

'The African Presence in Caribbean Literature' revisited: recovering the politics of imagined co-belonging 1930–2005

Article

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“The African Presence in Caribbean Literature” Revisited: Recovering the Politics of Imagined
Co-Belonging 1930–2005

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ABSTRACT

Working outward from Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s landmark 1974 essay, “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature,” this article explores the fuller history of the idea of Africa in anglophone Caribbean critical and literary works from the 1930s to the 2000s. It demonstrates that earlier, now forgotten Caribbean critics drew on imperfect and incomplete Caribbean literary imaginings of Africa to frame a counter-colonial politics of identity. The essay also brings back into view writings by Una Marson, Victor Stafford Reid, and Derek Walcott that expressed a different politics of solidarity based on the shared experience of colonial violence. Readings of recent literary works by Charlotte Williams and Nalo Hopkinson reveal the contemporary crafting of this relation around a heightened awareness of both presence and loss, history and imagination. Importantly, this gathering of sources and perspectives allows for an appreciation of the role that a reach toward Africa has played in articulations of Caribbeanness and its complex patterning of cultural co-belonging.

In thinking about the motivations for an address to Africa within Caribbean writings, it is imperative to acknowledge the weight of emotional, intellectual, cultural, and spiritual yields that

this connection both anticipates and seeks to render. The violence of the Middle Passage, enslavement, and the plantation system did not simply occasion historical ruptures for peoples of African descent in the Caribbean, but unspeakable and unknowable catastrophes. The legacies of this loss, displacement, and violence were subsequently compounded by the forced erasure of African cultural retentions in the Caribbean under the colonial rule that persisted over halfway into the twentieth century. To think toward Africa, beyond and in defiance of this injury and forfeiture, has properly been one of the central ongoing concerns and predicaments of Caribbean cultural and literary criticism. It is a testimony to the talent and commitment of writers and scholars that the links between African and Caribbean cultural, aesthetic, and linguistic forms are now an accepted and esteemed knowledge practice within Caribbean literary criticism.

However, while the successes of an Afrocentric critical rubric remain central to the present practice of Caribbean literary scholars, the complicated and sometimes conflicted patterning of ideas and expectations relating to African continuity and connection that informed and enabled the formation of this rubric is seldom revisited. Theories of creolization, diaspora aesthetics, and black Atlanticism have dominated Caribbean criticism since the 1980s and have come to privilege the expectation of the Caribbean as a place where fluid, multiple, and often incomplete knowledge systems come into contact with each other to generate newness and creatively configured cultural meanings. By attending to the history of these ideas as they developed around the initial disappointment and even dismay at the imperfect fit between the Caribbean and its Africa, this article examines the ways in which West Indian literary and critical discourses that reached toward Africa in their attempts to redress colonial bias and bypass European perspectives were consistently troubled as well as valuable vocations. I argue that it was through frustrated and failed attempts to align the West Indies with Africa that anglophone

Caribbean critics and writers succeeded in articulating the distinctive and celebrated Caribbeanness of the Caribbean situation.

In his 1970 lecture “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature,” delivered at the Centre for Multi-Racial Studies, the University of the West Indies, Barbados, and published in 1974, the acclaimed poet and cultural theorist [Edward] Kamau Brathwaite argued that literary works were the least likely place to find an African presence in the West Indies because the literary was a form of cultural expression imposed by colonial education structures and therefore “much of what we come to accept as ‘literature’ is work that ignores, or is ignorant of its African connection and aesthetic” (78). It is well known that Brathwaite’s own ideas on the traces of an African presence as manifest in linguistic and literary gestures within a West Indian context and his focus on an aesthetic genealogy expressive of cultural retentions, discussed in this essay among many others, were foundational to the recasting of what is now accepted as Caribbean literary discourse. My own interest here is to explore how Brathwaite’s reimagining of Africa in relation to the Caribbean was part of a broader and longer enterprise that collectively led to a fuller articulation of Caribbeanness more convincingly than it gestured toward a distinctly African presence. Drawing on a range of critical and literary works from the 1930s onward, I identify emergent Caribbean critical discourses seeking to redress the colonial norms that Brathwaite identifies as a barrier to a culturally relevant model of criticism. I am interested in how these sought an understanding of the African presence and similarly in how they struggled to find their critical desires for Africa manifested quite as they hoped in literary form. I also bring back into view a different and more direct connection to Africa in anglophone Caribbean literature through expressions of anticolonial geopolitical solidarity. This mode of relation has arguably been obscured by the defining persuasiveness of Brathwaite’s rubric, which was so

successful in bringing Africa into view as a historical presence within the Caribbean that it overshadowed those works that recognized Africa as a continent also experiencing the shocks and horrors of colonialism in the historical present.

Addressing these different vectors of relation to Africa as they emerge in mainly forgotten critical and literary works allows me to explore both what Africa meant in the Caribbean and what Africa meant to the Caribbean. I show how early Caribbean critics, such as G. R. Coulthard and Oscar Dathorne, drew on the imperfect and incomplete literary imaginings of relations between Africa and the Caribbean to speak to a counter-colonial politics of identity. Caribbean writers, such as Una Marson, Victor Stafford Reid, and Derek Walcott, crafted a different literary framework through which to imagine Africa from the Caribbean, creatively establishing an extension of sympathies and a politics of solidarity based on the shared contemporary experience of and resistance to colonial exploitation and violence. While these two imaginaries configure the relation between the Caribbean and Africa differently, they align in their realization that the connection cannot be recovered outside the colonial history of torn worlds and divided continents in which Europe continued to play a crucial role.

Brathwaite is now the intellectual and writer most powerfully associated with shaping an Afrocentric Caribbean epistemology, but he was not the first critic to identify the importance of Africa to Caribbean literary works. Looking back to the critics who came before him, now almost entirely silenced in critical histories, enables a fuller understanding of the imperatives and challenges that his own work develops. When G. R. Coulthard's *Race and Colour in Caribbean Literature*, the first book-length critical study on the subject of Caribbean literature, was published in 1962 it contained a brief, nine-page chapter on "The Theme of Africa." Coulthard, the Director of the Department of Romance Languages at the University of the West Indies,

Jamaica, was centrally concerned with mapping both geographical and historical continuities across literary works and his ambitious study encompasses the anglophone, francophone and Hispanic Caribbean.

In this work, published the year of Jamaica's independence and therefore in a period of heightened awareness concerning the need to seek traditions of intellectual and political thought outside the colonial mode, Coulthard clearly wants to be able to recognize the significance of an African presence in Caribbean worlds. This survey work is not only significant for presenting evidence against the argument that Africa is absent in literary works—a claim that Brathwaite makes a decade later—but also for its critical observations about the geographical and historical matrix through which the Caribbean and Africa come to know each other. Looking back to the 1930s, the decade of civil unrest and political turbulence that had ignited Caribbean nationalist struggles—newly won and newly relevant in the 1960s with the rise of Black Power movements globally—Coulthard's work, like Brathwaite's to come, reads for legacies, memories, and echoes of Africa. Working across a broad range, Coulthard suggests that many works reference Africa in an elegiac form, as “songs of exile, full of sadness and vague longings” (71). In one sense this exilic framework seems to suggest Africa as a lost homeland that can be recovered as well as reached by imagination, “*reminders* of Africa-music, dancing, voodoo and the colour of their own skins” (71; emphasis added). Yet Coulthard also acknowledges that the literary works themselves operate in a register of such elusiveness and abstraction that Africa as a willed presence is so generalized, even mythologized, that it becomes an idea, almost an affect, of belonging:

In the 1930s, the theme of Africa became one of the most widely handled by Caribbean poets... not of African civilizations or African cultural values, but of

Africa itself as a vague geographical region, and the imaginary and emotional fatherland of all the Negroes of the world. (71)

While seemingly undertaking the straightforward task of gathering literary voices around a theme, Coulthard's essay is compelled to navigate some of the more problematic mappings that inform the connections between the Caribbean and Africa. He observes how in Haitian works, such as those by Carl Brouard, Maurice Casséus, and Paul Laraque, Africa emerges as a "sort of lost paradise, Negro Arcadia, before the arrival of the Europeans" (73). Yet this imaginative geography of precolonial, black continental Africa is strangely complicated by the fact that these authors, along with other francophone writers who were engaged in the cult of primitivism and *négritude*, wrote from Paris and so their exile was first from the Caribbean itself. Indeed, given the fact that, as Coulthard reminds his readers, "African primitivism was fashionable in European intellectual circles," in many ways the links to Africa via Haiti were curiously unCaribbean in their bearings. In relation to the Hispanic region, it is the absence of this complex cartography of African imaginings entangled in the matrix of encounters made possible by European education and travel that accounts, Coulthard argues, for the fact that the "theme of Africa hardly exists in the literature of Cuba, Puerto Rico or the Dominican Republic" (77). "There is a lack of awareness of Africa in the Spanish-speaking islands, due to an almost total lack of contact. British and French West Indians meet and mix with Africans in London and Paris and the same applies to Haitians, many of whom study in France" (77). For Coulthard, the Afro-Cuban movement is connected to the Haitian only "in the fashionable cult of the primitive" (78) and it is only the work of Puerto Rican Palés Mato that proves the exception.

The historical importance of Caribbean writers and intellectuals connecting to Africa via the Europe they aimed to disavow through this very act of association is, of course, well

recognized. It was in London that the influential Jamaican Pan-Africanist and black nationalist Marcus Garvey met the Afro-Egyptian Duse Mohammed, who was in the capital city to attend the Universal Races Congress at the University of London in 1911 and who became an important figure in Garvey's African education. It was also in London that Garvey worked for the *African Times and Orient Review*, a publication advocating Pan-Africanism. Similarly, in the 1930s another leading Pan-Africanist, Trinidadian George Padmore, edited the *Negro Worker* from Hamburg, Germany, and in 1945 met Kwame Nkrumah in Manchester, England, when he travelled for the Pan-African Conference that Padmore had organized. These connections via Europe provided a frame for political solidarity and created a forceful conceptualization of a Pan-African unity with its shared African and Caribbean platform for advancing the principles of racial justice, cultural sovereignty, and independent governance. Importantly though, what Coulthard seems to imply in his pioneering effort to look back to those Caribbean works that first sought to bring Africa onto the literary horizon is their rendering of a profoundly distanced intimacy. Crafted by Caribbean writers based in Europe, these works demonstrated an intensified awareness of African cultural claims and of the political force that these attachments had in contesting European assertions of superiority and supremacy. The increased reactivity emerged most commonly though as an inflated affective register and consequently these works moved toward Africa in the shape of "dreams and fantasies... an ever-recurring obsession" (Coulthard79).

In Coulthard's estimation, there are few writers who occupy a space of relation outside the two dominant, and often conjoined, possibilities for connections between Africa and the Caribbean that he identifies: on the one hand, the intense imaginative yearning for Africa as an idea and ideal and, on the other, the actual contact with Africans via Europe. In addition to the

Puerto Rican Matos, Coulthard names the Jamaican poet George Campbell for his “fusion of the robust peasant women of Jamaica and his idea of Africa; she is both Jamaican and African and the tone is one of optimism and hope in the African (and Jamaican) future” (76). For Coulthard, as later for Walcott in his tribute poem to this Jamaican writer, Campbell’s expressions of African Caribbean affinity are differently dispersed to other poetic dreamings of a homeland during the 1930s, though they share the charge of affective co-belonging. Campbell’s reach across the historical and geographical distance to Africa is telescoped by a cherished proximity to African-Jamaican subjects in their everyday lives and unburdened by larger demands for historical redress. In Walcott’s words, he aimed, “to be the first West Indian talking to people,/ not to the distant roar of an electorate” (“George Campbell” 7). While Campbell’s nationalism was never in doubt, as his honorific, “Poet of Revolution,” demonstrated and his occasional poems dedicated to Manley’s People’s National Party testified, his revolution was (as Walcott also infers) most powerful when quietly spoken. Campbell’s works delivered a determined poetic appreciation of African-Jamaican people and an indigenous landscape that had long been degraded and distorted by the colonial gaze of Europe.

Although strident in his condemnation of racial injury in “Negro Aroused,” and passionate and inclusive in his blessings of non-Europeans in “Holy” (69), it is Campbell’s “Mother” (72) that Coulthard chooses to illustrate his African theme. Also from his *First Poems* published in 1945, this work explicitly references the overlapping resonances of African and Jamaican in the beauty and resilience of a working mother’s body bathing in the river.

She sings of the African womb

Everlasting above the tomb

She sings of her island Jamaica

She sings of the glory of Africa. (Campbell 72; Coulthard 76)

Accruing value to this almost religious scene of mother and child by linking the woman's song to the synchronized hopes of both a national future and a more distant endurance of continental African maternity, Campbell blends his core thematics of benediction, overcoming, and anticipation to render an individually significant life resonant with values unseen and unknown within a colonial perspective. He writes:

I saw her naked

I felt her sacred

She flung back her head and sung her story

Black mother, mother of Earth,

Greater than the mountains, deeper than the fountains

Art thou woman! (Campbell 73)

If what Coulthard values in Campbell is his reaching toward Africa from a distinctly Caribbean world of experience, then it is important to recognize that the mapping of Africa as part of the Jamaican world had gained widespread meaning from at least 1914 onward with Marcus Garvey's founding of the Universal Negro Improvement Association, the long-established custom of church collections throwing up for the Guinea country and the practices of Ethiopianism (a precursor to Rastafarianism). The philosophical, if not practical, success of these religious movements and of Garveyism in making Jamaican people of African ancestry feel united in belonging to Africa was an enduring one and remained vital in Jamaica through the nationalist agitations of the 1930s to the independence period and HIM Selassie's visit in 1966. Given this lasting connection, it is perhaps not surprising that it is another lesser-known poem by

an African-Jamaican poet of the same generation as Campbell that provides my first example of an alternative African literary connection expressing a political and historical solidarity.

Una Marson's meeting with HIM Haile Selassie was another important encounter between Africa and the Caribbean on European soil that led directly to a literary output and arguably infused others. Marson was the first black woman invited to attend the League of Nations at Geneva in 1935 and there met with the Abyssinian delegation. She was so provoked and outraged by Mussolini's invasion of Abyssinia that she immediately offered her help to Dr. Charles Martin, Abyssinian Minister to the United Kingdom, and went on to work as a secretary to Selassie. Marson's empathy and devotion to the Abyssinian/Ethiopian cause was so extreme that by late 1936 she returned to Jamaica in a state of acute distress and depression. Back in Jamaica, Marson's political Pan-African sensibilities found renewed strength and expression in both her journalism and creative writing. Working on the team of the newly founded political weekly *Public Opinion*, she wrote stridently of the need for Jamaicans to embrace their African ancestry with pride.¹ Similarly, in her third play, *Pocomania*, written in 1938, she focuses on the conflicted life of a middle-class Jamaican woman to offer a critique of class prejudice and its colonial bias. The play powerfully weaves into its expressive repertoire elements of the Pocomania religion to which the protagonist Stella is attracted and for which she is socially scorned. A creolized form of worship that blends Christianity with elements of African spiritual traditions, Marson's play thereby celebrated the subordinated elements of living African culture that Brathwaite would later emphasize.

The much more celebratory rhetoric of blackness and the declarative anticolonial politics of Marson's 1937 third volume of poetry, *The Moth and the Star*, might also be productively read as an index of her closer contact with African peoples and with colonial violence via the

Abyssinian experience. Yet, in one particular poem the human consequences of this African conflict find distinct and direct expression. “To Joe and Ben,” which has the following explanatory note in parenthesis: “(‘Brutally murdered in April 1937 at Addis Abbaba by the Italians’)” refers explicitly to the execution of Joseph and Benjamin Martin, the two sons of Dr. Martin, by the Italians in 1937 after their capture in Wollega. The poem is an elegy to African lives taken by colonial violence and delivers the brutal historical truth that during the period Coulthard addresses, the 1930s, Africa was itself experiencing the horrors of imperialism and the violence of colonial incursion, a historical process that was still being worked out with significant loss of lives in some parts of the continent in the 1960s. More than this, the poem’s referencing of this conflict also brings to light an important and often overlooked historical cause for political discontent and the urgent protest for self-rule in the Caribbean region during the 1930s. The betrayal of Abyssinia by England in 1935 through the failure to impose sanctions on Italy and the failure of the League of Nations to protect this fragile state led to the brief but bloody Second Italo-Abyssinian War and sent a wave of anti-Europe sentiment across the region.

Marson’s poem, while centered on the murder of two devoted brothers and Africans, is also tasked with navigating the complex patterning of loyalties and locations characteristic of the historical geographies of anticolonialism:

As David and Jonathan
So you seemed to me
In your love and devotion
One for the other.

They sent you forth

From “England’s pleasant land,”
Home of your fond adoption,
Of early boyhood’s years—
They sent you forth
To the battle’s front
To fight for a country
Yours, and yet not yours
By unfamiliarity.

I wept for you
As you two gallant sons
Went forth
From the brightness
Of an English summer
To die
On the mountain heights
Of Ethiopia.

I saw the tears
In your bright eyes
As you stood
Side by side
As ever you had stood—
I felt the swell of your throat

As bravely smiling

You bade farewell.

Forth you went

To your homeland

Gallant sons

Of Ethiopia

So young

And so beautiful

In your

Youthful splendour.

There were not enough

Of Ethiopia's youth

To dye her fields

Blood red

So you went forth;

But Nature cherished you,

Her darlings,

Grown in another clime,

Nurtured in her tongue,

Bred in her customs;

You were too young

And brave

And gentle
And so death
Passed you by.
Bombs rained
From hell's corsairs
Upon you
But you were still
Unscathed.
Conquered your land
But still
With the unconquered
Band of gallant warriors
You stood
Side by side,

In danger undivided. (*The Moth and the Star* 81–83)

This poem clearly eulogizes Ben and Joe's sacrifice for their African homeland through its representation of an enduring national loyalty captured in the expanded present of a moment of readiness for death. It also acknowledges their exile and distance from that home. Marson's poem configures a brutally different 1930s imagining of Africa in Caribbean literature to those "dreams and fantasies" of works that seek to re-Africanize the Caribbean world. While it acknowledges that Europe is implicated in the routes through which the Caribbean and Africa can come to know each other's suffering, it also makes clear that Europe is an active agent of ongoing colonial violence. So then, while Marson's work is linked to other Caribbean writers'

imagining of Africa in its incorporation of Europe as place for connection, in this poem it makes visible that Europe, the colonizer, is also the origin of their estrangement.

In a 1965 article, “The Theme of Africa in West Indian Literature,” the Guyanese-born, English-educated writer and critic Oscar R. Dathorne echoes many of the conclusions concerning the African presence in Caribbean literature, as well as the title of Coulthard’s 1962 essay. Dathorne’s focus on West Indian rather than Caribbean literature in general allows him to be much more searching in his range of examples from anglophone writers. Like Coulthard, Dathorne favors assemblage as a methodology and he works with some pace through a wide range of examples, sometimes covering three writers in a single page and including several now unfamiliar works such as the Jamaican playwright Cicely Waite-Smith’s *Africa Sling-Shot: A Play in One Act*, published in 1958, and the Barbadian novelist Geoffrey Drayton’s *Christopher* from 1959. Based in Africa at the time of this publication, Dathorne taught at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and later at the University of Sierra Leone, and was a critic of African literature. It is likely his lived knowledge of African countries that creates a certain confidence in his critical stance. Reading these two essays on the theme of Africa alongside each other, it is notable that the conclusion toward which Coulthard gently travels is the directly delivered presumption from which Dathorne begins:

When Africans do appear in the twentieth century in West Indian literature, it is because of the development of the Negro-American theme in Haitian writing, its influence in Cuba and Puerto Rico and, paradoxically, the interest of Europe in primitivism, especially the African primordial. (255)

Africa as a theme... entered into West Indian literature through the back door and via two second-hand intermediaries. (257)

Given this problem of entangled relations, Dathorne's particular interest is to identify where literature intersects with "genuine survivals" (257) of African culture in the West Indies rather than derivative imaginings. Like Coulthard, he finds himself turning to Jamaica within the anglophone Caribbean but more particularly to literary works that represent the community of runaway and rebel slaves in Jamaica known as the Maroons. Dathorne discusses *Black Albino*, published in 1961 by the Jamaican writer and artist Namba Roy, and stresses how its depiction of the Maroon community "wants to emphasize African inheritance" (259). Importantly this novel narrates the Maroons as if they are an African community dispersed by the Middle Passage from "the many tribes to which they once belonged before the coming of slavery" (Roy 19). In other words, for Roy, the Maroons he represents are effectively displaced Africans. Interestingly though, what Dathorne does not mention is that Roy's novel focuses on the eighteenth century and therefore sets the continuity between Africa and Jamaica at some historical distance. Roy was born in Accompong, of Maroon ancestors, and grew up in the Cockpit Country with an intimate knowledge of the Maroon carving styles and oral traditions. He therefore could have rendered the Maroon world realistically from his own twentieth-century perspective and yet this backward glance to a time when the continuity between African and Maroon lives can be imagined more authentically is an interesting gesture that seems to situate his literary work within the dominant nostalgic framing.

While Dathorne stresses that such genuine African survivals are scarce, his project is to try to discriminate between the different registers of literary approach to Africa. Importantly for my argument, he directly addresses the dearth of ongoing recognition around the centrality of

West Indians to the history of Pan-Africanism, dating back to Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams, who organized the first Pan-African Conference in 1900. “The extent to which West Indians inspired and contributed to the Pan-African ideal is not fully realized” (259). Yet, while Dathorne claims that “[t]he political invective was important not only in that it contributed a certain kind of attitude by West Indians towards the whole idea of Africa, but also on account of having produced some imaginative literature as well” (260), he does not address political sympathies with contemporary Africa as a model of relation within his comprehensive, almost exhaustive, register of imagined and desired literary connections. Moving across the folklore survivals of Anancy tales and the linguistic survivals such as those in Trinidadian Sam Selvon’s writings, Dathorne arrives at those works that he deems to imagine Africa in order to address questions of West Indian subjectivity. In general what strikes him is the distance still to be traveled. Dathorne describes literary gestures of affiliation and adoration as “flimsy foundations... half-understood beliefs and values” (260). He is keen to point out that there can be no easy assumptions about the increased authenticity of those West Indian writers that, like himself, have lived in Africa—and he references Guyanese Denis Williams and Jamaican Neville Dawes, as well as Barbadian George Lamming who had visited West Africa in 1958. Indeed, having offered an analysis of works by such writers, Dathorne concludes provocatively that an encounter with Africa generates “a kind of discomfoting realism—between the Africa of the West Indies and the real one” (271). According to Dathorne, Africa for most West Indians is “a composite mixture of fertile wish and barren memory” (262), a brutal if poetically phrased conclusion that seems to suggest that West Indian literature that reaches toward Africa scores highly in the affective stakes but poorly in the sociological and anthropological ones.

Ultimately, Dathorne sees the theme of Africa as imagined in literary works as a mode of engaging the West Indian condition rather than addressing Africa itself:

West Indians who prefer to ignore the belief that there is a country called Africa, express a truer concept of Africa embodied in larger and more significant terms. By this I mean that to a large extent the realistic shock of Africa being a large and not easily comprehended continent and the subsequent feeling of the West Indian that he is “lost,” tends to subjugate the wider concept of man in search of his roots beneath the theme of the West Indian in search of his past. (275)

Both Coulthard’s and Dathorne’s critical conclusions seem to chime with a 1957 piece, “Some Thoughts on West Indian Writing,” written for *Présence africaine* by Peter Blackman, a Barbadian left-wing activist and poet who moved to Britain in 1937 and whose powerful political voice is regrettably seldom heard in Caribbean literary histories: “So far as Africa is concerned the people of African origin will know little by way of folk-memory, and will be dependent for their ideas about Africa and African society on what they learn from European sources. And there begins a dilemma fraught with danger for the creative writer” (Blackman 297).

Interestingly, while Coulthard and Dathorne both make reference to Jamaican Victor Stafford Reid’s 1958 novel *The Leopard*, neither discusses the distinctive nature of its address to Africa among Caribbean literary works of this period. Coulthard describes the novel as “one of the most complete pieces of fantasy writing about Africa” (76) and while he acknowledges that “Reid has tried to pour himself into a completely African character” (77), he does not give any sense of his motivation for such determined imaginative labor. For Dathorne, this work is part of a body of literature about Africa that represents the West Indian with an optic through which to “come to terms with himself in community” (272). While I would not necessarily dispute the

validity of this claim, the fact that Reid's novel looks to a very specific historical moment and place in Africa, the Mau Mau Rebellion in Kenya between 1952 and 1960, is an important difference in his style of connection that remains unmarked in their commentary. Reid's writings were already known for rendering the struggle and agency of the colonized and his 1949 novel *New Day* was an important intervention in Caribbean literary history as the first narrative written in Jamaican Creole. Its focus on the Morant Bay Uprising of 1865 is also relevant as Reid's protagonist looks back from his present day of 1944, the eve of the new constitution, to the history of violent struggle that made political self-determination possible. In *The Leopard*, Reid writes from the perspective of an African freedom fighter during the Mau Mau Rebellion and thereby brings another armed uprising into Caribbean historical memory—this time one that reverses the bearings of *New Day* in that it is historically immediate and geographically distant.

Within contested accounts of colonial history, the Mau Mau have been variously represented as freedom fighters who helped to reclaim the homelands of the dispossessed Gĩkũyũ (Kikuyu) people and as savage murderers who left death charms to terrorize the living. Less typically perhaps, their contribution to Kenya's liberation struggle was not clearly defined within national histories because they did not go on to become part of the nation's postcolonial leadership. Indeed, the wrongs enacted upon the Mau Mau were only formally acknowledged by the British government in 2013, fifty years after independence, with the payment of £20 million as compensation for the torture inflicted. What is without doubt, though, is that the question of land ownership was at the heart of British interest in Kenya. In 1925 the British East Africa Commission described Kenya as having "some of the richest agricultural soils in the world, mostly in districts where the elevation and climate make it possible for Europeans to reside permanently" (Ormsby-Gore 149). While the British expropriation of land was a serious problem

for all the ethnic groups and areas of Kenya, it was arguably the Gĩkũyũ, who resided in the Kiambu, Nyeri, and Murang'a districts of Central Province, who were most damaged by colonial land theft even though they did not lose the greatest acreage. For the Gĩkũyũ, land rights were central to their cultural and historical life and they had mounted an unsuccessful legal challenge to the expropriation of their land by the British in the 1920s.

In Reid's *The Leopard*, the focus on Gĩkũyũ indigenous belonging via an intimacy with and knowledge of the land is emphasized from the start and provides the narrative perspective from which Nebu's quest to murder a white settler or *bwana*, Gibson, unfolds as a journey toward justice and freedom—albeit one that is painful and troubled. “It is a rich land: rich in humus and equally rich in hate, for all men crave it. Know, therefore, it is a land of feud: for the white challenger wants to conquer it, and the black man to keep it” (Reid, *Leopard* 6). The assertion of the prior ownership of the land by the black African and his struggle to retain it provide the outline set of cultural understandings and values that explain, and eventually humanize, the Mau Mau's violent revenge by “making beautiful” (i.e., murdering) the white settlers. Although Reid's novel draws on a real historical conflict at the time of his writing, his aesthetic mode is not conventional realism. Rather he compresses the long task of overcoming that resulted in the deaths of around 25,000 Kenyans into a singular quest. The logic of justice as revenge, which transforms murder into an act of making beautiful continues in the framing of the *bwana* as an object of pure antagonism and threat:

Nebu was hurrying towards a murder, but it did not appear in that way to him at all.... He was a gun: he hid a mile away behind a tree and slew you. And you were able to hate him as you could never hate a lion, for a lion... was even willing

to share his land with you, provided you took the day and allowed him abroad at night. (15–16)

This history is given further intensification by the fact that the settler he tracks coincidentally happens to be the husband of the white woman with whom he was sexually involved and who died while giving birth to their son. The successful revenge on the *bwana* is complicated by the fact that Nebu, according to his own moral code, should not act against a man whom he has wronged in this way. So while the novel brings the anticolonial narrative to completion with the death of Gibson, again somewhat against a realist imperative, given that only thirty-two settlers died in all the years of conflict, it also declares its interests in more than the political anticipations of the anticolonial struggle.

It is intriguing that Reid complicates his imaginative reach toward the Mau Mau rebellion with the affair between Gibson's wife and Nebu and their physically disabled son who is also psychically damaged by belonging to neither world. Nebu must come to terms with his own transgression and with his son who despises him. In his introduction to the novel, Mervyn Morris claims that "What is to be understood, *The Leopard* implies, is that the black man is human; no worse—but also, alas, no better—than the white" (x). Certainly this novel imagines the terrible consequences of an ecology of collective hatred so entrenched that human behavior is less humane than animal. As Nebu reflects, "both sides were full of sinners" (Reid, *Leopard* 19). Although he did later travel to both East and West Africa, Reid had not been there when he wrote this novel and without any mention of the Mau Mau context, Dathorne reads it as "set in East Africa" (272) as a displaced expression of the West Indian condition: "It would not be stretching a point too far to see the half-bwana as a West Indian, having two fathers, the dead European, to whom he wants to cling, and the dying African who loves him but whom he

continually abuses” (272). This is a compelling interpretation and one that powerfully illustrates the likely inevitable enmeshing of Caribbean and African experience even in narrative worlds that purpose themselves to inhabit a uniquely African situation.

What is significant to me is how Reid mobilizes his Caribbean experience of the encounter between Africa and Europe to imagine and write a literary humanization of the Mau Mau, a humanization that deals not in myth and ideal but in the totalizing psychological and physical damage that colonialism causes to all within its orbit. Reid’s imaginative reach toward Africa suggests his understanding of the freedom struggles happening on the African continent and of the collocated struggles of Africans and Caribbeans to be fully human in a colonial situation. Like Marson’s earlier poem, Reid’s novel is an attempt to extend an understanding of a brutal and brutalizing assault on Africa—not as a gesture of co-belonging to the ancestral homeland but as a gesture of co-belonging to the condition of unfreedom. In both the 1930s and the 1960s these literary gestures make an important connection to the urgency of anticolonial justice and black freedom movements in the Caribbean and Africa.

The intriguing playing out of an archetypically West Indian situation through an imaginative engagement with the Mau Mau in Kenya, which Dathorne reads in Reid’s novel, is much more explicitly performed in Derek Walcott’s “A Far Cry from Africa,” arguably the Nobel Laureate’s best known poem, published in 1962, a year before Kenya gained its independence from British rule. The poem articulates the dilemma of a Caribbean person caught between warring ancestral worlds:

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,

Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?

I who have cursed

The drunken officer of British rule, how choose

Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?

Betray them both, or give back what they give?

How can I face such slaughter and be cool?

How can I turn from Africa and live? (*In a Green Night* 18)

For Dathorne, Walcott's work here emphasizes "personal disorientation" (267). While it is indeed this sensibility of conflicted attachments that has come to be seen as the watermark of Walcott's poetic oeuvre, the specific political dimension of his reference point to Africa cannot be dissolved entirely into a generalized affective register. For Walcott, the impossibility of an unspoiled connection to Africa is made more problematic by his mixed ancestry, but his rendering of a conflicted call to both and a turn to Kenya and the bloody conflict there is not insignificant. The poem's ambiguous representation of victims that allows for sympathy with the Mau Mau and also with the murdered settlers seems to echo something of Reid's "both sides were full of sinners" (19). Yet, as Edward Baugh points out in his reading of this poem, Walcott's representation of a symmetry of cruelty does not finally lead to a symmetry of sympathy, "the purportedly even balance and conflict of choice... remains somewhat uneasy and factitious. Beyond the beauty of landscape, '[t]his Africa' is not realized in any way that establishes a vital blood-line between it and the poet. By contrast, the hold of English is real" (4).

Unlike in Marson's and Reid's works, the political energies of Walcott's imaginings are not sufficiently focused on anticolonialism to outbalance the weighted intimacy with Europe that West Indian subjects commonly experienced, even if as alienation, through their colonial education and a complicated dependence on and attachment to an enforced language. In a later essay, "The Muse of History," published in 1974, the same year that Brathwaite would publish

“The African Presence” and with a similarly enduring critical afterlife, Walcott suggests that the painful division became reconciliation—“maturity is the assimilation of the features of every ancestor” (1). All the same, the strong historical and cultural imperatives that had routed West Indian understandings of and approaches to Africa through a matrix of colonial interactions and European geographies during the decolonizing period of the 1930s to the 1960s offer a meaningful context in which to interpret Brathwaite’s impassioned arguments for attributing more significance and value to the African presence in Caribbean literature.

Coulthard had concluded his 1962 study by envisaging “a growing interest in African culture... and probably further developments in the direction indicated by *négritude* towards the formulation of an Afro-Caribbean culture may be expected” (118). As the fierce debates in Caribbean literary and cultural criticism that surfaced in the late 1960s and early 1970s show, this scanning of the cultural horizon was accurate. Although the literary fulfillments of this interest remained under question, historical tensions around Black Power and Afrocentrism were running high. When the African historian, black Marxist intellectual, and activist Walter Rodney was barred from returning to Jamaica in 1968, it sparked protests and riots. Rodney had built an alliance of students, urban youth, and Rastafarians around his thinking on alternative governance; these formed a potent community of dissent with a sophisticated understanding of African historical alternatives to colonial models. That same year Black Power leader Stokely Carmichael was banned from Trinidad, his birth country, and in 1970 the nation experienced an attempted Black Power revolution that also sought to challenge the European base and assert an Afrocentric alternative. The urgent sense of the necessity for a freedom of ideas connected to the freedom of a people pervaded the geopolitics of the region, with Africa emerging as a revolutionary possibility. This draw toward Africa and a focus on what the continent might offer

in terms of political and cultural alternatives were also becoming increasingly significant in Caribbean cultural and literary criticism, with a particular emphasis on the need to find ways of acknowledging and appreciating folk culture and its African heritage.

Central to this reevaluation were a group of intellectuals based at the University of the West Indies, but also another group who had formed the Caribbean Artists' Movement (CAM) in Britain. Like the earlier period, much of the Afrocentrism of the 1960s and 1970s developed within a cultural circuit that included the metropolitan north. The work of Kamau Brathwaite, who had left the UK and CAM to take up a lectureship in the History Department at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica, alongside that of his UWI colleague Sylvia Wynter was central to promoting a new agenda of literary value connected to a very real need to restore and represent African-Caribbean forms and lives that had been neglected and disavowed by the colonial paradigm. Brathwaite's creative work had sought to contest the denial and denigration of Africa in Caribbean worlds from the publication of his first poetry collection, *Rights of Passage* (1967), and in the two works that followed rapidly: *Masks* (1968) and *Islands* (1969). Like Marson's earlier interventions against the colonial imperative, Brathwaite's collected works, forming a hugely influential trilogy, *The Arrivants* (1973), uncovered and gave expression to the African foundations of Caribbean history and culture, voicing the lived and aesthetic value of the connections and relations between the two.

The most noticed and controversial pronouncement in the evolving critical debate came in 1974 with the publication of Brathwaite's *Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean*. Although Brathwaite makes it clear that his analysis is specific both to his time and place, his claim that cultural wholeness can only be restored through "the acceptance of the culture of this black ex-African majority as the paradigm and norm for the

entire society” (30) suggested separate traditions to which European, Indian, and African cultural forms properly belonged in the West Indies.² My own interest here is with the more subtle arguments made in another of his 1974 publications, “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature.” Brathwaite’s scholarship in this piece is clearly not dispassionate in the style of Coulthard and Dathorne. His aim is not simply to describe and document literary citations of Africa, but to advocate a new approach for reading Caribbean literature. Brathwaite’s central objective is to argue that “African culture not only crossed the Atlantic, it crossed and survived, and creatively adapted itself to its new environment” (73). For Brathwaite, this recognition is connected to the possibility for revolutionary consciousness in the Caribbean—“the African ‘phenomenon,’ continually present, like a bomb, in the New World since the abduction of the first slaves” (78).

In this critical work, Brathwaite structures a typology through which he addresses “[f]our kinds of written African Literature in the Caribbean” (“African Presence” 80). He prefaces this endeavor with a section examining religious continuities and admits that continuities are not “as easily traced in our literature as in the social/ideological world I have so far described” and yet he also ventures that with the inclusion of “the folk/oral tradition” this may be more likely (8). Brathwaite’s first listed mode is rhetorical:

The writer uses Africa as mask, signal, or *nomen*. He doesn’t know very much about Africa, necessarily, although he reflects a deep desire to make connection. But he is only saying the word “Africa” or invoking a dream of the Congo, Senegal, Niger, the Zulu, Nile or Zambesi. (80–81)

In many ways, this is the imagined Africa that Coulthard and Dathorne also noted. Indeed, Brathwaite echoes their work in identifying Claude McKay, George Campbell, Eric Roach, and

similar writers whose poetry expressed a yearning for belonging, what Brathwaite calls a “literature of rehabilitation and reconnection” (82) but identifies as “static, wishful and willful” (82). Brathwaite’s second category is “*the literature of African survival*, a literature that deals quite consciously with the African survivals in Caribbean society, without necessarily making any attempt to interpret or reconnect them with the great tradition of Africa” (81). In this category Brathwaite finds plenty of evidence within folk song and tales, proverbs, and the traditional invocations and laments of the *hounfort*, or Vodou temple spaces where spirit communion takes place. Within a literary tradition, he turns, as one might imagine, to Andrew Salkey’s *A Quality of Violence* (1959) and to George Lamming’s *Season of Adventure* (1960) and their literary depictions of spirit possession, but he finds the writing strained, the chosen lexicon unyielding, and their summoning of an African presence ultimately unconvincing and ambivalent. The linguistic blending that Brathwaite identifies in Salkey’s novel leads him to separate out cultural elements within an evaluative framework. He reads failure when, “in the heart of the *tonelle*, [Salkey] opts for the Euro-rational/descriptive and therefore fails to celebrate *with* his worshippers,” but sees success in “fragments of litany, of powerful enigmatic metaphor” (87).

This same reading of writers making an approach toward the African presence without complete arrival informs his third category, “*the literature of African expression*, which has its roots in the folk, and which attempts to adapt or transform folk material into literary experiment” (Brathwaite, “African Presence” 81). Here he measures Lamming’s effort in *Season of Adventure* at connecting to the *hounfort* positively as “able to move more fearlessly/innocently into this enigmatic alternative world,” yet even Lamming makes a momentary flaw when he uses the term “hysterical” (90). Perhaps significantly, Lamming had witnessed this ceremony of souls on a

1956 trip to Haiti and not in Ghana, which he also visited that year and to which he dedicated his novel, acknowledging the involved circuit of Caribbean-African cultural influence on which the book draws.

Finally, Brathwaite arrives at “the *literature of reconnection*, written by Caribbean... writers who have lived in Africa and are attempting to relate that experience to the New World, or who are consciously reaching out to rebridge the gap with the spiritual heartland” (“African Presence” 81). Here he endorses Paule Marshall’s *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* for its attempt to “transform the Afro-Bajan out of his drab, materialistic setting with meaningful correlates of custom from across the water in ancestral Africa” (100) and for its wider theme of the significance of historical knowledge as the basis for keeping non-colonial knowledges alive in the Caribbean project of making a people. Brathwaite’s essay is, like those that came before it, comprehensive and wide-ranging. Yet, unlike his critical antecedents who seemed uncertain of what a connection to Africa might offer beyond a creative swirl of affective relationality without closure or a single destination, Brathwaite has a powerfully holistic vision of how the African presence in literature catalyzes a political as well as emotional transformation, enriching, liberating, and protecting Caribbean minds, bodies, and spirits from the alienation of European cultural injury. Interestingly, while Brathwaite so powerfully imagines the outline for this vision that aims to locate the simultaneity of an African-Caribbean identity in which the hyphen is not a faltering fulcrum weighted in favor of Europe, he finds it hard to fill theoretical spaces meaningfully with literary examples. While he reads aspiration, intent, and desire across a wide range of Caribbean texts, he rarely finds fulfillment. It is only in the folk tradition of Bongo Jerry and in his own poetry that he finds what he is looking for in terms of a *literature of African expression*. Importantly, though his essay remains persuasive that the connection to and idea of

an African presence is meaningful and its communication possible, he also repeatedly registers that the Caribbean and Africa do not quite reach equivalence in most of the literary works he cites.

For Brathwaite himself, an eight-year stay in Ghana and time spent in Kenya allowed Africa to be real, substantial, and this shows in his creative works from *Masks* onward. Yet in his theoretical writings he was not concerned with the contemporary historical struggles that mark political affiliations with Africa that we find in the work of Marson and Reid. His interest lay with the very Caribbean question of how a submerged historical experience of Africa remains vital to black subjectivity, but in pursuing that question he found that Africa was not properly in the Caribbean or the Caribbean imagination as itself. Brathwaite's epistemological anticipations for the African presence remain in excess of the literary archives to which he turns and yet it is in this space between the idea and its expression that his inspired theorizing of a Caribbean aesthetics begins to take form. Within the article itself, this gap appears as a source of disappointment and seeming failure. Brathwaite's clear frustration that "there has been a more public and active interest in this area of our culture from historians, sociologists and social anthropologists than from writers and artists generally" registers his sense of writers not yet succeeding and relates to his investment in "the persistent attempts at all levels to deal with it" ("African Presence" 87). From a vantage point of twenty-first-century criticism, it is precisely in the creative turbulence between the African models that Brathwaite brings forward and the incompleteness of the Caribbean literary approaches to these that his thinking finds its analytical force and resonance. Even though what Brathwaite mainly registers here are mappings of desire for continuity, rather than successful expressions of connected presence, his essay initiates a line of inquiry that soon became central to the development of a regionally specific literary critical

discourse—the recognition of the potential and significance of a creolized African presence within Caribbean expressive forms.

Importantly, it is in this article that Brathwaite inaugurates his term “nation language.” This concept is fundamental both to his later theorization of Caribbean language and to his investigation of the way in which politics and poetics interplay in his landmark *History of the Voice*. In this way, his investment in the African presence is so demonstrably vital to his project to renegotiate the terms on which Caribbean national culture could come to know and affirm itself. As the Jamaican critic Norval Edwards argues,

“The African Presence” introduces some of Brathwaite’s primary concepts such as *hounfort*, *nommo*, *nam*, *loa*, *marronage*, *nation language*, and *groundation*. These constitute the alter/native Calibanic and creole poetics that enable Caribbean subjects to “become ourselves, truly our own creators, discovering word for object, image for the word.” (12)

The very critical tools that Brathwaite develops as a hermeneutics for reading Africa in the Caribbean become the dominant hermeneutics for reading Caribbeanness. The triumph of Brathwaite’s writings lies in the persuasiveness of his case that Africa is integral to Caribbeanness but, significantly, it is in discerning a literary character that he wishes to identify as African that Brathwaite succeeds in profiling something very particular to the Caribbean. Even as he appears to fail to bring his idea of an African presence to satisfaction, what he creates from his attempt is the articulation of an alter/native critical discourse and praxis that enabled West Indians to understand their cultural life and thereby themselves differently. As Edwards points out:

The history of the emergence of this orality is coterminous with that of Caribbean nationalism. The conflated trajectories signal the real intent of Brathwaite's project: the articulation of a nationalist discourse, an aesthetics that is simultaneously an ethics and politics of national becoming. (14)

The immensity of the intellectual effort that was needed to purpose this intent can only be understood in the context of the sustained and effective denigration of Africa in the Caribbean. Such profound denial and deprecation had meant that in Caribbean societies Africa was unknown even if known, distant even if proximate, imagined even if real, as the wealth of literary examples suggested above testify.

Trinidadian writer Earl Lovelace explains this challenging situation by theorizing that the Caribbean produced two types of psychic space: an ethnic space and a Creole space. All other groups—Europeans, Indians, Jewish—were allowed an ethnic space, but the Africans' culture had been so deeply denied and damaged that it could only emerge in a Creole space and African retentions survived in creolized, syncretic forms. As Lovelace makes clear, forms such as Shango and calypso are both Trinidadian and African and only exist as a result of both cultural spaces, but the recognition of Africa was never permitted:

Every group but the African was allowed an Ethnic space in which they could maintain the religion and culture they had come with. Cultural and religious forms that were African were all banned at one point or another, and so that in order for Africans to express themselves they had either to abandon their gods or find ways to bring religion and culture into what was legitimate.... Carnival would become one such space because it was a legal and legitimate festival, and what might now seem to be independent activities—calypso, stickfight, the carnival characters—

were, I suggest, linked to a larger cultural/religious whole. Recently someone told me that she had gone to an egungun festival—in Trinidad—where the masks were the carnival characters baby doll and jab molassie and blue-devils, etc. I remember going to Carriacou (at that time I had no idea of the connectedness between Shango and stickfight), so I went to Carriacou to witness the Big Drum Dance or Nation Dance as it is called, and I went with great anticipation to see all these African survivals that had been kept alive in dance. And when they started to play the drums and to dance, I recognized all the dances from the stickfights that I had seen over the years in Rio Claro and Grande and Mayaro. (4–5)

It is both a creative burden and a creative blessing for Caribbean literary works that they have needed to work ingeniously and inventively in order to manage a relation to Africa, rearranging ideas of presence, influence, attachment, and affiliation across, between, and remarkably in spite of geographical rupture and temporal dispersion. In recent literary works to emerge within the anglophone tradition, the relation between Africa and the Caribbean is explicitly shaped as a variegated experience both of presence and loss, the known and the unknown, the distant and proximate. In this century, works such as Charlotte Williams's *Sugar and Slate* (2002) and Nalo Hopkinson's *The Salt Roads* (2003) have found newly creative means through which to represent the presence of Africa in and for the Caribbean that allow the conditions of emotional, spiritual, and cultural co-belonging to come into imagination. In these two novels by women, the narratives traverse a tricontinental world in such a way as to craft a Caribbeanized spatial dynamic that also accommodates a black Atlantic temporal inclusivity. Both reach across to Africa without the need to grasp onto ethnic singularity for determining identity and both echo histories into the present to locate the meaning of Africa for Caribbean lives to come.

For Charlotte Williams, the daughter of Dennis Williams, the Guyanese writer and artist whose own writing of Africa in his fictional work, *Other Leopards* (1963), provides a compelling and highly wrought lens on the problematics of Pan-African identity, the task of constructing an autobiography is already entangled in the complicated stories of her parents, whose lives were often lived in places other than they felt they belonged:

Africa had called for Dad and now he was calling for her; Kate sweetheart, his love and his mentor. He loved the rhythms and poetry of her thoughts. Her ideas fell together like jazz, the blue notes resonating across the staves with their own logic, defying the predictable sequences and the rudimentary facts. (8–9)

As Williams journeys across a highly personalized triangle of Wales, where her mother came from and where she was born, to Africa, where her father chose to live in order to reconnect with the culture he felt to be most fully his own, and to Guyana, where her father was born and grew up, the very idea or project of recovering a singular familial and ancestral past is opened up to intellectual and emotional scrutiny. Her acts of travel to these places remain very real to the material of the book in all senses, but it is equally significant that in each part the ideas of one place and the stories and memories that it accrues cannot be “rooted” or contained by the geography that names its borders. Rather, the “arrival” at each destination is mapped as a literal movement in time and space, but also as an affective journey across a tissue of land, sea, and bodyscapes that mutually inform each other and that echo complicated ties and associations in which the personal is never fully individual and the located never fully bounded. In this way, her narrative is Caribbeanized by the very fact that it must exceed Caribbean space to account for the bearings of human relations. Its constant stretching and compressing of the distance between Wales, Guyana, and Ghana offer literary shape to cultural identities that operate between and

within the tricontinental. In this way, her narrative corresponds to the more pliant and open fictions of global belonging that can now be positively embraced within a Caribbean diasporic context. As Paul Gilroy argues in *Against Race*, “diaspora is a concept that... disrupts the fundamental power of territory to determine identity by breaking the simple sequence of explanatory links between place, location and consciousness” (123).

Nalo Hopkinson’s *The Salt Roads* stretches the reconfiguration of fictional time/space and the idea of Africa and the Caribbean touching each other even further in order to bring previously hidden intimacies into view. This work raises the stakes of African- Caribbean co-belonging by deploying an erotic energy between women as the connective force. Hopkinson’s fiction centers on Lasiren, a Ginen fertility god or Iwas, who moves into the bodies of three women from very different times and places (seventeenth-century Saint-Domingue, nineteenth-century Paris, and Egypt and Jerusalem in 345CE) in order to bring them to self-knowledge. While her sense of an African continuous presence links to earlier works that are interested in ancestral traces, Hopkinson consciously queers this relationality. When Mer, a healing woman enslaved in Saint-Domingue, is charged by Lasiren with clearing the salt roads to provide a channel to Africa, she asks, “And how was I one woman going to help a great African Power?” (66). The answer lies not in the reliance on oneself, but in being open to the touch and the possibility of touching others across space and time. The queer attachments of women in Hopkinson’s novel constitute a vital surplus to the economies and grammars of extraction that underpin both the slavery and prostitution that women have historically endured and that separate mothers from children, lovers from each other, and the Caribbean from Africa. The women who love each other, including Mer and Tipingee in Saint-Domingue, create an attachment and desire that allows them a life beyond their lived experience within a purely

transactional economy. Hopkinson's speculative narrative can be read as dramatizing the performative indices of other writing that addresses Africa from the Caribbean, which must also question official sources, work by association, and allow imagination to act as memory. In these recent literary works, and through the now established theoretical paradigms of creolization and black diaspora studies, the Caribbean becomes demonstrably the exemplary cultural location for conceptualizing mobile, hybridized, diasporic lives and identities in which discontinuous, incomplete, and multiple knowledges and cultural complications are reinterpreted as gain rather than loss, as a mode of encounter rather than its obstruction.

All the same, it is a tribute to the earlier critics and writers, both those who are well-known and those who remain too often unknown, that the literary is now regarded as a privileged space through which the possibilities for an ongoing flow of meaning between Africa and the Caribbean can be appreciated. If we look back to the poems of the 1930s and reread them through today's rubrics then we can trace a substantial and significant history of literary works in which lines of ancestry and legacy that seemingly refused to be identified, known, and extracted as African alone offer markers of a Caribbeanness in which ancestral ethnicities meet their horizon point and are transformed into something rich and rewarding.

NOTES

1. For more detail, see Donnell.
2. Brathwaite's first note points out that a study of Guyana or Trinidad, "less simply black/white cultures" ("African Presence" 66), would have arrived at different conclusions. The ongoing debate that this sparked between Brathwaite and Peter Hulme is well-known and can be traced in

the journal *Wasafiri*, issues 20 (1994, article by Hulme), 22 (1995, response by Brathwaite), and 23 (1996, response by Hulme).

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