anglo-caribbean slavery

guest editors: SARA SALIH and CANDACE WARD
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Endings to Slavery
Pamela McCallum

On 24 March 1807 the British Parliament voted to end the Atlantic slave trade. Almost a century earlier the Treaty of Utrecht had given England control over the Atlantic slave trade, a concession that allowed Britain to amass enormous wealth still visible in lavish buildings and inscribed in the names of city streets. The decision to abolish the slave trade was undoubtedly a crucial moment when a society turned away from a profitable business to advocate larger humanitarian values. As the African-Scottish writer Jackie Kay comments, “the movement to end slavery in the British Empire in the 18th century is probably the first human rights campaign in history.”

At the same time, it is imperative to recall that the Abolitionist movement around William Wilberforce, or the politics of William Pitt, occupy only a small place in the collective energies of human agency directed against ending slavery. Throughout the Caribbean and Latin America, in the English colonies and elsewhere, slaves rebelled against their masters, sometimes dying in the attempt, sometimes running away to form maroon communities deep in the interior of the islands. As examples of successful escapes from slavery, maroon communities were alternative spaces of life and imagination that, in the words of the American historian Eugene Genovese, “had a destructive impact on slavery and provided a spur to slave disaffection, desertion, and rebellion. In Surinam, Venezuela, Jamaica, and elsewhere, maroons inspired slaves to challenge white authority and to rebel” (55–56). The movement to end slavery begins with slaves themselves, who, in myriad ways, resisted and rose up against the inhuman conditions of their lives.

From another perspective, it is also necessary to note that slavery itself had been abolished in the Caribbean before 1807: in the French colonies with a dramatic, often forgotten, declaration by the
Paris Convention under the Jacobin government on 4 February 1794. Following the successful rebellion in San Domingue (now Haiti) under Toussaint L’Ouverture, the Paris deputies voted for the following decree: “The National Convention declares slavery abolished in all the colonies. In consequence it declares that all men, without distinction of colour, domiciled in the colonies, are French citizens, and enjoy all the rights assured under the Constitution” (qtd. in James 141). As the classic account in C.L.R. James’s *The Black Jacobins* insists, the abolition of slavery was not simply an act of legislators, but was the result of the revolt in San Domingue and “a reflection of the overflowing desire which filled all France to end tyranny and oppression everywhere” (141). Sadly, but not surprisingly, this moment of freedom did not last long: slavery was re instituted in the French Caribbean colonies under the Napoleonic empire.

Why is it important to remember these details of a history long past? Why is it necessary to keep in mind when we mark the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade that slavery itself was not abolished in the English Caribbean colonies until 1838? Kay points out the existential and material effects for the slave population: “Imagine the frustration of being an enslaved African in 1807, knowing the trade was supposed to have stopped because people in Britain had decided it was evil, and still being subjected to endless beatings and whippings, and still not getting a sniff of free air for another 31 years.” This number, seemingly insignificant in broad historical terms—only 31 years—represents more than a generation of infants born into slavery, more than half the lives of many adults, years and years of further suffering before slavery itself ended. Kay stresses the need to remember the silences around slavery and the slave trade: this lost generation who existed in slavery when the trade was abolished, the utter absence of those who died in the Middle Passage, the unwillingness to connect the wealth of eighteenth-century Britain with slavery and the slave trade.

And yet, it is also critical to remember the formal abolition of the slave trade in March 2007. As Kay has noted, it challenges us to recall a popular movement for basic human rights. By extension, it also reminds us that different forms of slavery—indentured labour, human trafficking
for the sex trade, household workers in many countries—have persisted into the twenty-first century. *ARIEL* is pleased to publish this special number on “Anglo-Caribbean Slavery” and is grateful for the work of the co-editors, Sara Salih and Candace Ward, and the research of the contributors on this historically significant and still urgent subject.

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University of Houston-Victoria
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Introduction:
Anglo-Caribbean Slavery
Sara Salih and Candace Ward

To lay the past to rest … means not that we should forget it but that we have no choice but to relate it, no choice but to live on within the full knowledge and unending of it. Time does not pass but accumulates. Why? Because what has been begun does not end but endures. Because this fatal Atlantic ‘beginning’ of the modern is more properly understood as an ending without end. Because history comes to us not only as flash or revelation but piling up. Because this is, not was. Because this is the Atlantic, now. Because all of it is now, it is always now, even for you who never was there.

Ian Baucom, *Spectres of the Atlantic* (333)

The essays collected in this special issue of *ARIEL* were produced in 2007 to mark the bicentennial anniversary of the Act To Abolish the Slave Trade. The year has seen many commemorations, celebrations, and academic conferences, all of which have provided useful opportunities to reflect on the myriad legacies of the slave cultures that for over two centuries held sway in European metropoles and colonies alike. Most of the essays collected here dwell on a moment or sequence of moments that is in some sense “past,” and yet this backwards-looking focus invites the reader to acknowledge, as Baucom does, that history is not a revelation marking an endpoint to a specific moment in time; rather, it is an accumulation, or as he puts it, “an ending without end” (333). It would not make sense, then, for this collection of essays to commemorate or to celebrate the 1807 Abolition Act, since that would seem to suggest that the Act marked an epochal shift or what Hilary Beckles describes ironically as that self-proclaimed moment “in which moral politics appeared to have transcended, finally, the power of profit, thereby closing
Sara Salih and Candace Ward

the darkest road modern man had journeyed.” To bracket the era of slavery so conveniently and neatly might provide comfort to contemporary readers who wish to believe that the extraordinary violences that were enacted in the name of economic “progress” could never take place in the present, but such a mode of historicizing would not constitute what Ann Stoler has described as the work of effective history and politically accountable acts—work that is necessarily discomfiting in its deliberate unsettling of the accepted boundaries between “then” and “now” (210).

While it is certainly the case that most of the articles collected in “Anglo-Caribbean Slavery” focus on texts produced in the past by authors who are long dead, this is not in the service of abstract historicizing. Rather, taken together, the essays are intended to produce precisely the uncanny sense Baucom evokes when he describes the melancholy possession our nonsynchronous present has only recently begun to take of its pasts, in partial acknowledgement of the debt the present owes to that past (203). In his contribution to this volume, Beckles is clear about the material nature of that debt, but as academics we are also forced to think in terms of what might be called “intellectual reparations” as we retrieve and pick over texts from what has, somewhat discomfitingly, been called “the slavery archive.” Of course, there is no single archive of slavery, notwithstanding the establishment of “slavery museums” in ex-slaving cities such as Liverpool. And it is certainly the case that, as Edward Said intuited in his by-now notorious chapter on Mansfield Park, the “archives” of culture and imperialism—specifically in this case, slavery—cannot be separated, no matter how oppressive the “dead silence” that may fall whenever the subject is raised. The “slavery archive” may be located almost anywhere and everywhere in the cultural productions of the era, whether in direct representations of plantocratic life, or as Said argued, in descriptions of the domestic order “at home” that was and still is the product of a plantocratic economy.

The essays in this volume are concerned with texts that are less than oblique in their relationship to life in a slave society, raising a number of ethical questions concerning what precisely academics are doing when they read, comment on, and/or teach texts that represent Transatlantic
Introduction: Anglo-Caribbean Slavery

slavery whether extensively or fleetingly. What is the value of such scholarship, and what might be its place and its relevance in a contemporary world, which, as one of the directors of National Museums Liverpool pointed out at the International Slavery Museum’s inauguration in August 2007, is still riven with racism and racialization (Fleming)? In this bicentennial year, we may also be prompted to ask whether it is possible to remember, comment on, and analyze colonialism in ways that are not merely voyeuristic or self-serving. How can we read fictional and non-fictional texts ethically and responsibly, remaining sensitive to the specific contexts of “the past” as well as the complex imbrications of “past” and “present”? Do we repeat “hateful speech” when we extensively cite and quote the racist ideologies of the past, along with the descriptions of punishments visited upon the enslaved, the harms done to their bodies, and the dismantling of those bodies? How are we bearing witness to the past, and what kind of witnesses are we? Must we join Giorgio Agamben in his claim that the language of testimony is a language that no longer signifies, and that the complete witness (in Agamben’s text, the troublingly-named Müßelmänner who did not survive the German death camps) is s/he “who by definition cannot bear witness” (39)? If that is indeed the case, then what is the value of the kind of scholarship represented in this special issue?

Part of the answer must come from its readers, whose interactions with this body of writings is shaped by the same concerns. For while the essays collected here may not directly address the questions above, those of us who work on, in, and around issues of slavery and enslavement are faced with the inherent contradictions of our role as witnesses. It seems inevitable, then, that cultural workers in this field should be more than usually conscious of the colonial epistemologies that frame the available ways of reading, seeing, and remembering the innumerable narratives of Transatlantic slavery.

To that end, this issue’s contents are arranged so that discussions of the present “bookend” the analyses that center on historical material. The first, Beckles’s “Remembrance, Reconciliation and the Reparations Discourse,” reveals both the instability and persistence of colonial epistemologies, nowhere better illustrated than by the loaded term “apology.”
In the context of twenty-first century reparations discussions the word clearly derives moral and legal significance from the demand for and expression of regret attached to the acknowledgement of past wrongdoing. However, as the essays by Brycchan Carey, John Gilmore, Sara Salih, and Candace Ward suggest, colonial writers like George Fox, Edward Long, John Singleton, and Cynric Williams act in the role of apologists, more interested in vindication than regret. At the same time these apologies reveal an awareness of a morally indefensible position, itself complicated by the texts’ attempted engagement with quotidian “realities” shaped by the institution of slavery. Finally, the particular push-pull inherent in the invocation of apology/apologist is complicated by the accumulation of history, a process by which, to use Mark McWatt’s expression, “things echo and re-echo.” In the interview that concludes this special issue, McWatt’s description of his work in Suspended Sentences calls to mind a kind of echo-locution, to coin a phrase, a strategy by which we locate ourselves spatially and temporally by sending out and receiving language, bits and pieces of texts that bounce back to us to shape us in our now. Of particular importance—as all the essays here reveal—are the means by which history is evoked in a language that is always freighted with past narratives.

Notes
1 See <http://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/about/capitalprojects/slavery.asp>.

Works Cited
“Slavery was a long, long time ago”: Remembrance, Reconciliation and the Reparations Discourse in the Caribbean

Hilary McD. Beckles

Memory of slavery in the Caribbean is no sporting matter.Nearly one hundred seventy years since general emancipation in the English-speaking sub-region, the immediacy of the recollection of slavery still angers many in the regional community. It also hinders movement toward ethnic reconciliation, and serves to sustain the identity consciousness that energizes the rapidly emerging reparations movement. In addition, the polarizing politics of post-modern economic globalization that insists history step aside to make room in the popular imagination for a mythical level playing field, daily drives daggers into the heart of the idea that ethnic reconciliation and reparations constitute a unitary idea.

British Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott recently discovered the extent to which passions can flare when he visited Jamaica in May 2007 and spoke to a public audience at the University of the West Indies. The speech was hosted by the National Bicentennial Committee on Slavery, and Prescott, when pressed on the controversial issue of an official apology for slavery from his government, stated that such an action was not necessary and that Britain was concentrating its efforts on shaping an Africa policy to facilitate economic development on the continent (Oostindie; Mamdani; Gilroy). He seemed as shocked by the reactions of the crowd as by the identities of those who reacted with rage. Jamaican Member of Parliament Mike Henry, incensed by this response, stormed out of the meeting and described Prescott’s manner as “disrespectful” and “condescending.” “How is it that you were prepared to pay the slave owners but not willing to compensate the slaves?” Henry asked. “We all know what happened and how we feel about it, so why should we entertain this British official on our front lawns without him being prepared
to discuss this matter which is of such heart-wrenching concern to us?” he asked of the irate majority (“MP Walks Out”).

It is no easy matter for citizens and public officials to negotiate the possibilities inherent in the Caribbean’s future. For most of the Caribbean population thinking towards the future requires an intense struggle to come to terms with the pressures that continue to weigh on public memories and to continue to resist any impulse to gloss over these chilling memories of slavery. Slavery is a legacy shouldered daily by millions of blacks who toil for little in the blazing heat of an impoverished paradise. Sharply contradictory images of reality continue to generate intense criticism and acrimonious dialogue. “Hell on earth” may just be a biased insider image of postcolonial society held by the historically disenfranchised visa seekers to America, but it is as legitimate as the notion of the region as an exotic traveler’s paradise.

The Caribbean has remained at the center of postmodernity’s big-business culture, as is evident in the tourism revenues that are the backbone of many Caribbean economies. In the seventeenth century, Enlightenment appetites called forth sugar and slavery; today monopolistic Norwegian cruise ships ply its sparkling blue waters (Bryce; Pietevse and Parekh). But nothing has exposed the inheritances of history in the contemporary world as completely as the visitation of the imperially designed international cricket tournament, the World Cup, which took centre stage from March to May in 2007. Islanders’ tentative entry into the twenty-first century is not associated with a deep engagement with the burning issues of the Internet age. On the contrary, the first decade of the millennium ushered in two seemingly ancestral discourses: the outstanding, unanswered questions about sugar and slavery continue to haunt collective memory, while the business of commercial cricket and the centrality of its relation to citizenship began a new chapter in the history of the region’s exploitation. In 2007, two hundred years after the abolition of the slave trade (but not the abolition of slavery), the British were first out of the blocks doing what the British are well known for—protecting exposed flanks from approaching threats. The government in London launched a nationwide series of events, defined as a celebration of high political morality, to mark the
bicentennial of British Parliament’s outlawing of the transatlantic trade in enslaved Africans it had sanctioned since the early seventeenth century (Farrell; Jordan; Tibbles). By means of early declaration of intent the British government sought to define the limits of the debate on abolition and to shape its discursive content. It was a skillfully executed, self-serving program meant to deflect mounting calls for serious discussions about reparations that could lead to positive parliamentary policy. Instead, politicians led communities down a triumphal path that sought to secure a moral pride of place for a Parliament that acted only when it was convenient. But even Prime Minister Tony Blair had to dismiss the voices of some academics and cynics who were heard uttering that British imperial society had benefited more than any other from the crime of slave trading and enslavement, and that on this score the self-righteous should take note.

It “simply wasn’t cricket,” some Englishmen would say, an expression that speaks to the politics of avoidance and concealment where openness and transparency should have been the order of the day. The business of the Cricket World Cup constituted a grand jubilee for West Indians who, since Emancipation, have grown to love the imperial game with great passion. Hosting the event was a great West Indian moment, and was granted enthusiastically, if with some hidden reticence, by the game’s global governing body. Following the previous World Cup held in South Africa in 2004, the international Cricket Council contracted the West Indies Cricket Board to host the Cricket World Cup in the Caribbean in March and April 2007.

The desire to manage the event successfully within spanking new stadia that were custom built as monuments to the excellence generations of cricketers have achieved, soared above the matter of slavery in the corridors of politics and the networks of capital. Sport and slavery had collided, and the clash for public attention, and financial resources, ensued. Communities went to words with themselves; divided to the vein they quarreled about the value of matters from the past, and the worth of cricket investments in the future. Public opinion shapers asked whether it was nobler in the mind to build heritage sites to the memory of ancestors who perished in watery graves or to construct
Hilary McD. Beckles

multi-purpose sports facilities to assure revenue streams for generations to come (“Mixed World Cup Fever”; Coupar).

These debates seemed to stimulate the public imagination. On one side, local advocates of the bicentennial project pitched in with the argument that the Act of Abolition on March 25, 1807, was the first and most significant event in the protracted program of dismantling the slavery system. It was, they argued, a crucial blow against the crime of slavery that had struck at humanity’s moral confidence over two long centuries. They wanted, however, to hear little from those who called for reparations, and even less from cricket officials. Nothing was as important as the spiritual moment in which moral politics appeared to have transcended, finally, the power of profit, thereby closing the darkest road modern man had journeyed.

Batting at the other end was the cricket fraternity. It keenly presented its case and rallied its allies around the notion that the Cricket World Cup was the greatest single commercial project ever to be undertaken by the region. For this reason, they argued, it would be an abandonment of reason to engage in activities that would lower cricket’s ranking on the Caribbean agenda. Slavery, they said, was long dead and buried, and reparations discourse would only serve to resurrect its ghost. Easily moved to irritation, the cricket lobby claimed vanguard standing in shaping the future of a region too easily encouraged to fall back on its troubled history. For them, remembering slavery and seeking reparations is all fine and well, but not at the expense of attracting international investments. Cricket, they said, is not a sporting matter; it is very serious business.

International allies of the local cricket fraternity, mostly based in London, suggested that winning the rights to host the global sports event and the delivery of a successful product required West Indians to present a united management mentality that was warm and welcoming. Explicit in this suggestion was the notion that paying too much attention to the emotive and racially divisive sins of slavery was bad for business. It would hurt the host in the pocket, reduce the social prestige of the championship, and promote a negative image for the region within the global business environment. Communities across the Caribbean
region were urged to think big rather than feel folly, and to settle their minds on the relative importance of slavery remembrance in comparison to the grasping of rare economic opportunities. Expenditures were enormous. The Government of Barbados spent some US$75 million on the World Cup project, primarily to construct a new stadium in order to host the final game in April 2007. Popular opinion has been that this was a necessary and worthwhile investment. The World Bank, however, consistently argued that the Caribbean governments were overspending on the project to the detriment of weak, fragile economies.

The two projects were conceptually contradictory although their common historical root was obvious. It was a form of sibling rivalry. The lineage of both converged on the landscape most easily recognized as the sugar-cane plantation that had consumed with little care the energies of countless enslaved persons, and served as incubator of the region’s cricket culture. Cricket was not considered a blood sport, but it held together communities of far-flung Englishmen’s voices more tightly than language ever could. The English defined themselves as a distinct ethnicity, not by virtue of words or mastering the science of slave trading, but by playing a game they alone understood, or cared for.

Two hundred years ago in the towns where these cricketing cane producers transacted commerce, slave trading was easily the biggest and most profitable business. As these towns prepared to implement the cricket project in the lead up to the World Cup, there remained the same expectation that Cup revenues would fill taverns’ tills and merchants’ coffers. Sugar cane and cricket shared a common relation to a heritage and environment now marketed to English tourists as cultural cousins. Linked by a chain of historical events, sons of former slaves and London financiers joined hands to corner the sports tourism market in an eager bid to remove themselves from the stain of enslavement and memories of slave merchants (Beckles, Development and “Whose Game”).

The University of the West Indies lobbied local and international officials of the Cricket World Cup in order to establish itself as a secondary venue and strategic planning partner. To mark the bicentennial moment, meanwhile, the British Government, in collaboration with the University of Hull, established a research center named “The
Wilberforce Institute for Study of Slavery and Emancipation.” It was officially launched at No. 10 Downing Street, under the distinguished patronage of Mrs. Cherie Blair, First Lady of the State. With the spirited acronym, WISE, it is expected to emerge as a site of scientific research and philosophical reflection on the subject of slavery and its abolition.¹

However, at no stage during the conception of WISE was research on reparations for slavery as a crime against humanity considered a priority. The British government had turned its face against any form of reparations policy and got its way in ensuring university academic research agendas did not treat aggressively with the matter. One comment, joking but also serious, noted that had this not been the case, the institute launched instead would have been “The Wilberforce Institute for the Study of Slavery, Emancipation and Reparations” (WISER), an altogether more appropriate acronym given the legacy issues currently confronting British society.

West Indian governments did not ask for, nor did they receive, any financial support from the British government in hosting the Cricket World Cup, branded by local organizing committees from Jamaica in the north to Guyana in the south as the “best and biggest ever.” Fifth to host the 27-year-old spectacle, West Indian governments looked to Asia, China, and India mostly, to provide grants and cheap loans in order to finance a US$360 million infrastructure development. Construction of internationally competitive facilities sprung up on the backs of Asian workers, while advocates for slavery reparations looked to the British government to respond, even if only with empty words, in order to heal the wound and break the silence inflicted by the most efficient slave exploitation machinery modernity had known.

On both sides of the Atlantic, however, reparations discussions surrounded the efforts of both the cricket and the bicentennial projects. A concerted effort was made by a radical minority in the Caribbean to establish for purposes of public education the historical linkages between chattel bondage and cricket culture. Stories were told about the role and function of master versus slave cricket matches during the early nineteenth century, about the cultural foundation of performance professionalism, and of the present-day commercialization of the World Cup
games as a sports spectacle. Cricket, so it seems, represents the region’s finest example of the “up from slavery” ideology that defines aspects of the African diaspora (Beckles, *A Nation Imagined*; *The First West Indies Tour*).

The WISE project, on the other hand, initiated by university faculty, but surrounded by a host of pro-reparation voices, mostly in grassroots non-governmental organizations, is not committed to revealing to an undereducated British public how national wealth extracted from slavery should be classified as unjust enrichment. This public, long cut off by school curriculum from knowledge about the Caribbean carnage, remains protected by a media that sees no value in dredging up the past or exposing skeletons in the concealed closets of castles and mansions. Within this context the most entrenched opponents of reparations in Great Britain, those unwilling to accept the criminality of slavery, seem unaware of the magnitude of the slave trade business. In academia, at least, the numbers game—head counting the Africans shipped—seems temporarily settled, and this has served to focus attention on the other issues in the discussion, particularly reparations.

It is obvious that the magnitude of any form of reparations settlement would have to be related to the size of the crime. There is increasing acceptance of the calculation that some fifteen million enslaved African people were shipped to the New World. Also, the lives of over thirty million were disrupted by the trade throughout the continent. It has been accepted for some time that one quarter of those shipped into captivity perished at sea. Slavery was an unprecedented human tragedy. All western European nations were participants with varying degrees of management success and profitability. The Portuguese were the largest single shippers, while the English profited the most by the slave trade (Eltis, *Rise and Transatlantic*; Curto). This trade in persons fed the most barbaric system of human bondage the world had seen. Africans were reduced by slave relations to the legal status of non-humans. It was the first time in recorded history that societies were built on the premise that persons were property, chattel, and real estate, with all the attendant features of modern monetary assets. As non-humans, enslaved Africans were subject to special laws for their public governance. They
had no right to life; their existence as social beings was at the pleasure of owners whose rights over them were effectively unlimited (Beckles, *White Servitude* and “A Riotous Lot”; Taylor).

No other ethnic group was subject to this system of bondage on an ongoing basis. Persons classified as “white” could not be enslaved. Chattel enslavement was considered a universal violation in western Europe. Although British workers were integrated into the labour market by means of several forms of coercion, from seasonal contracts to ten-year forms of indenture, slave-like forms of social organization had been gradually dismantled during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. For the English, then, the African encounter led to a re-establishment of a system long removed from popular culture. In order to consolidate African enslavement it was necessary, therefore, to first classify the enslaved as non-human—that is, outside the parameters of ideas about human rights already common to civil society (Kussmaul; Barrowman; Rowan). The success of this strategy is evident in Britain’s profitable and “legal” involvement in the slave trade for over two hundred years. Perhaps more insidious, though, is that strategy’s relevance to contemporary reparations discussions. At the United Nations Inter-governmental Conference on race and xenophobia held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, the stated official position of the British government was that slavery was not a crime against humanity because it was legal at the time. Therefore, its officials suggested, the question of reparations does not arise (Beckles “Case for Reparations”). Metropolitan and colonial governments did legalize slavery. Of course, the Africans, who constituted over seventy-five percent of the colonial population, were not consulted. The Slave Laws, as they were called, that classified enslaved Africans as non-human, were conceived and implemented within a global moral environment that accepted labour bondage of various sorts but that had turned its back on the process of legal dehumanization of workers. And, although there was widespread opposition in England at the outset to chattel slavery, it was marginalized and silenced by the power of the participatory State and its commercial allies.

The criminality of slavery was finally settled during the Nuremburg War Trials into the activities of the German Nazi State. The court de-
Remembrance, Reconciliation and the Reparations Discourse

fined crimes against humanity as “murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation and other inhuman acts committed against any civilian population, whether or not in violation of the domestic law of the country.” Since then international law has restated that there is a global morality in respect of slavery and that it is no defense to illustrate its legality within national law. The Holocaust was legal in the sense that the German Legislature had approved the actions enforced by the judiciary. The entire world, however, had rejected such notions of legality (Munford; Bergmann). It is ironic that the Republic of Haiti, the first sovereign Caribbean State, was also the first nation in modernity to pay reparations within the context of slavery. When the country secured its independence in 1804 from France after a bloody revolutionary war, no slave-owning European country officially recognized its status. The United States of America, a slave-based nation, joined in the stance of non-recognition as an act of solidarity with France. The French insisted upon the payment of reparations from the new rulers for the loss of property rights in Africans, livestock, plantations, and other forms of property. The refusal to pay this reparation meant that Haiti was excluded from the international community by means of trade embargoes and diplomatic isolation (Servant).

In 1825, however, as the fledging, struggling revolutionary nation celebrated the twenty-first anniversary of Independence, the government took the decision to make reparations payments to France in exchange for its official recognition. A team of French assessors arrived in Haiti to value property lost by French subjects, including 450,000 enslaved persons. The value of assets was computed at 150 million gold francs. By treaty, Haiti agreed to pay this sum to the French government. Payment began immediately, and was not completed until 1922. The enslaved community itself received no reparations; neither did the indigenous peoples who were decimated by French and Spanish colonialism on the island (Beckles “Global Politics”).

Historically the concept of reparations has dealt with themes such as peace and justice, reconciliation and harmony. It has focused on how to settle with the sins of the past and move on to a better life. Philosophically, it is rooted in the notions of forgiveness and atonement.
The idea of repairing the damage caused by historic wrongs confronts the process of colonial exploitation and enslavement. In instances where reparations have been paid the evidence suggests that payment has benefited those who suffered shame as victims as well as those who experienced guilt as perpetrators of crimes against humanity. As a moral and political action it breaks the silence that followed the crime and allows for human liberation (Robinson).

The competitive, recriminatory nature of global economic and political relations, however, has meant that reparations tend to take place within the context of hostile legal tribunals rather than as a result of ethical discourse and moral adjudication. In most cases existing legal thinking in countries that enforced enslavement has struggled to accept the criminal nature of historical wrongs. As a result, reparations movements have been ignored by ruling elites until such time that public consciousness has reached maturity on the issue.

The British government continues to reject the notion that slavery in its colonial societies was a crime against humanity. In a rather peculiar way it seeks to counter the issue of historic criminality by stating that were chattel slavery practiced today it would be a crime against humanity, a truly strange reversal of logic. The purpose of this argument is to confuse the legal understanding of chattel slavery by including it in modern forms of bondage that exist today in Africa and elsewhere in the former colonized world while maintaining the idea of its legality prior to 1832. In this way, global human rights forces would focus on these States while ignoring the historic enslavement of Euro-America (Young).

At Durban, the States of Nigeria and Senegal joined the “West” in opposing the call for reparations championed by delegates from the Caribbean and other parts of the African diaspora. The President of Nigeria, General Obasanjo, seemed more concerned that reparations discourse in respect of England could foster inter-ethnic domestic tension within the fragile Federation. The slave trade, like any major crime, required the participation of some locals, a process that makes the crime more rather than less hideous. The fear that ethnic groups labelled as collaborators would be targeted by victimized groups is a genuine one
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which cannot be treated lightly within the context of African domestic politics. President Wade of Senegal, not concerned overtly with the potential internal tensions facing Nigeria, seemed intimidated by the possibility of a hostile French reaction. He imagined reparation to be an antagonistic rather than conciliatory process, and he stated: “What we want from Europe is an apology but we do not want to engage in any discussions about reparations. An apology will close the door and close it forever.” He rejected the notion of reparation conceived in monetary terms, and urged instead greater direct European investments in African countries (Gifford, ch. 21).

Of course, European, specifically British, investment in Africa has a long history. The first English slave trading organization was the Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa; it was established in 1663 by the Restoration monarch, Charles II. This company was soon dissolved and replaced in 1672 by the greater and more intensely capitalized Royal African Company, under the chairmanship of the Duke of York, Charles’s brother and future King James II. The prospect of vast wealth was the vision of investors in the stock of slave trading companies. In the case of the Royal African Company, the list of shareholders is a “who’s who” within the extended family of royals and their aristocratic supporters. Created to supply 2000 enslaved Africans annually to Barbados, Jamaica and the Leeward Island, it generated considerable profits to the royal family that found expression in the modernization of rural estates and the constructions of castles and mansions. The Company’s corporate secretary was equally well known: he was the distinguished philosopher of liberty, John Locke (Thomas; Donnan; Pike; Davies). Legal opinion suggests that the British State has a principal concern with protecting the royal family from reparations litigation.

The most effective strategy still used by the British government to thwart reparations advocates and protect the royal family is the argument that colonial slavery is far too remote to be subject to recuperative legal procedures. It happened a long, long, long time ago, their legal experts suggest, and cannot be subject to redress. International law, however, provides that in the case of crimes against humanity there is no statute of limitation. In any event, jurists have suggested that modernity
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does not recognize one hundred and fifty years as remote. Caribbean families still endure the memories of great grandparents who were born in slavery.

Credit should go to Lord Gifford, first to place the case for reparations in respect of enslaved blacks in Africa and the Caribbean before the British Parliament. On March 14, 1996, he filed a reparations motion in the House of Lords asking the British government to acknowledge its crime. The Lords, led by Lord Wilberforce, a great-great-grandson of William Wilberforce (what irony!), rejected the motion on grounds that the experience was a long, long, time ago and that no one was alive to constitute a plaintiff in case of litigation. The guilty party, he said, was not clear because there had been African complicity. Slavery was evil, and shameful, he said, and the British government should continue to confront its legacies everywhere they are seen, but reparation was not an appropriate strategy (Gifford).

When the bicentennial moment moved debate on reparations from the streets and colleges into Parliament in March 2007, there was no substantive shift in its line of legal and political reasoning, except that this time both Houses of Parliament were occupied by black members whose remarks differed little from their white colleagues. They spoke about the need for moral atonement, and suggested that financial instruments such as debt relief and fair trade were better options for State policy. Greater attention was paid to contemporary wrongs, such as forms of cross-border slavery, female sexual mutilation, and child soldiers in Africa. Every conceivable challenge facing black States was debated while the illegality of chattel enslavement and the call for reparations were pushed to the margins.

Lord Morris of Handsworth, a black Jamaican and Chancellor of the University of Technology in Kingston, who had distinguished himself as a British trade union leader and educator, stated: “Well, what a remarkable thing it is that I, a descendant of slaves, am now speaking in the House of Lords on this motion.” “In my judgment,” he said, “we ought to do something in reparation,” but we all recognize the difficulty involved and the insurmountable nature of the challenge (Hansard Lords). Baroness Amos, also a West Indian, shared the view that the matter was
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legally too complex and beyond reasonable procedure. Jamaican Diane Abbot, speaking in the House of Commons, supported the notions of complexity, difficulty, and historical remoteness (Hansard Commons). Nothing was made, however, of the 1995 case in which Queen Elizabeth II signed a bill that enabled reparations to be paid to New Zealand’s Maori people who were subject to genocidal action and land appropriation by British colonizers in 1863. The Maoris received land settlement and substantial monetary compensation from the British Government.

The travails of the French case for reparations seemed even more bizarre. In 2000 the French Government reaffirmed its political position that colonial slavery was a crime against humanity and made a formal apology for its involvement. It did not expect that any of its former colonial citizens or states would legally seek reparation as a consequence. In January 2004, however, President Aristide of Haiti, on the two-hundredth anniversary of national independence, officially called upon the French Government to repay the 150 million francs illegally extracted from his country. The current value of this sum was computed at US$21 billion (“Haiti Wants”). It was the first time that a European government had received a formal request from a Caribbean government for reparations in respect of colonial crimes. A month later, Aristide was deposed, largely by means of the invasion of his country by a coalition of French soldiers and American marines. Aristide’s successor, the interim Prime Minister Gerard Latortue, hurriedly put in place by the occupying military authorities, immediately withdrew the claim, and described it while doing so as a criminal action not intended to benefit the proud, independent people of Haiti (“Haiti Drops”).

And yet, the question of the wealth produced by the slave trade and slavery will not disappear. In 2005, a group of British scholars and financial experts were asked to answer the question: “If the British were to pay the two million enslaved blacks in the Caribbean a retroactive wage, fixed at the lowest level of an English field worker for 200 years, plus a sum for their lost assets in Africa and trauma inflicted, what would be the sum of the settlement?” The figure suggested by the team came to 7.5 trillion pounds, more than three times the 2005 current GDP of Britain. The figure reflected the value of slave labour to British economic
growth, and illustrates how a small island economy on the outskirts of Western Europe was able to emerge the major global economic force in the nineteenth century (Inikori; Smith).

Despite these compelling calculations, from the mid-twentieth century a conscious effort has been made to minimize the role of the slave system in providing the capital that nurtured and transformed the British economy during the period described as the Industrial Revolution. This has been a necessary strategy to support the argument that the British State has no obvious or compelling moral obligation to an Empire now dismantled and re-classified as impoverished developing states. Sir Winston Churchill, the iconic British Prime Minister, whose grandfather held considerable West Indian investments, laid bare the facts as he understood them in 1938:

Our possessions of the West Indies, like that of India . . ., gave us the strength, the support, but especially the capital, the wealth, at a time when no other European nation possessed such a reserve, which enabled us to come through the great struggles of the Napoleonic wars, the keen competition of commerce in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and enabled us not only to acquire the appendage of possessions which we have, but also to lay the foundation of that commercial and financial leadership which, when the world was young, when everything outside Europe was undeveloped, enabled us to make our great position in the world. (qtd. in Robinson 17)

The contemporary British government, no longer prepared to discuss this historical relation to the Caribbean, has successfully bypassed the reparations issue and is hoping to exit the bicentennial year without any major challenges from its historical past. Success in this regard has been a masterful expression of statecraft in defusing what seemed at the outset an enormous legal challenge. The Cricket World Cup also came and went; a few comments notwithstanding about high ticket prices for locals and their inability to carry food and music into stadia, the global media were more concerned with the alleged murder of the English coach of the Pakistan team, Bob Wolmer, in a Kingston hotel. That too
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seemed a storm in a teacup when the official medical report confirmed that he had died from natural causes.

The reparations discourse, however, is unlikely to go away, and is expected to intensify in the next decade. Former colonial governments have recognized the liberalized global trade regimes that continue to sustain the unequal commodity markets so carefully crafted against them under colonialism. The trade rules brought alive by the World Trade Organization have created an uneven playing field for Caribbean exporters. Their sugar industry is as uncompetitive in the new trade regimes as it is possible to imagine, and the banana industry has gone bananas as American corporations operating in the Caribbean have cornered the European Union market. The Cricket World Cup is due to return to the Caribbean in 2025. This time around there might very well be an England versus West Indies final, played against the backdrop of an agreed reparations settlement.

Notes
1 Professor David Richardson of Hull University heads the WISE project; already it has established a prominent presence in the research network on slavery and emancipation.

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Reuben Makayiko Chirambo on “Subverting Banda’s Dictatorship in Malawi: Orality As Discourse in Jack Mapanje’s *Of Chameleons and Gods*”

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The role played by members of the Society of Friends in the history of the formal abolition movements on both sides of the Atlantic is relatively well known; Quakers were prominent members of both British and American abolition and antislavery societies from their foundation in the 1780s onwards. Rather less well known is the century-long debate that took place within Quakerism as to whether Friends could legitimately own or trade in slaves. The first Quakers of the 1640s and 50s were not automatically opposed either to slavery or the slave trade, and some Friends remained active slaveholders and slave traders into the late eighteenth century. A small number of studies have examined the processes by which Quakers turned away from slavery, but these have tended to focus attention on debates among Friends in the colony of Pennsylvania. There are certainly good reasons for this bias. After its foundation in 1682, Pennsylvania, and its major town Philadelphia, were home to a substantial proportion of the world’s Quakers, a sect which in principle renounced all forms of violent coercion. At the same time, the colony, like most others in the Americas, had a large and growing population of slaves. Added to this was the fact that Quakers had, by the standards of the time, a relatively high regard for open debate and freedom of speech and controlled most of the main political and spiritual arenas in the colony. This confluence of social, economic, and discursive factors is a likely explanation for why antislavery sentiment emerged as an important tenet of Pennsylvanian Quakerism in the mid eighteenth century, and why Quakers from the colony were able to take their views to others, Friends and friends, in both America and Europe from the 1760s onwards.
Only a handful of studies of this process exist and taken together they position Philadelphia as the cradle of Quaker antislavery. But in fact, Quaker thinking on slavery began not in the new world, but in the old, with a letter from England addressed to “Friends beyond sea.” The author of that letter, written in 1657, was George Fox, a major figure in the early Society of Friends—indeed, often thought of as its founder—and the ideas tentatively expressed therein were to be challenged, revised, and finally reasserted by Fox himself in the light of his own personal experience of visiting Barbados in the 1670s. Unlike some visitors to slaveholding colonies, Fox’s firsthand experience reinforced the purely theoretical dislike of slavery he expressed in his early letter. Although he clearly struggled to reach a position on slavery that would be compatible with his notion of righteousness, he just as clearly did not give way to the expediency of accepting the colonial status quo. Perhaps because this personal struggle is so evident therein, no less than because they are the words of a founder, Fox’s writings on slavery would later assume an importance to Quakers that perhaps outweighed what their actual length or content merited. Nevertheless, they were a source of inspiration to many, not least in Pennsylvania, and they have not yet received the critical attention they deserve as important documents of the very earliest stirrings of British abolitionism, as well as the occasion of some of the first defensive proslavery rhetoric as well. Accordingly, this article examines some of Fox’s major writings on slavery in the Barbadian context, paying attention both to the content of those writings and to their form and style. Throughout, I will show how Fox’s views on slavery evolved, first as a theoretical stand on a practice that was taking place far beyond his experience; second, in response to his personal experience of the institution in Barbados; and, finally, retrospectively, after his return to England.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Barbados was one of Britain’s most valuable plantations. Claimed for James I in 1625, and first settled by British colonists in 1627, the island rapidly became an important producer of tobacco, cotton, indigo, and sugar. There were African slaves in Barbados from its inception as a British colony but in the earlier years they were a minority of the island’s population. As Fox
himself demonstrates, with the repeated references to “blacks and taw-nies” across his publications on slavery, African slaves worked alongside both Native American slaves and servants and white indentured servants in seventeenth-century Barbados. The transition of the island’s economy almost exclusively to labour-intensive sugar production after 1640 led to a sharp increase in demand for workers. In part, this demand was met by white indentured servants, but the greatest increase in the island’s population came from the importation of African slaves. Estimates suggest that while the African population remained a minority into the 1650s, by the early 1670s Africans outnumbered Europeans by a ratio of three to two. Barbadian planters developed a ruthless attitude towards their slaves, fuelled by the ever-present fear of slave insurrection. An “Act for the better ordering and governing of Negroes,” passed in 1661 but amended and strengthened several times between then and 1688, required planters to provide slaves with the minimum in food, clothing, and accommodation, but granted them almost unlimited rights to beat, mutilate, or summarily execute their slaves. By the time Fox reached the island in 1671, both slave and planter lived in a brutalized society dedicated to maximizing the profits of the European few without regard to the rights or happiness of the African majority. 

As we shall see, Fox did not at any time issue an unambiguous call for the end either of the slave trade or of the institution of slavery, but he did insist that African slaves required spiritual care, should be educated in Christian principles, and that they should be treated with a level of respect which, though falling well behind what later generations would find acceptable, was considerably less brutal than contemporary practice. He can thus be described as the first important ameliorative writer on slavery, at least in the English-speaking Atlantic world. Some observers, however, have seen Fox’s writings on slavery as being more than merely ameliorative, and a few have seen in Fox’s writings the moment of inception of the abolition movement. As early as 1808, Thomas Clarkson had noted that Fox “left his testimony against this wicked trade” (1: 110). More recently, in language that betrays more enthusiasm than accuracy, the historian Thomas Drake argued that, although Fox made “only a beginning” in his letter of 1657, nevertheless, the central idea of this letter,
which he called “touchstone to the Truth—finally, more than a century later, freed the Quakers’ slaves” (5).

Treatments of Fox’s attitude towards slavery are bound to be accorded a special place by those who saw antislavery as the inevitable outcome of Anglo-Saxon Protestant liberalism. The less whiggishly minded, however, might note that there was nothing inevitable about the rise of antislavery sentiment nor, in the late seventeenth century, was there any indication that the views of Quakers—or of any other group of dissenters for that matter—would in time come to be much more widely accepted. Indeed, in the late seventeenth century, there was little enough even to suggest that Fox’s very tentative and perilously fragile views on slavery would come to be widely accepted among the Society of Friends. Nevertheless, as Drake points out, the fact that the founder of the Quakers questioned at least some aspects of slavery “lent the weight of authority to Quaker prophets of later generations who spoke out against slaveholding” (7). Although Fox’s words did not unleash an inevitable chain of events, they were nonetheless both suggestive and influential, and certainly presented no barriers to later Quakers whose abolitionism rested on more certain ground.

The central text of Fox’s engagement with slavery is his book *Gospel family-order, being a short discourse concerning the Ordering of Families, both of Whites, Blacks and Indians*, which was published in London in 1676, and which purportedly reproduced a sermon given in Barbados five years earlier. This text, which I discuss in detail below, presents the reader with a relatively consistent approach to the question of slavery. It was not, however, the first time Fox had approached the subject. By the time he delivered this sermon, Fox had spent years travelling, first as he grappled with his faith, then to disseminate his views, and later to develop the organization of the newly formed Society of Friends. He had suffered persecution and had been imprisoned on several occasions, experiences that may have coloured his view of involuntary servitude. Unlike most slaves, however, he had also been released on several occasions; once—from under the threat of execution—at the request of parliament, and once at the request of British Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell (who, admittedly, had had him arrested in the first place).
Fox and Cromwell would meet several times between 1654 and 1658, and it was also during this period that Fox first turned his attention to slavery in a short letter of 1657 titled “To Friends beyond Sea, that have Blacks and Indian Slaves.” This letter is an important document of the new international phase into which the Society of Friends entered in the 1650s. The first Quakers to settle in the Americas reached the continent in 1656, part of a rapid migration of Quakers to take place over the coming few years (Tolles 9–13). Given the length of time it took news to cross the Atlantic, the letter’s date demonstrates both that Quakers were buying both African and Native American slaves from the outset of their settlement in America, and that Fox must have come to a rapid view of the practice once it had come to his attention. The letter is short enough to be reproduced in full:

Dear Friends, I was moved to write these things to you in all those Plantations. God, that made the World, and all things therein, and giveth Life and Breath to all, and they all have their Life and Moving, and their Being in him, he is the God of the Spirits of all Flesh, and is no Respector of Persons; but Whosoever feareth him, and worketh Righteousness, is accepted of him. And he hath made all Nations of one Blood to dwell upon the Face of the Earth, and his Eyes are over all the Works of his Hands, and seeth every thing that is done under the whole Heavens; and the Earth is the Lord’s and the Fullness thereof. And he causeth the Rain to fall upon the Just and upon the Unjust, and also he causeth the Sun to shine upon the Just and the Unjust; and he commands to love all Men, for Christ loved all, so that he died for Sinners. And this is God’s Love to the World, in giving his Son into the World; that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish: And he doth Enlighten every Man, that cometh into the World, that they might believe in the Son. And the Gospel is preached to every creature under Heaven; which is the Power, that giveth Liberty and Freedom, and is Glad Tidings to every Captivated Creature under the whole Heavens. And the Word of God is in the Heart and Mouth, to obey and do it, and
not for them to ascend or descend for it; and this is the Word of Faith, which was and is preached. For Christ is given for a Covenant to the People, and a Light to the Gentiles, and to enlighten them; who is the Glory of Israel, and God’s Salvation to the Ends of the Earth. And so, ye are to have the Mind of Christ, and to be Merciful, as your Heavenly Father is merciful. (“To Friends beyond Sea” 117)

Besides the title and the first line, there is little indication that Fox has slavery in mind in this letter. Many of his arguments are relevant to other situations, and could have been applied to Quakers’ relationships with a range of other groups and individuals, in England as well as “beyond Sea.” But the title and opening line are significant, both in that they specify the subject of the letter, as titles and openings should, but also insofar as they comprise a rhetorical manoeuvre, offering the reader an ostensibly narrow and contingent set of circumstances, but then providing evidence that proves the topic is universal in scope. This universalizing is an important part of the message: God, who “hath made all Nations of one Blood,” has created only one human family, Fox argues, and all members of this family are equal before the God who created the rain and the sun to rain and to shine upon all his creation and not merely a part of it. This inclusiveness is strengthened by repetition. The word “all” occurs nine times in the first four sentences, and the words “every,” and “whole” appear frequently in the remainder of the letter. The repetition strongly enhances the sense that the precepts of the letter apply equally to all human beings, without exception, and that in itself is a powerful argument, both cogently expressed in Fox’s homily, and structured into the form and language of the letter itself. Nevertheless, while the letter clearly asserts the equality of human souls, it is far from being a call to emancipate slaves, be they “Blacks,” “Indians” or of any other origin. The key sentence argues that “the Gospel is preached to every creature under Heaven; which is the Power, that giveth Liberty and Freedom, and is Glad Tidings to every Captivated Creature under the whole Heavens.” In other words, the Gospel is available to all, and brings joy to captives, slaves included. While this is reasonably unam-
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biguous, and even relatively uncontentious, the same cannot be said of
the assertion that the Gospel “giveth liberty and freedom.” There are two
possible interpretations of this. The first is that the word of God brings
spiritual liberty to the individual, freeing them from the burden of sin.
This type of spiritual liberty might indeed be “Glad Tidings” to captives
bearing the weight of their transgressions. A second interpretation, and
a far more radical one, is that a true understanding of the Gospel confers
freedom on the “captivated.” If this is the case, then captives of all sorts
might walk free once they have embraced the light.

There is little evidence that this second meaning is the one that Fox
had in mind. Nevertheless, as H. Larry Ingle has pointed out, that did
not stop some of the Barbados plantocracy from believing “that by
merely meeting with blacks Quakers were ‘endeavouring to make the
Negroes rebel.’” This, Ingle has argued, led to Fox realizing that the
Quakers’ “stand on the slave question counted most with the island’s
powerful elite” (234). More interested in securing the reputation of the
Society of Friends than in emancipating the slaves, Fox issued a series of
statements that appeared to assert the legitimacy of slavery, while calling
for some degree of amelioration. In Ingle’s words:

The lesson was plain: Quakers’ slaves were more law-abiding
than those of other Christians. Fox was basically arguing that
to Christianize blacks made them more submissive and sub-
servient. In this respect, Fox’s thought reflected a maturing of
the slave culture and acceptance of a new view that no contra-
diction existed between Christianity and slaveholding. Hence
Christians might hold slaves, at least for the time being—and
that time always retreating into an indefinite tomorrow. (235)

But in fact, the lesson was not plain. Ingle’s biography of Fox deliber-
ately—and sometimes provocatively—challenges overly respectful rep-
resentations of the spiritual leader. Given his iconoclastic bent, it should
come as no surprise that Ingle contests the received notion of Fox as an
originator of antislavery sentiment and presents him as more complicit
with the plantocracy than many historians of abolitionism—and many
Quakers—would find comfortable. Clearly, slavery was not Fox’s priori-
ty but, equally, neither was antislavery a ready-made discourse, available to be incorporated into, or excluded from, Fox's theology. We should not seek, therefore, to compare Fox with later abolitionists, but instead to ask what contribution he made to emerging discourses about slavery and colonization; always recognizing that, like all others, he was only able to imagine those things that could be imagined in his age. As we have seen, he very early on emphasized to Quakers in the colonies the idea that all humans were equally capable of and deserving of receiving the light. More practically, he reminded colonial Quakers that, just as “the Gospel is preached to every creature under Heaven” so too “ye are to have the Mind of Christ, and to be Merciful.” In the 1650s, neither of these things were obvious in the minds of many Europeans dealing with African and Native American slaves.

Fox’s opportunity to meet with those early colonists arose when he visited Barbados and the British North American colonies between 1671 and 1673 as one of a group of Quakers which included Solomon Eccles, William Edmundson, John Hull, John Stubbs, and several others, many of whom are well-known to scholars of early Quakerism. Sadly, Fox’s journal is incomplete for this period, but a partial narrative of the visit has been reconstructed by John Nickalls, working from letters and other documents written by Fox and his party during the expedition. Fox arrived on Barbados in poor health, but soon recovered enough to hold “many and great meetings among the whites and blacks” (Nickalls 609). According to John Stubbs, in a letter written in December 1671, “the truth is freely preached, both to white people and black people. Solomon [Eccles] and I have had several meetings among the negroes in several plantations, and it’s like must have more yet” (qtd. in Nickalls 601). Stubbs’s description suggests that, for all of Fox’s conflation of “Blacks and Indian Slaves,” the majority of the slaves that Fox’s party encountered were of African origin. His description also suggests that that these meetings were racially segregated, but it says little about what was said there, or what the slaves made of Quaker rhetoric and theology. The barest hint of that is offered by John Hull in a letter written the previous month, in which he argues that “the Lord hath and will make [Fox] a choice instrument in his hand for much good unto them, even unto
the blacks as unto the whites, for the blacks (as ‘tis said) expect some good by his coming here” (qtd. in Nickalls 597). Clearly, Fox’s visit was being discussed among the slaves, and being viewed in some sort of positive light. Although it is likely that we will never know precisely what “good” the slaves expected of the visit, we do know that many of the Anglican plantocracy felt that that “good” would be a rebellion of the slaves. We know this, since Fox felt a need to refute that precise allegation in a letter “For the Governour and his Council & Assembly…in this island,” which consists for the most part of theological assertions, but which concludes with an important engagement with the problem of slavery on Barbados.

The letter, which was probably a collaborative effort, starts in combative mood, noting the “many Scandalous Lyes and Slanders” that have been levelled against Quakers, among which are the allegations that Quakers “do deny God, and Christ Jesus, and the Scriptures of Truth” (“For the Governour” 65). For the first three pages of this letter, therefore, Fox is concerned to assert the aspects of Quaker belief that were broadly in line with orthodox Anglicanism. Echoing the language of the Book of Common Prayer, Fox asserts that Quakers believe that Jesus Christ

Was Conceived by the Holy Ghost, and Born of the Virgin Mary … was Crucified for us in the Flesh, without the Gates of Jerusalem; and that he was Buried, and Rose again the Third Day, by his own Power, for our Justification; and we do believe, that he Ascended up into Heaven, and now sitteth at the Right-Hand of God.

That Fox felt it necessary to mount such a vigorous defence of his faith, and to align it so nearly with conventional Anglicanism, attests to the strength of the attacks made on Quakers in Barbados. And yet, Barbados cannot be described as a notable centre of religious faith in the late seventeenth century. The early Quakers aside, few people seem to have come to Barbados seeking religious freedom in the way that Puritans had come to New England, or later Quakers would come to Pennsylvania. Instead, colonists came to Barbados to make money, and this was equally true of the Quakers. Indeed, as David Brion Davis has
noted, economic realities proved to be a continual stumbling block to the development of Quaker antislavery: “the prosperity of Quaker communities in the New World,” he argues, “depended, to a large extent, on slave labour in the Caribbean” (304). Such religious strife as Barbados encountered had therefore more to do with the social and economic ambitions of the island’s plantocracy rather than with their excessive piety. As Hilary Beckles has shown, the island’s Anglican planters dominated public life and all civic organisations which conferred social status and respectability. In addition, they fashioned social ideologies so as to ensure that elitism was confined to white Anglo-Saxon Anglicans. In spite of an official policy of religious tolerance, Catholics, Jews and non-conformist Protestants were discriminated against and kept away from all seats of political power. (26)

It is in this context that Fox wrote “For the Governour and his Council” and it is not therefore surprising that the letter takes two distinct rhetorical approaches. The first, an assertion of the closeness of Anglican and Quaker theology, can be seen as an attempt to ingratiate Friends with the island’s Anglican elite by appealing to their sense of what was known, familiar, and presumably non-threatening: the Anglican catechism. A second tactic, which comprises the final two pages of the letter, approaches more nearly to the economic base of the conflict between Quakers and Anglicans on the island. Abruptly changing direction, yet retaining the defensive tone that characterizes much of this letter, Fox notes that “another Slander and Lye they have cast upon us, is; namely, That we should teach the Negars to Rebel” (“For the Governour” 69). In this, Fox reaches what surely must have been the bottom line. The colony of Barbados was a commercial enterprise, and the majority of the plantocracy had concluded that profits depended on a subservient, brutalized, and emphatically non-evangelized labour force. By contrast, Fox’s Quakers had from the start been enjoined to recognize that “the Gospel is preached to every creature under Heaven; which is the Power, that giveth Liberty and Freedom, and is Glad Tidings to every Captivated Creature under the whole Heavens.” While the emphasis on
liberty would most likely have been seen by Barbadian Quakers as metaphorical, the emphasis on preaching the Gospel to “every creature” had not been seen in that way. Throughout the 1660s, Friends had offered religious instruction to slaves and, in 1671, Fox himself preached to slaves, as the “Addition” to this letter attests (To the Ministers 76–77). Clearly, the planters felt threatened by this and put about the rumour that Friends taught the slaves “to rebel.” Fox’s response is telling, but his rhetorical movement, from outrage, through refutation, to a justification of his policy on the matter does not signal a retreat on the issue. Fox begins by refuting the “slander.” Teaching the slaves to rebel is “A thing we do utterly abhor and detest in and from our Hearts, the Lord knows it, who is the Searcher of all hearts, and knows all things; and so can witness and testify for us, that this is a most Egregious and Abominable Untruth.” This is a strong refutation of the accusation, rhetorically powerful in its use of repeated words and sounds, its deployment of emphatic tautologies such as “abhor and detest,” and its strong underlying rhythms that conclude with the meat of the matter: that the accusation is an “untruth.” This is a good start, which Fox follows up by explaining to his reader what it is that has really been going on in these meetings.

For, that which we have spoken and declared to them is, to exhort and admonish them, To be Sober and to Fear God, and to love their Masters and Mistresses, and to be Faithful and Diligent in their Masters Service and Business; and that then their Masters and Overseers will Love them, and deal Kindly and Gently with them. … And that they do not Steal, nor be Drunk, nor commit Adultery, nor Fornication, nor Curse, nor Swear, nor Lye … that there are but two Ways; the one, that leads to Heaven, where the Righteous go; & the other, that leads to Hell, where the Wicked and Debaucht, Whoremongers and Adulteres, Murderers, Lyars & Thieves go.

Although the religious rhetoric somewhat obscures it, Fox is offering a contract; if the slaves behave well, and work hard, they will be treated well. The contract works both ways of course: the masters and overseers are entreated to “deal Kindly and Gently” with those slaves who are
“Faithful and Diligent.” Fox’s “model” plantation anticipates ameliorative proposals put forward a century later in sentimental novels such as Sarah Scott’s *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766), and echoed by pro-slavery apologists such as Bryan Edwards in his *History, civil and commercial, of the British colonies in the West Indies* (1793). Eighteenth-century ameliorative gestures tend to lack plausibility, however, and this earlier example seems no more convincing. One wonders how seriously the slaves took this piece of advice, if it was indeed proffered at the Quaker meetings to which they were invited. While this sort of relationship may well have existed on some Quaker-owned plantations, such plantations occupied only a very small part of the island of Barbados, and slaves would have been able to see plainly enough that the majority of planters did not follow such reciprocal agreements with their slaves, nor did they, in many cases, refrain from debauchery, adultery, and murder. Indeed, in the words of Beckles, “under the 1688 Slave Code, a master could wilfully kill his slave and be liable only to a £15 fine. If, however, his slave died while being punished, and it could be established that no malice had been intended, then there would be no fine under the law” (34–5). Fox’s precepts clearly run counter to the spirit of the emerging Slave Code and to some extent can be viewed as an alternative to it. While it may well be the case that sentiments such as these were inculcated in Quaker meetings, in this letter, written to “the Governour and his Council & Assembly, and all others in power,” the idea of a plantation contract based around the mutual good behaviour of planter and slave seems proposed as a measure ideally to be adopted by the largely Anglican plantocracy, and it is they who appear to be being reminded of the wages of sin, and the promise of life everlasting. In effect, this section is less of a refutation and more of an admonition.

If Fox was addressing the Anglican plantocracy in this paragraph, his next is more explicitly addressed to Quakers, and to those sympathetic to Quakers. His rhetoric shifts again, as does his register, as he moves the scene of his oratory from the public realm of the plantation to the private realm of the family. In the seventeenth century, the understanding was that the head of the family was responsible for the moral welfare of his wife and children, their servants and—in Fox’s view at least—their
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slaves. “Now consider, Friends,” he writes, “that its no Transgression, for a Master of a Family to instruct his Family himself, or else, some other in his behalf; but rather, that it is a very great Duty lying incumbent upon them.” Despite its title and opening paragraphs being explicitly addressed to those “in power,” with its appeal to “Friends,” the letter seems now directed towards his own congregation. Invoking the biblical examples of Joshua and Abraham, Fox reminds Friends (and perhaps also the governors of the island) that it is the “Command of the Lord” that heads of households, like Abraham and Joshua, “have a Duty lying upon us, to Pray and to Teach, Instruct and Admonish those in and belonging to our Families.” This established, he slips in the more controversial part of his argument:

Now Negars & Tawny Indians make up a very great part of Families in this Island, for whom an Account will be required at the Great Day of Judgement, when every one shall be Rewarded according to his Deeds done in the Body, whether they be good, or whether they be Evil.

The letter concludes with familiar reminders about the rewards and punishments of eternal justice, but not until after an important rhetorical manoeuvre has taken place. In this letter, Fox conflates a defence of Quaker practice regarding slavery with an exhortation to Friends and others to extend those practices. To support this, he has substantially built upon his letter of 1657 to provide a theological grounding for his insistence that slaves receive religious instruction. For Fox, the plantation comprised a household and is subject to the same rules of household management that were laid down in the Biblical texts he cites. Failure to obey these rules leaves the head of the household open to the displeasure of eternal justice. Fox does not say that at the day of judgement, God will require an account from servants and slaves. Instead, he mentions the “Negars & Tawny Indians … for whom an Account will be required.” In other words, at the last day, slave owners will be held to account for the spiritual failures of their slaves and “will incur the Lord’s Displeasure” for not having instructed their household to call upon the name of the Lord. Fox’s text, Jeremiah 10.25, is specific on the point.
Here, Jeremiah asks the Lord to “Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not, and upon the families that call not on thy name.”

How true is it, then, that in his letter “For the Governour and his Council,” Fox was, in Ingle’s words, “at his conservative best” (235)? How true is it, indeed, that Fox repudiated the radical views that he appeared to espouse in his 1657 letter? The answer, as is so often the case, lies somewhere in between Ingle’s representation of Fox as a man anxious to placate the Anglican plantocracy at any cost, and the earlier hagiographic representations of Fox as the man who began the long march to emancipation. Faced with the politics of a small island that depended on slavery for its profits, Fox clearly toned down his rhetoric. We hear nothing of the idea that the Gospel “is the Power, that giveth Liberty and Freedom” emanating from George Fox while he was on Barbados. And yet, we do not hear that he stopped holding meetings among the slaves either, nor do we hear that he abandoned his broadly ameliorative message or his more specific injunction that, since slaves were part of a colonist’s household, then they were in equal need of spiritual care. What we do know is that while in Barbados Fox preached a persuasive sermon that included a lengthy section on the slavery issue. In the words of John Hull, Fox spoke to Barbados Quakers:

About training up their negroes in the fear of God, those bought with their money and such as were born in their families, so that all may come to the knowledge of the Lord that so with Joshua they may say, “As for me and my house we will serve the Lord,” and that their overseers might deal mildly and gently with them and not use cruelty as the manner of some is and hath been, and to make them free after thirty years servitude. (qtd. in Nickalls 598–99)

Hull does not mention that Fox felt it necessary to deny any allegations levelled against Quakers about teaching the slaves to rebel, although the absence of such a mention in such a short précis is not in itself conclusive proof. We do, however, have a reasonably detailed idea of the contents of this sermon since it, or something closely resembling it, was reprinted in London in 1676 as a book called *Gospel family-order, being*
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*a short discourse concerning the ordering of families, both of whites, blacks, and Indians.* This explicitly addresses the question of plantation management in a text that represents both Fox’s final position on the topic, and his most polished rhetorical approach to it as well.6

The book comprises nineteen pages of text, followed by three pages reproducing short extracts from other letters and texts in which Fox had revisited the question. The main body of the text offers substantially the same arguments that can be seen in Fox’s earlier writings on slavery, but these arguments are considerably extended, supported by copious evidence from scripture, and accompanied by a persuasive exegesis. Again, Fox takes as his central premise the idea that a plantation is a family. With this in mind he paraphrases—misquotes even—Genesis 17:10–13, conflating the four verses to read “Every Man-child shall be circumcised in your Generations, and he that is born in thy House, or bought with Money of any Stranger, which is not of thy seed, shall be circumcised.” Fox reads this as a clear indication that slaves are to be offered religious instruction in the hope that they will come to the light or, in other words, “be circumcised with the Spirit, which the outward Circumcision of the Flesh did type forth” (*Gospel family-order* 3–4). The following ten pages do not add substantially to the core of this argument, but they do provide a great deal of additional scriptural evidence to support it. This can be understood as evidence that may well have been to the taste of an enthusiastic audience in the seventeenth century, but which is likely to enthuse very few in the twenty-first. As John Hull had indicated, Fox referred to Joshua 24:15 (“As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”), and he also refers to several articles of the Mosaic Law that enjoin hospitality for strangers.7 Thirteen pages—or two thirds—of the book are taken up with this argument, and while the direction in which Fox was moving must have been clear to all present at the meeting in Barbados where this was first articulated, without the benefit of context there is little, other than the title of the book itself, to suggest that this is a tract on the management of slave plantations. Fox’s intentions become clearer on pages 13 and 14 of the book, where he moves his argument onwards from merely discussing families and strangers in general to a more
specific analysis of the role played by Africans in the Bible. This discussion, which again shows that, despite the title of the book and the reference to “Tawnes,” Fox is primarily concerned with African rather than Indian slaves, contains an uncompromising restatement of his views in the 1657 letter, and to a certain extent returns to its potentially liberationist language:

And so now consider, do not slight them, to wit, the Ethiopians, the Blacks now, neither any Man or Woman upon the Face of the Earth, in that Christ dyed for all, both Turks, Barbarians, Tartarians and Ethiopians; he dyed for the Tawnes and for the Blacks, as well as for you that are called Whites; ... And therefore now you should preach Christ to your Ethiopians that are in your Families, that so they may be free Men indeed, and be tender of and to them, and walk in Love, that ye may answer that of God in their Hearts, being (as the Scripture affirms) all of one Blood & of one Mold, to dwell upon the Face of the Earth. (Gospel family-order 13–14)

As in some of Fox’s earlier writings, this passage clearly proclaims the spiritual equality of all peoples, and makes an unmistakable case for the immediate amelioration of slavery, with its call to slave owners to “be tender of and to them.” It also demonstrates Fox’s discomfort with emerging notions of racial difference: by addressing “you that are called Whites” he foregrounds the artificiality of distinctions based on colour. A superficial reading might suggest, as with the 1657 letter, that Fox is going somewhat further and demanding emancipation under certain circumstances: slaves who have been brought to the light, he seems to be suggesting, “may be free men indeed.” This is not a reading that is supported by the rest of the text. Quoting from, although not referencing, Deuteronomy 15:12, Fox raises the question of manumission; “And if thy brother, an Hebrew man, or an Hebrew woman, be sold unto thee, and serve thee six years; then in the seventh year thou shalt let him go free from thee.” This is a practice, Fox argues, that “will doubtless be very acceptable to the Lord.” No doubt, but in translating this practice to the plantations, Fox somewhat alters the tariff:
To close up all, let me tell you, it will doubtless be very acceptable to the Lord, if so be that Masters of Families here would deal so with their Servants, the *Negroes* and *Blacks*, whom they have bought with their Money, to let them go free after a considerable Term of Years, if they have served them faithfully; and when they go, and are made free, *let them not go away empty-handed*, this I say will be very acceptable to the Lord, whose Servants we are, and who rewards us plentifully for our Service done him, not suffering us to go away empty. (Gospel family-order 16)

Fox's injunction concerning letting slaves go “empty-handed,” taken directly from Deuteronomy 15:12, was an important corrective to the occasional practice of emancipating slaves only at a point in their lives where they were no longer able to labour or to fend for themselves: a practice which was effectively a death sentence. Fox's rhetoric subtly invokes the Golden Rule, reminding his congregation that, as they have servants so in turn they are servants of God, and should treat their servants as they would expect God would treat them. But Fox alters the word of the Mosaic Law, enjoining Friends to let their slaves go free not after six years, nor even after the thirty years that Hull's report of the original sermon suggested, but only “after a considerable Term of Years, if they have served them faithfully.” Here, is at last revealed the meaning of the phrase “the *Gospel* is preached to every creature under Heaven; which is the Power, that giveth *Liberty* and *Freedom*, and is *Glad Tidings* to every *Captivated Creature* under the whole Heavens” that is found in the 1657 letter, and its counterpart in Gospel family-order, which argues that “you should preach Christ to your *Ethiopians* that are in your Families, that so they may be free Men indeed.” Clearly, Fox intends only that spiritual freedom, or freedom from sin, be conferred by the light. Temporal freedom is still very much in the gift of the slave owner, comes only after a long stretch of hard labour, and can be achieved only by good behaviour. While this might have been a crumb of comfort for some lucky slaves, one imagines that few indeed ever came to enjoy the comfortable retirement that Fox gestures towards. Indeed, as Kristen Block has argued, from an
Brycchan Carey

extensive analysis of Quaker wills, manumissions among slaves belonging to Barbadian Quakers in the years following Fox’s visit was only marginally, and certainly not significantly, higher than for the slave population as a whole. Fox certainly urged amelioration of sorts, and manumission at times, but he does not at any point come even near to arguing for general emancipation or an end to either slavery or the slave trade.

_Gospel family-order_ nevertheless concludes on a solidly ameliorative note, and with an uncompromising invocation of the Golden Rule. First, Fox argues that certain civil rights and responsibilities be extended to slaves. Principal among these is marriage: “if any of your Negroes desire to marry, let them take one another before Witnesses, in the Presence of God, and the Masters of the Families” (17–18). In the context of a plantation system that made a point of breaking up families and other personal connections, and in which sexual violence was routine, this was not an insignificant demand. Finally, he asks his congregation to:

Consider with your selves, if you were in the same Condition as the Blacks are (and indeed you do not know what Condition you or your Children, or your Childrens Children may be reduced and brought into, before you or they shall dye) who came as Strangers to you, and were sold to you as Slaves; now I say, if this should be the Condition of you or yours, you would think it hard Measure; yea, and very great Bondage and Cruelty.

And therefore consider seriously of this, and do you for and to them, as you would willingly have them or any other to do unto you, were you in the like slavish Condition, & bring them to know the Lord Christ. (18–19)

Fox thus concludes his argument with an appeal to the Golden Rule, an injunction which is inviolable to all those who accept that Africans are “fellow creatures,” bound by the rules that govern relationships within the human family—and it is to establish exactly that point that leads Fox to quote so generously from those parts of the Bible that discuss Africa and Africans. But while the argument concludes with the strongest rule of them all, the text itself concludes with a personal moment. It is a moment that helps to establish Fox’s rhetorical ethos, but which
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is also a glimpse into the personal difficulty Fox had in reconciling his beliefs about the spiritual equality of races and the necessity of ameliorating slavery, formed in England in the late 1650s, with the reality of a slave plantation as he witnessed it in Barbados in 1671. “Truly Friends,” Fox writes,

Great Troubles I underwent about those Things; yea, sorely was my spirit troubled when I came into the Sense of these Things, which were over my Life, and burden’d my Life very much, to see, that Families were not brought into Order; for the Blacks are of your Families, and the many Natives of them born in your Houses: I had a sore Burden, and (I say) much Trouble, how that Righteousness might be brought through in the Thing, and Justice and Mercy set up in every Family and in every Heart, that so God might be honoured in every Family...And so I leave these Things to your serious consideration. (Gospel family-order 19)

This is a personal statement from a man very much troubled by what he has witnessed, and yet lacking the ability to conceive of what to us is the obvious answer: that righteousness can not be brought through in the thing and thus the thing itself should be abolished. In Fox's age, slavery appeared to most as an unpleasant and unfortunate affair, but no more capable of being abolished than the “Blastings, Mildews, Caterpillars” and other natural phenomena that troubled Fox elsewhere in Gospel family-order (17). Fox seems unable rather than unwilling to recognize that slavery is not a natural but rather a socially constructed phenomenon. His response to slavery is within the discourses available to him, and represents perhaps the first serious attempt in the English language to ameliorate the institution. Nevertheless, it is not always certain, nor is it entirely consistent. In his writings on the matter Fox repeats himself, and sometimes contradicts himself, but we can plainly see that through the repeated writing and re-writing of some basic tenets he builds an increasingly sophisticated response to slavery, and an increasingly polished piece of rhetoric. In this, as well as seeing the development of his thought on slavery, we also get a fascinating insight into his creative
process, and into the way he developed both the policy and the theology of the early Society of Friends. And, while Fox’s Barbadian texts cannot truthfully be claimed as the start of the Quaker antislavery movement, one glimpses in them the origins of a Quaker rhetoric about slavery that prompted considerable debate among future generations of Friends.

Notes
1 The most important studies of Quaker antislavery, all of which focus on Philadelphia, are Drake, Davis, Frost, and Soderlund.
2 The best general history of the island is Beckles. A detailed examination of slavery on the island can be found in Handler and Lange.
3 The earlier sermon was given at the house of Thomas Rous in Barbados on 21 October 1671 and “was virtually reprinted as Gospel family-order.” See Ingle 345 n33.
4 Most biographies of Fox are sympathetic treatments in the mould of Marsh. Ingle is a more controversial (and certainly less hagiographic) recent biography.
5 For discussion of sentimental ameliorationism, see Boulukos and Carey, especially 46–72.
6 Fox also produced a book called To the ministers, teachers, and priests, (so called, and so stiling your selves) in Barbadoes (np 1672) which develops some of his arguments on slavery.
7 Fox’s central references are to: Exodus 12:48, Leviticus 24:22, Deuteronomy 5:13, 29:9–11, 31:12, and Jeremiah 10:25. In general, Fox gives chapter, but not verse, and he often conflates verses, misquotes entirely, or gives inaccurate chapter references, suggesting that his citations often came from memory.

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On Whose Terms?
Critical Negotiations in Black British Literature and the Arts
Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK
March 13th-14th 2008

This conference focuses upon local, international and transnational engagements with Black British literature and the arts – in relation to its production, reception and cultural position. Through the multiple disciplines of the arts, it creates a meeting point for prominent and emerging scholars, writers and practitioners in order to explore the impact of this field, both at home and abroad. The context is one of critical investigation and celebration; a journey along diasporic and aesthetic routes.

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- Andrea Levy interviewed by Blake Morrison
- Kwame Kwei-Armah in conversation with Britain’s key Black directors
- Malorie Blackman leading a forum on young people’s writing and writing for young people with Deptford Secondary School pupils
- Malika Booker performing her acclaimed one-woman show Unplanned

EXHIBITIONS
- A History of Black Theatre in Britain (Victoria and Albert Museum)
- Black British Lesbians (photographs by Ajamu Fotographie)

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- Lyn Innes
- Mark McWatt
- Sukhdev Sandhu

INVITED SPECIALIST PANELLISTS
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CONTACT
Deirdre Osborne (Goldsmiths, University of London)
Mark Stein (University of Muenster, Germany)
Godfrey Brandt (Birkbeck, University of London)
http://OnWhoseTerms.org
OnWhoseTerms@gold.ac.uk
“What Time Has Proved”: History, Rebellion, and Revolution in *Hamel the Obeah Man*
Candace Ward

A number of early Caribbean novels written in English have been reprinted over the past several years, from Lise Winer’s critical edition of E. L. Joseph’s *Warner Arundel, or the Adventures of a Creole* (1838) to Karina Williamson’s edition of the anonymously published *Marly; or, a Planter’s Life in Jamaica* (1828) and John Gilmore’s *Creoleana* (1842) by J. W. Orderson.1 Much of this publishing activity arises from interest in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British Caribbean colonialism as scholars examine discourses of slavery and abolition through the critical lenses provided by current postcolonial studies and critical theories of race.2 Certainly a reconsideration of early Caribbean fiction has contributed to this project, particularly the recognition that these texts are Creole rather than metropolitan productions. They are, as Kenneth Ramchand describes the West Indian novel, “written by West Indians about the West Indian reality” (qtd. in Winer xi).

To a large degree, construction of West Indian “reality”—that is, white West Indian reality—depicted in novels like *Hamel the Obeah Man* depends on a dramatic confrontation between Old and New World constructions of the Caribbean past, its present, and the future that white Creole authors meant to shape. Indeed, the intensity of these confrontations reminds us to be wary of our own historiographic practices. As David Scott argues in *Conscripts of Modernity*, scholars need to reexamine conceptions and representations of history that have led to “the facile normalization of the present” (2). We need, in other words, to complicate our readings of the past—as embodied in textual artifacts produced at particular socio-political moments—by going beyond simple acts of resurrection and commemoration, acts that discount the ongoing dialectic between historical moments. Such oversimplifying gestures encourage us to relegate the texts to a completed past even as we grant
them limited currency by bringing them back into circulation. Thus, while we happily read novels like the anonymously written *Hamel*, an anti-abolitionist, pro-planter work, as proof of an unenlightened colonial past and search for evidence of imperial discursive strategies within them, we ignore the ways such readings promote essentializing distinctions between “us” and the largely monolithic historical “them” of our enquiry.

One way to overcome such a temptation is to look at these early Anglo-Caribbean works not as static recordings of a completed historical moment. Rather, they should be seen as part of a colonial discourse that on one level is shaped by hermeneutical concerns over the reader’s role in the production of textual meaning and on another level by wider epistemological concerns over schooling readers to produce the texts’ “true” meaning, one that conforms to a colonial way of knowing. Central to both concerns are conceptions of history, temporality, and futurity and the role they play in dictating and assessing political events in the Caribbean. Among the most striking of these events were the numerous slave insurrections that took place in the years leading up to Emancipation. The most obvious response by proslavery writers to slave rebellions was to nurture fears of black violence. In this essay, however, I want to focus on another, more subtle response that can be found in works like *Hamel*, one that effectively displaces images of violent revolutions in order to privilege “revolutions in the manners and condition of mankind” (Williams *Tour* 75). Revolutions in manners, unlike the revolts that were part of British West Indian history from the beginning of Caribbean colonization, are represented as the “result of ages,” the product of advancing “civilization.” By arguing that enslaved populations were not ready for freedom, white Creole writers at once denied the possibility that rebellions were provoked by political motives, and positioned themselves as the promoters of peace, stability, and rational order.

To begin to tease out the implications of this response to revolutionary activity in early Creole fiction, it’s useful to look at a novel like *Hamel* in the way that Tilottama Rajan reads “the secrets of the political novel” of the 1790s. Like the Jacobin fiction that Rajan analyzes,
the first Caribbean novels in English present “history” as a shifting, ongoing retelling and re-visioning and simultaneously posit the reader as an active participant in constituting the text’s meaning. Although Hamel does not, like William Godwin’s Caleb Williams, introduce “the reader as a structural element of the text,” it does engage in a complex “commerce between present and future, textuality and reality” (Rajan 222), an engagement that invites an application of Godwin’s theory of hermeneutics as outlined in his essay “A Choice in Reading.” According to this theory, explains Rajan, “meaning is shifted by its articulation in language, and that is why the reader cannot be governed by the announced moral of the text, but must read actively, doing more than simply reproducing the text. For by making writing the production rather than the reflection of an anterior meaning, Godwin also makes reading the production, through ‘experiment’ or experience, of a text whose meaning is seen as still in process” (224). This “historicizing of intention,” moreover, assumes that there is a “prophetic reader” who will uncover the text’s “real” meaning, and that this reader will be “someone whose principles coincide with” the author, in this case, “Godwin himself” (Rajan 224).

Godwin’s principles and politics, of course, contrast sharply with those of Cynric Williams, the purported author of Hamel the Obeah Man (1827). Unlike the English Jacobins whose revolutionary rhetoric helped fuel the abolitionist cause, Williams clearly allies himself with the Caribbean plantocracy in the novel. And although he promotes—as did so many anti-abolitionists during the last decades of British slavery—the “just” and “humane” treatment of slaves and other ameliorative measures, Williams is clearly invested in upholding the status quo. So much so, in fact, that he published not one but two texts that articulate the desire to work through the fraught, unfolding history of the Caribbean in order to produce “prophetic” readers: Hamel in 1827 and A Tour through the Island of Jamaica, published the previous in 1826.

Both Hamel and the Tour, in fact, simultaneously construct and engage a discerning reader capable of divining the texts’ and, as an integral part of that text, history’s “true” meaning, thereby complicating Godwin’s hermeneutics by adding a third element to the textual “commerce between present and future.” In other words, for the “prophetic reader” to
uncover the “truth” of these texts and the Caribbean reality they claim to present, the reader must actively confront a history of colony and empire whose meaning is also “still in process.” The interrelationship between temporal categories reveals not only the contradictions of the moment of the text’s production in colonial history, 1827, but of those periods that immediately precede and follow it. Indeed, the decades following the 1807 Act of Abolition of the Slave Trade and leading to the passage of Emancipation legislation in 1832 saw a flurry of proslavery publications that, by providing an alternative reading and construction of Creole history to that represented by abolitionists, sought to redefine the terms of the Emancipation debate.

This is Williams’s intention in the *Tour*, as he explicitly declares in his preface. For despite all the publications surrounding the Emancipation question, Williams complains,

few persons, even of those who have taken the greatest share in the disquisitions which it has caused, seem to be at all informed of the general state of society in the West India Islands.

By the general state of society, it is meant to include the habits and manners of all ranks, from the rich slave owner to his slave; and although the author did not set out with this intention, the following pages will enable the reader to form a pretty correct idea of these habits and manners. The public, or a portion of it, will have an opportunity of learning that negro slaves are not worked and flogged alternately, at the option and caprice of their masters, as many good christians imagine, who have signed petitions for emancipating them; that they have their pastimes as well as toils, their pleasures as well as pains; and that they smile as often, and laugh as heartily, as the labouring people of this or any equally happy country. (iii–iv)

Even ignoring Williams’s stated intention, the *Tour*’s preface exhibits all the markers of the colonial hermeneutic project: well-intentioned but ignorant readers have blindly accepted the white West Indian “type” of tyrannical planter embodied by abolitionist writers, but with the help of the *Tour*’s disinterested report of Caribbean reality—taken, Williams
assures us, “from the life”—they can now learn the truth not only about
slave-owners but also about their slaves. With Williams’s assertion of
experiential authority comes an invitation to the reader to engage in
meaning-making, to correct previous misreadings (and writings) of
Creole culture. Readers, in other words, will learn something new about
actually existing phenomena in the Caribbean colonies, about “things as
they are,” to borrow Godwin’s phrase, and through their active engage-
ment with history, stem a tide of abolitionist fiction.

But encouraging readers to be suspicious of particular constructions
of colonial history (i.e., those put forth by abolitionists) also produced
an accompanying anxiety for Creole writers: a skeptical reading practice
might open the “correct” representation of history to further misinter-
pretation. Thus, even as the text appears to grant the reader the ability
to make meaning, there is a counter tendency to discipline the reader
into the “correct” moral interpretation. This tension between the text’s
hermeneutical and epistemological projects evident in the Tour and
other Creole writings contributes to the mixed reception of the Tour.

As Tim Watson points out, the reader for the Monthly Review (rightly)
expressed disbelief over Williams’s claims that he was a disinterested visi-
tor to Jamaica: “It is necessary to read but a few pages of this book in
order to perceive that it has been much less his object to describe his
tour in Jamaica, than to put forth, under that title, a defence of the
slave system” (qtd. in Watson ms 6). The reviewer for London Magazine,
in contrast, suggested that the project of correcting misrepresentations
of colonial life was worthwhile, particularly as the Tour’s subject is a
“country about which so much falsehood has already been published.”
Unfortunately for Williams and his cause, the sympathy that the review-
er expresses is dampened by Williams’s tendency to “mix up fiction with
fact…. The same admixture of the story-book with his own experience,
likewise exceedingly diminishes the force of much that would otherwise
carry conviction along with it” (qtd. in Watson ms 5–6).

While these two reviews illustrate the partisan nature of the
Emancipation debate, the accusation of literary masquerading on one
hand and of confusing fact with fiction on the other points to another
connection between Williams’s writings and those of English Jacobin
novelists: the authorial desire to “cast political theory in narrative form” (Rajan 222). Like Godwin and other London radicals and Williams’s Creole contemporaries J. W. Orderson and E. L. Joseph, Williams moved between polemical nonfiction and the novel, publishing *Hamel* soon after the *Tour.* Unlike these other writers, however, Williams provides no editorial apparatus for *Hamel,* no prefatory remarks to spell out his intention as he does in the *Tour,* no dedication or advertisement to instruct the reader how to go about making meaning of his text.

Despite the absence of such instruction, it’s safe to assume that Williams shares the opinion of the anonymous author of *Marly,* a Creole novel published the year after *Hamel.* In the preface to the second edition of 1828, the author explains his decision to work in novel format. In doing so, he claims,

> he only imitates the principal writers of the present day, who perhaps not unwisely imagine, that to awaken the interest and engage the attention of the mass of readers, there is nothing so effectual as the machinery of a novel. He thinks too, that essays and letters on slavery are already, probably, too numerous, and although he feels himself not altogether alive to the mysteries of fiction he was determined to avail himself like the generality of his publishing brotherhood, of the fashionable medium of a tale, to convey what facts he was enabled to pick up concerning West India matters, during a residence in Jamaica. (4; original emphases)

Not only does “fiction” convey “facts,” but as the “principal writers” of the day recognized, by availing of the popular and wide-ranging narrative form that was the novel, authors could also disclose what they saw as “the fictions used in the economy of the political world, both the theoretical and the actual worlds” (Rajan 222).

But if Williams is aware of the political power of fiction, his turn to the novel is complicated by his position at the margins of the British Empire. Writing back to the center—or, in this case, writing as a white Creole from a margin that is at the same time the center of “other” oppressed subjects—Williams exhibits anxieties of literary influence that
are not relevant to metropolitan writers, whether those writers assume a pro- or anti-slavery stance. At its most basic level, the relationship between colonial and metropolitan authors, between the “novel” subject matter occasioned by New World settings and the expectations attendant on the use of Old World literary conventions, is characterized by the tendency of Creole writers to validate their works by adhering to established forms and, at the same time, by following an impulse to break from them. The impulse to resist the “tyranny” of the “old stupid world,” as one of Hamel’s characters calls England, was fueled by the recognition that accurately representing Creole “reality” called, if not for an outright rejection of traditional forms, then for a self-conscious adaptation of them. Moreover, unlike their metropolitan counterparts, colonial texts of the Emancipation period routinely demonstrate the ways that colonial subjects, black and white, configured “new” identities while simultaneously adhering to “old” models of behaviour.

In Williams’s novel this configuration is accomplished in part through the appropriation and adaptation of a variety of eighteenth-century novel forms, among them English Jacobin political fiction, gothic fiction, and historical romance. Borrowing from established literary (sub)genres Williams leads the reader to a recognition of specifically colonial subjectivities by evoking the particularized responses tied to particular genres, whether that response is outrage at injustice, a shudder of horror, or a sympathetic tear. At the same time, these responses are called forth by the author’s ability to rework “fashionable mediums” by claiming an authority borne of West Indian experience—an experience rooted not only in the author’s familiarity with the day-to-day effects of slavery on the formation and development of Creole culture, but more importantly, with the acute anxieties generated by the resistance to enslavement by black subjects.

Resistance to Atlantic slavery was not new to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As Hilary Beckles points out, the slave uprisings and revolutionary plots in the West Indies, from their settlement in the mid-seventeenth century to Emancipation, should be read as “one protracted struggle launched by Africans and their Afro-West Indian progeny against slave owners. Such endemic anti-slavery activity represented …
the most immediately striking characteristic of the West Indian world” (1). For Williams, whose novel is set in October 1822 and opens with a violent hurricane and earthquake, insurrection operates on a figurative and literal level: the upheaval created by the storm depicted in the first chapters sets the stage for the slave rebellion that unfolds in subsequent scenes. The centrality of rebellion in *Hamel* makes a sharp contrast with the *Tour*. In the earlier work insurrection remains in the background, minimized by descriptions of unrest as grumblings, discontent, and so forth. At one point, the *Tour’s* narrator relegates political agitation and slave uprisings to the realm of emotion, drawing attention to the manipulation of slaves’ feelings by abolitionist missionaries. At another point, couched between a description of plantain juice and duppies [spirits of the dead] recent “disturbances in the Island” and their effects on master-slave relations are described by a young woman in the sentimental language of what Watson calls the Caribbean romance of the 1820s:9

Miss Neville … told me … that on the report of the insurrection at Saint Mary’s, several of the negroes on their estate had assured her and her sister of their fidelity and attachment, and promised, let what would happen, to defend them to the last breath of their existence. They owned that they expected a rebellion, which they deprecated, and laid all the blame on Mr. Wilforce [sic] and the brewer or beerman, as they call Mr. Buxton. As I rode by the side of my fair companion, I could see a tear steal down her cheek … while she spoke of the faithful and affectionate attachment of the negroes. “It is really,” she said, “a dreadful calamity to be exposed to the fear of every horror that any set of human beings can be led to perpetrate in a state of phrensy and infatuation; but the cruelest thing of all is, to rend the ties of gratitude and affection that have for ages united the hearts of the blacks and whites. The negroes will be taught, as they already begin to think, that we are their greatest enemies, and that the quakers and the methodists are their best friends. They will never regard us again as they have done, nor shall we for ages be able to divest ourselves of fear and suspicion. (88–90)
As in other parts of the *Tour* and *Hamel* we see the impulse to represent black insurgency in terms of romance, illustrated in this passage by the reassuring image of the faithful black retainer and the female planter’s nostalgic tear. The disturbance, moreover, is represented as a disruption of social relations and history: the sentimental ties that have “for ages” united blacks and whites are severed, and a new age marked by fear and suspicion has been introduced by interfering abolitionists from England.

The perceived break with the past, the destabilization of the present, and the anticipation of an unsettled future are even more troubled in *Hamel* because that work features (and often valorizes) a rebel slave rather than a grateful and affectionate “servant.” Even so, each text traces the disturbance among the “common” slaves to missionary activity, and in their representations of the political climate of the island both strain to clarify causes and effects for readers in an attempt to help them correctly interpret its contemporary state of affairs. According to Williams’s texts, the slaves are not agitated by dissatisfaction over their present physical condition but by impatience for a future event—emancipation—for which they are ill-prepared. In other words, time is “out of joint” and the project of Williams’s *Tour* and *Hamel* is to “set it right.”

This correction, moreover, does not call for a violent readjustment, but rather a recalibration of the white European reader’s sense of history and understanding of time’s movements. In other words, only with the recognition that history gradually unfolds will its lessons become clear to the reader, as Williams spells out in the *Tour*:

[What] is called slavery, has existed in all countries; it existed in some parts of Great Britain a very few years ago, and it exists still in many parts of Europe: its extinction has always been gradual…. [A] dispassionate review of history will teach [men], that revolutions in the manners and condition of mankind are the result of ages, the mind being gradually and almost imperceptibly prepared for them…. [I]f it were possible to put our slave population a few stages in advance in civilization, and … imbue them at once with sufficiently enlarged desires for
the comforts and luxuries of life, to induce them to work for wages eight or nine hours, six days out of the seven, I would most willingly give my slaves that boon, accompanied by their freedom; but their immediate emancipation, with their present ignorance and limited desires, would be destruction to us all, masters and slaves. (75–76)\(^{11}\)

Despite its formulaic articulation of the anti-Emancipation stance, this passage also reveals two key historiographic tendencies that shape the way the past is perceived and constructed and the role it plays for anti-abolitionists like Williams in the attempt to shape future events. That is, the passage illustrates a parallel between reading and futurity in the sense that reading holds the promise of future knowledge, and although the primary beneficiary of this knowledge is white, it also suggests that once this historical literacy is imparted to that privileged reader, it should become a goal of the slaves’ education as well.

The first step in this educational process is to instill in readers the notion that gradual emancipation conforms and contributes to the natural and orderly unfolding of history. Part of this work had already been done by Enlightenment science, which by the early nineteenth century, had produced a paradigmatic shift in the way time and the earth’s history was perceived. Williams’s emphasis on gradual and imperceptible change occurring over a period of ages, for example, echoes the language of contemporary scientists who argued against reading the earth’s history by reconciling geological phenomena to scriptural accounts. Charles Lyell’s description of the “uniformity of nature” in his influential *Principles of Geology* (1830) had been expressed earlier in James Hutton’s *Theory of the Earth* (first presented to the Royal Society of Edinburgh and printed in the *Transactions* in 1788) and rearticulated by Hutton’s friend and biographer John Playfair in *Illustrations of the Huttonian Theory of the Earth* (1802). Hutton’s famous summary of his theory—“In examining things present, we have data from which to reason with regard to what has been; and, from what has actually been, we have data for concluding with regard to that which is to happen hereafter” (217)—can be compared to Joseph Priestley’s influential system of chronography laid out...
in his *Chart of Biography* (1765) and *Chart of History* (1769). In those works, observes Daniel Rosenberg, the charts “convey not only the *unity* but the *uniformity* of historical time” (75). More important to my reading of Williams and other Creole writers, however, are the political implications of the enlightenment view of geological history and the way its language could be deployed as a rationale for maintaining the political status quo, both in England and its Caribbean slave colonies. Put simply, this conception of historical time allowed for the dismissal of revolutionary activity on the grounds that it represents anomalous, catastrophic interruptions of the smooth flow of history, aberrations that should not be encouraged.

After the numerous slave revolts that took place in the Caribbean at the turn of the nineteenth century—the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804), Fédon’s Rebellion in Grenada (1795–97), the Second Maroon War in Jamaica (1795–96), and Bussa’s Rebellion in Barbados (1816), to name a few—notions of predictability and stability must have held great appeal for Creole writers trying to (re)write the Caribbean present and future. Certainly John Playfair’s assessment of Huttonian theory assumes a greater political significance when read in light of these rebellions: “Amid all the revolutions of the globe, the economy of nature has been uniform, … and her laws are the only thing that have resisted the general movement. The rivers and the rocks, the seas and the continents, have been changed in all their parts; but the laws which describe those changes, and the rules to which they are subject, have remained invariably the same” (421–22). The desire to rise above the chaos of human political disturbance and take refuge in the uniform and consistent laws of nature expressed by Playfair can also be seen in the *Tour’s* minimizing of contemporary unrest in Jamaica (as described above) and read in the celebratory descriptions of the narrator’s pursuit of scientific information—his expedition to Jamaica’s Blue Mountain peak, the detailed explanation of the make-shift barometer used to calculate altitude and temperature “according to Sir Henry C. Englefield’s method and tables,” and Williams’s catalogue of plants growing in the mountains (277–78; 289–90).
More significantly, privileging the Huttonian perspective—relying on the “data” of “what has actually been” (history), to draw conclusions “with regard to that which is to happen hereafter”—highlights the way Williams’s *Tour* presents the shift from chattel slavery to wage labour as part of a uniform historical process, a teleological end in the advance of civilization. Political revolution—and immediate emancipation as well as slave insurrection, are presented as ‘revolutionary’—disrupts the flow of this history by preventing the enslaved from acquiring, as the author of *Marly* puts it, “fictitious wants.” In such a construction capitalism becomes, paradoxically, de-historicized, represented as transcending historical processes. The naturalization of its laws and rules, in other words, functions in the same way as the rules and laws that dictate John Playfair’s “economy of Nature.” Indeed, this is the same paradox embedded in what Ellen Meiksins Wood refers to as the “commercialization model” of capitalism’s rise in which the market is traditionally presented as “an arena of choice” and “commercial society” as “the perfection of freedom”:

Yet this conception of the market seems to rule out human freedom. It has tended to be associated with a theory of history in which modern capitalism is the outcome of an almost natural and inevitable process, following certain universal, tran-shistorical, and immutable laws. The operation of these laws can, at least temporarily, be thwarted, but not without great cost. And its end product, the “free” market, is an impersonal mechanism which can to some extent be controlled and regulated, but which cannot finally be thwarted without all the dangers—and the futility—entailed by any attempt to violate the laws of nature. (16)

In the configuration of a similar model put forth by Williams and other Creole writers intent on shaping the Emancipation debate, human freedom is indeed ruled out: slaves should/will remain enslaved until they prove their readiness to participate in “civilized” (i.e., commercial) society by expressing “sufficiently enlarged desires for the comforts and luxuries of life” through their willingness to “work for wages.”¹⁴
Given Williams’s representation of the destructive consequences of “immediate emancipation” in the *Touren* and the suggestion that insurrection runs counter to the natural order of things, it might seem strange that in *Hamel* he chooses for his protagonist a black revolutionary figure who is treated sympathetically and who retains his heroic stature throughout the novel. But even as Williams appears to enshrine African culture and romanticize rebellion, as Watson suggests, he also takes care to represent Hamel’s activities in such a way that rebellion is read as a catastrophe averted only by Hamel’s ultimate renunciation of revolution as an un-timely means to achieve his political ends.

Hamel’s goals in orchestrating the island-wide rebellion—a clear demonstration of political agency—constitutes a critical departure from earlier black heroes like Aphra Behn’s Oroonoko, who rebels to prevent his child from being born into slavery, and William Earle’s Jack Mansong, who rebels to avenge his father’s death in *Obi; or, the History of Three-Fingered Jack*. Initially, however, Hamel’s political sophistication is veiled by an air of mystery. Certainly the reader’s introduction to the obeah man, which occurs when the villainous Methodist missionary Roland takes refuge in his cave during the hurricane, encourages such mystification. As he sleeps, Roland’s guilty conscience generates a nightmare in which a “fiend” fixes him with “eyes glaring with a malignant fury”:

The only sound which escaped the lips of the demon was that of his own name—Roland! Roland!—articulated in a voice of mingled triumph and revenge—Roland! The traveller started from his dream as if he had been roused by the sting of a scorpion. He sat upright for an instant, and stared wildly around, scarce recollecting his own identity or situation; but what was his amazement, not to say horror, on perceiving before him the very figure of the demon of his dream, or a figure which his fancy so quickly substituted for him, that the idea of the first was as if by magic resolved and condensed into that which he beheld? …

“In the name of God or Devil,” cried Roland impatiently, “who or what art thou?”
Hamel, as his response suggests, is a fluid character, one who plays whatever part is necessary to forward his revolutionary aims. For Roland he is a demon; for Combah, the African-born prince to whom Hamel has promised the throne of Jamaica once the whites have been killed and/or forced off the island, he is a policy advisor; for Oliver Fairfax, his owner, he is a trusted and loyal slave. All of these roles, however, are shaped by Hamel’s position as an obeah man.

Hamel articulates this position most frequently in his debates with Roland, as when he defends his religious practices: “Master Roland,” he chides, “we say nothing against your religion, nor your God; we had a religion before we knew yours; such as it was, it is” (1.42). Here the apparently “timeless” African roots of obeah are not condemned by Williams so much as they are situated as a foil to emphasize the dangerous fanaticism of abolitionist missionaries. But choosing an obeah man to express heroic sentiments is a tricky business, particularly given obeah’s association with slave insurrections. Hamel is, after all, the mastermind of a slave revolt, and desires nothing less than to create “a confusion in the island” and “revenge him and his countrymen on their oppressors” (2.141). Here, then, Hamel assumes the stereotypical role of the obeah practitioner as depicted in eighteenth-century colonial writings, from the “historical” accounts, say, of Nanny of the Maroons, who defied the British in the early Maroon wars, or of the obeah man who lent supernatural aid to Tacky during the 1760 uprising in Jamaica, or of Bashra, who, in Earle’s fictionalized account of Jack Mansong, made Three-Fingered Jack invincible to everything but the power of the white man’s obi, Christianity. The associations between obeah and rebellion, in other words, were long established by 1822. As Mr. Guthrie, a neighbor of Fairfax and father of the novel’s heroine, explains, “there is always an obeah man in every insurrection; there always has been” (Hamel 1.286).

Unlike many other treatments of obeah in the pre-Emancipation period, however, Williams’s novel does not ridicule it or dismiss it as mere
superstition, but rather emphasizes its political significance to African Caribbean resistance. Hamel, readers are told, fully understands how to wield the influence he has acquired “over his fellow Negroes by means of his superior talents, his spells, and his magic” (2.273); he also knows how to manipulate whites’ fears and perceptions of the practice as well, especially those possessed of a superstitious mind, like Roland. Indeed, one of the novel’s more fascinating strategies is to define abolitionism in the terms used by earlier colonial authorities to describe obeah. Hamel, for example, denounces missionaries who, “while they affect to be for making us free, and for saving our souls,” are actually “cramming us with dirt, and trash, and filthy foolish lies” (2.130). This reversal—dirt, trash, and filth were terms routinely used to describe the paraphernalia associated with obeah—is vividly dramatized in the scene where Roland is forced to participate in what he calls a “filthy ceremony of Obeah” (2.150). Part of the drama derives from Roland’s literal fall: while preaching friendship and rebellion on the ruins of a sugar estate Great House, the floor gives way and Roland crashes down into the cellars where Hamel is administering an oath of secrecy to his fellow rebels. Rather than be killed for his intrusion, Roland agrees to drink “the filthy-looking mixture” from the obeah cup and to swear himself to secrecy, an act that, as he understands it, puts him in league “with a Pagan and apostate” and transforms him into “an incendiary … —a traitor—a rebel” (2.151). Hamel, too, is very much aware of the implications of Roland’s act and uses it to his advantage, blackmailing Roland to use his influence over those slaves who have converted to Christianity and bring them into the rebellion. Clearly Hamel’s sophistication in using the obeah ritual, not for supernatural aid (as so often suggested by other colonial descriptions), but to ensure Roland’s participation and ensure the secrecy of the rebels’ plans, points to its politicized applications.

As important as it is to recognize Williams’s treatment of obeah as a corrective to other writings that tended to divorce the (ir)religious from the more political motives of practitioners, we should also pay attention to Hamel’s other powers, specifically those he derives from his understanding of the operations of “history” itself as “occult” in its suggestion of future events. At times Hamel disguises this understanding by en-
encouraging supernatural explanations, as when he suggests to Roland, for instance that “there is nothing in these mountains, in this island, which is concealed from me” (1.32) and convinces him of obeah’s powers by divining the missionary’s past misdeeds and future plans. At the same time, Hamel realizes that such intentional mystification has its limits, as it depends “much, if not altogether, on the caprice” of his credulous followers (2.274). For this reason the more pointedly political forecasts Hamel delivers to the plantocracy seem more powerful, an application, as it were of Huttonian theory to the Caribbean context. Not everyone, however, is attuned to the wisdom of Hamel’s prognostications, particularly those who, like Roland, read contemporary events for only their supernatural significance or those who deny the urgency of the slaves’ discontent from a position of complacency. However, for those willing to view history as a key to the present and future, to read it as Priestley suggests—“all at a glance”—Hamel offers a pragmatic strategy for predicting “that which is to happen hereafter” given the data of “what has actually happened” (Hutton 217). One need look no further, he suggests, than a hundred miles east of Jamaica. The astute reader, in other words, should “Look at Hayti…. Look still at Hayti,” as Hamel tells Joanna Guthrie when warning her of the imminence of the revolt on Jamaica (2.185).

The mention of Haiti would, of course, function on several levels for Williams’s contemporaries given the significance of the Haitian Revolution for Creole and metropolitan readers. Reading the Haitian Revolution—whether in 1822 or now—is difficult, however, for as Michel-Rolph Trouillot describes it, the Haitian Revolution “entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable [to whites] even as it happened” (qtd. in Childs 142). Moreover, as Matt D. Childs points out, the slaves’ triumph rendered the previously unthinkable a source of terror in the minds of most whites recording subsequent events, so much so that “some white observers after 1791 [tended] to view any black resistance as an extension of the Haitian Revolution” (qtd. in Childs 142). This tendency doesn’t seem surprising given the response among enslaved rebels who (at least according to colonial documentary evidence) cited the example of Haiti as inspiration and who
invoked revolutionary leaders like L'Ouverture and Dessalines. In addition, reports circulated (and were believed by colonial authorities) that military advisors from Haiti had traveled or were prepared to travel to islands like Cuba and Jamaica to support revolutionary activities there. Indeed, the fears of Jamaican authorities would appear justified in light of L'Ouverture's proposal to Cuban military officials that Haitians would help Spain retake Jamaica from the British in exchange for weapons.

When Haitian militants appear on the island to help Hamel's rebellion, Williams's readers would appreciate their presence as part of a history still unfolding.

But if Williams—through Hamel and the specter of Haiti—raises the possibility of a catastrophic event that will alter the course of Jamaican and British history, the novel also attempts to restore confidence in the progress of civilization charted out by the increasingly dominant and "natural" operations of finance capital and global commerce. In respect to Haiti, although the Haitian Revolution raised fears of violent insurrection, it also revived Jamaica's sugar-cane industry and diminished France's trading power in the region to such an extent that in his *Inquiry into the Permanent Causes of the Decline and Fall of Powerful and Wealthy Nations* (1805), William Playfair declared that "the superiority" of Britain's West India trade could be "set down as permanent." Without St. Domingo, which was "lost for ever," France would "never again be a formidable rival" in the Caribbean—particularly because the British government "is sufficiently aware of consequences not to neglect taking every precaution possible" to protect its slave colonies from internal and external threats (156–57).

Similarly, as an example of the complete destruction warned against in the *Tour* and cited above, the economic devastation that accompanied the Haitian Revolution was seen as proof that blacks were incapable of self-rule, that they had attained neither the self-discipline to work outside the institution of slavery, nor the kind of unlimited desire for fictitious wants that would instill that discipline. Such "proof" was (and is) useful in upholding racist notions of black inferiority while at the same time eliding the artificial restraints imposed on Haiti that effectively guaranteed its inability to participate independently in the world.
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market. The refusal by France, Great Britain, and the United States to recognize Haiti's independence until Haiti agreed in 1825 to pay 150 million gold francs as reparation to the French government for lost property and income during the revolution ensured nearly a century of crippling indebtedness—a fact that even today is neatly forgotten in discussions of the “failures” of the Western Hemisphere’s first black republic.20

Given the import of the Haitian Revolution and the way that contemporary historians presented it as both an isolated event and representative example, we can see the “inevitability” of Hamel’s end. The novel closes when Hamel squashes the rebellion he had organized, exposes the villainy of the missionary Roland, acknowledges that the blacks are not ready for self-rule, and decides to leave the island. With the dissolution of the obeah man’s agency—both as historian and as actor in the island’s history—Williams’s epistemological project appears successful. The novel’s prophetic reader can now recognize the lessons of the past (since the record of that past has been corrected) and can apply them to make meaning out of Hamel’s story and West Indian history, a meaning that in turn produces a future in which eventual emancipation facilitates the supposed organic development of capitalism. This particular point is anticipated by an earlier admission by Hamel that without white laws, blacks would regress and never become civilized.21 In the ensuing chaos of immediate emancipation, Hamel asks, “[W]hat will be our freedom? What are we to do—the ignorant, nasty, drunken Negroes, who were born slaves in Congo, and Coromantin, and Houssa, and Mundingo. Some will make the others work: there will be slaves for ever, unless the white men stay with soldiers and cannons to keep the strong ones from beating the weak ones, and making the women do all the work” (1.179). This tidy prophecy ultimately locates the source of brutal oppression in the absence of civilization rather than in the operations of slavery or in the unregulated forms of capitalism emerging in England and posited as the desired end of Creole and metropolitan history. More obviously, though, Hamel’s departure from Jamaica demonstrates the inevitable futility, according to Williams’s historical vision, of attempts by black rebels and abolitionists to confound and disrupt the natural progression
of time and history. And so, despite Fairfax’s forgiveness of his role in the rebellion and the invitation to remain and “pass the evening of his days in peace” (2.326), Hamel leaves the Caribbean to return to Africa, the land of his birth.

Sympathetic as that return seems—an effect heightened by the lingering gaze of the white men as “they watched him without regarding the time they so misapplied, until his little boat had diminished to a speck” (2.326–27)—it also calls to mind other efforts at repatriation, like the Sierra Leone project, which by 1822 was seen by many commentators, whether abolitionist or antiabolitionist, as a disastrous alternative to the gradual transformation of slave labourers to wage-earners. For Marly’s author, the failure of the colony was due to the lack of inducements for the ex-slaves to work: “a natural consequence which evidently follows is, that till they acquire fictitious wants, they will never become good subjects, whether viewed in the light of improvement or as a means of improving the trade of the mother country. The negroes in the West Indies would naturally act in the same manner as the free negroes in Sierra Leone” if given their liberty (249). Far better, in other words, that slaves—even after they acquire fictitious wants—should remain on Caribbean plantations and estates in order to ensure, as William Playfair’s comment suggests, the permanence of Britain’s West Indian trading dominance.

But in the end, Hamel does not leave the island alone. Following the surrender of his revolutionary ambitions, he lays open the secrets of his cave, and reveals all its “natural and artificial contrivances.” The tour of this “extraordinary labyrinth” culminates with a view of the sea, where Fairfax and Guthrie, Joanna’s father, see another canoe “filled with Negroes, standing away to the eastward” (2.323):

“My comrades,” said Hamel, “the subjects of king Combah going back to the land of freedom—Haiti—with some of the wretches whom it vomited forth for your destruction, at the recommendation of the Obeah Christians in England. They will make up a pretty tale, no doubt—but they might have conquered.” (2.323–24)
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The pretty tale of the Haitians and would-be rulers of a black Jamaica is still being constructed, Hamel and Williams suggest, a warning that white readers must heed by remaining vigilant interpreters of the past in order to navigate the present and ensure a future that will reconcile colonial and metropolitan desires.

Notes
1 Winer’s edition of Warner Arundell was published by the University of the West Indies Press in 2001; Creoleana and Marly were reprinted in 2002 as part of Macmillan’s Caribbean Classics series. Other titles include Srinivas Aravamudan’s edition of Obi; or, the History of Three-Fingered Jack (Broadview 2005) and Tim Watson and Candace Ward’s Hamel the Obeah Man (forthcoming from Broadview 2008).
2 See, for example, Young, Aravamudan Tropicopolitans, and Carey.
3 One contemporary advertisement for Hamel cites a review that identifies the author as the same individual “who published an amusing Tour in Jamaica” (Westminster Review); the Tour’s title page identifies its author as Cynric Williams. Tim Watson has since uncovered the likely identity of Williams as a Creole planter who lived in Jamaica for much of his adult life. For more on his identity, see Watson’s “Caribbean Romance and Subaltern History.” I am grateful to Professor Watson for his generosity in sharing his manuscript with me and for our conversations about the novel.
4 J. W. Orderson’s political pamphlet, Cursory Remarks and Plain Facts Connected with the Question Produced by the Proposed Slave Registry Bill, was published in 1816, his play The Fair Barbadian and the Faithful Black in 1835, and Creoleana in 1842. E. L. Joseph, a London-born Trinidadian, published his History of Trinidad and novel Warner Arundell in 1838.
5 The anonymously written Marly instructs the reader in the preface that the novel will reveal “the real state of slavery” in the British Caribbean colonies. Williamson identifies a likely candidate for Marly’s authorship, a Scottish writer named John Stewart, “who was resident in Jamaica from 1787 to 1808, acquired property there, and wrote two books about the island: An Account of Jamaica and Its Inhabitants (1808), and A View of the Past and Present State of the Island of Jamaica (1823)” (xiv). If she is correct, then Stewart, like the other Creole writers listed here, turns from non-fictional reporting to fiction to document what he describes as the actualities of Jamaican life.
6 Again, a comparison to Godwin is fruitful: in the preface to Caleb Williams, he lays out the principles Marly’s author alludes to: “It is now known to philosophers that the spirit and character of the government intrudes itself into every rank of society. But this is a truth highly worthy to be communicated to persons whom books of philosophy and science are never likely to reach. Accordingly
it was proposed in the invention of the following work, to comprehend, as far as the progressive nature of a single story would allow, a general review of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism, by which man becomes the destroyer of man. If the author shall have taught a valuable lesson, without subtracting from the interest and passion by which a performance of this sort ought to be characterized, he will have reason to congratulate himself upon the vehicle he has chosen” (1).

7 See, for example, James Grainger’s Virgilian epic *The Sugar-Cane* (1764), in which Grainger conformed to classical models and argued that although his theme was new—sugar cane was “to song unknown”—it was worthy of poetic treatment because sugar cane was “most momentous to [his] Country’s weal” (1.17). Another example is John Singleton’s blank verse *General Description of the West-Indian Islands* (1767), discussed in John Gilmore’s essay in this special issue. In terms of the novel, J. W. Orderson’s *Creoleana* borrows from British sentimental novelists to describe “Social and Domestic Scenes and Incidents in Barbados in Days or Yore,” and in *Warner Arundell E. L. Joseph draws from picaresque novels like Roderick Random to depict his “Adventures of a Creole.”

8 See Nordius’s discussion of *Hamel* as colonial gothic in “Racism and Radicalism.” See also Watson’s discussion of the novel as colonial romance in “Caribbean Romance and Subaltern History.”

9 See also, as Watson suggests, Lambert’s discussion of the “planter ideal” based on the “romance of benevolent masters and loyal slaves beyond the reach of metropolitan meddling” (Lambert 65–72).

10 Williams opens each chapter with an epigraph, the majority of which are drawn from Shakespeare’s plays, including two from *Hamlet*. In a commentary relevant to my overall argument, Scott discusses the importance of *Hamlet* for James’s *The Black Jacobins*, in which James (partially) reconstructs the tragic figure of Toussaint L’Ouverture in the image of Hamlet. James’s Toussaint, Scott suggests, like Hamlet, “is the very embodiment of the historical conflict between the old and the new. This is why the alternatives with which he was confronted—France with reenslavement or freedom without France—were neither alternatives of his choosing nor alternatives between which he could choose. They were, in short, tragic alternatives” (*Conscripts* 133). In my reading, Hamel is also a tragic figure, caught up in the historiographic conflicts that shaped Williams’s construction of him.

11 The speaker here is the narrator’s “radical friend” Mr. Matthews, a character based, according to Watson, on the powerful Jamaican planter Simon Taylor. Matthews’s radicalism is defined by his hatred of the British aristocracy, who have been duped (he believes) by abolitionists, by his practice of boycotting English-made products, and by his spirit of self-reliance.

12 Cf. Priestley’s description of revolution in the *Chart of History*: “They are rather melancholy reflections, which the view of such a chart of history [civil history]
as this is apt to excite in the minds of persons of feeling and humanity. What a
number of revolutions are marked upon it! What a broken appearance, in par-
ticular, do the finest, and most cultivated parts of the earth exhibit, as Greece,
Italy, Persia, and Egypt! What torrents of human blood has the restless ambition
of mortals shed, and in what complicated distress has the discontent of powerful
individuals involved a great part of their species! Let us deplore this depravity
of human passions, and may the contemplation of their fatal effects be a motive
with us to keep a strict watch over our own” (15). Priestley, like many European
historians, does not comment on the Haitian Revolution, though the Chart’s
title page describes it as “Containing a View of the Principal Revolutions of
Empire that Have Taken Place in the World.”

13 For more on the shared lexica of politics, geology, and poetry, particularly the
comparison of political revolutions and geological phenomena like volcanoes,
see Heringman’s Romantic Rocks, Aesthetic Geology, 2–3.

14 This language was not isolated to anti-abolitionists, but also was deployed by
such ardent abolitionists as William Wilberforce in the parliamentary debates
preceding the 1807 act to abolish the slave trade. Wilberforce and others argued
(publicly at least) that the question of abolition and emancipation were two
entirely different questions, that slaves were not ready—in their present circum-
stances—to be freed. Similarly, following the adoption of the resolutions that
the slave trade was contrary to the principles of justice and humanity, another
abolitionist, Lord Grenville, stated that “it was his opinion that in ‘their present
state of barbarism and ignorance,’ emancipation would be productive of great
injury to the Negro population in the West Indies” (Wesley 156).

15 For more on colonial explanations of the term “obeah” and its etymology, see
Handler and Bilby, “On the Early Use and Origin of the Term ‘Obeah.’”

16 Writing about Tacky’s revolt, Long describes “a famous obeiah man or priest,
much respected among his countrymen” captured by the colonial authorities,
which checked an uprising on a St. Mary’s estate: “He was an old Coramantin,
who, with others of his profession, had been a chief in counseling and instigating
the credulous herd, to whom these priests administered a powder, which, being
rubbed on their bodies, was to make them invulnerable: they persuaded them
into a belief, that Tacky, their generalissimo in the woods, could not possibly
be hurt by the white men, for that he caught all the bullets fired at him in his
hand, and hurled them back with destruction at his foes” (Long 2.451). See also
Sharpe on Nanny of the Maroons, and Aravamudan’s introduction to William
Earle’s novel Obi and its many appendices of contemporary sources on the prac-
tice of obeah.

17 Even when texts associate obeah with rebellion, as often happens, obeah is usu-
ally derided as superstition and as such, belief in obeah leads to the rebel’s down-
fall (see note 14 above). In Earle’s novel Jack Mansong was also described in this
way, with the addition that his death at the hands of a converted maroon tracker
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was proof that the African religion/superstition was inferior to the white man’s obi (Christianity). For more on Tacky’s Rebellion, see Craton.

18 According to Geggus, “The example of Haiti was … invoked by slave conspirators in Barbados in 1816 who planned ‘to set fire … the way they did in St. Domingo.’” Denmark Vesey, leader of an uprising in South Carolina in 1822, had briefly lived in St. Domingo. As Geggus notes, Vesey “promised his followers the help of Haitian soldiers once they had taken over the city of Charleston. It is also probable Vesey planned to escape to the black republic, which was then advertising for black immigrants in U. S. newspapers” (xii–xiii).

19 In Cuba, it was reported that leaders of the Aponte Rebellion in 1812 “counted on the assistance of blacks from Santo Domingo,” including “several hardened black warriors that had served in Santo Domingo with military rank” (qtd. in Childs 142).

20 Damu, J. “Haiti Makes Its Case for Reparations: Th e Meter Is Running at $34 per Second.” Final Call (Feb. 10, 2004). <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43a/628.html> Later this amount was reduced to 90 million, though impact of the indebtedness remained the same. Also, the terms of the agreement called for Haiti to take out a loan from a French bank at above market interest rates, further ensuring Haiti’s grim financial future.

21 This argument is more fully articulated in Marly: too sudden emancipation will result, the anonymous author claims, in many abandoning the plantations to “seek asylums in the bush, and there lead a life of almost complete idleness…. And thus, in place of improving in the arts of civilization, they would retrograde from what they are at present, until they became equally savage with their forefathers…. [E]very one who retired into the bush would be lost subjects to the country, for no productive labour farther than to supply the wants of nature could be expected from them. The productive agriculture of the country would receive a severe check, if not a total annihilation….Unfortunately, there is no occasion to argue upon this topic, or to theorize upon it, for we have the example before our eyes, of the captured negroes who have been colonized at Sierra Leone as free people” (247–48).

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“Too oft allur’d by Ethiopic charms”? Sex, Slaves and Society in John Singleton’s A General Description of the West-Indian Islands (1767)

John Gilmore

In 1767, the Barbados firm of George Esmand and William Walker printed for its author, John Singleton, A General Description of the West-Indian Islands, As far as relates to the British, Dutch and Danish Governments, from Barbados to Saint Croix.¹ This was, as the title page noted, “Attempted in Blank Verse.” The substantial and well-produced quarto volume is a tribute to the capacities of colonial printing in the period. At 2,470 lines, it is one of the longer poems produced in the Anglophone Caribbean region during the period, rivalling James Grainger’s The Sugar-Cane, which was first published in 1764.² Like Grainger’s poem, Singleton’s enjoyed some success in its own day, though perhaps not for the same reasons that make it of interest to the modern student of Caribbean literature and social history. Another quarto edition (A Description of the West Indies: A Poem, in four books) appeared in London in 1776 and was listed by the Gentleman’s Magazine in its “Catalogue of New Publications” in July. The Monthly Review for September of that year was somewhat dismissive:

… the descriptions are sometimes too minute, and of course offend against the dignity of the verse in which they are conveyed … The Author has succeeded still worse in episode. There is something, however, entertaining in his geographical account of Cole’s Cave, and the animal flower, which is, certainly, one of the most extraordinary phænomena [sic] in nature.

This was mild in comparison with some of the Monthly Review’s condemnations of would-be poets, however, and a briefer comment the following month in the rival Critical Review allowed that, “the West India islands are described in blank verse, with tolerable diction and spirit.”
A so-called “second edition” in a smaller format was printed in London in 1777, and in this an advertisement leaf made the claim that “The Quarto Edition of this poem” (meaning, presumably, the London 1776 edition) “having been honoured with a very liberal Encouragement; it cannot prove less acceptable to the public, in a smaller Size, and at a cheaper Rate …” (unnumbered prelims). Yet another edition appeared in Dublin in 1776, which was the only one of the four editions to include a subscription list, totalling 151, including a few titled persons.

The text of the Dublin edition is in almost all respects the same as that of the Barbados one, with only minor variations in punctuation. The two London editions, however, share a text that is significantly different. Most of the sometimes-lengthy footnotes in the earlier edition are omitted, and the names of some individuals, which were previously given in full, are reduced to initials or have some letters replaced by dashes. Where the poem itself is concerned, many passages that are in the Barbados edition are omitted from the London ones, including most of those which are given extended discussion in this article: the references to slave punishments, the passages on the curse of Ham, wet-nurses, interracial sex, the use of cashew juice for skinning the face, the Castalio and Chloe story, and the moralizing injunctions at the end of the poem. One omitted passage that appears to be uncontentious is a description of scenery and horse racing in Saint Croix (III, 145–189 Barbados edition).

Whether these changes were made by the author or by another and whatever the reasons might have been behind them are matters about which there appears to be no evidence. Some, though not all, of the omitted passages are of a sort that might well have given offence to members of the West Indian planter class or to their relatives in Britain, and it is possible that Singleton himself decided to omit them from the London editions because he had received a hostile reaction to his criticisms of white Creole manners and customs, and he wished to placate a class whose hospitality he had enjoyed while in the Caribbean. It is also possible that, since English copyright law did not apply in Ireland, the Dublin edition, like many eighteenth-century Irish editions, was produced without the author’s involvement.
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A cursory survey of online catalogues of major libraries suggests that surviving copies of the London editions are more common than copies of the Barbados one. More important, perhaps, is the fact that the 1777 London edition is the only version of the text currently available on the widely used digital resource Eighteenth Century Collections Online (ECCO). Whether or not as a result of the prevalence of the shorter and less interesting version of the text, Singleton’s poem, in spite of the fact that it must have been one of the most widely circulated literary productions of the eighteenth-century Anglophone Caribbean, has attracted little attention from modern historians and literary critics. Lowell Joseph Ragatz called it “A poor effort from the nature of the method employed in presenting material” (234), while Jerome Handler thought it “cumbersome and of limited value” (40). In his pioneering essay, “Creative Literature of the British West Indies during the Period of Slavery” (originally published in 1970), Kamau Brathwaite (Roots 127–70) did not even mention Singleton, though he did include him in his Barbados Poetry? 1661-1979: A Checklist (2), and extracts from the poem have been included in recent anthologies (Krise 262–314, 356–57; Basker 166–69). One recent writer who does make some use of Singleton for purposes of comparison is Deirdre Coleman, in her 2003 article, “Janet Schaw and the Complexions of Empire.”

This article examines aspects of the 1767 version of the poem, and attempts to show that Singleton’s work is not just “a literary curiosit” as Ragatz called it, one that is “of no value whatsoever” for the understanding of Caribbean history (234). The General Description may lack, for example, the detailed vignettes of plantation routine found in Grainger’s The Sugar-Cane, but Singleton’s unabashed exposition of attitudes to race and sex that are utterly abhorrent to the modern reader (and about which even the author may have had second thoughts) may help to further our understanding of the complex nature of Caribbean slave societies. Singleton shows clearly how such societies cannot be analyzed in terms of a binary opposition of white and black, and a reading of his work brings out the importance of gender in complicating racial issues, and of the perceived differences between Europeans and Creoles that made “whiteness” a distinctly non-homogenous category. Like his
apparent attempts to condemn slavery and justify it at the same time, his assertions of the humanity of black people while disparaging them in explicitly racist terms show a lack of intellectual coherence, but his efforts to win over his readers to his illogical defence of an imaginary racial and cultural purity by the use of highly emotional language are of interest, not only for what they reveal of their original cultural context, but in comparison with the similarly spurious arguments which remain all too common in our own time.

Little biographical information is available about Singleton. He refers to his muse as “British born” (IV, 658) and his book suggests he had had a conventional classical education: he can quote Latin authors in the original in his notes, and the poem itself shows the parade of mythological allusions usual among educated versifiers of all degrees of talent at the time. Richardson Wright, in his *Revels in Jamaica*, a frustratingly amateurish book originally published in 1937 that nevertheless includes much recondite information, identifies Singleton as having been for a period a member of the American Company of Comedians led by Lewis Hallam, which toured the North American colonies and Jamaica from the 1750s to the 1780s. Singleton seems to have left the company by 1758 (Wright 38–41), and there is no specific mention of Jamaica in his poem. There are gaps in our knowledge of the history of Hallam’s company and we do not know which other Caribbean islands (if any) they may have visited. As a result, we can at present only speculate about how Singleton came to the Eastern Caribbean and what he was doing there. The poem does suggest that he had travelled along the entire arc of the islands from Barbados to the Virgin Islands, but his description of most places is brief. The exceptions are Montserrat and Barbados; more detailed accounts of these islands, and tributes to entire lists of local worthies, with whom he appears to have been on terms of some familiarity, suggest that he had lived in each of them for relatively protracted periods. He specifically says of Barbados—which he calls “Thou lovely Eden of the western isles” (IV, 124)—that

“Me thou received’st, with arms extended wide, / And thro’ a series of indulgent years/ Steep’d me in bliss complete” (IV, 35–7)
His mention of Fontabelle, then just outside the capital, Bridgetown, “Where oft in groves umbrageous I have trod, / Poring the melancholy tragic page” (IV, 145–6) hints that he might have continued his profession as an actor while on the island. However, very little can be said about theatre in Barbados at this period, apart from the often quoted fact that the young George Washington went to see a performance of George Lillo’s once popular play, _The London Merchant: Or, The History of George Barnwell_ during his visit to Barbados in 1751 (Goddard 17; Hampden 211–65). It is possible, though by no means certain, that Singleton had returned to Britain by the time the later editions of his poem were published in 1776 and 1777.

Among the most prominent aspects of the poem, at least in terms of bulk, are the descriptions of topography and natural phenomena: the difficulty of accessing “the forbidding solitary rock” (II, 147) that forms the little cone-shaped island of Saba, the volcano in Montserrat (II, 537–695), “that steep cave / Which takes its name from Cole” in Barbados (IV, 206–256) and the Animal Flower Cave in the same island (IV, 284–388), the terrors of “the dread hurricane” (III, 283–494). Singleton had read _The Sugar-Cane_, and specifically acknowledged the “tuneful Grainger, nurs’d in Fancy’s arms” as “fav’rite son” of the “pow’rful genius of these fertile isles.” Compared to Grainger’s “sprightly muse,” Singleton was but “an humbler poet” (II, 14–25). Singleton’s hurricane passage bears significant resemblances to that in Grainger, and there are other passages that might be verbal echoes, but the later poet says almost nothing about Grainger’s main subject. The Argument to Singleton’s first Book lists the “cane plant and the West-Indian fruits particularly described” among its topics, but the cane itself is dismissed in only five lines:

In high perfection here that plant uprears
Its verdant blade, whose yellow ripen’d stem
Pours its rich juicy streams abundant forth,
And from its sweets bestows increasing pow’r,
Plenty, and ease, on its impatient lord. (I, 61–65)

More attention is paid to how sugar is used to sweeten ladies’ tea (I, 66–76), and to the deleterious effects of rum (I, 77–90). The actual de-
tails of cane cultivation receive only passing mention. Singleton earlier requests his muse to

Traverse with me the hills, the varied slopes,
The level'd plains; crown'd with transcendent bloom;
Where ever-budding spring, and summer gay,
Dance hand in hand, and, with eternal joy,
Lead up the jocund harvest to the mill. (I, 23–27)

What human agency might be involved here is an awkward subject that is simply avoided. Singleton says only that “the rich planter, well rewarded, sees / Perpetual produce springing all the year” which enables him to be “hospitable, at his plenteous board…” (I, 28–30). In a later passage, Singleton does refer to “the lab’ring negroes panting heart” (II, 262), and, further on, to slaves for whom

… all their piteous hours
Drag heavily along in constant toil,
In stripes, in tears, in hunger, or in chains… (III, 516–18)

However, we are never told of what their toil consists. The only place in the entire poem where we are actually given any detailed description of slaves working is where they feature as “sable cooks” and attendants at a barbecue which forms a sort of extended pastoral idyll (I, 245–441). The reader who was not already aware that the main purpose of slavery in the Caribbean colonies was to provide labour for the cultivation of cane and the manufacture of sugar would have been left guessing. This is in marked contrast to Grainger, whose avowed purpose is to discuss such matters in detail. Even the Barbadian-born Nathaniel Weekes, whose 1754 *Barbados: A Poem* is mainly a eulogy of the island’s topography and productions, includes a relatively detailed description of crop-time and sugar-making on a plantation (while noting that “Long time has it been” since his Muse actually saw such scenes). Weekes makes it clear that these things were part of the “daily destin’d Labours” of the slaves, and he mentions, and deprecates, the use of the whip in the field, even if he claims “There’s not a Slave, / In spight of Slav’ry, but is pleas’d, and gay” during crop-time (30, 55–61).
Singleton, however, keeps returning to the topic of slavery itself, though it is difficult to find any consistent point of view in his comments. He qualifies the “constant toil” passage by immediately adding

> These are the ills which they rejoice to fly,
> Unless, by partial chance, their lot is cast
> Beneath some kind indulgent master’s sway,
> Whose hand, like their good genius, feeds their wants,
> And with protection shields their helpless state. (III, 519–23)

He urges slaveholders to be moderate in their use of “Correction’s useful stroke” (IV, 566). This may be no more than practical advice, “For cruel treatment steels the stubborn mind, / And frequent stripes a callous skin create” (IV, 563–64). While he urges

> … above all, no needful food with-hold,
> And, parsimonious, stint the toiling slave,
> Whilst you in pride and superfluity
> Wallow content, nor heed thy servants wants … (IV, 570–73)

and notes that “Too oft, alas! such practice, vile, prevails” (IV, 574). Here, too, better treatment is expected to benefit the master as well as the slave:

> So shall the toilsome task of labour run
> Far less tormenting thro’ the torrid day,
> And cheerful eyes survey th’arduous work;
> So shall the slave with grateful heart repay
> His gen’rous master’s care, and bounteous love. (IV, 583–87)

When he begins to describe a “gloomy cave” in Montserrat, he says it was

> First found, through chance, by some delinquent slave
> Flying the lash of his revengeful lord,
> Or overseer more cruel. (II, 35–37)

He speculates that the fugitive might have been “a prince perhaps; / By treach’rous scheme of some sea brute entrap’d” (II, 39–40), and follows this by calling the slave trade an “Accursed method of procuring
wealth!” (II, 45). Attempts to justify the trade on the grounds of alleged racial differences are similarly rejected as un-Christian:

Deal Christians thus, yet keep that sacred name?
Or does the difference of complexion give
To man a property in man? — O! no:
Soft Nature shrinks at the detested thought,
A thought which savages alone can form. (II, 48–52)

This is followed immediately by a passage which condemns the trader as a “wretch,” and a “treacherous friend,” who promised to provide a European education for the son of an African king, but who instead, “in some far distant isle exchange’d / His sacred charge for vile commercial gain” (II, 53–88). This bears more than a passing resemblance to the real-life story of “The Royal African” William Ansah Sessarakoo, who had been sold as a slave in Barbados in 1744, and whose case caused a sensation when he was freed and brought to England at the end of the 1740s. Nevertheless, Singleton does not take this argument to its logical conclusion. Saying that the slave is “by hard fortune … doom’d to toil, / And never taste the sweets of liberty” (IV, 588–9) may suggest that while the slave trade could be condemned as “traffic vile” (II, 42), enslavement itself is explained by bad luck, or simply part of the natural order of things. Singleton is aware that slaves might be subjected to brutal punishment: he talks of “flagellation [sic] dire” (IV, 447) and “Th’ hardening lash of public justice” (IV, 561), and he parallels the “kind indulgent master” (III, 521) with the “stern mistress” (IV, 604). Still, for him, good or bad conduct in slave-owners appears to consist in how they treat their slaves, not in the very fact of claiming “a property in man.” While Singleton does not actually set out such an argument, he may perhaps be assuming that, while enslaving free-born persons is a bad thing, slavery is a different matter when the slaves have been born into the institution and so can be claimed to be accustomed to it. Matthew Chapman advances this idea much later in Barbadoes, and other poems (1833) in order to forward his claim that slaves were contented with their lot and that Emancipation would be a disaster for all concerned.
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In his conclusion to the whole poem, Singleton urges his readers, particularly his female readers (“ye fair”) to

    Learn,
    That wheresoever Heav’n hath set his seal,
    “To give the world assurance of a man,”
    Whether that being is to slav’ry doom’d,
    Or shares an happier fate, yet, man is man,
    And claims a milder treatment than the beast … (IV, 638–43)7

A little earlier he has told the slave’s master – “thou lordly owner of his flesh” – that

    His sable body cloths a human soul,
    To passion’s impulse feelingly alive
    As well as thine. (IV, 590–93)

Similar acknowledgements of the common humanity of master and slave can also be found in Grainger’s The Sugar-Cane, where reservations are expressed about slavery, but the overall assumption is that it would be impractical to abolish the institution, except possibly at some distant point in the future. There are some things which Singleton, interestingly enough, does not say: for example, he follows up his passage on the evils of drunkenness in Book I with an extended reference (I, 91–104) to the drunkenness of Noah (Genesis 9.20–27), without bringing in the story of the Curse of Ham and its alleged justification of the enslavement of Africans. This idea was already widely credited in the British colonies in the Caribbean and North America by the late seventeenth century, when Morgan Godwyn found it necessary to argue against it in his 1680 publication, The Negro’s and Indian’s Advocate, Suing for their Admission into the Church (Davis 369–70). The contrast which Singleton draws between white mourners bewailing the loss of their loved ones in the hurricane and the behaviour of “th’untutor’d slave” at funerals, where “his calm deportment puts to shame / Th’e boasted reason of the polish’d world” (III, 495, 498–99) is not unfavourable to the African. Like Grainger, Godwyn is scornful about the activities of practitioners of obeah and traditional medicine (II, 331–85), but the “childish superstition” (III, 69) that leaves alleged piratical treasure unsearched for in
the Virgin Islands appears to be that of the white inhabitants. If obeah
men and women practice “bold deceit,” this is something to which “the
universe / At times becomes a prey” and which will “by turns, delude /
The ermin’d monarch, and the tatter’d slave” (II, 386–89).

Nevertheless, while Singleton claims that “man is man,” there are
places where his anxiety to emphasize differences between black and
white leads him to formulate arguments as repulsive as those of Edward
Long. In his History of Jamaica (1774), Long referred to Africans and
their descendants in the Americas as “these men” but claimed that such
was “their dissimilarity to the rest of mankind” that the logical conclu-
sion was that they were “a different species of the same genus” (II, 356).
The racism becomes increasingly apparent as we follow the references to
love and physical desire that Singleton brings into his poem.

He begins with the barbecue at the end of Book I:

There the woo’d virgin, and the sprightly youth,
Am’rous and gay, the cool retreat enjoy;
Whilst pastimes innocent, and rural sports,
With high delight, the jocund hours beguile. (I, 252–55)

Their elders look on approvingly at the courtship of young white cou-
ples, who

in pairs drawn off,
With virtuous dalliance the sweet hours beguile …
All unabash’d they toy, nor blush to meet
The chaste embrace, by chaste desire obtain’d;
Nor, cautious, from th’observing eye retire,
To steal, in secret, joys too dearly bought. (I, 340–41, 344–47)

In the next Book, we learn that the chief judge of Montserrat was “Blest
in a beauteous progeny, conjoin’d / In Hymen’s happiest bans [sic]” (II,
747–8). But the course of true love does not always run smooth, and in
Book III, Singleton introduces into his description of the Danish colony
of St. Croix the story of Philander’s love for Aurelia, who, “Few charms
attractive in her looks could boast” as a result of the smallpox, but who
instead possessed “Each grace the mind adorns, largely bestow’d.” The
reference to Aurelia’s “lily skin,” and the details of the story as a whole, make it clear that the romantic tale is that of a white couple. However, Aurelia’s mercenary father Avarus, who employed Philander and had taught him “all the secrets of commercial gain,” refused to see him as a suitable match for his only daughter. Only by flight from St. Croix, “to some protecting pow’r / Where British liberty should guard love’s rights” is the happy ending secured, “And in connubial bands the pair are join’d” (III, 190–282).

After this perhaps rather conventional story, it is a little startling to move on to the final Book of the poem, where, after extended descriptions of the social pleasures and topographical attractions of Barbados, we are abruptly told, “These are the island’s treasures: Now its plagues / Demand a thought” (IV, 389–90). Singleton claims that his muse is “unwilling to offend, / Yet studious to reform by soft advice / Where’er she finds a flaw” (IV, 391-393). He immediately continues, “Know then, ye fair, / Among your plagues I count the negro race, / Savage by nature” (IV, 393–95). It quickly becomes clear that Singleton is warning white Creole women to beware of their slaves, whose “callous senses” and “drowsy faculties” are, he claims, immune to instruction (IV, 397–400). They are “Cruel and fierce, no admonitions tame / The brutal disposition of their souls” (IV, 401–2). Adapting a phrase from Shakespeare, he suggests that “philosophy’s sweet milk” cannot “quench / The flame that ever and anon springs up / To curse their beings, and to torture ours” (IV, 403–5).  

The nature of the “flame” is not specified, but what follows later suggests that it is sexual passion.

The mention of “philosophy’s sweet milk” leads on to a vivid expression of the distaste inspired in more than one European observer by the thought that the white Creoles were in constant danger of becoming like their own slaves, a possibility described by Singleton in the language of disease and contagion. He warns white mothers against the employment of black wet-nurses. This was a common practice among white Creole women, and Singleton was not the only outside observer to be startled by the resulting physical intimacy across racial boundaries (Long; see also Watson 76, Coleman 174). If white mothers cannot nurse their children themselves, Singleton says, they should
…rather use all art the babes to rear,
Than e’er condemn them to the sable pap’s
Infectious juice! for, with the milky draught
The num’rous vices of the fost’ring slave
Deep they imbibe, and, with their life’s support,
Draw in the latent principles of ill;
Which, brooking no controul, in riper years,
Grow with their growth and strengthen with their strength.
(IV, 413–19)10

Singleton further advises white mothers to avoid allowing others to teach their children “an horrid oath to lisp, / Or phrase obscene” (IV, 422–23). Children are also to be discouraged from delighting in the sight of slaves being punished: “Taint not the minds with cruelty and rage.” But it is the white women who are told that they themselves should not “wantonly indulge a savage joy / To practise torments on the hapless slave” (IV, 427–28). Singleton continues for some lines about how “Such dispositions ill become your sex” (IV, 429) and how women, should, rather, plead for mercy on behalf of slaves facing punishment and “save the wretch, / Crouching beneath the vengeance of his lord” (IV, 438–39). His clinching argument is that losing one’s temper is bad for the complexion: “Soon shall the wrinkle those arch’d brows deform, / On which stern Anger oft triumphant sits” (IV, 443–44).

What follows suggests that Singleton shared the view expressed by other European commentators that the cruelty some white Creole women exercised upon their slaves was the result of jealousy11:

As Heav’n has form’d ye beautiful and fair,
Be wise, be good, be tender, and be kind,
And rather seek by gentle arts to win,
Your truant lord back to his joyless bed,
Too oft allur’d by Ethiopic charms,
And sinful made by an impetuous wife;
Be chaste, obedient, mild, sedate, and true,
With tender blandishments, and words of love
Reclaim your weaned spouse, meet him with smiles,
Let him find certain happiness at home,
And he’ll not fly to looser joys abroad. (IV, 449–59)
“Too oft allur’d by Ethiopic charms”?

However, there are limits to what a wife can be expected to do, and Singleton devotes forty-six lines (IV, 460–505) to warning her never “The desp’rate experiment to try / Of adding roses to the sallow cheek” by what he explains this at some length in a footnote as the “abominable practice” of “skinning the hands and face” by means of “a poisonous juice” obtained from cashew nuts. Singleton does not seem to have thought it was common (though it was also mentioned by Grainger), but his fascinated horror and the possibility that a few women might indeed have resorted to such a desperate and dangerous expedient—Singleton claims that one who tried it “skinn’d at length her precious eyes away”—appear to be rooted in the idea that the one thing which white women could offer men which black women could not, was the whiteness of their complexions. If this was a good thing, and Singleton takes it for granted that it was, then “freckled skin … / Or face imbrown’d by Sol’s irradiant beam” were evils to be avoided. Drastic cosmetic procedures, however, are “unwarrantable arts” which “insult” the power of the Creator who, Singleton rebukes his white female readers, “gave you beauty to attract mankind, / Sufficient beauty; yet ye covet more.” Even if they work, the results do not last:

… that momentary face ye own,  
Got with the loss of many days ill spent,  
Shall be the admiration of an hour …

It is much better, he goes on to suggest, to “preserve beauty at a cheaper rate” by practising a régime of moderate early morning exercise and drinking spring water and fresh milk (IV, 506–20). His choice of terminology (“bid the milky udder yield its streams”) returns us not only to “philosophy’s sweet milk” but also to the “milky draught” from the bosom of the black wet-nurse, and to the idea of whiteness as something which has to be actively preserved from contamination.

This is developed further, when Singleton moves on to address the “sons of Caribbean lands” and urges them to “Shun the false lure of Ethiopic charms” (IV, 521–51). His language becomes increasingly hysterical, as he talks about the “dark complexion”, “aspect foul” “deformity of features, shape and soul” and the “frouzy fragrance” of “the sable miss.” He works himself up to describing what he most fears:
... can the frightful negro visage charm,
Thro’ vague variety, or wanton lust,
Whilst the blind fool an angel’s bosom quits,
To pillow in a fiend’s unnat’ral arms,
Where the fond master oft succeeds his slave?

It does not make things any better, he goes on, if “the lewd spark the
tawny should prefer / To shining jet,” since

... Alas! that tawny draws
Its copper hue from such an odious source,
As Heav’n ne’er pointed out to nobler souls,
Form’d to be blest with elegant desires,
And to communicate the virtuous joy
To objects truly worthy of their love. (IV, 552–59)

In other words, Singleton is an absolutist: the lighter complexion of a mulatto mistress does not make her any less of an evil than “the sable miss,” it is merely evidence of the horrific fact of earlier miscegenation, the “odious source” of her “copper hue.”

After this, it at first seems surprising to move on, not just to the passage about avoiding excessive punishments and the benefits of treating slaves humanely, but to another romantic tale, this time of “young Castalio” and “his sable Chloe” (IV, 593–635). Unlike the story of Philander and Aurelia, this one has no happy ending. Chloe becomes pregnant, and her “stern mistress … wrapt up in hopes / Of sordid gain” is outraged at the thought that she will no longer be able to work as hard as before, and orders her to be confined so that the lovers can no longer meet. The despairing Castalio flies to the spot where they used to meet and there “He dash’d him down; and with a groan expir’d.” No explicit racial designation is attached to Castalio, and only the fact that the story follows immediately after the passage, already quoted, in which the slave-owner is told that his slave’s “sable body cloaths a human soul,” suggests that, like Chloe, Castalio is a victim of slavery. We may note how “British liberty” does not protect Castalio and Chloe the way it does Philander and Aurelia. Singleton then winds up the entire poem by asking his readers (and it is clear that the readers he has in mind are white Creoles) not to
deem his muse presumptuous “if from her tongue / Rash speech hath
dropt, rash errors to reclaim” (IV, 656–67). Instead, they should heed
his advice, or, as he puts it, “Submit to kiss the rod, by justice held” (IV,
660) and they will be all the better for it: “So shall your virtues ripen day
by day…” (IV, 665–71).

Some of the apparent inconsistencies in Singleton’s poem can be re-
solved if we look at two more omissions, along with his bypassing of
the “Curse of Ham.” Unless we follow Coleman’s reading, in which the
description of skinning the face “suggests that the ritual functions as a
cover for infanticide or for the application of abortifacients,” whereby
“young white women collude with hags to destroy their mixed-race fe-
tuses” (175), there is no mention in Singleton’s poem of the possibility
of white women desiring black lovers, something which was perhaps
just too horrifying for him to contemplate. Such relationships certainly
happened in reality, but I am not aware of their making a literary ap-
pearance before the early twentieth century.13 The parish chronicles of
the amateur local historians Shore and Stewart, first published in 1911,
make it explicit that the Annie Palmer of legend (based, however loose-
ly, on a real historical figure in early nineteenth-century Jamaica) had
sexual relations with some of her male slaves, though the well-known
novel by de Lisser, based on this story and first published in 1929 (and
for many years now an important ornament of Jamaica’s tourist indus-
try), only credits “The White Witch of Rose Hall” with a string of white
lovers (Shore and Stewart 36, 40). More significant in Singleton, I feel,
is the absence of the stereotype of the violent, lustful black man whose
desires are directed towards white women, since such a stereotype fea-
tures in Edward Long’s descriptions of slave revolts, and forms a lurid
part of Matthew Chapman’s imaginings of such revolts in his poem
“Barbadoes.” Like Long, who describes the sexual relationships of white
men and black women in Jamaica as “goatish embraces” (Long II, 328),
Singleton also represents interracial sex as bestial. For all his claims that
“man is man,” Singleton clearly relegates black people to a position of
inferiority and describes them in terms of racialized disgust. However,
what he seems to fear most, as he contemplates the idea of the white
man sharing his black mistress with one of his own male slaves, is not
the black slave of either sex, but the idea of white people becoming black, something hinted at by the language in which he describes how, during the process of skinning the face, “before the skin or mask of the face comes off, it turns black, and the person so suffering becomes an horrid spectacle.”

In the modern Caribbean, creolization, the process by which an often-painful past has brought different cultures together to produce new and distinctive cultures specific to the region, is generally seen in a positive light. While the “All o’ we is one” rhetoric can sometimes seem facile and look as though it is being manipulated to the disadvantage of minority groups, few would question the idea that modern Caribbean societies are to a large extent the product of genetic and cultural mixture. For Singleton, living in the Caribbean at a much earlier stage of the process, this is precisely the problem. As he takes it for granted that a white skin and European cultural norms are more desirable than black skin and African cultural norms, anything which works against the preservation of the former is to be feared. For him, hybridity is not something to be celebrated, it is cause for alarm, and in his poem the physical imagery of inter-racial sex or of the black woman nursing the white child functions as a synecdoche for the wider issue of what Singleton sees as cultural contamination.

Something of the sort can also be seen in a much better known, and more or less contemporary poem, *The Sable Venus*, written by the Rev. Isaac Teale (d. 1764), an Anglican clergyman resident in Jamaica. The poem was written at the request of Teale’s pupil, Bryan Edwards (1743–1800), later famous as the author of the pro-planter *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British West Indies* (1793). First published in Jamaica in 1765 and later given a wider circulation by its inclusion in Edwards’ *History, The Sable Venus* is, on the surface, a celebration of the attractiveness of black women to white men, although it also romanticizes white male sexual exploitation of black women. As I have pointed out elsewhere, the poem may have been intended as satirical, since Edwards, at least in later life, regarded the custom, so widespread in the Caribbean, of white men keeping black or mixed-race mistresses, as a “vicious system of life” which was “baneful to society” (Dabydeen, Gilmore and
“Too oft allur’d by Ehtiopic charms”? Jones 426). The essential point was that sexual attraction had the power to erase, if only temporarily, racial distinctions, as was shown in Teale’s comparison of his Sable Venus with the Venus de Medici:

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The loveliest limbs her form compose,
Such as her sister Venus chose,
In Florence, where she’s seen:
Both just alike, except the white,
No difference, no, — none at night,
The beauteous dames between. (9)
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That the consequences of interracial sex could be long lasting is hinted at by Teale’s reference (10) to the birth of a mixed-race Cupid (“Blest offspring of the warm embrace! / Gay ruler of the saffron race!”), who is described as a figure of power and influence. In the same way, Teale characterizes the Sable Venus as a “queen” and “Goddess” whose power over white men (“all, adoring thee, do one, / One Deity confess”) is clearly subversive of the conventional racial hierarchy of slave societies, in which, of course, whites occupied the ruling position (10).

For all his tributes to individual Creoles in high places in colonial societies, Singleton clearly worries about the white Creoles as a group, reflecting the way British society saw them as strange and different, unlike true Englishmen. Samuel Johnson pointedly asked where the elder William Beckford (a prodigiously wealthy Jamaican-born politician and absentee planter who enjoyed a political career in Britain and was twice Lord Mayor of London) had learnt his English (Boswell 774), while Richard Cumberland portrayed the eponymous hero of his play The West Indian, first performed and published in 1771 (Hampden 339–408) as a sort of noble savage, shaped by the tropical climate in which he had been born. Singleton is fully aware of the commercial importance of the sugar colonies to Britain, and, like many of his contemporaries, he assumes that keeping them depends on maintaining the system of slave cultivation which was linked to a racial hierarchy. Singleton feels that the white Creoles are failing in their duty here: they are not being white enough. His harping on inter-racial sex suggests that he wonders if some of them are indeed white at all. While to associate domestic with political virtue
is sufficiently commonplace, Singleton does so in such a manner as to indicate that his ideas are precursors of the racist ideologies of the twentieth century. When, in his concluding call to the white Creoles to adopt his program of moral reform, he associates “Such virtues as indear the marriage tie” with “Such virtues as inspire the patriot’s soul,” he appears to be motivated by the same views that led white South African politicians to view the Immorality Act as a bulwark of the apartheid regime. But we do not need to look at apartheid, or the similar prohibitions on mixed marriages which survived in several of the American states until well into the twentieth century, or at Nazism, for Singleton’s discourse of contamination is all too reminiscent of contemporary anti-immigration rhetoric in many countries.

Notes
1 An earlier version of this work was presented at the 36th Annual Conference of the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies, Oxford, 3–5 January 2007. I am grateful to several participants for comments made on that occasion.
All references are to this edition and are given by book and line numbers of the poem. I am grateful to Betty Shannon (formerly librarian of the Barbados Museum and Historical Society) and to Patrick Roach for their help in obtaining a photocopy of the copy in the BMHS library.
2 Gilmore’s Poetics of Empire includes a complete text of Grainger’s poem, with detailed introduction and commentary.
3 The London 1776 edition was priced at three shillings (half-title), while the 1777 edition stated a price of two shillings on the title page.
4 Additional information about the Hallam Company (though not about Singleton’s relationship to it) may be found in Hill (76–80). Singleton does say in a footnote that “I am farther informed, that the admiral at Jamaica sends all those afflicted thus [i.e., with leprosy] from the hospitals down to the grand Caymana” (II, 253).
5 See my entry on Sessarakoo in Dabydeen, Gilmore and Jones (439–40).
6 Singleton also refers to “The sweets of liberty” (III, 511).
7 Singleton is quoting from Shakespeare, Hamlet, 3.4. 61–62: “Where every god did seem to set his seal / To give the world assurance of a man …”
8 Probably means “banns” here, not “bands,” which would also make sense; the OED has a 1745 example (from the poet John Gay) of “bans” as an alternative spelling for “banns.” The London, 1777, edition of Singleton’s poem also gives “bans” in this passage.
9 Compare Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet, 3.3. 54: “Adversity’s sweet milk, philosophy.”
“Too oft allur’d by Ehtiopic charms”?

10 The image of the white child at the breast of the black nurse long remained a powerful one, but was sometimes shown in a more positive light: my personal collection includes an early twentieth-century postcard, reproducing a painting of possibly nineteenth-century origin by an unidentified artist, and depicting the “Impératrice Joséphine: Au Sein de sa Nourrice.” No publisher’s name is given, but the back of the card bears the rubber stamp of the “Musée Impératrice Joséphine” (now Musée de la Pagerie) at Trois-Ilets in Martinique, suggesting that it was sold as an affirmation of the Creole identity of the celebrated Empress of the French.

11 For an example, see the extracts from John Marjoribanks, Slavery: An Essay in Verse (1792), included in Basker (319–23): “A jealous mistress finds a ready sham/To give a handsome maid the sugar dram …” (i.e. poison).

12 Singleton’s note says, “I must with justice acknowledge that until I arrived at Montserrat, I never once heard of such an action, and I am not inclined to believe it a general fault in that or any other of the islands.” In a note to The Sugar-Cane (IV, 137), Grainger says the “highly caustic oil” obtained from cashew nut rinds “is used as a cosmetic by the ladies, to remove freckles and sun-burning; but the pain they necessarily suffer makes its use not very frequent” (Gilmore 193). Coleman discusses Singleton’s note (174–76).

13 As well as the examples cited by Beckles (78–79), see Marshall for a discussion of how local authorities in Barbados could use their control of a charitable fund to discourage poor white women from associating with black men.

14 Coleman draws attention to this detail (175).

15 South Africa’s Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) was followed by the Immorality Act (1950), which outlawed all sexual relations between persons of different races. Both acts were repealed in 1985.

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94
Filling Up the Space Between Mankind and Ape: Racism, Speciesism and the Androphilic Ape
Sara Salih

I believe it will be very difficult, or rather, impossible, for a man, who is accustomed to divide things according to specific marks, not individual differences, to draw the line betwixt the Orang Outang and the dumb persons among us. (Monboddo I, 297)

As with every bottomless gaze, as with the eyes of the other, the gaze called animal offers to my sight the abyssal limit of the human: the inhuman or the ahuman, the ends of man, that is to say the bordercrossing from which vantage man dares to announce himself to himself, thereby calling himself by the name that he believes he gives himself. (Derrida 381)

Race and culture have been analyzed and critiqued as “highly improper” fictions and metaphors during the past few decades of critical race theory and postcolonial theory (Young 53–54, Hall 443). In this article I want to turn to the production of two other contested notions, the “human” and the “animal,” with a focus on their various significations during the eras of slavery and Abolition. These terms predate the category of race as it is now used in critical race theory; indeed, they lay the ground for the deployment of race as concept and construct during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Numerous natural histories of the period are concerned with the taxonomization of human and animal, either in order to produce clear distinctions between these two contested categories, or to blur those distinctions. My discussion will centre on selected key works of the period, including Georges Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon’s voluminous *Natural History*, published between 1748 and 1804, and Edward Long’s now notorious *History of Jamaica*, published in 1774. I want to focus on these two texts because of their enduring
cultural impact, and because in them the mutual dependence of notions of race and notions of the human and the animal emerge with particular starkness. As is well-known, Long is engaged in identifying and characterizing different species of humans: following this line of logic (or illogic), I am going to argue that race-thinking is a form of speciesism that is highly invested in notions of the animal and the human. Indeed, I want to insist that it is impossible to discuss the history of race and racism without taking account of formulations of species distinction in which the putative boundaries between animal and human were (and continue to be) asserted with varying degrees of emphasis.1 Humanness is figured as a continuum in *The History of Jamaica*, and both Long and Buffon use spatial metaphors to describe the gradations by which man ascends from brute to civilized. If we were to adapt George Orwell’s ironic observation about equality in *Animal Farm*, we might say that for Buffon and Long, all humans are human, but some are more human than others. Human, as it will be clear, is a qualitative term: it is interpellative, performative, and ideologically contingent. It is, as Giorgio Agamben notes and as I discuss below, not a specific identity but the ability to recognize oneself as human (26).

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century natural historians may have argued over where to fix the border between human and animal, but as Marjorie Garber elucidates in her essay “Heavy Petting,” a new breed (so to speak) of “critical anthropomorphists” is currently engaged in interrogating why it is that “science” insists on the existence of a fixed boundary between human beings and the rest of the living world. “Indeed,” writes Garber, “as one researcher points out, the desire to establish a firm borderline somewhere, anywhere, between humans and other beasts—a desire inherited from both Judeo-Christian religion and the philosophy of Descartes—has resulted in a kind of scientific gerrymanderling, a constant redrawing of boundaries to suit the intellectual politics of the time” (16). The scientific manipulation of species boundaries has, as Garber intuits, a long history that extends back to Descartes and beyond. In *A Discourse on the Method* (1637), Descartes claims that both animal and human bodies are like a kind of “moving machine,” and he insists that despite the visual similarities between them, it is nonetheless
possible to distinguish an animal from a human “machine.” According to Descartes, this is because animals do not use language as humans do, and because their actions are mechanical, not conscious: “This shows not only that animals have less reason than man, but that they have none at all.” Descartes concludes: “they have no mental powers whatsoever… it is nature which acts in them, according to the disposition of their organs; just as we see that a clock consisting only of ropes and springs can count the hours and measure time more accurately than we can in spite of all our wisdom” (47–48).²

Visual similarities notwithstanding, Descartes insists on the internal differences between animals and humans. Still, if Garber is correct that anthropomorphism is a kind of transference in which human properties are transferred onto animals (in her essay, dogs), her formulation nevertheless presupposes that there is such a thing as a “human” property that is defined and recognizable and ready to be “transferred” from human to non-human.³ Earlier commentators such as Buffon and Long are engaged in debating precisely these kinds of questions: what is a human, for example, or how is it possible to distinguish human from animal, or how and where should species distinctions be drawn? (cf Monboddo 1: 297, quoted above).

Accordingly, Buffon and Long set out to delimit the ways in which animals and humans may be perceived, understood, and spoken about. In the course of their discussions, both of them use the body of the ape as an example, and like other eighteenth-century natural historians, both are fascinated and troubled by this borderline, hybrid creature that proves so difficult to define with any certainty. It would certainly be possible to argue that Buffon and Long (as well as other key commentators such as Rousseau and Monboddo) are engaged in the discursive practice of what Donna Haraway calls simian orientalism, whereby the primate body is both “a map of power” and “an intriguing kind of political discourse” (10). Haraway lays out the “transformative operations” that constitute the project of simian orientalist discourse:

Simian orientalism means that western primatology has been about the construction of the self from the raw material of the
other, the appropriation of nature in the production of culture, the ripening of the human from the soil of the animal, the clarity of white from the obscurity of color, the issue of man from the body of gender, the emergence of mind by the activation of body…. Primatology is a western discourse, and it is a sexualized discourse. (11)

As Haraway suggests in her inclusion of “the obscurity of color” amongst the binaries listed here, simian orientalism is a thoroughly racialized discourse, in which the boundaries of a gendered, white western self are secured through the construction of a dark, furry, ape “other.” According to Haraway, nature and culture as well as sex and gender mutually construct each other, so that one pole of each dualism cannot exist without the other (12). And yet, the orang-utan in Buffon and Long is neither othered nor gendered in exactly the ways one might expect, for while these two authors pay close attention to the similarities and relations between orang-utans and people of African origin (both authors are particularly interested in the putative visual resemblances between the two), neither of them argues that negroes are animals. If Linnaeus had dealt a blow to human pride by placing man among the primates as *Homo sapiens*, then it was at least possible to exploit this classificatory proximity by insisting that some humans were indeed more human than other, different species of human. Long’s speciesism similarly relies on a particular construction of the animal as sub-intelligent, untamed, savage and so on, but it is also based upon an acceptance of the proximity and similarity of animal and human, to the extent that Long insists that the orang-utan is human, and that negroes belong to this particular human species.

Like the mulatto, the ape exerted (indeed, continues to exert) a mixture of fascination and horror on white European (human) observers, perceived as it was/is to be unstable, hybrid, borderline, border-crossing. As Diana Fuss observes, the human may be one of our most elastic, mutating fictions. The dividing lines between humans and nonhumans have been repeatedly re-drafted to accommodate new systems of classification, which in turn represent different political agendas. “Sameness
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and not difference, provokes our greatest anxiety (and our greatest fascination) with the ‘almost human’” Fuss writes (2, 3). Long’s negro and ape exert precisely this fascination, stretching as they do the border between animal and human to reveal its elasticity and contingency. In order to understand the imbrication of constructions of race and species, it will be useful to consider some of the discursive functions served by the figure of the orang-utan in the works of Buffon and Long. Why is the negro retained as (mostly) human? What kinds of displacements occur from the humanity-conferring European observer to the African and the ape? Let me reassert that my exploration of these and other questions is informed by my assumption that racism and speciesism are discursively dependent and inseparable, sharing as they do the same historical and ideological trajectory. In that case, it is impossible to analyze and to discuss notions of race, past and present without also engaging with the deployment of the animal as category and concept.

“Everyone knows of the turmoil into which European thought was thrown by the discovery of the great apes of Africa and South-East Asia,” writes Keith Thomas in his Man and the Natural World: indeed, “since Vesalius [1514–64] anatomists had been embarrassed by their inability to find some respect in which the human brain differed in structure from that of the higher animals” (129). When Edward Tyson dissected an infant chimpanzee (which he called an orang-utan) in 1699, he demonstrated its essential resemblance to the human form. Prior to that in 1641, Nicholas Tulp had included in his Observationum medicarum libri tres an image of “Homo sylvestris – Orang-outang.” Just over a century later, in his “epoch-making” tenth edition of the Systema Naturae (1758), Linnaeus divided animals into six classes including a new group, mammalia, a category that joined humans to the animal kingdom (Schiebinger 383–84). Earlier editions had grouped humans in the order Anthropomorpha along with apes, monkeys and sloths, but Anthropomorpha was changed to primates in 1758. This term was greeted with resistance by natural historians such as Blumenbach who continued to insist on separating humans and apes into distinct orders. Buffon was amongst those who complained that Linnaeus’s order Anthropomorpha lumped humans together with apes and sloths: in his opinion this “vi-
“there was some small relationship between the number of nipples or teeth of these animals or some slight resemblance in the form of their horns” (qtd. in Schiebinger 388).6

Other contemporaries of Linnaeus were less resistant to his taxonomical “lumping together” of man with animals. In his Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men (1755), Jean Jacques Rousseau wonders whether various animals similar to men, which travellers have without much observation taken for Beasts, either because of some differences they noticed in their outward conformation, or merely because these Animals did not speak, might not indeed be genuine Savage men whose race, dispersed in the woods in ancient times, had had no occasion to develop any of its virtual faculties, had not acquired any degree of perfection, and was still in the primitive state of Nature. (205)

It is not easy to distinguish between men and beasts and monsters, Rousseau concludes, since the only men “we” Europeans know are Europeans (209). “I say that when such Observers assert about a given Animal that it is a man and about another that it is a beast,” he writes, “they will have to be believed; but it would be most simpleminded to rely in this matter on coarse travellers about whom one might sometimes be tempted to ask the same question they pretend to answer about other animals” (211).

Like Rousseau, James Burnet, Lord Monboddo cites the account of a traveller who claims that “the Orang Outang is not a man, but a species betwixt man and monkey” (1, 289; Rousseau 205), and like Rousseau, he claims that since the orang-utan possesses “the organs of pronunciation,” it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between orang-utans and men (Monboddo 299, Rousseau 207). Whereas Buffon, like Descartes, makes the faculty of speech the essence of humanity, Monboddo asserts that “articulation is not natural to man;” rather, it is “an artificial operation.” Since language is invented and neither innate nor natural, there must have been a time when men did not speak. In that case, asks
Monboddo, what is the “distinguishing mark of difference” between men and orang-utans?

I desire any philosopher to tell me the specific difference betwixt an Orang Outang sitting at table … and one of our dumb persons; and, in general I believe it will be very difficult, or rather impossible, for a man, who is accustomed to divide things according to specific marks, not individual differences, to draw the line betwixt the Orang Outang and the dumb persons among us. They have both their organs of pronunciation, and both shew signs of intelligence by their actions, with this difference, no doubt, that our dumb persons, having been educated among civilized men, have more intelligence. (293, 297)

Rousseau and Monboddo are aligned on one side of what Laura Brown has called “an anxious, even virulent debate on the topic of alterity,” whereby the notion of ‘man’ is problematized by its juxtaposition with or inclusion in other categories of being. These debates, as Brown rightly observes, imaginatively absorb one dimension of the European encounter with the non-European, while “the exploration of being in relation to humanity” involves a sustained (and sometimes uncomfortable) “intimacy with alterity” (223). Philosophers and natural historians of the period respond to this intimacy in different ways. For some, ‘man’s’ lack of physiological advantage necessitates the identification of something within which marks his superiority to the animals among whom he has been taxonomized. This is Buffon’s “principle of thought,” which, he declares, apes do not possess, even though they might closely resemble humans (9:138). Long similarly differentiates orang-utans from certain (white) humans by arguing that they can neither think nor speak, even though they possess tongues and brains that look identical to human tongues and brains (2.363). Both philosophers seem to be following Descartes, who asserts that the difference between men and animals is marked by animals’ inability to use words, which is itself a sign of their lack of reason. “[W]e can … determine the difference between men and animals by these two means,” Descartes insists, “For it is a very remarkable fact that there are no men so dull-witted and stupid, not
even madmen, that they are incapable of stringing together different words, and composing them into utterances … and conversely, there is no other animal, no matter how perfect and well endowed by birth it may be, that can do anything similar” (47). “Surely,” retorted Linnaeus in a note to the *Systema Naturae*, “Descartes never saw an ape” (qtd. in Agamben 23). 

In *The Open. Man and Animal*, Giorgio Agamben identifies the act of differentiating between human and animal as constitutive of humanity, and he gives a detailed description of the crucially humanizing function of this distinction-recognition. It is worth quoting his account in full:

> The division of life into vegetal and relational, organic and animal, animal and human … passes first of all as a mobile border within living man, and without this intimate caesura the very decision of what is human and what is not would probably not be possible. It is possible to oppose man to other living things, and at the same time to organize the complex—and not always edifying—economy of relations between men and animals, only because something like an animal life has been separated within man, and only because his distance and proximity to the animal have been measured and recognized first of all in the closest and most intimate place … Man has no specific identity other than the ability to recognize himself … to define the human not through any *nota characteristica*, but rather through his self-knowledge, means that man is the being which recognizes itself as such, that *man is the animal that must recognize himself as human to be human* … Those who … do not recognize themselves in the position that the *Systema* has assigned to man should apply the *nosce te ipsum* to themselves; in not knowing how to recognize themselves as man, they have placed themselves among the apes … *Homo sapiens*, then, is neither a clearly defined species nor a substance; it is, rather, a machine or device for producing the recognition of the human. In line with the taste of epoch, the anthropogenic (or … an-
thropological) machine is an optical one ... constructed of a series of mirrors in which man, looking at himself, sees his own image always already deformed in the features of an ape. Homo is a constitutively ‘anthropomorphous’ animal (that is ‘resembling man,’ according to the term Linnaeus constantly uses until the tenth edition of the Systema who must recognize himself in a non-man in order to be human ... In Linnaeus’s optical machine, whoever refuses to recognize himself in the ape, becomes one: to paraphrase Pascal, qui fait l’homme, fait le singe [he who acts the man, acts the ape]. (26–27)

Linnaeus’ category of homo sapiens is not a taxonomic given, notes Agamben, but an imperative, the sapiens summarizing the old adage, nosce te ipsum, to know oneself. Linnaeus does indeed insist that “[i]t is the exclusive property of man, to contemplate and to reason on the great book of nature,” and that only man is able to “form just conclusions from such things as present themselves to his senses, which can only consist of bodies merely natural. Hence the first step of wisdom is to know these bodies and to be able, by those marks imprinted on them by nature, to distinguish them from each other, and to affix to every object its proper name” (Linnaeus, 1802 2–3). Unlike Monboddo, Linnaeus expresses no doubt about the readability of the marks imprinted on bodies by nature, so that to be human in this context does indeed involve acknowledging humanity and animality through acts of looking. Linnaeus and Monboddo’s “marks,” as well as Agamben’s “optical machine,” suggest that humanity as such is an identity produced in the field of vision, in much the same way that gender and race are performatively constituted through looking and enunciation (we might be reminded of Fanon’s “Look! A Negro!,” Butler’s “It’s a girl! ... It’s a lesbian—and now we might add “It’s a human! ... It’s an ape!”). The human, as Agamben suggests, is merely that which sees itself as such, while homo sapiens is the optical machine that produces this recognition, both through a self-knowledge of the animal life separated within man, and by gazing upon the deformed mirror of the non-human Other in which the trace of the so-called human is nevertheless contained.
As we know, what confounded natural historians of this period, and what they sought to explain by recourse to the internal and metaphysical, was the discomforting visual similarity of animal and human forms in the body of the ape. Buffon accordingly acknowledges the “great picture of resemblances, in which the living universe presents itself as but one family,” before passing swiftly and somewhat anxiously to the “differences, wherein each species claims a separate place” (9:134). It is the ape in particular that concerns Buffon, since his body “appears to be most perfect, that is, approaches nearest to man.” In spite of these similarities, Buffon insists that apes require very accurate observations to distinguish one from the other … We shall find in the history of the orang-outang, that if we should only attend to the figure, we might look on that animal as the one in which the ape species begins, or, that in which the human species ends; because, except the intellect, he is not deficient in any one thing which we possess, and because, in his body, he differs less from man than from the other animals to which we have given the denomination of apes. (9:135)

Like many commentators (including Descartes), Buffon gets around the problem of morphological similarity by insisting that apes are only mimicking humanity, even though they might look human (which would seem to imply that apes must be looking at humans in order to imitate them). Thus his acknowledgement of the physiological likeness of man and orang-utan is qualified by an important caveat: “The mind, thought and speech … do not depend on the form or organization of the body. Those are gifts bestowed on man alone. Though the orang-outang, neither speaks nor thinks, he has a body, limbs, senses, a brain, and a tongue, entirely similar to those of man. He can counterfeit every motion of the human species, and yet cannot perfectly perform one single act” (9:135–36). Thanks to his invocation of the divinely bestowed gift of intelligence, Buffon can safely conclude that “whatever resemblance there is between the Hottentot and the ape, the interval between them is immense, since the former is endowed with the facul-
ties of thinking and speaking” whereas “the ape … has not the necessary principle [of thought]” (9:138). In that case, the ape “is in fact, no other than a real brute, wearing externally a human masque, but internally destitute of thought, and every other attribute which constitutes the human species” (9:149).

Apes thoughtlessly ape humans according to Buffon, just as Long will argue that negroes ape white people, a capacity for mimicry that constitutes their taxonomic danger and, ultimately, the inferiority that necessitates the interval between animal and human. Whereas Buffon’s ape remains no more than “a real brute, wearing … a human masque,” Long’s simian is not so sharply distinguished from certain humans, even at the formal level of his text’s organization. Unlike Buffon, whose analysis of “The Nomenclature of Apes” is situated at a five-volume remove from his discussion of varieties of human species (the former occurs in volume nine of the ten-volume history, whereas the “Varieties” chapter is included in volume 4), Long does not deal with orang-utans in a separate chapter or section; instead, he slyly segues from discussing the apparently bestial physical form of negroes into a description of orangutan behaviour, before concluding that there is not much difference between the two.

In fact, Long has already asserted that

there are extremely potent reasons for believing that the White and the Negroe are two distinct species. A certain philosopher of the present age avers ‘none but the blind can doubt it.’ It is certain, that this idea enables us to account for those diversities of feature, skin and intellect, observable among mankind; which cannot be accounted for in any other way, without running into a thousand absurdities. (2:336)

Long’s emphasis on the visual is resonant of Linnaeus and Monboddo’s “marks” and Agamben’s “optical machine,” whereby it is presupposed that the differences between humanity and animality are produced through the (white subject’s) humanizing perception of them. Long accordingly inventories the visual “marks” of bestiality in black people: their “covering of wool, like the bestial fleece, instead of hair … the
roundness of their eyes, the figure of their ears, tumid nostrils, flat noses, invariable thick lips and general large size of the female nipples, as if adapted by nature to the peculiar conformation of their children’s mouths.” Their bodies are infested by black lice, since “some say, that almost all animals have their peculiar sort [of lice],” their smell is “bestial or fetid,” their manners are also “bestial,” they have no moral sensations and do not cultivate the land, while “their barbarity to their children debases their nature even below that of brutes” (2:352–54). Only a few insignificant tribes know anything about mechanic arts or manufacture, “and even these, for the most part, are said to perform their work in a very bungling and slovenly manner, perhaps not better than an orang-outang might, with a little pains, be brought to do” (2:355). “When we reflect on the nature of these men, and their dissimilarity to the rest of mankind, must we not conclude that they are a difference species of the same genus?” asks Long. After all, other animals are divided into myriad subordinate species and kinds, so why conclude that man alone is “undiversified”? Horses, for example, resemble men, as do gibbons or orang-utans, which have some similarity to the “ape-kind” but are closer to men in their physical make-up (2:356, 2:358).

After quoting Buffon and Tyson’s descriptions of orang-utans, and citing (as Buffon does) La Brosse’s observation that orang-utans sometimes try to rape negro women (Long 2:360), Long concludes that when [the orang-utan] is compared with the ape, baboon, or monkey, he is found to have far more conformity to man than to those animals. The Indians are therefore excusable for associating him with the human race, under the appellation of oran-outang, or wild man, since he resembles man much more than he does the ape, or any other animal … If he is a creature sui generis, he fills up the space between mankind and the ape, as this [i.e. the ape] and the monkey tribe supply the interval between the oran-outang and quadrupeds. (2:363)

“Ludicrous as the opinion may seem,” Long continues, “I do not think that an oran-outang husband would be any dishonour to an Hottentot
female.” Again, the ensuing “description” emphasizes the Hottentot’s bestial features, since, Long asserts, “they are more like beasts than men … Has the Hottentot from this portrait a more manly figure than the oran-outang?” He concludes: “That the oran-outang and some races of black men are very nearly allied is, I think, more than probable; Mr. Buffon supports his deductions, tending to the contrary, by no decisive proofs” (2: 364–65). In sharp disagreement with Buffon, Long consigns Hottentots and “some races of black” men to Agamben’s mobile border, the intimate caesura where “man” and “animal” are “very nearly allied.” According to Long, they are like each other in external appearance, and what is more, they like each other sexually. Orang-utans and negroes “have the most intimate connexion and consanguinity,” Long asserts: “The amorous intercourse between them may be frequent; the Negroes themselves bear testimony that such intercourses actually happen; and it is certain, that both races agree perfectly well in lasciviousness of disposition” (2:370).

“Prominent in the discursive representation of the ape was the trope of interspecies miscegenation, in which the male ape, usually the orangutang, is said to carry off the female African, often described as a ‘Hottentot,’” observes Laura Brown in *Fables of Modernity*. “In eighteenth-century England,” she continues, “the sexual encounter of ape and human is a staple trope in the fable of the nonhuman being, offering a fertile instance in which a radical alterity is countered by a sudden intimacy” (236, 238). Brown argues that this “leap of affinity” generates the anxiety to separate European from non-European, and she is surely correct to note the reciprocal relation between what she characterizes as “attacks” on human superiority, and the development of “racialist” thinking (239, 240). All the same, to ascribe “radical alterity” to the “leap” of affinity between human and ape may be a contemporary retrospective projection, since eighteenth-century commentators seem fairly uniform in their acceptance of the “likeness” between ape and human. Furthermore, the persistence of the so-called ape rape theme in this period is symptomatic and not simply causal; in other words, it does not merely generate an anxiety, but it reflects one that is pre-existing and entrenched.
The physiological similarities between negroes and orang-utans, along with the miscegenated unions cited by Long, Buffon, Monboddo and others, lead Long to conclude that “an orang-outang … is a human being, quoad his intellect; he has in form a much nearer resemblance to the Negroe race, than the latter bear to white men.” This is part of the divine plan, since in his infinite wisdom, God has diversified the human species according to varying degrees of intellectual capability, positioning orang-utans as “the lag of human kind,/Nearest to brutes, by God design’d” (2:371). In the human hierarchy Long assembles, orang-utans constitute a “race,” a “kind,” a “type of man” (2.375). “Guiney Negroes” are one step up; and from there “the human” ascends into lighter shades of complexion, and therefore more advanced degrees of “humanity,” “until we mark its utmost limit of perfection in the pure White.” Long expresses his confidence in God’s racial design, insisting that “every member of the creation is wisely fitted and adapted to the certain uses, and confined within the certain bounds, to which it was ordained by the Divine Fabricator,” and that black people have an allotted “measure,” a “space, or degree, beyond which they are not destined to pass” which “discriminate[es] them from the rest of men, not in kind but in species” (2:375; original emphasis). It may be possible to teach orang-utans to speak, since there are examples of talking dogs and learned horses; indeed, orang-utans might even surpass Africans in their intellectual attainments, as “Guiney Negroes” have shown no sign of increased civilization in spite of their protracted contact with white men. And yet, “we cannot pronounce them [Guiney Negroes] insusceptible of civilization,” Long concludes, “since even apes have been taught to eat, drink, repose and dress, like men” (2:376).

The racism of Long’s hypothesis hardly needs pointing out, and yet his argument is nonetheless somewhat extraordinary. Rather than banishing negroes from the category of the human to that of the animal he has broadened the former in order to include orang-utans as a race or species of men with whom negroes have much in common, both physically and ontologically. To return to Agamben and Derrida, assigning the space or degree or limit of civilization to orang-utans and negroes alike constitutes and consolidates Long’s white European humanity and
superiority. If this is a version of Haraway’s “simian orientalism,” it is one in which the white self is secure in his assumption that the dark, furry Other under scrutiny will challenge neither the representation of it, nor the space that has been allotted to it in God’s grand design. What we see here, then, is a paradoxical undermining—or at least, a revising—of the limits of “the human” on the basis of the putative visual similarities between negro and orang-utan, and the neurotic (because so frequently repeated) insistence on the miscigenetic unions between these two varieties or species of man. Surely the ascription of orang-utan lust for negro women, along with the latter’s welcoming of the former’s “libidinous and shameless” embrace is one of the most heinous displacements in Long’s History, effectively erasing as it does the spectre of white men “carrying off” negro slave women for forced sex (2:383)? Strikingly, Long claims in a footnote that when “[a negro] lady conceived by her [orang-utan] paramour,” it prompted the extension to women of the law against bestiality. Long’s contention that “the oran-outang and some races of black men are very nearly allied” contains a highly significant biological assumption—namely that black women and orang-utans are capable of procreating (2:365)—whereas, of course, he notoriously argues that mulattoes “produce no offspring, though in appearance under no natural incapacity of so doing with a different connexion” (2:336).

If Long’s repeatedly invoked spectre of an orang-utan making off with a black woman is a displacement of white male sexual violence against black women, then perhaps herein lies the reason behind his discursive retention of “the Negro” as “human.” To consign “the Negro” to a genus of animals would put many (perhaps most?) white men in Jamaica on the wrong side of the law against bestiality, while the mixed offspring of such unions would also throw white European species-status into doubt. Is this why Long humanizes the orang-utan while simultaneously bestializing the negro? At the very least, his discursive move suggests that human and animal are indeed mobile, elastic fictions or borders. Like race, they are highly problematic ideological tropes with troubled histories, and we might do well to continue subjecting such taxonomies and the assumptions by which they are underpinned to sustained and careful critique.
Notes

1 “Speciesism” is the term Singer uses to denote a prejudice or bias in favour of the interests of one’s own species against members of other species. He argues that objections to racism and sexism apply equally to speciesism (6).

2 See also Fudge et al. for a brief discussion of the conundrum of “the human” in Descartes’ philosophy (3).

3 Although she provides a fascinating account of Freud’s dogs, in this instance, Garber does not seem to be using the term “transference” in a strictly psychoanalytic sense. Still, it would be interesting to consider the unconscious fantasies that are contained in anthropomorphic projections.

4 See Haraway, “[Linnaeus] is noted [by contemporary scientists] for placing human beings in a taxonomic order of nature with other animals, i.e. for taking a large step away from Christian assumptions. Linnaeus placed ‘man’ in his taxonomic order of Primates as Homo sapiens, in the same genus with Homo troglodytes, a dubious and interesting creature illustrated as a hairy woman in Linnaeus’s probable source” (9).

5 See, for example, Wiseman: “What is an ape? This question troubled the natural philosophers of the Enlightenment just as much as the early modern mythographers because the ape was where the border between the human and its others was both maintained and dissolved” (215).

6 I am indebted to Schiebinger’s account of Linnaeus’s taxonomies. See especially 384–88; see also Thomas 130.

7 Derrida reverses this humanity-constituting gaze in his essay, “The animal that therefore I am (more to follow),” by considering himself naked from the vantage point of the look of a cat.

8 The first citation of the verb “to ape” meaning ‘to imitate’ is 1632 in OED, although the phrase “to play the ape” is cited as early as c.1230.

9 See Buffon 9: 156, Monboddo 1:335.

10 Long is quoting Matthew Prior.

11 Buffon also refers to apes as a “race” or “variety.” See Buffon (9.199).

12 This is still in the Jamaican constitution, along with “buggery.”

13 See Long’s reference to the “goatish embraces” of “some black or yellow quasheba,” resulting in the production of “a tawney breed” (2:328).

Works Cited


Mark McWatt, Guyanese writer and scholar, is currently Professor of West Indian Literature at the Cave Hill (Barbados) campus of the University of the West Indies. He is a co-editor, with Stewart Brown, of *The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse* (2005) and a joint editor of the *Journal of West Indian Literature*. He has also published two books of poetry, *Interiors* (1988) and *The Language of Eldorado* (1994). His short story collection, *Suspended Sentences: Fictions of Atonement* (2005), was awarded the Commonwealth Writers’ Prize for best first book of fiction.

*Suspended Sentences* tells the stories of a group of students whose completion of the secondary school A-level examinations coincides with Guyanese independence in 1969. At a celebration party they vandalize the Sports Clubhouse of the Imperial Bank, and are consequently “sentenced” to each write a story about Guyana. These stories, brought together some twenty years later, make up the book. Their atonement is not only for the relatively minor incident of damaging the Clubhouse, but also for a moment in history when a generation of educated Guyanese left their homeland. In this sense, the book becomes a narrative, with both celebratory and melancholy tones, of the intriguing splendor of the Guyanese landscape, the diversity of its peoples, the multiplicity of its potential, and the erosion of that very potential.

We spoke with Mark McWatt in Calgary in March 2007. We began by asking about his turn to the short story form in *Suspended Sentences*.

**You had written two books of poetry before Suspended Sentences. What was appealing to you about shifting to prose? Was narrative a particularly useful strategy for what you wanted to say in the book?**

I didn’t really think of it that way, but yes, there is a kind of a seduction in narrative. Even in poetry I had started writing in long narrative
sequences so that I was moving in that direction anyway. As for what I had to say, yes I suppose it could be better said in narrative, because I wanted to celebrate both the physical reality of Guyana, the landscape, which I had done in the poems, and to mourn what had become of the country. Also, I wanted to talk about the period from the 1960s on, and prose narrative seemed more appropriate than poetry.

There is a strong sense of mourning in the book, perhaps most strongly felt in the fate of the characters, despite the exuberance of many of the stories.

Yes, that is something I really feel. When I go back to Guyana and visit the university, there are always one or two people who say, “You should be here helping your country instead of teaching in Barbados.” I do not pay too much attention to that, but I do feel a sense of guilt for, along with most of my class, having left Guyana. Although many of us tried to get back, it is just not possible.

Suspended Sentences has resonances with fiction that has formed the canon of postcolonial literatures: the echo of Conrad’s Heart of Darkness in Victor Nune’s tale of traveling into the interior and spending time at a “phantom outpost of civilization” (Suspended 70); the parallel with Rushdie’s Midnight’s Children in the association of the students’ graduation with Guyana’s independence; a hint of Faulkner’s Emily (“A Rose for Emily”) in the spinster, Miss Alma Fordyce. What do you see as the effect of these dialogues with other texts?

Some of it was conscious, a lot of it wasn’t. You mention Conrad and I really didn’t have that in my mind as I was writing. Marquez yes, and one or two others, the story about the courtesan, “A Lovesong for Miss Lillian,” is modeled in part upon a Garcia Marquez story called “Maria dos Prazeres.” But I just feel that the context of everything that I write is literature itself, these things echo and re-echo, although I am happy to have them pointed out.

It was fascinating reading the book because there were such obvious meta-narrative gestures, and you are also talking about the way we write fiction with an eye on all the fiction that has been written. How would you theorize about that?
For me, I think reading is just a natural thing. The only way you can write fiction is if you have read; the reading leads to writing, and you are not always consciously aware of the process. But I think that when I am doing it I always like to try to gesture towards other authors not only just for the sake of gesturing, but also because I think they are important pointers to what is crucial for me. I always find it helpful when an author makes these signals. It’s a kind of clue: think of Marquez, or think of this other writer at this point. It resonates as well with what is going on in my story, and it enlarges and enriches the writing.

_Do you think intertextual gestures are particularly significant for those of us who work in postcolonial literature because we are so burdened by the master narratives in the larger frame? Trying to work our stories into this enormous overarching tradition is a challenge._

Yes, it is a challenge, and I think it is a necessary one. One of the things I want to do as a writer is to try and inscribe my own experiences, and what I see as the centre of Guyanese experiences. I can only go by what I have experienced (which would, of course, include accumulated reading). Postcolonial writing is always engaged in this process of writing back. I am not especially critically conscious in my writing. It’s just that these kinds of connections come up at crucial points.

_You take up and use many genres in Suspended Sentences: science fiction, the travel story, the academic novel, the romance, magic realism, the epistolatory novel, Caribbean folktales of shape shifting, the bakoo, and so on. What do you see as the strength of this mixture of genres?_”

I suppose on one level you could say it is sort of self-indulgent. I just enjoyed myself exploring all of these forms and traditions that I have been drawing upon. It’s a kind of translation or accommodation, wanting to accommodate your own experiences, your own vision, your own desires, and the physical reality of a place and a time into what you consider to be central or important forms in literature. Here I do not necessarily mean only canonical literature, but in literature in general. My impression is that every writer makes use of some other forms or traditions. A mixture of genres is very much in the spirit of this book.
and how it uses framing, the characters, the different forms of story-telling and so on.

*Suspended Sentences* also has strong affinities with Latin American literature—with Gabriel Garcia Marquez and others. Earlier we mentioned Conrad as an intertext for Victor Nunez’s voyage up a river, but it could equally be situated alongside Alejo Carpentier’s novel *The Lost Steps* [los Pasos Perdidos] that tells the story of a trip up the Orinoco, a river in the same region as Guyana.

“Yes, through my wife, who is Colombian, I become aware of Latin American literature, especially the experimental writers, the Argentinian avant-garde, who play games with the rules of narrative. I am fond of Borges, particularly his short stories.

*Do you think that extensive cornucopia is part of the inheritance of Caribbean writers or is there one who you would privilege as an influence on your work?*

I am not sure I would privilege one. The first comment you made—the cornucopia—is what appeals to me. And, I have heard many people say I am not a Caribbean writer.

*Why? What are their reasons?*

They say I am not sufficiently concerned with using writing to redress the wrongs of history, and that there is not enough cultural nationalism in my writing. I am not sure I agree with that, but the comments reflect the climate in the Caribbean now.

*Your engagement with Guyana’s history is fascinating. It is intriguingly oblique, and yet it seems to be everywhere in the stories. You do not mention the successive colonizations the country underwent (Dutch, English), nor slavery, nor the indentured labourers brought from India and China (and also Europe) in the nineteenth century. At the same time, in Suspended Sentences history is written into the characters and their narratives: the names of the different ethnic groups of Guyana, the indigenous peoples in Victor’s Amerindian heritage; scenes like the story late in the collection which*
recounts the seduction of Dornford’s mother by the wealthy white man, and which re-enacts the past history of plantation societies, or the migration of many of the characters away from their homeland, a moment of recent history that has resonance across the Caribbean. How would you describe the book’s engagement with history? You also associate the story of the students very strongly with the story of Guyana as a nation. The “vandalism” of the Clubhouse takes place alongside independence in 1969, and so many of the students become part of the emigration of the late 1960s and 1970s. Sometimes the choice is personal: a young homosexual man finds he can live more openly and freely in England than in Guyana. At other times, the act of leaving a homeland speaks strongly to a historical lack of opportunities. Suspended Sentences articulates this much more recent history together with the distant history of slavery and colonization. What are your reactions to readers who see the book as a narration of history?

I am always asked some version of this question about history. My activity in history and the highlight of that history is in a sense inscribed into personality and identity. I do not draw any particular attention to it. I use characters and names that are quite plausible Indian or African names. I think they evoke the history of Guyana. It is difficult for people who are not familiar with Guyanese history to see that aspect of the story unless you draw particular attention to it, but I always prefer to just suggest it and move on with the story itself. So you evoke history in the name of the places and the people. Guyana has a particularly vivid history, and I do not like to dwell on it. On islands like Barbados the slaves planted cane and reaped it. The planting and reaping of cane in Guyana was extraordinarily arduous because the land on which cane was planted is below sea level. For every square mile of cane field, further miles of waterways and drainage, and higher-level waterways for transportation of the cane, had to be built. Shipping had to be done by water because the roads were too muddy to transport loads of cane. The slaves worked most of the time with shovels in their hands in heavy, waterlogged mud. It was a different kind of life than that lived by other Caribbean slaves.

The interior is important too: interior Guyana is different; it is extremely difficult to get there. That is why myths like *El Dorado* [the city of gold]
arose, to which I allude in *Suspended Sentences*. Colonists like Raleigh would go up the river, meet the first waterfall, and decide that it was too difficult to try to get around the obstacle. But then stories circulate that life is especially hard because the landscape is concealing something from us, something fabulous from which it wants to exclude us. And, as it were, these tales are part of your heritage; they are there, and together with the brutality of slavery and history, they produce the kind of people, the kind of stories, and the kind of superstitions that interest me.

*Visual art figures strongly in the stories. In one story, the young art student, Yasmin DeMattis, paints her way out of a bad relationship and reconnects with her father. In another story the artist, Alex Fonseca, imagines himself stepping into a painting and moving through time. And yet, visual art has a quite different effect than reading narrative; it’s more immediate, perhaps more like poetry. How do you see the relationship between visual art and writing?*

I have always been fascinated by visual arts, and I love wandering around galleries. The character Yasmin is based loosely on my daughter, who studied art at the University of Toronto, so some of the scenery in that story pertains to those experiences, although she never had a boyfriend like the young man in the story. There is a very fine Guyanese artist who lives in Barbados, Stanley Greaves, who did the cover for one of my books of poetry. He was part of a panel on local television in Barbados when the book came out and he talked about how the two stories about art validated some of what he had been saying and doing all his life. It was a moment of recognition for him. I do not know about all that, but I have always been interested in arts and I think that there is a nice interplay between writing and the visual arts. It is productive to look at one through the other, so I try to reflect the values and the moods of art in written form. Art and literature can overlap and embrace each other. And the whole idea of entering a painting is a very strong metaphor of life, but it is not real because it is fiction. The image represents one kind of creation containing or reflecting or commenting on another creation. Again, the process is part of the layering and inter-penetration of realities.
The collage that your daughter, Ana McWatt, produced for the Peepal Press cover of Suspended Sentences is very intriguing. It represents a window, through which a viewer seems to see the ‘real.’ And yet, what is beyond the window is not quite ‘real.’ It is an invitation into a magical world.

The Spanish translation of the book was just published in Cuba, and its cover uses another image of art: a Mexican painting, Homage to Miro, an abstract figure of a bottle with a face visible inside. It’s very appropriate.

It’s quite audacious to introduce a character named “Mark McWatt” into the group of students. Obviously, he is a fictional character like the others, but the name does suggest an association with the author, or at least with the position of “author.” Why did you, in effect, put yourself in the stories?

It has definitely caused surprise. I received a University award in Barbados recently and at the ceremony the unfortunate public speaker had taken his facts from the fictional biography of “Mark McWatt”, as in the stories! Many people who read the book have questions about it: does a character named Mark McWatt, for instance, mean that the other characters are also real? Perhaps I should not have done it.

I want to take these issues further. In what contingent position have you situated this character? The fictional Mark McWatt in Suspended Sentences seems to be the one carrying the weight of atonement.

To a certain extent, yes. He is the one who in the end has to pull the stories together; he has to urge the others to complete the task; he has to undertake the editing. He breathes a sigh of relief when the project is finished. And I personally have never been able to escape the feeling of a kind of lonely guilt for the betrayal of Guyana, by those of us who left, but also by those who remain.

There is a very striking image in the introduction to The Oxford Book of Caribbean Verse that you edited with Stewart Brown. It is the image of a “coffle,” a group of slaves chained together. Such an image is fascinating to me because they are chained together, a collectivity, but they are also individ-
Pamela McCallum and Aritha van Herk

You comment that the coffee might be a figure for Caribbean literature in its diversity and its collectivity. What drew you to this image?

The importance for me is that the slaves are singing. They are chained together, but they are still singing; the image reminds me of the Dylan Thomas line at the end of his poem, “Fern Hill”: something like “Time held me green and dying/ Though I sang in my chains like the sea.” The slaves are going off to do extremely hard work, but they are still singing. The song expresses solidarity and mourning, but also the fact that they can act, that things can change.

Thank you.
Postcolonial Performance
Patricia Krus


Le dernier caravansérail (Odysées) is a six-hour long epic, written and performed by the Parisian stage ensemble Le Théâtre du Soleil under the direction of Ariane Mnouchkine. The production, which ran from 2003 to 2005 in Paris and toured Berlin, New York and Melbourne, retraces the hazardous journeys of refugees, displaced persons, and illegal migrants. The play draws on testimonies Mnouchkine collected during interviews with asylum seekers in retention centres in Australia, as well as at the Red Cross shelter in Sangatte, in northern France. Developed over six months of intensive improvisations, the play in its final stage counted sixty-two different episodes divided into two parts which have since been filmed and released on DVD. The first, entitled Le fleuve cruel [The cruel river] reconstructs the diverse points of departure and routes travelled, while the second Origines et destins [Origins and destinies] examines the motives behind the journeys undertaken by men, women and children of heterogeneous origins and nationalities. While themes of exile and asylum seeking form the connective thread of the play, the sixty-two episodes show individuated fragments of the lives of a vast cast of characters. Importantly, presumably to underscore the myriads of stories, the play is set in a number of locations, starting with an unnamed river crossing in Central Asia and ending on the white cliffs of Dover. Throughout the play the characters travel from Africa, Central Asia and the Far East slowly working their way towards the promised lands of Western Europe and Australia. Mnouchkine presents her audience with the multiple facets that can make up asylum seeking: the political, religious, and moral persecution that cause one to flee, dangerous and pre-
carious journeys, exploitation by human traffickers, women forced into prostitution to obtain illegal passage, rhetorical arguments of government officials, but also the compassionate individuals who provide shelter and assistance. The play demonstrates both the existence of solidarity across language, cultural and national barriers, as well as the absence of fraternity and the exploitation of humans by other humans. The dialogues include fifteen different languages, some translated, others not, thus creating a chaotic microcosm of the world.

The title, which doubles as the theme, as well as the performance strategy of the play, underlines the centrality of displacement in the history of mankind and its crucial importance in the definition of cultural belonging and national citizenship. The word “caravansérail” derives from the Persian nouns, karvan [caravan] and seray [palace, large house or courtyard] which denote an enclosed, four-walled structure with stables on facing sides and sleeping quarters on each of the four corners. Traditionally, the caravanserail is a place of shelter on long distance journeys; it is also a place for gathering and exchange where foreign travellers encounter one another. The subtitle of the play, Odyssées is an allusion to the father of all odysseys, Homer, while stage props allude to other voyages. For instance, in the river crossing scenes at the start of the play the furious river waters are represented by metres of grey silk in a tribute to another ancient travel route, the Silk Road. Through these references Mnouchkine’s play then posits “l’errance,” geographic displacement, at the centre of human experience. However, Le dernier caravansérail also illustrates how Western values, forged through voyage on the one hand, and duty of hospitality to strangers on the other, are now being put into question by contemporary odysseys.

By addressing the issues of hospitality towards refugees and asylum seekers, Le dernier caravansérail takes a real and polemical global issue, usually discussed by newspapers, television news editors, and politicians, into the realm of performance and theatrical illusion. In an interview with the Franco-German television channel Arte, Mnouchkine describes the role of theatre in our understanding of daily events on the world stage as follows: “Tous les jours, nous voyons des images atroces, mais voilà, nous avons des cuirs. Nous disons: ‘Comme c’est atroce!’
Mais nous ne blêmissons pas. Le théâtre nous aide à nous rendre compte que ce qui se passe dans l’actualité n’est pas seulement médiatique, mais aussi historique. Le théâtre aide à se mettre dans l’Histoire.” [“Every day we witness horrendous images, but we have an armour. We say ‘How terrible!’ but we don’t turn pale. Theatre helps us realize that what is happening in the news is not only a news item but is also historical. Theatre helps us enter History.”] (“Ariane Mnouchkine Raconte”).1 These comments reflect Mnouchkine’s own perception of the dual aspects of theatre: an aesthetic role through the dramatization of an external reality, and a political one by eliciting the audience’s reaction. In this particular case, the creators of *Le dernier caravansérail* aim to make the public reflect on the refugee question, on the role of world powers in man-made human tragedies, as well as on our moral duty be compassionate and provide shelter.

*Le dernier caravansérail* explores the contradiction between a western cultural and philosophical tradition, which regards hospitality and the provision of asylum to strangers as cornerstones of its moral values but which, nevertheless, closes its doors to refugees in search of a safe haven. These issues are explored both in the performance and in a program book accompanying the play. The latter breaks with the traditional format of the theatre program in both its design (with the use of different fonts as well as handwritten passages) and content. Moreover, the booklet reproduces written testimonies of the individual refugees on whose accounts the play is based, and gives details of their fate since they first crossed paths with Mnouchkine. The program is also a philosophical and political inquiry into the motives, objectives, creative process and themes addressed by this theatrical production. Containing a series of short essays written by Hélène Cixous, a long-time collaborator of the Théâtre du Soleil, each piece focuses on a specific question: for example, the difficulty of speaking for silenced refugees, the place of odyssey in Western cultural imagination, or the significance of epithets ascribed to the displaced such as traveller, refugee, or stranger. As Cixous observes the term *refugié* (refugee) originates from the revocation of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV in 1685, which rendered the Protestant faith illegal and forced thousands of French Huguenots to flee Catholic repres-
tion. The word, then, is historically linked to persecution and conflict. Etymology also provides useful insights in current attitude towards refugees, guests and hosts in foreign countries: the Latin root of the word host, *hostis*, means the stranger, the enemy. But Host also has a religious dimension with the holy bread eaten at communion, which symbolizes the body of Christ. Host is further related to the Latin *hospes*, a guest. These roots gave us both hospitality and hostility. Etymology thus highlights how two opposing terms are nevertheless related. In his writings on hospitality and friendship, *Of Hospitality*, Derrida takes the roots of the two opposing words to coin the term *hostipitalité* to illustrate the paradox posed by hospitality by accepting that, which is other to my own self. While for Kant hospitality must be extended universally, absolute and unconditional in character, when strangers arrive with customs, languages and religions foreign to our own, the provision of hospitality is influenced by our awareness that accepting these differences may occur to the detriment of our own customs, language or faith. In reality, hospitality is then conditional, and in the case of asylum-seekers based on complex and often competing demands: for instance, the political desire to preserve national cohesion in terms of race, religion and/or culture while complying with humanitarian obligations defined by international agreements such as the Geneva Convention.

Themes of hospitality, as well as the limits of hospitality resonate in the play and in the entire approach to the performance. Further, the notion of hospitality is carried out beyond the stage, as Mnouchkine herself greets the audience at the entrance of the theatre, welcoming the audience on a voyage, which starts with a ride on a rickety bus from the nearest metro station. In addition, the actors also become hosts mingling with the audience during the intermission. But hospitality and the motif of displacement lie at the heart of the cast’s own understanding of performance. Maurice Durozier, an actor in the Théâtre du Soleil, explains: “Quand on est acteur, il suffit de rendre son corps disponible—je dis, il suffit, mais c’est un cheminement, tout un travail: avoir le vide nécessaire à l’intérieur et offrir cette enveloppe à une autre âme qui vient à un moment donné et qui est le personage.” (“When you’re an actor, you simply need to make your body available—I say ‘simply,’ but it’s
more a journey, something you work and develop: you need to have the necessary void inside and offer this shell to another soul which comes at a certain time and is the character” (qtd. Mouchkine, “Humour”).

Another question Hélène Cixous raises in the programme book concerns the ethical and creative difficulty of performing the lives of those silenced by their illegal status or their geographical position in a medial space where the moral values of society are ignored and legal protection is denied. Indeed, refugees face not only the loss of their homeland but above all of their own identities. They are, as Ulysses answers to the Cyclops Polyphemus, “Nobody”: stateless, kinless, and nameless. In our contemporary world identity and citizenship are defined in terms of nationality and legal residence in a given country. The landless are therefore voiceless outcasts. Hence, the play’s ambition to find aesthetic forms which give voice to the unheard and unseen refugees.

Le dernier caravansérail uses the representational techniques offered by theatre to force the audience to question how the plight of refugees is represented, and what we as an audience think of the refugee question. One such device is the use of ekkyklema, literally a “wheeled out thing” a theatrical device used in classic Greek theatre to present the results of deaths, often violent, occurring off stage. In Mnouchkine’s play the platforms are moved on, off and across the stage by other members of the cast in full view of the audience. These small platforms also frame the action in a confined space as they are wheeled onto a vast empty stage, thus focusing the audience’s attention onto a particular character and situation in each scene. As a result, the actors never move on their own volition but seem to be pushed forward by outside elements. With the ekkyklema, the actors’ performances are then characterized by an ongoing movement that mimics the relentless motion of the refugees who seem both mobile and immobile at the same time. Moreover, a contrast is created between the vastness of the stage and by extension the world, and the fragility, precariousness and insignificance of the lives portrayed by the actors.

As I mentioned earlier, the play depicts snapshots of human lives of a vast number of characters rather than focusing on a central figure, who would emblematize the plights of scores of refugees. This deliberate
avoidance of allegory nevertheless provides little psychological insight into the characters as we are faced with the bare facts and emotions of one particular episode of their lives. Yet, details such as a singing bird, a scarf and other personal items do still provoke real emotion and raise empathy for the plight of the characters. Simple details of everyday life are mixed with more unfamiliar staging. One of the objectives behind the Théâtre du Soleil’s collective approach to drama, is the need “to reinvent the rules of the game which reveal daily reality, showing it not to be familiar and immutable but astonishing and transformable” (Kiernander 89). One means to underline the transformative character of performance is through repetition. Straightforward, swift actions are repeated endlessly; for example, in the scenes depicting recurring attempts to board a train to England just outside Calais: discovered by security guards, the refugees make attempt after attempt to cut through the barbed wire which separates them from freedom.

To some extent, this repetitive aspect of the play’s action, together with the ekkyklema’s on-going motion becomes a form of ritual. Mnouchkine herself perceives rituals as being part of the aesthetics of life. In her view, ritual is poetic and has the capacity to forge identity. Cultural, ethnic, and national groups also rely on rituals to differentiate themselves from other groups. In the play, the coming and going of the wheeled carts, the repeated attempts to cross borders, transform geographic displacement into a ritual, which in turn forges a new form of identity dislocated from time and space. Indeed, exile is a state of limbo between a past that cannot be returned to and an elusive future. Another aspect these rituals highlight—together with the play’s dramatization—is the artificial character of control through the creation of national borders. In our postcolonial world, former empires have disappeared to make way for new countries with freshly designed frontiers, while Western and liberal democracies also consolidate their own borders through the introduction of tightened immigration and asylum seeking rules. Further, questioning the limits of Western ethics in Le dernier caravansérail should be seen within a long-standing preoccupation with issues of boundaries in the work of Mnouchkine and the members of the Théâtre du Soleil. Since its foundation in 1964, the Théâtre du Soleil has probed the limits
of theatre both in its organizational structure as a collective, and its artistic creations. In the course of over forty years, themes of resistance, oppression, identity and culture have formed the core of works, which also attempt to bridge the cultural and artistic distance between Western and Eastern forms of theatrical performance (Miller; Williams). Further information on *Le dernier caravansérail* and the Théâtre du Soleil can be found on the following websites: <www.theatre-du-soleil.fr> and <www.lebacausoleil.com>

**Note**
1 Translations from French are mine.

**Works Cited**

In his essay “Notes on the English Character” (1920), E.M. Forster recorded the popular conception of the role of Christian missions in the British Empire: “we are perfide Albion, the island of hypocrites, the people who have built up an Empire with a Bible in one hand, a pistol in the other, and financial concessions in both pockets.” A black character in William Plomer’s I Speak of Africa (1929) expresses a criticism often levelled at missionaries: “When the white man came here, we had the land and he brought the Bible: now we’ve got the Bible and he’s got the land.” Religion was a mask of imperialism as well as worked in collusion with it. To put it at its highest, the genuine missionary spirit got an enhanced chance under the Empire (the presence of missionaries often predated stable colonial occupation).

“Missions-Colonies” have been studied quite extensively. Yet, as Leon de Kock observes in his introduction to Civilising Barbarians (1996), missionary-colonial discourse has not ever been dealt with very comprehensively in terms of cultural analysis. This is the raison d’être for Gerhard Stilz’s book, a treasure trove of information and insight, which entertains while it enlightens. It originated in a conference held at the University of Tubingen in 1999 under the joint auspices of the European Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (EACLALS) and the Association for the Study of New English Literatures (ASNEL).

The Proceedings are arranged under four headings. Firstly, the contributions on “Colonial Construction of Missions.” Gareth Griffiths opens the whole volume with his essay, “Appropriation, Patronage and Control: The Case of the Missionary Text.” His subject is the appropriation by Africans of forms originating in missionary pamphlets and tracts which presented pre-colonial African societies as “violent, arbitrary and brutal,” an Africa of incessant tribal divisions with its warfare and inter-tribal enslavement, as the characteristics and unremitting conditions of everyday life—for their own purposes. Griffiths focuses on a fascinating by-product of this process in Jomo Kenyatta and other leaders drawing on the resources of such tracts and the missionary press for their own purposes—in the 1940s. Stephen Gray’s “Missionary Researchers and Researching Missions: A South African View of Cultural Colonisation at the Millenium,” which was the Conference’s opening, keynote address, is ironic, sensitive and flexible in its exploration of the motley of motives and emotions that fused into the impact of colonialism
and the scholarly tracking it has generated. Pointing out that the Christian advance was never a united one and that generalization is almost impossible, nuance is all, he cites a Quaker version of the first missionary century from the young Cockney Edgar Wallace, reporting from conquered Johannesburg on 28 May 1900:

First an interior, miles from the coast. Then an irreligious potentate who warmly declined to be converted or to exchange the simple devil he knew for the subtle devil he did not know, preferring wooden-faced Mumbo-Jumbo to the unclean serpent. Then following in rapid succession the inevitable consequences—a murdered missionary, an exchange cable, and a hastily organized punitive expedition. Long marches and much fever, and a funeral or two by the wayside. A little bush fighting, an early morning rush at a bristling stockade, a scramble over, a practical demonstration of the utility of the short lunge, a little burying, a little hanging, up with the bunting and “God Save the King”—with a Bombay lancer hauling at the lanyards, and a Sudanese policeman holding the Marine C.O.’s horse. That is the advent of the flag … trade follows the flag, and bad whisky and a new code of ethics are trade’s outward and visible signs.

Gray refers to Dr. John Philip who is remembered for his *Researches in South Africa* (1828), a manual for proselytizers, and Dr. David Livingstone who followed his lead with *Travels and Researches in South Africa* (1857) and concludes with the pregnant question: “Are we using the term ‘research’ to mean controlling new worlds as Drs. Philip and Livingstone did … or to reveal new missions of a different kind for future use?”

Victor J. Ramraj takes the reader to the West Indies in his essay, “Pragmatic and Expedient Conversion: Turning Christian in Indo-Trinidadian Narratives.” He refers to a newspaper report of how a condemned murderer, Kundun Lal, faced death without a quiver, adding immediately after that he had converted to Christianity, and thereby implying a cause-and-effect relationship rather than a simple connection between the two details. Ramraj proceeds to examine how 80 years or so later V.S. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, H.S. Ladoo and Clyde Hosein give their take on the question of conversion in their convert narratives, indicating social and economic benefits and convenience as the motives of conversion. Syd Harrex in “Kama Sutra, the Missionary Position and The Slayer Slain” and Meenakshi Mukherjee in “Gender and Conversion: Personal Narratives of Two Nineteenth-Century Indian Women” take the reader to the sub-continent. Harrex’s essay is a commentary valuable in the
way of information and evidence supplied by juxtaposition of well-selected quotations that carry his contentions such as that the Horror, the Horror is a consistent pre-Conradian attitude among Victorian Christian moralists of Anglo-India. Mukherjee puts a side the public and political implications of conversion to explore the internal pressures that prompt two young Indian wives who are initially strongly attached to their religion, to reconcile themselves and find fulfillment in their belated conversion.

The second batch of papers in the volume “addresses the pre- and sub-colonial structures and processes of submission and resistance in colonies shaped and transformed by the British Empire.…. Researching the acts and processes of submission leads to irritating fields of apparent ambiguities, covert forms of double-dealing and intriguing ambivalences,” as Stilz puts it in his Introduction. The first essay, Chantal Zabus’ “Two Colonial Encounters and the Philosophy of the Gift” is an intricate and scholarly argument that gifts engender entrapment which may lead to accidental or calculated misunderstanding, as exemplified in the encounter between Prospero and Caliban in Shakespeare’s The Tempest, as used by D.O. Mannoni, and that between Pocahontas and John Smith. On the other hand, André Viola in “The Inscription of Mission Work in British Popular Fiction about Africa (1900–1950)” is straightforward, compiling interesting passages from popular writers as well as writers taken more seriously such as Joyce Cary, Graham Greene and Chinua Achebe—to move towards his conclusion that the popular novelists offered valid as well as erroneous predictions regarding the role of Missions in the evolution of Africa.

Having taken account of the elements of subjection and cultural deformation as potential corollaries of mission, the third batch of papers, in Stilz’s words in his Introduction, “addresses formation and reformations of colonial cultures in the wake of missions.” Janet Wilson, in “Distance and Rediscovery of Identity in Recent New Zealand Literature,” takes the reader to a new region. She explores the relationship between the physical features of Aotearoa/New Zealand and their effect as interpreted by Maoris and Pakeha writers who reflect the bicultural composition of its people. She points out that whereas “Maori literature reveals a greater intimacy with the land than Pakeha, valuing its hidden riches as well as its contours” and “both the Maori protest movement and the writings of the Maori Renaissance have stressed this relationship with the land as one which confers identity,” Pakeha writers like Curnow, Manhire and Frame who draw on discourses of colonization, exploration and discovery, correlate New Zealand’s locale with a state of mind. Annalisa Oboe, in “Of Books and the Book: the Evangelic Mission in South African Literature,” describes the effect and importance of the Bible in
winning over Africans and analyses the approach to the Bible and missionary teaching in the work of Thomas Pringle, an Edwardian admirer of the missionaries, Olive Schreiner, J.M. Coetzee, the racist Gertrude Millin, Sol Plaatje, the product of a missionary school, and a dedicated believer, Bessie Head. Oboe shows how missionaries’ use of the Bible can either support colonization or create black consciousness, self-affirmation and so on. Anne Fuchs in “From Dependence to Independence: Mission, Christianity and Theatre in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century South Africa,” focuses on different art forms, moving from a history of the development of popular music to the evolution of drama.

In the final section of the volume, the subject of Postcolonial Mission is approached from different angles. Rajeev S. Patke in “Irretrievable Fragments: Postcolonial Projects in Indian Historiography,” engages in a lucid exposition and scholarly critique of the work of the Subaltern Studies Group, indicating how important Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak are for the subaltern project, and slightly tongue-in-the-cheek as he shows the theorists blowing their own house up and down. Barbara Korte, in “Exploring Without a Mission? Postcolonial Travel in a Global World,” among other things, examines the travel writing of Pico Iyer, Vikram Seth and Tahir Shah, and concludes: “a perspective which emphasizes the strengths of global mobility and global syncretism is gaining ground in the books of travel writers with a postcolonial background.” Korte appears to be positive about their unaligned attitudes as presaging “the global ecumene” envisaged by Ulf Hannerz. Her conclusion accords with Frank Schulze-Engler’s in “New Literatures, New Modernities: Notes Towards the Reflexivity of Culture.” Once we saw cultures as contained by time and place—a variety, co-existing with possibility of intercultural understanding/misunderstanding impacting one on another. We have T.S. Eliot seeing culture as religion-based or culture and religion as aspects of a single regional historical continuity. More recently, there arises the question: “Is there anything beyond the ‘clash of civilisations’ political scientists like Samuel Huntingdon present as the inexorable condition of the modern world? Are there exit options from this paranoid universe of cultures endlessly in conflict, endlessly in need of defense, endlessly claiming allegiance over centuries, over 2000, over 5000 years?” Yes, argues Schulze-Engler. Cultures can be reflexive, turn back and affect themselves. More importantly, globalization and the fact that modernity is not confined to the West may mean that there are no cultural alterities, no “Other.” Ever optimistic as in his vision of a civil society in his essay “Islands of Resistance: ‘Postcolonial’ Literature and the Politics of Civil Society,” (1) Schulze-Engler dreams of “the Parliament of man, the Federation of the world” (2).
euphoric tone of his last paragraph is the appropriate note on which the Proceedings close.

Gerhard Stilz’s handsome volume is rich, wide-ranging and, above all, thought-provoking. It will, surely, serve his ultimate aim of preparing “the ground for further integrative research into the borderline areas of Literature, Language, Culture and Society.”

Notes

D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke


Michael Keevak’s The Pretended Asian is one of only three book-length studies of George Psalmanazar that I am aware of, the other two being Frederic J. Foley’s The Great Formosan Imposter (1968) and Richard M. Swiderski’s The False Formosan: George Psalmanazar and the Eighteenth-Century Experiment of Identity (1991). Keevak builds upon and surpasses the work of these earlier scholars, placing greater emphasis on the historical context in which Psalmanazar’s seemingly outrageous imposture was able to succeed. Keevak examines Psalmanazar’s fraud in the light of eighteenth-century ideas of racial difference and their development from a focus on the cultural to a focus on the biological, with particular emphasis on the role of language as a marker of cultural difference and the foundation of Psalmanazar’s success.

Those unfamiliar with George Psalmanazar may be surprised to learn that, in 1703, the young man appeared in London claiming to be a native of the island of Formosa (modern Taiwan), who had converted to Anglicanism. Psalmanazar’s racial claim went largely uncontested, despite his being white-skinned and (according to at least one account) blonde, his insistence that Formosa was ruled by the Japanese (it was commonly considered part of China), his command of Latin with an accent that appeared French, and the tremendous differences between his wild accounts of Formosa and what was generally known about Formosa. Psalmanazar went on to author a popular
account of cultural life in Formosa and the story of his own religious conversion, entitled *An Historical and Geographical Description of Formosa, an Island Subject to the Emperor of Japan* (1704). The work went on to be reprinted in a second edition and translated into French, Dutch, and German—its popularity bolstered, no doubt, by the author’s absurd claims that the natives of Formosa yearly sacrificed thousands of young children and practiced ritual cannibalism. Psalmanazar’s own presence on the London scene, and his affinity for eating raw meat in public, must also have contributed to its popular success.

Psalmanazar is a fascinating figure, but because of the absurdity of his life and hoax, scholarship concerning Psalmanazar “hardly seems to have gotten beyond the let’s-tell-the-story-one-more-time stage” (11). Aside from the boldness and complexity of his Formosan hoax, which included the creation of a false alphabet and a serviceable language, he later became a Hebrew scholar of some renown, a hack writer on Grub Street, a close friend of Samuel Johnson, and is alluded to in Swift’s *Modest Proposal*. His autobiographical writings, particularly the *Description* and the posthumously published *Memoirs of ****. Commonly known by the Name of George Psalmanazar; a Reputed Native of Formosa* (1764), deserve a critical attention they have not been given, as does almost every aspect of his most unusual and singular life. Keevak argues that when scholars bother to address Psalmanazar’s Formosan fraud, “there is a certain way in which critics’ constant reiteration of its sensational details has ended up only obscuring the contexts in which the disguise was in fact able to succeed” (11). Keevak then sets out to right this critical wrong, offering a lengthy, coherent, and convincing series of arguments concerning the many aspects of Psalmanazar’s fraudulent assumption of an Asian identity.

Keevak’s primary argument is that Psalmanazar appeared at a time in European history before race had begun to be defined according to biological traits, such as skin colour, and was instead referenced in terms of cultural stereotypes, to the extent that “a Chinese or Japanese or Formosan identity had to be created in such as [sic] way as to incorporate stereotypes already present in the European imagination—and even if these biases might directly contradict the evidence of actual experience” (14). Psalmanazar’s fraud was therefore successful because he exemplified stereotypical notions concerning the Asian “stranger” even if the Europeans he encountered should have “known better” based on available evidence or prior contact with actual Formosans. Psalmanazar’s success is thus explained by his status as a cultural chameleon, intelligent enough to position himself in such a way that he “balanced what was currently known about the Far East with what remained mysterious, leg-
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Endary, and stereotypical” (61). Moreover, Psalmanazar was incredibly consistent in his fraud. Although he made many outrageous claims, he never once attempted to rescind or amend them, insisting upon their truth by reference to even more outrageous yet unverifiable (and therefore, in a sense, unquestionable) claims.

Keevak emphasizes the importance of Psalmanazar’s fictitious Formosan language, and indeed of language itself, in the creation and maintenance of the Formosan fraud. The chapter “Psalmanazar’s Language” is the longest and most interesting of the book. In it, Keevak offers a thorough description and analysis of the qualities of Psalmanazar’s invented language and alphabet, to illustrate the role of language and historiography in the formation, transformation, and development of cultural identity. This includes a history of Psalmanazar’s “Formosan,” which leads a remarkable life extending beyond the fraud itself, as the language and alphabet invented by Psalmanazar are adopted in various instances as examples of the “authentic” Formosan tongue—sometimes while Psalmanazar is being denounced as a reprehensible fraud in the same breath.

The Pretended Asian is undoubtedly the best existing work concerning Psalmanazar’s life and fraud. Keevak considers the various elements contributing to the success of Psalmanazar’s hoax to illustrate the preeminence of cultural performance in eighteenth-century Europe, providing important insight into the early blossoming of stereotypical ideas concerning racial identity, from which colonial attitudes were forged.

Jonathan Ball
Notes on Contributors

Jonathan Ball is a PhD student in English at the University of Calgary. He holds BA and MA degrees from the University of Manitoba. He is primarily interested in Canadian Literature, with an emphasis on radical poetics and the experimental novel, but also researches North American film studies. He is a creative writer and filmmaker.

Hilary McD. Beckles is a Professor at the University of the West Indies Cave Hill Campus. He is the author of numerous articles and books including *Centering woman: Gender discourses in Caribbean slave society*, and *The development of West Indies Cricket*. In 2002 he served as the Barbados’ UN delegate to the Conference on Race, which was held in South Africa.

Brycchan Carey is Senior Lecturer in English at Kingston University, London. A specialist in the literature and culture of eighteenth-century Britain and its colonies, he is the author of *British Abolitionism and the Rhetoric of Sensibility, Writing, Sentiment, and Slavery, 1760-1807* (Palgrave 2005) and the editor, with Markman Ellis and Sara Salih, of *Discourses of Slavery and Abolition: Britain and its colonies, 1760-1838* (Palgrave, 2004). He maintains an increasingly eclectic website at <www.brycchancarey.com> where can be found detailed information on all his research interests.

John Gilmore teaches at the University of Warwick and is the author of *Faces of the Caribbean* as well as *The Poetics of Empire: A Study of James Grainger’s “The Sugar Cane.”*

D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke, Emeritus Professor of English, is an internationally recognized authority on Sri Lankan English literature. He was elected Fellow Commoner by Churchill College, University of Cambridge, and was also Foundation Visiting Fellow at Clare Hall, University of Cambridge.

Patricia Krus teaches at the University of St. Andrews. Her research has focused on issues of historical remembering and cultural identity in contemporary women’s writing from the Dutch, English and French Caribbean. Her book, *Gendered Memories of the Caribbean*, will be published by Lexington Books in 2008. Currently, she is developing a project on the representation of human rights violations (genocide, rape, torture), forced displacement and human trafficking in drama, film and fiction.
Pamela McCallum is professor in the Department of English at the University of Calgary. Her research focuses on the representation of history. She has recently published an annotated edition of Raymond Williams’s classic study *Modern Tragedy* and she is co-editor (with Wendy Faith) of *Linked Histories: Postcolonial Studies in a Globalized World*.

Sara Salih is Associate Professor of English at the University of Toronto. Her research interests include the Caribbean, the eighteenth century (especially early black writing and women’s prose), and postcolonial theory and writing. She is the author of *Judith Butler* (2002), editor of *The History of Mary Prince* (2000), and is currently writing a book about representations of ‘brown’ women in Jamaica and England from the Abolition era to the present day, to be published by Routledge in 2008.

Aritha van Herk is a Professor of literature and creative writing in the Department of English at the University of Calgary. She is a novelist, short story writer, and literary critic whose work has been published nationally and internationally. Her latest book is *Audacious and Adamant: The Story of Maverick Alberta* (2007).

Candace Ward, author of *Desire and Disorder: Fevers, Fictions, and Feeling in English Georgian Culture*, is Associate Professor of English at Florida State University where she teaches early Anglo-Caribbean literature and culture and eighteenth-century studies. Her current projects include *Crossing the Line: Early Anglo-Caribbean Fictions*, and a critical edition of *Hamel the Obeah Man*, which she is co-editing with Tim Watson for Broadview Press.