
Editorial Preface

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This is an open issue of the *Journal of West Indian Literature (JWIL)*; however, the essays and interviews included here can be read as fundamentally interconnected. I would argue that they all attend to the history of Caribbean literary studies and criticism, as well as to the question of memory in key ways. They ask us to grapple with Caribbean literary histories as still-unfolding narratives. These essays and discussions position and engage with Caribbean literary histories and narratives as still being recorded and remembered and thus open to revision, retelling, and expansion. This is what situates Caribbean literary historiography as a particularly vibrant site of critical discussion. We are still grappling with how to tell the story of Caribbean literature, with its various locations, genres, debates, and protagonists.

The issue begins with a section that pays tribute to George Lamming, one of the Caribbean's literary giants. In recent years, as a Caribbean literary community, we have mourned the passing of a number of key literary figures. With his death on 4 June 2022, Lamming joins this list. Between 25 July and 1 August (Emancipation Day), 2022, the journal hosted a week-long *Twitter* residency by the poet Faizal Deen dedicated to reflecting on Lamming's legacy. In his comments on the first day of that residency, Deen suggested that remembering Lamming means that we have to grapple with "the multi-directionality of his influence" and additionally argued that truly attending to the meaning of Lamming's work takes us beyond a consideration of "the realms of art and culture." Instead, he contends that "Lamming's re/membering/s place/s him, locate/s him, and the ideational extensions of his writing and activism . . . in the service of building more equitable and fair societies" (Deen [residency @jwilonline]). We might understand the critical forum on Lamming that opens this issue as another part of this dialogue about the multidirectionality and reach of Lamming's influence and legacy. We might also read these pieces in relation to the previous issue of *JWIL* (vol. 30, no. 2, April 2022), which paid tribute to and remembered the work of Lamming's compatriot Kamau Brathwaite. These publications constitute different parts of a dialogue about the work of Caribbean literary memory.

As Aaron Kamugisha suggests in his essay, it is important to remember Lamming within the context of the passing of a generation that included a formidable quartet of Barbadian writers—Lamming, Brathwaite, Austin Clarke, and Paule Marshall—who all contributed to what he terms "a revolution in consciousness," moving Barbados and the wider Caribbean towards an understanding of "a new future in the world." Kamugisha situates Lamming both locally, in the context of Barbados—and in Carrington Village, specifically—and regionally, in terms of his consideration of Lamming's contribution to a

Caribbean political conscience. In offering us this phrase and idea of “a Caribbean political conscience,” Kamugisha usefully moves beyond just a focus on Lamming’s novels to consider also his social and political presence, particularly at key moments of Caribbean crisis and mourning, as seen in the important eulogies that Lamming delivered at memorials for C. L. R. James, Walter Rodney, and Maurice Bishop, which Kamugisha reads here as texts. In attending to these moments, Kamugisha indicates how Lamming modelled for us how to enact a Caribbean practice of memory, one that recalls the individual work engaged by Caribbean stalwarts and also contemplates the significance of this work for collective political futures. Kamugisha’s own essay follows in this tradition of memorializing. Indeed, his contribution to this practice of memory is seen not only in this issue but also in the reflections on Brathwaite that he recently assembled in the journal *Small Axe*.

In Curdella Forbes’s creative-critical essay, she reflects on some of the questions that Lamming’s work has provoked for her over the course of her career. Some of these questions are taken up in her theoretical work in *From Nation to Diaspora* (2005). Forbes additionally outlines some of the ways in which Lamming has used the novel as a specific form for engaging a Caribbean practice of philosophical thought and maps the compelling intellectual terms on which Lamming thought about the question of the human through an attention to Caribbean idioms. While Forbes offers a keen attention to her dialogues with Lamming in print, her reflections on Lamming’s fiction as philosophical practice also recalls for me some of the conversations of the still-memorable 2003 Caribbean Reasonings conference held at the University of the West Indies in honour of Lamming. I was still an undergraduate student at the time but vividly remember the dynamic conversations about Lamming’s writing and his political and creative vision of Caribbean sovereignty. I also remember Forbes’s central role in organizing that conference and Lamming’s moving address at the end of the gathering. In tracing significant moments in Caribbean studies, as part of the historiographical work that we do, it might prove important to recall and write a history of those landmark Caribbean Reasonings conferences held at the turn of the century.¹ This might serve as one companion to Evelyn O’Callaghan’s brief history of the West Indian Literature conferences, which is included in this issue.²

Honor Ford-Smith’s contribution is perhaps the most personal of the essays included as part of the forum on Lamming. In it, she recalls her encounters with Lamming while still a child, her discovery of his writing as a university student, and a life of encounters in the context of Caribbean creative and political work. Ford-Smith is interested in the “writer as social and political teacher,” and Lamming, we can note, is exemplary in this regard. What this essay also offers is a meaningful attention to Lamming’s contribution to Caribbean theatre. Writing in 1960, in *Focus* magazine in the immediate wake of the publication of Lamming’s *The Pleasures of Exile*, Noel Vaz critiqued Lamming’s focus on the novel as the foremost literature of Caribbean experience, suggesting that it was a middle-class form and that one

should be reminded that it is the West Indian dialect play or ballet, or ballad, written for and played, sung or danced out in the village hall before the entire village that is likely to restore the “peasant to his true and original status of

personality” (Lamming writing on “The Pleasures of Exile”) rather than a dozen novels. (145)

While Lamming is perhaps associated foremost with the Caribbean novel, Ford-Smith notes his deep commitment to and support for Caribbean theatre arts and his recognition of its potential to enable a social dialogue and the making of a common space. Her essay, like the other discussions, meaningfully extends the ways in which we might think about Lamming’s important and multidirectional influence.

The essays throughout this issue also offer a number of meaningful interventions and challenges for rethinking directions and questions in our field of Caribbean literary studies. I hope readers will spend time with each of these essays and think rigorously about their various critical, methodological, and political challenges. In my reflections here and in the interest of space, I will parse out only a few of the many connections between these works as one way of situating these interventions in relation to some of the broader unfolding debates in Caribbean literary studies.

It is worth noting the ways in which these essays urge us to continue to rethink some of the very categories that structure our field. Amanda M. Smith’s discussion of the Guiana Shield, for instance, pushes at the limits of our very conceptualization of Caribbean space. Smith asks us to think about the Guiana Shield, “crossed by the borders of five countries—Brazil, Suriname, Guyana, Venezuela, and a small part of Colombia—and the territory of French Guiana,” as an area of analysis. This critical move rethinks particular colonial structures and territoriality, and their related frameworks. Smith is instead guided by an attention to geological formations, waterways, and mountains in her approach to this analytical field. Similarly, though with an attention to different terrain, Arne Romanowski’s essay on Dominican sugar-cane novels and the questions that she raises about labour flows, racial relations, intimacies, and cultural contacts across the Haitian-Dominican border also ask us to think across and beyond colonially and nationally constructed lines. Such an orientation, Romanowski convincingly argues, might allow us to revise and to refine an approach to the study of the histories, literatures, and lives of Haiti and the Dominican Republic as intertwined rather than separate narratives. Romanowski’s discussion also allows us to think about how an attention to land, geography, and terrain (in this case, the fact of a shared island geography) might also complicate colonial emplotments of separate histories. We might read this essay in relation to Sylvia Wynter’s work in “Novel and History, Plot and Plantation,” where she asserts that “[t]he Caribbean area is the classic plantation area since many of its units were ‘planted’ with people, not in order to form societies, but to carry on plantations” (95). Romanowski offers much towards our continued engagement with a fuller understanding not only of the struggles to form societies in this region but also of the ways in which the plantation as structure (and the plantation as a narrative structure, as in the case of sugar-cane novels) shape our understanding of land, labour, and relational intimacies throughout the region. This issue includes essays and interviews that address areas of the region’s anglophone, francophone, Hispanic, and Portuguese worlds, and contributes to a fuller regional dialogue across and about the different histories of language, colonialism, and struggle as part of our work of Caribbean literary and cultural studies. The

interviews in this issue with Maryse Condé (by Kavita Ashana Singh) and Tobias Buckell (by D. A. Vivian) also demand that we reflect on how we include and narrate literature from territories such as Guadeloupe and the Virgin Islands, which might be understood in terms of what Yarimar Bonilla in *Non-Sovereign Futures* (2015) discusses as a politics of non-sovereignty. These territorial spaces have remained somewhat marginal to the recounting of the region's literary histories within what has been read and theorized as a postcolonial literary tradition.

The essays in this *JWIL* issue also amply demonstrate how recent theoretical turns and critical frameworks can prove useful for rethinking approaches to earlier texts and debates. Romanowski's mobilization of a decolonial framework, for example, expands and rethinks some of the earlier Marxist frameworks for reading the genre of the sugar-cane novel (see, e.g., Kaussen; Legrand). In noting the turn to the decolonial in recent critical work, I also mean to highlight the ways in which this has raised questions about the language of the "postcolonial" as a primary way of analysing and teaching Caribbean literary texts. Smith's essay, which asks us to think about Indigenous representations in Caribbean literature, extends Shona Jackson's earlier work in her book *Creole Indigeneity* (2012) and asks us to re-examine and critique the politics and strategies of Indigenous representation in well-known works such as Wilson Harris's novels, for instance.

We might also note how this re-engagement with the past, its frameworks and categories, also informs Jason R. Marley's essay. Not only does Marley recuperate Lindsay Barrett's largely forgotten novel *Lipskybound*, but he also aims to rethink how we have approached questions of gender in the context of Windrush writing. In this regard, his work extends the dialogues in the important and instructive volume *Beyond Windrush* (Brown and Rosenberg). Marley examines how Caribbean masculinity studies might allow us to reread those narratives of Windrush and Barrett's text, in particular. His intervention notably emerges at another moment when Windrush lives and stories have been foregrounded once again in the context of the ongoing Windrush scandal and the precarity of Black lives in Britain.

O'Callaghan's essay "Archiving the First Ten Years of the West Indian Literature Conference: Institutional Memory and West Indian Literary Celebration" is another particularly useful text for thinking about critical genealogies in Caribbean studies and for marking shifts and transitions in the field. O'Callaghan offers a history of the first ten years of the West Indian Literature Conference. Within this work, she also offers a consideration of how attention to these conferences might allow us to attend to shifts in critical focus in the study of Caribbean literature. O'Callaghan's essay does not just document these shifts but is arguably also a product of this changing landscape, in that it emerges from and is part of the archival turn in Caribbean scholarship in the last two decades (see, e.g., Sharpe).

The essays included here all evidence a range of methods. While Romanowski's essay dialogues with history and with the social sciences, the works by Kelsi Delaney and Marley demonstrate the rich value of textual close readings to ongoing examinations of Caribbean literature. At the same time, through her keen examination of recent Caribbean prose poems, Delaney's work also demonstrates how close reading might also demand an

attention to intertextuality and interdisciplinarity. She points to these not only as readerly tools but also as practices that writers deploy as part of their creative practice. Giving thought to intertextuality and interdisciplinarity thus becomes necessary as part of the practice of reading seriously.³ As Delaney asserts, “[U]nsettling the construction of the poetic line opens space for innovative and genre-blurring work.” In discussing Christian Campbell’s poems in tribute to Jean-Michel Basquiat, for instance, she reads Campbell as “collaging intertexts.” Her use of this language of collaging not only brings together the literary contexts of Campbell and the visual-arts context of Basquiat but also suggests the wider need to think through what Marta Fernández Campa has termed the “dialogic connections in Caribbean literature and visual art” (“Dialogic Connections”). These dialogic connections are also abundantly evident in the image that accompanies Delaney’s essay. The concrete pastoral poem “Bow” is a collaboration between Kaie Kellough, Kevin Yuen Kit Lo and Laura Toma and is a wonderful example of the interplay that is possible between poetry and visual arts. “Bow” appears in Kellough’s volume *Magnetic Equator* and uses text imposed onto an abstracted image of the Bow River. Like several of the works that Delaney examines, “Bow” pushes at the limits of poetry as conventionally understood. We thank Kellough, Lo and Toma for this richly illustrative visual poem and for granting us permission to reproduce this work in the current issue of the journal.

Delaney’s discussion of Kei Miller’s *The Cartographer Tries to Map His Way to Zion* (2014) also stages a dialogue between geography and poetry. We might read this in relation to Smith’s essay, which combines literary and geographical approaches. Smith and Delaney both point to a rich conversation between geography and Caribbean literary studies, not only one in which Caribbean literary scholars participate but also one in which it is important to note the role of geographers. We might think here about the work of Pat Noxolo and Nalini Mohabir, for example, who work in geography departments but for whom Caribbean literature has been central to their analysis of the region.

This issue also includes a series of interviews that engage with questions of Caribbean literary memory. They demonstrate the ways in which, as Cornel Bogle and Michael Bucknor argue, the interview is “a form suited to the recovery and recognition of . . . archives, figures, and movements” (31). In the interview between O’Callaghan and Lisa Outar, which serves as companion piece to O’Callaghan’s essay on the history of the West Indian Literature Conference in this issue, they recall and share institutional memory regarding the formation of *JWIL* and the annual West Indian Literature Conference, as well as trace O’Callaghan’s long and productive career as a literary scholar in the region. The following interview between Singh and Condé reflects on Condé’s life and work, and interrogates the role that autobiography has played in her writing career. The interview also reflects on questions of history and, in particular, what we might read as the Caribbean woman writer’s quarrel with history. The conversation between Condé and Singh, which moves between French and English, also forces us to think about the role of translation (not only in relation to Condé’s body of work and its translations but also in relation to the interview itself) in documenting the region’s literary legacies. Finally, the interview between Buckell and Vivian reflects on Buckell’s work, placing it within Caribbean and wider traditions of sci-fi and speculative fictions. The interview also makes an important argument about why

the Caribbean matters to sci-fi and speculative traditions by tracing keen connections between the work of imagining alternate worlds and the precarity of Caribbean small islands, particularly in the ongoing context of climate change, global warming, and rising waters.

Our book-review section is rich with offerings and continues the conversation about Caribbean literary histories. It opens with a multipart review of the three volumes in *Caribbean Literature in Transition* series, published by Cambridge University Press. Volume 1 is reviewed by Rachel Northrop and Jordan Rogers, volume 2 is reviewed by Sadé Gordon and Gabrielle Mary Jean-Louis, and volume 3 is reviewed by Jovanté Anderson. These reviews are introduced by an essay by Patricia Joan Saunders that offers reflections on the context for these collaborative reviews but also situates these volumes within a genealogy of anthologizing Caribbean literature and criticism. We encounter this critical question of genealogies and generations that Saunders raises not just as a thematic but as part of the very context of the work. Here graduate students are reviewing these works as part of their orientation to the field, as well as offering their own contributions to thinking about the state of the field today.

It is perhaps fitting that an issue that honours Lamming should close with words by Esther Phillips. In her review of Hazel Simmons-McDonald's new collection, *Shabine and Other Stories*, Phillips attends to the "mutilayered texture of the work." She traces for readers Simmons-McDonald's rendering of language, metaphor, and character in her reflections on this new addition to the Caribbean short-story pantheon. These reviews all exemplify the important work that book reviews do in introducing readers to new texts and in signaling their place in ongoing conversations and in the region's literary tradition.

We extend special thanks to the Barbadian artist Llanor Alleyne, whose work *Pool*, from her *Moonlight* series, graces the cover of this issue. Like the discussions in this issue, Alleyne's work also inhabits and reimagines a genealogy of representations of the Caribbean. In her discussion of Agostino Brunias's well-known painting *Three Caribbean Washerwomen*, Omise'eke Natasha Tinsley attends to how the women at the waterside, with their "water-soaked women's poses evoke a brown female sexual availability" (19). Although the painting is of women engaging in the work of washing at the river, Tinsley notes how the fact of the male gaze of the painter and the fact that "Brunias's paintings were sold to male owners of great houses and mansions" create a context of "white masculine viewers" who are able to view these bodies as available "with the same entitlement with which they claimed Caribbean lands" (19). Alleyne's work resists and responds to this view of both the landscape and Caribbean women's bodies. *Pool* can also be seen as responding to Romare Bearden's Caribbean collage paintings, which are arguably another intertext for Alleyne's series. Most of Bearden's Caribbean collage paintings were made during his time living in the Caribbean on the island of St. Martin. This period is documented by Sally Price and Richard Price in their book *Romare Bearden: The Caribbean Dimension* (2006). Alleyne's work reminds us that such representations have a history. It also reminds us that collage has history. We might understand her work as being in dialogue with that of other contemporary artists, such as Jacqueline Bishop, who have used collage as part of a practice of revisioning and response to previous texts.⁴ Alleyne's creation of an intimate female space in *Pool*

resists notions of availability. The lush, landscaped location by the water and the denseness that she is able to create through her particular practice of collaging (note not only the overlapping but also the visual intensity of the collaged material) offers a resistant, perhaps protective space of repose for these women by the silvered water. This is not a domestic (or domesticated) space but an intimate space where these women can just be themselves and be with each other. Indeed, we might understand this as a space that exceeds economies of availability, in that Alleyne seeks to represent something outside the time-space-desire of capitalism. Whereas in Brunias's painting the washerwomen are engaged in labour (even as they perform modes of unruliness), in Alleyne's *Pool* the women are seen in relaxation or even play. It is a space of another kind of exchange that night and moonlight afford.

The poet Derek Walcott, in his musings on Caribbean history and creativity, forwarded the question of "What the twilight says." Walcott's meditations on twilight attend to its "patience of alchemy" (4). He writes of Caribbean twilight as something "like a childhood signal to come home," a time that "keeps its pastoral rhythm, and the last home-going traffic" (3). I suggest that Alleyne's work is similarly interested in the alchemy of night and the alchemy of moonlight. But she is also interested in the "patience" of this time, something outside capitalist rhythms of relation.⁵ Her ongoing *Moonlight* series invites us to consider what the moonlight says. For Alleyne, this is both a time of enigmatic luminance and a time of afterglow, where we might rest, reflect, and recompose.

We hope you enjoy these essays, interviews, and reviews, and that they inspire deep and worthwhile reflection.

Notes

- ¹ For seven consecutive years, the Centre for Caribbean Thought at the University of the West Indies, Mona, hosted a series of Caribbean Reasonings conferences honouring outstanding Caribbean intellectuals. The conference honouring Lamming was the second in the series.
- ² For a discussion of a series of interrelated Caribbean feminist conferences, see also Alexander.
- ³ Here I am riffing off the title of Mervyn Morris's landmark essay "On Reading Louise Bennet, Seriously" and what it teaches us about practices of reading.
- ⁴ I am thinking of Bishop's collage works in her *Postcard* series, as well as her work *History at the Dinner Table*. See also the conversation between Alleyne and Bishop (Bishop).
- ⁵ See also the first work in Alleyne's *Moonlight* series titled *Respite of the Black Madonnas* (Alleyne).

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