Introduction

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Hay que aprender a recordar
Lo que las nubes no pueden olvidar

You've got to learn to remember
what the clouds cannot forget
—Nicolás Guillén, "Elegía"

Nicolás Guillén's insight, from his 1947 poem "Elegía," captures one of the central paradoxes of Caribbean literature. He states plainly, "hay que aprender," which implies a more generic mandate than the English translation can provide. "One must remember" or "we must all remember" or "it must be remembered" are all possible translations of the imperative to record and to commemorate a history that has no surviving witnesses except nature itself. The vague subject of the imperative is appropriate, since it is not clear who will be capable of remembering what the clouds alone seem to remember. Despite this uncertainty, the mandate remains; the past must not be ignored even if it cannot be known. Nature's muted voice can neither be fully reclaimed nor entirely suppressed. The clouds have witnessed the devastation of indigenous populations, the violence of the Middle Passage, and a host of other human atrocities in the Caribbean, yet there remains a palpable separation between natural phenomena, human history, and their mutual articulation.

Guillén's work, like that of many other authors in this volume, might be read as a response to the fact that there is probably no other region in the world that has been more radically altered in terms of human and botanic migration, transplantation, and settlement than the Caribbean. This unique and troubled history has caused theorists such as Édouard Glissant to conclude that the dialectic between Caribbean nature and culture has not been brought into productive relation. He determines that the Caribbean "landscape is its own monument: its meaning can only be traced on the underside. It is all history" (*Caribbean Discourse* 11).

The title of our collection, *Caribbean Literature and the Environment: Between Nature and Culture,* takes Glissant's observations as a starting point and is the first volume to examine literary narratives that engage with Caribbean and ecocritical studies in the four major language areas of the region. While we make no claims that this book is representative, we hope to create a dialogue between the growing field of environmental literary studies, which has primarily been concerned with white settler narratives, and Caribbean cultural production, especially the region's negotiation of complex ethnic legacies.[1] Our objective is to bring Caribbean and ecocritical studies together by exploring the ways in which the history of transplantation and settlement has contributed to a sense of place and an environmental ethic in the Caribbean.

Our contributors explore the relationship between human and natural history, or, in Glissant's terms, texts that produce a "language of landscape" (*Caribbean Discourse* 146). Overall, we begin with the premise that nature is already acculturated by the human process of rendering meaning, which is not the same thing as saying that nature does not exist outside of culture. In its exploration of the relationship between nature and culture, this collection addresses four overlapping themes: how Caribbean texts inscribe the environmental impact of colonial and plantation economies; the revision of colonial myths of Edenic and natural origins; connections between the process of biotic and cultural creolization; and finally, how Caribbean aesthetics might usefully articulate a means to preserve sustainability in the wake of tourism and globalization.

Although North American ecocritics often inscribe an idealized natural landscape that is devoid of human history and labor, the colonization and forced relocation of Caribbean subjects preclude that luxury and beg the question as to what might be considered a natural landscape. Against the popular grain of U.S. ecocritical studies, we argue that addressing the historical and racial violence of the Caribbean is integral to understanding literary representations of its geography. As Wilson Harris reminds us, this is "a landscape saturated by traumas of conquest" (*Whole Armour* 8). Like Guillén, Glissant also suggests that the land is a mute historical record of a "fight without witnesses" (*Discours antillais* 177), so that a gesture of destruction against land becomes an act of violence against collective memory. The land, states Beverley Ormerod, is the past's "only true guardian . . . history waits, latent, in Caribbean nature, which is filled with sorrowful reminders of slavery and repression" ("French West Indian" 170). While the brutality of the plantation system produced a particular relationship to the natural world, it is important to consider those sites

that served as vital repositories of indigenous and African beliefs and assertions of rebellion against plantation capitalism. This is most evident in the history of indigenous and slave resistance in which mountain ranges, mangrove swamps, provision grounds, and other sites of environmental opposition to the plantocracy provided vital alternative communities.

There are dangers in attempting to tell a muted story. Excessive historicity often leads to blaming the victim, in many cases the land itself, when the past is elusive. In 1930, Antonio Pedreira wrote his famous invective against his own Puerto Rico, blaming the land's tolerance for the historical and racial confusion that resulted from colonialism. Oddly, the culprit is the island itself: "Isolation and diminutive geography have condemned us to live in perpetual submission, having as our only defense not aggression but patience" (115). Similarly, V. S. Naipaul has argued that "the history of the islands can never be satisfactorily told," not simply because of the "brutality" but, notoriously, because "history is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies" (*Middle Passage* 29). Although much has been written about Naipaul's charge, few have pointed out that the landscape itself seems to have "invited" its degradation: "There were only plantations, prosperity, decline, neglect: *the size of the islands called for nothing else*" (27; our emphasis). Naipaul's literary oeuvre contradicts the "natural" futility he perceives in the landscape, yet he raises an important question about the ways in which assumptions about historiography are embedded in geography. As is the case for many writers of the region, "geography serve[s] as a metaphor for history —as well it might in islands whose history has been so deeply influenced by geographical factors" (Rohlehr 235).

Literature's challenge to speak of this history must resist not only the silencing effects of the Caribbean's colonial legacies on Amerindian, African, and Asian peoples but also what Derek Walcott calls nature's own "vegetal fury" (*The Bounty* 13). Ecological processes of death and regeneration are indifferent to, though certainly not independent of, the human story. As Guillén suggests, literature must do the impossible: it must remember a human history that has been buried by the tremendous tropical indifference of the Caribbean environment.

While this collusion of human violence and natural regeneration obstructs access to history, it also presents particular poetic and environmental opportunities. It means that in the battle against amnesia induced by colonialism's erasures, the deterritorialization and transplantation of peoples, and even natural disasters, the Caribbean writer often seeks nature as an ally. For this reason, writers have often articulated a poetic relation with land

that is consistent with the highest aims of sustainability, although not always couched in the language of environmentalism. Glissant explains:

> The relationship with the land, one that is even more threatened because the community is alienated from that land, becomes so fundamental in this discourse that landscape in the work stops being merely decorative or supportive and emerges as a full character. Describing the landscape is not enough. The individual, the community, the land are inextricable in the process of creating history. Landscape is a character in this process. Its deepest meanings need to be understood. (*Caribbean Discourse* 105–6)

Thus, poetic imagination in the Caribbean is simultaneously oriented toward the racial and biotic history of displacement, even though the latter has not received due attention.

If it is true that the current global environmental crisis is in part due to human alienation from nature and inattention to history, as many have argued, Caribbean literature has a vital contribution to make. Following the lead of ecocritic Lawrence Buell, we position Caribbean texts as "environmentally oriented work[s]" in that they demonstrate that "the nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history" (*Environmental Imagination* 7–8). However, like most ecocritics, Buell bases his study on U.S. landscapes and has not considered the more tumultuous aspects of (island) colonization. If we reposition Buell's definition of the environmental imagination in the Caribbean context, we might very well ask if the transplantation of sugarcane and the millions of slaves across the Atlantic to cultivate this crop could be called "natural," even if cane, breadfruit, coffee, nutmeg, ackee, mango, and countless other staple crops of the region have become deeply *naturalized*. Unlike the white settler production of nature writing, Caribbean writers refuse to depict the natural world in terms that erase the relationship between landscape and power. Foregrounding the discourse of power assures an interrogation of the ways in which the multiple ethnicities of the Caribbean have constituted the local environment, just as the history of enslaved and indentured women's labor helps to expose the Northern conceit of conflating women's bodies with passive nature. Ultimately, the complex diasporas of plants and peoples in the Caribbean, and these writers in particular, problematize the notion of natural history and its segregation from human agency.

Unlike the masculine Anglo-American insistence that alienation from nature is caused by excessive mobility and transience, here we see that

there are various causes for alienation from nature that differ according to the historical conditions of peoples in the wake of the violence of Western expansion. As recent work in environmental justice demonstrates, answers to ecological problems are possible only through a close examination of such specificities.[2] Postcolonial literature has given more attention to this problem than has U.S. nature writing; placelessness in the former tends to be seen more as a particular political problem rather than as a universalized moral one, as in the latter. Wendell Berry, one of the foremost voices of environmentalism in the United States, believes, for example, that for the modern American, "geography is artificial; he could be anywhere, and he usually is" (53). While this may be true of many white male Americans, it is certainly a harder argument to make for immigrants, women, and/or people of color. As Melvin Dixon has argued, slavery's legacies of geographical containment have necessitated an interest among African American writers in preserving and/or reinventing the self against the delimiting forces of history and oppression. Consequently, geography does not remain fixed outside of time and language as it might in white settler narratives; rather, "verbal invention [turns] figures of the landscape into settings for the performance of identity" (6).

Although ecocriticism overlaps with postcolonialism in assuming that deep explorations of place are vital strategies to recover autonomy, postcolonial criticism has given little attention to environmental factors. On the other hand, ecocriticism's opposite tendency to understate the social and historical specificities of place has been tempered by postcolonial and environmental justice studies. By bringing these fields together in the context of Caribbean literatures, we hope to reflect a postcolonial investment in what Fiona Barnes calls "the cultural and political ramifications of geography, the so-called sense of place" and a sustained ecocritical focus on the ways in which race, gender, and other social vectors help constitute environmental experience (150).

Natural Histories

The yoking together of the terms "natural" and "history" would seem to suggest a common recognition of the ways in which the nonhuman world has manifested change over time. But more often than not this phrase is generally understood as the narrative practice of humans, particularly Europeans, in their empirical observations of biotic phenomena—what Michel Foucault calls "the transference of a rationality formed elsewhere" (*Order of Things* 130). The colonization of the New World tropics, as Richard Grove has pointed out, has been integral to the European rendering

of the taxonomy of flora and fauna and has provided the epistemological "roots" of discourse and legislation on environmental conservation. To foreground the ways in which colonialism has radically altered and transplanted the Caribbean environment is to call attention to how natural histories are deeply embedded in the world historical process, to highlight the organicist assumptions of what might be deemed "natural," and to underscore the difficulties posed to European and Caribbean writers alike in rendering a history of the environment.

Despite the intense scrutiny and narrative interpellation of tropical environments, these landscapes continue to be misunderstood for reasons that can be traced to the early Caribbean colonists. European travelers had already discursively fashioned Asia through the classical lens of Herodotus, so it was hardly surprising that voyagers to the Caribbean incorporated this "popular vocabulary for constituting 'otherness.'" (Hulme 21).[3] Conflating texts of the broader Mediterranean with the startling difference of the New World, European reports rendered the landscape in a binary between the similarity to the writer's homeland and its radical differentness (Gerbi 6). The novelty of Caribbean flora and fauna caused a shift in European conceptions of human and nonhuman difference and raised questions about whether this newness could in fact be rendered as historical at all.[4]

From this tension arose an unprecedented interest in the science of natural history. Since Columbus's early journals, Europeans marveled at the "variety and newness" of the islands' flora and fauna, their "eternal greenness," the lack of deciduous trees, and the staggering absence, to European eyes, of a dormant winter season (Gerbi 48). This in turn led to hyperbolic misinterpretations of tropical fecundity. As early as 1494, armchair travelers proclaimed that one could plant any seed in Guadeloupe, "for the soil rejoices . . . and never reject(s) anything that you throw in it; it accepts nothing without giving it back much more abundantly and with great increase" (Nicolò Scillacio quoted in Gerbi 28–29). Gendering the soil as a receptive woman's body that "rejoices" at the insertion of male seed, the language of even the earliest colonists helped to naturalize what later would become the Caribbean plantocracy.

This myth of fertility confused plant diversity with an extraordinary yield for food, leading readers and many a current-day tourist to assume that one need not labor in tropical climates for sustenance. But when the Spanish forced indigenous laborers into the mines and disrupted their agricultural systems, countless died of starvation (Lowenthal 15). As David Lowenthal has argued, the West Indies with "their infertile, dry, or poorly

drained soils, precipitous slopes, and long history of soil erosion and depletion contrast sharply with the stereotype of lush tropical gardens that will bear fruit if one just pokes a stick in the ground" (15). In reality, the islands' formation and climate diversity have produced many soils that "are notably deficient in nutrients" (Watts 36).

While debates about the social and religious practices of native Caribbean peoples prevailed,[5] sustained documentation of the flora and fauna didn't appear until Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés's encyclopedic *Historia general y natural de las Indias* in 1535. Well before Enlightenment taxonomies of nature, Oviedo prided himself on his experience in the field in collecting ethnographic and botanical information (Gerbi 225). Here the relationship between ethnography, natural observation, and narrative production was forged and was deeply entangled with notions of spatial difference and colonial violence. The flora, fauna, and humans that were captured and transported lifeless to European metropoles for analysis, documentation, and display attest to the epistemic violence of the production of "natural" knowledge. Janet Browne has shown that the new histories of nature drew their language from the discourse of empire and increasingly from incipient nation-building, inscribing biotic "colonists" and natural "kingdoms" (32–57). With the systemization of natural history in the eighteenth century, particularly Linnaeus's standardization of plant nomenclature, a new science emerged that contributed to the erasure of indigenous knowledges while erecting a hierarchy of racial "species" and gendered difference.[6]

Scholars have documented a shift from the utopian representation of tropical nature to concerns about its generation of hypersexuality, disease, and moral decay in the eighteenth century.[7] However, they have not linked this to a possible social catalyst: the increased transplantation of Africans to the American neotropics. We suggest that these social and environmental changes are an important, if overlooked, factor in discourse of the Caribbean. During the height of plantation slavery, Europeans began to separate "culture" from its epistemological root, "cultivation," and attribute degeneracy to those involved in tropical agriculture. Reinvigorating classical texts, Montesquieu and travel writer Alexander von Humboldt argued that the soil fertility of the tropics "retards the progress of nations towards civilization" and degenerates "intellectual faculties" (Humboldt quoted in Stepan 42). Even as Humboldt drew from Caribbean nature to construct "nations of plants" (see Browne 32) and to theorize "a new kind of planetary consciousness" (Pratt 120), these were already deeply entangled in colonial hierarchies.

Thus a legacy continues in the split between the *natural*—often rendered as unmediated tropical flora and fauna outside the all-too-human hand of plantation agriculture—and an anthropocentric *history* that would focus exclusively upon the social layering of settlement in the colonial context. Perhaps this is why the first European novel written in the Caribbean, Fernández de Oviedo's chivalric romance *Claribalte* (1514–15),[8] does not draw from the local landscape. Although he completely obscured the tropical and colonial spaces from which European naturalists drew their specimens, Foucault determined that their genre depends on "a history restored to the irruptive violence of time," as well as "the common affinity of things and language with representation" (*Order of Things* 132).

Drawing upon Glissant, we argue that it is only by foregrounding the New World's "*irruption into modernity*" (*Caribbean Discourse* 146) that we might integrate the polarization between the social and natural, as well as the temporal and the spatial. This framework is vital to understanding one of the region's first colonial epics, James Grainger's "The Sugar Cane: A Poem, In Four Books" (1764). As an amateur historian and physician, Grainger attempted to reconcile the irreconcilable: the natural flora of the Caribbean with the racial hierarchies of the plantation. His georgic ode to that "Supreme of plants" (1:22–23), the sugarcane, is a dual and conflicted text: copious footnotes on the islands' natural history anchor and often overwhelm idyllic lines of verse. Grainger adopts Linnaean classifications of flora and fauna, records local botanical history, ethnographic observations of African religious and social practices, medicinal use of plants for venereal and other diseases, advice for the treatment of slaves, the usefulness of slave provision grounds, and the problem of insects and disease that affect the harvest. Inviting spectatorship of "cultured soil" that "charms the eye" (3:538, 539), and devoting extraordinary detail to "imperial cane," Grainger's abolitionist contemporaries were horrified by the contradiction of celebrating "the beauty of the island" by suppressing "the miseries of the slaves" (Anonymous 327). Kamau Brathwaite rightly observes that "when Grainger contemplates "Nature," the specificity of the Caribbean "disappears" (*Roots* 140); the "tyranny of the model" of georgic idyll prevents a local engagement with the Caribbean environment as well as a meaningful representation of its people (141). Yet the text's failure is instructive; the irruptive history of Caribbean colonization disrupts facile natural metaphors.

The difficulty in reconciling the natural aesthetics of a landscape that has been so dramatically altered with the violence of colonial history has proven a continuing paradox for Caribbean writers. For instance, in the

French-Caribbean literary tradition, the first black writers perpetuated the European romanticization of the landscape.[9] The rise of Marxist frameworks of interpretation for the histories suppressed by colonialism, and a body of literature that formed around the plantation and social realist novel understandably had far more investment in reclaiming a historical Caribbean subject than engaging with the natural environment. Wilson Harris has sustained the most vocal critique of the ways in which the adoption of a realist history for the Caribbean novel has prevented an engagement with the "numinosity" of the landscape, in which one might find "the legacies of the past in the present" (*Selected Essays* 207). In response to Grainger's epic, Derek Walcott laments, "no historical collection acknowledges the fact that the beauty of the Caribbean islands could have helped the slave survive," and suggests "there was some separate benediction in the stupendous dawns and sunsets that had nothing to do with the boring evil of their servitude" ("Frowsty Fragrance" 61). Cane, in the words of Sam Selvon, "is bitter," but there is more to the Caribbean environment than the plantation complex.

In an effort to decolonize Caribbean historiography, the revitalization of folk culture, including religious practices, has provided a regenerative framework for both human and natural histories in the Caribbean. For instance, Aimé Césaire has drawn extensively from botanical history to inscribe African and Arawakan "roots" on his "calabash of an island" (*Collected Poetry* 47), while Eric Roach's poetry explores the "glorious landscapes of the soul" (71) and positions rural plantation labor as a means to know "the spirit of the place" (80). Although this relationship to land has often been troubled by exile, Brathwaite's seminal work on "nation-language" specifically links the Caribbean "folk/metaphysical mind" to arboreal and other natural images derived from "African symbolism" and religion (*Roots* 221). Andrew Salkey observes of the peasant in Haiti: "The land . . . is his own way of claiming to have a history which includes past and present and insures the future" (35). More recent Caribbean writing has directly admonished those early naturalists, "the great plant appropriators" who "simply go out and take someone else's beauty for themselves" (Kincaid, *My Garden [Book]*: 102, 119), while others have produced "rewrites" of the botanists' journeys into the heart of (Caribbean) darkness.[10]

Over thirty years ago, Sylvia Wynter characterized the region's history by the ideological and geographical split between the plantation and the provision ground; this dichotomy remains "the distinguishing characteristic" of Caribbean narrative (99). Africans imported crops such as yam,

ackee, gourds, and other staples into the Caribbean. By growing these items alongside indigenous cultigens, the slave provision grounds and their internal markets contributed a vibrant, alternative economy to the monoculture of the plantocracy.[11] This tension between the ideologemes of plantation capitalism and maintaining a space for Caribbean agency and sustenance encapsulates some of the major concerns of our contributors in this section. Although in other works he has drawn upon one of the productive outcomes of natural history, chaos theory, in "Sugar and the Environment in Cuba," Antonio Benítez-Rojo provides an overview of this island's complex botanical history, arguing that much of Cuba's cultural memory is embedded in its environment; thus violence done to the land becomes a simultaneous assault on human memory. Derek Walcott's "Isla Incognita," written in 1973 and published for the first time here, is an intimate portrait of the poet's struggle to represent the landscape without the alienated and taxonomic lens of colonial naturalists. The essay provides evidence that his critique of the "muse of history" that would be published the next year begins with the interaction of the writer with the natural world. In a similar vein, "Shaping the Environment: Sugar Plantation, or Life after Indentured Labor," writer Cyril Dabydeen explores the paradox of rebuilding Indian diaspora culture upon the ruins of the plantation system, revisiting the ecological triumphs and disappointments of postindependence Guyana. Imagining that sugar might fuel the writer's lifeblood, Dabydeen raises powerful questions about the recuperative qualities of the artistic imagination. Finally, Trenton Hickman's essay, "Coffee and Colonialism in Julia Alvarez's *A Cafecito Story*," explores the plantation system in order to provide a trenchant reading of the neocolonial aegis of U.S.-initiated environmentalist movements in the Caribbean. Together these essays move beyond the plantation complex to suggest the indispensability of localized cultural responses to environmental history.

Myths of Origins

Inquiry into the natural history of a region inevitably leads to questions about origins, a topic that has fascinated both European and Caribbean writers alike. From colonial interpellations of tropical island Edens to the legends of El Dorado, the narrative teleology of conquest has produced a utopic counterpart that often positions itself outside of the Euclidean violence of the plantation system. The notion of Caribbean origins is tied to a long history of mythologizing nature in a region that Peter Hulme has succinctly described as a unique "discursive entity" (5). Hulme shows that in their reliance upon Mediterranean antiquity, European inscriptions

assimilated the Caribbean into an already established discursive relation between isolated islands and inquiries into philosophical and natural origins.[12] Of course, an assumed one-to-one relationship between woman and land (and island) was one of the originary tropes of colonial Caribbean discourse. Centuries later, few of these ideologemes have disappeared; the gendering of Caribbean nature, as well as idealizing its utopian contours, continues to the present. For example, twentieth-century histories of the French Caribbean perpetuate the Edenic myth: "All in all we have a vision of enchanted shores and happy islands" (Antoine 352). Such idealizations have inspired many Caribbean authors to recapture a more "Adamic" and perhaps more originary claim to the significance of their landscapes in a way that destabilizes the colonial gaze; these gestures to a naturalized archaeology include revisions of colonial myths and the natural sciences.

To the first Europeans, biblical and classical texts of the broader Mediterranean were vital to formulating their understanding of the Caribbean's newness. One finds ample testimonies from Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci, and Fernández de Oviedo likening the Antilles to the Greek "Blessed Isles" and the earthly Paradise. Fernández de Oviedo also put forth an argument that the Caribbean islands were in fact the Hesperides, already known to the ancient Spaniards in their (spurious) Greco-Roman antiquity (Gerbi 271). Generally speaking, the greater the writer's classical and theological education, the deeper the connections that were wrought between the islands of the ancients, landscapes of the Bible, and the New World. From reports of mermaids, Amazons, giants, and anthropophagites, "creatures from the ancient myths invaded the newly discovered lands and seas" (Gerbi 21). This led to the reconfiguration of the region through classical and Christian toponyms such as the Virgin Islands, the Antilles, and Brazil.[13]

Hulme points out that the image of America as woman reflects an anxiety about the novelty of the New World that can be traced in "the relationship between European, native, and land" in which case the latter two are handily conflated in a naked and visually accessible woman's body (xii). As Carolyn Merchant has argued, this prelapsarian Eve would eventually fall once Europeans discovered the unruly wildness of the New World, but this would only further inspire the attempt to tame nature into a recovered Eden. Consequently, the colonial machine would produce a refurbished "Mother Eve," or nature as an "improved garden, a nurturing earth bearing fruit" ("Reinventing" 137). The search for an original state of nature outside of industrialized Europe (even while the Caribbean

provided the labor and raw materials for this industrialization) hid the effects of environmental violence behind the guise of gendered metaphors of the feminized and maternal "womb" of Caribbean landscapes. As such, this produced a gendered division between the space/time of Europe and the feminized, "primitive" tropics that erased the historical depth of the New World and helped to perpetuate the myth of European innocence in the hemisphere.

Due to colonial and tourist views of the islands as ahistorical, passive, and idyllic landscapes, Caribbean writers have had to recover a sense of historicity. As early as the 1960s, Wilson Harris noted that "the theme of origins" was vital to West Indian writing and was being mediated through social and geological sciences (*Selected Essays* 140). Many writers have re-visioned a more "natural" and thus originary Caribbean archipelago by turning to biogeography. As Chris Bongie points out, "the topos of the island" lends itself to "the absolutely particular" on one hand and, on the other, "a fragment, a part of some greater whole from which it is in exile and to which it must be related" (18). To make regional claims to the broader archipelago and Americas, Brathwaite has asserted that the islands' "unity is submarine" (*Contradictory Omens* 64). In an attempt to destabilize the colonial balkanization that segregates the region into colonial language groups, these writers have turned to a precolonial and originary vision of the region's formation. In the words of Jean "Binta" Breeze, "under this ocean / we hold hands" (77).

Curiously, the biogeography of the Caribbean presents one of the more difficult challenges to questions of human and natural origins. In an effort to explain the simultaneous existence of apparently much of the same flora and fauna over large stretches of islands, scientists appeal to a combination of at least two theories. One, known as dispersal theory, argues that the islands were once connected to a common mainland by a land bridge and that subsequent continental drift and rising sea levels separated the islands. Biota were carried off on islands, like drifting rafts, separated from their island cousins. But vicariance theory argues that the islands were autonomously created by volcanic activities on the ocean floor. Given this Brathwaitian postulation of geographical autonomy with submarine unity, the only explanation for commonalities would be a series of complex biotic migrations facilitated by bird flight, by large pumice "rafts"—fragments created by volcanic activity—or by large masses of floating vegetation that spread biota from one island to another.[14] As such, these migration and settlement patterns have proven to be powerful metaphors

of the shared experience of diaspora, settlement, and adaptation. Given the geological diversity of the Caribbean islands, these two paradigms are insufficient to explain Caribbean origins, just as cultural theory has been unable to settle on singular continental explanations for Caribbean roots and has instead turned to theories of fragmentation and grafting.

These theories may sound more like poetic imagination than science, and indeed Caribbean biogeographers readily admit that "it is plain beyond all argument that we all suffer under the burden of ignorance" (Ernest Williams 32). On the basis of the complexity and uncertainty of these theories, Benítez-Rojo, Glissant, Harris, Kincaid, and Walcott, among others, have defended the role of literature in forging an environmental imagination in the Caribbean and in prioritizing spatial/natural relations. They place land and seascapes within a temporally dynamic human story and insist that Caribbean literature must not be balkanized by its presumably insignificant size but must be addressed in its island, oceanic, and continental complexity.[15] Precisely because literature's rhetorical stance is one of imagined relations, it is well suited to the task of responding to History's presumed absence in the region.

This need for a poetic imagination capable of rising to the challenge of historiography's lacunae is also relevant to the search for precolonial human origins. While most of the indigenous people of the Caribbean were decimated, this has not precluded indigenous cultural survivals, nor has it discouraged writers, nationalist literatures, and scientists from excavating their originary presence. But like biogeography, archaeology is not able to give a simple answer about origins. The Caribbean islands have seen various waves of human immigration from about 5000 BCE; while Edenic colonial narratives might have placed these migrants in a state of unaltered nature, Richard Grove explains that "rapid and extensive transformations in the natural environment" occurred long before Europeans arrived (16). For example, indigenous peoples introduced agouti, dogs, guinea pigs, and opossum from the mainland; they also developed the first fishing economy in the region (Wing 140, 143; Watts 41–77). Significantly, the learning curve of island peoples may have of necessity been sharper than that of their mainland counterparts, since large-scale nomadic hunting and gathering were not possible and spacious expanses were not as likely to shield them from the immediate environmental effects of their economic activities. The limited space and natural resources of island geographies made them vital and primary registers of ecological change and helped to "heighten awareness of man as an environmental

agent" (Grove 475–76). Both Brown and Grove have explained that the dynamism of these same islands allowed scientists to understand the threat of species extinction in the late eighteenth century.

The Caribbean's fossil records are not as scarce as Derek Walcott once claimed when he wrote that the Arawak "leaves not the lightest fern-trace / of his fossil to be cultured / by black rock" (*Collected Poems* 114), but archaeological and biogeographical science has been slow to establish a sufficient record (Perfit and Williams 73). If we are limited by an epistemology that cannot acknowledge its limitations, we are led to the perpetuation of myth; in this case, the myth that islands have no historical or temporal depth. This would belie the fact that as islands they bear witness to and participate in a history of migrations over land and sea, as Charles Darwin and Alfred Wallace first noted. Thus, rather than gardens emptied of history, islands are registers of a complex dynamic between the land and the sea, the indigenous and the immigrant, and the constant threat/anticipation of arrival.[16]

This leads to a kind of Glissantian poetics, close to what biogeographers call "retrodiction": "the use of the possibly distorted information about the present day as a means to extrapolate to the truth of the long past" (Perfit and Williams 73). Where the biogeographical and geological record is incomplete, all that is conclusive is that "biology and . . . geology must share common histories" even if we can't know their common story (Ernest Williams 14). The chief difference between this science and poetics, however, is the willingness to admit the unknowability of the past. To Glissant, a poetics imagines a whole that cannot be known, whereas science would seem to insist on knowing a whole that therefore need not be imagined. This rhetorical knowledge, we claim, functions as an effective countermyth to the virginal Eden of the European imagination because it is more self-conscious and self-critical. With important implications for ecocriticism, Glissant claims that human and natural history are the rightful territory of creative narrative: "Literature for us will not be divided into genres but will implicate all the perspectives of the human sciences" (*Caribbean Discourse* 65).

Literature is by no means the only way to establish a sense of place, but its rhetorical recovery of a *sense* of history, especially when historical memory is fragmented, can play a crucial role in establishing sustainable belonging in the land. According to Glissant, all cultural zones formerly organized by plantation systems have in common a preoccupation with cultural amnesia and the loss of origins. As a result of this loss, "[i]t is necessary to establish the legitimacy of the inhabitant in the land in anchoring him/her in a sense of permanence or of recovered time" (Degras and Magnier 15). As Walcott explains, nostalgia over a lost history, whether African, European, or any other, will lead us ultimately to a "rejection of the untamed landscape" ("Muse of History" 42), and will thus lead the Caribbean writer to lament and disparage the present and the immediate environment. The postcolonial subject must somehow acknowledge loss; a sense of place will have to come from sources more mythical and poetic than deep historical knowledge.

How have Caribbean writers negotiated these myths of origins? Shona N. Jackson's essay, "Subjection and Resistance in the Transformation of Guyana's Mytho-Colonial Landscape," warns that myths of origins stage the reprisal of colonial legacies unless they are sufficiently reimagined. She traces a disturbing nationalist revamping of the El Dorado myth in Guyana, in which Amerindian and women subjects are trapped in a neocolonial fantasy of expansion and desire. The myth of Eden is no less relevant to contemporary Haiti, as explained in LeGrace Benson's essay, "A Long Bilingual Conversation Concerning Paradise Lost," or to the broader anglophone Caribbean, as detailed in Jana Evans Braziel's "'Caribbean Genesis.'" Benson situates Wilson Bigaud's 1951 *Paradis Terrestre,* reproduced on the cover of this volume, within the tradition of Haitian landscape painting. This Garden of Eden at the moment of the Fall already contains evidence of a dynamic and complex meeting of African and European cultures and thus leads us to reflect upon how this encounter impacted the environment and artistic expression alike. Braziel reminds us that like race, myth is an inherited structure of colonial discourse, and argues against the balkanization of humans and environment through a Glissantian "poetics of (eco)relation" that draws from multiple creative geneses. The writers addressed in these two essays articulate the value of a consistent return to the story of land and to a disavowal of human claims on it, so as to revise Old World myths of Caribbean origins. In George B. Handley's interview, "'The Argument of the Outboard Motor,'" Derek Walcott insists on praising the Edenic Caribbean while also acknowledging the dangers of using such nakedness for appropriation and consumption. Direct experience with nature can teach, shape, and hopefully amend the human story, and this is perhaps the reason why, to invoke Walcott's interview, "the argument of the outboard motor" is fallacious, or, as Shona Jackson ultimately insists, the El Dorado myth does not completely erode the land's own natural dynamism. Consequently, attention given to nature's narrative may serve to ameliorate the effects of Edenic longings through increased knowledge and understanding.

Hybridity and Creolization

Glissant has argued that "composite peoples . . . those who could not deny or mask their hybrid composition, nor sublimate it in the notion of a mythical pedigree, do not 'need' the idea of Genesis, because they do not need the myth of pure lineage" (*Caribbean Discourse* 141). The destabilization of atavistic origins inevitably provides a framework for discussing hybridity and creolization. Long before postcolonial studies popularized these two terms, Caribbean writers were theorizing the complex and often violent histories of interaction in the primarily bounded island spaces of the region. Since colonial sciences, based largely on the Caribbean context, had established a hierarchy of racialized species that encoded intermixture as evolutionary degeneracy, it would seem that hybridity would have to be one of the first ideological battlegrounds in the region. While there are notable differences between the terms transculturation, métissage and mestizaje, Créolité, and nation-language, they share an engagement in cultural practices—from language to epistemology—that help characterize the complex layering of Amerindian, European, African, Indian, East Asian, and Middle Eastern settlement over time.

As Robert Young details, the concept of hybridity was first utilized in European science of the natural (nonhuman) world. With the visible presence of racial mixture in the nineteenth-century West Indies, Europeans erected a science that argued for the degeneracy and ultimate infertility of the offspring of mixed-race sexual unions. As much as this science established a taxonomy of race, it also encoded normative heterosexual and gender relations. As Nancy Stepan has explained, the European male was catapulted to the top of the masculinist hierarchy, non-European men were feminized, and the bodies of women of color were interpellated as the site of reproductive response and responsibility. Carolyn Cooper has argued that the notion of black (women's) amorality or "slackness" has been key to the degradation of Creole languages. As such, race, gender, language, and cultural production are deeply intertwined. Although the natural world largely has been bracketed out of these discussions, the tropical environment, invoking sensuality and languor to Europeans, was key to the denigration of creolization, just as it has been vital to its redefinition.

Caribbean writers have redefined these colonial myths by destabilizing the discourse of colonial desire and excavating the continued indigenous and African presence in the region, but this process has tended to emphasize the human rather than the natural dimensions of creolization. Yet one needs only to consider Fernando Ortiz's 1940 thesis regarding transculturation to realize the interweaving of racial and environmental histories. His theory relied as much on racial differences as it did on the differences between the cultivation of tobacco and sugar, the latter an imported and hybridized staple crop of plantation slavery that came to be known as "Creole Cane." Alejo Carpentier's 1949 articulation of America's "marvelous reality" was based in large measure on the notion of a Caribbean environment with "incredible intertwining of plants and its obscene promiscuity of certain fruit" and the "magic of tropical vegetation" that surpassed Western expectations (85). His theory was no more easily separated from the environmental history of his homeland than it was from his tendency to sexualize the "virginity" of the landscape and to racialize the "Faustian presence of the Indian and the black man" (88).

Because ample scholarship has been produced on the multiple forms of creolization in the region,[17] here we'd like to pick up on a neglected point made by Glissant:

> Creolization as an idea is not primarily the glorification of the composite nature of a people: indeed, no people has been spared the cross-cultural process. The idea of creolization demonstrates that henceforth it is no longer valid to glorify "unique" origins that the race safeguards and prolongs . . . Creolization as an idea means the negation of creolization as a category, by giving priority to the notion of natural creolization. (*Caribbean Discourse* 140)

Glissant's use of the term "natural creolization" is useful for two reasons. First, it dismantles the colonial binary between the presumed purity of Europeans and their hybrid others, and second, it returns to the broader language of *naturalized* acculturation and, by extension, the nonhuman world.

To engage Glissant on these two points, we might start by emphasizing the *circuitous* pattern of what Alfred Crosby called the "Columbian exchange." To do so would invigorate an understanding of the process of creolization on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond and would draw attention to what Young (through Raymond Williams) explains as the rhizomatic chain between the Latin word *cultura* and its etymological offshoots: culture and colony and, by extension, land, soil, and cultivation (*Colonial Desire* 30–31). To examine European culture at its root symbolism—its cultural/cultivated crops—uncovers a history of colonial exchange and begs the question of "natural creolization." We destabilize the authenticity of national culture when we realize that its icons, such as the potato in Ireland, the tomatoes of Italy, and the sugar that sweetened the tea of England all either derive from the New World or were imported

through colonial routes. Words and cultural objects from hurricane to cannibal to hammock and barbeque derive from indigenous Caribbean sources. The staple crops of the Caribbean—including sugarcane, coffee, and nutmeg—were all introduced through colonial trade networks or, in the case of the national fruit of Jamaica, the ackee, like the yam, across the Middle Passage.[18]

The colonial process involved a simultaneous uprooting of plants *and* peoples, reminding us that the etymological root of the word "diaspora" is "seed." Often the same ships contained flora and fauna as well as human beings for transplantation to colonial botanical gardens and sugar plantations across the Atlantic. In fact, the first ship of Bengali indentured laborers sent to Trinidad, the *Fortitude,* also brought nutmeg trees (Ragatz 76). In the Caribbean, the island landscape into which these laborers were acculturated was as routed in trade networks as the human arrivants. To quote from Jamaica Kincaid:

> What did the botanical life of Antigua consist of at the time . . . [Christopher Columbus] first saw it? To see a garden in Antigua now will not supply a clue. The bougainvillea . . . is native to tropical South America: the plumbago is from southern Africa; the croton is from Malaysia; the hibiscus from Asia and East Africa; the allamanda is from Brazil; the poinsettia is from Mexico; the bird of paradise is from southern Africa; the Bermuda lily is from Japan; the Flamboyant Tree is from Madagascar; the casuarina comes from Australia; the Norfolk Pine comes from Norfolk Island; the tamarind tree is from Africa and Asia. The mango is from Asia. The breadfruit is from [Tahiti]. (*My Garden [Book]:* 135)

The wake of plantation economies has necessitated daring natural adaptations of a wide variety of plants and animals. If diaspora constitutes much of the human experience in the Caribbean, it also constitutes the experience of plants and animals, a literal spreading of seeds, and the resultant adaptations that became necessary for survival.

This is not to unduly celebrate the process of "natural creolization," lest we forget that the horses, dogs, and disease introduced to the Caribbean by European carriers had devastating and violent consequences for Amerindian and African peoples, just as colonial contact increased rates of syphilis and malaria among Europeans (see Crosby). This exchange was hardly mutually beneficial or even equitable. But emphasizing the transatlantic circuits of creolization destabilizes a presumed European purity and stability. In the Caribbean context, the discourse of creolization not only has served to emphasize the inevitable fragmentation of racial

memory in the region, but it has helped to conflate human and natural histories, a welcomed shift that warns against the pretension that human societies can act independently of ecosystems. For even while tropical landscapes represent the most diverse flora and fauna on the planet, their diversity is all the more threatened. In fact, more Caribbean faunal species have disappeared in the last century than in any other habitable environment on earth (Watts 40).

Hybridity and creolization have been central terms to the various formulations of Caribbean cultural theory but have not yet figured prominently in the environmental philosophies of recent decades.[19] Thus these essays engage with the hybridity of cultural and natural landscapes, proposing new directions for ecocritical theorization. For instance, Renée K. Gosson's interview with the Martinican novelist Raphaël Confiant compares the homogenizing transformation of the landscape of his island-department of France to a deeper-seated and less perceptible cultural standardization that strives to erase the possibilities of Créolité. Isabel Hoving's "Moving the Caribbean Landscape" explores the axes of gender, sexuality, and ethnic hybridity in Shani Mootoo's novel of incest, *Cereus Blooms at Night.* Arguing that an acceptance of the ambiguity of Caribbean nature is vital to reclaiming the island environment for postcolonial ecology, Hoving reads Mootoo's vivid landscapes as the key to a necessary revolution in human ontology. In "'Rosebud is my mama, stanfaste is my papa,'" Natasha Tinsley explores the creole landscapes and sexualities of Surinamese oral literature in order to insist on the inextricability of social and natural discourses. She provides a broad and startling picture of how the European colonial system upheld expectations of normative "nature" that sought to discipline not only unruly tropical landscapes but also transgressive social practices pertaining to sexuality, gender, and race. Finally, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert turns to African-based religious practices in "'He of the Trees,'" demonstrating the vital role they have played in forging an environmental imagination in the Caribbean that fosters community, sustainability, and local food production. She highlights how writers from Alejo Carpentier to Mayra Montero have imagined the relationship between Afro-Caribbean religion and nature and insists that historically—and most recently in the floods in Haiti—Caribbean nations have failed politically to realize this vision of environmental and social well-being. Collectively, these essays suggest inextricable links between the history of human and botanical transplantation, the region's cultural and social hybridity, and the fate of the landscape's biodiversity.

Aesthetics of the Earth

Although the geographies and social histories of the Caribbean are diverse, many of the writers discussed in this volume suggest that a shared aesthetic response to colonial violence sustains regional unity. As Edward Said suggests about postcolonial representation, "the land is recoverable at first only through the imagination" (225). Caribbean writers observe the need for deeper historical knowledge but recognize that the search often leads to discontinuity in the historical archive, an obstacle that archaeology or biogeography may never overcome. For example, the attempt to recover Africa in its original wholeness, for example, although alluring, has led to facile attempts to smooth over the inherent discontinuities of New World history; consequently the equation between greater historical knowledge and a deeper sense of place is perhaps untenable. The Créolistes explain, "afraid of this uncomfortable muddle, we tried in vain to anchor it in [the] mythical shores" of "mother Africa, mythical Africa, impossible Africa" (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant 88, 82). They maintain that a "violent and paradoxical therapy, Negritude, replaced the illusion of Europe by an African illusion" (82). Historically, constructing a sense of place has taken many forms: from the Mediterranean topos imported by Europeans (re-visioned by writers such as Carpentier and Walcott),[20] to a return to African and East Indian cultural landscapes. Glissant refers to this as an alienating and "unfulfilled desire for the other country" that is only mitigated "when one rediscovers one's landscape" (*Caribbean Discourse* 234).

These writers suggest that one's cultural identity and sense of place are not to be pursued with a singular perspective. To use John Elder's ecological metaphor, fragmentation is not necessarily cause for lament since it can also represent a "composting, fermentive pattern . . . Only with the detritus of the past can soil be made to sustain the cycle of life into a new present" (30–31). In Wilson Harris's words, this means an engagement with "the native and phenomenal environment of the West Indies," which is characterized by a divide between "broken conceptions" of the pre-Columbian landscape and "misconceptions of the residue and meaning of conquest" (*Selected Essays* 140).

A sense of belonging in the Caribbean is conditioned by an always-incomplete knowledge of natural and human histories and therefore necessitates recreating a sense of place in the present. As Glissant explains, the Caribbean subject faces the rather paradoxical "obligation to remake oneself every time on the basis of a series of forgettings" ("Creolization"

273), since every step forward in forging a new identity and sense of place from the fragments created by New World experience means leaving behind an imagined whole. Consequently, all cultural and natural signs that are intended to communicate our sense of belonging to a place must be read backwards, metonymically reaching to a presumed wholeness of which the sign is simply a part.

Given the multiple ethnic settlements in the Caribbean, and the continuing pattern of diaspora and outmigration, how does a writer achieve a sense of place? Or in the bemused words of Phyllis Allfrey, "Living in sunless reaches under rain / How do the exiles from enchanted isles / tend and sustain their rich nostalgic blaze?" (1). Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* outlines a useful distinction between atavistic and composite cultures that suggests a way to find rootedness in the (literary) landscape without the concomitant problems of either ethnic nationalism or a devaluation of local place. Atavistic cultures, which reify ethnic genealogy and origins, claim a "faultless continuity" in the land by rejecting creolization (*Traité* 196). Land thus becomes "territory" (*Poetics* 45). Composite or creole cultures, on the other hand, have developed "a relationship with the natural surroundings" (145), a "defense" of Creole language, and a commitment to a "protection of the land." These components lead to "an ecological vision of Relation" (146). Consequently, a sense of place is established through a cross-cultural and synchronic aesthetic that is capable of imagining competing claims, lost histories, as well as a deep attachment to the natural environment in the present.

For composite cultures, belonging in the Caribbean landscape means engaging in historical reconstructions that may largely be an act of imagination or desire for a wholeness that is not achievable. This might reflect the tension between Caribbean subjects and the local landscape that undergirds narratives as diverse as Alejo Carpentier's *The Lost Steps,* Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea,* George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin,* Maryse Condé's *Crossing the Mangrove,* and Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John.* We become aware, then, not so much of the concrete historical density embedded in nature but of our own participation in creating a sense of place. That is why that wholeness often appears in *imaginative* literature; in representing the historical past of our landscapes, literature points to our desire for place. Derek Walcott expressed this redemptive value in his Nobel speech: "Break a vase, and the love that reassembles the fragments is stronger than the love which took its symmetry for granted when it was whole" ("Antilles" 69). Such has become the attitude of many Caribbean authors toward the natural world since recovery of its primordial

wholeness and historical innocence is not feasible. They do not have to accept environmental degradation as inevitable, but precisely for that reason many writers refuse to argue from a position of invisibility or moral purity. Learning to read the evidence of where human and natural histories have joined together is perhaps the best and only hope. This allows the Caribbean imagination not only to find the roots of its nature but to establish grounds for cross-cultural relations.

An aesthetics of the earth, then, not only forges a sense of place that is open to competing and fragmented histories of the Caribbean but also gives incentive for environmental conservation. The naturalist Aldo Leopold argued in 1949 that the environment was threatened by commodification of land and of recreation and that a "conservation aesthetic" would help to stay the hand of capitalist consumption of nature. Nature, runs his argument, can be protected if we have increased powers of perception and rely less on technology to transform the environment. Similarly, Octavio Paz once claimed that the "aesthetic impoverishment" of the market's so-called progress directly threatens the well-being of the land precisely because the market knows no values and makes blind decisions regarding local ecologies (157). While the market "is highly efficient . . . it has no goal." The result is the "contamination of lakes, rivers, seas, valleys, forests and mountains." Like Wilson Harris, Paz argues that the aesthetic relation to land that poetry teaches "is the antidote to technology and the market" because it aids in "reminding us of certain buried realities, restoring them to life" and helps us to hold "contrary or divergent realities in relationship" (159, 158).

Glissant has joined in the attack against the "international standardization of consumption" by which local economies, cultures, and ecologies are sacrificed for the sake of neocolonial gain (*Poetics* 150). While he calls for a return to an "aesthetics of the earth," he specifically insists that such an aesthetics would necessarily begin with a "passion for the land where one lives" so as to resist this "affective standardization of peoples" and of nature (148). This market-driven force, so typical of tourism, would blindly convert all islands into a "mini Miami," to quote from Walcott's interview in this collection (150, 151). At the same time, however, this aesthetics must resist the reactionary and "obsolete mysticism" of much environmentalism, which yearns for the sacred root, or the "sectarian exclusiveness" of atavistic cultures (147). An aesthetics of the earth, for Glissant, does not stem from a simple appreciation of beauty, especially since so much of the environment of composite peoples has long since been ravaged by colonial violence. But it is precisely the seeming inappropriateness of aesthetics in the context of waste and rupture that can enable a regenerative response. By reorienting a people to a "love of the earth—so ridiculously inadequate or else frequently the basis for sectarian intolerance," Glissant hopes that Caribbean literature can teach the political force of ecology (151); that is, that literature can recapture ecology's radical articulation of "the relational interdependence of all lands, of the whole Earth" (147). In this sense, aesthetics becomes a source of healthy "disruption and intrusion" into discourses of sacred claims to legitimacy and into the market itself.

While Caribbean landscapes can hardly be said to be untouched by human hands, learning an aesthetic appreciation of nature's otherness may help to preserve local particulars and resist the seduction of what Wilson Harris calls the "progressive realism" of First World teleology and technological power (*Radical Imagination* 73). The region's chief environmental problems at present stem from the aesthetic impoverishment of these neocolonial forces that first began, according to Harris, with Cortez. Colonialism's disregard for nature's otherness "has consistently broken [the life of the imagination] by making passive creatures of the very earth on which we move, by making the animals subject to our rages and our lusts and our greeds" (79). That we continue to believe that "mechanical adjustments" alone will solve the problem of ecological degradation is evidence of how profoundly the contributions of literature have been ignored.

Today IMF and World Bank–defined development means that ecological conservation plays second fiddle to immediate economic benefits. As Stephanie Black's film *Life and Debt* documents, transnational corporations, like the plantation economies before them, continue to exploit Caribbean agriculture and labor in the interests of Northern capital. Population pressures, exacerbated by limited geographical space, have led to struggles with waste removal and sewage treatment.[21] Many Caribbean nations are dependent on food imports, despite the rich agricultural promise the islands once held. Martinique, a country that formerly had a thriving system of provision grounds, imports over 98 percent of its food supply. In the interview included in this volume, Raphaël Confiant explains that the transformation of the Martinican landscape into shopping malls represents another chapter in the continuum of colonial occupation of his island. Glissant too has denounced the destruction of the agricultural economy of Martinique and its replacement by welfare-dependent consumerism.

The culture of tourism has become crucial to the economies of most of the islands. Most Caribbean states are forced to maintain tourist and service

sectors that are remarkably like exploitative plantation economies. Kamala Kempadoo points out that by 1996 "formal tourism employment" (exempting a vast informal network) represented over 25 percent of the Caribbean region and was one of fastest growing sectors (20). Alarmingly, between 70 and 90 percent of foreign capital earned in tourist industry is not invested in the Caribbean itself but is extracted through foreign goods and services (21). Like the plantation system, the tourist industry does little to sustain the local economy while fattening the coffers of industrialized Northern states and multinational corporations. Mimi Sheller explains, "following in the footsteps of the explorers, the planters, and the armed forces, the tropical 'holiday in the sun' became a safe new means of consuming the Caribbean environment" ("Natural Hedonism").

Tourism initiated this "second-invasion of land-snatchers" (Pattullo 178), but instead of clearing land for monocrop production, this international market force is clearing coastlines, destroying coral reefs, creating waste and water pollution, and ruining mangrove swamps and other wetland areas. Despite the tourist's presumed love of nature, the fact remains that mountains, rivers, cities, and historical sites do not hold the appeal of denuded paradises of white sand. The irony is that "what the tourist came to enjoy no longer exists in its pristine condition" simply because environmental concerns are consistently overlooked by Caribbean governments in the interest of obtaining the tourist dollar (Pattullo 179).

Caribbean writers have not always succeeded in having a voice in such matters. For instance, Hilton Corporation built the Jalousie Resort and Spa between the famous Piton peaks in St. Lucia in the early 1990s despite protests from the likes of Derek Walcott. Instead of turning it into a national park, the government allowed the land to be sold to Hilton where now only guests of this very exclusive spa—typically foreigners visiting the Caribbean—are allowed entrance. This occurred despite the fact that an environmental impact study recommended against the construction of the spa. Tragically, archaeological artifacts were destroyed in the construction.[22] Walcott vehemently protested the building of the spa, which earned him criticism from many of the local working class who viewed the development as a much-needed economic opportunity. He and the others who joined him to form the St. Lucia Environmental Awareness Council were cast as "Johnnie-come-latelies," outsiders who merely wanted the mountains for their own privileged pleasure.

This reaction against one of St. Lucia's most celebrated native sons demonstrates that without a strong tradition of local consumption, many of the otherwise noticeable effects of misguided environmental policies go

unnoticed on small islands because the hegemonic forces of tourism and neocolonialism have been adopted on the local level. It is this "passive consumption" and "non-critical adoption" that Aarón Ramos has in mind when he writes of the "deep-seated tension" between "contradictory inclinations" in islands such as Martinique, caught between "the preservation of social and economic gains, and the consolidation of the cultural community" (xvii). While transnational corporations develop land for economic profit without regard for long-term ecological health, some argue that there is an overall "deep-rooted indifference to the environment" in the Caribbean. This stems from the "culture of plantation management, which continues to prevent the majority from owning land in the countryside, [and which] has alienated people from environmental issues" (Beckles 193). Local Caribbean governments often lack sufficient expertise to adequately regulate environmental behavior, and local educational initiatives on behalf of environmental issues have been rare (Pattullo 181).

That is not to say that there have been no green successes in the Caribbean. One needs only to consider the recent cease-fire of naval bombing on the island of Vieques in Puerto Rico, for example, or the still-experimental development of ecotourism in the region. But in the face of continued environmental and cultural exploitation, more change is needed. To this end, Caribbean writers have consistently offered aesthetic representations of natural and human history that have insisted upon greater political change. The authors discussed in this final section offer distinct visions of the nature of such aesthetics and their relevance to ecological degradation.

Helen Tiffin's exploration of the vexed relationship between cultural belonging and place in "'Man Fitting the Landscape:' Nature, Culture, and Colonialism" explores how, through writing, Jamaica Kincaid and V. S. Naipaul dis-alienate themselves from their local and colonial topoi, achieving a "re-cognition" of literary landscapes inherited through the British canon. In "Flashbacks of an Orchid," Heidi Bojsen demonstrates how Patrick Chamoiseau's *Biblique des derniers gestes* similarly critiques the nineteenth-century French Romantic ideas of nature and nation in order to challenge their applicability to the creolized history and ecology of Martinique, especially in nationalist narratives lobbying for independence. Ineke Phaf-Rheinberger's "Landscapes, Narratives, and Tropical Nature: Creole Modernity in Suriname" traces the conflict between the Amazonian interior and Creole modernity as it emerged in the visual arts and how contemporary novelists—Cynthia McLeod, Clark Accord, and Astrid Roemer—revisit these colonial appropriations of the tropics. Her readings demonstrate that the crisis of Creole modernity is essentially a persistent

and unresolved ambivalence in the contemporary Surinamese metropolis toward nature, specifically the wildness of the tropical interior.

In "The Uses of Landscape," Eric Prieto demonstrates how post-Négritude writers from Martinique have used aesthetics to justify increasing engagement with "real-world" environmental problems. Using the "Manifesto for a Global Project" as an example of this activism, Prieto claims that ecocriticism would be wise to follow this model in exploring the interrelation between theoretical ideals and environmental realities. Finally, in "From Living Nature to Borderless Culture," Hena Maes-Jelinek explores the ways in which Wilson Harris's formative expeditions into the Guyanese interior catalyzed an ecological imagination that ranges from the deep history of geology to the frenetic energy of quantum physics. Covering the span from his earliest novels to *The Dark Jester,* her essay elucidates the ways in which Harris recovers the depths of Caribbean history and charts a path for the future through the living presence of dynamic inner and outer landscapes. Aesthetics, then, emerges in these essays as a vital strategy for resisting the predictions of colonial environmental discourse and resituating the perceiver within the particulars of the immediate environment. This in turn opens the possibility of understanding the relation between one's place and the larger shared history of the Caribbean region.

Caribbean Literature, Ecocriticism, and the Environment

Despite the history of ecological imperialism, the vital role the Caribbean islands played in the evolution of modern environmentalism, and a rich literary inscription of local landscapes, ecological concerns seem surprisingly absent in Caribbean criticism. Perhaps one reason for this inattention is the perception that environmentalism is chiefly a politics that protects urban social privilege, particularly within the United States. Many U.S. ecocritics have acknowledged this possibility and have urged a broadening of ecocritical inquiry but have not always recognized the "implicit imperialism in this globalizing move" (O'Brien paragraph 3).

The discourse of the "American Adam," which was so critical to the initial identification and critique of U.S. exceptionalism, and even its more recent rejection in the so-called "New American Studies," have largely ignored the Caribbean and Latin America, or have only touched upon authors in exile or of immigrant extraction within the United States. Ecocriticism arose from questions first raised by the work of Leo Marx, R. W. B. Lewis, Henry Nash Smith, and others about the environmental imagination of empire's westward expansion in the United States. That

the Caribbean has been bypassed is even more disconcerting considering that the roots of the current environmental crisis can be found in the age of conquest that begins in the region. Others have, of course, since revised their visions of America's ecology, especially within the environmental justice movement, but they have scarcely left the geopolitical boundaries of the United States to gain a more comparative understanding, despite lip service to the expanding borders of "American" studies. Ironically, a field that upholds the environment as the predominant spatial focus of analysis has quite rigidly adhered to that which is most inimical to ecology itself: a bounded national frame.

This has led to the tendency to uphold white, masculine settlers as normative subjects and to erase Native American, African American, Asian American, and Hispanic historical presence in the New World. This is especially apparent when one considers that love of nature, or defense against its destruction, has been articulated from the point of view of settlers who offer themselves as sole representatives of culture and history, while Amerindians and other racialized subjects are relegated to ahistorical beings whose political claims upon the land are rendered invisible by their very "naturalness." Unfortunately, the global claims of environmentalism have provided an all too easy justification for white privileged subjects to elide the complex issues of historical and social inequity. For instance, in his introduction to *The Green Studies Reader,* Laurence Coupe claims that "class, race and gender are important dimensions" of environmentalism, but "the survival of the biosphere must surely rank as even more important, since without it there are no issues worth addressing" (5). With this homogenizing sleight of hand, discourses that claim protection of nature come at the cost of ignoring histories of social stratification; since threats to ecology cannot be separated from their social causes, such dichotomous views prove ineffective in the face of such concomitant problems. As T. V. Reed notes, "pretending to isolate the environment from its necessary interrelations with society and culture has severely limited the appeal of environmentalist thought, to the detriment of both the natural and social worlds" (146).

While we are cautious, as U.S.-based editors of this volume, about the risks of "grafting" ecocriticism onto a Caribbean context, we believe that there are benefits from bringing the two fields into dialogue. Even though the social issues we have highlighted are elided in much ecocriticism, it would not be accurate to say that critics of Caribbean literature have generally ignored environmental concerns due to a conscious rejection of ecocriticism's limitations. There is no reason to believe that Caribbean

critics are any less vulnerable to the effects of modern alienation from nature; nature is often not "seen" simply because of a lack of ecological awareness. We hope this volume gives ecocritics a deeper appreciation for the voices of Caribbean literature and critics of the Caribbean incentive to pay more attention to environmental sustainability. We anticipate that these generalizations about both groups will eventually prove inaccurate. With the authors of this volume, we suggest that literature can play a vital role in reshaping human attitudes toward the natural world and that the natural world bears the marks of the best and worst of human behavior. We share Jack Corzani's belief that there is "a place for literature in a world where people are hungry and where the beaches, coconut trees and armchairs are reserved for the tourists" and that sometimes "poetic action can have a greater effect than practical and immediate action" (1–2).

Environmentalism's highest hope is manifest in its reorientation of human ethics toward what Aldo Leopold once called a "land ethic" that considers the well-being of all biota, including humans. Such an ethic involves a shift in our cultural imagination, "a reinhabitory commitment," writes Lawrence Buell, that "entails extension of moral and sometimes even legal standing to the nonhuman world" (*Writing* 170). Literature is crucial to guiding us in this process of "reinhabitation" since it shapes our imaginative responses to pain, loss, and suffering of human and nonhuman life and potentially leads us "toward alternative futures" (2). To this end, Wilson Harris calls for writers to "deepen our perception of the fauna and flora of a landscape of time which indicate the kind of room or space . . . in which whole societies conscripted themselves" ("Composition" 48). In so doing, however, Caribbean representations of nature will never be without risk. A poetics that imagines what Buell has named the "environmental unconscious" may serve to rekindle our environmental awareness that has been lost since the advent of industrialization, urbanization, and the cash economy (*Environmental* 22), but it may also simultaneously serve to reflect the prisonhouse of colonialism. But perhaps the Caribbean's colonial legacies enable writers to perceive more clearly their own limitations so that nature's dynamism becomes more apparent. In this way, history and human possibility both remain open. It is the role of ecocriticism, and the aim of this volume, to identify this dynamism at work in literature so that the biogeographical realities that underlie Caribbean cultural discourse can be acknowledged and thus help to mitigate against environmental indifference.

To this end, we conclude the volume with the region's foremost philosopher and writer of the complex entanglement between conquest, literary

representation, and ecological sustainability. In his epilogue, Wilson Harris asks us to "visualize the ever-changing mobility of the earth, a mobility, a vulnerability, a curious infirmity . . . that is born of land and water and fire and cloud through which we may create doors or windows." By building architectures of a spatial imagination, "the life of the earth" might be "seen *in fiction* as sensitively woven into the characters that move upon it, whose history . . . reflects a profound relationship to the earth." This allows us to "speak of a humanity whose feet are made of mud or land or water or any other element to attune us to our being on an earth that moves as we move upon it." In his engagement with chaos and quantum theory, Harris's "Theatre of the Arts" builds a cross-disciplinary bridge between contemporary natural sciences, histories of conquest, and our ecological futures, envisioning new directions for Caribbean literature and the environment.

Notes

Unless otherwise noted, all translations into English are by the authors.

1. There are obvious gaps in the geographies covered in this collection that reflect an uneven response to our call for papers rather than a lack of scholarship about particular parts of the region.

2. See Adamson, Evans, and Stein's *The Environmental Justice Reader,* which moves beyond the "wilderness-based, white-authored nature writing, and advocates a more inclusive, class- and race-conscious ecocriticism that articulates the complex human relationships to environment expressed in culturally diverse literature" (9).

3. See also Gerbi 125–26; and O'Gorman.

4. See Arnold 9–38; Gerbi 258–59; and O'Gorman 29–34.

5. For example, Bartolomé de las Casas's *Historia de las Indias* is almost exclusively concerned with ethnography rather than natural history.

6. See Schiebinger; Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*; and Young.

7. See Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* 48.

8. See Gerbi 202–5.

9. See Corzani.

10. This is a play on Mayra Montero's *Tu, la oscuridad* (*The Palm of Darkness*), a revision of Conrad's famous tale with a Haitian setting. See also Dabydeen's *Dark Swirl.*

11. In addition to being a stepping stone toward liberation, the slave gardens were also a powerful site of creolization. Slaves grew "a staggering array of crops" that included cashews, bananas, calabashes, calalu, okra, oranges, and other fruits and spices (Berlin and Morgan 9). See also Parry; and Tomich.

12. See also Loxley; Bongie; and DeLoughrey, "The Litany of Islands."

13. For a discussion of the classical refashioning of the Caribbean, see O'Gorman; Gerbi; and Hulme.

14. On the theory of pumice rafts, see Perfit and Williams 60.

15. See Philip on the shift from island to "I-land"; and DeLoughrey, "Tidalectics," on the role of the sea in the regional literary imagination.

16. See DeLoughrey, "Litany of Islands."

17. In addition to Brathwaite; Glissant; and Ortiz, see Shepherd and Richards, eds., *Questioning Creole.*

18. On the indigenous Caribbean, see Hulme. On botanical transplantation, see Crosby's works as well as the collection by Viola and Margolis, eds., *Seeds of Change.*

19. In *Roman marron,* Richard D. E. Burton identifies a botanical shift in the different natural metaphors used to express French West Indian identity and culture. He traces an evolution in Martinique's three main identity movements (Négritude, Antillanité and Créolité) from the single tree rooted in the landscape of Négritude, to the tangled paradigm of the rhizome and mangrove swamp, which—according to Glissant and the Créolistes—more accurately symbolizes the complexity of Creole identity.

20. See Dash's chapter, "A New World Mediterranean," in *The Other America* on Carpentier and Walcott's *Omeros.*

21. Barbados and Haiti, for example, are the two most densely populated nations in the Americas (Arthur 152).

22. "Hands Off Piton; Walcott Threatens to Get Physical."

PART 1

Natural Histories