



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia
Facoltà
di Lingue
e Letterature
Straniere

Dottorato di ricerca in Lingue, Culture e Società
Indirizzo Filologia Moderna, 22° ciclo

SETTORE SCIENTIFICO-DISCIPLINARE DI AFFERENZA:
L-LIN/10 LETTERATURA INGLESE

Contemporary West Indian Poetry: a “Creole” Aesthetics?

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A.A. 2006/2007 – A.A. 2008/2009

“Verandahs, where the pages of the sea
are a book left open by an absent master
in the middle of another life—
I begin here again,
begin until this ocean’s
a shut book, and like a bulb
the white moon’s filaments wane.

Begin with twilight...”

(Derek Walcott, *Another Life*, I,I)

Acknowledgments

As the motto of the University of the West Indies reads: “Oriens ex Occidente Lux”, “A Light Rising from the West”. Eventually, **from my experiences I found the East in the West, the light in the twilight**. I would like to thank my family for their invaluable support.

Academically, I would like to especially thank two professors, Prof. Armando Pajalich from the Cà Foscari University of Venice, who has been my tutor for the past three years of PhD, and Dr. Jeannette Allsopp from the University of the West Indies, Cavehill, Barbados, who has proof-read my thesis and given me precious advice as an external expert.

Special thanks also to (in alphabetical order):

Australia

Prof. Anne Collett

Barbados

the late Prof. Richard Allsopp, Adisa Jelani Andwele (AJA), Prof. Jane Bryce, Dr. Ian Craig, Mr. Alan Moss, the late Bruce St. John, Dr. H el ene Zamor

Canada

Dr. Pamela Mordecai (Jamaica), Prof. Victor Ramraj (Guyana), David Rudder (Trinidad), Prof. Olive Senior (Jamaica)

Germany

Prof. Michael Hoenisch, Dr. Peter H. Marsden

Guyana

the late Martin Carter, Prof. Ameena Gafoor

Italy

Prof. Shaul Bassi, Prof.ssa Franca Bernabei, Prof.ssa Michela Calderaro, Prof.ssa Roberta Cimarosti, Prof. Alessandro Costantini, Prof. Marco Fazzini, Prof. Giulio Marra, Prof. Anco Marzio Mutterle, Prof. David John Newbold, Prof. Matteo Santipolo

Jamaica

Prof. Edward Baugh, Mr. Carl Bradshaw, Mr. Wayne Brown (Trinidad), Prof. Carolyn Cooper, Prof. Hubert Devonish, Dr. Lorna Down, Prof. Stephanie Durllehmman (Switzerland), Dr. Norval Edwards, Joan Andrea Hutchinson, Miss Donna Mae Jackson, Mrs. Verna George, Mrs. Sharon Leach, Prof. Rupert Lewis, Prof. Earl McKenzie, Mr. Sean Mock Yen, Prof. Mervyn Morris, Mutabaruka, Prof. Rex Nettleford, Prof. Velma Pollard, Mr. Ian Randle, Dr. James Robertson, Dr. Veronica Salter, Prof. Verene Shepherd, Dr. Gregory K. Stephens, Mr. Ralph Thompson, Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis (Trinidad)

Singapore

Mr. Qun Xiang Eugene Ooi, Prof. Rajeev S. Patke, Prof. Kirpal Singh

St. Lucia

Kendel Hippolyte, Jane King, John Robert Lee, Derek Walcott

St. Maarten

Miss Rhoda Arrindell, Lasana M. Sekou

St. Vincent

the late Shake Keane

Tobago

the late Eric Roach

Trinidad

Prof. Funso Aiyejina, Prof. Leroy Clarke, Mr. Anson González, Prof. Barbara Lalla, Lutalo Masimba (Brother Resistance), Dr. Jennifer Rahim, Prof. Kenneth Ramchand, Prof. Gordon Rohlehr, Dr. Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw

UK

Miss Hannah Bannister, Prof. David Dabydeen, Prof. John J.M. McLeod

US

College Park, Maryland

Prof. Merle Collins

New York

Prof. Jacqueline Bishop (Jamaica), Prof. Kamau Brathwaite (Barbados)

New Orleans

Prof. John R.O. Gery

Venezuela

Mrs. Marijohn Sampson (Eric Williams's niece)

Special thanks to the following libraries which gave me access to their database/collections: Università Ca' Foscari, Venezia; Alma Mater Studiorum, Università di Bologna; Università degli Studi di Milano; Sorbonne Paris IV, Paris; École Normale Supérieure, Paris; Bibliothèque Sainte-Geneviève, Paris; The University of Warwick, UK; University of the West Indies: Mona, Jamaica, Cave Hill, Barbados, and St. Augustine, Trinidad; Harvard University; Stanford University, California; NUS, National University of Singapore; USyd, The University of Sydney.

As far as possible, I have tried to contact each and every person mentioned above to proof-read those parts of the thesis which reflect their advice.

Table of contents

Preface	9
Introduction: A West Indian “Creole” Aesthetics?	13
1950s: West Indian poetry: “poor imitations of English models”?	29
1960s: “West Indianization of the English Literature and Language”	31
1970s: “West Indianismus”?	33
1980s: The “federating” role of West Indian poets	45
1990s: Creole as a vector of aesthetic unity	54
2000s: “The entire world is gone ‘creole’”	59
Summarizing chart of the main aesthetic points	68
Chapter I – Eric Roach (1915-1974) – An ‘Island Aesthetics’ as an ‘Aesthetics of the Islands’	76
I.i. Roach’s nostalgia for origins: the influence of W.B. Yeats	77
I.ii. The importance of nature in Roach’s poetry	80
I.iii. The search for an aesthetic unity: the use of Creole and Roach’s relevance in the ‘Savacou debate’	84
I.iv. Poetry as a preparation for death	89
Chapter II – Bruce St. John (1923-1995) – The “Cultivated” Voice of the Common Folk	94
II.i. ‘Eddication’ vs. common sense: politics and aesthetics	95
II.ii. ‘Bajanism’: “cricket and kite-flying and sex”	99
II.iii. St. John’s socio-cultural aesthetics: from the Bajan folk and its language to a Caribbean creolization	103
Chapter III – Shake Keane (1927-1997) – The irreverent flourish of a Creole “Angel Horn”	110
III.i. An irreverent look at history as a poetic form of survival	112
III.i.i. History and religion of St. Vincent	112
III.i.ii. Irony, satire, and nonsense	118
III.ii. A daring look on language	122
III.ii.i. Keane’s employment of Vincentian Creole	129
III.ii.ii. The influence of jazz on Keane’s language	131

III.iii. A West Indian Aesthetics: the blending of people’s languages and musical/literary genres	134
Chapter IV – Martin Carter (1927-1997) – The Aesthetics of Social and Political Freedom in Post-Colonial Guyana	139
IV.i. Freedom in post-colonial Guyana	140
IV.ii. ‘Thought’: “This Colony Is a Jail”	142
IV.iii. ‘Inspiration’: prison as Hell?	146
IV.iv. ‘Art’: a metaphysical prison	147
IV.v. Speech: philosophical couplets or iambs?	149
Chapter V – Le Roy Clarke (1938 -) – The Poetic Call of the Orishas	152
V.i. Rhythms on the page, rhythms on the canvas	154
V.ii. Haunting presences: the call of the Orishas	157
V.iii. The universals of the Caribbean sociological aesthetics of love according to Clarke	167
V.iii.i. Sociological aesthetics of suffering	167
V.iii.ii. Aesthetics of love: women	169
V.iii.iii. Language	171
Chapter VI – Earl McKenzie (1943 -) – Creole in McKenzie’s Poetry: Blending Three Arts into One	174
VI.i. The poetics of the five Ps: Philosophy, Painting, Poetry, Prose-Fiction, and Pedagogy	175
VI.ii. Nature and spiritual reconciliation with the universe	176
VI.iii. Aesthetics and language	182
Chapter VII – Merle Collins (1950 -) – A People’s Revolutionary Aesthetics	192
VII.i. Revolution in Grenada: <i>Because the Dawn Breaks!</i>	193
VII.ii. <i>Rotten Pomerack</i>	199
VII.iii. The nutmeg as the queen of Grenadian crops: <i>Lady in a Boat</i>	205
VII.iv. Collins’s ‘Poetics of the Nutmeg’ and its aesthetic meaning	208
Chapter VIII – Kendel Hippolyte (1952 -) – Sound and <i>Undersound</i> : the Aesthetics of Cultural Resistance	212
VIII.i. Walcott’s and Brathwaite’s influence in Hippolyte’s poetry	212

VIII.ii. Creole Musicality: a Caribbean “submarine unity”	213
VIII.iii. Walcott’s influence in Hippolyte’s poetic palimpsest	215
VIII.iv. Brathwaite’s influence: neologisms and poetic inventiveness	218
VIII.v. Caribbean oral culture onto the page	222
Chapter IX – David Rudder (1953 -) – The New “King of Calypso”	229
IX.i. Rudder’s calypsoes on a local level: Trinidad	231
IX.ii. Rudder’s calypsoes on a regional level: the West Indies	250
IX.iii. Rudder’s calypsoes and world’s politics	254
IX.iv. Conclusion: looking for a Caribbean musical aesthetics	260
Chapter X – AJA (1957 -) – Music and Poetry <i>Live As One</i>	262
X.i. A fusion of music and poetry	263
X.ii Towards a Caribbean aesthetic unity	269
Chapter XI – Lasana Mwanza Sekou (1959 -) – The Aesthetics of Salt and Sugar	273
XI.i. The pervasive oxymoron of ‘salt’ and ‘sweet’ in Sekou	275
XI.ii. Use of language and graphic layout	280
XI.iii. An aesthetics of music	287
XI.iv. Sekou’s political fight: his aesthetic theory of the village chiefs and the maroons	291
Chapter XII – Joan Andrea Hutchinson (1963 –) – An Aesthetics of Performance	304
XII.i. <i>Meck Mi Tell Yuh</i> (2004)	305
XII.ii. <i>Inna Mi Heart</i> (2006)	309
XII.iii. An aesthetics of performance	310
Conclusion	313
Towards the definition of a West Indian “Creole” Aesthetics	313
Philosophical paraphernalia to a Caribbean aesthetics	316
The socio-aesthetics gains texture in a West Indian fine-grained poetic panoply	318
Aesthetic flourishes and solos in a West Indian poetic ensemble	323
A West Indian “Creole” Aesthetics?	332
Appendix A – Interviews with poets and scholars	339

Interview with Prof. Velma Pollard, 16 th Nov 2007, Kingston, Jamaica	339
Interview with Dr. Jeannette Allsopp, Nov. 29 th 2007, St. Michael, Barbados	342
Interview with Prof. Hubert Devonish, 29 th Nov. 2007, Kingston, Jamaica	354
Interview with Earl McKenzie, 3 rd Dec 2007, Kingston, Jamaica	358
Interview with Joan Andrea Hutchinson, 2 nd Dec. 2007, Kingston, Jamaica	370
Interview with Mutabaruka, 11 th Dec. 2007, Kingston, Jamaica	374
Interview with Prof. Edward Baugh, 11 th Dec. 2007, Kingston, Jamaica	378
Interview with Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis, 12 th December 2007, Kingston, Jamaica	384
Interview with Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis, 30 th April 2008, Kingston, Jamaica	389
Interview with Kenneth Ramchand, 9 th May 2008, Port of Spain, Trinidad	393
Interview with Prof. Funso Aiyejina, 8 th May 2008, Port of Spain, Trinidad	400
Interview with Prof. Gordon Rohlehr, 8 th May 2008, Port of Spain, Trinidad	403
Interview with Kendel Hippolyte, J. R. Lee and Jane King, 12 th May 2008, Gros Islet, St. Lucia	409
Interview with AJA, 13 th May 2008, Bridgetown, Barbados	417
Interview with Lasana M. Sekou – Philipsburg, St. Maarten, 15 th May 2008	422
Interview with Rhoda Arrindell, 16 th May 2008, Philipsburg, St. Maarten	431
Interview with Carolyn Cooper, 30 th May 2008, Kingston, Jamaica	434
Interview with David Rudder, 4 th November 2008	438

Appendix B – The presence of African-derived religions and beliefs in West Indian contemporary poetry	443
Introduction	443
Poems: the presence of Haïti	445
The voodoo pantheon	447
<i>Loas</i> : Agwé, Marassa, Shango, Ogun, Legba, Guédé	449
Calabash: gourds & rattles	458
Vévé	460
Haïti: zombies, boloms, and dances	461
Jamaica: obeah and pocomania	464
Conclusion	469
Works Consulted	471

Preface

Caribbean literature is very prolific in nature. There are hundreds of authors and artists in the Caribbean who deserve to be appreciated but are barely known outside the borders of their region. As an outsider, my interest focuses on contemporary Caribbean poetry, especially from the Anglophone Caribbean, or rather those islands and territories which were formerly colonised by the British. Many territories have been colonised by different European powers subsequently, the region being a check board game for the European colonisers. That is why many territories retain several European linguistic and cultural traditions. Attempts to analyze such a phenomenon have been made, but were not holistic enough to include an analysis of the literary texts and their contexts in order to outline the “contrasting similarities” and the “unifying differences” of the literary trends in the region. The “Caribbean” is a broader term and it generally includes the islands and territories from the whole region; thus my choice of the term “West Indies” because it differentiates the English-speaking territories from the French, the Spanish, the Portuguese, the Dutch, and the Danish. I will focus on the British West Indies. The term “Antilles” separates the Greater from the Lesser Antilles and it is split between geography and culture, between North America and South America, at the same time retaining colonial relics.

From my understanding, no approach like mine has been attempted or conceived before. My scope of work covers a huge spectrum including an analysis of several poets from the British West Indies writing in English and their regional Creoles, and focusing on the possibility of an aesthetic unity. Torres-Saillant’s *Caribbean Poetics* is in a sense a keystone work, a sort of breakthrough for Caribbean literary criticism, but it was limited to the study of three major authors: Kamau Brathwaite for the Anglophone Caribbean, René Depestre for the Francophone Caribbean, and Pedro Mir for the Hispanophone Caribbean. Nonetheless the other languages and cultures present in the region are mainly neglected in scholarly studies (Amerindians, Chinese, Indian, Dutch, and Portuguese). One could counter argue that the concepts of poetics and aesthetics are different, nonetheless the terms might still be used interchangeably: basically poetics is the study of literary and poetic theory, while aesthetics is the philosophical study of not just the beautiful aspect and the concept of taste, but also of the perception of society and the world surrounding us. When a poet speaks about the basic rules of poetry, the metre, the rhyme, the figures of speech and the poetic devices, he is talking about poetics; on the other hand, when a poet speaks of nature, of political issues and of art, he is talking about aesthetics.

As a pioneer thesis, my work will undoubtedly be subjected to frailties and criticism, especially because of the broad scope of it, of my arbitrary choice of the poets/artists to be analysed,

and because of historical and political reasons. However, I believe that with the proper focus on the relevant facets of my chosen topic, it is only a matter of time before the seemingly insurmountable difficulties are due for subjugation. The poets were chosen on the basis of equality, geographical provenance and thus respective regional variety of the Creole, and – aesthetically speaking – on the basis of taste. Nowadays the Caribbean is not politically or socially united yet, but I believe that it is not an improbable reality in the near future. The attempts to create a Federation of the West Indies failed one after the other: the last and most unsuccessful attempt to unify the whole region was in 1958. It was the UK which prompted the unification, but it failed a few years later in 1962, under the disagreement of the major island leaders, who could not arrive at an agreement re the conduct of the federal elections (Norman Manley and Alexander Bustamante in Jamaica, Eric Williams in Trinidad, leaving the office of Prime Minister to the Barbadian Grantley Adams) and the collapse of a plan which, according to the provinces, was more deleterious than fruitful and could rather hinder the attempt of independence more than giving a sense of social and political unity. Apart from disagreement on the taxation and economic freedom which would have probably penalised the smaller islands, the main islands were constantly afraid of receiving too many immigrants from the smaller territories. The choice of Chaguaramas (Trinidad) as capital was also contradictory, as it was US territory. Furthermore, Jamaica – which felt the distance from all the other islands as compromising for its political welfare – was displeased that Kingston was not elected as the capital of the Federation.¹

In comparison with what happened in the West Indies with the ten provinces involved in the Federation (Jamaica; Barbados; Trinidad and Tobago; St. Lucia; Antigua and Barbuda; St. Kitts, Nevis, and Anguilla; St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Montserrat; Dominica; Grenada), the European Union has instead found a balance among its twenty-seven states,² which have increased from the starting six countries which signed the Maastricht Treaty in 1993. There are still problems of a social and political nature in the Union but there is a common economic space, and the circulation of goods and people are not seen as insurmountable obstacles by one country or another. As far as a linguistic unity is concerned, there is no unity even in the European Union itself – even if at the end of the 19th century Zamenhof created Esperanto as an artificial language to promote cultural unity – by means of mirroring the Caribbean region, even though the use of English with island accents allows communication between speakers from one island and another. Nonetheless,

¹ For a more detailed history of the Federation, *cf.* “West Indies Federation.” [Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Indies_Federation). A Wikimedia project. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 28 Sept. 2009 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Indies_Federation>.

² I would like to thank Prof. Kirpal Singh for suggesting this comparison. Personal communication. 14 Sept. 2009.

Creoles are usually almost mutually unintelligible, due to the thick accents their speakers possess. So even though linguistic unity is still far from an integrative force, the poets of choice employ a mixture of English and regional Creoles to the extent that their meaning is understandable by most readers from other parts of the Caribbean or from overseas (the immense variety of dialects would see Bajan Creole as being more easily understood by native English speakers and the Saramaccan and Sranan spoken in Suriname the least understood).³ European national histories are very different one from the other, while, unlike Europe, the West Indies have a common history, which is that of colonialism. Caribbean literature is subjected to many political and economical constraints, which makes it inconceivable for a unity of any sort to be achieved any time soon. However, the poets are working tirelessly, leveraging on their arsenal of literary talents as a source of inspiration and hope towards the construction of a unified Caribbean, stressing the common cultural relics, the political achievements, or playing with the linguistic similarities and transforming them into literal weapons of cause moving onward from the simplicity and humble beginnings of the pen.

Prof. Mervyn Alleyne in his comparative study of Atlantic Creoles affirmed that African words in Caribbean Creoles are usually adopted in a private context in contrast with the lexicon derived from European languages, which usually apply to the public context:

Even within the lexicon which is generally European-derived, we may find that there are everywhere the same kinds of survivals of African words that belong to a semantic category that can be generally described as *private* in contrast with the broad semantic category of European-derived words that may be termed *public*.⁴

This observation is relevant because it highlights that points of contacts among different areas – as cultural, social, and linguistic – could be scientifically proven on a linguistic platform. Jean D’Costa on the other hand, explained how the different targets of a literature decide the uses and registers of language for West Indian writers, caught between Standard English and Creoles, with the strong desire to be understood by both regional and international readers:

³ To understand the existence of a *linguistic continuum* cf. Bickerton: “Take English Creoles, for example. There was Sranan, spoken in Suriname, which is totally incomprehensible to the naïve English speaker, and Bajan, spoken in Barbados, which is quite comprehensible even with no previous exposure. Strung out between these are Guyanese, Jamaican Creole, Krio (in Sierra Leone), and all the other English-related Creoles.” Bickerton, Derek. Bastard Tongues. A Trailblazing Linguist Finds Clues to Our Common Humanity in the World’s Lowliest Languages. New York: Hill and Wang, Farrar, Strauss & Giroux. 2008. 148. The same concept of a linguistic spectrum of Creoles was explained by Alleyne as follows, “if we consider all the English contact areas together, we find that we can construct a scale starting with Saramaccan and ending with Barbadian English and passing by varying degrees of retention or elimination of African speech habits. If we consider one territory such as Jamaica or Antigua, this scale is microcosmically represented in the continuum type structure existing there.” Alleyne, Mervyn C. “The Cultural Matrix of Creolization.” Pidginization and Creolization of Language. Ed. Dell Hymes. Pidginization and Creolization of Language. Cambridge: CUP, 1971. 181.

⁴ *Ibid.* 176.

The West Indian writer operates within a polydialectal continuum with a Creole base. His medium, written language, belongs to the sphere of standardised language which exerts a pressure within his own language community while embracing the wide audiences of international standard English (...). If the writer is to satisfy himself, his local audience and that wider audience, he must evolve a literary dialect which will meet the following: the demands for acceptability within and without his own community, and the pressure for authentic representation of the language culture of his own community.⁵

Indeed, studies on languages and linguistics are relevant and a powerful aid in my study, and I will look for linguistic, cultural, social, and aesthetic similarities in poets from the Caribbean region, consequently trying to analyze the results to extract a “Creole” – not only in linguistic terms – aesthetics in contemporary West Indian poetry. As a personal vision on aesthetics, it cannot be denied, even if other scholars might possess differing views on it. It could be a useful tool for students of Caribbean literature to have an understanding of the general outlines of a Creole aesthetics in West Indian poetry, which does not confine the work to the English language only, because in Creole there are relics of French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, together with African languages, Bohjpurī, Amerindian (mainly Carib and Taino), Chinese words or roots or grammatical features. Moreover, the fact that my study is limited to the production in English does not hinder the undeniable fact that a generalization could be done to extend similar observations to the other linguistic regions, most of all because the samples chosen try to be as comprehensive as possible, not limiting the research to gender (male/female), or area (islands or mainland). In terms of a relevance in socio-aesthetics, the poets chosen and the poems selected which will be considered and analyzed aim at identifying points of contacts and similarities among different islands and territories of the region, and this is because of a general consensus in the perception of historical events and of its translation by poets and artists into different forms of art: the study aims not at analyzing poetry *per se*, but at deducing from it a common perception of the literary and cultural production of the area.⁶

⁵ D’Costa, Jean. “The West Indian Novelist and Language: A Search for a Literary Medium.” Ed. Lawrence D. Carrington. Studies in Caribbean Language. St. Augustine, Trinidad: Society for Caribbean Linguistics, 1983. 252.

⁶ For a historical survey of the processes of creolization in Anglo-, Franco-, and Hispano-phone countries of the Caribbean, *cf.* Mintz, Sidney W. “The Socio-Historical Background to Pidginization and Creolization.” Ed. Dell Hymes. Pidginization and Creolization of Language. *Cit.* 481-496.

Introduction:
A West Indian “Creole” Aesthetics?

Starting to write about West Indian poetry is a daunting task because of the quantity of material, and because, as I have already said in the preface, there is so much written of, and about it. Nowadays, journals like the Jamaican *Sunday Gleaner*⁷ publish poems written by hundreds of authors, correlating them with the authors’ pictures. And West Indian poetry deals with so many themes that I have chosen to narrow the spectrum of my research to a dozen authors, analyzing their work under an aesthetic lens. They are linked one to the other and I will demonstrate how easily one can find connections between themes and authors in many poems. Poetry can express the Caribbean linguistic situation in all its aspects, and this is one good reason to:

- a. give an overview of what authors and critics said on Caribbean aesthetics from the 1950s onward;
- b. identify a dozen poets, who will be studied under an ideal lens, to see how their works deal within or without a common aesthetic ground;
- c. trace some tentative conclusions on the existence of a Creole aesthetics in contemporary West Indian poetry.

Significantly, I will try to find instances of passages in Creole – in many of the Caribbean Anglophone Creoles –, mostly but not exclusively, because the presence of SE and the constant interplay between the Creoles and SE in the Caribbean *linguistic continuum* is overwhelming. I will analyze Caribbean contemporary poetic production through the search for an aesthetics, which constitutes a provisional lens. In the end the questions arising from this analysis will be: what directions is contemporary Caribbean poetry taking? What are the creole retentions in society as mirrored by poetry? What poetic forms constitute today’s “Creole” aesthetics? Is there such a thing as a literary West Indian – or Caribbean – “Creole” aesthetics? These are not easy questions and it will surely be difficult – if not impossible – to give a definitive answer to them, but I will try at least to outline some general common features which could lead one to posit a hypothetical answer. It may somehow sound hazardous to start by putting forward the seminal question at the beginning,

⁷ Edited by Wayne Brown until 31st Dec. 2007. Poetry is so much connected to the social tissue to be part of it.

but I think that, this being the main topic of investigation, it will be necessary to work in such a manner as to try to understand more of it.

These questions involve so many fields of academic investigation that a multi-disciplinary approach will be required and preferable. In fact, even though my research will be focused on contemporary Caribbean poetry in English and on Anglophone Creoles, it will not be sufficient to approach a tentative answer just from a literary point of view, because the study of poetry involves the knowledge of the language/s, of the history/ies, of the culture/s of a people, if only to locate a poet and his/her poem in the right context or contextualisation so as to better understand them. But the language/s, the history/ies, and the culture/s in which the Caribbean literature was and is created form such a complex and interwoven tissue that it is not easy to disentangle what at first seem confused and entwined threads.

To speak of Caribbean languages, for instance, one must keep in mind that each island or territory of the Caribbean region has its own peculiarities and that often more than one language is spoken in each of them. Caribbean Creoles are often mutually unintelligible between one island and the other, in fact as Peter Roberts observed:

To West Indians and some non-West Indians the linguistic differences between Jamaicans on the one hand and Trinidadians on the other are noticeable and easily explained; the differences between Kittitians and Anguillans are not, but the perception of difference by the people of these two last islands is no less intense than in the case of Jamaica. The fact that similarity is in most cases unconsciously processed whereas difference is strikingly perceived means that difference, however small, assumes greater importance.⁸

One must also consider the historical conditions in which the language/s was/were created or transplanted. One cannot speak of West Indian languages without encountering the notion of ‘creole’, of course, even though Creoles are not an exclusive possession of the Caribbean region, but of all countries in the world (especially those which had been formerly colonised) in which there was a merger between languages, usually one (or more) European language(s) and an indigenous one, especially African or Asian.

The academic study of Creoles and the development of a branch of linguistics called “creolistics” began in the 19th century with the Neogrammarians Hugo Schuchardt and Johannes Schmidt and their “wave model”, but Caribbean Creoles started to be considered important in literary criticism only after literary landmarks like the Jamaican poets Claude McKay and Louise Bennett started to use Jamaican *patwa* in their work. Some critical commentaries and appraisal of

⁸ Roberts, Peter. *West Indians & Their Language*. Cambridge UP: Cambridge, 2007. 88.

their work, such as that done by the English ethnographer Walter Jekyll or Wayne F. Cooper in the case of McKay and by Prof. Rex Nettleford or Prof. Mervyn Morris in the case of Louise Bennett, shed some light on the aesthetic abundance of such a literary medium. In West Indian fiction – and the Barbadian writer George Lamming recalled that it truly began in the 1930s⁹ – the attention to the figure of the peasants and to the folk languages they use began with Lamming himself, with the Jamaican Roger Mais, and with the Trinidadian writers Samuel Selvon and Earl Lovelace.

But John Figueroa reminds us that in poetry Walcott was one of the first Caribbean poets who “has a command of the whole [linguistic, NbR] continuum, not just of one end of it”,¹⁰ as in “Tales of the Islands”, the beautiful set of ten sonnets Walcott published in 1958. As Prof. Gordon Rohlehr underlines in his “Articulating a Caribbean Aesthetic” (*My Strangled City*) the ‘50s, the ‘60s, and the ‘70s were decades in which the main part of the most important Caribbean Anglophone writers emerged such as works as Walcott, Brathwaite, Lamming, Harris, Naipaul, and Carter, to name just a few. Their literary production was therefore able to open up the beauty of Anglophone Caribbean literature, and poetry, to the world. And – to limit these considerations to Jamaica –, as Wayne Brown¹¹ said at a Poetry Lecture at UWI Mona Campus, Kingston, Jamaica, in April 2008 surrounded by poets like Mervyn Morris, Edward Baugh, Ralph Thompson and Steven Cramer, a new generation of Jamaican poets has grown nowadays, extending the range of poetic forms and even experimenting with form, but all aesthetically guided by truth-telling.¹²

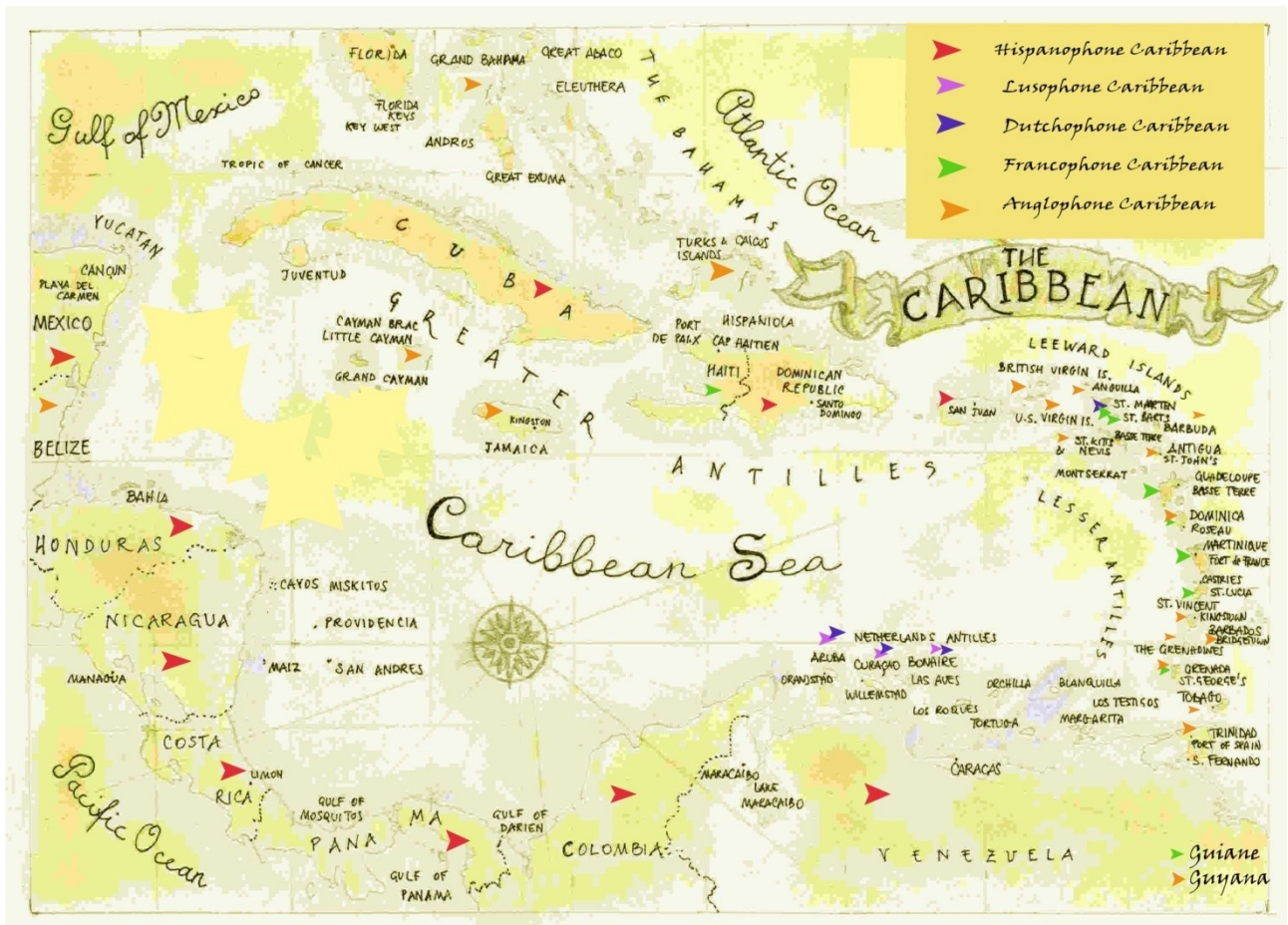
The English-speaking Caribbean is just a part of the whole in fact, as the languages used in the Caribbean are multiple and interweaving: we cannot forget the French-, Spanish-, Dutch-speaking Caribbean and the equally amazing literatures that were and still are produced in those areas. To be more precise, one cannot consider as – say – the Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean as separate entities, since they interweave; however, for historical reasons each island tends to have one language which is used more than others and usually is the official one. To give a brief and general overview of the complex linguistic situation, we could have a look at the map 1.1:

⁹ Gordon Rohlehr reminds that in the 1950s in *The Pleasures of Exile* Lamming wrote: “The West Indian novel, by which I mean the novel written by the West Indian about the West Indian reality, is hardly twenty years old.” Rohlehr, Gordon. “Literature and the Folk.” (1971) *My Strangled City and Other Essays. 1969-1990. Vol. 1.* Port of Spain, Trinidad: Longman Trinidad Limited, 1992. 52.

¹⁰ Figueroa, John J.M., ed. “Appendix: Our Complex Language Situation.” *Caribbean Voices. An Anthology of West Indian Poetry.* 2 vols. Volume 1. Dreams and Visions. (1966; 1968). Volume 2. The Blue Horizons. (1970) Liverpool and Prescott: Evans Brothers Limited. 1966; 1968. 1970. Vol. 2. 228.

¹¹ Brown (1944 – 2009) passed away on 15th September 2009, the same day of the Jamaican writer and director Trevor Rhone.

¹² Brown, Wayne. *Poetry Lecture with Edward Baugh, Stephen Cramer, Mervyn Morris, Ralph Thompson.* The University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, Jamaica, April 2008.



Map 1. 1 Hand drawn by Sara Florian with reference to a postcard purchased at Grantley Adams International Airport, Bridgetown, Barbados, 2008.

- the Hispanophone Caribbean includes: Cuba, Santo Domingo (Dominican Republic), Puerto Rico, but also the mainland territories of Venezuela, Colombia, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico;
- the Lusophone Caribbean includes: Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao (ABC islands, where Papiamentu is spoken), and Surinam (where Sranan and Saramaccan are spoken);
- the Dutch-speaking Caribbean includes: Surinam, ABC islands, the SSS islands – that is Sint Maarten, Saba, and Saint Eustatius –, where Dutch is the official language but Papiamentu is also spoken;
- the Francophone Caribbean includes: Haiti, St. Martin, St. Barts (Saint-Barthélemy), Guadeloupe (with Les Saintes, Marie-Galante and La Désirade), Martinique, St. Lucie, French Guyana, and also parts of St. Thomas, Dominica, and Grenada;
- the Anglophone Caribbean includes: the Cayman Islands (3 islands), Jamaica, the Bahamas (700 islands, 2000 cays), Bermuda (about 140 islands), Turks (2 islands, a few

cays) and Caicos (6 islands, a few cays), the British Virgin Islands (4 main islands, 50 smaller islands), the U.S. Virgin Islands (3 main islands, namely St. Croix, St. John, St. Thomas, and a few smaller islands), Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Kitts and Nevis, Montserrat, Dominica, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines (600 islands), Barbados, Grenada, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Belize, but English is also widely used in St. Maarten as well as in the ABC islands. Notwithstanding, to be more specific about it, each territory or island of the Anglophone Caribbean has developed its own Creole or Creoles and in poetic terms each poet will confront the range of linguistic possibilities of the place where he or she comes from. For instance, a Jamaican poet will have the possibility of choosing between “Standard English”, Jamaican English, or *patwa*, that means among the whole spectrum of possibilities going from a standard acrolect to a Creole, vernacular variety of language, the basilect.

Linguists and particularly creolists have been speaking of a “post-creole continuum”, of a process of “decreolisation” involving the whole linguistic situation in the Caribbean, for they maintain that language is progressively moving far from the basilectal forms, increasingly settling in intermediate mesolectal forms influenced by more standardised forms, and especially by “foreignerisms”, by foreign accents, tone, vocabulary, mannerisms, most of all of American English. Speaking with Prof. Kenneth Ramchand, he explained to me that the linguistic situation of the Caribbean could roughly be set straight in the following terms:

The Creole is always in a state of formation. Some diehard linguists speak of a post-Creole, meaning that there was a Creole formed out of the British, and the African, and in our case the Indian, and there have been new developments since then. Rather than humbling up and recognising that they are wrong to imply that the Creole was ever fixed, they pretentiously invent the term post-Creole to confuse graduate students. So a post-Creole is an evolution of the Creole. What gymnastics! I don't need the word “post” because for me it's constantly evolving. The word “post” wants to suggest that something was already established. It is not de-creolising. And it is not post-Creole. All languages are constantly evolving, some more dramatically than others.¹³

As Loreto Todd interestingly puts it in her *Modern Englishes, Pidgins & Creoles*, stylistic problems, in a sense, can enter the discussion on the development of creolisation, on the nature of a

¹³ Interview with Prof. Kenneth Ramchand, Appendix A in this thesis.

post-creole continuum, and challenge the limits of the spectrum of linguistic possibilities, in fact she says that:

A post-creole continuum is often described in terms of decreolisation, the process by which the creole or expanded pidgin is modified at all linguistic levels in the direction of the status variety of the language, SE. [...] It is interesting to speculate about whether or not decreolisation can develop to such an extent that the extremes of the spectrum may be considered to be *stylistic* rather than *linguistic* variants.¹⁴

As suggested before, Prof. Ramchand disagrees with the notion of a decreolizing process and sustains instead that West Indian English is creolising even more, admittedly absorbing the influence of American English (through TV, cinema, music, fashion, and so on and so forth ...), but his conception involves the very notion of creolisation process and Creole. In fact, if we defined Creolisation as a dynamic, ongoing, ever-fluctuating process, we would agree with him that the world tensions are shifting the linguistic properties of West Indian English. In this regard, I would like to quote Prof. Velma Pollard's view on the subject, that is:

I do not agree very much with the definition 'creole continuum', because I think about the interconnections between Standard English and Creoles more in a circular way, than in a unilinear way. Creoles show the interconnections and linguistic relics of many different languages, European, African, Chinese, Indian.¹⁵

When I first heard Prof. Pollard's words, a new conception of the functioning of Creoles came to my mind, because I always tended to conceive a *linguistic continuum* as something linear, while the circularity Pollard hints at opens up a third dimension to my understanding of it. Circles interconnect, and move along – or around – a spectrum as Creoles do with SE. Pollard's words remind me also of Prof. Richard Allsopp's conception of the intercircling spheres of influence of Caribbean, British, and American English, as he wrote in 1971, when he considered Caribbean English as a variety of English, which could be represented as a circle interlocking with other "branches" of the "English tree". All of these circles interlocking would explain the influence of other varieties of English on Caribbean English. But there would be other smaller circles openly interlocking with CE, that is the varieties of Caribbean Creoles.¹⁶

¹⁴ Todd, Loreto. *Modern Englishes, Pidgins & Creoles*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell in association with André Deutsch, 1984.

¹⁵ Interview with Prof. Velma Pollard. Appendix A in this thesis.

¹⁶ Cf. Allsopp, S.R.R. "Some Problems in the Lexicography of Caribbean English." *Caribbean Quarterly* 17.2 (June 1971): 10-24. "There is a central circle representing the basic corpus of homeland English and this is intersected by a number of other related circles of which only 2 are shown, representing Caribbean and American English. The

Other Caribbean scholars shared with me their notions on the concept of Creole and creolisation and on the impact of Creoles in literary production. Some of them were more linguistic-oriented as Prof. Velma Pollard's, Prof. Hubert Devonish's, Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis's, and Prof. Jeannette Allsopp's. Others had a more literary-oriented concept, as Prof. Mervyn Morris's, Prof. Edward Baugh's, Prof. Carolyn Cooper's, Prof. Gordon Rohlehr's, and Prof. Funso Ayiejina's. And even some poets I met or interviewed in my research shared with me their peculiar conception of Creoles and the use they make of them in their work, notably the Jamaican Joan Andrea Hutchinson, Olive Senior, Pamela Mordecai, Jacqueline Bishop, Earl McKenzie, and the already mentioned Pollard, Morris, Baugh; the Trinidadian Jennifer Rahim, and Anson González, Leroy Clarke, Brother Resistance, David Rudder; the Barbadian Kamau Brathwaite and AJA; the St. Lucian Derek Walcott, Kendel Hippolyte, Jane King, and John Robert Lee; the St. Maartenian Lasana Mwanza Sekou; the Guyanese David Dabydeen. I will briefly set out the main outlines I have gathered from academics during my first two travels to the Caribbean, while I will leave the others' comments for the conclusive chapter.

I have already exposed what Prof. Velma Pollard's view on the subject of *linguistic continuum* is, and it is important to underline that some scholars do question this concept, but Prof. Edward Baugh told me:

I accept the validity of the concept of the *continuum*, but I understand what Velma means. Velma has obviously thought deeply about this matter, I think those are worth serious considerations. In my own poetry I don't think about what I'm doing, whether circling or continuing, I just write the poems.¹⁷

circle of Caribbean English is further intersected by a number of peripheral dialectal circles parts of some of which (e.g. St. Lucia and Dominican patois, Jamaican Bongo language) fall outside the limits of English. All the circles are broken and we are to imagine free and continuous circulation of items in each circle so that there is nothing in principle to prevent any item in any circle entering or influencing the lexicon in any other. So perhaps you will agree that although I have used the term "co-ordinate branch" in my definition of C.E., that is not, if the model offered in my diagram is accepted, the most appropriate term. Ours is an expansion of the central corpus of English having the same mechanisms but with a later history and marked by a certain amount of change, so I apply the term "**metacentral expansion**" to Caribbean, as well as to each other English outside Britain, it is in an attempt to describe the above factors while also paying some regard to historical relationship. This way of looking at our English also has, I think, certain advantages. Firstly it helps to remind us that C.E. is not a small branch of English – as indeed DJE with its starting contribution of some 15,000 entries actually testifies. [...] Secondly the diagram draws attention to that sector of that Caribbean circle that actually represents the expansion. I have shaded this and would use my newly acquired licence to refer to it as the "**exocentral**" sector or area.

My diagram suggests that the area of greater lexicological significance is the exocentral sector, including of course an area in common with American exocentral English."

¹⁷ Interview with Prof. Edward Baugh. Appendix A in this thesis.

Before going to the Caribbean I assumed that the islands were all alike. I knew each one of them had its own peculiarities, and that the more one territory is distant from another, the more the language, the culture, the people are different. I knew that different groups of slaves were brought in chains to the West Indies from the Western coasts of Africa, but I could not associate, for instance, specific linguistic groups as the Koromantees, the Twi, the Hausa, the Ibo, the Yoruba, the Nembe, the Ashanti, the Ewe, the Kwa or the Fon, with specific islands. Actually, this is relevant as far as the cultural retentions have influenced the culture of the island or the territory we consider, and it has much influence on the Creole language which has been produced from this fatal and forced encounter with Europeans.¹⁸ From a conversation with Dr. Allsopp the concept of what Creoles are and how they formed emerges from their status of pidgins to the development into Creoles. Dr. Allsopp answered my questions about the non-mutual intelligibility of Creoles in different islands and territories of the Caribbean as follows:

the Creoles are often not mutually exclusive between the inhabitants either of the same territory or of other territories. Well, there is a reason for this, and, as you said the history of the region would have underlined all this. First of all, remember that the Creoles are contact languages that came out of the basic pidgins that were created for specific purposes, so, naturally, those pidgins were very limited and in the case of the Caribbean where the African slaves and other people were brought for the purposes of working in the plantations, the pidgins that were being formed were at first very basic because they had just to do with masters trying to understand slaves and slaves trying to understand masters, in order to get the work done. But as this spread into wider usage in the community their vocabulary of these contact languages expanded and their domains of use – as we would call them – also expanded, so that and they developed into Creoles. Now, remember that millions of African slaves actually came into the Caribbean from Africa through the Middle Passage, and they came from many, many hundreds of language-speaking groups, so that what existed was a set of African languages that would have influenced or formed the base set of the Creoles in their contact with whether with English, French, or Dutch. The case of Spanish is a different one because the Spaniards came first and they were ousted by the British, the French and the Dutch. Their contact was primarily with the indigenous peoples, who died in large numbers within fifty years of the arrival of the Spaniards and whose linguistic impact was largely lexical and not structural. By the 16th century the British, the French,

¹⁸ A picture of the whole chain of islands, and of the other Caribbean territories, is given by J.E. Mondesir in the poem “The West Indies” (*Pas Bon Dieu Qui Faire?*, [1984?]). Mondesir is also the author of the *Dictionary of St. Lucian Kweyol-English*, so it is interesting to observe how a linguist writes poetry and what are the modulations of language which he employs.

and the Dutch had assumed control and so the 17th century would have seen the expansion of British, French and Dutch colonization and settlement. The Spaniards were not involved in the slave trade, they had a few slaves but not many, so you would hardly find many Spanish Creoles...there are one or two: Palenquero is an example, which is found in Palenque, which is a remote village in Colombia, but what exists are regional varieties of Spanish. Now, what must be noted is that linguistic development depends not only on socio-political factors, but on geographical factors as well. First of all, Caribbean territories are separated by water because they are islands; secondly, the African groups of slaves that were brought would inevitably have an influence on the language spoken. Many territories have some common elements. For example, the Yorubas of Nigeria were taken to Cuba, they were taken to Guyana, Trinidad, not so many to Jamaica or Barbados, and some to Grenada. In Jamaica because of the settlement patterns, there is more influence from groups like the Twi, and the Hausa and the Mandingo and so on and so forth...So, there is more or less a very common worldview, because you can see it in the idiom of Caribbean English, which is different from the idiom of any other English, or any other world variety of English. But the thing is that in Jamaica for example, which is where you are, you know that there's a place called Cockpit Country, where the Maroons settled. Once there is a degree of geographical separation, the language of the isolated group will not lose much of its original flavour, or many of its original characteristics, but will tend more or less to stay the same, because language development also goes with contact between peoples, so a group like the Maroons would preserve the more divergent forms of Jamaican Creole. Similarly, there will be a difference between those people that live up there and the people that live in the other areas of the country. And then once there is any kind of barrier or separation between parishes there is going to be a difference in language varieties. Furthermore, it depends on the concentration of which set of slaves were there, as well as which set of masters, because of course there were not only English masters, but also Scottish, Irish and Welsh ones, so there was that influence, too. And that is the reason why the Creoles are not always completely mutually intelligible between the territories themselves, and even within the same territory. For instance, here in Barbados – flat and small as it is – there is the parish of St. Lucy, which is in the extreme north. People in St. Lucy speak very differently from people here in St. Michael, which is where we are now, and from people in St. Philip, which is in the far south so these differences manifest themselves.¹⁹

Prof. Devonish's view on the *linguistic continuum* and on the relationship between the two ends of the spectrum is that two ideal languages – English and Creole – exist and that there is a lot

¹⁹ Interview with Dr. Jeannette Allsopp. Appendix A in this thesis.

of variability between these two ends of the continuum, but his view is also that Creole speakers are bilingual, in that they move in and out of the continuum, mixing Creole and English:

You can construct a strain of features that are more or less English, or more or less Creole, and a combination and so on, that is true, but much of the variation is not necessarily Creole to English, within Creole itself, or probably within varieties of English. A simple example: in Jamaica you have regional variation of dialects inside Jamaica, so if you say “Me a walk”, or you say “Me da walk”, or “Me de walk”, each one of these forms signals different messages about who you are and where you come from, so I’m saying that simultaneously you would have particularly linguistic features which can be identified as more or less English, you have features which are simply variable within Creole itself and say or do other kinds of things. So to accept that there may be some kind of acceptable mix of features doesn’t deny the other, that you may have variability within Creole or within English itself. And then there is the fact that you don’t get random mixtures of Creole and English, so certain kinds of combinations are possible and not others, and the reason why that is important is that notably someone like DeCamp talks about a *post-creole continuum*, essentially denying the existence of a Creole and saying that everything is on a continuum; the other perspective is that most Englishes have idealised norms, but nobody speaks either English all the time or the idealised so-called Jamaican *patwa* all the time, but in fact people are doing things showing a level of variability. So if we are going to argue that Creole doesn’t exist because you don’t find anybody talking it consistently, neither does English exist here, because nobody uses consistently English either, right? So if you are talking about the Creole continuum, either there is no pool or there are two pools, but you can’t get the argument that DeCamp puts forward, that there is no Creole end but there is an English end, because English is as much an artificial construct as Creole.

In the end it makes sense to propose that you have two idealised languages: English and Creole and a variety of mixtures, to the extent that people are bilingual, they switch between one and the other, but bilinguals are lazy: the general tendency will be to move as little as it is possible, so you move enough to signal that change in language, but not so much to the inconvenient of changing massively your structures. What actually happens in reality is that you have therefore more Creole-like speech and more English-like speech operating, rather than two completely distinct varieties, and this movement is particularly characteristic of those who are to some degree bilingual.²⁰

²⁰ Interview with Prof. Hubert Devonish. Appendix A in this thesis.

Basically, Prof. Mervyn Morris's view on Creoles maintains what was just explained by Prof. Devonish, underlining the relevance of variation and interconnection of the two ideal ends of the spectrum, whereas there is an interaction between English and African lexicon.²¹ And this is also the explanation of Prof. Funso Aiyeina, who links up with what Prof. Ramchand said to me about the contexts of language use, which may suggest the employment of English rather than of Creole:

sometimes we do not find people who belong to either end, as the more educated ones, most of the times they operate off middle one way or the other, because when they are in the intellectual, academic context their language is mostly towards the standard, but when they are off their professional base they're back to the language of the ordinary persons.²²

Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis added an important consideration to my understanding of the *linguistic continuum* and the distinction or mixing of English and Creole: the idiomatic expressions which are characteristic of one Creole or another and may have a particular valence, and a completely different meaning from similar English expressions:

I think a case can be made for the separation. The fact that you are using English-based vocabulary tends to confuse the issue and so people, ordinary speakers, don't therefore understand the difference between the Creole and Standard Jamaican or Standard Trinidadian, they think it is the same language they are speaking, and this is to ignore the grammatical differences between the two systems and also the idiomatic differences. For instance, I just thought of something upstairs and I thought of it in a Jamaican idiom [...] "Try you bes", "Try your best". Now, Jamaicans say that if they want to say "I don't think that you can do something", you are trying to force a situation, like you are leading the horse to the water, but you can't make the horse drink the water, so if they wanted to express that level of scepticism, all they would say is "Try you bes". Now, "to try one's best" is an English idiom, but it would not be used in that situation or context in England. So, there are a number of speech mannerisms of that type that make the Creole different from Standard English or recognisably British or even American English.²³

If all these speculations have a value, it is that of understanding what Caribbean academics think of the use of language in literature and how, consequently, poets cope

²¹ Personal communication with Prof. Mervyn Morris. 4 Dec. 2007.

²² Interview with Prof. Funso Aiyejina. Appendix A in this thesis.

²³ Interview with Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis. Appendix A in this thesis.

with these notions. For instance, Prof. Carolyn Cooper pointed out that these concepts are valid when we have to criticize a piece of literature and question the nature of poetry:

some of the old binary oral/scrabal – Creole/SE are no longer as legitimate as they once were, especially if you consider the impact of the internet and the way in which e-mailing has allowed oral elements getting represented in print, they are not purely oral.²⁴

Notwithstanding, my choice of the poets is extremely personal, and I was tenacious and lucky enough to contact all of the living poets I will analyze, poets whose work I legitimately consider representative in my discourse and who contributed to create to the unifying features of a so called West Indian aesthetics.

I will soon indicate the contents of the chapters of this thesis, but before proceeding any further I would like to stress the importance of a chapter to the studies – articles, essays, books – dedicated to the aesthetics in Caribbean literature. As I have been carrying on my research, I have gathered together articles speaking of aesthetic problems from the 1950s to the present day – and by no means do I attempt to be absolutely exhaustive in my choice –, but encountered no work which systematically makes a survey of them or of the development of a Creole aesthetic taste. My initial research will not just attempt to produce a survey on the existing material on Creole aesthetics, but I will try to adjust this theoretical framework to a Caribbean one and verify whether it is possible to outline a common West Indian aesthetics out of it. Thus, according to the general understanding of a West Indian poetic and artistic production, in my thesis I will take into consideration the poetic oeuvre of the Jamaican Earl McKenzie and Joan Andrea Hutchinson, the St. Martinian Lasana Sekou, the Vincentian Shake Keane, the St. Lucian Kendel Hippolyte, the Barbadian Adisa Jelani Andwele (a.k.a. AJA) and the late Bruce St. John, the Grenadian Merle Collins, the Trinidadian David Rudder and LeRoy Clarke, and two other deceased poets, the Tobagonian Eric Roach and the Guyanese Martin Carter.

As may be seen at a first superficial glance my work will not be limited by geographical boundaries inside the region, nor by a gender criterion of choice. For I think that to sustain an accurate and valid hypothesis, one should consider as many different voices as possible and not be limited by a gender or theoretical framework. I think that some theoretical frameworks are useful but tend to reject the genuine relationship with the text. I will also pay attention to the social impact

²⁴ Interview with Prof. Carolyn Cooper. Appendix A in this thesis.

of the vital West Indian poetic environment in respect to the society and the socio-economic-political development of the Caribbean. As a non native speaker neither of English, nor of any of the Caribbean Creoles, it was not an easy task for me to start facing such a vital and intellectually stimulating poetic environment as the contemporary Caribbean's. Yet, I was somehow pushed to continue in my research both by my passion as well as by the fortunate encounter with many Caribbean and non-Caribbean poets and scholars who encouraged me to continue and who supported me with many useful comments and ideas.

It is important to remember what Roman Jakobson said about the two dimensions of poetry, one related to the written and one to the oral dimensions. On the side of craft, there is the double sub-dimension of the "Verse design" – that is the poem written down and crafted on the page – and the "Verse instance" – that is an example of a poem written down and actually read by someone, that means the actualisation of the text as such. On the other side, there is the "Delivery design" – that is how a poem is imagined to be read or performed when it is in the hands of a reader, either the poet himself/herself or someone else – and the "Delivery instance" – that is an actualised example of how a poem is read and made real by someone reading it aloud, giving voice to the words written down, applying his/her own voice and interpreting the verse conceived and crafted by the poet. Now, the ambivalent and binomial coexistence of text and voice is such, and the delivery of the poetic text concretises with what is usually defined 'tone'; the tone of the line of verse is usually defined by an abstract metrical pattern and a language of speech. Notwithstanding, what some poets conceive as 'tone' in their verse should otherwise be better defined as 'communicative key'.²⁵

As regards the 'tone' of his own poems, Derek Walcott made some interesting observations:

I have not only a dual racial personality but a dual linguistic personality. My real language, and tonally my basic language, is patois. Even though I do speak English, it may be that deep down inside me the instinct that I have is to speak in that tongue. Well, I've tried to write poems in patois [...] underneath it all I think the whole thing is really a matter of tone. (1977)²⁶

What the American poet Robert Frost conceived as 'tone' was the "sound of sense", that is the general overtone you could perceive from an eavesdropped conversation on the other side of a

²⁵ I would like to thank Prof. Valerio DeScarpis for this observation. Personal communication. 24 June 2008.

²⁶ Hamner, Robert D. "Conversation with Derek Walcott." (1975). Ed. William Baer. Conversations with Derek Walcott. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1996. 29-30. Also in Dawes, Neville. Prolegomena to Caribbean Literature. Kingston, Jamaica: JAMAL Foundation Press, 1977. 417.

closed door: what you can hear is not the exact conversation but the tone of voices entangled in the words.

In a more recent interview conducted by the Anglo-Caribbean writer Archie Markham, which took place on 17th March 2006 in Paris, and which I find really explanatory of this concept, Walcott explained that ‘tone’ means to translate from one language to another (in the case from French patois to English) and to be able to render the same musicality, the same melody in that language, and this is why in his poem “Sainte Lucie” he asks “Come back to me, / my language”.²⁷ In an interview with Charles Rowell, Walcott affirmed that: “It’s not a matter of the language; it’s a matter of the accent, it’s a matter of the tone”.²⁸ And in fact this was also underlined in 2001 when he recognised in the dramatic monologue “The Schooner *Flight*” some issues regarding tonality:

In ‘The Schooner *Flight*’, for example, the inflection is not St. Lucian but Trinidadian. Or better, it is not even purely Trinidadian, although it is set in Trinidad it is not accurate Trinidad dialect, but tonally I think it is; and that is the major thing, the thing that counts: tone. [...] Then I sort of reminded myself that what was important was not the language but the tone of the language and that speaking in English with the right tone would have been the same as speaking in creole.²⁹

In the following example Walcott speaks of his translation of the beginning of Aimé Césaire’s *Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal* and says that the intonation of a phrase, the way we speak and recite a word or a phrase, must give the exact idea of its melody, of the light and tonality with which it was originally conceived and which conveys its meaning:

“...Au bout du petit matin...”.³⁰ How do you translate that into English? “At the edge of the small morning”? (*laughter*) Crazy. What is that? “Dawn”? Trying to get fancy? (*laughter*) Something else? You cannot do it. And then, on the road to Damascus, it hit me: what you have to do *tonally*, is to do something in English that has to be West Indian in melody. Because the Césaire poem may be French, but the melody is Martiniquan. Be careful: it is not accurate in the sense that it is Parisian French or some kind of French. It is Martiniquan French. Equally valid. Because every language was a

²⁷ Walcott, Derek. “Sainte Lucie.” *Sea Grapes*. (1976) *Collected Poems 1948-1984*. London: Faber & Faber, 1986. 310.

²⁸ Charles H. Rowell. “An Interview with Derek Walcott.” (1987) *Conversations with Derek Walcott*. *Cit.* 128.

²⁹ Fumagalli, Maria Cristina. *The Flight of the Vernacular: Seamus Heaney, Derek Walcott and the Impress of Dante*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001. Appendix II, 279-281. Cf. also Brown, Stewart, “Derek Walcott: *Poems*.” Ed. David Dabydeen. *A Handbook for Teaching Caribbean Literature*. London: Heinemann, 1988. 100. “Walcott has striven for an English which echoes the essential and characteristic tones of West Indian speech, which is ‘fertilized by dialect’, as he puts it. The poet’s function, he maintains, is to be ‘filter and purifier, never losing the tone and strength of common speech as he uses the hieroglyphs, symbols or alphabet of the official one’. He has striven, then, to make English speak his language. In some poems this ‘fertilization’ is overt – the poet employing a version of Creole speech.” (1988).

³⁰ Césaire, Aimé. *Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal*. (1939) Paris; Dakar: Présence Africaine, 1983. 7.

dialect, right? Every one. It is like saying to Dante: “You can’t write like that, you should do it in Latin!” Same thing. So I thought, and I tell people this with great arrogance, that the proper translation of “Au bout du petit matin...” was a Jamaican or Antiguan or Montserratian – not Saint Lucian, it is an English translation. So the English, the Protestant if you want, translation is – because that is not a Catholic pronunciation – “Foreday morning”. That is brilliant. I want to clap myself on the back. (*laughter*) Because that is an exact melody in terms of scansion, it is close; “Au bout du petit matin...” is a little longer, but the stress and the weight [are the same] in “Foreday morning”. And what “Foreday morning” is in English, English English, is “before day”. “Fore day morning”. So you will get different pronunciations down the islands of “Foreday morning”, but the tone of saying that is what you do not get if you translate it into regular – what you call regular – English. You can’t say it, unless you “intone” it [...] And it is very good Elizabethan. A lot of the Caribbean Englishes are basically Elizabethan. To say “Foreday morning” on that pitch is what I mean by tone. “Foreday morning” is not dialect. It is very good English. “Fore day morning. (2006)³¹

At the *Calabash Literary Festival* on 24th May 2008 in St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, in conversation with Kwame Dawes, I heard Derek Walcott insisting that a cliché about Caribbean people – whether Central or Latin American – is that they have an inner tendency to rhythms. Walcott sustained that actually these rhythms come from Africa, and this is what happens in the Caribbean: there is a tendency, in his words, to “crystallize two forms into one”. He continued by saying that Caribbean literature absorbs a lot of influences, and this “spongy nature” is peculiar to it, but he thinks that Caribbean literature has just begun and that every writer should look for his/her own voice, not necessarily breaking into dialect, once the poet recognises that his/her own melody is right; for him Bob Marley was a true poet. Walcott asserted also that it is not only a question of rhythm and voice, but of respect and homage a Caribbean writer should pay to his/her own land. This is what happened at the end of Walcott and Dawes’ talk: Walcott read a poem extracted from his upcoming collection *White Egrets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Mar. 2010) entitled “The Mongoose”. The mongoose is an animal imported to the Caribbean from India and metaphorically it was meant by Walcott to stand for the Trinidadian Nobel Laureate V.S. Naipaul, whom is accused by Walcott of not paying homage to his Caribbean roots and ancestors – who were transplanted from British colonial India to the Caribbean as indentured labourers – and moving progressively away from them in his writing: “I have been bitten, I must avoid infection / or else I’ll be as dead as Naipaul’s fiction / [...] each stabbing phrase is poison / since he has made that

³¹ Walcott, Derek. “Interview with Derek Walcott.” Ed. Archie Markham. *Derek Walcott International Colloquium and Seminar*. Proc. of a conference. 17 Mar. 2006. Paris: Paris III-Sorbonne Nouvelle. Walcott had already given this example in Walcott, Derek. “A Letter to Chamoiseau.” (1997) *What the Twilight Says*. London; Boston: Faber & Faber, 1998. 219, when he said: “In those days” (Perse in Guadeloupe), “At foreday morning” (Césaire in Martinique), and “We used to” (Chamoiseau), and you have the elegiac Caribbean memory”.

snaring style / a prison". So an aesthetic debate is actually going on, as this quarrel between two literary Caribbean titans shows.

1950s: West Indian poetry: “poor imitations of English models”?³²

As the Guyanese poet and critic Oscar Ronald Dathorne once observed: “Until the late forties, with little exception, West Indian poetry had remained geared to strict metre and rigid rhyme-scheme.”³³ The problem of aesthetics and of a more peculiarly West Indian aesthetic unity began to be tackled in the 1950s by what are nowadays considered some of the best and most representative poets of the Caribbean: the Vincentian poet Ellsworth McGrahan ‘Shake’ Keane spoke of “W.I. Literary *Bourgeoisement*” in the late ‘40s and early ‘50s, of a literature which was starting budding, flourishing.³⁴ In this decade I will consider three examples: Derek Walcott, Martin Carter, and St. John Perse. In a 1957 article titled “Society and the Artist” the St. Lucian Walcott tackled the subject of a perspective which had already expanded outside his native island, questioned the obstacles confronting the artists in the Caribbean, and argued that what happened for a number of West Indian artists was that either they longed for the metropole – he was referring to the windrush generation which began in the ‘50s with Selvon, Lamming, Harris going to London – or they would have died in isolation – and here he foresighted two suicidal cases: that of his St. Lucian mentor Harold Simmons in 1966 and that of the Tobagonian poet Eric Roach in 1974.

Bitterly, Walcott argued that “There is no serious West Indian artist, painter or poet, who would not prefer to say something of his country rather than give a view of Venice. Europe does not belong to them.”,³⁵ but this limitation led him to claim that there were no voices for Caribbean artists, no national theatres, and that these voices could not speak because of the difficulty of having poetry published and commercialized, and subsequently to make a living out of this activity. This reminds me of what Joan Andrea Hutchinson said to me in an interview in December 2007: nowadays Jamaican young authors her age tend to self-publish books either because of the difficulties of the market or because they prefer to keep all the money from the selling of the books. Regarding this it would be interesting to underline the importance of the institution of a Caribbean publishing industry and the impact which *IRP, Ian Randle Publishers*, founded by Ian Randle, had on the formation of a Caribbean aesthetics; another important publishing house was founded by the St. Martinian poet Lasana Sekou, *HNP, House of Nehesi Publishers*.

³² Carter, Martin. “Sensibility and the Search.” (1958) Ed. Gemma Robinson. University of Hunger, Collected Poems & Selected Prose. Highgreen, Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2006. 207.

³³ Dathorne, O.R. Ed. Caribbean Verse, An Anthology. London: Heinemann, 1967. 11.

³⁴ Keane, E. McG. “Some Religious Attitudes in W.I. Poetry. The Orthodox Attitude and Variations.” BIM 4.15 (1952). 169.

³⁵ Walcott, Derek. “Society and the Artist.” (1957). Ed. Robert Hamner. Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott. Washington D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1993. 16.

One year after Walcott, in a 1958 article titled “Sensibility and the Search” the Guyanese poet Martin Carter, who had already been imprisoned for having published *Poems of Resistance from British Guyana*, considered one of his earlier interventions some years before in the Guyanese journal *Kyk-Over-Al*, in which his position on the colonial impact and on the role and consideration of the artist was harsh and plain: “look at the poetry we call West Indian. What has the larger part been, other than a series of poor imitations of English models?”³⁶ Again Hutchinson comes to mind, when she remarks on several occasions during the same interview that the legacy of colonialism is still remarkable nowadays on socio-political issues in Jamaica and this is startling, speaking about two centuries after Emancipation. So how can colonial legacy and perpetuation of stereotypes *not* have an impact and relevance also on the aesthetic side of poetic production in the Caribbean nowadays?

St. John Perse was in a totally different position than Walcott or Carter, having a Francophone background, coming from Guadeloupe and moving in his childhood to Pau (Pyrénées), Bordeaux and then the metropole, Paris. He gave a definition of poetry in aesthetic terms which others were rarely able to equalize in terms of depth and clarity, for the original comparison he made with the scientific disciplines, linking art and knowledge in a quintessential inseparable unity, “by virtue also of a language through which is transmitted the supreme rhythm of Being, the poet clothes himself in a transcendental reality to which the scientist cannot aspire. [...] Poetry is not only a way of knowledge; it is even more a way of life – of life in its totality.”³⁷ Underpinned by historicity³⁸ – and it could not be otherwise being part of the speech for the Nobel Prize acceptance in 1960 – , poetry is regarded by Perse as the supreme union with the Creator, as the language imbued with divinity, and in this aesthetic waving with Rhythm it is superior to science. As a way to transcendence it links us directly to God. I do not want to shift into philosophical speculations, but poetry leads me to consider the other side of the coin and add to Perse’s musings on transcendence, my ruminations on immanence. In fact, if we have to consider poetry in aesthetic terms, its beauty is immanent and transcendent at the same time, and it is an expression of both dimensions as well, for beauty lies inside things and poetry expresses it, reveals this beauty.

³⁶ Carter, Martin. “Sensibility and the Search.” (1958) *Cit.* 207.

³⁷ Perse, St.-John. Poésie/On Poetry. Speech of Acceptance upon the Award of the Nobel Prize for Literature. Delivered in Stockholm December, 10, 1960. Trans. W. H. Auden. New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1961. 9.

³⁸ “the poet also is tied to historical events.” *Ibid.* 11.

1960s: “West Indianization of the English Literature and Language”³⁹

The situation of West Indian poetry in the 1960s evolved a little bit in aesthetic terms, especially because an aesthetic form came to be recognised and outlined by theoreticians. For instance, at the very beginning of this decade the Kittitian John Brown, in the edition of an anthology of poems and stories from the small islands of the Lesser Antilles St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla, pointed out a fundamental characteristic to be found in the recognition of a West Indian aesthetics: the need for the search of a West Indian identity:

I would suggest [...] that the most successful of West Indian writers are, and are likely to be, those whose ears are most sensitively attuned to the characteristic rhythms of speech of their people, to their characteristic ways of expression and thus to their essential ways of thought and feeling. It is, too, particularly necessary at this time of the West Indian search for identity, a search to define their own social, cultural and racial values, that their roots should not be turned away from.⁴⁰

The abovementioned observation is particularly interesting because this comment was made by an academic living in one of the smaller islands of the archipelago, yet recognising the urge for a common, unifying West Indian identity. The theme of the search for an identity will be one of the most important themes in all the following research from and on Caribbean literature in general, and poetry in particular.

The fact that these observations were made in an anthology which contained poetry and folk stories leads me to think of Louise Bennett, the great Jamaican poet, honoured as a member of the Order of Merit in Jamaica and with an honorary degree as Doctor of Letters from the Canadian York University in Toronto, where she passed away in 2006. Bennett brought folk stories, proverbs, and all the devices of orality into poetry in Creole to the fore with her life and work. The importance of the folklore derives from the earlier works of the American folklorist Martha Beckwith or the English ethnologist Walter Jekyll, who discovered and encouraged Claude McKay to write his poetry in dialect.

In the 1960s the phenomenon of the Caribbean diaspora had already begun and one of the voices of *CAM* (Caribbean Artists’ Movement) the Trinidadian poet and critic Marina Ama Omowale Maxwell, living in London in the mid 1960s, commented on the importance of a Caribbean aesthetics which could not be separated from folk traditions, especially in some essays

³⁹ Dathorne, O.R., ed. *Caribbean Verse, An Anthology*. *Cit.* 15.

⁴⁰ Brown, John, ed. “Foreword.” *Poems and Stories of St. Christopher, Nevis and Anguilla*. Basseterre, St. Kitts: U.C.W.I., 1960.

published as *About Our Own Business*.⁴¹ She was underestimated both as a poet and as a theoretician, but Brathwaite recognised in her one of the proposers of “CR, the Caribbean revolution in the arts”.⁴²

Almost at the end of the 1960s, in an anthology of *Caribbean Verse* he edited, the Guyanese Dathorne recognised some recurrent themes:

At first sight there seems to be a great deal that is wrong with West Indian poetry—there are the ever-recurrent themes of seascape and landscape descriptions, a certain amount of religious hysteria and a melancholic pre-occupation with death. It is easy to dismiss this all as ‘romantic’, in the nineteenth-century sense, and to accuse West Indian poets of a blind adherence to an effete convention.⁴³

As much as John Brown or Omowale, Dathorne pointed the spotlight at the importance of the folk tradition, which has extended the literary dimension from the scribal dimension to a video-aural one, saying that “Equally no direct link can be said to exist between modern West Indian poets and folk-songs [...] The dialect verse of Claude McKay and Louise Bennett could not have been written without this folk-tradition which is to do with a new way of *seeing* as well as of *hearing*.”⁴⁴ But in this endorsing process of what he roughly calls “West Indianization of the English Literature and Language”⁴⁵ there still is a criticism for a low-key quality of Caribbean poetry, an observation following what the Jamaican poet John Figueroa argued just the year before (in 1966) in *Dreams and Visions*, the first volume of his anthology of West Indian poetry: “I belonged to a people without a literature. [...] It was not great poetry.”⁴⁶ It is a tough declaration, but even though Caribbean literature perhaps at first emerged with novels and fiction, it is important to consider Walcott’s observation, when he stated that basically the Caribbean novel remained formally ‘poetic’.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Omowale Maxwell, Marina. *About Our Own Business*. Arima, Trinidad: Drum Mountain Publications, 1981.

⁴² Omowale Maxwell, Marina. “Marina Omowale Maxwell.” [peepalmtreepress.com. The best in Caribbean writing](http://www.peepalmtreepress.com/author_display.asp?au_id=48). 8 July 2008. <http://www.peepalmtreepress.com/author_display.asp?au_id=48>.

⁴³ Dathorne, O.R., ed. *Caribbean Verse, An Anthology*. *Cit.* 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 3.

⁴⁵ “both English Literature and Language have been forced into a West Indianizing process.” *Ibid.* 15.

⁴⁶ Figueroa, John J.M., ed. *Caribbean Voices*. *Cit.* Vol. 1. vii.

⁴⁷ “When Derek Walcott said that ‘West Indian literature originated in verse’ he was only stating a half truth. What has happened is that the West Indian novel [...] emanated from poets and therefore remained ‘poetic’ in form and language.” Dathorne, O.R. Ed. *Caribbean Verse, An Anthology*. *Cit.* 1.

1970s: “West Indianismus”⁴⁸?

The passage to the following, important decade, was marked by the second volume of Figueroa’s *Anthology of West Indian Poetry*, entitled *The Blue Horizons*: even though the “dreams and visions” of his first volume had become “horizons” to foresee, he sounded peremptorily sure in finding “premature to attempt any final critical judgements at this stage.”⁴⁹ Notwithstanding, the interrogation on the nature of the West Indian artist and writer was taking shape more and more: “the West Indian poet is already contributing to the growth and texture of the English language by the use he makes of it, when writing in his own voice and with his special Caribbean structures and rhythms.”⁵⁰ But Figueroa’s comments expand to the importance of language, and the aesthetics of language is inextricably linked to a Caribbean poetics, for it structures the framework within which a poetic dimension evolved and moves.

In *The Blue Horizons* Figueroa questioned the nature of the West Indian writer, recalling also the Guyanese writer Slade Hopkinson’s definition of the “West Indianness” of a writer:

the question of what makes one a West Indian writer is difficult, and is fraught with all kinds of emotional problems. When ‘West Indianismus’, as Slade Hopkinson calls it, started, it was in many ways a healthy reaction to the attitude which has nothing but blind eyes for ‘burnished beauty nearer home’.⁵¹

His analysis was not just fraught with literary implications: he pushed the analysis of the linguistic aspects of poetry to an aesthetic meaning, by recognising the importance of the Caribbean poet for the growth not only of West Indian Standard English, but also of the English language itself.⁵² While some critics play between the Creole and SE limits of the West Indian *continuum*, a critic

⁴⁸ Figueroa, John J.M., ed. *Caribbean Voices. An Anthology of West Indian Poetry. Cit.* Vol. 1. 10.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* 11.

⁵¹ *Ibid.* 10.

⁵² This would be proved a couple of decades later, when the Trinidadian-Canadian poet Dionne Brand asserted in *No Language Is Neutral* (a 1990 collection whose title derives from Walcott’s *Midsummer*) that “no language is neutral / the green oak of English is a murmurous cathedral / where some take umbrage and some take peace / but all help widen its shade”. (Walcott, Derek. *Collected Poem 1948-1984. Cit.* 506). Dionne Brand confirmed that the title of her collection was taken from Walcott: “It’s based on a line from Derek Walcott’s *Midsummer* [...] Walcott and I come from different generations and different genders; that English language that he wants to claim is not the same one that I want to claim. [...] As women and as peoples of colour we write against that language. [...] That language that I encounter as a response to me in the world is no more neutral than mine to it.” (Cf. Daurio, Beverley, ed. “Writing It: Dionne Brand.” *The Power to Bend Spoons. Interviews with Canadian Novelists.* Toronto, ON: The Mercury Press, 1998. 37). Yet, the two poets assigned very different meanings to the “neutrality of language”: whereas Walcott’s mention was to the “shade” of the English language, Brand aimed to assert, through SE, her blackness and lesbianism. I would like to thank Prof.ssa Franca Bernabei for this observation. Personal communication with the scholar. March 2007.

like Gingell gives a political meaning to Brand's use of language, and recognises a kind of 'captivation' exerted by the dominant culture:

The virtuoso variations worked with umbrage, shade, and shadow reveal how secure Walcott is at verbal play beneath "the green oak of English," refusing to take sides in his confidence that he is adding to the breadth of shadow that oak casts. By contrast, when Brand picks up Walcott's assertion that no language is neutral she is more inclined to take umbrage than to find peace.⁵³

In the 1970s, many Caribbean poets, writers, and scholars embraced the problem of aesthetics and aestheticism, in fact this decade was really a fruitful one from the point of view of criticism on this topic. Those I consider are the most important comments come from two Nobel Prizes winners from St. Lucia, Sir Arthur Lewis and Derek Walcott, and from two scholars now based in Trinidad, at UWI St. Augustine Campus in Port of Spain: the Trinidadian Prof. Kenneth Ramchand and the Guyanese Prof. Gordon Rohlehr, who wrote extensively on these subjects.

In 1970 Walcott wrote the seminal essay "What the Twilight Says" in which he froze the dual nature of his schizophrenic poetic personality:

In that simple schizophrenic boyhood one could lead two lives: the interior life of poetry, the outward life of action and dialect. Yet the writers of my generation were natural assimilators. We knew the literature of empires, Greek, Roman, British, through their essential classics; and both the patois of the street and the language of the classroom hid the elation of discovery.⁵⁴

This binomial aspect could be extended by syllogism to the binomy "SE-Creole" and its uses in literature, especially poetry. Interestingly, as Prof. Ramchand observed in an interview he gave to me in May 2008,

After the 1840s, after Emancipation when the system of education begun, English was the language of instruction, it carried all kinds of cultural implications about superiority and inferiority, but coexisting with the education in the English language were the relics of the African languages actual in their language that these people were speaking. You could say in that early period people were bilingual, that the separation between the language of the school and the language at home or the language in the

⁵³ Gingell, Susan. "Returning to Come Forward: Dionne Brand Confronts Derek Walcott." *Journal of West Indian Literature* 6.2 (May 1994): 50. Eds. Marc McWatt, Victor Chang, Evelyn O'Callaghan, and Michael A. Buckner. Kingston, Jamaica: Dept. Of English, The University of the West Indies. May 1994.

⁵⁴ Walcott, Derek. "What the Twilight Says." (1970) *What the Twilight Says*. *Cit.* 4.

fields was so great that it justifies us in saying that there are two languages.⁵⁵

The separate but necessary coexistence of a two-dimensional set of languages, English and Creole, and the uses people made of them in different environments or contexts, proves again that the linguistic issue cannot be disentangled from the poetic issues, especially when a poet as prominent as Walcott engaged his most important essays in these consideration, reinforcing his opinion with a linguistic-based example:

Listen, one kind of writer, generally the entertainer, says, “I will write in the language of the people however gross or incomprehensible”; another says: “Nobody else go’ understand thus, you hear, so le’ me write English”; while the third is dedicated to purifying the language of the tribe, and it is he who is jumped on both sides for pretentiousness or playing white. He is the mulatto of style. The traitor. The assimilator.⁵⁶

To the Walcottian concept of the “mulatto of style”, Prof. Rohlehr dedicated many pages and essays, for this split stylistic identity is at the core of Walcott’s aesthetics. In his essay Walcott blamed the “Pastoralists of the African revival” saying that they “should know that what is needed is not new names for old things, or old names for old things, but the faith of using the old names anew”,⁵⁷ when he underlined in “What the Twilight Says” the evolution of West Indian poetics towards a consumer-oriented production: “So now we are entering the «African» phase with our pathetic African carvings, poems, and costumes, and our art objects are not sacred vessels placed on altars but goods placed on shelves for the tourists.”⁵⁸ He asserted that these intellectuals “had elected themselves as protectors of the people, [...] cried out that black was beautiful like transmitters from a different revolution without explaining what they meant by beauty.”⁵⁹ These considerations on African revival and “mulattitude” contributed to define a Caribbean identity.

Walcott would continue his remarks on aesthetics in his 1974 essays “The Muse of History” and “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?” in which he carried on his reflections on aesthetics, historicizing poetry and the use of language which is made in it with these words:

The truly tough aesthetic of the New World neither explains nor forgives history. It refuses to recognize it as a creative or culpable force. This shame and awe of history possess poets of the Third World who think of language

⁵⁵ Interview with Prof. Kenneth Ramchand. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁵⁶ Walcott, Derek. “What the Twilight Says.” (1970) *What the Twilight Says*. *Cit.* 8-9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 9.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 8.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.* 30-1.

as enslavement and who, in a rage for identity, respect only incoherence or nostalgia.⁶⁰

Hence, Walcott's new, "Adamic", poetic language was based on the fact that a "tribal" language, an oral-commanded poetic language, is at the heart of the poetic experience and that a blues-like melody constitutes its basic beat. Furthermore, Walcott suggested a comparison between the two great Caribbean Francophone poets: St. John Perse and Aimé Césaire. The former Guadeloupian, the latter Martinican, they both distinguished themselves for being among the most important Francophone poets of the whole region and beyond. Their poetry was quite different in form and content but Walcott remarked how they shared an aesthetic sensibility:

Perse and Césaire, men of diametrically challenging backgrounds, racial opposites, to use the language of politics, one patrician and conservative, the other proletarian and revolutionary, classic and romantic, Prospero and Caliban, all such opposites balance easily, but they balance on the axis of a shared sensibility.⁶¹

This common sensibility shared by two Caribbean Francophone poets is what I recognise in the Anglophone West Indian poetry I am considering in this thesis: although Rudder's might be very much different from Keane's poetry or music, they "share a common sensibility", as Walcott would say, and this aesthetic commonality is given by the fact that they were – first of all – both born in the Caribbean.

Walcott's opposition to Naipaul's vision on the West Indian literary situation is present only in the latest attack they both launched to each other in spring 2008, but refers to Naipaul's 1962 conviction "history is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies".⁶² In response to this polemical reference, in 1974 Walcott answered that the Caribbean process of creation must be disembowelled from European referents, for "Nothing will always be created in the West Indies, for quite a long time, because what will come out of there is like nothing one has ever seen before".⁶³ With this statement, Walcott seems to sustain that only through a process of imitation, through "mimicry", will the West Indies be able to satisfy a creative process. Notwithstanding, by tracing the grassroots of a West Indian aesthetics, Walcott demonstrated that actually the invention and production of literature and culture can stem from a mimetic process. Not

⁶⁰ Walcott, Derek. "The Muse of History." (1974) *What the Twilight Says*. *Cit.* 37.

⁶¹ *Ibid.* 52.

⁶² Naipaul, V.S. *The Middle Passage*. Middlesex: Penguin, 1969. 29.

⁶³ Walcott, Derek. "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" (1974) Hamner, Robert, ed. *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*. *Cit.* 54.

only, but also in “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?”, Walcott argued that Caribbean poets and writers can “renew” the West Indian literary scenario and the American archipelago:

The New World originated in hypocrisy and genocide, so it is not a question for us, of returning to an Eden or of creating Utopia; out of the sordid and degrading beginning of the West Indies, we could only go further in decency and regret. Poets and satirists are afflicted with the superior stupidity which believes that societies can be renewed, and one of the most nourishing sites for such a renewal, however visionary it may seem, is the American archipelago.⁶⁴

The other St. Lucian Nobel Prize, the economist Sir Arthur Lewis, in his in-depth and clarifying essay “On Being Different” (1971) seemed to feel a need to justify in sociological terms the thinking of West Indians compared to other people, but then his essay developed into a three-branched type of knowledge he characterised as such: “This knowledge divides into three areas—first, knowledge of how phenomena work, which includes the natural and social sciences; secondly, moral knowledge [...]; and thirdly aesthetic knowledge, or how to be creative in the arts.”⁶⁵ Lewis divided the second type of knowledge into two parts: on the one hand, in personality and social structure; on the other hand, in family relations, political systems, and class and economic relations. It is the third part of his categorization which is of interest for my discourse Lewis sustained that:

It is thus of the very nature of the game that as aesthetic activity burgeons in the West Indies, our art and music and literature will be clearly distinguishable from that of other peoples. We shall have our own schools of painting and music and poetry and drama and the rest. This is the essential and most valuable sense in which West Indians must be different from other peoples. This is the contribution which above all others we know we can make to the common human heritage.⁶⁶

Lewis’s considerations are particularly interesting from a socio-aesthetic point of view because they concerned the importance of the arts and the need for a unifying approach in a contribution to the “human heritage”.

Now I will take into consideration some of Prof. Rohlehr’s essays which I find remarkable for their analytical approach to the problems of a West Indian poetics and aesthetics: they are mainly condensed in *My Strangled City*. In his 1971 essay “Literature and the Folk”, Rohlehr speaks of the use of dialect which Louise Bennett made in her poetry, asserting thus that the very

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* 57.

⁶⁵ Lewis, Sir Arthur. “On Being Different. The Graduation Address delivered at the U.W.I., Cave Hill, Barbados, on 5th February, 1971.” (1971) *BIM* 14.53 (July-Dec. 1971): 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 8.

nature of poetry was oral as much as the beginning of the English language itself. Hence, he believes that the *linguistic continuum* existing between the West Indian Creole and the Standard West Indian English could be extended to a literary continuum where oral and scribal traditions melt and bridges are crossed.⁶⁷

“My Strangled City” (1971) also appeared the following year in *BIM* as “West Indian Poetry: Some Problems of Assessment”,⁶⁸ in which Rohlehr refers to an ongoing debate on the criteria of West Indian art which was taking place among West Indian and non West Indian artists and scholars. In referring to it, Rohlehr mentions the late Tobagonian poet Eric Roach, who joined this dispute by considering the innovative literary anthology *Savacou ¾*, edited by Brathwaite, and which was in a sense dismissed by Roach. Criticism and exchanges of opinions expanded into the so-called “Savacou debate”, and I will start by giving a general overview of it in the words of Prof. Rohlehr:

The Savacou Debate was a name coined by Kamau Brathwaite for the controversy that surrounded Eric Roach’s dismissive review of *Savacou ¾*. The ‘debate’ focussed on the issue of what was the appropriate language register for poetry, and questioned whether West Indian Creoles were at all suitable. In the process, questions were raised about Oral Tradition, links between poetry and music, oral and scribal modes of communication, performance, words on the page versus words in audible motion, etc.

I contributed two essays to this debate: “West Indian Poetry: Some Problems of Assessment” and “Afterthoughts”. Both were critical of Roach’s review, but raised issues and suggested contexts that went far beyond it. Roger Mc Tair and Syl Lowhar, two of the younger Trinidad poets, also replied to Roach, whose stand identified him as a person of his generation – he was born in the second decade of the twentieth century.

The debate continued when Roach committed suicide a year or two later and Wayne Browne in a poem condemned me and all the others who, he said, had driven Roach out and caused him to kill himself, of now hypocritically eulogising him. Wayne Browne called us “carrion”.⁶⁹ I replied to him in “A Carrion Time”. My essays are available in “My Strangled City and Other Essays”, whose title essay, “My Strangled City”

⁶⁷ “A continuum exists between a living oral tradition, and a growing scribal one in the West Indies. It relates to the continuum which exists between the various West Indian Creoles and Standard West Indian English. Most West Indian writers seem to enter this continuum at several points. Selvon, for example, bridges the gap between oral and scribal traditions. [...] From the very start of her career as an artist in the late 1930’s Louise Bennett decide to work in dialect [...] Her argument was that dialect and an oral tradition have provided the very basis of English Literature itself: that part of the process of self-acceptance was acceptance of one’s most intimate language.” Rohlehr, Gordon. “Literature and the Folk” (1971) *My Strangled City and Other Essays*. *Cit.* 68-9.

⁶⁸ Rohlehr, Gordon. “West Indian Poetry: Some Problems of Assessment. Part One.” (1972) *BIM* 14.54 (Jan.-June 1972): 80-88 and “West Indian Poetry: Some Problems of Assessment. Part Two.” (1972) *BIM* 14.55 (July-Dec. 1972): 134-144.

⁶⁹ What Rohlehr remarks here is Wayne Brown’s poem “Quinam Bay”, in which he wrote “Roach gone, the carrion / that drove him, hurt hawk, from the echoing ait / with their hunger for bloodbath, their shriek caws / of treachery, / shriek with excitement. / Dead, and to them he is Hero. / Carrion like them dead.” Brown, Wayne. *Voyages*. Port of Spain, Trinidad: Inprint Caribbean Ltd, 1989. 90.

was, I think, viewed by Kamau Brathwaite as an extension of the Savacou debate. It might have been, though it was written as the afterword of an intended anthology of Trinidad poetry written between 1965 and 1975.

The ‘debate’ fizzled out, though the issues that had emerged out of it could be seen in things like the Walcott versus Brathwaite controversy, which abated somewhat after the publication in 1981 of my *Pathfinder: Black Awakening in the Arrivants of Edward Kamau Brathwaite*. My “The Problem of the Problem of Form” may also have extended the debate. Other essays relevant to the debate are mentioned in *My Strangled City* “West Indian Poetry: Some Problems of Assessment” as well as my introduction to *Voiceprint* (See *The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays* (1992)).⁷⁰

Prof. Rohlehr’s words indicate that – as he said to me – a “terrible quarrel” was going on, the so-called “Savacou debate”,⁷¹ which was a literary quarrel in which poets and scholars had been questioning the role of language in literature, whether Creoles could be used in poetry, and whether orality could be legitimized to enter even more and under more specific forms the domain of the written verse. Also the issue of “Blackness” and “Africanity” gained relevance in the ‘70s, thanks to the Black Power Movement and a new awareness which writers gained; surely, in the Caribbean, Brathwaite was one of the major promoters of this and his experience in Ghana was definitely something which pushed him to think of Caribbean literature under a different aesthetic lens than the one used till then.

Differently from Rohlehr, Wayne Brown’s point of view on the Savacou debate in a sense reduces it to a promotion of Africanness on the spur of the ‘60s-‘70s Black Power Movement. The predominant role Brown gives to craft in poetry and also his linguistic predilection for SE over Creole, positions him in a totally different perspective.⁷² Wayne Brown’s view on it was the following:

⁷⁰ Rohlehr, Gordon. Personal communication with the author. E-mail. 22 Oct. 2008. Cf. also “Eric Roach, for example, reviewed *Savacou* ¾ in *Trinidad Guardian*. Restricting his commentary to an examination of some of the poetry, Mr. Roach described his criteria for determining what was art, and what was good and bad poetry. In so doing, he joined a sharp debate which is going on about aesthetics, tradition, literary criticism and sensibility in the West Indies.” Rohlehr, Gordon. “West Indian Poetry: Some Problems of Assessment.” (1971) *My Strangled City and Other Essays*. Cit. 109.

⁷¹ “the Caribbean in the end is a small region and in that respect there is no cultural unity, but in some instances a dialogue that exists among writers, sometimes a writer might write fully aware that he is maybe answering another writer without actually saying so, but you write with the consciousness of your fellow writers, whether you consciously answer them or not, some form of dialogue is taking place. At times the dialogue among writers takes the form of a terrible quarrel, and that’s what happened in the ‘70s, where, I think, writers were faced with the challenge of Blackness, “Africanity”, since we all come from societies in which the notion of Africa was perched out, since that is how existed in most of the educational systems in the sense that the idea of Africa was dead, even if you looked like an African, you had no consciousness of Africa, now that was challenged mainly by a poet like Kamau Brathwaite, it was challenged also by anthropologists in the ‘40, ‘60s, ‘70s.” Interview with Prof. Gordon Rohlehr. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁷² My scholarly compunction is just aimed at showing how different positions could have contributed and influenced an aesthetic debate in West Indian literature, and not at all at unearthing old resentment between the people involved in it, but I believe that these exchanges of views give an idea of how important is an aesthetic debate in the Caribbean, where Caribbean poets and scholars position themselves, and what directions it is likely to take nowadays.

What you call the Savacou “debate” was basically a spasm of mimicry spawned by the US Black Power movement of the late 60s: an attempt by some UWI academics to promote, in poetry, then-fashionable Black Power ideals imported from the US and having to do with the “African-ness” of the Caribbean, the “beauty” of blackness, the supposed moral superiority of “the folk culture” over the bourgeois culture, and the various island dialects or “nation languages” over standard English. Since these were ideological prescriptions that ignored the quality of the poetry itself, a lot of clichéd junk was written in their name, and in due course the movement subsided, along with the US Black Power movement it derived from.

By the end of the 70s the quality of the poetry had reasserted itself as the dominant consideration, Savacou’s “hero” Edward Brathwaite (now with his “African” name, Kamau) had migrated to New York, and Savacou’s main target, Derek Walcott, was well on his way to winning the Nobel Prize. Jamaica’s leading poets from the 70s to the 2000s, Denis Scott, Tony McNeill, Edward Baugh, Mervyn Morris, Ralph Thompson, Lorna Goodison, Delores Gauntlett, Gwyneth Barber-Wood, all wrote/are writing almost entirely in standard English. A few proponents of the Savacou ideology are still around, Carolyn Cooper in Jamaica, eg, but my sense is that “the Savacou debate” has disappeared into the dustbin of literary history, where it belongs (except when excavated by earnest scholar-historians like yourself).⁷³

In the “Afterthought” (1971) which followed his important essay “West Indian Poetry: Some Problems of Assessment”, Rohlehr underlined something which is essential for a criticism of the Caribbean contemporary poets, and that is why I try to accurately contextualize the poems and their authors in their creative context. That is why I believed – and still do – that living in the Caribbean for a while, listening to people speak, trying to understand why some social issues are more relevant than others were fundamental to me, in fact Rohlehr said: “one will have to study the Caribbean people and to listen to them, before one can learn to make important or relevant critical statements on the new writers. The critic’s business is first to understand the contexts out of which the work that he is examining grows.”⁷⁴ Similarly, Rohlehr observed two years later, in his 1973 essay “A Carrion time” that, according to the Trinidadian poet Wayne Brown “far worse than the poet whose work is directly related to politics must be the critic who ventures to relate aesthetics to society”.⁷⁵

Now, having followed a seminar on poetry – under the aspect of a creative writing course – with Wayne Brown himself in Kingston, Jamaica, I personally agree with Brown’s statement. In his lessons, in philosophical terms, the agnostic poet Wayne Brown would identify himself as closer to

⁷³ Personal communication with Mr. Wayne Brown. E-mail. 9 Nov. 2008.

⁷⁴ Rohlehr, Gordon. “Afterthought.” (1971) *My Strangled City and Other Essays*. *Cit.* 141.

⁷⁵ Rohlehr, Gordon. “A Carrion Time.” (1973) *Ibid.* 155.

Hegel's thought, and he would underline that in the creation of a poetic piece of writing the poet has to work hard on the craft, he has to mould the poetic material as an unshaped piece of clay, but in order to do that, he has firstly to know the subject he is dealing with, he has to start from the tradition and then take his or her own way to give voice to the personal poetic sensibility. In his workshops Brown used to repeat one of the Jamaican poet Anthony McNeill's favourite metaphors: a poet is like a ballet dancer, he/she has to exercise at a bar every day before moving to free verse, he/she has to move away from the classics. As regards the concept of imitation, Aristotle said in *Poetics* that mimesis, imitation, is natural and is a good thing; differently, Plato thought imitation a bad thing. During the centuries, the concept has evolved to reach the post-modern concept according to which 'art imitating art' leads to 'art imitating life'. Art was considered imitation or representation (Aristotle, Plato) or expression of emotions (according to the Romantics), but if we were to consider it as imitation, would it contain knowledge or truth? Derek Walcott tackled this question in his essay *Culture or Mimicry*: in his younger years he imitated Dylan Thomas, but the aim of this poetic imitation was to take inspiration from good models and imitate them to develop his own work, only after mastering the tradition could he produce a private aesthetics, unique to the Caribbean context.

In the same essay, "A Carrion time", Rohlehr said that Brown himself had tried to identify a Caribbean socio-aesthetics. The aesthetic field is a broad field of investigation, the philosophy of arts is a small branch of it, and literature is an even smaller sub-area of art. Brown's concerns about contemporary Caribbean literature regard what is good or bad literature and he was convinced that only good literature should affect people, so his concerns were related to the theory of art, or an evaluation of art, that is about what is good or bad in literature, and what kind of aesthetic standards one has to adopt in literature. Even before the slogan "black is beautiful", the Jamaican Marcus Garvey theorized a lot on black aesthetics, sustaining "I'll teach the Blackman to see beauty in himself", and writing poems on the arts, being convinced of the chief role of literature in Caribbean arts as a part of the whole liberation process.

In "A Carrion Time" – which is, as Rohlehr remembered, his own response to Brown's view – Rohlehr also pointed out that Kamau Brathwaite in his 1971 essay "Art and Society" identified three types of artists: one who, embodying a cultural tradition, becomes a sort of "social psyche", another who is a kind of "mediator" between the self and the society, and a third one who often speaks with a political intent for the society.⁷⁶ Brathwaite, according to Rohlehr, was a real cultural

⁷⁶ "The artist thus has to be "elaborately and expensively trained in the graces of the inheritance." [...] The artist here becomes not *isolato*, but moderator, mediator, and medium, bridging the gap between psyche and society, and between the élite and the folk. [...] There is a third type of writer who sees his role as being purely social, and whose writing grows out of direct, and often disastrous contact with politics." *Ibid.* 154.

inspiration for a younger generation of poets, in terms of his use of language, as well as in terms of poetic sensibility:

The very next year [1967, NbR] was to see the publication of Brathwaite's *Rights of Passage*, and the next two [1968 and 1969, NbR] that of *Masks and Islands*. Right away, a number of the younger poets, Questel, Gonzalez, McTair, Calliste and later Malik recognised in Brathwaite a careful and accomplished craftsman [...] They were attracted to quite different elements in Brathwaite: Questel to his skill at punning and association of related word-sounds, Malik to his ability to build on basic oral models such as the call-and-response pattern, the sermon, the refrain; Calliste to the theme of Africa; Gonzalez to his use of dissonance and discord to create the verbal equivalent to Jazz.⁷⁷

The aesthetic continuity and heterogeneity among poets, and both linguistic and poetic forms – which in a sense could be typical of a polyvalent music genre like jazz – made Rohlehr comment about the work of the Guyanese writer – who began his career as a poet – Wilson Harris: “As the work of Harris has already illustrated, Eastern and Western-based aesthetics are by no means mutually exclusive of each other – least of all in the Caribbean where they are most likely to intersect invisibly.”⁷⁸ This combination of polarities and the overcoming of these opposite poles as East-West or even Black-White⁷⁹ in Caribbean aesthetic terms would be confirmed by Harris himself, when seven years later he would have written about the “fabric of imagination”.⁸⁰ Harris underlined the importance of heterogeneity, cross-fertilization of cultures, otherness, which are constitutive features of a Caribbean aesthetics.

The seminal essay Brathwaite published in 1977 in *BIM* included two parts, “The Love Axe/1: (Developing a Caribbean Aesthetic 1962-1974). Part One.” and “The Love Axe/L: (Developing a Caribbean Aesthetic 1962-1974). Part Two”. Quite interestingly it referred to an event that happened at the beginning of the decade in 1970 in Jamaica at the Mona Campus, where personalities like Derek Walcott and Brathwaite himself were present, and where some students occupied the centre of Creative Arts to ask for a West-indianization of culture. In the words of Brathwaite:

⁷⁷ Rohlehr, Gordon. “My Strangled City.” (1976) *My Strangled City and Other Essays*. *Cit.* 177.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 262.

⁷⁹ “if one of the lessons learned from the sixties and the seventies has been the danger of dividing Caribbean sensibility along the false meridian of Black and White, it is equally limiting to divide it along the even more perilous lines of art and polemic, scribal and oral poetry, private and public statement. All our writers have embraced both poles of style and statement. If this has made our writing restless and ambivalent, it has also kept it new and alive.” *Ibid.* 263.

⁸⁰ Harris, Wilson. *The Womb of Space*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983. xviii.

The crunch came when in February, 1970, the Creative Arts Centre was occupied by a group of students demanding the West-indianization of the cultural events at the Centre and greater student participation in and control of its administration. [...] The occupation is crucial since it testified to the beginning of our post-colonial definition, or aesthetics.⁸¹

Brathwaite goes on pointing out that at UWI in Jamaica in that period there were many creative personalities who contributed to the formation of a West Indian socio-aesthetics: “this was the Renaissance period of the University with names and talents like Derek Walcott, Rex Nettleford, Slade Hopkinson, Garth St. Omer, Erroll Hill, Mary Brathwaite, Carol Dawes, Barbara and Ancille Gloudon, Stan Irons, Archie Hudson-Phillips – and all these on a campus of only 200.”⁸²

In the same year, 1977, an anthology of Antillean poetry was also published by the Guadeloupean writer Maryse Condé. In the general context of my thesis I think it is important to underline a couple of points she makes in the introduction, for it highlights the necessity of an aesthetics related to the society, a socio-aesthetics, and also that in looking for a Caribbean aesthetics one should try to avoid the stereotypes linked to exoticism and derivativeness:

- 1) the evolution of poetry is inextricably linked with the evolution of society, thus a socio-aesthetic theory of the evolution of Caribbean poetry could be eventually traced;⁸³ and consequently an emergence of the historic dependency from the “mother-countries” or the formerly colonising countries could have contributed to create a new and original aesthetics;
- 2) the poetry which was written in the French colonies was not “true” poetry, but a fictitious, “exoticised” version for tourists: “Suzanne Césaire écrit à leur sujet dans la revue *Tropiques* qui naîtra des années plus tard en 1941: « *Littérature de hamac. Littérature de sucre et de vanille. Tourisme littéraire...Allons, la vraie poésie est ailleurs. Loin des rimes, des plaintes, des alizés, des perroquets. Bambou, nous décrétons la mort à la littérature doudou. Et zut à l’hybiscus, à la frangipane, aux bougainvillées.* »”⁸⁴

It was only in 1979 that both the Guyanese Martin Carter and Rohlehr spoke of the figure and the role of the artist in a Caribbean socio-aesthetic context. Carter argued that the artist in Guyana is a producer of “negative productivity”, because he does not have the necessary “satisfaction and fulfilment” which have to do with “self-consciousness”. This is why Carter described the

⁸¹ Brathwaite, E.K. “The Love Axe/1: (Developing a Caribbean Aesthetic 1962-1974). Part One.” (1977) *BIM* 16.61 (June 1977) : 60.

⁸² *Ibid.* 61.

⁸³ “L’histoire de la poésie antillaise suit étroitement celle de l’évolution de la société.” Condé, Maryse, ed. *La Poésie Antillaise*. Paris: Editions Fernand Nathan, 1977. 4.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* 5.

displacement of the artist, as an entity out of context and outside the positive productivity of a society.⁸⁵

As a reaction to Martin Carter's words, Rohlehr wrote in his 1979 essay "Articulating a Caribbean Aesthetic: The Revolution of Self-Perception":

The "revolution of self-perception" really began with the inner resistance of the slaves to the self imposed on them by the plantation system and slavery. In its most fundamental form it was the refusal to be a thing, an object, a tool, mere chattel: the *negation of a process of reification*. The positive aspect of this revolution involved *the constant affirmation of the validity of the submerged self*, the self – to borrow Edward Kamau Brathwaite's phrase – in maroonage; the marooned, submerged and often subversive self. This *self-in-maroonage* was affirmed in infinite ways.⁸⁶

Rohlehr structured this seminal article by dividing it into three crucial phases: 1920-1950: "The literature of this period was being accompanied by serious inquiry into the roots and heritage of the people of the African diaspora. [...] The creative sensibility of the period was largely divorced from the creative thought of the period."⁸⁷ 1950-1960: "Afro-Caribbean folklore, religions, folkways, folktales, rhetoric and patterns of performance suddenly became 'visible', and we find Edward Brathwaite in an early essay 'Sir Galahad and The Islands' (*BIM*, 1957) suggesting that in these discoveries lay the basis for a new and alternative aesthetic."⁸⁸ and 1960 to the "present" (1979): "Just as Naipaul is able to deny the validity of the inner self-in-maroonage, Walcott is, in 'The Muse of History' able to reject all the manifestations of this inner self – the drums, music style, rhetoric, religion, symbolism, etc. – as the basis for a new aesthetic."⁸⁹ In this article, then, Rohlehr pointed out that what led to an aesthetic debate and to the Savacou debate was already in the air from the 1920s onward, with the attention given to orality and folklore by poets like Claude McKay or Louise Bennett.

To conclude the analysis of this decade, I would like to consider the German philosopher and social critic Theodor W. Adorno's *Aesthetic Theory*, that he wrote in 1970 and which was published posthumously in 1975. In it not only did he expose his ideas on the linguistic aspect of the work of art,

⁸⁵ Carter, Martin. "The Location of the Artist." (1979) *University of Hunger*. *Cit.* 232-4.

⁸⁶ Rohlehr, Gordon. "Articulating a Caribbean Aesthetic: The Revolution of Self-Perception." (1979) *My Strangled City and Other Essays*. *Cit.* 1-2.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.* 4-6.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 7.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 9.

The linguistic quality of art gives rise to the query of what exactly it is that art says. Linguisticity is the true subject of art, producer and recipient being false subjects. [...] True poetic subjectivity is by no means the grammatical 'I' that speaks in the poem. [...] the empirical subject is a function of the spiritual one, not vice versa.⁹⁰

but he also mentioned the importance of the social circumstances in which to insert the work of art, where art finds its appropriate environment to be expressed and created, and that is why poetry is the result of, even though being expressed by an 'I', a collective 'we':

Even without being conscious of society, the labour that goes on in the art work through the medium of the individual is social labour. The intervention of the individual subject as such is a residual component needed only to bring about the crystallization of the work of art. [...] It is through this direct participation in communicative language that all poetic writing is related to a collective 'We'. That linguistic quality is peculiar to poetic works, and they obtain it by sacrificing ordinary communicative language which is extraneous to art.⁹¹

1980s: The "federating"⁹² role of West Indian poets

Maryse Condé recognised in Édouard Glissant one of the foremost critical and literary personalities of the Francophone – and more generally of the whole – Caribbean.⁹³ In 1981 Glissant published a massive theoretical work entitled *Le Discours Antillais*, in which he exposed his theories on a Caribbean poetics and, in a sense, on an aesthetic dimension of the history, the

⁹⁰ "Il carattere linguistico dell'arte porta a riflettere su che cosa parli dell'arte; ciò che parla, è propriamente il suo soggetto mentre non lo sono né chi la produce né chi la recepisce. [...] Ma la soggettività non è affatto identica con l'io che parla dalla poesia. [...] l'io empirico è funzione di quello spirituale, non viceversa." Adorno, Theodor W. *Teoria Estetica*. Ed. Enrico De Angelis. Torino: Einaudi, 1975. Or. title *Ästhetische Theorie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1970. 237. The English translation was taken from Adorno, T. W. *Aesthetic Theory*. Trans. C. Lenhardt. Eds. Gretel Adorno, Rolf Tiedemann. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984. 239. http://books.google.it/books?id=gew9AAAAIAAJ&pg=PA239&lpg=PA239&dq=adorno+The+linguistic+character+of+the+work+of+art&source=bl&ots=Ms-77vtFuI&sig=JHSP40ihHQenkmbNj53KU_nJX20&hl=it&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result.

⁹¹ "Il lavoro dedicato all'opera d'arte è lavoro sociale che passa attraverso l'individuo, senza che l'individuo debba in tale operazione essere conscio della società; forse è tanto più lavoro sociale quanto meno conscio né è l'individuo. Il singolo soggetto umano che ogni volta interviene non è quasi niente di più che un valore limite, un minimo di cui l'opera d'arte ha bisogno per cristallizzarsi. [...] Le poesie, per la loro immediata partecipazione al linguaggio comunicativo, del quale nessuna si libera totalmente, hanno riferimento ad un noi; per amore della loro propria linguisticità devono darsi da fare per liberarsi della linguisticità a loro esterna, comunicante." *Ibid.* 238. The English translation was taken from *Ibid.* 239-240.

⁹² Aiyejina, Funso. "Derek Walcott: The Poet as a Federated Consciousness." *World Literature Written in English (WLWE)* 27.1 (Spring 1987): 78.

⁹³ "L'Antillanité a principalement pour théoricien le poète-romancier Edouard Glissant.[...] Le rôle du poète, de l'écrivain plus généralement, est de travailler à la guérison de sa communauté d'abord en analysant soigneusement les causes de ce mal, puis en tentant de proposer des solutions. [...] L'Antillanité naîtra après la Libération des Antilles, ou si l'on préfère la fin de la dépendance culturelle et politique dans laquelle elles se trouvent." Condé, Maryse, ed. *La Poésie Antillaise*. *Cit.* 70-1.

civilization, the literature, and the societies of the Caribbean, starting from his native Martinique. What interests me are the comments Glissant made on the Anglophone Caribbean poets and writers, especially Brathwaite and Walcott, but also Naipaul and Lamming, because he identified in their different *modi operandi* a unifying element, which in the end converges with other Caribbean literary traditions, like the Francophone, the Hispanophone, and – as Glissant points out – the Creole (which I would not separate from the others). Speaking of the 1976 Carifesta which took place in Kingston, Jamaica, Glissant mentioned Prof. Edward Baugh's « The West Indian Writer and his Quarrel with History » and in an explicative footnote he wrote:

Communication au colloque de la Carifesta (Kingston, Jamaïque, 1976). La problématique culturelle et littéraire dans les Antilles anglophones tourne principalement autour de tels concepts. L'historien comme poète (à propos de Brathwaite), le romancier comme historien (à propos de Naipaul), l'histoire comme projet (à propos de Lamming): l'énoncé du thème est permanent. Les rencontres entre les littératures antillaises (anglophone, francophone, hispanophone, créole) ne proviennent pas d'une décision des producteurs de texte; ce sont les effets encore camouflés d'une même mouvement historique, d'une même appartenance culturelle.⁹⁴

It is in fact from a 'camouflage' of the historical processes that a unique blending of elements came out of the Caribbean literary production, and this could help us identify a common socio-aesthetics. A 'camouflage' is a stratagem to conceal, to disguise. Glissant seems to sustain that Caribbean history disguised itself undercover and that it is what really unites the whole chain of islands and territories, like a subterranean vital sap nourishing the vitality of the literature. And in saying this he referred to Brathwaite's statement that "The unity is submarine":

Mais nos histoires diversifiées dans la Caraïbe produisent aujourd'hui un autre dévoilement: celui de leur convergence souterraine. [...] Le poète et historien Brathwaite, dressant dans la revue Savacou un récapitulatif des travaux effectués dans la Caraïbe sur notre histoire [...] résume la troisième et dernière partie de son étude en cette seule phrase: « *The unity is submarine.* »⁹⁵

As much as Brathwaite, Glissant considered Walcott's involvement with the history hidden under the sea, and returning again and again in his poetics: "Et Derek Walcott, dans son tout dernier recueil de poèmes: «History is Sea»".⁹⁶ It is interesting to underline also the association Glissant made between the work of Brathwaite and that of other poets from different parts of the Caribbean,

⁹⁴ Glissant, Édouard. *Le Discours Antillais*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981. 222.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* 230.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* Note 1 at the bottom of page 278. Here Glissant is probably referring to "The Sea is History" in the 1979 collection *The Star-Apple Kingdom*.

like the Guyanese Léon Gontran Damas (born in Cayenne, Guyane Française) or the Cuban poet Nicolás Guillén.⁹⁷

The importance Brathwaite has always given to the rhythm of a language emerges from his 1977 essay “Love Axe: Developing a Caribbean Aesthetics”, in which he claimed “my own aesthetic formulation for ourselves begins with rhythm: survival rhythm, emancipation rhythm, transfiguration rhythm”.⁹⁸ It was exactly out of this context that he gave a lecture in 1979 at Harvard University, later revised and published as *History of the Voice* in 1984, a lecture in which he developed the notion of a “nation language” and discussed about a Caribbean poetics and aesthetics. Glissant, in the extract quoted above, was associating poets from different territories of the Caribbean, whose mother tongues are English, French, and Spanish, yet he put them side by side in such a natural way that it is difficult not to agree with him when he speaks of the similarities in the oral production of their poetry: they always draw on history. He nevertheless highlighted the oral components of their poetry, where “L’écrit s’oralise”. This appeared also in his essay “Natural Poetics, Forced Poetics”, in which Glissant established the same fundamental point: poets from different areas of the region can be compared, for they approach one other’s work in a harmonic blending, even though taking into account the intrinsic differences, where the ‘artist’ – as seen by Martin Carter – assumes a role, and inversely from what Carter said in 1979, becomes a catalyst of positive energy, of ‘productivity’, a “reactivator of memory” in Glissantian terms, a “mediator” as Rohlehr would say:

La parole de l’artiste antillais ne provient donc pas de l’obsession de chanter son être intime ; cet intime est inséparable du devenir de la communauté. [...] l’artiste devient un réactif. C’est pourquoi il est à lui-même un ethnologue, un historien, un linguiste, un peintre de fresques, un architecte. L’art ne connaît pas ici la division des genres.⁹⁹

The connection between Glissant and Brathwaite finds another link in *History of the Voice*, when Brathwaite recalled Édouard Glissant’s definition of *nation language*: “it is the language of enslaved persons. For him, *nation language* is a strategy: the slave is forced to use a certain kind

⁹⁷ “ (...Des poètes anglophones comme Brathwaite [Barbade] ou Walcott [Sainte-Lucie] tentent peut-être de conjurer [la *drum-poetry*] cette opposition. Là où j’ai l’impression que Brathwaite reprend trente ans plus tard le discours d’Aimé Césaire, en réalité il lui confère une assise nouvelle: la concrétisation et la variété du vécu. Brathwaite rejoint non pas tant la poétique de Césaire que les rythmes cassés de Nicolás Guillén ou de Léon Gontran Damas. L’écrit s’oralise. La «littérature» récupère de la sorte un «réel» qui semblait la contraindre et la limiter. Le discours antillais s’articule tout autant sur l’éclat du cri originel que par la patience du paysage reconnu que par l’imposition des rythmes vécus.)” Glissant, Édouard. Le Discours Antillais. *Cit.* 347.

⁹⁸ Brathwaite, E.K. “The Love Axe/1: (Developing a Caribbean Aesthetic 1962-1974). Part One.” (1977) *Cit.* 65.

⁹⁹ Glissant, Édouard. Le Discours Antillais. *Cit.* 759.

of language in order to disguise himself, to disguise his personality and to retain his culture. And he defines that language as ‘forced poetics’ because it is a kind of prison language.”¹⁰⁰

The translation that Michael Dash did of *Le Discours Antillais* is quite interesting. He underlined the “deconstructionist” and “metamorphic” nature of Glissant as a writer and as a theoretician,¹⁰¹ but also stressed his search into the literary and historic guts of a Caribbean sensibility to come out with his aesthetic considerations.¹⁰² “In this tangle of new forms, this verbal carnality, Glissant visualizes the poetics of *Antillanité*. This idea stands in clear opposition to the longing for the virtues of clarity and the disincarnate aesthetic of those who wished to suppress the cross-cultural imagination.”¹⁰³ Dash compared Glissant to an Orpheus-like being capable, again, to dive into the submarine Caribbean – which could metaphorically be compared to a social unconscious – and sending out a music which embraces the aesthetic essence of the literature of the region.¹⁰⁴ The figure of Orpheus fits particularly, especially because it expresses a non-violent force, a purely musical and aesthetic force “teaching us to love the Other”; as Mauro Buccheri put it:

an Orphic Jesus or a Christian Orpheus that embodies symbolically the power of non-violence and sweetness, a figure in which “religion [...], aesthetics and ethics converge” if not to overcome at least to reduce violence, regenerate the power of the arts and sciences, and teach us “love for Nature, the Other, even the inanimate other”.¹⁰⁵

The same basic concept of cross-culturalization and cross-fertilization of cultures was expressed in 1983 by the Guyanese Wilson Harris, whose thought was much more influenced by the world of science, by the theories of quantum physics and mechanics, and whose conception was already *in nuce* in his seminal “The Womb of Space” (1983):

It is necessary to make clear within the fabric of imaginative exploration we shall pursue that homogeneity is a biological hypothesis that relates all mankind to a basic or primordial ancestor [...] The paradox of cultural

¹⁰⁰ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. *History of the Voice, The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*. London; Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1984. 16.

¹⁰¹ Glissant, Édouard. *Caribbean Discourse. Selected Essays*. Trans. and ed. J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1989. xii.

¹⁰² “Aesthetically, he had started his examination of the specificities of a Caribbean sensibility.” *Ibid.* xv.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* xliii.

¹⁰⁴ “The capacity of the writer to descend, like Orpheus, into the underworld of the collective unconscious and to emerge with a song that can reanimate the petrified world has a shaping force on Glissant’s conception of artistic activity.” *Ibid.* xiv.

¹⁰⁵ Buccheri, Mauro. “The Return of Orpheus, or the Persistence of Literature and Myth.” Eds. Mauro Buccheri, Elio Costa, and Donald Holoch. *The Power of Words. Literature and Society in Late Modernity*. Ravenna: Longo Editore, 2005. 14.

heterogeneity, or cross-cultural capacity, lies in the evolutionary thrust it restores to orders of the imagination, the ceaseless dialogue it inserts between hardened conventions and eclipsed or half-eclipsed otherness, within an intuitive self that moves endlessly into flexible patterns, arcs or bridges of community.¹⁰⁶

That same “fabric of the imagination” became the title of a 1990 essay by Harris, in which the threads of literary imagination constitute the trestle of a hypothetical socio-aesthetic: “I could *not* describe what I saw within a story-line frame that reduced nature to a passive absolute. [...] There are all sorts of connections and those are quantum connections. Quantum mechanics and physics would embrace those connections.”¹⁰⁷

The interconnections between literary systems and the totality of meaning and participation in the oral tradition and in Creole poetry are imbued with the totality of their different components, whose importance Brathwaite underlined in his *History of the Voice*:

We in the Caribbean have a similar kind of plurality: we have English, which is the imposed language on much of the archipelago [...] We also have what we call creole English, which is a mixture of English and an adaptation that English took in the new environment of the Caribbean when it became mixed with the other imported languages. We have also what is called *nation language*, which is the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and labourers, the servants who were brought in by the conquistadors. Finally, we have the remnants of ancestral language still persisting in the Caribbean (Amerindian, Hindi, Chinese, survival of African languages).¹⁰⁸

All this plurality of forms and heritage led Rohlehr to make some considerations about the nature of the West Indian writer, his stylistic development and achievement and his potential role in a continuum theory.¹⁰⁹ In fact he argued in his 1985 essay “The Problem of the Problem of Form. The Idea of an Aesthetic Continuum and Aesthetic Code-switching in West Indian Literature” that:

¹⁰⁶ Harris, Wilson. *The Womb of Space*. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983. xviii.

¹⁰⁷ Harris, Wilson. “The Fabric of the Imagination.” (1990) *The Radical Imagination: Lectures and Talks*. Eds. Alan Riach and Mark Williams. Liège: Université de Liège, 1992. 72.

¹⁰⁸ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. *History of the Voice*. *Cit.* 5-6. Mervyn Morris explained his considerations as follows in a 1997 essay: “In the 1990s we take it for granted that some of the work we prescribe will have been written in Creole. I do not myself say ‘nation language’ because it seems to me that by the end of Kamau Brathwaite’s *History of the Voice* the term is taken to mean, not what we used to call ‘dialect’ but, the whole range of West Indian language, including standard English with a regional accent. The language continuum of West Indian literature ranges between our West Indian standard English and our Caribbean Creoles. [...] What I am calling Creole is what we used to call dialect, or patois. A creole is a language; a dialect is a form of a language; a patois is a low-status dialect.” Morris, Mervyn. “Making West Indian Literature.” (1997) *Making West Indian Literature*. Kingston; Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005. 3.

¹⁰⁹ “One would naturally expect from such multi-disciplinarians a sense of form based not on the notion of a specificity of genre or aesthetic, but on the inter-relationship of various art forms, aesthetics and areas of interest.”

Form involves a number of factors. Firstly, there's the writer's intelligence, temperament and sensibility. Secondly there is the material, the *stuff* on which that sensibility nurtures or famishes itself. [...] Thirdly, there's the writer's imagination which shapes experience by means of processes which may be arbitrary, intangible and unpremeditated. [...] Our problem is complicated by the fact that some of our writers have been productive for over three decades and have, naturally, undergone several changes of style and developed very complicated notions of aesthetic.¹¹⁰

His notion of aesthetics derived from of a Modernist idea of aesthetics,¹¹¹ enriched with the concepts of an "aesthetics of silence", an "aesthetics of energy", of the "minuet", of the "closed system".¹¹² In linguistic terms, Rohlehr outlined his aesthetic ideas in a *linguistic continuum*, underlining its importance in the delineation of the aesthetic issue.¹¹³

The importance of orality would strongly be expressed through the anthology *Voiceprint*, in whose introduction Rohlehr wrote that "After the appearance of *The Arrivants*, the terms of the aesthetic debate had to change."¹¹⁴ And he was referring in particular to the plurality of shapes that the poetic voice can take.¹¹⁵ In the following extract he would speak also of the importance of a *linguistic continuum* in Caribbean poetry, which greatly contributes to the formation of an aesthetics:

It is only since the 1970's that the term "oral tradition" began to be consistently used in connection with certain developments in West Indian poetry. Before that decade, the debate concerned the viability of "dialect" as a medium for poetry, and was an extension of the troubled issue of the nexus between education, speech, class, status and power. [...] One useful concept, however, did emerge, which influenced the direction of literary

Rohlehr, Gordon. "The Problem of the Problem of Form. The Idea of an Aesthetic Continuum and Aesthetic Code-switching in West Indian Literature." (1985) The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays. Port of Spain, Trinidad: Longman Trinidad Limited. 1992. 2.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.* 1.

¹¹¹ "The idea [...] is that of an aesthetic continuum stretching between forms derived from an oral paradigm, and forms suggested by various aspects of Modernist aesthetics." *Ibid.* 60.

¹¹² "Any aesthetic based on the oral tradition seeks naturally to address itself to these considerations: energy, containment, catharsis." *Ibid.* 5.

¹¹³ "Continuum theory thus applied allows for both linguistic and aesthetic code-switching; for the dialectical collision of opposite tendencies and notions of form in the same writer and between different writers. Continuum theory employed as a tool for clarifying the problem of the problem of form, points us to two poles which have guided our writers in the achievement of shape: the oral traditions of the West Indies and certain aspects of the aesthetics of modernism." Rohlehr, Gordon. "The Problem of the Problem of Form. The Idea of an Aesthetic Continuum and Aesthetic Code-switching in West Indian Literature." (1985) The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays. *Cit.* 3.

¹¹⁴ Rohlehr, Gordon. "The Shape of That Hurt: An Introduction to *Voiceprint*." (1989) The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays. *Cit.* 165.

¹¹⁵ Cf. my interview with Prof. Gordon Rohlehr. Appendix A in this thesis.

criticism: that of a continuum stretching between Creole and Standard English.¹¹⁶

Regarding this use of language, also Prof. Funso Aiyejina observed that “Walcott performs a balancing/federating act in his use of patois/dialect”,¹¹⁷ and this could suggest at an aesthetic level that Creole may have indeed a “federating consciousness”. It could be one unifying medium employed by poets to look at contemporary West Indian poetry.

In 1983 Salman Rushdie had interestingly observed something about the use of the English language by the formerly colonized people, in fact he had stated:

I don't think it is always necessary to take up the anti-colonial—or is it post-colonial?—cudgels against English. What seems to me to be happening is that those peoples who were once colonized by the language are now rapidly remaking it, domesticating it, becoming more and more relaxed about the way they use it—assisted by the English language's enormous flexibility and size, they are carving out large territories for themselves within its frontiers.¹¹⁸

Thus, at this point of my overview and analysis, if we had to conceive the aesthetics of Caribbean poetry in terms of its relation to pleasure, and if, then, the socio-cultural implications on it would have a prominent role in the definition of an aesthetic itself, we would agree in saying that the role of reception has its part in it and also that the combination of scribality and orality in contemporary Caribbean poetry finds their way of fusing and melting, that in so doing they manage to melt the whole system of cultures which cohabitates in the region. As we know from the Structuralist thought and from Antonio Benitez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island*, a written text is just a 'pre-text', for it will become a 'text' only in the reciprocal binomial relationship with a reader, when either it will be absorbed and shared, or it will be rejected and neglected by a reader. To support these achievements, I would like to quote two extracts, one taken from the studies on poetics by Derek Attridge in an essay dedicated to Roman Jakobson:

how might we follow through the implication, suppressed in Jakobson, that readers are active in determining what is poetry and what is not? We would need some account of the role of ideology, of gender, of institutional practices, perhaps of the unconscious; [...] Upon these foundations we might

¹¹⁶ Rohlehr, Gordon. “The Shape of That Hurt: An Introduction to *Voiceprint*.” (1989) *Ibid*. 164.

¹¹⁷ Aiyejina, Funso. “Derek Walcott: The Poet as a Federated Consciousness.” *Cit*. 78.

¹¹⁸ Rushdie, Salman. “Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist.” (1983) *Imaginary Homelands. Essays and Criticism 1981-1991*. London: Granta Books, 1991. 64.

attempt to build a theory of pleasure [...] in its relation to the phenomenon of poetry.¹¹⁹

These words underline the importance of readership, of reception, of the ideology which poetry expresses and which might contribute to determine a socio-aesthetics. The other extract is taken from the linguist H.G. Widdowson, who affirmed that the content and the form of a poem are important as much as orality is an integral part of poetry and it contributes to its significance:

the manner in which the language of the poem is fashioned into spatial shape represents a contradiction which is resolved in its very expression: the fragmentation and the discontinuities are fused and unified in another order of significance. The difference between these two modes of arrangement leads to a deferring of expectation and so realises in a particularly significant way the Derrida concept of *difference*.¹²⁰

The concepts of cross-fertilization of cultures, of ‘pepperpot of cultures’ – as the New Zealander Gordon Collier put it –, of Derridean *difference*, are all summarised in an original theoretical framework, where many different post-modernist philosophical theories and post-structuralist achievements find their confluence: in Antonio Benitez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island*. In this theoretical book by the Cuban writer the Caribbean is seen as an instable area, where the main site is the island, located into a post-plantation system where each island mirrors the others, and which, in a sense, is a repetition of the same pattern which finally constitutes the Caribbean cultural region. The main elements are those recognised by Glissant like fragmentation, uprootedness and reroutedness, the importance of a historiography – as also Brathwaite pointed out, – and a general syncretism. In fact he sums up his ideas saying:

The main obstacles to any global study of the Caribbean’s societies, insular or continental, are exactly those things that scholars usually adduce to define the area: its fragmentation; its instability; its reciprocal isolation; its uprootedness; its cultural heterogeneity; its lack of historiography and historical continuity; its contingency and impermanence; its syncretism, etc.¹²¹

The chaos Benitez-Rojo recognises in the Caribbean is, in a way, representative of what Rohlehr wrote in a 1979 essay on the development of a Caribbean aesthetics “Fierceness and bleakness of

¹¹⁹ Attridge, Derek. “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics in Retrospect.” *The Linguistics of Writing. Arguments between Language and Literature*. Eds. Derek Attridge, Alan Durant, and Colin MacCabe. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987. 23.

¹²⁰ Widdowson, H.G. “On the Interpretation of Poetic Writing.” *The Linguistics of Writing. Arguments between Language and Literature*. Eds. Derek Attridge, Alan Durant, and Colin MacCabe. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987. 246.

¹²¹ Benitez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island. The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. Trans. J. Maraniss. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2001. Or. title *La Isla que se Repite: El Caribe y la Perspectiva Postmoderna*. Barcelona, Spain: Editorial Casiopea, 1989. 1.

vision are characteristic of the 1970's. Our poets at home have become furiously driven men. Walcott, Carter, Brathwaite, McNeill, Scott, Roach or Questel all share this "driven" quality, which is a direct response to the quality of chaos which exists in the contemporary Caribbean."¹²² These elements seem to be recognisable also in what Adorno said in 1970, that is that "the work of art is a constant repetition of itself".¹²³

Theoretically speaking, Benitez-Rojo defined the Caribbean as a meta-archipelago, in that it repeats itself in many ways, from its figurative language to its sound system, from its religious syncretism to its mere linguistic point of view, in that: "the Caribbean is not a common archipelago, but a meta-archipelago [...] But what is it that repeats? Tropisms, in series; movements in approximate direction."¹²⁴ As regard a definition of "tropism", the American theoretician Hayden White wrote the critical work *Tropics of Discourse* and in analysing the classical etymology of the word he affirmed that:

The word *tropic* derives from *tropikos*, *tropos*, which in Classical Greek meant "turn" and in Koiné "way" or "manner." It comes into modern Indo-European languages by way of *tropus*, which in Classical Latin meant "metaphor" or "figure of speech" and in Late Latin, especially as applied to music theory, "mood" or "measure." All of these meanings sedimented in the early English word *trope*, capture the force of the concept that modern English intends by the word *style*, a concept that is especially apt for the consideration of that form of verbal composition which, in order to distinguish it from logical demonstration on the one side and from pure fiction on the other, we call by the name *discourse*.¹²⁵

Thus, embedding White's definition into Benitez-Rojo's statement, one could agree in admitting that "what is characteristic of the Caribbean peoples is that, in fundamental aspect, their aesthetic experience occurs within the framework of rituals and representations of a collective, ahistorical, and improvisatory nature",¹²⁶ whereas what is so peculiar about White's work, and relevant to my analysis, is that the geographical "Tropics" were so called because of their astronomic position on the ecliptic, that is their accordance with the rules of nature, of the sun. The mercurial nature and

¹²² Rohlehr, Gordon. "Articulating a Caribbean Aesthetic: The Revolution of Self-Perception." (1979) *My Strangled City and Other Essays*. *Cit.* 15.

¹²³ "l'opera d'arte è la ripetizione di se stessa. Le opere d'arte sono l'autoeguaglianza liberata dalla costrizione all'identità. [...] Se le opere d'arte non imitano nient'altro che se stesse allora non le capisce nessun altro se non colui che le rifà." Adorno, Theodor W. *Teoria Estetica*. *Cit.* 180. Eng. trans. in Adorno, T. W. *Aesthetic Theory*. 182. [Google Books](http://books.google.it/books?id=gew9AAAAIAAJ&pg=PA239&lpg=PA239&dq=adorno+The+linguistic+character+of+the+work+of+art&source=bl&ots=Ms-77vtFuI&sig=JHSP40ihHQenkmB Nj53KU_nJX20&hl=it&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result). 15 Oct. 2009 <http://books.google.it/books?id=gew9AAAAIAAJ&pg=PA239&lpg=PA239&dq=adorno+The+linguistic+character+of+the+work+of+art&source=bl&ots=Ms-77vtFuI&sig=JHSP40ihHQenkmB Nj53KU_nJX20&hl=it&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result>.

¹²⁴ Benitez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island. The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. *Cit.* 4.

¹²⁵ White, Hayden. *Tropics of Discourse. Essays in Cultural Criticism*. London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978. 2.

¹²⁶ Benitez-Rojo, Antonio. *The Repeating Island. The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. *Cit.* 22.

essence of a Caribbean aesthetics, which is, as Benitez-Rojo remembers, an aesthetics which aspires to non-violence,¹²⁷ led him to speak of an aquatic culture,¹²⁸ a culture which lived – echoing Brathwaite and Glissant – submarine, and whose aesthetic unity derives from its complexity and repetition mode, from a new semantic system formed by language, rhythms and orality.¹²⁹

1990s: Creole as a vector of aesthetic unity

At the beginning of the decade the Barbadian Anthony Kellman – famous for using in poetry the so-called *tuk verse* – gave an overview of the poetic situation of the Caribbean dividing the poets into three generations:

The chief architects of Caribbean poetic tradition were those poets born circa 1930 (referred to as First Generation poets). These were followed by the Mid Generation poets (born circa 1945), a group that extended the earlier celebratory themes, but which also demonstrated an acute sensitivity to the socio-political outcome of the Independences, a response that absorbs much of the attention of the New Generation poets (those born circa 1960). [...] What characterises the new generation of poets? Where are these new voices leading as the mists of a new century gather?¹³⁰

Very attentive to the rhythm intrinsic to poetry, Kellman selected the authors in the anthology *Crossing Water* according to a pattern of orality and the importance given to the oral aspect of poetry:

At the heart of this language rebellion is the notion of sound as meaning and this has its genesis in an oral tradition, and in folk music. This is why the poetic form is now called “Rhythmn Poetry.” Caribbean Nation Language or folk language contains more rhymned words, sibilances, and alliterations than Standard English does and it becomes a more natural way for the expression of poetry directed towards the working class audience who speak exclusively in that language.¹³¹

Similarly, two years later the Barbadian George Lamming was questioning the necessity of having an inventory of what the literary production in the Caribbean has been in its development and in

¹²⁷ “aesthetic of pleasure, or better, an aesthetic whose desire is nonviolence.” *Ibid.* 21.

¹²⁸ “the culture of the Caribbean [...] is not terrestrial but aquatic”. *Ibid.* 11.

¹²⁹ “The Caribbean machine, or, if you like, a metamachine of differences whose poetic mechanism cannot be diagrammed in conventional dimensions [...] The Caribbean rhythm is in fact a metarhythm which can be arrived at through any system of signs, whether it be dance, music, language, text, or body language, etc.” *Ibid.* 18.

¹³⁰ Kellman, Anthony. “Introduction. A Legacy of Crossing and the Hope of Wholeness.” (1991) *Crossing Water, Contemporary Poetry of the English-Speaking Caribbean*. New York: The Greenfield Review Press, 1992. xv-xvi.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* xx.

fact he was following the Italian politician, historian, and writer Antonio Gramsci,¹³² who underlined the importance of knowing the material, diving it into its historical context, to later compile a tentative and historically-tied inventory of it. Lamming stated that “It is possible to trace the evolution of Caribbean literature as it graduated from the status of exotic and eccentric report to that of text as a genuine, organic report, of experience of a specific social reality (in other words, the inventory of an identifiable fold).”¹³³ But at the same time he recognised the lack of critics in the Caribbean who would rather engage in a dialogue with their mother countries than with each other, that is another reason to sustain the importance of a tentative inventory of the literature of the region, vast in its terms, but – as far as my thesis is concerned – limited temporally to the last half of a century and focused on poets who, coming from different parts of the region, are using their scribal and sound properties in recognisably comparable ways. Lamming said that:

It is rare to find a Caribbean historian or social scientist who takes the entire region as his field of enquiry and engages in a comparative study of the particularities of each. So Martinique and the region’s other French colonies engage in dialogue with themselves and Paris; The Netherlands Antilles clings to a professed notion of being an equal constitutional partner within the Dutch Kingdom; the Hispanic territories responded to Spanish and wider European orthodoxies; the English-speaking Caribbean, ignorant of debate among its neighbours, made its accommodation with an exclusive English tradition, yielding now to a new North American hegemony (which includes US territories in the Caribbean).¹³⁴

And this is underlined also by another scholar based in Barbados, the historian Alvin Thompson, who recognised the importance of a cultural unity in the region:

The task facing the Caribbean is to create an integrated culture out of the diversity of cultural elements introduced into the region. This is not to suggest that cultural diversity should be done away with; rather it is to suggest that the region needs to reflect a much greater degree of cultural unity within its diversity. Those elements which tend towards cultural unity need to be stronger than those which tend towards diversity.¹³⁵

However, in the hypothesis of an aesthetic unity, as said before, Creole would play a seminal role, and it is difficult to reproduce it onto the written page, especially when taking the form of poetry. In

¹³² As an epigraph to his pamphlet, Lamming quotes Antonio Gramsci “The starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is, and is knowing “thysself” as a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory...therefore it is imperative at the outset to compile such an inventory.” Lamming, George. Coming, Coming Home. Conversations II. Western Education and the Caribbean Intellectual. Philipsburg, St. Martin. House of Nehesi Publishers. 1995; 2000. 3.

¹³³ *Ibid.* 17.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* 22-3.

¹³⁵ Thompson, Alvin O. The Haunting Past. Politics, Economics and Race in Caribbean Life. Kingston and Oxford: Ian Randle and Jamzes Currey Publishers, 1997. 239.

this regard, the Jamaican poet and critic Mervyn Morris observed that: “We can never put the performance into print. The performance is an oral – or an audiovisual – event.”¹³⁶ But Morris also recognised in another essay in 1993 that:

Putting the Creole in print raises a number of problems. First of all, how do we spell the words? Some people argue for a standardised spelling such as the Cassidy phonemic system which linguists find acceptable. [...] The most common (if inconsistent) approach is to write the vernacular for the eye accustomed to Standard English, but with various alterations signalling Creole. Some authors, however, visually emphasise that what they have written is very different from Standard English.¹³⁷

Now, I firmly believe that we should consider the use of language in aesthetic terms in a parallel way in respect to the statements one could make about a Caribbean literary unity, because the fragmentation one could conceive at the linguistic level is the same that could bring, according to Walcott, to a process of unification, or rather of “restoration” of the scattered fragments of history and culture of the Caribbean. In the 1992 Nobel Prize Acceptance speech, the following famous and most-quoted words stand out:

Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than that love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole. The glue that fits the pieces is the sealing of its original shape. It is such a love that reassembles our African and Asiatic fragments, the crackled heirlooms whose restoration shows its white scars. [...] Antillean art is this restoration of our shattered histories, our shards of vocabulary, our archipelago becoming a synonym for pieces broken off from the original continent. And this is the exact process of the making of poetry, or what should be called not its “making” but its remaking, the fragmented memory¹³⁸

For Walcott history does not thwart the fate of the poet, which is that of falling in love with life, through the precious gift of ‘imagination’: in fact he said that “(in the Antilles poverty is poetry

¹³⁶ Morris, Mervyn. “Printing the Performance.” (1992) *Is English We Speaking, and other essays*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1999. 45.

¹³⁷ Morris, Mervyn. “Is English We Speaking.” (1993) *Is English We Speaking, and other essays*. *Cit.* 9-10. *Cf.* also Morris notes Lawrence D. Carrington’s definition of Caribbean English in *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* as: “(1) Regionally accented varieties of the standard language...(2) Localized forms of English...(3) Mesolects between English and Creole, as found in most communities...(4) Kinds of English used in countries where Spanish is official or dominant...(5) Varieties of English-based Creole.” 2-3. “It is not generally known that many readers in the West Indies are unfamiliar with the language and culture of West Indian territories they have not visited.” 6.

¹³⁸ Walcott, Derek. “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory.” (1992) *What the Twilight Says*. *Cit.* 69. And also “All of the Antilles, every island, is an effort of memory; every mind, every racial biography culminating in amnesia and fog. Pieces of sunlight through the fog and sudden rainbows, *arcs-en-ciel*. That is the effort, the labour of the Antillean imagination, rebuilding its gods from bamboo frames, phrase by phrase.” 82.

with a V, *une vie*, a condition of life as well as of imagination)”,¹³⁹ and subsequently this is why “the fate of poetry is to fall in love with the world, in spite of History.”¹⁴⁰

In 1994 Brathwaite published one of his most interesting collections of poems after *The Arrivants*, or *Mother Poem*, that is *Barabajan Poems*: in it the poet makes some interesting remarks on the use of language, especially on what in *History of the Voice* he defined as “nation language”, and on the role and function of the poet:

The Times Literary Supplement &
The Oxford English Dictionary &
The Washington Post & the Nikki
Index – which is why we need Dr
Allsopp’s Dictionary of Caribb-
ean Language – not English, Dr Allsopp,
as I think I see it advertised – but Language –
Caribbean speak¹⁴¹

As regards the poet and his Place in Bajan Culture, he stated that:

(i) Poet: “is a craftperson, oral or literary, ideally both, who deals in metrical and/or rhythmical – sometimes *riddmical* – worksong, wordsounds, wordwounds & meanings, within a certain code of order or dis/order – what Antonio Benitez Rojo calls *creative chaos* These word/sound/meanings are caught out of the mind or moment’s sky as it were & etched into the ground and underdone of the poet’s / of the artist’s culture. And from the ground of that culture is he/she grown // is he/she known // is he/she be/come”

(ii) culture. “is what the poet comes from and returns to over & over & over again & in the end. It is his home, it is his drum, it is his dream: the shared collective conscious (and unconscious) xperience of a people, with submerged underdrones – ghosts, spirits, sky – juices, ancestors, immemorial memories...”

(iii) Bajan culture: “is this shared collective xperience on a rock of coral limestone, half-way (?back) to African; but like Nelson’s statue / in both Trafalgar squares – but I’m talking about ours – seeing, it see ms, with only one & outer eye of the plantation; while the other inner eye & world of art & dream & meaning was for too long a time ignored, eroded, submerged; threated not only as if it did not xist, but that it could not: *Carry on Big Inglan, Lil Inglan is behine yuh!*”¹⁴²

¹³⁹ *Ibid.* 72.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 79.

¹⁴¹ Brathwaite, Kamau. *Barabajan Poems*. New York: Savacou North, 1994. 168-9.

¹⁴² *Ibid.* 21-2. (End of page after “statue”).

The exploration of the use of words and of the sounds and the importance of Creole was pursued not only by Brathwaite, but also by Walcott and again by Morris. In a 1997 essay, “A Letter to Chamoiseau”, Walcott made some considerations about the maternity of a mother tongue:

Written Creole is unreal because the grammar of its African auxiliaries varies from one Francophone territory to another [...] We have to understand that this vehement assertion of creating roots for what, linguistically, is a mother tongue blended with another mother tongue produces a false maternity.¹⁴³

In that essay, Walcott did nothing more than express what he had written in verse in *The Bounty*: Creole is let to dry open air, incrusting walls like moss, while the fishermen scan their oars on water following a poetic rhythm:

the raw hands of fishermen
their anchor of dialect, and phrases drying on walls
based in moss. These are its origins, verse, they remain
with the repeated lines of waves and their crests, oars
and scansion, flocks and one horizon, boats with keels
wedged into sand.¹⁴⁴

On the other hand, Morris expressed his conception of the use of Creole in poetry – and in his own poetry as well – as follows:

Most West Indian authors draw on a range of elements within the West Indian language continuum, which runs between a form of ‘standard English’ and a Caribbean Creole, and on a range of cultural reference which includes folk knowledge and belief and the largely European learning of the (colonial) schools.¹⁴⁵

To conclude about this decade, in which the number of critical essays bloomed and both critics and authors acknowledged the importance of the use of Creole and the recognition of an aesthetic unity in the region, I would like to consider the words of the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris in a 1999 essay titled “Creoleness: the Crossroads of a Civilization?”, for whom the crossing of gulfs and the bridging of cultural distances have always been as important as the divisions driven by cultural possibilities, that a writer can bridge through a Walcottian-like power of imagination:

¹⁴³ Walcott, Derek. “A Letter to Chamoiseau.” (1997) *What the Twilight Says*. *Cit.* 228.

¹⁴⁴ Walcott, Derek. *Prima Luce*. Trans Andrea Molesini. Milano: Adelphi, 2001. 31. Or. title Walcott, Derek. *The Bounty*. London: Faber & Faber, 1997; New York: Farrar-Straus-Giroux, 1997. iv, 132.

¹⁴⁵ Morris, Mervyn. “Sounds and Sense: West Indian Poetry.” (1998) *Making West Indian Literature*. Kingston; Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2005. 112.

The word chasm is adopted therefore [...] to imply that within the gulfs that divide cultures – gulfs which some societies seek to bypass by the logic of an institutional self-division of humanity or by the practice of ethnic cleansing – there exists, I feel, a storage of creative possibility that, once tapped, may energize the unfinished genesis of the imagination.¹⁴⁶

Harris goes beyond divisions of culture, beyond ethnic or racial differences, to make the creative possibilities of writing stick out and unite, energize and give a vital impulse to the social impact of writing.

2000s: “The entire world is gone ‘creole’”¹⁴⁷

At the turn of the decade and of the century, the Nigerian writer Fabian Adegunle Badejo, writing the introduction to Brathwaite’s *Words Need Love Too*, underlined that “the role of the poet becomes for him one of reconstruction, of re-creating through the “secret power” of the word, through creative memory”.¹⁴⁸ Thus, there is not only a creative imagination, but a creative memory too, through which the poet filters the historical processes and legacy to express, in Badejo’s words, “a dislocated psyche”: “The dislocated psyche is now “rock-steady”; it now has a history, it has become a wholesome psyche allowing the poet to conjure up his-story as a “Word-Making Man” (the title of his poem dedicated to Nicolàs Guillén of *Man Making Words*)”.¹⁴⁹ The importance of the sound of words in poetry as a fundamental part of an aesthetics is again underlined in these words: “The creative process for Brathwaite would appear to go through four stages that dissolve one into the other: silence or pre-sound, memory, dream, and sound (word/idea/language).”¹⁵⁰ In fact, Brathwaite in a new, last phase of his writing has shown even more awareness of the importance of the word sounds and their location in an aesthetic discourse, for they represent and materialize the syncretic combination of cultures and socio-aesthetic

¹⁴⁶ Harris, Wilson. “Creoleness: the Crossroads of a Civilization?” *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris. The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination*. Ed. Andrew Bundy. London & New York: Routledge, 1999. 239.

¹⁴⁷ Nettleford, Rex. “The Caribbean’s Creative Diversity: the Defining Point of the region’s History.” *Lecture delivered by Prof. Rex Nettleford, Vice Chancellor, University of the West Indies. University of Guyana, Guyana*. 21st March 2003. Press Release 54/2003. 4th April 2003.

¹⁴⁸ Badejo, Fabian Adegunle. “Introduction.” Edward Kamau Brathwaite. *Words Need Love Too*. Philipsburg, St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, 2000. x.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* xii.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* xiii. Cf. also: “For Brathwaite, words are not just mere sounds, or imagery, or symbols; they are all that and more. They are not just incantations, evocations, invocations; they are all that and more. They are not arranged as mere syntactic ornaments, nor as musical notes to caress our ears with the sweetness of their melody. He breaks them up, un-writes them, decants them of all earthly impurities, sifts them as if they were gold dust, re-arranges them, polishes them to bring out their original glitter, their essential luster. Then he breathes life into them and sets them free with their own intelligence, their own life, a new life, so that we can hear them, feel them, touch them, see them roam the world of his poems, naked like on creation day. In Brathwaite, words are made flesh. He re-creates them; makes them walk, makes them talk like us.” *Ibid.* xvi-xvii.

behaviour in the Caribbean. Again, Badejo gets the point when he speaks of different musical genres embedded in Brathwaite's production, stating his conscious position in relation to a Caribbean aesthetics:¹⁵¹

They [the words] do the limbo as a ritual re-enactment of their tortured history and lose their shackles to dance the syncopated and syncretic complexity of the vodoun, the ponum, the tumba, the gwoka, the bachatta; to dance to Marley's reggae beat-jumping, skanking, seductively wriggling in a movement of freedom¹⁵²

This syncretism of music and words is something of which also the St. Maartenian poet Lasana M. Sekou is much aware of, when he feels the ancestral music of his native island and tries to incorporate it into his 'performance poetry'.¹⁵³ As Sekou underlines, the Netherlands Antilles are united by a common historical background, but also detached from the other islands of the Caribbean by their insularity, an attitude common to many islands, which in a sense is a flaw, hindering an aesthetic integration with, for instance, the Anglophone Caribbean. Even though Sekou is able to cross these differences and embrace many different cultural inputs – which are present in the cosmopolitan culture of St. Maarten – the other islands formerly colonized by the Dutch, like the ABC islands, are defective even more for their insularity. In fact as F.A. Williams asserted in his introduction to an anthology of Aruban verse, poetry in Aruba could be divided into nature poetry (*Heimatkunst*) and historically-tied/political poetry, but he uses the term "insular complacency" to describe it, so that giving his definition of 'Arubanism', he lingers on the links with localism, even in protest poetry written by students in journals like *Chuchubi* and *Brindis*.¹⁵⁴

In many islands, then, local complacency seems to repress a more open regional interest, but a writer like Brathwaite, who is much aware of the complexity and thoroughness of the region, has

¹⁵¹ "Brathwaite is undoubtedly aware of his own impact on Caribbean letters; and he knows that his place is at the cutting edge of its aesthetics." *Ibid.*xix.

¹⁵² *Ibid.* xvii-xviii.

¹⁵³ Interview with Lasana M. Sekou. Appendix A in this thesis.

¹⁵⁴ For a definition of "Arubanism" cf.: "Besides an Indianism which is historically oriented, we can also discern a nationalism in Aruban poetry which is grafted onto the own time and environment of nowadays. This literature coincides within the rising nationalism of the seventies in its struggle for a separate status [...] These poets represent art which cannot be absolved from chauvinism. In the seventies magazines as *Chuchubi* and *Brindis* gave them the opportunity to express their thoughts. An outstanding representative of this rationalistic Arubanism was Julio Maduro (1924-1993), who most accurately sings the praise of the Aruban land in his nature poems.

In *Brindis* Jossy Mansur (1934), *Digua Laclé*¹⁵⁴ (1925) and Nena Vrolijk have published as well. The dominating themes are the beauty of the island and its nature. The *Heimatkunst* (art of the native land) prevails and the scope is purposely limited to the confines of the island. Therefore the poetry is meant for no one else than the Aruban himself. [...] In sharp contrast with this literature of insular complacency we see a fiercely critical attitude in the Dutch students magazine *Kontakto Antiyano* (1968-1979) in which Frank Booi and Cyril Berkel published from time to time and *Skol y Komunidat* (1969-1988) which was published in Aruba and in which besides political and educational articles mostly very critical poetry appeared." Williams, F.A. *Isla di Mi-Island of Mine-Un Antologia Bilingual di Poesia di Aruba* compila pa F.A. Williams cu introduccion di Wim Rutgers, *A Bilingual Anthology of Aruban Verse*. Ed. F.A. Williams with an introduction by Wim Rutgers. [Aruba?]: Interprint N.V. 2000. 38.

summarised in his poem “Praise Song 2000” an aesthetic-like unity given by poets and scholars from the whole region, mentioning the St. Lucian Walcott, the Bajan writer Frank Collymore and politician H. A. Vaughan and the cricketer Sir Garfield Sobers, the Tobagonian-Canadian poet Marlene Nourbese Phillips, the Guyanese academic Prof. Richard Allsopp, the Trinidadian calypsonian Sparrow, the Jamaican reggae artist Bob Marley, the Cuban poet Nicolas Guillén and Avant-garde artist Wilfredo Lam, the Martinican poet Aimé Césaire:

the moon-lipsed bays have been haunted by Walcott
the grapes & almond leaves. the goat-foot ipomea
by Frank Collymore; the sandylanes by the Hon. H A Vaughan. & in their
light i climb high into caves. the stalag-
mitred brevitor. the north-point mysteries. chimera
of pale-blue & purple sea anemones. [...]
praise be to those who have recovered us our names
nourbese & allsopp of our tongues. thank you jah
for the buttapan steel pan & sparrow & bob o Rastafari
children & the atumpan. those who have loved us lost
lost sheep when all the merchants who wd slaughter
slaughter sleep. thank you guillén césaire wilfredo
limbo. chad. sir Garfield sobers. Caribbean stars.¹⁵⁵

In the following year, 2001, *A History of Literature in the Caribbean* was published and two scholars based at Mona Campus, Jamaica, contributed to it: the Trinidadian Maureen Warner-Lewis and the Jamaican Edward Baugh. In her essay “Language Use in West Indian Literature” Warner Lewis made some appealing observations on the nature of the oral performance in Caribbean literature,¹⁵⁶ underlining the differences of Creoles in different islands of the region¹⁵⁷ and acknowledging that performance poets inverted a trend in using language in their work, contributing aesthetically to the incorporation of a *linguistic continuum* in an oral performative production:

While the performance poets tended initially to compose in Creole rather than let attempts at Standard English silence their thoughts or render their work “substandard” and flawed, interestingly, their later work display an increasingly use of Standard English syntax, perhaps due to their heightened exposure to this language medium through reading and travel.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ Badejo, Fabian Adekunle. “Introduction.” Edward Kamau Brathwaite. *Words Need Love Too*. *Cit.* xx.

¹⁵⁶ “The oral literature, or orature, of exclusively oral societies utilizes language as utterance per se, while written literature, just as written language, is based on conventions of both utterance and inscription.” Warner-Lewis, Maureen. “Language Use in West Indian Literature.” *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*. Ed. James A. Arnold. Vol. 2. English- and Dutch-speaking regions. Offprint. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001. 25.

¹⁵⁷ “Since these islands are outposts of several metropolitan languages, not only do their Creoles carry different lexical bases, but even Creoles using the same lexical base show variations from island to island with regard to pronunciation systems, intonation patterns, syntax, idiom, lexical inventory, and signifier-referent correspondence.” *Ibid.* 28.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 35.

In his “A History of Poetry” Baugh made similar considerations, when he stated that “The process has also been centrally a drama of language that saw a poetry of “the English in the Caribbean” being transformed into a poetry of the Creolization of English in the Caribbean.”¹⁵⁹ But other than making a general survey of the poetic production in the Caribbean, from the beginnings onwards, Baugh emphasized the syncretic influences that one can recognise in Caribbean poetry in conformity with what stressed by Brathwaite or Sekou before: “The experiments of some Eastern Caribbean poets also incorporate the spirit and sound of pan, or steelband music, the rhythm of the road-march shuffle and jump-up, and the prismatic vibrancy of carnival”,¹⁶⁰ as much as Fabian Adenkunle Badejo would admit that “In the Caribbean, we speak of “classic” reggae (e.g. Bob Marley, Jimmy Cliff), “classic” calypso (e.g. Sparrow, Kitchener), bachata *clàsica* (e.g. Frank Reyes) because, indeed, their musical recordings have become part and parcel of our daily idiom.”¹⁶¹ In this book (*Salted Tongues*), which constitutes a survey of St. Maartenian literature, Badejo has made some intriguing remarks about a Caribbean aesthetics:

The dialectic interplay between the text, the author, the society, and the critic must be one that unveils the inherent contradictions in our existential reality and point to possible solutions. Similarly, the criteria the critic uses in the analysis of the text must reflect a distinctively Caribbean aesthetics.¹⁶²

In the introduction to this work, also the Montserratian poet and critic Howard A. Fergus commented on the aesthetic terms of Caribbean literature, and he has underlined that most European critics tend to critically approach Caribbean literature from a European point of view, without ‘feeling’ the socio-historical processes that led it to develop as it has done. Being from Europe myself, I am not struck by this observation though in approaching a different culture I try to empathize with it as much as possible; I am not saying that I can understand Caribbean socio-history or culture as a Caribbean person would but, as far as possible, I try to discard the European perspective and understand the Caribbean in its wholeness, in its logic or un-logic, and in the complex mechanisms which push me to search for an aesthetic unity. Here are Fergus’s words about this issue:

¹⁵⁹ Baugh, Edward. “A History of Poetry.” *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*. Cit. 277.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 269.

¹⁶¹ Badejo, Fabian Adenkunle. *Salted Tongues. Modern Literature in St. Martin*. Philipsburg, St. Martin. House of Nehesi Publishers. 2003. 53-4.

¹⁶² *Ibid.* 68. Cf. also “The process of creating an authentic and autochthonous literary tradition rests, in my view, on four pillars: 1. The creative stage; 2. The publication stage; 3. The evaluation and assessment stage; 4. The readership stage” Badejo, Fabian Adenkunle. *Salted Tongues. Modern Literature in St. Martin*. Cit. 33.

the European perspective from which critics tend to judge Caribbean writers. To do so is to ignore the society and consciousness that generated the pieces and worship at the aesthetic altars of the metropolis. [...] Caribbean writings can be allowed to have their own logic, organic existence, and direction at best, they make connection to the lives of the people without denying access to an international audience.¹⁶³

That is why this decade is still so important in the definition of a Caribbean aesthetics, because scholars and writers have begun a sort of response to European approaches, probably aiming at a ‘liberation’ from a cultural subservience. Some appealing statements were made by Prof. Rex Nettleford in a lecture given in Guyana in 2003, in which he claimed that:

Outside of religion, exaggerated claims continue to be made in the realm of aesthetic discourse. What is “classical” is, for many, clearly European in this narrow view while all else is “popular” or “ethnic”. The Caribbean and the Americas, in general, by their sheer output of artistic innovation have long challenged this.¹⁶⁴

His discourse is multifaceted and multicultural, global in a sense, when he states that: “The entire world is gone ‘creole’”¹⁶⁵ Looking for a unity in epistemological terms, Nettleford has given an overview of the region in these terms:

Admittedly the eloquence of the differences is powerful. We continue to speak of this region of some 30 million people as Hispanic Caribbean, the Anglophone Caribbean, the Francophone Caribbean, the Dutch-speaking Caribbean and so on. Such hyphenated fragmentation emphasises the legacy of a heritage of separation and shattered identities. Yet none of this deprived us in our separate dispensations of that awesome process of *becoming*. Our people were able to survive the traumas of separation from ancestral hearths as part of the transatlantic slave trade and the indignity of dehumanisation in slavery for the vast majority by the exercise of their creative imagination. What results from this has been the germ of a culture which shares more in common than many like to believe. The products may differ one from another but the region shares a similar process of becoming.¹⁶⁶

The Trinidadian Joy Mahabir, making some general considerations on the importance of rhythm in Caribbean society, stressed the fact that a Caribbean socio-aesthetics would include not only literature, but also other social aspects like music, fashion, cuisine, etc. and she appropriately reported a comment made by Père Labat in 1722 in his *Nouveau Voyage aux Îles de l’Amérique*

¹⁶³ Fergus, Howard A. “Introduction.” Badejo, Fabian Adekunle. *Salted Tongues. Modern Literature in St. Martin*. *Cit.* xv.

¹⁶⁴ Nettleford, Rex. “The Caribbean’s Creative Diversity: the Defining Point of the region’s History.” *Cit.*

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibidem*.

(published in Paris). What follows is Mahabir's observations, ending with the recognition that Labat was a truly harbinger in looking for a socio-aesthetic unity in the region:

With improvisation, other basic tenets of Caribbean music, include call-and-response (antiphony), energetic percussion, cross-cultural rhythms and asymmetrical harmonies, all of which lead to considerations on rhythm, for it is rhythm that holds a place of privilege in Caribbean music and culture. [...] But rhythm can also be seen in other Caribbean cultural forms: in the asymmetrical movement of visual arts, in dub poetry and rapso, in the architectural flow of single family homes that extend over time into multiple family structures, in the innovative cultural fusions intrinsic to island fashion and cuisine. The fact that rhythm occupies a reified place in Caribbean society was even sensed by early historians and travellers, including Père Labat, who commented that it is rhythm first of all that establishes a socio-aesthetic link throughout the region.¹⁶⁷

In the same year 2003 Gordon Collier questioned the presence of Creole in poetry as an indicator of a 'pan-Caribbean' dynamism, which draws on a Glissantian rhizomatic dimension to plunge into a post-creole continuum reality. Even though the effectiveness of a post-creole continuum is still questionable,¹⁶⁸ Collier identified a rapid passage from insularity to globalization in the Caribbean:

Creole in poetry, in poiesis; poiesis in creole. Well, by now there is any amount of this, so a pan-Caribbean and even circum-Caribbean dynamic is already operating strongly. One might, though, ask: For how long? [...] In the post-creole continuum, language will keep changing, the lives of the folk will get less folksy, in this rhizomatic zone where so much has bypassed modernity and has plunged straight into postmodern globalization, despite the isolation of archipelagic identity.¹⁶⁹

Also the Nigerian Prof. Funso Aiyejina, based in Trinidad, recognised the impact of globalization in the Caribbean, and to do so – remembering Stuart Hall's vision of the construction of Caribbean identities according to two inter-crossing axes ("the vector of similarity and continuity; and the vector of difference and rupture")¹⁷⁰ – he is convinced of the importance of analysing and understanding many factors which could affect a regional socio-aesthetics:

¹⁶⁷ Mahabir, Joy A. I. *Miraculous Weapons. Revolutionary Ideology in Caribbean Culture*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc. 2003. 119.

¹⁶⁸ Cf. my interview with Prof. Kenneth Ramchand. Appendix A in this thesis.

¹⁶⁹ Collier, Gordon. "Two Aspects of 'Creole' in Literary Expression." Spec. issue "A Pepper-Pot of Cultures: Aspects of Creolization in the Caribbean." *Matatu. Journal for African Culture and Society* 27/28 Eds. Gordon Collier and Ulrich Fleischmann. 27/28. Amsterdam; New York: Rodopi, 2003. 28 Oct. 2008 <<http://docserver.ingentaconnect.com/deliver/connect/rodopi/09329714/v27n1/s3.pdf?expires=1255621799&id=52548010&titleid=6317&accname=Guest+User&checksum=3AB42998A7243668CC19AD0845E8A412>>. xliv.

¹⁷⁰ Aiyejina, Funso. "Introduction." *Caribbean Literature in a Global Context*. Eds. Funso Aiyejina, and Paula Morgan. San Juan, T&T: Lexicon Trinidad Ltd. 2006. 2. Stuart Hall's quotation is taken from "Cultural Identity and

Since independence, the Caribbean has been subjected to neo-colonialism, multinationalism, and now a new globalization. [...] To understand how the globalization enterprise has managed to succeed so well, the role of culture – language, religion, music, literature, etc. – has to be examined.¹⁷¹

In the same book, *Caribbean Literature in a Global Context*, the analysis that the Jamaican Harold N. McDermott made in his “Walcott’s Aesthetics and Globalization’s Opportunities and Challenges”, accounted for a double ‘vectoral’ influence, that of uniqueness and that of differentiation:

A viable conception of a West Indian aesthetics, if it is to be truly representative of the region’s dynamic and diverse culture, ought to acknowledge and accommodate this globalization paradigm while simultaneously asserting those verities that confirm our unique identities and view of the world.¹⁷²

For McDermott, Walcott’s theorisation on aesthetics redefined literature and culture through a “syncretic” process, in fact he argued that “The aesthetics Walcott envisions in his poetry and critical essays is a cross-cultural one.”¹⁷³

In more recent times, Edward Baugh gave a lecture at UWI Mona Campus entitled “Frank Collymore and West Indian Literature”,¹⁷⁴ in which he considered his encounter with the Bajan founder of the literary journal *BIM*,¹⁷⁵ and Collymore’s contribution to the creation of a Caribbean socio-aesthetic discourse. In the recording of this lecture Baugh remembered how he submitted his own poems to Frank Collymore at Woodville House, St. Michael, Barbados, and was published in *BIM*. The initial intention of Collymore was to publish a Caribbean sample of collected poems by Morris, Walcott, Brathwaite, etc. and Baugh himself – whom, says Baugh, was unknown to Collymore as a West Indian. Subsequently, Baugh wrote an article, “Frank Collymore and the

Diaspora.” *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*. Eds. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994. 395.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.* 3.

¹⁷² Harold N. McDermott. “Walcott’s Aesthetics and Globalization’s Opportunities and Challenges.” Aiyejina, Funso, Morgan, Paula, Eds. *Caribbean Literature in a Global Context*. *Cit.* 166.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* Both 169-170.

¹⁷⁴ Baugh, Edward. “Frank Collymore and West Indian Literature.” Record. on CD-ROM. Inaugural Distinguished Lecture. UWI Mona Campus, Kingston, Jamaica: Radio Unit, Library of the Spoken Word, 12 Apr. 2007. Courtesy of the Library of the Spoken Word, the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica.

¹⁷⁵ *BIM* is a literary journal published from 1942 by the editor Tony Cozier, who was the cricket commentator, son of the *St. Lucia Voice* and *Barbados Daily News* editor Jimmy Cozier. *Cf.* also “Tony Cozier.” *Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia*. A Wikimedia project. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 28 Oct. 2008 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tony_Cozier>.

Miracle of *BIM*”, after which Baugh changed his academic interests from the poetry of the late Victorian period to that of the West Indies. As Baugh said in the lecture, Collymore – who was a “white Bajan” defined by Philip Nanton as “white in appearance” – widely aided in the formation of a West Indian and Caribbean aesthetics both being an accomplished writer and being the editor and publisher of *BIM*. Baugh affirmed that Collymore succeeded thanks to what he (Baugh) defined “the proverbial labour of love; even though he saw himself as a politically conservative or reactionary, he was a revolutionary in literary terms and contributed to the creation of a Caribbean aesthetics.”¹⁷⁶

In a lecture given in 2007, “Color & Cultural Identity: A Caribbean Story”, Lasana Sekou declared that “Caribbean cultural identity—this new story—is actually a callaloo of ancestral (old) fragments of memory forging a new existential reality”,¹⁷⁷ and in so doing he remembered C.L.R. James’ words:

“People of the West Indies,” declared James, “you do not know your own power. No one dares to tell you. You are a strange, a unique combination of the greatest driving force in the world today, the underdeveloped formerly colonial colored peoples: and more than any of them, by education, way of life and language, you are completely part of Western civilization. Alone of all people in the world you began your historical existence in a highly developed modern society—the sugar plantation.”¹⁷⁸

Sekou goes on questioning the canons of beauty, the aesthetic canons which the West Indians have internalized. His remarks seem to underpin a Caribbeanness, a regional peculiarity which can redeem Caribbean artists from history:

Whose canon of beauty have we internalized? Whose images of beauty are we bombarded with everywhere we turn? Beauty, I dare say, is not in the eye of the beholder: beauty is in the mind of the beholden. If we do not see ourselves in our minds as beautiful—or handsome, for our men are also tenant to this pathological province—if we cannot redeem that aesthetic

¹⁷⁶ Baugh, Edward. “Frank Collymore and West Indian Literature.” *Ibid.* Alfred Gomez (the founder of the Trinidadian magazine *The Beacon*) who said of him: “*BIM* has already begun to take that shape”, they needed not a regional but a WI journal. Braithwaite said that Collymore’s “love, courage, and continuity” in publishing his writing helped him continuing his career. Walcott said that the older man treated him “with such love and care”, not as a schoolmaster who treats you good.

¹⁷⁷ Sekou, Lasana M. “Color & Cultural Identity: A Caribbean Story.” Keynote Address, 10th Annual Eastern Caribbean Islands’ Cultures Conference. “The Islands In Between.” Philipsburg Community & Cultural Center, Philipsburg, St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers. November 1 - 4, 2007.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibidem*. Quoted in Lasana’s speech from Ramcharitar, Raymond. “CLR James – Celebrating CLR Three-day Conference Begins Today.” *Express* (Trinidad). 20 Sept. 2001: 23.

image of ourselves from the gutters of the cultural pogrom history has condemned it¹⁷⁹

But in an interview also Calderaro asked the Jamaican/American poet Opal Palmer Adisa what she thought about the existence of a Caribbean aesthetics; Adisa's answer was:

I will readily say yes, there is a Caribbean aesthetic, but of course defining it requires careful thought. The question is partly rhetorical because if there is a region called the Caribbean, then it follows that such a place, populated with people, would have a specific culture and therefore that culture, as long as it is not stagnant, then would have its own cosmology and aesthetics. Now to try and define, rather theorize, what that is without citing icons such as Bob Marley, Rastafarianism, ackee and salt-fish, requires intellectual engagement. Caribbean aesthetic involves a feeling of ownership, of defiance, of belong; it's the symbiotic relationship between the people and the entire environment, which is often personified and is an active agent that participant in the people's lives. The aesthetic's motto can be said to be: The ability "fi tek bad things mek laugh." In other words, the people's refusal to lay down and die, or to allow hard times and sadness to determine the range of their lives. Instead, the people use these challenges to laugh at themselves as well as life, thereby being able to recoup their losses and go forth. Caribbean aesthetics involves physical gestures as well, which speak volumes... I love to observe the interaction, the bodily communication; it is simply marvellous in its innuendos and inferences.¹⁸⁰

What is, I think, the most recent opinion about the questionable existence of a Caribbean socio-aesthetics comes from some affirmations Derek Walcott made in conversation with Kwame Dawes at the *Calabash Literary Festival* in 2008, when, remarking on the presence of African rhythms in West Indian literature and poetry, and their oxymoronic nature— hard as crystals and soft as a sponge – he admitted that: "A cliché is that Caribbean people have rhythm, whether Latin or Central American, the rhythm is African, but crystallizing two forms into one is a typical Caribbean thing"¹⁸¹ and that : "Caribbean aesthetics is 'spongy', it absorbs all the influences (...), I think that Caribbean literature has just begun."¹⁸²

¹⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁸⁰ Calderaro, Michela A. "A Space Occupied by Swirling Caribbean Waters. An Interview with Opal Palmer Adisa." *Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters*. 5.1 (Summer/Fall 2008): 3. Eds. Jacqueline Bishop, and Michela Calderaro. New York: New York University. 28 Oct. 2008. <www.nyu.edu/calabash/vol5no1/0501104.pdf>.

¹⁸¹ Walcott, Derek. "Derek Walcott in conversation with Kwame Dawes." *Calabash Literary Festival*. 24 May 2008. Treasure Beach, St. Elizabeth, Jamaica.

¹⁸² *Ibid*.

Summarizing chart of the main aesthetic points

In the end the questions arising from this analysis will be: what directions is contemporary Caribbean poetry taking? What are the creole retentions in society as it is mirrored by poetry? What poetic forms constitute today's "Creole" aesthetics? Is there such a thing as a literary West Indian – or Caribbean – "Creole" aesthetics? This study of poetry will involve the knowledge of West Indian language/s, of the history/ies, of the culture/s of the Caribbean people, not disregarding the differences of Creoles in different territories: Hispanophone, Lusophone, Dutch-speaking Francophone, Anglophone Caribbean.

In the following chart I have summarized the main points made by the essays of poetics and aesthetics – divided by decade – that I have been considering and which were written by Caribbean and non-Caribbean poets, writers, critics, academics, philosophers. For a checklist of Caribbean Journals cf. González, Anson, ed. *The New Voices* X.20 (July 1982), which indicates the beginning dates of publication for a few literary journals.¹⁸³

¹⁸³ I will readjust the aforementioned list of journals (taken from González, Anson, ed. *The New Voices* X.20 (July 1982) Diego Martin, Trinidad & Tobago: E. Gonzales. 53.) according to a chronological order; whenever the year of publication coincides, the alphabetical order will be followed:

Trinidad. Trinidad. 1929.

Beacon. Trinidad. 1931.

West Indian Review. Jamaica. 1934.

Bim. Barbados. 1942.

Focus. Jamaica. 1943.

Caribbean Quarterly. Jamaica. 1949.

Caribbean Studies. Puerto Rico. 1961.

Voices. Trinidad & Tobago. 1961.

New Word Quarterly. Jamaica. 1963.

Flambeau. St. Vincent. 1965.

Kaie. Guyana. 1965.

Jamaica Journal. Jamaica. 1967.

Savacou. Jamaica. 1970.

Tapia. Jamaica. 1970.

New Voices. Trinidad & Tobago. 1973.

Now. Jamaica. 1973.

Corlit. Trinidad & Tobago. 1974.

Kairi. Trinidad & Tobago. 1974.

Kalaloo. Jamaica. 1976.

The authors of this list, however, skip the mention of the popular Guyanese journal *Kyk-Over-Al*, which was started to be published in 1945.

Decade	Poet/Critic - Essay	Key words
1940s	Oscar Ronald Dathorne (Guyana) – Dathorne, O.R. Ed. <u>Caribbean Verse, An Anthology</u> . London: Heinemann, 1967.	Dathorne expressed some considerations about West Indian poetry in the 1940s, recognizing in it “ strict meter and rigid rhyme scheme ”.
1950s	West Indian poetry:	“ poor imitations of English models? ”
		Problem of aesthetics began to be tackled.
	Derek Walcott (St. Lucia) – Walcott, Derek. “Society and the Artist.” (1957).	Walcott questioned the obstacles confronting the artists in the Caribbean and by those of the windrush generation; Walcott stated that “ Europe does not belong to ” West Indian poets .
	Edward Brathwaite (Barbados) – Brathwaite, Edward. “Sir Galahad and The Islands” (<i>BIM</i> , 1957).	He asserted that folklore and patterns of performance lay at the basis of a new Caribbean aesthetics.
	Martin Carter (Guyana) – Carter, Martin. “Sensibility and the Search.” (1958)	According to Carter, West Indian poetry looks like “ poor imitations of English models”.
	Saint-John Perse (Guadeloupe) – Perse, St.-John. <u>Poésie/On Poetry, Speech of Acceptance upon the Award of the Nobel Prize for Literature</u> . Delivered in Stockholm December, 10, 1960. Trans. W. H. Auden. New York: Bollingen Foundation, 1961.	Perse sustained that Poetry is the supreme union with the Creator and that it is superior to Science.
1960s	“ West Indianization of the English ”	Literature and Language ”
	John Brown (St. Kitts) – Brown, John. Ed. <u>Poems and Stories of St. Christopher, Nevis and Anguilla</u> . Ed. John Brown. Basseterre, St. Kitts: U.C.W.I., 1960.	From a fringe island an academic – Brown – stated the importance of rhythms of speech, and an urge for a unified identity .
	Marina Omowale Maxwell (Trinidad) – Omowale Maxwell, Marina. <u>About Our Own Business</u> . Arima, Trinidad: Drum Mountain Publications, 1981.	Active in the 1960s, she underlined the importance of folk traditions , and Brathwaite recognized in her one of the proposers of “CR, the Caribbean revolution in the arts”.
	John Figueroa (Jamaica) – Figueroa, John J.M. Ed. <u>Caribbean Voices</u> . 1967.	Figueroa sustained he belonged to a “ people without literature ”.
	Oscar Ronald Dathorne (Guyana) <u>Caribbean Verse, An Anthology</u> . 1968.	He stressed the importance of folk traditions ; the scribal and video-aural dimensions of literature; in this process of what he roughly called the “ West Indianization of the English Literature and Language ” (15) there is still room for criticism for low-key quality Caribbean poetry.

1970s	“West	Indianism”
	John Figuroa – <u>Caribbean Voices</u> . <i>The Blue Horizons</i> . 1967.	He found it premature to give final judgments, but West Indian poets contributed to making the English language grow ; there are links to a Caribbean poetics .
	Slade Hopkinson (Jamaica)	‘ West Indianism ’
	contribution of the two Nobel Prizes from St. Lucia, Sir Arthur Lewis (Economics, 1979) and Derek Walcott (Literature, 1992)	
	Derek Walcott – “What the Twilight Says.” (1970).	He counterpoised the inner life of poetry vs. the exterior life of Creole ; linguistic issues cannot be disentangled from poetic issues; Walcott’s concept of the “ mulatto of style ”, dismissal of a consumer-oriented production.
	Derek Walcott – Two 1974 essays: “The Muse of History”. and “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?”	He talked about the role of history in poetry; comparison between two Caribbean Francophone poets: the Guadeloupian St. John Perse and the Martinican Aimé Césaire according to a shared aesthetic sensibility; amnesia, fragmentation, and mimicry .
	Sir Arthur Lewis . “On Being Different” (1971).	He dealt with the socio-aesthetic importance of poetry for a common human heritage .
	Gordon Rohlehr (Guyana) – “Literature and the Folk”. <u>My Strangled City and Other Essays</u> . (1971).	He stressed the importance of orality in poetry, e.g. Louise Bennett.
	Scholars and writers from several parts of the Caribbean are involved in an aesthetic quarrel: the <i>Savacou debate</i>	
	Gordon Rohlehr – “My Strangled City” (1971) also appeared the following year in <i>BIM</i> as “West Indian Poetry: Some Problems of Assessment.” (1972)	The Savacou debate was born around the innovative literary anthology <i>Savacou</i> ^{3/4} , edited by Brathwaite. According to Rohlehr the debate dealt with the question of the use of Creoles in poetry , about oral traditions and how words are rendered on the page ; 1970s and the issues of Blackness and Africanity . See Walcott vs. Brathwaite controversy and his 1981 <i>Pathfinder: Black Awakening in the Arrivants of Edward Kamau Brathwaite</i> . See also “The Problem of the Problem of Form”, <i>My Strangled City</i> “West Indian Poetry: Some Problems of Assessment” (1971) as well as the introduction to <i>Voiceprint</i> (See <i>The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays</i> (1992).

	Wayne Brown (Trinidad)	His view on the Savacou debate was that it just promoted Africanness on the spur of the '60s-'70s Black Power Movement; concept of art as imitation .
	Gordon Rohlehr – “Afterthought” (1971)	He remarked that in critical judgments contextualization is important.
	Gordon Rohlehr – “A Carrion time” (1973)	Rohlehr identified a Caribbean socio-aesthetics .
		literature is part of the philosophy of arts, which is part of aesthetics
	Kamau Brathwaite (Barbados) – Brathwaite, Kamau. “Art and Society” (1971).	Brathwaite recognised that the cultural heritage worked as “ social psyche ”.
	Wilson Harris (Guyana) – Harris, Wilson. <u>The Womb of Space</u> . Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983.	Cross-culturalization: “ Eastern and Western-based aesthetics are by no means mutually exclusive of each other”. Harris underlined the importance of heterogeneity, cross-fertilization of cultures, otherness, which are constitutive features of a Caribbean aesthetics.
	Kamau Brathwaite – “The Love Axe/1: (Developing a Caribbean Aesthetic 1962-1974). Part One.” (1977, <i>BIM</i>) and “The Love Axe/L: (Developing a Caribbean Aesthetic 1962-1974). Part Two.” (1977, <i>BIM</i>)	1970, students occupied the Creative Arts Centre at Mona Campus, Kingston, Jamaica: they demanded a “ West-indianization ” of culture .
	Maryse Condé (Guadeloupe) – Condé, Maryse, ed. <u>La Poésie Antillaise</u> . Paris: Editions Fernand Nathan, 1977.	She took into consideration a Caribbean socio-aesthetics , saying that the evolution of poetry and society are parallel; Francophone Caribbean poetry was just an “ exoticised version ” of the French colonial poetry .
	Martin Carter (Guyana) – Carter, Martin. “The Location of the Artist.” (1979)	He thought of the artist as producer of “ negative productivity ” and his cultural and social displacement .
	Theodor W. Adorno (Germany) – Adorno, T. W. <u>Aesthetic Theory</u> (1970, published posthumously in 1975)	The German philosopher gave an exhaustive definition of aesthetics and he highlighted the importance of the social environment in which to insert the work of art.
	Kamau Brathwaite – “Love Axe: Developing a Caribbean Aesthetics.” (1977)	Importance of rhythm .
1980s	The “federating” role	of West Indian poets
	Édouard Glissant (Martinique) – <i>Le Discours Antillais, Le Discours Antillais</i> . Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981. Also in his essay “Natural Poetics, Forced Poetics”.	He gave importance to the camouflage of the historical process ; there was a subterranean vital sap nourishing the vitality of the literature; in saying this he referred to Brathwaite’s statement that “ The unity is submarine ”; importance of orality: “ L’écrit s’oralise ”.

	Michael J. Dash (Trinidad) – Dash’s translation of <i>Le Discours Antillais</i> .	He commented on the “deconstructionist” and “metamorphic” nature of Glissant’s writing and on his poetics of Antillanité; social unconscious in his aesthetics .
	Kamau Brathwaite – <u>History of the Voice, The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry</u> . London; Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1984 .	He gave a definition of his concept of nation language as a strategy.
	Wilson Harris (Guyana) , “The Womb of Space” (1983)	“fabric of the imagination”, cross-culturalization and cross-fertilization of cultures; quantum connections.
	Mervyn Morris (Jamaica) – Morris, Mervyn. “Making West Indian Literature.” (1997)	He spoke of the use of Creole in literature .
	Gordon Rohlehr (Guyana) – Rohlehr, Gordon. “The Problem of the Problem of Form. The Idea of an Aesthetic Continuum and Aesthetic Code-switching in West Indian Literature” (1985)	He commented on the nature of the West Indian artist : writer’s intelligence, temperament and sensibility; material; writer’s imagination; aesthetics , looking for “energy, containment, catharsis” . Concepts of an “aesthetics of silence”, an “aesthetics of energy”, of the “minuet”, of the “closed system”.
	Gordon Rohlehr – “The Shape of That Hurt: An Introduction to <i>Voiceprint</i> .” (1989). Edited by Gordon Rohlehr, Mervyn Morris and Stewart Brown.	The introduction and the anthology stress on the importance of orality .
	Funso Aiyejina (Nigeria) – Aiyejina, Funso. “Derek Walcott: The Poet as a Federated Consciousness.” (1987)	He commented on the “federating role of the artist” (Walcott in this case) also in his use of the patois .
	Salman Rushdie (India - UK) – Rushdie, Salman. “Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist.” (1983)	He stated that the Commonwealth poets are contributing to the growth of the English language .
	Antonio Benítez-Rojo (Cuba) – Benitez-Rojo, Antonio. <u>The Repeating Island. The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective</u> . Trans. J. Maraniss. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2001. <u>La Isla que se Repite: El Caribe y la Perspectiva Postmoderna</u> . Barcelona, Spain: Editorial Casiopea, 1989 .	He recalled Glissant’s concepts of “fragmentation, uprootedness and reroutedness” , the importance of a “historiography” , and of “syncretism” . He also identified some other features in Caribbean’s societies: “their instability, their reciprocal isolation, their cultural heterogeneity, their historical continuity, their contingency and impermanence”. He spoke of an “aquatic culture”; aesthetically speaking the unity derives from its “complexity” and “repetition mode”, from “rhythms” and “orality”.

1990s	Creole as a vector	of aesthetic unity
	Anthony Kellman (Barbados) – Kellman, Anthony. “Introduction. A Legacy of Crossing and the Hope of Wholeness.” (1991) <u>Crossing Water. Contemporary Poetry of the English-Speaking Caribbean</u> . New York: The Greenfield Review Press, 1992 .	He identified three generations of West Indian poets : 1) First Generation: 1930; 2) Mid Generation: born circa 1945, extending celebratory themes, but paid attention to society as well; 3) New Generation: born circa 1960; importance of Rhythm .
	George Lamming (Barbados) – Lamming, George. <u>Coming, Coming Home. Conversations II. Western Education and the Caribbean Intellectual</u> . Philipsburg, St. Martin. House of Nehesi Publishers. 1995 ; 2000.	He recognized the importance of the “social reality in Caribbean literature” : he made reference to Antonio Gramsci, and he admitted the difficulty in finding West Indian historians or social scientist who consider the whole Caribbean in their studies .
	Alvin Thompson (Barbados) – Thompson, Alvin O. <u>The Haunting Past. Politics, Economics and Race in Caribbean Life</u> . Kingston and Oxford: Ian Randle and Jamzes Currey Publishers, 1997 .	He stressed the importance of a cultural unity in the region.
	Mervyn Morris (Jamaica) – Morris, Mervyn. “Printing the Performance.” (1992); Morris, Mervyn. “Is English We Speaking.” (1993)	He argued on the “difficulty in reproducing the Creole onto the written page” .
	Derek Walcott – “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory.” (1992)	He dealt with the concepts of fragmentation and restoration , and the importance of imagination .
	Brathwaite, Kamau . <u>Barabajan Poems</u> . New York: Savacou North, 1994 .	He defined the poet , culture and the Bajan culture specifically : he sustained that the role of the poet – not systematically West Indian – was that of a “craftsperson” who must pay attention to rhythm and to try to reproduce the “collective social experience” .
	Derek Walcott – “A Letter to Chamoiseau.” (1997)	He made considerations about the maternity of the mother tongue .
	Morris, Mervyn – “Sounds and Sense: West Indian Poetry.” (1998).	He made observations on the use of the Creole continuum by poets, and how they move along the spectrum of linguistic possibilities.
	Wilson Harris - “Creoleness: the Crossroads of a Civilization?” <u>Selected Essays of Wilson Harris. The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination</u> . Ed. Andrew Bundy. London & New York: Routledge, 1999 .	He sustained that cultural differences might be bridged through a Walcottian-like power of imagination ; he also thought that differences and creative possibilities were there to improve literature and give it a “social impact” .

2000	“The entire world	is gone ‘creole’”
	F. A. Badejo (Nigeria) – Badejo, Fabian Adekunle. “Introduction.” in Edward Kamau Brathwaite. <u>Words Need Love Too</u> . Philipsburg, St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, 2000 .	He wrote that the role of the poet is that of a “ re-constructor ” through his creative memory ; the importance of sounds of words in poetry: this is the “new aesthetic consciousness of Brathwaite”.
	Lasana M. Sekou (St. Maarten)	He proved that the poet was able to cross linguistic differences and to make a syncretic use of words and sounds.
	Maureen Warner-Lewis (Trinidad) – Warner-Lewis, Maureen. “Language Use in West Indian Literature.” <u>A History of Literature in the Caribbean</u> . Ed. James A. Arnold. Vol. 2. English- and Dutch-speaking regions. Offprint. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001 .	She sustained the importance of orality and oral performance in the Caribbean.
	Edward Baugh (Jamaica) – Baugh, Edward. “A History of Poetry.” <u>A History of Literature in the Caribbean</u> . Ed. James A. Arnold. Vol. 2. English- and Dutch-speaking regions. Offprint. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001 .	He recognized syncretic influences in Caribbean poetry.
	Howard A. Fergus (Montserrat) – Fergus, Howard A. “Introduction.” Badejo, Fabian Adekunle. <u>Salted Tongues. Modern Literature in St. Martin</u> . Philipsburg, St. Martin. House of Nehesi Publishers. 2003 .	He criticised the European critics approaching West Indian literature from a “purely European perspective”.
	Rex Nettleford (Jamaica) – Nettleford, Rex. “The Caribbean’s Creative Diversity: the Defining Point of the region’s History.” <u>Lecture delivered by Prof. Rex Nettleford, Vice Chancellor, University of the West Indies, University of Guyana, Guyana</u> . 21st March 2003. Press Release 54/2003. 4th April 2003 .	He made consideration on multiculturalism and globalism and the position of West Indies in a world which, in his words, “is gone ‘creole’ ”.
	Joy A. Mahabir (Trinidad) – Mahabir, Joy A. I. <u>Miraculous Weapons. Revolutionary Ideology in Caribbean Culture</u> . New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc. 2003 .	She extensively commented on the importance of rhythm in Caribbean society/ies.

	<p>Funso Aiyejina (Nigeria) – Aiyejina, Funso. “Introduction.” Aiyejina, Funso, Morgan, Paula, Eds. <u>Caribbean Literature in a Global Context</u>. San Juan, T&T: Lexicon Trinidad Ltd. 2006.</p>	<p>In analyzing the region’s socio-aesthetics he sustained the importance of the culture, in terms of “language, religion, music, literature”.</p>
	<p>Edward Baugh – “Frank Collymore and West Indian Literature.” Record. on CD. Inaugural Distinguished Lecture. UWI Mona Campus, Kingston, Jamaica: Radio Unit, Library of the Spoken Word, 12 Apr. 2007.</p>	<p>He remarked on Frank Collymore’s contribution to the creation of a Caribbean socio-aesthetic discourse, also through the literary journal <i>BIM</i>.</p>
	<p>Lasana M. Sekou (St. Maarten) – “Color & Cultural Identity: A Caribbean Story.” <u>Keynote Address, 10th Annual Eastern Caribbean Islands’ Cultures Conference</u>. “The Islands In Between.” Philipsburg Community & Cultural Center, Philipsburg, St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers. November 1 - 4, 2007.</p>	<p>He remarked on how old cultural fragments constitute a new Caribbean reality; Sekou also questioned the canons of beauty.</p>
	<p>Opal Palmer Adisa (Jamaica/US) – Calderaro, Michela A. “A Space Occupied by Swirling Caribbean Waters. An Interview with Opal Palmer Adisa.” <u>Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters</u>. Ed. Jacqueline Bishop, Michela Calderaro. New York: New York University. Vol. 5. N. 1. Summer/Fall 2008.</p>	<p>Palmer Adisa stressed the relation between the people and the environment, that means “the society, the culture, the language”.</p>
	<p>Derek Walcott – “Derek Walcott in conversation with Kwame Dawes.” <u>Calabash Literary Festival</u>. St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, 24 May 2008.</p>	<p>Walcott affirmed that: “Caribbean aesthetics is ‘spongeous’, it absorbs all the influences. (...) I think that Caribbean literature has just begun.”</p>

Chapter I
Eric Roach (1915-1974)
An ‘Island Aesthetics’ as an ‘Aesthetics of the Islands’

Eric Merton Roach was born in Tobago, the twin island of Trinidad in the Southern Caribbean Republic of Trinidad & Tobago, in 1915 and started writing in his twenties, when he served in the island military forces. He then worked in the Civil Service, as a teacher, as a journalist, and as a contributor to Henry Swanzy’s BBC Caribbean Voices.¹⁸⁴ According to Brathwaite, Eric Roach is one of the most beautiful voices of the Caribbean Renaissance (1948-72), and his collected poems *The Flowering Rock* were published just twenty years after his death.¹⁸⁵ He did not receive much critical attention but his poetry pays special attention to craft, and as Laurence Breiner reminded in his review of the collection:

Roach is one of the region’s craftiest and most political poets, in a class with Claude McKay of Jamaica and Martin Carter of Guyana. Admiration for his work comes from a distinguished and diverse spectrum of writers from Trinidad, including Anson Gonzalez, Gordon Rohlehr, Ian McDonald, Kenneth Ramchand, and Wayne Brown. Despite that support, it is characteristic of Roach’s story that his collected poems did not appear until 1992, almost twenty years after his death.¹⁸⁶

Roach contributed to the region’s artistic and literary development and took part in the notorious *Savacou* debate, but he decided to commit suicide in 1974, drinking poison and romantically jumping into the ocean, towards Africa, from a cliff in Quinam Bay, Trinidad.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Swanzy was the Irish radio broadcaster who conceived the “BBC Caribbean Voices” program between 1946 and 1953 and contributed in spreading Caribbean poetry in the UK and thus being internationally acknowledged overseas.

¹⁸⁵ Henceforward ‘*The Flowering Rock: Collected Poems 1938-1974.*’ (Leeds: Peepal Tree Books, 1992.) will be referred to with ‘FR’. Roach was also the author of three plays: *Belle Fanto* (1967), *Letter from Leonora* (1968), and *A Calabash of Blood* (1971).

¹⁸⁶ Breiner, Laurence. “Life and Times. Laureate of Nowhere.” [The Caribbean Review of Books. The Home of Caribbean Books and Writing](#) 10 (Nov. 2006) Media & Editorial Projects Publications. 26 Mar. 2009 <<http://www.meppublishers.com/online/crb/issues/index.php?pid=1069>>. In his essay “Blues for Eric Roach” Gordon Rohlehr observed how “Edward Brathwaite has pointed it out in his essay “Sir Galahad and the Islands” *BIM* 1957, Derek Walcott has put in pleas for collection and publication of Roach’s poetry in articles published in *The Trinidad Guardian* in 1962 and 1965, while George Lamming had focused on Roach’s work in an article published in *Africa Forum* in 1965.” Rohlehr, Gordon. “Blues for Eric Roach.” [My Strangled City and Other Essays](#). *Cit.* 142-3. First published [Tapia](#) 4.21 (26 May 1974).

¹⁸⁷ “Eric Roach.” [ChickenBones: A Journal for Literary & Artistic African-American Themes](#) (n.d.) n.p. 11 March 2009 <<http://www.nathanielturner.com/ericroachandfloweringrock.htm>>.

I.i. Roach's nostalgia for origins: the influence of W.B. Yeats

Defined by Kamau Brathwaite as “the most splendid voice of the Caribbean Renaissance (1948-1972)”,¹⁸⁸ Roach – who started publishing poetry under the name of Merton Maloney – will be the first poet analyzed here in chronological order. Moving from an English-derived tradition, with his poetry he tried to develop themes which mainly concerned his island people, often rendering the epistemic and patemic values in descriptions of the island or the life of the peasants. At a thematic level, these two values interweave enabling the poet to express a sort of nostalgia for origins, as Brathwaite continued, in “precious confounded Yeatsian & still utterly Caribbean statements.”¹⁸⁹ In fact, in the critical book *Black Yeats*, Breiner compared Roach to the Irish poet William Butler Yeats (1865-1939). According to Prof. Rajeev S. Patke, who wrote extensively on aesthetics and on Yeats, this analogy has been chosen by Breiner because of three main reasons:¹⁹⁰

- 1) Roach was as passionate as the Romantic Yeats, as the 1957 poem “I Am the Archipelago” shows: “I am the archipelago hope (...) / I herd in my divided skin / Under a monomaniac sullen sun / disnomia deep in artery and marrow / I burn the tropic texture from my hair” (*FR*, 128);
- 2) through the gift of his poetic imagination, Roach intended the concept of a “nation” as a super-imposed item (in accordance to Romantic principles) to speak for the common people, as the poem “Men” unfolds: “Live my village kinsmen / Subject of my verse (...) / They are not brilliant men / Or hot heroic men, / Only broad homely men, / Common labouring men, / Barefoot, earthy men.” (*FR*, 83);
- 3) both Roach and Yeats had a notion of the present actions as an integral part of history (notion which is somehow connected to Walter Benjamin's thought). Roach was not happy with the Caribbean socio/political situation, neither did he want to subdue to emigration (like Harris or Lamming),¹⁹¹ thus he decided to commit suicide: to go back to his (fictive) origins. Yeats would not have opted for this solution, but, as Patke suggested, Roach intimately believed in what Lacan conceived as the “unfulfillability of the system”, and he preferred to die than to live an “unfulfillable life”. For Roach both

¹⁸⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁹⁰ I would like to thank Prof. Rajeev S. Patke for the discussions which led to the interpretation of the above information. Personal communication with Prof. Rajeev S. Patke. Interview. 14 Mar. 2009.

¹⁹¹ Cf. the poem “A Letter to Lamming”: “I hold my narrow island in my hand / While you have thrown yours to sea / And jumped for England, where, beyond my gaze / I hear only your seasonal voice, / A lonely seagull's crying on Atlantic.” (*FR*, 81)

important historical events¹⁹² and personal, daily events¹⁹³ are noteworthy in his aesthetics and unfailing parts of history.

Thus Roach found inspiration in Yeats for sharing Romantic principles like passion, the poetic imagination, the notions of “nation” and “history”, and also for a “nostalgia for origins”, which led him to being committed to his people and island. His Romantic gesture of suicide differentiates him from Yeats, but the yearning for origins is a concept that connects him to the Irish poet. The inspiration that Yeats represented for Roach is evident also in his metrical choices. Working mostly with traditional rhythms and employing rhymes drawn from Celtic popular songs, Yeats could nevertheless be considered somehow closer to the oral tradition, as was the case with Roach’s poetry,¹⁹⁴ about whose metre Prof. Ramchand observed that “in Roach’s work, the resounding iambic lines of the early poems, the dutiful use of rhyme and formal stanza give way (...) to an invisibly regulated free verse”.¹⁹⁵ On the other hand, Breiner denied the use of free verse by Roach:

Roach did not write in free verse. His poems might be called “free” with respect to the handling of rhyme, line-length, and stanzaic pattern, but the freedom is conditional; there is usually some metrical and stanzaic norm in the background. An exception proves the rule: “Eclogue for Christmas” is genuine free verse, but that is because it is modelled closely on T.S. Eliot.¹⁹⁶

Influences of Yeats, but also of Eliot, made critics argue about Roach’s verse: one thing that seem to have been noticed, though, is his crafted employment of poetic language, in which one could spot 19th-century reverberations, and further underline a nostalgia for origins.¹⁹⁷ What fostered Roach’s enduring voice was a strained attachment to the myth of origins as well as an articulation of how art (in this case poetry) from the colonies was believed to have been thoroughly influenced by the

¹⁹² As in the poem “Caribbean Coronation Verse”: “The famous pioneer of the three-way passage / The great slave-trading corsair gentleman / The queen acclaimed him with the accolade.” (FR, 99).

¹⁹³ As in the poem “I Walk Abroad”: “I take my Caribbean nature, / Under my continental negroid hair the skull / Assumes the infinite variety, shapes and moods of islands”. (FR, 96).

¹⁹⁴ The dichotomy orality/literacy relates to Ferdinand De Saussure’s concepts of *langue* and *parole*, where the *parole* does not exist without the *langue*: the spoken word does not exist without the written, literary one. Nonetheless, dub poetry represents an exception to this: let us think, for instance, of the Jamaican poet Michael Smith, in whose work the *parole* exists without the linguisticity of literature; his oral poems were first recorded and then written down as a literary text by Prof. Mervyn Morris.

¹⁹⁵ Ramchand, Kenneth. “Introduction.” Roach, Eric M. *The Flowering Rock*. Cit. 12.

¹⁹⁶ Breiner, Laurence A. “The Politics of Poetry. Roach’s Aesthetics and the *Savacou* Debate.” *Black Yeats: Eric Roach and the Politics of Caribbean Poetry*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2008. 264. In the allegoric poem “Eclogue for Christmas”: “The kings that came to the Birth / The heathen outlanders, stargazers and givers / Are gone and are gone: / Weary of fealty and homage / They have deserted the scene / And the picture is faded and the theme is a legend.” (FR, 68).

¹⁹⁷ It is for this sense of nostalgia that Derek Walcott created a new Adamic language, because he also had a nostalgia for history.

mother country's paradigms, and thus to be subjected to a colonial yoke,¹⁹⁸ thus the affinity of Roach to Yeats, both the poets being British 'colonials'. Certainly, despite their connection with a socio-temporal frame and tastes variations according to different epochs, the concepts of "beauty" and "aesthetics" transcend those frames. That is how we can connect Roach's poetry to his socio-historical surrounding, being it the expression of a sublime blend between common people and their lives, their personal histories, their oral tongue.

Many of Roach's poems were influenced by Yeats, and the more interesting ones are relevant from an aesthetic point of view: for instance, Breiner recognized an affinity between Roach's "Homestead" and Yeats's "Under Ben Bulben" "in its rhyme, form, and diction".¹⁹⁹ Roach's poem goes like this: "O sons, O strong ones from their loins, / Boldly inherit the rich earth / Though you keep their homespun traces / Or run in splendid gilded races. / O poets, painters, thinkers turn / Again and take new craft from old" ("Homestead", *FR*, 80). Yeats's lines that Breiner recognized as close to Roach's are to be found in "Under Ben Bulben", in which the poet, aiming at a united artistic spirituality, complained about the disregard for craft, the consequent lack of literary inspiration from the past, and the unruly verses of the new generation of poets: "Poet and sculptor, do the work, (...) / Irish poets, learn your trade, / Sing whatever is well made, / Scorn the sort now growing up / All out of shape from toe to top, / Their unremembering hearts and heads / Base-born products of base beds. / Sing the peasantry".²⁰⁰ The need to look for a new verse, derived from the traditional one, brings Roach's aesthetics to the fore: in these lines he praised a new creativity, the development of arts in respect to the past and to the "rich earth". The Tobagonian rural life and the bond to its simple rules are described to aim at a golden future, as Roach also wrote in "Poets and Painters": "Poets and painters, thinkers, strugglers / We who endeavour here / To write the future with the fire splendour" (*FR*, 70). Yeats's lines underline the affinity which is shared by the Irish poet and the Tobagonian: the two poets' could reasonably be considered, as Breiner also suggested, an "aesthetic of the peasants". Roach insisted on poets going back to roots, writing of peasantry for the peasants, singing the simple things in life, because the urge to write poetry is something ancestral which is pristine with the basic rules of life.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. Carter's affirmation that West Indian poetry was just "poor imitations of English models", also quoted in the introduction to this thesis. Carter, Martin. "Sensibility and the Search." (1958) *Cit.* 207.

¹⁹⁹ Breiner, Laurence A. "The Homestead: Intimate Poems." Black Yeats: Eric Roach and the Politics of Caribbean Poetry. *Cit.* 125.

²⁰⁰ Yeats, William Butler. "Under Ben Bulben." Last Two Poems and Two Plays. 1939. 12 June 2009 <<http://www.solarnet.org/Travel/IRE/BenBulben.htm>>.

I.ii. The importance of nature in Roach's poetry

In *The Poetics of Indeterminacy* the American critic Marjorie Perloff, who dedicated many studies to both theoretical and philosophical issues applied to literature, remarked how in European poetry the idea of beauty – since the Middle Ages, I would add – was linked to the concept of a ‘rose’: “it is quite obvious that the word ‘rose’ in the context of European poetry has come to mean ‘BEAUTY,’ just as Mallarmé’s damned swan is no swan at all but ‘THE POET.’”²⁰¹ In “Death Does Not” Roach mentioned the artistic ‘death of a swan’: “Plunge graceful as a swan / Into oblivion.” (69) and again in “The Old House” he claimed “And one is like a stricken swan” (77). Gliding in between nature and death, the image of the ‘swan’ could be a transfiguration of the poet himself, the beauty of whose poetry is comparable to the beauty of the swan that raped Yeats’s Leda. Rohlehr remarked how, in Roach’s poetry, the ‘hawk’ and the ‘rock’ are symbolic images representative of the poet, as in “Love Overgrows a Rock”: “The drunken hawk’s blood of / the poet streams through climates of the mind / seeking a world’s integrity” (*FR*, 127). Here the poet is represented by the hawk who is looking for probity and moral principles, wandering in his muffled mind and subject to uncertain thoughts.

Nature is of primary importance in the Caribbean because it is overwhelming, and it is inebriating, intoxicating (like, for instance, in Jean Rhys’s novel *Wide Sargasso Sea*). Nature offers the poet the first environment, after the familiar, domestic one, in which to confront with his/her own sensibility and into which the poet can look for answers to existential questions, but, in the case of the Caribbean, also to historical questions. The fact that the Caribbean landscape is constellated by ruins of mills and estate plantations has a relevance in a poet’s personal, familiar, national history. The Pre-Socratic Greek philosopher Thales of Miletus conceived water as the primordial element, and the sea or the presence/absence of water are of primary importance in Caribbean poetry, especially in Roach’s, even more so because his suicidal act culminated in a reunion with the uterine element. The uncertain dating of the poem “Finis” indicates it was probably written in the same year of his suicide, and its lines ooze with sorrow and “Conradian” darkness: “darkness has entered / at the pores of love (...) / now sound is silence (...) / a man has passed / into the heart of darkness” (*FR*, 209). In the past many poets and philosophers were inspired by the sea or by the moon to speak of life and death. Sea water, as Northrop Frye put it, is an archetype for life, but also for death. As a uterine element, the sea gives life, but it can also take it away.

Wayne Brown, a Trinidadian, felt poetically close to Roach not just because of the fact that they both come from the Twin Republic, but also, aesthetically speaking, because he admired the

²⁰¹ Perloff, Marjorie. *The Poetics of Indeterminacy: Rimbaud to Cage*. New Princeton UP Press. 1981. 294.

attention to craft in Roach's poetry. Poetry was for Roach the search for extreme perfection of the verse, the completion of life: "I hope I'm ripe to write / Perfection in the verse / As I am ripe to die" ("Men", *FR*, 83), as the great poets of the tradition did: "When Shakespeare cut and chiselled at his verse / And Marlowe (...) / Was made immortal on the kiss of death" ("Caribbean Calypso", *FR*, 153). Brown once told me "My poetry is the sea."²⁰² Roach would have maybe affirmed that his poetry was the land and the peasants, as the title "For the Peasant People of the Islands" may suggest.²⁰³ When Roach wrote about nature he could not avoid writing about its relationship with history,²⁰⁴ as he saw poetry as an incomparable instrument to metabolise the sorrows derived from the socio-historical situation; again, an Aristotelian catharsis.²⁰⁵ Let us consider the poem "Corn", for instance. Teelucksingh compared this poem to "Mother and Son", to "Men", "Homestead" or "Poets and Painters", in that she recognised the relationship of the artist with his people or with God:

the manner in which the poem is structured also reflects the idea of the connection between peasant, the seed and the earth. The poem is divided into three parts, with the first division focusing on the peasant or sower, the second division highlighting the earth and its role as nurturer to the peasant. The third division is centered on the seeds that the peasant must labour and plant.²⁰⁶

The peasants are described by Roach as "Patient, stubborn as their cattle, / Wearing out the changing weathers, / Wearing time in generations" (133): their relationship with the land is linked to history and to another archetypal concept of the earth as a motherly womb, to which everybody returns with death.²⁰⁷ Both the sea and the earth are uterine elements: ironically enough, after having sung of his land for a lifetime, Roach decided to return to the sea.²⁰⁸

²⁰² Wayne Brown's collections *On the Coast* (1972) or *Voyages* (1989) were born from the sea; his second collection derives its title from many journeys by sea.

²⁰³ Similarly, the Guyanese poet Brian Chan in his "Paradise" identifies land with people: "These islands we people". Chan, Brian. "Paradise." *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*. Eds. Stewart Brown, and Ian Mc Donald. *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*. London: Heinemann International Literature and Textbooks, 1992. 47

²⁰⁴ Explaining his own poem "The Sea Is History", Derek Walcott admitted that: "in this poem (...) It's not only an idealized, romantic or bitter view of history, because towards the end what is abused and what is excoriated is the decay, and the fact that the people who now run the Caribbean are acting on the same view of history: they are re-enacting this linear idea of possession, of rule, of using the same methods to govern as their predecessors did." Birbalsingh, Frank, ed. "Derek Walcott: The Sea is History." *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English*. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996. 24.

²⁰⁵ The sense of history is extremely important for many other Caribbean poets. In "Ruins of a Great House" Walcott depicts historical 'excoriation' – a kind of scarification on the Caribbean land – represented by a Great House in ruin, as a symbol of the decadence of an Empire. In a similar attitude, the Jamaican poet Edward Baugh clarified in "Old Talk or West Indian History": "Yes, I had meant it / to be purposeful, like history, but is only old talk." (Baugh, Edward. "Old Talk or West Indian History." *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*. *Cit.* 9.)

²⁰⁶ Cf. Teelucksingh, Jennifer. "A Critical Analysis of Eric Roach's. "Corn"." *ConneXions* 1.1 (11 Apr. 2007) The Connexions Project. Creative Commons Attribution License. 25 July 2008 <<http://cnx.org/content/m14441/1.1/>>.

²⁰⁷ Interestingly, the Jamaican dub poet Mutabaruka in "dis poem" sings of the relationship of the poet as historical and memorial spokesperson for his 'peopl', with the "wretched sea / that washed ships to these shores / of

Despite these ancestral evocations of natural elements and their link to death as a “rite of passage”, a parallel is more likely to be drawn between land/earth and woman, as eroticism could reach a transfiguration in the passion for a woman. What does render island/Caribbean women so poetically peculiar, then? Their beauty is mythical and it dives into the past: Roach depicted one of the most beautiful women in all Caribbean mythology, in a revisitation of mythical colonial history, Anacaona, in “The Legend of Anacaona” (*FR*, poem written in 1949, rewritten in 1955).²⁰⁹ This Haitian queen was associated with gold and her name, other than signifying ‘golden flower’, was compared to that of a sinuous snake, ‘Anaconda’, by early chroniclers.²¹⁰ As a matter of fact, Anacaona was a queen who, after witnessing her husband Caonabo’s murder, preferred to die than to be enslaved by the Spaniards,²¹¹ and according to Jean Fouchard she is to be considered the first poetess of Haïti.²¹²

mothers cryin for their young / swallowed up by the sea”. Mutabaruka. “dis poem.” *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*. Eds. Brown, Stewart, and McWatt, Marc. Oxford: OUP, 2005. 278.

²⁰⁸ Other instances of the relationship between the poets’ water (sea) and land (earth) are to be found in the Trinidadian poet and anthropologist Roy Ankhkara Kwabena in “Letter from Sea Lots” (*The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse in English*). Kwabena’s collections of poetry are *Lament of the Soul* (1974), *Insight* (1975), *Follow de Path* (1980), *In Other Words* (1986), *Seasons of Exile* (1986), *Manifestations* (1997), *A Job for the Hangman* (1999), *As Long As* (2005), *Orisha Song for Celina* (2006), *In the Moment* (2006).

²⁰⁹ “The Legend of Anacaona” is part of a cluster of poems in Roach’s production which narrate legends or are ballads, like “Legend of Daaga”, “Ballad of Canga”, “Ballad for Tubal Butler”.

²¹⁰ You read under the entry ‘Anaconda’: “Ramusio’s version of Pietro Martire d’Angheria such S. American names as Anacauchoa and Anacaona.” Yule, Henry, and A.C. Burnell. *Hobson-Jobson. A Glossary of Colloquial Anglo-Indian Words and Phrases, and of Kindred Terms, Etymological, Historical, Geographical and Discursive*. New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1886. 23. Google Books. 19 Oct. 2009 <http://books.google.it/books?id=20pdFRekGvMC&pg=PP22&lpg=PP22&dq=The+Etymology+of+Some+Botanical+and+Zoological+Names.Hobson-Jobson+By+Col.+Henry+Yule+and+A.C.+Burnell&source=bl&ots=9mbrdk7TBE&sig=WARAuvUxfG-GJvEZ21gPRrn8sV8&hl=it&ei=ryjcSquCKcOj4Qb-7_H0CA&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CAgQ6AEwAA#v=snippet&q=Anacaona&f=false>. Also in “The Etymology of Some Botanical and Zoological Names.” Lenin, Janaki. *The Wildlife Almanac* (17 May 2007) 19 Feb. 2008 <http://wildlifealmanac.blogspot.com/2007_05_01_archive.html>.

²¹¹ The animal kingdom is exemplified and considered by poets, too. The horse is an interesting animal for it evokes the ancient past and American origin, the extinction and its subsequent integration by the Europeans, let us think of Mahadai Das’s ‘Horses’ “Sinking into the sea”, but “They will rise from the sea tomorrow.” (Both Mahadai Das. “Horses.” *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*. Cit. 69.), or of Brathwaite’s *Born to Slow Horses*, in which their gallop could be compared to the earthily vibration of an earthquake. “Colonial history and contacts with Europeans are in the background of his poetry, embedding the image of the horses in a historic and biological frame of rearrangement. The horses, proceeding from North America but extinct, were reintroduced by the Europeans and used as a means to defeat the natives. The contacts between such different civilizations which Brathwaite’s style weaves together matches the syncopated gait of a galloping wild horse. Where his *Sycorax Video Style* assembles various fonts of different sizes, leaving the track of a restless race, on the page at times slow and repetitive – like the monotonous chant of an African story – at other times tough and marked – swift in the successive lines, disrespectful of prosodic norms.” My review of Brathwaite’s *Born to Slow Horses*. *Il Tolomeo*. X, 1, 2007. 45-47.

²¹² “La petite reine du Xaragua, demeurera le symbole de la poésie taino. (...) On la couronnera des lauriers dūs à la première poétesse d’Ayti. (...) « Fleur d’or » était douée pour la Poésie.” Fouchard, Jean. *Langue et Littérature des Aborigènes d’Ayti*. Paris: Editions de l’Ecole, 1972. 130-2. Cf. also the Grenadian poet Omowale David Franklyn, who spoke of the creative inventiveness of Anacaona in the poem “Coyaba”: “And through these channels / Anacoana [and not “Anacaona”, *NbR*] advises: / ‘Children of change: / It is not waiting— / your Coyaba / must be created (...)’ ” Omowale, David Franklyn. “Coyaba.” *Tongue of Another Drum: Anthology of Poems*. Mona, Jamaica: A.C.L. Art & Desktop Services, for St. George’s, Grenada: Talented House Publications, 1994. 9-10.

Roach, like the Trinidadian poet Kenneth Vidia Parmasad,²¹³ was very attentive to the process of creolization in his island and in the Caribbean. In fact in his poetry he often aimed at an aesthetic unity, as evident in “Despite Ancestral Rape”,²¹⁴ in “The World of Islands”,²¹⁵ or again in “At Sangre Grande”, in which all the racial groups of Trinidad are featured: “All night the Hindu drums / and chants his baroque East (...) / Fo Chin, in sleeveless vest, / keeps shop, grinning his pidgin” (*FR*, 184). Creolization meant – and still means – not just a harmonic blending of peoples, but also social issues and racial prejudices: “Hindu and Muslim snarl, Chinese / and whites stand off – blacks / seethe and rage in contempt of themselves” (*FR*, 185). To give importance to people is to give relevance also to the native Creoles, so that they acquire an aesthetic value.²¹⁶ So, in “Senghor Visiting”, Roach saluted the Senegalese poet and sang the praises of Creole “languages jostle in the mosaic (...) / come back to salt the tongue” (*FR*, 192).²¹⁷

Creole is not overflowing in Roach’s poetry, but the poet made use of it sporadically, and he mainly embroidered it in the poetic tissue.²¹⁸ In “Love Overgrows a Rock” Roach speaks of his island and of the migration of Caribbean people to other places, where diaspora or migration did not allow them to transcend their origins and their cultural roots: “We take banana boats / Tourist, stowaway, / Our luck in hand, calypsos in the heart” (*FR*, 127). Yet, he did not employ much Creole, thinking that his duty was of “Seeking a word’s integrity” (*FR*, 127). Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis observed how, even when Roach employed Creole in his plays – as in *Belle Fanto*

²¹³ Parmasad in his first collection *Child of the Storms and Other Poems* (1987) admitted “I was born in the wind”, (Parmasad, Kenneth Vidia. “Child of the Storms.” *Child of the Storms and Other Poems*. Trinidad & Tobago: The New Voices, 1987. 3.); as much as Roach or Wayne Brown he also derived his poetry from the sea. But Parmasad also raised the question of racial identity, being “Bound-Coolie” (*Ibidem.*) – which means Indian-born – in his own land, torn apart between Africans and Indians, being nowadays the political, racial, and cultural issues between the two groups high-pitched matters. In fact he described Trinidad as “the confluence / Of the Congo and the Ganga” (*Ibid.* 5.): again water, but this time carried over by the wind to the west, to his native Caribbean.

²¹⁴ “We thank our thick Caribbean stars for roofing.” (*FR*, 94).

²¹⁵ “I am the supple rhythm of the seas; / I recreate the world on islands.” (*FR*, 147).

²¹⁶ As the Jamaican poet Olive Senior does in her “Ode to Pablo Neruda”, where she replies to the Chilean poet Pablo Neruda’s “bottom of the well” (Senior, Olive. “Ode to Pablo Neruda.” over the roofs of the world. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2005. 92.): her poetry elevates itself over Neruda’s earthy poetry, ‘over the roofs of the world’, and Jamaican Creole acquires an aesthetic value of its own.

²¹⁷ Walcott connected the idea of salt to the tongue “...when I write / this poem, each phrase go be soaked in salt; / I go draw and knot every line as tight / as ropes in this rigging; in simple speech / my common language go be the wind”. (Walcott, Derek. “The Schooner *Flight*.” *Collected Poems 1948-1984*. *Cit.* 347.) or as the incipit of “Gros-Ilet” shows: “From this village, soaked like a grey rag in salt-water, / a language came, garnished with conch shells.” (Walcott, Derek. D.W., “Gros-Ilet.” *The Arkansas Testament*. New York: Farrar, 1987. 35.) *Cf.* also Lasana Sekou’s metaphor of the ‘salt’ in his poetry.

²¹⁸ Instead, a poet like the Nevisian Novello Maynard abandoned it almost completely in a collection like *Pebbles* (1989) (after the collection *Seeds*), preferring SE to the Nevisian Creole when he moved to the UK. Writing about a tormenting love in “Love Captured”, Maynard felt caught, under a sense of wrath, comparing love to a beautiful butterfly “on a pin”. It seems that the taxonomic greed has imprisoned the love “sole possessor of one master”, as much as the beauty of poetry. Both Maynard, Novello N. “Love Captured.” *Pebbles, Love Poems*. Bristol, UK: Carmina Publishing, 1989. 13. The same tone and issues are to be found in “A Love Cultivated”, “Honeysuckle Blossoms”, “Presumed Love”, “Spirits of Love”, “Love’s Indifference” and “Freedom from Love”.

(1966) –, his dialect had a “more orthodox setting and (...) more restricted orthographic changes”.²¹⁹ Roach’s was not the “movable language” or “chattel language” of the Tobagonian-born poet Marlene Nourbese Philip,²²⁰ but it was less flexible because more standard, and faithful to metric rules or adherent to tradition. Nonetheless, as Prof. Baugh observed, in “Letter to Lamming” Roach exhorted Lamming not to forget “cadences of island patois” (82), however his interest in folk culture and its traditions went beyond the use of patois, and in fact he expressed it in a very traditional rhythm and metre – even inspired by the poet W. H. Auden:

Roach himself is not exactly noted for using the “cadences of island patois.” In ‘Caribbean Calypso,’ where he seems to be essaying a calypso rhythm, the source of the music might just as well be Audenesque. But Roach is nevertheless remembered for taking seriously the study of the folk and of native folkways. (...) he modifies a basic iambic beat.²²¹

I.iii. The search for an aesthetic unity: the use of Creole and Roach’s relevance in the ‘Savacou debate’

What is the creative possibility of Creole and how does its use affect the aesthetics of Roach’s poetry? No definitive and ultimate answer can be given to this question, but, philosophically speaking, I would see that creative possibility as the passage from potentiality to action about which Aristotle spoke. It involves the ability to challenge history and make it different, to resist adversities and create, make, ποιεω, something new, ‘creolised’. Not by chance the Maker for excellence is, after God, the ‘Poet’, the ποιητης; God was the first Poet. And His is the first and foremost of creative possibilities, He sparkled what philosophers call Aesthetics, for His creation was the creation of Beauty. His was the first model, either transcendent as Plato thought, or immanent as Aristotle conceived. However, the XIX century German philosopher Hegel denied the presence of God and for him aesthetics was just a mortal configuration of emotions.

²¹⁹ Warner-Lewis, Maureen. “Language Use in West Indian Literature.” *A History of Literature in the Caribbean. Cit. Vol. 2.* 28.

²²⁰ The Tobagonian Marlene Nourbese Philip speaks of ‘chattel language’ in *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silent Softly Breaks* (1989): “this chattel language / babu english / slave idiom / nigger vernacular / coolie pidgin / wog pronunciation”. (Philip, Marlene Nourbese. *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silent Softly Breaks*. London: The Women’s Press, 1989, 1993. 47. Cited in Patke, Rajeev S. *Postcolonial Poetry in English*. Oxford; New York: OUP, 2006. 33-34.) Architecturally, the chattel houses were the movable houses of Barbadian slaves: “Early chattel houses were built symmetrical, with ridged or hipped, shingled roofs. (...) Barbados’ distinctive wooden chattel (literally ‘moveable property’) houses were built of clapboard on coral rock bases above the ground” (Gravette, Andrew. *Architecture Heritage of the Caribbean, An A-Z of Historic Buildings*. Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 2000. 117.): here Philip suggests the transient and changing nature of English Creoles.

²²¹ Baugh, Edward. “A History of Poetry.” *A History of Literature in the Caribbean. Cit. Vol. 2.* 242-3.

In his poetry, Roach aimed at developing an aesthetic unity, as the Trinidadian poet Ian McDonald observed in his foreword to *The Flowering Rock*, “He was one of the first to express in remarkable poetry and clear individual voice the vision of a precise and distinctive West Indian identity.”²²² McDonald also noticed how West Indian poetry was quite derivative, especially at the beginning, and thus Roach’s contribution to Caribbean literature could be seen as a transition from a tendency to derivativeness from the English tradition to a new fresh set of Caribbean aesthetics in which creative possibilities bloomed, thus Roach’s inclination to craft the verse starting from an English tradition. As I have already said in my introduction, the *Savacou* debate was going on in the 1970s and it was born out of Roach’s concept of a new approach to poetry (mainly exemplified by Kamau Brathwaite and his poetic experiments), as reported in the journal *ChickenBones* :

In 1972 [Edward Baugh reports 14th July 1971, *NbR*], he [Roach, *NbR*] had published a fiercely critical review of the new Caribbean poetry published in *Savacou* 3/4 (‘Tribe Boys vs Afro-Saxons’) and in the absence of the publication of his own poetry of this period, which was indeed much closer in spirit to the *Savacou* collection than his somewhat intemperate review suggested, he was widely castigated for what were perceived as reactionary views.²²³

In fact, the review bestowed the label of ‘conservative’, if not ‘derivative’, poet/writer on Roach, as Breiner observed “a rural conservative from Tobago, as a supporter of the Federation taken aback by the Jamaicanness of the anthology, as a respecter of craft”.²²⁴ The idea of him being committed to a literary tradition, of paying attention to craft and to a respected canon was partially misunderstood, as Danielle Gianetti observed in her 1985 essay “The Poetry of E. M. Roach: New Perspectives on His Use of Form”:

What was seen as his particular alignment earned him the reputation of being static and limited in his conception of form and a traditionalist who was incapable of recognizing the validity of committed and experimental poetry.²²⁵

Edward Baugh remarked that Roach’s review of the anthology in the *Trinidad Guardian* of 14th July 1971 was considered pompous and conservative: “Roach’s patrician side protested, somewhat bad-temperedly, what he saw as a surrender of high standards to the new unkempt brigade.”²²⁶ Now, it will be interesting to highlight what scholars like Breiner or Ramchand observed about

²²² McDonald, Ian. “Foreword.” Eric M. Roach. *The Flowering Rock*. *Cit.* 9.

²²³ “Eric Roach.” *ChickenBones: A Journal, for for Literary & Artistic African-American Themes*. *Cit.*

²²⁴ Breiner, Laurence A. “The Politics of Poetry. Roach’s Aesthetics and the *Savacou* Debate.” *Cit.* 259.

²²⁵ Gianetti, Danielle. “The Poetry of E. M. Roach: New Perspectives on His Use of Form.” *Kyk-Over-Al* 32 (Dec. 1985): 40-47. Ed. Ian MacDonald. Georgetown, Demerara-Mahaica, Guyana: Privately published, 1985.

²²⁶ Baugh, Edward. “A History of Poetry.” *Cit.* Vol 2. 258.

Roach. Breiner glossed how Roach did not eschew experiments, but was averse of poetry bereft of craft.²²⁷ Nevertheless, after defining Roach as one of the “craftiest” poets, Breiner was surprised about the fact that his literary criticism seemed less attached to craft than the chisel he worked out in his own poems, and how his poetics seemed here contradictory.²²⁸ But the “urgency” of African rhythms, of orality, of the voodoo ritual language, and the immediacy of the “island patois” can be heard in a poem like “Haitian Trilogy”. In “Verse in August” he seemed to combine what Breiner recognized as “urgency” and “finish”,²²⁹ because the explosion of the Trinidad French Creole verses seemed to respect an iambic trimeter: “*rum drums and singing men / gambash in the gayelle / carray! ah bois garcon! / ah ah! ah ah! / ‘hooray hooray cutoutah / how much hero you kill in arima?’*”²³⁰ (FR, 169): the lines aim at reproducing the local flavour in the description of a dance and of a fragment of conversation.

Roach’s comment was partially misunderstood, in that his commitment to his land and people stemmed also from his closeness to the language of the common people, and to the attention he paid in reproducing the orality in his verse. Roach’s view on the island language/music/musicality and on the possible bawdiness of the island Carnival might be heard in these words from the poem “Carnival”: “Choruses of bawdy calypsos /obscene as carrion crows / darken the sunlight with cacophonies / that desecrate all that harmony / the serpent’s cunning taught us.” (186). Wayne Brown, borrowing Roach’s word, defined as “carrion” those critics and writers who contributed to the *Savacou* debate, leading Roach to conceive suicide.²³¹ Similarly, in “Quinam Bay” Brown wrote: “Roach gone”, “Carrion like them dead”.²³² Nonetheless, Roach’s literary beginnings with some political poems do not justify, and thus question, his lament towards those politically committed *Savacou* poets.

A few scholars have commented on the dearth of Creole poems in Roach’s production. Like Walcott, Roach stratified the West Indian tone behind the verses’ “craft and perfection”.²³³ Roach’s

²²⁷ “He believed in the importance of experiment, certainly; but just as certainly he objected to the publication of *careless* work.” Breiner, Laurence A. “The Ambivalent Aesthetic of Eric Roach.” *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature* 19.2 (1988): 6. Alberta, Canada: University of Calgary.

²²⁸ “As a critic, Roach remained more preoccupied with the responsibilities of the poet than with the constituents of a poem, and on the evidence of the poem his aesthetic *seems* quite surprisingly *not* one of craft”. *Ibid.* 15.

²²⁹ “While Roach in his own poetry shows considerable respect for verbal performance, he finally ranks higher the craftsman who can immortalize verbal performance in a work of art (...). And certainly Roach himself had no inherent objection to verse of political urgency – he had been writing it himself for decades. What infuriated him [in the *Savacou* debate, *NBR*] was the ready assumption that urgency and finish were essentially incompatible; that one always had to be sacrificed to the other.” Breiner, Laurence A. “How to Behave on Paper: the *Savacou* Debate.” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 6.1 (July 1993): 5. Kingston, Jamaica: Dept. Of English, The University of the West Indies.

²³⁰ The ‘gambash’ is a flare in the way of dancing, while the ‘gayelle’ is an arena for cockfighting.

²³¹ In his essay “A Carrion Time”, Gordon Rohlehr responded to Brown’s view.

²³² Brown, Wayne. “Quinam Bay.” *Voyages*. Port of Spain, Trinidad: Inprint Caribbean Ltd, 1989. 90.

²³³ As Breiner observed in an article on the use of Creole in Walcott’s poetry, “Poets such as the Jamaican George Campbell or the Tobagonian Eric Roach published only a couple of poems in creole, almost as novelties. These

use of Creole was actually sporadic, as in the poem “At Sangre Grande”²³⁴: “For Chin in sleeveless vest, / keeps shop, grinning his pidgin” (184), mentioning the Chinese in the Caribbean, the reference to language implying that they smirk their Creole.²³⁵ Roach used Creole also in “Haitian Trilogy”,²³⁶ or in “Ballad of Canga”, the story of a maroon slave who ran away from the cane field.²³⁷ In both poems there are references to the Haitian-derived practice of *voudou* – or “jumbie obeah” (“Verse in August”, *FR*, 168) in the Anglophone islands – and they are confined to fragments of conversations or brief descriptions, as Prof. Ramchand observed in his introduction to *The Flowering Rock*:

In most of the poems, however, Roach does what our better poets are generally content to do, and that is, to maintain the dialect tone: the West Indian accent would carry the stress and intonation of the dialect, and would gear into dialect itself when required by the inner dynamics of the poem.²³⁸

Ramchand also noticed how important was the figure of Columbus for Roach,²³⁹ pointing out that Roach devoted his artistic life to a search for a Caribbean aesthetic unity: “Roach was committed, as selflessly and as passionately as one can be, to the idea of a unique Caribbean civilization taking shape out of the implosion of cultures and peoples in the region.”²⁴⁰ That is why the figure of Columbus is remarkable: he ‘discovered’ the Caribbean by mistake, but indeed he opened the road to a Caribbean creolization.

As regards his African origins, Ramchand observed how Roach contributed to a full-fledged social aesthetics: “He was very alive to the social, political and cultural issues in his time and place (...) he never had a problem with Africa”.²⁴¹ So, what about the *Savacou* debate which dismissed Roach’s relationship with Africanity? As a matter of fact, Roach did embrace his Africanity, as the poem “I Walk Abroad” shows, “I take my Caribbean nature, / Under my continental negroid hair

poems take the form of dramatic monologues or dialogues for folk voices that are plainly not the voice of the poet, and aim usually for comic or pathetic effect. But Walcott does not follow that pattern.” Breiner, Laurence. “Creole Language in the Poetry of Derek Walcott.” *Callaloo* 28.1 (Winter 2005). Special Issue devoted to Derek Walcott. 29-41. 26 Mar. 2009 <<http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/callaloo/v028/28.1breiner.html>>.

²³⁴ A Spanish name meaning ‘big blood’, given to this place in Trinidad by the Spaniards at the end of the 16th century.

²³⁵ Chinese were deported to the Caribbean as indentured slaves, like Indians, mainly to British Guyana; they later migrated to Suriname, Trinidad and Jamaica.

²³⁶ “Houngan O! Papaloi! / Aie Mama Samba! / Ah, ah Boukman! / Ah Makandal! / What Ouedo say? / The serpent gone? / We go die in shame? / Dahomey dead?” (*FR*, 90).

²³⁷ “Canga working obeah bad, / Throwing all the pain / Hotter than he get it / On the baccra woman” (*FR*, 117).

²³⁸ Ramchand, Kenneth. “Introduction.” *Cit.* 15-16.

²³⁹ For instance in the poems “Discovery” or “Caribbean Calypso”, in which “Westward Ho! Sails through Colon’s horizons”, 153.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 11.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.* 15.

the skull / Assumes the infinite variety, shapes and moods of islands.” (96) As Ramchand continued, Roach was wrongly considered to be an Afro-Saxon:

Not surprisingly, he got into wars in the 1970s with armchair radicals, aestheticians of the grassroots, neo-Africanists (...) Absurdly, he was accused of being against Africa, against the folk and against the dialect. He was an Afro-Saxon,²⁴² he was obsolete.²⁴³

or as Breiner defined:

the ‘Afro-Saxon’ Roach himself was not unaffected by the confrontation. After 1970, he wrote poems that are almost all overtly political, that make extensive use of folk language and custom, and that repeatedly envision the poet not as craftsman but as testifying witness.²⁴⁴

Roach saw the possibility of an aesthetic unity beyond the failure of the West Indian Federation,²⁴⁵ to which he assisted, and he saw the potential of what Teelucksingh addressed as “resurrection”: “The islands have the potential to flourish and foster greatness despite its apparent sterility.”²⁴⁶ Some critics complained about Roach’s aesthetic openness and unity ideals while it was striking that he did not know much about Tobago’s twin island of Trinidad.²⁴⁷ In fact, he had a much broader political concept in mind, and Tobago worked as a kind of clearing house from which his conception of his land and a federal unity could curiously bypass the urban environment of Trinidad. Roach’s poetry seems to emerge as contrite and well-crafted but at times – as in the case of the *Savacou* – its contours seems a bit blurred and contradictory: poetry as a form of deflation, aspiration, activism, but also of never-ending sorrow, which at times oozes with undue obsession for the final departure.

²⁴² Cf. Mervyn Morris’s “Afro-Saxon” in *Shadowboxing*. (London: New Beacon Books, 1979.): “Don’t let that nigger fool you, he is White!”

²⁴³ Ramchand, Kenneth. “Introduction.” *Cit.* 19-20.

²⁴⁴ Breiner, Laurence A. “How to Behave on Paper: the Savacou Debate.” *Cit.* 6.

²⁴⁵ “The poems of Eric Roach, among others, frequently urge cultural if not overtly political federation (for example his “Love Overgrows a Rock,” or “I am the Archipelago”).” Breiner, Laurence A. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 102.

²⁴⁶ Cf. Teelucksingh, Jennifer. “A Critical Analysis of Eric Roach’s ‘Corn’.” *Cit.*

²⁴⁷ Breiner remarks in his *Black Yeats* that “Roach, who travelled little, seems to overestimate the extent to which the islands were alike. When he thinks of the Federation he clearly thinks of islands like Tobago, Jamaica, Barbados; his obliviousness to the demographics of Trinidad, where he lived much of his life, is startling.” Breiner, Laurence A. “Federation Poems.” *Black Yeats: Eric Roach and the Politics of Caribbean Poetry*. *Cit.* 219.

I.iv. Poetry as a preparation for death

Ramchand noticed how “In a brief article entitled ‘Blues for Eric Roach’, Gordon Rohlehr suggests that the poet’s mind was filled with images of death since 1961.”²⁴⁸ Indeed, I recognise images of skulls, skeletons, graves and people dying or dead, as well as the idea of suicide itself, were present in his poems from at least the 1950s. Moreover, in “The Flowering Rock” the image of the “gaunt rock” (*FR*, 65) hinted at a last bony handhold before deciding to commit suicide in 1974, while in “I Walk Abroad” Roach questioned “Who holds me to these accidental rocks?” (*FR*, 96).

One of the recurrent motifs in Roach’s poetry is the colour red: in Columbus’s red wine and blood in “Discovery”; in two poems titled “Immortelles”, referring to a type of tree similar to the Poinciana, whose leaves are scarlet as blood is;²⁴⁹ in the red hibiscus of “Carib and Arawak”; in the “blood drops” in “The Legend of Anacaona”; in the sunrise of “Colour”, a poem revolving around three colours red, silver, and gold, in which the poet and painter blend to give birth to an aesthetics of colours. The isotopy of ‘death’ is created by a number of expressions such as: “The unhappy skull” and “the hopeless blood” (“Shallow Underground”, *FR*, 56); “the distilled voice of the skeleton” (“The Flowering Rock”, *FR*, 65). Skulls and skeletons constellate his poems; the ‘flowering rock’ may be a reference to re-birth on a sterile, inanimate, soil, and it could evoke, somehow paradoxically, a musical genre. In “Poets and Painters” we read: “O that we could carve open the stone skull of the dull time” (*FR*, 70) and “The waning moon swims in a sea of mist. / The death within us dies; grief’s phoenix sire / Is fagged to ashes in redeeming fire, / And dawn is eager for the thundering wing.” (*FR*, 70): this last line might refer to his suicidal intention, because the dawn reappears also in “Birth” with the words “I die with your dawn; your noon will not know me.” (*FR*, 76)²⁵⁰ Dawn is also present in the poem “Beyond”, but dawn seems a witness to Roach’s death or flight into the ocean,²⁵¹ about which Ramchand observed that “the poet is conscious of the inevitable passing (the word sits so innocently in the title of the poem)”.²⁵² In “The Old House” we read the poet carping about: “Their clock’s its skeleton”, “Died and broke the house’s heart.” (*FR*, 77).

²⁴⁸ Ramchand, Kenneth. “Introduction.” *Cit.* 17. In fact Rohlehr’s words are “Eric Roach was caught in this vision of death. Ever since 1961 his mind was filled with images of death.” Rohlehr, Gordon. “Blues for Eric Roach.” *Cit.* 142-3.

²⁴⁹ *Cf.* for instance “Letter to Lamming”, in which “Among the immortelles and poincianas / Dropping red pathos on our naked graves” (*FR*, 81).

²⁵⁰ Cesare Pavese used to repeat that dawn is the elected time for suicide and he himself committed suicide at dawn: this moment of the day carries all the burden of starting a new day afresh, and the suicidal person does not have the energies to cope with another painful day of sorrow.

²⁵¹ “Beyond the flood of sunlight on this sea (...) / Take wing, take wing; outward go singing.” (*FR*, 71)

²⁵² Ramchand, Kenneth. “Introduction.” *Cit.* 13.

The word “decrepitude”, that Breiner considered Yeatsian, mingles with horrid images of a deadly woman, “La mère seems deathless in her age, / Green in her decrepitude, / Laughing from the skeleton, / Rattling the dead bones of the years” (*FR*, 78), which reminds me of Walcott’s 1958 sonnets “Tales of the Islands”.²⁵³ Biblical and Christian figures appeared also in “Hard Drought”, where “Station by station throughout history / the ground is bloody; the hero’s face / stamped on the woman’s napkin’s masked in blood” (*FR*, 166), where Roach was referring to the stations of the passion of Jesus, and indeed his sacrifice acquired Christian overtones, mixed with the obeah ritual of blood offered to the earth. Other lines in “The Old House” beset the poem setting the stage for a ‘dance macabre’: “O may they know, who told my youth / To sing and dance, I tell their death.” (*FR*, 78) sound like lines in a Renaissance sonnet, where death was often represented as a skeleton dancing life away, and where youth was seen like blooming away as a withering rose.²⁵⁴

Remembrance and the use of ‘songs’ or poetry are seen by Roach as overcoming sorrow and troubles in “Token”, where the power of poetry as remembrance and as a way to overcome the haunting past was expressed, and where sea and heart are full of pain. In “Poem” nature understands and accepts the poet’s choice: “The seas are sorrows / And the seas accept the moon’s dark tragedies.” (*FR*, 67). While in “New Year Poem for Cecil Herbert” we read: “To be silent in our silent air / Is suicide, we’re given speech” (*FR*, 97): poetry is an expression of strength and weakness at the same time, and, whereas poetry and death are inextricably – and almost contradictorily – entangled, in fact his poetic voice, expressing his suicidal intention, allows him to avoid the suicide of silence. In “Homestead” Roach underlined how songs and poems are there in order not to forget but to remember and are a useful tool for memory: “One man wearying his bone”, “The man is dead but I recall / Him in my voluntary song.” (*FR*, 79). Through death Roach thought that men can reconcile themselves to the earth: “graves within their graves, / They nourish arteries of earth” (*FR*, 80): to go back to the Earth is a form of nourishment, and this is cyclically linked to the poet’s and his verse’s sacrifice for a future improvement: “Again and take new craft from old” (“Homestead”, *FR*, 80). Poetry becomes an aspiration to perfection and completion, as the poet asserted in “Men”: the poet and his poetry are one, after reaching the ability to write the

²⁵³ In a similar vein in “The Picture” Roach underlines: “such beauty had the Magdalen” (*FR*, 140). In chapter III of Walcott’s “Tales of the Islands” Miss Rossignol, a new Mary Magdalen, is compared to the woodcarving in the Duomo Museum in Florence, Italy. Walcott’s lines comparable to Roach’s are: “Miss Rossignol lived in the lazaretto / For Roman Catholic crones; she had white skin, / And underneath it, fine, old-fashioned bones; / (...) The living Magdalen of Donatello; / (...) While Miss Rossignol, in the cathedral loft, / Sang to her one dead child, a tattered saint / Whose pride had paupered beauty to this witch / Who was so fine once, whose hands were so soft.” Walcott, Derek. “Tales of the Islands.” *Collected Poems 1948-1984*. London: Faber & Faber, 1986. 23.

²⁵⁴ Cf. the American poet John Crowe Ransom’s “Piazza Peace”, in which “They want the young men’s whispering and sighing. / But see the roses on your trellis dying”. Cf. also the reference to the poetic rose in this chapter.

perfect verse, he is ready for a leap back to his origin, “Perfection in the verse / As I am ripe to die” (FR, 83).

As Prof. Rex Nettleford observed in a lecture delivered in Guyana in 2003:

in a region of largely limestone and volcanic rocks separated by divisive sea-water one can understand the metaphor and grasp the difficulties in transforming the creative diversity of floating island spaces, colonial historical experiences and language differences into an integrated whole expressed in a common humanity.²⁵⁵

This observation is interesting in that it explains how the water surrounding the different islands of the Caribbean could actually be considered a form of aesthetic glue, which links and melts together the creative possibilities of the region, as Walcott remarked in “The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory”. Roach’s death is, thus, a leap into that ocean of creative possibility, the consecration of his art to the literary development of the region, the love overflowing a rock (as in his poem). Quite effectively, Wayne Brown in his poem “Quinam Bay” – dedicated to Roach – reminded that “love overgrows a rock”,²⁵⁶ calquing one of Roach’s poems. The sea, which took the life out of him, still witnesses the presence of love in that last desperate act. Love and death are linked in Roach’s suicidal act, and his love for poetry manifests itself in the nurture the poet took from the sea, as Walcott witnessed in “The Wind in the Dooryard”: “He went swimming to Africa, / but he felt tired; / he chose that way / to reach his ancestors.”,²⁵⁷ and Brown sang: “but rest him in language unadorned / as bread, there where the ocean fed / him back to the shore he turned from.”²⁵⁸

As to aesthetics, Hélène Laforest noted how Walcott observed (during the *Derek Walcott International Colloquium* in 2005) that Europe “would never cede its control over aesthetics”,²⁵⁹ and she continued by saying that English and American critics like Stewart Brown, John Thieme, Paul Breslin and Robert Hamner saw in Walcott’s appropriation of a European aesthetics the right

²⁵⁵ Nettleford, Rex. Press release 54/2003 (4 April 2003). “The Caribbean’s Creative Diversity: the Defining Point of the Region’s History”. Lecture delivered by Prof. Rex Nettleford, Vice Chancellor, University of the West Indies, 21 March 2003, University of Guyana, Guyana. <http://www.caricom.org/jsp/pressreleases/pres54_03.htm>.

²⁵⁶ Brown, Wayne. “Quinam Bay.” *Voyages*. Port of Spain, Trinidad: Inprint Caribbean Ltd, 1989. 90.

²⁵⁷ Walcott, Derek. “The Wind in the Dooryard.” *Sea Grapes*. (1971) London: Jonathan Cape, 1976. 64. “Walcott wrote the poem, *The Wind in the Dooryard* after the death of his friend Eric Roach. Roach was a journalist that worked for the Trinidad Guardian and committed suicide. At that time, Walcott and his contemporaries were deeply disillusioned by the breakup of the West Indies Federation, which they blamed on the ambitions of the individual politicians. This poem sought to address what Walcott perceived to be a breakdown in literary standards on the islands in the post-Federal period and is a good example of Walcott’s attempts at representing the feelings of the West Indian people of the time.” Cf. “Memory of the World Register.” *The Federal Archives Fonds (Barbados)*. Ref N° 2008-01. 18 Mar. 2008 <portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/26829/12124160373FederalArchives.doc/FederalArchives.doc>. 6.

²⁵⁸ Brown, Wayne. “Quinam Bay.” *Cit.* 91.

²⁵⁹ Quoted in Laforest, Marie-Hélène. *La Magia delle Parole. Omeros di Derek Walcott*. Napoli: Guida, 2007.

to give legitimacy to his own poetry.²⁶⁰ As a matter of fact, Roach was inspirational for Walcott, and he gained knowledge and understanding of a European aesthetics to create a Tobagonian, Caribbean one.²⁶¹ Roach managed to absorb the European tradition, all the while emerging as a distinctive voice of the poetic “Caribbean Renaissance”, that is why his insular poetry from an ‘Island Aesthetics’ managed to amplify itself to an ‘Aesthetics of the Islands’. Breiner noted that the importance of a social aesthetics for Roach is underlying in the poet’s criticism, but also that his figure is to be considered more passively as that of a “symbolic totem” – a container of a message, the embodiment of a meaning – more than as “active shaman” – as someone who relates the society to its inner spirit and acts as an administrator of social issues – :

This conception of the social role of the poet is of salient importance in Roach’s *criticism* (...) but in the poems it repeatedly appears to give way to more effusive, less responsible, view. (as totem for the tribe, rather than shaman (...)) Such figures occupy a place conceptually *between* shaman and totem, between agent and symbol.²⁶²

Troping Wayne Brown’s concept of ‘decadence’²⁶³ and Yeats’s idea of ‘decrepitude’, Roach’s poetry of death could also be aesthetically linked to the concept of “beauty”. The themes of the transience of life and of the meaning of death are seminal also in Brown’s poetry. These are obviously among the most debated questions in human history, but they certainly reinforce the aesthetic issue in these two writers’ similar poetics. The American poet Wallace Stevens coined a phrase “death is the mother of beauty” (“Sunday Morning”, *Harmonium*, 1923), which raises a deeply philosophical question, because death is what gives value to life, and the factuality of death produces the emotions of love, for love and beauty are the offspring of the awareness of death: that is why one of the proofs of love is that it expresses itself as a pledge, mostly in a protective way to ensure survival.²⁶⁴

The overall sensation left by Roach’s poetry about death is a sense of what aesthetics defined as ‘kenosis’. The word derives from ancient Greek ‘κενός’ (*kenós*), which means “empty”. In philosophical terms it is related to the sense of ‘emptiness’ provoked in the reader by the reading

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 52.

²⁶¹ Laforest goes on with a comparison between the European and the Caribbean concepts of aesthetics. The new modernist aesthetics was marked by Picasso’s *Demiselles d’Avignon*, and “Europe claimed the right to decide what is art: aesthetics belongs to Europe and the rest of the world has to measure its judgement of values in relation to this” (*Ibid.* 27.), but authoritarian in spite of that European stance, the Caribbean aesthetics has developed through “loans, imitation, and reshuffling”. *Ibid.* 26.

²⁶² Breiner, Laurence A. “The Ambivalent Aesthetic of Eric Roach.” *Cit.* 10-1.

²⁶³ Brown loved to define himself an “amateur chronicler of the decadence of the English language, the last bastion of the light of the word”. Personal communication with the poet. May 2009.

²⁶⁴ And Brown loved to quote McNeill, too, a poet writing mostly in free verse, but who started from a classical formal tradition, and who used to say that “A poem lives in the tension between its spoken rhythm and the metronome beneath it”. Personal communication with the poet. May 2009.

of lyrical poetry. What is left after reading Roach's poetry is not emptiness though, but rather a sense of void, because that word has a second meaning related to the absence of time, 'timelessness'. Thus, if this sense of 'kenosis' is related to an abstraction from time and to a sense of elegiac – almost Eliotian – desolation, this poetry may also have a cathartic purpose. Whether naturally or philosophically sublime, death is what in the end leaves a sense of desolation and emptiness. The aesthetic notions of deprivation, purification, cleansing – through suicide or through death – emerge from Roach's refined lexical choices, from the vividness of his descriptions, and from a search for a – at that time – failed unified 'Aesthetics of the Islands'.

Chapter II
Bruce St. John (1923-1995)
The “Cultivated” Voice of the Common Folk

Bruce St. John (1923-1995) is one of the greatest Barbadian poets. Mr. Alan Moss has accurately informed me: “I learned from one of his former colleagues (...) that Bruce St John was born on 24th December 1923, and died on 4th December, 1995. The information comes from a leaflet produced for his funeral, and so I am sure that it is accurate.”²⁶⁵ His collections of poems are *Joyce & Eros and Varia* (1976), *Bumbatuk*²⁶⁶ (1982), *Ascent, La Subida, La Montée* (an anthology of 1985).²⁶⁷ The chronological order seems accurate but his collection of poems, *Bumbatuk 1* first appeared as *Bumbatuk. (Poems in Barbadian Dialect)* in December 1972 in the *Revista de Letras de la Facultad de Artes Y Ciencias*, Tomo IV, Num. 16. at the Universidad de Puerto Rico en Mayagüez.²⁶⁸ Ten years later, in 1982, it was published in book form by Cedar Press in Bridgetown, Barbados. The most famous Barbadian poet, Kamau Brathwaite, addressed St. John as one of the most important – if not the most important, together with him – Bajan poets, able of delving into the folkloric essence of his island: “A folk-poet like the Barbadian Bruce St. John captures (...) the very essence of the Bajan psyche”.²⁶⁹ Similarly, St. John’s “Bajan Litany” (*B*) is a comprehensive, pan Caribbean, West Indian – more than Bajan – litany, for it involves other islands like Jamaica or Trinidad, with the questions or affirmations of a listening and participating public.

²⁶⁵ Personal communication with Alan Moss. E-mail. 2 Oct. 2008.

²⁶⁶ This title reminds me of the “tuk verse” by the Barbadian poet Anthony Kellman, retrieved later also by the performance poet AJA, also Barbadian. In “Waterfalls” (*Watercourse*) Kellman described an echo of the Barbadian music “ruk-a-tuk and humming cataracts” (Kellman, Anthony. “Waterfalls.” *Watercourse*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1990. 20). Similarly, the ‘tuk’ of *Bumbatuk* recalls this type of Bajan tuk verse that Kellman claimed to have invented (Kellman, Anthony. “Tuk Verse and the Monomythical Folk Tradition.” *Wasafiri* 14.28 (Autumn 1998): 39-42.). In *Watercourse* Kellman defined it as “The music played by the tuk bands in Barbados. Each group is normally made up of a bass drummer, a kittle drummer and a penny whistler.” (Kellman, Anthony. “Glossary.” *Watercourse*. Cit. 63.); Édouard Glissant affirmed that Kellman’s “Watercourse” is like “A song whose dazzling waves foam among the islands, ‘rukking around a rock’” (Glissant, Édouard. “Introduction.” Kellman, Anthony. “Glossary.” *Watercourse*. Cit.) In *Depths of Burning Lights* (1982), *The Broken Sun* (1984), *Watercourse* (1990), *The Long Gap* (1996), *Wings of a Stranger* (2000), *Limestone* (2008) are the titles of Kellman’s collections of poems (As the cover of *Limestone* explains: “Limestone is the epic poem of Barbados. Drawing on the rhythms of the Tuk or ruk-a-tuk bands”. Kellman, Anthony. *Limestone*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2008).

²⁶⁷ Henceforward ‘*Joyce & Eros & Varia*’ will be referred to with ‘*JEV*’, ‘*Bumbatuk*’ with ‘*B*’, and ‘*Ascent, La Subida, La Montée*’ as ‘*ASM*’.

²⁶⁸ Cf. the collection of Manuscripts dated 1988-1999 Ms. Coll. 00502 donated by Prof. Edward J. Chamberlin to the University of Toronto, 7 boxes and items (2 metres). 1 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.library.utoronto.ca/fisher/collections/findaids/chamberlin502.pdf>>. Cf. also Castilleja, Diana, Lieven D’hulst, Krista Slagle, and Katrien Van der Aa, eds. With the help of Marie Beels, Hanne Callewaert, Marjan De Smet, Sofie De Smyter, Theo D’haen. A Critical Bibliography of English, French, and Spanish Caribbean Literatures (1954-2004). Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, 2009, 31. 1 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.kuleuven-kortrijk.be/nl/Onderzoek/Letteren/a-critical-bibliography-of-english-french-and-spanish-caribbean-literatures-1954-2004/CaribbeanBibliography.pdf>>.

²⁶⁹ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature.” *Roots*. The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor Paperback, 1993. 252.

II.i. 'Eddication' vs. common sense: politics and aesthetics

I will mainly take into consideration St. John's second collection, both for its wealth of content and for the difficulty in finding other materials, mostly available at the University of the West Indies. I am not aware of any critical materials on St. John, apart from fragments on individual poems in *Bumbatuk*. The main themes of the collection are education and politics compared to common sense or 'popular wisdom', creolization, and language. The tone of the poems is often ironic and sarcastic, but it hides deep and serious socio-historical issues, focusing on an island and pan-island socio-aesthetics. The poems draw on an oral tradition. As the title "Song Cycle" suggests, and as Kathleen Drayton remarked in her introduction to *Bumbatuk*, St. John liked to use repetitions: "Bruce St. John writes his poems to be performed. (...) There is repetition of single words for emphasis (...) The device of repeating a line is used frequently. (...) A third kind of repetition is found in those poems which are the antiphonal call and response pattern".²⁷⁰ The most common patterns of repetitions – derived from the oral tradition – are thus mainly twofold: repetitions of words or lines; or antiphonal responses and dialogues with the audience (since his poems and dramatic monologues were meant to be performed as much as the Trinidadian Paul Keens Douglas's poems),²⁷¹ and with the people the poet is addressing.²⁷² Creole forms are to be found in:

- ❖ the use of adjectives: as in "We Country" instead of "Our Country", in 'who is we?';
- ❖ the use of syntax: "-is wisdom, Boysie boy, wisdom", "Education", 4, or "We ain' got democracy?", "Political Progress", 5;
- ❖ the lexical choices: for instance the verb 'to lick' for 'to beat';
- ❖ the tones of the voice when he recorded the poems reaching higher pitches (as in "Education" or "The Other Woman").

A comparison of the CD version St. John recorded with Melvyn Atwell-Wood²⁷³ with the written form of the poems show that the Bajan voices became alive in the voice of the poet himself, acquiring the intonation and versatility that were suggested by the poet. Poetic Bajan becomes an

²⁷⁰ Drayton, Kathleen. "Introduction." St. John, Bruce. *Bumbatuk*. Bridgetown, Barbados: Cedar Press, 1982.

v.

²⁷¹ Cf. for instance Keens-Douglas's *When Moon Shine: Dialect*. Port of Spain, Trinidad: s.n., 1975; 1979.

²⁷² Cf. for instance "West Indian Litany", in which the lines alternate exclamations or questions and answers by two different voices (as evident from the recorded version), or "Bajan Litany", where the second voice answers in a prayer-like mode, "Yes, Lord / O Lord." (9). In this last poem there are also proverbs as "Wuh sweeten goat mout bu'n 'e tail" or "De higher monkey go, de more he show 'e tail" (9).

²⁷³ I would like to thank Mr. Sean Yang Pen from The Library of the Spoken Word, University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica, for providing the CD recording.

effective socialization of the vernacular: it interlocks folk voices in such a way that the delivery appears straightforward to the listener (as much as Brathwaite gave an extra flavour and meaning to his own poems when reading them aloud).²⁷⁴ The recording speeds up the process of blending literacy and orality, but it also helps non-Caribbean readers to get a more complete sense of the poem.

The first part of St. John's "Song Cycle" is titled "The Foetus – Pains": the pear/mango-shaped Barbados (which has often been described in that shape) could actually be compared to a foetus immersed in the uterine waters of the ocean. In the third part of the collection St. John considered the pros and cons of being Bajan. As the poet asked the white Bajan interlocutor in "We Country": "Buhbados is an islan'? / *Any fool knows that. / We gine see who is a fool. / Carry on Mr. Solomon. / Water all roun' Buhbados? / That's what is said.*" (28). Throughout all of *Bumbatuk* the interlocutor is Archie Williams, or Boysie (as he is addressed in "In Memoriam: Archie", 50). Williams is often mentioned sharing the poet's thoughts and proving their rightfulness, as in "Education": "Man, Archie man, what you talkin'?" (3), or in "Boysie boy" (4); in "Courage", in which he is invoked many times (8); in "Work Permit": "I'm telling you the truth, Archie Williams" (11); in "Cricket": "Boysie uh has was to tel yuh" and "Le' muh tell yuh somet'ing Boysie boy" (both 17 – and also mentioned on pp. 18-19); in "Privilege", "Boysie boy—trouble in town", "Boysie", and "Put it day Archie!" (38); in "Street Scene": "Shut yuh mout' fuh lil' bit, nuh Boysie" (39); and throughout "In Memoriam: Archie" (58-59).

In "The Foetus – Pains" there are quite a few poems which deal with the importance of education as in "Education", "Political Progress", "Widsom", "Work Permit", "Truth". In "Education" the poet claimed that intelligence gains over culture: "Studyation beat eddication" (3), explaining the difference: "Education is a lot a lot o' paper, / Studyation is 'nough 'nough brain." (3). The tone of the poem, when heard, sounds aggressive, and the poet asserted that "Buhbados eddication is de bes'! / Buhbados produce a lot a lot o' scholar!" (3). The opposition between these two words – the latter not even appearing in the dictionary ("Studyation (...) ent a word in a damn dictionary", 3) – brings along a differentiation between the importance of culture and that of common sense or popular wisdom. The poet often referred to the University Campus of Cave Hill, St. Michael, Barbados (3, 31), acknowledging the presence of many experts²⁷⁵ or scholars²⁷⁶ on the

²⁷⁴ Cf. Brathwaite, Kamau. "Caribbean Writers and Their Art, Program 15. Kamau Brathwaite Reads Two Poems." Caribbean Writers Summer Institute. Archival Video Collection. 1991. University of Miami Libraries: Digital Initiatives, Caribbean Writers Summer Institute. Online video clip. Time: 3 min 55 sec. Brathwaite reads his poems "Making of the Drum" and "The Gong-Gong". 6 June 2006 <<http://scholar.library.miami.edu/cls/yearDisplay.php?year=1991>>.

²⁷⁵ "Den why, why so many expert in de town?" (B, 3), and "Why de hell you en uh expert?" (B, 28)

²⁷⁶ In "We Country" the white interlocutor replies to the poet: "*I'm a humble academic.*" (B, 30)

island, but this fact actually did not help the society to recover from a colonial-derived social gap between whites and blacks, rich and poor, cultivated vs. ‘ignorant’ people (as in the poem “We Country”). Actually Barbados is one of the Caribbean islands with the highest percentage of white people. The creolization process has not speeded up though, and there is still a lot of cultural and social differentiation on which the poet shed light, as he did in “Political Progress”: “Slaves in the cane fields, backra²⁷⁷ in the House (...) De new backra rough and inhuman.” (5-6). The importance of education was also stressed in his first collection *Joyce & Eros and Varia*, in which the first part titled “Varia – Higher Learning” showed St. John’s involvement in education, as a teacher in elementary and secondary schools, as well as in college and university. In particular, the title “Academic – Epidemic” echoed a line in the poem “We Country” (*Bumbatuk*, 30). As Curwen Best observed St. John himself recognised an “indigenous aesthetics” under the form of a musical influence, especially with the Barbadian ‘tuk’:

Bruce St. John (...) [‘s] collection of poetry *Bumbatuk* begs to be interpreted for its nation language, tonal inflections and its use of the rhythms of tuk, the native Barbadian rhythmic and intonational style created by the percussive band. St. John’s essay which precedes a volume of the poetry (...), begins to formulate a context for the perception of a tuk or indigenous aesthetic. (...) In “Academic-Epidemic” he uses [Creole] for satire of intellectualism. He creates the Barbadian sound-scape in a way that other writers like Frank Collymore and A.N. Forde have only hinted at (...) St. John (...) constructed his works around a number of recurring characters and iconographies.²⁷⁸

In “Widsom” the poet used a Creole voice to make the persona critically analyse the socio-political situation of the island, as he kept asking if the reader or listener of the poem thought that Black people were foolish just because they went through slavery, or because they provided labour for the chosen diasporic countries: “Yuh t’ink we foolish? / We gine ban South Africa an’ invite the U.S.A. (...) / Keep Sam producin’ / Keep ‘e people wukkin’ (...) / We kin cut an’ contrive, / T’ink we is fools nuh. / Evah fool got ‘e sense, / T’ink we foolish?” (10). Moreover, in “Work Permit” he faced the issue of employment: the ‘Mr. Finney’ addressed in the poem is not given work for status prejudices, while his option was the one that Eric Roach would have despised: migrating. In fact, the poem goes:

“You get the job, ain’t yuh Mr. Finney?”
 “I didn’t, I’m afraid, I didn’t.” (...)
 “Dat post for a national, Mr. Finney?”

²⁷⁷ Meaning “white people”, *NbR*.

²⁷⁸ Best, Curwen. “Tracking a Tradition: Kamau Brathwaite and the Bajan Hardcore.” *Caribbean Quarterly* 47.4 (Dec. 2001): 42. Mona, Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies.

Take off dat Afro-jack, Mr. Finney, (...)
 Tell de man you ain' belong to nuh party,
 Tell de man you ain' got no ideology (...)
 When you leaving fo' de islands Mr. Finney?" (11)

In "Truth" the issue of education is equally important, but it is interlocked with social issues of race and prejudices. In fact the poem is about the massive presence of Indians in the West Indies – especially in Trinidad and Guyana, less in Barbados. They were called 'coolies' for they were indentured labourers imported from India and other parts of Asia to the West Indies under the British Empire from around the 1830s (that is when slavery started to be abolished) as manpower, and the poem goes "De coolie tekin' over (...) / Nigger plannin' 'e family! / Babu plannin' fuh nigger! (...) / Nigger 'n got needuh culture! / Coolie root back in India!" (12). In the poem "You" in *Joyce & Eros and Varia*, there is a reference to the Chinese racial group as well: "cool, dilingered, chinesed" (*JEV*, 38). The importance of creolization and the recognition of other racial groups was also evident in "Death or Immortal Love", which showed the poet's acquaintance with Chinese culture: "There is an Asian book / It says it teaches how / To die" (*JEV*, 53).

Education in Jamaica was then considered by St. John in the poem "Jamaica", where the poetic persona warns a prospective student to be careful of similarities and differences in the country and between the islands, asking: "Yuh say yuh gine to Jamaica fuh study Chrissie boy?" (49), and asserting: "Jamaica West Indian but um far far from we" (49). St. John seemed to be much more aware of these peculiarities than Roach actually was, having travelled little. He lingered on the lexical differences for food items, as in "Callin' eddoe cocoa an' christophene chocho, / Decent dunks coolie plum an' ackee one guinep / Dem ackee is fowl egg growin' pun a tree" (49). But St. John was also conscious of the Creoles linguistic differences: "Dey walkin' de same but talkin' diff'rent" (49). Stereotypes about the Rastafari were also evident in "'E gine bus' you enemy rastah an' den ask yuh wuh happen." (49), and in the comparison between Barbadian and Jamaican customs "Dem does joke at we 'bout turkey flyin' high, / But all you haffa seh dem is Jamaica hair force!" (49): the tone is sarcastic and not offensive, but it aims at embracing a Caribbean aesthetics. The syntax is still Bajan, but some expressions could also be found in Jamaican *patwa*, as "Le' me tell yuh!"²⁷⁹

Education was also related to politics, and St. John often made references to the Black Power Movement, as in "Who Is We?", where he mocked the belief in Black Power, to assert that white power was still more important than the Black one in Barbados: "Black power? Don' mek me laugh." (6). Effectively, the poet admitted that in spite of creolization power was still in white hands

²⁷⁹ Cf. Joan Andrea Hutchinson's book of poems *Mek Me Tell Yuh* in chapter 12 of this thesis.

“Bajan black, Bajan white, (...) / Yo’ brothere red, yo’ sister brown, / Yo’ mother light skin, yo’ father cobskin. (...) / Bajan divided, Bajan lick down.” (7-8), where the Bajan expression “lick down” means “to take revenge on somebody”, as the Barbadian writer Austin Clarke observed in “Culture Oozing through Politics”:

‘Licks’ have become a part of the vernacular of sports, of family life, of man-woman relationships, of educational competition, indeed *licks* is a kind of shorthand form of expressing the relish of applying vengeance to one’s opponent. And the idea of licks is best associated, in its stinging significance, with the world of politics. Licks, in the political culture of Barbados, means quite simply, *devastation*.²⁸⁰

In “Bajan Litany” there was another reference to Black Power in the States: “America got black power? / We got black power” (9), and again in “Wisdom”, the poet remarked “We gine ban South Africa an’ invite the U.S.A., / We gine kill apartheid an’ lick up black power” (10). In “Colour” St. John mentioned many leaders of Black Thought and ended up admitting that the colour of the skin was what really made a difference in ruling a country or expressing political ideas. In the poem, after a historical round-up of people like the Haitian revolutionary Toussaint L’Ouverture, or Ghana’s Saviour Nkrumah, or Martin Luther King, Marcus Garvey, Malcolm X, Grantley Adams, he turned over what he initially admitted “He did white, if any o’ we white” (51), and acknowledged that: “De trouble en in colour, / De trouble is in the power (...) / Colour! um en colour, um en colour, / Um is power dat cuttin’ we ass.” (52).

II.ii. ‘Bajanism’: “cricket and kite-flying and sex”²⁸¹

The second part of St. John’s “Song Cycle” is titled “The Foetus – Pleasures” and it mainly deals with the pleasures that the island of Barbados offers to its inhabitants. The main themes are – as Drayton observed in the introduction – “cricket and kite-flying and sex”, but these themes are treated also in the other sections of the book. The Bajans linger on “Art”: “Painter doan paint studyation, / Painter doan paint worryation, / Painter doan paint de nation.” (14), as they also did in “Saturday Night at the Exhibition”. Another pleasure of the island is the delicious rum, as remarked in “Who Is We?”: “Bacra don’ drink Mount Gay?” (6) or in “We Country”: “Which rum you does drink? / *I don’t drink rum.* / You en nuh Bajan den.” (29).²⁸²

²⁸⁰ Clarke, Austin. “Culture Oozing through Politics.” *Africa America Asia Australia* 8 (1990): 207-208. Roma: Bulzoni, 1990.

²⁸¹ Drayton, Kathleen. “Introduction.” *Cit.* vi.

²⁸² Other references to the liquors of Barbados appear also in “Alcohol” and “Cocktail Party” (both from *Joyce & Eros and Varia*).

Women are observed and described in “Self Portrait”: “But lookah me tho’ nuh / I’s e a good lookin’ woman / Clear skin an’ clear skin / An’ a all right figure...” (15) or in “The Other Woman”. The theme of sex is hinted at in the third part in “New Maid Mercy”, in which a secret intercourse seems to take place between a maid and somebody who pops out in the house she is looking after: “Let me go Mr. - - - / Why you carryin’ me in there? / I got my work to do – (...) / You doan know I is a Christian – (...) / Better change da shirt – / Straighten the tie –” (40-41). In the collection *Joyce & Eros and Varia* the references to love and sex are many, not just because the collection carries the name of the Greek God of Love, but also because the passion of love is compared to the natural climatic changes (as in “The Struggle” or “The Storm”). St. John made explicit references to sex in “Breath of Love”: “Possession of cherry popsicles, (...) / Not even the jellied affricate of pistoned glans / In cylinder of strawberry lips (...) / The ethereal feeling from that gasp unvoiced” (39), and he compared the figure of the woman to the island itself (cf. “Centre Island”). The islands are not only considered as women, but also as mothers, for they give fruit, they nourish, they provide poets with natural elements to feed them and to feed their language, as Derek Walcott remarked in “St. Lucie”, in “The Schooner *Flight*” or in *Omeros* – in which Saint Lucia is the feminine incarnation of Helen and of Beauty. This personification continues, for instance, also in St. John’s “A Visit” (*ASM*, 1985), in which the land produces phallic fruits from the avocado trees, the golden-apple trees, and the coconut trees.²⁸³

Conflicting with these open allusions to sex or alcohol, throughout the book there are also many references to religion, as in:

- “New Maid Mercy”, as already observed;
- the exclamation “Oh Christ!” (2) in “Reason”;
- the invocation: “By the mercies of God (...) / Wunna doan see God face” (30) in “We Country”;
- “You en hear ‘bout de steward in de Bible? (...) / T’ief from a t’ief an’ God laughin’ ” (37) in “Heroes”;
- “God go wid you.” (49) in “Jamaica”;
- “‘Bout Mozhes in de Bible” (50) in “Ode to a Tunisian Mosaic”, in which religion is mixed with superstition and the horoscope “‘Cause pisces mean fishes / Wunnah en know wunnah horrorscope?” (50);

²⁸³ “A Visit” was translated into French by Madly Fergé as “La Visite”. Cf. the phallic innuendo in Earl McKenzie’s “Coconut Series”. Chapter VI in this thesis.

- the third section of *JEV*: “Easter Sunday I heard the priest / Say resurrection, / But I saw trans- / Formation in his sermon.” (53) in “Death or Immortal Love”;
- the whole poem “Cricket” (17-19).

Apart from religion, as its title openly reveals, the major topic in “Cricket” is one of the common conversational topics in the West Indies, the most popular and favourite sport: “When yuh talk ‘bout cricket an’ de Lord” (17). St. John drew a strong parallelism between this sport and Christian rites, as evident in the lines “Yuh eatin’ like a gues’ at Cana feas’ ” (17), where the poet referred to the Cana wedding in the New Testament,²⁸⁴ and even more explicitly:

De Lord got somet’ing to do wid cricket.
 De wicket does remin’ me o’ de Trinity
 God in de centre of de three,
 Holy Ghost pun de lef’ and Jesus
 Pun de right an’ de bails like a crown
 Joinin’ dem an’ mekin’ dem Three in One.
 De pitch like an altar north and south
 Wid de sun transfigurin’ de scene
 An’ de umpires like two high priests (17).

Here the metaphor is quite striking, especially because the wicket is made of three wooden poles topped off with two smaller wooden pieces known as bails, in which the cricket ball has to strike to score: St. John elevated the game to a sacramental activity in which the trinity was represented by the three poles and the faithful believer had to fulfil the Christian tasks. As Prof. Edward Baugh observed about this poem the poetic persona is a “corner-shop philosopher” who exposes in Bajan his satirical reasoning about religion and Baugh also remarked on how St. John’s vernacular works represented a value-added expansion of the specific differences among national varieties of Creoles:

The mystique, communal ritual, and elaborate talk of West Indian cricket are also comprehended by Bruce St. John’s ‘Cricket,’ a worthy addition to the increasing cluster of West Indian cricket poems that grew around Brathwaite’s classic ‘Rites.’ (...) ‘Cricket’ is typical of St. John’s art in that, while it incorporates the storytelling mode to some extent, its metier²⁸⁵ is a kind of didactic “reasoning.” (...) The extended analogy between cricket and Christianity, which is central to ‘Cricket,’ might have seemed, if rendered in Standard English, too awkwardly extravagant and literary. (...) St. John also enriched the variety of West Indian Creole as a poetic medium in his

²⁸⁴ Episodes taken from the Gospels were often hinted at by Caribbean poets, as it is remarkable Derek Walcott’s reference to Giovanni Veronese’s painting *Feast in the House of Levi* in his *Tiepolo’s Hound*.

²⁸⁵ Meaning ‘asset’, *NBR*.

manipulation of the Barbadian version, another augmentation of Brathwaite's achievement.²⁸⁶

The comparison went on by mentioning a certain Pastor Worrell, who "sing de t'anksgivin' hymn / Like a angel, an' he preach 'bout David / An' Goliath..." (18). The language is funny and draws on popular saying, and it is aimed at making the reader actually see the game going on, enjoying it. As a sport commentator,²⁸⁷ St. John made use of his native patois to speak about two of the everyday Bajan topics, concluding with a witty remark on the fact that cricket was imported by the British into the West Indies but became a more popular sport in the former colonies: "Cricket is de game o' de Lord / Cricket is de game o' de Master" (19). As much as games and sports are part of Caribbean folklore, they were praised in Bruce St. John's "Cricket" and "Kites", in which he eulogized the national, and West Indian, popular sports, comparing them to the Christian faith and conceptualising in poetry the essence and the aesthetics which C.L.R. James had enunciated, as Lazarus explained: "In speaking of cricket as a form of dramatic art, James does not mean that cricket *resembles* drama. He means that it *is* drama. Indeed, it is drama of a distinctly orthodox and historic kind."²⁸⁸ St. John praised and mocked the English derivation of the sport, but at the same time he could be exploring public opinion by "flying a kite".²⁸⁹ Effectively, Patke noted that also in Brathwaite's *Islands* the reference to cricket was part and parcel of a social psyche: "Cricket is invoked as emblematic of the Caribbean psyche: 'when things goin' good, you cahn [can't] catch / we; but leg murder start an' you cahn fine a man to hole [hold] up de side' (201)."²⁹⁰

In the poem "Kites" St. John loitered on another favourite sport in Barbados, kite-flying: "Da is kite? (...) / Dem is kite? (...) / Da is sport?" (20). St. John's kites glide through his poetic sky interspersing it with a cluster of metaphors. The poet compared it to a woman, saying that "Evah kite got it own personality, / From animal to man to angel. (...) / Some roun' kite jus like a young gyal / Tekkin' de hauls, tekkin' de pills an' tee-vooin'" (20-21): here the moves of the kite seem to emulate an adolescent taking drugs and being in a heightened state of delusion: "Shakin' head from side to side, / Movin' hip from left to right." (21) It seems St. John's was making comparisons with animals, either with puppies whose tails got trapped in the wires "Some kite does tug like a puppy, / Twistin' roun' an' turnin' roun' de tail / But the wires does wrap roun' dem so tight" (21), or with

²⁸⁶ Baugh, Edward. "A History of Poetry." Arnold, James A. Ed. *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, Vol. 2. Amsterdam: John Benjamin, 2001. 270.

²⁸⁷ Cf. "On Reading 'Cricket'" in "Varia – The Caribbean", second section of *JEV*. Also the Trinidadian poet Dionyse McTair's "The Cricket Sings" (*Notes Towards an Escape From Death*) deals with cricket as a colonial legacy.

²⁸⁸ Lazarus, Neil. "Cricket and National Culture in the Writings of C.L.R. James." *C.L.R. James's Caribbean*. Ed. Paget Henry and Paul Buhle. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992. 96.

²⁸⁹ It is a pun on an English expression which means "to explore the public opinion".

²⁹⁰ Patke, Rajeev S. *Postcolonial Poetry in English*. Oxford; New York: OUP, 2006. 221.

sparrows, or with the raptor, hawk-like bird called ‘kite’, who eats scorpions “a kite is family to a hawk, / After all, a kite en nuh scorpion” (21). A final simile was made with angels and royalty, when the poet compared the flight of a kite to “De singin’ angel boy (...) / An’ white, pure white like a lily” (21); the sound created when gliding against the wind was compared to a humming “harminizin’ like de organ / De choir an’ de Easter congregation.” (22).

Listening to the recorded version of the poem “Subtlety”, the general impression one receives is that of an actor reciting a theatrical piece and making it sound so lively that the wisdom in it recommends one to be tactful in dealing with people and in displaying mannerisms typical of someone of stature. The lines “Too much nail, too straight, to’ much / Hammerin’ – need to be / Quiet an’ greasy like a screw!” (24) sound like a proverb or a popular saying, but they actually hint at inter-personal relationships, in such a way that the poet advised to avoid direct confrontation when it comes to sensitive issues, in favour of a more delicate, smart approach. St. John’s attitude seemed to recall the behaviour that slaves developed after centuries of oppression in order to win the master’s favours: you have to be flexible in order to excel, especially when you try to go against conformism. The lexical items are distorted (as ‘perdicament’ instead of ‘predicament’), and St. John – who was very much aware of the lexical differences in vocabulary around the Caribbean – employed the expression ‘Jook yuh tap-root’, a Gullah expression (from the South Carolina Vernacular) for ‘to dance’, so that people cannot make you leave your place, as it is said in “Suck in whoever drop so dat / When dem stem yuh fuh / Dislodge yuh, yuh turn de key / In de lock an’ yuh / Shove home de bolt” (24). This attitude is straightforward and tactful at the same time and reminds me of the complex Renaissance concept of “sprezzatura”, according to which the courtier – as the 16th c. writer Baldassar Castiglione suggested in *The Book of the Courtier* – has to behave tactfully and smartly in order to win the favours of the master or the patron.

II.iii. St. John’s Socio-Cultural Aesthetics: from the Bajan folk and its language to a Caribbean creolization

The third part of St. John’s “Song Cycle” is titled “We Country”. As to St. John’s use of Creole in his poems, his use of proverbs was remarkable, either in a cunning, subtle way as in “Subtlety”,²⁹¹ or in a more poetically rhyming way as in “Ode to Bat’s Rock”.²⁹² St. John played

²⁹¹ “Too much nail, too straight, to’ much / Hammerin’ – need to be / Quiet an’ greasy like a screw!” (B, 24).

²⁹² “De sea ain’ ha’ no back door bosie (...) / Proverbs does be sweet when dey slippin’ past we teet’, / Half win’ half water half sense half nonsense.” (B, 26) The British explorer Schomburgk noted in his travel narrative that Bat’s Rock is located along the road that connects Bridgetown to Speightatown. Schomburgk, Robert Hermann. *The History of Barbados*. Cass Library of West Indian Studies. 19. 1848. 544. [Google Books](#). 20 Apr. 2009

almost excessively with words and he produced irony in his lines to account for the funny, jocular side of Creole. The poem “We Country” is a good example: the Black Bajan poetic persona is represented as more amusing and inclined to jokes than his white interlocutor: “Duh remin’ me o’ de tiltman, / *Good heavens you’re a joker.* / Or a knock-knee tree, / *Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!* / Wid de bumps in de trunk, / *Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha!* (...) / *You’re funny, you’re funny!*” (29).²⁹³ In this poem St. John made use of idioms that resemble proverbs, as “Bajan is dog, / Crab in a barrel, / Cat in a tree.” (29), to highlight the difficulties that could objectively be found in the society of Barbados. And especially here social differences in class and education are marked, for the poet bitterly criticised how, once having achieved fame and success, any sympathy for the peers or friends is forgotten: “When a poor man rise, / By de mercies o’ God / Duh scratch ‘e down fuh dem climb up, / Da is how we treat hero, (...) / Da is de trouble wid we!” (30).

At this point I will comment on the importance of oral devices as it was observed and discussed by many Caribbean writers and on the relevance of folk retentions in St. John’s poetry as a marker of cultural and poetic features deriving from an African tradition. Digging into African verbal devices, the importance of orality highlights the complexity of Bajan talk and, as Kamau Brathwaite observed in his essay “African Presence in Caribbean Literature”: “The literature of African survival inheres most surely and securely in the folk tradition – in folk tale, folksong, proverb, and much of the litany of the *hounfort*.²⁹⁴,²⁹⁵ Moreover, in *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica* (1971) Brathwaite dealt with many aspects of Caribbean folklore, showing their cultural retentions in religion, music, dances, dresses, costumes, houses and furniture, and language. He also argued that, beyond the brutality of slavery and the tragic ‘black space’ – to employ a term by the Jamaican writer Erna Brodber – of the Middle Passage, the slave ships which took millions of Africans from West Africa to the Caribbean were some sort of space capsules which led together, with the survivors, their own African traditions, culture, folklore, oral literature, and religion. In fact, regaining the literary transliteration of the relationship conquerors-slaves after Octave Mannoni’s thought, which compared it to Shakespeare’s Prospero-Caliban relationship, Brathwaite argued that the “uncivilized” Africa made its breach in the Caribbean especially because of its

<http://books.google.it/books?id=fUhSFjUBpVoC&pg=PA368&lpg=PA368&dq=Schomburgk+The+History+of+Barbados+amazon&source=bl&ots=-HcYih2FBC&sig=rqUMo9J_AkOVAMnsbAduRWPnRx8&hl=it>.

²⁹³ Cf. also “We does laugh too quick, / We does laugh wid evahbody, / We does laugh at we self. / *That’s our sense of humour.*” ‘We Country’ (30).

²⁹⁴ The *vaudou* temple, *NbR*.

²⁹⁵ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature.” *Roots*. The University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor Paperback, 1993. 216.

“immanence”, and the slave ships worked as “space capsules”, as cultural vectors of African traditions across the Atlantic Ocean:

African societies did appear to European observers ‘to have no culture’, because there were no externally visible signs of a ‘civilization’. That dance was African architecture, that history was not printed but recited, contemporary Prospero could not understand. And yet it was the immanent nature of this culture which made its amazing and successful (‘miraculous’) transfer from Africa to the New World / Caribbean, even under the extraordinary conditions of slave trade/slavery, possible. The slave ship became a kind of psycho-physical space capsule, carrying intact the carriers of the kind of invisible/atomic culture I have described; so that every African on those ships had within him/herself the potential of reconstruction²⁹⁶

In St. John’s use of folk culture, proverbs and other oral devices, we can reconfigure Brathwaite’s African “space capsule”.

In his article on the London production of Lord Kitchener Hugh Hodges also observed that the African oral tradition, and the absence of a written tradition, made it difficult its understanding by Europeans.²⁹⁷ And as Theresa Lewis recorded in her *Caribbean Folk Legends*, folklore could be divided into fairy tales and legends, like those of the *soucouyant*, the *djablese*, the *Massacouraman* of Guyanese origin (which is also mentioned by Brathwaite in *Born to Slow Horses*), the *jamette*,²⁹⁸ the *old higue*.²⁹⁹ The Caribbean folklore derived from Africa, and so are the folkloric characters of Brother Anansi, Ti Malice, or Ti Jean. In her partly autobiographical, partly ethnographical work *Tell My Horse. Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*, the Afro-American and Harlem Renaissance writer Zora Neale-Hurston, asserted that:

First we talked about things that are generally talked about in Jamaica.
Brother Anansi, the Spider, that great cultural hero of West Africa who is

²⁹⁶ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. *Folk Culture of the Slaves in Jamaica*. Abstracted from a longer work entitled *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820*. London; Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1981. 13.

²⁹⁷ The “African culture that had survived the middle passage and could boast a rich spiritual and artistic tradition. It was not a written tradition, certainly, so it was not readily available, not even readily visible to an outsider” Hodges, Hugh. “Kitchener Invades England. The London Calypsoes of Aldwyn Roberts.” *Wasafiri* 54 (Summer 2005): 29.

²⁹⁸ Cf. Allsopp, Richard: the term ‘jamette’ (“Trinidadian spelling of ‘dja(n)mèt”, *cfr.* R. Allsopp, 311) is often spelled as ‘dja(n)mèt’, indicated by Allsopp as meaning “bad woman”, “[Fr. Cr., said to be derived < French ‘diamètre, ‘diameter’, in the sense of a line dividing the upper from the lower half of the social circle.”] *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. Oxford: OUP, 1996; Mona, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2003. 194.

²⁹⁹ Cf. Lewis, Theresa. *Caribbean Folk Legends*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1980. Cf. also Paul-Keens Douglas in “Ole Fletch.” *Sunsong* 3. Eds. Mordecai, Pamela, and Gordon, Grace Walker. Kingston: Longman, 1992. In Caribbean poetry, one of the most important reservoirs is Amerindian mythology, as retrieved by Olga W. Comma-Maynard’s *Carib Echoes* or in the “Legend of Daaga” and in the already mentioned “The Legend of Anacaona” by Eric Roach, in which the Haitian queen is scorned by the Spaniards (*The Flowering Rock*). Cf. also “Macandal Daaga”. “History of Immigration.” *Trinidad Newsday Historical Digest* (25 June 2000): 8. Daily News. 6 Mar. 2008 <http://www.nalis.gov.tt/Biography/bio_MACANDAL-DAAGA-slave.htm>.

personate in Haiti by Ti Malice and in the United States by Brer Rabbit. About duppies³⁰⁰ and how and where they existed, and how to detect them. I learned that they lived mostly in silk-cotton trees and in almond trees.³⁰¹

Now, this parenthetic digression helped me to delineate how Bruce St. John was – consciously or not – a transmitter of folk culture that originated in Africa. He recited many of his poems aloud – as if they were some folk tales. If Breiner defined Eric Roach’s a “peasant aesthetic”,³⁰² St. John’s could be considered a “folk aesthetics”, for he employed Creole to speak about socio-political issues concerning the different strata of society. Apart from the use of oral devices which derived from a folk culture, St. John was more aware of an urban mixed environment than Eric Roach was, being barely in touch with the Trinidadian urban scenario.³⁰³

If St. John referred to folk culture, he also considered higher education and abounded in references to the Classic tradition and Greek mythology.³⁰⁴ In St. John’s *Bumbatuk* references to Greek mythology can be spotted in “Political Progress”, where St. John, referring to democracy and slavery in ancient Athens, made a comparison with Barbados: “Athens was small, Barbados small too; / Athens had slaves; Barbados had too (...) / backra ain’ no Socrates. (...) / Slave playing he is a big shot! / Slave is a Plato? / Slave is a Midas?” (5). In “Heroes” St. John mentioned the Spartan General Lysander, who defeated the Athenians in the Aegospotami battle in 405BC, shuffling historical and mythological cards when he named the Trojan prince Hector, mentioned in Homer’s *Iliad* and complaining about the lack of contemporary heroes: “But a hero is a hard t’ing to fin’ / Hector dead an’ rotten like Lysander” (36). References to the history of Rome and to Cesar’s murder were made in “The Ides of March” (in “Varia – The Caribbean”, second section of *JEV*) and the poet also employed Latin to commemorate the death of his friend Archie Williams in “In Memoriam: Archie”: “*Ecce homo / In anno domini / Pax vobiscum / Requiescat in pace*” (58).

³⁰⁰ Jamaican ‘ghosts’ or ‘jumbies’, *NbR*.

³⁰¹ Neale Hurston, Zora. Tell My Horse. Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica. New York: Harper & Row, Perennial Library, 1990; 1938. 25.

³⁰² Breiner, Laurence A. “The Politics of Poetry: Roach’s Aesthetics and the *Savacou* Debate.” Black Yeats: Eric Roach and the Politics of Caribbean Poetry. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2008. 265.

³⁰³ Another Barbadian poet, the dub performer Winston Farrell wrote “Dear Brer Rabbit” as an invocation to the African folkloric persona of Anancy to come back to the arid life led in American style city life as Brer Rabbit, in fact at the end he claims “From one jungle to another...p.s. / Yours sincerely, please send u.s. /anancy”. Farrell, Winston. “Dear Brer Rabbit.” Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters 1.2 (Spring/Summer 2001): 124. Eds. Jacqueline Bishop, and Michela Calderaro. New York: New York University. 6 Mar. 2008 <<http://www.nyu.edu/calabash/vol4no2/0402124.pdf>>.

³⁰⁴ Many West Indian poets refer to classical mythology: Walcott in *Omeros*, Rachel Manley in “Orpheus” (*A Light Left On*), Lorna Goodison in “The Mulatta and the Minotaur” (*Heartease*), the Tobagonian poet Marlene Nourbese Philip in the retelling of the Ovidian story of Proserpina and Ceres (*She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*). At other times, they refer to other Caribbean writers in a cross-referential or inter-referential textuality, as for instance Anthony Kellman does in “Waterfalls” (*Watercourse*), in which the Guyanese writer Wilson Harris is evoked in the reference to “A peacock’s palace”, described in an echo of the Barbadian music “ruk-a-tuk and humming cataracts” (Kellman, Anthony. “Waterfalls.” Watercourse. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1990. 20).

This versatility in combining and blending seamlessly the basilect with cultivated languages was evident in the use of peculiarly Bajan ideophone like “Bragadung!”³⁰⁵ in “Bajan Language” (54) or in his perfect command of Standard English, as the poem “Early in the Morning” shows in *Joyce & Eros and Varia*: “To wake up early in the morning / To inhale the approaching crescendo / Of snowy gardenia’s perfume on polished green leaf / To pause, to add a perfumed contralto / Of the generous tube-rose, / Above the dying chorus of the lady-of-the night.” (*JEV*, 52). As the blurb of *Joyce & Eros and Varia* explains, that book is St. John’s “first book in Standard English” (*JEV*). In the poem “Who Is We?” he employed a British expression, “jolly good” (6), and as Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis remarked: “In a context of a diglossic social fabric – one in which code-switching is status-laden and in which the majority of the population speaks a mother tongue other than a metropolitan English dialect – Standard English operates as one such distancing mechanism.”³⁰⁶ Actually, in St. John’s poetry the “diglossic fabric” was not always a sign of social distancing, but rather of socio-aesthetic blending.

That is exactly where St. John’s aesthetics comes into play: the poet, conscious of socio-political issues and differences and well aware of the linguistic differences between one island and the other, aimed at reproducing poetically a West Indian aesthetics. In “Bajan Language” – which is said to have been translated into Spanish (*JEV*, blurb) –, St. John compared Bajan to a Creole soup or ‘pepperpot’, in which he affirmed “Evah language like a big pot o’ Bajan soup: / Piece o’ yam / Piece o’ potato / Two dumplin’ / Three eddoe³⁰⁷ / One beet / Two carrot / Piece o’ pig tail / Piece o’ beef / Pinch o’ salt / Dus’ o’ pepper / An’ doan fuget okra fyh add to de flavo’ ” (53). He compared simple, poor people who could not afford to go to study in England with those snobbish students (“She nose up in de air”, 53) who forgot their native Creole; he also compared the implanted English literary tradition with the local one which did not even include the same natural species, as speaking of Wordsworth’s daffodils in a wordplay (“Wordwutless di’n so bad / ‘Cause ‘e write

³⁰⁵ Cf. Kamau Brathwaite’s poem “The Dust” (Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. *Rights of Passage. The Arrivants, A New World Trilogy. Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968), *Islands* (1969). London: OUP, 1973.), in which the dust coming from the erupted volcano is accompanied by a potent noise, echoed by the onomatopoeic sound of “*brugg-a-lung-go*”. Walder lingered on the oral aspect of Brathwaite’s poetry: “Try saying it loud, and you discover why so much of this poetry is written for performance. But Brathwaite’s poem also relies on and confirms developing linguistic distinctions, such as what is meant by ‘patois’. *Patois* refers to an unwritten regional dialect, considered substandard or of low status; here it is the Barbadian speaker herself of a variety which to the outsider is simply Caribbean Creole, who distinguishes the speech of another small island as merely ‘patois’ – a variety so ‘tie-tongue’ it suggests to her something hardly English, although, as we can tell, it is truly expressive.” (Walder, Dennis. “Caribbean and Black British Poetry.” *Post-colonial Literatures in English. History, Language, Theory*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998. 154.)

³⁰⁶ Warner-Lewis, Maureen. “Language Use in West Indian Literature.” *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*. Cit. 26.

³⁰⁷ It is a kind of ‘dasheen’, spinach, *NbR*.

‘bout daffodil”, 54), and of Shakespeare (“Shakespeare, Shakespeare, / An’ no pear an drop yet, / King Lear did a ass an’ a hasty one too”, 54). St. John was preoccupied with the common belief about the limits of Creole: “We language limit! / De Yankee does read we short story, / All nation does read we poultry, / An’ like um too. / Dem doan on’erstan’ a single word” (55). He also mocked the Italian Renaissance writer Petrarca and his sonnets, distorting his name: “Peetrack macaroni mek sonnet, / Well Bajan coucou kin mek sonnet too” (55). He recognised the different components of the Bajan vernacular: “Bajan language is a damn funny language / Piece o’ English, piece o’ African tongue, / Mix Carib an’ Arawak to save damage / An’ de cook-up is a beautiful soun’. / De canny English tu’n it in a sanguage³⁰⁸” (55). The poet was nurtured by his native language, as by the ‘yam’ in the soup, an ingredient which reveals an idea of language as a nutritive means. Brathwaite spoke profusely of the concept of *nam*. Brathwaite’s *nam* represents the root which feeds the man, a man without an identity and without a real ‘language’: *nam* is

the word we give to the indestructible and atomic core of man’s culture. It is the kernel of his name, his nature of immanence, man in extremis, extremest nativeness, disguised backward (nam/X\man). It is the essence of our culture in the sense that culture is the essence of what men eat (nyam, yam); and the power and the glory out of that: nyame, onyame, dynamo. (1982)³⁰⁹

But *nam* had acquired also religious and spiritual connotations:

the banning of the drum (voice of god or worship: *nyame* – one of three Akan names for the Supreme Being); the gradual replacement of African foods and foodstyles (*nyam/yam*) by European or creole substitutes, and the Christianization of names (*nommo* – Bantu for the Word) and ideas (*nam*). (1970)³¹⁰

Nam became a vibration, and it gives a name (without the final vowel ‘e’) to the man-without-identity, the “X/Self”:

‘name,’ ...is another form of ‘nam’: the name that you once had has lost its ‘e’, that fragile part of itself, eaten by Prospero, eaten by the conquistadors, but preserving its essentialness, its alpha, is ‘a’ protected by those two intransigent consonants, ‘n’ and ‘m’. The vibrations ‘nmnmnm’ are ‘name’ and the god ‘Nyame’. (1990)³¹¹

³⁰⁸ The word “sanguage” seems a wordplay of “sandwich + language”, *NbR*.

³⁰⁹ Brathwaite, Kamau. “Gods of the Middle Passage: A Tennament.” *Caribbean Review* XI.4 (1982): 18.

³¹⁰ Brathwaite, Kamau. “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature” (1970/1973) *Roots Cit.* 195-196.

³¹¹ Brathwaite, Kamau. “History, the Caribbean Writer and *X/Self*.” Geoffrey V. Davis and Hena Maes-Jelinek, eds. *Crisis and Creativity in the New Literatures in English*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1990. 34. Brathwaite has insisted on his concept of ‘nation language’, as clarified in *The History of the Voice*, and on the power of the ‘naked word’, which becomes ‘ikon’ and nourishment for the poet, in a semiological association of the sea as feeder of and at the same time as fed by poetic language. Anthony Kellmann dedicated many of his poems to the sea or his personal relationship with nature; in particular his poem “Bajan” in *Watercourse* sings: “You are the sea (...) / Worlds overlap / whirl in arcs of islands” (Kellman, Anthony. “Bajan.” *Watercourse. Cit.* 11.), while “Sprat” recounts of herrings

Following in his fellow countryman's words and analysis, the 'yam' or 'nam' he mentioned in his poetry became for St. John nourishment for his soul and for his language, which is musical, 'vibrational' and an expression of the folk. St. John's "Bajan Litany" acquired also a poetic stature, commenting on the music in poetic language: "An' le' muh hear yuh speech; / Talk 'bout de image an' de soun' / Tell muh um doan mek sense. / An' watch out fo' de Bajan in de rhyme scheme – (...) / Sonnet? (...) / Proper Bajan rhyme. (...) / Bajan language limit? Ha! Ha! Ha!" (56). A Creole aesthetics surfaces in St. John's verse, with his vivid description and colourful cameos, with his cultivated references to Latin or Greek mythology, so that hypotyposis and classical culture allow Bajan, with its endless possibilities, to acquire the status of a proper 'language', expressing the voice of the folk.

dancing a "Caricom dance" (*Ibid.* 53.), reproducing the fight between David and Goliath in an imperial struggle: "When yuh weak, yuh humble yuhself" (*Ibidem.*). "Fishing Song" and "Sea Horse, Pass By" in *The Long Gap* better exemplify the poet's personal and cultural relationship with the sea, also because he employs Creole in them. Similarly, also the Barbadian Frank Appleton Collymore dedicated a "Hymn to the Sea". Collymore was the editor of the Barbadian literary journal *Bim*, which published many poems by dozens of Caribbean authors and improved the cultural matrix of Caribbean people, helping to forge a poetic and aesthetic conscience. *Bim Magazine* was published from 1942 until 1996; a new version of it has been published from 2003 (Barbados GIS (Government Information Service). "Bim Magazine to Be Relaunched Tomorrow". Caribseek News. Caribbean News (28 Nov. 2007) 20 Oct. 2009 <<http://news.caribseek.com/set-up/exec/view.cgi?archive=147& num=59256>>.). Together with the literary magazine *Focus* edited by Edna Manley from 1943 in Jamaica, and the Guyanese *Kyk-Over-Al* directed by A.J. Seymour from 1945, it was one of the most important literary mouthpieces for Caribbean writers and journalistic culture aimed to forge a culturally common poetic production, and not just a Bajan one (as much as St. John sustained).

Chapter III Shake Keane (1927-1997) The Irreverent Flourish of a Creole “Angel Horn”

It is not easy to find critical material on the work of the Vincentian jazz poet ‘Shake’ Keane (1927-1997),³¹² born Ellsworth McGrahan Keane in 1927 in St. Vincent (an island of the Lesser Antilles, which became independent in 1979³¹³ together with the other eight Grenadines islands). He spent his childhood on his native island, where his father died when he was only six, leaving him in legacy of a mastery of music, and the ability to play the horn, an instrument for which he would become famous as a jazz player in London, where he arrived in 1952. In London he also contributed to the BBC program *Caribbean Voices*, presented by Henry Swanze as contributor and producer, and which was one of the major resources through which Caribbean poetry had for many years was broadcast and disseminated outside the Caribbean region. To the 1950s, when he also attended London University, belong the collections *L’Oubli: Poems* (1950) and *Ixion: Poems* (1952).³¹⁴ After the first Caribbean Festival of Arts, Carifesta, in Guyana in 1972, Keane accepted a job in the government of his island and later, in 1979, the year of St. Vincent’s independence, after a political reshuffle decided to close the cultural program which he was working at, he published the collection *The Volcano Suite – A Series of Five Poems*. Thanks to *One a Week With Water: Rhymes and Notes*, also published in 1979, he gained the Casa de Las Américas Prize in Cuba. From the 1950s onward his poems had been published in West Indian literary magazines like *Kyk-Over-Al*, *Caribbean Quarterly*, *Savacou*. Especially interesting were the collaborations with two other Vincentian poets, Owen Campbell³¹⁵ and Daniel Williams. The “St. Vincent Trio” published in *BIM* 15.IV is an *ensemble*, including such icastic poems as “Three Contemplations”: “Osmosis” by Keane, “Cancer in the Sun” by Williams and “The Unwinding” by Campbell.³¹⁶

³¹² Cf. the back cover of Keane, Shake. *The Angel Horn. Collected Poems (1927-1997)*. Philipsburg, St. Maarten: House of Nehesi Publishers, 2005, where it is said that his nickname derives either from Shakespeare, whom the author loved very much, or from the popular song “Chocolate Milk Shake”.

³¹³ Philip Nanton opts for an actual independence of St. Vincent in 1980: “St. Vincent’s political independence, achieved in 1980”. Nanton, Philip. “Shake Keane’s Poetic Legacy.” (Sept. 1998) *The Society for Caribbean Studies Annual Conference Papers* 1 (2000) Proc. of a conference. Ed. Sandra Courtman. 24 July 2008 <<http://www.sconline.freemove.co.uk/olvol1.html>>.

³¹⁴ Keane, Shake. *L’Oubli: Poems*. Bridgetown, Barbados: Advocate, 1950. Keane, Shake. *Ixion: Poems*. Georgetown, Guyana: Miniature Poets Series, N. 10, 1952.

³¹⁵ *One A Week With Water* is dedicated to Campbell, with a footnote saying, “‘Children’s Day. Any Day.’ / A favourite saying of Owen Campbell’s – Vincentian Poet/friend Eccentric; now, unfortunately, grown-up.” Keane, Shake. *One a Week with Water: Rhymes and Notes*. Habana: Casa de las Américas, 1979. 59. Henceforward ‘*L’Oubli*’ will be referred to with ‘*O*’, ‘*Ixion*’ with ‘*I*’, ‘*The Volcano Suite*’ with ‘*TVS*’, ‘*One a Week With Water*’ with ‘*OWWW*’, ‘*Palm and Octopus*’ with ‘*PO*’, ‘*The Angel Horn*’ with ‘*AH*’.

³¹⁶ For a biographical outlook on Keane cf. Philip Nanton’s essays and postface of *The Angel Horn. cit.*

After about a quarter of a century spent in New York, in 1994 Keane published *Palm and Octopus*,³¹⁷ in which the homonym poem, “Palm and Octopus”, in *The Angel Horn – Shake Keane (1927-1997) Collected Poems* sounds like a ‘liquid’ love declaration:³¹⁸ “Each today after eleven years / I remember our death before it happens / and who knows what other green things³¹⁹ will reach me with watery tendril of love” (*AH*, 121). And it is indeed in this last, posthumous collection that forty years of his poetic production have been gathered. As Dr. Margaret Bryce pointed out in her note following the poems: “The order of the manuscripts and of the poems in each appear in this book as determined by the poet.” (*AH*, 184). Even though the poems are not placed in chronological order, they can be considered representative of his whole production, spanning from lyrics devoted to his native St. Vincent (like “Of Love and Rivers” or “Barrouaille Dawn”) or the Caribbean in general (as “People Like We” or “Three Roofs in Roseau”), to the period in London (as “Roundtrip”) or in New York (as the “Book Six – Brooklyn Themes”), till his death which occurred in 1997 in Oslo, Norway, where he was supposed to start a jazz tour.

Due to the difficulty in finding primary and secondary critical material on Keane, the collections analysed in this chapter will primarily be *One a Week With Water* (1979) and *The Angel Horn* (published posthumously in 2005).³²⁰ Being a jazz hornist, his poetry collections were partly recorded, as the sound recording *Dig It!* (1969) testifies.³²¹ His poems, I would argue, were born out of his music and from his island. He praised the nature of St. Vincent, particularly water and the volcanoes – with its eruptive power which resembles a trombonist’s *vibrato*,³²² as much as music,

³¹⁷ Keane, Shake. *Palm and Octopus: Twelve Love Poems*. New York: The Author, 1994.

³¹⁸ Cf. in this chapter the comment to “Palm and Octopus”, *AH*, *cit.*

³¹⁹ Keane used many green elements in his poems, especially in *AH*: “Green people / does come up to me” (“Nallidge”, 21); “A Man set out to Ibadan / and arrive at Cologne (...) / The next day he look for proper green pepper / The same day she look for a name” (“Adeyemi”, 60); “ten green bottles standing on a wall” (“Lesson Thirteen: SONG OF THE UNDERDEVELOPED CASINO”), 104; “I strive now / to hold on to the wind / to the tree of your green / green late and gone” (“Bananas”, 111); “Why do I pretend / that the grass / like a memory thundering under me / is still green” (“There Was Not”, 116); “in small rhythms / gross-green like the vessels” (“In This Ancient Bay”, 117); “I remember our death before it happens / and who knows what other green things will reach me” (“Palm ad Octopus”, 121); “Green live in green”, “when the prickopay and the winter green / he only hear bout”, “names call behind doors / green”, “earth open under rope / green doors opening with noise” (all, “Jumbie”, 149, 150, 155, 158).

³²⁰ *The Angel Horn* contains a selection of poems written in St. Vincent in the ‘40s, ‘50s, and ‘70s, in London in the ‘60s and ‘70s, in Germany in the ‘70s, in Guyana in 1972, in Bequia in 1976; moreover, it contains the unpublished collection *Eve and Adams, Love, Mating, and God-mother Poems* (1946-1979), *Thirteen Studies in Home Economics* (St. Vincent, 1972-1977), *Palm and Octopus, Twelve Love Poems* (September 1994, Brooklyn, New York), *The Wisdom-Keeper, Three poems located in the voice of the tea-meetin, the kaiso, the folk (jumbie) metaphysic, and other traditional language forms* (St. Vincent, 1972-1974), *Brooklyn Themes* (September 1982-February 1983).

³²¹ Keane, Shake. *Dig It!* Music Sound recording. 1 sound disc: analog, 33 1/3 rpm, stereo. 12 in. New York: London Record, [1976?] Vinyl. Rec. with The Ivor Raymonde Orchestra and Chorus. Decca Phase 4, 1969.

³²² “The island put a white mask / over its face / coughed cool as history / and fell in love with itself” Keane, Shake. “Soufrière.” Joyette, Anthony. *Vincientian Poets, 1950 to 1980*. St. Laurent, Quebec: A F O, 1990. 3. and in Burnett, Paula. ed. *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*. New York: Penguin, 1986. 231. Cf. also the poem Salkey, Andrew. “Soufrière.” Ed. Paula Burnett. *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*. *Cit.* 235-6. And Cf. also E. A. Markham’s “Introduction” to Fergus, Howard A. *Calabash of Gold, Selected Poems*. London & Plymouth: Linda Lee Books. 1993. “in 1979 Shake Keane wrote his magnificent ‘Volcano Suite’, after the blowing of the

since the ‘suite’ is a sequence of musical pieces and the ‘horn’ of his third collection of poems a musical instrument, which – according to the poet – emits angelical sounds.³²³ In the poem “Angel Horn”, Keane remembered “When I was born / my father gave to me / an angelhorn / With wings of melody. (...) / Love moves to claim, / to claim our secret name.” (AH, 181-182): placed at the end of the collection, this lines seal Keane’s love for music.

III.i. An irreverent look at history as a poetic form of survival

III.i.i. History and religion of St. Vincent

“All the world’s a casino.
The particular world in which I was born –
Or deliver, if you prefer – is over sixty miles long, and
some eleven miles wide. North to south
You can play any number of games from Fancy to Union.
The west and east walls are known as Barrouaille and Stubbs Point respectively...
For decoration we have a volcano smoking away peacefully at four thousand feet.
But the rest of the place is almost always real high...” (AH, 77)

This is how Keane geographically and topographically described his native island. Historically speaking, St. Vincent is well-known for some major natural disasters as some massive eruptions of the LaSoufrière volcano in 1812, 1902 (this was the same year of the disruptive eruption of Mt. Pelée in St. Pierre, Martinique),³²⁴ and in the 1970s (in 1979 Keane published *The Volcano Suite*);³²⁵ floods in 1896; or a hurricane in 1898. This small wild territory of the Windward Islands was discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1498 and became a Spanish possession after two centuries of Carib domination – after the Carib Indians won over the indigenous Arawaks. The island remained Spanish until 1627 when it was conquered by Lord Carlisle. The British were subsequently defeated by the Caribs and the French. The French island became British again only after the 1783 Treaty of Versailles, together with Grenada, Dominica, Montserrat, and St. Kitts & Nevis.³²⁶ As it is explained in the poetic anthology *Melanthika*, the history of the Garifuna a.k.a. Black Caribs began in St. Vincent, after the Caribs or Kalipuna from South America invaded St.

Soufriere in St. Vincent, we thought that might trigger a literary revival in that Island; but it’s possible that the collective response to a hurricane is different from that to a volcanic eruption.”

³²³ Shake Keane wrote also “Carol in A Minor” (*Vincentian Poets, Cit.*).

³²⁴ In his novel *Texaco* the Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau narrates the history of the island, including this natural disaster.

³²⁵ Keane, Shake. *The Volcano Suite: A Series of Five Poems*. St. Vincent: Reliance Press, 1979.

³²⁶ “The population of Trinidad and Tobago doubled in forty years between 1844 and 1881 as a result of this movement of our peoples from St. Vincent, Grenada, and as far as St. Martin in the northeast.” Lamming, George. *Coming, Coming Home. Conversations II. Western Education and the Caribbean Intellectual*. Philipsburg, St. Martin. House of Nehesi Publishers. 1995; 2000. 33.

Vincent and overcame the Arawak, taking their women as wives; together with Nigerians deported to the island by the Spanish, they formed the tribe of Balck Caribs, and were later deported to Honduras by the British:

The island of St. Vincent lies south of St. Lucia and to the east of Barbados on more or less the same latitude. (...) like Dominica, it became a haven of the Carib indians, who bitterly resented British annexation of the island in 1762. There followed a number of risings, that of 1795, with its French backing, being of such severity that the majority of the indians were, together with their Dominican bretheren, deported to the island of Roanto'n, off the coast of Honduras.³²⁷

Nonetheless, the Carib resistance against the British was strenuous and they invaded the capital Kingstown under the command of the Carib Garifuna chief Joseph Chatoyer – allied with some French revolutionaries inspired by the ideals of the French revolution – but they were defeated in 1795. In the poem “Hide and Seek” (book one of *AH*) Keane recalled this historical episode transposing the actual fight into a sort of rigmarole or nursery rhyme.³²⁸ He also inserted snippets of French Creole,³²⁹ which is part of the island’s historical and cultural heritage: “Di mamma di mamma / Bore booti la / Cochon ha-papa large ha” (*AH*, 16). St. Vincent became independent from Britain only in 1979.

As much as he loved his island, his love for women was timeless and at times linked with religion. In “Palm and Octopus” the poet considered his erratic essence: “And I am octopus / flailing at flood / eight arms / nomadic in water”; he aspired to an old age with his love in “water far far from our liquid thoughts” (both *AH*, 121). Similarly, in “Ruth” Keane observed, “She owns the stars / That we worship, / and all these bottles of liquid passion / Melting like candles under our liquid compassion” (*AH*, 167). In “Love Story (2)” Keane spoke of life after death, and of love, that he often connected to death,³³⁰ one of the most recurrent themes. Philip Nanton observed how the issue of identity is deeply linked to Keane’s sense of death: “(an) obsession with identity (after

³²⁷ Toczec, Nick, Nanton Philip, and Yann Lovelock Eds. *Melanthika: an Anthology of Pan-Caribbean Writing*. Birmingham: L. W. M. Publications, 1997. 8.

³²⁸ “One two three / I catch yo” (*AH*, 17), “Chatoyer / Where yo dey / Quako Babu / Where yo dey (...) / Chatoyer say / Tomorrow night / When the moon out-off / Come down / Down together in the dark” (*AH*, 16-17).

³²⁹ As much as other mixed races like the “Quako Babu” (*AH*, 16), which are terms referred to Black people and East Indians, whites are part of the creolized population of St. Vincent.

³³⁰ “Disaster like love / like memory / is always understated” (“Three Roofs in Roseau”, *AH*, 44); “like love / like disasterlike” (“Coming Back”, *AH*, 47); “like all death to the sea-bed / which is the dawn of the sea” (“Barrouallie Dawn”, *AH*, 55); “the mending of love’s ache, / And of all deaths the bitter spinal bread / Your youth in me recalls” (“Sonnet for Margarite” *AH*, 169). He also explained his wonders in: “Beyond the life, the death-life, / The biogenesis of all things.” (*AH*, 42). Cf. also “love and labour”, in “(Lesson Five: PER CAPITA PER ANNUM)” (*AH*, 86) with Sekou’s criticism by Howard A. Fergus. *Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou*. Philipsburg, St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers. 2007.

death since life seems unreal)".³³¹ In the poem "Love Story (21)" Keane spoke of contrasting feelings towards sex and death: he underlined how purity makes you feel guilty towards sex and how cheating makes you feel guilty towards your partner: "No one / ever looks at / the face / of a nun / or the face of a whore" (*AH*, 71). Two very different facets of this attitude, very diverse in nature, link human feelings to nature: "virgin islands will be born as oceans defecate". That line stands as a paradigm for new things born from the waste of old things, and at the same time the Caribbean islands may appear as a human discharge on the ocean, as seen from above. Keane was irreverent towards religion, as he implied Christ's death in "Darkness and thistles surround my face like the sun / There are very few nuns in China" (*AH*, 71). The sunlight is the setting of one or more love encounters: "In June the days dilate" until "it's too dark", because "love leaks from the island of the sun": the poetic persona seems to have an affair on the beach and his encounter is mirrored by nature, both by the crabs ("Do crabs in motion masturbate") and by the roses ("When thorns are set to mate / the roses run", and by the two combined together: "crabs mimic thorns / muddle and run / celebrate among the roses"). The sexual act is compared to the instalment of a gun, "Wherever there's a high place / install a gun"; when used the gun moves backward, and sex could be compared to shooting (when the recoil of the gun propels it to the rear) and to death: "Guns move backwards / when they speak" (all *AH*, 71-2). Another poem in which Keane spoke of love and death is "(Lesson Eight: HERE AM I SEND ME)", where the poet played with words and sounds to indicate that everybody becomes useless when dead, like an empty container: "bottles / nipples / topless / playthings / in / the / ice-box" (*AH*, 92). The mortuary, the 'ice-box', is compared to a vegetable garden, a "cive-patch", a "carrot patch", where there is "no / juice / brings up / the young ox", and where the earth represents a return to death. The title of the poem seems to refer to death itself, where a bird spins around in difficulty. But Keane's profanity comes out again in the comparison between a bat and Jesus Christ: "a bat / hangs / between / the nipple / and / the left ventricle (...) / like jesuschrist / ice / on / my / wing" (*AH*, 93): Jesus is hanging like a bat, and a white, cold body compares the poet to a bat or a bird, collapsing to the ground, sent to an uncertain, unexplored place.

Keane's historical outlook was often aimed at mocking history and especially colonial history. Employing his native Creole, he often delved into history and religion. In the footnotes in *OWWW*, Keane recorded historical and religious events but he mixed them with imaginary ones, so that we are not sure if the chronological record was aimed at giving credit to his nonsensical collection, or vice versa, if the blending of history and fiction was meant to see the two as inseparable. Thus, we find references to Christian festivities as Christmas, Epiphany, the Dimanche

³³¹ Nanton, Philip. "Shake Keane's Poetic Legacy." *Cit.*

Gras, sometimes with an irreverent tone, as in “Arsch Wednesday” (*OWWW*, 23). There are some references to the materialistic side of festivities (as in “Still too many shopping days before Christmas.” 28) or a weird link between Norwegians and the close island of Grenada: (“Saturday April 17th. Easter Eve. Time to order your Xmas-trees before the Norwegians sell them OFF behind YOUR back to Grenada.” 29), which finds an ironical solution in “XMAS-TREES SOLD OUT.” (49), or in “Thursday November 25th. National Day of Prayer. Grenada. / Thanksgiving Day. U.S.A. / LIMITED quantities of EXMAS-TREES available FROM Guyana. / Apply Japan.” (64). Keane’s tone is very pert in Week Thirty-Four where the poetic persona admits “But I really have to go and buy this shoe. It have a funeral four o’clock. I wonder why people does all time die on a shopping-day?” (50), or in Week Twenty-Three, in which he mingled a Christian prayer with a Rastafari one: “O SON of MAN O / Gard / who bringest dung woe / an mighty hard redemshan / through dye Lard / our son (...) / O Gard bredderin / Was’n dat / a fun tas tic pray / I just pray dey / Speak yo mine / bredderin” (38): the Christian basic belief in redemption is creolised as ‘redemshan’ and the depths of the woe and sorrows are mocked as “a fantastic prayer”.

But in *OWWW* we also find historical data recording the Middle Passage or other major events in Black history, as “In 1310 first recorded Africans arrived in the New World, from Mali” (16), the murder of Malcolm X, correctly catalogued on 21st February 1965 (the poems are mostly dated 1976): “February 22. Eleven years and a day since the assassination of Malcolm X, / (baptised in 1925: Malcolm Little)” (20). Less precise historical data appear too: “Any week this year, second recorded Afrikans arrived in St. Vincent (YouRoumai), 301 years ago, in the sea off Bequia (near Cane Garden), handcuffed, shipwrecked, alive and so forth” (28), a reference which dates the slaves’ arrival back to 1675, when the island was under British control. There are also historical references to such distant places as China, and in particular one to the 1915-1920 so-called ‘New Culture Movement’ or ‘May Fourth Movement’, which was a student protest spreading from Beijing to prevent the handover of Shanghai to the Japanese as provided by the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, referring to another colonial domination and to struggles for freedom: “May 4: Cultural and political student uprising. / China. 57 years ago.”.

In two early essays in *Bim* 1952 and 1953 – in which the poet showed a much more analytical approach which totally contrasts with the freedom he expressed in poetry – Shake Keane spoke about the presence of religion in poetry,³³² but poems on or about religion seemed to be an ideal locus to employ the native Creole, the patois being especially used during religious rites. Philip Nanton remarked how two poems by Keane (“Calypso Dancers” and “Shaker Funeral”) were

³³² Cf. Keane, E. McG. “Some Religious Attitudes in W.I. Poetry. The orthodox attitude and variations.” *BIM* 4.15 (1952): 169-174. and “Some Religious Attitudes in W.I. Poetry. Nature and religion.” *BIM* 4.16 (1953): 266-271.

especially linked to religious themes, but they were also an expression of both the oral tradition and his ability in music: he spoke of “religious contemplative themes in the 1940’s and 1950’s.”³³³ Nanton referred here the two critical comments on these poems, one by Prof. Edward Baugh and the other by Prof. Gordon Rohlehr:

among the poems in that first published collection [*L’Oubli: Poems*, 1950, *NbR*] were two, *Shaker Funeral* and *Calypso Dancers* which also establish his reputation for originality. Gordon Rohlehr identified *Shaker Funeral* as an example of Keane’s imaginative use of the religious paradigm infused with the energy of the oral tradition (Rohlehr, 1992). Edward Baugh recognised in *Calypso Dancers* the early use of jazz inflections which other poets in the Caribbean were to follow (Baugh 1971).³³⁴

As Baugh observed, Keane could have been anticipated in the use of Creole by the Jamaican poet Una Marson: “Marson’s concern for the common people is sometimes articulated through experiments with Jamaican Creole. In the dramatic and impressionistic ‘Gettin’ De Spirit,’ Marson anticipates Philip Sherlock’s ‘Pocomania’ and E. McG. Keane’s ‘Shaker Funeral’.”³³⁵ And after comparing the Jamaican poet Una Marson to the Jamaican Philip Sherlock, or the Vincentian Keane, Baugh proceeded with the Tobagonian Eric Roach and the two Vincentians Keane and Daniel Williams.³³⁶ Williams, one of the St. Vincentian poets close to Keane,³³⁷ was recognised to have Eliotesque overtones (yet, I recognise an affinity with Eric Roach, especially in the lines “The peasant is ploughed up and / Heaped up into muscles and miracles / Contoured and plotted, acres of flesh / With boundaries of bone and blood.”, from “Song of the Peasants”³³⁸), while Keane himself was believed to have anticipated the poetics of Africanness in Kamau Brathwaite, as Baugh observed for some poets from different islands:

Some little attempt was made to capture in poetry the “cadences of island patois” [here Baugh was referring to Roach’s line in “Letter to Lamming”, *NbR*] and the rhythms of West Indian music (...) In addition to Philip Sherlock’s well-known ‘Pocomania’ (in Burnett [1986], 154) and his lesser-known ‘Paradise’ (in Figueroa [1970], 76), we may note Daniel William’s

³³³ Nanton, Philip. “Shake Keane’s Poetic Legacy.” *Cit.*

³³⁴ *Ibidem.*

³³⁵ Baugh, Edward. “A History of Poetry.” Ed. James A. Arnold. *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, Vol. 2. Amsterdam: John Benjamin, 2001. 237.

³³⁶ “Their works appeared in literary magazines and foreign journals since the 1950s. It was not until the 1960’s that Vincentian’s were exposed to their works through the Kingstown Study Group and their publication *Flambeau...*” Blazer William, Cecil A. “Introduction.” Joyette, Anthony. *Vincentian Poets, 1950 to 1980*. *Cit.* xvi.

³³⁷ Anthony Joyette enumerates a number of poets from the early post-war period (E.McG. ‘Shake’ Keane, Daniel Williams, Owen Campbell), the late post-war period (Creswell Durant, Cameron G. King, Al T. Daisy, Travers Walter Phillips, Anthony T. Joyette himself, Nicholas Austin, H. Nigel Thomas), the early post-independence poets (Yemi Ajamu Khensu, St. Clair Jimmy Prince, Nelcia C. Robinson, Peggy B. Carr, Joyce Peters-McKenzie, Ava Johnson, Tien Providence, Ursula A. Branch). Joyette, Anthony. *Vincentian Poets, 1950 to 1980*. *Cit.* 1990.

³³⁸ Williams, Daniel. “Song of the Peasants.” *Ibid.* 7.

‘The Shakers’ (broadcast on ‘Caribbean Voices’ on 15 July 1951), a somewhat awkwardly Eliotesque sequence that attempts to evoke the rhythms and spirit of a Shaker ceremony and E. McG. “Shake” Keane’s more memorable “Shaker Funeral”: “Sorrow sin – / bound, pelting din / big chorus-clash / o’ the mourners.../ Drums, flags / pious rags o’ / robes stanching / sweat” (Keane [1950], 17). In its small way, this poem anticipated the much larger achievement of Brathwaite in turning African, African-American, and Afro-Caribbean rhythms to poetic profit.³³⁹

The poem “Shaker Funeral” mentioned here is “Mistress Mucket’s Funeral” in *The Angel Horn*, (AH, 29-32) where Keane described the Shakers’ funeral of a priestess, but references to the Bible were also made, for instance to passage 1. in Corinthians. 5-8, speaking of the slaughter of the lamb and the marking of doors with its blood to prevent the angel of death from entering (Jewish Passover): “But their sorrow was yells, / and their faith so brave, / as the blood-blemished lambs / piled big on the grave” (AH, 31).

On the other hand, Gordon Rohlehr’s criticism did not pay much attention to the linguistic aspect, but rather to the metaphorical, subconscious meaning of it:

the ecstatic religions should have served as tropes for novelists, dramatists and poets, by providing accessible metaphors of a process of descent into the inferno of the Self, which leads to a recovery of the-word-as-energy, electric, kinetic utterance. (...) One sees it in Shake Keane’s ‘Calypso Dancers’ and ‘Shaker Funeral’ (...) that remarkable exploration of the connection between cosmic and human violence on the one hand, and the idea of sacrifice as catharsis and containment on the other.³⁴⁰

Rohlehr supported Baugh’s view on “Shaker Funeral”:

a little known poem such as Keane’s ‘Shaker Funeral’ emerges as our most successful early attempt to capture something of the shape of the religious paradigm. The occasion is a Shouter/Baptist funeral, one of those ceremonies of release whose function is to facilitate the transition of the soul from the realm of the living to the world of ancestors, spirits, *les invisibles*. (...) Philip Sherlock had a similar vision in his well-known ‘Pocomania’, but Keane is much closer to the feel of the actual process, and it leads him naturally to broken, violent drum rhythms, nowhere present in the Macbethian incantations of Sherlock’s poem. In Keane, as Edward Baugh has suggested in an article which first made me aware of Keane’s poem, we find the true fore-runner of *Rights of Passage*. (...) The mourners are first heard (din, big chorusclash, shout, yelling, crash-ing). The feet keep

³³⁹ Baugh, Edward. “A History of Poetry.” *Cit.* 242.

³⁴⁰ Rohlehr, Gordon. “Paradigms of the Oral Tradition: The Religious Paradigm.” (5-7) “The Problem of the Problem of Form. The Idea of an Aesthetic Continuum and Aesthetic Code-switching in West Indian Literature.” (1985) *The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays*. Port of Spain, Trinidad: Longman Trinidad Limited. 1992. 6. Rohlehr comments on the poem “Shaker Funeral” as taken from Keane’s *O* (Barbados: Advocate Press, 1950).

the rhythm of life and death (dusty tread). (...) In the first chorus, which the poet recognizes as the funeral comes closer, we learn that it is a leader, a Mother of the congregation who has died. (...) That Keane's use of the word "madness" is not a pejorative is indicated by the preceding line, "and eyes were strong." Madness here is connected with inner energy and an intensity of vision inseparable from an intensity of passion. (...) ³⁴¹

In addition to funeral rites and chants, dance is also important:

As with "Shaker Funeral", Shake Keane was one of the first poets to recognise this, and to realise the concept of dance as secular ceremony leading to catharsis (...) Keane seeks to enact in his "Calypso Dancers", whose rhythms do not simply imitate those of the Calypso, but become a process whereby, as with the examples of religious enactment outlined above, the dancers as celebrant make their descent into subliminal space."³⁴²

Rohlehr deeply delved into the unconscious space of poetry, to re-emerge with the primordial rhythms ("violent drums", "inner energy (...) intensity (...) passion") that Keane's poems conveyed. Both the poems seem to be linked to an African tradition of folk tales, chants, and dances and bring along a spiritual sense of cathartic release and of a connection with the Other World, but at the same time they are aesthetically innovative for the way the poet tries to reproduce sounds, movements, and feelings.

III.i.ii. Irony, satire, and nonsense

In the whimsical collection *One a Week With Water: Notes & Rhymes* Keane handled time as he pleased, and timing assumed a magic relevance as when at the beginning of the book the poet reproduced what his grand-mother used to say "...when at last we are all free / each of us will have / her ('is) own language, flag, name / and Calendar" (*OWWW*, 11). This epigraph seems to be a hymn to freedom from time, not just from language, political domination, or name, even though in this collection the power of naming is important (as it is in Derek Walcott's poetry). As the title goes, rhymes and notes were written apparently once a week, and the rhythm of the poems follows a numeration that goes progressively for the first number preceding the dash (which indicates the number of days), and regressively for the number following the dash (counting down from 365 days

³⁴¹ Rohlehr, Gordon. "'Soul Thunder': Shake Keane's 'Shaker Funeral'." (15-20) "The Problem of the Problem of Form. The Idea of an Aesthetic Continuum and Aesthetic Code-switching in West Indian Literature." (1985) *The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays*. *cit.* 15-17.

³⁴² Rohlehr, Gordon. "'The Calypso'." (27-30) "The Problem of the Problem of Form. The Idea of an Aesthetic Continuum and Aesthetic Code-switching in West Indian Literature." (1985) *Cit.* 28.

of a year to zero). So we have from 1-365 for WEEK ONE to 366-0 (if the year is a leap year) for WEEK FIFTY-THREE (the last one). These indications are to be followed by:

- a purposefully misplaced WEEK FORTY-SEVEN 320-46 – about which he left a clue at WEEK FIFTY “Any night this week, upon the rising of the moon, try to find WEEK FORTY-SEVEN 320-46” (67);
- a DISCREPANCY DAY (added every 3114 years) – which is related to the Mayan calendar and to the beginning of it (which is, in its turn, comparable to 1st January AD): 13th August 3114 B.C.;
- an ending WEEK ONE, taking up the opening Week One, which sarcastically goes: “In the Caribbean Sea / I wee / Cordially”, and ends with a formal – and out of place given the colloquial tone of the collection – “Cordially” (74).

The footnotes at the bottom of the pages, with which the whole collection is equipped, are linked in the first and the last weeks, since the first goes “January 22nd. St. Vincent Discovery Day? A holiday! baps” (13), while the last describes the actual discovery of the island as a Carib spots the Spanish ships: “A yellow woman comes up nightly out of the depth-light of the Caribbean Sea. Her eyes are huge. She sees we.” (74) The flippant tone that Keane showed in this couple of lines, followed by a formal greeting, could stand for his use of poetry, and thus rhyme, as an instrument to survive colonial domination, as if he minimized the historical relevance of this strategic part of the world – contended and conquered so many times by the Europeans –, to an extent that he found it suitable to discharge his bodily waste.

Going back to how Keane handled the time, Week FORTY-FOUR precedes weeks FORTY-THREE and FORTY-TWO, WEEK FORTY-SEVEN follows WEEK FIFTY-THREE, but the 365 days in a year, divided by 7 (the number of the days in a week) makes 52 (weeks) and not 53 as Keane recorded. He also indicated the US Independence Day on 5th July 1976, (*OWWW*, 45) and not on July 4th. Keane played with time and with references, so that the reader gets lost in trying to disentangle truth from invention, as when he remarked at the end of the book that “In 1927 (the year my birth is registered) Turkey adopted the Gregorian calendar.” (69): here he underlined that he was mentioning historical facts, mixing his own life with poetical facts, and reminding that Turkey adopted the standard calendar only half of a century before. Sometimes in *OWWW*, the poet mentioned himself, as in Week Twenty-Nine “Mr. Kea!...heane!?”), later as “Shake” or “Shakes boy” (46), in Week Thirty, where he is addressed as “Shakecey” or “Shaykeen” (47), or in Week Thirty-Seven, where he signs the letter as ‘Shaky’ (53).

A few times Keane drew on Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) or *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (1871), as he did in *OWWW*: ““A packk of cards. Just

a pack of cards.” Alice addressing the Wonderland Conference of Delegates, 111 years ago. / (Conveners: lewis carroll, the chief returning officer, the tourist board and soforth)” (35). The urge to locate Alice’s dialogue 111 years before he was writing, that means in 1865 when Carroll’s novel was published, is to be considered from the point of view that Carroll himself was a writer, an Anglican deacon, a photographer, but also a mathematician and a logician, and that this reference adds a nonsensical and magical dimension to the poems, as on the wave of Carroll’s nonsense poems like the “Jabberwocky” or “The Hunting of the Snark”. In this poem by Keane at Week Twenty, there is another reference to Alice being woken up by her own voice in her dream and by her sister’s “I was cordially awakened / by a child / who also sleeps” (35). This flows into a Christian reference to the Gospel of Matthew: “where two or three / are gathered together” (35), which actually recalls the Gospel “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.” (Matt. 18:20), and which then irreverently turns back, in Keane’s poem, to a possible reference to *Through the Looking-Glass*, where the twin characters of Tweedledum and Tweedledee appear, as Keane wrote in Creole “it is best for we / to dis-engather / brother” (35). In the poem “(Lesson Thirteen: SONG OF THE UNDERDEVELOPED CASINO)” in *The Angel Horn* he also made a reference to two nursery rhymes: there are a few nursery rhymes and rigmaroles in the collection, and they both help to involve children in the poems, and to convey a musicality to language. The first nursery rhyme was taken again from *Through the Looking Glass*, “TEN GREEN BOTTLES / STANDING ON A WALL. / (Repeat) / And I do suppose / Humpty-Dumpty would fall out with me” (*AH*, 105):³⁴³ Humpty-Dumpty was the egg sitting on a wall that Alice met in her adventures and he made a linguistic excursion with Alice, philosophically sustaining that words have an important weight in communication, especially since we are the ones who give them meaning. In his philosophical and linguistic excursion Humpty-Dumpty also asked Alice to make a calculation for him involving the number of days in a year: Keane could have taken inspiration for his 365-day poems also from this brief episode narrated by Carroll. As Nanton commented, wordplays are important in Keane’s – as well as in Carter’s – poetry because they draw on a Carnival Trinidadian and Tobagonian tradition of speech, on the ‘mamaguyism’:

riddles, which have surfaced in quite different ways in Carter and Shake
Keane (*One a Week with Water*); forms of rhetorical performance such as

³⁴³ Cf. The Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco) mocked rigmaroles and nursery rhymes of English tradition in “Dan is the Man (In the Van)”, in which “Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall / Humpty-Dumpty then fall” or “[h]ickory a dickory dock / the mouse ran up the clock”. (Both quotations from *Leo’s Lyrics*. Powered by JForum 2.1.7 © JForum Team. Posted by talitha_cumi 7 June 2007. 26 Feb. 2008 <<http://www.leoslyrics.com/posts/list/17192.page>>.) Mutabaruka employed English nursery rhymes in “Nursery Rhyme Lament”, echoing the Trinidadian calypsonian: “first time / jack & jill / used to run up de hill everyday / now dem get pipe...an / water rate increase / everyday dem woulda / reincarnate humpty dumpty / fe fall off de wall”. (Mordecai, Pamela, and Gordon, Grace Walker, eds. *Sunsong* 3. Kingston: Longman, 1992. 14.)

Tobago Speech Mas, Robber Talk, Carnival word games of all kinds, children's ring games, jokes and speech-making.³⁴⁴

The nonsensical economics in Week Fourteen shows how he divided the gallons of rum per days and per number of domino dots, making up useless calculations:

if you take the amount of
strong rum (calculated in proof-gallons)
consumed in any given month (...)
then divide this amount by the energy required
to deface any number of domino dots (...)
and if
this entire calculation is undertaken
between nine and eleven-thirty in the
fore-noon of any Sunday, and ex-
pressed in terms of foot-pounds recurring. (27)

In "Book Three: Thirteen Studies in Home Economics", the poem "(Lesson Five: PER CAPITA PER ANNUM)" reverberates a later poem by Kendel Hippolyte in which the words 'per capita per annum' are repeated. In "(Lesson Seven: CREDENTIAL)" there are references to the calypsonians as in "Roundtrip", or in "Kaiso Kaiso", in which Keane mentioned the 'lenten season' – 'Lent', being the Carnival period –, together with the Trinidadian musical tradition of 'sans humanité', 'Sandimanite', and the Trinidadian calypsonians Kitchener and Sparrow (*AH*, 135-142). As Keane remembered in "(Lesson Seven: CREDENTIAL)", people in his life did not show respect for his ability as a musician, starting from his neighbours, and moving to his girlfriend and to his people "SIX year ole / an' me farder gimme a trumpit / an' 'e show me / how to blow it / how to polish it / how to respec' it" (*AH*, 89), because they think that "all dis trumpit is a famous load o' piss" (*AH*, 91). The poet showed his anger at people's lack of understanding and in a cryptographic manner, he swore, combining illogical mathematics with nonsense: "an' Ah say..// ¾! Sxhf=+f@@@..." (*AH*, 91), where the four letters in a row could stand for a synthesis of 'saxophone' and 'fluge horn', his well-beloved musical instruments, preceding a curse.

As Nanton pointed out, colloquialisms and references to popular speech appear throughout the collection, so that swear words, proverbs, snippets of gossip are blended to give the colours of folk irony and thus render the aesthetics of the vernacular; he remarked that:

folk humour is characterized by informal speech associated with the market place. (...) in rural St. Vincent, 'nonsense talk' is usually associated with speech performance in public places or at crossroads where 'rudeness',

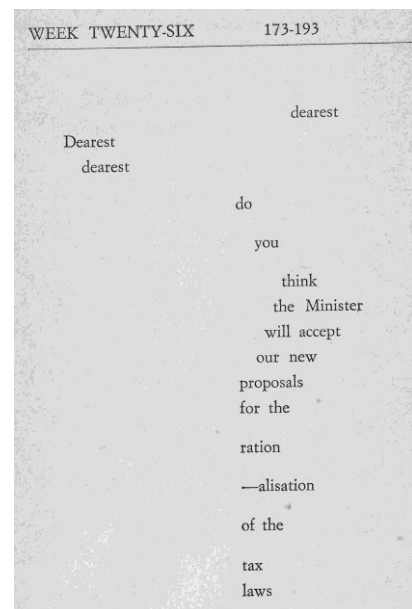
³⁴⁴ Rohlehr, Gordon. "'Soul Thunder': Shake Keane's 'Shaker Funeral'." (15-20) "The Problem of the Problem of Form. The Idea of an Aesthetic Continuum and Aesthetic Code-switching in West Indian Literature." *Cit.* 26.

which involves talking ‘broad’ or talking ‘bad’, also occurs. This activity may take place at set formal occasions, the most obvious being Carnival, or equally at informal occasions, for example, through *commess* or gossip.³⁴⁵

Verbal skills are most evident in public speech, or during Carnival. Thanks to his ability with words, Keane earned the nickname of ‘Man o’ words’, an apposition which West Indians use when addressing people who are good with words. His oral skills acquainted him with the folk culture of words, as Adrian Fraser commented in the introduction to *The Angel Horn*, noticing Keane’s “mastery of the folk culture, play on words, use of nation language and of musical symbols and themes, and the integration of rhymes and riddles into his work.”³⁴⁶

III.ii. A daring look on language

The devices employed by the poet to render orality are often expressed through the graphical layout of the poems, how they are displayed on the page, and how the poet used different fonts and sizes, to highlight words or reproduce speech. Sometimes the adopted format of formal letters, as “Cordially” (in the first and last poems), indicates that he played with forms and language. The result is a plethora of poetic calligrams. In Week Twenty-Six the poem takes the shape of a question mark, posing a political question: “do you think the Minister will accept our new proposal...” (*OWWW*, 42 – see image on the right):



Week Fifty-Two represents a military plane and a conclusive line

Keane, Shake. “Week Twenty-Six 173-193.” *OWWW*, 42.

wonders “Are they coming to save us today” (70). In “First Live with Guitar” he reproduced musical tones and used the page as Lasana M. Sekou does: giving priority to the performance and to the delivery of the poetic text and at the same time drawing a pair of wings on the page as he mentioned in the text:

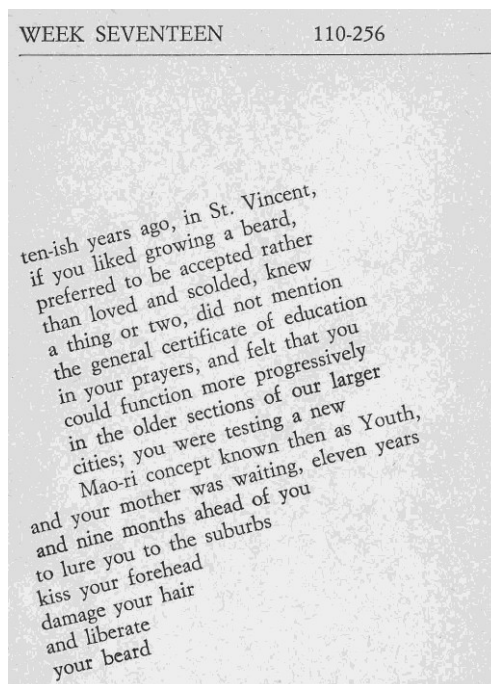
³⁴⁵ Nanton, Philip. “‘Shake’ Keane’s “Nonsense”: An Alternative Approach to Caribbean Folk Culture.” Part of a larger work published in *Small Axe* 14.7.2 (Sept. 2003): 71-92. <<http://www.cavehill.uwi.edu/bnccde/svg/conference/papers/nanton.html>>. Cf. the chapter dedicated to Kendel Hippolyte where the importance of noisy speech, as gossip, is defined as ‘commesse’ or ‘konmès’. Cf. the definition that Richard Allsopp gave to the word ‘commesse’ - “com(m)ess” (165) or “konmès” (333-4) in the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. *Cit.*, as “Noisy disorder; a disturbance” or “Scandal; gossip”.

³⁴⁶ Fraser, Adrian. “Preface.” Keane, Shake. *The Angel Horn*. *cit.*

ALL day
she would speak
of shrouds
and wings

(...) (*AH*, 53).

Week Seventeen presents an oblique layout where the poem lies diagonally on the page (see image below):



Keane, Shake. "Week Seventeen 110-256." *OWWW*, 30.

but – as he remembered in Week Six that the 6th February is “New Zealand Day” (18) – now he retrieves a “Mao-ri concept known then as Youth, / and your mother was waiting, eleven years / and nine months ahead of you” (30). In Week Four in *OWWW*, the poem assumes a graphical importance since the two words spelled in the Trinidadian Creole and English versions, “Kaiso/Mauby” and “Calypso/Maw-beer”, merge into an Afro-Caribbean tradition of “ ‘Nanse ‘tory”, that is the ‘Anancy story’ (by metanalysis), the African-derived traditional story, which – in its turn – merges into the “*Nonsense-story*”: here the distortion of words gives birth to an incorrect derivation: ‘Anancy’ becomes ‘nonsense’, the cultural tradition and history, then, become

nonsensical. Pertinently, in Week Eight Keane wrote: “EXCUSE MY SILENCE / i just wanted to say...nothing” (20), raising the poetic utterance to an empty statement, and making the written poem an empty affirmation. Instead, in “Book Five: The Wisdom-Keeper’s” folk legends and traditions are mentioned, as the subtitles says: “Three poems located in the voice of the Tea-meetin, the Kaiso, the Folk (Jumbie) Metaphysic, and other traditional language forms. St. Vincent, 1972-1974”, like in “Nancitori” (Ananse story), dedicated to Daniel Williams, or “Kaiso Kaiso”.

As much as Sekou does, in “Apartite” Keane used the page following a performative rhythm, pushing the line forward together with the voice, using the lines progressively and forwardly to create a sense of incitement, and using pauses to highlight the pauses of the voice:

buwen we call yo o didn hear
an if yo hear yo didn look
an if yo look yo didn see
an if yo see...(AH, 22)

At other times Keane employed Latin to mock tradition and to make fun of it, as in the motto of the University of the West Indies: “*Oriens ex occidente...lux*” (45), incorrectly translated as “Orientation exercise. Occidentally slipped on the lux”, and not as “A rising light from the West”, or in one proverb “*Per Aspera ad Aspirin* / Common Latin school-motto. Use any week” (39), in which the poet distorted the Latin proverb “*Per aspera ad astra*” (meaning “by going through rough times, you can reach the stars”) into a patient’s information leaflet or drug facts. In *OWWW* there is even a footnote in Italian: “nota bene” (*OWWW*, 58) or a phrase “da capo”, meaning “again from the beginning” (*OWWW*, 40).

The patient he referred to in this collection is most likely a psychological or psychiatric patient named Priscilla, who underwent name changes and, as Philip Nanton observed, “the form he devises refers to a female ‘psychological patient,’ much of whose career involves avoiding names. She travels to different parts of the Caribbean and Canada.”,³⁴⁷ as a reference to a misspelled “Montrehall” (45) or a reference to “eventually finding herself at McGill University, Canada, majoring in Micro-Psychology” (65) show. Nonsense and references to sanity intricate the poetic mosaic, as with:

³⁴⁷ Nanton, Philip. “‘Shake’ Keane’s ‘Nonsense’: An Alternative Approach to Caribbean Folk Culture.” *Cit.*

- ♦ “A Sane Man said” (14), “The Sane Man. / (Acting)” in Week Fifty-Three (71);
- ♦ mixing religious themes with sex “O GIVE ME A HOME / THE SANE MAN SAID” (24), “O AMEN / MY MOTHER HELP ME / TO AROUSE (...) / thus and thus dreamed the sane man / whose mother is Amen” (25);
- ♦ “BRUNG-SKIN GYURL / I GORN (...) / GONNA MAYBE SEN FOR YOUR SISTER / WHEN DE BABY BORN” (17);
- ♦ “So you best hads / DON’T EVEN CALL SHE NAME...” (34), which seems something in between a warning not to mention God’s or the saints’ names in vain, and the name of this patient ‘without name’;
- ♦ again in Week Twenty-Eight the lines go “Brung-skin gyurl / I gorn again (...) / in Montrehall / say tings bad but I *might* fit / Now I have me Certifi-kit (...) / (care de chile)” (45);
- ♦ and lastly “GYURL! / Brung-skin gyurl / BRUNG-SKIN GYURL!!! (...) / (thought *you* was in the U.S.A.) (...) / where de chile? / the CHILE TOO?!” (49);
- ♦ again in Week Thirty-Eight: “Brung-skin gyurl / BABY O GORD” (54).

The formality of a letter to a doctor shifts from the woman-patient to the poetic persona called ‘Brother Parrot’ (the same one who also signs the letters in Week Twenty-Two, Twenty-Five, and Twenty-Seven), who claims:

We
 have not attended a wake since your
 dear daughter died. (...)
 Two days within Lent I drank
 a bottle of Canadian Blended
 and got happy so that I fell upon
 our only reggae record and broke it.
 Today she left me and has gone
 to live in blasted Greggs.
 Am I suffering from identity-fatigue? (37).

In Week Forty-Six the poet seems to provide an Identity Card for this woman, whose name is uncertain “Name: / Name:? (...) / name: priscilla isola / HISTORY: Patient leaves Catholic Primary / School after 2 weeks, dreading / nicknames that could be built up / from the initials. / e.g.: PIN; PNIS; or the / grotesque PNIN.” (63) Her name is less important than others – hence the lower case letters – and instead capital letters are used for mocking nicknames, with an ironic reference to male genitals as another sign for the loss of her femininity. But the patient happens to be pregnant, and that is why there are so many references to a babyborn: speaking about which the patient, now

called ‘PIMSY’, is absurdly pregnant for three years, between 1973 and 1976, and her conditions are “cautious” (67), as much as she “describes her University life as “cautious”” (65). On Week Forty-Seven “*Patient priscilla’s latest (sane) declaration*” is “If the child is Female, I will call her “X”, / until she grows up and/or wishes to make / a name for herself. (...) / If the child is Male / I will call him / Priscilla Isola...” (72): could have Brathwaite taken inspiration for his later concept of the “X/Self”? This insane declaration, passed off as ‘sane’, underlines the irony behind the poet’s words and the inversion of roles between male and female is underlined by the fact that Week 47 is actually misplaced, so that it creates a discrepancy in timing, especially being set before a “DISCREPANCY DAY (added every 3114 years)”.

Keane often literally made up words: he created neologisms which were aimed at reproducing Vincentian Creole, but also at showing his poetic creativity. Nanton observed that:

standard English and Creole words are arranged in a pattern alongside each other though they are a part of a text without a sentence. (...) ‘Truction’, ‘bodderation’, ‘long-guts’, ‘edge up’, ‘gustify’ and ‘jokify’ are word creations. They are improvised words that he offers without comment, this time in his notes to the main text, as though challenging the reader to ‘read’ the experience through Vincentian eyes. Such neologisms or creolisations typify Vincentian speech patterns and, like the two streams of words, suggest a creative and irreverent relationship with language.³⁴⁸

Here are some creative examples of neologisms from *OWWW*, but sometimes words are just invented and it is very hard to try to find a meaning for them, because they are part of a nonsensical terminology:

- in Week Three: “Truction – bodderation - Moko-jumbie / radical” (15): was the poet hinting at “distruction”? “bother?” The third word seems to refer to the Caribbean term for ‘ghost’, ‘jumbie’, deriving from the Congo word ‘zombie’, whereas the “Moko-jumbie” is a stilt dancer, considered a kind of ‘God’ given the height of the stilts,³⁴⁹
- “Long-guts - long-eye - poor-brag / edge up - frien(d)ing” (17): does ‘long-guts’ refer to intestines? ‘edge-up’ might be a hint at the soca steps ‘jump up’;
- “Own way - radical / gutsify jokify - hug-up” (19): here Keane may have be referring to the action of embracing the jazz horn and pulling it up when playing;

³⁴⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁴⁹ Cf. the entry “moko-jumbie” in Allsopp, Richard. *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. Cit. 385.

“Much-up - Much-up - own-way / gutsify - nyam-and-go-away” (25): maybe Keane was playing with the expression “take-away food” and with Brathwaite’s concept of ‘nyam’ as a nutritive means when he speaks profusely of the concept of *nam*,³⁵⁰

- “KOONOO-MOONOO - FOOLY-FIF(TH) - FRESH / FRAY-FRAY - BODY-LINES - SWEET-EYE / HUG-UP - OWN-WAY” (27): the term ‘koonoo-moonoo’ is a Caribbean (with Trinidadian and Barbadian variations) term for “foolish person”; “sweet-eye” is a Caribbean expression to indicate a lustful glance;³⁵¹ whereas “fray” could refer to ‘scuffle’ (a scuffle of stupid people) or to the small fish (thus “fresh fish”);³⁵²
- “Fronting - never-see-come-see - tu(r)n-tongue / much-up-much-up / fray-fray moon-sammy / radical” (30): “never-see-come-see” is a reference to “a person whose amusingly unsophisticated behaviour discloses that he/she is seeing the better things of life for the first time”³⁵³; “much up” is a term of affection,³⁵⁴ thus the “tu(r)n-tongue” could refer to a tongue-twister or to a kiss, to the agitation of a riot (‘fray-fray’ seems to indicate a ‘scuffle’) or of love;
- “Much-up - maddup mash-up / bapsss - hug-up” (36): the “mash-up” is an expression referring to a damaged good or an ill person.³⁵⁵
- “Voicetrous - body-lines / We-One - baddaps” (73): “voicetrous” may be a blending of “voice” and “vociferous”; “baddaps” might be the exclamation “Badaow!” or “Badap(s)!” which, according to Allsopp, represent a fall.³⁵⁶

As to Parrot, mentioned before, this character was also one of the interlocutors in the dialogue between an ‘ox’ and a ‘donkey’, conversing in Creole as in one of the Latin writer Phaedrus’ (the “*fabulae Phaedri*”), or the Greek fairy-tale teller Aesop’s tales, to discuss the best excuse to make up in order not to work. But in the poem the donkey could also be irreverently compared to a ‘bottom’, and hide a comic double-meaning, as these lines show: “I livin for years just behind da bush dey. (...) I is now my own independent ass-self. Nuttin but meditate and eat grass all de time. Only ting, I does have to careful hold back meself when I feel to bray!” (*OWWW*, 22). The humorous effect is obtained again through references to animals, as in Week Fifteen:

³⁵⁰ Cf. Brathwaite’s poetic concept of *nam* in chapter II in this thesis.

³⁵¹ Cf. the entry “sweet-eye” in Allsopp, Richard. *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. Cit. 541-542.

³⁵² Cf. the entry “fray” in *Ibid.* 242.

³⁵³ Cf. the entry “never-see-come-(fo[r]) see” in *Ibid.* 404.

³⁵⁴ Cf. the entry “much up” in *Ibid.* 393.

³⁵⁵ Cf. the entry “mash(ed)-up” in *Ibid.* 374.

³⁵⁶ Cf. the entry “Ba-dap(s)!” in *Ibid.* 64.

since 1974 there has been a chicken-
 and-egg factory across the valley from
 our house. at first light, when the
 wind is blowing in the right or the wrong
 direction, we can hear the eerie neurotic
 staccato of the chickens. we cannot hear
 the eggs falling, so we have no way of
 calculating how many this asylum
 produces every hour. however, on such
 mornings, also at first light, a single
 fly enters the house, joins me in bed,
 and follows me to the bathroom.
 I know the chickens of 1976 must
 be an entirely new generation of inmates;
 but could it be the same fly? (*OWWW*, 28).

The comic effect is created by means of opposites (“the right or the wrong”), of obvious statements (“we cannot hear the eggs falling”), of useless calculations or previsions (“I know the chickens of 1976 must / be an entirely new generation of inmates”), and by drawing attention to a small, insignificant animal, a fly, which seems to follow the poetic persona around. The terminology is again linked to the psychological patient (“eerie neurotic”, “asylum”) so that the poet underlines the nonsense. Here Keane enriches the poem with musical terms, and he achieves a sense of sweet irony, giving a very light cameo of life in a rural village.

The poem “Unu Coonoomoonoo” is interesting from a linguistic point of view. In fact this is a Caribbean expression meaning “all of you fool”.³⁵⁷ In the same poem Keane used Creole expressions - as “I KNOW yo in dey / Mek yo don t come” (*AH*, 19) or “buwait nuh” (‘bwa-bwa’ means ‘stupid’), “forra damner”, “cha bwoy” probably meaning ‘chabin’³⁵⁸ – but also an expression

³⁵⁷ Cf. Interview with Dr. Jeannette Allsopp (Appendix A in this thesis), in which she explains the meaning of the word ‘unu’: “It means “you all”, “all of you”, but it comes directly from a West African source, which the *DCEU* will tell you about, and you have a variant form of it here in Barbados, because they say “wunna”, or “wunnuh”, or “unna”, whereas the Jamaicans say “unu”.”

³⁵⁸ The dictionary of Martinican Creole by Raphaël Confiant says that ‘chabin’ is either a friendly term to designate a person without phenotypic connotations, or a *métis* with generally light skin, hair and eyes. The use of “chabins” or “chabines” is used to describe mixed-raced people. Cf. entry ‘chaben’ in Confiant, Raphaël. Dictionnaire du Créole Martiniquais. Bwetamo Kreyol Matnik. Dictionary of Martinican Creole. Diccionario del Creol Martiniqueño. Potomitan. Site de promotion des cultures et des langues creoles. Annou voyé kreyòl douvan douvan. Presses Universitaires Creoles (Gerec-F). 1979-2007. Lettre CH. 7 May 2007, 2. 26 Oct. 2009 <<http://www.potomitan.info/dictionnaire/>>. Moreover, the meaning of ‘chabin’ also seems to derive from a variety of red-haired sheep from Normandy, France. Cf. entry ‘chaben’ in Allsopp, Richard. Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage. *Cit.* 145. In the Niger-Congo language Ewe ‘cha’ means ‘red’ and ‘bin’ means ‘man’.

In Derek Walcott’s “The Schooner *Flight*”, we find a bitter ironic reference to a Vincentian: in part 8, “Fight with the Crew”, the poet-sailor Shabine, the ‘chabin’, the red nigger, narrates: “It had one bitch on board, like he had me mark - / that was the cook, some Vincentian arse / with a skin like a gommier tree, red peeling bark, / and wash-out blue eyes; he wouldn’t give me a ease, / like he feel he was white.” (Walcott, Derek. “The Schooner *Flight*”. Collected Poems 1948-1984. *Cit.* 354). This Vincentian sailor steals Shabine’s log and starts reading it out loud to make fun of him in front of the crew; Shabine wounds him with a knife, but after that quarrel he says: “Vincie and me best friend, / but none of them go fuck with my poetry again.” (*Ibid.* 355).

in Spanish marks the Vincentian linguistic heritage: “conio su madre” (*AH*, 19) is a distortion of a Spanish swear word. It is interesting to observe, in “Ruth”, how Keane noted the character’s inability to pronounce the word ‘business’, which was the one from which the word and concept of ‘pidgin’ sprang out, “Yet she cannot pronounce the word “business” -- / She says “bidness,” as if the world, / Bound and bidden, / Had suddenly become a nursery of her enterprise and her fate.” (*AH*, 167).

In *OWWW* the animals Keane invoked are less sea-bound than in Wayne Brown’s poems or in Eric Roach’s. Keane’s poems abound in land or air animals: ox and donkey, fly and parrot, chicken. In an epigraph Keane reported the Jamaican - or, Eastern Caribbean – proverb involving chicken: “me t’row m’corn – me na call no fowl”, whose meaning is that the poet is throwing on the sheets of his poetry some words which will be picked up by no particular reader, but by whoever will read his poems. As Prof. Pollard observed, those words – appearing in one of Bob Marley’s lyrics, “Who the Cap Fit”, as “Who the cap fit, let them wear it! / Said I throw me corn, me no call no fowl” – are a kind of unpleasant and straightforward comment, a direct social critique.³⁵⁹

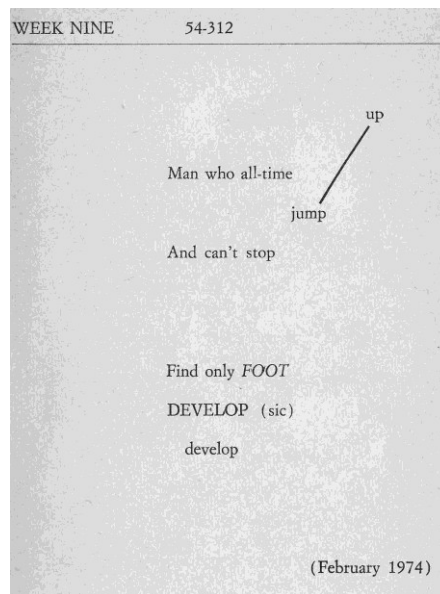
III.ii.i. Keane’s employment of Vincentian Creole

As it happens for the above-mentioned Caribbean proverb, the collection *OWWW* is mostly in Vincentian Creole, and in the same phrase one can find that Creole words are often merged with SE. In Week Five, for instance, the poem sings “Brung-skin gyurl / I gorn / kyant stop / gotta hop” (17), where the poetic persona says to the “brown-skinned girl” that “he is gone, cannot stop, and has to jump”, as much as in Week Eighteen he admitted that, given the poet’s personal diaspora, he was back in the Caribbean from 1972, four years before compiling this collection. In this part of the book Keane made some references to his exile in London³⁶⁰ “ME go back dey? / NO WAY (...) / AND I bring a suitcase just for yoo / Ooo / full with records and tootpaste” (31); then he asked about the girl’s sister saying “where yo sister dey / gyurl / She GORN?! / U.S.A.! I knoo she would / O GORD I knoo she would” (32). Similarly, in Week Nine, he referred to the Carnival period (“Vincentian Mas’ ”, *OWWW*, 62) and to the soca steps, “Man who all-time / jump up / And can’t stop” (21), but

³⁵⁹ I would like to thank Prof. Velma Pollard for her clear explanation of this proverb “I know it as Jamaican. An alternative is “ Who the cap fit wear it” I think that version is quoted in one of Bob Marley’s songs. If you make a comment the person who responds is likely to be the person to whom it applies. Literally you throw corn on the ground; you called no particular fowl. It belongs to whoever picks it up. The corn (or the cap in the version above) is usually some unpleasant comment. Someone responds and so exposes him/herself as the person to whom it applies.” Personal communication with Prof. Pollard. E-mail. 29 Aug. 2008.

³⁶⁰ “The theme of exile transpired a conscious state of being into a purposeful release of creative endeavour.” Blazer William, Cecil A. “Introduction.” Joyette, Anthony. *Vincentian Poets, 1950 to 1980*. *Cit.* xvii.

the peculiarity is that the words ‘jump’ and ‘up’ are linked by a diagonal graphical sign that pushes the ‘up’ above all the other lines (see image below).



Keane, Shake. “Week Nine 54-312.” *OWWW*, 21.

At other times the poet himself admitted that there is some uncertainty about the spelling of Vincentian Creole, for the language is subject to changes in spelling, as in the name of the village BUM-BUM: “We have not yet devised a means / of spelling its name in a way / that satisfactorily indicates the way / it is pronounced.” (18). In the poem “Private Prayer” Keane wondered “Why I don’t dream / In the same language I live in” (*AH*, 15): here language acquires importance since it separates what is innate from what is acquired; the poem is dedicated to Walter Rodney (as Martin Carter did for one of his poems)³⁶¹ in memory of the anticolonial political propaganda of this Guyanese politician. Creole is used in Week Thirty-Four, where “things were *so* different in them days” (50), and the poem sounds colloquial, because it aims at reproducing a dialogue with such colloquialisms and phrases as “right?”, or “like he crazy or something”, or “He, he...He must be think I blasted-well (excuse me) make outa sky-lark!...!...!. He...” (50). That is why it is not surprising that Keane often invented new spellings or words, because of the lack of a fixed orthography for Creole which, as a mostly oral language, is subject to continuous changes on the page. Variations of Creole words, common in St. Vincent, as well as in Jamaica (or in other islands), are to be found in words like “Aaks” (“Kaiso Kaiso”, *AH*, 136), where the metathesis is a relic of the African influence on the verb ‘to ask’; ‘fambly’ (*AH*, 150), for ‘family’, in which the epenthesis (the insertion of the sound ‘b’, an “excrecence” being a consonant, and not an

³⁶¹ Cf. chapter IV on Martin Carter in this thesis.

“anaptyxis”) is needed to facilitate the pronunciation; and ‘mooma’ or ‘granpoopa’, which indicate that the orthography follows the pronunciation of words.

III.ii.ii. The influence of jazz on Keane’s language

As Brathwaite wrote in his 1967 essay “Jazz and the West Indian Novel”,

It is of course difficult (and I make no attempt to disguise this) to make wholly convincing correspondences from music into literature; and easier to demonstrate relationships between jazz improvisation and the folk / oral tradition than it is to do the same with jazz and the more conscious products of the “written” tradition.³⁶²

It is difficult indeed to find evidences of jazz tonalities or overtones in literature, but, as Brathwaite sustained, attempts can be successfully made to prove the relation between jazz improvisations and their folk translation, which – both being part of the oral tradition – are to be found.³⁶³

Moreover, as Nanton among others recognised, there was a jazz period in Keane’s literary career (“The Jazz Years and Return to St. Vincent”); these years just preceded the publication of *OWWW*, in which Keane analysed the function of some musical instruments in his poems, as the guitar or the saxophone. “Bless cuatro-craft and kindred / For they make a body accurate with a head” (14) in Week Two refers to a South American type of guitar which can remind of a body and a head, but, being set at the beginning of this collection, the poem underlines Keane’s passion for music as much as for love, referring to ‘kindred spirits’, whereas the musical instrument can become a ‘soulmate’ for the artist or the musician, as much as the saxophone or fluge horn does in “Lesson Seven: CREDENTIAL”, and the angelhorn does in “Angel Horn”. The cuatro reappears in “Jumbie” (*AH*, 143-162): “Me and my cuatro can sing good” (144), “This cuatro here now / it have a lot of instruction / from uttermost anciency to the furtherest present time” (146), “Me cuatro speak with much instruction / PRANG A PRANG A PRANG A PRANG” (152).

In Week Thirty-Nine he referred to a saxophone he would like to have: “A SAX AND A SICKLE” (*OWWW*, 57), the Russian saxophone branded “Hammer & Sickle”; that is why the poet asked “Russia, America / Or green green cheese?” (*OWWW*, 57): “The saying ‘Can’t see green cheese’ refers to a Scots saying where one wishes to have something of no value that another

³⁶² Brathwaite, Kamau. “Jazz and the West Indian Novel.” (1967/1968). *Roots. Cit.* 79.

³⁶³ *Ibid.* 107.

possesses. It is intended as a humorous jibe”.³⁶⁴ The whole strophe sounds like a song, a rhyming rigmarole, “ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE MOON / THERE’S A DISH MAKING LOVE TO A SPOON / A SAX AND A SICKLE / PLAYING ROMP AND TICKLE / AND A DITHERING TUNE ABOUT JUNE” (*OWWW*, 57). In Week Seven the poet focused on music, and on jazz in particular,

JAZZ, the Sane Man said,
is a bit like surgery. You need it.
You buy it privately, or you socialise it
if you dare.
Also, it purifies by probing – even in public.
Cuts out the stuff and nonsense. But
it tends to heal sweeter if the instruments
are not too sterilised. (19)

Here Keane was comparing jazz music to surgery, saying that jazz is absolutely necessary for the poet, and that it is better when it is not too clean, a bit rough, as jazz flourishes, as when alcohol is not used to sterilise “surgical instruments” but to be drunk: it allows to better feel the rhythms of music. In these lines there is also a pun on the word ‘probe’, which is a medical instrument for inspecting internal organs. It might also mean that the poet was willing to inspect his own emotions through music “even in public”, even when he dares to play in front of an audience. As much as blues, jazz is a musical genre deeply linked to the musician’s feelings and to familiar things, so that a folkloric music is transferred into Keane’s poems.

As much as it happens with Hippolyte’s poetry, in his collections of poetry Keane presented many musical influences, of jazz and blues, dub and reggae, soca and calypso. As regards jazz and blues, many poets tried to reproduce their melodies into verse. As Brathwaite sustained in “Jazz and the West Indian Novel” (1967/1968) the rhythms of blues, jazz and the lilting calypso are part of a *nation language*.³⁶⁵ Keane’s employment of Creole has blues tones, as well as jazz overtones. As Polillo wrote in his compendium on jazz:

In the blues strophe the painful and seamy universe of the American Negro was translated into poetry. (...) It is a poetry based on everyday things, on familiar characters, which are seen under a realistic light, with a disenchanted eye. In blues music there is not – and there is no intention to create – any lyrical transfiguration.”³⁶⁶

³⁶⁴ Cf. “Green cheese.” [Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_cheese). A Wikimedia project. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 14 Apr. 2009 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_cheese>.

³⁶⁵ Cf. Brathwaite, Kamau. “Jazz and the West Indian Novel.” *cit.*

³⁶⁶ My translation from Italian: “Nelle strofe del blues l’universo dolente e squallido del negro americano si tradusse in poesia. (...) E’ una poesia fondata sulle cose di tutti i giorni, su personaggi familiari, visti in una luce realistica, con occhio disincantato. Non c’è, né ci vuol essere, nel blues, trasfigurazione lirica”. Polillo, Arrigo. *Jazz. La vicenda e i Protagonisti della Musica Afro-Americana*. Ed. Franco Fayenz. Milano: Mondadori, 1975; 1997. 43.

The blues and jazz poetics were born out of everyday life's concerns, and were based on the life of the folk. Kamau Brathwaite is a necessary point of departure for Caribbean poets writing 'jazz poems' in Creole.³⁶⁷ In his essay "Brathwaite and Jazz", James Louis described jazz as "at once 'folk' and modern (...) of content so much as style (...) dependent on performance" and "continually creative".³⁶⁸ The same could be argued for Keane, another jazz musician whose poetry

³⁶⁷ In his poems he blends worksongs and folk rhythms in a counterpoint, as in *Born to Slow Horses* (2006) where he has once again written jazz poetry, this time in Bajan. Cf. "With *Born to Slow Horses* Brathwaite gave voice again to the oral tradition of Afro-Caribbean poetry, encompassing collective and international stories, raising the Bajan Creole to jazz poetry." Florian, Sara. "Review to *Born to Slow Horses*." *CQ. Caribbean Quarterly* 55.1 (March 2009): 105. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies.

³⁶⁸ James, Louis. "Brathwaite and Jazz." *The Art of Kamau Brathwaite*. Ed. Stewart Brown. Melksham, The Cromwell Press, 1995. 63. Other kind of rhythms created by Brathwaite are present in *Rights of Passage*: a type of urban or "boogie-woogie blues" in "Folkways", the gospel song of "New World a-Comin", the spiritual in "Tom", the "honkey-tonk jazz" of "The Journeys", or the ska tunes of "Wings of a Dove", 'bus blues in bim' (*Crossing Water*). The Haitian-Canadian writer Jean-Claude Charles commented on the multiple facets of these musical genres from the humorous aspect to the mythological one: "From the time of negro spirituals and blues to modern jazz, black mythologies reverberate, with these double ideas: memory and invention [...] Music of humour and challenge, but also of dash, of extreme tenderness." Charles, Jean-Claude. "Life Jazzes like That." Trans. Sarah Downing. *Caribbean: Art et Littérature: Cuba, Jamaica, Martinique, Guadeloupe*. Spec. issue of *Revue Noire* 6 (Sept.-Oct.-Nov. 1992): 52. Paris. This tenderness, but also numbed emotions, are expressed, for instance, by Roach's "Blues for Uncle Tom" (*The Flowering Rock*), in which he retrieved the blues rhythm of the Southern States of America. On the other hand, Brathwaite himself – even though much influenced by North American rhythms – tried to create a Caribbean aesthetics of blues, to render in words an approximation to musical notes, as in "Work Song and Blues" (*Rights of Passage*), "Flutes" (*Middle Passages*), or with his collection *Black and Blues*, especially in "Starvation & Blues", a couplet in *Drought* in which Creole echoes, specifically of Jamaican vernacular, intertwine with the importance of the blues. Other instances by Brathwaite are "Blues" and "Ragged Point" in (*Other Exiles*), and also in the poem "Defilée" (*Words Need Love Too*), or even in the "Blues" of *Sun Poem*. The 'dub-poet' Winston Farrell, Barbadian like Brathwaite, tried to create a typically Caribbean rhythm, although being influenced in his turn by blues and jazz rhythms. Even Walcott wrote a poem titled "Blues", but it was not aimed at creating an approximation to the musical genre, rather to evoke a state of mind, a situation in which the blues becomes also a pun on words. In Walcott's "Blues" a pun is employed to describe a brawl, "They beat this yellow nigger / black and blue", (Walcott, Derek. "Blues." *Collected Poems 1948-1984*. Cit. 111.) 'black and blue' is a locution used when somebody is hit till he has blue and purple bruises, but 'black and blues' underlines also a blue mood. Furthermore, let us think of Pamela Mordecai's "Sky Jazz" (*Certifiable*) in which she tried to reproduce the nervous repetitions of jazz music, as in the attack with "Sky jazz / razz-ma-tazz / de furry white fellows raisin cane on brass / heavy set greys on dem big drums / fine black fingers strum-strum strumming de bass" ("Sky Jazz." *Certifiable*. Fredericton, New Brunswick: Goose Lane, 2001. 23.) of the Guyanese-Canadian Brian Chan's "In Memoriam Charles Mingus" and "Wind Musician" (*Thief With Leaf*), or the natural rhythms of the Barbadian poet Sandra (Sealy) E. Morris in "Sea Jazz" (*Calabash*). Thinking of jazz musicians who much influenced poets, as in the case of Baraka it was the obstreperous John Coltrane: "speaking in jazz unequalled black / music speaking in/ through/ outt / o Coltrane o trane of the realm / as the cries come" (McNeill, Anthony. *Credences at The Altar of Cloud*. Kingston: The Institute of Jamaica, 1979. 86.), in the case of many Caribbean poets it was Don Drummond. Don Drummond was a brilliant Jamaican trombonist in the 60s. He suffered from mental illness which led him to kill his girlfriend and then committed suicide. In a tribute to the great musician Lorna Goodison wrote "For Don Drummond" (*The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*), but also Brathwaite remembered the sound of this Jamaican-born trombonist in "Starvation": "wid de don drummon blues" (Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. "Starvation." *Black + Blues*. New York: New Directions Publishing, 1995. 19.). Brathwaite once quoted the Jamaican poet Bongo Jerry arguing that "Don Drummond Music has th'effect of ganja". (Brathwaite, Kamau. *The Art of Martin Carter*. Cit. 214.) Anthony McNeill in *Credences at the Altar of Cloud* sustained that: "bob marley new king of the music / behind him don d". (McNeill, Anthony. *Credences at The Altar of Cloud*. Cit. 5.) Mervyn Morris dedicated "Valley Prince" (*I been there, sort of*) to Don Drummond: "Me one, way out in the crows, / I blow the sounds, the pain, / but not a soul / would come inside my world / or tell mi how it true." (Morris, Mervyn. *I been there, sort of*. Manchester: Carcanet, 2006. 63.) But as again Brathwaite teaches to us, the power of words and their evocations are so much important that his poem "Jah Music" (*Crossing Water*) is not only based on jazz music, but evokes the religious aspects of Rastafarian belief, with its seven parts "Tambourines", "Flutes", "Klook", "Circles", "Birds", "And miles & miles & miles &", and "Bass". Even more so for the Jamaican Lorna Goodison with her "Jah Music" (*I Am Becoming My Mother*), and it is interesting to observe how the two poets, one Barbadian, the other

resonates with his own music, as in “Week Five”, in which he repeated a strophe with variants “GONNA SHARPEN MY KNIFE / GONNA COLLA A DOLLA / GONNA LIVE A COLORFUL LIFE” (17) , or in “Week Twenty-Four”, where the vibrato of the saxophone, or the flourish of a horn, resounds three times in whimsical *exploits*: “ “V” is for voting / him GOOD / “V” is for victimisation / him BAD / “V” is for victory / HIM DEFI-NIGHTLY CRAZY” (39), emphasizing the last line through capital letters written in a descending diagonal. Polillo identified some major features of jazz as part of African American culture, but these can also be found in Keane’s poetry: “This basic ambiguity, the tonal instability, the uncertainty in the mode, the changeability, the ductility, the tonal richness (which are typical tracts also of the singing Negro) find a peculiar but not accidental verification in the poetics of the blues itself.”³⁶⁹

III.iii. A West Indian Aesthetics: the blending of people’s languages and musical/literary genres

Even though Caribbean aesthetics is not the same as that of African Americans, the cultural influence of a poet and cultural activist as Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) has reached the Caribbean,³⁷⁰ and Caribbean jazz poems with his radical way of thinking, such as in Baraka’s *Funk Lore*. As William Harris remembered:

Baraka’s most radical move, from being an apolitical Beatnik to being a politically engaged cultural nationalist, provides an important example of how the jazz aesthetic process embodies forms for social as well as artistic change. His cultural nationalist poetry not only describes change but also calls for it; in this phase of his career, Baraka says: “We want ‘poems that kill’” (BMP, p. 116)³⁷¹

When he went back to the Caribbean, Keane took part to the first Carifesta in Guyana in 1972, and for the closing session he read “People Like We”, a poem on the unity of the Caribbean people,

Jamaican, deals with the same subject, for Goodison asks “What kind of ole nayga music is that / playing on the Government’s radio?” and that about this music “all it need is a dub organiser”. (Goodison, Lorna. “Jah Music.” *I Am Becoming My Mother*. London: New Beacon Books, 1986. 36.)

³⁶⁹ My translation from Italian: “Quest’ambiguità di fondo, l’instabilità, l’incertezza modale, la mutevolezza, la duttilità, la ricchezza timbrica (caratteristica anche della voce del negro che canta) trovano un singolare ma non casuale riscontro nella poetica stessa del blues.” Polillo, Arrigo. *Jazz. La Vicenda e i Protagonisti della Musica Afro-Americana*. Cit. 40.

³⁷⁰ Cf. chapter XI on Lasana M. Sekou in this thesis.

³⁷¹ Harris, William J. *The Poetry and Poetics of Amiri Baraka: The Jazz Aesthetic*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1985. 29

where the Creator God Makunaima and the Carib devil Qualeva³⁷² agree, where the natural elements of wind, mountain, star agree, where the musical instruments drum, flute, sitar – representing the different racial components of the Caribbean society – agree and sing in unison: “one note (...) / one love / in the midst of the sea / People like we say / yes” (AH, 36-37).

In the poem “Roundtrip”, Keane offered an ironic portrait of the socialization of West Indians as exiled people in London in the 1950s. In it he recognised a sort of ‘acclimatisation’ to the country of people from St. Vincent, who gather in a bar, and significantly introduced a misspelling, “all five of us would hold up a finger each / and drink to Sin-Vincent— / beer—out of a big glass— /later we call it a mug—” (AH, 3); he then continued by underlining the different racial provenance of the St. Vincentians: “Our fingers were different-coloured / especially without gloves (...)” (AH, 3): Caribs, Chinese, Spanish, Indians, Africans. The insularity of the Caribbean regular customers of the bar is evident in the following passage:

The moment the five of us left **The Pub**
 the Westindies came to London
 People from Jamaica
 and Trinidad
 and even Anguilla
 joined the family all of a sudden
 We held up a lot of fingers
 later drank a lot of beer
 laughed at the natives
 simply because we knew
 how to pronounce Grenada
 and they didn't

It's true that one Jamaican
 asked me what part of Jamaica
 St. Vincent was in (AH, 5)

In the poem Keane encompassed all the different diasporic exiled West Indians: Martiniquans, Surinamese, “Black Carib guy from Belize” (6), “Indian chappie from Mauritius” (7), “a fellow from Ghana” (7), “The Jamaican Chinese fellow” (7), “A Bermudan feller” (7). Keane focused on the difficulty in settling down in a foreign country (London in this case, but there is also a reference to New York, the city the poet would move to in the last part of his life), and of the typically

³⁷² Bryan Edwards registered under the term ‘Qualeva’ the devil, as a French translation from ‘Charaibe words’: Edwards, Bryan. The History, Civil and Commercial of the British Colonies in the West Indies. 4 vols. Philadelphia: J. Humpreys, 1806. 270. Google Books. 17 April 2009. <http://books.google.it/books?id=UBsWAAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA270&lpg=PA270&dq=qualeva+god&source=bl&ots=7tk4MmJXub&sig=qQH9VDpaC4nHRQeBImiwARmErTc&hl=it&ei=sSfnSfvhDdiMkAWp8bCoBw&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=3#PPR5,M1>. This ancient deity is also mentioned in Keane, E. McG. “Some Religious Attitudes in W.I. Poetry. The orthodox attitude and variations.” BIM 4.15 (1952): 170.

Caribbean way of hanging out together, feeling a sense of cohesiveness, using his native Creole and recognizing the different accents in the region (“But nobody can say peace and love sweet like a Jamaican”, 9):

Well we not settlin een **so** well
But we smiles a lot when we think about the family
We meet every Sunday morning in this year
People calls it a pub
maybe because we drinks beer here
out of a bottle
and is only Reggae records we plays (10).

On the contrary, in *OWWW* Keane admitted that: “I thought was only Jamaica people so fast and bad-mouth” (*OWWW*, 53). Nonetheless, he acknowledged a sense of Caribbean unity: “We had long ago stopped calling ourselves Vincentians / because the family name had changed to Westindian” (8). The submarine unity typical of Brathwaite and Glissant is here to be found also in Keane’s words: “The Jamaicachyne chap frinstance / wrote us to say / that after considerable roundsing around / he lately also forma a **Union** of his own / He now writin a bible / title / Solid Rock Underneath The Archipelago / S R U T A for short” (12-13).

Nanton stated that the collection *OWWW* is remarkable for its commitment to the aesthetics of the whole Caribbean region: “What makes *OWWW* important and distinctive is the way it demonstrates the nature of folk culture’s oppositional and regenerative role, not just for certain elements of the society, but for the whole of a society in the Caribbean.”³⁷³ That is one of the reasons why, along a line of theoretical continuity, we could put Keane’s Creole aesthetics after Roach’s and St. John’s aesthetics of the folk: the three authors have consciously employed the vernacular to represent their own folk cultures and at the same time to embrace the whole Caribbean region. Moreover, Keane remarked on the population in St. Vincent: “Red (or Yellow) Caribs in Yurumei (St. Vincent); Red (or Yellow) Caribs in Watikubuli (Dominica); Black Caribs in Belize; Black Caribs in Guatemala; Black Caribs in Honduras; and, Black Caribs in Nicaragua.”³⁷⁴, and in the poem “Nallidge” – a Creole transcription of ‘knowledge’ – on mixed racial ethnic groups in the Caribbean: “Brown people not brown you know (...) / Yellow people don’t really all yellow (...) / Red people is now nearly all dead people / White people try (...) / Black people black you hear (...) / G r e e n people / does come up with me” (*AH*, 21). In 1953, in one of his essays on “Nature and Religion”, Keane held that:

³⁷³ Nanton, Philip. “‘Shake’ Keane’s ‘Nonsense’: An Alternative Approach to Caribbean Folk Culture.” *Cit.*

³⁷⁴ Sheran, Helan. “The ‘Carib’ Story.” (20 Feb. 1997) in “The Caribs and Garifuna of St. Vincent & The Grenadines.” CAC. Caribbean Amerindian Centrelink. 29 July 2006. 8 April 2009 <<http://web.archive.org/web/20041011045522/http://www.lacc.cc.ca.us/academic/departments/busad/aboht/sheran/helan.htm>>.

no matter how many strains of culture have gone through the making of the West Indian people, and perhaps because of the very variety of those strains, a unique society is being evolved [...], with a peculiar system of attitudes, a peculiar reaction to facts and sights and circumstances.³⁷⁵

As Nanton observed regarding Creole aesthetics: “It was probably in this collection that he achieved his most imaginative commentary on Caribbean society in general and St. Vincent in particular.”³⁷⁶ Caribs were the first inhabitants of St. Vincent, together with Arawaks, and as Prof. Pollard explained to me “ “Garifuna” (...) are the Black Caribs from St. Vincent who were transported to Central America by the British. In fact they use the term Garifuna for their language and Garinagu for themselves but the layman simply refers to them as Garifuna. (...)”³⁷⁷ My following questions arose after reading Pollard’s paper “Black Carib to Garinagu” “I have read in your paper that St. Vincent Garifuna have lost their language, while Garinagu from Central America have preserved it. But would a Garinagu from Belize (or a Garifuna from St.Vincent) understand a Karifouna from Dominica? And does the fact that Karifouna women were monolingual (in Arawak) and men bilingual (in Arawak and Carib) still have an influence on – for instance – today’s literary production?” Pollard replied that:

Garifuna today retains some Carib words that are traditionally used by men only, with Arawak equivalents that should be used by women only, is a remnant of the fact that Carib speaking men took Arawak speaking women at the time that the island society in St. Vincent was emerging (Taylor 1951:31-32). (...) Modern Garifuna is spoken by Afro-Carib groups in Belize, Guatemala and Honduras where there are large settlements of Garinagu people and includes loan words from Spanish as well as from French and English. (...) Today there is a Garifuna Dictionary published by the Garifuna Council of Belize : *The people’s Garifuna Dictionary*, edited by Roy Cayetano.³⁷⁸

In “(Lesson Five: PER CAPITA PER ANNUM)” Keane underlined “everyone remembers / nota a single song / of the Callinagos” (*AH*, 86).

As the Barbadian writer George Lamming said, the poetic text can be linked to the social reality and the social aesthetics of the Caribbean region: “It must attempt to travel beyond this domain of mediation to link the human substance of the text to the collective consciousness, the

³⁷⁵ Keane, E. McG. “Some Religious Attitudes in W.I. Poetry. Nature and religion.” *BIM* 4.16 (1953): 266.

³⁷⁶ Nanton, Philip. “Shake Keane’s Poetic Legacy.” *Cit* .

³⁷⁷ Pollard, Velma. “Black Carib to Garinagu.” Proc. of a conference. The Seventh Seminar Series on Intra-Regional Migration. The Socio-Economic and Cultural Impact of Migration between the Anglophone Caribbean, Belize and Honduras. 8-9 July 2005. Personal communication with the professor. E-mail. 4 January 2008.

³⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

continuing social reality”.³⁷⁹ Keane’s poetic domain is a striking example of this social aesthetic attitude. As Joyette put it, a closer contact with Euro-American literature and society “partially helped to fill this void that inherently reflects a need for Vincentian literature, and a broader understanding of our aesthetics, uncompromised by the realities of other cultures.”.³⁸⁰

³⁷⁹ Lamming, George. Coming, Coming Home. *Cit.* 16.

³⁸⁰ Joyette, Anthony. “Preface.” Vincentian Poets, 1950 to 1980. *Cit.* v.

Chapter IV
Martin Carter (1927-1997)
The Aesthetics of Social and Political Freedom in Post-Colonial Guyana

Martin Carter was born in 1927 in Georgetown, Guyana. He began publishing in his thirties with A. J. Seymour's *Kyk-Over-Al* and with the journal of the PPP (People's Progressive Party), to which he was affiliated. After the 1953 elections for Guyana self-governance, Carter was arrested in his house for three months; he would have been arrested again in 1954. After the publication which raised him to international attention, *Poems of Resistance from British Guiana*, in 1954, he left the PPP to join the PNC (People's National Congress), led by Forbes Burnham, an Afro-Guyanese, because he was against the political radicalism of the other leader of the party, an Indo-Guyanese. In 1975 he went to England to teach at the University of Essex, and after one year there he went back to Guyana to teach at the University of Guyana. After joining the WPA (Working People's Alliance), because of his disillusionment with the political plan of the PNC, Carter was beaten during a demonstration and also witnessed the murder of Father Drake, a Catholic priest who was politically active, as well as the murder of the leader of WPA.³⁸¹ He died in 1997 in Guyana.

His main works are *The Hill of Fire Glows Red* (1951), *The Kind Eagle (Poems of Prison)* (1952), *The Hidden Man (Other Poems of Prison)* (1952), *Poems of Shape and Motion* (1955), *Jail Me Quickly* (1961), *Poems of Succession* (1977), *Poems of Affinity* (1980), *Selected Poems* (1989).³⁸²

³⁸¹ It is interesting to observe how Al Craighton compared Carter's life and political commitment to that of the Irish poet W.B. Yeats, which reminds of Eric Roach and Breiner's comparative analytical study on "the Black Yeats". Cf. Craighton, Al. "The Mob at the Door: A 'Biography' of Martin Carter." *Guyana Under Siege* 2001. 15 Sept. 2008 <<http://www.guyanaundersiege.com/Literature/review%20of%20Biography%20of%20Martin%20Carter.htm>>. Also publ. in *Starbrowk News* Dec. 2001. Biography in *Kyk-Over-Al* 49/50 Ed. McDonald, Ian, and Vanda Radzik. June 2000.

³⁸² Henceforward '*The Hill of Fire Glows Red*' will be referred to with 'HFGR', '*The Kind Eagle*' with 'KE', '*The Hidden Man*' with 'HM', '*Poems of Shape and Motion*' with 'PSM', '*Jail Me Quickly*' with 'JMQ', '*Poems of Succession*' with 'PS', '*Poems of Affinity*' with 'PA', and '*Selected Poems*' with 'SP'.

IV.i. Freedom in post-colonial Guyana

Martin Carter recognised four aspects in Poetry, namely ‘Art’, ‘Thought’, ‘Speech’, and ‘Inspiration’,³⁸³ and drawing on his statement I will analyse these four aspects of social and political freedom in his prison poems, in which I think he demonstrated his Aesthetics. Carter testified to and was one of the agents of the passage to independence of his own formerly Dutch and English colony, Guyana, the South-American mainland territory considered part of the Caribbean region. In defining historical and geographical spaces of freedom in Guyana, we must remember that between 1621 and 1803 Guiana was a Dutch colony until it became a British possession in 1815, after the Treaty of Vienna, and the three provinces of Berbice, Demerara, and Essequibo unified into a single entity in 1831, making up for the lack of African slaves after the abolition of the slave trade in 1834 with indentured labourers from India, and forming the Crown colony of British Guiana from 1928. The political history of this colonial country – which in the ‘50s and ‘60s was undergoing a metamorphosis as it moved towards independence – was truly shaping Carter’s status as a poet.³⁸⁴

As Stewart Brown argued: “In the Caribbean Carter is regarded as one of the great poets who have chronicled the journey from colonialism to independence, alongside such figures as Aimé Césaire, Derek Walcott, Nicholàs Guillén and Kamau Brathwaite.”³⁸⁵ Therefore, Carter’s poetry is often placed on a line of political resistance, whose point of departure was identified by Frank Birbalsingh and Neville Dawes in the Jamaican poet Claude McKay:

Carter deserves no less praise for celebrating and undying, human spirit of resistance against oppression and a persistent, equally human desire for freedom. (...) Comparison between Carter’s ‘Death must not find us thinking that we die’ and Claude McKay’s ‘If we must die, let it not be like hogs’ illustrates the prevalence of a spirit of resistance in West Indian literature and a desire for freedom that is as fundamental to West Indian experience as the issue of identity, or the reclamation of African cultural inheritance.³⁸⁶

Carter’s poetry is characterised by a tendency to auto-referentiality, but also by his concern for the social and political life of his country. In fact, his poetry has been defined by Bill Carr, Stewart

³⁸³ Carter, Martin. “Interview with Martin Carter.” Ed. Rovin Deodat. *Kyk-Over-Al* 40 (Dec. 1989): 80.

³⁸⁴ Not historically, but linguistically speaking, Rickford reported a speech of three Guyanese Creole speakers in 1878 circa: “Before time, / you know, de Calony belong to the Dutch.” (98) Rickford, John R. *Dimensions of a Creole Continuum, History, Texts & Linguistic Analysis of Guyanese Creole*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987. 97.

³⁸⁵ Brown, Stewart. “Introduction: ‘What I have been trying to do so far is to provoke you’.” *The Art of Martin Carter*. Ed. Stewart Brown. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2000; 2004. 7.

³⁸⁶ Birbalsingh, Frank. “Martin Carter’s Earliest Poetry.” *The Art of Martin Carter*. *Cit.* 95. And again another reference to McKay: “His poems are in a line of literary resistance which may be said to begin with Claude McKay of Jamaica” Dawes, Neville. “Preface to the 1964 Edition of *Poems of Resistance*.” *Ibid.* 98.

Brown, and Kamau Brathwaite among others, as “political”, or inciting to resistance, freedom, and to a political consciousness rising towards national affirmation.³⁸⁷ That is how politics influenced Carter’s poetics, in terms of thought – the political thought of the Italian thinker Antonio Gramsci –, art – the political relevance of the works of the Guyanese painter Stanley Greaves –, inspiration – the political thought of the Middle Ages Italian politician Farinata degli Uberti in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* –, and speech – as regards the political use of language and poetry by Carter.

When Carter in his twenties started publishing poetry in the Guyanese journal (directed by A. J. Seymour from 1945) named after a Dutch fort in ruin, *Kyk-Over-Al*,³⁸⁸ the journalistic tradition in the Caribbean had a great importance, and one can understand why many of his poems were first published in journals, or even why some newspaper directors were in possession of many of his manuscripts.³⁸⁹ The journalistic culture aided in starting an aesthetic debate on the role that a Guyanese colonial poetics could have in stimulating a political and poetical common conscience in the colony, most of all because neither a national nor a super-national common aesthetic taste had already developed, which could reveal a heuristic purport – in the sense of theoretical structure of research – in forging a common conscience and cultural matrix in the Guyanese people.³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Stewart Brown labelled it “public poetry-of-resistance”. Brown, Stewart. “Introduction: ‘What I have been trying to do so far is to provoke you’.” *Ibid.* 8. Brathwaite underlined that Carter “has been popularly (and quite rightly) identified with prison protest.” Brathwaite, Kamau. (1981) “Martin Carter’s Poetry of the Negative Yes.” *Ibid.* 201. “One cannot read Carter, either, without being made alert to the relationship between poetry and politics.” Kwayana, Eusi. “The Politics of the Heart.” *Ibid.* 159. Nonetheless, Bill Carr stated that “‘political Poetry’ (...) is also a misleading expression” (Carr, Bill. “Foreword to *Poems of Affinity*.” (1980) (*Ibid.* 155), for he argued that a public political statement may lead the ‘political poem’ to fade as soon as the issue is receded, but a private political statement gives and guarantees a life of its own to the poem, which is then less perishable.

³⁸⁸ Different spelling of the word are ‘Kyk-over-al’ or ‘Kykoveral’, a Dutch loan meaning “watch over all”, *cf.* the substantive ‘kijk’= “look, aspect”, and the werkwoord (ww), verb, ‘kijken (keek; gekeken)’, defined as “look (at), see, peep.” Dutch-English, English-Dutch Hippocrene Concise Dictionary. New York: Hippocrene Books, Inc., 1990; 2002. 287.

³⁸⁹ Precisely, it was A.J. Seymour who owned Carter’s manuscripts in the A.J. Seymour Collection in the national library of Georgetown.

³⁹⁰ “What are our aims? *Kyk-Over-Al* we hope will be an instrument to help forge a Guianese people, to make them conscious of their intellectual and spiritual possibilities.” Robinson, Gemma. “Martin Carter’s Poetic Essays in Community.” The Art of Martin Carter. *Cit.* 271. Quoted from Seymour, A. J. “Editorial Notes.” Kyk-Over-Al 1:1 (Dec. 1945): 7. At twenty-three, Carter was among the founders of the PPP, People’s Progressive Party, constituted by the Indo-Guyanese Cheddi Jagan and the Afro-Guyanese Forbes Burnham, which split in 1955, when Burnham founded the PNC, People’s National Congress. In “A Free Community of Valid Persons.” (1974) Carter asserted: “This is the war we have to fight, the war against paralysis of the spirit, for I am tempted to think (...) [that] this paralysis of spirit if not itself overcome, can delay, if not corrupt, our transformation into a free community of valid persons.” Carter, Martin. University of Hunger. *Cit.* 215. Yet, Wilson Harris stated that: “We all know that empires have created their subjects who, for periods, remain the passive recipients of the power exercised over them.” Harris, Wilson. “The Fabric of the Imagination.” The Radical Imagination: Lectures and Talks. Eds. Alan Riach, and Mark Williams. Liège: Université de Liège, 1992. 69.

Carter was jailed twice:³⁹¹ the first time in 1953, suspected of being a political agitator, and the second one in 1954, after publishing his collection *Poems of Resistance from British Guiana* in London, twelve years before Guyana gained independence. Many other Caribbean writers of the windrush generation had emigrated to London to pursue their careers as writers, like George Lamming or Wilson Harris.³⁹² As regards Carter, even though his paternal grandparents were from Barbados and his maternal ones from Grenada, his parents did not adhere to the windrush post WWII, and decided to remain in Guyana. Carter's collections of poems or singular poems which relate most to the prison experience – and which will be more relevant for this study – are: in 1952 *The Kind Eagle (Poems of Prison)*, and *The Hidden Man (Other Poems of Prison)*; in 1953 his poem “University of Hunger” and “Six Poems of Resistance”;³⁹³ in 1954 *Poems of Resistance from British Guiana*;³⁹⁴ in 1964 *Jail Me Quickly*.³⁹⁵ These collections were written before Guyana gained independence, but they were thrown by Carter like seeds on the social and political ground of his country, waiting for their germination.

IV.ii. ‘Thought’: “This Colony Is a Jail”³⁹⁶

One of the four above-mentioned aspects considered by Carter, ‘Thought’, could aptly be related to social and political issues raised by the Italian intellectual Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937). The prison experience marked both Carter's and Gramsci's lives as intellectuals and politicians. In *The Letters from Prison* and *The Prison Notebooks* Gramsci reflected upon the question of the intellectuals and their ideal role in society. He counterposed the ‘traditional’ and the ‘organic’ intellectuals: the former are supposed to think and act independently from a dominant social group,

³⁹¹ “Carter was arrested on 25 October 1953 at Plantation Blairmont. After a night in the plantation prison, Carter and his four PPP comrades were transferred the next day by armed guard to Atkinson Field.” Carter, Martin. *University of Hunger*. *Cit.* 257. Note: Robinson observes that Carter was imprisoned at Atkinson Field together with Eusi Kwayana – former Sydney King –, Rory Westmaas, Bally Latchmansingh, and Adjodha Singh, and that his poem, “Letter 1”, was probably composed when he was imprisoned there.

³⁹² Harris published privately his collection of poems *Eternity to Season* in 1954, and republished it in London in 1978.

³⁹³ In 1953 Cheddi Jagan was elected chief minister of the PPP.

³⁹⁴ Edward Baugh observed that the title was then changed into *Poems of Resistance from Guyana* in the 1979 republication, after Guyana became independent in 1966. Baugh, Edward. “A History of Poetry.” *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, 2 vols. Ed. A. James Arnold. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001. Vol. 2: 249.

³⁹⁵ Jagan won the elections in 1957 and was Prime Minister from 1961 to 1964; in 1958 Carter worked at the British Council in Georgetown. Burnham ruled Guyana from 1964 to 1985. Carter was Minister of Information and Culture from 1967 to 1970 and UN representative of Guyana, while during the ‘70s he became a technocrat of the PNC. From 1992 to his death in 1997, Jagan was PM, and after his death his wife Janet Jagan was elected. Cf. Robinson, Gemma. “A Chronology of Martin Carter.” Carter, Martin. *University of Hunger. Collected Poems & Selected Prose*. Ed. Gemma Robinson. Highgreen, Tarnset, Northumberland: Bloodaxe Books, 2006. 11-13.

³⁹⁶ “Now I am sure you all agree with me that this colony called British Guiana is a jail. Now why is it a jail? It is not because you and I are in some cell with an iron bar and a big key. No, it is not that kind of jail. Why is it a jail then?” Kwayana, Eusi. “The Politics of the Heart.” *The Art of Martin Carter*. *Cit.* 160. Also reported by Robinson in *University of Hunger*. *Cit.* 244.

while the latter are linked to and are the voice of a dominant social group. Gramsci believed in a new figure of intellectual, who is involved in practical life.³⁹⁷ For what Carter was striving in his life, he could be considered, reasonably, to embody this new figure of Gramscian intellectual, mirroring the importance Gramsci gave to the sociological nature of literary works. Actually – in his anti-fascist writing – Gramsci was:

aiming at a “militant” literary criticism, which is able to grasp the “organic” value of literature, melting together “the struggle for a new culture, that is for a new humanism, the critique of costumes, of feelings and of the conceptions of the world, with aesthetic or merely artistic criticism with passionate fervour.”³⁹⁸

One cannot but think of Carter’s hymn to nationalism, “Bastille Day – Georgetown” (1979). This sense of identity was fostered by Carter’s rebellion against a colonial condition not too dissimilar from slavery. As he said in his essay “Sensibility and the Search” (1958): “the essential meaning of slavery is the loss of self, the loss of identity”,³⁹⁹ for slavery was conceived as loss, not only of freedom, but also of self, identity, and thought.⁴⁰⁰ There are three drafts of this poem, which Gemma Robinson transcribed, and the variants which Carter introduced when passing from the first to the second and from the second to the third versions have denaturalized the contents and unshaped its textual fisionomy.⁴⁰¹ The third, final version looks like this:

³⁹⁷ “The passion with which Gramsci defends the inflexible sternness of intelligence is charged of that sufferance and the courage of an ‘I’ which knows he cannot expect anything from anyone”. My translation of “La passione con la quale Gramsci difende l’inflessibile rigore dell’intelligenza si carica di tutta la sofferenza e il coraggio di un io che sa di non poter “attendarsi niente da nessuno””. Ferroni, Giulio. Profilo Storico della Letteratura Italiana. Milano: Einaudi, 1992. 903-904.

³⁹⁸ My translation of : “Gramsci mira a una critica letteraria di tipo “militante”, che sappia cogliere il valore “organico” della letteratura, fondendo insieme “la lotta per una nuova cultura, cioè per un nuovo umanesimo, la critica del costume, dei sentimenti e delle concezioni del mondo con la critica estetica o puramente artistica nel fervore appassionato.”” Ferroni, Giulio. Profilo Storico della Letteratura Italiana *Cit.* 905. On his part, Carter was often considered a communist or socialist figure, being a technocrat of PNC, and the struggle for freedom he promoted could find an echo in the nationalist Sudanian poet SIRR ANAI Kelueljang who wanted “to make the myth of freedom explode!” Kelueljang, SIRR ANAI. The Myth of Freedom and Other Poems. London: New Beacon Books, 1985. 65. Kelueljang stated in “A New Poet” – a poem written in Khartoum in January 1977 – : “I am a new poet of African nationalism / And I am a new poet of socialism, / Both being inseparable just like body /And life in an organism.” *Ibid.* 60.

³⁹⁹ Carter, Martin. University of Hunger. *Cit.* 205.

⁴⁰⁰ The date which appears in “Bastille Day” is 14th July 1979 (Robinson, *cit.* 159). I would argue that the indication of the month and the day has more of a symbolic and political value than the truth, the 14th July 1789 being the day in which the French Revolution peaked with Bastille Day. The poem was written for the political murder of the “Jesuit priest Fr. Bernard Darke”. (Radzik, Vanda. “One Dream Is Enough: A Tribute to Martin Carter.” Brown, Stewart. *Cit.* 381. The Italian philologist Gianfranco Contini sustained that in a poetic text even the modification of a single term is important in respect to the balance of the whole text, because the elimination, the adding or the substitution of a single term, or rather a semantic or metaphoric shift, make the text wobble and vary the global meaning of the text. Contini, Gianfranco. Varianti e altra Linguistica, Una Raccolta di Saggi (1938-1968). Torino: Einaudi, 1970; 1984.

⁴⁰¹ With passages from 17 to 15 to 20 lines.

Bastille Day –Georgetown

Not wanting to deny, I
believed it. Not wanting
to believe it, I denied
our Bastille day. This,
is nothing to storm. This
fourteenth of July. With
my own eyes, I saw the fierce
criminal passing for citizen
with a weapon, a piece of wood
and five for one. We laugh
Bastille laughter. These are
not men of death. A pot
of rice is their foul reward. (...) ⁴⁰²

The modifications to this poem may, thus, reveal movements of self-censorship – Carter operated authorial choices to avoid potential political censorship, because the paratexts or peritexts are those which allow the filling of those blanks left by the time, sometimes by political censorship, some other times by the official version of history, which is really important in the hermeneutic of post-colonial studies. – ⁴⁰³ and other parts of expressive power, with less violent, more rational, and controlled expressions, starting from the title. As Gordon Rohlehr observed,

The title ‘Bastille Day – Georgetown’, is bitterly ironic, since its aim is to locate the Guyanese struggle in a context of international proletarian revolt, hereby exposing the former as a nauseating insult to the history of the working class. Guyanese sans culottes don’t rise up against an aristocracy of corruption; they murder for a mess of pottage (‘a pot of rice’). ⁴⁰⁴

Another observation which involves a kind of self-censorship is that Carter shifted from a strong term like ‘killers’ in the 1st and the 2nd versions, which substitutes ‘barbarians’, for ‘criminals’, because he did not want his people to be identified with killers or with the stereotype of barbarians, but with a more neutral term. In fact “men of death” of the 2nd becomes “not men of death” of the 3rd one. Instead, the connotations of a generic ‘men’ in the 1st one, which shifts from an indefinite “creature, something” to a “citizen” indicates that the purpose of the poem is that of instilling a political identity and a national conscience into Guyanese people, who are rebelling for a

⁴⁰² Carter, Martin. “Bastille Day – Georgetown.” *University of Hunger. Cit.* 159.

⁴⁰³ Cf. Wilson Harris’s “revisionary potential within texts of reality.” Wilson, Harris. “The Fabric of Imagination.” *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial*. Ed. Anna Rutherford. Mundelstrup & Sydney: Dangaroo, 1992. 19. Also quoted in Fazzini, Marco. “The Jesting Masks of Resistance.” *Resisting Alterities, Wilson Harris and Other Avatars of Otherness*. Ed. Marco Fazzini. Amsterdam; New York. Rodopi, 2004. x.

⁴⁰⁴ Rohlehr, Gordon. “ ‘Assassins of the Voice’ : Martin Carter’s *Poems of Affinity* (1978-1980).” (1982) *The Art of Martin Carter. Cit.* 189.

scarce portion of rice. Rice was taken to Guyana by Indian indentured labourers in the middle of the 19th century, thus the people in the poem are fighting to have a “colonial food”, defined “foul” – thus ‘disgusting’ and ‘obscene’ – and also “unfair”: all the three adjectives do not depict a delicious food. The hunger of the children in the 1st is ‘greed’, an impulse which disappears with a sense of hunger and then with a necessity to eat, a reward for a work, in any case the impulse is supplanted by a more rational discourse, on which the nation must be founded on the citizenship more than on an armed fight. In the same way, “the knives and the impulses” of 1st are substituted with “sticks of lepers” and the irrational impulses which come out of the terms of the 1st are constrained by generic ‘weapons’, ‘wood sticks’.⁴⁰⁵

In the end the three closures are very different one from the other: in the first case the offspring is compared to obscene ants which lewdly steal eggs from other “obscene ants” (as in the title). In the second it instead becomes “We do not want your gates.” (Robinson 289), but in ancient English ‘gates’ were also the ‘ways’, thus we “do not want to go through an alternative way in respect to the one you are going through or which you impose upon us”, or simply “we are opposing to the barriers you are foisting on us”, where the ‘you’ is referred to the colonial powers. Philologically speaking, the final tendency of Carter is thus towards the addition, and supporting the auto-referentiality of an organic intellectual and of the poetic ‘I’. In the third version, Carter displayed a civil and political commitment, where he said “I have at last started / to understand the origin / of our vileness, and being unable to deny it, I suggest / its nativity. / In the shame of knowledge / of our vileness, we shall fight.”⁴⁰⁶ The choice of the future tense ‘shall’ implies an order of values, an encouragement to a collective intellectual battle, a concept which seems to recall the Bakhtinian idea of “social language” with an extra-verbal nature, that is a vehicle of identitarian and nationalistic values. Thus the title implies, as the Kyk-Over-Al fort does, a slippage from ruin to re-birth, the symbol of an invasion, and of an attack to an armed fortress as a symbol of construction,⁴⁰⁷ where the open arch which is left of the fort is a paradigm of destruction, but also of reconstruction.

⁴⁰⁵ Let us think of the poem “Not Hands Like Mine”, “my strangled city lies” (91) and “killing my rice and stirring up my wrath” (91, which maybe displays a chiasmus), from the collection *Poems of Resistance from British Guiana* (1954).

⁴⁰⁶ Carter, Martin. “Bastille Day – Georgetown.” *University of Hunger*. Cit. 159.

⁴⁰⁷ As also Gemma Robinson noted. In fact, the term ‘Bastille’ comes from an alteration of the French ‘bastide’, and from the ancient Provençal ‘bastida’, (cf. Bloch, Oscar. *Dictionnaire Étymologique de la Langue Française*. 2 tomes. Avec la collaboration de W. von Wartburg. Paris: Les Presses Universitaires de France, 1932. Tome I: 70-71.) that is from the verb ‘bastir’ of Germanic origins, which means ‘to build’. (Cf. also [Dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com) Unabridged (v 1.1) Based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary (Random House, Inc. 2006) The American Heritage [Dictionary of the English Language](http://www.ahdictionary.com) Fourth Edition (Houghton Mifflin Company, 2006; Lexico Publishing Group, LLC, 2008) 15 Feb. 2008 <<http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=Bastille>>.)

IV.iii. ‘Inspiration’: prison as Hell?

The second aspect I will consider is ‘Inspiration’. And I will refer to literary inspiration through a syllogism: if Gramsci’s political thought could be compared to Carter’s and if Gramsci re-evaluated Dante’s *Comedy* and the question of language,⁴⁰⁸ then Carter could find literary inspiration in Dante, too. In an insightful comment on Carter’s “You Are Involved”, Rupert Roopnaraine recognised Dante as one of the milestones in Carter’s poetics,⁴⁰⁹ and this literary influence has also affected, as I believe, his political thought and aesthetics. One of the more relevant and picturesque political figures in the *Comedy* is that of the Ghibelline Farinata degli Uberti, in Canto X of Dante’s Hell (lines 31-42), which was also studied by Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*.⁴¹⁰ Dante’s lines in Italian and in their English translation are:

“Ed el mi disse: «Volgiti! Che fai?	“And he said to me: “Turn thee: what art thou doing?
Vedi là Farinata che s’è dritto:	See there Farinata who has risen erect;
de la cintola ‘n su tutto ‘l vedrai».	All from the girdle upwards will thou see him.”
Io avea già il mio viso nel suo fitto;	I had already fixed my face on his,
ed el s’ergea col petto e con la fronte	And he was straightening himself up with breast and front
com’avesse l’inferno a gran dispetto.	As though he had Hell in great scorn.
E l’animose man del duca e pronte	And the bold and ready hands of my Leader
mi pinser tra le sepulture a lui,	Pushed me among the sepulchres to him,
dicendo: “Le parole tue sien conte”.	Saying: “Let thy words be clear.”
Com’io al piè de la sua tomba fui,	When I was at the foot of his tomb,
guardommi un poco, e poi, quasi sdegnoso,	He looked at me a little, and then, as though disdainful,
mi dimandò: “Chi fuor li maggior tui?” ⁴¹¹	Asked me, “Who were thy ancestors?” ⁴¹²

Carter’s poem “Demerara Nigger” published in 1984 sings “In right accordance, and demandingly / because what withstands, stands, / Farinata, the Ghibelline, / ‘entertained great scorn of hell / and

⁴⁰⁸ Cf., among others, Fusaro, Diego, ed. “Antonio Gramsci.” www.FILOSOFICO.net. *La Filosofia e I Suoi Eroi*. 18 Mar. 2008 <<http://www.filosofico.net/gramsci34.htm> 20 Jan. 2008>. and the entry “Antonio Gramsci.” [Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gramsci). A Wikimedia project. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 18 Mar. 2008 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gramsci>>.

⁴⁰⁹ “It is not to be precious that we invoke the names of Donne and Blake and Coleridge. Nor is it merely because these visionaries of reality, with Dante and Yeats, are among the most revered of Martin Carter’s poets.” Roopnaraine, Rupert. *Web of October, Rereading Martin Carter*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press. 1988. 23.

⁴¹⁰ “Was Dante Guelf or Ghibelline? (...) Dante was a Ghibelline and Farinata «is his hero», only that Dante was Ghibelline as much as Farinata, that is «a political man» more than «a political partisan». My translation of “Dante fu guelfo o ghibellino? (...) Dante fu ghibellino e Farinata «è il suo eroe», solo che Dante fu ghibellino come Farinata, cioè «uomo politico» più che «uomo di parte». Gramsci, Antonio. *Quaderni del Carcere*. 4 vols. Ed. Valentino Gerratana. Torino: Einaudi, 1975. 525.

⁴¹¹ Alighieri, Dante. *La Commedia. Inferno*. Eds. Bianca Garavelli, and Maria Corti. Milano: Bompiani, 1993. c. X, vv. 31-42. 147.

⁴¹² Alighieri, Dante. *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri*. Trans. Charles Eliot Norton. Chicago; London; Toronto: William Benton Publ., Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1952.

asked about ancestors”⁴¹³ If we compare Dante’s and Carter’s lines we can appreciate the similarity. Nonetheless, Eusi Kwayana observed the signs of life in Carter’s hell,⁴¹⁴ a sense of final hope which Kamau Brathwaite also recognised in Carter’s poetry.⁴¹⁵ Brathwaite was referring to Carter’s poetics and “language of our negative yes”,⁴¹⁶ which referred to Carter’s antithesis, and which, in this case, could apply to the reverse situation in which Farinata ‘stands’ and ‘withstands’ in Hell. And yet Carter’s seems to be a poetry of the ‘mind’: he repeats the word ‘mind’ eight times in three lines: “companion mind; mind in advance of mind, / the mind requiting and mind singular, / enabled mind, mind minded to suppose / nigger and Ghibelline.”⁴¹⁷ Both Gramsci and Carter considered the figure of Dante that of an intellectual and of a politician who was fighting, through Literature and Poetry, politics in his time: all these three figures of intellectuals, writers, and politicians could be put on a line of continuity.

I suppose that the Canto X inspired Carter also for the contiguous figure Dante met right after, Cavalcante Cavalcanti, who Dante presented as saying “If thou through this blind prison go’st, / Led by thy lofty genius and profound”.⁴¹⁸ The blind prison is that in which Carter searched for sunlight in his poem “Letter 2”.⁴¹⁹ The prison of Carter is here depicted as “black and solid”.⁴²⁰ But the final sign of hope – the same recognised by Kwayana or Brathwaite – is to be found also in the work of an outstanding Guyanese artist who was very close to Carter, Stanley Greaves, and who will enable us to speak of the third feature of Carter’s poetics.

IV.iv. ‘Art’: a metaphysical prison

In his *The Primacy of the Eye*, a monographic work on Greaves, Rupert Roopnaraine analyzed the *People of the Pavement*, so defined by Basil Hinds,⁴²¹ a collection of paintings Greaves created in the ‘50s, where metaphysics reflected Carter’s poem “Who Walks a Pavement”, from the collection *The Kind Eagle* (1952). Roopnaraine said of Greaves: “Like the late and revered

⁴¹³ Carter, Martin. “Demerara Nigger.” *Four Poems and Demerara Nigger*. (1984). *Selected Poems*. Georgetown, Guyana: Demerara, 1989. 177.

⁴¹⁴ Kwayana, Eusi. “The Politics of the Heart.” *Cit.* 179.

⁴¹⁵ Brathwaite stated that “that eloquent militant opposition has been supported by an equally eloquent sense of hope”. Brathwaite, Kamau. “Martin Carter’s Poetry of the Negative Yes”. (1981) *The Art of Martin Carter*. *Cit.* 201.

⁴¹⁶ Drawing this expression on Carter’s “With that Loan.” *Poems of Affinity*. *Selected Poems*. *Cit.* 141.

⁴¹⁷ Carter, Martin. “Demerara Nigger.” *Cit.* 177.

⁴¹⁸ “piangendo disse: «Se per questo cieco / Carcere vai per altezza d’ingegno...»” Alighieri, Dante. *La Commedia. Inferno*. *Cit.* c. X, vv. 57-58. 147.

⁴¹⁹ “Letter 2”: “After twenty days and twenty nights in prison / You wake and you search for birds and sunlight / You wait for rain and thunder”, Carter, Martin. “Letter 2.” *Poems of Succession*. *Cit.* 45. in which Edward Baugh recognises a Biblical echo. Baugh, Edward. “A History of Poetry”. *Cit.* 249.

⁴²⁰ “I too live in a prison Morton Sobell / In prison where a night is black and solid (...) / We all live in a prison, Morton Sobell, / But only what stays clean will reach to honour.” Carter, Martin. “For Morton Sobell in Alcatraz.” *University of Hunger*. *Cit.* 181.

⁴²¹ Roopnaraine, Rupert. *Primacy of the Eye*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2005. 25.

Martin Carter, he was a man of the pavement”,⁴²² that is a man from “the nigger yard”, to quote Carter, and in saying this he depicted Greaves as another Gramscian example of ‘organic intellectual’.⁴²³

Carter’s poem “Who Walks a Pavement” was defined by Marc McWatt as another prison poem, which almost delved into Carter’s un-consciousness.⁴²⁴ Thus, the poem has metaphysical hints, and it hints at a metaphysical – more than at an actual – prison. Greaves’s paintings may have stemmed from Giorgio DeChirico’s or Andrea Savinio’s work, with their sense of imprisonment in a surrealist environment,⁴²⁵ well described by Carter in “[his] city with a prison for a heart”.⁴²⁶

Farinata’s literary prison was more solid than the metaphysical one which transfigures into Carter’s real jail. Carter’s prison becomes metaphysical as soon as he dances a metaphysical dance of freedom on the wall: “I make my dance right here! / Right here on the wall of prison I dance!”⁴²⁷ Rupert Roopnaraine recalled on Greaves’s writing of “the poet’s experiments with what he calls ‘philosophical couplets’ in the working through and making of his poems.”⁴²⁸

⁴²² *Ibid.* 26.

⁴²³ “This organic interest in the lives of ordinary working people – organic because he is of them and they are never for him mere spectacle.” *Ibidem.*

⁴²⁴ “another poem about imprisonment. In this poem the persona does not evade the prison by means of consciousness (...) Here imprisonment is obviously not a feature of time, place nor political circumstance, but is rather a feature of consciousness itself.” Mcwatt, Mark A. “‘The Challenge of Space’: Being and Consciousness in the Poetry of Martin Carter”. *The Art of Martin Carter*. *Cit.* 253.

⁴²⁵ From the collection *Jail Me Quickly* (1964): “Where are free men”, title ending with question mark in *Poems of Succession*, 1977, in *Selected Poems* 1989 and *Selected Poems* 1997. “Our prison of air is worse than one of iron!”, Carter, Martin. “Where are free men?” Carter, Martin. *Poems of Succession*. *Cit.* 73.

⁴²⁶ From the collection *The Hill of Fire Glows Red* (1951), “Three Years After This”, in which Carter was commemorating the killing of five sugar cane cutters during a strike and picketing at Enmore, Guyana, the 16th June 1948. “my city with a prison for a heart.” Carter, Martin. *University of Hunger*. *Cit.* 70. Also in Carter, Martin. “Three Years After This.” *Selected Poems*. *Cit.* 10.

⁴²⁷ Carter, Martin. “The Kind Eagle.” *Selected Poems*. *Cit.* 33. *Cf.* also “[The wild men in prisons, they who rot like rust!], “The wild men in prisons, they who rot like rust! / The loud men who cry freedom and are so full of lies! / The drunk men who go dancing like shadows down the street!”. *Ibid.* 110. “The image of the prisoner’s dance may not be out of place or as isolated as it seems. He can dance on the spiked wall that imprisons him, and in dancing think he sees hope.” (Kwayana, Eusi. “The Politics of the Heart.” *Cit.* 165) “In reality, however, Martin Carter is a deeply political poet; this is another way of saying a deeply human poet, because in the broader aspects of a man’s freedom, the precondition of individual freedom is political freedom (...) Thus, as a prisoner in “The Knife of Dawn”, he could rise above the prison condition – a real prison, by the way, - and ‘dance on the wall of prison’.” (*Ibid.* 168.) The prison wall is the same of “O strike kind eagle, strike! / Grip at this prison and this prison wall!” (Carter, Martin. “All of a Man.” *Selected Poems*. *Cit.* 34.) Let us compare, as also Robinson observed, “Poem of Prison”: “I go back, I return, I sink into the floor.” (From *Uncollected Poems University of Hunger*. *Cit.* 178.) with “Who Walks a Pavement”: “This prison will be a mound of ashes. / i will be born, I will be born my love.” (“Who Walks a Pavement.” *Ibid.* 296.) Here the image of the Phoenix reviving from ashes is crucial. See Robinson, *cit.* 242 comment on “Looking at Your Hands”: “I look for fire!” (Carter, Martin. “Looking at Your Hands.” *Poems of Succession*. *Cit.* 14.). The eagle is seen as “anthitesis of the American eagle, Marxism” (Seecharam, Clem. “The Shape of the Passion: the Historical Context of Martin Carter’s poetry of Protest (1951-1964).” (1998) *The Art of Martin Carter*. *Cit.* 30.), but it also recalls the eagle sent by Zeus to devour Prometheus’s re-generating liver, after the Titan had given the fire to humanity. Maybe the myth of Aeschilus’s *Prometheus Bound* reached Carter through Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound*, for Shelley was one of Carter’s poetic milestones.

⁴²⁸ Brown, Stewart. “Introduction: ‘What I have been trying to do so far is to provoke you’”. *The Art of Martin Carter*. *Cit.* 17.

IV.v. Speech: philosophical couplets or iambs?

Carter's 'philosophical couplets', thus, contributed to expressing his aesthetics, and to hinting at a social and political freedom achieved also through the means of Speech. Like Birbalsingh,⁴²⁹ Edward Baugh remarked *a propos* of Carter's rhythm that it is:

within or around the reach of the iambic. Yet he was not imprisoned by that metre; he modulated it, almost imperceptibly, into a flatter, freer, less insistent beat, where the meaning, rather than the metrical foot, moves the poem's sound.⁴³⁰

Let us note Baugh's choice of the term "imprisoned", and how the iambic metre yielded Carter poetic freedom.⁴³¹

Carr compared Carter's poetic craft to Walcott's, Brathwaite's, or Morris's.⁴³² Nonetheless, while Barbara Lalla spoke of Carter's poetry as written in "Standard Caribbean English",⁴³³ Mervyn Morris stated that "One of Carter's skills, not always mentioned in commentary on his work, is the unobtrusive incorporation of creole."⁴³⁴ As to this feature, I will focus on a line from "Who Walks a Pavement": "A prison is go back, go back, go back."⁴³⁵ Robinson noted the Creole grammatical patterns in this sentence, pointing out that:

If read as standard English the phrase can be interpreted as an imperative. If read as Creole, the phrase operates multiply – as an imperative (perhaps inverting and strengthening the Creole imperative, 'galang'[⁴³⁶] or 'go

⁴²⁹ "the iambic beat is distinctive in your lines" Carter, Martin. "Interview with Martin Carter". Ed. Frank Birbalsingh. *Kyk-Over-Al* 46/47 (Dec. 1995): 230.

⁴³⁰ Baugh, Edward. "Locating Carter." *The Art of Martin Carter*. *Cit.* 247. Also, with slight variations, in Baugh, Edward. "A History of Poetry". *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*, vol. 2. Ed. by A. James Arnold. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. 2001. 249.

⁴³¹ Derek Attridge defined the iambic metre as a poetic device which "provide[s] the poet with a firm rhythmic structure which at the same time allows him the greatest possible freedom to use the verbal resources of the English language." Attridge, Derek. *The Rhythm of English Poetry*. London: Longman Group, UK Limited. 1982: 193. "Brathwaite writes, 'Carter's prison experience gave him not only new rhythms [...] but a whole new formal shape of poem.'" Robinson, Gemma. "Martin Carter's Poetic Essays in Community". *The Art of Martin Carter*. *Cit.* 276. Quoted from Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. "Resistance Poems: The Voice of Martin Carter." *CQ, Caribbean Quarterly* 23.2-3 (June-Sept. 1977).

⁴³² "His work is unlike the work of Walcott, E.K. Brathwaite or Mervyn Morris. What relates his work to theirs is a shared and serious concern for craft." Carr, Bill. "Foreword to *Poems of Affinity* (1980)". *The Art of Martin Carter*. *Cit.* 157.

⁴³³ Lalla, Barbara. "Conceptual Perspectives on Time and Timelessness in Martin Carter's 'University of Hunger'". *Ibid.* 17.

⁴³⁴ Morris, Mervyn. "Martin Carter: More than an Excellent Poet." (1998) *Ibid.* 377. Some of the instances Prof. Morris could have in mind are "University of Hunger" or "They Say I Am". Personal communication with Prof. Morris. E-mail. 29 Feb. 2008.

⁴³⁵ Carter, Martin. "Who Walks a Pavement." *Poems of Succession*. *Cit.* 20. And *Selected Poems*. *Cit.* 30.

⁴³⁶ Cassidy signals "galang" as "go along". Cf. Cassidy, Frederic Gomes and Le Page, Robert Brock. *Dictionary of Jamaican English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967; 1980. 193.

along'), as a new composite noun (prison is a 'go-back'), and as part of an abbreviated sentence (meaning 'a prison forces a person to go backwards').⁴³⁷

As to the linguistic variations in Carter's poetry, we could consider what Talib sustained about 'linguistic politics' in post-colonial literatures:

The reason why a writer chooses to use a particular dialect or variety of English may not be merely a superficial or 'innocent' stylistic consideration, but there may be political reasons for doing so. The word politic here is used both more widely, from one angle, and, more specifically, from another, in the sense that it is wider than its usual denotation, and it more specifically refers to linguistic politics.⁴³⁸

In an interview with Carter in 1995 – two years before his death – Birbalsingh stated that Carter knew Guyanese Creole but did not employ it in his work, and when Carter replied saying "Creole or Creolese", Birbalsingh argued that 'creolese' is a "pejorative" term.⁴³⁹ In the *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage* Richard Allsopp did not see the term 'Creolese' as derogatory.⁴⁴⁰ I would agree with Morris, and recognise the almost hidden presence of Creole, which made his poetry even greater, as you can hear West Indian overtones in it as in Derek Walcott's poetry.

To conclude, I will linger on another example of silenced speech, Dionne Brand's poem "For Martin Carter", written in 1984, four years after the assassination of the Guyanese Pan-Africanist Walter Rodney, inasmuch as Carter dedicated to him "For Walter Rodney" (1980) and also a poem to the memory of Father Drake "Bastille Day – Georgetown". From Brand's poem, Guyana emerged as an unproductive place, a place of stagnation ("swamp") and sterility ("no flour...no rice"): ⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁷ Carter, Martin. *University of Hunger*. Cit. 245.

⁴³⁸ "Talib, Ismail S. *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures, An Introduction*. London & New York: Routledge. 2002. 130.

⁴³⁹ Carter, Martin. "Interview with Martin Carter." Ed. Frank Birbalsingh. *Kyk-Over-Al* 46/47 (Dec. 1995): 225.

⁴⁴⁰ "Re the difference between 'Guyanese creole' and 'creolese', there is really none, although some people, usually Guyanese of European origin and other Guyanese of mixed European and other racial descent, particularly those in the upper strata of the society, often used the word in a derogatory manner, but linguistically speaking, there is no difference between the two." I would like to thank Dr. Jeannette Allsopp for this clarification. Personal communication with Dr. Jeannette Allsopp. E-mail. 4 Mar. 2008. But Holbrook & Holbrook in their survey employ the term throughout the paper, even though they admit a negative consideration of it, arguing that "The urban lay person tended to take a very negative view of literature in Creolese and did not feel that it was something that would be helpful." David J. Holbrook, and Holly A. Holbrook. *Guyanese Creole Survey Report* (SIL International, 2001): 21 28 Jan. 2008 <<http://www.sil.org/silesr/2002/011/SILESR2002-011.pdf>>. "The attitude of the people of Guyana toward Creolese is almost totally negative in terms of its value and usefulness." (*Ibid.*) 20.

⁴⁴¹ All quotations: Brand, Dionne. *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*. Toronto: Williams-Wallace Publishers, 1984. 18. Brand's theme of memory begins like an uncompleted recollection, where those 'more' at the end of the first two lines are doomed to end in the void and desolation of that 'nothing' closing the fourth line. The poem speaks of thieves, robbery, and politics, as though political issues were connected with the historical robbery of the colonial by-products of the West Indies, that is fruit, liquor and gold ("handfuls of fruit, pink fleshed stories / a thief sipping pernod / with

let them take the damn thing
 the esquibo and more
 there is no flour
 and in place with so much swamp
 no rice
 and everybody has been to prison
 and we must write on toilet paper
 or eat it or hush
 and never, never for walter
 no words for walter, no forgiveness
 every bit of silence is full of walter.⁴⁴²

The sterility of the place is reflected by the imprisonment of politically or intellectually involved figures, such as Carter, for “everybody has been to prison”.⁴⁴³ Carter’s own experience clearly outcrops from the poem, with his words written on ‘toilet paper’ and an oxymoric silence full of the memory of ‘walter’, a name erased, without capital letter, the name of Walter Rodney. The lack of memories then becomes a hymn to the memory of a politician killed to silence him, and through him, to the memory of an imprisoned poet, who could not be silenced by his imprisonment and vice versa managed to find the strength to dance on the prison wall, with his Gramscian thought, Dantesque inspiration, Greavesian palette, and a speech of his own.⁴⁴⁴

The aesthetic reasoning coming out of Carter’s work as a Guyanese – and as a Caribbean – poet, is sociological, political, philosophical, artistic, and, of course, poetic. By analyzing the four aspects recognised by Carter in poetry, I have expressed his aesthetics of freedom, also by means of comparison with other poets, artists, or political figures of his own land and from abroad, from the past or contemporary to Carter himself. To me, the originality of Carter’s speech comes from his elaboration of all these heterogeneous figures and thoughts sharing an urge for a social and a political freedom.

moustache and his gold rings”), especially in Guyana considered a geographical chessboard to be divided up smugly: “let them take the damn thing / the esquibo and more”.

⁴⁴² Brand, Dionne. *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*. *Cit.* 18.

⁴⁴³ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁴⁴ “This is what they do with me / Put me in prison, hide me away / cut off the world, cut out the sun / darken the land, blacken the flower / Stifle my breath and hope that i die! / But I laugh at them – / I laugh because I know they cannot kill me / nor kill my thoughts, nor murder what I write. / I am a man living among my people” Carter, Martin. “Letter 1.” *Poems of Succession*. London: New Beacon Books, 1977. 44. “I’ll come alive again / and laugh again and walk out of prison.” *Ibidem*.

Chapter V
Le Roy Clarke (1938 -)
The Poetic Call of the Orishas

Talking about his boyhood, LeRoy Clarke said: “my boyhood was embroiled in constant revelry akin to that of nature in self-adoring fascination”,⁴⁴⁵ and to a great extent nature inspired both his poetry and his paintings. Clarke was born in Gonzales, Belmont, Trinidad in 1938 from Ellen Aberdeen, a Trinidadian of Vincentian origins, and Ebenezer George Clarke.⁴⁴⁶ He dedicated his life to art, theatre, painting, poetry. He was part of a musical group, The Beamers, and was one of the founders of The Trinidad Theatre Workshop.⁴⁴⁷ It is thanks to an art exhibition that he left Trinidad for New York in 1967, where he stayed until 1980, working for three years in the Studio Museum (1972-1974). In 1973, after writing *Fragments of a Spiritual*, he created *Douens*. His collections of poetry are *Woman, Woman* (1971), *Tonight My Black Woman* (1971), *Taste of Endless Fruit, Love Poems and Drawings* (1972) and *Douens: Poems and Drawings* (1976), published in New York,⁴⁴⁸ then came *Eyeing de Word: Love Poem for Etylene* (2004)⁴⁴⁹ and *De Distance Is Here. The El Tucuche Poems 1984-2007* (2007), both published in Trinidad,⁴⁵⁰ and *Secret Insect of a Bird, Deep in me, Wanting to Fly* (2008).⁴⁵¹

He is one of the most important contemporary Caribbean painters and as he clarified in an interview with Tony Hall “I hear that I am one of the best in the world and I kind of agree.”⁴⁵² His poetry and painting are inextricable one from the other and the aim of his drawings is embedded in the essence of his poetry. As regards his painting, he described his poetics geometrically as in a pyramid:

Think of a pyramid, with two feet at the bases. *Fragments of a Spiritual* under the left foot, *Douens* under the right. The pyramid acquires two shoulders, as the poet develops new phases. In *De Maze: A Single Line to My Soul* deals with Man’s choices and the decision to overcome distraction. One of the paintings – *Under It All, I All Right* – shows the poet under stress, beset by drugs and confusion and dreadness, but looking into a clear

⁴⁴⁵ Clarke, LeRoy. “Prologue. Fragments of a Spiritual.” *De Distance Here. The El Tucuche Poems 1984-2007*. T&T: Ka.Ra.Da.Ele.Pa.Aye.Ada. 2007. 46.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 47-9.

⁴⁴⁷ Clarke, Leroy. “A Brief Sketch of Citizen LeRoy Clarke...” Article sent by the poet. E-mail. 4 Nov. 2009.

⁴⁴⁸ Clarke, LeRoy. *Douens: Poems and Drawings*. <s.l.>: KaRaEle; Brooklyn, NY: Distributed by D.A. Reid, 1976.

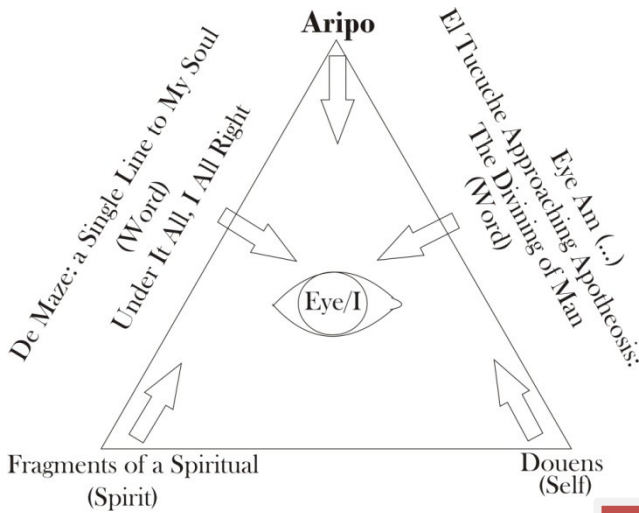
⁴⁴⁹ Clarke, LeRoy. *Eyeing de Word: Love Poem for Etylene*. [Trinidad, W.I. : Ka- Ra- Da- Ele- Pa-Aye-Ada], 2004.

⁴⁵⁰ Henceforward ‘*Taste of Endless Fruit*’ will be referred to with ‘*TOEF*’, ‘*Love Poems and Drawings*’ with ‘*LPAD*’, and ‘*De Distance Is Here*’ with ‘*DDIH*’.

⁴⁵¹ Clarke, LeRoy. *Secret Insect of a Bird, Deep in me, Wanting to Fly*. <s.l.: s.p.>, 2008.

⁴⁵² Clarke, LeRoy. “Interview with LeRoy Clarke.” Ed. Tony Hall. *banyan* Mt. Aripo, Trinidad: August 1985. 25 July 2008 <<http://www.pancaribbean.com/banyan/leroy.htm>>.

pool, which could be his tears, and the reflection is pure, the face is clear. On the opposite shoulder, *Eye Am (...)* *El Tucuche Approaching Apotheosis: The Divining of Man*. Man looks across from El Tucuche from his new height, and sees what is higher still: Aripo. He is stunned by what he sees; a brief ecstatic vision of unity. (...) ⁴⁵³



My interpretation of Clarke's pyramidal poetics

Clarke, LeRoy. "Eye Image I." Oil on Canvas. "Voice of Smouldering Coal. LeRoy Clarke 2009." Catalogue of an art exhibition 7-21 Sept. 2009. Mount Hope, Trinidad: Ka.Ra.Da.Ele.Pa.Aye.Ada, 2004; 2009. 47.

The way I interpret these lines is the following. The first two poetic works, *Fragments of a Spiritual* and *Douens*, stand at the feet of the pyramid, lying at the basis of Clarke's work. They aspire to the apotheosis to Aripo, ⁴⁵⁴ and through poetic and artistic works like *De Maze: a Single Line to My Soul* and *Under It All, I All Right* or *El Tucuche*. Ascending to the spiritual apotheosis of Aripo, Clarke did a self-analysis work, descending into the guts of his own artistic inspiration, and into that "pool, which could be his tears", he found himself, his clear Self, the Eye/I. And even after reaching the top of the pyramid (the "mountain range", *DDIH*, 69), after years of artistic work in his Aripo (Trinidad), he delved into himself, finding that his art allowed him to get closer to God ("*Apotheosis: The Divining of Man*"). In fact, the resulting scheme takes the shape of what has symbolically been associated with God (an eye inside a triangle, since ancient Egypt, especially with Ra), and the Orishas to whom Clarke is close and manifests his closeness through his art. The following line from the epilogue of *DDIH* seems to confirm this union of spirituality, descent into the self, and love for the word: "triangulate of Ra, Ba and Ka, or the making of an objective

⁴⁵³ Clarke, LeRoy. "LeRoy Clarke." The Art Society of Trinidad and Tobago 25 July 2008. <<http://artsocietytt.org/clarkeL.htm>>.

⁴⁵⁴ In fact, Clarke's house and studio is a "twenty-five acre cocoa estate in the Heights of Aripo situated as the tallest peak in the Northern Range" Cf. Clarke, Leroy. "A Brief Sketch of Citizen LeRoy Clarke..." Article sent by the poet. E-mail. 4 Nov. 2009.

understanding of Spirit, Self, and Word” (*DDIH*, 193). When I saw Clarke’s painting “Eye Image I”, it seemed to confirm my previous schematics of his poetics.

V.i. Rhythms on the page, rhythms on the canvas

“l’artiste est souvent un créateur qui transcende les limites, auxquelles l’occidental est habitué, et qui séparent les différentes formes d’art.”
(Patricia Donatien-Yssa)⁴⁵⁵

Clarke’s poetry and painting are inextricably linked, as also the pyramidal scheme represents. Many other poets and painters felt the same indissoluble connection, as happened for three Jamaican poets and painters: Jacqueline Bishop acknowledged: “my writing feeds my visual arts and my visual arts gives me subjects for my writing”;⁴⁵⁶ Earl McKenzie admitted that “in my case, writing is mainly a way of completing the artistic process that begins with painting”;⁴⁵⁷ while Ralph Thompson affirmed that “In painting I strive to capture what I cannot see; in poetry I strive to lose what is no longer needed.”⁴⁵⁸ And also for Clarke poetry is a form of liberation, of release from his internal movements. Those poetic movements, at times fluid and smooth like natural processes (like a river flow, the ebbs and flows of the sea, the flight of a bee or the blooming of a flower), most of the times are extremely fragmented, irregular, chaotic to the outsider, to the consumer of the work of art so that they resemble more the cracks left by an earthquake, the furious blowing of wind, or the inevitable *chévauchement* by a spirit or *loa* in a *houngan / mambo* (voodoo priest/priestess). Yet Clarke claims a rhetoric smoothness and fluidity in his work, which he considers seamless as an epic,⁴⁵⁹ also because its dimensions are determined by his own life span. As Clarke pointed out *De Distance Is Here* is to be considered:

a poem divided into six Shelves or Bands of Grace. Somewhat of an epic in that the length of the poem and the mix of the narrative-lyrical style describing an adventure of Spirit in the throes of Becoming. Mine is overtaken by testimony that strongly leans to an organic play of passion

⁴⁵⁵ “the artist is often a creator who transcends the limits which the Westerner is used to, and which differentiates the different forms of art.” My translation of Donatien-Yssa, Patricia. “Leroy Clarke: The Double Ritual of Poetic and Plastic Creation, a Way to Freedom / Leroy Clarke entre Poésie et Peinture, Chantre de la Spiritualité et de la Liberté.” *La Revue LISA / LISA e-journal* V.2 (2007): 85. 4 May 2009 <<http://www.unicaen.fr/mrsh/lisa/publications/015/05Donatien-Yssa.pdf>>.

⁴⁵⁶ Bishop, Jacqueline. “In Conversation: Writing and Painting.” *Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters* 4.2 (Spring/Summer 2007): 117-121. Eds. Jacqueline Bishop, and Michela Calderaro. New York: New York University. 15 May 2009 <<http://www.nyu.edu/calabash/vol4no2/0402124.pdf>>.

⁴⁵⁷ McKenzie, Earl. “A Philosopher Who also Writes and Paints.” *Ibid.* 124-7.

⁴⁵⁸ Thompson, Ralph. “On Writing and Painting.” *Ibid.* 133-8.

⁴⁵⁹ Cf. Clarke, Leroy. “A Brief Sketch of Citizen LeRoy Clarke...” *Article sent by the poet.* E-mail. 4 Nov. 2009. where he defines himself “the region’s first epic Poet!”

between the elusive boundaries of permanence and impermanence. Witness my “I” ascending in autobiographical statesmanship to the “EYE”. My El Tucuche – The apotheosizing Yes – My Obeah!⁴⁶⁰

His epic embraces his own life: his love, his failures and his achievements, but it cannot be set apart from the Trinidadians’ – or rather the whole Caribbeans’ – society. That is why his rhythms embrace a whole people: the ‘Douens’ are the afflicted Trinidadians,⁴⁶¹ as he writes in part II (*DDIH*): “Laughter slipped behind the trees in their colony of Douens” (105). This socio-aesthetic concern in Clarke’s poem is also recognised by Taylor and Lee:

Douens are the sad, playful characters of Trinidad and Tobago folklore, the children who died before they were baptised and whose feet point backwards. (...) The image of the douens, the lost souls, was powerful: people began to bewail *douendom*. (...) Other figures from the shadows of the folk imagination were recast too: the dehumanising soucouyant, the sucker of blood; the beckoning La Diabliesse, the Mama d’reau [probably a typo for “Mama de l’eau” or “Mama dlo” (French Creole), *NbR*]. It was a radical way of relating old and familiar insights and images to the turbulent society of the late 20th century Caribbean.⁴⁶²

This is why, in the case of Clarke, Brizan spoke of “douenophilia”: “The constellation of conspiracies, the distracting diversity of rhythms, of mimic and mamaguy [a pattern of speech aimed at ridiculing somebody, *NbR*] – all that has led to a vagrant douenophilia [love for ‘douens’, *NbR*], to a neurosis of self-doubt”,⁴⁶³ while Donatien-Yssa underlined the significance that ‘Douens’ have in Clarke’s production:

Chaque série présentée est saluée par la critique: « Douens » (1976), la série de « El Tucuche I, II et III » qui l’occupera de 1980 à 1991 et « Taste of Endless Fruit » (1992), remportent toutes un véritable succès. Parallèlement à sa peinture, Leroy Clarke produit plusieurs recueils de poèmes, dont *Douens*: une œuvre particulièrement significative dans la définition de son parcours spirituel (...); mais aussi le fameux *Taste of the endless fruit*, ainsi que *Eyeing de Word-Love Poems*.⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶⁰ Clarke, LeRoy. *De Distance Is Here. The El Tucuche Poems 1984-2007*. *Cit.* Blurp.

⁴⁶¹ Clarke writes in the epilogue, as also Gilkes acknowledges, that the title of *DDIH* derives from “a dream in which he addressed in the streets of a ‘desolate city’ by a derelict rummaging through garbage bins.” Gilkes, Michael. “A True Space. A commentary on LeRoy Clarke’s ‘De Distance is Here’.” Clarke, LeRoy. *De Distance Here. The El Tucuche Poems 1984-2007*. *Cit.* 20.

⁴⁶² Taylor, Jeremy and Lee, Simon. “Warrior Art.” *BWIA Caribbean Beat. The Magazine of the True Caribbean* 15 (Sept-Oct 1995): 50-56. *Caribbean Beat: Archive (1992-2006)* 5 May 2009 <<http://www.mepublishers.com/online/caribbean-beat/archive/index.php?pid=6001&id=cb15-1-50>>.

⁴⁶³ Brizan, David. “Reflections on “De Distance is Here”.” Clarke, LeRoy. *De Distance Here. The El Tucuche Poems 1984-2007*. *Cit.* 34.

⁴⁶⁴ “Every series presented was welcomed by the critical response: « Douens » (1976), the series of « El Tucuche I, II et III » with which he dealt from 1980 to 1991 and « Taste of Endless Fruit » (1992), were all a great success. At the same time of his paintings, Leroy Clarke wrote many collections of poems, whereof *Douens*: a work particularly significant in the definition of his spiritual journey (...); but also the famous *Taste of the endless fruit*, as

Clarke's "Douens" seem to evoke, somehow, the "people of the pavement", the "men from the nigger yard" by the previous poet, Martin Carter, and depicted also by Stanley Greaves. Another of the very suggestive paintings by Clarke is in fact "Under De Pavement", with its bright colours and phenomenal representation of somebody lying on the pavement, maybe smelt by a dog, it seem to recreate a Douen-like scene.



Clarke, LeRoy. "Under De Pavement." Acrylic on Paper. "Voice of Smouldering Coal. LeRoy Clarke 2009." [Catalogue of an art exhibition 7-21 Sept. 2009](#). Mount Hope, Trinidad: Ka.Ra.Da.Ele.Pa.Aye.Ada, 2004; 2009. 41.

Art and spirituality are embedded in Clarke's poetry as intrinsic stones in that pyramid. In this chapter I will mainly analyze the two collections *Taste of*

Endless Fruit and *De Distance Is Here*. *TOEF* (1974) is a peculiar text in which drawings and poems alternate and compensate each other. There are no chapters and the paging is arbitrarily my own; the collection will be analyzed in paragraph V.III in this chapter. On the other hand, Boyce Davies observed that in *DDIH* (2007) "'De Distance Is Here,' the title poem of this collection is a movement in sixteen segments",⁴⁶⁵ and she roughly summarised them as:

- 1 – death and loss
- 2 – movement from this state
- 3, 4 – search in himself and look for Yemanja
- 5 – Oshun, newness, landscape
- 6 – landscape "It is at once Aripo, at once his art, at once Caribbean beauty, but also the aesthetic vision itself."⁴⁶⁶
- 7 – rebirth

well as *Eying de Word-Love Poems*." My translation of Donatien-Yssa, Patricia. "Leroy Clarke: The Double Ritual of Poetic and Plastic Creation, a Way to Freedom / Leroy Clarke entre Poésie et Peinture, Chantre de la Spiritualité et de la Liberté." *Cit.* 82.

⁴⁶⁵ Boyce Davies, Carole. "Caribbean Griot. LeRoy Clarke's Power of Word and Image." Clarke, LeRoy. *De Distance Here. The El Tucuche Poems 1984-2007*. *Cit.* 14.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 16.

- 8 – awakening
- 9 – climbing
- 10 – part of landscape
- 11 – orgy with nature and women
- 12 – night, go back to childish innocence, naivety of creation
- 13 – disembodied
- 15 – morning again “unstoppable blossoming” (*DDIH*, 180), to find love again
- 16 – peace.⁴⁶⁷

The final part of the book with this title poem echoes dramatically the movements of the whole collection: from an initial sense of “death and loss” (I), to a “movement from this state” (II), a search for himself (III) and a contact with Orishas (IV, V), to a rebirth (VI), and a final awakening (VII, VIII – Epilogue).

V.ii. Haunting presences: the call of the Orishas

De Distance Is Here is divided into six sections and an epilogue. The sections are different in length and the metre employed is usually free verse. Clarke pays less attention to the regularity of the verse or to rhymes than, for instance, Roach or Carter, but the images he evokes constitute the pictorial display of the poems and the sounds and rhythms are absolutely hypnotic, especially when one reads the poems aloud, in their performative evocations.

- I. **Bush Woman – Woman With an Empty Face:** “I said to you / my race / remembers / the taste of bronze drunk hot.” *Brush Fire*, Felix Tchikaya U’Tamsi

The bush woman recalls the ‘bush doctor’, the popular ‘wizard’ or herb healer whose spirituality is recognised to be closer to the spirits and Gods. The woman has no face probably because the poet is in a state of oblivion and cannot remember her face. The epigraph taken from the Congolese poet Felix Tchikaya U’Tamsi claims the poet’s loss of his ‘totem’, and thus of his heritage. Often in this section Clarke mentions a dead woman, probably his poetic muse: “That woman / on whose lips / Rare flowers have blossomed / And died in the unknown / (...) That Angel Black / Beheaded...Can’t remember her name! / (...) I sing Rene Depestre to her...” (56-7). In the

⁴⁶⁷ Cf. *Ibid.* 14-17.

Haitian writer René Depestre's *Hadriana dans Tous mes Rêves*⁴⁶⁸ the main character, Hadriana, dies right after getting married and is 're-born' again after years, telling an incredible story of her own zombification; Clarke's lines make me think of this novel in the trend of magic realism, for the similarity with both the 'Angel Black', the beautiful Creole Hadriana, and her loss of memory and identity, "Beheaded...Can't remember her name!" (56).

In this section, the poetic tone suddenly turns into irreverence and squalor, describing disgusting images crude in their essence ("The air is laden with the smell of blood / Thick with crime and brine of cowards / Who eat and talk shit. Their manifestoes / Are condoms, bursting with pus; belching stupidities / Over the squalor of a urine-burnt mangue.", 57), infertility ("Nothing grows here", 57), decadence ("the enraged commerce of new cannibals", 57), and terror ("Evil howls: gunshots are menacing rain / on ghetto rooftops", 57). All these elements contribute to give a sense of despair and death, as if also the muse of poetry inspired such decay and hopelessness. This muse, which Gilkes recognizes in the Orisha goddess Yemanjá,⁴⁶⁹ is revered with the apparatus of worship dedicated to Yoruba gods:

I place seven drops of rum
On the center of her hardened precincts,
Fill her stubborn ear with Papa Legba. (...)
Ominous belly,⁴⁷⁰ ground of easy murders, her
Drunken blood proclaims her prodigious
Seasons filled with hours of knotted sap. (...)
hatched serpents and caterpillars
From odd copulations in the void.
With my spleen breaking the skin,
I kiss the sand of your lips (58).

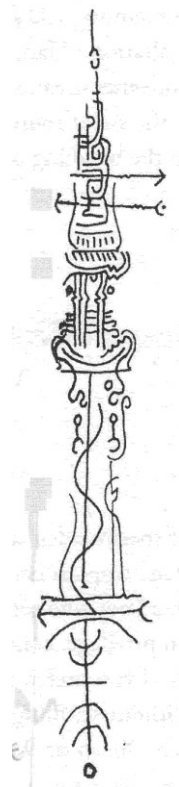
These disgusting images hint at abortion, at unhappy procreation and the voodoo gods are invoked through Legba, the god who stands at the crossroads and assists the believer in taking a path in life; the images are meant to describe a possession, but they also hint at an aspired, preferable death.

⁴⁶⁸ Cf. another reference to this book in Appendix B in this thesis.

⁴⁶⁹ Cf. "A True Space." *DDIH*, 18.

⁴⁷⁰ Cf. "ominous evocations", *DDIH*, 78.

In 1932 Joseph Williams in his *Voodooos and Obeahs* quoted Merwin describing how the combination of “The incessant booming of the drum, the sight and taste of blood, and the great amount of rum drunk cause a religious form of hysteria”.⁴⁷¹ As an Orisha priest, Clarke is devoted to the Yoruba gods, so much so that, as Maya Trotz recalled, he spreads rum at the four corners of the place in which he is about to work or create.⁴⁷² Clarke makes several references to voodoo, as when he says “I pour the spirit of a penis of a / Sacrificed turtle soaked in rum / (...) I band my belly, / I fill my mouth with flour. Silence!” (60): the flour is one of the powders used to draw *vévé* or sacred drawings on the sacred ground of the *hounfort*, the voodoo temple; he is describing a rite and the scene goes on “Open the centre of the primeval fruit of the world, / That I may trace with the silk saliva of sea foam / And the ancient dust of Guinea, his *vévé* / With flour of the teeth of slaves and tusks of / Hedgehogs, I search my fragments for her.” (60) Clarke seems to be describing a rite, and later he mentions one of the sacred animals of *vaudou*: “a fatidic hedge of cocks” (60). In section V of *DDIH* he refers again to a *vévé*: “The skin of the sun is wounded today: / Sides agape with sacred *vévé*, / Flowers of red vinegary hieroglyphs” (131). Some of Clarke’s drawings resemble the ritual *vévés*, as this instance on the right – taken from part IV. Miss Deeka – shows.⁴⁷³



Clarke, LeRoy, drawing, *DDIH*, 117

He makes other references to a *vaudou* rite:

Where is your Father...
 Poisoned him for hurting my Mother
 With his bold-face cavorting other women
 Sauced the obeah of roucou
 And other jaunty stories; Congo Pepper
 Chive and a crushed blade of mussel
 Laced with garlic piercing his heart.
 He dead and gone, a free lunch! (66).

It seems that a man has been punished for his polygamy with an enchanted *vaudou* doll, and the ‘roucou’ reappears later in part V as “so close to you, the roucou / Whose wound is as deep as mine,

⁴⁷¹ Williams, Joseph J. *Voodooos and Obeah: Phases of West India Witchcraft*. New York, Lincoln Mc Veagh Dial Press Inc.: 1932. 87. 11 May 2009 <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/afr/vao/index.htm>>.

⁴⁷² Cf. Clarke, LeRoy. “Interview with LeRoy Clarke.” Ed. Maya Trotz. *Jouvay.com* (Feb. 2004) 25 July 2008 <<http://www.jouvay.com/interviews/leroyclarke.html>>. I recall in Montego Bay, Jamaica, on the way to the maroon village of Accompong, St. Elizabeth, stopping for a floral tribute at Sam Sahrpe’s statue on 8th Dec. 2007 and a Yoruba priestess sprinkled the four corners of the monument, her own feet and her helper’s feet with rum.

⁴⁷³ In some cases, like in this drawing, Clarke’s art seems to correspond to the features listed by Berenson in an artistic “rebellion against classical shapes, for the cult of the distorted, the incongruous, the absurd, and the return to the geometrical.” Berenson, Bernard. *Aesthetics and History*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1954. 264.

weeps.” (123): the roucou is a tropical flower (*Bixa orellana*), from which a red natural colorant is derived, and the flower itself seems to be weeping blood, mirroring the poet’s sorrow.⁴⁷⁴

The poet seems to be in harmony with nature and he seems to have found his perfect dimension in it, hence his decision to move out from the city and retire in the laidback countryside of the heights of Aripo in Trinidad, “Eye have withdrawn, / Eye now live in the Bush, / Far into a mountain range” (69). The “Eye” for Clarke is the “I”, and it comes from the Rastafari beliefs. Other primeval religions seem to fit into his holistic dimension, as when he mentions a house “Roofless, rashly covered in vine. / A shattered dream in a cincture / Of sadness and aborted suicide.” (67), which makes me think of the Greek god Dionysus, god of elation and intoxication, whose symbol is the vine. He mixes classical references with folk Trinidadian stories like “Turns its blood sucking Soucouyant / Toward the succour of your scandalous rites / Your soca spikes the throat of calypso” (72), but he also sounds very irreverent towards established religion as in: “Wet from the devil’s woody bed / (...) Fart on your carved sacraments with my idiot, / Beg God for mercy too...Ha! Ho! Haaa!” (72), and when he claims: “Church and Culture overdressed / Headaches, cloaks edged in laced / (...) Marriages in Heaven with hell!” (73). However, the poet admits the one he has just written is nothing else than a “*Grotesque stanza* [which] *tell of* [his] *inhuman art*” (73) and then, reproducing the sound of a bird, he slides into Creole:

Kiss-kee-dee...Kisskeedee
Kiss meh arse. All ahyu
I am ah man dat luv, luv deep, deep
An’ since ah born
An’ get tuh kno meh self ah tryin
Ah tryin to show it/ Show meh pairance an meh family
How ah lv dem
But dey does luk yuh in yuh face
Dum dum, like yuh mad (74)

Here the poet remembers his childhood and his difficult relationship with his parents. Nonetheless – as Boyce Davies pointed out –, both the affection he feels for them in the “Prologue” to *DDIH* and the innumerable poems speaking of love for women or his arts show that “LeRoy Clarke is such a lover”.⁴⁷⁵ Thus, one of the aesthetic features of his poetry will be identified in ‘love’.

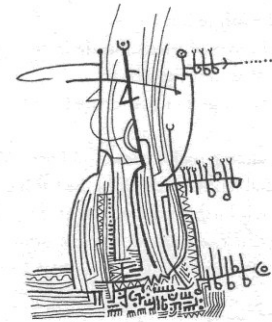
⁴⁷⁴ Cf. the Grenadian poet Omowale David Franklyn who, in the poem “Survey”, wrote: “We know this spill of sunset / to be / bloodstain on the sea / or the splash of *roucou*. / We were forced / to beat our tongues into one / and forge it / to be / both spear / and ploughshare.” My italics. Omowale, David Franklyn. “Survey.” *Tongue of Another Drum: Anthology of Poems*. Mona, Jamaica: A.C.L. Art & Desktop Services, for St. George’s, Grenada: Talented House Publications, 1994. 14.

⁴⁷⁵ Boyce Davies, Carole. “Caribbean Griot. LeRoy Clarke’s Power of Word and Image.” *Cit.* 17.

II. **Secret Insect of a Bird Deep In Me, Wanting to Fly:** “...ever again / it is the rancor of words that guides us / their perfidious smell / (slime made from the intimate friendship of our wound / just as their rage was nothing but their recrystallization / of burning ghettos)” (sentiments and resentments of words), Aimé Césaire

In this second section Clarke expresses his wish to fly away, as if his soul had wings. What guides the poet – as it is well evident from his choice of extreme words and excessively provocative images – is the “sentiments and resentments” that Césaire describes as the “rancor of words” with their “perfidious smell”. The cathartic power of words brings about hope for future birth, as when the poet says: “The fecund belly of woman / Round with seed. Winged nouns of dreams / Whisper in sap-like syllables of fresh scents, / Ovules verged on the spell of futures.” (87).⁴⁷⁶ In this section he also speaks of love not returned, “No one told me about this island, / No one speaks of her imperishable soul” (95). These two archetypes: the island and love seem to be recovered in the drawing taken from this section, that I have chosen to reproduce here: it is uncertain whether it represents a ship with unfurled sails or the profiles of two faces: there are also references to facial features (‘eyes’, ‘smiles’).

The words accompanying the drawing carry a positive semantic chain: (“advent”, “freshly blossomed nuptials”, “cloudless eyes”, “new sandals”, “first time”, “unbound”, “sunburnt islands / Floating parentheses, old talk of archipelagos”) and the poet seems free to follow his dreams and to observe the “cloudless”, “bird-deserted” sky to practice his solitary flight. The island floating is part of an “old talk of archipelagos” and it is sunny ‘sunburnt’. The knowledge of the Eye is the aim of the poet, who insists on this concept for five times: “We *knew* it then in the rushing tide of *knowing* / *Know knowing know...*” (my italics).



Advent of freshly blossomed nuptials in your cloudless eyes,
The fit of my new sandals on the shoulders of the earth!
I see for the first time what I have always dreamed
- Skies, flung in their leisured height of bird-deserted blue
Winds in the silence of spices roving edgeless spaces.
We knew it then in the rushing tide of knowing
Know knowing know...

Unbound from magisterial memory, sunburnt islands
Floating parentheses, old talk of archipelagos
Widen their rings from the sinking stone
- Each cusp, each sigh, an instant of pending civilization

Gains its light in the tide of a rhapsodic recline
Diaspora orbits the echoes of suns, phosphorescent
Obeah of stars, smiles seek our whirling toil,
Ungirding the fettered loins of muted foliage.

Clarke, LeRoy, drawing, *DDIH*, 97

⁴⁷⁶ There is hope for future birth, and a reference to Caribbean superstitious beliefs: “Maljo -blue skies screaming in my head” (94). Even though the term ‘maljo’ (also spelled ‘maldjo’ in Trinidad) commonly means bad luck brought on by an evil eye, it is also the name of a plant, which Jeannette Allsopp calls ‘grudge-pea’. The Caribbean Multilingual Dictionary of Flora, Fauna and Foods in English, French, French Creole and Spanish. Kingston, Jamaica: Arawak Publications, 2003. 35.

III. **At the Bend:** “From Flesh into phantom on the horizontal stone / I was the sole witness to my homecoming...” *Distances*, Christopher Okigbo

The third epigraph, taken from the Nigerian poet Christopher Ifekandu Okigbo, seems to echo the just mentioned section. The poet’s ‘homecoming’ is linked to the coming to terms with his poetic inspiration, as when he says: “Eye was fourteen when She appeared in Blue Basin” (105): his poetic Muse resembles Derek Walcott’s Anna Anadyomene in white and blue, the colours of the Virgin Mary; as Gilkes put it:

Derek’s Muse later appears in the guise of the Greek sea-goddess Anna Anadyomene (the Roman Stella Maris). (...) Clarke’s Muse wears the same archetypal blue and white and she appears to him in her African form as Yemanja, the most beloved of the Yoruba Orishas, who rules the subconscious and creative powers.⁴⁷⁷

Water is seen as a uterine element (*cf.* chapter on Roach in this thesis): “Ah, our female islands of midnight coral and sun! / Ah, blood of fireflies in the amorous uterus of waters!” (106).

Furthermore, Clarke’s Muse resembles Okigbo’s mother Anna Okigbo in *Heavensgate* (1962), the daughter of the priest of the cult of Idoto, the Igbo goddess of oceans, who is identified with the goddess herself.⁴⁷⁸ In his comment to *Heavensgate* Pajalich asserted that “The return to prayer [...] is enriched by the references to the biographical mother, Anna, which add new undertone to the mythical mother, Idoto.”⁴⁷⁹ The threefold association Okigbo-Clarke-Walcott could further be reinforced by Pajalich when he recalled the Latin prayer to the Virgin Mary “Ave, Maris Stella”.⁴⁸⁰

IV. **Miss Deeka:** “The voice that rends and embraces us, / On wakeful nights, like a flower is clasped / And from it pressed a bitter juice...”, Nicolàs Guillén

In section IV of *DDIH* Clarke invokes his primeval Muse, the mother of all muses, Miss or Ma (mother) Deeka, whom he addresses with the words of the Cuban poet Guillén. As Boyce Davies put it:

⁴⁷⁷ Gilkes, Michael. “A True Space. A commentary on LeRoy Clarke’s ‘*De Distance is Here*’.” *Cit.* 18.

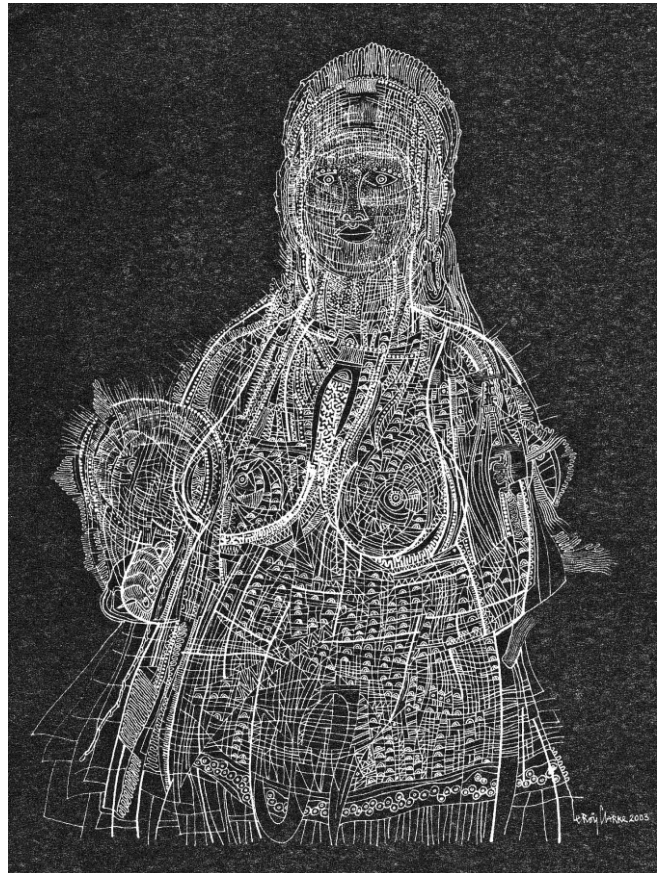
⁴⁷⁸ I would like to thank prof. Pajalich for suggesting this observation.

⁴⁷⁹ “Il ritorno alla preghiera [...] si arricchisce dei riferimenti alla madre biografica, Anna, che aggiungono nuove connotazioni alla madre mitica, Idoto.” (my translation) Pajalich, Armando. *La Musica, la Maschera, la Storia, Saggi Angloafricani 1978-1989*. Venezia: Cafoscarina, 1991. 27.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.* note 8. 16.

For Clarke, Ma Deeka is the mother of those muses, the anchor, the peristyle, the center. It is she who declares his greatness to come, feeds his desire for the best, the most beautiful, and therefore his aesthetic quest; gives him his power. (...) But who is this woman? She is both muse and anchor, but she is also island and continent caught in the squalor of poverty under exploitation. For she is often presented as dead.⁴⁸¹

In this drawing which seems to have been drawn with chalk on black paper, Ma Deeka appears majestic and regal, prosperous as a goddess of the earth. The black and white contrast underlines even more the blackness of the goddess/priestess and the chalk web of lines complies her generous and rotund shapes.



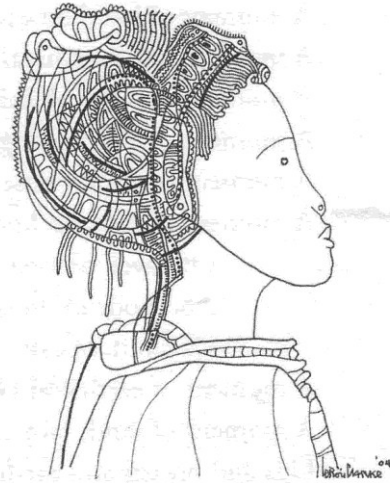
Clarke, LeRoy, drawing, *DDIH*, 110

- V. **Deliquescent Season:** “There is a thread / Reaching round the earth; / knitting scattered children / to whom the same mother / gave birth.”, *Links*, Pearl Eintou Springer

The fifth section epigraph is taken from a Trinidadian poet and political activist friend of Clarke: Pearl Eintou Springer. In the blurb comment to *DDIH* Springer remarked on Clarke’s search for his “African selfhood”. This thread seems to connect the complexity of threads in Ma Deeka’s drawing with the theme of diaspora and this kind of link can also be found in the following poem and drawing:

⁴⁸¹ Boyce Davies, Carole. “Caribbean Griot. LeRoy Clarke’s Power of Word and Image.” *Cit.* 8-9.

Kiss after kiss
 Water into water
 Kiss after kiss
 Air into water
 Kiss after kiss
 Moon into cloud.
 The ease and flow...
 Fire into smoke
 Kiss after kiss
 Arm in arm
 Without promise



Clarke, LeRoy, drawing, *DDIH*, 125

This drawing makes me think of a Japanese geisha or an Aboriginal woman, but on the left the shortness and swiftness of the poem resembles the Japanese haiku, a composition of few lines with evocation of seasons and natural elements. The section deals with natural elements as in the above mentioned lines, as nature exudes sex; the sexual ooze comes also from the purified burning fields (maybe connected to the ritual of the *canboulay*⁴⁸²): “The vapour of consumed rainbows / A flock of humming birds... / Mating!” (127). Clarke’s poetics is further expressed in his concern for “creation and experience”, where the poetic creation will be achieved through a ‘Dantesque’ ascension to the inspirational place ‘El Tucuche’: “We ascend our El Tucuche / Nibbling at an obsequious thunder / To find the taste of that kiss / Between ‘creation and experience’ ” (129).

Later in the section Clarke praises in a litany – or as Boyce-Davies put it, in a sort of “oriki, a Yoruba praise poem or homage to those who dabble in the word”⁴⁸³ – all the most important personalities of the Caribbean, like politicians (Eric Williams, Walter Rodney, Maurice Bishop), poets and writers (Martin Carter, Bob Marley, Earl Lovelace, Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite), calypsonians (The Mighty Shadow, The Lord Kitchener), academics (Maureen Warner-Lewis, Funso Aiyejina, Michael Gilkes) (132-5).

VI. **De Distance Is Here:** “Eye am moving towards something / That awaits me to complete itself... / Perhaps, it will fulfil me!”

⁴⁸² Allsopp defines “canboulay”, deriving from the French “cannes brûlées”, as “The firing of the sugar-canes at night to facilitate harvesting the next day (...) then transferred to mark the opening of CARNIVAL”. Allsopp, Richard. *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. *Cit.* 133.

⁴⁸³ Boyce Davies, Carole. “Caribbean Griot. LeRoy Clarke’s Power of Word and Image.” *Cit.* 6.

In the concluding section, which is titled after the collection, the epigraph is from Clarke himself. The lines seem to linger from a cyclical motion of life, when the God serpent – recalling the ancient Central American Quetzalcoatl – with its coils creates the cyclic life, but here the boa constrictor is inert: “Into the mauve bowels of macajuelian inertia.” (142): the stillness proves to the poet that his dreams are heavy and subjugated to his passions. He confesses his poetics to be harnessed by his dreams: “Alone, and yoked as only a poet can be, / By the heaviness of his dream, Eye turn / Toward the implacable pulse of your heart / Where the sea is perpetually cleansing itself.” (167)

He anticipates the development of an aesthetics of “submarine unity” *à la Brathwaite* linked to the poet’s use of language and interpretation of the “alphabet of islands” in a Walcottian sense of renewing the Caribbean language: “Drilling the open behind / The zero of a misused alphabet of islands, / With what does he seek context, / What splinters suit his contextual / Yearning for desire?” (178). That alphabet of islands could recall Walcott’s alphabet of “sea’s liquid letters”⁴⁸⁴ in the names of the Antilles; in fact, in the poem “Sea Chantey”, Walcott named the Caribbean “litany of islands” as the beads of his “rosary of the archipelagoes” in a sea-song, a sea chantey.⁴⁸⁵ In Walcott’s “Crusoe’s Journal”. Walcott’s prayer is uttered by “a seafaring, Christian”,⁴⁸⁶ who has learned a new language. It is relevant to note that Clarke, instead, in section VI, recalls exactly Walcott’s “Crusoe’s Journal”, “hewing a prose / As odorous as raw wood to the adze” (175).

VII. **Epilogue: Flowering Inscriptions:** “I wanted to talk to you /...../ With visible and palpable words, / Words with weight, flavour and smell, / Like things.”, *Letter of Testimony, Cantata, Octavio Paz*

Walcott’s “odorous prose” is evoked in the epilogue, where the verse gives pace to a free flow of prose, and the “boundless archipelagoes” just mentioned corroborate the poet’s dreams until “A supreme moment of contemplation emerges, individuation of presence brings distinction to its triangulate of Ra, Ba and Ka, or the making of an objective understanding of Spirit, Self, and Word that is with us and brings us joy!” (193). This triangulation recalls the three vertexes of the pyramid, because the symbol of the triangle containing the eye was one of the symbol of the Egyptian God Ra, and because the combination of “Spirit, Self, and Word” is the constitutive essence of Clarke’s work. At the end of the epilogue, the poet signs “The Elder, Chief Ifà Ojé Won Yomi Abiodun.

⁴⁸⁴ Walcott, Derek. “A Sea-Chantey.” *In a Green Night*. (1962) *Collected Poems*. *Cit.* 45.

⁴⁸⁵ Both quotations. *Ibid.* 46.

⁴⁸⁶ Walcott, Derek. “Crusoe’s Journal.” *The Castaway and Other Poems*. (1965). *Collected Poems*. *Cit.* 93.

LeRoy Clarke 29 May 2006” (196). Gilkes recognised in this joy the awe that Clarke reserves to the poetic Muse: “LeRoy Clarke, in his adoration of the Muse, of ‘these female islands’ is demonstrating what Robert Graves once called the sacred duty of all genuine poets: to sing the praises of the Muse ‘and the island over which she rules’.”⁴⁸⁷

In order to find his ‘Eye’, his Muse, Clarke decided to move to a laidback location, in Aripo, where he is much in contact with nature and feels the gods even closer to him, his creations, and his creative inspiration. Most of the time the impression that I gather from the poems is a sense of possession: the poet seems in the grip of an existential delirium, as if he had suicidal impulses to expel outside of himself, as if his suffering was a burden too big to be borne, and his life experiences brought him to scream on the page the sorrow of a whole people. In this instance, Clarke’s poetry assumes a sociological depth and intrinsically redeems the grief of the Middle Passage, of the centuries of slavery: the female black body, often compared to a flower blooming, is dismembered into several pieces (as were the Egyptian god Osiris and the Greek god Dionysus) and after that becomes the object of an insane sexual appetite.

The rhythms perceived on the page are comparable to the possession or *chévauchement* by a *vaudou* spirit, a *loa*, when the priest enters in a mystical trance and is the vector of communication – through his body and spirit – between this and the Other World. Clarke’s mysticism is so profound that it achieves the deep, hidden coils of human subconscious, echoing what Rohlehr called (in the case of Shake Keane’s “Calypso Dancers” and “Shaker Funeral”) the “descent into the inferno of the Self”.⁴⁸⁸ The rhythms he perceives in his own poetry are drawn from jazz, from calypso, and most of all from T&T Carnival. The Bacchanal music and atmosphere of Carnival create the perfect background for his lyrics and drawings, where reverberations of confusion and mixed emotions render the passionate rhythms of Trinidad.

⁴⁸⁷ Gilkes, Michael. “A True Space. A commentary on LeRoy Clarke’s ‘*De Distance Is Here*’.” *Cit.* 25.

⁴⁸⁸ Rohlehr, Gordon. “The Problem of the Problem of Form. The Idea of an Aesthetic Continuum and Aesthetic Code-switching in West Indian Literature.” (1985) *The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays*. *Cit.* 6. Rohlehr comments on the poem “Shaker Funeral” as taken from Keane’s *L’Oubli*. Barbados: Advocate Press, 1950.

V.iii. The universals of the Caribbean sociological aesthetics of love according to Clarke

V.iii.i. Sociological aesthetics of suffering

Clarke's aesthetics is linked to political fervour, as is the case with his friend and colleague Eintou Springer, but also to the spirituality which emerges from his poems, and which expresses the suffering of both the *Douens* and the poet himself. As Donatien Yssa put it: "Le combat politique, pas plus que la spiritualité ne sont à proprement parler les thématiques de l'expression picturale et poétique de Leroy Clarke. Mais ces deux aspects définissent son esthétique et apportent du sens à son œuvre."⁴⁸⁹ Donatien-Yssa recognised in this aesthetic dimension a space of suffering and violence, which, according to her theory of the "aesthetics of the *blès*", is a relic of the centuries of slavery and the suffering provoked by the Middle Passage historical stigma:

selon l'étude de l'esthétique du contre-exotisme que René Ménéil développe dans son ouvrage *Antilles déjà jadis* (1999), rendre cette dimension de la souffrance et de l'excès manifeste dans cette région où « l'écrivain antillais ne peut écrire [...] sans que son écriture soit démesurée, excessive, bref, sans que la parole soit un cri et le style une violence» (René MÉNIL, *Antilles déjà jadis*, Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1999, 223.)⁴⁹⁰

She continued explaining her aesthetic theory, a theory which she has developed by studying many Caribbean poets and painters, and which underlines a common understanding of artists in the region, so much so that contemporary painting influences writing and vice versa, as is the case with Clarke. Hers is an aesthetic of suffering, a pain which has been developing during the centuries of colonization in the Caribbean and which developed into a melancholy and emotive instability:

l'élément essentiel qui organise cette double production en une entité unique est l'esthétique. L'esthétique personnelle que le peintre-poète développe depuis près de quarante ans, s'inscrit parfaitement dans la tendance qui s'est amorcée depuis une vingtaine d'années dans la Caraïbe avec l'avènement de la peinture contemporaine. Cependant, cette esthétique trouve ses racines dans une recherche poétique qui est bien plus ancienne car les oeuvres des grands poètes caribéens datent des années 1940, voire 1930. L'esthétique caribéenne n'a jamais été définie en tant que telle, mais des grands poètes

⁴⁸⁹ "Neither the political fight, nor than spirituality are – to properly define – the themes of Leroy Clarke's pictorial and poetic expression. But these two aspects define his aesthetics and give meaning to his work." My translation of Donatien-Yssa, Patricia. "Leroy Clarke: The Double Ritual of Poetic and Plastic Creation, a Way to Freedom / Leroy Clarke entre Poésie et Peinture, Chantre de la Spiritualité et de la Liberté." *Cit.* 84.

⁴⁹⁰ "According to the study of the aesthetics of the counter-exotism that René Ménéil developed in his work *Antilles déjà jadis* (1999), renders this dimension of suffering and of excess shows in this region where «the Antillean writer cannot write [...] without his writing being immoderate, excessive, brief, without his word being a scream and his style one of violence» (René MÉNIL, *Antilles déjà jadis*, Paris: Jean-Michel Place, 1999, 223.)" My translation of *Ibid.* 87.

initiateurs aux jeunes artistes plasticiens contemporains, on peut retrouver et classer un certain nombre de principes autour desquels la conceptualisation d'une théorie devient possible. Après avoir mené une étude approfondie de l'oeuvre de plusieurs écrivains, poètes et peintres, aux rangs desquels figure Leroy Clarke, j'ai pu discerner plusieurs principes qui définissent ce que j'ai nommé l'esthétique de la blès⁴⁹¹

Clarke himself admitted "Eye write; Eye paint; Eye sing! Eye confess to be possessed by a malady"⁴⁹². To express this sense of violence derived from suffering, Clarke employs all the possible ways he knows, mingling different styles and senses in his art: he employs very consciously synaesthesia,⁴⁹³ so that both in his poetry and in his paintings he proceeds by combined and unique 'rhythms', accurately placed on the page or on the canvas. When Tony Hall told him that some lines in his canvases resembled 'squiggles', he replied offended: "In the first place for you to look at what I might call the signature piece of my most important work, El Tucuche, and use a term like 'squiggles'... (...) These are not squiggles, we're talking here about rhythms."⁴⁹⁴

Clarke's rhythms follow the rhythms of nature, as Brathwaite claimed in *History of the Voice* that Caribbean poets have to express the fury of the hurricane. In section IV Clarke sings his litany of islands as Walcott did in "Sea Chantey", aiming at an aesthetic unity among the islands:

An archipelago honed to a fine art of islands
On random vices of stranded currents.
Her ancient brow replete with sounding rhythms

⁴⁹¹ "the essential element which organises this double production in a unique entity is aesthetics. The personal aesthetics which the painter-poet has developed for approximately forty years, fuses perfectly with the tendency which began about twenty years before in the Caribbean with the advent of contemporary painting. However, this aesthetics finds its roots in a poetic research which is much older because the works of great Caribbean poets date back to the 1940s, or even 1930s. Caribbean aesthetics has never been defined as such, but in some great poets predecessors of the young contemporary plastic artist, we can find and classify a certain number of principles around which the conceptualisation of a theory becomes possible. After having led an in-depth study of the work of many writers, poets and painters, at the levels of which Leroy Clarke features, I could detect several principles which define what I have named the aesthetics of the « blès »" My translation of *Ibid.* 89. The 'blès' is described by the author as "The « blès » is a disease not recognised by Western medicine, which, in the Caribbean, essentially affects the young subjects. Being a psychosomatic or imaginary affection, it can take the shape of physical disorders, but it can also affect the mental functions of the individual and can manifest itself as confusion from progressing from an inconsequential melancholy to a serious disturbance which alters the physical and mental health of the subject. This disease would have developed over the course of four centuries of slavery and colonisation, as a result of the suffering endured by successive generations of Caribbeans." My translation of "La blès est une maladie non reconnue par la médecine occidentale, qui, dans la Caraïbe, touche essentiellement les jeunes sujets. Affection psychosomatique ou imaginaire, elle peut prendre la forme de désordres physiques, mais elle peut également atteindre les fonctions mentales de l'individu et se manifester sous forme de confusions allant d'une mélancolie sans conséquence jusqu'à des troubles graves altérant la santé physique et mentale du sujet. Cette affection se serait développée au cours des quatre siècles d'esclavage et de colonisation, suite aux souffrances endurées par les générations successives de Caribéens." *Ibid.* note 14.

⁴⁹² Cf. Clarke, LeRoy. "Voice of a Smouldering Coal..." 10 July 2009. [Article sent by the poet](#). E-mail. 4 Nov. 2009.

⁴⁹³ Cf. "The colour of sound, the taste of a touch, the echo of flavours, made moist between the eyelashes of fingers" *Ibidem*.

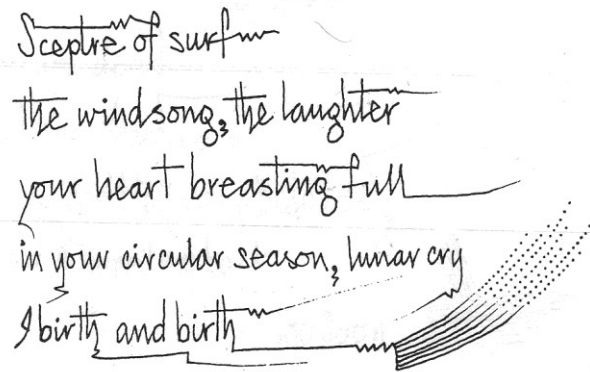
⁴⁹⁴ Clarke, LeRoy. "Interview with LeRoy Clarke." Ed. Tony Hall. *Cit.*

Repeat images of time's un-satiating rant
 Making visible the rattle of wind on galvanized roofs,
 The hurricane's ellipsoidal fury of horses
 Out grows its destination of original sin,
 Fascinates, a wake of blood-wrought jewels,
 Her Caribbean: Cuba, Jamaica, Bermuda, St. Kitts,
 Haiti, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines
 Antigua, St. Croix, The Caymans, St. Marteens
 Dominica, Martinique, Guadalupe, St. Lucia
 The Bahamas, Montserrat, a delirious
 Trinidad and Tobago, gardens growing spectral
 (...) To the breaking of passionate syllables" (117-8)

According to Boyce Davies, who recognised in Clarke some features of the African *griot*, his versatility in arts is a common aesthetic feature to a lot of Caribbean artists: "For creativity and aesthetic sensibility in the best of our artists have always sought more than one mode of expression".⁴⁹⁵ His aesthetics becomes a sociological urge to express the suffering and the passion of his people.

V.iii.ii. Aesthetics of love: women

Those rhythms he writes and paints are also rhythms of love: "People say you can't paint sound or you can't paint love, but I don't think so...I want to be conscious about the language of design...one of my mentors is Wilson Harris".⁴⁹⁶ The idea of rhythms as wave, as circularity, refers to the moon, which moves the sea-tides, and to the wind which moves the waves: their impact on the surf is like a cycle of cry and laughter, a windsong which commands the surfs like a sceptre. All of this can be seen in the following poem/drawing from *Taste of Endless Fruit*: a woman is happy, her breast is full and brings prosperity, and the circularity of the flow of the sea wave – as well as of her menses – carries the possibilities of birth.



Clarke, Leroy, drawing, *TOEF*, 3

⁴⁹⁵ Boyce Davies, Carole. "Caribbean Griot. LeRoy Clarke's Power of Word and Image." *Cit.* 1-2.

⁴⁹⁶ Clarke, LeRoy. "Interview with LeRoy Clarke." Ed. Maya Trotz. [Jouvay.com](http://www.jouvay.com) (Feb. 2004) 25 July 2008 <<http://www.jouvay.com/interviews/leroyclarke.html>>

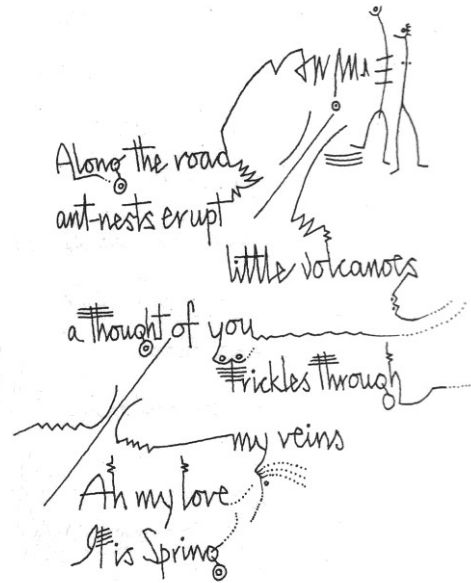
The circularity of natural elements and spirituality are present when he observes a “voodoo priestess descending / a waterfall” (29), which embodies the power of the water and of snakes writhing, whose encircling eyes are powerful “in your charms / I am drunk / under your gaze.” (29) Clarke’s aesthetics of love for women is evident in *TOEF*, in which the forbidden fruit with an endless taste is basically love: “...and when we had loved, / we lay blistered in sweet juices / of fermenting fruit...” (13). He often compares woman to a mango tree: “Woman / The tall mango tree / that fills the yard / of my longing / Please take me” (7): the poetic voice looks for nourishment from the fruit of love, and the woman is compared to a mango tree, an association (love-fruits or mango fruits in particular) which will reappear in McKenzie’s poetry. The poet seems to identify himself with the poetic persona: “When in a world of dawns stifled / in the smog of indifference, you appear / I am a child.. / know this woman / I stride with new vigour” (10). This reminds me of the figure of the woman compared to a samaan tree in the Trinidadian writer’s Dionne Brand’s novel *In Another Place, Not Here*, in which Dina Georgis noted that the main character (Elizete)’s attachment to this tree as a mother or ancestral foremother could stand for her recognised Caribbean hybridization of the culture and the land.⁴⁹⁷ Clarke’s woman is animals, is trees, is fruits: “Woman of gazelle-grace and body / smooth breadfruit trees / (...) preserve your sap for the heat / of my blade / I bring you a thousand kiss-kee-dees / for your hair...” (28), and the poem is also a woman: “the poem is woman / in her beginning and end / of all the earth. / Always woman / earth / the womb-door giving / receiving / the limbo of life’s dance / before and after the beginning / and the end / her lips / the kiss, / Eucharistic, / vaginal...” (34).

Love for a woman is controversial and often brings about sourness: “It burns... / It burns... / the cane is wet / with the molasses of my youth.. / the black smoke rising / with the lone calling / cock’s comb... / crackling wounds / you made...” (9): the wound inferred by the woman is like a heart burning, is *canboulay*, the ritual linked to the Emancipation process and to the beginning of Carnival, especially in Trinidad, evoked in part V of *DDIH*: “Ah, the oestrous aromas, credulously bright / At the shore of roots / The red rust smells of burning cane / The infant sighs of boiling green!” (128). The *cannes brûlées* symbolize also the burning for rebirth, like for the mythological phoenix, and the power which can be drawn from fire: “I whispered to God / O season rebirth / Taste of endless fruit / Be mine...” (4).⁴⁹⁸

⁴⁹⁷ Georgis also pointed out that this tree was transplanted from India and has an Arabic etymology recalling the act of hearing, in fact “In Arabic, Samaan is a common forename that originates from the word *samaa*, which means to listen”. Georgis, Dina. “Mother Nations and the Persistence of ‘Not Here’.” *Canadian Women’s Studies/Le Cahiers de la Femme* 20.2 (Summer 2000): 30. Another word deriving from Arabic seems to be “coffle” (in Brand’s *No Language Is Neutral*, 43), which carries in itself the difficult march of caravans of slaves across the desert.

⁴⁹⁸ Cf. “Fire is life itself.” Clarke, LeRoy. “Voice of a Smouldering Coal...” 10 July 2009. Article sent by the poet. E-mail. 4 Nov. 2009.

The love for a woman burns in Clarke like the bubbling fire of a volcano, as he mingles natural elements to feel one with nature. In the drawing on the right, two people are walking across trickling water, running down the page. “Along the road” a natural accident captures the attention of the poet, and the vision of two ant nests erupting like “little volcanoes” makes him think of the woman’s breasts, while a diagonal line following the poem down the page from up on the right to down on the left reproduces the flow of his thoughts trickling down the page like water, towards “love” and rebirth, as supported by the final statement: “it is spring”.



Clarke, Leroy, drawing, *TOEF*, 8

V.iii.iii. Language

In Part I of *DDIH*, Clarke utilizes irreverent, sarcastic, crude, coarse language, as in: “Haul yuh motherarse / No joke, Pinhead I mean it, / I gorn-gorn gorn / Gorn no lie nuh, gorn (...) / Like ah grain of corn in fowl yard” (75). This last proverb was present also in Shake Keane’s *Once a Week With Water*, standing for the poet who throws words as corn on the yard to wait for somebody to pick them up. Clarke’s language is often obstreperous and excessive: “Disgruntled odours of mamaguy. Blasphemous tongues” (79, Part I of *DDIH*), often aimed at ridicule the subjects he considers and targeted at provoking reactions as when he ‘spits out’ ‘mamaguy’, described in *TOEF* in Creole: “dem eyes / dem cheeks / all dem hips / rollin’ an’ rolling / an’ dem breasts / jumping up / an’ dong” (16). As Gilkes observed: “The poetry is at times hectoring and quarrelsome, sometimes elegiac and withdrawn, reflecting perhaps the ‘hard knock’ and disappointments of that early beginning (...) The language can occasionally descend to crude invective”,⁴⁹⁹ as when in section VI of *DDIH* he speaks “On the funeral flanges of a jamette⁵⁰⁰ light” (151), where the ‘jamette’ is the term used for a prostitute.

⁴⁹⁹ Gilkes, Michael. “A True Space. A commentary on LeRoy Clarke’s ‘*De Distance is Here*’.” *Cit.* 22.

⁵⁰⁰ Cf. Richard Allsopp, the term ‘jamette’ (“Trinidadian spelling of ‘dja(n)mèt’”, *cfr.* R. Allsopp, *cit.*, p. 311) is often spelled as ‘dja(n)mèt’, indicated by Allsopp as meaning “bad woman”, “[Fr. Cr., said to be derived < French ‘diamètre’, ‘diameter’, in the sense of a line dividing the upper from the lower half of the social circle.”] *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage. Cit.* 194.

In *DDIH* Clarke gives power to the words, and meaning to the language born out of suffering and slavery, through “The healing words of wounds / Refreshed words of distances” (135). This healing power is given by the belief that poetry, music, and painting are intimately connected and that this link is one of the most important features of Brathwaite’s “submarine unity”, especially if we agree with Boyce Davies that: “LeRoy Clarke sees his poetry and his art, like jazz, like steelband music, a proliferation of images, with numerous ‘subterranean tones,’ as articulated by Wilson Harris”.⁵⁰¹ Boyce-Davies also sustained how this subconscious link raised him to be a ‘*griot*’ of the word:

LeRoy Clarke’s poetry is perhaps one of the best interpreters of his paintings, the best entrée into his vision, the most poignant comprehender of contemporary Caribbean experience. (...) Clarke has his own concept for what he is doing, “obeahing the word,” a kind of “alchemy of the word” which he also calls “wordchemy” (Conversation in Aripo, April 14, 2007).⁵⁰²

Clarke’s invocation of Orisha/voodoo gods expresses this “wordchemy”: “Eshu’s Black star in the midst / Of a four corner traffic. / Ogun’s red and yellow eyes; / Obatala’s white skies; / Shango’s Red and white dice of thunder; / Oshun’s yellow combs and mirrors; / Yemanjá’s Blue and white bosom.”⁵⁰³ (135). The religious / poetic Muse reveals herself to him to allow the poet, in his turn, to reveal to himself, defining his aesthetic commitment: “Before you / Yemaha / I am--- / the land unveiling” (6). Donatien-Yssa recognised in this revelation a triple effect: a sociological type of aesthetics, an individual one, and a third one which leads as a benchmark to the key stones of a Caribbean aesthetics:

L’étude de l’œuvre duelle de Leroy Clarke montre que sa thématique et son objectif ultime peuvent être perçus selon trois angles. Premièrement, révéler la conscience collective en utilisant l’art comme un miroir, deuxièmement, cheminer vers un accomplissement individuel et collectif, et troisièmement, définir une esthétique caribéenne qui permette à chacun de s’épanouir.⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰¹ Boyce Davies, Carole. “Caribbean Griot. LeRoy Clarke’s Power of Word and Image.” *Cit.* 13.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.* 5.

⁵⁰³ *Cf.* Appendix B to this thesis.

⁵⁰⁴ “The study of the duality of Leroy Clarke’s work shows that his themes and his ultimate objective can be perceived from three angles. Firstly, to reveal the collective conscience in using art as a mirror; secondly, to progress towards an individual and collective achievement; and finally, to define a Caribbean aesthetics which allows everybody to fulfil their potential.” My translation of Donatien-Yssa, Patricia. “Leroy Clarke: The Double Ritual of Poetic and Plastic Creation, a Way to Freedom / Leroy Clarke entre Poésie et Peinture, Chantre de la Spiritualité et de la Liberté.” *Cit.* 86.

Clarke's work shows to other Caribbean poets and writers how to overcome the historical and social issues through art and how to come to terms with their own aesthetics, making their own, and Caribbean, art blossom.

Chapter VI
Earl McKenzie (1943 -)
Creole in McKenzie's Poetry: Blending Three Arts into One

When I was trying to contact St. Hope Earl McKenzie, I knew he was a poet. The first time I met him, he was in his office as professor of philosophy in literature at UWI, Mona Campus. When I read his second collection of poems, with one of his own paintings on the front cover, I realized he was also a painter.⁵⁰⁵ Before a reading from *A Poet's House* in June 2006, he stated: "This book is the nearest I have come to it (...) The cover is my painting, the writing is my poetry and a lot of the poems are very philosophical."⁵⁰⁶

So, at one point in his life, as he suspected, following his natural inclinations, the three arts – painting, philosophy, and poetry – had come together. If one looks at a painting like "Graffiti" or "Artefact", one has to read the proverbs in Creole which are an integral part of the paintings, just as when one reads his "Coconut Alphabet" one has to know that there is a whole series of paintings titled "Coconut Series", which was painted almost at the same time that the poems were written. So in a reading and analysis of his poetry, neither art nor philosophy can be excluded, because they contribute to rendering McKenzie as a full-fledged artist, as much as Derek Walcott, LeRoy Clarke, or the Haitians Petion Savain and Frankétienne, just to name a few. He does not employ much Creole in his poetry, but I feel that his *nation language* is embedded in his conception of art and of the world in philosophical terms, so that his poetry oozes with it.

McKenzie published two collections of short stories, *A Boy Named Ossie* (1991) and *Two Roads To Mount Joyful* (1992), and three collections of poetry, *Against Linearity* (1992), *A Poet's House* (2005), and *Almond Leaf* (2008).⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁵ After seeing a shot from the same painting which McKenzie showed to me, I realized that the front cover of his book was the specular or mirror image of the shot. Asking him about this coincidence, he answered: "I discovered only recently, from looking closely at my signatures, that several of the paintings in the coconut series were incorrectly printed as mirror images, so I got correct prints made, one of which you saw. The art historians will have a lot of fun with this, not to mention the critics! The prints were made from the slides which the photographer left before he died, and I did not take enough care to make sure that the commercial photographers printed them correctly. In any case those paintings were done in the 1960s, and since I have not seen most of the originals since then they would not be fresh in my mind. But I questioned one, which led me to check the signatures. I must say you are very observant, and I am grateful for those very sharp eyes of yours. So there is no deep artistic meaning behind the mirror image. Just as Picasso's famous Blue Period was perhaps the result of his running out of paint!" Personal communication with the poet. 5 Feb. 2008.

⁵⁰⁶ Cooke, Mel. "Poetry, Painting, Philosophy Fuse in Earl McKenzie's Work." E-article. *Jamaica Gleaner* (9 June, 2006) 12 Feb. 2008 <<http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20060609/ent/ent5.html>>.

⁵⁰⁷ Henceforward '*Against Linearity*' will be referred to with '*AL*', '*A Poet's House*' with '*APH*', and '*Almond Leaf*' with '*AL*'.

VI.i. The poetics of the five Ps: Philosophy, Painting, Poetry, Prose-Fiction, and Pedagogy⁵⁰⁸

As an all-round artist, McKenzie makes me think of those Greek artists who could easily converse in philosophy, art, and poetry and switch from one subject to another mastering them all. I will analyse the poetry of McKenzie focusing partly on folklore, partly on art, as when he describes ordinary things and elevates them to poetic word. His work on art is imbued, I think, with an aesthetic value, and, as Roland Barthes said, the act of writing is permeated with an artistic value, almost with a social role and

“to express” according to more beautiful rules, more social than those of conversation, which means to project one’s inner thoughts outward, thoughts which were originated and were nourished by the Spirit, a word which has been socialised by the evidence of its own rule.⁵⁰⁹

The collection *Against Linearity* contains a witty sociological comment on Jamaican society, as when he explains the title poem (“Against Linearity”), by saying that Jamaicans reject the straight, simple lines and are more inclined towards complexity: “We reject straight line. / (...) / for knotty is the way / to Jah and Zion.” and “Our rebels idolise Knotty Dread / knotty is the way / to Jah and Zion.” (*AL*, 57). Edward Baugh remarked on this collection as follows:

McKenzie, in *Against Linearity*, 1992, arrests with a luminiscently plain speech and a profound simplicity. He does achieve what is often said to be one function of poetry – to make us see the commonplace with fresh eyes and notice the wonder in what we had always looked at but never seen.⁵¹⁰

In the poem “Burglar Bars” (*AL*) McKenzie comments on a contemporary Jamaican issue: houses are armed with iron bars to protect them from burglars, but in the poem they achieve positive connotations, since they protect us from evil “Burglar bars have become an art form / In our nervous land. / The masters of this renaissance of dread, / (...) Designing patterns of steel, / Elegant geometries / And shapes of plants and animals / (...) / But *metal ornaments against evil*, / Visual harmonies for



McKenzie, Earl, *Comments Against Evil*

⁵⁰⁸ Only the first three arts will be analyzed in this paragraph.

⁵⁰⁹ My translation of ““esprimersi” secondo regole più belle, dunque più sociali, di quelle della conversazione, cioè proiettare al di fuori di un pensiero interiore, scaturito già tutto attrezzato dallo Spirito, una parola socializzata dalla stessa evidenza della sua convenzione.” Roland Barthes. “Esiste una Scrittura Poetica.” *Il Grado Zero della Scrittura*. Torino: Einaudi, 1982. 32. Or. pub *Le Degré Zéro de l’Ecriture*. Paris: Seuil, 1953.

⁵¹⁰ Baugh, Edward. “A History of Poetry.” *Cit.* 276.



the burglar's eyes, / And sculpted elegance for his philistine hands. / Only cold metallic webs of beauty / Stand *between us and the night*." (my italics, 41). Cooke commented on the painting displayed at the 20 Oct. 2009 art exhibition in the Philip Sherlock Centre for Creative Arts at U.W.I, Jamaica, as follows: "'Burglar Bars' was written when he returned to Jamaica and he was struck by the proliferation of the metal barriers, one house

McKenzie, Earl, *Between Us and the Night*

in Mandeville completely covered – even the roof. In that poem, McKenzie described the bars as "tombs for our freedom".⁵¹¹ His

paintings (here reproduced) depict two lines of the poem itself and express a sense of gothic beauty but also of suspended menace, like the ornaments of Gothic gargoyles (in the poem he even mentions "cathedrals with stained glass windows", 41), yet they support a protection from outer menaces with which he recognizes as aesthetic beauty and meaning to them. The lines "For a price they build pretty cages for our privacy / And tombs for our freedom." (41) display the preposition 'for' three times: in the first case it means "at a certain price", in the second "in favour of", and in the third "against", burglar bars are cages which entrap people in their own houses, "cold metallic webs of beauty", "renaissance of dread" (both 41), where the poet hints at the craft of ancient masters ("Work in studios with apprentices", 41) shaping iron and creating remarkable pieces of art.

VI.ii. Nature and spiritual reconciliation with the universe

McKenzie's poetry is deeply rooted in nature, especially in rural Jamaica, where the poet was born and bred. In *Against Linearity*, he makes many references to nature in the poems "Never-



McKenzie, Earl, *The Monkey Jar and the Pouf*

die Trees Are Blossoming", "A Love of Hills and Plains", "The Old Cotton Trees Are Dying", "Day of the Pouf" (*APH*), where the latter seems to create a perfect environment in which to visualize his Creole painting "The Monkey Jar and the Pouf": "in the glory shade / of a pouf aflame with yellow flowers" (*APH*, 18): the "monkey" in the Caribbean sense of the word is a water-jug made of earthenware.

As to nature, and the climatic phenomena in particular, it may be worth quoting what Brathwaite wrote about this in the *History of the Voice* (1984): "we are more conscious (in terms of sensibility) of the falling of snow, [...] than of the force of the

⁵¹¹ Cooke, Mel. "'A Bluebird Named Poetry' Takes Flight." *The Gleaner*. (26 Oct. 2009) Jamaica, W.I.: Gleaner Company Ltd. Online version. 27 Oct. 2009 <<http://www.jamaica-gleaner.com/gleaner/20091026/ent/ent3.html#>>.

hurricanes which take place every year”.⁵¹² As a matter of fact, not many poets wrote about hurricanes before Brathwaite’s “Shar: Hurricane Poem” (1991). Many poets felt urged by Brathwaite’s observation, and developed poems on the power of the hurricane, as the Jamaican Ralph Thompson did with “Rain” and “Hurricane” in *The Denting of a Wave* (1992), in which he designated water as “democratic”,⁵¹³ and he himself is the “eye / of the hurricane”.⁵¹⁴ Another younger Jamaican poet, Joan Andrea Hutchinson, dealt ironically with the theme of the hurricane, the 2004 hurricane Ivan, in “Ivan Lef Mi Inna Grief” (*Meck Me Tell Yuh*, 2004).⁵¹⁵ Earl McKenzie developed the subject of the hurricane in “After the Hurricane, the Moon” (*Against Linearity*, 1992), a contemplation of the destruction brought by the hurricane, almost accordingly to Walcott’s sense of “nature’s indifference”,⁵¹⁶ and in “The Hurricane Tables” (*A Poet’s House*, 2005): with his controlled lines he is able to convey the aftermath of a hurricane.⁵¹⁷

The latest hurricane in Jamaica occurred in September 2008: I contacted Prof. McKenzie to find out if he was all right and if Gustav left a disaster after its passage. In fact in April 2009 he asked me for information about the earthquake that hit Italy; this was my reply:

As a great poet said:

“I found myself
surprisingly calm,
observed the rocking, now darkened
office
as if from a distance.
(...)
Because we could have died together
we may become friends.”⁵¹⁸

Despite the surprise Prof. McKenzie experienced in seeing his lines quoted, the lines are mostly iambs, and the language is very simple but it describes a kind of serenity in facing life’s problems. Another natural phenomenon which was described by many Caribbean poets is earthquakes, as Earl McKenzie did in “Earthquake” (*A Poet’s House*, 2005): the poet controls his nerves even if he is

⁵¹² Brathwaite, Kamau. *History of the Voice. The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*. *Cit.* 8.

⁵¹³ Thompson, Ralph. “Rain.” *The Denting of a Wave*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1992. 16.

⁵¹⁴ Thompson, Ralph. “Hurricane.” *Ibid.* 17.

⁵¹⁵ Cf. chapter on Hutchinson in this thesis.

⁵¹⁶ McKenzie, Earl. “After the Hurricane, the Moon.” *Against Linearity*. *Cit.* 45.

⁵¹⁷ Similarly, two themes which are treated by the Jamaican-born (but living in Toronto) Olive Senior are the hurricane and the moon. She deals with four “Hurricane Stories”: 1903, 1944, 1951, 1988 in *Gardening in the Tropics* (2005) and develops a kind of history of Jamaica through this climatic phenomenon, and with “Hurricanes” in *Shell* (2007), where hurricanes are said to “expose these empty shelves in our lives” (Senior, Olive. *Shell*. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2007. 26).

⁵¹⁸ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 7 April 2009. McKenzie’s poem “Earthquake” is taken from *A Poet’s House*. 61-62.

experiencing a natural disaster, and the poem conveys an unsettling sensation of the demoniac, when during the earthquake some customers in a bank – according to the Biblical allusion – are “serving Mammon” (*APH*, 61),⁵¹⁹ the demon of greed. Also the volcano’s eruption is a pervasive element for instance in J.E. Mondesir’s “The Twin Pitons”, “The Soufrière”, “Man’s Nature” (*Pas Bon Dieu Qui Faire?*),⁵²⁰ in Andrew Salkey’s “Soufrière”,⁵²¹ or in the Vincentian Shake Keane’s “Soufrière”.⁵²²

The eclectic McKenzie often searches for a harmonic reunion with nature, as in many poems about animals in his collection *APH*: “Dolphins Trained for War”, “A Robin in Africa”, “A Cat Among the Rocks”, “Cows on the Lawn”, “The Screech Owl”. Several poems show the poet’s special relationship with nature. The poem “The Blue Stones of My River” displays a sense of loss, where a natural spot is depicted as a place of reflection inspired by nature and the flowing of water, in a search for peace: “I know that I shall never be at peace again / (...) / I have sat on those stones, / canopied by roseapple and trumpet trees, / and felt the water / gouge the land beside my feet.” (*AL*, 9). In “Firefly” the poet cares about small things in nature, does not want to kill either a firefly or a cockroach and leaves them the choice between light and dark moral problems: a choice between life and death “between darkness and light, / left it up to him.” (*AL*, 11). In “The Never-Die Trees Are Blossoming” (*AL*) McKenzie displays again the union of opposites, because the trees work as a fence to enclose cattle, whereas the blooming and blossoming of trees is letting juices, perfumes, flowers free. And again an opposition of light and darkness appears in “Picking Up Avocados”, in which the poet feels in harmony with nature when he observes it, and he finds hope in the future, “It was the tree’s yearly hope / for future generations; / the blossoms came unnoticed, / the young fruits grew without my attention.” (*AL*, 13). Differently, the poem “The Old Cotton Trees Are Dying” speaks of the strength of survival of Caribbean people and of a strong relationship with the land: “I have studied history / in the thick buttresses of / their roots” (29); he goes on saying “these coffin trees / are the dwelling places / of our spirits / (...) and I wonder if the spirits / are scattered.” (*AL*,

⁵¹⁹ McKenzie, Earl. “Earthquake.” *A Poet’s House*. London: Mango Publishing, 2005. 61. Cf. also Kendel Hippolyte’s “Mammon”, “ghost, guardian-spirit of banks, trans-national corporations”. Hippolyte, Kendel. “Mammon.” *Birthright*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1997. 23. and footnote 665, p. 223 in chapter VIII.

⁵²⁰ Jones E. Mondesir (1915-1996) was a St. Lucian linguist and compiled the *Dictionary of St Lucian Creole (Trends in Linguistics Documentation 7)*. Ed. Lawrence D. Carrington. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. 1992.

⁵²¹ Cf. Burnett, Paula, ed. *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*. *Cit.*

⁵²² This is a very popular poem, reproduced in *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Verse*, *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*, *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Poetry*, and in *Vincentian Poets, 1950 to 1980*.

29): according to a Caribbean belief, ghosts as ‘jumbies’ or ‘duppies’ that dwell in silk cotton trees.⁵²³

Popular are McKenzie’s mango poems, such as “Mango Dreams”, “Mangoes”, “A Basket of Mangoes”, “Mango Poem” (*APH*), in which the mango fruit is compared to a woman. The Caribbean islands have often evoked the bodily eroticism of women. For instance, in Walcott’s *Omeros* Helen is a beautiful woman – personified in the island itself – who works as a hotel waitress in Gros Îlet, St. Lucia. Similarly, woman is part of the landscape and is often fused into it in Walcott’s “Sainte Lucie”. In Earl McKenzie’s “Beauty Spot” water on a stone “has formed a sculpture / of the female organ of love.” (*AL*, 14). The association of the islands with women also provides poets with a new input into language: I think of Derek Walcott’s “Sainte Lucie” or “The Schooner *Flight*”, or Bruce St. John’s “A Visit” (*Ascent, La Subida, La Montée*, 1985):⁵²⁴ in it phallic fruits are produced from avocado trees, golden-apple trees, or coconut trees. In “Sainte Lucie” the poet’s eye follows a girl waddling down the hills: “Martina, or Eunice / or Lucilla, / who comes down the steps / with the cool, side flow / as spring water eases / over shelves of rock / in some green ferny hole / by the road in the mountains”,⁵²⁵ whereas at the end of the poem Walcott becomes plural and a female personification of St. Lucia: “moi c’est gens Ste. Lucie. / C’est la moi sorti; / is there that I born”.⁵²⁶ In “Hill People” McKenzie depicts the slow movements of climbing up or descending from the Jamaican hills as “nearly the only choice / of motion here” (*AL*, 28), calquing with the movement of people the remembrances of slavery, and thus of history, on these same hills. In “A Love of Hills and Plains” McKenzie plays with the eroticism of the land: “You like my hills / and I like your plains. / My hills have private peaks / you can climb to / through bamboo walks / and blossoming gungo peas. / (...) Come to my hills. / (...) I am coming to your plains.” (*AL*, 20-21). In “Woman”, the first poem he published in *BIM* (13.49 (July-Dec. 1969): 13.), the poet confesses “I grew from you / like a fruit from a tree / Independent now / Yet carrying you / In unrecognising regions / Of my mind.” (*AL*, 23); again he unites opposites: “To the release of a kind of death / And birth / In your arms.” (23), so that the poet becomes a kind of mediation on

⁵²³ There is a folk belief in Malaysia by which ghosts called ‘pontianak’ dwell in plumeria trees, a.k.a. frangipani.

⁵²⁴ Some instances by women poets are derived from Louise Bennett’s “Home Sickness” (*The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*), Claudia Rankine’s “She” (*The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*), or Grace Nichols’ “De Man” (*Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman*, 1989) dedicated to the Jamaican poet James Berry, in which Nichols depicts the anthropomorphism of man after the blending of woman and land as eroticism.

⁵²⁵ Walcott, Derek. “Sainte Lucie.” *Collected Poems*. *Cit.* 313.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.* 314.

death and nature, questioning and understanding. In McKenzie's poem a spot is depicted on a rock eroded and representing "a sculpture / of the female organ of love."⁵²⁷

There is a poem which I will take some time to analyze in this section, because it merges Nature with Love. I will reproduce the three versions of the poem "Nature Loves a Continuum": the one on the left is the first manuscript of the poem, the middle one is the second draft of it, and the last one is the published version; the manuscripts were kindly provided by the poet.

"Nature Loves a Continuum", manuscript, "1 st January"	"Nature Loves a Continuum", manuscript, "5 th March"	"Nature Loves a Continuum", (<i>A Poet's House</i> . London: Mango Publishing, 2005. 32.)
<p><i>Day merging into night zygote becoming human being nature loves a continuum.</i></p> <p><i>A man becoming bald black becoming white nature loves to do things gradually.</i></p> <p><i>All of history's motion is a panorama of gradation limestone.</i></p> <p><i>[The patience of calcium becoming stalagmites as a poet So I pile word on word remembering the patience of natural building stalagmites]</i></p> <p><i>[So everyday I pile word on word remembering nature building on stalagmite]</i></p>	<p><i>Day merging into night zygote becoming human being nature loves a continuum.</i></p> <p><i>A man becoming bald black becoming white nature loves to do things gradually.</i></p> <p><i>All of history's motion is a panorama of gradation</i></p> <p><i>[And so each day I pile word on word remembering nature's patience in the building of stalagmites.]</i></p> <p><i>And so each day I pile word on word Caves and remembering nature patiently building stalagmites.</i></p>	<p><i>Day merging into night zygote becoming human being nature loves a continuum.</i></p> <p><i>A man becoming bald black becoming white nature loves to do things gradually.</i></p> <p><i>All of history's motion is a panorama of gradation.</i></p> <p><i>And so each day I pile word on word remembering caves and nature patiently building stalagmites.</i></p>

⁵²⁷ McKenzie, Earl. "Beauty Spot." *Against Linearity*. Cit. 14. The Haitian novels grouped under the term "roman paysan" often make the same kind of association between female body and eroticism of the land.⁵²⁷ What is striking is that the writer Petion Savain – author of the novel *La Case de Damballah* (1932) – was a painter too, as much as the Haitian Frankétienne. He described the protagonist thinking "au pays là-haut, à son pays, couché entre deux grandes cuisses de montagnes. Comme un sexe de belle négresse." Corzany, Jack, Léon François Hoffmann, et Marie-Lyne Piccione. *Littératures Francophones, II. Les Amériques, Haïti, Antilles-Guyane, Québec*. Paris: Belin, 1998. 50. The depiction of the island as an embodiment of the Caribbean woman or as the mother-land is also exemplified by Pamela Mordecai's "Island Woman", or by Jacqueline Bishop's "Island Women". A male eroticism is instead illustrated in the trees of the Barbadian Bruce St. John's "A Visit", compared with the male bodies of "avocado tree", "golden-apple tree", "coconut tree" (St. John, Bruce. "A Visit." *Ascent, La Subida, La Montée*. Cit. 7-8).

No excessive distortions to the economy of the text appear, and the sense is more or less the same, but the first draft has been polished, for instance, of the word “limestone”, present in the first version, but absent in the second draft, and the same for the Latin-derived term “calcium”. McKenzie deleted the comparison “as a poet” from the first version, condensing it in that “I”, and the continuum of the title is not expressed by the “patience” of nature or by the gerund “becoming”, it naturally results from the poet’s work. “Everyday” in the first draft becomes “each day” of piling, writing and creating the poem by accretion. Curiously, the words in the published version hang down vertically like a stalactite, more than the stalagmite mentioned in the poem, but gradually, as every process in nature or history, as the poet says, usually happens. Nonetheless, in the second verse of “Nature Loves a Continuum” the line “black becoming white” has not the gradations of grey which it would suggest, rather it makes me think of a sudden change and of the Tao symbol, with its compenetration of black and white, of yin and yang, into one circle. McKenzie is very much influenced by Oriental philosophies like Buddhism or Taoism – about which he was enlightened by reading Herman Hesse’s *Siddharta*⁵²⁸ –, so that this dual vision of nature and events could help to interpret his lines. He admits having written Buddhist poems before being aware of the religion itself and before getting close to it.⁵²⁹ But McKenzie argued that this poem was influenced in particular by Spinoza’s thought.⁵³⁰ Theoretically, according to Spinoza’s recognition of a duality in human nature – derived in its turn from Descartes – the essence of the poet’s work could represent both the ‘res cogitans’ and the ‘res extensa’, that means both the intellectual and the creative activities of the poet; the poet’s extensive creation is the poem, as nature creates extensively the excretions of stalagmites or stalactites in the caves. In this poem, then, the poet plays the role of Spinoza’s immanent God, “Deus sive natura”, “God, or rather Nature”. This poem has no evidence of Creole, but it helps in better understanding McKenzie’s visual images and his interconnections with philosophy. In fact, the aesthetics of a Caribbean *linguistic continuum* could well operate inside the span of a natural evolution of language.

One of McKenzie’s paintings which represents a quotation from Lao-Tzû’s *Tao Te Ching* is “Vessel”. The phrase taken from this ancient Chinese philosophical text – as a foundation for

⁵²⁸ Personal communication with the poet. April 2008.

⁵²⁹ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 30 May 2009. Cf. also the poem “Sabbath”, regarding which the poet told me: “I have not yet sorted out the Buddhist themes. “Sabbath” which regards laughter as holy is in accordance with the Buddhist (as against Christian say), appreciation of laughter as religious.” Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 6 May 2009. In the poem: “laughter comes from deep down / with force enough to crack (...) / and while it lasts. / You have a clearer view of things.” (“Sabbath.” *AL*. 49.) the laughter is associated with the Buddha’s love for laughter as a religious path to wellbeing and enlightenment.

⁵³⁰ Interview with Earl McKenzie. Cf. Appendix A in this thesis.

Taoism – goes: “So both clay and the absence of clay are required to produce a vessel.” In it the poet represents a pot he made himself out of clay. This phrase is meaningful in that it combines opposites, full and empty, good and bad, light and dark. As in the painting “Calabash Totem”, the Tao is an important element, drawn in earthenware pots as much as masks and prehistorical drawings. Other religions and the connection with spirituality are also considered in McKenzie’s poetry: the Rasta religion is represented in the poem “The Singing Rastas” where the couplets sing “I met a truckload of singing Rastas / Coming around a bend, going downhill. / (...) / And the strains of the song that now came to me / Was a sorrow-laden yet fighting melody.” (35), and the paintings “Marley Contemplating a Bust of Garvey”, which depicts Bob Marley and Marcus Garvey, and the “Rasta series”: “Dread”, “Livity” and “Irie”. In “Arawak Drawings” (*AL*) an ancient form of spirituality is evoked: “dark symbols speaking from another age. / (...) / Was the dwelling place of imagined spirits” (50).

In 1953 Shake Keane wrote on the Caribbean poets’ connection with God and spirituality commenting on the mysticism and on the spirituality gained through a closer contact with nature; he wrote that:

in contemplating the objects of nature, our poets have achieved a state of mind in which they have either confessed to having found the “Peace of God,” or indicated that they had glimpsed the Energy and the Significance behind all things, or desired, like mystics, to be absorbed into a particular object of adoration, or felt impelled to make pronouncements on love, death, and eternity (...) As regards Pantheism (...) they have in general steered clear of specific declarations (...) Rather they have tended for the most part to regard nature as a teacher, or a symbol of deeper truths ⁵³¹

Many of McKenzie’s poems speak of a lost Eden, underpinning on the concepts of loss, nostalgia, and a yearning for a return to what was lost.

VI.iii. Aesthetics and language

McKenzie’s poems consider and describe simple things, so that they are the expression of an aesthetic of simplicity. The poem “Laughter” represents a simple occasion for poetry and it breaks up linguistic barriers: “They are speaking French / but their laughter is just like ours / and needs no translation. / (...) / nature’s laughter / beneath language’s superstructure” (*APH*, 28). His use of

⁵³¹ Keane, E. McG. “Some Religious Attitudes in W.I. Poetry. Nature and religion.” *Cit.* 271.

language is by nature and predominantly SE, but at times he consciously employs Creole and makes it a sort of social indicator of the aesthetics of language in Jamaica. Let us think of the poem “A Tale of Two Tongues”: both SE and Creole are present and embody two voices in a woman’s relationship with God and religion. Its depiction is sociological, for it hints at Creole words used in a family context and in church. In this poem:

Miss Ida speaks only English to God.
Scholars cannot fault the diction
of her graces and prayers;
to her, it is the language of holy things (...)
But to fellow mortals she speaks Creole,
the tongue of the markets and the fields;
the language of labrish,
su-su, proverbs and stories,
hot-words, tracings and preckeh;
it is the way to get
hard-ears pickney to listen
and facety men to keep off;
it is the tongue of belly laughs
and sweet body action. (32)

The poetic persona, Miss Ida, employs – as the majority of Jamaicans do – two languages: her bilingualism is divided between the religion and the marketplace. “Su-su” indicates the whispers behind somebody’s back sounding like the wind among the leaves of a tree, as in Velma Pollard’s poem “Su-Su” in which the “puoi leaves whisper just before they fall”, heralding death: “Susu su su / among the yellow poui / you hear / I hear / leaves in the Japanese garden / ‘tiday fi mi tumaro fi yu’ / like Brer Anancy talking in his nose / Susu su su”.⁵³² In McKenzie’s poem “Labrish” is the language of Louise Bennett’s *Jamaica Labrish*, it is the ‘gossip’, the language of the marketplace and the language that Bennett employed to narrate Jamaican and African-derived stories and proverbs, while “preckeh” means ‘confusion’.⁵³³ Creole becomes the language understood by the “hard-ears pickney”, a Jamaicanism to indicate stubborn children, and “facety men”, to keep off feisty or exuberant men. In “Cut Language!” (from the collection *Leaving Traces*) Velma Pollard describes a character “claiming this English language (...) / claiming our patwa (...) / didn’t I tell them / everytime / bilingual is the lick?”,⁵³⁴ and in McKenzie’s poem Creole really plays the part of the “lick”, the language of determination, of sincerity, of sweetness and of the “iron fist”, the language of the heart.

⁵³² Pollard, Velma. “Su Su.” *Crown Point*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1988. 78.

⁵³³ Cf. Allsopp, Richard. *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. *Cit.* 452-3.

⁵³⁴ Pollard, Velma. “Cut Language!” *Leaving Traces*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2008. 24 May 2009 <http://www.peepaltreepress.com/poetry_display.asp?isbn=9781845230210&au_id=63>.

But how do people respond to the Creole in poetry? They often think it is a bad, ugly, coarse, vulgar language still regarded with contempt, because it was stigmatized by the colonizers. What kind of aesthetic value is there in Creole? In some proverbs there is a diffidence towards beauty, of something that could deceive you, something distrustful. As the English Romantic poet John Keats said in “Ode on a Grecian Urn”, “Beauty is truth and truth is beauty”, while the contemporary American poet Wallace Stevens remarked that “Death is the mother of beauty” (“Sunday Morning”, *Harmonium*, 1923).⁵³⁵ Death gives meaning to things and decadence is what gives value to beauty, but if we had to combine syllogistically the two sentences, death would result in being the mother of truth. McKenzie’s thoughts on death are to be found in such poems as “This Animal of Funerals”: “This animal of funerals / does not let go of its dead / (...) / We are also *homo funeralicus*.” (*AL*, 16). In the collection *The Almond Leaf* (2008)⁵³⁶ he included some poems about death: “The Egalitarianism of Death” in which “Death / the egalitarian, / gnaws / at all our inequalities” (*TAL*, 17) and “The Unacknowledged Presence” (*TAL*): “Death is no leveller there / and hatred goes to the grave.” (*TAL*, 57). In the poem “Ground Zero” he again displays opposites and he affirms: “From the infinity / of negative numbers on the left, / and positive numbers on the right, / to the metaphor of book-keeping; / we must balance evil with good.” (*TAL*, 24): these lines reveal the poet’s “chiaroscuro aesthetics”, influenced by the Tao philosophy, as said before. McKenzie is convinced that in Jamaica there seem to be low aesthetic values, but his poetry – as much as Wayne Brown’s poetry – does not seem to be involved in this generalization: their poetry pays much attention to the sophistication of the word, to craft, and do not present much Creole.

Nonetheless, a series of poems which leads me to some aesthetic considerations is the “Coconut Alphabet” (*AL*) (52-6), in which language assumes a pictorial value – to describe the chosen fruit –, and an aesthetic value – because the poetic language is transmuted into the canvas. To justify his resolution in painting the series of coconuts and then writing the series of poems, McKenzie described the inspirational occasion as follows:

while contemplating a dry coconut I had placed in a still-life composition, it occurred to me that there was so much I did not know about this plant. I was seeing so many shapes and patterns I had not observed before. I resolved to

⁵³⁵ Cf. the reference to this phrase in chapter I on Eric Roach, par. I.iv., p. 92.

⁵³⁶ Mel Cooke described the homonym painting exhibited at the same Oct. 2009 exhibition at U.W.I. Jamaica as follows: “‘The Almond Leaf’, the title poem of an entire collection, was written when he was marooned by rain in Treasure Beach at the 2001 Calabash International Literary Festival. In the painting, the leaf, which fell at McKenzie’s feet and led to him taking up brush and pen, is in the foreground, prominently large against the sea in the background.” Cooke, Mel. “‘A Bluebird Named Poetry’ Takes Flight.” *Cit.*

do an artistic study of the plant to learn more about it. To put it in philosophical terminology: my motivation was part epistemological and part aesthetic. (...) this was the first time the two [art and poetry, *NbR*] had come together⁵³⁷.



McKenzie, Earl, Coconut Composition

The poem is divided into eight stanzas, and I have tried to find a correspondence between each stanza and one or more of McKenzie's paintings from the "Coconut Series". In stanza I the coconut is compared to a "mustard seed", and it "has answers of its own / Answers locked in husk and shell / Concealed in hues of green." (both 52) In the painting "Coconut Composition" the coconut looks like a seed and shades of green shape its features.

McKenzie told me that in the "Coconut Alphabet" poems a Christian influence is recognisable, and I find it in stanza II, where the coconut seems to be longing for the sunlight of God, "A greater longing for the sun" (52). In stanza III, instead the lines are given rhythm by a reggae beat, whose cadence is syncopated and created a pattern of colours that describe a coconut palm tree or "the rhythmic pattern / Of a reggae beat in silvery grey. / A curved syncopation on blue / With a radial finale of fronds (...) / This is the silent / Organic rocketry" (52-53); in that "organic rocketry" one could recognise Brathwaite's theory of the missile/capsule, of, as Edward Baugh put it, the "straight-line thinking and rigidity, conquering technological thrust; ['capsule,' 'space capsule' images the "culture of the circle," a curved space which "travels keeps miraculous intact despite the / intense outside heat / of the oppressor" (39)."⁵³⁸]

Missile and capsule turn into McKenzie's rocket science, in which science and nature converge into a geometrical

study: about this painting the poet said

"This is a part of the fruit, the nut. It's a large segment, it's a part of the nut, the husk, a part of the husk."⁵³⁹ for, as he said in stanza I, "The coconut has



McKenzie, Earl, Monument N. 3

answers of its own / Answers locked in husk and shell" (52) (*Cf.* the paintings



McKenzie, Earl, Coconut Valentine

"Monument N. 3" and "Coconut Valentine").

⁵³⁷ McKenzie, Earl. "A Philosopher Who Also Writes and Paints". *Calabash Journal* 4.2 (Spring/Summer 2007) Eds. Jacqueline Bishop, and Michela Calderaro. 12 Feb. 2008 <<http://www.nyu.edu/calabash/vol4no2/0402124.pdf>>.

⁵³⁸ Baugh, Edward. "Literary Theory and the Caribbean: Theory, Belief and Desire, or Designing Theory." Proc. of a conference. June 2001 (Re) *Thinking Caribbean Culture*. University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, Barbados. *Shibboleths: A Journal of Comparative Theory* שבוּלֶת 1.1 (2006): 58. 24 May 2009 <<http://www.shibboleths.net/1/1/Baugh,Edward.pdf>>.

⁵³⁹ Interview with Earl McKenzie. Appendix A in this thesis.



McKenzie, Earl, *Imprint*

The painting “Imprint” seems to be described by stanza III, where shades of colours create a rhythmic pattern and the trunk seems ending in fronds. But this painting seems to be depicted also in stanza IV, in which the slim trunk of a palm tree (“the slender trunk”, 53) is complemented by “cones, circles and ovals” (53). The terms used are geometrical, as much as the paintings are, and the study of the fruits, of the tree, of the colours is correlated by a study of the kinetic movement of the fall of a coconut: in stanza V,

The
 earth
 pulls
 a
 nut
 from
 its
 stem
 and
 the
 green
 meteor
 falls
 to a quick collision on the grass;

it rolls a bit
 and
 tumbles
 and
 pitchpupalick!
 pitchpupalick!
 pitchpupalick!
 to equilibrium. (54)



McKenzie, Earl, *A Coconut Falling from a Tree*

Stanza V appears like a study of the gravity law before, during, and after a collision to the ground, but the painting related to it, “A Coconut Falling from a Tree”, looks like a futuristic movement à la Giacomo Balla, the Italian futurist (*cf.* for instance “Dynamism of a Dog on a Leash”, 1912). McKenzie told me “The stanza in the poem ‘Coconut Alphabet’, that stanza with the nut falling from the tree...this painting is based on that stanza in that poem”;⁵⁴⁰ as he pointed out “‘pitchpupalick’: is a Jamaican Creole word, but I have never found it anywhere else. In the game

⁵⁴⁰ *Ibidem.*

children tumble head over heels”,⁵⁴¹ but “pitchpupalik” could also be an ideophone which reproduces the sound of the water inside the coconut which almost “chuckles” when you shake it (see stanza VI).



McKenzie, Earl, *Monument*

The ripe coconut of stanza V slides into stanza VI, which could represent the stem of a coconut: “Three firm bulges / And a hollow at the top” (55). The paintings “Monument” and “Monument N. 2” hint at eroticism and have phallic features: the coconut, much as the mango, is compared to a woman, it features both male and female characteristics and it suggests a symbiotic and natural union of opposites (see “Monument N. 3”).



McKenzie, Earl, *Monument N. 2*

Stanza VII digs deeper into epistemological and aesthetic reasoning and the painter’s brush becomes a machete which helps the poet to ‘discover’ things, to “uncoconut” things: “Then with a



McKenzie, Earl, *Coconut Letters*

brush I tried to find / What with machete I did not discover / And soon coconut shapes begin to say / Uncoconut things to me” (56). McKenzie’s verb “uncoconut” makes me think of the Scottish poet’s Edwin Morgan, whose poem “Centaur” (*Concrete Poems, 1963-1969*) transfigures the *pathetic fallacy* of the inanimate or animate object of nature into a neologism, when Morgan says “i am horse: unhorse me!” The painting “Coconut Letters” shows the interior of some coconuts as if they had been cut with a machete.

After the poet’s “encounter” with the coconut in all its aspects, in stanza VIII the poet declares in iambic tetrameters and pentameters “For I have lived in nuts and husks (...) / And I have felt the force of blues and greens” (56). The stanza seems to be written in praise of the poet’s encounter with the coconut, as a “botanical exploration” (53), as though the poet’s inspiration could dig inside the kernel of things, of nature – of a coconut in this case – to open up possibilities to the “outer space” (53), as though the husks and shells and seeds could reveal a thorough alphabet: in stanza VII he said “And I found innumerable letters / locked within a coconut



McKenzie, Earl, *Interior*

⁵⁴¹ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 6 June 2009.

alphabet.” (53). The painting “Interior” is the cover of *A Poet’s House*, in which I can see the shape of a stringed musical instrument, a lyre. McKenzie has been influenced by music and some of his poems show musical influences, such as “An Essay on Music”, “Metaphysics and Trombone” (dedicated to Don Drummond), “Music in the Rain”, “Reggae and the Sea”, “Harmonica Player”, “A Bit of Easter Music” (*APH*), etc. The poem “Dance” (*APH*) was written for performance and drum accompaniment, as the lines beat: “Rockareggae / Rockareggae / Rockareggae / Man” (85). The poem “Other Islands” (*APH*) encompasses rhythms from other islands of the archipelago and it conveys a search for Brathwaite’s and Glissant’s “submarine unity”, displaying the search for a Caribbean aesthetics:

There is the romance of Spanish places:
 rhumba, salsa and merengue,⁵⁴²
 and a language with echoes
 of pipe organs and praise. (...)
 Francophone tunes
 are a riot of rhythms:
 zouk, gwo-ka and voodoo jazz, with their language of love
 and revolutions.
 In islands of this tongue
 soca, calypso and chutney
 stir the carnival.
 From my reggae jamdown
 I listen and search
 for the submarine melody
 beneath all the tunes. (*APH*, 77)

Therefore, several musical genres influenced McKenzie; as Kamau Brathwaite pointed out: “The «rock-and-roll» base of black American music is another aspect of *shango*, as is «boogie-woogie» (piano imitation of the train), and the innumerable spirituals and gospel songs that not only *sing* about trains, but become possessed by them.”⁵⁴³ At times McKenzie tried to transpose musicality into the paintings, as in “The Healer’s Drum”, where the rendering of the spreading of sounds and lights reminds me of Robert Delaunay’s pictorial “Orphic Cubism”. McKenzie’s reply to my questioning about the visualisation of the musicality of Creole was:

I think you may be interested in looking at the paintings of Piet Mondrian, if you have not already done so. He did some wonderful paintings inspired by American boogie woogie music. As you saw, I have tried doing it with

⁵⁴² Rohlehr mentioned the “Southern U.S.A. and Haitian custom of awarding a cake or a lemon meringue pie as the prize for winning a dance competition. Hence the names “cakewalk” and “meringue” which both refer to dances.” Rohlehr, Gordon. *The Shape of that Hurts*. *Cit.* 366.

⁵⁴³ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature.” *Roots*. *Cit.* 221, note 73.

drumming. So I am sure it is possible to visualize the musicality of creole in some way.⁵⁴⁴

And to this he added more about language and visual images: “I was reading recently that [Saussure] said he could smell words, and they evoked powerful visual images in him.”⁵⁴⁵

I thought I recognised in some of McKenzie’s paintings some affinities with the Guyanese painter Aubrey Williams (as in his “Totem”), but he admitted that his mask totem was not influenced by Aubrey Williams’s masks, for he discovered them after doing it.⁵⁴⁶ Yet, I still recognise similarities between the two, and this is maybe due to the fact that both were exposed to non-Caribbean art: Williams in London,⁵⁴⁷ McKenzie in New York.



McKenzie, Earl, Totem

To quote proverbs in poetry is common among Caribbean – mostly Jamaican – poets.⁵⁴⁸ McKenzie often lingers on Jamaican proverbs, and he also wrote an article, “Philosophy in Jamaican Proverbs” (*Jamaica Journal*), in which he contended their importance according to four philosophical areas: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, and aesthetics. The article considers many proverbs, but just four of them were depicted by him, and of those four two belong to metaphysics and two to epistemology; in the paintings he manages to combine the meaning of Creole words with their aesthetic realisation. In the aforementioned article, he also explains the meaning of these proverbs. As regards metaphysics, which studies the truth in the nature of things and the meanings of existence, the proverbs depicted are “Weh fi yu cyan be unfiyu”, explained in terms of fatalism as “What is yours cannot be otherwise but yours”, and “Plantain ripe, can’t green again”, explained in terms of the passing of time and the impossibility of going back to greenness again. One of these

⁵⁴⁴ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 6 Feb. 2008.

⁵⁴⁵ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 17 Feb. 2008.

⁵⁴⁶ “Regarding Williams, all that I said was that I discovered his paintings long after I painted my mask totem, so there was no influence.” Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 15 Feb. 2008.

⁵⁴⁷ Roopnaraine, Rupert. *The Primacy of the Eye*. *Cit.*

⁵⁴⁸ Cf. Velma Pollard in “Beware the Naked Man Who Offers You a Shirt (African Proverb)”, in which she warned the reader against people who offer or promise something they cannot give, or rather against rich people (Americans in the poem) who give children guns “for dem de man fi ded” (Pollard, Velma. “Beware the Naked Man Who Offers You a Shirt (African Proverb).” *The Best Philosophers I Know Can’t Read and Write*. London: Mango Publishing, 2001. 57); Mervyn Morris mentioned a Jamaican proverb in “Critique”: “Yuh a grow, yuh wi come si” (Morris, Mervyn. “Critique.” *I been there, sort of: New & Selected Poems*. Manchester (UK): Carcanet, 2006. 37); cf. also Linton Kwesi Johnson in “Sense outta Nansense” (Kwesi Johnson, Linton. *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*. *Cit.*); Olive Senior inserted Jamaican sayings and proverbs in “Hen”, “Senseh”, or “Guinea Hen” (Senior, Olive. *over the roofs of the world*. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2005); the Grenadian Merle Collins mentioned proverbs in “Nearly Ten Years Later” (Collins, Merle. *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*. *Cit.*).

proverbs is depicted in the painting “Graffiti”, which, apart from “What is fey u cant be unfeyu”, also depicts the proverb “When cockroach mek dance him no invite fowl” – meaning “When a cockroach gives a party, he does not invite chickens”. The poet elucidates this painting with these words:

“Graffiti”...there’s a story I’ve written...I did the painting first and then I wrote a story. This is a bamboo, and this is a building technique based in rural Jamaica. And this painting is about a man who is living in a hut, made of bamboo with his writing, he is writing graffiti on the wall...(...) it’s proverbs, sayings, titles of songs that he has heard...(...) his feelings towards politics...his frustration with Jamaican politics...(...) and then [he draws] a bird, a woman, a pot is on fire, wood fire, palm coconut, a man is carrying water on his head, a basket, a fork, things that he uses, and a hoe.⁵⁴⁹

The other proverb is to be found in the canvas titled “Plantain ripe can’t green again”, which is a visualization of the passing of time and of youth which does not come back again.⁵⁵⁰ As it is unfolded in the *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, “Most of the commonly used proverbs are metaphors drawn from daily life or the observation of nature or are terse summaries of experience.”:⁵⁵¹ this is the case with these proverbs. As regards epistemology, the science of knowledge and of the truth and experience in knowledge, the proverbs depicted are to be found in the canvas “Artefact”, which actually consolidates three proverbs, “De truth a de gate”, “Me know I nebber go before”, and “One-one coco full basket”: only two of these three are explained in the article as “The truth is the gate”, and as “ ‘I knew it’ never goes before”,⁵⁵² unfolding popular wisdom and knowledge.⁵⁵³

⁵⁴⁹ Interview with Earl McKenzie. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁵⁵⁰ Martin Carter made a similar consideration on the right progression of things, “explaining that a ‘forceripe’ fruit is one which, picked ‘too green’ and then put up to ripen, ‘gets yellow, but doesn’t get ripe.’” Mc Andrew, Wordsworth. “Conversations. Interview with Martin Carter.” *Kyk-over-al* 49/50 (June 2000): 138.

⁵⁵¹ Jerome, Fried, and Maria Leach, eds. *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1972. 2 Vols. 902.

⁵⁵² McKenzie, Earl. “Philosophy in Jamaican Proverbs.” *Jamaica Journal* 29.1-2 (June-Oct. 2005): 50-53.

⁵⁵³ If we are to consider art as a branch of the folkloric tradition, I recognise a very strong affinity between poetry and painting in the Caribbean. Rembrandt, Gauguin, Chagall are among the painters most revered by Caribbean poets, they provided much inspiration under many aspects as painters from different historical and aesthetic backgrounds. As regards art, it is impressive to note that Caribbean poets are often painters and vice versa. Let us think of the just analysed Clarke, or of the Guyanese Stanley Greaves and Aubrey Williams, who often represented the extemporaneous in words. (Cf. also the Grenadian poet Abdul Malik’s poem “Instant Ting.” *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*. *Cit.* Or the aesthetics of the extemporaneous in the Grenadian poet Merle Collins, chapter VII in this thesis). The Tobagonian Eric Roach, instead, wrote poems like “Poets and Painters”, in which his father working the land becomes the metaphor of an art inscribed with work and sweat, or “The Picture” in which he tried to catch the light of Rembrandt’s paintings and the love which is hidden behind the relationship between model and painter (*The Flowering Rock*). The Jamaican Ralph Thompson is also a painter and in his poems “In Contemplation of a Poet’s Head” – dedicated to Derek Walcott – and “Ars Longa” (*The Denting of a Wave*) he reflected on the art of Rembrandt, Gauguin, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Hokusai (the author of Japanese minimalist sea waves, as the similar one in the front cover of Thompson’s book). Jacqueline Bishop’s “Gauguin” (in *Calabash Journal*) drew its inspiration from the French painter, too. The Jamaican Tony Mc Neill in *Credences at The Altar of Cloud* (1979) found inspiration in the airy paintings of Marc Chagall. McNeill, Anthony. *Credences at The Altar of Cloud*. Kingston: The Institute of Jamaica,

1979. 71. Notwithstanding, Walcott's St. Lucian sea is close to that of Anthony Kellman's Barbados, which generated in a coral barrier his *Limestone* (2008). And Kellman's use of language is compared by Brathwaite with the Jamaican poet Anthony McNeill: "The only other poet who is using language (nommo: naked word/ikon) is Tony McNeill (see *Credences at the Altar of Cloud*, Kingston, 1979) and to a lesser degree, but still there, Tony Kellman of Barbados (work largely unpublished but see cyclostyled *The Black Madonna*, B'town 1975)." (Brathwaite, Kamau. "Martin Carter's Poetry of the Negative Yes." *The Art of Martin Carter*. Ed. Stewart Brown. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2000; 2004. 206-207.) Gloria Escoffery in "Word Picture" praised the word as the beginning of all creations, as God, in conversation with her art "Where it most matters, trust me, / I shall outlive you. / If you frame me squarely / no cracks will show" (Escoffery, Gloria. "Thought Inspired by a Sheet of Masonite or Celotex or Hardboard Prepared for Use as Artist's Canvas." *Loggerhead*. Kingston, Jamaica: Sandberry Press, 1988. 29). Interestingly, Beverley Brown in "Looking Out" depicted a relationship between man and woman as if it was reflected by the relationship between sky and sea, and her words look like vivid touches: "Only the green moss, / the clinging crustacean see / what the woman and nobody else / sees over there" (Brown, Beverley Elizabeth. "Looking Out." *Dream Diary*. Mona: Savacou Co-operative, 1982. 31), integrating the expressionist image à la Max Ernst in the front cover of her *Dream Diary*, and William Wood with his *A Painter's Paradise* alternated his own paintings born out of his attendance at the St. Martin (the French half of the island of St. Maarten)'s school of art to many poems by Caribbean artists but also by English and American writers such as Wordsworth, Defoe, Stevenson, Whitman. *Roseau Valley and Other Poems for Brother George Odlum* (2003) is a beautiful anthology which gathers poems and folk songs in St. Lucia Kwéyòl by many St. Lucian artists, but also from Barbadian George Lamming and Kamau Brathwaite and Jamaican Edward Baugh; also Walcott has contributed to it, and Kendel Hippolyte, too, with his own poems and translating many poems or songs from patois into English.

Chapter VII Merle Collins (1950 -) A People's Revolutionary Aesthetics

Merle Collins was born in Aruba,⁵⁵⁴ Dutch West Indies, in 1950 but soon her parents took her back to their native Grenada,⁵⁵⁵ where she studied at St. George's. She took her degree at the University of the West Indies in Jamaica and then lectured in Spanish and History in Grenada and St. Lucia.⁵⁵⁶ DeCaires Narain pointed out that "Merle Collins began her work as a poet during the years of the 'Grenada Revolution' under Maurice Bishop".⁵⁵⁷ She wrote a short story in 1977, "The Walk", but her works first appeared in *Callaloo: A Grenada Anthology* (1984).⁵⁵⁸ She moved to the UK in 1984,⁵⁵⁹ and after one year, in 1985, she published her first collection of poems, *Because the Dawn Breaks!*, when she had already left Grenada for England⁵⁶⁰ and was a member of the *African Dawn*, a band in which she performed her poetry and played African music. She published two other collections of poems: *Rotten Pomerack* in 1992, and *Lady in a Boat* in 2003.⁵⁶¹ She also published two novels: *Angel* in 1987 (about the Grenadian revolution and the struggle for independence until the US invasion of Grenada through the eyes of three generations of women), and in 1995 *The Colour of Forgetting* (about the memories of a Carib woman); she also published a book of short stories, *Rain Darling* (1990).

⁵⁵⁴ "The Netherlands Antilles consists of five islands, Bonaire, Curaçao, Sint Maarten, Sint Eustatius, and Saba. Until 1986, Aruba also belonged to the Netherlands Antilles. After 1986 it went and formed a direct status with the Kingdom of the Netherlands. In Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao Papiamentu is spoken, while in the rest, English is the mother language." Allen, Rose Mary. "Tur hende a papia un ko'. African-Curaçaoan Women." *Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters* 2.1 (Fall 2002): 171. Eds. Jacqueline Bishop, Michela Calderaro. New York: New York University. 5 May 2009 <<http://www.nyu.edu/calabash/>>.

⁵⁵⁵ As regards the movements of young Caribbean writers, at two months of age, also Caryl Phillips was carried from his native St. Kitts to Leeds, England.

⁵⁵⁶ See the author's biography in *Lady in a Boat*.

⁵⁵⁷ DeCaires Narain, Denise. *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry. Making Style*. London; New York: Routledge, 2002. 119.

⁵⁵⁸ Cf. Ross, Jacob, ed. *Callaloo: A Grenada Anthology*. London: Young World Books, 1984.

⁵⁵⁹ Collins, Merle. "An Interview with Merle Collins. (Grenadian writer) (Francophone and Anglophone Literature: The Women Writers)." Ed. Betty Wilson. *Callaloo* 16.1 (1993): 94-107. Ed. Charles H. Rowell. Baton Rouge, Louisiana: John Hopkins University Press. 29 June 2009 <http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-9274195_ITM>.

⁵⁶⁰ "Merle Collins worked in Grenada as a teacher and as a Research Officer on Latin American Affairs from 1979 to 1983, when, following the American invasion of Grenada, she moved to Britain; more recently, she has moved to the USA, where she now lives and teaches." DeCaires Narain, Denise. *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry. Cit.* 120.

⁵⁶¹ Henceforward '*Because the Dawn Breaks!*' will be referred to with '*BDB*', '*Rotten Pomerack*' with '*RP*', and '*Lady in a Boat*' with '*LB*'.

VII.i. Revolution in Grenada: *Because the Dawn Breaks!*

The history of the revolution and change originated out of the history of Grenada itself, an island conquered by the Spanish, the English, and the French⁵⁶² and, as Honychurch explained, falling again under British control during the 18th century: “The Treaty of Paris, agreed to by Britain and France in 1763 at the end of the Seven Years’ War, ceded to Britain the formerly French island of Grenada as well as the ‘Neutral Islands’ of Dominica, St. Vincent and Tobago.”⁵⁶³ In terms of lexicon this colonial legacy associates Grenada with Trinidad, as much as it differentiates these two islands from others of the Lesser Antilles and of the Caribbean in general, explaining the presence of French terms chosen by Collins to reproduce a kind of literary vernacular. The linguistic interchange between these two islands is remarkable, and there are historical reasons for this: according to J.J. Thomas (the first Trinidadian writer to have compiled a grammar of French Creole in 1869), the French settlers brought with them their local dialects – mainly from Martinique and Guadeloupe or from Dominica, St. Vincent and Grenada – after the 1763 Treaty of Paris.⁵⁶⁴ But, according to Hubert Devonish, Maurice Bishop’s linguistic policy of education in Grenada saw the maintenance of the employment of Creole, together with English, to try to bridge the educational and literacy gap between the people and the political leadership, and to allow the people’s expression of socio-political thought.⁵⁶⁵

What happened in Grenada in the last fifty years was that, after the failure of the West Indies Federation (1958-62) and a formal independence from the UK obtained in 1967, Eric Gairy became its first Prime Minister. A coup d’état toppled the government in 1979. Three years later new

⁵⁶² Historical reasons also explain the following changes of the island’s name from ‘Granada’ to ‘Grenade’ to ‘Grenada’.

⁵⁶³ Honychurch, Lennox. “‘To Have a Garden is to be a Man’: Caribs and the Transformation of Landscape.” Eds. Robert S. Anderson, Richard Grove, and Karis Hiebert. Islands, Forests and Gardens in the Caribbean, Conservation and Conflict in Environmental History. Oxford: Macmillan, 2006. 34-35.

⁵⁶⁴ J.J. Thomas reports that “the French *patois* remained the normal speech of the majority of the Trinidad-born working population.” Thomas, J.J. The Theory and Practice of Creole Grammar. London; Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1969. x. Or. publ. Port of Spain: The Chronicle Publishing Office, 1869.

⁵⁶⁵ Devonish said that “Creole was simply regarded as ‘broken English’, a bastard form of speech possessing no rules, and Grenada was therefore considered a monolingual English-speaking country.” Devonish, Hubert. Language and Liberation, Creole Language Politics in the Caribbean. London: Karia Press, 1986. 138. Nonetheless, Paul Breslin affirmed about a poet like the St. Lucian Kendel Hippolyte in the poem “Stone (for Maurice Bishop)”, his “elegy, or anti-elegy, for Maurice Bishop of Grenada” that: “Like [Jane] King [another poet from S. Lucia and Hippolyte’s wife, *NbR*], Hippolyte sees language as the bond connecting political and poetic responsibility. Like Walcott, he distrusts the voice of the collective.” (Breslin, Paul. “After Walcott: The Next Generation of Saint Lucian Poets.” in John Robert Lee and Kendel Hippolyte. Eds. John Robert Lee, and Kendel Hippolyte. Saint Lucian Literature and Theatre. An Anthology of Reviews. Castries, Saint Lucia: Cultural development Foundation. 2006. Both quotations 175). Effectively, Hippolyte seems to dislike the pompous oratory of politicians in: “What now? – a public statement on Grenada? / We leave that to the manipulators, the manoeuvrers, / the managers of public righteousness” (Hippolyte, Kendel. “Stone (for Maurice Bishop).” Birthright. Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1997. 41), and he seems to transpose – differently from Collins who employs the Creole as a poetic tool for a social urge – the whisper/screams of the torments of his people into a private level: “So now what Grenada says to us / is private, we can only hear it / one man, one woman, at a time.” (*Ibid.* 42).

elections confirmed Gairy but were judged to be rigged by the opposition, New Jewel Movement: its leader, Maurice Bishop, overthrew the government, largely supported by the population. Collins remembered that period with these words:

1979 was the year the New Jewel Movement took over the government. It was a strange period. Even talking about it now sometimes people say Grenadians were demonstrating because they didn't want independence. But really, the demonstrations were because people were generally unhappy with the Gairy regime which was in power at the time in Grenada (...) Not wanting independence under Gairy.⁵⁶⁶

Bishop was put under house arrest by one of the leaders of the NJM, Bernard Coard, who was not satisfied with Bishop's politics, and was eventually murdered. The US government, led by Ronald Reagan, for fear of a Communist revolution in the Caribbean – since Grenada largely received help from Cuba – invaded Grenada in 1983. The Barbadian George Lamming remembered that: “after the invasion of Grenada by six thousand U.S. soldiers, the U.S. Secretary of State George Shultz arrived”.⁵⁶⁷ Moreover, the Grenadian artist Eric Johnn remembered Bishop's murder and the US invasion as follows:

In 1979, England-trained lawyer and native Grenadian, Maurice Bishop and his New Jewel Movement led a coup d'état and took power of the government. Four years later there was serious schism within the New Jewel Party that led to Bishop's assassination. The United States military intervened in 1983, and an Interim Advisory Council ruled Grenada until the constitution and parliamentary government were restored in December 1984.⁵⁶⁸

The hotchpotch of political issues and social revolts that saw its rise in the Grenada of the 1970s-1980s is reminiscent of the social upheavals and turmoil that happened in Martin Carter's Guyana; it is not by chance that in 1984 the Trinidadian poet Dionne Brand, as a consequence of her Grenadian period, wrote the poem “For Martin Carter”.⁵⁶⁹ the three poets Collins, Brand, and Carter (together with the St. Martin poet Lasana M. Sekou who was emotionally involved in the Grenadian political situation, and, taking up that cause, in 1983 wrote *Maroon Lives*)⁵⁷⁰ lived similar

⁵⁶⁶ Collins, Merle. “Working Out Grenada: An Interview with Merle Collins.” Eds. Jacqueline Bishop, and Dolace Nicole McLean. *Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters* 3.2 (Fall-Winter 2005): 56. Eds. Jacqueline Bishop, and Michela Calderaro. New York: New York University. <<http://www.nyu.edu/calabash/>>.

⁵⁶⁷ Lamming, George. *Coming, Coming Home. Conversations II. Western Education and the Caribbean Intellectual*. Philipsburg, St. Martin. House of Nehesi Publishers. 1995; 2000. 45.

⁵⁶⁸ Johnn, Eric M. “Heeding the Mermaids Instructions: The Work of Three Grenadian Artists.” *Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters* 3.2 (Fall-Winter 2005): 136. Eds. Jacqueline Bishop, and Michela Calderaro. New York: New York University. 25 May 2009 <<http://www.nyu.edu/calabash/>>.

⁵⁶⁹ Cf. chapter on Martin Carter in this thesis.

⁵⁷⁰ Fergus noticed that: “Sekou is a great admirer of Maurice Bishop, who was not building just a society “but a just society”—a cause he espouses for his own St. Martin. He rightly blames the counter-revolutionary action of the US

experiences, and it is inevitable that they translated them into rhythm and form in their poetry. Rajeev Patke observed something similar regarding Collins's first collection of poems:

A generation later [than Martin Carter, *NbR*], Merle Collins, in her early work, sustains the tension between ideological commitment and an alert use of language and form, as in the poem 'Rock-Stone Dance', in which the 1979 American invasion of her home island of Grenada is represented with power and precision, adapting the rhythm and syntax of nursery rhyme to a very adult education:

I watched
[...]
the ships that came
to scorn my tears
to mock our dreams
to launch the planes
that dropped the bombs
that ripped the walls
that raped the land
that burnt the earth
that crushed the dream
that we built (1985: 85)⁵⁷¹

In the 1970s and 1980s Grenada became a hot-spot of political and social issues, and poets like Collins or Brand – as much as the Grenadian poet Delano Abdul Malik de Coteau⁵⁷² – found fertile ground to be inspired for their poetry, to give voice to people who were not listened to or even allowed to speak. So in "Because the Dawn Breaks" Collins declared:

We speak
for the same reason
that
the thunder frightens the child
that
the lightning startles the tree

and their abiding big-stick policies". Fergus, Howard A. Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou. Philipsburg, St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers. 2007. 73.

⁵⁷¹ Patke, Rajeev S. Postcolonial Poetry in English. Oxford; New York: OUP, 2006. 94.

⁵⁷² Cf. his poem "Motto Vision 1971": "I born / from / a force / ripe / small / Island / an ah bitter / now / like a paw-paw / seed / SPIT ME OUT / buh Grenada soil / plant dey / on mih mind too", Burnett, Paula, ed. The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English. *Cit.* 50. The Grenadian poet Omowale David Franklyn wrote in the poem "Survey": "From this mountain fortress / Guillen Garvey Marryshow / Cesaire Brathwaite Walcott / and simple poets / sprouted by the land / proclaim: / We now presume to reign / and shine over our lives / our Antillean isles— / they are the handiwork / of hurricanes". Omowale, David Franklyn. "Survey." Tongue of Another Drum: Anthology of Poems. *Cit.* 13. " 'Marryshow'—Grenadian politician, regarded as the father of Federation." is cited in Delano Abdul Malik De Coteau's poem in Burnett, Paula, ed. The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English. *Cit.* 83. and Collins's poem "The Lesson", with a reference to "'Theophilus Albert Marryshow', Grenadian journalist, trade unionist and politician, known as the 'father' of the idea of Caribbean Federation." in Brown, Stewart, ed. Foreword by Mervyn Morris, illustrated by Jennifer Northway. Caribbean Poetry Now. *Cit.* 202.

We do not speak
to defy your tenets
though we do
or upset your plans
even though we do (...)

We speak
because
your plan
is not our plan
our plan
we speak because we dream (...)

because
we are workers
peasants
leaders
you see
and were not born
to be your vassals⁵⁷³.

De Caires Narain observed – in the use of the Marxist language by Collins in this collection – the “sense of loss”, melancholy, “silences and chants”.⁵⁷⁴ Collins was a supporter of Maurice Bishop, (as well as the activist Dionne Brand from Trinidad was), who moved to Grenada during the years of the revolution. But Brand’s poems, as “Military Occupation” or “P.P.S. Grenada”, or prose – as in the novel *In Another Place, Not Here* – show, at times, a lack of dreams and her hopelessness,⁵⁷⁵ Collins’s writings instead seem to be full of hope, energy and dreams. In the poem “Dreams” the hopes of a people are what the poet fights for and she aims at making people understand her view of justice and of equality in society: “My friends non-believing (...) / Dreaming alive / Leaving dreams / Alone / In a crowd of non-believers / Who will be converted” (“Dreams”, *BTDB*, 46).⁵⁷⁶ The

⁵⁷³ Collins, Merle. “Because the Dawn Breaks.” *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*. Eds. Stewart Brown, and Ian Mc Donald. London: Heinemann International Literature and Textbooks, 1992. 53-5.

⁵⁷⁴ DeCaires Narain, Denise. *Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry*. *Cit.* 129.

⁵⁷⁵ The poetic persona in Dionne Brand’s poem “Military Occupation” is sleepless, “eyes full of sleep lie awake”, “fear keeps us awake / and makes us long for sleep” and dreamless, “and dream is dead / in these antilles” like the character of Verlia in Brand’s *In Another Place, Not Here*. Or else, she suffers from the absence of a physical presence, “something is missing / some part of the body, some / area of the world, an island / a place to think about / (...) looking to where Grenada was”. Brand, Dionne. “Military Occupation.” *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*. *Cit.* 358, 361 and 358.

⁵⁷⁶ *Cf.* also the Grenadian poet Omowale David Franklyn, who wrote in “Coyaba”: “We / journey into this dream / we dreamers of these islands / Untying tongues / unchaining words / shaping expressions / from pieces of patois (...) / Searching even in our sounds / of soca, pan / reggae, zouk / salsa / for the Coyaba / that Anacoana [and not “Anacoana”, *NbR*] / and other dreamers” Omowale, David Franklyn. “Coyaba.” *Tongue of Another Drum: Anthology of Poems*. Mona, Jamaica: A.C.L. Art & Desktop Services, for St. George’s, Grenada: Talented House Publications, 1994. 9.

interweaving of linguistic registers and of different varieties seems to emerge since this first collection, regarding which DeCaires Narain sustained:

As with many of the poems in *Because the Dawn Breaks!*, translations of any patois used are offered within the poem or in footnotes. The seamless weaving of registers of language – Creole, patois, Standard English and the Marxist-inflected discourse of politics – are a striking feature in Collins’s first collection of poetry.⁵⁷⁷

DeCaires Narain also affirmed that Collins’s is one of the most important voices of Caribbean feminism, hers being an occasion to speak of social problems, going against the norm of a male-oriented society and grasping the medium of orality – as derived from the African tradition of storytelling as an adhesive element for the tribe – to speak for the voiceless. Also Edward Baugh made an observation on Caribbean feminist writers, highlighting Collins’s and Brand’s relevance in ‘black revolutionary struggles’:

West Indian feminism, in these poets, articulates the female self as an integral, necessary factor in the wider communal situation. It engages questions on history, class, and race. It claims woman’s place as cultural conservator and voice of the tribe’s renewal (...) The new woman’s voice speaks out against male-dominated power structures, and, especially in the case of Brand, Collins, and Goodison, allies itself with contemporary Third-World / black revolutionary struggles. Brand and Collins were directly involved in the Grenadian revolutionary movement of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The revolutionary orientation of these two is reflected in the allusion to the Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardenal in Brand’s title *Winter Epigrams & Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia*, 1983, and in the title of Collins’s *Because the Dawn Breaks! Poems Dedicated to the Grenadian People*, 1985.⁵⁷⁸

In *BTDB* Collins combined poetry with a sociological need of addressing the people and speaking about and for them. Collins’s production, in those years, would probably have not found sustainment in what Derek Walcott expressed in a 1982 interview in the *Sunday Express*, affirming that art is a matter of elitism and that the employment of a “bad” or rather “ill-expressed language” in a society leads to the lapse of that society:

A deterioration of syntax is related to the threat of deterioration in a society. (...) art is not democratic, art is hierarchical (...) if immediately your peers are made to be illiterate, or the people who feel that education is restricted

⁵⁷⁷ DeCaires Narain, Denise. *Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry*. *Cit.* 126.

⁵⁷⁸ Baugh, Edward. “A History of Poetry.” *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*. *Cit.* 266.

entirely to self-expression without craft, then the society is in danger. It is in more danger than it is from terrorists and revolutionaries.⁵⁷⁹

Having published *BTDB* in 1985, two years after the Grenadian Revolution, Collins seemed to care for a “Society’s urging” (“Dreams”, *BTDB*, 46), and at the same time the title collection hints at a social reason for poetry: the poet’s people. As Breiner put it:

Every society has its naive poets (...) The most extreme West Indian demonstration of this occurred in Grenada under the short-lived revolutionary government of Maurice Bishop (1979-83). During those years this small island produced a stream of poetry anthologies. (...) poetry has a significant role to play in contemporary society.⁵⁸⁰

Collins’s socio-aesthetics is partially an “aesthetics of the extemporaneous” (as that “Love the essence” in “Dreams” shows, *BTDB*, 46), where dreams of peace and a hope for improvement are what makes the poet love life and her people, despite socio-political issues, and where the period of time when ‘the dawn breaks’ becomes the moment in which the poet chooses to re-awaken social consciousness to awareness, “because temples built / to honour myths / must crumble / as the dawn breaks” (“Because the Dawn Breaks”, *BTDB*, 54). Also in “Trapped” Collins captures a special moment: a butterfly on the verge of flying is instead trapped by artificiality: Collins inserts some Creole to underline the relevance of history and men in the destruction or the slowing down of natural processes: “Butterfly / trapped in a mould / of molten steel / wings open / poised for flight (...) / wish I knew where history been”.⁵⁸¹ In “The Embrace” a personal sign of affection, an embrace, a hug, expands to a public sphere and “speak[s] worlds of love / of hope / for teeming millions / as we embrace / Revolutions touch / building beauty / that people let slip” (*BTDB*, 47). The moment becomes infinite (“When I hold you close / for an eternal moment”, *BTDB*, 47), so that the sense of love extends to that of hope, of struggle, of Revolution, and the poet, the woman of culture who appreciates the beauty in life and urges to appreciate beauty created by revolutions (“Revolutions touch / building beauty / that people let slip”, and “Revolutions merge / to touch the pulse / of all that’s beauty”, *BTDB*, 47), literally embraces the struggle of her people, the cause of the Grenadian revolution.

⁵⁷⁹ Walcott, Derek. “Interview.” *Sunday Express* (14 March 1982): 18. In *The New Voices* X.20 (July 1982): 68. Ed. Anson Gonzales. Diego Martin, Trinidad & Tobago: E. Gonzales, 1982. 68.

⁵⁸⁰ Breiner, Laurence A. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 19.

⁵⁸¹ Collins, Merle. “Trapped.” *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*. *Cit.* 55.

VII.ii. *Rotten Pomerack*

As DeCaires Narain observed in her work on Caribbean women's poetry, gender had its weight on the production of literature and in the discussion of important historical or cultural themes: "The commonly held idea that West Indian writing is almost exclusively male-centered has generated the assumptions that West Indian women writers and thinkers never entered the debate on history and identity."⁵⁸² Instead, in this collection the issues of history as a paradigm onto which to base our lives in order not to commit old mistakes, or the importance of the poet's identity firmly rooted in her history and tradition – despite the diasporic movements or the choice of exile made to better her life – are seminal issues. Her African-bound identity and the African-based cultural retentions in the Caribbean are brought to the fore by Collins in such poems as "Crick Crack", in which the voice of the poet emerges as that of a storyteller. As Baugh aptly put it:

Much of this largely Creole poetry also draws, even if at times only by the merest suggestion, on the storyteller's folk art. Louise Bennett drew on it, and it had always been one informing principle of the calypso. Merle Collins exploits it with consummate dramatic skill in poems such as 'It Crow Fire' and 'Crick Crack' in her collection *Rotten Pomerack*, 1992: "But some stories come / with no crick with no crack / and still monkey does well / break they back on a / rotten pomerack" (Collins [1992], 61).⁵⁸³

Collins chose this title for her collection of poetry because it is very evocative: it prepares the reader to expect references to proverbs and orality. In fact, as it is explained in the dust jacket of the collection, its meaning is elucidated as: "the proverbial slipping on a 'rotten pomerack' (French-Creole for the cashew fruit) which can make events take an unexpected turn".⁵⁸⁴ As Collins explained to me:

I don't know if you've read my poem "Crick Crack". That's one I would recommend. I think it's best in performance, because then you get the full impact of the call and response technique employed. I am always reminded of Merle Hodge's explanation that "our deepest thought processes are in Creole". Mine certainly are and I am motivated to explore many emotions and also many issues in a Creole voice.⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸² Wilson-Tagoe, Nana. "Configurations of History in the Writing of West Indian Women." Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998: 223-252. 223.

⁵⁸³ Baugh, Edward. "A History of Poetry." *Cit.* 270.

⁵⁸⁴ Collins, Merle. *RP*. Back cover. The 'pomerack' or 'Malacca-apple' (*Cf.* "malacca-apple/-pear" in Allsopp, Jeannette. The Caribbean Multilingual Dictionary of Flora, Fauna and Foods. *Cit.* 45.) was defined by Walcott in *Omeros* as "The pomme-Arac". Walcott, Derek. Omeros. London: faber and faber. 1990. Ch. III, XXXI, ii. 162. Or. publ. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1990.

⁵⁸⁵ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 2 May 2009.

Quite remarkable is the mention of the Trinidadian writer Merle Hodge, who wrote a novel titled *Crick Crack, Monkey* (much as the Haitian writer Edwige Danticat wrote *Krik? Krak!*),⁵⁸⁶ as Collins's poem goes "Crick! / Crack! / Monkey break he back on a rotten pomerack (...) / When we were children the signals were clear / somebody say crick we say crack / and we know then was nancy-story time in the place" ("Crick Crack", *RP*, 60). The proverb of the title reappears in these lines, which sound very much like a rigmarole, a musical nursery rhyme⁵⁸⁷ with repetitions of plosive sounds. Collins's elucidation makes also reference to an oral technique of antiphonal response: the formula "crick? crack!" – also spelled "krik? krak?" – alerts the listener or the audience that a story is about to be told in the African tradition of storytelling, of "Anancy stories", in which the main characters explaining moral precepts were often animals, like the monkey in this case. In Collins's poem other folkloric figures feature, as "la diablesse / devil woman with one good foot / and one goat foot" ("Crick Crack", *RP*, 61).⁵⁸⁸

⁵⁸⁶ Hodge, Merle. *Crick Crack, Monkey*. London: Heinemann, 2000. and Danticat, Edwige. *Krik? Krak!* New York: Vintage, 1996.

⁵⁸⁷ Cf. chapter III on Shake Keane, footnote 343 p. 120, on The Mighty Sparrow's and Mutabaruka's employment of nursery rhymes, respectively in "Dan is the Man (In the Van)" and "Nursery Rhyme Lament".

⁵⁸⁸ In the Caribbean folk tradition we find many characters: either they can be similar or the same ones, or they can differ from one island to another, especially those from the French-speaking islands are different from the ones derived from the English-speaking territories, such as "*La Jabllesse* (the devilwoman), *Soucouya* (the vampire) and *La Gahoos* (the werewolf)" (Lewis, Theresa. *Caribbean Folk Legends*. Cit. Back cover.). There is Ti-Jean (Cf. the St. Lucian Derek Walcott's play *Ti Jean and His Brothers*, 1958, or the Guadeloupean Simone Schwartz-Bart's *Ti Jean l'Horizon*, 1979), or the couple of Bouki and Ti Malice. The American ethnographer Alan Lomax described Ti Jean as "It really was John, the sly slave (...): the descendant of Little John in Robin Hood, of Ti Jean in French fairy tales of the West Indies, of Jack or Jacques in numberless fantastic tales, of John, the author of the Book of Revelation, and of John Henry." (My translation of "Era proprio John, lo schiavo furbo (...): il discendente in linea diretta di Little John in Robin Hood, di Ti Jean nei racconti francesi e delle Indie Occidentali, di Jack o Jacques in innumerevoli storie fantastiche, di Giovanni, autore dell'Apocalisse, e di John Henry." Lomax, Alan. *La Terra del Blues. Delta del Mississippi. Viaggio all'Origine della Musica Nera*. Ed. Alessandro Portelli. Trans. Chiara Midolo. Or. title *The Land Where the Blues Began*. 1993. Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2005. 126.) On the other hand, Amiri Baraka commented on the symbolic valence of these characters as nubbins of freedom, resistance, and of wit power: "The Afro-American symbology encloses the expression of freedom, both of Br'er Rabbit, who outwits thanks to a symbol (...), and of his dialectic counterpart, like for instance, Stagolee or John Henry or Jimmy Brown, all belonging to a sphere of strength and power." (My translation of "La simbologia afroamericana racchiude l'espressione di libertà, si tratti di Br'er Rabbit, che appoggiandosi a un simbolo si rese comprensibile attraverso l'astuzia (...), o del suo opposto dialettico come, per esempio, Stagolee o John Henry o Jimmy Brown, tutti appartenenti a una sfera di forza e potere." Baraka, Amiri. *Il Popolo del Blues. Sociologia degli Afroamericani Attraverso il Jazz*. Trans. Carlo Antonelli e Raf Valvola Scelsi. Or. title *Blues People. The Negro Experience in White America and the Music that Developed From It*. 1963. Milano: Shake Edizioni, 1994; 2007. 17-18.) As it emerges from both Lomax and Baraka, Ti-Jean and Ti-Malice are not the same folk character as Brer Rabbit, but they could be valuable counterparts. African-derived fairy tales are also told by the Jamaican-New Yorker Shara McCallum or the Jamaican-Canadian John Edgar Caulwell Hearne in "Bouki and Ti Malice Go Fishing" (*An Anthology of African and Caribbean Writing in English*). The Antiguan poets L.H.C (Lee Harris Camacho) Westcott's *The Garden of Life: the complete collection of poems* (1999), or Sylvanus Barnes's *Rioutous Rhymes 'N Remedies* (2000) and *Barney's Wit 'N Wisdom* (2005) deal with folkloric themes or with the authors' involvement and love for their native island. Other poets who dealt with the theme of folkloric characters are the Jamaican-Canadian Afua Cooper in "Memories Have Tongue" (1994) (*Copper Woman*), the Trinidadian LeRoy Clarke in "Soucouyant" (*The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*), which he dedicated to the "Vampires of the Caribbean", or the Guyanese writer Rooplal Monar in "Moongaza" (*Caribbean Poetry Now*), where the character of the title is a Guyanese jumbie, part of the folk tradition. John Agard in "Jumbie Romance" observed that "jumbie does play tricks". (Agard, John. "Mek Four." *Lovelines, For A Goat-Born Lady*. London: Serpent's Tail, 1990. 56).

Also the poem “It Crow Fire” is based on orality and reproduces a riddle, where the answer is given in an antiphonal response: “my uncle would appear on the top step / with a sasa mi oh! / and a Tim! Tim! / and with a Bashe (...) / Sese mwen oh! / Sa i ye? / Me father have a cock / when it crow it crow / FIRE⁵⁸⁹ / I know! / I know! / You know? / What you know? / A gun!” (“It Crow Fire”, *RP*, 1). In these lines: ““Sese mwen oh!” is Creole, shaped by a mix of African languages with French (the result of Grenada’s French colonial history). It’s an exclamation, the literal translation of which would be “My sister, oh!”;⁵⁹⁰ “Bashe” means “Bois seche. That entire sequence is a call and response pattern used in some areas (during the 40s to 60s) for beginning stories. Traditional call and response pattern of the oral story.”;⁵⁹¹ the response is “Sa i ye?”, Creole French for “What is that?” or “Yes, I am listening. Speak!”.⁵⁹² This entire sequence has a call and response pattern used in some areas (during the 40s to 60s) for beginning stories. Here the poet is reproducing snippets of dialogue in her maternal Creole, and the conversational tone continues with a Creole syntax, where French words (as “non”) are inserted among the English Creole words:

Bois seche
 Is who cock that crowing now!
 You hear the latest?
 Those on the hill selling up
 going back to England!
 Back?
 Is there they come from? (...)
 but is not really England, non (...)
 So if he goin
 What happen to the estate?
 Selling up?
 Who buying? (“It Crow Fire”, *RP*, 2)

These lines introduce the theme of the diaspora, dear to the poet herself who moved to the UK in 1984 and later to the US. A search for origins causes social displacement: “I went to see uncle in a London flat / no step of its own / no space for beginnings / not even for happy remembering” (“It Crow Fire”, *RP*, 3).

Three other poems from this collection deal with the theme of the diaspora: “She Sits on the Train and Sings Inside”, “Nabel String”, and “Seduction”. “She Sits on the Train and Sings

⁵⁸⁹ The poet creates an alliteration in /ai/ with the word ‘fire’, with words as ‘night’, ‘smile’, and ‘high’, ‘kind’, ‘style’ (“It Crow Fire.” *RP*, 1).

⁵⁹⁰ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 7 July 2009.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵⁹² ¹ would like to thank the poet for this observation. Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 8 July 2009.

Inside” is a poem probably written during one of the poet’s journeys by train, as she explains in an interview with Bishop and McLean:

sometimes on my way from a class or from somewhere else I would be sitting on the train – and this is really how *Angel* happened – I’d be sitting on the train just busily writing (...), writing these stories, grappling with the voices in my head, the stories that needed to come out.⁵⁹³

The poem is about a woman who describes her experience in the UK, in a city full of people lost or insane, eaten by the city itself and by its spinning navel, Piccadilly Circus; at home in her native Caribbean island, her daughter is proud of her mother working in England, and the daughter says “Me mother in England, yes / she says / and the eyes look at her with envy / Me mother in England / she working in Piccadilly Circus, now, / and she send ten pounds for me” (*RP*, 29). The woman sitting in this London train sings internally in French Creole and with an alliteration in /s/: “Las abété mwen, Naporinden⁵⁹⁴ / Las abété mwen / Las abété mwen, Naporinden / Las abété mwen / Las abété mwen, Naporinden / Las abété mwen / Sits and sings snippets of remembered songs (...) / sliding / subsiding / startling and recovering” (*RP*, 25). De Caires Narain observed that Collins’s poem “She Sits on the Train and Sings Inside” is “profoundly shaped – in terms of themes and aesthetics – by the experience of migration.”⁵⁹⁵ She also remarked that in the poem there is an allusion to an old calypso song: “Sad to say I’m on my way” (*RP*, 26) is a line from a song by Harry Belafonte, titled “Farewell Jamaica” (singing “Sad to say I’m on my way / Won’t be back for many a day / My heart is down / My head is turning around / I had to leave a little girl / in Kingston town”), but De Caires Narain observed that:

The haunting melody of the calypso (and other songs) is absent on the page, *completely* absent for the reader who is unfamiliar with the calypso/songs, and this, when compared to a live performance of the poem, or its performance on tape, may be deemed an unsatisfactory absence.⁵⁹⁶

The second poem which reflects the poet’s movements towards new places or back to places of the past which are now, somehow, different, is “Nabel String”, which was read by Collins in 2002 during an interview with Judith Paterson.⁵⁹⁷ As read by Collins, the poem sounds very sweet and it renders much more the dialogic parts which are just outlined in the written text, in

⁵⁹³ Collins, Merle. “Working Out Grenada: An Interview with Merle Collins.” *Cit.* 59-60.

⁵⁹⁴ “ “Las abété mwen, Naporinden”, is “Leave me alone” The words of a song. A mother with lots of children, asking her children to leave her alone.” Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 7 July 2009.

⁵⁹⁵ DeCaires Narain, Denise. *Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry*. *Cit.* 130.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 131.

⁵⁹⁷ Collins, Merle. “Interview with Merle Collins and Carlos Schroeder.” 21 Feb. 2002 Ed. Judith Paterson. *The Writer’s Tale*. Online video. UMTV (University of Maryland Television). 20 June 2007 <<http://www.researchchannel.org/prog/displayevent.aspx?rID=2638&fID=1574>>.

snippets of conversation such as “doodoo darling, you alright?” (“Nabel-String”, *RP*, 47).⁵⁹⁸ Nonetheless, there are some differences between the written poem and that recited version, some words are not read by Collins, such as “chickee baby / not” (*RP*, 47); two paragraphs, talking about love transforming itself into hate in the new diasporic land, are completely suppressed. Some parts are rendered in a Creole tone, and they are mainly snippets of dialogues and fragments of conversation, such as the aforementioned “doodoo darling, you alright?” (*RP*, 47). Towards the end of the poem there is a repetition of an article,⁵⁹⁹ there are introductory sentences that create the atmosphere of remembrance:

but running outside with the piece of bread
 Ay! Teacher Clearie!
 Shout the bus for me, non!
 Ay! Moore, man, you alright?
 I tell you already don’t smoke that ting, you know
 Ay! James! wait! Take the kerosene pan!
 I don’t taking no damn kerosene pan
 Eh! But he ignorant, eh!
 Awrite! Awrite!
 Bring it!
 Ka dammit!⁶⁰⁰ (...)

Go on, chile, take what I didn’t get
 you hear
 I have nothing left to give
 All I have is in you head
 Left because every year more out of work
 less work to get
 because the landless with money
 always getting land
 and the without money landless
 still more landless yet
 and still loving
 because of a memory. (*RP*, 47-9)

The conclusive part of the poem, in which the poet remembers her grandmother when suggesting that someone bury a navel string under a coconut tree, so that – according to the Caribbean belief – it will link the person to the land and call that person back again, sings “[hey] Bury the children

⁵⁹⁸ That “doo-doo” or “dou-dou” is “[A term of warm endearment] (...) [Fr. Cr. < Fr. Doux ‘sweet’ + emotive reduplication] Most common in *Trin* folk speech, but copied through calypsos (...)”. Allsopp, Richard. Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage. *Cit.* 200.

⁵⁹⁹ This reminds me of Lasana Sekou reading his poems and repeating articles and some other minor adjustments, such as “204” instead of “no. 204” (*RP*, 47); “so fast” instead of “so blasted fast” (*RP*, 47); “the drum / the drum” instead of “the drum / the drum / the drum” (*RP*, 47); “but still loving” instead of “and still loving” (*RP*, 49).

⁶⁰⁰ “in the case of Caribbean dialects the vast majority of correspondence (...) can be plausibly shown to be West African in origin; while others, like the preposition *na*, and the verbal particle *ka*, attributed to Portuguese” Alleyne, Mervyn C. “The Cultural Matrix of Creolization.” Pidginization and Creolization of Language. *Cit.* 169-170.

nabel-string / under the coconut tree, you know / by where I did bury their father own / so the nabel-
 string, there / and as the palm branch swaying / it pulling / it pulling / it pulling me / back” (*RP*, 50).
 The last ‘pulling’ is sung by the poet in her performance as an ancestral echo, as though with her
 voice she wanted to evoke a voice, a chant. The relationship with the land is further investigated in
 this poem, where the land is a matter of re-appropriations by means of money, and where the land is
 an alien soil, in which the poet has exiled herself to look “for a better life / to chase dreams / to find
 education” (*RP*, 49), but which still evokes native places, like the Grenadian “River Sallee” or
 “Belmont”.

The third poem which investigates the themes of displacement and of diaspora is
 “Seduction”, also performed by Collins during the same interview. The recitation is very similar to
 the written form of the poem, and the poem conveys a sense of sadness for a subsistence in the UK,
 where the woman interlocutor of the poet is pleading her not to linger too long in that cold place,
 aspiring to go back home: “Twenty years, she said, / in this cold confinement / and every winter I’m
 packing / to leave.” (*RP*, 14), but then the birth of her children and hopes for a better life, together
 with the summer which brightens up a little bit the spirits keep her in that land and hinder her
 decision to go back to her homeland. The silencing grows with staying in the UK, “and I linger /
 longer / in this seductive dying / this sad and sweet subsisting / and the more silent, it appears, / I
 become.” (*RP*, 15). An exchange of voices between the poet and the poetic persona becomes a clue
 for a socio-aesthetic movement, whereas the uprooting of the poet and the re-routing in a foreign
 land follow a pattern similar to that of the woman speaking: “Your shouting, my friend / is only my
 silence intoned” (*RP*, 16).

In other poems a particular attention is paid to the use of language, as in “Soon Come” – a
 Creole expression itself – : “Having a wonder- / full time” (*RP*, 52), with its wordplay. In the poem
 “What Ting Is Dat?” Collins considers different races and ethnic groups, such as the whites: “Down
 there in the Caribbean / it have a few people that is white / who into surfing and sailing and plant- /
 ation an ting” (*RP*, 59), or the Indians: “kinda like coolie to you?”, (*RP*, 58), or “Indian like / dougla
 / and the day they told the dougla that dougla means bastard (...) it’s just that in Hindi / there’s a
 word that’s dougla / which just happens to mean bastard” (“At Cock Crow”, *RP*, 5). These lines
 seem to underline a situation very far from any peaceful and unified Caribbean aesthetics, to the
 extent that especially in Trinidad some scholars articulated their works around the existence of a

‘dougl’a poetics’,⁶⁰¹, different from a Black one, a Creole one, a White one, being ‘dougl’a’ the result of a union between an African and an Indian.

VII.iii. The nutmeg as the queen of Grenadian crops: *Lady in a Boat*

The front cover of Collins’s third collection of poetry, *Lady in a Boat*, published in 2003, shows a drawing of a nutmeg, which is the queen of Grenadian crops: a spice⁶⁰² originally from the East, it is now endemic to the Caribbean “spice island” and it sustains the island’s economy.⁶⁰³ The nutmeg links the land to the peasants, and it is vital for the island, so much so that it is reproduced in the national flag as well; in the poem “Se Mwe, Nutmeg” (“It’s me, nutmeg”) we read:

I don’t want to boast but mine is a fancy face in the town.
True I living in bush but I love mi red and mi basic brown.
And when you see I have mi yellow coat over mi red petticoat
se mwè mèm, Nutmeg, that is really queen of my country’s court. (...)
For flying high on mi country flag, I taking ten out of ten.
For producing one third of world wants, ten out of ten (*LB*, 46).

Its image is in the flag of Grenada: “So in spite of mi exotic flying, mi future looking bleak. / My country small and my bargain power weak.” (*LB*, 47).

The drawing on the book cover represents the solution of a riddle designed all around the image of a nutmeg: RIDDLE: Lady in a boat with a red petticoat ANSWER: Nutmeg. This illustrated riddle announces the tone and content of the collection, in which the elements of orality are spread throughout, such as:

⁶⁰¹ Cf. Puri, Shalini. The Caribbean Postcolonial. Social Equality, Post/Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. I would like to thank the Trinidadian poet Jennifer Rahim for this observation. Personal communication with the poet. 10 May 2008. Cf. also the chapter on David Rudder in this thesis.

⁶⁰² The spices were often considered by poets, as in Olive Senior’s “Allspice” (*over the roofs of the world*), or included in a simple sociological description, as in the cameo of a marketplace in Amryl Johnson’s “Granny in the Market Place” (*The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*), in which a conversation in Creole between the vendor and the customer is reproduced. The Antiguan poet Joy Lawrence wrote a collection titled *Island Spice* (1996). One of the artists of Grenada painted the nutmeg with an allegorical meaning: “Benjamin uses the nutmeg as a kind of allegorical expression in Grenada’s visual art. He paints the nutmeg with pride to emphasize the legacy that Grenada has as one of the top producers and exporters of the crop. (...) The nutmeg is endemic to Grenadian society since it provides one of the largest sources of income and employs at least a third of the country’s population. Nutmeg is a labor-intensive affair and takes ten year or more to produce a crop.”⁶⁰² Other artists from the three islands of Grenada, Carriacou, and Petite Martinique are: the painters Canute Calliste (Carriacou), John Benjamin, Eric John, Susan Mains, Gilbert Nero, Nadine Bethel, Milton Williams, Christine Matuschek, Elinus Cato and Oliver Benoit (Grenada), and the sculptors Victor Francis and Wayne Snagg (Grenada).

⁶⁰³ Grenada produces one third of the world’s needs for nutmeg.

- ♦ nursery rhymes or rigmaroles, as in “October, All Over”, which speaks about the hurricane, “June, too soon; / July, stand by; / August, look / out, you must; September, re- / member; October, all o- / ver.” (LB, 33);⁶⁰⁴ the warning continues: “You know / hurricane develop in / secret? (...) / raise people and fling them / dekatché⁶⁰⁵ them who dead, who / dying, who behind bars. So / October, all over, oui. / You know nuff rooftop gone? Who / disappear” (italics in the original, LB, 33);
- ♦ poems dedicated to or inspired by music and songs, such as “Notes on Blue”, “Music” or “October Blues”: “bumbling bombs blast explosions / on a fumbling, fearful fort. / It’s nearly mid October / and I feel those October / blues again” (LB, 38);⁶⁰⁶
- ♦ fragments of conversations and the insertion of patois, as in “Dream Mourning”: “For seven months, and seven / days, they trudged every night / across the yard. Tell me you” (LB, 29); “Man Watch”: “Woman say / Me, I love mi callaloo soup” (LB, 84), and in “Woman Watch”: “Man say / One ting ah love / Is mi peas and mi dumplin” (LB, 85); or in “Quality Time”: “cocoa and cashew, guava and gospo, / mango and mortelle, nutmeg and nettle, / soursop and Seville orange” (LB, 13); in “Roll Call”: “a mourning at the empty / grave, need to chant a chandi / nèl klèwè, need a serious / wake to sing the names” (LB, 41): the “chandinel klewe” is a Creole song of mourning sung in wakes;⁶⁰⁷
- ♦ or other languages such as Spanish, as in “Mexico Aunque No Parezcamos”: “my Caribbean ears / are in tune with the familiar ring of / next to nothing. / And so, she says, we all look for / *otra cosa, entiendes? / para poder alcanzar,* / again the Caribbean search for / some little pankwai,⁶⁰⁸ you know” (italics in the original, LB, 77); “it’s not easy. / *Aquí en este país / trabajamos como negros / aunque no parezcamos.* / Here in this country, she says, / we work like blacks” (italics in the original, LB, 78); “I’m just wondering / whether *negros* / in that context / is translated / black or niggers.” (italics in the original, LB, 79).

This collection seems to summarise all of Collins’s major themes as identified in this chapter: the Grenadian revolution, the theme of the diaspora and the issue of orality. The revolution in the background is evident in the poem “Shame Bush”, where:

⁶⁰⁴ In the poem the term “masanto” refers about Grenada: the Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage explains it relates to the battle of Plombeau. Allsopp, Richard. *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. Cit. 373.

⁶⁰⁵ “dekatché is Creole for “destroy”” Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 7 July 2009.

⁶⁰⁶ Other women poets from the Caribbean decided to confront with the ‘blues poetry’ at some stage in their writing, like the Jamaican Christine Craig in ‘City Blues’ (*The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*), who – together with Collins – underpinned her poetry on the major examples of the Jamaican Una Marson, with poems as “Kinky Hair Blues” or “Brown Baby Blues” (*The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*).

⁶⁰⁷ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 8 July 2009.

⁶⁰⁸ ““Pankwai” is a Kweyol expression meaning “a little something”.” Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 8 July 2009.

All these years, people say, and still Grenadians not talking (...)
 Can't forget the promise of that jewel of a movement⁶⁰⁹ (...)
 But they don't talk because
 touch shame bush
 see how it curl inside itself (...)
 see how it close to defend itself (...)
 you will understand the silence people keeping (*LB*, 50).

In fact, in an interview with Bishop and McLean, Collins explained that in that poem she was “talking about how the country has folded in on itself – like the “Shame Bush””.⁶¹⁰ Moreover, the poem talks about “The announcement on radio, the crossfire story still haunting” (*LB*, 50) and “And I ain't worried because I think communism bad / I live capitalism” (*LB*, 51), whereas in the same interview the poet remembers: “There used to be a Wednesday night oldies and jazz at one of the clubs in Grand Anse. On one particular night, I remember I was driving, some friends and I were going down to the club and on the radio, there was this announcement that Maurice [Bishop] was under house arrest.”⁶¹¹

The theme of the diaspora is epitomized by the “Ballad of Mace and Nutmeg”, a kind of nursery rhyme or story in which the nutmeg and the mace – or macis, the exterior aril of the nutmeg – are travelling inside a bag in a car to be sold, and in a pathetic fallacy the two spices acquire emotions and are personified: the mace is sad so the nutmeg makes up a story to cheer it up:

*Mace, she said, you're my petticoat red
 So don't be afraid of a thing*

*When we were born we lived on a tree
 Were safe in a yellow boat
 When the boat opened out, I was pretty and brown
 And loved my red petticoat
 Then the older we got the less we could grip
 We fell from our safe yellow home
 Now time has moved on, our growing will change
 We'll remember our land as we roam* (italics in the original, *LB*, 49)

The story the nutmeg makes up stands also for the diaspora of Caribbean poets abroad (such as Collins herself) and in the experience of the diaspora the remembrance of the native homeland deletes all the negatives aspects or the historical issues, as in “This Anxiety Likes Absence”: “From

⁶⁰⁹ This is a wordplay with the New Jewel Movement, *NbR*.

⁶¹⁰ Collins, Merle. “Working Out Grenada: An Interview with Merle Collins.” *Cit.* 57.

⁶¹¹ *Ibidem*.

home, / voices wonder: You, too / thinking of this place as sea, / as sun, as carnival⁶¹² laugh- / ter, as rum and coconut / water?" (*LB*, 71) .

Finally, the issue of orality emerges in "The Word: In the Beginning: 1":

In the beginning, a little house facing the road
sitting down in the crooked elbow of a hill
cousins, uncles, aunts, macomères slowing down to call out

How things going? Sa ki fèt? You holding on? Child, God is love.
We making it. God don't give more than you can handle (...)
Gadé. (...)

Ay ay! Come come come. Let me pich you this thing.
You don't know what I hear down the road this selfsame morning?
Come, sit down for a minute let me tell you the story. (...)

Palé Patwa. Ou ba konnèt...? Eh!
When I hear I say, eh bien, wi!

Wéspé. Wéspé. (*LB*, 91)

In the poem childhood times are evoked, with the family in the surroundings, conversing in a Grenadian French-based patois, to ask "Sa ki fèt?", "How is it going?"; "Gadé", "watch out"; "Palé Patwa. Ou ba konnèt...?", "Speak patwa. Don't you know it?"; "wi" is the French "oui", "yes"; "Wéspé", "respect": here the exchange of cues indicates that the speaker, in order for the children not to understand, is asking the listener to speak "patwa", a kind of "secret language" kept away from the education of children in certain parts of the island.⁶¹³ Again, in "It Will Be Televised" Collins employs Creole, admitting that "everybody is going to cry": "Tout moun ka pléwé / black is white / The apocalypse will / be televised" (*LB*, 93).

VII.iv. Collins's 'Poetics of the Nutmeg' and its aesthetic meaning

The last collection allows me to consider it a reservoir of all of Collins's themes – Grenada's revolution, diaspora, orality – to delineate a simple design elucidating Collins's poetics:

⁶¹² Nellie Payne spoke profusely about the Grenadian "Mas' ", other term for Carnival, with a historical perspective: "Grenada was settled by the French in 1650 and France being a Catholic country, Carnival (Carni vale, Italian, i.e. farewell flesh) was a festival celebrated for 2 days before Lent. (..) After the cancellation of Carnival in 1974 due to the Independence crisis, in 1975 the pre-Lenten date was changed to May in order to use this event to celebrate Grenada's first year of Independence." Payne, Nellie. "Grenada Mas' 1928-1988." *Carnival Monograph*. Spec. issue of *CQ. Caribbean Quarterly*. (2001): 128-136. Ed. Veronica Salter. University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica.

⁶¹³ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 8 July 2009.

the poetics of the nutmeg. If we look at the section about the spice, endearing to the author, on the right, we could consider the yellow fruit as the whole body of her poetry consisting of the juicy edible part (her rhythmic lines, full of substance and imagery); the nutmeg itself – that is the brown seed contained in it – (the linguistic core sustaining the poems, mainly with an English Creole syntax and lexicon); and finally the bright red aril – that is the macis or mace – (the other languages employed by Collins in her poetry, with the embroidery of French and Spanish Creole relics, which are actually incorporated into the variety of Grenadian Creole, due to the island’s successive historical colonizations).



*Merle Collins's
Poetics of the Nutmeg
– pictures taken by Sara Florian –*

Collins is basically an oral poet, that is she is not a performer like the Jamaican dub poets or the Trinidadian rapso poets, but her poems are imbued with elements of orality and she also had an experience in the UK with a music band, the *African Dawn*, with which she used to perform her poetry as well. What I mean is that her poems are full of elements and techniques of orality, of proverbs, riddles, snippets of conversations. Once the poet told me: “I wouldn’t be surprised to find that one of my ancestors was an oral poet. I’m certainly motivated by performance techniques and the “performative” voice.”⁶¹⁴ When we hear Collins performing her “Sometimes in the Morning”⁶¹⁵

⁶¹⁴ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 2 May 2009.

⁶¹⁵ Collins, Merle. “A Veces en la Mañana./Sometimes in the Morning.” *Revista Prometeo, Corporación de Arte y Poesia Prometeo* (14-22 July 2007) Festival Internacional de Poesia de Medellin, Colombia. 26 July 2009. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5b54YSmDeSM>>. In her performance the only slight variation from the written form is the gerund “murmuring” instead of “murmur”.

the features of Creole are basically the lack of –s ending in the third person singular so that we have “sea roll”; the use of the third person pronoun as adjective in “she name”. The poem talks about the presence of the sea and of the memory of the Middle Passage in the poet’s dreams or nightmares, when she cannot discern between ‘dream’ and ‘wake’, and the sea seems to be the container of historical and personal memories: “One morning like that / sea roll into my dreams like is sea know the meaning. (...) / *Think how man flow here without clothes, without nothing, / Think how woman swim in with not one stitch to she name.*” (italics in the original, *LB*, 88).

DeCaires Narain pointed out that “What Collins’s preamble and the performance of the poem itself encapsulates is the incestuous intimacy of the relationship between ‘the oral’ and ‘the scribal’”,⁶¹⁶ an “incestuous intimacy” where the oral and the scribal elements are inextricably intertwined as the pulp of the fruit of the nutmeg and the two spices contained in its core. What is incorporated in Collins’s poetry is an African-derived oral tradition, whereby she reproduces and echoes by linguistic means or literary techniques the orality and ‘oraliture’ typical of Caribbean storytelling. The same techniques run throughout the other Caribbean islands, as in the Dutch Curaçao, close to the poet’s native Aruba; Allen did a survey on the remnants of orality especially in songs by African-Curaçaoan women, pointing out that “Oral tradition (...) refers to this practice by working-class people of using songs, proverbs, stories, etc. to pass on information to their families and to other members of the community. This information is an important tool for teaching and consciousness raising.”⁶¹⁷

When Collins employs French-derived patois in her poems, it is similar to the one used in the neighbouring islands of Carriacou or Petite Martinique, and as pointed out earlier it is also close to the Trinidadian Creole French, as well as to that from the Anglophone islands conquered by the French, such as Saint Lucia and Dominica; as Kephart observed regarding the Creole of Carriacou:

The Creole French spoken in Carriacou is most closely related to that of Martinique and Guadeloupe, as well as the officially Anglophone islands of St. Lucia, Dominica, and Trinidad. This reflects the fact that the first Europeans to settle in Carriacou were French who arrived in the 17th century (...) The Creole English which arrived at that time [in the second half of the 17th century in Carriacou, *NbR*] appears to have resembled, to some degree,

⁶¹⁶ DeCaires Narain, Denise. *Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry*. *Cit.* 124. She also adds: “Collins acknowledges the importance of Louise Bennett, who, she claims, ‘broke new ground by her use of the Jamaican language to explore the sociopolitical reality’. [from Collins, Merle. “Themes and Trends in Caribbean Writing Today.” *From My Guy to Sci-Fi: Genre and Women’s Writing in the Postmodern World*. Ed. Helen Carr. London: Pandora, 1989. 181]. But Collins’s harnessing of Creole and patois to a progressively political agenda marks her own use of the vernacular as significantly different, in its explicitly radical politics, from that of Louise Bennett.” *Ibid.* 127.

⁶¹⁷ Allen, Rose Mary. “*Tur hende a papia un ko’*. African-Curaçaoan Women.” *Cit.* 157.

the more conservative varieties still existing in Jamaica and other parts of the Caribbean, as well as other parts of Africa.⁶¹⁸

When Collins employs Creole, even if it is mainly English Creole, she manages to insert some Creole French words, as in the poem “No Dialects Please”, a poem about a poetry competition in which the participants were invited not to submit poems ‘in dialect’: “‘Send them to us / but NO DIALECTS PLEASE’, / We’re British! / Ay! / Well ah laugh till me bouschet [‘mouth’ from the French ‘bouche’, *NbR*] near drop / Is not only dat ah tink / of de dialect of de Normans and de Saxons / dat combine an reformulate / to create a language-elect”.⁶¹⁹ In the poem Collins recalls how the English language sprang from the linguistic variants or dialects of the Normans and the Saxons. In “Heavens o mercy! / Dat is dunceness oui! / Ah wonder where is de bright British?”⁶²⁰ She underlines that what gives splendour and brightness to a language is not its linguistic ‘purity’ or perfection, but instead its complexities and variations which give colour and add to the flavours of the language itself. In an interview with Betty Wilson, which took place after Collins’s performance of this poem in London in 1993, the poet admitted that her dramatic verve when performing could be seen as a poetic spirit which comes over the poet and imbues her with a social aesthetic task, also in her poetic use of the Creoles:

COLLINS: After a performance (...) it’s as if (...) the person who was doing that, on the stage, is not the person you are speaking to. (...)

WILSON: As if a spirit comes over you?

COLLINS: Yes, it’s like a completely different feeling. (...) all of the passion that’s on the stage, it happens there....⁶²¹

Through her dedication to her island, its problems, historical issues, linguistic peculiarities, Collins managed to make her people speak through her poetic voice, and that is one of the reasons why her poetry acquires an aesthetic meaning, as the poet herself admitted once: “For me, working out the story of Grenada is working out the story of humanity, of myself and my being in the world.”⁶²²

⁶¹⁸ Kephart, Ronald F. *Broken English. The Creole Language of Carriacou*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2000. 24-27.

⁶¹⁹ Collins, Merle. “No Dialects Please.” Performed 1970s, publ. 1987. Pope, Rob. *The English Studies Book: An Introduction to Language, Literature and Culture*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2002. 301.

⁶²⁰ *Ibid.* 302.

⁶²¹ Collins, Merle. “An interview with Merle Collins. (Grenadian writer) (Francophone and Anglophone Literature: The Women Writers) (Interview)”. *Cit.*

⁶²² Collins, Merle. “Working Out Grenada: An Interview with Merle Collins.” *Cit.* 65.

Chapter VIII
Kendel Hippolyte (1952 -)
Sound and *Undersound*: the Aesthetics of Cultural Resistance

Kendel Hippolyte (1952 –) is a St. Lucian poet, playwright, and actor. He has written and performed extensively and has contributed much to the culture of his island. His collections of poetry are *Island in the Sun, Side Two...* (1980), *Bearings* (1986), *Birtright* (1997), and *Night Vision* (2005).⁶²³ He edited the anthology of poetry *Confluence: Nine Saint Lucian Poets* (Castries, St. Lucia: The Source, 1988), gathering poems from Adrian Augier, Melania Daniel, Irvin Desir, McDonald Dixon, Melchior Henry, Jane King (his wife), John Robert Lee, and Egbert Lucien. He also translated many poems from St. Lucian patois into English in the anthology *Roseau Valley and other Poems for brother George Odlum, An Anthology*, edited by John Robert Lee (Castries, St. Lucia: Jubilee Trust Fund, 2003).

VIII.i. Walcott’s and Brathwaite’s influence in Hippolyte’s poetry

The concepts of sound and *undersound* are relevant in Kendel Hippolyte’s aesthetics as a form of cultural resistance, also in political terms. I would like to imagine Hippolyte’s creative process as born out of the clash and blending of a ‘birthright’ in Saint Lucia, Derek Walcott’s homeland, with the Jamaican-based poetic development of Kamau Brathwaite, thus to verify – beyond axiological provisions which could be traced in the three authors’ aesthetics – how the bilingual situation of Saint Lucia and the Jamaican linguistic situation apply to Hippolyte’s spectrum of poetic language(s).

Derek Walcott’s “aurality” or Kamau Brathwaite’s revolutionary *nation language* will be two literary master-paradigms which will help me to frame Hippolyte’s aesthetics.⁶²⁴ In constituting an oral palimpsest with his poetry, Hippolyte’s cultural resistance lies in fixing on the page the very moment in which voice is passed from mouth to ear and successively acquires the status of written truth. What I state here is that to translate the oral word onto the written page is equal to express Creole overtones in poems, recognizing the cultural importance of Creoles and their function as vehicles of ancestral cultural traditions. Both tradition and cultural resistance are employed by Hippolyte as a symptom of social issues or political beliefs, in fact, pertinently, Trincia Rose said that: “Cultural expression is an important site of social and political reproduction. How we imagine,

⁶²³ Henceforward ‘*Island in the Sun, Side Two...*’ will be referred with ‘*IS*’, ‘*Bearings*’ with ‘*Be*’, ‘*Birtright*’ with ‘*Bi*’, and ‘*Night Vision*’ with ‘*NV*’.

⁶²⁴ I have found out that a similar observation was made also by Kwame Dawes in his interview with Hippolyte, in Dawes, Kwame, ed. *Talk Yuh Talk: Interviews with Anglophone Caribbean Poets*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 2001. 161-172.

reproduce, and define ourselves, and how we are imagined, reproduced, and defined through culture, are critically linked to (and often sustain) struggles for change and freedom.”⁶²⁵

VIII.ii. Creole Musicality: a Caribbean “submarine unity”

The musicality embedded in Caribbean poetry is what strikes me most. Effectively, Hippolyte’s poetry is full of voices, sounds, and, borrowing a term from Hippolyte himself, *undersound*, a word he employs in *Birthright* (1997).⁶²⁶ Yet this neologism could be applied to what is behind evidence in his poetry, to what is hidden or untold, that is, messages, sounds, or voices which are part of a hidden discourse, a discourse of resistance, keeping on a literary discourse on Creole musicality which led Brathwaite, and Glissant after him, to define a “submarine unity”.⁶²⁷ This unity is searched for by Brathwaite also by means of a peculiar language, which he defined *nation language*, purposely not employing the derogatory term ‘dialect’, and which is “the *submerged* area of that dialect”.⁶²⁸ Analogously, Hippolyte’s submerged discourse, mostly in his later poems, plunges into the musical soul of poetry to be impressed upon a natural palimpsest: “following your voice down dream long ways through tunnel / I startled out / onto a scroll of opened sky” (“Journal”, *Be*, 23). This is why Hippolyte’s “Systematomic Hegemony” or “City” and “City Voices” are just a small part of a larger production aimed – as a “disfory” for “Westernization” and capitalism – at ‘eulogizing’ nature, originality and genuineness.⁶²⁹ In fact, as he says in “Liminal”: “I distrust the theories and book-answers that I’ve read on this / they may be right, but they may misconstrue me” (*Bi*, 119). This means that the poet searches for his own identity, resisting given cultural notions. Likewise, this is to be found in the words of Stewart Brown, when he outlined the cultural evolution of poets as a “transition of the Caribbean as a region from an essentially colonial space where poetry and the poetic were defined in European terms, to the situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century when the region’s poets have redefined their cultural identities”.⁶³⁰

⁶²⁵ Rose, Trincia. “Cultural Survivalism and Marketplace Subversions: Black Popular Culture and Politics into the Twenty-first Century”. *Language, Rhythm, and Sound, Black Popular Cultures into the Twenty-first Century*. Eds. Joseph K. Adjaye, and Adrienne R. Andrews. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997. 259-260.

⁶²⁶ Cf. Hippolyte, Kendel. “Castries: I Came Upon this Town.” *Birthright*. Leeds: Peepal Tree, 1997. 31.

⁶²⁷ Cf. Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. *History of the Voice, The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*. London; Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1984. And Glissant, Édouard. *Le Discours Antillais*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997. 230.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, both quotations 13.

⁶²⁹ That is why in “Our Daily Bread” Hippolyte dismisses the “Manhattan sliced loaf label”, full of preservatives and reduced to its bio-chemical ingredients – it could also be a reference to the loss of genuine faith in the belief of religion, in this case Christianity, for it recalls the Christian prayer “Our father” (“Our Daily Bread”, *Bi*, 73).

⁶³⁰ Brown, Stewart, and Marc McWatt, eds. *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*. Oxford: OUP, 2005. xvii.

At this point, I would like to extract Hippolyte's poetics in *Bearings* (1986), *Birthright* (1997), and *Night Vision* (2005), by going down the "noisy whirlpool" of his poetry, to borrow a term from Poe.⁶³¹ I have arbitrarily isolated his concepts of "sound" and "*undersound*", proceeding through apparently binomial aspects. In the "sound" we could gather his reflections on language, the poetic persona(s) singing, speaking and gossiping in British or American accents, or his way of intending cultural expressions in music and nursery rhymes. On the other hand, Creoles, both French- and English-based, could be considered part of an "*undersound* culture", to expand Hippolyte's expression, in which Creole carries either a double-meaning or a discourse of resistance and in which the "double-talk" in Hippolyte's poems is metabolised into palimpsests, hidden manuscripts, inscribed into nature or into a silent vacuum to be filled up. This could be just the resultant provisional scheme:

- SOUND: reflections on language; poetic persona and human voices in Br. / Am. Eng.; music and nursery rhymes;
- *UNDERSOUND*: employment of Creole(s); voices of nature; silence.

This is not meant to be a mere binary opposition, but a tool to explore his poetics, for Hippolyte would refuse it per se, resisting polarisations and being rather attracted by the idea of a spectrum of inter-connections.

For instance, the American English variety is used, after a "love-talk" in Creole, to negotiate the price for a "socio-economic exploitation" of prostitution, determining the outcome of social roles. In fact the poet says: "I was talking Creole love-talk to a girl just down from Morne La Paix – / we finished, bargaining how much it would cost, in American accents." ("Castries", *Bi*, 30)⁶³² A dyadic opposition would easily come out here, following a potentially dangerous binary path, opposing Creole as language of 'love' and 'intimacy' to English as the language of (historical) prostitution, the foster-mother tongue which has been inherited after the terrible past of slavery, still needed to refer to another kind of slavery, the sexual one; as Hippolyte himself explained to me:

in my own mind I don't think I really set up an opposition [between Creole and English, *NbR*]. If I were to use an image I'd say that English is a family, with the parents dead and various siblings all with their own particularities. You know the general notion of a language as a grouping of dialects. I reject the idea of a hierarchy among these dialects, so SE is one of the dialects and so is Jamaican English; so is the English I heard in Edinburgh this July. I think it's George Lamming who said that English long ago stopped being

⁶³¹ *Cr.* Poe, Edgar Allan. The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym in which he speaks of "strong whirlpools", ch. 13.

⁶³² Similarly, a prostitute is talking in the third part of "Talk", one of the "City Voices", confessing "Girl naked in we business". "3. Talk" and "City Voices." *NV*, 15. And a "djamet" is present in "A Village Guide (If You Return)", *Bi*, 28.

the property of the English people. So I don't feel a need to insist on an antagonistic relationship between SE and so-called Creole. Sociologically, the cultures and sub-cultures which are mediated through SE and Creole can be in opposition – though not invariably – but in language, ‘the unity is submarine’ as the man [Hippolyte is here referring to Brathwaite, *NbR*] said.⁶³³

Where an opposition exists, it stems from other catalytic resistances: love vs. unlove, truth vs. mendacity, feelings vs. money. In this concern, Mervyn Morris argued that:

Most West Indian authors draw on a range of elements within the West Indian language continuum, which runs between a form of “standard English” and a Caribbean Creole, and on a range of cultural reference which includes folk knowledge and belief and the largely European learning of the (colonial schools).⁶³⁴

Thus SE and Creole are revealed as opposites and framing edges of what Derek Bickerton called the “creole continuum”. As Régis Antoine stated Caribbean Creoles seem to testify for the remnants of ancestral echoes of orality.⁶³⁵ The tissue which comes out of this thread and woof is a ‘new’ voice, teleologically urging a Caribbean interweaving. Hippolyte would culturally resist such an opposition and propose, through his poetry, more than an aesthetically sociological polarisation.

VIII.iii. Walcott's influence in Hippolyte's poetic palimpsest

Laurence Breiner defined Hippolyte as part of a “ ‘third wave’ of Saint Lucian poets after Walcott”, together with John Robert Lee, McDonald Dixon, Jane King (Hippolyte's wife, *NbR*) and other five,⁶³⁶ who “pointedly do not present themselves as descendants of Walcott”.⁶³⁷ Breslin observed how “Kendel Hippolyte, Jane King, and John Robert Lee are now the most widely known Saint Lucian poets of the post-Walcott generation. (...) None of them has exactly been flooded with critical attention.”⁶³⁸ Actually, in the interview that the three poets Hippolyte, his wife Jane King and John Robert Lee gave to me, Hippolyte admitted that:

⁶³³ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 16 Oct. 2007.

⁶³⁴ Morris, Mervyn. “Sounds and Sense: West Indian Poetry”. *JWIL* 8.1 (Oct. 1998): 10.

⁶³⁵ The theme of remnants of lost languages coming from the primitive voice of Amerindians is analysed by Régis Antoine in “Paroles Perdues de l'Indien et du Nègre Marron”. *La Littérature Franco-Antillaise (Haïti, Guadeloupe, Martinique)*. Paris : Kartala, 1992. 13-33.

⁶³⁶ I am referring to the volume edited by Hippolyte in 1988, *Confluence: Nine Saint Lucian Poets*. Castries, St. Lucia: The Source, 1988. The other five poets I am referring to are Irvin Desir, Egbert Lucien, Melchior Henry, Adrian Augier and Melania Daniel.

⁶³⁷ Breiner, Laurence A. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. *Cit.* 87.

⁶³⁸ Breslin, Paul. “After Walcott: The Next Generation of Saint Lucian Poets.” Eds. John Robert Lee, and Kendel Hippolyte. *Saint Lucian Literature and Theatre. An Anthology of Reviews*. Castries, Saint Lucia: Cultural development Foundation. 2006. 171.

When I studied in Jamaica Brathwaite was more important than Walcott to me when I was getting into poetry, and he made more sense to me, but by the time in my mid thirties I had written poetry and I began to look at Walcott more closely, and still I am very appreciative of him. It's not so much that I try to write like him, and perhaps there is an older poet who has been trying to write like Walcott in his earlier works, McDonald Dixon, and his generation, which would have had no Caribbean literature as part of the education but would have grown entirely within a European literature. Then Walcott would have been a kind of revelation. But my generation was also exposed to Caribbean and African poetry, etc., Walcott was not such a shattering, liberating force as he would have been for McDonald Dixon. So, I am very much appreciative of his work in itself but not so much for making absolutely clear that poetry matters, that a society needs something called a poet and that a poet matters for a society as much as a politician, a builder. Honestly I don't think that all of the Caribbean islands quite have that. I don't want to boast on St. Lucia, but I took poetry traditionally for granted, as a part of the society.⁶³⁹

I think that Walcott's influence in Hippolyte's work can be perceived in a poetry which widens the theoretical gap between the spoken and the written word, a poetry in which the topic of 'naming' has a relevance as in Walcott's poetics.⁶⁴⁰ In Hippolyte's "Journal", a poem about the end of a love story, the sea – also one of Walcott's preferred subjects – is a metaphor for an antique parchment onto which history is not wizened, but rather renewed in the poet's name: "the bowsprit of an old ship and a kind of quill / crossing the Sahara-coloured parchment of unlove / marking my name again." ("Journal", *Be*, 23). The metaphor of the ship as a quill writing on the parchment of the desert reminds of hidden truths to be covered under the desert sand as a kept secret, as in "Lectin's Realm". The metaphor of books and writing goes on in the "leafage",⁶⁴¹ which recalls the "flipping of pages" in "Journal". Language is more than just twofold. Its layers pile syncretically, carrying multiple meanings, as African gods transplanted to the West Indies and worshipped by the slaves being disguised as European (Catholic) saints.⁶⁴² The trope of the desert reappears in Hippolyte's poetry, where words follow one after the other in a kind of 'kafala', an Arabic-derived 'coffle',

⁶³⁹ Cf. Interview with Kendel Hippolyte, John Robert Lee and Jane King Castries. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁶⁴⁰ A dichotomy which recalls the sourness of language could be represented by those "sour sea-grapes" ("Almond." *Bi*. 82), echoing Walcott's "names for the sour apples / and green grapes / of their exile. / Their memory turned acid" (Walcott, Derek. "Names." *Collected Poems*. *Cit.* 307) or his "colours of sea grapes, / The tartness of sea-almonds" ("A Sea-Chantey." *Collected Poems*. *Cit.* 46.) whereas the bitter-sweet nature of poetic incomprehensible messages is evoked by Hippolyte.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.* 21.

⁶⁴² For instance, the Yoruba god of iron Ogun was associated with St. Anthony in Brazil and with St. John the Baptist in Cuba. Cf. Hebdige, Dick. *Cut'n'Mix: Culture, Identity and Caribbean Music*. London: Methuen, 1987. 31. To go into more depth in this topic, cf. Hurbon, Laënnec. *Dieu dans le Vaudou Haïtien*. Paris: Payot, 1972.

So much more true, the understanding without words.
After all, the words trekking this page,
following each other like pack animals,
groaning in syllables under the burdening of meaning,
will lead you, if you follow their uneven caravanserai, finally
back to an understanding which is oasised in silence. (“Oasis”, *Bi*, 56)

Hippolyte’s ‘caravanserai’ of words seems to move into those grooves that the quill drew before, carrying as a pack the poet’s syllables loaded with meaning. The animals are groaning, possibly metaphorising a misunderstanding which will find peace and solution in the silence of an oasis “without words”. The situation depicted in the poem may have been created by a misunderstanding between lovers, for the poet says: “almost beyond secrets and the need for them / you lead me” (“Journal”, *Be*, 21). Thus, those secrets hiding under the sand protect themselves from alien tongues as acanthous plants, for “something secretes a poisonous glaze on our speech / words chip the heart like silica / incredibly, miraculously, secrets multiply, a sheet of sand / our tongues become cactus / self-protecting” (“Journal”, *Be*, 22). As regards this last aspect, Hippolyte’s poetry abounds in references to hidden truths, secrets and double-talk, as though he tried to inscribe his poetics onto a secret palimpsest, “hidden manuscripts / bright with a high, secret language of the senses” (*Be*, 22). In this way he forces the reader to go beyond the mere appearance of words, insisting, as he says, that “our conversation’s brackish / something evaporates, there’s haze / between us, a mirage of meaning / as though we speak in clouding mirrors” (*Be*, 22). By breaking the rhythm by means of enjambments and commas at half-line caesuras, Hippolyte renders the fragmentation of that ‘brackish’ conversation. The semantic chain of non-definitiveness is carried on by words such as ‘evaporates’, ‘haze’, ‘mirage’, ‘clouding’, so that waters are furtherly muddled and they set out the line between what the “secret senses” perceive and what they do not.

At other times, the impossibility of speaking or of naming, which is also one of Walcott’s preoccupations, takes the features of a terrifying silence, as in “Sand”:

Dear G –
i have reached the place you spoke about
so many years ago. Like you, i cannot name it.
No tongue can lift that word’s weight,
It is not strange no one has ever
screamed it out, ever whispered
what it is; there will never be
a language that can claim and hold
the horror of this numb. (“Sand”, *Bi*, 114.)

Again, words represent a burden, a weight difficult to lift and carry, as in the desert. In “Dedications” the “faltering syllables” represent an impossibility of expressing feelings in words or

historical experience in poems. It really seems that a haunting shadowy presence impends over language, the “thicketed dark speech / and undergrowth of silence” (both “Dedications”, *Bi*, 74). The task of naming has a different relevance for Walcott and Hippolyte: the former admits the seminality of the task, whereas the latter believes that its impossibility absorbs the failure of the poet’s tentative to convey his perceptions of reality. Under this aspect, Hippolyte’s poetics recalls what Glissant defined “forced poetics”, counterposed to “natural poetics”, because poetic innovation is needed to express his view of the Caribbean: “The issue is not one of attempts at articulation (composite and “voluntary”), through which we test our capacity for self-expression. Forced poetics exist where a need for expression confronts an inability to achieve expression.”⁶⁴³

VIII.iv. Brathwaite’s influence: neologisms and poetic inventiveness

The twofold polarity “slippage versus fragmentation” is foregrounded in Hippolyte’s poetry, where it seems to be in the middle of Walcott’s smooth and Brathwaite’s rough poetic surfaces. On the one hand, Walcott is keen on perfection and the smoothness of the surfaces he poetically depicts (like, for instance, the sea or the horizon) contrasts, on the other hand, with Brathwaite’s discontinuous rhythms and his aptitude in expressing brokenness or his fragmented *Sycorax Video Style*: both rhythms influence Hippolyte’s poetry.⁶⁴⁴ In the words of Laurence Breiner, Brathwaite’s “aesthetic comes out of fragmentation”,⁶⁴⁵ to create a hardly decipherable mosaic of meanings. Also Hippolyte charges his poetics with an ecosystem of language, under which continuity and discontinuity seem to coexist and where ‘sound’ and ‘undersound’ merge.

Hippolyte’s poetry, as much as Brathwaite’s, needs and oozes linguistic inventiveness, as in “sell-o-feign” (“Crazy Eddie Rap: Track 1”, *Bi*, 12) which maybe stands for ‘cellophane’, where the truth is hindered by money (‘sell’) and plastic (‘cellophane’); or “phantomicities” (“Lectin’s Realm”, *Bi*, 112) which suggest ‘phantoms’ at the level of ‘cites’, which the poet considers

⁶⁴³ “*Poétiques forcées* : il ne s’agit pas des tentatives (composites et «volontaires») d’expression, par où on expérimente dans le langage. Il y a poétique forcée là où une nécessité d’expression confronte un impossible à exprimer.”, in Glissant, Édouard. *Caribbean Discourse : Selected Essays*. Trans. Michael Dash. The University Press of Virginia : 1989. 402. Or. title *Le Discours Antillais*. Paris: Gallimard, 1997.

⁶⁴⁴ For instance, Hippolyte’s “Mt.” in *Night Vision* reminds me of the printed version of Brathwaite’s “Mont Blanc” in *X/Self*. 1987.

⁶⁴⁵ Breiner, Laurence. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. Cit. 19. Mervyn Morris stated that “Hippolyte, an important poet, knows “there’s no one way. / Like when you’re reassembling the pieces of a broken bowl, / the sequence of that depends upon what fragment you first take. / After that, shard by shard, trial and error, attentiveness / unto the shape forming itself under your hands.”” Morris, Mervyn. “Shard by Shard.” Review of Hippolyte, Kendel. *Night Vision*. *CRB. The Caribbean Review of Books* (May 2006) 30 June 2008 <<http://www.meppublishers.com/online/crb/issues/index.php?pid=1047>>.

microscopic particles.⁶⁴⁶ But is “Systemanic sacrifice” (“Abattoir”, *Bi*, 19) a “systematic and maniac sacrifice”? Does “singing over water” (“Harp”, *Bi*, 80) mean “singing a song” over the water? Are “Fascioners” (“Fascioners of Progress”, *Bi*, 50) military poets who prophesize the destruction progress brings about in a concoction of “fascism” and “fashion”? Without any doubt, “futuriginal circle” (“Fascioners of Progress”, *Bi*, 50) really catches the essence of the continuity of time, being the future and the origin fused in a circling movement. Other voices fill up Hippolyte’s poetic cities, “full of noises ... sclerotic” (“City”, *NV*, 5) with its raucous voice, and epagogically, its houses and people with raucous voices in their turn (“family sounds, fussing....not hear even one child?”, “City”, *NV*, 5; “the city’s hawk-and-spit”, “Castries”, *Bi*, 35; “in houses that you once knew chattering with children, ruled by raucous mothers”; “when sailors came there raucous and swaying off their vessels”, “City”, *NV*, 5).

Brathwaite forged poetic neologisms – like “stammering” or “calibanism”⁶⁴⁷ – in his *nation language*. Hippolyte’s rhythmic words echo the noise produced by many of Brathwaite’s lines, with onomatopoeias or ‘ideophones’ where echoic words represent a crashing fall or a loud explosive sound.⁶⁴⁸ Noise is embedded into the oral aspects of poetry, whereas onomatopoeias beget what I would refer to, in this case, an ‘auditory image’, a term which is defined in the *Dictionary of Oral Literature* as: “the image which appeals to the ear. Comparing sound or noise to, say, the jingling of goat bells or the clattering of metal appeals directly to our ears. Auditory images are closely related to ideophones and onomatopoeia.”⁶⁴⁹ Hippolyte’s aesthetics of sound and *undersound* raises Creole to a poetic means.

In his seminal *History of the Voice*, Brathwaite stated that “the use of dialects of English, or the introduction of some unglossed or *uncushioned* lexical items, can erect barriers to communicating with the audience or the readership outside the author’s country,”⁶⁵⁰ but I would like to try to knock down these barriers and develop a continuity of meanings. A continuity that Hippolyte links to politics or the economic system, when he states that sound and words, either true or false, can bring about some other examples of mendacity or of cultural resistance: “The sound is all. For want of it, / slogans proliferate, spawning their opposites; / true causes, generating and degenerating words, twist into lies.” (“Gulf”, *Bi*, 96). Progress has influenced people’s – and

⁶⁴⁶ I would like to thank Kendel Hippolyte for this observation. Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 16 Oct. 2007.

⁶⁴⁷ Cf. Hippolyte’s “canniballistic”, in Hippolyte’s “Systematomic Hegemony.”, *Bi*, 9.

⁶⁴⁸ “this mountain leggo one *brugg-a-lung-go*” (Brathwaite, Kamau. “The Dust.” *Mother Poem*. London: OUP, 1977.), while the expression ‘brugg-a-lung-go’ as much as ‘Bru-dum’, ‘Bru-dung’, ‘Brug-ga-dum’, ‘Brug-ga-dung’,⁶⁴⁸ ‘Brug-ga-lung’ (also repeated in “Cane”, “like de time when de May Dust come / like de time / o’ de *bruggalungdum*.”) Brathwaite, Kamau. “Cane.” *Islands*. *Cit.* 72.

⁶⁴⁹ Sunkuli, Leteipa Ole, and Simon Okumba Miruka. *A Dictionary of Oral Literature*. Nairobi, Kenya: Heinemann, 1990. 112.

⁶⁵⁰ Talib, Ismail S. *The Language of Postcolonial Literatures, An Introduction*. *Cit.* 129.

especially the poet's – language, who asserts in Creole “i doan want to tell lies / just the truth as it is” (“The Muse’s Complaint”, *Bi*, 60), “(and doh tell me no lie)” (“De Land”, *Bi*, 48),⁶⁵¹ or, as he admits in “Beck”, “i tell no lie” (“City Voices”, *NV*, 11). As far as lies are concerned, they could represent one aspect of cultural resistance when they degenerate into political propaganda or into gossip.⁶⁵² In Hippolyte’s poetry, gossip is revelatory of an unclear haze which covers the light of the truth, as light does in “Lectin’s Realm”: “light here glitters: something with blind diamond eyes / refracts the early truths into uncertainties” (*Bi*, 112). The blind eyes of truth cannot see but refract uncertain meanings. Light here works as gossip, becoming a sort of non-truth and its refraction in different directions produces a kind of buzz.⁶⁵³

⁶⁵¹ In this poem Hippolyte employs St. Lucian Kwéyòl. Hubert Devonish observes that in the 1970s literacy programme in St. Lucia Creole was considered “as an unwritten non-standard language associated with the language of the folk”, Devonish, Hubert. Language and Liberation. Creole Language Politics in the Caribbean. London: Karia Press, 1986. 75.

⁶⁵² According to their etymology, as Motta pointed out, gossip is linked to a hidden and unclear discourse rather than to a moral aspect. For instance, applying his words to trace the origins of the word ‘mendacity’, he stated that “*menda (mendacium)* is a spot, from Irish *mennar* which mainly means “spot”, but most of all “pustule”, so nothing which concerns morality” (Motta, Filippo. Berenice, Rivista Quadrimestrale di Studi Comparati e Ricerche sulle Avanguardie IX.26 (July 2001) Ed. Gabriele-Aldo Bertozzi. S. Gabriele: Editoriale Eco, 2002. 124.) Instead the Greek etymology is *ψευδος (pseudos)*, which is not connected to Latin *menda* but to “Armenian *sut*, (...) an item which is not unrelated to an onomatopoeic origin, and which resurfaces in the Italian verb ‘bisbigliare’, ‘to whisper’, that has the base **bhes-* “to blow, to inflate” (...) which is to be found also in the ancient Indian *bhastra-* “goatskin, bellows”.”(*Ibid.* my translation) Following or not its Latin, Greek and Indian derivation, Hippolyte incorporates the real meaning of ‘lies’ in his poetic palimpsest: as Genette stated “L’objet de la poétique, (...) n’est pas le texte, considéré dans sa singularité (ceci est plutôt l’affaire de la critique), mais l’architexte”(Genette, Gérard. Palimpsestes. La Littérature au Second Degré. Paris: Seuil, 1982. 7). Thus, going on with an etymology investigation, we could hint at the original meaning of the classic authors’ *undersound*, for Motta reminded us also that there is a “diafasic” and a “diamesic” distinction between “*mendacium dicere* and *mentiri*”, and that Horace and Lucan used the term in the meaning of poetic imagination (Motta, Filippo. *Cit.* 120).

⁶⁵³ I would like to open here a parenthesis to remember how, paradoxically, rumours play a big part also in Venetian society, and this lure as a paradigm of callidity has roots in the history of the city. In fact, Carlo Goldoni, who was an 18th century Venetian vernacular playwright (as much as Hippolyte), is remembered also for his plays of *Commedia dell’Arte*, in which he plainly depicted masks which represent social customs. In fact, he asserted that “Behind and beyond the match of rumours, with their irresistible movement, there are wickedness and malice, weaknesses and mania, but also social dynamic on which observation has precisely and inexhaustibly practiced.” (Goldoni, Carlo. I Pettegolezzi delle Donne. Ed. Paola Luciani. Venezia: Marsilio, 1994. 26-27. My translation.) During Venetian Carnival the custom is to eat traditional sweets called “chiacchiere” or “bugie”, in Venetian dialect “ciaccole” or “ciaciae”, which means ‘rumours’ or ‘lies’. So, avoiding going off at a tangent and finding other associations, I have lingered on this curiosity to try to knock down the barriers of cultural diversity and find analogies between two different cultures, in which rumours are interwoven in the outfits of daily – social – and literary – cultural – discourse. But also many Caribbean poets employed the theme of gossip. For instance, it is to be found in Louise Bennett’s “Labrish”, and in other writers, such as James Berry’s “Lucy’s Letter”, nostalgically remembering his native land from London: “Things harness me here, I long / for we labrish bad. The “labrish or labberish” is defined by Allsopp as “Idle chatter; wicked gossip”, in Allsopp, Richard. Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage. 336. Denise DeCaires Narain observed that in Valerie Bloom’s *Touch Mi; Tell Mi!*: “Gossip [...] functions as a kind of ‘social glue’ which, unlike its other, more benign manifestations, may function to *enforce* ‘community values’. (...) like Bennett, Bloom’s Creole poems also contain a sharp critique of Creole culture.” Denise DeCaires Narain. Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry. *Cit.* 103. Narain also pointed out that “Louise Bennett’s first collection of poems *Jamaica Labrish* was defined by Rex Nettleford as “ ‘gossip, chatter’ (RN, glossary, in Bennett, Louise. Jamaica Labrish. 233), while Mervyn Morris’s definition reads, “gossip, chatter, bear tales; idle talk, stories, gossip, news; gossipy, talkative” (Morris, Mervyn. Glossary, in Bennett, Louise. Selected Poems. 169): “Bennett self-consciously signals her role as a ‘gossip’, and, in performances, uses body language and intonation of voice to create an atmosphere of intimacy with the audience, inviting the audience to ‘collude’, as listeners, in the spreading of gossip. (...) Gossip, as a discourse, has long been associated (pejoratively) with women and the domestic sphere.” *Ibid.*, 72.

I am not just saying that Hippolyte enthrals a “quick currency of gossip in a village community”⁶⁵⁴ (as David Dabydeen stated in his introduction to *Slave Song*), or rather a “sexual innuendo”⁶⁵⁵ (as Paula Burnett’s introduction to *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English* stated about satirical songs), but that the oral devices embedded into the structural essence of the poems produce ‘sense’. Purposively, as Roland Barthes when stated speaking of the “rustle” of language and drawing a distinction between written and spoken word, “Can the language produce buzz? As spoken word, it would seem to be condemned to stuttering; as written word, to silence and distinction of signs: in any case, there is always *too much sense* left for the language to the enjoyment of its own matter.”⁶⁵⁶ That is why sometimes lies or rumours could be used by poets as a device to express or seep the poets’ own thought.

The “use of the standard device of personae, of masks”⁶⁵⁷ which Hippolyte finds in Walcott’s and Brathwaite’s poetry, is absent in his own poetry. I think that he needs rumour to exploit the musical effects of language or to create an effect of continuity with the people’s voices in a dialectical way, if we are to follow in Hayden White’s statement, that:

apart from being fraught with ideological associations of a specific sort, the term dialectical too often suggests a transcendental subject or narrative ego which stands above the contending interpretations of reality and arbitrates between them.⁶⁵⁸

Similarly, dialectics produce dichotomies which are derived from a judging ego, defining, in Hippolyte’s case, his employment of sound and/or *undersound* with different aims.

For instance, the voices and noise of nature become a great paradigm of the contact between man and nature, where the poet’s auditory sense admits that “All this is language” and that “Earth is

Carolyn Cooper said that Louise Bennett in her poem “Proverbs”, in which she played the part of an orphan, spoke of “a gossipy chat”, in which she revealed “Sake-a dat, as lickle news get bout / Dem call me po gal name; / Me bear it” (...) For Ma use fi tell me: ‘Sweet mout fly / Follow coffin go a hole’.” Cooper, Carolyn. Noises in the Blood, Orality, Gender and the ‘Vulgar’ Body of Jamaican Popular Culture. Warwick University Caribbean Studies, London: Macmillan, 1993. 44. Walcott’s use of gossip in “Tales of the Islands” was defined by Bruce King as “the portraits have their origins in imagination, rumour, and experience” (King, Bruce. Derek Walcott: A Caribbean Life. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. 204.). Instead, Lorna Goodison in Heartease described a ‘wild woman’: “Rumour spreads a story / that bad love killed her” (Goodison, Lorna. “Farewell wild woman II.” Heartease. London; Port of Spain: New Beacons Books. 1988. 50). The Vincentian “man’o’war” Shake Keane’s “commesse” - “com(m)ess” or “konmès” is defined by Allsopp as “Noisy disorder; a disturbance” or “Scandal; gossip”. Cf. Allsopp, Richard. Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage. 165 and 333-334.

⁶⁵⁴ Dabydeen, David. Slave Song. Sydney: Dangaroo Press, 1984. 11.

⁶⁵⁵ Burnett, Paula, ed. The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English. Cit. xxxii.

⁶⁵⁶ Barthes, Roland. “Il Brusio della Lingua”. Saggi critici IV. Trans. B. Bellotto. Einaudi: Torino, 1988. 80. My translation. Or. publ. “Le Bruissement de la Langue.” Essais Critiques IV. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984.

⁶⁵⁷ Hippolyte, Kendel. “All of a Man.” The Art of Martin Carter. Cit. 342.

⁶⁵⁸ White, Hayden. Tropics of Discourse, Essays in Cultural Criticism. London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1978. 4.

language” (“Ovalea’s Bedtime Story to the Third Child”, *NV*, 58). Similarly, as Dionne Brand said, “The Caribbean is a forest of rumours”.⁶⁵⁹ But now Hippolyte, literary replying to Brathwaite’s lamentation about the Caribbean poets’ lack of attention to their own climatic phenomena,⁶⁶⁰ claims “i hear thunder” (“Sane Blues”, *NV*, 63). The poetic utterance stems from what Hippolyte defines *undersound*, that is also the rumours and noise of the land, represents the auditory contact the poet manages to make with his own poetry, and the language of nature produces an “incantation”:

This, all this, is language:
 a sullen mob of rain distant and murmuring
 wind whispering low rumour in the bushes
 clear shout of light over the hill.
 The earth is utterance:
 hosanna! is the scattering of pigeons
 hallelujah! stands the tree in the noon hour
 selah, the psalmody of waves in the late afternoon.
 (“All this is Language”, *Bi*, 54)

Or again: “The river, talking often in its sleep / a long sentence, an incantation (...) / but words are like that / especially when spoken, like wind and water words.”, nature is “smouldering” (both “All this is Language”, *Bi*, 54), (reminding of a volcano or a lump of ash which covers fire *undersound*). The sounds and rumours of the land as resistance to colonization melt into an undifferentiated white noise which “hazes the undersound” (“Castries: I Came Upon this Town”, *Bi*, 31) and creates a smokescreen, “a haze of language”, “through mist ...unheard, unseen” (both “Contra Diction”, *NV*, 50). And beyond *undersound*, the sound of music permeates all of Hippolyte’s poems.

VIII.v. Caribbean oral culture onto the page

Either in the form of musical genres or of nursery rhymes, Hippolyte tries to translate Caribbean oral culture onto the page. Effectively, Breiner argued that:

“Fragments to a Return” and “Lusca,” fine poems by John Robert Lee, embed French Creole terms, phrases, and occasional scraps of dialogue in an SE matrix. (...) Poets also continue to exploit the specific thematic associations of particular forms of speech. Kendel Hippolyte’s work is notable for the number of poems in which the appearance of nation language is explicitly linked with some musical context, such as “Madrigal”, “Worker Chant,” “Last Waltz,” and

⁶⁵⁹ Brand, Dionne. *In Another Place, Not Here*. New York: Grove Press, 1997. Or. pub. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996. 221.

⁶⁶⁰ Cf. Brathwaite, Kamau. *History of the Voice*. *Cit.*

“The Muse’s Complaint”. (...) Robert Lee’s “Letter” (1974) employs a self-consciously “dialect” voice for a frankly comic purpose⁶⁶¹

I will add some other musical genres as suggested from “Antonette’s Boogie” to “Reggae Cat” (which linger on dancehall and reggae music), from “Crazy Eddie Rap – Track 1 and 2” to “Sale – A Millennium Rap”. As regards nursery rhymes and fairy tales they derive from his St. Lucian upbringing, and are present from “A Caribbean Round” to “The Piper’s Song”, from “Poem in a Manger” to “Ovalea’s Bedtime Story to the Third Child”, from “De Land” to “Revo Lyric”.

Musicality is perhaps what strikes most – at a first reading – in Hippolyte’s poems, and he seems to swing between Caribbean culture and a Western court tradition, like in “Madrigal” or “Villanelle for Blake”, whom he candidly acknowledges as a model: “Blake remains for me the archetype of the poet”.⁶⁶² Also Keats’s influence stands out, under the appearance of “La Belle Dame”: “a fiery mistress / all-consuming woman” (*Bi*, 64), a poetic muse.⁶⁶³ Yet, with this innovative syncopated rhythm, redundant with Brathwaite’s ‘*skeletonality*’ (my italics) and nursery rhymes which fed his St. Lucian childhood, and with “song[s] of childhood [which] are persecuted to a scream” (“Systematomic Hegemoney”, *Bi*, 8), he admits “i want some other rhythm (...) / an’ I tired dancing waltz” (“The Muse’s Complaint”, *Bi*, 60). So does the poet want to go back to childhood rhythms? With the reverie of a nana-figure in mind, unlike Tropica (Mary Adella Wolcott)’s “Nana”⁶⁶⁴ (a poem written at the beginning of the 20th century), he overturns the lullaby-device, prompting “come doudou, sing wid me...” (“Revo Lyric”, *Bi*, 87). But childhood is not equal just to sweet memories, because the snake of “Mammon”,⁶⁶⁵ the *soucouyant*⁶⁶⁶ or the *djablesse*⁶⁶⁷ of scary fairy tales outcrops from the dark and silence.⁶⁶⁸

⁶⁶¹ Breiner, Laurence A. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. *Cit.* 181.

⁶⁶² Hippolyte, Kendel. “All of a Man.” *The Art of Martin Carter*. *Cit.* 341.

⁶⁶³ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 16 October 2007.

⁶⁶⁴ Tropica (Mary Adella Wolcott). “Nana.” Eds. Alison Donnell, and Sarah Lawson Welsh. *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature*. London and New York: Routledge, 1996. 42-43.

⁶⁶⁵ Cf. footnote 519, p. 178 in chapter VI on Earl McKenzie.

⁶⁶⁶ “soukouyan”: “A legendary, evil, wrinkled old woman, who (...) by night (...) becomes a ball of fire roving in the air to seek out and light upon sleeping victims (...) whose blood she sucks before returning to her skin. (...) [(...) Cp. *lougawou, old-higue*]”, cf. Allsopp, Richard. *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. *Cit.* 250.

⁶⁶⁷ *Ibid.* “diabliesse” (Dmca, etc.) see djablès”, 191; “djablès”: “A legendary evil creature (...) assuming at first the form of a very pretty young woman, finely dressed, in order to lure a man into a wooded or bushy place before revealing herself as an old crone with cloven hoofs, who will cause the man to go mad or die.” 94.

⁶⁶⁸ Hippolyte mentions the funny mythical creature of the ‘bolom’ in his poetry, and here’s his explanation: “Bolom. As far as I understand, it’s a homunculus which is deliberately created from a process which begins with a woman holding an egg in her armpit for a period – not sure for how long, but I think it’s three days – during which she doesn’t bathe and do any of the normal stuff. I think the holding of the egg begins on Good Friday. I need to check this out, I’m telling you the scraps I’m vaguely remembering from childhood. Couple things about the bolom: it’s immortal. Not having been born in the true sense, it cannot die. Also, although it has supernatural powers, it must attach itself to a human master. This master has to feed it meat regularly to maintain its loyalty but it is absolutely loyal. When the master dies, it goes around wailing at night with the voice of a crying baby (though it looks like an old man) until someone takes it in and that person becomes its master. People might suspect who the owner of a bolom is, but it’s difficult to be sure. It will steal and carry out acts of violence and so on for its master, so it’s a terrifying figure. And yet

Metamorphosing the German fairy tale of the “The Pied-Piper of Hamelin” (or even echoing Mozart’s “The Magic Flute”), Hippolyte reproduces “The Piper’s Song”, where the Creole notes of its melody seem a ‘dirge’. The band of mice are “The Piper’s Children”, which, even though in both the *Night Vision* version and in the slightly different text in *Bearings*, speak of American economy and of the capitalism which are destroying the land, singing a rigmarole in patois: “Pa ni doubout an péi-a” (“De Land”, *Bi*, 49), glossed by the author as “In our land it have nowhere to stand”.⁶⁶⁹

If Hebdige was right when he said that is that “all West Indian music places the emphasis on the rhythm rather than the melody”,⁶⁷⁰ then the rhythms of Hippolyte’s language are perceivable in assonances and alliterations, or in evocations of musical instruments which have stripped the flesh of the sound, like the chords of a guitar in “Reggae Cat”, or “Harp”: “this steady, lone vibration / meets yours in a groan / songing over water; we tell, / in terrible unison, of separation.” (“Harp”, *Bi*, 80). What Hippolyte defines “dis ya music” (“Harp”, *Bi*, 80), either coming out the single chord of a guitar or as a plentiful vibration which was born out of an *arpeggio*, may often fall into silence as echoes of dance, music, deejay, boogie, voices, reggae: “where de rubber and de dubber making one” (“Antonette’s Boogie”, *Bi*, 66). “[R]ub-a-dub players” (“Systematomic Hegemoney”, *Bi*, 9) become part of his syncopated “Idioetry”, a poetry made of idioms and jazz sounds, for the persona

it is pathetic as well, not a monster in the usual sense of the word.” Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 21 March 2008. References to black magic and the ‘bolom’ were also made in the Interview with Kendel Hippolyte, John Robert Lee, and Jane King. Appendix A in this thesis.

JRL: I guess there are...and for instance *Vocations* was very much influenced by Brathwaite, and then *The Arrivants* came later. Nalo Hopkinson has in her work all of this orisha, voodoo things...what struck me was to put all of that ancient mythology and put it into contemporary novels set in Toronto. But we don’t have voodoo here, just remnants of African religions. I studied French, so I had a sense of Haitian literary movements and cultural life...

SF: I thought you had, being St- Lucia a French-influenced island, I though you had vodoun like Haiti.

KH: We have, if you spell it in the Creole way, ‘tjen bwa’...and ‘quin buas’ in Martinique.

SF: And what about ‘Lusca’?

JRL: ‘Lusca’? It’s just another name for St. Lucia, I had no particular or little sense of rural, so like Kendel I had no particular experience of rural, patois-speaking St. Lucia, just my own outside view of it.

SF: I thought you were speaking about a woman...

JRL: Well, I am also speaking of a woman or women in general...and of a second or third-hand experience with African tradition, of ‘tjen bwa’ or ‘magie noire’.

SF: In your ‘Caribbean exorcism poem’ you write about something related to religious practices, don’t you?

KH: I think I was referring to the phenomenon of projection of your own fears, phobias, longings outside of yourself...and then the solution for the desire, it hasn’t particular references to religion...

SF: What about the ‘bolom’?

KH: It’s interesting because it’s such a combination of things, it’s not a straightforward terrifying figure...Once a friend of mine told me I cannot stay, I gotta go before the sunset because there’s a bolom in the air and the master had died...and that he heard the bolom crying at night asking to someone to take it with him...and I saw people shutting windows for fear...it was late ‘60s, probably ‘67.

JK: There’s a recipe saying you have to pick the first egg laid by a young hen and it has to have been laid on Good Friday, you have to put it under your armpit for three days without bathing and then you’ll have this creature and you can ask him to do whatever you want. But I suppose that when the person who has created it dies, then it becomes this pathetic creature which goes around crying...I have read stuff referred to folktales but I can’t remember it.” Cf. interview with Kendel Hippolyte, Jane King and John Robert Lee. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁶⁶⁹ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 21 March 2008.

⁶⁷⁰ Hebdige, Dick. *Cut’n’Mix*. *Cit.* 34.

says: “they say / his words are random / no meaning, like scattin, can’t be scanned” (“Idioetry”, *NV*, 43). Rhythm is created with plosive consonants which reproduce by gemination in “De Land”: “But I notice big people does say: / dis big piece for dat big man dey / and dat piece for dat other man. / But really I doh understand” (“De Land”, *Bi*, 48) and “(and doh tell me no lie)” (*Bi*, 48). In “Zoo Story – Ja ’76”, instead, Hippolyte reported the death of a Jamaican who fell into the cage of a lion. The story becomes a kind of ‘fairy tale’ to be told together with the others. As Edward Chamberlin pointed out, “Zoo Story – Ja. ‘76” (1976) uses unmediated Rastafarian language to write about a resonant incident, the story of a Jamaican who died after jumping into the lion’s cage in the Kingston zoo”,⁶⁷¹ and Chamberlin also stated that:

the St. Lucian poet Kendel Hippolyte uses the language and the imagery of Rastafarianism, including the Lion of Judah, the red, green and gold colors of Rasta, and local words like “Jamdung” (Jamaica) and “dungle” (a version of dunghill, and the name of a now demolished shantytown in Kingston to which Brathwaite’s Rastaman referred in “Wings of a Dove”) to create a representation of Rastafarian experience in the dread time of the 1970’s, a time of dark troubles and no black lightning.⁶⁷²

The musicality of the poem is basically given by the Rastafari’s ‘dread talk’⁶⁷³ (which is also chosen to convey a sense of cultural resistance). Similarly, in “Reggae Cat” Hippolyte reports the sound of Jamaican Creole and Rastafari concepts comparing a ‘lost alley-cat’ to the cry of a guitar.⁶⁷⁴

Other poems which develop a musicality expand on the African-American genre of the blues. For instance, “Sane Blues” and “Kinky Blues” are ‘kinky’ expressions of the ‘blues’ of the poet, searching deep inside his soul. Sound is part of a poetic search, like for many poets, of the origins of language “the spark of word” (“Origins”, *NV*, 49), “the void before the voice” (“Last Waltz”, *Bi*, 62). Language is “Afterward, shouts, questions, orders, curses, / words creaking to formation” (“Oasis”, *Bi*, 56). As Badejo pointed out as regards the aesthetics of word formation in Brathwaite’s *Words Need Love Too*, the poet “becomes a geneticist, working with the DNA of the word, re-discovering the word-genomes that give the dream its texture, its very life (...) That is why

⁶⁷¹ Chamberlin, J. Edward. Come Back to Me My Language, Poetry and the West Indies. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. 230.

⁶⁷² *Ibid.* 220.

⁶⁷³ For an in-depth study of the *Dread Talk* cf. Pollard, Velma. Dread Talk, The Language of the Rastafari. Montreal & Kingston: Mc Gill-Queen’s University Press, 2000. 2nd ed. Cf. also footnote 810, pp. 271-2, ch. X and footnote 834, p. 282, ch. XI.

⁶⁷⁴ As Chamberlin observed, Rasta language was used also by Brathwaite in “Wings of a Dove” to reproduce African drumming echoes, like Hippolyte does.

the role of the poet becomes for him one of reconstruction, of re-creating through the “secret power” of the word”.⁶⁷⁵

Maybe, according to what Hippolyte’s poem “Prints” says, “These are not words”, because they are part of a “dimension[s] where the words disintegrate / to their original being, / (...) beyond language / beyond thought or sign or emblem” (both “Prints”, *Bi*, 57). There is a vacuum space “the black without sound” as silence (“like cold wind for a vacuum / settles into our silences”) (“Journal”, *Be*, 22), where “clashing words” are absorbed by void, and a deadly silence hangs over all, “even the truest music / said nothing. / Either he was deaf / or there really was, somehow, in all this noise / a silence” (“Abstract #1”, *Bi*, 97), together with a “stunned shocked silence” (“A Village Guide”, *Bi*, 27), where the poet can hear voices from the underworld: “i can hear whispers of those no longer there” (“City”, *NV*, 5).

This void finds also a space in Hippolyte’s poetics, which seems to be condensed in “Poems”. The poet is stuck in an in-between position which epitomises how he conceives his poetry. I quote at length:

Between myself and poetry, there’s a barrier –
the desire to make poems. Intent on this,
i do not see the gloss that words make
on reality; how they silently slice vision
into things, into what the eye can take
for granted. Making the poems, i miss
poetry, the sudden light that breaks
even its own limits and transforms
words into worlds and worlds into itself without distortion. (*Bi*, 59).

In this game of mirrors the lucid and reflective surface which Hippolyte calls ‘barrier’ is a glass *pane* or panel, which occasionally coincides with what divides the poet from his own poetry, that is the reality from words, and which I define “creative desire”. In his ‘poietic’ action,⁶⁷⁶ the poet’s desire is hindered by his own barrier and his own creative anxiety. Negativity is exemplified by the “Eichmann’s glass box”, which contained one of the SS responsible for the Holocaust. With their own vibrations his words can break the anxious negativity of creation and can reflect the specular image of the poet as a “curiosity”. Inside the poet a similar microcosm is reproduced, where, instead, another glass mirror panel seems to divide his own poems from the desire to write them. Whenever the words acquire a high pitch and make his “celled self” vibrate, they will be able to break those glasses and come out, “leaving the clarity of poetry”, and making the poet “a real

⁶⁷⁵ Badejo, Fabian Adenkule. “Introduction.” Brathwaite, Kamau. Words Need Love Too. Philipsburg, St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, 2000. ix-x.

⁶⁷⁶ From Greek *ποιεω*, to mould, to make.

poet”.⁶⁷⁷ As thus envisaged, the comparison and contrast between Hippolyte’s poetic and aesthetic macro and microcosms and Walcott’s and Brathwaite’s has demonstrated some affinities and differences with the two telamons of the Caribbean poetic temple, yet a great originality and the capacity to distinguish himself also appear. In his poetry, after a process of linguistic decantation, Hippolyte proves to create a poetry which compels the reader to listen to his sound, to feel involved in and to meditate on the *undersound* which has percolated through the filter of our critical intuitions, following in the poet’s claim of “[‘our’] voices and [his] own speaking together” (“Creation”, *NV*, 55).

In sociological terms it is interesting to acknowledge how both Hippolyte and Lee recognise in poetry a social function and a commitment that the artist has to keep in mind; as Hippolyte said:

it is not that I do not find any solutions or hope in the way the world is going, and fundamentally it still makes sense to me that my society fashions along social principles. It is the beginning of this type of society that we need, but it is clear also to me that these kind of societies will not produce the harmony which is the only guarantee of the type of society that we dream of. You have to create it out of a framework. In general I think that the outlines of a social society are the beginning of any kind of society we dream of, but that said we have to look for the final harmony.⁶⁷⁸

Similarly, Lee observed that there is a kind of unity that can be traced along the Caribbean islands:

we are Caribbean people, in spite of the racial mixing, the African, the European. There is in a certain way a kind of unity, whatever the negatives might be you can get a sense of what is Caribbean, influences, similarities, and differences as languages, but we can recognise something that make us Caribbean people. As poets we can speak of themes, our common history, European-African heritage and influences, the social development and movements, so what joins us is basically history.⁶⁷⁹

Hippolyte and Lee made two interesting points: one is related to the sociological aspects of an aesthetic unity, the other to a historical one, but both the topics highlight the fact that language is not the only relevant factor to be considered in an aesthetic analysis of Caribbean poetry, for it embraces also the truthfulness to the society, to the way people speak and to a linguistic naturalness. Effectively, when I asked Hippolyte:

⁶⁷⁷ All quotations from *ibidem*.

⁶⁷⁸ Cf. Interview with the poet. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibidem*.

so why do you use [Creole]? because you want your poetry to sound more natural, you want to reproduce or depict the speech of the people? what's the aesthetic purpose in employing Creole in poetry? and I mean in St. Lucia the situation is different than from other islands because of the French-based patois and the English, while in Jamaica you have West Indian English, Jamaica English, *patwa*...so according to the difference, how do you use language?

he replied:

Yes, its own voice. In our writing we are Caribbean poets, so you can write in SE, but if you want to be true to the voice, if you want to reproduce in the poems the voice of the persona, or whatever it is you are writing about, you will move along the continuum, you will change register, using it naturally, not even thinking about it, well I mean you will think about it, but it's not overly a self-conscious thing. The Creole inflection, the creole speech must be part of the natural register.⁶⁸⁰

Creole is what helps to convey sound and *undersound* in West Indian poetry, and especially in Hippolyte's. Its aesthetic purpose is linked to the importance of the sociological message poetry carries, being tightly related to the issues and changes of contemporary Caribbean society.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibidem.*

Chapter IX
David Rudder (1953 -)
The New “King of Calypso”

David Rudder was born in Belmont, Trinidad, in 1953. He spent a large part of his childhood with his grandmother, a spiritual Baptist, and was baptized three times: as a Baptist by her, as an Anglican by his mother, and as a Roman Catholic (evangelical Christian) when he started going to a Catholic school. His childhood developed between a Shango yard and a pan yard, listening to his grandmother’s Spiritual chants and all of this cultural pot-pourri would influence his music forever. He started singing at the age of 11, in 1964, with the doo-wop band the “InLarks” (the name was later changed to “The Solutions”). In 1981 he became a member of the brass band “Charlie’s Roots”. His Calypso career was launched when he started being a back-up singer in the tent of the famous Trinidadian calypsonian Lord Kitchener and he became the lead singer of the original Soca band, “Charlie’s Roots”. 1986 to 1988 were seminal years for Rudder’s career, in fact in 1986 he became well known for the album *The Hammer*, in which the title song is a paean to the late pannist Rudolph Charles; the album also contains the famous “Bahia Girl”. That year he shot to international fame by achieving the Triple Crown, the Calypso king (calypso’s holy grail), the Young King, and the Road March king, a feat not achieved before or after by anyone. The year after, in his album *Calypso Music*, Rudder proposed a history of the calypso, while in 1998 he released *Haiti*, an album which tells the notorious history of Haiti, and also contains a hit song as “Rally Round the West Indies”, adopted by the West Indian cricket team as its anthem. Currently he lives in Canada and he still collaborates with the Trinidadian Peter Minshall, the eccentric Caribbean artist who produces Carnival costumes and works with theatre.⁶⁸¹ As proven by scholars like the Trinidadian Maureen Warner-Lewis or the Guyanese Gordon Rohlehr, most of the calypso lyrics can be considered and analyzed as pieces of literature, due to their poetic density and for the highly politically and socially involved texts. Supporting Errol Hill’s view on calypso as a three-fold art,⁶⁸² Prof. Ramchand maintains that a calypso is not a poem, it is an experience which incorporates the verbal level, the aural level, and the visual level, because a text is sung and performed by the calypsonian:

A calypso is not a poem, a calypso can be read as a poem, but the calypso incorporates dance, music, miming, and a lot of things that the performer can add. To me a calypso is potentially a richer experience than a poem,

⁶⁸¹ Notably, Minshall’s creative designs were required for the Olympics in Barcelona, 1990, and Atlanta, 1996.

⁶⁸² “It is clear from the foregoing examples that the true calypsonian embodies the triple arts of the poet, the musical composer, and the actor.” Hill, Errol. “Calypso Drama.” *Calypso Monograph* Spec. issue of *CQ. Caribbean Quarterly* (2002): 21. Ed. Veronica Salter. University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica.

although some poems are very rich. But the text you extract from a calypso to analyse can never convey the richness of the whole calypso, so what you are saying about Rudder is that he is a superb calypsonian, and he is so good as a calypsonian that you can take his songs just at a purely verbal level, and those words would qualify as a poem.⁶⁸³

In this chapter my analysis will focus on Rudder's calypsoes as poetic texts, and where available as oral and visual representations as well. David Rudder's discography contains more than thirty LPs and CDs.⁶⁸⁴

There are many recurrent themes in Rudder's calypsoes, as spirituality or religion in "Heaven", "Another Day in Paradise", and "Hallelujah" from the album *Lyrics Man*; "Dedication (A Praise Song)" in *The Gilded Collection (1986-1989)*; "Day of the Warlord" in *The Gilded Collection 3 (1994-1997)*; "Visions of Paradise" in *Farewell to the Flesh*; "Show Me a Sign (Blessed 2)", "Jerusalem", and "Blessed" from *Blessed*; "Once More Hosannah" in *Eclectica*; "Shango Electric" in *International Chantuelle*; "God and Rum (Singh's Soliloquy)", "Show Me a Sign", "Erzulie", and "Stepping on the Serpent's Head" in *The Brand New Lucky Diamond Horseshoe Club*. The theme of Africa is to be found in "The Ganges & the Nile 1 & 2" and "New Day Dawning" from the album *International Chantuelle*, in which Rudder sings "My struggle is the struggle of the African people / [...] never giving up my dream of a free and just society"; in the album *New Day Dawning (1989)* other lyrics dedicated to Africa are "Good morning, South Africa", "Amandla Ngawethu", "Africa", and "Johannesburg woman", "Egyptian Eyes" in *Farewell to the Flesh*. Another seminal thematic is that of Carnival, with such lyrics as "Wining in the Carnival" in *Zero*; "Jou'vert", "Farewell to the Flesh", or "Jump Up" in the album *Farewell to*

⁶⁸³ Cf. Interview with Kenneth Ramchand. Appendix A to this thesis.

⁶⁸⁴ Rudder's Cds and Lps are: the LPs 45rpm *Dougla Woman (1977)* and *I Reggae Music (1978)*, the EP album *Stay (1979)*, the EP albums *Jungle Fever (1982)*, *Calaloo (1983)*, and *The River (1984)*, the LP albums *Calabash (1985)* and *The Hammer (1986)*, *Calypso Music a.k.a. This Is Soca (1987)*, *Haiti (1988)*, Warner Bros/London Records), the cd single *Bacchanal Lady (1988)*, London Records, Polygram), *Wild Orchid Soundtrack (1990)*, Warner Bros/London Records), *1990 (1990)*, Warner Bros/London Records), *David Rudder's Greatest Hits (1990)*, London/Polygram), *New Day Dawning - Tribute to South Africa (1990)*, Lypsoland), *Rough & Ready (1991)*, Lypsoland), *Frenzy (1992)*, Lypsoland), *Ministry of Rhythm (1993)*, Lypsoland), *The Gilded Collection Vol. 1: 1986-1989 (Trinidad: Lypsoland, 1993)*, *Here Comes the West Indies (1994)*, Lypsoland), *Lyrics Man (1995)*, Lypsoland), *The Gilded Collection Vol. 2: 1990-1993 (Ritual Records, 1995)*, *Tales from a Strange Land (1996)*, Lypsoland), *Wrapped in Plain Brown Paper (1997)*, Lypsoland), *Beloved (1998)*, Lypsoland), *International Chantuelle (1999)*, Lypsoland), *Zero (2000)*, Lypsoland), *The Autobiography of the Now (2001)*, Lypsoland), *The Gilded Collection Three: 1994-1997 (Trinidad: Lypsoland. Petit Bourg, Trinidad: BangaSeed Limited; Brooklyn, New York: JW Productions, 2001)*, *Farewell to the Flesh (2002)*, Lypsoland), *Blessed (2003)*, Lypsoland), *Eclectica (2005)*, Lypsoland), *The Brand New Lucky Diamond Horseshoe Club (2006)*, Lypsoland), *The Cricket Chroniclers (2007)*, the single "Oil and Music" in Machel Montano's album *Flame On (2008)*, also present in Rudder's *Trinidad Stories (2009)*, Lypsoland). I would like to thank Mr. Rudder for his help in ordering the chronological disposition of the LPs and CDs. Personal communication with Rudder. E-mail. 20 Aug. and 27 Aug. 2009.

the Flesh; “Carnival Ooman” in *The Gilded Collection 2 (1990-1993)*; “Carnival Tuesday” and “Oil and Music” (in collaboration with the soca singer Machel Montano) in *David Rudder*.

Rudder’s music is a blending of world rhythms: “Compay Segundo (Comrade N° 2)” (*Eclectica*) mixes salsa and Cuban rhythms; there is blues in “Cockroach Blues” (*The Brand New Lucky Diamond Horseshoe Club*) and rock and kaiso/calypso in “Lifted Rockaiso” in (*The Cricket Chroniclers*). This fusion of styles and genres stems also from Rudder’s opening to the world musical and political scene, in fact his calypsoes are peculiar in the sense that they are three-faceted: their subject matter and concerns expand from a local point of view, evolutionizing into a regional one and eventually culminating in a universal one, and these will be the major focuses of the next paragraphs. ⁶⁸⁵

IX.i. Rudder’s calypsoes on a local level: Trinidad

When we talk about calypso we should also consider and give a little bit of background of such terms as “kaiso” (at the origins of the word “calypso”), “kalinda” and “stick-fighting”, “sans humanité”. In *The Trinidad Carnival* Errol Hill gave an explanation of the term “kaiso” as a term derived from African words with a Spanish permutation – and Spanish influences are also what render Trinidadian calypso different from Jamaican mento –, and he explained that its more suitable language was the Creole:

It is therefore possible that the term *kaico* might have been introduced (or indeed reintroduced) into the argot of the Trinidad carnival songsters and masqueraders by newly arrived Hausa-speaking immigrants sometime in the first half of the nineteenth century. (...) Creole was the calypso language until the end of the nineteenth century, when English lyrics began to appear. ⁶⁸⁶

Hill recognised the first use of the word ‘calypso’ in reference to Trinidad Carnival in *The Port of Spain Gazette* in 1900, ⁶⁸⁷ and he continued by explaining that: “Except for legendary accounts of

⁶⁸⁵ From now onwards I will refer to *The Hammer* as *TH*, *Calypso Music* as *CM*, *Haiti* as *H*, *1990* as *1990*, *New Day Dawning* as *NDD*, *Rough & Ready* as *R&R*, *Ministry of Rhythm* as *MR*, *Here Comes the West Indies* as *HCTWI*, *Lyrics Man* as *LM*, *Tales from a Strange Land* as *TFASL*, *Beloved* as *B*, *International Chantuelle* as *IC*, *Zero* as *Z*, *Farewell to the Flesh* as *FF*, *Blessed* as *Bl*, *Eclectica* as *E*, *The Brand New Lucky Diamond Horseshoe Club* as *TBNLDHC*, *The Cricket Chroniclers* as *TCC*.

⁶⁸⁶ Hill, Errol. *The Trinidad Carnival: Mandate for a National Theatre*. London: New Beacon Books, 1997. 62.

⁶⁸⁷ “Errol Hill in “On the Origin of the Term, Calypso,” [in *Ethnomusicology: Journal of the Society for Ethnomusicology* 11.3 (1967): 359-367, *NbR*] suggests that the initial use of the term “calypso” in reference to Trinidadian carnival songs was in the Port of Spain Gazette in 1900.” Shaw, Andrea. ““Big Fat Fish”: The Hypersexualization of the Fat Female Body in Calypso and Dancehall.” *Anthurium. A Caribbean Studies Journal* 3.2 (Fall 2005): Note 2. 31 July 2009 < http://anthurium.miami.edu/volume_3/issue_2/shaw-bigfatfish.htm>. Hill also stated that: “Except for legendary accounts of earlier calypso singers and performances, the first documented record of a

earlier calypso singers and performances, the first documented record of a Calypso as part of the annual Trinidad carnival was in 1838. (...) Yet calypso drama was introduced only in 1933.”⁶⁸⁸ Nevertheless, Allsopp said that the word “kaiso” derive also from the African Ibibio “Kaa iso” and Efik “ka isu”, both meaning “go on”.⁶⁸⁹

The “kalinda” is a stick-fighting or “bois bataille”/“Creole wood” deriving from Africa, whose ritual and rhythms have been transposed into calypso; for instance, Warner-Lewis recognised it in Rudder’s “Dus’ in Dey Face”, where she asserted that:

another metaphoric allusion is to the indigenous stickfight, traditionally a feature of the Carnival, by invoking words like *manima*, and the athleticism of “wheel” and “tumble”, and by alluding to Lord Kitchener, whose classic 1950s calypso, “Trouble in Arima”, was a paean to the stickfight and its virtuosos. The kalinda/stickfight reference is also very much present in the rhythm of both these Kitchener and Rudder songs. The kalinda rhythm is allied to the driving 2/2 stamping processional of the *jab-jab* masquerade, and its short call-and-response phrases.⁶⁹⁰

Furthermore, Warner-Lewis related shango chants to kalinda and kaiso, the original form of the Anglicised word “calypso”, whereas Yoruba music influenced calypso: Shango chants were actually “matrices for calypso”.⁶⁹¹ As McWilliams made clear, kalinda was constituted of five parts: “challenge, lavway (chanting and drumming), karray (the dance), bois (actual stick-fight) and pas (the retreat). The ritual phase includes the preparatory requirements of the stickfighter, the stick and the space (gayelle) in which the fighting occurs.”⁶⁹²

As to the calypsonian tradition of The Mighty Sparrow (Slinger Francisco) of “Dan is the Man in the Van” Brathwaite wrote (in “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature”) that it is in “calinda-style”.⁶⁹³ Defining the “calinda” Hill wrote (in *The Trinidad Carnival*):

the belair was not, of course, the only type of carnival song, for there were also the calinda chants of the stickmen (...) the calypso in

Calypso as part of the annual Trinidad carnival was in 1838. (...) Yet calypso drama was introduced only in 1933.” (Hill, Errol. “Calypso Drama.” *Cit.* 15.)

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 15.

⁶⁸⁹ Allsopp, Richard. *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. *Cit.* 131.

⁶⁹⁰ Warner-Lewis, Maureen. “The Rhythms of Caribbean Vocal and Oral-Based Texts.” *Caribbean Culture: Soundings on Kamau Brathwaite*. Ed. Annie Paul. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2007. 63.

⁶⁹¹ Warner-Lewis, Maureen. “The Influence of Yoruba Music on the Minor-Key Calypso.” *Guinea’s Other Suns*. Dover, Massachusetts, 1991. 141-157. I would like to thank Prof. Warner-Lewis for this observation. Personal communication. E-mail. 13 Nov. 2009.

⁶⁹² McWilliams, Louis. “Kalinda/Stickfight. Form, Ritual and Content: Its Implications for Caribbean Theatre.” MPR. York University, Canada. 1996. *Online leaflet of Errol Hill’s Man Better Man. Directed by Tony Hall and Louis McWilliams*. The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine. 2. 31 July 2009 <<http://library2.nalis.gov.tt/infofiles/collect/news3/index/assoc/HASH01db/36cc38ea.dir/doc.pdf>>.

⁶⁹³ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature.” *Roots*. *Cit.* 250.

Trinidad (...) encompassed and preserved the major types of traditional songs functionally associated with the lives of the folk at work (digging songs), at play (the belair and calinda), at worship (Shango songs), and even in revolt (the insurrectionary songs of the slaves).⁶⁹⁴

The “Sans Humanité” was also linked to the stick-fighting, in that it recalled the practice of fighting during the slavery period as a mean of challenge and resistance to colonialism and also as “a form of contest between males”:⁶⁹⁵ “ ‘Sans Humanité!’ (without pity) was the ubiquitous refrain of the old stick-fighting songs and calypsoes, recalling the culture of unrelenting opposition to slavery and colonialism.”⁶⁹⁶ McDaniel reminded that Hill derived “the Patois phrase (...) as a translation of the Hausa word ‘kaiso’, meaning ‘you deserve no pity’”.⁶⁹⁷

Nowadays the tasks of the calypsonian (as Rudder said in an interview he gave in August 2007)⁶⁹⁸ imply that he should hold several positions as “a dance master, a narrator, a political spokesman, and a social commentator all at the same time”. In his album the ‘ministry’ of rhythm is not only a figure involved in politics but also a religious representative:⁶⁹⁹ the calypsonian has to split his abilities to be all these things at the same time and also be representative for his people. In fact, as Breiner observed: “The possibility of new links to music rather than prose proved especially exciting and productive. Calypso provides a powerful model here, given its success in delivering topical political and social commentary directly to a live audience.”⁷⁰⁰ In his songs Rudder increasingly mixes foreign and commercial genres, as he said in the interview “calypso absorbs other things”,⁷⁰¹ it truly is representative of that “spongy nature” which Walcott attributed to the Caribbean in his *Calabash Festival* speech (St. Elizabeth, Jamaica, May 2008). As a columnist of the *Trinidad Express*, Wayne Brown crystallized Rudder’s as a fusion music, innovative and thus representative of a new generation: “Rudder represents a new generation of Trinidadians. The spirit

⁶⁹⁴ Hill, Errol. *The Trinidad Carnival*. *Cit.* 58.

⁶⁹⁵ I would like to thank Prof. Warner-Lewis for this observation. Personal communication. E-mail. 13 Nov. 2009. *Cf.* also “Stickfight was a war exercise that indulged the casual attitude to death associated with warrior societies.” Warner-Lewis, Maureen. *Central Africa in the Caribbean. Transcending Space, Transforming Culture*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2002. 213-214.

⁶⁹⁶ Mahabir, Joy A. I. “Rhythm and Class Struggle: The Calypsoes of David Rudder.” *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 6.3 (2002) Published by the College of the Humanities and Social Sciences North Carolina State University, Raleigh NC. Spring 2002. SUNY at StonyBrook, New York Copyright © 2002 by Joy A. I. Mahabir. 2 Nov. 2009 <<http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v613/mahabi.htm>>.

⁶⁹⁷ McDaniel, Lorna. *The Big Drum Ritual of Carriacou. Praisesongs in Rememory of Flight*. Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1998. 156.

⁶⁹⁸ “David Rudder talks about his songwriting.” Online video. Posted by caribbeanpride. *YouTube*. 28 Aug. 2007. 3 Nov. 2008 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXSewmOv7wE>>.

⁶⁹⁹ “album where Rudder makes his most explicit comment on rhythm, (...) Ministry of Rhythm (1992), where the secular and the spiritual sense of the term “ministry” is merged – ministry being a government institution as well as one associated with the church.” Mahabir, Joy. “Rhythm and Class Struggle: The Calypsoes of David Rudder.” *Cit.*

⁷⁰⁰ Breiner, Laurence A. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 10.

⁷⁰¹ “David Rudder talks about his songwriting.” *Cit.*

of rock, and the spirit of blues coming and going in the mainstream of kaiso.”⁷⁰² In a sense his music is a very good example of creolization, on the one hand because it involves themes of the all Caribbean, on the other hand because it is a fusion of the genres of samba or rock.

In Rudder’s conversation with the belated Trinidadian John LaRose,⁷⁰³ LaRose recognised two types of calypsonians: the “conversational” (like Attila the Hun) and the “dramatic” (like Lord Kitchener or Melody)⁷⁰⁴ and put Rudder in the second group, but Rudder himself thinks he is a bit of both, in fact in some of his calypsoes he seems to be speaking and talking to the listeners, at other times he engages in dramatic performances during his concerts, dancing and moving to the Trinidadian rhythms.⁷⁰⁵

But the peculiarity of Rudder’s art and the success of a calypso depends on the link between rhythm and content, and from the way the calypsonian is able to combine and blend these features together in his performance, in his delivery. The St. Martin-based Nigerian scholar Fabian Badejo commented on this as follows:

Good calypso “lyrics” concerns itself primarily with how words sound, how they are pronounced, and the artist’s delivery. Meaning, therefore, does not issue from the word itself, nor from the conventional orthography, but from a phonic arrangement as important as the musical arrangement of instruments, and other contemporaneous circumstances shared with the public. Sounds detonate into meanings just as pods burst open to reveal seeds that we consume as food. The double entendre, puns, and word-play are aspects of this process of destabilizing meaning based on the sound of words.⁷⁰⁶

The recent calypso “Trini To De Bone” (Blessed, 2003) could be a good instance of this: the introduction and the first verse begin with “Islands in the sun / Islands in the fun / Welcome, welcome one and all to de land of fête / Trini to de bone, Trini to de bone / When it come to bacchanal, well they can’t beat we yet”, whereas the calypsonian presents some stereotypes linked to the Caribbean islands, locus amoenus of happiness, party (the Trinidadian Frenchisation is ‘fête’), and looseness, as the terms ‘bacchanal’ suggests, with a connotation of festivity which goes back to the Greek Bacchus, god of wine, of the vine, of drunkenness and orgy, all elements that stereotypically remind one of Caribbean parties. But the Caribbean is much more than just this stereotype – often fake and tourist-bound as an attraction. In fact, the chorus brings back memories

⁷⁰² Cf. “David Rudder’s Homepage.” 24 July 2009 <<http://www.davidrudder.co.tt/critics.html>>.

⁷⁰³ LaRose opened the New Beacon Books library in Brixton, London, in the 1950s.

⁷⁰⁴ Rudder, David, & LaRose, John. *Kaiso, Calypso Music. David Rudder in conversation with John LaRose*. London: New Beacon Books. 1990. 10.

⁷⁰⁵ Cf. Interview with David Rudder. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁷⁰⁶ Badejo, Fabian Adekunle. *Salted Tongues. Modern Literature in St. Martin*. Philipsburg, St. Martin. House of Nehesi Publishers. 2003. 57.

of the plantation period, such as “(Sweet sweet T&T) All dis sugar can’t be good for me” (where the part in brackets is back sung by the chorus), which hints at love for his country, that he “love[s] up” despite its social and political problems, but from where people are forced to emigrate to find better jobs or else go back to their native island to “big up they country”. The song is an affectionate description of the festive attitude of Caribbean people, and an embrace from “the years spent abroad in de cold” to his people and land:

(Oh oh) From Toco to Caroni
 (Oh oh) Maraval to Sans Souci
 (Oh oh) From Scarborough to Cocorite
 (Oh oh) Profiling on Fredrick Street (...)
 (Oh oh) From Couva to Signal Hill
 (Oh oh) Arima to Charlotteville
 (Oh oh) Matelot down to Port-A-Spain
 (Oh oh) We playin’ mas sun or rain (...)
 (Oh oh) West Mooring to Los Iros
 (Oh oh) From Sand’o to Mayaro
 (Oh oh) From Penal to Grand Rivière
 (Oh oh) Sweetness in abundance everywhere.

The ‘mas’ is both feast and a term which refers to Carnival, occurrence for which Trinidad is second only to Rio de Janeiro in Brazil for the great festivities and the eccentricity of masks and costumes.⁷⁰⁷ In the third verse Rudder talks about the creolization of cultures that is present in the islands: “We still fight to be a family / Indian, African or a Chinee / Syrian, French-Creole and

⁷⁰⁷ Festivals and festivities offer further occasions for poetry, as the CropOver Festival in Barbados or Guyana, but most of all the Carnival in Trinidad and Jamaica, with its profusion of clothes, dances, music, masquerade. Mervyn Morris described a preparatory phase in “Pre-Carnival Party”: “‘Beauty-queen an’ sagaboy,’ he said, / ‘dey posin’, but dey ain’ fool me: / de one sure t’ing is all-yuh dead” (Morris, Mervyn. “Pre-Carnival Party.” *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*. Cit. 163). Eric Roach dedicated a poem to “Carnival” (*The Flowering Rock*), while H.A. Vaughn remembered the folk traditions in “The Donkey” (*Sandy Lane and Other Poems*): “These tattered children from the slum, / And women too, who run, and shout, and reel, / Obedient to a deep instinctive feel, / An ancient music, mystic, mettlesome.” (Vaughn, Hilton A. “The Donkey.” *Sandy Lane and Other Poems*. BIM Magazine: Cedar Press, 1985. 20). Vaughn’s, as many other collections of poetry, is equipped with drawings made by the author, which illustrate the poems or are an integral part to them, in this case there is the image of a donkey reeling and whirling surrounded by people dancing, and playing drums in a festive mood. The Dominican J.R. Ralph Casimir in “Masquerade” evoked: “‘Midst the sweet laughing voice of music, / ‘Midst gay voices of lads and lassies, / ‘Midst laughter, and chatter, and song” (Casimir, Ralph J. R. “Masquerade.” *Poesy, An Anthology of Dominican Verse*. Book Four, Barbados B.W.I.: Advocate Co. Ltd., c. 1948. 61). Cf. also Ras Michael in “Preface”: “I stood watching / the parade of floats / and masqueraders / hiding my culture in a / pair of rubber slippers” (Michael, Ras. “Preface.” *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*. Cit. 153.), John Robert Lee in “Vocation” (*The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*), and V.E. Lake in “Trick-de-Elite” (*Poems and Stories of St. Christopher, Nevis and Anguilla*). Dance was analysed in Jean Binta Breeze’s *The Fifth Figure*, in which she lingered on the Jamaican quadrille, as a European-derived generational dance, which has shaped her partly novel, and partly poetic work, sometimes poetic prose. Breeze took her moves from the five – even six in one version – parts in which the quadrille was divided. She dealt with Figure One, Two, Three, Four and the Fifth Figure is preceded by a poem titled “Take Me to the Bridge”; now, the bridge could be considered as that interlude which connects two parts of a poem, but also as a prosodic connection. Dances were the object of poetry also in Christine Craig’s *Quadrille for Tigers* (1984), or Grace Nichols’s “Break/Dance” (*Lazy Thoughts of a Lazy Woman*), and Edward Baugh’s “Country Dance”, where he claimed “We had come seeking the true folk / (...) the music bounces in my head / like light” (Baugh, Edward. “Country Dance.” *Caribbean Writers/Les Auteurs Caribéens, Between Orality & Writing/Entre L’Oralité et L’Écriture*. Cit. 135).

Portuguese / We blessed with a spirit fiery". The song involves people in the audience, who see the singer as a spokesperson for their national pride and an analyst of the bad and good sides of their country, which in the end they love and praise.

In "Calypso Music" (1987)⁷⁰⁸ Rudder sings "the Middle Passage will never be in vain / we will sing the songs over and over again" and asks "Can you hear a distant drum, / Bouncing on the laughter of a melody?", whereas the African drums are what the calypsonian wants people to hear beyond the joy of his melody, and that 'laughter' is explained by Joy Mahabir as follows:

The specific history of Trinidad, which includes its comparatively less intense mode of slavery compared to the other islands, its status as a haven for rebel slaves, maroons and adventurers, and its plural cultural composition, all contribute to the "laughter" of the rhythm of calypso.⁷⁰⁹

Music in Trinidad is not only joyful, but it invokes pain, even if what renders it so special and a harbinger of positivity is its ability to hide the pain behind the laughter, to transform whatever kind of negativity into a festive occasion, which is, in a way, an aggressive way of biting the pain at the throat, and together with it the pessimistic load of being condemned to be at the bottom of World standards, a burden which the Caribbean has been carrying since the slavery times. In his performance Rudder dances to the rhythm in a composed manner, walking on the stage to metaphorically expand the word and backed up by the chorus to reach and involve the whole audience. In fact, the calypsoes are composed in order to be performed and judged during the Carnival season and be later broadcast for the whole year: the people's taste is extremely important in determining the success and life of calypsoes. In regard to this aspect, in an interview with Luigi Sampietro, Walcott affirmed:

And underneath carnival...I've had varying attitudes to carnival. [...] The reality of what you have in carnival or calypso – a competition of poets or poet-singers – is amazing, because it doesn't go on anywhere else in the world, that I can think of right now. It's not only the music. The lyrics are judged by an entire country. So, that aspect of it has always been important. It's very theatrical as well. (1991)⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁸ "Calypso Music" was sung on the Dimanche Gras of 1987 at the Calypso Monarch Finals broadcast on Trinidad and Tobago Television (TTT channels 2 & 13) against the Trinidadian calypsonian Black Stalin, who won with the song "Bun dem".

⁷⁰⁹ Mahabir, Joy. "Rhythm and Class Struggle: The Calypsoes of David Rudder." *Cit.*

⁷¹⁰ Sampietro, Luigi. "An Object Beyond One's Own Life, An Interview with Derek Walcott." *Caribana* 2 (1991): 32. Roma: Bulzoni. Walcott moved to Trinidad in 1953 to work as a journalist and having founded the Trinidad Theatre Workshop there in 1959 (even though he moved to New York in 1958-1959 on a Rockefeller Fellowship to study drama), which he directed until 1977.

Walcott's affirmation "it doesn't go on anywhere else in the world" has been objected to by Warner-Lewis as an exaggeration, in fact it is a feature of the oral tradition in parts of the world as India or Africa (e.g. in Somalia).⁷¹¹ "Calypso Music" was sung in 1987, and Rudder's lyrics at that stage had already reached such a level of national consciousness that he could be taken as spokesperson for his people and his nation. In fact, after the February Revolution in 1970, a period of social unrest and upheaval of the Trade Unions and the Oilfield Worker's Union, his songs acquired a layer of 'Trinidadianism' that was absent or not as developed until that time, as he affirmed in conversation with the deceased John LaRose:

We had a social and political upheaval which was known as the 1970 Revolution, which to me is the most important event that ever happened in my lifetime in Trinidad. It changed the minds of a lot of people. (...) Soca music was symbolic as a mark of that experience, that change. My lyrics became more Trinidadian, not necessarily calypso but more Trinidadian.⁷¹²

David Rudder is probably the most important Trinidadian calypsonians nowadays, and his themes touch more than just Trinidadian or Caribbean subjects.

One year before "Calypso Music" Rudder released the 1986 album *The Hammer*, which includes the calypso "The Hammer". As Rudder sang some covers of Bob Marley's songs like "Stir It Up" (1967), this title could lead one to think that "The Hammer" is another of Marley's covers (Marley's was released in 1979) which in actual fact it is not – even if Rudder was defined as "The Bob Marley of Soca".⁷¹³ The calypso was actually written to remember the outstanding pannist Rudolph Charles, who died in 1985.⁷¹⁴ Derek Walcott remembered the Desperadoes steel band in his 1981 "The Spoiler's Return", where the calypsonian Spoiler sings "I sit high on this bridge in Laventille / (...) Tell Desperadoes when you reach the hill",⁷¹⁵ where Spoiler sang "Hell is a city

⁷¹¹ Personal communication with Prof. Warner-Lewis. E-mail. 13 Nov. 2009.

⁷¹² Rudder, David, & LaRose, John. Kaiso, Calypso Music. *Cit.* 9. "In 1977, Lord Shorty (..) set out to improve on calypso's customary bounces, slightly ragged, but basically bland and generically Caribbean accompaniment patterns. He and arranger Ed Watson came up with a composite pattern they called "soca" (or "sokah," to reflect the East Indian influence)". Manuel, Peter, Kenneth Bilby, and Michael Largey. Caribbean Currents, Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae. 227. *Cf.* also my interview with the dub poet Mutabaruka: "Brother Resistance in Trinidad, he uses what he calls 'rapso', not calypso, but it has its origins in calypso as opposed to soca. He uses a terminology that separates himself from the others; he is a poet that has separated himself also from dub poetry, I like that. He is not a calypsonian like Sparrow, Kitchener, and so on, this is a poet, who uses poetry to music, but he uses music that is indigenous to his environment. And another good calypsonian is Rudder, it is very interesting to consider how they articulate the social commentary of calypsonians, from Kitchener to Rudder, the political, the social, and so on." Interview with Mutabaruka. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁷¹³ McGowan, Howard. Entertainment Editor, *The Gleaner* (Jamaica). "David Rudder's Homepage." 6 May 1997. 8 Mar. 2008 <<http://www.davidrudder.co.tt/critics.html>>.

⁷¹⁴ "Rudolph Charles of Trinidad and Tobago". The Trinidad and Tobago Search Engine. 22 July 2008 <<http://www.search.co.tt/trinidad/rudolphcharles/index.html>>. Charles was a member of the WITCO, the West Indian Tobacco Desperadoes, a steel band from Laventille, one of the most dangerous suburbs of Port-of-Spain, which he had been leading from 1961 until his death.

⁷¹⁵ Walcott, Derek. "The Spoiler's Return." Collected Poems. *Cit.* 432. *Cf.* also footnote 43.

much like Port of Spain”.⁷¹⁶ In my analysis I will adopt Maureen Warner-Lewis’s system of analysis of one of Rudder’s calypsoes as compared to one by The Mighty Sparrow, in which she counts the number of syllables and the number of stresses per line. At the end of the comparison her conclusions are that “This process unmasks the symmetry of the poem’s rhythmic structure, same-rhythm aggregations, and the correspondence between tempo and syllable quantity per line.”⁷¹⁷

David Rudder – “The Hammer” (1986) ⁷¹⁸	Stresses	Syllables
INTRO		
(Lavantille, here we come, we’re singing praises to your son)		
1 st VERSE		
Somewhere up in Lavantille	3	7
Many years ago	3	5
A man had a hammer	2	6
Used to follow him to and fro	3	8
He used to use it to pound a pan	3	9
Or sometimes a stupid man	3	7
All in the savannah	3	6
Never miss Panorama	3	7
One day the old hammer just disappear	4	10
(Oh, oh, oh) Some say that it vanish into thin air	4	(3+) 10
CHORUS		
A-Where de man wid de hammer gone	3	9
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
Anybody know where de hammer gone	3	10
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
Can you tell we what going on	3	7
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
Ah want to know where de hammer gone	3	9
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
REFRAIN		
Why you up and leave, Trail	3	6
Why you make me grieve, Trail	3	6
Hammer tell me flat, Trail	3	6
Why you do we dat, Trail	3	6
(Oh Lord), well the dragon doh walk the trail no more,	(2+) 4	(2+) 10
Well the dragon doh walk the trail no more.	4	10

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.* 436.

⁷¹⁷ Warner-Lewis, Maureen. “The Rhythms of Caribbean Vocal and Oral-Based Texts.” *Cit.* 70.

⁷¹⁸ Source Rudder, David. “‘The Hammer’ by David Rudder. Dimanche Gras 1986. Calypso Monarch Winning Performances.” Online video. Posted by grjoseph. [YouTube](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjV4INu7kOg). 11 Oct. 2008. 3 Aug. 2009 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjV4INu7kOg>>.

2 nd VERSE		
From April of Eighty-Five	3	7
Hammer went to sleep	3	5
After years of making noise,	3	7
Not even a peep	2	5
He used to move wid de dragon man	3	9
All through this soca land	3	6
Always on the scene	3	5
They used to control the barber-greene	4	9
Well the dragon doh walk the trail no more (no more)	4 (+1)	10 (+2)
Who holding the hammer I want to know.	4	10
CHORUS		
A-where de man wid de hammer gone	3	9
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
Thunderbolt Williams, what going on	4	8
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
This thing like a police boots on meh corn,	4	10
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
And now ah hear it by Y'De Lima on pawn	3	12
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
REFRAIN		
Look Children	2	3
Search under yuh bed, Trail	3	6
All above yuh head, Trail	3	6
Look behind the door, Trail,	3	6
What yuh waiting for, Trail	3	6
(Oh Lord,) well the dragon doh walk the trail no more (no more, no more)	(2+) 4 (+2)	(2+) 10 (+4)
Well the dragon doh walk the trail no more.	5	10
3 rd VERSE		
On a silver chariot	3	7
Riding to the sun	2	5
Leaving fire in its wake	3	7
Spirits on the run	2	5
As we gather round that day	3	7
Ah hear sister Sheila say	3	7
How last night she see a sign	3	7
She see the hammer and it doing fine (Lord)	3 (+1)	9 (+1)
Same time thunder roll she bawl out "You see?"	4	10
He done start to tune a pan already	4	10

CHORUS		
A-where de man wid de hammer gone	3	9
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
Sister Sheila, what going on	4	7
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
This hammer giving we a heavy horn,	4	10
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
This thing like a police boots on meh corn,	4	10
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
REFRAIN		
Search all through the town, Trail	3	6
Turn it upside down, Trail	3	6
Check on top de hill, Trail,	3	6
On dat window sill, Trail	3	6
Oh Lord, well the dragon doh walk the trail no more,	5	12
Tell 'em tell 'em, dragon doh walk the trail no more	7	12
4 th VERSE		
I want to hear the hammer ring out from every panyard	5	14
from Europe to Africa just like here in Trinidad	5	14
this hammer must never die	3	7
lemme tell you why	3	5
anytime the music played	3	7
life will cross me head	3	5
and so the children start singing the refrain	4	11
that lead me to want to question again	4	10
CHORUS		
Ah-where de man wid de hammer gone	3	9
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
Anybody know where the hammer gone	3	10
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
Can somebody tell me what going on,	3	9
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
I want to know where the hammer gone,	3	9
Tell me, tell me where he gone	3	7
REFRAIN		
CODA		
Tell 'em again, well the dragon doh walk the trail no more,	7	14
I say doh walk the trail...	3	6

This calypso employs the symbolic hammer to talk about a man and the tool needed to “beat the steel into depressions that will produce particular notes”,⁷¹⁹ but also as an instrument to awake consciousness and make people think and remember, playing the role of the social commentator who complains, for instance, of the disappearance of steel pan from Trinidad (as he will sing ten years later in “The Case of the Disappearing Panyards”, *TFFSL*, 1996). “The Hammer” tells the story of the birth of steel pan from the dangerous Port-of-Spain ghetto of Laventille.⁷²⁰ The song contextualises time (April of 1985) and space (Laventille) when Charles passed away. This dangerous ghetto of Port of Spain is the place where the steelpan was invented, but also Charles’s homeplace. As Breiner pointed out:

the popular poetry of calypso (...) had experienced a golden age before World War II (...) the events of the war provided new material for verse, while surplus oil drums led to the creation of the steelband as a powerful adjunct to calypso performance and to the culture from which it arises. From being looked down upon and even outlawed, calypso became Trinidad’s most democratic institution, and with the appearance of Sparrow, greatest of calypsonians, the lyrics reached a level of sophistication that justified treating calypso as poetry.⁷²¹

Instead the savannah is the arena where the calypso contests and Panorama are held, the Queen’s Park Savannah. Rudder contextualizes the song by employing hints at local realities.⁷²² The dragon mentioned in the calypso is instead related to Rudolph Charles’s nickname “Walk like a Dragon” (1960) from the movie of the same name,⁷²³ and to his death “the dragon doh walk the trail no more”. Nonetheless, I would recognise in it also the Chinese habit of reproducing a dragon moving along the streets;⁷²⁴ Warner-Lewis also pointed out that “the dragon [could] issue[...] from Catholic

⁷¹⁹ Personal communication with Prof. Warner-Lewis. E-mail. 13 Nov. 2009.

⁷²⁰ Also known as “La Ventaille” or “The Vent”, it is also the title of one of Walcott’s poems, *The Castaway and Other Poems*, 1965.

⁷²¹ Breiner, Laurence A. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. *Cit.* 74.

⁷²² At, for instance, Thunderbolt Williams, the Trinidadian wrestler, and Desparadoes “enforcer”, or Y’De Lima, a jewellery distribution and pawn shop in Frederick Street, Port of Spain, founded in 1885 by the Venezuelan Yldefonso de Lima.

⁷²³ “A lot of ghetto people gave themselves, or were given, names from Hollywood movies of the time; Charles was also called “Trail” and “Hammer”.” I would like to thank Mr. Rudder for this observation. Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 6 Oct. 2009.

⁷²⁴ Cf. Earl Lovelace’s *The Dragon Can’t Dance*, which described the shantytown of Laventille, as well as the picturesque Trinidadian Carnival. The dragon is a positive symbol in Chinese culture – differently from the Western conception of the evil dragon –, bringing prosperity and balance in the yin/yang functioning of the universe together with the female symbol of the phoenix. Walcott’s “The Spoiler’s Return” has a dedication to the Trinidadian novelist Earl Lovelace. The Chinese arrived in Trinidad in 1806, and nowadays their blending in with the island culture is proven also by the fact that there is a Chinese steelpan. During his Trinidadian period, Walcott was influenced by the calypsoes, as it is evident in “The Spoiler’s Return”, in which the calypsonian ‘Spoiler’ mocks Trinidadian and West-Indian ‘poli-tricks’ – and even the Trinidadian-born writer V.S. Naipaul, addressing him as V.S. Nightfall, – and depicts the Trinidadian calypso as:

Is Carnival, straight Carnival that’s all,

iconography related to hell”, as Hill also described on Carnival costumes.⁷²⁵ Rudder employs Creole in the third stanza or when he uses colloquialisms like “tell me flat” (to mean “speak clearly”). “Sister Sheila” is another West Indianism, where the word ‘sister’ could have the double meaning of ‘woman’ or ‘church member’,⁷²⁶ and according to Prof. Warner-Lewis it might also be “the mode of address used in the Spiritual Baptists religion”.⁷²⁷ At times, though, he uses images from the Bible or Greek mythology, as in “On a silver chariot / Riding to the sun”, reminding of the prophet Elia, who was taken up to heaven on a fiery chariot, or Apollo, god of the sun.

The creolization of cultures in this song is derived mostly from the use of Trinidadian Creole together with other levels of language, as Breiner observed: “The extreme shifts that occur in calypso – for example from Oxbridge British to military American to creole Chinese – reflect the tremendous ethnic diversity of Port-of-Spain.”⁷²⁸ In fact, the mention of the Chinese dragon is important here (as in other songs is the reference to Indians or to the Muslim festivities like Hosay) because it involves the issue of identity, especially in an island like Trinidad where the cohabitation of Africans and Indians has led to social unrest, and where scholars have theorized a “poetics of the dougla” or “dougla poetics”, the dougla being the Trinidadian Creole born from an Indian mother and an African father.⁷²⁹ This calypso was written in 1986, eleven years before Hill recognised

the beat is base, the melody bohbohl,
 all Port of Spain is a twelve-thirty show,
 some playing Kojak, some Fidel Castro,
 some Rastamen, but, with or without locks,
 to Spoiler is the same old khaki socks,
 All Frederick Street stinking like a closed drain,
 Hell is a city much like Port of Spain

⁷²⁵ I would like to thank Prof. Warner-Lewis for these observations. Personal communication with the scholar. E-mail. 13 Nov. 2009.

⁷²⁶ Cf. Interview with Jeannette Allsopp. Appendix A in this thesis: “so in Caribbean English you’ll get something like “Mary is a sister”, it goes “1-’2”, low-high. Now, that has a totally different meaning from “Mary is my sister”. “Sister” with an even stress and pitch means you’re siblings, the other girl child of your parents that is your sister, you are relatives; but if you say “Mary’s sister is a sister, you know”, the “sister” that’s going “1-’2” means “a member of a church”, but usually not the member of an established church like the Anglican or Catholic or Methodist or Presbyterian churches”.

⁷²⁷ Personal communication with Prof. Warner-Lewis. E-mail. 13 Nov. 2009.

⁷²⁸ Breiner, Laurence A. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. *Cit.* 176.

⁷²⁹ As Shalini Puri put it: “I am emphatically not suggesting a dougla poetics as somehow paradigmatic of postcolonial, West Indian, or even Trinidadian aesthetics (...) Rather, I am making a conjunctural (...) claim about the possibilities of a dougla poetics in Trinidad today”. Puri, Shalini. *The Caribbean Postcolonial. Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004. 218. Cf. also “dougla as the offspring of a (forced) union between an African man and an Indian woman” *Ibid.* 262 and “the figure of the dougla becomes an interesting site for the collision of classifications, for negotiations over the dougla’s racial “value” and place in a racially hierarchized society, and for the disruption of the notions of racial purity upon which stereotypes depend.” *Ibid.* 192. And cf. also the discussion on the cultural practice of “matikor”, the first ceremonial day of the three-day-long Indian wedding: “while *matikor* implies an empowering space shared by women from a particular ethnic group (...) dougla poetics very clearly refuses the idea of any discourse that privileges ethnic or racial origins.” Donnell, Alison. *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature*. London: Routledge, 2006. 177.

Indian and Chinese musical influences on calypsoes,⁷³⁰ and three years before Samuel Selvon commented on the Trinidadian and West Indian question of identity:

The question of identity has assumed greater importance, and in the context of the Third World the inhabitants seem to be thinking of themselves not as Trinidadians or Barbadians or Jamaicans, but as East Indian or African. I mention these two predominant races because like the whites, God alone knows what is happening with the Chinese and the Portuguese and the other elements that are sandwiched between them.⁷³¹

Rudder underlines the creolization in the Caribbean, hoping for a deeper integration of races, in the calypso “Trini to the Bone”, previously analysed: “As crazy as we might seem to be / We still fight to be a family / Indian, African or a Chinese / Syrian, French-Creole and Portuguese / We vex with a spirit fiery / Some people say God is a Trini”.

Maureen Warner-Lewis explained that her choice of analysing the calypsoes according to the number of stresses and syllables per line, which are almost always different, “allows us to excavate the underlying rhythmic coherence of line sequences, that is, to establish stanzas; to discover the structural segmentalization of the whole; and to more accurately convert the lyrics to poetic scribal form.”⁷³² Warner-Lewis analysed and compared two calypsoes: The Mighty Sparrow’s “Ten to One is Murder” and David Rudder “Dus’ [Dust] in Dey Face”; she explained: “I incorporated a *stress-based scansion* based on rhythmic analysis of the actual musical renditions. This two-dimensional framework then revealed evenness and unevenness of *intervallic stress*, which helped account for tempo changes”.⁷³³ Rudder’s calypso refers to Panorama’s show which concludes the annual calypso competition of steel-bands at the beginning of Trinidad Carnival.

The respect of metrical forms is seminal in poetry: whereas the calypsonian pays attention to his lines when he writes his lyrics (and Rudder is famous for writing all of his lyrics), he gives importance also to the language which he is employing, to his native Creole; as Torres-Saillant explained: “The critic Gordon Rohlehr, for instance, advises Anglophone West Indian poets to appropriate the ‘metrical forms’ employed by the calypso singer, whose language ‘is pretty close to standard English, yet his organization of language is entirely different’ (1970:99).”⁷³⁴ Of course,

⁷³⁰ “Within recent times calypsoes have even incorporated melodies from East Indian and Chinese music”. Hill, Errol. The Trinidad Carnival. *Cit.* 58.

⁷³¹ Selvon, Samuel. “Epilogue - Three into one can’t go - East Indian, Trinidadian, West Indian.” Foreday Morning. Selected Prose 1946-1986. Kingston: Longman Caribbean Writers, 1989. 223.

⁷³² *Ibid.* 64.

⁷³³ *Ibid.* 61.

⁷³⁴ Torres-Saillant, Silvio. Caribbean Poetics. Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. 82.

some languages function according to stress quantity as English does, while others according to syllabic quantity, as Italian, French or Spanish do:

English prosody is based on stress quantity per line, a system which is becoming increasingly difficult for younger generations of West Indians to “hear” in their inner ear (...) Yet children are introduced by way of nursery rhymes to the trimeter (triple time), and the dimeter (duple time) and hence the tetrameter (twice the dimeter) (...) In contrast to the stress-timed metre of English, some other speech cultures measure poetic lines or breath groups by their syllabic quantity. Latin, French, Spanish and African languages do so.⁷³⁵

What follows is, thus, a comparative chart of the stress quantity and the syllabic quantity of the first, second, and third repetition of verses, first and second part of the chorus in “The Hammer”.

Stresses				Syllables			
Verses							
3	3	3	5	7	7	7	14
3	3	2	5	5	5	5	14
2	3	3	3	6	7	7	7
3	2	2	3	8	5	5	5
3	3	3	3	9	9	7	7
3	3	3	3	7	6	7	5
3	3	3	4	6	5	7	11
3	4	3 (+ 1)	4	7	9	9 (+ 1)	10
4	4 (+ 1)	4		10	10 (+ 2)	10	
4	4	4		(3 +) 10	10	10	
Chorus							
3	3	3	3	9	9	9	9
3	3	3	3	7	7	7	7
3	4	4	3	10	8	7	10
3	3	3	3	7	7	7	7
3	4	4	3	7	10	10	9
3	3	3	3	7	7	7	7
3	3	4	3	9	12	10	9
3	3	3	3	7	7	7	7
Refrain							
	2				3		
3	3	3		6	6	6	
3	3	3		6	6	6	
3	3	3		6	6	6	
3	3	3		6	6	6	
(2 +) 4	(2 +) 4 (+ 2)	5		(2 +) 10	(2 +) 10 (+ 4)	12	
4	5	7		10	10	12	
Coda							
		7				14	
		3				6	

⁷³⁵ Warner-Lewis, Maureen. “The Rhythms of Caribbean Vocal and Oral-Based Texts.” *Cit.* 58-9.

The 8-line chorus is perfectly symmetrical in terms of stresses, and has slight variations in terms of syllables in lines 3, 5, and 7. The first part of the refrain pattern is symmetrical for all the three verses in stresses and syllables, while the second half of it is varied; the third one extends to the coda. The last part of the verses is syllabically shorter than the other two parts, but variations are not as symptomatic of great difference: the number of stresses is respected in all the three 10-line verses, in that the first seven lines have three stresses in all the first three verses composed. The last two lines are syllabically identical in the three verses. The second repetition of the chorus, “And now ah hear it by Y’De Lima on pawn”, contemplates an abnormal accumulation of syllables (12 versus 9 and 10) and Warner-Lewis explained it in her analysis of Rudder’s “Dus’ in Dey Face”⁷³⁶ – another calypso about the annual calypso competition held at the Savannah – as follows: “This overweight of stresses within the four or five syllables of the last four lines suggests a slowing of pace and a longer, smoother texture to the melody. But where syllables lengthen lines in the refrain it is due to the addition of interjections, conjunctives and direct audience address.”⁷³⁷

The metrical transcription of the first verse, whereas ‘/’ represents the accented syllable and ‘u’ the unaccented syllable, would be:

u / u u / u / (iamb, anapaest, iamb)
 / u / u / u (3 trochees)
 u / u u / u (iamb, anapest, u)
 u u / u / u / (anapest, iamb, iamb)
 u / u u / u u u / (iamb, anapest, phyrrie, iamb)
 u / u u / u / (iamb, anapest, iamb)
 / u u / u / (trochee, iamb, iamb)
 u u / / u u / (anapest, trochee, iamb)
 u / u u / u u u u / (iamb, anapest, molossus, iamb)
 u / u u / u u u / (iamb, anapest, phyrrie, iamb)

⁷³⁶ “David Rudder (...) an eclectic, intelligent, rock-oriented composer and bandleader who appeared on the scene in 1986. (...) Rudder’s 1993 “Dus’ in deh Face” described the excitement of the pan contests at the Savannah fairgrounds, subtly using steel-band rivalry as a metaphor for the violence and crime besetting the recession-torn island.” Peter Manuel, Kenneth Bilby, and Michael Largey. *Caribbean Currents, Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*. *Cit.* 230-1.

⁷³⁷ *Ibidem*.

Chorus:

u u u / u / u u / (pyrric, iamb, iamb, anapest)
/ u / u u u / (trochee, trochee, anapest)
u u u u / u / u u / (molossus, iamb, iamb, anapest)
/ u / u u u / (trochee, trochee, anapest)
u u / u / u / (anapest, iamb, iamb)
/ u / u u u / (trochee, trochee, anapest)
u u u / u / u u / (pyrric, iamb, trochee, iamb)
u / u / u u / (iamb, iamb, anapest)

Refrain:

u u / u // (anapest, iamb, /)
u u / u // (anapest, iamb, /)
u u / u // (anapest, iamb, /)
u u / u // (anapest, iamb, /)
u u / u / u / u u / (anapest, iamb, iamb, anapest)
u u / u / u / u u / (anapest, iamb, iamb, anapest)

Even if Brathwaite observed that the calypso usually employs the dactyl and not the iamb, that means / u u and not u /, the metrical transcription of “The Hammer” evidences a bolted rhythm, created by a tight alternation mostly of anapests and iambs, which place the stress even on syllables which are generally considered weak, as the article ‘de’. There are interjections like “Oh Lord” which – as it is the case with “O Gorm” in Warner-Lewis’s analysis of “Dus’ in Dey Face” – carries two accents and is needed to fill in the momentary void after the antiphonal response of the chorus, as sometimes Rudder does with the insertion of three successive unaccented syllables (molossus). The penultimate line in the 2nd chorus (“And now ah hear it by Y’De Lima on pawn”) has twelve syllables but only three stresses (u u u / u u / u / u u /, that is pyrric, iamb, anapaest, iamb, anapest) and its syllables are compressed to speed up the tempo. It is manifest that this metrical freedom is achieved by Rudder also through the employment of Creole which, not following the English grammatical pattern, allows him to play with rhythm, note lengths and contour, as in the 3rd verse.⁷³⁸ It is also interesting to observe how in the chorus the anti-phonal response of the chorus

⁷³⁸ The 3rd verse “Ah hear Sister Sheila say / How last night she see a sign / She see the hammer and it doing fine / Same time thunder roll she bawl out “You see?” / He done start to tune a pan already” translated into SE could not

which backs up Rudder is in trochees and anapests, while he sings in iambs and anapests, so differentiating the rhythm from a metrical point of view. Finally, the refrain backs up Rudder's part of the chorus, with anapests and iambs repeated with certain regularity.

The previously mentioned Muslim festival of Hosay is the subject matter of "Rudder's Hoosay, the best of 1991 calypsoes and the least known."⁷³⁹ The Muslim festival is notorious for the massacre of participants in this festival who in 1884 were trying to enter the town of San Fernando and were shot by the British colonial authorities, "It was the night that they say / That the martyrs died". Rohlehr in his "Apocalypso and the Soca Fires of 1990" gave the cultural and historical background for the festivity:

Rudder briefly draws attention to the fact that the Muslimeen uprising took place on the Friday immediately preceding the Hosein festival, which commemorates the battle of Kerbala, a fratricidal struggle in which Hussain and Hassan, the grandsons of the prophet Mohammed, were killed. The images in the calypso are drawn from the general iconography of Islam, with the star, the crescent moon and the tassa drums featuring prominently in the poem's refrain.⁷⁴⁰

As he addressed the Chinese and the Catholics in "The Hammer", he talks about Indians in "Hoosay" (*Rough & Ready*, 1991): both Muslims and Hindus were taking part in this festival which, even though it is Islamic in origin, succeeded in breaking down barriers between different social groups. To further evidence the breaking down of social and cultural barriers, Rudder employs even a Christian expression "The power and the glory". The Hoosay Muslim festival was the theme of Goodison's poem "Hosay" (*Goldengrove*, 2006):

On their indentureship he steered them straight
to the West Indies: these Indians come in bond to Cane.
Hosay, Hosein, East Indians delight in offering praises
to their spirit Guide, the son-in-law of the Prophet. (...)
In thanks each year they construct for him a marvellous
multi-coloured house, and hosay across the Savannah.⁷⁴¹

admit the same tempo "I heard sister Sheila say / That last night she saw a sign / She saw the hammer and it was doing fine / At the same time that thunder rolls, she bawls out "Can't you see?" / He has already started to tune a pan".

⁷³⁹ Rohlehr, Gordon. "Apocalypso and the Soca Fires of 1990." *The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays*. Cit. 362.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴¹ Goodison, Lorna. *Goldengrove: New and Selected Poems*. Manchester (UK): Carcanet, 2006. 90.

The colours which are displayed in Rudder's "Hoosay" hint at the massacre of Indians during the Hosay festival, but also at the Red Day, on 17th November 1989, when in support to the national soccer team the Trinidad and Tobago supporters were wearing red.⁷⁴² "Wear something red" was the popular cry / And like the pavements and streets, / They were filled with envy / Because by morning light / They were covered with our blood / I tell you not one soul here escaped the frenzy". In this calypso Rudder plays with the double sides of the macabre game and the terminology is one of games and doubles and of the dark side in everybody: "You know sometimes you're gambling for king / And wild is the joker / And sometimes the sight of the moon / Just riles up the lost, the hungry, the mad / These are the troubled times / That we have down in Trinidad". Rohlehr saw this reference to the double as the uncovering of a hidden side of the people, and the Haitian vodoun god Legba reflects this duality, as Rudder depicts Bakr as a Legba-like figure:

Bakr becomes Legba, the crippled door-keeper between the theatre and its Double, the one who "opened a door and showed us our other side." And in another, healthier sense, Rudder too, in *Hoosay* assumes the role and responsibility of Legba. He becomes Muse and guide.⁷⁴³

Madness and 'lunaticism' are evoked through an apostrophe to the moon, an Islamic symbol: "Because under the crescent moon / And above the bloody asphalt / Strange dogs were barking deep in the night / Under the crescent moon / I say the drums were silent" (i.e., the tassa drums of Hoosay festival),⁷⁴⁴ "Why don't you know we're a star / (...) Star, like that star in the moon / (...) Dance the moon, you can't 'fraid it / Come on, dance brother dance (...) Jump high jump low, but this Hosay will take the cake (...) So when we searched for the moon". His peering at the moon and being influenced by it is transfigured into a "danse macabre,"⁷⁴⁵ as Rohlehr observed, a dance of death. In fact the original title of this calypso was "Dance the Moon"⁷⁴⁶ and Rudder continues by saying that the meringue pie was the prize for the dance competition (hence the "meringue dance", in Haiti and Southern USA).⁷⁴⁷ As Warner-Lewis observed, "Dance the moon" was also referred to "a particular dance choreography within the Hosay procession when two participants carrying half moons on their shoulders perform a duo dance".⁷⁴⁸

Many of Rudder's lyrics are about the whole Caribbean, not just T&T (as in "The Hammer") or local politics and social events ("Hoosay", in which he rejects a politics of violence,

⁷⁴²Rohlehr, Gordon. "Apocalypso and the Soca Fires of 1990." *Cit.* 362.

⁷⁴³*Ibid.* 370.

⁷⁴⁴*Cf. Ibid.* 364.

⁷⁴⁵*Ibid.* 366.

⁷⁴⁶*Ibid.* 362. Quoted from Smith, Keith. *Express* 2 Feb. 1991. 9. *Cf.* endnote 27, *ibid.* 371.

⁷⁴⁷*Ibid.* 366.

⁷⁴⁸

“Now Trini know what is uzi diplomacy / Now Trini know what is SLR love / In these troubled times / Under the stars above”), but address international politics too (“1990”, “Day of the Warlord”). Another Trinidadian musical genre which comments on social issues and local politics is rapso. One of the founders of this poetic/musical genre is Brother Resistance (especially after releasing his album *Busting Out* in 1981⁷⁴⁹), who has found proselytes in the young bands of *3Canal*⁷⁵⁰ and *12 The Band*.⁷⁵¹ Brother Resistance, aka Lutalo Masimba, defined rapso as:

new progression of poetry created to relate to the everyday experience of the people (everyday people/street people/working people). RAPSO is a network of rhythms (riddum) where the rhythms of the voice blend with African drums (first man-made instrument on earth) and the rhythms of the steel drum/pan (last natural instrument created on earth by man). (...) which draws on the musical experience of the Shango / the Kaiso (Calypso) and robber-talk (a Carnival Theatre)/The Steelband and some have described it as Soka-Poetry or Poetry-in-Soka⁷⁵²

Brother Resistance also declared that “The Rapso artist [is] a revitalisation of the old Griot/Chantuelle traditions”.⁷⁵³ In fact, rapso was born as an oral form of poetry with the typical

⁷⁴⁹ Brother Resistance’s other albums are *Roots of de Rapso Riddum* (1982), *Rapso Explosion* (1984), *Rapso Takeover* (1986), *Rapso Uprising* (1989), *Tonight is de Nite* (1988), *For Rapso Lovers de World Over* (1990), *Touch de Earth with Rapso* (LP, 1991), *Heart of the Rapso Nation* (1992), *De Rapso Tradition* (1993), *De Power of Resistance* (Rituals Music, 1996), *Let Us Rejoice* (Rituals Music, 2001) and *When de Riddum Explode* (Blue Flame Records, 2006). “Brother Resistance.com.” 17 Mar. 2008 <<http://www.brotherresistance.com/#>>. and “Brother Resistance.” Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia. A Wikimedia project. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 17 Mar. 2008 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Busting_Out>.

⁷⁵⁰ I would like to thank the Trinidadian scholar and poet Dr. Jennifer Rahim, who brought their work to my knowledge. The band 3Canal in particular curates the lyrics to spread a universal message of love as in “Where is the Love?” or “Over the Mountain”, or “I believe” and “Illuminata”, which are prayers to the Lord. The melody is very sweet and at the same time it sounds like lounge music. The group is deeply rooted in T&T, as their lyrics show, but they also did covers of other singers like Carlos Santana in “Oye Como Va?”, underpinning the multilinguistic situation of the Caribbean. “Imperia” sounds more rooted in the Rastafarian language and credo, with “peace, love and possibility”, as much as “What A Feeling”, whose sound is profoundly reggae and rhythmically based on the Trinidadian creole, or “On+On”, which echoes the zion chant sung by a rapsoman. The desperation of “Emergency” vanishes in the reggaetòn sounds of “Blow Wind Blow”, even if poverty and education are the basic issues in the song, with “You say you care ‘bout the people / You say you care ‘bout the education system / But that is the roots of our problem / You say you care about health / And you care ‘bout the poor / Well the poor can’t afford the doctor bill / So what’s to become of the poor (...) / This is the voice of the voiceless / This is the voice of the distressed”.

⁷⁵¹ 12 The Band has a song titled “Canboulay”, a term defined by LaRose and Rudder in conversation as follows “Canboulay was to re-enact the burnt canes – what we call the cannes brulees. You burn down the slaveholder’s estate. (...) It went into carnival as something called the negres jardins – the garden negroes, field slaves. People spoke patois in those days because a lot of those slave owners were fleeing the French Revolution and had come to Trinidad. (...) People are speaking two basic languages. They’re speaking French and African-French creole. In addition they’re speaking a Spanish-influenced creole. (...) They’re not speaking English or English influenced creole yet.” (Rudder, David, & LaRose, John. Kaiso, Calypso Music. David Rudder in conversation with John LaRose. Cit. 19-20). The “negres jardins” or “negue jadin” is a reference to the Haitian practice of having “garden slaves”, or stretches of land, owned by the slaves and cultivated by their mistresses.

⁷⁵² Brother Resistance (Lutako Makossa Masimba). “Rapso – A New Poetic Vibration from Trinidad & Tobago.” Rapso Explosion. Cit. viii. Cf. also the chapter on AJA in this thesis.

⁷⁵³ Cf. “Brother Resistance.com.” 17 Mar. 2008 <<http://www.brotherresistance.com/#>>.

African features of story-telling but renewed as a Trinidadian form, and it is defined as “the poetry of calypso, the power of the word in the riddum of the word”.⁷⁵⁴

IX.ii. Rudder’s calypsoes on a regional level: the West Indies

On a deeper and at the same time more general level, Rudder’s calypsoes embrace the whole Caribbean, as some of his titles hint at an aesthetic unity: “Bahia Girl”,⁷⁵⁵ “Rally ‘Round the West Indies”, “Haiti”, “Panama”. At a regional level, one could find analogies between calypso and other musical/poetic forms such as rapso in Trinidad, dub in Jamaica,⁷⁵⁶ or tuk in Barbados.⁷⁵⁷ In this artistic fervour all of them are musical genres which are articulated around speech and verbal skills, address their community, make significant use of Creole, and are often directed to international audiences (especially the Black ones of Caribbean people scattered around the world) to maintain

⁷⁵⁴ “About Rapso.” RapsoFest. 17 Mar. 2008 <<http://rapsofestival.com/aboutrapso.html>>.

⁷⁵⁵ “Antiphony is enhanced by asymmetrical rhythmic patterns (...) asymmetry allows for angular rhythms, supporting the breaks, jarring sounds, and disruption in the flow (...) In many of his compositions, Rudder establishes the rhythmic rather than lyrical level of antiphony, especially in calypsoes like *Bahia Girl*, where the call and response elements are rhythms to be hummed.” Mahabir, Joy. “Rhythm and Class Struggle: The Calypsoes of David Rudder.” *Cit.*

⁷⁵⁶ Rastafarianism and dub poetry are linked one to the other, let us think for instance of dub poets like Michael Smith (“Give Me Little Dub Music”, “Dread” in *It A Come* or *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*), Mutabaruka, Oku Onuora, Jean Binta Breeze (*Riddym Ravings*), or Linton Kwesi Johnson (Morris, Mervyn. “Dub Poetry’: Some Problems of Assessment.” Proc. of a conference. Conference on Caribbean Culture. 4-6 March 1996, U.W.I., I.S.E.R., Documentation and Data centre, McGarrity Ross, t.s., n.p., 1996.) (the last two poets are Jamaicans who now live in the UK). Other non dub-poets have been writing dub poems, for instance Pamela Mordecai wrote “Taino Peace (A Dub Prayer).” (*Tiano*); Mbala “The History of Dub Poetry” (*The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*); Lorna Goodison “Mulatta Song” *Heartease* (1988); or a Pan-Africanist spoken-word artist as the Barbadian Adrian Green performs dub-like poems. Connections to drumbeats and to Rastafar-I and dub are to be found in Orlando Wong (Oku Onuora)’s “Niyabingi”, “Beat Yu Drums” (*Echo*) and the African connections of the Grenadian Omowale David Franklyn’s *Tongue of Another Drum*, or “Reflection in Red” (*Caribbean Poetry Now* – which could be compared to Senior’s *Meditation in Red*). Other noteworthy poems noteworthy are Brathwaite’s “Wings of a Dove” in *The Arrivants*, the anonym “Rastafarian Chant” or “Zion Me Wan Go Home” (*The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*), Linton Kwesi Johnson’s “Reggae fi Dada” (*Rented Rooms*), or Valerie Bloom’s “Trench Town Shock” (*Touch Mi! Tell Mi!*), after Bob Marley’s “Trenchtown Rock” (*The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*).

Thus the point of contact between Rastafarianism and reggae music is Bob Marley, whose lyrics have been anthologised by Paula Burnett in *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*, and analysed by Carolyn Cooper in *Noises in the Blood*. Let us think of Marley’s “Redemption Song”, in which he conceptualize the history of slavery and invites to “fulfil de book” or to Marley’s “The Hammer” or “Stir It Up”, both recovered by the Trinidadian calypsonian artist David Rudder, who will be one of the main focuses of this chapter. Rocksteady, reggae, and dancehall are other musical genres which have nurtured many poets and provided the inspiration for much poets in Creole, as is the case with the Dominican Eddie D’Pope’s “Rap 1”, “Rap 2”, and “Rap 3”, “Polyrhythm”, “Rhapsody” (*Beyond Dark Clouds*), with Lorna Goodison’s “A Dancing Master”, “Dance Rocksteady”, “Creation Story” (*Goldengrove*), with Jean Goulbourne’s “Rock My Baby” (*Actors in the Arena*) and with Rachel Manley’s “Bob Marley’s Dead” (*A Light Left On*).

⁷⁵⁷ Cf. also footnotes 266, p. 94 and 304, p. 106 in chapter II on Bruce St. John. Anthony Kellman’s “Waterfalls” (Watercourse) speaks of “ruk-a-tuk and humming cataracts” (Kellman, Anthony. “Waterfalls.” Watercourse. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 1990. 20.) and in “After the Rain” he states that this poem is in “Tuk Verse”, that is Kellmann’s own verse based on the Barbadian tuk rhythm: “ruk a-ruk-a-rock, ruk / tuk a-tuk-a-talk, tuk / Porous rock, a rock that can talk / water talking around your flesh of stone”. (Kellman, Anthony. “After the Rain.” Watercourse. *Cit.* 59.)

the cultural unity and stay united in facing Third World countries' problems (see AJA) or fighting for an equal society. Moreover, they aim at "One Love",⁷⁵⁸ as it can be perceived in lyrics by the Jamaican reggae artist Marley, the Trinidadian Brother Resistance, 3Canal or 12 The Band, the Barbadian AJA, or the Dominican Ras Mo (who migrated to the States). Many of today's dub or soca tunes are mainly an invitation to jump up at the rhythm of music and the overall idea is that of an excessive craving for fun, but if we analyse what more seriously concerns these compositions according to their social or political significance, then we have to admit that there are lines of contact between these genres, and mainly because the rhythms of the Caribbean are similar and can be perceived in daily activities, in the way of talking or gesticulating, walking or dancing, so that an aesthetics of the Creole in the Caribbean would be tailored according to several human activities, as for instance Mahabir identified for Caribbean music: "improvisation (...), call-and-response (antiphony), energetic percussion, cross-cultural rhythms and asymmetrical harmonies".⁷⁵⁹ More than half a century ago Martin Carter already questioned an aesthetic affinity in Caribbean music and detected a root in its African origins, as he wrote in his essay "Sensibility and the Search" (1958):

I invite your attention to the music and the poetry we call West Indian. What actually is the secret of the music, the native music? All I can find is the rhythm. But even this rhythm is not our own, in the sense of having been created by us. For are these rhythms not actually the germ motifs of African music? We certainly didn't create these rhythms.⁷⁶⁰

⁷⁵⁸ The Trinidadian poet Oscar A. Glaude in "Carnival Jump-up" (*Moods of the Caribbean*) to the incitation "Play Mas!" describes the festive joy of Carnival:

Bands came jumping, swaying, shuffling into town.
 Vagabonds and sailors, kings and clowns,
 Robbers, jab-jabs, pirates a few;
 Burroquites of days bygone
 And the Pries jumping too;
 One love, moving on in innocent fun.
 The strumming pans and rumbling drums
 Stirred ten thousand eager feet,
 All went wild to the lilting beat,
 As they skipped down Frederick Street.
 It does not matter who wears a mask,
 No time to look; no time to ask;
 A band of friends, just playing mas.
 (Glaude, Oscar A. "Carnival Jump-Up." *Moods of the Caribbean*. Belmont, Trinidad & Tobago: Superb Printers Limited, s.n. 18-19.)

In "Danse Calypso" (*Moods of the Caribbean*) Glaude says "Swaggering to the enchanting rhythms of the Calypso beat; / Tippity, tippity, tim / Bim, bim de bim. Bim bim de bim" (Glaude, Oscar A. "Carnival Jump-Up." *Moods of the Caribbean*. Belmont, Trinidad & Tobago: Superb Printers Limited, s.n. 37.), "In the universal lingua of dance" (Glaude, Oscar A. "Carnival Jump-Up." *Cit.* 38).

⁷⁵⁹ Mahabir, Joy. "Rhythm and Class Struggle: The Calypsoes of David Rudder." *Cit.*

⁷⁶⁰ Carter, Martin. "Sensibility and the Search." (1958) *Cit.* 207.

Gemma Robinson observed that nowadays Carter would be contradicted by “Calypso, ska, and steel pan music”.⁷⁶¹ The African rhythms acknowledged by Carter are symbolized by that “distant drum” in Rudder’s “Calypso Music”, the ancient echoes of Africa which have been transfigured and traded in calypso rhythms. Thus, calypso as a musical genre and as poetry cannot absolutely be ignored in Caribbean poetry in Creole, as well as pan, soca, and the Indo-Trinidadian chutney, with its Indo-Caribbean influences. Rudder acknowledges the potential existence of an aesthetic unity in the Caribbean, also in musical terms, because the rhythms and in some way the language have changed, without ignoring creative aspects too.

“Rally Round the West Indies” (*H*, 1989) was written for the West Indian cricket team, in praise of the game which is a typical legacy of the British empire, cricket:⁷⁶²

For ten long years
 We ruled the cricket world
 Now the rule seems coming to an end
 But down here
 Just a chink in the armour
 Is enough, enough to lose a friend
 Some of the old generals have retired and gone
 And the runs don’t come by as they did before
 But when the Toussaints go – don’t yuh know – the Dessalines come
 We’ve lost the battle but yet we will win the war”

Rudder is talking about the period between the 1970s and the 1990s, when the so-called “Windies” were the strongest cricket team in the world, especially between 1983 and 1991 when Viv Richards was the captain of the team. In his lines Rudder employs a military jargon.⁷⁶³

Rudder’s socio-aesthetics finds a symbolic figure in Michael Anthony Holding, a Jamaican cricketer, a player symbolically fighting for the whole region through cricket. Internal conflict is recognised by Rudder as one of the reasons for the troubles of the Caribbean, as much as self-contempt is an hindrance to regional development. The chorus sings:

As long as we, Rally, rally round the West Indies
 Way Down Under a warrior falls
 Michael Holding falls in the heat of the battle

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.* 303.

⁷⁶² *Cf.* chapter II on Bruce St. John in this thesis.

⁷⁶³ In the calypso Rudder refers to Toussaint L’Ouverture, one of the leaders of the Haitian revolution in 1804 who died in exile in France in the Jura Mountains; after his capture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines was the new main honoured leader and he proclaimed himself the Emperor of Haiti.

“Michael shoulda left long time!”
 I heard an angry brother shout
 Caribbean man, that, that, that is the root of our trouble
 In these tiny theatres of conflict and confusion
 Better known as the isles of the West Indies
 We already know who brought us here
 And who created this confusion
 So I’m begging, begging my people please.

Warner-Lewis observed that this calypso “speaks to West Indian impatience, a failure to give things time to gestate, a lack of confidence in our own people, and our disloyalty”,⁷⁶⁴ but these negative features were somehow contrasted by calypsoes like “Haiti” or “Bahia Girl”.

In “Haiti” Rudder shows solidarity with the ill-fated island of Haiti, which experienced political problems, social issues and hostile geological and weather conditions,⁷⁶⁵ in fact as it was noted after one of Rudder’s concerts in Brooklyn in 2009:

Among other favorites was his 1980s lament “Haiti”, as sweet and moving today as it was when he wrote it in the aftermath of a terrible hurricane. Since then, all manner of hurricanes have continued to pummel Haiti, and sadly, the song also remains pointedly relevant.⁷⁶⁶

Looking for a regional aesthetic unity Rudder wrote songs for islands of the whole Caribbean, and he probably found one of the linking elements in the African traditions, culture, and music. For instance, as he told me in an interview, the calypso “Bahia Girl”:

was meant to be a connection with Africa, that is how Africa was transformed in the new world by colonialism. I met a guy from Angola in Bahia and he told me that in Bahia they spoke the same Yoruba that in Angola would be called “Classic Yoruba” he compared it to the Yoruba spoken in the past, like Shakespearean English. The Bahia Girl was Afro-Trinidadian meeting Afro-Brazilian, she was the cultural connection.⁷⁶⁷

In fact, in this calypso (in which Pareles recognised a “lilting, rising melody and samba-soca beat”⁷⁶⁸) Rudder sings this cultural connection: “Then I start to notice like you is a Baptist, / she

⁷⁶⁴ Personal communication with the scholar. E-mail. 13 Nov. 2009.

⁷⁶⁵ Let us recall the terrible earthquake which hit Haiti very recently, on Tuesday 12th January 2010.

⁷⁶⁶ “Banning’s 2009 Concert Blog: David Rudder, Vieux Farka Toure.” 19 June 2009. Celebrate Brooklyn. [Afropop Worldwide. Your Guide to African and World Music Via Public Radio and the Web.](http://www.afropop.org/multi/feature/ID/891/Banning's+2009+Concert+Blog:+David+Rudder,+Vieux+Farka+Toure) World Music Productions. 17 Nov. 2009 <<http://www.afropop.org/multi/feature/ID/891/Banning's+2009+Concert+Blog:+David+Rudder,+Vieux+Farka+Toure>>.

⁷⁶⁷ Interview with David M. Rudder. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁷⁶⁸ Pareles, Jon. “Pop: David Rudder’s Soul-Calypso Mixture.” 13 Sept. 1987. [The New York Times. Arts.](http://www.nytimes.com/1987/09/13/arts/pop-david-rudder-s-soul-calypso-mixture.html) A version of this review appeared in print on Sunday, September 13, 1987, on section 1 page 87 of the New York edition. 16 Nov. 2009 <<http://www.nytimes.com/1987/09/13/arts/pop-david-rudder-s-soul-calypso-mixture.html>>.

said “Darling, no, no! My darling is not so!” / You see Trinidad and Brazil we have the same vibrations”.⁷⁶⁹ This reference to the Baptists and to the musical and cultural vibrations in Rudder’s music were confirmed also by Mahabir:

According to Rudder, the chants in *Bahia Girl* are influenced by the Baptist chants he grew up with, and he used them in this calypso to show that the rhythmic connections between black communities in the Americas exist despite the oppression of slavery. (...) as Rudder explains: “(...)what this girl coming back and saying, is that ‘they lie, we didn’t lose nothing, we still have it, the vibrations still here, because the same thing I seeing here I seeing in Brazil’.”⁷⁷⁰

Rudder then extends the geo-cultural notion of Caribbean to Brazil and he manifests how artists are not stopped by geographical barriers but instead look for a cultural aesthetic unity, which often becomes a socio-aesthetics for the interest they have in political and social issues.

IX.iii. Rudder’s calypsoes and world’s politics

Rudder’s calypsoes are also concerned with international politics, as in “1990”, “Day of the Warlord”, and “Here Comes the West Indies”. As Rudder affirmed in an interview he gave to me in November 2008:

In regards to my work, I don’t just try to keep it local, just Trinidadian or Tobagonian, I try to make it universal, to express a world view, but from my island point of view even though it’s looking at the world. Many years ago there was a problem of genocide in Rwanda and nowadays we see the same problem in Congo, the situation hasn’t changed...I’ve just written one on Zimbabwe on my latest album [Cf. “Zimbabwe Mash Up”, *Trinidad Stories*, released in 2009, *NbR*].⁷⁷¹

Rudder’s concern for the world’s politics mostly embraces social injustices to which he testifies as a witness of political change. In fact, the epigraph at the beginning of “1990” (1990, 1990) says: “(...and the seeds of world change were sown in the year...1990) (For Rosa Parks, Mikhail

⁷⁶⁹ Rudder, David. “‘Bahia Girl’ by David Rudder. Dimanche Gras 1986. Calypso Monarch Winning Performances.” Online video. Posted by grjoseph. [YouTube](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzMjVj-tvxA). 11 Oct. 2008. 17 Nov. 2009 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzMjVj-tvxA>>.

⁷⁷⁰ Mahabir, Joy. A.I. “Rhythm and Class Struggle: The Calypsoes of David Rudder.” *Jouvert: A Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 6.3 (2002) Published by the College of the Humanities and Social Sciences North Carolina State University, Raleigh NC. Spring 2002. SUNY at StonyBrook, New York Copyright © 2002 by Joy A. I. Mahabir. 2 Nov. 2009 <<http://english.chass.ncsu.edu/jouvert/v613/mahabi.htm>>. Rudder’s words are quoted by Mahabir from Rudder, David. “From the Belly of the Bamboo: Interview with David Rudder, Part 1.” Ed. Ramabai Espinet. *Trinidad and Tobago Review*. Christmas 1987, 12.

⁷⁷¹ Cf. Interview with David Rudder. Appendix A in this thesis.

Gorbachev and the Third World)". In that calypso Rudder is witnessing the passage from one decade or one century to another:

Nuclear warhead do I see it torn down (...)
I see the old colonials of Europe become united
And Perestroika fills the street
I see the eagle on the shoulder of the bear (...)
But 1990... the blood still flows in Bogotá
And from Beirut to Johannesburg (...)
1990... third world children still wander (...)
It is strange that the more we change, rearrange
Everything still feels the same (...)

He is also talking about international problems, addressing Rosa Parks (the Black woman who became a symbol of Black resistance when she rejected giving up her bus seat to a white passenger in 1955 in Alabama, later becoming a collaborator of Martin Luther King in claiming and fighting for the Rights of Black People); Mikhail Gorbachev (the Russian leader of the Communist Party and leader of the former Soviet Union until its collapse in 1991, known for his politics of perestroika = reconstruction, and glasnost = transparency); the Third World in general (with its war-torn countries and social injustices at the turn of a century. 1990 stands as a touchstone, a pivot around which the 20th and 21st centuries found a turning point of revolution and change. The European Union was established in 1993 ("I see the old colonials of Europe become united"): the calypsonian embodies the role of the witness not only to local or regional events, but to the whole world's. He metaphorizes the end of the Cold War with "the eagle on the shoulder of the bear", hinting at the US and USSR which collaborate. As Rohlehr wrote:

1990 could truthfully be termed the climax of both the "Soca" – that is the desire for cathartic escape from reality through hard-pounding frenzy – and the dream of a refining or avenging fire that had haunted Calypso for two decades since the Black Power apotheosis of 1970.⁷⁷²

Rudder's text embraces the whole world by metonymically rallying the Black Diaspora around the figure of the running Black man ("a black man on the run"), who runs from China to New York, from South Africa to the Southern US (with the linguistic debt to the French colonization highlighted by that "Dèja vu"). And this gives reasons for Rohlehr's comment:

Rudder's vision has achieved an international dimension with his concern over the last four years for the Caribbean and its ancestral linkages; for

⁷⁷² Rohlehr, Gordon. "Apocalypse and the Soca Fires of 1990." *Cit.* 334.

Haiti, Panama, Beijing, the dance of the Eagle and the Bear, the changes taking place in Eastern Europe and South Africa.⁷⁷³

Rudder complains about the people's repetition of the same historical mistakes, and about the situation of Black people which does not change even if time and space change.

I see a black man on the run
Through a lonely Beijing street
There he goes, running again
This time through Brooklyn's Howard Beach
There he runs again through the streets of Soweto
I'm saying so the story goes
And a man called Alabama; he shrugs and says
"Well, it's Deja Vu... I suppose". (...)
Or is it a touch of the sixties all over again ("1990")

in a kind of panoptical *déjà vu*. As AJA does in his poems, Rudder wonders why people do not learn from the mistakes documented and proven by history, while instead "It is strange that the more we change, rearrange / Everything still feels the same" comment on a political and a social instability not different from the one in the 1960s.

Instead in "Day Of The Warlord" (*No Restriction, The Concert*, 1998) the warlord could be the mastermind of wars but also a hocus-pocus, a kind of obeahman. The initial verse indicates that violence is needed to make people understand from the experience of violence, while historians give idiosyncratic and contrasting versions of History: "How do you tell a nation that its head is bloody / Short of beating it over the head / And every armchair historian around me / Is busy telling his story". Rudder hints at the corruption of the police or of those who should guarantee the observance of the laws. The warlord is depicted as a kind of devil ("the feast of the beast"), who banquets with the violence and the blood of the people:

And memory is just a matter of convenience in this land
Even the guardians⁷⁷⁴ around us need some guarding too
Mr. and Mrs. bullet and their family
Will they find your flesh today
Some say it's the feast of the beast.

The warlord seems to be a "superstar" under the spotlight of the world scene, he is popular, but "good people" have to stand united to defeat him and contrast his unruffled rule, rejecting war and imperialism and staying together against social injustices: "They're playing games with the western

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.* 369.

⁷⁷⁴ Prof. Warner-Lewis suggests also a possible allusion to the newspaper *The Trinidad Guardian*. Personal communication with the scholar. E-mail. 13 Nov. 2009.

mind / Ah, Bill Clinton, have they penetrated your armour?".⁷⁷⁵ As the terrorists or warlords have found a crevice in US politics and are breaching it, Rudder is addressing Clinton, who was President of the US between 1993 and 2001, soon after the Cold War, was involved in wars in the Balkans (Bosnia, 1995 and Kosovo), Somalia and the Middle East, leading to the US politics developed later in the Iraqi war, called the Second Persian Gulf War (2003-ongoing; Iraq's disarmament began in 2001). The chorus questions:

It is the day of the warlord (...)
From the African Horn to Haiti to the killing fields of Bosnia
They're playing games with the western mind
Ah, Bill Clinton, have they penetrated your armour?

The chorus indulges on a "Selah!", a Jewish expression found in the Bible as an "Amen" or to invite people to listen to what has just been said and praise the Lord. It sounds like a Baptist chant about history and war violence, and 'History' is different from the 'histories' of common people. "Day of the Warlord" was written in 1998. Now he has written lyrics for Obama ("One Fine Morning" and "Party on the Mall"). He is against US wars, as Mahabir explained:

As Rudder describes it, the aesthetic form actually projects itself into a liberated space that is not utopian, but presided over by anti-capitalist relations, and inscribed by class, race, gender, sexuality.⁷⁷⁶

Another calypso which recovers the metaphor of a "game" and the military jargon is "Here Comes The West Indies" (*Here Comes the West Indies*, 1994); in it all the references have a double meaning and are aimed at addressing the former coloniser, the English:

England had a dream
It was a mighty scheme
To devise a game by which they could always rule
So when they finish with their felonies
Right through the colonies
This game called cricket was their ace in the hole
But today they're going back to school (...)
When you're facing the generals
Nearly every ball is a funeral
And when we batting, brother, put your men on the boundary line⁷⁷⁷

⁷⁷⁵ As in "Rally Round the West Indies" he talks about "a chink in the armour".

⁷⁷⁶ Mahabir, Joy A. I. *Miraculous Weapons. Revolutionary Ideology in Caribbean Culture*. *Cit.* 132.

⁷⁷⁷ Mr. Rudder explained the lines "When you're facing (...)" to "And when we (...)" as follows: "This is a line affirming the "deadly" precision and speed of our bowlers (pitchers) who made the batters on the opposing team very scared to face them. In other words, every ball that they tossed up to the batters could spell the end for them. [While] the boundary line in cricket is the outermost part of the cricket field; if it was baseball it would be the wall at the extremity of the outfield. (...) This line emphasizes the physical power of our batters who hit so hard that the

And even if you give we a lick up (...)
You win the little battle but you lose the war.

The introductory and conclusive exclamation (“I am not a bad boy but I cannot help it”) looks like a hymn to mamaguyism, to a sardonic tone used by the calypsonian to challenge the listener and, virtually speaking, the politician, as a feature of the *mamaguy* and picong tradition of verbal confrontation and even abuse. Again, as in “Rally Round the West Indies” (1989) he talks about cricket and draws a comparison between the game and the battlefield, talking also about war as in “1990” or “Day of the Warlord”. As in “Rally Round the West Indies”, there is another reference to Viv Richards as the captain of the cricket team:

Well, look ol’ Bobby Simpson
Well the fellow turn crimson
But like Viv did always say, “He’s a sour sort of chap.”
Well they really thought they had we
Two runs for victory
It was Walsh to McDermott to Murray in a hurry....⁷⁷⁸

Creole is widely employed, as in “lick up” or “Man is licks”, a Bajan expression which refers to a beating, but also to the cricket team beaten in the game. Englishmen exported cricket around the world to their colonies:

You could bring Sri Lanka
New Zealand or India
You could smoke a little herb, be absurd
We’ll even lend you a beach [a reference to members of the Pakistani team
who were arrested on a Grenadian beach for
smoking pot, NbR]
You could bring South Africa or talk big like Australia
Man is licks like fire and you’re bound to surrender.

In fact he mentions some cricketers from the former colonies of the British Empire, such as the Australian Bobby Simpson, Walsh the Jamaican pacer, and Murray the Grenadian wicket keeper.⁷⁷⁹

fielding team has to spread out to the very extremes of the playing field to recover the ball as it is hit.” Personal communication with Mr. Rudder. E-mail. 18 Nov. 2009.

⁷⁷⁸ “I thought that I should perhaps give you a little more detail about the line “Walsh to Mc Dermott, to Murray in a hurry”. The West Indies cricket team at the time was the most successful sporting team in the history of any sport on the planet (unbeaten for almost twelve years) but as they began showing signs of “mortality” the Aussies, trained by their former cricketing great Bobby Simpson felt that this was their time to topple the Windies and they almost did in that game. The nail-biting game came down to the Aussies needing only one run, the Windies needing one wicket and Walsh (WI) bowling to McDermott(AUS).The final ball and McDermott touches the ball into the waiting gloves of Murray(WI) he catches it and West Indies win in front of over 60,000 shocked Australian fans.And that was that.” Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 6 Oct. 2009.

⁷⁷⁹ I would like to thank Mr. Rudder for this observation. Personal communication with David Rudder. E-mail. 6 Oct. 2009. Other cricketers from the former colonies of the British Empire who could have been implied in Rudder’s

The expressions “on the boundary line” and “this thing goes beyond the boundary” refer to C.L.R. James’s 1963 *Beyond a Boundary*, about which Graves stated that:

The opposition of batsman and bowler serves as a metonym for the broader antagonism between not only colonizer and colonized, but between leader and led, between nation and individual, and between competing Trinidadian class and race factions. Those “who only cricket know” forget that cricket (both a legacy of British imperialism and a means of resistance against it) is an instrument of power, political ideology, and social transformation.⁷⁸⁰

On the aesthetics of cricket he stated elsewhere: “cricket’s aesthetics enact a stylization of social resistance against British colonialism”.⁷⁸¹ Moreover, Rohlehr observed about this calypso that:

Rudder’s “Rally Round the West Indies” (1987) also recognized the issues of cricket as going well beyond the boundary of the playing field. The calypso begins with a consciousness that had permeated political discourse of the early 1980’s: that Clive Lloyd’s successful West Indies team—which had in 1984 between March and December won eleven Test matches in succession including a 5-Test ‘blackwash’ of England—should be recognized as a symbol of Caribbean unity and potential, and adopted as an example by regional politicians and statesmen, pussy-footing on or elevating local issues above common regional goals. Though Richards’ teams between April 1985 against New Zealand and February to May 1986 against England had won seven Tests in succession including another blackwash of England, this time in the Caribbean, drawn three-Test series against Pakistan (October-November 1986) then New Zealand (February-March 1987) were clear indications that the team was beginning to experience the cyclic difficulties of transition.⁷⁸²

Nearly four minutes long, this calypso is one of Rudder’s calypsoes together with “1990” that most closely follow the pattern defined by Hill:

The average calypso takes about four minutes to sing. The majority of songs (apart from the calinda-type calypso) now follow a standard pattern of four

song because homonyms were the Australians Walsh (but it could also be a homonym Grenadian cricketer) and McDermott, and the New Zealander Bruce Murray (or a South African, Kenyan or another New Zealander, or even Trinidadian cricketer).

⁷⁸⁰ Graves, Benjamin. “Beyond a Boundary: Cricket and West Indian Self-Determination.” *Political Discourse: Theories of Colonialism and Postcolonialism*. Brown University, 1998. [Contemporary Postcolonial & Postimperial Literature in English](http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/james/james1.html). 29 July 2009 <<http://www.postcolonialweb.org/poldiscourse/james/james1.html>>.

⁷⁸¹ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁸² Rohlehr, Gordon. “Calypso, Literature and West Indian Cricket: Era of Dominance.” [Anthurium. A Caribbean Studies Journal](http://anthurium.miami.edu/volume_6/issue_1/rohlehr-calypso.html) 6.1 (Spring 2008) 30 July 2009 <http://anthurium.miami.edu/volume_6/issue_1/rohlehr-calypso.html>. Or. publ. [Transgression, Transition, Transformation: Essays in Caribbean Culture](#). San Juan, Trinidad: Lexington Trinidad Ltd, 2007.

eight-line stanzas and chorus, though they may contain more verses if the earlier form of four-line stanza is used.⁷⁸³

while he often employs 10-line verses or even longer ones, in “Here Comes the West Indies” Rudder exceptionally uses a 7-line stanza, whereas “Day of the Warlord” maintains longer verses and it lasts longer than the standard 4-minute-calypso.

IX.iv. Conclusion: looking for a Caribbean musical aesthetics

Calypso is a Trinidadian musical form close to Jamaican dub poetry or mento. Its refined blending of words and rhythms has been defined by Mahabir as the “marriage of rhythm and lyrics in dub poetry and rapso”.⁷⁸⁴ Nonetheless, at times there are controversies in attributing the same validity to all of these musical / poetical forms, in fact some scholars give more substantiality to the calypso lyrics than to reggae lyrics; as Breiner put it:⁷⁸⁵

This social niche of popular, almost cabaret poetry is neighbour to calypso of the Eastern Caribbean. The calypsonian shares Bennett’s manipulation of tone and satirical edge in a way that Jamaican song does not, at least since the overshadowing of mento by the more serious, often frankly religious, tone of reggae. The lyrics of calypso are on the whole much more substantial and rhetorically interesting than those of reggae and reward critical attention copiously.⁷⁸⁶

What Hill stated is also true, that a purely textual analysis of calypsoes is limiting their expressiveness and does not capture their whole pregnancy of references and meaning:⁷⁸⁷ the accent on a word more than on another, the different accents of Trinidadian Creole in respect to other Caribbean Creoles or Standard English, the moves that accompany a performance are invisible on paper, and can only be captured when one sees a calypso, listens to it and experiences it. According to Errol Hill, one of the reasons why the oral tradition of calypso is important in Caribbean culture, especially in Trinidad, is that the French patois conveyed a great “poetic force”.⁷⁸⁸ In fact – as it was reported before – he added that calypsoes were mostly written in Creole until they started using

⁷⁸³ Hill, Errol. “Calypso Drama.” *Cit.* 26.

⁷⁸⁴ Mahabir, Joy. “Rhythm and Class Struggle: The Calypsoes of David Rudder.” *Cit.*

⁷⁸⁵ Cf. Carolyn Cooper’s insightful work on reggae lyrics.

⁷⁸⁶ Breiner, Laurence A. An Introduction to West Indian Poetry. *Cit.* 175.

⁷⁸⁷ “It has been observed that the impact of calypso songs can never be recaptured on paper since it is the manner of presentation of the singer which gives life to his renditions. This observation is true; but it does not state the whole case against substituting the printed calypso for a live performance because the underlying rhythmic harmonic base of the calypso is also an important element which cannot be conveyed satisfactorily on paper.” Hill, Errol. “Calypso Drama.” *Cit.* 18.

⁷⁸⁸ Hill, Errol. *The Trinidad Carnival*. *Cit.* 57.

English at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁷⁸⁹ And Rudder's texts prove how he developed calypso music, grounded on the Trinidadian tradition of calypso but moving further towards a poetic dimension. Nowadays there are maybe too many poets/singers – especially among the younger generations – who believe that they are the inheritors of a Caribbean tradition and thus able to compose good lyrics or poems, while they mainly appear as angry spokespersons against the whites, and dub is often reduced to a rigmarole sung or declaimed at the rhythm of a beating drum. Linton Kwesi Johnson was right when he affirmed that:

a “nativized” aesthetics does not mean an open season for anyone who can turn a phrase or two. Johnson was himself critical of some dub poets who string a few words together in any sing-song rhythm that rhymes, make some utterance about Black people and slavery, and call that poetry.⁷⁹⁰

His complaint is perfectly understandable, and suggests that there are similarities among the regional forms that can allow us to talk about a Caribbean aesthetics. On the contrary Rudder's poetic density stems from the plethora of intertextual references, the expressive figures of speech, the lilting rhythms, the attention he pays to rhetorical devices. But we must also be wary of distinctions, and not recognise every singer or professed poet as a new *griot*. Rudder can be considered a ‘chantwell’, a social and political commentator and not just an entertainer. He embodies the role of a ‘griot’, that is why, provocatively, in October 2008 Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis asked me “is Rudder a calypsonian at all?”⁷⁹¹

The most famous Lord Kitchener and The Mighty Sparrow were great calypsonians because of their innovativeness in the use of language, which became closer and closer to the spoken variety,⁷⁹² but Rudder's strong manipulation of today's international media, like television, music, and the internet, and his possibility of travelling have allowed him to address the calypso texts to a wider audience, at times employing more SE, at other times maintaining his native Creole, in a sense transposing his language to a mass audience who is able to understand his lyrics, and thus extending the knowledge of calypso well outside the limiting borders of his island.

⁷⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 62.

⁷⁹⁰ Fergus, Howard A. “Introduction.” Badejo, Fabian Adekunle. *Salted Tongues*. *Cit.* xvi. Quoted from LKJ, “Just Talking” (Interview). *Artrage – Intercultural Magazine*. 12 [Spring] (1982).

⁷⁹¹ Personal communication with Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis. 15 Oct. 2008.

⁷⁹² “Calypso, when it is the real thing, of necessity sticks very close to everyday speech rhythms. (...) Both [Kitchener's and Sparrow's calypsoes] are innovative in respect of the way in which they use rhythm and the West Indian language spectrum.” Figueroa, John J.M., ed. *An Anthology of West Indian Poetry*. Vol. 2. *Cit.* 20. By comparison, the language change and development of language use in Caribbean songs as well as Trinidadian calypso was explained by Warner-Lewis with “the gradual acquisition of a creole language to replace or supplement the African mother-tongue, the African and their Caribbean-born offspring would have transferred the aesthetic and structural principles which underlay the poems they recited [in the Yoruba language] and sang to their new language medium.” Warner-Lewis, Maureen. *Guinea's Other Suns*. *Cit.* 113.

Chapter X
AJA (1957 -)
Music and Poetry *Live As One*

Born in 1957 Michael Richards later changed his name to Adisa Jelani Andwele (or AJA). He is a Barbadian trombonist and poet. In 1990 he blended the two artistic expressions, as his first international collection of poetry *Antiquity* (2002) shows. Divided into two parts, “Words” and “Chants”, the collection dedicates the first section to the written word – poetry to be read – and the second to performance poetry – poetry fused to music. AJA is also an international personality, involved in humanitarian work with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) as its “Spokesperson for Peace & Poverty Eradication for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean”.⁷⁹³ He tours the Caribbean and British schools to raise attention to conflict, poverty and HIV/AIDS. AJA’s art is parallel with his socio-political involvement, and this is extremely important for his humanitarian cause, which entrenches his poetry/music with an even deeper meaning.

Religiosity is another aspect of his works as it comes not only from his Bajan poems, but also from the wide embrace of the whole Caribbean cultural, political, and social situations that his poems propose and discusses. His full-length CDs include *Mike Richards & The Re-Emergence Band Live* (1990), *Conscious* (1993), *Doin’ It Saf* (2000) and *Live As One* (2002), both produced by Ajeland Records, *Deception* (2003), *AJA All As One* (2007) and two CD singles, *Legacy* (2005) and *I am* (2007); he produced a few music videos and DVDs released between 1991 and 2007. He also published an anthology of poems, *Antiquity* (2002), and an eBook of poems, perspectives and photos on war and poverty, *Don’t Let Me Die* (2005).⁷⁹⁴

⁷⁹³ Cf. “AJA: Poet-Musician-Humanitarian.” [ajapoet.com](http://www.ajapoet.com) 8 Mar. 2008 <http://www.ajapoet.com/index_main.htm>.

⁷⁹⁴ Henceforward ‘*Antiquity*’ will be referred to with ‘*A*’ and ‘*Don’t Let Me Die*’ with ‘*DLMD*’.

X.i. A fusion of music and poetry

In the 1990s AJA decided to pursue an international career as a performance poet by fusing his poetry with music and including live accompaniment on stage. Despite the fact that he was one of the best trombonists in Barbados at the time, he chose to give up his musical career to focus on experimenting with performance poetry. Two years later in 1992, he officially changed his name from Michael Richards to Adisa Jelani Andwele, which reminds us of his co-islander Brathwaite's choice in adopting an African name. AJA was adopted for the stage in 2001. However, his musical background infuses his poetry with jazz and other Caribbean rhythms, passing on the vibrations to his first internationally published collection of poems *Antiquity*.⁷⁹⁵ The Bajan Creole which resonates in the poems can be easily spotted in a silent reading of the poems on the page, but it is better heard when one listens to their recorded versions. The orality embedded in the poems is linked to their performative purpose:

What engages – and energizes – many West Indian poets is the matter of their relationship to improvisation, to oral composition, to ‘orature’, to poetry written as a script for performance, to poetry written (or improvised) for distribution through recordings, to poetry written for performance with or to music (as well as to songs *per se*), and even to a kind of shaped poetry whose visual effects function remarkably as a metaphor for orality.⁷⁹⁶

Memory and history are linked by music: the poet wants to grab the meaning of his history. With his poetry he tries to raise his people's consciousness about politics, history, health, and the music and dance are ways to get the audience involved in these issues. “De Banana Man” is a poem about politics: it narrates the history of the Caribbean workers, poor people cheated and abused by ‘politricks’: “it’s de banana man / wid he cutlass in he han’ ” (“De Banana Man”, *A*, 58). The published text presents some variations from the musical version, such as insertions of “I say” or “an’ this is de life of...” which is retrieved in “an’ this is de life / of de Caribbean man / born an’ dead pon these islan’s / run by afro-saxons / cause education mek them politicians / an’ them just don’t care / but soon will pay (...) / de banana man soon rise up / wid he cutlass in he han’ / dread them politicians / an’ unite de Caribbean” (*A*, 59). The rhythm of the recorded version is infused with the calypso steel-pan orchestras. Even though the music sounds joyful and the poet invites the listeners to dance, its contents are bitter, recalling the destiny of many Caribbean workers from the

⁷⁹⁵ From now onwards I will refer to the two collections of poetry *Antiquity* and *Don’t Let Me Die* as *A* and *DLMD*.

⁷⁹⁶ Breiner, Laurence A. “How to Behave on Paper: the *Savacou* Debate.” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 6.1 (July 1993): 1. Eds. Marc McWatt, Victor Chang, Evelyn O’Callaghan, and Michael A. Buckner. Kingston, Jamaica: Dept. Of English, The University of the West Indies.

days of the plantations until nowadays, when they are still unofficially ruled by their former colonizers or by “Afro-Saxons”. The cause of their sufferance mainly lies in politics, because AJA criticizes those politicians who are not attentive to the interests of the majority of people, but of just a few. The poet is warning against upheavals of the “banana men”, the plantation workers, and hopes that the Caribbean will become a unified entity.⁷⁹⁷

The poem “Antiquity” deals with the theme of history: the beating of African djembe drums engenders a whirlpool of memories from the Middle Passage experience, as though the music and the spirituality were means to come into contact with the past:

leh muh reach
fuh de mem’ry of muh pas’
so uh could be
wid de African spirits
that sing down in muh soul
leh de djembes lively up muh feet
wid de invisible riddims of history (...)
leh de mem’ry possess muh body” (“Antiquity”, *A*, 9).

AJA consciously decides to employ Bajan in poetry, and these lines show a contraposition between an African spirituality and the master’s tongue: “yes they are burning / in dem de orishas are worshipping (...) / under de talk of massa tongue” (“Antiquity”, *A*, 10).

The theme of health is dealt with in “Living in Hell”: “uh bullet-hole body get splatter pon de wall / uh building get bomb wid childrun an’ all / uh mother wid young lie dying from AIDS / while she starve-out childrun stare into space”. The number of stresses are 5, 4, 4, 4 and the syllables 12, 10, 9, 10 and the refrain is removed in the sung version, with no trace of “we got to be living / we go to be living in hell / we got to be living / we go to be living in hell” (“Living in Hell”, *A*, 63). The third stanza in the poem:

across de worl’ is nuf poverty
but de building of arms is big money
while de baby is bathe when de sewage is flow
an uh dirt floor bed is all he know

becomes:

an uh dirt floor bed is all he know
while de baby is bathe when de sewage is flow
across de worl’ is nuf poverty
so de building of arms is big money.

⁷⁹⁷ The same disregard for politics and hope for a unification of the Caribbean will appear in his second collection, *Don’t Let Me Die*, in poems such as “Tell Muh Why” or “Live As One”.

Despite their sombre titles, the recorded versions of the poems are vital, and their cheerful melody hides dreadful issues, as the fact that the aesthetic exuberance of Caribbean culture, arts, literature and music are at odds with the difficult situations the majority of the population lives in: in ‘Poor People Dead’ the poet sings “an’ yuh tell muh / that the worl’ progress / yuh tell muh to look ahead / but all i see is dread / all i see / poor people dead ” (A, 56).

In the 1990s such Barbadian performance poets like Winston Farrell and AJA have written and performed extensively, and the distance between poetry and music has been reduced so much that the two arts are fused into one. As Curwen Best noticed: “Throughout the 1990s Farrell has produced ‘African Lion on the Loose’, ‘Earth Spirit’, and Adisa has done ‘Conscious’, and ‘Doing It Saf’”,⁷⁹⁸

Adisa’s poetry also reveals a fascination with the drum as a primary symbol of liberation. In the poem “Apartheid War” (c. 1989) (...) Adisa’s ongoing preoccupation with African history, heard on his most recent cassette “Doing It Saf” (1999) and the impact of knowing that history on the present, mirrors Brathwaite’s own preoccupation with historical dialectics in his many collections like *The Arrivants* and *Mother Poem* and *X/Self*.⁷⁹⁹

In “Doing It Saf #1” the poet sings:

i’m doing it saf
real saf
cause i’m caught up in history
stuck with uh memory
that don’t let muh fuhget muh destiny
uh cross de water
but guh back from time to time
chanting riddims silently through
de middle passage of muh mind (“Doing It Saf #1”, A, 68)

The sung version is different:

i’m doing it saf
i’m doing it in a saf vibration
cause i’m caught up in history
stuck with uh memory
that don’t let muh fuhget muh destiny
I cross de water through de Middle Passage
but uh guh back from time to time
chanting riddims silently through.

⁷⁹⁸ Best, Curwen. “Tracking a Tradition: Kamau Brathwaite and the Bajan Hardcore.” Caribbean Quarterly 47.4 (Dec. 2001): 43.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.* 47.

The end of the poem reminds of the Jamaican Mikey Smith's poems with extended vowels expressing a pain protruding from the words: "slowww an' saf / saf / saf / safffff" in the explanatory notes at the end he defined 'Saf' as "Soft, and the name for Caribbean jazz" (*A*, 90). History and memory are present in many poems. He cannot stop singing the experience of the Middle Passage and the slavery and the repetition of these themes through his poetry is like a kind of redemption or expiation from the pain of history:

de banning of de drums
that tell de story of muh history
but de plantations could not de-plant
de root of ever' riddim an' chant
buried in de musical expressions
from all de islan's (*A*, 68).

He feels close to South Africa, Canada, the UK, North America: "in ever' hip hop dancehall / black diaspora riddim" (*A*, 69). The music leads to a liberation from the issues of history and helps him to find his natural dimension, the "natural vibration": "chanting riddims silently through / de middle passage of muh mind" (*A*, 68). In fact, the second part of the poem, "Doing It Saf #2", hints at relaxation from daily stress and at sharing of Caribbean jazz. He wants to embrace his people through his music:

from de bacchanal an' carnival (...)
riding through space an' time (...)
when yuh unite wid muh vibration
where de drums explode in silence
shhhhhh...don't talk be quiet (*A*, 70-1)

He uses an oxymoron ("de drums explode in silence") whereas the vibrations of the drums are united to the vibrations echoed in the poet's soul:

I'm doin it saf (...)
to heed de silent call
eccuhing from deep widin
floating through de win' (...)
saf saf music pon de slide trombone
that will take us home
vibrating notes of poetic ecstasy (*A*, 71):

silence is to find that moment of relaxation which gives the poet the peace of mind to find the memory of the past, and it is a "silent call" of the drums, silent because it is distant and because slaves did not have the right to speak but expressed themselves through music.

AJA's music is what he calls a 'fusion' of different genres: in "De Banana Man" he employs the calypso rhythm with a Shango rhythm (Yoruba religiosity that survived colonialism in the West Indies),⁸⁰⁰ in "Live As One" reggae, in "Doing It Saf" jazz, in the poem "Riots in de Land" the Bajan *tuk* verse, an indigenous Barbadian music which originated from the slaves playing African rhythms on the British marching drums. As he admitted in an interview he gave to me, his performance poetry is very close to what dub poetry is in Jamaica or rapso in Trinidad, suggesting a network of links in performance poetry spread throughout the Caribbean:

this phenomenon began in the early '80s, maybe a little earlier in Jamaica, with Oku Onuora in the late '70s, Mutabaruka, and so on, but in terms from an Eastern Caribbean perspective, *rapso* began in the late '60s, but it only came to the fore in the '70s and early '80s. But what I wanted to point out is that in the '80s the rhythm poets or performance poets across the English-speaking Caribbean started to form a kind of network. So you have Brother Resistance in Trinidad, Oku Onuora in Jamaica, Ras Mo in Dominica – emigrated to Canada though – but what I am saying is that we knew each other, we were in different territories of the Caribbean and at one point a unity came across, and not just because we were performing from our own territory to rhythm, but we were all performing in our respective Creoles. So there was rhythm, there was dialect, but also the themes touched the dynamics of decolonisation in the Caribbean, whether it was poverty, or slavery, whether it was racism or sufferance. It was all these forces and energies that determined our unity. It was like we were all speaking in one voice despite being on different islands. And our poetry was not much for the page, as for the street, it was performance poetry for theatres, we were street artistes, not in the traditional sense of poetry reading in a room.

(...)

In Barbados we created *tuk*, it's a creolisation of African rhythms on British military drums, so that's what *tuk* is. African drums were banned in Barbados during slavery, but military or European instruments were permitted, so what they did was to give the slaves the British marching drums. They saw no problem with that, so obviously what the slaves did was to play African rhythms on military drums and the fusion of the two, the creolisation created *tuk*. This same creolization took place in the other islands and that is why the region has so many different music forms. And it is these rhythms in the respective territories that also laid the foundation for the different poetic forms like rapso in Trinidad and dub poetry in Jamaica. I will give you an example of the *tuk* influence in my poetry with each line being dropped on the down beat of the bass drum e.g.:

⁸⁰⁰ In it he claims for "One Caribbean! No more Cuba, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, St. Kitts, Antigua, Guadeloupe, Dominica, Martinique, St. Lucia, St. Vincent, Barbados, Grenada, Tobago, Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname, I say no more... One Caribbean! Caribbean unity!"

From de time
Dat dem tek we up
Outta Africa
In uh ole slave boat
It was riot in de lan'⁸⁰¹

(...)

Bruce St. John, who is considered to be the father of Bajan (dialect) poetry became our teacher in the 1980s when we were trying to fashion our poetry forms. He made us use the language of Bajan and showed us that there was a relationship between how we talked and how we walked. This helped me to understand and further appreciate my own dialect. Then Kamau Brathwaite produced the book on nation language called "History of The Voice", which cemented my perspective. Personally, I pay attention to people speaking in everyday conversation and try to reproduce their rhythm into my poetry, and we walk the way we talk and viceversa....then with observation of people moving and speaking it was the very first time I understood Bajan language⁸⁰²

Lutalo Makossa Masimba, aka Brother Resistance, is the major exponent of rapso poetry in Trinidad or, as he defines himself, a "Kaiso (Calypso/Soka) show promoter". Like him, AJA relates his poetry to his people and their everyday issues and employs African drums as well as steel pan. In a definition Masimba gave of rapso poetry, relying on oral traditions of 'Trinibago', he matches many of AJA's poetic features:

RAPSO can be defined as new progression of poetry created to relate to the everyday experience of the people (everyday people/street people/working people). RAPSO is a network of rhythms (riddum) where the rhythms of the voice blend with African drums (first manmade instrument on earth) and the rhythms of the steel drum/pan (last natural instrument created on earth by man). This is foundation RAPSO. Eventually a musical form evolved from this rhythmic foundation and stringed instruments were blended. (...) RAPSO is a unique style of street poetry from Trinidad and Tobago which draws on the musical experience of the Shango / the Kaiso (Calypso) and robber-talk (a Carnival Theatre)/The Steelband and some have described it as Soka-Poetry or Poetry-in-Soka, but the Rapso Poet has resisted such labels. 'Rapso' is a term originally coined by Network Riddum Band of East Dry River, Trinidad.⁸⁰³

Like AJA's music and poetry, rapso is a fusion of genres and styles, and Masimba draws his inspiration from the calypsoes of his favourite Sparrow, Black Stalin, the reggae singer Bob Marley

⁸⁰¹ AJA. Rhythm an' Roots: a Collection of Poems. [Barbados: Carib Printers, 1990.]

⁸⁰² Cf. Interview with AJA. Appendix A to this thesis.

⁸⁰³ Brother Resistance (Lutako Makossa Masimba). "Rapso – A New Poetic Vibration from Trinidad & Tobago"Rapso Explosion. London: Karia Press. 1986. viii.

or the R'n'B guitarist and singer Curtis Mayfield.⁸⁰⁴ When it comes to the employment of Creole or 'nation language', as they both admit, the influence of Brathwaite has to be recognised, and these lines by AJA with their insistent repetitions and the evocation of a far away Africa remind of "Negus" by Brathwaite:

*but uh hear uh black distant voice
down in de ghetto
an' it chanting
an' it singing
uh hear uh black distant voice
down in de black diaspora
an' it chanting
get up black man an' dance
get up black woman this yuh chance
get in de power an' shake
get in de power ("Black Distant Voice", A, 53).*

In the recorded version the chorus is sung by children, to render even more powerful their demand for attention to war-torn countries.

X.ii. Towards a Caribbean aesthetic unity

In the poem "Caribbean Culture" AJA is comparing the different cultures of the Caribbean islands, highlighting their landmarks. Among the Anglophone islands, he considers Barbados, Trinidad and Jamaica; among the Francophone islands St. Lucia, Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Haiti; among the Hispanophone islands Cuba. Barbados is evoked by the poetic rhythm of the ruk-a-tuk and "bumbatuk",⁸⁰⁵ as in the poem "Antiquity": "Rock Hall village [the poet's native village and first free village of Barbados after slavery] / brek de chains / now pon de town / we culture come long down / so we ruk-a-tuk / an' bum-ba-tuk / wuk up to de drum beat" (A, 78). AJA mentions the "Crop Over time", a festive period running from June to August which generated in the days of slavery and similar to the Trinidad Carnival, with calypso competitions. That is why he refers then to T&T, "in Trinidad / Rudder come back / from Laventille / wid de Shango riddim / in de iron an' steel / as de pan men beat", and he mentions "Butler an' Spree", the politician Tubal Uriah Butler and the 'father of the steel pan', Simon Spree, "wunnuh wuk / was not in vain" (A, 79). Rudder, the poet analysed in the previous chapter, stands out and his music becomes a symbol of resistance to the pains of history (as AJA wants his music to be). The references to the French islands are mainly musical, and they hint at different musical genres: "Francois playing / de

⁸⁰⁴ Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 11 Feb. 2009.

⁸⁰⁵ It is the title of a collection of poems by Bruce St. John, who was his teacher.

saxophone / uh Castries struggle / in uh Martinique home / uh islan' blues call zouk (...) / so Kassav in Paris / wid de mernegue" (A, 79). What links the Hispanophone Cuba (with his "Céspedes Square", "Fidel", and "José Martí") is its history and its religion: "it's uh African vibe / that still down there / in de Congo ritual in Santiago (...) / uh santera / is chant an' pray / rising up deads" (A, 79). Finally, Jamaica is the island of reggae and Rastafari.⁸⁰⁶ His reference to music hints again at asserting an opposition to the white man, with the use of African instruments (like the conga here or the djumbees in "Antiquity") to accompany the awakening rhythm.

When I asked him if he recognised a common aesthetic in West Indian poetry, AJA replied that he believes that it exists and that he aspires for a unity of the Caribbean islands, as he claims in many of his poems (for instance, "Caribbean Culture"). In his article "Tracking a Tradition: Kamau Brathwaite and the Bajan Hardcore" Curwen Best analysed the impact of Brathwaite's work and prominence on Barbadian poets, at the same time digging the ground for what seems to be a 'folk aesthetics', not only of Bajan poetry, but also of a more extended regional one:

This article provides some insights into the conceptualization of Barbadian aesthetics through an analysis of what might be termed 'folk' and 'popular' subversive works. It discusses some connections between apparently disparate artists and art forms. The foundation of this essay is built upon Kamau Brathwaite's hypothesis of an underground literary and artistic tradition which links selected writers and art forms within Barbados.⁸⁰⁷

In fact, AJA's work is linked to his native island, but it expands its range to touch the problems common to the Caribbean region, as well as to other Third World countries and especially, as already said, to the conditions of children. Many poems (as "When the Bombs Drop Tonight", "Legacy of Poverty" or "My Country") are narrated by a poetic "I" embodied by a child. In the poem "A Childless Child" a child, probably from a Caribbean or Latin-American country ("the salsa-blaring noise of the streets", 15), has been abandoned by his mother ("too many mouths to feed she said", *DLMD*, 15) and is brought up by an uncle who taught him to believe he has to become a martyr like his father. Instead of growing up as other children do with colourful crayons to draw his family, he grows up in "darkness", where his "toys are bullet-holed vests / and abandoned warheads (...) / patrolling with an M-16" (*DLMD*, 15). He has become so emotionless that he coldly witnesses rapes and murders. His state of calmness was born out of a fast rape of his innocence, that swept away his tears forever. AJA started to travel to the poorest countries in the world in what he launched as *Ifppe, International Foundation for Peace and Poverty Eradication* –

⁸⁰⁶ AJA himself has dreadlocks.

⁸⁰⁷ Best, Curwen. "Tracking a Tradition: Kamau Brathwaite and the Bajan Hardcore." *Cit.* 33.

at first self-financed. Then he was recognised by the United Nations as a *UNDP, United Nations Development Program Spokesperson for Peace and Poverty Eradication for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean*. He has visited Third World war-torn countries to witness the state of degradation and inhumanity to which children and women are especially subjected. He was very negatively impressed by the conditions of children and that is why he wrote many poems as if they were the poetic voices, or as if he was the one living those atrocities, because AJA believes in the oneness of the Self, in the unity of all the peoples and in putting ourselves in other people's shoes to better understand what they are going through. His view on religion is that God, or Jah, is one for all and that everybody should avoid the too strict religious precepts made to divide us, but believe that we, as human beings, are one people. In fact, in his "Thought Patterns" in *Don't Let Me Die* he has explained this concept of unity:

Human consciousness is trapped in the confines of history, social habits, culture, heritage and national legacy, to only which humans refer for their relationship and association with themselves. As a result, they only see themselves in relation to their respective families, communities, societies, countries and race and do not grasp the infiniteness and formless nature of consciousness. Only then will humans understand that those physical groupings are a consequence of space and time and distract them from connecting to their inner spirit that is part of the oneness of the universe and the creator.⁸⁰⁸

As a Rastafari AJA believes in Jah⁸⁰⁹ ("de roar of de lion / eccuh in yuh brain", "Bajan Poetry", *A*, 19) and his poetry reflects his views: "slam down pon de domino table / under de tam'rind tree / where yout's hang out / making out outtuh wuk / splifs encircle de brethren / an' de air's full / wid de aroma of de bajan green / it's uh peace ritual / so de hard times / ain' really uh bother / cause t'ings just irie" ("Bajan Poetry", *A*, 20). As the other 'Rastafar-I', mostly based in Jamaica, he conceives of Babylon as any oppressed system or place of exile, and of the Biblical Zion/Sion as the promised land.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁸ AJA (Adisa Jelani Andwele). *Don't Let Me Die. Perspective, Poems & Photographs on War & Poverty and Their Impact on Children*. Adisa Andwele: Rock Hall, St. Thomas, Barbados. 2002. 2.

⁸⁰⁹ Hurbon gave an overview of Rastafarianism saying it was founded in the '20s and '30s after the engagement and guide of the activist Marcus Garvey – deported in 1922 – , and of some Ethiopian churches: "les unes de tendance baptiste, les autres de tendance méthodiste – plusieurs leaders noirs se jettent dans une interprétation de la Bible en fonction de la condition actuelle et présente des Noirs et lisent déjà certains passages comme l'annonce de la venue de leur propre messie-rédempteur, pour les arracher de l'asservissement par les Blancs, comme les Israélites de l'Égypte." Hurbon, Laënnec. *Le Phénomène Religieux dans la Caraïbe: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, Haïti*. Paris: Kartala, 2000. 333.

⁸¹⁰ Many Biblical references are drawn from Rasta religion and, to use a term by Edward Baugh, "Rastafarianate" (Baugh, Edward. "A History of Poetry." *A History of Literature in the Caribbean*. Cit. Vol 2. 258.) philosophy. I think of Victor Questel's "Judge Dreadword" (*The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse*) and of his employment of the 'dread word'. The 'Rasta language' or 'Iyaric' has been studied by Velma Pollard in her *Dread Talk* (1994), in which she researched this language, linked to the Rastafari phenomenon, originated in society's

Moreover, in these “Thought Patterns” he highlights how developed countries waste money in making weapons and warfare when they could feed millions of children dying of hunger and because of wars. AJA’s is a socio-politically involved aesthetics and he wants to bring these situations to the attention of his people and to First World countries.

AJA’s chants want to be universal, because his poems embrace all the situations he has seen and all the countries he has visited. For instance, in the collection *Don’t Let Me Die* he mentions Haïti (cf. the poems “Nutten Can Prepare Yuh Fuh” and “Poems for Haïti”), Somalia, South Africa, South America. For AJA the children are the hope and the future of a country and that is why he is so much concerned with their lives. In the poem “Tell Muh Why”, for instance, he recognises that there are “millions of starvin’ chilrun / fuh politics they are dyin’ (...) / movin’ to de death march / them is feet of uh Somali chile (...) / moans still groan in Soweto (...) / when apartheid in Pretoria / imprisoned freedom in Africa (...) / an’ chilrun sleep pon de ground / in streets of South American towns” (*DLMD*, 26).

In the recorded version of “Live As One” AJA has added some hues to his poetic lyrics, singing: “there is too much hate in de world / too much strife on mother earth today / there is too much war in de world / unite to mek de world better today” (*DLMD*, 31) and then adding: “those are symbols of a world unity, I want everybody to just hold hands: let us show the world how humans are supposed to live! Let’s be a symbol for world’s peace!”.

“downpressed” strata and diasporically extended to other Caribbean islands (like Barbados or St. Lucia) both in Rastafar-I communities and in urban districts. That is why several poems related to Rastafarianism were written both in Jamaica and in other islands. The Barbadian poet Anthony Kellman wrote “I Smoke Some Herb and Dream of Bertha” (*Watercourse*): is it a Rasta ‘Irie’ experience he is referring to? In the poem he mixed up the visions he had after smoking weed and the concretisation of a passion for a woman, so we cannot understand if it is his musing caused by the sacred ‘herb’ or if it is what really happened to him. Lorna Goodison spoke of Rasta in “Jah the Baptist”, or in “Moonlight City”, where “That Kingston’s dungle is called ‘Moonlight City’” (Lorna Goodison. “Moonlight City.” *Goldengrove: New and Selected Poems*. Manchester (UK): Carcanet, 2006. 39.). Other Jamaican poets developed Rasta themes, as Michael Smith in “I an I alone” (*It A Come*) or Olive Senior in “Parakeet” (*over the roofs of the world*), in which she put a Jamaican Revival hymn in epigraph, explaining the contents of the poem: “I heard a parakeet in the garden / he was talking to Jesus alone / It was Judas betraying the master...” (Senior, Olive. *over the roofs of the world*. Toronto: Insomniac Press, 2005. 29.), for she connected Rastafarianism and a story from the gospel. The religious allusions or issues raised are often part of the poet’s spiritual search, as in Anthony Blend’s “The Search” (*Statements*), Jean Binta Breeze’s “Holy Day” (*Spring Cleaning*), or Anson Gonzalez’s “Postcard V” (*Moksha: Poems of Light and Sound*), in which he said “All life must respond / to the secret name of God / in each universe”. (Gonzalez, Anson. “Postcard V.” *Moksha: Poems of Light and Sound*. Trinidad and Tobago: New Voices, 1988. 48). At other times poets made more general reflections on the divine essence and on the poet’s search for spiritual answers, as the Jamaican poet Anthony McNeill in *Credences at the Altar of Cloud*, a collection in which he articulated and decomposed the essence of God: “Ungod even now / o prayer so moving / you light the blue / day the voices / have spoken”, (McNeill, Anthony. *Credences at The Altar of Cloud*. Kingston: The Institute of Jamaica, 1979. 28), and then “un God on / the day of the egg / may you come” (McNeill, Anthony. *Credences at The Altar of Cloud*. Kingston: The Institute of Jamaica, 1979. 60.), “Ungod in the gray / city of iron” (*Ibid.* 73). Similarly the Vincentian poet Shake Keane made his reflection in “Osmosis”: “Space is the face of God / And it is naked / Who will unknit the light / Blind the bland eye of the moon” (Keane, Shake. “Osmosis.” *BIM* IV.15 (1951): 198).

Chapter XI

Lasana Mwanza Sekou (1959 -)

The Aesthetics of Salt and Sugar

The St. Martin poet Lasana M. Sekou is a product of different geographical migrations. Born Harold Hermano Lake in Aruba in 1959, Sekou grew up in St. Martin, the native island of his parents. From the early 1970s onward, Sekou spent thirteen years studying and writing in the USA, where he studied in New York with Amiri Baraka. In 1984, he returned to St. Martin⁸¹¹ and the first collection he published there was *Born Here* in 1986. The linguistic and demographical situation of his island in the context of the Caribbean archipelago is peculiar. The island has changed hands many times becoming Spanish, English, French or Dutch.⁸¹² Sekou was born in the mostly Papiamentu-speaking Aruba (in the Dutch West Indies), but, as Hans Vaders pointed out, his work is not much read there, maybe because it is mainly written in English.⁸¹³ Sekou is a product of contemporaneity and diaspora and his linguistic poetics reveals multiple influences from Africa, Europe, Asia. Moreover, Sekou's linguistic interest and attention to the poetic language extend to a St. Martin Creole (which is being studied and recognised by Rhoda Arrindell, who believes that it may form a "language" of its own). His imagined poetic space has its roots on his territory and the history of his island, but it expands also towards the other islands of the archipelago so that what I configure, in the case of Sekou, as an aesthetics of salt and sugar can become a Caribbean aesthetics and hypothetically embrace the whole region.⁸¹⁴ The themes that the Montserratian scholar Howard

⁸¹¹ "Sekou, on the other hand, is an established voice in the world of Caribbean writing. He was born in Aruba but grew up in St. Martin". Shaw, Andrew E. "Kei Miller, *Kingdom of Empty Bellies*. (Coventry, England: Heaventree Press, 2005). and Lasana M. Sekou, *37 Poems*. (St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, 2005)." Reviews. Journal of West Indian Literature 16.1 (Nov. 2007): 105-106. Eds. Mark McWatt, Victor L. Chang, Evelyn O'Callaghan, and Michael Bucknor. Mona, Jamaica: Dept.s of Literatures in English, The University of the West Indies.

⁸¹² "The 37-square mile island is in actual fact divided between the Dutch and the French. The Dutch spelling "Sint Maarten" was adopted in 1946, as a way of the colonialists claiming the "Dutchness" of the part of the island that falls directly under Dutch rule. Before then, the whole island was referred to as "Saint Martin" which is also the French spelling of the name purportedly given to the island by Christopher Columbus. (...) The official Dutch spelling however remains "St. Maarten." Badejo, Fabian Adekunle. "Modern Literature in English in the Dutch Windward Islands: A Brief Introduction." Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters 1.2 (Spring-Summer 2002): 77. Eds. Jacqueline Bishop, and Michela Calderaro. New York: New York University. 4 Aug. 2009 <<http://www.nyu.edu/calabash/>>.

⁸¹³ Sekou, Lasana M. "Schoonheid maakt de dichter bedeesd/(Beauty makes the poet shy). Interview." Ed. Hans Vaders. 10 May 2008. Amigoe.com 28 July 2008 <<http://www.amigoe.com/cgi-bin/artikel/exec/view.cgi?archive=94&num=42147>>.

⁸¹⁴ "Six small Caribbean islands and a fertile coastal area on the South American continent came under Dutch control during the seventeenth-century drive for conquest and colonial power. The three A.B.C. islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao are situated off the South American coast, the three even smaller S.S.S. islands of Saba, Sint-Eustatius and Sint-Maarten (half of which is French) are nearly a thousand kilometres to the North in the archipelago that forms the northern border of the Caribbean Sea with the Atlantic Ocean. For the Dutch, the Antillean islands served as regional centres for trade and privateering, from which to inflict losses on Spain in the New World during the Eighty Years War of Independence they had been fighting at home. The islands turned out to be great repositories of salt needed for the herring trade, and they served as a clearing-house for the slave trade." Rutgers, Wim. "Dutch Caribbean Literature." Caribbean Writers/Les Auteurs Caribéens. Between Orality & Writing/entre l'Oralité et l'Écriture. Cit. 185-186.

Fergus – a poet himself – identified in Sekou’s work are “love,⁸¹⁵ labor, liberation.” I will here focus on his life and works, on linguistic and poetic peculiarities in his poetry, on an aesthetics of music, and on a further aesthetics of the maroons as a more general theory concerning Caribbean politics. Moreover, I will consider what I recognise as an “aesthetics of salt and sugar”, that is a bitter-sweet combination of cultures and languages that were forced to coexist or that, instead, are chosen by the poet to live together, to heal the wounds left by history and to learn from the mistakes of the past (as AJA’s and Rudder’s poetry showed with their historically committed poems). As Fergus clarified: “History is a motivator, but we must take responsibility for our future if we are to usher in new regimes of love.”⁸¹⁶ Sekou’s work includes thirteen collections of poems: *Moods for Isis – Picture poems of Love & Struggle* (1978); *For the Mighty Gods...An Offering* (1982); *Images in the Yard* (1983); *Maroon Lives – A Tribute to Grenadian Freedom Fighters* (1983); *Born Here* (1986); *Nativity & Dramatic Monologues for Today* (1988); *Mothernation: Poems from 1984 to 1987* (1991); *Quimbé: The Poetics of Sound* (1991); *The Salt Reaper – poems from the flats* (2004, 2005); *37 Poems* (2005); *The Salt Reaper – selected poems from the flats* (Audio CD, 2009), and two collections of short stories: *Love Songs Make You Cry* (1989) and *Brotherhood of the Spurs* (1997, 2007). Among Sekou’s critical works we can mention *The Independence Papers – Readings on a New Political Status for St. Maarten/St. Martin* (1990); *National Symbols of St. Martin – A Primer* (1997); *Big Up St Martin – Essay & Poem* (1999). He also produced *Fête – The First Recording of Traditional St. Martin’s Festive Music* by Tanny & the Boys (LP/cassette/CD, 1992, 2007).⁸¹⁷

⁸¹⁵ In Vaders’s interview Sekou affirmed that: “It is beauty that humbles and impassion the poet to write about a woman that he may know intimately, or admire, or desire.” The interview is titled “Schoonheid maakt de dichter bedeesd” which means “Beauty makes the poet reserved” or “The poet is reserved about beauty”. I would like to thank Sekou for the translation. Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 4 Aug. 2008. Sekou, Lasana M. “Schoonheid maakt de dichter bedeesd/(Beauty makes the poet shy). Interview.” *Cit.* At other times Sekou flows from love into eroticism, as in “ ‘till Earth collapses in full / blooming & uttering forth / an orgasmic quenching of thirst (...) / and arrive fertile fresh / & copulating fire / wet / with ...”. *Nativity*. 10-1, or in “On Caribbean Aesthetics”: “You love too much (...) / Middle-passage waves crack the dry sand / Lick the inner vaginal flesh of beach-head rocks”, *Born Here*, 146; “children, put your ears / to the still moist vulva of tired earth”, ‘in berlin’, *Quimbé*, 102.

⁸¹⁶ Fergus, Howard A. *Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou*. *Cit.* 28.

⁸¹⁷ Henceforward ‘*Moods for Isis*’ will be referred to with ‘*MI*’, ‘*For The Mighty Gods...An Offering*’ with ‘*MG*’, ‘*Maroon Lives*’ with ‘*ML*’, ‘*Images in the Yard*’ with ‘*IY*’, ‘*Born Here*’ with ‘*BH*’, ‘*Nativity & Dramatic Monologues for Today*’ with ‘*N*’, ‘*Love Songs Make You Cry*’ with ‘*LSMYC*’, ‘*Mothernation: Poems from 1984 to 1987*’ with ‘*M*’, ‘*Quimbé: The Poetics of Sound*’ with ‘*Q*’, ‘*Brotherhood of the Spurs*’ with ‘*BS*’, ‘*37 Poems*’ with ‘*37 P*’, and ‘*The Salt Reaper*’ with ‘*TSR*’.

XI.i. The pervasive oxymoron of ‘salt’ and ‘sweet’ in Sekou

“Their cargoes of sponges
On sandspits of islets,
Barques white as white salt
Of acrid St. Maarten”.
Derek Walcott,
“A Sea-Chantey”⁸¹⁸

Walcott’s description of white ships and acrid salt contrasts with Sekou’s lines on the sacredness of the Great Salt Pond of St. Martin, so sacred that Black people:

now black as tar, would be baptized in the pit of
salt
spit piss semen & sweat (...)
a lake of brine, mirror the splinter of this crime of centuries
past the saltpicking (...)
borne on the fresh and sweet stink (...)
*Cheeeeeeeeeeeeeee! Nasty Salt Pond. Go
away!* (“Cradle of the Nation”, *TSR*, 50-1)

and then “to seaman (...) / her sweetness drew you a dream. a succession, a promised land” (*TSR*, 51). This acridness is counterpoised by sweetness and by a fertilization of the Salt Pond with bodily fluids (spit, semen, sweat), which indicates the hard labour of the enslaved on the pond. The pond became a contingent place around which all the activities and life of the slaves took place; even his seaman became a ‘fertilizer’ of the briny ocean (“seaman” is pronounced as “semen”). The Great Salt Pond of St. Martin was discovered by the Dutch colonisers in as early as the 1620s (together with other not as large salt ponds on the small island) and exploited to sell salt to other Caribbean islands and to parts of the Americas and Europe. I argue that the metaphorization of the Salt Pond by Sekou, together with the sweetness related to love and dreams and to the symbolism of sugar, creates a contrastive landmark of his aesthetics, the salt representing the healing of wounds, the acridness of hard slave labour and a product of colonialism and slavery, a theorization supported by Gadsby in her study *Sucking Salt*: “*sucking salt* carries a simultaneously doubled linguistic sign of adversity *and* survival”.⁸¹⁹ The metaphor of salt has been used extensively by Sekou and by the critics on him, as in *The Salt Reaper* or in Badejo’s critical work, *Salted Tongues*. As quoted by Sekou during my interview, he metabolised the symbols of salt and sugar, relating them to a Yoruba idiom:

⁸¹⁸ Walcott’s maternal grandfather was a Dutchman from St. Maarten. Walcott, Derek. “A Sea-Chantey.” *In a Green Night*. (1962) *Collected Poems*. *Cit.* 46.

⁸¹⁹ Gadsby, Meredith. *Sucking Salt: Caribbean Women Writers, Migration, and Survival*. Columbia, Missouri: The University of Missouri Press, 2006. 3. Gadsby also mentioned some pieces of literature related to salt by Caribbean writers, such as Earl Lovelace’s *Salt: A Novel*, Nalo Hopkinson’s *The Salt Roads*, Fred D’Aguiar’s *Feeding the Ghosts*, and Édouard Glissant’s *Black Salt*. *Cf.* footnote 4. *Ibid.* 4.

It should be natural for the salt metaphor to be present in the literature of St. Martin. Salt was the main crop on the island during the unholy slave period. (...) As metaphor and as material salt has the experience of curing, preserving, healing. There is a connection to life's sweetness in some cultures. The Yoruba, I am told, have a saying: "May your life be as sweet as salt." It is also intrinsically connected with the exploitation and human suffering of the enslaved ancestors that toiled away in the salt ponds of St. Martin. (...) *The Salt Reaper* poems "salt reaping I" and "salt reaping II" are about this double and layered relationship of salt in the history and culture of the St. Martin people and as a recurring expression of the psyche, even if latently so, at the core of the nation. Both poems are sorts of aesthetic extractions from a conversation, a "relate," with a rather beautiful woman from Sucker Garden [district of St. Martin] who worked in the Great Salt Pond as a very young child during the first half of the last century.⁸²⁰

As Fergus has noted:

on imagery, [Sekou, *NbR*] uses "salt" as a remarkable extended metaphor in *The Salt Reaper* to evoke the brutality of slavery (...) salt is also a preserver and seasoner. Salt hurts and heals.⁸²¹

The salt of St. Maarten (also known as "the salt island", the island where the main crop and trade good was salt), is used by the poet as a major metaphor for curing, healing, preserving and also expressing pain and the fatigue of hard labour.⁸²² Sugar, on the other hand, was a slave plantation and colonial product of more extended island territories like Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Haïti, Saint Domingue, or Demerara (Guyana) and it allows a visually similar crystal product to represent and symbolise the hope for and freedom of all Caribbean people, "her sweetness drew you a dream".

The indigenous Carib name of the island of St. Martin was reputedly "Souligia" or "Souligia" – the "Salt Island" or "Land of Salt", thus, historically speaking, the salt has always been

⁸²⁰ Cf. Interview with Lasana M. Sekou. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁸²¹ Fergus, Howard A. *Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou*. *Cit.* 135.

⁸²² Sekou is not the only St. Martin artist to employ the symbol of 'salt' in his work, in fact Deborah Jack, a St. Martin poet and visual artist also uses this as a metaphor, even if nowadays the pond is used as a dump: "St. Martin has this "Great Salt Pond" where slaves were brought to work. This pond has since become a landfill for garbage in the middle of the island (...) This idea of the dirtying/the sullyng of the pond can be linked to the suppression/oppression of memory. (...) That is why I use salt as a strategic metaphor. (...) There were moments when the pond would stink (...) In the summer of 2002 I had an exhibit at the Bearden Gallery in St. Martin where I actually applied salt to the canvas, and then painted in grids—these works were called the "A/Salting Series"—and these grid-like structures have a direct connection to the salt pond that was also gridded, aerial photographs show that the pond is divided up into squares and rectangles. (...) St. Martin was called "Souligia" at one point, which was the old Carib name for the island, and this meant island of salt. So salt was really strong for even the indigenous people." Jack, Deborah. "Unhearting Memories: A Conversation with St. Martin Artist Deborah Jack." Ed. Jacqueline Bishop. *Calabash. A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters*. 2.2 (Summer-Fall 2003): 87-107. Eds. Jacqueline Bishop, and Michela Calderaro. New York: New York University. 19 Sept. 2009 <<http://www.nyu.edu/calabash/>>.

an integral part of the landscape as the older may indicate. At the onset of the post-Columbian period, the island changed names, or at least the spelling of the name, several times according to the Spanish, English Dutch, or French dominations, which alternated their strongholds on the island more than a dozen times between 1648 and 1817. Menkman confirmed the historical background that Rhoda Arrindell explained to me in her interview, saying that:

From the fact that the Spanish made use of the materials of the poor reinforcement on Anguilla should be deduced that ours also had a settlement on the aforementioned island; it would have also produced salt. While our riches were depleted on St. Maarten, they were not yet begun on the other Windward Islands. The written history of Statia [St. Eustatius, *NbR*] begins a little later for us. While nothing else is known about Saba except that in 1632 some Englishmen, who had lost their ship, went ashore in an open boat and were fortunate to find some tea.⁸²³

In regard to Sekou's collection of poems, the academic Hollis "Chalkdust" Liverpool, in his introduction to *The Salt Reaper*, defined the poet as somebody whose intellectual effort for his island led him to harvest the ground and provide this pregnant metaphor which derives from the slave period:

Sekou is the salt reaper, for his land, his labors, his ideals, and his values have been, to a large extent, fashioned by the salt ponds, St. Martin's historical "plantation".⁸²⁴

Liverpool added that:

A few years ago, Earl Lovelace put forward the idea of using salt to season our minds, knowing that our intellectual food was losing its savor. He thus called his novel that won the 1997 Commonwealth Writers Prize *Salt*. Now Sekou, in 2004, gives us *The Salt Reaper* to provide salt for all of us.⁸²⁵

⁸²³ Cf. "Uit het feit, dat de Spanjaarden gebruik maakten van de materialen der geslechte versterking op Anguillas moet afgeleid worden dat de onzen ook op laatstgenoemd eilandje een vestiging hadden; het zal ook wel zout hebben opgeleverd. Voorloopig was nu ons rijk op Sint Maarten uit, terwijl het op de andere Bovenwindsche Eilanden nog niet begonnen was. De geschreven geschiedenis van Sint Eustatius vangt voor ons iets later aan, terwijl van Saba niets anders bekend is, dan date r in 1632 eenige Engelschen, die hun schip kwijtgeraakt waren, in een open boot aanlandden en er gelukkig iets tee ten vonden." Menkman, W.R. De Nederlanders in het Caraïbische Zeegebied waarin vervat de Geschiedenis der Nederlandsche Antillen. P.N. Van Kampen & Zoon N.V.: Amsterdam, 1942. 39. I would like to thank Lasana Sekou and Rhoda Arrindell for their correction of my translation from Dutch. Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 16 Sept. 2009.

⁸²⁴ Liverpool, Hollis. "Introduction." The Salt Reaper – poems from the flats. St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, 2005. x.

⁸²⁵ *Ibid.* xv.

At times this bitter-sweet combination results in splinters of memory and reminiscence of the local Creole (e.g. “becausin”, 15, which is the paragoge recurring in St. Martin Creole for “because”):

when it raise up in you
sweetly so and salty too
and it raise you up (...)
that no count of splinters splintering (“st. martin soul II”, 37 P, 15),

or in the poem “nourishment”: “ahl yu’ all is s’maatin children (...) / simply told befo’ / splinterless and embraced where they wanna be” (37 P, 21), giving a landright to St. Martin’s children, when as ‘cubs in the field’ a generic ‘they’ (neo-imperialists?) will try to deprive them of their land: “try they will, to maraud thy birthright of sweet land...” (“The Cubs Are in the Field”, BU, 23), while “telling tales from the great salt pond / showering in rainy seasons / tuning the sweet salt of songs” (21). Hard labour and sweat are recurrent images, as already seen in “Cradle of the Nation”, or as in the following quotation:

I still question
The way my fathers danced
While our mothers bore children
Stooped in labor over the clean Salt Ponds of Great Bay
Where you can still see them
Chanting ponums (...) “Now, would you drink my sweat please...” (“On Caribbean Aesthetics”, BH, 145-146).

In “saline” the poet depicts: “picking hands / greased by tears of sweat / and ooze of blood (...) / in and out the saltpans of great bay and grand case” (Q, 5) – citing one of the other large salt ponds of the island in the village of Grand Case (another sizeable salt lake was at Orient Bay). Elsewhere, in “middle region”, he describes:

what splash won’t thirst for
salt feet will drink the rest (...)
you got to pound salt crack open locust to eat
from yellow powder sprinkling fo’ food to grow up” (37 P, 28-9);

in “My Boy Told Me” Sekou writes:

He asked you
If you will need sugar
While on your journey
You said no (...)
He must know you’re hot-blooded
Not a diabetic (...)

Besides you have a salt pill to equalize
The excess sugar water” (MG, 53);

The blood and the pain of hard work are evident also in “1”, a very short poem, which sings: “It was pain / in this labor among saline blades / cutting into our blood / to reap pyramids of salt.” (Q, 4). The poem somehow refers to ancient Egypt when slaves were used to build pyramids. The poet transposes the pyramids to the island of St. Martin. The lines also make reference to the wounds which have been healed by the contradicting material which causes cuts in the skin of the labourers: they find their tiredness and death in the same element that can partially heal their wounds.

One of Sekou’s more interesting poems in the plethora of poems that reference the Salt Pond, is “Great Salt Pond Speaks”, which speaks of:

salt-cauterized feet, rapine of skin (...)
reaping pyramids of salt for the red, white, and blue (...)
From salt crystals of purple glow in harvest (...)
From reservoir of salt (...)
I am the stink of town: the nation’s stench and scorn.
Septic trucks haul up like chamber pot (36).

The pyramids of salt were built for the European nations (he mentions the colours of the flags), but nowadays the Pond is used as a dump for rubbish and the stink of slavery transposed in the contemporary stink of the remnants of the pond. Fergus aptly observed:

Salt is St. Martin’s sugar (...) in “Great Salt Pond Speaks” (...) Intentional or not, pyramids conjure up notions of Israelites building those structures under Egyptian bondage. The universality of slavery, whether it relates to Soweto or El Dorado, does not diminish its iniquity.⁸²⁶

In this poem the speaking poetic persona is actually the Salt Pond itself:

I come from creation. Teeming with life.
Sifted salt from hillside majesty; kept beach a virgin garden (...)
I am the mudbag reservoir of your labor (...)
floating over my glass calm face on flats” (TSR, 35)

This collection is sub-titled *poems from the flats*, thus the reference to the “flats,” which were the small square-shaped boats used to ferry the picked salt to shore. The oxymoric pun with “beach”

⁸²⁶ Fergus, Howard A. *Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou*. Cit. 44.

(which sounds like “bitch”) and “virgin” extends the range of this Biblical symbol to the New Testament.⁸²⁷

Through briny ages, I was the pot of water
in which you first saw your sweat-drenched face,
anchored your sweating ebon brow under a crown of thorns.
In the blowing season, the salt I bore was stock (...)
It was you who sowed humanity in me with the bleeding (35).

In these lines the salty taste of ocean is evoked, the surface of the pond becomes a kind of Holy Shroud with Christ’s face impressed on it, and the “crown of thorns” image the very Christ who said to his disciples “Ye are the salt of the earth” (Matthew, 5:13). There are other salt references in this poem, such as salt as a seasoning: “it was I who seasoned the brine of ages in your pool of / blood” (35); and in relation to a quimbé song: “mark and mock time, beat tempo / keep/a/count/in hurricane voices / in a shanty sing in a Quimbé ring / dem inna wukkershout riddim: / *How dey say salt pond dead, / we eat she head with a penny bread... / salt-picking hands, choked red shreds of fingers / (but I had seasoned you, my son)*” (35).

XI.ii. Use of language and graphic layout

Sekou’s employment of language and his play with visual forms in the graphic disposition of the poems on the page make him an outstanding example of a full-relief artist. He takes care of the word from the moment of its birth, to its successive developments on the page, to its visual effect, equipping it with indications of how its oral delivery should be. He employs graphic devices such as parenthesis to indicate breathing pauses, or period marks linking words without spaces to keep up the pace with a more intense reading. He relies on repetitions of words or sentences, the enhancement of sounds through alliteration, or the multiplication of vowels to extend the word’s length. In some early poems in *Moods for Isis* and *Maroon Lives* (even when they employ free verse and are not as outstanding as the later poems), there are already some traces of his latest Brathwaite-like style, under the influence of Michael Smith, evident in lines such as, “I am the front caller—catch up—catch up / Shangoooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo” (“Little Guerrillas”, *MG*, 70), with an invocation to the African god or orisha of thunder prolonged in a catalytic sequence of vowels suggesting a scream.

In *Nativity* “BRAGADANGBAM boom si kai si ka boom di la” (10) is reminiscent of the expression of noise used by Brathwaite in “Cane” (1969), “*bruggalungdum*”,⁸²⁸ or in “The Dust”

⁸²⁷ Salt is mentioned several times in the Bible, being used in sacrifices, as a currency, to describe Lot’s wife after she looked back at the burning city of Sodom, and the Jews harvested it for trade.

(1967) “*brugg-a-lung-go*”⁸²⁹ (66) to describe the volcano eruption in one – if not the most – of his powerful nation language poems. This is an influence which the major critic of Sekou’s work to date, Fergus, recognised: “the poet’s nation language has been influenced by Brathwaite known for his “video style” writing (...) These stylistic devices began as early as *Mothernation* and *Quimbé* in 1991”⁸³⁰.

Despite his contemporary creations and adaptations of visual poetry and computer-style language, and as has been mentioned by others, “literary *avant-garde*”⁸³¹ in his admirable introduction to Sekou’s work in *Love Labor Liberation*, this critic further recognised an affinity between Sekou and 17th c. metaphysical poets: “I discern in his love poems a marked resemblance to the work of the English metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century such as George Herbert and John Donne.”⁸³² As regards metre, Fergus recognised a cohabitation of tradition and innovation, of old and new in Sekou’s poetry, which “employs mainly free verse with scant rhyme, and one hardly escapes the dominance of the iambic pentameter and classical forms”⁸³³.

The graphic layout on the page of “No Love Poems” follows the rhythm of the poet’s voice, with hectic breaks, wordplays, parenthesis to correspond to his breathing pauses – as in “to vent out the vex self / to combat it) to splice it)” (*TSR*, 4) –, whereas the graphic design is meant to correspond to the oral delivery. Owing to its disposition on the page, the poem “title” (*37P*) looks like a two column poem:

<p>title</p> <p>militants&insurgents come to be</p> <p>new code for the coders a codeX.a con- stitute to “hunt them down”</p> <p>come to be all who look so all alike my brothers, again, the dark mane locks in the cross hairs.</p>	<p>X</p> <p>+males of military age+</p> <p>+marked man+</p> <p>+</p>
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⁸²⁸ Brathwaite, Kamau. *Islands*. London: Oxford University Press, 1969. 72.

⁸²⁹ Brathwaite, Kamau. “The Dust.” *Rights of Passage* (1967) *The Arrivants*. *Cit.* 1973. 66.

⁸³⁰ Fergus, Howard A. *Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou*. *Cit.* 128.

⁸³¹ “Poets who strike out in this direction are achieving a synthesis of two sources: that which originates in experimentation with the language of the literary avant-garde.” Rodriguez, Emilio Jorge. “Oral Tradition and Recent Caribbean Poetry”. *Cit.* 4.

⁸³² Fergus, Howard A. *Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou*. *Cit.* 7.

⁸³³ *Ibid.* 136.

On the left the lines progressively increase in number from two to three to four, while on the right a strange arithmetic started with an “X” explains the “codeX”, with “+males of military age+”, “+marked man+” (2). The poem talks about war, militants and insurgents, people who “look so all alike” because dressed in uniforms, targets (“ “hunt them down” ” (2), “+marked man+”) – who may also be Rastafarians or identified with Rastafarians because of the “dark mane/ locks in the crosshairs” (2). The “mane” stands for the mane of the lion, which is a symbol of the Rastafarians, the locks are the dreadlocks and the crosshairs are the target sighting device in the scope of a weapon which could also suggest the action of targeting a Rastafarian. The cross is reproduced twice with a capital X and four times with the symbol +, while the explanation of the code is accompanied by an alliteration in the plosive velar sound /k/and a repetition of /m/. The play with language touches even *Dread Talk*⁸³⁴ in “A Last Love Song”, where the line “You must overstand” (BH, 65) follows the Rastafari linguistic pattern for “understand fully”.

Aggressively critical is “r’ass remnants” (TSR), about which Mark Nowak, in his review of Fergus’s *Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou*, commented:

The acronyms identify the remaining colonial territories of the Caribbean region (and the sixteen “s”s in “us” certainly points to the USAmerican colonial project in the Caribbean (& in Irak, & in Afghanistan, & in...)).⁸³⁵

On the other hand, Fergus observed that:

The acronyms—identifying the remaining colonial territories in the Caribbean region—work visually, they goad (poke) us like asses while branding us with an external identity.⁸³⁶

This is the poem:

bdt
bot
bvi
bwi
cpr
dc
dwi
fod
fwi
na
upt

⁸³⁴ For an in-depth study of *the Dread Talk* cf. Velma Pollard’s [Dread Talk](#). Cf. also footnote 673, p. 225, ch. VIII and footnote 810, pp. 271-2, ch. X.

⁸³⁵ Nowak, Mark. “Labor Love.” 7 Feb. 2008. [Harriet, A Blog from the Poetry Foundation](#). Posted by Angelo Rombley. 4 July 2008. 28 July 2008 <http://www.poetryfoundation.org/harriet/2008/07/labor_love.html>.

⁸³⁶ Fergus, Howard A. [Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou](#). *Cit.* 129.

dom-tom.&all
like cowbrands
poking usssssssssssssss. still.

In a performance he gave for me in May 2008 the whole poem sounds like a rap beat, the final “still” is needed to keep up the pace of the poem, and the final prolonged “us” is similar to the sound of branding cattle skin. In the reading Sekou pronounced “dom-tom” as “dumb tom.”⁸³⁷

For Sekou, we can speak, as Badejo did, of “plurilinguism”.⁸³⁸

We may not be able to come up with a common Caribbean language any time soon—in the manner that African Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka once advocated Swahili as a common language for the whole of Africa or as noted Antiguan thinker Tim Hector once suggested Papiamentu as the linking regional language for the Caribbean. [...] I also hope that soon, such translations will be available in what Brathwaite has called our “nation languages” or what Sekou has termed our “nation tongues”⁸³⁹

The employment of what he may recognise as a St. Martin Creole – of which he described some grammatical and lexical features in the glossary of *Nativity* – sheds a bright light on Sekou’s poetry and language, and it decorates them with very fresh images imbued with colourful expressions. Badejo noted with grace that: “One of the most remarkable aspects of Sekou’s literary output is indeed his refreshing and daring use of language. He himself has described the polyglot and cosmopolitan nature of St. Martiners”.⁸⁴⁰

Thus, Sekou employs French, Spanish, Dutch, English to describe the consecutive colonial dominations of the island, as much as he inserts German or Chinese to follow his travels around the world. Snippets of French can be heard in “Quimbé”: “give us new words! to do words of *veuglé, sa ce bois*⁸⁴¹ / children at the window witnessing their own birth / chimes full of laughter: *oui mama!*” (*Q*, 46); in the poem “Speak Out”: “You forgot your Teachings— / Your language is gone— / I tell

⁸³⁷ The acronyms are decoded as follows: “bdt”: British Dependent Territories; “bot”: British Overseas Territories; “bvi”: British Virgin Islands; “bwi”: British West Indies; “cpr”: Commonwealth of Puerto Rico; “dc”: Dutch Caribbean; “dwi”: Dutch West Indies; “fod”: French Overseas Department; “fwi”: French West Indies; “na”: Netherlands Antilles; “upt”: Ultra-Peripheral Territory; “usvi”: US Virgin Islands; “dom-tom”: Départments d’outre-mer and Territoires d’outre-mer.

⁸³⁸ “virtually all the languages spoken in the Caribbean can be heard on St. Martin, St. Martiners themselves are not really polyglots even though they are often multi-lingual. They normally speak English at home, study in Dutch (or French) at school, and often socialize in Spanish and/or Papiamentu”. *Ibid.* 76.

⁸³⁹ Badejo, Fabian Adekunle. *Salted Tongues. Modern Literature in St. Martin*. *Cit.* 44.

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.* 20.

⁸⁴¹ “*veuglé, sa ce bois*” means “dazzled, this is wood”, “it’s a kind of an exclamation in *kweyol* (I believe St. Lucian but probably in other *kweyols* too). The word ‘wood’ is a phallic symbol reference/a sexual connotation, which for the poem, lends itself to the sweetness of copulation (engaging the truth / essence / union etc. of life) / pregnancy / birth... thus the subsequent line “children at the window witnessing their own birth (this poem / line influenced the cover art for *quimbe*).” Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 28 Dec. 2009.

you— / They stole your drums— / Distorted your Family— / You bare the scar...of the earth's wretched— (...) / The wretched of the earth...[Cf. Frantz Fanon's book]" (MG, 17); in "Souviendrai": "But we must leave, Ah mon ami, / J'esperai que nous / Recontrerons un jours, / Aurevoir mon amour... / Till another dawn" (MG, 46); and together with Arabic in "the blood boil": "some are hidden. *se cacher*. (...) / *a bon / jour, alaikum salaam*" (TSR, 111). When I asked Ms. Arrindell if there is a French Creole in St. Martin she replied that there is and it is actually a mixture of the French Creole of other islands, especially Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe,⁸⁴² as much as the variety of English Creole spoken in St. Martin is a mixture of basilectal or mesolectal features spoken in Cruxian (from St. Croix) Creole, or a double negation derived from Spanish or Papiamentu (spoken in the other Dutch territories such as the ABC islands or in the country of Suriname); also Dutch can be found in borrowings or calques of some lexical items.

After reputedly being discovered by Columbus in 1493, St. Martin was in Spanish hands, particularly from 1633 to 1647 there was a Spanish presence. Therefore some Spanish expressions can be recognised in Sekou's work and are probably rooted in more recent sociocultural, literary, immigration, trade and political connections in the region (e.g. with the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico). Words and terms in Spanish are found in "No Cat": "Be strong, *querida*" (BH, 73); in "clarity": "we have been looking at each other / through alien eyes, pale and cruel / *como extranjeros* (...) / clutching at the dante lassos of *el norte* / sat upon *un caballo diablo*" (Q, 78-9); and in "immigrants": "But who will soon pay / who will soon run / from *san martin* / from *san materialismo*?" (Q, 11).⁸⁴³

Another European language he employs is German, but the only instances found are in the poem "in berlin" (Q), written during a visit to that city in the late 1980s to read poetry to a student association. In this poem Sekou plays a lot with language by inserting words that he made up and transformed or distorted from languages, including Dutch, and other than English: "rising specters of *rassismus* [racism, NbR] / skinhead-bleeding façades of *faschismos* [Fascism, NbR]" (100), in which he hints at the survival of Nazism among skinheads, or when he employs expressions, such as "the afro-look / of the *schwarzen duetschen* [a typo, Deutschen, NbR],⁸⁴⁴ meaning the "Black German", NbR] / and immigrant *menschen* all ["people", NbR] (...) / and distant *lander* ["lands",

⁸⁴² "It is a pot pourri of Haitian Creole, Martiniquan, Guadeloupian. But, legally, there is no official language in St. Maarten, there are different policies used in official circles: for instance, French is used in the judiciary system, while Dutch is not. Standard English is widely used. But it is also spread a so-called "ghetto English" or "broken English", which has a great Yankee influence." Cf. Interview with Rhoda Arrindell. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁸⁴³ He uses this same expression in the collection of short stories *Love Songs Make You Cry* when one of the two protagonists, a young woman, said: "The women of my country are treated like nothing in *San Martin*, *San materialismo*." Sekou, Lasana M. "Love Songs Make You Cry." *Love Songs Make You Cry*. Philipsburg, St. Maarten, Caribbean: House of Nehesi, 1989. 84.

⁸⁴⁴ This typo was confirmed by the poet. Personal communication. E-mail. 12 Oct. 2009.

NbR] (...) / *wat macht niet* [“what power does not”, *NbR*] is what you will not) / you are true *sonnen kinder* [“sun children”, *NbR*] (...) / this is the *zeitgeist* [“spirit of the time”, *NbR*]” (100); “*luisteren* [“listen”, *NbR*] racist motherfuckers (...) / *in der spiegel* [“in the mirror”, *NbR*] of inwardly brutalized / races / this ain’ no dibi-dibi “atom-kraft” [“atomic power”, *NbR*] / pinned down on its back / *luisteren allemaal, hort mal alle zu, escuchan pueblo*, [“listen all, listen at all time, listen everybody”, *NbR*] / the victory in unity” (101). He then globalises the message of resistance by extending it to a Spanish audience: “*la luta continua / seguro / der kampf geht weiter / tschus*” [“the struggle goes on / for sure / the struggle goes on / bye”, *NbR*] (103).

37 Poems was written by Sekou as a homage to his island and its thirty-seven square miles of land, as Shaw remarked:

37 Poems, engages the Caribbean from a more nationalistic and even global perspective. The title very aptly heralds Sekou’s decidedly politicized agenda for his collection, referring to the heavily contested thirty-seven square miles of land that constitute the author’s island home.⁸⁴⁵

More interesting are his “China poems”, or better “Hong Kong poems” (*37P*),⁸⁴⁶ which he composed during a fellowship to Hong Kong he was granted in 2004. In the cosmopolitan city which is an enclave of the Chinese mainland Sekou is attracted by the creolisation of cultures and by Westernized landmarks, as the Christian “mass” in “hong kong Sunday”. He refers to “Filipinas” (a notably Christian republic, colonized by the Spanish between 1521 and 1898) and “the familiar communion” (1). The poem’s layout plays an important role, in fact he plays with circles as the alliterative line “in Central.ground like crop circles” (1) shows. The church seems a circular central monument architected after the principles of Chinese geomancy or “*feng shui*” (1). The poet plays with languages when he inserts the Spanish line “*aquí. avemarias y más.niñas*” (1) in the colonial language of the Philippines, while the alliterative line “weeptowailtoworrytowin” (1) aims at reproducing the sound of the “*erhu*” (1), the Chinese violin. Multiculturalism and the creolisation of cultures are evident in the combination of Christian and Chinese cultures, as “**the other feng shui**” (my bold, 1) indicates, and as Khair observed in his introduction to the collection: “The collection begins with a trilingual description of a Sunday “mass” (weekly picnic-like gathering of immigrant domestic workers) in Hong Kong and contains the political poems.”⁸⁴⁷

⁸⁴⁵ Shaw, Andrew E. “Book Reviews to Kei Miller, Kingdom of Empty Bellies and Lasana M. Sekou, *37 Poems*.” *Cit.* 108.

⁸⁴⁶ “The up-to-date *37 Poems* with its polished journalistic tone does not eschew the people’s language. The book generally features China, but the St. Martin poems in the collection reflect island rhythms and realities”. Fergus, Howard A. *Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou*. *Cit.* 124.

⁸⁴⁷ Khair, Tabish. “Introduction: Reasons to Live.” Sekou, Lasana M. *37 Poems*. Philipsburg, St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, 2005. x.

In “worker island”, Sekou describes Lantau Island in Hong Kong where there is a huge bronze statue of the Buddha on the top of the hill (“the Buddha brilliant regime in sun”, 34). He also refers to the Chinese religious practise of the “*qian*” (34), that is the casual choice of a stick fallen from a cylinder after shaking it, and which is supposed to foretell the future (“to shake sticks at their future”, 34). The interlocutor in the poem is Cynthia, the same woman to whom “beijing monday” is dedicated, who proposes to check a fishing village and poor houses, to see the other face of the tourist attractions or of the Westernized life of the former English colony (which reverted to Chinese sovereignty in 1997). Sekou’s journey in the East continues towards home in “going home”, where the line “over the east china sea / caressing up and along the dragon breast of japan / the iron beast stretches, wings it” (39) describes his flight back to his homeland and the nostalgic feelings felt when the plane flies pass Japan.

Peculiarly pregnant is the poem “xinXin”, whose title represents the huge landmass of the People’s Republic of China, in fact the word “xin” in Mandarin could mean, according to the different tones which makes it difficult to understand some of the words, both “star” and “heart”, as much as it could mean “new” or “fishy”. In this case, the first meaning seems to better fit the title strongly suggesting the five stars on the Chinese flag, and the line “crest-sacred / iron” (35) hinting at the crescent shape formed by the stars. Sekou describes his missed trip to the “forbidden city” (35), the imperial palace in the hub of Beijing. While he describes the missed trip he briefly speculates on the many historical incidents or events that occurred in China during the centuries, such as the “nanjing mass- / acre” and the “nankin mask” (both, 35) (about the Japanese invasion of Nanking or Nanjing in 1937), as well as the Tiananmen Square events, when tanks killed some students in the notorious square during a social protest. Local politics is mingled with international politics, as AJA or David Rudder do in their jazz poems or calypsoes, or elsewhere in Sekou’s work: “forcing wide open democracy’s boulevards / in chile...in the kwangju of korea / peopling the tiananmen square of china”, “in berlin” (*Q*, 102), or in “the blood boil”, where he mentions “a home in kigali [Rwanda, *NbR*] / was it following morning prayers in kosovo? / was it before a pall pot brew in kampuchea? [Cambodia, *NbR*]” (*TSR*, 111), where horrific and catastrophic events have occurred with tremendous amounts of bloodshed. In “xinXin” the poet is also good at wordplay, with the line “still no misty beidao in sight / i see no mad poets wording for cold miners” (35), suggesting both possibilities of the word “beidao” referring to one of the northern islands, or to Zhang Zhenkai, a political activist-turned-poet nicknamed Beidao. Apart from the wordplay with colours in different languages like “red”, “roseau”, and “rouge”, or with the words “ghosts, guests, and just” (35), the poet plays with alliterations and repetitions of sound as in “let the beijing bus ride pass by / and miss bai and i, the growl of a breakfastless rush” (35). This Miss Bai (one the

university students assigned to the group as guides)⁸⁴⁸ is introduced here as the lady interlocutor: he seems interested more in her than in the history-filled locations that he is passing by. In fact, he is eating history for brunch: “talk and mao on the money and marx on lit / theory and in practice” (36) hinting at the viability and challenges of, or experiences with communism in the Caribbean, but he admits: “i foresook the forbidden city / for a perfect set of eyes” (36).⁸⁴⁹ As Fergus remarked: “The critic Tabish Kahir recognized that in his introduction to *37 Poems* when he insists that “xinXin,” penned in China, is essentially a love poem”.⁸⁵⁰ In this poem historical notes and love are gently and deeply interwoven as happens in the sound of the *qin* or *gu zheng*, the ancient musical instrument mentioned in the poem.

Other references to Hong Kong are made in “father guide”, with the mentioning of the Wang Jiao district and Nathan Road: “mongkok at night / (...) / along nathan road” (37), and “kowloon tong” (38). The period in time to which he is referring is either at the beginning or the end of the Chinese year after January/February which is the period of the Chinese Lunar New Year. The lines “in the wake of the dragon’s full claim” (37) and “like longing for these tall eve days to christmas / and look on to the new year’s coming of this world” (37) seem, in fact, contrasting. The line “like the inducing asoka flower sprinkling queen maya” (37) speaks of the birth mother of Siddharta Gautama, the Buddha, the “Queen Maya”, and it connects Buddhism to Christianity, as he did in “hong kong sunday”, without sounding disrespectful of religions even if it speaks of Hello Kitty and mixes the profane and the sacred in the same paragraph.

XI.iii. An aesthetics of music

Sekou’s performances in conferences or at poetry festivals are powerful. The music which is added as the background of his performance CD⁸⁵¹ makes him sound even more suggestive. At a first hearing he might sound like a dub poet, but the different rhythms, added as a background to the poems, enrich them with a suggestive potpourri of flavours: from a merengue rhythm to the Dominican bachata,⁸⁵² from African drums to new age and soft jazz, from steelpan to electronic music, to a Spanish guitar like in “El Malecòn” (“The Waterfront” – in Cuba –, my translation, *The*

⁸⁴⁸ I would like to thank Lasana for this observation. Personal communication. E-mail. 12 Oct. 2009.

⁸⁴⁹ The “onyx eyes” (33) of “beijing Monday”.

⁸⁵⁰ Fergus, Howard A. *Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou*. *Cit.* 14.

⁸⁵¹ Cf. Sekou, Lasana M. *The Salt Reaper - selected poems from the flats*. CD-ROM. House of Nehesi Publishers. Record Label: Mountain Dove Records. 2009. 24 Aug. 2009 <<http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/lasanamsekou>>.

⁸⁵² “While the merengue was sizzling its way throughout the Dominican Republic and abroad, in the ‘60s and ‘70s a quite different kind of music was thriving in the countryside (...) The early Cuban bolero—and some say, the term “*bachata*”—had been brought to the island by Cuban troubadour Sindo Garay in the 1890s”. Manuel, Peter, Kenneth Bilby, and Michael Largey. *Caribbean Currents, Caribbean Music from Rumba to Reggae*. Kingston; Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2006. 132.

the wail of a “whalesong”. In order to create a Caribbean aesthetic of music Sekou gathers together different musical genres from the region, and insists on the steel pan of calypso:

and panalanglangsteelarkestras
arkestrating pan vibes
pan Caribbean
pan *Caribe*
pan *Antilles* (...) C.L.R.wise, Bobwise, dubwise.
Make us
wail like wailers wailing whalesong (*N*, 6),

and “come like Man born to Pan (...) / steel palms / & goatskins / of drums” (*N*, 10). Napolina Gumbs summarised on Sekou’s aesthetics in her introduction to *Nativity* as follows: “The “pan” themes are, in *Nativity*, synthesized in a revolutionary cultural holism that materializes, and when it feels like, mythologizes, in a fresh imaging of Caribbean aesthetics – inviting, embracing, mobilizing.”⁸⁵⁴

The quimbé is an old type of St. Martin song, which Sekou describes in a glossary in the collection *Quimbé*, a “topical St. Martin song, sung in a fast-paced singsong without musical accompaniment. [Composed and sung up to the mid-20 c; orig. unkn.]” (129). This collection is original in that each page is equipped with the correspondent number in the Braille symbol, but it is also contradicting because the blind person who would approach the book could not feel the texture of the Braille reproduced onto the flat page, so that Sekou’s idea seems to be of breaking down barriers between disabilities, but at the same time a common reader could not understand the Braille symbol and a blind person could not see the symbol depicted. As much as he tears down barriers between sensorial experiences, he also aims at transposing the rhythms of music into poetry, and the fusion which results embeds some jazz rhythms, following Brathwaite’s approach: “rap link / x-clangangstarbustinggraysfull: it’s like a jazz thing” (“Quimbé”, *Q*, 46). In “cradle of the nation” he finally blends indigenous dance and musical forms, *quimbé* and *ponum*: “your steps stout to a quimbé / trace through the canyons of brine, courted her at home. you&she. Divine in ponum” (*TSR*, 51).

In the glossary of *Nativity* the *ponum* is defined as follows: “traditional dance, has origin in fertility rites and harvest celebrations, reportedly danced on St. Martin’s Emancipation Day and has been associated with that Day ever since.” (73) In fact Badejo wrote about the ponum that:

There is the “Brim song,” which, since 1848, accompanied the traditional dance called the Ponum, also pronounced “Panam.” The

⁸⁵⁴ Gumbs, Napolina. “Introduction.” Sekou, Lasana M. *Nativity & Dramatic Monologues for Today*. St. Maarten: House of Nehesi, 1988. vii.

Brim song is a marker, a time capsule that records not only a critical historical event but also approximates the pronunciation, elements of grammar and so forth of the way our ancestors spoke in 1848. Some of us see the Ponum as a liberation dance since it was danced openly to celebrate the late notification to the enslaved population of the 1848 Emancipation in the French colonies. And of course the Brim song, also called the Ponum song, is rooted in the oral tradition.⁸⁵⁵

In “On Caribbean Aesthetics” Sekou reminds us of the dance form, how: “I still question / The way my fathers danced / Chanting ponums / For the hills and people to mirror themselves” (*BH*, 145). The cry of the Salt Pond laments with “Ponum! Ponum! I am belching back a stench. You stifle your / nole holes, cry” (36), and “*A-Buyaka! Buyaka! Becausin I am a bomb of poison. (...) / Buyaka. and retaliate, Salt Pond! Re-ta-li-aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaate!*” (“Great Salt Pond Speaks”, *TSR*, 37). The “Buyaka” is an invocation to “retaliate”, “to fight back”, as in the invocation “Buyaga” during the stickfight in Rudder’s “Dus’ in Dey Face”.

Sekou is certain about the African origins of the ponum and other “survivals” in St. Martin:

The syntax of our speech, the creole languages, foods that we still eat, elements in the traditional and modern music, song and dance forms, definitely the folk dances such as the Ponum in St. Martin, traditional instruments, and folk tales, some of the hair grooming such as braids, or dread locks for that matter, board games and martial arts forms such as stick fighting, traditional medicines and some of the belief systems, all reflect African origins, survivals and influences. At times these influences are embattled and not too infrequently wrought with the self-denial of the African or Black “Self” and other inferiority complexes by some of African descent. Some traditional cultural forms like stick fighting are not practiced any more or the jumbie stories, which are not as popular as they were until the mid-1960s, but because they are known as a matter of fact to have been active features of the Traditional St. Martin culture they are indicative of our African origins, influences and survivals. The African influences, however transformed or transforming, are imprinted in what the scholar Rex Nettleford identified as a “cross-fertilization” process relative to European, Asian, and Amerindian features and influences in the development of the Caribbean nations. An example in St. Martin of an African “survival” would be the sparse number of families with remnants of Oral Tradition stories about an Ashanti ancestor, or a great great grandmother from the Guinea area; or just having the specific knowledge that a great great grand father who is buried on succession land in French Quarter, came “from Africa” – but not knowing what specific part or people of Africa. I like to say that we lost our old African nation but gained a continent through

⁸⁵⁵ Badejo, Fabian Adekunle. *Salted Tongues*. *Cit.* 25.

historical, cultural and political interpretations of, for example, the ideas and solidarity practices of pan-Africanism.⁸⁵⁶

An interesting reference to this African origin of St. Martin's ponum was expressed also in *The Daily Herald* article of 5 August 2009, in an article on Jeannette Reiph-Barrington. Her family were gathering in St. Martin, from both parts of the island, and from other Caribbean islands, the US and Europe for their first family reunion: "Jeannette's mother was Josephine Mimi Barrington, remembered by her daughter as a popular Ponum dancer of the 19th century (...) Josephine was born in St. Martin around the mid 1800s and her mother "Sey Sarah" was brought to St. Martin from Africa during the unholy period of slavery."⁸⁵⁷

XI.iv. Sekou's political fight: his aesthetic theory of the village chiefs and the maroons

Whether Sekou's fight for political independence is just another dream – maybe even a love dream, the love for his nation – or a smouldering torch which has kept alive and re-kindled his poetical work up to today, is yet to be proved, since the island of St. Martin is still politically divided into two parts: the southern portion is part of the Netherland Antilles, while the northern portion is an overseas French COM (Collectivité d'outre-mer). One of Sekou's most uplifting poetic commitments is his political engagement, and the profession, by means of poetry, of political independence. This commitment goes back to his early poetic days when in *Moods for Isis* (1978) we find lines of verse like: "Soggy dreams every morning / Or find their beds wet / Or feel / salty rings around their eyes" ("Call Upon Triumph", *MI*, 11). This early collection is about political struggle and love and in it the poems are equipped with very strong drawings and pictures of different people, without an explanation as to who are where they are, faces without names. The poems hint at revolution and at struggle against poverty, capitalism, and imperialism, regardless of the third world country he is addressing, but making many references to Africa as in the poems, "Oh Afrikaland", "Azania...Zimbabwe...Namibia...come...", "Mohagony", "In Time", and "A Kwanza Poem". A few years later, in *For the Mighty Gods - An Offering* (1982),⁸⁵⁸ he would have addressed Africa again in a fight for political and social justice which is still going on: "Africanita", "A Song for Mozambique", "Shanikwa", "For Ngugi Wa Thiong'o", "What's on You Mind [*sic*]". In the introduction to this collection his then mentor, Amiri Baraka, wrote that Sekou's commitment is as treasured by the poet as a philosophical/religious faith could be by a Rastafari:

⁸⁵⁶ Cf. Interview with Lasana M. Sekou. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁸⁵⁷ "Reiph-Barrington family reunion set for Friday." *The Daily Herald* (5 Aug. 2009): 11. St. Martin. Personal communication with Sekou. E-mail. 7 Aug. 2009.

⁸⁵⁸ This collection divided into five sections in a Middle Passage-like journey: "Beginnings", "The Crossing", "The Diaspora", "Love Sutra", and "Revelation".

this is a poetry constructed from struggle, reflecting the awareness that is one constant of Black life (...) We also hear the Caribbean mode throughout. Lasana is from Aruba/St. Maarten. Often he comes to us as, or by way of, Natty Dread, checking things out from a Rasta hop, an I (eye) man, a seeker, committing himself to the mythopoetic integrity of Jah the real.⁸⁵⁹

But it was not until one year later, in 1983, that Sekou's political breakthrough made his way through the poems. This breakthrough was made in a political collection, which historically locates itself during the Grenadian Revolution, a political fact which was deeply felt by many Caribbean writers: Merle Collins, Abdul Malik, Dionne Brand, Kendel Hippolyte, Lasana Sekou, to name a few. Sekou's collection *Maroon Lives—A Tribute to Grenadian Freedom Fighters* is introduced by a list of fifty-one "US historical intervention/invasion of "neighbour" countries" in the Caribbean and South America between 1833 and 1973. This historical remark proves the anti-imperialist stand of the whole collection, especially addressed and dedicated to the so-called Maroon Fighters in the Grenada revolution. Noteworthy is Fergus's description of this collection is to be noted:

It is worth emphasizing that Sekou took special interest in the thwarting of Grenada Revolution in 1983 and in Bishop, its prime protagonist. From front to back cover, *Maroon Lives* is dedicated to that cause the author so passionately espoused. The success of this revolution would have been for him and opening skirmish and microcosm of a globalized liberation of oppressed people everywhere from under the iron heels of neoimperialists. His depth of disappointment and anger at its failure are expressed in the most damning and dismissive imagery and epithets of loathing in naming and shaming the forces of the invasion and their Caribbean accomplices. There is very little nicety of irony in his "execratory tone."⁸⁶⁰ In "War Dogs," they sup their "master's waste"; in "Drink Water Children," they are "dogs"; in "Maroon Lives," they are the "Babylonian whore"; and the colluding Caribbean states are "baying jackals." (*Sekou, ML, 4.*)⁸⁶¹

Sekou's aesthetics is one of aggregation of the whole Caribbean, with his references to the Guyanese politician and scholar Walter Rodney, the Jamaican activist poet Mikey Smith, the Brazilian runaway slaves, and, of course, the fighters for the revolution in Grenada, with its references to a discourse broadcast by Maurice Bishop in 1979 and to *The Washington Post's* report

⁸⁵⁹ Baraka, Amiri. "Introduction." 1980. *MG*. <n.p.>

⁸⁶⁰ This portion of the quotation is also cited by Fabian A. Badejo in "Revolution as Poetic Inspiration: Grenada in Maroon Lives by Lasana Sekou." *Caribbean Studies Association Conference*. St. Kitts, 1984. 2.

⁸⁶¹ Fergus, Howard A. *Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou*. *Cit.* 74.

of Bishop's release on 20 October 1983. There is also a poem written the day before the invasion of Grenada, "Continuum", which includes an allusion to Bishop's *New Jewel Movement*:

broken jewels
Bloodied here
By the hand of executioners (...)
And the imperial dogs
With the gunboats
And loathing license (...)
To make principle jewels
Casualties
On this first line of defense. (*ML*, 35)

In the poem "Maroon Lives" the engaged poet claims in a still Rastafarian tone: "Defy the Babylonian whore / And its wuthless minions / Defy the kontras / Who defile our land / Who trample / The triumphs of our revolution / With their base objectives" (*ML*, 11). Rastafarian principles are considered close to the political fighting commitment of the maroons, the runaway slaves, in the poem "For Walter Rodney".⁸⁶² In that poem Sekou addresses the Brazilian maroons, the "quilombos": "Oh, restate the quilimbos / Organize there / In the camps of Accabre" (*ML*, 24). In this poem Sekou inserts many expressions in Spanish and French, which are underlined to make them stand out. The Spanish expressions especially hint at resistance according to the inspiring principles of the Cuban revolution and the struggle for freedom.

His aesthetic stance and his claim for a Caribbean aesthetic were already in progress, but in 1986 in *Born Here* we find the poet sarcastically and bitterly questioning: "Ask the fucking CBI (Caribbean Bourgoise Intellectuals) / What they mean / That our Caribbean aint got no aesthetics?" ("On Caribbean Aesthetics", *BH*, 145) appealing to a "season for recall and renewal" after one of his poetic inspirers: "Brathwaite, the one we call Kamau / Him say / It is time for ceremonies / It is time for rituals / It is time for Love / It is time for a Season of Remembrance / A Season for Recall and Renewal" (*BH*, 146). Badejo underlined Brathwaite's influence on *Nativity* (1988), where the hint at a silent maroon fight was still going on, and in which the peculiar employment of punctuation shapes his visual poetic layout with closed brackets, dots linking words and words cut into two different lines:

The evidence of this [linguistic, *NbR*] continuum and Brathwaite's influence are very obvious, for example, in the young St. Martin poet, Lasana M. Sekou's work, especially in "Nativity," a long, epic performance poem, in which he writes:

⁸⁶² Rodney was a Guyanese pan-Africanist who was assassinated for his pan-Africanism, his commitment to the poor people, and his anti-imperialist thought. Martin Carter also wrote a poem titled "For Walter Rodney."

*Kamau-an-found beats in warriorsilence
mek night march through cosmic cadenza
. (who feels it knows it. keeps ac-
counting. We Keeper of counts...⁸⁶³*

Also Andrew Shaw made a point about Sekou's peculiar use of punctuation and of capital letters:

Sekou's interesting utilization of punctuation and capitalization (or lack thereof) certainly contributes to the eccentric nature of his writing. His almost exclusive use of lowercase font creates a level of visual uniformity that while disconcerting in some respects, also gives a sense of cohesion to the poems.⁸⁶⁴

One year after *Nativity*, in 1989 Daniella Jeffry understood that in the short story "Love Songs Make You Cry":

The hope for a future based on Self-Determination and an assertive S'maatin/Caribbean cultural identity is expressed in the words of the young man in "Love Songs Make You Cry" who was conscious that the French/Dutch colonial barriers, as well as any form of neo-colonialism must drop: "Do I look like a European? I was born here so how could I be French or Dutch."⁸⁶⁵

Actually, the protagonist of the short story says "As for Independence it got to come, even though most of our leaders 'fraid an' dey discouraging the people dem; making dem believe that we can't take care of ourselves and run this country better." She shook her head in agreement, "Verdad."⁸⁶⁶

Ten years later, in 1999, Sekou claimed in *Big Up*, the essay in which he questioned the political identity of St. Martin as a colony, territory, or partner of the Dutch Kingdom, "Political independence remains the time-tested, unavoidable and necessary first step to the true and widest possible social and material development for the individual and democracy and prosperity for the nation."⁸⁶⁷ Following this essay in the same booklet there is the poem "The Cubs Are in the Field", a political and inspirational poem, which also makes inferences to St. Martin's literary and cultural artists who nurture the land:

⁸⁶³ Badejo, Fabian Adenkule. "Introduction." Brathwaite, Kamau. *Words Need Love Too*. St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, 2000. xix.

⁸⁶⁴ Shaw, Andrew E. "Book Reviews to Kei Miller, *Kingdom of Empty Bellies* and Lasana M. Sekou, *37 Poems*". *Cit.* 110.

⁸⁶⁵ Jeffry, Daniella. "Introduction." Sekou, Lasana M. *Love Songs Make You Cry*. *Cit.* xi.

⁸⁶⁶ Sekou, Lasana M. "Love Songs Make You Cry." *Ibid.* 87.

⁸⁶⁷ Sekou, Lasana M. *Big Up. St Martin Essay & Poem. Colony, Territory, or Partner? "The Cubs Are in the Field"*. Philipsburg, St. Martin: House of Nehesi Publishers, 1999. 9-10.

telling tales from the great salt pond
 showering in rainy seasons
 tuning the sweet salt of songs
 ehm...ehm...ehm...
 okay, esther
 okay, debbie
 okay, miguel
 okay, vanessa
 okay, angelo
 okay, jean baptiste
 okay, dominga
 okay, priya
 okay, wang cheung
 okay, kwame...
 the cubs are in the field (“The Cubs Are in the Field”, *BU*, 21-2)

Here Sekou is probably referring to St. Martin’s poets and artists Esther Gumbs (poet), Drisana Deborah Jack (poet and artist), or Angelo Rombley (digital artist who mixed the music for Sekou’s first Audio CD *The Salt Reaper – selected poems from the flats* and cut the video for “Casualties”),⁸⁶⁸ and others, and metaphorises their presence on St. Martin as cubs in the field of arts and poetry, so that they could transform the salty taste of historical ravages into a sweet national melody, like the ponum song of which the islanders are so proud. In his list of names Sekou tries to assimilate all the races and people of different Caribbean heritages in St. Martin: French, Spanish, Chinese, African. He continues by saying “try they will, to maraud thy birthright of sweet land. / but you are the cubs in the field / the long time is your catacomb lair / your ticket of maroon massif / forge & refuge for our restless rage / washes the wanna-be weave from the hair / of runaways to the field” (23).⁸⁶⁹

Another element found in “The Cubs Are in the Field” is that of the maroon: “been up the hill / chiseling people’s text to tablets / been in the infernal hermit’s cave / pounding the pondering

⁸⁶⁸ Sekou, Lasana M. “CasualtiesFX3.” *Casualties Music Video from The Salt Reaper – poems from the flats*. by Angelo Rombley. Big Eye Opener Studios, 2009. 24 Aug. 2009 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIWWBMWPs7c>>.

⁸⁶⁹ The Belizean poet Adele Ramos-Dely shows a similar concern and affection for her native land when she describes herself as one ‘cub’ in the land’s lap. In “Poets Healing Belize” she asserted: “No matter how far I’ve travelled / America, Jamaica or Asia (...) / For she who nursed me from the crib (...) / Defending her cubs / I AM HER CUB / And she fights for me (...) / What Belize needs right now / Is to rediscover her soul / And SHE IS rediscovering her soul / Through poetry”. Ramos-Dely, Adele. “Poets Healing Belize.” *Black Orchid*. in *Belizean Poets Society. Lyrically Inspiring Belize*. 2005. 31 May 2009 <<http://www.freewebs.com/belizeanpoetsociety/poetry.htm>>. Cf. the Belizean poet Abraham Ramos’s “The Carib Sailors”: “eighteen twenty three / One the nineteenth of November / When our love ones settled here / We must hold this land forever” (Cf. Ramos, Abraham. “The Carib Sailors.” *BellyFull e-Newsletter, the Jewel’s poetic vizez. New Anthology of Poetry*. 2005. 30 June 2009 <<http://www.freewebs.com/bellyfull/november2006.htm>>.) and Adele Ramos-Daly’s “Black Orchid”: “We settled / In 1823 / Bringing with us / A vibrant culture / The boom of the drums / Sending a message / Loud and strong / That we have arrived (...) / Maracas’ gleefully announcing / Chülühadiwa / Chülühadiwa / Chülühadiwa” (Cf. Ramos-Daly, Adele. “Chülühadiwa (We’ve Arrived).” *Black Orchid*. *WAPS. Belize Writers and Poets Society*. Founded 2007. 4 Aug. 2009. <[http://www.belizeanwaps.org/html/index.php?action=view&id=12&module=poemmodule&src=%40random48b32681f0ba4](http://www.belizeanwaps.org/html/index.php?action=view&id=12&module=poemmodule&src=%40random48b32681f0ba4>)>.)

truth to word up (...) / been recruiting in the region of unbelievers.” (19). Maybe here Sekou is talking about recruiting maroons to fight for “the promise[d, *NbR*] land that even now / is being worded to new matter” (20); “long time since brothers & sisters & fathers & mothers / been toiling home yards / & / maroon miles to go” (21). “‘The cubs are in the field’ is predominantly about labor and here, too, Sekou uses the sexual imagery and graphically so.”⁸⁷⁰

Less than ten years after *Quimbé* (1991), the maroon theme still “haunts” Sekou’s texts, as with “preacherman”:

to mash up this nation
wid all dem who still fear african liberation day
at the hands of maroons and genius (...)
who are these people
who kept slaves on their knees in church
on emancipation day in 1800&something
while maroons went pelting over border (*Q*, 32).

In “maroon nation”, also from *Quimbé*, the range of the political address has become international, with references to Haïti, Argentina, Jamaica, and the US, but most of all to his theory of the village chiefs and the maroons. The poem goes like this:

Caribbean manhood
is maroon
it’s not noreiga [*Noriega?*, *NbR*]
nothing like argentinian generals (...)
Caribbean manhood
is nothing like ton’ton macoutes (...)
when *imperialista* come down from ill *norte* (...)
Caribbean manhood
is not constructed in caribbean schools
'causin it is maroon
and offends babylon system (...)
because it belongs to runaways
who can’t be controlled by whips
and petty village chiefs who always catching cold
from a fart of wind blown from afar
where they believe better always come from
so da’s woi so much ah we always so sicky sicky (...)
Caribbean manhood
is cimarron family is marronage nation is maroon colored (...)
see how maroon caribbean manhood is out there (...)
warriors down from the hills
battling your roof from dusk to dawn
to disturb your slavery
make you grow up to damn well know

⁸⁷⁰ Fergus, Howard A. *Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou*. *Cit.* 54.

what is going on to save your life (*Q*, 83-5)

In this politically pregnant poem he is questioning the warrior nature of the Caribbean people, inciting to fight and not always consider what comes from outside as better than their own indigenous things. This is evident in the line “when *imperialista* come down from ill *norte*” where the poet is actually criticizing the imperialistic politics of the USA. Not to be missed is the reference to “ill *norte*”, which is not to be taken purely with “el norte”, “the North”, but presents a damning pun with “ill” and the village chiefs catching colds. This could be taken as a covert critique of the Imperialists coming from North, the US in the case being located geographically to the north of the Caribbean. In the poem maroons are depicted as heroes who can also be compared to Rastafarians because their system “offends Babylon system”. But untameable maroons cannot be stopped or controlled by the whips, since they are “runaways”. The maroons⁸⁷¹ were several different groups but they can be considered as one big “family” or “resistance nation” (my definition), so that the “Caribbean manhood” becomes a “maroon Caribbean nation” of indefatigable warriors, completely different from the cruel behaviour of Noriega, the military leader of Panama, or the Haitian *tonton macoutes*, the paramilitary body which served the notorious dictator Papa Doc (François Duvalier). They are going to teach the rules of survival, so that “you grow up to damn well know”, more than “Caribbean schools” do.

On the other hand, the village chiefs are described as “petty” and always paying attention to what happens outside of their “village”: Sekou seems to criticize the tendency of Caribbean politicians and heads of state to be xenophiles and “believe better always come from” abroad. The poet is extremely sarcastic in his use of expressions and to render the criticism in a more colourful way he employs Creole “so da’s woi so much ah we always so sicky sicky” (“so that is why so many of us are always so out of the unhealthy”, my translation).

In my interview with Sekou he spoke *en passant* about an aesthetic idea of the slave plantation, the maroons, and the post-emancipation or traditional village chief in relation to contemporary Caribbean politics or political society. Sekou suggests that the Caribbean contemporary political society could be considered as evolving out of but yet related to a sort of historical translation of what he calls “the unholy slave period” and the post-emancipation period:

During the slave period the plantation system included the enslaved people that worked the field and mines, the house slaves, and the slave-owning plantocracy. Apart from the plantation during this period were the maroons (...) Pressed to the bottom rung of the plantation by the slave owners were the brutally exploited enslaved African majority with its hierarchy of

⁸⁷¹ French *marrons*, Spanish *cimarrónes*, Brazilian *quilombos*.

‘internal’ leadership (*griots*, medicine men and women, culture bearers). The rung cast above the field slaves were the house slaves. (...) The absolute and oppressive ruling class of the plantation system was the wealthy plantocracy, headed significantly by the European slave masters. (...) The post-emancipation or traditional Caribbean societies maintained and even saw reinforced features of the plantation society – especially relative to racial and class hierarchies. George Lamming said that “to truly understand the Caribbean people it is essential to understand the dynamism of Race and Class in the region.” Within the post-slavery political society I point generally to the new ruling elites (...), as replacing but not changing entirely what Edward Said would call ‘the structures of attitude’ (*Culture and Imperialism*) of the plantocracy (...) The new house slaves are those who defend uncompromisingly the new elites (...) The masses of the people, the working classes (...) remain for the most part at the bottom rung of the new dispensation. Fundamental to and at times in the leadership of the ongoing historical transformation of Caribbean societies (...) have been revolutions and revolutionary activities (e.g. Haiti, Cuba, Garveyism, Rastafari as translations of maroon traditions); land reform, labor and independence movements; socio-cultural renaissance and activities (e.g. *Negritude*, *Indigisme*, Hosay as a cultural importance to entire nation of Trinidad & Tobago, carnival); cultural survivals (e.g. foods; medicines; philosophies; dance, song, music and religious forms), deconstruction and reconstruction (e.g. new scholarship perspectives; resiliency, popular and educational uses of Creole languages); political and educational empowerment; and socio-economic developments. These aspects have all in varying degrees and kind been propelling the region beyond the plantation base structure, its inherited hierarchies, beyond colonial legacies (...) In the modern Caribbean it should be made clear too that the activist leadership and support of change for better societies may come from throughout the political society, from throughout the whole social structure, including significantly from the working people.⁸⁷²

⁸⁷² I would like to thank Lasana Sekou for sharing with me these observations. Personal communication with the poet. May 2008. E-mail. 16 Jan. 2010. The full version of his thoughts and analysis is as follows: “During the slave period the plantation system included the enslaved people that worked the field and mines, the house slaves, and the slave-owning plantocracy. Apart from the plantation during this period were the maroons, the Blacks that ran away from slavery or that were born free in marronage. The maroons set up and defended their own independent communities and in some instances nations, in what was called “inhospitable” forested interiors, and in swamplands, rocky bays and “inaccessible” mountains. Pressed to the bottom rung of the plantation by the slave owners were the brutally exploited enslaved African majority with its hierarchy of ‘internal’ leadership (*griots*, medicine men and women, culture bearers). The rung cast above the field slaves were the house slaves. The house slaves were predominantly loyal to the slave masters and worked in the masters’ mansion, cared for the masters and the masters’ family and maintained the house. A number of the house slaves were the offspring of rape of female slaves by slave owners. Among the house slaves were those who were known or suspected to be traitorous to the activities of the field slaves such as planning to run away, starting an insurrection, sabotaging plantation operations, and engaging in African cultural dances, songs, language usage, and social and religious ceremonies. The absolute and oppressive ruling class of the plantation system was the wealthy plantocracy, headed significantly by the European slave masters. At the top rung of the plantation, the slave owners assumed the power of life and death over the enslaved people that were held captive as ‘property’ of the slave owners. The post-emancipation or traditional Caribbean societies maintained and even saw reinforced features of the plantation society—especially relative to racial and class hierarchies. George Lamming said that “to truly understand the Caribbean people it is essential to understand the dynamism of Race and Class in the region.” Within the post-slavery political society I point generally to the new ruling elites (including the undisputed “village chief,” who may have been a local politician during the post emancipation period, wealthy estate owners, major business owners, politicians, government administrators, media, church, court and security principals), as replacing but not changing entirely what Edward Said would call ‘the structures of attitude’ (*Culture and Imperialism*) of the plantocracy – even

Sekou also mentioned to me that he shares views about the negative aspects of Caribbean politics with the Barbadian writer and thinker George Lamming, who inspires him tremendously. They both criticise the insular views of Caribbean politicians while drawing inspiration from José Martí's essay "Our America" ("Nuestra América", 1891). In that essay the Cuban thinker tries to awaken the Latin American leaders not to consider their nations as an entire world, but to be wary of the super-power of other bigger nations, such as the US, which might end up destroying the peculiarities of nations and cultures. Martí's view was undoubtedly anti-imperialist and both Lamming and Sekou were inspired by this powerful metaphor of the villager; in Lamming's words:

The villager fondly believes that the world is contained in his village and he thinks the universal order good if he can be mayor, humiliate the rival who stole his sweetheart, or add the savings in his sock. (..)
Martí's Village of the nineteenth century has now become a very sophisticated modern design, supervised largely – though not wholly – by an essential village mentality.⁸⁷³

In 2005, two important collections by Sekou were published, *37 Poems* and *The Salt Reaper* (the second printing, following its 2004 publication). In *37 Poems* critics, like Shaw, recognised in it a poetical and political commitment in favour of independence:

Sekou (...) has become a forceful voice campaigning for independence. Most of the collection is in free verse, and although the book's appeal is rhythmical, at times lines are somewhat obscure. Sekou is known for his performance poetry and perhaps his seemingly denser poems fall more lightly on the ears than on the eyes.

when the racial features or make up of the main actors or agents may change. The fundamental life-line link, subordination to European colonialism and engagement of neocolonialism cast the new elites arguably in line with the slave-owning class or structure of the previous period. The new house slaves are those who defend uncompromisingly the new elites and at times have been or are the frontline repressive agents of any sign of meaningful discontent, cultural assertion – especially of the Black identity, and movements or uprisings for fundamental structural changes by the mass of people. The masses of the people, the working classes, often exploited and certainly struggling against exploitation and the marginalization of their reality remain for the most part at the bottom rung of the new dispensation. Fundamental to and at times in the leadership of the ongoing historical transformation of Caribbean societies beyond the plantocracy and its manifestations beyond the unholy period have been revolutions and revolutionary activities (e.g. Haiti, Cuba, Garveyism, Rastafari as translations of maroon traditions); land reform, labor and independence movements; socio-cultural renaissance and activities (e.g. Negritude, Indigisme, Hosay as a cultural importance to entire nation of Trinidad & Tobago, carnival); cultural survivals (e.g. foods; medicines; philosophies; dance, song, music and religious forms), deconstruction and reconstruction (e.g. new scholarship perspectives; resiliency, popular and educational uses of Creole languages); political and educational empowerment; and socio-economic developments. These aspects have all in varying degrees and kind been propelling the region beyond the plantation base structure, its inherited hierarchies, beyond colonial legacies and in defiance of imperial interventions toward the realization of greater democratic societies. In the modern Caribbean it should be made clear too that the activist leadership and support of change for better societies may come from throughout the political society, from throughout the whole social structure, including significantly from the working people.”

⁸⁷³ Lamming, George. Coming, Coming Home. Conversations II. Western Education and the Caribbean Intellectual. St. Martin. House of Nehesi Publishers. 1995; 2000. 34.

(...) In some of the poems Sekou pursues his agenda to advocate St. Martin's independence with translucent and crisp language (...) In some of his other poems that sustain similar themes, the language at times seems unduly vague⁸⁷⁴

However, I will mostly focus on *The Salt Reaper*. Apart from the poems about salt, this collection is also interesting because it heightens Sekou's political vision of the Caribbean and allows him to extend his aesthetic thought beyond the borders of St. Martin. In "No Love Poems" he commiserates the village chieflets attributing to them a snake-like double "fork-tongue":

So here we are
faceless agendas
fork-tongue village chieflets (...)
rising through earth-womb
of the Mothernation
becausein we are not permitted
to plant a new banner of colors
in the nipples of the future
to wave at the present for all to see
the many fine features of Our Oneness (*TSR*, 4).

These "chieflets" hinder people from manifesting their nationalism and from becoming an independent nation but also from achieving a regional integration, Caribbean unity, "Our Oneness".

In another poem, "Visit&Fellowship II", Sekou congregates the theme of fight and his "region" of fellowship appears to extend not only to the whole Caribbean but to the Americas as well. He opens the poem with the Rastafarian linguistic construct and symbol for "we" or unity forged from individual selves or parts, "i&i / in eternal seeding time" (*TSR*, 33), and follows up with major historical traits that explain the Caribbean and aspects of the history of the Americas: "from colón to cortez / from pizarro to puritans / from founding fathers to feeding empire / from the middle passage helled up hull of "Desire" / to Hollywood" (33). He aims at freedom and liberation: "*para sembrar luces de libertad*" (33), "to kindle fires of freedom" (my translation). A performance of this poem was given in Medellín, Colombia, in 2006, with the Spanish title of "Eterno tiempo de Siembra" ("Eternal Sowing Time", my translation). In the oral delivery of the poem to the crowd,⁸⁷⁵ Sekou adjusted the poem by repeating some lines many times. The repetition could serve to make the meaning of the lines better understood by the listeners. Other adjustments are made to the poem

⁸⁷⁴ Shaw, Andrew E. "Book Reviews to Kei Miller, Kingdom of Empty Bellies and Lasana M. Sekou, 37 Poems". *Cit.* 108-9.

⁸⁷⁵ Sekou, Lasana M. "Eterno Tiempo de Siembra." "Eterno Tiempo de Siembra." 2004. Memoria Audiovisual del Festival Internacional de Poesía de Medellín. Poetas de América. Online video. 10 Oct. 2009 <<http://www.festivaldepoesiademedellin.org/pub.php/es/Multimedia/sekou.htm>>.

during the recital by orally underlining words that are written in capital letters in the book version of the poem, such as “POWER” and “LOVE”, with a more firm pronunciation; and by whispering the final two words of the conclusive line “power to do right...or perish.” (34)

In his Medellín performance of “Visit&Fellowship II” Sekou chose to emphasize certain phrases by varying the tonal intensity of his voice, to enhance his delivery. Such is the case when he repeats – reminiscent of a Black American preacher tradition – , “we are a rake of fingers / huh”, to describe a bunch of people who are united and share the similar ideals. At the same time the description is employing a gardening tool to emphasize the contact that this people have with the earth, the land, “seeding what is budding over adolescence” (33), which is talking about the blooming of a society with its culture and literature, which has begun to flourish since not long ago. In the opening lines of the poem he wrote “in eternal seeding time (...) / in perennial quest of harvest / weave a hemisphere of holes” (33), as well as “the rejoicing of every orifice” (33), where the human efforts to improve their lives and their desire for excellence are destroying the planet’s environment. The hemisphere is both environmentally and historically in danger, and the democracy is obtained by the recommendable targets of “sweat&sacrifice&study&science” (33).

Another poem critical of politics and the abuse of power is “Casualties”, a poem about war and war victims, and also about Caribbean people abroad and abused, symbolized as “Abner Louimas” jailed and being abused. The poem is mostly about the abusive horrors to the prisoners-of-war of Abu Ghraib in Baghdad, Iraq, during the US-Iraq war, at Mazar-e-Sharif in Afghanistan, and the Gitmo Detention Camp, a part of Cuba occupied by the US. The poet is emphasizing the various locations around the world where many people were recently victimised by the system that was supposed to protect them, “in / carcerated a/new *in a carcél* [Spanish for “jail”, *NbR*]” (*TSR*, 110). This poem was interestingly enhanced by video and music by Angelo Rombley. The video shows victims of wars being killed by aeroplanes and much bloodsheds that have occurred needlessly around the world while the poet-reaper’s voice is heard in grim tones: “in war / love is still well. tattered battered shattered awake / justice never tires the knobkneed hunchbacked / googlieeyed (...) / peace is a/brew /a bitters cup to take.” (110). As it can be inferred from the storyboard I created below from Rombley’s video, unaware peasants become casualties of war and their bloodshed will nurture their fields. Fergus described Sekou as follows: “I agree that Sekou is a poet of war and that without condemnation. In these still colonial territories, art for art’s sake is a

luxury we cannot afford all the time. For Sekou poets are absolutely essential to life; they not only sing of beauty but also “curse the demons of evil”.⁸⁷⁶

Considering the importance he gives to music and to politics, if we had to define Sekou’s aesthetics, I argue we would have to consider the importance he gives to history, to language, and to style. Several critics have delineated this outline. Fergus understood that “History is that important in Sekou’s aesthetics”.⁸⁷⁷ In his review of Fergus’s critical analysis, Nowak wrote that “Sekou’s writing intertwines the lyric, labor, and political liberation in dynamic, aesthetically innovative, and transnational ways.”⁸⁷⁸ Badejo affirmed that, regardless of Brathwaite’s influence with his national language or Martí’s political thought, Sekou is innovative and his use of language is innovative and original:

Sekou’s distinctive style and idiom are modern if only because they are his own, rooted in contemporary circumstances, and his “nation language” is functional and fresh. Classical forms would hardly serve the purpose of this burdened prophet and may even be at variance with his worldview, if not his aesthetics.⁸⁷⁹

Badejo recognised the possible existence of a Caribbean aesthetics: “What Sekou has achieved is a personal aesthetic which is coherent, internally consistent, and effective as a subset of a Caribbean aesthetic.”⁸⁸⁰ Nettleford’s seminal observation about the “creolization” of the world opened up a



Sekou, Lasana M. “CasualtiesFX3.”
Casualties Music Video from The Salt Reaper – poems from the flats.
 By Angelo Rombley. Big Eye Opener Studios, 2009. YouTube. 24 Aug. 2009
 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JIWWBMWPs7c>>.

⁸⁷⁶ Fergus, Howard A. *Love Labor Liberation in Lasana Sekou*. *Cit.* 60.

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid.* 85.

⁸⁷⁸ Nowak, Mark. “Labor Love.” *Cit.*

⁸⁷⁹ Badejo, Fabian Adekunle. *Salted Tongues*. *Cit.* xi.

⁸⁸⁰ *Ibid.* xii.

new dimension of epistemology and aesthetics in a West Indian discourse, which will be followed up in the conclusion of my work: “The entire world is gone ‘creole’ – in the Caribbean sense of forging from the disparate elements of a ‘village-world’ new expressions challenging us all to a new ontology, a new cosmology and, by extension, a new epistemology.”⁸⁸¹

⁸⁸¹ Nettleford, Rex. “The Caribbean’s Creative Diversity: the Defining Point of the region’s History.” Lecture delivered by Prof. Rex Nettleford, Vice Chancellor, University of the West Indies. University of Guyana, Guyana. 21st March 2003. Press Release 54/2003. 4th April 2003.

Chapter XII

Joan Andrea Hutchinson (1963 –)

An Aesthetics of Performance

Joan Andrea Hutchinson is a Jamaican poet, performer, media personality and communicator, an actress, a radio and TV presenter, but also a motivational speaker. She has written *Meck Me Tell Yuh* (2004), *Inna Mi Heart* (2008), and *Kin Teet Kibba Heart Bun* (2009). She has also published CDs like *Wild About Jamaica* (2003) and *Jamaica Ridim and Ryme* (2003), and audio cassettes, as *Dat Bumpy Head Gal* (1997), *Jamaica Kin Teet* (1997), and *Everyting Jamaican* (1998). Hutchinson has often been compared to Louise Bennett, in whose footsteps she followed, and whom she thanks in *Meck Me Tell Yuh*⁸⁸² – published two years before Bennett’s death – for “ready advice and encouragement, and for the fount of wisdom and knowledge which she shares so freely.”⁸⁸³ In the preface to her first collection of poems, Mervyn Morris asserted that Hutchinson has an “astonishing facility in various Jamaican accents”,⁸⁸⁴ while Hubert Devonish keenly observed that, living in a successive historical period different from Jamaican dialect poets like Claude McKay or Louise Bennett, the issue of Jamaican as a “language” or a “ ‘dialect’ of English” still being questioned nowadays, and there being no normalised orthography for it, “Joan Andrea’s writing [is] another foundation stone in the construction of Jamaican as a formally written national language.”⁸⁸⁵ Even though she writes poems for many occasions such as ceremonies (“Kicking fi di Christmas”, “Today a Teachers Day”, “Secretary di Real Boss”, “Tenky Miss Lou Tenky”, or music “Reggae Boyz”, “Dance Hall Queen”), or natural phenomena as the hurricane (“Ivan Lef Mi Inna Grief”), hers are mainly sociological poems and include various devices of orality such as proverbs and typical features of storytelling.⁸⁸⁶

⁸⁸² Henceforward ‘*Meck Mi Tell Yuh*’ will be referred to with ‘*MMTY*’, and ‘*Inna Mi Heart*’ with ‘*IMH*’.

⁸⁸³ Hutchinson, Joan Andrea. “Author’s Acknowledgements.” *Meck Mi Tell Yuh*. Kingston: Joan Andrea Hutchinson, 2004.

⁸⁸⁴ Morris, Mervyn. “Preface I.” *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁵ Devonish, Hubert. “Preface II.” *Ibid.*

⁸⁸⁶ Cf. Colombres on the aesthetic aspect of proverbs: “los proverbios se revistan con la oscuridad del símbolo (...) Participan así, tanto o más que la misma poesía, de la naturaleza de lo poético.” Colombres, Adolfo. “Sobre el Proverbio.” *Oralidad: para el Rescate de la Tradición Oral de América Latina y el Caribe* 11 (2002): 51. La Habana, Cuba: Editorial UNESCO. Office Havana and Regional Bureau for Culture in Latin America and the Caribbean. Unesco Documents and Publications. 29 June 2008 <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/Ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?database=&lin=1&fut8=1&ll=1&gp=1&look=default&sc1=1&sc2=1&ref=http://www.google.it/search?hl=it%26q=unesco%2Bsobre%2Bel%2Bproverbio%2Badolfo%2Bcolombres%26meta=%26aq=f%26oq=&nl=1&req=2&au=Colombres,%20Adolfo>>. Cf. also “se lo emplea en situaciones nuevas, desactivando su vieja carga contestataria para afirmar sólo el aspecto estético” *Ibid.* 55.

XII.i. *Meck Mi Tell Yuh* (2004)

The title in Creole suggests that the tone of the collection is basically humorous and it leads one to think of the poet as a social commentator, using this formula of orality as a way to involve the reader in a social comment or storytelling. The collection is equipped with humorous sketches and cartoons which represent the content of the poems. The choice of an orthography was a matter of particular interest for Hutchinson, who was trained in Linguistics and decided to try popularizing Jamaican culture and language outside the Caribbean:

There is something I've been battling for years. I was trained with Cassidy, and the Linguistics Department, Language, Linguistics and Philosophy which wanted to produce this book for me wanted to produce it in Cassidy. I thought about it, I was a bit doubtful, but the truth is that every author wants to be read, it still seems that to the average person Cassidy is not taken seriously, it seems like an academic imposition; I felt that I wouldn't be that read, so I sort of used a bit of Cassidy and also a bit of the English orthography, that is why it is mixed.⁸⁸⁷

However, Hutchinson makes extensive use of Creole, as her inspirational figure, Louise Bennett, did. One of the most outstanding poems in her first collection is "Tenky Miss Lou, Tenky", "Tribute to Dr. The Honourable Louise Bennett Coverley O.J., O.M., M.B.E. (Miss Lou) in recognition of her work in making the Jamaican language more acceptable":⁸⁸⁸

An say tanks to Miss Lou (...)

An nuff nuff people wend ah laugh
An a call her pappy show (...)

Entime trouble teck wi a Miss Lou wen
Put wi good name pon di map
An wen dah push Jamaica heritage
An lawd, she wouldn stop

She say "Teck kin teet kibba heart bun" ["Use your laughter to cover the pain in your heart", my translation]
Wen times never so sweet
"Good luck will come as long as fowl
Dah scratch up dungle heap" ["Good luck will come as long as the chicken will search in the rubbish", my translation]

Nuff a dem went ink say she crazy
An nuff meck up dem face

⁸⁸⁷ Cf. Interview with the poet. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁸⁸⁸ Patricia Whittle's "The Honourable Louise Bennett." (*Mi Waan Fi Publish A Book, An Anthology of Jamaican Dialect Poems*. Arawak Publications: s.l., s.d.).

How Miss Lou a chat dis boogooyagga patwa
All over di place

For dem went ink patwa was bad English
Dem never know poor ting
Dem would tell dem pickney Nancy story
An folk song, dem wouldn sing

Now wi nuh shame fi chat wi own language
A wi dah tank yuh fi it Miss Lou
("Tenky Miss Lou, Tenky", *MMTY*, 20-1)

Hutchinson exalts Miss Lou and her work for the affirmation of a Jamaican heritage and for her contribution towards having the Jamaican language considered a "language" and to be studied academically.⁸⁸⁹ Bennett's power was in being epigrammatic and employing proverbs, in being very incisive and direct, and this represented a source of inspiration for Hutchinson, whose performances are like Bennett's: her voice is loud and clear, incisive, aphoristic; her images range from funny ("Madda Lumba"), to judgmental of social practices or behavior ("Dem Sweet Jamaica Pickney"), to vector of racial stereotypes ("Rapunzel"). In this poem the proverbs,⁸⁹⁰ the importance of language, the references to Africa, all hint at raising the low grade "boogooyagga patwa" from a state of inconsistency and degrade. As Hutchinson says in "Tenky Miss Lou Tenky": "Mi is a bawn Jamaican an mi proud proud proud" (*MMTY*, 20). The poet criticises the critics of Creole as "bad English" or low-grade dialect and of people who would tell "Anancy stories" to their children or sing folk songs. Nowadays, thanks to Miss Lou, for being a pacesetter among other poets, and thanks to many scholars who fought for Creole to acquire the status of "language", the Jamaican language is recognised and studied all over the world, is being used with pride, is being taught in universities and used in poetry, novels, songs and movies.

In "Madda Lumba" Hutchinson banter a character called "Madda Lumba", a supposed mambo or obeah woman "Caw fi mi obeah wuck",⁸⁹¹ who is more interested in publicizing her work on the internet and in making money than in helping people with her practices. In fact, this 'Mother' claims:

An mi a nuh nuh lickle pyaw pyaw obeah woman

⁸⁸⁹ Initially, Louise Bennett was not taken seriously but then Mervyn Morris started analysing her poems from an academic point of view and she was recognised internationally.

⁸⁹⁰ Such as "Teck kin teet kibba heart bun", "Use your laughter to cover the pain in your heart", or "Good luck will come as long as fowl / Dah scratch up dungle heap", "Good luck will come as long as the chicken will search in the rubbish". In both cases the translation from *patwa* into English is mine.

⁸⁹¹ Hutchinson, Joan Andrea. "Madda Lumba." *Meck Mi Tell Yuh. Cit.* 44.

Mi is very modernise
Travel first class, an have mi business kyard
Fully computerise

Yuh kyan reach mi pan lan phone, cellular, e-mail
Yuh does not haffi fret
An WWMadda Lumba dot com, mi dat
For mi on di internet⁸⁹²

The comic tone of the poem does not impinge on its truthfulness, or on a vivid description of one of today's possible developments of obeah.⁸⁹³

As regards stereotypes on social behavior, the short story "Rapunzel" is seminal. As the subtitle suggests: "Eavesdropping on a little girl in conversation with her doll reminds us of colonial retentions and issues of self-esteem". For instance the child is telling her daughter to prefer to get involved with a white man rather than to raise her social status:

Him have di right colour an him is nat a cabba cabba. Yuh woulda meck yuh mummy so proud becaw mi woulda get one nice brown grandawta wid tall hair. Yuh haffi learn fi put a lickle milk inna yuh cawfee. What did I said? ("Rapunzel", *MMTY*, 122).

Also the question of the hair is relevant, because it leads back to Hutchinson's own life experience:

Rapunzel, tideh tideh wi haffi have one lickle madda an dawta talk. Yuh is one pretty lickle girl, pretty an bright an full a nuff talent an kine an genkle like yuh madda, but a jus one ting weh wrong wid yuh...Yuh hair Rapunzel, yuh hair. After mi try so hard fi meck sure say mi fine one nice brown skin pretty hair husband. (...) Wah meck yuh couldn come out like adda pickeny foofa hair tall an nuh even haffi comb, dem dis flash it an galang? No mi nuh mean dreadlocks. (*MMTY*, 121)

In fact in the poem "Dat Bumpy Head Gyal" the poet remarks how "chacka chacka" hair (defined in the glossary as "untidy, lacking in order", 150) is a symbol of social prejudice and disgust, as she

⁸⁹² *Ibid.* 43.

⁸⁹³ This humorous approach to obeah and obeah practices reminds me of The Mighty Sparrow's "Obeah Wedding", in which the calypsonian dismantles many credences of obeah, like when he sang: "Obeah wedding bells don't chime / And you can't trap me / With necromancy" (The Mighty Sparrow. "Obeah Wedding." *Rhapsody. AMG. Portions of Album Content Provided by All Music Guide, LLC. 2001-2009 Listen.com, a Subsidiary of RealNetworks* 30 Apr. 2009 <<http://www.rhapsody.com/the-mighty-sparrow/volume-one/obeah-wedding/lyrics.html>>.); ironically he argues that the woman who is trying to work obeah on the singer is 'nasty', in the sense that all the paraphernalia she uses on him, going to an 'obeah man', has the only result to make her stink. As Rohlehr observes regarding the presence of obeah in calypsos and its picong tradition, Sparrow's "Obeah Wedding" is "the most comical expression", for as Rohlehr put it in it "the persona, having escaped the machinations of the sorceress, mocks her with triumphant abuse." Rohlehr, Gordon. *Calypso & Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*. Port of Spain, Trinidad: Gordon Rohlehr, 1990. 263.

provocatively wore Nubian Knots – or Chiney bumps – when she was hosting a national TV programme. In the interview she gave to me Hutchinson intently remarked how:

For a number of years I have been using this name “Dat Bumpyhead Gal” and in 1996 I appeared on a television program. I wore my hair in the hairstyle which in Jamaica is called Chiney bumps, while in Africa they call it Nubian knots, but in post-colonial societies it’s a no-no, it’s not accepted.⁸⁹⁴

In fact, the poem goes:

Tell mi say mi a one black, ugly, bumpyhead gyal / An mi tell yuh, mi feeling right (...) / Yuh say mi hairstyle disgustin, chacka chacka an tan bad / An fayva sinting out a street (...) / Caw ef it kinky, or straight, black or white (*MMTY*, 54).

Thus, given the problematic social background, the short story (“Rapunzel”) touches on social aesthetic problems like the stigma of the Black skin and of the “bumpy hair”, and still nowadays these social differences are felt in the Caribbean. In the story a girl speaks to her doll in a mother-daughter conversation about the dos and donts for her to respect before starting school. The girl-mother is complaining to the doll-daughter about her hair, and emphasizing the fact that she does not have to mix with “cabba cabba pickney” (*MMTY*, 121), with uneducated and rough children, but instead has to look for the company of the rich and cultivated ones, “An play wid di pickney dem foofa parents play golf an tennis” (*MMTY*, 122), and to speak with rich and Creole or mulatto boys, “Yuh haffi learn fi put a lickle milk inna yuh cawfee.” (*MMTY*, 122). A link between the use of language and the style, the fashion, could be found and this contributes to perpetuate social and historical stereotypes.⁸⁹⁵

A slightly bitter feminist tone emerges from poems like “Ef Ooman Shoulda Strike”, in a society of contestation as the Jamaican one, where people have really aggressive personalities, Hutchinson describes the fights for the recognition of some women rights in a sexist society like Jamaica:

Supposen all a wi ooman decide fi ban togedda (...)
So-so chaos would a bruck out, everybody a run

⁸⁹⁴ Cf. Interview with the poet. Appendix A in this thesis. “the name Bumpy Head Gal (...) sprang from the incident when the people called the TV station, angry about being confronted with this Afrocentric image, and called me lots of unkind names. One woman told the station operate ‘Teck dat dutty bumpy head gal off the TV.’ Then I adopted the name.” I would like to thank Joan Andrea for this observation. Personal communication with the poet. E-mail. 4 Oct. 2009.

⁸⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

Like say yuh chop off dem head
An bi time yuh quint di place lock dung tight
Jamaica would a dead (*MMTY*, 92).

“Blockroading”, on the other hand, is a poem in an ABCB rhyme scheme – like many English nursery rhymes – about a social aesthetic feature of Jamaican society: blocking the roads to protest against something that creates personal discontent or public unrest: ““J-O-S-T-E-S-S Justice an unfairity / A just becaw wi poor”” (*MMTY*, 39). The employment of proverbs and a humorous tone contribute to give the poem a sarcastic tone also when dealing with many Jamaicans’ eagerness to appear on TV: “An cock mout kill cock / Chicken merry hawk deh near / Lawd mi deh pan TV / Greetings to my lovin baby faada / An him tuff turbit girl Mairie” (*MMTY*, 39). The use of colourful expressions and verbal abuse is a landmark not only in Trinidadian language, but also in Jamaican language, as it is used in “Playground” by naughty girls against one another, so that the rigmarole tone is transposed to signify their verbal wickedness:

Get below and suck mi big toe
Picky picky fry head
Bumpy bumpy grater face
Gwaan a bush go dead
Chat to mi back but nuh to mi front (...)
Ratten teet ugly girl yuh still a wear
Yuh bredda tear up socks
An a kyarri yuh lunch inna newspaper
Hm, borrow my lunch box (*MMTY*, 72).

Also the short story “Dem Sweet Jamaica Pickney” is about the “naïve-tongued” Jamaican children who can spoil relationships between adults by saying truthful things that should be hidden: “Jamaican pickney...yuh haffi bite yuh tongue and remember say most time dem talk, dem a talk inna innocence.” (*MMTY*, 146). What emerges from Hutchinson’s poems is the cameo of a woman figure who is able to cope with everyday problems and to look for logical solutions, who does not intend to let a sexist society prevail on her, who has to deal with her work, with raising a child, who is aggressive but can also be supportive, sweet, and funny, in short the depiction of a stereotypical Jamaican ‘oman’.

XII.ii. *Inna Mi Heart* (2006)

Inna Mi Heart is a light romantic collection, less concerned with social problems and whose central theme revolves around love in all its facets: romantic love (“Mi nuh have nuh bag a lyrics fi fling down / Mi clueless bout romance / But wah mi really waan fi say to yuh is / Just gi mi an yuh

a chance”, “Gi Mi Di Bligh”, *IMH*, 11), the beginning or ending of a love story (“Dem say “Man nuh dead, nuh all him duppy” / But dis a more dan ghost / For mi just nah feel nuh love fi yuh”, “Mi Think It Best Mi Gwaan”, *IMH*, 47), Rasta love (“Rasta Love”: “Tell yuh madda say mi a di right man fi yuh / Will give yuh love sure an solid, from a heart pure an true / ell yuh family say, yuh / destined fi be mi queen (...) Di rasta love is not nuh game, a lion yuh alone kyan tame / A prophesy of eternity, Creator ordained”, “Rasta Love”, *IMH*, 19), etc. As she did in her first poetry collection, also here Hutchinson does not renounce the use of the Jamaican patwa, but instead she makes of it the centre of her work:

In my new book I’ll use the title *Inna Mi Heart*, it’s a book on Jamaican love poetry. Somebody said I had to use ‘Me’ and I said “No! I must be ‘M-i’, simply because within the context of Jamaican language the first singular possessive pronoun is ‘mi’ in the same way that in English is ‘my’. What I try to do is to standardise my work.⁸⁹⁶

These love poems are born out of an oral communication, the expression of one’s deepest feelings to somebody. Hutchinson wants to put her writing abilities to the use of people who are not able to express their emotions at best or to put on paper the devices of orality. In doing this, Hutchinson proves that Creole is a language because it is able to express feelings which manage to overcome the dichotomy patois / language and the belief that Creole could not be considered a proper language because of its inability to express the deepest feelings of a person. The linguist Susanne Mühleisen spoke of a “long tradition of what is sometimes referred to as “oral literature” in the Caribbean, i.e. literature that has its origin in oral communication”,⁸⁹⁷ and that is the tradition from which Hutchinson mainly draws inspiration and motivation, and which she transposes into performance.

XII.iii. An aesthetics of performance

Hutchinson’s ability in combining elements of the African oral tradition and contemporary techniques emerges from poems like “Madda Lumba”, where the obeah practice is metabolised into modern technology and the Creole discourse is respected in its devices. The poet is able to combine

⁸⁹⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁸⁹⁷ Mühleisen, Susanne. Creole Discourse. Exploring Prestige Formation and Change Across Caribbean English-Lexicon Creoles. Vol 24. Amsterdam; Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2002. 198-9.

the ambivalence of what Rodríguez defined “the literary-aesthetic values of the African folk tradition”⁸⁹⁸ and of what Breiner called an “aesthetic of performance”:⁸⁹⁹

enhances the appeal of an aesthetic of performance – already attractive because it draws on both the oral folk tradition (enriched with African associations), and the power of electronic media, and further because it elevates the West Indian voice over literary diction, asserting the force of presence in post-colonial culture of invisibility and erasure.⁹⁰⁰

Breiner also suggested that for those writers who are reverent towards orality and performance, like Hutchinson, the “delivery of the word” is almost a venerable act: “The upshot is the cultivation of an aesthetic of performance, which (among other things) has the virtue of circumventing the obstacles to publication.”⁹⁰¹ And in fact this observation balances Rodríguez’s inference on the national poetry in the Caribbean and its relationship to performance: “It is thus no accident that, in most Caribbean countries, the concept of contemporary national poetry is associated with the notion of a literature that is to be heard, and with the image of a recite who is able to attract a live audience”.⁹⁰² What might lead to compare Hutchinson to musical and poetical expressions such as dub poetry is the fact that dub was born in Jamaica and she might have easily absorbed the performative rhythms of this kind of literary expression; in the interview she gave to me she said: “But the thing is that dub works for standardised rhythm for the most part, but in my performance I’ve always said I don’t need the music, in my performances rhythms are naturally there in the way I present pieces”.⁹⁰³ Nonetheless, having endorsed Bennett’s influence in her poetry, it is very likely to find a connection between her poetic rhythms and music like ‘mento’, that led scholars to speak of a “mento aesthetics”.⁹⁰⁴ It would be even more interesting – and it would add a patemic value to

⁸⁹⁸ Rodríguez, Emilio Jorge. “Oral Tradition and Recent Caribbean Poetry”. Eds. Mariles Glaser, and Marion Pausch. Caribbean Writers/Les Auteurs Caribéens, Between Orality & Writing/entre l’Oralité et l’Écriture. Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994. 7.

⁸⁹⁹ “Louise Bennett’s poems and performances of those poems might be better described as *staging* the *performance* of a people’s voice.” DeCaires Narain, Denise. Contemporary Caribbean Women’s Poetry. Making Style. London; New York: Routledge, 2002. 56.

⁹⁰⁰ Breiner, Laurence A. An Introduction to West Indian Poetry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. 12.

⁹⁰¹ *Ibid.* 12.

⁹⁰² Rodríguez, Emilio Jorge. “Oral Tradition and Recent Caribbean Poetry.” *Cit.* 9. *Cf.* also “The poetry of these writers is not fashioned for passive enjoyment through reading. The language is vital in terms of its sonority, its rhythm, the auditory impact it can produce. (...) The aesthetic enjoyment of the oral reading involves a response to a multiplicity of sonar and rhythmic events.” *Ibid.* 5. and “Abraham Moles has said, of the poetic message, that “the aesthetic pleasure of the written or spoken language resides in and derives from the structure of the artist’s personal repertoire”” *Ibid.* 9.

⁹⁰³ *Cf.* Interview with the poet. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁹⁰⁴ “Some attempts have been made at identifying and defining a musical aesthetic in Jamaican popular music, and given the fact that Louise Bennett popularised and drew from some popular musical forms such as mento (see CD) for her poetry, it could be interesting to point out the work which some scholars did at UWI, Mona Campus, in Kingston in the definition of “mento aesthetics” (Neely, Daniel T. “Calling All Singers, Musicians and Speechmakers:

the comparison – to compare Hutchinson’s poetry with calypso, given their common satirical influence and popular reach.

As Susanne Mühleisen put it, “‘oral literature’ and its elements of proverbs, jokes, tales, songs, rumour and gossip have become functional as sites of popular resistance, subverting the semiotic power of the written language (*cf.* J. D. Scott 1990).”⁹⁰⁵ This should be the privilege and the power of oral literature, and the multifunctionality of oral poetry – one of the oldest forms of expression in the Caribbean⁹⁰⁶ – and should allow us to see reactive criteria in the aesthetic of poetry: as Colombres said:

Con la tradició no sòlo sofre el aspecto semàntico, sino también el estético. Por lo común la poesía oral no se sustenta en la rima y el metro, sino en el ritmo, y los proverbios, a pesar de su brevedad, poseen un soplo rítmico, dado por su misma estructura.⁹⁰⁷

Therefore, in Hutchinson we find proverbs as poetry, poetry as performance, and orality as the privileged delivery to pass on the cultural and linguistic relics of the Jamaican patwa.

Mento Aesthetics and Jamaica’s Early Recording Industry.” Pioneering Icons of Jamaican Popular Music. Guest Editor: Clinton Hutton. Spec. issue of CQ, Caribbean Quarterly 53.4 (Dec. 2007): 1-15. University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica.), the phenomenon of sound systems and DJs (Hutton, Clinton. “Forging Identity And Community Through Aestheticism and Entertainment: The Sound System and The Rise of the DJ.” *Ibid.* 16-31.), and ska music, the precursor of rock steady and reggae.” Hutton, Clinton. “The Social and Aesthetic Roots and Identity of Ska: Interview with Garth White.” *Ibid.* 80-95.

⁹⁰⁵ Mühleisen, Susanne. Creole Discourse, Exploring Prestige Formation and Change across Caribbean English-Lexicon Creoles. *Cit.* 199.

⁹⁰⁶ “Este hacer de acuerdo con los costumbres y la tradición (...), este recordad de la forma más simple posible, aunque sin dañar la belleza de la literatura oral, ha sido una constante desde hace siglos en América Latina y el Caribe.” Caballero, Nersa. “La Oralidad, Parte Esencial de las Cultural de Resistencia Afroamericanas.” Oralidad: para el Rescate de la Tradición Oral de América Latina y el Caribe 11 (2002): 12-13. La Habana, Cuba: Editorial UNESCO. 9 Aug. 2008 <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/Ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?database=&lin=1&fut8=1&ll=1&gp=1&look=default&sc1=1&sc2=1&ref=http://www.google.it/search?hl=it%26q=unesco%2Bsobre%2Bel%2Bproverbio%2Badolfo%2Bcolombres%26meta=%26aq=f%26oq=&nl=1&req=2&au=Colombres,%20Adolfo>>.

⁹⁰⁷ Colombres, Adolfo. “Sobre el Proverbio.” *Cit.* 55.

Conclusion

Towards the definition of a West Indian “Creole” Aesthetics

“My aim here is to show that literature written in European languages in the Caribbean area constitute a regionally unified and coherent socioaesthetic corpus with its own identity.” (Silvio Torres-Saillant)⁹⁰⁸

My main task in this thesis was that of identifying – after the analysis of literary and non-literary texts by several West Indian poets – a “Creole” aesthetics. I often felt that my research could be a sort of a trail-blazer, because works of this kind on poetics or aesthetics might seem discouraging and the results questionable due to the complexity and the diversity of the different parts of the region. Édouard Glissant’s work on Poetics, *Discours Antillais*, was a breakthrough in Caribbean literature and criticism. And not many other works have dealt with a “Creole” aesthetics in West Indian poetry. Torres-Saillant’s *Caribbean Poetics* was, in a sense, a keystone work for Caribbean literary criticism but it narrowed down the field of study to three major authors, Kamau Brathwaite for the Anglophone Caribbean, René Depestre for the Francophone Caribbean, and Pedro Mir for the Hispanophone Caribbean. Nonetheless, the other languages and cultures (Amerindians, Chinese, Indians, also Dutch and Portuguese) were left aside to focus on the three main European colonial cultures: the English, the French, and the Spanish; many other works deal with the search for elements of a general “African” culture.

If we wanted to try to give a definition of a West Indian “Creole” aesthetics, we should start from explaining the terms involved. I chose the adjective “West Indian” instead of “Caribbean” or “Antillean” because – if we consider the employment of these in scholarly literature – they are sometimes used interchangeably by scholars and critics; as my title suggests, the term “West Indian” usually refers to the English-speaking or Anglophone Caribbean. Instead, the term “Caribbean”, deriving from the indigenous Carib group, is referred to the region as a whole; in fact we have the “Francophone or French Caribbean” and the “Hispanophone or Spanish Caribbean” (which is mainly Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic). Finally, the adjective “Antillean” has colonial retentions and goes back to the colonial period; it is used more in the description of the

⁹⁰⁸ Torres-Saillant, Silvio. *Caribbean Poetics. Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997. xi.

Dutch-speaking and Francophone islands, but its etymology is Portuguese: “Antilha”, which means “in front of”, became the Spanish “las Antillas” after Columbus’s voyage.⁹⁰⁹

The term “Creole” has always been controversial, because as a noun it was interchanged and mixed up with the concepts of “dialect”, “vernacular”, “bastard tongue” or – in the case of the West Indies – “bad English”.⁹¹⁰ Actually, if we followed the model of D.E.S. Maxwell with its distinction between settler colonies (such as the United States of America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand) and invaded colonies (such as India or African countries), we would realise that the colonial situation of the West Indies (as much as that of South Africa) is not contemplated.⁹¹¹ The recognition of Creole as a literary language has been a touchstone in the region’s development, a development which is not only literary, but also social, political, identitarian. Many of the poets studied, in fact, developed a socio-aesthetics, in that they committed their work to their people and to their issues, employing the artistic mean to problematize socio-cultural institutions and look for possible solutions. There is not just “art for art’s sake” in their work, but there is a whole historical past to deal with and the conditions of a region which is still considered, as a whole, part of the Third World.

As an adjective, instead, “Creole” refers to those historically, culturally, and linguistically mixed regions, populations and languages which were a result of the Caribbean colonisation. “Creole” are those societies born out of a clash and a blending. In the past LePage foretold a cultural and linguistic movement from a dominant French Creole linguistic situation to a catalyst English Creole one; in fact, as Taylor observed:

Le Page thinks that the islands (...) are moving or have moved from “a Creole French past” toward “a Creole English future.” (...) the creoles (or non-time creoles) of Barbados, Antigua, Jamaica, and British Honduras

⁹⁰⁹ I would like to thank Dr. Jeannette Allsopp, Prof. Earl McKenzie, Prof. Velma Pollard, and Prof. Kenneth Ramchand for sharing their insights on the different meanings of these terms and for confirming my understanding of them. Personal communications. E-mails. 29 Sept. 2009. 29 Sept. 2009. 30 Sept. 2009. 30 Sept. 2009.

⁹¹⁰ Laforest noted what follows: “The Creole has been defined by linguists in terms of a loss. Differently from Standard English, there is not the same use of the definite article; there is no copula; the voiceless interdental fricative is transformed into a stop occlusive; the ‘s’ disappears at the third person singular, the subject is often dropped; the past tenses are not marked by a desinence, the sound of vowels changes, and so on and so forth. This approach to Creole languages and the underlying contempt for the Creole-speaking people, led to the fact that they have often been deemed as “bastard tongues” or “pidgin”, even when their full-blown nature of languages was already evident.” My translation of “il creolo è stato definito dai linguisti in termini di perdita. A differenza dell’inglese standard non vi è lo stesso uso dell’articolo determinativo; non vi è la copula; la fricativa interdentale sorda e sonora si trasforma in una occlusiva sonora ‘d’ o in una fricativa sorda ‘f’; la ‘s’ scompare alla terza persona singolare, il soggetto spesso cade, i tempi passati non sono segnati da desinenze, cambia il suono delle vocali, e così via. Questo approccio alle lingue creole e il soggiacente disprezzo per le popolazioni che le parlano, ha fatto sì che spesso siano state definite ‘lingue bastarde’ oppure ‘pidgin’, anche quando la loro natura di vere e proprie lingue era ormai evidente.” Laforest, Marie-Hélène. La Magia delle Parole. Omeros di Derek Walcott. Napoli: Guida, 2007. 67.

⁹¹¹ Cf. Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. The Empire Writes Back, Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. 23-25.

appear to be in the process of reabsorption by English and to have the status of what David De Camp has called “post-creole continua.”⁹¹²

I also think that when we consider the West Indian linguistic fragmentation, and how languages developed in the region, we might find some clues on what the developments of aesthetics are and will be. As Roberts said: “Language is in part a universal human factor and in part a factor of place”.⁹¹³ And effectively language is what comes out of the choice of West Indian writers.

As Jean D’Costa observed, the type of language which evolved out of the average West Indian writer’s possibilities is one which keeps fluctuating consciously between one end of the continuum (the standard) and the other (the Creole), but that “consciously” means that the writer knows what he/she is doing and what type of audience he/she is addressing. Whenever a large audience is to be considered, the Creole has to be sacrificed to some extent, but it cannot be eschewed if the local flavour has to be rendered; in her words:

The West Indian writer operates within a polydialectal continuum with a creole base. His medium, written language, belongs to the sphere of standardised language which exerts a pressure within his own language community while embracing the wide audiences of international standard English (...). If the writer is to satisfy himself, his local audience and that wider audience, he must evolve a literary dialect which will meet the following: the demands for acceptability within and without his own community, and the pressure for authentic representation of the language culture of his own community.⁹¹⁴

But aesthetics encompasses many more *clivages* than pure linguistic choices. In fact, it is originally a philosophical subject, and here I will give a brief overview of the story of aesthetics in philosophy to demonstrate how the term evolved during the centuries.

⁹¹² Taylor, Douglas. Languages of the West Indies. Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977. 224-6.

⁹¹³ Roberts, Peter. The Roots of Caribbean Identity. Language, Race and Ecology. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge UP, 2007. 1.

⁹¹⁴ D’Costa, Jean. “The West Indian Novelist and Language: A Search for a Literary Medium.” Ed. Lawrence D. Carrington. Studies in Caribbean Language. St. Augustine, Trinidad: Society for Caribbean Linguistics, 1983. 252.

Philosophical paraphernalia to a Caribbean aesthetics

“The entire world is gone ‘creole’ -
in the Caribbean sense of forging
from the disparate elements of a
‘village-world’ new expressions
challenging us all to a new ontology,
a new cosmology and, by extension,
a new epistemology.”⁹¹⁵
(Rex Nettleford)

I started my thesis with a question: “Does a ‘Creole’ aesthetics in West Indian poetry exist?” As one starts approaching the subject of aesthetics, he/she has to deal with the fact that it is basically a philosophical subject. But the topic has been approached by scholars from different theoretical fields and they have enhanced it by making remarks which do not apply solely to philosophy. Ancient Greek philosophers like Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle dealt with the concepts of “Taste” and “Beauty”. Some philosophers linked the concept of “beautiful” to a “moral good”, like Socrates; Plato, for instance, thought that the recognition of the “beautiful” is linked to an idea in its immaterial, “pure” form. Humans can recognise the qualities of proportion, unity, and harmony in something beautiful and thus relate it to a “moral good”. Unfortunately for my discourse, Plato considered art as a perilous expression of imitation (of *mimesis*), a form which outdistances men from the perfection of the idea of beauty, and thus, in his judgment, poets – especially those expressing their ideas on social or political matters – had to be kept out of his ideal concept of “Republic”. On the other hand, Aristotle had a much higher consideration of poetry than Plato and he judged it important in the field of aesthetics. He spoke instead of “catharsis”, of purification, because the act of experiencing beauty can help to unblock emotions.

Apart from late Roman philosophers or Neo-Platonists, aesthetics was not much studied until as George Dickie observed: “About the middle of the century [18th c., *NbR*], the minor German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762) coined the term “aesthetics,” which in time became the name of the field.”⁹¹⁶ Differently from Aristotle, Baumgarten did not focus on the emotional part and considered aesthetics as purely rational. Another German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, pulled apart the concept of “aesthetic beauty” from the “Judgement of Taste”, and instead sustained that it is closer to nature. Nonetheless, Schelling returned to recognise a bond between the experience of “beauty” and emotions. Unlike Kant, Hegel linked beauty to the feelings

⁹¹⁵ Nettleford, Rex. “The Caribbean’s Creative Diversity: the Defining Point of the region’s History.” *Cit.*

⁹¹⁶ Dickie, George. *Introduction to Aesthetics. An Analytic Approach*. New York; Oxford: OUP, 1997. 9.

rather than to the intellect. Like Schelling though, Hegel did not link the concept of beautiful to nature as much as to art, and the art which he reputed to be the most prominent in the theory of the arts is poetry.

In the 18th century a bunch of German philosophers and intellectuals (like Winckelmann, Goethe, or Schiller) seemed to be the most influential on the topic, so much so that even French writers (like Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot) and English philosophers (like Hume, Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Ruskin, Hogarth and Burke)⁹¹⁷ were influenced by their thought. In Italy Benedetto Croce made a discrimination between prose and poetry in aesthetic terms: if we considered prose as a concept and poetry as expression, we could affirm that poetry can exist independently from prose, but not vice versa because an expression embodying no concept can exist, but a concept without expression cannot, and in fact for him a single line of poetry could be more beautiful than an entire novel.⁹¹⁸

In the 20th century Martin Heidegger investigated the *Origin of the Work of Art* while Jacques Derrida's philosophical views, by searching for an artistic "truth" or a "truth in the arts", somehow influenced a Post-Modernism aesthetics. The relevance of a study of a Creole aesthetics nowadays lies in the fact that, as the Jamaican scholar Rex Nettleford put it, "the entire world is gone 'creole'". But in the Caribbean area, even if European cultures had their major impact on the development of an indigenous aesthetics, we should not forget the relevance of African, Indian or Chinese communities. Different cultures developed different concepts of aesthetics. Indian culture and art consider aesthetics as a vector of enhancement for spirituality. Chinese philosophers, instead, speculated on aesthetics since ancient times and in 500 B.C. Confucius recognised the aesthetic relevance of poetry. Nonetheless, as Breiner observed: "Neither Indo-Caribbean nor Sino-Caribbean writing is likely to invest heavily in an aesthetic of performance, as Afro-Caribbean writing does".⁹¹⁹

⁹¹⁷ Dickie offered a summary of the theories of 'Taste' in the 18th c.:

"Shaftesbury the form of Beauty [derived from Plato, *NbR*]
Hutcheson uniformity in variety [different from Plato, *NbR*]
Burke a short list of qualities—smallness, smoothness, etc.
Hume a long list of qualities—uniformity, variety, luster of color, etc.
Alison a sign of a quality of mind
Kant the form of purpose". *Ibid.* 25.

⁹¹⁸ I would like to thank Prof. Anco Marzio Mutterle for this observation. Personal communication. 26th Nov. 2009.

⁹¹⁹ Breiner, Laurence A. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. *Cit.* 87.

The socio-aesthetics gains texture in a West Indian fine-grained poetic panoply

Today's West Indian aesthetics has to consider the influence of a strong European culture, but also of other cultural, linguistic, and philosophical influences. From the explanation of the terms involved in the formula, a West Indian Creole aesthetics would thus mean that the approach the poets chose has not only gravitated towards art or the concept of "Beauty" and "Taste", but also towards social issues, towards an ethical good, nature, death or even cultural problems. The gist of it would show both frictions and *embrayages*, as a creole culture entails some adjustments in the mechanism of blending, while the social function of a poet could be that of trying to make these elements flow more easily or of understanding why they are damaged and repair them with the powerful function of literature. That is why Plato was wrong in wanting to ban poets from an ideal state: their function could be more fundamental than expected, the socio-aesthetics of their poetry a mean to foil socio-political, cultural, religious, linguistic issues, and to let the voices of their people resound in unison.

The tools employed in my research, apart from primary works, have been either general or specific works on poetics, aesthetics, and literary criticism on West Indian literature by Caribbean writers and scholars as well as by foreign scholars. But when some critics – especially in the Anglo-Saxon academic world – use the concepts of "poetics" and "aesthetics" interchangeably, it could create some problems to a general understanding. In fact, according to Patke, Poetics and Aesthetics are strictly related, especially because the latter reconnects us to the "universals of experience", and because it dissects our emotions when we are in front of a work of art and are in the process of experiencing it; Patke believes that the Poetics of Caribbean history has to be broadened.⁹²⁰ However, poetry is aesthetically subjected to historical changes; as he observed:

in a world that is rapidly but unevenly globalizing, where and when certain artistic processes first occurred has a direct bearing on where they recur subsequently, whether as imitation, repetition, re-enactment, adaptation, transposition, extrapolation, or allusion. In that sense, art as process is historical, intertextual, and self-reflexive. The truly naïve or original artist is rare and atypical.⁹²¹

The function/s of poetry, or of poetic language are analysed by Poetics, as when a poet writes on rhyme, verse, lines, poetry, etc.; instead, the function/s of art, of literature and their implications with history, politics, or ideas are dealt with by Aesthetics, as when the same poet writes about

⁹²⁰ I would like to thank Prof. Rajeev S. Patke for the discussions which led to the interpretation of the above information. Personal communication with the scholar. 13 Mar. 2009.

⁹²¹ Patke, Rajeev S. "SENI 2004 as Process, Product, and Practice." AA.VV. *SENI: Singapore 2004, Art & the Contemporary*. 1 October-28 November 2004. Singapore: National Arts Council and National Heritage Board, Singapore Art Museum. 2004. 214.

nature, death, his view on socio-political issues, etc.⁹²² In the post-modern era the concept of “art” and “beautiful” changed (*cf.* among others Derrida, Foucault, Lacan), but the concept of aesthetics remains the same. In the post-colonial era it makes sense to talk about aesthetics. But we should remember that “post-modern” and “post-colonial” are labels, as much as “aesthetics” is. Thus in a work of art, as a poem is, this binomy of elements to consider is represented by the “Poetics” of an author and the “Aesthetics” of his/her art.

In 1925 Louis Morpeau identified a developing evolution in a unitarian and vivid Caribbean literary panoply:

This linguistic mosaic, in constant evolution towards more harmony, clarity, purity and finesse in the purely phonetic orthography and in pronunciation, will give birth to an extremely picturesque and vivid literature, but *above all an oral literature*.⁹²³

Glissant defined as a “convergence souterraine”⁹²⁴ in Caribbean literature what Brathwaite embedded in the formula “the unity is submarine”. He recognised as one of the common features of Caribbean language a “Baroque impudence” (“l’insolence baroque du langage”⁹²⁵); nevertheless, he attributed a reactive force to the “grotesque” Creole in Latin America and an “eccentricity of a void” (“flamboyance d’un vide”⁹²⁶) in his native Martinique. Recently instead, for the Francophone islands, Donatien-Yssa identified an “esthétique de la blé”, an aesthetics based on the sense of being stranded, on a type of “melancholy”.⁹²⁷ In his theory of the “natural” and “forced poetics”, Glissant – as much as Gordon Rohlehr did⁹²⁸ – asserted that the Caribbean artist becomes a “re-activator” of the collective memory, of the past, of those voids left by the colonisation period and filled by the slaves with whatever culture they brought with them from their African past, their roots, and the language that developed in the “vernacular” site of the sugar plantation. As he said: “The word of the Antillean artist does not come from the obsession to sing about its intimate being; this intimacy

⁹²² I would like to thank Prof. Armando Pajalich for this observation. Personal communication. 29 Sept. 2009.

⁹²³ My translation of “Cette mosaïque linguistique, en constant evolution vers plus d’harmonie, de clarté, de pureté et de finesse dans l’ortographe purement phonétique et dans la prononciation, donnera naissance à toute une littérature extrêmement pittoresque, vivante, image mais *surtout orale*” Morpeau, Louis. “La Muse Haïtienne d’Expression Créole.” *Anthologie d’un Siècle de Poésie Haïtienne 1817-1925*. Préface M. Fortunat Strowski. Paris: Bossard, 1925. 18.

⁹²⁴ Glissant, Édouard. *Le Discours Antillais*. *Cit.* 230.

⁹²⁵ *Ibid.* 128.

⁹²⁶ *Ibidem.*

⁹²⁷ *Cf.* Donatien-Yssa, Patricia. “Leroy Clarke: The Double Ritual of Poetic and Plastic Creation, a Way to Freedom / Leroy Clarke entre Poésie et Peinture, Chantre de la Spiritualité et de la Liberté.” *Cit.*

⁹²⁸ “The artist thus has to be “elaborately and expensively trained in the graces of the inheritance.” [...] The artist here becomes not isolato, but moderator, mediator, and medium, bridging the gap between psyche and society, and between the élite and the folk. [...] There is a third type of writer who sees his role as being purely social, and whose writing grows out of direct, and often disastrous contact with politics.” Rohlehr, Gordon. “A Carrion Time.” (1973) *My Strangled City and Other Essays*. *Cit.* 154.

is inseparable from the future of the community. [...] the artist becomes a re-activator”.⁹²⁹ This social task of poetry could also be spotted in Barthes’s words:

it is at the moment when the research comes to link the object to its discourse and to dispossess our knowledge through the light which it sheds on objects better than unknown: unexpected, it is in that moment that it becomes a genuine interlocution, a work for others, in one word: a social production.⁹³⁰

As Badejo maintained, in fact, one of the tasks of a poet is a social one, in which he/she can identify social issues and try to improve them:

The dialectic interplay between the text, the author, the society, and the critic must be one that unveils the inherent contradictions in our existential reality and point to possible solutions. Similarly, the criteria the critic uses in the analysis of the text must reflect a distinctively Caribbean aesthetics.⁹³¹

My analysis could be important for literary criticism because it sets out something that cannot be denied: my perception of a West Indian aesthetics is my own, and even if there are some scholars who might not agree with generalizations or if any weaknesses are found in my study, I still think it could be a useful tool for students of Caribbean literature to have an understanding of an overall production in the Anglophone Caribbean of a Creole aesthetics. This should not be confined to literary works written in the English language, because in English-based Creoles there are relics of French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, Bohjpuri, Chinese, Amerindian (mainly Carib and Taino) lexicon, together with African languages, which often provided also the grammatical basis from which Creole stemmed. In fact, Prof. Mervyn C. Alleyne in his comparative study of Atlantic Creoles affirmed that:

everywhere African forms of technology, political organization, clothes, left little or no trace in the new cultures of the New World, while everywhere religion, magic, music, superstition, forms of amusement of Africa survive either in a pure state or syncretized. In language the correlates may be considered to be the deep structure which is African-derived and persists, and the surface structure (or from a different point of view, the lower order

⁹²⁹ My translation of “La parole de l’artiste antillais ne provient donc pas de l’obsession de chanter son être intime; cet intime est inseparable du devenir de la communauté. [...] l’artiste deviant un réactif.” Glissant, Édouard. *Le Discours Antillais*. Cit. 759.

⁹³⁰ My translation “c’est d’ailleurs au moment où la recherche parvient à lier son objet à son discours et à déproprier notre savoir par la lumière qu’elle porte sur des objets mieux qu’inconnus : inattendus, c’est à ce moment-là qu’elle devient une véritable interlocution, un travail pour les autres, en un mot: une production sociale.” Barthes, Roland. “Jeunes Chercheurs.” *Communications*. Année 1972. *Persée. Revues Scientifiques* 19.19 (2005-2008): 5. Université Lumière Lyon 2: Ministère de l’Enseignement Supérieure et de la Recherche. 6 June 2009 <http://www.persee.fr/web/revues/home/prescript/article/comm_0588-8018_1972_num_19_1_1276>.

⁹³¹ Badejo, Fabian Adekunle. *Salted Tongues. Modern Literature in St. Martin*. Cit. 68.

elements) which is everywhere European-derived. Even within the lexicon which is generally European-derived, we may find that there are everywhere the same kinds of survivals of African words that belong to a semantic category that can be generally described as *private* in contrast with the broad semantic category of European-derived words that may be termed *public*.⁹³²

This observation is relevant to my study because it emphasises that points of contacts among different areas – cultural, social, and linguistic – are scientifically proven. In terms of a relevance in socio-aesthetics the poets chosen and the poems selected aim at looking for points of contact among different islands and territories of the region, and this is because of a general consensus in the perception of historical events and of its translation by poets and artists into different forms of art: the study aims not at analyzing poetry per se, but at looking for a common perception.⁹³³ This is why, the fact that my study is limited to the production in English does not prevent that a generalization could extend similar observations to the other linguistic regions, most of all because the samples chosen try to be as comprehensive as possible, not limiting the research to gender (male/female), or area (islands or mainland). But, linguistically speaking, we should also remember Albertazzi's words:

The language of the post-colonial writer is not English, French, Spanish or Portuguese anymore: it is an *other* language [my italics, *NbR*], which has structures of its own and its own vocabulary to express a reality that the West cannot express with words. To take the floor is to seize the power.⁹³⁴

And these words also link to a gap that Pajalich identified in the linguistic mechanism of colonial powers, and deletes the apparently bogus problem of some languages being considered “bastard” or “corrupted” in respect to others, for the standards which decide that a language should gain power stand in political rules, in which languages are pawns of the dominant colour on a chessboard:

the problem of language – and, thus, of the *double bind* – luckily proved, nowadays, to be a fake problem, pertaining to the demands of imposition on one hand of a standard, and on the other hand to a still assimilatory phase in relation to the colonial writers. (...) Then it is useless to make a distinction between major and minor languages, ruling and ruled language: it is only

⁹³² Alleyne, Mervyn C. “The Cultural Matrix of Creolization.” Ed. Dell Hymes. Pidginization and Creolization of Language. *Cit.* 176.

⁹³³ For a historical survey of the processes of creolization in Hispano-, Franco-, and Anglo-phone countries of the Caribbean, cf. Mintz, Sidney W. “The Socio-Historical Background to Pidginization and Creolization.” Ed. Dell Hymes. Pidginization and Creolization of Language. *Cit.* 481-496.

⁹³⁴ My translation of “La lingua dello scrittore postcoloniale non è più l’inglese, il francese, lo spagnolo o il portoghese: è una lingua altra, che ha strutture sue proprie e un suo vocabolario per esprimere una realtà che l’Occidente non ha parole per descrivere. Prendere la parola è prendere il potere.” Albertazzi, Silvia. Lo Sguardo dell’Altro. Le Letterature Postcoloniali. Roma: Carocci, 2000. 105.

the world's political situation – which aims at new hegemonies – which gives to some languages an imperialistic power in comparison to others.⁹³⁵

In trying to recognise a West Indian aesthetics Prof. Ramchand advised me to pay attention to the features I would have identified, because those same features, if my analysis was ostensible, would work as a clearing house to identify a broader concept of aesthetics, extended to other artistic and cultural expressions of the same people, in fact as Ramchand suggested:

It is more important to recognise the aesthetic than to attribute it to a particular place or person or time: this is the aesthetics I can construct out of the various expressions. And if your judgment is true, and there is a West Indian aesthetics, than you'd see it in paintings, you'd see it in the crafts and in the lifestyle, because an aesthetics is not something that is narrowly focused to one field, it is something that is part of the spirit of the age.⁹³⁶

Thus, the recognition of a West Indian aesthetics will help to identify some common traits in the poetry, culture, arts and crafts, lifestyle, painting of a whole society and to gain a groundbreaking outlook on the considered society, its literature and language.

In the next paragraph I will sum up the main aesthetic points that emerged from my research. The influence that wordsmiths like Walcott and Brathwaite had and still have on their own and on younger generations of poets is very much evident, and if we wanted to consider Brathwaite's 1971 essay "Art and Society" in which he identified three types of artists,⁹³⁷ we would divide the twelve poets studied as follows (but these generalisations are not meant to be fixed and immutable): a first group in the capacity of "social psyche" (as also suggested before by Glissant or Rohlehr) represented, for instance, by poets like Roach, St. John, Keane, Rudder, AJA, or Hutchinson; a second group in which we find a tentative fusion between the singular poetic "Self" and the plural of a society, represented, for instance, by poets like Clarke, or McKenzie; a third one in the role – similar to the first one – of voice which springs from social and political issues, represented, for instance, by poets like Carter, Collins, Hippolyte, or Sekou.

⁹³⁵ My translation of "il problema della lingua – e, quindi, del double bind [Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the linguistic double bind, cf. note 25, p. 28 with a reference to their *L'Anti-Oedipe*, *NBR*] – si è dimostrato, fortunatamente, oggi, un falso problema, inerente alle pretese di imposizione di uno standard, da un lato, e a una fase ancora assimilatoria da parte degli scrittori coloniali, dall'altro. (...) E' inutile allora distinguere lingue maggiori e lingue minori, lingua dominante e lingua dominata: è solo la situazione politica mondiale – mirante a nuove egemonie – che dà a certe lingue un potere imperialista in rapporto ad altre" Pajalich, Armando. "Le difficili affiliazioni della poesia sudafricana del Novecento: dalle radici europee al multiculturalismo." Filiazioni e Affiliazioni: (nel Testo Periferico Africano). Venezia: Supernova, 1995. 29-31.

⁹³⁶ Cf. Interview with Kenneth Ramchand. Appendix A in this thesis.

⁹³⁷ Cf. also footnote 76, p. 41 in the "Introduction".

Aesthetic flourishes and solos in a West Indian poetic ensemble

Poetry is a private institution and many poets used this to envision a personal deflation for feelings, for venting their frustrations and fears, or simply to express their musings on life and death (Roach).⁹³⁸ But more often in the case of mostly oral traditions like the Afro-Caribbean one, the voice of the poet becomes the collective expression of the folk, according to an aesthetics of community and orality (St. John). The inspirational pivot is often political and involved in social issues (Carter, Collins, Hippolyte, Sekou, Hutchinson), and it may change the balance in a relationship between a poet and his/her audience, as Breiner observed: “Ramchand (...) argues that if achievement of aesthetic independence end with the empowering of the poet, he remains in an almost literally dictatorial relation with his audience.”⁹³⁹ The search for a common aesthetics in the economy of poetic texts involves also tropes, craft and philosophy (McKenzie), religious expression (Clarke), or a cluster of features deriving from what Brathwaite defined “jazz aesthetics”, such as repetition, improvisation, and working in an “ensemble” (Keane, Rudder, AJA).

Breiner also reminded that in 1948 Blackman refrained from a search for categories in West Indian literature due to the lack of writers, and ushered the concept of “West Indian aesthetics”:

Peter Blackman (...) felt (...) that West Indian literature needed writers before it could afford the luxury of defining categories (...) and introduced the expression “West Indian aesthetic” for the self-definition their future work would make possible. In 1949 Henry Swanzy took up the same question and gave the same answer (...) Swanzy proposed a new touchstone for the emergence of a West Indian literature: the presence of a distinctive *language*, in which term he included not only idiom and rhythm, but also the climate of ideas and values that finds expression in a literature.⁹⁴⁰

Furthermore, he highlighted that one of the first projects related to poetry in the whole West Indies was A. J. Seymour’s Miniature Poets Series.⁹⁴¹

⁹³⁸ As Derrida put it: “There is no poem that does not stem from an incident, there is no poem which does not open as a wound, but there is also no poem which does not hurt. I would call ‘poem’ a silent enchantment, the voiceless wound that I want you to teach me by heart [*par coeur*].” My translation of “Non c’è poema senza incidente, non c’è poema che non si apra come una ferita, ma anche non c’è poema che non ferisca. Chiamerei poema un incanto silenzioso, la ferita afona che voglio che tu mi insegni a memoria [*par coeur*].” Derrida, Jacques, and Maurizio Ferraris. “L’Istrice. Che Cos’è la Poesia?” *Aut Aut* 235 (Jan.-Feb. 1990) Scandicci: La Nuova Italia. 123-4.

⁹³⁹ Breiner, Laurence A. “How to Behave on Paper: the Savacou Debate.” *Cit.* 8.

⁹⁴⁰ Breiner, Laurence A. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. *Cit.* 92. McMorris: “Laurence Breiner submitted a more systematic study of the ideas that shaped literary culture in the West Indies through the early 1990s: *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry* (1998) provides a history of aesthetic and other questions that poets addressed” McMorris, Mark. “Discrepant Affinities in Caribbean Poetry: Tradition and Demotic Modernism.” *Contemporary Literature* 47.3 (Fall 2006): 505-6.

⁹⁴¹ “Another of Seymour’s projects, the Miniature Poets Series, ushered in the 1950s with small collections by poets from throughout the region.” Breiner, Laurence A. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. *Cit.* 80. The Miniature

The poets chosen have many features in common, and it is often difficult to confine poets into a grid, for they resist such restrictions, but the following one could help us to sense poetic nuances and to delineate traits useful to look as an interpretative key. On the left there are the names of the poets studied, and for each of them I have tried to match the highlight. It is difficult to confine the poetic creativity and themes of each poet to a single feature, but some poets are most likely using, for instance, a traditional metre instead of an innovative one, in some of them the devices of orality are more outstanding than in others, and some themes are more infused in the poetic integument of some poets than in that of others.

	Metre					Orality					Themes				
	Traditional metre	Innovative metre	Importance of craft	Poetic innovations	Main British influence	Orality	Performance	Employment of Creole	Employment of SE	Employment of other languages	History	Nostalgia for origins	Politics	Nature	Death
Eric M. Roach	x		x		W.B. Yeats			(x)	x		x	x		x	x
Bruce St. John	x		x	x		x	x	x	x	x			x		
'Shake' Keane		x		x		x	x	x	(x)	x	x		x		x
Martin Carter	x		x		W.B. Yeats; P.B. Shelley			(x)	x		x		x		x
LeRoy Clarke		x		x		x		x	(x)					x	x
Earl McKenzie	x		x					(x)	x		x	x		x	x
Merle Collins	x		x			x	x	x	x		x		x	x	
Kendel Hippolyte	x		x	x	J. Keats	x	x	(x)	x	x		x	x	x	
David Rudder	x	x				x	x	x	x	x	x		x		
AJA		x		x		x	x	x	(x)				x		
L. M. Sekou	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x		x		
J. A. Hutchinson	x	x				x	x	x	x				x		

Poets Series was launched between 1951 and 1953: the poets included were the Guyanese Martin Carter, Wilson Harris, Ivan Van Sertima; the Jamaican Philip Sherlock; the Barbadian Frank Collymore; the Trinidadian Harold Telemaque.

The following grid, instead, just shows who the painters or the musicians are, and which poets are to be considered part of a literary “diaspora”; the last pigeonhole tries to suggest a possible definition for each poet’s aesthetics.

	Painter	Musician	Diaspora	Aesthetics
Eric M. Roach				Peasant Aesthetics
Bruce St. John				Folk Aesthetics
Shake Keane		x	x	Jazz Aesthetics
Martin Carter				Political Aesthetics
LeRoy Clarke	x			Visionary Aesthetics
Earl McKenzie	x			Tao Aesthetics
Merle Collins			x	Political Aesthetics
Kendel Hippolyte				Socio-Aesthetics
David Rudder		x	x	International Aesthetics
AJA		x		Socio-Aesthetics
Lasana M. Sekou				Political Aesthetics
Joan Andrea Hutchinson				Socio-Aesthetics

Roach moved from an aesthetics of his little island to an aesthetics of the islands, of the whole region. Moving from the English tradition of poetry, like that of the Irish Yeats, to write about his tiny country and to raise his people’s language, culture, and life to a “peasant aesthetics” (as Breiner suggested). For him poetry was much more of a private activity, in fact he sang the simple lives of Tobago, stressing out with national fervour that they were the real heroes. Roach rejected the choice of diaspora, the “windrush generation” and decided to “go back to Africa” by committing suicide. He mainly employed traditional rhythms and gave importance to the craft, but his employment of Creole was not strong, even though in a few instances his mastering of it would produce poems with local – almost folkloristic – flavour. In fact he rendered what he called the

“cadences of island patois” (*FR*, 82), re-creating what for Walcott was the West Indian tone. The perfection he looked for in the verse was fulfilled with the completion of the full circle: his death. And from his island the posthumous author could make considerations that extend to the whole region: from an “island aesthetics” to an “aesthetics of the islands”.

If Roach’s could be defined a “peasant aesthetics” (following in Breiner’s analysis), St. John’s could be read as a “folk aesthetics” mainly because his employment of Creole is much stronger than Roach’s and because he really depicted the life of Barbadian people creating a set of delightful cameos, with such landmarks of lifestyle and conversation topics as “cricket, kite-flying, and sex”. His is a socio-cultural aesthetics for, as a cultivated person, and as a lifetime teacher, he directed the spotlight onto education. His poetry is imbued with references to the classics, and this proves that his cultivated voice is employed by the poet to speak for and to his people, in fact he deals with popular topics as well: from politics to education, from local sports to human behaviour. His poetic creativity (neologisms, use of irony, etc.) is expressed in Creole and with a strong command of SE, so that he combined basilect and acrolect as he acknowledged the existence of a Caribbean creolization of races. St. John’s outlook was not just focused on his island, but open to the whole region.

Shake Keane’s poems are very interesting both for their variety in metre and form and for the use of a (fictional) St. Vincentian Creole. His voice was often both privately and publicly irreverent, and he played a lot with satire, irony, and nonsense, like St. John. Again like St. John he strongly employed Creole but his depiction of the St. Vincent folk often showed that his voice was that of an exile, of a Caribbean man of the diaspora who considered the Caribbean united from the perspective of an exile. His taste for improvisation, for voices working in ensemble, for a flourish of different sociolects and tonalities hinted at his professionalism as a jazz hornist, blending different voices and tones on the same page. In his socio-aesthetics, he criticised religion, history, politics, and used poetry as a tool to survive colonial domination, but also to infuse it with the exuberance of Carnival (Robber Talk, a tradition also present in Trinidad), with irony, with gossip, with colloquialism and proverbs – as also Hutchinson will do – and with calligrams – playing with words and images like Clarke or Sekou. His voice was cultivated as St. John’s, imbued with classic quotations and plurilinguist like Sekou’s poetry will be; also Sekou will share a performative rhythm with Keane’s poems. His jazz flourish will be shared by another jazz musician, the Barbadian AJA.

Like for the first three poets, Carter's was a very educated voice as well, but it was also the voice of a "political poet", somebody who fought for his country, Guyana, who assisted to political turnouts and assassinations, but chose not to leave and stay – like Roach. As in the case of Breiner with Roach, Al Craighton also recognised a strong influence of the Irish poet W.B. Yeats in Carter's work; but also P.B. Shelley was one of Carter's models, as he paid much attention to craft. His use of Creole was not as extended as the previous two authors', but, like in Walcott's poetry, the West Indian inflections can be heard in his verse at a closer reading.⁹⁴² Even though also Dutch relics are to be found in Guyana's Creole, given its colonial past, unlike the Aruban Sekou, Carter did not employ Dutch in his poems. His lines were often philosophical and political, hoping for freedom and unity in his country, and imbued with literary models of the past as Dante, or artistic contemporary mates as Stanley Greaves. In the search for a Caribbean unity Ileana Sanz spoke of "Circum-Caribbean", borrowing Lamming's claim for a "regionalization of consciousness".⁹⁴³ Even though Odile Ferly affirmed that: "A fundamental element of pan-Caribbean theory is the creolisation process, in which the role of the sea is considered essential. And if indeed 'the unity is submarine', then it may follow that the mainland [...] remains somehow foreign to Antillean thinkers.",⁹⁴⁴ this is not true in the case of Carter: even though Guyana is a huge land and much political turmoil happened in the country, its resonance was heard throughout the Caribbean islands. His complex aesthetics is at the same time political, sociological, artistic, and philosophical.

The Trinidadian poet/painter/Orisha priest LeRoy Clarke creates a poetry which is sociologically deep for its impact on the readers: despite its private references, his poetry is dense with provocative and strong content, crude images and passionate words which echo the call of the Orishas, the survival of African-derived religious practices in the contemporary Caribbean. As a painter, like McKenzie, his work is split and amplified at the same time between poetry and painting, so that his theory of the "Douens", the "people of the pavement" seems to follow in Carter's reference to Stanley Greaves's painting. In his poems Clarke is less concerned with craft than Roach's or Carter's but the poems convey hypnotic evocations, and as in the case of Roach, water becomes in his poetry a uterine element. In his sociological aesthetics, poetry becomes a

⁹⁴² Birbalsingh stated in his interview with Martin Carter that Brathwaite's "nation language" refers to "the vocabulary, rhythms, cadence and oral practices of creole". Carter, Martin. "Interview with Martin Carter." Ed. Frank Birbalsingh. *Cit.* 225.

⁹⁴³ Sanz, Ileana. "Early Groundings for a Circum-Caribbean Integrationist Thought." The Unity is Submarine. Monograph. Spec. issue of CQ, Caribbean Quarterly 55:1 (March 2009): 1-14. Ed. Veronica Salter. Mona, Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies. 12.

⁹⁴⁴ Ferly, Odile. "A Limited Caribbeanness? The Continental Caribbean as Visions of Hell in Alejo Carpentier's *El siglo de las luces* and Maryse Condé's *La vie scélérate*." The Unity is Submarine. Monograph. Spec. issue of CQ, Caribbean Quarterly 55:1 (Mar. 2009): 43-59. Ed. Veronica Salter. University of the West Indies, Mona, Kingston, Jamaica. 44.

locus of exploitation of the inner torments and a site of expression for his love for women and hope towards an improvement of socio-political issues, in fact he is often very harsh and critical in his crude language, a sort of Trinidadian *mamaguy*. The language is also highly metaphorical and – like Keane, McKenzie, or Hutchinson – he makes use of proverbs and oral devices.

As much as Roach, who was caught by the nature of his island, McKenzie observes nature in all its aspects, from a fly or a bug to an earthquake or a hurricane and reports life and death in his poetry. His use of Jamaican *patwa* is much more limited in respect to other poets, but not absent. McKenzie favours the use of Standard English and his metre is very structured and aptly crafted – like in the case of Roach and Carter. His competence in philosophy makes of him a sounding board for the reflection on aesthetics and as a teacher of philosophy in literature he is very much aware of West Indian poetry and existing criticism, both local and international. McKenzie's poetry becomes a site of a tentative reconciliation with the universe and not only of expression of his rich inner life. McKenzie is a poet like Clarke but his paintings are less abstract and more figurative than the Trinidadian painter's and from them a "chiaroscuro aesthetics" or "aesthetics of the Tao", of the opposites, is evoked.

Merle Collins employs her Grenadian Creole very often, especially when making use of traditions and literary formulas from Africa. Like Keane she is a diaspora poet, who now lives in the States. Her study and use of Creole is very conscious, and it allows her to hand down and faithfully describe her island and her people's language. As a political activist – and a political poet like Carter, Hippolyte or Sekou – since the times of the Grenadian Revolution, Collins has been involved in political turmoil and a climate of social unrest: she has always supported the poorest and weakest strata of society, for whom she speaks, tailoring her language to the message she wanted to convey and the people she wanted to address. As De Caires Narain observed that Collins's language was at times Marxist,⁹⁴⁵ we could remember Albertazzi's words on post-colonial (and militant) poetry:

the [post-colonial] poetry tries to turn to the people, to lose its elitist aura through an appeal to the traditional culture of the people itself, but mostly through «the questioning of the ruling uniqueness of the language». Post-colonial poetry turns out to be new, at last, mostly through the linguistic work: in the aggressive, wanted and, mostly militant distortion of the language of the colonizer.⁹⁴⁶

⁹⁴⁵ DeCaires Narain, Denise. *Contemporary Caribbean Women's Poetry*. *Cit.* 129.

⁹⁴⁶ My translation of "la poesia cerca di rivolgersi alla gente, al popolo, di perdere la propria aura elitaria attraverso il ricorso alla tradizione culturale del popolo stesso, ma soprattutto attraverso «la messa in discussione

Collins's in poetry could be defined as reflecting a "social aesthetics", as much as St. John's or Keane's. But her poetry oozes also with an "aesthetics of the extemporaneous", of the flickering certainties of the island life and of the solid African roots which are perpetrated in the orality, in the folkloric tales, in the use of Creole as a "secret language", and in the natural blending of English, French and Spanish Creole relics in the Grenadian Creole, a blending which I have compared to the cohabitation of the nutmeg and the macis in the same fruit (the nutmeg).

Kendel Hippolyte's language reveals the double nature of his linguistic St. Lucian inheritance: English and St. Lucian French patois are involved in a folkloric merry-go-round of tales, songs, urban and countryside noise which expresses the musicality of his literary inheritance – both African and European. In fact as Breiner noted:

The sort of poem that takes off from an encounter with objects of nature remains fairly common in the smaller, less developed islands, like St. Vincent, though even in St. Lucia poets of the generation after Walcott's tend to depict an urban scene.⁹⁴⁷

His poetic "undersound" reveals his coincidental affinity to the two telamons of West Indian poetry: Walcott and Brathwaite, both in a West Indian overtone interwoven into his lines and in a search for a Caribbean aesthetic "submarine unity". His employment of nursery rhymes echoes Keane's, as well as the creation of neologisms or the poetic inventiveness, as also in the case of St. John and Clarke. His are also cultivated references and he pays attention to craft, like Roach, Carter or McKenzie, as one of his models is the English poet Keats. His socio-aesthetics springs from his poetic palimpsest as is the case with Collins or Keane, and the references to multiple musical genres echo the poetic choices of Rudder.

David Rudder has been considered the new "king of calypso" in his homeland, Trinidad, and his calypsoes, whose lyrical poignancy allow us to read them as poems, extend their level of socio-aesthetic commitment from a local, to a regional, to an international level. Like Keane and Collins, he is an artist of the diaspora, living in Canada. Like Keane, or AJA, Rudder will lead us to look for a musical aesthetics. The three-fold nature of calypsoes locate them on a triple level of verbal, aural, and visual compositions. The themes he treats lead to think in his case of a socio-political

dell'unicità normativa della lingua». E' soprattutto nel lavoro linguistico che si rivela, da ultimo, la novità della poesia postcoloniale: nella deformazione aggressiva, voluta e, soprattutto militante, della lingua del colonizzatore." Albertazzi, Silvia. *Lo Sguardo dell'Altro. Le Letterature Postcoloniali*. *Cit.* 100.

⁹⁴⁷ Breiner, Laurence A. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. *Cit.* 135.

aesthetics, of a music and poetry which are not just based in his land but extended to the whole region, to all the Caribbeans of the diaspora, and the people of the Third World in general, like in the case of AJA. His cultivated references to the Bible or the classics echo St. John's or Sekou's. Rudder employs his native Trinidadian Creole inserting it with Spanish or French relics and the craft of his lyrics is more performance-oriented.

AJA is Barbadian like St. John and, like his master did, he employs Bajan Creole in his poetry, towards a "folk aesthetics", as in the case of St. John. AJA sustains the use of Creole and he searches for a Caribbean unity within his poetry. Owing to his commitment in social and public issues, and his work as a Spokesperson for Peace & Poverty Eradication for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean spokesperson in the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), so, like in Rudder's work, his poetry and music (actually a fusion of genres that both the two poets/musicians employ) address an international audience. Like Keane, AJA is a jazz trombonist and his lines ooze with Caribbean music, the Bajan "saf" he creates.

Lasana Sekou is an interesting poet from St. Martin: the linguistic situation of the island makes the use of language in his poetry complex: from the Dutch and the French of the two parts in which the island is divided, to the Spanish of colonial times, to the yankee English which is the language officially used, the island sees also the presence of a French *kwéyol*, different from the Haitian and the Antillean, and of Papiamentu, a Portuguese-based Creole. Sekou delves into this pot-pourri of languages to re-emerge with a socially and politically committed poetry. As regards one of the smaller islands of the archipelago, as St. Martin, Breiner endorsed that:

The situation of writers in the smaller islands (and in mainland Belize) is rather different. For poetry as for other arts there is an analogue to critical mass; the number of poets, regardless of quality, seems to increase the *number* of significant poems produced⁹⁴⁸

Brathwaite's school makes its appearance in the use of a "nation language" and in the intricate graphical layout of his poetry, and the colonial past of slavery and of salt-picking in the island left the poet with a persuasive "aesthetics of salt and sugar", in which the maternal tongue sweetens the harshness of labour and of historical chains. The attention he pays to the graphic layout goes back to Brathwaite's *Sycorax Video Style*, but he also pays attention to the performative aspect like AJA or Hutchinson do. As in Rudder's texts, in Sekou there are references to multiple musical genres. His socio-aesthetics, based on a historical excursus, on his plurilinguism and skill between SE and

⁹⁴⁸ Breiner, Laurence A. *An Introduction to West Indian Poetry*. *Cit.* 85.

Creoles and on his peculiar poetic style, is headed to his political commitment to St. Martin but also to Collins's Grenada or Carter's Guyana and to the whole Caribbean – as his aesthetic theory of the village chiefs and the maroon shows– and he pays attention to an international audience like AJA or Rudder do.

Joan Andrea Hutchinson is a Jamaican poet and performer. Her poetry draws and takes inspiration from the great Louise Bennett. Hutchinson largely employs Creole and from it she takes sayings, proverbs, devices of the oral tradition which implement her poetic oral delivery. She writes for her people and self-publishes her books, a tendency which has increased in the past couple of decades (even though in 1948 Walcott also, for instance, self-published his first collection *25 Poems*). The contemporary West Indian poetic tissue has been strained by the dearth of resources, but the necessity of publishing and the passionate creativity in present them lead many people to write and publish; as Breiner aptly observed:

Throughout the islands people from every level of society write and publish verse, not only in newspapers and in ephemeral little magazines like *Now* and *Scope*, but in small books, privately printed and distributed through local bookshops or by the authors themselves, who may be housewives, students, incarcerates.⁹⁴⁹

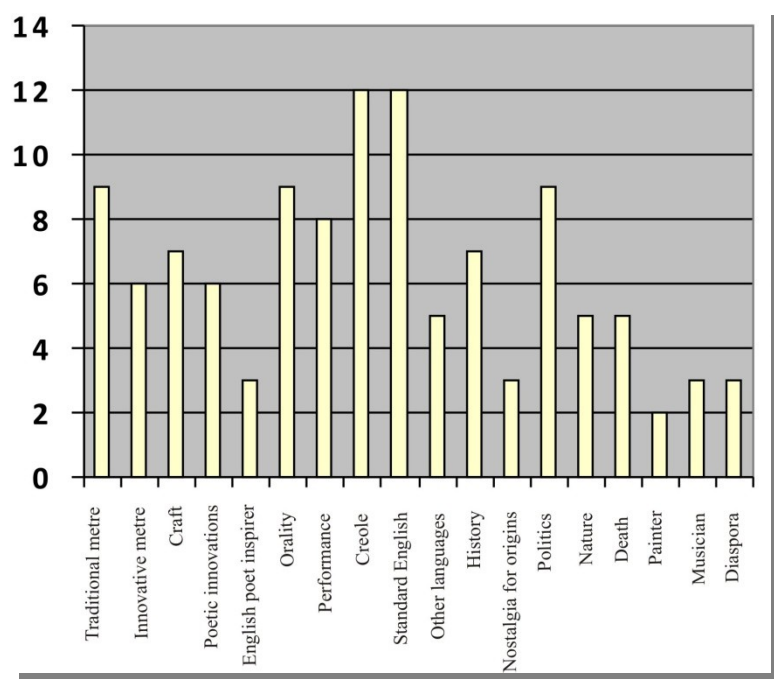
Like Keane, Hutchinson employs humour in her poems and she equips her collection with humorous sketches and photographs. Like Collins she is slightly feminist, and like her again – but also like Keane, like Hippolyte and like the other Jamaican poet here analysed, McKenzie – she inserts features of orality in her poems like proverbs, gossip, or folk tales.

⁹⁴⁹ *Ibid.* 20.

A West Indian “Creole” Aesthetics?

“Caribbean literary texts, at least since the early twentieth century, are linked among themselves by an aesthetic kinship born of the more or less common experience lived by Caribbean societies.”⁹⁵⁰
(Silvio Torres-Saillant)

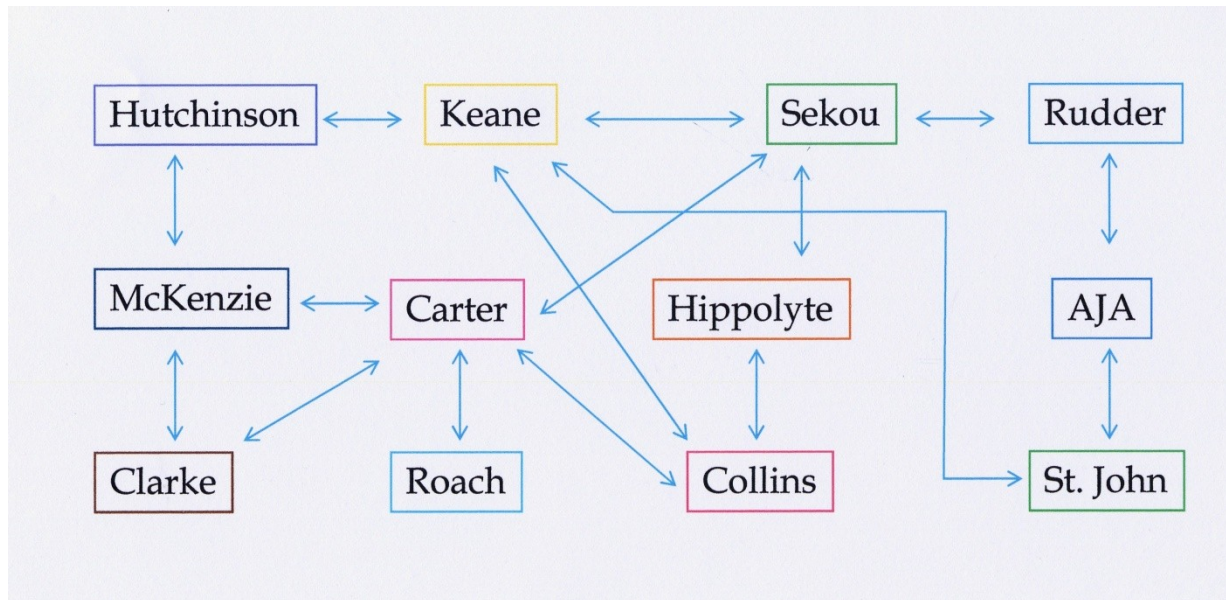
As the grid above shows, I have identified some features which are more outstanding in the works of the poets studied, here translated into a histogram.



If we analyse the visible results of the previous diagrams transposed into a histogram, we will see that – provided that my conclusion is not unchangeable and perfect – the most common features are related to the linguistic use of both the Creole and Standard English, although in different ways, by all the poets. Other important features are the respect of a traditional metre, the employment of oral devices (mainly derived from an African tradition) in poetry, and as a theme, the socio-political commitment of the poetry of many of them. Many poets (eight out of twelve) pay attention to a performative aspect, while other relevant features are the attention to craft and the treating of history as a common theme. Half of the poets are innovative in their metre and use neologisms and innovative poetic devices. Less frequent themes are nature and death, together with

⁹⁵⁰ Torres-Saillant, Silvio. *Caribbean Poetics, Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature*. *Cit.* 1.

the use of languages other than English in the poems (five out of twelve). Only one third of the poets has a definite English poet as inspirer and mentor, and the same amount shows an evident feeling of “nostalgia for lost origins and traditions” in their poems. Only one third of these poets live outside the Caribbean. One third is poets-musicians, while two of them are also painters.



The diagram above tries to show the stronger relations that I found between one poet and another. Carter seems to be at the centre of many poetic relations, as his affinity with Roach and McKenzie in the poetic craft is evident; with Clarke for their concern in a social commitment in favour of the poor people; with Collins and Sekou for their political commitment. McKenzie and Clarke are both painters as well as poets, and Hutchinson is close to McKenzie for their use of oral devices of the Jamaican patwa and of African culture in their poetry. Hutchinson employs irony and comic references as Keane did. Keane is also close to Sekou and Collins for the social issues they treat in their poetry. As said before, Collins and Carter, as well as Hippolyte and Sekou, deal with political issues in their poetry. But Sekou is also similar to Rudder in the importance they give to performance. AJA is a musician as Rudder, and his mentor and poetic master, St. John, taught him to employ Creole in poetry, a feature used widely also by Keane.

Both Roach and Carter were compared to the Irish poet W.B. Yeats (the former by Laurence Breiner, the latter by Al Creighton). Both the poets decided not to leave the Caribbean to go abroad, even though Carter taught in England for one year. Of the twelve poets only three decided to leave the Caribbean: Keane (who spent part of his life in London and part in New York, going back in between), Collins (who teaches and lives in Maryland), and Rudder (who lives and works in Canada). Sekou studied in New York, but nowadays it is much easier for everybody to move around the world, to travel and spread their poetry at the same time, but all of them basically decided to be

based in their native (is)lands. The theme of nature is evoked by Roach's poetry, or by McKenzie's. The folk culture and the importance of the folk aesthetics are important for Roach, St. John, Keane, Clarke, Hippolyte, Hutchinson. Irony is a poetic strategy of St. John, Keane, Collins, Hutchinson. The poets are all very educated and as such they are the spokespersons for their people: in their poetry there are several references to classical mythology, European history, foreign languages, philosophy, and religion. Their involvement with political and social issues is so strong that almost all of these poets' aesthetics could be defined as "social aesthetics". Some poets are more attentive to the use of metre and craft, as Roach, Carter, McKenzie; some employ more traditional verse than others or alternate traditional poetic forms with free verse (Roach, St. John, Keane, Carter, Collins, Hippolyte, Sekou, Hutchinson). Their employment of Creole is mostly alternated with SE, but at some point or another of their writing they felt the necessity of intruding some Creole in their poems; when not openly employed, it can be heard with West Indian overtones. Performance is important for poets like St. John, Hippolyte, AJA, Sekou, Hutchinson. The development of the poem on the page and the presentation of an original layout of the poetry book is important for Keane (who played with the layout of the poems on the page or created calligrams); for Clarke (who inserted his own drawings in the poetry book); for Hippolyte (who equipped his poetry books with Rossini François's paintings); for Sekou (who plays with the layout of the words and poems on the page, playing with different fonts and sizes like Brathwaite did with his *Sycorax Video Style*, or inserting computer-drawn images); for Hutchinson (who inserted drawings, vignettes, and pictures in her poetry collections). Other forms of art are the linking point of poets like Clarke and McKenzie (both painters) or Keane, AJA, and Rudder (all musicians, jazz trombonist and hornist the first two, calypsonian the third).

As Sampietro observed, the literature of the Caribbean is like a new wine with a full-bodied flavour that complements the old European-shaped bottles in which it decanted, it settled, and the Caribbean writer/poet becomes a new "Palm-Wine Drinkard" (if we want to follow the Nigerian writer Tutuola's novel's title), or rather, talking about the Caribbean, I would suggest a comparison with an indigenous rum made from the sugar worked by slaves and aged in oak-wood barrels:

Caribbean literature is Caribbean not only in its content. It has a specific aesthetic character of its own. It is a young and thriving literature, a literature that decants into the old bottles of traditional Western forms – revisited by cosmopolitan authors – the new wine of the figurative and acoustic imaginations of Amerindians, Africans, Creoles, Indians. A literature at the same time provincial and universal, insular and cosmic.⁹⁵¹

⁹⁵¹ Sampietro, Luigi. "The Specificity of Caribbean Literature." *Caribana* 2 (1990): 7-11. Roma: Bulzoni. 10.

Lamming also remarked on the blending of different cultures and languages in Caribbean literatures and in the necessity of studying them to metabolise the past slavery and direct our attention toward a brighter future:

I do not think there has been anything in human history quite like the meeting of Africa, Asia, and Europe in this American archipelago we call the Caribbean. (...) the most urgent task and the greatest intellectual challenge: how to control the burden of this history and incorporate it into our collective sense of the future.⁹⁵²

But Lamming sustained this urge of finding an aesthetic unity in the creative arts of the region at least since his 1986 lecture, when, answering a question on “the prospect for Caribbean unity”, he affirmed:

I consider the forging of regional contacts between each territory to be a very urgent task. I do not believe in what people call a national identity. No individual can realize this national identity creatively unless it takes place in a liberated Caribbean region.⁹⁵³

Lamming was both a writer and a critic (as other poets analysed are – for instance, Keane, Carter, or Sekou, etc.) and Breiner observed that since the 1971 ACLALS Conference in Jamaica there was a need for a critical discussion that would beget the basis for a regional unity, for the search of the common aesthetic features of West Indian literature:

For a literature to exist as a going concern, however, there must be some commentators who are not primarily writers themselves, but critics (...) West Indians at the ACLALS Conference of 1971 asserted that these minimal conditions had at last been achieved for the Anglophone region *as a unit* (...) The ACLALS Conference was not an isolated event; it was preceded by pertinent critical discussions, accompanied by such provocative publications as the *Breaklight* and *Savacou* ^{3/4} anthologies.⁹⁵⁴

⁹⁵² Lamming, George. Coming, Coming Home. Conversations II. Western Education and the Caribbean Intellectual. Philipsburg, St. Martin. House of Nehesi Publishers. 1995; 2000. 25.

⁹⁵³ Birbalsingh, Frank, ed. “George Lamming: Concepts of the Caribbean.” Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English. London and Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996. 12.

⁹⁵⁴ Breiner, Laurence A. An Introduction to West Indian Poetry. *Cit.* 8-9.

To conclude, lingering on a verbal/visual phenomenology that emerged clearly from the analysis of the above-mentioned poets, we should not bypass some important common aesthetic features, such as:

- the use of CREOLES together with Standard English and other languages in poetry, as the language is the core – the “nam”, as Brathwaite said – of a people and it determines all the creative expressions of that people, as well as their lives. Patke made clear a point on the use of a creole continuum in literature: that it depends on the world location of it, as it was born out of a clash and blending, and it was enriched by the cultures and idioms of the peoples involved in this forced creative effort:

*the Creole continuum served a particular historical function whose liminality changes as poets move towards idioms and tonalities more suited to their new homes and societies. (...) the period from the 1960s to the 1980s as the phase in the evolution of West Indian poetry when this resource was at its most prolific.*⁹⁵⁵

- the existence of a subterranean RHYTHM in Caribbean literature, a rhythm which crossed the Middle Passage together with the slaves, and which nowadays is shown by the musicality in West Indian poetry, and by the coexistence of the art of music with that of poetry itself, with the employment of oral and musical devices in literature, with the vibes given by “broken”, irregular, angular rhythms, as also Creoles were defined “broken languages”. Döring made an interesting observation about this:

*Regardless of the question of what a concept like ‘the brokenness of Creole’ may suggest about his attitude towards Caribbean languages, the call for ‘brokenness’ as the most relevant aesthetic concept in plantation discourse deserves emphasis.*⁹⁵⁶

Carter, in fact, recognized that rhythm could actually be considered a common feature of Caribbean literatures and certainly, nowadays, West Indian poetry has developed far from what Carter defined in 1958 “a series of poor imitations of English models”.⁹⁵⁷ Similarly, Brathwaite affirmed that an “aesthetic formulation [...] begins with rhythm: survival rhythm, emancipation rhythm, transfiguration rhythm”,⁹⁵⁸ thus supporting the fact that an African rhythm came with the slave ships and was brought together with the languages, culture, and music from Africa and it developed as a medium for survival and resistance during the centuries.

⁹⁵⁵ Patke, Rajeev S. *Postcolonial Poetry in English*. Cit. 104.

⁹⁵⁶ Döring, Tobias. *Caribbean-English Passages. Intertextuality in a Postcolonial Tradition*. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. 65.

⁹⁵⁷ Carter, Martin. “Sensibility and the Search.” (1958) Cit. 207.

⁹⁵⁸ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “The Love Axe/I: (Developing a Caribbean Aesthetic 1962-1974). Part One.” Cit. 65.

- a third element which comes out of the previous two (the use of Creoles and the presence of a subterranean, “submarine” linking rhythm): the presence and relevance of ORALITY & PERFORMANCE, that is the importance of the written texts and their delivery to an audience or readership, as the texts are often very innovative, equipped with drawings and calligrams, or related to other arts, as painting or music, in fact Breiner underlined the importance of orality in an aesthetic debate in West Indian poetry:

an open debate on the interplay of oral and literate aesthetics in poetry seems to be endemic to the cultural situation of West Indian literature. It makes its appearance quite early; in the conflicting Edwardian and Modernist aesthetics of Trinidad poetry of the 1930s, and more articulately in the ideological friction between the writers of the Jamaican Poetry League and those who came to be associated with Focus.⁹⁵⁹

- the literary and aesthetically social embrace extended (by means of their literature and of the themes treated in it), by Caribbeans of the DIASPORA, and by extension all Black people of the diaspora, and of Africa and of other Third World countries, and then the poor in general. The roots of West Indian poetry and the issues dealt with in it extend from an island context to a world environment. It does not confine itself to the borders of an island but its roots become part of a world poetry, as the mangrove “rhizomatic” roots – as Glissant sealed – of poetry expand to the rest of the world swamp.
- a TRADITION, basically European-based (mainly British English and Romantic or late Romantic), to which something new was added to improve it, both through African culture and the other cultures involved in the process of aesthetic creolization. Post-colonial aesthetics, though being somehow a continuation of Modernist ones (for instance in the emphasis on literary experimentations or linguistic sophistications), has been much inspired by Romantic aspects, especially if we consider: the features of orality or the use of a non-standard language (which appear, for instance, in Wordsworth’s or Coleridge’s work), the importance given to history (let us think of Yeats, for instance, who lived at the end of 1800s, but was not much influenced by Modernism), and the attention for a socio-aesthetic commitment.

⁹⁵⁹ Breiner, Laurence A. “The Ambivalent Aesthetic of Eric Roach.” *Cit.* 16. Prof. Edward Baugh said: “Preeminent among the poets associated with *Bim*, *Focus*, *Kyk-Over-Al*, and “Caribbean Voices” were Edward (later Kamau) Brathwaite of Barbados, Martin Carter of Guyana, and Derek Walcott of St Lucia. There were also Cecil Herbert, Ian McDonald, Eric Roach and Harold Telemaque of Trinidad, A.N. Forde and George Lamming of Barbados, John Figueroa and A.L. Hendriks of Jamaica, Jan Carew and Wilson Harris of Guyana, Owen Campbell, Daniel Williams and E. McG. Keane of St. Vincent.” Baugh, Edward. “A History of Poetry.” A History of Literature in the Caribbean. *Cit.* 241.

- *their common SOCIO-AESTHETIC COMMITMENT, that is a “Creole” inspirational blow which stems from the memorabilia of their common past of colonization and slavery, which is the blending of – mainly – African and European features merging into one another and combining to give birth to an original Creole socio-poetry. This relates to the music, the catchy nature of Caribbean rhythms with their verve and passion, and to the colourful arts: all of these features combined together illustrate a commitment to the people’s problems and lives, for their history and politics.*

Appendix A Interviews with poets and scholars

What follows is an appendix with some of the interviews I was given by academics and poets during my visits to the three main campuses of the University of the West Indies, at Mona Campus in Kingston, Jamaica, at Cave Hill Campus, Barbados, and at St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad.

§

Interview with Prof. Velma Pollard, 16th Nov 2007, Kingston, Jamaica

Sara Florian: I was looking at this beautiful tree with yellow flowers on the cover of this book of yours...

Velma Pollard: This is a peculiar poui tree, and that I have written about it, because when the wind took away all its limbs in one of the storms, it started bearing again from the trunk, so I think it represents bravery- what I mean is that you cannot die if, when you lose your limbs, you start bearing from your trunk. When we had the hurricane Gilbert in 1988 a lot of trees started doing that; this tree still exists on the campus and every year it bears just a little bit... It has just not died. A friend of mine said to me once some time last year “why don’t they cut down that tree?”, and I said “You won’t believe it, it’s going to come back!”. I was very glad to see her recently and I showed her “Do you see that tree? It hasn’t even dried- it’s flourishing- it just needed a little rain”...Most of the poui trees don’t look like that- they are really big, but this little one is one that I really value.

SF: But now we have just passed the hurricane season, so...

VP: Yes, and pouis are blooming again. In May they all come up, and it is indicative for students indeed: if by April when the pouis are in bloom you have not finished your revision, then you are going to fail your exams on the campus...

SF: Wow, interesting...Now, prof. Pollard, what is your view on Creoles and on the linguistic *continuum*?

VP: First of all, I do not agree very much with the definition ‘Creole *continuum*’, because I think about the interconnections between Standard English and Creoles more in a circular way, than in a unilinear way. Creoles show the interconnections and linguistic relics of many different languages, European, African, Chinese, Indian. But I am also interested in the Rasta language, the *Dread Talk*, which I consider a dialect of Jamaican Creole, both *Dread Talk* and Jamaican Creole show many differences from SE. For instance, in *Dread Talk* they say “I-man a forward”, to mean “I am leaving”.

SF: Do you also use the definition ‘*patwa*’?

VP: The word Creole is the word that linguists use. But any regular Jamaican would say he is using *patwa*: they usually spell it ‘*patois*’, but I never spell it like that, I spell it ‘*patwa*’, because ‘*patois*’ is usually the Creole of the French speaking islands. I will give you some grammatical features which define Jamaican Creole. One of them is ‘a’+verb and that’s the

continuous; another one is that the verb does not change: the English verb changes for example for the third person singular as in “She lives here”, while the Creole verb does not change at all: “She live”, “He live”, “They live”; another good grammatical example is the use of the adjective: you also need to know that there is something called a ‘predicate adjective’, which exists not only in Jamaican Creole, all the Creoles really, where in English you might say “I am tired” – and that “am” is very important – in Creole you say “me tired”, because that ‘tired’ contains both the adjective ‘tired’ and the predicate notion of ‘am’, so ‘Me tired’ in Jamaican translates “I am tired” in English. With the predicate adjective there’s no necessity for the verb ‘to be’, which is such a strong thing in English. One more example is that the plural is not formed by adding anything to it, the way that you have ‘books’ in English, ‘book+s’: in JC the pluralizer is quite separate, its ‘dem’, so you would say “de book dem”, that’s how you pluralize and that’s quite different from how English pluralizes. What you get when people are learning English, but have a Creole consciousness (maybe they grow up speaking Creole but they learn English), then they might start saying “the books dem”: they are doing the double pluralisation, because they are saying “books” and feeling almost as if it is still not pluralized unless the “dem” is there, so you get a kind of hypercorrection with “de books dem”. In English it is “books”, while in Creole it is “book dem”. Of course, if you have a number like “ten book”, that makes the plural.

SF: Can it happen that someone say “the sheeps”, speaking of the animals (instead of “the ships”), using a pluraling ‘s’ for an uncountable noun.

VP: We say “sheep dem”, but we don’t have many sheep, we have mostly goats. Were you asking if they may say “sheeps”? That would mean that they have gone to school, learnt that “sheep” is pluralized “sheep”, but didn’t remember that that “sheep” belonged to a small list which keeps its form unchanged. But that can happen to anybody learning English, because “sheep” and a few others break the rule that says that you pluralize by adding the ‘s’ sound or ‘z’ sound, with the ‘es’ group as in ‘roses’...that rule is broken by ‘sheep’...mainly children learning English would say “sheeps” until they get it right.

SF: Would they say ‘childrens’?

VP: No, they would say ‘childs’. By the time they can say “childrens”, they would have learnt that it’s a plural. In Creole rather than saying ‘child’, we would use another word, ‘pickney’, so we would say “de pickney dem”. That word ‘pickney’ is one of a very small number...it is in the same group with ‘sampatta’ – the ‘sandals’ – you’re going to find it in all the Creoles: you’ll find it in Portuguese Creoles, for example, in other words that did not come from English interaction with an African word, that is one which came from Romance languages. Let me see what Cassidy and LePage say about the term...

SF: When my landlady speaks English, she uses some Creole words like ‘pickney’ or some other words in Creole...

VP: Which is what I am saying: if you ask her, I don’t know if she knows that ‘pickney’ is not an English word. She would have English, I’m sure, with lots of Jamaican words in it. I see some others on a slip of paper here: ‘galang’, ‘mash’...this, I must have given some class to write down which words they think are not English, like ‘bufu bufu’, ‘dem’, ‘iron bird’ (‘edenbird’). Let us see Cassidy’s definition of ‘pickney’, which makes it derive from Spanish

and Portuguese: “...also old-fashioned /pikiny/. Sp of ‘pickaninny’ (...) Prob <Pg pidgin (...) Pg *pequenino* (...).”⁹⁶⁰

SF: Maybe our dialects, or languages, or let’s say our vernaculars, are not so different, because in Venetian dialect we say ‘picinin’...[laugh]

VP: ‘Picinin’? That is not unreasonable, because the Portuguese is ‘pequenino’, which sounds close, and remember I’m saying that Romance languages came about from the Romans invading some subject nations which must have absorbed something.

SF: Yes, actually one thing that is maybe pushing me to study these things, apart from passion, is trying to give an explanation to what I am studying and to why I am here, I wouldn’t like to be just a tourist..

VP: Ok, but you will be a tourist somewhere...

SF: Yes, sure, I am a stranger, I am a foreigner...

VP: No, I don’t mean here, after you organise yourself not to be a tourist, and you pick up and you go to Egypt, or you go to Australia...

SF: Sure...

VP: In other words one would have always to be a tourist somewhere, but you don’t want to be a tourist in the Caribbean.

SF: Yes, what I’m saying is that I am trying to knock down barriers between cultures...

VP: Because the cultures are more similar than they are different...

SF: But it is difficult for people to understand it.

VP: People pick on difference all the time, people like to exalt difference, and I don’t know why...

§

⁹⁶⁰ Cassidy, Frederic Gomes and Le Page, Robert Brock. *Dictionary of Jamaican English*. *Cit.* 348.

Interview with Dr. Jeannette Allsopp, 27th Nov. 2007, St. Michael, Barbados

Sara Florian: I would like to begin by speaking about you and your interest in lexicography. I am so fascinated by languages and by the etymology of words that I've found Prof. Richard Allsopp's (your husband) and your own dictionaries such wonderful tools for a student like me who is focusing on Creoles. So, how did you develop your interest in lexicography?

Jeannette Allsopp: Well, it started a long time back now because first of all I'm a foreign language specialist in French and Spanish. My first degree is an honours degree in Spanish with French as my minor, which I did at UWI Mona, many, many years ago. I then went on to do a Master's in Romance Languages – emphasis on Spanish – at University of London, King's College, and finally I did a Ph.D. in Linguistics at London Metropolitan University. I had at first looked at a Ph.D. in literature, but I've always been interested in languages. I taught Spanish and French and French at Secondary Level, I lectured for years in Spanish language and literature at the University of Guyana, which is where I am originally from – Guyana – and then I left Guyana and went to London where I did work on a Ph.D. in literature and then left and went out to the United States, where I was going to settle. I had known my husband from the time I was in school, and I met him again at the University of Guyana, just before I left. Suddenly I heard from him in the early '80s and he invited me to come to Barbados. We got married not too long after that.. From the very beginning I offered him help in his work, because I knew he was doing this dictionary and I knew he was having trouble with it, because he had all this stuff, and I suppose when you have all this research material to put together you can get overwhelmed, so although he had started compiling, he wasn't making much progress. He then said to me: "Caribbean English is not just English, it has, as you know, French and Spanish loan words, and I would like you to do a supplement for me to the *English Dictionary*", so I said "Fine! Perfect! Just what I'd love to do!". But then from there it developed, because he was working on his own, there was no team and usually lexicographers have some kind of a team, so he wasn't making much progress, and the university was complaining because of the fact that he was spending too much time on the dictionary. He had a monitoring committee of three Caribbean linguists, who were Lawrence Carrington, Dennis Craig – who's now dead – and Mervyn Alleyne. So these were three very well-known Caribbean linguists, very good scholars, and I had been taught by Mervyn Alleyne, and he knew that I was a graduate of Mona, and I was a student along with Lawrence Carrington, so I knew him, and then I met Dennis Craig. Craig and Carrington told him "you've now to stop collecting and you've now to start compiling". Then, there was a crisis over who would be chairman because the chairman at the time who was Dennis Craig left to be vice-chancellor of University of Guyana, as Craig too was originally Guyanese. So Craig left and we needed a chairman, and the University decided that it should be the Dean. As it turned out that was the University Dean, Professor Helen Pyne-Timothy who is also a linguist, and although she's more literature-oriented, she was very helpful. She got together a team, I headed the team and we had a number of part-time research assistants, keyboarders who helped with typing the material. I taught some of the research assistants how to compose entries, because I had been learning by just observing the work as I went along. And so we sat down and did a whole lot of research and I entered stuff, lots of stuff, on cards between the letters M and Z, and then I actually drafted manuscript, a couple of others drafted as well. That helped to speed up the process of compiling the dictionary of Caribbean English Usage. I was working on my Multilingual Supplement at the same time, so the committee, having seen that my work was coming on so well, decided that I should produce my own dictionary as an expansion of the work into the

entire Caribbean, because my husband's work is Anglophone based on the twenty-two English-speaking countries of the Caribbean, mine takes in the other territories like Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Haiti, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and then later on as I was actually coming to do my dictionary I decided to include Costa Rica as well, which is a very rich source, and also has a thriving centre of lexicography. So I made contact with these people all at my own expense, as the university wasn't paying for me to do the supplement, and I wasn't employed here at the time, I was employed at the Teacher's Training College, since I'm also a teacher trainer of foreign language teachers, but I was transferred here and I helped to finish the *English Dictionary*, as well as the Supplement and I was in charge of the computerized production...I read the *Dictionary* about sixteen times to check it, etc. etc. and so from the time I started I knew that I really, really loved it and that I wasn't going to continue in literature, so I switched my Ph.D. to linguistics.

SF: So did you decide to include also the ABC islands (Aruba, Bonaire, Curaçao)?

JA: Well, I will be doing that in the second volume of my Caribbean multilingual dictionary...those were mentioned sort of briefly but they were not absolutely included in the *Dictionary of English Usage*, for example, but I am planning to include Aruba, Curaçao, Bonaire in my Volume II if I can get of Papiamentu in there and also...

SF: Saint Maarten?

JA: Sranan...and Saint Maarten, yes...Sranan, which is the Surinamese Dutch Creole, for the time being if I can get those three: Sranan, Surinamese Dutch and Papiamentu, I will include them in the volume I am working on now, which is *Music, Dance, Religion, Festivals and Folklore*, five themes...

SF: Let us speak about Caribbean Creoles, the so called Atlantic Creoles. In my Ph.D. thesis I am working on Creoles from different islands, and once you know about the history of the region, it is not surprising to find out that every island has its own Creole...

JA: Yes...

SF:...many times they are not mutually intelligible in the different islands, and even by inhabitants of the same island who fluently speak Standard English or a regional variety of English...so what can you tell me about this non mutual understandability?

JA: Well, the Creoles are often not mutually exclusive between the inhabitants either of the same territory or of other territories. Well, there is a reason for this, and, as you said the history of the region would have underlined all this. First of all, remember that the Creoles are contact languages that came out of the basic pidgins that were created for specific purposes, so, naturally, those pidgins were very limited and in the case of the Caribbean where the African slaves and other people were brought for the purposes of working in the plantations, the pidgins that were being formed were at first very basic because they had just to do with masters trying to understand slaves and slaves trying to understand masters, in order to get the work done. But as this spread into wider usage in the community the vocabulary of these contact languages expanded and their domains of use – as we would call them – also expanded, so that they developed into Creoles. Now, remember that millions of African slaves actually came into the Caribbean from Africa through the Middle Passage, and they came from many, many hundreds

of language-speaking groups, so that what existed was a set of African languages that would have influenced or formed the base set of the Creoles in their contact with whether with English, French, or Dutch. The case of Spanish is a different one because the Spaniards came first and they were ousted by the British, the French and the Dutch. Their contact was primarily with the indigenous peoples, who died in large numbers within fifty years of the arrival of the Spaniards and whose linguistic impact was largely lexical and not structural. By the 16th century the British, the French, and the Dutch had assumed control and so the 17th century would have seen the expansion of British, French and Dutch colonization and settlement. The Spaniards were not involved in the slave trade, they had a few slaves but not many, so you would hardly find many Spanish Creoles...there are one or two: Palenquero is an example, which is found in Palenque, which is a remote village in Colombia, but what exists are regional varieties of Spanish. Now, what must be noted is that linguistic development depends not only on socio-political factors, but on geographical factors as well. First of all, Caribbean territories are separated by water because they are islands; secondly, the African groups of slaves that were brought would inevitably have an influence on the language spoken. Many territories have some common elements. For example, the Yorubas of Nigeria were taken to Cuba, they were taken to Guyana, Trinidad, not so many to Jamaica or Barbados, and some to Grenada. In Jamaica because of the settlement patterns, there is more influence from groups like the Twi, and the Hausa and the Mandingo and so on and so forth...So, there is more or less a very common worldview, because you can see it in the idiom of Caribbean English, which is different from the idiom of any other English, or any other world variety of English. But the thing is that in Jamaica for example, which is where you are, you know that there's a place called Cockpit Country, where the Maroons settled. Once there is a degree of geographical separation, the language of the isolated group will not lose much of its original flavour, or many of its original characteristics, but will tend more or less to stay the same, because language development also goes with contact between peoples, so a group like the Maroons would preserve the more divergent forms of Jamaican Creole. Similarly, there will be a difference between those people that live up there and the people that live in the other areas of the country. And then once there is any kind of barrier or separation between parishes there is going to be a difference in language varieties. Furthermore, it depends on the concentration of which set of slaves were there, as well as which set of masters, because of course there were not only English masters, but also Scottish, Irish and Welsh ones, so there was that influence, too. And that is the reason why the Creoles are not always completely mutually intelligible between the territories themselves, and even within the same territory. For instance, here in Barbados – flat and small as it is – there is the parish of St. Lucy, which is in the extreme north. People in St. Lucy speak very differently from people here in St. Michael, which is where we are now, and from people in St. Philip, which is in the far south so these differences manifest themselves.

SF: An instance occurs to me: the island of Hispaniola which was divided between the French and the Spanish...

JA: ...at first the British and the French, then the French and the Spanish...

SF: Exactly...so, well, they couldn't understand each other...

JA: that's right.

SF:...and when some slaves under the French tried to escape, the Spanish made them pronounce the Spanish word 'perejil', which they weren't able to pronounce, so Spaniards cut out their tongues, if I'm not mistaken...

JA: Yes, yes, yes...they committed all kinds of unbelievably brutal acts ...So, it is because of that, because I remember when I first went to Jamaica as a student many years ago, I did not understand the Jamaican Creole, and there was a pronoun which they kept using 'unu', and we do not use that in the Eastern Caribbean...

SF: Yes, they always use it..(laugh) what does it mean?

JA: It means "you all", "all of you", but it comes directly from a West African source, which the *DCEU* will tell you about, and you have a variant form of it here in Barbados, because they say "wunna", or "wunnuh", or "unna", whereas the Jamaicans say "unu", and I couldn't understand what they were saying, I couldn't understand what that meant, until I had been there a few months before it made sense...so that is quite true. And I don't think that somebody from here will necessarily understand the most divergent form of Guyanese Creole, which is in a sense similar to Jamaican Creole, because it is the Indians who were brought as the immigrants...

SF: ...as indentured labourers...

JA: ...yes, and they preserved the most divergent forms of the Creole up in the country, and remember Guyana is huge compared to the rest of the Caribbean, and has three separate counties which are all huge in themselves, separated by huge rivers miles and miles wide and miles and miles long...

SF:...which are Demerara, Essequibo and...

JA: ..Berbice...so you will find that the kind of Creole that the Indians in Berbice speak, somebody in the city of Georgetown will hardly understand, because the historical fact backing that up is that when there was Emancipation in 1834, as I was saying last night, the Africans left the plantations, began to buy what we call free villages and the Indians were then imported to come and work on the plantations, and they stayed...Quite a few of them are still on the plantations today, even the notion of reduction is much in abeyance, because we don't have the preferential markets that we used to have in Britain and Europe anymore, and that is a big cause of concern, so that the quantity of sugar that was produced before is certainly not being produced now. Barbados was also a main sugar producer, but now all the factories except one are shut down, that is one in St. James called "Portland, but the others are closed down. There's still a sugar crop, there is still our festival of Crop Over in July, celebrating the end of the crop, and so on...but sugar is not a big thing like it used to be from the 17th right through to the end of the 20th centuries.

SF: And in Guyana there are also Amerindians who survived...

JA: Oh yes, there are – as I said – they are concentrated in the interior of Guyana, in the hinterland, and they interact a lot with Venezuela and Brazil, but some of them do come down into the city and people do go up to work in the interior. The English of the Amerindians is influenced by Catholic missionaries, so you find they speak "very good English", or very

correct English, once they were taught by them and they also speak their own languages of Warrau, Arekuna, Akawaio, Patamuna and so on.

SF: And are there other survivors of the Amerindians in the islands, like the Garifuna in St. Vincent or Belize...

JA: In S. Vincent you have what you call the black Caribs, because what happened there was that the Caribs were thrown out of St. Vincent and some of them went to Dominica, and there was a fairly large concentration of them there. They mixed with the Africans and that's how they came to be called Black Caribs. And, similarly, in Belize you have the Garifuna, who are also Black Caribs, who, from Dominica, went on to Belize and so on and so forth, so there was a lot of movement between the peoples and a lot of racial mixing, hence linguistic mixing, hence cultural mixing.

SF: I'm thinking of Roy Cayetano's *The People's Garifuna Dictionary*, and apart from that, I know some other minor dictionaries, apart from the Cassidy-Le Page Dictionary of Jamaican English, which was the biggest one before your own.

JA: Yes, I have some quite detailed wordlists that somebody who's an American woman, who was working on Garifuna sent to me, when she heard about my work, and I downloaded and printed them up, and it's quite interesting. As she knew I was working on flora, fauna, food and she sent me other stuff relevant to that.

SF: So, you know, in Italy there is almost no knowledge of Caribbean Creoles..

JA: No, there wouldn't be...[laugh]

SF:...and I've often found confusion in the definitions in academia, so it is not just a matter of labels, but could you please clarify to me the difference between West Indian or Caribbean English and Creole, and how does for instance Guyanese English differ from Trinidadian English, Jamaican English from Barbadian English, and so on?

JA: All right, West Indian, or let's say Caribbean English, because West Indian is a different concept, Caribbean English includes Creoles, you know, so that you will find that for instance in the *DCEU* we have everything from Creole usage up to Caribbean standard usage. The difference, if you want to call it that, is that the Creoles have a strong underpinning of the African languages and the African worldview: how do I explain that? If you look at our phrases and our idiom in Caribbean English, there are some compound words, things like "nosehole", instead of "nostril", "eyewater" instead of "tears", "neckback" for the "nape of your neck", "footbottom" for the "the sole of your foot", and things like "hard ears", meaning "you are stubbornly disobedient and do not listen to what people tell you" and it is usually used of children who are very disobedient and don't listen to their parents. Now, if you note, and this is what I've been trying to bring over in my lexicography course, in one of them which is called "The study of Caribbean words", if you note these are all English words use that are put together in a most un-English, un-European way...you will never get a British English person saying something like "nosehole" for "nostril", something like "neckback" for the "nape of your neck", something like "footbottom" for the "the sole of your foot", or "eyewater" for "tears". These are what we call "calques" from West African languages, which, as you know, are copy translations or loan translations – very literal translations – directly from the source language

into Caribbean English. So that just as it was said in West Africa among one or several linguistic groups, it comes into the English of the Caribbean, and it has become a part of the English of the Caribbean, because even standard speakers – people who speak Caribbean standard English – will use Creole terms like “hardears”, or “own way” meaning “stubborn”, when they can’t find an English word, a British English word or phrase, that will so graphically describe what they want to get over. And this is why the Creoles will stay with us, although they’re decreolizing, because in the case of Barbados, it had a Creole, which decreolized and approximated to the standard, so that there are a lot of problems now because Bajan has Creole features, but it’s also fairly close to the standard. And one of the things that you will find that differentiates Caribbean English from other Englishes, and certainly from British English and American English, is the use of pitch, stress, intonation, accentuation. Pitch and stress are crucial, because a British English person’s pitch and stress are more or less in a sense the same, but in Caribbean English pitch and stress have a lot of influence on the meaning of the language, of what you are trying to get across, the meaning of the message, what you are trying to convey through the message and so on and so forth. So that, ...a Caribbean English person saying the word “coffee”, I would say “coffee” because I’ve travelled a lot, I’ve lived abroad, I’m very educated and educated people would speak like me and w stress like I do, which is close to the British pattern, however having a Caribbean accent, but anyone in the world is going to understand what I’m saying, because my structure is the same, there are maybe differences of vocabulary, but basically they would understand me without a problem. But then a Caribbean speaker is going to say something like this “coffee” /'kŌ-fē/, “‘1-2”, and you will find those speech patterns, as we call it, in the *DCEU*. A British English speaker would say “coffee”, “da-da”, which is the same pitch and basically almost the same kind of stress. Let me give you an even more graphic example of Caribbean English. Now, you know that there are words like “tailor”, “farmer” “sister”, “brother”, and various others, so in Caribbean English you’ll get something like “Mary is a sister”, it goes like “1-’2”, low-high. Now, that has a totally different meaning from “Mary is my sister”. “Sister” with an even stress and pitch means you’re siblings, the other girl child of your parents that is your sister, you are relatives; but if you say “Mary’s sister is a sister, you know”, the “sister” that’s going “1-’2” means “a member of a church”, usually not the member of an established church like the Anglican or Catholic or Methodist or Presbyterian churches, but a member of a church that is usually Pentecostal.

SF: Oh, I didn’t know that, that’s so interesting!

JA: Well, there are lots and lots of things and that is why Caribbean English is different and that is why people from outside like tourists will come here and say “Uh, my goodness, do you speak English?” [laugh] when Bajans speak, as I told you, they drop stop consonants, they chew up the ends of their words, etc. so it’s very difficult to understand it...

SF: ...and it’s really fast!

JA: yes, it’s fast...it’s one of the fastest Creoles or Caribbean dialects that you can find. So, when I first came here I was at a loss, then I gradually got accustomed, but at first there were some people that I didn’t understand at all.

SF: So, there’s a pitch change between islands, I mean from an island to the other?

JA: There may be, but basically speaking our pitch, the Caribbean English pitch, is low-high. In some cases it is high-low...listen to this: somebody expressing surprise or disapproval “Eh-eh!” /’2-1/, high-low, meaning “my goodness, what a thing!”, you know, “what’s going on?”, your stress and pitch are two-one instead of one-two, sometimes it’s /’3-1/ “Eh-heh!”, kind of thing, really high. The difference between, for instance, Guyanese English and, say, other Caribbean Englishes would be accentuation because all the accents are slightly different but all of them have similarities, so that you may be able to tell the typical Guyanese speaker, whose speech is very sing song but we don’t hear it...you know, in each territory everybody says “We don’t have an accent”...and in Barbados the famous term is “Well, she spoke with an accent”, meaning that she was from another territory. But the differences too would be in lexicon, because, for example, Guyanese English has Dutch words, it has a lot of Indic words, especially to do with food and clothes, and some other areas of life. Guyanese English will have some unique kinds of phrases that many other territories will not have, because of its environment, and its ecology and so on, and as I said the Dutch had a heavy influence, while the majority of our place names are British, there are still many Dutch place names, things like ‘Beterverwagting’, ‘Onverwaagt’, ‘Essequibo’ itself, no that’s more indigenous, ‘Kyk-over-aal’ that we talked about, and then words like “stelling”, which is the wharf of the jetty, and “polder”, which means divided into sections near to a canal, and stuff like that...so those would be the differences. The word “bass”, pronounced [ba:s], is the Dutch name for “boss”.

SF: Wow...well again a question on definitions...what is from a linguistic point of view the difference among the terms Creole, dialect, vernacular, *patois*, or *patwa* with a different spelling?

JA: When you talk specifically in linguistic terms about dialect, a dialect is a variety of language, any variety of language; you can have non-standard dialects and standard dialects. You can’t say that any dialect linguistically is better or worse than any other dialect, and it means a variety that can be differentiated from other varieties because of certain characteristics that it has, and is usually influenced by geographical factors, in some cases, the strong case is the social factor, because you know that any standard dialect of any country is usually the dialect or the variety that is spoken by the people with the more power and influence in the society, who can impose their will, and their desire, and their influence on the rest of the people and they accept it, and then it becomes codified through grammar and dictionaries, and therefore standardised. Then you have the non-standard dialects, which are dialects that have not reached the highly-developed structure or may not have the full lexicon of the standard dialects. I will give you a good example of a non-standard dialect: you will hear people talk in Bajan dialect, “Bajan dialect”, ta-da-da, /1-1-1-’2/, and when you say “dialect” you can’t use it linguistically as a variety of language; when you are using “dialect” in Barbados, you mean one thing “Bajan dialect”, and it may carry social connotations, meaning that it is assumed to be spoken by people who are not very educated, by unsophisticated, crude types, the lower classes of the society. That is what is assumed to be, but what people do not realize is that the dialect, the non-standard, is either dialect or Creole, is the first language of most of the Caribbean speakers, that’s what they were born speaking, that’s what they hear in their homes; there are very few homes which speak pure standard. And that is a fact that the more educated you are, the more your parents are going to insist that you speak standard properly, but everybody – standard and non-standard speakers – can in some way deliver a non-standard phrase or two. Some standard speakers can speak non-standard, – because they’ve learnt two dialects – they can interchange between the two and know when they can speak what. French “*patois*” or Jamaican *patwa* – as they call it – was a form of Creole – it was really interchangeable with

Creole – and it had a kind of stigmatization attached to it, meaning that it was spoken – just as I told you people talk about “dialect” here, meaning the lower classes of society less educated, less affluent, etc. etc. – it was a similar thing with the *patwa*, but *patwa* is used more or less interchangeably with French, particularly with the French Creole.

SF: I’m thinking of Kamau Brathwaite, who defined in *History of the Voice* the “nation language” and he said that he was inspired when he was in Carriacou with Alan Lomax, the American ethnographer and folklorist, who was recording some Carriacou people speaking their dialect, so “nation language” was basically a definition given to any kind of Creole, or a Jamaican-based one?

JA: No, no, not necessarily Jamaican-based... “nation language” as I understand it is the non-standard variety of any territory, whether it is a Creole or whether it is a non-standard dialect. He calls it “nation language” because it is the national language of most people in the Caribbean, their non-standard variety is really their first language and therefore the national language, the language that spreads across the whole nation, hence the term “nation language”, like Bajan dialect would be “nation language”, Jamaican Creole would be “nation language”, Guyanese Creole would be “nation language” in the particular territory.

SF: As regards poetry there are some problems passing from the oral, the performance, to the written text and there are problems of normalized orthography...

JA: ...of course, always...

SF: ...so how do poets manage with these problems?

JA: Well poets, fortunately, have somewhat called “literary licence”, in which they can use any kind of form and present it in such a way that it becomes part of the art. Brathwaite has been very successful with this because he has some dub poetry and he has been able to do interesting things with language in it, make interesting combinations, do interesting kinds of blends of words and so on and so forth. So the poet, in other words, is freer than the ordinary person to experiment and to introduce into his language the kind of language that some people look down on and don’t want to see in print. There are quite a few educated people who have no regard for the non-standard variety of, say, like Bajan or any of the Creoles. They think they should be swept under the carpet, should not be allowed, etc. etc. and some people will go with the notion that, even if they are Creoles speakers themselves or non-standard dialect speakers, if you want their children to speak the same way as they do, you want to keep them down socially, because language is associated with social mobility: the better you speak, the more you go up the social ladder So they feel “why do you not want my children to speak like you? why do you want my children to continue the way they speak is it because you don’t want them to make progress?” But this is not so, because from a purely linguistic point of view nothing is wrong with the way a Creole speaker language...what people have not realized is that it has a system, it has a structure, it has its own grammar, and all that...so it’s a problem and it continues to be a problem in our language teaching here in the Caribbean of English and in the French Creole territories...it continues to be a problem for all languages actually, because first of all you really cannot teach somebody another language or another dialect without moving from their first language or their first dialect; you can’t wipe it out...it’s what they were born with. If you notice, and I’m sure this may have happened to you, if you are bilingual or almost bilingual and you speak two languages quite fluently, you have your first language, and then you have

English as a second language. Get into some situation of crisis or get really upset emotionally, what comes out? Your first language, automatically! So it's too powerful, it's too natural to kill, so the answer is not to kill off the Creoles and pretend that they do not exist and wipe out the non-standard dialects, the answer is to move from the first language towards the standard. Velma Pollard has a book, *From Jamaican Creole to Standard English*, which is excellent for teachers showing them how to use the Creole as a stepping stone to acquiring the standard dialect. Craig did work in this, too. How to use that first language or first dialect creatively to step across and what you have to keep emphasizing, as I tell my students all the time, is the context of use...there's nothing wrong in using dialect or Creole with your friends, in natural settings, in your home if that's what your parents use when you are speaking with them, but you can't use it in the education system...your teacher has to use it to bring you out, to show you another way of saying it, you know, in other words teachers don't have to use only a sentence like "Me na nyam", which means "I can't eat", to the child who is a Creole speaker either Jamaican or Guyanese Creole – you'll find it in both Creoles – but the teacher has to use them and say "You know that you can say that, but there's a different way of saying it which you must use in this context: when you are speaking with a stranger, when you are in school, when you are on the radio". Nothing is wrong with speaking your nation language or your non-standard dialect, nothing at all but context, context...

SF: ...matters. In fact, I met Prof. Velma Pollard and I was surprised by how much she was concerned with education and when we were speaking about the Creoles and by what was defined by John Rickford [Professor of Linguistics at Stanford University, NbR] as a "*Creole continuum*", well, she did not agree very much with this definition, because she told me that she thinks about the interconnections between Standard English and Creoles more in a circular way, so do agree or do you think about this in a unilinear way?

JA: No, I don't think so. Having been in education myself and having to look at all these various mistakes of language and having broadcast about this kind of thing, and having done interviews on TV and so on, I am thinking that it's not a straight line – that is an ideal that we are looking at it – it is something in which there are gradations. Yes, it is something of A graded scale varieties, shading into other varieties, but I think it is probably more circular indeed, because you have connections between the two, and that's the point she is making in her book: that if you use a kind of connection in the Creole with the standard, you will be able to get a child more easily to the standard. You need to emphasize to him or her the context of usage, where it is best to use what, so if you only know your nation language you are limiting yourself to only operating within a narrow space, a fairly narrow space, a fairly narrow context; if you learn the other type of language or the other dialect, because my big thing about Caribbean English speakers is that they should be bidialectal, they should be able to have a knowledge and a mastery or semi-mastery of both dialects. What you will find is that very often the non-dialectal speaker or Creole speakers understands the standard perfectly, but can't produce it, and in many cases the standard person understands the Creole or the non-standard dialect and can produce it to an extent, a few just can't produce it because they were schooled and kept away from it, but that is very rare. So the idea is to get the students of the English-speaking Caribbean to master two dialects, to be at least basically proficient in the standard, to be fluent in their non-standard, their first language, or L1 as we call it, or Dialect 1, and in their second dialect they should have at least a basic proficiency in that.

SF: You also teach semantics: what could you tell me about, let's say, some recurrent linguistic chains in Creoles, I mean in my thesis I would like to see poets from different islands of the

Caribbean, not just focusing on a particular island, and I would like to search for some specific connections between them. Do you think that looking for a specific semantic chain could be a useful tool to analyze their poetry, seeing things from a linguistic point of view?

JA: I think so, because semantics has to do with meaning and certainly many Caribbean poets are trying to interpret and convey the nature of Caribbean reality to their readers. So that if you look at a semantic chain, a chain of meaning, to me there would be a Caribbean semantic chain which was stressed across the region regardless of territories, but it has meaning and it has application for readers and I think poets you could look at that, too.

SF: How do you think that Caribbean aesthetics in literature or poetry has been changing during the last fifty years? Do you think that there is a poetic canon or that one could be traced?

JA: One might be able to be traced, yes, I feel – I don't know if you have looked at Derek Walcott...

SF: Sure!

JA: ...but I feel that Walcott is Caribbean and yet not Caribbean in his approach because he is more – what should I say? – he tends to be more classical in his whole approach to language, to the expression of Caribbean reality, and so on. Whereas, if you look at Brathwaite, you look at Carter, you look at Mervyn Morris...well, if you look at their work, and maybe Carolyn Cooper, she has done some work, hasn't she? And in Barbados, there's a guy...

SF: AJA?

JA: Yes, AJA and there's another guy, Winston Farrell, and a lady, Esther, who have written poetry and have been trying to develop a new sort of approach to the whole expression of Caribbean reality, to the use of language, to the whole business of looking at Caribbean identity, and that kind of thing.

SF: In fact, I was thinking of the two most well-known poets: Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite. Walcott is more keen on line, prosody, while Brathwaite employs the power of words..

JA: ..words, right and the rhyme and the classical kind of poetic structure do not matter, it is the words and the wordplay and the music of the words that matter to him.

SF: So...do you think that a combination of literature and aspects of creolistics or Creole linguistics – especially semantics – could be a fruitful one in my thesis? Because I'm convinced of the power of words, and of the freedom that they allow you to express. As an Italian native speaker, it was a real challenge to start studying these subjects, poetry in Creoles...

JA: I would imagine so...But what led you to it? Why did you choose it?

SF: I was fascinated by the jigsaw that poetry presented me each time I couldn't understand a word...actually I am fascinated by poetry in general, but then I started reading a poem by Walcott, 'Parade' – which is maybe not the best known of his poems – but I was interested in the ways he was using his language, the images he was able to construct, the musicality he

conveys with his poetry...so this basically led me to read more Walcott, and then I moved on to Brathwaite, and then all the rest...But let us move to the last question...how did you organize your research? How is your department structured?

JA: As you see there were really two strands originally, which always worked in conjunction, because when I came my husband had the English or the Anglophone side, I joined with that and then I extended to the Multilingual side and for a good while we were separate but still together, because I was working with the English base, spreading across into the other languages. What happened was that I was working informally on my Multilingual Supplement to his English dictionary...then as I told you the monitoring committee recommended that I work on my own dictionary. For years I had no funding when I did the Supplement, I worked on my own, I bought the books, I travelled at my own expense, set up the links with the various universities in Venezuela, in Puerto Rico, in Costa Rica, in Santo Domingo, in Cuba, and then in the Francophone Martinique, Guadeloupe, Haiti, French Guiana. When the dictionary came out, when I finished the dictionary manuscript – we finished it on 11th May 1992 – it's when I put the whole dictionary together on the computer – it was still on diskettes at that time and sent it out to Oxford. Between 1992 and 1996, when the *Dictionary of Caribbean English* was actually published, my husband and I were looking for funding. We both made applications to CARICOM, the Caribbean community, and Edwin Carrington, the general secretary, was very impressed with our work and he took the applications forward. And my Multilingual project was funded by the EU. At that time the Caribbean Anglophone countries were trying to push culture, so they had this cultural centres programme, and they were intrigued by my multilingual project. It was what just the region needed, rather than just a strict Anglophone thing, so they voted funding for my project, under this cultural centres programme. Mine was the only research project on the programme, the others were actual cultural centres, one in Jamaica, one in Trinidad, one in the Dominican Republic and me here, as the research person. So, this is how the multilingual side of the work grew, I was given the funding in 1998, but I had been working on my dictionary since 1984, so that I worked for about fourteen years without funding...without backing, without anything, and then I developed it, when the university said that I would be employed as a lexicographer, and I got together a staff of about fourteen people, because I had staff here on the ground, I had two research assistants here full time, one in French and one in Spanish, she [Hélène Zamor, NbR] is also my first Ph.D. student in lexicography, she just completed her Ph.D. successfully, but she has some revisions to do, so I am still working with her on her lexicon of French Caribbean music. Hélène is from Martinique. So I had her full time and a Spanish one, he was from Antigua, he was working in Spanish all time with me, and they both travelled with me when I had to travel, because I have been to all the territories except Haiti and Cuba for specific reasons, but I had a Cuban native speaker on the ground here as well. So there were just me, the two research assistants, and the main research assistant, the Martiniquan girl, she was keyboarding as well, and we had a secretary that belonged more to the Anglophone project at the time, then I had field researchers in Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, Dominican Republic – which helped Haiti as well – Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and I had a Cuban on the ground, so I had about nine field research assistants, and it was about twelve of us on the staff, and then the funding was limited to two years, so that I had to reduce my dictionary by almost half because it could have been twice as big. And then the publisher didn't do a good job at all, because she squeezed the manuscript up together, didn't put in my eighty pictures, she squeezed up the indexes at the back and I would like to have that edition redone. She is in Jamaica, she is the head of Arawak Publications, a Guyanese I went high school with and then subsequently taught at the University of Guyana, she was head of UWI Press, but then she went on her own. And I really should not have

published with her, but i didn't know how inefficient she was, because she hasn't marketed the dictionary very well either. I hope to get my *Flora, Fauna and Food* redone, expanded and then I'm not giving her any more work. What I did after the funding was over was to get the permission of the university to continue with my research then i started teaching linguistics. I continued like that, I ran the project, and then my husband got ill in 2004. The Caribbean English dictionary came out after he had retired, in 1996. He was working all alone from 1990 onward without being paid, all he was given was a secretary. After he fell ill in 2004 I had to run both branches of lexicography and the university was only paying me for lecturing, I appealed to the principal for a post in Lexicography and he agreed saying that I should have the support of the Dean of Humanities. I had that support, as the Dean is a linguist, so the post of Senior Research Fellow in Lexicography was approved in 2004-2005, but was funded from 2007, so now I'm Senior Research Fellow in Lexicography, having been appointed last year.

SF: And you mentioned another Supplement to the Caribbean English Dictionary?

JA: My husband worked on a small supplement to the English Dictionary. called the *New Register of Caribbean English Usage*, which we are finishing up now, we are still trying to proofread it, but he can't see, he can't do much... I'm now in charge of all that, I'm going to produce it and we have it here in the computer, I'm having corrected it now, seeing that everything is as it should be lexicographically, while I work on Volume 2 of the *Multilingual Dictionary*, but I don't have staffing. I have one part-time research assistant, who helps me excerpt text, as I'm still collecting material. At the end of this year I'll stop and from next year I start compiling the actual Volume, writing the actual entries and so on. And I have some final-year undergraduate students as volunteers, who are doing the Study of Caribbean words, which is one of the lexicography courses I've introduced.

SF: When is it due?

JA: I am starting compiling in January. That will take me another two or three years, as it takes a long time, you know. I've been able to do things much more quickly than my husband has, for in all it took him forty years to produce the Caribbean English Dictionary , which he started before he left Guyana to come here. He was working on his own, then his project was officially launched in 1972, the dictionary was finished in 1992 and was actually published in 1996, that is twenty-four years, plus the number of years he worked on his own. So lexicography is something that takes a long time. But I have a lot of my own ideas and I have a feel for it, so I well know to produce and get things out in shorter time. That's why I'm working in themes, because several languages are much, much more work than English, than one language. To produce my dictionary it took really a lot, it was about eighteen years that I've worked you know on that dictionary. But I'm getting older and I'm not doing lexicography all my life, so I have to train people, that can take over from me.

Interview with Prof. Hubert Devonish, 29th Nov. 2007, Kingston, Jamaica

Sara Florian: Prof. Devonish, what could you tell me about creolistics?

Hubert Devonish: Creolistics is a discipline within linguistics which focuses in particular but not only on a group of languages which came about as a result of contact between Europeans and non-Europeans during the colonization process. In some situations, like in the Pacific for example, it is contact between Europeans and indigenous set of people, in the Caribbean it is predominant the contact between European people with imported people in our situation from West Africa.

SF: They are the Atlantic Creoles.

HD: Yes, but you need to remember that the other Creole languages that do exist involve languages that are non European, so the question there is what are these? I suppose the first definition of Creole languages is that they originated from language contact, and usually we know when that contact began so what distinguishes Creole languages, say, from a language like Italian is that Italian derives from Latin and the Romance languages in Europe, so there was a kind of seamless movement, no particular day or time when Italian suddenly emerged, it was a gradual process of divergence from Latin and diverging across Europe: there is Italian, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Romanian, and so on, and there is no date when these languages emerged because it was a gradual process. In the case of Creole languages we know, say, for example for Caribbean Creole languages, that there were no Creole languages before 1490, or thereabout. We pretty much know when the languages would have become possible because of the dates when the people who were in contact came into contact with each other, and the evidence suggests that these language emerged very quickly, so that in a place like Surinam, which was colonised by the British in 1650, and the British left in 1667, 17 years later, and it was later seized by the Dutch, the main language of Surinam is an English Creole, suggesting that things happened very quickly, this tells you how quickly this language formed.

SF: But was this Creole influenced also by the presence of Dutch or not?

HD: Subsequently, but Dutch developed in Sranan, while in Surinamese but the main vocabulary and so on are English, it is identifiably an English Creole. It is different in Guyana, which was a Dutch colony for two hundred years and then became British, Surinam was English and became Dutch very quickly, and of course there is a French Guyana with a French Creole: it is a very complex linguistic situation you are dealing with. So the main point I am making is that these languages emerged very quickly, they emerged as a result of contact between speakers of a European language and very often a variety of a West African language and the main characteristic is that the vocabulary is predominantly derived from European languages and the structure arguably coming from another source, probably the substrate languages, probably the West African languages. I say probably because there is a massive literature on this which argues the derivation of the grammatical structures. Bickerton, for instance, has the language bio-program hypothesis, this similarities came about as a result of there had been no input into the proper language input into a new generation of children, who had been born into a hodgepodge multilingual mixed-up pidgin-like situation and therefore he goes back to what is universal human language and produced a set of grammatical structures which are the most basic two and historically the structures of human languages, that's

Bickerton's hypothesis. Others would say that these structures would be identifiable with West African languages in the case of the Atlantic Creoles. So the theory is that what we do know is that the vocabulary tends to come from the European languages and the rest of the grammatical structures from elsewhere, the interests is why the structures of these languages are very similar, and whether in fact you deal with a French Creole, an English-lexicon Creole, or a Spanish-Portuguese lexicon Creole, or a Dutch Creole, even though the vocabulary is different, the grammatical structures are the same. So that suggested something about these languages: that the common features required to be treated as a whole.

SF: You were mentioning vocabulary, lexicon, and grammar: lexicon, phonology and phonetics, but I'm not sure that these are just the grammatical aspects on which I should mainly focus my attention: what are the other main points which one should consider when reading contemporary Caribbean poetry in Creole?

HD: The tense on the aspect-marker system so that as a simple example you could say in English "I am running", the Creole equivalent sentence would be "Me a run", with an 'a' in front of the verb and nothing else, if you want to signal that it is anterior, like in "I have been running" or "I was running", there you would get a form like "Me been a run" or "Me een a run", or in more urban varieties "Me did a run", which is closer to the European. And that can be translated so it is translatable both as "I have been running" and "I was running", because the system don't match when you translate, they don't quite work; this is an example of the tense and aspect system.

Secondly, the issue of pluralisation and the fact that in Creole language generally the only noun phrases that are pluralized are definite noun phrases like "de man dem", or I would say "Woman like man", but I couldn't say "Woman dem", so pluralisation only operates with definite noun phrases and actually it is possible to pluralize personal names as well, as "Mary dem gone", meaning "Mary and her relatives" or "Mary and her friends", so the 'dem' operates as a marker in definite noun phrases.

Swinging back to the verb you get a characteristic that is called serial verbs, it is a combination of verbs in a strain together to create a single meaning, so if you say something like "a man come" it means "he is running in my direction", while "him a run go" it means "he is running away from me", "him a go school", "him a come a me yard", so the 'go' and 'come' operate as directional elements in our verbs of motion like 'come', 'go', 'walk', 'drive', and so on and so forth. You get serial verbs with the use of 'tek' like instruments "He tek a knife and cut me" meaning "He took a knife and cut me", where the 'tek' is an instrument to say "with a knife he cut me", so you have a lot of serial verb constructions. People have debated quite a bit about the prospect of serial verbs being an African influence there, because the language which have serial verb constructions are very few in the world like Chinese, other languages are serialising verbs are Niger Congo, or West African Kwa languages, which is a huge group of Niger Congo, and Caribbean and Atlantic Creoles is a third group, suggesting there is an influence of Niger Congo, Kwa in particular, in Atlantic Creoles.

The non inflection of personal pronouns in subject verbal possessives is another thing: "Me sse the man", "The man see me", "This is me book" and so on. Any kind of fairly common book on Caribbean languages and Atlantic Creoles will give you a sketch. If you look in Cassidy's *Jamaica Talk*, you will outline all of very simple non-technical terms, so you get some sense of what are the features you are looking for.

SF: What are the African languages which most influenced Caribbean Creoles? We are talking about slavery from West Africa to the Caribbean.

HD: They are basically the standard sources depending on the Creole language would be Akan, which is more or less spoken in Ghana, so the Akan cluster including Twi, Fante, Aka-Pen. If it is a French Creole you get a lot of claims of influence from...

SF: Ewe?

HD: Ewe, Fonbe, all of them are part of the same language group, or cluster. And of course you have a considerable amount of influence as well obviously from the Bantu languages, Kikuyu in particular, but it is specific to the particular Creole language, so you get a Creole language which is pretty much almost there, like the Berbice Dutch Creole and it has predominant influence from Eastern Ijo, which is a cluster of languages spoken in Eastern Nigeria, languages like Kalabari and so on. So it depends on the particular Creole, but generally the Akan group, which is inclusive of the Akan sub-group, and the Fonbe, and then Bantu, in particular Kikongo. A lot of people have been spending a lot of time tracking them down, there is a massive literature on it, like with the *Journal of Pidgins and Creoles*.

SF: It was surprising for me to find the influence of tonal languages on the poetry in Creole, because it is so musical when you listen to a poet performing his poems, like Walcott or Brathwaite, what do you think about the connection of the tonalities, the tones of African languages, and poetry?

HD: I wrote two books about tones on Caribbean Creole languages. The problem is making the transfer of this specialist work, because simply saying you hear the tonality doesn't really help because there are different kinds of tone languages in West Africa and their sub-types, so for someone who is not a linguist the risk of giving the impact of tone languages is going to be difficult and technical thing. Because music itself has rhythmic features to it, as well as pitch features to it, it is a combination of both things, so, what are you hearing, rhythmic or pitch features? Is it a combination of both, and, if so, what kind of combination? The pitches are predictably based on the beat, because if the pitches are predictably based on the rhythm, then you have something like English, or even Italian, these are stress-accent languages where the sentence intonation gets associated with the stress syllable. If, on the other hand, you have a musical or pitch differences that are at least in part independent of the rhythm, and then they are unpredictable then maybe you have a feature which is more tonal. So it's not just a matter of whether it's up and down, it's a ritual between pitch, duration and rhythm, and how they come together, and whether in fact you can say that one seems to be more like a West African tonal language, or this one more like an intonation language like English or pitch-accent, a stress-accent language like English.

SF: So you focused on repetition, tonalities, etc?

HD: It's again the interface with rhythm on the one hand and the pitch differences on the other. For instance, Ras Michael is a Guyanese poet and he has a lot of two-syllable words that we pronounce differently from the way English would do it.

SF: Are you from Guyana?

HD: Yes, and in Guyana, for instance, we have words like “wata” and not “water”, and we make a distinction between ‘dàda-words’ and ‘da-dà words’...so very subjectively this is the kind of linguistic distinctions that interest to me.

SF: Are you familiar with Brathwaite and the way he employed a particular graphic style to express differences of pronunciation, of performance, of orality in print?

HD: I know the poems and I know the print and I know that in the late 1980s he started playing with it. I see things on the page and the lines coming down, but I cannot claim to have any special insight to what they mean. I think I would have to hear them read and match the reading to the things on the page to see if I see any consistent pattern: this is how I operate as a linguist. The key thing is he won the Casa de Las Americas Prize for a very small book, I don’t remember the title, but it focused on what he calls Nation Language and the tonalities...

SF: *History of the Voice*?

HD: *History of the Voice*, that’s it, and as a linguist I would ask what is meant by tonality, what are the things to be going out to measure, I would measure the difference of pitch between x and y, the difference of links between one and another, these things have physical characteristics that should be analysed if you are going to make any statement, so non literary people think that the research method of literary people is their feelings.

SF: Do you agree with a monolinear version of an interaction of Creoles in a *continuum* or do you imagine like a circled thing? how would you say that they interact among each other?

HD: You can construct a strain of features that are more or less English, or more or less Creole, and a combination and so on, that is true, but much of the variation is not necessarily Creole to English, within Creole itself, or probably within varieties of English. A simple example: in Jamaica you have regional variation of dialects inside Jamaica, so if you say “Me a walk”, or you say “Me da walk”, or “Me de walk”, each one of these forms signals different messages about who you are and where you come from, so I’m saying that simultaneously you would have particularly linguistic features which can be identified as more or less English, you have features which are simply variable within Creole itself and say or do other kinds of things. So to accept that there may be some kind of acceptable mix of features doesn’t deny the other, that you may have variability within Creole or within English itself. And then there is the fact that you don’t get random mixtures of Creole and English, so certain kinds of combinations are possible and not others, and the reason why that is important is that notably someone like DeCamp talks about a *post-creole continuum*, essentially denying the existence of a Creole and saying that everything is on a continuum; the other perspective is that most Englishes have idealised norms, but nobody speaks either English all the time or the idealised so-called Jamaican *patwa* all the time, but in fact people are doing things showing a level of variability. So if we are going to argue that Creole doesn’t exist because you don’t find anybody talking it consistently, neither does English exist here, because nobody uses consistently English either, right? So if you are talking about the Creole continuum, either there is no pool or there are two pools, but you can’t get the argument that DeCamp puts forward, that there is no Creole end but there is an English end, because English is as much an artificial construct as Creole.

In the end it makes sense to propose that you have two idealised languages: English and Creole and a variety of mixtures, to the extent that people are bilingual, they switch between one and the other. But bilinguals are lazy: the general tendency will be to move as little as it is

possible, so you move enough to signal that change in language, but not so much to the inconvenient of changing massively your structures. What actually happens in reality is that you have, therefore, more Creole-like speech and more English-like speech operating, rather than two completely distinct varieties, and this movement is particularly characteristic of those who are to some degree bilingual.

SF: This is very interesting, and it explains something I was very surprised about: to see a Jamaican Language Unit on campus...

HD: Why were you surprised?

SF: Because critics at first tended to see Jamaican as a *patwa*, a dialect, in the pejorative sense and not as a “language”.

HD: Well, the first conference on Creole languages took place in 1958, so it was fifty years ago, the discipline of linguists would have established that they are different languages with their own structure. What has happened over the years is that a combination of probably attitude plus a pressure from linguists has caused a kind of rise in the awareness on the status of the language, but there would be ten thousands of people at least who would agree in saying they are a form of broken English, so it’s a gradual process but linguistics as distinct from literature has always been aware that these things are languages.

§

Interview with Earl McKenzie, 3rd Dec 2007, Kingston, Jamaica

Sara Florian: You are a published poet, your first book *Against Linearity*, and then *A Poet’s House*...

Earl McKenzie: Poetry, yes, but I am also a fiction writer, I published two collections of short stories as well *A Boy Named Ossie* and *Two Roads To Mount Joyful*, two collections of short stories...

SF: And what are they about?

EMK: *A Boy Named Ossie* is set in rural Jamaica, is about a little boy, about ten-years old, growing up in rural Jamaica and the experiences he has growing up there. All the stories are about the same character.

SF: Like Claude McKay’s *Banana Bottom*?

EMK: Yeah, that’s a novel, that is set in rural Jamaica as well. Mine is a collection of short stories, rather than a novel and *Two Roads To Mount Joyful* is set mostly in rural Jamaica, and is more adult.

SF: And there’s a third book of poetry which is due out?

EMK: Yes, *The Almond Leaf*, which is due out next month [January 2008].

SF: When did you start writing poetry, thinking that you needed to write?

EMK: I've been writing since childhood, I was about 8-9 years of age, it's part of my nature, a second nature, I've been doing it almost all my life.

SF: Looking at a span time of fifteen years in which you published your books of poetry, from 1992 *Against Linearity* to 2005 *A Poet's House*, to 2008 with your last one, can you trace down any major links between your books or any evolutions in the narration, in poetry, something that links poems?

EMK: Well, I don't know... I was telling you that I recently discovered that many of them are about painting and art, which I was not conscious of until someone asked me to write an article on the links...I'm very aware that people say that they're all very rooted in Jamaican experience, a few of them analyse my life overseas. I think that they might deal with the Jamaican rural landscape and cultural sites, especially the Jamaican landscape where I grew up. So I think that I'm bit of an environmentalist, in the sense that I'm very interested in nature or the natural world, plants, animals, fruits, the earth, the sea. Some of them are very philosophical and deal with my philosophical interests, many are sociological about Jamaican society...

SF:...like the poem 'Against Linearity'?

EMK: 'Against Linearity' is a clearly sociological poem in a way. A lot of them are about women, love poems, fruits, mangoes: mango is a special symbol in a lot of my poems. I was at the doctor's once and the nurse who reads all of my stuff, told me that she likes my mango poems a lot, and when I was leaving they called me back and gave me a mango, a big mango, you know...[laugh] Many critics that I have read say that – I think it was something written by Eddie Baugh – that my poems...what they do is “they show the significance of ordinary things”, the ordinary experience I write about. I think I recall reading somebody saying that art or literature should try to take ordinary experience and make it holy, and I think that in a way that is what I do.

SF: It's like creating another dimension in which 'holy' matters. It reminds me of Lorna Goodison's poems and the spirituality she puts inside them, seeking through everyday things, everyday life, to transpose it onto the written page.

EMK: Yes, I admire Lorna Goodison a lot. I wrote an article on her, in which I liken her to Spinoza, my favourite philosopher, who was once described by Novalis as being “intoxicated with God”, and in Lorna Goodison's book, *Heartease* I think, she seems to be like Spinoza, “intoxicated with God”.

SF: Another dimension... “intoxication” is like something that I felt when I was reading Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea*, and it was like a complete experience of nature as what led the main characters towards madness or alienation. It was as if the Caribbean environment and nature, that you and other poets depict so insistently, is like an intoxication, something that penetrates inside...If you have the power of catching this kind of sensations, it remains inside of you and that's why I have been so passionately reading Caribbean poems. I was struck by the great amount of Caribbean poetry that is produced here, instead in Italy young people are not

encouraged to read and write poems, or to buy books of poetry...even though we have a great literary tradition! I really appreciate what you are doing in terms of a Caribbean culture...

EMK: I agree with you. My first poem as a boy, going home from school late one day, talked about a bird. It was the twilight and both of us were going home late, we were almost colliding with each other on the road, and I went home and wrote this poem, 'Blue Bird', and my teacher saw it and said that I could write poetry, and encouraged me to keep on writing poems. So I used to write poems about events in the school, and I recited them, I read them at concerts and so I became the school poet. And people in the community were very appreciative of that and walking on the road, on the street, people stopped me to talk about my poems. So I grew up in this, from a child I had this sense of poetry or something important and something that people appreciated. I've had this strong feeling that poetry somehow would be an important part of all my life...and my teachers had that feeling. I have to tell you a story, I was going home from school in the evening and I saw a man in the country, rural Jamaica in the hills, and I saw this old man with a bundle of grass on his head and a donkey going home from his field. When he saw me, his face lit up and he said: "You're dat boy who writes all those poems up at de school?" and I said "Yes, sir", and he said "Good man, keep going, you keep writing those poems." A peasant farmer going home from work...he remembered my poetry, I was so delighted, so happy, he encouraged me on keep on writing them...

SF: You told me that in many newspapers people can publish their poems and that maybe they're recognised because there are pictures of them...

EMK: Yes, I have a pack of them in some place...it's true what you say about pictures, poems and photographs of their poetry, people are recognised in the most surprising places, and this is happening because of Wayne Brown, and also Mervyn Morris. Wayne has been the editor of a newspaper supplement, which had a tremendous impact on literature in general, but poetry especially, in Jamaican society in the past few years.

SF: As far as my research is concerned – you know that I am investigating the relationship between Standard English and Creoles in contemporary Caribbean Poetry – even though you told me that you are not using Creole that much, still you have employed Creole lexicon, especially Jamaican *patwa* I guess, and Creole structures in your poetry, could you give me some instances of this?

EMK: Yes, from my recollection of what I mentioned, it is in one of my poems in *Against Linearity*, "A Tale of Two Tongues", is about that, the language situation in Jamaica, and I have a poem called "St. Hope", St. Hope is my first name: one of my students did some research and found out that St. Hope is actually an Italian saint [laugh]...I didn't know that, I thought it was an invented name, but it's actually an Italian one...

SF:...we have plenty of saints... "Italiani, popolo di poeti, santi e naviganti" which means "Italians, a people of poets, saints, and sailors"...

EMK: [laugh] And also in my paintings I use Creole expressions...

SF: This is very interesting...

EMK: I know that there are some poems I wrote recently about dancehall music, where I also use Creole. There's a poem titled "Voice drummers".

SF: Of course I cannot ask you as a linguist what you think because you are not a linguist, but do you think of Jamaican language as a 'language' or as a '*patwa*', a 'Creole', or 'nation language' as we were saying the other day?

EMK: Well, I'm not a linguist, but I've read a lot about linguistics and I've taken one course in linguistics as a student...[laugh]...I don't think I know enough about it to come out strongly on that question, but I'm taking my lead...I think Frederic Cassidy is the most respected, most highly esteemed scholar who has studied Jamaican language, and the fact that he titled his book "Dictionary of Jamaican English" and not as a language separately, I'm inclined to agree with him and say that it is a dialect of English, rather than a language separately, but the newer linguists and people in my department regard it rather as a separate language, which lies on a *continuum* with English...and the Jamaican moves up and down the *continuum*...

SF: Do you think of a spectrum of *continuum* as something linear, unilinear I mean, or something which – like Prof. Velma Pollard, for instance, states – is kind of circling around and interconnecting? I mean, if a native speaker of Jamaican English is speaking to someone like me, he is using maybe a more standardized form, but if he is speaking with you, you can hear some *patwa* in it.

EMK: I'm not very aware of that, but given my poem *Against Linearity*, I suspect it's non-linear you know! [laugh] But the vocabulary is mostly, probably 80% or more, of English origin, and the syntax is partly West African. I'm inclined to think that because they're so closely linked anyway in usage that if I have to make a decision I would probably go with Cassidy, and say it's a dialect of English.

SF: What do you think about milestones of dialect Caribbean poetry like Claude McKay and Louise Bennett? Do you feel that they broke into the literature, into the canon of the region, that they employed dialect to state something?

EMK: Claude McKay was a real pioneer with his *Constab Ballads*, but I think that Louise Bennett had a much larger impact on the society, being both a dramatist, actress, comedian, newspaper writer, tv and media personality and poet. Louise Bennett is probably the most admired Jamaican personality of our time, among Jamaicans. People see her as somebody who made them accept and be proud of the Creole language. People still call Louise Bennett the first lady of Jamaican comedy and I think that often people think that Creole is not a language for seriousness or deep thinking, but for comic things.

SF: Today there is still a difference between poems in creoles and in "standard languages", but, as we know, no one speaks as it is written in the books, for languages are fluent, are something in constant evolution...that is why I would like to see how the aesthetics of poetry is changing together with how languages are changing as well, so as a philosopher you teach philosophy in literature, what do you think about the aesthetics of Caribbean poetry? Do you think that it has been changing in, let's say, the last fifty years?

EMK: Yes, well, I'm aware of some of the history of it, the historical development, but you also need to study it carefully, but I certainly think that from McKay to Louise Bennett and all

the dub poets and performance poetry. There was a recent poetry contest at “Red Bones Blues Café” [a club in Kingston, Jamaica, NbR], most of the people who perform seem to be what they call ‘performance poets’, and there is quite a bit of that in night clubs in Jamaica. People who tell me they have no interest in poetry, but they like dub poetry, they understand it, they do not have to think or to analyse to get into it, it’s immediate and understand, they can hear it and there’s a kind of rhythm, they can dance to it. It has a kind of close connection to music and dance than the more reflective kind of poetry, that I write. So, people find it easy to relate to it. What I find is that when I used to listen to Michael Smith, whom I really admire, is astonishing, but when you look at the poems on the page, they seem to be very disappointing. It is the extra-linguistic factors, voice quality, gesture, and salt, which are lost completely when it’s written down, and it seems quite bare and uninteresting when it’s written on the page, but when it’s performed it’s something else...

SF: I’m thinking of Kamau Brathwaite and his use of his *Sycorax Video Style*, and the fact that he is employing different fonts and different sizes of words to try to communicate the oral part of poetry, like he wanted to translate a performance onto the page. So, it’s really something that strikes me a lot: how poetry is connected with orality because of the African tradition and how poets like Brathwaite or others try to reproduce it on the page, exemplarily. They have often been counterpoised in a sense, I mean Brathwaite and Walcott, because Walcott is more keen on perfection, on the rhyme, prosody and so on, and yet they can give you two different points of view on Caribbean culture, Caribbean languages. But I think that you maybe feel closer to Walcott than to Brathwaite, poetically speaking...

EMK: Yes, this is true...

SF: ...and you are a poet, as Walcott is, and a painter, as Walcott is, so how do you relate painting to your poetry?

EMK: I’ll show you something. This just came off the press: I’m taking part in an art show in New York at the moment, and this book [Bishop, Jacqueline. *Writers Who Paint, Painters Who Write*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2007. NbR] was produced to be a part of that. One of the items comes from the *Calabash Journal* [McKenzie, Earl. “A Philosopher Who Also Writes and Paints”. *Calabash: A Journal of Caribbean Arts and Letters*. New York: New York University, 4: 2, Spring/Summer 2007. <<http://www.nyu.edu/calabash/vol4no2/0402124.pdf>> 6 Jan. 2008. NbR], the editor of the journal is the editor of this book as well [Jacqueline Bishop, NbR]. And I wrote an article for it entitled “A Philosopher Who Writes and Paints”, that was my first thinking about the link between them.

SF: So can you relate any paintings to your poetry? Did you begin painting then you realized that it was something you had already written or vice versa?

EMK: I did both of them quite separately. I started writing poetry at about the age of 8 or 9. I didn’t do a lot of art at high school, there wasn’t any art program, so I did more writing at high school. But it wasn’t until many years later, when I was actually teaching art at a college that I started painting a series called the “Coconut Paintings”, the “Coconut Series”, and I started writing poems about the coconut as well, the poem in *Against Linearity* is called “A Coconut Alphabet”, a long poem written in conjunction with those paintings. So, I paint and sometimes when a painting ends a poem would begin when the painting is ended. Or sometimes I would write a poem about a painting just completed. Or a poem would suggest a painting. Sometimes I

go from the poetry to the painting, painting to poetry and when one starts the other is ending. And I wasn't exposed to philosophy at that time, I didn't know much about that, and I started reading a book about the Buddha, Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, which was quite impressive at the time. That was my first exposure to Buddhist philosophy, and about the painting and the poem I was writing I realized that I was much influenced by the Buddhist philosophy I was reading by Hermann Hesse...

SF: So are you a Buddhist?

EMK: I don't call myself a Buddhist...I don't give myself any religious labels, but I have a very deep admiration for the Buddha. I admire the Buddha as a thinker and I have a very great respect for he was a philosopher as well, for he was a great philosopher, as well as a great religious leader, so I value a lot of his insights. I think I have a soft spot for the Buddha and I tend to lean towards his views...and the religion that he founded seems to be the most peaceful of all religions. It is a very peaceful religion and I admire peace and humanism. I also admire much about Jesus and Christianity. If you read my poem "A Coconut Alphabet", you see I have Christian influence in it as well. But it was the first time when writing my article I realized for the first time that these three interests of mine were coming together: my writing, my painting, and my philosophy.

SF: Do you think that any philosopher influenced your poetry?

EMK: My poetry? Yes, sometimes. There's a poem I have, "Nature Loves a Continuum", which was influenced by Spinoza, who's my favourite philosopher. And I think that in *A Poet's House* "The Humanity of Beauty" shows Plato's influence...

SF: Actually, the first thing which I saw when I entered your house was one of Plato's books...

EMK: Oh yes, that's a gift from a student, I taught a course on Plato some years ago and at the end of the course a student gave me that book as a present. I am teaching history of philosophy this semester, a graduate course, and Plato is one of the philosophers I analyse. I think he is one of my favourite of the ancient philosophers.

SF: And you mentioned a painting "Graffiti"?

EMK: Yes, let me show you some pictures of my paintings in which I employ Creole, as "Artefact" [Image 1, from Bishop, Jacqueline. *Writers Who Paint, Painters Who Write*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2007.], which



Image 1_EMK-Artefact



Image 2_EMK - Graffiti

represents a Jamaican hand-cart with the Jamaican proverbs written on it. Instead, in "Graffiti" [Image 2] there's a story I've written: I did the painting first and then I wrote a story. It represents a bamboo wattle, a building technique based in rural Jamaica; this painting is about a man who is living in a hut made of bamboo on which there is his writing, the graffiti of the title.

SF: Graffiti on the walls of his house: "When cockroach make dance he no invite fowl" ["When a cockroach gives a party, he does not

invite chickens”, NbR].

EMK: “What is fe yu cant be unfeyu” [“What is for you, cannot be otherwise but yours”, NbR] is another Jamaican proverb: what he writes are proverbs, sayings, titles of songs that he has heard.

SF: ...and politics as well... “Vote J.L.P. – Vote P.N.P.”

EMK: Yes, it is his feelings towards politics...his frustration with Jamaican politics...[laugh]...and then his drawing: a bird, a woman, a pot on fire, wood fire, palm coconut, a man is carrying water on his head, a basket, a fork, things that he uses, and a hoe. I also wrote a story called “Graffiti”, which was published in a Journal about the character.

SF: Those paintings are beautiful...



Image 3_EMK – Between Us and the Night

EMK: These? All the paintings that I haven’t at home are in New York at the show. I’m interested in this because what I’m doing now is this exhibition which I have in New York and this book of paintings based on my poems: the first one I did recently was titled “A Renaissance of Dread”, which is based on a poem in *Against Linearity* called “Burglar Bars”, so this painting is a painting drawn from the poem “Burglar Bars” with the word ‘dread’, shaped into the metal. It was quite a popular painting in New York, people like it a lot. So I thought of a series, based on that theme.



Image 4_EMK – Ornaments Against Evil

This one is from another line in the poem, called “Between Us and the Night” [Image 3] and this one is called “Ornaments Against Evil” [Image 4], both are phrases from the poem “Burglar Bars” in *Against Linearity*. I have just finished this one. [Image 5]



Image 5_EMK – The Healer’s Drum

SF: This seems to have the influence of “Orphism”, do you know what I mean? I speak of “Orphic Cubism”, during the 1910s the French Robert Delaunay’s paintings were defined ‘orphyic’ by Guillaume Apollinaire, they tried to depict the sensations synesthetically through the spectrum of colours, rendering musical vibrations, and when I was looking at it I gathered the same impression: what does it represent?

EMK: It’s a bit different from everything I’ve done before...This one is based on one of the stories I have in *A Boy Named Ossie*. It is called “The Healer’s Drum”. Ossie the boy is taken by his mother to a faith healer because he is not feeling well.

SF: Is it connected with ‘myal’ and ‘obeah’?

EMK: You know the healer tries to distinguish himself from the obeahman, because obeah is meant to do harm: people go to obeah when they want to hurt somebody, because you go to the obeahman when someone has done something bad to you, and you want justice, and you don't trust the court or else the courthouse is so far away that you can't go there, but you want to get revenge from the person who harmed you, and so you go to the obeahman to do something to his or her spirits, so that the spirits harm the person. But the healers are not in the obeah, they are faith healers, they are herbalists, who study herbs and plants.

SF: And the myal? Is it different from obeah?

EMK: Myal is different from obeah. Myal was intended to be a correction to obeah. Myal is supposed to be the good side of obeah, if you like, the healing, myal emphasizes the healing part rather than the harm.

SF: And do they work?

EMK: [laugh] Well, I don't know much of that...Erna Brodber knows a lot more on that than I do!⁹⁶¹ But in my story the little boy is being sent to a healer and he is walking, because the healer lives up in a village and you can hear the drums, where the healer has his church, his temple, where they beat drums, and he goes up there and hears drums. So this painting is titled "The Healer's Drum". The drum beats...bam bam bam, bam bam bam: that is why I represented three beats

SF: So, you were actually painting aural sensations...as I said...right?

EMK: Yes, it is a visualization of the sound.

SF: Exactly, a kind of syncretism of painting and music, of arts...

EMK: Yes, I think you are right. And can you see the landscape in the background? The hills, the mountains and the trees are part of a rural setting in the country...

SF: I went to Clarendon last weekend, so I've been to the rural part of Jamaica, because I went to Crofts Hill and Jamestown, where Claude McKay was born, I can visualize this kind of landscape...



EMK: Oh, did you go to Jamestown? Claude McKay's "My Green Hills of Jamaica", then I can show you some more rural paintings. This is a self-portrait [Image 6], this is a younger me feeding a bird...

Image 6_EMK – Self Portrait **SF:** A hummingbird?

Image 6b_EMK – Self Portrait – Detail

EMK: A hummingbird, yes. There used to be a bird station near Montego Bay, I went there many years ago and the bird sits on your fingers and you can feed it...so a friend of mine took a photograph of me feeding this



⁹⁶¹ The Jamaican writer Erna Brodber wrote the novel *Myal*. (London; Port of Spain: New Beacon Books. 1988; 1999).

bird and I decided to do a painting of it.

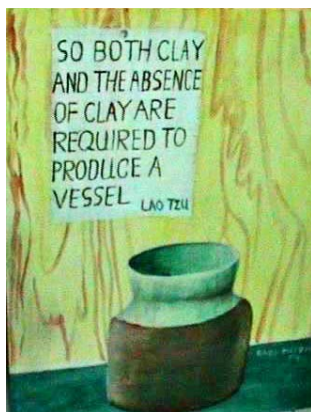


Image 7_EMK – Vessel

EMK: Instead, this [Image 7] is a representation drawn from one of my favourite books, the *Tao-te-Ching* by Lao-Tzû, the Chinese philosopher, and that quote is one of my favourite quotes from it, and that’s a pot I made myself, many years ago. So I painted ‘Vssel’, the painting of a pot with a quote from Lao-Tzû. And the paper is painted as if it was tacked on wood [Image 7b]. The Chinese combine calligraphy with other images so I thought I would do it in a Chinese way.

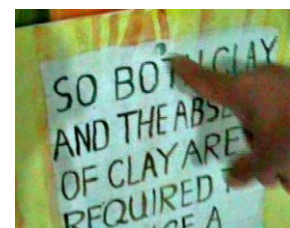


Image 7b_EMK – Vessel – Detail

Instead here I began painting a series on Rastafarian words because I think they are philosophically important: in this one [Image 8] “Irie” is a Rastafarian word, the one in New York is “Dread” – the one lined to “Burglar Bars” –, and there is another one in New York called “Livity”. These are three paintings based on Rastafarian words, or you can call it Rastafarian Creole..



Image 8_EMK – Irie

SF: Yes, Prof. Velma Pollard wrote *Dread Talk*, so “Irie” means...

EMK: It means ‘feeling great’, you know ‘I feel good’, when the Rastas smoke ganja they say “I feel Irie”, meaning “I’m on a high”...

SF: Would it be something like the Buddhist ‘nirvana’?

EMK: Something like that.

SF: At first it appeared to me like a Christian symbol, you know, there’s the INRI plaque on the cross, with that circling symbol....

EMK: Rastas paint on oil drum lids, so this is meant to suggest an oil drum lid with a Rasta word on it, and a wooden fence.

SF: And this is “Artefact”, again. [Cf. Image 1]

EMK: Yes, on canvas. The cart is there with Creole words on it.

SF: Why did you choose those three proverbs?

EMK: I wrote an article titled “Philosophy in Jamaican Proverbs”, which is published in *Jamaica Journal*, so I am philosophically interested in proverbs, that’s why I thought I would write Jamaican proverbs on this cart. Those are three Jamaican proverbs, two of which are in my article, and the other one happens to be one of my favourite Jamaican proverbs. “De truth a de gate”, “Me know I nebber go before” means that experience is always before knowledge,

which in philosophy would be empiricism: it is always after you've had experience that you say "I know it, knowledge never goes before the experience". "One-one coco full basket": coco is a small tuber which grows under the ground and farmers grow them and collect them in baskets: "one-one" means that you put cocos one at a time in the basket, eventually you have a full basket; little things add up over a period of time.

Instead, this [Image 9] is my interpretations of one of Rembrandt's – who is one of my favourite painters – paintings called "Aristotle Contemplating a Bust of Homer".



SF: Yes, I know that painting.

EMK: So, I thought about a Jamaican version of it, and it is called "Marley Contemplating a Bust of Garvey" and I also have a painting titled "The Poet and the Philosopher". So Marley is a poet and Garvey is a philosopher.

Image 9_EMK – The Poet and the Philosopher

SF: Well, they are pretty recognizable...

EMK: [laugh] I'm not a photographic kind of painter, I don't try to imitate photographs, I use the original image as the starting point. That's a philosophical one, too [Image 10]: it's a Jamaican proverb "Plantain ripe can't green again", which means...



SF: "Once the plantain is ripe it can't go back to being green".

Image 10_EMK – Green Plantain Can't Ripe Again

EMK: Exactly, so I thought to paint a young Jamaican girl, who is still green, she is still a green plantain, contemplating the ripe plantain [Image 10b], so that was the idea.

Image 10b_EMK – Green Plantain Can't Ripe Again - Detail



Image 11_EMK – Women's Eyes

And that's one that nobody understands...[Image 11] "Women's Eyes", having people around them waiting for them to fight and go on. Nobody can understand this painting, that's amazing...



Image 12_EMK – Calabash Totem

This one [Image 12] instead is one which I have at the show in New York, which is called "Calabash Totem": it's a calabash vendor on highway selling calabashes that he has carved things on and it is about Jamaican history, you know

there's the Tainos, the Spaniards (you can recognise the Spanish helmet), the African mask, the Indian elephant and the Chinese Tao.

SF: Actually I think that the Tao symbol is one of the most complete symbols ever, because it unites yin and yang, male and female components in life, it is very interesting.

EMK: I agree. This other canvas [Image 13] is in New York as well, "Monkey Jar and Pou." When I grew up as a boy in the country, in order to keep water cool, you put a thunder stone in the water.



Image 13_EMK –Monkey Jar and Pou

SF: With the poui tree...

EMK: Yes, the poui tree. This is one instead dates back to many years ago [Image 14]; a friend of mine in Wales owns the original and sent me the photographs recently.



SF: Is it a kind of totem?

EMK: Yes, a totem based on masks.

SF: This is very nice. I like the vivid colours...

EMK: Thanks. And this one [Image 15] just came from my friend in the US: it is one from the coconut series, it's a coconut falling from a



Image 15_EMK –Coconut Falling from a Tree

Image 14_EMK – Totem

tree. The stanza in the poem "A Coconut Alphabet", that stanza with the nut falling from the tree: this painting is based on that stanza in that poem. So this is one from the "Coconut Series", as well. And this one [Image 16], too.



SF: So, were you trying to depict the fruit in all its parts?

Image 16_EMK – Monument N.3

EMK: This is a part of the the nut. [Image 17] It's a section, it's a part of the nut, the husk, a part of the husk. All paintings in the coconut series were in that exhibition in Mandeville. So, this is the wall with all the paintings of the "Coconut Series".

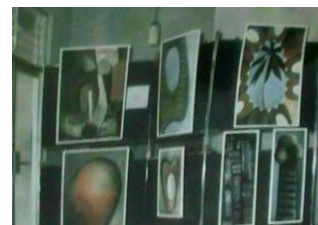


Image 17_EMK - Section of Mandeville Exhibition

fruit,
large
the



And this [Image 18] is from the coconut series, too.

Image 18_EMK – Coconut Composition

While this one [Image 19] is the cover of *A Poet's House*....

SF: When you were writing *A Poet's House* were you thinking about your own house or the intimacy which poetry provokes and the intimate feelings that you were trying to convey with your poetry?



Image 19_EMK – Interior

EMK: Well, the title poem and many poems in that collection were written while I was living in that place, the house that the poem deals with, so it is why I chose it as the title. Once I was telling a newspaper reporter that when I was having a show on campus last year [2006, NbR], that in a way every house I live in becomes ‘a poet’s house’ [laugh]. And this was also from the “Coconut Series”, titled “Monument”. So as these ones are from the “Coconut Series”. [Images 20, 21 and 22].



Image 20_EMK – Monument



Image 21_EMK – Monument N. 2



Image 22_EMK – Imprint

...And that’s me with the paintings...[Image 23]

SF: Oh, so you painted them some years ago?

EMK: Yeah, a long time ago, yeah.

SF: Some years ago...

EMK: Many years ago. You can see how young I was, almost a baby...[laugh] I was very young.



Image 23_EMK – Shot

SF: How old were you?

Image 24_EMK – Coconut Valentine



EMK: I must have been...in my late twenties. I am trying to show you all the “Coconut Series”, because those are the ones which relate most to the poem. This one [Image 24] is called “Coconut Valentine” [laugh]...These are not really good reproductions, because I have the negatives of many years ago. A friend of mine took the photographs, but while I was away studying he passed away and he had the negatives. So when I was asked to contribute to this



Image 25_EMK – Coconut Letters

Journal, the *Calabash*, and I had to print them, but unfortunately the quality of the colours has changed.

SF: Do you also make oil painting?

EMK: No, acrylic. This one was bought by an American, who was living in Mandeville. This is another painting from the “Coconut Series” [Image 25]. The original of this one is in the college in Mandeville, where I was working at that time, and I left it there.

§

Interview with Joan Andrea Hutchinson, 2nd Dec. 2007, Kingston, Jamaica

Sara Florian: Thank you Joan for meeting me. I was listening to your CD “Dat Bumpyhead Gal”, what does it refer to?

Joan Andrea Hutchinson: There are still problems accepting or assuming women in Jamaica because they wear knots, there are still places in Jamaica where children are thrown out of the schools because they have knots. For a number of years I have been using this name “Dat Bumpyhead Gal” and in 1996 I appeared on a television program. I wore my hair in the hairstyle which in Jamaica is called Chiney bumps, while in Africa they call it Nubian knots, but in post-colonial societies it’s a no-no, it’s not accepted, you can’t walk in the streets as a black person with the hair like that, and I was on television confronting the whole nation and it created such a problem because they questioned why I was allowed to wear as a lower-working class that hairstyle on TV. There are still stereotypes and a natural expectation based on racial assumptions which go back to the history. The field slaves were very dark-skinned coming directly from the African continent. The house slaves were often the product of a planter and a black slave so they were generally lighter, and house slaves had certain privileges because they were exposed to the English language. After Emancipation, the missionaries set up churches and they taught the English language. There was a stereotype in terms of language use and skin tone: the general assumption was that people speaking the English language were more intelligent than the ones who spoke the Jamaican language.

SF: I’m very surprised because Louise Bennett used what we use to call ‘dialect’, and she insisted on that word...

JAH: Yes, absolutely...But we’ve been talking much about it and society has not advanced so much from when there were problems of people writing in the newspaper.

SF: I am surprised actually by how many young girls here have their hair straightened...and in Europe we do the perms to have it curly! It’s curious how stereotypes work inversely! [laugh]

JAH: Yes, that’s curious. With a culture that has produced Bob Marley, Marcus Garvey, Rastafarianism, there are still kids thrown out of schools because they wear locks. There are also other deep socio-political issues that we have to deal with, and they influence our society.

SF: So with your work, with your poetry, with your radio performances you try to struggle against these issues...

JAH: Absolutely, and I am also a motivational speaker, so that there's a piece called 'Dat Bumpyhead Gal' with a preamble. My first cassette is called 'Dat Bumpyhead Gal', as my first CD, and I use a piece in it as a motivational speaker.

SF: Why do you think there is not much criticism on you, on your poetry?

JAH: I'm a new writer, I have three cassettes and four CDs...this was my first book, I'll be launching my second book on the 18th December [2008, *Inna Mi Heart*, NbR]. So I haven't spent so much time on that part of my work...

SF: Why did you decide to use a normalised orthography in your poetry?

JAH: There is something I've been battling for years. I was trained with Cassidy, and the Linguistics Department, Language, Linguistics and Philosophy which wanted to produce this book for me wanted to produce it in Cassidy. I thought about it, I was a bit doubtful, but the truth is that every author wants to be read, it still seems that to the average person Cassidy is not taken seriously, it seems like an academic imposition; I felt that I wouldn't be that read, so I sort of used a bit of Cassidy and also a bit of the English orthography, that is why it is mixed.

SF: In the introduction Prof. Mervyn Morris says that in your book different Jamaican accents can be recognised, is he referring to different social classes or to a geographical difference?

JAH: Yes, different social classes but even more so he is referring also to a *continuum* from one end to the other of the island; there are similarities but also differences. You will find for instance at the Western end of the island the 'been' marker: while in this end of the island you will hear "Me go a shop", "I went to the shop", on the Western part of the island you would hear "Me been go a shop" or "Me been gwen go a shop", so they use the 'been' marker. Or it may be extended just to lexical items, like the calabash: on one end of the island it is called 'gourd' or 'gourdy', on the Western end of the island is called 'paki', as in the Jamaican proverb "hand go paki come", which is based on reciprocity and basically means "I give you a hand for something, you give me a calabash"; there are geographical differences for many words and sayings.

SF: I'm also interested in the differences I've noticed between some of your poems written down and spoken in the CD...

JAH: In the written form, for the most part, we are still using the English system, like the word 'house', even if in the printed form you would find 'h-o-u-s-e', the average Jamaican speaker would pronounce 'ouse', without the initial 'h', that's why the Cassidy is so perfect for writing. Representing the Jamaican language, not everybody drops the aspirate when they are speaking, so there is inconsistency in the actual use and realisation of language, which criss-crosses social or educational barriers. In my new book I'll use the title *Inna Mi Heart*, it's a book on Jamaican love poetry. Somebody said I had to use 'Me' and I said "No! I must be 'M-i', simply because within the context of Jamaican language the first singular possessive pronoun is 'mi' in the same way that in English is 'my'. What I try to do is to standardise my work.

SF: Yesterday I went to Jameshill where Claude McKay was born, do you recognise more the influence of Claude McKay or of Louise Bennett in your work?

JAH: Well, Claude McKay wrote in the English language for the most part, so he contributed putting the body of Caribbean literature on the international map, but Louise wrote in the Jamaican language and there was a “resistance Louise” in the context of the post-colonial societies. Everything was reflected until the Reggae Radio Station – RFM – was launched in the ‘50s, we didn’t play a reggae music on a Sunday because it’s the Lord’s Day and it was considered not proper. So reggae music is ‘buguyaga’ music – which means ‘rude’ and ‘uncouth’ – and it’s not right to play it on the day of the Lord. When Lady Saw sings a reggae song that is “The Lord is my saviour, him is my keeper, I mean he never let me dung, etc.” or something like that, nobody accepts that as a religious song, even though it is very much a religious song. Similarly, when Buju Banton sings “Somebody please tell me now oh massa God world around” nobody accepts that as Christian religious music, because the vehicle is the Jamaican language. Now, if you take Buju Banton’s song and translate it into English, you get “Oh, please tell me how the way of the Lord go if”, let us put aside the rest, but that is accepted as religious music, but when it is sung in reggae, nobody is going to play that in church. That is directly what happens as a result of colonialism: everything African is not accepted as good.

SF: Actually, going back to my last question, I was thinking of Claude McKay and his use of language, can you comment a bit more on that?

JAH: What you will find when Claude was employing the dialect it was a mixture of dialect and English, not straight dialect, there was much resistance to our world as a result. Do you know of the Jamaican Development Commission, the JDC? Right, they run an unknown festival of the performing arts every year, and one of the issues that I have is that there is this notion that the language can be used just for rude, uncouth kind of contents. When the children are doing SE pieces are dressed differently from when they do it in JE, and I think: “Can’t you see there’s something wrong?” Every year this stereotype is perpetuated. A woman told me I should be dressed with peasant skirts and a basket of fruit upon my head...

SF: You are saying there is a link between the use of language and the style, the fashion, the way people are dressed differently and this contributes perpetuating social and historical stereotypes...

JAH: Yes, for example Buju Banton had a song years ago which the minister of health adopted for HIV campaign, the song went “Ragamuffin, don’t be silly, put a robe upon your ‘willy’, it will prevent if you don’t wanna catch it”. Why does the minister accept that song? If he would have used a Jamaican word for the male genitalia, the minister would have never used that song.

SF: I’m thinking of dub poets like Muta, Oku, LKJ, Jean Binta Breeze...have you ever thought of doing something in dub?

JAH: Yes, I have. But the thing is that dub works for standardised rhythm for the most part, but in my performance I’ve always said I don’t need the music, in my performances rhythms are naturally there in the way I present pieces...I’ve never worked with music, even if I won an award for a dub poetry set to music in the Jamaican language. Miss Lou used in her early work to put to music and created as it was almost dub poetry...As a writer I self-publish my books and a lot of younger writers do the same, because we want all the money to come back to us, we don’t want some publisher to take royalties and stuff. Do you know Ras Tafari? He went off in the UK and right now he is poet in residence at the city college of Birmingham. My living outside of Jamaica has meant this: either broadcasting music, or teaching courses of creative

writing in poetry, journalism, etc.. like in Spain or North Africa, in Tunisia, as well as in Holland.

SF: How was the reception of your poetry?

JAH: Wonderful, because, you see, the Jamaican brand is so strong. I remember when I went to Holland they were doing like a Caribbean theatre festival, I said I am from Jamaica, I'm a poet, I'm a performer... What I ended up doing during a kind of theatre performance it was telling Anancy Stories, doing folksongs, explaining the Jamaican culture, explaining the language, doing poetry. The same happened in Spain or Japan: Japan has already produced Japanese-*patwa* dictionary, and I think we would have done it, because we don't appreciate the value of our language. We as 'Jamaica' should maximize those opportunities because it is important. And we go back to the colonial stereotype that everything coming from Africa is inferior. What would happen if we taught English through the Jamaican *patwa*, to teach the unknown from the known.

SF: I met Prof. Velma Pollard and I was surprised by how she tries to putting together the studies of language and literature and combine SE and JE and doing what you have just said. All these people working on the same subject and doing it from different points of view.

JAH: A lot of Jamaicans don't realize that we are all pretty much all bilingual, we are all diglossic but we don't accept it, because we don't accept the Jamaican language as a language stream, so that any aberration from English is just bad English, broken English. Colonialism is so bad in terms of colonial retentions. It is not just the language, there are socio-linguistic issues to consider. Even in churches speaking the Jamaican language may become the source of embarrassment, and these are the kind of issues that we have. Once I went to Tunisia and said "Je suis de Jamaïque" "Ou est la Jamaïque?"...they thought it was somewhere close to Gambia [laugh]...but when I said "It's the country of Bob Marley": bingo! they got it and understood where Jamaica was...[laugh]

SF: Yes, and also the Creoles from other islands are not all mutually intelligible...

JAH: No, they aren't. That is why it is easier to communicate through the reggae music, think for instance to the dynamics which springs from the music of Elephant Man...To change subject, my new book is called *Inna Mi Heart* and it's all about Jamaican love poetry, and it's because a lot of people think that Jamaican language cannot communicate issues of love and passion...

SF: It is similar to the difference they made between a pidgin and a Creole: one is used to communicate practical issues, the other can express inner thoughts, but when scholars realized that Creole could explain the same range of emotions that a standard language could do, then it was raised to the level of 'language'.

JAH: Exactly, this is the all gamut of love poetry...from the beginning of a relationship, to when it's not working, to when it's all over...in a society where people are unable to articulate on those issues, there is a manifestation in terms of violence, and we cannot articulate on issues of love, I decided to write it for people.

§

Interview with Mutabaruka, 11th Dec. 2007, Kingston, Jamaica

Sara Florian: Mr. Mutabaruka, thank you for your time. I would like to start by asking what was your school formation based on?

Mutabaruka: English literature, I hardly ever heard of other European poets.

SF: What did you prefer to read, to study?

M: One thing I remember *The Animal Farm*, Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, but in school I personally started reading American poets like Sonia Sanchez and Amiri Baraka, so besides what I learned in school, I gathered from underground.

SF: And now, do you have a favourite poet, a favourite artist, a musician to whom you feel particularly close? And I include musicians because when I first came here I thought wrongly that poetry was distant from music, it was something written down, but with dub poetry I soon realized that the two can go together...

M: With dub poetry we started to fuse poetry and music, and they started to call it 'reggae poetry' or 'dub poetry', it is like performance poetry. I like artists like Peter Tosh considered as a poet, in whose work the music lends itself to a connection, so that you can understand through the music even though you don't understand the artist. The poets that I like are mostly from the '60s and '70s, like Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Gil Scott-Heron: these were the ones I used to listen to and inspire my art form.

SF: You said that during the '70s you and other people started doing this fusion of music and poetry, are you talking about Linton Kwesi Johnson, Oku Onuora...?

M: Yes, and also Mikey Smith who was killed...it was like myself, Linton, and Oku started to fuse music and poetry in the reggae vein, and there were people doing jazz poetry as well. But nowadays there aren't DJs like in the '70s, now there is mostly dancehall...

SF: So how do you create a poem? Do you start from music?

M: No, I start from poetry. The difference between the DJ and the poet is that the DJ starts from the rhythm, while the poet starts from the lines, and the music is created for the poem, whereas the DJ creates words for the rhythms. I am a poet first, because if I am to record it, I have to write it first. I write the poems and eventually I take the poems from the book and start to record them. I read the poem, recite the poem and the musician plays what he hears in the recital, that is how the music is created for the poem.

SF: Do you employ many linguistic or literary devices which are useful for the musician?

M: Not really, I just read my poems and the musician creates the music, he plays what he hears. Have you heard dancehall music?

SF: Yes, of course.

M: In dancehall music, the DJ is saying his lyrics to the rhythm. When I recite my poems I am just saying them, even if it seems that the words are following the music, it is the music which is following the word. If you listen to my earlier work, I would say a poem and the musician just play, he conforms to the words.

SF: It is a mutual thing, isn't it?

M: Yes, the musicians are keen listeners, so they hear things, it comes together as a work of the both of us. It starts like a base line, like a melody played for instance by a guitar, like instrumental hip hop, then the poets starts to rhyme. Most of my poems don't come with melody.

SF: When you record your music, what musical instrument is your favourite one?

M: It always starts with a reggae beat...when I tour I tour with a bass drum, keyboard, lead guitar, a drummer, and a percussionist; there are five musicians.

SF: Do you play instruments yourself?

M: No, I don't play any instruments.

SF: As I told you before I am interested in the use of language in Caribbean poetry and I would like to ask you if you employ and how SE and Creole in what is called a spectrum of a *continuum*...

M: I have a special way of doing it, because sometimes I find myself using a mixture of the two, I write before and then realize that there is a mixture, because I think that the first mind that created it is the intention, so if I am writing a poem I don't think at how I am going to write it, if it is a dialect poet or not. I am likely using Creole if I am writing a poem about Jamaica and poverty, "sufferation", ghetto life. If I am writing a love poem or a poem about nature I am mostly likely writing in English. When I write, I just write how it comes, I am not bound to any aspects of the dialect.

SF: Do you consider Jamaican *patwa* as a dialect or a language?

M: It's a language: if you speak English, I speak Jamaican. I give you an example for the Creole in Haiti: a person in Haiti speaks French, but someone from Guadeloupe doesn't understand him, because the Guadeloupeans or the Martinicans speak French like the French in France; the Haitians instead speak what they call a dialect of the French. The English language is also coming from other European languages, so it is not right to say that the English language is the mother of all other languages. It is arrogant when they say "Speak proper", because they mean "Speak proper English", nobody speaks like the Queen. One of the cultural manifestations of the spoken word is that the spoken word allows you a freedom of expression that most of the art forms don't, you say what you want to say, it is not bound to certain characteristics or art forms, even if sometimes the language is incorrect, the artist knows what his/her intention is.

SF: And as far as I know, your concern is more political...

M: Yes, most of my poems tend to take that African-centred commitment, what is embedded in our past as a Jamaican people. We draw from that and write. The need to be heard is one of the greatest things that a poet has, the poet wants to be heard, so that when he or she speaks it is coming from feelings. Even if music and poetry are fused, the poems are too serious, and people want to be loose and the poets go off of those looses, so that's way the poets have to stay underground, it's not up there. Poets do not lend themselves to frivolous things.

SF: When you started writing poems were you writing for yourself?

M: Yes, I started writing what I think and what I feel.

SF: Have you been to Italy to perform?

M: I've been there as a reggae artist, but not as a poet. When you perform the poem to the music, you understand the importance of the spoken word. I usually perform with the band, that is exciting because you become a part of the performance, and that makes a difference to the spoken word.

SF: As I was saying before, I am struck by the link between the written text and the musicality, and I didn't have the possibility of listening to many poets reading their poems, but I figured out that it is different to hear the poet reading his own poems and even more to see the poet performing...so I think that your work gives a completion to the art of poetry, because you involve the written text, the voice, the music...now I'll change slightly topic...when did you become Rastafari?

M: I was born a Rastafari, from school in the early '70s I started becoming a Rasta until now.

SF: Do you think that your work is inflected by this?

M: Yes, definitely. My belief system shapes the poems and Rastafari allow you to say things from a different perspective, you have a political mind, and you have a mind that is political but yet it is fake, so in Jamaica we have communists, socialists, but no awakening, so I think that what we developed is a "so so" religious and political perspective, people with a religious movement see an awakening, my poems are shaped by things seen through that eye.

SF: What are the political aims you are trying to reach with your poetry and your political commitment?

M: Liberation, and freedom of liberation, especially for black people who find themselves in the situation they are in, they are not aware of their situation, so most Jamaicans are scared to say Africans, when they speak of their parents they tell you about Scotland or Ireland, not about Ghana, being black in Jamaica is a serious problem...

SF: Even nowadays?

M: Even nowadays...but Rastafari is a shape of identity of the self that was lost in this confusion that was based on the idea of a white Jesus coming down to save us. Rastafari will free you from that mentality: everything white is white, and everything black is bad, you know?

SF: Do you feel really close to Africa?

M: I'm African first...

SF: And do you feel particularly close to other poets in the Caribbean?

M: Linton, because he has toured as much as me, and he has done the things that I did, and Jean Breeze, she's in England: I think she has excelled, and she is one of the few women to make dub poetry.

SF: And to poets from different Caribbean islands?

M: Brother Resistance in Trinidad, he uses what he calls 'rapso', not calypso, but it has its origins in calypso as opposed to soca. He uses a terminology that separates himself from the others; he is a poet that has separated himself also from dub poetry, I like that. He is not a calypsonian like Sparrow, Kitchener, and so on, this is a poet, who uses poetry to music, but he uses music that is indigenous to his environment. And another good calypsonian is Rudder, it is very interesting to consider how they articulate the social commentary of calypsonians, from Kitchener to Rudder, the political, the social, and so on.

SF: Yes, it is interesting apart from the entertainment of calypsoes...

M: We call it "edutainment", because there is not just entertainment, but also education.

SF: Did you mention Amiri Baraka before?

M: Yes, when I was at school I remembered that book of poems with music: he uses jazz music as Gil Scott-Heron, he is the most popular American radical poet, he has been very successful in infusing jazz with poetry, and has been more successful than any other American poetry.

SF: And of course, you know Brathwaite, he employs jazz, too...

M: I have seen him fusing jazz with poetry, he is one of the greatest Caribbean poets. At first when we did dub poetry, nobody appreciated that, and then Mervyn Morris was almost the one who legitimized dub poetry: he was speaking for us to say that it is literature, it is legitimized for the academia as serious writer. It is like Miss Lou, she was legitimized, but at first she was seen as a joker, not as a social commentator. And I think that what poetry should do is a social commentary as well: just recently people started to recognise our poetry...Linton was included in the Penguin Book, he is the second poet alive who has been published by Penguin, so dub poetry gets this legitimacy as real, authentic literature. But I do not consider myself as a Caribbean writer actually, I don't know what is the Caribbean: West Indies is a mistake that Columbus made, while the term Caribbean define a people: the Chinese in Jamaica are Chinese, the Indians are Indian, we are Caribbean.

SF: Well, if you are looking for etymology, the term derives from the Caribs...

M: Exactly, but I am not a Carib, nor an Indian, yet I take this terminology. I write for Caribbean people, but the Africans in the Caribbean lost their identity...the Chinese or the Indians brought Chinese or Indian food, while the Jamaicans brought slavery...

SF: In fact, I have noticed that here the social subgroups are quite separate from the rest...

M: Of course, and that is why we have to bring back memory, as the Rastafari say there is something missing, and it is missing from the majority of people: it is the Africanness, our task is to make other people aware, it is like the memory.

SF: Of course you have been to Africa..

M: Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, South Africa many times, Cameroon, a lot of countries, I've been to Egypt, about ten countries to England, Germany, Italy, Spain, Finland, Switzerland, Sweden, Denmark, in Italy to Venice, Milan, Bari, Sicily, a lot of places.

SF: What was the response of people?

M: They appreciate different cultures without taking it personal as opposed to the Americans. I think that Europeans are much tolerant of different cultures, that is why reggae can go there so many times.

SF: And in Africa?

M: They can't imagine that somebody coming from so far is 'them', and it is enthusiastic to hear somebody with which they identify. Once I toured in South Africa with Saul Williams and Sarah Jones, it was such a long performance, really interesting.

SF: Have you been to Japan? or Australia?

M: Yes, I have been to Japan and Perth. Same good response. Also Maori came from New Zealand. In Japan there was a very good response, too: thousands of people, they are very lively. I've never been to China, and I want to go to India.

§

Interview with Prof. Edward Baugh, 11th Dec. 2007, Kingston, Jamaica

Sara Florian: First of all, thank you very much Prof. Baugh for meeting me. I know that you wrote extensively on Derek Walcott's poetry and I would like to speak of a St. Lucian poet of a generation after Walcott, Kendel Hippolyte. In my thesis I would like to be able of linking together different poets of different islands of the Caribbean. Do you think we could speak of an aesthetic canon as regards Caribbean contemporary poetry?

Edward Baugh: I don't know, I am always hesitant about making those kind of generalisations. I mean, there is maybe but I don't know if I would say there is a definite aesthetics, it is just that there is just quite a few good poets in the younger generations and there would be similarities in them, and I suppose that one of these similarities is this sense of moving more between the

Standard English and the Creole than older poets did, but also another influence would be the influence of what one might call the popular music. Clearly what is called dub poetry was a view post-Brathwaite, post-Walcott thing, although post-Brathwaite from the beginning, very much into the idea of music and local folk music influencing poetry, like dub poetry in Jamaica and you have cousins to it in Barbados, and *rapso* in Trinidad, that's a kind of 'rap poetry' but under the influence of music, too. I suppose that's one commonality this business of mining the popular, proletarian kind of music, which has a resistance, because of course the dub poetry is coming out of reggae and protest in the music of Bob Marley, and so you have that as I think one could call a common feature. Kwame Dawes, a very prolific and very accomplished poet, wrote a book titled *Natural Mysticism: Towards a New Reggae Aesthetic*, in which he argues that a sort of aesthetics for approaching Anglophone Caribbean poetry is the music, the reggae, and I don't think he is limiting that to the post-Walcott generation, I think he would even include Walcott in it. What I am saying though is that all sorts of people are making a big point of the more recent poetry being in some way grounded in or influenced in its aesthetics by the music of the people. Well, the fact that you will find more poetry now than at the older generations, that's not obviously influenced by English poetry, where Walcott is a kind of the prototype of the person who knows that and is using all that stuff, you'll find poets in the past few decades who hardly ever at school were exposed to that much of it, and therefore it was difficult to write poetry out of other kinds of influences, including popular speech, and the music and their own ideas. I am thinking of people like Mutabaruka, or the late Mikey Smith, whom I thought was a very good poet.

SF: He was stoned, wasn't he?

EB: Yes, he died tragically young, but a poet like Mutabaruka is very conscious of his poetry, which is written in a kind of opposition of what he knows about what we call the high tradition. So, I don't have any strong ideas about an aesthetics, but there are factors that you could find actually when you look to link poets.

SF: Do you think that it could be worth juxtaposing poets working differently?

EB: It depends on what the juxtaposition is doing, whether it is trying to bring them together or showing that even there are some features they are making, there are differences, it is always a matter of differences and similarities, I think it's basic. The danger about the tendency to round up things in a bag is that one has to see generalisations, and generalisations are maybe valid, but one always has to make sure that one hasn't to downplay the differences.

SF: Before coming here I thought that there weren't so many differences between the non-standard dialect of one island and another and that they were always mutually intelligible...

EB: Well, Jamaicans can understand Trinidadians, or Barbadians. The one that sometimes is more difficult to understand is Jamaican, because is more distinct, something to itself, while Barbadian, or as we say, Bajan speech is still recognisably English. What is difficult for other people to understand is simply the intonation, which you don't hear in the words probably, and the difference between Trinidadian Creole and Standard English, for instance, is not as marked as the difference between Jamaican Creole and Standard English. If somebody like Paul Keens-Douglas, who is a kind of half poet half story-teller, comes and does a performance, apart from the specific reference to some particular words, everybody would understand and roar with laughter. But to read or to hear Louise Bennett for a Barbadian or a Trinidadian can be very

difficult because the thing is not written down anyway and when you write it down then it becomes a block. But the language, I think, is a huge topic in Caribbean poetry and it's not just that it defines itself by seeking in its varieties its own language, but it is also using English. I mean to a lot of the poets they are not to be defined simply by the fact that they use Jamaican, but also the way they use English, so that sliding is part of what you say, but it's also part of the cliché of finding a voice, a Caribbean voice, and I think there is such a thing.

SF: In fact, in studying Creole and Caribbean poetry I bumped into definitions to which I was not really accustomed, for instance, I was thinking about the Creole *continuum*, so the spectrum of variations between Standard English and Creoles and the way it is employed by poets in their poems, but when I spoke with Prof. Pollard she told me that she doesn't agree with that definition of '*continuum*', but that she thinks of a more circling interconnection of language...

EB: That's an interesting idea...

SF: So what do you think about the variations of language between standard English and Creole? Would you call it "intercircling" or *continuum*?

EB: I accept the validity of the concept of the *continuum*, but I understand what Velma means. Velma has obviously thought deeply about this matter, I think those are worth serious considerations. In my own poetry I don't think about what I'm doing, whether circling or continuing, I just write the poems.

SF: Actually, I happened to read your collection *Tales from the Rainforest*.

EB: But, of course, I have another collection, *It Was the Singing*, which contains some poems in Creole.

SF: Yes, I found it out when I arrived here. When did you start writing poems?

EB: I don't know, when I was at school, but I wasn't taking it seriously, I remember at the age of fourteen entering a competition in my town, Port Antonio, with some foolish poem about sunset and rhyming, the old clichés, and I got a prize, and then later on I got a prize for another poem, but never was considering myself a poet, but I liked poetry. It was when I was an undergraduate in my early twenties that I wrote a couple of things that I said, over the years it developed, so I don't have any definite marking poem.

SF: I would like you to tell me more about your employment of language, of Creole and standard English.

EB: What makes you decide to write poems in Creole or in a mixture? It's not any pre-determined thing, when I feel I have a poem coming on or I have a idea or a situation which might be a poem, I tend to say "The poem can't really happen until I find or hear the voice that this things open and the rhythm and so on" and until that happens I can't start at all, once I think I have got that, then I can write. I can only talk in specific examples, my second book is called *It Was the Singing* and the title poem is called 'It Was the Singing': what this poem expresses among other things is— it seems to me a peculiarly Jamaican thing — how people sing at funeral services, how they empty themselves; this happens more often in country churches and the singing is not necessarily musically correct or they might be singing just the half of it, people

just empty themselves to the singing. I wanted to convey the atmosphere of when you go to a funeral service and you go through a ritual and you know what they are going to say. But when the people get up to sing is when then chokes me up: I don't know at what point it suddenly occurred to me and I could hear it. What I must do is not to speak in my own voice, because my normal voice would normally be Standard English, I speak Creole but imagine a woman describing to another woman the funeral service, so that woman is going to speak and she is not going to speak in Standard English, so that was the voice and that determined the poem. Sometimes I begin a poem in SE but somehow it slides into Creole because it seems that it is needed. I don't know if it is a matter of inferiority or superiority, or anything about the two languages, but, to tell the truth, many Jamaicans are always moving between languages and how your language comes out at any given moment it depends on who you are speaking to and – I guess you'll know this already – you'll find somebody talking to another, for instance, on the telephone in SE, and the person is not hearing or understanding: suppose that the question is "Where did you go yesterday?", and somehow it comes out blurred and the other says "What?", so the person asking will say: "Me she a where you did go yesterday" [laugh] The context and the necessity determines that shift. This I noticed as a child: somebody who speaks Creole or *patwa* as their standard normally, will say something in a sort shrill voice to a similar person, cursing them, and then they become aware that somebody like me is standing by and they repeat it automatically bringing it more to SE. This happens in a lot of the Jamaican poetry, so poetry is in a way a reflection of what happens.

SF: Is this poem a kind of dramatic monologue?

EB: Many of my poems are dramatic monologues, but they don't necessarily have to be. In someone like Brathwaite, in a sense, all of his Creole poems are like dramatic monologues, it is not exactly him speaking. One of the greatest things I have always thought about Lorna Goodison is that in her poems you can feel that it is the poet speaking, it's her voice, but she is using Creole and SE. It's not that she has created a character and the character speaks, there are maybe one or two. It's one of her great spans, the sort of lyricism that the poet's persona incorporates, using Jamaican language quite naturally.

SF: And what about Walcott? I'm thinking of 'The Spoiler's Return' or 'The Schooner *Flight*'...

EB: These are dramatic monologues and clear examples of how you can use that voice, that language, when you get a character. But one of the things about Walcott, though, is that there are many instances where there is a page in SE, and there is some Creole going on very subtly in the inflection...in Walcott's poem called 'Sea Grapes' there is a line saying "the ancient war between obsession and responsibility will never finish", now he uses the word 'finish', everybody knows what it means, "it will never end", but SE does not normally use that word, they would actually say "it will never end": 'finish' is a very Caribbean word use in the final way. Any person using SE would understand what it means, but I don't think an English person would use the word like that because normally 'finish' is used with an object, e.g. "I finish the task", but not in that intransitive way: that is very much a Jamaican and Caribbean usage of the word. In more than one interview, in a way defensively, when people ask him "Why don't you write more in Creole?", Walcott said that the thing has not to be in a Creole lexicon, but what matters is the intonation, not imposed on it but inside those lines, so that somebody can read a Walcott's line that is in SE, but the same lines can be read with a Caribbean intonation. There is another instance in *Another Life* which I cannot recall...

SF: In *Another Life* I'm thinking of St. Lucian insertions...

EB: Well, that's another matter, of course Walcott's case is very peculiar. When we say Creole we mean anglicised Creole, but Walcott has SE, the French *patois* as when he says "Come back to me my language", but then he also has the anglicised version of that. So that, for example, in the great poem 'St. Lucie', in the middle part, he says "generations going, generations gone, mwen c'est gens St. Lucie, c'est la moi sortie, is there that I born". Here you move from SE "generations going, generations gone", to French Creole "mwen c'est gens St. Lucie, c'est la moi sortie", to the English version "is there that I born", which, in this sliding, sums up Walcott's linguistic being.

SF: Yes, and belonging.

EB: Yes, because what he has done is to define himself as a person who came from St. Lucia, was made by there, but a big part of what he is defining is made by the languages and the register he uses.

SF: In a sense it is almost easier to read Walcott than other poets.

EB: Well, very often when he puts the French *patois* he translates it in the next line, so that for instance he gives you what a person says and then there is the anglicised Creole.

SF: Like in 'Names' or in 'Sainte Lucie', in which I think there is the translation of a folk song, a *conte*. But sometimes Anglicised Creole seems to be more difficult because it is not so obvious, I mean it is not French-derived.

EB: It is not French-derived, but it is following the French. For instance, "is there that I born": no Jamaican would say that, or no Barbadian would say that.

SF: What would they say, "me born there"?

EB: Yes, "me born there", or "is dere seh me born", or put another one in Walcott in a place he says "down the road it have a old man", now "it have" is French, it is the anglicised version of "il y a".

SF: So there is a big difference in reading a poem and listening to the poem read.

EB: Oh yes, especially for you [laugh], I mean, for all of us, but yes, it would make a big difference, and somebody read it, understand it, but never would appreciate what it would sound like.

SF: It is what I realized when I started studying poetry, at first I thought it was just a written thing and then I have to sit down and understand all the words, meaning, and so on and so forth, but I bumped into Caribbean poetry and the musicality of language it made a difference. For instance, when I was reading Brathwaite's *Barabajan Poems* or his *Sycorax Video Style*, he wasn't just expressing on the page, I understood that the performance of the poetry is very important and it really makes a difference. For instance, there is a difference between when a poet is performing and then he needs to write things down: Joan Andrea Hutchinson told me she

was using the Cassidy system, the normalised orthography, but I don't think that it always happens, there are some poets who are using an orthography, other poets are using another orthography.

EB: Oh, yes, because there is no set of rules, the Department of Linguistics is trying to set one, but I don't know when it will ever be available to everybody, and there is a resistance to it. What they are trying to do is to develop an orthography using Cassidy: phonetically, it will mean that the words are spelt when you write them in ways that make them look very strange. Some words which are English words, but have been creolised, look so strange. So that a lot of us still will write, for instance "Don't do that", if I wrote it in a poem, I would write "don", meaning "don't", but somebody now would say it is not the exact sound, you would have to set two values, but I would write as I say it, "don", yet my choice would create a block to somebody who doesn't agree. Carolyn Cooper is a person advocating in making official the Jamaican language and so on, and she used to do a column in a local newspaper which was written in this advanced Cassidy-Le Page system, but the column created a lot of controversy, a lot of people said that it was too difficult to read and she got into some quarrel with the newspaper, so it was stopped. Whereas there might be other people writing columns in Creole but with the orthography, the spelling and so on, is not emphasizing the difference. For the people who are advocating strongly that you should teach SE and making Creole as a second official language, part of the argument is that it is a different language albeit it has so much derivation from English. Nevertheless, it is a different language and you will only establish that difference when it looks different, and that is a crucial way to establish difference, as long as you are writing it, it is visibly English – so to speak – "corrupted". Then you work against the possibility that they are appreciating that there is English and there is Creole.

SF: This is what I was about to ask you: do you consider Jamaican as a *patwa*, a language, a dialect, a vernacular...?

EB: I would say a language, and part of my reason for doing this was pragmatic, in other words as a child you call it a 'dialect'. '*Patwa*' was a derogatory word from my childhood and before, the people are trying to revalorise it now.

SF: I was surprised to find here on campus a "Jamaican Language Unit".

EB: When I first went abroad to study in Canada and I was 22 years old, people asked me "what language do you speak?", and I was offended, my answer would be "English", nobody would have understood that there were two languages "English and Jamaican". So, mine is a pragmatic definition because part of the problem and it is a problem of English in Jamaica is that people think that they speak English and they don't, and there is a bit of an emotional debate, and I think that a basic part of the problem is because so many people do not appreciate the difference. You know, I was a school teacher long ago and I remember teaching the boys, and I was teaching English language class, but they would answer me in what was not SE, but you went on and they never really appreciated the difference, so that the blurring is part of what is the problem about English. So, anything that will highlight the differentiation would be useful because it will alert them to the fact that the two things are different, rather than shading off one another.

SF: I was speaking about this with Prof. Pollard. Let me ask you something which interests me just for personal curiosity...how did you happen to study Walcott?

EB: [laugh] I don't know if anybody has ever asked me that question...When I was an undergraduate student there was no such thing as West Indian poetry. For my degree in English I did the same that a student at the University of London would do, because this place was affiliated with the University of London. There was no West Indian literature on the syllabus. When I came as an undergraduate in September, the previous June Walcott had graduated, but he was still around and I met him, but already even as in school, his reputation as a playwright and so on was high. It blew my mind that I was going to a campus where plays were being produced by students like him, and then there was this magazine called *BIM* which I would read and I read Walcott in it and I was struck by him, and I remember that in 1957 when I had just graduated, I saw in one number of *BIM* Walcott's *Tales of the Islands* and it blew my mind. So when I got a scholarship to do my MA, I thought of what would be nice to write about Walcott, who had published just one or two books. I remember the day in 1962 when *In a Green Night* came out and I still have it in jacket, it was just one of the greatest things in my life, so it just grew and grew and grew and there is no writer in the world which I know so well, it was a cumulative thing...and then the point is that I like Walcott. I know he is difficult as a person sometimes, but I find a lot of his things very convenient.

SF: What was the first poem you read?

EB: I can't remember, I read poems before *Tales of the Islands*, maybe sonnets, which were short stories, but with the quality of a prose narration. I was struck when you said that at first you thought a poem is just on the page, but what I have always thought is that every poem has to be heard, by which I don't mean that you have to read it aloud but I can't write a poem unless I'm hearing it in my mind, so that in a sense this notion between some poems being performed and some not, I mean some poems lend themselves to be performed and some not. Yet, I think this is an invalid division because, as Walcott says, he is a poet who says that doesn't like reading his poems, but he reads them low key, he doesn't dramatise his poems, he reads them in a monotone, and once as he was reading and provoking, he said that the best reading would be a boring performance.

SF: And what happens when you read your own poems?

EB: Some of them are just more introspective, some of them are dramatic monologues, but there is a difference between merely reading and performing, it is not as sharp as people try to make out: in other words every reading for me is a performance, even if it is low-key, even if it is Walcott.

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Interview with Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis, 12th December 2007, Kingston, Jamaica

Sara Florian: Dear Prof. Warner-Lewis, thank you very much for your time and for this interview.

You were telling me before that you have taken a little bit of distance from literature. Is that true?

Maureen Warner-Lewis: Yes, in the sense that I am not too fond of the Post-modernist style of literary criticism. I find it very difficult to follow because the language is deliberately obscure, although in some cases I understand the point that the literary critics are making, and even though I may even agree with it, I find it could have said in a simpler way. I have gone more and more into historical and linguistic topics.

SF: Actually, one of my interests is linguistics, not as a discipline in itself but applied to literature. And the question I am about to ask you is not just to attach any labels to concepts, but for my personal understanding: how would you define Jamaican, a language, a dialect, a *patwa*...?

MWL: Again, I am not quite on top of that topic, I know it is very much a topic under consideration. I think a case can be made for the separation. The fact that you are using English-based vocabulary tend to confuse the issue and so people, ordinary speakers, don't therefore understand the difference between the Creole and Standard Jamaican or Standard Trinidadian, they think it is the same language they are speaking and this is to ignore the grammatical differences between the two systems and also the idiomatic differences. For instance, I just thought of something upstairs and I thought of it in a Jamaican idiom, by the way I'm not Jamaican, I'm from Trinidad, I've been living here for about thirty years, but my accent is not totally Trinidadian, because I've travelled a lot, my intonation, my accent, my speech is different from my sister's who lives in Trinidad, my English is a mixture of several different intonations, patterns, Trinidadian, Jamaican, I've worked in Nigeria for some years, I've studied in England, so it's a sort of cosmopolitan type of accent; but Jamaicans will hear my Trinidadian accent very clearly. What is the point I was trying to make? Yes, I was thinking to this idiom "Try you bes", "Try your best". Now, Jamaicans say that if they want to say "I don't think that you can do something", you are trying to force a situation, like you are leading the horse to the water, but you can't make the horse drink the water, so if they wanted to express that level of scepticism, all they would say is "Try you bes". Now, "to try one's best" is an English idiom, but it would not be used in that situation or context in England. So, there are a number of speech mannerisms of that type that make the Creole different from Standard English or recognisably British or even American English. For instance, there's a phrase that has become very popular here, made popular by Rastafarians, but used widely outside of the Rastafarian communities and that word is "Bless", you've heard of it?

SF: Yes, I have. Is it like "Respect"?

MWL: Yes, "Respect" is another one of those, again coming out of the Rastafarian culture. I suppose it may come from a phrase like "Bless you" or "Blessings", but it's a respectful way of saying "Hello", or it could also mean "Goodbye", but instead of using those English correlations they would say "Bless", and maybe holding your hand to the heart or something like that. So, here we have an English word, which is not being used in an internationally recognised English setting. Our literature is full of those kind of local nuances

SF: May we speak of 'localisms'?

MWL: Yes, localisms.

SF: Actually, when I was writing my M.A. dissertation on Walcott's and Brathwaite's *linguistic continuum*, I read something you wrote, if I'm not mistaken about it, on the historical importance of Brathwaite's poetry, being based on the African culture.

MWL: Yes, I did that. And I wrote an article which should be out now, in a collection of essays in honour to Kamau Brathwaite, and it has just been published by the University of the West Indies Press, and edited by Annie Paul. In that paper I wrote for a Conference on Caribbean Culture I did a response to Brathwaite's *nation language*, and in it I quoted a section from Earl Lovelace, where the narrative voice is speaking in SE, but there are numbers of idioms nested inside of the SE, and therefore when you finish reading the passage you may feel that you have heard a real Trinidad voice, and it is a real Trinidad voice, but speaking both in standard Trinidadian English but also using some Creole expressions that are embedded in it. And also if Earl Lovelace reads it, he reads with a very Trinidad accent, intonation, so that the whole piece ends up sounding very unlike SE, but in fact the grammatical rules followed for most of the extracts are the grammatical rules of SE. But that is overridden, or juxtaposed, or jostling with phrases, idioms from the Trinidad Creole. And also if you know a Trinidadian voice or Earl Lovelace's voice, you would be hearing the intonations of that English which is unlike the intonations of SE.

SF: So, you were speaking about *nation language*...

MWL: My essay in that collection is a response to Brathwaite's, his attempt to identify what he means by *nation language* which is his way of talking about the "dialect, *patwa*, or the Creole"... and I take up a number of issues. One of the issues I remember I take up in that article is to examine the way in which some Caribbean or Anglophone Caribbean poets harness rhythm from folksongs, and what I've found about the folksong is that they use syllable-length, which is important in those segments of the poetry where there is a deliberate attempt by the poet to mimic or to echo Caribbean folk music. And what I found certainly has a relation to Louise Bennett's poetry, and the *mento* songs that is mimicking – well, not only *mento* songs but the poetry of English nursery rhymes –, and for Brathwaite or Walcott they have attempted to mimic or echo the Trinidad calypso music, and when that happens the rhythm is based in syllable quantity rather than on English poetic metre. What the Creole voice brings to the poetry is a complex of vocal intonation, phonology, lexical choice, idiom choice, syntax, rhythm, it's a melange, a composite of those. There's obvious recourse of the poets to oral mechanism, ejaculations, the way a question is asked, and other oral techniques, techniques of the voice.

SF: I think of Walcott's 'Sainte Lucie' in which he tries to reproduce a *conte* he has heard on the back of a truck, so maybe this is the point you were making.

MWL: If he is telling a *conte*, I think he is using some narrative devices...

SF: He was reproducing a Creole *conte* in St. Lucian *patois*, which is French based but with an English translation...I love that poem because it is a clear example of mixture of Creole and English, and the fact that Saint Lucia was conquered by French and then English and then it exchanged hands many times, so it's peculiar in a sense as a Caribbean island and when I came here I thought that Caribbean Creoles were mutually interchangeable but then I realized that some Jamaicans did not know that in Barbados they spoke a different language and vice versa.

MWL: Bajan is very difficult to understand

SF: It is, it's like cut off from the rest of the chain of islands.

MWL: It's the phonology. The Barbadian Creole phonology borrows a lot from one of the dialects of England.

SF: Is it Irish?

MWL: I don't think it's Irish, it is one of the rural ones in England, I forget which one it is. But 'oy' that's also Irish I think 'oy' instead of 'I' is Irish and that makes what one might 'deep' Barbadian Creole very difficult to understand. Similarly, for Jamaicans, when I go to Trinidad I can't understand some people at all, because they speak very fast, the men in the streets tend to speak rapidly and that make them difficult to understand. In all the islands you have levels of speech which are mutually intelligible across the islands, if people speak in some form of standard English and if they speak somewhat at a major pace. But when I first came here in 1962, I couldn't understand what the people in the airport here were saying, I never heard Jamaican speech in such a concentration before, but if people spoke to me slowly I could follow, as when I heard Louise Bennett's jokes, everybody was cracking up around. So yes we do have a problem of unintelligibility with the forms of Creole which are more distant from Standard English. Poetry which tends to be humorous, satiric, in a gentle old some satire is different from the meditative poetry, which much spirituality.

SF: I love poetry and I find that Caribbean poetry is so much concerned not only with personal issues, but also with social, political and cultural issues...

MWL: Very much so...

SF: Apart from the written text of poetry which needs to be read and studied, and in my case not being an English native speaker needs to be understood, metabolised, I have to look up for the words I don't know, and for Creole, of course, I need more than one dictionary at a time, apart from that there is the performance, the musicality, which you can hear when a poet reads his or her own poetry, so what could you say about this relationship about the written text and the performative aspect of poetry?

MWL: The written text yields you textual understanding and things like that, whereas hearing the poetry read and performed has another dimension to the poetry, as I say, for instance with Walcott does not perform his poetry very well, he reads in a monotone.

SF: Low-key?

MWL: Yes, and this maybe because he so strongly identifies with the written tradition and he is hearing maybe I don't know if it is quite so, but he probably hears in his mind and ear British poets reading their own work in their own very self-absorbed way and not really concerned very much with projection. Once you begin to conceptualize your work as performative, you begin to think of the necessity to project, to put emphasis, to put pauses, and all the whole battery of elements that go into pitch changes and all of those things that make for good performance. And it is interesting because Walcott is himself a dramatist so it doesn't mean that he doesn't have a sense of drama but maybe it is just because, as you said, he sees his poetry in a text printed as a

written palpable production rather than as an oral production, which is in a sense a little odd, given that he is a dramatist, he has written so many plays and he hasn't have an ear for performance.

SF: Instead Brathwaite, on the other hand, tries to reproduce onto the written page the oral tradition.

MWL: Well, this is because when he would have had the same conditioning, education, as Walcott, so that he would have started off by identifying the poem with the printed text, or the written text, the scribal text, but his experience in Ghana, in the Gold Coast, brought him into contact with forms of what one might call "high poetry" which were not written, but which were memorised and performed in many cases with drum or horn accompaniment or with something like a lute accompaniment so that opened up for him a new dimension of what constituted poetry, that it was not alone, the scribal text, but that it was also an oral text, an oral and aural text, and that is the big difference between them. In the Caribbean Walcott would have been exposed to folk poetry to the masquerades and things in St. Vincent, but these were not the types of poetry that one studied in school, these were not considered poetry, these song forms and recited forms were not considered poetry, they were considered as folk culture, so whereas in the case of Brathwaite he is exposed to a similar type of thing but in a context where even the most serious and the highest form of poetry was in other words aural and oral poetry was not confined to what one might consider innocuous folk forms of practice, but were themselves very much a part of the apparatus of kinship and ceremony, of this kind of high poetry would have been beaten out on the drums and pronounced by the 'okyeama' they call it, is a spokesperson, the Akan king doesn't speak to his people. So the king's speech, the king's ideas, the ideas of the court were expressed in forms of poetry that as a Caribbean person he would not have recognised anything in our environment, in the Caribbean there was institution of kinship, of courtly life that was connected with poetry as in Africa.

SF: I was thinking in the French-based African context I was thinking of the 'griot': does he embody the same figure?

MWL: The 'okyeame' is not the same as the 'griot' who is Senegal, Mali, Gambia. Those 'griots' for the Sene-gambian area are attached to royal families, aristocratic families, and need to know the history of those families and to say or pronounce or recite this history on certain occasions of festivities the family is having, like weddings, or funerals, things like that, festive occasions. I don't know if they say anything for the harvest, but they also perform for entertainment, there would be times in the yearly cycle when it would be accepted that this type of *conte*, if we can call them *contes*, of stories, of narratives are heard so that this is the time when they perform. Now the 'okyeame' performs for the king and all of those chiefs and kingly figures in the Akan system, so in a way you have a type of parallel here, but he doesn't necessarily recite the history of the king or the aristocratic families, I don't know that he does that. The 'okyeame' is less into narrative than into poetry and philosophical pronouncements.

SF: Do you think that there is a kind of link between the oral performances or the orality that Brathwaite employs linking him to the African tradition and on the other hand with dub poets or calypso singers which are, of course, Caribbean-based types of poetry or orality, between the use of music and poetry?

MWL: Yes, certainly in his trilogies Brathwaite has used – but I think he has moved away from that – the popular poetic forms of the Caribbean and in fact his co-optation of these popular forms in his poetry was what gave the impetus, I think, to dub poets to do the same. They, of course, employ more of the Creole. I think that if you look, I suspect, at the early dub poets like Michael Smith, Oku Onuora, if you look at their writings more of it would be in the Creole than in the standard English, so that they are linking with popular forms of poetry like folk songs, reggae songs and so on, using the language of the people, of the vulgus, whereas Brathwaite approaches his poetic expression from the standard English end and then puts out his hand and brings in the poetry and rhythms of the popular poetry. So that what I have noticed with the dub poets is that increasingly over the years their poetry has moved more and more towards a standard.

SF: Yes, actually once you read a text by, say, Michael Smith and you listen to Smith performing the same poem is totally different: I couldn't read the text but it was so suggestive listening to him, on the other hand when I read Brathwaite using his Sycorax Video Style it seems that I can hear him performing the poem, because he tries to convey the sound, the orality of poetry, using different fonts or characters, I don't know much of Trinidadian poets, maybe because Trinidad is more well-known for prose than for poetry, I think of Sam Selvon, Earl Lovelace, and V.S. Naipaul, and as a poet I can think of is Mahadai Das...

MWL: There is Eric Roach..

SF: He is from Tobago, isn't he?

MWL: Yes, he is from Tobago. Well, for instance we have Jennifer Rahim. I think that more recent writers from Trinidad tend to stick more to Standard English, when the Creole comes in it is what is called in Trinidad *rapso*, which is the equivalent of dub poetry here, whereas the writers are approaching poetic expression from the angle of Trinidad Creole.

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Interview with Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis, 30th April 2008, Kingston, Jamaica

SF: As regards calypso, I've read that its themes are much linked to social and political realities of the island of Trinidad itself, and maybe this is one reason why it did not spread much outside Trinidad.

MWL: I would speak of the parochial contents of calypso, and this is one of the reasons why Prof. Gordon Rohlehr was criticised for dedicating much of his work to it, because he was considered very brilliant and many people inside and outside Trinidad could not understand why he devoted his studies just to what they considered a lower subject such as calypso, so much confined to the island.

One of the reasons why David Rudder is different from traditional calypsonians, instead, is that he has a broader scope. Reggae music in comparison with calypso has a broader scope, it deals with broader themes, as the struggle for survival, which could have been applied even to the fall

of the Berlin wall. The wide breath of reggae music is that of a perennial 'lucha', which comes out of the Jamaican folk and from a life of suffering and survival and the history of the Jamaican settlement. The historical situation of Jamaica in the post-Taino era was very much different from the situation of Trinidad began in the post-Carib/post-Arawak era. In the late 18th century when Jamaica was a mature sugar plantation society, Trinidad was in a very different situation. The plantation system in Trinidad in the late 18th century, when in Jamaica it was starting to decline. The most important crop in Jamaica was sugar cane, while in Trinidad there were sugar cane and cacao. But the situation of the plantations in the two islands was so different.

SF: I guess it was because of the cultural differences between the English in Jamaica and the French in Trinidad...for instance, in Haiti plantations were very well governed systems, while in Jamaica they were left to "ruination"...

MWL: Yes, there were strong cultural differences between the French and the English, but Trinidad was never taken over by the French, even if they had a strong cultural impact in the island, the French never owned the island: there was what was called 'cedula', which was an invitation sent from the British to other European settlers in other island to go to Trinidad and buy some land. Differently from Jamaica, which experienced slavery for three centuries, Trinidadians experienced slavery for only fifty years, after 1780s, and by that time in England ideas about slavery were somewhat changing, for in 1830s liberation from slavery came. Some absentee landlords in England bought the land and left subalterns in Jamaica, where there were plantations with even 300 or 400 slaves completely neglected, and this caused the entrenchment of the poor. But in Trinidad at the end of the 19th century another profitable good was discovered: oil.

SF: Is Trinidad a magnet for the economic development of the Caribbean region still nowadays?

MWL: The oil boom was in the 1970s-1980s, but there is a strong chauvinism in Trinidadians' attitude, for they try to prevent people coming from other places to drag them down, there is a tendency to closeness, but there is still a high rate of illegal immigration.

SF: Another very big feature of Trinidad, apart from calypso, is Carnival, isn't it? But it is an important folk occasion in the whole Caribbean, yet in Jamaica it has not developed as it did in T&T. What can you tell me about the development of Carnival in relation to calypso? And, correct me if I'm mistaken, I think carnival derives from both European and African traditions, where different traditional cultures mix together...

MWL: Carnival is a big thing also in Puerto Rico, and I guess it derives from Southern Spain. The Caribbean Carnival is derived from a masquerade tradition of Western and Central Africa of parading in the streets or in the open air and it was connected with harvest. This tradition was very much different from the fancy-dress ball room of the French. There are other Carnival traditions related to the harvest, like in Curaçao or Aruba the 'tambu' or 'seu', which are festivities related to the end of the harvest of the 'Guinea corn' or 'sorghum', one of the main foods for Africans, or the one in Barbados...

SF: ...the Crop Over festival?

MWL: Exactly, which celebrates the end of the harvest of the sugar cane. Then there are the ‘gumbe’ or with a different spelling ‘gumbay’, which begins in Christmas time, and it is celebrated in St. Kitts, Antigua (in August), Bahamas, Belize, and Guyana, with the opening processions of masking during Christmas time. The European tradition instead celebrated Carnival before Lent, for the farewell to the flesh.

SF: So, I guess that Venetian carnival, which is before Lent is something in between the French-like fancy-dress parade indoor and the African street parade, only that the most characteristic costumes are those imitating 17th and 18th centuries...yet people parade along the narrow lanes of Venice and there are bands and music too, but certainly not to the extent of the Caribbean!

MWL: In the Caribbean the Carnival season begins with Christmas and goes on until Lent. In Trinidad, for instance, there are ancillary activities like stick-fighting and song competitions with steel-bands.

SF: Which are not the ‘parrandas’...

MWL: No, ‘parrandas’ are Spanish-derived and are sort of carolling sung during Christmas time. Calypsoes instead harshly criticise political and social behaviours.

SF: ...According to the tradition of the ‘picong’?

MWL: In a sense, for the tradition of ‘picong’ or ‘mauvaise langue’ (bad tongue) is aimed at teasing or trying to imitate somebody to tease him. But there are other festivities in Trinidad like the ‘Hoosay’, which is a Muslim celebration.

SF: To which David Rudder dedicated a song...but there is also what they call ‘Jonkonnu’...which in Jamaica is a horse-headed mythical figure of African derivation, isn’t it?

MWL: Yes, yes, there are different names for carnival, like the ‘gumbay’, ‘old mas’, the ‘Jonkonnu’...This last one in particular derives from the traditional African masquerade, which begins the first opening Monday of Carnival with the ‘Jou’vert’ (Jour ouvert), starting from pre-dawn to 11 am, and when the most traditional masks appear, often with a placard on their back and satire, like men dressed as babies or women in a cross-dressing style. On Monday afternoon until 8/9pm the most European concept appears as fancy dress bands with sections of bands of around 20 people out on the road. Each band contains several sections, each section wearing a different costume and colour scheme. During this day there is a preview of what will be the day after. In fact, on the Tuesday, or Mardi Gras, from 10 in the morning until late afternoon there is the Tuesday parade, when fancy bands come out in their full force, divided into sections by colours or themes. If on Monday afternoon there were like 20 people in the streets, on Tuesday there would be 50 or 100 people or more for the serious competition, when bands attend various venues to be judged, and results usually come out the day after. This is the climax of Carnival, but before this there are weeks of fetes, dances, and parties, calypso tents with competitions like Shakespearian plays with different theatres and different committed actors. The calypso competition, in particular, reaches the climax on the Sunday night before Carnival, with a venue called ‘Panorama’ – with a play on the word ‘pan’ – when a jury decides which is the steel band who has performed the best.

SF: Do you mean the hit which will be played on the streets?

MWL: Yes, but nowadays since steel bands can't reach the whole parade, they make use of sound systems, like the Jamaicans. Steel bands are very much a folk festival, and people are linked to a particular steel band. On the night of the 'Panorama' then everybody is jumping and shouting 'hooray', but in the end some people are always disappointed by the winner...

SF: But the fact that Carnival was originated also from Catholic cultures like the Spanish one has something to do with the cultural differences between Carnival in Jamaica and in Trinidad, hasn't it?

MWL: Yes, but Jamaica never had a strong Catholic influence as Trinidad, where Catholicism tried to suppress Carnival many times without achieving its purpose, they were never totally effective in stamping out Carnival. Jamaica instead had a strong Protestant tradition which abolished any form of dancing or alcohol. In Trinidad Catholics could never tell you not to drink wine...

SF: Is it because the priests drank wine during the Mass?

MWL: Yes, until 19th century in Jamaica there were Moravians, Baptists, Methodists who were against alcohol, music, African masquerades and drums. What happened was that the 'Jonkonnu' was suppressed and it never matured to a Carnival tradition, so in Jamaica religion succeeded in stamping it out and marginalizing it.

Interview with Kenneth Ramchand, 9th May 2008, Port of Spain, Trinidad

Sara Florian: I am focusing my thesis on the aesthetic importance of Creoles in contemporary Caribbean poetry. What is your definition of ‘Creole’?

Kenneth Ramchand: There’s a potential dispute at this point. So, you tell me what you mean by the word ‘Creole’ when you speak about a ‘Creole’ language. Am I speaking a Creole language to you now?

SF: I don’t think so...

KR: OK. So if I said to you, [with Trinidadian inflection] “Why it is you people in Italy want to know about this kind of language thing? Why you bothering with other people language thing you would tell me this is...”

SF: This is Trinidadian Creole!

KR: Exactly, so would you say I am a bilingual?

SF: Well, I think that all the Creoles of the Caribbean can be considered languages per se.

KR: Separate languages? Separate from the ‘English’ we speak or learn in schools ?

SF: This is a part of the question because are they separate languages? Are they part of a *continuum*? Do we consider a *continuum* starting from Standard English to a particular Creole, a basilectal form, or do we consider all the whole range of Creoles part of the same *continuum*?

KR: The reason I asked the question is that I may be one of the few people that think that I’m speaking a Creole, I’m speaking the Trinidad language, which is a language that was born in this island, Trinidad and Tobago, and I recognize that a long time ago people living here had large elements of African languages and some of them may even have spoken African languages, and we know for a fact that people of Indian origin spoke Bhojpuri well into the 1920s and 1930s. But while they were doing that, they were subjected to the idea of “English English”. After the 1840s, after Emancipation when the system of education begun, English was the language of instruction, it carried all kinds of cultural implications about superiority and inferiority, but coexisting with the education in the English language were the relics of the African languages actual in their language that these people were speaking. You could say in that early period people were bilingual, that the separation between the language of the school and the language at home or the language in the fields was so great that it justifies us in saying that there are two languages.

SF: Let’s say there was an official language and a language used at home or in private contexts.

KR: Yes, but I feel the history of the language in this country is a history of the converging of the two streams. Hence, I am really a *continuum* person, I believe that at this moment while I am speaking to you, I am speaking Trinidad Standard English, whose sound system belongs to many Trinidadian speakers and which has many unanalysed African elements. At the level of sound, to the ear, my language is Trinidadian.

SF: Because it is different in intonation.

KR: And in its cadences and stress patterns. When I put it down on a piece of paper, if I put what I am saying on a piece of paper and you read it you mightn't know unless you live in Trinidad and know how we sound. So at one end of the spectrum the written form of my language seems indistinguishable as writing from English English or American English or whatever. Yet, the more familiar you get with my language, the more you will recognise even in my Standard English the phonetic difference between it and...

SF: And the lexicon and syntax as well..

KR:...yes, in fact you may have noticed certain un-English expressions in my Standard, but I am just going first with the phonetics because the phonetics is what distinguishes Trinidad English from Australian English and from American English or Canadian English. I feel the major and most obvious difference exists at the phonetic level. And when we write, the differences aren't as obvious although they are there. There are words that I use in Trinidad Standard that are different and maybe there are different ways of using the words. So studying the aesthetic importance of Creole in contemporary Caribbean poetry would make it easy for you by allowing you to restrict yourself to one aspect of the language. You have to deal with the whole spectrum from Trinidad or Jamaican or Barbadian or Guyanese Standard English right across to what I suspect you think of as 'Creole'. The whole wonderful thing is a Creole. I know I am not bilingual.

SF: So let's say that there is a West Indian English which is the type of English spoken in the region, and then there is a local variety of English.

KR: In a sense. But a Jamaican might say: "I don't speak West Indian English, I speak Jamaican English". We have a generalized West Indian English with variants in all the islands, Trinidad, Barbados, Guyana, etc...

SF: If it was that easy I could just choose some poets from each territory and study the way he or she employs the language, but it is not that easy...

KR: What I am saying is that it is hard. If you took it on, you would have to come to terms with the whole Jamaican linguistic situation, and there's a whole spectrum there to deal with, as in Trinidad, and you'll find certain common elements in the spectrum. If you go for a dual language, if you were to buy in to the political notion that there are two languages, I don't know where your cut off point would be, but wherever it is you would be leaving out a great deal and missing out on the crossovers between different registers in our language. Our Standard feeds upon our oral and non-Standard; our oral and non-Standard is constantly absorbing from our Standard. Listen to the Pierrot Grenade or the Robber or the pre-1950s calypsonians and you will understand this better.

SF: What are the most used parts of the spectrum, the *patois* or a more standardised form?

KR: It would be up to you to make up your choice, if you wanted you could decide that although you recognise a Jamaican Standard English, there are elements from non-English and non-written sources in it. My position is the whole thing is a Creole, that it is a constantly

evolving language, and in these days it is being bombarded by Americanisms and I'm afraid by our own illiterates writing in the newspapers or talking on the radio.

SF: Is it decreolising?

KR: No, to me it is creolizing even more! Because it is now absorbing Americanisms and other new elements. You see, I'm not taking a static view that Creole was made of African plus British, I'm saying that the Creole is a language generated in the islands, and that if at first the influences were African on the one hand and British on the other, and then later Indian and all the others, since the Second World War, and the movies, and the travels to Brooklyn, Washington, etc. and the entry of American popular media there are more influences, sometimes if you listen to a radio station it seems you are in the United States...

SF: Yes, and I think that young people in Jamaica are closer to an American than to a British accent.

KR: Yes, especially young people. So if we say that the language in each territory is a Creole the whole thing, then you have to take a very dynamic view of the Creole. It's not stable, just constantly changing and I'm looking to see now how the American influences are working into the Creole I speak and write. In twenty years the Creole I speak would have assimilated certain American features and made them part of itself.

SF: So you think that Creoles are not decreolising but creolising even more with the absorption of American features.

KR: Yes, if your concept is a concept of a language which is being created, not a language that was created, but a language that is being created. The Creole is always in a state of formation. Some diehard linguists speak of a post-Creole, meaning that there was a Creole formed out of the British, and the African, and in our case the Indian, and there have been new developments since then. Rather than humbling up and recognising that they are wrong to imply that the Creole was ever fixed, they pretentiously invent the term post-Creole to confuse graduate students. So a post-Creole is an evolution of the Creole. What gymnastics. I don't need the word "post" because for me it's constantly evolving. The word "post" wants to suggest that something was already established. It is not de-creolising. And it is not post-Creole. All languages are constantly evolving, some more dramatically than others.

SF: The problem with poets is that I don't think there are many poets using the word "Creole" and that's it...

KR: In the extreme sense of dialect?

SF: Yes.

KR: But I would say that every West Indian poet is using the Creole. Maybe they are using the more educated part of the spectrum. But they can't abandon and never abandon the oral or non-Standard part. Our most Standard speakers and writers speak in a West Indian tone of voice unless they want to be sniggered at. Think of the notion of "the tone of voice" and you will see that it is something we share no matter what point of the spectrum we are inhabiting.

SF: That's exactly why I would like to exclude a discourse on orality.

KR: No, you should not, not at all. And Poetry especially exists as much for the ear as for the eye. Poetry began as something oral, so you should never exclude the oral dimension. My speech now is Creole, and because you recognise the lexical items and the grammatical structures you may think it is English, but it is not English English that you are hearing. The most standard-looking West Indian writer sounds Creole. But that makes the whole thing a lot more difficult, eh?

SF: Yes, that's what I was about to say. Because it's like saying I will consider the whole of Caribbean poetry..

KR: But within that you could say that one of the most important things inside Caribbean poetry is the oral traditions and the other non-English components which have affected not only the vocabulary but also the sound-patterns. West Indian poets' attitudes to the iambic pentameter could be very different and the use of dactyls and spondees could be very different. If we have a sing-song thing, you'll find that we are very dactylic in our language, even the most educated ones of us. Our early West Indian poets, poets of the late 19th century had as models the English poet and they de-natured themselves by imposing more iambs on their poetry than it actually exists in our language.

SF: So does it sound more like a trochaic line?

KR: Yes, it does. Using that terminology, what I was saying is that the iamb, and for that matter the iambic pentameter, are not as prominent in our language as our early poetry might suggest.

SF: That's why Brathwaite said that "the hurricane does not roar in pentameter".

KR: Yes, so those early poets had to stop being themselves and following the English model they were creating pentameters when they knew very well that this was a kind of hook.

SF: They were trying to force their way of writing.

KR: Yes. And one of the great liberations for the West Indian voice is connected with the kind of liberation that T.S. Eliot was advocating. Wordsworth was there before him in would have said that before in the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* . He wanted poetry to be written in the language spoken by men, its living rhythms, and not in the artificial language of the court or establishment. He argued against the view that there is a certain a subject matter and a certain language that is suitable to poetry. Everything human is subject suitable for poetry, and the language of poetry should be based on the language people speak.

SF: Not just the Arcadian model. So let's say that English poets like Wordsworth or the Romantic poets were providing actually a more natural background than others.

KR: Certainly Wordsworth would have done it. If you read Walcott in *Another Life* you'll find that it is quite similar to what Wordsworth was trying to do in the *Prelude*, because both of these long poems have long stretches of rank prose in them and the only thing that makes them verse is that they are set out in lines. There are passages in Wordsworth that are so spoken that it is hard to call it "poetic language. You know that *Another Life* began as a piece of prose and

then he decided to cut it up into lines. But don't forget prose can be poetic, and it was not the cutting it up into lines that made it poetic. But to go back to T.S. Eliot. He came up in the XX century and said the same things that Wordsworth was saying, that everyday life is a part of poetry, poetry must relate to the speaking voice which cannot be imprisoned in stanzas and rhyme schemes.

SF: Do you agree with this?

KR: Absolutely.

SF: Ok, well I must say that I am attending a poetry workshop in Kingston with Wayne Brown, he's from Trinidad, and he's teaching us to use the poetic forms, the meter, actually it's a kind of course of creative writing so, as regards meter, it's not easy for me because I'm not a native speaker and I must stay into meter, but I often feel that it's easier to write into free verse, 'cause when you have to stick to rhythms, couplets, rhyme and verse.

KR: Do you play tennis? Do you know about tennis?

SF: Yes, I do, why?

KR: When you are teaching someone to play tennis, you tell them I want you to learn to play a backhand smash, you put your feet in a certain way, you align your body, and your elbow, and you use your wrist, and here's the forehand, and here's the lob: you teach them the basic rules. Once you master the basic rules...

SF: ...You can produce your own.

KR: Yes, you can produce your own! But it's a technical exercise after knowing basic strokes. Then what there is inside of you will modify the basic strokes, and this is to protect you as a writer of free verse from lack of discipline, because free verse is more difficult. It is like playing tennis without a net, when you are playing you have to imagine a net, and you have to put the ball above the net, whether you see it or not it's there. To value free verse and write free verse you have to know about the closed forms and the different kinds of feet, etc. This knowledge stops your free verse from becoming loose and indiscriminate.

SF: But actually at first when I was reading Brathwaite I had the impression that he was not using any kind of meter, which is not true.

KR: It's not true, it's very cunning.

SF: Sometimes, it sounded more as a piece of jazz, blues.

KR: He started by imitating T.S. Eliot, quite disciplined and cunning, but he soon discovered the voice. Later, his experiments with the computer tended to move him away from the voice. But the point is that although right now most of our writers are liberated from the pentameter or from the rigid forms, this doesn't mean that they aren't disciplined. The best free verse is highly disciplined.

SF: So, going back to the selection I should operate in my thesis, what do you think are the

main issues?

KR: Although there are themes which are typical colonial themes, the emphasis is stronger on identity, or on the place or nation I belong to. I know there's a global generation and that questions now may vary. Now there is a generation which may not believe in a solid, discreet self, who holds that the self is much more in flux and chaotic. But we are drifting from your main business, I may go home to my wife and say "Today I met a young woman and she was so and so" and probably be totally wrong, but I am right as far as my experience of you is mine and cannot be denied.

SF: So you are saying that I may have my particular experience of Caribbean poetry which might be totally wrong, but it cannot be denied since it is my own experience...

KR: Yes, because it is your experience, it cannot be denied.

SF: This is encouraging, thank you very much! [laugh]

KR: Put it another way, when I used to lecture in the United Kingdom, people listening to me knew that I was telling them something different from what their experience of their own poetry was. I was not disputing the views of their native lecturers. We agreed on certain kinds of analyses, for instance this is free verse, this is alexandrine, this is couplet, etc., we can agree on the description of techniques. What we may differ about is our experience. There will be certain commonalities but because we are different as individuals and because a Trinidadian and an Italian come out of different cultural and historical contexts, we must have different experiences of the poem. This is what part of criticism is about, that you tell me about your experience and I tell you about mine, and that's where the dialogue takes place. And I would recognise what Lionel Trilling, an American critic said: it is very frustrating, very annoying that here we are, Americans, trying to understand *Huckleberry Finn*, and a man from Italy comes along, reads this book and says something about it which is absolutely true and we Americans failed to see it, and the reason we Americans failed to see it, is that sometimes in any particular culture you cannot see the wood for the trees, and because this foreigner is not aware of the "buzz of implications", he can focus on the main things, he would have a kind of clarity that we lack. I'm sure I can tell a Russian something about *Anna Karenina* that he may not feel as strongly as I, but then his experience of *Anna Karenina* would be so rich and complex I can never hope to respond to it as he does. When we get into dialogue I can tell things surprise him with what I see, it is not the whole truth, but there are parts of the truth that he was conditioned not to see.

SF: Because of lack of perspective you mean?

KR: Because they are so immersed in it, they are seeing everything, responding to every nuance. For instance, I don't know the Russian language and I can read it only in translation, so already I've lost a lot.

SF: So, how would you choose the texts? How would you choose the poets if you were asked to do it?

KR: I would know that there's a whole wave of poets after Walcott and Brathwaite, like Tony McNeill and then Wayne Brown himself, Mervyn Morris, Edward Baugh, there's Kendel

Hippolyte, there's a whole set of younger poets who are building upon what these guys have done. In some ways Walcott and Brathwaite are classics, and young people aren't bothering with them maybe because they don't accept the notion of classics. All kind of things are happening in contemporary West Indian poetry, some of it is implied by the fact that some of our poets are writing from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom. Brathwaite was a leader of the performative dimension, a lot of our poetry is now performative and now orality is recognised as a new dimension, it is not plain oral. I have coined the phrase "literary orality", meaning that these fellows who are injecting orality into their poetry are also people who know a lot about the written poetry: they are literate in the written culture and they are literate in the oral culture, and when they decide to write a poem that is very oral they bring to bear on their orality a lot of their written sophistication. The older type of oral poetry would allow you to change words and put in things, but modern oral poetry is just as fixed as written poetry. The owner himself can make little variations when he performs, but written oral poetry is not a possession of the community to do with it as they please. The authors can modify, but it's not a completely spontaneous thing, so oral poetry today or orality in poetry today is highly disciplined, and the guy who produces it would tell you that this poem is complex too and doesn't just exist in the air...

SF: I was thinking of the analysis of David Rudder's lyrics and Prof. Maureen Warner-Lewis gave me an article that she wrote on calypso texts and Rudder's lyrics, in comparison with *The Mighty Sparrow*.⁹⁶² She was analysing each line counting the stresses and syllables and, the analysis was perfectly logical and not seen just as a song, it's something on which the author has worked a lot.

KR: There's a difference. A calypso is not a poem, a calypso can be read as a poem, but the calypso incorporates dance, music, miming, and a lot of things that the performer can add. To me a calypso is potentially a richer experience than a poem, although some poems are very rich. But the text you extract from a calypso to analyse can never convey the richness of the whole calypso, so what you are saying about Rudder is that he is a superb calypsonian, and he is so good as a calypsonian that you can take his songs just at a purely verbal level, and those words would qualify as a poem. I get very annoyed when people say that a calypso is a poem, a poem may exist in a calypso, but a calypso is a larger, different entity.

SF: So you are saying that it is not enough to read a lyric of course, but it not even enough to listen to a calypso, it is necessary to see a calypso performed to obtain the richness of a calypso.

KR: Absolutely, I bought all of David Rudder's CDs, so when I am listening to his CDs, I remember what I saw him doing, so I recreate the performance in my head while I am listening, and sometimes I buy a Rudder's CD that I couldn't see performed, I mean that's enjoyable, but I am looking forward to seeing him perform it. So you still have a job whether you want to focus on Walcott and Brathwaite or whether you are going to move on to the next generation.

SF: Definitely I am moving to the next generation, but I don't think I can ignore the presence of the two big writers.

KR: No, you can't.

⁹⁶² Cf. Warner-Lewis, Maureen. "The Rhythms of Caribbean Vocal and Oral-Based Texts." *Cit.* 54-75.

SF: And I should give a kind of general introduction of what kind of aesthetics have been forming in the past 50 years.

KR: Or what aesthetics...that's an open question: whether there is a West Indian aesthetic, whether there is an aesthetics that embraces everybody...don't know yet, but you could say if one is going to recognise an aesthetics, it will contain the following elements, or some of the elements that would be involved to construct or recognise a West Indian aesthetic, so it's not a useless thing: you might be helping to define an aesthetics. Brathwaite would have a "jazz aesthetic", right? and the features he bounces on are improvisation, working in ensemble, repetition, all of these are known elements of poetry, so the question is whether the blend of recognisable components is unique: how long that blend will survive as the aesthetics we don't know, and whether we can say that this aesthetic is derived from Africa or from India, those are almost political questions. It is more important to recognise the aesthetic than to attribute it to a particular place or person or time: this is the aesthetics I can construct out of the various expressions. And if your judgment is true, and there is a West Indian aesthetics, than you'd see it in paintings, you'd see it in the crafts and in the lifestyle, because an aesthetics is not something that is narrowly focused to one field, it is something that is part of the spirit of the age.

SF: As far as you know, has a work of this kind already been done?

KR: No, it hasn't. It's very difficult to do, there are partial attempts. I just think that "the aesthetics of West Indian poetry" might be a more manageable thing. Your work might want to be descriptive and analytic before you begin theorizing, you can't theorize if you don't know although many theorists – this is my quarrel – some theorists haven't read much, probably just one West Indian novel and have come across with a whole theory, feeling they have understood how the whole West Indian literature works. So some critics just read up to the point when things connect to what they have in their head, and do not read more. A good critic makes you want to read a book, or re-read a book, or go back to the book, he shouldn't use poetry to elaborate a theory he has picked up from some other theorist or his Ph.D. adviser.

§

Interview with Prof. Funso Aiyejina, 8th May 2008, Port of Spain, Trinidad

Sara Florian: Prof. Aiyejina, what do you think about the academic contraposition between Walcott and Brathwaite which emerged in the 1970s?

Funso Aiyejina: There is a sense in which they can be contrasted, but there is also a sense in which they are very similar, in that their primary aim is to reconstitute the notion of the Caribbean mind or the Caribbean person and culture, so that no matter what language they use,

no matter what end of the *continuum* they start from, they are still basically doing the same thing. If in your Ph.D. thesis you start from the southernmost point, which is Trinidad, you could consider its poets.

SF: Well, from Trinidad I know Jennifer Rahim: does she employ Creole?

FA: Jennifer Rahim would be a good poet to look at, there are a few lines in which she employs Creole, but her primary take-off point is the standard. She also writes fiction, and in it she uses significantly modified Creole; this is of course because fiction lends itself more readily to the use of Creole, because you have to reflect the language of communication.

SF: As Sam Selvon and Earl Lovelace did.

FA: Yes, as they both did. But in poetry it doesn't come as naturally as in prose writers. Walcott is both Trinidadian and St. Lucian, I know he sees himself as St. Lucian, but we should consider the fact that he lived here for a long time and the language he used was influenced by Trinidad Creole, as in "The Spoiler's Return". And I guess one can find some Jamaican Creole too, because, of course, he also studied in Jamaica. What I have found about a lot of West Indian people is that, when they move around, they do assimilate a lot of the mannerisms and linguistic features from the various islands.

SF: The first time I came to the Caribbean and started to travel around I realized that many people do not know, are not aware of, the linguistic differences of Creoles from one island to the other, and maybe this depend on the insularity...

FA: Well, that's true, but they realize it at a certain level. Maybe Trinidad is not the best example, from my observation as an outsider.

SF: Where are you from?

FA: I'm from Nigeria, but I've been living here since 1977 on and off. From my observation I think that the Trinidadians' mentality is more cosmopolitan than of other islands, so Trinidadians tend to be a lot more aware of the cultures of other islands. And when you look at the jokes that calypsonians make about people from other islands, you see that they are aware at that level. I find Barbados to be definitely more insular than Trinidad and Jamaicans think that they are "the Caribbean", because of their size, because of the global impact of reggae, and because of the kind of political figures that they have produced. But even Jamaicans are very aware of the differences since their scholars have always interrogated all notions of the Caribbean. Do you know Eric Roach?

SF: Yes, Roach was from Tobago...

FA: Exactly, I'm not sure about the amount of Creole you are going to find in his work. From Trinidad there is also Cynthia James; the problem with her and others is that most of these poets are published locally, and they are not readily available outside. Other Trinidadian poets are Anson Gonzàalez...and then Victor Questel, he was a fantastic poet who died some years ago. James Aboud instead is a new poet and has published something recently but he is not new in age...Are you interested in *rapso* poets?

SF: I know there is Brother Resistance...

FA: Yes, he is one of the pioneers of *rapso*. *Rapso* poets employ Creole, and they are not published in written form but in audio forms.

SF: And then there is David Rudder, the calypsonian.

FA: Yes, definitely. Have you seen *Self-Portraits* [Self-Portraits: Interviews with Ten West Indian Writers and Two Critics. San Juan, Trinidad, Lexicon. 2003.], the book of interviews of West Indian poets? I have interviewed Olive Senior, Mervyn Morris, Jane King, Kendel Hippolyte. There is a Barbadian poet working with a form unique to Barbados.

SF: Is it the *tuk*?

FA: Yes, exactly.

SF: Then, it is Anthony Kellman.

FA: Yes, Kellman. But if you are going to include people from the diaspora, you will also have to include Sister Lou. There is Pearl Eintou Springer, she is Trinidadian and definitely uses some Creole in her work, she is in her early 60s and still active. As far as your research is concerned, I would look at the *continuum* and see who represents the pure Creole and the pure Standard English, and then how the two ends move towards each other. Do they move towards a middle point or do they move back out in their directions?

SF: We have to define a *continuum* first...

FA: Yes, and sometimes we do not find people who belong to either end. The more educated ones often operate from the middle. When they are in the intellectual, academic context, their language is mostly towards the standard, but when they are off their professional base they're back to the language of the ordinary persons. At the end of the day, it is the material that will force your arrangement on you, the material you choose will then determine how to arrange if you are going to see it from the point of view of the *continuum*. What you are going to find is that except in very few cases, like in the case of Miss Lou, you are not going to find anybody who writes only in Creole, apart maybe from Mikey Smith.

SF: Do you think there is a kind of unity in all these varieties of expression? I mean I know a Trinidadian in Jamaica, Wayne Brown, and he strongly believes in the predominance of the poetic written text over the performance poetry, but I think that in a thesis like the one I am going to write I cannot ignore oral poetry, dub poetry, calypso...

FA: Of course you can't because it is the basis of the language that you are interested in it.

SF: I am trying to search for a kind of unity, a cultural continuity, which, in my conclusions, can comprehend all of this material.

FA: Well, Merle Hodge has done a fantastic Ph.D. thesis on the evolution of the Trinidad voice, where she looks at the development of the Trinidad voice in fiction, not in poetry. She did a linguistic analysis which she then applied to the work of the early Trinidadian writers, and then

she applied it to the work of Lovelace, to see how he applied it to both ends of the *continuum*. The beauty of her thesis is the linguistic understanding, she said this is how Spanish influenced, this is how French influenced Trinidad Creole, or African languages. Without the mechanics of linguistics, you will have to deal with cultural studies, or to analyse specific socio-economic conditions in which the different writers operate, intellectually and educationally. That way you could take Miss Lou and see how her location within the society and the choice of the segment of the society with which she identified herself influenced her way of writing. Whereas the Jamaican Mervyn Morris is an intellectual writer inside an intellectual society and reflecting it into his writing.

§

Interview with Prof. Gordon Rohlehr, 8th May 2008, Port of Spain, Trinidad

Sara Florian: Prof. Rohlehr, could you please comment on the main points to consider when talking about performance poetry?

Gordon Rohlehr: All the kind of things that you can look at when you start to talk about performance are particularly about: contestation, quarrelling, exalting, ridiculing, and so on; the other things of course are social criticism and satirical poetry, easily the view that a certain kind of satire is bitter satire, and Walcott said “Hell is a city much like Port of Spain”: it is another way of saying that Port of Spain is like Hell! [laugh] But the satirist will twist it in such a way that, in other words Port of Spain is worse than hell, hell is just trying to imitate Port of Spain.

SF: I haven’t realized it so far, I’ve only been here for just a day...

GR: Well, it’s always like hell! According to the poem, it’s looking at politics, it’s looking at the things which needed to be done, it seems to me to be the decay of lifestyle, that sort of things, and there’s an image of decay which runs right through the poem, but then you have the whole calypso tradition, there are hundreds of thousands of calypsos and if you want to deal with satire and calypso you have a rich body of work, you have Chalkdust...

SF: He is in St. Croix now, isn’t he?

GR: No, he is back in Trinidad, he works at the University of Trinidad and Tobago. There are people like David Rudder, Black Stalin, and many others.

SF: As regards Rudder, I know that both you and Prof. Warner-Lewis wrote about his work.

GR: Yes, and what I am saying is that you can get CDs, records...you could also get a box with twelve CDs of calypso from 1938 to 1940-42, these were recorded by Decca company...do you know this book of mine titled *A Scuffling of Islands*? It has a lot of stuff on calypso, satirical calypso, and a “scuffling”, which is a Jamaican word: “to scuffle” means “to hustle”, “to

scrunch” to live, when you’re poor or in the street things are tough, and you’re barely surviving, but “to scuffle” means also “to fight”, it is an English word for two people fighting, quarrelling. So I created this, I used the word in two ways: the islands are all poor and they’re struggling to survive, and at the same time the islands are constantly fighting each other.

SF: Because of the insularity?

GR: Insularity, that’s right. Do you know Christian Habekost’s work?

SF: Do you mean the work of Dub Poets? Yes, I do. Actually, I am attending a course on creative writing with Wayne Brown and he is much committed to the written form, to the craft in poetry, and he thinks that a lot of dub poetry is bad.

GR: I think there is good and bad in all of these forms of poetry. There is a lot of bad written poetry and also some good written poetry, and there’s a whole lot of very bad oral and performed poetry, but there is something which is also good. Our problem is to devise ways to determine what is good from what is bad, and I don’t think that one should be given the assumption that something because it’s performed or is in dialect is bad, and I also don’t think that one should be given the opposite assumption that because it is in dialect is good. It has to be good because of certain qualities in the performance, or qualities in how the language is used, whether it is in dialect or standard, it doesn’t really matter, it’s how this particular artist is using language, so that’s where the problem of assessment in criticism arises. I know Wayne’s position because you see in those collection of essays *My Strangled City* and *The Shape of That Hurt* that there has been a controversy between us, but I think that you should allow people to express themselves the way they feel of expressing themselves, and then there will be those who are very good at a thing, those who are just mediocre, that’s what I feel. Our criteria haven’t taken any clean, or clear absolute shape yet, we are still working at developing criteria, developing standards.

SF: Exactly, I’m thinking of the fact that there is so much material in the Caribbean, and I am also thinking of the stage in which this kind of literature is, the kind of ways it’s using to express itself, but do you think that there is a kind of cultural unity in all the region?

GR: I won’t call it that way, except from the fact that most of the people who are involved in writing know each other, know each other’s work, are aware of each other’s work, I’m not saying that everybody know everybody else, but the Caribbean in the end is a small region and in that respect there is no cultural unity, but in some instances a dialogue exists among writers. Sometimes a writer might write fully aware that he is maybe answering another writer without actually saying so, but you write with the consciousness of your fellow writers, whether you consciously answer them or not, some form of dialogue is taking place. At times the dialogue among writers takes the form of a terrible quarrel, and that’s what happened in the ‘70s, where, I think, writers were faced with the challenge of Blackness, “Africanity”, since we all come from societies in which the notion of Africa was perched out, since that is how existed in most of the educational systems in the sense that the idea of Africa was dead, even if you looked like an African, you had no consciousness of Africa, now that was challenged mainly by a poet like Kamau Brathwaite, it was challenged also by anthropologists in the ‘40, ‘60s, ‘70s. The question there was “How much of Africa remained?”, and whether what remained was strong enough or viable enough to become the basis of anything, and in any case what was the business of being in Africa when Africa was in such a muddle, such a poor state politically,

socially, economically? The idea of Africa was tied up with the idea of blackness, and it proved the challenge that people who had not been educated into entertaining had the notion of Africa at all, and it began to affect our notion of aesthetics, since it was very clear that even those remnants of Africa in us pointed us into directions which were quite different from the vast amount of unity in us. If you say that Africa exists in a set of rhythms, or exists in some of us at least as a bundle of rituals, or a collection of proverbs, or ways of thinking, notions of metaphor, a kind of orality, I mean how do you identify these remnants? In the music of the diaspora, these music re-communicate with Africa like African jazz, or you might look at dance, again.

SF: Or at religious remnants as well.

GR: Yes, a bundle of rituals. So now that posed a problem, Brathwaite who had lived in Africa for a number of years, looked at a whole impact of Africa on orality, looked at what we are still doing in the Caribbean like storytelling and so on, what we could therefore develop, and that posed a problem because we had not been accustomed to thinking of Africa or the Caribbean in this way.

SF: Was the '70s the time of the academic opposition between Walcott and Brathwaite?

GR: Yes, it came out in the '70s, but there was no opposition between Brathwaite and Walcott before Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* emerged: *Rights of Passage* was published in 1967, *Masks* in 1968, and *Islands* in 1969 and then they were combined in 1973 as *The Arrivants*. Now, I think the opposition began to arise because of the spontaneous way in which Brathwaite's work was accepted by people who heard it, people who saw it performed, people who read it even. We faced the same problem when we undertook to make a collection of poetry, which was meant to be poetry of the voice, poetry in which the voice was dominant, and at that point in time we were working with, the idea of dialect versus standard, which is what you are working with and that could lead to a certain kind of selection, but after we collected quite a lot of poetry, the question of finding a principle or a ranging aim of the texts...

SF: Sorry to interrupt, but I guess with all this material you can understand me...

GR: Oh, yes, I can understand you: you've got the material but the question is how to deal with this material? Well, I had to write the introduction to *Voice Print* so that was the question that I attempted to address in the introduction, at least in writing the introduction I had to explain how we had selected the material and I thought that one had to answer some very simple questions. If you are dealing with poetry of the voice, but poetry which is nevertheless published in written form, in print, the first question is: what do you do with our voices? what do we mean by voice? Well, we tell stories, and I thought that there should be a category, a chapter in the collection which really deals with narrative poetry, which addresses the different ways in which Caribbean poets have chosen to tell stories, and addressing that you are doing more than addressing the question of dialect versus standard, because you could find a clear amount of Caribbean poetry which tells the stories in standard English, you could find them telling it in dialect, you could find them telling in a mixture of the two, so what I am saying is that once you get away from the categories of dialect and standard, we free ourselves to group the poems in different ways. You could take it as we did in the collection: a story is just told like a long 19th century Romantic poem, or Wordsworth's or Keats's or Byron's or any of those poets who employed the poetic form to tell long stories: Byron's *Don Juan* is like an enormously long novel. And of

course this tradition goes back to Chaucer and beyond Chaucer it goes back to Anglo-Saxon epics; I'm just talking about story-telling and the question of telling a story in a poetic form. I'm saying that there are several ways in which one can do this, in English poetry we can go back to the very beginnings of the Anglo-Saxon, or later the Middle English, Chaucer and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and so on: they are telling stories in poetic form. Of course, when the novel and the romance emerged, whatever emerged in France and in Italy, it became the dominant form in storytelling.

SF: In Italy in the Middle Ages there was this writer called Boccaccio...

GR: Boccaccio, yes, of course...

SF: ...and in *The Decameron* he was telling stories, it's a kind of collection of short stories put together in a frame...

GR: ...and Boccaccio took a lot of his stories from North Africa, a lot of his stories were African stories which were rendered in Italian, and then people like Chaucer derived them from the Italian, from Boccaccio.

SF: I think he had some influence also from the Middle East.

GR: Yes, that's right. There is a collection called *The Black Decameron*. Anyway, what I am saying is that some contemporary Caribbean poetry draws from that tradition. On the other hand, you have other traditions operating in how our stories are told. It could be interesting to see how poets like Walcott and Brathwaite derived some of their poems from stories: in *The Arrivants*, for instance, there are some very long and complicated stories and storytelling, but with a sort of shifting, with a narrator who can be anybody, he can be the poet, he can be a character...

SF: I'm thinking of *Born to Slow Horses*, his latest collection...

GR: Yes, that's right, very contemporary Brathwaite, but I was thinking of *Ancestors*, and *The Arrivants*. Wherever you are looking at Brathwaite, you can see that there is a storytelling tradition and you can approach an entire collection of poetry as a single story that has been broken down into several other stories, in other words it's almost as if he is writing a novel, but a peculiar kind of novel that is fragmented, and the narrator is not fixed in time and place, the narrator can be the voice of an African *griot*, or the narrator can be Brathwaite himself, or Brathwaite himself adopting the voice of all kinds of people, some of them mythic, some of them real, some of them historic, some of them contemporary. Storytelling is one of the categories that we used to group the poems.

SF: Do you think that storytelling is a feature deriving from African tradition?

GR: African tradition, European tradition, the oral tradition, a tradition of the voice. And of course we were confronted with a great deal of African tradition, and with Caribbean traditions which may not necessarily be African. What I mean is that they may derive from African styles of telling stories, but you don't know, for example, the way in which a story is told in Trinidad, which might be different from the way it is told in Jamaica, so the different Caribbean islands have created different styles. If you are talking about storytelling, you are also talking about

performance, and this is one category you might want to look at: it involves the voice, it involves dialect, it involves the standard, but it also involves how you deliver the poem, and the way Louise Bennett would do a poem might be completely different from the way, say, Mikey Smith would. In the calypso tradition in Trinidad, there are hundreds, maybe thousands, of stories that are told in this tradition, and maybe some of them were collected in *Voiceprint*, to give you a sense of the different ways in which these calypsonians tell stories. That is one element that we identified, because in looking at storytelling you are also looking at composition, there is somebody telling the story, and there is somebody listening to the story, reading the story...

SF: And there are formulas implied in the act of storytelling, like *Cric? Crac!*, which were communicated between the speaker, the ‘griot’, the storyteller and the audience...

GR: Yes, of course, there are formulas which might appear at the beginning and at the end of a story, sometimes in the middle of a story, too. At other times, you might even get a story that begins at the end, but there is something like a proverb at the beginning, and the story will illustrate the proverb, and maybe you will end with the same proverb. There are all of these conventions deriving from Africa like the use of proverbs. I don’t know how much of it actually enters into the poetry, but you will find it in the act of folk tales. We Caribbean people often quarrel, so you might find that there is a whole category of poems which illustrate the kind of techniques we use when we are quarrelling with somebody or renders when you are having a verbal contest with some person...

SF: A verbal confrontation..[laugh]

GR: A confrontation, yes. [laugh] You get some of that in Louise Bennett, for example, “cuss cuss”, and you get a lot of it in calypsos, like the convention of confrontation, the “picong”; you also have the oratorical calypso, in which you improvise stanzas against each other, singing in a minor key, so there’s another category...I’m getting examples of that running through the West Indies, so you can read through the collection and see where there is a whole confrontation, contestation, and how this directs the protagonists, how this forces the protagonists to find a certain kind of language. In verbal contests they depend very heavily on the simile, as “your face is like so and so”, and sometimes you get a lot of very bizarre comparisons between people’s faces or their bodies; there is always the use of the simile, and you can also get some strange metaphors coming out of these quarrels.

SF: I’m thinking of Walcott’s ‘The Spoiler’s Return’ in which – as you said at the beginning of the interview – he compares Port of Spain to Hell: “Hell is a city much like Port of Spain”...

GR: Well, within the calypso tradition using comparison such that is very normal, so that you can actually analyse linguistically and from a socio-linguistic point of view what takes place in this verbal confrontation. In the oratorical calypso the whole idea was to use very “learned” language to show that you were more intelligent, or had a better education than, the other person, and to do that you had to use suitable language so that it went almost away from dialect: you had normal Creole speaking singers, but in confronting each other they had to show how educated they were.

SF: So they used a different register of language.

GR: Yes, striving for a different register of language, and of course you can get very strange things coming out of that, because if they had mastered the “higher” register, if they had mastered that they might even insult each other in perfectly, meaningful, and eloquent standard English: but let us say that they haven’t really fully mastered standard English, they might say a number of quite ridiculous things, they use words wrongly, or out of context. So this is another way of organizing the material, and you get a lot of confrontation in the sort of African-American hip hop, rap: we have similar traditions of rapping.

SF: Like in *rapso*?

GR: Yes, but some of the American rap was influenced by the Caribbean. Rap existed before *rapso*; *rapso* began in the 1970s. These diasporan traditions have influenced each other, so that a calypsonian from Trinidad who signed under the name of Houdini went to New York in the 1920s and recorded quite a number of calypsos between the 1927 and 1934 well into the 1960s I think, and in fact I think he was very much alive in the 1970s. His grandson became one of the rappers in New York and he joined some of the things that his grandfather said. Calypsonians in Trinidad knew for example about “the dirty dozen”, doing the dozens it’s a verse form among African-Americans and they sang these verses insulting each other, it’s like a game, very dangerous thing, with the audience around them. The dozens were know from the 1900, now it is known as competition, a game to make up those rhymes on the spur of the moment. What I am saying is that I am sure that calypsonians knew here what African-Americans were doing, and there was an element of obscenity coming from the street, a poetry of the street which is involved with social issues, the way people live with satire, with attacking the establishment, the authorities, or the hypocrisy of those people who pretended to be of a better class, who pretended to be superior. There is always an element of rhythm, too, because it’s performed to a beat that you would maybe be dancing too. So in oral poetry you are dealing with storytelling and performance too, you are dealing with confrontation, ridicule, insult, argument, dialogue, elements where one person has to respond to the other, and there is always an audience judging your performance.

§

**Interview with Kendel Hippolyte, J. R. Lee and Jane King,
12th May 2008, Gros Islet, St. Lucia**

Sara Florian: I was observing the covers of your books of poetry, with these dreamy design.

Kendel Hippolyte: I like the illustrations in *Bearings*...

SF: It's similar to this one, *Island In the Sun*...why did you choose this cover design?

KH: Yes, it's the same artist, Rossini François, I wanted the book illustrated and Rossini and I were friends, we used to live in the same house for a couple of years, so we had a very close connection, and he is very much into other art forms, like jazz music, classical music, poetry and so on: it was just a natural thing to ask him. There were some of my poems which he found responded to this kind of pointillism, and for him it was something to stimulate his technique further.

SF: Did you study in Jamaica?

KH: Yes, my major was Literature and I also did History and Sociology, it's what you call a general studies degree with a major in Literature. I was writing poetry from before then, but I started writing seriously from when I attended a creative writing course that Mervyn Morris was teaching, where I learned that the technique is very important. To me if you don't acknowledge that, you are fooling yourself, and from that moment on I felt I could give it a kind of a life commitment. I think that before I hadn't realized that.

SF: It's what Walcott says about 'craft'...Actually in Jamaica I am attending a creative writing course in poetry with Wayne Brown and he is teaching us rhythm and form, but for me it's not easy as a non-native speaker of English and I have to pay attention to rhyme and metre. At the beginning I had the sensation I was not writing poetry, I was just following a scheme, and this was limiting myself, limiting my emotions and my writing. Instead you have to learn to master the scheme, the rhythms, the poetic forms and then even if you are writing in free verse you would be a better poet...

KH: I think it's right, I think this is what musicians do for instance. They have to learn the vocabulary and grammar of music first and then they can expand.

SF: Do you have a particular form that you prefer?

KH: No, I like many poetic forms. And I like Robert Frost: he has a saying, which I like very much, "I load myself with chains and then try to get out of them".⁹⁶³ But I do not think there's one form I'm more drawn to, the free verse is a form, too. In every form what you are trying to do is to try to unify elements, which have to stick, you know, to cohere.

⁹⁶³ Actually, the phrase "I load myself down with chains and try to wriggle free." was pronounced by the Irish poet Austin Clarke to Robert Frost. Cf. "Austin Clarke (poet)." [Wikipedia. The Free Encyclopedia. A Wikimedia project. Wikimedia Foundation, Inc. 28 Nov. 2009 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austin_Clarke_\(poet\)>](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Austin_Clarke_(poet)).

SF: I remember you saying to me once that Blake is one of your favourite poets, so is he your major poetic inspiration?

KH: Yes, as a figure of poet, because I think that the poet has to speak to the society but to keep an internal world as well, bravely, and in a way that acknowledges his responsibilities to both of them. Now some poets, if you like, emphasize the public responsibilities, so political statements and social criticism. But nobody can tell you what to write. I believe you should be able to find a connection between these two spheres. Public poetry is more straight, and that's probably true, but I don't think the issue depends simply on what my fundamental ideas about the issues are, but on my understanding about what to do about it, and what can be done about it. I think it is not that straightforward: it was easier to point fingers at enemies when you were younger, and I think that when you grow up you realise that things are more complex.

SF: What do you think about capitalism? Maybe the most important thing in educating people, as a poet in a Third World country, gives you an urge...do you feel a certain kind of responsibility for this condition and your role as a poet?

KH: Let me clarify: it is not that I do not find any solutions or hope in the way the world is going, and fundamentally it still makes sense to me that society is best shaped along socialist principles. It is the beginning, the broad base of this type of society that we need. But it is clear also to me that these kinds of societies will not of themselves produce the personal harmony which is the only guarantee of the type of society that we dream of. You have to create that harmony yourself. But it's more likely done inside of a certain social framework. In general, I think that the outlines of a socialist society are the beginning of the kind of society we dream of, but, that said, we have to look for the final harmony ourselves.

SF: I don't want to constantly refer to Walcott, but outside the Caribbean he seems to be the only well known Caribbean poet, and it's a pity because there are lots of good Caribbean poets, like you and Jane and John Robert Lee, yet you have to refer to his poetic model, at least it is what they say in the other islands...What do you think of Walcott's work? What's your relationship with him?

KH: Of any of the writers we consider seriously, I can't honestly say that we experience Walcott as a big, oppressive weight; as for myself, when I began writing Walcott was one of a number of poets. When I studied in Jamaica, Brathwaite was more important than Walcott to me when I was getting into poetry, and he made more sense to me. But by the time in my mid-thirties I had written poetry with a stronger sense of craft, I began to look at Walcott more closely, and I became deeply appreciative of him. Still am. It's not so much that I try to write like him. I don't know that any of us here try to do that ...Well, perhaps. There is an older poet who had been trying to write like Walcott in his earlier works, McDonald Dixon, he's a kind of bridge figure. And his generation would have had no Caribbean literature as part of their education but would have grown entirely within a European literature; so Walcott would have been a kind of revelation. My generation instead was also exposed to Caribbean and African poetry, etc. Walcott was not such a shattering, liberating force as he would have been for McDonald Dixon. So, I am very much appreciative of his work in itself, deeply so. But not so much as a poetic model as for making absolutely clear that poetry matters, that a society needs something called a poet and that a poet matters for a society as much as a politician, a builder. Honestly, I don't think that all of the Caribbean islands quite have that. I don't want to boast

about St. Lucia, but I took the poetry tradition here for granted, as a part of the society. That's a tremendous thing.

[John Robert Lee arrives]

SF: As you speak of harmony, I think of Walcott's lines when he feels "divided to the vein" and to me this doesn't convey a feeling of harmony...

KH: Well, I think that anybody in a self-reflective process could feel divided, you can feel divided along lines of ancestry, race, class lines. I feel that people have over blown it, that line, and it made sense at the time as showing a contradiction or a sense of division, but I think that that division made more sense in an era when the whole anti-colonial struggle was very much in progress, in process, as a cultural clash. It was a striking example of a huge political issue, a social issue, a global issue. But I think that from early on he was interested in synthesis, and in many ways he achieved it.

[Jane King arrives]

SF: I'm thinking of the situation in Jamaica and there is a very strong class division. How is the situation down here, in St. Lucia?

KH: I've never felt it as acute as it is in Jamaica because it's part of a class oppression that was never as acute here, at least in the modern era - in the twentieth century anyway. When the blacks reach the middle and upper-middle class they are as oppressive as the whites.

SF: I'm interested also in the linguistic aspects of poetry and I'm trying to see how poets employ Standard English and Creoles along the *continuum*, and as far as I know and as far as I read, you employ some Creole in your poems...so why do you use it? is it because you want your poetry to sound more natural, you want to reproduce or depict the speech of the people? What's the aesthetic purpose in employing Creole in poetry? In St. Lucia the situation is different from other islands because of the French-based *patois* and the English, while in Jamaica you have West Indian English, Jamaica English, *patwa*...so according to the difference, how do you use the language?

KH: It doesn't occur to me not to use it. Every poem has its own vibes, its own voice...

John Robert Lee: Yes, its own voice. In our writing we are Caribbean poets, so you can write in SE, but if you want to be true to the voice, if you want to reproduce in the poems the voice of the persona, or whatever it is you are writing about, you will move along the *continuum*, you will change register, using it naturally, not even thinking about it, well I mean you will think about it, but it's not overly a self-conscious thing. The Creole inflection, the Creole speech must be part of the natural register.

KH: It's not a programme...

SF: Don't you think that generally there are poets using it on purpose?

KH: Sure. For instance in Martinique you get more of that because it is still very much tied to the whole anti-colonial struggle so to speak, it is very much within the cultural realm, and within that even more centred.

SF: Do you feel much closer and more related to Martinique than to other English-speaking island?

KH: No, I wouldn't say so, the general Saint Lucian link with Martinique it's not mainly on the lines of poetry or music, but of small trading, friends and family going back and forth...not so much on defining cultural lines.

SF: Mr. Lee, as I was saying before, in my research I'm trying to see if there is a kind of cultural and poetic unity among Caribbean poets from different islands, because many times academics focus on one particular island or on one particular author, but not on the whole Caribbean, and I am trying to see if poets can be put together, blended together: do you think there could be such a unity?

JRL: Well, I think if you look deep and hard enough you could, because we are Caribbean and even if you are focusing on the English-speaking islands, even in the French- and Spanish-speaking islands, either from Puerto Rico, or Martinique, or Curaçao, we are Caribbean people, in spite of the racial mixing, the African, the European. There is in a certain way a kind of unity, whatever the negatives might be you can get a sense of what is Caribbean, influences, similarities, and differences as languages, but we can recognise something that make us Caribbean people. As poets we can speak of themes, our common history, European-African heritage and influences, the social development and movements, so what joins us is basically history.

SF: Well, actually each island has a different history...

JRL: Yes, in its way but there's an overall common history, and if you look at it more closely, we are closer to the French culture but then we developed a really Creole culture.

KH: For me there is a cultural unity but, you see, we are "talking poetry" for now...but if four Caribbean poets, males and females, one from a French island, one from an English, a Dutch one, a Spanish one all sit together and start talking, all of them would find they have experienced the same phenomenon: growing up within a community, within a society that was smaller, with a lifestyle that everyone could recognise, like going to the market, or the social figures we had in common like the wayside preacher, and a particular way of life that affected us. That's what we experience, our ways of life would mesh and have a same Caribbean flavour.

JRL: We are speaking about poets of our generation, and again if you speak of a whole generation like the '50s and meeting our friends from other islands, we would recognise similar features, like our cultural background, and maybe what would make a common thread would be to have grown up under a colonial experience, in terms of cultural attitudes, of how you see yourself. I think the colonialism for writers of our particular generation would be a unifying factor, but in the '70s we would have been more influenced by people going to America, to England and Europe, while in our generation people coming from Trinidad, Barbados, Cuba, would share this common thing even in painting or music. Now a new generation of the '80s

and '90s would have its own experience, influenced by reggae, Rasta, dancehall music: that's how we could find our own poetic voice.

SF: Apart from common Caribbean festivals like Carifesta, what do you know about the other islands? Are there common journals? I remember *Bim* in Barbados, *Focus* in Jamaica and *Kyk-over-al* in Guyana: what are the occasions in which Caribbean poets come in contact?

JRL: For me the '70s, the '68 to the 1980, was the period when the new Caribbean came to birth and our generation of writing was very much involved. People like Dennis Scott, Walcott and Brathwaite came out, and for us there was a unifying link. Nowadays, I don't know if these things are there anymore, there are other things that are happening like *Calabash* festival. These kinds of things no longer have the regional, local sense, maybe parochial sense. There are journals like *Caribbean Quarterly* which create a kind of networking but it is more spread out, international.

SF: Maybe because of the diaspora....

JRL: Yes, maybe. You see me, Kendel, and Jane have been working together at journals, magazines, TV programs, and there is in a sense kind of remnants of what we were, of what nurtured us, which give us a sense that the life continues, but the world has changed. For instance, in St. Lucia there are no great writing poets, though there's a number of good performance poets nowadays...

SF: Something like dub poetry in Jamaica or *rapso* in Trinidad? How do they call themselves? Performance poets?

KH: Yes, performance poets...there's one here called Ras Isley, who works in a range of performance forms, but he does performance things that are not necessarily based on rhythmical forms, he just uses the voice in quite interesting ways. There's another called Nkrumah Lucien, whose father is Egbert Lucien..

SF: I remember Egbert Lucien from *Confluence*...

KH: Nkrumah is a poet with a very literary background...so there are a few...

SF: What do you think about younger poets?

JRL: They are influenced by different things...in the '70s I was in Barbados and Kendel was in Jamaica, but we were both very much influenced by Brathwaite, who was writing *Masks* etc. The trilogy was just coming up and he came to Barbados to read: listening to him you had the sense of oral poetry, that's what Brathwaite gave us, while Walcott gave us something else, Kendel is right, apart from Frank Collymore or Walcott there are not many 'scribal poets', and when the performance poets or dub poets were coming to the fore, Louise Bennett was also performing in a sense...

SF: What about music as a cultural unifying manifestation? Kendel, I think you are very much into music as far as your poems show...

KH: Yes, but I'm not sure how much I can trace it down in my poems. I grew up with jazz. I'll explain to you a couple of things: one, the idea of poetry as an art form that has a musical tradition, that has some traditional forms that are anchored in music. That's helpful because you can then see jazz as something that can, in a sense, free those forms: I think the music thing is important in grounding and forcing this idea of poetry as an art form that has a tradition, a set of structures. But the thing with jazz music is that it takes a structure and then you kind of reassemble it, you have the hint of a motif, it's underneath and then you can hear it. In the poetry, you can have a hint every now and then of a musical form you are not even conscious of. Walcott helped me to understand the importance of the integrity of the image, trying to keep the image true, but before that the notion that rhythm in itself can help some emotional states to happen, it's something that has always made sense to me, and it's in music and in jazz music in particular. Jazz musicians really work with this idea. I've always been interested in how you make a parallel to jazz in poetry, listening to rhythm, listening to how words move.

SF: I think of how Brathwaite managed to do that: Prof. Velma Pollard told me that she remembers that when Brathwaite was teaching at Mona he used to listen to jazz music and then it would have transposed naturally into his poetry...and what about folk tales, *contes*, etc., in S. Lucia? I know you've translated a couple from patois into English.

KH: Yes, but I don't think I have an in-depth connection with them. I grew up in Castries, not in a rural environment, so that kind of tradition was in the background, but it's something I would like to connect with more closely.

SF: I remember your performance in London last July: you were putting together folk rhythms, proverbs, and so on, in the background there was a lot of this. But what about you Jane? Have you used them in your poetry? I remember reading 'Fellow Traveller' and I thought you were using some of this in it.

Jane King: Not particularly, and certainly not in terms of French Creole, but as a Creole in general yes, it's quite natural to use. I've published two collections of poetry *Into the Centre* (1993) and *Fellow Traveller* (1994).

SF: I think you employ a lot of natural metaphors and religious references in your poetry, and that the themes you and Kendel use in a sense complete, compensate one another in your poems, is that true?

JK: [laugh] I suppose so, but even so, it's not something conscious...it's been a long time since I had time or space to write and when I do so I don't choose what to write, I just write about everything that comes to my mind. I don't have any particular program, so I'm not conscious of themes. I started writing poetry when I was a kid, but then Kendel pushed me to write.

SF: Would you define yourself a St. Lucian poet? Just a poet? a Caribbean poet?

JK: I have trouble with these kinds of definitions, I don't like the fact that there is any kind of worrying about that at all...

SF: I'm asking this because it's part of my research, I don't want to put labels on you...

JK: No, I know, I know, but what troubles me is that people in general have to categorise things, or it troubles me that people have to look for instance at Rossini's work on the cover and say "You can't sell that, because it's not a Caribbean work...". To me it's a foolish kind of contradiction...does it matter? He is a Caribbean person doing that kind of work, and you can't fall into a stereotype.

SF: I think that the problem with labels sometimes is that you want to frame things or make them work before seeing what you have in front of you.

JK: And I think that for so long people used labels to exclude things and say "this is Caribbean", or "this is not"...

JRL: For instance, I define myself as a "Christian poet"...

SF: That's exactly what I was going to ask you.

JRL: Yes, and it's the only label I use, and I know why I do it. Having said this, I think that my friends and the people who know me would understand what it's about and then they move on. I am a Christian in terms of religion and faith and it's a very personal thing, much of my poetry has been informed by this perspective.

JK: As much as I couldn't be anything else than a Caribbean poet...

JRL: Yes, but ultimately you are a poet...

JK: I remember once in London meeting a person who said she was a "radical Lesbian feminist Black British woman"...[laugh]...that's how she described herself, I can't even recall her name!

SF: As regards religion I think that it sometimes can become a unifying feature. I'm thinking of the Jamaican poet Earl McKenzie and the fact that he says he is very much influenced by philosophy: so what is your relationship with philosophy and religion?

JRL: I use this label deliberately, but I would say that my own readings of philosophy, I sometimes culturally fit into cultural-philosophical perspectives...

KH: I don't think there is a particular philosopher I'm affiliated with, but I think that without our inner effort we don't receive the grace that makes the completion. In terms of analysis of society in the last few centuries, I've never seen any reason to discredit Marxist analysis of the society, in terms of what it is, how it's constructed, how it works.

SF: What about the influence of 'obeah' in your poems? I've found references to it here and there...

JRL: I guess there are, and for instance *Vocations* was very much influenced by Brathwaite, and *The Arrivants* came later. Nalo Hopkinson has in her work all of this orisha, voodoo things...what struck me was to take all of that ancient mythology and put it into contemporary novels set in Toronto. But we don't have voodoo here, just remnants of African religions. I studied French, so I had a sense of Haitian literary movements and cultural life...

SF: I thought you had, being St. Lucia a French-influenced island, I thought you had ‘vodoun’ like in Haiti.

KH: We have religious remnants, like Robert said, remnants of beliefs and practices. What people call, in our Creole, ‘tjen bwa’. In Martinique they’ll say ‘quimbois’.

SF: And what about the poem ‘Lusca’ and the religious references in it?

JRL: ‘Lusca’? It’s just another name for St. Lucia, I had no particular or little sense of rural, so like Kendel I had no particular experience of rural, *patois*-speaking St. Lucia, just my own outside view of it.

SF: I thought you were speaking about a woman...

JRL: Well, I am also speaking of a woman or women in general...and of a second or third-hand experience with African tradition, of ‘tjen bwa’ or ‘magie noire’.

SF: In your ‘Caribbean exorcism poem’ you write about something related to religious practices, don’t you?

KH: I think I was referring to the phenomenon of projecting your own fears, phobias, longings outside yourself, and then the direction of the solution being something that you have to go inside to find. It hasn’t any particular references to religion...

SF: What about the ‘bolom’?

KH: It’s interesting because it’s such a combination of things, it’s not a straightforward terrifying figure...Once when I was a teenager, a friend of mine I was visiting told me I cannot stay, I have to go before the sunset because there’s a ‘bolom’ around. The master had died, and they had heard the ‘bolom’ crying at night asking for someone to take it with him. I saw people, his neighbours, shutting windows early. Out of fear: it was in the late ‘60s, probably ‘67.

JK: There’s a recipe for making a bolom. They say you have to pick the first egg laid by a young hen and it has to have been laid on Good Friday, you have to put it under your armpit for three days without bathing and then you’ll have this creature and you can ask him to do whatever you want. But I suppose that when the person who has created it dies, then it becomes this pathetic creature which goes around crying...I have read stuff referring to these kinds of folktales, and they are very interesting.

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Interview with AJA, 13th May 2008, Bridgetown, Barbados

AJA: Well, I speak Bajan dialect and if I'm talking like that I hope you can understand what I am saying...

SF: Of course I can, even though I'm not a native speaker of English or of any of the Caribbean Creoles...

AJA: I speak of Bajan in the sense that it is what Kamau Brathwaite called nation language, and it is a kind of second language, it is not English, because English means "English from England", and we don't speak like that, *all we talk is a dialect*. It is really a fusion of the African languages that came across the "middle passage" and the English that came with the colonisers. The slaves were forced to merge their languages with English, transforming words and sounds, like when we say 'fuh', it is 'for'...

SF: But now you are not speaking Bajan...

AJA: Now I am speaking English, so that you can understand...

SF: But still I can recognise a Barbadian inflection, which is different, say, from Jamaican English or Trinidadian.

AJA: Yes, it's different, I think we speak in a lower register than them, we use 'fuh', 'wuh', 'dah'..

SF:...for 'that', or 'them'..

AJA: Yes, 'dem', so we don't pronounce the 'th', while in Jamaica because of the Spanish influence they do not say 'hatches'. They drop the 'h' which is silent indicating the Spanish influence on their language. I think we can express ourselves more in Bajan dialect, as when I go to St. Lucia; actually my mother is from St. Lucia but she never taught me St. Lucian...

SF: French Creole? *patois*?

AJA: Yeah, but when I go and hang out with guys, my friends in St. Lucia, and when the 'fellars' come down they all speak Creole as a matter of expression, mannerism and vibe. One cannot truly understand the culture of St. Lucia unless you can understand the St. Lucian *patois*. As we say, "*Dah is dem kulta, dah is dem heritage*", and as I am saying I will not understand the dynamics of St. Lucian culture without totally understanding their *patois*...

SF: You mean the French-based *patois*, not the English-based Creole.

AJA: Yes, because is the French *patois* which gives the dynamics.

SF: What is the contemporary poetic situation in Barbados? How do poets deal with this kind of linguistic issues?

AJA: Well, I don't know. I am a performance poet, and I deal poetry from a performance perspective, in terms of what we call '*rhydem poetry*', it's poetry to rhythm.

SF: It's kind of similar thing to dub poetry, *rapso* in Trinidad...

AJA: Exactly, this phenomenon began in the early '80s, maybe a little earlier in Jamaica, with Oku Onuora in the late '70s, Mutabaruka, and so on, but in terms from an Eastern Caribbean perspective, *rapso* began in the late '60s, but it only came to the fore in the '70s and early '80s. But what I wanted to point out is that in the '80s the rhythm poets or performance poets across the English-speaking Caribbean started to form a kind of network. So you have Brother Resistance in Trinidad, Oku Onuora in Jamaica, Ras Mo in Dominica – emigrated to Canada though – but what I am saying is that we knew each other, we were in different territories of the Caribbean and at one point a unity came across, and not just because we were performing from our own territory to rhythm, but we were all performing in our respective Creoles. So there was rhythm, there was dialect, but also the themes touched the dynamics of decolonisation in the Caribbean, whether it was poverty, or slavery, whether it was racism or sufferance. It was all these forces and energies that determined our unity. It was like we were all speaking in one voice despite being on different islands. And our poetry was not much for the page, as for the street, it was performance poetry for theatres, we were street artistes, not in the traditional sense of poetry reading in a room.

SF: What you mean is perhaps that poetry is often quite a solitary activity...

AJA: Yes, we changed that and shifted that perspective. In the process we became very conscious that we were part of the decolonisation process, that we were shifting barriers, in terms of what they thought us poetry was supposed to sound like, but obviously that was a very British perspective. Coming from Africa instead, we were story tellers, with pain and sufferance. And that's why this kind of people made that kind of poetry, like Ras Mo, Oku Onuora, Muta from Jamaica, and from Barbados the late Ricky Perris and Winston Farrell. In Barbados it was the same with our indigenous music. In Barbados we created *tuk*, it's a creolisation of African rhythms on British military drums, so that's what *tuk* is. African drums were banned in Barbados during slavery, but military or European instruments were permitted, so what they did was to give the slaves the British marching drums. They saw no problem with that, so obviously what the slaves did was to play African rhythms on military drums and the fusion of the two, the creolisation created *tuk*. This same creolization took place in the other islands and that is why the region has so many different music forms. And it is these rhythms in the respective territories that also laid the foundation for the different poetic forms like *rapso* in Trinidad and dub poetry in Jamaica. I will give you an example of the *tuk* influence in my poetry with each line being dropped on the down beat of the bass drum e.g.:

From de time
Dat dem tek we up
Outta Africa
In uh ole slave boat
It was riot in de lan'⁹⁶⁴

So there are many different values, cultures, themes, with respect to Creole rhythms. And an important gathering of all these performance poets happened in 1993 in Toronto. The Caribbean diaspora performance poets there held an International Dub Poet Festival bringing

⁹⁶⁴ AJA. *Rhythm an' Roots: a Collection of Poems*. *Cit.*

everyone together. It was fantastic. It was the first time I saw the people's poet of apartheid South Africa Mbuli. Later in 2004 I performed with him at the Johannesburg Joy of Jazz Festival. It was a fantastic show, with the organizers having a performance poetry jazz night.

SF: What was the response of the audience at the International Dub Poet Festival?

AJA: There were a lot of Jamaicans because of the impact of reggae music. Also you have to consider the Caribbean diaspora, with internationally known poets and singers like David Rudder and Machel, and with likes of Muta and Oku from Jamaica, the festival was very popular.

SF: Machel Montano, you mean the Trinidadian soca singer...

AJA: Yes, they perform in the Caribbean but are part of a mass culture.

SF: And what about young performance poets coming on the scene in Barbados?

AJA: Nowadays, from the metropolises slam poetry is becoming very popular. Because of that trend, in Barbados we could recognise a couple of good poets: Adrian Green, and DJ Simmons, they perform in clubs with two hundred people coming to listen to their poetry. The slam poetry may be just a North American trend, but these poets are generating a lot of enthusiasms. They are very young, rebellious and anticolonial: Greene, for instance, focuses on the struggle of racism in the world, more in the trend of Muta. Generally speaking they are a brand new young generation of Barbadian performing poets. However, I personally would like to see them pay more attention to the sound of drums, paying attention to the voice of the poem in terms of the Bajan voice, and *let de rhythm of de poem echo de tuk* more than as it happens in the USA .

SF: So what's the Caribbean peculiarity?

AJA: Adrian's voice is Bajan, Simmons is even more, like Bruce St. John, who is considered to be the father of Bajan (dialect) poetry became our teacher in the 1980s when we were trying to fashion our poetry forms. He made us use the language of Bajan and showed us that there was a relationship between how we talked and how we walked. This helped me to understand and further appreciate my own dialect. Then Kamau Brathwaite produced the book on nation language called "History of The Voice", which cemented my perspective. Personally, I pay attention to people speaking in everyday conversation and try to reproduce their rhythm into my poetry, and we walk the way we talk and viceversa....then with observation of people moving and speaking it was the very first time I understood Bajan language: I had to understand how to phrase that.

SF: Can you play any instruments?

AJA: I was a trombonist. My first interest was in music, I wanted to become a professional musician as a trombone player, poetry came after... Ironically, I was the best trombonist in Barbados at one stage. But in 1990 I stopped playing the horn to focus on developing my poetry into what it is today...my first band was *Mike Richards* [his real name, N.d.R.] & *The Re-Emergence Band*, meaning the re-emergence of the African culture, that was the intentional meaning of the band. I was a trombone player and decided to make a living from performance

poetry, to make records, to make music videos, and what I was doing was to transcend poetry from a literary art into a form of music and bridge the two...

SF: Do you have a band right now?

AJA: Yes, I tour, but I don't give them any name, I just tour as AJA. In 1993 I changed my name from Mike Richards to Adisa Jelani Andwele (AJA).

SF: How many albums did you put out?

AJA: Six full-length CDs: *Mike Richards & The Re-Emergence Band Live* (1990), *Conscious* (1993), *Doin' It Saf* (2000), *Live as One: AJA Live* (2002), *Deception* (2003), and *AJA All As One* (2007); and two CD Singles: *Legacy* (2005), and *I Am* (2007). I don't really confine myself to albums, or books because I focus on one aspect of the literary work at a time. And that is why I have just two publications: *Antiquity* (2002), an anthology of poems, and *Don't Let Me Die* (2005), on aspects of poverty and the fight against HIV/AIDS.

SF: So, you were saying to me that you are not a UNESCO ambassador for peace? Sorry, I don't want to be picky, just precise. [laugh]

AJA: No, no, you are right: I am a United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Spokesperson on Peace and Poverty Eradication for Barbados and the Eastern Caribbean from October 2003.

SF: I understand. Now, what do you think about structure and the fact that sometimes you have to stick to a particular form of poetry?

AJA: Well, some poets don't necessarily do that, the rhythm just flows, for instance I was using a musical form in my poetry, and it could happen right on the stage, playing with the best artists, on the spot; now I'm able to do that thanks to the sophistication of musical forms. My poems have a form – verses and chorus – with a 'chord structure' to a melodic base, other than only a 'rhythm base'. It is like how one writes and arranges a song. I decided to approach my poetry the same way, so you have the choruses in the poem and you have the chords which I write. But since I can't sing, that's why I am a poet [laugh]... that is why I have back-up singers in my band. Also sometimes you have a musical bridge and as a result, you know, you can stop listening to me and listen to the music behind me. When you listen to the song nothing sounds untied because of the high quality of the music. For my poetry to reach the audience I have to write on this musical base, with a particular structure.

SF: Can we say that you were influenced by jazz rhythms?

AJA: Yes, but as a musician I was also influenced by *tuk*, by every rhythm within the region, like soca, calypso, meringue, mambo and salsa from Cuba. And so the musical work in my poetry, I would define as 'fusion', because you can hear every kind of rhythm, my music is not soca, is not reggae and it is not calypso, it's a fusion...

SF: The themes you treat in your poetry are rebellion, anti-racism, anti-colonialism...

AJA: Yes, and poverty, and awareness, and I want my life to have a purpose, that to educate what other people want to do with their lives: it could be with a child in Bosnia, as well as a child in Rio de Janeiro. Interestingly enough I got a lot of inspiration in London, launching the book *Antiquity* in July 2002: in that occasion I had to transform the poetry from the page to the stage.

SF: Maybe I'd like to ask you a last question: do you think there is a kind of aesthetic unity in the Caribbean islands?

AJA: Yes, there is on historical basis, because of the dynamics that happened, and the Caribbean territories were a plantation, the slavery rendered people less than human, and we are still part of that process, it is still there and we are still dealing with this issue. The music is definitely something which unites our Caribbean territories: soca, rumba, salsa...and probably the same would say Anthony Kellman, who is here right now, launching a book in Bridgetown [*Limestone*. Peepal Tree press, 2008. NbR].

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Interview with Lasana M. Sekou, 15th May 2008, Philipsburg, St. Maarten,

Sara Florian: As far as I have noticed, there is a very peculiar linguistic situation in St. Maarten. Would you like to comment about this as an introductory remark?

Lasana M. Sekou: Not only do we have all of the languages of the Caribbean spoken in St. Martin^{965*} by immigrants native to those languages, but an arguably significant number of St. Martin people, native to the island's core culture, are also bilingual or multilingual, at least functionally so. I say "functional" because there is the question of fluency. I think that the multilingual aptitude, as a cultural feature of the St. Martin people, being able to speak between two to five languages, is due in part to the post-Emancipation period when many of our people emigrated throughout the region, and to European metropolises and US cities, looking for work and education. A number of our people, between the late 1800s and 1963 regularly returned home bringing the new languages, the fashion, the music from the countries and territories where they had gone to work, live, and in some instances where they were born. Between 1963 and the early 1970s, a number of St. Martiners returned home to retire, especially from Papiamentu-speaking Aruba and they became very much involved in the society. The wave of immigrants arriving from throughout the Caribbean between the 1970s and 1980s looking for work in the newly booming tourism industry in St. Martin, included descendants of St. Martiners (both parts of the island) fluent in Spanish and Papiamentu and at times some more fluent in Dutch and French than some of their compatriots that they were meeting at home for the first time. The language cross-fertilization is reinforced, with English as the mediating or even the median language, because in the work place, living spaces, places of socialization, and during business transactions people are in a normative contact with each other and do communicate, even to the degree that there are of late stress lines relative to that communication, not only between both parts of the island but within each territory that divides the nation. In St. Martin, English as we speak it, has been used island-wide since the 1700s as, what I would call, the "nation tongue."

SF: So is English the official language in St. Martin?

LMS: English is the popular language, it is the lingua franca historically of the St. Martin people. In the South, which is a colony of the Netherlands, English is now an official language along with Dutch. That is a development within the last five years, though as a language of instruction English has been used in some of the schools since the 1980s. It is the language of instruction at the University of St. Martin (USM), which was founded in 1989 and is to date the island's only native tertiary institution. In the North, a colony of France, the official language and language of instruction in the schools is French. Nowadays in the North the schools in particular and generally the official system are reinforcing the language issue and pushing the use of French. Increasing numbers of children speak only, or predominantly French to their parents and to each other. With regard to the St. Martin nation as a whole this could be seen as a point of division, because it harbours ultimately severe problems of communication for the whole St. Martin people, between families and family friends, neighbours and associates, natives and visitors. There are at least two important government officials of the Collectivité Territoriale de Saint-Martin that are publically suggesting that the establishment could formally

⁹⁶⁵ Lasana M. Sekou uses the traditional or what he calls the nationalist spelling of St. Martin to refer to the entire island – instead of the Dutch spelling of St. Maarten for the Dutch part and the French spelling of Saint-Martin for the French part.

revisit the traditional place of English in the North. The idea is to seek to introduce a curriculum that would make students effectively bilingual, in French and English, throughout the school system. This would not be in the interest of France but in the interest of St. Martin unity.

SF: The reinforcement of the use of French in the Northern part of the island looks like a counter tendency against the evolution of the use of languages throughout the Caribbean and in the world in general...

LMS: It is indeed. And to me it looks like and is experienced as a reinforcement of colonialism. Notwithstanding the Collectivité as a structural change for the French colony in St. Martin in 2007 and the current discussions for more autonomy for the Dutch “island territory,” St. Martin had been for the longest while what you would call a neglected island by its colonizers. It was not a trading, military or colonial sub-management centre or post in the Caribbean region for any of the European countries that controlled the territory during the post-Columbian period. For example, in the post-Emancipation period the colonial sub-centres in the Caribbean region to which St. Martin was attached was Willemstad, Curacao, for the Dutch part and Basseterre, Guadeloupe for the French part of the island. “There is nothing there,” was what not only the colonialist rulers might have said, but what was also uttered by some St. Martiners who migrated to and lived in the western and southern Caribbean and beyond during the first half of the 1900s. The island’s population then was not much more than 5,000 people, compared to around 80,000 people in the first decade of the 21st century. About 100 years ago, any number of government officials in The Hague or Paris might not have had any idea as to exactly where St. Martin was on a map. Some may still not be too sure of the location.

SF: So you are saying that the colonial centres were in Curaçao for the Dutch Antilles and Guadeloupe for the French Antilles, but if I’m not mistaken, the Dutch Antilles were important for the production of salt, is it correct?

LMS: Relative to salt production there would have been a certain importance during the slave period for that natural resource found in the Dutch colonies. Salt was produced in the natural salt ponds, divided by slave owners and colonial shareholders into “salt pans” in especially St. Martin and Bonaire. But this activity, overseen regionally from Willemstad, did not make St. Martin a centre or a central post of any sort to Dutch colonialism and trade. The Great Salt Pond in St. Martin was a relatively big mine, arguably the largest for the Dutch in the region, from which to exploit by brutal slave labour a raw resource, salt. It was relatively much larger than the Grand Case and Orleans ponds in the “French part” of the island. A number of slave owners that had plantations and salt pans in any one part of St. Martin very likely had property on both parts of the island and plantations and warehouses on the nearby surrounding islands as well. That salt from the great pond was an elemental resource to Dutch long-distance trade, preservation of various foodstuff, and ultimately or arguably, a contributor to considerable wealth that benefitted primarily The Netherlands, absentee slave owners, the trading houses such as the West Indies Company and its departments, the banking, business, political and military classes, churches and temples, even smugglers, and members of the royal family.

SF: I remember you using the salt metaphor in your poetry, in your writing, as in *The Salt Reaper*. Or rather, let’s think to the critical work of Badejo, *Salted Tongues*...

LMS: Yes. It should be natural for the salt metaphor to be present in the literature of St. Martin. Salt was the main crop on the island during the unholy slave period. After the 1848

Emancipation there were minor and infrequent salt harvests well until the early 1960s. As metaphor and as material salt has the experience of curing, preserving, healing. There is a connection to life's sweetness in some cultures. The Yoruba, I am told, have a saying: "May your life be as sweet as salt." It is also intrinsically connected with the exploitation and human suffering of the enslaved ancestors that toiled away in the salt ponds of St. Martin. St. Martiners created and chanted work songs and topical quimbé songs⁹⁶⁶ as they laboured in the salt pans. Blood, sweat and tears were literary shed in the ponds. News and secrets were shared in the wide salted body of water; *petite marronage* and other escapes and acts of sabotage were planned. Parents and children sold to different plantations on- and off-island would meet in this gruelling place of labour after long forced separations. Social relationships, in spite of the hard labour, were forged in the Great Salt Pond, sweet social relationships. Because of its size, even while salt was being picked in the other salt ponds, the Great Salt Pond demanded most of the enslaved labour from the island. At times, during peak periods of salt reaping bonded labour from surrounding islands were shipped in. To the extent that the enslaved men, women and children were herded off the plantations from both parts of the island to "pick salt" in the salt pans during the salt reaping season for some 200 years, the Great Salt Pond became the cradle of the St. Martin nation.

The Salt Reaper poems "salt reaping I" and "salt reaping II" are about this double and layered relationship of salt in the history and culture of the St. Martin people and as a recurring expression of the psyche, even if latently so, at the core of the nation. Both poems are sorts of aesthetic extractions from a conversation, a "relate," with a rather beautiful woman from Sucker Garden [district of St. Martin] who worked in the Great Salt Pond as a very young child during the first half of the last century.

SF: Is the use of salt as metaphor a trend in the work of the new generation of St. Martin poets?

LMS: So far in all of the key published poets, Ruby Bute, Changa, Esther Gumbs, Charles Borromeo Hodge who probably played on the flats of the Great Salt Pond as a child, and certainly Drisana Jack. Since the mid-1990s, we are seeing in the works of musicians, for example the outstanding *Sweet Salt* CD by Neville York. Jack is probably the only serious painter experimenting with salt in multimedia art. The dancer and choreographer Clara Reyes has been making dramatically bold and informed performance pieces relative to this business of salt in our history and culture.

SF: It's really interesting what you say about polyglossia and fluency in the Caribbean and especially in St. Martin, and this seems to be indicative of a post-Emancipation aptitude: the necessity to communicate in different languages, but also the importance to combine languages and musical rhythms. St. Martin became the salt island, the island where the main crop was salt, and that is why you often use 'salt' as a major metaphor for curing, healing, preserving and also expressing pain and the fatigue of hard labour. I'm thinking of the other islands, Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, Cuba, where they basically had plantations of sugar cane, so this metaphor of the sugar and the salt could be a very interesting one.... And this ambivalent relationship could be, in my opinion, translated also to the language, I mean between standard languages and Creoles. I cannot speak as a linguist because I am not a linguist, but I think that some definitions could connect separate languages, and especially in the Caribbean whose poets keep using metaphors and interweave languages: there is a kind of unified conception of the languages used in the different territories. Brathwaite spoke of "nation language", that's what

⁹⁶⁶ A kind of folk song from Tortola, British Virgin Islands.

poets use to reproduce the language of the people, the language closer to the natural spoken word...

LMS: Indeed, you speak like Brathwaite, he would be proud to hear you...[laugh]

SF: Well, thank you [laugh]...I guess you also employ “nation language” in your poetry.

LMS: I use the term “nation tongue,” but it is the same concept. In addition to the layered identification with or deconstruction of the European languages spoken in the region, there is too a sweet fluency to the languages that we created in the Caribbean from the disparate and Calibanic tongues. For example, when you hear someone speaking Papiamentu or Haitian it is just a sweet sound, the way it rolls off the tongue, fluent, fluid...

SF: Is there such a thing as an English-based Creole of St. Martin?

LMS: You should speak with Rhoda Arrindell, a doctoral candidate at the University of Puerto Rico and head of the language division at USM. Ms. Arrindell is researching this kind of thing, exploring and correlating the linguistic markers which indicate that there is a way in which the St. Martin people speak and the development of our way of speaking from the past. There is the “Brim song,” which, since 1848, accompanied the traditional dance called the Ponum, also pronounced “Panam.” The Brim song is a marker, a time capsule that records not only a critical historical event but also approximates the pronunciation, elements of grammar and so forth of the way our ancestors spoke in 1848. Some of us see the Ponum as a liberation dance since it was danced openly to celebrate the late notification to the enslaved population on the island about the 1848 Emancipation in the French colonies. And of course the Brim song, also called the Ponum song, is rooted in the oral tradition.⁹⁶⁷ In poetry, in the dialogue of the short stories, I sometimes write words to approximate the way we still pronounce them or construct sentences in the manner of our speech, as expression of the St. Martin nation tongue. The extent to which the way we speak is, has or had roots or elements of a Creole language will probably increase in debate over time.

SF: I was wondering what type of African influences are there in St. Martin?

LMS: The majority of the Blacks in the Americas and the Caribbean, including St. Martin, would have ancestral origins particularly in West Africa. The syntax of our speech, the creole languages, foods that we still eat, elements in the traditional and modern music, song and dance forms, definitely the folk dances such as the Ponum in St. Martin, traditional instruments, and folk tales, some of the hair grooming such as braids, or dread locks for that matter, board games and martial arts forms such as stick fighting, traditional medicines and some of the belief systems, all reflect African origins, survivals and influences. At times these influences are embattled and not too infrequently wrought with the self-denial of the African or Black “Self” and other inferiority complexes by some of African descent. Some traditional cultural forms like stick fighting are not practiced any more or the jumbie stories, which are not as popular as they were until the mid-1960s, but because they are known as a matter of fact to have been active features of the Traditional St. Martin culture they are indicative of our African origins, influences and survivals. The African influences, however transformed or transforming, are imprinted in what the scholar Rex Nettleford identified as a “cross-fertilization” process relative

⁹⁶⁷ Cf. Badejo, Fabian Adekunle. *Salted Tongues – Modern Literature in St.Martin*. *Cit.* 25.

to European, Asian, and Amerindian features and influences in the development of the Caribbean nations. An example in St. Martin of an African “survival” would be the sparse number of families with remnants of Oral Tradition stories about an Ashanti ancestor, or a great great grandmother from the Guinea area; or just having the specific knowledge that a great great grand father who is buried on succession land in French Quarter, came “from Africa” – but not knowing what specific part or people of Africa. I like to say that we lost our old African nation but gained a continent through historical, cultural and political interpretations of, for example, the ideas and solidarity practices of pan-Africanism.

SF: I would like to slightly shift back to the subject of your own poetry. Apart from the subject and metaphor of salt in your work, you also speak of political issues...

LMS: Indeed. The subjects of politics, history and race are consistently and variedly discussed in all of the literatures of the Caribbean. Salt is linked to culture and history in St. Martin in a unique or specific way as we discussed previously. ... History is both our bane and the bountiful reservoir of our victories. The political issues I tend to prefer to work with or work out in the poetry tend toward liberation politics, national and human liberation processes in the Caribbean: from slavery, racism, colonialism, neocolonialism and as continuing processes in the region’s countries to realize full sovereignty and in the still colonized territories like St. Martin to become independent. ... When I use political terms and discuss certain political ideas in poetry it is not always related to colonialism. The issue of corruption by new national elites is also a form of terrorism and theft that is insidious and criminal and must be railed against. But the discussion of and organization for political independence for St. Martin is a legitimate and genuine development emerging out of a political reality, of a historical experience, of a cultural imperative that drives us to claim our own space, our nation, because it is ours by our blood, sweat and tears, by our love and labor over the centuries. Our nation is one of the last remaining colonies in the region, a physical remnant of a history of horror. Our island of 37 square miles is held captive by Dutch and French colonialism through structures and processes based in part on what Edward Said calls “structures of attitude and reference” and what George Lamming terms a “terror of the mind.” Such a terror it is that there are many among us who believe that St. Martin is not a colony but in the South, an “equal partner in the Dutch kingdom,” and in the North “est la France.” For a colonized people, once enslaved by their colonizers, this is delusional thinking on a grand scale. ... The people in the North and in the South who believe in or are active in the seminal movement for independence are called *Independentistas* [laugh].

SF: A Spanish term?

LMS: Yes. The Cuban Revolution, the Puerto Rican independence movement, the commonalities of revolutions and labour movements in South America and the Caribbean – including the Haitian Revolution, the region’s and Latin American intellectual traditions, revolutionary leaders, and St. Martin’s multilingual aptitude might have influenced the use of that term as a purposeful name and symbol of political identification and determination.

SF: Does political terminology have much importance in your poetic production? How do you cope with all these different languages?

LMS: The historical and contemporary political realities in the Caribbean are very important to the poetic language that I work with; ... words and terms are drawn freely from the region’s languages as symbolic of ideals, practices, and manifestation of Caribbean unity – and also as

literary devices and elements of exploration of a St. Martin aesthetics. Politics, language, history, religion, the geographic landscape are just a few of the elements I work with to construct a poetry that would hopefully have meaning in the lives of people. The poetic license with language or the use of language with license probably has to do with this, that in St. Martin we do not cope with languages, we live languages as a popular reality. In a five-minute communication event, two people in St. Martin can go through up to five languages, seamlessly. As previously noted, this is more of a functional reality than a matter of fluency, but it is certainly a feature of sophistication of the St. Martin people's culture. However, relative the stress signs alluded to earlier, this language culture is not yet an official reality, our politicians and educators are not great advocates of the language culture as it is felt, as it should be owned, even as a natural resource. Arguably the polyglot pride of St. Martin is embattled, there are public, vocal stress signs like never before since the beginning of Modern St. Martin. The nation tongue is historically English for both parts of the island, and it has been serving as the median language of unity, communication and business for the people of St. Martin for most of the Survivalist Period (1648-1848), for the Traditional Period (1848-1963) and in the Modern Period (1963-). Mind you, this is not to advocate or favour one European or colonial language over another, but the claim of an English derived from the historical and cultural experiences at the very core of the St. Martin identity. This nation tongue or nation language has been historically imparted to folks who have immigrated and contributed to and become part of the St. Martin nation, even as it is evolving. While the language allegiances of the territorial governments are to Dutch in the South and French in the North, most of the island's media and commerce are conducted in English. The nation's seminal literature is in English but the colonial languages are the languages of instruction in most of the island's schools. The schools in the South with English as the language of instruction have increased significantly since the 1980s, with telling successes. The French educational system has been over a corresponding period, reinforcing French and all things of France in the schools in the North. There was in the 1990s a troubling attrition rate in the North relative to students beyond the high school level in the French system. I don't know how that situation stands today. It should be noted too that as of the late 1980s, boosted by *défiscalisation*, there started what has become a significant settlement of French metropolitans in the North. With that development have also come related charges about racism, language complexes about who is really speaking French, identity issues about who belong in the French territory, economic disparities and displacement between Black St. Martiners and the white metropolitan French, and of late what is for St. Martin an unprecedented tension between gendarmes and the youth. All of these, let's call them elements, have been working their way into the poetic production and projection, from *Born Here* (1986) to *37 Poems* (2005).

SF: What kind of literary, poetic, influences do you recognise in your work?

LMS: The Black American poets from the 1960s, their reading styles in particular, had an influence on my earliest attempts to write poetry in my early teens while living in New York. In the early 1970s, between the ages of 11 and 12, I was taken from St. Martin by my mother to New York City to attend elementary school. I lived with my mother and two sisters for about seven or eight years before heading off to university. But about a year after arriving in the US, The Last Poets, Amiri Baraka, Nikki Giovanni would come to make some specific impressions in this regard of reading styles. They served faithfully as an oral and textual balance to the text of other American writers and British authors that I would be introduced to in high school. It is during the last two years of high school when I would also start reciting poetry in plays and in community centres through after-school activities. Later on, in the early 1980s, I was taught

literature by Amiri Baraka at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, “Great books of the Black Experience,” was the name of one of the courses. From the beginning of the writing exercises, between age 12 and 13, there was this wakening consciousness of always working with Caribbean rhythms and sounds, images of our geography, the sun, something about the sea, St. Martin culture, the body shape and facial features of our women, the accents, the music. Coming from St. Martin the use of words from different languages came very easy, as a normal thing to do in poetry, a form which I might not have really understood then but certainly felt, that it had a oral expression, a street performance element, a spoken word imperative. The St. Martin/Caribbean background, having lived with my extended families in St. Martin that encouraged all sorts of reading and fostered a healthy curiosity, even admiration for Africa and things African or of Black people, I connected easily to the Black American experience, especially the recent civil rights struggles and gains. There were the news and feature magazines that my father, a political man, received from the US while I lived with him in St. Martin. These magazines – I can remember the photo in *Ebony* of the police dog attacking freedom marchers – were stored in the garage of my father’s Middle Region home and between playing marbles, football and such games as boys would play, I read them voraciously. The influences have been wide and varied.

SF: Dylan Thomas? e.e. cummings?

LMS: This is interesting [laugh]. I am really impressed by the reviewers who since *The Salt Reaper – poems from the flats* (2004) make a comparison to such great artists. All great artists who touch the soul of their people, their milieu, our humanity, impress me profoundly. There are a host of poets whose work I like very much, from Kofi Awoonor to T.S. Elliot to Mikey Smith ... But I must admit that the text and the foundation from which the analyses are drawn and that continue to influence my poetry and fictions, even the essays, ... are influenced far more by historians, political writers and activists, DuBois and Marcus Garvey, J.A. Rogers, Frederick Douglas, Martí, Dr. ben Jochannan, Malcolm X, Che, CLR James; the social and political activism of José Lake, Sr. and Thomas Duruo from St. Martin. All brilliantly reinforced later on by the works of people like Paulo Freire, Walter Rodney, Samir Amin, Howard Zinn, Edward Said. Even the novelists have influenced the content of my work more than specifically the poets, James Joyce, Kafka, Chinua Achebe, Alejo Carpentier, Bernard Shaw, definitely Ngugi wa Thiongo. I love Nietzsche, whose work I first read at age 16, there is an appealing madness to his work. My sister must have brought one of his books home from the library one Summer to start that relationship. The Bible and the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, which inform the religious symbology that Badejo is intent on analyzing in a critical study [laugh]. There is an early influence, during the teen years, from the writings of St. Augustine, The Mahatma, Kahlil Gibran, the Koran through the Black Muslims, John Mbiti, and much later, in my early 20s, traceable impressions by Machiavelli’s *The Prince* and by the works of Kierkegaard and Chinese and African philosophy in a general sense. The liberation movements all over the Third World, labour movements everywhere, and the revolutions of Haiti, Cuba and Grenada have made lasting impacts on my consciousness and inform not so much what is written but its “reasoning” – to use that word as the RasTa would. The political and cultural implication, more so than the religious features of RasTafari helped significantly to shape aspects of the very deconstruction and re-construction of the poetic language that I am still working at, trying to make it better and more useful to people. All of these are among major influences.

SF: Brathwaite?

LMS: A very late influence, though like Dylan I had heard of Kamau Brathwaite as a great artist, of his sojourn in Africa but had not read to any extent his actual work. So you can imagine the utterly humbling experience when a scholar like Joe Pereira from UWI-Jamaica, after hearing a recital at the Caribbean Writers Conference in St. Thomas in 1985, compared my poetry, the poems that he had heard to “Eddie [Brathwaite], Cardenal and Guillén.” I remember the exact order of the names he mentioned [laugh]. These are gods of our poetry and revolutionary traditions and I was still a child in this way of the world. I had already read Guillén in New York, and Cardenal at Howard University, where I also discovered more in depth the political writings of George Lamming. In Washington DC I also delved deeper into Neruda, Lorca, Roque Dalton – almost as what I would think of now as a third layer of fascinating poets. The European and African poets would have been the second layer. I came to Brathwaite’s work in 1986, after having returned to St. Martin in 1984 to work as a journalist with the *Newsday* newspaper. Brathwaite’s poetry provided the final formula, a sort of cosmological freedom, to complete the long poem *Nativity* [after it was rejected by the publisher].

SF: Can you recognize any influence of folk traditions and music?

LMS: Well, the influence of the folk tradition is ever present, the Brer Rabbit tales told to my sisters and I by our grandfather Martinus when we were children. The folk elements from the Oral Tradition are drawn on heavily in *Mothernation* (1991) and *Quimbé – poetics of sound* (1999), though both collections are packed with poems of an island, regional and international political nature. The stories of daily folklife recounted by my mother, Thomassillienne; material from interviews while working as a journalist on cultural articles, hearing worksongs, folksongs, all informed the work. The quimbé song of Traditional St. Martin. The folk content of certain music forms, the very instruments from Santo Domingo, Curaçao, Guadeloupe, Trinidad, the drum, the steel pan, the roundness and movement and beauty of the woman [laugh], exert a recognizable and informed influence on the work, its language, its rhythms, its nuances and so on. The folk elements are essential ingredients in claiming, deconstructing, constructing reality, the culture of the St. Martin folk in particular, Caribbean people in general, Black peoples universally, and in solidarity with humanity always. There are folk elements that allow the poet to enter into intimate spaces of people, places and things that are either known to the folk or make the people known to the themselves. The Afro-Amerindian-Indo-Judeo-Christian syncretism in Caribbean religions and belief systems. The oh so very impressive cultural hinterland of the Haitian novel. The Bad John or Feroze in the works of Earl Lovelace. Where and when to pick the bush to make the tea to use for this or that. We know these beliefs, we know these people, we live in these places. Sometimes, some of us feign ignorance of the totality or pieces of the folkways until the code is inserted and the floodgates open [smile]. I am glad that you brought up the question of music. There are singers and musicians that introduced or kept me tuned to particular music and song forms for both the joy of it and for this thing we call “Art for life sake,” art as sustenance or as the RasTa would say, for the *livity* of the people. These singers, music makers who had a profound impact on me by the age of 19, Sparrow and other calypsonians like the Mighty Duke and Chalkdust, Bob Marley, James Brown, Fela Kuti and the jazz of Coltrane ... Did I mention Gil Scott-Heron? His influence as a poet using music that in turn made the Spoken Word sing, would come at the start of my undergraduate studies. The dub poetry of LKJ of course, informed militancy, revolutionary reasoning. I am certainly concerned most of all with a poetry that informs, artfully, the intelligences and decision-making of people. Now there is Bachata. This lyrical poetry/blues music from the Dominican Republic.

Oh! Bachata is superior music. It influences as a latter-day muse. There is this documentary in which an old Bachatera called Bachata, “*Una cadena de amarga.*” Ay ya yai!

SF: Are these kind of things, the folk traditions, institutionalised or recognised?

LMS: Not fully at all. This is still part of the struggle for the true independence of Caribbean peoples and their countries and in the territories where they are still subject to colonialism. It is Lamming still leading the charge for the very “sovereignty of the imagination.” Maybe less so in this new century than say fifty years ago but some of these folk traditions essential for the revolutionizing of our very manhood and womanhood, of our societies, are still marginalized, denied, even disdained in certain quarters of Caribbean society, particularly by those with or in power. You know, many of today’s celebrated Caribbean features, a number of the music forms, festivals like carnival, RasTafari, martial arts, languages, foods, medicine and so on were once banned, vilified and had to be fought for by the people until concessions were forced from the powers that be—regardless of the complexion of who made up the ruling or governing elite at the time when the particular cultural victory was realized. The greatest symbol of our labour and birth as a St. Martin nation continues to suffer from neglect, disrespect and landfilling by the very government in Philipsburg. In fact, the territory’s only garbage dump is near the centre of the great pond. Throughout the region some aspects of Caribbean cosmology are still related, relegated more to the negative.

SF: Do you mean like Legba?

LMS: Indeed. Legba is seen in the Voodoo cosmology as the mediator with the other gods or Orishas. We know this kind of go-between persona, maybe by different names or for different reasons: religious, familial, social, political. But it is an abiding feature of Caribbean culture.

SF: Yes, I remember you using it in *Salt Reaper* and *Nativity*...

LMS: In *Nativity* Legba closes the long poem with the command, “Functionnaire ... open the gate ...,” to engage a movement between worlds, between time passing and time coming forth, between conditions, between oppression and transformation. In *Nativity* he is a supra-central or linking figure that is invited to be the code initiator or code switcher. In Vodun, he may be the fatherly gate-keeper, the impish trickster or the linguistic among the Orishas. The meditative gate-keeper is the persona I tend to employ most: Papa Legba opens the ceremony that awakens the path that the mediums and divine horsemen must trod in communion between the living and the spiritual worlds. This is powerful cultural and spiritual hinterland stuff, with awesome social, political and aesthetic implications and symbolism.

SF: With all of these stories that you are telling me, you remind me of a *griot*...[laugh]

LMS: Well, the *griot* is a storyteller [smile]... today he tells the stories of the people to the people. In the ancient nations and kingdoms of West Africa, the *griot* recounted the royal family lineage and the political history of the rulers.

Interview with Rhoda Arrindell, 16th May 2008, Philipsburg, St. Maarten

Sara Florian: Rhoda, could you please describe me the St. Maarten linguistic situation?

Rhoda Arrindell: The linguistic situation in St. Maarten is complex because there are seven or eight different groups of people, and many languages are spoken like English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, Dutch, French, Papiamentu, Indian, Arabic. I am doing a Ph.D. in Linguistics at the University of Puerto Rico, and I am interested in analysing the linguistic situation of the SSS islands – St. Maarten, Saba, and Statius [the island of St. Eustatius, NbR] – and the Virgin Islands.

SF: Does anything like an English Creole of St. Maarten exist?

RA: I am studying it, and I think so. Anglophone Creoles are different from French-based ones, let us think of the difference among the French-based Creoles. Haitian Creole is just one in terms of French lexifiers.

SF: Here in St. Maarten there is an island variety of French Creole and someone told me, even though I knew that Haitian Creole was considered the true ‘Kweyol’, that the Haitian Creole is not considered so in this island.

RA: Haitian Creole is considered a ‘bastard’ language in St. Maarten, Martinique or Guadeloupe, where they think they speak the ‘true Kweyol’. But there are seven French Creoles: in Haiti, Martinique, Guadeloupe, St. Lucia, Dominica, St. Barthes and French Guyana. Haitian Creole in St. Maarten is the biggest Creole spoken; the prestige variety is considered that of Martinique or Guadeloupe, and they wouldn’t accommodate other people, while Haitian Creole speakers would do it.

SF: Is there a St. Maarten French Creole?

RA: It is a potpourri of Haitian Creole, Martiniquan, and Guadeloupian. But, legally, there is no official language in St. Maarten, there are different policies used in official circles: for instance, French is used in the judiciary system, while Dutch is not. Standard English is widely used. But it is also spread a so-called “ghetto English” or “broken English”, which has a great Yankee influence. The verb “to yank” means “to stop”, because it means accommodating your language to “fresh water yankee”, and it is used for someone who has been very recently to the US and in a couple of minutes was able to accommodate the speech to the US one. In the late 1980s there was a great diaspora from St. Maarten to the US, differently from the other Netherlands Antilles, they had more money and the Netherlands used to give scholarships to their former colonies in the Caribbean; at one point the Government stopped giving money to St. Maarten, but not to the ABC islands [Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao, NbR]. In 1986 the island of Aruba acquired a separate status differently from the larger part of the Netherlands Antilles, so as a country within a country, Aruba became independent from the Netherlands Antilles, but still part of the Netherlands Kingdom, which is then constituted of Holland, Aruba, and the Netherlands Antilles, that is the SSS (St. Maarten, Saba, St. Eustatius), Bonaire and Curaçao.

SF: What are the languages spoken in the ABC islands?

RA: Mainly the Papiamentu, a Portuguese-based Creole, but there is a big discrepancy because within the literature Papiamentu is considered part of the Spanish-based grammar. For instance, to say “I’m sleeping” or “I sleep” they say “Mitadrumi”, which derives from “Mi ta drumiendo”, from the Spanish “Estoy dormiendo”. Suriname is independent but is considered part of the Dutch Caribbean. Curaçao instead is going back to Dutch as the language of instruction. Aruba’s language policy is different, and the languages spoken are English, Dutch, Papiamentu, and Spanish.

SF: Where are the immigrants in St. Maarten mainly coming from?

RA: They mainly come from Guyana, Jamaica, Haiti or the Dominican Republic, but there are about two-hundred undocumented people. And immigrants tend to concentrate, for instance, in Philipsburg: Indians are mainly along Front Street, while Arabs in Back Street.

SF: Who are the most important poets in St. Maarten?

RA: There are not many writers, and they are not versed in any particular language, because there are many languages and maybe they do not feel enough confident. But there are important writers like Wycliffe Smith, Camile Bailey who have a Dutch background but they use English. There are also women writers as Esther Gumbs, or Deborah Jack, who lives in the US. The Dutch in St. Maarten made slave transport and trading, there was an early changing of hands.

SF: Why didn’t a Dutch Creole develop in St. Maarten?

RA: The US Virgin Islands were Danish, then they were bought by the US but they have developed a Dutch Creole! Instead, St. Maarten is not a fertile island, and it was full of slaves from St. Kitts and St. Eustatius, who brought with them an English-based Creole. Now, my hypothesis is a domestic hypothesis, where English was influenced by Spanish or Portuguese. One of the theories is that there was a prototype language then relexified. Mervyn Alleyne’s position is that all languages would evolve in a similar way. They all have a socio-historical process according to the processes of universal grammar. Derek Bickerton’s hypothesis of the language bioprogram (from MIT, Massachusetts Institute of Technology) was based on the fact that Creole languages resembled early child language acquisition, for in the absence of a rich input (the simplified language of masters) it is similar to baby talk. Then, I think that St. Maarten’s language evolution came from St. Kitts and St. Eustatius. I am looking for typological features which characterize a Creole in St. Maarten. There are thirteen typological features, like the compounding, where they take two words to make one, e.g. “deadhouse”, which is “a funeral parlour”. In St. Maarten there is no word like the Jamaican “eyewater”, but there is “nosehole”, like in Jamaican *patwa*. I have noticed a disappearance in terminology, but I would not speak of ‘decreolisation’. Alleyne spoke of “opposite processes”, for he sustained that in normal linguistic development a language like French begun closer to the European lexifier and then diverged, while English started as divergent, as a basilect much closer to the African languages. Basically French is a “diverging language”, while English is a “converging language”. In St. Maarten the language was early closer to a standardised form of English, and I saw this comparing the text of a traditional “panam” song. In St. Croix there was a form of Negerholland, for instance the ‘a’ in “me a go”, gives the *continuum*. In St. Maarten there maybe was no such thing as a ‘been’ Creole feature. Maybe it never existed in St. Maarten, but the older speakers in Emancipation songs now disappeared substituted it. An example in St. Maarten Creole could be “I had tell you”, while in St. Kitts or the USVI they say “I did tell

you”. In St. Maarten a socio-historical process was closer to SE, so that in St. Maarten I think that both processes are present, the convergent and the divergent.

SF: Are there any examples you could give to me?

RA: Yes, the ‘been’ is a basilectal feature, and it exists in Cruxian (from St. Croix) Creole, as a mesolectal feature. The double negation exists in Spanish but not in the English language. You could also have the reduplication and substitution of different Creole languages, like the “had had”: in St. Maarten you could hear “I had self”, which means that something is very good; in Papiamentu they would say “bum bum”, that is “good good”. Another feature is the fronting, like in the Creole “Boy, he’s run is running”, which means “he is running for real”; or for instance, “to wok obeah” you could also say “to put blijf hier in someone’s food”, which is a Dutch expression for “to poison someone”, because “blijf hier”, “hier blijven” means “to remain”.

Interview with Carolyn Cooper, 30th May 2008, Kingston, Jamaica

Sara Florian: Prof. Cooper, I would like you to talk to me about your work.

Carolyn Cooper: The work that I have done basically looks at Black Verbal culture starting with my first book called *Noises in the Blood: Orality, Gender and the "Vulgar" Body of Jamaican Popular Culture* [London: Macmillan, 1993.], in which I look primarily at Jamaican texts that struggle the oral and the scribal tradition and I look at pre-eighteen century song texts, children books. I was able to make a link between one text called "Mi know no law, mi know no sin": it is a kind of permissive gender identity in dancehall, regarding female sexuality: that's the furthest back I've gone. Then I have looked at Louise Bennett's texts and the relation with women, I've looked at proverbs, at *The Harder They Come* the novel and the movie, and I've looked at Bob Marley's lyrics, at the representation of dancehall that comes through some texts, and then I've looked in more depth at Jamaican dancehall culture, still focusing on lyrics but trying to look at the ideology which is coming out of the dancehall. So how does this relate to your Ph.D. project?

SF: Well, as I told you I am trying to see how Caribbean poets employ SE and Creole in their work, and I am considering some linguistic aspects of the linguistic *continuum*, but I also am trying to see how poets operate in different territories to see if there is such a thing as a Caribbean cultural unity.

CC: I think your project is kind of ambitious in trying to identify a line of coherence. What I would suggest is that, perhaps, you could try to narrow it down, looking maybe at a selection of poets and see how they use oral and scribal discourse, because you can't really generalize across the broad spectrum of islands. It seems to me that if you look at a poet like Lorna Goodison, you can see that she is using both the oral and the scribal, she is using Creole and English, but increasingly Creole is getting written down, so you can't think of it as a purely oral language anymore. Maybe some of the old binary oral/scribal, Creole/SE are no longer as legitimate as they once were, especially if you consider the impact of the internet and the way in which e-mailing has allowed oral elements getting represented in print, they are not purely oral.

SF: And also the effects in the way people speak or send text messages.

CC: Yes, so that oral/scribal boundary is getting very permeable.

SF: Do you think that this is true just for Caribbean poetry?

CC: Well, I don't know about other poetry, this is what I know. I presume that it would be the same in the States, in Europe, in places like India where there is a long tradition of literacy in indigenous languages and maybe less literacy in English, the Hindi/English fusion is a kind of creolising force, so I'm sure that the pattern is not that peculiar just to the Caribbean.

SF: How would you define Creole or creolization?

CC: Creolization is essentially the process for which different cultural groups came together and you would have to ask linguists how they define it.

SF: I have asked this question to Prof. Devonish and also to other poets because I am sure they all have their own ideas about Creole and creolization. How did you start working on the oral/scribal tradition?

CC: I thought it started out of my interests in exploring the verbal creativity of Black people, and so I started analysing the work of dub poets like Mikey Smith and Jean Breeze, and so on and so forth. Then I would say in a way it had its origins in my Ph.D. thesis on Derek Walcott, in which I was looking at the dichotomy between theatre and poetry and for him the theatre was the space in which the Creole consciousness was articulated, while poetry was more of a private, inner discourse. I began to see that kind of schizophrenia of which Walcott talks about.

SF: There are some critics who stressed the way in which Walcott is able of writing on theatre, and I am struck by the difference between some of his theatrical pieces and poetry and the way in which he is able of using and performing in Creole, while when he reads his poetry he is kind of low-key.

CC: I wrote about this in my thesis. If you read the introduction to “What the Twilight Says” he would be talking about that, sitting in his verandah with his back to the street, trying to write these Greek tragic pieces, but the rhythms of the street enter his private space so he is very much aware that the verandah is a kind of inner liminal space between the street and the house: the verandah becomes the interface between the domestic and public spheres, and Creole is the language of the public space, of the Salvation Army. But his ears are not closed so that Creole enters his private space: he is very much conscious of that. And you can see that the piece with which he was attacking Naipaul, the one he read at *Calabash*, is very much into the *picong* oral tradition.

SF: What led you to the study of Bob Marley’s lyrics as poetic texts?

CC: It was a kind of logical extension of looking at oral texts, you look at Louise Bennett, then you look at the dub poets and then you think that you need to look at the DJs, so that is a part of a kind of *continuum*.

SF: But I think that not every song can be analysed as a poetic text.

CC: It depends, some songs maybe do not have that much of richness, rhyme, literary or kind of ideology or content, but quite a lot of Bob Marley’s songs are really rich in Biblical allusions, proverbs.

SF: Do you think that reggae lyrics influence dub poetry?

CC: I don’t think that reggae lyrics influence dub poetry, but dub poets use reggae rhythms to thrive their beat, so some dub poets don’t want to be called ‘performance poets’ but just ‘poets’.

SF: What’s your favourite reggae lyric?

CC: There are so many different people that you like, I don’t have one favourite, I like Peter Tosh and I like Bob Marley, Tanya Stevens, Luciano...

SF: What do you think are the directions that Caribbean literature is taking?

CC: It is difficult to say, because in the Caribbean we have French, Spanish, Dutch, not just the Anglophone Caribbean, it is a big region with a lot of different writers and different writers are taking different directions. You can't say that there is one direction in which they are going, you have to look at a particular writer and see in what trajectory he or she is going, you can't just generalize about the whole region.

SF: Do you recognise any similarities between, for instance, Jamaican literary production and Trinidad or Barbados?

CC: Well, we have an annual conference of West Indian literature, we have book produced and there is a *Journal of West Indian Literature*, so there is a big body of writing that looks at the region. When we talk about the Creole Anglophone literature, we have to remember that there are journals on West Indian literature that come out of the UK and the US that maybe conversely cover different cross-linguistic barriers, but you have to look at a particular poet from Jamaica and a particular poet from Trinidad and see if you can see some recurrent concerns, or women writers across the region, so you have to break it up, you can't talk about the imaginous Caribbean because it doesn't exist.

SF: Do you think that there is a big difference between poets more concerned about written form and craft as compared to performance poets?

CC: I think that performance poets are concerned about form, it is more a metrical form that allows them to operate within a reggae frame. They are concerned with a different kind of form than the scribal tradition which considers the sonnet, iambic pentameter and so on, but all poets are sensitive to sound and rhythm.

SF: A lot of people don't think that cultural studies are as important as the study of written literary texts.

CC: But some cultural studies texts are also literary written texts.

SF: Yes, but let's consider, for instance, a calypso text: it is concerned with political problems, and tied to a particular historical time, but you can count the bars, the stresses, so it is a musical text too. What do you think of that kind of attitude which discharges these kind of studies?

CC: I think it is backward and we can't change this attitude. For instance, Gordon Rohlehr spent a lot of time focusing on these texts and he demonstrated that it is an important part of social commentary, as much as Chaucer was a popular entertainment, so that Chaucer has been considered "high art", but in his time he was popular entertainment and culture.

SF: What do you think of the opposition that was made between Walcott and Brathwaite?

CC: I think there is a continuity between them and people try to set up the sharp distinctions, but they are both part of a colonial experience. Brathwaite chose to affirm an African identity, whereas Walcott chose to affirm a mixed raised mulatto identity, but those choices are the product of the same kind of socialisation. The conscious choices made by poets sometimes have an unconscious value, so that when Walcott affirms his mulatto identity, he is very much aware of his Creole identity, and that is when we get some dramatic monologues where the Creole

voice is coming out, but at the same time they express that kind of exterior consciousness, in which the poet's persona is hiding behind a Creole speaking character.

SF: What do you think is the social impact of Caribbean poetry on song lyrics?

CC: Some song lyrics have a greater social appeal in terms that the fact that people pay to go to concerts: songs certainly serve as a greater entertainment in terms of social consumption. In some poets you can hear the Creole/English slide: these poets are not operating in discreet spaces, and a lot of them would be influenced by the reggae and dancehall artists. In them you can find African orality, Indian orality, Chinese orality, European orality, but I think that in the Caribbean because the majority of people are African they would more likely make connections with the African oral traditions, coming from proverbs, African song texts, in preaching style, sermons, even in an oral performance tradition.

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Interview with David Rudder, 4th November 2008⁹⁶⁸

Sara Florian: Mr. Rudder, as I wrote to you, I am an Italian Ph.D. student and I am writing my thesis on Caribbean contemporary poetry. I am not focusing on a particular island, like on Jamaica, but I would like to analyze the work of poets from different islands and territories of the region, and see if there are any affinities among poets. As regards you and your work, I think you are a poet [laugh].

David Rudder: Thank you.

SF: What do you think about that? I mean, I know you are a calypsonian and you write music, but I think that many of your lyrics are so beautiful and pregnant and they could be recognized the quality of poems.

DR: For me, poetry was like when you are in primary school and they give you this little limerick. For me, writing it is not forced, I just write the way I see and feel things. So I accept when people say that they think my work is like poetry, I have never thought of myself as a poet, but I just thought that this is the way I write. I just want to express how I feel about things and that is how the work comes out.

SF: I know that calypsoes in Trinidad are very much linked to what happens, for they are a kind of indicators of social and political issues, so which one of your calypsoes do you think is the most representative in regard to this socio-political commentary on Trinidad history, culture and life?

DR: The most popular calypso for me is the one that is written at the moment something manifests in our world, because it is the most linked to what is happening right now. Today is the American election [election of US President Barack Obama, 4th November 2008], and if there was a calypso written now about the American election, that becomes the most important song. I have written so many that to pick one is almost impossible.

SF: How can a calypso be remembered and be popular just for the time it is written, but becoming a song forever, because for instance some of your calypsoes are beautiful even though they have been written twenty years ago, or a decade ago: they carry a universal message, don't they?

DR: In regards to my work, I don't just try to keep it local, just Trinidadian or Tobagonian, I try to make it universal, to express a world view, but from my island point of view even though it's looking at the world. Many years ago there was a problem of genocide in Rwanda and nowadays we see the same problem in Congo, the situation hasn't changed...I've just written one on Zimbabwe on my latest Album.

SF: So you feel very much linked to Africa...

DR: Yes, it is an ongoing thing, because the historical incidence teaches that we haven't changed anything, so the song keeps a life of his own.

⁹⁶⁸ The interview was done through the phone.

SF: So don't you think that history does teach human being, people how to behave not to make the same mistakes again?

DR: Yes, it does, but the old cliché goes that if you know your history, you don't repeat it. If you leave things undone, they will come back to you again and again. Unfortunately, men often do not learn from history.

SF: On the internet I saw an interview of you talking about your work – I am not sure about the date but it was posted last August [2007]⁹⁶⁹ – and in which you were speaking about the tasks of the calypsonian nowadays: you say that he should be a dance master, a narrator, a political spokesman, and a social commentator all at the same time, so do you think that among these one of these tasks could be more important than another or do you think that he should be all of these at the same time?

DR: A calypsonian is basically like a newspaper editor, but instead of printing the news he sings it, so he or she has to find new ways to express these news, that is the challenge of the calypsonian: finding new ways to express the same news, that it has to sound just like news but making it interesting to the listener, so he or she should or could be all of these.

SF: And what about avoiding censorship?

DR: We've mastered the trick of avoidance for many years now, but there was a time in the '40s when every calypsonian had to take the songs to the police station everyday, so they had to find a different way to present the song; what has happened is that they have become more sensational. For instance, you might have the *New York Times*, but you also have the *New York Daily News*, which will give you a more sensational slant to the same story. This may give more life to the news, and also the fact that the world has now changed and we live in the era of internet communication, it is a new medium of expression for the songwriter: to write the song, the reaction to what is going on in the world, and throw it to the internet. This is instant worldwide calypso.

SF: What I like in your songs is that, if calypsoes had a flaw – if we can call it that – is that they were very local, “insular” in a sense, instead you try to expand their spectrum...

DR: I try to make them international, and I could talk of what was going on in Africa, and there is something good about it in the sense that people would say this is my world, but because the world has become so globalised, that has changed things quite a bit.

SF: Exactly, and your music in a sense is a very good example of creolization, on the one hand because it involves themes of the all Caribbean, on the other hand because, if I'm not mistaken, it is a fusion of genres of samba or rock in some pieces, is that correct?

DR: Yes, the fact is that where I grew up in Trinidad there were just two radio stations, they would change one with the other, but there was also music from India, or classical music. So I was influenced by the music which rotated on these radios and that you were exposed to vibrations from different parts of the world. The journey we made through the Middle Passage from Africa, brought African music to manifest itself in Brazil, or in Jamaica, the Caribbean,

⁹⁶⁹ “David Rudder talks about his songwriting.” *Cit.*

and also to North America. All these musical manifestations like samba, reggae jazz, blues, calypso, or *compas*, so at the time when I create my music all these influences come through the creative process.

SF: I find this really interesting because in this way the fact that you are putting together different genres from the Caribbean, it is like you are embracing with your music different territories of the Caribbean, giving a real example of creolization and this gives a lot of sense to what I think, that is that there is a common aesthetics throughout the region, and that is what I am looking for, because usually academics are focusing on a particular island, on a particular genre, on a particular author, and your work really gives an example of creolization, also because you employ Trinidadian Creole in your work, right? So, what do you think of an aesthetic unity throughout the Caribbean? Do you feel closer to any author?

DR: In Trinidad you will find that people from the middle class love soca and calypso, while others love reggae and dancehall music, so they created a genre called dancehall soca. There is also a lot of influence of the music from Martinique, Guadeloupe or Dominica, Creole style. The soca embraces them all and manifests as a new form, a Caribbean aesthetics.

SF: And I've seen that you made the cover of one of Bob Marley's songs, "Stir It Up"...

DR: Oh, that was a long time ago...

SF: Yes, what I have noticed is that they defined you "the Bob Marley of soca"...

DR: Yes, that is true, there was a Jamaican journalist who thought that my work in Trinidad was much like that of Bob in Jamaica.

SF: Is Bob Marley the author to whom you feel particularly closer or are there other contemporary authors or poets?

DR: I really don't have somebody who I really tap into, but I love Stevie Wonder, I love Gilberto Gil, a Brazilian musician from Bahia, I listen to everything, I don't have any favourite.

SF: Can you speak Portuguese?

DR: Very little.

SF: I asked this because today I was listening to a song of yours, "Children of Fire", and I think you were singing in Portuguese...

DR: Yes, because that song was recorded for a movie...

SF: "Wild Orchid"?

DR: Exactly, and I was in Brazil but I wanted to dub it in Portuguese, so I just called some Portuguese speaking people and talked to them on the phone. [laugh]

SF: And then you wrote "Bahia Girl", which is another song based in Brazil.

DR: “Bahia Girl” was written before “Children of Fire”, and “Bahia Girl” was meant to be a connection with Africa, that is how Africa was transformed in the new world by colonialism and so on. I met a guy from Angola in Bahia and he told me that in Bahia they spoke the same Yoruba that in Angola would be called ‘Classic Yoruba’ he compared it to the Yoruba spoken in the past, like Shakespearean English. The Bahia Girl was afro Trinidad meeting afro Brazil, she was the cultural connection.

SF: Yoruba, Ewe, Twi, Fante were all languages taken from the Western coast of Africa and they melted with European languages in the Caribbean and Brazil.

DR: When I was growing up in Trinidad I used a lot of West African words and I didn’t even know that.

SF: Can you speak French or Spanish?

DR: A little French, or rather *patois*, but now most of the people do not speak French or *patois* anymore.

SF: Yes, French was the language of the planters, so it was the language of white people, but since Trinidad is very close to Venezuela and South America where Spanish is the most spread language, I was wondering if you could speak Spanish too.

DR: No, unfortunately not.

SF: Ok, I would like to ask you something again about your relationship with Africa, for you have songs like “Johannesburg Woman” or “Good morning South Africa”, and I know that one of your sons is called Khafra, which is an Egyptian name, meaning ‘pharaoh’...

DR: Yes, Khafra is my eldest son and I wanted to give him a name that I love, something original. African tradition is right there instantly, all of our roots are there, so I think that the natural way of expressing the memory of our ancestors and to understand my origins.

SF: I read something that John LaRose wrote in a pamphlet titled *Kaiso Music*, when you were commentating on some calypsoes that were playing on a radio program, and he said that he thought that there are two types of calypsonians: one more conversational like Attila The Hun, the other more dramatic like Lord Kitchener, Melody or yourself.⁹⁷⁰ Do you think this is a good division to distinguish between two types of calypsonians, and do you think you fit into the dramatic category or not?

DR: Kitchener dealt a lot with social issues and folk drama, while Attila was more conversational in his approach, he spoke of the people suffering...

SF: Was this differentiation made on aesthetic terms, like in the way they were singing, or about the content?

⁹⁷⁰ Cf. Rudder, David, & LaRose, John. *Kaiso, Calypso Music*. David Rudder in conversation with John LaRose. *Cit.* 10.

DR: If you go to a calypso tent there are many different angles to say the same things, because everybody has the right to express him or herself.

SF: Do you think there might be an aesthetic unity in the Caribbean, also in musical terms: is there something that links the region, the islands and territories together?

DR: Yes, the rhythms and in some way the language has changed, the creativity too, like people do not take their time to read anymore.

SF: Well, probably there are some common features, but each territory has a different variety of Creole, hasn't it?

DR: Yes, what I mean that nowadays people wear the same brand name shoes, or the same jeans, so there is a similarity in the way they express themselves through body language, the slangs.

SF: What do you think are the main features in this expression of similarity?

DR: The use of the computerized sound is wide spread, but probably the most important feature is the search of a beautiful melody in spite of the roughness of the times...

Appendix B

The presence of African-derived religions and beliefs in West Indian contemporary poetry

Introduction

In 1927 the Haitian intellectual Jean Price-Mars defined *voudou* as a religion because of: a connection with the whole universal spirituality; a ritualized set of beliefs and a structured power (“hierarchy”); a set of myths which attempt to justify the order of things (“theology”).⁹⁷¹ *Voudou* was dissected by intellectuals and ethnographers in all its rituals, beliefs, and paraphernalia, and was placed at cultural crossroads, so that the Haitian theologian and sociologist Laënnec Hurbon recognised the presence of different religions in it, affirming that: “In this central core, we can find not only African religious elements, but also elements from Amerindian and Carib, Muslim, and then Hindu religions.”⁹⁷² As far as literature is concerned, Maximilien Laroche remembered that the first Haitian writer to introduce *voudou* in literature was Antoine Innocent with his novel *Mimola* in 1906;⁹⁷³ Laroche subsequently compared a possession by a *vaudoisant* with that of a Taoist.⁹⁷⁴

In this appendix I will show through some instances drawn from the corpus of contemporary West Indian poetry how poets deal with the subjects of religion and religious practices,⁹⁷⁵ for the religious topic in the Caribbean has proved to be one ideal locus of cultural crossroads. And I will deal with these themes treating the poetic subject as the chalk dust drawing of a *vévé* on a sacred ground, as the St. Martin poet Lasana M. Sekou wrote in *Nativity*:

Culture is Self

Sufficiency self-

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zation

⁹⁷¹ Cf. Price-Mars, Jean. *Ainsi Parla l’Oncle: Essais d’Ethnographie (1927)*. New York: Parapsychology Foundation, Inc. 1954; 1998.

⁹⁷² My translation of “Dans ce noyau central, on retrouve non seulement les éléments religieux africains et chrétiens, mais aussi des éléments des religions amérindiennes-caraïbes, musulmanes, puis hindouistes.” Hurbon, Laënnec. *Le Phénomène Religieux dans la Caraïbe: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, Haïti. Cit.* 313.

⁹⁷³ Laroche, Maximilien. *Littérature Haïtienne Comparée*. Université Laval, Québec: Grelca, 2007. 213.

⁹⁷⁴ *Ibid.* 214.

⁹⁷⁵ It is not my contention to analyse all the works of poetry or fiction in which the African-derived religions are treated, for Brathwaite made an excellent survey of it, starting from an anonymous novel written in 1827 titled *Hamel the Obeah Man*. The only works of non-poetry which come to my mind, and I will quickly make reference of, will be a novel by the Jamaican sociologist Erna Brodber, *Myal* (1988), a fictitious story dealing with a young girl and her relationship with myal, and the anthropological work of the Afro-American Zora Neale-Hurston, *Tell My Horse* (1938), partly autobiographical, partly an anthropological study of voodoo in Haiti and Jamaica; as regards her use of the vernacular in writing Henry Louis Gates said: “she used black vernacular speech and rituals (...) This use of the vernacular became the fundamental framework for all but one of her novels”. Neale Hurston, Zora. *Tell My Horse. Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. New York: Harper & Row, Perennial Library, 1990; 1938. 290.

self
actual
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I&I Self
determine
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Love and tra-la-la-dition sprinkling
vèvè Chalkdust markings treat us like
precious blackboards and HIM Steel Pulse (...)
grounations of reasoning/
Cric crac
Legba
Journey
Guillen.... "Far off".⁹⁷⁶

Anthropologists and ethnographers have proved the common matrix of many Caribbean religions and religious beliefs, in that we could draw a line of continuity among all the Caribbean islands and territories and recognise affinities in their development, associating the Jamaican ‘obeah’⁹⁷⁷ or ‘pocomania’ or ‘Convince’ to the Trinidadian and Grenadian ‘shango’, to the Guyanese ‘comfa’, to the Grenadian ‘Big Drum’, the Belizean ‘Black Carib’ and in non-Anglophone Caribbean territories, to the Haitian ‘*voudou*’, to the St. Lucian ‘kele’, to the ‘santeria’ (a.k.a. Lukumi or Regla de Ocha) in Cuba, to the ‘macumba’, ‘umbanda’ or ‘candomblé’ in Brazil.⁹⁷⁸ I will search for references to these creolised religious beliefs and see how poets employ the spectrum of linguistic possibilities to describe them, to render them without denaturalizing their holy essence. Brathwaite made some interesting observations about the interpenetration of religions in the Caribbean, stating that the Guyanese “*Cumfa (kumfa)* (...) In Jamaica, it is known as *kumina*”⁹⁷⁹ and then that “*Poco*: or pocomania [is t]he name given in Jamaica to *vodun / shango* forms”.⁹⁸⁰ Similarly the Haitian anthropologist and theologian Laënnec Hurbon linked “the creation of voodoo (in Haiti) to the

⁹⁷⁶ Sekou, Lasana M. *Nativity & Dramatic Monologues for Today*. *Cit.* 8-9.

⁹⁷⁷ “the term VOODOO is loosely used throughout the Caribbean to refer to occult practices and is almost equivalent of OBEAH”. Allsopp, Jeannette. “The Contribution of Caribbean Folk Religions to Caribbean Languages with Special Reference to French and Spanish.” *Hispanic & Francophone Caribbean Studies, Contemporary Perspectives*. Ed. Kahiudi C. Mabana and Victor C. Simpson. The University of the West Indies: Department of Language, Linguistics and Literature, Barbados, 2007. 173.

⁹⁷⁸ *Cf.*, among the other sources, Pradel, Lucie. *Dons de Mémoire de l’Afrique à la Caraïbe. Littérature et culture des îles anglophones*. Paris: L’Harmattan. 2000. 9.

⁹⁷⁹ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature.” *Cit.* 197, note 13.

⁹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 198, note 15.

Santeria and Nanigos (in Cuba), in Shango-cult (in Trinidad), of Obeahisme (in Jamaica), and then, of Candomblé (in Brazil).”⁹⁸¹

I will analyse the way in which West Indian poets talk about the Haitian voodoo pantheon, how sacrifices, dances, and beliefs of both voodoo and obeah are employed in the poems with all their sacramental paraphernalia. The range of poets included will try to account for different territories of the Caribbean, going from Eric Roach’s Tobago, to the Trinidad of The Mighty Sparrow, LeRoy Clarke, and David Rudder, to Brathwaite’s and AJA’s Barbados, to the Jamaica of Olive Senior and Lorna Goodison, Philip Sherlock and John Andrea Hutchinson, to the Dominica of Eddie D’Pope, to the St. Lucia of Derek Walcott, Kendel Hippolyte, and John Robert Lee, and finally to Lasana Sekou’s St. Maarten.

Poems: the presence of Haïti

The presence of Haitian voodoo rites and history is pervasive to the whole Caribbean literature and in many cases I have observed a transfiguration of religious beliefs, whose cultural crossroads encounter happen on the page. This could be the case of the Tobagonian poet Eric Roach, who in his poem “In Mango Shade” (*The Flowering Rock*) seemed to invoke a kind of calypso (“truth in my calypso is out of tune”),⁹⁸² but he also stated that “My drums summoned my dark voodoo gods / Thrum in the frippery of the carnival”.⁹⁸³ The religious drumming interweaves with the festive drumming of Carnival, and this reminds me of the religious origins of Carnival, a festival which was related to the Christian practice to give a “farewell to the flesh”, in Latin “carne vale”. Gordon Rohlehr underlined the profuse references to Obeah in the Calypsoes of the Pre-Independence era in Trinidad (before 1962), “Obeah, like Bongo, was banned in the late nineteenth century. It, however, persisted and there are many calypsos about Obeah”.⁹⁸⁴ Roach’s poem was actually written nine years before, in 1953, which could link the composition of calypsoes – or as he says “foreign cansonet”⁹⁸⁵ – to the presence of a voodoo-like religion. Even though in Trinidad there is more Shango than Obeah, still we can find calypsoes on obeah practices, like The Mighty Sparrow’s “Obeah Wedding”, in which he dismantled the credence of obeah, as these lines show: “Obeah

⁹⁸¹ My translation of “Ainsi les créations du Vodou (en Haïti), de la Santeria et des Nanigos (à Cuba), du Shango-cult (à la Trinidad), de l’Obeahisme (à la Jamaïque), et plus loin, du Candomblé (au Brésil), sont connues.” Hurbon, Laënnec. *Le Phénomène Religieux dans la Caraïbe: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, Haïti*. Cit. 311.

⁹⁸² Roach, Eric M. *The Flowering Rock: Collected Poems 1938-1974*. Cit. 101.

⁹⁸³ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁸⁴ Rohlehr, Gordon. *Calypso & Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*. Port of Spain, Trinidad: Gordon Rohlehr, 1990. 165.

⁹⁸⁵ Roach, Eric M. *The Flowering Rock*. Cit. 101.

wedding bells don't chime / And you can't trap me / With necromancy",⁹⁸⁶ here the poet was being ironic, for he argued that the woman who was trying to work obeah on the singer was "nasty", in the sense that all the paraphernalia she used on him, after going to an "obeah man", had the only result to make her stink. As Rohlehr observed regarding the presence of obeah in calypsoes and its *picong* tradition, Sparrow's "Obeah Wedding" is "the most comical expression", for in it "the persona, having escaped the machinations of the sorceress, mocks her with triumphant abuse."⁹⁸⁷

But, going back to Roach's poem, in its final stanza there is a twist to a Christian-like terminology and imagery, which links the text to a historical background of slavery, with the lines "Pray to preserve the centuries we slaved", "Our feet are deep in slave-despairing ground, / Firm as the cross on Golgotha", and finally "But after, if love plough, shall come / The Christ sweet bounty of the lovely corn"⁹⁸⁸ (with references to Christ's passion and the slaves' passion, to the bounty of Christian corn, and the transubstantiation of flesh and blood). Roach surprisingly treated the theme of voodoo and of the same gods of this poem in "Black Gods", the first part of the "Haitian Trilogy", where he described the animals which are more likely involved in a voodoo ceremony: the cock, the serpent, the goat, to then evoke the sound of drums, where "Black Gods" were conjured as the Dahomeian (from the Western Coast of Africa) gods transplanted into the Caribbean:

Da! Damballa Ouedo!
 Papa Legba! Frieda Dahomin O!
 Ogun Ferraille! You come?
 Pound drum! Pound drum!
 Ouedo! You see this shame?
 Ogun! Give sword! Give sword!
 We give you blood!
 Petro!

Houngan O! Papaloi!
 Aie Mama Samba!
 Ah, ah Boukman!
 Ah Makandal!
 What Ouedo say?
 The serpent gone?
 We go die in shame?
 Dahomey dead?⁹⁸⁹

In this extract he summoned the serpent god Damballa, Papa Legba, Ogun Ferraille, Papaloi, and the mythographic figures of the ceremony of Bois-Caïman (Bwa Kayiman according to the

⁹⁸⁶ The Mighty Sparrow. "Obeah Wedding." *Cit.*

⁹⁸⁷ Rohlehr, Gordon. *Calypso & Society in Pre-Independence Trinidad*. *Cit.* 263.

⁹⁸⁸ Roach, Eric M. *The Flowering Rock*. *Cit.* 102.

⁹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 90.

Haitian spelling), where Boukman and Makandal, according to the myth, were two obeahmen (or *houngans*) whom gave the input to the Haitian revolution which took place in 1804. The scene described by Roach in this poem is one of anger and raging turbulence, for the *loas* are weeping, and the snake or serpent ends up burning among the canes. Blood is invoked by the Radas, the most powerful spirits of the Haitian *vaudou* pantheon, and Roach hinted at blood in the second part of the poem, concerning Haitian history, where in alliterative aspirate sounds he sang: “Henri, a hurricane at heart”, as a reference to Henri Christophe, the Haitian king, and the “loa and loud god” are kept “with blood in bloody earth”,⁹⁹⁰ where earth becomes the symbolic ground fertilized by blood.

The voodoo pantheon

What follows is a chart and classification of the *lwa* in the voodoo pantheon, as a result of a combination of adaptations from Hurbon, Laënnec. Dieu dans le Vaudou Haïtien. (Paris: Payot, 1972. 106-109) and Hurbon, Laënnec. Voodoo, Search for the Spirit. (Paris: Gallimard. 1993. Trans. Lory Frankel. New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc. and London: Thames and Hudson, Ltd. 1995. 140-143). Nonetheless, Hurbon’s conclusions were discussed by other specialists like Claude Planson:

Laënnec Hurbon ne parle de la religion populaire de son pays (car il est né haïtien) que par ouï-dire, d’où d’innombrables erreurs qu’il serait fastidieux de relievier. (...) et son «Tableau de répartition des loa» contient un si grand nombre d’erreurs”⁹⁹¹

This chart is a combination of the two aforementioned charts, with Claude Planson’s charts of “Comparison entre les principaux loa rada et petro” and “Les principaux loas et leurs caracteristiques”,⁹⁹² and also with Dr. Louis Maximilien’s chart in *Le Vaudou Haïtien*.⁹⁹³ I will analyse a few poems according to these charts trying to look for the features poets attribute to *loas* and whether they stick to anthropological deductions.

⁹⁹⁰ Roach, Eric M. The Flowering Rock. *Cit.* 92.

⁹⁹¹ Planson, Claude. Vaudou, un Initié Parle... Paris: Éds. J’ai lu, 1975 (1ère éd.: Paris, Jean Dullis Éditeur, 1974). 325.

⁹⁹² Cf. Planson, Claude. A la Decouverte du Vaudou. Paris: Éds. De Vecchi, 1978. 214-5.

⁹⁹³ Cf. Maximilien, Louis. Le Vaudou Haïtien. Rite Rada-Canzo. Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie de l’État, 1945; réimpression Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Deschamps, 1982. 20.

NAMES	<i>LEGBA/ ATIBON</i>	<i>GE'DE'/ GUÉDÉ</i>	<i>DAMBALA/ DAMBALLAH</i>	<i>EZILI/ ERZULIE- FREDDA- DAHOMÉY</i>	<i>OGOY FERAY/HOGOY</i>	<i>AGWE/ AGOUÉ</i>
rites	Rada	Rada and Petro	Rada	Rada	Rada	Rada
COLOURS	red, (black according to Planson), blue (according to Maximilien)	black and purple (according to Planson as well), white	white (according to Planson and Maximilien as well), blue or pink (according to Maximilien)	blue, pink (according to Planson and Maximilien as well), white (according to Maximilien)	red (according to Planson and Maximilien as well)	white, Pink, Green (according to Planson as well), blue
PREFERRED TREES	Calabash (according to Planson as well), <i>Cirouillier</i> , <i>Médecinier</i> (<i>Tatropa cureas</i>) ⁹⁹⁴	<i>Médecinier</i> , Calabash	“All trees, especially the cotton tree and the silk tree; also the calabash, palmetto, tamarind”	<i>Cirouillier</i> Laurel	Calabash Pine (according to Planson as well),	Raisinier (<i>cocolota uvifera</i>) (according to Hurbon), mango tree (according to Planson)
TYPES OF POSSESSION	“brutality, force, violence”	“obscene words and gestures; cadaverous appearance”	“imitation of a snake’s movements”	“seductive air and provocative behaviour; seeks perfumes”	“brusque, coarse, and authoritative language”	“seeking water for diving and swimming”
OFFERINGS	“cassava, rice, green banana, smoked foods, mottled rooster”	“black goat, black rooster”	“everything white: hens, rice, milk, eggs”	“toiletries; rare and refined dishes, rice, chicken”	“red rooster, bull”	“white sheep, hens; fine drink: champagne”
ATTRIBUTIONS	“protector of the home”	“making or repelling spells”	“wealth, luck, happiness”	“love”	“fighting against miserable conditions”	“protection of navigation and shipping; fishing”

⁹⁹⁴ The Hatian ‘cirouelle’ is also known as ‘chil(i)-plum’, ‘hog-plum’, or ‘Jamaica-plum’. Cf. Allsopp, Jeannette. *The Caribbean Multilingual Dictionary of Flora, Fauna and Foods in English, French, French Creole and Spanish*. Cit. 19.

CHARACTERISTICS	“interpreter of the <i>lwa</i> ; keeper of the gates (according to Planson as well), crossroads, and paths; rival of Dambala”	“ <i>Lwa</i> of the dead”	“principle of goodness”	“mulatto, coquette, sensual; beauty and grace, luxury and pleasure; promiscuous”	“warrior and soldier”	“mulatto, fair skin, sea-green eyes; naval officer”
HABITATION	“gates and crossroads; <i>médicinier</i> ”	“cemetery and subterranean places”	“springs and rivers”	“river banks”	“Calabash tree, bamboo”	“sea”
CATHOLIC COUNTEPARTS	Saint Peter (keys) or Saint Anthony (lost objects)	Saint Expedit	Saint Patrick represented chasing the snakes from Ireland	The Virgin Mary	Saint James the Greater	Saint Ulrich
REALMS	Earth	Earth	Water	Water	Fire	Water
SYMBOLS	“feeble old man in rags”	“cadaver, black cross (according to Planson as well); farm implements”	“snake-rainbow” (the snake according to Planson as well)	“heart (according to Planson as well), mirror”	“a saber driven into the earth”	“boat, oars”
SPECIAL DAYS	Friday; Saturday	Monday, Friday	Thursday	Tuesday, Thursday	Friday, Saturday, Monday	Thursday

Loas: Agwé, Marassa, Shango, Ogun, Legba, Guédé

The Agwé described by Senior in “Caribbean Basin Initiative” is invoked by the persona to control an unstable boat, an improvised raft, almost adrift. The poetic persona describes a constricted embarking, governed by no sailor (“No sailor am I. / I was farming / till my seed / failed to yield / fell on stony / ground.”⁹⁹⁵) and by a fate which halves the number of passengers by

⁹⁹⁵ Senior, Olive. “Caribbean Basin Initiative.” *Gardening in the Tropics*. Toronto: Insomniac Press. 2005. 29.

drowning: “our numbers / kept shrinking”.⁹⁹⁶ The narrator invokes “Agué Lord of the Sea / rules over me”⁹⁹⁷ and then, as in a refrain, “Agué Lord of the Sea / Watch over me”.⁹⁹⁸ In the sixth part of the poem another clue is offered to the reader: the boat which was searching for the Gulf Stream was possibly a ship crossing the Middle Passage, where a Creole interjection says “it is we / who are found”.⁹⁹⁹ But in the eighth part of the poem Senior inserts a formula to invoke another *lwa*, Legba, saying “*louvri baryè pou mwen*”.¹⁰⁰⁰

In the mysteric section of *Gardening in the Tropics*, Senior displays several *lwas*, like the Marassa, Ogun and Guédé among others. As Hurbon pointed out, one of the symbols of Ogun is the sabre driven into the earth: in Senior’s poem we find that Ogun “beat / ploughshare into gun”.¹⁰⁰¹ The language employed by Senior aims at conveying aggressiveness, with rough sounds, a quick rhythm, obtained with a succession of trochees, spondees and anapests as in “while, knife in hand, / iron-hearted warrior, / you coolly / stalk alone.”¹⁰⁰² But Ogun seems to be also the African counterpart to Efestus/Vulcano, the god of the Greek-Roman pantheon, for his vividness in the red colour, the metallurgy, the metamorphosis of materials, the creation and use of weapons, of blood, fire and sun. Instead “Ogun” is a poem in which he compares the god of thunder and creation to his uncle who was a cabinet-maker and carpenter; he respects neither Hurbon’s association of colour (green, gray, and black instead of red), nor of the special day (Sunday instead of Friday, Saturday or Monday).¹⁰⁰³

Brathwaite’s description of “Agwé” is more analytical than Senior’s in the employment of symbols he makes, as the colour green or pink: “the sea gathers no moss / (...) the lambi’s whorled pink is the ear of the sea”¹⁰⁰⁴ or the colour white, as in: “take a white sheep / (...) and kill it” or “the white wolf of surf gets hold of the carcass”.¹⁰⁰⁵ Agwé is described in his double nature of protector and warrior, and his colour respects Hurbon’s chart “Even today this *lwa* loves the sound of gun- / fire. the boots of marines. the stuttering tongue / of the cannon. His colour is blue”.¹⁰⁰⁶ To call the *lwa*, a sacrifice is due: “If you wish to see him. sit on a chair / and pretend to be rowing. or take a white sheep / on the first day of the year. The first clear / day of the year. And kill it among the

⁹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 31.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 30.

⁹⁹⁸ *Ibid.* 32.

⁹⁹⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁰⁰ *Ibid.* 33.

¹⁰⁰¹ Senior, Olive. “Ogun: God of Iron.” *Gardening in the Tropics. Ibid.* 121.

¹⁰⁰² *Ibid.* 122.

¹⁰⁰³ Cf. “*Le guerrier invincible : Ogun/Gu/Ogoun* (...) Pince, houe, lance, épée, coutelas, herminette ou tête de flèche, enfilés sur une tige de fer, symbolisent ses activités.” Pradel, Lucie. *Dons de Mémoire de l’Afrique à la Caraïbe. Littérature et Culture des Îles Anglophones*. Paris: L’Harmattan. 2000. 56.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Brathwaite, Kamau. “Agwe.” *Words Need Love Too. Cit.* 37.

¹⁰⁰⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁰⁶ *Ibidem.*

freshwater pools”.¹⁰⁰⁷ In another poem of the same collection titled “Agoue” (with a different spelling), Brathwaite makes many references to the voodoo pantheon and its paraphernalia, like references to *hounsi*, *bolom*, *Erzulie*, *yemojia*. To “Yemoja: Mother of Waters”, Senior dedicates a poem “Mother of origins, guardian / of passages”.¹⁰⁰⁸ LeRoy Clarke invokes several *loas*, and Ogun’s traditional colour is respected: “Eswhu’s Black star in the midst / Of a four corner traffic. / Ougun’s red and yellow eyes; / Obatala’s white skies; / Shango’s Red and white dice of thunder; / Oshun’s yellow combs and mirrors; / Yemanja’s Blue and white bosom.”¹⁰⁰⁹ Instead David Rudder wrote a song titled “Erzulie”: “Please hear me Erzulie...Oshun / Hear me...Oshun / Hear me...Oshun (...) / This girl with the heart of gold / Come out to sea with me”.¹⁰¹⁰ Brathwaite’s “yemojia” becomes Clarke’s “Yemaha” and the invocation to the poetic Muse allows the poet to reveal himself: “Before you / Yemaha / I am--- / the land unveiling”.¹⁰¹¹

In “Agwe” (in the collection *Words Need Love Too*) Brathwaite writes of the god of the sea in whose ‘lambi’ (the French Creole version of the English Creole ‘abeng’, the ritual marrons’ shell) the king Henri Christophe blew to start the Haitian revolution. He speaks of this god as a *lwa* who “loves the sound of gun- / fire. the boots of mariners. the stuttering tongue / of the cannon. His colour is blue”.¹⁰¹² In this collection Brathwaite wrote another poem titled “Agoué”, “a sequence for voice, choral chorus, music & vodounistas”,¹⁰¹³ and about this persistent references to religion in his collection the poet explained:

The literature of African survival inheres most surely and securely in the folk tradition – in folk tale, folksong, proverb, and much of the litany of the *hounfort* –. Here, for example is a *marassa* (spirit twins) lament from a *vodoun* ceremony.¹⁰¹⁴

Brathwaite also reported that in a 1966 novel by the Anglo-Indian writer Morna Stuart, *Marassa and Midnight*, the Haitian revolution provided the literary background for the story of two twins (the title provides their names) who were separated and tried to find each other. Brathwaite also highlighted George Lamming’s novel *Season of Adventure* (1960) describing a Haitian rite, in

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Senior, Olive. “Yemoja: Mother of Waters.” *Gardening in the Tropics*. *Cit.* 133.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Clarke, LeRoy. *De Distance Here. The El Tucuche Poems 1984-2007*. *Cit.* 135.

¹⁰¹⁰ Rudder, David. “Erzulie.” *The Brand New Lucky Diamond Horseshoe Club. A Calypso Musical*. CD-ROM. Lypsoland. Petit Bourg, San Juan, Trinidad: BangaSeed Limited; Brooklyn, New York: JW Productions 2004; 2006.

¹⁰¹¹ Clarke, LeRoy. *De Distance Here. The El Tucuche Poems 1984-2007*. *Cit.* 6.

¹⁰¹² Brathwaite, Kamau. “Agwe.” *Words Need Love Too*. *Cit.* 37.

¹⁰¹³ *Ibid.* 63.

¹⁰¹⁴ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature”. *Roots*. *Cit.* 217-218.

particular a possession dance.¹⁰¹⁵ Olive Senior in “Marassa: divine twins” describes these two *lwas* as one spirit, but two complementary entities: “One spirit split in two / equals one”, “Our spirit guards your hearth” (117). Nonetheless, in the last part of this collection Senior speaks of “African gods in the New World” (“Mystery”).

A historical excursion is embedded in a religious frame in AJA’s “Conscious”, in which he invokes both Shango¹⁰¹⁶ and Legba:

but in this colonial darkness
 we ancestors were there in pray
 de voodoo chant was dancing loud
 an’it come back in art today
 so Cleaver geh we *soul on ice*
 while reggae-form Marley shone
 an’de Shango lick up uh storm
 but the voodoo chant din’t stop wid art
 cause we history was down in hell
 so Legab sen’ fuh Malcolm X Diop an’Ben
 de past to we them tell¹⁰¹⁷

Instead, Senior’s version of “Shango: god of thunder” is particularly interesting from the linguistic point of view. In the first verse she says: “He come here all the time (...) – but don’t pull his tongue / is trouble / you asking / his tongue quick / like lightning / zigzagging / hear him nuh” (123). The lack of –s ending at the third person singular, the lack of the neutral subject for the impersonal sentence, the lack of the verb to be, or the negative imperative with the negative particle ‘nuh’ are all features of Creole, aimed at reproducing part of that “sweet-talk”¹⁰¹⁸ Senior attributes to Shango himself in his essence of “sharp-dresser / womanizer / sweet-mouth / smooth-talker” (123), for “they say / he have three wife already / he sweet-mouth them yes” (124). Then Senior restates with the Jamaican opening formula “I tell you something” (125) that if you want to please this god “learn sweet-talking / be smooth” (125).¹⁰¹⁹

But the more interesting of all of Senior’s invocations is the last one, to the “Guédé: lord of the dead”, for it describes the physical appearance of the Guédé (“I don’t come dressed in top hat /

¹⁰¹⁵ It is interesting to underline the discourse on Caribbean writers, such as Andrew Salkey, Wilson Harris or Alejo Carpentier, that Brathwaite made in this book.

¹⁰¹⁶ “There was a new note on the Rada drums. We went into the hounfort to the altar of Ogoun. There are many Ogouns. Ogoun Badagris, Ogoun Ferraille, Ogoun Shango or Chango. Ogoun Balingio.” Neale Hurston, Zora. *Tell My Horse. Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. Cit. 160.

¹⁰¹⁷ Andwele, Adisa (AJA). “Conscious.” *Antiquity*. Cit. 81-82.

¹⁰¹⁸ Cf. the entries “sweet-mouth” or “sweet-talk”. Allsopp, Richard. *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. Cit. 542-543.

¹⁰¹⁹ Cf. “*La préservation de l’harmonie par le respect de l’ordre moral : Shango / So / Hevioso / Xevioso (...)* Le tonnerre, la foudre et le jet de pierres incandescentes constituent à la fois les signes distinctifs et le langage de ce dieu (...) dieu de la chasse et du «pillage»” Pradel, Lucie. *Dons de Mémoire de l’Afrique à la Caraïbe. Littérature et Culture des Îles Anglophones*. Cit. 59.

and tails, dark glasses / on mi face, puffing big Havana, / strutting round the place”, 136), the food he requires for sacrifices to him (“pepper rum” and “cassava bammy”, 136), and the music (“beat two turns of the drum / turn and beat again”, 136). He is depicted as the lord of “crossroads”, as Legba is.¹⁰²⁰ Senior’s “Guédé: Lord of the Dead” is described in six quatrains mainly composed of short words, almost epigrammatic and prescriptive, as in the opening stanza which sounds like a nursery rhyme: “By the sign of the crossroads / beat two turns of the drum / turn and beat again / put the pepper in the rum”.¹⁰²¹ The *lwa* speaks in the first person for the whole poem, giving prescriptions for his cult and remembering his power as lord of the dead in a scaring memento: “Remember: is you / waiting on me, not the other / way: today you here, tomorrow / you gone – if I say.”,¹⁰²² twisting the belief in him as “just a trickster”.¹⁰²³ His external appearance is the reclamation of someone’s last hour’s “in top hat / and tails, dark glasses / on mi face, puffing big Havana, / strutting round the place.”¹⁰²⁴ His hunger has to be satisfied by the believer with “cassava bread” or “cassava bummy, maybe a chicken / or two”, and “pepper rum”.¹⁰²⁵ The ethnographer Zora Neale-Hurston made a detailed description of the “powerful loa” Guédé:

The apparel of this god is in keeping with his people. He likes to dress himself in an old black overcoat, a torn old black hat with a high crown and worn-out black pants. He loves to smoke a cigar. He cavorts about, making coarse gestures, executing steps like the prancing of a horse, drinking and talking. His drink is very special. The god likes clairin well seasoned with hot peppers, to which powdered nutmeg is added at times. The grated nutmeg should always be in this strong, raw rum infusion, but when it is not to be had, Guédé will content himself with the pepper in alcohol. He also drinks pure clairin, that raw white rum of Haiti. He eats roasted peanuts, and parched corn which is placed at the foot of the cross on a plate. No white cloth is used in this offering as in others. (...) That phrase “Parlay cheval ou” is in daily, hourly use in Haiti and no doubt it is used as a blind for self-expression. There are often many drunken people in the cemeteries who claim to be “mounted.”¹⁰²⁶

As evident in Brathwaite’s poems, one of the most invoked *lwás* of the Haitian pantheon by Anglophone poets is Legba. As Métraux sustained, Legba is the guardian of crossroads, and he is invoked by poets with similar formulas. For instance, Olive Senior in “Caribbean Basin Initiative” –

¹⁰²⁰ “*Le maître-décepteur : Legba / Eshu / Legbara / Koku / Esu* (...) parmi ses prérogatives majeures, figure celle de gardien des temples, des maisons, des villes. Legba assure également la communication entre l’Au-delà et l’Ici-bas.” *Ibid.* 64.

¹⁰²¹ Senior, Olive. “Guédé: Lord of the Dead.” *Ibid.* 136.

¹⁰²² *Ibidem.*

¹⁰²³ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰²⁴ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰²⁵ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰²⁶ Neale Hurston, Zora. *Tell My Horse. Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica. Cit.* 220-221.

as analysed before –, stages an adrift scene which historically recalls the Middle Passage: in her poem a small group of people is on a Géricault-like raft, invoking now and then the protector of the sea, the Haitian Agué. Another divinity of the Haitian pantheon is invoked, for in stanza eight Senior writes “*louvri baryè pou mwen*”, which seems addressed to papa Legba, the same formula employed by Brathwaite in “Negus”: “*Attibon Legba / Attibon Legba / Ouvri bayi pou’ moi / Ouvri bayi pou’ moi...*”.¹⁰²⁷ Brathwaite argued that during voodoo ceremonies a particular language – the *langage*¹⁰²⁸ – is employed, a language which retains phonetic fragments of an African tongue. Maybe it is the same language he refers to in “Eating the Dead”: “My tongue is heavy with new language / but I cannot give birth speech.”¹⁰²⁹ In this last poem he is not referring to the practice of cannibalism, but rather, to a fetish-like¹⁰³⁰ ceremonial offer to the gods of voodoo, and offers of food to the gods, for he invokes Ogun, Damballa, and the “hounsi kanzo” (the voodoo initiate) and says in the end “what it means to eat / your god, drink his explosions of power” (64), a Christian-based derivation from the concept of transubstantiation and of sharing the host and Christ’s blood.

The Trinidadian poet Pearl Eintou Springer in “The Yard” employs the same formula as Brathwaite does but with a different spelling: “Attibon Legba / Ouvrez bayion pour moi. / Attibon Legba / Ouvrez bayion pour moi.”¹⁰³¹ The Jamaican poet Opal Palmer Adisa in her “Boat People” mixes the features of the voodoo gods Damballa and Legba and writes “damballa oh / oldman gatekeeper / (...) / open the gate oldman / hold back the waves gatekeeper”.¹⁰³² Another Trinidadian, David Rudder, the calypsonian, in his calypso “Hoosay” connotes the character Bakr as a Legba-like figure. As Rohlehr noted:

Bakr becomes Legba, the crippled door-keeper between the theatre and its Double, the one who “opened a door and showed us our other side.” And in another, healthier sense, Rudder too, in *Hoosay* assumes the role and responsibility of Legba. He becomes muse and guide.¹⁰³³

¹⁰²⁷ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “Negus.” *Islands*. London: Oxford University Press, 1969. 67

¹⁰²⁸ Cf. also Alfred Métraux.

¹⁰²⁹ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “Eating the Dead.” *Islands*. *Cit.* 64.

¹⁰³⁰ “Fetish” not in the sense of “kitsch”, but in the religious sense of “«Feticcio» [which] comes from the Portuguese *feitico*, which comes from the verb *fazer* (to do), employed for an object which is made for a special purpose, generally in connection with the supernatural world. This term, in our [Western?, NbR] society was often negatively intended, giving to it meanings connected with sorcery. As far as a «magic» side of the fetish exists, actually in this particular context we want to indicate those African representations of supernatural entities which protect villages, in which they were cultuated.” My translation of «Feticcio» viene dal portoghese *feitico*, derivato dal verbo *fazer* (fare), usato per indicare un oggetto che viene appunto fatto, costruito, per un determinato scopo che in genere ha connessioni col soprannaturale. Questo termine, nella nostra [Western?, NbR] società, è stato spesso inteso in senso negativo, attribuendo significati connessi con l’ambito stregonesco. Per quanto esista un lato per così dire «magico» del feticcio, in realtà in questo contesto vogliamo indicare quelle rappresentazioni africane di entità soprannaturali protettrici dei villaggi, dove venivano cultuate.” Faldini Pizzorno, Luisa. *Il Vodù*. Milano: Xenia Edizioni, 1999. 112, note 1.

¹⁰³¹ Springer, Eintou Pearl. *Loving the Skin I’m In*. San Juan, Trinidad: Lexicon Trinidad Ltd., 2005. 78.

¹⁰³² Palmer Adisa, Opal. *Caribbean Passion*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2004. 87

¹⁰³³ Rohlehr, Gordon. *The Shape of That Hurt and Other Essays*. *Cit.* 370.

In his poem “Return” the St. Lucian poet, John Robert Lee depicts a wanderer Legba-like figure who beats a drum and whose stick/cane rhythmically “tapped out curbs for him”, while “his thumbs come / drumming / on the dumb”,¹⁰³⁴ echoed by the gossip of a “cancanesse”.¹⁰³⁵ I said Legba-like because this figure is associated with “Damballa”, as Lee writes at the end of the poem: “joyous fear in Legba’s heart”.¹⁰³⁶ Lee defined himself as “a Christian poet”,¹⁰³⁷ but he is also a preacher and he is well aware of the African-derived religions in St. Lucia. In fact in “Lusca” (*Vocation*) he speaks of his beloved woman saying “your early gods were rum-soaked banjo-players, / wanderers of hills and towns, story-tellers, gossip-mongers”.¹⁰³⁸ Again, the musical accompaniment is the ideal background for the religious practice, and instead of being soaked in blood gods are “soaked with rum”. Later in the poem he refers more specifically to voodoo-like practices:

you knew, my little, Lusca, of old crones dégagéd;
of strange and silent single men who, they said, might have mounted you,
you dear Lusca, in their magie noire! You knew as I did not
of soucouyants and loup-garous, of kele and kutumba,
of chembois and of obeah!¹⁰³⁹

Lorna Goodison’s “Legba” is described differently, even though an assonance with Senior’s work could be found. I am referring to “Was it Legba She Met Outside the Coronation Market?” in *Goldengrove* (2006), originally from the collection *Travelling Mercies* (2001). In this poem Goodison crafts three verses of six, six, and seven lines, narrating an episode occurring to a woman outside the Coronation Market, a marketplace in down-town Kingston. The first stanza depicts an approaching strange man, a sort of Baron Samedi, the scary Haitian voodoo god or *guédé*, but the title speaks of papa Legba. The man is described with red-veined eyes, hunch-backed, lame but not with a straw hat and smoking a pipe, as he is often depicted in the iconography. Instead, as Métraux said, Baron Samedi is, together with Baron LaCroix and Baron Cémétière, a *loa*, a spirit of the dead, and stands equally at crossroads. The fact that Legba is depicted approaching in a limping pace (as a dromedary), “with his halt legba walk” (39), underlines the relationship between his pace

¹⁰³⁴ Lee, John Robert. “Return.” *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*. *Cit.* 340.

¹⁰³⁵ “kankannez” is “a lover of scandal; one who gossips”. Mondesir, Jones E., and Lawrence D. Carrington, eds. *Dictionary of St. Lucian Creole, Part 1: Kwéyòl – English, Part 2. English – Kwéyòl*. *Cit.* 112.

¹⁰³⁶ Lee, John Robert. “Return.” *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*. *Cit.* 341.

¹⁰³⁷ The Jamaican/Canadian poet and writer Pamela Mordecai does not define herself “a Christian poet”, but in *De Man*, defined by Mordecai as a “performance poem”, she told in Creole the story of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion, and the two storytellers are a carpenter educated by Joseph and a maid of Pilates. The *via crucis* is illustrated with photographs, which equip the poem with symbolic images, underlining the most significant passages of the story/history. Mordecai’s collections of poems are *Journey Poem* (1987), *de Man* (1995), *Certifiable* (2001), *The True Blue of Islands* (2005).

¹⁰³⁸ Lee, John Robert. “Lusca.” *Vocation and Other Poems*. St. Lucia, U.W.I Extra Mural Department: Litographic Press St. Lucia, 1975. 32.

¹⁰³⁹ *Ibid.* 32-33.

and his ability to prophesize. In fact, as Jed Rasula observed, there is a correlation between the two.¹⁰⁴⁰ As Jed Rasula puts it there are reasons to find a link between the limpness of Legba and Odipus, and the capacity of foreseeing:

Legba's an old man in rags, with a crutch: *pied cassé* or broken-foot. Oedipus, too (with prophecies said to "flutter about his head" like birds) hobbles—as his name indicates: "Swellfoot." It's as if those feet were swollen with eyes, overcompensating for some other mutilation. Emerson: "I become a transparent eyeball"... — ..."we are lined with eyes; we see with our feet." The eyes continue Ezekiel's vision (1:18) of the heavenly chariot, its inter-revolving wheels "full of eyes round about." And in Zachariah 4:10 the "eyes of the Lord run to and fro through the whole earth." Blake: "The Chariot Wheels filled with Eyes rage along the howling Valley."¹⁰⁴¹

Continuing the classical analogy, the mythological Greek prophet Tiresias was blind, and that is the meaning of Goodison's poem, when she describes the ritual of removing his eyes to see, to "speak[] prophecy" (38). As the Italian intellectual and writer Antonio Gramsci stated in his commentary to Canto X of Dante's Hell, in his *Prison Notebooks*: "In literary tradition and in folklore, the gift of prescience is always connected with the seer's infirmity (...) that is why the seers are not believed, as Cassandra; if they were believed, their prophecies would never come true."¹⁰⁴² Moreover, as Emile Benveniste observed in his *Vocabulary of Indo-European Institutions*:

Superstitio is the gift of the second sight, which allows the bearer to know the past as though we had been present, *superstes*. That is why the *superstitiosus* claims the property of 'double sight' which is attributed to the 'seers', that of being 'eye-witnesses' of events to which they did not assist (...) in French [with] the word *voyant* 'the one who is gifted with sight' but beyond an ordinary sight, 'gifted with a second sight'.¹⁰⁴³

In the second stanza a trance and a grotesque episode, not rationally explained, are described. The man "removes his eye's white ball / and swallows it. It reappears in her palm. She

¹⁰⁴⁰ Also the Greek mythological king Oedipus was limp (Rasula, Jed. "Syncope, Cupola, Pulse." *Time: Tempo: Temporality*. Spec. issue of *Pores. An Avant-Gardist Journal of Poetics Research* 3 (2005) Ed. Will Rowe. Contemporary Poetics Research Centre, School of English & Humanities, Birbeck College, London. 21 Feb. 2008 <<http://www.pores.bbk.ac.uk/3/rasula.pdf>>.), even though for a different reason (he had his feet pierced with a spike).

¹⁰⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁴² My translation of "Nella tradizione letteraria e nel folklore, il dono della previsione è sempre connesso con l'infermità attuale del veggente (...) perciò i veggenti non sono creduti, come Cassandra; se fossero creduti, le loro previsioni non si verificherebbero." Gramsci, Antonio. *Quaderni del Carcere*. Cit. 527.

¹⁰⁴³ My translation from the Italian version of the *Vocabulary of Indo-European Institutions*: "*Superstitio* è il dono di seconda vista che permette di conoscere il passato come se fossimo stati presenti, *superstes*. Ecco perché *superstitiosus* enuncia la proprietà della 'doppia vista' che si attribuisce ai 'veggenti', quella di essere 'testimoni' di eventi ai quali non hanno assistito.(...) in francese [con] la parola *voyant* 'colui che è dotato di vista', ma al di là della vista ordinaria, 'dotato di seconda vista'." Benveniste, Emile. *Il Vocabolario delle Istituzioni Indoeuropee*. Vol. 1 e 2. A cura di Mariantonia Liborio. Torino: Einaudi, 2001; 1976. 495. Or. pub. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1969.

returns / the white sphere, he swallows it and speak prophecy.”¹⁰⁴⁴ In the third stanza he leaves but behind him the situation has changed. Lexically the Creole “crocus bag sack”¹⁰⁴⁵ could be compared to the Haitian Creole “macoute”,¹⁰⁴⁶ while the “bush-doctor” to the Jamaican “healer”, one of the aspects of the “obeahman.”¹⁰⁴⁷ Richard Allsopp did not speak of the term “bush-doctor”, but of “bush-medicine”, a folk knowledge about healing herbs; Jeannette Allsopp instead hinted at a term spread throughout the French Caribbean: “docteur-feuilles”¹⁰⁴⁸ (I think it could be linked to the Martinican Glissant’s “quimboiseur”). Thus, outside Coronation Market, the woman of the poem could have met an ‘obeah-man’, who is similar but not the same as the Haitian ‘houngan’, to whom Brathwaite refers in his poem “Mulatta”: “It is the *houngan* / wizened, the wise one, in white (...) / lift lift lift up your hands and / shout / silence still circles where the *houngan* stands”.¹⁰⁴⁹ The symbols referring to the Haitian voodoo are the appearance of the man, and the crossroads (for Legba is considered the king of ‘carrefours’). Legba is considered the perfect intermediation between the living and the dead, and that is why he is described to stand at (physical, but also spiritual) crossroads. His invocation of the “spirits” in this poem, more precisely the ‘*loas*’, is aimed at a possession of the woman, for the *loas* to speak through her, through the voodooesque “chevauchement” or “horse mounting”. In fact, there is no communication with the boy, who is left dumb, nor with the mother. The woman seems not perturbed by the scene, and so the child who, in the end, is just silent; the mother comes back with “ground provisions”, after buying them at the marketplace, and so the scene seems to return to normalcy.

Kamau Brathwaite’s “Legba” (*Islands*) is not a poem about the Haitian divinity, but a lamentation on the disablement of poor black children and on the drought of a Caribbean landscape, made of “shak shak tree” and snapped plants. Brathwaite’s “Legba” is “like a lame old man on a crutch”,¹⁰⁵⁰ but the description of this *lwa* differs from descriptions in the other poems: his progeny is “pot- / bellied, knobble- / kneed”.¹⁰⁵¹ The second part of the poem describes animals and plants, the cutting of the sugarcane and the bamboo, the soil yearning for rain. The symbols of farm

¹⁰⁴⁴ Goodison, Lorna. *Goldengrove: New and Selected Poems*. *Cit.* 38.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Made of jute. *Cf.* Allsopp, Richard. *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. *Cit.*

¹⁰⁴⁶ “Tonton macoutes” were the militants of the Haitian dictator François Duvalier, aka Papa Doc. “Macuto” is a term which derives from the Taino Language and it describes a bag made of vines. *Cf.* Taino Inter-Tribal Council Inc., The Taino Language Project. *The Dictionary of the Spoekn Taino Language*. New Jersey, 1993; 1999. 8 June 2009 <<http://members.dandy.net/~orocobix/telist-m.htm>>.

¹⁰⁴⁷ In fact Cassidy defined him as “One who practises herb remedies; especially one who practices obeah under the guise of medicine”. Cassidy, Frederic Gomes, and Le Page, Robert Brock. *Dictionary of Jamaican English*. *Cit.* 84.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Allsopp, Jeannette. “The Contribution of Caribbean Folk Religions to Caribbean Languages with Special Reference to French and Spanish.” *Cit.* 174.

¹⁰⁴⁹ Brathwaite, L. Edward. “Mulatta.” *BIM* 13.50 (Jan.-June 1970): 86.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “Legba.” *The Arrivants, A New World Trilogy. Rights of Passage* (1967), *Masks* (1968), *Islands* (1969). London: Oxford University Press, 1973. 174.

¹⁰⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

implements employed for Legba cross here with Hurbon's suggested symbols for Gédé. The end of "Negus", moreover, invokes Attibon Legba, "*Ouvri bayi pou' moi*".¹⁰⁵²

In "Eating the Dead" some tones of Brathwaite's *skeletonality* emerge, as in "I will sing songs of the skeleton",¹⁰⁵³ when a sacrifice is staged: "Eating the Dead" could be a calque from the Haitian formula "manger morts", but it also implies the Christian practice of eating Christ's body through the host and it may refer to cannibalistic practices as well, performed by the priestess or the hounsi 'kanzo', when the poetic persona says at the end: "I / can show / you what it means to eat / your god, drink his explosions of power".¹⁰⁵⁴ Before the sacrifice begins, some *lwás* are invoked: "It is the iron stranger / Ogun, cloud of gloom, / and Damballa / with his stamp of doom".¹⁰⁵⁵

Calabash: gourds & rattles

Keane Gibson wrote a thorough study of Guyanese Comfa rituals, underlining the African presence in West Indian religions:

Some of the songs sung at ceremonies are in Kikongo which is indicative of a Bantu orientation. (...) the Bantu system of thought as exemplified in Tempels (...) is a philosophical system which is more or less still intact in Comfa¹⁰⁵⁶

and again she highlighted: "the dominance of Bantu influence in Comfa, rather than Yoruba or Fante-Ashanti."¹⁰⁵⁷ In her dissertation, Gibson remembered seeing during a rite "a calabash with a floating wick; and a calabash with high wine, the drink of African spirits. The calabash is a receptacle symbolic of African spirits."¹⁰⁵⁸ Three Jamaican women poets wrote poems about the 'calabash': I am referring to Olive Senior's "Gourd" (*Gardening in the Tropics*); Jacqueline Bishop's "Calabash" (*Fauna*) and Lorna Goodison's "Inna Calabash" (*To Us, All Flowers Are Roses*).

Senior's "Gourd", a calligraphic visual poem, depicts a 'calabash', also referred to as "cosmic / container, you ordered divination, ritual / sounds, incantations, you were tomb, you were /

¹⁰⁵² Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. "Negus." *The Arrivants, A New World Trilogy*. *Cit.* 224.

¹⁰⁵³ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. "Eating the Dead." *Cit.* 62.

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Ibid.* 64.

¹⁰⁵⁵ *Ibid.* 62. Damballa is described by Brathwaite in the final glossary as "a god of the highway". *Ibid.* x.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Gibson, Kean. *Comfa Religion and Creole Language in a Caribbean Community*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001. 35.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Ibid.* 1 67.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Ibid.* 103.

womb, you were heavenly home, the birthplace of / life here on earth”; the gourd, dried and shaken, produces a “humble took-took”,¹⁰⁵⁹ that is a sound like Bajan ‘tuk’¹⁰⁶⁰ music. But the Ryerson Caribbean Research Centre underlined how both “took-took” and “packy” were names for the “calabash gourd.”¹⁰⁶¹ The spirit of Orehu hints at Guyanese Amerindian mythology, and to the fact that Senior summons many mythologies and religious beliefs in the same poem. In fact, she refers to the Haitian voodoo in “Mbarakà”, in “the houngan’s asson or the shaman’s maraka” (then spelt in a different way as “maracca”,¹⁰⁶² and to the “shak-shak” (as Brathwaite’s “shak shak tree” in the poem “Legba”). Bishop draws a calabash with words (as a sort of Apollinaire’s *calligram*): “The fruits are globular in shape and large / specimens may grow to more than twelve inches / in diameter. The central pulp and seeds are / often removed, leaving a hard woody shell”.¹⁰⁶³ Goodison on the other hand tells the story of a slave girl who pretends to be pregnant to get some rest from the hard work in the fields, thus the calabash becomes her womb: “Quasheba show me (...) / Pick a big calabash / bore both ends she say / shake out the gray pulp belly. / Run a string through both ends / and tie it across your belly.”¹⁰⁶⁴

The fifth section of Brathwaite’s *Masks* is entitled “Crossing the River”, as the crossing of water or the water baptismal is important in voodoo-like practices. In the first section, “Libation”, in the poem “Gourds and Rattles”, Brathwaite describes how to build a ceremonial calabash, putting inside it the rattles which allow the rhythmical accompanying sound of it, poetically fragmenting the lines and reproducing the recipe with imperative instructions, eventually concluding the poem with an alliteration in ‘m’ referred to the calabash tree – which provides the fruit and leaves for the “asson” (the mambo’s or houngan’s rattle represented by a calabash full of seeds, employed to convene the *lwás*) – “that makes and mocks our music”.¹⁰⁶⁵

¹⁰⁵⁹ Senior, Olive. “Gourd.” *Gardening in the Tropics*. *Cit.* All quotations 7.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Allsopp defined “tuk” as a type of folk music. Allsopp, Richard. *Dictionary of Caribbean English Usage*. *Cit.* 569

¹⁰⁶¹ *Ryerson Caribbean Research Centre*. © Ryerson University, 2006. Last modified 2008. 21 Feb. 2008 <<http://www.ryerson.ca/caribbeanresearch/Olive%20Senior/Background%20on%20the%20Text/Index.html>>.

¹⁰⁶² The musical instrument “maraca” derives from the Taino language. Taino Inter-Tribal Council Inc., The Taino Language Project. *The Dictionary of the Spoken Taino Language*. *Cit.* <<http://members.dandy.net/~orocobix/telist-m.htm>> Last access 8th June 2009. But I have also found the word “*mara: ka*”, meaning “rattle” in the word index of Hoff, Brenda Jane. *The Carib Language, Phonology, Morphology, Morphology, Texts and Words*. Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-, en Volkenkunde 55, The Netherlands: The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1968. 415.

¹⁰⁶³ Bishop, Jacqueline. *Fauna*. Leeds: Peepal Tree Press, 2006. 40.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Goodison, Lorna. “Inna Calabash.” *To Us All Flowers Are Roses*. Urbana & Chicago: U. of Illinois Press, 1995. 35.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “Gourds and Rattles.” *The Arrivants, A New World Trilogy*. *Cit.* 10.

Vévé

In “Vévé”, a poem in the third part of his first trilogy, Brathwaite describes the vévé as a medium to establish a contact between the world of the living and that of the dead, and in so doing combining all the natural elements together; as Wilson-Tagoe observed:

Brathwaite’s “graven Word” in “Vévé” is therefore not just the Word simplistically drawn from ancestor and god and easily reinstated to bridge discontinuities of time. It is the emerged image, the reclaimed life and pain integrated into consciousness (...) and merged with wind, fire, and dust, the elemental as well as the inarticulate presences of Caribbean space.¹⁰⁶⁶

Instead, Bobb commented on the figure of Legba linked with the inscription of the vévés:

The poet suggests that through the intercession of Legba, language will be reclaimed and the Caribbean’s “broken ground” made whole. Upon this ground, the vévé will be inscribed. To move from vévé, the signs and symbolic drawings of New World gods, into sound and meaning, Legba, god of the crossroads, who translates the messages of the gods into human language, must intercede. In the poem, as in mythology, Legba hides his terrible powers beneath an appearance of fragility, but he is a subversive multi-faceted figure.¹⁰⁶⁷

Senior mostly writes in Creole, sometimes enriching her poems or invocations to the different Yoruba gods transplanted into the Caribbean with Haitian Creole terms, transcribed with an anglicised orthography, like for instance “vever of grain” (127) in “Balalu: lord of the earth”, which is the Haitian vévé, the propitious drawing marked on earth with coffee powder, grain wheat, or ash to invoke the gods. In this respect, Brathwaite’s “Vévé” (*Islands*) describes the function of a ceremonial, propitious drawing on the ground, for it facilitates the possession from the *loas*, as I interpret these lines: “walk / the hooves will come, welcomed / by drumbeats, into your ridden head; / and the horse, cheval of the dead, charade of *la mort*” (108), where the *chevauchément* (possession) is propitious to invoke Ogun, Shango, and Damballa. Patricia Mohammed associated the designs of vévés with Islamic art:

reading the formal values of a recurrent geometrical style on flat surfaces composed of shapes and forms with bright colors, in an abstract, if not magical realist, style that characterizes so much of popular Haitian art. The

¹⁰⁶⁶ Wilson-Tagoe, Nana. Historical Thought and Literary Representation in West Indian Literature. Gainesville: U. Press of Florida, 1998. 221.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Bobb, June. ““Minefield[s] of Unmemory”: The New Poetry of Kamau Brathwaite.” Migrating Words and Worlds: Pan-Africanism Updated. Eds. E. Anthony Hurley, Renee Brenda Larrier, and Joseph McLaren. New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1999. 177.

geometric symmetry reminds one of Islamic art: flat, decorative, and linear.¹⁰⁶⁸

The Trinidadian LeRoy Clarke describes the ritual drawing of *vévés* in some of his lines from *De Distance Is Here*: “Open the centre of the primeval fruit of the world, / That I may trace with the silk saliva of sea foam / And the ancient dust of Guinea, his *vévé* / With flour of the teeth of slaves and tusks of / Hedgehogs, I search my fragments for her.”¹⁰⁶⁹ Later he refers again to a *vévé*: “The skin of the sun is wounded today: / Sides agape with sacred *vévé*, / Flowers of red vinegary hieroglyphs”.¹⁰⁷⁰

Haïti: zombies, boloms, and dances

The Jamaican ‘duppy’¹⁰⁷¹ or ‘jumbie’ is a ghost who dwells in cotton-trees or almond trees. As the Afro-American ethno-anthropologist Zora Neale-Hurston stated in *Tell My Horse*: “duppies do not like salt. (...) salt vexed duppies. If a duppy sees salt around a place he will keep away. He will run right back to his grave.”¹⁰⁷² The Haitian ethnographer Alfred Métraux said something similar regarding zombies, the half-dead servants of evil masters; zombies do not like salt because it awakens their mind and it makes them disobey and turn against their “master”:

The zombie remains in that misty zone which divides life from death. (...) Their docility is total provided you never give them salt. If imprudently they are given a plate containing even a grain of salt the fog which cloaks their mind instantly clears away and they become conscious of their terrible servitude. Realization rouses in them a vast rage and an ungovernable desire for vengeance. They hurl themselves on their master, kill him, destroy his property and then go in search of their tombs.¹⁰⁷³

Neale-Hurston gave three reasons why a zombie might be awakened:

A was awakened because somebody required his body as a beast of burden
(...) B was summoned to labour also but he is reduced to the level of a beast
as an act of revenge. C was the culmination of “ba’ Moun” ceremony and

¹⁰⁶⁸ Mohammed, Patricia. “The Sign of the Loa.” *Small Axe. A Caribbean Journal of Criticism*. Ed. David Scott. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press. N. 18, Sept. 2005. 144.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Clarke, LeRoy. *De Distance Here. The El Tucuche Poems 1984-2007*. *Cit.* 60.

¹⁰⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 131.

¹⁰⁷¹ In “The Angel in the House” (*Certifiable*) Pamela Mordecai spoke of the role of a woman in a house, but she invoked a “Cherub”, “angelic hosts”, the “Spirit”, “ghosts” and “Angel Duppy”, the Jamaican spirit or ghost (Mordecai, Pamela. “The Angel in the House.” *Certifiable*. Fredericton, New Brunswick: Goose Lane, 2001. 78-79).

¹⁰⁷² Neale Hurston, Zora. *Tell My Horse. Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. *Cit.* 46.

¹⁰⁷³ Métraux, Alfred. *Voodoo*. Trans. Hugo Charteris. London: André Deutsch, 1959. 281-282.

pledge. That is, he was given as a sacrifice to pay off a debt to a spirit for benefits received.¹⁰⁷⁴

After this short introduction, we could observe the presence of zombies and ghosts in poetry. Zombies are present in Kendel Hippolyte's "a caribbean exorcism poem", in which the malefic presence of the "devil, beelzebub, devourer"¹⁰⁷⁵ represents a hidden side of man, like Goodison's "as yet untold half".¹⁰⁷⁶ The presence of 'zombie' or 'bolom' is explained as some form of "unfulfilment" that everyman can have in his/her own life: "zombie/is the thing we didn't do/words unsaid and roaming/the life we never lived" (100). Maybe it is the dark side of human nature, that side unborn, or as Hippolyte puts it in a word pun "still-born, still un-born". Why does the persona need an exorcism, then? From evil? He replies "i am the devil". That "i" is not written with capital letter, and this maybe signifies that the evil part has not the same importance in the poetic I, in an eternal fight between good and evil, "the eternal parable of our need to love" (100). Yet, he employs terms from Haitian *voudou*, like 'zombie' or from St-Lucian patois like 'bolom'. In St.Lucia voodoo is not practised, but Hippolyte and his wife Jane King told me this story about the 'bolom':

As far as I understand, it's a homunculus which is deliberately created from a process which begins with a woman holding an egg in her armpit for a period – not sure for how long, but I think it's three days – during which she doesn't bathe and do any of the normal stuff. I think the holding of the egg begins on Good Friday. (...) Couple things about the bolom: it's immortal. Not having been born in the true sense, it cannot die. Also, although it has supernatural powers, it must attach itself to a human master. This master has to feed it meat regularly to maintain its loyalty but it is absolutely loyal. When the master dies, it goes around wailing at night with the voice of a crying baby (though it looks like an old man) until someone takes it in and that person becomes its master. People might suspect who the owner of a bolom is, but it's difficult to be sure. It will steal and carry out acts of violence and so on for its master, so it's a terrifying figure. And yet it is pathetic as well, not a monster in the usual sense of the word.¹⁰⁷⁷

The activities this creature pursues for its master are evil ones, and under this light bolom and zombie are similar figures.

Brathwaite refers to the "bolom's laughter" in his poem "Mulatta":

¹⁰⁷⁴ Neale Hurston, Zora. *Tell My Horse. Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica*. *Cit.* 182.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Brown, Stewart, and Ian Mc Donald, eds. *The Heinemann Book of Caribbean Poetry*. *Cit.* 100.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Goodison, Lorna. "Was It Legba She Met Outside the Coronation Market?" *Goldengrove: New and Selected Poems*. *Cit.* 39.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Personal communication with Kendel Hippolyte. E-mail. 21 Mar. 2008. Brathwaite in *Sappho Sakyi XXI* talked about the cock's nest: "The black cock will not crow / Until he lays an egg / He will not lay an egg / Until two thousand years are cold" (Brathwaite, Edward. *Sappho Sakyi's Meditations*. Mona, Jamaica: Savacou Publications, 1989), and also Zora Neale-Hurston spoke of a cock who laid an egg in her narrative on Haitian voodoo.

and far among the falling leaves they heard the *bolom*
 laugh.
 The *bolom* laughed in time to thunder
 and the getting heavy clouds
 in time to grumble rumbling down the deep and belly
 turning over
 of the heavy earth
 the *bolom* laughed in earth and fire.¹⁰⁷⁸

The closing lines of the poem are “Who laughs / who says the *bolom* laughs”.¹⁰⁷⁹ The poetic persona asks: “why does the sage say / save / Save? / sav / whom? / Why *bolom* sacrifice and / save?”¹⁰⁸⁰ and then he refers to the woman of the title seeing “the *bolom* dance”.¹⁰⁸¹ The agitation of the poem rises when in describing a sacrifice with the accompaniment of cymbals, fifes, and drums Brathwaite refers to the woman in a state of apparent death, and at this culminating point she seems to have found a conjunction with the ‘bolom’, for he says: “She loved the *bolom* now / she loved his flute that fled her on to darkness / forded his dark streams / and rode across the shining roots that fed the deepest nights”.¹⁰⁸² The Haitian writer René Depestre’s novel makes me think of an ideal point of contact between the literary importance of Haiti and that of Jamaica. Lorenz noted that in Depestre’s *Hadriana dans Tous Mes Rêves (Hadriana in All My Dreams)* the reader can find that voodoo is depicted with an oxymoronic nature: the “black magic”/“phallic” one vs. the gleeful and “sensual” one. In that novel *Hadriana* (133), described by Depestre as a Creole fair (as much as Brathwaite described the liberation of his mulatta from the *bolom*), discovered dismissal in the free setting of Jamaica.¹⁰⁸³

Oscar A. Glaude’s “Heigh – Ho Haiti” (*Moods of the Caribbean*) is a poem about the responsibility of politicians or “despots” in the socio-historical developments of the Caribbean. They are compared to “devils, buffoons or voodoo ghosts”; the poet says:

Sometimes we see the spectre of oppression looming high,
 And ju-ju converts dance and sing
 In voodoo rituals, to talking drums,
 Their mahogany bodies shimmering bright in the humid moonlight
 And tattered peasants in frenzied spells and spasms,
 Caught in the influence of voodoo gods wallowing in the mud,

¹⁰⁷⁸ Brathwaite, L. Edward. “Mulatta.” *Cit.* 88-89.

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Ibid.* 94.

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 90.

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid.* 92.

¹⁰⁸² *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁸³ Cf. Denise Lorenz’s article “Baron Samedi ou la Fleur d’Or? La Culture Populaire dans la Littérature Haïtienne.” in *Caribbean Writers/Les Auteurs Caribéens, Between Orality & Writing/Entre L’Oralité et L’Écriture*. Eds. Mariles Glaser, and Marion Pausch. Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1994.

Haunted by jumbies they know and fear
Talking in the tongues unknown and rare”¹⁰⁸⁴

The colonial French presence in Trinidad was poignant, so that Glaude expressed the significance of this Haitian religion in it.¹⁰⁸⁵

The quintessential essence of Caribbean religion is placed at crossroads, starting from their mixed derivation from different cultures, as Lorenz noted regarding Haitian voodoo: “à l’origine même d’Haïti un double élan, l’un mystique d’inspiration africaine, l’autre plus rationnel d’inspiration française.”¹⁰⁸⁶ But this in between position could be considered not only as a connotation of defectiveness, as non belonging to Creole people, language and cultures, but as a positive element, because a standing at the crossroads suggests an openness to decisions, and an agglomerating central point in the middle of diverging or different paths.

Jamaica: obeah and pocomania

As Brathwaite observed in his illuminating essay “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature (1970/1973).”: “the focus of African culture in the Caribbean was religious”¹⁰⁸⁷ But he claimed that religion has to be intended also as cultural heritage, for “there is no separation between religion and philosophy, religion and society, religion and art. Religion is the form or kernel or core of the culture.”¹⁰⁸⁸ Linguistically speaking, the semantic field of religions offered a great reservoir of lexicon. Effectively, Jeannette Allsopp observed that:

it is from the folk religions of the Caribbean, rather than from the established European religions of Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism and various forms of Protestantism, that the lexical contributions to Caribbean languages are made. By folk religions, I mean the religions of the mass of Caribbean people, influenced by their African heritage throughout the Caribbean.¹⁰⁸⁹

¹⁰⁸⁴ Glaude, Oscar A. Moods of the Caribbean. Belmont, Trinidad & Tobago: Superb Printers Limited, n.d. 8-9.

¹⁰⁸⁵ Analysing the folk presence in Haitian literature Lorenz affirmed that: “le phénomène vaudou est généralement considéré comme la principale manifestation culturelle haïtienne”. Lorenz, Denise. “Baron Samedi ou la Fleur d’Or? La Culture Populaire dans la Littérature Haïtienne.” Caribbean Writers/Les Auteurs Caribéens, Between Orality & Writing/Entre L’Oralité et L’Écriture. *Cit.* 115.

¹⁰⁸⁶ *Ibid.* 116. *Cf.* also “Pour Jean Price-Mars, le “folk-lore,” le savoir du peuple, est constitué avant tout par la tradition orale et son medium, la langue créole et par les croyances.” *Ibid.* 118. and “Rigaud fait du vaudou une description dont le caractère sensationnel et cruel n’a rien à envier aux reportages exotiques et malveillants de certains voyageurs étrangers. Cinéas, de son côté, place le vaudou en dehors des catégories morales occidentales du bien et du mal.” *Ibid.* 120-1.

¹⁰⁸⁷ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature.” *Cit.* 192.

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Ibid.* 194.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Allsopp, Jeannette. “The Contribution of Caribbean Folk Religions to Caribbean Languages with Special Reference to French and Spanish.” *Cit.* 167.

Moreover, the different religious aspects of the West Indies, assuming peculiar but similar forms in different islands, were observed by Dathorne to be close to one another and also to carry a pregnant meaning in the development of oral literatures:

If one examined the spoken ritual of santeria, brujeria, voodoo, the queh-queh (or wedding songs from Guyana), the shango shouts in Trinidad, and the songs of Pocomania and Myal in Jamaica, he would readily observe that these constitute an important body of African oral literature.¹⁰⁹⁰

Notwithstanding, the practice of obeah is not restricted to Jamaica, but extends to the other Anglophone islands and the Guyanese mainland. In fact, Allsopp reported the use of idiomatic phrases in different territories: “To play obeah on (Dominica)”; “To practice obeah (St Vincent)”; “To work obeah on (Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, Tobago, Trinidad)”.¹⁰⁹¹

A comic and ironic poem has been written by the Jamaican poet, actress, motivational speaker, TV and radio communicator Joan Andrea Hutchinson. She banters a character called “Madda Lumba”, a supposed mambo or obeah woman, who is more interested in advertising her work on the internet and in making money, than in helping people with her practices. In fact, this ‘Mother’ claims:

An mi a nuh nuh lickle pyaw pyaw obeah woman
Mi is very modernise
Travel first class, an have mi business kyard
Fully computerise

Yuh kyan reach mi pan lan phone, cellular, e-mail
Yuh does not haffi fret
An WWWMadda Lumba dot com, mi dat
For mi on di internet¹⁰⁹²

“Caw fi mi obeah wuck”¹⁰⁹³

Let us focus on obeah. It is, as I said, “the Anglicised counterpart” to *vaudou* in that there are many similarities in the two practices, yet there are also differences. When one thinks of obeah, one often associates it with evil and harm, and even more so one can liken and counterpoise it to the practice of ‘myal’. ‘Obeah’ is evil as ‘myal’ is good. According to the *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, ‘obeah’ is “The practice of malignant magic widely known in Jamaica”, and Cassidy and LePage go

¹⁰⁹⁰ Dathorne, O.R. “Oral Literature and the Reality of Africa.” *The Literature of the Black Man in the Caribbean*. Baton Rouge; London: Louisiana State University Press, 1981. 33.

¹⁰⁹¹ Allsopp, Jeannette. “The Contribution of Caribbean Folk Religions to Caribbean Languages with Special Reference to French and Spanish.” *Cit.* 172.

¹⁰⁹² Hutchinson, Joan Andrea. “Madda Lumba.” *Meck Mi Tell Yuh*. *Cit.* 43.

¹⁰⁹³ *Ibid.* 44.

on explaining that ‘myal’ “was supposedly curative of the illnesses caused by the former”,¹⁰⁹⁴ or could also be referred to “dancing with a spirit in a trance”,¹⁰⁹⁵ in fact they speak of the ‘myal dance’ performed by a ‘zombie’, a possessed person. Zeale-Hurston described a groom-to-be who kept fainting before the ceremony: Cassidy said that a herb used to revive a person in a faint could be the “myal weed”,¹⁰⁹⁶ made of rum and calalu/calaloo. But Brathwaite sustained that originally obeah does *not* deal in evil: “The principle of *obeah* is, therefore, like medical principles everywhere, the process of healing / protection through seeking out the source or explanation of the cause (*obi* / evil) of the disease of fear.”¹⁰⁹⁷ On the other hand, Gibson gave this definition of ‘obeah’:

Moore (1995, 142-43) suggests that the word “obeah” is derived from the Twi word *obeye* used to describe the *won* entity that is within the witch – that is, anything that can work but not seen [*sic*]. (...) The witch or possessor of this obeye is an obeyefu. Similarly, the Akan word for witch is obayifo.¹⁰⁹⁸

Laënnec Hurbon, instead, gave this definition of obeah and myal:

Le Myalisme et l’Obeahisme sont, comme dans le Vodou haïtien, des croyances et des pratiques de magie et de sorcellerie appuyées sur les cultes à différents «esprits», capables de se manifester chez les fidèles par des trances et des possessions, ou dans les différents éléments de la nature. La «Pukuma», ou pratique de «possession», le «catch the power», sont des rituels qui ont pu se développer librement au coeur de certaines églises baptistes.¹⁰⁹⁹

At the beginning of 1900s, Cyrus Francis Perkins narrated the runaway of a maroon slave: this is one of the first instances of West Indian narrative and what is relevant in this context is that it contains the description of a myal dance:

Preceded by the Obeah Man about fifty adults of both sexes proceeded at dead of night to this locality, several lamps having been suspended to the branches of the trees. Magungee began to play very slowly on the ‘gumba’ (a fantastic little drum), and the Myal dance commenced. The dancers were all but in a state of nudity. The obeah man had placed on a stool in the centre of the ring a coffin about a foot in length, in which was to be placed the shadow, when ‘caught’. Around this they danced. They [then] threw

¹⁰⁹⁴ Both in Cassidy, Frederic Gomes, and Robert Brock LePage. *Dictionary of Jamaican English*. *Cit.* 326.

¹⁰⁹⁵ Both *Ibid.* 313.

¹⁰⁹⁶ *Ibid.* Cf. definition. 314.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature”. *Cit.* 195. Note 10.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Gibson, Kean. *Comfa Religion and Creole Language in a Caribbean Community*. *Cit.* 16.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Hurbon, Laënnec. *Le Phénomène Religieux dans la Caraïbe: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, Haïti*. *Cit.*

themselves into the most ridiculous postures imaginable. It was impossible for the eye to follow their subtle and frantic movements.¹¹⁰⁰

The Dominican Eddie D’Pope in “Silhouette of Obeah” (*Beyond Dark Clouds*) employs apocalyptic tones and combines mixed visions from the Bible (“the seventh seal is broken”), with Christian elements of heaven (“fire, blood and human flesh”), and Indian elements (of “the flying elephants”): mixed religious references are blended in his poem on the background of which ‘obeah’ stands out.¹¹⁰¹

The colorology of the white colour emerges again in Philip Sherlock’s “Pocomania”, in which the master of ceremony is described as “Black of skin and white of gown”.¹¹⁰² But even though the rhythms of the drums, of the rattles, and the dance are needed in the rite, there is a contradictory gaining and losing of power: “Gone today and all control / Now the dead are in control”.¹¹⁰³ The poem contributes to render a sense of alienation, as also Brathwaite argued in “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature”:

The animalizing tendency betrays the mark of alienation, as in the use, for example, of the word *grunt*, instead of *trump*, to describe the deep rhythmic intake/expulsion of breath which precedes possession in Philip Sherlock’s «Pocomania».¹¹⁰⁴

Again Brathwaite observed that ‘myal’ is a “divination aspect of Afro-Caribbean religion (...) expressing, through dreams, visions, prophesying, and possession (*kumina*), what the establishment called “hysteria” and later *pocomania*: «a little madness».”¹¹⁰⁵ According to the *Dictionary of Jamaican English*, the term “Pocomania” or “Pukumina” describes a “small madness”, for it derives from Jamaican “*po*, small”, and “*kumina*, madness”, or else from “**po-*” and “*kumona*”, or again from “*po* (to shake or tremble)” and “*kòm*”, “to dance wildly in a state of frenzy”, where its prominent features are “dances wildly performed under possession by ‘ancestral spirits’, and induced catalepsy”.¹¹⁰⁶ The ‘Kumina’ rites are performed with dance and songs,¹¹⁰⁷ in fact as Kenneth Bilby wrote:

¹¹⁰⁰ Perkins, Cyrus Francis. *Busha’s Mistress or Catherine the Fugitive. A Stirring Romance of the Days of Slavery in Jamaica*. Eds. Paul E. Lovejoy, Verene A. Shepherd, David V. Trotman. Kingston; Miami: Ian Randle Publishers, 2003; 2005. 99.

¹¹⁰¹ All quotations D’Pope, Eddie. *Beyond Dark Clouds*. Roseau, Dominica: Tropical Printers Ltd., 1974. 31.

¹¹⁰² Sherlock, Philip. “Pocomania.” *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*. *Cit.* 154.

¹¹⁰³ *Ibid.* 155.

¹¹⁰⁴ Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “The African Presence in Caribbean Literature”. *Ibid.* 227.

¹¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 201. Note 23. and *Ibid.* 202. *Cf.* also Erna Brodber’s novel *Myal*.

¹¹⁰⁶ Cassidy, Frederic Gomes, and Robert Brock LePage. *Dictionary of Jamaican English*. *Cit.* 356.

Some writers have been quick to place this religion alongside the well-documented, older Afro-American religions, such as Cuban santería or Haitian vodun. (...) The evidence past quite clearly to a Central African background and a post-Emancipation origin in Jamaica. (...) The Kumina songs are sung in “Bongo” which the singers say in an African language. They offer translations into Jamaican dialect.¹¹⁰⁸

Similarly, Laënnec Hurbon recognized the importance of kumina music alongside that of reggae music in Jamaica.¹¹⁰⁹ As thus being clear with regards the African and syncretic¹¹¹⁰ origins of pocomania, there are similar references to Africanity both in Sherlock’s and Walcott’s “Pocomania”: Sherlock’s Zion becomes Walcott’s “Zion fills each eye”.¹¹¹¹ Walcott’s “De shepherd shrieves in Egyptian light”¹¹¹² is Sherlock’s “the shepherd and his flock” (155), whereas the “flock” is Walcott’s “sheep” made of “sisters” and “bredren” worshippers (31). Walcott’s description of a

¹¹⁰⁷ Brathwaite in his 1976 essay “Caribbean Man in Space and Time” judged the transcription from the recording of a Kumina Queen from Jamaica to be poetry: “the tape-transcript from a Jamaican Kumina Queen. This authentic inner plantation statement, it will be observed, attains the quality of poetry. It is my contention that it *is* poetry.” Brathwaite, Edward Kamau. “Caribbean Man in Space and Time”. Carifesta Forum. An Anthology of 20 Caribbean Voices. Ed. John Hearne. Institute of Jamaica and Jamaica Journal, 1976. 207. I think he might be referring to what has been reported later as the foreword to *The Arrivants* (1973), “Well, muh gran’parents, she teach me some of the African languages an’ the rest I get it at the cotton-tree root...I take twenty-one days to get all the balance...So I just travel right up to hey, an’ gradually come up, an’ gradually come up, until I experience all about...the African set-up...” Brathwaite, Edward. The Arrivants. A New World Trilogy. Cit.

¹¹⁰⁸ Bilby, Kenneth M., Fu-Kiau kia Bunseki. Kumina: A Kongo-Based Tradition in the New World. Bruxelles: Centre d’Etude et de Documentation Africaines – Cedaf; Afrika Studie – En Dokumentatiecentrum – Asdoc. Cahier/Studie: 8/1983; Série/reeks 4: linguistique/taalkunde. Courtesy of library of the Main Library of the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica. 1-3.

¹¹⁰⁹ “Reggae music (...) together with the Rythm’n Blues tradition, retrieves musical and instrumental elements coming from ‘kumina’: drums, grattoirs, rhythm, system of repetition and improvisation which contribute to find the language of «ancestors».” My translation of “la musique Reggae (...) à côté de la tradition du Rythm’n Blues, reprend des éléments musicaux et instrumentaux en provenance de la KUMINA : tambours, grattoirs, rythme, système de répétition et d’improvisation qui font retrouver le langage des «ancêtres».” Hurbon, Laënnec. Le Phénomène Religieux dans la Caraïbe: Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane, Haïti. Cit. 338.

¹¹¹⁰ In *The Empire Writes Back* ‘syncretism’ is defined as “a process by which previously distinct linguistic categories, and, by extension, cultural formations, merge into a single new form”. Ashcroft, Bill, Griffiths, Gareth, and Tiffin, Helen. The Empire Writes Back, Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Literatures. London and New York: Routledge, 1989. 14. This definition could be well extended to the religious aspects. Albertazzi gave the following definition of literary “syncretism”: “In the sphere of post-colonial Caribbean literature – apart from the fact that colonizers were Spanish, French or English (...) this syncretistic phenomenon gave rise to a rich literary production where an important position is held by the work of the Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier, especially with *Ecue Yamba’O*. In fact, in this work the instances are not limited to the presentation of religious syncretism typical of the Antillan environment, but they are extended also to the re-production of the language and the music which comes out of a mixture of the two cultures.” My translation of: “Nell’ambito letterario caraibico postcoloniale – a prescindere dal fatto che i colonizzatori siano stati spagnoli, francesi o inglesi (...) ditto fenomeno sincretistico ha dato luogo ad una ricca produzione letteraria dove un posto di rilievo è occupato dall’opera del cubano Alejo Carpentier, in particolare con *Ecue Yamba’O*. Infatti, in quest’opera gli esempi non si limitano alla presentazione del sincretismo religioso proprio dell’ambito antillano, ma si estendono alla riproduzione della lingua e della musica caratteristiche della mescolanza delle due culture.” Albertazzi, Silvia, and Vecchi, Roberto. Abbecedario Postcoloniale I-II. Macerata: Quodlibet, 2004. 267-268.

¹¹¹¹ Walcott, Derek. “Pocomania.” Collected Poems 1948-1984. Cit. 32. Zion is actually Sion, the symbolic place of the Promised Land (Jerusalem) for the Rastafari (cf. Bob Marley’s song “Zion Train” or to Lauryn Hill’s “To Zion”).

¹¹¹² *Ibid.* 31.

possession dance during a rite may somehow recall Sherlock's frenzied lines: "De sisters shout and lift the floods / Of skirts where bark'n'balm take root, / De bredren rattle withered gourds / Whose seeds are the forbidden fruit."¹¹¹³ The "skirts" here may also hint at a metonymy for "dance", which echoes "this jump and jive" in "Tales of the Islands", Chapter VI.

And effectively in "Tales of the Islands", Chapter V, Walcott portrayed a 'fête' in which: "They lead sheep to the rivulet with a drum, / Dancing with absolutely natural grace [...] They tie the lamb up, then chop off the head, / and ritualists take turns drinking the blood".¹¹¹⁴ According to Breslin, these lines were written to describe a sacrificial murder of a child, perpetrated in Monchy – a rural district in the island of St. Lucia – in 1902 by a man who was trying to salvage the ailing crops.¹¹¹⁵ In "Tales of the Islands" some other voodoo figures are portrayed, such as the old witch, the zombie and the werewolf. Moreover, Walcott in *Omeros* introduced the character of Ma Kilman, an obeah woman: as Hélène Laforest observed, her name is composed of "Ma" (which stands for "mother" and was an epithet used to address elder women), and "Kil man" (which is the Creole for "kill man", a word construction which implied the murders of some white plantation owners perpetrated by their slaves, usually women). Laforest also noted that "In the middle of *Omeros*, Walcott inserts the chapter dedicated to his mother Alix, who has the role of *poto-mitan*, the central pillar which sustains the ceiling of the voodoo temples."¹¹¹⁶

Conclusion

The presence of voodoo and obeah religions, beliefs and paraphernalia is overwhelming in Caribbean literature, and I have mentioned many instances drawn from poetry. Very often the case is that poets do not respect what anthropologists and scholars on comparative religions infer and are more driven by poetic licence. Nonetheless they manage to depict a comprehensive canvas of the religious situation in the Caribbean, and they challenge the reader by combining and mixing features of different gods. At other times, poets who are more scrupulous students of folklore, religions, history, and cultures – as for instance Brathwaite is – employ the poetic medium to describe rites or tools employed in religious rites. At an aesthetic level, this study has proved how poets from different islands can be analysed on the same aesthetic grounds: the religious issue

¹¹¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹¹¹⁴ Walcott, Derek. "Tales of the Islands." *Collected Poems 1948-1984*. *Cit.* 24. Whereas in "Pocomania": "The Lamb bleeds on the Coptic Cross". *Cit.* 31.

¹¹¹⁵ Cf. Breslin, Paul. "I Met History Once, but He Ain't Recognize Me': The Poetry of Derek Walcott." *TriQuarterly* 68 (Winter 1987): 168-183. and also Thieme, John. *Derek Walcott*. Manchester : Manchester UP, 1999.

¹¹¹⁶ My translation of "Al centro di *Omeros* Walcott inserisce il capitolo sulla madre, Alix, nella funzione di *poto-mitan*, il pilastro centrale che sorregge il tetto dei templi vudù." Laforest, Marie-Hélène. *La Magia delle Parole, Omeros in Derek Walcott*. *Cit.* 79.

allowed me to gather poems from the whole region of the Caribbean (and also from poets of the diaphora) and unfold them on the same socio-linguistic map. Regardless of small linguistic peculiarities, the poems have revealed a common understanding of religion and basically a shared aesthetic sense.

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