Special Issue on Caribbean Literature and Culture: “Opening Out the Way(s) to the Future”

Issue 10, 2013

Guest Editors: Sandra Courtman and Wendy Knepper
# Table of Contents

**Introduction**  
Sandra Courtman and Wendy Knepper  

**Articles**

"Beyond the Horizon, Out at Sea, A New Day Breaks": Memory and Identity in Ingrid Pollard’s *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By*  
Lou Smith  

The Creolised Waltz: European Music in the Leeward Dutch Antilles  
Luigi Maduro  

The Politics of Slavery and Commemoration: Derek Walcott’s *Walker*  
Penny Woollard  

Plátanos and Perejil: Border Thinking in Contemporary Caribbean Literature  
Rebecca Fuchs  

"A Table of Plenty”. Representations of Food and Social Order in Caribbean Writing: Some Early Accounts, Caryl Phillip’s *Cambridge* (1991), and Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song* (2010)  
Sarah Lawson Welsh  

**Creative Submissions**

“Trees and All and “Untitled”  
Sheree Mack  

“On Walking to See the Exhibition *London, Sugar & Slavery*” and “Apothecary”  
Lou Smith  

“Philosopher and Father” and "My mother’s journal left us strict instructions"  
Shirley May  

“One. .....Drop”  
Mark Jason Welch  

**Contributors**

Biographical Statements
Abstract

This interdisciplinary special issue examines considers both neglected histories and future directions for Caribbean scholarship, with papers ranging across the fields of the visual arts, music, literature, and food studies. Contributions by poets contribute to wider discourses concerning space/place, embodiment, and the negotiation of shifting temporalities.
Introduction to “Opening Out the Way(s) to the Future”
Sandra Courtman and Wendy Knepper

The idea for this special issue of EnterText on Caribbean literature and culture originated from our sharing a panel at the 2010 Society of Caribbean Studies Conference. We decided to disseminate the scholarship of the Society by extending the conference Call for Papers to include submissions to a special issue. Our collaboration on this issue is typical of the work of The Society for Caribbean Studies which has been connecting scholars since 1976. The Society and its international membership go from strength to strength and many of the leading figures in Caribbean Studies have presented their research to its annual conferences. Universities (such as my own) have recently revived an interest in the value of offering interdisciplinary degrees. Yet, in recent years, departments offering area studies have had to fight for survival in some institutions. We who work in this field have always known how relevant and fruitful interdisciplinary area studies are for understanding postcolonial societies. Jamaican intellectual and founding figure in contemporary cultural studies, Stuart Hall suggests that the Caribbean offers a paradigm for exploring the modern conditions of diaspora and creolisation because “no one is from here.”¹ These essays and creative pieces recognise these complexities and respond to Caribbean Philosopher C.L.R James’s call to “…orient for the future only by comprehension of the present in the light of the past.”² As a visionary intellectual, he believed that arts and culture could offer alternatives to present horizons. The “supreme artist,” he argued “summed up the past and […] opened out the way to the future.”³ In this special issue, scholars and creative writers of the Caribbean and its diasporas respond to James’s call to expand present horizons and (re-)envision the future through an engagement with the past. Their respective insights make a valuable contribution to the field of interdisciplinary studies, which focus on the Caribbean as a paradigm of different experiences of lived time and space.

The postcolonial emphasis on decolonisation through the acts of cultural reclamation and representation has long been a central concern for Caribbean studies. Lou Smith offers a fresh perspective of such issues in her multimodal analysis of the work of visual artist, Ingrid Pollard. In “‘Beyond the Horizon, Out at Sea, A New Day Breaks’: Memory and Identity in Ingrid Pollard’s The Boy Who Watches Ships Go By,” Smith considers how Pollard’s work, which combines image and text, reclaims Lancaster’s relatively neglected history as a site of colonial trade and Caribbean migration. Drawing on Kamau Brathwaite’s notion of tidalectics, Smith argues that Pollard’s The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By (2002) represents both time and space in ways that defy linear approaches to historiography and cartography. Exploring the relationship between land and sea, Pollard’s combination of image and text elicits new critical horizons for envisioning British and Caribbean identities, particularly through her engagement with the histories of forced and chosen Caribbean migrations through the longue durée. Smith offers a sensitive and original reading of the impact of Pollard’s work on the viewer,
highlighting how more the artist’s work reconstructs dominant ideological horizons by mapping new vantage points. These textual re-inscriptions of space and place call upon viewers/readers to recognize alternative, multiply situated, and more historically-informed relations, thus contributing to wider communal discourses and acts of memorialisation. Through her emphasis on Pollard’s aesthetics of interactivity, which place emphasis on both being and becoming, Smith highlights the importance of active engagement in negotiating ways of the future via encounters with past-present horizons.

Maduro’s “The Creolised Waltz: European Music in the Leeward Dutch Antilles” intervenes in Caribbean cultural studies to investigate the cross-cultural transformation of European musical forms in the Dutch Antilles. Drawing on various historical accounts of the European waltz, theories of creolisation, and an interview with Randal Corsen, the great grandson of Joseph Sickman Corsen, a key figure in the history of the creolised waltz, Maduro carefully pieces together an account of the emergence, transformation, and possible future of this musical form. His analysis pays close attention to the uneven dynamics of cultural translation, highlighting accidental, improvisational, and highly strategic interventions in the form as it was adapted to express both the cultural diversities of the Dutch Antilles and the specific perspectives and world horizons of the white elite. Challenging the work of scholars who insist on European circulation and influence through top-down influence, Maduro’s account of the cultural politics of musical transformation in the Dutch Antilles sheds light, more widely, on creolising transformations. The technical analysis of rhythmic variation, the hemiola-effect, and the dactyl will be of particular interest to musicologists while the debates concerning European influences, particularly through the work of Chopin, are particularly fascinating for non-specialist readers. This article considers the impact of creolisation as on ongoing process that may renew the life of musical forms, such as the mazurka, which have been largely consigned to the category of heritage music in Europe, but which remain open and vital forms for the future in the Caribbean. Finally, the article closes by outlining future directions and methods for studies of the creolized waltz, thus opening up directions for further scholarship.

Through discussions of the legacies of slavery and transnational perspectives, Penny Woollard and Rebecca Fuchs shed light on the cross-border aesthetics of two leading Caribbean writers, namely Derek Walcott and Junot Díaz. Woollard’s “The Politics of Slavery and Commemoration: David Walcott’s Walker” examines a lesser known play by the Nobel laureate, which concerns the life history of African American abolitionist, David Walker. Woollard argues that Walcott stages an interventionist representation of Walker’s history, which calls attention to the enslavement of African American, Caribbean, and Irish peoples as part of a wider history of economic expansionism. Her transnational reading of slavery acknowledges the influence of Eric Williams’s Capitalism and Slavery to consider how violence and marginalisation relate to transformations in the global order. In conclusion, Woollard reflects on how Walker might be read in dialogue with Walcott’s shifting views of race in America, considering his recent poem, “Forty Acres,” written in response to Barack Obama’s inauguration as the first black President of the United States, as one that reclaims the space of the plantation as a site of fruitful
transformation. In the light of the recent Dominican court ruling that potentially strips Haitians born in the Dominican Republic of citizenship, it is especially timely to consider the negotiation of borders and borderlands on the island of Hispaniola. Rebecca Fuchs analysis of Junot Diaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) and Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones* (1997) examines the ways in which both authors critique the histories of border violence whilst also reclaiming a border culture that resists the violence of geopolitical and ideological divisions, particularly through the use of testimonial forms and vernacular idioms. Building on the work of Walter Mignolo, Fuchs argues that both the Haitian-American and Dominica-American author share a vision of pluraversality as forms of critical border thinking that challenge universalist paradigms and seek to overcome the residual logic of coloniality.

Rounding out the scholarly contributions, Sarah Lawson Welsh’s work contributes to the growing body of research concerning the culture(s) of food and taste in postcolonial and Caribbean studies. In “‘A Table of Plenty’: Representations of Food and Social Order in Caribbean Writing: Some Early Accounts, Caryl Phillips’s *Cambridge*, and Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song*,” she examines the relationship between writing and cooking in historical documents of slavery as well as neo-slave novels, considering the significance of food hierarchies and the creolisation of food cultures in Caribbean contexts. Building on Richard Wilk’s analysis of food status and respectability in Belize, she argues that both Levy and Phillips employ “narrative strategies which deliberately decentre the hegemony of the white Creole accounts upon which they draw.” She argues that Levy’s novel is more radical than Phillips’s in its subversive potential due to its ability to “disrupt the intertextual field” and realign our reading of archival sources. Bringing archival texts into dialogue with fictional sources, Lawson Welsh offers innovative readings that shed new light on the interpretation of past-present texts and practices related to food culture. She skillfully decodes subversive practices as well as calls attention to the culture of respectability that led the plantocracy to value imported foodstuffs and recipes over the (more) local and indigenous. This innovative article opens up new perspectives and reading practices in Caribbean studies through its careful analysis of the consumption of food and narrative.

Finally, this special issue encompasses poems that stimulate us to re-envision the past and future by evoking an imaginary engagement with place and space. The poems here offer a visceral take on the Caribbean and its history, language, and culture. As Sheree Mack puts it: “landing here, in this place./ Everything has its time. And could again.” Lou Smith’s representation of the Dockland in London presents a contrapuntal account of the contemporary space of tourist pleasure, where sun-tanning bodies are on display, and the historical space of Black Atlantic trade and oppression, which leaves its bloody traces on the ships. Smith’s poem, entitled “Apothecary,” refers to the “umbilical cord of ancestral memory,” a theme which resurfaces in Shirley May’s commemorative poems, which place emphasis on the family, representing both paternal and maternal influences on the formation and expression of self through time. Mark Jason Welch’s “One. ….Drop” offers a strikingly lyrical account of the effects of dispossession on children. The image of the dripping standpipe takes on a wider resonance, associated
with tears and the echoes of the past in the present. The use of code-switching elicits a pan-Caribbean consciousness so that space, like time, seems permeable and expansive. Finally, the dispossessed and insurgent children of Welch’s poem resist parental directives, stand in opposition to deprivation, and demand a better future.

Addressing historical, cultural, and literary perspectives, this special issue offers new perspectives on overlooked and emerging themes and topics in Caribbean culture. Both scholarly work and poetry reflect the need to address the past in an actively critical and creative fashion in order to come to terms with events unfolding in the present. Attention to the archive is a common theme running through most, if not all, of the pieces in this special issue. But that archive is never simply a repository of knowledge and facts. Rather it represents a source and resource, open to purposeful reactivation, not only in understanding past-present horizons but also in orienting a way for the future.
**Endnotes**


3. C.L.R. James, “The Artist in the Caribbean” was delivered as part of Open Lecture series at the University College of the West Indies, Mona, (1959-1960); cited in C.L.R. James, “Two Lectures by C.L.R. James,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 54:1 (March-June 2008): 179-187.


5. Ibid.


Abstract

Born in Georgetown, Guyana, Ingrid Pollard now lives in England. The sea and shoreline feature prominently in her text-photographic works signalling the ebb and flow of time. In a meditation on temporality and memory, *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By* (2002) evokes cultural memory of Caribbean migrations to Britain. In this article I argue that *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By* evokes what Elizabeth DeLoughrey refers to as a “tidalectic engagement” in *Routes and Roots*, which reveals a history of place that has been largely erased from Britain’s historical consciousness, namely the city of Lancaster’s involvement in the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. By focusing on the burial site of the enslaved African child “Sambo,” *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By* engages with geography, history, and cartography to critique British imperialism and nationalism whilst also highlighting the alternative forms of memorialisation currently taking place at the site where “Sambo” was buried. I argue that the methodology of “tidalectics” devised by Barbadian poet and scholar Kamau Brathwaite as well as invoked by DeLoughrey in *Routes and Roots* can be applied to *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By*. Through its use of artistic metaphors in both text and photography, which posit the ocean as ‘place’, Pollard’s work possesses an historiography, rather than amorphous space, through its exploration of the relationship between land and sea. I argue that images of the sea and shoreline on the coastline of Lancaster in *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By* can be read as metaphors for Caribbean diasporic migration experiences, both forced and chosen.
“Beyond the Horizon, Out at Sea, A New Day Breaks”: Memory and Identity in Ingrid Pollard’s *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By*
Lou Smith

Using silver photographic emulsion on stretched canvas and hand-tinting, *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By* (see http://www.ingridpollard.com/the-boy-who-watches-ships-go-by.html) was first exhibited at Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester 2002 as part of the exhibition entitled *Travelogue: Views of Britain by Seven Contemporary Artists* curated by Mary Griffiths, and is included in a collection of Pollard’s work entitled *Postcards Home*, published by Autograph (The London-based Association of Black Photographers). Pollard uses photography and text art as a combined medium, a method she began in the early to mid-1980s. In “In Their Own Image” in the collection *Black Feminist Cultural Criticism*, curator and writer Kellie Jones discusses the work of eight black women photographers from the United States and Britain, including Pollard, who combine text and photography, and suggests these photographers “adopted the photography/text format as a method to both delimit and expand the implicit meanings in standard ‘straight’ photography.” Pollard disrupts ‘official’ discourses through the use of autobiographical representative strategies in her work, which include the personal voice in the form of an explorer narrative. As Jones contends, photographs can offer multifaceted meanings. In *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By* the addition of the written text alongside the photography works to ground the political intentions of Pollard’s photographs (which will be discussed further in this article).

In *Image, Music, Text*, Roland Barthes discusses the “parasitic” relationship between the photograph and text. Using press photography as his example, he suggests that a reversal has taken place whereby “it is not the image which comes to elucidate or ‘realize’ the text, but the latter which comes to sublimate, patheticize or rationalize the image.” For Barthes, this means that, dependent on the closeness of text to the image, for instance, or the content of the words and photograph, the text can either add emphasis by “simply amplifying a set of connotations already given in the photograph” or generate “an entirely new signified which is retroactively projected into the image” or even, at times, “contradict the image.” In *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By* Barthes’s former statement applies: the content of the text provides an anchor-point from which to view the photographs, even though the signifiers of both text and photographs exist as independent narratives.

The written first-person narrative adds another layer of autobiographical and historical agency to Pollard’s photographs, which depict elements of the natural landscape such as rocks, driftwood, sand, and the sea, as well as structures such as boats and buildings in an exploration of migration, remembering and forgetting, and diasporic identity. Similar to Lynn Silverman’s photographs of the Australian desert,
depicted in the series *Horizons* (which feature deliberately disorienting images of landscape), Pollard’s images “give us an idea of place but never endeavor to claim it.”11 However, although Pollard’s photographs are, at times, ambiguous, they differ from Silverman’s; the combination of text with images of the Lancaster landscape serves to re-claim place by examining and ‘sounding’ a repressed history.

The subtle photographs create a sense of temporal suspension, which alludes to the transition from one life to the next for those who were enslaved as well as the “liminal” stage between life and death. In his examination of liminality, Joseph Roach discusses the “middle state” as put forward by Arnold van Gennep in his “seminal formulation of death as a rite of passage”12:

The middle state (dying, or more expressively, “passing”) is the less stable stage of transition between more clearly defined conditions: it is called the “liminal” (literally, “threshold”) stage, and it tends to generate the most intense experiences of ritual expectancy, activity, and meaning.13

In *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By*, the coast of Lancashire as the burial place of the enslaved African child “Sambo”, and the sea itself as the location of catastrophic events, are representative of this threshold. The “liminal” stage is evoked through images of the sea and shore as the threshold between one life and the next,14 through the re-imagining of Sambo’s journey to Britain, and his consequent journey into death.

Ten photographs constitute the series *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By* in *Postcards Home*, all depicting the coastal landscape of Sunderland Point, Lancashire, and the sea itself. What structures are present exist either as ruins, such as a broken rowboat or window, or in isolation, such as a view of the edge of a tethered rowboat, for instance, or a lighthouse in the distance. Through the use of repetition (three images of rowboats, for example), and through the exclusion of the body, the images evoke a sense of desolation. This sense of desolation is also captured through the muted sepia tones and the motif of the horizon line in the distance. Reproduced in the book *Postcards Home*, each photograph stands alone with the accompanying text beginning the series, locating the viewer in the narrative. Exhibited, however, the photographs were printed on canvas (another reference to the ships’ journeys).

Reproducing the photographs in a book alters the context of the work, affecting both memory and temporality, but we might also consider the role of exhibitions in framing the interpretation of cultural works. In *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By* reproduced in *Postcards Home*, any particular image or text can be contextualised within Pollard’s oeuvre. But the situation is very different when works are commissioned, displayed and placed alongside those of other artists. Such was the case with Pollard’s work which was included as one among many in a multi-artist curated exhibition, entitled *Travelogue: Views of Britain by Seven Contemporary Artists*, held at the Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester during the Cultureshock Festival in 2002 (the year of the Commonwealth Games).15 Seven artists’ work were exhibited in *Travelogue*, that of “Sonia Boyce, Manchester-based Nick Crowe and Kwong Lee, David Cushway, Jacqueline Donachie,
Roshini Kempadoo and Ingrid Pollard.\(^{16}\) The occasion and location are worth considering for they alter the contexts for interpreting the work. As a part of *Travelogue*, the work is viewed within the context of a variety of artists’ responses to and interrogation of contemporary Britain whereby each artist was asked to respond to a different location in Britain specifically for the exhibition.\(^{17}\) All of the works draw on the autobiographical and the political as all of the artists asked to exhibit have cultural links to countries throughout the wider Commonwealth\(^{18}\) and the work of each artist “focused on exploring territories, boundaries, cultural and physical landscapes and national identity.”\(^{19}\) Responses varied, from David Cushway’s *Snowdon*, an unfired clay cast taken on Mount Snowdon, Wales, which, once displayed in a glass cabinet produced its own microclimate therefore highlighting the continued environmental effects on the mountain,\(^{20}\) to Roshini Kempadoo’s multimedia work entitled *Back Routes* investigating Caribbean colonial subjectivity and narratives of the trans-Atlantic through an exploration of the imperialist legacy of the 16th Century Drake Cup.\(^{21}\) Pollard’s work, in focusing on Lancashire’s slave-trading history, would have held specific contextual resonance when exhibited in a gallery in Manchester due to the city’s own links to the slave trade through its cotton mills, the product of which was transported through the ports at Liverpool.\(^{22}\) Similar to the interrogation of colonial narratives in Kempadoo’s *Back Routes*, the politics of Pollard’s work is apparent in its exploration of the ways in which Britain was built on the money gained from slave trading.

Through images of the sea and shoreline as well as representations of the fluidity of time and space, Pollard engages with geography, history, and cartography to critique British imperialism and nationalism. Although a methodology most commonly used in reference to literary works, it can be argued that *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By* employs a tidalectic framework, what Barbadian poet and scholar “[Kamau] Brathwaite calls an ‘alter/native’ historiography to linear models of colonial progress,”\(^{23}\) whereby “success” is a continuum which moves outward from a circle’s centre and back again,\(^{24}\) just as the tide moves back-and-forth from the shore. Using a tidalectic methodology in examining literatures from both the Pacific and Caribbean regions, Elizabeth DeLoughrey in *Routes and Roots* argues:

> While most scholars have focused on the slave plantation system as the originary mechanism of creolization in the Caribbean, they have neglected the ways in which the region’s writers have mobilized a fluid oceanic imaginary, positioning the Atlantic as a shifting cultural origin of modernity and creolization…\(^{25}\)

The “tidalectic engagement”\(^{26}\) of *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By* is evident, I argue, through the investigation of “the complex relationship between land and sea”.\(^{27}\) Specifically, the exploration of a diasporic historiography of the sea suggests a multiplicity of identities. Images of the sea and shoreline on the coastline of Lancaster, England are metaphors for Caribbean diasporic migration experiences, both forced and chosen.

An historical amnesia has tended to pervade Britain’s involvement in the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade\(^{28}\) especially concerning the activities of the port at Lancaster\(^{29}\): Lancaster being a city that “had all but dissociated itself from the trade by the time it
came under public scrutiny at the hands of the petitioning for its abolition.\textsuperscript{30} A. V. Seaton puts forward that as Britain’s imperial power was at its height after the abolition of slavery, Britain has been able to mythologise the story of empire to centre on its role in its abolition in 1833 rather than focus on its involvement in slavery.\textsuperscript{31} “Indeed,” Seaton suggests, “by doing away with slavery before America, Britain was even able to claim a moral high ground that formed part of the Victorian mythology of an ethical empire.”\textsuperscript{32} The port of Lancaster has also not been as thoroughly discussed in histories of the Atlantic slave trade as that of neighbouring Liverpool.\textsuperscript{33} Additionally, the existence or extent of the port’s involvement in the African slave trade is much less well known than its involvement in the trade of colonial produce where Lancaster ships carried cloth to both the West Indies and America as well as returned with goods such as sugar, rum, and mahogany.\textsuperscript{34}

In \textit{Lancaster and the African Slave Trade}, Melinda Elder determines that the slave trade: spanned a period of 71 years and at its height, during the 1750s and 1760s, slaving vessels constituted, on average, 20 per cent of transatlantic arrivals at Lancaster. The tenacity of local slave merchants meant that in addition to Lancaster becoming Britain’s fourth largest West India port, it also topped the minor ports as the country’s fourth slaving port, after Liverpool, London and Bristol.\textsuperscript{35} And as Alan Rice points out, “Between 1750 and 1790 alone Lancaster merchants were responsible for the forced transportation of approximately 24,950 Africans across the Atlantic and into slavery in the West Indies and the Southern States of America.”\textsuperscript{36}

As is evident through the continued scholarship and artistic practice focusing on public engagement, disruptions to the silences pertaining to Lancaster’s involvement in the slave trade are occurring in multifarious and complex ways. Acts of re-membering and memorialisation are taking place through the work of artists, writers, scholars, including figures such as Ingrid Pollard, Alan Rice, Lubaina Himid, Dorothea Smartt and Kevin Dalton-Johnston, and official channels for historical memorialisation, such as the city’s involvement in the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 2007. During the Bicentenary, Lancashire Museums commissioned the artists Lubaina Himid and Sue Flowers to create installations for the work \textit{Abolished}? as well as instigate a project for secondary schools about the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act in 1807.\textsuperscript{37} However, while positive actions such as these were taking place at a local level, at a national level, Tony Blair’s government expressed deep sorrow over slavery, but failed to issue a public apology for Britain’s role in the slave trade.

\textit{The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By} traces the forced migration of the African child “Sambo” who died on arrival at Lancaster. Sambo died “within days of his stepping on Lancashire soil”: “[h]e was laid to rest, without ceremony, in 1736, at Sunderland Point where the Lune flows into the sea.”\textsuperscript{39} Alan Rice claims that “[a]ccording to \textit{The Lonsdale Magazine} of 1822, he had arrived in [or] around 1736 from the West Indies in the capacity of a servant to the captain of the ship (to this day unnamed).”\textsuperscript{40} The photographs depict the coastal landscape of Lancaster where Sambo is buried, a landscape indicative of both trauma and erasure: the trauma of arrival for those such as Sambo who were enslaved and the erasure of the city’s history of involvement in the
trans-Atlantic slave trade. Through the representation of Sambo’s journey, Pollard’s work participates in the act of reclaiming history through traumatic representation and stands as a corrective to public memory. In “Naming the Money and Unveiling the Crime: Contemporary British Artists and the Memorialization of Slavery and Abolition,” Rice discusses the collective amnesia of Lancaster’s involvement in the trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, particularly the lack of civic memorials. This amnesia, he argues, is due partly to the fact that Lancaster has relatively small African and African Caribbean populations which has meant that “Lancaster has never experienced a sustained political demand to atone for its history of slave trading.” However, he contends, despite this amnesia people have created their own forms of memorialisation at the site where Sambo is buried “where coloured stones, flowers and funerary ephemera surround a memorial plaque first laid in 1796.” Pollard’s work can be seen as one that extends folk acts of memorialisation to a wider audience.

Pollard’s work can be situated in wider communal acts of memory work. For instance, in 2009, seven years after Pollard exhibited The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By, a memorial was created at Sambo’s gravesite by children from Alston School, Cumbria, which consists of approximately 30 small memorial stones attached to bamboo canes, each carrying a painted personal message. In Creating Memorials, Building Identities, Rice describes this memorial as “forming a circle of memory like a bunch of flowers or a group of toadstools.” This form of “unofficial” memorialising at Sambo’s grave is alluded to in Pollard’s work, but such activities are not overtly expressed or portrayed. Pollard does not depict objects left as memorials at the gravesite such as the painted stones brought by schoolchildren since the 1970s, or the toys left at the grave; a form of memorialising that Rice describes as a significant form of memory work, one “that bring[s] the grave alive in ways that help to transform Sambo’s status from solitary human chattel to socialised human being, if only in death.” Rather, Pollard’s text and photographs evoke an expanded temporality and spatiality; the viewer is forced to imagine the place where Sambo is buried within the locale of the surrounding landscape. Specificity is not addressed in relation to the location of Sambo’s grave in Pollard’s text or photographs. In the text, his grave is described as being “off Sunderland Point” existing “in a field nearby.” The ambiguity of the location of Sambo’s grave serves to highlight the amnesia that Rice writes of, and which he suggests is evident in the absence of civic memorials to the African people who were enslaved. Pollard, as observer, acts as witness to Sambo’s story, his burial place, and the consequent activities that take place there: activities which both memorialise and ignore Sambo’s gravesite, and hence, the larger history of Lancaster’s involvement in the slave trade. The Slave Trade Arts Memorial Project (STAMP) (to which Alan Rice acted as academic advisor) was set-up in 2002 to debate issues of memorialisation and concretise them in a monument reflecting the city’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade. STAMP commissioned a permanent public memorial by artist Kevin Dalton-Johnson in recognition of the Africans who were transported on board Lancaster ships. Entitled Captured Africans, it was unveiled on the Lancaster quay in October 2005, three years after The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By was first exhibited at the
Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester. Rice claims that this act of memorialisation recognises the city’s link to slave trading without exiling it to a museum; rather, the public memorial forms part of the people of Lancaster’s everyday lives. In the process of developing Captured Africans STAMP also “worked with a number of artists, schools and community groups to increase public awareness of the slave trade.”

Such challenges to historical amnesia through artistic and scholarly practices, involving active community engagement, work towards redressing the city’s past. This is particularly evident in Dorothea Smartt’s haunting collection of poems, Ship Shape (2008), which explores landscape trauma and the erasure of Sambo’s identity from the historical record. Ship Shape began as a commission by Lancaster Litfest in 2003 where Smartt was asked “to write a contemporary elegy for Samboo of Sambo’s Grave.” Smartt’s poems re-imagine Sambo’s experience through the evocation of his journey. His identity is re-affirmed through the sounding of his name, Bilal:

Because I’m nothing you can name,
I repeat my own names to myself—

_Bilal Amadou Ibn Sori_—
over and over, out loud…

The poem “Today on Sunderland Point” echoes in just four lines Sambo’s homesickness in an unfamiliar landscape, a landscape which Pollard also documents: “tradewinds moan through boughs of beached schooners, / sucked into tidal muds; both longing for a ship / to sail, heading with the reeling birds, home.” A number of Smartt’s poems also comment directly on the wealth gained by Lancaster merchants through their involvement in the slave trade. Smartt’s specially commissioned poem, “Lancaster Keys,” was distributed to secondary school children in Lancaster “alongside information on Lancaster’s involvement in the trade and quotations about the importance of memory,” an acknowledgement that Rice describes as a “radical counter-memory” to Lancaster’s historical narrative.

The focus on landscape and embodied memory in The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By brings Sambo’s story into political and social consciousness, resonant with Valerie Smith and Marianne Hirsch’s definition of cultural memory where, “Acts of memory are thus acts of performance, representation and interpretation.” Rice views the performative dynamics of memory—such as the act of memorialisation at Sambo’s grave site—as crucial “for the full history of Lancaster to be told” because memory work move[s] beyond the merely documentary and historical and into the performative and contemporary realm, where the full implications of Lancaster’s involvement in the slave trade can be teased out, in contradistinction to the way the traditional historical record obscures the city’s involvement.

Although The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By is not a site-specific work or a public memorial, it operates to affect social change through instigating re-remembrance and enacting social and cultural memory. The shoreline depicted in Pollard’s photographs connects with what Karen E. Till in “Artistic and Activist Memory-Work: Approaching
Place-Based Practice” refers to as “wounded places,” which are “understood to be present to the pain of others and to embody difficult social pasts.” In “Language of Disappearances,” Sarah Irwin suggesting that the wound’s presence is often marked by its very silence, yet wounds hidden from view, easily stitched up and forgotten, are also a call to survival. Through their resistance to amnesia wounds have the potential to re-write our stories.

The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By examines the temporality of landscape trauma and the psychic haunting of wounds. In Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History Cathy Caruth discusses the temporality of trauma and its continued effects, its wounds which manifest throughout history, for “it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available.” Through the voice of the narrators in The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By, the embodied memory of slavery for those in the African diaspora is highlighted. By sounding Sambo’s story and examining Lancaster’s involvement in slavery, Pollard’s work challenges hegemonic versions of history. Hershini Bhana Young argues that “[d]iaspora is performed in our collective memories of the continually reenacted trauma of modernity’s regimes.” As Young suggests, the African diaspora doesn’t solely refer to geographic displacement but is performed through rituals, artistic practice, and embodied memory.

Pollard’s photographs of the landscape on the River Lune direct the gaze to the history of slavery by suggesting “a new way of seeing” the landscape. As John Berger notes, “When we ‘see’ a landscape, we situate ourselves in it.” The focus on images of both the shoreline and the sea highlights the tempo-spatial moment of both arrival and departure (as Rice suggests is unique to the location of Sambo’s gravesite), thus, re-envisioning Sambo’s story as well as more recent histories of Caribbean migration.
The role of the photographer as both “mediator and storyteller” is acknowledged through the complexity of Pollard’s work which, particularly in *Seaside Series* and *Wordsworth Heritage*, offers a narrative of migration and settlement that challenges the view of black settlers “as an illegitimate intrusion into a vision of authentic British national life that, prior to their arrival, was as stable and as peaceful as it was ethnically undifferentiated.” There are three gazes operating in *The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By*: the gaze of Sambo who watches the ships; the gaze of the spectator, or viewer of the photographs who also looks towards the horizon from the shore; and, the narrator, seemingly Pollard herself, who meditates on the act of looking. The first of three textual entries begins the series:

HMS Globe. Freeport Jamaica from Sunderland Point, Lancashire


As I scan this evening horizon, I imagine another night. Across the Atlantic the young boy called Sambo waits on board the ship as it loads its cargo: sugar, rum, ebony. His eyes look to the horizon and back to the shore. He looks at the lamplight moving across the surface of the ropes, looking to the night sky. The tall ships leave the harbour, catching the ebb tide. Sails unfurl, yield to the wind. Crews take to the rigging. There are shouts from above, ropes are tied off, gulls cry out. Light from a nearby town peers out of the evening gloom. The ships glide past towards the arms of the harbour walls. He watches, and feels the ship’s bow cut swiftly through the waves. Beyond the horizon at open sea, a day breaks.

The text is structured as a ship’s log written in the years 1739 and 2001; it also refers to place: “Freeport Jamaica”; “River Lune, Lancashire”; “Sunderland Point, Lancashire”; and, “‘Sambo’s Grave’ off Sunderland Point.” A sense of space and time is problematised in the text through its back-and-forth movements that are similar to the motions of the tide or the ships’ journeys back-and-forth between continents. In the first entry from Sunderland Point, Lancashire imagines Sambo waiting onboard the ship docked in Jamaica while its cargo is loaded. In the second entry, Pollard writes, “Imagine a different night, a different horizon.” As a result, the reader is propelled forward in time, creating a disjuncture in time and space. We are asked to imagine each place described in the text and depicted in the photographs, but there is also a desire to locate more precisely the significance of this Black Atlantic experience.

The photographs do not designate a specificity of place: it is possible that they have been taken along the shoreline of the River Lune, Lancashire or possibly another place entirely: the shoreline of Jamaica from where the crew has embarked on a journey or the shoreline of Guyana where Pollard herself was born and brought up as a child. The ambiguity of the photographs offers an expanded imaginary of place: a deliberate mechanism within the work pointing to the shifting horizons of the diasporic experience of migration as well as to a landscape with its own fraught history. Pollard’s photographs go against pictorial trends by critiquing myths of “landscape” and the invention of the term “[landscape]” in parallel with the European voyages of discovery. A photograph of Abbey Lighthouse at Plover Scar, for example, references the hazardous crossing of the
estuary for ships due to its sandstone outcrop [See http://www.ingridpollard.com/the-boy-who-watches-ships-go-by.html, 2nd image, 2nd row], highlighting the maritime and mercantile history of a place complicit in slave trading.

The photographs create a sense of movement, of here-and-there, of time constantly in flux, which evokes the movement of bodies across space and time. These imagistic representations of time are deliberately unclear, suggesting cyclical time rather than linear time. As a result, the photographs possess a dream-like quality. The text also possesses this quality; through the use of repetition, it ebbs and flows in a disrupted narrative. However, it also acts as an anchor, so to speak, within this temporal disjunction. The viewer feels captured within the photographs—with the water endlessly lapping and the horizon forever present—resulting in a heightened awareness of the history of forced migrations of African peoples, of captivity, of history held in wounded places. Here I think of Dionne Brand’s account of dreams in A Map to the Door of No Return: “One is not in control in dreams; dreams take place, the dreamer is captive, even though it is the dreamer who is dreaming…In the Diaspora, as in bad dreams, you are constantly overwhelmed by the persistence of the spectre of captivity. The door of dreams.”

Brand suggests that one spectre of captivity is that of loss. The dream-like quality of the photographs, and to an extent the written words, enables the past to be fully felt in the lived present. The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By offers an exploration and meditation on loss (of identity, of home, of history?) through borders that are constantly shifting. In a reading of Marguerite Duras’ writing, Sarah Irwin describes the author’s work as “exist[ing] in the rifts of identity, geography, history. Through the continual shiftings and crossings that recur Duras throws our sense of borders into question.”

This sense of shifting movement is also evident in the photographic techniques employed by Pollard: the photographs are grainy; the colours muted; the threads of canvas visible; and, the photographs’ borders are rough as though they have been torn or slowly disintegrated over time. Pollard photographs the tools of empire such as boats, buildings, and pylons—some in states of decay—as well as images of the ocean’s surface [see http://www.ingridpollard.com/the-boy-who-watches-ships-go-by.html, 2nd image, 1st row; 3rd image, 3rd row]. DeLoughrey observes that “the ocean’s perpetual movement is radically decentering; it resists attempts to fix a locus of history.” Likewise, this tidalectic sensibility emerges through encounters with Pollard’s work.

The repetition of the textual entry “Beyond the horizon, at open sea, a new day breaks” evokes waves washing upon the shore: the repetition of “sugar, rum, ebony” emphasises the capitalist endeavour of British imperialism and the value of goods over human life by making particular reference to Britain’s involvement in the Triangular Trade. Pollard describes everyday rituals of children running, people walking their dogs: the act of foraging and collecting at the seaside counter to the bringing and taking of commodities. The last line of this entry differs from those before: “Beyond the horizon, out at sea, a new day breaks” (my italics) suggesting that history is not forgotten. There are the traces left behind. The narrator watches as people collect remnants:

From the water’s edge, the lighthouse beam brushes the surface of the waves. In the distance the ferries cross to Dublin. In a field nearby, on un-consecrated ground, a gravestone is approached by visitors, children, pilgrims, the curious. At low tide I watch people taking part in seaside rituals; foraging, collecting seashells, wood, trinkets, objects of value. Children run along the shore, dig holes, walk their dogs. Shouts and voices are caught and taken by the wind. Beyond the horizon, out at sea, a new day breaks.\[91\]

Pollard’s narrator witnesses “unofficial” acts of remembrance: people collecting “seashells, wood, trinkets, objects of value,” acts of re/claiming the detritus of the past. At the same time, she also bears witness to various re-imaginings of the future as “visitors, children, pilgrims, the curious” approach Sambo’s burial site, some instigating their own form of memorialising.

The photographs also depict remnants and traces, including the remains of a rowboat moored on grass, the Lune estuary with Abbey lighthouse in the distance, the rusted bars of a window, the remains of a dwelling, watermarked patterns in sand, rocks, driftwood, and high and low tides. Spatial memory is foggy, evoking a sense of dislocation and unbelonging. The sea is like a mirage shimmering in the distance. Photographs of what remains suggest absence (an absence of “home” perhaps?). The photographs depict a surreal landscape, a space where time and memory are unstable. A place of forgetting. In her essay in Words for Country: Landscape and Language in Australia, Rebe Taylor contemplates, “I’ve often wondered if places can feel intrinsically sacred without the learned stories and respect that we bring to them.”\[94\] By bearing witness, The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By brings the history of slavery to the fore and suggests a spatial history where new narratives can and are being created.

Images of the Sacred

Pollard draws on the use of light, such as commonly found in the tradition of religious art, through her hand-tinting method to represent Sambo’s gravesite at the shoreline of Sunderland Point as a sacred site and a place of spiritual pilgrimage for those who visit it. As Rice observes, the site of the grave has been shaped by religiously-based practices of exclusion: “Sambo was buried in such a lonely grave because he had not been baptized, and thus had to be laid to rest in unconsecrated ground.”\[95\] But we might also consider another approach to the sacred through travel literature. In his discussion of Mandeville’s Travels, Stephen Greenblatt describes two rocks and their sacred significance. He writes, “The rocks function then as tangible materializations of sacred stories. Mandeville and his contemporaries are saturated with such stories, circulating not as chronologies or sources but as radiances that attach to material existence.”\[96\] Hand-tinted areas in The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By—such as rocks or the rust line of a rowboat [see http://www.ingridpollard.com/the-boy-who-watches-ships-go-by.html, 3rd image, 1st row; 1st image, 2nd row; 2nd image, 3rd row]—suggest a sense of the sacred by drawing attention to particular parts of the landscape, as though the sun is illuminating localised areas. This is akin to the way religious painters have used light to highlight sacred sites.
In “Sacred Landscapes and the Phenomenon of Light,” Barbara A. Weightman observes, “To see the light cast upon places orients believers in otherwise undifferentiated space, grounding them in context of home. As sacred places are created, an inner light outweighs outer darkness, and a spiritual journey commences.” This illumination of areas within Pollard’s photographs alludes to the sentience of objects in the natural world, objects which hold memory within place. The sacredness of place runs counter to linear histories that erase the memory of certain events and atrocities.

*The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By* suggests a transformative potential then for both the landscape and the people in their interaction. In “A Landscape of Variability,” Stephen Muecke argues that a sense of belonging is not clearly defined in terms of the significance of connectedness because the place changes according to who comes to occupy it and what they do there; the people change as a consequence of the place, which is itself defined not just by its form, but through the potentialities introduced in the intervals in its territory. This has consequence for seeing landscapes and eventually building them.

Pollard places herself within the text, inviting the reader to take an active role in their remembering of the past: to contest the patriarchal imperial gaze of the British explorer and colonialist through the movement of time in the text as well as the photographs of decay and tidal flows. Readers and viewers come to investigate the landscape as a site of trauma. In opposition to imperialist thinking, Muecke contents that if we think of landscape as a set of spatial intervals where transformations can occur, then the landscape can be seen as an heterotopic site.

The consciousness of a society, and what has become of our memory (and it is not that far removed from the present), is vehicled by popular forms, as these codes and forces are articulated with a logic, not of causality, but with a more poetic logic of interval, movement, and the multiplicity of layers folding over each other in a heterotopic and variable space.

Like the etymology of the word “diaspora”, which “privileges a rhetoric of journeying,” both Pollard’s text and photographs suggest a sense of movement, particularly through their emphasis on the British Empire’s colonial expansion to island space: from the notion of island spaces as both static and isolated to the myth of island space as manifest in “a discursive construction of predetermined islands that were literally mapped before they were found.”

Pollard explains the impetus behind her photography in this way:

The starting point for *Oceans Apart* (1989) and *The Boy Who Watches Ships Go By* (2002) was both autobiographical and historical narratives involving the sea. Using the sea as a way of exploring the themes of separation and the diaspora experience of migration, I look at journeys that have crisscrossed the Atlantic Ocean both east and west...These voyages echo the sea’s own relentless movement of waves and tides: journeys out towards the sea’s horizon and journeys of arrival from the
same horizon. What traces are left of the past accumulate in contemporary coastal locations.\textsuperscript{107}

DeLoughrey states that "[f]ocusing on seascape rather than landscape as the fluid space of historical production allows us to complicate the nation-state, which encodes a rigid hierarchy of race, class, gender, religion, and ethnicity for its representative subjects."\textsuperscript{108} As James Proctor points out, "the etymology of “diaspora” suggests both routes (scattering) and roots (sowing)."\textsuperscript{109} Pollard’s photographs of remnants comment on the passing of historical time in depicting objects used in empire-building that are now crumbling—a building gone to ruin or a broken rowboat for example. In a tidalectic reading, these images break down the linear space/time continuum of exploration synonymous with the dialectics of Western colonial ideals of empire building.\textsuperscript{110}

In \textit{Dwelling Places} Proctor proposes that, "‘sowing’ and ‘scattering’ cannot be said to be uncontaminated from a ‘sedentary poetics’. To sow is not simply to disperse, it is also to deposit, it involves an act of plantation and presumes a ground, land, soil, territory or ‘field.’\textsuperscript{111} Pollard’s work more broadly investigates the traversal of terrains and ownership of land through a (de)construction of landscapes (particularly in her works \textit{Seaside Series} and \textit{Pastoral Interlude}) in opposition to a nationalist “imagined community” which aligns Blackness with urbanity, as “diaspora is also an issue of \textit{settlement} and a constant battle over territories: over housing and accommodation, over the right to occupy a neighbourhood, over the right to ‘stay put.’"\textsuperscript{112} Through the memorialisation of Sambo’s grave, perhaps a new “sense of place” can be established.

However, as Pollard’s text-photographic work demonstrates, and Alan Rice points out, the act of memorialising at Sambo’s grave produces ambivalence by simultaneously signifying the history of the Atlantic crossing while aiding in its national denial.\textsuperscript{113} Rice is wary of the over-sentimentalising that has occurred at Sambo’s gravesite, from the elegy added to Sambo’s gravesite by Reverend James Watson in 1796\textsuperscript{114} to the ephemera placed by schoolchildren at the site:\textsuperscript{115}

Sambo’s tragic biography and creolised name posit an eighteenth century reactionary sentimentality which is overlaid by a twenty-first century pilgrimage that remembers him as representative of the lives wasted in the exchange of bodies for goods. As such, Sambo’s grave is atypical, being a physical memory of black British historical presence in an environment where the memories of such bodies are typically elided. His grave can only perform as a radical narrative of the black Atlantic by the force of our memorialising activity. By performing his memorialisation, however, we disavow the silence his grave could be said to more properly bear witness to—a fitting and mute commentary on the sacrifice of bodies to the greed of the slave traders. A mute voice speaks, but only as we ventriloquise it and surely that makes the memorialisation successful mainly for ourselves.\textsuperscript{116}

Despite his critique, Rice sees how Sambo’s grave “can be transformed by social and political activism”\textsuperscript{117} into what Pierre Nora terms “\textit{lieux de memoire},”\textsuperscript{118} or a place of memory “gaining much of its power as a site because of its minor status and local scale.”\textsuperscript{119}
The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By brings the history of the Black Atlantic into historical consciousness through its focus on Sambo’s story, and through its comments on the everyday meaning of Sambo’s burial site. In documenting the sea and shoreline as history Pollard brings the past into the present. It additionally suggests, a “cultural identity” that “is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as of ‘being,’” an identity that “belongs to the future as much as to the past.” Through a re-visitation of the remnants of the past that exist in the present Pollard’s photographs become “an act of making visible.” Through Pollard’s “political awareness of personal geography and the politics of location,” her exploration of the ocean as history (of both roots and routes as Paul Gilroy suggests in The Black Atlantic) The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By articulates not only the Caribbean presence in Britain but also conveys a more expansive sense of black British diasporic identity.
Endnotes

2 Ibid., 126. Note: I have not seen Ingrid Pollard’s photographs exhibited. My reading is purely of the photographs as text reproduced in the publication Postcards Home.
4 The signifier “black” has been used by Jones to refer to female artists in Britain not only of African descent but also of Asian and Caribbean descent (175; 182). Jones comments, however, that there has been “debate in Britain as to the essentialist (inherent, cultural) connotations of the use of the term versus its importance in signifying a shared political oppression” (Ibid., 182). James Proctor elaborates on this debate in Dwelling Places: Postwar Black British Writing (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003). Quoting Kobena Mercer, he argues that “[i]n the British context ‘black’ has been translated as a ‘political, rather than racial, category’, an ‘achievement’ that is ‘specific and unique to British conditions’” (6). However, Proctor contends that this wasn’t a situation devoid of power plays, and in the period of the 1980s, when Pollard’s work was first being exhibited, discourses by artistic practitioners from queer, feminist, and South Asian communities were marginalised by the hegemonic male African-Caribbean discourse of that time (Ibid). To this end, Proctor suggests that the 1980s were a crucial time in challenging “notions of a ‘unified’ black community” in Britain (Ibid). Drawing on both Proctor and Jones the signifier “black” is used in this article as a term of resistance for artists of the African, Caribbean, and Asian diasporas.
5 Jones, 174.
7 Ibid
8 Ibid., 27.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
13 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.


Pugh.; Kempadoo.200-207.


DeLoughrey, 2.


DeLoughrey, 51-52; The exhibition Landfall held at the Museum of London Docklands February 2009, and of which Pollard was both curator and an exhibitor, is also indicative of this “tidalectic engagement” (Ibid., 51). In Pollard’s description of the exhibition she states that, “[t]he artists contributing to LandFall (sic) are from the various coastal stopping points of the Atlantic Gulf Stream. The histories which ride its currents are central to our work, which has at its basis the natural phenomena of winds, sea and the stories of transportation. LandFall explores how we negotiate first encounters and their resonance through time. It follows the journey of points of arrival as they ripple through history and layer our memory.” See “Landfall—Europe, Africa and the Americas: Landfall at Museum of London Docklands,” OneWorld Events [accessed 3 August 2011]: http://uk.oneworld.net/article/view/161966/1/5889.

DeLoughrey, 51.

Ibid., 95.


Ibid., 3.


Ibid.

Elder, 25; Although this is the case Alan Rice points out that Liverpool also struggles to come to terms with its involvement in slavery. In discussing a plaque that was erected by The Merseyside Maritime Museum at Albert Dock in an attempt to rectify the amnesia present in Liverpool, Rice writes, “Liverpool’s desire to forget its part in the trade is confirmed by an act of vandalism that occurred soon after the plaque was unveiled in which the word ‘slave’ in ‘slave ship’ was erased, a graphic example of how the city is still unable to come to terms fully with its association to slavery,” Alan J. Rice, *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic.* London; New York: Continuum, 2003, 203.

Ibid. In *Radical Narratives of the Black Atlantic,* Rice points out that the slave trade contributed greatly to the wealth of both the city of Lancaster and its population (215); see also A. V. Seaton, 109.


Elder, 24.

Ibid.

Rice, Radical Narratives, 213.

For a detailed discussion on Lancaster’s involvement in the slave trade and the subsequent erasure of this history see: Melinda Elder, Lancaster and the African Slave Trade and Alan Rice, “Naming the Money and Unveiling the Crime.”

Rice, “Naming the Money,” 322.

Ibid.

Ibid., 323; Radical Narratives, 215-217.

Ibid., Ibid.


Ibid.

Ibid., 36-37.

Ibid., 37.

Ibid.

Pollard, 112.

Rice, “Naming the Money,” 323.


Ibid., “Remembering Iconic,” 86.

Rice, “Naming the Money,” 323.

Ibid., 323, 329.

Ibid., 322.

Ibid., “Remembering Iconic,” 86.

In Creating Memorials, Rice describes Smartt’s poems as “guerilla memorialisations,” 43.


Ibid., 49. From the poem “Because I’m Nothing You Can Name.”

Ibid., 65.

See Rice’s discussion in “Remembering Iconic,” 80-81.

Ibid., 80. Rice comments that “Litfest’s distribution of a limited edition of 24,950 of Smartt’s poems—each representing a person shipped into slavery by Lancaster slave traders between 1750 and 1800—to all secondary school pupils constituted a dramatic gesture of rememory in the cultural life of the city” (80).

Ibid.

Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith, “Feminism and Cultural Memory: An Introduction,” Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society 28.1 (Autumn 2002): 5. In Cities of the Dead, Joseph Roach claims that, particularly in the “circum-Atlantic” world, “[t]he social processes of memory and forgetting, familiarly known as culture, may be carried out by a variety of performance events, from stage plays to sacred rites, from carnivals to the invisible rituals of everyday life. To perform in this sense means to bring forth, to make manifest, and to transmit. To perform also means, though often more secretly, to reinvent” (xi).
Rice, Creating Memorials, 34. See also Paul Ricoeur, Memory, History, Forgetting. trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2004. In Ricoeur’s discussion of memory and forgetting, he points to the peril of forgetting that can exist within historical discourse, and in the complicit acts of forgetting within the community at large (448). When used as a strategy of avoidance he terms this form of forgetting an “ambiguous form of forgetting, active as much as passive” (449).


Ibid.

Elder., 24.

Rice, Radical Narratives, 216.


Pollard, 112.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Annear, 3.

Ibid.


Irwin, 77.

DeLoughrey, 21.

Pollard., 112.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.

Ibid.


Rice, Radical Narratives, 215.


98 In Creating Memorials Rice discusses Paul Ricoeur’s concept of the sepulchre as also being suggestive of transformation, through the “repeated acts of remembrance of death” which take place at Sambo’s grave (36). For Rice, this everyday act is “important to effective historical retrieval” (36). See Paul Ricoeur’s Memory, History, Forgetting, 365-367.


101 Muecke, 296; See also Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s discussion of heterotopias in Routes and Roots.

102 Ibid., 297-298. Muecke’s discussion focuses on heterotopic sites within another island subject to British colonization, and the position from which I write this paper, Australia. Muecke draws on Foucault’s idea of heterotopias in The Order of Things where he argues that heterotopias stop language and undermine our narratives (Foucault xviii) thereby “dissolv[ing] our myths and steriliz[ing] the lyricism of our sentences.” See Michel Foucault, The Order of Things. An Archaeology of the Human Sciences. London: Tavistock Publications Ltd, 1970, xviii. The heterotopic in The Boy Who Watches the Ships Go By is both discursive and spatial: Pollard’s text unsettling discourses of power and explorer narratives through the use of the personal voice and her photographs challenging the popular representations of landscape in photographic practice and in the traditions of landscape painting.

103 Proctor, 13.

104 Ibid. Proctor writes that “[t]he word ‘diaspora’ can be traced back to the Greek diaspeiran (disperse), from dia (over, through) and sperien (sow, scatter)” (13). See also Hakim Adi in Diaspora Diaries: An Educator’s Guide to MOCADA Artists, Regine Romain, ed. New York: The Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Artists, Inc., 2009, 18-19.

105 DeLoughrey, 10-12.

106 Ibid., 10.


108 DeLoughrey, 21.

109 Proctor, 14.

110 DeLoughrey, 2.

111 Ibid.

112 Ibid.

113 Rice, Radical Narratives, 215-216.

114 See Rice’s discussion in Radical Narratives, 215-217.

115 Rice, Radical Narratives, 215-216.

116 Ibid., 217.

117 Ibid

118 Ibid.

119 Ibid.

120 Gilroy.


123 Lubaina Himid quoted in Rice, “Naming the Money,” 322.


125 Roach; Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic: Finance Capital, Slavery, and the Philosophy of History*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005. Following on from Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic*, Joseph Roach discusses the Black Atlantic as circum-Atlantic rather than trans-Atlantic (4), a relational space of interchange through everyday practices that Roach describes as an “oceanic interculture” (5). The circum-Atlantic, as described by Roach, “insists on the centrality of the diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas, North and South, in the creation of the culture of modernity” (4), a conceptualization in which embodied performance is central (5). See also Ian Baucom’s *Specters of the Atlantic* which, in its analysis of the catastrophic Zong Massacre, discusses public memory, the importance of the sea as historical location, and the ways in which the past affects the present.
The Creolised Waltz: European Music in the Leeward Dutch Antilles

Author: Luigi Maduro

Source: EnterText, “Special Issue on Caribbean Literature and Culture: ‘Opening Out the Way(s) to the Future,’” Sandra Courtman and Wendy Knepper, eds. 10 (2013): 25-43.

Abstract

Through empire, colonisation, and cross-cultural contact, creolising processes emerged and came to shape Caribbean culture and society as well as contribute to its ongoing processes of transformation. Significantly, these creolising tendencies have been, historically, shaped by uneven relationships between colonial powers and the colonised. This essay considers the politics of cultural transformation for the European waltz in the context of the creolised society of Curaçao. This analysis considers the impact of social stratification, especially through the role of the colonial elite, and the music-historical events that shape the introduction of the waltz. As will be shown, the role of Curaçao’s harbour as a port of transit and the island itself as a place of political and religious refuge were both pivotal to the transformation of the waltz. There are notable protagonists in this process of creolisation, such as Agustín Bethencourt, who established the first printing press on the island, and Jan Gerard Palm, who composed many of the first creolised waltzes and also worked at the printing press during the heyday of Notas y Letras, a musical journal. As it turns out, the creolised elite incorporates rhythmic devices, which were introduced by the musicians of African descent into the transformed waltzes. Thus, the waltz becomes a creolised form.
The Creolised Waltz: European Music in the Leeward Dutch Antilles

Luigi Maduro

Art music is the musical voice of certain classes of people, just as folk music speaks for other classes and ritual music for still others.

Of the six former colonies of the Dutch kingdom in the Caribbean, Aruba, Curacao, and Bonaire make up the Leeward Antilles. The other islands Saba, Sint Eustatius, and Sint Maarten comprise the Windward Antilles and, along with the aforementioned Antilles, are referred to as the Dutch Antilles. As of the tenth of October 2010 the Dutch Antilles have been officially dissolved as an autonomous administrative subdivision of the kingdom of The Netherlands. Yet, in the mainland, “Antilles” and “Antillean” remain valid and commonplace terms used by the ‘native’ Dutch population. The adjective derived from this former subdivision and geographic area is also used to refer to Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao (hereafter ABC-islands); in the case of this essay, the adjective will be used to refer to the circulation and transformation of a number of European musical genres by the people of these Leeward Antilles. These developments mainly took place on the island of Curacao and therefore form the greatest part of this research. The essay concerns the (Antillean) waltz, one of the European dances which have undergone transformation in the New World during the nineteenth century. In order to map out this particular transformation, the article will examine how European (art) music has been appropriated and creolised through the Dutch Leeward Antilles, paying close attention to the role of elites and social stratification in the process.

This essay aims to provide a critical analysis of the historical events and the social aspects that shape the musical transformation of the waltz through processes of creolisation. In so doing, I am going to draw on important historical accounts of these processes and elements to offer a more balanced, critically informed and comprehensive account of the creolised waltz. Specifically, I will consider the cultural and political influences and factors that have played an important role in constructing a history of the waltz as part of wider processes of creolisation in Curacao. As will be seen, the varied ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the cultural historians and critics appear to affect their approach to framing the histories of the creolised waltz. One group of secondary sources are written from an ‘autochthonous’ perspective by three Dutch writers, in some ways outsiders to the Antillean culture: A.M.G. Rutten (1922-) and Jan Brokken (1949-) in the forms of a research monograph (Leven en werken van de dichter-musicus J.S. Corsen, 1983) and a historical novel (Waarom elf Antillianen knielden voor het hart van Chopin, 2005) respectively, and Nanette de Jong with an article in Latin American Music Review, an influential journal in the field of Latin and South American music according to the Garland Encyclopedia. The other group consists of Dutch Antillean authors, more
commonly known as the “Caribbean Dutchmen”: Edgar R.R. Palm (1905-1998, Curaçao), Johannes I.M. Halman (1952-, Netherlands), and Robert A. Rojer (1939-, Curaçao). An important and rather striking fact about this trio is its common consanguinity; all authors are kin to Jan Gerard Palm (1831-1906), the patriarch of the Antillean waltz. As one of the leading figures in the transformation, Jan Gerard’s story will play a central role in this look into the history and genealogy of the creolised waltz in Curaçao. Alongside his narrative, an insider’s critique of the current state of affairs will be presented by the Antillean composer/pianist Randal Corsen, great grandson of Joseph Sickman Corsen, who has played a part in the history of the creolised waltz with his compositions.

The Concept of Creolisation

With reference to the Antillean waltz, creolisati
on refers to the transformation of the waltz as a result of mixtures between African and European cultures. Before moving on to describe these processes, I would like to define my terms and approach to the issues of socio-cultural transformation. The term ‘creolisation’ refers to the processes of transformation that have resulted from cross-cultural contact through empire and colonisation in the New World. In the great Dutch Van Dale dictionary creolisation is defined as a process of “becoming Creole,” and further as “the coming into existence of a Creole language, e.g. through the fusion of the mother tongue of a particular indigenous people of a colony with a [foreign] European language.” The noun “Creole” refers to “someone who was born in a foreign continent of European parents, more specifically a descendant of Europeans in the Spanish American states and on the West Indian islands.” This definition can refer to “a person with a mixture of European and non-European ancestry.” These definitions indicate that the word “creolisation” has been called into being as a reference to the creation of a new culture, resulting from the encounter between two (or more) distinct and at times conflicting socio-cultural groups.

From a historical and an etymological perspective, Robin Cohen argues that the word creole originates from the Latin word “creare,” which is translated into English as “(to) create.” According to Cohen, this connection can be taken from the Spanish use of the word “criollo”: this word refers to the children of Spanish colonisers who were born in the New World. There are other deeper implications though, that is to say that the term had been used to distinguish second (and future) generations of colonisers from the full-blooded Europeans who were not exposed to this new environment from the start. These creoles had become different to and other than the first colonisers by “taking up some local ‘colour.’” Here Cohen points to the “figurative and emotional relationship[s] with the local landscape and[…] social, and sometimes sexual relationship[s] with the local people.” Arguably, in a process of a (forced) mixture of contrasting social groupings, it is a question of how (much) rather than if interaction will take place between the diverse cultural elements. My analysis will build on these arguments to consider both the general processes of intermixture as well as the extent to which these processes of blending occur.
Moreover, I want to consider the specific elements and features that combine to create a genuinely transformed musical experience. Here I want to look in more detail as creolisation as an unconscious or conscious process of combination as well as the political dynamics at work in assessing how specific elements come to circulate in the Caribbean and undergo change. Addressing the uneven dynamics of cultural transformation and aesthetic practice, Wendy Knepper approaches creolisation as a sometime deliberate practice of “bricolage,” drawing on the meaning of this term as first defined by Claude Lévi-Strauss. Accordingly, Knepper argues that bricolage refers to a process wherein the (cultural) materials, close at hand, are used in an improvisatory manner as a means to create a transformed identity, substituting creatively for aspects of a fragmented past, a factor especially important for African peoples of various social and cultural backgrounds. In the Caribbean context, Knepper identifies the bricoleur as an adaptive survivor, fighting for her or his place within a new environment. She asserts that colonial violence played an integral part in the processes of bricolage in the West Indies. In this respect, Knepper makes a proper assessment of the complex and problematic nature of the process of bricolage as part of a creolising world history. The political dynamics of cultural creolisation will especially be seen in my account of the Dutch waltz, which brings together European and African cultural elements, but through processes that reflect the work of uneven power relations, especially through the interventions of colonial elites. Moreover, the history of the waltz as a process of “bricolage” is accounted for very differently, as will be seen, depending on the Creole versus non-Creole (Eurocentric) vantage point.

Regarding the historical specificities of Dutch colonial processes, Pieter Emmer’s *The Dutch in the Atlantic Economy* and Willem Klooster’s *Illicit Riches* shed light on the role of the Netherlands within the Trans-Atlantic slave trade until its abolition. Compared to the other larger colonies in the Atlantic, these Antilles did not function as giant ‘factories’ for growing export products. Instead, Curaçao functioned chiefly as a port of transit in the trade of peoples and products. As Emmer notes, “[i]t has been estimated that 33,000 slaves passed through Curaçao during the seventeenth century and 34,000 during the eighteenth century. […] Curaçao was also used as a transit harbour for ships arriving in Venezuela with export products, mainly hides and cocoa.” Therefore, both the socio-economic and socio-cultural situations of the seaport Willemstad will be analysed in order to paint the picture of the creolised waltz. It should also be noted that, in practice, the aforementioned “non-European ancestry” of Creoles excluded Africans or their descendants who were not born to one European or Amerindian parent. This observation highlights the uneven power relation between (freed) black slaves and white Creoles. Although it is drawn from the Spanish caste system, it seems probable that this form of dominance was also applied in Curaçaoan society under Dutch rule. The chance of a white Creole having an equal and legitimate relationship with an African descendant was quite slim due to racial and/or social objections. The reasons for this will be explored further on.
Social Stratification on Curaçao

The colonial history of the ABC-islands begins with Spanish intervention. After Alonso de Ojeda conquered the ABC-islands in 1499, in the name of the Spanish monarchy, they remained under Spanish rule for nearly fourteen decades. In 1634, starting with Curaçao, the Dutch sailor Joannes van Walbeeck of the West-Indian Company (hereafter W.I.C.) captured the islands on behalf of the Dutch monarchs. Since then the islands have belonged to the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The same W.I.C. was responsible for the founding of New Holland in 1624, a short-lived colony in Brazil ranging from São Luís to Salvador in the eastern part of this South American country. This area was captured from the Portuguese and remained under the rule of the W.I.C. for thirty years. Moreover, the W.I.C. enjoyed a monopoly over the triangular trade during its existence. The slave trade played an important part in this triangular trade route; the slaves would be collected in Africa and transported to Curaçao via the Middle Passage. Hereafter they were sold to traders and the ships sailed back to the Netherlands with goods and commodities. Although the W.I.C. does not play a direct and immediate role in the analysis of the Antillean waltz, it is nevertheless important to state its position and its influence in Dutch colonial history, especially as the forced migration of Africans, bringing their own cultural forms and music, is central to the formation of the creolised waltz.

As for the population of Curaçao in general, and that of the capital Willemstad in particular, there were many different nationalities present during the nineteenth century. Because of the reliable docks in the various bays of the natural harbour Schottegat, it was possible for vessels of different sizes to arrive and depart simultaneously in rapid succession. Johannes Halman and Robert Rojer refer to the observations of S. van
Dissel, who recorded a yearly average of a thousand ships docking in Schottegat. In the same publication of Halman and Rojer the observations of Minister Bosch are used to paint the demographic picture of Curaçao in 1829; of the fifteen thousand and five inhabitants there were 2755 whites, 6280 slaves, and 5970 freed slaves. These inhabitants can be divided in three influential social categories, namely the West-Europeans, the Sephardic Jews (mainly refugees from New Holland), and the heterogeneous composition of African slaves. According to Halman and Rojer, these slaves originally hailed from the Gulf of Guinea, from countries such as modern-day Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and the island of São Tomé; in addition, Emmer mentions the Gold Coast, Senegal, Gambia, and Angola. At the time, the W.I.C. had owned settlements in these areas for preparation of the ships that sailed the Middle Passage, as is illustrated in the figure (1) above.

In her description of the social stratification on Curaçao in the late eighteenth century, Nanette de Jong takes one step further by introducing a fourth category of the island’s population, namely the Venezuelans. Due to the prosperity associated with trade and the tolerant attitudes concerning politics and religion, Curaçao became a haven of refuge for many, including the inhabitants of this neighbouring country. According to de Jong, both the Dutch inhabitants (due to their political influence) and the Sephardic Jews (due to their economic power) were located at the top of the social hierarchy as the elite. Under this elite group came the non-black Venezuelans and at the bottom were the unsellable slaves or manquerons as opposed to the slaves for trade or negotie slaves. The manquerons were forced to serve the higher social groups; this was also the case when music was needed. All groups embraced music and dance as desired forms of amusement and enjoyment. The black clerks were expected to provide the music during dances and other events. Through time, the manquerons would add African aesthetics to the music of the higher posited social groups for the purpose of further embellishment. This was done through the addition of other musical instruments, such as small drums and (vessel) rattles, and by accentuating the rhythm with syncopated phrasing. The Dutch dance music of choice at the time was the boerendansen or farmer dances. This dance set contained two waltz types: the Östen Ländler (the slow Austrian forerunner of the waltz) and the Deutscher (the German version). The Sephardic Jews preferred the French quadrille, which was performed as a series of five dances that could vary during each performance. In addition to this there were performances of Spanish influenced Venezuelan musical forms, such as the joropo, during church services and informal religious gatherings attended by the negotie slaves and the manquerons. As a result of this socially forced acquisition and performance of the aforementioned dance music sets, the manqueron quadrilla was conceived by the manquerons and the slaves on the island. De Jong argues that the labour-free days on the plantations set the stage for showcasing the creole dances, which were mixtures of heterogeneous African elements and various European influences. In relation to the Sephardic quadrille this manqueron quadrilla would consist of a random number of dances, including the joropo or the creolised farmer dance. This phenomenon would only gain popularity among the
blacks. Yet the introduction of another cultural artefact, the *ka'i orgel* or mechanical barrel organ,\(^{31}\) would change the musical landscape.

**The Arrival of the Waltz**

The exact date of arrival of the waltz in the Curaçaoan music culture is highly debatable and impossible to determine. There are various stories to be told of the waltz’s introduction to the island, which I would like to assess through a reading of selected sources and responses. Through a critical assessment of these versions, weighed against one another, I aim to establish a reliable amalgamation and perhaps suggest a plausible composite account of the waltz’s emergence and transformation. De Jong contends that the waltz had arrived on Curaçao in the form of the *ländler* in the nineteenth century.\(^{32}\) The work in question appears to be a set of compositions by Franz Schubert from 1824, *16 Ländler and 2 Ecossaises* (D. 734, op. 67). This particular work had been imported as cylinders for the *ka'i orgel*; this was the desired format for the mechanic barrel organ which had become a status symbol for the island’s social elite. Furthermore, de Jong argues that the first Curaçaoan waltz, *18 de febrero* (18 February) composed by Jan Gerard Palm, can be seen as a “deliberate imitation of the Schubert Ländler.”\(^{33}\) The Palm composition was first published by the *Curaçaoische Courant* in 1883, and incorporated an ABA form and eight-measured sections similar to the Schubert compositions. This comparison is put forward as an argument for the dissemination of these musical influences by various social groups on the island: “a German-inspired waltz written by a Dutch composer, to be published in a journal catering to the island’s Jewish community,” writes de Jong.\(^{34}\) Her view generally corresponds to the historical reality: Schubert’s waltz inspired Palm, who actually was a descendant of a Swedish sailor recruited by the W.I.C.\(^{35}\) Furthermore, the Jewish community, as a part of the island’s elite (alongside the Dutch), harboured musicians who could not only read printed scores but also had the means to subscribe to this journal.

However, in their biography of Jan Gerard Palm, Halman and Rojer challenge de Jong’s account. Instead, they claim that the oldest known Curaçaoan waltz, *Cantos de los Angeles* (Angels’ songs), dates back to 1867.\(^{36}\) Unfortunately, no further analysis is provided to explain the arrival of the waltz as the primary goal of their biography was to share Jan Gerard’s life story with a wider audience. Nonetheless, they assert that the waltz was the favourite dance in Europe, Latin America, and Curaçao during the nineteenth century.\(^{37}\) Additionally, they compare the island’s waltzes to the art-waltzes of Chopin: “[t]hese compositions awe more often as serious pieces than as dances, especially when performed strictly according to the score. A substantial amount of [Jan Gerard’s] waltzes...bears a strong resemblance to the [Chopin] waltzes.”\(^{38}\) Thus, they present an international and distinctly European analysis of the waltz form in Curaçao by upholding the standard of its waltzes as both dance and art forms comparable to their canonised European counterparts. In this way, the Antillean waltzes cannot be disregarded as inferior attempts at reproduction.
Brokken also considers how the waltzes were introduced to Curaçao and seeks to identify key figures in this process. Having discovered that eleven Antilleans were present at the five-hundredth anniversary of Chopin’s death in Warsaw, including presumably the bastard son of Edgar Palm, he argues for the primary influence of Chopin on the Antillean waltz. To found his argument, he does arrive at a rough estimation of this circulations and influences of Chopin on the island. According to Brokken, Chopin’s music was introduced to the island by Jan Gerard Palm or Jules François Blasini, a pupil of the former. The evidence for this conclusion is Blasini’s brief study at the Parisian conservatory. It was there that Blasini came in contact with compositions by Chopin through his teacher Georges Mathias, Chopin’s former pupil. After leaving the conservatory in 1866, Blasini would return to Curaçao eight years later, bringing his knowledge of Chopin to the island.

In my view, it is quite possible that Jan Gerard introduced Chopin’s music to the island. He was in touch with musicians from Cuba, where the American composer Louis Moreau Gottschalk was immensely popular at that time. Gottschalk was seen as one of the most driven disciples of Chopin; he was tutored by Camille Stamaty, also the tutor of Camille Saint-Saëns. Because of this connection Gottschalk would shake Chopin’s hand after his debut performance of the Polish master’s Piano Concerto in E minor in the Salle Pleyel in 1845. This presents an interesting possibility when combined with the information from Halman and Rojer’s biographic research. Jan Gerard would play Chopin’s Fantasy in F minor (op. 49, 1831) every morning in order to loosen his fingers: “pa lòs e dedenan.” It can be argued that he would only play such a piece every day as a finger exercise if he was affectively and technically impressed by it. This must have been an exemplary composition. It had to be a desired standard, a norm on both aesthetic and practicable grounds. A skilled musician would not play a large exhausting masterpiece as an introduction to a practice session if she or he would want to develop her or his talents further that same day. Also, during the appearance of the first waltzes around 1865, the creolisation of this musical form had not yet taken place according to Edgar Palm. This would not start until two decades after.

Creolising the Antillean Waltz

Before the transformation of the waltz is discussed, a very important medium in the exchange and promotion of musical ideas on Curaçao deserves being mentioned. Notas y Letras (1886-1888) was a short-lived music journal written in Spanish and published by Agustín Bethencourt. After growing up on Tenerife, Bethencourt relocated to the New World at a young age. Due to political circumstances in Venezuela, he sailed to Curaçao in 1860 where he tasted freedom and opportunity. This led to him to settle on the island. Bethencourt died before the first issue appeared, yet his contributions and workmanship were pivotal to the realisation of a medium for the advancement of local composers and musicians on Curaçao and in South America. For employees such as Jules Blasini, Joseph Sickman Corsen, and Jan Gerard Palm, Notas y Letras was a very influential musical breeding ground. The journal reached seventy two issues, with its demise being caused by overdue debts from unpaid subscriptions.
The work of Halman and Rojer sheds light on the thorough musical transformations of the waltz through creolisation. They conclude that the rhythm undergoes the most changes, when compared to its original European roots. An overview of the rhythmic variations is shown in the above figure (2). In the traditional waltz, which is played in three-four time, the metric accent is laid on the first beat of each bar. The creolised waltz however has two metric accents, one on the first beat and the other on the latter half of the second beat. In effect, the two metric accents cause the ternary metre to be experienced as a binary metre by splitting the bars in two halves: this is done with an accent at the beginning of each half (accents on the first beat and latter half of the second beat). In other words, there is a shift from triple metre to duple metre; this phenomenon is called the hemiola-effect. Halman and Rojer emphasise that the Curaçaoan dactyl, taken from an antique Greek poetic art, differs from both the Colombian and Venezuelan versions. In the Venezuelan dactyl the accents are laid on the first and the third beat; this does not cause a proportional split. The Colombian *pasillo* (a waltz-descended genre) does not even have a hemiola-effect because the metre is not halved. The dactyl can be applied to the rhythmic accompaniment as well as the main melody of the waltz. As far as the musical forms goes, the creolised waltz can contain two or three sections of sixteen bars each, a twofold of eight bars. Accordingly, a binary waltz contains thirty-two bars and a ternary waltz contains forty-eight bars. These are also somewhat short compared to the lengthier European waltzes.
Edgar Palm also refers to the rhythmic transformation of the creolised waltz. According to Palm the first European waltzes arrived in the first half of the nineteenth century. Among the waltzes were compositions by Carl Maria von Weber, Schubert, and Chopin. These works would become the sources of inspiration for the first local versions. Through the embellished accompaniment by plucked instruments such as the guitar, the first instances of rhythmic transformation were put forward on the island. As for the dactyl, Palm provides two European compositions wherein the dactylic rhythm is employed, namely the Allegretto of String Quartet No. 8 in E minor (op. 59, no. 2) by Ludwig van Beethoven (published in 1808) and an unknown waltz by Chopin, partly displayed in the above figure (3). This passage appears to be a part of Chopin’s *Farewell Waltz.*

Regarding the use of melody and harmony in the creolised waltz, Palm argues that the former could be applied with a certain degree of freedom. The melody could be embellished and accentuated by a performer according to her or his insight and skill. Through the rhythmic and melodic interpretations, the dance was rendered suppler than the stylised European versions. This resulted in a freer and more loose-limbed waltz.
Furthermore, Palm contends that only consonant chords are to be used in the creolised waltz. If this rule was not abided to, the result would sound as a "violated Curaçaoan waltz." This was certainly not music to his ears. This notion is shared by A.M.G. Rutten, who has also researched the waltz. Rutten observed that the harmony of the waltz was kept simple by focussing on “the shift between the tonic and the dominant.” De Jong summarises: “[M]any…waltz characteristics were retained, including…the emphasis on primary chords, with melodies based on major and minor tonalities. Modulations may occur, but are always closely related the original key center.” Jan Gerard Palm once found himself in a heated public dispute with a number of fellow composers regarding his use of dissonance in a few of his works. In this sense, it can be argued that there are numerous forms of freedom, of which some forms are freer than others.

The Return of the Creolised Waltz

On Sunday 30 October 2011 at half past ten in the morning a special episode of the musical television programme Vrije Geluiden (Free Sounds) aired on the national station Nederland 1. The guests for this episode were Jan Brokken, the author of the already mentioned Why Eleven Antilleans Kneed before the Heart of Chopin, and Wim Statius Muller, one of the Antillean composers who surfaces as a figure in that novel. Statius Muller is presented as the Antillean Chopin during the programme. The episode is about the Brokken’s journey to Curaçao, as an avid art music devotee, in search of the origins of the Antillean waltz. In his novel he explains his fascination with the creolised waltz, especially with the geographic and social contexts that influenced its transformation. As an outsider to a people with a shared history, Brokken experienced the way of life of a marginalised people at the outskirts of the Dutch kingdom. Following his return to the Netherlands, he had also invited Statius Muller to Amsterdam in 2003 for a performance of his own composition along with Johnny Kleinmoedig, one of the great Antillean pianists of the latest generation. In his book Antillean Dances (1998), Muller claims that his compositions are exclusively dances. Regarding the waltz, he concludes that every step in the opposite direction of the diatonic nature of the Antillean version of the European dance is one too many. In his attempt to modernise the waltz’s conventions, Muller realised that it was to no avail: Harmonically the waltzes and all the other Antillean dances are rooted firmly in the nineteenth century, and though I will occasionally add a sixth for color and have, in fact, toyed with parallel harmonies, blue notes and polytonality to bring my dances a bit more ‘up to date,’ I have found that any significant straying from the traditional diatonic framework leaves one with a composition that is not an Antillean dance.

Notwithstanding the unsatisfactory results of his attempts to modernise the waltz, Muller’s oeuvre spans over half a century. Whether in the Netherlands, other European countries, or the Americas, to this day, he is only known within small circles in the art music scene. Nevertheless, the impact and importance of this Antillean composer as an ambassador of the creolised waltz needs to be addressed. To a certain extent, it can be argued that
departing from this harmonic trait diminishes the Antillean identity in the creolised waltz already set in the nineteenth century. Bearing in mind the work of Halman and Rojer, the rhythm underwent the greatest transformation, thus making it the most creolised aspect of the waltz. The straightforward diatonic framework is quite important, yet at the same time is of lower importance as a creolised characteristic compared to the former. In this respect it seems that by maintaining the rhythm and the form, room is created for experimentation on a harmonic level.

Logically, the ears need adjusting to a different harmony, especially considering that this aspect has been kept unchanged for generations. In this respect, it seems that space for experimentation is limited by resistance from those who see the genre as a cultural artefact to be conserved due to its place in Antillean history and identity. As Jan Gerard Palm experienced, even the sporadic use of dissonance could come to be highly contested within the community of listeners, performers, and composers. Randal Corsen (a music instructor at the Utrecht Conservatory and pianist, composer, and arranger) takes issue with the notion that the creolised waltz cannot be modernised. Commenting on the inability and/or unwillingness of composers in the Antillean tradition to do so, he observes:

When I heard Statius Muller say that he did not succeed in modernising the waltz, I intuitively knew that he did not succeed because this feat can be accomplished. I have sincere respect for a great pianist such as Statius Muller, yet I believe that he is not quite (cap)able of modernising the waltz.\(^\text{64}\)

In Corsen’s view, one needs to be well informed of the more modern art music conventions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in order to modernise the waltz. In this respect, as a composer, he has noticed a gap between countries where art music is institutionalised and the ABC-islands; contemporary musical developments in art genres have reached only a few fellow Antillean composers and performers, such as Izaline Calister, Eric Camles, Ronchi Matthew, and Cedric Dandare.\(^\text{65}\) These musicians have been influenced by jazz and \textit{bossa nova} (among others) and can use both rhythmic and harmonic devices from these genres in order to deviate from the aesthetic of original creolised waltzes. Also, the changing musical tastes need to be considered: there is a lowered interest for and exposure to the Antillean waltz in the latest generations of musicians and potential audience members.

In Corsen’s mind, younger generations need to be aware of contemporary stylistic innovations in order to further the advancement of the creolised waltz, with this task being the responsibility of the cultural elite. It is unclear whether this group, which judges and safeguards art music of the Antilles, is to be regarded as the government, the educational system, or a select body of individuals within these systems. It is certain, however, that this group has the power to influence which aesthetic direction the music institutions will take, possibly through the granting of state subsidy. According to Corsen, the cultural elites have their own reasons to maintain the status quo; at the moment, there exists a heightened interest in more authentic African cultural expressions. One clear example thereof is the \textit{tumba}, which replaced the Trinidadian \textit{calypso} as the official genre for
celebrating Carnival in Curaçao over forty years ago.\textsuperscript{66} This interest has not appeared out of the blue, and is strengthened by the island’s autonomous status within the Dutch kingdom. It is arguable that the cultural agenda has been shifted to the historical origins of most of its inhabitants. After all, the creolised waltz represents the Creole elite and not the common working class Curacaóans with their Afro-diasporic background. I would contend that this choice has been made in order to present a unified cultural identity within and without the local community.

Lastly, Brokken has reasons as an author to argue that Chopin is the leading musical influence on the Antillean waltz. After discovering the presence of Antilleans at the commemoration of Chopin, he regards the Polish composer as the bridge between a known European musical phenomenon and an unknown appropriation of this phenomenon.\textsuperscript{67} This was neither a revelation for him nor for those who participated in this tradition. Brokken does not stray from his argument concerning Chopin’s central role in the formation of the Antillean waltz tradition because this would undermine the effectiveness of his story. In the novel, he implicitly mentions his goal of proving that Chopin substantially influenced the creole composers, or at least providing evidence to account for the presence of these Antilleans.\textsuperscript{68} According to Corsen, the main point of Brokken’s novel is the influence of nineteenth-century (art) music on the ABC-islands. When analysing the story it is “the big picture” that needs to be taken into account, namely that Chopin was not the main source for the Antillean waltz, but rather that he belonged to a certain group within a specific period in European art music history which had made its way to Curaçao. In other words, Corsen believes that the Antillean composers were not only influenced by Chopin but also by certain composers within the Romantic period of art music, which included Schubert, Gottschalk, von Weber, and Chopin.\textsuperscript{69} Edgar Palm expresses similar Eurocentric ideas concerning the origin of the waltz in Curaçao.\textsuperscript{70} While Corsen and Palm embrace the Antillean musical tradition as a creolising form, Brokken traces the influence and circulation of the European waltz form through the Caribbean. It has to be said in Brokken’s defence that, even though Chopin’s influence on the waltz was not a sole one, his overall influence on the Creole elite is most definitely worth a mention. Chopin was personally responsible for the circulation of the mazurka as a “highly artistic, stylized” dance and Brokken noticed that this genre had its own important place in Antillean music history.\textsuperscript{71} Regarding this importance, Edgar Palm notes it being remarkable that the mazurka is nowhere near popular in Poland, its native country, while on Curaçao it “has stood for more than hundred years and still regularly is danced to by young and old.”\textsuperscript{72}

Conclusion

The goal at the very outset of this essay was to map out the transformation of the waltz, on the outskirts of the Dutch kingdom, in the New World. The driving forces for this transformation were the negole slaves and the manquerons, who appropriated European dances in their own sets, and the predominantly white pianists of the higher social classes, who were responsible for transforming the waltz into an art genre. In my view, the creolised waltz is ultimately a product of the aforementioned white Creole elite. The
balance of political and economic power was in favour of the whites during the age of slavery, and because of this they were privileged in their access to knowledge and expertise. It was impossible for a *negotie* or *manqueron* to have an equal degree of access to or opportunity in the field of music education. Benefitting from the advantages of imbalanced power relation, the white Creoles took on the role of *bricoleurs* by incorporating musical aspects that selectively represented aspects of the identities of the different social groups. The rhythmic aspect was derived from the influence of the black musicians, yet was transformed with an ancient European device, the dactyl. With melody and harmony also adapted to represent the typical Antillean inhabitant, the music was “generally cheerful, sometimes melancholic but always rhythmic.” At the same time, the music was kept as an elitist affair by performing it predominantly as solo piano compositions and regarding it as more serious, and less danceable, art music. In the time when the W.I.C. was in power, an expensive musical instrument, such as the piano, could not be an item of purchase for this sector of the black population. In fact, according to Rutten, even the average white household on Curaçao could barely afford a piano. There were many pianos on the island due to the fact that the performance of music by individuals was seen as an important pastime in the nineteenth century. For the white population, performance was held in high regard as was owning a piano. Taking into account the cost of the piano and the social value placed on musical accomplishment, especially for the elite, Rutten observes that the piano itself as an object became a status symbol; more often than not, the piano would be exhibited in the homes of the owners. Indeed, the piano remains a status symbol even to this day, both in the Antilles and elsewhere. Ironically, the white Creole elite has created a specific musical language—namely the creolised waltz—which, to a certain extent, has come to represent all of the island’s social classes and cultural resources.

Alongside the serious version of the creolised waltz, there existed also a more folkloric approach to the waltz, which was introduced by the underclass blacks and lower class Creoles. As mentioned above, among the higher social classes there was a tendency to employ a caste system for marriage. Only the lower class Protestants contended themselves with Venezuelans or blacks. In this respect, creolisation had a low impact in the lower part of the social hierarchy. Also, in the last few decades of the nineteenth century, the *ka’l orgel* lost its importance as a status symbol for the social elite. It quintessentially replaced the (skilled) pianist, a musician who could cost members of the lower classes a sheer amount of money to hire; Rutten describes the instrument as “a street piano with marker rolls,” aptly marking its (relative) inexpensiveness. In this manner, the waltzes would be played during weekly dance parties by turning the crank and this performance was rhythmically enhanced by an accompanying *wiri*, a metal rasp which was struck with a thin metal stick. This mode of performance is still used today, especially during folkloric events or local holidays, and by more popular composers such as songwriter Rudy Plaatje, guitarist Oswin ‘Chin’ Behilia, and pianist Padu Lampe. Notwithstanding the influences of the lower social classes, including the cultural aspects of the African slaves which played an important role in the amalgamation of the genre, it was the creolised whites who would bring about the Antillean waltz as we know it today.
In conclusion, much work remains to be done to understand all of the cultural forms and influences that shaped the emergence of the creolised waltz. In particular, this analysis has not considered the important influences of wealthy Sephardic families and ecclesiastical institutions. This conscious omission was done, in part, to focus more on the aesthetic influences and musical transformation through time, and also because of the limited published resources on the role of wealth and religion on the island in that period. In his analysis, Brokken mentions that the Jews on Curaçao played a dominant role in society during the nineteenth century, when the journal *Notas y Letras* was published.\(^7\) For instance, Jan Gerard Palm was an organist at the Protestant Fortkerk as well as the Jewish Mikvé Israël synagogue. He also played for the Masonic lodge *Igualdad*.\(^8\) Brokken had access to this information due to his temporary residence on the island, where local archives are open to inquiry; this research cannot be undertaken from overseas. As a result, more research needs to be carried out to address the ways in which religious institutions and faith-based organisations contributed to the creolisation of the waltz, especially through the performance history. Both Rutten and Palm briefly discuss the performance of the dance as well as related social aspects during the interactive occasions of dancing.\(^8\) Thus, there are several aspects pertaining to the creolised waltz that still require an in-depth investigation in order to present a more definitive analysis of this musical and cultural phenomenon. In the light of the Creole elite taking its responsibility as *bricoleurs*, I would like to address that further research on Antillean art music also should be(come) the honoured responsibility of this region’s academic elite, irrespective of racial origins or social classifications.
Endnotes


2 Compared to the British interpretation of leeward and windward, the Dutch use of these adjectives refers to the geographic positions of the two island groups in relation to the north-easterly trade wind; the ABC-islands lie to the south of the trade wind while the SSS-islands lie to the north.

3 Ibid. “The most comprehensive source for the study of Latin American art music is the journal *Latin American Music Review, edited by Gerard Béhague*.”


5 Ibid.


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.


10 Ibid., 73.


13 Emmer, 27.

14 As depicted on a *casta* painting by Ignacio María Barreda from 1777, the caste system contained sixteen possible mixtures or racial categories from a Spanish vantage point. Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn point out that the painting provides “commentary on racial purity and on status” alongside the racial mixtures that were allowed by the Spanish conquerors. For instance, pure Amerindian and African men had no place within the system. Moreover, a second-generation Spanish-Amerindian male descendant together with a Spanish female produced a Spaniard, thus making it possible for the Amerindians to obtain Spanish identity and status on the long run. Carolyn Dean and Dana Leibsohn, “Hybridity and Its Discontents: Considering Visual Culture in Colonial Spanish America,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 12.1 (2003): 9-10.

15 Although it is common knowledge under the Dutch Leeward-Antillean population, the discovery of Curaçao by Alonso de Ojeda in 1499 has not been well documented or archived. A relatively unknown and striking fact is that Amerigo Vespucci, the famous cartographer whose name is the source of inspiration for the New World, was aboard de Ojeda’s vessel. W.R. Menkman, “Vespucci en Ojeda in de geschiedenis van Curaçao,” *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 41.1 (1961): 260.


18 Especially the famous capture of the Spanish treasure fleet by Piet Heyn can be used as an argument for this importance. C.K. Kesler, “De verovering van de Zilveren Vloot,” *Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 10.1 (1929): 193.

19 Emmer, xii.


Johannes I.M. Halman and Robert A. Rojer, Jan Gerard Palm: Een muzikale patriarch op Curaçao. Leiden: KITLV, 2008, 17; “Curaçao earned its keep and the same was true for the twenty-odd Dutch forts in Africa on the Gold Coast, in Senegambia and along the Luanda-Angola coast” (Emmer, 79).

Halman and Rojer, 17.

“TThe social hierarchy of eighteenth-century Curaçao comprised a four-way stratification, with Dutch and Sephardic elements ranking at the top of the list, Venezuelan nationals and manqueron blacks at the bottom. Blacks were forced to serve all three higher culture groups, although the Venezuelans, held in just slightly higher esteem, were also segregated from Curaçao's upper classes.” Nanette de Jong, "An Anatomy of Creolization: Curaçao and the Antillean Waltz," Latin American Music Review 24. 2 (2003): 235.

Ibid. "Negotie" is the Dutch word for trade and was introduced to the Dutch Van Dale dictionary in 1521: "The Dutch sold and transported negotie slaven (slaves for trade) throughout the Caribbean and South America. Although large numbers spent time on Curaçao, the island’s permanent black population was sparse, with around 2,300 manquerons (unsellable Africans) left behind to serve as domestic servants.”

Ibid. “During the parties’ early years, the manquerons played the dance music in a manner to which the Dutch were accustomed, but eventually African-centered aesthetics were added through the addition of small drums and by accentuating and embellishing the music with off-beat phrasing and occasional polymeter.”

According to Mosco Carner, “[a] folkdance in 3/4 time of varying speed: generally fast in the west (Switzerland and the Tyrol) and slow in the east (Styria, Upper and Lower Austria). Before the dissemination of the waltz, mazurka and polka in the 19th century, the ländler was the most common folkdance in Austria, south Germany and German Switzerland” (Mosco Carner, “Ländler,” Oxford Music Online [accessed 20 September 2012]: http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/15945).

The joropo is “a true creole couples’ dance that combines Spanish and Afro-Venezuelan elements.” De Jong, 236.

Ibid., 235-237.

The ka'i orgel is the name of a certain type of mechanical barrel organ imported on Curaçao; the term means “organ-box” in Papiamento, the native language of the ABC-islands, and is derived from the functioning of the of the original cylinder-organ. In this older instrument, the organ pipes were operated by the pins of the rotating barrels or cylinders. See Edgar Palm, Muziek en Musici van de Nederlandse Antillen (Willemstad: Curaçaoische Courant, 1978), 83.

De Jong, 240.

Ibid.

Ibid.; Palm, Muziek en Musici, 57.


Halman and Rojer, 26.

Ibid., 81.

Ibid., 79.
"Chopin matched the Caribbean mentality the best, the mix of volcanic fire and quenching melancholy, of refined and rhythmic, of melody and dance. For an Antillean, music is only music when it can be danced to, and that could be done to waltzes and mazurkas" Brokken, 47-52.

Ibid., 55-56.

Ibid.

Ibid., 59-60.

Ibid., 64.

Unfortunately, the initial dates for this daily routine are not mentioned. This kind of information would provide more information in order to formulate a plausible and valid theory, notwithstanding the fact that the exact date and manner of the arrival of Chopin’s music remains unknown. Halman and Rojer, 36.


Ibid., 42-43.

Rutten, 22.

Halman and Rojer, 81.

This is the case in all creolised rhythms except for the (second) ‘4x1/8’ variant of the Ka’i orgel rhythm, which sees its metric accents put on the first half of the second beat (the first of the four quavers), and on the second half of the third beat (the last quaver).

Ibid.


Halman and Rojer, 82.

Palm, Muziek en Musici, 56.

Ibid., 57. It is presumed that this unknown waltz is incorporated in the second section of the ‘Valse de l’adieu’ by Chopin, formally known as Waltz in A flat major op. 69, no. 1 (posthumously published in 1852). The consulted version published by G. Schimmer in 1880 differs from the score in figure 2 regarding the use of contrasting clefs and mood markings (con anima as opposed to sempre delicatissimo). Nevertheless, the musical material matches on both scores. A possible explanation is that Palm did not have access to the reference material needed to make such a comparison. With this reference he would have made the same conclusion; there is no question to the broad musical insight of this composer, as the last representative of the Curaçaoan Palm family of performers and composers.

Ibid., 55.

Ibid., 65.

Rutten, 57.

De Jong, 241-246.

For further reading, consult "Een dispuut in de negentiende-eeuwse pers over het gebruik van dissonanten". Halman and Rojer, 24-28.
The Creolised Waltz


62  Brokken, 290-291.


64  Personal conversation with Randal Corsen at Utrecht Conservatory (6 December 2012).

65  Ibid.

66  According to Gabi Christa, “[p]re-Lenten Carnival is a twentieth-century celebration in Curaçao, and before tumba was introduced in 1971 as the Carnival music, the music of Carnival was calypso, which still is the music of Carnival in Aruba” (Gabi Christa, “Tambu: Afro-Curaçao’s Music and Dance of Resistance,” *Caribbean Dance from Abakuá to Zouk: How movement shapes identity*, Susanna Sloat, ed. Gainesvilla: University of Florida, 2002, 295).

67  In his novel, Brokken shares with the reader a striking passage from his conversation with a Dutch interpreter, August Willemsen, wherein Willemsen speaks of his opinion on his own recent discovery of the Antillean waltz: “What kind of colonisers are we? […] How is it possible that we’ve never heard this music in the Netherlands? The Portuguese know the Brazilian music, [they] know Villa-Lobos, but we haven’t got the slightest notion of the existence of something like the Antillean mazurka. Three hundred and fifty years these islands belong to the Netherlands, much longer than Brazil belonged to Portugal. And we know nothing, we stand here flabbergasted. I don’t know about you, but I feel irritation coming over [me]. As if I have been deliberately kept in ignorance” (Brokken, 26).

68  Ibid., 13. Brokken writes: “I read [Reuter’s press release on Chopin’s commemoration] in München, where it snowed as heavily as further on in Poland, and [I] felt the beginning of homesickness coming over [me]. I still had a few lectures to give; hereafter I packed my luggage, returned to [Curaçao] and made the first notes for this book.” In addition to this passage, the title, *Why Eleven Antilleans Kneeled before the Heart of Chopin*, indicates that Antilleans hold the composer Chopin in high esteem.

69  Conversation with Corsen.

70  Palm, *Muziek en Musici*, 57. Palm observes: “During the first half of the nineteenth century[,] Curaçao became acquainted to the waltzes by Carl Maria von Weber, Franz Schubert and Chopin. Schubert’s and Chopin’s waltzes mostly consisted of two or three sections, with exceptionally beautiful melodies. Given that the first Curaçaoan waltzes qua form, rhythm and melody bear a lot of resemblance to these waltzes, we presume that the first Curaçaoan waltzes were composed under the influence of these masters.”


73  Rutten, 38.

74  Ibid., 36-37.

75  Ibid.

76  Brokken, 39.

77  Ibid., 40.

78  De Jong, 237. De Jong claims that “[b]ecause the music came pre-programmed on the cylinders, early creolization of *ka’i orgel* music centered around accompanying instrumentation. The *wir* became a popular addition, its raspy timbre thickening the *ka’i orgel’s* texture of sound, its rhythms enhancing the otherwise strict pulse of the mechanical
organ. As the wiri gained acceptance, two people were customarily hired for dance parties—one to work the ka’i orgel, the other to accompany with wiri.”

79 Brokken, 86.
80 Halman and Rojer, 23.
ENTERTEXT

The Politics of Slavery and Commemoration: Derek Walcott’s *Walker*

Author: Penny Woollard

Source: *EnterText*, “Special Issue on Caribbean Literature and Culture: ‘Opening Out the Way(s) to the Future,’” Sandra Courtman and Wendy Knepper, eds. 10 (2013): 44-57.

Abstract

Derek Walcott’s long professional and personal relationship with the United States of America has often exposed his ambivalence towards the country. As a writer from the Caribbean, with his own roots in slavery, he could hardly be expected to ignore the vexed question of slavery in the USA. This paper examines Walcott’s play, *Walker* (2002), which was first performed at Walcott’s own Boston Playwrights Theatre in November 2001, directed by Wesley Savick. *Walker* examines one black abolitionist’s response to slavery. The play allows Walcott to imagine a version of the last day in the life of an early black abolitionist in Boston, namely David Walker. The action of the play takes place around Walker’s preparation to publish the final version of his *Appeal in Four Articles; together with a Preamble To The Coloured Citizens of the World*. Three editions of Walker’s Appeal were actually printed between 1829 and the last edition was printed in 1830. Walcott’s fictional Walker, provides a conduit into the history surrounding the man, and Walcott is also able to comment on the lingering expression of racism which persists in modern United States of America. This article considers how Walcott’s play addresses slavery and the politics of blame that surrounds it as well as experiments with alternative responses to both slave history and its legacies.
The Politics of Slavery and Commemoration: Derek Walcott’s *Walker*

Penny Woolard

When Derek Walcott was born in 1930 it was barely a hundred years since slavery had been abolished in his home country of St Lucia. That he is directly descended from slaves via his grandmothers and the fact that both his grandfathers were white; one Dutch and one English, presumes its own story of slavery. The histories of black Atlantic and Caribbean experience of slavery and their legacies surface frequently in his oeuvre, including, for example, works from his early drama, such as *Henri Christophe: A Chronicle in Seven Scenes* (1949 / 50), to his well-known epic poem, *Omeros* (1990). Walcott’s engagement with the history of slavery extends as well to the African American experience, especially through his career as a Caribbean writer in the United States of America (USA). In 1992, while he was living in Boston, Walcott was invited by the city’s Athenaeum Library to contribute to an exhibition dedicated to Boston’s abolitionists both black and white. The result was a short opera entitled *Walker*, the libretto of which by 2001 he had refashioned and turned into a musical play with the same name. In this article, I will focus on Walcott’s play, arguing that Walcott’s representation of Walker’s life history opens up a transnational critique of slavery and oppression in the Americas, which sets the lesser known history of Irish slavery alongside the histories of African American and Afro-Caribbean peoples. In so doing, as will be seen, Walcott exposes related histories of economic expansionism and related acts of violence and exploitation.

*Walker*, the play, portrays an imagined last day in the life of David Walker (1796(?) - 1830), a black activist who became a vociferous abolitionist in Boston in the early nineteenth century (before there was a collectively-defined abolitionist movement in the United States). Walcott does not aim for literal historical accuracy in *Walker*. He combines real people with created fictional characters to interrogate slavery and the impetus for abolition from his own perspective. What follows will combine factual evidence with Walcott’s imagined version of events. Walcott approaches the historical accounts in *Walker* by foregrounding the slightly less well-known characters who exist alongside more celebrated figures. For example William Lloyd Garrison, a very well-known white abolitionist who founded an anti-slavery newspaper in Boston in 1831 aptly named *The Liberator*, has a role in the play as a friend of the eponymous David Walker. Walker, who is the main focus of the play is, on other hand, not generally well known except to those with a particular interest in militant precursors to abolitionism in Boston.

Who then is David Walker, and why did Walcott think it worthwhile basing a play around his life? David Walker was a free-born black man, son of a *free* mother and a slave father. The law in slave-owning states at the time of his birth (probably late 1790s) required that the offspring of black Americans took the status of their mothers who, it must be said, were usually slaves. Walker died in almost obscurity before he became
known outside of his immediate circle. He died as the abolitionist movement in the United States was on the threshold of becoming a vocal force unable to be ignored. David Walker’s outspokenness against Atlantic slavery in early nineteenth-century America culminated in the form of a printed pamphlet published as *Walker’s Appeal In Four Articles; together with a Preamble To The Coloured Citizens of The World, But in Particular, and Very Expressly, to those of The United States of America. Written in Boston, in the State of Massachusetts, Sept. 28, 1829.*  

It cannot be overstated just how courageous Walker was in publishing his *Appeal* and how its articulation of the evident wrongs of slavery alarmed the slave-owning classes and other whites into demanding draconian measures in an attempt to prevent its circulation, particularly amongst the black population.

According to his *Appeal*, Walker had “travelled over a considerable portion of the United States […] tak[ing] the most accurate observations of things as they exist,” before ending up in Boston in about 1825. During the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, there was a noticeable eruption of anti-slavery activity in the south of the United States undoubtedly influenced by news of the successful Haitian Revolution in St Domingue, where triumphant black generals, under the leadership of Toussaint L’Ouverture, had expelled the white ruling class from the country and outlawed slavery by way of a new constitution. The towering figure of Toussaint L’Ouverture demonstrated that former slaves could be leaders, and, as such, L’Ouverture’s influence was profound and inspirational to both slaves and free blacks. As has been well documented, the events in St Domingue resonated beyond Haiti, influencing the actions of slave-owners, enslaved peoples, and abolitionists, both black and white. Walcott, himself, who has written three plays connected to the subject of the Haitian Revolution, suggests that it is an important context for Walker’s life. In his *Appeal*, Walker questioned the paradox that the white people’s own anti-colonial struggle with the English and their fight for freedom, as so proudly affirmed in the American Revolution, did not extend to include the black population who had fought the same battle alongside them.

Denmark Vesey’s rebellion of 1822, which contributed to the spread of slave unrest in the South, appears to have been directly influenced by events in St Domingue. The anti-slavery sentiments which Walker verbalises in the *Appeal* are so similar to Vesey’s reported announcements that it could be possible Walker was there to experience the unrest first-hand. Vesey’s rebellion involved perhaps as many as 2000 slaves and was a reaction to the local white authorities harassing members of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Vesey’s plan was to seize arms in Charleston and murder the white population. In the event the rebels were given away and all those concerned in the rebellion were tried and put to death. The trial records show that Vesey encouraged his fellow conspirators to unite together as the people of St Domingue did and that they believed help would come from there and from Africa as soon as their revolt began. By the early 1820s, Jean Pierre Boyer, the president of Haiti, was urging free blacks from the United States to migrate to Haiti and bring their much needed skills and enterprise to the new country to help with the economic devastation caused by the Revolution. Just after David Walker’s death the Nat Turner revolt took place in Southampton County in South
Virginia which was, in terms of participants, a much smaller affair but one in which contemporaries also believed in the St Domingue connection. Turner left written evidence that “Hayti [would offer] asylum for those who survive the approaching carnage.”

Turner’s master was murdered but all perpetrators of the revolt were caught and put to death. While none of these events in the South resulted in a fraction of the success of the Haitian Revolution, they show the rise of an abolitionist agenda on the part of those who were enslaved. There was a definite sense, because of the Haitian Revolution, that there could be an organised opposition against the practice of the slavery. The anxious response from the slave-owning population and other whites to events in Haiti was to bring blacks under closer scrutiny to prevent news from Haiti reaching them, and to encourage further draconian legislation in the South.

David Walker’s life is relatively poorly documented in the written history of slave rebellion. But if the response to events in Haiti was a backdrop to his writing the Appeal, then his courage in publication can only be reinforced. Walker’s most recent biographer, Peter Hinks, admits to having trouble framing Walker accurately in the period. Hinks is able to posit no more than “perhaps he was born a freeman in 1796 in Wilmington, North Carolina” and “it is likely” that he was in Charleston at the time of the Denmark Vesey’s abortive conspiracy.

Hinks speculates that Walker left Charleston because the Vesey trial had made life very uncomfortable for free blacks in the area. We can be reasonably certain that Walker had arrived in Boston by 1825 as he is listed in that year’s City Directory as a Second-Hand Clothes dealer, a popular occupation amongst free blacks in Boston.

What was it about the Appeal which made David Walker a subject of interest for Walcott and modern Boston over 150 years after his death? Walker’s Appeal was published in three different editions between September 1829 and 1830. The printing of the last edition in 1830 serves as the setting for Walcott’s play. The Appeal’s message was unambiguous, and challenged slave holders, and free and enslaved black people alike. It claimed that under American slavery, “that we, (coloured people of these United States) are the most degraded, wretched, and abject set of beings that ever lived since the world began”; and that black people must refuse to submit to slavery. The Appeal excoriated the dominant racism of white Americans and informed black Americans in no uncertain terms that they were partly responsible for their inferior rank because most of them refused to stand up for themselves and fight back. Maurice Jackson goes as far as to claim the Appeal as “the first Black Nationalist statement”; Peter Hinks believes it had a similar psychological and social impact on the contemporary black population that Thomas Paine’s Common Sense had on the white patriots of revolutionary America. In his Appeal Walker petitioned all black Americans to take an active role in achieving their own independence from white control. In his eyes, it was crucial to the success of abolition that they did not meekly accept their second class status in the American hierarchy; a status that was constantly reinforced by assumptions of white supremacy. The Appeal was rooted in African American oral culture and written in a highly evangelical religious style which matched the religious revival of the early nineteenth century in the eastern parts of the country both north and south. The contents of the
Appeal show that Walker was an educated man who was sufficiently well read in the Bible and the classics to pepper his writing with intelligent allusions to both; so much so that some people were incredulous that it had been written by a black man at all.

Walcott’s fictional Walker explicitly states that his pamphlet was written in direct response to “[l]ies, [and] subtle treacheries!” (WGD, 54) encountered in the 1641 Citizens of Massachusetts’ Body of Liberties. The founding fathers’ declarations of the Liberties appeared to veto the practice of slavery: “There shall never be any bond slavery, villenage, or captivity among us…,” but the reality was a mocking contradiction which, “lets them / keep slaves who have slaves” (WGD, 54). Not surprisingly, the Appeal caused immense alarm among the white population in the South where slavery was a way of life not to be given up easily, if at all. It must have made very uncomfortable reading for any white possessing a modicum of religious faith to be assaulted with the intense and abrasive irony that Walker vocalised in the Appeal. Walcott emphasises in the play just how isolated David Walker was because of his outspokenness. White Southerners were not the only peoples opposed to the sentiments of the Appeal; historically, some notable abolitionists in the North shied away from Walker’s calls for a violent response towards those involved with slavery.

Walker has had only had a single outing as a stage-play, and therefore lacks a performance history to influence and shape interpretation. In 2001, under the direction of Wesley Savick, Walcott’s own theatre at Boston University, the Boston Playwrights’ Theatre, staged the production to celebrate its twentieth anniversary. Walker takes place on the last Thanksgiving Day of David Walker’s fictionalised life in his house in Brattle Street in Boston. By shifting the date of Walker’s death from the summer of 1830 to Thanksgiving Day Walcott subverts any idealised interpretation of this festivity. In the national mythology of the USA, Thanksgiving celebrates the hard-won successes of white settlers in America, but such a ‘celebration’ effaces the actual histories of conquest, genocide, and displacement that settlement and colonial formation entailed, especially in the case of indigenous peoples and African Americans. As Walcott ironically suggests, through the voice of David Walker, Thanksgiving is not worth celebrating because “niggers have the freedom of turkeys” (WGD, 28).

The play’s action takes place over four scenes with both the exterior and interior settings simultaneously visible to the audience. Walcott blends real people with fictional characters in the play. The real-life people are David Walker, his wife Eliza, and William Lloyd Garrison. The premise of the play is an imagined relationship between David Walker and, the later to become well-known fiery white abolitionist, William Lloyd Garrison. Walker and Garrison never met in reality, but Garrison would later draw on Walker’s Appeal to demonstrate his commitment to ridding America of slavery. Initially a non-resistant pacifist, Garrison was greatly affected by the force of Walker’s Appeal, and when he returned to Boston in 1830, he appropriated, for The Liberator, some of Walker’s strong views on the violent means to end slavery.

The invented characters in the play are: the Walkers’ maid, Catherine Healey, a rescued Irish girl; Barbados, a black visitor; and the shadowy and threatening presence of
the Figure. The Figure, permanently prowling outside in the dark, represents the Southern states’ plan to assassinate Walker to prevent him from re-printing his Appeal and disseminating it in the South. Walcott’s Garrison is presented as an appeaser who at first tries to reason with Walker and then in a later scene attempts to persuade the Figure of the futility of his mission to have Walker killed. The “Figure” is an impersonal descriptive name; the character’s inability to be identified underscores the menace that his unknowable presence conveys. Both Walker and the Figure have their own strong agendas, however, which the fictional Garrison is powerless to influence. Walker and Garrison, in the first scene, rehearse the divergent issues that faced black and white abolitionists. Walker bears the risk of being taken up as a fashionable cause amongst the amiable and well-meaning white Boston society “into conspicuous tolerance” (WGD, 38).

He experiences frustration as a result of the slow pace of change towards abolitionism and is “tired of the patience, / of [Garrison’s] New England society, / [his] measured abolitionists” (WGD, 38). The Figure initially states that “slavery is pitiful,” but as the South is unable to forgive the fact that Walker’s Appeal “urges violence, / massacre, and revenge” (WGD, 91) towards the slave owners, the Figure’s role is to stop Walker disseminating these threats. The Figure’s fears of a black revolution are articulated in a repugnant speech flooded with watery similes, which warns of a black tide of Africans “creeping over the map of these States” (WGD, 92). Even worse, according to the Figure, (but couched in an audacious collective noun by Walcott) “a Niagra of niggers, / a black waterfall” will drown the country (WGD, 93).

As befits a drama about abolition and the brutal treatment of blacks by whites, Walcott employs oppositional black and white imagery throughout the play. That the white characters are associated with the blackness is typified by the opening scene during which the menacing character of the Figure stands in the darkness, refusing to emerge, even as Garrison entreats him to come forth:

Come with me, come inside.
Don’t stand there like a raven
in the afternoon snow,
or a black crow in the cotton. (WGD, 11)

The same black / white imagery is repeated by Eliza, Walker’s wife, later on in the scene when she senses the Figure’s threatening presence outside, “like a raven walking in the snow. / Like a black crow hopping in the cotton” (WGD, 16). Walcott’s intention is to stress how whiteness, when employed by white oppressors to intimidate whomsoever they choose, represents a profound threat. The Figure says that, “[He] won’t eat until [he] sees that nigger / spread-eagled in the snow” (WGD, 8). Walcott makes use of the eagle, the official emblem of the United States’ Great Seal, when he orders that Walker be “spread-eagled” in the snow and thereby lie prostrate as a victim of white domination. The black / white imagery is echoed by ominous light / dark distinctions, which link to the slightly misquoted epitaph on the dedication page from the seventeenth-century Welsh poet, Henry Vaughan, from his poem entitled “They are all gone into the world of light.”

Garrison asks the Figure to “[c]ome into the light” but he responds sinisterly, “[n]o. The
light is too late” (WGD, 9). Garrison tries once more and begs the Figure to “leave the darkness for the light” (WGD, 11) but Walcott firmly roots the Figure, with his Southern accent, in darkness where he embodies the evils of slavery. For all that Walker is a free man, the Figure represents the disavowal of black freedom. In direct opposition to his apparent darkness, the Figure regards himself as “innocent” and “as white as the snow” thus encapsulating the dichotomous black versus white predicament. Furthermore, he promises he will, “be gone when it stops snowing” (WGD, 12) meaning that once his job is done and Walker is dead the snow will no longer be needed to assert its white dominion.

The play is truly the work of a “poet in the theatre,” further enriched by operatic influences in the songs. Amongst the poetic forms that make up the play there are several examples of inspired embedded rhyme where part of a word, sometimes the complete word, is echoed in another. For example, early on in Scene One, Walcott rhymes “devil” and “evil” when the Figure rails against Walker’s printing press:

[the press] now does the work of the devil
Keep the niggers from printing machines.
Deliver us from that evil. (WGD, 8)

Walker’s wife, Eliza, in the same scene welcomes the festival of Thanksgiving by thanking him for fetching wood for the fire: “Good. To light the fire in the hearth / as well as our hearts David” (WGD, 15). By embedding firelight at the “heart” of the “hearth,” Walcott once again underscores the sentimentality of Thanksgiving Day and the symbolic value of home for white Americans; but where is home for Walker and Eliza? Walcott in an oft-repeated theme, of the privations of cold weather for those used to tropical climates, shows Eliza, troubled by the cold and whiteness of snow, mourning for the red dirt of what she feels is her home, from where she came in North Carolina:

The tall green pines. And blood-red dirt.
Maybe I’m just tired of snow,
maybe I’ll never get used to winter,
but I wish this Thanksgiving,
with the bells muffled in cotton,
I wish I was back there now. (WGD, 21)

The “blood-red dirt” forms the native soil where Eliza was born, making her an American. Walker talks of Africa as their “true land,” but Eliza offers a different perspective when she pleads, “[w]hich Africa? Whose Africa? / I don’t know no Africa. / I ain’t going and I never been there” (WGD, 20). With Eliza’s remarks, Walcott alludes to black resistance to the resettlement programme put forward by the American Colonization Society. Created in 1816, it attempted to promote the removal of the nation’s free blacks to Liberia on the west coast of Africa. David Walker, along with most other free blacks, hated this extreme idea for it would play straight into the hands of slave owners. If the free blacks were sent away, it would then leave only enslaved blacks, without a voice, to fight for them.
Furthermore, the majority of slaves had no notion of Africa because their life experience was in the United States. The Society’s programme, of course, appealed to many whites and the prejudices that fed it were supported in print by Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1787). In his *Notes*, Jefferson put forward the opinion that white people were inherently superior to black. Walker’s response in the *Appeal* is to berate Jefferson’s characterisation of blacks as lazy, physically unattractive, sexually impulsive, and prone to lethargy. Jefferson had written “[t]his unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people.” According to Jefferson, the only way for blacks to be free and to avoid conflict with and threat to the white population, was to remove them from “the reach of mixture.” Thus, Thomas Jefferson, President of the United States (1801-1809) and author of the “Declaration of Independence,” endorsed the perception of white supremacy from the pinnacle of ‘democratic’ government. As such, it is not surprising that Walker chose to vilify Thomas Jefferson’s *Notes on the State of Virginia* in the *Appeal*, vehemently showing it up as little more than state-sanctioned racial aggression.

As David Walker’s experience shows, learning to read was difficult but not impossible for slaves or free blacks. In the play, Walcott claims Garrison as Walker’s reading tutor, which fits neatly with Garrison’s fictional role as Walker’s mentor and means of entry into white Boston society. The real David Walker was likely to have been taught to read during his early years by autonomous black schools that began to flourish in the Wilmington area in the 1750s. As the religious and classical allusions in the *Appeal* demonstrate, Walker was not new to reading but had studied literature at length and in some depth. Significantly, in Walcott’s play, Walker tries to teach his illiterate Irish maid, Catherine Healey, to read from the type that he will use on the printing press to create his pamphlet. Walcott places emphasis on the practical function of reading as a means to make the Bible accessible: “[i]n the beginning was the Word” (WGD. 51). The “Word” is capitalised in order to indicate its divine origins, but the capitalisation also indicates the importance of entry into the world of letters through reading “the Word.” Walcott’s metaphorical path through the textual forest, a reference to Dante’s *Divine Comedy*, illustrates the difficulties the fictional Walker faced *en route* to becoming a reader:

> [w]hen I began I saw the thick page as a forest
> with no track to go through, excepting my own will,
> and the determination in my fear. (WGD, 51)

Walker perseveres in breaking down each tree by its shape of leaves, each leaf representing a facet of sound, until he was able to interpret the whole tree as one complete sound. Gradually, as he passed under more and more trees in the forest path and decoded their branches as sounds and rhythms, he came to a light far ahead in the wood, which represented his ability to read the Bible. Earlier on in the scene, Walker uses similar forest imagery to negotiate the landscape of language when he describes a threatening dream to Eliza:

> I was walking alone through a forest
> of black trees whose leaves were like print,
but their language was different
and the leaves were letters I had learnt
but forgotten, from the African kingdoms,
[...]
And all of the leaves were talking,
in tongues I almost understood,
and I, David Walker, kept walking
as if towards my own ghost,
through these letters in a dark wood. (WGD, 19)

This time “the leaves” are further complicated by needing to interpret an African language with which Walker is unfamiliar because he has been acculturated to the United States. Moreover, he is at pains to point out to Catherine Healey the sense of responsibility associated with the ability to read as well as the trouble that literacy may cause. The ability to read means not only do you know you are a slave, but you also know it goes against all biblical and rational thinking. Consequently, once that learning has taken place it cannot be unlearned. Eliza, too, has her own regret about learning to read, calling it a “temptation / of bettering our minds” (WGD, 22). To Walker’s irritation, she purposely, mispronounces “exactly,” informing him that they may have been illiterate in Carolina, but noting,

we smelt the pines and the earth,
we knew exacterly,
without books and promises,
exacterly what we was worth (WGD, 22).

The power of Eliza’s words, although mispronounced, confirms for her that the slave-owning South rather than the ‘free’ North corresponds with her perceptions of home.

The imagined character of Catherine Healey—the Irish girl rescued from the poverty of the workhouse by the Walkers and brought to live and work at their house—enables Walcott to compare the plight of the Irish to that of American blacks. By freeing slavery from the confines of a single race, he is offering the argument that other elements, most obviously, class, and gender (which in their turn have economic consequences), have a part to play in the history of slavery. Walcott has long declared an intimacy with the Irish via their shared experience at the hands of British colonists. In a 1977 interview he claimed that the Irish experience at the hands of the British colonists in their own country had made them “the niggers of Britain.” Catherine has made her own Atlantic crossing just as the Africans have. She may not have been forced in quite the same way as shackled Africans, but, nevertheless leaving Ireland was often the only alternative to starvation at home. Catherine sings a mournful lament while setting the table for Thanksgiving dinner, where she will be invited to sit and partake of the meal. The point, of course, is that Catherine Healey, a white woman, is the servant of black folk, “they got theirselves a white slave” (WGD, 66), but, unlike most black slaves, she is treated with
kindness and respect by the Walkers. Catherine’s lament further highlights the similarity of the landless Irish to the Africans who were taken from their land and left only with an imagined ‘home.’ They are too far removed from this homeland to ever achieve anything other than an illusory relationship with it:

For when they take from your land,
Far, for whatever reason,
Only the heart can understand
Why it commits its treason,
Or why it sanctifies the sound
Of Donegal or Kerry,
Oh, I’ll be coming, there I’m bound,
If only in my green memory. (WGD, 62).

Catherine is heard singing by Barbados, a black character who has been hired to kill Walker and so buy himself freedom with the promised reward money. Barbados’s downfall is that he is unable to read and will in the event be cheated out of the money by the Figure and not receive his prize for killing David Walker. Unable to make out the letters on the reward notice, he fails to understand that it offers 10,000 dollars if Walker is captured alive but only 1,000 dollars if assassinated. Unfortunately, for Barbados, the cost of his freedom is 10,000 dollars, a sum he fails to achieve because he has killed Walker rather than captured him alive. The Figure, who never intended to award Barbados with either money or freedom, compounds the deceit when he finally shoots the enslaved man, rewarding him with death instead of liberty.

The character of Barbados provides the means to further emphasise the similarity of experience for the Irish, for black Americans, and of course for Africans who were taken to the Caribbean islands. He further stresses the economic foundation of slavery and of buying indentured workers for very little financial outlay. Barbados tells Catherine, “[t]hey call me Barbados, after the island. / You know Cromwell sent a lot of Irish / to Barbados in chains. Just like me” (WGD, 69). Walcott is making reference to Oliver Cromwell’s “terror” in Ireland in the 1650s in the complicated aftermath of the English Civil Wars. Poverty had already driven many Irish to Barbados as indentured servants as early as 1636, but from the 1650s enforced exile was inflicted on perhaps as many as 40,000 Irish Catholics who were considered a threat to Cromwell’s Commonwealth. In Barbados, they supplied the cheap labour required to support the tobacco and later sugar industries, thus underlining the economic benefit of slavery to the mercantile classes. The practice of enforced exile became so common that the verb “to barbadoes” a person became absorbed into the English language. This coerced migrant group included women and children who had been deserted by their men folk after they had been forcibly sent by Cromwell to fight his wars in Europe. Those abandoned had no means of subsistence at home. Famine was rife in Ireland. As with the indigenous population of the Caribbean, cannibalism was even hinted at amongst the starving left behind to fend for themselves. The parallels with African slaves are astonishing. The Irish were rounded up, herded into
pens, tied together with rope around their necks, and marched to embarkation ports in southern Ireland where they were branded with the initials of the slave ships which were to take them to Barbados or Virginia; the very same slave ships that were used to transport Africans from the West coast of Africa to the Caribbean islands.\textsuperscript{31} Irish indentured servants shared the slave-ship experience too, arriving in America \textit{en route} to the Virginian tobacco plantations after a cramped journey in unventilated ships where the dead were left to lie amongst the barely living for the journey. According to one historian of black America, amongst contemporaries, the practice became known as the “Irish Slave Trade.”\textsuperscript{32} Although disputed by some accounts of slavery,\textsuperscript{33} for the purposes of the play, Walcott makes a strong connection between the Irish experience and African slavery to emphasise slavery’s economic base.

That David Walker died in 1830 in the middle of the furor surrounding his \textit{Appeal} is not disputed. However, because he was found lying in the doorway of his home, some have insinuated that it must have been death by sinister means. Less mysteriously, Peter Hinks confirms a death record in “The Boston Index of Deaths” of a David Walker who died of a lung infection on 6\textsuperscript{th} August 1830. He died a week after his daughter Lydia who had died of the same pulmonary infection at the age of 21 months. Moreover, theirs were not isolated cases; there had been a spate of similar deaths in Boston during this time.\textsuperscript{34} Suspected foul play in the form of a gunshot wound at that time would have required an autopsy be carried out. (The Figure finally shoots Walker in the play as he staggers from the effects of Barbados’s poison.) But Walker was a thorn in the side of the ruling white elite. Darryl Scriven argues, that autopsies were only carried out if there was a vested interest.\textsuperscript{35} Clearly, there was no vested interest for white authorities in finding out the true cause of death of a black agitator. Scriven suggests, therefore, that the foul-play theory, although rivalled, should not be entirely dismissed. Walcott is evidently open to the idea of foul play as it supports his imagining of the events leading up to Walker’s death. Both Barbados and the Figure are in the play to corroborate the rumour that there was a Southern conspiracy to kill David Walker in order to prevent the \textit{Appeal} being further disseminated and so exacerbate slave unrest in the South.

The ending to Walcott’s \textit{Walker} intervenes in history through the use of meta-theatrical techniques that serve to bridge the divide between past and present while prompting spectators to consider the drama as a historical intervention in a world where race-thinking and racism persist. Once Walker’s corpse has been carried offstage by the members of the chorus of Yoruban warriors, Eliza removes her costume, make-up, and wig and stands in ordinary light to speak directly to the audience. The stage directions require that she remove her character’s clothes, but she does not appear to step out of character completely because she continues to address the audience as Eliza. Her last lines bring together the voices of Eliza as Walcott’s character, Walker’s wife, and a contemporary black woman. This composite figure comments that “some of you will be ashamed / of this violence for which he died” (WGD, 114). Her final reproach concerns the vestiges of racism that remain prevalent in society; she exits, remarking “and some will be satisfied” (WGD, 114), leaving the audience to confront the death of David Walker and the afterlife of slavery and racism in America.
It is almost unthinkable to leap from the dark conclusions of *Walker* to November 2008 when Walcott marked the first black President of the United States in a poem entitled, “Forty Acres.” With a nod to post-Civil War America and the rescinded promise of forty acres and a mule to be allocated to former slaves, he nevertheless, optimistically, proffers an alternative vision of the (former plantation) field as a new frontier:

Out of the turmoil emerge[d] one emblem, an engraving –

A young Negro at dawn in straw hat and overalls,
an emblem of impossible prophecy, a crowd
dividing like a furrow which a mule has ploughed,
parting for their president […]

and the young ploughman feels the change in his veins,
heart, muscles, tendons,
till the land lies open like a flag as dawn's sure
light streaks the field and furrows wait for the sower.⁴⁶

Almost twenty years earlier, before the inauguration of President Barack Obama, Walcott made the following claims: “[t]he Black American is still enslaved” and “the struggle rages wherever you look” because of the prevalence of the ghetto system. By contrast, the Caribbean enjoys a “sense of freedom, of possibility, of just the simple reality of air, sun, light, grass, fruit, beauty,” which belongs to the black inhabitants of the islands.⁴⁷ Walcott's ambivalence towards the United States and its response to racism, however, is perfectly illustrated when these comments are set alongside remarks made in a 1974 essay: “we know that America is black, that so much of its labour, its speech, its music, its very style of living is generated by what is now cunningly and carefully isolated as ‘black’ culture, that what is most original in it has come out of his ghettos, its river cultures, its plantations.”¹³⁸ The inheritance of black Americans then is not to be reduced to simply a story of subjugation. In spite of the repugnant racism in the United States, which perplexes and saddens him, Walcott does not participate in a politics of blame as some descendants of survivors or perpetrators of slavery have done. He is resolute that slavery was in the first instance an economic prerequisite to European economic expansion. It is not enough to identify African Americans (or Afro-Caribbean people) with the culture of slavery. Certainly it was part of their story, but it was part of the story of other economically disadvantaged races too.
Endnotes


2 Further references to this work in the text will be shortened and referred to as Walker’s Appeal or the Appeal.


4 David Walker’s adult life spans these years of heightened activity viz: Gabriel Prosser’s Revolt in 1801, Charles Deslondes’ in 1811, Denmark Vesey’s in 1822 and Nat Turner’s in 1831. Haitian independence dates from January 1, 1804.


6 Conversation with Derek Walcott, (4 October, 2008). From the broadcast of his first play, *Henri Christophe*, by the BBC Caribbean Service, it was clear that Walcott’s dramatic direction would be firmly located in issues of relevance to the history of the Caribbean. The motivation to write *Henri Christophe* in 1948, whilst still at school, came from his twin brother who had read about the Haitian revolution and asked Walcott write a play about it. It was an exciting topic to dramatise because it was tangible Caribbean history with strong characters who could be interpreted as local heroes. *Henri Christophe* would later be published in a compilation of plays called *The Haitian Trilogy* together with *Drums and Colours* (written to celebrate the formation of the short-lived Federation of the West Indies), and *The Haitian Earth*, which was written to commemorate the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of St Lucia’s Emancipation in 1984. Walcott’s plays about the Revolution collected together in *The Haitian Trilogy* add to his imagined and factual background of the abolitionists’ unrest in the early part of the nineteenth century. *The Haitian Trilogy*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002.

7 *David Walker’s Appeal*, Article IV in Peter P. Hinks, 2000, 78.


9 Hinks, 2000, 126n.

10 Ibid.

11 Turner’s words are quoted in Maurice Jackson, “‘Friends of the Negro! Fly with me. The path is open to the sea:’ Remembering the Haitian Revolution in the History, Music, and Culture of the African American People,” *Early American Studies* (Spring 2008): 63-64.

12 Hinks, 1997, 47.

13 Ibid., 30.

14 Ibid., 66.

15 Hinks, 2000, 3.


18 Walcott makes his character of Walker into an isolated man who argues with his wife’s preferences to return to the warmth of the South and he rejects the friendship of his white mentor in the play, William Lloyd Garrison

19 Both Benjamin Lundy and William Lloyd Garrison in spite of the “valuable truths contained in it, deprecate[d] the spirit and tendency of this Appeal”’. Quoted in Hinks, 2000, xliii.

Walcott’s epitaph appears as follows: “I see them walking in a *cloud* of glory / Whose light doth trample on my days.” Vaughan wrote: “I see them walking in an *air* of glory” (Italics are mine).

“The Poet in the Theatre” refers to the title of a lecture that Walcott gave in September 1990 at the Purcell Room on London’s South Bank where he exhorted playwrights to not be afraid of embracing pentameter in their plays. It was printed in *Poetry Review* 80.4 (Winter 1990/91): 4-8.

Quoted in Hinks, 2000, xxvi-xxvii.

Ibid. xxvii.


There was a real person called Barbados in Walker’s circle of friends in Boston. He was a hairdresser, a popular occupation for a free black in the northern states.

By offering a larger reward for Walker’s live capture, the inference can only be that the white slave owners were looking forward to punishing him.


O’Callaghan, 2000, 77-88.


Eric Williams strongly believes whites were never slaves in the same way as blacks. Amongst his reasons are that the number of white slaves was certainly dwarfed by the millions of black African slaves and that the status of slave of course, did not descend to whites’ offspring. Williams, 18.

Hinks, 1997, 269.


Baer, ed., *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, 167.

Abstract

This paper analyses the "Plátano Curtain" as a metaphor for the border that separates the Dominican Republic and Haiti as represented in The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (2007) by Dominican American author, Junot Díaz as well as The Farming of Bones (1997) by Haitian American writer, Edwidge Danticat. While both authors pay attention to the divisions and separations associated with the border, they also represent the Hispaniola border through the common history of a border culture shared by Haitians and Dominicans. Historically, the Dominican dictator, Rafael Leonidas Trujillo, presented a symbolically charged representation of this border in order to isolate and separate Dominicans and Haitians, thereby contributing to a culture of violence. The border divides two nations, but it also serves as an epistemic representation of division and separation, especially as expressed through the discourses and practices associated with the "Parsley Massacre" or "Mantanza" of 1937, when Trujillo oversaw the massacre of thousands of Haitians living in the borderlands. Drawing on the work of Walter Mignolo, I argue that both Danticat and Díaz challenge the dictator's violent acts or border patrol and divisive nationalist representation while reinforcing the connective character of border culture by incorporating voices from both sides of the boundary and offering important examples of "border thinking". By giving voice to hitherto silenced voices, new meanings in language emerge that serve to erase epistemic borders and separations and enable a view of the shared history and cultural proximity of Dominicans and Haitians rather than merely focusing on the separating character of the border. The meaning of borders is no longer fixed, but rather open and flexible. The challenge to dictatorial violence, shaped by the legacies of colonialism, enables another vision of the world to be articulated, a world in which different worlds can coexist in "pluriversality" rather than universality.
Plátanos and Perejil: Border Thinking in Contemporary Caribbean Literature
Rebecca Fuchs

The Border as Epistemic Division in Caribbean History and Literature

Like many other metaphors of Caribbean identity, the Plátano Curtain implies the violent history of colonialism and slavery out of which Caribbean society has emerged. The phrase “Plátano Curtain” for describing the Dominican-Haitian border during the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930-1961) was first used by Junot Díaz in his novel The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao (2007). He thereby ironically alludes to other borders termed as curtains, particularly to the Iron Curtain as a physical and ideological border between East and West during the Cold War and to the Tortilla Curtain, the border between the US and Mexico. Díaz adopts the phrase for a Caribbean context by combining the term curtain with a typical Caribbean symbol, the plantain. Historically, the plátano as a commodity stands for the economic exploitation of people in the Caribbean, particularly during slavery as well for racial discrimination. More recently, the plátano has been transformed by some Caribbean artists into a sign of cultural and national pride. Luciano’s sculpture with the title Plátano Pride (2006), an actual plantain plated in platinum, emphasizes this connotation.

By setting this background into relation with curtains as borders, Díaz places the Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo’s attempt of erecting a similar kind of border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti that is also based on notions of violence and separation in one line with those geopolitical and ideological borders installed in Europe and America. The Trujillo dictatorship can therefore be regarded as another manifestation of those epistemic borders that have remained in effect even when the actual borders have been abolished. These epistemic borders that divide the world in binary oppositions serve to perpetuate the exploitation of the formerly colonized by neo-colonial powers or local elites represented by the Trujillo regime.

As a literary metaphor and Caribbean neologism, the Plátano Curtain is symbolically negotiated in Caribbean fiction, which will be analysed in the above-mentioned novel The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao by the Dominican American author Junot Díaz and in the Haitian American Edwidge Danticat’s novel The Farming of Bones (1997). While The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao describes a Dominican family in the contemporary US and their past in the Dominican Republic during Trujillo’s dictatorship, The Farming of Bones tells the story of a Haitian woman living in the Dominican border region with a Dominican family during the time of the 1937 massacre. In Danticat’s novel, the Plátano Curtain manifests itself in the Massacre River, the border river between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. As “forced isolation” (BW 224) established by the dictator Trujillo, the Plátano Curtain represents the actual border that separates the Dominican Republic and Haiti in metaphorical terms. Both novels show how the Dominican dictator, Trujillo,
who erected the first regulated border with military command posts to separate the
Dominican Republic from its neighbour Haiti, aimed to reinforce the Plátano Curtain as a
“border that exists beyond maps, that is carved directly into the histories and imaginaries
of the people” (BW 225).

Both Danticat’s and Díaz’s novels reflect different aspects of Trujillo’s border
epistemology and are a reminder of how, strengthened by this ideology of separation, the
carefully nurtured anti-Haitian sentiment has entailed consequences until the present day
that have become manifest in Dominican xenophobia and racism. In order to abolish the
Plátano Curtain’s epistemic power to continue the racial, cultural, and national separation
of Haiti and the Dominican Republic passed on through coloniality, new strategies of
decolonisation are necessary. With the concept of coloniality, the Peruvian sociologist
Aníbal Quijano emphasises the importance of distinguishing the terms ‘colonialism’ and
‘coloniality.’ Even after the end of political colonialism, coloniality as its ideological pattern
is still effective. This is why he calls for “la destrucción de la colonialidad del poder
mundial” (“a destruction of the global coloniality of power,” my translation) and asks for “la
descolonización epistemológica” (“epistemological decolonisation,” my translation).

This paper interprets the border metaphor in a Dominican American and a Haitian
American novel as an epistemic construction, which can be undermined linguistically and
culturally as well as through the ontological claims of lived histories. Drawing on Walter
Mignolo’s theory of “border thinking,” this article shows how voices from both sides of the
boundary offer efficient strategies to destabilize the Plátano Curtain as a separating
mental border while reinforcing its connective character.

Specifically, Mignolo’s ideas about border culture extend Gloria Anzaldúa’s work on
the borderlands with the general aim of decolonisation through “transformations of the
rigidity of epistemic and territorial frontiers established and controlled by the coloniality of
power in the process of building the modern/colonial world system.” This theoretical
framework enables us to understand the Haitian-Dominican border as a political,
subjective, and epistemic boundary primarily created in the course of history from the
perspective of a European imperial/colonial expansion. This Western universalism has
been abused to justify the appropriation of land, the control of knowledge, and the
subordination of people. Border thinking, then, means to transcend these borders as an
epiphenomenal answer from the perspective of oppressed and marginalized peoples as an
epistemology that comes from the border. According to this view, modernity and
globalisation cannot be fully understood without coloniality. This makes philosophies and
literatures from a border position, such as the Caribbean, necessary to expose these
mechanisms and present alternatives in the form of local histories that articulate new
forms of border thinking. The border as “an epistemic metaphor to make an effort toward
thinking beyond the hegemonic Western conceptualization” becomes a space “where
the distinction between the inside and the foreign collapse” so that it can be
acknowledged as a place of thinking and enunciation. The two novels offer different
strategies of narrative representation and issues around language, which will be analysed
in the following. While border thinking in Danticat’s novel may be observed in the
relationship between language, geopolitics, and narrative strategies and focuses on the
exposure of artificial constructions of identity via language, Díaz’s text is more concerned with strategies of representation and translatability and focuses on silenced aspects of history. In different ways, both literary texts show the arbitrariness of linguistic borders that can be crossed and destabilised. Since Haiti invaded the Dominican Republic in 1822, with the aim of unifying the island to prevent future incursions by European colonial powers and a concomitant re-institution of slavery, a certain anti-Haitian sentiment has been apparent in official discourses of Dominican identity. Silvio Torres-Saillant argues that after the Dominican Republic’s separation from Haiti in 1844, the Dominican elite has been given “occasion to construct a nation-building ideology based primarily on self-differentiation from Haiti, including the area of racial identification” that was later appropriated by Trujillo for his nation project. However, as Silvio Torres-Saillant concludes in “One and Divisible,” this Dominican anti-Haitianism must not be mistaken for a general feature of Dominican-Haitian relations but rather as a result of an epistemological colonial legacy. Nor should it be confused with historical reality. Even during Spanish colonial rule, the border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti was a site of struggle and resistance. During that time, the border region was a haven for runaway Indians and African slaves (cimarrones), providing refuge and freedom in the centre of Hispaniola. Therefore, long before Trujillo’s time, there was a “strong border culture and interdependency that transcended boundaries,” suggesting that, in spite of anti-Haitian sentiment, peaceful relations between Dominicans and Haitians persisted. As a result, the border was actually rather permeable and could be crossed without difficulty in the pre-massacre period.

Junot Díaz’s novel recounts how the Dominican dictator Trujillo successfully exploited anti-Haitianism and used it as “part of his nation-building scheme to consolidate and modernize the Dominican Republic.” As Díaz ironically states in his novel, Trujillo “treated the country like it was a plantation and he was the master” (BW 2). The dictator seems to be omnipresent in Junot Díaz’s novel: living on after his death and haunting those who live beyond the geopolitical borders of the Dominican Republic. Dominicans in the diaspora as well as those born in the post-Trujillo era continue to suffer the effects of the dictator’s malevolence, which this paper regards as a continuing manifestation of coloniality. The Hispaniola border, therefore, becomes the epitome of Trujillo’s project “la dominicanización de la frontera” for a better control of the whole country, which culminated in the 1937 massacre. This Trujillo-decreed massacre of Haitians took place at the border and provides the story line in Edwidge Danticat’s novel The Farming of Bones, which will be dealt with in more detail later. At the same time that the Hispaniola border stands for division and disconnection, however, it also represents the common history and shared cultural elements of Haitians and Dominicans, which all of Trujillo’s endeavours could not eradicate.

“Another Kind of Eye”: Decolonising the Border in Caribbean Literature

The connective character of borders is emphasized by Mignolo’s border thinking. As “a machine for intellectual decolonization,” border thinking aims at introducing a new perspective that overcomes the focus on thinking in terms of separation. Literature
provides a powerful means of telling stories from marginalized perspectives that unmask a separating border epistemology and the power structure beneath it as artificial constructions. In literature and criticism, border thinking means not only to change the content of a discussion but also its terms. This will be exemplified below by analysing how a colonial epistemology that uses language as a tool of domination and oppression can be resisted and challenged from a border position.

26 Border thinking is useful in a Caribbean context, where experiences of exile and diaspora have created strong links to two or more places simultaneously. The Caribbean has always been a diaspora space—a voluntary one in the case of Europeans and an involuntary one in the case of African slaves and many labourers from Asia. Caribbean writers in the US, moreover, live in the condition of a double diaspora, which requires constant movements between spaces, cultures, and languages. From a passive position of oppression and marginalization, this state of moving between places becomes a position of agency that also enables epistemic border crossings. As Caribbean diasporic writers who move between the US and the Caribbean, Danticat and Díaz know both the Caribbean and the US-American perspectives intimately. Even though diaspora writers are not always recognised as producers of national culture in their Caribbean home nations, writers like Edwidge Danticat think that it is good for an author not to be a complete insider since the external gaze “adds some nuance, some depth. Of course, you lose some direct line to your culture, but distance can also give you another kind of eye with which to examine things.”

27 Border thinking offers an articulation of their epistemological flexibility, “another kind of eye,” and of how their writing changes a modern, universal point of view to a perspective from below that includes coloniality.

The novels by Junot Díaz and Edwidge Danticat make use of the Plátano Curtain as an epistemic border metaphor from both sides of the Haitian-Dominican border. As we have seen, Trujillo ordered the massacre to reinforce the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The Massacre River as geographical border separating the Dominican Republic and Haiti becomes a manifestation of the Plátano Curtain. Thus, from being a natural border, the river became the site of the 1937 massacre initiating Trujillo’s anti-Haitian nationalization program that manifests itself linguistically. While trying to demarcate the physical border to Haiti “to signal the end of illicit trade and ultimately the unsupervised movements of people across the border,” Trujillo also reinforced a metaphorical or psychological border by the use of language. The connection between geopolitical and linguistic borders becomes manifest in the use of the word perejil (parsley), which was used to differentiate Haitians, who could not pronounce the word like a Spanish speaker, from Dominicans. In analogy to a territorial demarcation, language is abused by the Trujillo regime to culturally, racially, and linguistically separate Dominicans from Haitians. Just as Trujillo’s dominicanización bases itself upon a supposed opposition to Haitianess, language, too, as an instrument of the state and linked to a certain territory, aims at unifying the nation by excluding what lies beyond its surrounding borders.

The following analysis will show how a colonial epistemology represented by Trujillo converts language into an object of possession linked to territory. As a counter-
strategy, border thinking aims at breaking away from the control of grammar, language, and epistemology by exposing its ambiguity. By linking language to the body “in the sense that we do not ‘have’ a language but ‘we are’ language,”31 border thinking in the novels transcends the notion of language linked to a certain territory and thereby decolonises the notion that the state may own language or appropriate it as an instrument to control its subjects.32 Understood as a literary strategy of border thinking, the narration of Caribbean local histories represents a challenge to the violent modern/(post-)colonial epistemology perpetuated by the Trujillo dictatorship, which justified oppression and exploitation by fixing borders and linguistic meanings.

**Perejil as Identity Border in Danticat’s The Farming of Bones**

*The Farming of Bones* describes the 1937 massacre commanded by Trujillo from the perspective of Amabelle, a Haitian woman who works for a Dominican family on the Dominican side of the border. When the lives of Haitians are endangered, she and other Haitians flee to the border town of Dajabón, where they try to hide but fall into the hands of Dominican men looking for Haitians (cf. *FB* 189-191). The Dominican men approach Amabelle and her fellow Haitians and “raised handfuls of parsley sprigs over their heads and mouthed, ‘Perejil. Perejil’” (*FB* 191). The novel recounts how the Spanish word *perejil* (parsley) was (ab)used as an identity marker or shibboleth to differentiate hispanophone Dominicans from Kreyòl-speaking Haitians who could not pronounce *perejil* like a Spanish speaker. In the novel’s epigraph, Danticat links Dominican-Haitian history to the Biblical conflict of Gilead and Ephraim in the Book of Judges. She likens the Massacre River to the Jordan River due to the similar abuse of pronunciation as identity marker. The word shibboleth has henceforth been used to describe the phenomenon of exclusion via linguistic particularities.33

With the supposed words “[y]ou can never hide as long as there is parsley nearby […]” (*FB* 304), Trujillo ordered that people in the border region had to pronounce the word for “parsley” in Spanish. If their accent gave them away as Haitians, they faced prison and death. However, ethnic Haitians often pronounced *perejil* indistinguishably from Dominicans, which is why the language test “served largely as a pretext, a mock confirmation of the presumptions and fantasies of an inherent and radical distinction between ethnic Dominicans and Haitians clung to by outside officials and elites.”34 As a consequence, the shibboleth reduced Haitians to their ability to pronounce one single word, even if “there is much more we [Haitians] all knew how to say. Perhaps one simple word would not have saved our lives. Many more would have to and many more will” (*FB* 265). As a form of resistance to this colonial epistemology, the novel gives Haitians a voice, represented by Amabelle. Even if it cannot save people’s lives, as many of Amabelle’s fellow Haitians die, it can keep up the memory of a silenced local history in which the Massacre River, as the site of the killing, becomes the border between life and death for Haitians, Dominican Haitians, and Dominicans mistaken for Haitians. Many of those classified as ‘purely’ Dominican by Trujillo’s men, ironically “were also culturally Haitian, bicultural people long accustomed to a world without formal government intervention in their lives.”35 Thus, neither identity nor language can be clearly attributed
Rather, the ambiguity of cultural and geographic borders is extended to language and epistemology, which the dictatorship used as a means of manipulation.

Dictatorial acts repeat the violence associated with linguistic practices under colonialism. The use of shibboleth by Trujillo in order to Dominicanise them and erase their Haitianess resembles earlier Spanish imperialistic efforts to impose culture and language on others. When Haitians are forced to pronounce a Spanish word, they are compelled to accept Dominican linguistic dominance and superiority, while accepting their own ineptitude at mastering the ‘superior’ language. At the same time, Kreyòl was condemned as backward and primitive, features that many Dominicans later associated with Haitians in general. Thus, Haitians are excluded from being part of the Dominican nation. Colonial connections are further reinforced through the description of how Dominican men plunge a machete into a Haitian man’s back (cf. FB 192).

Furthermore, Dominicans violently impose their meaning of parsley onto Haitians and thereby epistemically reinforce the dividing border between the two cultures by literally forcing Haitians to eat peppered parsley until they almost choke (cf. FB 194). The protagonist Amabelle and other Haitian victims do not even get the chance to say perejil to save themselves. Dominican soldiers stuff parsley into their mouths to silence them and thus show that their ability of correctly pronouncing perejil does not matter at all. Perejil turns into a linguistic symbol of death, ethnic cleansing, and genocide. This violent change of meaning is justified by the alleged threat posed by Haitians. Trujillo appropriated the concept of perejil “in some larger order […] for his country” (FB 203), and as a means of trying to ‘cleanse’ it from Haitians and their association with blackness. He celebrated his own and his country’s alleged purity, even though, ironically, Trujillo’s mother’s side was Haitian. He committed genocide and turned it into a patriotic act of self-protection by silencing Haitian voices to hide the potential linguistic and cultural similarities between Dominicans and Haitians.

While Trujillo reinforced cultural and racial hierarchies, the narrative suggests the socially transformative potential of language in connection with fostering communities. Pamela J. Rader notes that Danticat emphasises the dividing power of language, which separates her characters even more than skin colour. She observes that “[i]f the Haitian-born Amabelle praises parsley for its many uses, Spanish-speaking Dominicans tout its ethnic cleansing role.” However, in opposition to the dictator’s aim of establishing borders via linguistic and cultural difference, Danticat’s novel also demonstrates how the word perejil changes meaning so that it becomes a vehicle for resistance and transformation. Parsley is not just a tool of anti-Haitian violence but also a healthy herb described as an element that plays an important role in the “we” of community: for Haitians, parsley is used in our “food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides” (FB 203). Thus, Danticat critiques the violence of colonial/dictatorial language even as she conveys a sense of communal meaning through shared cultural significances and practices.

Border thinking as an act of resistance through language occurs when the Haitian Odette dies after crossing the Massacre River, just after uttering her last word, the Kreyòl
word for parsley, *pèsi* (cf. *FB* 203). Instead of fearfully uttering *perejil* as was demanded by their Dominican perpetrators, or being silenced like her fellow travellers, she affirms her Haitian identity and remains true to it until the very end rather than trying to be spared by passing for a Dominican. This implies the limited power of Trujillo’s shibboleth, which cannot invade and control people’s minds or completely silence them. By articulating *pèsi*, Odette weakens the power of *perejil* and claims her Haitianness as a “great discomfort of those trying to silence the world” (*FB* 266). Her utterance from an oppressed position thus resists the dictatorial-colonial epistemology imposed by Trujillo and adds the possibility of resistance to the linguistic concept of *perejil* because

> [t]he Generalissimo’s mind was surely as dark as death, but if he had heard Odette’s ‘pèsi,’ it might have startled him, not the tears and supplications he would have expected, no shriek from unbound fear, but a provocation, a challenge, a dare. To the devil with your world, [...] your words. You ask for *perejil*, I give you more. (*FB* 203)

Odette gives him ‘more’ by uttering the shibboleth in her own language and therefore weakening its power to exclude her from life and community. Indeed, she claims her belonging through language—Haitian Creole—to invoke a sense of affiliation and belonging. However, Odette is a minor character in the novel, and her act of resistance only occurs right before she dies. Significantly, she is not killed by a Dominican but by her fellow-Haitian Amabelle who tries to protect their lives while they cross the river. Amabelle accidentally chokes Odette by putting her hand over Odette’s mouth because she screams when she witnesses how Dominican soldiers shoot her husband (cf. *FB* 201-202). Thereby, Amabelle repeats the above-mentioned traumatic pattern of being stuffed with peppered parsley (cf. *FB* 194). Moreover, Odette’s *pèsi* consists of only a single word. This implies that more words and a further decolonisation of knowledge are necessary to reach more minds.

Amabelle’s account can be interpreted as the major enactment of decolonising language and epistemology. The novel writes victims of the genocide back into memory and history. Already the first sentence, “[h]is name is Sebastien Onius” (*FB* 1) is a calling out and remembering of a victim’s name that shows the importance of this act of resistance since “[m]en with names never truly die. It is only the nameless and the faceless who vanish like smoke into the early morning air” (*FB* 282). Amabelle repeatedly mentions the name of her lover Sebastien and thereby affirms his existence and identity as well as the importance of remembering all the voices and names of those silenced by a colonial epistemology and historiography. Thus, border thinking enables the discovery “that we have voices sealed inside our heads, voices that with each passing day, grow even louder than the clamor of the world outside” (*FB* 266). In literature, these hitherto unheard voices can finally speak and be heard. By narrating her story—including even her accidental killing of Odette—Amabelle demonstrates both the power of language to kill as well as transform radically cultures of violence.

Acts of witnessing, especially those that bear witness to border culture, have the potential to undermine Trujillo’s power position as constructed and asserted through the massacre. Odette’s *pèsi* reminds one of the diverse pre-massacre frontier society on both
sides of the border strongly influenced by Haiti.44 Danticat describes the border residents as people who are “as fluid as the waters themselves, the people of the Massacre River” “who tried to build a new world.”45 This shows that hope for peaceful coexistence in Hispaniola in the future depends very much upon the acknowledgement of local peoples who acknowledge a common past. In addition, it helps to recognise the cultural fluidity in the Dominican-Haitian border region that replaces the obsolete view of a clean distinction between Haitians and Dominicans. It is more a case of the people of Hispaniola living side by side, continuously faced with challenges of community and humanity.

*The Farming of Bones* as a local history “from below” provides the reader with an alternative version to Trujillo’s universalized historiography, which tried to silence these local voices. Odette’s *pèsi* and Amabelle’s narration represent an act of resistance as a strategy of border thinking against an epistemology shaped by coloniality. To continue the decolonisation of knowledge, these local voices need to become louder and to attract more attention. Amabelle remarks that “there are many stories. And mine is only one” (*FB* 305). Thus, a plurality of local stories from a border position offers the chance of further weakening an allegedly global, universal system of knowledge represented by the dictator by demonstrating the ambiguity of language and by exposing manipulative acts by those in power. The same linguistic manipulations in relation to Trujillo and his epistemic power are also represented by a curse that hit the New World with the conquest and still haunts it today.

**The Curse as Border of Silence in Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao***

In Díaz’s novel, the *Fukú americanus*, or *fukú*, is the “Curse and the Doom of the New World” (*BW* 1), which was brought to the Americas via Santo Domingo in the course of European colonization. *Fukú* is also called “the Curse of the Admiral” (*BW* 1) after one of its main bearers, Columbus. He is only called ‘the Admiral’ since his name must not be spoken aloud or heard because this “is to invite calamity on the heads of you and yours” (*BW* 1). This habit suggests that, nowadays, it is better not to talk about the colonial past or to reflect critically on it. *Fukú* is “like all the most important things on the Island, not something folks really talked about” (*BW* 2).46 Instead of coming to terms with colonial history, *fukú* turns it into a taboo and enforces silence on it.47 Therefore, the curse represents another aspect of the legacy of coloniality that violently suppressed oppositional insurgency. In contrast to the shibboleth *perejil*, which functions as a linguistic marker of identity and of the concomitant effort to control what is being said, *fukú* rather controls what is *not* being said to prevent those formerly colonized from coming to terms with their own history and, in doing so, to protect the power hierarchy established during the colonial period.48 Introduced by the Spanish colonizers of Hispaniola, the idea of the curse is associated with colonial conceptions of ownership, not merely of territory, but also of language and knowledge as well as of people, since “it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved [...]” (*BW* 1). However, *fukú* is not only a feature of the colonial era but also continues in postcolonial times. The Trujillato can be regarded as its extension because, as Edwidge Danticat says, “[i]n our part of the world, we have not totally recovered from colonialism.”49 Thus, *fukú* is a direct
consequence of Dominicans’ experiences of the trauma of dictatorship in the aftermath of colonial history.\textsuperscript{50}

According to Díaz, the main issue of his novel is not whether \textit{fukú} can be defeated or not. Rather, he aims at collectively acknowledging its existence, “[l]o be a true witness to who we are as a people and to what has happened to us. That is the essential challenge for the Caribbean nations—who [...] have been annihilated by history [...]”.\textsuperscript{51} Writing a novel about \textit{fukú} challenges this enforced silence and overcomes it because “it’s those fragments in language that are the testimonies, the testament, to what has happened.”\textsuperscript{52} \textit{The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao} is written against the annihilation of history in Dominican memory, which has been dominated by silencing violence and coloniality. For this reason, the novel belongs to a new generation of Dominican literature that is characterised by consciously addressing the violent past as a result of global and colonial forces.\textsuperscript{53}

However, in the novel, it seems that this violence is beyond control; \textit{fukú} does not only take effect in one direction, from the coloniser to the colonised. Columbus was not only \textit{fukú}’s ‘midwife’ and initiator but also its victim (cf. \textit{BW} 1). In the context of dictatorship, it is not apparent “whether Trujillo was the Curse’s servant or its master, […] but it was clear he and it had an understanding, that them two was tight” (\textit{BW} 2-3; emphasis original). Therefore, the curse establishes a connection between Columbus and Trujillo, between colonialism and dictatorship after Dominican independence. As a consequence, coloniality as the ideology behind colonialism has been passed down from Columbus to the Trujillo regime that continued to violate and exploit the country and its people, so that Trujillo became the curse’s “hypeman of sorts, a high priest, you could say” (\textit{BW} 2). The curse as a linguistic metaphor of silence and manipulation emphasises the power of language that has an epistemic influence on a global scale. The novel exemplifies this by providing an answer to the famous question “Who killed JFK?”: “It was Trujillo; it was the \textit{fukú}” (\textit{BW} 4). The curse of coloniality and its hypeman, the Dominican dictator, are furthermore responsible for the US losing the Vietnam War. The novel’s narrator Yunior establishes a triangular logical relation between Vietnam, the US, and the Dominican Republic, whereby he firmly anchors the Trujillato in a geopolitical web of interdependencies, all based on language, on an orally uttered curse that silences and controls what is being passed on.

Díaz’s concept of \textit{fukú} thus mirrors the complexity of global events that cannot only be described in terms of European modernity but are also influenced by coloniality. \textit{Fukú}’s ambivalence demonstrates that there is never only one truth or one version, such as the one promoted by a universal European historicity. Many local versions from border positions challenge the idea of a single fixed meaning by emphasising multiple shifting and oscillating meanings. \textit{Fukú} cannot be owned and controlled from a certain power position. Therefore, it illustrates the arbitrary linguistic relationship between signifier and signified. However, in the course of history, the curse has become increasingly linked with ideas of coloniality, ownership, and territoriality as demonstrated by Trujillo who “treated the country like it was a plantation and he was the master” (\textit{BW} 2). The arbitrariness of the curse is demonstrated by Díaz’s references to the 1937 massacre,
which he ironically calls one of Trujillo’s “[o]utstanding accomplishments” (BW 3), in which “the Friends of the Dominican Republic were perejiling Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans and Haitian-looking Dominicans to death […]” (BW 215). Here, he points to the arbitrariness of the dictatorial violence based on the linguistic ability to pronounce one word. As a mechanism out of control, it also hits Dominicans and cannot be stopped by national, cultural, or racial categories but crosses borders in every direction.

The novel promotes linguistic resistance against fukú, border thinking in The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao and this works via a counter spell, which “[n]ot surprisingly, […] was a word. […] Zafa” (BW 7). The Spanish verb zafar means “to loosen, to untie, to get free of something.” As an embodied act of border thinking, zafar can refer to whatever runs counter to the reductive understanding of language that occurs when signification is tied to a certain territory. Dominicans on Hispaniola as well as in the diaspora “zafa everything. […] Twenty-four-hour zafa in the hope that the bad luck will not have had time to cohere” (BW 7). The meaning of zafa goes even further when Yunior, the narrator, wonders “if this book ain’t a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell” (BW 7). Even if, as Monica Hanna argues, Yunior transcends the Plátano Curtain and relates the story from a diasporic perspective, he remains nonetheless affected by fukú himself. As the archivist of Oscar’s writings, he hides his works and uses it for his own narrative, which is why Yunior himself features dictatorial traits. He does not let Oscar speak but relates the story from his own perspective. Thus, Yunior’s zafa is as ambiguous as fukú.

However, the true border crosser in the novel is Oscar whose legacy is passed on by Yunior who narrates his story. In spite of being threatened by the dictator’s heirs, his lover’s boyfriend, the capitán and his thugs, Oscar returns to the Dominican Republic to his lover Ybón. His courage results in two trips to the canefields, the second of which is lethal. The fukú silences him on the way to the canefields, when he “tried to find his voice but couldn’t” (BW 297). The first time, he is rescued by his friend Clives who hears a magical realist voice singing, which can be attributed to the mystical Mongoose (cf. BW 300). After this magical zafa saved him once, Oscar returns again and shows that, as a real border crosser, he does not let a dictatorial system of power silence him and keep him away. By challenging the fukú to the point of losing his life, Oscar highlights the necessity of crossing borders again and again, emphasised by the site of his murder in the canefields. The canefields are not only a reference to slaves’ sufferings but also a repetition of his mother Belicia’s experience who was almost beaten to death in the canefields by the dictator’s henchmen (cf. BW 147). Therefore, border crossings need not only be spatial but also temporal in order to decolonise knowledge and free oneself of the silencing fukú. Due to the stability of the structures established by colonialism and perpetuated by the dictatorship, it is necessary to remember the past that was silenced by the fukú and to pass this knowledge on in acts of narration, which constitutes the ultimate zafa against the dictator’s command of silence. As a result, in a metafictional sense, the novel represents a counter spell against coloniality and its aftermath. It above all, resists the silencing of local versions of Caribbean history, especially as passed on by oppressed peoples. The novel as “a fukú story” (BW 6) creates a zafa in order to get away from the notion of language as an instrument of possession and power that tries to
silence the violent history of colonialism and dictatorship. More than this, literature reveals hidden versions and gives voice to the silenced. Both fukú and zafa expose the arbitrary character of language and how a colonial and dictatorial epistemology appropriated it as an instrument of power and control. However, since Yunior as the first-person narrator who is in control of the narrative relates the story all by himself, the reader never knows in how far he abuses his power position. His narrative authority points to the difficulty of decolonising knowledge, which requires a constant awareness of one’s own language and epistemology. As a consequence, it is necessary to keep the balance and always regard zafa in relation to and in tension with fukú, since the decolonisation of knowledge is a process that will have to continue in the future, long after the colonial period has officially ended. By ‘listening’ to many local voices as zafas, border thinking has to be renegotiated continuously in order to prevent the curse from dominating and reinstating a global design.

Conclusion

Border thinking begins with being aware of the constructed and manipulated character of borders. Furthermore, it does not aim at abolishing them because boundaries are sometimes necessary to obtain structure and order. Rather, the theory does not accept boundaries’ abuse by establishing a monopoly of power and oppression. Influenced by the legacies of colonial geopolitics, the Trujillato erected borders as dividing lines to maintain a power position by “harden[ing] the border and police[ing] the frontier.” The dictatorship aimed at preserving Dominican separateness and uniqueness behind the Plátano Curtain based on anti-Haitianism and a fear of becoming Haitian (cf. FB 261). For Trujillo, the border region between the Dominican Republic and Haiti signified a “serious and uncontrollable threat to his power.” That is why he tried to strictly order and organise it into a hierarchy to consolidate his power position, and this becomes obvious in his exploitation of language.

Literature offers a unique way to apply border thinking because, in novels, it is possible to change not only the content of the discussion but also its terms, for instance in the use of language and in the preservation of the memory of local, silenced voices. A multiplicity of linguistic meanings ensures that not only one universal meaning is passed on. Local voices are reminders of the diverse Haitian-Dominican border culture destroyed by the Trujillato and thus of the shared history and cultural closeness of Dominicans and Haitians. Against the fukú’s silence, the zafa enables the act of telling a version of Hispaniola’s history that exposes coloniality as the root of Trujillo’s epistemology and thus paves the way for an understanding relationship between Haitians and Dominicans in the future.

However, Haitians are still being rejected in the Dominican Republic due to their ethnicity and their blackness among other factors. Many Dominicans still identify with the colonial logic of white supremacy, thereby denying their own blackness. This shows the persistence of epistemic borders erected by a logic of coloniality that relied on race. Therefore, it is necessary to further continue the process of decolonising knowledge and
to carry on applying it in effective ways against the relics of a colonial epistemology of power and oppression. In the examined novels, a silencing fukú and a weak voice resisting the powerful dictatorial and colonial epistemology demonstrate that this is merely the beginning of border thinking. To further work against these discriminatory tendencies, the meaning of the plátano must again be extended beyond national pride to also include the silences and stains of a history of exploitation and slavery determined by coloniality, which is reflected in Miguel Luciano’s art and which is increasingly echoed in Caribbean diaspora literature.

As a result, border thinking in literature is a powerful tool against a colonial epistemology that focuses on the separating border and the differences between countries and cultures. Instead, it can shift views of Dominican-Haitian relations in favour of a common history and intercultural connections. Nevertheless, border thinking demands awareness that decolonisation of knowledge is a process far from finished that has to continue beyond language in order to expose and unmask further manifestations of coloniality, above all in historiography, philosophy, and literary theory. As a further consequence, the meaning of the Plátano Curtain as an ideological barrier or border is transformed through the act of writing a cross-border history of the Haitian-Dominican past, which lays claim to an alternative future. Caribbean literature makes us aware of the power of invisible epistemic borders and how they can be transcended: by working together from both sides of the border, from the Dominican Republic, represented by Díaz’s novel, and from Haiti, represented by Danticat’s, relics of coloniality can be effectively decolonised. By exposing the constructed character of borders, new means of transcending them can be developed, which might not abolish them. Nevertheless, their meanings open up and they are no longer boundaries separating two different entities. In addition, borders become flexible and connective, so that epistemic decolonisation enables a world in which different worlds can coexist in pluriversality rather than being restricted to universality. Mignolo says that “critical border thinking is therefore a method to connect pluriversality (of the different colonial histories that are trapped in imperial modernity) and the universal project of de-linking from the imperial horizon (of the rhetoric of modernity and the logic of coloniality).” Reading the two novels together provides such a pluriversal view in a geopolitical context.
Endnotes


4 Luciano, “Artist’s Statement.”


6 The massacre is known under different names. Dominicans refer to it as el corte (the cutting), while Haitians designate it as kout kouto-a (the stabbing). It is also known as matanza. See Richard Lee Turits, “A World Destroyed, a Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic,” Hispanic American Historical Review 82.3 (2002): 590. See also Frauke Gewecke, “‘El Corte’ oder ‘Les Vêpres Dominicaines’: Trujillos dominicanización de la frontera und ihr Reflex in der dominikanischen und haitianischen Literatur,” Iberoamericana 50.1 (1993): 45 and Rita de Maeseneer, Encuentro con la narrativa dominicana contemporánea. Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006, 66.

7 Turits, “A World Destroyed, a Nation Imposed,” 630.


10 Ibid., 19.


14 Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Designs, 260.


16 Paulino, “Erasing the Kreyol from the Margins of the Dominican Republic,” 36.


19 Ibid., 39-40.
21 Paulino, “Erasing the Kreyol from the Margins of the Dominican Republic,” 36.
23 Paulino, “Erasing the Kreyol from the Margins of the Dominican Republic,” 37.
24 Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Designs, 45.
26 Due to the manifold ways of applying border thinking, this essay focuses on linguistic manifestations of a colonial border epistemology. Other possible ways of analysis are, for instance, the diaspora experience as a border space, transculturation, and double consciousness.
28 Suárez, The Tears of Hispaniola, 14-15.
31 Ibid., 19.
32 In this context, see Mignolo’s concept of ‘languaging’ as a process emphasising the flexible interaction between people instead of fixed, pre-existing ideas (Walter Mignolo, Local Histories/Global Designs, 253).
34 Turits, “A World Destroyed, a Nation Imposed,” 617.
35 Paulino, “Erasing the Kreyol from the Margins of the Dominican Republic,” 58.
36 See also Cox, “The Trujillato and Testimonial Fiction,” 121.
37 Paulino, “Erasing the Kreyol from the Margins of the Dominican Republic,” 47.
42 See also Marta Caminero-Santangelo, “At the Intersection of Trauma and Testimonio: Edwidge Danticat’s The Farming of Bones,” Antipodas XX (2009): 13-14.
43 This quote reminds one of the first epigraph in Díaz’s novel, a quote from the Fantastic Four comic book series, in which Galactus, an evil supervillain who is a foil of Trujillo, says: “Of what import are brief, nameless lives… to Galactus??” (emphasis original).
44 Paulino, “Erasing the Kreyol from the Margins of the Dominican Republic,” 40.


46 For an analysis of the novel in terms of magical realism, which is negotiated between scepticism and belief in magical elements, see Monica Hanna, “’Reassembling the Fragments’: Battling Historiographies, Caribbean Discourse, and Nerd Genres in Junot Díaz’s The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,” Callaloo 33.2 (2010): 498-520.

47 Ibid., 504.

48 In The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, the shibboleth is parodied when Oscar is asked to say “what fuego means in English” (BW 322; emphasis original). When he blurts out “fire,” his tormentors kill him. See also Sandra Cox, “The Trujillato and Testimonial Fiction: Collective Memory, Cultural Trauma and National Identity in Edwidge Danticat’s The Farming of Bones and Junot Díaz’s The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,” Antípodas XX (2009): 121.


51 Díaz qtd. in Edwidge Danticat, “Junot Díaz,” n. pag.


53 Suárez claims that traditional Dominican literature, in contrast, ignored violence in Dominican history in favour of romanticised, mythic stories, see Lucía M. Suárez, The Tears of Hispaniola, 7-8 and Monica Hanna, “’Reassembling the Fragments,’” 503.


55 Hanna, “’Reassembling the Fragments,’” 505.

56 Turits, “A World Destroyed, a Nation Imposed,” 635.

57 Paulino, “Erasing the Kreyol from the Margins of the Dominican Republic,” 41.

58 Ibid., 58-59.

Abstract

The Caribbean is in many ways, as Richard Wilk has shown in his 2006 study of food and globalisation in a Belizean context, the perfect example of the mixing of ethnicities, cultures, and culinary practices as well as a region with one of the longest histories of global connectedness and globalizing processes in relation to food. However, there have been surprisingly very few studies of the relationship between food and culture in a Caribbean context. This article builds and extends upon Wilk’s important work on food status and respectability in Belize (2006, 2008) by considering the textual representation of food, food patterns, and foodways in some earlier—and crucially, in some wider—Caribbean contexts. The main focus is on the relationship between food and social order in a Caribbean plantation context and, in particular, on responses to food and social hierarchies of food status (e.g. between indigenous, naturalised or imported foods), as they are explored and mediated in a number of Caribbean and diasporic Caribbean texts from, or set in, the colonial plantation period. A related focus is the shift from food practices which perform a version of the culinary nation, constructing national identity, whether Caribbean or expatriate European, and the establishment of a more creolised identity through food. The paper acknowledges that foodways (the eating habits and culinary practices of a region, people, or era as well as the socio-cultural constructions and practices related to food) and food practices have been richly represented in and through Caribbean writing since the earliest colonial period (earlier if we include oral tradition and food practices) and across a number of different genres: plantation accounts, memoirs, fiction, poetry, essays, recipes [oral and written], and cookery writing. As such, the paper considers attitudes to food cultures and social order in a range of written sources: early traveller and planter’s accounts and two more recent literary texts: Caryl Phillips’s *Cambridge* (1991) and Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song* (2010). The latter, as historiographic metafictions, not only draw upon some of the early sources in some interesting ways, but stage and re-present, in a more self-consciously ambivalent way, early attitudes to food and social order in a Caribbean context.
“A Table of Plenty.” Representations of Food and Social Order in Caribbean Writing: Some Early Accounts, Caryl Phillip’s *Cambridge*, and Andrea Levy’s *The Long Song*
Sarah Lawson Welsh

Food, Writing, and Culture

At the start of his recent book, *The Meaning of Cooking*, Jean-Claude Kaufmann recounts how in 1785 English writers and diarists James Boswell and Dr Johnson were trying to come up with a definition of the human, a not untypical Enlightenment concern. Boswell suggested: “the beasts have memory, judgement and all the faculties and passions of our [human] mind, in a certain degree…but no beast is a cook.”¹ Man was, then, a 'cooking beast' concluded Boswell. He might equally have noted that no beast is a writer and that Man is therefore a beast who both cooks and writes. That the two processes are intimately connected is Andrew Warnes’s argument in his 2004 study of food and resistance in twentieth century American writing, *Hunger Overcome*. In a specifically African-American context, Warnes argues that writers such as Zora Neale Hurston, Richard Wright, and Toni Morrison draw a “profound connection between cooking and writing, insisting on the capacity of both processes to replenish two disabling voids—hunger and illiteracy—that external forces have invested with special prominence throughout African-American history.”²

This paper moves beyond a broad analysis of the links between food and writing to a more focused consideration of the representation of food hierarchies, food status, creolisation, and narrative strategies in fictional texts. However, Warnes’s idea of food and writing as linked “volatile practices” capable of filling a void and performing resistance is a very useful one and one which underpins the present discussion. Indeed, it’s important to recognise that in the Caribbean too, the two-way relationship between culinary and writing practices is significant. The Caribbean is in many ways, as Richard Wilk has shown in his 2006 study of food and globalisation in a Belizean context, the perfect example of the mixing of ethnicities, cultures, and culinary practices as well as a region with one of the longest histories of global connectedness and globalizing processes in relation to food. The Caribbean is therefore ripe for study in terms of the relationship between food and culture. There is still much work to be done in unravelling the full implications of this close relationship in a Caribbean context but there is clearly not space in this paper to do this. This paper’s province is neither to construct a geopolitical and economic history of food, a task which has been accomplished with consummate scholarship by food historians such as Sidney Mintz in his monumental study, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar In Modern History* (1985), nor to use anthropological and qualitative methodologies in order to construct a sociological study of
micro level practices of food preparation and consumption. Instead, this paper builds and extends upon Wilk’s important work on food status and respectability in Belize (2006, 2008) by considering the textual representation of food and foodways in some earlier and crucially, in some wider Caribbean contexts. The primary sources are written accounts, literary and otherwise, which are linked by their exploration and mediation of a number of issues relating to food in a Caribbean context.

The chief textual locales of *Cambridge* and *The Long Song* with their doubled historical narratives prove especially illuminating of this unfixed and shifting relationship between food and culture, food and social order. Both novels feature black hunger and white Creole plenitude, different kinds of ‘illiteracy’ and authorship, and both stage fictional explorations and reworkings of white Creole and slave attitudes to food and foodways in a Caribbean plantation context. Moreover, Levy’s bibliographic acknowledgements which form a paratext to *The Long Song* and comments made by Phillips and his critics reveal that both novelists make extensive use of a sometimes shared, archive of historical sources and writings from an earlier period in Caribbean history. However, Levy and Phillips’s use of this archive and their respective fictional ‘revisitings’ of this particular period in Caribbean history are neither unmediated nor unproblematic. As fictional texts produced by a diasporic Caribbean and second-generation Caribbean British writer and published in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first centuries respectively, *The Long Song* and *Cambridge* are necessarily distanced from the historical sources upon which they draw.

The paper concludes by arguing that although both writers draw extensively on earlier writings, each writer’s relationship to this archive is quite different and gives rise to very different degrees of narrative agency in the novels’ key characters. Whilst the fictional characters of Phillips’s *Cambridge* arguably remain somewhat constrained by the historical voices of the novel’s source materials, Levy creates a number of characters, including her chief protagonist and narrator, Miss July, whose narrative voices exceed the bounds of these same source materials. Indeed, they present an interesting challenge to them, in the form of a playfully postmodern, metafictional framework which speaks from the interstices between Levy’s sources and which decentre the hegemony of white Creole accounts as source materials for the novel.

**The View from Outside: European Accounts and Food Creolisation**

Amongst the early writings from and about the Caribbean anthologised by Thomas Krise in *Caribbeana* (1999) are a number of early texts which mention early foodways and food practices, and register responses to food in the Caribbean, whether indigenous or naturalised. Striking amongst them is Edward Ward’s wonderfully satirical travelogue *A Trip to Jamaica* (1696), a European account of the Caribbean which parodies the “kind of promotional travel narrative that characterised reports from the settlements in the Americas.” (Ward was an English journalist, much like Daniel Defoe, who developed the persona of the Trip in some of his later writings, and whose *Trip to Jamaica* inspired the writing of *The Jamaican Lady* written by his friend William Pittis and published in 1720.) In
the following passage, Ward constructs Caribbean foodstuffs and foodways as utterly bewildering if not repellent, using tropes of exoticism and alienation rather than commensality, as was common to European accounts of the Caribbean of this time:

Of their Provisions

The chiefest of their provisions is Sea Turtle, or Toad in a shall, stew’d in its own Gravy; its Lean is as white as a Green-sickness Girl, its fat of a Calves-turd Colour, and is excellently good to put a stranger into a Flux and purge out part of those ill Humours it infallibly creates...they have Beef without fat, Lean Mutton without Gravy, and Fowles as dry as the udder of an Old Woman, and as tough as a stake from the haunches of a Super-annunated cart horse

There are sundry sorts of Fish, under Indian names, without Scales, and of a Serpentine Complection; they eat as dry as a Shad, and much stronger than stale Herrings or Old Ling, with Oyl’d Butter to the sause as rank as Goose-grease, improv’d with the palatable Relish of a stinking Anchove.

They make a rare Soop they call Pepper-pot...Three Spoonfuls so inflamed my Mouth, that I devour’d a peck of Horse-Radish, and drank after a Gallon of Brandy and Gunpowder, (Dives like) I could not have been more importunate for a Drop of Water to coole my tongue...

They have Oranges, Lemons, limes, and several other Fruits, as Sharp and Crabbed a themselves, not given them as a Blessing, but a Curses, for eating so many Sower things, generates a Corroding Slime in the Bowels, and is one great occasion of that fatal And Intolerable Distemper, The Dry Belly-Ach; which in a Fortnight, or Three Weeks, takes away the use of their limbs, that they are forc’d to be led about by Negro’s.5

Ward’s strategy here is to separate himself from the white planter class whose culinary practices and tastes he satirizes. Without exception Caribbean foods and dishes are found to be inferior to that of Europe: too at variance with European norms; too tough (as Lewis also notes6), oily, hot, or sour for the more moderate and ‘refined’ European palate. However, if we read against this dominant grain, Ward’s account also reveals the emergence of a counter-narrative, the story of a nation or a region being told through its food, an identity being formed based, in part, on what people eat. In this reading, food practices act to mirror wider patterns of social encounter and change in the Caribbean as both colonizers and, to a lesser extent, slaves, adapted their food patterns to a new environment. Ward’s response of disgust can be read alongside other accounts which register curiosity, adoption, rejection, synthesis, transculturation, and creolisation as different groups respond to each other and to foodstuffs and food practices both familiar and unknown. Read in this alternative way, Ward’s passage inscribes some instances of early markers of white Creole identity as culturally Caribbean rather than European: the taste for the indigenous meat of the turtle and for the African-derived one pot meal of Pepperpot. When Ward notes the turtle served in its shell as a favourite set piece or culinary performance of the most sumptuous plantocracy tables, he strikes on an early
emblem of Jamaicaness, a way in which early white Creole identity was defined and practised.

In *The Long Song* and *Cambridge*, both Levy and Phillips have their fictional characters note the turtle as the centrepiece on their lavish planter's tables and it is noted by a number of later archival sources including Lewis, Coleridge (1825) and Mrs Carmichael (1833). The social ritual of the formal dinner party was an important part of the relationship between food and culture for the planter classes, since it was the main, if not only way, in which they met socially and exchanged news, views, food, and drink. In this context, the range, kinds and quality—as well as quantity—of food and drink offered to others in the same racial and social group became very closely fraught with particular distinctions of taste and associations linked to status, as Levy’s novel, in particular, testifies.

It is significant that a text as early as Ward’s 1697 account should mention Pepperpot, perhaps the most well-known Caribbean version of the one pot meal and still eaten throughout the Caribbean to this day. Pepper pot has both an important economic and symbolic function. It originated out of the one pot method of cooking in an iron vessel over an open fire, a practice originally necessitated amongst slave populations and favoured by the poorest classes in the Caribbean, and makes use of largely indigenous and naturalised ingredients (cassareep from cassava, peppers, available green vegetables such as the leaves of the eddoe, dasheen, known as Callaloo) which could readily be grown on the slave smallholdings or provision grounds. The knowledge required to make Pepperpot was primarily an orally transmitted one. This factor created a symbolic function for Pepperpot in reconnecting plantation slaves to orally transmitted African culinary traditions and, in the post-emancipation period, in reconnecting West Indians to slave food on the plantations. Unlike the turtle, then, Pepperpot was primarily marked as ‘slave food.’

Quite when and why Pepperpot was first served to the planter class by slave cooks, and appropriated by the planter class as part of its cuisine, is uncertain, but one thing is certain: Pepperpot did successfully cross the social divide from slave to master, which is, in this context, also the division between African or African-descended cook and the Euro-creole consumer. Pepperpot, is seems, was one of the first thoroughly creolised dishes in the Caribbean and continues to be prepared and eaten in different forms to this day. In a 1965 cookbook from the Caribbean, the author notes the longevity of the dish and its potentially very old provenance in Caribbean cuisine: “Pepperpot can be kept going for several months and is almost passed on from generation to generation. Every evening it is warmed up and fresh meat or cold remains are added to it. Sir Algenon Aspinall declared in *The Pocket Guide Book to the West Indies* that he had partaken of Pepperpot said to have been one hundred years old.” Pepperpot also has an important specific function within domestic economy as an efficient means of eking out available food (“making do”) by adding to and boiling up the one pot meal each day; this social phenomenon and characteristically Caribbean “cultural philosophy of food,” born out of historical necessity rather than choice, has been documented by a number of sociologists and critics including Olive Senior and Lynn-Marie Houston.
In a recent unpublished paper, Ilari Berti refers to this as a shift from an attitude of suspicion and/or “disgust” towards food local to the Caribbean, accompanied by a discourse of “contamination” (as others such as Wilk 2006 have shown) to an attitude of “curiosity and appreciation” as the colonizers adapted their food patterns to the new environment.\textsuperscript{14} She notes how this clash between old and new foodways and patterns of consumption is explained by Mrs Carmichael through the figure of the cook, usually a Creole or African man, and the importance of the Plantation House kitchen as a “site of creolization”: “consuming different foods was a common habit and not only gave rise to new practices of eating but generated dynamic spaces of transculturation.”\textsuperscript{15} Carmichael notes that “creole soups [are] much liked…made with salt beef or pork and at times with salt fish”\textsuperscript{16} whilst Callaloo “a principal article in their pepperpots” makes a “soup [which] is excellent, wholesome and palatable to all—creole, white, free, colored or slave; and indeed is one of the great blessings of the West Indies.”\textsuperscript{17} However, as a number of studies demonstrate,\textsuperscript{18} and The Long Song fictionally stages, this shift was not necessarily permanent or exclusively one way towards greater creolisation, as will be seen.

**Food Taboos and Health**

Interestingly, in Ward’s mention of the turtle which puts “a stranger in a flux” and the various “sower” fruits which causes a “corrodning slime in the bowels,” Ward pathologises Caribbean food as unhealthy and related to illness, thus introducing a common trope which recurs in Lady Maria Nugent’s accounts of her sojourn in Jamaica just over a hundred years later. Nugent was convinced that the planter class’s over-indulgence in rich food and good wine precipitated the onset of yellow fever, a significant killer in early nineteenth-century Jamaica. In this belief, Nugent also reflected a number of educational treatises on the relationship between health and diet, which circulated widely in the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{19} Given Ward’s satirical tone in this piece, it is difficult to assess how far he accepted the European derived taboos and medical advice surrounding the eating of tropical foodstuffs of his time, but Nugent’s views seem to be more clearly informed by, and in endorsement of, such public advice. Her account of early nineteenth-century Jamaican foods and planters’ tables is a good example of the intersection of the personal and the public, the individual and the social. Nugent’s account shows how, in matters of food preferences, practices, and taboos, a primarily individual and very primitive sense of taste is shaped into a more socially constructed concept of taste as informed by various discourses of colonialism, class, gender, and medicine.

Significantly, however, as Lewis’s account also makes clear, such taboos and attitudes to particular foods were not usually shared by the slave population whose access to the range of foods eaten by the planter class was not possible, and who conducted their own dietary and medicinal (often herbal) remedies. Nor were such taboos fixed or unchanging. Phillips’s novel *Cambridge* gives one such example. When the white English woman, Emily Cartwright, is travelling to her father’s plantation in Jamaica, she notes how “the ‘doctor’ upon ship recommended as the “recipe for white survival” “to avoid exposure to the sun, eat sparingly, avoid mixing wines and fruits, take no coconut
water, malt liquor or cider, eat a fair proportion of animal food or fish, and take at least two to three glasses of madeira each day. Yet at a luncheon out later in the novel, she reflects how: “we had thrust upon us baskets of fruit from which, according to our physician’s maxim, one should eat as much as possible since ‘fruit never hurts.’”

In *The Long Song*, Andrea Levy wryly comments on the extraordinary range as well as plenitude of foodstuffs grown, imported, and eaten by the white Creole and planter class in the Caribbean, as documented in texts such as Long (1776), Lewis (1834), Carmichael (1833) or Nugent (1801-5 [1905]), through the fictional character of the English woman, Caroline Mortimer. Caroline has lately arrived in Jamaica, to live with her brother, plantation owner John Howarth, who married into Creole society (much like the Rochester figure in Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea*) but has recently been widowed. When she first arrives on the island, Caroline is keen to try and to taste local foodstuffs and West Indian dishes:

> Her appetite, which she had feared she would never regain after her ravaging voyage…was now returning. And fresh and adventurous it was too. Why she thought the mango the loveliest of fruit – juicy and sweet. True, it did have the taste of a peach dipped in turpentine…but she was not a timid person, too scared to try these new experiences…She told her brother, ‘if turtle is considered fine food in this foreign place then I must taste it, even if only the once.’ She wanted to try everything…Bring on the duck, guinea birds and jack fish, for Mrs Caroline Mortimer was eager to nibble upon their bones. Even breadfruit destined for the slaves’ table.

In this and related passages, Levy foregrounds her character’s prodigious appetite and ambitious social aspirations within Jamaican Planter society—as evidenced by her sumptuously spread dinner tables and, in particular, her elaborate plans for a grand Christmas dinner—in order to stage some extraordinarily evocative as well as funny passages, which explore both black and white attitudes to food and food consumption in a plantation context. Whilst we should always bear in mind *The Long Song*’s status as complex amalgam of contemporary historical materials, and non-contemporary fictionalised text, this part of Levy’s novel usefully highlights not only vast discrepancies in patterns of consumption between planters and their slaves, the hunger and plenitude existing in close proximity in the plantation environment but also dramatizes the small but daily acts of resistance, on the part of the slaves, to the authority of their white masters and mistresses, through practices such as deliberate misdirection and pilfering. Here again, food acts as a “volatile practice” capable of filling a void and performing resistance to white Creole power.

**Food and Slave Resistance**

Whilst Levy’s Caroline is busy listing the endless courses and individual items required for her Christmas dinner to her cook and her head servant, the novel’s mischievous third-person narrator interjects:
Perhaps, reader, you are familiar with the West Indian planters and their famed appetites. You may have had cause to entertain them at your own table and watched your house servants dash and scurry to attend upon them. If this be true, then you will also know that the flesh of many a poor creature needed to be sacrificed in order to satisfy their greedy guts...

This shift in narrative perspective is highly significant. Indeed, it can be argued that both Levy and Phillips use narrative strategies which deliberately decentre the hegemony of the white Creole accounts upon which they draw. Levy’s novel starts with the orally-based narrative and free-indirect discourse of Miss July and it is only within the frame of her narration that Caroline exists at all in the novel. Such a decentring of the dominant discourse of the white planter class constitutes a by now familiar postmodern fictional trope of historiographic metafiction; it also links the novel to various subaltern or ‘history from below’ movements in recent historical writing, both scholarly and creative. However, Levy’s narrative strategy also, importantly, shifts the novel’s axis away from the relative formality and abstraction of an archive of written documents on plantation life towards an adapted oral, idiom, and communal reading of the same, including planters’ and slaves’ relation to food. In this respect, Levy’s novel shifts the ways in which readers and writers such as Phillips have responded to an archive of written materials on plantation life. This is the chief originality and significance of Levy’s novel: to disrupt the intertextual field and to realign our reading of all of these sources, historical and fiction thereafter. In contrast, when Phillips melds fact and fiction, historical reference and creative licence in Cambridge, the effect is far less radical and his characters are arguably much more constrained by the nature of their source materials.

The shift to the third-person satirical observer in the passage from The Long Song cited above, and the pre-eminence of Miss July’s narrative voice in the novel overall is important, not just in terms of the narrative strategy of Levy’s novel but also in that it represents a shift in power in other ways. In short, The Long Song shows how, historically, the dynamics of food and social order were not only more complex than they might initially have appeared but were also imbricated in wider, often quite delicate networks of power. In a plantation context, food and food preparation for the Planter class devolved to a relatively small house slave population which, in many cases, had just as much power to resist as to conform to the planter’s instructions in the crucial matter of food preparation; in certain cases, as Lewis and others document, house slaves harnessed the possibilities they had to cause ill or to poison, despite the threat of severe punishments. Levy’s novel imaginatively recreates the power relations between the white Creole planter class and their black house slaves in the shared but hierarchical space of the plantation house. Arguably, nowhere was this more subtly played out than in the intimate area of food preparation and consumption.

Trouble in the Kitchen

Indeed, Levy’s novel is peculiarly attentive to these nuances of power, subversion, and resistance in her fictional slave community. In the Christmas dinner passage from The Long Song we find, in cook and house slave, evidence of clear resistance to Caroline’s
culinary direction and a deliberate transgression of the social niceties and proprieties of the planter's dinner table. Wilk and others note the widespread tension between employers and cooks in this and a later period and argues “while these women cooked European dishes for their employers, they did not always follow orders to the letter. Either from ignorance, lack of raw materials or their own resistance and unwillingness to give up what they had learned at home.”

Similarly, in Lewis’s account of his second trip to his Jamaican plantation in 1817, he notes his frustration with a black cook who is seemingly unable to follow his requests for specific foods or dishes at dinner:

> slaves] never can do the same thing a second time in the same manner; and if the cook having succeeded in dressing a dish well is desired to dress just such another, she is certain of doing something which makes it quite different. One day I desired that there might be always a piece of salt beef at dinner, in order that I might be certain of always having enough to send to the sick in the hospital. In consequence, there was nothing at dinner but salt beef. I complained that there was not a single fresh dish, and the next day, there was nothing but fresh. Sometimes there is scarcely anything served up, and the cook seems to have forgotten the dinner altogether: she is told of it; and the next day she slaughters without mercy pigs, sheep, fowls, ducks, turkeys, and everything that she can lay her murderous hands upon, until the table absolutely groans under the load of her labours.

Whereas Lewis reads such behaviour as slave obtuseness and ignorance, an inability to follow simple instructions, we might read this as deliberate disruption, indeed as evidence of slave resistance to white authority on a small but daily basis.

### Acts of Resistance: Food Theft

Another documented example of slave resistance, reflected in both Phillips's and Levy’s novels, is the stealing of the planter’s food and drink. Indeed, Cambridge is tried for food theft among other charges and eventually hung for the murder of his tormentor, Mr Brown, in Phillips’s novel, although the evidence for murder is ambivalent at best. Levy shows Miss July pilfering from the dining room as a regular occurrence. It is both performed in collaboration with other slaves and its “little deception[s]” practised and passed on from slave to slave. Warnes notes how the autobiographies of slaves “often [...] refer to acts of resistance—to moments of food theft and foraging, to surreptitious self-education, and to other individual rebellions that challenged [the] circumscription [of cooked foods and written words]. By characterising cooking and writing as volatile practices, which held out a promise to slaves and a threat to slaveholders, occasioning ‘stratagems’ through which plantation codes could be transgressed and consolidated, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass furnishes a rich supply of such acts of everyday resistance.” As Warnes observes, “if slaves could reassert their humanity by appropriating ‘white’ foods and ‘white’ books, then slaveholders could deny it by withdrawing such materials and so returning their property to what they saw as an animalistic diet and an animalistic illiteracy.” In short, as Douglass’s account demonstrates, food opens up “possibilities for disciplinary control and defiance” and it is
within such a regime that Cambridge is cruelly punished with his life. By way of contrast, his wife, the alleged obeah woman, Christiana, is so feared (and also possibly sexually available)\textsuperscript{35} that she is tolerated to sit defiantly at the table of the corrupt Mr Brown in Emily’s presence in Phillips’s novel. This, as Caroline notes, is a transgressive act of the highest order since Christiana is neither a house slave nor a servant at the dinner table.\textsuperscript{36}

Such a framework and this comparative context allow us to read several scenes in Levy’s novel as particularly significant. In a notable scene, Levy has Head Servant Godfrey warn and then challenge his mistress over the cost of the provisions she wants him to purchase for the Christmas meal:

‘My brother says you cheat me. How can everything be so expensive?’ the missus asked.

And Godfrey, holding her gaze, unflinching, answered softly, ‘It is not that things be expensive, it is just that you cannot afford them.’…

‘How dare you question me,’ Caroline Mortimer said, ‘I know you cheat me. Now, just get me good price or I’ll have you whipped.’…

From a small linen purse she counted out money into her hand. Then passing the coins to Godfrey, she said firmly, ‘And be sure to lay the best linen cloth upon the table. The Irish linen should raise Elizabeth Wyndham’s envy’.\textsuperscript{37}

Godfrey’s insubordination earns him a blow to the ear, but his transgression goes much deeper; indeed it speaks not only of Caroline’s nominal control as a white woman over what is ultimately her brother’s money,\textsuperscript{38} and her fragile authority in the context of the particular domestic economy, but also to the wider encoding of respectability, which marks the family’s place in Planter society and the fine gradations of status within the same.

In a later scene, having been left alone in the Great House, Miss July wanders freely through the rooms and peruses those of her mistress’s possessions which are usually out of bounds. Her transgression extends to liberating the missus’s best porcelain cups and plates from a high cupboard and, in a marvellously parodic scene, mimicking the crooked finger of her mistress on her tea cup.\textsuperscript{39} July’s mimicry extends to calling to fellow house slave Marguerite to serve her tea and then when startled by the entrance of freed slave, Nimrod (whose very name suggests both speed and rebellion), transferring her orders to him. In occupying the exclusively white space of the dining table, where usually slaves serve rather than sit, and in appropriating exclusively ‘white’ commodities such as wine, July overturns the codes and hierarchies of plantation society and delights in her open and flagrant resistance. That this scene is an example of the ‘world turned upside down,’ of the inversion of social hierarchies and the revelry characteristic of what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the “carnivalesque,” is suggested by the image of July looking at her reflection in the lid of the silver salver: “in the large serving spoon she, and the whole world, was reflected upside down, then back upon the ground in the spoon’s other side.”\textsuperscript{40}

Indeed, when Nimrod enters the house, July co-opts him into her subversive play, which exhibits all the hallmarks of classic inversion and colonial mimicry: he (the freed
slave) is now enslaved and subservient; she (the slave) is now not only free, but the dominant party in the relationship, with recognised authority. But this is also a courtship scene in which domination and subjugation are the core elements in an unchoreographed ritual dance of mutual attraction. Both racial and sexual politics are interesting here, as July, mimicking the ‘missus’, takes evident pleasure in exercising her racial and gendered power over her ‘slave’ Nimrod and Nimrod bows to his role as subservient to Miss July:

‘Bring me some tea and be quick’…

The knife, fork, spoon and blue and white plate that Nimrod laid at the end of the dining table for July were placed well enough, but still she had to punish him. For he was too slow. He was a dull and indolent nigger. She took the spoon and hit it upon his head. He yelped – oh – at the sharp pain, then promised her he would do better. Yet he did not pull out the chair far enough for her to sit, nor push it close enough for her to eat.

‘You are a very stupid nigger and I will see you whipped,’ July cried.

And Nimrod cringed, ‘Sorry, missus,’ before her.

The orange upon the plate was not peeled. ‘How am I to eat this?’ July asked him. As Nimrod leant forward to splice the fruit with a knife, July hit him once more upon the head with her spoon. ‘You are too close to me, nigger,’ she told him. And as he jumped back from her, she yelled, ‘What about this fruit Am I to peel it myself?’ When he leaned over to attempt a second slice, she slapped him about the ear, ‘Are you disobeying me?’ she asked him.

‘No missus’, he said, breathless.

‘How dare you speak to me while I am at my table,’ she said, before striking him again with her spoon.

The glass Nimrod filled with red wine overflowed, the dark-plum contents dribbling upon the table. ‘Be careful, nigger, that is our finest wine,’ July was forced to yell.

Nimrod fell to his knees before her pleading, No beat me, missus, no beat me.’

‘But I must,’ July said, slapping his head, ‘or you will never learn.’

In this passage, Miss July appropriates some stock tropes of colonial discourse within a recognisable, if thoroughly domesticised, disciplinary field. According to colonial constructions, Nimrod is a ‘dull and indolent’ and ‘very stupid nigger’ and therefore must be disciplined accordingly (with verbal chastisement, beating and the threat of the whip). However, he is also a suitor, as Miss July is well aware, and thus the coded politics of erotic dominance and subjugation are also brought into play. In an inversion of the dominant sexual politics of the plantation and the power relations of the European courtly love tradition, Miss July makes herself the active subject rather than the longed-for object of the liaison. That she actively appropriates tropes of dominance in both racial and gendered terms, suggests another example of ‘the world turned upside down’ and makes for a powerfully transgressive scene.
‘Everything foreign being better than local’?

A different kind of hierarchy, yet one still linked to concepts of respectability, social status and taste, is revealed in Caroline’s list of foods for her Christmas dinner. It reveals an interesting tension between imported culinary traditions (the plum pudding, the roast beef, and English jams) and the transformation of more indigenous foods such as ‘the turtle served in its shell’ into exoticised culinary performance pieces which connote status and wealth. It is not just the imported or foreign foods and recipes which have particular value and high status in this context, but the more indigenous and local too. This is a perfect example of the interplay of the local and the foreign at the same table, “how people produce both a sense of familiar locality, and exotic foreignness—often at the same time [or] in the same dish”.

And in this example too, we see how the cultural value attributed to certain foods in terms of a hierarchy of taste and preference is itself malleable and unfixed as well as reversible. As her brother John predicts, Caroline soon tires of local dishes and foodstuffs in favour of a more ‘respectable’, largely European-influenced diet.

Such a shift in an individual character’s taste also, importantly, reflects a wider trend in the white Creole or planter classes and upper middle classes, over a longer historical period, a shift away from indigenous or naturalised foods and dishes back toward imported goods as most prestigious and highly valued by those classes who could afford imported foods. Significantly, by this stage in her Jamaican residence Caroline’s culinary preferences have shifted away from embracing the exotic and the local to the safety, but also crucially, the prestige of imported and Eurocentric dishes: imported English preserves and instructions to cook plum pudding. For Caroline, as an English expatriate and incomer to the Jamaican planter class, food—and this most visible of Christian feasts: Christmas—is closely linked with social status. Ceremonies such as formal dinners and parties were important precisely because they seemed to be the main means of social contact with other white Creoles, as Mrs Carmichael notes:

When I first arrived in the West Indies, there was little of what we call visiting ‘in an easy way'; family dinners, or a quiet cup of tea were in known, ceremonious dinners were the only media of intercourse.

Caroline’s choices of dishes may appear relatively random and haphazard, as a newcomer and relatively inexperienced housekeeper, but are in fact encoded within a larger colonial register of respectability, a system “for expressing the myriad social distinctions in the colony.” As Wilk (2008) and a number of other anthropologists of the Caribbean have shown, Levy’s novel reflects a wider historical reality as the wealthy and powerful Planter families expressed their “wealth, education, social status and position” in highly codified ways. Writing of the nineteenth century Belizean upper middle classes’ close attention to the “practices of European upper classes and fashions,” Wilk suggests,

Respectability demanded a constant flow of imports, as did building reputations. While the daily diet of the poor was ‘plantain and salt fish’ supplemented by ‘ground food’ (root crops), any festive occasion demanded imported luxuries. Spending every penny to treat friends and
relatives to expensive wines, liquor and foods was essential in building reputation... imports always trump local products, new is better than old, and expensive things are always better than cheap ones.\textsuperscript{49}

The eager anticipation of the arrival of regular shipments of desirable imported consumables is noted by the English character, Emily Cartwright, in Philip’s \textit{Cambridge}: “I have adjusted myself to tolerate poorly dressed meat served without butter, unless a shipment from Ireland or England happens to have been freshly landed (although fresh it is unlikely to be after such a voyage).”\textsuperscript{50} As Wilks argues, a distinct hierarchy of food stuffs is reflected here with imported food products (Irish or English butter) being perceived by Emily as of higher status than locally produced ones.

\textbf{“The puff and twaddle of some white lady’s mind”}\textsuperscript{51}

The writings of white Creole and English gentlewomen such as Carmichael, Nugent, and Schaw, are referred to by \textit{The Long Song’s} chief narrator, Miss July, as “the puff and twaddle of some white lady’s mind,”\textsuperscript{52} a nicely self-reflexive strategy which at once foregrounds the recreated residual orality of her narrative voice and distances the novel from its written historical intertexts. However, no such distancing strategy is used by Phillips in \textit{Cambridge}; the fictional Emily Cartwright, who travels to the Caribbean to visit her absentee father’s plantation in Jamaica, is far more fully an amalgam of a series of historical predecessors or ur-voices than is Levy’s Caroline Mortimer. Indeed, as Lars Eckstein has shown (2001),\textsuperscript{53} numerous passages from Philip’s novel bear direct resemblance to historical textual antecedents. Thus, for example, the meal laid on to welcome Emily to the plantation is strikingly similar to those described by Lady Nugent:

\begin{quote}
Of the meal itself there was little with which I could find fault, except perhaps its extravagance. The table is clearly one of wasteful plenty, in violation of all the rules of domestic propriety. I have never seen such rich and heavily seasoned food: land- and sea-turtles, quails, snipes and pigeons, doves and plover. Excellent port, pepperpot, and then heavy vegetables which bore some resemblance to potatoes and cabbage, but were only near-cousin to these familiar staples of my diet. Dishes of tea, coffee, bumpers of claret, Madeira, sangaree, were all to be followed with citrus fruits and tarts of pineapple. I did enquire of Mr Brown if such a banquet were normal and he nodded as he pushed another stewed fish into his mouth, I could only imagine that he eats but once a day. For my part I must confess I found such excesses vulgar.\textsuperscript{54}
\end{quote}

And yet here the relationship to source material is quite unlike Levy’s handling of the same. Gone are the mocking narrative voice and the complex narrative distancing strategies of Levy’s novel. Phillip’s narrative style seems to match the conservative discourse of his character. Thus, for example, when Emily refers to “heavy vegetables which bore some resemblance to potatoes and cabbage, but were only near-cousin to these familiar staples of my diet,” she may well be referring to sweet potatoes, yam, or some related ground provision, and Callaloo, yet she is clearly struggling to define this gustatory experience. She has at her command only limited terms, chiefly those of the
metropolitan centre from which she has come. Indeed, Bewes argues that Emily’s journal is:

saturated with ‘colonialist’ attitudes—not only politically […] but also aesthetically […] Emily is an aspiring writer and lecturer; she intends to give a lecture tour in England on her return, and to write a pamphlet in reply to those abolitionists ‘who would have us believe slavery is nothing more than an abominable evil’. But what we read in her journal are the outpourings of a stilted, derivative, and ideologically unreflective writer, inhabiting the literary discourse of a hegemonic, culturally dominant Europe. The level of overstatement in her narrative is so spectacular that many of her passages […] read more like a satire of colonial speech than an attempt to achieve ‘authenticity of voice’, the quality for which Phillips work has often been praised.55

Bewes notes that:

The most striking characteristic of [Phillips’s] writing, particularly marked in the novels dealing with slavery, is an almost complete absence of authorial commentary and third-person narration. Not only are his stories told entirely through the words and reflections of his characters; those characters are themselves, for reasons that are never specified, incapable of speaking “authentically”, on their own account or in their own voices. As a result, these words have a curiously disembodied quality, despite the fact that, in the most literal sense, every word and idea is “embodied” in the verbalisations or thoughts of the characters.56

Emily and Cambridge are unreliable narrators “in different ways.”57 What is especially useful to the current discussion of Cambridge is Bewes’s observation that “it is far from clear that the “voices” Phillips gives to his characters are really intended to belong “to them, that his characters meaningfully own the discourse they make use of”58 and in this respect Bewes’s reading concurs with my own here.

Emily’s political and aesthetic conservatism is also mirrored on a narrative level in Phillips’s novel. When Emily focalises the narrative, it never moves to an ironic or distanced double vision. The latter is only provided by the secondary narration of Cambridge towards the end of the novel which provides a counterpart to Emily’s account, a different version of the same events through a different focaliser and a more reliable narrative voice. Later in the novel, Emily can be seen to present a limited but more creolised sensibility, taking on the food names, processes, and practices she encounters on her brother’s plantation and feeling suitably ‘at home’ with its culinary traditions,59 even complaining about the disappointing lack of culinary cosmopolitanism at a “traditional West Indian dinner” held by a merchant in Baytown.60 Yet Phillips’s character never becomes completely creolised in the cultural world of the novel; nor, in narrative terms, does her voice ever break through the discursive ‘comfort zone’ of her real-life colonial predecessors to connect with Cambridge or other black characters in the novel. Cambridge remains an alien ‘other’, locked outside of her discourse and its terms of reference. Likewise, Phillips’s narrative strategy locks Emily into a much tighter and constrained relationship to the novel’s sources and “precursory voices” than Levy’s. This
may reflect a relatively greater concern with representing an historical moment rather than privileging the fictional reshaping of such moments as, arguably, is the case with Levy’s novel. Cambrige’s narrative voice does not dominate and contain other narrative voices in Phillips’s novel, as Miss July’s does Levy’s text. Phillip’s novel never admits the recreated oral register and repertoire of narrative techniques, which mark Levy’s novel as thoroughly creolised and transformative of the narrative she has to tell in The Long Song.

It is thus significant that the fictional ‘white ladies’ in both novels return to England in a muted and diminished state, and that it is Levy’s feisty character narrator, Miss July, who has the last word on matters of food and survival. July’s pièce de résistance is a magnificent silver salver of insects, meticulously collected and served to the father of her baby, and husband to Caroline, John Goodwin as his “leaving dish.” As such, July’s ‘dish’ functions not only to parody the planter’s sumptuous table and to provoke Robert’s particular fears and responses to abjection but also to raise a wider food taboo shared by many, but not all, cultures. Fittingly enough, after she leaves the Great House, July’s survival strategy, both economic and psychic, involves cooking: she sets herself up as the maker and purveyor of “the finest jams and pickles to be found anywhere upon this island.” Such creative practice proves good grounding for her final role as narrator of the story we are reading. In this, Levy has July remain close to the oral creativity and communal life world of her slave beginnings and she narrates her story as an oral storyteller: “a woman possessed of forthright tongue and little ink.” Commensality is intrinsic to her telling, as if at a long meal, as she calls forth her story and notes the responses of her son Thomas, the book’s printer, as well as our own response to her story, teasingly seated at her window with a “cup of sweetened tea resting beside me.”
Endnotes

5 Ibid., 88-90.
9 Lewis, 2005, 103 and 151.
13 Houston, 2005: xxv-xxvii.
15 Ibid, np.
17 Ibid., 68.
19 Ibid., 110.
20 *Cambridge*, 35.
21 Ibid., 48.
24 See also Lewis, 2005, 347-8 and Mrs Carmichael, 1833, on this.
25 *Long Song*, 57.
26 Wilk, 2008: 190-1.
27 Ibid., 109.
28 Lewis *Journal*, 393-4.
29 Cambridge, 166.
30 *Long Song*, 72.
31 Ibid., 73.
33 Ibid., 3.
34 Ibid., 2-3.
35 *Cambridge* 74-5.
36 Ibid., 77-8.
37 *Long Song*, 61.
38 See ibid., 60
39 Ibid., 98.
40 Ibid., 97.
41 Ibid., 99)
45 Wilk 2006: 79
47 Wilk, 2008: 79
48 Ibid., 82.
49 Ibid., 83. Indeed, the longevity of this tension is evidence in more recent West Indian texts such as Merle Hodge’s *Crick Crack Monkey* (London: Heinemann, 1970) when the child Tee reflects newly acculturated middle class tastes for Anglicised tea and cakes and is repelled and mortified by her visiting relatives taste for greasy ‘Creole’ food, which they eat in what she now perceives to be an uncouth manner. Similarly, the poem ‘icons’ in Grace Nichol’s 1997 collection *sunris* (London: Virago), starts with the image of European apples given to Caribbean children at Christmas and notes the continuation of the foreign as an index of ethnic and class superiority:

English icons praised to the skies
Everything foreign being better than local
Or so it seemed as a child (24)
50 *Cambridge*, 80-1.
51 *Long Song*, 8.
52 Ibid, 8.
53 See “Dialogism in Caryl Philips’s *Cambridge*, or the Democratisation of Cultural Memory,” *World Literature Written in English* 39.1 (2001), 54-74. Lars Eckstein painstakingly maps Phillip’s use of specific passages from sources such as Mrs Carmichael’s *Domestic Manners and Social Conditions of the White, Coloured, and Negro Population of the West Indies*. London: Whittaker, Treacher and Co.:1833; Mrs Fiannigan’s *Antigua and Antiguans: A full
account of the Colony and its Inhabitants (London: Saunders and Otley, 1844); M.G. Lewis’s Journal of a West India Proprietor (1834); and, Janet Schaw’s Journal of a Lady of Quality...in the Years 1774 to 1776 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1921), alongside more diffuse use of sources by Henry Nelson Coleridge, Six Months in the West Indies. (Cambridge: CUP, [1862] 2010); Bryan Edward, The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies (2 vols, London: Parsons and Bell, 1794); Lady Maria Nugent, Lady Nugent’s Journal of her Residence in Jamaica 1801-5 (Kingston, Jamaica: Institute of Jamaica, [1907] 1966; and, J.B. Moreton (1790) and F.W.N Bayley, Four Years in the West Indies (London: William Kidd, 1830). Likewise, Philip’s portrayal of the fictional slave, Cambridge, draws heavily on classic slave narratives such as James Gronniosaw’s A Narrative of the Life of James Albert Gronniosaw (Bath: W. Gye, 1770?), Otobah Cugoano’s Thoughts and Sentiments on the Evils of Slavery (1787), Olaudah Equiano’s The Interesting Life and other Writings (London and New York: Penguin, [1789] 1995), and Ignatius Sancho, Letters of Ignatius Sancho (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1994).

However, Timothy Bewes argues for a more problematised reading of the complex narrative strategies of Phillips’ fiction, centred on the disjunction between the important matter of Phillips’ novels and his ‘clichéd’ and ‘derivative’ narrative style. Bewes argues that Phillips’ narrators often ‘ventriloquize’ other discourses to the exclusion of any individual voice of their own and are seen to have a profoundly unsettled relationship to the materiality of the text of which they are part. (‘Shame, Ventriloquy, and the Problem of the Cliché in Caryl Phillips’, Cultural Critique, 63 (Spring 2006), 33-60).

56 Ibid., 43.
57 Ibid., 44.
58 Ibid., 46.
59 Cambridge, 114.
60 Ibid., 114.
61 I am indebted to the careful reading of an external reviewer for the basis of this observation.
62 Long Song, 270.
63 Ibid., 279.
64 Ibid., 2.
65 Ibid., 8.
“Trees and All: Poem II” and “Untitled”

Author: Sheree Mack

Source: EnterText, “Special Issue on Caribbean Literature and Culture: ‘Opening Out the Way(s) to the Future,’” Sandra Courtman and Wendy Knepper, eds. 10 (2013): 90-91.
**Trees and All: Poem II**

In the grounds of the University,
the great old samaan tree
shelters rumours of resistance
under the hush of its canopy.

Skimming the clouds from the heavens,
stretching just as wide, its nectar,
sickly sweet, attracts
the hummingbird and parasites.

Pod, pulp, flower, root; a liquid
moon over the dripline of branches
throws growing shadows as
leaflets close together in prayer.
**Untitled**

Even the silk cotton trees feel it.
Their white blooms, their fine sensitive veins,
bend in the breeze and beg for forgiveness
to come in a sudden shower,

and join the crowd of silence that stand
witness. One woman, held in a cell
and whipped will never work again
in the refineries.

In the midday light, the harsh
humid light, that burns hearts,
a song sweeps from mouth to mouth;
a man’s memory carves out centuries.

Down and down, a calypso beat in his heart,
in an old ship that crossed an ocean;
the screams of grief – is that why
we remember certain times and not others?

The rubble of the bass, the hiss of the whip,
the seething strangled breeze.
Bruises floating through the heavy air
like blossom and landing,

landing here, in this place.
Everything has its time. And could again.
“On Walking to See the Exhibition *London, Sugar & Slavery*” and “Apothecary”

Author: Lou Smith

Source: *EnterText*, “Special Issue on Caribbean Literature and Culture: ‘Opening Out the Way(s) to the Future,’” Sandra Courtman and Wendy Knepper, eds. 10 (2013): 92-93.
On Walking to See the Exhibition *London, Sugar & Slavery*

Cobbles blue and bruising, laneways carry history on their backs. Following the tourist walk through twisting East End streets, the imprint of feet in roads sloped and sunken. The guidebook doesn’t describe the discordance, the bitterness at the back of the throat. Rats squeaking, flesh and bone and blood seeped in.

At Docklands, across from business people sipping Pino Gris, I watch cranes lifting and balancing, filling spaces, girls lying on grass in their bikinis under golden summer sun.

From West India Docks ships came and went, came and went, came and went. Cargo of rum’s sticky syrup, hulls glued with blood


**Apothecary**

An umbilical cord of ancestral knowledge

like a liana vine

taking root in the ventricles of the heart.

Kananga Water (*Cananga odorata*) for the spirits of the dead

Florida Water’s citrus scent, pimento and Bay Rum

familiar yet as distant as

lemon myrtle’s astringency or

the complexity of brown boronia.

On your skin, Grandma

was cooling Ice Cologne

and Pawpaw Ointment

sticky like sap

on mine

cocoa butter rich like chocolate

ylang ylang as fragrant as orchids

eucalyptus to ward off chills

and Pawpaw Ointment

amber and viscous

soothing and healing
“Philosopher and Father,” “My mother’s journal left us strict instructions” and “In her suitcase (Mother B’s)”

Author: Shirley May

Source: EnterText, “Special Issue on Caribbean Literature and Culture: ‘Opening Out the Way(s) to the Future,’” 10 (2013): 94-98.
Philosopher and Father

He was our oracle; he held the keys
to knowledge passed down
from father to son and daughters:
in your skin, he said, is the truth
of homelands, with their shanty towns,
and pretty aquamarine painted houses,
with their white grilled windows.

He spoke of the sun’s blessing but how deoad deh tuff. So he travelled to England.

Out of the cane fields and orange groves of Jamaica
he found a new city living in Bristol town,
lived on a rainbow people’s street,
one man came from Zanzibar, another from Delhi,
another from Ireland. He could have believed in Utopia
even though it never come, especially on Monday.
Only work, he said, came on a Monday.

It was on a Sunday night when he spoke of sorrel wine
and fish on a Friday, tail ends of colonialism
and Catholicism. He smiled when speaking of rice and peas,
cornmeal, his mother’s sweet potato pudding,
His knowledge of cricket, home runs from Sir Garfield Sobers -
an adopted Jamaican, from Barbados.

He listened to Jim Reeves on Sunday, calling dem secret songs
after dancing to John Holt on a Saturday night,
Drank brandy shorts, and Guinness, held his woman right,
It reminded him of home, of jukeboxes, reggae and mento music,
dominating the Kingston air, vibrating off roof tops,
the blessed assurance that came from the churches
on every street corner of the city.
You could hear the righteous sing, every Sunday morning.

There were times, life and love shafted
him hard in this cold place—Liverpool.
He said try to be who you are, be true to yourself,
he remembered It's what was taught him, it was his philosophy.
Even if life punched ugly wounds into gutsy living,
it was to be expected. So he danced to his own rhythms,
in those movements, each child he fathered was conceived.

His death leaves shattered pieces, shards,
jagged edges, each one holding broken reflections of hope.

Now his light is extinguished, so we grieve for him.
Like an overused, stinking dish cloth
on a clean plate, death comes to prove its power.
He told us it was there at our birth,
And not to be afraid of it, each petal containing
no possibility or fragrance, just the gathering
of life's bends and turns, pieces of us like daffodils in spring.
A new season will come just wait and see, don't cry for me.
I don't leave you behind, I'm your rising and your setting.
Move towards each other, it will help you to remain unbroken.
My mother’s journal left us strict instructions

I held her aqua silk bound book in my hand, a precious thing now.
The scent of my mother’s Charlie perfume on its cover.

The date of all of our birthdays,
all ten of us, our birth signs,
as if to remind her of our characteristics
doodles and sketches of places I’d never seen,
A love heart and a pressed buttercup
were amongst her private thoughts,
its pages are where we might know her now.

My mother’s journal left us strict instructions:
On my death, try fe make mi look good,
the cream suit should be the one you put me in,
i like the length of the skirt, put on mi good shoes,
i don’t want fe meet mi maker wid mi naked, bare-footed.

choose the songs for the church wisely,
I like the 23 psalms, and I did like Rod Stewart’s
Don’t you think i sexy. That will shock a few.
There will be those who mourn loudly,
but didn’t love me, that’s ok, it’s dem conscience.

Cry if you must, but know it was my end,
smile if you can, cause I did love
each and everyone a you de same.
remember me, my voice,
it’s my mother’s and her mother’s and is yours now,

it’s how I bear losing my own mother, in 1962,
I made mistakes, it the way of this life and it’s alright, 
remember I grow you with faith.
It will become important at the hours after my passing, 
love one another.

Be mindful of each other, for there are those 
who will try fe set you against each other. 
Don't fight fe money, I set aside a little something fe all you, 
all that I am you are,

You are the voice of my mother, 
the knowing of my father, 
all the sistas and brothas of your lineage 
From David to Arabella and those that withstood de storms.

p.s. Buy me a good headstone—one befitting of your mother.
In her suitcase (Mother B’s)

People love her cornmeal porridge, 2 hour dumplings,
Stew peas and rice,
her salt pork on their lips.

Mother B’s Irish Moss and Guinness punch came
with a warning, helped a brother to kiss right,
rented rooms for the night.

She descends into the cellar, turns on the red light,
sets up the bar for the night. Her house was the spot
after the Reno was shut.
People come from far and wide to sway, Persian
de music man play John Holt: Cupid, draw back your bow,
you know love will find a way.

Mother B tells us stories of St Mary, where mi poppa’s
people deh come from: Obia men, women who practice science
yet still fear God, Anansi’s cunning; whilst remembering
the quiet place up the hill, the burying ground,
where the nutmeg tree shades.

She whispers her memory in my ear,
descends into the cellar, turns on the red light,
sets up the bar for the night. Her house was the spot
after the Reno was shut.
People come from far and wide to sway, Persian
de music man play Jimmy Cliff: Many rivers to cross,
reminder of home.
"One. .....Drop"

Author: Mark Jason Welch

Source: EnterText, "Special Issue on Caribbean Literature and Culture: ‘Opening Out the Way(s) to the Future,’" Sandra Courtman and Wendy Knepper, eds. 10 (2013): 99-112.
One.

…..Drop
A standpipe drips
at de side a de road
onto concrete,
down to barbergreen
barking in de midday sun
dat is a crackling conundrum for children
with feet too hot to dance;
down into the depths of the caves cadence
where the limestone kisses their soles
with white lies
and the chalk lines
where dreams lay
beaten down
blackened
eyes soaked
and swollen from tears
that turn green like moss
dat
drip
deep down into de well of de soul.

It drips

each moment fallen and tingling
like a twitching scream caught in the top of the throat
and stuck
stumped aboard thick thick clouds
which never seem to go nowhere
but hang on hooks
above the sea;
tickling the tongues of fisherman,
wrapping around their waterlogged visions
waist deep in wonderment;
casting wide nets on shrinking oceans of time and space
that threaten to crush us into enlightenment
lest we row where the flying fish go and never return
but for mermaids and porpoises.
Turtle meet it sweeeeeeet…
But there is a time and place for everything.

Even us

a people
caroused by a zombification

that causes our heads to spin on our necks

like it wukking up

or worse

getting rape with the wrong ideas

until our insides are rubbed raw and bloody

and nobody ent doing nothing

but for the few that burst like brown Batmen from outta de canefields
and get laugh back into de solace of de swamps and de rivers
where de souls of the Indians float supine
waiting for a sliver of redemption that will never come
even if you wave an ear of corn infront it face
it just won’t move.

De sucker

stinking mother….

But wait… who fault this really is though?

Here is the thing:

My memories link up by caustic currents that brought the boabab

upon my great great grandmother back

as she tears drip

Drip

Drip

Drip

down through the village

down through she own mudda

wailing womb

like a wound of a scar with no silence to heal

echoing from Chagaramus to Cerra de Punta

Papa?
Y tu mama bien

The echo echo echo echo echo echo

we hear goes:

Keep the moss off ya toes

Don’t slip in the muck

Keep ya frock and ya trouser legs dry

Watch how ya ben’ ovah.

Keep looking over ya shoulder.

Don’t put that in your mouth

[tu boca]

unless you wash it.

Come back home clean

Or don’t come home at all!!

Nous ka vetiw (We’re warning you)
Mais maman, papa

we cyan find home once we lef’.

We don’t want to find it.

We heart heavy wid de wait ah dis bucket a bull,

wid dis burden of truth.

In this world we don’ have nuh home

to go back to

because we ain’t come from nowhere

all our dreams disappeared

so we writing them anew

in blood and sand and fashion.

We don’ care if we backside get wet Mama

Sittin on dis cold clammy cement Mama

With the world trickling between we toes

like the blood from the belly of your memory.
We thirsty

And determined

To forge our own Bible

With words warm like stardust

that pretend Pharoahs

could never seek to understand.

We will somersault across continents

on a base of bleached blonde bones

Mamaaaaaaaaaaaaa!

We thirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirstythirsty

Thirsty.

We thirsty for time.

Our time.

Now time.

One moment is all we need to squeeze
The syrup from the city
from the people in the village

from the brains in the university

from the students in the colleges

from the books in the libraries

from the truth in the books in the libraries.

I don’t want no more pretend costumes or wukking up

Getting on like a Jesus or Mary that get leggo.

*What you mean?*

So wait,

I can’t just be now…?

Think for myself now?

Ya mean you poisoned too?

Now?

With this

One
Now

Drop

Now

Nuh?

Ok.

I gine get up

because I love you mama

but I will not stand at attention

as a matter fact I gine turn my back

and hide my tears & anger.

*Keep the moss off ya toes*

*Don’t slip in the muck*

*Keep ya frock and ya trouser legs dry*

*Watch how ya ben’ ovah.*

*Keep looking over ya shoulder.*

*Don’t put that in your mouth*
unless you wash it.

Come back home clean

Or don't come home at all!!

Mwen ka vetiw (I'm warning you)

You have no right to warn me mama.

I saw you with your legs open

Long before the sun went down

like a hibiscus flower gasping for breath

knotted and compressed,

yearning for a little water

a long cool drink to make the stalk sane and whole.

Memories don't leave like people do.

It's true.

We will gather hold then on the moss of suck teeths

And sunk ships

God bless David.
We wear blackbird wings beneath sackcloth

There is nowhere we cannot go

wid a pocket full of tamarinds

soursops, guineps;

buckets full of pigtails;

bowl full of yam, dasheen,

cou cou, pepperpot.

Chestfuls of beliefs

(somewhere there is a cross,

an alter,

a mala,

a dead bird,

a word,

a hymn of chants).

We now claim the tales that holler for life in our ventricles.

We hallo from the hallows of the Piton.

Volcanoes shake we teet loose,
Scatter we like grain

From sea to shiny sea.

And now these few fragile spit balls

Solidified

& Scattered in the sun

Like gooseberries

In a basket in a bucket at a standpipe that spill

And roll to rest in perfection

In the street of the universe

Where color or cunt size

Does not

(should not)

matter.

Only time

As it drips

Drips
Drips

Down.

Here, where our ideas grow

In sensual semiquavers,

Perfect pirouettes

& monologues

& meager moans,

Wails of words –

dat we mount and ride

from Manhattan to the Blue Mountains

and back.

We wear the spines of de spirits along we han’s like tattoos

We listen and repeat.

in our own language.

Invent and refresh.

Become.
Break down walls and t'ing

Tell dem move like hell

Like our lives depended on it

‘cause dey do

ya know!

*We beating bottle, cup, tot, pan whatever in we hand.*

And we are not afraid.
Contributors

Dr Sandra Courtman (guest editor) is Programme Director for Literature with Creative Writing in the Institute for Lifelong Learning at the University of Sheffield. Her work on women writers of the Windrush generation led to a 1969 Jamaican autobiography, Joyce Gladwell’s *Brown Face, Big Master*, being reprinted as a Macmillan Caribbean Classic in 2003. She edited *Beyond the Blood, the Beach and The Banana: New Perspectives in Caribbean Studies* (Jamaica: Ian Randle, 2004). She has written about women writers and the black British canon and Caribbean connections with Birmingham’s photographic collections. Recent publications include a cross-cultural reading of the Caribbean short story, an essay on Caryl Phillips’s *A Distant Shore*, and a generational study which compares the trajectory of the migration novels of Beryl Gilroy and Andrea Levy, published in *EnterText* 9 (2012), a special issue on Andrea Levy.

Rebecca Fuchs holds a Master of Arts in Americans Studies from the Johannes Gutenberg-University in Mainz, Germany. Since September 2009, she has been working on her PhD project, entitled “Caribbeanness as a Global Phenomenon.” The dissertation explores how strategies of decolonisation and creolisation in Caribbean diasporic literatures and Caribbean theory. She is a grant-holder of the interdisciplinary graduate program “Formations of the Global” at the University of Mannheim, Germany.

Dr Wendy Knepper (guest editor) is Senior Lecturer in transnational modernisms and postcolonial literatures at Brunel University as well as co-founder of the Brunel Gender & Sexuality Research Centre (2011). She has published articles on Caribbean literature and theory as well as gender-related issues in essay collections and peer-reviewed journals, including *Journal of Postcolonial Writing, The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *PMLA*, and *Small Axe*. Her monograph, entitled *Patrick Chamoiseau: A Critical Introduction*, was published in 2012.

Dr Sarah Lawson Welsh completed her PhD in Caribbean Studies at the Centre for Caribbean Studies at University of Warwick. She is currently Reader in English and Postcolonial Literatures at York St John University, York, UK. Her co-edited collection, *Rerouting the Postcolonial: New Directions for a New Millennium* was published by Routledge in 2010. Her monograph, *Grace Nichols*, was the first book-length study of this Guyanese/Black British writer to be published and appeared in the British Council “Writers and their Work” series in 2007. She also co-edited *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*, first published in 1996. She is Associate Editor of the international *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* and is Anglophone Caribbean editor for the online resource, *The Literary Encyclopaedia*. Her current research focuses on food cultures and food writing in and from the Caribbean; she is working on both a monograph and an edited collection on food writing. Her most recent publication, “Cooking up a Storm: Residual Orality, Cross-cultural Culinary Discourse and the Construction of Tradition in the Cookery Writing of Levi Roots” appears in Anne Bruske et al eds, *Caribbean Food Cultures: Representations and Performances of Eating, Drinking and Consumption in the Caribbean and its Diasporas* (2014).

Dr Sheree Mack is a writer and artist living by the sea in the North East of England. She has a PhD in Contemporary Black British Women's Poetry. Her first collection of poetry, *Family Album*, was published by Flambard Press, 2011. *Laventille* her next collection will be forthcoming with Smokestack Books.

Luigi Maduro was born on March 7th, 1984 on the island of Aruba. At that time the island still formed part of the Netherlands Antilles, from which it withdrew two years later to assert its autonomous status within the Dutch kingdom. He is attending the Musicology master programme at Utrecht University and aims for graduation in 2013. His academic interests lie in the music of the Atlantic Afro-diaspora and contemporary Euro-American electronic dance music. This particular essay was written for the master seminar “Ida y Vuelta” in 2012, which was led and supervised by Dr. Barbara Titus.

Shirley May is a poet from the Speakeasy Collective in Manchester, which she also co-managed for five years. She is a member, of Commonword's writing development agency. Her work has been published in several anthologies, including *The Suitcase Book of Love Poems*. She has performed in the North West of England as well as at the Nuyorican Poets Cafe in New York and the Calabash writing festival in Jamaica. She is the director of Young Identity writing collective, which primarily works with 13-25 years old. Shirley believes her role is to make poetry both performance and page poetry accessible, to young people in Manchester. She has worked for 18 years to promote a culture around performance poetry to make it "cool and happening" by mentoring and supporting new writers in schools and community groups. Shirley and her team of young writers and mentors believe that the voice of young people in writing is as valid as adult writers. She seeks to free "de inna voice."

Dr Lou Smith has recently completed her PhD in creative writing from The University of Melbourne, Australia. Her poetry has been published in various Australian and international journals and anthologies including *Wasafiri*, *The Caribbean Writer*, *Kunapipi*, and *Mascara Literary Review*.

Mark Jason Welch is a Barbadian-born writer and actor whose work has appeared in the Caribbean literary journal *BIM* and the University of the West Indies Cave Hill Campus Journal of Creative Writing: *POUi* where he served as editor and creative director. In 2009 he was featured on the BBC World Service Program “Caribbean Voices,” which focused on trending Caribbean writers. He is the recipient of the Irving Burgie Scholarship Award (2006), the Kamau Brathwaite Award for literary excellence (2007) and the Frank Collymore Literary Arts Endowment (2008). He has functioned as Cultural Officer for the Literary Arts in Barbados, Poetry workshop facilitator and external reviewer of the Literatures in English Programme at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill. He is currently pursuing an MFA in Film Production at Howard University where he works as a teaching assistant in the Department of Radio, Television, and Film.

Penny Woollard is a PhD candidate in Literature and Administrator for The Centre for Theatre Studies at the University of Essex. Her research is concerned with evaluating Derek Walcott’s intellectual and artistic engagement with the people, the history, the land / seascape, and some writers and artists of the USA. While Walcott has been Professor
of Poetry at Essex she has been fortunate to work closely with him, producing three of his plays at the University’s Lakeside Theatre: Moon-Child (from Ti-Jean and His Brothers; Pantomime, written in the 1970s; and the premiere of Walcott’s latest play centred around Paul Gauguin’s visit to Vincent Van Gogh in Arles, O Starry Starry Night (2013).