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Introduction

Raphael Dalleo and Curdella Forbes

When the 1920s began, the field called 'Caribbean literature' was virtually unimagined.[1] Within a few decades, writers from the Caribbean were achieving worldwide recognition, and a large body of scholarship, criticism, and theory debating the nature and contours of the literature had emerged. This volume tells the story of the rapid ascent from the isolated literary efforts of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries described in Volume 1, towards the expansive and rapidly changing contemporary field seen in Volume 3. Our focus is on the anglophone Caribbean, which we bring into conversation with literary and political developments in the francophone and hispanophone Caribbean. Because the sociopolitical as well as the literary histories of these societies intersect at different points, highlighting such convergences helps provide a fuller picture of anglophone Caribbean literary studies. Connections with the Dutch-speaking Caribbean remain to be written, the result of still persistent divides in the region's intellectual traditions.

The literary history revisited in Volume 2 is pivotal to any account of Caribbean literature. The body of writing, criticism, and theory that emerged particularly during the latter half of this period forms the 'centre' to which contemporary scholars return, either to identify it as foundational or to engage it by revision, and, increasingly, contestation and dissent. The essays in this volume take a fresh 'backward glance' at the period, filling in gaps and silences but also highlighting what Alison Donnell calls 'critical moments' that were overlooked or that bear rereading in light of newly emergent archival evidence and current local and global contexts within which the writing is participated.[2] Such gaps and silences include the occlusion of the 1920s and 1930s, a crucial period between the two world wars and the waning of the British Empire and the rapid expansion of US imperialism. The literary innovations of this period are often overlooked, largely as a result of the (with hindsight, mistaken) tendency to date the rise of the nationalist movement from the end of the 1930s, and moreover

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to identify anglophone Caribbean literature with the nationalist agenda. The volume also addresses women writers who published during this male-dominated period but were too often relegated to silence; the unequal visibilities of fiction, poetry, and drama; the seeming disappearance, in many contemporary accounts, of locally based writers who did not enjoy the high visibility of their counterparts who migrated to Britain or North America; and the ways in which the pressures of reading through the overarching lenses of creolization and nationhood obscured the paradigms and aesthetics of Indo-Caribbean writing. Other significant contributions to the expanded account of this defining period provided by our volume include attention to the mutually enabling networks (travel, correspondence, congresses) writers established within the region and with other decolonizing spaces in Africa and North America; the role of literature in the scholastic enterprise; and how the writer-theorists and critics of the period produced a vibrant cultural and literary poetics that debunks the idea of theory as a recent phenomenon in Caribbean literary studies.

Volume 2 of *Caribbean Literature in Transition* is therefore a tangible critique of the literary history to date. Yet, despite the now widespread questioning of nationalism and creolization as twin overarching poles through which the literature was read over so many decades, part of what emerges from the essays in this volume is the range, complexity, and openendedness of the creolization concept.[3] These qualities give the creolization discourse fruitful provenance in contemporary thought (even as it is being contested) as pointed out by Shalini Puri, Bénédicte Ledent, and others.[4] Some essays in the volume also begin to signal how writers' thinking at this time had already gone beyond nationalism or creolization, or any narrow conception of these, towards global and cross-cultural imaginaries that are more readily made intelligible through current conceptual frameworks which highlight relation, globality, and black Atlantic/ Kala Pani diasporas.[5]

Literary and Generic Transitions

'Antillean art', Derek Walcott muses in his 1992 Nobel lecture, 'is [the] restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for the pieces broken off from the original continent'.[6] Inevitably, the search of Caribbean writers during the period was for a language, familiar yet new, that could carry the freight of an experience rooted in slavery, indenture, colonization, resistance, and the conflicted paradoxes of modernity. Underlying George Lamming's

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assertion that 'the West Indian . . . is perhaps the most cosmopolitan man in the world' is the awareness that modernity found its most profound expression in the aftermath of violent removal and forced migration of peoples from 'original homes of spirit' to the Caribbean.[7] Literary word-making in the 1920s to 1970s reflected the fraught complexities of transition from empire to urgent independence movements. It was a form of creative self-fashioning for writers and their lived and imagined communities.

Among the well-known examples of the search for a Caribbean expressive register and form were Louise Bennett's, Una Marson's, Claude McKay's, and V. S. Reid's poetry and narration in Jamaica's Creole vernacular; Merle Hodge's and Sam Selvon's writings in Trinidad and Tobago Creole; Wilson Harris' cross-cultural poetics rooted in an archeology of indigenous and global traditions; Kamau Brathwaite's recovery of African cultural forms pulsing beneath and within Caribbean, African American, and other black diaspora modern/ist expressions; and his and Lamming's investments in Caribbean grassroots culture. Our volume addresses some of these as well as less well-known and more ambivalent iterations of national identity.

One important but often overlooked feature of poetics during the period is their deep connection to global movements, events, and concepts. The writers' sense of relationalities encompassed more than the global within the local that underlay Caribbean creolization as a process formed through the encounter and exchange of cultural knowledge from at least three continents. Formal and structural choices reflected writers' direct experience with cultures and neo/colonial centres outside the region. The volume extends recent work recognizing how a poetics of diaspora informed work by migrant writers such as Austin Clarke, Lamming, and Selvon while contemporaneously they were being read in terms of exile and a focus on nationhood.[8] What emerges here is not so much the familiar vectors of metropolitan diaspora but, more intriguingly, multiple relations in transitional spaces, and the literary and political capital that these accrued. Traditionally less-discussed writers such as W. Adolphe Roberts, Eric Walrond, and even Alfred Mendes and Andrew Salkey acquire a different significance when read through such lenses.

Yet what Carol Bailey innovatively calls 'the inward turn' by which writers crafted a cultural nationalism remains crucial in any account of the period.[9] Later critics, focusing especially on lesser-known writers who did not make the 'founding fathers' list, have shown the contradictory nature of the literary nationalism of the period.[10] Kenneth Ramchand's seminal

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account, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (1970), categorized the nineteenth century as a 'life without fiction' for the ordinary West Indian, yet while writers, from the most innovative to the most 'imperially-inflected', drew on the forms made familiar by a British colonial education, they also drew on the poetry, fiction, and ways of telling to which they were accustomed in the orature of the folk and popular traditions.[11]

Both in its explicit theorization, and in its practice, Caribbean literature was not separated from the popular and performing arts. Tea-meeting, gossip, yard tracing, comesse, calypso, carnival, folktale, the religious arts of Revival, Shouter Baptist and Haitian Vodou, the cultural performance of madness, African American jazz and blues, African praisesong, litany and masquerade, reggae, Cuban son, and cricket all found their way into the *textual form* of fiction, poetry, and drama. Caribbean writers made local traditions central to their art, whether philosophically, as Lamming did in his application of the Haitian Vodou Ceremony of Souls, or formally, as Harris did in his fictions that looped back on themselves in proliferating nuclei of paradoxical repetition.[12]

It was in the work of Derek Walcott that the influence of European canons was most explicitly seen as a creative resource. Yet Walcott's work, especially his drama (which also made excursions into Japanese Noh and other forms), was deeply rooted in an indigenous Caribbean Creole way of speaking. Walcott summed up his approach variously as, for example, a 'mulatto of style'; 'purifying the language of the tribe'; and 'Adam's task of giving things their names'.[13] Even V. S. Naipaul's surface adherence to the concept of the linear narrative and the bildungsroman in a novel such as *A House for Mr Biswas* (1961) was laid over an eruptive architecture of Trinidadian carnivalesque and disruptions of forms such as saga and epic. Indeed, if the debates and experiments around vernacular literary poetics were fraught, they also produced some of the most innovative genre-crossing modernities in Caribbean literature. The experience of 'fragmentation', loss, and erasure was not so much mourned as translated into groundbreaking literary form in such novels as Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953). The well-documented 'autobiographical' thrust of the literature, particularly the tendency to use the bildungsroman as an allegory of the nation, and the close space between fiction and lived reality, meant that poetry often slid into autobiography (as in Walcott's *Another Life*, 1973); novel into memoir or testimony (as in the novels of Jean Rhys, and Lamming's *Castle* and *Season of Adventure*, 1960); memoir into novel (as in Cuban Miguel Barnet's *Biografia de un cimarrón*, 1966); myth into history (as in Walcott, Harris, and Sylvia Wynter); history into fiction and

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vice versa; and literary and cultural theorization took place across and within all genres. Given that many writers had multiple expressive personas (Brathwaite, Alejo Carpentier, Aimé Césaire, Nicolás Guillén, Amy Jacques Garvey, C. L. R. James, Roger Mais, W. Adolphe Roberts, Walcott, Denis Williams, and Wynter were variously multi-genre practitioners within literature, journalism, the humanities, painting, and music), it is not surprising that in a culturally hybrid society such literary modernities would emerge.

There is a way in which the genre of fiction has tended to overshadow the poetry and drama of the period. While anthologists have done much to bring to attention poets other than outsize figures such as Walcott and Brathwaite, the greater visibility of the novel as monograph in contrast to the 'scattered skeleton' of poetry gathered in anthologies and (errantly) in newspapers, partly accounts for the way poetry has played second fiddle to fiction.[14] Lloyd Brown's *West Indian Poetry* was published in 1978, but Ramchand's *The West Indian Novel and Its Background*, published eight years earlier, had a shaping influence on discourse, and most of the writers who came to prominence were novelists who migrated and from their positions in metropolitan centres became more widely known.[15] There is a certain irony in this: the 'choice' to be a novelist not infrequently had to do with the pressures of readership and, concomitantly, publishers' requirements. It is intriguing to consider whether writers such as Lamming would have opted to continue in the genre of poetry or Naipaul and Selvon in the genre of the short story, had British publishers not preferred the novel for its ability to sell or its prestige as a vehicle to establish professional authorship.

In the case of drama the visibility gap was even more marked, as typically the theatre is a local institution and plays are performed, published only after testing through repertory. Many radio and for-stage scripts that had far-reaching decolonial impact remain lost or hidden in the archives: for example, Marson's plays from the 1930s have only recently been republished, while her contemporaries such as Frank Hill wrote a number of plays, of which only a few of the scripts are known. Locally based cultural journals such as *Caribbean Quarterly* (*CQ*), founded by and with the University of the West Indies in 1949, kept the spotlight on carnival and other forms of street and popular theatre. *CQ* also occasionally published plays, such as, in 1961, Walcott's *Drums and Colours* commissioned for the opening of the First Federal Parliament of the West Indies in 1958.

While plays by Pat Cumper, Errol Hill, James, Errol John, Trevor Rhone, Dennis Scott, Sistren Theatre Collective, Walcott, and Wynter

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were published separately or anthologized between the 1950s and 1980s, relatively little critical writing on Caribbean drama or theatre emerged in mainstream publications, though local newspapers often kept up a lively theatre review tradition. One exception was Richardson Wright's *Revels in Jamaica* (1937) which addressed British-in-the-Caribbean theatre in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries. It took another half a century for Molly Ahye's *Cradle of Caribbean Dance* (1983), Rex Nettleford's *Dance Jamaica* (1985), and Errol Hill's monographs on theatre to be published, and Judy Stone's *West Indian Theatre*, regarded as a ground-breaking work, was only published in 1994. Other scholarly works, such as Bruce King's *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama* (1995) and Wycliffe Bennett and Hazel Bennett's *Jamaican Theatre* (2011) trickled out later.[16] Given the large and flourishing body of work that exists on Caribbean religious and festival arts, it may well be that in the Caribbean critical imaginary, the spaces of popular performance are where the 'real' Caribbean drama lies.

All the same, drama and performed poetry had a local impact that could not be captured in their mainstream publication. Our look at less-travelled avenues of dissemination shows poetry to be a crucial decolonial agent at the local level during this period. Newspapers, poetry anthologies, local performance arenas, and dramatic competitions organized by national and regional institutions became the channels through which the public accessed and participated in locally produced literature. The formation of theatre spaces with a national vision also played a primary role. Such spaces included the Jamaican Little Theatre Movement which introduced the National Pantomime; the St Lucia Arts Guild fostered by Derek Walcott and his brother, Roderick; the Theatre Guild of Guyana; in Trinidad, the Trinidad Theatre Workshop founded by Walcott, and Beryl McBurnie's Little Carib Theatre; and the regional CARIFESTA speech and drama competitions. Drama that was rooted in African spiritualities had a special place in the imaginary, as discussed in Part I. Equally interestingly, theatre emerges starkly as one arena in which women's participation as writers, directors, and producers was quite prolific, and so it is an arena in which the occlusion of women's presence in literary history appears more stark.

Across genres, writers' engagements with a colonial education often took the form of rewriting. Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) and Roberto Fernández Retamar's 'Caliban' (1971) famously used the essay form to rewrite Shakespeare's *The Tempest*; Lamming continued that engagement in novels such as *Water With Berries* (1971), much like Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) that engages fictively with Charlotte

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Brontë's *Jane Eyre*. In drama, we have Brathwaite's 1955 *Odale's Choice*, a rewriting of Sophocles' *Antigone* for schoolchildren in newly independent Ghana where he taught during the 1950s, Dennis Scott's *The Crime of Anabel Campbell* (1970) rewriting Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* in the volatile social context of 1970s Jamaica, and Césaire's *Une tempête* (1969), also rewriting Shakespeare in the context of Negritude, the US Civil Rights Movement, and African and Caribbean revolutionary uprisings. Edwidge Danticat tells us that playwrights in neighbouring Haiti rewrote and secretly performed Sophocles in resistance to the 'Papa Doc' dictatorship.[17]

Cultural and Political Transitions

Between the 1920s and 1970s, the Caribbean underwent major political and cultural transitions. The era began with Crown colony status thoroughly entrenched and ended with the collapse of the British Empire and the founding of new nation-states in its wake. The years in between saw widespread labour uprisings in the 1930s signalling the crisis of British rule; the emergence of massive nationalist political movements during the 1940s and 1950s; the creation of a West Indies Federation in 1958; independence for Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Barbados during the 1960s; and postcolonial disenchantment throughout the 1970s growing from perceptions of the independence movements as too bourgeois and leading to uprisings in Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago as well as socialists coming to power in Grenada and Jamaica.

Alongside these political transitions, the cultural landscape also shifted rapidly. The social unrest of the 1930s inspired literary formations such as the *Beacon* group in Trinidad and Tobago or the Drumblair circle in Jamaica that sought solidarity with the working classes through genres such as yard fiction; members of those groups such as Albert Gomes and the Manley family would translate that symbolic solidarity into leadership roles in anticolonial political parties. Cultural nationalism dominated the 1950s and 1960s and became inextricably linked to the emergence of some of the most famous figures in Caribbean literature: Brathwaite, Martin Carter, and Lamming became spokespeople for decolonization movements; Naipaul established himself as a prominent sceptic; and Harris, Selvon, and Walcott occupied ambivalent positions vis-à-vis the nationalist politics of the time.

The end of the political experiment with decolonial regional unity in the form of Federation was an especially significant transition for these writers,

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none more so than Eric Roach, who, as Laurence Breiner argues, had positioned himself as the poet of Federation and would find himself without a literary home after 1962.[18] By the 1970s, disillusionment with the compromises of independence led to testimonial literary movements seeking to allow marginalized elements of society – peasants, Rastafarians, black women, the urban poor – to speak in their own voices. Such responses included the Black Power movement in Trinidad and Tobago, a 1970 special issue of *Savacou* edited by Brathwaite, and the founding of the Sistren Theatre Collective in Jamaica in 1977.

The political and cultural movements of the mid-century created and gained support from new institutions, including a range of periodicals (both those devoted to literary work and to nation-building, with some overlap), the University of the West Indies, the BBC, and the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM). Our volume builds on recent scholarship on the roles these institutions played in shaping the emergence of Caribbean literature and Caribbean nations in the mid twentieth century. Scholars have delved into the archive to reconstruct the periodical culture of this period, rereading publications such as *The Beacon*, *Bim*, *Focus*, and *Kyk-over-al* while also recovering lesser-known journals like *The Cosmopolitan* (edited by Una Marson) or *Planter's Punch* (edited by H. G. de Lisser).[19] This interest in the material circumstances that allowed Caribbean literature to thrive has led to exciting scholarship on the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* programme that made work by a range of writers available to Caribbean audiences.[20] Anne Walmsley's work on the Caribbean Artists Movevemt (CAM) remains foundational, showing how that group helped to shift the critical conversations surrounding Caribbean culture in the 1960s.[21] The impact on literature of the upheavals in education that took place with independence and its aftermath has only begun to be understood, and our volume points towards new ways of understanding those transitions.

If literary institutions were influential in shaping and disseminating the emerging literature, popular and vernacular traditions inspired writers and exerted pressures on the literati. The newspaper-reading and radio-listening populace weighed in on matters such as language choice (English versus Creole), seeing themselves as a crucial part of nation-decolonization or empire-preservation. Audience was crucial: writing to a local audience within the context of an oral-performative tradition, Louise Bennett, for example, had no interest in modifying her use of the Creole vernacular, in contrast to double-placed novelists such as Reid and Selvon who invented versions of their respective national Creoles to straddle cultural and linguistic authenticity and accessibility to their metropolitan

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audiences. It was in the performance arts that the Creole registers and modalities found their most fluent and uncompromising expression. Performative literature and literary performativity had their greatest audience impact when they merged the 'language of the people' with the concerns of a politically engaged populace, or used a highly accessible medium such as carnival, radio, or the formal stage that from mid-century was becoming more and more decolonized.

It was during the period covered in this volume that debates over language reached a height. Critical interventions such as Mervyn Morris' 'On Reading Louise Bennett, Seriously' (first published in the *Daily Gleaner* in 1964 and then reprinted in *Jamaica Journal* in 1967), work by linguists such as Mervyn Alleyne and Richard Allsopp in establishing the Creole languages as legitimate registers in their own right, and the publication of successful Creole language fictions and poetry between 1949 and 1970, helped lay the foundations for the kind of confident narrative and poetic practice engaged in by later writers, who move with ease between English and Creole in their writing. But part of what emerges from several of the essays in this volume, taken collectively, is that Caribbean performance and orality, far from being one of many strands of equal weight, was in fact foundational in the literary poetics of the period.

The Caribbean Region in Transition

The story of Caribbean literature has often focused on the mid twentieth century through a group of writers publishing in England. Our volume complicates that story by exploring a range of other transnational connections. The essays here show the complicated positioning of these writers in the United Kingdom, even as many other international contexts shaped the development of Caribbean literature between the 1920s and 1970s. The anglophone Caribbean's cultural and political relationships to the rest of the world experienced multiple, overlapping transitions during this period, and our volume seeks to extend the limits of how we understand these exchanges. The essays in this section suggest that current terms such as diaspora, transnationalism, and migratory capacity become insufficient to describe the kinds of relational practice across borders that helped forge this modern literature.

Kamau Brathwaite in 'Sir Galahad and the Islands' (1957), George Lamming in *The Pleasures of Exile*, and Kenneth Ramchand in *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (1970) established the centrality of

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British-based writers after World War II in the story of Caribbean literary history that was already emerging in a cluster of anthologizing projects.[22] The 2015 publication of the collection of essays *Beyond Windrush: Rethinking Postwar Anglophone Caribbean Literature* encapsulates the scholarly movement to complicate that story, to which the essays here also contribute, by revisiting this canonized moment to show the diverse and sometimes contradictory projects amongst these UK-based writers.[23] Even calling these writers UK-based can reify and oversimplify the complexity of their locations and movement. The most centrally 'Windrush' writers, including Lamming, Naipaul, and Selvon, travelled extensively during this period, whether back to the Caribbean, to the United States, or to various parts of Africa. The community these writers inhabited was similarly transnational; the BBC's *Caribbean Voices* involved contributors from and clearly meant to speak back to the region, while Clarke's letters show how a writer based in Canada could see himself and be seen as part of this community too.[24] Ultimately, Selvon would end up relocating to Canada, further blurring the identification between 'Windrush' and location in England.

If the story of anglophone Caribbean literature's nationalist moment was once told primarily in relation to a simultaneous exile in England and rebellion against British cultural imperialism, the story has become increasingly routed through the US empire that initially competed against Britain – intervening in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Puerto Rico during the first decades of the twentieth century – before eventually becoming the dominant power throughout the region. Scholars have begun to see how the Caribbean literary scene during the 1920s was at least as vibrant in the United States as it was anywhere else in the world. Scholarship on the Caribbean contribution to the Harlem Renaissance by Winston James and Louis Parascandola among others reminds us that what was known at the time as the New Negro movement had explicitly transnational aspirations.[25]

About one in four blacks in New York during the 1920s was born in the Caribbean, and Caribbean people such as Marcus Garvey, McKay, Eulalie Spence, and Walrond were among the leaders of the political and aesthetic movements of the time. African Americans such as Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and James Weldon Johnson amplified their close connections to Caribbean writers in New York by travelling to the region, extending their networks to include writers like Guillén, Jacques Roumain, and George Sylvain. Rosa Guy, Audre Lorde, and Paule Marshall would carry forward the legacy of this US-based diaspora in the second half of the century. At the same time, US influence within the

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