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THE JOURNAL OF WEST INDIAN LITERATURE has been published twice-yearly by the Departments of Literatures in English of the University of the West Indies since October 1986. Edited by full time academics and with minimal funding or institutional support, the Journal originated at the same time as the first annual conference on West Indian Literature, the brainchild of Edward Baugh, Mervyn Morris and Mark McWatt. It reflects the continued commitment of those who followed their lead to provide a forum in the region for the dissemination and discussion of our literary culture. Initially featuring contributions from scholars in the West Indies, it has become an internationally recognized peer-reviewed academic journal. The Editors invite the submission of articles in English that are the result of scholarly research in literary textuality (fiction, prose, drama, film, theory and criticism) of the English-speaking Caribbean. We also welcome comparative assessments of non-Anglophone Caribbean texts provided translations into English of the relevant parts of such texts are incorporated into the submission. JWIL will also publish book reviews. Submission guidelines are available at www.jwilonline.org.
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Notes on Contributors
This April 2016 issue of *JWIL* is the second one of the journal to appear on our online platform. As an “open issue,” there is no set theme or subject that this publication explores. However, some central ideas circulate through these articles establishing connections and resonances between and among them. The *JWIL* 24.1 issue features articles on three established writers of the Caribbean: Lorna Goodison, Caryl Phillips and Myriam Chancy. Some of the echoes throughout the publication are related to travel and trauma. Craig A. Smith quotes Clingman as saying, “the passage across water—as in the original Black Atlantic passage—is a place of transition, trauma, and indissoluble time: an experience that will live on forever” (Smith 34). In her article on Goodison entitled, “‘Remember Us in Motherland’: Africa Revisited in Goodison’s *Oracabessa,*” Anthea Morrison returns to the idea of Africa as creative source for Caribbean writers and as a “travelling culture,” spreading its roots throughout the world. She is careful to note though that this return to a “motherland” is not a romantic gesture, fossilizing Africa in the past, but a move to show its dynamism: “Lorna Goodison is obviously devoid of the capacity for such exploitation of the “idea of Africa,,” and the collection, *Oracabessa,* displays both the allegiance to ancestors manifest in her early work, and a new perspective, a refusal to freeze the experience of African peoples — still kinfolk — in time” (Morrison 23).

If Africa, invoked throughout Goodison’s oeuvre and prominently foregrounded in *Oracabessa,* is a kind of meta-narrative, then male migration trauma is a grand narrative for Phillips, according to Smith in his article, “Migration, Manhood and Melancholia in the Works of Caryl Phillips.” In this essay, Smith examines the psychoanalytic concept of melancholia in Phillips’s body of work, particularly in three different kinds of narrative published between 1982 and 2005. This concept allows Smith to expose the traumas that Caribbean men experience when they migrate to the United Kingdom and the United States of America. According to Smith, “Through his engagement with the past, Phillips forces his readers to confront a history that is oftentimes traumatic and one that some would rather remain hidden…. I am particularly interested in the ways and reasons for Phillips’s use of the lives of his male protagonists as a means of voicing a silenced history” (29). The unearthing of a “silenced traumatic history” is also germane to Carol Bailey’s preoccupation in her article, “Trauma, Memory and Recovery in Myriam Chancy’s *The Scorpion’s Claw.*” In this paper, she “brings into conversation two areas of postcolonial Caribbean studies—migration studies on women and trauma theory—to argue for a representation of migrant loss and remembering as phenomena shaped by wounding, which can only be partially healed through stories and a return to community” (47).
The issue also features an interview by Glyne Griffith of Henry Swanzy, one of the great architects of that BBC radio programme, *Caribbean Voices*, which was so important to the development of West Indian Literature. This interview, conducted in 1992 when Swanzy is in the twilight of his life, provides a rare opportunity to reflect on the embryonic moment of the development of Anglophone Caribbean literature. This interview sets the stage for our review section that includes a review of the book, *Beyond Windrush: Rethinking Postwar Anglophone Caribbean Literature*, itself dedicated to that formative moment of West Indian literature and two other books: *Eric Walrond: A Life in the Harlem Renaissance and the Transatlantic Caribbean* and *Caribbean Irish Connections: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. The editors of *JWIL* commend this issue to you, our readers, and we hope you will consider contributing to our next issue, which will be on Caribbean Ecocriticism. The call for papers is already on the website. We also wish to invite visual artistes from the Caribbean who would like their work to be considered as the art work for our covers to submit such works to us.

As the literary festival season is underway—the Bocas Lit Fest in Trinidad and Tobago recently concluded, Bim Lit Fest in Barbados currently running, and Calabash Literary Festival in Jamaica yet to come—it is a good time to celebrate the work all of the organizers, volunteers and sponsors do in the Caribbean to provide such wonderful occasions for bringing together our writers, readers and scholars. And hearty congratulations from all of us at *JWIL* to Olive Senior, winner of the 2016 Bocas Prize for her new collection of fiction, *The Pain Tree*. Finally, we want to give you a heads up that the 2016 Annual Conference on West Indian Literature will be hosted by UWI Mona Campus at the Western Jamaica Campus in Montego Bay, in October (6-8). The theme is “Archiving Caribbean Literature and Popular Culture” and the call for papers has been posted so we hope some of you can attend ([https://goo.gl/T21OpJ](https://goo.gl/T21OpJ)). We also hope to see some of the best papers presented at that conference in a future issue of the *Journal*, as the relationship between the two has had a long and fruitful relationship!

Enjoy *JWIL* Online Take 2!
Several collections of Lorna Goodison’s poetry have shown respect — respect due — for an African ancestor, sometimes embodied by a feisty Guinea foremother, invoked both because of the enduring place of the continent of origin in the collective imaginary and for the personal relevance of this ancestral figure to someone who is insistent on not erasing any element of her family story. The Jamaican poet seems fond of beginning public readings of her work by honouring the revered “Guinea Woman” memorialized in the eponymous poem, first published in 1986. Recent examples of her tendency to privilege this text, on two very different occasions, are readings at the Manchester Literature Festival in the UK (October 2014), and the Two Seasons Talking Trees Literary Fiesta held at Treasure Beach in Jamaica (May 2015). Another instance of Goodison’s foregrounding — with contained
but perceptible emotion — of this poem/genealogical credo may be found in her interview with Geraldine Skeete in the series “The Spaces Between Words: Conversations with Writers”; the podcast begins with the confident, ever compelling words:

Great grandmother

was a guinea woman

wide eyes turning

the corners of her face

could see behind her,

her cheeks dusted with

a fine rash of jet-bead warts

that itched when the rain set up (…)

It seems her fate was anchored

in the unfathomable sea

for great grandmother caught the eye of a sailor

whose ship sailed without him from Lucea harbor. (Selected Poems 64)

In this self-conscious assertion of lineage, the writer contributes to a New World discourse which does not elide ancestral Africa, though it can hardly be neatly labelled Afrocentric nor accused of a passéist obsession with lost glories. In an essay entitled “Cultural Reconfigurations in the African Caribbean” appearing in the volume The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities, Maureen Warner-Lewis focuses on a group of Caribbean intellectuals who play a leading role in “African diaspora discourse,” and specifically identifies creative writers who, one may infer, also participate in that discourse:

Speaking from a Caribbean perspective, the most notable advocates in African diasporic discourse have been publicists, historians, and anthropologists…. Among the creative writers have been Aimé Césaire and René Maran of Martinique; George Lamming and Kamau Brathwaite of Barbados; Maryse Condé, Joseph Zobel, and Simone Schwarz-Bart of Guadeloupe; Nicolas Guillén from Cuba, and the Jamaicans Erna Brodber, Lorna Goodison and Mutabaruka. (Warner-Lewis 19)

Warner-Lewis goes on to recall the complex nature of the creolization process: “The coexistence in the Caribbean of transplanted Africa and Europe led to the layering and multiplicity of identities… compromise and syncretism have been inevitable strategies for personal and group survival” (21).

Goodison’s oeuvre is, I think, emblematic of that “layering” and of individual and collective compromises effected, not always smoothly, over generations. The concept of creolization, of which Kamau Brathwaite and Édouard Glissant are the best known theoreticians, is clearly linked to that of cultural hybridity, as suggested by Robert J. C. Young in Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race: “Hybridization as creolization involves fusion, the creation of a new form, which can then be set
against the old form, of which it is partly made up” (23). Indeed, it is tempting to read Goodison’s work through the lens of the cultural theory of hybridity, an approach which is clearly not unproductive in discussing the work of a writer who has over several decades celebrated her people’s African origin while at the same time articulating and embracing a mixed heritage (that “new form” referred to by Robert Young) consonant with Jamaica’s national (though to many, problematic) motto: “Out of many, one people.” In addition, the several “mulatta poems” written by Goodison would seem to reinforce the notion of racial and cultural métissage as inextricably linked to her poetics. One should note, however, that the problematic of Caribbean/Jamaican identity is resistant to a facile assertion or valorization of syncretism and hybridity. Perhaps what it is essential to remember is that this discourse of identity allows for contradiction and also for changing emphases and attitudes. Thus, in discussing Goodison’s approach to Africa — the continent, its past and its present — I hope to trace a genealogy of this preoccupation in her work, and to nuance what might have initially seemed to be an Afrocentric position. My reading takes into account, especially, the increased impact, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, of multiculturalism and of globalization, phenomena which have substantially undermined any belief in cultural “authenticity” or “purity.” It is important not to overlook what I see as the persistent strand of affiliation with Africa in Goodison’s work even while it appears to epitomize, both in its formal and its thematic elements, the notion of cultural hybridity. This paper attempts to show how, without adopting a romantic, essentialist attitude to the African source, Goodison is resolutely postcolonial in her rewriting of the discourse of Africa as essentially Other — barbaric and void of tradition or civilization — as she undertakes, in the new volume Oracabessa, what is both a personal and a collective reckoning with the little known ancestor, and, importantly, with the unknown “cousins” who remained on the African continent.

The Jamaican’s acknowledgment of the tenacious African hold on her culture and on her imagination does not preclude an understanding of the consequences of historical rupture, including an inevitable loss of some aspects of the ancestral heritage. At the same time, at this moment in the history of Caribbean civilization, the poet does not seem burdened by a fear expressed as early as 1956 by the celebrated champion of négritude, Aimé Césaire, the fear of “dilution dans l’<<universel>>” [dilution in the ‘universal’]. Certainly, the Martinican writer, whose words prefigure much later debates in Caribbean literary and cultural criticism around issues such as hybridity and transnationalism (and whose “native land” had already been amalgamated into a metropolitan whole as a result of the novel 1946 law of départemelisation), was susceptible to a more piercing fear of dilution of identity than one might expect of a Caribbean poet writing in the early twenty-first century.
Lorna Goodison epitomizes a very Caribbean — and postcolonial — sense of contradiction and complexity, the same complexity which led her to take the label “mulatta” tossed out at her in a Latin American sojourn, and to exploit its provocative elusiveness: “I went somewhere in Latin America once and there were these people who kept referring to me as a mulatta, which I found very funny, because I’d never thought of anything like that….They told me I was a mulatta, and I said all right, I kind of like the sound of that” (Baugh 20). At the same time, the writer has distanced herself from the assumption that she might be preoccupied with the biological notion of métissage, an assumption she confronts squarely in the interview with Wolfgang Binder: “I have relatives who look like Egyptians and my son is an African prince — all of it belongs to me. If somebody tells you, take some and leave some, that is his or her problem. I am not going to do that. All of it belongs to me!” (Binder 57). The description of her son as an African prince is interesting, not only in its confident declaration of an African bloodline still visible in the younger members of her family, but also in its celebration of that bloodline through the evocation of royalty.

Asked specifically, in the Binder interview, about the term “mulatta,” Goodison shrugs it off with some irritation: “Apparently someone was writing this paper about my poetry and was getting into these deep, serious connotations on seeing myself as a mulatta. That’s garbage! All it is is a persona” (57). And Edward Baugh, in the seminal essay “Goodison on the road to Heartease,” reacts as follows to Goodison’s explanation of the Latin American origin of the term “mulatta” (in an interview with him): “The persona, then, is just a device, a clever suggestion, and is neither substantially delineated nor used with any intention of talking about what may be called the mulatto condition, whether cultural or psychological” (20). Whatever the reader chooses to see in the writer’s arguably ambiguous use of the term, what is striking in “Guinea Woman” is that, while the daughter of the African forebear is described as “the first Mulatta,” the poem ends with an overwhelming sense that the African stamp is indelible, as “the high yellow brown/is darkening down” (65). Given the series of “mulatta poems” appearing in Selected Poems and the several lines in the middle of “Guinea Woman” focusing on the circumstances of the appearance of the persona’s mixed-race ancestor (“the evidence my blue-eyed grandmother/the first Mulatta,/ taken into backra’s household/and covered with his name,” (64)), the final foregrounding of a darker-skinned descendant is unexpected and powerful. The structure of the poem, which appeared to be linear, finally becomes circular.

In an era when the fear of essentialist labels, coupled with the illusion of the “post-racial” and the appeal of the transcultural, might seem to foster an unquestioning valorization of hybridity, it is significant that, in her 2013 collection Oracabessa, Goodison should return to the continent of origin and its lasting impact on the descendants of those the poet describes by the emotionally charged term the “stolen” in the poem “Remember Us in Motherland.” An early poem (from the 2001 volume Travelling Mercies), powerfully titled “What We Carried That Carried Us,” had explained and validated the African role in Caribbean culture, by representing story, music and dance as invisible lifeboats on that dreadful crossing, prefiguring the survival strategies to be devised by diaspora Africans:

In ship’s belly, song and story dispensed as medicine,

story and song, bay rum and camphor for faint way.
Song propelled you to fly through hidden other eye, between seen eyes and out of structure, hover.

In barks of destruction, story functioned as talisman against give-up death, cramped paralysed darkness. (Travelling Mercies 4)

In the second part of the poem, entitled “Dance Rocksteady,” the tone is more confident, though the threat of “give-up death” still floats in the alien air, as the poet fuses two distinct time periods, the historically limited moment of the ocean journey, and the decades and even centuries which would follow of shaping unique musical and dance forms — both religious and secular — such as kumina and rocksteady, to suit the new space:

You danced upon the deck of the slaver Antonia named for the cherubic daughter of sea captain Fraser. Aye kumina.

You moved just so, in and out between wild notes sounded by the suicide followers, staying well within rock steady rhythm. (4-5)

Of particular interest here are the words “you moved just so,” underlining the deported Africans’ need and ability to impart a restorative order and structure onto a world where they seemed powerless, and their effort to create steps both stylized and meaningful — as do dancers and choreographers in contemporary Jamaican performance. I am thinking here, for example, of the ability of the late Professor Rex Nettleford to reinterpret and transform traditional Jamaican religious practices and dances — such as kumina, revival and gerreh — for the stage.5

In another poem from Travelling Mercies, “Natal Song,” — in which Goodison may be gesturing to the title of that foundational text of the literature of négritude, Césaire’s Cahier d’un retour au pays natal — the triumphant traveller (though not conquistadora) appears to find in an African location the source of, and also antidote to, the “quest fever” which has long afflicted her. The name of the South African province is particularly felicitous, as the persona represents herself as both tourist and returning native, plunging “through the Natal bush/this Sunday in search of the sleeping rhino” (45). It is striking that here again, as in “What We Carried That Carried Us” (the poem in which rocksteady ruled), the sustenance of a culture resistant to displacement is linked with musical expression, with remembered and reinvented rhythms of belonging. Goodison has explained the importance of musical allusion in her work by recalling a childhood immersion in different types of music: “Music of all kinds is a thing I grew up with, it’s very much integrated in my work” (Dawes 105):
I come to find my vital self left back here
so that I land in Xamayca with quest fever
and all the while Africa you had my remedy (…)

Continent of my foremothers, to reach back I have
crossed over seas, oceans, seven-sourced rivers.
Under my heartbeat is where you pitched and lodged
persistent memory, rhythm box with no off-switch,
my drumbeat and monitor which never let me
settle for barracoon, barracks, camp or pagoda. (Travelling Mercies 45-46)

But despite its patent nostalgia, this poem of apparent homecoming is also one of departure; this is
no anthem comparable to the heady lyrics of Bob Marley’s “Exodus,” in which the persona resolutely
pledges to leave “Babylon” for the “fatherland.” In Goodison’s oeuvre Africa will remain that vibrant,
stubborn drumbeat, associated with the life force itself sustaining the human body (“Under my
heartbeat is where you pitched and lodged…”); but the final stanza of “Natal Song” suggests that the
Guinea woman’s descendant must/will move on:

  Thank you God for this day most amazing. Amen
good driver Adrian. Tomorrow I will drink bush tea
on the Island of Salt, realizing that we never
did see the rhino. But the wicked toe of the ostrich
excavated a stone with the seal of a mother and child
upon it. Kenzurida found it; and Africa, I kept it. (47)

That the poem ends by reworking, in memorable style (the stone, though initially hidden from view,
bears a seal difficult to erase), the mother-child trope frequently deployed to discuss the relation between
the continent of origin and the Caribbean makes it clear, however, that the poet/persona can never
leave Africa behind. Thus, she will, if necessary, excavate the past on which her self-identification is
based. It is worth noting here how important the mother-child trope is in Goodison’s work in other
contexts, such as in her representation of her own close bond with both her mother and her son, as well
as in the persona’s likening of the difficult creation of a poem to giving birth, for example in “My Last
Poem (Again).”

More interesting perhaps than this evocation of Africa as the lost but not forgotten mother
figure is the celebration of African culture in “To the Tall Comrade,” published in Goodison’s first
collection, Tamarind Season, in which the persona imagines with a lover, presumably the “tall comrade”
of the title, an idyllic life which appears as a diasporic recreation of an African ethos and lifestyle.
The appeal and context of the poem are to some extent reminiscent of a famous love poem by the Senegalese pioneer of négritude Léopold Sédar Senghor, published in the 1961 volume *Nocturnes* and subsequently in *Oeuvre poétique*, which begins with the enchanting words: “Et nous baignerons, mon amie, dans une présence africaine” (177) [And we will be bathed, my love, in an African presence]. A magical, dreamlike sequence incorporated in Goodison’s text might recall, for some West Indian and African American readers, those exhilarating years in the 1960s and 1970s when the message of the Black Power movement lingered in a sometimes flamboyant, self-conscious embrace of African art and African dress (the era of the dashiki). For in this poem, while there is no physical return to Africa, in the “chiaroscuro” of the woman’s home, in the semi-darkness where dream and reality need not collide, her lover “gives her Africa”:

“But how can you give me Africa?”

“simple,” you say, breaking your continent of silence.

We’ll build the house of terra-cotta.

Our images will imitate Benin

and the child will know about Soweto

and the trees will have West African roots (*Selected Poems* 22)

The ambiguity inherent in the notion of “giving” someone Africa (as object of fantasy or as birthright, one might ask?) lends the poem some of its seductiveness, challenging the reader to imagine whether this marvellous ability to restore Africa is attributed to the “comrade” (a word recalling the socialist leanings of many Jamaican intellectuals in the 1970s and underscoring the political context of the poem) because he himself is of African origin. Another possibility is that “giving Africa” is, in a more complex way, an act of will, an individual determination to remember and to refashion ancient linkages. One notes the interest of the verb “to imitate” (“Our images will imitate Benin”), a linguistic choice which might be read as acknowledgement of the role of mimesis even in the most Afrocentric of New World manifestations of cultural fidelity. The reader is also justified in wondering whether the context of this
“gift of Africa” — a moment of seduction, in which the persona cannot help but be dazzled by the comrade’s persuasive words — might introduce a degree of uncertainty about the likelihood of recovering the past, even in the modified form implied by the image of trees with “West African roots.” And even in this imagined, African-inspired near utopia, the glorious past — represented by the pre-colonial kingdom of Benin — will not be allowed to eclipse the reality of twentieth century South Africa in the era of apartheid. For Goodison, writing in the contemporary period, can hardly echo the certainty of a Senghor, secure — in the mid-twentieth century — of his immersion in an undiluted “présence africaine.” So, the persona does not envisage a return to paradise lost, but what is certainly striking here is the extent to which the dream of Africa functions as both romantic idyll and ideological grounding.

That implicit Afrocentricity also underpins another early poem, in which Goodison expresses respect for one of her community of writers, the celebrated Nigerian Wole Soyinka. The poem, published in the 1999 collection *Turn Thanks*, bears the evocative title “Africa on the Mind Today” and links two distinct cultural traditions by using the Jamaican term “a Bide-Up” in a musical allusion honouring Soyinka. In its final verse the poet makes the now familiar tribute to her African forebears while also paying respect to the continent’s contemporary literary production:

Sing a Bide-Up for Wole Soyinka
say, Abeocuta rock of our foreparents stay.
Strength of Guinea women on our mother’s side.
Africa rest, Abeocuta abide. (Turn Thanks 37)

The place name “Abeocuta” is clearly a reference to the city in Ogun state, Nigeria, where Soyinka was born, but also functions as symbol of formidable strength and steadfastness.

Such admirable fixity and such simple reverence are largely absent in Goodison’s representation of Africa in the 2013 collection *Oracabessa*. Here, the familiar motif of journey assumes a new resonance, and the relationship with Africa and with African kinsmen is given an unexpected, twenty-first century twist, as the poet rewrites the colonial voyages of conquest and deportation, in chronicling her own travels through Spain and Portugal. This European tour forms the backdrop for musings on and conversations with young Africans, semi-nomads who could be termed “illegal aliens” or “undocumented immigrants,” trying to “make life” in unwelcoming European cities where their continent’s creativity is peddled for a few euros. It is with a sort of maternal concern that the poet/persona reaches out to these new exiles, to these self-deported Africans. While two of these poems might seem to recall, by allusion, the trauma of the Middle Passage, much has changed in the contemporary seascapes. The ships are not transporting chained Africans to the West Indies, and the reference to one “small stowaway” hidden in the hold is in contrast to the haunting images of human cargo crammed into claustrophobic space (14); in the poem “O Africans…” the financial implications of the journey are foregrounded as the passengers, no longer merchandise, are “ferr|ied|for a fee” (11). So Goodison, descendant of a once muzzled Guinea forbear, is now privileged tourist/traveller, interacting with young African men who have voluntarily left the “motherland.”
In “O Africans in the Plazas of Madrid,” the initial use of apostrophe accords a degree of respect to migrants who, in the stanzas which follow, might seem diminished by an illicit European sojourn, in which they are purveyors of African jewellery — but also of cheap DVDs:

O Africans I saw you in the plazas of Madrid
with your ethnic jewellery and bootleg DVDs
set down on flying blankets rigged with strings

you pull when shrill sirens swarm the air (...)

O Africans you followed the scent of salt to boats
ferrying you for a fee; or you lodged in the maw
of liners; dark humanity released

into metropoles where you make-believe

you are rejoining Africa’s assets… (Oracabessa 11)

That the poet’s attitude towards these “Africans in the Plazas of Madrid” is one of empathy and solidarity is suggested by the fact that she reprises here the form adopted in addressing the subjects of a much earlier poem (from the 1995 volume To Us, All Flowers are Roses), entitled simply “O Africans.” That poem provocatively described the effects of acculturation and assimilation in the colonized world — as seen in the quadrille dance — as “a marriage mixed/but a marriage still” (62). But in “O Africans in the Plazas of Madrid,” the “dark humanity released” is far removed from the creolized descendants of the enslaved evoked in “O Africans.” These latter-day “castaways” are neither captives nor victims. They appear not as questers of identity but as emigrants seduced by the mirage of a better life across the waters, by the “scent of salt,” a doubly resonant image for island dwellers familiar with the inimitable smell and taste of sea water — associated with healing and new beginnings — but also knowing what is meant by the Caribbean idiom to “suck salt,” which is to endure hardship and lack.

A similar scenario is constructed in the poem “O Lisboa,” in which the speaker befriends a young man imaged as a barnacle, a hardy sea creature, who might merit the label “hustler,” and who first arrived in Europe as a stowaway. To some extent this solitary migrant/maverick follows in the footsteps of the various travellers whom the speaker encountered in Madrid, some of whom had been “ferr[ied]... for a fee,” while other, less visible passengers “lodged in the maw/ of liners” (11). Here again, the aura of clandestinity hovers. While in “O Africans in the Plazas of Madrid” the signal to flee came in the form of “shrill sirens,” in “O Lisboa,” the young African “becomes furtive when a marked car rounds/the corner”:

Once a ship docked off the Gambia Coast
and took into its hold, unbeknown to all
aboard, a small stowaway;
a boy barnacle; juvenile remora fastened
on to bark then slipped off ship in Spain.
this boy turned man; crossed into Portugal,
addresses Monica and me as “my mothers.”

He sells us bead necklaces he’s strung himself… (Oracabessa 14)

The parallels with the Middle Passage story are suggestive, as are the differences in the two life-changing voyages: the twenty-first century “boy barnacle” travelled from home in the hold, but his confinement was self-inflicted, and he was dare-devil, not powerless captive. The Oxford English Dictionary definition of the barnacle is instructive: “a marine crustacean with an external shell, which attaches itself permanently to underwater surfaces.” And here roles are reversed as the descendant of the enslaved must now “mother” the “authentic” African, who, in addition to the necklaces he sells, leaves the two women small but lasting gifts (leather bracelets), as a newly learned opportunism gives way to a still compelling culture of civility. For their part, the speaker and Monica (one of the group with whom she travels), now cast as surrogate mother figures to the itinerant African, offer the irreplaceable gift of words, and the poet bestows on the boy turned family man a sort of legitimacy:

He gifts us leather bracelets.

Says, “Thank you, mothers, for talking to me”

says he is going to buy supper for his children

and their mother, she like him is Senegalese. (Oracabessa 14)

Here Goodison is no longer the diasporan traveller in search of origins of “Natal Song,” but ironically, even while on a physical journey herself, she has become a still centre, source of comfort and serenity—perhaps that “lit heart, shining out” so memorably evoked in the early poem “I Shall Light a Candle of Understanding…” (Selected Poems 77). Goodison has never feared embracing the personal even in her most political poems, and perhaps the calm confidence of her voice in this sequence is not unrelated to the presence, in this European voyage, of her beloved companion/husband — whose role is discreetly hinted at in several of these poems of journeying. For instance, he is gently acknowledged at the end of “It is Sunday in Sevilla”: “Through the Patio de los Naranjos/Dan and Monica; Ted and me://proceed in love and friendship” (24).

The images of the barnacle and the remora (the latter defined by the OED as “a slender sea fish which attaches itself to large fish by means of a sucker on top of the head”) are related, and equally compelling: both sea creatures are able to cling to larger structures (such as ships). At the same time, inherent in what one might term their modus operandi is a quality of adaptability (some would say of Anancy-like, shape-shifting flexibility), a quality necessary for migrants who must survive in inhospitable terrain. Hence the nuanced portrayal of the young man who jumped from ship to city streets in “O Lisboa,” and who is memorable because he embodies both vulnerability and resilience, for he is boy
and also barnacle. In the last lines of the poem, the tourist persona makes a moving appeal to St Vicente, patron saint of Lisbon (whose statue was evoked in the first stanza) to protect “the ravens,” a potent metaphor for these young black men on the move, and sometimes in frantic flight:

He becomes furtive when a marked car rounds
the corner, whispers, “Policia.” St. Vincente,
tent your stone palm. Shelter the ravens. (Oracabessa 14)

These poems of displacement may be read as forming a triptych with the epic “Remember Us in Motherland,” in which African retentions are enumerated in a pan-Caribbean inventory of religious and cultural practices, even while the persona reveals a lingering disquiet about the loss of Africa. The three poems share a concern with the possibility of interaction and understanding between descendants of Africans on different sides of the Atlantic, between those who came to assume hyphenated identities and those who remained at home, even if “no longer at ease”:

…From the Sierra Maestra

Fidel Castro rode down into Havana in 1959; in his pockets
A Santeria fetish and a Roman Catholic icon. I’ve seen white-robed
Santeria priestesses sugar petals in the Hudson’s brackish flow.

I witnessed the Mothers of Pocomania, Revival, and Myal trump
the winding way up the Hope River valley… (“Remember Us in Motherland,” Oracabessa 48)

In accepting an apparently fruitful syncretism, Goodison displays no triumphalism. Rather, while confronting irreparable loss, she embraces continuities, in this pursuit of a communication — however imperfect — between the descendants of those separated by the slave trade. In these solemn verses she adumbrates, in non-linear mode, three stages akin to the “metamorphoses” described in Poetics of Relation by Édouard Glissant, who characterizes as follows the experiences of the deported Africans, forced to make peace with a strange “New World”: “…the panic of the new land, the haunting of the former land, finally the alliance with the imposed land, suffered and redeemed” (Glissant 7).

“Remember Us in Motherland” is indeed a sustained meditation on the “haunting of the former land.” It begins in muted, almost matter-of-fact style, with a snapshot of another young African traveller, this one more privileged than the street vendors of “O Lisboa” and “O Africans…”, and yet patently not “fitting in” — carrying a suitcase, intended to hold books, but also functioning in the poem as marker of unbelonging. This time, Goodison’s interlocutor is Jacob, a student in a North American university; if one were to compare this poem to the much earlier “To the Tall Comrade,” it is noteworthy that the person who embodies Africa here is a vulnerable young man in whom
Goodison manifests a motherly interest, as opposed to the commanding male figure who dominated the other, apparently Afrocentric, poem. The speaker’s voice in “Remember Us in Motherland” conveys authority, and at times sadness, as if maturity has brought with it a certain loss of illusion, as if she has moved beyond the dream of réenracinement:

You say your name is Jacob; your kente cloth shirt
is woven in red and ochre and you wander
the corridors of Angell Hall with a small suitcase
in search of extra texts I give away to students.
I gave them all away but I’ve retained questions.

Many questions, Jacob, questions and meditations. (Oracabessa 43)

The first stanza quoted above is disturbing, seeming to introduce dissonance into this meeting/confrontation of two worlds more closely linked in earlier poems such as “Africa on the Mind Today.” The very name Jacob may appear to be at odds with the kente cloth which the young man wears as if to assert/flaunt undiluted heritage, serving in the poem as a reminder that there is no fixity even in the motherland, that the colonial intrusion resulted in a cultural commingling that has left continental Africans, as well as the peoples of the diaspora, forever changed. One may read the persona’s words, in this opening stanza, as a petulant challenge to her African student/brother, as if undermining his purpose in the alien environment of Angell Hall (the name of a building at the University of Michigan where Goodison taught for many years), through which he wanders. The poem quickly gathers emotional intensity, with a tone wavering between the querulous, the solemnly elegiac and, though less frequent, the celebratory. At times, as in these early lines, the teacher/persona is plaintive, and is on her own quest for knowledge to be gleaned (perhaps), from one whose “genuine” Africanness gives him an insuperable advantage. There is in this exploration of loss and survival a persistent note of wistfulness, occasionally sharpened by a contained rancour, that of the “outside child,” emerging from the penumbra of assumed illegitimacy, and yet not fully secure in his identity:

The ones transported, do you recall them? Say
sing of them in sorrow songs? hold sacred
their dropped altars and makeshift shrines

the rough heaped tokens left behind by the stolen
as plea for Africa never to forget them… (Oracabessa 43)

A more specific, more personal question has to do with the much revered African foremother, as if the persona’s confidence in her ancestor’s place in history needs to be buttressed, endorsed by the original oral genealogists, by those who inscribe stories in “grey headbooks” (43). One might see in the lines that
follow a disturbing contradiction, highlighting the lacunae of memory or, more troubling, the erasure from history of those who should be remembered and mourned; for if the foremother was “legend on the Guinea Coast,” one would expect a formulation less tentative than that contained in the question “might there be griots…?”:

Jacob, might there be griots who in grey headbooks 
retain chapters on my own captured foremother 
who passed from castle into ship’s belly bottom?

My foremother was legend on the Guinea Coast 
as the woman who, even with her tongue 
pressed down by iron, would not stop chanting. (43)

Though urgent, these questions are manifestly rhetorical, and Jacob’s voice strangely muted. But his assumed presence through the seven-page long poem positions the little known African student as the one who mediates, for the West Indian poet, the emotions and experiences of those who were not “transplanted” or “stolen.” Several stanzas further on, there are welcome moments of exuberance, as the poet defies space and time to fly away to the Africa that she imagines; for after all:

…athletic imagination can

borrow and Usain Bolt me swift back and forth in time.

I’ve been propelled to Abena Busia’s village.

There I crouched in thickets to see the compassionate 
hide the snatched free from coffles; break yoke off 
rubbed raw necks, hack chains off linked ankles… (45)

The creative use of the name of the prodigious sprinter as a verb (to “Usain Bolt” me!) may be seen as an assertion of Jamaican identity, of Jamaican audacity and accomplishment, and wonderfully demonstrates the inventiveness allowed by the Creole language, which, as Velma Pollard has pointed out, Goodison is adept at exploiting. At the same time, the reference to the village of the Ghanaian critic Abena Busia allows the persona to also lay claim to Africa: the choice of this particular village is not, I think, gratuitous, since a substantial proportion of the slave population of Jamaica originated from the then Gold Coast, now Ghana. In this section of the poem, the mood of mourning is alleviated by the persona’s vision of a compassionate community in which some did what they could to hold on to their own: this is a narrative of covert resistance, a notion conveyed by gestures of caring and courage, giving agency to those bold enough to “hide the snatched” and to “hack chains…” (45). Yet the images
and trappings of violence which form the very essence of the history of enslavement — the “coffles,” the “yoke,” the “rubbed raw necks” — overwhelm the poet’s and perhaps the reader’s imagination, making it difficult to assimilate the less told stories of individual generosity. There are no happy endings, no easy tales of redemption here. But several lines further on, the complex answer to Jacob’s dolorous question (“Where in the world…are the burying grounds for slaves?” (47)) speaks at least in part of survival and renaissance, in the canefields and highways of the “New World”:

In the blue boneyard of the Atlantic; along whale roads, railways,

and highways; in mortar edifices of empires, fields of sugar cane,
cotton, tobacco, and humus at the root of cotton trees; in Jazz,
and Rocksteady; in our music. I crossed with my people, you know,

I came with them as chanter girl. (47)

The shift from the personal (Goodison talking to her student) to the public narrative (Goodison assuming the role of griote) is striking in the use of the first person pronoun to mark the presence of a semi-magical figure (divinity or muse?) who “crossed with [her] people,” as “chanter girl” (47). It is interesting also to note the inclusiveness which seeks to redeem the inherent tragedy of this narrative of dispersal, as the poetic vision embraces the descendants of Africans sent to North America — who would construct edifices in which they had no place and highways destined for others — as well as those enslaved in the West Indies, consigned to canefields.

In this section of the poem, once again music, while not curing all ills, is both a strategy for survival and an exuberant affirmation of selfhood. So the persona is able to “rock steady” through troubled waters of memory. At the same time, some episodes from the past allow her to go even further, offering cause for celebration, as they demonstrate an admirable New World inventiveness and resilience. In a striking sequence which draws on the beliefs of a culturally plural Caribbean, Goodison evokes strong female figures from both European and Antillean mythology, ending with an allusion to the quasi-mythical Jamaican, Nanny of the Maroons, and her supposed ability to catch bullets with her buttocks:

Rivermummas lap their scale tails in wet caves till hurricanes tear past.

Holy Mother of the sea, what does she there in underwater rooms?
chatelaines a staff of water maids to keep the sea bed washed clean
as the sand floor of Jamaica’s great Jewish synagogue.
But in the world pantheon of goddesses Grandy Nanny aces a Valkyrie or an Amazon; place her atop a cotton tree colonnade, wreath her in a camouflage crown of quakoo bush; she is to wickedness a great wall of bounce back; bullets ricocheted off her hinder parts as she lifted her frock braveheart style and exposed her mighty fortress. (48-49)

The language of these verses appears to underscore the thematic focus on hybridity, with abrupt changes of register (from the very formal “what does she there…” to the colloquial “aces”) and multiple allusions, inscribing cultural difference. It is near the end of the poem, immediately after these words, which seemed to valorize a creolized identity, that the persona imperiously asks Jacob to communicate to a griot familiar with her particular lineage a wish, even a plea to be remembered, a wish which is also an affirmation of affiliation, of kinship. In this final imagined dialogue with African brother/son, Goodison enacts a ritual of reconciliation, once again invoking the Guinea woman who would be the first of a line of survivors, identified here by their “blacktar skin” (49). One notes that Goodison’s use of “downpression,” a lexical item evocative of Dread Talk, in lines that speak of the African heritage—of the past—is a potent linguistic reminder of her inalienable Jamaicanness, of a certain hybridity, of the ever renewable creativity of the present:

So Jacob, if you find the griot tell her, tell him, that till I lend

my blacktar skin into whatever earthroad I will be interred; on behalf of foremother who pushed back downpression through muzzle-tongue of iron,

remember us in motherland. (49)

Asked in a 1986 interview to elaborate on his sometimes controversial comments on the relationship between the West Indian writer and Africa, Derek Walcott remarked: “The Caribbean very often refuses to cut that umbilical cord to confront its own stature. So a lot of people exploit an idea of Africa out of both the wrong kind of pride and the wrong kind of heroic idealism” (Hirsch 79). Lorna Goodison is obviously devoid of the capacity for such exploitation of the “idea of Africa,” and the collection, Oracabessa, displays both the allegiance to ancestors manifest in her early work, and a new perspective, a refusal to freeze the experience of African peoples — still kinfolk — in time. The often quoted “Guinea Woman” which traced the genealogy which led great grandmother to give birth to “the first Mulatta,” ended by foregrounding subsequent generations in whom the persona sees the racial origin stamped anew:
I see your features blood dark
appearing
in the children of each new
breeding.
The high yellow brown
is darkening down.
Listen, children,
it’s great grandmother’s turn. (Selected Poems 65)

Here, as elsewhere, Goodison plays provocatively with the discourse of racism, choosing “blood dark” over the predictable idiom “blood red.” Similarly, at the end of “Remember Us in Motherland,” the epithet “blacktar” is unexpected and memorable: the abbreviation of the comparative phrase “black as tar” is a fruitful, valorizing rewriting, expunging the negativity associated with the racist taxonomy still lingering in some postcolonial societies. The identity of the persona is ambiguous, and perhaps the poet speaks not only in her own voice but as the collective “I”. In discussing Goodison’s early volume Heartsease, Denise deCaires Narain has commented that “…at the level of content — and, more fundamentally, of form — Goodison’s poetic identity is one which is so strongly allied to ‘the people’ that the individuated poetic voice merges with the collective, so that she becomes the body politic” (161). deCaires Narain also observes, however, that the writer shifts “to a more individuated poetic role” (157) in later collections, specifically Turn Thanks and To Us, All Flowers Are Roses. Almost thirty years ago, Edward Baugh wrote of Goodison that “her voice, personal and unmistakable as it is, is increasingly, and whether she knows it or not, the voice of a people” (21). I believe that both critical judgments point to aspects of Goodison’s practice which are still manifest in Oracabessa, a volume in which one senses that in several ways, the poet, in maturity, has arrived at a place of relative serenity, even as she continues to grapple with issues of self-identification which affect her personally, but which also confront the people for whom she is understated but loyal porte-parole.

Thus, the “I” of the last few lines of “Remember Us in Motherland” is the great granddaughter of the beloved, quasi-mythical Guinea woman, but also the “ordinary” [move to end of sentence] Jamaican who identifies, however tentatively, and without benefit of certified family tree, with African forebears. The poem finally focuses not on biological métissage but on choice, on the individual choice — irrespective of pigmentation — to honour the lineage, and the continent, represented by the speaker’s “blacktar” skin.

Notes

1 The podcast is the work of members of the Literatures in English section, UWI, St. Augustine.

2 It would be interesting to investigate how this list might be revised in 2015 (the comments quoted are from a 1999 collection).
3 Aimé Césaire made this comment in the text *Lettre à Maurice Thorez*, in which he was resigning from the French Communist Party.

4 Césaire himself advocated this change in the political status of the French West Indian colonies, which by a 1946 law became “Overseas Departments of France”. At the time of the measure, long before other Caribbean and West African colonies of European nations gained their independence, it seemed a favourable shift in the colonial relationship between Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyane and the “métropole.”

5 This creative revisioning was the subject of an extraordinary presentation on “Nettleford’s NDTC: Folk Origins and Contemporary Aesthetics,” at the third Rex Nettleford Arts Conference, Edna Manley College of the Visual and Performing Arts, 14-17 October 2015.

6 The normal spelling is Abeokuta.

7 In discussing “linguistic overlapping” in Goodison’s poetry, Pollard comments that “…the occasional JC item is woven into a poem whose fabric is undoubtedly SJE [Standard Jamaican English]” (246).

8 The writer has confirmed, in a telephone interview in October 2015, that the poem was in part inspired by an actual encounter and lengthy conversation with an African student, although obviously it also springs from questions which she had put to herself. Interestingly, the student did ask the poignant question regarding the burying place of the slaves.

9 J. Edward Chamberlin says of Goodison in *Come Back to Me My Language*: “…she dignifies all that people do and all the places they live, however humble, by the quality of her attention; and she celebrates the nobility of ordinary things” (198).

**Works Cited**


Migration, Manhood and Melancholia in the Work of Caryl Phillips

Craig A. Smith

The terror of the mirror held up by one’s own self up to one’s broken nature

Kamau Brathwaite, *The Zea Mexican Diary* (151)
Throughout his writing career, Caryl Phillips’s oeuvre has challenged a history that tells us that black voices and black stories do not matter. He has done this while simultaneously challenging a code of masculinity that demands that (black) men’s pain and trauma go unvoiced and unrecorded. To this end, he joins other Caribbean writers such as Kamau Brathwaite, for example, who suggests: “NO/BODY bizness wid im [Caribbean men’s] grief & / dislocation. im is suppose to cope /'(real man’ na cry et etc etc)/ & stann up pun im onetwofeets” (Zea Mexican 174-75). It is to this unacknowledged “grief”—a kind of “dislocation”—that I would suggest Phillips addresses. Collectively, Phillips’s work both speaks out against and bears witness to a history of the silenced traumatic experiences of emigrating Afro-Caribbean males who suffer from what Freud might describe as a kind of melancholia, an internalized irrevocable sense of longing and loss, caused by their migration. Melancholia can serve as an overarching framework to discuss the psychological conditions of virtually all of Phillips’s male protagonists. Engendered by migration, melancholia is compounded by the loss of racial identity and patriarchal privilege that occurs when Phillips’s protagonists move away from their island homes to relocate to the United Kingdom and the United States. The condition is worsened once they internalize the dehumanizing shame and pain caused by the systemic racism they encounter in these countries.

In this essay I will focus on several of Phillips’s texts: Where There is Darkness (1982), A State of Independence (1986) and Dancing in The Dark (2005). Initially, these works seem quite disparate: they are structurally very different—as the first is a stage play, the second is a fictional narrative and the last is a biographical fiction; they are published roughly twenty years apart; they are set in England, the Caribbean and the United States respectively; and finally, the temporal setting between the first two texts and the latter is a difference of about fifty years. Despite these disparities, however, I contend that they can be read as part of a single larger melancholic metanarrative. Each of the texts provides a bit more insight into an archetypal troubled male character.

The earlier text, Where There is Darkness, is set in England on the eve of Albert Williams’s return to his West Indian homeland after a twenty-one year residence in England. The play reveals Albert’s profound sense of alienation and disconnection from his son and his wife. A State of Independence, on the other hand, is set on an unnamed Caribbean island on the day Bertram Francis, an Afro-Caribbean male migrant, returns to his Caribbean homeland after twenty years in England, the novel explores the alienation he experiences upon his return. The novel, interestingly, reveals virtually nothing of Bertram’s experiences while in England. Dancing in the Dark, conversely, focuses exclusively on the traumatic experiences of the protagonist Bert Williams who is originally from the Bahamas but now living in the United States. At the time, Bert Williams was the highest paid and most famous Black entertainer in America. He achieved his success by performing in blackface. Though he has achieved the American Dream, Williams leads a miserable life, disconnected from family and friends.

What readers see in Dancing in the Dark, then, is what remains unseen and unspoken in the earlier texts. Like most of Phillips’s work, these three texts explore issues of migration, displacement, unbelonging, and fragmentation. However, up to the publication of Dancing in the Dark (2005), what makes them stand apart from the rest of his oeuvre is Phillips’s exclusive focus on a single Afro-Caribbean male protagonist. While all of Phillips’s texts feature at least one Black male character; that character usually shares the central narrative with a white female. All five novels between A State of Independence and Dancing in the Dark, from Higher Ground (1989) to A Distant Shore (2003) share this feature. It is only in the former two novels that an Afro-Caribbean male maintains the primary focus throughout.
It is no surprise that the three texts I focus on here also reference key historical moments; Albert Williams, for example, is a part of the Windrush Generation, Bertram Francis returns on the eve of his island’s independence and Bert Williams’s story takes place during the turn of the twentieth century. While these historical moments are often the focus for other writers, in much of his work, Caryl Phillips actively engages with, complicates, troubles, or even reinvents received history. This engagement with the past, particularly that of people of African descent, is an important aspect of his work as this history continues to inform our present. Stephen Clingman makes this very point in his discussion of Phillips’s *A Distant Shore*, where he suggests: “The past is irredeemably part of the present in a way that haunts, trails and intrudes—the dust and ice in the tail of a comet that the present will never escape” (54). Through his engagement with the past, Phillips forces his readers to confront a history that is oftentimes traumatic and one that some would rather remain hidden. However, an honest engagement in history helps us to understand where we have come from and provides some explanation as to who we are today. I am particularly interested in the ways and reasons for Phillips’s uses of the lives of his male protagonists as a means of voicing a silenced history.

In an essay discussing *Cambridge*, another of Phillips’s novel, Evelyn O’Callaghan suggests that: “In attempting to shed light on the past, Phillips has chosen to explore the voids, gaps between cultures, races and sexes” (40). This statement is not only true of *Cambridge*, but applies to all of his work. It is in filling the gaps and the voids that Phillips is most genius. Phillips is not interested in simply retelling the history as it appears in the colonial archives or traditional historical texts; in many cases, he purposely blurs the lines between fact and fiction, the real and the unreal, documented histories and historical creative (re)imaginations. This creative (re)imagination or as O’Callaghan might call it, “hybrid… syncretic fabrication” (40), is an important aspect of Phillips’s work since it allows him to expose the constructedness of history while also enabling him to represent those whose stories may have been deemed unimportant, whose voices may have been left out of the written histories.

One such voice belongs to Bert Williams who, despite being one of the most famous American entertainers of his time, has all but disappeared from contemporary popular memory and discourse. That Williams was a black man, a Caribbean immigrant and fiercely guarded about his life story undoubtedly plays some part in his lack of popularity. In (re)creating the narrative of Bert Williams’s life in *Dancing in the Dark*, then, given the lack of recorded accounts of Williams’s life and history, Phillips has had to move beyond the limits of public recorded memory and create a history that relies on a collective communal memory. Jenny Sharpe posits that, for Phillips, the act of “memory does not [simply] involve recovering the past” (157). On the contrary, he works actively as I have already suggested to problematize the ways we engage with history and the present. In an interview with Sharpe, Phillips explains that:

> [t]he larger historical question regarding memory has to do with our own collective memory of history as a community, as a society. So my way of subverting received history is to use historical documents, use first-person voices, digest what they’re saying, and somehow rework them. (157)
So while Phillips’s work may reference actual historical figures, locales, and events, readers must remain aware of his active, imaginative vision of these histories. It is on the border of fact and fiction, historical revisions, and public memory that he attempts to provide readers with new ways of understanding their present social, political, economic and psychological conditions. In the essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” Stuart Hall suggests that, in the new visual and cinematic representations, Caribbean artists need to be more than mere archeologists digging up the history of Caribbean people that the colonizers have buried, but should become involved in the production of identity. He further argues that “[w]e cannot and should not, for a moment, underestimate or neglect the importance of the act of imaginative re-discovery” (393). This imaginative re-discovery is especially important when attempting to tell the stories of those who have been marginalized. Phillips’s “imaginative re-discovery” of his male protagonists, specifically Bert Williams, introduces readers to new ways of thinking through the effects of migration on Afro-Caribbean masculinities.

Not Sadness but Melancholia

In “Melancholy-Gender-Refused Identification,” Judith Butler explains: “In melancholia, a loss is refused...internalization is the way in which loss is preserved in the psyche” (5). While, according to Freud, loss and the subsequent melancholia are a part of the human condition, Anne Anlin Cheng suggests: “[a]s a model of ego-formation (the incorporation as self of an excluded other), melancholia provides a provocative metaphor for how race in America, or more specifically how the act of racialization, works” (Cheng’s italics, 50). Cheng suggests that in America, the minority is “the object of white melancholia” (51), but the minority “is also a melancholic subject, except that what she renounces is herself” (53). Cheng explains Freud’s cogent distinctions between mourning and melancholia:

Freud posits a firm distinction between mourning and melancholia. His 1917 essay on “Mourning and Melancholia” proposes melancholia as a pathological version of mourning--pathological because, unlike the successful and finite work of mourning, the melancholic cannot “get over” loss; rather, loss is denied as loss and incorporated as part of the ego. In other words, the melancholic is so persistent and excessive in the remembrance of loss that that remembrance becomes part of the self. (50)

I wish to use this concept of melancholia as a way to think through Phillips’s representation of his Afro-Caribbean male protagonists. Melancholia as it is represented through these characters ultimately results in paralysis, as its victims are neither able to move forward nor return from whence they came. The characters all suffer from a loss, but it is a loss that they can never be free of and never get over. In the three cases, this loss occurs once they leave their island homes where they imagine themselves to have been whole men.¹ The idealized memory of a perceived whole-self with an intact masculine identity in the Caribbean is juxtaposed with a fractured self-identity and limited expressions of masculinity in the metropolis and leads to an impasse for Phillips’s men; they forever see themselves as incomplete and haunted by a past to which they long to return.²

Once they migrate, Phillips’s male protagonists become acutely aware of a loss, it is a loss that they may not be able to articulate but one that affects their very being. In “Caribbean Masculinity: Unpacking the Narrative,” Linden Lewis explains that in the concept of masculinity, power and control are central:
Masculinity is predicated on the presumption of power, whether real or imagined. Though not all men exercise power, all nevertheless view it as an entitlement. Masculinity therefore is often associated with access to and control over resources, privilege and status. (97)

None of the three male characters is able to achieve this masculine ideal once he migrates. Daniel Coleman’s “hypothesis for Masculine Migrations,” found in the preface of his text of the same name, may be helpful here. Coleman writes:

…since the experience of migration involves a process in which the immigrant brings one set of cultural codes and assumptions into a setting where another set predominates, the immigrant is likely to have to negotiate between the two. In other words, values and beliefs [and power] that may be unconsciously assumed at home are disrupted in migration, and the immigrant usually goes through a process of re-evaluation and adjustment. (xii)

But what happens to those men who are never able to “adjust” because they are unable to let go of the fantasy of the past in which they had access to patriarchal power? Indeed, even before the initial migration, many black Caribbean men may have not actually possessed power but they no doubt “imagined” that they did.

This is one of the ways in which migration and melancholia affect men and women differently. To be sure, Caribbean women who migrate also feel a similar sense of loss as Caribbean men; however, in analyzing novels about Caribbean women who migrate, Maria Christina Rodríguez points out several important differences between women who migrate and their male counterparts; firstly, she suggests that: “Caribbean women always migrate to acquire some degree of independence” (12), and she explains that new job opportunities lead to them being more empowered, financially and sexually. For her, “Caribbean women often find in the metropole a freedom they never experienced at home” (13). She then goes on to explain that “women become nostalgic, … they recall … good memories: love and sharing…. But they also remember clearly the problematic situations back home—poverty, loss of land, kinship abuse” (19). Rodríguez cites Gayle Greene who explains the difference between nostalgia and to remember: “whereas ‘nostalgia’ is the desire to return home, ‘to remember’ is to ‘bring to mind’ or ‘think again,’ ‘to be mindful of,’ ‘to recollect’ (297)” (qtd. in Rodríguez 19). The relationship those women have with their past, then, is very different than the relationship Phillips’s male characters have with a past. Where these women refuse to idealize the past and the hardships they faced—in large part due to patriarchal masculinity—Phillips’s male characters hold on to an idealized past and refuse to let it go. Further, if we are to accept that women who migrate develop a more empowered sense of self where she is not as dependant on the male, then we can see how this loss of power (over “his” woman) could further engender a sense of melancholia in the male.

That Phillips’s male protagonists are self-destructive and ultimately unable to fulfill their (human) potential is no surprise since they are unable to move beyond their pain—they suffer from melancholia, which Cheng explains:

produces a peculiarly ghostly form of ego formation. Moreover, the incorporation of loss still retains the status of the original lost object as loss; consequently, as Freud reminds us, by incorporating and identifying with the ghost of the lost one, the melancholic takes on the emptiness of the ghostly presence and in this way participates in his/her own self-denigration. (50)
It is clear that the three characters that I will analyze here suffer from a sense of emptiness and, throughout the narratives, they all search to find ways of filling that void. Albert Williams and Bert Williams, each blames migration for his profound sense of displacement and loss of identity. Their loss of identity in many ways is connected to their racial positioning in their new home spaces. In an interview with Vikki Bell, Butler discusses her views on the intersections between race, melancholia and migration:

So to the extent that the history of race is linked to a history of diasporic displacement it seems to me that melancholia is there, that there is, as it were, inscribed in ‘race’ a lost and ungrievable origin, one might say, an impossibility of return, but also an impossibility of an essence. (170)

In another interview, Caryl Phillips echoes Butler when he suggests: “One can never go back. The old Garveyite dream of returning to Africa makes no sense. A lot of the people are saying that in England now. Older folk, pensioners, have begun to understand that there is no return to Trinidad or Barbados” (qtd. in Sharpe 157). This melancholic attachment to a lost and irretrievable home—and self, as we shall see, is also echoed by several of Phillips’s characters. Albert Williams, Bertram Francis and Bert Williams all develop a similar melancholic attachment to a Caribbean home place and identity to which they can never return. While Bertram Francis does physically move back to his island home, his sense of loss remains. At the novel’s end, Bertram is as adrift on his small island home as he ever was in England. Albert Williams and Bert Williams would undoubtedly encounter the same fate, were they to return to the Caribbean, since it could never live up to the idyllic space they have constructed in their mind’s eye.

States of Mourning and Melancholia

While they exist in different literary worlds, Albert Williams, Bertram Francis and Bert Williams are connected. Bénédicte Ledent traces the intertextuality of Phillips’s work, explaining how his earlier plays provide the basis for his novels. Of specific interest here, Ledent explains that Albert Williams is closely linked to Bertram Francis of A State of Independence. Albert, “after more than twenty years in England where he made good in material terms, is about to go back to his native Caribbean in a self-deceptive attempt to return to a simpler way of life, while in fact running away from himself and his relational failures” (Ledent 11-12). Bertram’s story of return, then, can be seen as an extension of or reinterpretation of Albert’s story. But as with its predecessor, the end of State of Independence leaves readers to question the fate of the protagonist. In other words, even in the play’s reimagining as a novel, the fate of the protagonist remains unclear and Albert/Bertram’s story seems incomplete.

Phillips also uses Bertram’s narrative to further elucidate the “paradoxical condition of post-coloniality” that plagues his characters (Thomas 22). The novel ultimately exposes Albert’s fallacy and explores the more disturbing reality of return. The fantasy of a paradisiacal homecoming as Albert imagines is not possible. Where Albert, according to Ledent, is running away from “relational failures,” we see that Bertram has returned home and is also confronted with “relational failures.” We can see then that these two characters could be read as representative of one narrative arch. Phillips uses these characters to highlight one aspect of Caribbean immigration. Helen Thomas explains that Phillips “imbued [Bertram] with some of the conditions and ambivalences characteristic of protagonists within other texts dealing with the paradoxical conditions of post-coloniality” (22). Rodriguez may
be useful for understanding at least one aspect of this paradox; she explains the “no-win situation for the immigrant, [since] the center creates the conditions of marginalization and then blames the marginalized for not functioning inside the center itself” (9).

Following Ledent and Thomas’s lead, I propose that Phillips continues his (re)visioning, with a third character in another narrative. I want to suggest that Albert Williams of Where There is Darkness, who becomes Bertram Francis of A State of Independence, eventually becomes Egbert/Bert Williams of Dancing in the Dark. While the three characters do share similar first names Albert/Bertram/Egbert and two of them the same last name, Williams, I wish to contend that it is the protagonists’ preoccupation with return (to their island homes) as salvation, which is the most salient connection of the three texts. Not to be overlooked in my analysis, too, is the theme of darkness that is invoked in the title of two of the texts: Where There is Darkness and Dancing in the Dark. For me, the trope of “darkness” is quite telling especially in thinking through the idea of the loss of identity. This darkness is symbolic, I would argue, of the melancholia from which each of the protagonists suffers. To be sure, a reading of Where There is Darkness is not necessary in order to understand and appreciate A State of Independence and likewise, it is not necessary to read A State of Independence in order to understand Dancing in the Dark. However, reading these three works as parts of a larger narrative provides insight into one aspect of the “paradoxical condition of post-coloniality” (Thomas 22), or as I intend to show, the complex concerns of migration, melancholia and Afro-Caribbean masculinity, themes that I argue permeate Phillips’s body of work.

In Where There is Darkness, we meet Albert Williams, a dominating and abusive patriarch who is so at odds with his past that by the play’s end, he completely loses touch with his present reality. The time frame of the play spans approximately eight to ten hours, beginning at the end of Albert’s going away party and ending just before he is scheduled to leave England to retire in his Caribbean homeland. Throughout the play, Albert experiences several memory flashbacks, staged as visions only he can see; he is literally haunted by his past. These memories include: his leaving the Caribbean and arriving in England with his new wife Muriel and their newborn son, Remi, in tow; his meeting of a fellow West Indian, Vince, who befriends him and whom he [Albert] later betrays; and his meeting and subsequent affair then rejection of his white English lover, Lynn. When these memories possess Albert, he is inaccessible to Ruth, his current wife, and Remi who both, unsuccessfully, attempt to communicate with Albert during these flashback episodes. But Albert builds a wall of silence around himself, effectively creating an unbridgeable chasm between himself and his family. The play ends with Albert, a man adrift and alone, unable or unwilling to communicate with his wife or his son. He seems to suffer a mental breakdown and imagines himself as already returned to the Caribbean of his birth; he wanders off the stage hearing the sea and commenting on how good it is to be back home. He strips off his clothes while deciding whether he wants to pick mangos and then go swimming or vice versa (63). All the while, Remi begs Albert to talk to him.

A State of Independence begins with Bertram Francis’s return home after a relatively undistinguished twenty years in England. Bertram differs from Albert in this respect as Albert distinguishes himself socially and financially while there. In fact, he boasts to Remi of his achievements as “Executive Social Worker and Magistrate,” and owner of “this house, two cars and a flat” (27). The far less successful Bertram returns to the Caribbean on the eve of the nation’s independence, hoping to reconcile with family and friends with whom he has lost contact, reestablish his residency and start his own business
on the independent island. But Bertram’s return is not greeted with the jubilation he initially expected, since his family and friends now consider him a stranger and seem more annoyed than pleased that he has returned.

Like Albert, Bertram is also haunted by ghosts of his past. He revels in his memories of his exploits with his brother, George, his teenage love affair with a virginal Patsy and his schoolboy friendship with Jackson Clayton. But he returns to discover that his brother has died, Patsy is a single mother of an adult son (who, as it turns out, may be Albert’s child) and Jackson has become an ethically questionable politician. Also, like Albert, Bertram hides behind a wall of silence. The text offers very little information regarding Bertram’s time away from home, and he himself is reluctant to discuss his experiences in England. On the occasions when Bertram is asked directly about his time in England, he is, like Albert, either unwilling or unable to put his experiences into words. Upon his return, all of Bertram’s interactions with his mother and former friends are haunted by awkward silences, especially when he is asked about England. This obscurity around what happens in England – both Bertram’s and the text’s – is indicative, I would suggest, of his traumatic experiences there, experiences so destabilizing that victims remain unwilling or unable to articulate their horrors.

Despite the text’s lack of information about what happened to him in England, readers understand that Bertram’s migratory experience has changed him. The Bertram who leaves the Caribbean for England is not—the Bertram who returns after twenty years. Migration changes those who take part in the process whether willingly or by force. Clingman suggests that “[t]he passage across water—as in the original Black Atlantic passage—is a place of transition, trauma, and indissoluble time: an experience that will live on forever” (Clingman 54-55). The journey across the water transforms both Albert and Bertram into the other. This transformation is psychologically violent and traumatic and engenders self-alienation because it oftentimes includes a stripping away of one’s identity.

While Phillips does not describe Bertram’s arrival in England, he does depict a similar arrival in the pages of his first novel, *The Final Passage* (1985). In this novel, a young couple migrates to England in search of a better life for themselves and their newborn child (similar to Albert and Muriel). But as a close reading of the arrival scene reveals, loss of identity is the initial crisis encountered by many black male migrants to the metropole. As the boat docks in England, Michael, the male protagonist, strikes “up a conversation with a group of men, three of them in panama hats and double-breasted suits, the fourth in trilby and blazer and Oxford bags” (140). Though this conversation covers three pages, Phillips never clarifies the individual identities of the men who take part in the conversation. Michael, who up until this point in the narrative is very distinctive, is lost among the horde of other black men becoming just one in a number of others. In this scene, the only distinguishing feature between the men is their clothes and even those, for the most part, are uniform. In England, then, Michael becomes just another Caribbean man, a Negro, or worse yet, a nigger. In *Where There is Darkness*, Vince explains as much to Albert the very first day he and Muriel arrive in England. In order to give the couple an understanding of their new home, Vince, an eighteen-year resident, leans into the couple and assuming the role of the English landlord says to them: “Nigger whore, fuck off home and take your picknie with you.” “Sambo, get back on your jam jar.” [Pause.] “In England is legal law to put up a sign saying, ‘No coloureds in this house’ or just ‘No monkeys’” (20). These are the realities faced by the newly arrived West Indian in England. Unfortunately, Albert comes to understand and believe the English construct of blackness and learns to see himself, and other black men, as abject. He tells Remi at one point:
It’s as if this country had opened her great mouth to welcome us, licked us, sucked on us a little, swallowed and passed us out via her bowels. Useless, brown, shapeless objects of waste. Have you ever looked closely at a lump of shit? They say inside every black man is a white man trying to get out. I say inside every lump of shit is a black man trying to get out. (Darkness 60)

Albert’s metaphor here is indicative of the profound change that England has on black men; he likens the experience of a black man entering England to food that is swallowed, digested then passed though the bowels, eventually emerging as a totally different element. Bertram Francis undoubtedly learned the same lessons, faced similar challenges of alienation during his time in England. His refusal to talk about his time there, then, might be seen, in part, as an attempt to maintain some level of power and control via an upholding of patriarchal norms.

Maintaining this marginal position in patriarchy, however, means that he must accept its rules; patriarchy requires that all pain, no matter how damaging or traumatic, must be ignored, denied, silently accepted. bell hooks refers to this stifling of (black) male emotional expression in order to access patriarchal masculinity as “soul murder,” while Janet Billson and Richard Majors refers to it as a “cool pose.” Bertram’s silence, then, may have a lot to do with his attempt to maintain, no matter how tenuous, his position in patriarchy. In fact, in order to save face in the presence of other men, he often elides any hints of his alienation, failures or loneliness while abroad, by extolling the virtues of life in England. At one point, Bertram suggests to Lonnie, a local bartender, that there are benefits to life in England: “Plenty of black people there so you never really getting out of touch” (62). Bertram’s statement here is ironic since he has clearly been out of touch; had he been in touch with his community, he surely would have know about Patsy’s child, Clayton’s political strivings and his own brother’s death. Bertram’s statement, then, only serves to show his own self-deception and his denial of the alienation he suffered while in England.

Interestingly, even though Bertram is unable to name or articulate his experiences in England as traumatic, those around him are able to sense something—I would call it melancholia—in his demeanor. Local shop owner Mr. Carter “stared at him [Bertram] as though he could see some dreadful change that England had wrought in him” (78). Bertram’s mother tells him that people had grown “used to the fact that England had captured [his] soul” (82). She also confronts him regarding his silence about England: “Why it is that you being so damn secretive about the whole thing? Even to this very minute you still don’t have the decency to tell me what happened in England” (84-85). But Bertram’s response to his mother provides her with no clarity:

Nothing happened… England just take me over. New things start to happen to me, new people, like I was born again and everything is fresh… Nothing happened to me in England… A big rich country like that don’t seem to have make any impression on me. I might as well have left yesterday… I think I’m the same fellar (85, my italics).

Reading between the lines of Bertram’s statement reveals, in fact, that England has indelibly changed him; it was an experience in which he “was born again.” To be born again, as in the Christian religion, the old self must die in order for a new self to be reborn; so indeed, by his own account, the Bertram who returns to the Caribbean is transformed because of his transnational experience. Ironically, Bertram’s description of what happened to him in England seems a far cry from Albert’s grotesque illustration but even so, readers are left with the impression of the character passing through the body of England and coming out the other end as something/someone different. But more importantly,
Bertram’s confusing report that “new things start to happen” yet “nothing happened” belies the anxiety around voicing his trauma (85).

Frustrated by his obtuseness, Bertram’s mother ends the conversation, stating “[since] it is really causing you so much pain and trouble to get around to speaking with me on this subject then I don’t want to know” (85). Bertram’s mother’s dismissive comment may in fact be more insightful than even she understands, and the same may be true of Jackson Clayton’s invective: “you [English West Indians] lost for true for you let the Englishman fuck up your heads” (136). Both Bertram’s mother and Clayton unwittingly point to the trauma caused by Bertram’s, and other English West Indians’ migration. When they return—if they ever do—they return as lost souls haunted by the loss of home and self. This is the paradox in which all of Phillips’s protagonists find themselves. The initial loss of home place and identity experienced after migration is irreversible, even if they were to return home. Bertram Francis’s continued alienation on the island and Albert Williams’s witless meandering at the end of Where There is Darkness indicate that there is no happy ending for men who have had this particular experience.

In Where There is Darkness, we see Clayton’s observation of England’s effect on the West Indian ring true as Albert eventually does lose his mind. Albert views his arrival and time spent in England in similar ways as Bertram does; Remi reports that Albert repeatedly told him that “his [Albert’s] life began when he stepped down the stair of the plane and kissed the tarmac at Heathrow” (Darkness 54). Albert also entreats Remi to recognize all the financial benefits and opportunities that England has given him. In reflecting on his time in England, Albert describes only the positive experiences; however, during his flashback memory, the audiences see the truth of his experience—racists at one point firebombed the bar he owned with Vince. Of course, when Albert attempts to retell his story he changes the narrative to one that elides any painful memories. For example, his telling of his arrival in England is different than what the audience sees in the flashback; Sonja, Remi’s girlfriend, reveals this inconsistency in Albert’s narrative when she points out that the Williams family actually arrived in England by boat and not by plane, as in Albert’s recollection (54).

Albert’s trauma leads him to invent a history that is less painful while Bertram Francis’ trauma leads him to shut down. When Bertram attempts to discuss his experiences while in England, he is unable to find the words to do so, most likely because he has suppressed the traumatic experience for so long. After a sexual encounter, Patsy asks Bertram about his life in England, but “every time he formulated a sentence that could lead him into some kind of clarification of his life in England, his thoughts became too complex and he withdrew” (State 149-50). Bertram asked that Patsy not make him discuss his life in England since he feared that “it [would] come out upside down” (State 150). He eventually offers Patsy the simple facts of his stay: “when I arrived in England everything was either fascinating or frustrating or both. Things sometimes difficult…. After two years they tell me I must leave the college so I take a job. Then I take a next one and so on, until my time just slide away from me” (150-151). Bertram’s just the facts report is devoid of any emotional connection to England. He has managed to dissociate himself from his time there. When Patsy surmises that Bertram
does not feel at home in England, he counters: “I don’t yet feel at home back here either” (152). This in-betweenness, this un-belonging is a characteristic tragedy of Phillips’s black male Caribbean immigrant. Another of Phillips’s characters, Sonja, explains the predicament of Bertram’s and other first generation Caribbean migrants: “They change faster than the countries they have left behind and they can never go back and be happy. Yet they can’t be happy in their adopted countries because it’s not home” (Darkness 47). In other words, they suffer from melancholia, forever attempting to reconnect to an idealized past that can never be reclaimed. This melancholia furthers the inability to articulate pain, and so furthers the silence.

As is often the case in Phillips’s texts, the unsaid becomes as important as what is said. By maintaining the silence around Bertram’s (and Albert’s) life in England Phillips strategically brings more attention to and forces readers to question exactly what happened to them while there. Conscientious readers, then, must work to uncover this history. Though Bertram is never able to acknowledge his loss and the alienation and conflict it engenders within his psyche, an analysis of his inner thoughts uncovers that it results in melancholia. In his conversation with Patsy:

> [h]is mind sailed back to those first few months in England…and the frustration of trying to understand a people who showed no interest in understanding him…he had felt compelled to relinquish his family photographs, for they had become a reminder of loneliness as opposed to a temporary cure….His only regret had been that he did not have a photograph of Patsy to jettison. (151-52)

Bertram’s way of coping with the pain of separation from his family and friends is to eradicate all memories of them from his mind. These memories of an old life in his new home would have been too much to endure, so he attempts to forget. But it is a slippery slope between mourning and melancholia. Indeed, Cheng suggests that mourning and melancholia exist on somewhat of a continuum. She explains: “Freud’s idea of a proper mourning begins to suffer from melancholic contamination” (Cheng’s italics, 53). She goes on, to suggest that a healthy “letting go” for Freud requires complete eradication of the loved object as “[t]he denigration and murder of the beloved object fortifies the ego” (53). Bertram’s total separation from his family and friends can be read as an attempt to thoroughly “kill” his past and move beyond melancholia. However, Cheng poignantly asks:

> How different is this in aim from the melancholic who hangs onto the lost object as part of the ego in order to live? That is to say, although different in method and technology (the mourner kills while the melancholic cannibalizes), the production of denigration and rejection, however re-introjected is concomitant with the production and survival of “self.” The good mourner turns out to be none other than an ultrasophisticated, and more lethal, melancholic. (53)

Though Cheng problematizes Freud’s neat divide between the mourner and the melancholic, she nevertheless agrees that, ultimately, the objective of both mourner and melancholic is the survival of self.

**New Land, New Men**

But Albert’s and Bertram’s narratives are only the beginning of Phillips’s investigation of migration and melancholia as they affect the Afro-Caribbean man. It is within the narrative of Bert
Williams that Phillips is able to find the inspiration and the perfect metaphorical figure with which he could explore the complexities of this experience. While the first two narratives investigate the experiences of Afro-Caribbean men who migrate to England at the middle of the twentieth century and *Dancing in the Dark* is set at the turn of the twentieth century in the United States, I contend that Bert Williams's narrative provides readers with useful insights in understanding the earlier characters. I am suggesting, then, that reading the texts backward, starting with *Dancing in the Dark*, would allow a richer and fuller understanding of the silences found in the former texts.

Phillips’s 2005 novel begins with Bert Williams at the peak of his career; it is 1903, several years after Williams’s life changing decision to don burnt cork and perform in blackface. So when readers meet Bert Williams, like both Albert Williams and Bertram Francis before him, he is already a lost soul; he is withdrawn, friendless, and uncommunicative. It is the initial trauma of Williams’s migration to the United States of America at eleven years old that is the melancholic memory that haunts him throughout his life and sets the stage for his inevitable self destruction. Upon entry into the United States, Bert Williams learns to see himself differently. This is not an uncommon occurrence for migrants. In *Black Skin White Mask*, Frantz Fanon famously wrote that his migration to France left him “recolored” and “clad in mourning” (italics mine, 113). Under the white gaze, Fanon loses his individuality and simply becomes a “nigger.” In this hostile environment, he is left to grieve the loss of the man he once knew himself to be. Likewise, Bert Williams, like other Phillipsian characters before him, is also “recolored” and “clad in mourning.” Even before he darkens his skin with burnt cork, Williams is recolored as “nigger” (17), simply because he is a man of African descent in a racist United States that refuses to see his humanity.

Phillips represents the moment Bert first experiences melancholia, when he writes that upon arriving in America, the Williams family are “encouraged to see themselves as inferior,” Bert notices “the shocked faces of his parents staring at each other,” which leaves him “looking intently at the horizon trying desperately to repossess what his family has recently left behind” (*Dancing* 23). This experience indelibly affects the relationship between Bert and his father, for “since their arrival in America father and son seem to have found it difficult to communicate on any subject” (*Dancing* 14). Bert migrates at age 11, unlike Albert and Bertram who are grown young men when they migrate. Lack of communication, indeed, silence, permeates all of Bert’s subsequent relationships, particularly the relationship with his father. We see a similar lack of communication between Albert and his son Remi in *Where There is Darkness*. This silence becomes a defining aspect of Williams’s psyche. Yelin points out that: “Williams, as Phillips portrays him, is a product of a diasporic trajectory punctuated – or dominated – by racism, variously casual, violent, and soul-killing” (95). Indeed, upon migration, many Afro-Caribbean males must renegotiate their concept of self under the white gaze in the metropolis in ways they did not have to in the Caribbean. This forced renegotiation of identity is violent and traumatic. In discussing the encounter between people of color and the white power structure, Mark Reid suggests that: “Fanon is correct to point out that mental traumas occur when black racial Others meet with the policing agents of white patriarchy” (*PostNegritude* 5).

Throughout his life Williams continues to mourn the loss of both his manhood and his homeland, a loss brought about by his migration. Williams’s memories of his home in the Bahamas, which haunt his dreams, represent the love object that he attempts to jettison but on the contrary, has internalized. In fact, I would argue that these unrelinquished memories of home are the images against which Bert and his father construct their sense of self, while in America. Even as his star begins
to rise on the Broadway stage, Bert’s dreams are disturbed by the memories of: “Hot sun, that is what he remembers most about the Bahamas of his birth. Hot sun, tall trees, and the sound of the sea… and his tall stately father, who walks as though he is balancing the roof of the sky on his head, and his mother, with her light skin and strange green eyes” (*Dancing* 22). For Williams, the Bahamas of his birth represents an Edenic past where he was connected to the land and his family. He remembers a strength and pride embodied by his father who, in this dream/memory, recalls Atlas of Greek mythology, who held the world on his shoulders. Being nurtured in a world where his father seemed godlike, balancing the roof of the sky on his head and then having all of that change abruptly was undoubtedly a rude awakening for Williams. In America, the Williams family is forced to define themselves anew. Williams’s “[h]ot Caribbean past [is] undermined by cold American anxieties” (23):

In this new place they are now encouraged to see themselves as inferior…In this new place called Florida they are not treated as West Indian people who have come to America by steamship and who are keen to work; they are not viewed as migrants who are prepared to remake themselves in the new American world…In this new place they are simply Negroes (*Dancing* 23-24).

The term “negro” is a loaded one. It imbues those defined as such with the heavy weight of its history. Fanon explains, that “[t]he Negro [as seen by the white French] is an animal, the Negro is bad, the Negro is mean, the Negro is ugly” (*Black Skin* 113). Becoming negro on their arrival in the American South, then, the Williams family is stripped of their individual identity, their “Caribbeanness,” their “quiet authority,” which only now lives in Bert’s dreams (*Dancing* 22).

In America, the Williams’s light skin does not retain the authority it did in the islands. Neither does their “refined quality” (23) prevent their being lumped with other negroes. Fanon explains the resultant psychological trauma caused by this eliding of individual identity. He recounts his own encounter with a white child and his mother while in France. Upon seeing him, the child shouts: “Look, a Negro…Mama, see the Negro! I’m frightened!” (112). Fanon analyzes the psychological effects of this child’s interpellation of him as such: “My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day” (*Black Skin* 113). Fanon shows here that in this foreign space and under this foreign (read “white”) gaze, he is no longer the author of his identity; he and other men of African descent, regardless of how they see themselves, are already identified as negro and thus are subject to all the negative connotations that term invokes. He continues:

Assailed at various points, the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema. In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places…[;] I existed triply: I occupied space. I moved toward the other…. And the evanescent other, hostile but not opaque, transparent, not there, disappeared. (*Black Skin* 112)

Here, Fanon describes a process that shatters the unified self, resulting in a tripling of identity accompanied by an obliteration of the self. Prior to Fanon, W.E.B. Du Bois most famously wrote about the psychological splitting of self that occurs when one is confronted by the negative construct of blackness. Du Bois wrote: “it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others… shut out from their world by a vast veil” (*Souls* 2). Like Fanon and Du Bois, Bert’s notion of self is also fractured by the new identity imposed on him when he enters the United States. It seems impossible for victims to merge these different selves. An older Bert contemplates what it would take for him to find a voice in which to communicate to his estranged wife: “[h]e understands that in order to do so he will have to travel… back to a place and to a time when he was not yet two people” (*Dancing* 127).
Bert understands, however, that a reconciliation of this type is impossible in a racist America. Ironically, the burnt cork Bert wears as a performer becomes a physical manifestation of the psychological veil he is forced to live behind.

Neither Bert nor his father ever return to the Bahamas that haunts their memories, but Phillips makes it clear that both men cling to the hope of an eventual return as they are never really at home in the United States. Throughout the novel, both men continually dream of and reminisce about their island home. They internalize the loss and use it to construct their identities as non-American men in America. Theirs is a perpetual struggle, “to be both of the Caribbean and of the United States of America… to be coloreds and niggers, foreigners and the most despised of homegrown sons” (Phillips’s italics, Dancing 24-25). However, despite their efforts to be both one and the other they inevitably fail. During an interview, a reporter asks Bert directly whether “he feels like a Negro American. This question renders Bert ill at ease and he is unsure how to respond” (Dancing 198). The truth is that Bert does not feel like a “Negro American,” and it is doubtful that if he returned to The Bahamas that he would feel at home there either.

The fact that both Bert and his father are haunted by the ghost of their Caribbean identity most pressingly at those moments when confronted by Bert’s performance of blackness (in blackface) reveals the connectedness between migration, melancholia and masculinity. When his father sees Bert’s act for the first time, he questions whether “this real funny nigger is his son?” He wonders: “What has happened to his Bert? His Bahamian son who would sit patiently with him for hours and study the manner in which chickens threw dust behind them… [a time when] Father and son were inseparable” (Phillips’s italics, Dancing 83). Fred, upon seeing his son perform in blackface, is besieged by the loss of their filial bond as well as his (and Bert’s) racial identity and home place. Fred understands that a “nigger” could never be accepted as a man in America. Fred’s instant reaction upon seeing Bert is a longing for an irrevocable past where he and his son were thinking men; men who would study the behavior of the animals around them rather than this present condition as the “animals” that were studied. From this point on, in place of the loving relationship built upon mutual respect and admiration between father and son grows a corrosive and malignant silence that ultimately destroys both men.

Every night of his professional career, Williams would make himself disappear behind a mask of burnt cork; a big lipped, popping-eyed buffoon would replace the light skinned handsome Bert. While Bert Williams began to lose sight of himself with his migration to the United States as a little boy, it is with his adoption of blackface makeup that he completely loses himself. In blackface, Bert grows into a mystery to everyone including himself. In an introspective moment he thinks to himself about how his peers see him: “they look at me and wonder why I am what I am” (Dancing 52). Bert even questions his own identity the first time he wears blackface:

I smear the black into my already sable skin…I am leaving behind Egbert Austin Williams…but just who was this new man and what was his name? Was this actually a man, with his soon-to-be-shuffling feet, and his slurred half speech, and his childish gestures, and his infantile reactions? Who was this fellow? Sambo? Coon? Nigger? (Dancing 57).

While he did not know any blacks who resemble this character, he was certain that his white audience would recognize it: “That’s him! That’s the nigger! He looks like that. And that’s just how he talks. And
he walks just like that. I know him! I know him!” (Dancing 58). The audience will recognize the character in much the same way as the white French boy recognized Fanon as a “nigger.” Nightly, in his dressing room mirror, melancholia takes over Williams as he confronts what he has become in America; he longs to reclaim what he imagines is an authentic self that he connects to his island home.

Masquerade and Desire

I have shown above that upon their migration to the United States, the Williams men internalize the unforgettable loss of home space, racial identity and masculinity and the resultant melancholia that forever changes their relationship. And while Bert’s decision to perform in blackface sets the Williams and Walker team on the road to superstardom, it also ruins his relationship with George, his best friend and performing partner, and his father. But it is Bert’s relationship with his wife, Lottie, which demonstrates the depths of his self-abjection and melancholia. When Bert meets Lottie he is already performing in blackface; however, when Lottie meets him for the first time, she does not meet him in makeup as the buffoon, the caricature of the negro. She meets Egbert Austin Williams, a tall, handsome, well-dressed and dignified man. However, on the night Bert proposes to Lottie “they both hear the word ‘niggers’ fly from a horse-drawn carriage” (Dancing 17). They attempt to ignore the insult but as Phillips makes clear, there is no escape: “Were they to turn around they would still see the word hurting around…picking up speed here, losing tempo there, as purposefully silent as a bird’s flight, yet furiously burning energy deep into the New York night” (Dancing 17). The experience of that night damages Bert and Lottie’s relationship. Louis Yelin suggests that: “[I]n this episode, racist violence derails the sexual awakening of a young black man” (96). This cry of “nigger” proves that in or out of makeup, in America, Bert will always already be painted black and coded as nigger. Furthermore, his inability to protect his fiancée from this verbal attack on this particular night, the night of their engagement, challenges his ability as a man to protect his wife. Bert, like his father, understands that a “nigger” is not regarded as a man; at best he is an emasculated boy and at worst he is an animal. Judith Butler unpacks Fanon’s statement, which addresses this paradox of black men’s exclusion from manhood and humanity:

When Frantz Fanon claimed that “the black is not a man” he conducted a critique of humanism that showed that the human in its contemporary articulation is so fully racialized that no black man could qualify as human… [it] was also a critique of masculinity, implying that the black man is effeminized…the implication…no one who is not a ‘man’ in the masculine sense is a human…. (Undoing Gender 13)

When he hears the word “nigger,” Williams is once again reminded of the paradoxical position he occupies in the United States. The word robs him of citizenship, it robs him of his humanity, and it robs him of his masculinity, and finally, it robs him of his sexuality. With this scene “Phillips underscores the engendering of psychosexual pathologies by the traumas of racism and shows us how identities are formed – and deformed – in the tangled nexus of race, sex, and nationality” (Yelin 97).

The neurosis engendered by the blackfaced Sambo, the nigger, the boy, for Williams is a psychological castration manifested in his lack of sexual desire. Beyond one kiss, Bert appears to have
no sexual desire for Lottie or anyone else for that matter. This one intimacy shared between Bert and his wife occurs on their wedding day. But Bert “prefers some measure of detachment” (Dancing 87). At home, Bert begins to address his wife as “Mother,” a term that effectively desexualizes Lottie and sets the tone for her role in their relationship, that of caregiver. And while the two initially share the same bed, Lottie understands that “there will be no touching” (Dancing 49). His isolation increases as he chooses to spend more of his free time drinking alone at the neighborhood bar. We see similar psychosexual disorders in the earlier texts as well, as Bertram Francis seems to be similarly castrated (though his intimate night with Patsy helps him to move toward healing) and Albert demonstrates abusive and detached behaviors towards the three women with whom he is intimate.

Bert’s, as well as Bertram’s and Albert’s arrested sexual development can certainly be ascribed, in part, to the dehumanizing effect of the epithet “nigger.” In Bert’s case this is further exacerbated by the self-alienation caused by his blackface performances. Cheng observes:

We have all heard the wisdom that women and minorities internalize dominant cultural demands, but do we really know what that means? Where does desire come into the equation? It is a dangerous question to ask what does a minority want. When it comes to political critique, it seems as if desire itself may be what the minority has been enjoined to forget. (54)

Even in the make-believe world of the stage, Bert’s desires are controlled by the whims of the white American public. The expectations of his white audience members are that “niggers” are not capable of love. Aida, George’s wife and Lottie’s best friend, explains: “Prejudice means that, of course, we can never fall in love or have a romance at the center of our Williams and Walker productions…we pretend that we have no such emotions, and we are all guilty of this pretense, all of us. We accept that the remotest suspicion of a love story will condemn us to ridicule” (Dancing 117-18). Phillips’s narrative indicates that the dehumanizing racial slurs and Williams’s blackface performance engender the loss of sexual identity via the merger of self and performed self as asexual. It could be argued then that Bert’s and the other two protagonists’ internalization of this prejudice is at the root of their inability to show intimacy to wives and lovers.

With the application of blackface makeup as he sits in front of his dressing room mirror, Williams erases himself every night, “[w]iped himself clean off the face of the earth so that he found himself staring back at a stranger” (58), and every night stares into the mirror in a vain attempt to reclaim the man he has erased. The narrator suggests “[t]he mirror is the most important part of the room. The mirror and the lightbulbs” (89). The mirror is where Williams attempts to connect with the part of himself that he has lost. But the damage is too extensive; it is impossible for him to return to a unified self and Egbert Austin Williams is forever lost in the mirror. The mirror motif appears again at the end of the text when, laying in his sick bed, Bert would ask Lottie for a mirror in which he would “stare shaken into panic by the puzzled face in the glass,” Lottie knows “that once the mirror is in his hands [her] husband is no longer with [her]”; Lottie knows that Bert will “spend the whole day staring into the mirror, at first tormenting himself, and then comforting his spirit with happier memories” (Dancing 207). On his deathbed, Bert continues his fruitless attempts to rediscover Egbert Austin Williams; however, he remains “puzzled” by the unfamiliar face that stares back.

The mirror that Williams gazes into at the end of the novel allows him to reflect on his lived experiences in an attempt to make sense of his life but it is also, I would suggest, a mirror that forces
Phillips’s readers to see themselves looking back in the reflection. It forces us to reflect onto our collective histories, stories that have been lost to many of us, stories that explain the silences of our fathers and grandfathers, stories that might account for the disconnect between one generation and another. As the Brathwaite epigraph above suggests, we must hold up the mirror that reflects our broken nature, it is only then that we can move towards a healing.

Notes

1 Even though Bert Williams is only a boy when he leaves the Caribbean, he nevertheless sees himself as the man he remembers his father was.

2 While a return home for Albert Williams and Bert Williams remains a fantasy, Bertram Francis does return home. Nevertheless what he finds at home is not what he expected and he does attempt to recapture his past by connecting with his former lover Patsy and his former best friend, Clayton. However, neither of the two can be or even want to be the friend he remembers. So he fails to reclaim that past.

3 I tentatively use the term “unified self”. As Julia Kristeva indicates in her interview with Susan Sellers “A ‘fixed identity’: it’s perhaps a fiction, an illusion – who amongst us has a ‘fixed’ identity? It’s a phantasm; we do nevertheless arrive at a certain type of stability” (133).

Works Cited


Trauma, Memory and Recovery in Myriam Chancy’s *The Scorpion’s Claw*

Carol Bailey

“This is not a story. It is a memory…”

_The Scorpion’s Claw_

Given Caribbean writers’ decades-long preoccupation with the past, that often includes a focus on how the wounding events of history continue to shape present-day experiences, it is not surprising that trauma theory provides a useful analytical lens for reading some Caribbean literature. In its attentiveness to memory and remembering, Myriam Chancy’s second novel, *The Scorpion’s Claw* (2005), centres on the experience of one female immigrant to Canada and instantiates the kind of literary accounts for which postcolonial trauma studies is particularly useful. Through an analysis of *The Scorpion’s Claw*, this essay brings into conversation two areas of postcolonial Caribbean studies — migration studies on women and trauma theory — to argue for a representation of migrant loss and
remembering as phenomena shaped by wounding, which can only be partially healed through stories and a return to community. With its allusion to scorpions’ firm or even deadly hold, the novel’s title, *The Scorpion’s Claw*, evokes suffocation and menace and therefore captures this essay’s concern with how the main character Jo is stricken and held down by painful memories from which she at least partially frees herself. Because of its ultimate validation of the curative possibilities of stories, this work offers the kind of fictive account that has compelled trauma theorists to rethink the notion of trauma as an “unrepresentable event” and to “restructure how we understand trauma’s function in literature” (Balaev 2).

*The Scorpion’s Claw* is a collage of interconnected stories about one extended Haitian family. The events in the novel take place in Canada and Haiti over a period of roughly two decades, and are recounted from the perspective of Josèphe (Jo), a young member of this family and a Canadian immigrant. Because she emigrated at an early age, Jo’s contacts with Haiti during her adolescent and early adult years are from short, mostly delightful summer visits. Josèphe is therefore heavily reliant on memories — hers and those of other family members — to (re)create her sense of Haiti and shape her identity. In its layering of multiple, interconnected stories, the structure of *The Scorpion’s Claw* illustrates the disjuncture and dislocation that are often the result of emigration. At the same time the novel details the roles of memory and stories in further fragmenting but somehow simultaneously suturing self and community. The novel includes stories by and about her grandmother Carmel, her cousins Delphie, Alphonse and Désirée, along with stories from another ancestor, Mami Céleste. While intersecting with one another, each of the individual stories is written as a novella with its own chapters, varied narrative points of view and settings. And although the above-mentioned characters tell their own versions of life in Haiti, it is through their tales that Josèphe extracts her own troubling and potentially restorative stories. The shaping of this novel around fragmented stories that Chancy pieces together to reconstruct Jo’s story demonstrates Jo’s journey into multiple memories, recollections, and ultimately restoration through telling.

I locate this novel within a broader conversation about postcolonial trauma literature to engage with Chancy’s portrayal of loss, silences, displacement, and rupture, particularly as these manifest in the specific kind of trauma that results from emigration and the memory of personal violation. The specific concerns of trauma theory pertinent to my reading of this work include the emphases on memory and remembering — in how traumatic events result in a kind of haunting that creates physical and emotional pain, but also in how a search for potentially recuperative recollections may also uncover painful memories that initially exacerbate personal trauma. Drawing on classic trauma theories that emphasize the lasting impact of wounding experiences, and more so revisionist theories about the way narrative and a turn to community can foster recovery, I also address the connections this novel establishes between individual and collective trauma, especially in the way this kind of wounding is linked to the lasting impact.
of colonialism. At the same time this essay attends to the significance of narrative strategy: how fictional works that address trauma are often structured in ways that convey the disruptive experiences of trauma and the concomitant search for wholeness. Taking into account trauma theorists’ emphasis on the recollection of stories, most significantly, I demonstrate how this work complicates the role of remembering, the psychic return to the homeland (both landscape and community) as a journey into possible re-trauma and the potential for partial healing.

**Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literatures**

Emerging primarily in Holocaust studies, trauma theory has, in the last two decades or so, been a useful affiliate of postcolonial studies. Grounded primarily in Freudian psychology, and concerned with the remembering and reliving of painful experiences, trauma studies centre primarily on a definition of trauma that Ole Birk Laursen characterizes as “experiences that alter the state of mind of the victim” (54). Scholars such a Judith Herman describe trauma as the result of “the repeated effects of prolonged abuse” (100). And Cathy Caruth has emphasized psychological shock, the lasting effect of shared experiences — particularly the Holocaust — on generations, underscoring what she terms the “inherent belatedness” of trauma (Explorations 11). Marianne Hirsch extends Caruth’s theorization to include post-memory—the “inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge”—as characteristic of trauma (106).

Recently, the vibrant conversation about the shortcomings of trauma studies and its limitations as an adjunct critical model to postcolonial studies illustrates tensions between these two modes of inquiry. A diverse range of theorists has sought to expand the analytical possibilities of trauma theory. Consequently, there have developed clear lines between classical trauma studies and postcolonial trauma studies with the latter critiquing but also expanding the critical apparatus that trauma studies has provided. While these interventions that address the limitations of trauma studies began soon after the publication of Caruth’s groundbreaking book, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Irene Visser marks the 2008 publication of a special issue of *Studies in the Novel* as the specific moment when she terms “the call for a decolonized trauma theory” (250) was formalized. Subsequently, critics of trauma studies have isolated and quite extensively developed the fault lines of trauma studies, which they all agree are rooted in its generic Eurocentric orientations. For example, Ananya Jahanara Kabir has argued that: “Eurocentric paradigms even in revisionist form prove inadequate in explicating trauma and its memorialization outside of European spaces” (68). Michael Rothberg suggests that: “trauma studies need to travel further and add a whole new series of designations to its agenda” (iii). And especially crucial to works such as Chancy’s *The Scorpion’s Claw* is Sonya Andermahr’s observation that “…racially based forms of trauma historically rooted in the global systems of slavery and colonialism pose a significant challenge to the Eurocentric model of trauma as a single overwhelming event” (2).

The critical rebuttals to trauma studies have moved beyond the incongruities, gaps, and elisions to engage a productive set of conversations about how this field can become more expansive and therefore applicable to a wider range of cultures and speak to a broader set of experiences. Rothberg’s call for “building a non-Eurocentric fully historicized trauma” (xii) captures the spirit of the corrective turns in more recent revisionist trauma studies. More specifically, in her comprehensive, forward-looking critique, Visser includes the need for trauma theorists to “reconsider alternatives for the foundation in Freudian psychoanalysis” (253). Drawing on work by Roger Luckhurst, Stef Craps, and others, Visser argues for a break from the Freudian emphasis on “weakness, victimization and
melancholia,” and a movement towards more agential responses to trauma such as “acting out” and “working through” traumatic experiences, as these latter responses are more consistent with how postcolonial writers (such as Chancy) have treated trauma in literary works. An approach that attends to postcolonial writers’ treatment of themes such as “social activism, recuperation, and psychic resilience,” Visser contends, would more accurately represent the “creative” and “political” orientations of postcolonial trauma literature (254).

An especially relevant point of contention and correction that Visser emphasizes is the way in which classical trauma theory propagated by Caruth dismissed the value of narration and narratives in recovery from traumatic experiences. While this aspect of trauma studies was never the single view, it was the dominant perspective that, as Visser points out, influenced even the work of postcolonial scholars. Notably, this view was an early area of disagreement between two of the leading trauma theorists. While as Visser notes “Caruth’s aporetic dictum opposes the notion of the therapeutic and recuperative value of narrative…” (256). Judith Herman embraced the view that “trauma narrative is therapeutic, enabling psychic integration and eventual resolution of trauma” (256). Using examples from South Africa and the writings of Toni Morrison and Patricia Grace, Visser concludes that “telling the story of trauma leads to health” (257). It is an important observation that speaks directly to the concerns of this essay. For Visser, “It is the domain of literature to present, represent and dramatize trauma…” (255). The Scorpion’s Claw is exactly the kind of postcolonial fiction that buttresses and exemplifies Visser’s point about the role of literature in addressing trauma. This novel, therefore, undermines any argument against the value of “working through” trauma by telling stories in the way that it emphasizes Jo’s recollections as part of her journey into healing. Furthermore, the novel itself engages a meta-narrative discourse in the way it calls attention to the role of fiction as a productive response to trauma.

Pertinent to the culturally situated ways in which recovery from trauma is fictionalized in The Scorpion’s Claw is Visser’s call for “a respectful cognition of culturally specific spiritual and religious perspectives” (259). Visser’s view that “decolonizing trauma theory must involve an awareness of entrenched Western notions of ideological superiority” (260) is a sobering reminder of the ways in which western-derived critical approaches such as trauma theory bear traces of colonial biases, which, as she shows, “have eroded indigenous minority cultures” (260). Visser emphasizes how trauma theory reflects secular biases and prejudicial attitudes towards spirituality; an important component of the new directions in postcolonial trauma theory, she notes, is a recognition of how trauma literature represents spiritual traditions as part of the corrective. That Jo’s return to community for healing includes encounters with the supernatural is a testament to how writers such as Chancy, who treat trauma and recovery in culturally-grounded ways, call into question strains of trauma theory that would even tacitly discount spiritual practices outside of the Western rational and secular worldviews.

Postcolonial critics and theorists have long been addressing trauma and memory in ways that speak directly to the persistent impact of colonialism on the experiences of formerly colonized peoples. For example, Paul Gilroy’s work emphasizes the significance of the “telling and retelling of stories” of collective traumatic experiences as essential for cultural identity and renewal (198). Similarly, Édouard Glissant has argued for the important role of memory, relationality, and connection to physical space as offering promise for transcending trauma and creating new, more positive experiences out of such historical ordeals as slavery, colonialism, and their various aftermaths in the Caribbean context (cited in Thomas 6). That potential value of remembering is likewise articulated by Edward Baugh as “the necessity of a painful looking back into the terrible past” (110). Beverley Ormerod’s identification of
two types of memory typically explored in studies of French Caribbean women resonates with my argument about Chancy’s novel in even more specific ways. She identifies these as “the historical–collectively shared [memory] of the Caribbean past... and the private memories of a particular individual whose life is conditioned, or even dominated by what has happened in some personal past” (17). The link between the individual experience of trauma and that of a larger collective is an overarching feature of this work, and one of its most important links to a more general engagement with trauma in Caribbean literary representations. Therefore, while Western-oriented trauma theorists have quibbled about the value of narratives in working through trauma, postcolonial scholars have consistently acknowledged the value of narrative as a pathway to healing. And often, these scholarly explorations highlight the challenges and problematics of memory and resolution of these fictional explorations.

Acculturation as Trauma

The ever-present backdrop of colonization (and its forcible replacement of enslaved people’s mother tongues) is most clearly illustrated in the linguistic battle that ensues between Josèphe and her first teacher in Canada. The teacher force-feeds Jo with English. This represents not only the desire to instruct but also comes to epitomize the broader efforts to deracinate and acculturate Josèphe into the school system. This imposition of the English language carries with it the intention to replace—or at best marginalize—her mother tongue, Haitian French Creole. Her description of the impact that learning a new language has on her body calls attention to the emotional and psychological trauma involved in the kind of self-refashioning that migration necessitates:

“Stick my tongue between my teeth to make that sound? I was revolted at the thought. I had already been taught to hide the whites of my teeth when I smiled, to close my mouth when I ate. How could I stick my tongue out to make a sound I could barely hear? It was simply too much to ask. Obscene.” (49)

This passage defines language usage as a performative act, and therefore highlights an often neglected inclusion of bodily changes required by “proper” re-colonization, as demonstrated in Jo’s description of how she is required to fix her body in a way that contrasts with how she has been taught—in the way her home culture had socialized her. As obtains in many situations that involve language, the switch is not merely from a native culture, but from a complicated (often) creole culture to a foreign one. The drastic switch that Jo is required to make from one language to another typifies the stark differences between cultures that make migration a torturous experience. Embedded in the expression a “sound I could barely hear” is the notion of foreignness, and a disconnection from a place in which one is physically located, but culturally alienated. This example underscores the way in which the body functions as a place where anxieties about location and dislocation are worked out. The body’s performance of its rootedness in and connection to place is the best evidence of acculturation.

Ananya Jahanara Kabir’s reminder that: “the body must be returned to the centre of analysis” (72) in trauma studies is well illustrated in Chancy’s representation of the body as both a carrier of trauma and site of resistance. For example, Jo’s recalcitrant body evenly matches the pressure that Madame Fréchette exerts and her insistence that Jo’s very survival in a new place depends on her body’s performance of adjustment. As Jo relates: “Our teacher Madame Fréchette, would take me aside at the
end of each day and tell me that I would never amount to much, never be a true Canadian, if I did not make a more concerted effort to blend in. It’s the end of the summer, she would say, and you still resist” (49). The rejection of a traumatic acculturation is starkly represented in Jo’s bodily response to the physical environment and in the way she refuses to position herself in the classroom space: “That heat, the sweat, all the discomforts of that Canadian Prairie summer come back to me in waves of nausea. I would lift my thighs one at a time from the chair to ease them. How unfree I felt: a tiny person sitting in a tiny chair at a tiny table” (48). It is striking that although Jo is from Haiti, where it is mostly hot, she finds Canadian heat so different and oppressive. And the waves of nausea that return years after these brutal assimilation efforts underscore the enduring wounding effects of this experience. The “tiny” table and chair (actual instruments of restraint that literally box Jo in) are poignant metaphors for the constrainingly alienating socio-cultural space.

Jo’s response to being bent into acceptable Canadian shape instantiates the characterization of trauma as a “powerful psychological shock that has damaging effects” (Colman 955). And the representation of the impact of acculturation on Jo’s body underscores the way in which painful or wounding experiences trigger physical manifestations. The novel is replete with references to the body as the place where trauma lives, and it repeatedly shows how both remembering and forgetting act as stimuli for physical symptoms. Life in Canada without her connection to Haiti renders Jo an amputee, as she experiences “a life half-lived, cut-off at the roots” (31). With this metaphor Chancy describes not only her protagonist, the individual tormented by her longing for home and subject to the hostility of a foreign land; it speaks to the larger experience of migrant displacement and loss so well documented in both creative and scholarly works. These individuals are virtually homeless; they face the difficult choices between the challenges of living in their homelands and a “half-lived” life elsewhere. Yet, even as place continues to be implicated, it is the impact on the traumatized subject that features most prominently.

A Torturous Silence: Jo and Haiti

Jo’s retreat into silence as a response to violent acculturation methods resonates with Balaev’s theorization of a “pluralistic model” for exploring literary representations of trauma (3). On the one hand Jo’s initial silence appears to affirm Caruth’s suggestion that traumatic experiences are unspeakable. And along similar lines Mairi Emma Neeves has argued that “one of the central tenets of trauma theory is an acknowledgement of the way in which traumatic experiences overwhelm the individual and resist language” (14). Thus, our initial encounters with Jo would suggest that the painful memories that she unearths have rendered her speechless, that her traumatic experiences typify those that Caruth theorizes as “unrepresentable.” Yet, as I argue later, Jo’s ultimate return to community and her recovery and retelling of her stories, including the traumatic experiences, undercut that notion of “unrepresentable” trauma and thus aligns this text more closely to other models of trauma theory such as that espoused by Herman who argues that narrative is therapeutic (1-4). Jo’s refusal to speak—either orally or through writing—may be directly linked to her torturous early encounters with a foreign language in a foreign country; but her withdrawal is also linked to her memory of personal trauma in the form of sexual violence inflicted on her young body. Before Jo recovers the stories that both torture and potentially revive her, silence appears to be her primary coping strategy. Her cousin Désirée’s letters consistently begin: “Why haven’t you written” (23) or “You have become silent” (26), and silence recurs in the novel as a place of retreat for Jo. Interestingly too, Jo’s periods of silence, the times when she is
most disconnected from community, seem to be when she is most negatively impacted by the painful
memories that she recovers. Jo’s early adult years, when she is in college, away from family, alone, and
confronting life on her own as woman, migrant, and displaced Haitian, are the moments when silence
appears to be Jo’s default position. It is when she starts to recover brutal memories that she begins to
retreat into silence.

Chancy continues, but also expands, a decades-old trend in Caribbean migrant writings that
centre on the act of remembering the homeland as the immigrant characters’ default coping strategy.
Caribbean migrant literature has a long history of documenting the writers’ psychic return to the
homeland, which has often been represented as the logical counteraction to the perils of migration.
Jo’s psychic return to home through her instinctive and deliberate turns to memory clearly illustrates
her understanding of home and community as sources of empowerment as she seeks to combat her
previously suppressed wounds. This focus on memory places The Scorpion’s Claw in direct conversation
with established theories of memory and with Caribbean migrant writers’ sustained engagement
with this subject. The novel offers a compelling fictional version of Ormerod’s notion that there are
often intersections between “the historical — collectively shared [memory] of the Caribbean past...
and the private memories of a particular individual whose life is conditioned, or even dominated by
what has happened in some personal past” (17). The most wrenching aspect of Jo’s personal past —
sexual violation — is entangled with the historical and ongoing violation of Haiti inflicted from both
inside and outside of the county. Hence a psychic return to home, the source of both personal and
shared wounding is an inevitable act of remembering that must precipitate Jo’s recovery. The novel’s
treatment of memory suggests that a recollection of stories yields mixed results. The instinctive or
deliberate turn of the mind to ease psychic wounds offers neither instant healing nor freedom from
physical pain. When she journeys in search of healing memories, Jo does not immediately find curative
memories — those that will reattach the amputated self. Instead, as demonstrated in the non-linear
narrative structure, memories come unsorted. As she expects, Jo finds many reassuring memories: the
four weeks of bliss she spends in Haiti every year during her childhood; her grandmother’s love and
delicious cooking; memorable moments spent with her beloved cousin Désirée; being physically present
to experience Haiti’s beauty. But alongside these pleasant and potentially therapeutic recollections come
those memories she speaks of trying hard to erase.

As illustrated here in Jo’s recollection of a rape, one important aspect of the emergence of
Caribbean women writers as central voices in literature from the region is the attention their writing
brings to female-specific issues such as the particular ways that women experience sexual violence as a
type of trauma that migrant females may carry in their memories. Not surprisingly then, is Jo’s most
bruising recollection of the sexual assault by Eric when she was a prepubescent girl. The treatment of
rape as the most devastating personal trauma that Jo suffers calls attention to how this experience lives
on in the body of its victim. This brutal recall of sexual violence is especially useful in illustrating this
novel’s treatment of psychic returns to the homeland as partially problematic. In this regard, Catherine
Clinton’s theorization of remembered trauma in her essay “With a Whip in his Hand: Rape, Memory
and African American-Women” is helpful. Clinton argues: “In all cases memory will replay the
circumstance, allowing the rapist to prey again and again on the psyches of their victims” (205). As a
young adult traumatized by her challenging migrant experiences, Jo’s memory of rape “preys” on her
even as she recollects pleasant memories of her childhood in Haiti. As she recalls one of her happy days
eating sugar cane and the laughter that accompanied those moments, Jo takes her readers back to the
moment of her exploitation: “He [the eighteen-year-old Eric] reaches down to wipe my face for me and
I laugh into the fabric until I notice that his hand is not moving away but keeping me from breathing. I struggle against his hand but he uses it to cover my face” (42). Jo recalls all the details of the rape scene, and as an adult she is able to connect it with the horror that she feels when a boy kisses her as she plays a childhood game. Jo articulates the indelible imprints of this personal trauma: “The priest usually only gives me one Hail Mary to do after I confess… forgetting to put my toys away or for forgetting to pray for the hungry children back in Haiti. But it will take a lifetime to wipe Eric away. A lifetime of sacrifice and devotion” (47). The impact of Jo’s recollection of this event on her emotional, physical and psychological states calls to mind Caruth’s observation that “to be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by the image of an event (Explorations 4-5).

The significance of these painful memories as bodily experiences is emphasized in the choice of metaphors depicting physical illness. Jo describes some of these painful memories as the source of the trauma that floods her body “like a fever” (2). She also compares the act of writing her traumatic memories to “…vomiting up a virus that has weakened [her] muscles and clouded the sharp, clear patterns of [her] thoughts” (33). Illustrating the intersection between bodily location and place in migrant trauma, these terms, “fever,” “vomit,” and “virus,” bring into sharp focus Jo’s bodily response to the memories of place.

That Jo’s return to recollections of home includes a recovery of traumatic memories effectively challenges and reshapes her previous sense of home as a space that is the positive antithesis of her new migrant locale. Her confrontation with the torture of her childhood aggressor, Eric, highlights this shift in her perception of home:

I sat in front of the television…to watch the news to see Eric, a boy ten years older than me, whom I had known in childhood, driving a coal truck in Pétion-Ville to the capital…the mob, protesting years of death by terror…took hold of Eric’s shirt…stones were being thrown at him, at his truck…I watched Eric fall into a pool of his own blood, teeth breaking against the pavement. Then he seemed to be nothing more than a small dot in the crowd…I wanted to protect and save him, and yet, I also wanted to join with the crowd raise my fist to pummel him in the ground. (26)

Jo’s description of this scene and its impact on her highlight tensions between her longing for home and the association between home and memories of personal trauma. This scene moves Jo beyond merely seeing home as a volatile and threatening space: the fact that Eric, the perpetrator of her remembered wound, is the victim of violence heightens the sense of personal threat. The memories continue to bear down on her, which are intensified by this scene that engenders more complicated feelings about home. Notably, the urge to both join the mob and protect Eric implicates Jo and sheds further light on the nature of trauma by showing how a violent past possibly creates not only hurt in its victim; such experiences also potentially instigate further acts of violence in former victims, and importantly too, does not leave victims devoid of empathy. This picture of Eric is therefore the most jarring representation of the complexity of one’s relationship with a homeland. In this case home is not just imperfect: it is also menacing.

This intersection of Jo’s personal traumatic experiences and those of postcolonial Haiti is vividly conveyed in the way Jo connects her depression-induced silence to what may be termed her twin traumas. In a letter that she does not intend to send to Désirée, Jo asks: “Why is it that I can’t do anything with myself? For us? For Haiti?” (28). Here the self and the community are brought together as almost one traumatized body. Jo’s inaction and silence in this instance are clearly linked to the
seemingly stagnating, sometimes retrogressive, and violent state of Haiti. Even more striking is the way the sexual abuse that haunts Jo is intermingled with her torment about Haiti: “I watched Eric die on the tele today…I live as an immigrant in this country and cry when I see even men like Eric stoned to death, because there is no justice in our country, only streams of pain” (28-9). Undoubtedly seeing Eric die on television aggravates Jo’s psychic wounds. Yet, her own pain from sexual abuse and displacement are intertwined with the pain brought on by Eric’s brutal death, which evokes mixed, but overall agonizing feelings from Jo, particularly because of how Eric’s fate and her own hauntings remind her of the brokenness of Haiti.

**Recovering Complicated Family Memories**

Yet, despite its insistence on further trauma as a consequence of the return to memories, *The Scorpion’s Claw* also suggests that the individual’s capacity to sort through different kinds of memories and determine how these memories are used, enable recovery and refashioning. Although in her psychic return to her family tree in Haiti Jo encounters a range of characters, it is by evaluating each of these characters that she is able to select which stories have the potential to heal and which must be acknowledged as part of her permanently “painful … past” (Peterson 1). The ways in which Jo’s deliberate exercise of memory and her use of stories to support her healing centre attention on the female subject as an agent who determines how stories will impact her. In this regard, the subject exercises agency by controlling the way memories are treated, while relying on her family, particularly her grandmother, for support. It is through Jo’s understanding that she has to play an active role in determining how stories are used that the novel most explicitly shows that the recovery of stories does not simply and immediately lead to restoration.

The value of her grandfather Gustave’s life story in helping Jo arrive at a greater understanding of herself, her family, and the Haitian community makes clear this novel’s portrayal of home and its memories as nuanced and varied. Deeply involved in political activities in Haiti, Gustave “died in a cell in Fort-Dimanche, of hunger…because he protested a minimum wage the day a minister of Papa Doc’s came home from buying a mansion in the South of France” (9-10). Gustave, Jo learns, owned a newspaper that often opposed the oppressive regime. However, Gustave used that same medium to cut deals that ensured him a middle-class lifestyle. While clearly an advocate for a more equitable Haiti, Gustave’s commitment to the country was questionable because of his corruption. Gustave’s corruption illustrates quite powerfully the complexity of living in a space with the challenges such as those that Haiti faces. Thus, the ways in which he negotiates his relationship to Haiti are noteworthy because his efforts to improve the country are (perhaps inevitably) sometimes at odds with his desires for personal survival and advancement. Access to this heretofore missing biography of her grandfather therefore allows Jo to agonize about her family, but at the same time this access presents her with an opportunity to (re) consider the different memories and experiences—some torturous and others wholesome—as constitutive of her history.
If Gustave represents the coexistence of virtue and immorality in individuals within the family and in Haiti, then another family member, Jo’s uncle, Tonton Léo, epitomizes the kind of Haitian in whom all the negative traits of former colonizers are reincarnated. His story further complicates Jo’s understanding of Haiti, erasing any attempts to romanticize Haiti as the foil for the sense of loss and alienation she experiences in Canada. Chancy presents Tonton Léo as the quintessential neocolonialist and traitor to his country, a privileged, middle-class Haitian who basks in the glory of wealth, and who knows all the unethical byroads to take in order to maintain his privileged position. Like his father, Gustave, Tonton Léo uses his gender and class advantage to keep himself and some of those close to him protected from the social ravages that continue to bear down on Haiti. But unlike his father—a politically active citizen who, conscious of the dire needs of and injustices suffered by his fellow citizens, tried to address some of these challenges through the articles in his newspapers—Léo is an uncomplicated, flat character who is completely desensitized to the social problems endemic to his community. He fathers a number of children through extramarital affairs, and most notoriously keeps one of these children, Alphonse, in his home as a domestic servant. Through her access to Tonton Léo’s story, Jo sees embodied in her own family members some of what is wrong with Haiti. This reconstituted master-enslaved person relationship is emblematic of the larger socio-political colonial remnant that continues to be a source of trauma for the county at large and for individuals who are so deeply impacted by the ongoing inequities and injustice, such as Jo. Not surprisingly, the memories in which Tonton Léo is featured are among the least comforting that Jo and other characters recover because he is such a vivid symbol of enduring injustice.

On the other hand, Chancy’s sympathetic portrayal of Jo’s maternal grandmother, Carmel, offers the kernel of the redemptive remembering that the novel foregrounds. For example, the intimate relationship with Haitian culture that Grandmother Carmel provides for Jo during the latter’s yearly visits anchors Jo to the homeland and functions as a contrast to some of the more painful memories of Haiti. From this representation, the reader gets a glimpse of the novel’s position on what memories are among the most worthwhile and finds ideas about how Jo might make sense of the plethora of events and experiences that constitute her past. Carmel is the major source of the stories and Jo’s most cherished association with Haiti. Yet, in many ways, she is considered morally flawed because of her relationship with Gustave while he is married to another woman. Jo learns that Carmel was her grandfather’s mistress who bore him four children in an adulterous union that began a trend of “illegitimacy” that his son Léo continues in a much more destructive manner. Yet the love Jo receives from Carmel, Carmel’s sincerity and her astute understanding of the importance of resisting neo-colonialism through the preservation of local, indigenous culture all virtually exonerate Carmel in the reader’s mind.

The central role of community in facilitating healing for both personal and community experiences with trauma, for which Glissant has argued, is addressed in this work’s representation of Carmel. Jo’s reconnections with Carmel most decisively show the novel’s investment in the significance of cultural renewal and community in self-healing, and thus show how these experiences necessarily coexist with traumatic remembering. Because Carmel is ostensibly flawed but is also the novel’s most wholesome character, she is the one through whom the possibility and limits of restoration are most extensively explored. Jo’s current life as a college student, tortured in Canada because of her longing for the Haitian landscape and culture, is made more bearable by the memories of her grandmother. Not only does Jo carry experiences to which she can return, there is also physical memorabilia: Carmel consistently sends Jo letters and “silverware wrapped loosely in Kleenex” (60). In her discussion of
Francophone fiction by Giséle Pineau, Bonnie Smith notes that “Glissant’s image-laden approach to memory reinforces Pierre Nora’s assertion that memory takes place in the concrete, in spaces, images and objects” (qtd. in Smith 28). Along similar lines, the material objects that Carmel sends to Jo illustrate this novel’s connection to a broader conversation about the role of remembering in easing the effects of emotional wounds. Notable too, along with these material gifts, Carmel sends her scents, her aura and her spirit, which are so strong that they provide Jo with a vicarious connection to her grandmother and the culture she represents and preserves. Apart from the emotional connection (worthwhile in and of itself), Jo’s ability to connect with her grandmother at this level represents and prefigures the healing of Jo’s psychic wounds. But Carmel offers Jo these means of healing while she lives a life characterized by brokenness and shame at being a kept woman for most of her adult life. It is from Carmel that Jo learns that memory does not need to be what Ormerod describes as “an instrument of self-destruction because of the individual’s inability to break free” (17). On the contrary, Carmel demonstrates that breaking free from traumatic memories does not necessarily mean discarding them; rather freedom—which the novel presents as only partial—is achieved by embracing the full gamut of memories.

While it does not present a turn to community as the automatic antidote to individual traumas, no reading of *The Scorpion’s Claw’s* treatment of trauma would be sufficient without a focus on the novel’s representation of the potentially restorative possibilities of Haitian culture. By presenting Carmel and Tonton Léo as respectively supporting and disavowing Haitian creole culture, this novel highlights an embrace of Haitian indigenous culture as integral to self-reconstruction. Léo champions French culture in his attempts to Europeanize the children through a brutal severance from their grandmother, whom the novel presents as a custodian of Haitian culture. Jo recalls that on one of her best-remembered visits to Haiti, “Tonton Léo had kept Désirée from [Carmel] as much as possible and gotten us a French tutor. Everything was changing, the way we spoke, the way we played.” Carmel represents “Creole, the language of fools,” and a past that Tonton Léo and others like him assiduously try to eradicate (58). Tonton Léo’s deliberate attempts at cultural erasure make clearer the novel’s representation of him as a symbol of the persistent and destructive colonial power. Yet, despite her fluency in French and English, Jo longs for the language and cultures of those deemed fools. It is therefore the connection that she maintains with her grandmother, the memories that Carmel shares, that equip Jo with the skills to isolate the various memories and understand how and the extent to which they can help her restoration. Jo’s relationship with Carmel clarifies the kinds of cultural negotiations and reconnection that are essential to her psychological equilibrium.

The depiction of these characters clearly follows patterns of gendered cultural roles. Tonton Léo, for example, is a stereotype of a particular kind of male whose abuse of women exacerbates Jo’s memories of sexual violation as part of female experiences in Haiti, making Jo’s recall of those memories more bruising. On the other hand, Jo’s grandmother is the quintessential matriarch who preserves family memories and serves as a culture bearer. Yet, each of these character types is counteracted either by the individual character’s personal limitations or by their more wholesome traits. Gustave is a complex character who embodies parts of Jo’s family memories that she can discard and others that are valuable to her ultimate goal of self-healing. Likewise, Carmel is both victim and enabler of male power, and she reminds readers of the kind of uneven gender landscape that might have influenced an eighteen-year-old male’s acts of sexual violence on Jo. However, despite Carmel’s
shortcomings, it is her connection to Jo and her insistence on a balanced use of memories and judicious cultural negotiation that are most instrumental in Jo’s healing.

Jo’s deliberate and instinctive recollections foster a new understanding of the variability of memories and locate her relationship with memory and trauma within a broader realm of postcolonial experiences. While this recourse to memory initially worsens Jo’s trauma, taking this initial step allows her to move toward understanding the meaning of these experiences in relation to her own identity and sense of self. Chancy includes in this story “a time before memory,” which alludes to pre-colonial times and a time before Haiti’s centuries of trauma. Jo learns that “[t]he measure of [her] loss” encompasses the untarnished past that her community is unable to recover, and all they have had to forget as they work towards reconciliation and partial healing (188). Therefore, Jo’s “healing” and that of others rest on a full acceptance of a wide range of Haitian experiences during that time since memory. Migration, Jo comes to learn, magnifies loss, but at the same time provides the need and opportunity to recollect the memories that facilitate her understanding of a fuller picture of Haiti. Loss is a permanent and inevitable feature of the postcolonial condition. Yet, as the novel shows, many memories are still available, and this is knowledge that makes some partial recovery possible in the midst of Jo’s acceptance of the inevitability of traumatic memories.

The Scorpion’s Claw offers a useful fictional account of Glissant’s, Gilroy’s and other scholar’s insistence on the critical roles of remembering and storytelling in recovery from trauma. Illustrating how postcolonial trauma texts validate supernatural elements of various cultures, the gathering of spirits near the end of the novel stands out as a significant moment of revelation, reconciliation, and reflection about the value of stories in stimulating individual and collective capacities for healing. It is not only the memory itself that is important, as emphasized by Céleste’s pronouncement in this scene; of equal importance is sharing of these memories through telling. In reference to the typewriter that Jo uses to transcribe the stories, Céleste observes: “Very nice, but remember this cannot replace your tongue.” Showing Jo her tongue, Céleste continues: “You see this? This is what has kept me alive through the ages” (185). While not discounting the usefulness of technological devices to tell stories, Céleste brings Jo closer to a positive turn to the body through her admonition that Jo should not try to replace her tongue. Not only does this advice emphasize the significance of speaking, telling stories and embracing and preserving memories, Céleste’s insistence that Jo speak is a clear counteraction of Jo’s earlier silence, during the period when memories functioned only as sources of trauma. By advocating speech, Céleste addresses more than the healing; her revelation that “[the tongue] is what has kept me alive through the ages” represents speaking as essential to the body’s very existence: to speak is to live. Mami Céleste’s entreaty as well as this novel’s alignment with models of trauma theory—such as Herman’s and Visser’s that advocate the value of stories in both representing and reliving trauma— are underscored here. Jo’s productive recollection and recounting of sexual abuse and other traumas actualize this validation of narrative in trauma theory and affirm Mami Céleste’s counsel.

This final turn to a life-sustaining storytelling practice unequivocally locates survival and wholeness of body in a Black, female-centered tradition. This recourse to a form that is well established as a core feature of Black diasporic communities establishes the necessity of reconnection to community in the healing of the individual. Early in The Scorpion’s Claw, Jo refers to her disconnected and dislocated self as an amputee. It is from that brokenness, that trauma-induced disintegration of self, that Céleste prescribes speaking as remedy. While keeping the focus on the subject, the reconnection to community through storytelling underscores the significance of community, also addressed by Glissant, in the remaking of the migrant self. Therefore, this return to community revisions diasporic relations
and ultimately discourses on those relationships, since the subject must embrace a Sankofa sensibility to attain any semblance of wholeness as Jo remains in a foreign location. And because Céleste chooses a practice integral to Black diasporic communities, this resolution takes the discourse away from spatial location, and instead centres it on the female subject, who must embody and embrace multiple locations. The trauma inflicted by home and foreign spaces results in a turning in on the self, a turn away from community and, ultimately, a fragmentation. It is only logical then that partial self-healing is contingent upon a return to that community, which in turn nourishes and strengthens the individual.

**Conclusion**

In its exploration of trauma and memory, *The Scorpion's Claw* offers insights into the possibilities and limitations of stories to aid recovery from trauma. Because Jo’s recollection of stories at first stimulate further trauma, her psychic return to home involves a kind of torturous remembering of her past. As a result, Chancy does not relate Jo’s journey of reconnection to community as unproblematic therapy. Yet, the novel clearly presents this act of remembering as offering demonstrable possibilities for recovery. The representation of stories therefore has implications for how home, in this case Haiti, and migrant subjectivity are characterized. If the turn to home and memories results in only partial recovery, then that very notion of the importance of home is disrupted, although not completely undermined. The latent traumatic experiences from the homeland that Jo recovers, and which have been inscribed on her body and etched in her individual memory, must reside in the subject as part of her renewed self. Thus a renewed migrant subject is one who embodies multiple and varied memories. The healed subject then is not one who emerges recovered from trauma; she is instead one who owns and accepts traumatic memory as part of a new self. Jo’s last words, as she sits on a plane en route to Haiti, “the measure of our loss,” mark an acceptance of the partial nature of the unlikelihood of a full recovery (188). This journey home is not presented as a journey into wholeness. Jo’s utterance reveals a resignation and acceptance of the inevitable loss that is characteristic of the larger postcolonial experience in general and the consequence of migration in particular.

**Notes**


2 Much work has been done on the specific ways in which migration impacts women. See for example Carole Boyce Davies’s important book, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London, UK: Routledge, 1994), which explores the centrality of Black women’s writing in the re-negotiation of identities as a fundamental component of migration experiences. Similarly, see Chancy *Searching for Safe Spaces*. Two recent works by Alison Donnell and Kezia Page, which explore how the preoccupation with migration destinations has resulted in an exclusion of Caribbean locations in migration discourses, provide a more explicit point of departure for an exploration of how this tension between home and migrant destination is addressed through a consideration of the traumatizing possibilities of both places for the
migrant female subject.

3 In her “Introduction” to *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma*, Michelle Balaev notes that the turn away from an exclusive psychoanalytic approach to more “pluralistic models” has had its greatest impact on literary studies.

4 See Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*.

5 For a detailed discussion Glissant’s treatment of memory, and relationality as well as connections between Glissant’s work and that of memory theorists such as Pierre Nora, please see Thomas, 23-38.

6 Dawn Fulton’s essay “A Clear-Sighted Witness: Trauma and Memory in Maryse Conde’s *Desirada*,” which explores Conde’s treatment of memory as fragmented and impeded by “temporal, spatial and interpretive divides” (1) exemplifies the complex and varied ways that postcolonial scholars examine the intersection of trauma, memory, and narrative representation.

7 Such writers include Austin Clark, Dionne Brand, Edwidge Danticat, Carole Boyce Davies and Kezia Page, who have treated this subject extensively in their creative and scholarly writings.

8 See Caruth’s *Unclaimed Experience*.

9 Early writings such as those of Claude McKay and Samuel Selvon, as well as more recent literary works by Dionne Brand, Zaidie Smith, Austin Clarke and others exemplify this decades-long engagement with displacement and a yearning for home.

10 An example, as early as the 1920s, is Claude McKay’s poetry. See for example McKay’s “I Shall Return,” “Home Thoughts,” “The Tropics in New York,” “Flame Heart,” and several other poems from McKay’s 1922 collection, *Harlem Shadows*, reprinted in *Complete Poems*, 2004.

11 See, for example, Edwidge Danticat’s *Breath, Eyes, Memory* in which a migrant female’s traumatic migration experiences are similarly complicated by her memory of rape.

12 Here I refer to the West African bird’s forward movement and simultaneous looking back, a well-known metaphor for the significance of recognizing the past as one goes forward or looks to the future.

**Works Cited**


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Scholars of post-war Anglophone Caribbean literature are generally aware of the importance of the BBC *Caribbean Voices* literary radio programme to the development of the region’s literature. The programme was edited and produced out of the BBC studios in London, with sub-editorial assistance from Cedric Lindo in Jamaica and was broadcast to the region from March 1943 to September 1958. Though the idea for the programme was conceived and initiated by Jamaican journalist, activist and writer, Una Marson, it was the programme’s longest serving editor, Henry Swanzy, who most influenced the direction it took. Swanzy served as editor and producer from July 1946 to November 1954. In October of 1992, I travelled to Swanzy’s home at Bishop’s Stortford, East Hertfordshire, England on two separate occasions to speak with him about his work on *Caribbean Voices*. Though the interview was conducted some two decades ago, it has remained unpublished until now. Here it is, at last:
GG: How did you approach the organizing of *Caribbean Voices*?

HS: How many words a minute can you read, something like two hundred? I can’t remember now, but I used to have to work it out, really, to be able to judge how long we could go for on a programme. You see, you had to cut the things, really, especially in the early period when the programme was a total twenty minutes long, including the introduction and so on.

GG: Can you say a bit about Arthur Calder-Marshall’s work on Caribbean Voices? I know that he was one of the regular critics on the programme and so I’d like to ask you what influence he had?

HS: I don’t know, really. I think that, well you had the various times he had been shown as commenting, and so on. I thought at times that he was a sensitive person being there, and his great friend in his book, *Glory Dead*, was this man from Trinidad who actually never featured on *Caribbean Voices* because instead of going to England he went to Australia. He was a writer and there is acknowledgement in *Glory Dead*. Ah, yes, Ralph de Boissière. He never played a part in *Caribbean Voices*, but, as I said, Calder-Marshall and he were great friends and you do have the times when Calder-Marshall offered comments on the programme.

GG: What was your vision for the programme when you began?

HS: When I first started, I mean, one just approached things as another programme to fill the space, really. On the whole, it was, as I say, one took it on as a number of jobs. I had, for example, to do a French programme to Mauritius in French. There was a wonderful old man named Georges Rosin who was the mayor of the capital city [Port Louis] in Mauritius and he was living in England because it had become too dangerous for him to continue living in Mauritius. Well, one had that, you see, and at the same time one had a lot of things on the other side as well. There were elaborate things about Africa, a programme, for example, called *Africa at the Crossroads* and there was also an interesting programme, about thirty-six half-hours, really, about problems of African development, you see, and there were all the experts consulted on that programme, experts and various agricultural advisors and the Secretary of State and such people who discussed the problems of subsistence farming and the falling cocoa prices in a place like Ghana. And even to this day, the number of things that are sent to Africa, particularly by the International Monetary Fund and that sort of thing, are infinitely less than the interest that the various areas in Africa have to pay on the loans received, and so on. Anyway, this was the sort of thing that *Africa at the Crossroads* took up, and then one had, as I say, the Mauritius thing and also had *Caribbean Voices*, really, and at the time it was a question of carrying on.

But, as I say, one had the idea of [Calder-Marshall’s] *Glory Dead* which one had read, and one had the sort of left-wing view of encouraging people who had had a raw deal, really. One didn’t expect much at the beginning, and on the whole one didn’t initially find much, really. You know, it was mostly these kinds of things — and one doesn’t want to be unkind — but there were contributions by Albinia Hutton and J.Z. Myrie and a number of others at that time who were Parnassians, really. But the word “Parnassian” as applied by me really refers to this marvelous French poet, J.M. [José-María] de Heredia, and I think some of the early *Caribbean Voices* poets had a translation of de Heredia by Vivian Virtue, and this was an influence. But there was also the traditional school of English poetry from the 1890s that was still taught in the West Indies in the 1950s and that was also an influence in the early writing one saw on the programme. But the very first thing I remember that was read on the programme was “Do You Appreciate Music?” by John Figueroa.
GG: But even as you say that some of the early submissions left much to be desired, did you have a sense that there might have been something worthwhile on the horizon?

HS: Well, gradually the point is that one realized that the thing was extremely worthwhile. The things that were coming in were not at all parish magazine stuff, really, and that was the stirring of the waters, perhaps by Una Marson, really. At the start one just depended on what was coming, really. I don’t know when actually the machinery was started, but I think it must have been by John Grenfell-Williams when he set up this office in Kingston which was overseen by Cedric Lindo. To tell you the truth, I also had a certain amount of personal interest because I used to write poetry, verse and some of my things were published. I even wrote an epic in the winter of 1940 about the battle of Britain which, in a way, I rather despise now because it was nationalist and so on, but it was a great sort of relief when the battle of Britain was won, really. But I did sort of have a personal interest in writing when I wrote this quite long poem.

GG: Did you seek publication of the poem?

HS: To some extent I did, I suppose. It was actually put up to the Department of Information by people in the BBC, actually by John Grenfell-Williams who is worth mentioning in all this. He was a strange sort of figure in the BBC. He was a South African liberal who wrote a book called, *I Am Black [The Story of Shabala]*[^4] and this was a sort of early version of *Cry, the Beloved Country*,[^5] though it wasn’t as good as that book. But anyway, Grenfell-Williams got a job as Director of the Colonial Service, through this book of his, really, and he was there at the BBC when I submitted this long poem which was damned with faint praise by Cecil Day Lewis who was, as you know, one of the buddies of W.H. Auden and [Stephen] Spender. And he said things about it which were justified, I think, but still, he might have been a little less lukewarm about the poem. But thereafter, I never had sufficient confidence myself to push it too much, really. One got a number of rejection slips which is a disappointing thing and then I really didn’t get much encouragement. And my problem, of course, is that I come from Ireland, you see. I’m Irish and although I left Ireland when I was five and we never went back, or seldom did, one did have the feeling that what one wrote was not the kind of thing that somebody like a Philip Larkin or Gavin Ewart would write.

So one didn’t get much help from anybody, really, and so I thought, perhaps out of a sort of empathy, that it would be nice to assist some of these writers from the West Indies if I could, you know, because they didn’t get much help either, really. And anyway, there one was, one had to fill 20 minutes of time on the air each week, really. But very soon one realized that a lot of the stuff coming in was better than one ever thought one might receive. Quite a lot of it had started to come out in Una Marson’s time, but she had this tragic breakdown,[^6] you know, and old Claire McFarlane[^7] who worked in poetry and was a well known figure—he helped Vivian Virtue, who was a very nice man, indeed, charming fellow, well, he had this room in Hampstead where he had photographs of poets on the wall and he, too, wrote “Parnassian” poetry and some of it was quite nice, actually, poetry on subjects like Solomon and the Queen of Sheba and

[^4]: Source: www.stephenbourne.co.uk
such things—well McFarlane helped Una and she returned to Jamaica. Looking back now, one sees the way in which the thing went on gradually, expanding in interesting ways and bringing on other people, and so on.

**GG:** Going back to the issue of the time slot for a moment, did you still feel the pressure of time against you in the same way even after the programme was expanded to thirty minutes?

**HS:** The time slot was a problem, I mean you could put in a poem, but a short story or a long short story or even an excerpt from a novel, you know, there was very little you could fit into the time slot. Also, apart from anything else, the fact of coming at the words, I mean it’s easier to take in the written word since, literature, after all, it is reading; it’s not this awful word “orality,” although, I must say I can see that it was certainly true of the dialect, the accent and the turn of phrase, and the spoken language was extremely rich. I always remember, for example, phrases such as “Their eyes made four.” Ah, yes, there were a lot of wonderful phrases. I would say there was quite a bit of the dialect, particularly with Trinidad and the southern Caribbean, but I did find, as I think I mentioned before, that the offers from the southern Caribbean were, on the whole, more interesting than, say, some of what came from Jamaica, really. Although, you know, there was John Hearne and there was Roger Mais and Vic Reid. There was, at the time, a lot of activity by various literary people in London that showed an interest in the Caribbean, if only as a place to sell their books, really, like Robert Herring with *Life and Letters* and Phyllis Bottome who was out there and who took up Vic Reid, really. But, as I say, the time slot was a problem to get much in, really.

**GG:** Did you have a keen sense of the listenership, your radio audience?

**HS:** I never really knew how widespread the listenership was in the Caribbean. As I say, on the whole in 1948 or so, when one started, you saw the sixth month sort of review of the programme which got reprinted in the various newspapers. I think that started quite a lot of interest. Cedric Lindo would probably have had a much clearer idea about the listenership in the Caribbean. Eric Coddling, you know, Cedric Lindo’s pseudonym, but, as I say, one never really knew about the listenership and so one tried to put on the air things one found interesting. I was sent a copy of Derek Walcott’s *25 Poems* by dear old Frank Collymore, really, and one was bowled over in a way by Walcott’s collection, because, among other things, it was clear that he had been reading some of the same twentieth century poets with whom one was familiar, such as W.H. Auden and A. E. Houseman. One of the interesting aspects of it is that at that point in time, one had never heard of Jean Rhys, you know, the white West Indian. It was extremely annoying when one had British literary people visiting, like Patrick Leigh Fermor who wrote *The Violins of Saint-Jacques [A Tale of the Antilles]* and one or two travelogues on the Caribbean in the early 1950s, but he never mentions *Caribbean Voices* or the local people at all, really. Nor, of course, did persons like Noel Coward mention the local perspective either.

Anyway, naturally I guess it is fair to say that when one is broadcasting, as I said, one tries to put
on the air the things that one finds interesting, and on the whole, I was always interested in literature and poetry in particular. Poetry, perhaps, more than other literary forms because one could more appreciate a poem in one’s mouth much more than say, a short story, really. It was nice to broadcast stuff which was worth broadcasting and to have an un-egotistical interest in pushing other people, really, helping new and interesting writers, and so on.

GG: Did you ever manage a visit to the region yourself?

HS: I did visit Jamaica, and, of course, I must say a bit about the libel charge, you know. That was when I was in Jamaica, the only time I have ever been to Jamaica, actually, and that was in March of 1952. Part of the reason for the visit was to provide myself with a change to help me recover from the death of my first wife, and also to visit a bit. The visit was limited to Jamaica, unfortunately. On the whole, in those days there wasn’t anybody in particular—later, there was somebody like Evan Jones with “The Song of the Banana Man” and that sort of thing, but in those days there wasn’t yet anything particular—that was great. I didn’t think, nor do I think that to this day, the Jamaican contribution is anything comparable to the southern Caribbean, like say, Guyana, really, for whatever reason. I think there are perhaps so many more varieties of psychology, if you will, in the southern Caribbean, and the different issues of blood mixtures, and so on. Anyway, when I was in Jamaica, I had to address the local Pen Club and I said that the problem was this “Service Time” on the radio. You see, they had a sort of period on the radio when they had to broadcast stuff which was supposed to be of general interest and not necessarily commercial interest. That was the time when Rediffusion was coming into Jamaica, well indeed the English-speaking Caribbean, and I had said that it would have been a good thing if they could have broadcast some literature on the radio, you know, good writing and so on. I received a letter telling me to lay off such pronouncements or they would have me up for slander or something. But one of the lessons I got from all this while in Jamaica was that on one occasion I happened to visit some office and the woman at the receptionist desk was listening to the radio when this “Service Time” came up and they began to play one of Beethoven’s quartets, or some such thing, and when the young woman heard that, she leaned across her desk and switched off the radio. I thought, this is the voice of the people, you see, vox dei, vox populi.

GG: Was the libel charge actually pursued?

HS: No, thankfully, it never went further than a letter of complaint from the station manager, I think his name was [Bill] McClurg, to Grenfell-Williams.

GG: I would like to ask you now a bit about the “Critics’ Circle.” Do you think the movement to the “Critics’ Circle” on the programme facilitated improvement in the submissions you received?

HS: It’s hard to say, but I think possibly it did. It certainly did. I mean if you talked to [George] Lamming or [Sam] Selvon or any of those young writers of the time, they would all meet every Tuesday night, I think it was, in order to listen to the programme that went out on Sunday. I think they recorded it in advance and then listened to it on a Tuesday evening, and they
certainly appreciated it because the actual quality of the submissions was improving, really. And a lot of the time, like a fisherman throwing out a lot of bait in order to catch as many fish as possible, one would find those precious fish that one wanted to keep, really. On the whole, after a while one could recognize what was quality and what wasn’t, what had a great quality, though simple and modest, because it rang true, really. I am reminded now, for example, of a photograph I have of a young woman from Guyana, Edwina Melville, sitting astride a water buffalo on the Rupununi plains. She sent several wonderful short stories to the programme. I remember there was a story called “The Voice” and it spoke of the thrill she got from hearing her own work read from London, in her own voice, so to speak, as it came back to her as she sat in her lonely house in the Rupununi listening to Caribbean Voices.

It was rather like, in a direct way, Seepersad Naipaul, Vidia’s father also was kept going by the programme. Possibly E.M. Roach was never kept going on that, poor fellow, but it was like a sort of movement in the tide, really. And, on the whole, I think Calder-Marshall, well I don’t know if he was ideal [on the “Critics’ Circle], but either he or Roy Fuller would comment. At times I disagreed with both of them to some extent, you know, with what they said, but thought, well, it’s up to them to say it, really. And then there was also a good deal of criticism, mostly by people who were not included in the programme, about the little clique in London who were putting out things, you know, with double standards.

But Vidia Naipaul was also kept going, I think, when he started in 1951 or 1952, before he left Oxford, really. He was thinking of getting a job in the British Council in Turkey. Anyway, he was talking about that and then it seemed that he had nowhere else to go, really. Then he came to London and they gave him a job on the Voices programme. This, of course, was at the Langham Hotel because they had moved from 200 Oxford Street. The Langham Hotel was just opposite Broadcasting House and that was where the programme finally stopped, I suppose.

GG: So the programme seems to have helped V.S. Naipaul?

HS: Well, I think it certainly gave him an outlet, you see. It just managed to keep him going on and ticking over with his writing. I think he worked on Miguel Street while he was there and then he was able to go on from there. I think Lamming, too, was helped a bit by the programme. I remember he could be somewhat cantankerous in those early days and I remember telling him once as we walked along Oxford Street and I lost my temper, I told him, “For Christ’s sake, George, I’m probably about the only person in London who knows what you’re doing and hopes that you’ll succeed.” But as I say, there was the idea of somebody who was really trying to help.

GG: But after a while, the programme and your association with it became a sort of focal point for aspiring writers from the region who had made their way to London?

HS: Well, because, of course, one was really what was called a Colonial Assistant, and one’s salary was extraordinarily low, on the level, practically, of the programme expenses. But, as I say, it was very worthwhile, really. Part of what helped, generally, was the fact that you had the Lammings and the Selvons and the Mittelholzers, and so on, all concentrated in London and they were striking out for themselves. I mean I was practically useless in hooking them up with publishers and so on. But I do remember that there was a tremendous reception for Mittelholzer’s Shadows Move Among Them. There was an interest in it taken up in The New Statesman, for example. But later, when I came back from Africa [in 1958], no one in England seemed to have been aware of it, really. But Lamming and Selvon had got a bit of interest, I think. Selvon did quite a lot of work for the Daily Telegraph newspaper, and there
were people helped by work like that, for example. There also was some recognition for the writing from a man named Bonamy Dobrée. He was from the Channel Islands, a French speaker, and he was a Professor of Literature at Leeds University. He had an interest in overseas writing and there was an Englishman at Leeds who offered as his thesis, around 1953, the new Caribbean literature, and Bonamy Dobrée came down for this man’s thesis defense and I had to pass the man’s thesis as representing an accurate picture of the writing that was actually being done, really. I must say that at the time I felt a bit like the anthropologist [Louis] Leakey who was working in Kenya on a degree for Cambridge University, and when he was told that he needed to offer a foreign language in addition to French, he set his own exam paper in Kikuyu and he got his degree at Cambridge with Kikuyu and French as his two foreign languages.

But as I say, *The New Statesman* was among the first magazines that took an interest in the new Caribbean literature and this was not until about 1960 as I seem to remember. And also Walter Allen and V.S. Pritchett, they wanted something about Caribbean literature and so they wrote to Eric Williams in Trinidad to ask if he would contribute something, but he declined because he said he was too busy. But also I don’t think he knew a great deal about the literature, really, because it wasn’t his field. But I think it was typical of the time that that was the only person they could think of asking. However, somebody then suggested a man called Swanzy, really, and so I did a piece in *The New Statesman*.

**GG:** As I’m sure you were aware at the time, there were those in the region who viewed your critical investments and admonitions as an attempt to impose English standards on the developing writing. What are your thoughts on such a claim?

**HS:** I wouldn’t have thought so, really, but it’s hard to say. I mean I doubt very much that someone like Derek Walcott would have felt this way, and even the early Eddie [Kamau] Brathwaite was quite enamored of Paul Valéry’s “Le Cimetière Marin” [The Graveyard by the Sea], and I believe that much of this is reflected in Brathwaite’s early poetry. I don’t know, therefore, if it’s a matter of conforming to English or European standards as much as it is, perhaps, a matter of finding your own poetic voice. And one of the advantages of my being there at the time is that I didn’t have an axe to grind. Particularly, I didn’t have any axe to grind in having my own stuff put out. But I suppose, on the other hand, the axe I ground I never realized, really. It may be that there were people who objected. The only one I remember who objected a bit, though I greatly admired her and found her work as a performer very interesting, was Louise Bennett. Louise Bennett was certainly a nationalist, shall we say. I think of all the people one met, she was the one who took the most sort of critical view of the British approach altogether, really. Or rather the English approach to the emergent literature. Well, that is why when one is at such a vast distance it is not exactly the easiest sort of commentary, really. But Louise Bennett possibly also had a feminist approach, but I’m not sure, really. But then one had the writing of someone like [Wilson] Harris who seemed more interested in the legends of the Amerindians than in the nationalist approach, but then Guyana was always slightly different. Some of the writing from Guyana, like that of Harris, had a sort of continental feel about it. I think obviously the geography and everything else had an influence. It wasn’t an island culture. But, as I say, I don’t think that it was a matter of the writers conforming to English standards, really. I think you might say that it was more a
matter of finding your own poetic voice, really.

**Notes**

1. Arthur Calder-Marshall was an English novelist and essayist who served as a member of the Critics’ Circle on *Caribbean Voices*.


3. José-Maria de Heredia was a Cuban-born French poet whose literary style was associated with Parnassianism, a poetics grounded in nineteenth century positivism and socio-political detachment.


6. Marson suffered a bout of severe depression during this period in England and after her initial recuperation there, she returned to Jamaica with Claire McFarlane in 1946.

7. J. E. Clare McFarlane was named Poet Laureate of Jamaica in 1953.

8. The phrase, still occasionally heard in several territories in the Anglophone Caribbean, refers to the situation where two people meet each other’s gaze and stare intently at each other.


10. At the time, Bill McClurg was the Managing Director of Radio Jamaica and Rediffusion (RJR).

11. Poet, Eric Merton Roach was born in Tobago in 1915. He had several poems broadcast on *Caribbean Voices* and published in *Bim* and *Kyk-over-Al*, but he never achieved the professional success of other *Caribbean Voices* alumni such as Derek Walcott or Edward Kamau Brathwaite. Tragically, he committed suicide in 1974.


Eric Williams earned a doctorate in history from Oxford University in 1938, founded the People’s National Movement (PNM) political party in Trinidad in 1956 and then served as Prime Minister of the twin island state from 1962 to 1981.
Book Reviews
This is a very good, and perhaps important, book. It is certainly one which all scholars of West Indian literature should read. A collection of essays by diverse hands, *Beyond Windrush: Rethinking Postwar Anglophone Caribbean Literature* sets out to address the perceived imbalance in the critical representation of West Indian literature as being too much dominated by that group of male novelists — George Lamming, V. S. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, Wilson Harris, and to a lesser extent Edgar Mittelholzer, Andrew Salkey, John Hearne, Michael Anthony etc. — who have become tagged as “the Windrush generation.” The argument made by the editors in their lucid and thoughtful introductory essay is that a disproportionate amount of scholarly attention has been paid to the work of those novelists. This is partly as a result of the self-aggrandisement of some of those authors and partly through critical and pedagogical laziness on the part of the academic establishment. Even more particularly, most of the focus has fallen on the first four listed above to the detriment of the general understanding of the depth and breadth and complexity of West Indian writing.

While welcoming the attempt to broaden the focus of the study of West Indian writing, and while applauding the several essays in the collection that focus on the work of writers who have seemed marginalized or disregarded for whatever reason, it seems to me that the editors of *Beyond Windrush* are essentially pushing at an open door insofar as there is not, nor has there ever been, much resistance within the academy to anyone wanting to work on or write about these under-represented authors. Perhaps the editors themselves, and some of the contributors, are not quite able to imagine how marginal and exotic a field of study West Indian literature seemed to most of the academy for most of the last sixty years. There has been an ambition to build the field, to make a space for it, for example, in the programmes of University literature departments — often of course at the expense
of something else. With that in mind, it is perhaps understandable, if not inevitable, that critics and scholars tried to establish who might be the major writers whose work might be studied, if only perhaps as pathfinders for a later generation who would be able to expand and extend the canon. The story of Louis James and *The Islands In-between*, which gets rehashed once or twice in this book, particularly in the light of Sylvia Wynter’s unsympathetic account of the project, is relevant here. Despite what his critics said, what James was actually attempting to do, in the circumstances of the times, was not very different from what the editors of the collection under review are trying to do: that is, to extend the critical resources available to readers and scholars new to the field, who want to encounter and think seriously about what West Indian writing is, and to use a variety of voices to do it. *The Islands In-between* had its weaknesses and its absences, just as the editors of *Beyond Windrush* acknowledge that the almost total absence of discussion on drama or poetry weakens the impact and argument of this collection. But again, as they say, you can’t do everything in a single volume. As scholar/editor you can only hope that such absences will inspire others to fill the gap. Although there is a sniff of a conspiracy theory in some of these survey essays, I don’t think, personally, there was ever a conscious conspiracy to exclude or marginalize women writers or Indian writers or gay writers. There just wasn’t so much space in the critical/pedagogical arena, nor so many people interested and invested and able to explore the variety of writings and writers who make up what is — as this book demonstrates — the rich diversity of West Indian writing.

Such grumbling aside, there are some excellent essays in this book. Indeed, without exception the individual pieces are very well researched, organized and presented. One of the pleasures of this particular text is that the essays are so well-written (and perhaps well-edited) and so readable. There is a single brief gobbet of impenetrable jargon in one of the essays, but overall what this set of essays demonstrates is that scholars can write about complex, sophisticated, problematic issues and texts without resorting to language that excludes a general reader. More please. The several survey and perspective essays in the collection are all well done and interesting. I should single out Alison Donnell’s detailed and scrupulous research on neglected and marginalized women writers as necessary to set our engagement with the several excellent pieces on individual writers that make up the rest of the collection: essays on Ismith Khan, Joyce Gladwell, Austin Clarke, Andrew Salkey, as well as two contesting discussions of John Hearne’s work. I particularly admired Evelyn O’Callaghan’s richly detailed and beautifully written essay on Elma Napier, which really convinced me that here was an important writer whose work I needed to discover and read. I found Faith Smith’s essay on Roger Mais in Paris fascinating for the light it throws on the relationship between his practice as a visual artist and his literary work (the book’s cover features a Mais painting from that period). In the end though, it is Edward Baugh’s wonderfully evocative and measured autobiographical essay, “Coming of Age in the 50s” which really steals the show. His account of being a student at Mona in those early years of the university, rummaging through the stacks to find each new issue of *BIM* as it appeared and of one day discovering Walcott’s “Tales of the Islands” there, and of the excitement and inspiration of such literary encounters is itself inspirational.

So, *Beyond Windrush* is definitely a book worth reading and is an important reminder to all of us engaged in whatever ways with the discussion and presentation of aspects of West Indian literature. As that Windrush generation of writers sails into the sunset, so to speak, there is almost certainly much more to discover and consider than our conventional framing of the field of West Indian literary studies would suggest.
Transcontinental influences and exchanges—the myriad interrelationships between Africa, the Americas, Europe and more lately Asia—have received appropriate attention in discussions about the complexities of Caribbean life, culture and history. Caribbean Irish Connections: Interdisciplinary Perspectives intervenes to map out the specifics of a little-explored, yet critically-significant network of connections, namely the historical, political and aesthetic relationships in play between Ireland and the Caribbean from the early modern to the contemporary period. This collection is an ambitious, multidisciplinary project, bringing together a substantial body of work across the domains of archaeology, literary studies, history, performance and visual culture, with essays from well-established scholars sitting side by side with critical interventions from early career researchers. The essays bring fresh eyes to the significance and singularity of Caribbean-Irish connections, ranging from literal and material presences, explorations of mutual aesthetic concerns, strands of influence and currents of exchange.

Part 1, “Histories of Encounter and Exchange,” opens with an essay by Nini Rodgers, which lays out the changing historical terrain occupied by the Irish in the Caribbean in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Rodgers’ essay is complemented by Karina Williamson’s case studies of five Irishmen in Jamaica in the early nineteenth century—the period leading up to the end of slavery. Williamson strategically positions these first-hand accounts alongside Rodgers’ groundbreaking Ireland, Slavery and Antislavery: 1612-1865 (2007), and in doing so helps illustrate the ways in which this collection speaks not only for itself but to major currents in Atlantic scholarship. The other pieces in this section each does related work, with the essays that follow unpacking the specifics of the ways in which religion, race and political ideology fed into processes of acculturation and the development of identity in relation to place, and developing notions of freedom in the British Caribbean. Of particular note is Matthew C. Reilly’s analysis of Irish identity in Barbados in relation to labour, and his observation that Irish “creolization” is best understood as part of a centuries-long set of processes involving both complexity
and contradiction, rather than as subject to the operations of creolization as a “deus ex machina” that runs the risk of essentializing identities and relationships that “emerge in zones of cultural contact” (53-54).

Reilly’s essay also speaks in provocative ways to Harvey O’Brien’s insightful exploration of the representation of “Bajan-Irish Abjection” in Chris Nolan’s documentary Redlegs (2009), in the context of the political economy of narratives of diaspora as they are selectively integrated to contemporary narratives of the Irish state, and Krysta Ryzewski’s and Laura McAteckney’s examination of “Historic and Contemporary Irish Identity in Montserrat” in Part 2 of the collection. This second section, “Cultural Performance and Exchange,” enriches the work done in Part 1. It develops new ways of reading Caribbean-Irish cultural performance by marshalling a range of critical frameworks which clarify the active presence of performative radicalism; across the domains of the queer, in Alison Donnell’s “Queer Relations,” which finds new ways of situating Ireland and the Caribbean in relation to colonialism and empire by sidestepping the difficult binaries that often attend such configurations; of primitivism, in Elizabeth O’Connor’s intriguing research into the work of the almost forgotten illustrator and writer Pamela Colman Smith; and in Maria McGarrity’s unfolding of Derek Walcott’s mediation of the poetic possibilities of “Exile and Indigeneity” in his play on the Irish visual archive in Omeros, invoked through the figures of “the Plunketts (the Major and Maud)” (143), and read as part of a wider interest in underlining the cultural function of the “Pigeon Island Museum” in St Lucia and the wider Caribbean.

Poetics are at the heart of the third and final section of the collection, with exemplary essays by Lee Jenkins tracing the reiterations of Yeats’s “Lake Isle” in Jamaican poetry, specifically the appearance of Antonio Benitez-Rojo’s ‘repeating island’ in the work of Claude McKay, Lorna Goodison and Una Marson; Elaine Savory, whose ecocritical approach to the poetry of Medbh McGuckian and Dionne Brand transforms understandings of poetic strategy and intent; and Jean Antoine Dunne who speaks to the “Mutual Obsessions” shared by Samuel Beckett, Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite, which result in the work of Irish and Caribbean writers coming “to resemble each other” in ways that are facts “not of influence but of recognition” (286). Recognition takes on a different cast in K. Brinsley Brennan’s account of the analogous operation of the shibboleth in producing and policing national and sectarian divisions in the Dominican Republic, and in Ireland and Northern Ireland; and in Emily Taylor’s examination of the figure of Heathcliff as he migrates from the Yorkshire Moors to Maryse Conde’s Antillean La Migration Des Coeurs (1995). The specifics of postcolonial identity that emerge in the encounter with the British find correspondence in Richard McGuire’s carefully-nuanced comparison of the distinctive “Settler-Colonist Worlds” of the Anglo-Irish and Creole Dominica as evidenced in the work of Elizabeth Bowen and Jean Rhys, while Schenstead-Harris’s “The Haunted Ocean: Mourning Language. . .” speaks to the cultural poetics of tragedy and the ways in which Walcott’s The Sea at Dauphin works to “politically [reorganize] the space of loss . . . to shape a new social and individual consciousness and social identity” (214).

There is richness and diversity here, though, inevitably perhaps, the majority of essays emphasize the Anglophone Caribbean, and Jamaica and Barbados in particular. It is never possible to do everything, and this selection covers much ground while retaining its critical integrity intact, providing suggestive and fruitful ground for future scholarship. Hilary Beckles’s “Preface” and the Editors’ “Introduction” strongly establish the scholarly remit, identifying the possibilities opened up by this collective endeavour. The essays bear witness to the coherence of the editorial vision. This is a significant work, which will provide the foundation for further work in this area and a considerable resource for scholarship and learning.
In writing a first biography of Eric Walrond, a journalist, essayist and fiction writer who until recently was the most understudied central figure of the social, artistic and intellectual life of Harlem in the 1920s, James Davis attends to and reflects on unfinished projects.

Born in then British Guiana, Walrond grew up in Barbados and Panama’s port city of Colón, arrived in New York in 1918, and published to critical acclaim in the 1920s, most notably his short story collection *Tropic Death* (1926), which was set in the Caribbean during the American Panama Canal project. The book Walrond took on next earned him a Guggenheim fellowship. Called *The Big Ditch*, it was a study of colonial modernity focused on the massive West Indian labour migration to Panama over the period of two imperial canal projects (French and later American). That Walrond never finished this work is one of the great losses of modernism and black Atlantic studies. More than thirty years later Richard Wright would meet Walrond for the first time in London at George Padmore’s funeral. In asking Walrond what happened to this book, Wright echoes W.E.B. Du Bois who, as Davis recounts, had the same question in 1941. Add to this unfinished work the plan (never realized) to reprint *Tropic Death* in the late 1960s with an introduction by poet and novelist Arna Bontemps, and the biography of Walrond that scholar Robert Bone began in the mid-1980s but couldn’t complete.

Walrond understood his unfinished projects as symptomatic of his psychological fragility. They have a larger significance for Davis, who links our long-delayed attention to Walrond to “the methodological challenge of black transnational history,” by which he means “the incompleteness and fragility of the archive where transnational black writers are concerned, even when they are established intellectuals” (244, 357). In describing Walrond as a “diaspora intellectual,” Davis demonstrates that what distinguishes him as such is a function of both geography and sensibility: first, a peripatetic life lived “in British colonies, a Latin American country under U.S. occupation,” New York, France and
England, combined with a “comparative and transnational” perspective rare if not unique among intellectuals of his time (72, 276, 356).

With Davis’s *Eric Walrond: A Life in the Harlem Renaissance and the Transatlantic Caribbean*, as with the invaluable archival projects of collections such as “Winds Can Wake Up the Dead”: *An Eric Walrond Reader* (Louis J. Parascandola, ed, 1998) and *In Search of Asylum: The Later Writings of Eric Walrond* (Parascandola and Carl A. Wade, eds, 2011), we move away from the long-held idea that Walrond disappeared from print after *Tropic Death*. Davis’s lengthy bibliography is a reminder that Walrond’s career extended to “150 publications in nearly 40 periodicals in at least five countries” (2). And no other work on Walrond conveys quite so well Walrond’s exceptional capacity to recognize, articulate and make a place for himself within the transformative energies and historical alignments of his time. Davis takes us through a career that extends from the New Negro movement in 1920s New York (with often-tense intersections of Garveyism, Marxism, and Pan-Africanism), to 1930s England, marked by the emergence of a “periodical culture that was unprecedented in its anticolonial ambition and international reach,” followed by the shifting racial dynamics of wartime, the first wave of Caribbean immigration in the late 1940s, and with the Notting Hill riots of 1958, “one of the most acrimonious periods in British race relations” (265, 339).

As Davis makes clear, scholars have arrived at Eric Walrond so late because only in recent decades have we been reframing the Harlem Renaissance according to the kind of “critical internationalism” that was foundational both to Walrond’s conception of the movement, and even, though more obliquely, to the movement itself (91). Drawing on work by Louis Chude-Sokei, Michelle A. Stephens and others, Davis provides a corrective to histories of the movement, making a compelling case, for example, for Walrond as “a more important catalyst for the New Negro movement than has been recognized” (3). Perhaps even more interestingly, Davis’s biography directs us to the cultural moment that Walrond’s outsider status makes visible. Walrond’s writing often underscores how the movement’s nationalist emphasis on “bichromatic U.S. race relations” meant “pressure on West Indians to become African Americans” (118, 75). And yet, as one of a number of West Indians to become representative African Americans — “an authority on African American culture, from the Charleston dance craze, to the Harlem cabaret scene, to the Great Migration” — Walrond connects “modes of ‘Negro’ expression” generally understood as singularly American with forms of racial masquerade that emerge out of the intra-racial dynamics of diaspora (3, 75).

We find one of the best examples of “critical internationalism” as an unrecognized context of the nationalist New Negro movement in Davis’s discussion of *Tropic Death*’s reception in New York. For Davis and contemporary readers, what comes through most clearly in Walrond’s depiction of Panama and the Caribbean more broadly is the region’s profound cultural and linguistic hybridity, the realities of often brutal inter- as well as intra-racial hierarchies and conflict, and Panama’s importance to what would much later be termed the black Atlantic. For Walrond’s readers, the result was a “challenge to Anglo-American powers of discernment” (107). *Tropic Death* was lauded despite being, in crucial respects, illegible. How else to explain the response of a reviewer who remarks (approvingly) that Walrond “raises no race question” (179)? Or, another reviewer (Waldo Frank) who identifies the collection’s signal contribution as its language (what Walrond termed a “babel” of creole dialects), but offers the mystifying clarification that “the language he heard was American” (185). Davis responds: “Only in the 1920s could *Tropic Death* have been understood in so many conflicting ways: as taking
its place in the American literary tradition, as New Negro literature, and as literature of “the tropical Negro”” (186). In his work’s very illegibility, Walrond marks the movement’s limits and its unrecognized insides.

The recent explosion in critical interest in Walrond would suggest that he is more a match for the critical sensibility of our own time. Surveying a career that explored the complexities of displacement and diaspora, Davis concludes: “The implicit question Walrond asked was: How could cross-cultural, transnational knowledge be represented in literature?” (107). In taking up the challenge of Walrond’s unfinished projects and the broader problem of black transnational history, Davis’s *Eric Walrond: A Life in the Harlem Renaissance and the Transatlantic Caribbean* asks the same question.
Notes on Contributors

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