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Landscape and Genre in the Caribbean Canon: Creolizing the Poetics of Place and Paradise

— Lorna Burns

Colonialism saw not only the radical redefinition of the Caribbean population, but also the appropriation of the landscape itself by the colonial imagination and its reformulation as the site of Europe’s lost Eden. As Elizabeth DeLoughrey, Renée Gosson, and George Handley emphasise in their introduction to Caribbean Literature and the Environment (2005): ‘[o]ne finds ample testimonies from Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Fernández de Oviedo likening the Antilles to the Greek “Blessed Isles” and the earthly Paradise’ (11). Their collection represents one of the first sustained attempts to apply a postcolonial perspective to ecocriticism, arguing that ‘North American ecocritics often inscribe an idealised natural landscape that is devoid of human history and labor […]. Against the popular grain of U.S. ecocritical studies, we argue that addressing the historical and racial violence of the Caribbean is integral to understanding literary representations of its geography’ (3). The editors criticise both ecocriticism’s undervaluation of socio-historic factors and postcolonialism’s failure to fully engage with environmental issues, and, as such, the collection seeks to correct this by offering ‘a sustained ecocritical focus on the ways in which race, gender, and other social vectors help constitute environmental experience’ (5). This present essay takes up the challenge posed by DeLoughrey et al by exploring Caribbean poets’ engagement with both the landscapes of the archipelago and the political and historic forces that have shaped it. An issue is the colonial impulse to exoticise the Caribbean at the expense of a true account of the power relations that radically altered its population and ecosystems. Importantly, the accusation directed at the idealisation of landscape in current ecocritical practice by DeLoughrey et al corresponds precisely to the challenge against those colonial discourses which sought to depict the Caribbean as an idyllic, fecund paradise: both conceal historical legacies and their role in shaping both environment and people.

This essay traces the impulse to identify the Caribbean landscape with paradisiacal or Edenic imagery from the foundational texts of the Caribbean canon, such as James Grainger’s *The Sugar Cane* (1764) and works by the pre-1930s poets J. E. Clare McFarlane, Tom Redcam, H. S. Bunbury, which clearly proclaim their affinity to the European perspective that sought to erase the hardships of plantation life by evoking the lazy languor of life in the tropics, through to the forceful appraisal of the idealising gaze of the coloniser/tourist in the poems of Una Marson and Aimé Césaire. Yet despite the ideological discrepancies between these poets that this suggests, each displays a concern not only to imaginatively engage with their environment but also to challenge Europe’s right to narrate the colonised land as well as its claim as the imperial cultural centre. It is this particular engagement...
that runs consistently through the Caribbean canon, but which also intersects with another important Caribbean term: creolization. Understood as a process of adaptation or synthesis in response to relocation in the New World, patterns of creolization emerge in Caribbean texts as European genres and literary tropes are imaginatively transplanted in the Americas. In particular, it is those genres that evoke the Edenic or paradisiacal mindset, such as the pastoral and georgic, that this essay explores as a creolization of poetic representations of place and paradise. This process of creolization, of relocating familiar literary conceits to the New World, begins in the Caribbean in 1764 and the publication of what Brathwaite has referred to as ‘the picturesque poem par excellence’ (137): James Grainger’s *The Sugar-Cane*.

Grainger’s didactic poem, *The Sugar-Cane*, offers a unique contribution to the Caribbean canon: ‘a West-India [sic] georgic’ (Grainger 90). Grainger was a Scotsman by birth and a graduate of Edinburgh University where he studied medicine. As John Gilmore suggests, exact dates concerning Grainger’s life are difficult to trace, however, it would seem that he arrived in the Caribbean island of St. Kitts (St. Christopher) in 1759, where he worked as a doctor and married into a prominent creole family. It is, however, his literary ambition and, in particular, his poem *The Sugar-Cane*, that suggests Grainger, as David Dabydeen has argued, is ‘the “Father” of Caribbean literature’ (1513), by merit of the fact that *The Sugar-Cane* was the first, pre-twentieth century text from the Anglophone Caribbean to assume a place within the Western canon. Notable in Grainger’s poem, however, is his attempt to relocate the georgic tradition to the Caribbean. As would be expected, *The Sugar-Cane* is a didactic poem, with the chief intention of informing its readers of the best methods and practice of sugar cane cultivation, as is clear from the opening lines:

What soil the Cane affects; what care demands;
Beneath what signs to plant; what ills awaite;
How the hot nectar best to christallize;
And Afric’s sable progeny to treat (92).

Grainger covers all aspects of sugar production: from planting and cultivation, to the management of slaves and refining. In this respect Grainger is following the model established by Virgil’s *Georgics*, and popular contemporary works such as William Somerville’s *The Chace* (1735), Christopher Smart’s *The Hop-Garden* (1752), John Dyer’s *The Fleece* (1757), and James Thomson’s *The Seasons* (1730). Grainger’s poem, however, is a ‘West India georgic’, and this has several implications for the way in which Western influences can be read.

The title page of *The Sugar-Cane* features a Latin epigraph from Marcus Manilius’s *Astronomica*: ‘and I am the first to attempt to stir with new songs Helicon and its green-topped, nodding woods, bringing strange mysteries, proclaimed
by none before me' (23). Reading this epigraph against the content of the poem, the Grecian mountain range on which temples to both Apollo and the Muses were built, is reimagined as a cane field; confirming, Gilmore notes, Grainger's belief that 'the cultivation of the sugarcane is a dignified and suitable subject for poetry' (24). Within *The Sugar-Cane* itself, this conviction is reasserted:

Such, green St. Christopher, thy happy soil! –
Not Grecian Tempé, where Arcadian Pan,
Knit with the Graces, tun’d his silvan pipe,
While mute Attention hush’d each charmed rill;
Not purple Enna, whose irriguous lap,
Straw’d with each fruit of taste, each flower of small,
Sicilian Prosperpine, delighted, sought;
Can vie, blest Isle, with thee (93).

Grainger evokes classical mythology and traditional Arcadian imagery that would have been familiar to contemporary readers. By suggesting that these classical images cannot compete, or 'vie', with the fertile, 'happy soil' of St. Kitts, Grainger is elevating the status of a minor region of the British Empire to equal that of Ancient Greece, and suggesting it as a subject equally worthy of poetry. It is in this process, Dabydeen reminds us, that, two centuries later, Derek Walcott develops in *Omeros* (1990), a work that revises previous representations of Caribbean history and landscape, 'converting abandoned islands and plantations into the stuff of poetry' (1514). Grainger's *The Sugar-Cane* is, then, the beginning of a process of re-evaluating the relationship between the Caribbean writer, the landscape, and the colonial legacies that affect both.

Whereas twentieth-century Caribbean authors such as Édouard Glissant promote the reclamation of the land by Caribbean peoples, Grainger never questions the fact of British ownership. *The Sugar-Cane* is a celebration of creole plantation society: its purpose to offer the planter the best possible advice for the production of sugar. Gilmore notes that Grainger was desirous of literary fame (21), and the Caribbean appeared to Grainger to offer a unique opportunity for the poetic imagination. As Grainger writes in his preface:

>[s]oon after my arrival in the West-Indies, I conceived the design of writing a poem on the cultivation of the Sugar-Cane. My inducements to this arduous undertaking were, not only the importance and novelty of the subject, but more especially this consideration; that, as the face of this country was wholly different from that of Europe, so whatever hand copied its appearance, however rude, could not fail to enrich poetry with many new and picturesque images (89).
Grainger identifies the Caribbean as both wholly different to Europe and novel, which is to say that it is new in terms of what is commonly depicted in literature. In this sense, Grainger identifies in the Caribbean precisely what Alejo Carpentier’s concept of the ‘marvellous real’ finds in the Americas: newness. Moreover, just as Carpentier’s concept of the marvellous has been criticised by Roberto González Echevarría because it depends on the identification of the Caribbean as other – the perspective of the coloniser (128) – in the same way, by defining the landscape of St. Kitts as wholly different, Grainger is similarly maintaining the colonial perspective. Further, Grainger’s claim that the Caribbean is a particularly fertile ground for the literary imagination, so much so that any ‘hand’ could draw poetry from the surroundings, suggests a careless ease with which poetry may be produced, and in doing so recalls the coloniser’s misunderstanding of the fecundity of the Caribbean environment: ‘for the soil rejoices [...] and never reject[s] anything that you throw in it; it accepts nothing without giving it back much more abundantly’ (Nicolò Scillacio cited by DeLoughrey et al 6). The engagement with the landscape that The Sugar-Cane imagines, then, is one in which the coloniser’s perspective and ownership of the land is confirmed. Grainger’s achievement is not Caribbean, or even creole, repossessing, but rather should be remembered as his determination to celebrate the peripheries of the Empire, and its landscape, as worthy of literature.

The difference between Grainger’s representation of the Caribbean landscape and that of the twentieth-century canon is explicit in the following example. In Book Four of The Sugar-Cane, Grainger discusses the treatment of slaves, and in particular, draws a comparison between British and Spanish practices:

How far more happy ye, than those poor slaves,
Who, whilom, under native, gracious chiefs,
Incas and emperors, long time enjoy’d
Mild government, with every sweet of life,
In blissful climates? See them dragg’d in chains,
By proud insulting tyrants, to mines
Which once they call’d their own, and then despis’d!
See, in the mineral bosom of their land,
How hard they toil! [...] 
[...]

With these compar’d, ye sons of Afric, say,
How far more happy is your lot? Bland health,
Of ardent eye, and limb robust, attends
Your custom’d labour; and, should sickness seize,
With what solicitude are ye not nurs’d! –
Ye Negroes, then, your pleasing task pursue;
And, by your toil, deserve your master’s care (150-1).
This is, as Gilmore suggests, an opportunity taken to disparage the Spanish ('proud insulting tyrants'), comparing their treatment of the Amerindians with the benevolent, British slave owner (294). However, the distinction that is drawn is not only between two rival colonial powers, but also between Amerindian and African slaves. What is notable in this passage is that the particular insult felt by the Amerindians is the fact that they are slaves in their own land. The reference to the Spanish as 'proud insulting tyrants', can, therefore, be read as an allusion to the offence of forcing the native population to mine their own resources for a foreign power. The African slaves, on the other hand, are 'fortunate' not only because they have compassionate masters, but also, extending the comparison that the poem establishes, because they do not belong to the land¹. Therefore, whereas Glissant writes specifically in Caribbean Discourse (1989) with the aim to imagine a connection between the Caribbean landscape and the population in the production of a new, creolized Caribbean identity, The Sugar-Cane must be read apart from such a move: the land belongs only to the coloniser and all engagements with the land are regulated by that fact.

The potential within The Sugar-Cane, then, lies in the way it disturbs Western expectations of the georgic poem and the Caribbean landscape, and as such, Grainger points the way towards a creolizing meeting of literary legacies. However, the possibility of locating the beginnings of creolized identities in The Sugar-Cane is made impossible by the fact that colonial possession of the land is absolute and there is no space for the transported population to make the Caribbean land their own. Yet, while The Sugar-Cane represents an idealisation of one form of society (plantation), it is tempered by the recognition of disease and hardship: as Steven Thomas argues, 'Grainger's poem was not merely a Georgic idyll that naturalized or nationalized the plantation, because that idyll is in the future, and the present was not so idyllic' (102). In the 1900-1929 era, Caribbean poetry continued to utilize European-derived literary representations of parasitical landscapes at the expense of the diseased reality that Grainger's poem remains aware of². For example, Jamaican-creole poet J. E. Clare McFarlane offers in his poem, 'My Country' (1929), a nationalistic expression of an idealised native land that slips easily into Western-inspired Edenic discourse. Whereas Césaire's later depiction of his native land in Notebook of a Return to My Native Land (1939) presents Martinique as 'desolate bedsore on the wound of the waters’ and revealed 'At the brink of dawn’, the 'screeches of prattling parrots' (73), McFarlane envisions a very different landscape: 'I have felt thy breath/Moist with the mountain-dew, and seen thy face/Aflush with Eden's earliest dawn' (50). Recalling his childhood experiences, McFarlane depicts Jamaica as a nourishing mother from whose resources the poet's 'dawning consciousness' (50) has benefited. However, this description is far removed from the harsh realities of plantation life:
[...] well do I recall
Thy first sweet favour, my first love: a flower,
Star-like and tender, whose perfumèd breath
Wafted my soul into the enchanted land
Of dreams and fairies (51).

In the course of his poem, McFarlane does make reference to 'thy hidden pain' (51) and 'burden of thy grief' (52) in connection with his native land, suggesting that whereas Jamaica was once idyllic in the poet's childhood, in adulthood he recognises a troubling aspect. However, the poem's celebratory ending - 'see thee stand triumphant on the heights/Steadfast like thine own mountain-range and flush'd/
With the bright splendour of a new-born day' (52) - suggests that, ultimately, the state of grief is one to be overcome and 'the o'erpowering harmony' (52) and poet's romantic outlook will prevail.

Another Jamaican, Tom Redcam (born Thomas MacDermot) offers a similarly idyllic portrait in 'My Beautiful Home' (1929). Once again, the poem is organised around the poet's expression of love for his native land - 'I sing of the Island I love/Jamaica, the land of my birth' - then focuses emphatically on an idealised vision of nature - 'kissed by the white-gleaming foam/And fanned by the balm of the breeze' (45). Again, like McFarlane, the poet's idealism is briefly offset by the recognition of nature's dark side:

I sing of the cloud reaching height,
Of the roar of the wind-waving wood,
Of the torrent descending in might,
Of the sweep of the swift-gleaming flood (45).

Redcam hints here of nature's destructive tendency in the form of hurricane or flood. However, these factors remain part of his 'song'. Any suggestion of a fearful reality is, therefore, subsumed by the main thrust of the poem, which is to celebrate the 'sublime' (45) elements of Jamaica.

A final example of the prevalence of Edenic discourse in this era may be found in H. S. Bunbury's 'The Spell of the Tropics' (1929), which depicts an idyllic Caribbean evening - the time of the day at which 'the spell of the tropics is deepest/Most subtle and sweet their power' (56). Unlike both Redcam and McFarlane, this poem imagines the position of the coloniser idealising the conquered land, characterising the island as 'mistress' to 'that northern lover' who 'holds them [...] /In the innermost shrines of his heart' (56), but in doing so ultimately confirms the relocation of Eden:
From beyond the mist-ridden horizons
Of his pallid tempestuous shies,
For that Eden of palms and of moonlight,
And the ocean of love where it lies,
Comes an ache of an infinite longing
That is set to a cadence of sighs (56).

Within Bunbury's poem, as with McFarlane and Redcam, the portrait offered of the Caribbean is as an idealised, Edenic space far removed from the realities of plantation life. To this list might be added Mary Adella Wolcott's 'Busha's Song' (1929), Astley Clerk's 'Islets Mid Silver Seas' (1929), or Eva Nicholas's 'A Country Idyll' (1929), all of which contribute to this early canon of Caribbean literature and its idealising/paradisiacal discourse.

The absence of plantation life in the works of the 1900-1929 era overlook the significant social and ecological impact that industrialisation was having on the natural world. Focusing on Grainger's subject, Antonio Benítez-Rojo's 'Sugar and the Environment in Cuba' replicates the desire to relocate Eden in the New World. The essay opens to a pre-temporal scene, 'in the Creation's Fifth Day', as the author casts his eye over his native land: '[m]y look slows down to take in all of Eden's landscapes: Cuba before Good and Evil' (33). However, this Edenic vision is quickly undermined by an account of industrialization and deforestation caused by the sugar industry. From the first settlements of Tinos, through the 'Creole Machine' of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and the contemporary 'Republican Machine', exploitation of Cuba's natural resources has reduced forest coverage from seventy-two percent in 1518 to just eight percent by the 1960s. Within representations of the Caribbean as paradise, whether that be in the early accounts of Columbus, the poetry of early twentieth-century Caribbean poets, or the more recent touristic myopia, there is no room for an eco-consciousness: 'Cuba is part of the Caribbean basin, the Gates of Paradise that, moved and marvelling, the first European explorers and chroniclers described. Today, nevertheless, the archipelago's ecosystems are fighting for their lives' (49). Myths of the Caribbean's Edenic status come into conflict with environmental issues precisely because they seek to mask the exploitation which lay behind the European presence in the New World, and as a result contemporary writers have sought to challenge the notion of returning to an original state of nature and pioneer DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley's project: to address the historical realities that lie behind idealised representations of landscape.

The conflation of Eden and the Caribbean not only disguised the exploitation of its resources, but also the power relations that existed between coloniser and colonised. Derek Walcott makes this point as he draws a comparison between the figures of Adam and Crusoe, both of whom are faced with the need to adapt to their New World environment. In this situation, Walcott argues, the coloniser, Crusoe,
has to create a different kind of identity for himself: ‘on his island [Crusoe] doesn’t know the names of the plants that he is living among. He doesn’t know the names of the natives that he may find there. So he renames them, probably from what he already knows […] by associating what he is looking at with another image from the old world’ (Handley 134). This renaming has a great deal of significance for the relationship between the Caribbean and its image as Europe’s Edenic paradise: it is the repetition of an already established discursive practice, and by reframing the Caribbean in the discourses of Eden, the coloniser forces the landscape to signify through an imposed, foreign order. Adam, on the other hand, ‘really has to begin from the immediate surroundings that are there’ (Handley 134). Walcott does, of course, recognise the ideological perspective with which Crusoe is aligned: a discrepancy that draws him closer to Adam as the archetypal figure of the New World poet, with one crucial qualification: that by reverting to Adam, the importance of historical legacy is not diminished. As Walcott argues, ‘the idea of Adam contains original sin. I am talking about someone looking at a morning that is unspoiled, not devastated by any means, and the feeling that one can rechristen things, rename things’ (Handley 133). The past is a given: what Walcott imagines is a representation of the Caribbean landscape that does not rely exclusively on established European modes, though it remains aware of them, and as such, DeLoughrey et al note, envisions a poetics that gives authors a ‘more originary claim to the significance of their landscapes in a way that destabilizes the colonial gaze’ (11). Importantly, the destabilization of ‘the colonial gaze’ is not effected by merely giving ‘new names for old things, or old names for old things, but the faith of using the old names anew’ (Walcott 9). Walcott envisions the creolization of ‘old names’ as they are brought into relation with new contexts and environments. What is significant here is that the challenge to colonial idealisations of the landscape does not erase the legacy of slavery and colonialism, ‘original sin’. Rather, Walcott’s New World poet challenges colonial discourse by adapting ‘old words’, giving them new significance: that which the coloniser has seen through established terms (Eden, for example), becomes distorted as it is forced to signify in new, slightly different ways: effectively a process of creolization.

Walcott’s vision of the New World poet foregrounds the primacy of creolization as adaptation to the Caribbean environment, but also as a discourse that circles around the idealistic image of Eden/paradise. As I argued, early creole poets such as McFarlane, Redcam, and Bunbury utilized such imagery to reproduce an idyllic vision of the Caribbean that often neglected the realities of plantation life. Nevertheless, the works of these poets remain the foundation of the contemporary Caribbean canon, and the twentieth-century poets and theorists that the remainder of this essay will discuss, have all produced works that return to the paradiisiacal vision characteristic of the early canon in order to redress the biases expressed. In doing so, the importance of landscape to the Caribbean imagination is reconfirmed, not as a site of unspoilt beauty, but as a model for a contemporary, creolized reality.
Paradisiacal tropes are themselves subject to a process of creolization as they are forced to relate in new ways to Caribbean life and the historical legacies that shape it.

In the 1930s Caribbean literature and, in particular, the works of Una Marson begin to distance themselves from expressly paradisiacal imagery and present a more apparent challenge to the inherited European canon. For example, Marson’s poem, ‘Jamaica’ (1930), in the first instance, appears to confirm the traditional pastoral vision. Recalling the classicism of Grainger, Marson evokes ‘the Muse’ to inspire her account of her ‘lovely Island’, and the verses that follow resound with the paradisiacal vision offered by McFarlane et al:

And when Diana rising o’er yon hill
Sheds her pale light, while all the earth is still,
Ah, then, what bliss to wander hand in hand
Like lovers ‘neath the bowers in Fairyland (130).

Donnell and Lawson suggest that resistance to the English pastoral may be found in Marson’s ‘positive inversion’ of the snowy English landscape – ‘No fields and streams are covered o’er with snow’ (130) – but that this is ultimately undermined by the poem’s recourse to Eurocentric views and ‘fashioning of the Jamaican climate as “one long summer”’ (Donnell 119). However, there is some resistance to colonial discourse to be found in this representation of the Jamaican landscape. In the opening line Marson refers to Jamaica as ‘Island of the Western Sea’, and later as ‘Fair Island of the West’ (130). Whether the term is meant to emphasize that Jamaica lies to the west of Europe (alluding, perhaps, to Columbus’s mistake), or, more likely given the capitalization, that Jamaica belongs to the West, either way the island is being read from the Western point of view, and, as such, the poem can be seen to ironically expose the idealising gaze of the coloniser.

Marson’s critique becomes more express in her poem ‘In Jamaica’ (1931), which once again employs an ironic register as she presents a sun-drenched paradise where ‘the darkies smile on in Jamaica / And whistle or sing all the day’ (131). However, this allows her to introduce an aspect of social criticism:

O! it’s a glorious life in Jamaica
For the man who has merely enough,
But it’s a dreary life for the beggars,
And the large slums are all pretty rough.
It’s a gay life too for the children
Not poor, and whose skin is light,
But the darker set are striving
And facing a very stiff fight (131).
Within this paradise there is division between rich and poor, black and white. The pleasant ‘lazy life’ suggested in the opening stanza, gives way to an image of slums and a fight for survival. The Western tourist’s point of view, in particular, comes under criticism in the following stanza:

O, it’s a wonderful life in Jamaica
For the tourists who visit this shore,
There’s golf, there’s dancing, and swimming,
And charms that they ne’er saw before.
They call it a garden of Eden,
They love the fair hills of St. Ann,
And they say on the white sand of Mo. Bay
They get such a wonderful tan! (131)

Eden forms part of the tourist’s perspective, a lens through which the Caribbean is viewed, but one that stands in complete contrast to Marson’s reference to the slums and poverty that lies behind the tourist’s world of golf and sunbathing. As such, Marson’s poem represents what Donnell terms (in reference to the later poems of Olive Senior) a ‘politicism of the pastoral’ (103) that draws attention to Western biases and critiques the view of the Caribbean as paradise. Marson’s poetry, then, marks an engagement with tradition that revises the biases on which those traditions have been founded.

By acknowledging the poverty behind the tourist’s view, Marson offers what Edward Said has identified as a ‘contrapuntal reading’ (78): that is to say a re-reading of a text, or in this case, a tradition of representing the Caribbean as paradise, that acknowledges the relations of power that lie behind it. This is the difference between Grainger’s revision of the georig in The Sugar-Cane, which disturbs the expectations of his British readers, but nevertheless confirms the colonial relationship, and Marson’s politicisation of the pastoral, which challenges the exploitative relationships that inform representations of the Caribbean as paradise. To read The Sugar-Cane contrapuntally would necessarily involve a reassessment of the poem in light of its unquestioning acceptance of British rule, but also the economic and ecological problems that the sugar industry has created in the contemporary Caribbean. Tropicalising a literary tradition is not the equivalent of creolizing the canon: Grainger’s ‘West-India georig’ may point the way towards a postcolonial dialogue with tradition, but a properly creolized landscape aesthetic involves a much more radical engagement. The challenge to mythologized landscapes must be seen to recognise the ways in which land and people are defined in relation to historical circumstances. Yet, this awareness of historicity is not the same as
establishing a community’s legitimate claim to a particular land: as DeLoughrey et al comment, ‘[t]he destabilizing of atavistic origins inevitably provides a framework for discussing hybridity and creolization’ (16). Accordingly, the rejection of origin is a fundamental priority to the model of creolization established by Glissant in Caribbean Discourse, in which dispossession results not from alienation from the ‘motherland’ or the site of pure origins, but the historical inability for Martinicans to discover their island.

In the writings of Glissant, there is a concerted attempt to debunk nostalgic longings for Edenic landscapes, such as those articulated by McFarlane, Redcam, and Bunbury, but also a rejection of all forms of discourse that celebrate pure racial or cultural origins. In Caribbean Discourse, Glissant views the impulse to identify with a primordial source, or ‘the longing for the ideal of history’ (79), as directly related to a linear ordering of history that relegates the Caribbean to the margins: ‘it is a matter of learning the natural Genesis, the primordial slime, the Eternal Garden, and embarking [...] on a journey to an ordering-knowledge’ (73). Thus to impose upon a landscape a myth of genesis is to force it into an alien and stifling notion of time and legitimacy that does not correspond to Caribbean reality:

our diverse histories in the Caribbean have produced today another revelation: that of their subterranean convergence [...] The implosion of Caribbean history (of the converging histories of our people) relieves us of the linear, hierarchical vision of a single History that would run its unique course. It is not this History that has roared at the edges of the Caribbean, but actually a question of the subterranean convergence of our histories. The depths are not only the abyss of neurosis but primarily the site of multiple converging paths (66).

History, for Glissant, is not only the combined result of the collective experience, but, more importantly, it is inextricably linked to the ‘subterranean’ landscape on which the collective exists. Glissant’s rejection of pure origins and Edenic imagery, then, is not a disavowal of the importance of landscape to the literary imagination. On the contrary, the relationship with the land

becomes so fundamental in this discourse that landscape in the work stops being merely decorative or supportive and emerges as a full character. Describing the landscape is not enough. The individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process (105-6).
If, as Glissant argues in *Faulkner, Mississippi* (1996), composite cultures such as the Caribbean utilize a different kind of genesis mythology to imagine their relationship with the land on which they co-exist — a ‘digeneity’, as he terms it — then landscape plays a fundamental role in the articulation of such discourse.

Where Glissant embraces the natural world as a creative force, other Caribbean theorists, such as Antonio Benítez-Rojo, reject the potential of landscape to offer a fruitful site for the postcolonial consciousness in favour of the chaos and carnival of the city. Like Benítez-Rojo, Glissant similarly celebrates notions of disorder, but finds the exemplary model for this in the ‘convulsive, unregimented’ (Dash ‘Introduction’ xv), baroque extravagance of the Caribbean landscape. For both theorists, the major challenge to linearity and Western-privileging historical discourses clearly presents itself in the idea of disorder, yet, whereas Benítez-Rojo in *The Repeating Island* (1992) bases his vision of Caribbean identity in what Silvio Torres-Saillant might regard as, the Western-imported concept of chaos theory, Glissant finds his framework for creolization in the unregulated, non-hierarchical relations characteristic of his native landscape. Moreover, Benítez-Rojo’s field of chaos designates the replication of features, in which, as he argues:

> every repetition is a practice that necessary entails a difference and a step toward nothingness (according to the principle of entropy proposed by thermodynamics in the last century); however, in the midst of this irreversible change, Nature can produce a figure as complex, as highly organized, and as intense, as the one that the human eye catches when it sees a quivering hummingbird drinking from a flower (*Repeating 3*).

This statement reveals the fundamental discrepancy between Benítez-Rojo’s chaos theory and Glissant’s creolization: the principles of entropy, as Glissant’s precessor as a poet of relation, Victor Segalen forcefully argued, designates an inevitable progression to lukewarm uniformity: the end of diversity and the triumph of the same. The complex relations that the natural world offers, by Glissant’s account, do not threaten to progress towards ‘nothingness’, but signify an ever changing, endlessly opaque model of difference and creolization.

The vision of chaos that Benítez-Rojo finds in the city space surfaces in Glissant’s untamed landscape of the Caribbean, which is presented in *Caribbean Discourse* as directly contrasting to the idealistic vision of early New World poets such as McFarlane, Redcam, and Bunbury. Clearly evoking the pastoral sensibility that these poets represent, Glissant writes: ‘the language of my landscape is primarily that of the forest, which unceasingly bursts with life. I do not practice the economy of the meadow, I do not share the serenity of the spring’ (146). Dash identifies the key link between Glissant’s language of the forest and the imagin-
ing of community when he argues that, for Glissant, nature is not ‘simply décour consentant [consenting scenery] or pathetic fallacy. Land is central to the process of self-possession’ (‘Introduction’ xxxv). In Glissant’s poetic vision, the landscape becomes the ‘subterranean’ site on which the collective’s experiences converge, and find the model for their diverse, creolizing existence. However, if it is the case that Glissant’s postcolonial landscape aesthetic is created specifically in opposition to a European one (evoked by ‘spring’ and ‘meadow’), this is problematic: it merely reinscribes the binaries which constructed the colonial self and landscape as other. Glissant avoids this trapping through his use of creolization theory, which in his writings takes the form of the ‘cross-cultural imagination’, or, to adopt Brathwaite’s phrase, ‘submarine roots’:

We are the roots of a cross-cultural relationship.
Submarine roots: that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches.

We, thereby, live, we have the good fortune of living, this shared process of cultural mutation, this convergence that frees us from uniformity (Caribbean 67).

This world-vision of cross-cultural relationships is an intermingling of experiences that is exemplified in Glissant’s conceptualisation of the Caribbean landscape. It deconstructs the notion of essentialised categories of identity with its focus on instability and flux, rejecting entirely the possibility, or even longing for, pure racial and cultural origins:

creolization demonstrates that henceforth it is no longer valid to glory ‘unique’ origins that the race safeguards and prolongs [...] . To assert that peoples are creolized, that creolization has value, is to deconstruct in this way the category of ‘creolized’ that is considered as halfway between two ‘pure’ extremes (Caribbean 140).

Thus a cross-cultural poetics rejects the colonial desire to locate a myth of genesis, or prelapsarian innocence in the Caribbean island-space. This does not mean that a Caribbean individual should deny his status as heir to both European and African traditions; rather, Glissant argues, ‘[h]e must recognise’ his heritage while understanding that ‘another reality has come about’, a cross-cultural identity in which both African and European elements coexist through a synthesis in which ‘each element is enriched’ (Caribbean 8). A creolizing poetics, then, rejects essentialist positioning; avoids the use of creationist myths of pure origins; and favours fluid, unstable notions of identity and character that are viewed as inseparable from the landscape and community in which they are entangled. And, above all, it is a landscape aesthetic drawn from an honestly realized representation of Caribbean
community and environment, not the exotizing imagination of the coloniser or tourist, that Glissant values, the model for which he finds in the poetry of fellow Martinican, Aimé Césaire and, in particular, his *Notebook of a Return to My Native Land*.

From the outset, Césaire clearly attempts to debunk exoticist imaginings of Martinique as Edenic paradise. The opening line which is repeated throughout, ‘At the brink of dawn’, suggests a lost point of origin and innocence, an image which is destroyed in the description of the island as a ‘desolate bed sore on the wound of the waters’, where ‘flowers of blood’ wither, not bloom, and the ‘screeches of prattling parrots’ resound (73). As Mireille Rosello points out, ‘the resulting vision [of the island] is unexpectedly violent and sordid. The native land of the *Notebook* is a sick paradise […]'. The picture of a cane-cutter crushed to death by a locomotive or “the suddenly grave animality of a peasant urinating on her feet, her stiff legs parted” ruthlessly shatters the idealised version of the pastoral peasantry' (57). Césaire’s imagery may certainly offend the pastoral vision of McFarlane, Redcam and Bunbury, However, in doing so, it fills the space that J. M. Coetzee argues is wanting in the pastoral vision: the place of the black labourer. For both Césaire and Glissant the recognition of the black peasant is key to the proposed new relationship between self, community, and landscape. And, as Glissant would argue, such an aesthetic must necessarily include deprivation: ‘[t]he world is ravaged, entire peoples die of famine or are exterminated […]'. These are part of the everyday realities that a cross-cultural poetics must take into consideration’ (*Caribbean* 254).

Césaire’s rejection of discourses that attempt to revere an idealised landscape turns its criticism briefly towards those ‘madly idiotic attempts to resuscitate the splash of gold of privileged moments, the umbilical cord restored to its frail splendour’, which do not lead to any solution (a ‘diversion’ that leads nowhere, for Glissant), but only ‘making me aware of my present misery’ (79). In this case, the veneration of a fantasy landscape only extenuates the current state of decay of the ‘real’ land and does nothing to relieve that situation. While the fantasy continues, the native land remains fixed as a diseased, base space in which even the stars have no resonance: ‘At the brink of dawn, the great immobile night, the stars deader than a burst baleful’ (79).

*Notebook*, however, does not reject ‘reversion’ or the notion of return outright; rather, as Glissant argues, it authorizes ‘by diversion the necessary return to the point where our problems lay in wait for us’ (*Caribbean* 25). Glissant’s *Caribbean Discourse* is clear that forms of diversion that overcome the limitations of a ‘strategy of trickery’ (22) and authorize a return to the native land, can potentially lead towards creolization. *Notebook* offers a degree of this promise insofar as, despite its close association with négritude, the poem is structured around an imaginative return to the native land, not to Africa:

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we have never been amazons of the King of Dahomey, nor princes of Ghana [...] We do not feel the itch of those who used to hold the spear in our armpits. And since I have sworn to suppress nothing in our history [...], I will admit that for as long as I can remember we have always been quite pathetic dishwashers, shoeshiners with no ambition, looking on the bright side, rather conscientious witch-doctors, and the only undeniable record we ever broke was at endurance under the whip (105).

Césaire’s sense of irony is tangible here as he veers between the stereotypes of the noble savage and the happy slave. Importantly, while Glissant’s critique of négritude is grounded on the fact that it seeks to return to a state before the historical fact of slavery, in the above extract, by contrast, Césaire’s poetic vision is clearly historicised: the stereotypes themselves function metonymically for the processes of colonization and enslavement that have marked his native land and people. Notebook engages, then, not so much with an abstracted notion of Africa, but with Martinique: ‘the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away’ (Glissant Caribbean 26).

Reintegration with a historically situated Martinique drives the speaker to confront the sick paradise rendered in the poem. Establishing a model that Glissant would adopt for his own novel The Ripening (1958), Dash argues that ‘Césaire presents a dense field of relationships that allows the individual consciousness to grow with the discovery of landscape’ (‘Introduction’ xxvi). It is this unique relationship between individual and landscape, where the process of self-awareness and a renewed consciousness is directly linked with the space in which that consciousness exists, that is essential to Glissant’s fiction and essays. Césaire’s Notebook begins to formulate a new understanding of the process by which identities can be formed in relation to landscape, and, to this end, Césaire’s poem traces the growth of consciousness in relation to the rediscovery of the native land. This process is initiated as the poem’s narrator starts to identify features of the landscape within himself: ‘So much blood in my memory! In my memory are lagoons. They are covered with death’s heads. They are not covered with water lilies. In my memory are lagoons’ (101). Here the relationship between the landscape, the collective’s history (here the legacy of slavery and colonialism), and the individual consciousness is formed, shedding light on Glissant’s assertion that ‘[o]ur landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history’ (Caribbean 11). Not only is landscape the process through which present identities are formed, but it is a tool for the recollection of the community’s past. This association is continued in Notebook as the narrator, celebrating the ‘strange pride’ (111) he feels growing within him, proclaims that ‘my négritude is neither a tower nor a cathedral/it reaches deep down into the red flesh of the soil/it reaches into the blazing flesh of the sky’ (115). Once again, but more forcefully, the poem asserts
that Martinican identities are inextricably linked to the soil and sky of their native land, and once more this land is expressed in painfully humanised terms: a process that culminates in the perfect unity of the speaker and his native land:

And now we are standing, my country and I, hair in the wind, my hand small now in its enormous fist and strength is not within us, but above us in a voice piercing the night and the audience like the penetrance of an apocalyptic wasp. And the voice pronounces the Europe has been stuffing us with lies and bloating us with pestilence for centuries (125).

This passage marks the unity between the individual consciousness (the ‘I’ of the poem), the landscape, and the polyphonic expression of the community that is sounded both in the various histories told in the course of the poem and here as the great voice from above.

Césaire’s development of paradisiacal tropes may be read alongside the poetry of Marson as a further expression and critique of the pastoral vision that was appropriated and creolised by Grainger, Bunbury, McFarlane, and Redcam. These poets of the early canon paved the way towards the more nuanced creolization theory of Glissant by relocating European genres and paradisiacal tropes to a Caribbean context and environment: grounding their poetics, Glissant might argue, not in some ideal elsewhere, but ‘the point of entanglement’, the Caribbean. However, Marson and Césaire expose the deficiencies of the early canon by contrapuntally highlighting the true extent of deprivation and exploitation of both people and land during colonisation. This much Glissant acknowledges as he too insists that a poetics of creolization begins with an engagement with the native land, not elevated to the status of unspoilt origin, but honestly realised. Césaire remains an important influence in this respect; however, Notebook remains problematic insofar as although the poem recognises the historically situated reality of the Caribbean environment, ultimately, Césaire seeks to return his native land to a form of original purity, albeit in the Caribbean and not Africa. Dash makes this point when he argues that ‘the most important neologism in his epic Cahier is not the word “négritude” but, rather, “verrification”, the word that brings the poem to a close’ (‘Anxious’ 293). Translations of this key term differ: Eshleman and Smith adopt ‘verrification’ from the Latin verb ‘verri’ (to sweep or scrape a surface) (Notebook 148-9), whereas Rosello’s own translation of ‘verrification’, ‘revolvolution’ (135), encapsulates the full force of the clearing envisioned by Césaire by associating it with ‘revolution’; while, the sense of movement offered in ‘verrification’ – both in the verb ‘veer’ and the action implied by the suffix – is present in the association with ‘revolve’. These important connotations, Dash argues, ‘ha[ve] much to do with Césaire’s poetics of erasure and pure origins [...]. His poem ends, therefore, with the fiery tongue of the night, spurring out of the reanimated volcano, destroying the past and creating the ground for a
new world space' ('Anxious' 293). Later, Césaire rearticulates his vision. In Discourse on Colonialism (1950) he writes: 'the problem is not to make a utopian and sterile attempt to repeat the past, but to go beyond. It is not a dead society that we want to revive. We leave that to those who go in for exoticism. Nor is it the present colonial society that we wish to prolong [...]. It is a new society that we must create' (31). In order to meet Glissant’s requirements, however, this new society must not be founded on the clearing away of past and present Martinique, but a creolization of that impure and diverse origin.

The apocalyptic vision with which the poem closes, then, returns to a politics of what Glissant terms reversion – 'the obsession with a single origin' and the possibility of an immutable and 'absolute state of being' (Caribbean 16) – as Césaire conceives of the potential to circle back (revolve) to a pure, unspoilt condition (albeit a future potentiality, as Arnold notes [168]). The Caribbean, not Africa, becomes the location of absolute origin and legitimizing genesis. Although this conforms to Glissant’s demand to return to the point of entanglement, it problematically creates, as Dash argues, a 'sovereign territory on which a new social order can be grounded' ('Anxious' 293). What Notebook effects, then, is a legitimizing mythology and unique founding moment of the community’s genesis, as opposed to a composite culture’s digenesis. By envisioning a state beyond historicity and clearing a completely new, blank space Notebook limits the potential of creolization which functions always as the transformation, not erasure of historically situated identities. This feature of Notebook marks the limits of its compatibility with Glissant’s project. It may offer a new model for the relationship between the individual consciousness and the landscape, while, alongside Marson, reclaiming the island-space from colonial possession (Grainger’s failure) and freeing Caribbean discourse from exoticising impulse of New World poets like McFarlane, Redcam, and Bunbury, but by imagining a revolutionary clearing of historical legacies, Césaire’s poem, in the final analysis, stops short of fully anticipating a true, Glissantian poetics of creolization.

The attempt to engage imaginatively with the Caribbean landscape runs consistently through the Caribbean canon, from the early georgic verse of a Scottish-born doctor, James Grainger, to the works of the mother-figure of black Caribbean women’s poetry, Una Marson. And it is a concern that transcends the national and language divides of the archipelago, as Césaire’s closeness to Marson’s anti-exoticism, and Glissant’s development of an environmental poetics evidence. Grainger begins the process of creolizing the literary tropes that sought to reformulate the Caribbean landscape as a lost Eden, and as such marks the first step towards a creolization of the canon that has resonance in contemporary works such
as Jean Rhys’s *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), Derek Walcott’s *Omeros* (1990), Maryse Condé’s *Windward Heights* (1995), and Césaire’s *A Tempest* (1969), to name a few examples of Caribbean writers’ continuing engagement with European literary legacies. McFarlane, Redcam, and Bunbury, creole poets of the pre-boom era, were complicit in the elaboration of Grainger’s project, although these poets often went further than Grainger in their wilful short-sightedness with respect to the disease and exploitation present in plantation life: a point well borne out by comparison with Marson and Césaire, both of whom confront their readers with a ‘sick’ island-paradise.

But it is Glissant’s image of creolization as a process in which the individual, community and landscape all participate in the creation of identity that represents a move beyond Césaire’s visionary ‘revolvolution’; foreseeing not a clearing of history, or the establishment of further claims of legitimacy and a particular culture’s right to a particular territory, but, rather, to use an environmental metaphor, celebrates new, rhizomatic growth out of historical legacies. This Deleuzian-inspired image is at the heart of Glissant’s poetics and resounds with more recent surveys of place in the Caribbean literary imagination, whether that be Glissant’s own inversion of the Arcadian shepherd’s isolation in *The Ripening*; or Shani Mootoo’s exploration of the complex points of intersection between the natural world and society, sexuality and violence, within the small community of Paradise in *Cereus Blooms at Night* (1996); or Gisèle Pineau’s *Macadam Dreams* (1995), in which the impulses towards, what Glissant would term, ‘diversion’ and idealisation of both the native land and Africa as lost motherland are firmly dismissed as Pineau advocates the celebration of a ‘macadam paradise’ (Burns 10) located in the real circumstances of the land and the regenerative power of nature; or finally, Mina Montero’s *In the Palm of Darkness* (1995), a novel that recreates an academic fact-finding mission, reminiscent of Alejo Carpentier’s *The Lost Steps* (1953), and in doing so highlights the rapidly diminishing frog populations throughout the Americas.

These novels pursue a rhizomatic poetics of creolization precisely because at their heart is a sense of each character as an element in a web of relations, or, to quote Guyanese author, Wilson Harris, that “[w]e are related to every creature in the tree of life and death” (34). This shift towards relationality is at the heart of creolization theory and is dependent not on a utopian desire for a single, unspoilt origin, but on the ability to confront the real and present challenges of an environment understood as part of human history, shaped by human history, but also as an inextricable element in ‘the process of creating history’, ‘a character in this process’ (*Caribbean* 106). In order to reflect this change towards a poetics of relation in which history, environment, and community converge, literary genres and tropes that once eulogised paradise become further creolized as they contrapuntally re-

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read the Caribbean’s colonial past and confront its present.

Notes

1 Fernando Ortiz suggests that, in fact, the opposite was true: ‘the Indians suffered their fate in their native land, believing that when they died they passed over to the invisible regions of their own Cuban world. The fate of the Negroes was far more cruel; they crossed over the ocean in agony, believing that even after death they would have to recross it to be resurrected in Africa with their lost ancestors’ (102).

2 Grainger’s own occupation as a doctor accounts for his particular interest in the diseases that affected the slave population, and in the same year as the publication of The Sugar-Cane Grainger also published Essay on the West Indian Diseases. Although the Essay does not hold the same canonical significance as The Sugar-Cane, as Mary Galvin has argued, changing medicinal practices in response to both the New World condition, environment and its resources was a sign of creolization (see ‘Decorations for Carolinians’). In this way, Grainger’s documentation of West Indian diseases and their treatment, might also be taken as further evidence of creolization in the early era.

3 In Faulkner, Mississippi, Glissant delineates atavistic communities, which take ‘shape around a genesis, a creation story in which there is uninterrupted lineage from father to son, with no illegitimacy’ (114), from composite cultures. Importantly, composite cultures proceed ‘from a point that is hybrid’ and as such constitute a ‘digenesis’, a ‘new type of “origin”, which is not about the creation of a world’ (195). As a result ‘this is a Genesis, founding the sacred, but doing so outside the absolute legitimacy of possessing a community when it feels chosen by an unhesitating creator-god’ (195).

4 See Antonio Benítez-Rojo The Repeating Island (1-29). Dash discusses Benítez-Rojo’s contribution to Caribbean theory and, in particular, his celebration of the city as a more suitable model for Caribbean identity than, for example, landscape (The Other America 8-9).

5 See Silvio Torres-Saillant An Intellectual History of the Caribbean (44). Describing his application of chaos, Antonio Benítez-Rojo writes that ‘within the (dis)order that swarms around what we already know of as Nature, it is possible to observe dynamic states or regularities that repeat themselves globally’ (Repeating 2). However, although Benítez-Rojo is employing ‘Nature’ as a central paradigm for chaos theory, his usage of the term is distinct: ‘[w]hen I speak of Nature in the island, I do
so in integral terms: Indians and their handicrafts, nuggets of gold and samples of other minerals’ (Repeating 6). Nature here is more akin to native product, which is indicative of Benítez-Rojo’s socio-historic approach in *The Repeating Island*.

6 Glissant refers to Segalen as one of the first poets of relation (*Poetics* 27), and, in particular, this opposition between the diverse and the same is the subject of Victor Segalen’s *Essay on Exoticism*. For a specific discussion of Segalen’s rejection of entropy and the second law of thermodynamics see Charles Forseick *Victor Segalen and the Aesthetics of Diversity* (190).

7 Opacity is a concept Glissant discusses in *Poetics of Relation* (189-194).

8 See Coetzee’s *White Writing* (2-3).

9 As Glissant outlines in *Caribbean Discourse*, both ‘diversion’ and ‘reversion’ are characteristics of the Caribbean psyche. Diversion is a strategy of avoidance, of looking elsewhere (a place other than the native land) in order to recognise oppression or to find a solution. Reversion is the impulse to revert back to some idealised pre-colonial state. Glissant summarises his position: ‘[w]e must return to the point from which we started. Diversion is not a useful ploy unless it is nourished by reversion: not a return to the longing for origins, to some immutable state of Being, but a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away’ (26).

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NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Andrew Armstrong is a temporary lecturer in Literatures in English in the Department of Language, Linguistics and Literature, UWI Cave Hill. His PhD dissertation was on narrative strategies in contemporary African Fiction and Film, and he teaches African Literature and Film as well as West Indian Literature.

Lorna M. Burns holds the PhD from the University of Glasgow. Her thesis was entitled “Creolising the Canon: Engagements with Legacy and Relation in Contemporary Postcolonial Writing”.

Richard Clarke is a lecturer in literary theory at the Cave Hill campus of the University of the West Indies. He specialises in Continental philosophy, Pragmatism, and literary, rhetorical, psychological, social and political theory. He is also the editor of Shibboleths: a Journal of Comparative Theory (www.shibboleths.net), PhilWeb: Theoretical Resources On- and Off-Line (www.phillwebb.net) and the Encyclopaedia of Theory (www.literary-theory.net).

Donald Cleary is a postgraduate student working on his MA in the Department of Literatures in English, University of the West Indies, Mona.

Raphael Dalleo is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English at Florida Atlantic University, where he teaches U.S.Latino/a, Caribbean, and postcolonial literatures and cultural studies. His essays have appeared in ARIEL, Anthurium, South Asian Review, Latino Studies and Small Axe. He is co-author of The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), an analysis of the relationship of contemporary diasporic Caribbean literature to politics and the market.

Curdella Forbes is an Associate Professor in the Department of English at Howard University. Her essays on Caribbean literature, Caribbean literary theory and Shakespeare have appeared in various academic journals. She is the author of From Nation to Diaspora: Samuel Selvon, George Lamming and the Cultural Performance of Gender (UWI Press 2005) and three books of fiction: Songs of Silence (Heinemann 2002); Flying with Icarus (Walker Books 2003); and A Permanent Freedom (Peepal Tree Press 2008).

Donnette Francis is an Associate Professor of English at SUNY Binghamton. Her research and writing focuses on contemporary Caribbean literatures. Her book, Fictions of Citizenship, is forthcoming in 2009.

Maureen Warner Lewis is Professor Emerita in the Department of Literatures in