



Editors' Note

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EDITORS' NOTE

RESOUNDING CARIBBEAN LITERATURES: VOICE, MUSIC, AND TEXT¹

Dear Readers,

This special issue on Caribbean literatures is a first for *ESLA*. Thematically speaking, it represents the first issue dedicated entirely to literary expressions of the Caribbean, a region often misunderstood in Chile, but which is nevertheless historically and culturally connected to the country, as it is to the rest of Latin America. Lest we forget, Gabriela Mistral once wrote that Puerto Rican Spanish reminded her of the Spanish she grew up speaking in northern Chile's Elqui Valley.² Such observations can help guide us across artificial national borders to recognize the cultural similarities between geographically distant points of the continent. The issue also introduces readers to the linguistic heterogeneity of the Caribbean by showcasing work that deals with and emerges from the Anglophone, Hispanophone, and Francophone Caribbean, as well as the various Creoles spoken throughout the region. In this respect, we are especially excited to print poetry written in Guadeloupean Creole, alongside the author's own English translation. Finally, this issue is one of the largest that *ESLA* has published to date, including six articles, four non-fiction essays, and six bilingual poems.

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² "En Puerto Rico, me reencontré con mi español de Elqui, siglo XVI, y me dio gusto saber con prueba que hablo lo mío más legítimo y entrañable" (In Puerto Rico, I rediscovered my Spanish from Elqui, 16th century, and I was pleased to know for certain that the language I speak is the most legitimate and endearing) (1943).

Throughout the 20th century, Caribbean authors and intellectuals have posed important questions regarding sound, voice, language, and identity construction in societies scarred by colonialism, slavery, and foreign intervention. From Nicolás Guillén's *Sóngoro Cosongo* to Kamau Brathwaite's concept of Nation Language, or the Creole poetry of Louise Bennett and Gilbert Gratiant, we find a vast array of authors who look to incorporate orality or music into their engagement with national, postnational or indigenous quests. Moreover, scholars such as Sylvia Wynter, Gordon Rohlehr, Mervyn Morris, Velma Pollard, Kwame Dawes, Colette Maximin, Silvio Torres-Saillant, Véronique Corinus, Cyril Vétoratto, Lydia Cabrera, Antonio Benítez Rojo, Emilio Jorge Rodríguez, Arcadio Díaz Quiñones, Juan Carlos Quintero Herencia, Nicolas Darbon, among others, have further offered pivotal critical outlooks on these issues. Many of these scholars would argue that music and popular culture have provided constructive models for writers in forging postcolonial/anticolonial poetics. Indeed, one can recognize the fabrics of indigenous music and oral forms in the novels of Alejo Carpentier and Simone Schwarz-Bart, for instance. Yet poets such as Derek Walcott or M. NourbeSe Philip stage the textualization of the oral by emphasizing the plasticity of words and pages. New scholarly work coming out of the region and elsewhere focuses on music as a vehicle of identity affirmation and critical discourse. We can read this in pieces such as Errol Montes Pizarro's *Más ramas que raíces. Diálogos musicales entre el Caribe y el continente africano* (2018), Andrés Espinoza's *Salsa Consciente. Politics, Poetics, and Latinidad in the Meta-Barrio* (2021), as well as Matti Steinitz and Juan Suárez Ontaneda's recent dossier "Sonido y movimiento: música popular y transnacionalismo negro en las Américas," published in *PerspectivasAfro*, a journal dedicated to Afro-Latin American studies edited by Silvia Valero at the Universidad de Cartagena in Colombia.

As debate over the colonial roots of orality continues to develop, anthropologists and musicologists have also made fruitful use of “the term aurality to encompass the immediate and mediated practices of listening that construct perceptions and understandings of nature, bodies, voices, and technologies in particular moments and places” (Minks and Ochoa Gautier 25). Accordingly, and following in the footsteps of Wilson Harris’s essays, such aural approaches could strengthen studies of orality and the “musical turn” (Torres-Saillant 28-33) in Caribbean literary theory. Moving between apprehensions of orality and literary perceptions of aurality, this special issue presents contributions that engage with these critical bodies of work and develop original analyses to further our understanding of the dynamic relationships between oral and scribal forms of expression in the Caribbean.

The issue opens with Thomas Rothe’s “Notes on Voice and Tempo in Anglophone Caribbean Literatures,” which offers an overview of the relationship between scribal and oral forms in this subregion, considering a variety of literary genres and popular music expressions such as calypso and reggae. Rosario León continues with a case study in “*Drums and Colours: metateatralidad y re-escritura histórica*,” arguing that Derek Walcott’s theatrical work engages musical elements of carnival to revise major Caribbean historical events, such as the Haitian Revolution. Connectedly, in “The Contrapuntal Melophrasis of Bob Marley’s ‘Buffalo Soldier’ in Derek Walcott’s *Omeros*,” Malik Noël-Ferdinand explores how the poet integrates reggae aesthetics into his epic poetry as a way of addressing Marley’s anticolonial philosophy. Sarah Couvin takes us beyond linguistic and regional borders in “Lyrical perspectives on Lady Brion’s ‘I talk Black’ and Simone Lagrand’s ‘Nous sommes des rivières,’” establishing a dialogue between the two women’s musical and oral-based writing that reveals insight on race, gender and language politics. James Staig also focuses on spoken word dynamics in “La voz diaspórica: encuentro y pertenencia en la performance de

'Puerto Rican Obituary' de Pedro Pietri," examining issues of displacement, belonging, and sonic potential in four recordings of this now classic Nuyorican poem. Paulette A. Ramsay and Erick Mendoza Barroso close the articles section of this issue with "Muestras literarias cubanas devenidas de temáticas caribeñas para la formación axiológico-cultural," arguing for the axiological relevance of Cuban authors Nicolás Guillén and Alejo Carpentier in Caribbean education systems, based primarily on how each author engages with language, cultural tradition, and regional history.

The non-fiction section offers a variety of reflections on language, gender, and history in the Caribbean. The first piece is a reprinting of Ana Lydia Vega's classic "Pulseando con el difícil" (Wrestling with the Hard One), which uses humor to examine the linguistic politics in Puerto Rico, where English, "el difícil," carries the weight of a colonial language imposed on a population historically grounded in Hispanic and African traditions. This piece urges us to reflect on the role of English throughout the region: aside from acknowledging the diversity of Englishes spoken in the Caribbean, it is also necessary to recognize the imperialist function that English has fulfilled, especially evident in an island like Puerto Rico, which still experiences the destructive effects of US colonial rule. English-language journals in Puerto Rico, such as *Caribbean Studies* and *Sargasso*, have also opened up spaces to explore these issues, all the while embracing English as a vehicle of intra-Caribbean communication, as well as artistic and epistemological/affective exploration, as Vega articulates in her work. In "Archivo Nardal: inscripciones, documentos y traducciones," María José Yaksic questions how one can apprehend the presence of female intellectuals in the burgeoning Black French tradition of the 1930s, taking a closer look at several rare texts, like Paulette Nardal's works on Martinican music and folklore or Suzanne Césaire's essays in *Tropiques*, to show how these women's contributions are often found inside the interstices of silenced archives. In the same manner as Any-Dominique Curtius's archeology of Suzanne Césaire, Yaksic inventively molds

the Nardal sisters' presence by investigating a special papers collection held at the Martinique Territorial Archives. On the other hand, TiMalo's "Journey of a Disposable Hero of the Revolution" gives light to the original manufacturing of a French-based Creole writer and songwriter. His creative and ethical engagement stems from an inner experience of Guadeloupean nationalist history, and from a taste for multiple Afrodiasporic styles, namely negritude poetry, hip-hop, heavy metal, funk, and gwoka music. Lalau Yllarramendiz Alfonso concludes this set of essays with "Ella me besó y yo la besé': Cuerpo, performatividad de género y sexualidad en la canción 'Omelette' de Malaka," which analyzes the performativity of queerness in a well-known song by Cuban reggaeton singer Malaka. The importance of such perspectives rests in exploring gender nonconformity in a popular musical genre that all too often objectifies women's bodies.

The final section of this issue offers a lineup of some stellar Caribbean poets. Cuba's national poet Nancy Morejón gives us "Paulina Pedroso," an original, previously unpublished piece on the Afro-Cuban independence fighter who José Martí considered his second mother. The second poem, "Qana," taken from *Peñalver 51* (2010), alludes to the Lebanese city which suffered various devastating attacks by Israeli Defense Forces in the 1990s and 2000s, establishing a relevant connection to the ongoing genocide of Palestinians. St. Martin's preeminent intellectual figure, Lasana M. Sekou, presents a pan-Caribbean verse composition based on the names of the region's heroes. The names' musicality resonates with the piece's appealing title, "We Continue," or, in the Spanish version, "Continuamos." This pan-Caribbean perspective is consistent with Sekou's large body of writing and his work as founding director of House of Nehesi Publishers, which has been publishing in several of the major languages of the region for over forty years. TiMalo makes another appearance here to share two Creole-based pieces: the first song-poem, "Iwaryen" (Ivorian), interrogates the common fate of Guadeloupeans and Ivorians regarding France's (neo)

colonialism; the second, “Haine à foutre” (They hate us!), published for the first time in this issue, is a bilingual and ironic pondering on the French Caribbean political situation. Costa Rican author Carlos Vidal wraps up this section with “Ranchera Nights” / “Noches rancheras,” a poem penned in both English and Spanish that revisits the nostalgia of childhood sounds and melodies remembered in two languages.

We would like to thank all of the contributors, authors, and reviewers of this issue for their generosity and dedication, as well as the whole *ESLA* team, especially Francisca Fernández and Richard Parker, who have put in many hours of work and treated every text with the care it deserves. We also send a special shout out to Jamaican artist Krystal Ball for generously offering her spectacular painting for the cover art—as Aimé Césaire wrote, “on a beau peindre blanc le pied de l’arbre la force de l’écorce en dessous crie...” / “however much one paints the foot of the tree white the strength of the bark screams from below...” (207).

Big up, abrazos, tchimbé raide,

Thomas Rothe and Malik Noël-Ferdinand

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