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978-1-108-41681-8 — The Caribbean and the Medical Imagination, 1764–1834
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THE CARIBBEAN AND THE MEDICAL IMAGINATION, 1764–1834

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Caribbean was known as the ‘grave of Europeans’. At the apex of British colonialism in the region between 1764 and 1834, the rapid spread of disease amongst colonist, enslaved and indigenous populations made the Caribbean notorious as one of the deadliest places on earth. Drawing on historical accounts from physicians, surgeons and travellers alongside literary works, Emily Senior traces the cultural impact of such widespread disease and death during the Romantic age of exploration and medical and scientific discovery. Focusing on new fields of knowledge such as dermatology, medical geography and anatomy, Senior shows how literature was crucial to the development and circulation of new medical ideas, and that the Caribbean as the hub of empire played a significant role in the changing disciplines and literary forms associated with the transition to modernity.

EMILY SENIOR is Lecturer in Eighteenth-Century and Romantic Literature at Birkbeck College, University of London. She has had articles published in the *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, *Eighteenth-Century Studies* and *Atlantic Studies*.

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THE CARIBBEAN
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Slavery, Disease and Colonial Modernity

EMILY SENIOR

Birkbeck College, University of London



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To Ian, Avery and the next chapter

New-come buckra,
He get sick,
He tak fever,
He be die;
He be die.

Slave song reported by
Robert Renny, *An History of Jamaica* (1807)

Everyone who is born holds dual citizenship, in the kingdom of the well and in the kingdom of the sick. Although we all prefer to use only the good passport, sooner or later each of us is obliged, at least for a spell, to identify ourselves as citizens of that other place.
Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor* (1978)

how astonishing, when the lights of health go down, the undiscovered countries that are then disclosed, what wastes and deserts of the soul a slight attack of influenza brings to view, what precipices and lawns sprinkled with bright flowers a little rise of temperature reveals, what ancient and obdurate oaks are uprooted in us by the act of sickness, how we go down into the pit of death and feel the waters of annihilation close above our heads and wake thinking to find ourselves in the presence of angels and the harpers.
Virginia Woolf, 'On Being Ill' (1926)

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