Editorial

The 1977 special issue of *ARIEL* on Caribbean Literature in English contained articles and poems on many of the writers who had brought Caribbean literature to prominence in the 1950s and 1960s, writers like Edward Brathwaite, Wilson Harris, George Lamming, Mervyn Morris, V. S. Naipaul, Garth St. Omer, Jean Rhys, Samuel Selvon, and Derek Walcott. In the sixteen years since that special issue came out, there have been many new voices in West Indian creative writing; and there have been interesting developments in criticism, too, much of it suggesting dialogue of some sort with movements in Euro-American criticism and cultural theory. This special issue on New Voices in Caribbean Literature attempts to gather in aspects of these developments.

The ideal special issue on New Voices in Caribbean Literature of course would be one that incorporates a sense of the great number and diversity of the new literary talents. We have not achieved this here. With no articles commissioned and no restrictions placed on how "New Voices" should be interpreted, we let the issue shape itself according to what was submitted. And while quality and the limitation of space dictated how much of what was received could be included in this issue, the range of submissions was undoubtedly affected by the fact that there are more outlets for critical work on West Indian writing today that there were in 1977.

There were no submissions on drama, and nothing therefore on playwrights like Trevor Rhone, Caryl Phillips, and Dennis Scott; no reports on the theatrical activity that has always in some sense represented literature in the islands and in Guyana and

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Belize; no reports either on the readings and performances that supplement or take the place of the reading of literature in the Caribbean nations themselves.

Surprisingly, there were no submissions on poetry or poets, on either the new work by Walcott and Brathwaite, or the newer voices in the literary magazines and largely self-published collections, or the women poets like Dionne Brand, Claire Harris, Lorna Goodison, Grace Nichols, and Binta Breeze, to name the most obvious. The dub and oral poetry associated with the names of Mikey Smith and Linton Kwesi Johnson also have not been touched upon. We include here, however, Sumana Sen-Bagchee's review of *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*, in which many of the new poets and trends are to be found; Keith Ellis's article on the image of sugar in Caribbean poetry, a reflection on a seminal topic (echoes of which occur in a number of the other articles) and a welcome reminder of the fundamental connections among the several Caribbean literatures; and Frank Birbalsingh's interview with Fred D'Aguiar, one of the more recent poets talking about the linguistic choices and the subject matter available to him as a modern poet of the region.

Fred D'Aguiar and David Dabydeen, whose poems are included in this issue, represent a recent extension of the term "Caribbean writer." The current voices in Caribbean literature now include the familiar category of writers born in Guyana, Belize, and the islands in between, and the recent émigrés from the Caribbean to Britain, Canada, and the United States (John Agard, David Dabydeen, Merle Collins, and Janice Shinebourne; Neil Bissoondath and Dionne Brand; Jamaica Kincaid and Michelle Cliff). It is these recent émigrés that Sam Selvon refers to in his review of Anne Walmsley's *The Caribbean Artists Movement 1966-1972: A Literary and Cultural History* as the generation to whom "the movement bequeathed . . . its vision of the future." In addition to these, there are those who came as infants or were born of parents who had emigrated in an earlier period, writers and writers-in-the-making caught in a new crisis of identity.

The weighting of submissions accepted bears testimony to the one indisputable fact about the current literary situation: in the last two decades, women have been the dominant new voices in

Caribbean literature. (The other indisputable fact, the return to the short story form, partly coincides with the first and to some extent is borne out by the contributions). There was no submission on Jamaica Kincaid, whose *Annie John* woke us up from the patriarchal delusion that Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*—in which there are no little girls—was the classic account of West Indian childhood; but articles by Richard Patteson (on Olive Senior), Maria Helena Lima (on Michelle Cliff and Merle Collins), Miki Flockemann (on Opal Palmer Adisa), and Mervyn Morris (on Pauline Melville) all show, at the very least incidentally, West Indian women writers articulating from the inside the experiences of Caribbean women and the nature of the female.

Writings by Caribbean women are important not only because they bring forward the previously repressed other half, but also because the perspective of women on social, cultural, and political matters adds vitally to our understanding of the making and the identity of the Caribbean. Lima examines how Cliff and Collins envisage revolution and the necessity of revolution; Flockemann finds in Adisa a linking of concerns with female and colonial identities; Patteson looks at Senior's stories that portray the orphan condition of female protagonists and reflect profound changes in modern West Indian societies; and Morris's preliminary study of *Shape-shifter* points up Pauline Melville's portrayal of metamorphosis, masking, and impersonation in colonial and cross-cultural situations. One reminder that emerges from all of this is that West Indian writing has always been concerned with social, cultural, and political analysis, and it has never been necessary to lecture the region about the world, the text, and the critic.

Since the break up of the West Indian Federation and the procession of the separate territories to independent status, some of the differences among the territories have become visible. One of the most important arises from the fact that in Guyana and Trinidad, descendants of East Indians make up at least half of the population. Chelva Kanaganayakam's review of *Indenture and Exile: The Indo-Caribbean Experience* draws attention to the East Indian experience in the Caribbean. So does Marjorie Fee's article on David Dabydeen.

Significantly, Fee examines Dabydeen's portrayal of the Indian not as a tribal figure or as a marginal one but as a "new" West Indian, undergoing, like all other West Indians, a cross-cultural experience. Whatever their racial origin or mixture, virtually all West Indians experience cultural crossings, and the region is distinctive as the location from which has begun to emerge out of the meetings of peoples and cultures a vibrant cross-cultural sensibility. So John LeBlanc's review of Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays* reminds us that "cultural exchange is endemic to the Caribbean region," and that Glissant made it his mission "to engender a culturally unified Caribbean." This is one light in which might be seen the recent novels of Lawrence Scott (*Witchbroom*, London: Allison and Busby, 1992) and Robert Antoni, whose *Divina Trace* is introduced in this issue by John Hawley. Hawley sees Antoni as a member of a new generation of white West Indian writers much more vocal about their place in the national building than writers like Rhys and Phyllis Allfrey.

But it would be wrong to make it sound as if the discussion of Caribbean literature is simply a discussion of social and cultural themes or, even worse, that there is a monolithic attitude. The sixteen years since the publication of the 1977 special issue of *ARIEL* on Caribbean literature has seen the emergence of new critical approaches and theories that have generated tension in responses and reactions to Caribbean and other literatures. Gone—except as the convenience it has been at best—is the label "Commonwealth." The replacements have bred controversy. Take for instance "postcolonial," which is to be found in articles in this issue by critics who do not come from the Caribbean. The word was intended to supplant the hegemonic connotation of "Commonwealth" but it is viewed by some as a loaded political term that looks at literature strictly in a hegemonic context, and by others as a reductive device constantly forcing coloniality on all current concerns and homogenizing countries and regions with disparate histories of colonialism. Insult is added to what many Caribbean critics and scholars consider injury by the coupling of this notion with the adjective "marginalized."

If "Commonwealth" has departed, "political" has come to life with a vengeance. In responding to Caribbean literature, some emphasize the imperial-colonial antithesis while others reject this as an exclusive approach that ignores such other crucial determinants as the individual and the familial. Some privilege differences while others recognize commonalities. Some write back to the Empire while others like Walcott, in "The Muse of History," reject the syndrome of shame and revenge. Some are historicists, insisting on historical contexts while others are concerned with symbolic truths and presences. (Lima concedes that Collins might be regarded as an old-fashioned socially realistic novelist, but she suspects allegory and symbolism in Cliff of having a tendency to deny political and historical reality.) Some indulge in Derridian deconstruction, claiming that every interpretation of a text has its equally valid opposite while others, agreeing with M. H. Abrams, contend that deconstructionists are parasites feeding on prior interpretations.

There are traces of these civil wars in the articles published in this issue, and there can be no doubt that out of this welter is emerging a renewed sense of the significance of alternative and repressed cultures, of the relation between the female and the colonial conditions, and of the need for profound dialogue and two-way traffic between the Caribbean and the Euro-American cultures.

The topic that occurs most often in the articles in this issue and in the submissions as a whole is the question of language. The concern is less with style, however, than with language as cultural and political tool. Finding or making a language, a process that involves appropriating and replacing the language of the colonizer, is equated with finding an identity. Although some of the non-Caribbean critics have difficulty in hearing the dialect tone in Caribbean Standard English, all the critics explore the cultural liberation and uniqueness implicit in orality, seeing the values resident in life styles associated with orality as ways of contending with imperial formations and deformations. Hovering over these discussions is the figure of Glissant, whose views on orality are often as misunderstood as Fanon's views on Africanity. But whatever their emphases, all the critics essay towards a fusion

of oral and written (a fusion which, incidentally has been going on in Caribbean writing for the last fifty years).

It is not out of any wish to cancel out difference or eliminate healthy controversy that we invoke a *bête blanc* and suggest that the criticism may be seen as being involved in the common pursuit of knowledge of people and books. But we have given the last word to an essay on the nature of Caribbean literature and criticism by Roy A. K. Heath, one of the new voices and the only author of an extensive and substantial oeuvre since the first wave of the 1950s and early 1960s.

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