The Limits of the Postcolonial Theory in the Caribbean Context: "Nearing Forty" as a Case Study

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Asma Hussein
Al-Ahliyya Amman University, Jordan

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Abstract: The present paper examines the limits of the postcolonial theory as a critical and historical approach to the Caribbean: its history, its literary and cultural products. To contextualize this examination, the paper starts by comparing the approaches of two contemporary historians to the region's history, namely, B. W. Higman and Carrie Gibson who traversed and chronicled the region's checkered past. The comparison aims to isolate the exclusivist-inclusivist dynamics at work in Higman's linear approach in *A Concise History of the Caribbean* and Gibson's episodic approach in *Empire's Crossroads: A History of the Caribbean from Columbus to the Present Day*. The paper, then, addresses the analogous manifestations of these dynamics in literary criticism. Concretely, the dynamics are traced in the postcolonial critical approach to Caribbean literature via conducting a close reading of Derek Walcott's "Nearing Forty" and a critical assessment of John Lennard's 'postcolonial' reading thereof as a case study. The paper concludes with a call for similar reevaluations of the corpora of Caribbean writers and a critical (re)assessment of the attendant postcolonial readings that framed them for long. Being mainly library-based, this paper relies on books, articles, reviews, and interviews.

Keywords: Caribbean literature, Derek Walcott, "Nearing Forty", postcolonial theory

Introduction

Geographically, the Caribbean is an archipelago of over 7000 islands and islets stretching roughly 2000 miles long and over 160 miles wide, whose topographical morphology shapeshifts depending on the optic of its beholder:

> These islands are scattered in a curve of dots and distances continuing for nearly two thousand miles from the coast of Florida to the northern tip of South America. Coaxed by wind and water, these volcanic peaks display strange and familiar shapes: a *camel's turbulent hump*, the sleek, swollen *arches of the snail*, *crabs' claws*, a *turtle* fast asleep (Lamming 2009: 16, emphasis added).

Despite its limited extension, the region hosts various climatic zones back-to-back without clear transitions: tropical rainforests, subtropical savannahs, and swamps. This geographic *abruptness* and its diverse organic *imbrications* characterize, additionally, the densely packed historical, lingual, cultural, geopolitical, and demographic topography of its individual islands. George Lamming, however, spots a deep running continuity under that crust of topographical diversity:

> Islands of the Caribbean are evidence of some ancient mountain range that rode once without a flaw between the extreme points of North and

> South America. None but geologists can now conceive the years, lost by millions, before that huge, continuous family of mountains broke and fell beneath the sea. Long submerged, it has left an archipelago of peaks like a swarm of green children patiently awaiting its return (ibid).

Nevertheless, the drama of the Basin's geological formation that is rendered poetically by Lamming above is reversed in its class-color-coded demographic *tapestry*: odd remnants of indigenous communities, descendants of European colonizers, swathes of Christian 'negroes,' white slaves, and convicts from Europe, millions of enslaved Africans, thousands of indentured laborers from India, China, and Portugal. Similarly, an all-inclusive construct would fail to appropriately designate the intrinsic gradations of the region's historical, lingual, cultural, geopolitical, and demographic diversity. For example, a *monolithic* Afrocentric identity propagated by diehard elitist intellectuals is ever undermined if read in terms of what it heralds: exclusionist politics.

In the same vein, this paper examines the exclusionist politics underlying the postcolonial approach/discourse into which the region's history and literature are conventionally conscripted. In other words, this paper proposes that systematizing the historical and critical approaches to the Caribbean's history and literature via the postcolonial theory is reductive and limiting.

1. Caribbean history

Since the Caribbean witnessed dramatic twists and turns prefaced by accidental discovery, an ensuing radical demographic change, and incessant (neo)colonization waves, homogenizing these historical wanton dramas into a linear grand narrative is ever stymied by the imbrications of asymmetric nexus of individual histories, demographic makeup, linguistic norms, political/administrational status quo, etc. 'Dramatic' applies to the near past, too. In the past century alone, the formation of a pan-Caribbean identity passed through (was almost trapped in the maze of) 'conflicting' views on belonging, namely: "the sequence of colonialism, nationalism and federation, black consciousness, micro-nationhood, and trans-nationalism" (Breiner 1998: 24). Significantly, these identity formulae had been stymied since the Caribbean "nations [are] sharply isolated from one another as much by history as by geography" (Breiner 1998: 25), which harks back at the intricate imbrications mentioned above. What is pertinent, here, is that in addition to their synergized bearing on the question of national belonging, these historical fluctuations and vagaries seriously challenge any historical project that employs the conventional systematic approaches to chronicling a given region. To showcase this argument, this paper will reference *A Concise History of the Caribbean* by B. W. Higman and *Empire's Crossroads: A History of the Caribbean from Columbus to the Present Day* by Carrie Gibson.

In his prefatory note to *A Concise History of the Caribbean*, Higman rivets the reader's attention to the "special difficulties" (2011: xi) that jeopardized his project of writing a history of the Caribbean. The 'difficulties' are glossed into the region's checkered past and the concomitant geopolitical incongruities. To answer this problem and uphold the structural integrity of his project, Higman freely

redefined the 'Caribbean.' The redefinition involves curtailing (in Higman's wording, "ignoring") the outliers like Belize and the peri-Caribbean enclaves (aka. the rimland or hinterland) of Guyana[1], Suriname, and French Guiana (ibid). Over and above, the coastal and insular stretch (aka., 'extended Caribbean') from Virginia down to the Brazilian easternmost state Bahia is excised to evade "distort[ing] the demography" (ibid) of his narrative. This outline of the 'making of his book' indexes the blurred line that purportedly sets history and fiction writing apart. Higman himself refers to his history book as a "narrative" (ibid), and his deliberate exclusion of lands and peoples is carried out in the manner of a realist fiction writer who would (de)emphasize (ir)relevant settings and peripheral characters in the subservience of structural coherence, in Higman's words, "periods and patterns of development." Skimming the table of contents, it is evident that Higman's history is a narrative with a clear-cut (gapless) linear sequence of periods and patterns:

- Ancient Archipelago, 7200 BP[2]–AD 1492
- Columbian Cataclysm, 1492-1630
- Plantation Peoples, 1630-1770
- Rebels and Revolutions, 1770-1870
- Democrats and Dictators, 1870-1945
- The Caribbean Since 1945.

In effect, the structural integrity was salvaged; nevertheless, at the cost of sabotaging integrity *per se* since the region referred to as the Caribbean Basin[3] encompasses, *by definition*, the islands *and* the neighboring coasts of Central and South America (except for the coasts of the Gulf of Mexico). In *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 'Caribbean' encompasses: "the island nations of the Caribbean Sea *and* territories on/the surrounding South and Central American mainland (such as *Guyana* and *Belize*) … the term 'Caribbean' refers to *all* island nations in the area (*and* mainland *Guyana* and *Belize*)" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2013: 38/39, emphasis added). Furthermore, Higman's rationale for the curtailing measure is disturbingly telling: "Confining the narrative to the islands sets limits but at the same time provides an *ecological coherence* that enables an attempt to write a *systematic* comparative history" (2011: xi, emphasis added). While the basic elements of Higman's assertion have more than a grain of truth and ring true to the aforementioned complex givens of the Caribbean's prelapsarian (pre-Columbian) as well as postlapsarian (diasporic) past, he refrains from discussing their implications: conceptual and structural integrity are incommensurable. Carrie Gibson, another prominent historian, contends otherwise.

Like Higman, in the introductory pages to *Empire's Crossroads*, Gibson outlines her project's "limitations" (2014: xxv) and the "quandary" (2014: xxvii) that arises from the region's vicissitudes and individual histories' dissonances that she alternately terms "diversity" (2014: xviii, xxv), "multiple yet conflicting strands" (2014: xix), "connections and crossings" (2014: xxi), "contradictions and complexities" (2014: xxviii). Despite the observable unanimity in diagnosing the problems, Higman and Gibson's answers are antithetical. Higman's "ecological coherence" stands at the stark opposite of Gibson's instructive proposition that "the

past cannot so neatly be packed into boxes, and the story that unfolds in this book is often one of extremes" (2014: xx). If a box, it is rather "a box of puzzle pieces[4]" (2014: xxiv). Rather than tailoring a 'seamless' Caribbean, Gibson celebrates the fabric's global reaches: "each of the islands has its own rich, dense history that extends across the globe, far beyond the Caribbean" (2014: xxi)[5]. Informed by this conviction, Gibson's book charts a "shared history of … diversity" (2014: xviii) that is, contrary to Higman's, neither "a reassuring narrative" nor a "straightforward" one (2014: xix). Instead, Gibson offers a "story [that is] … diffused, dappled, a ramble with shadows and light" (2014: xxv). Unlike Higman's curtailed 'Caribbean,' Gibson's study scope is "the wider West Indies" (2014: xxi) In other words, Higman's vision towards "a systematic comparative history" is supplanted with Gibson's vision whereby "[t]he Caribbean lends itself to the mosaic approach to history – there are so many fragments to use and arrange." (2014: xxvi). The fragmentary nature of Caribbean history informs the episodic outline of Gibson's *Crossroads*' chapters:

- A Passage to the Indies
- Stepping Stones to the New World
- Pirates and Protestants
- Sugar
- The Rise of Slavery
- A World at War
- Haiti, or the Beginning of the End
- Cuba and the Contradictions of Freedom
- Banana Wars and Global Battles
- The Road to Independence
- The Cold War in the Tropics
- Island Life
- Import/Export
- Invented Paradise

Notably, no strict and date-bound tags are attached to these episodes since, even though the titular episodes connote "the shared history" of the region, their manifestations and reverberations were diverse and had been experienced differently[6]. After all, it is a "*shared* history of *diversity*." Gibson's treatment of 'Independence' in the tenth chapter titled "The Road to Independence," for example, shows that "Road" is misleading. They were rather roads with diverse starting points, routes, trajectories, and destinations (2014: 256-280).

To sum up, though politically so far apart, there is an observable unanimity among intelligentsia and literati that the fine line between history and fiction is malleably redefined[7]. Taking the Caribbean as a case study would show that the (literal and metaphorical) redefinition, exemplified by Higman, is tantamount to deformation. The above exclusivist dynamics that are evident in Higman's approach to Caribbean history are not exclusively traceable in (re)constructing Caribbean history but equally mark approaching Caribbean literature.

2. Caribbean literature

'Caribbean literature' is an umbrella term covering the multilingual literature(s)[8] produced in the Caribbean or by Caribbean-born authors. As a general field of literary and cultural studies, Caribbean literature is conventionally subsumed *under* American literary and cultural studies and is approached through the theoretical lens known as postcolonialism, which surveys the colonized nations' encounter(s) with and response(s) to the cultural vestiges of the colonization experience. The responses took revivalist, apologist, revisionist, etc., forms.

It is undeniable that the colonization moment and its subsequent postcolonial one is a formative and visceral experience for Caribbean literary sensibility. However, regressing to the postcolonial theory as the default mediating approach to the region's literature is reductive and has its limits and problems. Reviewing the rich output of literary criticism that approaches Caribbean literature, one can discern two major camps regarding this issue. Two prominent intellectuals have representatively argued these camps' positions: George Lamming and Sandra Pouchet Paquet.

In a conversation conducted by Anthony Bogues intermittently over a period of three years (2006-2009), Lamming rightly avers that Caribbean sensibility "is shaped and given meaning by the peculiarities of it's [sic] historical formula" (Bogues 2011: 202). He glosses the "formula" as a coincidence with the colonization moment: "a point in time, roughly say the end of the 15th century" (ibid). The problem with this statement is that Lamming (and the like-minded members of this critical camp) uses it to bolster his deterministic position "that the *major components* [of the Caribbean intellectual tradition] are history and politics. The *generating forces* that lead to thinking, *whatever direction* you go, have been the history of the region and the politics of the place" (Bogues 2011: 198, emphasis added)[9]. According to Lamming, this is indiscriminately valid for Caribbean writers who are politically so far apart like C.L.R. James, Eric Williams, and Derek Walcott (ibid). Even though Lamming retracts that the latter "may not see himself as a political man", like *any* Caribbean intellectual Walcott must be "informed *all the time* by this combination of political culture whose major components are history and politics" (ibid, emphasis added). In addition to asserting twice that history and politics are *the* "major components," Lamming designates them alternately as "the foundation" and "the oxygen" of the Caribbean intellectual tradition (ibid).

On the stark opposite from this determinism stands the skeptic critical camp whose battle cry goes, in Supriya Nair's words: "the point of theory is, I would think, to be just that, theory, not dogma[10]" (2011: 351). Their position is best epitomized in Paquet's words. Paquet argued at considerable length to the effect "that Caribbean cultural practices are antagonistic to hegemonic definition[11]" and are rather "transboundary" (2011: 357). Consequently, homogenizing these diversities is dubbed by Paquet as a "coercive[12] proposition" (ibid).

Chiming with Paquet, this paper proposes that systematizing the critical approaches to Caribbean literature via the postcolonial theory is no less restrictive than Higman's "systematic comparative history" approach to historicizing the region. Moreover, it is as deforming. To make the 'deforming' influence of reducing any and all text(s) herd under the category of "Caribbean literature" into

a response to the colonization moment and the postcolonial aftermath conspicuous, Derek Walcott's poem "Nearing Forty" will be used as a case study. First, the poem proper will be examined. Thereafter, Lennard's postcolonial reading thereof will be critically assessed. Lannard's postcolonial reading of the poem appears in the 2nd edition of his *The Poetry Handbook*, namely the ninth chapter entitled, coincidently, "History."

2.1 Walcott's "Nearing Forty"

Derek Walcott's "Nearing Forty" appeared first in *The Gulf and Other Poems* volume (1969)[13] and was reprinted in the *Collected Poems 1948-1984* (Walcott: 1986: 136-137). It is a profound introspective poem, grappling with the inexorable passage of time and the poet's relationship with his own aging process. Walcott's deft craftmanship weaves this theme into all elements of the poem. The peripheral elements are no exception, namely the recent death of the poem's dedicatee John Figueroa[14] and the poem's epigraph excerpted from Samuel Johnson's 1765 "Preface" to his edition of Shakespeare: "The irregular combination of fanciful invention may delight awhile by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest. But the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted [sic] and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth." The dedication and the epigraph, in other words, encapsulate the lyrical I's complex emotions towards the quotidian truth, in Walcott's phraseology "the household truth" (1974a: 67), that human life is a transient episode and is bound to an eventual culmination.

Walcott, the virtuoso of form, coalesces the encrustations of form with his theme. For instance, though the poem is in free verse with varying line lengths, over half of its lines are pentametric, i.e., lines 2, 5-10, 12, 16, 19-22, 24-25, 27, 30-31. If free verse is metonymic of the poet's wish to defy the conventional/metrical line, the latter's dominance exposes the limits of realizing that wish. To dilate, the imperatives of time passage are stronger than man's wish to brave them.

The choreography of images in the poem proper derives from this thematic tension of nature's constant existence and humans' ephemeral one as early as the evocative opening lines:

> Insomniac since four, hearing this narrow,
> rigidly-metred, early-rising rain
> recounting, as if its coolness numbs the marrow,
> that I am nearing forty (1974a: 67).

The 'insomniac' pivotal moment is intercut with flashbacks that recount the yesteryear of the poetic persona's career with limpid clarity:

> nearer the day when I may judge my work
> by the bleak modesty of middle-age
> as a false dawn, fireless and average,
> which would be just, because your life bled for
> the household truth, the style past metaphor
> … you who foresaw
> ambition as a searing meteor
> will fumble a damp match, and smiling, settle

for the dry wheezing of a dented kettle (ibid).

Evidently, the poet's surrogate's insomniac reflections and recollections are replete with aquatic images: "early-rising rain", "*frosted* pane," "damp match," "this year's end rain" (1974a: 67), "measuring how imagination/ebbs" (1974a: 67/68), "lightly-falling rain" (1974a: 68). It is evident, too, that the image of rain, in particular, predominates since it best embodies the tension between the steady pace of time, "rigidly-metred," and man's helplessness vis it (the rainfall). The tension could be read synecdochically in the water-clerk's routine measurement of the rain's momentum without a chance to affect its tempo: "conventional as any water-clerk | weighs the force of lightly-falling rain," (1974a: 68).

This personal experience, with all its universal/human reaches and philosophical undercurrents, has been recruited by John Lennard to a reductive postcolonial perspective:

2.2 Lennard's "Nearing Forty"

Lennard's *The Poetry Handbook* takes on the ambitious task of providing readers with a comprehensive guide to understanding and appreciating poetry via its wide-ranging analysis, explanation of historical (like sonnets and ballads) and contemporary poetic forms (such as concrete and performance poetry), and thorough exploration of the intricacies and technical aspects of poetry crafting (versification, syntax, diction, imagery, etc.,) as well as the strategies for critical reading. Though the *Handbook*'s methodical structure hinders the reading experience, it is informative, educational, and accessible[15] to various audiences/readers (beginners, intermediate, advanced). Nevertheless, I hold that the structure exposes a problem in the monochromic approach to the literature produced in 'postcolonial' settings or by authors from a 'postcolonial' background. Whereas the structure showcases the *evolution* of poetry over time, it betrays an implicit conviction of a *static* 'postcolonial' poetry landscape.

Lennard utilizes an array of poetic examples to break down complex concepts and make them more digestible. In conjunction therewith, explanatory passages are extensively analyzed at the close of each chapter. The anthology of poets covered therein leans predominantly on well-established authors from the Western (Eurocentric) canon[16], as follows:

1. Metre: John Donne's "The Flea," Wilfred Owen's "Anthem for Doomed Youth," and Derek Walcott's "Nearing Forty."
2. Form: John Keats's "Ode on Melancholy," Elizabeth Bishop's "Sestina," Geoffrey Hill's "September Song," and "Nearing Forty."
3. Layout: Emily Dickinson's "I Heard a Fly buzz–when I died–," "September Song," and "Nearing Forty."
4. Punctuation: "The Flea," "I Heard a Fly buzz–when I died–," "September Song," and "Nearing Forty."
5. Lineation: "Ode on Melancholy," "Sestina," and "Nearing Forty."
6. Rhyme: "I Heard a Fly buzz–when I died–," "Anthem for Doomed Youth," "Sestina," and "Nearing Forty."
7. Diction: "The Flea," "Ode on Melancholy," "Anthem for Doomed Youth,"

and "Nearing Forty."

8. Syntax: "The Flea," "Ode on Melancholy," "I Heard a Fly buzz–when I died–," and "Nearing Forty."
9. History: "Ode on Melancholy," "Anthem for Doomed Youth," "September Song," and "Nearing Forty."
10. Biography: "The Flea," "Anthem for Doomed Youth," "Sestina," "September Song," and "Nearing Forty."
11. Gender: "I Heard a Fly buzz–when I died–," "Sestina," and "Nearing Forty."

Notably, Lennard uses a handful of poems (namely, seven) and variably builds out of them constellations that best represent the concept under consideration in the corresponding chapter. Unlike the other poems, Walcott's "Nearing Forty" figures consistently (and *terminally*) throughout the book's chapters. In all chapters, "Nearing Forty" proved to be a felicitous pick and a fitting site to examine the poetic elements under consideration. All but the "History" chapter. Therein, Lennard's initial *lengthy* comment in the "Nearing Forty" subsection categorically places the poem out of the chapter's scope:

> The title suggests *closer involvement with biography than history* at large, and *lyric inwardness excludes the historical concerns* courted by satirical and narrative poetry. That in no way lessens the importance of locating Walcott as a Caribbean poet whose island and people have suffered a violent history, often[17] at British hands, but does focus that importance on Walcott as an individual, and I will come to it under 'Biography'. [sic] The recent publication of some drafts of the poem, making available an aspect of its *textual history*, is directly connected with the death of John Figueroa, its dedicatee, and also *belongs under 'Biography'*, [sic] but less *personal history* is explicitly and complicatedly invoked in two ways: by the epigraph, and particular intertextual association of "water clerk" (2005: 303, emphasis added).

The logic and line of argument that govern the paragraph above are problematic. While I find Lennard's premise/introduction that the poem's title ("Nearing Forty"), content (a reflection on the mid-age crisis), and context (John Figueroa's death) point *unequivocally* to biography and lyricism, I demur to his off-color conclusion that the poem "is *explicitly*" invoking history. Like Higman, Lennard prioritizes 'seamless' structure; hence, he is compelled to maintain his fixed chapter-by-chapter outline/structure. Consequently, 'history' must be automatically extracted from Walcott's poem, as was meter, punctuation, rhyme, lineation, etc. Nevertheless, despite the phonic affinity, calling biography "personal history" and context "textual history" is sheer wordplay to retain the chapter's subject ('history') at the sound level.

The 'explicit' history Lennard alludes to above is clearly the history of colonization "at British hands." Hence, the historical reading of the allusions is about conscripting Walcott's poem into the postcolonial discourse. Not only the jointly coordinated "explicitly and complicatedly" do not sit well with one another, but also the follow-up comments stretch the point thinly and proceed in a

convoluted manner that justifies "complicatedly" yet complicates "explicitly."

Lennard excavates *narrowly* and *lengthily* to unearth the *explicit* allusion to colonization and its legacy in the epigraph and the ancillary image of the "water-clerk." More than in his reading of the epigraph (Lennard 2005: 303-306), the far-fetched historical reading is strikingly visible in Lennard's postcolonial reading of the "water-clerk" image. The analysis opens with an anecdotal paragraph:

> The intertextual spark that connects "water clerk" is not formally acknowledged in the same way as the epigraph, and *the term is not a quotation* as such, but so far as *Walcott's intent*[18] is held to matter, *I think* it highly likely he was aware of his reference and the word constitutes an allusion. In first attempting to understand the presence of this "water clerk [/] who weighs the force of lightly falling rain"… I mentioned that *OED2* [Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd edition] offered illustrative quotations from 1898 and 1973. These, from obscure sources, are cited as the earliest and latest uses known to the editors; beyond harbour-life the term is not common–encountering it I had to *hunt for the meaning*–but in the *OED* [Oxford English Dictionary] offices are ten further recorded usages, all from the same high-canonical text: Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim* (Lennard 2005: 306, emphasis added).

The very verb "hunt" signifies the amount of effort exhorted to detect the Conradian echo and to give "Walcott's figure a gendered identity and history: a past he flees, a fate he lives, and a destiny he approaches" (Lennard 2005: 308). To dilate, the "water-clerk" image is not rendered in clear nautical (seamanship) glossaries in the poem proper, and Lennard's task of spotting the thing in Jim that leaches into Walcott's lyrical surrogate is not easy; in his own words: "'water-clerk' creates the intertextual invocation of Jim's decline from first mate towards an obscure death, but the preceding qualification of the clerk as 'conventional' keeps apart a water clerk of Jim's recklessness and the one imagined in the poem" (2005: 310). The manner of Lennard's quote hunt in the above excerpt, rummaging one dictionary after the other, is far from straightforward. Furthermore, settling for the *OED* rather than the *OED2* merely because it goes in the postcolonial direction is unobjective. Over and above, the underlying assumption that Walcott consulted the *OED* while writing "Nearing Forty" is clearly untenable.

To further illustrate the 'cogency' of his reading, Lennard argues for an 'indelible' association among the triumvirate: Walcott, Jim, and *Jim*. In passing and unwittingly, for example, Lennard connects the fact that Conrad was 43 by the publication of *Lord Jim* and the lyrical thrust of Walcott's poem as a ground for identification (2005: 306). Moreover, he elaborates:

> the presence in Conrad's third passage [the third quoted occurrence of "water clerk" from *Lord Jim*, in the *OED*] of the reiterated 'niggers' … though Conrad may in *Lord Jim* as a whole criticise the imperial honour-codes by which Jim lives and is hounded, the historical fact and consequences of those codes for many colonial subjects (including Walcott) remain, intransigent and unpalatable (2005: 310).

Allowing that the "imperial honour-codes" and their "consequences" are

anathema to postcolonial Walcott and despite the 'abundant evidence' that Lennard marshals above to pinpoint a connective subtext that binds Conrad's novel and Walcott's poem, no satisfactory answer is provided for the questions: how do the patina of coloniality and the miasma of racism fit in Walcott's personal mid-age crisis? Where in the *lyrical* poem does Walcott arrogate to himself the role of a *national* spokesman? In sum, to pedantically search dictionaries for the trace of a quote and to examine a fat novel for the trace of intertextuality is not the way to read a poem or any work of literature. Devoting almost six pages (Lennard 2005: 306-311) to pinpoint the postcolonial allusion that informs "water-clerk" tells that the allusion is cryptic rather than *explicit*.

To avoid misunderstanding, Walcott's life span and career trajectory concurred largely with his home island St. Lucia's transition from a colony to an independent state. Hence, the historical moment (and cautionary tale) of colonization, its etiology, and sequelae are real, visceral, and formative for his literary and intellectual sensibilities. Nevertheless, casting the lyrical vignettes that "Nearing Forty" chart into a tight match of St. Lucia's (or the Caribbean's) national struggle vitiates the rich imagery of the poem into a thin content revolving around the sporadic allusion to "water clerk." To testify my acknowledgment of the postcolonial aura in Walcott's work without intriguing my proposition that it should neither be magnified nor denied, in all cases, not imposed, I will use no other example than Joseph Conrad.

Conrad and his novel *Heart of Darkness* are referenced in two poems by Walcott where they could not be divested from the unalloyed symbolism endowed by the colonial semiotics. In the autobiographical book-length poem *Another Life*, Conrad is *explicitly* named in the very poem (Walcott 2009: 70), rather than buried in some citation of a collegiate dictionary. Similarly, in the title poem of *The Fortunate Traveller*, the allusion, and the textual clues (Walcott 1981: 93) are in keeping with the stock images of postcolonial critical practices and discourse. Even if the "heart of darkness" (ibid) is neither italicized nor with uppercase initials, and might be read as a loose postcolonial allusion, the *explicit* reference in the preceding line to "Kurtz" solidify an argument to their unalloyed intertextual dimension and postcolonial reaches. In both cases, the critic does not need many words to chase (hunt) the explicit postcolonial resonances. Lennard could have used these poems in his *Handbook* to exemplify the element of "History" in poetry, but his predisposition that *any* poem by *any* Caribbean poet would do i.e., must have a postcolonial/historical resonance to it was compulsive (perhaps, blinding).

Telegraphically put, regressing exclusively to the sedimented allusions of the colonial period and the bottled discourse and terminology of postcolonial theory, elastic as its transatlantic avatars might be, in approaching Caribbean literature is reductive and limiting. A Walcottian scholar can investigate Walcott's work beyond and/or out of the tentacles of coloniality and postcolonial jeremiads. In her recent study *Lyric Poetry and Space Exploration from Einstein to the Present* (2023), Margaret Greaves, took that liberating and enriching approach. Herein, Walcott, is rendered as a cosmopolitan writer: "interested in human collectives and moral absolutes" (Greaves 2023: 139). Greaves even regrets that "readers miss in

these poets [like Walcott] an attendant cos-mopolitanism [sic] of extraterrestrial despair" (ibid). Having analogized Lennard's undertaking to Higman's, the best critical analogy to Gibson's 'mosaic' approach might be Stewart Brown's popular anthology: *Caribbean Poetry Now*. In his anthology, Brown spots a gamut of topic categories and *gradations* of the Caribbean experience. He anthologizes Caribbean poems on lyrical concerns as in "Childhood and Adolescence," "One Love," and "Old Folks, Death and Grief" chapters; on culture and spirituality as in "Folks" and "Gods, Ghosts and Spirits" chapters; on social and societal concerns as in the "Home-City Life," "Home-Country Life," and "Exile and Homecoming" ones; on women as in the "Her Story" chapter; as well as on national identity crisis as in the "Roots" one (poems by Walcott figure under all but three chapters)[19]. Indeed, this variety is the book's praise. The anthology is recommended in the review (typed on the back cover) as "the ideal choice for those wishing to enjoy the range and liveliness of Caribbean poetry." In other words, it is an approach that offers an extensive foundation for understanding Caribbean literature since it champions opening the field of Caribbean literature studies and celebrates the diversity, or "range," of its thematic concerns and intellectual sensitivities. The postcolonial theory operates in the opposite direction: closing and narrowing down (which has been referred to, in this paper, as limiting and reducing). In the "Postcolonialism/Post-Colonialism" entry, Ashcroft et al., point out that the coined term 'postcolonial' has a political valency since it "was part of an attempt to *politicize* and *focus* the concerns of fields such as Commonwealth literature and the study of the so-called New Literatures in English" (2013: 204, emphasis added).

It is of note, here, that questioning the orthodox monopoly of postcolonial theory is not conducive to dehistoricizing Caribbean literature or overseeing the lingering imprint(s) of the seminal moments of colonization and decolonization on Caribbean writers like Derek Walcott. Rather, it is a qualified shift in priorities, perhaps, a modulated reinstatement of the interface between the postcolonial and the aesthetic. Even Ashcroft et al. felt the "need to be careful about falsely prescribing postcolonial theory as a panacea" (2013: viii). In a few words, this paper calls for a careful acceptance of the validity of prescribing the postcolonial theory to reading any and all Caribbean literary text(s).

The case of Derek Walcott cited in this paper is neither peculiar nor exceptional. Currently, this paper's author is researching the postcolonial reading(s) of Jean Rhys's corpus and the preliminary findings render Rhys as another curious case. Since the research that has been conducted so far is long and could not be integrated within the scope of the present paper; perhaps even the scope of a paper on its own (unless meticulously curtailed), it might be presented and published in a chapter of a coming monograph. However, to briefly share these preliminary findings, one would say that setting her last novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* in the Caribbean was highly operative not only in conscripting Rhys and her novel into the postcolonial tradition but also in re-reading her previous works retrospectively from that point and lens. Representative of this stand is Caryl Phillips, who, indeed, follows the lead of Louis James in this issue as he pronounces in an interview conducted by Savory (Savory 2020: 17, 19).

3. Conclusion

This paper has outlined the reductive and limiting (exclusionary) politics that has informed history writing and literary criticism, whose subject is the Caribbean. On the one hand, the accidental discovery and subsequent barrage of vicissitudes that the archipelago witnessed made its inroads into chronicling the region, theorizing on and approaching its cultural output. On the other hand, the foresighted 'fitful' ends of individual historians and critics interfere. For example, the region's history in Higman's project is forced into the 'monochromic' Eurocentric linear view to the exclusion of a significant chunk of the region. The result is a bleached version of Caribbean history. Likewise, the 'monochromic' politics of postcolonial theory has explored to saturation the Caribbean literature as continuous séancing of the colonial past to the exclusion of (re)appreciating the plethora of its topics and thematic concerns.

Instead, this paper endorses an approach to the region's literature that is analogous to Gibson's "mosaic approach to history". Instead of homogenizing, albeit obliquely, the rich thematic resources of Caribbean literary sensibilities into long-drawn jeremiads that swing and pendulate between a recriminatory tone and a toothy sarcasm, the paper endorses a critical approach that takes a middle ground and seeks a panoramic view of the region's literary topography that could be read into various literary traditions and whose output could occupy a sliding scale of creative genealogies. In conclusion, the present paper calls for more studies that reevaluate the corpora of Caribbean writers and critically reassess the attendant postcolonial readings that framed them for a long time. Since this paper cited Anglophone Caribbean literature (Derek Walcott and Jean Rhys), it recommends, too, enlarging the target of these reevaluations and reassessments to encompass the multilingual Caribbean and the world-wide postcolonial settings.

Asma Hussein (PhD)
Al-Ahliyya Amman University/Jordan
ORCID No.: 0000-0001-8903-7675
asma.hussein@uni-goettingen.de
+49 176 47342842

Endnotes

[1] Formerly, i.e., pre-independence, British Guiana.
[2] Stands for "Before the Present" (Higman 2011: xii)
[3] Also interchangeably referred to as the Antilles and the West Indies. However, the short-lived Federation of the West Indies (3rd January 1958-31st May 1962) gave the latter term (the misnomer, indeed) an exclusive connotation of English-Speaking Caribbean islands (except for US Virgin Islands and the Bahamas).
[4] Gibson revisits and expands this image on a latter occasion: "a large, disparate puzzle" (2014: xxvii).
[5] This is true not only on an insular level but also regionally. For example, in his "Foreword" to *The George Lamming Reader: The Aesthetics of Decolonisation*, Thiong'o says that

understanding the rewards of what he dubbed as "the praxis of decolonisation" in the Caribbean could only be comprehended as interconnected with "the rewarding of the power map of the world by the forces of decolonisation" (2011: xi) around the globe longitudinally and latitudinally: "The rewarding had already started with India's independence in 1947; the Chinese Revolution in 1948; the defeat of the French in Vietnam at Dien Bien Phu in 1954; the start of the Mau Mau armed challenge of the British colonial state in Kenya in 1952; and a similar armed challenge against the French in Algeria. There was also Ghana's Independence in 1957; the Cuban revolution in 1959; the rise of Civil Rights Movement in America marked by the now famous act of Rosa Parks refusing to give her seat to a white person in/Alabama; not to mention the workers movements in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean often marked by general strikes and mass uprisings." (2011: xi/xii).

[6] Though Gibson's assertion "there are patterns here that cannot be ignored." (2014: xxiii) recalls Higman's "periods and patterns," Gibson's "here" connotes the parallels between contemporaneity and antiquity, i.e., the "great deal of the present in the Caribbean past … [which realizes] the adage that history repeats itself" (2014: xxiii).

[7] For example, in his statement essay "The Muse of History," Derek Walcott avers: "history is fiction, subject to a fitful muse, memory. … history is written … is a kind of literature without morality" (1974b: 37), anticipating Said's dilation: "history is made by men and women, just as it can also be unmade and unwritten" (2003: xviii).

[8] Linguistically, the islands are largely branched into the major (European) lingual categories of Anglophone (also termed West Indian), Francophone, Hispanophone, and Lusophone.

[9] This position is paraphrased and recurs later in the "Conversation" (Bogues 2011: 229).

[10] Paradoxically, even Lamming warns against "the tyranny of theory" in his essay "Reflections on Writing *The Pleasures of Exile*" (2011: 278).

[11] The Eurocentric definitions that operate in Higman's linear history and Lennard's postcolonial monochrome (see below) are exemplary.

[12] Paquet dubbed it, too, as "utopian … [and] imagined." (2011: 357)

[13] The quotations in this paper are excised from the 1974 edition, pp. 67-68.

[14] Jamaican man of letters.

[15] Except occasionally (unavoidably though) when Lennard's analytical style feels dry and overly academic; dissuading readers who seek a more emotive (perhaps, experiential) relationship with poetry.

[16] Which perhaps underserves diversity.

[17] "often," that is, since St Lucia changed hands several times between the French and the British before the former ceded the island to the latter in 1814 (the Treaty of Paris). In Walcott's "Leaving School" essay, it was "thirteen times" (1965: 24), and in his modern epic *Omeros*, Major Plunkett references "thirteen treaties" (1992: 72). McGarrity, however, talks of "at least fourteen times" (2015: 27). This fact, i.e., "launching so many ships and sailors into battle" (ibid), won the island its renowned appellation "Helen of the West Indies." Walcott personified his home island in the eponymous local housemaid Helen in *Omeros*. The island's less renowned appellation, which is referenced in *Omeros* "Gibraltar/of the Caribbean" (1992: 71-72) and in *Another Life*: "this 'Gibraltar of the Gulf of Mexico'" (2009: 71), is informed by another kin historical incidence: from 711 to 1783 Gibraltar changed possession between the Moors, the Spanish (aided by the French on two occasions), and the British (McGarrity 2015: 42).

[18] Even if Walcott's intent does not exist or coincide with Lennard's position, the determinist tone of the latter's pronouncements will persist since, according to Lennard: "Literary relations need not be matters of intent: a poet may forget where they first encountered a

phrase or technique, and a reader recognise what the poet did not; neither ignorant writing nor ignorant reading alters the existence of that phrase or technique in the two poems, or a relationship in time between them" (2005: 295).

[19] These poems include "Names" (Brown 1992: 2-4); "Ruins of a Great House" (Brown 1992: 18-19); "A Lesson for This Sunday" (Brown 1992: 30); "Laventille" (Brown 1992: 74-76); "A Sea-Chantey" (Brown 1992: 86-87); "The Saddhu of Couva" (Brown 1992: 105-106); "Shabine Encounters the Middle Passage" (Brown 1992: 112); "Midsummer, VII" (Brown 1992: 140).

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