

FIRST EDITION

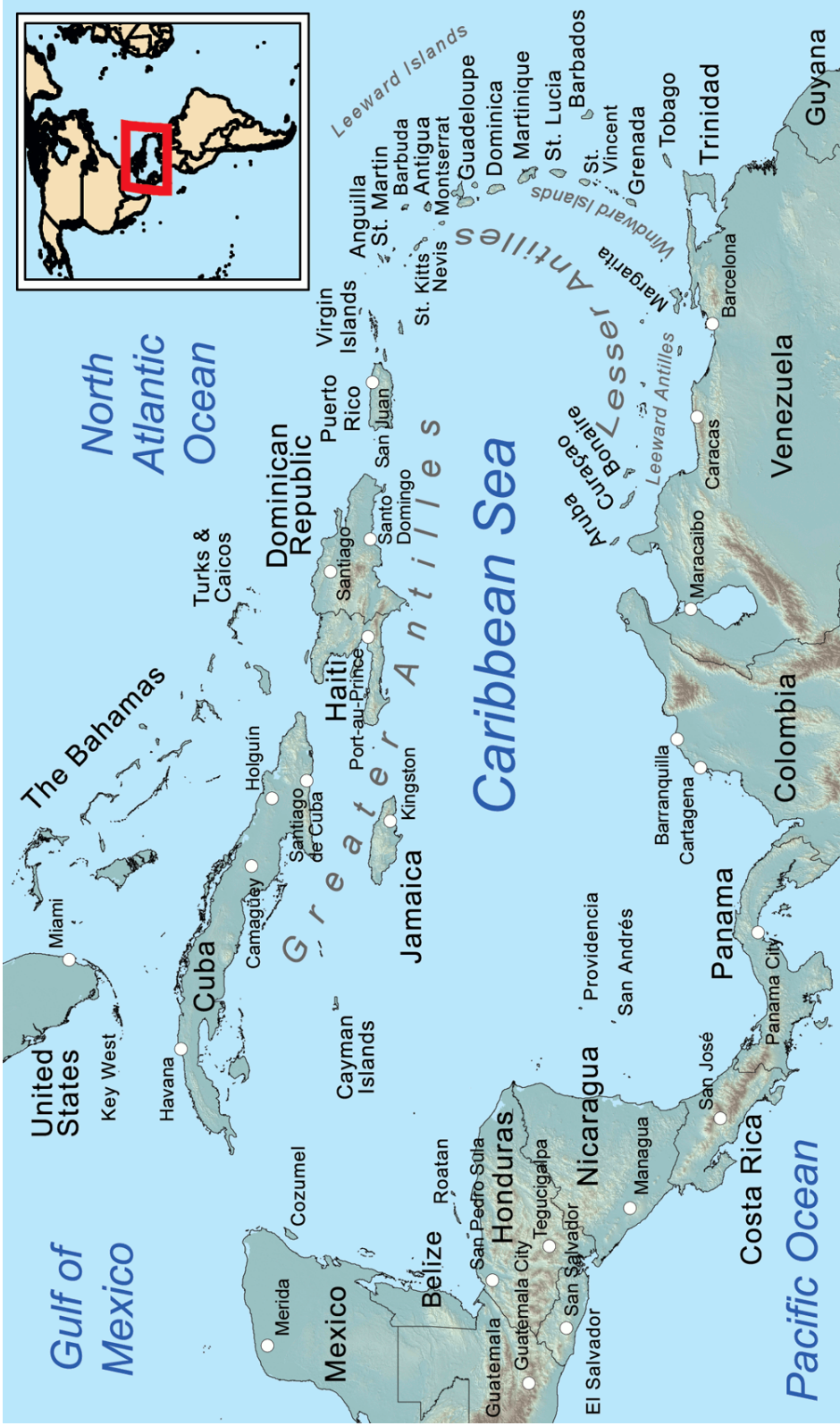
WAVES

An Anthology of Caribbean Literature

Edited by Patricia McDonald



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Palm Beach State College



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PREFACE

MY AFFINITY FOR CARIBBEAN LITERATURE GOES back to my formative years in Jamaica where the education system, inherited from colonial days, was largely British. However, while the British influence was heavy, it was infused with an unmistakable “Caribbean-ness” that only strengthened after independence in 1962. This bolstering of national pride post-independence also pertains to other Caribbean territories loosening the colonial stranglehold during the heady period of the ’60s, ’70s, and early ’80s: Trinidad and Tobago also in 1962; Barbados in 1966; the Bahamas in 1973; Grenada in 1974; Dominica in 1978; St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines in 1979; Antigua and Barbuda in 1981; and St. Kitts and Nevis in 1983 (Caribbean Elections, 2021).

Independence time in Jamaica meant festival time, when a series of government-sponsored activities was staged in tiny, obscure villages to overpopulated city capitals islandwide. As early as the elementary years, children engaged in competitive performances staged from rustic one-room schoolhouses to grand colonial styled structures at events with foreign sounding names, like eisteddfods. However, whether rural or urban, rustic or grand, what we performed at those locales—poetry, drama, and song—were decidedly Caribbean.

The late Louise Bennett-Coverley, affectionately called Miss Lou, remains to this day the foremost performed artist during this independence celebratory period. In addition to the dominance of her creative, Miss Lou’s significance extends to her pioneering work in gaining national and international acceptance of the Jamaican variety of English, Patois, or Patwa. Miss Lou and other intellectuals and writers, such as Hubert Devonish and Carolyn Cooper, have sought to elevate Caribbean varieties of English to comparable status of what is commonly referred to as Standard English, or “the Queen’s English” as we would say in Jamaica.

As a British colony, Jamaica’s schools embraced the British canon, and while its students dove into the works of Shakespeare, Chaucer, Milton, and many others, we also read the emerging literature of the Caribbean. It was the literary works of these authors that left an indelible imprint on my consciousness. I clearly

remember the stories of Michael Anthony's *The Year in San Fernando*, C. Everard Palmer's *The Cloud with the Silver Lining*, George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, Samuel Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners*, the drama of Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and Aimé Césaire's *The Tragedy of King Christophe*, the poetry of Claude McKay's battle cry "If We Must Die," the rhythmic chant of Nicolás Guillén's "*Sensemayá*," the performance dub poetry of Michael Smith's "Roots," Mutabaruka's "Dis Poem," Linton Kwesi Johnson's "Sonny's Lettah," and so many more. Their stories were my stories, and I reveled in their telling.

I currently teach composition and literature at a college in Florida, and I brought Caribbean literature with me to that institution. Today it is included in the curriculum of the many general education literature courses in which students can dip their feet. However, were I not introduced in Jamaica to this genre that awakened my literary senses, my career trajectory would have been different, and I would not have understood the urgency for such a course at the college.

It is my love of the craft of Caribbean authors, poets, and essayists and the journey I have taken with them that has brought me to *Waves: An Anthology of Caribbean Literature*. The anthology, symbolic in the title, rides the waves of the Caribbean classics to the contemporary. Authors include Nobel laureates Derek Walcott and V. S. Naipaul; seminal works utilizing Caribbean or creole language from Sam Selvon; classics from authors and poets, such as C. L. R. James and Claude McKay; and women authors, as they came into their own, exemplified in Jamaica Kincaid, Astrid Roemer, and Paule Marshall. These are just a few examples of the literary giants, stalwarts, who grace the contents of this work.

The anthology is meant for anyone who loves reading and expanding their knowledge of themselves and others. Here, the works of Caribbean authors have been explored in many ways, such as the loss and recovery of history, the evolution of language use, exigencies relating to the metropole, and thematic considerations of migration, belonging, family relationships, coming of age, racism, and more. They are all condensed into three units in this collection: Part One is entitled "Slavery and Colonialism"; Part Two comes under the heading "Language, Culture and Community"; and Part Three addresses "Migration and Identity." The topics explored are universal and familiar, but here they are viewed in a Caribbean context.

With the exception of essays, each entry is followed with ideas under the heading "Connecting" to encourage the reader to do just that: connect to the pulse of the story by building a mental bridge to the characters. Under the headings "Connecting" and "Linking" for all readings, the scholar who wants to dig deeper will find comprehension and critical thinking questions as well as interesting links to help further the conversation. Also, as far as possible, biographies of authors accompanied with their images are included to help give you, the reader, more background and further insight into their ideologies and, consequently, their stories.

Grouped as the readings are, you should consider the borders relaxed and fluid. Many are interchangeable insofar as themes are concerned—the same readings could have been arranged differently. For example, Samuel Selvon's (2015) "Brackley and the Bed" comes under the heading "Migration and Identity" but could easily have been in "Slavery and Colonialism." As it stands, we read Brackley as living in a foreign land, having a difficult time adjusting. He isn't working, lives in a one-room apartment, and has to acclimatize to winter. For warmth, he has to "put a shilling in the meter and light a gas" (Selvon, 2015, p. 140). Alternatively, we could also view Brackley as a victim of colonialism because he, like so many others, has had to leave the poverty of his island home in search of a "better" life. It all depends on context. While categorization is necessary to streamline content pages for publications and for ease of reading, life rarely comes so neatly packaged. There is much overlapping in the throes of living.

The Caribbean population is significant with approximately 44 million people inhabiting some 30 countries (Worldometer, 2020) and little more than nine million living outside the region ("Migration Data," 2021). Additionally, its population is as racially diverse as its territories are numerous, consisting of "groups of Indigenous peoples, Africans, Indians, Europeans, Chinese and Portuguese" ("Our people," n.d.).

I have tried to reference the Caribbean as a whole, but my focus is the Anglophone territories because this is where my expertise lies. Authors from all Caribbean islands have made significant contributions to the genre. *Waves*, the title of the anthology, was carefully selected to signify not only the range of authors and contents, as stated previously, but also to pay homage to peoples of the African diaspora drowned in the Atlantic Ocean and Caribbean Sea during the triangular slave trade—men, women, and children thrown overboard by their captors or who jumped ship to escape a wretched life in the New World. To this very day, these bodies of water continue to act as burial grounds for those escaping the poverty, political persecution, and brutality of their homelands. Water is therefore an especially potent symbol for the Caribbean people, in particular, and those of the African diaspora, in general.

Whether through revision, imagination, humor, or another approach, Caribbean writers have accepted the weight of their craft by staring into the clouded rearview mirror of times past, steering that history into the present, and plotting coordinates for future wordsmiths. It is as the illustrious Derek Walcott says in *Muse of History* (1995), "Thus as we grow older as a race, we grow aware that history is written, that it is a kind of literature without morality, that in its actuaries the ego of race is indissoluble and that everything depends on whether we write this fiction through memory of hero or of victim" (Walcott, 1995, p. 371).

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INTRODUCTION

Looking Back while Moving Forward

In *Waves: An Anthology of Caribbean Literature*, you will find select essays closely aligned with the fiction. In Unit I, Slavery & Colonialism, such essays include an excerpt from Kamau Brathwaite’s “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature” (1974) and an excerpt from Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* (1988). In Unit II, Language, Culture and Community, there is Andrea Sand’s “From Bush Talk to Nation Language: Language Attitudes in Jamaica before and after Independence” (2013); Gus Edwards’s “Caribbean Narrative: Carnival Characters—In Life and in Mind” (2002); and Derek Walcott’s “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?” (2005). Unit III, Migration and Identity, offers up Wendy Varney’s “Howzat! Cricket from Empire to Globalization” (1999); Nick Dearden’s “How British Imperial Policies Led to the Windrush Scandal” (2018); and Beverly King Miller’s “Why Do We Have to Choose: Afro-Caribbean’s Navigating the Intersections of Space and Home” (2016). These are included to give background to the fiction because, as we know, stories aren’t created in a vacuum; they are born from one’s reality.

This idea of enmeshing fact and fiction is certainly not new, but it is neatly explained in Earl Miner’s poetics of the affective–expressive, an Eastern poetics, in the concept of *monogatari*. Monogatari holds that fiction complements history. It delves into the minds and hearts of the people and the times by breathing life into and expanding their personal stories and, by extension, their collective consciousness. Miner references monogatari as “a personal, supplemental interpretation of historical events that not only continues but fills out history, giving it wholeness and completeness” (Miner, 1990, p. 140).

Monogatari, the relationship between history and fiction, is also found in an African tradition dating back to the 17th century among the *Luba* people of South Zaire. The concept of the Luba attest to history as fluid—unfixed. Memory is stored in “a small, rectangular wooden panel” called the *lukasa*, or memory board (Cotter, 1996). Although ornately decorated, the power of the *lukasa* lay in

its functionality, not its appearance. Cotter explains: “it is an instrument used for storing the coded history of the Luba kings, who flourished from the 17 to the early twentieth century.... The clusters of fine beads define a political landscape of potentially competing powers kept in hierarchical balance. The iron pins recall the myth of Luba origins, when the bonds of the community were first forged.” Read by “court-trained historians, the history they offer will be an official history with the past endlessly reshaped by the needs of the present” (Cotter, 1996).

Also, Édouard Glissant (Glissant 1981/1989), one of the Caribbean’s foremost intellectuals, points to African poetics in the work of Thomas Mofolo’s epic, *Chaka*. Glissant says, however, that Mofolo’s work essentially adheres to Western poetics, departing from it in two significant instances. He notes that “while enacting the ‘universal’ themes of passion and man’s destiny, [it] is not concerned with the *origin* of a people or its early history. Such an epic does not include a creation myth” (Glissant 1981/1989, p. 134).

Much like monogatari, the lukasa, and *Chaka*, postcolonial writers are concerned that their writing is more than a creative endeavor but also a recording of a fluid and/or “unrecollected” past. The Nigerian author Chinua Achebe (1988) is quite direct when he says, “we are all connected. You cannot tell the story of any of us without implicating the others” (Achebe, 1988, p. 60). This idea of disconnection is mirrored by Ashcroft et al. (2002) who says, “A major feature of post-colonial literature is the concern with place and displacement. It is here that the special post-colonial crisis of identity comes into being; the concern with the development or recovery of an effective identifying relationship between place and self” (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 9). Derek Walcott (2005) repeats this concept in “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?” when he says, “In the Caribbean history is irrelevant, not because it is not being created, or because it was sordid, but because it has never mattered; what has mattered is the loss of history, the amnesia of the races, what has become necessary is imagination, imagination as necessary, as invention” (Walcott, 2005, p. 259).

Though not included in this anthology, it is important to reference the Guyanese author Wilson Harris’s *Palace of the Peacock* (1988), for its philosophy especially lends itself to the idea of monogatari and the lukasa where history and fiction are seen as blended and blurred. Harris died in 2018 in England at the age of 96, and in his obituary in the *New York Times*, Neil Genzlinger (2018) summarizes the body of the author’s work as addressing “themes of colonialism and cultural identity in weaving stories of history, fantasy, myth and philosophy.”

Equally important to this concept of fusing history and fiction is the work of Beryl Gilroy (1996), who is also from Guyana. Gilroy reawakens the tale of rescue, love, and betrayal between the English trader, Inkle, and the Carib woman Yarico in her novel *Inkle and Yarico*. This time, however, Gilroy reconceptualizes Richard Ligon’s 1657 tale first published in *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados*, and the story is told from the viewpoint

of the betrayed Yarico. Of interest, Jessica Wolcott Luther (2012) points out that “Ligon’s work was the only comprehensive text published about the English Caribbean throughout the entire seventeenth century. His text was widely read and often quoted. There is no indication from Ligon’s text if his account of Yarico is based on actual people or simply an allegory for how the English treated the native Carib people on Barbados.”

Other examples of history reimagined lay in the novel of Guadeloupean Maryse Condé’s (Condé, 1986/1992) *I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem* in which the period of the Salem witch trials is revisited through the eyes of the West Indian slave, Tituba, who is accused of witchery. Angela Davis comments, “This transcendent revenge—retelling of a history that is as much mine as it is hers—allows her to save herself without taking on the historical characteristics of the colonizers and the slave holders she detested” (as quoted in Condé, 1986/1992, p. xii).

Finding the Center

Recently, themes often explored in Caribbean literature—migration, displacement, and identity—have taken real-world center stage in Britain in what has been dubbed the Windrush Scandal, included here in Nick Dearden’s article (2018), “How British Imperial Policies Led to the Windrush Scandal.” Windrush refers to the ship the Empire Windrush, which carried thousands of immigrants to the United Kingdom from the late 1940s to early 1970s when Britain encouraged immigration from the Caribbean to relieve the severe labor shortage it suffered as a result of World War II (Dearden, 2018). The shortage was crippling the British economy so much that the government sought to alleviate it with a Caribbean workforce. Immigrants to England during this period are referred to as the Windrush Generation (Dearden, 2018).

More than 60 years after this migratory movement, with the lives of these British-Caribbean people now intricately woven in the tapestry of British life, many of them and their children have been told they are illegal immigrants, have been cut off from the benefits of British citizenry, and have been subject to deportation (Dearden, 2018). The stories of the lives of these people, first- and second-generation residents, as they lived as British citizens are admirably captured, albeit playfully, in the stories of Sam Selvon. In addition to telling their stories, however, Selvon proffers these tales in *their* language. He writes his novels and short stories entirely in Caribbean lingo. This is significant because Selvon, in the company of Inez Sibley and Claude McKay, was a forerunner within the Caribbean literary community to make this leap. While first-person dialog in the vernacular is an accepted literary technique, adopting it wholesale risks alienating large swaths of readership who may not understand it. However, American authors Mark Twain and Zora Neale Hurston made it work, as did Sam Selvon.

In *The Routledge Guide to Modern English Writing*, John McRae and Ronald Carter (2004) make the following statement: “In the 1950s Sam Selvon was the first writer of West Indian origin to write novels and stories about immigrants to England. As such, his voice is a very important one, and has been ignored all too often. But his social observation, his humour and his linguistic inventiveness deserve to be widely recognized. He practically invented the literary use of a new variety of English, London Caribbean English ...” (McRae & Carter, 2004, pp. 93–94). Selvon, himself, explains, “When I wrote *The Lonely Londoners*, my intention was not primarily to be realistic and to differentiate between the several West Indian groups ... I only tried to produce what I believed was thought of as a Caribbean dialect. The modified version in which I write my dialect may be a manner of extending the language” (as quoted in McRae & Carter, 2004, p. 95).

Included in this anthology are two of Sam Selvon’s short stories: “The Cricket Match” and “Brackley and the Bed.” In “The Cricket Match,” Selvon (2015b) humorously illustrates the impact the sport of cricket had in uplifting British-Caribbean immigrants in Britain during the period when Caribbean cricket was king, and its players transformed and dominated the sport internationally for 15 years, from 1980 to 1995 (Riley, 2010). The opening paragraph to the story goes like this: “The Time when the West Indies cricket eleven come to England to show the Englishmen the finer points of the game, Algernon was working in a tyre factory down by Cheswick way, and he lambast them English fellows for so” (Selvon, 2015b, p. 149). While Selvon’s rendition of life in Britain will certainly elicit a chuckle as the Algernon protagonist bamboozles his team into a winning position, Wendy Varney’s essay “Howzat! Cricket from Empire to Globalization” on cricket and colonialism expounds on the racist relationship between the two (Varney, 1999). This juxtaposition of humor and anguish is not uncommon in Caribbean society, as Patricia Mohammad summarily states, “Humor allows the unpalatable to be evoked and easily digested” (as quoted in Vasquez, 2012, p. 1).

In “Brackley and the Bed,” Selvon’s (2015a) trademark humor is also evident when Brackley is relegated to sleeping on the cold, hard floor upon the arrival of his distant cousin/fiancé who commandeers his bed—sans Brackley—turning his erstwhile underachieving lifestyle upside down: “Well, a pattern begin to form as the weeks go by, but the main thing that have Brackley worried is the bed. Every night he curl up in the corner shivering, and by the time he doze off: ‘Six o’clock, get up, you have to go to work’” (Selvon, 2015a, p. 142).

The need to rescue one’s history is central to peoples of the African diaspora, who were alienated from their ancestral rites of passage by having their history, culture, and language virtually erased from memory during the savage period of transatlantic slavery. It is as Stuart Hall says in the following quote:

Most African-Caribbeans no longer interpret “back to Africa” literally, but instead symbolically, including Rastafarians. Many African-Caribbeans

resonated to reclaiming their African heritage, feeling: “I have no voice, I have no history, I have come from a place to which I cannot go back and which I have never seen. I used to speak a language which I can no longer speak. I have ancestors whom I cannot find, they worshipped gods whose names I do not know. (as quoted in West-Durán, 2003)

It is therefore through the regenerative creative works of authors, poets, musicians, and artists that past and present can be reassembled, reunited, and history resuscitated.

Migration and Identity

Like the undulating waves of the ocean, movement—forced and voluntary—has been a driving force in the formation of the Caribbean landscape. Perhaps the most racially and ethnically diverse region in the world, the Caribbean people are essentially the product of Amerindian migration, transatlantic slavery, indentureship (especially from China and India), and European imperialism and colonialism.

Though racially diverse, the Caribbean population is overwhelmingly Black. The tilt of the scale is resultant of the transatlantic slave trade that violently uprooted millions of Africans, depositing them in the region. Before the Africans, however, there were the Amerindians, Caribs, and Tainos, whose populations were decimated with the arrival of Columbus in his quest for Asia and spices and gold. While Columbus may not have found what he originally sought, his faulty nautical calculations put him on a path to the Caribbean and the “New World” that would have dire consequences for those island nations—consequences from which they would never recover. In his book *Caribbeana*, Thomas Krise (1999) says, the “‘Indies’ not only represents Columbus’ goal to reach and exploit lands that Marco Polo made so desirable, but also, in time, came to stand for all territories open and available for Western European conquest and use” (Krise, 1999, p. 1).

Columbus’s entry to the New World in the late 1400s ignited the subsequent introduction of labor-intensive cash crop farming, such as sugar, rice, and tobacco, and the ensuing need for cheap, mass labor to farm those crops, which led to the transatlantic slave trade. His arrival in the name of Spain ushered in a period of European rivalry and conquest that enmeshed Caribbean territories in a chess game whereby the territories were always relegated as mere pawns. In enriching their own coffers, Europe depleted the Caribbean of natural resources, setting up a relationship of dependency that exists to this very day. Columbus himself said, “I ought to be judged as a captain sent from Spain to conquer a warlike and numerous people, of rites and customs very much opposed to our own, as far away as the Indies, where, by God’s will, I have reduced a new world to the leadership of

our lord and lady, King and Queen; thanks to which Spain, which was once called poor, has become the richest of kingdoms” (quoted in Krise 1).

In addition to exhausting Caribbean wealth, Europe was successful in virtually obliterating the local Amerindian population through disease, overwork, and cruelty; hence, the need for new blood and bodies that would withstand the harsh conditions mandated by plantation life. Africa provided that relief. Africans, especially those from the kingdoms of the West Coast of the continent, such as Songhay, Mali, and Ghana (McKissack & McKissack, 1994), would enter a period of unspeakable barbarism whereby its people would be kidnapped, harnessed, and exported as chattel to the New World at the behest of European greed. West-Durán (2003) expounds on this relationship:

The trans-atlantic slave trade shipped approximately 11.6 million Africans to the Caribbean, Latin America/Brazil, and the United States. Only 10 million arrived, which means that one out of seven slaves did not survive the horrifying trip of the Middle Passage. In this period (1519–1867) almost half of all the slaves went to Brazil and Cuba. There were noticeable patterns to the trade: in the sixteenth century, it was dominated exclusively by Spain and Portugal, but in the seventeenth century, Britain accounted for a third of the trade (with Spain, Portugal, and France roughly equal), and in the nineteenth century Spain and Portugal (again, Brazil and Cuba) accounted for 90 percent of the slave trade. The nineteenth-century figures are due to several factors: England, France, Holland, and Denmark had ended their slave trades by 1815, and Britain, then the most influential European country on a world scale, abolished slavery from 1834 to 1838. Despite the British example, France did not act until 1848, Holland until 1863. Cuba (1866) and Brazil (1888) were the last two nations to abolish slavery in the Western hemisphere. (West-Durán, 2003, p. xvi)

While it is not my intention to elaborate too much on the history of the region, it is a necessary starting point in understanding the current migration patterns of the area. Those bygone years of conquest and subjugation lay the blueprint for the emigrational patterns we see today. In the scramble for wealth, the various European nations fighting for the spoils of the Caribbean established a long-term relationship, albeit a highly oppressive one through slavery and colonialism, between the regions. It is a relationship that is evident today in the migratory routes between these islands and Europe.

Significant Caribbean populations are found in the United States, England, Spain, and to a lesser extent in France and the Netherlands. Jie Zong and Jeanne Batalova (2019) report: “The United States is by far the top destination for Caribbean emigrants outside of the region, followed by Canada (405,000), Spain (294,000), and the United Kingdom

(232,000), according to mid-2017 estimates by the United Nations Population Division.” The Zong and Batalova (2019) study reveals Caribbean emigration to the U.S. as approximately four million.

In *African Caribbeans*, Ramón Grosfoguel points out that “from 1950 to 1989 some five million people (one out of every seven inhabitants) left the region” (as quoted in West-Durán, 2003, p. xxvii). He continues saying, “there are half as many Surinamese living in Holland [as there are living in Surinam]; the figures for Martinicans, Guadeloupeans, and Jamaicans are similar but slightly lower. Ten percent of the population of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Haiti live abroad; for the Netherlands Antilles (including Aruba) it is 30 percent” (as quoted in West-Durán, 2003, p. xxvii).

Jamaican author Colin Channer (2008) also reinforces this notion of migration when he says, “Migration is one of the central themes of Jamaican existence. To be Jamaican means to move—to Panama and other Central American countries in the 1920s, to Cuba in the 1930s, to New York in the 1940s, to London and other parts of England in the 1950s, to Canada in the 1960s, to New York and Miami and Hartford, Conn., from the 1970s until now.”

Many of these immigrants have had considerable impact on their new home countries. For example, what is known today as America’s Black national anthem “Lift Every Voice and Sing” was penned by the Harlem Renaissance poet James Weldon Johnson, the son of a Bahamian immigrant. The Haitian born immigrant Jean Baptiste Point du Sable founded the city of Chicago in the 1780s, and the Jamaican-born John Russwurm was the coeditor in the early 1800s (and then editor) of *Freedom’s Journal* the “first newspaper in the United States owned and operated by African Americans” (Caribbean Americans, 2004). Carlos Juan Finlay, a Cuban immigrant, discovered that yellow fever was transmitted by the *Aedes (Stegomyia) aegypti* mosquito (Caribbean Americans, 2004).

Caribbean immigrants and their offspring have contributed in all facets of life to their adopted home countries: politics, entertainment, sports, science, the arts, and much more. In the political sphere in the United States, Marcus Garvey, born in Jamaica, was a powerful political activist who galvanized African Americans during the period of Reconstruction (Simba, 2007). Shirley Chisholm, whose parents hailed from Barbados and Guyana, was the “first African American woman in Congress (1968) and the first woman and African American to seek the nomination for president of the United States from one of the two major political parties (1972)” (Michals, 2015). There are many more notable persons of Caribbean heritage who have made positive contributions in politics—too many, in fact, to go in detail here. These are a few of the most prominent ones: Alexander Hamilton (first Secretary of the U.S. Treasury, St. Kitts and Nevis born), Stokely Carmichael (civil rights activist, Trinidad born), Malcom X (civil rights activist, mother from Grenada), Louis Farrakhan (leader of the Nation of Islam, mother from St. Kitts), Colin Powell (first Black U.S. Secretary of State, both

parents from Jamaica), Constance Baker Motley (first Black woman appointed to the federal bench, both parents from Nevis), Sonia Sotomayor (first Hispanic U.S. Supreme Court Justice, both parents from Puerto Rico), Eric Holder (U. S. Attorney General, Barbadian father), and Kamala Harris (first African American vice-president and first female vice-president of the U. S., father from Jamaica) (U.S. Department of the Interior, n.d.; Nelson, 2014).

In sports, there is Kareem Abdul-Jabbar (decorated NBA athlete with both parents from Trinidad and Tobago), Patrick Ewing (Jamaica born decorated NBA athlete), Sammy Sosa (Dominican Republic born decorated baseball athlete), and Sanya Richards-Ross (Jamaican born sprinter and U.S. Gold medal Olympian).

On the arts and entertainment front, persons of Caribbean heritage also take center stage with the likes of Claude McKay (Jamaica born Harlem Renaissance poet); Sidney Poitier, the first Black actor to receive the Academy Award for Best Actor (grew up in the Bahamas with both parents Bahamian); Clive Campbell, aka DJ Kool Herc, the father of hip hop (from Jamaica); and Christopher Wallace, aka Biggie Smalls, renowned rapper and songwriter (both parents from Jamaica). There is also Harry Belafonte (Jamaican mother), Cicely Tyson (both parents from St. Kitts and Nevis), Celia Cruz (Cuban born), Naomi Campbell (Jamaican mother), Sheryl Lee Ralph (Jamaican mother), Maxwell (Haitian mother and Puerto Rican father), Lenny Kravitz (Bahamian grandfather), Beyoncé (Bahamian father), Rihanna (Barbados born), and Nicki Minaj (Trinidad born).

In science, there is the indomitable Jamaican born nurse Mary Seacole whose statue was recently erected on the grounds of St. Thomas' Hospital, London, in honor of her dedication to the field. Finally, there is the renowned scholar Neil deGrassi Tyson whose mother is of Puerto Rico descent and grandmother from Nevis. These people and the outstanding contributions they have made are just a tip of the iceberg of ways Caribbean immigrants have helped to shape the landscape of their new homelands (Nelson, 2014).

Several Caribbean authors have immigrated to other countries, with most from Anglophone Caribbean territories going to the United Kingdom and the United States. Early emigrants, such as Nobel laureates Derek Walcott (St. Lucia) and V. S. Naipaul (Trinidad), were solid by-products of the colonial era and battled intensely to slough off the colonial psyche, characteristic of the times, evident in Caribbean literature. However, the manner in which these new world authors tried to shed the colonial skin while simultaneously forging a new literary frontier was often expressed through various, sometimes conflicting, ideologies. For example, friction existed between Walcott and Naipaul that often played out in media conversations.

Naipaul adopted the stance that there is no culture originating in Caribbean lands and that everything residing there is shipwreck and mimicry. This philosophy culminated in his well-received novel *The Mimic Men*, published in 1967. In the opening paragraph of the novel, Naipaul's protagonist, Ralph Singh, expresses his utter contempt for island

life represented by the fictional island of Isabella. He says, “This tainted island is not for me. I decided years ago that this landscape was not mine. Let us move on. Let us stay on the ship and be taken somewhere else” (Naipaul, 1969, p. 51). The Isabellian Singh goes on to say, “To be born on an island like Isabella, an obscure New World transplantation, secondhand and barbarous was to be born to disorder. From an early age, almost from my first lesson at school about the weight of the King’s crown, I had sensed this” (Naipaul, 1969, p. 118). The thoughts of the fictional Singh are symbolic of the disenfranchised Naipaul, who eventually abandoned connections to his birthplace, Trinidad, in favor of his ancestral origins of India and his adopted homeland, England. Having stirred up such considerable animus, it is no wonder that, to some degree, Naipaul earned the enmity of fellow Caribbean authors, intellectuals, and the Caribbean populace in general with such morbid utterances.

Before *The Mimic Men*, however, Naipaul’s work was primarily satiric, poking fun at personas in his largely fictional characters. Such satire is evident in his early novels *The Mystic Masseur* (1957), *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958), *Miguel Street* (1959), *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961), and *The Stone and the Knight’s Companion* (1963). His later novels departed from both comedy and Trinidad, taking on a more somber tone (with the exception of *The Stone and the Knight’s Companion*, which takes place in London). This anthology contains Naipaul’s “The Maternal Instinct,” one of a compilation of short stories from *Miguel Street* highlighting the idiosyncrasies of “street life” in Trinidad. Much like Selvon’s work, Naipaul’s story is yet another example of the sadness permeating the laughter, of using comedy as a coping mechanism. It is as the popular Jamaican saying goes, when one “Takes bad things make laugh.”

In “The Maternal Instinct,” this somewhat sobering outlook is evident when the ever-jovial, fun-loving, procreating, Laura (mother of eight), becomes a broken woman upon hearing that her eldest daughter, Lorna, is headed on a similar path to hers when Lorna gets pregnant. Before learning of Lorna’s pregnancy, the omniscient, first-person child narrator, states, “Laura never seemed to grow any older or less cheerful. I always felt that, given the opportunity, she could just go on and on having babies” (Naipaul, 2011, pp. 90–91). But Laura transforms upon hearing the news, and for the first time he “heard Laura crying. It wasn’t ordinary crying. She seemed to be crying all the cry she had saved up since she was born; all the cry she had ever tried to cover up with her laughter” (Naipaul, 2011, p. 91). Tragically, recognizing her mother’s disappointment in her, Lorna commits suicide, drowning herself in the wide and deep expanse of the Caribbean Sea, to which a defeated Laura’s response is simply, “It good. It good. It better that way” (Naipaul, 2011, p. 92).

Naipaul’s *Miguel Street* is an excursion in tragicomedy: although humorous, all the characters are tragic individuals stunted and dwarfed by island life and whose only hope of growth is through escape. Accordingly, we see the unnamed boy narrator escaping by

leaving the island as he “walked briskly towards the aeroplane, not looking back, looking only at [his] shadow before [him], a dancing dwarf on the tarmac” (Naipaul, 2011, p. 179).

Derek Walcott (2005) disagreed with Naipaul’s bleak outlook of Caribbean life and culture, turning Naipaul’s notion of mimicry on its head in the essay “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?” Walcott asks the existential question, What is life if not mimicry? In rhetorical response, he presents several thought-provoking answers. For example, he states that mimicry “is the process by which we were Christianized. The imitation of Christ, the mimicry of God as man” (2005, p. 262). He also sees mimicry as a necessary means of survival and says, “Mimicry is an act of imagination, and, in some animals and insects, endemic cunning... What if the man in the new world needs mimicry as design, both defense and as lure?” (Walcott, 2005, p. 262). Aligning with Walcott’s philosophy, West-Durán (2003) states the following:

The Afro-Caribbean transculturated heritage has infused the region with a unique creativity. Few parts of the world can match the verve and imagination of Caribbean music, literature, dance, and the visual arts. Though not exclusively, it was mostly writers who spearheaded the negritude or Afro-Antillean movements of the twenties and thirties. From the biting syncopations of Nicolás Guillén to the violent landscapes of Aimé Césaire, from the mythological infused novels of Wilson Harris to the raucous (and sometimes raunchy) tales of Anna Lydia Vega, Caribbean literature has a quality, insight, and imagination that is world-class. (2003, p. xxxiii)

The Caribbean imagination has thus far produced three literature Nobel laureates: Saint John Perse of Guadeloupe in 1960, Derek Walcott of St. Lucia in 1992, and V. S. Naipaul of Trinidad and Tobago in 2001 (Caribbean Elections, 2021). Maryse Condé (Guadeloupe) was the recipient of what could be considered the alternate Nobel Prize for Literature in 2018 when the Swedish Academy suspended the award (Quinn, 2018).

A notable difference between Walcott and Naipaul is evidenced in their worldviews and in the final resting place of each. While Naipaul never returned to live in his native Trinidad, dying in England in 2018, Walcott never really left St. Lucia. He constantly traveled between the U. S., Europe, and the Caribbean for much of his life, eventually taking up permanent residence again in St. Lucia before his death in 2017.

Brief Overview of Caribbean Literature in English

The literature coming out of the English-speaking Caribbean dates back to the 1600s. These early literatures were primarily travel journals and slave narratives. Similar to

African American slave narratives, Caribbean slave narratives told of the slave experience, but “while many of the African-American slave narratives were created to work as a tool for the pro-abolitionist movement (by showing the humanity of the enslaved or those recently freed), Caribbean narratives were less concerned with the humanizing of the slaves. Instead, they often served as pieces for entertainment or ‘information’—they were published in newspapers, travel journals deposits, and treatises” (Early Caribbean). The article “What Makes the Caribbean Slave Narrative Distinct?” (Early Caribbean Digital Archive, n.d.) goes on to point out other differences: for example, whereas African American narratives tended to be long and its authors American born, those of the Caribbean were often short (even a paragraph in length), and its authors tended to come directly from the African continent. Much of what was related in Caribbean slave narratives, therefore, was concerned with more recent memory of lives lived in Africa.

There were few works of the genre that did, in fact, resemble the African American format, and such is the case of the Bermudan born Mary Prince (2004) in *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave (Related by Herself)*. Published in 1831 and presented in this anthology, it is important to note the phrase “related by herself.” This is significant because it is as one would expect: Mary Prince could not read or write and had to have an amanuensis record her tale. In a comparable period, one of the few exceptions to having the need for a scribe is seen in the American/British Olaudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, published in 1789 (Equiano, 2004). Writing his autobiography was no small feat on Equiano’s part considering the times (although the authenticity of his work had to be vouched for by a long list of white, male dignitaries).

Mary Prince would have written her own story if she could have; she would have learned to read and write if allowed, as her autobiography attest, but, seen only as chattel, the Mary Princes of that era were denied any human rights whatsoever. Essentially used as a toy for her mistress’s young child, Fanny, Mary Prince shares the following in her autobiography: “Directly she had said her lessons to her grandmamma, she used to come running to me, and make me repeat them one by one after her; and in a few months I was able not only to say my letters but to spell many small words. But this happy state was not to last long. Those days were too pleasant to last. My heart always softens when I think of them” (Prince, 2004, p. 240). Under threat of severe punishment, slave laws throughout the Caribbean and the Americas forbade slaves from gaining literacy skills in an attempt to keep that population subjugated and subdued:

The vast majority of slave-owners were opposed to any suggestion that their slaves might be taught to read and write. It was not until the first missionaries arrived in the Caribbean in the middle of the eighteenth century

that slaves received instruction in anything other than how to work.... Where laws did not already exist forbidding the teaching of slaves to read or write, they were soon passed, as happened in Barbados in 1797. An act passed that year made it the duty of every Anglican priest to try to convert the slaves, but made it illegal to teach them reading and writing. (Dyde et al., 2008, pp. 35–36)

Again, this is not meant to be a history lesson, but we must examine the past with a view to understanding the present and acknowledging the weighty role history plays in shaping our world. Slave narratives, the early literature of the Caribbean, were written by white transplants from European countries who primarily acted as scribes in recording those narratives. We must, therefore, understand the lenses through which these writings have been filtered.

In dissecting the nuances of Caribbean slave narratives, it is necessary to keep in mind the complications immanent in translation. Those enslaved and those who owned the enslaved did not speak the same language, so we can assume some meaning was lost or altered in translation. For example, in the preface to Mary Prince's autobiography, the editor of the published work, Thomas Pringle, is careful to assure readers of its authenticity. His words, however, only serve to underscore the nebulous nature of translation, ergo interpretation. Pringle says Prince's scribe was simply a "lady who happened to be at the time residing with [his] family as a visitor" (Prince, 2004, p. 237). We can therefore assume this lady had no particular skill in translation outside of knowing how to read and write. Pringle also says the work was "pruned into its present shape; retaining as far as was practicable, Mary's exact expressions and peculiar phraseology" (Prince, 2004, p. 237). Noteworthy are his words "as far as practical" (Prince, 2004, p. 237). The words are troubling because they could indicate a stark difference between what a white, European male of stature would consider "practical" as opposed to a Black, African female relegated to the bottom rung of slave society. The phrase "peculiar phrasing" is also attention getting, as it suggests the unfamiliarity of the scribe with the words of the dictator and also speaks to the uneven relationship between the two, one being the signifier (European slave owner) and other being the signified (enslaved African).

Lastly, we must take into account the fact that enslaved Africans did not come from one area or tribe since slavers traversed wide areas along the West Coast of Africa in search of human currency. With more than two thousand languages spoken in Africa, the captured men, women, and children coming from the many tribes did not speak the same language; there was no *lingua franca*. Europeans capitalized on this fracture by intentionally grouping together tribes with different vernacular in an attempt to isolate them from each other and prevent uprisings or any collective behavior.

Language and communication, however, inherent to every group, community, and society, is impossible to eradicate, so in spite of repressive acts on the part of their oppressors, enslaved Africans found innovative ways to communicate, thereby creating new languages. Those languages are known today as creole languages, such as Aruba, Bonaire, and Curacao's Papiamentu; Dominica and St. Lucia's Kwéyòl; and Jamaica's Patois or Patwa. In the U.S., the creole language, spoken by descendants of the formerly enslaved African American minority population, is known as Ebonics (Rickford, n.d.). All are symbols of survival, resilience, and resistance.

Whose Language?

One conundrum Caribbean writers and intellectuals alike have faced is language use: whose should be used and how should it be used? V. S. Naipaul summed it up best when he said, "Every writer is, in the long run, on his own; but it helps, in the most practical way, to have a tradition. The English language was mine; the [English] tradition was not" (Howe, 1979). In his article "Creolization in Jamaica," Kamau Brathwaite (1995b) further opines on the dilemma saying, "Cultural autonomy demands a norm and a residential correspondence between the 'great' and 'little' traditions within the society. Under slavery there were two 'great' traditions, one in Europe, the other in Africa, and so neither was residential" (Brathwaite, 1995b, p. 204).

Today, the official languages of the Caribbean run the gamut of the European colonizer: English, Spanish, French, Dutch, and Portuguese (Brazil). These are the languages of business, the elite, and the educated. However, when one looks at popular language, the language spoken in the street—the language of the people—a very different picture emerges. The articulations of the masses are not of those official languages, but rather, varieties of them. They are what Kamau Brathwaite (1995b) defines as "nation language." Nation language, he says, "is heavily influenced by the African model"—as opposed to the European—and he considers it a more fitting descriptor than the term "dialect." He rejects the word "dialect" because of the negative connotations or "pejorative undertones" associated with it, insisting "dialect" is synonymous with "bad English," seen as caricaturistic, and associated with the uneducated and inferior (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 311).

Louise Bennett-Coverley (Miss Lou) also sounds the alarm in support of Jamaica's nation language, Patwa. Somewhat akin to the Kenyan author Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o who rejected English in favor of writing in his native language of Gikuyu, Bennett-Coverley's work is primarily in Patwa. Considered a comedian, poet, activist, and folklorist, she has this to say in a piece entitled "Fi Wi Language" or "Our Language." The following is my translation of Miss Lou's Patwa: "When the Asian culture and the European culture came

upon the African culture in the Caribbean people, we stirred them up and blended them to suit our flavor. We shook them up and moved them to our beat; we wheeled them and we turned them, and we rocked them, and, my goodness, the resulting rhythm was sweet” (ShakaRaSpeaks, 2011). She continues, asking why the Jamaican language is described as a “corruption” of the English language while English is described as “deriving” from Norman French, Greek, and Latin (ShakaRaSpeaks, 2011). Miss Lou’s rhetorical question is perfectly answered in a saying made popular by the Yiddish scholar Max Weinreich: “A language is a dialect with an army and a navy” (McWhorter, 2016).

Similarly, in making language more malleable to the Caribbean condition, Kamau Brathwaite’s style is described as “using nation language as well as linguistic and typographic innovation” (Poetry Foundation, n.d.). For example, his avant-garde use of language and fonts in the short story “Dream Haiti” can be seen as analogous to Picasso’s ingenious use of the canvas and paintbrush. Interestingly, although Picasso denied it, curators have found ample evidence pointing to the African influence in his work (Pablo Picasso: Paintings, Quotes, & Biography, n.d.). Brathwaite’s style in “Dream Haiti” is also reminiscent of James Joyce’s experimental language use in *Finnegans Wake*. Below is a brief excerpt from “Dream Haiti” in which a U.S. Coast Guard member of Haitian descent agonizes at his impotence in helping his Haitian countrymen achieve their dream of a better life:

The sea was like slate grey of what was left of
my body
& the white waves
I remember
they was like very white
on what was left of my skin
& they kept comin in at this soft swishing diagonal
against the
bow & wet metal slides of my nerves

where the US Coast Guard cutter was patrolling all
along the borders of the Mexicans & my brothers—
the what was called ‘the Haitian Refugees’

////I write Shante Chackmul & ask
WHAT NAME BAHAMAS GIVE TO
HAITIANS WHO COME TO UR OUSE
TO BEG WRUK////

(Brathwaite, 2001, p. 170)

Jamaican born, England based, Linton Kwesi Johnson's (2006) works are in the performance poetry genre; in Caribbean terms, he is a "dub" poet and also writes his poems in Jamaica's nation language, Patwa. In Johnson's poem "Sonny's Lettah," the protagonist writes from jail telling his mother of the unprovoked clash he and his younger brother, Jim, have had with police officers in the heavily Caribbean populated city of Brixton, England. As a result of the encounter, "Dem charge Jim fi sus/Dem charge mi fi murdah" (Johnson, 2006, p. 29). Johnson's "lettah" had to be written as it is because otherwise the letter would have come from the colonized version of Sonny and not the decolonized one. The rhythm of nation languages is different from the "standard" English varieties, so they cannot fully convey the Caribbean character. In *The Empire Writes Back*, Ashcroft et al. (2002), make the following comment: "This is not to say that the English language is inherently incapable of accounting for post-colonial experience, but that it needs to develop an 'appropriate' usage in order to do so (by becoming a distinct and unique form of english). The energizing feature of this displacement is its capacity to interrogate and subvert the imperial cultural formations" (Ashcroft, 2002, p. 10-11).

The early literature coming out of the Caribbean reflected European norms. Slave narratives and travel journals in the 1600s through the 1800s were written by Europeans and reflected a European aesthete, but the early writings of Caribbean authors in the 1950s had similar betrayal: while reflecting Caribbean themes and setting, they were demure with regard to language. For example, Jean Rhys' (1999) "Pioneer, Oh, Pioneers," only has one line attempting use of nation language in the entire story. It comes near the end when the white outsider, Rammage, has either been killed or committed suicide, and his "colored" wife who "called herself Isla Harrison, though she had no right to the name Harrison" returns for his funeral (Rhys, 1999, p. 12). Isla's godmother, Miss Myra, defends her goddaughter against the swirling rumors: "Eh-eh," echoed Myra. 'Since when the girl obliged to tell everybody where she go and what she do chapter and verse....' (Rhys, 1999, p. 16).

In the webinar *Caribbean Literature in Transition, 1970-2020*, Ronald Cummings points to a recently held lecture by foundational Caribbean literature scholar Kenneth Ramchand, who explained that it wasn't until 1969 that the first West Indian literature course was offered at the University of the West Indies (Cambridge University Press Academic, 2021). This was the period during which postcolonial thinking solidly manifested into the branch of Caribbean postcolonial theory. On a global scale, postcolonial thought recognizes that "one of the main features of imperial oppression is control over language" (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 7). Aspects of postcolonial theory also acknowledge continued colonial oppression through use of colonial languages whereby "Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is perpetuated, and the medium through which conceptions of 'truth,' 'order,' and 'reality' become established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice" (Ashcroft et al., 2002).

Borders and Definition

It is impossible to talk about postcolonial philosophies without drawing attention to the contributions of Martinicans Aimé Césaire (poet, author, and politician) and Frantz Fanon (psychiatrist and philosopher). Both can be considered the founding fathers of such metaphysical interrogation as presented in Caribbean postcolonial thought. Sharing similar concerns to those of the Harlem Renaissance and the civil rights movement in the U.S., as well as the liberation struggles taking place on the African continent (symbolized in Jomo Kenyatta—Kenya, Kwame Nkrumah—Ghana, Samora Machel—Mozambique, Agostinho Neto—Angola, Amílcar Cabral—Guinea-Bissau, and Patrice Lumumba—Democratic Republic of the Congo), Césaire and Fanon were excited by the anticolonial zeitgeist of this Pan African period and the possibilities it offered. Acutely aware of the impact colonialism had on the Black and Caribbean psyche, they also passionately voiced their concerns.

Césaire crystallized much of the anticolonial intellectual thought at the time in the term “negritude”: “Negritude is a term coined from a literary and ideological movement developed by French-speaking Black intellectuals during the 1930s, which reflected a widespread reaction to the colonial situation. It was a movement that influenced Blacks around the world to reject the social, political, and moral domination of European colonizers” (Bryant, 2011). Notably, the word, negritude, can be compared to modern-day usage of the n-word, especially among U.S. rappers, in an attempt to redefine assigned meaning and empower a previously debilitating word. Roshad Bryant explains: “The term negritude, originating from the same French term as the ‘n-word,’ embodies this movement’s efforts to transform the value of Black personality. By treating a racial slur as a treasure, Aimé Césaire highlights the explosive value of the expression; a term used so stoutly to curse a people has even greater power to connect an entire race, which is exactly what negritude did for African and Caribbean peoples.” Édouard Glissant (1981/1989) surmises that “The thrust of negritude among Caribbean intellectuals was a response perhaps to the need, by relating to a common origin, to rediscover unity (equilibrium) beyond dispersion” (Glissant, 1981/1989, p. 5).

Fanon believed the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer was so unhealthy that it led to mental anxiety—a schizophrenia of sorts on the part of the colonized who yearned after Europe, wanting to emulate Europe in all aspects while denying African origins. He also believed colonial policy was in itself violent and that only by reciprocating this violence could Black people shake the psychological shackles imposed on them (Drabinski, 2019). Malcolm X made similar pronouncements during the civil rights movement in the U.S. in the 1960s (Smithsonian Channel, 2018).

This was also the period of modernist literature during which the literary community experimented with new approaches to writing and language use. The modernist period is

described as having “its origins in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, mainly in Europe and North America, and is characterized by a self-conscious break with traditional ways of writing, in both poetry and prose fiction” (Manuel, 2021). This movement was also sure to have impacted the sensibilities of Caribbean writers.

During this redemptive period of postcolonial and modernist thought, magazines, such as *The Beacon* (Barbados, 1931), *BIM* (Trinidad, 1942), *Kyk-Over-Al* (Guyana, 1945), and *Savacou* (Jamaica, 1971) came into vogue. These magazines launched the careers of some of the Caribbean’s most prominent writers. Additionally, the very nature of the medium of these productions is thought responsible for the popularity of the short story genre among Caribbean writers. The BBC program *Caribbean Voices* was also instrumental in propelling the voices of these postcolonial intellectuals, trailblazers of the genre. The authors, such as George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, V. S. Naipaul, Derek Walcott, Andrew Salkey, C. L. R. James, Michael Anthony, Louise Bennett-Coverley, and Una Morrison, to name a few, were aware of the deep tentacular reach of slavery, the colonial legacy, and the role language played. They sought to neutralize it. Nigeria’s Chinua Achebe astutely points out that “until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter” (Quinn, 2013), and Antigua’s Jamaica Kincaid (1988) follows up in scathing reproach when she admonishes slavers and colonialists by pointing out the irony:

For isn’t it odd that the only language I have in which to speak of this crime is the language of the criminal who committed the crime? And what can that really mean? For the language of the criminal can contain only the goodness of the criminal’s deed. The language of the criminal can explain and express the deed only from the criminal’s point of view. It cannot contain the horror of the deed, the injustice of the deed, the agony, the humiliation inflicted on me. (Kincaid, 1988, pp. 31–32)

With the exception of *BIM*, most of these originating magazines are now defunct, but new publications have sprung up in their place to keep the torch burning. Examples include *Ariel*, *Callaloo*, *Caribbean Review*, *Caribbean Studies*, *The Caribbean Writer*, *Journal of West Indian Literature*, *POUi*, *PREE*, *Sargasso*, *Small Axe*, and *Wasafiri*. Also, Caribbean authors have taken the baton and run with it. They continue to thrive as evidenced in the numerous awards and accolades, national and international, these scholars have received and continue to amass: Edwidge Danticat (Haiti/U.S.), Junot Díaz (Dominica/U.S.), Lorna Goodison (Jamaica/Canada), Marlon James (Jamaica/U.S.), Kwame Dawes (Ghana/Jamaica/U.S.), Colin Channer (Jamaica/U.S.), Kei Miller (Jamaica/England), Geoffrey Philp (Jamaica/USA), Afua Cooper (Jamaica/Canada), Alecia McKenzie (Jamaica/France), Canisia Lubrin (St. Lucia/Canada), and so many more.

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UNIT I

SLAVERY AND COLONIALISM

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION



FIGURE 1.1 Kamau Brathwaite

“Instead of developing a sense of ourselves, we developed a false sense of Europe”¹

—Kamau Brathwaite

Kamau Brathwaite was a Caribbean poet, historian, and intellectual born in Barbados on May 11, 1930, to Hilton Brathwaite, who worked as a warehouse clerk, and Beryl Brathwaite (nee Gill), one of the first Black women in Barbados to work as a clerk during the early colonial years.

Born Lawson Edward Brathwaite, he was encouraged to change his first name to Kamau while on a fellowship at the University of Nairobi. Brathwaite published under the names Edward Brathwaite, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, as well as Kamau Brathwaite, respectively.

In Barbados, Brathwaite attended the prestigious Harrison College, where he earned a scholarship to the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom to study history. He later received his doctoral degree from the University of Sussex in 1968. After returning to the Caribbean, he taught at the University of the West Indies, where he also directed the Institute of Caribbean Studies. In addition, he guest lectured at Harvard University, Yale University, and New York University.

¹ Neil Genzlinger. (2020, February 20). Kamau Brathwaite, A Poet Who Celebrated Caribbean Culture Dies at 89, *The New York Times*.

Kamau Brathwaite's work has been recognized in the Caribbean and internationally. Selected awards include the Casas de las Americas Prize for Poetry (1976), both Guggenheim and Fulbright Fellowships (1983), the Order of Barbados (1987), the Neustadt International Prize for Literature (1994), the Charity Randall Citation for Performance and Written Poetry from the International Poetry Forum (1999), an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Sussex (2002), the Griffin Poetry Prize (2006), the Musgrave Gold Medal from the Institute of Jamaica (2006), the PEN/Voelcker Award for Poetry (2018), and the Bocas Henry Swanzy Award (2020, accepted by family).

His experience while in Africa, where he served as school inspector in Ghana, helped reshape his worldview and pedagogy. There he began to rethink the Caribbean's relationship to Africa and reconnecting with it.

Brathwaite is notable as one of the Caribbean's finest poets and intellectuals, having nurtured the genre both locally and overseas. He is solidly of the canon. He was a founding member of the Caribbean Artist's Movement (CAM), along with John La Rose and Andrew Salkey, in 1966. The Movement, the first such organization of its kind, gave Caribbean artists an outlet for their talent in London, England. He was also founder of *Savacou* (1970), a journal of CAM, housed at the University of the West Indies, Jamaica.

Recreating and massaging language to reflect the Caribbean aesthete was central to Brathwaite, and reconnecting to precolonial times was a central theme in his work. He coined the term "nation language" to replace what are commonly known as Caribbean dialects, saying "nation language" is a more accurate descriptor and that the term "dialect" has negative connotations. Additionally, in arriving at a language more expressive of the Caribbean experience, Brathwaite also experimented with fonts to create visual impressions for the reader/speaker. He called this form Video Sycorax, naming it after the unseen mother of Caliban, a character in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

Having studied under the renowned musicologist, J. H. Nketia, Brathwaite's poems are rhythmical, as he calls upon jazz, blues, calypso, and reggae to help convey his message. Among Kamau Brathwaite's best-known works are *Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968), and *Islands* (1969), which were later published as a collection in *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy* (1973). Other well-known works include *Mother Poem* (1977), *Sun Poem* (1982), and *X/Self* (1987) that later comprised the trilogy *Ancestors* (2001). *Middle Passages* was published in 1992 and *Slow Horses* in 2005.

Kamau Brathwaite died on February 4, 2020, in Barbados at the age of 89.

CREDIT

Fig. 1.1: Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=f-IJE4luDQU>.