton de Kom from Suriname, Aimé Césaire and the Nardal sisters from Martinique, George Padmore and CLR James from Trinidad, all of whom belonged to a generation of thinkers who, in the early 20th century, reworked the Caribbean intellectual tradition. Two overarching impulses of this tradition during the colonial period were sovereignty and forms of freedom. Today, these two conceptions, which influenced the character of Caribbean life, remain alive.

The early 20th century provided another set of grounds for Caribbean thought, specifically the centrality of the literary, in which George Lamming was one pillar. Not only did Lamming edit *Bim* for a while and was an early writer in this journal in the 1940s, he was always a figure that was a touchstone for the Caribbean, a region which in his view had a distinctive set of possibilities. His passing in June 2022 marked a moment in the history of the region. The region will miss that voice and his ideas about the possibilities of a different postcolonial Caribbean.

Over the last few years, the passing of Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott as well have marked the closing shadows of an era in the history of Caribbean thought, one in which literature was a defining feature. What defines the Caribbean today? At the popular level, it is said that the music defines the region. As performance and sonic language, musical genres from steel pan to calypso, reggae, and others, are forms of popular languages. If words are "public tools", then the sonic language of various Caribbean musical genres is not just a view of the complexities of the Caribbean world, but perhaps more importantly a view from "below". But is this a complete definition of the region? Lamming, for whom this issue is dedicated, once remarked that one of the most profound challenges that faced us was how to control "the burden of history and incorporate it into our collective sense of the future".

Today in this period of deep neo-liberalism, it is sometimes said that there is no serious Caribbean tradition and that the halcyon days of the 20th century marked a moment which has passed. What might have passed is the push of aspects of the tradition to make deep social and political changes. And even that is debatable. What has not passed is the everyday search, the impulse to live and make life, for the ordinary Caribbean person. In this regard, both music and art become critical terrains of the tradition within the present. So perhaps what Caribbean politics demands today is a dose of the imagination which catalyses music and art.

This issue of *Bim* opens with a series of tributes to George Lamming, our doyen of Caribbean letters and thought. In a moment when Caribbean sovereignty is fragmented and horizons of possibilities seem limited, we present various offerings here.

The volume is divided into segments. Following the reflections on Lamming are a set of essays which seek to elaborate aspects of the Caribbean intellectual tradition. It is important to note that many of the offerings address the work of female Caribbean thinkers. The essays are followed by a selection of poems and short stories. This edition fittingly closes with images and an essay about the work of Haitian abstract painter Renold Laurent. Fitting, because the Caribbean intellectual tradition recognises all forms of art as the deepest conversations between the present and the past; to the extent that, as the late Wilson Harris once noted, there is a philosophy of history which resides within the "arts of the imagination".

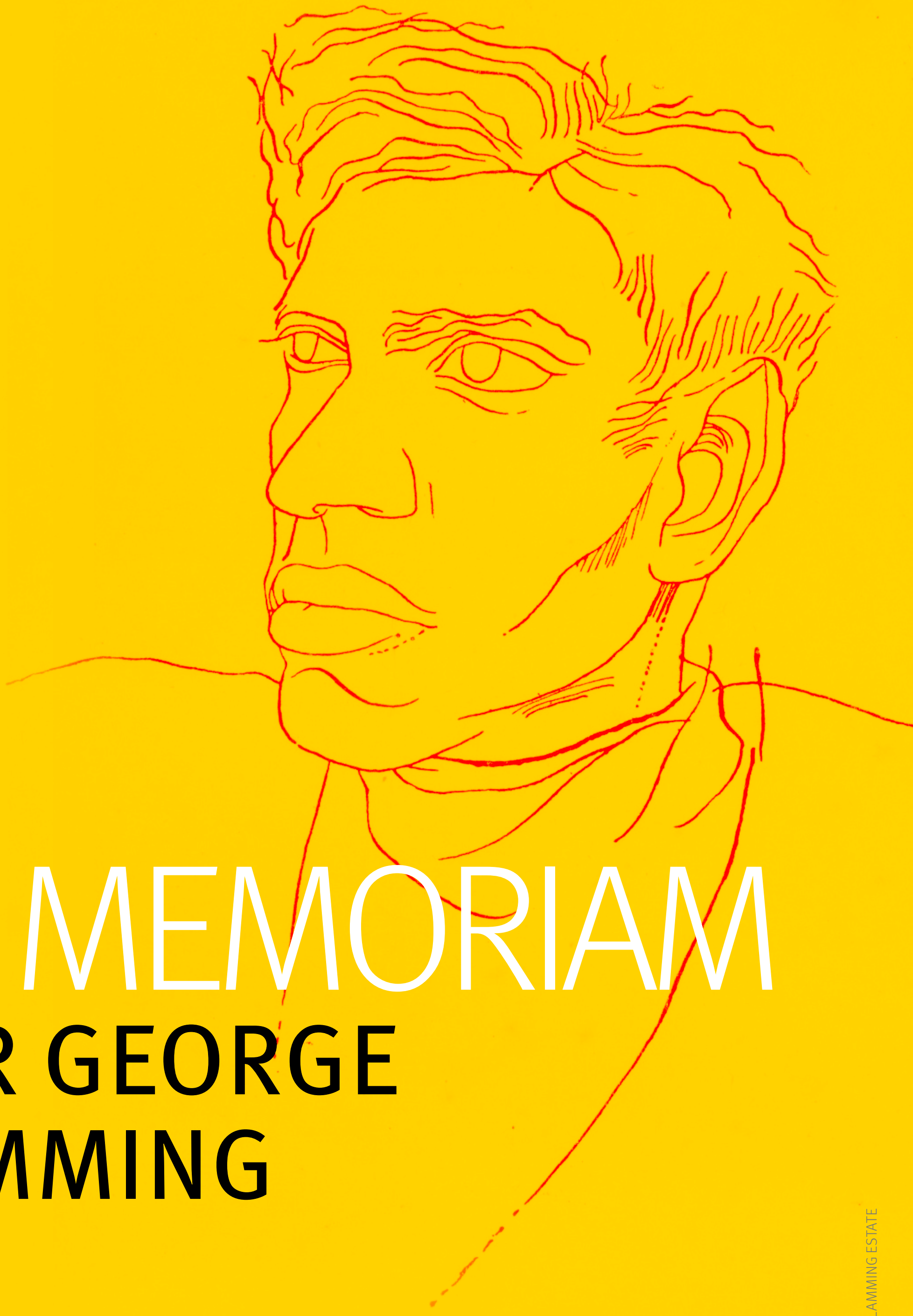
This issue of *Bim* does not include all aspects of the Caribbean intellectual tradition, but we hope that the conversations within it illuminate how we grapple with the various problems of Caribbean life. The ground of the history and practices of thought which we have created ourselves are the necessary inventories about who and what we are. In 1999, Lamming collaborated on and then edited with the Trinidad and Tobago Institute of the West Indies a publication called *Enterprise of the Indies*. In the editorial, he wrote, "What is the Caribbean…? …[T]he vocabulary of taste and sound and sight may vary the…ethos remains [and] repeats itself. The sea registers a recurring theme…everything is multiple here…." This complex polyvocality is perhaps a defining feature of the Caribbean. "The unity is the submarine," insisted Kamau Brathwaite. This is about how history, culture, and the performances and products of the imagination have wrought us

into a singularity punctuated by difference and integrated complex networks of movement and diasporic gatherings.

Today that movement is greater than ever, generating a new circuitry of what constitutes the Caribbean. There are no "pleasures of exile" here, but instead a grappling with the world both at "home" and "abroad". The offerings in this issue, written by a combination of those at home and abroad, hopefully opens up a space where we can begin another necessary inventory of who and what we are.

Anthony Bogues & Maziki Thame

Kingston, Jamaica
July 2023



IN MEMORIAM
FOR GEORGE LAMMING

COURTESY OF THE LAMMING ESTATE

FLOOD WATERS

By Dr. The Most Honourable Anthony "Gabby" Carter

Flood waters
rushing down again
the village filled with rain
they're singing
happy birthday

Flood waters
today I'm nine years old
my mom god bless her soul
she's singing
happy birthday

But through it all I'm feeling all so sad
wishing for the dad I never had
oh today is such an awful day
wish the flood waters
would wash my tears away

Flood waters
rushing through the roof
the rain it speaks the truth
while they sing
happy birthday

Flood waters
rushing through the roof
the rain it speaks the truth
while they sing
happy birthday

But through it all I'm feeling oh so sad
wishing for the dad I never had
oh today is such an awful day
wish the flood waters
would wash my tears away

Flood waters
hmm, mmm, mmm
flood waters
hmm, mmm, mmm
flood waters
hmm, mmm, mmm
flood waters
hmm, mmm, mmm

Flood waters
rushing on my head
soon to be on my bed
while they sing
happy birthday

Flood waters
rushing on my head
soon to be on my bed
while they sing
happy birthday

But through it all I'm feeling oh so sad
wishing for the dad I never had
oh today is such an awful day
wish the flood waters
would wash my tears away

Flood waters
hmm, mmm, mmm
flood waters
hmm, mmm, mmm

George
George
no rain could keep you down
in no country no town
no rain could keep you down

You fought poverty
and came to me
as a mentor
an author
a lecturer
a professor
a doctor
that's what you are

Flood waters
Flood waters
could never keep you down
could never keep you down

you activist
what is this
I reminisce
on who you are

To me you're a star
to me you're a hero
I want the whole world to know
my friend George Lamming is a hero

Flood waters

rushing down the deep
the village filled with rain
while they sing
happy birthday

Flood waters
hmm, mmm, mmm
flood waters
hmm, mmm, mmm

Flood waters

This song was performed at the memorial service held for George Lamming, in June 2022.

MEMORY

By Esther Phillips

If sharing between two makes a memory complete,
what happens when one forgets,
and every *Do you remember?* is met with a blank look.
A shake of the head, *No, I don't remember.*
I don't remember at all.

Then it strikes you that you never really knew,
Could not have known, the exact map of his memories.
Their colours and contours, nuances, their proper indentations.
How long each stood in the queue waiting for his admittance.

So come, memories of mine, let me light candles and burn sweet incense for you.
Let me summon that day when, for the first time, we sat and talked until late in the evening.
It wasn't so much what we said, but the way that trust, ever drawn by the open heart,
Came in and settled itself in the room.
It was then I felt that whatever might come, I could find such moments again,
Or it would be worth the seeking.

Or the way he danced with three-year-old Zoë (not knowing I observed him),
But I saw how the tensions he had so carefully nurtured slipped for a while,
His face transformed by such delight, such gentleness!
I held that memory against the harsher times
When neither words nor silences could counter disillusionment, or
Calm the impatience with a world gone deaf to those ideals he had fought for all his life.

And how his voice could turn a lecture into a symphony!
His power of intellect, the elegant phrasing that rose or fell
on the under song of ocean tides, multi-tiered resonances, the soft swell of waves,
Water sifting through pebbles.

Where do I store a voice that caused the blood to leap inside the veins,
The mind to sound out depths I had hardly known,
The ear to hear how chords, captured within a phrase,
Could reinterpret meaning, spark illumination!

Now, I no longer ask, *Do you remember...?*

A TRIBUTE TO LAMMING

by Anthony Bogues

As I reflected on George Lamming's life, a remarkable life, on where he was born in the village of Carrington, of the island of his birth, Barbados, and then on his profound literary and personal commitments to the Caribbean, I reflected and thought about these islands of ours washed by the Caribbean Sea.

These islands, where, as Derek Walcott reminds us, "the sea is history". And here Walcott does not mean that it is just the Caribbean Sea that has history, rather it is the entire Atlantic Ocean. Walcott means the movements on this ocean through which these islands were born at the heart of the European colonial project. Lamming was always clear about this history. He once said, "The entire Caribbean society has rested on the complex of plantation slave society." And in this world that rested on plantation slavery, a different and distinctive form of slavery in human history emerged, not seen before, and not just because of its violence, its systems of death and humiliation. Racial slavery, as a social system, created a society in which race determined perpetual servitude. What the Guyanese historian Elsa Goveia would call a group of people who would become "property in person".

Born 89 years after so-called emancipation in the Caribbean, Lamming had to confront the afterlives of this kind of plantation slavery and colonialism. He had to confront the afterlives in which history moved like a sedimented deposit, structuring the everyday lives of the society. In a 2014 interview just recently published, he stated: "I have always thought that I was lucky or blessed, because from before I was in my teens, I was in secondary school, and already decided that I was a writer, and thought of myself as a writer, even before I wrote my first book."

Lamming, we know, was a writer, a novelist, a poet and an essayist, and his six novels—from the first one, *In the Castle of My Skin* in the 1950s, to *Natives of My Person in the 1970s*—tell the story of this Caribbean. A Caribbean that begins in plantation slavery and colonialism, and a Caribbean that also begins a journey of expectation, what he calls in that 2014 interview "a journey that is still insisting on being discovered".

This remarkable man of letters was always searching, because one of the things he was clear on was that these islands of the sea, constructed by histories of crossings of the Atlantic Ocean, had to confront who and what we are. In that confrontation about who and what we are, we had to have what he called, in conversation with David Scott some years ago, a certain kind of "sovereignty of the imagination". This work of the imagination for Lamming was not about literature or the literary. It was about a certain kind of imagination that had to do with the political, social, and, yes, economic. And at the heart of this work, indeed of his own, I would argue, was the matter of language.

From 1956, at the black writers' conference which he attended in Paris, and at which there were folks like Fanon, and Stephen Alexis and Jean Price-Mars from Haiti. In addition, there were figures like Césaire, Richard Wright and Léopold Senghor. From that particular conference, Lamming presented in his speech "The Negro Writer and His World" a sentence in which he says, "*A name is an infinite source of control.*" This was the dilemma for the Caribbean. How do we name our own reality? And for Lamming, it was a kind of dilemma which required us to have a certain form of imagination that resided in the question of sovereignty. Because it was this sovereignty which would give us the capacity to name.

In his novel *Season of Adventure*, he ended with a declaration: that "all the republics would fall until they begin to use the language of the drum". And where does this language of the drum come from? It comes from, in Lamming's words, the "people from below". In a profound sense, this was the ground from which he operated. It was where his gaze was always focused. And we who live today; who inhabit these islands of the seas, in whom the islands of the seas are in our bones, we who are here to celebrate a Caribbean life, a life of letters, a life of remarkable audacity, intellectual and political, might have to think about this language of the drum and how we structure ourselves around the language of the drum.

Lamming—George—is now gone. He has gone to join the ancestors, CLR James, Kamau Brathwaite, Derek Walcott, Walter Rodney, Alejo Carpentier, Andaiye, Rex Nettleford, among many others. And I can just imagine, as I thought about this, and about all the others who have gone to join the ancestors. I thought about them laughing and drinking Caribbean rum and debating the Caribbean. And I wonder about the keeper of the gates of this ancestral land, and what he or she must be thinking about these audacious Caribbean souls. Something, I am sure, that keeper has never seen before.

So we celebrate George, but as we do so, we should remember what he thought about himself. So I leave with these particular words he wrote in 2016, at the end of the new introduction to *In the Castle of My Skin*:

> The catapult ones of rights have become the subject of their own history, engaged in a global war to liberate their villages, rural and urban from the old order of poverty and fear. This is the most fundamental battle of our time, and I am joyfully lucky [and you can see the twinkling in his eye when he writes this] to have been made by my work, a soldier in their ranks.

But, I would say, he was more than a soldier in their ranks. He was a soldier in the ranks of those of us who want to have a different Caribbean. He was really the anchor of our ideas. An anchor about the possibilities of what *we* may become, of what *we*, the people of these islands of the sea, might one day fashion as a different future.

Walk good, my friend and brethren. Your life and work will shine, leading us onwards always. One love.

FOR GEORGE LAMMING

by John Robert Lee

**"...the end of all our exploring, will be to arrive where we started.
And know the place for the first time".**
—*Four Quartets*, T.S. Eliot

What remains to be said, written and sung?
What remains to be said, written and sung?
We have been to the end of history and back again.

We have returned from cities of perfection,
come again to narrow lanes of Belmont,
sat in the King's halls of Cambridge, re-entered March and
walked with laureates in Boston, Stockholm, Castries,
climbed hills of shanties above Fort-de-France,
swam in Skeete's Bay, drank over late-night fish on Baxter's Road, Bridgetown,
laughed with reggae stars and kaiso kings,
strolled pagodas in Tokyo, temples in Kyoto,
and prayed in simple pews of village churches.

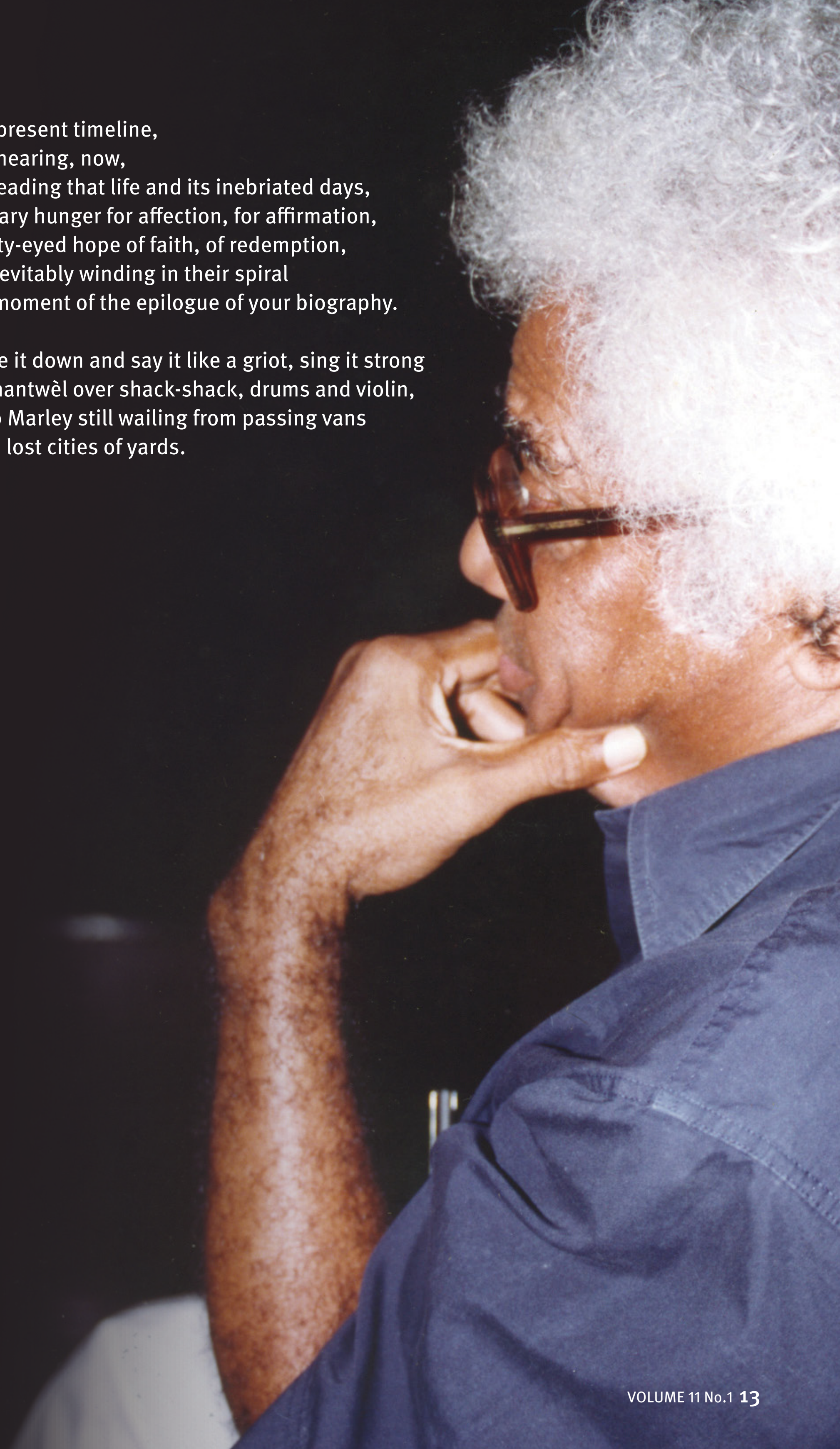
Love has left wrinkled skins of loneliness,
children gone to far countries, as they must,
lovers distracted by diversions of age
and old flames rekindling dead wood.
What remains to be sung, made poetry of,
of all those gone-so-quickly hours?

All of it, I guess, that voyage of a life,
if you are brave enough to find
metaphors of the metaphysical in it.

In all the messy stuff,
the sacred and sacramental
in certain failures,
in bird-call insisting, insisting,
pup saying something to a goat in the yard,
konpa music coming up the hill,
child shrieking somewhere in a house,
and so on, all of it there,

in your present timeline,
in your hearing, now,
now threading that life and its inebriated days,
your weary hunger for affection, for affirmation,
the shifty-eyed hope of faith, of redemption,
years inevitably winding in their spiral
to that moment of the epilogue of your biography.

So, write it down and say it like a griot, sing it strong
like a chantwèl over shack-shack, drums and violin,
like Bob Marley still wailing from passing vans
over the lost cities of yards.



COURTESY OF THE LAMMING ESTATE

BLACKSPACE AND RITUAL FABULATION

ERNA BRODBER AND THE AFTERLIFE OF LIVITY

By Catherine John

"Well, the work that I've tried to do is to make people aware of the history of kinship. And to make aware that their history is the history of the one beside them, and the one around them and so on, in the hopes that people will see each other as blood relations to be loved rather than disregarded or despised." *—Erna Brodber*

"For me, narrating counter-histories of slavery has always been inseparable from writing a history of present, by which I mean the incomplete project of freedom, and the precarious life of the ex-slave, a condition defined by the vulnerability to premature death and to gratuitous acts of violence." *—Saidiya Hartman*

The Archival Black Absence

Erna Brodber, born in 1940, notes in an interview that her father was "reduced to tears when he thought about the fact that people like him, Black people, had no written history". He was referring to a non-generic history, one that addressed their lives, circumstances, and emotions as African Jamaicans specifically.[1] Erna Brodber's work can be seen as a response to this vacuum.

She was trained at the University of the West Indies (UWI), earning a BA in History in 1963, and eventually an MSc in Sociology and a PhD in History. She describes her post-graduate life as a "ghost-like wandering through the disciplines—sociology, social psychology, anthropology, psychiatry, social work...in search of a methodology by which information about and action with or on behalf of black people could proceed at the same time" (165).[2] The body of work she produced includes over twenty-four articles, six single-authored historical texts, five novels and one collection of short stories.

Reflecting on her own education, Brodber states that of the "more than twenty papers" she read for Honours in History at UWI London, only one dealt with the Caribbean. Her specific focus, which, she states, "they tried to dissuade me from choosing, was—mercifully—the Reconstruction period in the southern United States" (164).[3] Thus Brodber intentionally trained herself. Her scholarly research, her fiction as well as her community-related projects were all a counter to the void in both the archives and the educational system, a void about who "we" the descendants of enslaved Africans are and have been.

Across the water, twenty years later, Saidiya Hartman, trained in literature with a BA from Wesleyan and a PhD from Yale, wrote three of the more significant texts in 21st-century African American literary theory. She, too, studied US Reconstruction, exposing it as a period that counteracted the liberty of the formerly enslaved. What resulted instead was a "burdened individuality, one that highlighted the blameworthiness of the freed (Black) individual within the context of the larger society".[4]

Hartman's work demonstrated how "discourses of rights" were implicated in and "facilitated relations of domination and new forms of bondage", as opposed to creating subjects who were equal citizens in a free new world. Her work privileges inversions, re-reading the dominant society's universalising discourses, as well as those ascribed to the Black body and exposing the extent to which a national rhetoric of good will was at odds with the "gratuitous acts of violence" and the "premature death" that actually characterised the life of the formerly enslaved.

What interests us here is Hartman's short 2008 essay, "Venus in Two Acts", in which she puts forth the concept of "critical fabulation", which she describes as the process of "straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, [while] enacting the impossibility of re-presenting [these] lives through the process of narration" (11).[5] Critical fabulation, for Hartman, is an attempt to conjure beyond what the archive presents while accepting the impossibility of imagining more than the official record allows. She states, "By playing with and rearranging the basic elements of the story, by re-presenting the sequence of events in divergent stories and from contested points of view, I…attempt to jeopardise the status of the event…and to imagine what might have happened or might have been said or might have been done."

Venus, the title character, is "a dead girl" fleetingly referred to in the records about a slave ship captain's murder of two black girls. Nothing is known about Venus, and that is Hartman's point. Venus (a name frequently used to describe Black women in slave plantation records) is similar to thousands of Black girls fleetingly described and found in archival references to places like "the barracoon, the hollow of the slave ship, the pest-house, the brothel, the cage, the surgeon's laboratory, the prison, the cane-field, the kitchen [or] the master's bedroom". These narratives are never *about the black girl or woman*, but rather they are "about the violence, excess, mendacity, and reason that seized hold of their lives, [and] transformed them into commodities and corpses, and identified them with names tossed-off as insults and crass jokes".

Hartman keeps returning to a basic question: "How does one recuperate lives entangled with and impossible to differentiate from the terrible utterances that condemned them to death…that identified them as units of value…that claimed them as property, that stripped them of human features? How does one rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human, as the practice of freedom?" I maintain that Erna Brodber's body of work has in many ways anticipated Hartman's questions and mounted a valiant attempt at a kind of response.

The Literary Turn

Brodber's fiction has been interpreted through a wide variety of lenses. Carolyn Cooper, in the 1990s, addressed the Afro-Jamaican folk elements in *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*.[6] In the same era, Daryl Cumber Dance makes comparisons between this same text and African American writer Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters*.[7] Dance's essay was published in the same year and shares overlapping titular references with Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido's groundbreaking anthology on Caribbean women's criticism, *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature*. The "kumbla" reference, taken from Brodber's first novel, "signifies movement from confinement to visibility allow(ing) for a multiplicity of moves no longer contained and protected".[8] Simone Drake explores migration and gendered dynamics in Brodber's *Lousiana*,[9] while Suzanna Engman compares the text to Wilson Harris' *Jonestown*.[10] Other scholars, such as Maria Cristina Fumagalli, situate Brodber's work within a modernist context and compares it to the writings of Lady Mary Wroth.[11]

Curdella Forbes in her analysis of Erna Brodber's novel *Louisiana* argues that there is a pioneering of a "non-nationalist worldview" here, one in which the "hegemony of the spirit", a term used in the novel to describe spirit possession, is the primary vehicle by which a "higher than human power" directs the course of both the living and the dead. Forbes further argues that the novel's main character develops powers akin to "an Old Testament prophet or West African spirit medium" and, in so doing, Brodber "recreates religious experience as the *organizing* dynamic of liberation [in the novel]…making this experience the heart of its epistemology".[12]

In a more secular but compatible reading, Jenny Sharpe first refers to essays by both June Roberts and Angeletta Gourdine[13] as evidence of analyses of *Louisiana* that see Brodber as instructing us to "listen carefully to the past for an agency that exists in the silent spaces of history". Sharpe, however, suggests that "the novel's depiction of spirit possession [be read] as a critical engagement with the materiality of sociological data and official archives". Sharpe notes that Brodber's character Ella "likens the moment of spirit possession to the feeling of a silver spear piercing through one side of her head to the other", going on to explain that the spear leaves a trail of silver dust. Quoting from the text directly, Sharpe adds, "these particles of dust are absorbed into the brain and your whole mind becomes suffused with understanding".

In the novel, Ella Townsend is an anthropologist, somewhat of the ilk of a Zora Neale Hurston, trained in anthropology at Colombia and hired in the 1930s as a WPA worker, sent to "retrieve the history of Blacks in South West Louisiana using oral sources" (*Louisiana*, 3).[15] Unlike Hurston, instead of colouring within the lines of academic rules of engagement and returning with credible information, as the opening of the novel states, "Ella came under the influence of psychic forces. Today, the intellectual world understands that there are more ways of knowing than are accessible to the five senses. In 1936 when Ella Townsend received her assignment it was not so. The world is ready" (*Louisiana*, 4). In the novel, Ella becomes the unwitting "horse" or spirit vessel for the

Era Brobder

transfer of soul consciousness of two dead women, one from St. Mary in the state of Louisiana in the US, and the other from Louisiana in the parish of St. Mary in Jamaica. Ella hears voices and receives knowledge from both of these women, and ultimately becomes a clairvoyant who can see people's pasts and help them relive painful and forgotten moments, as a strategy for getting over trauma and moving on with their lives. She renames herself "Louisiana", which is not only the name of the geographic locations in two separate countries, but is also a contraction of the names of the two "spirit women", Louise Grant and Sue Anne King, who transfer their souls and their gifts to her.

As far as Columbia and the intellectual academy is concerned, Ella "disappeared with a confidence trickster into storefront fortune-telling in receptive New Orleans". (*Louisiana*) As Jennifer Sharpe argues, "Due to the incompatibility of the two discourses of science and superstition, the idea that spirits actually speak through the social scientist can only be presented as fictional rather than empirical evidence." Sharpe states singularly, "The rules of reason cannot account for the process of understanding that [Ella] is describing, for [she] is able to access a knowledge that exceeds her own individual mind." Sharpe argues, therefore, that if we read the spirit possession represented in the novel as literal rather than figurative, in so doing, our understanding of "the materiality of the archives, whether… textual, visual or sound recordings elicit a more intuitive, rather than rational response to a misrepresented or hidden past, thus breaking with an archival violence enacted against the dead".

As Sharpe suggests, Brodber's deliberate collapse of the subject/object construct in a myriad of ways in this text stages a confrontation with Western, scientific, exclusively rational ways of knowing the world. As we can see, Ella got much further, by claiming the seeming contradictions to objective reason that she confronted, than she would have had she resisted. But beyond this, the notion of collective consciousness is introduced and takes on a wildly visionary status, since Brodber draws the transfer of souls into the equation. What are we to make of this move on her part? Ancestors handing down not just written notes of their struggles but passing on their thoughts in tangible form. Ella as the character Louisiana becomes a bridge. Instead of being an "objective" observer, she makes herself part of a transtemporal matrix, sacrificing her individual psyche in order to allow others to heal. There is no structure in place in the West to systematically separate the advent of this way "to be" in the world from the skeptic abyss of psychiatric disbelief. What Brodber manages to make materialise in *Louisiana* is not a static notion of religious icon as healer with the power to cure. What is birthed instead is a multidimensional representation which combines the roles of doctor, community organiser, therapist and priest into a syncretic mix, one that spirals, circles and triangulates beyond the linear spectrum of time as we know it.

Sociological Fabulation: Brodber's Response to Archival Absences

In 1996 at the Rex Nettleford Conference at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, Erna Brodber gave a keynote address entitled, "Re-Engineering Black Space." Here, she called on schooled intellectuals "to give Black children more than the legacy of slavery to carve out a Black space in this white world". Six years earlier, Brodber had published "Fiction in the Scientific Procedure." Like Hartman, whose notion of "fabulation" implied a creative union between archival "fact" and a narrative that attempted to fill in the plausible gaps, Brodber described how and why fiction became a part of her approach to teaching Jamaican social workers. In Hartman's instance, the archive bequeaths limited information about the full lives of the Black persons fleetingly referenced. For Brodber, the absence of full representations in the archive was also replicated in the case studies that were taught in the various social science disciplines in Jamaica during the 1970s.

In this essay, Brodber maintains that as a sociologist, her first novel, *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home*, was not intended to be a literary text, rather it was part of her "sociological method".[16] She states, "My sociological effort and therefore the fiction that serves it, unlike mainstream sociology, has activist intentions: it is about studying the behavior of and transmitting these findings to the children of the people who were put on ships on the African beaches and woke up from this nightmare to find themselves on the shores of the New World".[17] While trained as a historian, it was as a post-graduate student in sociology that Brodber first concerned herself with the gaps and absences that various academic disciplines had about diasporic Black populations. Generic quantitative data was available, but it often did not represent the specificity of our experiences. Brodber states clearly at one point, "Every book on slavery was about the slave master."[18]

She ran into problems with the quantitative methods used, stating that sociology would operate by saying things like, "Eighty percent of people think this or that." Brodber noted that this did not help her to understand "who the people actually were". This frustrated her, and as she observes, the "boredom with a social science methodology devoted to 'objectivity' distancing the researcher from the people and spurning the affective interaction led me into fiction". She developed the habit of writing down her feelings before entering the field as well as her speculations about the informants' lives that questionnaires could not penetrate. She entered one of her descriptions into a fiction contest and it won third place. This experience helped her to see that "fiction could

be an opposite to quantitative work". Her fiction writing became a more serious part of her psychotherapeutic methodological praxis.

Her fictional sketches in the field also served two other purposes. On one hand, they were a way to deal with what she describes as "prejudice against blacks in a country of blacks. The enemy was a ghost that talked through black faces" (165). She had returned to Jamaica, after experiencing the open racism in North America and England, to find an anti-black bias back home. "It was maddening, and to keep my sanity I talked on paper, reviewing from time to time what I had written before" (165). On the other hand, there was "her need to find data for her students". She was teaching a course in "abnormal psychology", one that "could not be sensibly taught without case studies, of which there were none. Such were the limitations of the social sciences in the Caribbean of that era" (165).[19]

Brodber then makes several key observations relating to traditional approaches to research in the social sciences, the biases that were inherent, and how she approached the use and creation of data in a way that would serve the African diaspora population in Jamaica. Quoted at length below, the complexity of what she assessed, conceptualised, and theorised is still formidably ground-breaking and innovative—to say nothing of the still urgent necessity of modeling what she did in contemporary academic spaces—today:

> Anthropology, generally speaking, is directed by concerns that are not at all those of the researched. This is not the way of social science. Accountability has not been to the people researched, but to fellow academics. *It has been my position that the native social scientist cannot operate in that way.* She/he is part of the polity examined, and the conceptual framework with which she/he works as well as the way the data are presented have to take this into consideration. Thus although *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* was intended to provide information such as Erickson, Mead et al. had given to students of culture and personality, I felt that my examination of Jamaican society could not be written from the standpoint of the objective outside observer communicating to disinterested scholars. It had to incorporate my "I" and to be presented in such way that the social workers I was training saw their own "I" in the work, making this culture-in-personality study, a personal and possibly transforming work for the therapists and through them, for the clients with whom they would work. This study also had to be short enough, sharp enough, and topical enough to make its point quickly because as a poor, half-illiterate people, we have neither the time, the skills, nor the paper to deal with long works. It had to have space in which people could do their own dreaming, their own thinking, and their own planning. These considerations account for the format, content, and style of the piece. For whatever reasons, *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* finds itself on reading lists for Caribbean literature rather than Caribbean sociology. It has failed to inform sociology students.

Brodber continues:

> My exposure to psychiatric anthropology, the last of my journeys in search of a methodology, showed me that my habit of writing through my feelings before entering the field was a valid methodological device. Having through writing out, rid oneself of fantasies concerning the field, the researcher is better able to see the field's reality without this particular distortion. The fiction writing that I had been doing could, theoretically at any rate, make me a better field tool. But there was another way in which this act of writing informed my social science practice.
>
> Before my entry into published fiction, I had researched and published two pieces in Jamaican sociology: *Abandonment of Children in Jamaica* (ISER, 1974) and *Yards in the City of Kingston* (ISER, 1975). The one rose out of the other, one providing hypotheses which the other investigated. Hypotheses for the more recent work, *Yards*, now needed to be examined through a longitudinal study of life in Jamaica. I needed to know if the patterns of behavior I had noticed in the two previous studies were traditional, thus requiring a particular approach to treatment, if they could at all be changed and ought to be changed. *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* was an instrument through which I thought through the cardinal problem implicit here—the relationship between history, tradition, and defense mechanisms, applying the result to the act of producing the research outline for the next academic piece. It was what the theorists call a "heuristic device". All of this mental activity eventuated in a three-year-old field study of Afro-Jamaicans over the age of seventy, out of which had come a collection of oral histories, raw data for anyone who cares to use it, a PhD thesis on the history of the second generation of freemen in Jamaica, and several papers in oral history methodology and in Jamaican history and sociology.[20]

David Scott notes of Brodber's PhD thesis, later published as *The Second Generation of Freemen in Jamaica, 1907–1944*, "I have long thought this work to be an historiographical intervention of unparalleled significance, demanding much more critical engagement than it has so far received".[21]

In her own words from "Fiction in the Scientific Procedure", Brodber crafted a methodology which not only utilised concrete research gathered in the field and in the archives, but she then analysed that evidence and used creative writing to gain an understanding of aspects of the raw data that were not self-evident. As she states above, "I needed to know if the patterns of behavior I had noticed in the two previous studies were traditional, thus requiring a particular approach to treatment if they could at all be changed and ought to be changed." She describes "the cardinal problem" that she encountered as the relationship between "history, tradition and defense mechanisms". She then went back into the field and interviewed elders over the age of seventy, with the express purpose of doing a deeper dive into some of the insights that she had gained from the data that produced the two articles previously mentioned. Along the way, she learned a great deal about oral history methodology, as well as history and sociology specific to Jamaica.

Brodber's *sociological fabulation* engages in a kind of activist paradigm shift, one that was too forward thinking for her discipline at that time. Her innovative plan of attack had several features:

i) The strategic use of fiction to create more accurate and complex cultural case studies.

ii) A meticulous and careful abandoning of the Western (colonial) stance of abstract objectivity, in favor of incorporating the "I" of the native social scientist into the way the research is presented.

iii) The native social scientist's insertion of his/her/their "I" functions to engage the "I" of the student learner, thus opening the door of possibility to their personal transformation and possibly those of the clients they serve.

iv) Brevity and precision are taken into account in light of the external pressures facing the student learner.

v) Space is created for student learners to incorporate their own thoughts, dreams, and plans.

vi) Native social scientists must write through their feelings before entering the field to eliminate or decrease the fantasies and/or biases they might have about the subjects.

vii) Fiction is utilised as a "heuristic device", i.e., as a strategy to understand and assess the problems presented by the data gathered. This aids in laying the foundation for future studies.

It is important to unpack the implications of all that Brodber states here. Scott remarks that her work is mobilised by "a social ethics of Black memory". He notes that "what is at stake in Brodber's work is not only an epistemological claim about *access* to the past. But more than that, there's also an obligation to learn, and to learn how to learn, from the living voices from our past still with us in the present".[22] Brodber's *sociological fabulation* establishes a methodological gateway, incorporating fiction, demonstrating the need for a unique approach to the education of the descendants of the enslaved. Brodber states the need succinctly: "The descendants of enslaved Africans have something experientially that continental Africans don't have. We were sold, auctioned, transported, considered cattle as well as freed without a society being formed, and we have to find a way of handling all of this—emotionally, spiritually and psychologically".[23] Her fiction is instructive in this regard. Her fourth novel, *The Rainmaker's Mistake*, directly addresses these predicaments.

The Rainmaker's Mistake

The Rainmaker's Mistake can be seen as Brodber's response to both the auction block as well as the psycho-spiritual and materially existential conundrum in which diasporic Africans find themselves. Marie Sairsingh, in her analysis of this text, sees Brodber as "reshaping the genre of the historical novel to pose philosophical questions of being and to interrogate the concept of freedom within Caribbean emancipatory discourse".[24] Comparing her innovative reconceptualisation of time to the work of George Lamming, Wilson Harris and Derek Walcott, Sairsingh further argues that Brodber's work supersedes conventional bildungsroman structures that have shaped fiction about colonialism and empire. Curdella Forbes, for her part, argues that *The Rainmaker's Mistake* situates Brodber as a philosopher, cultural activist, and fiction writer par excellence, stating that "in this latest example of her ongoing search to re-narrativise the history of how black space is engineered in the New World, Brodber makes a turn to the novel as fable. Yet the rigorous historical, anthropological, and philosophical imagination that energises the book complicates this designation" (1-4).[25]

This work appears to inaugurate a new category which could be called "emancipation sci-fi mystery". This is a kind of *Island of Dr. Moreau* that meets Octavia Butler's *Kindred* in the post-emancipation 1838 British West Indies. In concrete terms, we enter a world in which a six-year-old girl, Queenie, is a seemingly happy labourer on a sugar estate, one who is surprisingly eager to be incorporated into the "soon-to-be-pickney-gang" of workers. However, much to her disappointment and the astonishment of the various adult labourers, their master, Mr. Charlie, announces that they are free. In the novel, Mr. Charlie is described not only as master, but as also father and creator, and the text opens with a description of him ejaculating "his seed" into the earth and with this act creating "yams" that eventually become people. Hence Queenie, her six-year-old cohorts, as well as the adults and children both older and younger believe that they were yams created by Mr. Charlie. The already inscrutable text then takes an unexpectedly magical realist turn when one Woodville, the seeming overseer on the estate, laughs during the emancipation proclamation and generates spiritual power and energy strong enough to launch Mr. Charlie and his great house into the sky and out of orbit.

After Woodville's act of sacrilege, another labourer, Isis, declares that her daughter Sally Water was never a yam. Woodville and Isis split off from the rest of the group, who end up on the imaginary island of Caberita, where they use their former skills to carve out an existence, and in the case of Queenie and the "soon-to-be-pickney-gang" attempt to make philosophical sense of who they are. For the reader needing traditional historical and geographical markers from a narrative, Brodber's text will frustrate, confuse, and even bore. Although this work has elements of mystery and intrigue, Brodber's novel requires a disciplined, analytical reader, one with an eye for the layers of meaning behind the turn of a phrase, and one who is also a student of pre- and post-emancipation Caribbean history, since nothing in this text is accidental. The narrative voice shifts from character to character and from chapter to chapter without introduction or warning. The persistent reader realises at some point that the story's characters have been the victims of a maniacal scientific experiment, one calculated to dramatically slow down the aging process, scramble their memory, and create a timeless slave labour force for the plantation.

The science fiction portion of the novel unfolds as we realise that Queenie and her cohort are over one hundred years old, although they are as able-bodied as teenagers. They develop the capacity to travel backwards and forwards through time. The mystery element of the text unfolds as Queenie and company try to discover why some of their members are beginning to age and what their origins really are if, in fact, they "were

never really yams". They are also in the process of understanding their relationship to their own bodies and the natural world, since the experiment not only altered their memories and retarded their growth but also suppressed their understanding of reproduction and procreation. Then, as if things weren't complicated enough, Brodber adds mythological storytelling to the narrative map.

Attempting to provide an alternative to the simplicity of the yam story, Luke of the Caberita island males tells the children they are descended from a lost tribe with the power to fly towards the stars. As it turns out at the novel's end, the reader discovers that the formerly enslaved residents of Caberita island were in fact descended from a fairly powerful African tribe, which previously had such a deep understanding of the natural world that they were able to manipulate the forces of nature and make rain. At a low point in their circumstances, however, the tribe's rainmaker made a mistake, and natural disasters ensued, creating a situation in which survival involved striking a bargain with the likes of the Mr. Charlies of the world. Forbes argues that the rainmaker's actual mistake was being "tricked into following the white man's star, thereby unleashing the history of slavery that they had to endure, witness and dismantle".

These revelations that come at the end of the text appear to have several implications. First, the extent to which Africans were accidentally, if not maliciously, complicit in the enslavement of their brethren is hinted at, although responsibility for the scientific experiment that served the purposes of greed and greed alone is squarely laid in the camp of Western industrial imperialists. Next, the text could be seen as an allegory, which relates to the current state of the descendants of enslaved Africans who are

trapped in an historical, economic, spiritual, and cultural moment in which emancipation or "full free" never happened, despite the fact that the world progressed as if it did. If this is the case, then we the descendants are not only economically still suffering from the absence of reparations, but our social and cultural understanding of who we are is still stunted like the children of Caberita island.

Without this guiding knowledge, we are left, like the characters in the novel, to solve the mysteries of our past to have an adequate road map for the future. As with Queenie, there is the suggestion that we can learn a lot that we don't know if we have the discipline, commitment, and patience to dig, sift, weigh, and consider. There is also the suggestion that we come from a power base that is more enormous than even our captors and oppressors imagine, and that we ourselves glimpse it only in moments and believe it to be true mostly in our dreams. The challenge of the present is to bring together our disparate realities of knowledge, suppressed skills—underdeveloped and unutilised—subdue our destructive tendencies, and above all else hold on to the hope that, at the end of the day, never deserted our ancestors, and made our survival and existence possible. This is the prerequisite to obtaining that elusive "full free" that has been nearly two centuries in the making.

The tale attempts to wrestle in complex ways with both a history of continental betrayal, the violence of being categorised as non-human within the European schema, as well as the hidden enormity of psycho-spiritual power that was unwittingly bequeathed to the enslaved. Brodber's novels function as hieroglyphic clues waiting to be deciphered by future generations. The mythological elements of this tale also remind the

non-Western minded reader that Western philosophy's approach to understanding "being" and "the senses" is the product of a particular historical and cultural reality. At the end of the day, this is only a narrow spectrum of the possibilities available for understanding the self and one's place within time and space.

There is another unique aspect to Brodber's project. It involves not just the inclusion but the evolution of her own "I". In other words, her own growth and development were not separate from her research. This is a crucial point. Not only is the researcher not separate from the research into his/her/their people, but there is a recognition that "*if these are your people*", then as you expose the trauma in them you can better see the trauma in yourself. It is with this in mind that we shift to look at how this aspect of Brodber's activism culminated into her B l a c k s p a c e reasonings and what I call "ritual fabulation."

B l a c k s p a c e and Ritual Fabulation

"Everybody knew what she was called, but nobody anywhere knew her name. Disremembered and unaccounted for, she cannot be lost because no one is looking for her, and even if they were, how can they call her if they don't know her name? It was not a story to pass on." Toni Morrison[26]

Spirit of the dead,
Rise Up!
Lingering spirit of the dead,
Rise Up and possess your bird of passage.
Those tied bound and whipped from Brazil to Mississippi,
Step out and tell your story. Haile Gerima[27]

One of the three "social psychological facts" that Erna Brodber refers to in the preface to *The Second Generation of Freemen in Jamaica* is "the notion that anger arising out of the ancestral history of enslavement is a central part of the present-day emotional heritage".[28] As the poem cited above that opens Haile Gerima's *Sankofa* as well as the ending of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* attest, there are ample reasons that anger would be a part of the emotional legacy of the descendants of the enslaved in the absence of significant and substantial widespread reparations. There was no land to live on, no education designed to meet our collective needs, no respect for the spiritual or cultural beliefs of our ancestors. There was no attempt to establish religious and political institutions that were premised on our cultural ways of knowing. The legacy of anger makes sense as a response.

The violence recorded in the archive and the disenfranchisement of the partially freed, incompletely emancipated Black subjects was the point of departure for both Brodber's research interests as well as her methodological employment of fiction. In addition, her focus after the research and writing she did in the 1970s shifted to the internalisation of these histories of violence and their redirection among those who no longer saw each other as "kin". In an interview with her about the beginnings of the B l a c k s p a c e reasonings that took place at her house in the village of Woodside, she remarks:

> Before the beginning of my work in this village, someone was actually murdered, beaten up by a truckload of people from the neighboring village of Kilancholy. They had accused this man of coming to their village and stealing. And the rest of us here, just kind of listened while the shouts and screaming was going on. And I myself, I just simply closed my doors and my windows and took my typewriter to another room. And when I realized the next day that the fellow had died and was beaten to death, he was finally taken from here to the other village and beaten to death, I said No! This cyaan (cannot) happen! We cannot live in a community where somebody comes in and takes somebody from the village and it's just another day at work. So I got together with the youth in the village, and I hoped that looking at their history would build some sort of self-esteem. (79)[29]

The Kilancholy incident was an example of violence internal to diasporic Black spaces, inherited from the external violence of slavery. Brodber's goal across the course of her multifaceted scholarly and organic intellectual career has been to contribute to "completing the task of emancipation" by working on the collective public and private Black self. This involves reconstructing failed kinship relations, re-membering and reminding us that there were times that we worked together across our differences, and suggesting that we can resist being at the mercy of externally constructed divisions.[30]

When the Kilancholy incident occurred in 1985, Brodber had already published one novel and several significant sociological essays. She had already developed a profound interest in the gap between the "anglo-conformity" required to do academic writing, and the cultural production and lived reality of the cartographers of reggae, dancehall, Zion Revival and Kumina. She had rebelled against "Babylon's system" with both her personal involvement with Rastafari as well as with her radical choice to move back to Woodside, the rural village community of her birth. The Kilancholy incident also propelled a shift in her research, writing and community praxis. It launched the beginnings of what later became the Emancipation Summer School and the B l a c k s p a c e reasonings.[31] She invited the village youth to her home, telling them that she had nothing to offer them "except what was in her head". But this simple act of intellectual generosity inaugurated a pedagogical praxis that I would refer to as "communagogy", one in which reciprocal learning happened between her and the village community. She states:

> So they would come to my house and we would read books which had to do with us and our history. And the writers of those books, people like Jamaican scholars George Beckford and Swithin Wilmot, would come down, and sit with about fifteen youth and explain what they were trying to do in their books. Very often we could not reach any further than the preface of the book because we in the village were not readers, really. Some of us could not read at all. Swithin had done some work on the history of the parish of St. Mary where the village was, and by this time, the group of fifteen had widened greatly and old people were coming as well. An old lady I was getting ready to take home said, "When my history is being discussed I don't move!" Others asked: "Why haven't we been taught this?" So it caught on.

People wanted to know about their history and so that is what led me to write the book *The People of My Jamaican Village*. (80)[32]

Brodber's work in this text coincided with her research on the second generation of freemen and freewomen. The septuagenarians that she had interviewed for that project had grandparents who had lived through the emancipation process. In 1962, Independence from Britain had replaced Emancipation as a national holiday. But the elders she interviewed were angry about this, saying, "Oonoo dish out fus a augus."[33] Emancipation for them had been a sacred holiday. She reported tales of elders who on August 1st would sit on their porches in silence, dressed from head to toe in white clothes. She said those old folks "gave her an order", one which involved restoring the memories of what their ancestors had been through to younger generations. Brodber's report on what the elders said, was read in the House of Commons and contributed to the reinstatement of Emancipation Day as a national holiday in Jamaica.[34]

Working with village residents who had a strong memory of things past, Brodber helped to organise an Emancipation celebration, indigenous to the Woodside community, one that was a *ritual re-enactment* of what people in that community had done on August 1st in 1838. On the morning of August 1st, the old people chanted while stamping their feet:

Thank you, Massa God, for this blessed August morning!

Thank you, Massa God, for this blessed August morning!

Those of us visiting Woodside would begin the day with this chant. We would then proceed with community residents to walk to the top of a hill in the community where the first church used to be. There are no remnants of it anymore, it is a wide-open field now. But we would stand in a circle, sing some of the Emancipation songs that had been passed down, while the Rasta drummers kept a beat. We would reason about topics of interest. One year it was the physical appearance of the historical Christ. If he existed, what did he look like?

After the open-air service there would be a break, and sometimes householders in the community would provide breakfast for those of us who were visiting. Then in the afternoon, the centerpiece of Emancipation Day would be a re-enactment play, written and revised each year by Brodber, and performed by village residents and some of us visitors. The play was Brodber's brainchild. While all the re-enactment activities were significant, this theatrical re-enactment of what the people in Woodside may have thought of Queen Victoria's emancipation proclamation is the definition of what I refer to here as *ritual fabulation*.

Brodber wrote and revised a "fabulative" imagining of what various villagers may have thought of the emancipation proclamation. Some of the characters imagined were entirely fictitious. Others, the majority, were based on actual historically existing, formerly enslaved village residents like: Sarah Williams, Mary Andrew, Selina Montague, Pamela Cunningham, as well as those with surnames such as Ferguson, Binnings, and Kelley—all of whom were listed by name as the property of Dr. William J. Nielson's

Woodside Estate in 1817.[35] In the play, some speak of wanting to return to Africa and wondering if ships will be provided; some speak of having been manumitted; some speak of relatives still remembered who were left behind; some recall the traumas of punishment, such as being rolled in molasses and put in ants' nests. But one of the most significant aspects of this ritual fabulative re-enactment was the fact that some of the village participants in the performance *were the literal descendants* of the people whose parts they were playing.

Brodber created a situation in which those in the community who had limited knowledge of what had taken place gained insight into what had happened in that land space, possibly to their own relations. I remember coming to a kind of surprised recognition that the enslaved folk were ordinary, everyday people who spoke and thought as we do now. For some reason, this felt like a revelation. I, too, had drunk the statistical Kool-Aid, subconsciously presuming that the enslaved were, if not another species, a group so different from those of us living now that we could only wonder at what their thoughts and feelings might have been.

There was something also to be said for doing some of the things that others before us, whose ancestors were similar to our own, had also done, like marching together around the estate while singing songs.

Slave before
But we nuh slave no more
Bury mi foot chain
Dung inna market square!

We had been cut loose from the root. Some of us had a grandparent or grand cousin who had heard something, a joke or a rumour about what might have happened to an ancestor, and passed it on. Those of us who were one generation or more into the middle class didn't know a psycho-spiritual limb had been amputated. We believed that "A" grades and good schools were the passports to personhood. But the reenactment, "like even the most angry mother, drew us back".[36]

While the Emancipation celebration was a village affair, Brodber's larger goal was to explore "the links between the way of life forged by the people of two points of the black diaspora, the Afro-Americans and the Afro-Jamaicans". Her further political concern was the fact that "black initiative is weakened by the misunderstanding between Caribbean and US blacks and both of them with Africans" (167).[37] To this end, she argued that "Black people (from various parts of the continent and the diaspora) needed a private space to work out their differences". Therein lay the basis for her creation of the reasoning sessions known later as B l a c k s p a c e. She purposefully spaces out the letters to symbolize our right to be here, as opposed to always feeling as if we are "cotching on a corner" of white space. Anyone who considers themselves partially or fully the descendant of an enslaved African is welcome, and others of African descent who are interested in the relationship between their reality and those of the descendants are also welcome. There has been controversy about the exclusion of those who

are not descendants of either enslaved Africans or continental Africans. Brodber is not opposed to dialogue with these other groups of people with equally complex identities. But that discussion is for another space. For her, the privileging of conversations specific to Black people in B l a c k s p a c e reminds us of our unfinished business, which is so easy to ignore and forget, since we are not a priority in many spaces. It reminds us that the task of emancipation is still incomplete.

A Curing Thinking: The Afterlife of Livity

As part of the process of self-healing in the Jamaica of the 1970s, Brodber gravitated towards the Rasta worldview and way of life. She described Rastafari, at its best, as "a curing thinking", a practice and strategy that helped Black people to cleanse their bodies, minds, and spirits from the negative effects of colonialism. She saw it as helping us to recognise that love could be "there" between us, despite the oppression of the past. At its best, it allowed for a person-to-person, internal sense of spiritual awareness to develop. She saw Rastafari as making this more possible than, say, Catholicism, since, as she states, it began with making your life clean. Clean in terms of the food you eat, the relationships you have; it forced an examination of self.[38] Her clear and simple explanation of how this ideology shaped her life and the lives of others with a similar view of its power can be described, using the language of Rastafari, as a kind of "livity" praxis.

In the present academic moment, there has been much said about the afterlife of slavery. All of Erna Brodber's work as well as that of other scholars of Afro-modernity attests to this fact. Yet the Black consciousness that the Rastafari rebel yell of Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, and others projected into the universe came with a re-engineering of Black speech in a clever way, one that re-articulates the language of our oppressors in the hopes of "fabulating" our way out of their matrix. In this universe:

Politics = Politricks
Old library = Ole lie bury
Community = Come Unity.

Taking a page from this Ital-"I"-tology, we forward one more
Slavery
Slave
Drop the "s" and replace the "a" with an "I"
Like "I" and "I"
Slave
Live
Live-ry
Live-We
We live
Livity.

Endnotes

1 Erna Brodber, interview for the documentary on Brodber's life, *A View from the Field*, conducted by Catherine John 2 July, 2018. Eleven minutes and ten seconds in.

2 Erna Brodber, "Fiction in the Scientific Procedure," in *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays from the First International Conference*, ed. by Selwyn Cudjoe (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1990), 165.

3 Brodber, "Fiction in the Scientific Procedure," 164.

4 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

5 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," Small Axe 26 (2008): 1-14.

6 Carolyn Cooper, "Afro-Jamaican Folk Elements in Brodber's Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home," in *Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990), 279-288.

7 Daryl Cumber Dance, "Go Eena Kumbla: A Comparison of Erna Brodber's Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home and Toni Cade Bambara's *The Salt Eaters in Caribbean Women Writers: Essay from the First International Conference*" (Wellesley: Calaloux Publications, 1990), 169-186.

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10 Suzanna Engman, "Haunting Literature of the Americas: The Ghosts in Wilson Harris' Jonestown and Erna Brodber's Louisiana," in *Critical Perspectives on Caribbean Literature and Culture* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 102-120.

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14 Jenny Sharpe, "When Spirits Talk: Reading Erna Brodber's *Louisiana* for Affect," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 16:3 39 (2012): 91.

15 Erna Brodber, *Louisiana* (London: New Beacon Books, 1994).

16 Erna Brodber, *Jane and Louisa Will Soon Come Home* (London: New Beacon Books, 1980).

17 Brodber, "Fiction in the Scientific Procedure," 164.

18 Erna Brodber, interview for the documentary on Brodber's life, *A View from the Field*, conducted by Catherine John 2 July, 2018.

19 Brodber, "Fiction in the Scientific Procedure," 165.

20 Brodber, "Fiction in the Scientific Procedure," 167.

21 David Scott, "Preface: Erna Brodber's Social Ethics of Black Memory," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 26:2 68 (2022): vii-x.

22 David Scott, "Preface: Erna Brodber's Social Ethics of Black Memory," *Small Axe: A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*, 26:2 68 (2022): vii-x.

23 Erna Brodber, interview for the documentary on Brodber's life, *A View from the Field*, conducted by Catherine John 2 July, 2018. Three minutes and twenty-five seconds in.

24 Marie Sairsingh, "*The Rainmaker's Mistake*: Reshaping the Genre of Historical Fiction," *The CLR James Journal*, Vol. 25, Issue 1/2 (2019): 81-106.

25 Curdella Forbes, "*The Rainmaker's Mistake*," *Postcolonial Text*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (2009): 1-4.

26 Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987).

27 *Sankofa*, directed by Haile Gerima (Washington, DC: Mypheduh Films, 1993).

28 Erna Brodber, *The Second Generation of Freemen in Jamaica, 1907–1944* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004).

29 John, "Caribbean Organic Intellectual: The Legacy and Challenge of Erna Brodber's Life Work," 79.

30 Brodber's most recent historical text, *Moments of Co-operation and Incorporation: African Americans and African Jamaicans, 1782–1996* (2019), is an example of the "togetherness work" that has been part of the history of the descendants of enslaved Africans who arrived in the Americas.

31 I first got involved with assisting Brodber with the Emancipation Summer School in 2001. I went back to Woodside to assist in both Emancipation and B l a c k s p a c e for ten summers.

32 Ibid.

[33] This translates as: "You all abandoned the emancipation celebration."

[34] Erna Brodber, interview for the documentary on Brodber's life, *A View from the Field*, conducted by Catherine John 2 July, 2018. Thirty-nine minutes in. Brodber's research into the history of the village exposed, among other things, that the area had been a coffee estate owned by the Nielson family. There was a place in the village called Daddy Rock where the enslaved used to gather in secret. She discovered that on the eve of emancipation the newly freed people had a vigil with drumming and dancing, and they also built their first church at the top of the hill in the community. She discovered that on Emancipation Day they had marched around the former estate and then had a "free will feast", one in which village residents brought food to share with one another. The Anglican church in the community used to be the great house, and approximately seventeen families currently residing in the village had been there since the days of slavery.

[35] Erna Brodber, *Woodside Pear Tree Grove P.O.* (Mona: University of the West Indies Press, 2004), 58-61.

[36] Michelle Cliff, *The Land of Look Behind* (Ithaca: Firebrand Books, 1985), 102-103.

[37] Brodber, "Fiction in the Scientific Procedure," 167.

[38] Erna Brodber, interview for the documentary on Brodber's life, *A View from the Field*, conducted by Catherine John 2 July, 2018. Thirteen to fifteen minutes in.

SYLVIA WYNTER

CONSTRUCTING RADICAL CARIBBEAN THOUGHT

by Anthony Bogues

Introduction

Today, the Caribbean theorist Sylvia Wynter is considered a seminal critical theorist. Yet many contemporary studies of her voluminous writings pay little attention to her Caribbean formation in Jamaica and her deep interactions with a Caribbean diaspora in London during the 1950s/1960s. Wynter's Caribbean formation was embedded within a radical anti-colonial Caribbean intellectual tradition, and then merged in the 1970s with the African American radical intellectual tradition. In acknowledging this, three points come to mind that are worth specific elaboration. Firstly, why are we discussing Wynter today, what is her relevance? Secondly, what connections can be made from Wynter to *Black Metamorphosis*, the unpublished, 1970s, 970-page manuscript that myself, a group of graduate students, and young professors are editing as a contribution to Black critical theory and radical Caribbean thought. Thirdly, I want to briefly reflect on an essay she wrote on Bob Marley.

In this exercise, I begin with a set of caveats. I am not presenting Wynter as an intellectual god, nor someone we cannot disagree with or somebody that we cannot critique. Rather, I want to present elements of her work as generative. I present aspects of her thought as one possible line of radical thinking that may be useful in this current moment, a moment which is still embedded in deep neoliberalism. As well, I want to make some connections between Wynter's current configuration of thought and her relationship to radical anti-colonial Caribbean thought. These ideas are presented, therefore, as but one attempt to theorise this tradition and the times we inhabit.

Caribbean Radical Anti-Colonial Thought

Sylvia Wynter belongs to a tradition of radical Caribbean anti-colonial thinkers and practitioners. This is a tradition of thought and practices which historically attempted to do two things. Firstly, it sought to overthrow the epistemological privilege of European thought as universal thought, what George Lamming recently called, "Europe as the only universal teacher."[1] Secondly, this Caribbean tradition attempted to create political practices which decolonized the politics of different Caribbean nations, as part of the political independence project, by positing different forms of sovereignty. Part of this political practice was a preoccupation with radical forms of democracy.[2] In thinking about this complex tradition, I make a distinction between anti-colonial nationalist thought, with its objective of the creation of a nation state through the processes of constitutional decolonisation, and radical anti-colonial thought. With the former, the key was a process generated to create a constitutionally independent nation state and forms of national-flag sovereignty. On the other hand, radical anti-colonial thinkers had a different set of political ideas. They were preoccupied not just with the nation state and with sovereignty, but with the transformation of the societies in which they operated. The names of the individuals within this tradition are legendary: Frantz Fanon, Aimé Césaire, Claudia Jones, Suzanne Césaire, Wilfredo Lam, George Lamming, Maryse Condé, and CLR James, just to name a few. It is in this tradition of radical anti-colonial Caribbean thought that I wish to locate Wynter.

I begin with Wynter as a radical anti-colonial thinker because one of the issues in our contemporary moment is how the historical residues of settler colonialism and racial slavery, in general, shape political practice and discourse. Wynter's work initially draws its sources from the Caribbean and is, today, a critical resource of radical thought. Importantly, radical anti-colonialism practices and the thinkers who were engaged in this tradition created an epistemological revolution and rupture with conventional radical theory. At the heart of that epistemological rupture is the question of the human. Here we might well recall Fanon's final concluding chapter in *The Wretched of the Earth*. "Come let's leave Europe alone," he says, "to create a new Man."[3] Recall as well the writings of Aimé Césaire in his remarkable text *Discourse on Colonialism*, and then Lamming's work around these questions, particularly in the novel *Season of Adventure*, where there is a profound discussion in the opening between Powell and Crim around the issues of language and questions of being human.

As well, let us not ignore Wilfredo Lam's artistic work as he attempted to grapple with Afro-religious practices in Cuba alongside his various efforts to rethink questions, not only of Afro-Cuban religious practices, but of Blackness and being human in Cuba. Finally, we need to be attentive to the writings of the Haitian intellectual Jean Price-Mars from 1928 onwards and his attempts to redefine Haitian culture.[4]

All of these practices of thought were singularly about a distinctive reclamation of the human. This was not the human of Western thought, a philosophical anthropological conception of the human shaped by various European Enlightenments, mired in racial

classification schemas and with Cartesian splits between mind and body. Rather, the question of the human was a deep political and social one, in part driven by a form of domination in which the colonised was non-human, as well as practices of refusals by the colonised, which often circled around the vindication of being human. As such, this question of the human was also, not only, an issue of ontology, that is to say, the question of being. Why?

Within the practices of colonialism in all its shapes and forms, there was the drive to create various hierarchical, classificatory schemas of the human. These schemas were about creating regimes of *man*. These regimes were constructed around who was human and who was not human. In these classifications, Africans were heathen, therefore not human. Indigenous peoples were heathen, but by nature could be called "natural men", at least some of them, some of the time.[5] What Wynter attempted to do in her work by developing different conceptions of man, beginning with notions of Christian man, political man, and then *homo economicus* man, reconfigured the ways we think about history. This paradigmatic shift by Wynter creates a different ground from which we begin to think about history.[6] Her work troubles a historiography which is predicated in an understanding of history as a linear progression within the Marxist frame that is rooted in a formulation of modes of production. Wynter's thought overturns the Marxist analysis of the modes of history, and argues for what I call *modes of being human*.

Instead of thinking primarily about political economy through Marxist categories, she begins to examine ways of life and practices of human beings and how they constitute a society.[7] This does not mean that the economy in her work is dismissed from any theoretical analysis of society. As Stuart Hall argues, because there is no production in general, there is historical specificity. Thus a society needs to be understood in terms of the reproduction of the "social relationships of production". Wynter takes this argument one step further by submitting that these social relations generate conceptions of the human.

This different historiography of Wynter, one which defines modes of being human and ways of life, generates distinctive ways to think about the human species itself. Secondly, and this a critique of Wynter's work, if one begins to think about modes of being human, then there is no telos for the human species to arrive at. In other words, there is no final human to recover. I would argue for a case in which the human is always in motion even if that figure of the human is constructed as we happen to be. As well, by grappling with the modes of being human as a series of practices, then another important element of Wynter's thought emerges—the work and function of narrative. That is to say how we tell the stories of what we are. How do we create the explanatory grounds for a set of practices in which we engage? For Wynter, what distinguishes the human as a figure is the capacity and history of narrativity. She notes in her most recent essay "The Ceremony Found: Towards the Autopoetic Turn/Overturn, its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-) Cognition", that, for her, the form of emancipation which she is working through theoretically is one which will set out "at long last, the autonomy of our species, that is, *Homo Narrans*".

However, I would like to insert a formulation here which complicates Wynter's work. In this formulation, I do not make any distinction between word and deed. In fact, I'm collapsing them into an intimate dialectical relationship. I do so because I think that it is important, following Aimé Césaire, that one grapples with both the word and the deed simultaneously. When this occurs, then the figure of the human as a series of enactments, always in the making, appears. What bourgeois colonial thought has done, in its own classification schema, is to create and establish a logic in the contemporary world in which the human could mean only two things. Firstly, a figure that is *homo economicus*, and, secondly, a figure that can only operate within the field of white supremacy and capitalism. I have presented here, in broad strokes, some of the critical ideas of Wynter. At the core of these is the preoccupation with the human as a figure. I think that this preoccupation should be understood as rooted in some of the thematic preoccupations of radical anti-colonial Caribbean thought.

The Present Moment

In the present moment of neoliberalism revolution, one that Stuart Hall has called "an ideological revolution about what we are", I suggest that a radical anti-colonial history, or a radical anti-colonial telling or narrative which focuses on the modes of being human, might be productive as an opening breach, as a break with the universalism of the West. Wynter's preoccupation with the human, while being part of a series of questions raised in the radical anti-colonial thought, is one which faces us today, while neoliberalism, as a form of power, seeks to organise our desires and imagination in ways which would fundamentally alter the tentative ground on which the figure of human and the planet rest today.

Sylvia Wynter

My second point about Wynter's relates to her remarkable text, *Black Metamorphosis*. Here I take a step back. Firstly, in discussing this text, I want to situate Wynter in the 1970s at a moment when she was completing the writing of *Black Metamorphosis* in the United States. By this time, she had migrated from Jamaica in the early 1970s, and as part of her move to the US, she was both working and in dialogue with black radicals who were associated with the Institute of the Black World in Atlanta. The Institute of the Black World was a remarkable grouping of black radicals in the late 1960s and 1970s led by the late historian Vincent Harding. During this period, as mass black struggles (civil rights and black power) began to enter a period of downturn, this cluster of black radicals engaged in the process of reimagining black struggle internationally.[8] In the group were individuals like Walter Rodney, CLR James, George Beckford, Vincent Harding, St. Clair Drake, Robert Hill, William Strickland, and Joyce Ladner. Wynter joined the group in the 1970s and sat on the board for a number of years.

Why am I mentioning this Institute? A great deal of the time when we think about Wynter's work it is almost understood as springing from nowhere. Often, in accounts of her work, there seems to be no kind of influence, or any currents that actually shape her work. I do not want to detail all the currents that shape her work in Jamaica,[9] but I think it is necessary to address a particular current in the United States that shaped her work in the 1970s—the Institute of the Black World.

The Institute of the Black World did a number of remarkable things, one of which was the establishment of summer schools in 1971 conducted under the title "New Concepts for the New Man". In the summer schools, the following individuals taught courses: Walter Rodney, Bill Strickland, St. Clair Drake, and Joyce Ladner. This is how the summer school was advertised:

> We at The Institute of the Black World, IBW, believe with Fanon, that to create a new humanity, Black men and women must break the shackles of our past thoughts and actions, and we must confront the stark reality of our present existence and generate new concepts for the new relationship of man to man.[10]

Given this advertisement, I do not think that it is far-fetched to say that the IBW was one of the key influences on Wynter. Indeed, I want to posit that as she began her travels in the United States, and her process of grappling with the issues of blackness and anti-black racism in the United States, her ideas were being shaped by her involvement with the Institute. From this perspective, I would suggest the following things.

When Wynter was working with the Institute of the Black World, what began to happen was that her radical anti-colonial thought merged with elements of the Black Radical Tradition in its African American genre. This meant that Wynter's work in the late 1970s was a configuration shaped by a confluence of currents that were not just anti-colonial, which she drew from her time in London, England, and her growing up in Jamaica. Additionally, she was drawing from the Black Radical Intellectual Tradition typified by the IBW. These currents congeal in her work and provide the ground for the numerous versions of *Black Metamorphosis* which she writes during the 1970s. Importantly as well, I suggest that there is a reworking of her thought around the concept of culture. That while in her articles in *Jamaica Journal* she posits the centrality of culture as a terrain on which Afro-Jamaican life can be grasped, in her dialogues at the IBW and in *Black Metamorphosis* she elaborates a distinctive form of radical black politics rooted in Afro-Diasporic cultures.

The Text

It is within this particular political and discursive context that I want to briefly address *Black Metamorphosis*, the 970-page book not yet published. It is a text which was written over several years and, based on research, has about four versions. In this brief discussion, I pay attention to three elements of the text.

The first is that, within the text, one needs to be attentive to the ways in which Wynter breaks with Marxism. This is very important because in London and in Jamaica, before she comes to the United States, she is a Marxist. She does not beat a drum about it, but if you read her carefully and the various articles published in numerous journals, *Jamaica Journal*, *Savacou* and *New World*, you will see that for her, Marxism as a mode of thinking is very important.[11] In *Black Metamorphosis*, she breaks with Marxism. The break begins when she starts to think about not just the relationship to race and class, but when she begins to examine questions of culture and enslaved labour. What is fascinating in this text is that the first segment is devoted to an extremely rigourous reading of capitalism. Not from the point of view of Marx, but from the point of view of the enslaved on the plantation, as well as that of New World Caribbean political economy, particularly the writings of George Beckford on the plantation.[12] Her argument, to put it succinctly, in the text was that capitalism emerged with the creation of the plantation, not with the English factory system. Now, I have a particular disagreement with her, because I think capitalism emerges before that, but it does not matter. What matters is that she is rewriting the actual emergence of capitalism and how it relates to New World slavery and plantations.[13]

Secondly, in the text, Wynter explores the ways in which Black culture works as a process of both refashioning and rehumanisation for the enslaved. The book is called *Black Metamorphosis* for a reason. What she argues is that the enslaved arrived in the New World and they are transformed into an African diaspora, and that transformation into an African diaspora is illuminated primarily on the terrains of religion and culture. For her, Afro-Caribbean religions are crucial as one ground for a counter-symbolic order produced by the refusal processes engaged during colonialism and the racial enslavement of Black people. Whether it is Afro-Christianity in the United States, or Afro-Caribbean religions such as Vodou, Santeria or Shango, these forms now become the terrains on which Black people begin to rehumanise themselves. That rehumanizing of self means that the enslaved is also engaged in a process of "indigenization". In this formulation, there are many arguments taking place, but I will just mention two of them that we might want to think about.

One of them is her argument against Melville Herskovits around African retentions in Caribbean and the American South.[14] The other argument is one in which she critiques various theories of creolization which were then popular in the Caribbean. In this regard, her adversary is the seminal Caribbean thinker and poet Kamau Brathwaite. In opposition to the arguments about African retentions and creolization, she posits the concept of indigenization, which comes from her reading of the book by Jean Price-Mars, the Haitian anthropologist, *So Spoke the Uncle (1928)*. So alongside her break

with formal Marxism, from this text Wynter is developing theoretical concepts of Black culture and its expressions in the Americas. However, it should be noted that, in the final analysis, currents of Marx's method remain in her thought. For example, there continues to be certain grammar of Marx and Hegel that remains in her work, specifically around the notions of totality and telos. What is clear, though, is that in this moment of the 1970s, her idea about indigenization became generative in her discussion of African American cultural life, the blues, jazz, and the so-called Negro spiritual. This is discerned in her readings of Baraka and her readings of blues and jazz as liberatory cultural forces. All of this allows us to grasp how Wynter's understanding of Blackness expands from its Caribbean beginnings.

In this particular engagement with *Black Metamorphosis*, what we perhaps should understand is how Wynter becomes not just an anti-colonial thinker, but actually becomes a part of the Black Radical Tradition. Once she began to think of Blackness, she began to think of the enslaved as both labour and capital. She began to think about the questions of Blackness as lack, of Blackness as being non-human, and the Black enslaved both as exchange value and use value. All this meant that Wynter began to give us a different story of the history of capitalism long before the academy began to frame the study of racial slavery and capitalism under the term racial capitalism. For Wynter, there was now a different logic and ground of history. This history can be discerned in the enslaved thingfication process, refusals and processes of rehumanisation defined through a logic of freedom from domination, rather than a proletariat/labour exploitation/human emancipation one. From this perspective, a different understanding of the human as a figure emerges.

What is fascinating to me is how this engagement is done through an exploration of culture as well as a critical engagement with Marx, while paying really deep attention to issues of labour. This different story of capitalism, its emergence and functioning pushes us to search for a different set of logics about what Black freedom might actually look like. Additionally, I would note that in one section of the manuscript, she begins to search for language which would theoretically describe this new historiography which she posits. Thus, she moves back and forth between calling the mode of production in the Caribbean and the American South a slave mode of production, suggesting sometimes that this might be a variant of capitalism. Here, one is reminded of Fanon's remark that when it comes to the colonies one has to "stretch Marx".

In grappling with Wynter's thought, we know that this discomfort with Marxism emerged in Guyana in the 1960s, when on seeing the manipulated, external, imperial intervention of the USA that led to conflict between Afro-Guyanese and Indo-Guyanese, she noted in an interview with David Scott in *Small Axe*, "My Marxism could not explain that." What one should note is how the manuscript draws on Jamaican culture, particularly on dance and the practices of Rastafari. Given this, it is safe to say that during this period Wynter was working through a theory of Black culture and its relationship to radical politics. In the text, she would try to find the site of a radical politics of culture that could transform a society.

The Marley Essay

The essay in which she elaborates this radical politics of culture is a1977 essay titled "We Know Where We Are from Mayalism to the Politics of Black Culture". What does she write in this particular text about Marley and about Blackness?

> Black hair, Black skin is re-evaluated as a sign, not an index. One can have Black skin and be a heathen (talking about Marley), one can have white skin and have a black heart, or to the knowledge of the self or the sons of Jah (in Rastafari) as such cease to perceive the self as white.

What point is she making here? A new symbolic order and semantic field displaces the hierarchy of the dominant order in which whiteness operates like noble blood. She posits that at the core of what she calls the counter-symbolic order of Rasta in the 1970s is a form of radical Blackness. My point is that the politics of Wynter in 1977 became one in which the politics of creating a counter-symbolic order was primary. Later on in her work, she created forms of radical sociology, drawing on the concept of liminal groups, from the works of anthropologists like Victor Turner and Asmarom Legesse, and then later on from social groups such as the "new poor" which were emerging. This line of thought in my view is a continuation of a certain tradition which we see in her writings in the *Jamaica Journal*.

In the end, what am I arguing? What I am arguing is that there are distinctive phases in the evolution of Wynter's critical thought, but the phase that I have tried to discuss, briefly, is the moment when there was a transformation of her radical anti-colonial thinking and its merger with the African American Black Radical Tradition. Within that moment of merger, she began to think through and reformulate this question of the human and culture.

Is the question of the human not one of the central issues of our times? Not the business of who we are, but what we are? What we have become, and what might we become? Is this not the moment in which we have to ask these fundamental questions, not just because of COVID-19, but also because of the ecological dangers in the world that shape our everyday lives, and the deep inequalities which mark all societies as well those which exist between societies? Does all of this not point to a question: What is it that we are, and what is it that we need to do, to be able to live a different life?

Recall Fanon's comment "that Europe has butchered what is most important in 'man'—freedom". My argument is that the Black Radical Tradition and the anti-colonial tradition have been working to create new practices of freedom from a ground which reframes what it means to be human. Both of these traditions have been engaged with exploring alternative conceptions of freedom for us to have a more of a life as human beings in this world. Wynter's work is a defining part of these traditions.

This essay is in part a lecture delivered at Dartmouth College in 2022. Thanks to Donald Pease for the invitation.

Endnotes

1. Unpublished interview with George Lamming, June 2021.
2. The richness of this Caribbean tradition in its anglophone dimensions is discussed in Denis Benn, *The Caribbean: An Intellectual History, 1774–2003 (2004)*; the francophone tradition in Nick Nesbitt, *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Critical Theory from Toussaint to Glissant (2013)*. The Hispanic tradition is discussed in Silvio Torres-Saillant, *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean (2006)*. For the clearest exposition of mass democracy in the Caribbean, see CLR James, *Party Politics in the West Indies (1984)*.
3. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth (1961)*.
4. The work of Jean Price-Mars is critical in understanding Wynter's work. His book *So Spoke the Uncle (1928)* was generative in the emergence of the literary and artistic movement of indigenism in early 20th century Haiti during the American occupation. Wynter, in her many articles published in *Jamaica Journal*, draws heavily from this work. It frames her critiques of theories of creolization and of cultural pluralism in Caribbean social sciences during the 1970s.
5. For a discussion of this, see Anthony Padgen, *The Fall of Natural Man: The American Indian and the Origins of Comparative Ethology* (1987).
6. For these conceptions of the various regimes of Man which Wynter develops, see various essays in Anthony Bogues (ed.) *After Man, Towards the Human—Critical Essays on Sylvia Wynter (2006)*, in particular Neil Roberts, "Sylvia Wynter's Hedgehog: The Challenge for Intellectuals to Create New 'Forms of Life' in Pursuit of Freedom."
7. This aspect of Wynter's thought is in line with that of many Caribbean radicals who, while deeply influenced by Marx, make attempts to rework the issue of the material and the role of the economy in their thought. For example, Stuart Hall in the 1970s was preoccupied with working through this question in his articles "Marx's Notes on Method: A Reading of the 1857 Introduction" and the essay "Rethinking the Base and Superstructure Metaphor". Both essays are published in Stuart Hall, *Selected Writings on Marxism* (2021).
8. For a very good description of the Institute, see Derrick White, *The Challenge of Blackness: The Institute of the Black World and Political Activism in the 1970s* (2011). It was at the summer school of the Institute that Walter Rodney delivered a series of important lectures, and CLR James in 1971 delivered his remarkable three-part lectures on the *Black Jacobins*. These lectures were published in *Small Axe* No 8 (September 2000). As well, the Institute published a path-breaking volume on education and Black struggle which included an essay by Richard Small and Robert Hill about the little-known radical small farmer, and political leader from Clarendon, Robert Rumble.
9. This aspect of her work will be part of a larger intellectual biography of Wynter which is now in progress. Anthony Bogues, *The Critical Theory of Sylvia Wynter and the Politics of the Human* (2024).
10. IBW advertisement for summer school, 1971.
11. These essays are now published. Demetrious Eudell (ed.), *We Must Learn to Sit Down Together and Talk about a Little Culture: Decolonizing Essays 1967–1984* (2022).
12. There is no doubt about the deep influence on Wynter of Beckford's work. Doing research for her intellectual biography, I found in the box of the various versions of the *Black Metamorphosis* manuscript the 1971 unpublished work of Beckford, *Foundations of Black Dispossession*.
13. My disagreement would centre around an historical account in which the moment of capital accumulation was not the plantation, but the transatlantic slave trade itself. All historical evidence now points to the emergence of various forms of capital institutional formation, stock markets, financial instruments like credit and insurance, as well as debt within the structures of the odious trade in "human commerce".
14. See his seminal work, *Myth of the Negro Past (1941)*.

THE PAN-CARIBBEAN ETHOS OF NALO HOPKINSON'S *MIDNIGHT ROBBER*

by Divia Sookdeo

Introduction

The term pan-Caribbean does not have a single definition. The very geographical parameters of pan-Caribbean are debatable. However, within this instability, this essay is grounded in the Caribbean perspective of what constitutes the pan-Caribbean. This is most significant as the Caribbean has not always been depicted from a Caribbean perspective and has often been stereotyped as an idyllic destination of sun, sex, sea and sand. The pan-Caribbean perspective offers a view of the Caribbean as it is held by territories that identify as Caribbean, regardless of definitions. Tracey Skelton lists some Caribbean elements that this pan-Caribbean perspective highlights:

> an articulation of Pan-Caribbean pre-history; an examination of European colonialism; a consideration of the development factors of the contemporary independent and dependent/colonial Caribbean; an analysis of the migratory patterns and social transformations throughout and beyond the region; and a scrutiny of the region's role in respect of globalization and tourism.

The pan-Caribbean is represented through time and space but always from the perspective of an inclusive definition. These elements represent the facets that comprise the pan-Caribbean and shape the perspective from which the Caribbean is discussed in this study. In order to understand the pan-Caribbean ethos in which the study is interested, it is therefore more important to understand the meaning of ethos. The culture of a people can reflect their moral ideas and attitudes. Culture is often a result of ideology and history. The changes in a society can be interpellated in ideology and culture over time. The pan-Caribbean ethos can therefore be encapsulated by the elements described by Skelton which account for the Caribbean's development and history of colonisation. It is important to explore these elements from a Caribbean perspective. Various Caribbean authors have done this, including Nalo Hopkinson.

Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber* follows the development of the young female protagonist Tan-Tan on the technologically advanced Caribbean-colonised planet Toussaint and its mirror planet, New Half-Way Tree, which is devoid of technology. Toussaint is managed by the artificial intelligence Granny Nanny and its extensions, Eshus, named for Yoruba's trickster god and messenger between the gods and the people. Lawbreakers are permanently exiled to New Half-Way Tree, a forested planet with strange creatures and beings that echo the folkloric characters of the Caribbean. Tan-Tan spends the first seven years of her life on Toussaint with her mother, Ione, and her father, Antonio, the mayor of Cockpit County. Her parents' unstable relationship results in Antonio's murder of Ione's lover, which lands him in prison with only exile on New Half-Way Tree as a chance for freedom. Antonio abducts Tan-Tan and escapes to New Half-Way Tree. Antonio, Tan-Tan and Antonio's second wife, Janisette, stay in the human exile settlement Junjuh. However, Antonio begins to sexually abuse Tan-Tan on her ninth birthday. At the age of sixteen, the abuse ends when Tan-Tan kills Antonio in self-defence and escapes Junjuh's harsh laws, and Janisette's judgement, with the aid of the douen Chichibud. Tan-Tan temporarily lives with the douen community but subsequently finds her voice through the Midnight Robber persona of the Robber Queen, who helps her to survive and save other lives after she loses the comfort of all community. As Tan-Tan comes to terms with her past trauma, unwanted pregnancy and her place on New Half-Way Tree, her acts are immortalised in the mythical folktales of Tan-Tan, the Robber Queen.

The pan-Caribbean ethos of Hopkinson's science fiction bildungsroman *Midnight Robber* resonates with the Caribbean reader, despite the novel not being set in the Caribbean, because the alternate universe or fictional world evokes a sense of familiarity with the Caribbean region, history and culture. Science fiction facilitates the exploration of cultural elements which are unique to each Caribbean territory. Zimbabwean writer Ivor Hartmann notes the ability of science fiction to convey the culture of a people: "Most speculative fiction, be it fantasy, sci-fi or horror, is firmly rooted in cultural mythologies" (Bryce 3). For example, the allusions to certain figures, folklore and cultural events of the various Caribbean territories evoke a pan-Caribbean ethos. This represents the culture, history and colonial legacy which impacted the development of the Caribbean from a Caribbean perspective. Hopkinson has lived in three Caribbean countries: Jamaica, her birthplace, Guyana and Trinidad (Joy 343). Hopkinson is therefore familiar with these Caribbean

Nalo Hopkinson

SANNA PUDAS

territories and is in a good position to speak about the Caribbean from a Caribbean perspective, which is important when representing the pan-Caribbean. The unique allusions to each Caribbean territory root *Midnight Robber*'s alternate universe within a familiar Caribbean aesthetic. Each allusion resonates with the Caribbean reader as it evokes Caribbean history and culture, thus creating a pan-Caribbean ethos for the alternate universe of the novel. Cultural and historical elements from numerous Caribbean territories, rather than a single territory, contribute to creating the pan-Caribbean ethos of *Midnight Robber*.

Jamaica

Jamaica, Hopkinson's birthplace, greatly influenced her creation of *Midnight Robber*. New Half-Way Tree references the parish of Kingston in Jamaica, in which New Half-Way Tree is located. According to Ann Mary Joy, "the penal colony of New Half-Way Tree is a shadowy replica of both Jamaica and Toussaint, a space in which the processes of colonisation, discrimination and exclusion replay themselves through a number of metaphors, like the barren land, labour culture and the marginalised natives" (Joy 345). Whereas Half-Way Tree and Toussaint have significantly progressed from colonisation and discrimination, New Half-Way Tree has not. New Half-Way Tree and Toussaint are juxtaposed. New Half-Way Tree references the Caribbean's colonial past, whereas Toussaint is an imagined and advanced future away from the struggles faced on New Half-Way Tree as well as the realities of the contemporary Caribbean. Half-Way Tree may be considered a halfway point between the Caribbean's colonial past, represented by New Half-Way Tree, and the Caribbean's imagined future, Toussaint. Half-Way Tree in Jamaica contains several successful businesses and includes the "historical landmark, Devon House, the Government-owned mansion, built by Jamaica's first black millionaire, George Stiebel in 1881" (Rose). These successes exhibit the Caribbean's current developing status. The Caribbean is no longer colonised, but is not yet advanced like Toussaint. The resonance of the Caribbean's colonial history and social and economic development in the name New Half-Way Tree therefore lends a pan-Caribbean ethos to *Midnight Robber*.

Also, Cockpit Country in Jamaica is refashioned as Cockpit Country on Toussaint. Cockpit Country was a refuge for runaway enslaved who became known as Leeward Maroons (Sivapragasam 9). This makes it an ideal place name for a county on Toussaint, a place that is free of oppression and discrimination, all of which parallel the role that Cockpit Country served for the Maroons. Hopkinson's use of real place names helps to engage the Caribbean reader by giving her alternate universe a sense of familiarity. However, it goes deeper than a mere passing reference. These place names are carefully chosen because of the things they represent. Half-Way Tree bridges the gap between the painful past and the advanced future. Cockpit Country, on the other hand, evokes a sense of freedom and revolution from slavery.

While Hopkinson's use of Cockpit County recalls the Leeward Maroons, Granny Nanny, the artificial intelligence, invokes the Windward Maroons. Granny Nanny is named after

Queen Nanny, the Maroon leader who freed several enslaved people in Jamaica and fought numerous successful wars against the British using guerrilla warfare. Jamaica has celebrated Nanny as a heroic and mythical figure: for example, "in 1976, Grandy Nanny of the Windward Maroons became the seventh Jamaican to be conferred with the Order of National Hero" (Williams). Her military prowess is accompanied by fantastical stories, since "Nanny was said to have supernatural powers that drove fear into the heart of the British" (Williams). She transcended European gender roles and served as a leader and mother for her people in the face of adversity. The legendary Queen Nanny represents the strength and power of the black Caribbean woman due to her military, maternal and mystical ways.

Queen Nanny's magic is exchanged for advanced technology in science fiction. Queen Nanny's stance against the British in defence of her people is encapsulated in Hopkinson's artificial intelligence, the Grande Anansi Nanotech Interface, who upholds the laws of Toussaint and even manages to make her way to New Half-Way Tree to attempt to right the wrong done to Tan-Tan. Granny Nanny is a maternal protector for Toussaint who evokes the matriarchal nature of some African cultures. The name Granny Nanny grounds the technology within Caribbean pride and strength, eliciting a pan-Caribbean ethos within *Midnight Robber*'s alternate universe.

In addition to this, Jamaican folklore features in *Midnight Robber* as the "duppy" known as the rolling calf. A duppy can be defined as "the soul of the dead manifest in a variety of fabulous beasts, and also in the forms of real animals like lizards and snakes" (Leach 207). The notion of the duppy may have originated in Africa (Leach 207). The enslaved Africans would have brought the concept to Jamaica, and the folktale would have passed down through oral tradition.

Within *Midnight Robber*'s alternate universe, the rolling calf folktales from Toussaint inspire the colonists of New Half-Way Tree to name an animal after it. "That is why the first colonists did name the animal 'rolling calf', the rattling noise remind them of the scary Anansi stories their grannies tell about the Rolling Calf, a jumbie bull-calf all wrap up in chains, with eyes of fire, that does chase people travelling alone at night." (Hopkinson 293). The name assigned to the animal accentuates the impact and resonance of stories. The exiles brought their stories from Toussaint to New Half-Way Tree just as the enslaved Africans managed to retain aspects of their culture through folktales. The use of Jamaica's rolling calf adds to the pan-Caribbean ethos by mirroring Caribbean history and foregrounding the science fiction within the cultural mythology of Jamaica.

Trinidad and Tobago

While Jamaican influence is undoubtedly important to the overall Caribbean essence of the text, allusions to the history and culture of Trinidad and Tobago also contribute to the pan-Caribbean ethos. Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival is a significant cultural event that features prominently in the novel. After the French Revolution, several French planters came to Trinidad and Tobago and hosted masquerade balls. The enslaved used mas to express themselves and mock the whites. Carnival became a form of cultural expres-

sion and resistance for the enslaved, who had been stripped of their cultural identities. Carnival therefore became a defining aspect of their identity.

According to Nanette De Jong and Christian Mieves, "Carnival creates a world where acts of representation flourish: objects are liberated, however temporarily, from perceived definition. A piece of cloth transforms a boy into a dragon, a cardboard hat turns a man into a king" (7). Carnival's freedom of expression and adaptability make it empowering to people. People from different groups can all participate and express themselves freely. Trinidad and Tobago's multicultural landscape thrives in Carnival celebrations, as it does not belong solely to one group but to all. In *Midnight Robber*, depictions of Carnival are therefore significant in contributing to the pan-Caribbean ethos because of its historical and cultural significance.

On Toussaint and New Half-Way Tree, Carnival's adaptable, dynamic and expressive nature is empowering and symbolic of the diversity and heritage of Caribbean colonisers. Carnival revelry on Toussaint encompasses calypso, mas and stick-fighting. Carnival contributes to the plot: it allows Antonio and Ione's lover, Quashee, to express themselves within the confines of the stick-fighting competition. Carnival also inspired the name of one of Hopkinson's most ferocious creatures on New Half-Way Tree, the mako jumbie. Most importantly, Toussaint's Carnival gives Tan-Tan the opportunity to learn of the Midnight Robber, who lends his name to the novel's title. Tan-Tan's fascination with the Midnight Robber comes full circle during New Half-Way Tree's Carnival, where she confronts Janisette as the Robber Queen.

The *Midnight Robber* in Trinidad and Tobago's Carnival spins boastful and powerful tales of himself and his exploits. His speech, or "Robber talk," imitates the slave master and is foregrounded by David Findlay's poem "Stolen", which prefaces *Midnight Robber*. The persona steals the antagonist's language and uses it to empower himself. Robber talk can be likened to Edward K. Brathwaite's "nation language" as "the Midnight Robber subverts upper-class Standard English, spoken by the former white ruling elite, and his language functions as a device to deceive as he bends and changes it to suit a Caribbean context" (Marshall 217). Robber talk also resembles Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s signifyin', which is "a boasting, mocking playfulness in language, a type of linguistic dexterity and the ability to 'show off' with words" (Marshall 217), that is characteristic of rap battles in African American culture.

The Midnight Robber often boasts of a great or royal ancestry, which possibly inspired the title Robber King. The Robber King describes an identity which was lost because of slavery and speaks of his escape from the plantations, but not the New World (Joy 345-346). This character, with his Robber talk, forges a powerful identity in the New World with ties to Africa by empowering people who were once silenced. The Midnight Robber's escape also serves as a form of wish fulfilment for the enslaved and their descendants, who lament lost ancestral ties. The Robber King's story parallels Tan-Tan's story of forced exile from Toussaint and later Junjuh. Tan-Tan even steals and builds a legendary reputation like the titular Midnight Robber. The Midnight Robber embodies the voices of the enslaved and their descendants throughout Caribbean history.

The Robber King's female counterpart is the Robber Queen. While the Robber King empowered the black man, the Robber Queen empowers Tan-Tan and the oppressed black woman. The Robber Queen allows Tan-Tan to grapple with the horror of her sexual exploitation. It is the Robber Queen who defends Tan-Tan by killing Antonio. This violence is evocative of the enslaved black woman's suffering on the plantation. The Robber talk empowers Tan-Tan by giving her the ability to speak after being disempowered and silenced. Tan-Tan's Robber talk commands the crowd's attention and overpowers Janisette's accusations, as victorious rappers would in a rap battle. Tan-Tan's empowering Robber talk is also cathartic as her split personality merges, showing the healing of her mental psyche. "Rough with emotion, her cracked voice came out in two registers, simultaneously. Tan-Tan the Robber Queen, the good and the bad, regarded Janisette with a regal gaze and spoke" (Hopkinson 325). The Robber Queen persona makes *Midnight Robber* a bildungsroman, as Tan-Tan grows and gains self-discovery by finding her voice. The creation of this identity from Carnival's Midnight Robber contributes to the pan-Caribbean ethos as it attempts to address the trauma of black women throughout Caribbean history.

While Carnival characters are central to the narrative, there are also folkloric characters from Trinidad and Tobago, such as the douen that play an important role in the story. The term "douen" is used by the exiled humans to refer to the natives of New Half-Way Tree. In Trinidad and Tobago's folklore, douen are the spirits of children who are not baptised. They are recognised by their triangular-shaped hats and feet, which are turned backwards. These lost souls lure living children away, making them lost as well. The naming by the humans of New Half-Way Tree's indigenous civilisation evokes the sense of being lost, as the folkloric douen are lost souls. The humans' naming of the indigenous civilisation without considering what they call themselves mirrors the way that the Europeans dubbed the indigenous Kalinago as Carib and Taino as Arawak. The humans even view the douen as inferior. Tan-Tan notices, for example, that the adults speak to Chichibud in the same way that they speak to her, as a child (Hopkinson 120). Janisette, like many exiles, is condescending and refers to Chichibud as a "nasty douen" (Hopkinson 137). The exploitation of the douen for manual labour in Junjuh adds to New Half-Way Tree's reflection of the Caribbean's colonial history.

It is noteworthy that the indigenous douen, mako jumbie and jumbie bird of Toussaint were destroyed in order to make the planet habitable for humans (Hopkinson 32). Like the douen, they were given names based on the colonisers' Carnival and folkloric characters. The douen and these creatures have become extinct on Toussaint after colonisation mirroring the genocide of the indigenous civilisations of the New World and in this way evokes a pan-Caribbean ethos.

Aside from Carnival and folklore, aspects of several religious denominations in Trinidad have been referenced in *Midnight Robber* through the allusion to the goddess La Divina Pastora. This allusion is used to exaggerate the way that Chichibud speaks about his wife: "Chichibud does talk about he wife like she is the living goddess. Pastora Divina she-self come down to Earth" (Hopkinson 128). La Divina Pastora is revered by vari-

ous religious denominations. "This Good Friday tradition of honouring the dark-skinned statue is mainly observed by Christians and Hindus, although the First Peoples are said to offer her devotion, too. Those of the Christian faith consider the statue as being of the Virgin Mary, while Hindus worship her as Supari Mai" (Persad). The Spanish name of La Divina Pastora denotes the Spanish influence on Trinidad prior to British colonisation. La Divina Pastora is another Trinidadian reference that lends to the creation of a pan-Caribbean ethos in *Midnight Robber* through its significance to the religious, cultural and historical landscape of the Caribbean territory.

Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana

The Indo-Caribbean people who went to Trinidad and Guyana are also referenced in *Midnight Robber*. When describing one of Ione's lovers, the history of indentured labourers is recalled. "Jairam was a dougla boy, Indian and Euro blood from Shipmate Shiva that had settled two continents away. Jairam's mammy was descended from the longtime ago East Indians, the ones who had crossed the Kalpani, the Black Water on Earth to go work their fingers to the bone as indentured labour in the Caribbean" (Hopkinson 49). Shipmate Shiva is named after the god Shiva, who is worshipped by Hindus who comprise a large part of the Indo-Caribbean population. This representation of Indo-Caribbean people further contributes to the pan-Caribbean ethos of *Midnight Robber*.

Jamaica and the Bahamas

Jonkanoo, a prominent expressive and dynamic celebration in the Bahamas and Jamaica, is celebrated on Toussaint. Jonkanoo grew out of the seasonal breaks that were granted during the Christmas period to the enslaved on Boxing Day and New Year's Day (Reid 350). Jonkanoo surrounds the mythical royal figure of John Canoe or Conny. "John Conny was likewise known on the islands as a 'personage' who showed up as a king once a year, dressed in freakish attire, wild and weird in appearance—cow tails, animal head, boar's tusks—cavorting in wild dances with a basket on his arm asking for handouts" (Reid 353). John Canoe is notable for outwitting the Dutch and sacrificing himself to kill his enemies (Reid 356-357). Jonkanoo challenges society's power structures while also allowing people to express themselves. According to Peter Reed, Jonkanoo denotes "cultural difference, the sign of a New World pan-Africanism—the product of a history of forced migrations and slavery" (Reid 69). For Jamaica and the Bahamas, Jonkanoo is a significant part of their cultural identity and therefore captures the pan-Caribbean ethos of *Midnight Robber*.

Trinidad, Guyana, Jamaica and Suriname

Midnight Robber's alternate universe has a halwa fruit, which is a reference unique to the Muslim ethnic group in the Caribbean. According to Nnedi Okorafor, halwa "originally means Arabian sweet meat" (quoted in Mukherjee). The Muslim community consists of both Indo-Caribbean and Afro-Caribbean people who dwell in Caribbean territories such as Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Suriname and Jamaica (Warner-Lewis

259). Hopkinson's representation of the Muslim ethnic group further reflects the Caribbean's multicultural landscape and the pan-Caribbean ethos of *Midnight Robber*.

Haiti

Haiti's revolutionary hero Toussaint L'Overture is alluded to in the name of the planet, Toussaint, which provides comfortable living conditions and fosters equality and diversity. The planet resembles the conditions that L'Overture attempted to foster among the discordant groups within Haiti, which included the former enslaved and their former slave masters. Toussaint is a place where everyone can feel like they belong and have a home: "Time to remember the way their forefathers had toiled and sweated together: Taino Carib and Arawak, African, Asian, Indian even the Euro, though some wasn't too happy to acknowledge that-there bloodline. All bloods flowing into one river, making a new home on a new planet" (Hopkinson 18). Science fiction allows the developing Caribbean to imagine a future of comfort through the fictional Toussaint.

Haiti and the Dominican Republic

Midnight Robber also alludes to Anacaona, a heroine celebrated by both Haiti and the Dominican Republic. According to Samuel M. Wilson, Anacaona was "a Taino queen who attained legendary status in narratives of anti-colonial resistance in Hispaniola during the early years of Spanish conquest. Anacaona, known as 'Golden Flower', is claimed by both Haitians and people of the Dominican Republic, since she was both the widow of Caonabo, chieftain of the cacique of Maguana (in present-day Dominican Republic), and sister to Bohechio, chieftain of the cacique of Xaragua (in the southern part of present-day Haiti)" (Boyle 188).

Tan-Tan asserts herself as Anacaona in her confrontation with Janisette: "Not wo-man, I name Tan-Tan, a 'T' and a 'AN'; I is the AN-acaona, Taino redeemer" (Hopkinson 320). The reference strengthens the Robber Queen's female agency, as she opposes injustice like Anacaona. Wilson has argued that research about the matrilineal Taino culture and society suggests that Anacaona may have been equal or even greater in power and status than her brother (Boyle 188). The comparison to Anacaona is also suitable since the powerful Robber Queen is not afraid or constrained by men. The reference to Anacaona and Taino culture reflects the multicultural Caribbean region and therefore adds to the pan-Caribbean ethos of *Midnight Robber*.

Grenada

Another significant figure in *Midnight Robber* is the Marryshow Corporation, which is responsible for bringing the settlers to Toussaint. The name "Marryshow" is an allusion to the Grenadian politician Theophilus Albert Marryshow. While the corporation bears his name, a calypsonian also named Marryshow is credited with facilitating Granny Nanny's development of Nannysong (Hopkinson 51-52). Marryshow the calypsonian is responsible for the artificial intelligence; Marryshow the corporation is responsible for the colonisation of Toussaint. The allusion to the Grenadian politician foregrounds

the Marryshow Corporation in *Midnight Robber* in a position of power as the coloniser of Toussaint. Marryshow the calypsonian maintains the power structures on Toussaint because of his contribution to the artificial intelligence which governs Toussaint.

Language

The language of *Midnight Robber* is also evocative of the pan-Caribbean with its blend of various English dialects. Despite not being a part of the Caribbean, America and England have had a major influence on the region. This influence is reflected in the language of the text: both of their standard varieties are present alongside Jamaican Creole English and Trinidadian Creole English. Joy believes that the combination of the languages allows for the creation of a hybridised language for the planets within *Midnight Robber*'s alternate universe. "Hopkinson mixes standard British and American English with Trinidadian and Jamaican creoles and thus, hybridizes the language as well" (Hopkinson 344). The Creole languages which are often oral rather than scribal set the tone of the tale by foregrounding it within the oral tradition of Caribbean culture. This is significant, as *Midnight Robber* showcases Eshu narrating Tan-Tan's story to her unborn child, Tubman. Chichibud draws further attention to the languages spoken by the humans of New Half-Way Tree, "Anglopatwa, Francopatwa, Hispanopatwa, and Papiamento" (Hopkinson 95). These languages parallel the English-speaking, French-speaking, Spanish-speaking, and Dutch-speaking territories of the Caribbean, highlighting language as an important aspect of their cultural identities. In this way, Hopkinson manages to accentuate the pan-Caribbean ethos of *Midnight Robber*.

History

Each Caribbean territory is unique in many ways. However, the colonial past is a commonality among them. The Caribbean shares a history of genocide, colonisation and enslavement that continues to haunt its people. While *Midnight Robber* draws on several unique aspects of certain Caribbean territories, this shared history of the region seeps into the story through the various allusions. The characters recognise the horrific history as illustrated in the difference drawn between the journey from Earth to Toussaint and that of the Middle Passage. "This is the right way to play Jonkanoo, the old-time way. Long time, that hat woulda be make in the shape of a sea ship, not a rocket ship, and them black people inside woulda been lying pack-up head to toe in they own shit, with chains round them ankles. Let the child remember how black people make this crossing, as free people this time" (Hopkinson 21). Hopkinson acknowledges Caribbean history while refashioning it through science fiction to empower the characters who are still troubled by the horrors that their ancestors suffered. Tan-Tan, a child born on Toussaint, is terrified when learning about the experience of the enslaved:

> Tan-Tan squinched up her face at the nasty story. Crêche teacher had sung them that same tale. Vashti and Crab-back Joey had gotten scared. Tan-Tan too. For nights after, she'd dreamt of being shut up in a tiny space, unable to move. Eshu had had

> to calm her when she woke bawling. Nursie shut Ben up quick: "Shush now, don't frighten the child with your old-time story. (Hopkinson 21)

The characters of *Midnight Robber*, including young Tan-Tan, commiserate with the past trauma and distressing history of Caribbean peoples. The illustration of this key part of Caribbean history contributes to the pan-Caribbean ethos of the story.

Science fiction allows Hopkinson to provide comfort and consolation for the trauma of slavery by imagining an ideal future for Caribbean people. The juxtaposition of the slave ship and the rocket ship allows for both an acknowledgement of history and a refashioning of it. "Tan-Tan's rocket ship...rewrites the Middle Passage on the slave ship to the dystopian New Worlds as a space travel to a utopian New World outer space." (Thaler 98). The event of Jonkanoo celebrates the consensual movement of black people as opposed to the forced crossing from Africa to the New World. Ingrid Thaler explains that, "instead of imagining the slave ship as a symbol of forced dislocation, exile, and displacement, its 'shape' is rejected and inverted to become the passage to freedom on the rocket ship" (Thaler 99). Consolation and catharsis are invoked when Tan-Tan names her child after Harriet Tubman, who fought against slavery. The name Tubman induces the catharsis and healing described by Eshu as in "Tubman the human bridge from slavery to freedom" (Hopkinson 329). Hopkinson's treatment of the Caribbean's shared history is significant to the pan-Caribbean ethos of *Midnight Robber*, especially as it recognises historical horrors, while attempting consolation and recovery through the imagining of a comfortable and technologically advanced future.

Distinguished Differences

The Caribbean has not lost its essence or ethos in the imagined future. The Caribbean has not become utterly assimilated into American culture and hegemony. The allusions to elements that are unique to each of the Caribbean territories allow for each territory to stand out and be represented, rather than be lost in the grouping of the overall term "Caribbean". Capturing defining aspects of each territory allows them to shine. Their differences, even if they are small, allow them to be distinguished. Yet their similarities are also noted, identifying the Caribbean as a region without allowing the uniqueness of each territory to be lost. Given the fact that *Midnight Robber* has a Caribbean author, it manages to evoke a stronger pan-Caribbean ethos than one described by a writer not of the region, who may be unable to capture the distinctions among the territories and instead may resort to stereotypes.

The pan-Caribbean ethos of *Midnight Robber* is manifested through the various elements that represent Caribbean territories. Caribbean territories share a history of slavery and colonialism. The region shares this with America. What separates Caribbean territories from America, and in turn each other, is their languages, unique cultural celebrations, distinct heroes and folkloric characters, all of which allow them to have an impactful presence within *Midnight Robber*. Each allusion has a certain resonance within the narrative as it invokes a Caribbean history and culture which allows Caribbean readers to identify with a futuristic science fictional alternate universe. The pan-Carib-

bean ethos is not simply evoked by any one Caribbean territory. It is not purely Jamaican because it is Hopkinson's birthplace, nor is it solely central to Trinidad and Tobago because of the title. Both Caribbean territories, though undoubtedly prominent in the story, only partially contribute to the pan-Caribbean ethos. The pan-Caribbean ethos is further evoked by other Caribbean territories, such as Guyana, Suriname, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, the Bahamas, Grenada, and the territories that are encompassed by the reference to the various languages. It is the presence of cultural and historical aspects from numerous Caribbean territories that encapsulates the pan-Caribbean ethos in Nalo Hopkinson's *Midnight Robber*.

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CARIBBEAN LITERARY EPISTEMOLOGY AS FRONTIER

TWO CARIBBEAN POETS AND THINKERS—KAMAU BRATHWAITE AND DEREK WALCOTT

by Philip Nanton

"Language is the perfect instrument of empire."
—Bishop of Avila to Queen Isabella of Castile, 1492

"Language is also the perfect instrument of anti-imperialism."
—Paula Burnet

In the Caribbean context in which my essay will be situated, knowledge production presents a particular kind of conundrum. European thinkers have for a long time been at the heart of social theory—Marx, Weber, Durkheim—as well as those of more recent vintage—Foucault, Habermas, Giddens, Derrida—and provide a foundation for contemporary analysts in the framing of their scholarship. While their work is rich and important, it is not without its problems. For example, Bhambra has argued convincingly for the widening of conventional epistemologies of social science to include perspectives from the periphery (Bhambra, 2014). As Robin Cohen has observed, modern European social theory does not have concerns central to the Caribbean situation, in particular discussions of colonialism, postcolonialism, colour, race and racism, identity politics and discrimination (Cohen, 2017). In the field of history, Eric Williams' 1964 survey, *British Historians and the West Indies*, excoriated the anti-democratic leanings of historians like Carlyle, Trollope and Froude, who were all for crown colony rule and who wrote, he suggested, "almost as if Britain had introduced Negro slavery solely for the satisfaction of abolishing it" (Williams, 1966, 233). These lacunae in turn raise questions of social identity central to societies historically formed almost wholly by voluntary and forced migration; an issue that, for the most part, also falls outside the concern of European theorists. In response to these realities, Stuart Hall has observed what he calls the *Presence Europeenne*: "For many of us in the region this presence is a matter not of too little but of too much" (Hall, 1993, 399). The important question concerning Europe and European theory, he suggests, is how to "recognize its irreversible influence, while resisting its imperializing eye" (400). Hall here challenges the fundamental relationship between epistemic entrapment and economic dependence that holds the region in thrall. The Caribbean philosopher Paget Henry defines the problem in Shakespearian terms as "Caliban's dilemma of getting caught in the languages and discourses of Prospero which emerged as a pervasive challenge in most areas of our order of knowledge production" (Henry, 2016, 218).

This conundrum has been the concern of a number of Caribbean thinkers. In attempting to create some distance from European dominance and a colonial mentality, Caribbean thinkers have, nonetheless, drawn selectively from different elements of Western epistemology. Richard Clarke has demonstrated how some Caribbean thinkers, like Aimé Césaire and Kamau Brathwaite, favor arborescent tropes (of African rootedness) to link Caribbean Creoles and their African ancestors, while drawing on the divide between thesis and antithesis. This strategy, he notes, which lays emphasis on issues of identity formation, is limited by a residual essentialism and a distrust of universal formulae. Other Caribbean theorists, Clarke suggests, like Edouard Glissant and Derek Walcott, equally resentful of colonial rule, but cleaving to a more universal narrative, have chosen to emphasise the synthetic outcome of the dialectical process. For Glissant, this has involved what he describes as "archipelagen" or "rhyzomatic" thinking, a process that is non-systematic, changeful and open to the unexpected. For Walcott, this process is seen in terms of "Adamic" discovery of the local. At this general level, Clarke argues, both rooted and rhyzomatic thinking share an "organicist" problematic, while, more importantly, neither strategy has provided a radical break from overarching Western influence (Clarke, 2000, 22). However, what I suggest here is that in each instance

(whether rooted or rhyzomatic) there has been a sufficient play of difference to be able to identify a change in the shape of dialogue emanating from the region, and the beginnings of the escape of the problematic conception of identity through language. One central quest, then, for the Caribbean thinker is to find or create a language in which to express local realities.

This question can be examined through what may at first sight be considered an unlikely example: that of the Caribbean language situation broadly and, more specifically, its poetry. Why poetry? And what might a theoretical study of the Caribbean language situation offer in this context? As a preliminary answer to my question, why poetry, I offer the following statement from the essay that accompanies a poetry anthology edited by Nick Laird, "Why Poetry Is the Perfect Weapon to Fight Donald Trump". In it he observes: "Populism claims to love the people but of course it hates the individual, and poetry is one mode of opposing that. It only deals in individuals, while its trust in complication is at the far end of the verbal scale from the demagogue's three-word phrases framed as hoarse imperatives" (Laird, 2017).

Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott are, in a sense, twin pillars of the edifice of Anglophone Caribbean poetry as it was constructed in the second half of the twentieth century. Adherence to one or the other has long been aligned with identification either with the dominant (linguistically formal) discourse, or that of the folk, which Brathwaite called "nation language" Rather than taking sides in this debate, framing their work in the context of the frontier troubles that dichotomy. Using this lens to examine the ways in which they each attempt to challenge conventional poetic boundaries, I will assess the extent to

which either has been able to escape the "imperializing eye" of Western epistemology.

The concept of the frontier, with which I analyse the work of these two Caribbean poets as examples of interventions in the process of unravelling epistemic entrapment, is fully explored in my recent book *Frontiers of the Caribbean*. The argument of the book is based on the frontier as a conceptual tool with which to explore the impact of globalisation in the Caribbean context and its wider applicability. It extends the notion of the frontier as physical boundary to one of moral and ideational tension between an ideologically imposed societal order and organisation "civilisation", and the apparent absence of imposed order "wilderness". In my thinking, the frontier is a flexible concept that operates as much at the individual as at the collective level. The frontier is never completely closed—the wild is always with us, is often interiorised, and "wild" frontier behavior is often interpreted by the "civilised" as transgressive, threatening and constantly in need of taming. However, the process of recognising the wild, resulting in its recapture or "taming", is effective only until another recognisable challenge occurs. I adopt Hayden White's understanding of the term "wild" as a convenient myth whose function is the projection of repressed desires and anxieties (White, 1978, 154). Central to this process of repression is the concept of a contested terrain. Such a context is central to the Caribbean language situation, ultimately because of its effect on Caribbean identity. In this way, I arrive at a definition of the frontier as characterised by conflict over ideas and territory, involving some form of outpost status; inconsistent commitment to local infrastructure (including government institutions): prevalent violence; and a rough and ready society that privileges masculinity and improvisational skills.

My monograph *Frontiers of the Caribbean* employs an essentially geographical demonstration of the operation of frontier concepts, the focus being on the small and underresearched multi-island Anglophone Caribbean state Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Generalising from the monograph, in a more abstract sense, the frontier can be read as describing an absence of consolidated hegemony, which is illustrated through an ongoing relationship between the concepts of "civilisation" and "wilderness". Thus the notion of frontier recognises the existence of contested terrain at the heart of an apparently stable concept.

The Caribbean language situation has long been recognised in literary and linguistic studies as an example of a contested terrain, best expressed by Caliban's declaration to Prospero: "You taught me language, and my profit on't is, I know how to curse." A shared tongue, in other words, is no guarantee of subaltern conformity. Having learnt Prospero's language, Caliban implies, it is by rupturing and repurposing it that he can most effectively challenge Prospero's domination. This is the central concern of my argument. One route of partial escape for certain Caribbean thinkers, particularly Kamau Brathwaite, has been through a turn to orality and an alternative system of thought arising from his contact with Africa. Another, quite distinct and alternative route, that of working from within European literary conventions while infusing them with his own distinctive cultural perspective, has been adopted by Derek Walcott. Although they are not impermeable—Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*, for example, is clearly intertextual with

Eliot's *The Wasteland*, and Walcott has recourse to Creole forms, each strategy broadly offers an alternative approach to literary/epistemological boundary breaking. But each strategy has been received very differently.

The framing of the strategies in the context of "frontier", as defined by the "civilised/wild" divide, brings out the perceived difference in approach to the oral and written word adopted respectively by Kamau Brathwaite and Derek Walcott. Both were literary innovators central to the articulation of creative strategies of resistance. Through shamanic divination and by dramatising the history of the diasporic African experience in the Caribbean, Brathwaite work seeks to challenge the dominant text-based tradition and remake the language; that is, to replace it with textual forms that aim to capture orality or versions of it. In contrast, Walcott argues that, having mastered established forms, the poet needs to use the metrical language that we have been given in ways that subvert its dominion. For him, the means by which the Caribbean will transcend its historical experience is by invoking a sense of newness our work, remaking the world from the perspective of what he calls "Adamic wonder". The question I will finally confront is whether, or to what extent, either strategy has facilitated an escape from the domination of Prospero's language. Before focusing on their specific poetic strategies, let us briefly consider the language situation that they inhabited.

Devaluing of the Caribbean Language Situation

In the matter of the language situation, the divide between civilisation and wilderness in the Caribbean context has been present since earliest colonial times. The debate between the two turns on the legitimacy or otherwise of noise, sound and orality. An underlying feature of the power/knowledge system of Western colonialism is the belief that the origins of Western civilisation are not only to be found in written records but are concomitant with writing itself. This is most clearly seen in the 19th-century preoccupation with all forms of classification, from Darwinism to eugenics, involving the establishment of clearly defined hierarchies understood as scientific. Non-Western societies which could not be easily brought into such classificatory systems were perceived as Other by Western eyes. One marker of this Otherness was language, which, experienced as impenetrable, was characterised ultimately as noise. This ideology is captured in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* when Marlow recounts how the tribespeople opposing his escape "shouted periodically together strings of amazing words that resembled no sounds of human language; and the deep murmurs of the crowd, interrupted suddenly, were like the responses of some satanic litany" (Conrad, 1899, 112). If language and civilisation were symbiotic, it followed that African languages were at best '"primitive", at worst devilish. The same logic applied to the encounter with African religious belief systems, embedded as they are in the precepts of orality. The consequences of this way of thinking can be seen in the denigration of African deities as satanic, idols, fetishes, for example. The devaluing of orality has a long colonial history in the Caribbean as well, characterised by a situation in which Western epistemology was mediated by colonial administrations. For example, at the turn of emancipation in 1834, John Anderson, an expatriate stipendiary magistrate located in Saint Vincent, writing in his journal, dismissed as a hindrance the everyday orality of Sunday market language. "Long, long, indeed will it be," he claims, "before this gibberish becomes intelligible to European ears" (McDonald, 2001, 75). This division between the "wild" popular oral tradition and the "civilised" literary establishment has remained a constant. In the modern context, it is apparent just as forcefully between one Caribbean tradition and another: for example, between popular oral performance poetry that emanates from a tradition of protest and formal, or literary, poetry centered on the text. In his discussion of performance poetry in the Caribbean, the following statement reflects, ironically, Derek Walcott's dismissal of the "wild" of modern performance poetry for its teleology and its technical limitations. In an interview, he said:

> I think performance poetry is a juvenile thing, you know, an adolescent thing, for the art…eventually the poet wants to do something a little more disciplined, a little more modest, a little more humble, a little less of the 'I', showing himself…. I think that there is a sort of virulent, vehement, aggressive incoherence that is taking the place of poetry and I think it's stupid. (17)

In this interview, he also noted performance poetry's inability to communicate effectively: "If you don't want to tell people your poem, and you want to go for the incoherence that you think is national, I'm not part of that." (Walcott, 2008/2009).

This divide between the oral and the literary in its modern context has been interpreted by the Caribbean literary critic Gordon Rohlehr as a question of the relationship of form to social purpose. He suggests that poetry that leans towards the oral tradition is designed for a collective or communal space. Such poetry, often simple, rhythmic, repetitive, rhyming and deliberately eschewing Western rules of prosody, is as at home at a "lime" (informal social gathering), calypso tent or in a church sermon as in a dub or spoken word performance (Rohlehr, 1992). The oral poet sees him/herself as addressing a collective and dealing with matters of collective interest, for example, genealogy. In the Caribbean, the form is called "performance", "dub" or "spoken word" poetry. Performances are often infused with metaphors of resistance, communal initiatives and the nurturing of ancestral links. For example, one Barbadian spoken word performer who captures the elements of warning and liturgy in his performances is Adrian Green. On eight of the fifteen tracks on his first CD, *Random Acts of Conscience*, he alerts his listeners to be on guard against re-enslavement by greed, warmongers, superficial entertainers, false intellectuals, whose textbooks are "littered with lies", and professional exploiters who "don't use chains and whips but brains and tricks". They all represent the generalised threat of "spiritual wickedness in high and low places". The threat is conveyed in his performance utilising simple rhyme combined with the rising crescendo of a Baptist preacher as he warms to the task:

> Man I tell ya, in this nation of blue, black and yella, we raising an entire generation on musical junk food, a strict diet of jam and wine, it's no wonder that we will find the children can't concentrate but are great at rolling their behind. (Green, 2007)

By contrast, the classical or modernist literary modes that grew out of colonial education produced a poetic form designed primarily to be experienced in a one-to-one relationship between text and reader. It is out of this tradition that Walcott's poetry emanates. He has consistently emphasised the value of mastering established forms. His early work indicates a commitment to established forms and metrical patterns, for example, the iambic pentameter, as well as free verse. Here are two examples from Walcott's early poetry. The first, from "A Lesson for this Sunday", is in iambic pentameter, while the second, "Oddjob, a Bull Terrier", is in Walcott's free verse conversational style.

The growing idleness of summer grass
With its frail kites of furious butterflies
Requests the lemonade of simple praise
In scansion gentler than my hammock swings.
(Walcott, 1992, 38)

You prepare for one sorrow,
But another comes.
It is not like the weather,
you cannot brace yourself
the unreadiness is all.
(Walcott, 1992, 334)

In light of the denigration of the local language situation and the authority of imposed form, how, then, do Walcott and Brathwaite break this apparent boundary?

It is worth emphasising that both Brathwaite's and Walcott's approach to the Caribbean language of resistance described here have been undertaken consciously. Brathwaite's insistence on African rootedness and the centrality of orality to his thinking are responses to the legacy of colonial language hegemony. Walcott's approach has been to subvert more subtly the inherited colonial language legacy and the authority of imposed form.

Brathwaite's Approach: Challenging Form

Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite was in some sense a shaman whose work is infused with a passionate spirituality, expressed in broken jazz-inflected lines and words, and linguistic structures drawn from a form of orality that he called "nation language"' In his early discussion of nation language, Brathwaite openly recognises a major debt to the work of T.S. Eliot. He states: "What T.S. Eliot did for Caribbean poetry and Caribbean literature was to introduce the notion of the speaking voice, the conversational tone. That is what really attracted us to Eliot" (Brathwaite, 1984, 30).

Thus, in a sense, Brathwaite is part of the modernist school of Western poetry, but his modernism is closer to a Caribbean- and African-inflected mode of expression. Brathwaite in his poetic work then goes on to build on the fragments and ruins of the Caribbean experience to achieve the ultimate goal, which, to use Edward Glissant's term, is the creation of a "free poetics". That is, a transformative mode of poetry that

involves simultaneously telling, listening and commenting, all of which are in turn keys to the reshaping of society (Glissant, 1997). The dominant feature of revolt for Brathwaite harks back to the region's slave past. In his study *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770–1820*, Brathwaite asserts that the slaves' most important act of rebellion against domination was in their challenge to the language of the masters, adopting strategies that included concealment, ambiguity, parody and mimicry. Caribbean language, which in Anderson's perception is "gibberish", becomes for Brathwaite an essential way of undermining Prospero's dominance, whether linguistic or political. These strategies are part of what he calls the "little" or "folk" tradition (which plays off Leavis' "Great Tradition" of the English canon), and are founded on a culturally specific conception of the self. Brathwaite writes: "It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his masters, and it was in his (mis) use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled. Within the folk tradition, language was (and is) a creative act in itself; the word was held to contain a secret power" (Brathwaite, 1970, 17).

By orality, I do not mean simply the mimicry of speech patterns or the use of dialect but the encapsulating of an alternative world view. In the Ghanaian context, where Brathwaite wrote some of his early poetry and which had a lasting influence on his thinking, orality is a complete system encompassing a cosmology, a belief system and a philosophy characterised by distinct and complex concepts. In brief, it is an overriding belief in the simultaneity and interpenetration of spiritual and material worlds, encompassing animism, kinship, rebirth, the contiguity of the dead and the living, and the role of the ancestors. A fundamental concept in many African philosophical systems is that of the condition of being human as "relational" or "processual". The field of action of the individual is framed by the society which gives his or her life meaning. The Ghanaian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu, surveying the ontological concepts propounded by African orality, speaks of a normative idea of personhood as something to be aspired to and achieved through one's own efforts (Wiredu, 1992).

The parallels here with the Caribbean context are apparent. While it is through the voice (incantation) that the gods or ancestors are invoked, in West Africa there exist "cults" of which initiates are not allowed to divulge the secrets, which may even be in a secret language, or a "deep" version of a familiar language. Brathwaite argues that nation language is subversive of the official language, the "grand" tradition, and is essentially oral (and thus communal), and so directly challenges the dominant textual language of government, law and authority bequeathed to the region by its colonial masters.

I identify in "nation language", the term that Brathwaite gives the alternative language of the Caribbean, features of the continuing "wild". He identifies its characteristics in this way:

The poetry, the culture itself, exists not in the dictionary but in the tradition of the spoken word. It is based as much on sound as it is on song. That is to say, the noise that it makes is part of its meaning, and if you ignore the noise (or what you would *think* of as noise shall I say), then you lose part of the meaning. When it is written, you lose the sound or the noise, and therefore you lose part of the meaning. (Brathwaite, 1984, 17)

As a contemporary poet, historian and critic, Brathwaite, however, is not interested in merely recreating or preserving the oral dimension. To free the language requires nothing less than a break with the conventional English text. As the critic Stewart Brown observes: "He has always been very much engaged with texts. What his work more and more reflects is his quest to find ways in which texts can be made to accommodate the 'noise' of nation language, to represent 'the new shapes and consciousness of ourselves'" (Brown, 2007, 199). This requires a breaking up of the language, as seen and especially as spoken, allowing it to stammer and stutter itself into a linguistic rebirth. The poem "Negus" from his collection *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*, for instance, begins with these stutters:

> it
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> It is not
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> It is not
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> it is not
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> it is not
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> It is not enough
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> It is not enough to be free
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> of the red white and blue
>
> of the drag, of the dragon
>
> It is not
>
> it is not
>
> it is not enough
>
> It is not enough to be free
>
> of the whips, principalities and powers
>
> where is your kingdom of the Word? (Brathwaite, 1967, 222)

In a note in *History of the Voice*, Brathwaite is clear that the Establishment is challenged by orality through its dislike of and unease with the non-conforming (wild) voice. He notes, in contrast: "It was Eliot's actual voice, or rather his recorded voice which turned us on." He points out further: "And it is interesting that on the whole, the Establishment couldn't stand Eliot's voice." He makes a similar point about the voice of John Arlott, the BBC test cricket commentator, who subverted the Establishment with his

"*riddmic* and *image*-laden tropes" and his "revolutionary Hampshire burr" (Brathwaite, 1984, note 41, 30-31).

Beyond accommodating the noisy challenge of nation language or orality, Brathwaite's creative work had in his latter years increasingly experimented with technology, especially with different online fonts, to subvert the conventional notion of a book as written text. Referring again to *The Tempest*, he calls this "Sycorax video style" as well as "writin in light". Of this, he argues in an interview with Stewart Brown in 1989:

> The computer has made it much easier for the illiterate, the Caliban, actually to get himself visible. The miracle of that electronic screen means that the spoken word can become visible in a way that it cannot become visible in the typewriter where you have to cease physically…The computer has moved us away from scripture into some other dimension which is "writin in light". It is really nearer to the oral tradition than the typewriter is. The typewriter is an extension of the pen. The computer is getting us as close as you can to the spoken word. (Brown, 1989, 84-93)

The result, as Brown has observed, is that:

> There has been an ever present concern with orthography, as if the very technology of printing was loaded against the enunciations of the new/old/evolving oral-now-literary language he wants to use. Brathwaite has experimented with layouts and with syntactical "calibanisms" as he calls them, innovative or shortened spelling, breaking, spacing, shaping words in ways that dislocate them from their familiar associations and meanings, but more importantly allowing nuances,

> echoes, puns, rhymes and particular kinds of music "out" of the language that history has imposed on him to express his experience and vision. (Brown, 2007, 200)

In his poetry, Brathwaite becomes a kind of contemporary shaman to whom and through whom various African-centered voices speak of the neglected slave history of the Caribbean. For example, in discussing how the poem "Namsetoura", from his award-winning collection *Born to Slow Horses* (2005) came about, he recounts a revelation in which an image of a spider in its web shattered his camera lens a number of times. Eventually, after capturing the image and trying to provide a narrative of the experience of this female image, he recounts how he heard Namsetoura (in effect his muse) speaking to him "in a mixture of Asante Twi, Ga and Barbadian Nation language", encouraging him to recognise the sacredness of a nearby slave burial ground and how this was connected to the need to protect his own land from the encroachment of officialdom. In a 2005 interview, he further recounts: "But what she said is that I should do some real research, I should defend her sacred space, and I should become concerned therefore with the environment, both historically and spiritually, from where she had come." (McSweeney, 2005). This clarifies the connection between his attempts both to make language in a new way and to give expression to his alternative view of history. In "Namsetoura", the spider, a Ghanaian folk-figure which emerged in the Caribbean as Anansi, embodies the African belief in animism, whereby all living and inanimate things are imbued with spirit. Namsetoura herself is an ancestor figure, by means of which history is transmitted, not through text but through the voice of a spirit medium. In this way, through his poetry, Brathwaite signifies the complicity of official language in the making of one version of history while offering a different route to ancestral knowledge.

Walcott's Approach—Mastering Established Form to Change It

In contrast, Derek Walcott chose a very different path by which to pose his challenge. On the one hand, he is the arch-compromiser who learns from and adapts the classics. He has spoken often of how, in his early writing, he would mimic the style of established poets in English whom he admired—Auden, Thomas, Yeats, to name but a few. On the other hand, adopting the persona of the shipwrecked mariner Robinson Crusoe, in his poem "Crusoe's Journal", he observes Friday using the master's language for his own ends. Note how closely this parallels the Calibanic and suggests, again, that Walcott and Brathwaite are after the *same* ends:

> parroting our master's style and voice, we make his language ours. (Walcott, 1992, 93)

His mastery of the language of poetry in its formal sense was a key driver of Walcott's international reputation. In 1964, after his *Selected Poems* was published, Robert Graves famously observed in a review: "Derek Walcott handles English with a closer understanding of its inner magic than most (if not any) of his English-born contemporaries." Walcott's turn to the classics in his epic poem, *Omeros*, both in language and theme, with characters named from Homer's *Iliad*, and in form, using a loose *terza*

rima (the form of Dante's *Divine Comedy*) and a hexameter in preference to the more portentous and "poetic" pentameter, reinforces an apparent concern for tradition and suggests the "civilising" influence on his work. Walcott himself also recognised in the poem what he has called "Homeric endeavors" (like the cutting down of trees) that open the poem. Though it is important to note that Walcott, in discussing *Omeros*, also described the poem as one of *associations*, not derivations, and that he consciously strove to downplay the epic dimension in favour of what he called "the diurnal, day to day heroism of people who go out and face the arrogance".

In another part of the same interview with Luigi Sampietro, he explains his choices and specifically the ways in which he *is not* writing "epic" poetry in the grand style, but something he feels is more appropriate to his subject:

> The usual meter for heroic or narrative verse in English is pentametrical. But the echo of the pentameter, it seems to me, it's felt to be a little conventional and a little pre-determined. And, of course—I think—even if you add rhyme to that, you have a risk of either quatrains or couplets. So I preferred to use a longer line—a hexametrical line. Because I felt that the prose, the narrative experience in the poem would've had less of a sort of an epic echo if it were in hexameter as opposed to if it were in pentameter, in which it would already begin to certainly have echoes of Milton, or Tennyson, something Victorian—in terms of the measure of it. And I don't think that the pentameter would've allowed me the kind of prosaic space that I wanted for the action of the narration—the prose element in it. I think that in the pentametrical measure ordinary things tend to get over-emphasized by the beat. Whereas *here*, there is more flexibility, more caesuras. You can relax, you can pick up—accelerate as you wish. (Walcott, nd)

On the face of it, these observations make Walcott apparently both more conciliatory to the Western world and accepting of the standard English paradigm. However, the critic Paula Burnett argues that Walcott's "use of metrical language is not a form of Eurocentrism", asserting that "he engages with the literary canon to subvert its domination" (Burnett, 2000, 126). One way that he does this is by the juxtaposition of the language of Prospero and Caliban, standard and dialect. In his poem "The Saddhu of Couva", the persona, now grown old, reflects on his life from indentured migrant from India to a member of a local village council in Trinidad, and observes:

> I talked too damn much on the Couva Village Council
> I talked too softly.
> I was always drowned by the loudspeakers in front of the stores
> or the loudspeakers with the greatest pictures.
> I am best suited to stalk like a white cattle bird on legs like sticks, with sticking to the Path between the canes on a district road at dusk.
> Playing the Elder.
> There are no more elders.
> *Is only old people* [my emphasis].
> (Walcott, 1992, 372)

The poignancy of his situation turns on the juxtaposition between the experience expressed in standard English and the succinct Trinidadian dialect of the last line.

I have noted Brathwaite's preoccupation with history, but Walcott, too, maintains that all colonials are haunted by the horrors of the past. In his essay "The Muse of History", he writes: "For us in the archipelago the tribal memory is salted with the bitter memory of migration" and "the old vision of paradise wrecks here".

He argues that in literary terms one ancestor, the enslaver, screams for pardon while the enslaved or victimised screams for revenge. But for him, it is futile to apply a linear, sequential model of history in wrestling with the past, and he refuses a notion of history as following a predetermined trajectory, that is, a chain of cause and effect. Such a concept of history results either in "shame" or "awe", and is, he suggests, "filial". He refuses to forgive his ancestors, whether white or black, enslaved or slave owner, since such a stance results in an idea of history which justifies, explains and expiates. Where Brathwaite views history as broken and seeks to heal the rupture, Walcott rather reads history as eternal recurrence and repetition. His interest is in a perpetual starting over. The Caribbean literary theorist Richard Clarke (previously quoted) reads Walcott's approach as tantamount to history-qua-eternal recurrence (Clarke, 2008-2009). He cites Walcott's own claim that the result of this perspective is not a '"jaded cynicism which sees nothing new under the sun", but one that offers "an elation which sees everything as renewed" (Walcott, 1998, 38). Furthermore, Walcott has observed that "history is fiction, subject to a fitful muse, memory" (Walcott, 1998, 37).

Ultimately, Walcott's challenge, which he gladly accepts, is expressed neither as resistance nor rebellion, but as celebration of the newness that Creolisation signifies. This, he claims, is nothing less than the "elemental privilege of naming the new world". Echoing Brathwaite's appropriation of Shakespearean tropes, Walcott suggests that poets like himself, who draw on the classics, have in common the transcendence of ordinary experience through moments of intense apprehension and awareness, "whether they are aligned by heritage to Crusoe and Prospero or Friday and Caliban". One application of this ordinary experience to boundary breaking in the context of the epic is illustrated in *Omeros*. Patricia Novillo-Corvalan points out how "the characters that inhabit *Omeros* adopt the grandiloquent names of their epic ancestors, but emulate a new type of heroism that arises, not from the battles of high rank individuals, but from the struggles of fishermen and local people who have to survive the socio-economic challenges of the island" (Norvillo-Corvalan, 2007, 159). Any inheritance, bequeathed by either figure, is there to be transformed, for "Caribbean sensibility is not marinated in the past. It is not exhausted. It is new. But it is its complexity, not its historically explained simplicities, which is new" (Walcott, 1998, 54).

The Caribbean Literary Frontier and Epistemological Ruptures

Rather than a simple opposition between accommodation and rupture, then, both poets can be read for their break with colonial epistemology, but there are also clear differences. They have, in the past, also contested the legitimacy of one another's strategy. Walcott famously satirised the opening of Brathwaite's poem "Negus" with the repetition of the words "it/it is" and "not/it is not a good" followed by "it is not a good poem", and Brathwaite has damned with faint praise what he described as Walcott's "first major nation language effort". In his comments on Walcott's poem "The Schooner Flight", which opens:

> In idle August, while the sea soft
> And leaves of brown islands stick to the rim
> Of this Caribbean, I blow out the light
> By the dreamless face of Maria Conception
> To ship as a seaman on the schooner *Flight*.
> (Walcott, 1992, 345)

Brathwaite traced Walcott's "first major nation language effort" to Langland's prelude to *Piers the Ploughman*, criticising it for using the pentameter and thus remaining at some distance from "a rhythm which approximates the *natural* experience, the *environmental* experience", of the Caribbean, concluding with his famous claim, "The hurricane does not roar in pentameters" (Brathwaite, 1984, 10). The Walcott of *Omeros* would appear to agree!

Beyond this shadow-boxing, more importantly, the strategy of each poet, in its own way, attempts to shake off the influence of Western epistemology, and, I am suggest-

ing, each reflects a frontier thinking characteristic of this deeply colonised region. How successful have these strategies been?

Both writers can be read as located at the frontier of Caribbean literary epistemology, each in his own way breaking literary boundaries. In the process of incorporating and extending Prospero's language, Walcott's strategy, it would appear, remains well within the official and "civilised" sphere of language and any break, where apparent, has been in some ways too subtle to affect his reputation. The international acceptance and recognition that has been given to his poetry over the years (indicated below) would appear to make any claim or suggestion of a fundamental break spurious. His literary strategy of building on traditions from wherever he chooses, but notably his adoption of Western forms and rewriting of Western myths, resulted in international awards, widespread fame and popularity. It was not that Walcott necessarily sought out recognition and acclaim, but the fact that his work prompted them is of itself significant. His association with other international literary names who were his contemporaries in the world of poetry, including Seamus Heaney, Joseph Brodsky and earlier the Americans Robert Frost and Elizabeth Bishop, indicates also an international acceptance and legitimation for his work and by implication for Caribbean or Saint Lucian letters. This recognition can be traced back as far as his "discovery" through the BBC radio programme *Caribbean Voices* in the 1950s, when his poetry was promoted by the programme's editor, Henry Swanzy, and other London-based critics, as "the real thing" (Nanton, 2000, 68).

Kamau Brathwaite's struggle with an epistemological break has been of a different order, more overt in language use, structure and style, transcending conventional notions of what he would call the "Grand" tradition of English letters. Ironically, however, he has not escaped the prison-house of printed language, albeit produced by digital means, as the means to express his orality. This contradiction is captured by the term that Brathwaite coined, "*writin'* in light". More importantly, while the literary world embraced his experimentation—he received, among many awards, the Casas de las Américas Prize for literature in 1976 and 1986 from Cuba, the Neustadt International Prize for Literature in 1994, the Canadian Griffin Poetry Prize in 2007, the Robert Frost Medal in 2015, as well as twice winning the Frank Collymore Literary Endowment Award, given annually in his home island, Barbados—does this academic and local recognition suffice for one whose espoused aim was for the wider Barbadian/Caribbean people to understand his work?

Edouard Glissant was pessimistic about the local relevance or efficacy of Caribbean poetry or letters, at least as far as Martinique was concerned. As critic Kelly Baker Josephs has pointed out, in his Introduction to *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant concludes that the "discourse on discourse, has come too late", with the result that his country-people have lost "the meaning of their own voice". She notes that Glissant suggests negative answers to the following questions: "Would an awakening to orality and the explosion of Creole satisfy the deficiency (the loss of voice)? Is the revolution that would mature them still possible? Is the land which will *understand* them still there around us?" (Josephs, 2003). Glissant accepts that in attempting to actualise a collective Caribbean identity, a writer will inevitably be separated from the community for which he writes, as well as from the language that is presently in use.

To return to the question of whether it is possible to escape the "prison house of language"' Richard Clarke is confident that both Brathwaite and Walcott can be accommodated within the Western philosophical tradition, reading both as offering versions of the Kantian sublime. He suggests that, faced with the overwhelming magnitude and inevitable might of the literary and by extension intellectual canon of European provenance, the Caribbean thinker vacillates, at least initially, between discomfort and pain, on the one hand, and terror and even awe on the other (Clarke, 2008/2009). These negative feelings are transcended by two possible responses that give rise to two critical impulses, each informed by a particular set of assumptions, not least about the nature of identity, the sign and a posited relation between these two. These are an elated embrace of the tradition and an affirmation of an essential self that transcends time and place (representative of Walcott's world view) and, by contrast, a canny irreverence towards and a questioning of the Grand tradition accompanied by a desire to substitute an alternative founded on a culturally specific conception of the self (more relevant to Brathwaite's world view). The former Clarke identifies as Kantian and the latter Herderian (respectively transcendentalist and historicist).

Walcott and Brathwaite, each in his own way, took up the challenge to break free of Western epistemology. Finally, how are their efforts to be read in the context of a frontier analysis of a globalised world? As two Caribbean poets and philosophers who

offered to the world their respective cultural products, might one be read as closer to "civilised" and the other to the "wild"? These questions return the analysis to the issue of real politics. Whether one reads their philosophical underpinnings as springing from a common Western epistemology, or from diverse ideological points of origin, an important underlying cultural issue concerns how their respective work as a cultural product is consumed, evaluated and circulated. This is, to some extent, reflected by the rewards they received for their work.

Put bluntly, the embrace of Walcott's oeuvre by a European/American readership and critical community suggests its greater congeniality and acceptability than the work of Kamau Brathwaite. The former appears closer to the ideology that would consume it as "civilised" and thus reward it lavishly, and the latter closer to the "wild" and so less congenial, and, I would argue, more unsettling, stranger and ultimately more challenging. This difference can be measured partly in terms of their official reception—most conspicuously, the honouring of Walcott abroad with a Nobel Prize. At home in Castries, the capital of Saint Lucia, a square has been named after him, and he has received a knighthood. Following his death, he was accorded a state funeral. Brathwaite, in contrast, maintained a conflictual relationship with his national government for many years over control of the land (CowPastor) in Barbados where he lives. Following his retirement from teaching in New York, though he continued to write and publish, he became increasingly secluded in his island home. If in the final analysis neither poet was able to break free of Prospero's embrace, as Caribbean subjects both are demonstrably in creative tension with it. In terms of the frontier between civilisation and the "wild", however, they have each been accorded a distinctly different position in that negotiation. The multiple significations of this different relation to the frontier offer an alternative to the dichotomies of postcolonialism, and thereby a new perspective on these icons of Caribbean literature.

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SHORT STORIES

OVER THERE, NAME DON'T MATTER

by Shastri Sookdeo

The difficulty with having a famous namesake is that people often see evidence of a personality that is not actually there. Someone called Edison likely has no ability to innovate, in the same way naming a child Zico will not guarantee the ability to dribble. However, output does not matter as much as perception. A man called Williams or Singh remains largely free to choose whatever path they wish. A commonly heard name has no inherent blocking points. Someone named Stalin, however, would struggle to win an election. At least, this is what seventeen-year-old Azharuddin Mohammed from Pace Village in Central Trinidad thought, until he saw a paragraph about Indian elections in the newspaper his fish was wrapped in.

"You seeing this?" Azhar said. "A man name Stalin win election in India. I would have never imagine that could ever happen."

Azhar had always had difficulty with his name. It was an uncommon one on the island. Named after the Indian captain in 1999, the subsequent match-fixing conviction had unforeseeable consequences. Azhar became, in Trinidadian cricket circles, a person who could not be trusted.

This would not have mattered had he been interested in football or table tennis. But for a person of Indian origin in the villages, there was only one sport. Azhar kept playing cricket, even though his name made him work harder than others for opportunities.

"Over there, name not the same like here. You name Mohammed because that's your father title, I name Mangalsingh because that is my father own. Over there, people name Engineer because they father was engineer. People have one name, and they have they father first name as title, so every generation have a different last name."

"And don't even start with misspell when they have to put English characters. Every time I see Abdul Razzaq, he jersey have a different spelling with 'K' and 'C'," the fish vendor replied.

"He from Pakistan, though."

"That is beside the point, it still true enough. Once I went to look in the archive to see if I could have figure out where my family from. The way they was spelling name then to now, plenty things change. And you already know how much mistake they probably make before they put people on the boat. Imagine a British officer trying to write down Hindi spelling. He bound to spell it wrong. You does get the same thing when you go

licensing office and tell people your name. Depending how they look, the name might spell right."

"For me it easy, it don't have so much ways to spell Mohammed. Is the Azharuddin people can't manage, unless they old and like cricket."

"Is the benefit of being name after somebody. Nobody could have spell Tendulkar or Muralitharan when I was born, but they could spell it now. Tell somebody spell Prahalad Mangalsingh and see the kind of magic you go get."

"Anyway, the thing is name don't matter. Stalin win the election," Azhar said.

"I know you didn't read the thing good. Is not name, is who you know. This man father used to be the minister and all."

"How I could read it with *carite* guts all over the thing?"

"Is only yesterday papers. Here, hold this and read while I go down to the end of the road and see if anybody want the *cavalli*."

Mangal drove off, shouting out of his car window about the powers of fish broth and his prices, leaving Azhar with the day-old newspaper.

Despite the fish he held dripping through the soggy newspaper onto the ground, Azhar retreated to a chair next to the gate, in the shade of a frangipani. The tree was free of caterpillars, but Azhar knew it was only a matter of time before the yellow and black pests would return. He risked having his mother yell at him for staying outside and dripping watery fish residue into the yard instead of putting the fish into the freezer, but he did not want to risk missing Mangal's return. If he was not at the gate, Mangal would drive straight past, even though the fish vendor had nowhere in particular to be.

"Look, I smarter than anybody in this team. But they go ever let me be captain?" Azhar said.

Mangal, if he saw Azhar after finishing his tour of the village, would sit with him in the shed under the mango tree at the back of the house, during the stultifying hours of the afternoon.

His car would bake outdoors, and Azhar could not fathom how he endured the stench. Despite Mangal's repeated claims that the heat made the odour decrease, since it cooked the fish remnants, Azhar couldn't believe it. But he never belaboured the point. If Mangal lost his temper, he would strike someone off his route and would not stop no matter how much the person flagged him down. This could go on for months. It wasn't that Azhar liked fish so much that he could not go without, but that the replacement of chicken or goat meant walking all the way to the other side of the village. Fish came straight to the door, and there was no risk of getting the wrong ones because the halal supplier hadn't delivered that day.

"You really think is just your name stopping you?" Mangal said. "I mean, captain have to make the team first."

"Most wickets is me. Second most runs is me. Probably most catch, if they was counting it," Azhar said. "Captain is not about that. Is about smart. Darren Sammy didn't do nothing when we win World Cup."

"But people like Sammy. He players like him. Anybody like you? Me ain't saying, it just so. Is just, captain is not just knowing what to do, is knowing how to make sure everybody pulling in one direction. Or somebody go call for a run and stay in he crease."

"Look at this Stalin character. He could have never win an election over here. If he wanted to captain a side, he would have."

"If your father was the captain, maybe you could have be captain, too," Mangal said. "Because Indian Stalin, I sure he father tell him exactly how to win. And then people say the father was probably good, so the son bound to be and all. But you, if this was 1999, then for sure you had name for a captain. But now, you just have name for match fixing. Anyway, real Azharuddin win election, too."

"I just saying, here they not taking me seriously. Over there, I might make it. It have too much things going against me here," Azhar said. "They don't want spin bowlers in West Indies anyway. But nobody coming down in the village to find players either. Everybody who make national went some prestige school. And if your hair straight, you have to be twice as good to get in. And I already have to be twice as good just to get a look. That's four now."

"Look, you not wrong. But if you was able to study even a little bit, you and all would have go prestige school. They could put people in sixth form just to play cricket and football if they barely pass anything. But they can't put them in if they didn't pass nothing," Mangal said. "I know you could play. Don't mind I does give you horrors. In truth, I never see anybody turn the ball big like you and struggling to make national. But selectors watching the scorecard for school cricket. And your name not there."

Azhar's main problem, apart from his name, was he was terrible at school. It hadn't helped that he was seen by all the teachers as untrustworthy. The rare occasions when he performed well academically were greeted with consensus that he had cheated in some way. Though most teachers did not watch cricket and had probably not heard of the former Indian captain's involvement with gamblers, Pace Village was not a big place. When someone has a reputation, it sticks, even though the underlying reasoning may have been obscure.

"People with this face, we supposed to be good at school, and other than that, it don't have nothing for me. Can't sing soca, must sing chutney. Can't play football, must play cricket. Or work in the garden and drink rum till diabetes or heart attack come for me. And then my children go fight for the land. I don't want that."

"What else you could do? You think I wanted to drive around and sell fish in a falling-down old car without air conditioning?" Mangal replied. "To have to wake up early and go down by the depot to get what piece of fish I could get, and even then, is fighting for leftovers. Because they hold the best ones to sell in the hotel or big boys' restaurant. Here, you have

the choice between doing whatever you could do or doing nothing and starve. It don't have nothing like doing what you want to do. You have to go abroad for that.

"What you would have do if you could have?"

"You wasn't the first who wanted to play cricket. When I was growing up, I wanted to be a fast bowler. You couldn't not want to, back in the days. No seam or swing, just pace for making men smell leather. And I was good, too. By the time men put they bat down, keeper done hold the ball. No pelting, neither. Action clean like a textbook."

"So, what happen?"

"What does always happen? They watch me and they say, 'It don't have nothing like an Indian fast bowler. Why you don't try leg spin?' And I can't make no team bowling long hop looking for stick," Mangal said. "Alright, you struggling because of your name. And that not right, and it not fair. But one way or another, you would have end up struggling down here. You can't get away from that."

Mangal often watched cricket, but Azhar had never known he ever played. The story did not surprise him, however.

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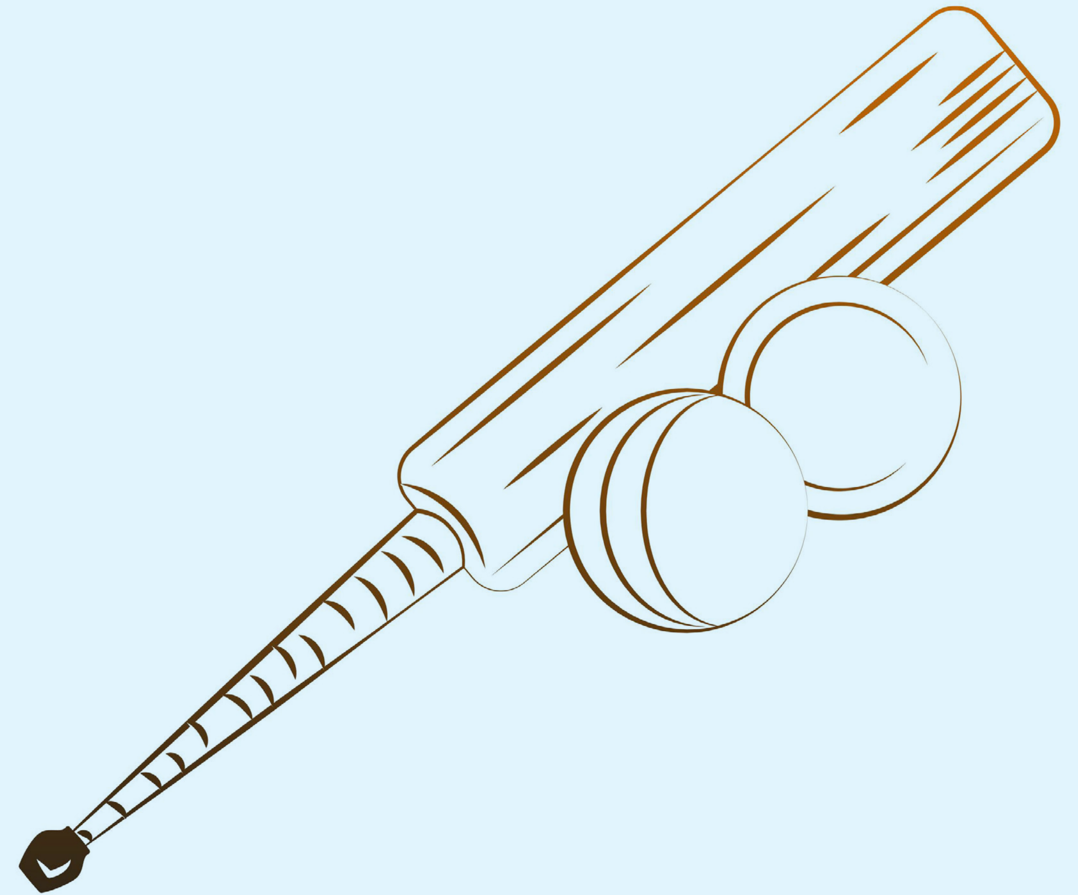
Only after failing everything at the end of fifth form was Azhar finally able to stop going to school. For the past year, he had done almost nothing. His mother had briefly tried to get him to go work with his cousins, who planted peppers on the land they had been given as part of a severance package when the sugar industry had collapsed. The work had been long and tiring, with days that began before sunrise and continued until late afternoon. He had not been prepared to stay all day in the sun. Years of cricket, especially multi-day matches, had led him to believe he was immune to the heat. He quickly realised that removing weeds and dragging a five-gallon knapsack full of industrial chemical liquid along the beds was a very different prospect from occasionally returning a throw from fine leg. He managed to keep at it for two weeks before giving up.

His father's attempt to have him try construction was no more successful. Azhar considered himself the kind of person who was adept at tasks and self-sufficient. On the worksite, he discovered he was the kind of person who could not hammer a nail properly, nor could he easily saw through pieces of wood without getting the length wrong. All his life he had heard a difficult task be compared to mixing cement. He finally was able to understand just how apt the comparison was. He had lasted less than eight days.

The last he had heard was that his father was trying to have him apprenticed as a fisherman. It was not something he wanted to do, but he was not worried. No fisherman, from this notably superstitious community, would be willing to take him on a boat. Not even if they were paid. The fact that his father had last spoken about this months ago seemed to give credence to this assumption.

There was little to do in Pace Village. He tried not to spend a lot of time in the house, as his mother would give him chores or berate him on his lack of academic achievement. Often, she would do both at the same time.



The village was not empty during the day, as it had been when he was younger. Then, only housewives could be found on their way to shops or religious functions, while husbands worked in the sugar cane fields or the industrial estates. Since the sugar industry had collapsed, the numbers of unemployed who lived off their voluntary severance package had increased immensely. Few took up the opportunity to retrain. The closure of the oil industry only hardened the belief that it was better to do nothing, as the unemployed oil field workers swelled the ranks of the idle in the village.

The rum-shop had never been empty, even during the morning, but it had become a place that was always full. The mosque was only crowded on Fridays, and the temple on Sundays, but both houses of worship always had people on the compounds at any given time.

Azhar avoided the options of both alcohol and religion. He was too young to drink, though this was no real barrier, as anyone who looked old enough would be served (and sometimes this criterion was waived). It was against his religion anyway. It was one of

the few religious ordinances he followed, as well as not eating pork. He was not strict enough to deny himself bake and shark at the beach, nor did he pray five times a day.

The mosque was a place he avoided not because he did not wish to be involved in religion. He distrusted atheists, though he had known but two in his entire life, because to not believe in anything was itself unbelievable. He avoided the mosque because he struggled to remember the prayers and could not remember verses from the Quran. To see children easily reciting surahs, while he struggled through the *shahada*, filled him with shame. Even Jumah he no longer attended, despite nominally never missing it when he had been a student. The main allure had been for its allowance of having a half-day on Friday, though even then he often went home instead of to the masjid.

The only choice left to Azhar was to try to visit other equally idle former classmates. They, too, steered clear of their own houses, some in hiding from irritating parents and some just to have a change of scenery. It was becoming harder to find anyone, anymore, as most had committed to the types of jobs Azhar avoided. Though his family was not rich, just by being able to stop working at a job he did not enjoy meant he was far better off than most of his contemporaries. He did not imagine this luck would continue forever.

As he frequently found no one to waste time with, Azhar would drift off to the village cricket grounds where it was certain some idlers would always be present. Mangal came occasionally after his route was over, though he did not live in the village, but his own village a few miles away had no cricket grounds. There were usually training sessions in the late afternoon, and on mornings players could be found working on their game in the nets. During midday, when the temperature was the highest, the nets would be empty, and most people would take a siesta. It was at this time, when he knew the nets would be empty, that Azhar chose to work on his game.

The nets were in a state of disrepair, and the club did not have the equipment that a club in the North would have. Certainly, there was no bowling machine, and as no one could be convinced to bowl to him at 1 p.m., Azhar would use this time to work on his own bowling. Only later, around 3 p.m., when the shadows of the almond and coconut trees began to cast a shadow over the nets, would it be possible to find the first willing participant to help him work on his batting.

The club canteen opened early, and ex-members as well as the public would gather to drink beer, especially if there was a match playing on TV. They used this time to pass comment on the many ills of West Indies cricket, which usually boiled down to not having enough local players in the regional side. By mid-afternoon most would be asleep, in the chairs they sat on or in the stands of the pavilion, gathering energy to begin a fresh round of criticism for the training session ahead in the evening. The only man who would be awake at 3 p.m. would be Coach.

Coach was not really a coach. He had no qualifications that Azhar knew of and neither had he been given charge of any team at any level. Though he had an opinion on how every aspect of the game should be executed, this did not make him unique in a country where every fan professed himself an expert. His nickname, though Azhar was unsure if

it was really the case, likely came from his willingness to help others train. Albeit many were quick to give verbal pointers, Coach was the only person not paid who would give throwdowns or loft hits into the outfield to simulate high catches.

They did not speak much to each other, separated by an age gap that made communication difficult as well as a familiarity with each other that rendered dialogue also superfluous. It was then surprising that after one session Azhar asked Coach if he could give an opinion on a plan. Though he must have been surprised, Coach's face showed no change in emotion.

"If your mother and father already say no, I can't say yes," he said.

"No, Coach, I don't need you to sign nothing. Just to ask advice. Let we talk in the shade, nah?"

"The thing is I see in the newspaper that anybody could make it in India, don't mind what your name is," Azhar began.

"I tell him is only when you have links you could do that, you know," a voice behind him said.

Azhar had not looked around before sitting and so had not noticed Mangal was behind him, several rows behind, laying on the concrete bleacher. "If living in India was a good plan, why we come here? We could have just stay," Mangal continued.

"I not saying everybody have to go. I just saying it might do me better to go back," Azhar replied.

"The boy could have a point. This is what I have to say about that. Now, nothing in life guaranteed. Anybody who talking about guaranteed, either they lying or they going to say something that everybody already know anyway," Coach said. "But India now is not India like 100 years ago. It not even like India 20 years before. It have money. And you should never tell somebody, especially somebody who playing sports and one bad injury is the end, to not go and look for money. This gentleman's game nice to talk about, but it don't full your belly."

"Coach, I go be the first man to say everybody have to eat a food. But it probably have more cricketers in India than it have people in this whole country. How he going to make? He can't even talk the language, and he don't know nobody. What he supposed to do?"

Azhar had thought about every point Mangal had laid out. He was unwilling to bring any of them up due to anxiety about presenting a brave face. So he was grateful to the fish vendor for addressing the issues. He knew without full conviction, or at least solutions, any plan of playing cricket in India was dead before he even bought a ticket.

"He supposed to try. That should be the first thing. To go from here to play in India, it could happen. A Knight in red could soon be a Knight in black in Kolkata. The problem is not going to India, the problem is playing for Trinidad," Coach said. "The boy have talent. I training with him, so I know. And you see him, so you know, too. But cricketers from around here never going to get a chance."

"So, what you saying, Coach? It done and is best I only play for fun?"

"Not at all, although it could come to that. What might be best for you is to skip a step."

"Which step he skipping? He done skip out from school already."

"Players here want to do well and go play in India, not so? But that wouldn't happen for you. So go India direct and play. Wouldn't be the first time. It happen to Robin Singh."

"Azhar, you too young to remember Robin Singh as anything except a fielding coach. He from Princes Town, and went India because he wasn't getting a chance down here," Mangal said. "But he went university, and it was a different time."

"Exactly. It was a different time. Now, no need for the university. Cricket is enough," Coach said. "Azhar, your family from India. This mean once you ask by the Indian Embassy, then they going to give you a card to live in India. India have a million cricket schools where you going to eat and sleep cricket, all day and night. If you think you working hard here, well, you going to learn what really is hard work when you reach."

"Coach, who paying for that? And I not sure my parents going to agree."

Even as Azhar said this, he was already thinking of himself in the subcontinent. In his mind, it was a place where clichés both old and new amalgamated into a unique world. The land of old traditions his community had brought with them during indentureship, as well as the exciting modern world he saw in the Bollywood films his parents were fond of. A land of slow, dusty pitches baked bone dry in the relentless heat, as well as green outfields under floodlights, with fireworks in celebration of boundary hits. It was a place where community mattered and rules were strict, but also where a man called Stalin could win an election. He saw it as a place where anything was possible.

"The boy have a point, you know. It expensive to go India," Mangal said. "And I hear it not so easy for Muslims over there."

"If you could play, then everything OK. They will pay you to come. And we already know he could play. Same thing for religion. Bat and ball don't say prayers. Once you good, nothing going to stop you. Over there, name don't matter."

"You really feel it simple so? Because I more than ready."

"The thing is, boy, nothing simple," Coach said. "But to remain here, that not simple neither. So, is best you try, not so? If you go and it don't happen, well, what you go lose? Your mother and father still going to be here, this cricket club going to still be here, and anyway, you not leaving work or school or wife and child behind. The way I see it, best you go now and make up your mind and try a thing."

"You never know, you might find a nice *dulahin* and fix up right over there," Mangal said jokingly.

India was everything that Pace Village was not. It contained more possibility than the entire island. But there was no proof of this. He had never even met anyone from there.

The only person he had ever met who had been to the land of his forefathers was his primary school teacher in standard three, who also doubled as a pundit. (Azhar had heard that he had left the teaching service to go full-time into the world of religious services.) The pundit-teacher's experience had been six months of learning Hindi and religion in Benares. Azhar doubted this would have any overlap with the life of a cricketer. Still, he did not need to know India, neither first nor second-hand, to believe that it would be a life-changing place.

It was impossible to go to a place where neighbourhoods had more people than the entire island and not learn things that were impossible to learn at home. Maybe all he would learn would be to be a better cricketer. This would be enough. If he achieved success and a career in the sport, and perhaps a family life, it would exceed expectations immensely. This was unlikely, and the chances were low. Azhar already knew this. It was not important to him, the probability of success, even though what success meant exactly was vague. Success was as irrelevant as the reality of the country of India itself. It did not matter. What mattered was there was a possibility. And this sliver of opportunity was greater than any that he could see for himself by remaining in Pace Village. Even though he would not be an adult for a few months still, he already saw a stagnant life if he remained.

"First thing, let we go and talk to your parents," Coach said. "And then is time to get serious with this training. Mangal, you go have to dry yourself out. He go need some practice with fast bowling. We going to need a whole video presentation to send them over there."

"Coach, I ready to go in academy, too, you know."

The two continued to banter as they all walked down the street. Azhar had stopped listening. In his mind he saw himself raising his bat, wearing the blue jersey (the green would have made his mother happier, but it was as out of reach as the maroon), with his name emblazoned on the back. He already knew he would put his entire name on the back. Space constraints didn't matter, he would make a circle if he had to. It was the first time he had thought of a situation where he could display his name proudly.

IT WILL BE BETTER BEFORE YOU MARRY

by Maziki Thame

Before I turned sixteen, my mother invited me to learn to cook. In response to my disinterest, she asked what I would do when I was married. I told her it was not my destiny to cook for a man. When the opportunity for marriage came my way, I questioned whether it was not a sort of cage, a place to snatch a woman's freedom by the cooking, the cleaning and minding of children and the man. I saw that men could leave the house and return to sit for a dinner made to their liking, lots of pepper to taste—not suited to children. Marriage could snatch a woman's power to object to the Friday nights that are for men alone or to the children who would come of other women— becoming known to the world as the men lived or when they passed. It could cause wives to be diminished to the status of children with the threat of violence if they misbehaved. It could cement them in the formal status of wifehood, scheduled to dance with their husbands at official occasions. I could not imagine my grandmothers wanting those things for me.

When we would suffer some ailment as children, my maternal grandmother would reassure us, "It will be better before you marry." Although not marrying was implied, she never said there was a choice not to. She never said some women made better wives or might not meet men's expectations, nor what to look for in a partner, and since my grandfather died too early, I never observed her as a wife. She never told me not to trust the sweet mouths of men or that their words would not be love stories. Yet I imagine she might have been telling me to give myself all the time in the world to heal my wounds before marriage. And if they could not heal, I would have to keep to myself.

My daughter is not the get hurt type. She walked at nine months, her first full steps in pursuit of my friend's cat and the flowers (not so) in her reach. She has since then been reaching for flowers. Before she walked, she climbed. One morning, I woke to find her missing from our bed. I discovered her seated in her high chair next to the bread pan and happily eating a slice. Instead of my grandmother's words of comfort, my stories to my daughter are meant to match her bravery and to locate her in her tribe. She took the stories I gave her to heart: "be nobody's darling", "see beyond your feeding spoon". She was the most fearless, not-backing-down little girl I've known.

She was different than I. My little girl self—held my rage inside, until provoked by my sister. She knew how to draw my tongue, how to draw me into a fight. In my quiet, I climbed trees and nestled myself in their limbs for daydreaming, for imagining myself with impossible long hair and a fantastic white dress, even if I had a sneaking suspicion of the implications of marriage.

I don't remember being told I was beautiful in my youth, but I knew beauty mattered. It could determine if you were liked at all. When I would fall and cut or bruise myself as a little girl, my mother would tell me I was spoiling my chances of entering Miss Jamaica. She never said I would be too short for Miss Jamaica. My people are short. My grandmother thought that stretching put us in danger. To protect my mother's unborn babies' from having umbilical cords wrap around their necks, she had a stool made to prevent my mother from having to stretch to reach the kitchen cupboards. We cannot stretch beyond our reach. There were no remedies for one's height or nose, my hair could be straightened, but the other things could not be fixed, if those were not right for Miss Jamaica. I recall feeling diminished by boys in my pubescent years telling me I would be better off bagging my face. My body, they could relate to.

My mother was vigilant about looking good and vigilant in warning us about how looking good turned men's attentions your way. I am fretful about what my daughter wears. We had a family visitor once who my mother decided was giving too much attention to her little girl. She called me away from the family to the washroom early one Saturday morning during his visit, to learn to wash underwear. I was questioned about his behaviour toward me, warned that something was not quite right and that I needed to be careful. I was left feeling ashamed that I had done something to attract his attention. I felt guilty for my obliviousness. My mother always complained that I was never paying attention and walking directly into madmen on the street. I had enjoyed his attention since it was my sister who was typically everyone's favorite. Years later when he visited again, I observed him carefully for any signs he might be a pedophile. I saw none.

Our household had a domestic helper when I was little who was courted by a man who would sit on a rock across from our house, play his guitar and sing songs to her. I associated him with the church next door and romantic love. In that same yard, with its several houses, and no front gate, I recall a stranger walking up to me, taking my hand and leading me to the back of an empty house at the end of the lot. I remember the helper appearing and there being an exchange between them. It may have been a quarrel. I don't recall any discussion with my mother later on. I had not yet begun primary school. I don't recall any sense of distress on my part. Did my grandmother know such men? Did they marry? Did they think little girls wounded by them could? Maybe my grandmother's lesson was that there isn't time enough for healing before you do.

In the long arc of time taken for healing, I found men worthy of marriage, but I did not choose them. They were all from someplace else. The first was a believer, stable, wrongly employed and not kind enough. His job had him surveilling my people and jailing them in an imperial war in our region. He did not fit my politics. I think he withheld his resources because he believed the stories his colleagues told him of local women trying to take your shit. The next was an artist, a traveller, free thinker. He was not manly enough. He came to visit in hurricane season and could not wield a machete to clear the banana trees uprooted by a small storm. What use did I have with such a man when hurricanes were sure to come? Then there was Femi, the dreamer, the knower, the giver of stories, who had nothing wrong with him at all.

Femi was not like my people. His foreparents were not shackled on their journey to the West. History did not mean for us to meet. But I believe, if you follow the path and take care at the crossroad, you can defy history.

His parents travelled all the way from Yorubaland to America, where he was born and schooled in our tragedies. I left my tiny former slavery island for America, where I found him and offered him some comfort for having come and seen. Eventually, he told me to call him Femi. My middle name also means love. He said his other name was too easily used as a weapon. Femi is the name he gives potential lovers so they cannot use his other name against him. I had been given that other name, he said, because I wasn't "wearing the uniform". Instead, I appeared as "boujee black", and my light skin did not fit his image. First time I saw him, I thought he was beautiful, though badly dressed. He

wrote me an apologetic letter: "Dear M, the incongruence between the first time I saw you and the first time I became aware of you boggles my mind...I assumed you not to be of my earth, or roots, as you say." I did not call him Femi since he did not choose me to be his lover.

First call, "Hello, this is...," he assured me he was aware of me. First not-a-date, a meal together, we talked about patriarchy. I told him I was bothered by how boys are not brought up to be good partners to women. He said he was perplexed by the assertion that male identity should be rooted in their attachment to their lovers. Was I thinking as a woman who thought about how one becomes a wife? First proposal, he gave me a wooden ring which made an incomplete circle. It was wooden, he said, because his spiritual head did not do metal. I was meant to keep it until our circle was complete. A longtime friend decried its value, declaring I accepted it because I had no sense of the need to leave something precious to my daughter.

His first disappearance sent me driving seven hours across America's unfamiliar highways to find the familiarity of friends. I would have driven halfway around my island by then. Halfway there, fear welled in my throat. I did not see then that my decision to go was giving myself permission to leave him. He may have seen, in my refusal to await his return, an unfamiliar lack of respect for wifehood. I should have stayed. I should have waited. I should not have chosen to go.

We couldn't agree on who wronged who. And such was our life until we couldn't agree. Before then, he gifted me stories and comfort, which I loved for the way they turned reality on its head. He heard me. We might have been equals. But he did not want me to be free. He believed in marriage and partnership. He promised not to let me do all the work. He believed marriage was worth giving up your freedom, and so he married straight out of college. They built their little family far away from their home base. He was no stranger to separation from his people, and so he did not understand my longing for my own. Marriage was for two people after all. We were inseparable, consumed, "bench and batty", an elder observed. And in our union, my alienation deepened. He gave me no one to whisper news in my ear, no one to put a wedge between us or intervene on either's behalf. He would not repeat the mistakes of a first marriage. When they split, so, too, did beloved friends. They took her side, he said.

He did not tell me stories of why he believed in marriage. Femi told me stories of mothers who gifted elephants, his peace and power animal. They flew off bridges to other places. He told me stories of daughters who mothered and gave solace to their fathers, when their mother left to other places. He gave me stories of women gone mad loving him. He roused my suspicion with stories of mothers who gifted their daughters, and girlfriends who stayed overnight when I was not around. In the story he gifted of us, we found each other in another lifetime, on home base, and were bonded in common cause. We conspired against the missionaries and burned their church together. Yet we could not find footing to keep us together, ultimately driven to different sides of the world by familial over romantic love.

My people value marriage. They marry. They called a meeting when my sister announced divorce. My grandparents married, until death parted them, though my mother's mother was really known to me as a woman without a husband. I remember the day of my grandfather's funeral, but not my grandfather. We children played "red light" under the carport, the gate was the base. White hibiscus bordered the fence. Pink hibiscus closed in the carport. Flowers closed in the verandah. They were never thick enough to close you in. You couldn't hide there, but the flowers nurtured fireflies, known to us as peenie wallies. The street where my grandmother lived with my grand-aunt and where we spent much of our childhood was called Geranium Path. They watered the flowers in the evenings.

My mother chose wifehood until she did not. Sometimes, she seemed happier with a garden than a ring (which none of my parents ever had). I have seen women blossom in their aloneness when their husbands go, and I have also seen them despair their loss of status and companion. Maybe such a woman would have been undone by the boy who showed up as a son at the man's funeral. Maybe she knew all along. Maybe his death gave her room to find her own, other lovers. Maybe, by the time grieving and finding new life ended, she decided all she needed was the Lord. I understand the need to be respectable and with a ring on your finger. We grew up on it. The National Family Planning Board even had an ad that showed the woman without a man and plenty children begging from door to door. She eventually met a primary school friend at the door of a middle-class home with "two (children), is better than too many", and a husband to boot. To the begging "maths brains" from primary school, the woman extolled, displaying her ring finger, I'm no longer the girl you knew, "I'm Johnson now."

Among the stories I tell my daughter is that of an Igbo woman about one's Ikenga (representation of one's chi) and marriage. She said one's Ikenga could change throughout life, but that it takes form at marriage because marriage requires you to live with a different personality for it to work. She also said that when a woman gets married in her tradition, she does not take her husband's name because it was not given that one would always be a wife. You are, however, always a daughter. You do not take your husband's name because the possibility of returning home is permanent. My daughter dropped the last of her double-barrel surname when she was five. She announced it to her grandma. The next day, I asked my daughter her name. She gave me all the names I had given her. She said she was planning to change them, but changed her mind, because then, all her friends would think she was a whole new person.

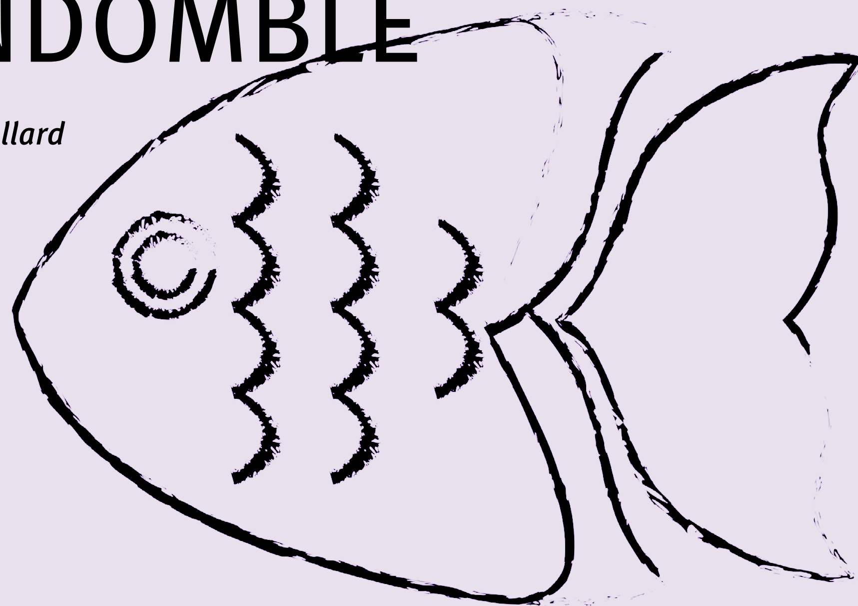
Bim

Bim

AN INTERLUDE

CANDOMBLE

by Velma Pollard



"Fish die by their tongue." That was the legend I read underneath the drawing of a fish in a wooden frame hanging on the gate. It was the Summer of '77. I was descending the slope from a Kumina celebration in St. Thomas, Jamaica. I went home and typed four foolscap pages on my old typewriter. I hid them and never looked at them again. Years later, I read an article by a colleague who had been an onlooker at the same event. He described many of the things we had seen. He is still alive. Fish don't ALWAYS die by their tongue. So heartened now, I feel free to write about the candomblé celebration I witnessed not so long ago in Salvador da Bahia.

The drumming didn't stop as the van unloaded us, fifteen tourists. We stood on the outside briefly. Soon we were herded in to sit mostly on the concrete floor. All the seats were taken. At first, I thought there was sand on the floor. It certainly looked that way. I immediately thought of parallels with the Jewish synagogues I had visited elsewhere. I let one hand down, running it slowly over the area where I would sit. Surprisingly there were no grains. The surface was smooth. I slid my whole body down and sat cross-legged on it. I still don't know what gave the effect of sand or whether my eyes were just playing tricks on me.

The building was simple, rectangular-shaped with one short side open so people could enter. The centre of activity with the table and other paraphernalia formed the other short side. Beyond that other you could peep, if you were so minded, into a room. There was no way to tell what went on in that room, but whatever it was, it was obviously important. Devotees were constantly coming and going in and out of it. Along one long side of the rectangle was a row of chairs on which men were seated. Thick rows of women were on the opposite side. The division was deliberate. When we were herded in, the guide had told a couple, "You will have to separate."

The men were all dressed in white costumes of varying elegance. One that impressed me wore a shirt and pants of an expensive cotton material with the waist of the shirt and the edges of each pant leg decorated with *broderie anglaise*. They were sitting

solemnly on chairs, motionless as if they represented ancestors silently supervising, looking on to make sure everything went as it should. The women opposite, two rows of them, and my row seated on the floor seemed more like onlookers in varying degrees of engagement.

The only instruction we had been given was not to wear black, white if possible, or any other colour. I remembered my attendance years earlier at the Dabuyaba, where the Dugu was taking place in Dangriga, Belize, and the naivety with which I had put on a black T-shirt under my tunic, out of respect, to hide my naked back before entering the building, and how quickly the frowns of older women sent me questioning what I was doing wrong till my sister/friend hurried me to a place for appropriate clothes. Black was wrong there as well. Here, my peach-coloured summer dress was fine.

In the central area, women and men danced around in the kind of circle which allowed people to enter at will. Not just anybody. There were women with elaborate costumes as well as women with ordinary dresses complicated by sashes of white cotton or lace, draped across the body from shoulder to hip, and men dressed in white garments of cool cotton. Some women wore many tiered dresses which ballooned from just below the neck, both front and back. The underskirts and the leggings were all fringed with lace or other decorative material. The general theme was "white", but two women wore clothes integrating shades of brown and other colours, with the white sometimes eclipsing it.

The drums were constant. The dancers, mostly women with just two men among them, danced non-stop as the drumming continued. Every now and then someone shuddered or did a half-fall as the spirits indicated their intention to overpower them.

Less than an hour after my group arrived, men and women came from the back room carrying huge trays laden with popcorn and slivered dry coconut meat. Solemn-faced devotees took handfuls of this fare and supplied everyone seated and standing. Soon the whole room was chewing white food.

We ate till it was done. The drums and other instruments I could not see kept going. The dancers did intricate steps as they moved in orderly, formal motions in the centre. The music intensified, and two women in the most complicated of the balloon dresses fell quietly on the ground, and began to roll their bodies laterally from the male side of the room to the female side and back. They rolled in these ample skirts, but there was no show of disarray. Not even a little blowing up of skirt. In the corner where I sat, two young girls were being possessed, one more intensely than the other. She shuddered with downward movements and collapsed in an almost daze, her eyes staring out into the nothingness beyond the faces around her. I don't know which spirit possessed her. Women came to minister to her, touching her hands and face carefully, and eventually taking her into a private room where presumably they would keep her till the spirit freed her.

The dancing did not stop. Every now and then someone in the circle got a mild possession but never quite fell. In that state of half-trance, the affected/afflicted one would go over to the chairs of men and be hugged and patted and generally recognised as someone to be loved.

I had read that not all celebrations were as exciting as tourists expected. I felt no disappointment when it was clear that no neck of chicken would be rung. There wasn't always sacrifice, wasn't always blood. In fact, the overall "whiteness" of this particular celebration suggested there would be no blood. The orisha being honoured was not one involved with blood sacrifice.

I kept remembering the tremendous energy of the spirits invading the devotees at the first Kumina I ever saw, the one I didn't talk about and couldn't write about. People climbed up on rafters, people rolled convulsively on the ground, and loving bodies had to "ride them out". What this celebration shared with that one was the care of fellow devotees, the love and comfort they offered the possessed. As I remember it, men would ride women old and young out of it, riding no matter how long it took till they were calm. Here in this cool enclosure men helped men and women equally, and I wondered how that would go down in the pathologically homophobic society I come from.

POETRY

OWN

by Kendel Hippolyte

A road razzled with restaurant signs and menu boards,
lights twinkling in the eaves, winking a come-on at the tourists;
glimpses—between the tall hedges—of hotel staff, busy
in black and white, a slash of colour, slice of a smile;
the strip, a tourism hotspot, cools down in the evening,
then flares up, a febrile condition, in the night.
i try to understand a whole economy based on fantasies—
beach umbrella, sipping a culture on the rocks, Stella's groove—
and ponder: for some, in fact, we did begin as fantasies—Cipango, El Dorado—
then were traded down to sweating-stink, slave-holding colony.
So centuries later, on a tropical Friday night, what now? What?
You can't dissolve history in a fruit punch, make it delish.
Even the sugar in the coffee has a bitter aftertaste
when you know. The charcoal briquettes make the barbecue
then become ash. You see it everywhere, in everything.
See what, though? What exactly do i see?
This hedged-in hotel, with a glance of bustling workers,
and built on the remains of what had been the village cemetery,
is locally owned. A Black industrious couple from industrious families
and captains now of the twinkling industry of fantasy.
No absentee plantation owner's property, this—a native enterprise.
Why my disquiet, then? Skeletons under the tiled floors?
Gravestones and bones crunched in with the numbers?
Wincing, the thought of that but—no, what stabs the mind
is that the buried could not hold even that final patch of ground as theirs.
And their descendants hustling in the palace of fantasies above them
don't own it—not even in fantasy.
And I'm thinking that what may finally resolve this history,
shred the black and white raiments it is clothed in,
is when they own
not only the hotel, its ground, the other ancestral grounds,
but also
their own history.

NO RUINED STONE

(FOR MY GRANDMOTHER)

by Shara McCallum

When the dead return
they will come to you in dream
and in waking, will be the bird
knocking, knocking against glass, seeking
a way in, will masquerade
as the wind, its voice made audible
by the tongues of leaves, greedily
lapping, as the waves' self-made fugue
is a turning and returning.

The dead will not then nor ever again
desert you, their unrest
will be the coat cloaking you,
the farther you journey
from them, the more distance
will maw in you, time and place gulching.

When the dead return to demand
accounting, wanting
and wanting and wanting
everything you have to give and nothing
will quench or unhunger them
as they take all you make as offering.
Then tell you to begin again.

DREAM TIME

by Mervyn Morris

The lady dreams herself shut out
her lord in the castle
his lady without.

He waves from a window
a long way away
she doesn't know what
he intends to convey.

One evening in dreamtime
the wind blew right
and a voice floated down
from that worrying height.

I live in a castle
with very thick walls
and the drawbridge drawn
up tight.

ART

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

by Renold Laurent

My main subject is communication: whether it's a dialogue between the materials I choose to work with and the subject matter of the painting itself; a dialogue among the shapes, colours, shadows, and light that I paint; the ongoing dialogue between the different collections of my work as I change and develop as an artist; or the various exchanges that occur between my paintings and the diverse spectators who confront, encounter, and ponder my work.

Always hoping to encourage these different forms of communication, I try to make each of my paintings at once an alluring and complex topic of conversation. So, for example, my paintings will broach elusive, contested, and personal topics such as "memory", "resistance" and "spirituality". My paintings try to invite a viewer's take on the multiplicity of their meanings.

Very early on in my career as an artist, I turned to my roots, the ancestral past of my country, Haiti, to enrich my artistic vision by drawing inspiration from the tangible and intangible aspects of Haiti's heritage. Because Haiti has a strong sense of history and heritage that travels and inspires beyond its own national borders, my collaboration with the Ruth J. Simmons Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice feels not only quite sensible but also destined to happen. The collaboration helped bring into stark relief my desire to think seriously and creatively about slavery, its aftermath, and ever-pulsat-

ing movements for justice across Africa and the African diaspora. How do you capture captivity? Indeed, how do you capture liberation? In whatever way one chooses, one must talk with my paintings in order to find those complicated answers for oneself.

I use different materials, classic and unconventional. By "unconventional," I allude to a very specific technique in which I deploy mixed media, including, but not limited to, fabric, charcoal, resin, and sometimes even coffee grounds. Depending on the context in which I am working, I will favor certain materials over others. For example, for this exhibition, I use acrylic paint and recovered pieces of fabric to create a painting in relief and to think about recovery as a form of repair and justice work. By "recovery", I mean how I reuse and ultimately transform these materials whose introduction on to the canvas always brings the eye to a centre of interest. Through my superimpositions of layers of colours, shapes, and brushstrokes, I try to create a luminous and spiritual image as a symbol of hope.

In *Marooning, when the slave snatches his freedom*, I try to place particular emphasis on Marronage as a living testimony to the enslaved's ability to escape dehumanization, and the pedagogy of terror that aims to shatter all hope for freedom. I imagine the enslaved settling in a community in a region far from the slave society and rediscovering his ancestral traditions. I imagine, too, the enslaved travelling in his own internal universe to recharge, find energy, hope, and to formulate a strategic response to oppression. Overall, I try to offer a spiritual vision of the resistance strategies of the enslaved in their long walks toward freedom.

Marooning, when the slave snatches his freedom, 2022
Rénold Laurent
acrylic on canvas
60" x 40"
PHOTO: PATRICK SYLVAIN

THE MEMORY OF SLAVERY AND MODERNITY

IN TWO WORKS BY RENOLD LAURENT

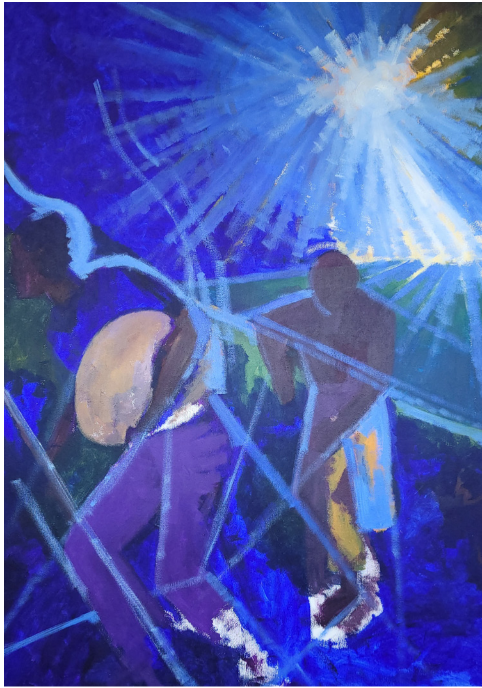
by Sterlin Ulysse

In recent years, the general representation of slavery, including its representation in art and literature, has gained considerable significance in practice as well as in theoretical, academic and critical reflections, and in cultural activities such as exhibitions, festivals, broadcasts, media, monuments and commemorative activities. The emergence of social media has made it possible for any citizen to attempt to question the educational curriculum or official discourses on slavery in general and on the so-called triangular trade and its consequences in Africa, America and Europe.

All this has given rise to a different way of thinking about the enslavement of Africans and a new approach to modernity itself, that is to say as a multifaceted phenomenon. Since modernity starts with the arrival of European colonialism in America, understanding it requires an analysis of slavery and the birth of racism based on skin colour. Representing slavery or those who are its victims, namely African captives, does not only imply that the artist or the writer should solve an aesthetic problem, it is also a way to take a position faced with and within this modernity.

Having said that, the work of the contemporary artist on the memory of slavery can only be a poetic work—a reflection on art. The artist is confronted with a collection of images, depictions and writings that allow him to question the visible, the aesthetic or the ethics. He (or she) is exposed to several ways of expressing slavery through the art of the past and of today, to ways of comparing memory and representation while reshaping himself (or herself) in the ever present modernity. It is in this context that, by examining the images and writings on slavery in the United States, Renold Laurent chose to highlight the escape from slavery and the celebration of the end of slavery by

Procession of slaves celebrating the abolition of slavery in the United States, 2022
Rénold Laurent
acrylic on canvas
70" x 40"
PHOTO: PATRICK SYLVAIN



Sketch of *Marooning, when the slave snatches his freedom*

creating two abstract works. How could we understand this artistic choice? What can the abstraction of a historical phenomenon as concrete as slavery suggest?

Although Laurent is best known for his abstract works, he has never abandoned representational art, even though he most often creates these on commission. That said, in the context of this exhibition, he could have given us representational works which would have the benefit of speaking to us more directly. However, the iconography of slavery is, in a way, codified: rows of captives, captives spread out like merchandise in the slave traders' holds or on the decks; slave markets, slaves working in the fields or performing tasks related to their circumstance; scenes of punishment; domestic slaves serving their masters, runaway slaves, dance scenes, and scenes of celebration after the abolition of slavery. These images, created by white artists in circumstances reflecting various slavery or abolitionist ideologies and sometimes mere concerns of artistic description, pose real problems for the contemporary artist when it comes to drawing inspiration from them in the context of the memory of slavery. Added to these images are numerous commentaries on American slavery.

Many of these commentaries portray the image of submissive slaves resigned to their fate, but in reality those enslaved have always known how to react against their masters and their circumstances by all sorts of means. It is this image that Laurent criticises in the works he displays in this exhibition. Abstraction gives him a voice to challenge this image.

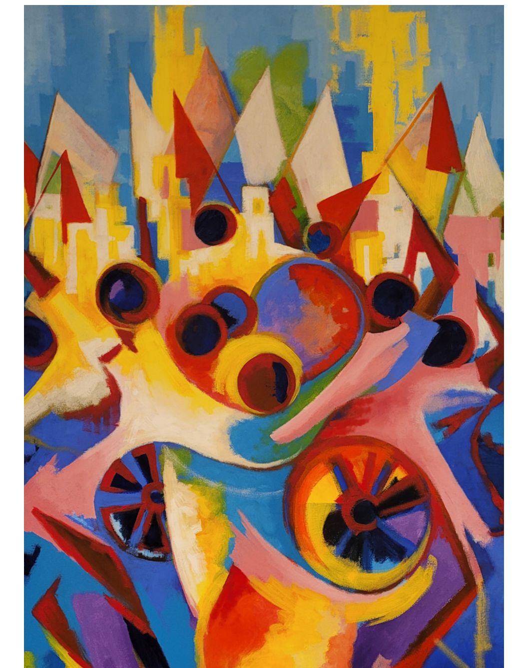
Laurent draws inspiration from traditional iconographic collections, reinterpreting them, transcending them, putting them in abstract form. This work of reinterpreting realistic or figurative works is not unusual of the artist's style. It has been part of his artistic research for many years. One of his best-known reinterpretations is his abstract reworking of *Liberty Leading the People* by French Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix. For his works on slavery in the United States, Laurent adopted this same process of artistic and aesthetic transformation to pre-existing images. In doing so, he moved away from representation towards evocation.

His works evoke two moments. One is the period of slavery showing not submissive slaves, rather the escape from slavery, where slaves fight to regain their freedom. He then refers to the end or abolition of slavery, marked by parades celebrating the event.

The transformation of realistic images into abstract works emerges both as an act of protest, as just mentioned, but also as a demonstration of the challenges of memory that the period of slavery poses. We know that even today, despite all the civic advances, the lives of Black people in the United States still need to be defended. Given the historical periods evoked in the United States, and since the works of Laurent are not purely representational, they function as commemorative plaques of the resistance of enslaved Africans to regain their freedom. Laurent shows us that the African, even when enslaved for several generations, had never forgotten that his ancestors were always free. The 2019 film *Harriet* by Kasi Lemmons illustrates very well that it is from this memory that the enslaved African draws the strength to brave all dangers to obtain this freedom.

Ode to Escaped Slaves

Laurent's works, although they correspond to his aesthetic of abstract rereading of realist or representational works, are, for this exhibition, the fruits of veritable documentary research. The artist is not only satisfied with revisiting the iconography of slavery in the United States. The themes he chooses to address in his two works are therefore derived from a historical consciousness. Indeed, the history of Africans revolting or fighting against slavery has long been obscured in conventional American historiography. The first work presented by Laurent is titled *Marooning, when the slave snatches his freedom* in reference to this concealment of the resistance by enslaved Africans in the United States. Escape from slavery was one of the most effective means of protest against the bondage of Black people. To do this, Laurent has chosen abstraction as his artistic expression. What does this suggest, when we know that, for more than one of them, a figurative representation would have the benefit of a direct reading, minimizing ambiguities as much as possible?



Sketch of *Procession of slaves celebrating the abolition of slavery in the United States*

While Laurent's work wants to revive the escape from slavery, it is the moment of escape that interests him—the escaped slave's confrontation with a hostile environment. It is a moment where tension is at its highest. In this context, abstraction insists that the viewer question the smallest details, the smallest features of the shapes, points and lines, while imagining the landscape. In *Marooning, when the slave snatches his freedom* by Laurent,

blue dominates the entire work. This colour is almost fetishised in the artist's aesthetics, but it takes on a particular importance and significance here. This blue is the effect of a light that not only illuminates the fugitives by enveloping them, it is this light of awareness of their humanity that guides them. It is determined by a plain white dot at the top right of the painting. This bluish light unites the fugitives in a kind of solidarity. There is a movement that sweeps them up in a whirlwind that seems to make them inseparable and perhaps invincible in their determination.

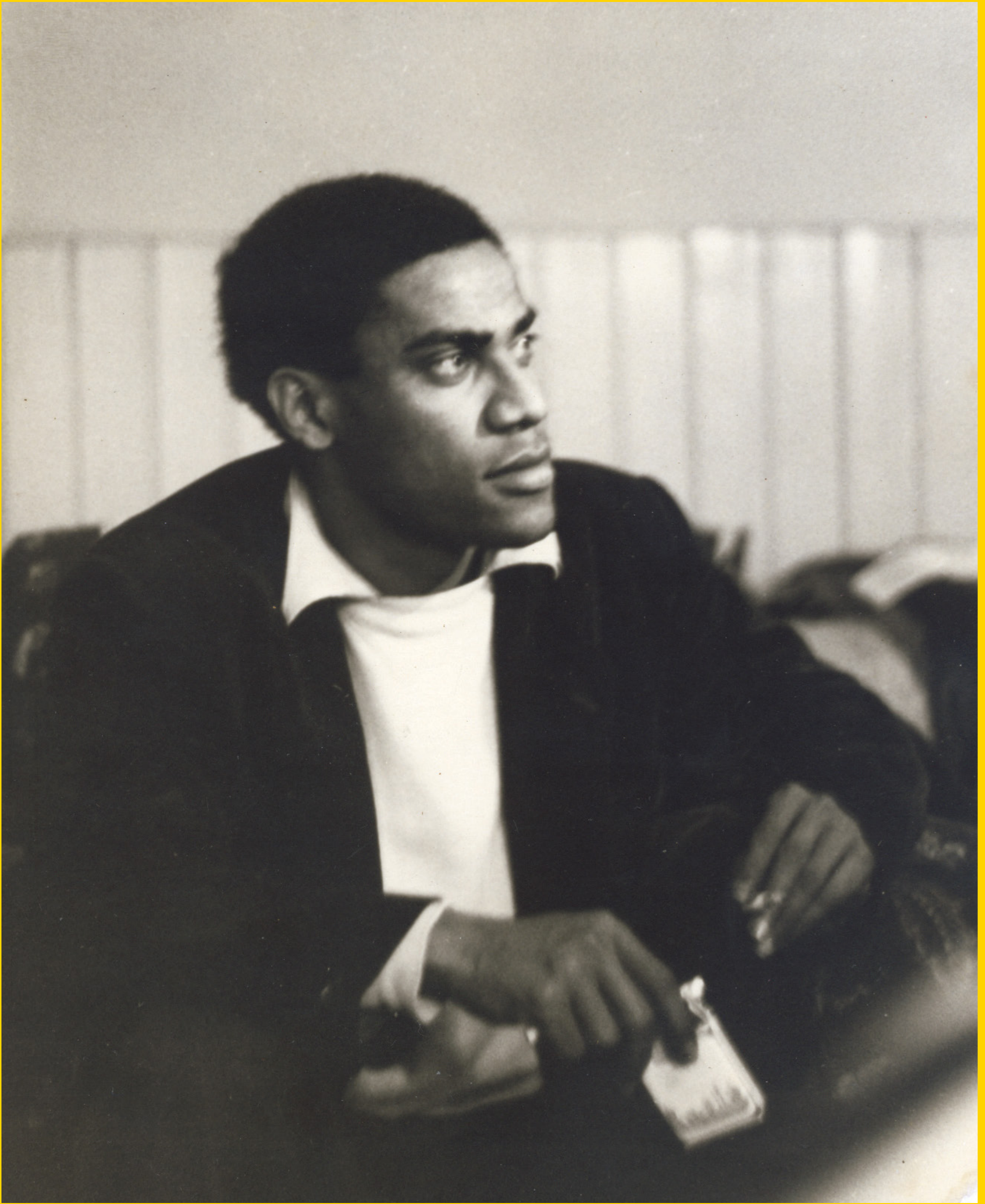
The Fragility of the Celebration

The second work is titled *Procession of slaves celebrating the abolition of slavery in the United States*. Unlike the first canvas, in which a blue light illuminates the shapes in a circular motion that harmonises them, the strokes in this second work are fragmented. The yellow that serves as an outline of the shapes in *Marooning, when the slave snatches his freedom* completely pervades this painting. It is the colour of the sun, of joy, of celebration. There is a lot more movement in this painting, which undoubtedly indicates a loss of concentration, a relaxation, a utopian vision of the future. At the top of the painting there is a burst of joy, not to mention the small torches that signal the small groups marching in procession, sometimes in a disorderly fashion. But the artist is not fooled. He shows that the danger is not completely over despite this change of situation. He inserts small cotton balls into the canvas to signify that, despite the abolition of slavery, the cotton fields are still there and still form the basis of the economy of the American South. After the excitement of the party, it is necessary to return to reality, to wake up to the understanding that other obstacles are now emerging, and that they will not be easier to overcome.

As mentioned above, the artist's work on the memory of transatlantic slavery could not go without questioning modernity or himself in regard to the former. Slavery required a completely different definition of humanity. It made humanity a plural entity to justify itself. Skin colour determined one's place in the human race. If the aesthetic shapes the artistic work, the artist's work on slavery must necessarily question this aesthetic and compare it with history, for the scars and traumas at stake are real and are still dividing the world. Renold Laurent has chosen to evoke the memory of slavery in the artistic expression that has always been considered the culmination of modern art. In this way, he brings together two extreme expressions of modernity: transatlantic slavery and artistic abstraction.

Translated from original French text.

In-progress photograph of *Procession of slaves celebrating the abolition of slavery in the United States*



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