

MaComère

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Helen Pyne-Timothy

About Our Name

The word *macomère* is widely used by women in the Caribbean to mean “my child’s godmother”; “my best friend and close female confidante”; “my bridesmaid, or another female member of a wedding party in which I was a bridesmaid”; “the godmother of the child to whom I am also godmother”; “the woman who, by virtue of the depth of her friendship, has rights and privileges over my child and is a surrogate mother.” The word seemed appropriate as the name for the journal because it so clearly expresses the intimate relations which women in the Caribbean share, is so firmly gendered, and honours the importance of friendship in relation to the rituals of birth, marriage, and death.

Moreover, *macomère* is a word which, although related to the French language, has taken on a structure and meanings indigenous to the Caribbean. The word is spelled in this way (instead of as *macumè*, *makumeh*, *macoomè*, *macomeh* for example) so that the female connotations of the word are highlighted and those meanings which apply to males (“a womanish or gossipy man”; “a homosexual”) are less obvious.

In those islands where Krèol (the linguistic term for the French patois) is the first language, the word is used in reference to both females and males, with meaning determined by the context. However, in some islands such as Trinidad where English has overlain Krèol, the Creole (linguistic term for the English patois) has incorporated the redundant *my macomè* and *macomè man*, thus reinforcing both the perceptions of intimacy and the female meanings associated with the word.

Interestingly, Richard Allsopp, in *The Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* (Oxford University Press, 1996), has indicated the possibility that *maku* (which means midwife) in Belize is also derived from *macomère*. Hence, the word enables us to recall the continuities and correspondences in Caribbean languages and cultures, as well as the dynamic, creative, and transforming power of Creoles. In the English-speaking islands, the only comparable term is *godmother* (usually the mother’s best friend). In the Hispanophone Caribbean, there is the similar *comadre* although, as we would expect, some of the connotations are different.

Join us in continuing to interrogate all the connotations of this culturally rich lexical item from the Caribbean.

Hyacinth M. Simpson

From the Editor

In one of her essays, Elizabeth Nunez, the novelist whose latest work of fiction is featured in this issue, says that for authors from communities that have long lived with oppression, writing brings with it a responsibility to change the world (25). Indeed, the works presented and discussed in this issue take that responsibility seriously. Both critical readings and creative pieces point to the importance of recollecting, reflecting, and reclaiming. These works understand the significance of story and the power inherent in telling one's own story, and intervene into existing narratives in ways that empower the marginalized. One could say, then, that resistance, recovery, and recuperation are common themes across the various pieces in this issue.

Certainly, they are major considerations in Nunez's *Prospero's Daughter*, the novel discussed in two articles and an in-depth author interview here. *Prospero's Daughter* is the kind of work that engages the reader fully on the first reading, rewards multiple readings, and sustains close analysis. *MaComère* is the first publication to provide extended discussion of this remarkable novel; and we offer the critical engagement with the novel mindful of how it addresses some of the questions—including how communities take responsibility for and respond to past wrongs—that were raised as various parties prepared to mark the bicentennial of the abolition of the British slave trade on 25 March 2007. Alison Donnell's conversation with Nunez took place during one of these events, which was held at Ryerson University in Toronto on 27 March 2007. Nunez, Donnell, and their audience tackled difficult questions—also dealt with in the novel—about forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing, as well as the controversial subject of reparations for communities (still) adversely affected by the centuries-long ravages of British slavery and colonialism.

The two articles and interview on *Prospero's Daughter* point to the novel's strategies of rewriting and revisioning the canonical narrative presented in *The Tempest*, to the relationship between *Prospero's Daughter* and earlier Caribbean appropriations of the Shakespearean text, and consequently to the book's commitment to recovering lost voices and challenging entrenched discourses and practices of power. In her essay, Jennifer Sparrow offers a nuanced feminist reading of the novel and argues that *Prospero's Daughter* "writes back not only to the history of racism and Eurocentrism that informed the colonial venture, but also to

the sexism and erasures evident in earlier male-authored Caribbean texts”(80). Sparrow focusses on the mutually supportive relationship between the Caliban and Miranda figures, and suggests that it not only presents a challenge to colonialist racial and sexual discourses but is also a means through which Nunez makes a convincing argument about the potential inherent in creolized Caribbean culture to transcend the divisions and violence of the past. In her essay, Sandra Pouchet Paquet turns the spotlight on the novel’s setting, arguing that Nunez’s choice of an actual, recognizable Caribbean location facilitates her “re-emplotment” of the “classic drama” of colonial encounter (65). For Pouchet Paquet, the novel’s deliberate and careful reconstruction of native place and space—Chacachacare and Trinidad on the cusp of political independence in 1961—enables an alternative genealogy and genesis that recover the absent and silent native female and allow those who have a true claim on the island to take it back for themselves.

The cover art for this issue provides visual depiction of one artist’s attempt to recover the absent body of the native female. The four images are frames from a video narrative titled *White Skin, Black Kin: A Creole Conversation Piece*, by Barbadian-Canadian visual artist Joscelyn Gardner. *A Creole Conversation Piece* was part of a larger multimedia installation titled *White Skin, Black Kin: “Speaking the Unspeakable”* that Gardner mounted at the Barbados Museum in February and March 2004. The installation, like *Prospero’s Daughter*, raised questions about the extent to which white women were complicit in the patriarchal structures of colonialism as those structures played out in Caribbean societies. By introducing shadowy black female bodies engaged in various acts of service into the frame of the *tableaux vivant* depicting the female members of a white plantation-owning family, Gardner points to the complex relations and identities fostered in the encounter between peoples and occasioned by the violence of the colonial enterprise.

In another interview in this issue, Katherine McKittrick talks to Carole Boyce Davies about *Left of Karl Marx*, the latter’s critical biography of the Trinidad-born “intellectual activist” Claudia Jones. Their conversation lays bare contemporary acts of violence against people like Jones, acts that have their genesis in British colonial and American neo-colonial practices of policing and constraining black (female) bodies. As McKittrick puts it, “Boyce Davies writes and discloses a radical project that reintroduces Jones within the context of violent state repression” (30). Jones lived her brief but very full life with a sense that she, too, had a responsibility to change the world; and Boyce Davies carefully, even lovingly, pieces together the details of that life in her own act of recovery. She pulls back the veil of silence, and the neglect, that hitherto proved far

more effective in entombing Jones than the grave at Highgate Cemetery in London, UK. In so doing, Boyce Davies reclaims Jones's place on the list—composed predominantly if not exclusively of men—of people whose intellectual work and political activism significantly shaped the postcolonial Caribbean.

The twelve-year-old protagonist of M. NourbeSe Philip's short story "Bad Words" channels Claudia Jones's indomitable spirit. Named Miranda in an ironic inversion of her Shakespearean namesake, who taught Caliban his "own meaning" (Shakespeare 1.2.359),¹ Philip's young heroine uses words to "enter[] forbidden spaces" (24). Her relishing of forbidden words, the secret tasting of them that culminates in a public demonstration of her choice vocabulary, marks Miranda's refusal to be constrained by behavioural codes underpinned by discourses about race, gender, and sexuality held over from the colonial past. Similarly, the voices in Opal Palmer Adia's three poems signal the presence of the demotic. The vernacular register employed, the insistence on lower case letter throughout, and the marked lack of punctuation work together to take the power of naming and representation away from "Standard" English.

Rounding out this issue's offerings are three book reviews. Shani Mootoo's novel, *Valmiki's Daughter*, reviewed here by Val Lem, locates other sites of struggle and resistance for Caribbean women who live outside of heterosexual norms and disrupt racial/ethnic and class boundaries. *From Harvey River*, Lorna Goodison's memoir of her mother and her mother's people, is reviewed by Wendy Knepper. *From Harvey River* is not only richly evocative of place and time but is also a story of women (and men) who dared to imagine other lives and possibilities for themselves and their children. Finally, Jacqueline Bishop, described by Elaine Savory as a "new voice in Caribbean women's writing" (108), has three works reviewed: a novel, a collection of poems, and a book of oral histories. Like Nunez, Bishop shows that she is conscious of, and deftly interweaves into her own work, a tradition of Caribbean writing that precedes her even while marking out her own unique contribution to that tradition.

Together, the fiction, interviews, essays, and book reviews offer readers an opportunity to consider the ways in which Caribbean women writers, artists, intellectuals, and activists continue to challenge us to look beyond accepted practice and insist that we, too, take responsibility for the world in which we live.

Ryerson University

Acknowledgement

My thanks to Annalee Davis, Barbadian visual artist (<http://www.annaleedavis.com>), for suggesting the cover image and introducing me to Joscelyn Gardner.

NOTES

1. I am using one of the editions that assign these words, and the larger portion of speech from which they come, to Miranda. Some editors assign the words to Prospero.

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IS CARIBBEAN SHE

OPAL PALMER ADISA

is who she

when she get born

who spit she out
pan what ship
crossing which ocean
she wailed into life

knew from she first breath
the life she tek on
heavier than hamper heaped packed
with yam and banana

but she ain't fraid nothing
will not be turned back
forever moving forward
she mouth chalice
tracing people all up
and under dem clothes
inside dey private parts

is where she going

to see whom
wid she slippers
clapping against she soles

she is crosses
spit pan she and
see if it don't sizzle

she manish too
walking like de ground
mek fah she

sitting all day
in de market
she body
rank with sea-weed and gold

or working in de cane-field
swinging she cutlass
daring man or insect

she been flogged
many times
for she same loosed tongue

she been tied down
legs spread then forcefully entered

she did wash weh
dem poisoned seed

she did refuse
she womb

she did run too
and tek bush
fah she second skin

but she did stay also
and cook a sweet pot
seasoned with she blood

she did bide she time
squat and study de mountain range

she did mek sheself
present when she was absent
and missing even as she stood
before dem
she is duppy
and leggo beast
sometime barmy
other times sanier
than your mother
she is everywhere
and no where

is what she name
is whe she come from

see she deh
a serve afternoon tea
in government office

see she deh
a si down in parliament

see she deh
at airport
clearing she goods
to sell

she no easy
you know
she no somebody
whose foot you
want step on

she laugh belly-laugh
and chat like deaf-ear man
she always going places
been many places already
she naw let
de times
leave she behind

is caribbean dem
call she

is she you need
study

CARIBBEAN SHE SPEAKING

OPAL PALMER ADISA

momsy says
me born with a paragraph
on me tongue
so me not afraid
of saying what's
on me mind

lately however
me rationing me words
but some things
me can't keep quiet about
like the killings and rapings
the anger and frustration
that is like sweat
plastering everyone's shirt
to them back

me not no intellectual
or historian nor politician
but even a new born baby
can tell something
sure enough wrong

and it way deeper than just
hard times and sufferation
cause we cut we teeth
on those things

momsy says
and me agree
that the madness
in the society is duppy's revenge
you can laugh and call me idiot
but me believe
all the years of
oppression and downpression
violence and disrespect
our people had to suffer
in silence and tun de other cheek
ah ride dis generation
so dem just a spin around
kill each blinded by an anger
dem inherited
same way pot
boil over raising the lid

sometimes no matter
how many basket of words
you have none can really
shed meaning on the leggoism
we living through

CARIBBEAN SHE MAKING DO

OPAL PALMER ADISA

no river nuh mek yet
that me won't wade across
even though me can't swim

me born knowing
trouble come with company
but me children and me
nah go look hunger
in the eye and beg food

since me little girl
head just at me momsy's waist
we see and hear her argue
with god and man
and tell them straight
she not gwine drink spit
and call it milk

momsy teach me
fi climb life
like coconut tree
so don't take it no way

if you see me jump pan
plane today go to cayman
and next week to curaco
wherever there is
goods to buy and sell
me there no matter what
language dem chat
for as long as there
is life people will
always have needs
and me is a supplier

me nah sit down
chin propped up in me hands
face gloomy as a battered pan
me scaling hard times
bartering and trading
each day treading water
but getting closer
certain of reaching dry land
on the other side

BAD WORDS

M. NOURBESE PHILIP

How she envied him, this newfound friend of hers! The way he cursed. Walking before the big mirror in her parents' room, bony chest—almost as flat as his—puffed up with the trying, trying hard to imitate him. If she could only look like him, Miranda thought, maybe she would acquire his knowledge, his way of cursing.

Starting with words like damn and blast, Miranda was slowly working her way up her list of bad words—from the least to the most bad. They all shared a common quality: they were all too heavy for her tongue to lift up, or so her mother pronounced regularly. “Prick! Shit!” Miranda looked at herself in the mirror. The smile that was reflected there was one of deep satisfaction. Her mother was wrong. She could, would, and did lift the weight of these words, these forbidden words with her child tongue, the secret pleasure all the stronger for being visible in the mirror as she sharpened her mouth around them all. “Practice makes perfect,” her father had always told her. Practise to be perfect, to be in control—as he and her friend were—of words.

When she got to “fuck” she paused, took a deep breath, mouthed the word silently, then out loud. Her heart beat loudly as she replaced the “u” with an “o”: “fock.” She felt the sharpness and power of the word. Suddenly and involuntarily she shivered. Was it fear or excitement? She didn't know—it was probably both—and didn't care.

Now came the best word, the baddest of them all. Whenever Miranda got to “fuck” she knew she had crossed a line as palpable to her as it was invisible. A different world awaited her with the next word. A threatening word in many ways. For a long time she could never say it out loud. As with all the other words, she had begun by mouthing it. The times when she was lucky enough to practise before the mirror, as she was now, she thought she looked pretty stupid opening and closing her mouth on the word—like a fish gasping for air. But mouthing this word suggested nothing of its power, and for a long time she remained at this stage, not even being able to whisper it as she had with the others. The taboo against it was absolute. Almost.

Hurrying to school one day, late and therefore alone, just so—it came out as she was crossing the bridge over the thin and brown trickle that was the Wapsey River in dry season. “Cunt!” A great wave of relief washed over her as she said the word for the first time. Her surprise at hearing it come from her own mouth brought Miranda to a standstill, and although she knew it was unlikely, she couldn’t stop herself from looking behind her, both fearing and expecting to see her mother standing there, a silent and stern witness to this new level of her daughter’s shameful behaviour. Miranda gave a nervous laugh at seeing no one there and hurried on, saying “the word” over and over again to herself under her breath.

She had taken a long time to say “the word.” That was how she referred to it. But she had come to like rolling it round and round her mouth, except that you couldn’t really roll these words around. They all had edges—hard edges that hurt somehow as she intentionally and deliberately strained her mouth around them, her tongue paying strict attention to their individual shapes. Afterwards she would carefully examine her mouth and tongue for the staining she expected. She was surprised that her mouth did not show the outrage she had just committed.

Why was it that men had words that could excite her? Miranda would often think of this as she travelled the time between the inner and outer bound-

aries of her life: home and school, school and home. Chaucer, for instance, with all his plumbing the depths of women. Late at night and lying awake in bed, she would ask her cousin what this meant, and the older girl would tell the younger one about men entering women. Miranda would wonder how you could enter another person. Fanny Hill and Henry Miller, men's words that she read secretly, her mother not dreaming of the feelings she had, or the wetness between her thin, twelve-year-old thighs. Excitement would quickly turn to OK-so-what boredom, and after the third or fourth time a woman's depth was plumbed, she grew bored and wanted something else. So she would go back to her practise-makes-perfect and that most secret of words, and most profane when coupled with another. Cunt. And Mother. In their opposition the two words—one harsh, defiant, and threatening, and the other resonant with safety—were locked together irrevocably. The power of this combination, made greater by its secret nature, made her feel light-headed, even faint at times. Before moving to the city, Miranda had never heard “the word” before. No one told her what it meant. No one had to. From the first day she heard it, felt it sear her ears, spindly-legged and innocent as she was coming fresh from the country, she knew it was bad. Bad bad.

Until then “totee” was the worst word she had known, but it was child bad. Its badness existed only in the world of children when you could laugh at a boy—only boys had totees—and say, “Look, look, I see he totee,” and the girls would giggle and scream and laugh and run away leaving the boy shame foh so for having a totee. Except Clarence. He just took his for granted. Clarence was her cousin who played marbles in the hot sun with her and her brothers and sisters for hours on end under the guinep tree and let her play with his balls while they stood waiting their turn. Every time Clarence stooped to pitch he was facing Miranda. Looking back on it that's the way it seemed to her. Her eyes would drop to the crotch of his pants where the stretching, straining cotton threads struggled to hold the seams together, her gaze riveted by what she both expected and feared would happen. Suddenly, there it was, his little worm, his totee, hanging out. She let out the breath she hadn't known

she was holding. Totee—a soft word with none of the edges of these new words. He let her touch it sometimes, his totee, and the soft, warm snuggly sacs behind it.

She had had no words for them. He just had them. Balls would come later. In the hot sun waiting turns to pitch marbles, he would stand patiently while she crept her hand up his short khaki pants to his totee, and then to the cool yet warm squishy things, her fingers moving and squishing them around—doing the same things that her tongue now did with these new words she was learning—exploring the limits of her world and, therefore, of difference.

Miranda and Clarence had never done anything more than that. He, in fact, did nothing, a willing subject to her inquiry. And always in public. Her brothers and sisters must have known what she was doing, but in that sometimes inexplicable and implacable silence of childhood, no one said anything to her or to her mother. There had been no secrecy to her exploration; they had, therefore, felt no need to swear themselves to secrecy about something that was not a secret. There was, consequently, nothing to tell.

The words she now explored were, however, adult-bad, big-people-bad, and secrecy was the screen behind which she now travelled into their newness. Secrecy was what she needed to explore them; and secrecy was the key to why these words were so bad. She had only to look at her mother's face to know they were bad—the way she shut down her eyes and her whole face at the sound of these words, particularly the one that referred to her—to all mothers.

This word had to do with women, all women. That much Miranda was sure of. And weren't all women mothers? Maybe only mothers had cunts because that was the only way she had ever heard it used. Never your sister's cunt, or your grandmother's cunt. Only your mother's cunt. And she had both wanted to cover her ears and stretch them wide to take in the sound of these words. Would she have a cunt when she grew up? She didn't dare ask her

mother. Did she have one now? Was it something that came with having children? Once left on her own, she got a mirror to explore exactly where she knew the word referred to—except she wasn't a mother—not yet anyway. As she explored, she said the word soft soft to herself, mouthing it, mashing it between her teeth, tasting it, whispering it—looking to see if she changed as she said it.

In her house there was no word for what Miranda explored with her fingers. Baby girls had pat-a-cakes, or muckunzes or pums pums. As you grew older, the safety of those soft domestic words disappeared, leaving behind a thing unnamed, referred to only by the neutral pronoun: “Have you washed IT yet?” Or, sometimes, “Have you washed yourself yet?” She knew full well that the self referred to was not the whole self, but only that tiny part of the self that somehow became your entire self. If you were a woman. Until it became a mother's cunt—harsh and jagged—the words intended to cut to the quick the man to whom it was aimed.

Lips would curl savagely around the words—“Your . . .”—shape the words with a blunt and rough-hewn style, replacing the “t” and “h” with a double “d”—“mudder . . .”—only to let fly the deadly missiles that home in and explode—“Your mudder cunt” in the man's face, dripping the bitter-sweet sticky mess all over him. Miranda had seen grown men grow murderous at this insult. She had seen her brother come home in tears because of this.

It was only men she had heard saying these words. Did women curse it too, or was it only a male curse? And what did women say, “Your father's prick?” Somehow it didn't sound as bad as mother's cunt. She knew all the words now, and cock or father's cock just didn't count if you really wanted to curse. None of them came close in badness to *the* word.

The exploration of forbidden words was always always in the practice-makes-perfect of secret places—at night in bed with the sheets pulled up tight tight over her head; in the bathroom under cover of the shower's noise, or if she was home alone, in front of the big, round mirror in her mother's bed-

room. Her mother and father shared the room, but Miranda always thought of it as her mother's room—it smelt like her, carried the imprint of her order. The big obzoky bed took up most of the smallness of the shabby room; in the day time, with its dark wood shiny with the high gleam of regular Saturday polishings, it seemed not to belong—didn't quite fit—but at night time when hurricane season came round, or during earthquake time, it was the safest place to curl body 'round sister or brother or mother, its wide expanse like some ballasted haven among the shaking and the lightning and the thunder, and her mother's voice no longer forbidding, but soothing and comforting at each tremor, flash, or roll. Miranda now pranced up and down the hard mattress feeling boldface and nervous. She watched herself in the mirror as she formed the words: excitement balancing risk as it did when she played with matches under the house, knowing it was worth the flogging she might get if caught. To practise-make-perfect forbidden words in forbidden spaces . . .

In this new country—for that was how she saw her move to the city, even the air felt and smelt different. Where before there were no spaces or places she could not enter, where before everything was allowed and permitted, now the forbidden was the usual: forbidden places, especially for girls; forbidden books, forbidden people, forbidden words, forbidden thoughts, and yet what was forbidden was all the more clear to her because it was forbidden. The forbidden had come to life in new and unusual ways in this new place.

For a while Miranda had envied her new friend: nothing was forbidden him. Her eyes would follow his sure and insolent swagger, avidly trail each movement of his walk—its casualness all the more brutal for his indifference to all that Miranda could not ignore—and come to rest at that place within herself where she knew she could never be like him. To shut out the image that she also desired, Miranda could only close her eyes; it didn't always work. His ignorance of the forbidden was absolute. As absolute as her envy of him. And she felt her thin body vibrate with the energy of want—so keen was her desire at times for this state where the forbidden did not matter. Then something happened that made her switch her loyalties and allegiances

abruptly. Miranda was stubborn in her loyalties once formed, and in making this switch she felt that she had, somehow, betrayed her friend. But it *was* a war, wasn't it, she argued with herself as she hurried to school one day, and you had to take sides.

Pomona Adams was a large and beautiful brown-skinned woman. Miranda was impressed. Very impressed with Pomona. With all things about Pomona—she was close to six feet with full shapely breasts, the kind Miranda wanted; wore high heels all the time; and had the largest behind Miranda had ever seen. But more than anything else what Miranda was impressed with was Pomona's ability to curse. Miranda was intrigued by how Pomona, her plump arms resting on her window sill, could casually carry on a conversation with her neighbour, pause mid-sentence, calmly tell her son to stop kicking the arse out of his shoes, turn back to her neighbour and continue her conversation as if nothing had happened. Miranda was entranced by the way Pomona could combine words when she cursed—words that she Miranda would never have dreamt of putting together, like arse and shoe. Under the pretext of doing homework she would often try to parse the use of certain words she had heard Pomona using—trying hard to understand the context. She was not very successful, for while arse was a noun, shoes did not have arses, yet she knew what Pomona had meant . . . she shrugged her bony shoulders and gave up in frustration after a while. She was young, but she recognized artistry when she heard it, and she knew that if ever there was a cursing contest, Pomona would win hands down and she, Miranda, would be there cheering her on.

Pomona, Miranda saw, had powerful words too and she used them as if none were forbidden, as if she had the right to use them all—the good *and* the bad. And something about the way Pomona walked made Miranda suspect that Pomona's words, especially the bad ones, and the way she used them were connected with her body. She used her words like she walked, with a prideful determination that matched her size. You couldn't even call what Pomona did walking, Miranda thought, as she watched Pomona mashing the ground as if she owned it and knew that she owned it—each step was merely

intended to confirm that ownership. The proof of this connection between Pomona's body and her words came early one morning several weeks after Miranda had moved to the city, and while she was struggling to understand this new badness that was all around her.

Pomona and one of her neighbours hadn't talked for several months, they just threw words at each other—this Miranda only found out by listening to her parents' conversations. When Pomona and Sybil stopped speaking to each other their children did too. The men pretended to be above it all, and would nod to each other. To go out, Pomona had to pass Sybil's house, so almost every day as Pomona passed by, Pomona and Sybil would be throwing words at each other under their breath so that the other one wouldn't hear, but know something was said, or just over their breath so that the other one did hear. Miranda never found out what Sybil said to Pomona on this particular morning but Pomona's response was the reason why she switched allegiances. She saw Pomona lift one of her solid arms, grab the flesh on the underside of her upper arm and say, "Look, see here, this is flesh!" She flung her challenge at Sybil who was by no means a small woman, but certainly smaller than Pomona. As if this was not enough, Pomona turned her back to her opponent and with two hands flung her skirt up and up over her behind; down, down, and still further down came Pomona's panties, her hands swift and sure with the choreography of pride. "Look, you want to see flesh, this, this is flesh!" And there for all the world who cared to look, and Miranda, was Pomona's fat backside exposed to the sweet morning air as she grabbed a handful of her brown flesh to demonstrate the proof of its existence. Proud, and in the brown amplitude of her flesh, unashamed of her size or her words, any of her words, particularly the bad ones that now, after the unmatched challenge of her flesh, issued forth from her round pretty mouth, Pomona threw her words in her neighbour's face and made a stand for truth—the truth of flesh and bad words.

"Come in here now!" Her mother's voice banished Miranda from the forbidden and the desired—to be bad—to use bad words—to make them good perhaps, though she liked the power that badness gave them.

Once again in front of the mirror in her mother's bedroom, the house empty, Miranda threw up her skirt to expose her bony bottom to the mirror. "Yes, yes, this is flesh," gripping her arm tightly muscled with youth. "Oh hell!" Disappointed, she flopped on the bed. "To have a behind—no—an arse like that," she said out loud, "something you could grab on to." She longed for flesh on her arms or breasts like Pomona. The person she now most wanted to be like was Pomona. In the dark she told herself that she didn't so much want to *be* like Pomona Adams as to curse like her. She wasn't sure if there was a difference. Practice makes perfect, Miranda now reminded herself, as she stood on the bed, hoping that the mattress would give her the sort of rocking majestic walk of Pomona. Once again she started to work at her words, trying hard to get the right inflection, the right sneer. Women curse too—she knew that now. Pomona had taught her that. She had even heard one say *the* word, the one that made men cry—the mother's curse. It wasn't only men that used it, but only men cried or got really angry at it. The women didn't carry on like the men did at the mother's curse. Why that was she hadn't figured out. Not yet anyway.

As long as she continued to practice in secret, Miranda felt uninitiated into the world of the forbidden. Her initiation, she felt, had to be to be a public one—a speaking of at least one of these words in the presence of others. She picked one—shit—knowing she was a coward for choosing one of the least bad. Plotting and practising to make it perfect in public, she rehearsed all her words, tasting them secretly as you can only words. In the secret spaces of her mouth she spun, unspun, and respun with a loving tongue a new language, the language of badness. Her testing and retesting of these words became a fuguing against and with the words of her mother and father.

"But he say massa day done, and that all the children going to have a free education." Miranda didn't so much listen—these conversations went on almost every night—as she was aware of the rising and falling voices drifting in from the front porch to where she sat, preparing for the examination that would give her a chance to enter yet another forbidden world. "Better educa-

tion” was what her parents called this new world. She heard the voices rise and fall, passion and excitement strengthening the rhythms of an already rhythmic language. “Yes, but he not going far enough, England and America still going control the economy.” The cadenced voices reflect the trajectory, the rise and fall of empire. The deep bass of her father’s voice and her mother’s higher, softer tones throw back and forth between them words like “politics” and “freedom,” pulling a thread here, a strand there, trying hard to twist and braid these hard, new words into dreams for their children—a good job in the civil service perhaps, exploring the furthest limits of their world—maybe even a doctor! As they talked, Miranda felt rather than heard the urgency behind her parents’ words, words that they had stoked and fired into life, and now would not let die, words that under the lash and caress of their tongues now transformed themselves—slavery into freedom, nigger into human. Miranda heard and felt all this, she knew that like her they were entering forbidden spaces, naming now what they had only dared to dream of before. In secret. But Miranda also knew they would never see how her exploration of bad words was anything else but an expression of vice—proof of her badness. So she smiled a knowing smile to herself and continued working.

Sunday. That was the day Miranda chose for her initiation. She had woken up at cock-crow and knew that that was the day, but when it was to be she couldn’t tell. It would happen when it happened, she thought. After church and the heavy Sunday lunch, and still dressed in their Sunday best, her mother had taken them all to a neighbour’s for a visit. There the two women and the children had all sat stiffly, drinking sweet drinks on the front porch before the adults released them to play in the front yard while they talked.

Like her favourite cowboy shoot-out scenes from Saturday matinees, where the good guy—usually Roy Rogers or Gene Autry—dressed in white, meets the bad guy dressed all in black and shoots it out, Miranda replayed the scene in her mind for many months, even years, after. She was standing close to the top step about to jump all the way down to the bottom—some six or so steps—when someone, she couldn’t tell who it was since the push came from

behind, pushed her off. She never found out who it was, she never cared enough. Like the morning “the word” had just popped out over the Wapsey River, she didn’t will them, the words just came, “Oh shit!” The release was almost too much to bear, and before she knew what she was doing, before she could savour the delight and pride she felt, she heard herself, “Oh fucking, fucking shit!” She saw the shock on everyone’s face and felt a rush of excitement. One or two of the other children even had their hands over *their* mouths, as if they themselves had said the words, and that made Miranda want to laugh out loud. Her mother’s face was serious—like a bull she remembered thinking. Maybe she added that thought later—as time went on Miranda did have a tendency to embellish the memory. Her mother’s full eyes that could cow them into quiet in public, now gazed at Miranda, commanding her to silence. As if she were rushing toward a cliff in preparation for leaping off and flying, Miranda saw it all, and knew she couldn’t stop or she would fall and not fly. She saw the licking her father would give her with the thick leather strap that lay like some threatening snake, coiled in the bottom drawer of the bureau—there was a rumour that it had been soaked in pee to make it sting more; she saw the washing out of her mouth that her mother *would* carry out. But she also saw Pomona Adams, with her shapely breasts and large backside, mashing the ground—proudly—and thought of her using her words and her body just the way she wanted to, and Miranda smiled and rushed to embrace the unembraceable, the forbidden: “And your mother’s cunt!” She slung her mouth around the words and repeated them all again to no one in particular, but with a bravado and a gauche sureness that was sureness all the same, and an understanding way beyond her years. She had practised to make perfect and she had come close to perfection that Sunday afternoon. She understood badness now and that was what mattered.

The words had not stained her mouth—even in this public uttering. The moist, wet, inner pink space of her mouth had become a tender womb to bad words, any words—mother’s cunts, pricks, dicks—the words were embedded deep inside Miranda filling up all the secret places and spaces created by the

forbidden. Like Chaucer's male characters, the words, mother's cunts and all, had plumbed her depths. No one, not even the guardian of space and words, her mother, could take them or any of her words from her. They're all mine now, Miranda thought as she lay in bed, remembering how she had panted and her forehead had broken out in sweat after she was done swearing. "But see here," her mother's friend had said, "she not even done grow yet and she want to be woman." Miranda's eyes had locked with her mother's—behind the hardness of the glare she could faintly recognize the hurt—she had shamed her in public, and for that she was sorry, but not for saying the words. Her fingers now gently touched the raised weals on her arms and legs from the flogging her father had given her. They were the painful proof of her allegiance with Pomona Adams. And the truth. There was a certain truth in those words, she knew that now; it was that truth that made some people dislike them so—like men crying at the mother's curse. Having uttered them, Miranda now felt that she had made the words good, especially the mother's curse, but she now wanted very much to keep the power of their badness. And how was she to do that—make them good yet keep them bad?

On that thought Miranda fell asleep.

* * *

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INTELLECTUAL LIFE: CAROLE BOYCE
DAVIES'S *LEFT OF KARL MARX:
THE POLITICAL LIFE OF BLACK
COMMUNIST CLAUDIA JONES*

KATHERINE MCKITTRICK (IN CONVERSATION
WITH CAROLE BOYCE DAVIES)

Marx is all right, but we need to complete Marx . . .
—Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, 86

In *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (2008), Carole Boyce Davies details the radical, creative, and intellectual contribution black communist Claudia Jones made throughout her life. Due to her ongoing commitment to peace and justice—work that was informed by a black diasporic, Marxist-Leninist, and anti-imperialist world view—Jones was a punishable and punished subject. She was arrested three times and eventually deported from the United States to the United Kingdom for her political activism. Jones died in the UK in 1964. She was buried in a plot “to the left of the grave of Karl Marx” in Highgate Cemetery, London, early in 1965 (*Left of Karl Marx* xxvii). The thrust of Jones’s life story that Boyce Davies advances in this scholarly work is indicated in her title: *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*. The first part, *Left of Karl Marx*, encapsulates two ideas central to the book. In the first in-

stance, the title references a real location: Jones's cemetery plot, which, depending on one's vantage point, positions her interned ashes left of the grave of Karl Marx. In the second instance, "left" is a reference to Jones's politics, which Boyce Davies suggests were "well beyond the limitations of Marxism" (*Left of Karl Marx* 27). Boyce Davies argues that Jones's politics were "left" of Karl Marx precisely because her intellectual and activist work produced a geopolitical framework and activities that posited various gendered and racial locations—black, poor, colonial, transnational, working class—as sites that generate, rather than passively accept, discourses of liberation. Jones was "left" of Karl Marx not because she inserted black women into his analytic framework, but because she insisted that activist/intellectual work on the left, particularly if it addressed the concerns of black women, could draw attention to the left itself. In so doing, she exposed the limits of the party line and the incompleteness of the tenets of Marxism, Leninism, and communism (Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx* 27).¹ Jones's work thus challenged left-leaning praxis and serves as a model to think through the super-exploitation of black women and other disenfranchised communities.

The second part of the title, *The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones*, indicates that the book is something of a biography; and Boyce Davies does provide a narrative that retells the facts, chronologically, of Jones's life. Boyce Davies traces Jones's steps from her birth in Trinidad, to her years growing up in New York City, through to her surveillance by the FBI (an aggressive tracking that did not deter Jones from writing and speaking against the super-exploitation of black and other disenfranchised communities) and her work as founder and editor of the *West Indian Gazette* and initiator of the first London Caribbean Carnival. Many of these activities were achieved despite her persistent health challenges. Although Jones's life and labour are carefully detailed in the text, *Left of Karl Marx* is not a straightforward biography. Boyce Davies indicates in her introduction that her goal was to address the ways in which an account of Jones's life and work can offer an opportunity to reassess intellectual activism in the context of African diaspora history:

This book is not a biography but a study of someone who, in my estimation, is one of the most important black radical thinkers, activists, and organizers in African diaspora history. The need to reintroduce Claudia Jones and account for her in all relevant discourses essentially drives this project. (xiii)

Left of Karl Marx positions Jones as a black diasporic woman whose radically “left-of-Marx” political vision necessarily informs how Boyce Davies writes the text. It follows, then, that Boyce Davies’s retelling and presentation of Jones’s life is in itself a meaningful political project as her analysis refuses an easy, linear, political biography and instead offers a textually rich, anti-imperialist, and transnational reading that complements Jones’s vision.

Some of the difficult questions Boyce Davies asks us to consider concern the layers of violence and marginalization Claudia Jones experienced and challenged, and how we, as readers, might ethically attend to her complex life of displacement. Boyce Davies discloses several incidents of removal and displacement: Jones’s political life in the US, a white supremacist state, resulted in incarceration and deportment; her feminist critique of communism went largely unnoticed and unacknowledged; her leadership in the Communist Party was undermined by the party’s patriarchal vision; she was a migratory subject who inhabited and was connected to Trinidad, the US, Britain and beyond; her forced and voluntary travels transported and transformed her political vision; her life story is absent from key debates in feminism, black studies, left studies, and Caribbean studies; scholars have only recently begun asking about, and uncovering, her political contributions; her intellectual/poetic/activist work, produced outside the academy, has rarely informed academic queries; and her life in Britain, her founding of and contributions to the *West Indian Gazette*, and her celebration of blackness through engineering Carnival were haunted by state repression and racism. Beyond these are yet more displacements, more violence occasioned by white supremacy, various kinds of erasure, and sexism. Significantly, Boyce Davies reads this marginalization anew, neither naming the marginalization as evidence of axiomatic black oppression nor simplistically documenting and celebrating Jones’s

achievements and acts of resistance. Positioning Claudia Jones as a radical black subject, Boyce Davies reads her life as central to our broader understanding of diasporic intellectual history and human life. In this sense, Boyce Davies insists that Jones is *not* the margins, not newly discoverable. Put differently, in the face of imminent violence and erasure, Jones always *created*; and it is through her creative intellectual activism that we can identify her commitment to living and sharing ways to foster “the best of our humanity” (*Left of Karl Marx* 233).

Left of Karl Marx is not, then, an easy text, in part because Boyce Davies seeks to honour the intricate ways in which Jones challenged the practices commonplace within political, activist, and intellectual circles, including leftist and left-leaning positions such as feminism and communism. The process of remembering and recovering Jones in *Left of Karl Marx* is not simply a project of feminist reclamation wherein Jones is written into history as someone found, discovered, and displayed. Instead, Boyce Davies writes and discloses a radical project that reintroduces Jones within the context of violent state repression. This, then, is a study of *intellectual life*, with Jones bringing into focus and embodying the activist, diasporic, and poetic dimensions of human life itself. Indeed, Jones’s health challenges loom large in *Left of Karl Marx*, reminding me, as I read of her tireless activism and inspiring writings, that she was physically depleted.² In refusing to position Jones on the margins or to settle for simple celebratory recovery, Boyce Davies provides a meaningful pathway to think about Jones’s Lordeian Sister-Outsider-ness as a site of memory wherein we, as readers, are connected to the centrality of state repression through which violent marginalization is made possible. That is to say we learn from Jones’s migratory diasporic practices precisely because they identify the ways in which erasure, marginalization, displacement, and death mark the livability of radical black political agency as something central to the historical moment in which we live.

Katherine McKittrick

Interview

Katherine McKittrick: In *Left of Karl Marx* you discuss the ways in which Claudia Jones was a deportable migratory subject. Did deportability and Jones's diasporic agency inform your methodology in the book? I am recalling here your conceptual framework in *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject*, where you think about material and theoretical convergences, travel, and dispersal as enabling a deeper understanding of black fiction.

Carole Boyce Davies: Both of those formulations work, yes. The “migratory” version of course coming conceptually before the “deportability” logic. While I see Claudia Jones as someone who had a lot more agency in terms of her own “migratory subjectivity”—coming from the Caribbean as a child and then making her way to London, for example—the other side or the “dark side” of diaspora is what is identified here in the deportability issue. By that I mean she came to the US yes, but landed in Harlem as a poor, Caribbean black girl subject to racism and all the other subordinations of the time, and because of this gets politically active. And, ironically, this was what brought her to the attention of the state and where she was seen as a problem. So many of us see migration as providing agency, but “deportation,” which does not suggest any agency, has to be also seen as the other side of that diaspora formation. For example, what happens when the state decides that one is not a desirable subject? And I tried not to limit it to the US as the Caribbean has also dealt with activists in similar ways: barring entry (Kwame Toure), house arrest (C.L.R. James), and so forth. But two things are significant when considering Jones's life: (1) she threw in her lot with African Americans in their struggle against racism in the US; and (2) when she went to London she became a major figure there in developing the Caribbean community, creating some of its institutions, and struggling for rights at critical periods because of her US experience.

K. M.: Claudia Jones's life and work also demonstrate how diaspora, deportation, and incarceration can be complex sites of productivity, even when the "darker side" looms large, in the form of repressive state mechanisms that "crack down" on migratory subjects, especially when radical political subjects like Jones refuse to fully comply with the logic of deportability and racial-sexual discipline. Do you think histories of migration contributed to Jones's political visions? To put it differently, did displacement figure into Jones's relationship with liberation practices?

C. B. D.: I would say that displacement definitely figured into her practices of liberation. I recall that Stuart Hall says in his response to the conference presentations on his work at UWI–Mona, edited by Brian Meeks in the *Caribbean Reasonings* series, that living as a Caribbean diaspora subject is living with a certain displacement.³ Jones was a world-class activist who knew, as I say in *Left of Karl Marx*, that there are different sites of struggle; and once situations change, one has to adapt to meet the conditions and she did this in a magnificent way. Indeed, her short time in London—only nine years—seems as if it was twice as long because of what she achieved (see fig. 1). I like what you said about refusing to comply with the racial-sexual discipline, for indeed this is what she did; she asserted that black women can "read and think and write"—and affirmed our intellectual and creative space which signifies our humanity and which, therefore, many have historically sought to deny. For this reason I argue that she steps out of the logic of deportation and into her own formation. This is evident when one considers that her journey across the Atlantic seems nothing like a deportation because she turned it into a journey to new horizons. It is an interesting rewriting of the Atlantic crossing for these reasons.

K. M.: Could you talk about your sources for *Left of Karl Marx*? The book is not a straightforward biography of Claudia Jones. Instead, as I read it, it is an interdisciplinary study of a black woman's radical politics. So what kinds of sources helped you to formulate your argument?



Fig. 1. Claudia Jones addresses crowds, Trafalgar Square, 1962. Photograph by Henry Grant. Courtesy of the Henry Grant Collection / Museum of London.

C. B. D.: I have tried hard not to identify it as a biography. Biographies are the work of people like Arnold Rampersad and others who do volumes on the life of people like Langston Hughes and for whom it becomes their life work where they track down every existing archive and find every little detail. There is still a biography out there that has to be done. Lydia Lindsey of North Carolina Central University is working on one. But I wanted to do a study of her life particularly as there was not much out there; and I felt it important, as I indicated in *Out of the Kumbia*, to know who—besides Sylvia Wynter, for example—was out there for us in an intellectual/activist way in the generations that preceded us, beyond the mytho-legendary Maroon Nanny types. Besides, people like C.L.R. James have many books written about them, and so it should be with Jones. So, I am gratified that the book has garnered so much attention. It seems that Claudia Jones herself has come into her own in 2008 with a stamp in her honour in the UK and plaques and blue markers identifying her place in the British landscape. As for my sources, there was a great deal of archival work, particularly because I was trying to come to terms with the idea of women in the Caribbean radical intellectual tradition and her placement in that framework, which is often identified as male only. There was a lot of spadework to find the materials in archives, collections, published works, symposia on Jones, and so forth. But talking to people who knew her well was the most rewarding. I was able to only distill a bit of that information and hope that this book generates a great deal more work on her and other figures written out of history.

K. M.: What of reading the FBI files as a way of uncovering part of Jones's life?

C. B. D.: Reading the FBI files was as paradoxically revealing as it was intimidating. One is confronted with this massive document of thousands of pages on a person's life. Ironically, as I show, since she never hid anything, all the information is there. What is hidden or redacted is what the state wants to hide—its informants and its agents and the like. Jones never saw herself as

doing anything wrong by being able to think and she was very explicit about this. She even said as much publicly in the courts: that she saw herself as being immersed in ideas. So her question was: are you all criminalizing or jailing the thinking process now? Clearly, she was a political prisoner; or an “imprisoned intellectual” as Joy James terms it.⁴

K. M.: My favourite part of the text is your analysis of Jones’s creative works—specifically her poems. Your analysis allowed me to think through what I have called elsewhere “prison life” and about the links between blackness, incarceration, survival, and creativity.⁵ Could you talk about the ways in which Jones’s creative output, from the poems to Carnival, shaped her broader political concerns?

C. B. D.: I have a writer friend in Trinidad who thought that these were not good poems; and clearly Claudia Jones was not a poet in the formal sense. But I am with Audre Lorde here in thinking that poetry is a means by which one can give form to one’s feelings.⁶ I see Claudia Jones then as being an organic poet. She wrote those poems while she was incarcerated and perhaps those were the moments when she felt the most intense pain, longing, loss, sense of separation, desire for a better world and, above all, a conviction that history would absolve her—and clearly it has. The state set out to punish and destroy the Communist Party leadership and clearly it achieved what it intended. Almost all the leadership were incarcerated and many of them died not long after getting out of prison. Claudia Jones was able to live an active life nine years after her imprisonment and deportation, and for this I am grateful. I am glad that there is a record of her thoughts in periods of most intense pain. Interestingly as well, her statement that “a people’s art is the genesis of their freedom” [from the *Caribbean Carnival Souvenir Booklet*, reprinted in *Left of Karl Marx* 189] has become an important watchword for many. Remember that she fought her comrades in London who thought that organizing a carnival was too frivolous and that they should spend the time doing more political education in the community. But she saw culture and the creative as sites

where we define our humanity. In many ways, Jones's reorientation of struggle through culture, although there were elements of it in communist strategies, was also organic to black liberation pursuit at that time and particularly in Europe. In fact, independence was heavily fought for on the grounds of artistry and culture, as well as formal party politics. This is what was original in Jones's cultural struggle: that while articulating aspects of communist strategies, her reorientation was grounded on a cultural self-confidence in the potential for mass resistance that she knew to be inherent to carnival aesthetics.

K. M.: In the book you present Jones's politics—in particular communism—as part of her larger world view. Your analysis and intellectual work show a commitment to thinking about her life differently—without the seductive workings of identity politics (that communism might *solely* define Jones). Could you talk a little about your strategies for working through Claudia Jones's relationship with the left/communism as not fully or wholly indicative of her political vision?

C. B. D.: One of the points I make very early on is that Jones did not only *receive* an ideology and a practice from communism but she also *contributed* to it from her own locations. For this reason, she is on record as putting the issues of race and gender squarely on the table during her time of involvement in the party. She is on record as challenging the relegation of black women to an absented presence in all political formations. The fact that she was an Afro-Caribbean woman who came from a variety of communities with which she was continuously in touch meant that she was able to also bring their concerns to the table; for example, she worked with New York black communities, black women's organizations, Caribbean groups, poor people struggling to make a way in Depression-era conditions, and black intellectual and political cadres. Thus I indicate that the true creative fusion of these allied positions is her major contribution to a distinctive anti-imperialist politics that positions her "left of Karl Marx." From all accounts, her desire to be buried left of Karl Marx was her choice, which her partner Manchanda fulfilled. I see this as her

way of encoding for posterity her particular location, which reopens Marxism but from a black woman's point of view. So locating her solely within the frameworks of American communism would be doing a disservice to someone who broke through uncentered identifications and who saw communism as a "theoretical horse" that she would ride as far as it would take her (she rode it; it did not ride her). That horse allowed her to approach a range of issues, such as the obviously still difficult one of race relations both in the Americas and Europe. It is a racial drama we are still engaging with fifty years after her various trials and challenges.

K. M.: Throughout *Left of Karl Marx* you bring a critique to, yet also employ, black feminism. Could you talk a little about how feminism works in your analysis?

C. B. D.: It is not so much a critique as it is a challenge, I think. I was surprised, for example, when I talked to some black women historians who work in the African American context that they had no idea who Claudia Jones was. Their lack of knowledge did not quite signal a wilful desire to leave her out, as can often occur in the US, particularly because the US as an American empire looks out for its interests. Indeed, anybody who is not wholly in the narrowly identified genealogy as coming down through US enslavement, etc., is not really part of the framework in any serious way. In other words, the framework is set up to work with a US domestic agenda and the international is included only to the extent that it enhances that. As a Caribbean woman living in the US how could I work with such a narrow framework? It would mean leaving myself out. I was often surprised during my young professional days to run into people like Nellie McKay, who I discovered had Caribbean background (she was from Jamaica). But one would never have known as she worked primarily within the US African American narrative. One can easily relate that very narrow reading of US identity to some of the more nationalistic responses to Barack Obama as well, where he is seen as not fully African American for similar reasons: that linear narrative back to having ancestors

who were slaves in the US. I think in an unintentional way black feminism has some aspects of that in its early formation. As it critiqued white American feminism for its erasures, it also instituted its own. I think there is a way that most discourses, if they are not careful, do the same unless challenged on the question of exclusion. For example, that entire period of the 1950s in which there was substantial activism, as with the organization of the Sojourners for Truth and Justice, which was a black feminist organization, was omitted. So, yes I do use black feminist frameworks, but I try to open them up to suggest someone like Claudia Jones belonged to several other communities and if we apply a series of lenses we can see all sorts of other connections.

K. M.: Reading the book, it became increasingly clear that you were perhaps positioning Claudia Jones as inhabiting what Sylvia Wynter calls “demonic grounds.”⁷ *Left of Karl Marx*, for me, really encourages us to read differently. From these demonic grounds, you look at FBI files, cultural production, journalism, deportability, the nation-state, and so forth. Could you say something about how and why you engaged the key themes of the book in order to emphasize not only Jones’s radical politics, but also the politics of *your* argument?

C. B. D.: I kind of answered this in a way earlier when I suggested that I was trying to see who else was out there ahead of us, in the generation of Sylvia Wynter, doing the kind of work that may have put them in a position of disfavour, even minimally. Indeed, I dedicated the book to Sylvia Wynter but in the end the publishers left out that dedication page in error. The key themes of the book were generated in process as I moved through the body of work; and I can see others even now. There should have been a chapter, for example, on migration. I read a review in which the reviewer wanted more of her early life as well. There was another reviewer who wanted more on her emotional life and thought the book too academic. That was in the *Caribbean Review of Books*. As you know, with writing, one has to reach a point at which one says this book needs to go and perhaps I will do something else later. So deporta-

tion loomed large for me, as did her role in the founding of the London Carnival, which was debated for a while as there was an attempt to give somebody else the credit. Then there was a book that dealt with her London exile so I did not want to focus on that too much. The journalism as well I found significant, as I did her working out of the questions relating to black women. And I felt that the way the state framed her and how she responded to it in her autobiographical accounts needed to be there as they represented her most stunning moments of clarity about who she was and why she would fight an oppressive system.

K. M.: How do you understand Claudia Jones in relation to the black left—in particular those intellectuals who critiqued the underlying racism of left politics, some of whom eventually abandoned Marxism? I am thinking of intellectuals and writers like Richard Wright, C.L.R. James, Ralph Ellison, and Sylvia Wynter.

C. B. D.: I believe her presence makes us recalibrate what we mean by the black intellectual. We have done substantial work in reclaiming the creative writers. I think now we also have to do the same with the intellectual/activist figures in our history. There has always been a pantheon of great men who did great things, as if that space can only be a male space. For example, in the Trinidadian and larger Caribbean calling out of historical figures, there is a long list from Sylvester Williams down to Kwame Toure, but no woman has ever been included there. With Claudia Jones and the work that is being done on her that has to change, and we were successful in having them do it in Trinidad at the last Emancipation Celebrations (2008). I am not sure if they will maintain it in the future. I need to check that out. Regarding the black left, many of them left the party because they found it was not able to be radical enough on the issue of race. Jones pushed them to do just that and for me this is another reason why she is positioned “left of Karl Marx.” It is a shorthand for reinforcing all the other critiques of Marxism, I would say. But like many Marxists who remained so, she saw it as an intellectual and theoretical frame-

work and so used it, but not without a critique. There is evidence that towards the end of her life she had started to move away from the Communist Party identification and while still working it analytically, the applications were coming out differently as she worked for the Caribbean working-class community in London. Stuart Hall says that when he arrived in London in 1951, those who were there were mostly students, but following the various post-Windrush migrations, there was a huge influx of other groups of Caribbean people.⁸ While C.L.R. James could be considered the voice of a certain intellectual class, Jones certainly became the voice of the Caribbean working class.

K. M.: At the end of the book I thought that Claudia Jones has a future, and that you have given her a *new* future. Do you agree?

C B. D.: Absolutely. The future is hers. She will be heard and seen again, and there is something dynamic in how that is coming about. Besides, I find her such a beautiful and compelling figure. It is so rewarding to know that she led the way in so many wonderful and challenging areas.

NOTES

1. Other Caribbean intellectuals and scholars have taken up Boyce Davies's point about the left's lack of engagement with race. See, for example, Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism* and Stuart Hall's "Cultural Studies and Its Theoretical Legacies."

2. Claudia Jones's narrative, then, reminds us of what Sylvia Wynter calls new forms of human life, a sense of being that is not invested in securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (with its profitable insides and outsides, margins and centres, and a measuring stick of liberation that is laden with bourgeoisie values) but rather a mode of humanness that honours the being of being human itself (Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality" 257-337). This is clearly evidenced by Jones's physiological well-being and illness, which are bound up in her intellectual and activist labour and tied to the surveillance of her work and life by the nation-state.

3. See Hall's "Epilogue: Through the Prism of an Intellectual Life" (269-291).
4. In James's edited collection *Imprisoned Intellectuals: Americas Political Prisoners Write on Life, Liberation, and Rebellion* (2003).
5. McKittrick refers to her 2008 paper "'Being Locked In and Locked Out Are Two Sides of the Same Coin . . .': Reading Ruth Wilson Gilmore's *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis and Opposition in Globalizing California*."
6. Audre Lorde discusses poetry in *Sister Outsider* (36-39, 53-59).
7. See Wynter's discussion in "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman'" (355-372); see also McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds: Black Women and the Cartographies of Struggle* (2006).
8. Hall discusses this period in his interview with Kuan-Hsing Chen, "The Formation of a Diasporic Intellectual."

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PROSPERO'S DAUGHTER: RECOVERING CARIBBEAN WO/MEN

ALISON DONNELL (IN CONVERSATION WITH
ELIZABETH NUNEZ)

A prominent Caribbean woman writer as well as an academic, Elizabeth Nunez has written six novels (with a seventh forthcoming), is co-editor, with Jennifer Sparrow, of the anthology *Stories from Blue Latitudes: Caribbean Women Writers at Home and Abroad* (Seal/Avalon Press, 2005), and has published monograph studies on Caribbean literature. Currently provost and senior vice president of Medgar Evers College at the City University of New York, Nunez juggles demanding and competing roles, which has no doubt sharpened her political and observational skills. These skills are on display in and reflected by the keen insights she offers in her novels. Delicately crafted and elegantly written, Nunez's novels are consistently informed by an understanding of political structures and social categories that remain steeped in the unequal histories of colonialism. More than this, though, they are unfailing in their rendering of lives and loves that might offer a way of undoing the sinister logic of oppressive histories, although they never underestimate the demands of such a task.

Nunez's 2006 novel, *Prospero's Daughter*, is located at a significant crossroads in Caribbean literary and social history. Intertexting with Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, as well as with a significant range of Caribbean literary works, the novel tells the story of an English doctor and scientific sorcerer

Philip Gardner (Prospero), who, with his daughter, Virginia (Miranda), seeks isolation on a former leper colony off the coast of Trinidad after his scandalous experiments with grafting human limbs fail. Having arrived with nothing but his own daughter, Gardner claims power over the two children he finds on the island: Carlos Codrington (Caliban), the orphaned son of an Englishwoman, Sylvia (Sycorax), and a Trinidadian man; and Ariana (Ariel), the daughter of Sylvia's cook. Taking control of Carlos's house and land, Gardner proceeds to systematically abuse all three of the children; and, after petting and educating Carlos, he imprisons him in a sty when Carlos declares his love for Virginia. The first section of the novel is framed by the musings of John Mumsford (a reluctant English policeman) investigating Prospero's claim that Carlos tried to rape Virginia; the novel then moves through versions of the story as told by Carlos and Virginia. Layering perspectives and voices, Nunez unfolds the tissue of violence and injustice that has informed the lives of those who share the tiny island "home," as well as the possibilities for love and friendship that Gardner's force and will have no power to prevent.

Prospero's Daughter is critically acclaimed. Among other accolades, it was the New York Times Book Review Editor's Choice, the Florida Center for the Literary Arts One Book One Community selection at the Miami Book Fair, and Novel of the Year from *Black Issues Book Review* in 2006. Nunez's seventh novel, *Anna In-Between*, is forthcoming in the fall of 2009.

My interview with Elizabeth Nunez took place as part of a day of public events hosted by Dr. Hyacinth Simpson at Ryerson University, Toronto, in March 2007 to mark the bicentennial of the abolition of the British slave trade. The interview was conducted at the evening session and followed a reading by Nunez and a performance by a group of Ryerson students of a number of key scenes from *The Tempest*. Towards the end of the interview, the audience was invited to ask questions and their responses are also recorded. Although it is not possible to acknowledge all the individuals who contributed, I have endeavoured to retain a sense of the dialogue that emerged during the session; and I am very grateful for their shaping of the discussion.

Alison Donnell

Interview

Alison Donnell: *The Tempest* has been such an important, if not central, text within Caribbean literary engagements with the canon of English literature. Could you talk about what made you want to take up this story so directly?

Elizabeth Nunez: The discomfort I felt with my secondary school teacher's interpretation of *The Tempest* never really went away. There I was, a black girl of thirteen or fourteen, living on an island colonized by the British, the recipient of a first-class education—thanks to the British. And I was intimidated into silence when my teacher extolled the virtues of Prospero and agreed with him that Caliban is a lazy, ungrateful native who did not know his own meaning until taught it by his European master. According to Prospero, Caliban is a lascivious savage and a would-be rapist if Prospero hadn't caught him before he attempted to violate the honour of his master's daughter. My teacher gave no counter-argument as Prospero makes the leap from accusing Caliban to implicating all members of "his vile race," seemingly including all non-European natives in the claim that Caliban's nature is such that "nurture can never stick." Then came George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), which revisions Caliban as the heroic Caribbean native who defies the colonizer, claims his rightful ownership of his island, and rejects the obligation of feeling gratitude toward the colonizer. Caliban strikes out at Prospero: "You taught me language; and my profit on't / Is, I know how to curse" (Shakespeare, *The Tempest* 1.2.363-364).

A. D.: I want to come back to Lamming and his version of Caliban in a moment; and the novel not only clearly engages with Lamming and other significant male figures in Caribbean literary tradition, but it is also wonderfully textured throughout with echoes from a whole range of English canonical as well as Caribbean literary works—from Shakespeare to Naipaul!

All the same, to my mind, there is an important correlation between your particular act of rewriting *The Tempest* and what has emerged as a central preoccupation in the body of work produced by Caribbean women writers: recovering the complexity and fullness of Caribbean women's subjectivities. As you know, the figure of the white Caribbean woman has been a vexed one within Caribbean cultural criticism; and her position has been contested and scrutinized from Kamau Brathwaite to Sylvia Wynter. Could you comment on this and on your representation of Virginia (Miranda), a white woman, as a Caribbean subject?

E. N.: I began by thinking of Miranda not as a white woman but as a Caribbean woman. I don't believe that the colour of our skin defines us. I reject the notion of "race." We are all, of course, human beings and are all subject to shaping by our environment. Miranda arrived on the island when she was three years old, and she stayed there for twelve years. It seems to me that she would have been affected by the particularity of the island's landscape and by her contacts with the people living on the island.

A. D.: The undoing of race as the determinant of identity is a very strong element in the novel, as is that shared connection to the island and its close-knit but ethnically diverse micro-community, which, as you suggest, Miranda must have been an integral part of in the Shakespearean version and which is so important to Virginia in the novel. At the same time, that sharing of a common geography and the condition of being human that can "ground" connections between peoples whose history has dictated profoundly different relationships to the land is also clearly contingent on building a new understanding of their shared rights and responsibilities over the land and to each other. This is why there is a real possibility for Virginia to belong in ways that Gardner never could.

To return to the idea of a Caribbean literary tradition, one of the most distinctive features for me in thinking about how *Prospero's Daughter* might intersect with Caribbean women's writing is its narrative form. I was very

struck by how the narrative moves from the opening third-person account, which describes the uncertain and often defeated struggle to find an authoritative or “acceptable” version of events, on to Carlos’s story, and finally to Virginia’s account in her own words. This formal strategy reminds me of Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* and particularly of Antoinette’s claim that “[T]here is always the other side, always” (128).

E. N.: Well, the fact is that in school, even at university, we are taught to accept Prospero’s version of the story. Unfortunately, even those who recognize the paradigm of the colonial experience still continue to see that story through Prospero’s eyes. And what surprises me a lot are the people—they are not many, thankfully—who say to me that they find I have portrayed Prospero as an excessively evil man in the novel. Well, my response is that it depends on what side of the fence you’re on. If you’re the one who is doing the colonizing, of course it seems that Prospero is right, but if you are the one whose island has been colonized by a foreign power, who is forced to do the bidding of a foreign power, who is enslaved, then Prospero doesn’t seem like a good man.

I wanted Caliban and Miranda to speak, to tell their stories. I think I said this morning that I am energized as a writer by discovery. It isn’t that I know the answers before I write; I write to know the answers. What did Caliban think? What did Miranda think? I didn’t know. They were on this island together for such a long time, and she was so young when she came on the island, and her father was not a nice man. I can’t imagine her not wanting to run away from him and form a sort of clandestine relationship with the other creatures on the island, the other characters on the island. I just wanted to hear their stories; I wanted them to speak their stories.

Isn’t this what Jean Rhys did in *Wide Sargasso Sea*? Rhys was a white Caribbean woman and she claimed that what she wanted to do was to vindicate that mad Creole white woman that Emile Brontë put in the attic. I read *The Tempest* I can’t tell you how many times. Finally, when I came to write the novel I spent a year just writing down all the dialogue, all the words these four characters said in the play. So that when you read the novel, there are times

when you can actually find (hopefully) the equivalent in the play for what my characters are saying. And I did that because I knew I was going to get this criticism about how evil I made Prospero. In fact, what my Dr. Gardner did to Carlos was not as bad as what Prospero said he was going to do to Caliban:

For this, be sure, tonight thou shalt have cramps,
Side stitches that shall pen thy breath up; urchins
Shall, for that vast of night that they may work,
All exercise on thee; thou shalt be pinched
As thick as honeycomb, each pinch more stinging
Than bees that made 'em. (Shakespeare 1.2.325-330)

If that isn't torture I don't know what is. I think my re-creation of that torture was less vicious than what we just heard [referring to the staging the drama students did] (see fig. 1 and fig. 2). So that's why I spent a year just doing that, and then jumping into that bank of quotations so that I could have some kind of a basis for the development of my characters; or just to get myself to think of, and to get you the readers to think of, new things really—for you to participate in the story. I couldn't have written this novel when I was much younger, even though it was in my head for many, many years, because it is the result of a lot of reading, a lot of thinking, a lot of being with my friends and hearing what they had to say.

A. D.: The novel has a very specific and intriguing setting on Chacachacare, the westernmost of the tiny Bocas Islands that lie between Trinidad and Venezuela. It is a place with a fascinating history, as the base for the Venezuelan revolutionary Santiago Mariño during his 1813 invasion of Venezuela and later as a whaling station and the site for a leper colony run by nuns. It is then both a sanctuary and a place of danger. I wonder if you'd just tell us a bit more about the island setting and also what ideas locating the narrative in such a very small place might allow?

E. N.: This novel is the product of a lot of stories in my head. For example, there's my friend Anne Marie [laughter as she acknowledged her friend in the audience]. She may not remember this, but she told me the story about her



Fig. 1. Ryerson theatre students playing scene from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* during *Prospero's Daughter Day of Events*, Ryerson University, 27 March, 2007. Miranda: Kate Corbett; Prospero: Ian McRoberts; Ariel: Ben Sanders. Reproduced with permission.



Fig. 2. Ryerson theatre students playing scene from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* during *Prospero's Daughter Day of Events*, Ryerson University, 27 March, 2007. Miranda: Kate Corbett; Prospero: Ian McRoberts; Caliban: Michael DeRose. Reproduced with permission.

childhood in Chacachacare a long time ago. Her father was one of the last doctors in the leper colony on the island of Chacachacare. I remember her saying to me that as a little girl (she's probably amazed that I'm remembering this story) she spent a lot of time alone, playing on the beach by herself. Then, when I went to the island, I saw that it's not a beach; it's a kind of a pebbled thing. I saw how completely isolated she was on that island, not even able to see the leper colony. So that was one story in my head which made me choose that place. I'm not saying that Anne Marie is Virginia or Miranda, but I had an idea from what she said to me about how the landscape and the isolation of the place could affect a person's character, and I began to form an idea of a little girl on the island and how she would relate to the landscape and ways in which it would shape her and change her.

Then once the novel had chosen the place for me, which was Chacachacare, I had to do a lot of research. I had to go there many times, and read a lot about the place, and then I was really lucky that one of the old nuns, who was in her eighties, came to my house in Trinidad and spent a whole afternoon telling me about what life was like on the leper colony. She brought lots of handwritten notes for me and told me a lot. I not only had the written research, but I actually had her words. So a lot of that scene in the second chapter was based on what she told me. Yes, that was great.

A. D.: Time, as well as place, is obviously very important to our reading of *Prospero's Daughter*. The novel is very specifically set in 1961—a time when Trinidad and the West Indies more generally were on the threshold of political change. It is a year after the publication of Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* that, as you have already said, so powerfully repositioned Caliban, and a year before independence in Trinidad. Interestingly, Glissant refers to this period from 1960-1980 as “notre passé de tempête”—our tempest years. Could you talk a little bit about the historical moment that you chose and how that shaped the narrative?

E. N.: Well, the time chose itself. I know that when novelists say this it sounds really weird, but the fact is that it's true. You're writing the novel,

and the novel tells you this is the time for the novel. And when the novel tells you this is the time for the novel, you now have to go and find out what life was like during that period—although, in a way, Shakespeare’s play (at least Prospero’s opening accusation of Caliban) tells a very contemporary story. Right now, this very moment, we have exactly that situation. . . . You know the story of Susan Smith. That’s the first thing she said [that a black man had taken her children], and everybody went looking for this black man until she broke down and said she did it; she killed her two children (Gibbs et al. 42). So here it is that Prospero, a European, accuses Caliban, a native, of attempting to rape his daughter. What evidence does he have? We are never given that evidence; we are simply expected to accept his word. Why? Yes, I am aware of Caliban’s response, but could his response have been a defensive swagger? Or a political statement? Could he have been intimating that if there were more people like him on the island—more Calibans—he could defeat Prospero?

For the novel, I had to choose a time when the police inspector on the island would be an Englishman. I wanted him to do the investigating. If I had chosen a time when we were independent, then it would have been difficult for me to find an Englishman in that position. That was one of the considerations. Then I wanted Carlos to have the sense that the island is his home, that it belongs to him; and also I wanted him to be connected to the people on the mainland, which is Trinidad, who were demanding political independence from the British colonial powers. The island became independent in 1962, so I chose 1961, the year before independence.

A. D.: I’d like to pick up on your English inspector, Mumsford. In the opening section that you read he is a pretty unsympathetic character, but he changes as the novel develops and almost forms some kind of relationship with Carlos. He begins, I think, to understand his outsider position, as a class outsider; and there’s something, a tentative, almost a reluctant, kinship—something he feels between them. I’m just wondering if it’s too optimistic to suggest that a white Englishman could be a site of decolonization?

E. N.: I think they're in the same situation in a way. Of course, as an Englishman, Mumsford is privileged by the colour of his skin. Once he arrived in Trinidad, his skin took on loads of value. He could have been a nobody in England, but in Trinidad the colour of his skin would put him on the top. But Dr. Gardner, who is an Englishman himself, knows that Mumsford comes from the lower rungs of the social classes. And Mumsford knows that Dr. Gardner knows who he is and at times in the novel Dr. Gardner laughs at him, laughs at the things he says, and laughs at his lack of education. So although Mumsford does not fully identify with Carlos's position, there is some connection between them and he empathizes with Carlos somewhat. In Trinidad, Mumsford is in a high position but here he has someone, Dr. Gardner, who reminds him all the time of his status in England.

And I think that one may not in fact be a racist in one's heart, although one may do racist things. At least, I know quite a few people who may say racist things, but it's basically because the environment and the society in which they live have taught them to act that way. So that although Mumsford says some awful things, when it comes to crunch time, he doesn't like the way, as human being to human being, Gardner treats Carlos. He does not like the relationship between Carlos and Virginia because he has been taught that blacks and whites should not marry. At the same time, as a decent human being, he cannot see another human being treated unjustly and do nothing. In this novel, I am really also interested in the way we learn to be racist, and Virginia's father does a lot to try to teach his daughter about her superiority over people of colour based on the colour of her skin. He tries to teach her how she's supposed to act and what she's supposed to do and the value of her skin. Mumsford learned this in England.

I'll just give you a quick example. There's a scene where Mumford is speaking to Dr. Gardner, who is much more educated; he's a doctor. And they're talking about Carlos being freckled, which you [the drama students] enacted. You recall that Prospero refers to Caliban as "a freckled whelp, hagg-born." Mumsford is trying to figure out the significance of the freckles: "'Ah,' he said knowingly. 'I've heard that happens.'" Gardner does not understand

him and Mumsford clarifies: “When the two bloods meet . . . Sometimes it makes black and brown dots on the white.” Gardner laughs at him. He’s so ignorant, he’s so stupid: “I mean,” Gardner said to him. “[D]idn’t they teach you anything about biology in police school, Inspector? . . . [C]olored people don’t leave dots on white people. Or stripes, for that matter. A black and a white horse don’t make a zebra, Mumsford” (Nunez, *Prospero’s Daughter* 54-55). And then in a later scene Mumsford is thinking about this, and he realizes that when he was in the pub with his friends in England, this is what they said; these are the kinds of things they say all the time. And although rationally he knows what they say is stupid, it doesn’t make sense, he repeats it. How do you separate myth from truth? How do you pull that off? I was raised a Roman Catholic, a very religious Roman Catholic. I don’t believe now much of the stuff I was taught. But I don’t think I can pull all the myths I learned out of me. You know, they are in there. I can’t take them out. And that’s what scares me about being taught racist things at an early age, because even when you do in fact change, and you know better, I wonder whether you can actually exorcise these early beliefs out of you. Can you? I don’t know.

A. D.: I’d like to end my part of this evening by asking you about Ariana, the Ariel figure, who is a woman of mixed African and Indian descent. Like Shakespeare’s Ariel she’s blackmailed into service for Gardner/Prospero but what’s really crucial to your novel is that her service isn’t just domestic service—it’s sexual service; she has to serve him sexually. Yet, despite this coerced service, she still chooses to serve Carlos and Virginia, to enable them to have time with each other. Most importantly, she chooses to write a letter to the police commissioner that defends their relationship and the love that they have for each other. So then, she’s a figure who’s forced into service but who also wants to do good service, which I think is really interesting in relation to questions of resistance that *The Tempest* texts usually configure. I just felt deeply Ariana’s lack of presence when the novel ends with Carlos and Virginia locking hands over Virginia’s pregnant belly. The trio has become a duo, and she is not part of this harmonizing image of a new kind of family, which

could also be a new nation and a new kind of opportunity for belonging that corresponds to the ideals of justice and love and belonging. Finally then, although Ariana gives so much, she's not fully accommodated in those ideals.

E. N.: I know, I know. She does good things, but she does them, in a sense, reluctantly. You know, she starts off liking her position. . . . She's ahead of Carlos. She is Dr. Gardner's little secret person; she's his little lackey; she has his confidence and so she has something over Carlos. And she uses that power to some extent and I guess, like Mumsford, she reaches that point where she can't do so any longer. She can't tolerate it any more. But she pays a huge price for her earlier actions.

As for her sexual relationship with Prospero, I was thinking of the sexual relationships that many Englishmen I knew in Trinidad had with the local women during the time Trinidad was a colony. They seemed to feel that the local women were available to them, and they didn't necessarily have to marry them. I was thinking of the rubble they left behind when they went back to England. In terms of Prospero, I guess the question, as I told you, Alison, that I asked myself was "What did he do for sex?" I think you said to me, "Well, I don't know. He was a man of the mind," and so on. That's true, but throughout the play he makes a lot of sexual references. He has sex on his mind. He was constantly talking to and about his daughter in ways that emphasized her value from below her waist. Her value was there. And when he talks about his wife, his dead wife, her value was that too—her virginity. So my question was "What did he do for sex?" There were only . . . How many people were on the island? In the twelve years, what did he do? So those were the thoughts in my head.

A. D.: Are you ready to take questions from the audience?

E. N.: Sure.

Question from a member of the audience: You talked about how you chose the novel's time period. Could you have captured the particular issues you address if you had used any other period of Caribbean history—that particular sense of being beholden to our colonizer that attaches specifically to my generation? We were the last generation to be raised in that particular context. We were better educated, but we were also burdened with feeling this tremendous gratitude.

E. N.: Exactly. I couldn't have chosen another time . . .

Audience member continues: History also makes it so difficult for us to contextualize the harm. It's there—that sense of being beholden—when you listen to all the characters, Shakespeare's and yours. And there's also the importance of skin colour to everyone and how society is stratified. I think it would be interesting to think about whether the doctor would have actually lowered himself. Would he have chosen a black woman, even in dire straits?

E. N.: People keep asking me questions like that. What happened afterwards? You know, I really was influenced as a writer by Shakespeare, and Shakespeare's plays require you to participate in them and answer some of the questions they raise yourself. They absolutely require you to become involved in the story, and I try to do that with my writing. This is my story. This is how I'm seeing the world, and you have to come in and see for yourself if what has happened makes sense, and what could have happened. Your version may be different from mine, but there is space for it, just as I found space in *The Tempest* to jump in. I'm hoping you'll find space in my novel to jump in. But you're right. I couldn't have chosen any other time because we were that last generation, and we were tremendously grateful; we had to be. We were getting some kind of education, and yet, we knew that was *our* island, that was *our* home. It belongs to us. It does not belong to you.

A. D.: It seems to me that the “us” that you have just mentioned is very significant within the novel because it is an inclusive us. The island community of Ariana, Carlos, and Virginia is almost a proto-nation, a grouping that suggests the possibility of alliance between different peoples to create an “us” that the historical nation-building project failed to achieve as different ethnic groups were pitted against, rather than encouraged to work alongside, each other.

E. N.: Yes, that’s true. Politics sometimes artificially hardens the divisions between people. On the island—maybe because of the smallness of the place—people tend to intermingle, to have all sorts of intimate relationships. Can a person of European ancestry who was raised by a person of African ancestry not be influenced by her/him? See, that’s the problem Rochester has with Antoinette in Rhys’s novel: “Creole of pure English descent she may be,” he says, “but they are not English or European either” (Rhys 67). You just have to see the response of people on the island to steel pan, which was an invention of enslaved Africans. Whites, Indians, Chinese, Europeans, etc., respond to the steel pan in a way that unites them culturally in the Caribbean but separates them culturally from others of their origin on the continents. Then the politicians come in with their own agendas. Of course, they are right to point out our history of brutality and exploitation, but there’s also our “us-ness”: a mixed-race Carlos marrying an English girl, and a mixed-race Ariana of Indian and African parentage.

A. D.: Elizabeth, I hope you don’t mind me saying, but although you talked just now of feelings of gratitude, when we were talking earlier today you also said to me that the first time you visited England you felt very angry.

E. N.: That’s right. So there was gratitude, but I always also felt a simmering anger. I live, of course, in New York, and there’s a sense in which I admire African Americans for their freedom to be angry. They have this freedom to rage and to call names. I don’t have that freedom to rage and to call names. Every time I start to call a name I say, “Dah” . . . It’s very hard to explain my

reluctance to African Americans. This is a major difference between African Americans and West Indians. A major difference. And they resolve that difference by saying to me, “You’re not black; you don’t know who you are.” But the major difference is that they did not live the life we lived under colonialism. This is Shakespeare’s genius. I mean, even while Prospero is saying those things to Caliban, Caliban is saying, “But I loved you. You did all this to me and I loved you.” Even in that moment, even in that time when he is being enslaved and tortured, Caliban is able to say, “But I loved you; you taught me much.” So yes, going to England, for me, was difficult. The first time I went, I could only stay two days. I had to get out. Every building looked to me like a sugar cane field. I saw the blood.

Audience member: That’s the conflict because on the one hand we knew what was happening. My year was the first year we studied West Indian literature; we were allowed to write on West Indian literature for our papers at high school. It was a tremendous experience to discover West Indian writers, despite what Naipaul said. We also knew that, for us, education was the only way out and that the gates of education were fairly closely guarded. That access was something we were always grateful for. I went to one of the best high schools on the island [Trinidad], but I hate it even now and won’t attend anything that has to do with that school. We had mandatory elocution classes so we could learn to speak “good” English. We had music education from a Prof. Edwards and so when I listened to you, Elizabeth, reading from the novel I remembered those music lessons which, like everything else, were intended to “civilize” us.

E. N.: But we loved it. I love classical music. I love John Keats. I love Shakespeare. I love it all. That’s it. Even right now the novels that I feel the closest affinity to are the novels written by British writers. I read their work and I feel. . . . I tell people I was Betty as a child; I became Elizabeth because of Elizabeth Bennett. She and I were the same. When I read *Pride and Prejudice* she was who I was, and who I wanted to be.

Question from another audience member: You seem clearly comfortable with and passionate about Shakespeare. How much of the novel is about homage and how much is critique, an intervention—a coming to terms with those two places from which you are writing?

E. N.: I don't know. I mean, it was only after I had written the book and it was published and it was all over that it occurred to me to think about what I had done with it. But in the process of writing it I wasn't conscious in that way. That piece I read,¹ you know whenever I read it I say, "Oh well, that's true." And when I read the questions that Carlos asks—"Why hadn't I left before? Why had I stayed so many years?" (Nunez, *Prospero's Daughter* 216)—I don't know the answer myself. One lives with ambiguity and with irreconcilable opposites; one lives in the shadows. That's how we live. We don't live with clear answers about this or that. We live in-between, and we straddle these worlds, unless you're not a particularly thinking person, and then it's easy for you to say, well this is bad and this is good. And so I live with that ambiguity. On the other hand, I tell you I really admire people who have the freedom to declare that things are so clear for them. I'm like, "Well, but." The Hamlet problem: to be or not to be [laughter].

A. D.: But, within the novel, to take away the power of Prospero's accusation, to completely vindicate Carlos and make it clear that he has no intention of violence towards Miranda, is really significant isn't it? As we know, historically most Caribbean engagements with *The Tempest* have chosen to focus on the power dynamic between Prospero and Caliban for obvious reasons of the colonial allegory. Here, it is not Caliban as a solitary and revolutionary figure who offers resistance to Prospero's power. Rather, what undoes Gardner's power is the consensual and loving relationship between Virginia and Carlos. That marks a major shift in terms of revisiting *The Tempest* as a text that stages the colonial problem. Could you say a bit more about this?

E. N.: Yes, thank you. For me, in this novel, it is indeed the loving relationship between Virginia and Carlos that is the undoing of Gardner. Do you remember how Carlos's section of the novel begins? Carlos speaks of a Miranda test. "Pass it and I believe you," he says. "Fail it and all you say about the races being equal, that character, not color, is what matters, becomes theoretical" (Nunez, *Prospero's Daughter* 105). I find that to be true among many dogooders, liberals, advocates of racial equality. Yes, they say, play together when you are children, but on the point of marriage, marry your own people. In the end, their position is not much different from the hypocrisy of US law in the early twentieth century: separate but equal. But, of course, at no time did Gardner conceive of Carlos as an equal. Carlos is his successful experiment in educating a local, but he always remains superior to him.

A. D.: All the same, that your work clears that particular slate is really significant, I think. It humanizes Caliban in Carlos and does not assume that people became what the colonial project sought to make them.

E. N.: Having been to that island and as often as I went—it was not very often, but the time I spent there was intense and significant—I don't think you can live with that flora and fauna and not be affected. Remember that soliloquy: "Be not afeared" (Shakespeare, *The Tempest* 3.2.135)? Trinculo and Stephano are scared; they're hearing all these things, and Caliban says, "Be not afeared. . . ." (Just when I want to recite these lines, they disappear). I play with those words in the novel. A man who says these words, a man who could tell those guys don't be scared of this, these are sounds that would not hurt you, a man who could dream that the clouds would open and show him riches, such a man is a remarkably sensitive person, a poet. And these are Shakespeare's words. So he invested in Caliban this possibility. This isn't a man like Prospero who is learned, and yet, in spite of his learning and education and all he knows about the arts, he could still be an evil man.

I was telling Alison that I was once in charge of the core curriculum at my college, and I was preaching that the humanities humanize you so let's have more humanities courses. And a professor said to me yes, but in the forties you could not have found a more civilized, more culturally elevated society than that of the Germans and yet they were capable of the Holocaust. So I'm looking at Prospero who, you know, has all this education and yet is still capable of inflicting great cruelty on others. But Shakespeare allows us to see Caliban reacting to the beauty of his environment; he dreams of it. To me, the person who had this kind of connection to the beauties of his landscape would, in fact, show a three-year-old girl the same thing. And can you imagine any little three-year-old girl on such an island who wouldn't ever be curious about a flower or a lizard or a bird that she saw? Surely, she'd ask Carlos about what she was seeing and he would share his enthusiasm for the landscape with her. I have a scene in the novel about that. Once I had Caliban's soliloquy, I just imagined what could happen between a three-year-old girl in that environment and an older boy who feels that way about the landscape. You know how three year olds are: "What's that? What do you think?" He would show her. He was that kind of person; and they would bond.

Hyacinth Simpson: In this morning's session and just now we got some very interesting comments about the time period in which the action in the story unfolds—1961 mainly. But we are also reading and talking about the novel in 2007, and one of the many wonderful things about your story is that—as you indicated earlier in your reference to Susan Smith—the past clearly reverberates in the present. That brings me to Ariana. In the end she chooses to be the one to act in service of Virginia and Carlos. There is something that many of us don't like to talk about and that is the ongoing animosity between Afro-Caribbeans and Indo-Caribbeans. It continues to rear its ugly head, particularly in Trinidad and Guyana. So I'm wondering if there was anything about that history of racial and ethnic conflict and its current violent manifestations that influenced your presentation of Ariana. People tend to think of the Ariel figure as the subservient sell-out willing to betray even the most nascent re-

bellion in order to get what she or he wants instead of forming alliances with others who are oppressed. As you said earlier, that is kind of what Ariana does at the beginning, but then she realizes that Gardner has betrayed them all. When she asks Virginia, “Did he do that to you, too?” the two young women begin to realize that they have common cause. So, did you consciously configure your Ariel character as someone who would find solidarity with other oppressed peoples on the island?

E. N.: Well, I should say that I develop that idea more in the novel that I am currently working on. And that’s what happens with a novel. You write the novel and it has the germ of something that you know is there, but you haven’t developed it in that particular work. So in the novel I’m working on (I’m actually pretty much finished) I do develop that. But yes, Ariana is in a very tenuous position. She’s reaping some good advantages with Dr. Gardner. She’s getting better treatment, but it’s kind of, you know, something she could lose at any time. And yes, this kind of conflict happens between ethnic groups in the Caribbean. It’s the history of colonization. At the end of slavery, the Indians were brought in and given the advantage of five acres of land. Ramabai [Espinete] and I have talked about this many times. I really can’t say too much more, except that when my next novel comes out you’ll read what I think about that.

But I do want to say just one thing, which I said this morning. At the end of the novel, as Virginia and Carlos get together and everything looks rosy and things are going fine, Virginia turns to Carlos and reminds him that she is her father’s daughter: “I am his daughter,” she says. And, as I was saying this morning, that was a problem I didn’t know how I would resolve when I started on the novel. I mean, what if at some point, in the middle of the night when they are having a big fight, the black husband accuses the white wife of being no different from her white father, whom he considers to be a racist? My characters had to give me the answer. And, as I said to the group this morning, I got help from *Hamlet*. So I’m leaving you with a little political problem here. You’ll recall that in *Hamlet* when Claudius is praying and Hamlet, unknown to him, is

listening, we learn that what Claudius is praying for is forgiveness. He wants forgiveness, but his prayer doesn't work. He asks, "May one be pardon'd and retain th' offence?" (Shakespeare 3.3.56) And then he admits that he has no intention of giving up the queen, and he certainly was not going to give up Denmark, or his other prizes and privileges. So his prayer ends with his heels kicking toward heaven. I used *Hamlet* to answer Virginia's concern, and I want you to jump into the novel and tell me what you would say. Carlos responds to her in the novel. He tells her that in the end he got back his house, but Virginia wonders what would have happened if he hadn't got it back. What if he hadn't got back everything? Do you see where I'm heading?

Audience members: Reparation.

E. N.: Correct.

A. D.: That question is very pertinent this year with the bicentennial of the abolition of the British slave trade being marked so widely. It is a question of whether this historical wrong can ever be righted. When we think about the way in which the old colonial powers have continued to benefit from that legacy of slavery, it's exactly the right question to ask.

E. N.: People look all over the place for a case for reparation, and the case for reparation is right in their face—for hundreds of years, written beautifully, and answered! The answer to Claudius's question is "No" [laughs].

A. D.: There's the question about responding to the call for reparation in emotional terms. We know that forgiveness is not simply the apology; it must be the reciprocal process of apologizing and of having that apology accepted.

E. N.: But it goes beyond that because in that scene Claudius says exactly what he knew he wanted to retain. He wanted to retain his power; he wanted to retain his position; he wanted to retain his goods; and he wanted to retain

the queen. Now you can make equivalents to those. Claudius answers his own question; or Shakespeare puts the answer in his mouth. No, can't happen. To answer my question, Virginia worries that "a day would come when Carlos would shift [her] father's sins from [her] father to [her]." "I am his daughter," she reminds Carlos (Nunez, *Prospero's Daughter* 309). She is basically asking him if he can forgive her, and Carlos responds by saying yes, he can forgive her because he now has his house back.

A. D.: In other words, there have to be the material grounds for equality and a recognition of the need to redistribute power. I understand that, but the novel works extremely powerfully to explore the possibility of healing, as well as to expose the violence that colonialism enacted on its subjects. What seems most crucial to me in terms of linking the novel to a tradition of Caribbean writing in the present, and here I am thinking of works like Lawrence Scott's *Night Calypso* and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*, is that the possibility for healing only emerges as meaningful if it is collective. Carlos's liberation may be importantly achieved on his own terms but he does not claim it at the expense of Virginia. Could you speak to that idea?

E. N.: The point I hope to make, which is clear in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, is that forgiveness requires some sort of material reparation. That is one of the reasons there is hope for the relationship between Carlos and Virginia, and for Ariana's future happiness.

Hyacinth Simpson: Thank you very much Elizabeth and Alison; and thank you also to our very enthusiastic audience.

[Applause]

NOTES

1. Nunez is making reference to her article “Channeling Shakespeare,” published in 2006, in which she talks about what influenced her writing of the novel.

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“THE ISLE IS FULL OF NOISES”:
MYTHICAL SPACE AND PLACE
IN ELIZABETH NUNEZ’S
PROSPERO’S DAUGHTER

SANDRA POUCHET PAQUET

In this paper, I explore Elizabeth Nunez’s reappropriation of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1623) in the context of the transgressive lineage that has preceded *Prospero’s Daughter* in Caribbean discourse. Inspired by an anti-colonial spirit of revolt and the ideological necessity of decolonization, this discourse has had difficulty envisioning the native woman as centrally embedded in the twin processes of revolt and recovery, barring gestures in that direction in George Lamming’s *Water with Berries*. In her reconfiguration of *The Tempest*, Nunez resituates her version of the canonical colonial text in a time and place of the original text’s enshrinement. That setting is the historical Trinidad and Chacachacare of the twentieth-century Caribbean at the height of the anti-colonial movement, just prior to independence in 1962. Nunez’s interpellation of colonial authority is staged discursively in the tension between Shakespeare’s fiction and her own, between one text used as an instrument of subjugation and her own counter-discursive narrative of liberation. The architecture of her novel is elaborate as it undertakes a multi-faceted re-enactment of the classic drama of Europe’s encounter with alterity in a cultural context that necessitates its re-employment. It is here that an unresolved

tension in *Prospero's Daughter* surfaces between that patriarchal emplotment of the original and the contemporary woman writer's counter-discursive strategies in her culturally and politically situated rewriting of the original.

Appropriations of *The Tempest* have a lineage of some distinction in Caribbean writing and scholarship since the publication of Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* in 1960. Others include Aimé Césaire's *Une Tempête: D'après "la Tempête" de Shakespeare—Adaptation pour un Antillan négre* (1969), Roberto Fernández Retamar's "Cuba Hasta Fidel" (1969) and "Caliban: Notes Toward a Discussion of Culture in our America" (1969), Kamau Brathwaite's *Islands* (1969), Lamming's *Water with Berries* (1971), and Derek Walcott's *The Isle Is Full of Noises* (Hartford Stage Company and the Negro Ensemble, 1982). In his 1987 article, "Caribbean and African Appropriations of *The Tempest*," Rob Nixon concludes that, "*The Tempest's* value for African and Caribbean intellectuals faded once the plot ran out" (576). He deferred to Sylvia Wynter's judgment in her "Afterword" to Lemuel Johnson's *highlife for caliban* (1973) where she wrote that "it is the neocolonial event that finally divests Caliban of that which had kept him whole—a dream of revenge against Prospero. But how shall he now revenge himself upon himself?" (137). However, in a subsequent article, "Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/Silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman'" (1990), Wynter went much further in her reading of *The Tempest* as a foundational image-making text by arguing that the absence of the native woman as an alternative to Miranda as "erotic model of sexual desire" from the play's list of characters is an ontological absence that effectively erases the native woman from the social pyramid (360).¹

A singular achievement of *Prospero's Daughter* is the way Elizabeth Nunez resituates and restructures this body of thought, while remaining in dialogue with it all, through the use of allegorical signs originating in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and employed in any or all of the works mentioned above.² Fundamental to Nunez's poetic schema is her use of island space, and not an invented island, a fantasy island, or another magic island, but a specific island with a name, geography, and known history. The conceptual power of

Prospero's Daughter derives in no small part from the specificity of its island settings—Chacachacare and Trinidad. I argue that Nunez's use of the island of Chacachacare, a known space with a distinct human history and cultural geography, as the primary setting for *Prospero's Daughter* facilitates a markedly different adaptation of the Prospero-Caliban-Ariel-Miranda trope to her own purposes. Nunez's choice of an island space that is empirically known and claimed as native space gives her a measure of creative authority over the human drama enacted in the specificity of that landscape and also a canonical narrative that has assumed the proportions of a myth of genesis in Caribbean discourse. In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, Yi-Fu Tuan observes that "Two principal kinds of mythical space may be distinguished. In the one, mythical space is a fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically known; it frames pragmatic space. In the other it is the spatial component of a world view, a conception of localized values within which people carry on their practical activities" (86). Yi-Fu Tuan reminds us that on the local level, mythical space "is a conceptual extension of the familiar and workaday spaces given by direct experience" (86). In the Chacachacare and Trinidad of *Prospero's Daughter*, the experience of place generates competing myths of genesis among individuals and communities where the idea of a terrestrial paradise is reclaimed and refreshed. In this paper, I will focus on Nunez's creative use of literary space and place as the linchpin of her revisioning of race, gender, freedom, and independence in national cultural politics.

In "Caribbean Genesis," Jana Evans Braziel advances an "ecocritical paradigm for understanding Caribbean returns to myths of genesis (not as origin but as problematic and process) in their writings" (112). Braziel's parenthetical clarification—not as origin but as problematic and process—may explain in part the attraction of *The Tempest* as a counter-discursive site of decolonization. Consider, for example, Lamming's discursive self-positioning in *The Pleasures of Exile*:

... I see *The Tempest* against the background of England's experiment in colonization. Considering the range of Shakespeare's curiosity, and the fact that these matters were being feverishly discussed in England at the time,

they would most certainly have been present in his mind. Indeed, they must have been part of the conscious stuff of his thinking. And it is Shakespeare's capacity for experience which leads me to feel that *The Tempest* was also prophetic of a political future which is our present. Moreover, the circumstances of my life, both as a colonial and exiled descendent of Caliban in the twentieth century, is an example of that prophecy. (13)

The reinscription of these discursive assumptions over time by Caribbean writers underscores the challenge of locating the native woman within the Prospero-Caliban-Ariel-Miranda paradigm where the "native" woman, Caliban's mother, is identified off stage as Sycorax, a witch and hag, whom Prospero has imprisoned in a tree. Attentive to the absence of the native woman as rebel, in *Water with Berries* Lamming splits the character of Miranda into Myra and Randa; the former is the sexually violated, displaced, white West Indian woman, and the other is the sexually "dishonoured," rejected, black West Indian woman. Though their roles in the novel mark them as victims of an unrelenting male quest for patriarchal dominance that extends through colonization into decolonization and the quest for independence, the novel is primarily concerned with the fortunes of three male artists who emigrate from the Caribbean to the fictive Albion (a thinly disguised Great Britain in this postcolonial allegory) in a reversal of the *Tempest* paradigm. In her radical rewriting of the paradigm, Nunez restores both the white West Indian woman Virginia (Miranda) and the black West Indian woman Ariana (Ariel) to the status of native woman in a revisioning of the inherited racial binaries enacted and maintained by colonial patriarchal authority. Braziel discerns a pattern in contemporary Caribbean writing that suggests "a reconsideration of the 'natural' in subjectivity—not as a pre-given medium but rather as a created mode of relation in the world" (124). In this context, she identifies "a reconfiguration of landscape in citizenship—not as citizens bound by and inextricable from a fixed territory and not as subjects bound to a *pays natal* but as a land diasporically reconfigured, or as subjects with rhizomic roots that do not exploit the terrains in which they dwell" (124). Though Braziel does not name Nunez in her article, her observations speak directly to the eco-critical sensibility evinced in Nunez's revisiting of the Caribbean genesis thematic as part of her counter-discursive strategy.

There is a lot to be said about islands in British literature, and still more to be said about islands in the Caribbean imagination, where they have had to be repossessed, so to speak. In *Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands*, Diana Loxley makes the case that in nineteenth-century British literature the island motif is institutionalized as an ideal discourse for the ideological advancement of a colonial/imperial vision:

The motif of the island cannot simply be understood as just another 'theme' that variously appears and disappears throughout British and European literary history. It is not therefore, an *arbitrary* choosing of one specific strand in literature, the historical presence of which alone might justify his self-examination. What, on the contrary, is being proposed is that the texts examined must be seen not simply as variations on a theme but, in essence, literary representations of *the* theme of British colonialism. (xi)

Lamming adds another dimension to Loxley's conclusions in respect to the island setting of *The Tempest*, when he observes in *The Pleasures of Exile* that "It is not only aesthetic necessity, but also the *facts* of lived experience which demanded that the territory of the drama had to be an island. For there is no landscape more suitable for considering the Question of the sea, no geography more appropriate to the study of exile" (96). Our writers and scholars have employed and explored the trope tirelessly, and this is to be expected; the trope is also a lived Caribbean reality, a site of self-assessment and redefinition in the aftermath of slavery and colonialism. Most recently, Chris Bongie, in *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature*, builds on the work of Lamming, Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, and Antonio Benítez-Rojo, among others:

The island is thus the site of a double identity—closed and open—and this doubleness perfectly conveys the ambivalences of Creole identity . . . If insular thinking is at the root of a traditional identity politics, the relational thinking that emerges out of the cross-culturalizing dynamics of the creolization process puts this insularity into question. (18)

And there is the question of the smaller island in relation to the bigger island in *Prospero's Daughter*, where Nunez uses two islands in close proximity to each

other in counterpoint, so to speak, and where the smaller island experiences a thralldom that makes it a living image and reminder of the larger island's past.

Prospero's Daughter is set on the island of Chacachacare, a former leper colony (1922-1984) and thus a site of banishment and human tragedy within recent memory, in the years just prior to the independence of Trinidad and Tobago (1962). This sets the stage for the structural transformation of positional relations in the Prospero-Caliban-Ariel-Miranda trope. Since this island is described historically and geographically in its relationship to Trinidad, where anti-colonial agitation for independence is gaining momentum, the events unfolding on Chacachacare appear unique to that island and yet contingent on the nation-defining events occurring in Trinidad at the same time. Thus, as the epic tenure of British colonial rule is winding down in the face of active resistance in Trinidad, those events generate a specific cultural context for interpreting the pattern of territorial annexation, repression, abuse, torture, and rebellion unfolding on Chacachacare nearby. The abstract and concrete spaces of conflict in the novel are imbued with verifiable historical and cultural data; it is into this literary historical space, saturated with post-colonial awareness of the nationalist project, that Nunez imports *The Tempest* as emblematic colonial master narrative.

The assumptions of the seventeenth-century play are invoked consciously as individual characters rehearse and interpret the moral imperatives and curses that they read into the play's language, and thus Nunez subjects the provenance of the play to the test of time and place in her historically grounded geopolitical fiction. For example, Carlos (Caliban), the central character in the novel, explains at some length to his friend and ally Ariana (Ariel), who is functionally literate but formally unschooled, why Dr. Gardner, who holds them in his thrall, is appropriately nicknamed Prospero. Gardner himself in fits of rage and passion curses Carlos in language that Shakespeare's Prospero reserves for castigating Caliban. Conversely, Carlos, who is also a poet, spits out Caliban's language of defiance and curses, directed at Prospero in Shakespeare's play, at his nemesis Gardner. The symbolic relations of the cultural order that structures Shakespeare's play flip back and forth to illuminate the

trajectory of system-change underway in Nunez's fictional world and its correlative in historical time and space.

Nunez overrides any notional opposition that might exist between the fictional space of her narrative and its geographical and historical specificity with a range of verifiable data. For example, early in the first of three sections of the novel, titled "The Englishmen," and before Nunez fully introduces her two versions of Prospero (Mumsford, a racist yet dutiful English Inspector of Police stationed in Trinidad, and Dr. Gardner, a racist English scientist and researcher who has stolen Carlos's property on Chacachacare), she narrates the colonial history of Trinidad with an identifiable nationalist bias, beginning with the arrival of the French in 1777 through to Emancipation in 1834 (8). Even before this, she inserts a brief account of a Trinidad/Chacachacare land-lease package that the British made with the United States during World War Two in exchange for twenty warships; the United States built military bases on this land and supported the British war effort. They built bases, roads, and fortifications in Trinidad and also on Chacachacare in 1942. When the novel opens the year is 1961, and the narrator makes the historical moment specific by identifying Dr. Eric Williams as the head of an anti-colonial government in Trinidad at the time (11). The island is on the verge of independence from Britain and public anticipation of the event is keen. Later in the novel, Carlos learns about Dr. Williams from a shopkeeper in Trinidad; he is identified to the questing Carlos as an agitator for independence with a public following, and as one who is bringing the hierarchy of race and colour to the forefront of public debate in Trinidad's Woodford Square: "Eric Williams. *De Doctah*. He had come from America where he had been teaching at Howard University. He was an Oxford man, the shopkeeper said proudly. Got his doctor title from Oxford" (181). In this way, Nunez deliberately problematizes distinct categories of knowledge in her novel—fiction and history, oral and literary discourses—which force a re-reading of the colonial master text as culturally situated and entrenched in the political, cultural, and educational discourses of colonialism.

In keeping with the island's centrality in the narrative, the geopolitical history of Chacachacare is introduced with great care, with information about

how it got its name; its location in relation to Trinidad, the Gulf of Paria, and the Dragon's Mouth; its proximity to a once-thriving whaling industry in the gulf; and its history as a cotton plantation, a vacation site, and a leprosarium (19-24). Nunez introduces the island from the vantage point of omniscient narrative; she doesn't trust either Englishman with the task. She is concrete and historically accurate about its topography, its flora and fauna, its neglected paths, and its lighthouse. She is knowledgeable about the leprosarium located on the island, about Hansen's disease and its history and methods of treatment at the leprosarium, and about the leprosarium's medical personnel and caretakers. She knows the ocean currents by name, the direction of the winds, and how long the trip to Trinidad by boat takes. There is never any doubt that this small island, though little more than a rock (900 acres), is a place with a recorded human history. This spatial consciousness pervades the narrative and anchors the cultural politics of the novel in the terrain of lived human experience. In this localized cultural space, *The Tempest* takes its place in the narrative as an authoritative colonial text and inspired work of art that the characters Gardener (Prospero) and Carlos (Caliban) internalize (each to a different scale of value) and use to different ends.

Thus *The Tempest* becomes multiply visible as colonial paradigm or pre-text that Nunez mimics in her emplotment of *Prospero's Daughter*, an interpretive strategy that illuminates the role of the book as fetish and emblem of colonial authority, and also as a mechanism for dismantling that authority.³ On Nunez's Chacachacare, the fuzzy outlines of Shakespeare's magic island are filled in, and this becomes the mainstay of a resistant, historical consciousness that matures into the keen intelligence enabling Carlos (Caliban) to defeat Gardner (Prospero), marry his daughter Virginia (a motherless Miranda whose sensibility and intelligence are nurtured by Caliban, who has enduring memories of mother-love), to form a mutually liberating alliance with Ariana (Ariel), and restore his mother's good name—and with it his genealogy and inheritance: “‘My mother,’ he said, was blue-eyed, but she was not a hag. She was beautiful. The house was hers. He stole it from me” (Nunez 67). Nunez makes much of the fact that Carlos is “freckled” and

therefore of mixed race, which intensifies his monstrosity in Gardner's eyes, and facilitates Nunez's vision of the rebirth of community around the traditional values of work and family in harmonious relationship with alterity. The marriage of Carlos and Virginia is an act of mutual love; it is never an act of revenge against her monstrous father. Their shared victimization engenders a new beginning, though in Glissant's sense of "a beginning whose time is marked by these balls and chains gone green" (6). This dynamic image actually reanimates the model of integrative community established by Carlos's parents on Chacachacare before disaster strikes, suggesting the genesis of a myth of place around the individual family unit, which carries its own historical burden of patriarchy, sexual possession, and property ownership.⁴ The latter remains evidence of an unresolved tension in the novel that is perhaps exacerbated in the intersection between two kinds of time: the historical time of progress towards individual freedom and independence from colonial rule, and the cyclical time of myth invested in the replay of the individual family unit as foundational value in the reclamation of Chacachacare as productive native space.

The link that Lamming makes between island geography and the study of exile is richly explored here because Nunez's *Prospero's Daughter* reflects on both islands and exiles, an established theme in Caribbean literary culture that has been replayed repeatedly in various prescriptive and performative enactments of national belonging.⁵ In *Prospero's Daughter*, all of Chacachacare's human occupants are arrivants—all, that is but Carlos (Caliban) and the children of those born to the sufferers from Hansen's disease who are imprisoned there (though the latter are hurriedly removed from their parents). This tenuous and varied historical relationship to place is fundamental to the cultural politics embedded in the novel, which while celebratory of formal independence from colonial rule models a flexible vision of heterogeneous national identities. In *The Repeating Island*, Benitez-Rojo fashions this flexibility as a sign of unstable cultural origins: "Finally, every person of the Caribbean is in exile from his own myth and his own history, and also from his own culture and his own Being, now and always, in the world" (2In *Pros-*

pero's Daughter, Chacachacare models multiple relationships to place: escape, work, prison, refuge, isolation, love, death, exploitation, abuse, new beginnings, and so on. For the lighthouse keepers, Chacachacare is a place of work and temporary exile; they come from Trinidad two at a time and work in isolation on weekly shifts. For those who sufferer from Hansen's disease, the island is a prison where their medical and social needs are inadequately met, and where they endure mandated painful treatments and death. When the authorities abandon forced treatments and compulsory isolation, only a few of the afflicted remain for lack of a viable choice. Prior to this, their caretakers are French Dominican nuns and later US Sisters of Mercy, who surrender individual freedom to the dictates of their orders; they leave when the leprosarium is closed. Doctors responsible for the care of survivors come and go as to a vacation spot; they are appointed with little formal accountability.

The settlers on Chacachacare are a mixed-race couple that shares the island space with the leprosarium, its inhabitants, and the lighthouse keepers. The woman, who stands in for the silenced and imprisoned Sycorax in *The Tempest*, is born in Algeria to English parents and raised by a sub-Saharan African servant to identify with Africans and their culture, and to be contemptuous of the European colonial privileges she enjoys there. She is a rebel in her unconventional relationships with African men and women, and is jettisoned from a passing cruise ship as a whore. She is rescued by an African Trinidadian poet and teacher, lately a fisherman and a one-time messenger of drug runners. She is independently wealthy and purchases the property on Chacachacare in anticipation of an idyllic life with her rescuer, whom she loves. She does not speak in her own voice, but her son's memories of her are keen and formative; he names her a woman of love. Carlos Codrington (Caliban) is the son and undisputed heir of the woman and her rescuer. Drug-running thugs murder Carlos's father, and his mother dies not long after from a broken heart. Carlos is left in the care of the housekeeper Lucinda, a well-intentioned woman from Trinidad who is rescued from abuse and homelessness by Carlos's mother. She has a child, Ariana (Ariel), but Lucinda is dying of cancer and vulnerable to the wiles of a stranger, Dr. Gardner (Prospero)

who, on his arrival in search of safe harbour from the British police and shelter for himself and his three-year-old daughter Virginia (Miranda), promises to restore the property damaged in a storm in return for dispensing medical treatment to Lucinda.

If we are familiar with the plot of *The Tempest*, the rest is predictable. When the novel opens, Gardner has stolen Carlos's inheritance, has sexually molested his own daughter, and has made a sexual slave of Ariana since childhood. Most recently, he has charged Carlos with the attempted rape of his daughter, Virginia, now fifteen, in a desperate attempt both to cover his abuse of her and to disrupt the love-match developing between Carlos and Virginia. By the end of the novel, a principled if racist Inspector Mumsford frees Carlos on the testimony of Ariana and Virginia, and Carlos returns to Chacachacare to claim his birthright. Gardner finds poetic justice in a storm; his body is torn and battered on the rocks when he plunges off a cliff in a histrionic attempt to manage the raging elements and restore his authority over the island. Ariana finds a new life in Trinidad as a police cadet, and Virginia marries Carlos after a year in a convent, to settle down like Carlos's mother on the island of Chacachacare with the man that she loves. When the novel closes, she is pregnant with their child in a seeming assertion of future possibilities, though in an environment that continues to be fraught with both predictable and unforeseen dangers, given that it has been the site of their shared thralldom. The tentativeness of their new beginning suggests the bitterness of the acidulous in Derek Walcott's second Eden, but Walcott also speaks to the necessity of new beginnings that Nunez affirms here: "the apples of its second Eden have the tartness of experience . . . It is the acidulous that supplies its energy" (41).

The first of three sections of the novel, "The Englishmen" is an omniscient narrative, the second is Carlos's first-person narrative in which he details his complicity as a child in Gardner's abuse of him; his growing emotional attachment to Virginia in his role as guardian, teacher, and companion; and his undiminished memories of his parents, their love for each other, and their love for him. The third and final section of the novel is Virginia's first-person account of her life on Chacachacare (the only life that she has a

conscious memory of), her blindness to her father's cruelty and abuse, and her growing emotional attachment to Carlos. What is distinctive about Nunez's narrative is not Carlos's intelligence, progressive rebelliousness, and eventual will to self-possession, because that is certainly a feature of Lamming's *Water with Berries*, Césaire's *Une Tempête*, and even Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Rather, it is her radical response to Sylvia Wynter's complaint that the absence of the native woman, as an alternative to Miranda as "erotic model of sexual desire," is an ontological absence that effectively erases the native woman from the social pyramid. In *Prospero's Daughter*, "native" women as black women emerge as visible, vocal, victimized by the system, and resistant, and Virginia as Miranda holds her ground as "erotic model of sexual desire" in respect to Carlos as Caliban. In fact, she acquires the status of "native," through the transformative experience of place and nurturing personal relationships in that place; she is native by choice, desire, and love of Carlos. She is a creolized "Miranda," with an island accent, a complexion that Virginia describes as a kind of "browning" (raising questions about her mother that Gardner alludes to more than once), the quality of her identification with place, and her sense of loss stemming from her isolation from the community of people beyond the perimeters of their compound, whom her father has instructed her to fear. For example, she observes, "My hair was blond and my eyes were blue but my skin was the color of copper, brown as if that hue were native to me" (230), and an encounter with a white American visitor draws attention to her speech: "At lunch he spoke slowly to me as if English were not my language. I did not speak like Father. I did not have his accent. Father spoke like an Englishman; I spoke like Carlos" (230). Finally, her connection to the island is palpable:

I had seen the ibis return home before twilight; I had seen the sky turn red with their scarlet feathers when they flew past our island from their feeding grounds in Venezuela to roost in the mangrove in Trinidad. I had seen the sky so blue, I imagined God. I had seen the sun set on fire and spread its dying embers in a carnival of colors across the horizon. I had smelled the air after a rainfall, sodden with salt from the sea. I had heard thunder roar when lightning sliced clouds in two. I had mistaken the sounds of

birds for the voices of humans singing. This was my world. These were the sounds and sweet smells I knew. (246)

The isle is indeed full of noises, and it seems that they are to be read as signs of a territorial unconscious; to know them and commune with them in the novel registers as a sign of territorial belonging. In *Prospero's Daughter*, Carlos and Virginia are defined by such expressions of felt intimacy with place and alterity as a condition of being that belonging in this place signifies.

My sense of the novel's ending is that, given its careful attention to the struggle for independence as the immediate context and apperceptive background to the human drama that unfolds, Nunez functionally revises the language of nation and national belonging. In *Prospero's Daughter*, one may become a "native"; racial identity in Chacachacare and neighboring Trinidad is displaced by national identity as a criterion of native belonging.⁶ This is a conclusion that Nunez engineers through specificity of place and time in association with a host of Caribbean writers, who have written the Caribbean in all its contradictoriness and complexity into a distinctive literary and cultural space.

NOTES

1. These issues of absence, silence, and erasure are richly explored in a number of works, including Abena Busia's "Silencing Sycorax: On Colonial Discourse and the Unvoiced Female" (1990), and Patricia Joan Saunders's *Alien-Nation and Repatriation: Translating Identity in Anglophone Caribbean Literature* (2007).
2. In *Tempests after Shakespeare*, Chantal Zabus constructs a different genealogy that includes Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* (1983), Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (1987), and Marina Warner's *Indigo* (1992).
3. In "On Rewriting," her introduction to *Tempests after Shakespeare*, Chantal Zabus charts the many different shapes of rewriting through versions of mimicry and parody in the body of literature inspired by *The Tempest* over time (1-7).
4. I am mindful of Adrienne Rich in *Of Woman Born*: "At the core of patriarchy is the individual family unit which originated with the idea of property and the desire to see one's property transmitted to one's biological descendents" (60).

5. As Marshall Sahlins explains in *Islands of History*, “The performative orders tend to assimilate themselves to contingent circumstances; whereas, the prescriptive rather assimilate the circumstances to themselves—by a kind of denial of their contingent and evenemential character” (xii).

6. In *Islands of History*, Sahlins reflects on a Hawaiian custom that seems to parallel the sense of Nunez’s ending: “Just so, in Hawaii one may become a ‘native,’ i.e., by right action. Having resided a certain time in the community, even strangers become ‘children of the land’ . . . the term is not exclusively reserved to the native-born. The example allows me to argue that the interchangeability between being and practice itself depends on communities of meaning, hence the determination in either direction is structurally motivated. . . . For Hawaiians, to live and eat from a certain land makes a person one in substance with the land, in the same sense that a child is of his parents’ substance (in Hawaii, by birth and by nurture). A stranger is thus metamorphosed into a child of the land by equal title to the people ‘born to it’ (as we also might say)” (xi-xii).

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FROM PROSPERO'S DAUGHTER TO
CALIBAN'S WOMAN: ELIZABETH NUNEZ
REIMAGINES *THE TEMPEST*

JENNIFER SPARROW

Prospero's Daughter (2006), by Elizabeth Nunez, is a rewriting of *The Tempest* that takes as its point of departure Caliban's taunting response to Prospero's accusation of rape and reimagines, through the perspectives of Caliban and Miranda, the events that transpired in the twelve years between Prospero's arrival on the island and his decision to confine Caliban on a "hard rock" (Shakespeare, *The Tempest* 1.2.345). Nunez, who wrote her doctoral dissertation on Caribbean rewritings of *The Tempest*, is well aware of her literary predecessors, such as George Lamming, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, and Roberto Retamar—male writers of the independence era who first championed Caliban as a figure of colonial resistance. However, in an important departure from the work of these authors, *Prospero's Daughter* looks beyond the Manichean, all-male struggle between Prospero and Caliban, and reveals instead how Prospero misuses and betrays all three of his "subjects": Caliban, Ariel, and Miranda. Indeed, *Prospero's Daughter* writes back not only to the history of racism and Eurocentrism that informed the colonial venture, but also to the sexism and erasures evident in earlier male-authored Caribbean texts that, in positing Caliban as *the only* victim of Prospero's will-to-power, obscured the ways in which both daughter and slave are subject to Prospero's

authority. Consequently, *Prospero's Daughter* is the latest addition to a growing body of feminist rewritings of *The Tempest* in which Miranda and Caliban become allies to escape what they come to recognize as their common subjugation to Prospero.

Prospero's Daughter is set in colonial Trinidad on the eve of political independence in 1961. Caliban's island is relocated to Chacachacare, a former leper colony off the coast of Trinidad that is inhabited by Dr. Peter Gardner (the Prospero figure), an English doctor-turned-botanist living in exile; his young daughter Virginia (the Miranda figure); and two orphaned children/servants, Ariana (for Shakespeare's Ariel) and Carlos (Nunez's version of Caliban). Peter Gardner is a modern-day magus, a kind of mad scientist obsessed with cloning new limbs and grafting them onto damaged humans. In flashback, the reader learns that after a patient died following a botched experiment, Gardner fled to Trinidad to escape scandal and prosecution. On Chacachacare, Gardner found Carlos Codrington, the six-year-old orphaned son of an Englishwoman Sylvia (Sycorax) and a Trinidadian man, and Ariana, the daughter of Sylvia's cook. Sylvia and her husband were dead, and Ariana's mother was dying of cancer, so Gardner moved into and appropriated Carlos's house under the pretext of taking care of the dying woman and saving the two children from the orphanage.

As the novel opens, Inspector Mumsford, another expatriate Englishman, is being sent to Chacachacare to investigate an attempted rape described by his superior as "[a] delicate matter" because "Dr. Peter Gardner, an Englishman [has] lodged a complaint on behalf of his fifteen-year-old daughter" (Nunez, *Prospero's Daughter* 5). Mumsford arrives to find that Gardner has imprisoned Carlos in a sty, very much like the "hard rock" on which Prospero confined Caliban in the Shakespearean version. When Caliban complains in *The Tempest* of being confined and prevented from roaming freely about the island, Prospero responds with outrage: "I have used thee / (Filt' as thou art) with humane care and lodged thee / In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate / The honor of my child" (1.2.347-350). Caliban responds to Prospero's accusation of attempted rape, "O ho, O ho! Would't have been done; /

Thou didst prevent me, I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans” (1.2.350-353). In postcolonial readings of *The Tempest*, a central interpretive quandary is whether Caliban, in his statement of defiance, is admitting guilt of attempted rape or merely taunting Prospero with a vision of an island peopled with his offspring. In beginning her novel at this critical moment in Shakespeare’s play, Nunez is able to defend Caliban against accusations that cast him, as Leslie Fiedler observed, as the first non-white rapist in Western literature, “ancestor of innumerable Indian warriors and skulking niggers who have threatened ever since . . . the fragile honor of their oppressors’ daughters” (234). Her defence of Caliban is accomplished by “giving the women on the island a voice” (Schmidt 22), mainly through Virginia’s first-person narrative, where she explains that she is in love with Carlos and that it is actually her father who has been sexually abusing her. The reversed accusation at once explains Prospero’s/Gardner’s obsession with his daughter’s “virgin knot” (Nunez, *Prospero’s Daughter* 51) and also frees Miranda/Virginia from the discursive trap of being seen as nothing more than Prospero’s/Gardner’s collaborator or possession. Like *Indigo*, Marina Warner’s 1992 rewriting of *The Tempest*, *Prospero’s Daughter* attempts to extricate the daughter from the father’s plot (Zabus 524). For Nunez, the affinity between Miranda and Caliban is made possible, in part, by a recognition that although different histories have brought them to the island they call home, they are now both Trinidadians and share a creolized identity informed by a sense of place rather than by race or ethnicity.

Nunez has written that *Prospero’s Daughter* is the culmination of a long engagement with *The Tempest* that began in secondary school in colonial Trinidad. She remembers “cringing” during a classroom discussion of *The Tempest*: “[E]ven at 14, I cannot miss the parallels between my situation in a British colony and Caliban’s. In both our cases, Europeans have come to our islands, and though surely they have laid claim to our land, they have given us much in return. I am proof of their beneficence, sitting in a classroom, getting an education they have been kind enough to provide for me” (“Channeling Shakespeare” 24). Nunez recalls reading later in the heady days after

political independence George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), which recasts Caliban as a Caribbean freedom-fighter, and then returning to *The Tempest*, this time "committing to memory Caliban's audacious assertion: 'This island's mine, by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak'st from me'" ("Channeling Shakespeare" 24)—the line on which Afro-Caribbean writers of the independence era based their revisions of *The Tempest*.¹

In *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming uses *The Tempest* as a model for thinking about a writer's relationship to the past. At the heart of this relationship lies the Prospero/Caliban conflict, which, Lamming writes, illustrates "a certain state of feeling which is the heritage of the exiled and colonial writer from the British Caribbean" (9). The feeling is one of profound ambivalence. Although, as a descendant of slaves, Lamming, like Nunez, is well aware of his affinity with Caliban, his British education has also bound him to Prospero:

Prospero has given Caliban Language; and with it an unstated history of consequence, an unknown history of future intentions It is this way entirely Prospero's enterprise, which makes Caliban aware of possibilities. Therefore, all Caliban's future—for future is the very name for possibilities—must derive from Prospero's experiment, which is also his risk. (109)

Carlos Codrington, Nunez's Caliban, also feels ambivalent about Peter Gardner's "gift" of language. Carlos comes to realize that Gardner regards tutoring him as an experiment—as "grafting" a European education onto a "primitive" mind and civilizing a coarse nature (Nunez, *Prospero's Daughter* 163); yet Carlos is eager to learn. As the education offered by Gardener is his only access to formal education, he finds a compromise: "I learned to wear a mask over my face, an invisible barrier that Gardner could not see . . . I made a bargain with him in my mind: in exchange for knowledge, I would let him presume" (163). Carlos learns about botany, about "how to create a new flower by grafting the stem of one flower on to the stem of another" (165). He learns about astronomy, biology, and chemistry, and finds solace in literature: "[T]he education I was getting from Gardner was British; it was European. But the poems spoke to me and I found myself in them" (167). In accepting Gardner's "gift" of knowledge as a means to furthering his own growth and development, Carlos exemplifies

Lamming's thesis that the colonial encounter cannot be undone and that Caliban must use Prospero's language to make his own meaning: "Caliban had got hold of Prospero's weapons and decided that he would never again seek his master's permission" (*Pleasures of Exile* 63).

Nunez's Carlos Codrington is like Lamming's Caliban with regard to making use of Prospero's "gift" of education; however, his relationship with Virginia in the novel is markedly different from the way in which it is depicted in *The Pleasures of Exile* and other independence-era appropriations of *The Tempest* that recast Caliban as a revolutionary figure at the expense of Miranda. In Lamming's novels, Miranda's complicity with Prospero is assumed, and she suffers the retribution that should, by rights, be directed at her father. After speculating in *The Pleasures of Exile* on whether or not Caliban really tried to "lay [Miranda]," Lamming answers his own question in his 1971 novel *Water with Berries* with an obscenely violated Myra, a prostituted, suicidal Randa (Myra/Randa), and an on-stage rape committed by an actor who once played Othello at Stratford but is now reduced to playing corpses. Lamming's use of rape in *Water with Berries* especially asks the reader to empathize with a Caliban who, rather than rejecting Prospero's accusation that he sought to violate Miranda, accepts it, in Supriya Nair's words, "with a leer" (67). Indeed, in *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming tells us that Miranda probably *dreams* about Caliban raping her (111). According to Lamming, Caliban does not want Miranda "for the mere experiment of mounting a piece of white pussy" (102). He has a political agenda: populating the island with an army of Calibans with whom he would organize a resistance movement, thus reducing Miranda's role in Lamming's brave new world to that of potential incubator of Caliban's instrument of revenge against Prospero.

If the reader—especially a female reader—identifies with Caliban as a freedom-fighter, what is she to make of the disconcerting prospect of Caliban-as-rapist? Nunez explains that she was "haunted by . . . [a] discomfort with scholarly interpretations of *The Tempest*" and that she wrote *Prospero's Daughter* to find answers to questions that went unasked in her dissertation: "[W]hy, after 12 years of an apparently amicable relationship with Caliban,

does Prospero turn on him? What actually happened between Miranda and Caliban? What connection is there in the coincidental timing of Prospero's desperation to find a husband for Miranda and his accusation that Caliban attempted to rape her?" ("Channeling Shakespeare" 25). In *Prospero's Daughter*, as in *The Tempest*, Gardner/Prospero uses the alleged threat of rape as an excuse to imprison Carlos/Caliban, thereby demonstrating, as Jyotsna Singh notes, that the discourse of sexuality underpins colonial authority and that the identities of both slave and daughter are "*produced* in terms of sexual struggle" (198). Because the colonial script requires that the potential rapist be subdued, whether for his "own good" or to ensure the safety of white womanhood, Caliban's motivation becomes meaningless, even though his attempted "violation" of Miranda may have been nothing more than a possessive father's misinterpretation of a perfectly honourable action.

With Shakespeare's text, the reader can only speculate about the relationship that existed between Caliban and Miranda, although I would argue that it must have been friendly at some point since Miranda is credited with teaching Caliban her language and teaching him about the moon and the stars (1.2.355; 2.2.138-139). *Prospero's Daughter*, which recounts in flashback the early years after Gardner and Virginia first came to the island, makes it clear that Carlos and Virginia were childhood playmates who grew up and fell in love. In both works, for Prospero/Gardner, *any* attempt by Caliban/Carlos at courtship, regardless of his daughter's response, would be seen as an assault on his daughter's chastity—a subject about which Prospero/Gardner is obsessive. In Shakespeare, since it is clear that Prospero's account of how he came to inhabit the island differs markedly from Caliban's and that his version of history serves to legitimate his colonialist claim to Caliban's island, we have good reason to question the motivation behind Prospero's demonization of Caliban-as-rapist as well. In *Prospero's Daughter*, there is no doubt that Gardner is demonizing Carlos in order to keep his property and that he is also using Carlos as a scapegoat for his own incestuous feelings towards his daughter.

In *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* (1950), D.O. Mannoni suggests that Prospero is projecting his own incestuous feelings for

Miranda onto Caliban because “the ‘inferior being’ always serves as scape-goat” (106).² The spectre of incest is also raised by Lamming, who writes, “Prospero is afraid of Caliban. He is afraid because he knows that his encounter with Caliban is, largely, his encounter with himself” (*Pleasures of Exile* 15). In his recent biography of Shakespeare, Stephen Greenblatt locates the source of Prospero’s obsession with Miranda’s virginity in Shakespeare’s relationship with his own daughter, Susanna, concluding that “the woman who most intensely appealed to Shakespeare in his life was twenty years younger than he: his daughter Susanna. It cannot be an accident that three of his last plays—*Pericles*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest*—are centred on the father/daughter relationship and are so deeply anxious about incestuous desires” (389-390).³ Nunez goes beyond imagined desire by making her Prospero figure monstrous enough to act on his incestuous feelings for his daughter. In the novel, Gardner’s accusation of attempted rape fails because Virginia is not simply a “brainwashed” subject in the grip of her father’s “propaganda” (Lamming, *Pleasures of Exile* 105), nor is she a sexual prize that Caliban seeks to claim in the revolutionary struggle. Here, Nunez springs what Lori Leninger calls the “Miranda Trap,”⁴ a construction in which Miranda’s assumed identification with Prospero’s patriarchal power denies her a space in which to locate her own subjectivity, by asking what would happen if Miranda and Caliban joined forces against Prospero and if they fell in love.

In her important essay “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings: Un/silencing the ‘Demonic Ground’ of Caliban’s ‘Woman,’” Sylvia Wynter argues that *The Tempest* reflects an epistemological shift concurrent with Western Europe’s expansion into the New World: “difference” was no longer figured along a male/female axis but in terms of cultural and physiognomic variations ascribed by racial classification (358). Wynter argues that this shift from sexual difference to racial and cultural difference is articulated in *The Tempest* through Miranda’s gender-based and Caliban’s race-based subjugation to Prospero. Wynter goes on to say that Caliban’s presence on the island elevates Miranda nearer to Prospero in terms of colonialist discourse on humanity and

rationality because race trumps gender in Western man's hierarchy of otherness. Miranda's sharing in the power and privilege accorded to Prospero empowers her to speak and to chastise Caliban, while her position as the object of desire for all classes (including Stephano and Trinculo) is predicated on the absence of a physiognomically (racially) complementary mate for Caliban. For Wynter, the white woman's (Miranda's) speech is grounded in the absence of women of colour.

Although Nunez does not envisage a black mate for Caliban, her novel offers a way out of this impasse between the "Miranda Trap" and the silenced ground of Caliban's missing woman by suggesting that in spite of their outward differences, Virginia and Carlos share a creolized culture—an identity neither European nor African but Caribbean, specifically Trinidadian. The acknowledgment of the insurgent creativity of this shared New World identity offers the possibility of displacing its brutal origins and forging hybrid alternatives to colonial stratification. Creole identity, then, becomes a strategic position inhabiting the space between colonizer and colonized, black and white, rather than a sad accident of birth as it is for Jean Rhys's "white Creole" Antoinette Cosway Mason, who remains tragically trapped between worlds, unable to connect meaningfully on either side of the Sargasso Sea.

In fact, the structure of *Prospero's Daughter* recalls that of *Wide Sargasso Sea*. *Prospero's Daughter* is divided into three sections: "The Englishmen," "Carlos," and "Virginia," with each section narrated from a different character's perspective. The first section, "The Englishmen," is told from Inspector Mumsford's point of view, thereby creating a sort of detective story at the beginning of the novel. Mumsford is an outsider, both to the Gardner family and to Trinidad, and since he views people and events through the prism of his own perceived superiority and his racist misperceptions, he initially sees only an innocent English daughter (in his mind she is an "English Rose"), an outraged English father, and a dark-skinned native servant accused of attempted rape (Nunez, *Prospero's Daughter* 10). The novel begins with a note from Ariana, addressed to the island's police commissioner, that exonerates Carlos of the rape accusation: "I tell you he love she and she love him

back. They love one another. Bad. He never rape she. Mr. Prospero lie” (1). The suggestion that Virginia Gardner, the daughter of an Englishman, and Carlos Codrington, the mixed-race son of a Trinidadian father and an English mother, could fall in love strikes Mumsford as preposterous. A working-class Englishman, Mumsford has come to the colonies as a civil servant to “improve his class, his station in life” after being promised by a colonial recruiting office that “[i]n the colonies, young man, every Englishman is a lord” (11). With his entrenched belief in the superiority of all things English, his sensory overload when confronted with the tropical island landscape, and his perpetual fear that he is being mocked by the natives, Mumsford calls to mind the unnamed husband in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, another down-on-his-luck Englishman packed off to the West Indies to improve his fortunes.

Seething with indignation at the thought of an “English Rose” being violated by a man of colour, Mumsford goes to Chacachacare vowing to bring Carlos Codrington to justice and so “settle the score for every Englishman whose daughter and sister had become prey these days of the colored man” (Nunez, *Prospero’s Daughter* 16). However, over the course of the deposition, Mumsford’s initial approval of the doctor falters. His interview with Gardner (a version of Prospero’s long exposition to Miranda in act 1, scene 2 of *The Tempest*) disturbs him, particularly Gardner’s repeated references to his daughter’s virginity, much of which Nunez takes almost verbatim from Shakespeare’s play: “fire i’ th’ blood”; “jewel in her dower”; “virgin knot” (50-51). In *The Tempest* these are throwaway lines, a somewhat humorous prelude to the wedding masque; but through Mumsford’s sober eyes, the reader sees these references to a fifteen-year-old girl’s sexuality for what they are: “inappropriate . . . not normal for a decent father” (Nunez, *Prospero’s Daughter* 52). Mumsford’s misgivings are confirmed when Gardner takes him to see Carlos and he finds Carlos penned (styed) on a rock in the yard, exposed to the hot sun and surrounded by flies and filth. He is told the cause of this obscene punishment is that Carlos voiced his desire to “people the isle with Calibans” with Virginia, causing Mumsford to reflect that “the boy had been tortured . . . For nothing. For expressing a wish, a desire” (61).

Although in some respects the blustering, inept colonial officer is a stock character (depicted by a variety of writers such as Chinua Achebe, Joyce Carey, and Austin Clarke), Mumsford differs from the type in that he does not privilege Englishness at the expense of doing what is right. Mumsford remains enough of a racist to tell Virginia disapprovingly that “kind should stay with kind” (Nunez, *Prospero's Daughter* 307) when she tells him of her plans to marry Carlos, but he is human enough to be sickened when he finds Carlos penned in the yard and covered with flies and sores. Mumsford *wants* to believe Gardener. They are, after all, both Englishmen. In spite of this initial desire to close ranks with Gardner, however, Mumsford finds his sympathies shifting to Carlos. He knows well what it is like to live in a society that wants to keep the lower classes in their place. He came to Trinidad to escape “his place” (90), and he resents Gardner’s patronizing attitude that reminds him of the whippings he suffered as a boy at the hands of sadistic schoolmasters. After Ariana tells the astonished inspector that Gardner has been keeping her prisoner and having sex with her since she was nine years old, which Virginia later confirms, Mumsford is left with no choice but to conclude that it is Gardner, not Carlos, who is the monster on the island.

The novel offers Carlos and Virginia’s love as a remedy to the monstrosity of Gardner’s sexual appetite and acts. Nunez challenges colonialist beliefs about the impossibility (or at least the inadvisability) of crossing different races (mixed races were thought to be of a species other than human) and counters Gardner’s opposition to racial mixing—although he does not count his abuse of Ariana in the same category—with evidence from his own experiments with cross-breeding plants. Through Virginia, the hybrid English Rose, the novel engages with theoretical paradigms for Caribbean identity that posit hybridity, métissage, and creolization as positive creative processes that offer a space in which a loving relationship between a Carlos and a Virginia can develop. In their 1990 manifesto, “In Praise of Creoleness,” Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant suggest that *la créolite* (creoleness) connects all people of the Caribbean with one another, as well as with the various countries of their respective origins.⁵

Prospero's Daughter endorses creoleness as a foundation of Caribbean identity—Virginia is described later in the novel as a “true *Trini*” (Nunez, *Prospero's Daughter* 311; italics in original)—with the caveat that creoleness must not become a racial and cultural signifier that elides the histories of domination and resistance that gave rise to it. Here *Prospero's Daughter* resolves some of the tension surrounding the vexed figure of the white Creole woman that Nunez has addressed in her scholarly writing and fiction. In a 1985 essay on *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Nunez argues that “[white Creole] women must bear the guilt of the horrors of slavery inflicted by their own white ancestors upon the people whose country they now call their own” (“Paradoxes of Belonging” 282). In order for Antoinette to succeed in her quest to belong and fulfill her wish to “live with Tia and . . . be like her” (Rhys 27), she must first explain herself and seek forgiveness. She cannot simply decide to change sides and erase history, a fact that is made painfully clear when Tia hits her in the head with a rock during the burning of Coulibri. For Virginia, the situation is less fraught. Perhaps because she is *of* Trinidad but was not born in Trinidad or because, though English, she is not descended from a slave-holding family, Virginia easily rejects the power and privilege that come to her as Gardner’s daughter and aligns herself, instead, with Carlos and with anti-racist politics.

Prospero’s assertion in *The Tempest* that Miranda is “ignorant of what thou art” (Shakespeare 1.2.18) can also be applied to Virginia. She knows nothing of her family history and nothing of life beyond the island that has been her home for the past twelve years; however, instead of looking to her father, Virginia turns to Carlos for the answers that she seeks. She knows only what her father has seen fit to teach her and, indeed, ignorance is bliss because she knows nothing of European conquest of the New World, the slave trade, or colonialism. Virginia does not know the blood-soaked history that has brought her and Carlos together on Chacachacare in 1961. Carlos teaches Virginia about how *his* father’s people were brought to the Caribbean from Africa in chains and how before that there were Amerindians, “[a]lmost every last one of them wiped out by smallpox” (Nunez, *Prospero's Daughter* 189). Indignant, Virginia asks, how could the colonialists “stand to know that peo-

ple had to suffer and die for them to live so grand?" Carlos notes approvingly that Virginia said "*They*. She didn't conceive of herself as part of *they* The landscape, the sun, the sea had shaped her" (191). Through the symbol of the hybrid flower created in England but grown in Trinidadian soil, Nunez posits a creolized self that acknowledges its European and African antecedents but that privileges the influence of the Trinidadian landscape as the locus of a specifically New World identity. That said, I would also argue that the claim to creoleness gives Virginia a convenient and perhaps too easy way out of white guilt and being implicated in history. Confronted with the horrors of colonialism and slavery, who *would not* rather be associated with the *them* rather than the *us* who perpetrated the crimes against humanity?

I noted earlier that Nunez wrote the novel to find answers. *Prospero's Daughter* joins a feminist tradition of Shakespearean revision that uses fiction as a form of criticism. Marianne Novy makes the point that, in "let[ting] characters escape plots that doom them to an oppressive marriage or to death," contemporary women's revisionist narratives "demythologize myths about male heroism and also about female martyrdom, and they imagine stories for figures who are silent or demonized in Shakespeare's version" (1). In addition, Nunez's feminist-inflected revision allows the recovery of silenced male voices by creating an alliance between the Miranda and Caliban figures, an affinity grounded in part in recognition that, in spite of racial differences and having come to inhabit the island via different histories, they are both Trinidadian. It is a shared identity that gives primacy to place over differences of race and gender. Although feminist critics argue that Miranda is a liminal figure "perfectly placed to mediate the complex interrelations of race, gender and sexuality" that construct and maintain Prospero's power, even a Miranda "who refuses to be a pawn in the elaborate chess game which history has made of the elements of *The Tempest*" (Chedgzoy 98) can still find herself in a difficult position vis-à-vis black and white race relations as she is both a part of the group that is/was the oppressor *and* an agent of political and social change. Elaine Savory describes it as "the Catch-22 of being white and morally aware of white history: being white cannot be denied or embraced with-

out damaging consequences” (31). I have been critical of the novel for making things too easy for Virginia through allowing her to both embrace and deny history through her rather disingenuous distinction between *us* and *them*, and Nunez does give Virginia and Carlos a happy ending in the “brave new world” (308) that they make on Chacachacare together (here Virginia finally gets a line from *The Tempest*). However, Virginia worries that “a day could come when Carlos would shift my father’s sins from my father to me” (Nunez, *Prospero’s Daughter* 309). Carlos assures her that this will not happen because he got back what was stolen from him, yet Virginia wonders to herself whether Carlos would have married her if he had not got his house back: “Would he have wanted me to be the mother of his children if Father still occupied his house?” (309). My answer is no. Rapprochement between the colonizer’s daughter and the victim of colonization is possible, but not without a righting of the scales.

Here again *Prospero’s Daughter* answers a question about *The Tempest*—what happens to Caliban?—that I always ask my students whenever I teach the play. We know that Prospero and the rest of the Europeans are returning to Naples; we know that Prospero has his dukedom back; we know that Ferdinand and Miranda are going to marry; and we know that Prospero finally frees Ariel. But what about Caliban? Does he get his island back? Does Prospero take him back to Naples as a slave? In the novel, Nunez does not simply send Prospero home to Europe; she kills him off, perhaps because Prospero, to borrow Gayatri Spivack’s phrase, “cannot be contained” by a narrative that rewrites *The Tempest* in the interest of restoring Caliban, rather than Prospero, to his rightful position and allowing Caliban and Miranda to “people the isle” together by mutual consent. In response to Virginia’s question about whether he would have married her if he had not got his house back, Carlos asks his own question, borrowing a line from *Hamlet*: “May one be pardoned and retain th’offense?” (Nunez, *Prospero’s Daughter* 312) Can one be forgiven for a crime and still allowed to profit from the crime? In the conclusion to *Prospero’s Daughter*, as in *The Tempest*, there is reconciliation, renunciation, and restoration; however, rather than Prospero being restored to

his rightful position as the Duke of Milan, here it is Caliban/Carlos who is restored to his rightful place as master of his own island. The answer to Virginia's question seems to be that Miranda and Caliban can join forces to create a brave new world together only if there is reparation: Virginia gains acceptance as a true Trini *after* that which was stolen is returned.

NOTES

1. For an excellent discussion of African and Caribbean appropriations of *The Tempest*, see Rob Nixon's 1987 article in *Critical Inquiry* titled "Caribbean and African Appropriations of *The Tempest*."

2. Mannoni writes, "Miranda is the only woman on the island, and Prospero and Caliban the only men. It is easy to see why it is always his daughter or his sister or his neighbour's wife (never his own) whom a man imagines to have been violated by a negro; he wants to rid himself of guilt by putting the blame for his bad thoughts on someone else" (108).

3. In an author's note at the end of *Prospero's Daughter*, Nunez writes that she read Greenblatt's *Will in the World* only after she finished writing *Prospero's Daughter*.

4. In her 1980 essay, "The Miranda Trap: Sexism and Racism in Shakespeare's *Tempest*," feminist critic Lorie J. Leininger imagines a new epilogue to *The Tempest* in which Miranda "talks back" to Prospero: "Will I succeed in creating my 'brave new world' which has people in it who no longer exploit one another? I cannot be certain. I will at least make my start by springing 'the Miranda-trap,' being forced into unwitting collusion with domination by appearing to be a beneficiary. I need to join forces with Caliban—to join forces with all those who are exploited or oppressed—to stand beside Caliban and say, 'As we from crimes would pardon'd be, / Let's work to set each other free' (294)."

5. See, for example, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant's "In Praise of Creoleness"; Chris Bongie's *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial Literature*; Kamau Brathwaite's *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*; Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse*; and Roberto Retamar's "Caliban: Notes toward a Discussion of Culture in Our America."

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SHANI MOOTOO'S *VALMIKI'S DAUGHTER*

Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2008. Pp. 398. C\$29.95 hc.

VAL KEN LEM

Shani Mootoo's first novel, the critically acclaimed *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996), is set in the imaginary Caribbean island of Lantanacamara. Her second novel, *He Drown She in the Sea* (2005) is set in part in another imaginary Caribbean island, Guanagaspar. *Valmiki's Daughter* (2008), however, Mootoo's third novel and fifth published work, is decidedly set in the real island of Trinidad. It is very much a novel of place, with the city of San Fernando and its upper-middle-class neighbourhood of Luminada Heights figuring prominently in the story; and yet, as the novel reveals, perhaps neither imaginary nor real Caribbean islands can offer a home for Mootoo's protagonists.

Those familiar with Mootoo's work know that she envisions worlds through a predominantly queer lens, even when the protagonist is heterosexual (such as Harry St. George in *He Drown She in the Sea*) as, for her, queer references not only non-heterosexual but any desire or relationship deemed non-normative—whether that is understood in terms of disrupting sexual, racial/ethnic, class, or other boundaries (“Shani Mootoo/Writer Notes” 203). In *Valmiki's Daughter*, the main characters are Dr. Valmiki Krishnu, “a man, who although he was known for his affairs with women, actually preferred the company of other men” (*Valmiki's Daughter* 123-124), and his twenty-year-old daughter Viveka, a “mannish” university student who takes after her fa-

ther in many ways. Both are gay, or possibly bisexual, but unlike Valmiki, who leads a double life and is determined to maintain appearances, Viveka rebels against the expectations of her parents and Trinidadian society, which leads her to seek an escape from the cage-like existence of life in San Fernando and Trinidad.

Valmiki's Daughter is a coming-of-age and coming-out tale for Viveka and an account of Valmiki's journey toward self-recognition as he gradually learns that he must let his adult child experience the world on her own terms. When we meet Viveka, she is trying to convince her parents Valmiki and Devika to allow her to join a volleyball team at "a local women-only sports club, not connected to the university but a local community club that met on Tuesdays and Thursdays for practice at the public park at the far end of the Harris Promenade" (Mootoo, *Valmiki's Daughter* 46). Both parents are opposed. Devika argues that proper Indian girls, particularly those from well-to-do families (with Brahmin ancestry), do not wear short skirts and prance about in public. She declares that playing sports is unladylike and expresses dissatisfaction with Viveka's unfeminine looks and dress. Some of these concerns are more clearly stated to Viveka by her younger sister Vashti, who explains that their mother worries that playing sports will make Viveka more muscular and mannish. Valmiki is more concerned about his daughter being in a park late into the evening, especially in a place where idle young men of African origins are known to gather. He would be devastated to learn that she secretly has a part-black, part-white, and part-Carib "boyfriend" named Elliot, a fellow English major at university who is urging her to explore heavy petting and full sexual intimacy. Valmiki is also nagged by fear that his daughter's involvement in team sports has "the potential to involve something else: complicated kinds of physical contact." His own experience warns him: "He knew something of this; he had played soccer with boys from his high school and, later, soccer and cricket at university" (50). Some of his most powerful and erotic memories focus on his liaisons with other school boys and with a male university student who loved him deeply but whom he rejected with near-fatal consequences. Although uncertain that Viveka might be susceptible

to same-sex desire, Valmiki fears that she may discover this type of “confusion” and be forced, like him, to keep it to herself.

Viveka reveals that she has long been attracted to members of her sex, but that she has not always had the words or self-understanding to recognize her queer orientation. When she was about twelve years of age, she snooped in her father’s locked drawers and came across some heterosexual pornography and a calendar of male nudes. She was only interested in the female images and never questioned the presence of the male calendar in her father’s stash. A few years later, as a high school student, she developed a crush on her female physical education instructor and tried to impress her teacher with her physical strength at throwing the discus and javelin. This was, she later recognizes, her way of trying to kiss the teacher. Viveka had difficulty reconciling her same-sex attraction with the expectation that she should be heterosexual. Her desire to block out the possibility that she could be other than heterosexual is mirrored in her relationship with her friend Merle Bedi. At one point, Merle confesses that she wants to kiss a female teacher for whom she harbours strong feelings, but Viveka’s response is to end the conversation: “Merle, I really think you should keep those feelings and all that kind of thinking to yourself. I don’t want to carry on this conversation. Don’t say those kinds of things. Not even to me” (Mootoo, *Valmiki’s Daughter* 95). Viveka’s fears for her friend, and ultimately for herself, are well founded. In the real world of San Fernando, Trinidad, it is unsafe to be anything other than straight. Trying to live as an out lesbian is doomed to failure as is demonstrated by what happens to Merle. The reader learns that Merle lets her grades slump, becomes known as a buller woman, and ends up rejected by her family and living on the street, where she is rumoured to be prostituting herself in an effort to support her addiction to alcohol.

In a complex struggle with herself around her sexuality, a struggle that is inflected by her ethnic and class identity, Viveka rebels against her mother’s expectation that she date young men from her own social group and ethnic background. Her relationship with Elliot is a secret that only her sister and friends are privy to. While fooling around with Elliot in his student apartment,

Viveka experiences her first orgasm. She is amazed by her unintentional desire since she is not all that interested in Elliot as a lover and does not even consider him a true boyfriend, preferring to think of him in terms of a friend who is a boy, albeit one with whom she is intimately involved. She concludes that he is not the right man for her. Eventually, she will come to recognize that no man can arouse her sexually like a woman can.

That realization is sparked by the return of Nayan Prakash, the only son and heir to a successful cacao plantation and chocolate-manufacturing business on the island. Nayan, who was abroad in Canada studying towards a degree, arrives with his brand new French wife, Anick. Anick, whose whiteness and non-Hinduness makes her exotic among the Trinidadians, is stifled by what she perceives as a lack of refinement in her in-laws. She chafes at the loss of her more cultured friends and the limits set on her desire to walk about freely and do as she pleases. To ease her way into her new family and social environment, Dr. Krishnu encourages a close friendship between the cultured Anick and his book- and arts-loving daughter Viveka. Anick, who is bisexual, is a catalyst in more ways than one as she both engenders Viveka's sexual awakening and sparks her interest in her country's colonial history. It is not a stretch to see parallels between the suppression of same-sex desire and a national history marred by exclusions, marginalizations, and taboos of all sorts. Tellingly, Viveka and Anick become acquainted at an old French colonial estate house now owned by the Prakash family.

What emerges from the web of secret desire and longing that is woven around the newlyweds and Viveka is that the island, the only place Viveka knows as home, is not the place where she can truly come home to herself. Viveka's sexual awakening and her first experience of same-sex love are undermined by her fear that discovery would necessarily mean the loss of her family, which, "despite everything, was her life" (Mootoo, *Valmiki's Daughter* 326). She comes to recognize that she must leave Trinidad in order to be true to herself. The resolution comes quickly, and ironically, in the form of a new heterosexual relationship and marriage that will take her "to Canada . . . where there were thriving communities" (335) of people like her. One could

argue that Viveka, unlike her father, has courageously grasped the chance to leave the stultifying world of Luminada Heights and Trinidad behind in an effort to continue her own journey of self-realization in a distant, more liberal land where unhidden same-sex love is possible and relative anonymity would shield her family from shame. While Viveka's choice of the subterfuge of a heterosexual marriage to make her escape may trouble some readers, Mootoo clearly intends to portray the marriage as simply one of convenience where both parties benefit; it is important to note that Viveka's suitor makes his offer of marriage with full knowledge of her sexual orientation and recent same-sex affair with Anick. At a dinner party hosted by her publisher in Toronto, Mootoo explained to the assembled guests that both Viveka and her groom are achieving some short-term goals by their union. While her future is uncertain, it is clear that moving abroad will open new worlds for Viveka, including opportunities to meet and develop relationships with other women. There are no guarantees of a happy ending, but here as well as in her other novels part of what makes Mootoo's writing so compelling is that she and her characters are willing to imagine more liberating possibilities for people whose lives are constrained.

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LORNA GOODISON'S *FROM HARVEY RIVER:
A MEMOIR OF MY MOTHER
AND HER PEOPLE*

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WENDY KNEPPER

Hailed by Kwame Dawes as one of the three great poets of the contemporary Caribbean, alongside Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite (151), Lorna Goodison is often praised for her candour, richness of voice, attentiveness to the specificities of place, celebration of the maternal, and ability to enchant the reader. These poetics infuse *From Harvey River: A Memoir of My Mother and Her People*, a work that demonstrates that she is also an accomplished prose writer. Framed as a dream book passed on from mother to daughter, the memoir is subdivided into three main sections: Part 1 covers the settlement of Goodison's ancestors at Harvey River in the parish of Hanover; Part 2 details the courtship and early married life of her mother (Doris Louise Harvey) and father (Vivian Marcus Goodison); and Part 3 recalls the migration of Doris, Marcus, and their children from their home in rural St. Elizabeth to Kingston, where they confront the comparatively harsh socio-economic realities of urban life. This auto-ethnographic text incorporates a family genealogy, supplemented by photos and excerpts from Goodison's own poetry; the latter provide an important glimpse into the author's life and the factors that influence her acute awareness of the long histories that shape Caribbean societies.

Goodison deftly weaves intimate and “grand” histories in a narrative that foregrounds the ways in which the global entanglements of the Caribbean inflect the local and the personal. As the title suggests, Harvey River plays a constitutive role in the articulation of identities. The place functions, Goodison writes, as “an enchanted place in my imagination, an Eden from which we fell into the city of Kingston” (1); yet Eden rarely represents a place of untarnished perfection in the Caribbean imagination. As such, Harvey River is presented as far from perfect when witnessed through the eyes of Goodison’s ancestors. It is the place where Doris and her siblings were born and came of age, and where each came into his or her own particular version of a sometimes loving, sometimes ambivalent, and even hostile place. Goodison situates both her family and Harvey River in open relation to the world, calling attention to their connection to the history of slavery, indentureship, and migrations from Europe, Africa, India, and China.

The history of Harvey River and its role as a literal and symbolic source of life is traced back through the lives of William Harvey, Goodison’s paternal great-grandfather, and his brother John, who name the place after themselves in “the spirit of true conquistadors” (31). This founding of place is allied not only with colonial violence but also with migration, resistance, and maroon history. The Harvey brothers’ decision to find their own place on the island is directly influenced by the actions of another pair of brothers—Liberian twins who arrive in post-abolition Jamaica to work as indentured labourers on a plantation where William and John are bookkeepers. When Grant Elbridge, the plantation owner, attempts to whip the twins for spurning his and his wife’s sexual advances, the men employ the bounce-back technique made famous by their ancestor, Nanny of the Maroons, and turn Elbridge’s punishment back onto himself. The Harvey brothers take this act of open resistance as a sign for them to strike out on their own.

Stylistically, the creolization of voice, the inclusion of oral traditions, and the use of a range of English registers enhance the sense that this narrative about community is told in the voice of that community. Goodison’s prose is peppered with song lyrics, such as “Down by the Sally Gardens,” a Jamaican

folk song about a “coolie” man named Gangalee, and Leadbelly’s “Goodnight Irene,” as well as local expressions. The call-and-response of the mango sellers and the use of vernacular lend lexical richness to her prose. Well-known personalities and events from Jamaican history are also part of the story. Walter Jekyll, author of *Jamaican Song and Story*, lived in Harvey River. Goodison provides descriptions of this colourful character from the perspective of the locals, in so doing offering a counterpoint to Jekyll’s ethnographic enterprise. Moreover, she traces Jekyll’s influence on Claude McKay, a leading figure in early Jamaican literature and the Harlem Renaissance, and follows that poetic influence on a return migration to England, where Winston Churchill rallied the nation in World War II by appropriating McKay’s anthem of black resistance: “If we must die let it not be like dogs . . .” (72). Beyond the tale of Harvey River, a fascination with the etymology of the names of people and places is evident throughout the text, such as in the descriptions of the parish of St. Elizabeth, the explanation of the origins of Santa Cruz (137-139), and the account of Kingston (169-170). This migration of voice and cultural influences to and from Harvey River reinforces the mutually transformative effects of local-global encounters and calls attention to poetic histories that go beyond the dynamics of colonial contact.

Within the family and the community at Harvey River, Goodison is attentive to uneven power dynamics and the intersections of race, class, and gender that inform the constitution of identities. Her account of the marriages of and the cross-racial families produced by her great-grandparents and grandparents on both sides provides an alternative genealogical account of a Jamaica where racial hierarchies are contested. When William Harvey’s choice of Frances Duhaney for his second wife meets with the cautioning advice that “black women were only fit to be concubines,” Harvey responds that “any woman who was good enough to share his bed was good enough for him to marry” (34). Goodison’s even-handed, realistic account of her racially mixed family paves the way for the emergence of a post-racial equality, while at the same time noting the challenges and schisms that often occur along colour lines. Such is the case when George O’Brian Wilson,

Goodison's Irish great-grandfather, dies and Goodison's grandmother, Margaret Aberdeen Wilson Harvey, sends a message to his Creole family in Lucea to inform them (109-110). As throughout his life, they refuse to acknowledge Margaret. Consequently, when the Wilson family arrives late at the funeral and demand that the coffin be opened to pay their respects, Margaret refuses the request, driving the nails deeper into the coffin and ordering the burial to proceed.

The second part of the narrative pays close attention to the aspiring middle class and the rivalries that exist within families and communities, and provides details of the lives of Goodison's parents during their courtship and first years of marriage. Doris and Marcus's experiences in St. Elizabeth highlight the envious, back-biting, and less positive aspects of village life. While the loss of Marcus's business and income was a painful event in the life of the family, it seems likely that the author's own creative energies and attitudes owe much to her parents' fortitude in the face of economic misfortune and migration. The notion that reputation and respect are earned through hard work and gained in the practices of everyday life informs Goodison's critical voice when it comes to those who embrace prudish or elitist values. For example, the ambivalent account of Cleodine's (Doris's older sister) life choices and attitudes, which reflect a Victorian sensibility in terms of sexuality, social behaviour, and class, becomes a means to critique certain stances within Jamaican society. Similarly, miserly behaviour, such as that of Marcus's grandmother Dorcas, who will not share extra fruits and vegetables with those in need, is subject to critique. In this second part of the memoir, the stultifying emphasis on clothing, status, and reputation serves to make the fall from grace (when Marcus is forced to declare bankruptcy) appear as a blessing in disguise. The loss of home leads Goodison's parents to migrate to Kingston in search of employment opportunities.

The dispersion of Goodison's mother's family from Harvey River is typical of that generation and the one to follow, which saw mass migrations from rural to urban settings within Jamaica as well as from the island to metropolitan centres. In urban Jamaica, the narrative comes to life. The exchanges

in the yard the Goodisons lived in upon arriving in the city, recounted in local dialect, are lively and often humorous. Folk expressions such as “country come a town” and an ongoing mockery of middle-class socio-economic values introduce a vitality absent in the second part of the book. However unwelcome the change may have been, the transition from Harvey River and Malvern, St. Elizabeth to Kingston proves to be a testing ground that brings out the best in “fabulous Doris,” who comes to be known as Mama Goodie; she develops into a truly formidable woman who engages in a daily struggle for survival and justice in everyday life. In the yard, in her work outside the home, and in her efforts to care for her family, she encounters “hard life” and shows herself to be a woman of courage, toughness, and tenderness. The account of Doris’s experience working at Bellevue, the country’s “lunatic asylum,” offers an inside view of the terrible conditions that prevailed at the institution in the first half of the twentieth century. The tale of a young girl who is sexually abused and locked up as mad by her mother and her mother’s boyfriend is harrowing. Doris comes to see her own sanity as something she has held on to only by the grace of God in a city that “mashes” people up (181). The passage from rural to urban requires new forms of heroism.

From the perspective of women’s writing, the memoir is compelling in its attentiveness to the coming-of-age experience, sexuality, courtship, marriage, and the maternal experience. The contrasting life choices and attitudes towards gender and sexuality, espoused by Doris, her siblings, and their partners, present a complex view of the possibilities for self-articulation in Jamaican society through generations. Particularly intriguing is the example of the youngest sister, Ann, a resistant spirit who expresses her sexuality through dance and is spontaneous in a manner deemed “slack” by others, even as her dream of becoming a lawyer is dismissed as the profession is not considered proper for a young lady (28, 131). Ann’s attitudes and actions, particularly her fondness for the titillating beat and lyrics of dance music, serve as a forerunner to dancehall (and the related debates about its values). However, Goodison eschews a celebration of either slackness or propriety in her delineation of femininities.

Mothering and creative work are actions that embody feminine self-articulation at its best. In Kingston, Doris teaches young girls to sew so that they can earn their own money and be independent. From Harvey River to her sewing room in Kingston, Doris emerges as a “freedom-fighter” who helps battered women escape lives of desperation and a moderator in an ongoing discussion about women’s rights and issues. Symbolically, the act of sewing and the stitching together of the pieces of history surface as the means whereby lives undergo positive transformation. Goodison notes that the first word she and her siblings learned to read was Singer (the sewing machine brand) because of her mother’s profession. Lyrical creativity in the context of Goodison’s work is much like sewing, where the hum and whirr of the machine that creates a garment out of the raw material of a bolt of fabric mimic the rhythm of the poetic composition.

Thematically, the focus on the matrilineal figure and women’s voices enable a feminist rewriting of history. Similar themes and techniques surface in Goodison’s poetry; she makes the autobiographical elements of her writing explicit when she remarks that her poems and stories about the Guinea Woman are inspired by her maternal grandmother (39). She also quotes from her own poetry in the text, such as the following line: “All the river water could not cool the fatal furnace within” (97), which is drawn from the poem titled “Notes from My Mother’s Village before the Village Got Light” in *Turn Thanks*. Such intertextual connections offer intriguing glimpses of the creative currents that shape Goodison’s wider oeuvre.

More generally, the memoir gives the reader a sense of the rhythms, including Rastafarian language (in the story about a young man called Phantom), that influence Goodison’s poetic voice. For instance, her account of rocksteady rhythms and beat underscores relation between the sonic, the sacred, and the natural. Amidst the curses and prayers of the Middle Passage, the captives become conscious of “a music which took its rhythm from the waves on which the ship of darkness rode, a rhythm which rocked out and returned to its centre, conducting in its wake and movements the peace that passeth understanding” (45). The rocksteady beat emerges from this powerful

moment when eternity is apprehended, silencing the slaver. The (simultaneous) disruption, reclamation, and resistance inherent in such a moment also characterize Rastafari language as is most evident in the decentering ontology of “I and I” and the world view sounded in the Rastafarian desire to “overstand” Babylon. Just as the pace and rhythms of dread talk inspire Goodison’s poetry, her prose often elicits moments of wondrous apprehension. Carefully crafted chapters and episodic narratives take on a similar rhythm and beauty, leading to moments of quiet contemplation as well as confrontation. The delight of the reading experience comes as much from the language as it does from the resonant poetic sensibility that infuses the prose.

For those interested in Caribbean women’s writing, life writing as a literary genre, and the transitions from colonial to postcolonial society, Goodison’s memoir is essential reading. Yet this text is so much more than a sourcebook for the author’s inspiration or an ethnographic account of Jamaica. This memoir makes an important addition to the ongoing discussion of self-representation and cultural identity addressed in other life-writing texts, including works by George Lamming, Jamaica Kincaid, Kamau Brathwaite, Edwidge Danticat, Derek Walcott, and V.S. Naipaul. Like these authors, Goodison is attentive to the ways in which individual and local engagements with history and the world resonate beyond the particular to show us something both glimmering and unsettling about the constitution of identities through time and space.

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JACQUELINE BISHOP'S

FAUNA

Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2006. Pp. 80. £7.99 pb.

MY MOTHER WHO IS ME: LIFE STORIES FROM JAMAICAN WOMEN IN NEW YORK

New York: Africa World Press, 2006. Pp. 204. US \$19.95 pb.

THE RIVER'S SONG

Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2007. Pp. 184. £ 8.99 pb.

ELAINE SAVORY

A new voice in Caribbean women's writing, Jacqueline Bishop has already mastered several genres. In two short years, she has produced a novel, a collection of poems, and a book of oral histories. In preparation for a career in writing, she completed two MFA degrees at New York University, one in poetry and the other in fiction. Extremely versatile, Bishop also paints; and she founded *Calabash*, described as a "journal of Caribbean arts and letters," which has a full online presence.

In the biographical sketch that follows her novel, *The River's Song* (2007), she recalls aspects of her life that clearly inform her writing. After her

parents' separation, she lived for a long time with her mother and siblings in Jamaica. Then, after her mother left for the United States, she went to live with her father. In her poetry collection *Fauna* (2006), the title poem is ostensibly about birds, but its human referents are clear. The poem concludes by suggesting that, because of various lengths of stay, the bird population is made up of "migrants, transients and vagrants" (73). Similarly, the whimsical "Jamaican Birds" affords brief glimpses into different migration stories: "the mother bird and four of her five baby birds / are in the United States; the father has remained in Jamaica. / There is a brother bird in Toronto along with an aunt bird, and two niece birds" (72). After traversing Paris, Holland, and the Panama Canal (the reader is reminded that many "birds" helped build the latter), the poem concludes, "In North America three or four species / have been identified by the peculiar way they sing" (72). Some poems express a wounded longing for connection, or a fear of forgetting connections. In "An End, or Maybe a Beginning," the poetic persona laments, "I cannot remember any more. I cannot remember" (13). Towards the end of "Pa," the persona asks, "Don't you remember, / remember, / remember me, Pa?" (71).

Some kinds of separation are seen as betrayal, resulting in trauma and permanent injury—psychological and physical. "Litter" tells a disquieting story about a child who disobeys instructions to stay away from newborn kittens lest their mother abandon them, only to end up having to bury each one. The reason for the child's disobedience soon becomes clear:

I did not realize then
 what I had been reaching for—
 my own mother long lost to me, the woman who,
 for years
 I had not seen
 not felt, not touched; I was reaching for my brothers (24)

"The Smell of Mango" discloses the sexual abuse of a girl by her grandfather: "I am seven years old" (25). The setting provides a sharp contrast to the horrific act. She is abused on a lovely sunny day in a prettily feminine bedroom belonging to the girl's mother:

Let me tell you about the smell of mango,
 I can even tell you about the silence
 within the room
 as my grandfather
 raises himself up,
 pulls the zipper of his pants (25)

“Snakes,” which follows “The Smell of Mango,” accuses the mother of complicity in the act of abuse—“It happened to me too” (26)—and likens both the mother and grandfather to poisonous snakes “curled around each other, . . . / the evil intent in their glowing eyes” (26). The snake image surfaces again in Bishop’s novel to illustrate and account for the tension between the protagonist and her mother who “each had [their] long black snakes” (87).

There is a substantial canon of Jamaican women poets, including Lorna Goodison, Olive Senior, Velma Pollard, and Pamela Mordecai, and Bishop’s poems pay homage to them as well as to the early prose of Jamaica Kincaid—not by direct imitation or reference but through parallelism sufficient to make the connections clear to the reader. Kincaid is evoked in the poem titled “Girl” (17); Senior in the section of poems named for local fruit—the poem “Calabash” (40) is reminiscent of Senior’s use of concrete poetry; and Goodison in the poems on family relations, a major theme in Jamaican women’s writing but particularly in the latter’s work. The poem titled “My Great Grandmother” echoes Goodison’s “I Am Becoming My Mother” in the lines “Finally I just gave up and became / my great grandmother” (69). Bishop is acknowledging her debt to, and great respect for, her literary mothers.

She is also clearly making her own way in this collection, however. “The Apple Tree” is a particularly interesting poem for it shows Bishop developing a language for dealing with child abuse, especially the kind hidden in plain sight, through crafting a sensuous rhetoric that reflects in words exactly what is being done in action. The third-person poetic voice tells the story of a girl who loved an apple tree that grew along with her. She bypasses overly lush tropical flora, “slender green bamboo slit down the middle, / and going brown; / banana plants hung with the burden of rotting fruit; / sugarcane swaying and rustling in the cool night’s air” (46). One day, her grandfather

threatens to cut down the tree unless she gives him her body. She is nine. The consequences lie in the last stanza: "The fruit the tree eventually bore; / the crowds that came to eat of it; / the many who found them and took them are fallen away" (47). Abuse is the subject of "Don't You Know This Woman?" The poem is a bitterly ironic address to "Massa, Backra" from numerous slave women expressed in a collective voice. Having given her life to the plantation, her body violated sexually by the planter, she is finally set free to fend for herself when she is prematurely aged and exhausted (51).

Mythology and folklore are also central to Bishop's writing. In "Calling Me Back Home," it is the river mamma who takes away young girls. The title of her novel is also derived from folklore as explained in a one-page intrusion into the narrative where the story of Dora, a river-maid who makes rivers from a pool in which she lives, is recounted. On full moon nights, she sits on a rock combing her hair and singing songs about individual dreams, the underlying theme of the novel. As with the poetry, the themes of disrupted connection and betrayal, migration and separation are central to the novel. The novel opens with a memory, indicated in italics, that the narrator has of leaving a distraught and fragile friend behind as she moved away from home to pursue her education.

Those themes are also evident in *My Mother Who Is Me: Life Stories from Jamaican Women in New York* (2006), suggesting that all three texts are variations on, versions of, one another. *My Mother Who Is Me* is a fascinating collection of oral history on migration and includes the story of Bishop's migration from Jamaica to the US, underscoring Joyce Toney's observation in the introduction to the book that "[t]he modern story of the Caribbean begins with migration" (xvii). Bishop's story is a moving account that registers simultaneously her understanding that her mother's migration was prompted by love and a desire to make sacrifices for her daughter, and her lingering resentment that her mother was not present for important occasions, such as her high school graduation. The volume also includes her mother's memories of her migration experiences, alongside those of a number of other women. There are oral accounts by Bishop's two closest friends, by her sister and her

uncle's wife, and by women who were close to political figures (the niece of Edward Seaga, a former prime minister of Jamaica) or who were political figures in their own right (the first female mayor of Kingston); the many women who tell their stories represent not only the complex mix of ethnicities and cultures that make up Jamaican society but also newly contested sexual identities (there is an account from a self-identified lesbian). Even the language of the oral histories reflects the richness and variety of the Jamaican migrant community in New York. At the close of the volume, Heather Russell Andrade rightly remarks on the range of speech registers reflected in the women's accounts, from the "polished speech of the richest 'Victorian English' to the syncopated rhythms of 'mother tongues'" (176). *In My Mother Who Is Me*, Bishop has produced a very valuable historical and sociological record of the impact of migration on Jamaican women of very different stripes as they moved to the US.

Bishop is clearly a sensitive and insightful storyteller and a gifted researcher who is able to bring personal and communal history into constructive dialogue with her fiction writing. That her work is just beginning means that readers can hope for much more from her in coming years.

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Elizabeth Nunez is a CUNY Distinguished Professor of English at Medgar Evers College and the award-winning author of six novels: *Prospero's Daughter* (Ballantine Books, 2006); *Grace* (Ballantine Books, 2003); *Discretion* (Ballantine Books, 2002); *Bruised Hibiscus* (Seal Press, 2000); *Beyond the Limbo Silence* (Seal Press, 1998); and *When Rocks Dance* (Ballantine Books, 1988). Her most recent novel, *Prospero's Daughter*, was a *New York Times Book Review* Editor's Choice, the 2006 Novel of the Year for *Black Issues Book Review*, and the 2006 Florida Center for the Literary Arts One Book, One Community selection. Nunez has published several monographs of literary criticism focused on Caribbean literature and is co-editor with Jennifer Sparrow of the anthology *Stories from Blue Latitudes: Caribbean Women Writers at Home and Abroad* (Seal/Avalon Press, 2005). Co-founder and director for fourteen years of the National Black Writers Conference, Nunez is executive producer of the 2004 NY Emmy-nominated CUNY TV series *Black Writers in America*. Her audiobooks include *Grace* and *Prospero's Daughter* (BBC/America) and *Discretion* (Recorded Books). Her website is: www.elizabethnunez.com

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