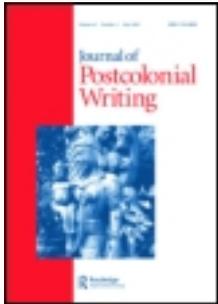


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The Caribbean short story: critical perspectives

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REVIEW

The Caribbean short story: critical perspectives, edited by Lucy Evans, Mark McWatt and Emma Smith, Leeds, Peepal Tree Press, 2011, 356 pp., £19.99, ISBN 978 1 8452 3126 2

Caribbean literature and the public sphere: from the plantation to the postcolonial, by Raphael Dalleo, Virginia, University of Virginia, 2011, 320 pp., £26.50, ISBN 978 0 8139 3199 9

Projections of paradise: ideal elsewheres in postcolonial migrant literature, edited by Helga Ramsey-Kurz with Geetha Ganapathy-Doré, Amsterdam and New York, Rodopi, 2011, 304 pp., £54.00 (hbk), ISBN 978 9 0420 3333 7

The focus in *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives* is on how Caribbean writers creatively rework old traditions to depict contemporary diasporic connections and female identities. This interesting collection of essays demonstrates how Caribbean short stories elude the limited criteria of short story theorization and highlights neglected writers in this genre. Five sections trace the publishing history from the early 20th century when much Caribbean literature was influenced by imperial culture. When the *Beacon* was established in 1931 it aimed to accentuate local customs in contrast to western ways. Suzanne Scafe and Raymond Ramchariter both discuss short fiction of this period: Scafe focusing on the innovative and experimental styles used to depict the struggles and conflicts of ordinary lives in contrast to the colonial aesthetic, while Ramchariter suggests that this portrayal of a poverty in the “yard” genre was simplified by middle-class contributors to the *Beacon*. Alison Donnell’s discussion of neglected women Caribbean writers in the early period up to the 1970s is followed by a study of Indian-Caribbean short stories, another neglected area of literature, and in a sociopolitical context Abigail Ward and Claire Westall both reveal the rivalry between African-Caribbean and Indian labourers – a friction traced from the days of indenture and shown in Ismith Khan’s stories. Westall’s essay focuses on how the divisions between Indian and African-Guyanese communities are filtered through cricket in stories by several authors. A fascinating section on folktales and oral traditions explores the creativity of Caribbean short fiction in its creolization of various themes: food, local and old-world art, standard and vernacular language, and the Caribbean traditions such as shaman, masquerade, anancy and magical realism. The essays show how Caribbean short story writers creatively reconfigure traditional storytelling methods to include diasporic and female identities, while they also use innovative techniques. Elaine Savory writes on the intriguing figure of Kamau Brathwaite, who simulates oral performance using the computer to recreate a known story. This stimulating book exhibits diversity in creative methods of writing, recalling old traditions juxtaposed with the new to include a diasporic multiracial dynamic. As Andrew Armstrong states, the short story epitomizes “the continued diversity and complex nature of Caribbean literature as it writes the new spaces into the future” (310).

The diversity and complex nature of Caribbean writing is also examined in *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere: From the Plantation to the Postcolonial*. Raphael Dalleo refers to authors' aims to "reconstruct the anticolonial relationship between writer and public while acknowledging its impossibility in a postcolonial problem-space transformed by new social, political, and economic realities" (17). The public sphere is both real, encompassing institutions of government and publication which shape the writers' imaginations, and imagined – a virtual space in which the writer can give expression. In the novels discussed, the plantation, pirate ship, market place, carnival and traffic jam are examples of spaces imaginatively used to express a public voice. The book loosely defines the historical trajectory of the Caribbean in three periods – plantation slavery (1804–86), modern colonialism (1886–1959) and decolonization (1959–83) – but Dalleo acknowledges that it "is governed by overarching transnational structures of domination that particular islands and writers come to terms with in different ways" (13). This book investigates the contradictions which complicate the various moments and the changing political and social circumstances in which writers sought to find an audience. It explores the tensions that relate to the author's role in each period and how contemporary writers attempt to engage with the anti-colonial sentiment from an earlier time. This detailed study analyses novels of both familiar and less well-known authors and will be useful to Caribbeanist scholars with an interest in anglophone, hispanophone and francophone Caribbean fiction.

Paradise, an elusive and slippery word with many interpretations, is carefully and thoroughly scrutinized in the introduction of *Projections of Paradise: Ideal Elsewheres in Postcolonial Migrant Literature*. This section is very informative about the historical development of changing notions of paradise and explores them in the context of migrancy. For the displaced person, paradise is a site of desire subject to constant transformation and can be linked to Bhabha's "realm of the *beyond*", and the "interstitial passage between fixed identifications" (xviii). The familiar authors of "paradisal" novels by Gunesequera, Ghosh and Ondaatje are discussed, but it is also refreshing to see novels not usually considered in the context of paradise, postcolonialism and migrancy, being given this attention. Penelope Lively's writing, more usually connected to Englishness, is analysed by Vera Alexander in this frame. Most of Lively's novels are set in England but they also reflect her early life in Egypt, and depict scenes from both countries. Alexander emphasizes Lively's description of gardens and, although the study of paradisiacal gardens is not unique,¹ this article in particular offers an inspiring look at writing not usually associated with a postcolonial perspective.² This is a captivating collection of essays which will be of value to those interested in migrancy, identity and landscape.

Notes

1. For a study of paradisiacal gardens, see Melanie A. Murray, *Island Paradise: The Myth: An Examination of Contemporary Caribbean and Sri Lankan Writing*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2009.
2. Lively's work is also discussed within a postcolonial context, but with a different emphasis, in Huw Marsh, "Unlearning Empire: Penelope Lively's *Moon Tiger*". *End of Empire and the English Novel Since 1945*. Ed. Rachael Gilmour and Bill Schwartz. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011. 152–66.

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