
Editorial Preface

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This special issue on Caribbean literature, art, and environmental activism complements the 2016 *Journal of West Indian Literature* special issue Elaine Savory edited on ecocriticism. Savory introduced that issue by calling attention to the danger Donald Trump, then just elected as president of the United States, posed to global efforts to address the climate crisis. She made a powerful case for the importance of literature and ecocriticism and their power to reshape dominant narratives and to change minds (7). Savory documented the increasing prominence of Caribbean literature and criticism in the larger field of ecocriticism, while the issue showcased the depth and breadth of Caribbean scholarship on literature and the environment. It has been an honour to carry on Savory's efforts in 2023. The moment of climate urgency that motivated Savory has only intensified, while the art, the activism, and the scholarship engaged with this crisis is so innovative and abundant that one regrets having to limit the number of voices included.

The seeds for this issue were planted when the Caribbean Studies Association (CSA) released their call for papers for their 2022 conference in Jamaica. I am a great admirer of the Jamaican film-maker, activist, and writer Esther Figueroa, and decided that it would be important to honour her work with a round table at the conference, as it would be held in her home country. Of course, COVID intervened; the CSA was virtual, but the round table went on. Its participants were adamant, however, that the round table address Figueroa in the context of the region as a whole. Three essays originally delivered at the CSA remain in this issue (those of Alejandra Bronfman, Rachel Moseley-Wood, and Jeannine Murray-Román). Others have joined, including Shalini Puri, who attended that 2022 round table. The special issue has retained the dual goal of embracing art and environmental activism regionally and of highlighting Figueroa's work. The first nine pieces—comprising eight scholarly articles and a photo essay—address art, literature, and activism of the twenty-first century, much of it produced during and in the wake of COVID, catastrophic hurricanes, earthquakes, mudslides, landslides, flooding, and the unrelenting push to develop tourism and extract natural resources despite the crises. The issue concludes with a section on Figueroa comprising Moseley-Wood's analysis of her films *Fly Me to the Moon* and *I Live for Art*, an interview with Figueroa, and Figueroa's "*Fly Me to the Moon: Imagining a Future beyond Extraction*," a manifesto.

This special issue addresses a wide spectrum of literary genres (poetry, novels, short fiction, essays, hurricane diaries, soca, calypso) and visual art (drawings, sculpture, film, installations), and a diverse geography, from the Bahamas to Guyana with special emphasis

on Puerto Rico and Jamaica. The articles demonstrate how the environmental crises shape both the form and the content of art, and how these various artists activate their audiences. They concern themselves with many of the same issues as the 2016 *Journal of West Indian Literature* special issue: the profound environmental, human, and political implications of extractive industries; the centrality of the environment to the region's cultural theorists; and the importance of Indigenous rights, knowledge, and culture. Perhaps the most significant common ground, so to speak, is that authors in both issues share some of the core tenets asserted in recent influential works on the Caribbean and the environment, Malcom Ferdinand's *Decolonial Ecology* (2019; trans. 2022), Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey's *Allegories of the Anthropocene* (2019), and Mimi Sheller's *Island Futures* (2020). These works are grounded in the premise that the current climate crisis and larger notion of the Anthropocene can only be understood in relation to and as a product of what Ferdinand calls "modernity's colonial and environmental double fracture," the inseparable history of colonial violence against humans (manifest in racism and patriarchy) and against the environment (based in anthropocentrism) (3). The apocalypse of human and non-human extinction and transformation of ecology, as DeLoughrey states, has already happened in the Caribbean and began with European conquest (7). That climate crisis is now being felt and seen in the global North. Therefore, justice for the environment and humans is inseparable and must be addressed together and at once.

Despite this substantial common ground, I sense a difference in immediacy and newness in the scholarship and arts in this issue, which was not so palpable in 2016. The efforts to stop ExxonMobil from developing Guyana's oil, which Sasha Ann Panaram addresses in her article, dates back only to the turn of this millennium; legal and other challenges are ongoing. Murray-Román examines how living through Hurricane Maria and its aftermath shaped aesthetic form and content. Annalee Davis designed the garden and art installation she presents in her contribution to this issue to help communities heal from COVID and other traumas such as the plantation. Yet, an unusually strong storm destroyed it not long after its completion.

It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the fact that artists and scholars in the region have been working in the shadow of Maria and Irma, hurricanes that brought such devastation to many communities—from Dominica and Barbuda to Puerto Rico and Saint Croix—and exposed in such sharp relief the cruelty and continuities of centuries-old colonialism and present-day colonialism and neoliberal capitalism. The combined scholarship and activism that the storms engendered cohere perhaps most prominently in Yarimar Bonilla and Marisol LeBrón's *Aftershocks of Disaster* (2019), which constitutes an important context for the articles in this volume.

Bronfman begins the issue with "Public Art and Military Afterlives in Culebra, Puerto Rico," which explores strategies for remediation and reclamation of spaces damaged by environmental violence and toxins of US military occupation. Taking as her case study the artwork painted on military tanks the US abandoned on the island's shore, Bronfman

makes a powerful case that public art, open to all and on the spot, has a special role to play in the reclamation of land. Bronfman introduces themes that will recur through much of the issue, the intertwined and ongoing challenges posed by US colonialism and environmental destruction, and the innovative ways Caribbean people fashion art to remediate and repair that damage. Murray-Román, like Bronfman, illuminates the intertwined forces of US colonialism and environmental destruction by examining how the experience of living and writing through catastrophic hurricanes and US government failure shaped the form and the content of the literature Audre Lorde produced about Hugo in Saint Croix in 1989 and that Sofía Gallisá Muriente wrote concerning Maria in Puerto Rico in 2017. Though separated by nearly thirty years, this shared experience led Lorde and Gallisá Muriente, Murray-Román argues, to fashion a new subgenre of the *crónica*, the hurricane diary that demonstrates the therapeutic power of art to assist communities in fashioning futures collaboratively and exposing the role of the United States in what Bonilla has conceptualized as “the coloniality of disaster.”

In the third article, “Postcards Remixed,” Puri also takes up the question of artistic form and Caribbean artists’ ability to fashion aesthetic genres to illuminate and redress the intertwined crises of environment and human oppression. Focusing on the postcard, long associated with the colonial and environmentally destructive tourist industry, Puri deftly illustrates Lorna Goodison’s and Olive Senior’s ability to repurpose that genre in powerfully reparative ways that—like the work of Lorde and Gallisá Muriente—foster community among Caribbean people.

Aliyah Khan’s “Ship and Storm” takes the question of the relation of environment and aesthetic form in a new direction by making a compelling case that the hurricane has been a central metaphor and concept in Caribbean cultural theory and a theme in Caribbean literature throughout the tradition. Her article further illuminates the question of remediation and reparation that Bronfman, Murray-Román, and Puri address by illustrating that there exists a long tradition in calypso and soca of writing songs about hurricanes, which perform “climate-trauma mitigation” by anthropomorphizing the hurricane, often as a woman.

Panaram introduces environmental degradation caused by extractive industries, a phenomenon that has characterized colonialism in the Caribbean since the eras of conquest and plantation slavery. She analyses the protest and reparative labour of women artists and activists, primarily Roshini Kempadoo and the Red Thread Collective, as they challenge ExxonMobil’s exploitation of petroleum under Guyana’s coastal waters and the government’s complicity. ExxonMobil has been granted extraordinary rights to extract the oil without assuring either profits or protection for Guyanese people and the environment. Panaram frames her analysis of art and exploitation in contemporary Guyana with an analysis of the long discursive history, from Sir Walter Raleigh onward, that has portrayed Guyana as El Dorado, inspiring and legitimating predation of its natural resources.

Davis’s photo essay “Pray to Flowers—A Plot of Disalienation” comes at the midpoint of the issue because it presents an artist explaining how she collaboratively designed and built an art installation to assist in healing multiple communities from the trauma of COVID, as well as from other older traumas. Davis describes the production of her installation and project for the 2023 Sharjah Biennial, where her “slow cultural work”, collaboration of collective sewing with Barbadian women, gardening teamwork with Yoei Guépin, sharing teas, collection of reading material, seed depository, and sound work were exhibited as an “antidote to extreme global challenges, growing environmental collapse, pandemics, and information overload,” and as part of the process of “unlearn[ing] the plantation.”

The second half of the issue features three essays that showcase Caribbean authors who portray non-human animals as a means of challenging anthropocentrism. First, Hannah Regis offers new readings of Senior’s *Gardening in the Tropics* (1994) and *Over the Roofs of the World* (2005), illustrating that Senior represents birds and other non-human animals as carriers of complex social and cultural patterns, specially allied with Indigenous peoples and able to communicate their knowledge. Senior’s presentation of human-animal symbiosis functions, Regis asserts, as a means of conceptually dismantling the colonial order of things that placed European humans above all non-human beings, Indigenous peoples, and other communities of colour. Regis’s focus on Senior, a Jamaican poet laureate considered a leading author in the region and far beyond, establishes that this critical appreciation of and alliance with non-human animals has long been an important element of the Anglophone Caribbean literary tradition.

Seanna Viechweg introduces Haiti and Hispaniola—so long understood as critical sites in the region’s political and environmental history—into the issue. She identifies two recent influential novels—*Claire of the Sea Light* (2013) by Haitian Edwidge Danticat and *La mucama de Omicunlé* (2015) by Dominican Rita Indiana—as advocating that multispecies justice is an imperative for the island’s future. She calls on scholars, to, place these works in dialogue. Both authors highlight the role of foreign scientists and environmentalists who perpetuate human and non-human suffering by blaming local, often impoverished communities for failing to be good stewards of the land and sea. If placed together, as Viechweg advocates, Danticat and Indiana voice a shared call for multispecies justice across the island of Hispaniola, insisting that the environment and people will survive only when the struggles against human oppression (racial, class, gender) and environmental destruction are united.

In the final article in this section, Akhim Alexis analyses three more recent short works of climate fiction, Nadine Tomlinson’s “The Metamorphosis of Marie Martin” (2022), Ada M. Patterson’s “Broken from the Colony” (2021), and Celestine Rita Baker’s “Rock, Father, Shell” (2021) published in online, open-access platforms that promote writing from the Caribbean and the global South. Featuring a human who becomes a fish and a futurist society created by trans youth, these short stories emphasize many of the core issues raised by Indiana, Danticat, and Senior: the imperative to address the needs of

human and other animals, and to include the needs and desires of women, trans, and queer individuals. Alexis brings attention to the role of NGOs in promoting climate fiction by focusing on winners of Imagine 2200, a climate-fiction contest developed by Grist, a US-based non-profit environmentalist media organization. He also showcases a short story that addresses the devastation of Hurricane Dorian, a category five storm that hit the Bahamas in 2019 and is often overshadowed in scholarship by Maria and Irma.

The concluding section of this issue is dedicated to the film, literature, and activism of Figueroa, whose work as artist, activist, and thinker inspired this issue. It begins with Moseley-Wood's analysis of Figueroa's experimental documentary short *I Live for Art* (2013) and her feature-length *Fly Me to the Moon* (2019); Moseley-Wood examines the connection between environmental destruction and human rights from the perspective of citizenship. She argues that in these two very different films, Figueroa exposes multiple instances in which the Jamaican government's investment in neoliberal policy and development has wrought irrecoverable damage to Jamaica's ecology and revealed the failure of the state to offer meaningful citizenship to Jamaicans. Moseley-Wood's focus on citizenship resonates with Panaram's revealing discussion of the Guyanese government's complicity with ExxonMobil in denying profits, protections, and a voice to citizens.

Following Moseley-Wood's scholarly analysis is an interview with Figueroa, in which Puri and I ask Figueroa about the practical side of creating environmentally engaged art, focusing on the small local organizations that take the lead in activism across the region and on the perpetual dilemma of securing funding, which almost without exception comes with contradictions that potentially compromise the organizations' goals. As artist and environmental activist, Figueroa gets the last word in the issue. "*Fly Me to the Moon: Imagining a Future beyond Extraction*," her manifesto, concludes the issue with the four "foundational beliefs" upon which her future imaginaries are based.

Despite their diverse objects of study and forms of expression, the authors and artists published in this issue share Figueroa's integrative and critical vision for a future beyond extraction.

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