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Editorial Preface

Elaine Savory
Guest Editor, Special Issue on Caribbean Ecocriticism

I write this just after the 2016 election for President of the United States, won by Donald Trump. He has been skeptical about climate change. He has climate change deniers in his inner circle. Beijing, once also not supportive of environmental protocols, has said Trump will be defying the wishes of the whole planet if he resists keeping the US seriously engaged with the control of emissions. The US may face action from a coalition of nations which will try to ensure high carbon usage is punished. So this is both a moment to both realize that huge progress has been made in raising consciousness where it counts and a chilling sense that a newly empowered destructiveness of our earth may soon be underway.

Then in terms of the field to which this issue contributes, there is Timothy Clark’s fierce concern in Ecocriticism on the Edge (2015) that ecocriticism is too often reductive. Responding to a reading of Paule Marshall’s The Chosen Place, the Timeless People and to the urgency of our present time, the Anthropocene era, Clark says it will “be harder in the future to be satisfied with an ecocritical method whose contribution to knowledge remains only to take up a work of fiction and affirm in it values and environmental truisms most readers of the criticism would hold anyway.”

In the face of all this, it can be hard to have confidence that writing an ecocritical essay has some possibility of making a positive impact. But part of the reason that progress is being made in environmental matters is that information and consciousness are increasing, and this is where not only literary texts themselves, but environmentally aware interpretations of them, do contribute. Otherwise there is just a gap between the leading edge of change in literature and literary studies and old ways of thinking about both text and the world. Ecocriticism is fortunately multi-stranded, for it permits a wide variety of tools and approaches to be employed, with the common goal of educating and raising consciousness about environmental issues through the medium of literary texts, and can also provide particular kinds of discourse within the field of environmental humanities. Important literary texts are expressed in powerfully effective language and form, which not only shape story and theme but even become primary vehicles of meaning, and language is the vehicle and the arena for change before it becomes thoughtful action. Clark’s urging for reinvention of ecocritical methods is completely valid and necessary, but it is the more likely to happen if a variety of ecocritical practices thrive than if there is nothing but the most challenging.
Postcolonial ecocriticism has already evolved as a distinct field, and within this Caribbean ecocriticism is just emerging as a strong body of work. For those who need a bit of a map here, Greg Garrard’s general *Ecocriticism* (2004) remains a valuable first stage, solid in what it surveys, but it does not engage with the postcolonial. Even the recent *Ecocriticism: The Essential Reader* (ed. Ken Hiltner, 2015) inexcusably barely does so. But five years earlier, a number of books began to establish a global vision. This is something which is necessary to establish if environmental disaster is to be averted: however a focus on the local is also of critical importance. Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin’s *Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Literature, Animals, Environment* (2010) sets out the case for the field. Part of their argument was that postcolonial ecocriticism challenges Western “ideologies of development,” and they pointed out that some writers (such as Ken Saro-Wiwa, who was executed for his activism around oil pollution in Nigeria) are deeply engaged with political action. Laura Wright’s *Wilderness into Civilized Shapes: Reading the Postcolonial Environment* (2010) explores work by South African, Nigerian, Kenyan, Indian, US and New Zealand writers. She positions her book as literary analysis which makes environmental issues visible. *Postcolonial Green: Environmental Politics and World Narratives* (eds. Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt, 2010) includes Pablo Mukherjee’s thoughtful essay on *The God of Small Things* (Roy). He links the style and structure of this novel to Trotsky’s idea of uneven development, specific in this case to India. *Eco-Imagination: African and Diasporan Literatures and Sustainability* (eds. d’Almeida, Viakinnou-Brinson and Pinto), and Byron Caminero-Santangelo’s *Different Shades of Green: African Literature, Environmental Justice, and Political Ecology* (both 2014) meet the need for middle-range focus: not the globe but one continent, huge and various as it is. Africa is of particular critical interest to the ecologically minded, because of its vast range of different climates, terrains and ecologies, the history of rapacious colonialism and the socio-economic and political struggles of its peoples to build postcolonial societies after that history.

But, importantly, disturbing questions have been asked about the relation between postcolonial and environmental studies. Timothy Clark’s *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (2011) asks, “Is environmentalism another form of colonialism?” In *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (also 2011), Rob Nixon asks, “What would it mean to bring environmentalism into a full, productive dialogue with postcolonialism?” He explores this at length and in very interesting ways.

All of this is profoundly relevant to thinking about Caribbean ecocriticism, which got an important start with *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture* (eds. Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Renée Gosson and George Handley, 2005) and *What is the Earthly Paradise: Ecocritical Responses to the Caribbean* (eds. Chris Campbell and Erin Somerville, 2007). DeLoughrey et al. mark their cautiousness in “grafting” ecocriticism onto Caribbean contexts. Campbell and Somerville’s collection of conference papers brings together a mix of papers on Caribbean environments and on Caribbean literary texts. Sarah Phillips Casteel’s *Second Arrivals: Landscape and Belonging in Contemporary Writing of the Americas* (2007) includes substantial discussion of Naipaul and Walcott within her focus on the pastoral and
landscape. Rob Nixon once wrote on “postcolonial pastoral” in relation to Naipaul’s work (1992). By the time DeLoughrey and Handley co-edited *Postcolonial Ecologies: Literatures of the Environment* (2011), the title itself was far more assertive of connection between postcolonial literature and ecological concerns.

Though there are as yet few books entirely devoted to the Caribbean, there has been sustained interest in including the region in collections of essays. *Postcolonial Green* has a section of essays on South America and the Caribbean (there is an essay on Walcott’s *Omeros* here, a text proving somewhat popular with ecocritics). Both *Eco-Imagination* and *Ecocriticism of the Global South* (eds. Slovic, Rangarajan and Sarveswaran, 2015) include a limited amount of Caribbean material. In *Slow Violence*, Nixon makes some brief references to Caribbean literature, and Huggan and Tiffin include a detailed and interesting discussion of Kincaid’s *A Small Place*, though their references to Caribbean literature are generally brief. Questions as to method, intention and function rightly still abound.

The six very interesting and innovative pieces of work published here represent this eclectic spread of approaches to ecocritical reading. Two are literary criticism with an ecocritical awareness, one is a photo-essay and three take an interdisciplinary approach. This range represents important differences in approach which are brought together here in an implicit conversation. A photo-essay encourages imagination about the environment, focused around particular images which may raise certain questions. Literary criticism reads a text or texts, focusing on explicit or implicit, deliberate or subliminal, representations of the environment. The interdisciplinary brings the methods and knowledge of another discipline (or several) to the interpretation of the literary. The experience of reading highly achieved imaginative literature takes the engaged reader beyond the limits of lived experience and individual knowledge, and also into reconsidering how language itself participates in apprehending the world: all invaluable as part of developing an ecological awareness.

This issue is not only concerned with literature, but with images. The visual is often key in apprehending environmental issues. Though not included in discussion here, I must bring the reader’s attention to two films which address Caribbean environmental concerns. *Landscape and Memory: Martinican Land-People-History* features Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant. Professor Richard Price (*Caribbean Studies Journal*) describes the film as a “wake-up call” about environmental destruction. Subscribers to *The Journal of West Indian Literature* are also offered a one-time chance to view *Small Change*, a documentary produced by IAMOVEMENT, a Trinidad and Tobago NGO. *Small Change* looks at climate change with focus on the present state of the local economy and tries to start conversations in multiple spaces: grassroots, private and public sectors hoping to better the state of the environment and bring social and economic benefits.

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It has been particularly rewarding to edit this issue because it has widened and deepened my sense of the high calibre of the family of scholars working in the field. I have a great debt of gratitude to the authors of the papers published here and also to the peer reviewers and the production team at JWIL: everyone has been superbly professional and utterly responsive to tight deadlines. This issue demonstrates the intellectual acumen and range of this new field, and I thank JWIL’s Board very much for having the foresight to make space for it.
Food, Biodiversity, Extinctions: Caribbean Fauna and the Struggle for Food Security during the Conquest of the New World

Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert

In Book One, Chapter XIII, of Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo’s *La historia general y natural de las Indias* (1526), the Spanish adventurer turned historian tells the dramatic tale of the desperate struggle for food faced by the earliest conquistadors in the Caribbean region. In 1493, after the Taínos of Hispaniola destroyed the first European settlement in the New World, La Navidad—built by Columbus from the remains of his leading caravel, the Santa María, on what is now Haiti’s northeastern coast—the Admiral established a second settlement, La Isabela, in the vicinity of present-day Puerto Plata in the Dominican Republic. The small settlement, which initially covered about five acres, was intended as a base from which to explore the interior for gold and silver and housed a population of sailors, soldiers, a variety of skilled workers, and priests. Its foundation marked the introduction into the New World of European domestic fauna (pigs, horses and dogs) and crops (chiefly wheat and sugarcane).
The settlement was the testing ground for some of the features that would constitute Spain’s technology of conquest and colonization: the system of distribution among colonizers of lands and indigenous workers known as *encomiendas*; the introduction of invasive fauna and flora species to help acclimatize the European population to the new lands and open a space for the cultivation of crash crops intended for European consumption; the imposition of the Spanish language and the Catholic religion on the indigenous population; and the development of an economy based on the exploitation of local resources and the indigenous workforce to produce commodities for European markets. The profound social, political and economic upheaval of indigenous life it represented would soon lead to what Elinor Melville, writing about the conquest of Mexico in *A Plague of Sheep*, would call an “ecological revolution”—“an abrupt and qualitative break with the process of environmental and social change that had developed in situ” (12). It would also unleash a pathogenic assault on an indigenous population devoid of immunological defenses against diseases never before present in the region, which in turn would lead to a catastrophic and deeply traumatic decimation of the original inhabitants of the Greater Antilles.

It is in this context of social and cultural upheaval, biological assault and environmental change that I would like to place a narrative that could be described as the New World’s first food fight—one that took a swift and violent toll measured in terms of human losses and animal species ostensibly gone extinct on the island. I would like to focus here on an early tale of acute food insecurity and its consequences, as it illuminates the ways in which food anxieties marked the early colonization process (and its texts) and ultimately resulted in actions that indelibly impacted the surrounding Caribbean ecosystems. The specific nature of the Isabela settlement during the earliest years of the colonization process created conditions that severely impacted its food security—“the condition in which all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (FAO); Spanish responses to this food crisis would have deep reverberations across the region.

The events—as narrated by Oviedo—opened with the natives’ “evil scheme” of refusing to plant their annual crops to protest the Spaniards’ appropriation of their lands. A key element in this resistance strategy was the invader’s dependence on the indigenous population to provide food “through formal and informal tribute arrangements” (Wilson 145). The plot—of which the Spaniards were initially unaware, being “so new to the land”—led to widespread hunger and cost the lives of half the Spanish population and “countless” Amerindians in the settlement. The agonizing deaths from widespread hunger, from Oviedo’s description, left “a pervasive pestiferous stench over the land” (49). Those among the natives who could escape Spanish control fled into the interior or were succored by other native communities. The besieged conquerors resorted to eating everything in sight, with dire consequences for some species of fauna—and themselves. The scheme—which stemmed from the native population’s recognition of their control over the food supply—sought to counter the imposition of a Spanish socio-economic organization that placed the “materiality” of the indigenous population (and its familiar fauna) “at the economic, political and juridical disposal of the Spanish conquerors” (Cesareo 446).
Oviedo described the crisis thus:

During these times of so much want, the Christians ate all the dogs that were to be found on the island, which were mute, they did not bark; and they also ate those they had brought from Spain, and they ate all the hutías that were to be found, and all the quemis, and other animals they called mohuy, and all the ones they call coris, that are like young or small rabbits. These four types of animals were hunted with the help of the dogs that had been brought from Spain; and which were eaten in their turn—in payment for their services—after they finished off the ones found in this land.

And they not only brought to an end these five species of four-legged animals, which only existed on this island, but once these were gone, they began eating a type of serpent known as an ivana, which has four legs, and is, to those who come to know it, a dreadful animal. They did not spare lizards, salamanders, snakes—of which there were many types, but none poisonous.

So that, in order to live, they did not show any mercy to beast or animal; any animal they could find ended up in the fire, boiled or roasted, there was no lack of appetite for eating things that were frightful to the eye. (Oviedo, my emphasis, 50)

Oviedo’s tale, focused as it is on the plight of the beleaguered conquistadores, bemoans their fate after a too prolonged diet of reptiles, which left even those fortunate enough to be able to return to Spain looking as yellow as the gold they were seeking so eagerly, having turned the colour of sulfur, many of them dying after their return to Spain as a result of what they had endured in Hispaniola. Prolonged eating of reptile meat, as they had no possibility of knowing, can cause severe health problems through diseases like trichinosis, pentastomiasis, gnathostomiasis, and sparganosis, to which we can add microbiological risks from handling and preparing the animals for consumption and which stem from the possible presence of pathogenic bacteria like salmonella, e-coli, and Staphylococcus aureus (Magnino et al.). The food shortages extended from La Isabela to the fortress of Santo Tomás, in the mines of the region of El Cibao, where the new settlers suffered the same “anguish” as those of the coastal town and watched helplessly as their numbers were reduced from day to day. These dire conditions were exacerbated when, in the summer of 1494, La Isabela was struck by the earliest hurricane described by European settlers.
Oviedo’s narrative of this first fateful food crisis in the Americas underscores the pressures of feeding a growing, antagonistic European population in the West Indies in the early days of the encounter, and how these pressures impacted various species driven to endangerment or extinction by the increasingly desperate search for food for a population suddenly brought out of balance. The faunal extinctions would be followed by an acute decline of the human population, an “extinction” that Spanish Friar Jerónimo Mendieta, in his *Historia eclesiástica indiana* (1570-1597), would describe as that of “a people in decline from day to day whom we can palpably see consuming themselves… pitilessly watching them die like flies… whom we are exploiting for as long as they last… until there are only relics left” (qtd in Cesareo 449-50).

Spanish reaction to this traumatic episode of food insecurity was swift and multifaceted. It ranged from concerted efforts to force the local population to produce food for the conquerors’ consumption to the introduction of invasive species (particularly pigs) that represented familiar and easily reproduced sources of food. Cows, sheep and goats were eventually introduced, but most important in the early phases of the colonization process were pigs. Prized in Spain, where they were an important source of cheap and plentiful protein, pigs have always been considered “one of the glories of animal domestication” (Kiple 537). They are prolific, producing an average of ten piglets per litter after a relatively short four-month gestation period, grow very quickly, and are fairly omnivorous. Their introduction in late 1493 coincided with the events narrated by Oviedo, as they were brought in by Columbus during his second voyage. The original stock of eight (Kiple 538) multiplied rapidly on a plentiful diet of wild fruit, and the offspring were distributed throughout the Caribbean region, where many became feral. As José de Acosta’s *Moral and Natural History of the Indies* (1590) describes it, “in some places pigs have returned to the wild and become savage and are hunted like wild boar, as in Hispaniola and the other islands where these animals have taken to the hills” (239). They provided a convenient advance party that guaranteed colonizers an abundant supply of familiar protein as the colonization process proceeded throughout the Caribbean. Traveling through the region 100 years later, Samuel de Champlain would give us a glimpse of the revolutionary impact on the environment of animals imported for food and hides. In his *Narrative of a Voyage to the West Indies* (1859), Champlain marvels at the abundance of cattle roaming free throughout the region. Of the coastal plains of Mexico he would write that they were met “as far as the eye can see, with immense flocks of cattle, such as horses, mules, oxen, cows, sheep and goats, which have pastures always fresh in every season” (24). Entering the port of Havana he will marvel at the abundance of cattle, such as oxen, cows and pigs, which are better meat than any other in this country, or in all the Indies. They keep a great number of oxen, more to have the hides than the flesh. To take them, negroes go on horseback after these oxen, and with *astes*, at the end of which is a sharp crescent, cut the hamstrings of the oxen, which are immediately skinned, and the flesh so soon consumed, that twenty four hours after none can be perceived, being devoured by great numbers of wild dogs and other animals which inhabit this country. (45)
Of particular importance in the Spaniards’ quest for food security was a rapid intensification of the system of *encomiendas* that Columbus had already established before his departure from La Isabela and which Oviedo describes as having been at the root of the indigenous population’s “evil scheme” not to plant crops. The system gave the *encomendero* a set of rights to extract goods, metals and (most importantly) labour from the native population in exchange for protection and instruction in the Catholic faith. Before his return to Spain to report on his success, the Admiral, Oviedo tells us, had “distributed the lands so that the Spaniards could build their houses, as they did, and showed them the lands and cattle that would belong to them, together with the holdings that would become their inheritance and the Indians who would work for them” (49). The dispossession and distribution of lands and population, Oviedo argues, had “chagrined” the Indians and pushed them towards their rebellious attempt to rid themselves from their tormentors through an agricultural strike. The strategy signaled the indigenous population’s clear understanding of the role of food security as a potential weapon in their rapidly destabilizing society, especially as monitoring systems (armed patrols and European-trained dogs) curtailed their independence in availing themselves of wild fruit and vegetables. These events were unfolding, ironically, as the Taínos of Hispaniola had been dangerously deprived of their principal source of protein (fish) as men (responsible for the fishing) were forced into the interior to search for gold. The Spanish-imposed protein restrictions on the local diet (the impact of which they were perhaps in no scientific position to understand) contributed to the depressed immunological condition of the indigenous population as they faced a biological assault with no historical precedent.

The struggle to control the source and nature of the food available for ready and convenient consumption (ironically, among the plethora of wild fruits available in the forests)—as Oviedo’s traumatic tale conveys—illustrates how from the earliest moments of the conquest of the Caribbean region the intersections among political, economic, cultural and biological “narratives” helped cement the foundations of the power relationships we have come to subsume under the term “colonial.” The species purportedly driven to extinction by this first food crisis—barkless dogs, some species of hutias, quemis, coris—and the invasive species brought in to reassure the Spanish forces that their initial famine crisis would not be repeated also illustrate how quickly and devastatingly the Columbian encounter would evolve into an ecological revolution. Intensified hunting, the redrawing of agricultural boundaries, the cutting of trees to open additional land for food cultivation as well as for cooking fuel and construction material, the removal of workers from the food-producing fields and of fishermen from the sea as they were redirected to mining, the introduction of invasive species, and (of greater importance in later years) the beginning of cane cultivation, would forever change the ecologies of the Caribbean islands. It would also mark the beginning of what in time would amount to catastrophic habitat collapse that would introduce a period of intense species loss that can be measured in terms of biodiversity losses that have erased thousands of flora and fauna species in the region, some—as Oviedo’s narrative shows—dating back to the earliest moments of the Indies’ colonization and conquest.²

Oviedo’s narrative of the natural imbalance precipitated by the introduction of invasive species to feed his fellow conquerors—to which I will return shortly—can be placed in dialogue with the pictorial narrative offered by *The Drake Manuscript* (c. 1586, Morgan Library)—which almost
affectionately (if one could apply such an adverb to the act of painting) depicts some species gone extinct in the first century of colonization while recreating the ways of life of indigenous Caribbean communities by then also mostly extinct. The collection of 199 captioned watercolours, officially titled *Histoire Naturelle des Indes*, includes a catalogue of plants and animals from the Indies and the Caribbean coast of South America and scenes from Amerindian life that tell a complex narrative about the balances and stresses of Amerindian life under European control. The unknown artist—a Frenchman—must have sailed with Francis Drake—hence the manuscript’s association with the English captain, whose passion for the Caribbean he captures in the paintings.

Verlyn Klinkenborg, in the introduction that accompanies the 1996 facsimile edition of the manuscript, describes the scenes captured in the paintings as depicting “a world already shaped and overlaid by two highly sophisticated cultures, one European, one Indian” (see Klinkenborg). The artist pays particular attention to the economic enterprise of Spanish colonization in drawings depicting the mining and smelting of gold and silver by indigenous populations (whose “great skill and intelligence” he praises in his commentary) and the diving for pearls by African slaves, but weaves his most charming narrative through his description of the domestic lives of the Amerindians among whom he places his own self-portrait. These images, as Klinkenborg argues, are the most engaging, since they satisfy “simple human curiosity.”

Nothing pictured in them could have profited a European, and yet no European could have resisted their charm. Women tend babies, bathe children, bring fish home from the sea, grind maize in wooden mortars. Men drive away a woman’s labor pains by playing musical instruments as they march around the house where she gives birth. A dog leaps to their music and from the roof a pet monkey watches over the entrance. Other men tend barbecues, spin cotton, and weave fishing nets and hammocks. And unlike the rest of the manuscript, where each drawing and caption stands on its own, a continuous narrative of courtship begins to evolve, a story that alludes to earlier drawings and arches across several scenes, culminating in *The Drake Manuscript*’s final tableau. (Klinkenborg)

This final tableau is of particular interest in my context because it narrates how central to Amerindian life was the production and gathering of food and—most importantly—how important was the need for sustainable husbanding of resources to sustain a vanishing life. This narrative of
courtship—a story told through a short series of watercolours—underscores a relationship to food production that spoke to the values of the community. It goes like this: a young man visits his loved one’s parents, bringing with him the tools (canoe, arrows, fishing nets) that can reassure them about his ability to provide food for their daughter. He does not share food with them until he returns the next day bearing the game he has hunted. Their wedding portrait—in which the young man holds a rabbit and his bride grinds corn—emphasizes “fertility and abundance”: “You need this young man,” the father tells his daughter. “He will feed you well; you see that he brings a lot of good things for us to eat, he works hard at fishing as well as hunting, he plants, gathers fruit in the wood, and, in short, does everything needed to feed the whole house . . . [as] when they are married, her parents no longer want to work and customarily their children feed them” (*Histoire Naturelle*, Folio 124r). These values—in which labour is centred around the production of food for the family and the community—acknowledge and honour the damage humans inflict on the land, as “when their land no longer bears fruit or is tired of producing, they leave it and go to live in another place where they cultivate the land where they know there is fresh water. Then after three or four years, they return to their first land where they settle down as they had done before” (*Histoire Naturelle*, Folio 124v).

The unwillingness to inflict permanent change on their environment that *The Drake Manuscript* ascribes so appealingly to indigenous Caribbean populations contributes, ironically, to the parallel European notion of Caribbean landscapes as “time-locked.” Rivke Jaffe, in “Global Environmental Ideoscapes,” argues that “precisely the fact that the ‘natives’ had not managed to alter and subdue the natural landscape, as the colonizers had done at home, proved their inferiority and served as a rationale for colonialism . . .; the image of Caribbean landscapes as time-locked,” in other words, “served to emphasize the modernity of the colonial powers” (Jaffe 114). This very notion of European modernity is at the heart of Oviedo’s narrative of the Spaniards’ efforts to successfully acclimatize European species into the New World, furthering the destruction of the environment (and the worldview) that *The Drake Manuscript* depicted as intrinsically sustainable. Gold and silver-seekers they may have been, but their exploitative enterprise was grounded in a transformation of the environment that would allow for their survival through ready access to plentiful and familiar food through minimal effort on their part. It is not their purpose, after all, to go the way of *The Drake Manuscript*’s virtuous suitor, whose life’s toil is in the service of securing food. The traumatic episode on La Isabela underscored a power imbalance (a dangerous dependence on an oppressed population to provide food security) that symbolized the very essence of insecurity from a colonial perspective. In response to this imbalance, the Spanish authorities moved quickly to acclimatize dozens of fruit and vegetable species in the New World, thereby transforming the landscape through the imposition of their needs upon the very land. They were particularly successful in the introduction of animal species harmful to the fertility of the land—particularly of hooved animals responsible for rapid and particularly destructive damage to topsoil, as Elinor Melville argues so convincingly in her seminal study *A Plague of Sheep*. Cows, sheep, goats, and particularly pigs, became an additional invasive force, quickly “going native” and overrunning landscapes and putting undue pressure on native species.
In Book III (Chapter 11) of *La historia natural*, Oviedo describes the speed with which Spanish cows—which had arrived “in our time” (he is writing in the 1520s)—had become so numerous that “ships were returning to Spain loaded with skins and it had happened that they had rounded up and killed three to five hundred of them and had left the carcasses to rot on the ground, only to be able to ship the skins to Spain” (85). He describes the new conditions, not only through this tale of wasteful abundance (following so closely on devastating and politically-induced famine) but through descriptions of the extremely low prizes their meat commands: “A lot of this cattle has gone wild, as have the pigs; so have the domestic dogs and cats brought from Spain, as many of them are roaming wild in the hills” (85). This boastful declaration of the profusion of food available to the Spanish population marks the beginning of the “colonial” separation between “European” and “native” foodstuffs of which Sydney Mintz would write in “Food Enigmas, Colonial and Postcolonial.” This separation is evident through a comparison between the management of and access to food in Oviedo’s narrative and the Amerindian sequence of *The Drake Manuscript*, with its quasi-ceremonial links between the supplying of foodstuffs and the practices of careful husbandry of resources. This separation will be exacerbated later when hierarchical and coercive approaches to food availability become institutionalized as part of the plantation economy. As Mintz writes,

> Who came to the islands, and what they ended up eating, were outcomes that turned upon the organization of the pioneer societies into which they were, for the most part, dragged. These bits of seized land, then—the early agricultural equivalents of today’s foreign-owned mines and oil wells—became tropical outposts in newly conquered lands, agrarian food factories for the delivery of desirable consumer goods not producible in temperate climates. Yet those who produced them would remain in chains for centuries. (149)

The anxieties around food security narrated in texts written during the first century of the European conquest underscore how the Caribbean region’s subordinate entry into global mercantilism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries affected local populations’ diverging access to food. As the Caribbean’s indigenous population adapted to new realities after the European conquest began, their roles (and those of the African slaves who joined them as a labour force) were bound up with the extraction of natural resources and the production of commodities for metropolitan consumption. The success of this enterprise required the assurances of palatable and abundant food for the colonizers but did not always attend to the welfare, development and feeding of local populations. As border zones, moreover, the territories fell into patterns of exploitation that ignored their impact on local inhabitants or environments—a chief theme in Jerónimo de Mendieta’s appeal to the Spanish Crown for better working conditions for the indigenous populations of the Caribbean and Central America. Many plants and animals (and most certainly the indigenous population) fell victim to early forms of environmental misuse (plantations, mining, deforestation, overfishing), while others were sacrificed to the needs of itinerant populations (pirates, buccaneers, merchants, adventurers whose food insecurity continued to plague them even after more stable communities had brought food security under some control).

These itinerant communities put tremendous pressure on fauna found “in the wild,” bringing significant populations to the brink of extinction, as was the case of the Caribbean monk seal (*Neomonachus tropicalis* or West Indian seal)—the only subtropical seal native to the Caribbean and the
Gulf of Mexico—which was declared officially extinct by the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) in 2008. The last recorded sighting of this gentle creature—which once lived in pods of between 50 and 500 on beaches throughout the region—was in 1952, when what was described as “a small colony” was spotted at the Seranilla Bank between Jamaica and Nicaragua. After decades of futile efforts to confirm sightings, the monk seal finally joined the growing list of victims of ecological changes unleashed by conquest and colonialism. It has the sad distinction of being the only seal in history to vanish due to human exploitation and unrelenting encroachment upon even its remotest habitats.

The Caribbean monk seal is relevant in my present context because of its cameo role in three of the earliest texts about the colonization of the region. The seal enters literary and recorded history in Christopher Columbus’ diary of his second voyage to his newly discovered territories—at about the same time that the indigenous population of Hispaniola is staging its courageous agricultural strike. In August 1494, his ship anchored off the southern coast of Haiti, he sends men ashore to kill eight “sea wolves” to feed the crew. His son Fernando will also describe the episode nonchalantly, telling of how “as they were leaving the island they killed eight seals which were sleeping in the sand. They also killed many pigeons (most probably gulls) and other birds, for as that island is uninhabited and the animals are unaccustomed to men, they let themselves be killed with sticks” (57). Almost 20 years later, in 1513—as Antonio de Herrera y Tordesillas will record in his Historia general (1601-1615)—Juan Ponce de León, having just discovered the Dry Tortugas Islands, sends out a foraging party that returns with 14 dead seals. So begins the narrative of relentless slaughter of these mellow, slow-moving creatures, which at its peak approached 100 deaths per night (King).

For centuries—until 1952, that fateful last official sighting—the seals weave in and out of a remarkable variety of “texts”: in pre-Columbian archeological findings as figures drawn in Mayan pottery; in Diego de Landa’s 1566 Relación de las costas de Yucatán; in the 1675 travelogue of English adventurer William Dalrymple; in the 1595 narrative of Sir Walter Raleigh and the 1687 report of his visit to Jamaica by naturalist Hans Sloane; in the seventeenth-century work of Jean-Baptiste Du Tertre; in eighteenth-century illustrations of Caribbean fauna; in the work of nineteenth-century naturalists such as C. R. Nesbitt and Robert Hill; in the increasingly fantastic 1930s stories and photographs of Gordon Gunther.
The fate of the Caribbean monk seal is linked to the history of marginal Caribbean populations whose need for food led to the development of communities characterized by raucous fraternity and opportunistic access to hunting wild species—such as pirates and buccaneers. The particular characteristics of these communities can be best ascertained through an examination of a developing iconography that emphasized their access to particular technologies (guns and gunpowder, for example) or skills (as in the hunting of whales, seals, or other animals requiring some level of equalizing between human and animal power) used primarily to secure food. The struggle may be for readily available food for populations often found outside the law and therefore not served well by legitimately available foodstuff, but it rests on notions of freedom from adherence to colonial law. Being outside the law, they (naturally) sought animals in the wild.

We can see the development of these iconographies of technologically-assisted colonial food lawlessness, for example, through the representations of hunters in Alexandre Olivier Exquemelin’s *History of the Buccaneers of America* (1678). Exquemelin’s celebration of buccaneer culture underscored the precariousness of the food supply available to his subjects. He regales his audience, therefore with descriptions of the hunting of “wild” animals whose destruction is vital to the survival of pirate communities—many of these species are now either extinct or critically endangered. Many of them were large mammals (whales, seals, manatees) vulnerable only to communal hunting efforts and capable of being both consumed as food and used for its by-products. Others, particularly turtles, were especially vulnerable because of their need to return to land to lay eggs. Their hunting had the additional advantage of providing a unique “adventure”—a challenge that poised man (or more properly, men) against beast in a quasi-titanic clash. One can see it simply, yet quite vividly in this illustration of the instructions offered by Exquemelin’s text to handle such animals. A large turtle, for example, needs to be turned over and thereby neutralized and rendered helpless if one is to steal its eggs—a readily available source of protein. The image is just a fragment of a larger one which includes the hunting of a Manitou or manatee (now endangered). The hunter’s presence appears particularly disturbing, as it is placed in a cove used by the illustrator to identify for the reader a number of birds of beautiful plumage—many of them now extinct.

“Manière de pêcher la tortue. Le lamanitín” (How to Hunt Turtles. The Manatee) from *History of the Adventurers and Corsairs* by Alexandre Olivier Exquemelin (1744). Volume I.
The representation contrasts deeply with the type of “legal” (that is, within the political and economic system) slave-assisted “hunting” that we find in Captain John Gabriel Stedman’s versions of the struggle between wild beasts and colonial control—as we can see in the well-known image of “The Skinning of the Aboma Snake” or in the idealized image (also from Stedman’s narrative) of the young slave woman who serves as protagonist of his *Narrative of Joanna: An Emancipated Slave of Surinam*, reminiscent of the portrait of the happy married couple in *The Drake Manuscript* surrounded by the animals, grains and implements that guarantee a simple, sustainable, level of food security.

I want to return to our old friend Oviedo in order to address a brief narrative with which he ends the chapter of *La historia natural* I have been discussing. In concluding the chapter, Oviedo tells of the heroic selflessness of the Spanish officer in charge of the gold mines in El Cibao, a community of Spaniards who had faced food shortages similar to those of La Isabela—although he does not tell us if those had their root in local conditions or were the result of an extended food strike across the Spaniards on the island. A Taíno, moved by the plight of the Spanish and thinking well of the officer, Pedro Margarite, who, according to Oviedo “was a man who did not commit or tolerate in others the mistreatment of the indigenous population” (51) had brought the alcalde a pair of live turtle doves for his supper. The Indian having departed happy with a few glass beads given to him in return for the
gifts of the birds, Pedro Margarite turned to his men to lament that the doves were not enough for all of them to eat. Faced with general encouragement to eat the doves, since he needed them most, being sicker than the rest, Oviedo reports the following gallant speech as the alcaide’s reply:

May God never allow me to behave as you suggest; since you have accompanied me in our hunger and toil until this moment, I would like to remain in your company and undergo the same fate as you, to live or to die, till God’s will has been served through our collective deaths from hunger or through our collective rescue through His benevolence.

(51)

This said, he released the turtle doves from a window in the tower and watched them fly away. The gesture, according to Oviedo, won him the admiration and undying loyalty of his men, who valued the alcaide’s grace and commitment and who vowed to follow his lead to rescue or death.

This dubious tale of Spanish chivalry in the midst of frightening and prolonged hunger encapsulates perfectly the ecological imbalance that the Spanish colonizers have brought to a society that—if we are to believe The Drake Manuscript’s depiction—lived in accordance to long-established principles of environmental sustainability. Bent on imposing a new labour system that would allow them to turn the newly discovered lands into economies of extraction, these Spanish soldiers, sailors, and adventurers were dying of hunger in the midst of remarkable natural abundance. Locked in their tower, dependent on food provided by exploited others, fearful of venturing into the forests (especially after the indigenous population had essentially declared war on them through agricultural attrition), they had to “heroically” adhere to their capitalist project or go native into sustainability (if they only knew how). It is a sad fate to die slowly from hunger within a few minutes’ walk from a seemingly endless supply of mangoes, papayas or avocados.

Why then, you could ask, do I find these tales of unnecessary hunger so compelling? To me they speak of the tragic moment of historical transition, a moment of heartbreaking replacement of one worldview for another, a moment that would inevitably lead to numerous deaths, countless species extinctions, and an assault upon the land that continues to this day as the Caribbean region remains in the grip of an economy of extraction that the alcaide at the San Tomás mine was willing to defend with his honour and life. The futile struggle of the uncelebrated Taíno heroes who tried to starve out the forces of empire is reminiscent of equally painful struggles in our island nations to fight against the new hotel that bars locals from their beaches, or against the sale of valuable agricultural land for a new golf course, or against a cruise-ship port that will destroy the surrounding coral reefs. The legacy of the starving Spaniards of Oviedo’s tale has been, ironically, a legacy of food insecurity as the Caribbean region—its subsistence agriculture under assault from the earliest stages of the colonization process—has not been able to feed itself for centuries; its labourers removed from the land, it cannot produce enough food to sustain its population. It must, therefore, work to provide the world with what the world wants in order to survive. Their capitalist dependency is a crucial one as the nations of the Caribbean basin (except for Cuba and Nicaragua) are net importers of food. It is not surprising, as the region faces
the environmental impact of its historical past, of that initial ecological revolution that keeps repeating itself from island to island—reduced rain because of deforestation, loss of soil fertility, destruction of fisheries as the mangroves have disappeared, despoiled landscapes as huge hotels closed their doors, leaving ruins on our beaches. You can add your own.

In *Landscape and Memory: Martinican Land-People-History*, a documentary by Renée Gosson and Eric Faden, three of Martinique’s most salient contemporary authors—Jean Bernabé, Raphaël Confiat, and Patrick Chamoiseau—argue for an understanding of the island’s marked environmental degradation as the most disturbing result of France’s colonial history and continued political control—as the disturbing by-product of enduring colonialism. The anxiety over the sustainability of Martinique’s physical territory allows these three proponents of the Créolité movement to bridge the gap between the local specificity of their movement’s concerns and the increasing interconnectedness brought about by intensifying globalization of which their colleague Édouard Glissant writes in his *Poétique de la Rélation* (*Poetics of Relation*). In *Landscape and Memory*, Chamoiseau, Confiat, and Bernabé identify the environmental problems facing Martinique as those same issues confronting the rest of the archipelago to which they belong: food insecurity, since Martinique produces only two per cent of the food its population consumes; the increasing bétonization (cementification) of the land as more land is taken away from agriculture for the building of hotels, supermarkets, shopping centres, and other infrastructure typical of tourism development; the pollution of land and rivers with fertilizers and insecticides used for agro-businesses on the island; the production of larger quantities of garbage than the island landfills can reasonably absorb; the destruction of mangroves and of the wildlife they support from a failure to understand their uniqueness as a “cradle of life”; and the disconnection of the Martinican population from its land and culture.

Both Chamoiseau and Confiat trust in the dream of greater local political autonomy—of finally achieving the goals that our Taínó agricultural rebels sought to begin—in the restoration and reorganization of land and water supplies as a necessary step towards an environmental balance that ultimately rests on creating a strong agrarian sector devoted to the cultivation of local foods for the local market. Chamoiseau uses his novel *Biblique des derniers gestes*, which has been described by Richard Watts as “an impassioned rant against ecological degradation,” to ponder how the island’s status between colonization and independence complicates environmental issues, particularly those related to control over resources such as land and water. Like land, on an island that is not politically autonomous and has become a “privileged site for the fulfillment of metropolitan fantasies of vacations in paradise,” “water [like food] is a local commodity,” access to which has become “a global issue.” Ultimately, for Chamoiseau as for Confiat, the development of a sustainable agrarian nation appears as the only solution to an economic impasse in which Martinique has only an “Economie-Prétexte” that subsists only on French state subsidies—a pretense, as Confiat has argued, “to give the appearance of an economy, that there are people who go to work, etc., but in reality, our country has been, and is, economically ruined” (Gosson 2005, 144).
In his essay “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory,” St. Lucian poet Derek Walcott describes the Caribbean region’s peasants and fishermen as drawing their working strength organically from the land—“like trees, like the sea almond or the spice laurel of the heights.” The image is a powerful one, as it rests on our understanding of the land as a sustaining force that feeds the trees as it had traditionally fed its local populations before Oviedo’s Spaniards made landfall. As “trees,” however, their survival is threatened by profound changes in the islands’ ecologies over which they have little control since, as the poet stresses, “every day on some island, rootless trees in suits are signing favourable tax breaks with entrepreneurs, poisoning the sea almond and the spice laurel of the mountains to their roots.” In “Antilles,” Walcott poignantly ponders the apocalyptic question of whether the destruction of Caribbean ecosystems begun in the name of colonialism so many centuries before could signal the loss of the region’s peoples, flora and fauna, asking if “a morning could come in which governments might ask what happened not merely to the forests and the bays but to a whole people.”

Notes

1 Throughout, translations of Oviedo’s Historia General are my own.

2 Oviedo’s claim that five endemic species of Hispaniolan mammals disappeared completely—that they, in fact, went extinct—has not been scientifically verified. The species he describes are indeed extinct, but he may be describing a local extinction followed later in the colonial process by a global extinction.

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“Black was never more beautiful,” proclaimed Eric Williams, prime minister of Trinidad and Tobago, in his Independence Day message in 1974 in the wake of his government’s purchase of an oil refinery and other assets from Shell Trinidad Ltd.¹ Four years earlier, Williams’ administration had narrowly survived a Black Power uprising, motivated in part by discontent at the lack of meaningful socio-economic reform in the country since independence in 1962.² Williams’ play on the Black Power slogan in his speech renders oil the means through which to unite the twin discourses of economic and cultural nationalism. The purchase of Shell’s holdings is not only meant to signal a determination to curtail foreign domination over Trinidad’s economy (a key grievance of the Black Power protesters), but is also celebrated as heralding the rebirth of the nation. The Independence Day message, delivered from the site of Shell’s operations in Point Fortin,
was accompanied by a flag-raising ceremony in which the oil major’s standard was lowered and that of Trinidad and Tobago hoisted in its place. Williams concludes his oration on a portentous note:

As we proceed to lower the flag of yesterday [...] and hoist the flag of today and tomorrow and tomorrow, the flag of our nation as against the flag of an external corporation, as we see the flag, our flag, flying high and riding proud in the breeze, symbolizing the ascent of the nation and the higher destiny of the citizens of Point Fortin, let us say, [...] we are going well” (Williams, Forged 80).

The Trinidadian state and its citizens, then, are presented as having entered a new era of independence, one in which oil functions as the (black) face of the island, the signifier of its sovereignty and progress.

Williams’ acclamation of the Shell purchase as ushering in a new dawn for Trinidad and Tobago may seem somewhat brazen given that his party, the People’s National Movement (PNM), had been in government for 18 years by that point, 12 of those at the helm of an independent country. But Williams had good reason for feeling confident. The spike in oil prices caused by the OPEC embargo in 1973 had begun to generate windfall profits for the local economy, precipitating a decade-long boom during which average revenues grew at an average annual rate of 44 per cent (Ryan, “Political Change” 126). “Money is no problem,” Williams famously boasted in the wake of the oil shock, the rise in revenues enabling the PNM to throw cash at the social grievances that had precipitated the unrest of the early 1970s.3 But the regime’s largesse did little to solve the structural weaknesses plaguing the island’s economy. Indeed, in many instances the infusion of oil money merely exacerbated the problems associated with the PNM’s rule. It did, however, contribute decisively to the shift in political discourse exemplified by Williams’ speech at Point Fortin. This shift was a reflection of the government’s new aim of creating “a national identity in energy” (Furlonge and Kaiser 539).

In what follows, I explore how the transformations in life- and environment-making through which the oil boom unfolded were inseparable from the production of a range of new cultural discourses in Trinidad. These included the kinds of narratives required as part of the government’s efforts to create a national identity in energy, as well as aesthetic forms such as novels and calypsos. As the oil boom rapidly reorganized existing social relations, there developed a new cultural politics of life. The government promoted new, petro-soaked modes of subjectivity, with the significant increase in mass consumption enabled by the influx of oil money radically altering normative understandings of what constituted the “good life.” The emphasis on oil-led industrialization that underwrote this shift in cultural politics also reinforced the terminal decline of the island’s sugar industry. The consequences of this, I will argue, are registered in a proleptic way in Sam Selvon’s The Plains of Caroni. Published in 1970, Selvon’s often overlooked novel sits on the cusp of an ecological revolution, involving the transformation not merely of Trinidad’s energy sector, but of whole ways of life.
Underwriting my approach to literary analysis is a form of environmental criticism that draws on the world-ecology perspective developed by Jason W. Moore. This perspective understands history as always co-produced by humans alongside the rest of nature. It argues that the processes through which historical systems such as capitalism develop (including, for example, colonization, industrialization, and financialization) must be grasped as not merely having consequences for the environment, but as ecological projects—as both producers and products of specific forms of life- and environment-making. On this view, capitalism is “not an economic system; it is not a social system; it is a way of organizing nature” (Moore 2). The capitalist world-system, in other words, is a world-ecology. The centrality of the Caribbean to the epochal reorganization of global natures through which this world-ecology emerged, as well as the often rapid and catastrophic nature of environmental change in the region, make writing from the archipelago a particularly fruitful locus for thinking through the implications of the world-ecology perspective for literary criticism. One constructive line of enquiry, I believe, is to consider the effects on cultural production of the ecological transformations entailed by the commodity frontiers through which capitalism secures the “cheap nature” required to sustain the world-economy (Moore 118). Such is my interest here in exploring how the environment-making movements of the sugar and oil frontiers in Trinidad have been implicated in practices of narrative-making.

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Trinidad’s oil industry dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, when the US company Merrimac drilled a successful oil well at La Brea (Mulchansingh 74). By 1940, the industry had established itself as the island’s dominant economic sector (Brereton 205). It would go on to play a vitally significant role in shaping the social and political life of the country in the latter half of the twentieth century. In this regard, 1956 stands as an important turning-point, marking the year in which the PNM came to power, but also the year in which Texaco acquired the assets of Trinidad Leaseholds Ltd. As James Millette observes, Texaco’s actions were to have serious economic repercussions:

The coming of the oil giant was to mark a decisive shift, not only towards big capital investment, but towards big United States investment in the country. It was the most significant step in the establishment of US hegemonic control of the country’s economy even before British overlordship was terminated by the winning of independence in 1962. Immediately, Texaco upgraded the throughput capacity of the Pointe-a-Pierre refinery from 75,000 to 124,000 barrels per day; and plans were laid for further expansion to 250,000 barrels, thereby making it one of the largest refineries under US control operating outside the continental USA. (67)

Crucially, the PNM endorsed Texaco’s take-over, earning it the ire of the Caribbean National Labour Party. The latter accused the PNM of having come under the domination of American oil interests, branding the party the “Petroleum National Movement” (Ryan, Race 133).
Perhaps the most striking example of the influence of oil in political life came in 1973. In September of that year, Williams unexpectedly announced at the PNM’s annual convention that he intended to retire, only to reverse his decision in December. The reasons for this volte-face have been much debated. Some argue that his announcement was merely a political stratagem designed to flush out opponents of his leadership. Others claim that his initial decision was genuine, but that he then changed his mind (Parris; Ryan, *Revolution*). Certainly Williams’ position in 1973 was a difficult one: the economy remained in a poor state and there was much social unrest. Indeed, the government was in the midst of a confrontation with an armed guerrilla movement, the National Union of Freedom Fighters, which had been formed in the aftermath of the Black Power revolt. If Williams was genuinely disillusioned with office in September, what had changed by December to convince him to persevere? One answer, of course, is the uptick in oil prices following the OPEC embargo. Williams would admit that the oil shock “made of the local scene a different ball game”: “If the Sheik could play, who is me?” he declared, in conscious parody of the calypsonian Cypher’s composition “If the Priest Could Play” (Regis 103).

Following this dramatic, petroleum-inflected twist in the trajectory of Trinidad and Tobago politics, there occurred that shift in government policy and rhetoric epitomized by Williams’ 1974 Independence Day Message. As the state now sought to construct a national identity in energy, oil’s significance changed: no longer just closely imbricated in the political life of the island, it became “an idiom for doing politics” (to borrow Michael Watts’ description of the situation in Nigeria [“Resource Curse?” 76]). Watts contends that “as a subterranean, *territorial resource that is highly centralized as property around the state,*” oil necessarily “channels claims over nature (‘our oil’) into a sort of ‘rights talk.’” This ‘rights talk’ “speaks to three questions: (1) local identity, territory and the rights that stem from them, (2) relations between local political and territorial claims and forms of governance (decentralization, participation, autonomy), and (3) links between various identity politics […] and notions of citizenship.” Underlying all three, concludes Watts, is “a notion of a nation-state, on which discussions of community, citizenship, and rights ultimately turn. It is no accident that so much of the rhetoric of oil raises questions of the nation (or the social body) or of national development” (207-08). Such was certainly the case in Trinidad, the increased importance of oil to the economy post-1973 quickly issuing in Williams’ new, petro-inflected discourse of national sovereignty and progress. As the oil dollars flowed, moreover, the rhetoric of national development could be concretized in spectacular infrastructural projects designed to showcase the modernity of the island.

What Fernando Coronil, writing with reference to Venezuela, calls the “Faustian trade” of petro-money for modernity was widely pursued by many oil-rich countries during the boom years of the 1970s (391). Andrew Apter describes how in Nigeria, for instance, “oil money transformed the […] landscape into images of national renewal,” with “new highways, centres, buildings, [and] processing plants” producing a “spectacle of development” (213). “The tangible signs of progress and abundance,” argues Apter, “ratified the new prosperity with visible evidence, producing a national dramaturgy of appearances and representations that beckoned toward modernity and brought it into being” (41). Something similar was the case in Trinidad, where the centrepiece of the government’s oil-driven development programme (and the most visible manifestation of its efforts to create a national identity in energy) was the Point Lisas industrial complex.
The wealth generated by the oil boom had led the government to seek to re-orient the island’s economy. Hitherto the PNM had prioritized import-substituting industrialization. Although this continued, the emphasis now was on the “utilization of oil revenues to create large-scale resource intensive export industries” (Thomas 283). And because the boom “happened to coincide with the discovery of huge natural gas reserves, the energy intensive export industries tended to be favoured” (Thomas 283). These new industrial activities, which centred on fertilizers, chemicals, iron and steel, were to be located at the Point Lisas complex. Speaking in 1977 at the start of the construction of the iron and steel plant, known as ISCOTT (Iron and Steel Company of Trinidad and Tobago), Williams celebrates the venture as heralding the island’s entrance into the brave new world of (petro)modernity:

Steel today; tomorrow aluminium. Maybe, the next day petrochemicals (and by petrochemicals I mean not just the production of simple fuels and intermediate products; but the production of finished petrochemicals that could lead to meaningful downstream activities in plastics and other modern-day chemicals). [...] We have taken what may be the more difficult road and that is—accepting the challenge of entering the world of steel, aluminium, methanol, fertilizer, petrochemicals, in spite of our smallness and in spite of our existing level of technology. We have accepted the challenge of using our hydrocarbon resources in a very definite industrialization process. I am certain that, bearing in mind the skills, the educational level and the ambitions of our people, particularly our young citizens, it was in fact the only choice we could have made. (Williams, Forged 84)

There is something of a modernist flavour to Williams’ celebration of the material vectors and velocities of “modern-day” industry, not least in the image of accelerated technological development with which he heralds Trinidad’s new future (“Steel today; tomorrow aluminium. Maybe, the next day petrochemicals”). The ISCOTT plant is not only construed as the spectacular embodiment of national progress; it is also presented as concretizing the hopes and ambitions of the Trinidadian people, responding to their longing to inhabit a new, petro-modern form of citizenship.

In this respect, Williams’ oil-soaked discourse represented an original twist on the ideology of citizenship that he had typically articulated in the 1950s and 1960s. The emphasis then had been on the importance of creolization in the context of Trinidad’s complex mix of ethnicities and cultures. An ideal “hybrid Trinidadian national subject” was posited as “necessary for the foundational legitimacy of the nation” (Puri 48). Here, for example, is Williams in his inaugural address following independence in 1962:

There can be no Mother India for those whose ancestors came from India [...]. There can be no Mother Africa for those of African origin [...]. There can be no Mother England and no dual loyalties [...] There can be no Mother China [...] and there can be no Mother Syria or no Mother Lebanon. A nation, like an individual, can have only one Mother. The only Mother we recognize is Mother Trinidad and Tobago, and Mother cannot discriminate between her children. (History 281)
Williams’ stern evocation of an organicist and patriarchal vision of the national family was intended to promote creolization as the glue to bind Trinidad’s multiracial society. (In practice, of course, the discourse of cultural hybridity was frequently used to divert attention from the persistence of social inequalities.) In the oil-boom era, this ideology of citizenship was reinforced, but also re-inflected by the pursuit of petro-led modernization. Writing on the Point Lisas complex, Graham Holton accurately summarizes the cultural work such development projects performed:

Williams saw petroleum-based industrialization as the quickest way to remove Trinidad’s stigma of slavery, indentured labour, and colonialism derived from its sugar industry. It was not by accident that Williams chose the Point Lisas estate, an old sugar plantation covering 672 hectares on the south-west coast of Trinidad. Point Lisas was to symbolise the creation of a new Trinidad that had overcome its woeful colonial past. The new industrialization was to bring racial harmony ‘where sugar divided.’ An industrialized Trinidad would be a wealthy, modern nation without ethnic and class conflict. (102)

Against what was presented as sugar’s retrograde divisiveness and its association with the colonial past, therefore, the island’s new, oil-based industrialization was now promoted—alongside creolization—as the guarantor of racial harmony and as the basis of the freedoms of the petro-modern citizen.

However, just as the ideology of creole citizenship was often mobilized as a means to mask ongoing social inequalities, so Williams’ emphasis on the racially-integrative role of the new industrialization was viewed by some as obscuring the PNM’s complicity in maintaining ethnic divisions in Trinidad. As Percy Hintzen explains,

Conditions of regime survival pre-empted the implementation of a viable fishing and agricultural policy. The East Indian population, which has an almost exclusive predomination as agricultural labour and own-account small- and medium-sized farmers, was not politically strategic for the PNM’s hold on power. The regime depended for its mass support upon the racial mobilization of lower-class blacks. To survive it had to allocate resources in ways that proved most beneficial to the middle- and upper-class sectors of society while engaging in a system of racial patronage directed at the black lower-class population. This meant that spending on agriculture had to be neglected. (176)

The PNM’s neglect of agriculture in favour of industry was thus felt by many Indian farmers and rural labourers to be of a piece with the government’s favouritism towards its black supporters.
The failure to put in place a strong system of support for agriculture was reflected in the sector’s economic performance. In the post-war years, the sugar industry’s output declined markedly as a percentage of GDP, falling from 17.8% to 5.9% between 1952 and 1970. Over the course of the boom years it would sink to 2.3%. Oil, by contrast, grew from 22% to 42% over the same period (Vertovec 132). In his speech to mark the start of ISCOTT’s construction, Williams celebrates the supersession of sugar by the planned new energy-intensive industries. “Here at Point Lisas,” he proclaims, “sugar cane gives way to wire rods” (83). The land at Point Lisas had previously belonged to Caroni Ltd., a subsidiary of Tate and Lyle, which in the 1950s and 1960s had dominated Trinidad’s sugar industry, accounting for 90% of all output at the time of independence (Brereton 217). It is at this point that I want to turn to Selvon’s *The Plains of Caroni*. Set in a sugar-cane village, the novel was written by Selvon following his return to Trinidad in 1969. His trip had been financed by Tate and Lyle, who asked him to produce a book on the island’s sugar industry (Fabre 69). Tate and Lyle was, in fact, on the verge of disengaging from its Trinidad operations; in 1970, it sold a majority share in Caroni Ltd. to the PNM government, before ending all involvement in the company in 1976 (Pollard 828). Against this backdrop, Selvon’s novel conveys a deep sense of impending change, not only highlighting the difficulties facing Trinidad’s agricultural sector, but also foreshadowing the emergent cultural politics of life associated with the triumph of Emperor Oil over King Sugar.

*The Plains of Caroni* registers the struggle over efforts to reorganize life- and environment-making on Trinidad’s sugar frontier in the context of rising costs of production and declining competitiveness. As the character Romesh observes (and in testament to the research Selvon undertook during his Tate and Lyle-sponsored trip), “it takes 1.94 man days to produce a ton of sugar in Hawaii, and 15.21 in Trinidad” (72). Romesh works as an agricultural scientist for the management of a fictionalized version of Caroni Ltd., which is seeking to rationalize its operations through greater mechanization. The plot of the novel turns on the controversy caused by the testing of a new harvesting machine on the sugar estate where Romesh’s family works. The estate labourers fear, rightly, that the success of the machine will see them lose their jobs. The threat of disruption it represents to the prevailing configuration of human and extra-human natures is emphasized by the way the harvester’s arrival is experienced as a strange, other-worldly event. Various described as a “magic machine” (85), a “space machine” (90) and a “giant monster” (91), the harvester is initially suspected of being a “metal Trojan horse” ready to “disgorge eighty-eight men” (85). Its operation is a “miracle” (86) that leaves Romesh’s cane-cutter brother, Teeka, “not sure of what he was seeing” (85). Understood as providing “a glimpse of the world outside [the village] and Trinidad” (90), the oil-powered machine represents to the agricultural labourers the encroachment of an alien (petro)modernity into their lives.

The arrival of the machine as heralding an ecological revolution that will transform not just working practices, but a whole way of life, is best exemplified by the fate of Balgobin. An aged and experienced cane-cutter (and, it will transpire, Romesh’s real father), Balgobin’s subjectivity has been fundamentally shaped by the sugar frontier. His body is said to ooze “with the sweet smell of molasses, and sugarcane, and rum. By smell alone, he was part of the plantation” (20). Such is the imprint left by the rhythms of cane-cutting on his habitus that without his cutlass he cannot “keep his balance”: “He was like a man without a limb: so accustomed were his fingers to nest around the handle that they were curled although they only clutched empty space” (130). It is worth recalling the presentation of
the sugar industry in the petro-inflected political discourse of the 1970s, where it was associated with the bitter legacy of slavery and colonialism in contrast to the bright new future promised by energy-intensive industrialization. Balgobin’s exhausted body, scarred and deformed by estate work, certainly testifies to the industrial pathologies of the sugar frontier. For the old cane-cutter, however, his labour (and in particular his skill with his cutlass) is also a source of pride and identity:

He began cutting, his arm arcing the air with [his cutlass] in a grace of movement. It did not seem as if he hurried, and yet cane after cane fell swiftly. Every move he made had purpose and effect, and after a minute or so he became engrossed with the rhythm of the work […] It was always so with him in the fields. (92-93)

The appearance of the harvester is thus a direct threat not merely to Balgobin’s livelihood, but to his sugar-moulded subjectivity and sense of self-identity.

The potential of the harvester to overturn his way of life induces a kind of delirium in Balgobin. Maddened by the machine, he sets off at night to confront it. In a dream-like sequence focalized in part through the old labourer’s disturbed consciousness—the unrealism of the scene emphasizing the de-realizing effect had by the harvester’s disruption of everyday life—Balgobin hacks at the surrounding sugar-cane, imagining it to be the “eighty-eight coward vagabonds” who had been hiding in the machine’s Trojan horse-like belly (93). He then proceeds to attack the harvester with his cutlass. Perceiving it as a monster, he succeeds in severing one of its “veins”—in reality a pipeline that spews oil all over his feet. Balgobin uses the oil to set the harvester alight, destroying it. This will be something of a pyrrhic victory, however. For the image of Balgobin, his feet sunk in oil, his cutlass irreparably damaged by his attack on the machine, could be said to foreshadow the future direction of Trinidad’s economy—the triumph of oil over sugar—and the associated re-making of subjectivities along new, petro-oriented lines. Balgobin himself has no place in this world; and in this regard it is telling that following his encounter with the harvester his health deteriorates and the novel ends with his death.

Balgobin’s fate and the sense it embodies of a community and, indeed, a country in transition has a formal analogue in the organization of the text. Frank Birbalsingh has complained that \textit{The Plains of Caroni} is merely a “collection of sketches and anecdotes jumbled together in flimsy frames of romantic intrigue” (155-56). But this is to miss the way the disjointed, uneven quality of the narrative speaks precisely to the situation Selvon encountered on his return to Trinidad in 1969. The novel’s lack of unity is an expression of the tensions and ruptures that surfaced in this period, with the island on the cusp of the Black Power uprising and the prevailing modes of life- and environment-making beginning to unravel.
If, in exploring the troubled trajectory of the sugar frontier, *The Plains of Caroni* registers certain emergent trends and tendencies in Trinidadian society, it is unlikely that Selvon could have foreseen the spectacular way in which these would be manifested during the oil boom. As Daniel Miller observes, the island’s inhabitants “seem to have experienced [the boom] as something on a par with a tropical storm, which, with hindsight, passed over the country leaving an astonishing trail of detritus in its wake” (*Modernity* 204). As the spike in oil prices made itself felt at the national level, wages shot up and new forms of mass consumption emerged. The “number of cars in the [...] country increased by 65 per cent between 1974 and 1980, and the number of televisions trebled over the decade. Electricity became more readily available throughout the island, and refrigerators, stereos, TVs and video recorders became universal possessions” (Vertovec 138). Miller’s ethnographic fieldwork provides a snapshot of the responses of various islanders to the topsy-turvy logic of this period:

‘In ’73 I felt it first, I got a raise in salary from $250 a month to nearly $475 a month.’

‘People had money coming out of their ears. You would see people go into a store and buy 100tt whiskey and whatever top brands of everything. Everybody had on Gucci jeans, Calvin Klein, Reebok shoes.’

‘We were even close to importing winter coats and so on because everything was being brought into Trinidad. You know things had gotten so out of hand I was ashamed.’

(*Capitalism* 27)

This was an era in which, as the Mighty Sparrow sang, “Capitalism Gone Mad.” His calypso was one among many to critique the easy-money, free-spending ethos that took hold in Trinidad. “Money today change up so much life / Calculators take the place of wife,” sang Black Stalin in “Money” (1980). King Austin, in “Progress” (1980), saw “consciousness abate, / As today we live recklessly / Money makes egos inflate / And thereby creates a turbulent state” (1980). The PNM, however, was keen to encourage the new consumerism—not least, one suspects, precisely because of its capacity to make “consciousness abate.” The increased availability of consumer durables enabled the proliferation of a whole new set of “lived practices and visions of the good life” (to borrow Matthew Huber’s description of the impact had by oil in the re-making of post-war US society [305]). Williams’ oil-soaked discourse of national progress appeared to have become reality. Petroleum, both as the source of wealth and as materially constitutive of many of the consumer durables, now shaped the reproduction of everyday life in Trinidad more deeply than ever before.

Of all the consumer items popularized during the boom, the automobile was perhaps the most significant to the new forms of life-making to emerge in this period. Cars had been important in Trinidad prior to the boom as markers of prestige. As they became more widely available, however, they not only seemed to symbolize the era as one “of new possibilities for many people,” but also came to “dominate the Trinidadian self-image” (Miller, *Modernity* 237). “In contemporary Trinidad,” writes Miller, “the car is probably the artefact which outweighs even clothing in its ability to incorporate and express the individual” (237). Given the fundamental association of the automobile with the new technologies and velocities of modernity, the popularity of cars as “a vehicle for expressive identity” (Miller 240) dovetailed neatly with the government narrative of Trinidad’s entry into the age of petro-modern citizenship. But the car also became a key trope in critical responses to the boom era by writers and calypsonians. With this in mind I want to turn now to V. S. Naipaul’s *Guerrillas* (1975).
A cynical and disturbing novel, *Guerrillas* offers an imaginative reconstruction of the Black Power Killings in Trinidad, while also alluding to a series of other events of the early 1970s, including the Black Power uprising and the government’s struggle against the National Union of Freedom Fighters. However, the oil boom is absent, at least in any explicit sense. This is perhaps understandable given that the novel was written during the early years of the boom. But the text also makes no mention of the island’s oil economy in general. This is a surprise given its otherwise forensic, if problematic, dissection of Trinidadian society. Moreover, in a companion essay exploring the real-life incidents on which *Guerrillas* is based, Naipaul not only mentions oil but situates the Black Power Killings in the context of the social fallout from Trinidad’s dependence on the petroleum industry, the revenues from which are “magically cycled” through the island, helping to sustain an otherwise unproductive economy (“Michael X” 178). *Guerrillas* evokes the consequences of such petro-led under-development, but oil is curiously displaced from its presentation.

I will return to the reasons for this displacement in a moment. First I wish to highlight how, despite not being represented explicitly in the novel, oil’s shadow falls unrelentingly over Naipaul’s prose:

After lunch Jane and Roche left their house on the Ridge to drive to Thrushcross Grange. They drove down to the hot city at the foot of the hills, and then across the city to the sea road [...].

After the market, where refrigerated trailers were unloading; after the rubbish dump burning in the remnant of mangrove swamp [...]; after the new housing estates, rows of unpainted boxes of concrete and corrugated iron already returning to the shantytowns that had been knocked down for this development; [...] after this, the land cleared a little.

[...]

Traffic was heavy in this area of factories. But the land still showed its recent pastoral history. Here and there, among the big sheds and the modern buildings [...], were still fields, remnants of the big estates, together with remnants of the estate villages [...]. Sometimes there was a single rusting car in a sunken field, as though, having run off the road, it had simply been abandoned; sometimes there were heaps of junked vehicles.

[...] Sometimes there were rows of red brick pillars [...]. It was what remained of an industrial park, one of the failed projects of the earliest days of independence. Tax holidays had been offered to foreign investors; many had come for the holidays and had then moved on elsewhere. (1-3)

Oil is absent here in any direct sense; yet it saturates every line of the text. For what we are presented with is a landscape and an account of that landscape organized around the automobile and the infrastructure of petro-modernity. Naipaul’s narrative is propelled and textured by the movement
of Jane and Roche’s car through the city and the specific kinds of sensory experiences this engenders. The landscape flashes by in a sequence of distinct snapshots to produce a linear, serialized view of the cityscape, one mediated throughout by the windows of the car. In this way, the text underscores not only Jane and Roche’s alienation from an increasingly reified lifeworld, but also how the demands of petrolic life have fundamentally reshaped environments and human sensoria.

Significantly, the above passages present Port of Spain as a de-industrialized space, a portrait that might well be read as an oblique critique of the political ecology of Trinidad’s oil frontier. The depiction of the landscape as degraded and decayed, littered with junked cars and dilapidated factories, serves as something of a riposte to Williams’ contemporaneous celebration of the country’s bright, new petro-powered future. The suggestion is that Trinidad’s incipient course of oil-led development will prove hollow and unsustainable; the images of broken, rusted cars suggest the decay of Trinidad’s new dream of modernity just as much as the reference to the failure of the island’s policy of industrialization by invitation.

Naipaul may have been writing on the cusp of the boom, but his novel’s gloomy forebodings would prove fairly accurate. By the early 1980s, the oil boom had turned to bust. Despite the windfall gains of the previous decade, “unemployment in 1985 stood at 15 per cent of the labour force, with the huge investments at Point Lisas yielding less than 1 per cent of total employment” (Thomas 293). The massive ISCOTT plant in particular had become a visible white elephant, haemorrhaging money (Thomas 284-85). The proleptic quality of Naipaul’s narrative could be said to derive from its registration of tendencies already at work in Trinidad’s oil-dominated economy, which the boom only exacerbated. Most significant among these was the petroleum industry’s corrosive impact on other branches of the economy as oil profits forced up exchange rates, thereby reducing the competitiveness of domestically produced goods and services (so-called Dutch disease). Thus, as the boom unfolded the country found itself earning an excess of wealth (in the form of oil rents and revenues) even as its productive economy stagnated. “Growth without development” was how Trinidad’s Central Statistical Office described the state of the island’s economy in the very year Guerrillas was published (qtd. in Stewart 724).

Writing with reference to the Nigerian oil boom, Apter offers an illuminating comparison. Since the value created for the Nigerian economy by oil was “based not on the accumulation of surplus value” but on the circulation of externally-generated oil rents and revenues, “oil replaced labour as the basis of national development, producing a deficit of value and an excess of wealth, or a paradoxical profit as loss” (14, 201). The various signs of economic development the state had promoted—infrastructure projects, new institutional buildings, an abundance of money and goods—turned out to be precisely that: signs, lacking substance. Such was the “magical realism” of Nigerian modernity, as Apter puts it (41). Oil profits were not productively absorbed; hence, “underlying the appearance of instant development [...] was a negative dialectic of internal consumption that expanded the state at its own expense by pumping money into the public sector while privatizing public office and resources—
partly along ethnic lines—and by absorbing organized assaults on its position” (44). In this context, corruption and the dispensing of political patronage could flourish, hollowing out democratic political structures and, ultimately, eroding the very foundations of citizenship and civil society.

Elaborating on the tendency for oil booms to have a pernicious effect on both the productive economy and modern structures of governance, Watts suggests that oil “simultaneously elevates and expands the centrality of the nation-state as a vehicle for modernity, progress, civilization, and at the same time produces conditions which directly challenge and question those very same, and hallowed, tenets of nationalism and development” (“Petro-Violence” 208). Such dynamics were clearly visible in Trinidad during the boom, not only in the form of those white-elephant development projects such as ISCOTT, but also at the level of the state and of political institutions. The boom “enabled the regime, through authoritative decision-making, to employ the state as an instrument for reallocating the phenomenally expanded oil income into politically strategic sectors of the domestic economy” (Hintzen 143). The Trinidadian state, marked by the imprint of colonial history, was already characterized by a certain prebendalism. Now, with its “tremendously increased revenue, the regime was able to sustain and expand the system of patronage” aimed at its electoral base in the black lower classes (much to the ire of the rural Indian populace), while also meeting “the accumulative claims of the country’s middle and upper classes” (Hintzen 143). The effect of such clientelism was to further hollow out already precarious democratic structures and intensify class and ethnic divisions.

Once again it was the calypso that led the way in critiquing the phenomenon of oil-backed patronage. Most striking, perhaps, was Black Stalin’s “Piece of the Action” (1976):

Oil drilling, money making
Mr Divider here is a warning
Mih blood in this country
Mih sweat in this country
So when you sharing your oil bread
Ah say remember me
[...]
Fix up my little piece of dough
Before oil finish and the Yankees go
[...]
Mr Divider, [. . .], so much of bread you saying,
You spending on food a year
But ah cyar get flour,
Ah cyar get butter
And when Ah get rice the thing so dear

[...]

Ah say T&TEC defrosting mih fridge and still
Month end they still sending a big bill
Piece of the action, Ah tell you, piece of the action
Local Arabs feteing
Two Mercedes one driving
And my old bus stalling

[...]

Stalin’s calypso offers a brilliantly concise account of the life- and environment-making dynamics of the oil boom, not least through its various plays on the word “bread.” There is the combination of excess and want, of wealth without development: oil bread is everywhere, but real food is still hard to come by; and when it is available, the inflation caused by the boom has made it prohibitively expensive. There is the continuation of US imperialist domination (undercutting Williams’ assertions of a new oil-based sovereignty). And there is the saturation of life with new consumer durables (the fridge, the car). The contrast drawn between the two Mercedes and Stalin’s rickety old bus (reminiscent of Naipaul’s junked cars) crystallizes the uneven quality of Trinidad’s modernity, the simultaneous over- and under-development of the island.

While calypsos were able to furnish direct critiques of the “oil drilling, money making” logic of the boom years, however, the novel form seems to have had more difficulty in responding. We have already touched on oil’s displacement in Naipaul’s Guerillas. And broadly speaking, while the effects of the 1970s boom—the rise in mass consumerism, say—have often received attention, it is rare to find a Trinidadian novel that deals explicitly with the oil windfall as the immediate cause of the upheavals. There are exceptions (Neil Bissoondath’s 1988 A Casual Brutality springs to mind), and the island’s more recent, post-2000 hydrocarbon boom has a more obvious presence in narrative fiction (see, for example, Oonya Kempadoo’s All Decent Animals [2013]). But in general, the novel form tends to struggle when confronted by the topsy-turvy logic of the boom era.

The problem here, I think, has much to do with the implications for narrative of oil’s “magical” capacity to produce something out of nothing. Oil, as Ryszard Kapuscinski once observed, “creates the illusion of a completely changed life, life without work, life for free [...] The concept of oil expresses perfectly the eternal human dream of wealth achieved through lucky accident” (35). Discussing how oil shapes narratives of development, Jennifer Wenzel describes it as a kind of deus ex machina: “a
miraculous agent, external to a historical narrative, whose arrival makes possible what is otherwise impossible within the narrative’s own terms. That is to say, there is something almost anti-narrative about the ontology of oil, if narrative is understood as the working out of cause and effect and oil is understood to produce something out of nothing” (212). In circumstances such as obtain in Trinidad and Nigeria, moreover, where oil windfalls give fresh impetus to already existing structures of prebendalism, oil’s anti-narrative qualities are reinforced by the similarly anti-narrative qualities of patronage and clientelism. For the latter, too, introduce an element of the miraculous into everyday life, fostering a situation in which an individual’s existence might suddenly be transformed on the whim of a benevolent patron. Thus, Stalin’s Mr Divider (Williams) is himself something of a *deus ex machina*: win his favour, receive his oil bread, and you, too, could be driving a Mercedes and not an old bus.

The volatility and whimsicality of a social world structured along such clientelistic lines, combined with the illusions induced by the magic of oil booms, perpetuate into the postcolonial era what Shake Keane once called the “sense of the unreality of colonial life” (qtd. in Nanton 76). In this regard, it should be no surprise that so many authors have explored “the idea that Trinidadian people inhabit a social reality underwritten by fantasy” (Evans 188). Certainly this is at the heart of Naipaul’s *Guerrillas*, where it is embodied most arresting in the novel’s deluded protagonist, Jimmy Ahmed. A would-be writer and revolutionary, Jimmy produces degraded, autohagiographic versions of Gothic romances. The parallel between his ersatz politics and his imitative prose—whimsical, lacking internal necessity, and overdetermined by his personal neuroses—gestures to the problems posed to novelistic form by the fantastical quality of Trinidadian social reality. The hollowing out of narrative-making in Jimmy’s fictions encodes the hollowing out of nation-making in Trinidad.

Crucially, however, Naipaul can only approach these issues in terms of Jimmy’s individual psychopathology. The problem of representation is not incorporated as a formal principle of the novel, which remains confident in its realist anatomization of the delusions of its central characters. Rather, the crisis in narrative-making is displaced on to Jimmy’s (psychologically crisis-ridden) prose. The narrative’s distance from Trinidad, in the sense that it takes Trinidadian society as an object to be dissected, is replicated formally in its objectification of the representational dilemma through Jimmy’s “novel” and not within itself. Insofar as it does respond to the pressures brought to bear on representation by the dynamics of the oil economy, it does so through a series of hysterical, Gothic-inflected phobic responses to the landscape, women and black bodies. These responses register the new forms of environment-making attendant on the boom, which involve the suturing together of human and extra-human natures in strange new combinations. They do so, however, at the level of what might be termed the ecological unconscious of the novel. What remains is to turn the representational problem posed by the oil boom and its energizing of the patronage system into a constructive formal principle.

Such is the achievement, I want to argue in conclusion, of the work of Earl Lovelace. Lovelace’s most recent novel, *Is Just a Movie* (2011), deals explicitly with the petro-driven politics of both the 1970s and post-2000 booms. Indeed, it directly engages with the government’s efforts to “create a national identity in energy.” Against the backdrop of an oil-fuelled modernization drive, the narrative presents
a prime minister-figure whose declarations of a bright, new, energy-intensive future—"if we are to enter the modern epoch as a contending force that the world shall respect"—must "ensure that every rural community be given electricity" (124)—unmistakably echo those of Williams in the 1970s. This discourse is subject to ironic scrutiny in the text. But the novel also works to mediate and objectify in its own narrative apparatus the experiential peculiarities and aesthetic dilemmas that derive from oil’s seemingly miraculous transfiguration of social reality. Thus, for example, Lovelace very deliberately shifts narrative gears when invoking the post-2000 boom, switching to a more obviously "magical realist" style as a means to capture the "petro-magic" quality of Trinidadian modernity.

Prior to Is Just a Movie, however, Lovelace’s work had already demonstrated a capacity to confront the topsy-turvy logic of the oil frontier. Take The Dragon Can’t Dance (1979), published at the peak of the boom. As with Naipaul’s Guerrillas, explicit references to the oil economy are absent here, but (unlike Naipaul) the novel’s formal inventiveness allows for the narrative internalization of the boom’s reorganization of life- and environment-making in such a way as to produce it as an object of critique. Tellingly, Dragon erects a form of narrative scaffolding that will be revealed to lack a corresponding interior substance. In the first five and last two chapters, the text narrates the lives of its major protagonists by dedicating a chapter to each, designating their role via chapter headings such as "The Princess," "The Dragon," or "The Bad John." These labels, however, are shown in the chapters that follow to be inadequate to, or even at odds with, the personhood of the respective characters. The allotted roles or identities come to be recognized as hollow shells, the meaning they may once have possessed evacuated, with the characters needing to shed these carapaces if they are to achieve a kind of existential fullness—what Lovelace often refers to as "aliveness." It is worth stressing here the novel form’s fundamental association with modernity and the modern nation-state: as Fredric Jameson has observed, in the Third World "the imported form which is the novel is fully as much a component of modernization as the importation of automobiles" (476). In this regard, the lack of a substance corresponding to Dragon’s narrative scaffolding might be read as the aesthetic correlative to those modernizing development projects, such as ISCOTT, which the oil boom enabled yet rendered hollow through its erosion of the productive economy.

But to say that this narrative scaffolding lacks a corresponding substance is not to say that it is merely empty. It is inhabited by a content, only one governed by a very different logic—a content that seeks to burst the bounds of conventional novelistic discourse, drawing on a range of popular Trinidadian cultural practices to become the stylistic abstraction of an alternative mode of life. This is the Lovelace sentence: characterized by its distinctive combination of Faulknerian modernism and the rhythms of calypso and steelband, it is a spiralling, voluble, unruly instrument. The way in which Lovelace’s writing explodes outwards with a centrifugal force, spilling from one theme or incident to the next, recalls Trinidad’s economic extroversion and the volatility caused by the island’s dependency on the fluctuating fortunes of the oil frontier. It might also be said to encode the movements of a society organized around the arbitrary and capricious dynamics of patronage. Yet this literary style simultaneously stages the quest for a new way of organizing human and extra-human natures. Rhythm is meaning too, Lovelace has declared (Growing 94). And the rhythms of calypso and steelpan that inhabit his sentences bespeak the search for organizational structures and forms of practice coincident with and capable of channelling in fulfilling ways the energies of the mass of the people.
What is at stake here is perhaps best summarized by Lovelace himself in his short story “A Brief Conversion” (1988). Here the narrator Travey, for whom his Uncle Bango is all he has to “pit against the desolate humbling of our landscape” (27), wonders what it is that his uncle possesses that he finds so inspiring:

I suppose I must call it style. It was not style as adornment, but style as substance. His style was not something that he had acquired to enhance an ability; rather, it existed prior to any ability or accomplishment—it was affirmation and self looking for a skill to wed it to, to save it and maintain it, to express it; it was self searching for substance, for meaning. (27)

What Travey says of Bango’s style could be said to apply equally to Lovelace’s literary style. Those long, sinewy sentences informed by the rhythms of various Trinidadian cultural practices represent a self “searching for substance”—a Trinidadian self seeking out “a skill to wed” itself to. This search entails a rejection of the empty promises of Williams’ petro-modern citizenship, inextricable from the hollowing out of Trinidad’s productive economy and its continued domination by imperialist oil interests. Instead, what is sought is a substance or skill in the form of autonomously organized modes of life- and environment-making that would allow the Trinidadian “self” to realize itself fully.

Notes

1 For reasons of brevity, I have tended hereafter to shorten Trinidad and Tobago—the official name of what is a twin-island state—to Trinidad.

2 The Black Power Revolution began in February 1970 following demonstrations by students and unemployed persons. By April the movement had swelled, as urban and rural workers joined the uprising. With a general strike apparently imminent, Williams declared a State of Emergency on 21 April and all the major spokespeople of the movement were arrested. Despite a mutiny in the army by militant junior officers in protest at the arrests, the revolution was stymied and the government was able to reassert control.

3 Despite the frequent citation of Williams’ declaration, there is some confusion as to his exact words and in what context they were uttered. It has been suggested that he was in fact misquoted, and that the phrase he used was “Money is not the issue”, spoken in parliament with reference to the development of a sports facility.

4 I borrow the term “irrealism” from Michael Löwy, for whom it designates modes of writing in which realism is absent or becomes warped in some way through the incorporation of elements of the fantastic, marvellous, or dreamlike (194-95). Elsewhere I have argued (2012) that irrealist literary forms such as surrealism, magic realism, or the Gothic might be especially well suited to expressing the feelings of strangeness and rupture engendered by rapid reorganizations of human and extra-human natures. The current article represents a further specification of that argument.
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Informal Urbanism and the Hard Question of the Anthropocene

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The theme of informal urbanism is perhaps not an obvious choice for a special issue devoted to ecocriticism. There is, to be sure, a well-established recognition of the relationship between the urban and the natural within the field of ecocriticism (e.g., Bennet and Teague 1999; Williams 1973), but for some in the environmental humanities, the city is still considered to be one of the “others” of nature. And the kinds of places that fall under the general heading of informal urbanism (shantytowns, squatter cities, favelas, barrios, bidonvilles, megaslums, etc.) are often associated with the worst of the destructive forces unleashed by large-scale urbanization, including pollution, urban sprawl, encroachment, and social injustice. But it has become abundantly clear that the future of humanity will be ever more urban, meaning that any attempt to think seriously about the environment must factor in the various ecological entanglements of cities. And within this field, informal urbanism must play a role, especially in the Global South, where more than half of all city dwellers inhabit some kind of self-built housing. Given all this, I believe that there can be no viable discourse of sustainability that does not factor in the informal-urbanism question, and, conversely, that close consideration of the various roles that informal urbanism plays may suggest useful new strategies for adapting to the era of anthropogenic climate change.
Clearly, the phenomenon of informal urbanism is an important social and humanitarian issue in its own right, especially given the dismal conditions that often prevail in informal settlements which are typically impoverished, illegal, insecure, poorly served by public services and utilities, and subject to eviction or demolition without notice. But the subject takes on added urgency when we consider it in light of the advent of what many are calling the Anthropocene age, defined as the geological epoch marked by the preponderance of mankind’s impact on our planet’s surface and environment. Whatever else it may imply, the notion of the Anthropocene asks us to do three important things: first, to reframe our understanding of environmentalism on a planetary scale; second, to draw attention to humankind’s embeddedness within nature; and third, to ask if human societies have the ability to modify their behaviour sufficiently to mitigate their environmental impact in time to avert a human-induced biological catastrophe.

Some in the humanities and social sciences have contested this use of the concept by pointing out that the undifferentiated universality of the term “Anthropos” seems to imply that responsibility for human environmental impact is shared equally by all of humanity when in fact a relatively small minority of humans are responsible for the vast majority of the impact (see Morton 2014 and Parenti and Moore 2016). This is a point that resonates with particular poignancy in the Caribbean context, for reasons that will be discussed momentarily. Nonetheless, it remains important for the way in which it brings into sharp focus what Ian Morris calls the “hard ceiling” of a resource ceiling defined not just in regional terms, but on a planetary level (see Morris 2010). And this brings us to what I call the “hard question” of the Anthropocene, which requires us to envisage the outright exhaustion of the planet’s most precious resources and to ask how best to balance such long-term environmental concerns against the equally important need to promote economic development and social well-being.

In the Caribbean context, this Anthropocenic encounter with the hard ceiling is already being prefigured in places like Haiti, which has experienced catastrophic levels of deforestation and soil erosion due to human policies going back to the colonial period (such as slavery and industrial-scale slash-and-burn monoculture) and the early years of the nation (through its land laws). But a big part of the difficulty of the problem in the broader Caribbean context is that the islands, as well as the coastal regions of the mainland, will be among the first and most powerfully affected by climate change, even though they have contributed relatively little to its main catalyst (fossil fuel consumption). This, as we know, is concentrated in other, richer parts of the world, including, most egregiously, its continental neighbour to the North. Caribbean citizens can certainly do much to improve stewardship of the local environment but relatively little, proportionately, to fight directly against climate change itself, except perhaps through their interventions into international discussions and debates on the topic. Whether they are for or against globalization in the economic sense, then, Caribbean climate-change ecologists must be globalists. (See Heise 2008 for a related set of thoughts on the international dissemination of environmental risk in the era of globalization.)
Climate change and informal urbanism

How then does climate change relate to the phenomenon of informal urbanism? As it turns out, the interaction of climate change, poverty, and housing have been much in the news lately, with growing recognition that climate change will force many people out of rural and coastal areas, depriving them of their homes and livelihoods. According to estimates by the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security and the International Organization for Migration, “Between 50 million and 200 million people—mainly subsistence farmers and fishermen—could be displaced by 2050 because of climate change” (Davenport and Robertson 2016). Many of those displaced people, indeed probably the vast majority, will find themselves in the nearest city that offers better opportunities for survival. Why? Because “[m]ost poor people have neither the means nor the international connections needed to actually flee a country... So if their homes become untenable, they instead move to the nearest safe place—which is often the nearest city” (sociologist Cristina Bradatan, quoted in Meyer 2016). And when these “climate refugees” arrive in the city, they will find cities that are ill-equipped to receive them, meaning that they will likely be joining the many millions already living in the informal settlements. Adding insult to injury, informal settlements are themselves particularly vulnerable to climate change-induced disasters. As a Slum Dwellers International (SDI) document puts it, “Natural disasters are not ‘equal-opportunity destroyers’. The urban poor are the most badly hit. They have poorer quality housing and insufficient ‘risk-reducing’ infrastructure (piped water, sewers, electricity and good roads)” (Walker 2014).

All of this confirms the extent to which the issue of informal urbanism is intertwined with the issue of climate change. And also that a better understanding of the relationship between the two is a matter of utmost urgency. To be sure, solutions to the housing problem cannot provide direct solutions to the climate problem. But progress on the housing front can help to mitigate the human costs of climate change while also suggesting behavioural modifications that have value in the larger fight against climate change. It is no accident, then, and perhaps a promising sign, that the recent publications of the United Nations Human Settlements Program (aka UN-Habitat) have increasingly prioritized the notion of sustainability, both economic and environmental.2 The big question is what we do with all this information. What is the best way to address the concerns of the world’s slum dwellers in light of climate change?

Mike Davis, in his influential Planet of slums (2006), reacted with well-researched outrage. Struck by the extreme misery that is characteristic of Third-World slums (open sewers, lack of running water, polluted land, disease, hunger, etc.), he sees them as emblematic of the increasing disparity between rich and poor that has accompanied the rise of globalized capital and the dominance of the “Washington consensus” in the 1980s. Davis devotes space to localized environmental concerns (see chapter 6, “Slum Ecology”), but does not give much consideration to the broader issue of climate change. For him, urban informality provides above all the occasion for a Marxist critique of neo-liberal economics, globalization and financialization. Short of a revolutionary movement able to radically transform the current system, Davis sees no future that doesn’t involve the ever-increasing immiseration of the world’s poor. He is quite dismissive of attempts (like those of the self-help housing guru John F.C. Turner or
the Peruvian economist Hernando de Soto) to suggest incremental or market-based solutions, which he sees as a form of collusion with capital. But he also has serious reservations about the extent to which the “informal proletariat” of slum dwellers can themselves be said to possess historical agency (200). In these conditions, it is not at all clear how, or by whom, radical change could be brought about, and so Davis ends his book with pessimistic speculation about the likelihood that atavistic forms of resistance, with religious extremism and narco trafficking at the fore, will come increasingly to define urban poverty. (Works like Paolo Lins’ *City of God* and Mahi Binebine’s *Les étoiles de Sidi Moumen* provide some support for this claim.)

Davis’s pessimism, however, makes him somewhat of an outlier. Indeed, for many of those who work most closely with people in informal settlements around the world—including sociologists, architects, urban planners, and activists of all stripes—those settlements have an important role to play in the search for solutions to the problems of uncontrolled urbanization. And if we return now to a consideration of the relationship between climate change and informal urbanism from an Anthropocenic perspective, it is possible to put a quite different spin on the data that Davis analyzes, as Stewart Brand does in his *Whole Earth Discipline*.

**An eco-pragmatic approach to the informal city**

*Whole Earth Discipline* (2009) engages in an almost gleeful polemic against a good number of widely accepted environmentalist principles. The programmatic subtitle of Brand’s book says it all: *Why dense cities, nuclear power, transgenic crops, restored wildlands, and geoengineering are necessary.* To many more traditional environmentalists, each of these “necessities” sounds outright heretical. And indeed, such ideas initially surprised many people who knew Brand as an icon of the environmentalist counterculture of the 1960s. So, we might ask, what turned him into an eco-pragmatist in favor of nuclear energy, GMOs and big cities? It is precisely what I have been calling the hard problem of the Anthropocene: the danger that humans are at the point of exceeding the carrying capacity of the entire planet and need to find measures that might avert such a catastrophe.

What Brand is looking for is what I call a “soft landing” solution to the problem of scarce resources. And he sees cities, including the impoverished informal settlements in the cities of the Global South, as playing an important role in preparing a soft landing. Thus, looking at the same 2003 UN data that Mike Davis used, Brand reaches diametrically opposed conclusions. He describes squatter cities as “the most creative urban phenomenon of our time” (36), and emphasizes that what you see in squatter cities is “not a despondent population crushed by poverty but a lot of people getting out of poverty as fast as they can” (36). He justifies this apparently Panglossian view by citing statistics that show that populations that move from the countryside to the city experience, in aggregate, a number of beneficial transformations—including a reduction of the birthrate, increased levels of education, higher incomes than in the countryside, greater tolerance for difference, and greater autonomy for women. On this basis he sets out to present squatter cities as a perhaps harsh but ultimately beneficial machine for the urbanization of rural populations, which he considers to be a necessary element of any environmentally viable future that would avoid the “hard landing” of a global humanitarian catastrophe.
Brand’s upbeat take on informal urbanism is, at first glance, seductive: the problem contains its own solution! Upon reflection, though, his somewhat mechanistic assumptions about urbanization leading inevitably to desirable outcomes sound much like the neo-liberal thinking that did so much to exacerbate the problem in the first place. Meanwhile, many readers have been appalled by the breezy way he glosses over the very real forms of suffering that we find in squatter cities. Unlike the writers who will be considered below, he pays scant attention to the daily experience of slum dwellers. Indeed, one important reason to study and discuss works like Carolina Maria de Jesus’s autobiographical Quarto de despejo (1960) is to inflect the course of such abstract debates by reminding us of the grim realities confronting many slum dwellers in their daily lives.

The geopoetics of eco-urbanism

Which, then, of the accounts considered here gets closest to the truth? Davis and his dark vision of the ever-increasing immiseration of the developing world’s lumpenproletariat? Or Brand’s rose-tinted view of informal settlements as a transitional stage of urbanism paving the way to a more prosperous and ecologically balanced future? I would say that both make important contributions but also leave important gaps. Davis’s contribution is to have convincingly identified the full scale and gravity of the contemporary urban housing crisis and to have identified some of its historical causes, but he is unable to articulate any elements of a resolution to the problem beyond a broad condemnation of neo-liberalism. Brand does something symmetrically related, starting on the environmental front, emphasizing the gravity of the environmental problem of the Anthropocene and the role that cities might play in addressing it but failing to factor in the social and humanitarian costs that his solution seems to imply. The real question from an Anthropocenic perspective is how to balance the demand for social justice that Davis emphasizes against Brand’s prioritization of the need to respond to climate change. This is the hard question of the Anthropocene, which, by its very nature, confounds conventional ideological categories, requiring us to set aside our ingrained patterns of thought in order to seek out solutions that are pragmatic in orientation and attuned to the circumstances of each place with its specific needs, without losing sight of the common good, at both the local and planetary levels.

With such “eco-pragmatic” questions in mind, I’d like to turn now to literary explorations of informal urbanism that can provide further insights, organizing my analysis around a set of environmental questions that feed into the hard question of the Anthropocene. My aim is not to impose some kind of “environmentally correct” reading on them, but to use them to explore as fully as possible the complexity of the relationship between urban informality and environmental responsibility when seen from the inside, with occasional efforts to tease out some of their policy implications at the local, national, and international levels. My corpus is made up primarily of works from the French and Anglophone West Indies, along with some texts from coastal cities in Brazil (São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro) which have much in common with the Caribbean islands historically and culturally. Many of these works—especially the older ones from the 1950s and 60s—lack an immediately detectable environmental discourse (environmentalism was not as far forward on the agenda back then), but it can often be teased out from a closer reading of other preoccupations.
Waste management

A recurrent preoccupation of those who write on shantytowns and the like is the central role that waste plays in the lives of the residents, from human waste, to the consumption of discarded food, to the importance of trash picking, scavenging, and recycling as sources of income. Examples include Carolina Maria de Jesus’s *Quarto de despejo* (1960), whose title could be translated as “junk room,” Orlando Patterson’s *The Children of Sisyphus* (1965), which is set in Kingston’s Dungle (i.e., dung hill), and the highly regarded Brazilian documentary films *Boca de Lixo* (Eduardo Coutinho, 1993) and *Estamira* (Marcos Prado, 2004), which bring to light the experience of *catadores* (trash pickers). It might be tempting for an environmentalist like Brand to provide a positive reading of such activities by touting the social contribution of trash pickers, who make society’s use of resources more efficient by recycling everything that the more affluent sectors of society discard—from paper, scrap metal and building materials to uneaten food scavenged from waste bins. But as this last item vividly suggests, these are not especially joyous pursuits. Nor are they particularly productive forms of labour. The opening sequence of *Boca de Lixo* makes it immediately apparent how dangerous, dirty and dehumanizing this work is, juxtaposing images of people competing furiously for scraps with images of prowling animals, a cinematic gesture that evokes Agamben’s notion of bare existence (see Peixoto 2007, 176).

Still, despite such considerations, commentators like Kirsten Seale have been able to make convincing arguments for the social and environmental utility of these practices. Scale touts second-hand markets as “a node within a globally ubiquitous network of secondary economies that generates valuable social, economic and material infrastructure in cities,” and emphasizes the “entrepreneurial” aspect of the work. She would no doubt make a distinction between scavenging for food and more high-end forms of recycling (she is particularly interested in flea markets), but she warns against the temptation to assume standards of propriety derived from “hegemonic projections of what constitutes livability in urban contexts” (69). The point is well taken, although we must not forget either that in most cases those who do the actual scavenging are able to bring in at best a subsistence-level income. (As in all areas of the informal economy, those at the very bottom of the chain are subject to the demands of a whole network of dealers and middlemen, who extract their take before passing on a few cents to those who do the actual collection.) And the risks are enormous, ranging from food poisoning, parasitic infestations and respiratory problems (all common themes) to wounds sustained while dealing with dangerous materials. Thus, although de Jesus, who spends every available hour of every day wandering the city in search of paper and metals to recycle, shows no particular distaste for the work, she brings in so little money that she is not always able to feed herself or her children. Even the most minor setback (a day lost to illness or to a police or school summons) can put her family on the brink of starvation and eating discarded food (which does disgust her).

Seale takes care to emphasize the important distinction between the symbolic and physical values of trash picking and recycling, something that is also emphasized in *Quarto de despejo*. One of the recurrent refrains of de Jesus’s memoir is the idea that she, and other *favelados* like her (i.e., those on the very lowest rung of the economic ladder), are themselves discards or rejects (*despejo*). Quarantined in their favelas, they can be easily ignored by the city’s better-off citizens, like trash once it has been carted
off to the dump. De Jesus makes this association on several occasions: “I’m also a favelado. I’m one of the discarded. I’m in the garbage dump and those in the garbage dump either burn themselves or throw themselves into ruin” (29; see also 135 and passim). It is easy to understand why, given the social stigma of trash picking, the first reaction of the subjects of Coutinho’s film upon seeing the camera is to hide their faces: they do not want their public image to be defined by association with trash.5 But de Jesus’s book, whose English translation was titled Child of the Dark, was explicitly written to bring the stories of these hidden, silenced sufferers out of the dark and into the light of public awareness. She dreams, for example, of getting her writing published in the United States so that visitors will know “that the most famous city in South America is ill with ulcers—the favelas” (77). This is a crucial function of shanty literature: amplifying the voice of the world’s most disadvantaged subaltern populations.

The spiritual contamination of the association with trash is most strongly emphasized in Orlando Patterson’s The Children of Sisyphus, a novel whose vision is every bit as sombre as Davis’s. What all of Patterson’s characters have in common is their underdog mentality, closely linked to the “place effect” theorized by Chicago School sociologists, which takes on a self-replicating function akin to destiny. It is this interiorized sense of worthlessness that forms the existential basis of the characters in Patterson’s novel, which, as its title suggests, borrows from Albert Camus’ Myth of Sisyphus to depict life in the shantytown as the very image of existential absurdity. Although the novel suffers from a somewhat heavy-handed attempt to impose a Camusian reading of the Absurd onto his otherwise vivid account of the Dungle community, Patterson succeeds in stressing the gravitational pull of the Dungle, understood as a place that allows no one to escape. Even the ambitious Dinah, who staked everything on an escape from the Dungle and seems to be on the verge of succeeding thanks to a couple of promising romantic prospects and a solid job opportunity, finds herself returning there to die. Only Rosetta, the gifted student, is able to escape, but this comes at a high cost: repudiation of her mother and all those associated with her mother’s social milieu, including the entire Black community (“Education no mek fo’ neager people,” her mother is told, 98).

Urban ecologies (policy perspectives)

With these literary perspectives in mind, it is useful to look at questions of waste as a matter of public policy, as the journalist Juliana Barbassa does in Dancing with the Devil in the City of God (2015). Her book, which foregrounds environmental issues, emphasizes the extent to which the social costs of trash and pollution are intertwined with the housing problem that made favelas such a major part of the Latin American urban landscape. They can, in a sense, be understood as two sides of the same problem. To give just one particularly telling example: much of the trash and sewage that so famously worried those competing in the open-water Olympic events held in Rio’s Guanabara Bay in 2016 had its origins in the city’s favelas. To demonstrate this point, Barbassa actually follows the course of one of the streams unloading effluent and trash into the bay, starting at the bay and going all the way to the stream’s source in the mountains, after passing through multiple favelas. Had the city followed through on its Olympic promise to build water-treatment facilities to serve such places, it would have provided a lasting benefit, not only to the citizens living in those favelas but to all Cariocas.6
What comes through strongly in Barbassa’s book—as in many other analyses of informal urbanism and waste—is the impossibility of addressing the larger environmental problems without taking into account the needs of the residents of informal settlements and vice versa. Governments, of course, have many competing priorities, and funds for urban development projects are always in short supply, but this is a case where a service provided to the squatter settlement would also accrue to the larger community in ways that would have a synergistic effect. Such a lack of holistic vision explains what went wrong with many failed or inadequate housing policies of the past. As many observers have emphasized, the hostile attitude that sees informal settlements as nuisances that need to be eradicated has tended to make the problem worse. Once the bulldozers have come, the squatters, having no other options, will most often simply move to another, often worse, settlement. By thinking only of the localized problem—illegally occupied land—city managers were aggravating the systemic problem. Similarly, high modernist solutions, like the construction of massive public housing projects, often proved inadequate as well. There are many reasons for this, but perhaps the most basic is simply, as Justin McGuirk puts it, that it “wasn’t possible to build housing blocks fast enough to cope with the scale of the problem, or cheaply enough to avoid bankrupting nations” (11).

The general principle here is an ecological one, the need to think in terms of the relationship between the ecosystem as a whole and the various nodes within that system (the part always affects the whole and vice versa), keeping in mind that urban ecologies include more than physical space, infrastructure, and inhabitants. They also include intangible considerations (like the larger goals and values of the city and nation) as well as a complex mix of available resources (e.g., private and public funding sources, administrative bureaucracies with their own priorities) and a variety of barriers to development (inept or corrupt agents, shifting political winds, unscrupulous speculators, etc.). A truly urban-ecological perspective requires setting priorities based on a holistic understanding of the city that factors in all of these considerations, and no doubt many more, including the one underlying them all: insufficient economic development leading to a dearth of good jobs and massive levels of un- or under-employment.

The new urban planning consensus is more attuned to such a systemic or holistic view of urban planning and includes in its models the creative potential of the informal settlements themselves. The work of Alfredo Brillembourg and Hubert Klumpner and their Urban Think Tank in Caracas exemplifies this tradition, promoting the use of “formal-informal” hybrids between slum communities, city governments, and private-sector partners. They emphasize the importance of participatory budgeting plans based on close consultation with the slum dwellers, and note that many informal settlements, given a chance, have evolved into highly functioning, dynamic, resourceful, and innovative communities. Although still poor and under-served, they are largely self-regulating and functional. Indeed, the real problem may be with the urban planners, not the informality.

The totally planned city is... a myth. Therein lies the historic error of urban planners and designers and of architects: they fail to see, let alone analyze or capitalize upon, the informal aspects of urban life, because they lack a professional vocabulary for describing them. (Brillembourg and Klumpner, quoted in McGuirk, 26)
This emphasis on leveraging the practices of the shack dwellers themselves will serve to bring us back to the literary treatments of informality, which often feature important insights and observations that have broader implications. If the problem is, as McGuirk emphasizes, a lack of “vocabulary,” then the imaginative insights and lexical experiments of literature have an important role to play.

**Natural mystics**

From an ecocritical perspective, it is notable that informal settlements most typically spring up as a result of rural-urban migration. They often provide the first foothold in the city for migrants from the countryside, and those migrants typically bring with them their agrarian habits. (This was, early on in the study of informal urbanism, often but incorrectly assumed to be among the primary sources of dysfunction within such settlements.)

We find this pattern borne out in Patterson’s *The Children of Sisyphus*, where the community of Rastafari promote a powerful environmentalist vision, advocating a return to a more spiritual state identified with an agrarian past and the African motherland. This is an ethos that grew out of the (rural or semi-rural) tradition of maroon-style resistance to enslavement and militant resistance to the plantation system. Highly attuned to natural rhythms and the humility of man before nature, the Rastafarian group in Patterson’s novel emphasizes the value of maintaining a sustainable relationship with nature (celebrated in the herb sacrament), clean living (vegetarianism), and rejection of the Babylon system of industrial modernity.

These priorities lend it a certain natural appeal for environmentalists. On the other hand, we could also say that it is a backward-looking ethos, one that may have emotional or nostalgic resonance but is inadequate to the task of addressing the challenges of the modern world. This, at least, is how it appears to be judged in Patterson’s novel and in Roger Mais’s *Brother Man*. In the latter novel, John Power, the Christ-like prophet of Rastafari, suffers a sacrificial death and is abandoned by his own followers. Meanwhile in *The Children of Sisyphus*, Brother Solomon’s story is organized around the failure of his project to arrange for the “repatriation” of his flock to Ethiopia. The novel ends with Brother Solomon’s suicide, on the day that the ship from Ethiopia was supposed to arrive. (We are left to imagine what the reaction of his disciples will be upon learning the truth, which he had hidden from them, that the expected ship will not be coming.) Although Brother Solomon is in many respects an admirable figure and a principled leader, his story is uncomfortably close to that of Shepherd John, the leader of a local church, who is depicted unambiguously as a con man (and is eventually killed by a heretofore devoted member of his congregation).

To put this another way, the anti-modern promise of a return to traditional ways of life may be just as much a form of escapism as the promised return to Africa, at least if taken in the literal way they are presented in the novel. Certainly, Patterson and Mais would say, it is important to honour those traditions, which are important markers (and shapers) of cultural identity. But if the natural-mystic attitude means a return to old modes of social organization and a rejection of modernity
(medical treatment and public schooling were held in suspicion by the Rastas), it just serves to further marginalize the very people it claims to help. The dream of a return to a mythologized agrarian past may well be as much a form of escapism as the literal voyage to Ethiopia. And despite the appeal of the communal structure of the Rasta community in *The Children of Sisyphus*, it is also a form of self-imposed ghettoization.

What then is the lesson to be learned from all of these foiled plans for redemption *qua* escape? Camus’ text, which is quoted in an epigraph to the novel, emphasizes the importance of dogged resolve in the face of a world without meaning: “One must,” as Camus puts it, “imagine Sisyphus happy” (Camus 123). In this light, Patterson’s novel would have to be read not as a tragic, fatalistic or resigned statement, but as a call to stand and fight—where one is. The political (and perhaps revolutionary) implications of this stance for the novel are evident, and of immediate relevance to slum dwellers everywhere, who must often fight literally to keep their homes. The real mistake made by the characters in Patterson’s novel, then, would be to believe that the only way to transcend their degraded condition was to move on to a better place, whether to an idyllic past, an idealized motherland, salvation in the afterlife, or a more desirable neighbourhood. This is not to say that the desire for a more comfortable home is somehow improper, but that, *pace* Davis, many slum dwellers have compelling reasons for staying right where they are, despite the hardships. And urban planners often have compelling reasons for acceding to such demands. Although such settlements are typically located on illegally occupied land and composed of substandard dwellings, a city or state government with a sufficiently holistic, systematic, or urban-ecological vision, of the kind outlined above, may well decide that it is in its best interests to work with the existing community, even if that means resisting the demands of powerful developers or other constituencies.

**Second nature and the urban mangrove**

In order to develop this point, it will be useful to look at Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco*, which comes very close to Patterson’s novel in its interest in preserving a more traditional, sustainable relationship with the natural environment, while also maintaining a more Brand-like emphasis on the important transitional role that squatter communities play in the process of urbanization. Chamoiseau’s novel, we could say, builds on the Rastafarian devotion to rural agrarian values while also insisting on the need to adapt them for integration into city life.

*Texaco* is a historical fiction that gives a bottom-up version of the history of Martinique, told by Marie-Sophie, one of the leaders of the eponymous shantytown community of the title. (Texaco is a real neighbourhood in Fort-de-France, Martinique, so named because it is situated on the former site of a Texaco gas-storage facility.) Marie-Sophie, who is something like the matriarch of the Texaco community, is able to save the neighbourhood from a planned demolition. She does this by convincing the urban planner who had come to scout the site for its eventual destruction that it is in fact a vibrant community that should not be thought of as a nuisance. The urban planner, convinced
by her arguments, arranges for a formal-informal collaboration between the city government and local residents that results in the neighbourhood being incorporated into the city’s network of services and utilities and provided with materials that will enable the residents to upgrade their dwellings. Significantly, Aimé Césaire himself, then mayor of Fort-de-France, comes to Texaco to consecrate this partnership in an official ceremony.8

This strategy, it should be noted, is a more or less classic example of the kind of slum-upgrading programme promoted by Turner and picked up by McGuirk, Brillembour and others. Such programmes have become widely accepted throughout Latin America and make it possible to alleviate the most severe problems in these neighbourhoods at a cost that is relatively manageable to the city. They typically involve formal recognition of the community, a guarantee of security of tenure, infrastructural improvements (sewage, water, electricity) that bring the dwellings up to publicly recognized standards of safety and hygiene (although these may not be as high as in the formalized parts of the city), and provision of some construction materials, although the residents normally do the actual construction work themselves (or pay local contractors to do it for them). This kind of partnership, described by McGuirk as a public-private hybrid, is theorized by Chamoiseau’s urban planner in terms of a nature/culture hybrid comparable to the mixed (land/sea, freshwater/saltwater) environment of the mangrove swamp:

Texaco was not what Westerners call a shantytown, but a mangrove swamp, an urban mangrove swamp... Texaco is neither City nor country. Yet City draws strength from Texaco’s urban mangroves, as it does from those of other quarters, exactly like the sea repeoples itself with that vital tongue which ties it to the mangroves’ chemistry. (263, emphasis in original)

There are multiple levels of metaphorical mediation here, but they are clearly grounded on the principle of sustainability and a desire to attain a mutually beneficial exchange between the city centre, the informal settlements of the periphery, and the wider environing milieu. The city centre is associated with Cartesian rationalism, colonial domination, capitalist exploitation, and unbridled consumption. It is an expansionist, resource-hogging model of the city. Meanwhile, the urban mangrove of the periphery is shaped by the folk wisdom of those recently arrived from the countryside, and who maintain a more properly symbiotic relationship with the natural environment. Crucially, this hybrid is understood to be as beneficial to the formal city as to the informal neighbourhoods themselves:

If the Creole city had at its disposal only the order of the center, it would have died. It needs the chaos of its fringes... Texaco is Fort-de-France’s mess; think about it: the poetry of its Order. The urban planner no longer chooses between order and disorder, between beauty and ugliness; from now on he is an artist... (184)

Functionally, the urban mangrove, like the coastal mangrove swamp, acts as a kind of buffer zone. It provides a safety net for those squeezed out of the city centre by economic competition or
a setback of some kind as well as a staging point for new arrivals seeking to enter the city. But what Chamoiseau emphasizes is the organic nature of such communities. The accumulation of individual dwellings gives rise, in aggregate, to a kind of second nature, a community that, because it grows up without the formal planning and technological resources of the city centre, more closely adheres to the dictates of the landscape and the natural environment. This is a mode of urbanization that is adaptive rather than domineering. And if we think of the favelas and barrios of Latin America, which, like Texaco itself, spill down hillsides and create organic shapes that can be quite lovely, we have a kind of visual instantiation of the adaptive logic of these settlements, which adhere to the topographical contours of the landscape and create an engaging vernacular architectural vocabulary. Unlike the grid and hub-and-spoke patterns of centrally planned cities, or the prefab uniformity of suburban subdivisions, the informal settlement obeys the dictates of the landscape and available materials.

It is important to recognize, as always, that this respect for the landscape is born of necessity: the residents simply don’t have access to the tools or materials necessary to reshape the contours of the landscape or build structures that would overwhelm it. This “second nature” of improvised urbanism should not then be construed to confer some kind of moral superiority to its practitioners. But it does provide food for thought for those interested in building more sustainable cities while developing better solutions to the ever-growing problem of providing adequate housing for city dwellers. Indeed, the recognition that informal settlements have value, and can even be things of beauty if one knows how to understand the adaptive logic and make-do ingenuity that prevail there, while setting aside those normative “hegemonic projections of livability” evoked by Seale, is itself an important step towards progress on this front. To the extent that novels like Texaco are able to make such arguments intelligible to a broader public, they play an important role in this process.

**Concluding thoughts on sustainable cities**

The technological progress of industrial modernity has, with the help of capitalist market economies, allowed it to accumulate excess productive capacities. These have made it possible to, so to speak, ride rough-shod over nature, creating the illusion that humanity, or at least that segment of humanity that shares in its wealth, has risen above nature and is no longer subject to the resource constraints that limited the growth potential of pre-modern societies. But, with the advent of the Anthropocene era, as we reach the point where the planet’s resources are being stressed on a global scale, that form of modernity appears to have reached its limits. Perhaps some unforeseen technological breakthrough or advance in social organization will make it possible to break through even this ceiling to development. If not, we will all have to re-learn what it means to live within our means, to accept and adapt to the constraints imposed on it by ever-scarcer resources. This can, at least in principle, be planned for in such a way as to lead to a soft landing (characterized, say, by moderately lowered standards of living, technological advances that enable us to wean ourselves off of fossil fuels, and a gradual, intentional slowing of population growth). But it is equally possible that the planet will make the decision for us, in which case a hard landing, characterized by social collapse and humanitarian disasters (which would almost certainly fall disproportionately on the world’s poor) are likely outcomes.
For many on the radical left like Mike Davis, the only adequate response to such a state of affairs is a radical social and economic restructuring, which would put an end to capitalism as we know it. This, I think, is why Davis is so reflexively hostile to the kinds of small-scale self-help solutions that Turner, McGuirk, Brillembourgh and the others promote. Incrementalism and market-based solutions are ruled out on principle. Brand’s vision of the future, on the other hand, involves no such challenge to capitalism and seems to accept the kind of market-based logic characteristic of neo-liberalism, making it more palatable to a mainstream American audience. What neither of them is able to do, though, is give a convincing account of the specific practices that will go on in the interim period leading from the current to the desired state of affairs. What will this period look like from the inside? This is where Chamoiseau’s novel excels. To the extent that it extols the vitality and entrepreneurial virtues of slum dwellers (like the djobeurs that populate many of his novels), it would seem to be more in line with Brand’s account. But it is also more cognizant of the specific challenges they face and, crucially, detects in them a more active form of agency than Brand’s rather mechanistic model, or Patterson’s apparent fatalism, seems to allow. Chamoiseau’s urban planner emphasizes the positive role that this transitional space he calls the urban mangrove could play, both as a strategy for addressing the housing problem and as a model for sustainability. This is a view that he shares with McGuirk, Brillembourgh and Klumpner, and also many other specialists and insiders.¹⁰

Is it possible, though, to say that the kinds of survival strategies depicted in the novel provide clues for addressing the challenges specific to the advent of the Anthropocene era? Certainly, those strategies provide a model for living frugally in an urban context—practices such as urban gardening, reuse of found materials, and the formation of communal social structures, resonate strongly with eco-friendly principles. But it would be hard to say that the highly idiosyncratic, individualistic practices that prevail in these settlements can be scaled up for global use. If anything, they are probably less efficient than, for example, a highly regimented lifestyle in a high-density housing block. Their exemplarity has to be sought elsewhere. I would locate it in the principle of adaptability itself, in the ability of these characters to find solutions to the problems at hand with the materials at hand. Like his mentor, Édouard Glissant, Chamoiseau is an evolutionary thinker in the sense that he emphasizes the need to adapt to prevailing conditions. This evolutionary bent of Glissantian thinking is opposed to the kind of radical rhetoric favored by Davis and has led many postcolonial critics in the Fanonian mould to accuse him of being a “go with the flow” accommodationist (see Hallward 2001). And it is true that this kind of rhetoric can be frustrating in many respects, as demands for sweeping reform and absolute justice tend to give way before incremental strategies for achieving modest reform within the current world order. But from an Anthropocenic perspective of ever-more constrained resources, these kinds of incremental strategies have an important role to play. And with no available path to a global socio-economic successor to capitalism in view, it may be precisely in these kinds of small-scale, unsexy, incremental strategies that the real action is taking place.
Notes

1. According to 2003 UN figures, every week 1.3 million people move to the city (70 million a year), most often finding themselves in some kind of informal settlement, so that today one billion people—a sixth of humanity and fully half of the city dwellers in the global South—live in some type of unplanned, extra-legal settlement, without security of tenure and without adequate infrastructure. (See UN Habitat 2003.)

2. This was the central theme of their 2009 annual report, titled Planning Sustainable Cities, and many of the recommendations of that document found their way into the 2016 New Urban Agenda, which was prepared for the third summit of the UN-Habitat program, which took place in October 2016 in Quito, Ecuador. (The most recent draft of the 2016 document can be viewed and downloaded at: https://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/.)


4. Other compelling, but non-Caribbean, texts that feature this theme are Boo 2012 and Begag 2007.

5. This film is analyzed in greater detail, alongside Prado’s Estamira and an impressive number of related works, in Geoffrey Kantaris’s excellent “Waste not, want not” (2016).

6. L. Alan Eyre, in “Self-Help Housing in Jamaica,” makes a similar set of observations about the Riverton area of Kingston.

7. This is another common theme of many shanty novels, including, for example, novels about the Maroko district in Lagos by Chris Abani and Maik Nwosu: the residents of that neighbourhood really had come to love their community and fought vigorously, albeit unsuccessfully, for the right to stay there. (See Abani 2004 and Nwosu 2001). Meanwhile de Jesus, with the profits from the publication of her first book, was able to move to a middle-class neighbourhood—only to find herself ostracized and isolated there—an experience much like Dinah’s in Children of Sisyphus.

8. The urban planner character is based on Serge Letchimy, who was in fact a protégé of Aimé Césaire. Trained as an urban planner, he has now succeeded Césaire as mayor of Fort-de-France and leader of the Parti Progressiste Martiniquais (which was founded by Césaire). The concept of the “urban mangrove,” which will be discussed below, was coined by Letchimy (see Letchimy and Bazabas 1992).

9. Several of the essays in Potter and Conway’s Self-help Housing, the Poor, and the State in the Caribbean emphasize the importance of vernacular architecture, which tends to be both cheaper and better adapted to local conditions than imported architectural styles. (See Potter et al. 1997). Peattie 1992 makes a closely related point.

10. Some of them are listed in my bibliography: Koolhaas, Letchimy, Neuwirth, Peattie, Perlman, Pithouse and Potter all share some version of this vision.
Works Cited


Fischer, Brodwyn. “A Century in the Present Tense.” In *Cities from Scratch: Poverty and Informality in Urban*


For three centuries the islands and parts of continents affected by this phenomenon proved to be the real forgers of a new humanity, where languages, races, religions, customs, ways of being from all over the world were brutally uprooted and transplanted in an environment where they had to reinvent life.

*Éloge de la Créolité*
In the citation above, the authors of the manifesto *Éloge de la Créolité* effectively launch the *Créolité* movement by making an explicit connection between the profound crisis which plagues attempts to define French Caribbean identity and the environment in which these island populations were “forced to reinvent life.” This passage alludes to the interlocking histories of both the French Caribbean islands and the people who inhabit them: the extermination of the islands’ indigenous populations; the forced migration and enslavement of African slaves and indentured workers in the plantation economy until its abolition in 1848; the decimation of the islands’ flora and fauna and the introduction of non-native monocultural crops and farming practices; French colonial rule and its assimilationist tendencies; and the eventual integration of Martinique and Guadeloupe as a département of Greater France in 1946. In more precise terms, Caribbean land, sea, flora and fauna as much as the human inhabitants of these islands were transformed—Creolized, as the Créolité movement would have it—resulting in radically new ecosystems from these interactions. In fact, in the line which follows this citation, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant proclaim that French Caribbean “Créoleness” is “therefore born from this extraordinary ‘migan,’” wrongly and hastily reduced to its mere linguistic aspects, or to one single element of its composition.”

Echoing the authors of *Éloge de la Créolité*, Cara Cilano and Elizabeth DeLoughrey remind us that “because the monoculture plantocracy violently altered the natural and social environment[s] of the Caribbean, the region has [and continues to] provid[e] an especially important space for theorizing the vexed relationship between nature and culture” (Cilano and DeLoughrey 77). Explorations of the profound alienation and Otherness of French Caribbean identity by passing through island spaces, landscapes, flora and fauna—that is, the complex ecosystems of these islands—is not a new phenomenon. As Eric Prieto makes clear, “[t]here is a strong sense that the Eurocentric attitudes and assimilationist policies of the colonial period have made it difficult to see the Caribbean world as it actually is, since it is always filtered through the distorting lens of Eurocentric norms” (Prieto 237). Indeed, the major intellectual and anti-colonial movements of the French Caribbean have all mobilized the island landscapes and non-human environmental imagery as a potential source of Caribbean identity formation. Aimé Césaire, for example, sees the origins of Caribbean identity as being rooted in the African Motherland—an extension of this original root—from which Caribbean people can thus grow and expand their sense of self. *Négritude*—as articulated in *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*—identifies the Caribbean with nature over and against European technological advancement in an overall push for “social and political justice” (Prieto 238). *Négritude* gives way to *Antillanité*, inspired by Édouard Glissant’s early work in *Discours Antillais*. Abandoning Césaire’s “tree” and “single root” framework, Glissant proposes the image of the “rhizome” to capture the system of submarine roots “floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches” (Glissant 67). For Glissant, French Caribbean people are not a simple derivation from Africa, but, rather, a complex cultural creation “of multiple interrelated cultures [where] the Caribbean represents not a closed space but one that is open, both internally, within the archipelago, and externally, exposed to the continental mass of the Americas and the Atlantic Ocean” (Glissant 7). In order for the French Caribbean to move from non-history to history they must—in Glissant’s approach—consolidate all that is uniquely Caribbean as leverage against and in defiance of the alienating gaze of Metropolitan France. To demonstrate his point, Glissant articulates a spatio-temporal poetics in which landscape and other ecological metaphors are linked to history
and memory, particularly in his 1958 novel *La Lézarde* and later in *Mahagony* (1987). However, as Eric Prieto demonstrates, Glissant reads “the physical attributes of the landscape in purely symbolic terms,” subordinating landscape “to the history of its inhabitants” (Prieto 239), albeit a history which is now properly Caribbean.

By the time of its publication in 1989, *Éloge de la Créolité* signaled a departure from the earlier *Negritude* and *Antillanité* movements to a more nuanced embrace of a cultural theory and identity profoundly linked to and anchored in Caribbean ecology. *Éloge de la Créolité* displays a remarkable sensitivity to the role that imperialism played in fashioning Caribbean understandings of human subjectivity and the environment and the neo-colonialist forms of exploitation which continue to threaten both the environmental and human sustainability of these islands. “Creoleness,” as put forward by Barnabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, underscores the inextricable intertwining of the cultural, political and natural history of the Caribbean region and the attendant processes of mediation in representations of the environment, on the one hand, and the formation of identity—which is itself a product of these processes—on the other. In fact, *Éloge de la Créolité* insists on the urgent need for an “aesthetic approach” by and through which French Antilleans can begin to “re-learn how to visualize our profound depths. To re-learn how to look positively at all that *pulsates* around us” (Chamoiseau, et al., 24).

Published two years after *Éloge de la Créolité* and winner of the prestigious Prix Goncourt literary prize, Patrick Chamoiseau’s *Texaco* is widely accepted as the most concrete and complete elaboration of the ideals of *Créolité*. Texaco, the shantytown on the outskirts of Fort-de-France for which the novel is named, has been identified for demolition by the municipal authorities. Dispatched to inform Texaco’s inhabitants of their impending displacement, the Urban Planner is stoned by a mysterious assailant as he enters the community. While nursing the Urban Planner’s wound, Marie-Sophie—the founder of the community—recounts the history of Texaco to him in an attempt to save her community. Marie-Sophie tells the story of her slave ancestors—beginning with her father Esternome Laborieux, a freed slave and urban marron—from the abolition of slavery in 1848 to the present postcolonial period and the founding of Texaco on land which has now been abandoned by the Texaco oil refinery. While culturally specific to Martinique, the Texaco community—its history, inhabitants and physical location—are at the crossroads of globalization processes. Texaco thus occupies more than just a decorative frame or metaphorical extension of the successes and failures of the neighbourhood’s inhabitants. The Texaco shantytown is the very condition of possibility for their survival. The epic battles that Marie-Sophie and her ancestors have had to fight in order gain a home-place have shaped not only Martinican society, history, and oral traditions but also the land. Indeed, as the novel opens we are told that “to escape the night of slavery and colonialism, Martinique’s black slaves and mulattos will, one generation after another, abandon the plantations, the fields, and the hills, to throw themselves into the conquest of the cities” (Chamoiseau 3). It is at this complex intersection of the literary—the fragmented historical narrative of both land and people—and the environmental—the land’s participation in the creolized history and identity of Martinique and the region—that Chamoiseau’s *Texaco* is located.
Drawing on insights from literary theory and the social sciences, this study attempts to render visible the environmental discourse of *Texaco* and *Éloge de la Créolité* as the source and location of Caribbean identity. In a close reading of the novel, I will show how *Texaco* transforms the landscape trope into a central figure in the conflictual and prodigious encounters of peoples, languages, cultures, and histories of Martinique. Having established a symbolic and material relation of the land and non-human environment to the human narratives of time/history, in the second part of this essay I focus on the structuring function of “place/environment” in the quest for cultural identity and collective expression. More precisely, the “place/environment” of the Texaco shantytown is the generative source of thought and action of individual and collective agency. Ultimately, this paper suggests that the textual re-enactment of the challenges posed by both the environment and history of Martinique and the adaptive, flexible responses of the Texaco community to them are a vital building block of creolization’s cultural and environmental interplay.

**Transforming the landscape trope**

So I took a real deep breath: I had suddenly understood that it was I, around this table with this poor old rum, with my word for my only weapon, who had to wage—at my age—the decisive battle for Texaco’s survival. (26-27)

In an interview in the French journal *Nuit Blanche*, Patrick Chamoiseau develops the idea that the natural environment has played a determinant role in the history of the Caribbean. In specific reference to his novel *Texaco*, he states that “the urban fabric is always a production of historical and cultural forces. Work, memory, historical conflicts are all inscribed there” (Chamoiseau and Peterson 123). The multiple forces inscribed in the concrete reality of the Texaco neighbourhood are showcased from the debut of the novel: “Upon his entrance into Texaco, the Christ was hit by a stone—an aggression that surprised no one” (Chamoiseau 9). Entering the quarter, the young urban planner charged with the eradication of this shantytown on the outskirts of Fort-de-France is stopped in his tracks, after having been hit in the head by a stone flung at him. The reader learns a bit further on that:

In those days, truth be said, we were all nervous: a road called Pénétrante West had joined our Quarter to the center of City. That is why the ever-so-well-to-do from the depths of their cars had discovered our piled-up hutches which they said were insalubrious—and such a spectacle seemed to them contrary to the public order. (9-10)

In this passage, the “we” of Texaco quarter and the “ever-so-well-to do” people of the city pitted against each other highlight the fact that colonial and anti-colonial struggles have long been grounded in land and locality. The struggle over the very existence of this shantytown, its jumbled hutches a concrete affront to public order and decency, recalls the fact that, during plantation slavery, the most sumptuous and fertile plots of land were appropriated by the old plantocracy of Martinique, leaving
what remained to be shared up among maroons and freed slaves. This contemporary urban slum grew up as a result of the descendants of former maroon and freed slaves descending from their hillside communes, in the hope of finding work on the outskirts of the city.

Even more telling is the eponym “Texaco”. The quarter is named for the now abandoned Texaco oil refinery around which the slum dwellers built their “butches.” The word “Texaco” conjures up contemporary iterations of multinational capitalism and environmental abuse in this once exploited and now abandoned mangrove area. That this already-polluted oil refinery is the only place left for the descendants of slaves to claim as their own brings into stark relief the lasting legacies of human activity and interaction with the environment. Texaco, now doubly “polluted” by the insalubrious shantytown, unites past and present, bearing witness to the foundational relationship of the Antillean population and the land. A relationship marked by exclusion and exploitation.

As a result of the new road (Pénétrante Ouest) linking the Texaco quarter to “L’En-ville” (meaning both city and urban space in French), the “ever-so-well-to-do” people of the city have now come face-to-face with this slum, growing/pulsating on its periphery. Coined by Chamoiseau and first employed by Marie-Sophie, “L’En-ville” captures the implicit relationship between language and landscape which hides the continuing struggle between the French and Créole languages in Martinique behind a fundamental misconception of this shantytown and its inhabitants. The Urban Planner, who represents the Fort-de-France populace, sees in the road project connecting city and periphery an aspiration on the part of the slum dwellers to fully integrate and be incorporated into and by the city centre. However, the Créole phonetic double lanvil, meaning “projet de survie” (project of survival), betrays this false misconception. In precise terms, the land, the environment prevail against human activity intended to “master” and “exhauste” this material, non-human space.

Given the now filled-in former wetland environment out of which Texaco grows, the Urban Planner in his copious notes indicated that:

I understood suddenly that Texaco was not what Westerners called a shantytown, but a mangrove swamp, an urban mangrove swamp. The swamp seems initially hostile to life. It’s difficult to admit that this anxiety of roots, of mossy shades, of veiled waters, could be such a cradle of life for crabs, fish, crayfish, the marine ecosystem. (263, emphasis in the original)

The contrasting image of the City—as the place of power and order—and the organic, insalubrious chaos of Texaco transforms this landscape into a diverse and complex ecosystem that is the cradle of life and survival. Neither fully in the City nor fully rural countryside, Texaco as literal mangrove is the point of convergence of the chaos and coherence of the dynamic process of Caribbean identity formation.
The living spaces of the community are and have to be both dynamic and fragile, constructed out of scavenged and recycled materials which are subject to constant re-fashioning and repair. In fact, the shacks’, sheds’, and hutches’ lack of rigidity and less than solid foundations demonstrate their inherent versatility and durability (understood in terms of tensile strength, i.e., “the stress a given object can bear before failure”). Texaco exemplifies the will to survive, against the odds of both Caribbean colonial history and natural phenomena such as hurricanes and earthquakes, in the very fact that the area can be easily dismantled, rebuilt, or simply renovated at will. Modeled on the maroon communities recounted to Marie-Sophie by her father Eternome, the construction of Texaco, this “space of place,” is the result of a symbiotic, dynamic and fragile relationship with the land.

Dispossessed and uprooted from time, history, space and place, the inhabitants of this shantytown demonstrate the fragile mastery of a singular space and struggle for placedness, which the community must forge for itself within the totality of all that pulsates around it:

It’s the bottleneck where all our stories come together. The Times too. The plantation used to keep us apart. The hills planted us in rooted driftings […] But: Once out of the bottleneck you don’t fall back in the bottle. It starts over.

How?

In another way. (293)

Both as novel and place, the neighbourhood inhabitants have and continue to (re)appropriate the active agency of the land as part and parcel of a collective project of survival and renewal. Bringing together the disadvantaged and marginalized, the unemployed, and people surviving solely on welfare benefits, Texaco (material place/landscape) is an active, shaping force for Marie-Sophie and the other inhabitants. As Edward Casey so eloquently reminds us, place “is the immediate environment of my lived body—an arena of action that is at once physical and historical, social and cultural” (Casey 683). This Texaco quarter is the locus of their very existence, their struggle as Antilleans to (re)appropriate this land, uniting a people with and with-in their ecosystem.

**Texaco: Place/ habitus**

It is in large part due to the efforts of Marie-Sophie Laborieux that the Texaco community takes shape. In Texaco, there is no barrier between landscape, history and person. Each is an integral and constitutive part of the other. It is striking to note the convergence of the eponymic and anthropomorphic registers at work in the text. Texaco is the name of this “space of placedness” for the community and Marie-Sophie’s secret name:
So I took a deep breath, keeping it stuck between my sides, and, bringing up one of Papa Totone’s demands, I named myself a secret name. It came to my mind with natural simplicity. When it rang in my head, I felt my languors disappear, my hair stand on end, and myself becoming a fighting cock again. At the center of a flood of words bustling in my head, my secret name began to throb in léwoz rhythm which shook my bones. (296-297, emphasis in original)

The convergence of Texaco (place) and Marie-Sophie (human being/subject) transforms “Texaco” into a *habitus*. Let us pause a moment on this term. Pierre Bourdieu describes habitus as

[s]ystems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu 53)

In other words, habitus is the product of an apprenticeship having become unconscious, which then translates into a seemingly natural aptitude to evolve in a given milieu or environment. For example, a musician can improvise at the piano only after having learned and practiced the basic musical scales and acquired the rudimentary rules of composition and harmony. It is not until after having internalized the codes and constraints (i.e., *structured structures*) of music—as a field of human endeavour—that our musician can create, improvise and compose (i.e., *structuring structures*) her own music. Our musician can now fully actualize her creative freedom, unconscious of the codes and styles she has deeply internalized. Habitus is, in concrete terms, a generative rather than fixed system, a basis from which endless improvisations can derive in the encounter with new environments and/or fields.

Returning to our text, the Texaco quarter is not just a flattened slate available and waiting for human inscription. Nor is it just a particular urban space standing as a bulwark against colonialist discourses aimed at assimilating Creole language, culture and traditions into the dominant French “order” by incorporating this slum fully into the city limits. In concrete terms, *Texaco as habitus* is the generative source of action and thought for Marie-Sophie and the community. Marie-Sophie’s and the community’s “apprenticeship” to and with the land provide them the means by and through which they can and are able to *act*:

Repeating it ceaselessly [her secret name] … I whittled a few very straight bamboos and dragged them through the oil company’s domain, behind Mano Castrador’s back … On the slope, *like my Esternome had taught me*, I planted my four bamboo sticks which I then wrapped with canvas. Then I *carefully weeded my space, packed down the land within my tent, made the logwood in the area stand aside in a four-meter radius*. I found myself surrounded with a little wall of wild sage and thorns. The canvas was fastened to the poles on the lateral and back sides … *We fastened the sheets [of tin] with stones and two nails … And that’s how I got my hutch. It was nothing, just something against the sun, but it was my anchor in City. I was entering myself directly into that very old struggle. (297, emphasis mine)
Marie-Sophie’s gestures—whittling bamboo, packing down the earth, weeding her space—concretize the improvisation and innovation inherent in the habitation of place. Texaco is “embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history. It is the active presence of the whole past of which it is a product” (Bourdieu 110). Further refining Bourdieu’s concept, Susan Crosta observes that “building Texaco, laying its foundations, and participating in its definition and evolution involves a vision of place and being” (Crosta 376).

I rose— … I say “I,” but in fact the being rising was no longer me, nope. It was someone else braced by her secret name, who could mangle Castrador with words but also with stones and who could crumple him like some callaloo weed […] I took a step toward him like that, without opening my mouth, hissing almost like a long-one, and in a French of a good sort to better sting his heart, Well, my Monsieur Castrador, tell me one thing, where would you like me to go? When the béké came to settle here did you go up to him to tell him what you’re telling me here? (298, emphasis in the original)

Texaco is more than just a supporting structure for both writing and text: the manner in which human beings construct, individualize and/or collectivize their physical, non-human environment. Place and Self, or rather, Texaco and Marie-Sophie are thoroughly enmeshed, not fused into a single, essentialized whole. There is a continual reshaping and reconnecting at work between Texaco/Place and Texaco/Self. Indeed, both novel and place Texaco are as much about how human beings are structured and changed by place and place is structured by human interaction:

I wanted it to be sung somewhere, so that generations to come could hear that we fought with the En-Ville, not to conquer it (for it did indeed swallow us up), but to conquer ourselves in the new Creole way for which we had to find a name—within ourselves, for ourselves—until we achieved our full authority. (427)

More precisely, and in line with Edward Casey’s formulation, “the relationship between self and place is not just one of reciprocal influence but also, more radically, of constitutive coinherence: each is essential for the being of the other” (Casey 684). In the words that the Old Black Man of the Doum maroon community offered as council to Marie-Sophie, “Find yourself a secret name and fight with it.” (“Fight” here translates the original text’s use of the French verb for to beat/pulsate, as in sense of a beating heart.)

**Texaco: from landscape to I/dentity**

The case of Marie-Sophie/Texaco is a demonstration of the structuring function of place/landscape in any quest for collective and individual identity. Chamoiseau presents us with a text, a history, a person that neither escapes nor transcends her non-human context/environment. When Marie-Sophie first lays eyes on the hillside slope which would eventually give birth to Texaco, we learn that:
On the slope, I felt the same sweet wind, rich with the world and with the Caribbean, and I saw City’s awakening from up high: the beating and blinking shutters, the morning birds fluttering the sky, the silhouettes of busy servants, civil servants going down to the mass, the first dust covering the low houses … I saw the trees light up in the Savanna where my Esternome settled so many years ago … The sky. The sea. The land. The hills. The winds. The place was magical.

So I took a deep breath, keeping it stuck between my sides, and, bringing up one of Papa Totone’s demands, I named myself a secret name. (296, emphasis in the original)

Facing this undulating land on which and within which Texaco, place and person will be anchored, Marie-Sophie soaks up the landscape with her eyes and imbibes it through the olfactory senses of nose and mouth to capture it within her ribs. Through this process of imbibing the land, Marie-Sophie accesses the liminal space of the interrelations of identity, community and the non-human, environmental elements of the world. It is in this liminal space, this bridge between historicized cultural encounters on, in and through colonized landscapes that the ceaseless process of exchange and transformation which marks the Caribbean’s “irruption into modernity” takes place:

Texaco, my work, our Quarter, our field of battle and resistance summed up my interest in the world. There we kept up the fight to be part of City, a century-old battle. And this battle was the beginning of a final confrontation in which the stakes were either life as we knew it or our definitive defeat. (25)

The inseparability of landscape and identity reveal the dynamic, reciprocal, and deeply transformative logic uniting people and environment. This deeply transformative relationship does not, however, subsume community and identity to environment or vice-versa. To “inhabit” the land is at once and at the same time an affirmation of identity where landscape and identity co-determine and permeate each other. Or, to borrow Edward Casey’s formulation “there is no place without self and no self without place” (Casey 684, emphasis in the original).

In the non-dualist nature of the relationship between the Texaco community and its environment, Patrick Chamoiseau offers an alternative constitution of the Antillean self, emanating from out of the fragmented histories of the land and people of the Caribbean. In representing the critical entanglements of the human and non-human environmental elements of Texaco, Chamoiseau offers a compelling portrait of the particular ways in which both human and environmental cultures absorb, recuperate, divert, struggle with, let slip, and (re)appropriate the sedimentation of human and natural history without being wholly or predictably circumscribed and subsumed by the other. And while Marie-Sophie describes her modest hutch as “nothing, just something against the sun,” this hutch, her habitation, “it was my anchor in City. I was entering myself directly into that very old struggle” (Chamoiseau 297, emphasis mine).
Conclusion

Marie-Sophie—and by extension the Texaco community—demonstrate that the quest for a place and identity cannot be dissociated. It is indeed in the co-constitutive habitation with and in the natural environment that Caribbean identity takes shape. Allowing us to see and to understand Texaco in and through the perspective of Marie-Sophie is an opening unto the heretofore-unseen horizon of “interactional and transactional aggregate of Caribbean, European, African, Asian, and Levantine cultural elements united on the same soil by the yoke of history.” If, at the end of the novel Texaco, community and identity are achieved through Marie-Sophie’s improvisational and innovative struggle with the land, that is with “placedness,” hers is an I/dentity which draws its strength from the interactions between bodies and land in the dynamic and transformative “eco-system” that is the Caribbean.

Notes

1 Migan is a Creole term for a soup made with all-local ingredients, chief of which is the breadfruit. Originating from the South Pacific Ocean region, the breadfruit was introduced to the Caribbean in the eighteenth century by British and French navigators. Today the breadfruit and soups of this kind are quintessential elements of contemporary Caribbean cooking.

Works Cited


Literature for Children and Young Adults as Path to Enlightenment Emancipation

Melissa Garcia-Vega

The fusion of Afro-Amerindian folk myths, a matter of enormous cultural significance in the New World, offers us an opportunity to view the entire Columbian era through a spectrum of the Human World. The storyteller and the story were synonymous when the oral tradition was the one through which the indigenous culture was handed down from generation to generation. The stories now have to be transposed into a written form not just as dull ethnographical material for scholars but as living artistic creations.

Jan Carew

“The Fusion of African and Amerindian Folk Myths”
The visibility and impact of Caribbean literature for children and young adults is contextualized in what Upamanyu Pablo Mukherjee’s work *Postcolonial Environments: Nature, Culture and the Contemporary Indian Novel in English* (2010) calls a “green postcolonialism” that reflects a theory of culture referred to as “eco-materialism” (81). The function of children’s books and/or the results of reading these books in an ecocritical way is central to an elucidation of the “work” they perform. Mukherjee concludes that an ecocritical postcolonial studies framework, or what he suggests as a “materialist ‘green postcolonialism’ or ‘postcolonial green’” approach (59), is necessary to interpret culture and literature. Freedom from the entrenched foundation of “anthropocentric assumptions” (Mukherjee) is currently a common discussion across multiple disciplines.

The recurrence of terms such as *environmental crisis* and *capitalist neo-liberalism* transpires in a framework that dates back to the Enlightenment period. In this era global expansion encouraged scientists to travel. They sought to present how knowledge and scientific development would emancipate the individual person from the mercy of the limits of an ecological existence, to explore the Americas. Through these explorers and scientists of the past (for example, Louis-Antoine de Bougainville in 1766-1769; Francis Masson in 1776; Franz Boos in 1786-1788; Joseph Martin in 1790; and Alexander von Humboldt in 1799-1804) as well as work in the present, natural elements of the ecological world may present splendor—as in the Romantics’ celebration of nature—or may terrify and limit life—as with natural disasters that more recently we see evolve into recurrent climactic catastrophe.

Now well into the first quarter of the twenty-first century, we are in the Anthropocene era.¹ Nature can no longer be seen as separate or subservient to the individual. This concept, most common in intellectual discussion, has long been illustrated in a harmonious manner in the daily efforts of the ordinary or common folk that have sustained a “subsistence perspective” (Mies and Shiva 2014). And while there is the risk of romanticizing a subsistence perspective, as Huggan outlines and challenges in *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001), further consideration of meeting life’s needs without domination of sectors within a society must be given. This act of thinking will counter the “catch up” game that has directed the modern world and all that aspire to be in it. Sylvia Wynter discussed the idea of how to advance in “One-Love Rhetoric or Reality?—Aspects of Afro-Jamaicanism” (1972). She wrote,

Increasingly, it is seen that the masses suffer from, and are the sacrificial victims of the Rostow, take-off-stage development process by which the underdeveloped countries are supposed to ‘catch up’ with the developed areas. What, of course, happens, is that the so-called entrepreneur classes ‘accumulate’ their capital for development, by extortion via high prices from the middle and working classes… It is this cross section that begins to ‘catch up’ in their life style with the ‘developing countries.’ This catching up is done at the expense of the rest of the masses, the rural employed, semi-employed and unemployed; the vast masses of unskilled and underemployed and unemployed in the towns. (69)

Wynter’s depiction of the Caribbean “catch up” game in 1972 reverberates with how Mies and Shiva address the same illusory pursuit of material wealth at the expense of natural resources. They point out: “our critique of the Enlightenment emancipation-logic was impelled not only by an insight
into its consequences for women, but also a concern for those victims, who... include nature and other peoples—the colonized and ‘naturalized’ (7). Rather than emancipation from nature, a freedom tied to “transforming nature and natural forces into what was called a ‘second nature’” (6) or culture, ecofeminists and eco-logic call for the emancipation or freedom from the Enlightenment period and thought.

Wynter’s emphasis on “a cultural subsoil” (65) bears a strong connection to Mukherjee’s discussion of the “concept of the material unevenness of the world and its aesthetic consequences” (77). I argue that a literature for children and young adults embodies the cultural subsoil that Wynter emphasizes. The game of catch-up was initiated and tested first throughout the Caribbean region during nation-building and the celebration of independence from imperial metropolitan powers. A closer look at what literature was produced for young readers at that time bears further attention, however is not addressed within the scope of this article. Instead, I examine literature for young readers in recent years (1995-2013), and how it evidences an interdisciplinary approach to emancipation from Enlightenment, braiding all strands of culture: history, economics, politics, geography, race, gender, sexuality, religion and nature. Caribbean literature for children and young adults complements and illustrates the status of cultural subsoil today.

The confluence of various cultural strands is part of the setting where child as central character engages in events that are often influenced, if not produced, by all these factors. The ecologically-embedded figure in land or water represents a subsistence perspective, as defined by Mies and Shiva. This representation has existed and continues to evolve in ways that reflect the influences of Caribbean culture from Africa, Asia and Europe, as well as indigenous peoples of the Americas.

**Location and agency**

The Caribbean reader familiar with stories of deity figures, such as Papa Bois and Mama D’leau, often called folklore characters, will simultaneously recognize the context, including the setting where the figure is most often found. The Caribbean water source, whether ocean saltwater or river freshwater, is home to the water deity, be she Mama Dlo/ D’leau, Yemaya, or Mami Wata. Likewise, the Caribbean forest is home to the land deity: Papa Bois, Osain, the Green Man, and Old Man of

Fig 1. Papa Bois in Besson, *Folklore & Legends of Trinidad and Tobago.*
*Courtesy Paria Publishing*
the Woods or Wild Man of the Forest. As Gerard Besson (2001) presents Papa Bois (see fig.1) in his tale, “Papa Bois,” the land deity, “knew no difference between himself and all that lived about him, and there was no difference” (12).

Location is also central to the water deity (see fig.2), as seen in Besson’s telling of the folktale, “Ti Jeanne’s Last Laundry.” While finishing the laundry by the river, Ti Jeanne “saw circular ripples on the water emerging from under the foliage, and then the face of an old African woman emerged from the water. She had tattoos, and wore large earrings and strands and strands of necklaces made of colourful beads…the old woman rose and rose…the hag had the body of an anaconda” (49).

In both tales, the presence of the natural elements, forest and watershed, are central to the formation of the deity. They also bear significant resemblances to orature from the Americas, Africa, and Asia/South Asia, as well as Europe.

The Caribbean deity from water or land is a mythical avatar for the subsistence perspective. As Mies and Shiva explain,

To find freedom does not involve subjugation or transcending the ‘realm of necessity’, but rather focusing on developing a vision of freedom, happiness, the ‘good life’ within the limits of necessity, of nature. We call this vision the subsistence perspective, because to ‘transcend’ nature can no longer be justified, instead, nature’s subsistence potential in all its dimensions and manifestations must be nurtured and conserved. Freedom within the realm of necessity can be universalized to all; freedom from necessity can be available to only a few. (8)

Caribbean literature for children and young adults involves an ethos of reciprocal freedom in the aesthetics of illustration and language that mirrors the Caribbean landscape. The Caribbean deity fuels the imagination while also acting as a proponent of nature via her history and role within the region. Both deities represent the connectedness of what continues to provide life. They function as creolized, syncretic, transcultural figures of agency, locating nature’s subsistence potential at the centre of Caribbean community and culture. Examples range in terms of how the nature deity is affiliated with the human form.
In Nalo Hopkinson’s novel *The Salt Roads* (2003), there is an interplay of water and woman, as in the children’s story, *The Mermaid’s Twin Sister* (1994) by Lynn Joseph. One sister speaking to the other in the story says, “I’m one of them now, but they think you’re my spirit floating on de sea. They don’t know it’s two of us. So go now and be my earth self, and I’ll be your water self. Before I could answer, she turned fast and swam away. And all I could see was a long, beautiful fish slicing de waves” (16). As with Hopkinson’s depiction of the water deity, no separation exists between the human and the water form. While on the one hand, mermaids may be familiar to purveyors of Disney films and sirens of classical Western literature, Lasirén, Mami Wata, Yemaya, River Mumma, Erzulie, Mama Dlo and Aziri are all pervasive figures in the imaginaries and beliefs of Caribbean cultures.

Water is home to this multi-named and multi-modal figure that exists for and nurtures Caribbean people. The following excerpt from *The Mermaid Escapade* (2013) by Susan Francis-Brown captures how a grandparent feeds her family with a sense of resilient ancestry. Mama Sara is the elder griot, who educates her granddaughter on the mythology of River Mumma.

She sighed and Abena looked around to see what had troubled her. “Ribba Mumma…” she said with a faint smile. “That’s what the old time people call her.” And she started to sing softly, her voice shaking just a little: “Me a de Ribba Mumma…Me a di Ribba Mumma…shwa, shwa, shwa…” That’s the song people always say that the River Mumma would sing, sitting on a rock by the river, soon a mawnin’—early in the morning—combing her hair. She was a mermaid from days long before time, when the fish of the sea and the people walking on the earth and the birds of the air all lived together as one people. Then, fish could fly and people could swim to the bottom of the sea… so they say. “Anyway, a little boy went to the river early one morning, and he surprised the River Mumma as she was singing—‘shwa, shwa, shwa’—and combing out her hair. And she dropped her comb…” (n. pag.)

In relation to religion, Miguel Barnet explains how the “process of accrual and loss typifies the transfer of elements from one culture to another and gives evidence of the permeability of a religion when, forced not so much by sociological as by ecological circumstances, it has to adjust to a new environment” (88). Hopkinson, Joseph, and Francis-Brown depict time, travel, and space in different ways, yet with a similar emphasis on ecological permeability.

Similarly, the land deity is an ecological figure for the imagination at any age. Walcott uses the Old Man in the Woods in his folktale rendition of *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*. His lines speak to the permeability of a different form than that of water. Shape-shifting of the land deity within the tale illustrates Caribbean history and materialist ideas. Walcott’s work invokes the poetic tensions of the evil forest.
For a child-reader, Debbie Jacob in *Legend of the St. Ann’s Flood* (2005) presents Papa Bois as a kind and benevolent figure. The only fear he strikes in the child in the story is in his physical description: “From the waist up he was a man—an old man who needed the support of an exquisitely carved stick, which looked like it came from Africa. But as for that lower furry body and those hooves for feet—it was all rather confusing. His voice was powerful and yet somehow comforting” (93). In both instances the water and land deity play a central role in the literature for children as well as in Caribbean literature for adults.

Knowledge of masculine deities based in the forest exists in many cultures and religions. Similar to the water deity, he “of the trees” is known by many names, and is often a medicine figure placed in the forest. His knowledge of tree and plant medicine is associated with the various masculine figures: Papa Bois, Osain, and the Green Man. Obviously Caribbean religions also include dominant Christian denominations, which may also influence how these figures exhibit a power that often exemplifies male strength as an offset or alternative to the feminine energy present in the female water deity. As Lizbeth Paravisini-Gebert observes: “Osain defines the parameters of the bond between man and his natural environment—the most crucial relationship in African-derived religions—such as Santería, Vodou and Rastafarianism, is a religion that integrates human concerns with spiritual forces” (2005 183).² Specific to an ecocritical reading are what Paravisini-Gebert and Fernández Olmos describe in *Creole Religions of the Caribbean* (2011) as “beliefs in other spirits (often found in nature)... Plants and trees for example, have a will and a soul, as do all things under the sun” (8). This integration allows for an ecocritical reading to appreciate the value placed on living in a reciprocal manner as opposed to in subjugation of the local environment. These two deities represent the connectedness of nature to humanity.

Furthermore, as Murphy states in *Working the Spirit: Ceremonies of the African Diaspora* (1994), “While each tradition looks to Africa for its wellspring, each has also defined itself against Africa as a distinct community” (178). Within each religious community, the site of communal space inherent to traditions is where the individual performs their spirituality via the natural environment, both literally and figuratively. The significance of sacred circular spaces with central objects such as “the great tree of the poto mitan which links the visible trunk and branches of Haiti with the roots in the invisible earth of Ginen” (187) in Vodou, or the centre pole, “staff of Oranmiyan” (187) in Candomblé that serves as phallus representing a “mystical geography” (186), are examples that resonate with how child protagonists in story engage in relationship to a deity that impacts the community. Most often this impact extends the sustained influence and existence of the nature deity throughout the Caribbean as a transcendent figure. These deities resonate with a push for a subsistence perspective that illustrates the historical agricultural roots of the majority of Caribbean residents in relation to the economy. However, history tells us how; to this day, these practices are compromised by the “catch up” of a society’s economic structure. The capitalism model continues to grow since the seventeenth century.

Implicit to the argument, yet made explicit by Wynter and Mukherjee, is that the freedom from necessity model that has served empire and limited resources, causing irrevocable damage, makes urgent the need for humanity to find more healing cultural paradigms. As with finding new food to feed culture, humanity must find new ways to heal the world. But how does emancipation from a logic
that has been in place for centuries begin? Growth via material consumption needs to be re-thought on more sustainable grounds. And while a new paradigm is under theoretical construction, reading children’s literature within an ecological framework offers examples of how the old paradigm is being dismantled for young readers, especially those perceiving the world from a Caribbean perspective.

Children’s books set in the Caribbean are but one type of cultural production that continues to preserve the syncretic culture of the region by depicting the uneven material development from a child’s perspective. While children’s literature may not seem crucial to global capitalism or the Enlightenment, the modern world grew with and largely because of both, with story serving as a mirror of society. Inherent to this growth was the expansion of the socio-economic status of class so that books became affordable objects for consumption. Many of these books in the past presented the Caribbean in a central way, such as William Shakespeare’s The Tempest (1610–11), Robinson Crusoe (1719) by Daniel Defoe, and Alexander Humboldt’s Cosmos (1848). These examples present how knowledge in all fields of study from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century expanded along with the imperial quest.

Any objects, people, flora and fauna within the newly encountered spaces of the Americas became property of new arrivals to the region. Karen Sands-O’Connor in Soon Come Home to This Island: West Indians in British Children’s Literature (2008) presents how the children’s book in England altered the depiction of indigenous peoples as well as engaging in myth-making in favour of building the imperial nation’s identity as altruistic and virtuous. The pursuit to dominate was largely justified by a consumer ethic, as Lissa Paul’s The Children’s Book Business: Lessons from the Long Eighteenth Century (2011) makes clear. The early children’s book growth in popularity during the Romantic period’s idealization of childhood, within European society, culminated with families now able to build and maintain personal home libraries largely because of their growing economy amassed in the Americas. The aesthetics of books for children spanning the 1780s to early 1900s celebrated youthful imagination and fantasy, such as Alice in Wonderland (1865) and Peter Pan (1902).

Another perspective voiced, particularly in the eighteenth century—a mid-point between the initial age of imperial thievery and abuse—was that of the vitalist. Monique Allewaert, in her work Ariel’s Ecology: Plantations, Personhood, and Colonialism in the American Tropics (2013), reviews the evolution of natural histories invested in a “vitalist” understanding. She describes how American vitalism

… proposed an ontology in which combining and not being was the first principle. The implications of this ontology include that… there is no absolute separation of organic and inorganic forms (which means that humans, animals, vegetables, and minerals cannot be conceived as entirely categorically distinct), and that unexpected combinations of matter, including monstrous combinations, are always possible. (62 emphasis in original)

Allewaert goes on to present the implications of interest in vitalism and the fears of “monstrous combinations” that historically dominated the perception not just of the Caribbean but the majority of places in the world under Western colonial domination.
The trope of the white creolized person being distinct from the Anglo-European as well as the so-called “savage” person of colour to this day resonates in insidious ways. Yet, Allewaert points out the agency that is implied in the tenacious capacity for constant change, which resonates with the shift that Katherine McKittrick presents in her discussion of Sylvia Wynter in *Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis* (2015). This idea of a natural world in flux is what Wynter is “putting forward as a challenge here, as a wager” (16). The evolution of society and time, Wynter argues, “is, meta-Darwinianly, a hybrid being, both *bios* and *logos* (or, as I have recently come to redefine it, *bios* and *mythoi*)” (16). The perceptual shift that Wynter proposes in the “contemporary epistemological order” (14) is possible through Caribbean literature for children and young adults. The water and land deities serve as exemplary figures of Caribbean agency formed from a syncretization, creolization, and transcendence of culture that engages the natural world biologically as well as the mythological world that, Wynter argues, does in fact also form the human.

In her conceptualization of the hybrid being, Wynter cites Aimé Césaire who “puts forth the idea of a new science, a hybrid science: a science of the Word. This idea is one in which the study of the Word (the *mythoi*) will condition the study of nature (the *bios*)” (McKittrick 18). Also posing the disappearance of distinct separate disciplines is Mukherjee’s argument where he cites Marx and Engels to “suggest that it is with the idea of labour as a force linking earth’s humans and non-humans that we begin to move from a dualism of ‘man’ and ‘nature’ to the singularity of an ‘environment’ that is the sum of the relationship” (65). If these ways of understanding the components of the modern world are a legacy in the twenty-first century, a deeper appreciation for how the child understands this legacy and first becomes aware of it is a priority.

**Folklore and cultural memory**

In the introduction to *Children and Cultural Memory in Texts of Childhood* (2014), Lorna Hutchison and Heather Snell present “how young people fit or are made to fit into the processes and collective experiences associated with cultural memory and the operative structures, such as identity formation, patriotism, or political and moral values, through which cultural memory exists or operates” (1). They go on to describe what the child represents in terms of time, where “the child’ embodies futurity… Children become the privileged recipients of such attempts to remember” (8).

This idea is prescient in the consistent uses of childhood memory in Caribbean literature for adults. And recent fantasy tales for young readers show how modern-day conflict is faced by child protagonists, who at first disregard Mama Dlo or Papa Bois as nostalgic or irrelevant cultural markers. There is evidence of how “the child” receives ways of remembering in the story setting and plot. In other words, the initial disregard for figures of superstition and/or romantic nostalgia, prevalent in several children’s texts, implies the larger political agenda of the island nation’s relationship to the folktales and character, particularly when only viewed as representing a past peasant life. What is exciting and fruitful within relatively current children’s books is how they open up possibilities for a child’s perception of the figure, where they initiate a sense of what Hutchison and Snell call “divergent political agendas” (8).
Through the folklore character in Caribbean literature for children and young adults we see stories that exemplify how children interact with what Snell and Hutchison call a “national past” (8). Folktales are the first oral story that forms culture. Ample research supports the idea of oral narrative playing an important role in Caribbean communities. Cynthia James in “From Orature to Literature in Jamaican and Trinidadian Children’s Folk Traditions” (2005) shows how the West Indian children’s folk tradition has evolved from a history of various peoples’ arrival in the region to the establishment of a new Caribbean home, a process that includes “growing self-knowledge” (165). She tells us that historically, Caribbean children would have first been introduced to a folk tradition as “an oral/vernacular tradition consisting of myths, legends, tales, riddles, proverbs, songs, and similar cultural forms transmitted by word-of-mouth” (175). James makes the distinction between oral story and written literature largely because of the persistent view of oral traditions as backwards or remaining stuck in old ways.

This is the very criticism Okpewho presents in his work on African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character, and Continuity (1992). These broad views of orature and literature are germane to examining Caribbean literature for children and young adults because they illustrate how there is a strong relationship between the artists creating oral and written story throughout the Caribbean, as innovative traditions that are very much alive. Examining James’s discussion of how the traditional oral story is performed alongside of the modern Caribbean fantasy tale further supports what both Okpewho and Dundes address within folklore regardless of whether it is orally performed or written down.

One example of innovating traditions is in the book, Le Jour Où La Mer a Disparu (2007) by Fabienne Kanor and illustrated by Alex Godard. The story opens with the narrator referring to the ocean while fishermen are crying. The narrator is Nina, a little girl who looks along with the town members for the sea, saying there is nothing to point to except some fish. The fish are described as dressed in mourning clothing: gray and black. One fish speaks to a man and says, “I have a message for you. The sea told me that she’s gone—she went on a very long trip. Very important issues are keeping her in a foreign land” (n. pag.). The personification of the sea articulates an environmentalist thought and later in the story the reader sees Nina’s ability to speak with the sea as illustration of her ecoliteracy.

Ana Lydia Vega and Alida Ortiz Sotomayor also innovate traditions, creating folklore within their contemporary realistic story En la Bahía de Jobos: Celita Y El Mangle Zapatero (1998). Don Felo Cora takes his granddaughter, Celita, out on the water in his jolla (small boat), “El Brujito,” and comments on how even the crabs will not bite that day. As he steers towards the mangrove, the narrator describes the pout on the child’s face as she hoped to catch fish as large as herself to show pictures back in New York after her summer vacation. Soon after, Don Felo begins to reminisce, saying, “Antes, todo eso estaba bien verdecito” (“Long ago, all of this was very green”) (n. pag.), as they travel along in the mangrove. The grandfather tells Celita about Pablo, a young slave boy seeking to return to coastal Africa, the home he had never forgotten, after he is told he is a “hijo de Ogún, el espíritu de fuego” (“son of Ogún, the God of Fire”) (n. pag.) by Chemba, an old African guide who is enslaved on the plantation. Pablo prays to Ogún for protection and soon after, while working in the cane fields, a fire breaks out. Pablo takes the opportunity to hide in sea grape shrubbery. He runs through the mangrove to escape slave owners and gets trapped in the root system. Yolanda Pastrana Fuentes’s illustration shows him becoming one with the vines and roots so that his limbs grow entwined, all the while his body and face are turned towards Africa. In these children’s books we see support for the idea of a subsistence
perspective that challenges the paradigm of emancipation from nature, a logic that has led humanity to the precipice of a climate apocalypse.

The land and water deities in these stories encode rather than separate agency between the human and their natural environment. Caribbean literature, with characters such as the Old Man of the Forest or the Water Serpent Woman, is illustration of an affiliation that resonates with what Sylvia Wynter puts forward as a bios and mythoi examination of the word that informs a new epistemological order.

To explicate the mythical and magical elements of Caribbean culture that emanate from a culmination of peoples brought together to the region, useful questions posed by Hutchison and Snell come to mind:

…which individuals and groups in society are invited to participate in cultural memory and to what extent their participation is circumscribed? Who gets to decide or settle on a specific interpretation of a fixed point in the past?… Who gets to control the distribution of collective interpretations? And finally, who benefits from them? (7)

The folk tale and multicultural emphasis of recent decades became didactic and forced in attempts to portray children worldwide as similar, yet with distinctly colourful or exotic details. Many of these multicultural stories were viewed by broader teaching communities as opportunities to foment global consciousness in classrooms. Unfortunately, the emphasis on folk tales, particularly in the Caribbean, limited child readers from identifying with characters that reflected more current/realistic narratives. The opportunity to mix old folk tales with new realities amidst fantastic figures links certain narratives to children today. There are children’s authors who continue to use magic and myth to present the culture’s reality from a child’s perspective.

One such story is *Jessica* (1998) by Christine Leo and illustrated by Kim Harley. The story opens with Jessica, a young girl, living in the Caribbean Sea, speaking with her grandfather. The narrator says, “Jessica loves being out and about with her friends…Best of all, she loves her grandfather’s stories about the time when he was young. A time when the ocean was peaceful and clean. A time when the only litter to be found on the sea bed was the odd bit of treasure and remains of sunken, wooden ships” (n. pag). There are two illustrations of the grandfather: in the first he is seated in his chair and later he is swimming in the water, wearing his kufi with many seashells of different sizes adorning it. Jessica learns at the feet of her grandfather and is first enlisted by him to become an activist. Her grandfather teaches her about the constant dangers from the habits of the humans that live above the water. In her swimming, she comes across such an incident of contamination and partners with a ship of concerned human protesters trying to protect the environment, in pursuit of a polluting ship.
Susan Francis-Brown approaches the children’s story somewhat from a historical-fiction standpoint in her book *The Mermaid Escapade* (2013). Lula, one of the mermaid girls, says to Rananna, “I thought the whole story was not mine to tell” (n. pag). Rananna is a mermaid official. She, like Mama Sara, has a moment where she looks at the two young mermaids. Yet as she thinks of how she could have been their grandmother the reader is told she is an important elder, who fills in the story gaps of how River Mumma came to be.

The role of adults in many stories parallels an important aspect of the current Caribbean family and captures how these contemporary fantasy stories are also realistic in depicting experiences specific to the region. Child protagonists are depicted as with parents or separate from parents in the following ways: orphaned; visiting grandparents in the Caribbean for the summer; and long-term separation for economic matters with parents searching for work in the diaspora. Often the adults in the story are grandparents raising children, while parents build lives and earn a living in metropoles. Family elders serve as cultural source, teaching the children the oral folktales as well as being nurturing surrogate parents.

In *Parental Absence as a Consequence of Migration* (2007), Mala Jokhan writes, “In relation to the Caribbean, parental migration is not uncommon, as several parents may leave in order to improve their living standards, as well as to economically support those left behind, who comprise mainly children” (2). An example of this occurrence is in *The Mermaid Escapade* by Francis-Brown. Parents are absent, with an explanation of how they migrated for work to large cities in Europe, North America or on more urbanized islands in the regions where jobs are available. Stunted local economies are the implied status for these families. As a result, grandparents fill two roles: primary caretakers and bearers of the cultural knowledge that link children to the folkloric deities. The elders within the community serve as the figures that a child turns to when in need of guidance. Furthermore, both deities embody a sense of age-old wisdom, the wisdom of experience that does not represent a linear progression but rather an all-knowing awareness. They have access to knowledge of how all forms of life/matter evolve.

The prominent adult figure in texts such as Grand in Susan Cooper’s *Green Boy* (2003) and Mama Sara in *The Mermaid Escapade* (2013) illustrate a dynamic that is addressed in a number of different but related academic and artistic disciplines with attention on the Caribbean child. For example, Jacqueline Sharpe, a Caribbean-based child and adolescent psychiatrist, addresses the fundamental role of male figures in the socialization of children while cinematically, Lisa Harewood’s debut short film *AUNTIE* (2013) presents the Barbadian story of a young girl being raised in Barbados by a parental surrogate while her biological mother migrates to the United Kingdom. The attention to this current experience serves as further evidence for Caribbean children to read literature that reflects this reality.

**Pre-colonial roots**

An avatar of the Wild Man or Papa Bois is the Yoruba God, Osain. Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert (2005) states, “Loco and Ayizan, together with Osain... offer a path to an ecocritical reading of the
relationship between the Caribbean folk and nature, and of the representation of this relationship in Caribbean literature” (182). Osain manifests in the woods and forest. This depiction is also consistent with how the Green Man came to be popularized throughout Northern and Central Europe and also resonates with Shiva in Hindu mythology. According to Carlos Antonio De Bourbon-Galdiano-Montenegro in Ozain, the Secrets of Congo Initiations and Magic Spells Palo Mayombe-Palo Mont (2012): “The origins and the sacred mysteries of the spirit Ozain are believed to have come to Earth on a meteorite” (6). This quote illustrates the formation of the forest deity in cosmology and is parallel to discussion of the water deity rooted in how life needs water.

As Henry John Drewal writes, “Every child swims in its mother’s womb before taking a first breath of air. In this sense… ‘water is life,’” and there is a reverence for the “sacred nature of water” (Mami Wata 2008, 23). There are communities that honour the water spirit precisely because of the value that they place on water sources such as rivers and rain. Elsewhere Drewal discusses Mami Wata as the “African water divinity as well as… a vast ‘school’ of trans-cultural and trans-African Atlantic water spirits” (Sacred Waters 2008, 1). He locates the water deity in Africa and the African Atlantic world, stating, “The identities of these divinities, however, are as slippery and amorphous as water itself. Only the frames of history, art, and culture can contain them, giving them shape, contour, substance, and specificity” (Mami Wata 2008, 23). So what are the origins of this image and persona? What role has she served within cultures and how is she currently perceived? She is not limited to one continent and exists as an archetype of female energy in various civilizations.

In Legend of the St. Ann’s Flood (2005), Debbie Jacob highlights Jaya, Joseph’s closest schoolmate, who talks about her Indo-Trinidadian identity. Her mother is warmly presented, cooking favourite and delicious meals that represent Jaya’s culture and identity. Jaya says, “my mother, [is] the best cook in Trinidad, [she] will fix you roti and the spiciest curried chicken you could ever hope to eat—plenty of coriander, garlic, hot peppers and curry powder. She’ll tell you stories about snakes in India—you know—snake charmers with cobras in their wicker baskets. Wouldn’t it be fun to be a snake charmer?” (8). Specific within Jaya’s narrative of family, parents and home life is the role of snakes and rivers. She tells Joseph her mother’s tales of growing up in India and how courageous “her mom was staring boldly at a snake” (9). The young reader, alongside the author of each story, is guided towards understanding agency for individual community members often with a common goal.

The confluence of each Caribbean deity is part of the formation of a Caribbean cosmology that Patricia Mohammed describes, citing Wilson Harris, as “buried in the arts of the imagination” (Harris qtd. in Mohammed, 67). She also cites Bhoendradatt Tewarie (2006) who asks, “Should the discussion that has, traditionally, centered around a Eurocentric Enlightenment view, based on the pre-eminence of science and technology, secular notions and rational thought, be broadened?” (66). Finally, Mohammed refers to the late Rex Nettleford (1995) for pointing out how the Caribbean has “created thought systems, ontologies, and cosmologies and a Caribbean way of knowing, a Caribbean way of seeing, nurtured not out of magic, but out of the empirical experience of a collision of cultures” (66).
Caribbean children’s literature illustrates this collision for the child reading within a current community. Nettleford’s emphasis on the earthly world, paired with Mohammed’s argument for a Caribbean cosmology, complements the organizing principle of Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s inner and outer plantation. Mohammed points out one example of Caribbean creation that brings cultures of different continents together. She asks, “Might we configure New World narratives of morality through origin stories that unite rather than divide, that tells [sic] of a people who have come together rather than been rendered asunder?” (67-68). She argues that “mythopoetics” becomes the underpinnings of a philosophy of ideas that originate with both masculine and feminine archetypes.

Wynter also addresses the role of myth in the Caribbean. She cites the trailblazing Haitian intellectual Jean Price-Mars, whose significant body of work includes the study of Haitian folklore, to highlight how African religions, beliefs and myths that “had been retained from Africa created a cultural matrix” (1972, 65). Through this cultural matrix, Wynter posits that the “revindication of blackness, which is in a sense the revindication of the native, the revindication of the humanness of Man, has taken place in the Caribbean” (66). The water and land deities serve as vindication through their role in Caribbean origin narratives and their current presentation in books for children today. Billy Elm (aka Helen Williams) in Delroy in the Marog Kingdom (2009) uses the Arawak/Taino origin story first published in a collection of mythology gathered by Ramon Pané in the fifteenth century. In its original form the story tells of an Indian man who “became angry at the sun for its various tricks and decided to leave. He convinced all the women to abandon their men and come with him along with their children. But, the children were deserted, and in their hunger they turned into frogs. The women simply disappeared.” (6). Williams uses bits of this myth as background story for how the fictitious Marog kingdom developed. As mentioned earlier, Monique Allewaert also speaks to the idea of a cultural matrix being created in the Americas from a postcolonial, ecritical disciplinary perspective. The convergence of these opinions from varied perspectives, that are all located in the Americas, advances the conversation of a syncretized Caribbean folklore that is vibrant today.

These three distinct, yet related disciplinary publications—Ariel’s Ecology: Plantations, Personhood and Colonialism in the American Tropics, 1760-1820 by Allewaert; “Morality and the Imagination—Mythopoetics of Gender and Culture in the Caribbean: The Trilogy” by Mohammed; and Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis, edited by McKittrick—frame how the Caribbean deity is embedded in the ecology of the region. The Caribbean region’s political, economic, and social context has historically been countered by the presence of the water and forest deity. When one peels away the outer layers of Brathwaite’s description of the plantation, there in the inner circle we find an adult who passes along to children throughout the islands a remnant of deity preserved. She continues to nourish the soul as well as body, the mythoi and the bios. Wynter provides the philosophical basis for the production of myths, while Mohammed approaches the formation of the origin story as it forms “the basis of how a set of philosophical ideas may be reasonably argued” (68). Allewaert elucidates how as a result of the US plantation system, subaltern persons “have long been among those most directly impacted by the environmental crises that accelerated with the development of colonial capitalism” (18). Allewaert, in examining the de/humanizing colonial creation of the parahuman, supports how the political, economic and social context of the Caribbean and the Americas was ideal for the
evolution of each deity. She states how colonial trespass and brutality “in these regions produced modes of story…that gave rise to a minoritarian mythos of the Americas in which the autonomy of parts engenders new fusings. In this mythos, diversification and diversity became the originary American story” (25). The Caribbean deity is central to this story.

Patricia Mohammed questions how the story is told and what details are included within the story. She encapsulates the choices for Caribbean people, asking, “How do we build bridges across this divided conception of humanity? It is part of an all-too-consuming search for identity, in which we think we must choose between modernity and tradition, between Europe and the Caribbean, between Africa and Asia” (73). Mohammed uses a painting by William Turner, “The Slave Ship” (1839), that ushers in a new style in painting, to represent ideological shifts not captured in the classical manner of painting at the time. In a similar vein, Wynter proposes, as mentioned earlier, “the idea of a new science, a hybrid science of the Word... in which the study of the Word (the mythoi) will condition the study of nature (the bios),” and calls for “a rewriting of our present now globally institutionalized order of knowledge” (18). The discussion of myth and biology that Wynter presents is the necessary evolution of discussing how myth, and I include folklore, are the public dreams of a people (Campbell 48). My interest is to situate and see how mythology as manifestation of body energies, as Joseph Campbell describes it, exists within the Caribbean landscape. Wynter’s recognition of the rupture that Fanonian theory of sociogeny causes is not limited to just that of the social interaction between people, but extends to the interaction between people and natural environment.

Furthermore, the repetition of features across cultures on various continents illuminates the role of archetype and the collective unconscious, both concepts informed greatly by the work of Carl Jung. However, Jung’s work is limited in his failure to register racism. Rather, Fanon’s premise is that racism, as a product of society, fosters the existence of the Other which creates another layer of repetition, regarding oppression and domination, across cultures that must be considered if we are to view the myth as a public dream. In addition, within the discussion of societal features one must consider how people understand their relationship to other life forms, i.e., animals, plants and natural resources such as bodies of water. The mythos focused on here often includes the female serpent in water and the man with wild hair, resembling the roots and branches of a tree. For example, in “Ecology and Indian Myth” (1992), Kapila Vatsyayan outlines the role of water and the deities, largely reptilian, that are associated with Indian myths. This depiction correlates to how and what informs the Caribbean water deity. Vatsyayan states,

The myths of waters take innumerable other forms relating to the ocean (Sagara), the rivers and the nymphs of the skies. Indian literature is replete with their names—Saraswati, Ganga, Yamuna, Urvasi or Menaka. Indian folklore sanctifies these. All these deities are members of the vast water cosmogony so vital and central to Indian thought. Little wonder that from the simplest tribal to the most sophisticated Indian venerates water in some form or the other. (163)
Further description of the myth of creation focuses on watersheds, as well as the relationship between water and serpent.

However, there is no sequential evolution of one element to another. Rather, the Ganges River moves—a living organism that interacts with humans. The river is “related to serpents” (163) and cast as female: “she often assumes a mermaid form protected by a hood of snakes” (165). The relationship to the other elements makes the distinction that the Ganges does not birth the serpent but rather is connected to it. Vatsyayan emphasizes connection, which I highlight as an ecological perspective, based on the relationship between culture and ecology. She concludes the interconnection between water and reptiles is based in movement and change. The very same change that Wynter illustrates in her challenge of the order of knowledge.

Espousing an ecological view, Vatsyayan states: “All ancient religions have given a special significance to the snake. The coiled and intertwined snake represents a moment in the undifferentiated condition of creation on which human life rests. The snake is the symbol of this interconnection—swift, silent, limbless and deadly” (169-170). Her discussion of mythology emphasizes how “Man and reptile as man and water and vegetation are inter-related and inter-dependent” (170). This interrelationship is central to Caribbean children’s stories. In *Escape from Silk Cotton Forest* (2008), Francis C. Escayg presents the legacy of myth by telling the reader how Domino was predestined to be a leader, as told to him by his mother:

She once told me that I survived a snake bite when I was a baby. It was a miracle and the entire village sat in silence for thirteen days, waiting on a message from the great spirits. When they did talk to Mother Blanchisseuse they told her that snake medicine people are very rare. We have the power to take on the darkness and to resurrect into the light. She said that nothing would hurt me, unless I allowed it. (155)

Vatsyayan also cites the Nagas and Naginis and draws attention to the “coiled serpent as the eternal movement of cyclic time…a perfect geometric statement of the lotus—*Naga*, water and earth” (170, emphasis in original). This focus on a sense of time is central from both a Caribbean and global ecological perspective in Caribbean literature for children and young adults. For example, *The Parrots & Papa Bois* (2002) by Lynette Comissiong, illustrated by Avril Turner, tells a tale using repetitive rhythm in the three exchanges between Mira, the central bird character, and her friends in the forest. There is also the scary character, Ma Zeena, whom Turner illustrates with clasped hands, stooped over in a sneaky, suspicious position, invoking the image of witch. In exchange for making Mira’s voice sweet, Ma Zeena requests a *carambola* (star fruit) from the fruit tree near Papa Bois’s house. Ma Zeena cackles as she states, “If I eat that carambola I will be more powerful than Papa Bois” (23). The reader sees how, just as Mira picks the fruit, “the forest grew dark. The winds began to whistle through the trees and there was a noise like thunder!” (25). At that moment Mira drops the fruit, changing her action. This sudden action and freezing of the moment is similar to how Domino is quickly brought from a dream-like trance to staring at a snake holding him down in *Escape from Silk Cotton Forest*. Time also serves to exaggerate—
via a slowing-down of the moment within the water—Delroy’s transition from human boy to marog (man-frog) in *Delroy and the Marog Kingdom*, and is also emphasized in his amazement in River Mumma’s timelessness in appearance.

Turning to the land deity, Vatsyayan describes how

…snakes and reptiles in a dramatic moment of biological mutation acquire wings and become birds. They are inter-related antagonists and yet complementary. Intuitively, the Indian sees this ecological connection and Indian myth provides many examples of reptiles changing to birds or reptiles and birds seemingly antagonistic to each other being vehicles of gods. (170)

Looking at *The Parrots & Papa Bois* we see the interrelationship with several animals and symbols. Correlations are evident with the Caribbean deity, Old Man of the Forest and Osain/Osanyin, the Yoruba orisha of herbalism, as Maureen Warner-Lewis, among others, describes him in *Guinea’s Other Suns: The African Dynamic in Trinidad Culture* (1991). In the Caribbean, the forest represents a power of knowledge in the shape of medicinal cures and overall life source. It is indeed possible that the Caribbean representation of Osain is conflated, considering that this deity is more pronounced in those islands where there are transmigrated Yoruba, Fon, and Igbo cultures, as well as in Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Cuba.

The value and need for both the water and the forest source to sustain the majority of matter requires protection from hubris and/or ignorant use. A foundational interconnection between nature and humanity exists, or as Wynter postulates, the hybrid being defined as both *bios* and *mythoi* (16), an “auto-instituting species, a third level of existence, from the event of our origin on the continent of Africa until today” (244). This third level of existence harbours the potential to emancipate people, particularly those of Caribbean descent, from the era of Enlightenment and its dominant paradigms that persist today. Literature plays a role in breaking with the paradigms of past philosophical approaches to humanity, science, and politics. However, if as Wynter wagers, there will be a “third emancipatory breaching of the law of cognitive closure” (244), then we must begin to envision how individual citizens will exist. Inherent to the discussion is the role of the environment and natural resources to life. Caribbean folkloric characters and their distant cousins of today serve to educate towards an expanded mindset that questions how one chooses to live.

The forest deity as introduced thus far links to deforestation, medicine, animal protection, and also water, if we consider the mythic image of the Ganges River forming matted hair, as well as the Osun River, Ogun River, and others predominantly in the Yoruba area of Nigeria. Similarly, the water deity exists in both salt and fresh water, is often depicted as part snake, and can vary in age so that she may represent the young virgin or mother, as well as Yemayá, or the hag-like witch with ties to sorcery, as invoked by Morgan le Fay or Mama Dlo.
Mohammed’s discussion of Caribbean folklore characters as depicted in the painting *Trinidad Folklore* (1958) by Alfred Codallo (fig. 3) presents these characters visually, and to a broad audience. Mohammed notes, “How we now imagine these characters is a result of Codallo’s listening to stories and embodying them” (75). Much of Codallo’s work illustrates change and transition as presented by Mohammed.

A Darwinian genealogy informs a Caribbean cosmology, for example, when the water deity is represented as “organisms … related to [the human]… through common descent, the symbol of our amphibian antecedents” (76). From an evolutionary model we can view the Caribbean children’s book as it depicts a non-linear existence of the water and land deities. Mohammed concludes her discussion of what she calls the pagan, and what Allewaert might suggest is the parahuman, stating,

…to reinvent for us the words pagan and heathen as they were transcribed by the Eurocentric pen. In this mythopoetic space, we find a window for the reconfiguration of memory and reinvention of a past without the idea of *limpia de sangre*—purity of blood—which was so important to the construction of race or raza by the Spanish conquistadores. (79)
This speaks to the *mythoi* and *bios* that Wynter identifies as a new order. Both Wynter, in her identification of a contemporary epistemological order, and Mohammed’s desire seek to define the Caribbean cosmology. In doing so, the material Caribbean ecology becomes central in its collusion to situate these two deities as nature personified. The ascendance of nature via the deity enables the reconfiguration of the Caribbean person through a mythology based largely on regional features of the landscape.

Children’s literature, to a large degree, is at risk of fostering a dominant perspective, largely driven by capitalism. Yet there exists in the growing body of books published in the last 20 years, as well as the fairly recent theoretical frameworks and criticisms employed to discuss children’s literature, evidence of countering what Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva see as a “relationship of exploitative dominance between man and nature (shaped by reductionist modern science since the sixteenth century) and the exploitative and oppressive relationship between men and women that prevails in most patriarchal societies, even modern industrial ones, [that] were closely connected” (3). In a similar fashion, children’s literature illustrates Brian Attebery’s claim “that these [myth and fantasy] are not two different stories but two aspects of the same historical narrative” (9). A number of aspects shape how current books function for reading the environment within the fantasy tale. Visionary aspects that inform these stories are location, the natural world, and a cultural sense of history.

The new language and epistemology forged by Mohammed and Wynter parallel how Tina Hanlon presents the Robinsonnade literary genre, based on Daniel Defoe’s 1719 novel *Robinson Crusoe*. This genre asks to “consider new ways of living to grapple with… unsolved problems about how to live in harmony with the natural environment and other people” (67). Characters within contemporary novels for children and young adults are conscious of limitations in the natural world and their role in maintaining a harmonious relationship. This awareness also forms the foundation of an ecofeminist framework that incorporates “a new cosmology and a new anthropology which recognizes that life in nature (which includes human beings) is maintained by means of co-operation, and mutual care and love” (Mies and Shiva 6). Enacting this cosmology anew in the Caribbean requires an understanding of the logics and histories that directed the expansion of colonial European powers to the Americas, as well as other regions of the world. The late Édouard Glissant elaborates on this in *Poetics of Relation* (1997), addressing the sources of “The Relative and Chaos,” or

...why philosophies issuing from different ‘stages’ of science have driven successively ‘established’ ideas of cultures and their entanglements. It is because scientific ideas always presuppose generalization (unconsciously influenced by the metaphysics from which they freed themselves) and are suspicious of it in each instance (as every poetics in the world inspires us to be). They have finally been able to understand generalization from the angle of generality, abandoning filiation’s linearity for the surplus of expansiveness. This is how the evolution of culture works. (138)

From a Caribbean as well as an ecological perspective, expansiveness is necessary for survival. Allewaert addresses the idea of alternative understandings, a recalibration of the conceptions of the body, of personhood, and of agency that Americanists as well as ecocritics have inherited (2). This
recalibration that Allewaert advocates I use in conjunction with and as a reply to what Attebery presents as the modern perspective, defined as “up to date, rational, well armed, technologically savvy” (10). This viewpoint, Attebery goes on to say, enables the individual to

...see myth as something from an earlier age and those who maintain mythic traditions as survivals: living cultural fossils. We admire their vivid imaginations and regret the loss of such primitive faith, but we would not trade our central heating, automobiles, and Internet for their masks and miracles. (11)

This modern person enacts the very ethos of an Enlightenment where separation is absolute, so that mythical miracles solely exist to prop up the buzzing air conditioner. The modern perspective, in terms of the environment, must reinvent itself in dialogue with the subsoil culture. In aligning these relatively new approaches of theorizing stories for children, where the fantasy genre is seen as a route to myth through an ecocritical lens, Caribbean children’s literature reflects a long historical lineage that reveals a regional cosmology as well as an ecocritical aesthetic. Via these theoretical approaches, texts written for children throughout the Caribbean illustrate a diversity of affiliations not limited to race/class/gender/sexuality but also incorporating economics and the natural ecology as variables that inform or relate to culture within this literary corpus. A number of issues are highlighted regarding the status of Caribbean children’s literature. One, the cultural identities of Caribbean children; two, the intellectual formation of these children and how it reflects their relationship to the physical environment; three, an engagement in the pleasures of reading that begins with an aesthetics that leads to a love of literacy; and finally, an overall appreciation and grounding in a sense of what being in or from the Caribbean means that can be responded to in critical ways. Drawing on the interconnectivity in Wynter’s argument, highlighting its evolution from Fanon’s sociogeny and his elucidation of Jung’s idea that myth is the public dream I argue is prescient in Caribbean literature for children and young adults. The metamorphosis of water and forest deities in the child’s imagination serves as the current catapult for how humanity may proceed on a twentieth-century path with water and forest fueling the search for knowledge.

Notes

1 The Anthropocene defines Earth’s most recent geologic time period as being human-influenced, or anthropogenic, based on overwhelming global evidence that atmospheric, geologic, hydrologic, biospheric and other earth system processes are now altered by humans. http://www.anthropocene.info/

2 Other religions to consider are Kumina, Candomblé, Zion-Revival, Spiritual Baptist, etc. Rastafarian spirituality is very concerned with environmental balance and borrows heavily from the culture of Judaism and the cult of the Nazarites. They are the modern-day Nazarites who like Elijah, John the Baptist, and Samson in the Old Testament do not eat meat etc.
3 Parahumanity, Allewaert theorizes, is a “term [that] describes the slave and maroon persons who seventeenth-through-nineteenth-century Anglo-European colonists typically proposed were not legally or conceptually equivalent to human beings while at the same time not being precisely inhuman” (6).

Works Cited


“Seeing” Goat Island Clearly: A Question of “Development”

Jacqueline Bishop

In the end we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand, and we will understand only what we are taught.

Baba Dioum

(All photographs in this essay taken by Jacqueline Bishop)
For most of its history, the Caribbean has served as a muse for endless creative works, travelogues, and memoirs. Yet, there is a noticeable absence of the exploration of environmental issues within the arts and literature, especially around the concept of development—a term that is deeply entangled within the larger conversation of globalization.

This photographic essay employs the backdrop of Goat Island, Jamaica, to explore how development is defined and carried out in the Caribbean from the lens of an artist whose work intersects environmental policy.

**Environmental discourse**

The Caribbean consistently feels like an afterthought in literature addressing environmental concerns. Marginalized in environmental discourse, issues such as protecting the biodiversity of animal and plant life are undermined by priorities given to economic development (Roberts and Thanos 2003). In addition, environmental concerns are largely about how the environment is perceived from the tourist purview. Even more problematic, the experiences and concerns voiced by poor and indigenous communities are often completely ignored in the discourse—even though they are often the grassroots conservationists who are committed to protecting and sustaining the Caribbean.

In addition, more and more Caribbean countries are turning to ecotourism as a solution to both their environmental and economic development problems. But the concept of ecotourism is in itself highly problematic. On one hand, ecotourism often brings in much-needed revenue on the promise of protecting the environment. On the other hand, the lack of a clear definition of what ecotourism is and how it should be transacted has disrupted local wildlife by failing to provide adequate policy on how the environment should be sustained and protected. And then there are old colonial hierarchies still present that maintain a power-over relationship in which many of the communities living in or around these ecologies have no control, but are left to fix and repair the ruptures made by intrusive tourism (Anthanasiou 1998).

The question then becomes, is it possible to safeguard the environment while pursuing economic development?
Goat Island, Jamaica

Beginning in 2013, news reports emerged that the then government of Jamaica had entered into a US $1.5 billion deal in which it would sell Goat Island to a Chinese company for development. The pristine natural reserve that is part of the Portland Bight Protected Area would serve as a logistics hub. Jamaican officials argued that the deal would produce more jobs for citizens; however, past dealings with the East Asian country have shown that employment opportunities were generally directed toward Chinese citizens.

The Portland Bight Protected Area, Goat Island specifically, is a significant environmental asset of Jamaica. The area forms part of the largest mangrove system in the country, and is home to various vulnerable and endemic species. The region also houses the close to 50,000 fisher-folk—the country’s largest concentration of Jamaicans in the fishing industry—whose livelihoods became threatened by this deal. Given all that was at stake with the proposed logistics hub, I circled back and forth to another question: What does the Jamaican government mean when it speaks about development and who is this development for?

And so early one morning, I found myself on a boat heading out to see for myself this place called Goat Island. As I journeyed on the calm, clear waters, so many images kept tumbling in my head. Then there were all the questions that viewing the island on Google Maps could not answer. Would the islands be lush? How many islets made up what is called Goat Island? On and on went the questions. I knew that I would not get all the answers during the one-day visit, but I would understand better as I captured the island with my camera—as shown in the photographs showcased here.
down. Fish, thick in abundance, were jumping out of the water and crisscrossing mid-air over the boat and back into the water. There was even a large reptile of some kind that crawled off the banks and into the waters. The place seemed untouched—a nod to a time not marked by time or development.

While we made our way down waters full of life within and around them, spatial considerations were collapsed into the distinctive lift and fall of the voices of the two fisher-folk on whose boat we were traveling. They were talking about the need to protect Goat Island and their love for the place. Those two people, a woman and a man, were all part of the beauty captured not only through camera lens, but through the stimulation of many senses. They were part of what I discovered that day on Goat Island.

My friends and I were not the only ones in the water that morning: there was a man fishing in waters where buoys clearly stated there was no fishing allowed. And there was a group of two or three other people who, perhaps like us, had come out to see for themselves this place that had caused so much fuss lately in the newspapers and on social media; this place that the then government thought it so easy to destroy in the name of “progress,” in the name of “development.”
Places of intrinsic value

It so happens that at the time that I came to see Goat Island, I was yet again in graduate school, but for politics and public policy rather than studio art or creative writing. In some tangible way, I wanted to work to safeguard and protect places like Goat Island.

Since my trip to Goat Island, I have come realize that I had long been going to Goat Island before that morning trip because it represented so many places I have been before. Locations that should be held dear—places holding intrinsic value—but seem to be vanishing due to the incomplete idea too often called “development.”

Oftentimes our politics—and consequently our policies—get mired into quick (and fallacious) binary positions. We can either safeguard the environment or we can have economic development. Very little thought is given as to whether we can have both. I argue that it is possible to utilize the protection of the environment as a means of economic development, especially for the most economically vulnerable and hardest hit members of our society, many of whom are based in rural areas.

In writing a thesis on species protection specific to Jamaica I found that the small community of Bowden Pen, deep in the dark blue Portland mountains (and home to one of the largest butterflies in the world, the endangered endemic Giant
Swallowtail Butterfly) was leading the way in trying to answer some of the questions on environmental assets and community economic development. In the past, foreigners would pay local boys to catch the large, gorgeous, resplendent butterfly which could grow larger than the size of an adult hand. Sold around the world as decorations, these butterflies garnered huge sums of money. However, the species was being depleted.

Largely through the efforts of one woman, Ms. Lynette Wilks, the poaching of the Giant Swallowtail halted. Using grassroots efforts, Wilks protected an important part of the Jamaican ecology. More so, she and others in her community built and sustained a successful economic infrastructure based largely on safeguarding and protecting this butterfly. An economic infrastructure that is dependent on even the children in the community being lookouts against pilferers who no longer roam the countryside with impunity. Nonetheless, Ms. Wilks has yet to be given any type of national recognition by the government.

There have been more spin-offs from the protection of this one butterfly than I would be able to write about now, but among the things that the community has done is replant the food source for the butterfly, and anecdotal evidence suggests that once again the butterfly’s numbers, which for years remained critically low, are now rising. When I visited Bowden Pen to conduct interviews with community members that would form the basis of my thesis work, there was the sense that the Giant Swallowtail Butterfly has intrinsic value because it exists, yes, but also that safeguarding and protecting the worth of an environmental asset can itself become a form of economic development.

And that for me is ultimately a more wholesome definition of what development means and who should benefit the most from economic development. With that in mind, Goat Island can truly be “developed” in such intriguing ways, all to the benefit of the local community, but only if there is enough thinking-through of key terms like “development” to imagine it so.
Many thanks to Kaia Niambi Shivers who helped me think through many of the ideas in this essay.

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Caribbean and Postcolonial Ecocriticism: Revisioning in an Urgent Time


Elaine Savory

My editorial preface to this JWIL issue provides much of the context for this review essay. Here, in a necessarily short space, I will address work which has appeared in the past year and a half or so and which either focuses on the Caribbean or includes it in the global vision that is at the heart of ecologically-centered thinking. Two of these texts are literary in their focus and two are interdisciplinary. Each approach is important. The first encourages the imaginative and empathetic response to ecological crisis, as well as a deepening awareness of language registers and functions. The second approach encourages innovative ways of thinking in which generalities work cautiously in relation to particularities.
In her excellently-titled *The Storyworld Accord: Econarratology and Postcolonial Narratives*, Erin James makes a case for what she terms “econarratology”, a particular kind of narrative practice which bring into dialogue ecocriticism and narratology. She takes issue with theories of reading which suggest a “recentering” of the reader into the world of the story they are reading, while failing to address environmental concerns. Following this thesis, James points out that postcolonial readings of texts have long asked questions about the relation of form and place even while they did not directly thematize the environment. Her particular focus in the book is on literary texts emerging from two locales, Nigeria and Trinidad and Tobago (which James refers to only as “The Caribbean island nation of Trinidad”, (39)), and on making “connections between ecocriticism, postcolonialism, and narrative theory” (40). From Trinidad and Tobago she considers Samuel Selvon’s *A Brighter Sun* and *The Lonely Londoners* and V.S. Naipaul’s *An Area of Darkness* and *India: A Million Mutinies Now*. She devotes two of her six chapters to Nigerian writers Ken Saro-Wiwa and Booker prize winner Ben Okri and his *The Famished Road* trilogy.

In her discussion on Selvon, James utilizes Gerald Prince’s theory of “counterpersonal narration” to explain Selvon’s narrative shifts from objective to subjective (47) in his story-world of *A Brighter Sun*. She makes a similar case for *The Lonely Londoners*, and in this instance, extends her argument to show how this type of narration offers “non-1950’s black British readers” a strangely unfamiliar space, distancing such readers from characters. It is when James compares these two texts that her insights become the most engaging. She argues that in the earlier novel, there is an “alternative environmental imagination” offered to challenge colonial constructs of the nation, just as in his representation of London, he puts distance between what James imagines as his reader’s familiarity with the city. It is somewhat puzzling why here James does not employ reader-response theory. Is she claiming that *The Lonely Londoners* sets out to exclude readers in the world Selvon experienced when he wrote the text, or that in today’s cultural contexts, a particular kind of reader becomes perhaps less resisting or even just puzzled? Speaking to the creolized politics of *A Brighter Sun*, it is unfortunate that James states (twice, in different parts of the book), that Kamau Brathwaite is a Jamaican poet, literary critic and scholar (35, 71). He of course spent many years in Jamaica and his work reflects Jamaican culture as it does many other aspects of the African diaspora. He is a local, regional, diasporic and global writer all at once. But he is a Barbadian. However, James accurately identifies in Brathwaite’s work “a powerful connection between the physical environment of the Caribbean and the particular rhythms of Caribbean poetry in his theory of nation language” (35).

In the case of Naipaul’s travel account in India, James challenges readings such as Rob Nixon’s which name Naipaul’s narrative voice as that of “the disdainful outsider”. Instead, James argues for “the self-conscious failure of imperial eye/I”, for noticing the many “gaps” in the story-world of the book. Similarly, she demonstrates that in *India: A Million Mutinies Now*, the narrator is less in control of the story-world. James’ overarching analysis is that Naipaul “recognizes, complicates, and offers alternatives” to imperial tropes (127). At the end of this chapter, she gathers her informing vision together: whereas each text/writer offers a different conjugation of this, all present a challenge to the reader, so that they may experience “modeling and inhabiting an environment according to a local point of view” (164). This thesis is again reiterated in her concluding chapter. Here she articulates explicitly the intercultural possibilities of the storyworld accord: “Yet storyworlds can foster respect
for comparison, difference, and subjectivity, and that respect, in turn, can foster more sensitive and informed discussions of environments and environmental policies” (208).

Like Erin James, John Thieme is centrally concerned with rethinking established ways of close reading literary texts. He too remains within the familiar practice of privileging the literary even where he provides extensive geographical contexts. *Postcolonial Literary Geographies: Out of Place* has a global vision, considering both literal maps and the imaginative “mapping” of literary texts in postcolonial space. Included in Thieme’s analysis are the following Caribbean writers who seem to “map” the world: Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott, Jamaica Kincaid, Vic Reid, Patrick Chamoiseau, and at least length, Olive Senior, V.S. Naipaul, Phyllis Allfrey, Jean Rhys, Jan Carew, Édouard Glissant, Garth St. Omer, Sylvia Wynter and Andrew Salkey. Attention is also given to Caribbean writers who have revised The Middle Passage. As with discussions with such reach, there is some sacrifice of depth and detail in order to privilege connection and overarching vision. It is this vision that therefore directs the reader to see what is at stake here. With somewhat disappointing vagueness at the end of *Postcolonial Literary Geographies: Out of Place*, Thieme posits, “post-colonial literary geographies shape identities in ever-moving waters. Sometimes these issue storm warnings that alert us to the ecological dangers that threaten the contemporary environment” (220). Though this argument seems to ignore the urgency of many writers on ecology now, Thieme adds an important coda.

He points out that Colonial and Enlightenment thinking and influence made place “singular and fixed” whereas postcolonial space is complex. But perhaps his last sentences are just too light-weight for the times: after listing elements of oncoming apocalypse (rising temperature and seas, for example), he ends with cautious (and perhaps irrational?) aspirational optimism that disaster might “dismantle continuing inequalities between South and North, East and West, “periphery” and “centre” (221) and claims this is the journey many postcolonial literary texts travel.

Though this might be far too comforting and reductive, Thieme’s detailed readings of individual texts within his own conceptual map provoke much productive thought. For example, he identifies Sylvia Wynter’s analysis of Vic Reid’s *New Day* as an example of “two diametrically opposed Caribbean attitudes towards the land and its cultivation: “plantation” and “plot” (52), though he does not make as much of this as might have been expected, given that he next turns to Kincaid’s *My Garden*. The point of the distinction is that plot has always been the small bit of land which was worked for one’s own subsistence by those who gave the majority of their labour to the powerful and wealthy, with or without coercion. This is as true in Britain (with its war-time allotments—dig for victory) as in the Caribbean. Thus Kincaid’s “plot” in Vermont is indeed under her control, and the ironies of this do not escape her (that is, the parallels between her gardening and British colonial garden practice). “Plot” is needed more for productive use—food, rather than a decorative garden. By the end of the chapter, Thieme does say “it would be invidious to see these attributes as purely postcolonial—the European cottage garden can be, after all, very similar in conception and design” (71). This is such a provocative chapter that it would have been interesting to see Thieme take it a step further into exploring the nature not only of gardeners organizing and dominating plants but of plants being willing to grow meekly and in
orderly fashion only where they are put. The complexities of the colonial and postcolonial garden and of agriculture are an important, rich and far-reaching topic and accordingly invite a more thorough examination.

The two interdisciplinary texts both have literary components, but their framing of literature is different. In the collection on aesthetics, world-ecology and politics with reference to the Caribbean, editors Campbell and Niblett remind us that concerns over the environment have been present in the region since Columbus (1). At the very core of Caribbean history lies the exploitation of both land and people who were forced by enslavement or indentureship to work it for the profit of others. Thus, as Jason Moore (whom they cite) argues, “(c)apitalism . . . is a world-ecology.” (3). This point is even more clearly made when the editors address Brathwaite’s work. They emphasize his conjoining of catastrophe over time (slavery, the Middle Passage, Katrina). Indeed, thinking about these issues within the frame of capitalism is key.

This collection contains very important work, starting with a prologue by Wilson Harris, which reiterates some of his core statements on the necessity for creation and study across cultures. Two-thirds of the essays flag in their titles their literary focus as well as their ecological concerns. The other three essays discuss important topics for environmental concern: tourism, state control over indigenous peoples and the aftermath of disasters such as earthquakes. The essays are thoughtfully organized in three sections, respectively titled “Catastrophes and commodity frontiers”, “Ecological revolutions and the nature of knowledge” and “Economies of extraction, restructuring and resistance”. But the important thing about this ordering is that in each section different approaches are juxtaposed. For example, Sharae Deckard’s discussion of the political ecology of storms in a wide and various group of literary texts sits alongside Kerstin Orloff’s essay on Gothic narrative and ecology in texts by Ana Lydia Vega and Mayra Montero and Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert’s essay on the Haitian earthquake of 2010 and the environmental catastrophe there. The very idea of text is complicated in this, and the work collectively speaks across not only the borders of knowledge but across language and nation in the Caribbean region. The “cross-cultural” imagination that Harris urges is in play in a variety of different modes.

Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches, edited by Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Jill Didur and the late Anthony Carrigan advertizes its global breadth both in the title and in the essays that make up this important collection. Included are essays on topics related to India, the Caribbean, Australia, the Marshall Islands, Latin America, Somalia and the Niger Delta (unhelpfully reduced to “Africa” in the abstract, which sadly does not help to remove the long-established colonial and neocolonial habit of thinking of the African continent as one entity). These range from the literary with ecological frame to politically envisioned ecology expressed through art. George Handley provides a detailed and rewarding reading of Omeros in the context of Walcott’s “use of poetry as a kind of surrogate cosmology” (344). Caribbean visual art (from Cuba, Martinique and Jamaica) is the subject of a brilliantly-argued essay by Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert on the use of “bagasse”, the detritus of sugar production, as raw material for creative readings of colonialism and neocolonialism. Michael Niblett’s essay in this issue again links oil and literary texts. In “Oil on Sugar: Commodity Frontiers and
Peripheral Aesthetics”, Niblett makes a strong case that since capitalism is now a global system, world ecology and world capitalism are inextricable. Imperialism was and is capitalist. This is a consciousness which brought new ways of establishing systemic inequalities in wealth and power.

Again in this collection, we see the adroit positioning of essays which cross-fertilize each other. Framing the second section of the book on disaster, vulnerability and resistance, Anthony Carrigan discusses postcolonial disaster studies, and insists, following Ato Quayson’s encouragement of a “synoptic” or truly interdisciplinary approach to critiquing imperialism, that the humanities, (like literary studies) need to keep their strengths but recast their focus at times. In terms of disaster studies, environmental humanities “must include a more rigorous understanding of how narratives shape our perception and understanding of what constitutes a disaster”(123). In other words, the kinds of strategies literary critics and writers perform with language and texts are helpful in making better readers of us when it comes to stories we are told and “facts” we are given. Jill Didur’s fascinating essay focuses on one colonial Englishman’s obsession with collecting plants, taking them to England and finding ways to make them thrive there: she argues that this practice “forced horticultural enthusiasts and experts to confront orientalist assumptions about the superiority of British horticultural practice” (69).

Elizabeth DeLoughrey’s essay which closes the volume, asks three key questions. Firstly, is the term “Anthropocene” likely to make for universalizing? Does it exceptionalize the human? To tackle these doubts, how can the term be made local and inclusive? In answering these questions, DeLoughrey’s essay is centered on the New Zealander, Keri Hulme, and works from the general to the specific, whereas Didur works the other way. This is another example of the richness of intellectual debate in Global Ecologies and the Environmental Humanities: Postcolonial Approaches.

Though not specifically about Caribbean ecocriticism: there is much of related interest in the collection Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature, (eds. WReC, or the Warwick Research Collective), a series on postcolonialism across the disciplines. This is collaborative work of the best kind, one which lays aside academic possessiveness for the higher purpose of serious, engaging debate. Some of the collective’s members are known for the quality of their work in ecocriticism. The book’s core concerns are highly relevant to thinking about the postcolonial in general and for us here, the Caribbean in particular.

To close, it is important to reiterate that many approaches need to exist so as to extend the reach of this vital field—a field which needs every avenue to reach more and more people in the Caribbean and the world. If this batch of new work is any indication, the field is thriving and truly operating as a cross-cultural space. As Harris says, with regard to the novel, “linearity is maintained like a blocked door to cross-cultural psyche” (eds. Campbell and Niblett, 17). That is not and should not be true of Caribbean ecocriticism and related fields. This is a rich harvest of recent work in a field which is the more effective for its eclecticism of approach and subject matter.
Spectacular Suffering: Witnessing Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century British Atlantic


Joseph Childers

Ramesh Mallipeddi’s new monograph is an important contribution to our understanding of the long eighteenth century’s responses to and “management” of the institution of slavery in the (primarily) British Caribbean. Mallipeddi’s study is notable for the deftness with which it moves among a number of important theoretical registers, including body studies, affect theory, and Marxist/materialist inflected political economy. While the book is not particularly wide ranging in terms of its scope, it does introduce a number of texts and extra-literary practices that otherwise might be overlooked in their relation to Atlantic and Caribbean slavery, while it also produces new takes on slave narratives such as The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano.

For Mallipeddi the crux of unraveling some of the complexities of Atlantic slavery rests in the deployment of sentiment, specifically melancholic sentiment, as the mediator between the English and the Africans they enslaved on Caribbean plantations. The articulation of that mediation, unsurprisingly, returns to the embodiment itself of the slave—both in the particular as one around whom a narrative of loss, destitution, punishment, and property arises, and in the general as a group that struggles to define the parameters of possible subjectivity even while the limits of that body in slavery operate as a fundamental characteristic of that group. As a sort of touchstone to this dialectic of embodiment, Mallipeddi often points to Equiano’s declaration: “I would sooner die like a free man, than suffer myself to be scourged by the hands of ruffians, and my blood drawn like a slave” (3). As Mallipeddi argues, Equiano here “understands the unremitting savagery of slavery as first and foremost, a violation of bodily integrity” (3). But as one who is outside
of slavery, he functions as an observer, as one who can articulate the affective register that attends such observations, a register crucial to the formation of the metropolitan antislavery project.

Mallipeddi shapes his argument around two central lines of inquiry. First is what he describes as the “problem of embodiment.” As he correctly observes, the emphasis on the body is central to sentimental representations of slavery by abolitionists. Typically, these representations highlight two characteristics of slavery, commodification and punishment, which effectively subject the body to “the regimes of the market and to plantation discipline” (3). According to Mallipeddi, “the movement of sympathetic feeling is frequently a direct corollary of the objectifying operations of mercantile capital, on one hand, and the exercise of slaveholder disciplinary authority on the other” (4). Thus we find that in sentimentalized accounts by metropolitan (e.g., British) observers of slavery, the singular body of the specific slave is counterposed to the abstract commodity, the particular to the general. The result is the observer taking what Mallipeddi calls “affective property” in the slaves in opposition to the legal property rights that could be claimed by the actual slave owner. It is through this shift that British abolitionists of this era “registered (sic) their disquiet over enslavement” (4).

While the logic of this first line of inquiry is persuasive, and Mallipeddi does an excellent job of presenting the evidence in the first portion of the book, it raises another issue about ownership and subjectivity that would have benefited from more of the nuanced insights that characterize this study. At issue is the problem of subjectivity itself and the reliance of the institution of slavery to bring the existence and presence of the African—especially the African in the West—to the attention of these metropolitan writers. That is to say, the “affective property” that Mallipeddi so astutely identifies merely extends the institution of slavery to a different kind of ownership, and one that is arguably just as complicit in the subjection of these individuals and clearly participates in the formation of their individual subjectivities as a result of the very institution it wishes to dismantle. The question then becomes: who “owns” the sentimental affect and the representation of slaves (and by extension imperial slavery)? These sentimental representations, with only a few exceptions, would not have circulated widely among those who are effectively being written by the discourse; it is even perhaps possible to posit that most of these slaves would not have even been aware of its existence, and thus the delimitations of their subjectivity within metropolitan discourse. As well-meaning and sympathetic as these representations may have been, one has to wonder if a slave would even have recognized him or herself in that discourse.

This is not a new problem; indeed it is in some ways at the heart of Gayatri Spivak’s classic essay, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Nor does the metropolitan sentimental representation of slaves and slavery speak to any sort of standard of putative “authenticity.” It does, however, help to raise the question that Mallipeddi pursues in his second line of questioning. Namely, is “ownership” of sentimental affect around slavery the sole domain of the metropolitan discourse, or did it also operate among the slaves themselves? Mallipeddi is concerned to demonstrate that it did indeed function in the register of the subjugated, and as a consequence undertakes a redefinition of the politics of sentimentalism in the
interests of theorizing embodied slave agency, since by designating emotional responsiveness to slave sufferance (sic) as always politically suspect and compromised, our critical frameworks have made it hard to grasp the embodied dimensions of black experience in slave narratives and in black cultural and aesthetic forms more generally (5).

This is a grand and daunting undertaking, and in so many ways it is what sets Spectacular Suffering apart both theoretically and in its application to the texts it chooses. Consequently, while the first portion of the book, which deals with works by Aphra Behn, Laurence Sterne and others is vital to explicating the connections between imperialism, capitalism in its mercantile avatar, and slavery as the site of melancholic affect for representations of slavery and the slave, it is really the second portion of Spectacular Slavery where the truly innovative work takes place. Mallepeddi does an outstanding job, early on in this work, of outlining the archival difficulties attendant upon analysis that insists on a dialectical relationship among the possibilities of representation in the sentimental register for observers and slaves alike. As Mallepeddi points out, slaves were by no means entirely dispossessed of subjectivity or the possibility of resistance; nor is there an adequate explanation of how reforms aimed to ameliorate the conditions of slavery in the Caribbean, and thus reduce the likelihood of insurrection, remained a site of contestation between masters and slaves.

Perhaps the most compelling part of Mallepeddi’s argument is the portion documented by the non-literary artifacts and activities produced in and by slavery, which attest to that experience in precisely the sentimentalized way (though to very different effect, often) that typifies the metropolitan observer’s accounts. Especially strong are the chapters, “Slave Culture and Sentimental Fiction” and “Memories of Migration in Atlantic Slavery.” It is in these sections of the book that the reader feels as though he or she is in new territory, learning to read and assess differently, truly a part of Mallepeddi’s project to rethink sentimentality and its discursive force in representations and understanding of slavery.

Such an important argument would go begging without an appropriate afterword that at least nods toward the effects of emancipation in a world whose economy was absolutely dependent on slave labour. Mallepeddi does not disappoint on this score, pointing to the ways that “the problem of freedom” is every bit as gripping as the “problem of slavery,” especially for our own times and the continuing struggles of developing nations in the Caribbean. Here again, Mallepeddi adduces the experience of the subjugated to underscore the fault lines in arguments that have pointed to apprenticeship and even emancipation as merely more sophisticated forms of bondage. Certainly it was not the case that former slaves themselves experienced freedom in that way. Citing an 1837 British work by James Thome and Horace Kimball that collected documentary evidence concerning the effects of apprenticeship (which was the intermediary step in the British emancipation plan between slavery and complete freedom), Mallepeddi singles out one respondent, who, when asked if he would consider being “willing to be a slave again provided he was sure of having a kind master,” answered, “…me neber slave no more. A good massa a very good ting, but freedom till better” (215). As Mallepeddi suggests in his epilogue, however much better freedom is, the residue of our accepted representations of slavery makes it difficult to understand and experience “freedom” fully and in all its potential glory.
While not always recognized, Jews have had an impactful presence in the Caribbean, dating back as far as the European “discovery” of the New World. Several Jewish and Holocaust Studies including Michael Rothberg *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), Bryan Cheyette *Diasporas of the Mind: Jewish and Postcolonial Writing and the Nightmare of History* (2013) and Jonathan Schorsch *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (2004) have been pioneers in mapping this underexplored history, often in dialogue with postcolonial studies. The result, as Guadeloupean author Maryse Condé notes, has brought about a greatly needed “widening of horizons” in Caribbean studies. Sarah Phillips Casteel’s (Carleton Univ.) insightful *Calypso Jews* is a significant addition to this group. In examining the “historical presence of Jews in the region” she articulates “a distinctive discourse of Black-Jewish relations that unsettles dominant narratives of slavery, empire, and race” (2). During the course of the book, Casteel raises many provocative ideas, including her suggestion that the Caribbean is a better place to consider Black-Jewish relationships than the United States since it is not freighted with as much, to use Rothberg’s term, “competitive memory,” between the two groups to muddy the intercultural waters.

Casteel divides her book into two parts, focusing on seminal moments of Jewish-Caribbean intersectionality: the first in 1492 when many Sephardic Jews emigrated to the Caribbean after being expelled from the Iberian peninsula and the second after Nazism drove them from their European homes during the Holocaust. In both parts, Casteel links these historical events in Europe with the horrors of slavery and the racism wrought from colonization that were occurring in the Caribbean. She examines novels, memoirs
and poetry written by well-known authors from the English-, French-, Spanish- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean such as Derek Walcott and Jamaica Kincaid and by lesser-studied yet significant figures like Michèle Maillet and Cynthia McLeod. Several of the writers—McLeod, Myriam Chancy, and Caryl Phillips—they themselves have traces of Jewish ancestry. One of the recurrent themes of the book, in fact, is the hidden history of Jews in the Caribbean.

The year 1492 is, of course, significant for the Americas because of Columbus’s explorations. However, Casteel notes the irony that this was also the year when Jews were expelled from Spain and Portugal and deftly intertwines the two events. She examines the bidirectional impact resulting from the Sephardic exodus and Caribbean migration, for example, in Derek Walcott’s verse biography of Sephardic painter Camille Pissarro (a native of St. Thomas), in Tiopeko’s Hound (2000). Though born a century apart, there is an affinity between Walcott and Pissarro, Caribbean born artists who straddle European sensibility with that of the Caribbean. Though Pissarro is in a relatively privileged position in St. Thomas and operates within the tradition of European culture, he still creates art using a Caribbean sensibility in his paintings. She also notes the Jewish/Caribbean connection through the theme of marranism (Jews forced to convert but who continued to practice their religion secretly) in Myriam Chancy’s novel The Loneliness of Angels (2010) and Michelle Cliff’s novel Free Enterprise (1993). Both novels present “lost or obscured histories… awaiting discovery” (70). The inclusion of Sephardic Jews in the novels allows for a view of Caribbean society as being inclusive, as part of the creolization of the region, even if it sometimes comes at the risk of romanticizing this process by the authors.

In addition, Casteel explores Port Jews, early Jewish merchants who crossed several boundaries—religious, cultural, and geographic—helping to create “a Jewish Atlantic.” She makes the case that Jews are often featured as liberating figures, even if viewed suspiciously, in works concerning Caribbean slavery as is demonstrated in Maryse Conde’s Moi, Tituba, sorcière… noire de Salem (I, Tituba, Black Witch of Salem, 1986, trans. 1992) where a Sephardic merchant has a relationship with and eventually frees his slave concubine and David Dabydeen’s novel Harlot’s Progress (1999). Both of these neo-slave narratives demonstrate how, Casteel maintains, “the representational regimes of slavery can by enriched through an engagement with historical constructions of Jewish as well as Black Others” (133). Rather than seeing Jews as individuals who aid in the slaves’ eventual emancipation, in Surinamese author Cynthia McLeod’s historical novel Hoe duur was de suiker? (The Cost of Sugar 1987, trans. 2010) the focus is on the entire Jewish community. While pointing out the crucial role Jews played in Suriname’s development, they are seen as privileged and participants in the slave system. The thorny issue of Jews’ place within the system of slavery is one that Casteel takes on throughout the book, challenging both Jewish apologists for slavery and groups who exaggerate the role of Jews in slavery. Casteel posits that the popular use of the Sephardic Jew by so many Caribbean writers occurs “because it serves as a bridge between European and New World subaltern histories” (42). Jews and Blacks share a common history of being diasporic groups who have dealt with a history of oppression and prejudice even if it has not always resulted in the same outcome.

In the second half of the book, the focus is on Holocaust memory seen through the twin disciplines of postcolonial and Jewish studies, a field in which scholars such as Rothberg, Cheyette and Paul Gilroy Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race (2000) have been at the fore. This memory needs to be multidirectional and not competitive between different racial/ethnic groups. However, the lack of understanding often results in misreadings by both groups. One topic that emerges is the figure of the Holocaust refugee in the Caribbean. Casteel makes an intriguing comparison of this figure in white Jamaican John Hearne’s novel Land of the Living (1961) and Jamaica
Kincaid’s fictionalized biography of her father Mr. Potter (2002). At the centre of both novels is a lack of recognition of the other race/ethnicity. Whereas in Hearne’s novel, the Jewish narrator does not understand his own white privilege is given only at the expense of Blacks, in Kincaid’s book, the relationship between Mr. Potter and a Jewish Czech refugee “is characterized by misrecognition” (195) where they fail to see the commonalities they may share.

Casteel also discusses what she refers to as Black Holocaust narratives, particularly in the works of M. NourbeSe Phillip and Martinican Michèle Maillet. The Holocaust in Phillip’s work serves “as a gateway to the memory of a different historical trauma,” that is slavery (216). This gateway is apparent in the young adult novel Harriet’s Daughter (1988), where the protagonist, Margaret Cruickshank, identifies with both Harriet Tubman and the Holocaust survivor in the novel, Harriet Blewchamp. Maillet’s novel L’étoile Noire (The Black Star, 1990, trans. 2006) provides a different perspective, an “insistently Afrocentric interpretation of the Black Holocaust” (222). The book is written as a camp diary of a prisoner who has been mistaken for a Jew in Vichy France. The novel tells the story not only of her time in camp but also reflects on her ancestors’ history of slavery in the Caribbean.

Finally, Casteel compares Michelle Cliff’s novel Abeng (1984) with Caryl Phillips’ novel The Nature of Blood (1997) using the lens of Anne Frank’s Diary of a Young Girl (1953, trans. 1958). In the semi-autobiographical Abeng light-complexioned Clare Savage initially has absorbed a racialized thinking from her mixed-race father. Clare changes her thinking after seeing a film adaptation of Frank’s Diary and then reading it. Images of the crematory stir memories of slavery in Clare. Despite this connection, however, Clare is seen as more of an observer in the novel while Jews are portrayed as victims. Phillips’s The Nature of Blood utilizes a complex multi-narrative form, including a doctor who aids Jewish refugees in adjusting to life in Palestine shortly after War II and Shakespeare’s Moor, Othello. The Caribbean/Jewish link is further strengthened by Phillips’ attempt in the novel to finish what Frank’s diary would have been like if she had been able to write of her experiences in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen through Eva.

Casteel has undertaken a daunting task here, exploring the Jewish presence throughout the entire Caribbean and through a variety of texts. She provides the necessary historical and critical context to explain her argument convincingly. Her meticulous research and lucid writing has created a fascinating, highly informative work that adds significantly to our understanding of the complex amalgam that makes up the Caribbean whether one is a Caribbean scholar or one with a more general interest in the region. It is a balanced work that makes the case that not only does the Jewish presence and their contribution in the Caribbean need to be more fully acknowledged, but also their participation, even if relatively minor, in the oppression of Blacks.
Notes on Contributors

Jacqueline Bishop is a poet, fiction and non-fiction writer as well as a photographer and visual artist. Her latest book, *The Gymnast and other Positions*, was awarded the 2016 Bocas prize for Caribbean Literature, non-fiction category. Her work has been showcased in two exhibitions: A series of photographs used in a video format entitled *Bodies of Water* was part of the Digital exhibition at the National Gallery of Jamaica. *The Female Sexual Desires Project* that she has been working on for the past three years was shown at the Meyerhoff Gallery in Baltimore, Maryland.

During this period, she also oversaw the *Dialogues in the African Diaspora Project* funded by the United States State Department and administered by the American Association of Museums, through their Museums Connect program. This project put students from Nonsuch, Jamaica in conversation with students from Harlem, United States, around an art and history project.

She teaches at New York University in Liberal Studies.


**Louis J. Parascandola** is a Professor of English at Long Island University, Brooklyn. He is the editor or co-editor of several works, particularly on Caribbean-born author Eric Walrond. His latest book is *Amy Jacques Garvey: Selected Writings from the Negro World, 1923-1928* (University of Tennessee Press, 2016).

**Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert** is a Professor of Caribbean culture and literature in the Department of Hispanic Studies and the Environmental Studies Program at Vassar College, where she holds the Sarah Tod Fitz Randolph Distinguished Professor Chair. She is also a participating faculty member in the Programs in Africana Studies, Latin American Studies and International Studies.

Her books include works on Phyllis Shand Allfrey, Jamaica Kincaid and religious practices in the Caribbean. She is currently working on a new book, *The Parrots of the Caribbean: An Environmental Biography*. She co-edits *Repeating Islands*, a popular blog on Caribbean culture, with Ivette Romero-Cesareo.

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**Melissa Lee Garcia Vega**, born in Brooklyn, NY, completed her Bachelor’s degree at (CUNY) Queens College in English literature. She taught elementary school in East Harlem while completing a Master’s degree at Hunter College and received tenure in Westchester, NY. Melissa completed her doctoral degree examining postcolonial and global contexts in Caribbean literature, at the University of Puerto Rico (UPR) in Rio Piedras. She currently teaches at UPR in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico.

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