

Editorial Preface

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This is the dark time, my love,

It is the season of oppression, dark metal, and tears.

It is the festival of guns, the carnival of misery.

Everywhere the faces of men are strained and anxious.

—Martin Carter, “This Is the Dark Time, My Love,” lines 5–8

I begin this introduction to the November 2020 issue of *JWIL* with a stanza from Martin Carter’s famous poem, because it seems to me that the force of Carter’s poem captures our current time as insightfully as it did that period in 1953 when the British government declared a state of emergency in the territory then known as British Guiana and arrested and jailed democratically elected members of the People’s Progressive Party, including Carter. Of course, our contemporary moment in the Caribbean is not characterized by resistance to colonial rule and the political struggle for independence, as was the case in the 1950s and 1960s. Nor are we poised at the threshold of political decolonization, excitedly envisioning a range of possible postcolonial futures that the heady period of the fifties and sixties inaugurated. Ours is certainly a different time, and yet what Carter’s poem spoke to then, and continues to remind us of now, is the stubbornness of systems of oppression and thus the abiding need to maintain the vigilance of an antitotalitarian, collective Caribbean imagination. Just as that period of the region’s political history helped to consolidate a shift in the ways that Caribbean thinkers and artists reconceptualized the region and the relationship of Caribbean peoples to the archipelago and to themselves, so too our current conjuncture is indicative of a period of change, a transitional phase.

There are several occurrences at the close of the second decade of the twenty-first century that have some purchase on Caribbean life and letters. Perhaps the most obvious challenges the region faces at present are the economic uncertainty, social disorientation and displacement precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. The repercussions of this protracted public-health challenge are still being realized and will likely mark a shift not only in the economic outlook for many territories across the region but also for the ways in which we reconceptualize and balance ideas of the public good against widening expectations of personal freedoms in the public sphere. There is also the fact of climate change and its particular threat to vulnerable ecologies, such as exist in the Caribbean. There is, as well, the worldwide outcry at the callous murder by a Minneapolis police officer of forty-six-year-old George Floyd on 25 May this year. In response, Professor Sir Hilary Beckles, vice chancellor

of the University of the West Indies and chairman of the CARICOM Reparations Commission, stated that “every person on the planet who carries a spirit of love for humanity has become a protesting priest,” and he concluded his remarks as follows: “We need our prophets now more than ever. The ‘old pirate has robbed I’ once again. And yet we shall rise!” (Beckles). Beckles’s concluding sentence unifies the resistance voices of Bob Marley and Maya Angelou, reminding us of the long-standing Black Atlantic tradition of resistance orature and literature that maintain hope even in the “dark time.” As guardians of the word in defence of the sovereign imagination, our writers and raconteurs continue the important work of protecting Caribbean dreams from deadly invasion.

Yet another coincidence of occurrences that suggests a transitional phase in the environment of Caribbean letters is the demise, during the second decade of this century, of several prominent writers, many of whom came of age in the post–World War II period. Between 2011 and the current year, Caribbean literature lost Kamau Brathwaite, Austin Clarke, V. S. Naipaul, Garth St. Omer and Derek Walcott. Within the same period, the literature also lost important critics such as J. Michael Dash, Michael Gilkes and Édouard Glissant. Among these losses to our literature in the same period, I include Dr. Victor Chang, who served as coeditor/editor-in-chief of *JWIL* for twenty-two years. It is imperative to highlight the connection between the writers of poetry and prose fiction, the literary and cultural critics, and the journal and literary-magazine editors, since the absence of any one of these categories of literary interlocutors would render the cultural conversation far less vibrant and vivid.

This issue of *JWIL*, an open issue, includes essays that examine, or in other ways draw upon, the work of several of the writers and critics referenced above. Julianne McCobin’s essay analyses the role of the olfactory in revealing the challenges of narrating Caribbean history and recovering cultural memory. One of the novels she engages to illustrate her argument is Austin Clarke’s *The Polished Hoe*. Janet Graham’s essay, “Derek Walcott’s Poetics of Naming and Epistemologies of Place,” analyses Walcott’s *Omeros* and employs aspects of Glissant’s theory of relation to elucidate her observations; and Tyrone Ali examines Naipaul’s *A House for Mr. Biswas*, as he discusses representations of Indo-Trinidadian masculinities. I have not referenced these writers simply because some of their work is the subject of analysis in this issue; as an open issue, that intersection is merely coincidental. I reference these late authors and critics, including the importance of commitment to Caribbean journal and magazine editorship, in order to highlight the fact of generational shift, even as the triptych of new interlocutors, writers, critics and editors takes the literary conversation in new directions.

In the spirit of helping to foster and advance another generation of scholars focused on Caribbean literature and culture, this open issue of *JWIL* includes essays by several advanced doctoral candidates, whose work is presented here alongside established scholars in the field. In addition, two interviews are offered in this issue. Véronique Maisier interviews Alecia McKenzie, a Jamaican poet and fiction writer whose internationally recognized work has garnered several literary awards, and Stephanie McKenzie interviews Aruban Argentinian writer and visual artist Arturo Desimone. Desimone works across several languages, and one of his poems, written in Papiamentu and accompanied by his English translation, is published in this issue. Continuing the theme of translation, Rajiv Mohabir’s essay “Drinking Forever: *Daru* (Rum) Poetics in Chutney Music” presents English translations of Indo-Caribbean Bhojpuri as a critical aspect of interpreting the *daru* poetics of chutney music in Trinidad.

Also in the issue are essays by David Buchanan, Joshua Murray, Leighan Renaud and Sebastian Galbo. Buchanan reads Margaret Cezair-Thompson’s *The True History of Paradise* as highlighting novel modes of connectedness between Caribbean selfhood and landscape in the age of neoliberalism and globalization. Joshua Murray’s essay on Claude McKay’s fiction focuses on McKay’s third published

novel, *Banana Bottom*, to argue for the artistic coherence of the novel's protagonist, particularly in the context of the Harlem Renaissance. Renaud critiques the fractal structure of Erna Brodber's novel *Nothing's Mat* to demonstrate the destabilizing effect of such an interpretation on patriarchal hegemony, and Galbo examines Harold Sonny Ladoo's *Yesterdays* to argue that the novel uses scatological discourse to examine the anxieties of its Indo-Trinidadian characters with respect to caste identity and cultural assimilation in pre-independence Trinidad.

Completing the offerings in this November 2020 issue of *JWIL* are five book reviews. Renée Landell reviews *Reading/Speaking/Writing the Mother Text: Essays on Caribbean Women's Writing*, edited by Cristina Herrera and Paula Sanmartín. Amílcar Peter Sanatan reviews *A Portable Paradise* by Roger Robinson, Carol Mitchell comments on *A Tall History of Sugar* by Curdella Forbes, Andrea Ringer examines Paulette A. Ramsay's *Afro-Mexican Constructions of Diaspora, Gender, Identity and Nation* and J. Dillon Brown reviews four publications in the University of the West Indies Press's Caribbean Biography Series: *Derek Walcott* by Edward Baugh, *Marcus Garvey* by Rupert Lewis, *Earl Lovelace* by Funso Aiyejina and *Beryl McBurnie* by Judy Raymond.

Works Cited

- Beckles, Hilary. "Marcus, Martin, and Minneapolis." *UWI TV Global*, 2 June 2020, uwitv.org/uwi-news/marcus-martin-and-minneapolis. Accessed Oct. 20, 2020.
- Carter, Martin. "This Is the Dark Time, My Love." *Poems of Resistance from British Guiana*, Bloodaxe Books, 2006, p. 99.