
Editorial Preface

Raphael Dalleo

Over the past few years, Caribbeanists have grown accustomed to special issues of journals, conference panels, *Twitter/X* residencies, and other forms of memorialization to mark the passing of some of the most important figures in our field.

George Lamming, who passed away on 4 June 2022, is one of these towering intellectual presences. He was born in 1927 and belongs to a generation that brought Caribbean literature to a world stage and participated in struggles for decolonization, nation-building, and forging sovereignty in a neo-liberal, postcolonial era. The names of writers born a dozen years before or after Lamming is an amazing roll call: Suzanne Césaire (1915), Claudia Jones (1915), Marie Chauvet (1916), René Marques (1919), Wilson Harris (1921), Jacques Stephen Alexis (1922), Rosa Guy (1922), Sam Selvon (1923), Beryl Gilroy (1924), Frantz Fanon (1925), René Depestre (1926), Peter Kempadoo (1926), Martin Carter (1927), Sylvia Wynter (1928), Pedro Juan Soto (1928), Édouard Glissant (1928), Andrew Salkey (1928), Paule Marshall (1929), Guillermo Cabrera Infante (1929), Kamau Brathwaite (1930), Derek Walcott (1930), Antonio Benítez-Rojo (1931), V. S. Naipaul (1932), Stuart Hall (1932), Maryse Condé (1934), Austin Clarke (1934), Earl Lovelace (1935), Luis Rafael Sánchez (1936), Frankétienne (1936), Edward Baugh (1936), Severo Sarduy (1937), Velma Pollard (1937), Mervyn Morris (1937), Simone Schwarz-Bart (1938), Rosario Ferré (1938), and Myriam Warner-Vieyra (1939).

The accomplishments of this generation are so monumental that scholars, critics, readers, and writers today want very much to mourn their passing while celebrating their accomplishments. The *Journal of West Indian Literature (JWIL)* has been a venue for this process, for example, in the April 2022 issue of *JWIL* (vol. 30, no. 2), edited by Kelly Baker Josephs, which focuses on Kamau Brathwaite; or the November 2022 issue of *JWIL* (vol. 31, no. 1), edited by Ronald Cummings, which includes the special section “Critical Forum: Remembering George Lamming.” These issues simultaneously commemorate, remember, and engage with the thought of these incredibly prolific, provocative writers and thinkers. The discussion of Lamming that Ronald curated in *JWIL* brings together Aaron Kamugisha, Curdella Forbes, and Honor Ford-Smith to present wonderfully generative reflections on Lamming’s life and work. For readers seeking memorialization, that forum is exemplary. The current issue affirms and remains invested in that work of mourning, honouring, and celebrating.

Few writers have engaged with any historical period—let alone one as important as the years he lived through—with as much insight and intellectual rigour as Lamming. As Kamugisha puts it, “No greater guide to the transformations in Anglophone Caribbean society in the late colonial period emerged than Lamming,” as “the entire arc of his literary works represents one of the most profound meditations on the promise and pitfalls of decolonization in Anglophone Caribbean letters” (1–2). His novels tell the story of the transformation of Caribbean consciousness during the labour unrest of the 1930s in *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) and grappled with the meaning of not only political but also cultural and psychological independence in *Of Age and Innocence* (1958) and *Season of Adventure* (1960). In his non-fiction, Lamming’s assumption of the position of Caliban in relation to Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* resonated throughout the decolonizing period. It is no surprise that the first edition of the field-making anthology *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* begins with an excerpt from Lamming’s *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) titled “The Occasion for Speaking.”

Lamming was therefore very much a writer in dialogue with his world and his historical context. Looking back to Lamming and celebrating how clearly and powerfully his writing spoke to a very particular historical moment lead this issue to also ask the question: What does Lamming mean to us now and going forward?

To answer that question, we include a mix of established and new scholars who build on major critical engagements with Lamming, which include Sandra Pouchet Paquet’s *The Novels of George Lamming* (1982), Supriya Nair’s *Caliban’s Curse: George Lamming and the Revisioning of History* (1996), A. J. Simoes da Silva’s *The Luxury of Nationalist Despair: George Lamming’s Fiction as Decolonizing Project* (2000), Forbes’s *From Nation to Diaspora: Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and the Cultural Performance of Gender* (2005), and Anthony Bogues’s edition of *The George Lamming Reader* (2011). As important as these landmarks remain to understanding Lamming’s life and work, the scholars featured in this issue are also charting new directions in Lamming studies and speaking to the ongoing project of engaging with his writing and his thought.

Lamming’s passing does not silence his voice. He himself framed his practice by opening *The Pleasures of Exile* with a description of his dialogue with the ancestors:

This ceremony of the Souls is regarded by the Haitian peasant as a solemn communion; for he hears, at first hand, the secrets of the Dead. The celebrants are mainly relatives of the deceased who, ever since their death, have been locked in Water. It is the duty of the Dead to return and offer, on this momentous night, a full and honest report on their past relations with the living. . . . Through the medium of the Priest, the Dead speak of matters which it must have been difficult to raise before; and through the same medium, the living learn and understand what the Dead tongues have uttered. Revenge, guilt,

redemption, and some future expectations make for an involvement which binds the Dead and the living together. (9–10)

Lamming writes of creating this exchange between the dead and their descendants, offering the dead a chance to speak again in a new context and the living an opportunity to re-engage with those who still have lessons to teach.

Everyone working in Caribbean studies is an intellectual descendant of Lamming in one way or another, and we offer this issue as another chance to hear him speak and to learn from him again. The urgent exploration of imperialism and regional identity that Lamming raised throughout his life remain pressing topics for us today. In this issue, we also find the contributors listening to what Lamming has to tell us about matters that we may not have been attuned to hearing before. The essays in this volume connect Lamming to new conversations and new bodies of thought such as affect studies, animal studies, and surveillance studies. In the process, they renew the questions about Caribbean sovereignty and humanity that Lamming always foregrounded.

The issue begins with Linden Lewis's essay "George Lamming's Caribbean Epistemology." Lewis, who carried out a dialogue with Lamming over many years, has published a number of recent articles on the author, including "George Lamming: The Vocation of Writing and his Critical Social Engagement" in *Anthurium*, which focuses more on Lamming's fiction. In his contribution here, he instead steps back to "explore the philosophical underpinning of Lamming's work." Lewis argues that Lamming's epistemology rests on a Caribbean Marxism that may seem out of joint with the dominant ideologies of our time but remains urgent in a region still characterized by imperialism, inequality, and exploitation.

Next is the first of two essays in the issue that engage with Lamming's work in relation to affect studies. This essay's author, Yutaka Yoshida, centres his analysis on Lamming's first novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*, a Caribbean classic that has been read and discussed many times. Yoshida has his own long-standing engagement with Lamming, including having translated *In the Castle of My Skin* into Japanese. In this essay, Yoshida offers a new entry point by foregrounding the centrality of shame in the novel. Lamming's work has always probed the intersection of the socio-political and the psychological, but Yoshida argues that shame in particular allows Lamming to show how the "structur[ing] and de-structur[ing of] the dominant discourse in the plantation society" occurs.

Jacqueline Retalis also returns us to *In the Castle of My Skin*, but in this case to engage with the roles that non-human animals play in that novel. Retalis notices how frequently Lamming compares or connects his human characters to animals—especially birds and crabs—and in the process blurs the lines between human and non-human. She follows Wynter in making the case that this blurring invokes the history of dehumanization of Black Caribbean people, even as Lamming's fiction also points to the potential for destabilizing the exclusionary versions of humanity that Wynter also seeks to undermine.

The next essay in the issue is Stephanie Brown’s “Resistance to Racializing Surveillance in George Lamming’s *The Emigrants*.” Brown finds in Lamming’s second novel a trenchant reflection on surveillance as a multifaceted practice that racializes and seeks to control Caribbean people, even as the novel’s characters attempt to turn this practice against itself to create space in a hostile London. Reading through the lens of surveillance studies offers Brown a different approach to thinking about this novel’s reflection on the challenges to forging a diasporic community in a late-colonial metropole organized to manage and defuse difference.

Tohru Nakamura, meanwhile, returns us to affect studies to consider Lamming’s final novel, *Natives of My Person*. Nakamura makes the case for the work as an exploration of the emotional reorganization required to move beyond capitalist, patriarchal colonial relations. Drawing on Brathwaite’s and Glissant’s theorizations, Nakamura sees in *Natives of My Person* a critique of “missile culture” in favour of a relational identity that recognizes the plurality of self that the novel’s title references. Nakamura, too, points to Lamming’s repeated return to the Ceremony of the Souls as key to recognizing interdependence—on past and present, self and Other—as crucial to building the “architecture of the future” that Lamming wants us to imagine.

We end this section on Lamming with three poems by Amílcar Sanatan. Sanatan’s poems offer a creative reflection on how Lamming’s work and his thought speak to the present, especially in terms of transformed meanings of nationhood and gender. Lamming, who began his career writing poetry, has inspired so many poets over the years. Some are quite overt in acknowledging this inspiration, such as Brathwaite, who wrote of that influence repeatedly, or Esther Phillips, whose 2015 collection *Leaving Atlantis* is dedicated to Lamming. We are happy to give space in this issue for Sanatan to undertake his own dialogue. Lamming’s voice echoes in Sanatan’s poems, not to drown out or overwhelm the younger poet’s voice but as the dialogue between generations that Lamming described in those opening pages of *The Pleasures of Exile*. We offer this issue as another invitation to continue making space for these voices and conversations.

The issue ends with two reviews of recent work: Kris Singh’s review of Christopher Laird’s *Equal to Mystery: In Search of Harold Sonny Ladoo* and Renan Cabral Paulino’s review of Zalika Reid-Benta’s *River Mumma*. As Singh points out, there has been renewed interest in Ladoo’s work, and Laird’s book helps to flesh out the life and context of a writer whose work is crucial to understanding the development of Indo-Trinidadian, as well as Canadian Caribbean, writing. Cabral Paulino places Reid-Benta’s novel into this context of Caribbean writing in Canada, but also into a lineage of Caribbean writers engaging with African-derived spiritual practices. These two works, in different ways, show how issues that Lamming foregrounded—of diaspora, Caribbean belief systems, and cultural loss and reinvention—continue to play out across Caribbean literary history.

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