Cultural and Gender Politics in a Neglected Archive of Jamaican Women's Poetry: Una Marson and her Creole Contemporaries

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

IN MEMORY OF MY FATHER, DERRICK DONNELL (1933-1993)

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SUMMARY

This thesis considers the gender and cultural politics of selected Jamaican women's poetry published during the first half of the twentieth century and seeks to establish that an approach to this poetry sensitive to these issues will illuminate aspects of their work previously neglected by canonical and colonial modes of interpretation. The central interest of this thesis is the poetry of Una Marson, a black woman poet whose work has been critically neglected and devalued to date. My project is to read Marson's work in some detail, and to explore to what extent her poetry, which often works within colonial models and with conventional notions of feminine fulfilment, employs received aesthetic and ideological paradigms both strategically and subversively. In the belief that critics of Jamaican women's writing should be as attentive to the gender and cultural politics of their ways of reading, as of the texts they wish to read, the first chapter of this thesis engages in a sustained analysis of theoretical positions and attempts to map out the various problems and possibilities which critical discourses present in relation to this material. The second chapter examines the various social and literary contexts in which Jamaican poetry was produced and received during this period, and the third chapter looks in more detail at contemporary notions of aesthetic and cultural forms. The fourth and fifth chapters are structured around close textual readings which explore the variety and complexity of Marson's, and her Creole contemporaries', poetic engagement with the issues of cultural and gender identities. The thesis concludes that Marson's poetry questions dominant notions both of identity and of aesthetics, and consequently that her poetry offers an example of Jamaican literary expression which moves beyond the nationalization of consciousness which has come to mark the literary achievement of this period.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis analyses poetry from the period 1900-1945 and thus centres on a period of Caribbean literature which was marked by a growing awareness of a possible post-colonial reality and a searching for a national voice and subject outside the colonial imagination. Writers of this period were clearly at the forefront of the project to indigenize writing from the Caribbean and to break away from standard English form, diction and subject, even though this is a project more commonly associated with later writers, such as Naipaul, Lamming and Selvon, and the renewed perspective which came with their migration to the metropoli of the West.

The few Jamaican writers and poets from this period who have gained recognition, most notably Claude McKay and Thomas MacDermot, have been seen as exceptional rather than representative in their contributions to cultural nationalism. Indeed, to date, little has been researched or written about the texts of other Jamaican writers during the first half of the twentieth century, with the achievements of women poets being particularly neglected.

Even the recent acknowledgements of the vital role which women's creativity now plays within a Caribbean, and particularly a Jamaican, literary profile are suggestive of a sudden emergence of women writers over the last twenty years. In the introduction to *Hinterland*, an anthology of Caribbean poetry, E. A. Markham comments on how in recent years women poets from the region have not simply

> broken through the ghetto of invisibility but - from Louise Bennett to Judy Miles to Olive Senior to Dionne Brand to Amryl Johnson to Grace Nichols to Jean Binta Breeze and Lorna Goodison - we have a sense here that people who have been responsible for making certain things work in a society - through a continuous rather than a sporadic attachment to them; making certain - often nebulous - structures cohere, have assumed a special responsibility for that society, and derive part of their authority from that fact. *They now have the confidence to articulate it, and an international climate ready to receive it.*[1]

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[1] 'Random Thoughts', *Hinterland* edited by E. A. Markham (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1989) p. 21 (my italics). Other recognitions of women's literary status include *Savacou*: A journal of the Caribbean Artists Movement, Issue 13, Gemini (1977) which is devoted to the work of women writers and dedicated to Una Marson, *Savacou*'s special 'New Poets' issue in which seven of the thirteen poets are women, and the anthology *Jamaica Woman* edited by Pamela Mordecai and Mervyn Morris (London, 1980), which was selected to represent the quality of Jamaican poetry rather than any gender grouping.

What Markham indirectly refers to here are the internal politics of literary production (those factors which promote women's confidence to write) and the external politics of literary reception. While both of these have been crucial in securing a high profile for contemporary Jamaican women poets, their absence was equally instrumental in maintaining the invisibility of their creative foremothers.

Despite the high quality and profile of contemporary women's writing from the Caribbean, in which Jamaican women poets have gained particular recognition in recent years, literary scholars have not yet thoroughly researched the marginalized archive of their literary precursors.[2] Indeed, the perception of Caribbean literature as a 'tradition' which can be traced back beyond its point of visible (commercial, metropolitan) origin half way through the twentieth century remains an unpopular line of enquiry. As Edward Baugh has pointed out: 'the poets of the post-1940 mainstream do not consider themselves to be descendants of these forerunners, who produced a strictly colonial poetry'.[3] It is my aim in this thesis to offer a reading of early Jamaican women's writing which will enable such reductive conclusions to be abandoned. To this end, the thesis will open up debates surrounding literary value with reference to texts which are often situated at the cusp of colonial/post-colonial aesthetics and politics, and offer ways of reading which explore how textual traits which have been fixed as colonial by previous readings may be interpreted in more creative and interesting ways.

In 'Reading for Resistance in the Post-Colonial Literature', Stephen Slemon calls for

> a comprehensive 'second wave' of post-colonial studies, one analogous to the recuperative effort of feminist literary criticism, wherein that history which has made possible our work as post-colonial critics is rewritten to show how Commonwealth critical practice has always been marked by a counter-discursive 'newness' and an 'otherness', and how its foundations have always been grounded in a productive ambivalence in relation to Western 'travelling theory'. [4]

It is at the merger of these feminist and post-colonial, textual and critical recuperative efforts that my thesis is positioned.

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[2]Olive Senior was awarded the Commonwealth Writers' Prize in 1987 and Lorna Goodison won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize for the Caribbean Region in 1986.

[3] Edward Baugh, *A Brief Account of West Indian Poetry 1900-1970: A Study in Cultural Decolonisation* (Kingston, 1971), p. 5.

[4]'Reading for Resistance in the Post-Colonial Literature' in *A Shaping of Connections* edited by Hena Maes-Jelink, Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford (Coventry, 1989), pp. 113-114.

The archive to be examined is the poetic works of Una Marson, a critically neglected black woman poet publishing material during this period in Jamaica, and a number of works by Creole women poets who were either born in Jamaica or lived there for a considerable part of their lives.[5]

The thesis has three main objectives. First, the recuperation of silenced texts; this is reflected in the choice of texts under consideration. Second, an exploration of the aesthetic and material reasons as to why these texts were silenced and devalued; this involves an examination of both the production and the reception of writing, as well as a detailed analysis of the roles played by gender and cultural politics in determining concepts of poetic excellence. Third, the thesis aims to offer a detailed examination of the nature of the poetic voices which have been silenced, by engaging in close readings. I wish to repoliticize the reading and writing of this poetry, not only by establishing the ideological contexts in which it has been written, read and re-read, but also by examining the ways in which the writing has sought to foreground political issues of cultural, class and gender identity.

These criteria place the work of Una Marson at the centre of the study, as her poetry is both contextually more interesting and textually more complex and innovative. However, I shall contest the projected view of early Creole women's poetry in Jamaica as simply decorative, imitative, and culturally and aesthetically inconsequential [6], along with received critical opinions of Marson's poetry as either neo-Romantic or 'near feminist'. [7]

My reading is motivated by a belief that an approach to Jamaican women's poetry sensitive to the issues of gender and cultural politics within the context of a society fraught with crises of cultural identification, will illuminate aspects of their work previously neglected by canonical (and by implication colonial) modes of interpretation. I believe that this analytical axis will also allow for an exploration of the extent to which colonialism functioned as a gendered and aesthetic project, as well as an economic and racial one. However, although I

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[5]For the purposes of this thesis Creole is taken to mean white persons who have been born in Jamaica or chosen to settle there and so taken the island as their homeland. In short, it denotes those whose cultural heritage has engendered an allegiance to Jamaica as well as to Britain. In *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica 1770-1820* (Oxford, 1971), p. xv, Edward Brathwaite describes how 'the word was used in its original Spanish sense of criollo: born in, native to, committed to the area of living, and it was used in relation to both whites and slaves'.

[6]Lloyd W. Brown refers to such works as 'the substandard landscape poetry of the more forgettable writers of the period' in *West Indian Poetry* (London, 1984), pp. 25-26.

[7]Both of these views will be fully explored in the critical heritage of Marson's work in chapter one. However, it is important to note that the term 'near feminist' which Markham applies to Marson in the introduction cited above, implies that she only almost achieved an already prescribed goal, rather than conveying her role in pioneering new ideological positions with regards to gender within the poetry of her society.

have chosen to concentrate on subjects according to their gender, this is not because I consider this to be a greater unifying category than those of ethnicity or class, but rather that it is a significant factor which has been neglected, or simply highlighted in order to justify neglect. Indeed, one area of enquiry is to explore to what extent these two determinants affect any potential commonalty, in terms of a gendered identity, between women's poetry of the period.

The first chapter of the thesis maps out the unresolved problems which have been encountered due to the methodology employed and also establishes a consciously speculative theoretical basis appropriate to the poetry under consideration. Clearly, the freedom to read and the continuum of meaning are more troubling concepts with reference to post-colonial texts, with the context of cultural imperialism foregrounding questions of positions (theoretical and ideological) in a highly-charged manner. The persistent uncertainty regarding acceptable ways to read the texts I had selected and permissible theoretical parameters is reflected in the sustained theoretical debates of this first chapter and informs the project as a whole. Throughout my work on the thesis I have sought to develop ways of reading which remain conscious of their potential power over texts and which do not operate as a neo-colonial intellectual devices. This has not been easy and finding a way to read has been the most fraught but significant task of my research. I have aimed to find a way of theorizing my work which does not disempower post-colonial texts, but rather which allows for the empowerment of the post-colonial text as a site for theoretical challenge and development. The task of theorizing post-colonial women's writing is fraught with many questions concerning the eligibility of certain discourses to elicit valid or 'authentic' readings of material which is culturally, aesthetically and ideologically distant from the origins of the analytical apparatus. In an attempt to confront some of the major areas of difference and possibly of conflict, this chapter will examine the relation of the reader to the material and the bearing of specific theoretical frameworks (feminist and post-colonial) in relation to the writers and their work. Also, working against the absence in terms of critical attention, I wish to examine the traces of reception which have characterized these poets' careers and evaluate the critical biases which have consistently defined their work as insignificant in terms of both aesthetics and politics.

Before a discussion of possible revisionist modes of criticism, it is important to explore the problems inherent in certain given traditions of literary analysis. In order to present a more sensitive reading which accounts for gender and

cultural orientation, it is necessary to deconstruct many of the received literary histories and theories which are implicitly informed by patriarchal and colonial institutions and intellectual aims, both contemporary to the publication of their works and to our reading. Yet, the process of deconstructing the biases of the canon, will be accompanied by a restructuring of criteria, in order to offer new perspectives which allow for an exploration of difference and resistance, by which these poets' work can be more fully appreciated.

Furthermore, I would propose that a sensitive reading of this poetry bids for more than a reconstruction of literary myths concerning individual writers and writings; the revised significance of a specific few possibly calls into question the received perception of the early literature of the region as a whole.[8] The quality and interest of this single neglected archive could be seen as suggestive of much wider literary activity yet to be re-discovered or re-evaluated. Certainly, evidence of the high profile and the wide spectrum of literary talents of Jamaican women poets during this early period poses a challenge to the accepted idea of Caribbean literary beginnings as male and Eastern Caribbean centred. The detailed attention which is given to considerations of various theoretical frameworks is necessitated by the challenge which the material I have chosen to study offers to previously stable and separate modes of enquiry. I hope that the reading strategies which I present will serve as a model for re-reading both the early texts and those aesthetic criteria which have fairly systematically devalued them.

In order to explore specific personal and group histories alongside literary histories of the region, the second chapter, which deals with historical backgrounds, includes a section written within an allegorical framework calling upon *The Tempest* and the now familiar, if not over-determined, colonial triangle of Prospero, Miranda and Caliban. This chapter will also examine the institutions and groups which fostered poetic endeavour during the period 1900-1950 in order to unveil the power implicit not only in the visible discourses which were produced but also in the processes which dictated the production and dissemination of these writings. Any attempt to conjure history into the present is evidently limited by ideological narratives and material constraints (the two being inextricably bound) and these obstacles which mediate between the experience of the past and our apprehension of it are to be even more acutely perceived in relation to Caribbean women's history, and

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[8] I refer to the works under consideration here as examples of 'early' Caribbean literature, not in order to employ a different historical framework for consideration of this region, but simply to indicate that they were produced during the period when literature written in the Caribbean was becoming distinctly Caribbean literature. This argument will be explored more fully in chapter three.

particularly the experiences of black Caribbean women. The nature of my enquiry into certain particularities of these histories is guided by a fore-knowledge that I can only hope to access fragments.

The third chapter of the thesis examines the impact of culture, history and gender upon conventions and expectations governing the currency of the poetic contemporary to the period under consideration, and the way in which these factors can make us question our assumptions about what is ideologically and aesthetically valid. The relation which these poets hold to the aesthetic innovations of what is now known as Modernism in Britain, the major literary 'development' contemporaneous with their own careers, will also be explored. In addition, the chapter offers an alternative reading to the theoretical one concerning notions of the poetic, with a selection of close readings which analyse the ideas presented in the women's poetry which discusses the role of the poet and of poetry. In this way, the thesis is concerned not to follow rigid paradigms for reading, especially since these are likely to be derived - if not prescribed - by dominant Eurocentric theoretical trends, but rather to read closely in order to guard against the potentially stifling intervention which authoritative discourses can make in determining literary value. This is evidently a politics of reading informed by the belief that any simplistic adoption of given theoretical narratives as a mode of discovery and text as simply a site for discovery rather than a space which also provokes us to re-think what we aim to discover, can deny the creative agency of early Caribbean writers to the same degree as the colonial project itself.

It is this belief which also informs the final two chapters of the thesis. While the first three chapters are more theoretical in their mode of enquiry, the last two hope to carry the issues and questions raised into detailed readings of the poetry. In this approach, my thesis follows the analytical rubric sketched out by Barbara Christian, a highly esteemed African American female critic, who suggests that a methodology in which theory has 'some relation to practice' is particularly appropriate to textual readings of black women's writing, as it facilitates a critical ability 'to read the works of our writers in our various ways and remain open to the intricacies of the intersection of language, class, race and gender in the literature'.[9]

The thorough examination of the context in which the poets under consideration wrote (historical, cultural, and literary) will be treated as an enabling, if fragmented, backdrop to the comprehensive textual analysis.

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[9]'The Race for Theory' in *Gender and Theory: dialogues on feminist criticism* edited by Linda Kauffman (Oxford, 1989), p. 227.

Indeed, the primary focus of the thesis is literary analysis rather than socio-historical or biographical enquiry. In order to explore the complexity of the aesthetic and ideological positions conveyed by literature, it is important to question the significance of language and style, as well as to analyse the content and context of the literature selected. This is especially significant when considering the tensions and conflicts arising from the plurality of discourses symptomatic of such a culturally heterogeneous, but also hierarchized, society as Jamaica.

Having established the models and contexts for my reading of this archive, the final two chapters will offer close critical readings of selected poems which explore the issues of cultural and of gender politics respectively. Chapter four offers an examination of works relating to nationalism, cultural belonging and ethnicity, and to this end analyses how the ideologies of Empire and of Jamaican nationalism often emerge confused and conflated in interesting ways. Una Marson's work offers the clearest engagement with the project of decolonizing Jamaica culturally, several poems point to the means through which cultural identity has been denied to the black population, while others seek to establish ways of creating and of expressing a Jamaican cultural identity (and tradition). Her poetry concerning Jamaica works to rehearse and redress various representations of her homeland and her people both within and beyond a colonial framework, offering a space through which voice and subjectivity can be achieved. This is in contrast to many Creole poems which fix and objectify the African Jamaican population within a European gaze. However, while the poetry by Creole women which seeks to represent Jamaica or to discuss national interests may appear less challenging to the colonial *status quo*, it is no less demanding of the reader. Indeed, the engaging and often perplexing concentration on the issues of cultural placement and origin within certain works presents a challenging new perspective on these concerns.

It might be suggested that, in the poetry to be examined in chapter five, a gendered consciousness emerges in two distinct ways. The more conventional of these finds expression through the genre of love poetry and the other, more directly politicized, can be found in those poems which directly address the social conditions of women and the oppression and silencing of woman's presence. However, my analysis of these works does not begin with the assumption that the poems of romance and those of resistance to patriarchy are oppositional (or even separable), but rather attempts to trace how this range of poetry raises questions about the gender politics both of literary forms and of the various positions (intellectual as well as cultural) available to

women. Again, my reading is most interested in the points of collision and crossover between 'political' and representational paradigms, the points at which gender politics become most crucial and most contentious. It is my aim that this mode of enquiry, which informs both chapters, will highlight how, within this project, it is precisely the problems, the excesses, the 'undecidables', and the 'unaccountables' which are the focus of attention.

CHAPTER 1

TOWARDS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

She didn't write it.
She wrote it, but she shouldn't have.
She wrote it, but look what she wrote about.
She wrote it, but "she" isn't really an artist and "it" isn't really serious, of the right genre--i.e., really art.
She wrote it, but she only wrote one of it.
She wrote it, but it's only interesting/included in the canon for one, limited reason.
She wrote it, but there are very few of her.
(Joanna Russ)[1]

I have crossed an ocean
I have lost my tongue
from the root of the old one
a new one has sprung
(Grace Nichols)[2]

Material Difficulties

The major problem encountered during the research and writing of this thesis has been the lack of an established archive of poetry and the attendant profound difficulties encountered in locating and reading the material.

Such problems are not solely due to the ocean which separates the reader and the writers, although this has presented certain difficulties. It would seem that hardly any of the poetry would have survived if the writers themselves, or often their friends and relatives, had not felt that their work was worthy of national attention and so donated manuscripts or copies to the West India Reference Library in Jamaica. Yet, even when copies are known to exist, they are not always easy to locate. Jamaican libraries are still recovering from the devastation of hurricane Gilbert and it is only because of the patience and generosity of librarians at Mona and the West India Reference Library, and the resilience of modern photocopying machinery, that I have been able to gain access to so much of the relevant material. The British Library archive also appears to have been hit by misfortune, as several of the texts listed in the catalogues were bombed during World War II and never replaced. The few texts which are scattered around university and specialist Commonwealth libraries

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[1]*How to Suppress Women's Writing* (London, 1983), front cover.
[2]'Epilogue', *i is a long memoried woman* (London, 1983), p. 80.

testify to the scarce and random nature of the interest and care taken to preserve these early Caribbean literary voices.

While it has been very frustrating and disappointing to encounter such obstacles, researching this archive has brought a personal realization of the problems inherent in the task of recuperating writing which was marginalized or neglected during its time. As the re-voicing of female literary histories emerges on a global scale, it is becoming evident that women writers of all times and places tend to fade into critical oblivion more rapidly than their male counterparts. While this 'phenomenon of the transience of female literary fame' is evidently primarily governed by very real material practices, the characteristic and paradoxical presence of female absence within dominant literary histories could also be reconstructed within recent psychoanalytical feminist theories.[3] The absence of these Jamaican women poets from the known traditions, both of their own time and of ours, could be seen as a quite literal and historical example of the association between women's writing and gaps and silences, as pioneered by revisionary psychoanalytic French feminist scholars.

This theory, in its broadest terms, signifies women's language as the archetypally absent, that which is repressed, unspoken and unspeakable. The intersection of this gender-based theory with a post-colonial theory which emphasizes the negation of that which is constructed as 'other' by colonial culture, seems to offer an interesting psychological backdrop to the issues of literary censorship, self-censorship and longevity, pertinent to the poetic archive to be studied. The problems associated with the retrieval of the archive to be studied in this thesis would certainly seem to confirm that both intellectually and materially 'in patriarchal, eurocentric, phallogocentric culture the feminine and the post-colonial both exist in this dark chthonic region of otherness and non-being'.[4] Indeed, it could be argued that many of the Creole women poets do convey the unspoken through their works which articulate a consciousness which is at once dominant (culturally) and marginal (in terms of gender), and that Marson, in her poetry which overtly challenges the political *status quo* of colonialism, certainly articulates that which was conceived of as unspeakable to many within her own society.

As my reconstruction of a psychoanalytic theorizing of silence and suppression in approach to these texts may signal, this thesis is often

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[3]'Flying Pigs and Double Standards', *Times Literary Supplement*, 26 July 1974 quoted in Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, revised edition (London, 1978), p. 11.
[4]W. D. Ashcroft, 'Intersecting Marginalities: Post-colonialism and Feminism', *Kunapipi*, 11 (1989), p. 23.

deliberately playful and experimental in its handling of theoretical frameworks, blurring the boundaries between modes of enquiry into interior and exterior realities in order to reveal how women's poetry can be a fascinating archive in the exploration of the constitution of subjectivity and the relationship to 'history'. Certainly the interdependence of these within Jamaica at this time cannot be underestimated, and as Ketu H. Katrak points out 'the psychological aspects of colonialism that can only be adequately explained if the historic and economic criteria are a part of the analysis'.[5]

While the matrix of various modes of oppression has prevented the works of many Jamaican women poets from being included in this study, their presence, even as ellipses in a tradition (undiscovered texts on a bibliography), still testifies to the spaces of resistance that exist within a political regime which operated silencing as power (their silence being powerful), as well as conveying the vulnerability of any sustained or communal aesthetic movements during this period.

Reading the Reader

> Everything begins with love. If we work on a text we don't love, we are automatically at the wrong distance.
> (Hélène Cixous)[6]

> All literary works, in other words, are 'rewritten', if only unconsciously, by the societies which read them; indeed, there is no reading of a work which is not also a 're-writing'. No work, and no current evaluation of it, can simply be extended to new groups of people without being changed, perhaps unrecognizably, in the process; and this is one reason why what counts as literature is a notably unstable affair.
> (Terry Eagleton)[7]

As this thesis is interested in how the historical, ideological, gender or cultural positionings of previous readers of the Jamaican women's poetry under consideration have constructed the biases of their readings, I believe that it is appropriate to state my own position in relation to the subject matter under consideration. This is a difficult endeavour, particularly as I find the advent of the self-conscious reader within post-colonial studies to be potentially problematic. The project of identifying an individual position and therefore

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[5]'Decolonizing Culture: Toward a Theory for Post-Colonial Women's Texts', *Modern Fiction Studies,* 35 (1989), pp. 163-4.
[6]'Conversations', *Writing Differences* edited by Susan Sellers (Milton Keynes, 1988), p. 147.
[7]'What is Literature?', *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (Oxford, 1983), p. 12.

limitations before commencing any analysis might lead me to use the strategic preface 'As a white European feminist...'. However, I am not confident that this is what I am, or that I could maintain such a stable mode of identification through the course of a single piece of writing, or, even if I did, whether my readers would share any consensus on terms such as European or feminist? While my aim here is to be a self-conscious reader (as the apparently neutral or absent reader may well be the naive and undiscriminating eurocentric reader), I do not wish to announce my position as a disclaimer or as a legitimation device, which can paradoxically operate as a way of claiming all the power in achieving meaning for the reader and thus of erasing issues of cultural difference altogether. Clearly, it is significant that there is little shared ground in terms of cultural experience between the writers and the reader. However, it is also significant that I share a similar culture in terms of dominant ideology (patriarchal and paternalistic) and also have experienced a common encounter with canonical poetry and notions of the 'poetic' (what poetry should properly be) through the syllabi of an English schooling, sharing a background, which W. D. Ashcroft has termed 'an imperial system of education and cultural patronage, issuing forth in the widespread uniformity of curriculae, readers, and other cultural 'guides' used throughout Britain's empire'.[8]

The dynamic between writer, text and reader is more highly-charged with regards to cross-cultural acts of reading and the process of negotiating meaning can be complex. With this in mind, I hope to use my awareness of the various positions of reader and writer in order to give consideration to the possibilities of multiple or contested meanings. Moreover, with a sensitivity to the historical and cultural distancing which underlies my position as reader and critic, I hope that my reading strategies will not provide 'a totally ambivalent site for communication', but rather a means through which to interrogate the ambivalence and difference which certain ways of reading of these texts generates.[9]

The application of post-colonial and feminist literary theories with their attendant foregrounding of gender and cultural difference as key determinants within evaluation would almost certainly have been unacceptable to the prominent Jamaican literary and critical personalities, some of whom even today wish to ob-literate such issues from any discussions of poetic creativity

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[8]'Constitutive Graphonomy: A Post-Colonial Theory of Literary Writing' in *After Europe* (Coventry, 1989), p. 60.
[9]Loc cit.

or criticism and maintain a heritage of ideological neutrality.[10] Indeed, my whole theoretical apparatus which seeks to interrogate the ideological biases which inform aesthetic production and reception would quite clearly have been anathema to Jamaica's own poetic theorists (possibly excepting Marson) who appear to have perceived poetry as organic, spontaneous, and fundamentally most valuable in its ability to somehow transcend material and political concerns.

Previous Relevant Scholarship

There has been very little previous scholarship in this area. The lack of critical interest in current years can probably be attributed to the fact that the poets under consideration (with the notable exception of Una Marson) are situated at the intersection of various neglected areas of Caribbean literary scholarship during recent decades: the early period of literary activity, Creole writing, and women's writing. Apart from surveys of Jamaican literature contemporary to the period being studied (J. E. C. McFarlane's *A Literature in the Making* (1956) being the only substantial scholarly attempt), there has been no sustained critical interest in the women Creole poets, with only scarce and somewhat scathing and insubstantial reports of their work.

Possibly the project closest in focus to my own is Rhonda Cobham-Sander's 'The Creative Writer and West Indian Society Jamaica 1900-1950' which also aims to redress the neglect shown to early West Indian writing within mainstream criticism - a situation which I might add is still much the same over a decade on.[11] Yet, while Cobham-Sander does express an uneasiness with the concentration on ethnic identity and social commitment as the primary qualifications for critical attention, and so includes Creole writers within her study, she does not seem to challenge or change the criteria for evaluating literary merit according to historical, cultural and gender specifics. Her analysis moves from a discussion of male to female poetry without any

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[10]In a letter, December 1990, Cedric Lindo answers a question which I had asked about the impact of race upon the attribution of literary worth (Una Marson was the particular subject in mind) with the following comment: 'But race did not come into the picture at all. It was just that the white women had leisure - domestic servants at their beck and call. The blacks, especially the womenfolk, were busy with domestic chores and had no time for what they must have regarded as frivolity. Una was an exception'. This ironic 'admission as denial' of the significance of race is characteristic of the response of many who seem to distinguish between the demands of literature and those of the 'real world' and thereby to deny that black writers were disadvantaged.

[11]'The Creative Artist and West Indian Society Jamaica 1900-1950' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of St. Andrews, 1981).

acknowledgement of the preferable, or even possible, change in criteria. Consequently, while her study is of primary importance in drawing our attention to the aberration which emerges from unproblematically equating the historical movements towards political freedom in Jamaica with an equal desire for creative liberation, she offers no framework for a positive reading of women's poetry and attributes little space to their careers. Erika Smilowitz's thesis, 'Expatriate women writers from former British colonies: A bio-critical study of Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys and Una Marson' presents mainly biographical information on Marson, with selected textual readings. The thesis provides the material for her two articles on Marson, both of which will be discussed later, and although these are interesting my own work on Marson departs significantly from the lines of enquiry which Smilowitz pursues.[12]

Indeed, while scholarship during the last decade has successfully highlighted the wealth of creative talent and literary innovation to have emerged from contemporary Caribbean women writers, there remains a notable dearth of research and criticism on early women's writing in the region. Even *Out of the Kumbla* (1990), the recent study on Caribbean women and literature, introduces its volume of scholarship with the bold declaration that 'out of this voicelessness and absence, contemporary Caribbean women writers are beginning some bold steps to creative expression'.[13] In general terms it might well be significant to note that Caribbean women's writing, like many other literary traditions outside of Western metropolitan male interest, has been subjected to a whole range of material obstacles and critical biases which have affected the quality of literary production and reception. However, such an observation should not suggest that being silenced is synonymous with being voiceless, or that neglect is somehow the same as absence. By focusing all attention on the exciting and acclaimed writings of the last two decades, scholars interested in Caribbean women's writing have only further marginalized the early literature (with perhaps the exception of Louise Bennett's work). I would contend that the current critical axis is still set to overlook the neglected archive of early Caribbean women's poetry which merits attention, and that readers interested in this region's literature might be surprised and rewarded by a closer look at its almost forgotten female heritage.

Nevertheless, despite the lack of any detailed readings, it is apparent from reading newspapers and journals from the period, that contemporary to their

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[12]Erika Smilowitz, 'Expatriate women writers from former British colonies: A bio-critical study of Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys and Una Marson' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1986).

[13]*Out of the Kumbla: Caribbean Women and Literature* edited and introduced by Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido (Trenton, New Jersey, 1990), p. 2.

publications, Jamaican women poets were relatively well-known within those circles concerned with poetry, even though interest was mainly focused on personalities and critical readings were often patronising and pedestrian. So why is it that these writers have now faded into critical oblivion? In the case of the Jamaican Creole women poets, who have been most severely subjected to critical silence, the reason for their neglect can be traced to a necessary stage in the development of Caribbean literary thought, during which the critical axis shifted its focal point away from the aesthetic productions of the educational and social élite in order to chart previously unacknowledged works by black and anti-colonial writers. This phase of ideological re-positioning in relation to literary history can be most obviously traced, and its strategic essentialism identified, in Edward Brathwaite's often cited rejection of Jean Rhys as a *bona fide* Caribbean writer.[14]

However, this ideological shift in the establishment of appropriate criteria in order to rewrite the cultural history of the region against those versions inscribed by colonial culture, is not the only factor informing their literary invisibility. The politics of literary production, which cannot be underestimated in their ability to disadvantage women writers, are certainly an important consideration which will be examined in a later chapter. However, it is the criteria of poetic excellence and the agenda used to determine those worthy of historical status that are possibly the most significant factors to explore when evaluating the current diminished profile of early Caribbean women poets. Even Una Marson, whose work belongs both ideologically and culturally to the category now being revised and prioritized by critics (that of black women writers who resist Euro-centric and patriarchal definitions of themselves and literature) has received no detailed critical attention. This seems to be partly attributable to the slow development and acknowledgement of gender-based approaches in Caribbean literary studies. Although I trust that it is with a heavy note of irony that Selwyn Cudjoe claims the first international conference of Caribbean women writers at Wellesley in 1988 to be 'the founding event of Caribbean women's writing', his sweeping assertion does clarify how little awareness and attention has been focused on the wealth of women's writing from within this region from the beginning of the twentieth century and before.[15]

Gender-focused scholarship of Caribbean texts emerged in the late 1970s and for quite some time was concerned with deconstructing patriarchal

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[14]For further details see Edward Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens* (Mona, Jamaica, 1974).
[15]Editor's 'Introduction' to *Caribbean Women Writers : essays from the first international conference* (Wellesley, Massachusetts, 1990), p. 5.

discourse and its attendant negative images of womanhood and notions of femininity.[16] While this was a significant stage in contemplating the gender politics involved in and perpetuated by creative writing, which often elucidated puissant reasons as to why women writers were inspired to write about and for their own selves, it concentrated mainly upon the male writers and thus, by continuing to give textual space and prominence to the voiced, had little impact in breaking the silence that had been imposed on the early women writers in the region.

This critical propensity remains fairly standard, even today. Indeed, as late as 1987, Evelyn O'Callaghan acknowledged that 'attempts to 'discover' early West Indian women writers are still in progress, so it is difficult to identify a female literary tradition'.[17] *Out of the Kumbla*, a volume of criticism which seeks to work towards an agenda for a Caribbean womanist aesthetic, presents a whole section on 'Women in Caribbean Literature' which includes Rhonda Cobham's essay on early Jamaican writing. This piece concentrates mainly on historicizing and analysing images of women within male texts in order to argue for the politics behind the various modes of presentation, and thus continues to register masculinist discourse as the reference point for a discussion of women and women's writing. Her work on Una Marson's poetry in this essay is also guided by an interest in establishing cultural authenticity and abjures her work which deals with less clearly politicized issues such as frustration as 'works of negligible poetic achievement.'[18]

Nevertheless, it is Rhonda Cobham, along with Merle Collins, who in the introduction to *Watchers and Seekers* (1987), reminds us that

> in the search for foremothers to the writers presented in this anthology, the figure and work of the poet and playwright, Una Marson, cannot be overlooked.[19]

Certainly, Una Marson is now well recognized as an important literary role model and there is no shortage of tributes to her. Yet, while such gestures are

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[16]After the critique of male writing according to this criteria, the focus shifted slightly to incorporate a discussion of gendered imagery within women's writing. Marjorie Thorpe's, 'Beyond the Sargasso: the Significance of the Presentation of the Woman in the West Indian Novel' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Queen's University, 1975), Joycelyne Loncke's 'The Image of the Woman in Caribbean Literature', *Bim*, 64 (1978) are two of the early examples of this school of criticism.

[17]'"Vive La Difference!": Political Directions in Short Stories by West Indian Women Writers' (paper presented at 7th Annual Conference on West Indian Literature, University of Puerto Rico, 1987), p. 9.

[18]Rhonda Cobham, 'Women in Jamaican Literature 1900-1950' in Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, eds., p. 208.

[19]'Introduction', *Watchers and Seekers* (London, 1987), p. 3.

significant in sentiment, the brief biography and scattered quotations from her poems which the piece offers will not effect any real unearthing or recognition of her as a poet. Similarly, E. A. Markham's introductory comments to the anthology *Hinterland* (1989), only revive interest in Marson in line with the prevalent politics of reading, rather than through a desire to give voice to a poet of the region who has been wrongly neglected.

> We note with some satisfaction, the general revival of interest in pioneering figures like Claude McKay (Jamaica/USA, 1889-1948) and Una Marson. McKay's somewhat visionary quality and his early use of nation-language and Marson's near feminist perspectives and wide social sympathies appeal to the present time.[20]

Significantly, none of her work is included in the collection.

Despite several such vague, appreciative gestures, which generally signal to Marson's pioneering awareness of gender as a significant determinant of cultural identity and endorse her historical significance, there has been no detailed or substantive reading of her work. Even those critics who have pioneered a literary recognition of Una Marson's work have adhered to criteria which make an uncompromized acknowledgement problematic. The elements of mimicry and pastiche within her poetry, along with her use of orthodox poetic forms and archaic language continue to elicit embarrassed critical silences or excuses.

It would appear that before the work of any of the poets under consideration here can be given a detailed and challenging reading, it is essential to formulate a new critical agenda appropriate to an evaluation of their work. I believe that one of the previously unacknowledged problems with accrediting worth to West Indian women writers is that their work was only really admitted into the 'tradition' once criticism of male writing had established an agenda of themes, tropes and aesthetic trends characteristic to the region's literary output. The reluctance to admit that Caribbean literature does also have a tradition and even a canon (with all the attendant notions of stasis, monologism and privilege) has prevented critics from revising or dismantling preconceptions about the region's literary activity which might have militated against women writers achieving equal recognition.

While in many respects the literary history of the Caribbean has evidently been one of resistance to the Anglo-centric, canonical reverence of sacred texts, I cannot share the view presented by Evelyn O'Callaghan that it has

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[20]E. A. Markham, 'Random Thoughts', *Hinterland* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1989), p. 22.

wholly escaped the categorization and hierarchical structuring of certain texts and is thus neutral in its gender policy.

> Further, in the West Indian situation, admission of women writers into such a 'canon' as exists has not been problematic since this canon is not an attempt to shore up the status quo, eschewing any deviant or subversive minority art.[21]

By the 1970s when a serious, sustained and 'mainstream' interest was being taken in Caribbean women's writing as a tradition in its own right, with all the problematics such a term implies, it would seem that the critical and evaluative agendas for reading these texts had already been inscribed according to the then comparatively well-established body of Caribbean male writing to have emerged since the 1950s and the Anglo-American and French schools of feminist literary criticism which had developed in parallel to the mass women's movement in the 1960s.

Early identified tropes (such as childhood, alienation and accommodation) and stylistic and linguistic devices (such as the use of nation language and the abandonment of the omniscient narrator) which derived from an analysis of male writing, still dominated and dominate discussions of a Caribbean aesthetic. This tendency is evidenced by recent readings of Caribbean women's writing which continue to foreground those literary concerns identified as central to early male writing and thereby to emphasize areas of similarity within women's writing rather than areas of difference. Carole Boyce Davies observes that

> the exile and departure motif [in Kincaid's *Annie John*] is strong in a way reminiscent of G's departure in Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953) and Tee's exile in Merle Hodge's *Crick Crack Monkey*. Idyllic, but often difficult, childhoods seem a stock feature of Caribbean literature.[22]

The formation of a proto, even if counter, canon of Caribbean writing was prompted by critical response to the boom in writing which came with the publication of several seminal works in the 1950s post-exile period. Although conceptions of possible traditions and characteristics of Caribbean writing have changed since this period, the consensus over crucial markers of national identity has remained unquestioned within much critical work. Similarly, issues of economic independence, autonomy from heterosexual structures and fragmentation of masculinist narratives which were highlighted by Western

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[21]Evelyn O'Callaghan, p. 10.

[22]'Writing Home: Gender and Heritage in the Works of Afro-Caribbean/American Women Writers' in Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, ed.s, p. 66.

feminist thought during its early phase of prominence have retained a high priority in application to other historical and cultural contexts. While many of these content-based and structural considerations were, and indeed remain, pertinent to readings of Caribbean women's writing, this does not preclude the possibility of a more suitable agenda which accounts for the particular nexus of gender and cultural positioning. The foregrounding of similarity is a convenient critical practice through which to manage a complex matrix of sexual/textual difference, but it can also slip into a means by which to simply overlook the specific nature and effects of those differences.

Indeed, while both of these alternative agendas of Caribbean and Western feminist writing might have been liberating in their rejection of the criteria of a eurocentric, patriarchal canon, they have also become restrictive. Although they had been developed in order to oppose prescriptive models they were suddenly, unwittingly, becoming their own nemeses. Yet, since both bodies of scholarship were seeking to give voice to the silenced, no consideration was given to the fact that their own vociferousness might be drowning out more subtle and marginalized tones still striving to be heard. Among these less defined cadences was early Jamaican women's poetry, which, as it ostensibly failed to fulfil either clear feminist or anti-imperialist agendas, was either ignored or misread.

Problems of Theoretical Application

Nevertheless, the weaknesses of past readings should not persuade us to dismiss the analytical potential of certain theories altogether, but rather caution us to be aware of their limitations and of the cultural distance which stands between the origins of such frameworks and their potential subjects.

In many ways theory-speak with its lexicon of esoteric, elitist and pseudo-scientific language may seem inappropriate in an evaluation of post-colonial and women's texts, which have constantly, and often fiercely, had to struggle against such intellectual orthodoxies in order to achieve recognition. Certainly an unquestioning adoption of a privileged and possibly even alienating discourse in order to discuss the work of writers whose very potential lay in the accessibility of their writing and its capacity to shatter authority and hierarchy in terms of language, seems more than a little misplaced. In addition, as a discipline which has almost wholly gained status in Western and European forms, the application of critical theory could be perceived as a

means through which to reassert the hegemony of the dominant culture - a neo-colonial intellectual device. Nevertheless, I would strongly argue that certain theoretical readings do have important functions in relation to neglected and undervalued literary works in the Caribbean.

As Alice Jardine points out, new modes of reading are able to erode old biases and assumptions within a language system and make us alert to their inconspicuous pervasiveness, thereby offering both indirect and direct ways of subverting the hegemonic.

> Roughly speaking 'Anything worth saying can be said simply and clearly' is our Anglo-American motto par excellence, while much of the continental and especially French philosophy and criticism over the past twenty-five years has unveiled the presuppositions of that 'simple clarity' with admirable lucidity. To choose an attitude toward interpretation - and therefore toward language -these days is to choose more than just an attitude: it is to choose a politics of reading, it is to choose an ethics of reading.[23]

The complexity of theoretical discourses can work to elucidate areas of intellectual activity in which covert and somehow naturalised biases masquerade as clarity and common-sense, but it can equally serve to disguise its own value-laden assumptions within a cumbersome costume of elaborate language games. The central point here is that theory should be embraced by the critics of women's and post-colonial writing only when it is illuminating, and not when obfuscating or excruciating. In this study, my own attitude to contemporary critical theory echoes that of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who addressing 'the critics of black literary traditions', announces his belief in their responsibility to 'those traditions to bring to bear upon their readings any 'tool' which helps us to elucidate, which enables us to see more clearly, the complexities of figuration peculiar to our literary traditions'.[24] The main issue to be considered when establishing a critical agenda for previously excluded works, should be to dismantle a monologic and prescriptive model and to be receptive to a plurality of readings in which no criteria or methodology holds absolute authority.

The employment of theory within this thesis will be consciously eclectic and tentative, but will centre on the two major bodies of relevant scholarship - feminist literary criticism and post-colonial literary criticism. In different ways,

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[23]Alice Jardine, 'Opaque Texts and Transparent Contexts: The Political Difference of Julia Kristeva' quoted in Sandra Gilbert, 'Look, Ma, I'm Talking!' in *The State of the Language* edited by Christopher Ricks and Leonard Michaels (London, 1990), p. 132.

[24]'Criticism in the Jungle' in *Black Literature and Literary Theory* edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (London, 1990, first published 1984), p. 4.

both of these theoretical discourses have sought to expose and displace the ideology behind the norms prescribed by the cultural hegemony of the English literary tradition, through a variety of strategies and methodologies. There is an obvious intersection of interests and practices in the theoretical considerations of post-colonial and women's writing. The need for a change in criteria, a sensitivity to silences (caused by domination, censorship and self-censorship), publication difficulties, linguistic barriers, and critical blindness are all common to both. Yet, despite such significant overlaps in areas of enquiry, as W. D. Ashcroft states

> the amount of genuine cross-fertilisation between the two is scant. Studies of post-colonial women writers tend to concentrate heavily on the social and political oppression of women, with little attention to the question of woman's language or to the possibilities of a specifically post-colonial feminist theory. On the other hand feminist theories tend to be deeply eurocentric in their assumptions.[25]

This thesis will attempt to work with aspects from both theoretical schools in a reading of Jamaican women's poetry and therefore will confront and explore the unresolved anxieties and problems which are generated by an application of these two frameworks to this subject.

However, it is also my intention to explore the much debated nexus between post-colonial literatures and eurocentric literary theories from another perspective. By engaging in close readings of poems, I hope to show how the texts produced by these poets are themselves attempts to theorize and, moreover, that the nature of their textual processes and representations can actually foreground and question the assumptions and limitations within orthodox modes of interpretation, including feminist and post-colonial models (in some ways the 'new orthodoxies'). In her essay 'The Race for Theory', which also interrogates this somewhat tense point of crossing, Barbara Christian has stated that

> people of colour have always theorized - but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking.[26]

As the close readings will elucidate, the strategies which Christian describes as characteristic of this theory - which I would not wish to posit as any kind of

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[25]W. D. Ashcroft, 'Intersecting Marginalities', p. 23.

[26]'The Race for Theory' in *Gender and Theory* edited by L. Kauffman, (Oxford, 1989), p. 226.

exhaustive or privileged model of 'black theory' - are pertinent to much of Marson's poetic technique.

By seeking to establish an equal critical distance from theory and text, it is my aim to disrupt any hierarchized relationship between theory and literature in the process of generating meanings and consequently to question the claims to centrality and authority which certain theoretical discourses seem to make without an awareness of different cultural modes of signification.

Feminist Literary Theory

Certainly the application of Western-oriented feminist theories in readings of Caribbean women's writing has generated some significant friction in recent years. Those resistant to the terminology and methodology of feminism often perceive the notion of a post-colonial feminist to be inherently contradictory. The synthesis of gender and cultural positioning which this term implies could be perceived as erasing the crucial differences between the imposed and elected positioning of the subject and the universalising and differentiating impulses in relation to European and American women's experience which these two positions indicate.

Possibly the most stimulating and challenging piece of writing by a Caribbean scholar located within this debate is Sylvia Wynter's essay 'Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman'', which I wish to discuss in some detail here.[27] Wynter traces how Western Europe's post-sixteenth century colonization of the New World not only offered a new form and rationale for oppression, but also instigated a crucial shift from anatomy (sex) to physiognomy (race) in the construction of essential otherness.

> The new physiognomic model of 'race'...was to begin that ongoing transformative meaning process by which it would come to function, within our contemporary, behaviour-regulatory theoretical models and systems of meaning, to provide, parallely to the earlier traditional sex-gender models...the grounding 'mimetic model' or totemic operator which now *primarily* describes/prescribes at the multiple levels of global order, analogical behavioural relations of dominance/subordination activity/passivity, theory-givers/theory-takers.[28]

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[27]Afterword to Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, eds., pp. 355-66.

[28]Ibid, pp. 358-9. Although Wynter's argument concerning this crucial transposition of inferiority is helpful in understanding the position of the 'native' woman, I would wish to argue that while patriarchal societies' oppression of 'woman' may have been modified by the

Using *The Tempest* as a textual locale in which to play out the implications of this shift, Wynter points out that 'the most significant absence of all, [is] that of Caliban's Woman, of Caliban's physiognomically complementary mate'.[29] However, her particular line of analysis does not lead her to concur that 'native' women are doubly colonized in relation to the single colonization of European women (a fairly wide-spread formulation) but rather that the silencing of this new category of the inferior other 'enables the partial liberation of Miranda's hitherto stifled speech'.[30] For Wynter, it is this model of certain women's enfranchisement of voice being acquired at the expense of others' silencing and obliteration which makes the position of feminist thinking so difficult to negotiate within the Caribbean context.

However, as the 'Afterword' to a volume of essays on Caribbean women and literature, this essay is also attempting to find strategies and spaces through which the seemingly textually absent 'native' woman can be spoken of without being spoken for. Locating a position from which this project can identify itself is evidently difficult, as Wynter points out in her discussion of the term womanist (first proposed by Alice Walker in the preface to her 1984 book *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, and now quite commonly used by African-American and Caribbean critics engaged in gender-based studies).

> The very attempt to redefine the term *feminist* with the qualifier 'womanist,' expresses the paradoxical relation of Sameness and Difference which...Caribbean women...bear to their Western European and Euroamerican peers.[31]

However, it is the ability which the term womanist holds to alert us to its ambivalent distance from and affiliation to feminism which is its very potential, as it

> serves diacritically to draw attention to the insufficiency of all existing theoretical interpretative models, both to 'voice' the hitherto silenced ground of the experience of 'native' Caribbean women and Black American women as the ground of Caliban's woman, and to de-code the system of meanings of that other discourse...which has imposed this mode of silence for some five centuries, as well as to make more

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reconstitution of essential difference offered by imperialism it was clearly not entirely erased by it.

[29]Ibid, p. 360. Although the term 'Caliban's Woman' may seem to connote possession and thus oppression of male over female, Wynter is clear that it is the potential for procreation denied by her absence which is so crucial.

[30]Ibid, p. 363.

[31]Ibid, p. 356. In the preface to *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (London, 1984), Alice Walker suggests that 'Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender.', p. xii.

> thinkable the possibility of a new 'model' projected from a new 'native' standpoint.[32]

Furthermore, from the 'demonic ground' beyond the now consolidated epistemologies of both patriarchal and feminist thought, Wynter proposes that

> rather than only voicing the 'native' woman's hitherto silenced voice we shall ask: What is the systemic function of her own silencing, both as women and, more totally, as 'native' women? Of what mode of speech is that absence of speech both as women (masculinist discourse) an as 'native' women (feminist discourse) as imperative function?[33]

Her argument here is well-executed and persuasive (and a clear demonstration of her ability to 'theory-speak' and of her refusal to be a theory-taker); she unravels the politics of Euro-centric feminism in such a way as to fully explore the significance of racial difference, without denying that gender too makes a 'difference' even within groups which have been primarily defined according to 'race'. Her attention to the complexities of Caribbean women's relationship to theory and the feminist project is significant, as its insistence to thoroughly explore the historical narratives through which the "native" woman has been positioned as silent other is clearly motivated by a desire to find ground from which a positioning of reclaimed subjectivity can take place, ground on which Caribbean women (writers) can be more than just positioned subjects or subject positions. Wynter's essay is instructive in illustrating that racial difference cannot be, and should not be, overlooked by a desire for gender 'sameness', it is also helpful in its call for 'trans-"isms"' rather than 'isolated "isms"' as a way to break away from the 'master discourse'.

I cannot begin my project from the proposed 'demonic ground' (the very nature of a thesis as institutionalized text prohibits this, as does my own position within European social and academic structures), and I do believe that it is still worthwhile to attempt to clear a space within the web of defining discourses in and through which cultural and gendered identities have been inscribed. Clearly, it is important not to employ feminism as another totalizing grand narrative but rather to accept the provisional and culturally-determined nature of each of its narratives and therefore the particular possibilities and limitations which they present to different groups of women. The problems

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[32]Ibid, pp. 363-4. It seems pertinent that Wynter's suggestion of the particular awareness which the term womanist can provoke should echo the post-colonial critic, Edward Said's, call for 'awareness of the differences between situations, awareness too of the fact that no system or theory exhausts the situation out of which it emerges or to which it is transported.' in *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1983), p. 242.

[33]Ibid, p. 365.

associated with the application of Anglo-American, French and even African-American feminist theory, all of which have been developed precisely to be axiomatic to their own specific contexts, must be negotiated. However, it is also important to be aware that anxieties about approaching texts with such a sensitive cultural valency could function as yet another reason for scholars to license their neglect, as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak so neatly points out.

> The sort of breast-beating which stops the possibility of social change is to say, 'I'm only a white male and cannot speak as a feminist,' or, 'I'm only a white male, I cannot speak for the blacks.'...What we are asking for is that the hegemonic discourses, the holders of hegemonic discourse should de-hegemonize their position of the other rather than simply say, 'O.K., sorry, we are just very good white people, therefore we do not speak for the blacks.' That's the kind of breast-beating that is left behind at the threshold and then business goes on as usual.[34]

Moreover, I believe that it would be serving an injustice upon the early women writers of the Caribbean to sever them from a global heritage of feminist/womanist thought and practice, even though to draw a broad frame is inevitably to deny some of the specific import of more localized struggles. While feminism may well have been named and to a great extent formulated within Anglo-centric cultures this is not to deny an alternative and comparable system of lived, and I would claim aesthetic, resistance from women within the Caribbean during the first half of this century. Elaine Savory Fido has stated that

> whereas it is certainly true that the women's movement in the region has been strengthened and developed by contact with outside feminism, it has equally been true that from the beginning Caribbean women have understood that they have a long history of struggle and of valuable experience in dealing with sexism, racism and class prejudices.[35]

I would propose that a sensitivity to culturally exclusive and consequently inappropriate frameworks of feminist thought (an awareness which in itself can de-hegemonize feminism) should be balanced by a recognition of an authentic Caribbean feminist poetics which emerges from the very intersection of oppression and resistance cited above.

A major problem with applying 'neat' feminist criticism to these texts is that this process could be seen to imply a unity between all women, and consequently privilege considerations of gender over those of culture or class - a

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[34]'The *Intervention* Interview' in *The Post-colonial Critic : Interviews, Strategies and Dialogues* edited by Sarah Harasym (London, 1990), p. 121.

[35]'Introduction', Carole Boyce Davies and Elaine Savory Fido, eds., p. 15.

policy which is evidently deeply problematic within the Jamaican context. Nevertheless, considering that issues of cultural and ethnic difference have been the prime foci of critical enquiry in Caribbean writing to date, gender-based scholarship does present a way of generating new meanings. To this end, through close textual analysis, I wish to analyse the particular purchase of ideas relating to gender and sexuality in the poetry of Una Marson and the white Creole women poets of the early twentieth century. Such a field of enquiry might also help us to determine in what ways and to what effects the dynamic between gender sameness and cultural difference establishes itself in this particular archive.

As I have already stated, I am aware of the cultural tensions inherent in the application of Anglo-American or French feminist theory to Caribbean material, and also acknowledge that gestures towards a specifically Caribbean feminist poetics from within the region have been very tentative to date. Nevertheless, I do believe that two feminist literary critical practices are particularly pertinent to the writings under consideration in this thesis. The first of these is the recuperation of silenced texts, and the second is the reading for resistance within these texts.

It is now a well defined function of feminist literary practice to recuperate women's texts, including those which do not fit unproblematically into prescribed moulds of feminist discourse. The awareness of women's writing as a denied voice dates back at least to 1929, and Virginia Woolf's treatise *A Room Of One's Own* in which she laments the invisibility and imagined destiny of Judith Shakespeare (the fictitious sister of William) and calls for a united female tribute to the foremother of women's professional writing in Britain, Aphra Behn.[36]

In subsequent years, many other women writers throughout the globe were inspired by the mass identification of women with narratives of their own oppressed social and cultural position during the liberation movements of the 1970s, and consequently sought to research the literal rather than fictional absences which have characterized a female literary tradition. As the title of Tillie Olsen's study, *Silences* indicates, her aim - along with others - was to

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[36]Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (London, 1977, first published 1929). For the discussion of Judith Shakespeare see pp. 46-47, for Aphra Behn see p. 63. It is interesting that 1929 is also the year to which J. E. Clare McFarlane points when establishing a date at which Jamaicans gain 'the opportuntiy of knowing something of the quality and significance of their poetic literature' in his discussion of the anthology, *Voices from the Summerland*, in 'The Poetry of Jamaica - II', an address delivered April 1940 and published in *The Challenge of Our Time* (Kingston, 1945), p. 197. However, while McFarlane points to the recent visibility of an emerging Caribbean tradition, Woolf points out the invisibility of an already known female tradition.

focus attention on the previously unheard literary voices of women in order to reconstruct a counter tradition to that of the male-biased canon and simultaneously provide a newly supportive context of a female literary heritage for contemporary women writers to behold.[37]

This thesis is based upon the same premise and thus represents the feminist project of giving space to the voices of previously silenced women writers, even if those voices are not gendered in ways which we can easily apprehend or categorize as feminist. Indeed, it is important not confuse this project which is, in Barbara Christian's words, 'promotion as well as understanding, a response to the writer to whom there is often no response, to folk who need the writing as much as they need anything', with an over zealous desire to find feminist foremothers and to read into the work of the region's early women poets a sensitivity to our culture's and society's contemporary feminist ideals.[38]

I shall attempt in this thesis not to employ prescriptive criteria, but rather to follow in the spirit of French feminist criticism, which encourages the reader to come to the text with an attentive, rather than aggressive, intellectual attitude and to attempt to engage with the voice of the text on its own terms.

> A 'feminine' mode of research also has implications for the way a text is approached. Reading becomes an act of listening. The application of textual theories which serve to confirm the superior position of the reader is resisted, for the adoption of a state of 'active receptivity' in which the reader tries to 'hear' what the text is consciously and unconsciously saying.[39]

Such a reading of the poetry makes us sensitive to the nature of textuality and reluctant to impose preconceived ideas or simply to highlight those issues currently in academic vogue.

In line with the feminist/womanist practice of reading for resistance, my textual analysis will draw attention to aspects of the poetry (content, imagery, language, and form) which confound rather than conform to a patriarchal version of ideology and of aesthetics. The particular modes of resistance (and models of patriarchal thought being resisted) will be addressed through the close readings, and range from explicit poetic commentary on the patriarchal construction of passive, white female icons as the objects of desire, to the more

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[37]Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (London, 1980). Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own*, revised edition (London: 1978) is probably one of the key texts in the feminist reconstruction of the British novel tradition, although today it too appears rather canonical.

[38]Barbara Christian, p. 235.

[39]Susan Sellers, 'Introduction', *Writing Differences: Readings from the seminar of Hélène Cixous* edited by Susan Sellers (Milton Keynes, 1988), p. 7.

coded subversion of the sonnet form and the progression of the sonnet sequence towards consummation and heterosexual social integration.

However, I also wish to further my reading of resistance by questioning where the possibilities for resistance lie within particular theoretical approaches, as well as within texts. The very phrase 'reading for resistance' suggests it to be something which a way of reading has discovered. In my reading of Jamaican women's poetry, I wish to find an approach in which reading for resistance is a method of exploration, not of discovery. In this way I hope to offer a way of reading that can register the resistance which a woman's text and a post-colonial text may present, not only to colonialism or racism or sexism, but also to feminism, to post-structuralism, to colonial discourse theory and thereby to avoid prescriptive analysis.

Post-colonial Theory

Probably the most problematic issue surrounding the application of post-colonial analysis within this thesis is the position of the Creole writers under consideration. Clearly, post-colonial analysis need not only pertain to post-colonial texts, but indeed, like feminist analysis, can be most effective in deconstructing those dominant texts in which naturalised tropes are designed to invisibly signify and supplement the oppression of the 'other' whether 'woman' or 'native'. While much writing by Creole writers within Caribbean societies may fulfil such a rubric and thus demand an approach which takes as its object the ideological complicity of certain texts with colonialism, I would argue that the poetry of early Creole women writers cannot be so easily categorized.

Although differences in terms of cultural allegiances do make for significant departures between Una Marson's poetry and that of the Creole women, there are also some shared considerations. My aim here is to try and negotiate these. I do not wish to play Una Marson and the Creole writers against each other in another rehearsal of the now classic confrontation of binaries such as colonizer/colonized, oppressive/resistant.[40] However, neither do I wish to deny the significance of their various positions in relation to these categories.

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[40]The significance of this approach in identifying the particular areas of attention and strategies for criticism should not be underestimated. It is probably with Frantz Fanon's declaration that 'The colonial world is cut in two.' that we can locate the attention within post-colonial theory to the Manichean model. *The Wretched of the Earth* (Middlesex, 1967, first published 1961), p. 29.

It is clear why some might challenge the validity of any approach which suggests that writings by those whose position in Jamaica was so intimately bound to the colonial project might be termed to be 'post-colonial' in some respects. Certainly, the complexity of the reference of a term such as post-colonial within the context of Creole culture and writing does need to be attended to, as does the way in which to extend the definition of post-colonial in order to include those belonging to colonialism's cultural and probably educational elite is to dilute the particular political resonance of the term.

In many ways the Creole community in Jamaica can be equated with the white settler communities in Australia and New Zealand, whose 'ambivalent location within the structures of imperial authority offers an important - though often highly ambivalent - grounding for the discursive interrogations of imperialism's centralising power' and whose writing is consequently often considered as an appropriate subject of post-colonial analysis.[41] Yet, as Wynter's model with regard to feminism counsels us, it is often the differences between groups which needs more fierce articulation than the similarities. The claim which in-dwelling white communities in post-colonial societies make to post-colonial status threatens to deny the very real divisions between racial groups which colonialism sought to establish. However, any intransigent model which seeks to confine the resistance and destabilization of colonialism to those who have been subject to such divisions and injustices does not allow for some of the more subtle and interesting patterns of oppression and resistance within each group to emerge.

Taking post-colonial to represent a particular type of relation to colonialism (either an anti-colonial stance or a position which refuses centrality to the tyranny of colonialism by envisaging ways of being and of writing outside of its boundaries of definition) rather than as a chronologically or culturally defined term, enables us to move outside of a constrained historical and racially determined definition of peoples and literary works in order to examine a whole range of texts in which the incomplete assimilation of colonial ideals and practices, as well as the more direct opposition to these, can be explored.

Such a definition enables us to perceive, as Ian Adam has in his analysis of works by Birney, Carey and C. S. Pierce, that 'the post-colonial may be detected, in some cases, in the heyday of colonialism and in works of some of its most articulate defenders'.[42] It consequently allows us to explore ostensible

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[41]Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffin, Introduction to *After Europe*, p. xix.

[42]'Breaking the Chain: Anti-Saussurean Resistance in Birney, Carey and C. S. Pierce' in *Past the Last Post: theorizing post-colonialism and post-modernism* edited by Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (London, 1991), p. 79.

anomalies in the writings of early Creole women. In several fascinating poems by these white Creole women poets, who elsewhere in text and life express unconditional loyalty to Empire, subversive, possibly unconsciously radical elements appear and disturb any clear reading of ideological divides between cultural and racial groups. This approach also makes the naming as 'post-colonial' of works and aesthetic practices in texts which were written during the period of colonial domination in Jamaica, less problematic.

For the purposes of this study, I wish to use the term post-colonial as a descriptive label which refers to writing 'grounded in those societies whose subjectivity has been constituted in part by the subordinating power of European colonialism'.[43] However, I also wish to employ the term post-colonial as an evaluative designation which marks out those aspects of the poetry which foreground the resistance and subversion of colonialist discourse and the attendant ideologies and power structures which often covertly informed it.

It is now evident that colonialism was not, in philosophy or practice, as simple as a uniform and unrelenting narrative of brutality and oppression inflicted by one racial group on another, although the extent to which such action did occur should not be underestimated. The complex dynamics which supported various hierarchies of 'race', shade, class and gender meant that there are undoubtedly some commonalties between black and Creole women of the period. Equally, it would be wrong to assume that writers who adhered to models of social conformity and imperial allegiance, were precluded from the possibility of challenging or deviating from this orthodoxy through aesthetic means.

In the same way as feminist criticism aims to suspend a prescriptive reading of texts, so post-colonial theory also tries to be aware of the complexities of identity which characterize literary works. Diana Brydon's counsel to

> listen to the voices of the formerly colonized writing out of the fullness of their lives, not just to us but to each other, and to listen to them writing themselves in roles other than that of our colonized.[44]

is motivated by her belief that

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[43]Helen Tiffin, 'Introduction' in *Past the Last Post: theorizing post-colonialism and post-modernism* , p. vii.

[44]'New Approaches to the New Literatures in English: Are We in Danger of Incorporating Disparity?', in *A Shaping of Connections* edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek, Kirsten Holst Peterson and Anna Rutherford (Coventry, 1989), p. 89.

> it is true that imperialism touches every aspect of life in a colony, but in subtle as well as brutal ways that do not always privilege the perspective of the oppressor.[45]

Such an understanding allows for the fact that, although an unequal balance of power existed between the authority of the Creole culture and that of the majority black Jamaican culture - the significance of the former being clearly stressed through the education system - there is a powerful emotional identification with Jamaica as homeland in the Creole women's poetry. The expression of this sentiment suggests that both white and black West Indians experienced some tension between the cultural norms of the emerging nationalistic Jamaican society and those of the colonial powers which had been fiercely retained in an historical aspic.

Indeed, taken as a whole, the women's poetry under consideration clearly testifies to shared concerns with the issues of nationalism, the future of Jamaica, and romantic and creative fulfilment. Perhaps more strikingly, the work of the Creole poets also displays many tropes usually considered to be distinct to a black aesthetic. Indeed, invisibility, masking, and duality are all relevant within their work. The bizarre twinning of nationalist and imperialist sentiment in the Creoles' poetry even reveals their double consciousness, a state identified as endemic to black writing by W. E. B. Du Bois in his passionate and articulate 1903 work, *The Souls of Black Folk*.

> It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels this twoness,- an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body.[46]

In this way, the texts themselves provide the space through which to rethink ideas and theories of cultural identity, questioning how the construction of cultural boundaries operates within the identity formation of liminal groups such as Creole populations.

However, although I wish to argue strongly for the cultural ambivalences and nuances of the Creole poetry, the poetry of Una Marson does undoubtedly 'represent the point at which two parallel discourses - one masculinist and the other Orientalist - are spliced together. This knitting renders the point of union

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[45]Ibid, p. 93.

[46]*The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches* (Chicago, 1903) in *Black Voices* edited by Abraham Chapman (Ontario, Canada, 1968), p. 496.

highly charged'.[47] Certainly, none of the poets to be studied was involved in cultural opposition comparable to that of Marson, the only black woman poet publishing during the period as the Creoles. Since an integral part of decolonization is achieving the consciousness of European culture as imperialist - imposed, destructive, stifling - the Creole poets, who appear to still have been deeply enamoured with the historical and literary figures of Empire, cannot be regarded as consciously involved in forging a literature of decolonization, or of being anti-colonial in the same manner as Una Marson. Equally, although the poetry of the Creole women does offer fascinating material in a discussion of gender and sexuality, it does not give prominence to the depiction of women's oppression and specifically female experiences to the same extent as Una Marson's verse, and so cannot be seen as contributing to the same body of feminist or womanist poetry which relates certain ideologies in relation to women as social subjects and celebrates the quality of sexual difference as a positive attribute.

The difference between the poetry of Una Marson and her Creole contemporaries lies fundamentally in the fact that while the Creole poets generally only address the cultural and gender politics of Jamaican society indirectly, even unconsciously, Una Marson's texts offer a deliberately ideological and radical discourse, as well as a more oblique engagement with tradition and cultural authority. Yet, it is this differing and often ambivalent orientation in relation to issues of gender and Empire which generates the crises and paradoxes endemic to a pre-Independence national consciousness, and from which some of the most interesting poetry evolves.

Although I wish to explore some of the ways in which the post-colonial theoretical agenda can work in tandem with the feminist one in terms of recuperation and reading for resistance (the emphasis is obviously upon a critique of colonial discourse rather than of patriarchal), it is important to acknowledge that there are some ways in which these two methodologies can be yoked together in a seemingly easy but often not a constructive partnership.

One area of common interest between contemporary feminist and post-colonial theories (especially those influenced by post-structuralist thought), which is both potentially exciting and deeply problematic is the question of 'the other' and the concept of alterity. Although incredibly instructive to eurocentric thought in its ability to elucidate the destructive basis upon which the Western

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[47]John McBratney, 'Images of Indian Women in Rudyard Kipling: A Case of Doubling Discourse', *Inscriptions*, vol. 3 (1988), p. 53.

self (in gendered and cultural terms) is constituted, the question of 'the other' may be less helpful in approaching the constitution of Caribbean female subjectivity. Moreover, by simply collapsing these two theories into the question of the other (and thereby somehow homogenising gendered difference with cultural difference), post-colonial feminist scholarship can deny the ways in which alterity of the 'native woman', to use Wynter's term, is too complex to be articulated simply by feminist or colonial discourse theories, as these are often predicated on a belief that the other can easily be understood by the methodologies constructed by the self in order to 'discover' difference, and which further have a tendency to theorize that other into the self, rather than recognizing that within a post-colonial context it might be that 'self' which is actually the 'other'. Clearly the question of 'the other' remains a crucial one to be negotiated (we do not, after all, all want to be the same) and, with careful critical approach, texts by early Caribbean women may provide an excellent archive in which to trace an exploration of alterity from a liminal space within the already fragmenting colonial and patriarchal discourses.

Possibly one of the most fascinating intersecting areas between feminist and post-colonial theory is the discussion of language. While the emphasis of Anglo-American feminist linguistic scholarship has been to elucidate the means by which men have had power over language and manipulated it to serve and preserve their supremacy,[48] French feminism has offered versions of an alternative women-centred language.[49] Emerging from the elements repressed within a patriarchal linguistic structure, this feminine language is, generally speaking, associated with the absent, the silent and the unspeakable. Signifying an expression of female sexuality, it is a discourse of fluid, plural subjectivity.

Such feminist struggles to expose and erode the beliefs in the transparency of gender and ideological neutrality of the inherited linguistic and stylistic forms can be viewed alongside similar attempts by anti-colonial writers. The Kenyan writer and critic, Ngugi wa Thiong'o succinctly and powerfully draws our attention to the way in which language can convey particular ideological presences and absences within the colonial context.

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[48]This, crudely speaking, is the thesis of Dale Spender's key work *Man Made Language* (London, 1980).

[49]See, for example, Hélène Cixous, 'Le Rire de la Meduse', translated as 'The Laugh of the Medusa' in *New French Feminism* edited by Marks and de Courtivron (Massachusetts, 1980), pp. 245-64 and Luce Irigaray, 'Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un'. in *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* translated as 'This Sex Which Is Not One' by Catherine Porter (Ithaca, New Jersey, 1985), pp. 23-33.

> Language is a carrier of people's culture. Culture is a carrier of people's values. Values are a carrier of people's outlook or consciousness and sense of identity. So by destroying or underdeveloping people's languages, the colonizing nations were deliberately killing or underdeveloping the cultures, values and consciousness of the people. And by imposing their languages, they were also imposing the culture, values and consciousness carried by them.[50]

There is, however, one significant difference between these two projects, as Hermoine Lee points out.

> The aim of such [anti-colonial] groups is to write what they speak: to challenge the power of a mainstream, colonial literary tradition by the force of an oral tradition. But no one speaks, or has ever spoken, a distinctive, alternative female language. If it is to come into being, it must be an entirely fabricated, artificial, written invention.[51]

Indeed, while for all the Jamaican women poets under consideration their entry into language was gendered, it is evident from the dialect poems of Una Marson that her linguistic resources were also powerfully informed by her heritage of African Caribbean culture in such a way as to facilitate an expression of linguistic and consequently cultural difference more explicitly within her work.

It is not easy to make assertions about a poet's use of language without close textual reference and so I wish to postpone a detailed discussion of this issue until the final chapters. However, it is important to be aware of the various problems which underlie all three manifestos for linguistic revision. If women seek only to expose the ideology which informs their language, but still to accept it as a vehicle of creative expression, then they may find it difficult to distinguish themselves linguistically (and consequently in other ways) from men. However, if they assume the validity of *l'écriture féminine* then they could also be seen to endorse their essentialist, aberrant status. Similarly, if black poets appropriate standard English as their literary discourse they could be seen as denying their difference and buying into a centralized language which supports an oppressive ideology. Yet, if they write in a nation language or creole, then they might be surrendering their vital mode of resistance to a culture based on literacy which can assimilate and dilute its revolutionary potential.[52]

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[50]'The Tension between National and Imperialist Culture', *World Literature Written in English*, 24 (1984), p. 4.

[51]'Power: Women and the Word' in Christopher Ricks and Leonard Michaels, ed.s , p. 115.

[52]An associated discussion of the relations between gender, culture and genre and the particular dynamics which inform the relation between Jamaican women and poetry will be offered in Chapter 3.

While the convergence of contemporary post-colonial and feminist studies remains an area of lively debate, it may hold some value in the analysis of post-colonial women s texts, as well as in analysis of European philosophical traditions. Although the emphasis in this thesis will be on feminist and post-colonial theory, I aim to remain open to the failings as well as possibilities which these and other theoretical approaches present in relation to Jamaican women's texts.

In her article which questions the value of theoretical discourse in general, and the term deconstruction in particular, Alison Lurie paradoxically serves to illuminate the reason why deconstruction can function as an exciting and productive approach to poetry written during the colonial period.

> With deconstruction we move into another and more complex realm of implication. The most common use of the terms construction and deconstruction in English is in the building trades, and their borrowing by literary theorists for a new type of criticism cannot help but have certain overtones to an outsider. First, it suggests that the creation and interpretation of literature are not organic but mechanical processes; that the author of a piece of writing or 'text' is not an inspired, intuitive artist or interpreter, but merely a workman who cobbles existing materials words into more or less conventional structures.[53]

It is this analogy to literal construction. as the material process of building an artifice, which actually alerts us to the possibilities which deconstructive readings hold in relation to post-colonial texts. For many writers trying to forge their own poetic identities during the colonial period, the processes of mimicry, parody and collage are familiar ones. While it might be argued that such creative practices did hamper inspiration and intuition, one might alternatively wish to propose that this scenario provides an ideal model through which to question the received Romantic notions of the poetic act as original and organic.

Indeed, in each instance, I would suggest that the theoretical debates and frameworks which I believe are advantageous to our understanding of these texts, are not only employed in order to examine the problems and adverse affects of being a woman and black in relation to a creative identity, but are also focused on the possibilities and creative potentialities engendered by multiple modes of self-identification.

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[53]Alison Lurie, 'Notes on the Language of Poststructuralism in Christopher Ricks and Leonard Michaels, ed.s, p. 290.

Establishing a Suitable Criteria

It is this process of re-evaluation which is a crucial companion to that of re-discovery. Neglected writers will only be acknowledged when critics accept the need to change the criteria by which literary worth is assessed. Caribbean critics have strongly contested many of the accepted criteria of literary criticism which have been developed by and for those outside of the colonial experience for some time, and this argument seems even more pertinent to the poets being studied, as they are also marginalized as women by many literary criteria which dismiss considerations of gender whilst being covertly informed by patriarchal thought. Indeed, in many ways the criteria on which we base literary criticism are as dominated by an Anglo-centric, white, masculinist bias as the canon which they sanctify, and therefore, are as useful in revealing the true substance of Jamaican women poets as a fishing net is to reveal the substance of the sea.[54]

There is a certain critical vocabulary supported, as all language is, by a particular ideological apparatus which coerces us into misjudging and neglecting certain writers. It is the vocabulary which offers us the choices between good poetry and bad poetry, objective and subjective, universal and delimiting. Although still prevalent, this seemingly lucid and comprehensive vocabulary offers false values determined according to a deeply conservative and biased ideology which is subsumed within it. No set of classification exists without criteria; it is simply that the criteria of what is conventionally considered to be objective, has been unquestioned and unexplored for so long that it has formed a silent conspiracy to maintain a set of judgements which work to exclude certain texts.

Literary production and criticism in the West has been dominated by those with social power and as such has evolved in a shape to suit their needs. The groups which have created and maintained cultural hegemony for all texts within the English Literary Tradition have been overwhelmingly white and male and consequently the criteria which they have proposed should be closely scrutinized for suitability before being applied to post-colonial and women

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[54]The small numbers of Caribbean or black writers who have gained admittance into the canon do appear to be those who work most closely with the master narratives of the English Literary Tradition. For example, Naipaul, Ellison and Walcott all seem to appropriate (and at times subvert) the given linguistic and stylistic moulds rather than refusing them. This point has been made by Rex M Nettleford in *Caribbean Cultural Identity: The Case of Jamaica* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1978), p. 14. 'Whether it is George Lamming, John Hearne, Vidia Naipaul, Wilson Harris, Derek Walcott, Alejo Carpentier or Aime Cesaire, it is the achievement in the master's language which has earned them their well deserved place in the pantheon of treasured gifts that they undoubtedly are to a still powerless people.'

writers, who have not had equal voice in formulating them and whose own historical, social and cultural orientation should make the exploration of literature an occasion for rethinking the assumptions which inform our ways of reading.

It is the dilemma of the critic to determine to what extent we can and should retain a colonial and patriarchal evaluative framework in order to analyse texts which challenge and oppose these institutions. Nevertheless, I would suggest that if we wish to offer an approach which directs us to areas of interest and innovation within early Jamaican women's writing and therefore gain a fuller reading of these texts, a hierarchized framework of literary value and its attendant critical vocabulary are tools of which we must disabuse ourselves. We must make ourselves sensitive to the use of language and imagery and receptive to the somewhat unconventional criteria of emotional valency, evaluating on the basis of ideology as well as invention, context as well as craft. This is not because such criteria provide us with a methodology by which to excuse poetry which is in 'truth' simply 'bad', but rather because they gives us, as critics, a chance to destabilize a monolithic and static view of literary excellence which fulfils only its own prophecies.

Gordon Rohlehr, a prominent critic of West Indian literature, has proposed the notion of 'an aesthetic continuum', a model of literary evaluation which acknowledges the heterogeneity of standards and styles in the attribution of literary value.[55] This proposal of a continuum blurs the entrenched boundaries constructed to contain and defend the realm of literary excellence. Certainly it is crucial to take account of the variables of history, culture and gender when determining any equation of poetic excellence. It is also important to be open to the possibility of aesthetic failure as a particular kind of success, which displays not simply an inability to match up to a model tradition, but a crucial, even if unconscious, rejection of that tradition as the standard to be matched.

A Critical History

It is certainly interesting to consider the relevance of historical positioning in a discussion of West Indian women's poetry and its criticism. The dramatic shifts in critical axes during the period since publication of this poetry are

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[55]'The Problem of the Problem of Form: The idea of an aesthetic continuum and aesthetic code-switching in West Indian Literature', *Anales del Caribe*, 6 (1986), pp. 218-277 quoted in Gordon Rohlehr's 'Introduction', *Voiceprint*, selected and edited by Stewart Brown, Mervyn Morris and Gordon Rohlehr (Essex, 1989), p. 2.

clearly evidenced by the fact that at the beginning of her career, in the 1940s, Louise Bennett received less critical attention and was accredited with less status than the Creole women poets. Yet in the 1990s, when Bennett's work has been awarded its rightful status, it no longer needs to be considered in a study of the neglected archive of Jamaican women's poetry during its early phase, and it is the work of the Creole which now needs to be recuperated.[56]

A more detailed analysis of how the shifting value placed on aesthetic and cultural criteria affects the critical reception of certain writings is provided by a brief history of the critical reception of Una Marson's work from its publication to date. Indeed, the varied critical readings of her verse testify to the way in which literary forms are granted different aesthetic and ideological values in relation to changing cultural situations and the agendas authorized to determine meaning and worth. They also endorse Trinh T. Minh-ha's observation that 'she who "happens to be" a (non-white) Third World member, a woman, and a writer is bound to go through the ordeal of exposing her work to the abuse of praises and criticisms that either ignore, dispense with, or overemphasize her racial and sexual attributes'.[57] My project here is to map out how Marson's poems have been read by previous critics and moreover to try to theorize the variously gendered narratives within which her work has been written and the particular exclusions from her range of work upon which these positionings are founded.

The only indications of the critical response to Una Marson's poetry contemporary to its publication in the 1930s and 1940s are those opinions expressed by male academics in the introductions to three of her volumes. Sir William Morrison's introduction to *Heights and Depths* in 1931 is the only one of these critiques to offer whole-hearted praise of her verse, which he refers to as 'excellent'. Expressing his belief that the poems in the volume are 'strongly indicative of the poetic temperament of its Author', he lays down the roots of the biographic-literary line of analysis, which all of her subsequent critics have somewhat zealously pursued.[58] Morrison also singles out Una Marson's use of language and her preference for Jamaica as poetic subject for special praise. Certainly, both of these are important aspects of her verse which received

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[56]The academic acknowledgement of Louise Bennett's work as 'poetry' worthy of literary analysis only came after many years of performance and popular recognition. For further information see Mervyn Morris, 'On Reading Louise Bennett Seriously', *Jamaica Journal,* 1 (1967).

[57]*Woman, Native, Other : Writing Postcoloniality and Feminism* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1989), p. 6.

[58]'Introduction' to Una Marson, *Heights and Depths* (Kingston, 1931), p. vii.

further critical attention with the rise in nationalist thinking towards the end of the decade.

Introducing *The Moth and the Star* six years later, Sherlock presents the most substantial piece of the three, more rigorous and less generous in its analysis of the verse. Following Morrison's cue, Sherlock also identifies the nationalistic feeling with which her poems are imbued, but interprets her sentiments of cultural belonging as an extension of her emotional generosity : 'how strong is Miss Marson's love of her homeland and its people'.[59] Although, he condones the expression of her 'love' in this respect, Sherlock seems to believe that her emotional utterance tends towards the excessive in certain other poems, displaying 'more of sentimentality than of sentiment'.[60] It is interesting that sentimentality is employed here as a pejorative term, denoting Marson's inability to restrain emotional expression, an implicitly gendered evaluation. In a close reading of 'Winged Ants', the poem to which this label was attributed, in chapter four, I hope to show that this charge is due to a failure of sensitivity to Marson's allegorical poetics on Sherlock's part. Another clash of ideologies between poet and critic emerges in Sherlock's evaluation of Marson's poems which address issues of racial politics. He criticizes these as being sometimes 'hectic and forced rather than normal'.[61] It is clear that what Sherlock seeks to uphold as 'normal' here is an aesthetic which preserves the *status quo*, and that for him the fundamental problem in appreciating these poems is that they protest too vehemently, venturing a critique of the oppression of black people within society, rather than simply inscribing their equality. Indeed, he praises those poems in which he senses a 'note of quiet assurance' of racial identity. Almost consciously seeming to turn a blind eye to the element of protest within the Blues poems of this volume, Sherlock esteems these, along with her 'dialect' ones, to be her greatest achievements, asserting that she 'has captured the spirit of the people', and judging them as both sincere and spontaneous.[62] Certainly, the emphasis of this early critical appraisal echoes on, and it is Marson's poetic rendition of a more authentically Jamaican vernacular voice which remains her major achievement in the eyes of her critics - even today.

L. A. Strong's introduction to *Towards the Stars* in 1945 opens with his assessment of Marson's poetry as autobiographical in nature, continuing the tenacious and interesting, but often flawed, notion of Marson's verse as an

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[59]'Introduction' to Una Marson, *The Moth and the Star* (Kingston, 1937), p. xiii.
[60]Ibid, p. xii.
[61]Ibid, p. xi.
[62]Ibid, p. x.

unproblematic telling of her-self: 'the personality revealed in the letter...was manifest also in the poems'.[63] It is important to note that Strong is the third male critic who, while alert to the progressiveness of Marson's poetic voice in terms of cultural politics, fails to appreciate the equally powerful and innovative exploration of gender identity. In their move to prioritize those mould-breaking elements of her poetry which linked it to the dominant trends in Jamaican poetry at that time, and their insensitivity to the then unpopularized issue of sexual politics, these critics simply overlooked the added complexity and richness engendered within her poetry by her exploration of gender related issues. Their own critical myopia, which led them to contextualize her solely amongst her contemporaries, made them blind to the fact that she was, in her exploration of gender politics, ahead of them. Also, their evaluation of her verse as autobiographical in impulse seems to establish a transparently gendered version of Marson's poetics. As with many other female poets, the blurring of poet and poetic persona in analysis of Marson's poetry leads to spurious and simplistic readings and scant attention to the specific formal and linguistic dynamics of the poetry itself.

In his 1957 book, *A Literature in the Making*, which chronicled the literary careers, aesthetic positions and personal lives of the leading figures of the Poetry League of Jamaica during the 1930s and 1940s, J. E. Clare McFarlane, whom Una Marson esteemed as a friend and a source of creative support, devoted a chapter to her work. This was the most extensive critical reading of her work to date. The essay clearly expresses McFarlane's belief that Marson's poetic achievements centre on her 'dialect' poems: 'her revival of interest in the thought and sentiment of the common people as expressed through the medium created by themselves'.[64] Certainly, we should not underestimate the contemporary significance of these poems, which will be explored in chapter four of this thesis, and yet there are areas of equal achievement within Marson's work which McFarlane ignores or devalues. By clipping Marson's aesthetic in order to fit it into the popular cultural forms of that period, McFarlane's reading leaves significant absences. There is no discussion of gender, and only a fleeting allusion to issues of 'race'. By shaping his reading of her work around his own expectations of poetry, McFarlane depoliticized and unsexed Marson's work, leaving the reader with an incomplete and therefore misleading picture.[65]

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[63]'Introduction' to Una Marson, *Towards the Stars* (Kent, 1945), p. 3.
[64]*A Literature In The Making* (Kingston, 1956), p. 96.
[65]McFarlane's notion of the poetic will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

In 1965 a reassessment of Marson's achievements was formulated in response to her death in that year. As a memorial, the *Sunday Gleaner* newspaper published an article 'What Una Had To Say' written by a friend of hers, Aimee Webster, and also an elegy by the fellow Jamaican woman writer Sylvia Wynter.[66] As the title of this elegy, 'The Blues of a Jamaican Lady', reflects, Wynter signals the significance of nationality and gender to an appreciation of Marson's life and works. The final stanza of the poem offers a summary of Marson's achievements.

> Playwright, distinguished
> Social Worker, journalist,
> And poet, I insist, poetess
> If you wish, above all, poet,
> She sang the blues of a Jamaican Lady.

It is significant that Wynter asserts Marson's status as a poet here, not as a means through which to privilege genre over gender, but as statement of her poetic achievements and serious engagement with issues of gender which far exceed any prescriptive notion of 'feminine' verse which such a diminutive and precious term as poetess connotes. Yet despite this claim for recognition from one Caribbean woman writer for another, Marson's work was not critically evaluated again for nearly a decade.

Considering the significant shifts which occurred in the hierarchizing of values during the 1960s and 1970s, with the growth of post-colonial awareness, the final arrival at full independence for Jamaica, the rise of Black Power and mass women's movements, it may seem surprising that the work of Una Marson, an obvious and important foremother, remained silenced. R. L. C. Aarons opens his 1974 article, 'Una Marson- A True Trail Blazer', with the lament that Marson had been wrongly neglected. Using the jargon now made popular by the rhetoric of the women's movement, Aarons is the first to suggest that Marson is a feminist. While his acknowledgement of Marson as progressive in her awareness of and action against racial and sexual oppression provided a new focus for a reading of her work, even this praise of her is tempered by his cautious and ambiguous statement that 'she was a pioneer in many fields. For this if for nothing else, she deserves to be remembered'.[67]

In the 1970s, as West Indian Literature began to be acknowledged by the 'centre' and accepted as worthy of serious publishing attention, two now

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[66]Aimee Webster, 'What Una Had to Say' and Sylvia Wynter, 'She Sang the Blues of a Jamaican Lady', *Sunday Gleaner*, 9 May 1965, p. 4.
[67]'Una Marson - A True Trail Blazer', *Sunday Gleaner*, 22 December 1974, p. 37.

definitive studies which drew attention to the major figures and tropes of the emergent tradition appeared. Una Marson makes a brief appearance in two chapters of *West Indian Literature* (1979), edited by Bruce King. In the first, her poetry is alluded to under a group identity along with that of many of her contemporaries as 'sentimental, imitative of Romantic and Victorian nature poetry, and strives too hard to seem elevated'.[68] Although such terms of appraisal predominate even today, they are clearly rooted in an inability to assess the value of given criteria, and consequently they create unfounded generalisations about Marson's work which I hope to carefully address in this study. A similar flaw also informs the second essay, in which Marson's poetry is viewed alongside that of Vivian Virtue and receives tepid praise for what is considered to be a 'mildly' enlightened poetic stance: 'though dependent on borrowed tradition, [it] begins to show an awareness of contemporary poetic techniques and attitudes'.[69]

However, in *West Indian Poetry* (1978), Lloyd Brown devotes more attention to Marson, providing a fuller analysis of her verse. Indeed, he makes a significant claim for her as 'the earliest female poet of significance to emerge in West Indian literature'.[70] He also foregrounds the importance of gender as a poetic trope and identifies the link between her experience of England and her awareness of racial oppression: 'exile to a predominantly white society sharpens her ethnic perceptions'.[71] Nevertheless, Brown remains unable to offer any sustained evaluation of Marson's early poetry and simply dismisses *Tropic Reveries* as 'extremely immature...adolescent love lyrics' suggesting that her work is, in these romantic and devotional poems, unsuccessfully a woman's verse.[72] It is significant that, even though Brown is the first critic to clearly identify the significance of gender within Marson's work, he perceives the poetry of Tropic *Reveries* as obscuring this argument rather than illuminating it. In his desire to discuss gender only in terms of awareness of oppression, a position clearly motivated by the political claims being made for women's literature and black writing during the 1970s, he neglects a vital aspect of Marson's poetic archive and fails to negotiate the complex representation of gendered consciousness which her work as a whole offers.

Indeed, it was not until the 1980s, almost half a century after the publication of Marson's four volumes, that any critical essays devoted solely to

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[68]Anthony Boxhill, 'The Beginnings to 1929' in *West Indian Literature* edited by Bruce King (London, 1979), p. 41.
[69]Reinhard Sander, 'The Thirties and Forties', ibid, p. 59.
[70]*West Indian Poetry* (London, 1984), p. 34.
[71]Loc cit.
[72]Ibid, p. 32.

her poetry were written, and the voice of the female literary critic was heard. However, Erika Smilowitz's biographical article 'Una Marson - A Woman Before Her Time', in 1983, and her critical reading, '"Weary of Life and All My Heart's Dull Pain": The Poetry of Una Marson', in 1984, redressed this absence.[73] The biographical essay has been of central importance to the act of unearthing Marson as a significant figure, and reassessing her creative achievements alongside those of her male contemporaries. Smilowitz catalogues Marson's diverse interests and achievements in journalism, social work and broadcasting, as well as her steadfast and vehement commitment to cultural expression as a crucial source of national pride. Nevertheless, while Smilowitz's research was evidently rigorous, and certainly much needed and appreciated, her involvement with the facts and reading of the poems appears to have been complicated by a temptation towards rather romanticising Marson's life.

Smilowitz does not deny the significance of gender within Marson's poetry, but rather declares that she 'wrote as a woman. Her poems tell of passion, of desire, of frustrated love and above all, of loneliness'.[74] This construction of 'woman' is not only limited, but more importantly selective. Smilowitz moves swiftly from Marson's personal crises to her poems in order to fix an arresting and powerful image. The lack of close analysis, which would reveal the ironies within many of these ostensibly tragically romantic poems and also the failure to draw attention to the contrasting vision of the parodies, facilitates the consolidation of one specifically gendered line of analysis. In a sense Smilowitz's literary-biographical line of enquiry does not position itself too distantly from Sir William Morrison's first critical pronouncement in 1931; her focus on the relationship between 'feeling' and authentic 'femininity' is also reminiscent of earlier comments.

While Smilowitz's endeavour seems to be simply to describe or explain Marson's poetry with the aid of biography, the icon of the sad woman which she presents becomes more crucially evaluative in the male criticism. Indeed, Brown's 'immature' and Boxill's and Sherlock's 'sentimental' are brought into sharper focus by a comment which John Figueroa makes in his review of the *Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*. Objecting to the inclusion of eight of Marson's poems, he questions, 'Are Una Marson's bletherings worthy of so

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[73]'Una Marson: Woman Before Her Time', *Jamaica Journal*, 16, (1983) and '"Weary of Life and All My Heart's Dull Pain": The Poetry of Una Marson' in *Critical Issues In West Indian Literature* edited by Erika Smilowitz and Roberta Knowles (Iowa, 1984).
[74]Erika Smilowitz, 'Una Marson: Woman Before Her Time', p. 63.

much space?'.[75] As Figueroa's comments and those of his male predecessors illustrate, the accreditation of literary value is as dependent upon the gender politics of the critic, as upon those of the writer. In her discussion of Phillis Wheatley, Alice Walker comments on the devastating effect which the authority of an androcentric, colonial, canonical vision of 'serious poetry' can have upon a black woman writer and her literary reputation. Her observation is extremely pertinent to many of the male critics' readings of Marson's work.

> Deadlier still, to the artist who lacks models, is the curse of ridicule, the bringing to bear on an artist's best work, especially his or her most original, most striking deviant, only a fund of ignorance and the presumption that, as an artist's critic, one's judgement is free of the restrictions imposed by prejudice, and is well informed, indeed, about all the art in the world that really matters.[76]

Certainly, the received 'wisdom' of Marson as 'a lonely person, and...a hard worker in many a good cause' seems to be informed by such an opinion and suggests that her creative work should be treated with pity rather than intellectual rigour.[77] This is a view which I have encountered throughout my efforts to research Marson's poetry and one which I believe is inextricably bound to the notion that women's poetry is somehow merely a vehicle through which unreconstructed repressed emotions may seek expression. Although this assumption is more prominent in Figueroa's comments, Smilowitz's reading does also lead us to similar conclusions. I can appreciate that she may have been struggling for a reading which did not deny the significance of lived experience to the work of a black woman poet, but in this biographical piece her analysis slips into a gendered discourse which I find uncomfortable and uncritical.

However, in the slightly later critical essay, Smilowitz does pay close attention to the poetry and identifies many of the subtleties and ironies which her earlier piece left unexplored. She continues her examination of gender within the poetry, viewing this as Marson's area of originality 'beyond the racial themes of her male contemporaries'. Nevertheless, to Smilowitz, Marson's first volume, *Tropic Reveries*, still strikes a note of painful honesty: 'the emotions are straightforward, distressingly sincere and depressing'.[78] These early images and voices of the 'lonely woman' continue to arrest Smilowitz's attention too powerfully. She advocates that there is 'no escape for women in Marson's

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[75]John Figueroa, 'Review', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 32, (1986), p. 59.
[76]Alice Walker, pp. 4-5.
[77]John Figueroa, loc cit.
[78]'The Poetry of Una Marson', p. 22.

poetry' and that 'Marson leaves no doubt in her reader's mind as to her perception of the plight of women, and it is a convincingly despondent picture'.[79] In contrast, I wish to argue that Marson constantly leads us to doubt the finite nature of despair in her poetry, both by presenting alternative paths for fulfilment and by her radically unstable aesthetic which mocks easy assumptions concerning gender identity.

Even when Smilowitz does discuss the balance between resignation and rage which Marson sets up in *Tropic Reveries*, through her inclusion of poems which both seemingly celebrate and ridicule self-sacrificial love, she cannot reconcile the two images as coexisting, and insists on a model of linear progression (often seen as a masculine form) in order to establish Marson's feminist consciousness.

> On the one hand, she writes that she wishes to be a 'slave' to her lover...on the other hand...she implies that husbands make their wives seem foolish...Marson's own philosophy, unformed at this point, may have been emerging.[80]

I believe that we are better equipped to understand Smilowitz's readings when clear about her critical orientation. There is one statement in which Smilowitz draws our attention to (her unreconstructed reading of) aesthetic failure within Marson's poetry and through which her theoretical position becomes evident.

> Her poetry, it must be noted and emphasized, is of uneven quality; many of her poems barely rise above the level of greeting card doggerel and hardly belong to any serious discussion of serious poetry.[81]

This appeal to seriousness and consistency as essential for poetic achievement signals Smilowitz's naïve alignment with conventional criteria of literary criticism. Certainly it is important to be aware of this given the impact of colonialism upon the conventions and expectations of the 'poetic' within the Caribbean and the ways in which this discourse of aesthetic norms has served to marginalize women writers within Caribbean societies. It is the lack of sensitivity which Smilowitz shows to this revision of evaluative methodology and its attendant imperative to re-read aesthetic and implied cultural values which drives her prescriptive and limited view of gendered consciousness and serious poetry.

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[79]Ibid, p. 24.
[80]Ibid, p. 25.
[81]Ibid, p. 22.

The same insistence upon a single focus for a discussion of gender appears in Honor Ford Smith's article 'Una Marson: Black Nationalist and Feminist Writer' the only other article of length to investigate Marson's poetry.[82] Ford Smith's paper is undoubtedly important for its contextualizing of Marson's work within women's organizations and 'race associations' of her time, and is also of great significance in its exploration of Marson's work as a playwright, an aspect of her work which has been almost completely neglected (mainly due to the fact that the plays have survived only in manuscript form). Although Honor Ford Smith explores Marson's involvement in countering racial oppression, she also draws our attention to the specifically female presence within her poetry. However, whereas Smilowitz had pursued the line of 'feminine' identification established by the early male critics, highlighting the icon of the lonely, frustrated woman, Honor Ford Smith extends Brown's line of enquiry, inverting this axis, to focus on the 'feminist', both within Marson herself and her literary work. Again, the construction of boundaries around and singular concentration on one icon of womanhood, here that of the feminist, precipitates another prescriptive and monologic critical framework with certain blind spots.

Unlike Smilowitz, Honor Ford Smith acknowledges the class affinity in Marson's work and is also sensitive to Marson's insistence upon the act of social re-vision through artistic and cultural means: 'she pioneered an approach which expresses and articulates women's issues through aesthetic forms'.[83] However, she shares with Smilowitz a desire to prove Marson's baptism into feminism as a linear, consequential raising of consciousness, misreading the date of Marson's address to the first Women's Congress, where she was the first black woman to speak, as 1938 (rather than 1935) in order to causally resolve the conflicting views of women's psychological and social lives presented in *The Moth and the Star* in 1937.

The practice of significant exclusions is also of importance in Ford Smith's article. She does not discuss the early material which Smilowitz concentrates on, an absence which could be interpreted as an unwillingness to engage with those poems which may militate against a clear feminist reading. Throughout, her analysis of Marson's poetry is suggestive of the desire to foreground elements of ideological resistance and play down elements which are associated with essentialist notions of women's difference. Indeed, it may be that Honor Ford Smith's analysis can be traced to a particular point in feminist literary

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[82]Honor Ford Smith, 'Una Marson: Black Nationalist And Feminist Writer' (research project on women and development, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, 1983-1985).
[83]Ibid, p. 2.

criticism when a sensitivity to charges that women's poetry was characteristically emotional (marked and limited by its gender) produced a distancing from material which might be used to substantiate such a claim.

Certainly Marson's early sentimental, self-sacrificial love sonnets do disrupt the securing boundaries which late twentieth century feminism has constructed around our notion of the post-colonial female subject, and consequently we might locate Ford Smith's discussion of the politics of Marson's poetry as being informed by a trend in feminist critical approaches to reassert identity-based politics through an identification of the points at which resistance of the oppressed subject seemed most startling. Whilst I am sympathetic to such a reading, there is a danger that the poetic work of a figure like Marson, who was clearly involved in the struggle against female oppression, can become misrepresented as uniformly harmonious with an agenda of contemporary feminism and consequently denied a substantive reading which is sensitive to the particular complexities and culturally specificity of gendered identity within her poetic work.

Clearly, the two women critics who have analysed the writings of Una Marson have given new prominence to the issue of gender politics. Nevertheless, in seeking to produce readings which are of contemporary interest and critically coherent, they have both suppressed the crucial element of ambivalence in her writing and ultimately promoted readings which facilitate ideas of resolution and closure. To a certain extent both have reinscribed an insistence on an integrated self (a liberal humanist myth which feminism has, in other contexts, sought to displace), and both appeal to the 'reality' behind the representations and look to biography to substantiate their readings - the spinster or the active women's campaigner. In these respects, I would suggest that both readings are reductive in their approach.

Indeed, this brief history of Marson's critical reception seems to suggest a fundamental and protracted conflict between a series of poems which aim not to present a unified, fixed female subject and a series of critics who struggle to establish this very object. I would argue that in their desire to give Marson a poetic voice, previous critics have failed to realize that it is the multiplicity of her poetic voices which so consummately reveals her aesthetic exploration of the conflicts and paradoxes which informed the cultural and gendered consciousness of her time. It is possibly only fifty years later, in the present intellectual climate, so saturated by the influence of post-structuralist thought and the acceptance of the indeterminacy of meaning and the impossibility of any fixed, centred subject, that the most interesting aspect of Marson's work

can be acknowledged. Certainly, the acceptance of multiple identities is a literary practice endorsed by French feminist concepts of *parler femme* and *l'écriture féminine* which emphasize the plurality and fluidity of women's identity in relation to language. Yet the denial of a monolithic, resolved and closed voice is also a testament to Una Marson's commitment to cross-culturalism and her sense of aesthetic experimentation, which characterized her quest for an appropriate voice and form during a time of such linguistic and cultural flux.

It is this propensity to appeal to the consistent subjectivity within the texts which appears to be the crucial 'impasse' yet to be negotiated in approach to Marson's poetry. The readings rehearsed above together work towards the suggestion that Marson's poetry is coded by oppositional experiences: it is the literature of a fragmented, decentred subject of (having been subject to) the constructs of patriarchy and colonialism in the slave sonnets, and yet somehow a centred, whole, self-determining subject in the explicitly feminist poems. There has been no reading to date which has attempted to reconcile, or even to stage a meeting of, the perceived ideological failings of a black woman poet and her perceived triumphs, even though Marson herself published poems articulating these two positions within a single volume - thus refusing any absolute disassociation. Such a reading may illustrate how Marson's poetry presents 'this subjective plurality (rather than the notion of the cohesive or fractured subject)' which Mae Gwendolyn Henderson argues 'allows the black woman to become an expressive site for the dialectics/dialogics of identity and difference'.[84]

In the close readings of the final two chapters, I shall offer such a meeting and thereby contest the mutually exclusive categorizing of these two poetic modes (the sentimental and the polemical), and consequently attempt to release Marson's poetry from the tyranny of cognitive binarism (that well-known accessory to imperialism). I hope to show that to perceive the collision of two language systems, two ideological positions as oppositional is to read the constitution of female subjectivity too simplistically (the feminine or the feminist), as well as to read the poems transparently. In the light of post-structuralist philosophy, with its endorsement of the undecidability of meaning, and of womanist and post-colonial theories, with their foregrounding of difference as positive presence, contemporary readers are able to celebrate the difference of Marson's poetry in its fullness. In order to do this, we must not

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[84]Mae Gwendolyn Henderson 'Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition' in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader* edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hemel Hempstead, 1993), p. 264.

simply draw attention to the ways in which her poetry is different from that of white women or black men writing in Jamaica during this period, but also highlight the difference within. Indeed, it is this 'privileging (rather than repressing) of 'the other in ourselves' which Henderson perceives to be a distinguishing feature of black women's writing.[85] As the limitations of previous criticism counsels us, we must be careful not to let the search for the legitimate post-colonial female subject (whether constructed in the form of the oppressed [Smilowitz] or the resistant [Honor Ford-Smith]) obscure or deny the complexity of the poetry.

Objections to Objectivity

In attempting to formulate criteria which will not suppress the significance of difference and contradiction within a poet's work in order to generate an integrated reading, but rather resist the notion of a resolved and unified poetic self, it is crucial to destabilize and re-examine the premises which support the dominant Anglo-centric and androcentric criteria of objectivity and universality.

As the word objective implies, this criterion of literary merit admonishes writers to focus on the external world and suggests that they should (be able to) paralyse their own subjectivity in relation to textual production. It is not difficult to perceive how this presumption, that literature could somehow be neutral and impartial, worked to establish certain experiences and perspectives as objective and thereby to banish others as inadmissible on the grounds of their subjectivity. As Trinh T. Minh-ha states, 'non-white' and women writers are particularly prone to such exclusion: 'The domain of subjectivity understood as sentimental, personal and individual horizon as opposed to objective, universal, societal, limitless horizon is often attributed to both women, the other of man, and natives, the other of the West'.[86] Indeed, one of the crucial steps in forming a criteria for a positive reading of early Jamaican women's poetry is the re-evaluation of the place of radical subjectivism within a transforming aesthetic.

The interpretative significance attributed to the writer's life is still a central problem to be negotiated before analysing the work of women poets. It is ironic that women's poetry is often criticized for being too personal and yet even

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[85]Ibid, p. 259.

[86]'Not You/ Like You: Post-Colonial Women and the Interlocking Questions of Identity and Difference', *Inscriptions*, 3 (1988), p. 74.

today in many cases the constructed personality precedes the poetry, and it is far easier to locate biographical works than actual texts.[87] While it is evidently misleading and derogatory to the poet's skill and imagination to interpret their works solely through their lives and to read each poem as confessional (as illustrated by the example of Marson's literary history cited above), it is equally prescriptive to deny the lyric voice, and the often politicized refusal of the space between the conditions of being and of writing.

It is important to revise our understanding of the terms subjective and autobiographical if we are to approach the texts of these poets sensitively. Rather than perceiving such impulses as simple acts which tell the truth of self (since all notions of authority, intention, truth and self have been significantly problematized by post-structuralist theory) it would be more positive to see these as textual practices which engage the reader in a discursive field where the unravelling and constitution of subjectivity may be traced. Subjective, or even autobiographically informed, poetry does not render us the psychology of the subject as a transparent entity, but possibly represents an encoded version of the conditions of their subjectivity, and an exploration of experiences close to a lived reality. It is clearly important not to read lived experience as equivalent to authentic experience and to allow for the possibility of staged and strategic subjectivities. The notion of the self being unproblematically revealed through poetry also needs to be subjected to revision in order that the 'I' is not simply read as a legitimate signifier of a fully realized and unified solipsistic ego, but is also seen to hold the possibility of signifying a representative self, speaking for a communal or multiple or contradictory 'I' which has been denied voice.

For women poets, and particularly women poets living in a colonial society, the power of these positions should not be underestimated. For Una Marson, the articulation of personal experience is in no way restrictive. By telling the 'truth' about a black woman's life, her poetry becomes inevitably subversive and iconoclastic when viewed within the context of the English Literary Tradition, a context in which she herself insists on placing it. Through the expression and transformation of known experiences within her poetry, Marson communicates to us the realities of gender and racial politics, as well as the principles of her own black female aesthetics. She directly opposes the impulse towards anonymity and homogeneity which objectivity and universality appear to demand by using her poetry as means through which to address the

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[87]Consider the cases of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning, Emily Dickinson, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath, for example.

very aspects of her 'identity' in which her difference is constructed to reside - her black female body, her nation language and her home landscape of Jamaica.

Indeed, when we consider that for these Jamaican women poets the vision of a literary tradition imparted by a colonial education was overwhelmingly white and male, we begin to understand that the authority of their own experience, and of those around them, provided a more sincere and accessible basis for writing. This seems particularly true for black Jamaican women poets. In an interview, Louise Bennett has spoken of her dialect poetry as emerging from the desire to give voice to experiences and people who were not being listened to.

> Then I started to write and I realized more and more that this is what I should do because this is what I understand and this is what the people were saying. More was being said in that language than in any other thing and nobody was listening to them.[88]

The importance and value of speaking from experience, with a language of urgency and immediacy, is also articulated by Carolyn Cooper in her appraisal of the work of Sistren, a Jamaican women's theatre collective.

> Its autobiographical form - the lucid verbal flash - articulates a feminist subversion of the authority of the literary text as fiction - as a transformative rewriting of the self in the persona of distanced, divine omniscience.[89]

This assertion of the personal as political, in its potential to deconstruct masculinist norms of creativity, has been a fundamental premise of feminist literary criticism.

However, the proposition that inner and outer worlds are equally determined by sexual and racial politics also enables feminist critics to re-evaluate the propensity which masculinist critics display to highlight women's personal crises over their poetic achievements. Indeed, it is notable that several of the women under consideration have been described almost solely in terms of their personal lives, as lonely, frustrated, sad, tragic; in other words prone to such 'personal problems' as only women are.[90] While these adjectives might describe

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[88]'Louise Bennett' in Nesha Z. Haniff, *Blaze a Fire* (Ontario, Canada, 1988), p. 58.

[89]'Writing Oral History: SISTREN Theatre Collective's Lionheart Gal' in *After Europe*, p. 49.

[90]This critical propensity appears in Aimee Webster's article, 'What Una Had To Say', p. 4. Webster makes the first of a series of allusions to Marson's acute personal problems, 'complex domestic problems of her own', although here the suggestion is used to emphasize her great achievements in spite of these, rather than the depressing love poems which it is presumed that she wrote because of such problems. In contrast, John Figueroa (see above)

their lives, the framework in which we interpret such states of being and accredit negative value to them has been challenged by feminist thought. 'The great thrust of radical feminist writing has been directed to the documentation of the slogan "the personal is political". Women's discontent, radical feminists argue, is not the neurotic lament of the maladjusted, but a response to a social structure in which women are systematically dominated, exploited and oppressed.'[91]

Yet this focus on the context in which women live is also anathema to patriarchal, colonial criteria, which demand not simply an erasure of one's self within the text, but also an erasure of the context of one's writing, if it is to be granted the status of universality.[92] This imperative is informed by the belief that truly valuable artistic expression should be 'timeless' or ahistorical. As J. E. C. McFarlane proclaims: 'The great poet is above his age; all poetry possessing anything of permanent value will be found to exhibit qualities transcending the circumstances attendant on its creation'.[93]

As universality is such a tenacious criterion for literary merit, it might be interesting to consider what experiences are truly universal. As far as we can imagine death is, but certain others which we seem to assume are uniform, or universal, bear a little analysis. Love and beauty for instance are clearly culturally constructed and are also reliant on class perspectives and gender determinants. Indeed, in order to suggest that an experience or an aesthetic is universal one must propose that it would have the same value within every context. As I have already discussed with reference to the criticism of Marson's poetry, such an assumption is usually based upon the critic's suppression of certain factors or erasure of certain specifics - historical, cultural, racial or gender.

Seamus Deane traces the assumption that literature can be universal back to

> the Arnoldian notion that the work of art that most successfully disengages itself from the particularities of its origin and production is, by virtue of that 'disengagement,' most fully and purely itself. It is 'universal,' the proper thing for art to be.[94]

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evidently uses this personal platform as a stage from which to denounce Marson's literary worth.

[91]Heidi Hartmann, 'The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism' in *Women and Revolution*, edited by Lydia Sargent (London, 1981), p. 13. This piece of work was first brought to my attention by Paulina Palmer's book *Contemporary Women's Fiction* (London, 1989).

[92]It is with this same denial of context as a significant consideration to textual analysis that certain post-structuralist theories can conflict with post-colonial analysis.

[93]*A Literature in the Making*, p. 96.

[94]'Introduction', *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis, 1990), p. 7.

In this respect it is clear that the momentum of feminist and post-colonial scholarship, and of my enquiry, works directly in opposition to such a concept of universality. However, the purchase of this concept within Jamaican literary circles during the 1940s and even later must be acknowledged. J. E. C. McFarlane expresses a faith in 'a universal standard by which art is judged, and which is above and beyond the incidental qualities that decide individual preferences'.[95] Elsewhere, in his discussion of the English language, McFarlane goes on to state that

> any attempt to use this vehicle of thought for the expression of exclusive race ideas foreign to it is doomed to disappointment. It certainly cannot be used in this way to create art of any permanent value. There is only one outlet from the citadel of language in which we have been placed Providence, and it is upward into the universal.[96]

Unwittingly exposing the politics which underlie the claim which universality makes for its own neutrality, McFarlane clearly expresses the belief that universality is not accessible to those with 'foreign' ideas.

It is perhaps unsurprising that counter-discourses to universality are particularly highly-charged with reference to the post-colonial situation. As Helen Tiffin documents,

> once colonial Calibans transported the language or had it imposed on them, they used it to curse and to subvert. One of the earliest sites of direct attack apart from institutional and commercial control of the means of production of literature, was the notion of 'literary universality'. This had fostered the centrality of the dominant discourse by enshrining the values of one particular culture as axiomatic, as literary or textual givens, and invoked policies of either assimilation or apartheid for the remainder of the English-speaking world.[97]

This same process by which masculinist, imperialist norms were taken to be universal norms is similarly opposed by feminist critics who argue that within patriarchal discourses 'masculinist' functions as synonymous to 'objective'.[98]

As a contemporary Caribbean-Canadian woman poet, Marlene Nourbese Philip is conscious of the way in which universalising can act as a drive towards 'non-being' within literature for those who are black and female. In the

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[95] *A Literature in the Making*, p. 35.

[96] 'The Poetry of Jamaica - II', p. 200.

[97] 'Post-Colonial Literatures and Counter-Discourse', *Kunapipi*, 9 (1987), p. 19.

[98] Adrienne Rich summarises this problem by pointing out that 'male subjectivity is still perceived as *the objective point of view* on all things, in particular women', *On Lies, Secrets and Silences* (London, 1980), p. 14.

process of writing her poem 'Discourse on the Logic of Language', Nourbese Philip made notes in a journal which chronicle her thoughts during composition. She records her need to 'deuniversalize' it - make it specific and particular once again' and furthermore traces this need back to the context of the English Literary Tradition and the version of universality which it uncritically assumes.

> Eliot talked of the objective correlative - the arousal in the reader of the exact emotion the poet felt as *he* wrote. This assumes the existence of certain universal values that would or could prompt the reader to share with the writer *his* emotions. This assumption is never articulated and the so-called universal values were really a cover for imperialistic modes of thought and ways of acting upon the world...So the little Black girl in the West Indies was supposed to conjure up the same feeling that Eliot had when he wrote of frogs and cats and Prufrock.[99]

It is interesting to explore how the etymology of subjectivity maps out a possible challenge which Caribbean, and other post-colonial, writers make to the colonial notion of universality. From its Latin root, the word subject came to mean a person under the dominion of a lord or sovereign, or alternatively matter worked upon. In the context of Jamaican women's poetry, the relevance of both is startling. All the women poets under consideration were, indeed, British subjects and I would argue that as a consequence of this reality they were worked upon by, or *subjected* to, specific ideologies. In a sense then, it is inevitable that any expression of themselves as subjects or of their subjection should be subjective. Furthermore, it is equally clear that any such subjectivity would challenge the hegemony, and as such be undermined aesthetically.

As this reading seems to validate, it is essential that post-colonial critics revise the understanding and status of subjectivity within creative works if they are to explore the continuum of aesthetic and ideological resistance towards political and cultural authority. However, it is equally essential that we do not neglect the significance of cultural contexts in evaluating texts by West Indian women writers and, moreover, that we do not place their works within a fixed context of British colonial authority and thereby work only within the parameters which they so often had to escape in order to claim agency, but rather that we attempt to read the texts as part of a tradition which resists imposed authority and universality and emphasizes the creative potential of plurality, difference and marginality.

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[99]Marlene Nourbese Philip, 'Managing the Unmanageable' in Selwyn Cudjoe, ed., (Wellesley, Massachusetts, 1990), p. 297.

Indeed, the issues of cultural pluralism and the hybridization of cultural, social and imaginative forms have a special relation to the Caribbean's social reality and to contemporary criticism's fascination with the construction of subjectivity and the provisional nature of self and of society. It is with this consideration of the lived difference of the Caribbean in mind that I believe it is crucial to be aware of the historical factors which informed the individual writers' lives as well as the political dynamics which affected their relation to each other, to the production of literature and to the Jamaican society of their time as a whole.

CHAPTER TWO

SKETCHING A CONTEXT

> I met History once but he aint recognize me.
> (Derek Walcott)[1]

> History is natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance; new species of fact arise, and old, saurian truths go to the wall, blindfolded and smoking last cigarettes. Only the mutations of the strong survive. The weak, the anonymous, the defeated leave few marks: field-patterns, axe heads, folk-tales, broken pictures, burial mounds, the fading memory of their youthful beauty. History loves only those who dominate her: it is a relationship of mutual enslavement.
> (Salman Rushdie)[2]

Recent thinking on history as a discipline and mode of knowledge has alerted 'spectators of the past' to the impossibility of any innocent or transparent apprehension of self-present history (now as then) outside of the politicizing and often perplexing matrix of philosophical and textual mediation. Indeed, theorists of historicism and culture (most notably Michel Foucault and Hayden White) have placed a question mark over the whole concept of History, emphasizing the relations between histories of ideas and ideas of history, and consequently between knowledge and power, event and discourse which are implicated in our search for the past, and which foreground the unrealizable nature of the ideal of a (single) history, although not the possibility of an event.[3]

The relationship between historicism and imperialism has been traced more explicitly by Robert Young in his book *White Mythologies*, in which he suggests that historicism as a discipline is grounded in eurocentric thought and moreover explores 'the way in which theory and history, together with Marxism itself, have themselves been implicated in the long history of European colonialism'.[4] Young goes on to point out how 'the story of 'world history' not only involves what Fredric Jameson describes as the wresting of freedom from the realm of necessity but always also the creation, subjection and final

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[1]'Schooner Flight', *The Star Apple Kingdom* (London, 1980), p. 8.
[2]*Shame* (London, 1983), p. 124.
[3]Relevant works include Hayden White, *Metahistory:The Historical Imagination of Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, 1973) and Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* translated by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, 1977).
[4]Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London, 1990), p. vii.

appropriation of Europe's 'others'.[5] Yet, as he goes on to analyze, this relation means that critiques of colonialism's treatment of 'others' (intellectually as well as socio-politically) are also, inevitably, critiques of historicism. The fact that there is no longer a single excluded 'other' (the working class, women, black people) which can shore up grand historical narratives (whether capitalist or Marxist, patriarchal or feminist) might actually enable us to rethink our notions of History as Western global metanarrative (to use Lyotard's formulation) in different, non-totalizing ways which allow for a coexistence of multiple histories, and nowhere is such a rethinking more pertinent than in the histories of the Caribbean which was 'created' by the narrative of Empire.

Certainly accounts of history are no longer assumed to be more truthful, objective and consequently reliable than 'fiction', with the epistemological credibility of historical enquiry substantially shaken by post-structuralist and post-modern thinking (which questions the whole basis upon which claims to any knowledge are legitimated and centred in the present) and equally by feminist, post-colonial and other non-stabilising modes of scholarship which, in a variety of ways, have scrutinized standard or received versions of the past and uncovered others which have been suppressed, forgotten or effaced. Both modes of enquiry into History have revealed 'fact' as discourse by disclosing that historical enquiry is not an objective discursive practice but rather subjective, and as such subject to a whole range of prejudices and blind-spots. We now know that there are many histories, and that many of these, like many texts, have been erased by neglect or wilfully marginalized, and that these histories, like their fictional counterparts, were usually those of the 'powerless' who were prohibited from official discourse. This emergence of alternative histories, what Foucault might call 'counter-memory', has brought an awareness that histories of societies and peoples, like literary histories, are forged according to ideological biases and are intimately involved with narratives of power. Like other narratives, these historical narratives are equal agents in bestowing privilege and memory to one version of the past. Consequently, dominant historical readings highlight the plans and actions of men who have had social, economic or political power, and tend to ignore the contributions, achievements and lives of women and colonial subjects, who generally have not commanded such authority.

Since the practices of recording and reading histories are so vulnerable to biases and are, in themselves, means of exercising power, it is with caution that we should approach an historical reading of any place and time with the

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[5]Ibid, p. 2.

intention of 'discovering' versions of that past which are representative of all there and then. An awareness of partiality is particularly relevant when the region and period of study leads us into 'colonial history'. In this context, the relationship between literature and history is certainly an interesting and complex one; one which by nature of its multiple misrepresentations and competing positions cannot be reduced to a simple model of causality with history seeming to offer 'explanations' for literary content (whether colonial or anti-colonial), or literature offering material for the writing of a history. However, this is not to deny the ways in which 'authors [and texts] are...very much in the history of their societies, shaping and shaped by that history and their social experience in different measure', as Edward Said has elucidated in his most recent work, *Culture and Imperialism*, or that there are some interesting correspondences between historical and cultural moments.[6] In this chapter, I do not wish to abstract literature from its histories, but rather to see the relation as less easily definable and to be aware that these already 'slippery' discourses might slide alongside and over each other in a whole variety of ways. My aim here is simply to trace certain events and perspectives on these, rather than to offer explanations or reductive correlations.

In discussing Jamaica, it is crucial to be aware that almost all the histories **written** during the early twentieth century period were by people whose cultural affiliations were fiercely colonial and who consequently believed their Anglo-centric understanding of history and culture to be synechdotal of the whole society, if they considered the society as a whole at all. Therefore, when evaluating the historical and cultural theories which they pronounced, we must be aware of the positioning of the historian (ideologically, historically, culturally) and his or her context in order to evaluate the spectrum for which each text (history) might be valid, and also be mindful of the unwritten texts (histories) which might have challenged these if the politics of literary production had not denied them any such opportunity. Indeed, in the history of Jamaican history, a change in the relation between knowledge and power can be noted as black Jamaican historians begin to publish; this shift is indicated not only in what is written but also by virtue of who writes. Indeed, since much of the material which I draw on here is written by contemporary historians who offer readings of earlier histories as well as of past events, this question is of particular importance.

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[6]*Culture and Imperialism* (London, 1993), p.xxiv.

An additional complication in attempting to sketch a context of Jamaica in which the women poets under consideration lived and wrote is that nearly all source material is male-centred, both in its perspective and its research base. H. G. De Lisser's comment that 'of the white women who came to the island or were born in it during the first hundred years of its history, little need be said. There were not many of them, and they had very little influence on the course of affairs.', although referring to a much earlier period in Jamaica's history, is nevertheless instructive both in its delineation of the paradigms of proper historical interest and in its untroubled categorization of one third of the white population as insignificant and undifferentiated.[7] It is of course not incidental that less than 'little' is said of the black women in Jamaica. Certainly the historiography of twentieth century Jamaica has undergone significant revision since De Lisser's 1913 version, but the articulation of legitimate historical interests as masculine and the disarticulation of the female as valid historical subject remain issues for debate.

This chapter does not aim to present the reader with any comprehensive survey of Jamaican histories during the first half of the twentieth century, but rather to provide fragments and peep-holes which will illuminate a historical context while preserving an alertness to the limitations and biases which govern its perspectives. Yet, despite this awareness of 'history' as a series of hierarchizing discourses, misinterpretations and absent chronicles, I do wish to briefly contextualize the literary focus of this study within the wider history of Jamaica during this period, and to this aim must resort to a descriptive, generalizing and somewhat totalizing perspective. I shall be drawing heavily on the historical research conducted by others in order to sketch the major events relevant to the concerns of this thesis and place them alongside contemporary attitudes in order to consider any relationships between historical events and the changing conditions for and perspectives on different cultural groups and women during the first half of this century. I then wish to outline the conditions of writing, publication and criticism and (assuming writing to be a socially defined activity) explore the power implicit not only in the visible discourses which were produced but also implicit in the processes which dictated the production and dissemination of these writings.

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[7] *Twentieth Century Jamaica* (Kingston, 1913), p. 37.

The Changing 'History' of Jamaica in the Twentieth Century

The first fifty years of the twentieth century represent a time of great change both politically and culturally within the Caribbean region. In Jamaica, the closing years of the nineteenth century and the opening decades of the twentieth century marked a growing mobilization of the previously powerless (black) majority population with more organized and empowered means of resisting colonialism. As trade unions, race associations and a black and mixed-race middle class began to take form, the status of the colonial administration and its authority, which lay in the hands of a minority élite, began to appear less secure. In the crumbling economic context of the late 1920s and 1930s (with the Depression striking Jamaica as well as the motherland), the presence of Garvey, who visited Jamaica in 1929, and of others within the society also calling for political platform, representation and moreover self-government for the majority population (whose needs and aspirations were so evidently not being catered for by the power base of the British Governor), became increasingly difficult to 'manage'. As the pressure of this 'proliferation of groups and organisations intent on gaining an influence over the political processes' mounted, a point of crisis became almost inevitable.[8] Indeed,

> By 1938 the lid had blown, and in May of that year strikes and public disturbances erupted across the island. In the aftermath of these disturbances, the two streams of political discontent which had been growing in the island coalesced to form a broad-based potentially nationalist movement. On the one hand there were Bustamante, Coombs, Buchanan and the other labour leaders; on the other there were the middle class decidedly Anglophile professionals - men like Nethersole and N. W. Manley.[9]

As V. S. Reid has stated, this demonstration of mass discontent and of political agency and solidarity on the part of the working class majority was a public declaration of a 'new brand of loyalty' which expressed itself not only outside of, but more importantly in opposition to, colonial rule.[10] The establishment of political parties and the appointment of a Royal Commission which came in response to the 'up-rising' did effect some significant changes to

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[8]Peter Phillips, 'Jamaican Elites: 1938 to Present', in *Essays On Power and Change In Jamaica* edited by Dr. Carl Stone and Dr. Aggrey Brown (Kingston, 1977), p. 4. These groups included 'Marcus Garvey's UNIA and later his People's Political Party' and, towards the end of the decade, the union leaders such as Bustamante.

[9]Loc cit.

[10]V. S. Reid, 'The Cultural Revolution in Jamaica After 1938' (address delivered at the Institute of Jamaica, [1978]), p. 4.

the political climate of the colony, but even this new breed of politicians was somewhat removed from the lives and concerns of the working class majority.

However, in 1944 in Jamaica, 'a New Constitution granting universal adult suffrage and providing for increased local responsibility for government' was finally instituted.[11] The elections of this year therefore provided the first real occasion for the majority voice of Jamaica to be heard. Unsurprisingly the Jamaica Democratic Party, formed by the economically secure minority (the writer and journalist H. G. De Lisser included), and The People's National Party, with its middle class bias, were defeated by Bustamante, the 'labour leader', who gained the support of the black majority. Clearly the events of 1944 effected significant change in terms of political status and living conditions but such a fundamental shift in the power base of Jamaican politics also signalled significant potential for change within the cultural and intellectual life of the island. As Peter Phillips has commented

> The way was paved constitutionally for the acquisition and exercise of power by the black and brown sectors of the population. Control over the state apparatus brought with it the capacity to effect transformation of the society by mobilising the populace and transforming the pathological patterns of social relationships which has been wrought in colonialism and slavery.[12]

Even though full independence was not secured for Jamaica until 1962, it is the period of the 1930s and 1940s which seems to represent a moment of changed (national) consciousness, what Foucault might term an epistemic break, in which the age and mentality of colonial domination was forever fractured. However, this break out of the colonial phase cannot be simply attributed to mass protest and/or constitutional changes which have been 'historically' transcribed and 'named' according to a contemporary vision which perceives the pre-given aim and presumes to know the nature and parameters of its power base. It is rather is a result of 'a profusion of entangled events', some designed, some random and many unrecorded; indeed, Jamaica's move out of the colonial 'episteme' suggests how 'an event...is not a decision, a treaty, a reign, or a battle, but the reversal of a relationship or forces, the usurpation of power, the appropriation of a vocabulary turned against those who had once used it'.[13] In this sense, the 'events' of 1930s and 1940s are crucially important to a consideration of Jamaica's literary, as well as historical, texts.

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[11]Peter Phillips, pp. 4-5.
[12]Ibid, p. 9.
[13]Michel Foucault, 'Nietzche, Genealogy, History' in *The Foucault Reader* edited by Paul Rabinow (London, 1986), pp. 89 & 88.

With such a notion of history and the interdependence of political, moral and discursive authorities within colonial power structures in mind, it is perhaps important to realize how those who were campaigning for political freedom in Jamaica saw cultural decolonization as a site of resistance and agency: 'In the great thrust towards self-government and national self-determination, Manley with the crucial support of his artist wife was to put the creative urge and cultural activities as one of the main planks of his platform for national unity'.[14] Certainly, within Jamaican histories the concerns of cultural politics cannot be disentangled from those of party politics or anti-colonial struggles for formal political independence.

History and Cultural Politics

In Jamaican historiography the issues of colonialism and of racial divides have been granted primary status, and clearly the shift from colonial stability and the racial hierarchizing of the power base is a significant change of the period under study. Philip Sherlock has expressed the belief that 'colonialism, however important, was an incident in the history of Nigeria and Ghana, Kenya or Uganda; but it is the whole history of the West Indies, and...it has a deeper meaning for the West Indian than for the African'.[15] The lasting impact which colonialism has had upon Caribbean literature and its reception will be discussed in more detail in chapter three, but it is essential to appreciate the significance which it has within Jamaican society and attempts to record its history. As the grand narrative which inscribed and instituted the island as European possession, the colonial project represents an experience in which all groups are implicated and, although responsible for the most extreme divisions between peoples and their lifestyles and opportunities, colonialism and its consequences are also, ironically, the major area of commonalty and shared historical and cultural experiences between different groups living in Jamaica.

One of the major consequences of the inevitable backdrop of colonialism upon writings of the island's histories and the island's writing of histories, is the predominant focus upon 'race'. Although as contemporary critics this concern with race now seems misplaced, as we are aware of this term's history as a signifier of classification rather than differentiation and of physiognomical and

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[14]Rex M Nettleford, p. 41.

[15]*West Indies* (London, 1966), pp. 12-13.

biological difference rather than cultural difference, it is clear that colonialism was informed by, even founded on, exactly such practices and beliefs. It is also evident that the issue of race was a concern for both colonial and anti-colonial Jamaicans during the first half of the twentieth century and consequently I believe that a discussion of racial politics is relevant to the material being considered here.

Indeed, it could be argued that 'race' in terms of an assumed 'white' perspective, authority and even methodology informed all early official histories of Jamaica, and that in more recent decades historiography has moved to an exploration of 'race' as an explicit field of enquiry. As colonialism was fuelled by an expedient and brutal racism, questions of race may always be central to histories of the Caribbean islands, as Lowenthal has so succinctly expressed: 'There are few aspects of West Indian life that race and colour do not significantly touch'.[16] While we may feel more comfortable with the terms 'cultural identity' or 'cultural difference' this does not fully articulate the politics of perceived difference between African Caribbean and European Caribbean peoples during this period and can even become a language through which to neutralize these questions.

For many twentieth century historians of the Caribbean, racism, and resistance to it, is the explanatory narrative behind the dominant recorded historical moments, and consequently models of experience structured according to racial divides are often put forward as those most accurate to the Jamaican reality in which

> the society is stratified in three culturally distinct and institutionally separate layers: a white, a brown and a black layer. Each stratum...maintains its own distinct set of value orientations, its own pattern of activity and a distinctive social relationship. One's role in the power structure then, or one's status position is determined primarily in this view by one's membership of these culturally defined strata.[17]

Yet it is this final statement of the quotation which provides us with a key with which to unlock the additional complexities of accessing Jamaican history. The categories of white, brown and black are described as culturally rather than racially defined (despite their colour coding) and it is this issue of cultural affiliation and 'belonging' which problematizes historiographic models which divide and devise histories according to clear racial categories (and perhaps which work with single explanatory narratives). As David Lowenthal points out

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[16]David Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies* (London, 1972), p. 1.
[17]Peter Phillips, p. 2.

> Black and coloured legislators, civil servants, judges, and doctors were increasingly numerous [after emancipation], but their values were correspondingly white. In this context it is easy to understand West Indian reluctance to throw off European bonds. White and non-white alike viewed the imperial connection not as a shackle but as a support; independence would threaten their view of the world and their place in it.[18]

While the proposed model of a society structured according to racial or ethnic strata allows for differences, it does not allow for cultural intersection or overlap, and yet it is this complex model in which highly- charged differences and close allegiances exist simultaneously which best approximates the situation in Jamaican during this period. With this in mind, it is possibly the typology of cultural (although not necessarily ethnic) hybridization which offers the most complete model, as this allows space for the possibility of shared cultural values between different ethnic groups and also diverse cultural values within a shared ethnic, or gender, strata. The variety of different names afforded to those of European descent resident within the Caribbean - white West Indians, Creoles, Euro-Creoles, ex-patriots, red-legs - suggests certain types of hybridization and exclusion as possibilities. These terms not only register the great diversity of social positions assumed by or granted to Europeans within Caribbean societies, but also signify the continuum of cultural involvement and allegiance to colonial powers along which such individuals might position themselves or be positioned by different historical narratives.

Indeed, it would seem reductive to attempt to distinguish different racial histories in Jamaica, especially considering the complex ethnic admixture which constitutes the majority of people living in Caribbean societies. Nevertheless, I do feel that 'race' often still bids for exploration as a means of differentiation, if only in order to problematize it with reference to cultural groups and to foreground it (as ethnic diversity) against a background which can otherwise easily fade to white.

In the period under examination, there were influential persons who were racially identified as black or mixed-race, but who in terms of cultural values gravitated quite definitely towards the white Creole and European groups. As will be illustrated later, J. E. C. McFarlane, a central figure in Jamaican literary circles of this time, is a fine example of this cultural divergence. Such crossing over also occurred among white artists who in terms of cultural identification chose to align themselves with African Caribbean forms. It has

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[18]David Lowethal, p. 70.

been suggested that Edna Manley's sculptures of African figures helped to initiate and validate the African physiognomy as appropriate for artistic expression in Jamaica. While this act of cultural patronage is somewhat uncomfortable on one level, it is interesting in terms of destabilizing any historical account which readily translates 'racial' history into cultural history.

This concept of multiple positioning and interaction seems particularly crucial to any understanding of the white Creole population, whose ambivalent position in relation to both the European and African cultures has in many respects relegated them to a limbo within histories and texts which dramatize the past and present life of Jamaica solely according to European/African dynamics. Certainly, the active presence of the Creoles in Jamaica does complicate issues of cultural nationalism, if we adopt a fairly standard definition, such as Edward Said's.

> Nationalism is a word that has been used in all sorts of sloppy and undifferentiated ways, but it still serves quite adequately to identify the mobilizing force that coalesced into resistance against an alien and occupying empire on the part of peoples possessing a common history, religion, and language.[19]

It is precisely the lack of any such unifying base which characterizes nationalist struggles in Jamaica at this time. Again this seems to problematize Jamaica's relation to 'ready-made' historical narratives which presuppose a common purpose as well as a notional point of 'origin' (in time or population) for a post-colonial consciousness.

It would be naïve, and possibly nostalgic, to perceive the 1930s and 1940s as a period of unqualified raised consciousness and cultural revision in Jamaica. There could be no 'quick fix' for the long history of colonization during which 'economic exploitation went hand in hand with cultural subjugation by way of deracination, psychological conditioning around to a superordinate-subordinate determinism in the European-African relationship, [and] systematic cultural denigration'.[20] However, in venturing a critique of any unproblematic correlation between political and cultural liberation, Rhonda Cobham-Sander argues that cultural forms often reacted against the grain of social and political change. Drawing on the trends towards social mobility amongst black writers, the influence of white patrons and the titles of volumes published, Cobham-Sander gathers evidence in a way which appears equally dependent on establishing stable causal links. In a sense both models are inadequate

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[19]'Yeats and Decolonization' in *Nationalism, Colonialism and Literature* (Minneapolis, 1990), p. 74.
[20]Rex M. Nettleford, p. 2.

because both are structured to provide explanations and generalizations concerning the relationship between political and cultural events at a time when both political and cultural systems were in a state of flux, if not crisis. There is no 'universal' trend to be noted, but rather a series of contingent and sometimes contradictory relations.

The diversity of cultural awareness and affiliation can be glimpsed by a brief comparison of events. In 1929, the charismatic and influential Marcus Garvey visited Jamaica in order to represent his theories on 'black pride' and African consciousness to the Jamaican people (a presence and position which was consolidated during this decade by the developing profile of the 'negritude' movement, associated with the Martinican poet, Cesaire). Yet, as Mervyn Morris relates, 'referring to an art competition in the 1930s, the sculptress, Edna Manley, tells of entries in which Jamaican market women had been portrayed with Caucasian features. Blackness was inconceivable'.[21]

There also appears to be a rather ambiguous history concerning the ways in which the relationship between poet and audience (writer and society) is determined for certain cultural groups. Before we examine documentation on this relationship, it seems important to be aware of the given, generalized perspectives. It would seem obvious to suggest that the Creole male writers were those with the power (of official discourse, of economic security) to secure a wide reading public among Jamaica's (literate) middle class. Certainly the fact that De Lisser's newspapers (and therefore his novels serialized therein) sold two thousand copies does indicate a significant audience. It is also worth noting that in the 1920s and 1930s certain male Creole poets had access to a crucial (if 'captive') audience through the colonial education system. Discussing the poetry of Tom Redcam, McFarlane relates how his poem, 'Jamaica Marches On', 'has been sung countless times to the tramping feet of little children, and We Are Marching to Conquer the Future is, I believe, known to every school boy in Jamaica--and to every school girl too'.[22] The imperial, militaristic language of these titles is almost too obvious to note, although it is nevertheless important to do so considering that these codes which paired culture with ideology in very particular ways were passed on through the 'popular front' of Jamaican poetry to the island's young people.

Although these examples of large-scale audiences may offer a stark contrast to certain literary activities of the Creole women, for example *Singers*

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[21]'The Arts in Jamaica: when 'a freedom was released and the desert flowered', *Commonwealth* (April-May 1975), p. 9.

[22]'Tom Redcam', *A Literature in the Making* (Kingston, 1956), p. 4. Interestingly, there is a footnote which states 'This was the position in the twenties and thirties....This lapse must be corrected'.

Quarterly which was circulated among a select group of fourteen individuals, the relationship between the Creole women poets and their audiences cannot be adequately represented by reference to this journal or by the rather isolated existence in the hills of Jamaica which many lived. Expressing his snobbery and condescension towards the majority Jamaican population, J. E. C. McFarlane seems to suggest that there is a serious intellectual cleft between poet and audience for certain of the Creole women. He states that Arabel Moulton-Barrett (a relative of Elizabeth Barrett Browning) 'is not a poet of the people' and then ventures an explanation for her neglect 'she would never have won the applause of the crowd in a land where passions are for the most part elemental, and where thought in the majority is directed to simple ends'.[23]

Nevertheless, during the late 1940s, the profile of these poets in relation to Jamaica is perceived quite differently within the context of the BBC, where they are seen as being representative of Jamaican poetry. Archie Lindo, quoting from Henry Swanzy's broadcast of 11 January 1948, in which he summarized the poetic achievements of the *Caribbean Voices* programme in 1947, writes that

> In fact, when I think of Jamaican poetry, as far as "Caribbean Voices" is concerned, I think of a number of ladies, with fluent and tuneful, if rather conventional muses. There is Vivette Hendriks, who is now in England; Elsie Hutton, who is capable of a close-knit line; Lena Kent with whom one can voyage to the island 'and see the far Blue Mountains re-appear'; Albinia Hutton, whose measures are closely akin to hymns; and Daisy Myrie, whose Christmas Carol at least one critic thought the purest single poem broadcast in 1947.[24]

The poetic achievements of the Creole women poets are also highlighted in A. J. Seymour's review of J. E. C. McFarlane's *The Challenge of our Time*, 'For non-Jamaican readers, this volume is a first-class introduction to literary life and thought in Jamaica...In those addresses we gain some idea of the qualities that distinguish, in both sense, the work of Lena Kent, Constance Hollar, Arthur Nicholas, Albinia Hutton, and that most intellectual of women poets, Arabel Moulton-Barrett'.[25] Thus it seems that attempts to measure the quantity or quality of audience response are not easily disengaged from the contexts (personal and institutional) in which evaluations have been made and therefore do not provide a satisfactory 'history' from which to draw conclusions.

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[23]Ibid, p. 48.
[24]'Poet's Corner', *The Sunday Gleaner*, 25 January 1948, p. 9.
[25]'Book Review by the Editor', *Kyk-Over-Al*, 1, (1945), p. 41.

Such peepholes may help to elucidate the situation in its broadest terms, but the relationship between Jamaican writers and their (potential) audience remains open to debate, and particularly contentious with reference to black Jamaican writers. Rhonda Cobham-Sander draws attention to the way in which

> the act of writing not only separated him [the writer from the black community] in terms of education from his group as a whole, it also tended to produce a movement away from the aspirations and cultural forms of the black community and towards the values and attitudes of the dominant group. Thus [he] makes no attempt to speak on behalf of fellow blacks, and appeals for recognition and redress to the very system of values which discriminates against him.[26]

In his essay, 'Claude McKay', J. E. C. McFarlane offers an evaluation of the reception of McKay's poetry which both confounds and confirms this argument.

> It is a small wonder that his dialect poetry went immediately to their hearts and that, although he is still unread by the majority, his name has become something of a legend among them. The masses do not read him because his work has never been issued in an edition sufficiently large and cheap to encourage its easy circulation among them; but many of his phrases have passed from lip to lip and have become household words. For McKay has caught up within his verse the spontaneous humour and infectious laughter of his people; he reflects their ability to make a jest of their own dilemmas and illustrates their capacity for tender emotion.[27]

McFarlane's emphasis on McKay's poetic alignment with the 'values and attitudes' of 'his people' and his status as household oracle would seem to contradict Cobham-Sander's point. However, the fact that McFarlane, himself an African Jamaican, clearly desires to distance himself from 'the masses', whom he stereotypes in line with romantic racialism, paradoxically endorses her argument. Moreover, McFarlane's comments also point to an interesting denial of an African Caribbean culture. Although the majority population is described as having distinctive features - the laughter referred to above and the elemental passions cited earlier - these appear as almost 'racial' traits, suggesting that the only culture to be acknowledged as such is that of the European (colonial) population. Thus the dispossession of African Caribbean culture is consolidated by those from this group who wish to aspire to cultural

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[26]Rhonda Cobham-Sander 'The Creative Writer and West Indian Society: Jamaica 1900-1950' (1981), p. 18.

[27]*A Literature in the Making*, p. 84.

belonging and appear to perceive responses and activities amongst this group as acultural.

Indeed, this wish to differentiate from rather than identify with the wider black population is not uncharacteristic. As Cobham-Sander illustrates later in her thesis,

> In poems such as Campbell's "Market Women" which begins with the distancing epithet, "These people..." one is uncomfortably aware that Campbell sees himself as distinct from other black Jamaicans, and that this sense of being a spectator to their life is never openly acknowledged.[28]

Yet, this position was clearly not exclusive, as the example of McKay's popularity illustrates, and as Cobham-Sander also points out with reference to Louise Bennett: 'By the time she left for England at the end of 1949 Bennett had established herself as a leading performer and scriptwriter in the Little Theatre movement's annual Jamaican pantomime and "Miss Lu" had become a household name for Jamaicans at all social levels'.[29]

As the above examples illustrate, the relationship between writer and society cannot be easily generalized. Although Cobham-Sander asserts that 'curiously, the group least willing to respond to the change in mood within the wider society was the new generation of creative writers', and argues this perspective thoroughly, it is certainly not an incontrovertible thesis.[30] Certainly, it is true that not every poem, or even every volume, explicitly addresses the social and political upheaval of its time, or makes gestures which can be easily identified as fulfilling an agenda of cultural decolonization, yet there are ways of reading which might wish to suggest more subtle registers of change. These will be fully explored in chapter four, but it is worth noting that many of the women in Jamaica at this time wrote occasional poems and that (despite the obvious denigration of these as trivial and transient aesthetic statements) these do indicate some level of engagement with social and historical events. Volumes by the Creole women poets are often replete with poems which are dedicated to or commemorate visits made by members of the British Royal family to Jamaica. Constance Hollar's *Songs of Empire* which was published to mark the visit of the Prince of Wales and Prince George in 1931 is a key example. However, it is not only events in dominant 'colonial' history which are recorded in the poetry. Una Marson's 'At the Prison Gates', published in 1937, provides an instance of counter-memory in its chronicle of

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[28]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 156.
[29]Ibid, p.101.
[30]Ibid, p. 45.

the desperate urban poverty experienced amongst the working classes in Jamaica during the Depression and more particularly the incident when men asked to be 'imprisoned' in order to be fed.

Perhaps one area where the racial politics operated within a colonial society are fairly evident is in the history of literary production. The historical effects of these are actualized in this thesis by the very fact that there is only one black woman poet whose work can be considered. For C. L. R. James, the influence of racial politics in determining a literary career was evident. 'We went one way; these white boys all went the other way. We were black and the only way we could do anything along the lines we were interested in was by going abroad.'[31]

Literary Histories

One major problem to be faced when sketching the literary history of Jamaica during the period 1900 to 1945 is that it is virtually impossible to be certain of when much of the material was produced. Articles and poems often appeared in various places at very different times, for example J. E. C. McFarlane's survey of Jamaican literature during the 1920s and 1930s, *A Literature in the Making*, was first published in serial form in *West Indian Critic and Review* from 1929 to 31 and then in *Public Opinion* in 1939 and only finally by the Pioneer Press as a single volume in 1957. Also many poems were only published in collected works which often spanned more than a decade of writing, with rarely any indication of the year they were written in.[32] Lena Kent's *The Hills of St Andrew* published in 1931 presents some poems written before the turn of the century and in the foreword to Constance Hollar's *Flaming June,* she points out that the volume has been delayed some twenty-five years. Consequently, I do not attempt to deduce a literary history based on a chronology of works. Rather, I wish to concentrate on the 1930s and 1940s as it is during these years that there was a flurry of publications by women

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[31]'Discovering Literature in Trinidad: the 1930s' (1969) in *Spheres of Existence* (London, 1980), p. 238.

[32]Constance Hollar's volume of poetry, *Flaming June* (Kingston, 1941) was published shortly before her death. As the poetry in this volume represents her life's work it is extremely difficult to date individual poems. This is also the case with certain anthologies. *Caribbean Voices* selected by John Figueroa and published in 1966 contains many poems written decades before. In a private letter, 14 November 1990, Cedric Lindo wrote that Vivette Hendriks's poems were 'written when she was a school girl or shortly afterwards, appeared only in the BBC's "Caribbean Voices" and two in Focus of 1960 (those two having been broadcast in Caribbean Voices many, many years before)'.

poets which I wish to examine. The first half of the twentieth century is only invoked as rough indicator of the period in which these women were writing and is not designed to demarcate a period of time during which every female Jamaican poet who was writing is to be studied. As explained in the previous chapter, and above, the main focus is on the work of Una Marson.

The other main difficulty to be negotiated when attempting to provide even a tentative literary history of the 1930s and 1940s in Jamaica is that very little attention has been paid to the period of Caribbean literature before the 'boom' years of the 1950s. Although it is often suggested that the 1930s are the watershed years in terms of a genesis of 'authentic' Caribbean literary voices (the period before being branded by Kenneth Ramchand as 'life without fiction'), any detailed examination of the 1930s and 1940s reveals that they too are not well-catalogued or regarded, probably due to the often ambivalent relation which writings of this period bear in relation to colonial cultural authority.

In 'Discovering Literature in Trinidad: the 1930s', C. L. R. James comments that he did not 'know much about West Indian literature in the 1930s - there wasn't much to know'.[33] This view is corroborated by Philip Sherlock's 'Foreword' to the 1966 publication of *Caribbean Voices: An Anthology of West Indian Poetry* selected by John Figueroa, in which he states that: 'at that time [1948] there were one or two West Indian writers - McKay, C. L. R. James, H. G. De Lisser, but there was no West Indian literature'.[34] Perhaps one of the reasons why an acknowledgement of a Caribbean literary history was slow to arrive is the unorthodox and diverse profile of literary endeavour from this region. As Henry Swanzy has pointed out, 'it is significant that the work [of the first writers in the West Indies] was mainly conversational, never literary in the pure sense'.[35] Journals and 'histories' such as those of Monk Lewis, Lady Nugent and Mary Seacole should not be perceived merely as examples of a subgenre or anomalies in the line of Caribbean literary production. In Jamaica, the long existence of *Singers Quarterly* and more recently the emergence of Sistren's working class autobiographies, *Lionheart Gal*, suggests that the cultural status of 'literature' is conceived more flexibly.

However, if the absence pointed to above, was not so much an absence of writing as an absence of recognition, then now that Caribbean writing is accepted by the 'centre', even strategically celebrated by it, it is difficult to imagine the critical wilderness which surrounded these poets. Cedric Lindo has

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[33]C. L. R. James, p. 237.

[34]*Caribbean Voices: An Anthology of West Indian Poetry* selected by John Figueroa (London: Evans Brothers Ltd, 1966), p. vii.

[35]'The Literary Situation in the Caribbean', *Books Abroad*, 30 (1956), p. 267.

informed me that 'Una's poems were not highly regarded, but then very few Jamaicans were concerned with poetry'.[36] Indeed, J. E. C. McFarlane cites the lack of any collective identity even amongst Jamaican poets as his motivation for writing *A Literature in the Making*:

> I felt compelled to the task [of reviewing Jamaican poetry] by the special knowledge which I possessed of the intrinsic merit of that body of verse which constitutes Jamaica's poetic literature, and which is known, for the greater part, only to its creators: and to these, not as a whole, but in such parts only as they individually have brought into being.[37]

Fragmented and atomized literary traditions, as described above, are always more vulnerable to invisibility and disappearance, nevertheless, we do have some indications of the archive of Jamaican poetry produced at this time even though it is no longer available. Referring to the main 'events' which mark the literary activity of 1933, Rhonda Cobham-Sander comments that 'apart from declaring Thomas MacDermot Jamaica's Poet Laureate in this year, the League held a poetry exhibition at the Institute of Jamaica, organised by Astley Clerk, which contained over one thousand exhibits of individual poems, books and unpublished manuscripts by Jamaican writers.[38] Recording this event in the 'Nineteenth Annual Report of the Poetry League of Jamaica' in the 1943 Year Book, J. E. C. MacFarlane notes that 'an exhibition of Poetry and allied subjects...was visited by more than 700 persons'.[39] This single image evokes a striking picture of just how much textual material and interest from this period has been 'lost'.

An analysis of literary criticism from this period also provides an interesting perspective on the issue of a projected vision of literary development in Jamaica. There are several indications of the strong expectations of a literary history which has been entirely eclipsed. The 'Foreword' to *Seed and Flower: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry by the Ormsby Family of Jamaica compiled and edited by H. V. Ormsby Marshall* (1956) written by The Rt. Rev. the Hon. P. W. Gibson B.D., B.A., Lord Bishop of Jamaica suggests, almost asks, that this contribution be remembered.

> A history of Jamaican literature will no doubt be written in due course. It will cover both prose and poetry in dialect as well as in the traditional English of the Mother Country. I trust that in this history-to-be the contribution made by the Ormsby family will be given due recognition. Before my eyes a new generation has sprung up which knows very little

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[36]Private letter, 22 December 1990.
[37]*A Literature in the Making*, p. 1.
[38]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 88.
[39]*The Year Book of the Poetry League of Jamaica, 1943* (Kingston, 1943), p. 28.

> Before my eyes a new generation has sprung up which knows very little of the good and great of just a generation past. This booklet will remind them.[40]

Not only does this statement confirm that no history of Jamaican literature was known in 1956, but it also anticipates the changing cultural sensibilities of the island which are possibly an important consideration when questioning why this volume which represents the writings of three generations of the family and includes poems, short stories, letters, sermons and short biographies, has not been commonly read or recognized.

Even the publication which attempted to provide such a history (of Jamaican poetry at least) and was finally collected and published in 1956, J. E. C. McFarlane's, *A Literature in the Making*, has now faded from critical focus, an ironic occurrence when we consider his confident prediction of this archive's rise out of invisibility.

> The studies in this present book cover more than half a century of creative effort, during which time the lone call of Tom Redcam has swelled to a chorus that may no longer be ignored. This chorus has evoked wonder and surprise from important quarters in other lands; only in Jamaica itself is appreciation of its significance and promise lacking. The coming years will, I am persuaded, correct this position; for the volume of song will prove irresistible.' [41]

Against these empty prophecies of a literary history engaged with the texts of this era and of these poets, it is necessary to consider the dominant narratives of Caribbean literature which have emerged and remained vital.

Popular Histories

The popular texts of authors such as George Lamming and literary historians such as Reinhard Sander which sketch different versions of Caribbean literary history, concentrated on the male writers of the Eastern islands, have generated a now common assumption that Caribbean literary activity was born from man's lower thigh of the archipelago. It is one of my aims in sketching Jamaican women's literary history during this period, to re-

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[40]The Rt. Rev. the Hon. P.W. Gibson B.D., B.A., Lord Bishop of Jamaica, Foreword to *Seed and Flower: An Anthology of Prose and Poetry by the Ormsby Family of Jamaica compiled and edited by H.V. Ormsby Marshall* (Kingston, 1956).

[41]*A Literature in the Making*, p. 109.

dress such gendered myths. To this end, it is necessary to briefly outline their particular narratives.

On the back cover of Reinhard Sander's (and Peter Ayres's) well-known book, *From Trinidad*, it is declared that: 'The aim has been to go back to the beginnings of West Indian literature, to dispel the myth that West Indian writing started with Lamming, Selvon and Naipaul in the 1950s'. The replacement picture of Caribbean Literature launching itself across the region from the literary springboard of the far Eastern Caribbean island of Trinidad in the 1930s may act as a corrective perspective to the 'myth' cited, but it does little to correct the geographical and gender biases which are subsumed within it. Although the book does mention a few Creole women (Olga Yaatoff, Beatrice Greig and Kathleen Archibald) these are clearly peripheral figures to the literary movements and Sander's reconstruction does little to theorize or discuss this as an issue. Rather, his concern is to trace the catalyst of 'the beginnings of West Indian literature' to a relatively small group of writers and intellectuals who 'published essays, poetry and short fiction, and formulated basic postulates for an indigenous West Indian literature'.[42] Sander focuses on Trinidad as he believes it to be the first island in the region to have 'a group, which fostered the exchange of views and theoretical discussions, and prevented creative loneliness and frustration'.[43] Although the sense of a common purpose, almost an agenda, and the consistently large reading public does mark the activities in Trinidad out as having a collective identity and appeal, there is certainly evidence to suggest that Jamaica's self-consciousness about its own literary tradition and its various clusters of 'literary' individuals around key figures such as J. E. C McFarlane and Roger Mais does offer rival groupings who were engaged in working through questions of writing and cultural identity during an even earlier period. Moreover, as Rhonda Cobham-Sander established through her research on Jamaican literature from 1900 to 1950:

> The amount of material published locally by these groups far exceeds the total amount published in the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean during the same period. Although none of the writers belonging to these groups was able to make a living off their literary earnings in Jamaica, the high sales figures for early novels...indicate the existence of a literary market of sorts in Jamaica even before the First World War.[44]

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[42]Sander, *From Trinidad*, p. 1.
[43]Ibid, p. 2.
[44]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 107.

She furthermore concludes that the public recognition afforded writers from both a (crudely speaking) conservative and radical orientation 'must be evaluated by contrast with the literary publishing scene elsewhere in the West Indies during the same period where literary periodicals were almost non-existent before the mid 1940s, and individual writers pursued their vocation without public support or even awareness'.[45] This distinguishing early feature of Jamaican writing rather upsets Reinhard Sander's very focus on Trinidad as the first island to nurture a 'West Indian' literature.

While this line of enquiry is pursued more thoroughly in chapter three, my aim here is simply to suggest how Sander's focus on one island has templated our notion of the region's literary history in ways which might not be useful with reference to other islands or women writers.

George Lamming's sketch of Caribbean literary history in his influential book, *The Pleasures of Exile*, is more eclectic and wide-ranging in its interests. Perhaps one of his most familiar essays 'A Monster, A Child, A Slave', which examines the triangular relationship between Prospero, Miranda and Caliban, is my focus here. Although Lamming's reading of this Shakespearean play is not consciously framed as an allegorical history of the Caribbean, I wish to interpret several of his observations as paradigmatic of a history which in its questions of discourse and affiliation is also pertinent to our considerations of literary histories. Invoking *The Tempest* as a metaphorical space through which to explore the dynamics of colonizer and colonized, Lamming argues for Caliban as the native man of the isle tricked into servitude by Prospero whose tyranny and cruelty is akin to that of a slave master (*The Tempest* with its unpopulated isle - settled first by Sycorax and Caliban and then by Prospero and Miranda - also serves as an interestingly analogous site for questions of nativism).

As this reading is now both familiar and theoretically sophisticated, it is not my aim to reiterate it here, but rather to focus on Lamming's comments on Miranda which have received rather less critical attention. In the framework of the African/European dynamics which I referred to earlier, not only are Creoles marginalized, but so too are women as the master/slave dialectic is almost always conceived with masculine protagonist and antagonist in mind. My reading here hopes to bring Miranda back into the frame of this now 'well-worn' colonial allegory and to explore her relationships with Prospero and Caliban. I wish to suggest that if *The Tempest* does provide a staging of colonial encounters then maybe the Creole women writers are in an analogous position

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[45]Loc cit.

to Miranda, whose ambivalent position in relation to Prospero and Caliban is informed by both the presence of the father and the absence of the mother.

Lamming points out that it is Prospero who directs Miranda to 'rememory' her history, and in Prospero's mind it is very clearly his/story.

> thee, my daughter, who
> Art ignorant of what thou art; nought knowing
> Of whence I am.[46]

Yet, while Miranda's ignorance of 'what' she is in terms of social position may be traced to her lack of understanding about Prospero's origins, her ignorance of what 'she is' could be argued to be a result of her displacement from her mother rather than from her kingdom. Miranda's point of origin is her mother who, as Lamming also comments, is mentioned but once in the entire play. 'Thy mother was a piece of virtue' is clearly an ambiguous statement which leaves the reader questioning whether her mother was (alive) and is no more, or was virtuous and is no more. The very fact that we have no suggestions to help resolve these questions means that Miranda's mother remains the significant silence within Shakespeare's text.

Indeed, although Caliban's mother is also now lost to him, he does have memories of her, unlike Miranda who cannot remember her mother. This absence/presence of maternal memory appears to be crucial in determining the relationship between Prospero, Caliban and Miranda. Lamming observes how 'for some reason or other, the memory of Sycorax, Caliban's mother arouses him [Prospero] to rage that is almost insane'. However, he does not offer any reading of this disproportionate response, but rather decides that 'we could not speak with authority on the possibilities of this defect until we had heard from Sycorax and Miranda's mother. They are both dead'.[47] Despite Lamming's determination, I do wish to offer a reading of Prospero's incensed reaction to Sycorax and his denial of Miranda's mother [both dead to the text] and to this end wish to draw on another of Lamming's points - the (potential) alliance between Miranda and Caliban.

> Throughout the play we are impressed by the affinities, the likeness of circumstances between Miranda and Caliban. Like many an African slave child, Miranda has no recollection of her mother...But Miranda has a deeper affinity than this likeness of circumstance. She was no more than an infant when she and her father met Caliban on the island. Prospero says she was scarcely three. Caliban would have been about

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[46]William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, edited by Frank Kermode, The Arden Shakespeare (London, 1954), I. 2. 17.

[47]George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London, 1960), p. 116.

> twelve...Caliban and the child, Miranda, must have grown closer by the necessary contact of the servant and mistress...Caliban and the Duke's daughter have a bond that is not easily broken. They are alike in their ignorance; and there are parallels in their response to strangers from the world beyond these shores.[48]

While it is certainly true that both are 'ignorant', I believe that it is the different ways in which they are unenlightened which are most significant to our understanding of this complex triangular relationship. Miranda, as argued, lacks a maternal, female presence and is ignorant about romantic mores and mutual, loving relationships. Caliban on the other hand is ignorant of sensible (Aristotelian) language and rational meaning. Why then does this make them, in Lamming's words, 'opposite and contiguous at the same time'?[49] I would suggest that it is a consideration of their positions in relation to language and their different modes of entry into the symbolic order which helps us to resolve this enigmatic twinning.

Although as 'woman' and 'native' both Miranda and Caliban share a marginal and precarious position in relation to the symbolic order, the fact that Miranda is without memory of the maternal call and that she acts as an agent for the propagation of the patriarchal language means that, although potentially an equal exile with Caliban, Miranda is actually a co-oppressor with Prospero. In broad terms, Lamming might be correct to assume that it is Prospero who attempts to provide Caliban with 'education, meaning the possession of the word', but it is actually Miranda who teaches him.[50]

> when thou didst not, savage,
> Know thine own meaning, but wouldst gabble like
> A thing most brutish, I endow'd thy purposes
> With words that made them known. (I. 2. 357)

In teaching Caliban to speak her father's language, Miranda has confirmed her own position within the patriarchal symbolic order and has also further alienated herself from the pre-symbolic, pre-linguistic feminine space from which Caliban 'gabbles'.

In contrast, Caliban is never fully assimilated despite his surface acquisition of Prospero's language, and although, as Lamming states, 'Prospero lives in the absolute certainty that Language which is his gift to Caliban is the very prison in which Caliban's achievements will be realised and restricted', his relation to pre-symbolic language through his mother Sycorax (characterized within the

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[48]Ibid, pp. 111-12.
[49]Ibid, p. 115.
[50]Ibid, p. 109.

play as archetypally feminine and diabolic) prevents any such finite constraints. Given this reading it is not surprising that the most poetic speech in the play is spoken by Caliban.[51]

> the isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not...
> ...that, when I wak'd
> I cried to dream again. (III. 2. 133-35 & 140-41)

This evocation of a place of nurture is reminiscent of a regression to the infantile world of maternal intimacy, and pre-colonial belonging, which could also represent the pre-Oedipal semiotic chora in Kristeva's terms. Therefore, while Caliban and Miranda alike are potential outsiders to 'the word' as Logos, mother-less Miranda is socialized into its order through subordination to the (Lacanian) Name of the Father and moreover through her subordination of an 'other' to it. In this play Miranda is exiled not simply from Italy (her motherland) but more significantly from her mother and the maternal influence. She is orphaned from the semiotic, pre-patriarchal world which might provide a space for resistance or slippage out of the symbolic order. It is therefore through his links with his mother and the secrets of the isle (his maternal inheritance) that Caliban holds the potential to rupture Prospero's colonial and patriarchal order, and it is surely this threat (to himself and Miranda) which Prospero responds to with his vehement suppression of the mother.

However, in terms of my playful analogy between Miranda and Creole women, the possibility for alignment with Caliban against Prospero still exists although not realized in this instance by Miranda, who is fully re-integrated into patriarchal Europe through her marriage to Ferdinand. As Lamming points out, 'In different circumstances, they could be together in a way that Miranda and her father could not.'[52] It is this ambiguous and unstable relationship to the linguistic and cultural traditions both within and without Prospero's world which I believe characterizes the difficult and multi-accentuated position of the Creole woman and her texts. I hope to be able to draw out some of these more subtle divergences in later chapters and my wish here is merely to open up a space for 'Miranda' which appears to have been closed through previous masculinist-centred readings of *The Tempest*. It would be misleading to propose that Creole women writers were more closely aligned with alternative cultural and literary traditions to that of the dominant colonial establishment, however,

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[51]Ibid, p. 110.
[52]Ibid, p. 115.

I believe that it is equally reductive to simply categorize their position according to colonial boundaries of racial difference in an unproblematized collusion with Prospero's representatives.

In 'A Monster, A Child, A Slave', Lamming engages with the complexity of the triangular relationship between Prospero, Miranda and Caliban, but he remains within its parameters. Consequently, the black Caribbean woman unrepresented by Shakespeare is not even a significant absence to Lamming (or to Sander). As I have already discussed, her place in literary histories of the Caribbean in the first half of the twentieth century is often overlooked or undermined, and obviously one of the key aims of this thesis is to explore the texts of 'Caliban's (woman) sister' and her position in relation to dominant and legitimated discourses which have served to dispossess her of a 'speaking' subjectivity. However, I do wish to return briefly to Sylvia Wynter's piece which aims to take us beyond Shakespeare and Lamming, 'Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the 'Demonic Ground' of Caliban's 'Woman".

I have already discussed Wynter's argument in relation to the emergence of the silenced 'native woman', and simply wish to highlight the problems which her approach presents in terms of my reading of Creole women and their texts here. The most significant of these is that in attempting to position the excluded 'native woman' Wynter does offer a somewhat simplistic reading of Miranda's situation. Wynter foregrounds the relation that Miranda bears to Prospero, aligning her with him in her assimilation and consolidation of a 'monarchical' discourse. While this is clearly substantiated by the text, Wynter's reading fixes Miranda within this ideological confine without the possibility of any allegiance with Caliban in her lack of a matrilineal traditional or her potential entry into the disruptive semiotic chora. For Wynter, Miranda serves to represent the racially defined Caucasian daughter of Prospero, rather than the culturally positioned Creole woman. However, Wynter's assertion of ' the physiognomic (and cultural) difference between the populations groups of Prospero/Miranda and that of Caliban' does not fully account for the fact that Miranda is only about three years old when she is shipwrecked on the island with her father and does draw her experience from its world.[53] I would suggest that Miranda (as Creole female) is not unproblematically tied to Prospero's European patriarchal or monarchical language or way of seeing, but through both her gender and cultural positioning is potentially at odds with these, even though she is clearly profoundly influenced by them in Shakespeare's particular scenario. While Wynter's argument is compelling in its articulation

[53]Sylvia Wynter, p. 362.

of the way in which the 'native woman' as 'stranger' to both discourses is different in way which cannot be (and should not be) assimilated within them, she does not venture any such imaginative reconstruction of Miranda outside of the fixed text and consequently almost seems to repeat the very pattern of articulation through disarticulation which she critiques within *The Tempest*, although she evidently positions the 'native woman' as speaking subject.

As these sketches of possible ways of reading Caribbean (literary) history show, the task of negotiating a model which can represent the complexity of one group without excluding or simplifying the position of another is not easy to achieve. However, this should perhaps counsel us of the impossibility of a totalizing perspective or narrative of the history of a region such as the Caribbean where peoples and cultures cannot be readily disentangled from each other, and endorse the significance of consciously provisional and partial versions of its configuration.

History and Gender Politics

It is clearly important to be aware of the ways in which histories are informed by certain biases or exclusions according to gender. Certainly any attempt to reconstruct a picture of women's history in Jamaica is particularly difficult as the issues of inscription, representation and voice, already key considerations with regard to 'colonial history', are extremely resonant in the context of colonial women's history where questions of authentic historical subjects and of ideologically informed narratives become even more vexed. A writing of women's history is also problematic with its conscious attempt to foreground gender over culture and class in its agenda for analysis. Nevertheless, I wish to discuss certain events in order to see how they might have impacted on the gender politics of Jamaican society during this period, but wish to resist a narrative which implies a particular reading of the development of women's lives.

Although distinct areas of oppression, in many ways the gender politics of Jamaica at this time were subsumed within the more conspicuous cultural politics of the society. Although Rhonda Cobham-Sander asserts 'that Jamaican women in the early part of the twentieth century were, in comparison to their counterparts in post-Victorian England, both economically and sexually independent' it is important to be aware of the policies and agencies which the colonial administration implemented in order to end any

such female autonomy.[54] Traces of female independence residual from the slavery period (when the exploitation of and indifference to all black people meant that morality and lifestyle was not determined according to gender divides) was fiercely countered by a new wave of interest in women's lives and the attendant post-emancipation efforts to uphold and enforce eurocentric ideals of femininity for all women.

Perhaps the earliest organization to attempt to socialize Jamaican women along these lines was The Lady Musgrave Self-Help Society of Jamaica, founded in 1865 (not insignificantly the year of the Morant Bay Rebellion). Its stated purpose was to cultivate 'feminine industries such as embroideries, native jams, jellies and drawn thread work to provide employment for poor needlewomen', thus shifting economic independence into the arena of prescribed femininity.[55] The title of this organisation reflects its affinity to colonial establishment and a British Victorian ideology, not only in the patronage of the Governor's wife, but also in the patronizing suggestion of 'self-help'.

Attempts at this form of socialization were consolidated early in the twentieth century. In 1918 the Women's Social Service Club emerged with their efforts to 'uplift womanhood'. However, as Rhoda Reddock points out, these endeavours did not work to liberate women in any meaningful way, but rather functioned to perpetuate the wishes of colonial authority as they 'seldom went outside of the parameters of domesticity, morality and class-boundness'.[56] It is clear that any attention and interest directed specifically at Jamaican women at this time served to merely reinforce their position within a male-dominated society and to establish codes of normalized behaviour and attitudes in line with eurocentric conceptions of femininity. Although nominally 'women's organisations', these societies were in no way women-centred but were rather directed at the marginalization of women within the patriarchally organized public life of Jamaica. Unsurprisingly, colonial establishment-centred organisations were also directed at the 'moral improvement' of women, this is made explicit by the founding of the Social Purity Association of Jamaica 'which was formed in 1917 for the purpose of eradicating immorality and venereal disease'.[57] The assumption that it was women who needed to be

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[54]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 195.

[55]French and Ford Smith, 1984, p.170 quoted in Rhoda Reddock, 'Feminism, Nationalism and the Early Women's Movement in the English Speaking Caribbean' (paper presented for the First International Conference on Women Writers of the English-speaking Caribbean, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, 8-10 April 1988).

[56]Rhoda Reddock, ibid, p.6.

[57]Loc cit.

educated in 'social purity', either because they were innately morally irresponsible or culpable (and therefore posed a threat to Jamaica's social purity) or because they were intended to take on the role of moral guardians or even repositories of moral virtue, again confirms the underlying Western patriarchal ideology which informed this so-called women's society.

Historians who have carefully researched this area, draw attention to the way in which divisions on a class basis crept in to this organisation and the attempted socialization of women within Jamaican society more generally. Economic independence was granted for working-class women but not middle-class ones and limited suffrage was bestowed upon middle class women but not working class ones. Indeed, it is essential to appreciate how restrictive the class ideology was at this time. Rhoda Reddock suggests that the first black women's society, Jamaica Women's Liberal Club, formed around 1937, was governed by a belief in class determinism which remained unchallenged despite its commitment to promoting the role and status of women in Jamaica's public and political life. 'Members saw themselves as establishing a place for women within the developing national identity of their country. They, however, saw women's place as clearly defined by their class and accepted their natural superiority in relation to women of the labouring classes.'[58]

Nevertheless, their acquiescence to established social hierarchies did not extend to the racist organisation of Jamaican society and, as Reddock points out, 'The Liberal Club was also influenced by the ideas of Marcus Garvey. The early aims and objectives of the club included the study of negro history'[59] However, the interests in racial politics were not merely academic and 'leading member, Amy Bailey defined herself as a feminist and took up a personal campaign against the non-hiring of black women by commercial enterprises'.[60] Furthermore, the new awareness and support which this collective engagement with issues relevant to black Jamaican women provided, also facilitated 'middle-strata liberal feminists like Una Marson, Amy Bailey and others of the Women's Liberal Club...to challenge the leadership of white upper-class women's organisations'.[61] There is also a possibility that this Club created a space for collectivity and discussion amongst Jamaica's female population. In February 1939 Amy Bailey chaired the first Jamaican Women's Conference, held at Collegiate Hall, Kingston. A report in the *Daily Gleaner* describes the demands for equal rights which were made: 'Ridiculing the age-old

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[58]Ibid, p. 11.
[59]Loc cit.
[60]Ibid, p. 10.
[61]Ibid, p. 22.

institution of women's inequality to men, proclaiming the world-wide dawn of a new feminine era, and declaring that women of Jamaica are ready, willing and able to march side by side with men.'[62] The continuation of this feminist group and approach is suggested by the staging of the second Jamaican Women's Conference in Kingston in April 1941, with Ina Bailey (sister of Amy) as Honorary Secretary.

The Liberal Club's ambiguous pairing of the avocation of black women's rights alongside the acceptance of colonial hierarchies is also demonstrated by its position in relation to women's careers. Reddock comments that 'little challenge was made to the existing sexual division of labour. Indeed training in domestic work was a major means of bringing black women closer to European levels of housewifery and domesticity. This unfortunately was perceived as progress and upliftment'.[63] It would appear that this acceptance of sexual differentiation as a basis for social differentiation was not an uncommon position amongst Jamaica's womanist population.

Joan French's article, 'Colonial Policy Towards Women After The 1938 Uprising: The Case of Jamaica', provides an interesting insight into the relationship between the treatment of women and the wider patterns of social change in Jamaican during this time of crises. French concludes that for women in Jamaica the period 1938 to 1944 represented a phase of carefully gendered policies which effectively served to 'blunt the militancy of women...[and] make [them] second-hand beneficiaries of the reforms implemented after '38'.[64] Indeed, the findings of the Royal Commission chaired by Lord Mayne suggested that the 'woman question' was at the very heart of Jamaica's problems and thus the very focus for its 'solution'. As a consequence, 'the main pillars of the policy were the promotion of the ideology of the dependent housewife, male breadwinner, and the promotion of 'stable monogamy', preferably marriage. The promotion of the idea of voluntary social work as the most laudable and prestigious occupation for middle strata women'.[65] In Albinia Hutton's 1930 work, *Life in Jamaica*, we can trace an early example of the willing acceptance of good charitable works as the sanctioned vocation of a middle class (or upper class) Jamaican woman. In the sketch 'A Jamaican Village', Hutton relates a day in her life and the life of the village.

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[62]*Daily Gleaner*, 23 February 1939.
[63]Rhoda Reddock, p. 11.
[64]Joan French, 'Colonial Policy Towards Women After The 1938 Uprising: The Case of Jamaica.', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 34 (1988), p. 38.
[65]Ibid, pp. 39-40.

> We have just received an S.O.S. call from the village. A certain man has sent to tell us that he is very ill, and would 'De misses dem" kindly come to see him. The nearest doctor is ten miles away, and as the people are too poor to send for him, we often receive such messages.[66]

As the narrative develops and they reach the village, they also have to rescue a young woman from the cure (told as afflictions) of the local obeah woman. Economic difference is naturalized in this sketch, which acknowledges and catalogues cultural difference (even linguistic) in a condescending manner which shows both concern and contempt at the village customs. Most significantly the charity, even heroism, of her actions is explicitly connected to an imperial ethos in the last line of the piece: 'Is not "The Back of Beyond" also "An outpost of Empire"?'.[67]

In order to institute such practices as the social norm, by removing women from the possibility of economic empowerment and integrating them into a patriarchal family unit these would secure the continuation of an essentially eurocentric and colonial model of social progress, 'part of its programme helped to promote and create an organisation of women, the Jamaica Federation of women'.[68] Founded in 1944 by Mary Huggins (again the wife of the current Colonial Governor), the Jamaica Federation of Women modelled itself on the Women's Institute and rallied under the banner of 'For Our Homes and Our Country'. The conservative feminist beliefs which Huggins and the Federation advocated did little to forward the cause of Jamaican women as a whole, but rather held to narrowly prescribed definitions of family life which were preached to working-class women in the hope of redeeming Jamaican society from its perceived moral chaos, which might be translated by feminist social historians as its potential collapse in terms of colonial (racist, sexist) authority.

Retrospectively it is easy to surmise that the limited recognition and advancement, which this cluster of women's organisations appeared to offer, functioned as a means for guaranteeing the dissemination of a fundamentally regressive attitude to the majority population of Jamaican working-class women. The rhetoric of women's issues was expediently employed amongst the middle classes, because, as French suggests, these women 'could serve the socialisation process'.[69] It is not much more difficult to perceive that even these restricted opportunities were too attractive for middle-class (especially black) Jamaican women to refuse.

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[66]Albinia Hutton, *Life in Jamaica* (London, 1930), p. 3.
[67]Ibid, p. 9.
[68]Joan French, p. 39.
[69]Ibid, p. 43.

Nevertheless, outside of small groupings of sympathetic ears, the wider state apparatus after 1938 still functioned as powerful agencies of patriarchal power. Married women were not allowed to pursue careers as civil servants, the school curriculum was revised in line with the notion of female education as matrimonial training in 1939, and the 1941 Committee on Concubinage and Illegitimacy chaired by the Lord Bishop recommended that working-class women be directed into domestic duties, clearly revealing the Church's support for the attempt at patriarchal social restructuring.[70]

Despite the fact that such ingrained class divisions were clearly intended and enforced in order to protect the interests of the minority, the assumption that working class women would simply obey the edicts of their socially advanced 'sisters' was not always correct. As David Lowenthal states: 'the failure of the Jamaican mass marriage campaign of the late 1940s underscored the futility of moral exhortation by an elite itself notorious for dual family arrangements'.[71] However, as historical evidence nearly always emerges from and tends to support middle-class lives and perspectives, it is difficult to know or even speculate about the actual changes to Jamaican working-class women's lives which this sustained twentieth century campaign of feminine socialization effected. Nevertheless, it is perhaps instructive to note that in her 1991 book, *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-speaking Caribbean*, Olive Senior still sees the issues of lower-class women's supposed independence and strength, and the barriers (both political and attitudinal) to their actual social advancement and achievement as worthy of serious reflection.[72]

However, this emphasis on class as the primary means of social differentiation does not to exclude the fact that there were particular anxieties and constraints surrounding women of all classes. One of the focal points of such attitudes was the 'spinster'. Representing a troubling excess to the heterosexual nuclei of social integration which the prevalent ethos of patriarchal femininity fostered, it not surprising that unmarried women needed to be 'managed' and directed carefully. The statistics for this period seem to suggest that the number of unmarried women was at a high, but the problem was probably not simply that they existed but rather that their aspirations as twentieth century women or as women with a matriheritage of slavery might seek to disrupt the *status quo*. Although the war may have offered a temporary

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[70]See French for a more detailed discussion.

[71]David Lowenthal, p. 110.

[72]Olive Senior, *Working Miracles: Women's Lives in the English-speaking Caribbean* (London, 1991).

entry into the public sphere for some women (in Jamaica and the motherland) and a rise in female solidarity and confidence, the effects of economic decline and subsequent male demand for jobs, meant that many women were forced out of paid employment and thus needed to be re-integrated into the re-established patriarchal social order. To this end, any promotion of female independence expedient during the war years was often countered by a fierce promotion of femininity rather than feminism.

David Lowenthal comments that

> The West Indies are infested with maiden ladies, socially precluded from concubinage or casual affairs, who devote themselves to spoiling nieces and nephews, promoting good works, and arbitering class mores.[73]

In a similar way, Joan French points out how

> Among these feminists [affiliated with Jamaica Federation of Women] the image of women as housewife was strengthened, and the spinster was seen as leading an unhealthy existence, though it was accepted that spinsters could re-channel the sex instinct into creative vocations.[74]

These strategies to direct unmarried women into 'good deeds' and to charge them with policing (rather than disturbing) the established social structure are obviously crucially concerned with a containment of female sexuality and as such become particularly interesting when we consider Rhonda Cobham-Sander's observation that:

> Social studies of Jamaican middle-class society between the wars and after often draw attention to the disproportionate number of unmarried black women within the Jamaican middle class....The sociologist Fernando Henriques takes note of this trend in *Family and Colour in Jamaica* and ascribes it to the tendency of Jamaican men to marry upward on the colour scale, rejecting well-educated women of their own shade or darker in preference to fairer complexioned women or foreign white women through whom they could increase their social prestige.[75]

It was almost certainly black women who were perceived by the colonial authorities as the most morally unstable (sexually incontinent) and therefore menacing if they remained unintegrated into the social units. However, for the black women who were aware of the oppressive nature of these units, integration levied a heavy price, as will be discussed later with reference to Marson's poems 'To Wed or Not To Wed' and 'Kinky Hair Blues'.

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[73]David Lowenthal, p. 110.
[74]Joan French, p. 51.
[75]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), pp. 213-4.

In the consideration of black Jamaican women who remained unmarried, the hypocrisy of the reverence for 'spinsters' as guardians of moral virtue, family values and spiritual lives when set alongside the assumptions of female failure (to marry, to have children) which are also heavily implicated in the patriarchal rhetoric of dissuasion from autonomy for women, is further compounded by the gross hypocrisy of a colonial society which having instituted a slave culture in which black women were sexually exploited and abused, further restricts their control over their own sexuality by producing social dictates and instigating groups of 'well-wishing', 'morally upright' women to police them.

However, although the cultural politics of this situation makes the motivation clearer, it was not only the Caribbean where an excess of unmarried women was a subject for discussion. In her 1934 book, *Women and a Changing Civilisation*, Winifred Holtby, the writer, feminist and peace campaigner (and acquaintance of Una Marson's), explores the duplicity of patriarchal society in its attitudes to women (a duplicity which is even more intolerably manipulative of black women whom although most abused are cast as potentially most harmful).

> Why then do we associate spinsterhood with frustration? Bachelors are not assumed to be frustrated....The reason for this distinction is historical. The long concentration of women upon domestic functions had for so many years deprived them when unmarried of normal activities and achievements that the popular mind came to associate a woman's marriage with her fulfilment. And conversely, without marriage she must remain "unfulfilled." Whereas neither sexual experience nor social activity for a man was presumed to depend upon his marriage. The double standard of morality expected all unmarried women to remain virgin, but cherished no such expectations for a bachelor.[76]

It could clearly be argued that the promotion of the European cult of femininity affected black Jamaican women more severely, as they had enjoyed at least a measure of self-determination with regards to womanly practices and, equally significantly, because this cult held not only European manners but also European bodies as its ideals. Also, the attempt to market the eurocentric feminine domestic destiny transculturally was not simply incidentally historically contiguous with the erosion of African cultural practices and beliefs, which were often woman-centred. In *Women of the Caribbean*, Pat Ellis discusses how many of the African retentions which were

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[76]Winifred Holtby, *Women and a Changing Civilisation* (London, 1934), pp. 130-1.

focused in the areas of religion, song, dance, folklore, medicine, where women held cultural responsibility fell into decline during the twentieth century.

> After the 1900s the black woman's predominant cultural role was to alter. The decline of the peasantry, urbanization, some industrialization, the new emphasis on anglicization, the introduction of education and the fact that social mobility was defined in European terms meant a growth in the Europeanization of these societies...The "women's culture" became even more of an alternative, known but marginal, alive but less respected.[77]

Nevertheless, the life of the Creole women in Jamaica was also not fixed to an unbroken line of eurocentric femininity from some distant point of uncorrupted European origin. Indeed, while it is often assumed that the colonial woman was preserved as an enclave of European virtue and cultural purity, Edward Long argues that from the earliest colonies it was the women who creolized more readily.

> Antillean absenteeism left rural whites little alternative except slave modes of life. Isolated from other whites, with daily contacts limited to slaves and free coloured servants, the Creole woman in particular took on folk speech, diet, and customs, 'gobbling pepper-pot, seated on the floor, with her sable hand-maids around her....Her ideas are narrowed to...the business of the plantation, the tittle-tattle of the parish; the tricks, superstitions, diversions, and profligate discourses of black servants.[78]

As a contemporary female academic, Pat Ellis draws similar conclusions, although with rather less phallocentric language.

> The [European] women here were not cultural creators but saw themselves as defenders of the inherited values. From the beginning, however, they were shaped by their new environment. They adopted many aspects of the slaves' culture in dress, food and speech. In the end visitors recognized them for what they were, Euro-creoles. They were no longer Europeans living in the tropics but Creoles with an altered sensibility. This created a conflict within them which pervades the literature. Many attempt to come to terms with their Creoleness, while others recoil and, although they increasingly share the Creole world, the problem of identity remains a real one for them.[79]

These observations tend to support the view that Creole women are ambivalently positioned in terms of the two major conflicting cultural traditions within Caribbean societies, which I discussed earlier with reference

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[77]*Women of the Caribbean* edited by Pat Ellis (London, 1986), pp. 110-11.
[78]Edward Long, *History of Jamaica* (London, 1754) Vol. II, p.279 quoted in David Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies*, p. 38.
[79]Pat Ellis, ed., p. 109.

to Miranda. However, in terms of the Creole women who are the focus of attention in this study, it seems very unlikely that any of them was involved in organisations committed to the advancement of fellow women (however naïve these may have been), unlike Una Marson, who, in addition to her participation listed above was also a member of International Alliance of Women and active in The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

Although women in Jamaica at this time may have experienced a restricted access to both the reading and writing of poetry compared to men due to their limited educational and social opportunities, in many respects the main obstacles preventing an acceptance of the creative writer were ethnicity and class more than gender. With the hierarchy of imperialism more active than that of patriarchy, it was more likely for a middle class white or coloured woman to become a published poet than for a lower class black man. However, in her research on the relationships between Jamaican society and the creative artist, Rhonda Cobham-Sander observes particular correlations between the changing profile of desirable women's roles in society and the literary texts produced during this period.

> Given the background it is not difficult to surmise how the Jamaican lower-class women came to be perceived by the rest of the society as both unusually industrious and sexually promiscuous...these women who appeared to work, and hard work was perhaps only second to chastity in the Victorian hierarchy of values. For the dominant culture these traits presented a contradiction in terms and it is not overstating the case to say that nearly all Jamaican creative writing before 1920 is taken up with trying to resolve this contradiction in away that would rationalise the position of women in Jamaican society in terms acceptable to the dominant culture.[80]

As black middle class women were also a target for socialisation, fostered to perceive marriage and maternity, or alternatively chastity and charity as suitable paths of feminine development, literary depictions both reflected and consolidated these female destinies. Cobham-Sander records how:

> Instead of writing about women as workers and free sexual agents, the writers in post-war Jamaica portrayed women in domestic settings, as ideal figures whose conflicts were likely to be between marriage and the service of God rather than a choice of lovers.[81]

I wish to reserve my comments on such issues until chapter five which closely examines the gender politics of the archive under consideration.

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[80]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 198.
[81]Ibid, p. 210.

Publishing Histories

In her thesis, 'The Creative Writer and West Indian Society: Jamaica 1900-1950', Rhonda Cobham-Sander provides a comprehensive account of the development of printing and publishing in Jamaica leading up to and during this period, and the particular memberships of literary clubs and coteries. My aim here is to document such publications and contributions as are relevant to our understanding of the general profile of literary production at this time and more particularly to the involvement of the women poets under consideration in this thesis.

Poetry Leagues and Clubs

By far the most influential organisation for the promotion and production of poetry during the early part of the twentieth century was the Poetry League of Jamaica, and the majority of the poets who form the focus for discussion here had some level of involvement with the League.

The particular notions of poetic achievement promoted by J. E. C. McFarlane, the founding and arguably the most active member of the League, and to a certain extent by the League as a collective body, are discussed in detail in chapter three, but the relative aesthetic conservatism and appropriation of eurocentric literary models is perhaps of some relevance to our consideration of individual's orientation to this organisation, as is the fact that it was a branch of the Empire Poetry League.

The Poetry League of Jamaica was formally initiated on 19 September 1923, and with its public meetings, lectures, prizes and Year Books (from 1939) undoubtedly served to raise the profile of poetic activity in Jamaica. Among the Creole women poets Arabel Moulton-Barrett, Albinia Hutton, Elsie Hutton, Tropica, Lena Kent, Constance Hollar, Clara Maude Garrett, M. M. Ormsby and Mary Adella Walcott all joined the League and their poetry appeared in the Year Books published by New Dawn Press. Indeed, many of the poets involved and published by the League were women and there appears to have been no discrimination along gender lines.[82] Una Marson was the

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[82]Other women poets published in the Year Books include Ruth Horner, Agnes Maxwell Hall, Joan Richmond, Faith Goodheart, Anita Kneale, Barbara Lushington, Nellie Olson, Wynn Rutty, Mary Lockett, Dorothy Whitfield and Lucy Norman (who published *West Indian*

League's first secretary but was in England during the opening years of the 1940s when the Year Books emerged. However, Inez Sibley another African Jamaica woman writer (whose pseudonym was Pennib) and Hope McKay (Claude McKay's daughter) and many of the black male poets published poems with the League, suggesting that individuals from a variety of cultural heritages participated in its activities. Although the Year Books did draw together a variety of Jamaican poetry from a range of poets, they nevertheless functioned as a powerful mouth-piece for the promotion and glorification of J. E. C. McFarlane's views and poetry. The 1943 Year Book includes a lengthy essay by J. J. Mills on J. E. C. McFarlane entitled 'Our Leading Poet'.

Several documents pertaining to the League's events can be found in the West India Reference Library in Kingston, these point to the particular involvement and recognition of certain individuals. There are pamphlets recording the 'Formal recognition of Thomas Redcam as poet Laureate of Jamaica at tenth annual meeting of the Jamaican branch of the Poetry League, Ward Theatre 26 October 1933' as well as a 'Memorial Address in honour of Constance Hollar and Astley Clerk' given by J. E. C MacFarlane in 1945.[83] Such events are evidently problematic in their canonical and colonial gestures but such implications do not negate the value of Jamaican poets offering some recognition to each other's work.

Retrospective evaluations point to the support and stimulation for poetry which the League provided. In an article celebrating twenty five years of the Jamaica Poetry League, Archie Lindo reflects on

> years of pioneer work, of high endeavour and of struggle in the face of public indifference and sometimes of lack of interest from their own members.
>
> The League which was founded by Mr. J. E. Clare McFarlane has accomplished a great deal. It has helped to keep the writing fraternity together. It has been responsible for the encouragement of the young writer, for the publication in print of the work of our poets and for a kindling of interest in our literature by means of public lectures and radio broadcasts.[84]

This view of the League as a key forum for literary activity with a clear ability to promote and publish material as well as to generate an audience from

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Scenes and Other Verses in 1944). I am aware that many of these names are pseudonyms but have been unable to discover any significant details about these writers or their work in general.

[83]The following pamphlets are held in the West India Reference Library. 'Formal recognition of Thomas Redcam as poet Laureate of Jamaica at tenth annual meeting of the Jamaican branch of the Poetry League, Ward Theatre Oct. 26 1933', 'Memorial Address in honour of Constance Hollar and Astley Clerk' .

[84]'Poet's Corner', *The Sunday Gleaner*, 19 September 1948, p. 19.

poetry being written by Jamaicans is also echoed by A .J. Seymour, who comments on how 'The Poetry League seems to have provided a framework for encouraging a poetic literature in Jamaica, by lectures and discussions and by encouraging and fostering the teaching of poetry in schools'.[85] Certainly, the introduction of some Jamaican poetry in schools seems an important achievement, even though the cultural status of those poems selected remains somewhat contentious.

Although clearly a partial view, coming from the League's Honorary Secretary, Wycliffe Bennett recalls the way in which

> the rays of our literary destiny which were finding individual expression in the works of these and other writers gathered to a focus under the dynamic leadership of John Ebenezer Clare McFarlane in the founding of the Poetry League of Jamaica...The Poetry League of Jamaica is not a league of poets, but a band of persons with a love of poetry and other forms of creative literature'.[86]

The League's function as a designated place in which poetry could be shared and discussed clearly had a significance, not least in the debates and challenges concerning Jamaican poetry which they provoked, but the League became increasingly out of step with the changing cultural profile of poetry in Jamaica and, during the exciting and turbulent years of the 1930s, became associated with a rather defensive and tired stance. Rhonda Cobham-Sander points to the League's 'social remoteness' and suggests that:

> by the end of 1933, most of the League's members seem to have exhausted their slender fund of inspiration. Their publications over the next few decades show a tendency to repeat and conserve old achievements rather than to continue publishing new and original work.[87]

Although the four anthologies published between 1929 and 1949, *Songs of Empire* edited by Constance Hollar, and *From Overseas*, *Voices From the Summerland* and *A Treasury of Jamaican Poetry* all edited by J. E. C. McFarlane, do represent a range of poets and poetry which developed in the context of the Poetry League of Jamaica, they do not offer any real opportunity to trace any development or change in this group's work as there is substantial replication of material. As each of these anthologies aims at putting forward 'the best' of Jamaican poetry, they actually consolidate a

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[85]'Poetry in the West Indies', Kyk-Over-Al (Special Issue 'The Literary Adventure of the West Indies'), 2, (1950), p. 20.
[86]'Poets Play Part In Jamaica's Life', *The Sunday Gleaner*, 17 October 1948, p. 6.
[87]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 89.

static and conservative version of this poetry and furthermore begin to create a canon of Jamaican poetry. Poems such as Albinia Hutton's 'The Empire's Flag' appears in all four, and Lena Kent's "At The Gate Alone' and "The Hills of St Andrew', Tropica's 'The Green, Blue and Gold', Constance Hollar's 'Wide Spaces' and 'Flaming June', J. E. C. McFarlane's 'England How I Love Thee' and 'My Country', and Claude McKay's 'I Shall Return' all appear in at least two of these collected volumes.

Una Marson's poetry is clearly a notable exception to this rule, as her 1937 volume *The Moth and the Star* clearly presents new poetic departures both formally and in its choice of subjects, although it is likely that her years spent abroad meant that by this stage she had little involvement with the League. There were also a few other younger poets whose creative energies helped to revive the League towards the end of this decade, and the end of many of the original members' creative life spans. In a sense the League was comprized of two generations and in 1938, when Una Marson was only thirty-three years old, Constance Hollar and Clara Maude Garrett were fifty-eight years old, Lena Kent was fifty years old and Mary Adella Wolcott was sixty-four years old.[88] Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that a different notion of Jamaican cultural affairs was emerging and 'eventually the League became the butt of attack from all directions'.[89]

Objections to the League's position can be detected in Roger Mais's protest against the defiantly entrenched aesthetic practices and beliefs (discussed in chapter three), even though Mais published several of his poems in the League's 1940 Year Book. For Mais the antipathy was felt towards the specific kind of poetry fostered by the League, was tempered by an appreciation of their genuine (if misplaced) interest in generating a Jamaican poetry. However, in his review of the 'Year Book of the Poetry League of Jamaica', Bruce Wardropper does not restrain his discontent.

> In the "Year Book of the Poetry League of Jamaica, 1941" - a book distinctive in having the ugliest cover design since Edwardian days - some ex-schoolchildren with vaguest reminiscences of the R. L. S. - R. K. doggerels which pass for poetry in our schools, publish their exercises in verse-writing...The present book would be more valuable if it contained five poems instead of eighty-five. As it stands it contains little for a reviewer to linger over. It is only as a local product and as a source of merriment that it deserves longer treatment.[90]

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[88]As these differences in ages suggest, the term 'contemporaries' is applied only loosely in this thesis.

[89]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), pp. 93-4.

[90]Bruce Wardropper, 'Book Review', *Public Opinion*, 29 November 1941, p. 8.

Although, Albert Gomes's editorials in *The Beacon* refer to Trinidad, it does not seem inappropriate to link Wardropper's evident distaste for the Jamaican League's poetry to Gomes's anathema for the literary club in general.

> Our opinion of the literary club movement remains unchanged. As far as we can see their very existence constitutes a flagrant prostitution of the word "Literature." That they promote social intercourse of a kind we reluctantly admit...If a group of energetic adolescents wish to amuse themselves over a few tea-cups why must Wordsworth's grave be disturbed? No one wants to deny these simple souls the right to acquire culture or side-step ennui...There is, as far as we can see, no via media. The spirit of the literary club movement is the very antithesis of artistic or literary...The very atmosphere of the "literary" club reeks of an unctuousness, a stupid formality and a hypocrisy, from which any man or woman of true artistic sensibilities would flee in disgust.[91]

Also, it is important to note that despite its fairly wide membership, the League was not welcoming to all the stirrings of poetic achievement in Jamaica. The rather limited (and exclusive) views on poetry and the poet which the League advocated did not allow for the exciting work of Louise Bennett, who '"wasn't ever asked to a Jamaican Poetry League meeting", Louise Bennett remembers; "most people thought that...they couldn't discourse with me at all because I was going to talk to them in Jamaican dialect which they couldn't understand"'.[92]

Despite its obvious prejudices, there is sense in which the Jamaica Poetry League was less precious than its predecessors, although even these were not culturally exclusive in any simple or obvious manner. The James Hill Literary Society (1912) and the literary gatherings which Claude McKay termed 'Browning clubs where the poetry of Robert Browning was studied but not understood' both represented attempts to foster an appreciation of poetry in Jamaica.[93] The first of these is distinctive in its aim at a proto-nationalistic event where the work of Jamaican writers could be shared. Reporting on this event Thomas MacDermot comments on the event's importance in terms of breaking down the binary oppositions which colonialism established, with 'the descendants of slaves and their masters equally taking their places in the field of literature'.[94] Even the 'Browning Clubs' of the 'Creole ladies' which McKay evidently did not respect greatly invited him to read. However, the surface inclusivity of these clubs should not be mistaken for any genuinely

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[91]Albert Gomes, 'Literary Clubs', *The Beacon*, II, (1933), in *From Trinidad* edited by Sander, pp. 29-30.
[92]Dennis Scott, 'Bennett on Bennett', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 14 (1968), p. 98.
[93]*My Green Hills of Jamaica* reprinted in Morris ed. (Kingston, 1979), p. 86.
[94]Quoted in Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p.74.

transcultural approach to poetry. Indeed, for many of the younger generation of Jamaica's poets, whose poetry was eager to embrace rather than to evade the shifts in social moods, the somewhat prescriptive and out-dated beliefs of the Jamaica Poetry League in particular meant that it became a stifling obstacle to poetic expression rather than an enabling institution.

Newspapers and Journals

Although the Poetry League of Jamaica was able to publish anthologies of its poets' work for some years, the access to publishing outlets was clearly not always easy. The first anthology of Jamaican Poetry, *Voices From The Summerland*, which was aimed at Jamaican schools, was published in London by Fowler Wright in 1929 and twenty years later when a revised and up-dated version of this appeared, *A Treasury of Jamaican Poetry*, it was published in London by the University of London Press. Writing in 1966, John Figueroa points to the lack of any large scale support for Caribbean poets wishing to achieve a public profile. 'Until recently there was no West Indian publishing house. There were few opportunities to publish verse regularly; and unfortunately the reading public for poetry in the West Indies has tended to be found mainly in schools, where little West Indian poetry has been read.[95] Local newspapers did provide a valuable opportunity for poetry to be published and discussed, and as journalism appears to have been a fairly standard occupation for many of the island's (middle-class) writers (Una Marson included) there were often editors eager to emphasize their own literary talents, and those of others.

From her extensive research on the publishing activity in Jamaica, Rhonda Cobham-Sander suggests that:

> Literary publications in Jamaica before 1950 therefore can be linked with two broad groups; the Jamaica Times/ Jamaica Poetry League, with which such publishing ventures as the New Dawn Press and the All Jamaica Library are associated; and the Public Opinion/Focus group which produced the 1943 and 1948 Focus anthologies and helped to found the Pioneer Press.[96]

The *Jamaica Times*, which Thomas MacDermot edited from 1904, cultivated an educated, professional readership and provided cultural stimulation with its 'Poetry Corner'. From 1912, the *Jamaica Times* served to make public the high

[95]Introduction to *Caribbean Voices*, p. xiv.
[96]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 106.

level of literary activity in the island, 'the front page of each edition usually featured a new poem by a local author in its top left-hand corner, often on a subject of topical interest'.[97] Certainly poems by Albinia Hutton and M. M. (Milma) Ormsby were published on the poetry page of the paper, and J. E. C. McFarlane recalls first encountering the latter's poetry as a result of this exposure.[98] However, while Cobham-Sander's conclusion that this paper was more closely aligned to the Jamaica Poetry League may direct us to consider the *Jamaica Times* as more conservative and eurocentric in its interests, it did engage with the issues of racial politics on a global scale, informing its readers of significant events and individuals in America and Africa. However, the paper did not sustain its cultural interests for more than a decade, reverting to the *Gleaner*'s habit of publishing occasional poems, and often not the most exciting or innovative material to emerge. Indeed, the *Gleaner* expressed its interests in poetry at a later stage with a 'Poet's Corner' (which Archie Lindo began November of 1938 and continued intermittently into the 1940s), and perhaps most significantly with its venture into publishing, the Pioneer Press, which Henry Swanzy, in 1956 describes with some enthusiasm.

> In the last five years Kingston has even seen a special press, the Pioneer Press, started by the main newspaper, the *Gleaner*, to provide reading material for the new generation of self-awareness that is dawning. It, too, has a poet as director, Una Marson, who has had work published in England and America. The series has assembled a number of small but agreeable talents.[99]

Perhaps the most culturally engaged paper of this time was *Public Opinion* , a weekly paper which aimed to foreground issues of cultural politics. Cedric Lindo describes it as 'the first political weekly which had a literature page, a first in Jamaican life of the twentieth century'.[100] The writers associated with this publication demonstrated a willingness to court the discontent of a whole range of authorities (the colonial administration and the Catholic Church included) in their pursuit of a Jamaican cultural consciousness. There was also an attempt to realign literary sensibilities and this inevitably procured a clash of views with the already established Jamaica Poetry League.

Although there appears to have been some initial co-operation between the two groups which Rhonda Cobham-Sander cites, (for example the publication of Mais's poetry in the League's Year Book) by the early 1940s, *Public Opinion*

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[97]Ibid, p. 70
[98]*A Literature in the Making*, p. 57.
[99]'The Literary Situation in the Caribbean', p. 266.
[100]Cedric Lindo, private letter, 22 December 1990.

assumed a fairly explicit counter-position in terms of aesthetics and politics to that of the League. These debates will be examined in detail in chapter three, but it seems worth noting that when the paper began in 1937 it was staffed by many of the island's culturally active women, Edna Manley was editor, Una Marson and Amy Bailey were board members and Gloria Escoffery 'artist and poet (and Jamaican-white) was the editor of [the literature] page.[101] As *Public Opinion* faded, the skeleton group went on to produce *Focus* which had a short but interesting publishing history, continuing to campaign for Jamaican cultural nationalism.

Although I have briefly outlined the major publications in circulation in Jamaica at this time, I do wish to discuss three other journals relevant to the archive being examined in this thesis. My discussion here is motivated by the belief that any creative work is already partly evaluated from the context in which it appears and moreover that this context may have implications for writing as well as reading.

Herbert De Lisser's magazine, *Planter's Punch*, is a fascinating subject for an analysis of gender and cultural politics. Established in 1920, Rhonda Cobham-Sander perceives De Lisser's intention to be a reinforcement of colonial values amongst those with social power.

> He often seems to be urging his contemporaries in the upper-middle class not to forget their position and sink to the levels of their ancestors, and to maintain a correct distance socially between themselves and the less cultured members of the new black petite bourgeoisie.[102]

In my own reading of this magazine I was astounded by the conspicuous and relentless promotion of European graces and beauty and the particular concentration on the white female body. One article entitled 'The Fair Daughters of Jamaica' which frames ten photos of adolescent white women, is clearly seeking to establish links between a 'fairness' of complexion and of being.[103] De Lisser adopts a very mannered style, often presenting the poetry of a society lady or her 'beautiful' daughter alongside an estimation of their physical attraction or social and domestic skills. For example, discussing Lady Stubbs, the wife of the Governor, De Lisser declares that 'Lady Stubbs is a charming hostess. She has a gift of forceful literary expression'.[104] Despite the inclusion of a significant amount of women's verse, the magazine's interest is

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[101]Ibid.
[102]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 83.
[103]H. G. De Lisser, 'The Fair Daughters of Jamaica: Characteristics', *Planters' Punch*, 1 (1920), pp. 4-5.
[104]'Editorial', *Planters' Punch*, 2 (1927), p. 1.

never wholly poetic, and its excessive and outrageous interest in measuring woman as bodily objects discloses a clearly sexist bias. In an article on 'Miss Jamaica' by Sub Inspector Harvey Clarke, this propensity is clearly visible. 'Physically I bow to the perfections of our girls. There are very few with unshapely figures and those who do not reach the 100% class generally manage to dress effectively, so as to hide defects and bring out pleasing features.'[105] This approach to the subject of the island's 'beauty queen' is in sharp contrast to Una Marson's 1931 article in *The Cosmopolitan*, the magazine which she founded, in which she expresses her contempt for the insistent idealization of white beauty, epitomized by the recent announcement of yet another 'blond and blue-eyed' Miss Jamaica. Marson suggests that the title should have been awarded to a 'girl who is more truly representative of the majority of Jamaicans'.[106]

As I have already discussed, *Singer's Quarterly* was a scrap-book journal originally edited by Albinia Hutton and circulated amongst a small group of interested individuals. Now very dusty, fading and frail, its hand corrected, pasted and gaudy pages reveal an amazing range of materials from biblical postcards, snapshots, biographies of relatives, and letters from friends, to a pets' page with poems about and to animals. The extreme eclecticism of the journal can be illustrated with reference to one edition from Spring 1943, which presents poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay, Kipling, Christina Rossetti and Walter de la Mare, alongside those by Lena Kent, Elsie Hutton, Constance Hollar, Clara Maude Garrett, Pennib, and Archie Lindo. In addition there is an extract from *Time* magazine and a letter from Clara Maude Garrett in Canada with the address of a Canadian book binder willing to take on volumes of poetry. It is interesting that with such a broad range of poetry as its resource base (including Innez Sibley and Claude McKay) no poetry by Una Marson appears in the journal. Indeed, the only indication that the Creole women poets knew of Una Marson and her work comes in the 'Author's Foreword' to Constance Hollar's *Flaming June*. After a long list of thanks to the Creole women poets who have supported and encouraged her, Hollar writes

> I must not however omit...Una Marson who has become an international figure and has published three books of poetry. One can hear her fine sympathetic voice on the Radio as it comes to us from the B.B.C. - Bravo Una! We are proud of you![107]

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[105]Harvey Clarke, 'Miss Jamaica', *Planters' Punch*, 2 (1929), p. 5.

[106]*The Cosmopolitan* quoted in Rhonda Cobham-Sander. Unfortunately I have been unable to locate this magazine in order to conduct further research.

[107]Author's Foreword to *Flaming June*, p. v.

Discussions of the relationship between text and context seem particularly pertinent to Una Marson's poem 'Nigger' which was published in Britain in *The Keys*, the quarterly magazine of The League of Coloured Peoples. Both the League and *The Keys* were moderate in their approach to racial politics, emphasizing harmony and unity, as the dedication of the first issue suggests.

> This, The First Copy of THE KEYS
> The Official Organ of the League of Coloured Peoples
> Is most humbly presented to His Royal Highness
> THE PRINCE OF WALES, K. G.,
> By the President and executive of the League
> Beseeching His Royal Highness
> To honour the League and the Coloured Peoples
> Of this Empire by his most gracious acceptance.[108]

This mingling of anti-racism with patriotism, and of black pride with monarchical loyalty, clearly indicates the cultural ambivalence of colonial subjects in the 'motherland'. Nevertheless, the explicit treatment of 'race' as an issue was evidently a significant gesture and it is within this context that Marson produces her most directly anti-racist poem, 'Nigger' (to be explored in further detail in chapter four).

I wish to end this chapter with a brief consideration of Una Marson's place within the (literary) histories considered above. Rhonda Cobham-Sander points out how 'Marson's literary and professional careers overlap with the activities of both the Jamaica Poetry League and the Public Opinion writers'.[109] In addition, we must remember her involvement with Pioneer Press, *The Cosmopolitan*, and *The Keys*, and also her membership of women's organisations and charities, and her work with the BBC. This range of interests not only suggests the level of her commitment to cultural activism within the changing and emerging Jamaica of the early twentieth century but also testifies to a mobility, flexibility and inclusivity in terms of cultural positioning which was so rare amongst her contemporaries, and which more pointedly provokes the question of her previous exclusion and marginalization when she so clearly belongs to many of Jamaica's early twentieth century histories.

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[108]Edward Scobie, *Black Brittania: A History of Blacks in Britain* (Chicago, 1972), pp. 146-7.

[109]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 217.

CHAPTER 3

POETRY IN NOTION

I met the world through England, and if the world wanted to
meet me it would have to do so through England
(Jamaica Kincaid)[1]

I am a woman in the prime of my life, with
certain powers
and those powers severely limited
by authorities whose faces I rarely see.
(Adrienne Rich)[2]

In this chapter I wish to discuss the role of certain individuals and institutions involved in the production of poetry within Jamaican society during the period 1900-1945. My aim is to explore how dominant notions of what constituted poetry or the 'poetic' came to be circulated and consolidated, and to assess to what degree the perceptions of this genre were determined by the factors of education, gender, culture and class. In assessing these issues, the central project of this thesis, an examination of the neglected archive of Jamaican women's poetry, must to some degree be compromised. During this period the vast majority of critical prose concerning the nature of poetry was written by men, both within the region and back in the literary motherland, England, and consequently, in order to examine thoroughly the contemporary debates and influences of which the women poets may have been conscious, much of this chapter will be devoted to male discourse.

The genesis of a West Indian aesthetic has been traced by many of the tradition's scholars to a desire to decolonize and indigenize imaginatively and to claim a voice for a history, a geography, and a people which had been dominated by British Victorians - both literally and in literature. I would agree that this desire to reclaim and restore a cultural tradition independent of Britain was a prime motivating factor for many Jamaican poets, and any attempt to assess the motivations behind and beliefs in an authentically Jamaican aesthetic must clearly take into account the influence which British colonial education policy and colonial policy more generally would have exercised over notions of the poetic and of the emerging national identity.

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[1] *A Small Place* (London, 1988), p. 33.
[2] 'I dream I'm the death of Orpheus', *Poems Selected and New 1950-1974* (New York, 1974), p. 152.

However, I would suggest that an examination of the role which gender allegiances play within the theory and praxis of Jamaican poetry reveals new complexities and unexplored ideals outside the arena of directly colonial power struggles.

It also seems important to be aware that the idea of a West Indian or Caribbean aesthetic was really only just emerging during the 1930s and 1940s and, although it does appear as an issue for discussion in early editorials of *The Beacon* in Trinidad, Jamaican writers and critics at this time seem to have been more focused on the idea of founding a specifically Jamaican literature.[3] It is perhaps important to be aware that those involved in the Jamaican literary scene focused their involvement and interest on the development of local writing and do not appear to have shown much significant interest in the development of literature elsewhere within the region, and also that there were significant differences between various islands in the relations between national and cultural development.[4] It is also relevant to consider that at this time the use of the term West Indian was more likely to occur within colonial contexts, as the most powerful unifying factor between West Indian islands was their shared experience of colonial administration. Consequently when this term is employed in the Singers Quarterly scrap-book, for example, it does not as a label represent any radical anti-imperialist sentiment and certainly no vision of a pan-Caribbean culture. Like so many terms which have passed into our contemporary vocabularies for discussing literary histories, this notion of a West Indian literature or aesthetic (connoting a common cultural base and purpose) seems to have been applied retrospectively by those attempting to look back on the achievements of this period from the 1950s and 1960s, and as such it should not be taken to signify any homogenous or stable aesthetic in discussions of this period, even though it was often employed to summon up the sense of a potentially unifying cultural presence among all those who had been dispossessed of their cultural heritage by colonialism.[5]

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[3]An editorial of *The Beacon*, 2 (1933) was actually entitled 'A West Indian Literature'.

[4]Henry Swanzy, has commented on the fact that literature from other parts of the Caribbean had 'little success in Jamaica, where I have been told that precisely three copies were ordered by the aforesaid book shop in Kingston of the work of the latest and in many ways the most interesting talent in the West Indies, the Barbadian George Lamming, author of the autobiographical novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*' in 'The Literary Situation in the Caribbean', p. 267. Jamaica's relative independence from the rest of the Caribbean is sometimes attributed to its geograhpical location in the Western Caribbean or even possibly to its size and economic status. This trend towards autonomy has not only been demonstrated through literary matters, but was most dramatically staged when Jamaica withdrew from the emerging Federation and effected its collapse.

[5]However, criticism was very slow to emerge and as late as 1961 R. J. Owens commented that the absence of any detailed criticism is one of the great lacks on the West Indian literary scene' in 'West Indian Poetry', *Caribbean Quarterly*, 7 (1961), p. 123.

Indeed, the group of poets sketched in the previous chapter does not present the same kind of consciously radical or politically motivated movement with shared goals as that which emerged from Trinidad in the 1930s, and yet I would contend that the literary activities of Jamaican women poets during and preceding this period are equally interesting and significant for a literary historian trying to weave together the forgotten threads which we now draw on to discuss a specifically Caribbean aesthetic. Furthermore, it is the very lack of consensus about what constituted poetry and what were the most appropriate facets of their culture and experience from which to draw a Jamaican aesthetic that makes the work of this group of poets so fascinating.

It is my belief that the poetry of these women, with its complex and often contradictory positioning (in relation to Jamaica as colony and Jamaica as nation, poetry as spiritual expression and poetry as cultural expression), can only be understood against the backdrop of a Jamaican aesthetic which was very much in the process of becoming. As this chapter aims to catalogue, their were significantly diverse claims to the 'essence' of poetry and its relation to society and the individual during this period. The various disputes, crises and even imprisonment which afflicted the most central participants in these struggles to establish a Jamaican cultural identity are testimony to the highly charged nature of this activity. My attempt to reveal the contingency of cultural identity in Jamaica during this period, with particular reference to poetry, does focus on the serious differences in orientation between J. E. C. McFarlane and Roger Mais, and their associated organizations and publications. However, while McFarlane and Mais and several others articulated their interests in these issues very plainly and publicly, it is not so easy to trace the opinions or practices of the women poets during this period or indeed of those who are marginal for other reasons (except through textual analysis), as they are simply not well-documented.[6]

Colonialism and its Consequences Upon Literary Production

There was a single, almost monolithic, obstacle facing the Jamaican poet who wished to embrace major themes such as homeland, the self and poetry.

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[6]In 'The Cultural Revolution in Jamaica After 1938', V. S. Reid offers a glimpse of another neglected poetic archive when he distinguishes between Campbell, Sherlock, Mais and Bennett (whom he describes as 'orthodox poets') and those 'Spread out into the woodlands, in the mountain villages and seaside fishing towns...scores of other poets, the young activists, Sam Hinds, McBean, who wrote political songs that would rouse a generation of voters', p. 7.

All of these concepts were enmeshed in the history of colonization. Yet, while the effect of colonization upon racial, gender and artistic identities has been a major concern of post-colonial scholars, less attention has been focused on the ways in which the backdrop of British colonial history influenced, if not determined, any Jamaican notions of poetry, and consequently any notions of Jamaican poetry and the writers' perceptions of themselves as Jamaicans and as poets.

It might appear rather strange to the contemporary reader of Caribbean literature, who is familiar with the profile of social protest and cultural transformation within which this literature, and post-colonial literatures more generally, are often placed, that in the context of Jamaica from 1900 to 1945 literature was often promoted as a vehicle through which to preserve the colonial *status quo*. As late as 1961, R. J. Owens alerted us to the fact that 'colonialism may be a dead force politically, but it is very much alive culturally'.[7] The fact that an unjust and dominating mentality could seek survival through the literature of a society in the process of reconstructing and indigenizing itself is a powerful statement of the cultural politics operating within Jamaican society.

Colonial institutions had always played a primary role in determining the nature and value of literature in the West Indies. The literature selected for dissemination was constructed to serve the interests of colonial policy and as such was ideologically motivated in the very essence of seeming to be devoid of ideology. Many of the texts which were promoted by school syllabi as unproblematically apolitical are interesting subjects for transcontextual analysis. The much referred to 'Daffodils' by Wordsworth (which appears to be the one poem learnt by every child educated in English regardless of their placing on the globe) is an excellent example. Its political orientation is implicit. It is pedagogically promoted as apolitical because, written by a white man and being about flowers native to England, within anglocentric patriarchal culture it is seemingly both objective and aesthetic. However, the poem cannot be identified as ideologically neutral within a context such as the Caribbean, where daffodils are unfamiliar and de-familiarising (although this is not to suggest that the instability or absence of the referential world always precipitates a negative impact upon Caribbean poetry). Indeed, the cultural politics of the canon and the way in which the now familiar notion of 'English Literature' was constructed in line with the colonial project to educate 'the natives', has generated some interesting debates within post-colonial writings.

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[7]'West Indian Poetry', p. 121.

In *The Pleasures of Exile*, George Lamming makes explicit the power dynamics behind colonial educational policy.

> The West Indian's education was imported in much the same way as flour and butter are imported from Canada. Since the cultural negotiation was strictly between England and the natives, and England had acquired, somehow, the divine right to organise the native's reading, it is to be expected that England's export of literature would be English. Deliberately and exclusively English. And the further back in time England went for these treasures, the safer was the English commodity.
>
> How...could a colonial native taught by an English native within a strict curriculum diligently guarded by yet another English native who functioned as a reliable watch-dog...ever get out from under this ancient mausoleum of historic achievement?...The greater mystery is that there should be West Indian writers at all. For a writer cannot function; and, indeed, he has no function as writer if those who read and teach reading in his society have started their education by questioning his very right to write.[8]

Lamming's perception of the colonial education system as an imperial propaganda stunt which acted as a ritual burying alive of any authentic talent or expression of a Caribbean consciousness holds much historical truth. While we should not underestimate the power of influence exercised by colonial education and its laudation of all that was British - including racism, sexism and imperialism - it is important to see that an understanding of British culture was valuable in the hands of some. C. L. R. James, who is equally aware of the effects of a colonial education, expresses an appreciation of what is to be gained from this 'commodity' and in this way helps to de-mystify the emergence of the Caribbean writer.

In 'Discovering Literature in Trinidad: the 1930s', James asserts his pride in claiming a rich intellectual heritage as his own while remaining vigilant to the cultural implications which this 'great literature' held.

> I want to make it clear that the origins of my work and my thoughts are to be found in Western European literature, Western European history and Western European thought.
>
> In my youth we lived according to the tenets of Matthew Arnold; we spread sweetness and light, and we studied the best that there was in literature in order to transmit it to the people -- as we thought, the poor, backward West Indian people.[9]

As a central figure in Trinidad's anti-colonial literary movement, C. L. R. James 'discovered' that the intellectual heritage of Western Europe was not ideologically rooted even though ideologically informed, and thus he was able to

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[8] *Pleasures of Exile*, p. 27.

[9] 'Discovering Literature in Trinidad: the 1930s', p. 237.

draw upon his learning in his quest to make Trinidadians see themselves, their society and their own literature as distinctive and of value. His own philosophy and writing practice revealed how a colonial education could be ideologically re-directed against the demeaning biases of colonialism and used to subvert the power relationship between European and colonial culture at this time.

Certainly the charges of internalized racism and inherent degradation are familiar critiques to be levelled against colonial education. However, Derek Walcott in his article 'Is bad verse forgivable at a certain stage of our evolution?' points to a different but equally damaging effect of this education upon the colonial subject who aspires to write. He charges colonialism with betraying the West Indian creative artist, not by demeaning his self-perception, but rather by inflating it. 'Instead the biggest failing of the West Indian poet had been ambition, grandeur. But this ambition may have itself sprung from the rhetorical manner in which our generation was taught.'[10]

Indeed, the issue of rhetoric remains crucial. In addition to the assertion that cultural supremacy was securely British through the content of the literature chosen for pedagogic purposes - and the implicit assertion that attempts to appropriate content would lead to affiliation with British and not Jamaican culture - the specific language in which the received notion of poetry and the 'poetic' in Jamaica was written also consolidated colonial influence. It is clear that, as Walcott points out, by presenting poetry as a domain of highly sophisticated discourse, colonial culture attempted to predetermine, and even preclude, any Jamaican notion of the poetic as communicating the language of life and consequently provided a model of potentially sterile and alienating grandiosity for many poets.

In the sense that the English language was the only language available to the prospective Jamaican poet, it may be believed that the colonial influences inherent in the language system are less open to debate than those which pressured choices of form and content. Certainly, the most obvious consequence of colonialism upon any literary attempt is the language in which it is written, and it is a significant aspect of the colonial legacy within Anglophone Caribbean societies that the form and standardization of one's language was taken to be indicative of social position and also of intellectual capacity. According to such a hierarchy, the assumption of high poetic diction, along with the appropriation of the genteel imagery and grandiose ideas which were symptomatic of this style, was one means for West Indians to prove their

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[10]'Is bad verse forgivable at a certain stage of our evolution?', *Sunday Guardian*, 11 September 1966, p. 5.

'equal' validity and worth as poets. From this perspective, there is nothing unusual or bizarre about the fact that the women poets to be studied were clearly enamoured of elegant poetic style and genteel subjects, as these represented the poetic norm in terms of given models.

In the Jamaican situation, it could be argued that to some this rhetoric did function to burden their attempts to establish a national consciousness and a developing literary tradition of their own. Yet, while the seemingly unquestioning appropriation of a diction endemic to a *passé* literary English élite may have limited the possibilities in terms of an authentic Jamaican idiom, I hope to show, through close readings, that it did not always signal unconditional loyalty to the values and cultural norms of the colonial system which had naturalized this linguistic currency.

To others, however, the mother-tongue, although it had originated from the consuming mouth of the imperialist 'Mother Britain', did provide a suitable vehicle for the nascent Jamaican aesthetic. The fact that the language system which Jamaicans had inherited by force was already shaped by cultural associations and value judgements, and was not a stable or neutral medium, was ironically its very potential. Language as a dynamic medium was one which they began to shape according to their own cultural and gender identities. It was the task of Jamaican writers to try to forge new ways with language, to work with a vocabulary, syntax, register, and implied value system that would 'speak them' as colonial subjects in order to speak themselves as national subjects. Indeed, the most obvious and important statement of this kind was the introduction of Jamaican nation language into literary works.

Yet, while in many respects the validation of a vernacular voice also implied a validation of the experience and the lives of those of that voice, even this attempt to break free of the cultural alienation factor inherent in the English language was confronted with institutionalized opposition. Rhonda Cobham-Sander draws attention to the way in which the two main periods of dialect interest within Jamaican literature (1900 to 1914 and the 1940s) coincided with the times of popular discontent with the ruling classes. As the use of such forms of cultural expression for political statements in the hands of the politically powerless was a dangerous phenomenon, institutions re-appropriated this linguistic tool of dissent and consequently nation language was, to a large degree, disarmed as a protest language.

> One of the ways in which the new colonial establishment attempted to efface the association of the Creole culture with hostile attitudes to the

> dominant group was by taking over the Creole language themselves and using it to express pious or acquiescent sentiments.[11]

Within a society in which social standing within the community was partly reliant upon linguistic prowess, the use of language became particularly important to members of the black community who were attempting to justify their intellectual and moral equality. Although it appears that the adoption of standard English as a written norm did not prohibit the use of nation language, it did facilitate the relegation of it to the minor status of a folksy language suitable for naïve, humorous or provincial poetic subjects. The consequence of this marginalization was that 'eventually the dialect came to be perceived as a language in which it was not possible to carry on intellectual conversation or serious discussion'.[12] A particular instance of this inability to perceive the creative potential of nation language as a literary language in prominent critics of Jamaican poetry can be found in J. E. C. McFarlane's discussion of Claude McKay's poetry. The fixed notion of 'art' to which McFarlane subscribes reveals an unwillingness to reconsider aesthetics in relation to cultural forms or cultural politics.

> Dialect, as I have pointed out elsewhere, is a "broken tongue" with which it is impossible to build an edifice of verse possessing the perfect symmetry of finished art. It can be forceful and impressive in conveying ideas within the power of the people, whose natural vehicle it is, to express; but it can never transcend them in the way that their own spiritual qualities transcend their physical and intellectual limitations. So it must fail in any attempt to explain the people fully to themselves; it may serve as an admirable record of feeling, but not as an interpreter of that record.[13]

However, while it may appear that in much of the verse to be studied such beliefs and practices concerning Jamaican nation language were internalized, it is important to be aware that the given colonial cultural decrees were only taken in varying degrees. The language and the models presented by the English Literary Tradition may have been assumed to a parasitic degree by some, but were reshaped by others to offer pastiche and commentary. As such, the use of stylized English poetic diction and the conscious adoption of British literary models should be viewed suspiciously by the critic searching for a mirror image to substantiate claims of unbroken colonial domination in the work of both white and black writers. Even given the power of the dominant or

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[11]Rhonda Cobham-Sander, 'The Creative Writer and West Indian Society Jamaica 1900-1950' (1981), p. 121.
[12]Ibid, p. 124.
[13]J. E. C. McFarlane, *A Literature in the Making*, p. 85.

authoritative discourse in Jamaica, the poetry of the period testifies to the possibility of appropriating and inverting the 'mother-tongue' in order to resist and expose its cultural politics and release the language and life of a culture repressed by it. In this respect the poetry to be examined offers evidence of the colonial poet's ability to resist dominant social, cultural and intellectual forces at the same time as being powerfully constituted by them through educational imperatives.

Poetry in Particular

Clearly, the politics at work behind the given colonial culture throughout the English-speaking Caribbean had a profound effect upon aesthetic production of all kinds. However, it is notable that in the writing and theorizing of poetry, as opposed to fiction, language and sentiment appear to be more fiercely defensive of Victorian English norms. To some extent poetry has a tradition of cultural purity, with classical roots and prescribed forms and metres. Even today, poetry is seen as discrete from other genres, somewhat erudite and exclusive, and the status of the poet as a visionary, a person set apart from others who speaks for rather than with the people, lingers on as a foreboding popular myth.[14]

Perhaps one reason why poetry seemed to preserve a vacuum of cultural purity in the English speaking West Indies longer than fiction can be traced to the dearth of sensitively and intelligently translated poetry accessible in the region. It is possible that while translations of Russian and French novels endorsed the fact that fiction was culturally mobile, and prose less bound by the strictures of a single tradition, the vast collections of sentimentalizing and moralizing British verse offered up in schoolrooms and parlours presented a model far more exclusive in terms of culture and value.

Certainly, the relation between the particularities of a chosen genre and the social structure of the society which adopts it should not be overlooked. Indeed, the model of genre evolution which Lukács draws seems pertinent to the Jamaican situation.

> The forms of the artistic genres are not arbitrary. On the contrary, they grow out of the concrete determinacy of the particular social and historical conditions. Their character, their peculiarity is determined by

[14]It is perhaps significant that the 'new orality' and performance poetry which has emerged so powerfully within Caribbean culture over the last two decades has been instrumental and widely influential in dismantling this eurocentric version of the poet.

> their capacity to give expression to the essential features of the given socio-historical phase. Hence the different genres arise at particular stages of historical development, they change their character rapidly, sometimes they disappear completely, and sometimes in the course of history they rise to the surface again with certain modifications.[15]

In a phase of colonial rule, it is evident that expressive vehicles were specifically selected in order to preserve a social order based on acquiescence and admiration for authority. The resulting shape of this socially moulded canon had serious implications for both the form and content of Jamaican poetry in the 1930s and 1940s. It is now the common practice of post-colonial critics to elucidate the ideological biases disclosed through content-based analysis, but it is also important to explore how these may become evident at the level of form and genre as well.

As discussed in the former chapter, poetry leagues and reading circles were middle-class in social orientation, and functioned as a means for the educated minority to assert their knowledge and appreciation of what they supposed to be high culture. With a few significant exceptions, those drawn to poetry in Jamaica appear to have shared a fairly uniform middle-class colonial belief system and consequently the choice of genre seemed to prescribe certain decisions concerning content. As close readings of texts and critical writings will testify, those who chose poetry seemed mainly to perceive it as a vehicle for the communication of non-socially related values and experiences (although such beliefs do not preclude the production of texts which engage with these issues). Indeed, poetry appears to have been favoured by those striving to achieve the communication of assumed universal and spiritual values, above and beyond local concerns, as Wycliffe Bennett hopes to make clear. 'The Poetry League of Jamaica is not a political organisation. We consider that our work transcends politics. Nor is it a clique. Our perspective derives from our vertical relationship with God and our horizontal relationship with one another.'[16] In this respect, poetry's general relation to context was antithetical to that of much prose written at this time which was actively inscribing the realities of everyday experience (particularly of yard and barrack room life) in a conscious attempt to centre the genre on the realities facing Jamaican society. It is therefore important to be aware that the choice of form might well have been as ideologically motivated as that of content.

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[15]'Hegel's Asthetik', *Werke*, 10 (1969) quoted in John Frow *Marxism and Literary History* (Oxford, 1986), p. 10.

[16]Wycliffe Bennett (Honorary Secretary, Poetry League of Jamaica), 'Poets Play Part In Jamaica's Life', *The Sunday Gleaner*, 17 October 1948, p. 6.

Reading Luckacs' model of the socio-historical emergence of genres, it could be argued that the characteristic genre of Victorian verse remained continuously culturally active within the English literary tradition because of colonialism. Just at the time when poets in Britain were mounting an irreversible challenge to this genre, it began to be echoed in the early poetry of the West Indies. Yet, while it is true that a commonalty in terms of literary education clearly did produce a shared written notion of the poetic to some degree, as reflected in the amount of 'replication' of received form and diction, the comparisons to be drawn in terms of interpretation and the notion of the 'poetic' as constructed by readers are not so simple. The series of common textual conditions had varied consequences because of the diverse contexts in which they were read and written. The certain cultural differences and possible misapprehensions inherent in a Caribbean reading of an 'English' poem had an inevitable effect upon the reception of poetry and the conceptualisation of it as a medium for expression. The highly stylized, rhetorical and non-realist, even non-referential, status of much British poetry within Jamaica may have produced

> the disengagement from the immediate: all this is very conspicuous and could be instanced elsewhere in the West Indies then. So much of its descriptive verse, seeking to capture the natural beauty of the Caribbean, turns out to be unrealistic tourist pictures that romanticize out the human element completely, both objectively and in the implied location of the poet in the poem.[17]

However, while this almost inevitable inability to produce realist texts might have been disappointing in the context of cultural nationalism, the almost surreal aesthetic which Arthur Drayton criticizes above can be alternatively viewed as an early sign of cultural difference and therefore evidence of the way in which a colonial literary education did not always have the negative effect of promoting senseless derivation, but rather inspired a more intensely imaginative engagement.

Nevertheless, it was in choosing to write, and not only through being made to read poetry at school, that a notion of the poetic was created. For the Jamaican poet wishing to gain some public recognition of their work there were few sympathetic institutions. The newspapers and journals already discussed did provide valuable forums, but as I have illustrated they were often subject to, and so probably moulded to, the preferences of individual editors and the

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[17]Arthur D Drayton, 'West Indian Consciousness in West Indian Verse', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 9 (1970), p. 86. Drayton takes *A Treasury of Jamaican Verse* (London, 1949) as his particular example here.

colonial institutions and sponsors to which they were closely affiliated. One sympathetic and liberal ear was Henry Swanzy's at the BBC, and because of this many aspiring poets and writers submitted scripts to him in London for broadcast back to Jamaica. The BBC *Caribbean Voices* programme (originally conceived by Una Marson in 1939 as 'Calling The West Indies' for the purpose of relaying messages from those West Indians on active service back home) was to become a pioneering and supportive forum for many early Caribbean writers, and was significantly often far from neo-colonial in its literary expectations. Yet, despite the surprisingly liberal policy for judging the content-based suitability of material, along with their encouragement, they may also unwittingly have passed on traces of genre snobbery on to the developing writer. It was their policy to pay according to air-time and this could often result in the writer receiving £15 for a short-story and only £2 for a poem. Such a reward system was practical and easy to calculate but clearly militated against poets for whom a day's work might generate only fourteen lines rather than fourteen pages.

In general, it would be true to say that assumptions about the nature of poetry which may have inhibited the flourishing of a specifically Jamaican poetic tradition were perpetuated by institutions and can be traced in the work of many Caribbean creative artists and literary historians.

Contemporary Notions of the Poetic in and for Jamaica

Considering the specific status of poetry within British colonial culture, it is worth noting that its inflexibility in form and lack of 'Caribbeanness' in content has been noted by the literary critics of other English speaking islands. With regards to Trinidad, Peter Ayres has drawn attention to a significant disparity in terms of content as relevant to cultural politics, between poetry and prose during this period. In contrast to the 'iconoclastic, aggressively anti-bourgeois element in the prose work', he judges the poetry to be reliant on 'sin, despair, world weariness, and religious ennui'.[18] The latter evidently bids for closer comparison with a late nineteenth century British literary mode than with any specifically Caribbean aesthetic, or even with a twentieth century European model.

Discussing creative writing in Jamaica from 1900 to 1950, Rhonda Cobham-Sander concludes that a strongly Anglophile stance was the aesthetic norm

[18]Peter Ayres, Introduction to Reinhard Sander, p. 18.

and that the Jamaican literary direction 'differed from the European cultures in its arch-conservative attitude to aesthetic innovation and intellectual debate'.[19] It is perhaps symptomatic of colonial societies in general, and of Jamaica to a certain degree, that a literary time-warp operates in which the cultural purity of the motherland is preserved across the oceans through out-dated literary fashions. In addition to the institutionally driven reasons for this trend already outlined, particularly by Lamming, this phenomenon might be explained by the actual amount of time which it took for 'new' literature to arrive, but it might equally and less innocently signify a nostalgic desire among the social group most noted for their poetic interests not to surrender a comfortable and comforting aesthetic at a time when other changes seem inevitable and troublesome to their position. As this reading suggests, it is the non-engagement with the modern (both in terms of society and literature) which much of this archive represents which is interesting, and which paradoxically seems to confirm Edward Said's observation that 'even when they [texts] appear to deny it, they are nevertheless a part of the social world, human life, and of course the historical moments in which they are located and interpreted'.[20]

However, the relationship between poetry and national identity in Jamaica was a very complex one and, although orthodox attitudes towards poetry were tenacious, Cobham-Sander's conclusion does betray the wide range of opinion concerning the proper nature of poetry, notions of the poetic, as well as the diversity of texts which were generated at this time. In Jamaica, poets and critics alike seemed to be conscious of the particular expectations of the genre and many highlighted the artistic limitations which they believed these imposed. The qualities of aesthetic value and cultural value were seen as discrete from each other (even oppositional) and critics divided most crucially between those chastening poets who adopted a poetic language which served to mask the cultural chasm which existed between England and Jamaica, and those defending the worth of such poetry on the grounds that it was acultural and apolitical, and must therefore transcend the immediate in favour of the eternal and universal. Although it might seem reductive to trace these two positions to Roger Mais and J. E. C. McFarlane respectively, a close examination of their involvement with these dominant notions of poetry during this period is certainly instructive.

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[19]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 12.
[20]*The World, the Text, and the Critic* (London, 1983), p. 4.

J. E. C. McFarlane has left a careful record of his offerings to Jamaican poetry; through collections of lectures which he delivered at the Institute of Jamaica during the 1930s and 1940s and documents detailing his involvement with the Poetry League of Jamaica it is clear that he was a prominent poetic critic of the time. As the constant recourse to his views and publications in my own work indicates, McFarlane's writings remain accessible, and the confidence and authority of his essays are suggestive of a dominant as well as a prolific presence within the Jamaican literary scene. Although his prose attacks on civil and Christian institutions and Jamaica's 1934 Crisis reveal him as politically forward thinking in terms of economic analysis, his attitude to poetry was far more conventional. He adhered vehemently to the belief that poetry should transcend the earthly and everyday in order to offer 'the gold amidst much dross; the eternal and imperishable amidst the topical and ephemeral'.[21]

He did not evade the relation between poetry and society, but rather framed it in the rhetoric of redemption and within the context of Jamaica as colony.

> Therefore as representatives of a great tradition we offer you Poetry, upon which we feel certain the true foundation of this Empire rests and by which it will be preserved throughout the storm that hangs above the horizon of civilization.[22]

As an imperial preservative, McFarlane's recipe for poetry declares its cultural orientation towards the mother-land and a Leavisite bias in sentiment, although not literary taste. Although later in the same address, McFarlane does show an awareness of the inevitably of change, he attempts to harness this for the good of moral, rather than directly social, development.

> The Poetry League is proposing to you that you begin the change of your environment and the improvement of the quality of your public men by changing and improving the pattern and quality of your individual thought...We offer you the inexhaustible riches of poetry with which to do this.[23]

Indeed, it is this question of how the regeneration of consciousness should be directed which brings us to the crucial difference between McFarlane and Mais,

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[21]'The Prospect of West Indian Poetry', *Kyk-Over-Al*, 5, (1953), p. 126.

[22]'The Challenge of Our Time' (address delivered at the opening of the twenty-fourth Session of the Poetry League of Jamaica, Institute of Jamaica, 31 January 1935) in *The Challenge of Our Time* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1945), p. 29.

[23]Ibid, p. 34. This same emphasis is made explicit in his earlier 'On the Nature of Poetry' (annual Presidential Address delivered before the Jamaica Branch of the Empire Poetry League, 30 October 1924 in *The Challenge of Our Time*: 'And it is here that poetry can be of greatest service to humanity: in restoring the lost outline, in raising it from the maze of sensuous things into the clear atmosphere of the spirit', p. 107.

the one advocating moral amelioration and the other cultural and social transformation.

McFarlane's insistence upon the duty of the poetic to forge spiritual growth causes him to resist the necessity of both aesthetic and social change. This position led him to a somewhat inevitable attack on modern poetry:

> Another stumbling block in the path of high poetic achievement (and in a sense, more formidable than the lack of form) is lack of faith. This blight of unbelief is today almost universal; yet I cannot help feeling that in the case of these islands the disease is very largely an affectation...We are, as a people, ardent believers with a profound faith in the future. If our poets persist in affecting the unbelief which has overtaken Europe, they will be but dry limbs on the young tree of West Indian society and will be discarded and forgotten as the tree pushes forward in its development.[24]

McFarlane's attempt to resist the rising profile of modernity and Modernism (recognisably the aesthetic which he attacks above) within Jamaica discloses him trying to negotiate a position capable of defending 'faith' as a poetic necessity in the face of political and aesthetic movements already dominant in Europe which had sought to point out just how debilitating an unquestioning adoption of that which passed as faith had been to the development of both society and literature. Even though his efforts to impede the ensuing materialism and crisis of faith in Jamaica appear to have been genuine, his textual solution in the form of spiritual writings (and his re-assertion of universal values as discussed in chapter one) was fundamentally flawed in its failure to acknowledge its own socio-political origins. As George Cumper illustrates:

> The typical writers of Mr McFarlane's period are not of course bad because they worshipped universal values, but because they mistook self-admiration for divine afflatus, and schoolroom conventions for artistic standards. There is always the danger of...mistaking the sentiment of a different cliché, and the conventions of a different political atmosphere, for universal values.[25]

Whether or not McFarlane's quest to retain the aesthetics of pre-war Europe as a poetic model for post-war Jamaica was a 'mistake', his lectures and criticism instil a version of the poetic in which the spiritual inheres very powerfully, and in which Anglo-centric canonical criteria and figures remain unchallenged. Furthermore, his high profile within literary circles almost certainly resulted in his vision of Jamaican poetry, as the means through

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[24]Ibid, p. 127.

[25]'Literary Period Piece', *Public Opinion*, 26 January 1957, p. 7.

which to preserve eternal ideals and absolute values in the face of inconstant and unreliable reality, being powerfully communicated to many of the nation's poets.

However, McFarlane was not alone in his vociferous defence of poetry against the changing reality of the modern world. In Trinidad, E. A. Carr was also attempting to reinstate the apolitical status of Art. 'Many good artists today are deliberately denying...the essential part tradition plays in art. The flouting of this fact has something even of the fanaticism of a crusade...It seems the political unrest of the age has seeped into and infected the serenity of the sphere of Art.'[26] Carr opposes modern poetic praxis by defining the poetic in terms of the received rather than the experienced or the experimental, thereby endorsing the derivative and implicitly acquiescent nature of poetry which others in the Caribbean were so stridently protesting against at this time.

> The artist who attempts a new formula will achieve deserved success only if the content of this formula draws its sustenance from the well of the past, in other words, if the artist pays due reverence to tradition...the most lamentable state of the artist is found in the poet, the high priest of the noblest artistic expression, in his spate of so-called "New Poetry". This "New Poetry" seems to be chaos, "without form", and void. The authors are young people who parade their bitterness and disillusion as virtue.[27]

Yet, while there was a shared belief system between McFarlane and Carr, there was almost certainly a significant difference in their status. In Trinidad of the 1930s, Carr must have seemed a somewhat stray and lonely voice, a reactionary declaiming the strides towards a defiantly politicized national aesthetic which *The Beacon* group and others had achieved. Whereas in Jamaica, McFarlane was probably the accepted oracle on all things poetic for the majority of prospective poets, with Mais perceived as the radical and aberrant presence.

Nevertheless, the abandonment of tradition and the celebration of disillusion which Carr highlights serves as an excellent introduction to the ethos of those on both islands who wished to respond to colonialism through the establishment of a counter-culture. If culture had been organized for political ends by the colonial authorities, then this strategy was also appropriated by those who contested the reactionary with the radical. For many Jamaican writers, writing became a consciously political activity.

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[26]'Art and Tradition' in Reinhard Sander, p. 38.
[27]Ibid, pp. 39-40.

Despite widespread aesthetic conformity in the region well into the second half of the twentieth century, the 1930s did mark the period when significant change could no longer be deferred. As V. S. Reid records,

> culturally, our concern was with Keats; our fascination was with the View from Westminster Bridge. Even those two best among our political and social awakeners, N. W. Manley and his cousin Alexander Bustamante, were not immune to matters of King and Empire. Jamaica was a cultural wasteland that exiled sanity...But a sense of renewal was surging against those bonds of remembered bondage.[28]

In Jamaica, Leo Oakley comments that the 1930s produced 'a different brand of writers...who did not hesitate to assert their Jamaicanness, their nationalism. They could not identify with England and English ways. They were for things Jamaican, and they gave voice to the nationalist movement of the time'.[29] It was certainly this shift in cultural identification which motivated Mais and provoked his dissent from received aesthetic and moral ideals .

However, before I explore Mais's position it seems important to state just how fiercely a defence of 'purely aesthetic' value was articulated. In an early article, provocatively titled 'Is bad verse forgivable at a certain stage of our evolution?', Derek Walcott comments on the lack of aesthetic merit in West Indian verse as a means to affirm his ardent belief in the importance of literary standards which are formally rather than content-based and thereby to assert the significance of aesthetic excellence over cultural relevance.

> The question is whether bad verse can be used as a means to achieving a political end. None of the anthologies mentioned is overtly political, but the most sincere ones try to impress us that indifferent West Indian verse is preferable to fairly acceptable English verse...It is a nasty argument and it threatens us with sacrificing standards. Whatever happens in politics cannot affect poetry. There can even be poetry, like Pound's, whose content is anti-semitic, that survives its own humanistic failings, because it is good verse.[30]

The connotations of such an argument suggest that Walcott here also subscribes to a belief that only apolitical analysis can provide us with objective criteria by which to determine good and bad poetry. The reference to 'standards' points to a faith in established criteria and an unwillingness to admit considerations of cultural politics into evaluations of poetic worth. Indeed, this school of 'aesthetic criticism' is consistently marked by a failure to

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[28]V. S. Reid, p. 3.

[29]'Ideas of Patriotism and National Dignity in Some Jamaican Writings', *Jamaica Journal*, 4 (1970), p. 19.

[30]Derek Walcott, p. 5.

acknowledge any social or political analysis of art and its production, and an equal denial of its own political orientation. It is particularly interesting that Walcott takes Pound as the example to justify his own position in defence of aesthetic standards, as it is the tenets of Pound's own notion of the poetic which Mais employs to ridicule the emphasis upon the 'empty aesthetic' within Jamaican verse.

Echoing the fierce guidelines of Ezra Pound, Roger Mais attacks the practice of merely appropriating all the aesthetic markers of poetry, as mediated through colonial institutions, without any consideration of their relevance.

> One of the troubles with people who write poetry is that they have picked that medium. It is not a medium that lends itself to practising nothing more than the modicum of mediocrity...Why go to all that pains to say in rhymed lines, what you would be ashamed to say in indifferent prose? Do you think you can hide superficiality behind assonance or alliteration, or successfully camouflage the trite between a sequence of rhymes?[31]

This unquestioning adoption of received poetic templates, in which delicate language and elegant rhyme are merely vacantly rehearsed, is also cited as a major limitation by R. J. Owens in his discussion of 'West Indian Poetry' and its

> widely held view of the nature of poetry. A poem, one imagines, is an elevating thought, or an aspiration, or a pretty landscape, or a confession, clothed in high-flown language. The essential banality of the thought or aspiration, the predictability of the response to the landscape, the conventionality of the confessing mind don't seem to matter providing only that the words are eye-catching or ear-catching enough.[32]

The list of conventional assumptions about the nature of the poetic and the failing he ascribes to these elicits a consideration of what actually should inform a Jamaican poet's imagination.

As Mais is eager to convey, it is clearly not simply the diction or form of their eurocentric literary models which should inspire the Jamaican who writes poetry.

> The gist of my contention is this that if we Jamaicans desire to awaken our fellow Jamaicans to a true poetic consciousness, then the sooner we

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[31]Where The Roots Lie', *Public Opinion*, 9 March 1940, p. 12. Mais's advice is similar in register and reason to Pound' in 'A Few Don'ts by an Imagiste', *Poetry* March 1913, 'Do not re-tell in mediocre verse what has already been done in good prose. Don't think any intelligent person is going to be deceived when you try to shirk all the difficulties of the unspeakably difficult art of good prose by chopping your composition into line lengths', in *Imagist Poetry* edited by Peter Jones (Middlesex, 1972), pp. 130-31.

[32]R. J. Owens, 'West Indian Poetry', p. 120.

> stop writing "Pretty-pretty" lines, just for their prettiness and get down to the real business of writing significant verse, the better.[33]

It would appear that for Mais significant verse is that which breaks with tradition, colonialism and those uncritical minds which had 'stopped growing with the school room'.[34] In opposition to McFarlane, Mais advocates a recognition of the present in terms of contemporary aesthetic developments and Jamaica's lived reality. In his characteristically ebullient style, Mais declares his unwillingness to conform to the prevalent version of Victorianism, as enmeshed in both the cultural and aesthetic values of certain Jamaicans.

> As to your dogged refusal to accept the more modern form; that in itself constitutes an insult to my mentality. I refuse to be hurled back into the dark ages, or to be dragged there supinely on the back of a sure-footed, nimble quadruped.[35]

However, Mais's provocative style is clearly part of his attempt to engender a reconstruction of Jamaican poetics and often represents his own less polite and more politicized demand for a growth in consciousness. After one of his most vitriolic attacks on his country's poetic talent, he confesses his own intent of provocation: 'I am deliberately saying all these unpleasant things about us in the hope that somebody will rise up in self-righteous indignation, and try to justify us'.[36] Certainly the question of Jamaica's cultural development was a serious one during this period and claims to authority and authenticity in relation to the nation's emerging aesthetic were strongly contested.

Besides the debate concerning whether or not the works produced could be deemed poetry, there is a parallel and equally important discussion, foregrounded by Mais, examining their worth according to social and cultural phenomenon. I therefore wish to open up cultural politics as a field of enquiry in the quest to determine that which is significant to a Jamaican poetic consciousness. This reading offers a way in which to reinterpret the aesthetic within a perspective which includes cultural and ideological evaluation as significant and allows aesthetic 'failure' to be valued and interpreted as a

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[33]'Contemporary Jamican Verse', *Public Opinion*, 4 November 1939, p. 10.

[34]'Where The Roots Lie', p. 12.

[35]Loc cit. Mais was not alone among Caribbean critics attempting to shock their writers into a new perspective. 'Local Poetry', an editorial in *The Beacon*, 1 (1932), enquires, with a similar acerbic tone, 'Why so many of the poems we recieve are imitations of Ella Wheeler Wilcox is a question we have been asking ourselves for quite some time. We realize, of course, that intellectual dropsy is a popular form of ailment in Trinidad', in Reinhard Sander, p. 28.

[36]Loc cit.

process through which static, received versions of aesthetics can be fractured and thereby de-naturalized. Indeed, it is by applying cultural criticism (alongside formal criticism) to the works of these writers that we can shift the axis away from determining to what extent their works should be valued as poetry (an evaluative agenda of aesthetics which only dissembles as apolitical) in order to look at the degree to which we can accept them as efforts to produce creative writings which are discretely Jamaican. This is not to suggest that cultural criticism should be merely substituted for formal criticism, but rather that within colonial Jamaica the issues of cultural forms and cultural politics could not be comfortably divorced from each other.

In addition to the underplaying of cultural elements by those critics focused on the aesthetic claims of a Jamaican poetic tradition, there was an equal repression of a specifically Jamaican poetic identity by institutions and individuals charged with the retention of colonial values. In an aptly entitled article, 'Ideas of Patriotism and National Dignity in Some Jamaican Writings', Leo Oakley traces the relation between political expediency and cultural affiliations.

> Colonial Jamaica was never encouraged to have any sense of national dignity - at least not until the 'Mother Country' saw which way the wind was blowing. We were to have instead a sort of Empire dignity, and the literature was really a by-product of an educational system geared to ensure loyalty to England, and designed to make us look outside for standards and values.[37]

It is not surprising that the Institute of Jamaica, which was founded by Governor Musgrave, adopted a conservative policy towards literature which, at the same time as seeming to offer recognition and praise, acted to dilute any dissent from colonial culture.[38] This institutionalized criterion which sought to underplay any distinctly Jamaican phenomenon, seen as potentially threatening to the integrity of the colony, was adopted by many of the dominant group of critics and purveyors of literary taste. Cobham-Sander states that 'social protest and the expression of racially motivated distrust of the establishment were seen as negative qualities, associated with the absence of social order as dictated by the dominant group. The expression of anti-establishment sentiment in poetry was considered in 'poor taste'.[39] Such an

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[37]Leo Oakley, p. 19.

[38]Una Marson (1930), Lettice King (1931), J. E. C. McFarlane (1935), and Astley Clerk (1937) were among those members of the Poetry League of Jamaica to be awarded Musgrave Medals. For further information see John A. Aarons, 'Recognizing Excellence: the Musgrave Medals of the Institute of Jamaica', *Jamaica Journal*, 22 (1989), pp. 19-22.

[39]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 46.

approach is evident in Sherlock's evaluation of Una Marson's verse as 'provocative' in its confrontation of racism and McFarlane's judgement of her style as 'agitated'. However the bias of the critic is revealed as much in those elements underplayed or neglected as in those highlighted. The exclusion of any discussion of gender or of a positive reading of non-European cultural identity by early critics of Jamaican poetry also discloses their prejudices as establishment-centred. Indeed, this orientation was still very much alive and wonderfully displayed by the garlanding of J. E. C. McFarlane as Jamaica's second poet laureate in 1952, a ceremony which V. S. Reid sees as 'late in the day of the revolution to be holding coronations; but the tenacity of poets, especially when strengthened by an Empire Poetry League, is legendary'.[40]

Nevertheless, cultural validity was an important consideration to many critics evaluating the worth of Jamaican poetry during this period. To most, the basic criteria for this cultural reorientation was to leave behind any stylistic or content-based striving towards pseudo-Britishness. For a key example of such a manifesto, I draw attention to the well-known article in *The Beacon* in which Albert Gomes stresses that cultural departure must be the first step towards liberation from cultural enslavement and the establishment of an indigenous literature.

> It is important, moreover, that we break away as far as possible from the English tradition; and the fact that some of us are still slaves to Scott and Dickens is merely because we lack the necessary artistic individuality and sensibility in order to see how incongruous that tradition is with the West Indian scene and spirit...the sooner we throw off the veneer of culture that our colonisation has brought us the better for our artistic aims...One has only to glance through the various periodicals published in this and the other islands to see what slaves we still are to English culture and tradition. There are some who lay great store by this conscious aping of another man's culture but to us it merely seems a sign of the immaturity of our own spirit.[41]

It would appear that statements of this kind became prominent in Jamaica in the late 1930s and early 1940s. In March 1940, *Public Opinion* reported Albert Huie's observation that a worthwhile national literature would emerge 'whenever our poets realize they are Jamaicans and not Europeans of another colour'. However, although the significance of cultural difference within aesthetic practices was a crucial area for debate at this time, there was little consensus over the means of assimilation or the consequences of culturally different modes.

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[40]V. S. Reid, p. 6.

[41]'A West Indian Literature', *The Beacon*, 2 (1933) in Reinhard Sander, p. 31.

> In 1938 McFarlane claimed that there were two legitimate sources of Jamaican poetry - the African with its emotion and mystery, rooted in the manners and emotional qualities of the common people, their irresistible humour, their simplicity and innate kindness. Claude McKay stands at the head of that tradition. Then there is Tom Redcam, with his roots in the great past of English poetry, but no less Jamaican and from his stems the influence of English thought and tradition.[42]

I would argue that McFarlane's reductive and decidedly stereotypical analysis of the separate influences of Africa and England within Jamaican poetry does not attend to the complicated matrix of cultural and class affiliations which influenced aesthetic practice.

The cultural orientation of a developing Jamaican aesthetic was not clearly divided between white poets and critics who supported a tradition based upon the premises of colonial models and black ones who challenged this with an emphasis upon specifically African Jamaican experience and voice. Factors such as colonial education, the absence of any known non-white literary tradition, and literary patronage led to an admixture of influences which diffused any such rigid ethnic boundaries. Also class status and social standing affected cultural affinities with the result that the two sources of a Jamaican tradition as identified by J. E. C. McFarlane were more precisely manifest as two distinct attitudes towards the issue of cultural nationalism via literature, rather than essentialist English and African writing practices, the origins and authenticity of which had been obscured by colonialism. Indeed, McFarlane himself straddles these two traditions. Although he shared an African heritage with Claude McKay, his poetic tenets clearly demonstrate his cultural affiliations to colonial Jamaica. As Cedric Lindo has commented, 'there was a difference of opinion about J. E. Clare McFarlane. Some thought him old-fashioned in his thought and poetry but he did provide a father figure for others. He was irreverently known as the black Englishman'.[43]

Nevertheless, in terms of a specifically Jamaican tradition, McFarlane's ostensibly bizarre assertion that the aesthetic developing from the English literary tradition was no less authentic than that emerging from the African, is interesting to consider.[44] Although evidently marked by its politics and mode of production, the poetry written by those still loyal to the literary legacy of

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[42]A. J. Seymour, 'Poetry in the West Indies', *Kyk-Over-Al* , 2 (1950), p. 22.

[43]Letter from Cedric Lindo 10 June 1991.

[44]McFarlane's position on the validity of the English tradition differs crucially from that of C. L. R. James cited earlier. While James is concerned to acknowledge the significance of an Anglo-centric tradition within a developing Caribbean culture, McFarlane seems to validate Anglo-centric culture as the only desirable culture for the Caribbean.

Britain was often surprisingly similar in motivation to that written by those intending to de-colonize Jamaica culturally. Several of the individuals and groups affiliated most clearly to the English colonial culture declared and pursued definite nationalist objectives, and there appears to have been little conflict of interests between loyalty to Jamaica and loyalty to Empire. Although this twinned pride in Jamaica as homeland and colony evidently entertains a rather limited scope in terms of cultural politics, the specific nationalism which was generated by this position is still significant to note.

Indeed, the first real occasion of Jamaican literary nationalism appears in 1899 from a Creole: Tom Redcam's (Thomas MacDermot's) All Jamaica Library (1904 to 1909) was sponsored by *The Jamaica Times*, the leading literary newspaper which MacDermot edited from 1900-1920.[45] This project became a valuable outlet for cheap editions of local writers, with the specific aim 'to present to a Jamaican public at a price so small as to make each publication generally purchasable, a literary embodiment of Jamaican subjects'.[46] Henry Swanzy believes Redcam's early commitment to Jamaican culture was an inspiration to other of the island's writers.

> Because he was faithful to his own soil, he succeeded in firing the enthusiasm of a small group of poets, most notably the present *doyen* of Jamaican letters, Clare McFarlane, and a school of lady poets, whose tuneful measures, mainly based on the rhythms of hymns, adorned an Imperial anthology published in 1924, the year of the Wembley Exhibition.[47]

It is certainly true that a level of commitment to Jamaican cultural and literary matters was also shown by the group of writers, most probably those whom Swanzy identifies as 'lady poets', responsible for *Singers Quarterly*. This scrap-book poetry collection, into which both popular and original poems were pasted, was created by and distributed around eleven of the Creole women and three of the 'Parnassian' poets (McFarlane, Vivian Virtue and Astley Clerk). This journal is significant in the nascent Jamaican aesthetic which it professed, it was described as 'excerpts concerning the West Indies or by West Indians'. The fact that these writers were motivated by the desire to collate and appreciate a body of culturally specific verse discloses their appreciation of the need for a national literature, even if one which affirmed the value of

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[45]Henry Swanzy has taken Redcam's achievements, along with those of H. G. de Lisser and Claude Mckay, to be 'the first positive break in West Indian silence' in 'The Literary Situation in the Caribbean', p. 268. For further information see Mervyn Morris, 'The All Jamaica Library', *Jamaica Journal*, 6 (1972), pp. 47-49.

[46]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 72.

[47]Henry Swanzy, p. 268.

colonial tradition and rule. They evidently read the work of other poets with zest and enthusiasm and their inclusion of both female and male, and black and white poets within their prospective canon reveals an inclusive and anti-hierarchical policy antithetical to that of colonialism.

It is also characteristic of this national/imperial crossroads of loyalties that volumes of poetry would include poems celebrating both Empire and Jamaica. An example of this is *Pondered Poems* (1956) by Mrs. Nellie France Ackerman Olson. This volume, published by her husband in the year of her death which represents her life's work, includes many poems dating from well over a decade before its publication date. However, I do not believe that it is due to a wide time-span alone that 'Salute to Queen', a sincere homage, appears in the same volume as 'Diving Boy' which celebrates the black male body in classical terms:

> Ebon brown, with nymph like grace,
> Lithe of limb, each sculptured line
> Is a curve of classic beauty;
> With your skin like bronzed silk,
> Nude you stand above the pool.[48]

Also, while we may find the critical bias of McFarlane problematic in terms of any anti-colonial stance more commonly associated with nationalism, it is evident that he was crucially committed to a vision of Jamaica with a literature of its own: 'John Ebenezer Clare McFarlane, himself a considerable poet, has done more than any other man, dead or alive, to convince Jamaicans of the importance of having a literature of their own'.[49]

Certainly these examples of mainly Creole activity within Jamaican literature provide a substantial challenge to the picture of Caribbean nationalist aesthetics as drawn by Arthur D. Drayton:

> The first writers were Europeans and whether migrant or Creoles of local birth, saw themselves as nothing else. For a long time, and especially in the British islands the moral compromise of their life, their reticence in those matters where self-questioning would have been disturbing, strengthened that tendency to look back to Europe. In literature this produced an attempt to recreate in the English-speaking islands the literary scene of London.[50]

Instead of the clear line of mimicry suggested here, the poetry of this period testifies to a complex cultural orientation, with the often curious hybridization

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[48]Nellie France Ackerman Olson, *Pondered Poems* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1956), p. 50.
[49]Wycliffe Bennett, 'The Jamaican Poets', *Life and Letters*, 57 (1948), p. 60.
[50]'The European Factor in West Indian Literature', *Literary Half-Yearly*, 11 (1970), p. 86.

of Jamaican and imperial allegiances which were perceived both imaginatively and politically as one by the writers. Cobham-Sander points out how this conflation of national and colonial ideals was also symptomatic of the institutions and patrons of the island. It seems that to the Creole and expatriate literary figures in Jamaica there was no sense that black writing and pro- Jamaican writing was mutually exclusive to pro-imperial writing projects. Even to the island's governor from 1907 to 1913, Sydney Olivier,

> the possibility that the black Jamaican might want to put his education to a different use, even one inimical to the interests of the "Civilised European Community", does not seem to have occurred...He was one of the earliest critics to perceive the literary dearth within Jamaican society brought about by the insistence on forms of expression which denigrade the black population while vaunting the military strength and physical supremacy of the dominant group.[51]

A similar paradoxical attitude, expressing nationalistic pride in Jamaican alongside adulation and respect for Britain, is also present in the women's poetry which focuses on the concept of a homeland. Many poems seem to endorse the concept of Jamaica as an emotional home within the politically imperial framework of the globe, as Leo Oakley observes,

> Constance Hollar too loved Jamaica, but, like so many at that time, she seemed bound up by the historical situation within which she found herself...and she seemed quite sincere about her "Songs of Empire" publication in 1932. There was nothing denoting 'pure' Jamaican patriotism in the writings of Albinia Catherine Hutton. In 'The Empire's Flag', the Union Jack, she could see a 'gallant symbol', or what she regarded as 'the Flag of Freedom'.[52]

In the processes of developing a national aesthetic, ambivalent and competing attitudes towards both notions of Empire and of Jamaica seem to be strong. Despite, the unequal balance of power which existed between the authority of British colonial culture and Jamaican culture (whether defined within or against the cultural parameters of the motherland) a curious union of these two was not uncommon. Indeed, it is this union within Jamaican poetry that has created the culturally mixed matrix from which some of the most interesting and challenging poetry evolves.

However, the most significant gestures towards a Jamaican aesthetic were made by those writers acutely aware of the realities of cultural politics within

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[51]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 23. For further information concerning Olivier see *Sydney Olivier Letters and Selected Writings* edited with a memoir by Margaret Olivier (London, 1948).

[52]Leo Oakley, p. 17.

the island, and who had no reservations or anxieties over expressing the new atmosphere of anti-colonial nationalism within literature. Most of the acknowledged figures of this movement were men (George Campbell, M G Smith, Vic Reid, Philip Sherlock, and Roger Mais), although in their use of dialect Una Marson, and later Louise Bennett, were clearly committed to the formation of a Jamaican literature distinct from colonial antecedents.

Perhaps now in the 1990s it seems almost too obvious to note, but the naming, or more significantly re-naming, of the landscape, as pioneered by this group, was an important phenomenon in the poetry of the 1930s and 1940s. Indeed, this process, along with the legitimation of Jamaican nation language or the vernacular as a voice acceptable within literary works, marked a definite breaking away from, but by no means abandonment of, the finite association between the mother-tongue and the motherland. It was a poetry which sought to register the thoughts, voices and bodies of those previously unrepresented in texts by Jamaicans, and as such it was a poetry which offered a positive framework for cultural difference to find expression.

The extent to which poets of this period contributed to movements aimed at cultural decolonisation is clearly an important and interesting line of enquiry for a post-colonial critic. Nevertheless, in order to be able to fully appreciate the poetry of this period, it is essential to consider that these poets did not just write as colonial subjects or as women but as human beings with complex subjectivities. At a time when the inherited English tradition was being subjected to cultural scrutiny and the alternative Jamaican one was consolidating its genesis, poetry became a crucible for new modes and channels of communication. Against the looming backdrop of the colonial conflict, it is essential to consider that women and black people were writing poetry for each other and for themselves and to read this poetry, as in this act alone they were resisting the tyranny of colonial culture.

Imitation or Re-writing?

By examining the earliest wave of critical attention given to Jamaican poetry within Jamaica (1950 to 1960), it becomes evident that the commonest criticism of Jamaican poetry during the period from 1900 to 1945 was its reliance upon British models and its lack of experimentation and boldness. Aesthetic critics challenged the worth of the poetry on the basis that it relied too heavily upon received colonial poetic models to offer any exciting or

innovative insights into language, imagery or form. Cultural critics disputed the poetry's worth on the basis that it was too dependent upon the experiences and ideas of the colonial predecessor to merit the label Jamaican. Both charges reveal that imitation was seen as the principal stumbling block to real achievement. As this charge of imitation is relevant to the poetry under consideration here, I wish to stage the debate concerning the status of mimicry as colonial or anti-colonial in some detail.

A study of the criticism of Jamaican poetry during this period provides ample examples of articles which cite derivativeness as characteristic. George Cumper, in 'Literary Period Piece', sees the dependence upon culturally inappropriate models as the primary artistic limitation: 'There is, first of all, a complete lack of technical inventiveness. It is the fashionable verse-forms of nineteenth century England which appear'. [53]

Arthur D. Drayton also draws attention to this quality in *A Treasury of Jamaican Verse*, where he identifies 'the triteness, the "second-hand" mentality'.[54] Indeed, in a later article, Drayton asserts that this derivative format was so totemic of the poetry being written that the criteria of evaluation came to be based on how authentic an imitation was provided.

> The reader came to measure the validity of literature by its capacity to remind him of the long English twilight, its capacity to affect the various moods and interests of the Romantics, to find equivalents for daffodils and lilies and lakes, to reproduce familiar English situations, and above all to achieve this within metropolitan varieties and manipulations of the English language that alone, in the eyes of the reader, were permissible.[55]

His comments clearly highlight the aesthetic acrobatics and dissimulations which were practised in order to provide 'poetic authenticity'.

This trait was not only identified as a weakness in early criticism, as a contemporary literary historian, Ayres, displays a modern distaste for unoriginality when describing the state of the genre in Trinidad during this period. He comments that in Trinidad the poetic tradition consisted of 'bloodless imitations of late Victorian verse'.[56] However, despite the persistent belief that originality and creativity are synonymous, in more recent years those critics condemning verse on the basis of derivativeness have been contested by those offering the reasoning behind this process. Indeed, even Derek Walcott actually

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[53]George Cumper, p. 7.
[54]Arthur D Drayton, 'West Indian Consciousness in West Indian Verse', p. 86.
[55]Arthur D. Drayton, 'The European Factor in West Indian Literature', p. 75.
[56]Peter Ayres, 'Introduction' in Reinhard Sander, p. 18.

offers an explanation for this practice at the very moment of condemning it as inexcusable: 'this rhetoric, during colonisation was synonymous with the grandeur of English Literature'. [57]

It is important to be aware that before the challenge to criteria was mounted, mimicry was the most obvious way to prove poetic status. Imitative forms were a natural attempt to seize all that went with a centrality of discourse - recognition, publication and even money. Consequently, in some texts the process may have been sincere, evolving from a craving for recognition. In this context, imitation can be seen as a rite of passage stage in poetic genesis, as Edward Baugh suggests: 'it is as if one of their chief aims was to show that the natives of the colonies could write verse like that which poets of the "mother country" had written'.[58]

However, there are other interpretations which also choose not to see this characteristic reliance on derivative modes of practice in a purely pejorative light, as the single most shameful failing on the part of the individual writer, but to view it as an inevitable consequence of a historically and culturally specific situation. The fixation on an individual 'pure' origin for art could be viewed as eurocentric myth which does not hold the same purchase with cultures where the oral transmission of literature is common (although this is not to deny the possibility of originality within oral forms). Consequently, one might suggest that an awareness of oral forms within African retentions, alongside the various vehicles of imaginative indoctrination employed during colonial rule, created less emphasis upon complete originality (as opposed to originality through modification) for the early Jamaican writer, than for their European contemporaries.

In addition, I would propose that imitation was prevalent in so much Jamaican verse of this period not solely because of the much-debated psychology of colonial dependence, but also because it presented the poetic norm of the motherland. Looking at the 'common verse in Britain from 1890', Ezra Pound beholds 'a horrible agglomerate compost...a doughy mess of third-hand Keats, Wordsworth, heaven knows what, fourth-hand Elizabethan sonority blunted, half-melted, lumpy'.[59] His analysis that the very poetry which is often unquestionably accorded the status of the 'original' genre was itself disappointingly derivative helps us to contest the notion that mimicry was a specifically colonial failing.

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[57]Derek Walcott, p. 5.

[58]*West Indian Poetry 1900-1970 A Study in Cultural Decolonisation* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1971), p. 5.

[59]Quoted in Peter Jones, ed., p. 14.

Considerations of the kind of aesthetics which were delivered by both the African and the British literary heritages to a Jamaican poet do certainly provide substantial justification for the practice of imitation. Yet, some critics have progressed beyond excusing this practice by offering historical and cultural reasoning for it, in order to re-evaluate the process itself and assess the potential it holds for subverting from within and mobilizing the very conventions to which it appears to submit.

Subjective assessment means that the line between a mere imitation of a European literary model and a re-writing or re-dressing of it is difficult to draw and in many cases is as reliant upon a politics of reading as upon that of writing. However, reading the texts with an alertness to gender and cultural issues, I would contend that the treatment of British poetic models is multi-valent in the work of these poets and shifts from emulating to parodying and from mimicking to travestying, and I hope to demonstrate this with close readings. As the boundaries between these practices become unstable, the relationship of these works to their quoted authorities is thrown into crisis and modes of interpretation more imaginative than those which trace aesthetic immaturity and colonial dependence are opened up.

Within post-colonial discourse, the ideological currency of reference to works of colonial culture, regardless of the perceived degree of its reverence or irreverence, has been highlighted. Homi Bhabha has sought to revise our perceptions by illustrating how 'to the extent to which discourse is a form of defensive warfare, mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance'.[60] An example of the Caribbean writer's ability to make such signs can be located as early as 1889. In this year J. J. Thomas, a self-educated black Trinidadian man, published *Froudacity*, an audacious and contemptuous mimetic criticism of J. A. Froude's infamous 1888 book, *The English in the West Indies*.[61]

This same practice is also evident in the archive to be studied here. Particularly in the work of Marson who is culturally more distant from her Anglo-centric models than the Creole poets, re-construction on the levels of diction, form and imagery does serve to facilitate de-construction on the level of ideas. For example, the devotional sonnets in Marson's *Tropic Reveries* invert the conventional paradigms of courtly love by exalting and worshipping the man, and her pastiche 'To Wed or Not to Wed' challenges Shakespeare's

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[60]'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Dehli, May 1817', *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985), p. 162.

[61]J. J. Thomas, *Froudacity* extract reprinted in *Black Writers in Britain 1760-1890* edited by Paul Edwards and David Dabydeen (Edinburgh, 1991), pp. 224-235.

criteria of the profound with a vision of domestic dread. Marson's poetry is, as Linda Hutcheon has pointed out of parody in general, 'creating form out of the questioning of the very act of aesthetic production'.[62]

Indeed, in much of the poetry to be considered it is clear that the Jamaican woman poet is not bidding to be a pale imitation of a brilliant British predecessor, but is rather choosing from given models and forms in order to elucidate her own ideas and express her own versions of self and the world, which in many cases have been suppressed by patriarchy and colonialism.

Apart from the consciously resistant and inventive attempts to re-write canonical works, it is important to consider to what extent any pure imitation was truly possible in the Jamaican context. For women writers and black writers who adopted the texts of cultural and literary domination as their models - white and male texts - there was already a space occupied by difference and inherent tension. By assuming the position of writers and bringing their own consciousness to their work, they are inevitably exchanging the hegemonic for the marginal and therefore engaging in a counter-discourse. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has pointed out in his discussion of African American writers' engagement with canonical texts as a mode of protest: 'ours is repetition, but repetition with a difference, a signifying black difference'.[63]

Taking into consideration the fact that imitation can be interpreted in a variety of ways, it remains an interesting line of enquiry to trace the consequences of certain writers' preferences in terms of poetic models. Obviously there was a standard canon imposed upon the colonial imagination by the school syllabus and popular adult fiction, but it is still significant to assess who demonstrated affiliations to whom and the possible motivations behind this. The evaluation of Jamaican poetry according to its relationship to British models may seem to repeat the practice of colonial criticism by taking this discourse as its point of reference, but the purpose here is to assess to what degree the signifying differences in terms of cultural affiliations affected the commonalty in terms of an inherited canon.

The split between poetic trends of this period which I have interpreted as a division between those subscribing to an aesthetic (and implicitly cultural) - defensively British (McFarlane) - and those to a cultural (and of necessity revised aesthetic)- consciously Jamaican (Mais) - notion of the poetic, has been characterized by Rhonda Cobham-Sander as a line dividing those who admired Wordsworth from those who favoured Eliot. This difference between

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[62] *A Theory of Parody: the Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms* (London, 1985), p. 10.
[63] 'Criticism in the Jungle' in *Black Literature and Literary Theory* edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (London, 1984), p. 3.

the Romantic and Modernist alignment might convey the division between the two groups in terms of the value accorded to the given colonial models and their accompanying prescriptions for morality, diction and form. Yet, despite the diversity of appreciation granted to members of the English canon, Cobham-Sander believes that in terms of cultural affiliation both groups remained bound to the motherland.

> Both generations of writers remain Anglo-centric in their orientation to language and form...such conscious imitation points to a shared assumption that an external literary standard existed, against which the style of Jamaican writers could be ultimately assessed.[64]

The consensus of opinion regarding Britain as the repository of universal and objective literary values which Cobham-Sander suggests above can be traced in some Jamaican poets' adoption of a meta-British stance. Indeed, it could be argued that certain poets in Jamaica retained more loyalty towards Britain than those native to the country. During the war period, as European poets articulated their crises of faith and disillusionment in the explanatory narratives of the Victorian Age by writing fragmented and consciously obscure works, some Jamaican poets, stirred by the renewed vigour for imperial values and Victorian ideals, produced texts supporting and promoting this ethos. As the links between aesthetic and cultural positions were strong, it is not surprising that the degree of pro-British sentiment was often directly proportional to the level of aesthetic conformity.

> One sees this insistence on formal poetic structures at its most overt in the patriotic poems written during the war by Jamaican authors, many of which were collected in C. Hollar's *Songs of Empire*.[65]

Even for those less defensive of Jamaica's status as colony, the process of choosing poetic models appears to have been guided by the criteria of content-based suitability and rarely encompassed a consideration of the need to indigenize Jamaican poetry. It was a natural choice for those wishing to preserve the morality and ethos of the Victorian era to choose models such as Browning, for those upholding spiritual values to adopt religious poets such as Herbert for their mentors, and for those wishing to challenge all of the above to champion the modernists such as Eliot and Pound (although not the implicit politics of their works).

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[64]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 185.
[65]Ibid, p. 150.

Indeed, references to and derivation from writers linked with the colonial motherland was so much the norm that in this context any variation in poetic models merits exploration. For some of the women poets, the canon of English writers was abandoned in favour of those with regional links to the poet's own ancestry - Albinia Catherine Mackay writes poetry dedicated to Robert Burns and also in the style of Burns.[66] For others, the male models were substituted by female ones - a bold step considering that at this time the concept of an alternative tradition of women's literature had not been formulated. Marson's search for models closer to her own experience is evidenced by an elegiac sonnet dedicated to Winifred Holtby in the style of Elizabeth Barrett Browning and in blues poems reminiscent of the Harlem Renaissance aesthetics of African American writers pioneering black consciousness.[67] Also, Clara Maude Garrett, one of the Creole women poets, wrote a poem entitled 'Beautiful' on 18 April 1946, published in *Singers Quarterly*;` subtitled 'Beautiful, the last word of Elizabeth Barrett Browning' this poem praises the enduring pleasure of the sonnets of this woman poet.

While these examples reveal ways in which the women poets were able to see beyond the limited canon offered by colonial education, it is significant that the very influences which Pound lists above as most prevalent in English verse are also those most evident in the work of these women poets. Specific comparisons will be reserved for the close readings of poems, but it is important to be aware of the ways in which their chosen models can help us to understand their aesthetic principles, as well as their cultural allegiances.

The Romantic poets are undeniably the most conscious and conspicuous models for Marson's verse (the epigraph to *Heights and Depths* is taken from Wordsworth and that for *The Moth and the Star* from Shelley), although the adoption of the diction and imagery of the Elizabethan sonneteers is also not uncommon. While her choice of such models could be seen as rooted solely in the schoolroom mentality which Mais condemns, it is possibly significant that both the Elizabethans and the Romantics championed the worth of personal

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[66]'Robert Burns' in *Poems by Albinia Catherine Mackay* (Kingston, 1912), pp. 16-17. Burns is a perfect poetic model for Mackay as his memory offers the culmination of her particular interests in nature, Scotland and death.

[67]'Indeed, novelist Winifred Holtby, who was active in women's orgainizations, joined the fight for black rights and became Marson's personal friend...little is known about their friendship. Holtby records an evening with Marson in 1935 in a letter to Vera Brittain, her close friend...identifies Marson as "the Jamaican dramatist who is writing The Autobiography of a Brown Girl."' in Erika Jane Sollish Smilowitz, 'Expatriate women writers from former British colonies: A bio-critical study of Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys and Una Marson.' (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Mexico, 1986), p. 114.

experience and emotion in verse, and as such mirrored the same criteria of aesthetic expression to which many of the women themselves wrote.

The centrality of emotion to the success of poetry, as expressed by William Wordsworth in his *Preface To The Lyrical Ballads*: 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'[68] is an important consideration when evaluating much of the poetry to be discussed. It is necessary to balance the judgement of this poetry as sentimental and therefore a failure by current aesthetic criteria, with the value of their emotional sincerity as a positive quality according to their chosen aesthetic principles and predecessors.

In terms of linguistic and formal models, Wordsworth is probably the most important influence upon Marson. The ballad form itself is an important model for many Caribbean poets for, as the scribal form of folk songs, it possesses a close relation to an oral tradition and is therefore a suitable model for her own oral poetry which bids literally to voice experience:

> Hallelujah- Amen
> Shout sister- shout- [69]

Wordsworth's belief in poetry which portrays 'incidents and situations from common life...in a selection of language really used by men' seems particularly appropriate to Marson's poetry which depicts Jamaican life in a language more authentically reflective of Jamaican speech, although significantly her poems often voice women's language.[70] Marson, unlike Wordsworth, did not write prose accounts of her aesthetic principles, but we know from her newspaper articles that she advocated cultural forms which honestly communicated Jamaican life:

> We are passing through the birth pains of bringing forth a new Jamaica. In this new era literature must take its place; indeed, the writing and production of books by us about ourselves and our problems is essential.[71]

While many poems do allude to and consciously introduce their Romantic models, many - especially Marson's - also extend or revise their aesthetic and moral foundations of these models. Often the intensity of feeling in her poems is poised in dynamic equilibrium with her ironic perceptions, possibly signifying that the Romantic faith in the imagination and poetry as 'the great instrument

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[68]William Wordsworth, *Preface To The Lyrical Ballads*, 1800 in *Wordsworth and Coleridge Lyrical Ballads* edited by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, second edition (London, 1991), p. 246.
[69]'Gettin' De Spirit', *The Moth and the Star*, p. 76.
[70]William Wordsworth (1802 revision), in R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones, ed.s, p. 244.
[71]'Wanted: Writers and Publishers', *Public Opinion*, 12 June 1937, p. 6.

of moral good' had been fractured by her own perception and experience of the often unpoetic life of a black woman. Certainly, when interpreting the work of Marson, and the other women poets being discussed, it is crucial to balance the view of imitation as an easy, anti-creative practice with the reading of mimicry as a means of communicating a plurality of writing practices and a multiplicity of motivating factors - ranging from admiration to satire.

Mimics or Modernists?

Despite several assertions that Jamaican women's poetry during this period does not offer any shared qualities with the twentieth century literature being written in England and Europe, but rather represents a somewhat pallid reflection of nineteenth century aesthetic forms and ideals, I wish to explore how the multiplicity and experimental nature of their narrative forms does offer interesting material for a comparative discussion of aesthetics during the Modern period. In particular, I wish to contest Erika Smilowitz's conviction that 'it is necessary to remind ourselves...that Marson was a contemporary of W. H. Auden and that Pound and Eliot were major literary figures then. It is clear that Marson was influenced very little by the innovative English or American poets of her time'.[72]

It might be true that Marson's poetry leaves little doubt that she was aware of the Romantics and their aesthetics, but this does not necessitate her denial of Modernism - the most significant literary movement of her time. The easy rejection of links with Modernism in early Jamaican poetry by contemporary critics has possibly been compounded by the fact that this literary movement was not only neglected but also maligned by some certain key figures in Jamaica during the early twentieth century.

An example of such an attitude is given by J. E. C. McFarlane's interpretation of the modern quality within Una Marson's verse. While his comments on her work are significant in that he is the only critic to identify her work as a primary source of the modern in Jamaican poetry, his perception of this movement is revealed to be somewhat jaundiced. He sees the modern as reflected in Marson's poetry through the 'element of unrest and discontent, of uncertainty and questioning, for which no earlier parallel can be found'.[73] His evaluation of the 'modern' lies in his apprehension of the 'negative' aspects and

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[72]"Weary of Life and All My Heart's Dull Pain": The Poetry of Una Marson', p. 29.
[73]J. E. C. McFarlane, *A Literature In The Making*, p. 92.

the sense of 'loss' within her work, and consequently he defines her aesthetic in terms of lack. This displays a failure on his part to understand both Modernism's highly conscious departure from previous stabilizing moral and aesthetic stances and Marson's positive attempts to disturb the *status quo* of colonialism and the stable hierarchy which dictates acquiescence to English literary models.

With equal critical bias, he judges her use of 'short, irregular, unrhymed lines and jerky rhythms' as a display of agitation and her breaking of regular metre as a sign of 'impatience'.[74] Again, he buries the positive reading, which would view these poetic experiments as conscious attempts to reject the standard iambic pentameter and conventional form in order to establish a characteristically modern, and possibly Jamaican, mode of expression. In terms of content, he attributes the expressions of despair and frustration within her poetry solely to a generalized 'modern sense of futility', without accounting for the specific tensions inherent in her perceptions of herself as a Jamaican woman and her subsequent approach to poetry.

However, McFarlane's view, although representative of the dominant culture's anxiety concerning the loss of Victorian values, was not unanimous, and much earlier Roger Mais had reacted against this 'dogged refusal to accept the more modern form'.[75] Indeed, Mais appears to have been the major champion of Modernist aesthetic practice in Jamaica at this time, clearly advocating the basic premise of a revolt against the condescending and moralizing nineteenth century aesthetic, although advocating a specifically Jamaican development. Certainly the anathema shown towards modern poetry by some male contemporary critics should not make us insensitive to the comparisons and shared ideals existent within the poetry and writing of others.

While the work under question may not conform to many aspects of 'high Modernism' as constructed from the European canon, in which the text often deliberately repudiates 'easy realism', with a denial of cognate form or progressive, agreed meaning, and an elusive and disturbed surface narrative, there are still significant historical points of comparison. The Jamaican women's poetry to be studied here does seem to reflect the contemporary anxieties about the notions of reality and self which had been generated by the scientific and psychoanalytical claims of the period, claims which question the existence of any objective state. This shared exploration of what experiences

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[74]Ibid, p. 94.
[75]'Where The Roots Lie', p. 12.

and perceptions can be confidently employed in order to assess and communicate our sense of the world may be the reason behind the element of uncertainty and unrest which McFarlane recognized and also behind Marson's poetic questioning of the economic and moral self.

It has been suggested that Caribbean writers have a distinct relation to modernism through their lived experience. For Edouard Glissant, the writers of the Caribbean are almost compelled to write modernist, 'destabilized' texts in their search for a form capable of expressing their reality, a condition which Michael Dash discusses as 'lived modernity': 'preoccupied with the issue of incompleteness and as a creative rupture with the petrified and alienated self of the colonial world'.[76] Indeed, the conditions of discontinuity and dislocation axiomatic of the lived social and cultural reality of the Caribbean region are key issues to be addressed aesthetically within Modernist literature.

Parallels in terms of creative purpose and the breaking of convention can also be drawn with the Modernist movement. Those Jamaican poets aware of the cultural alienation of their poetic tradition experienced the same dissatisfaction with the inability of language to communicate the 'reality' of their consciousness and the frustration with its incapacity to reveal their perceptions or experiences authentically. The Modernist practice of yielding poetic sensibility up to the intense perception of experience does relate to the Caribbean praxis of writing poetry specific to experience, close to everyday speech and therefore the *quotidian* reality. There is also a shared attempt to somehow rupture or fracture language in order to provide a genuine peep-hole upon the nature of experience. However, while the desire to create a new poetic language was in common with Modernism, because of the power dynamics of colonialism, for Jamaicans this project was often explicitly ideologically, as well as aesthetically, focused. In Europe, the Modernist writer was often engaged in an attempt to rescue language from its degraded and meaningless status as the mass language of the newspaper, whereas in Jamaica the momentum for this movement was quite different, with writers striving to textually present the real spoken language of the mass of Jamaican people, rather than a voice which in intellectual terms was recognisably more authentic to the nature of experience in its complexity but less accessible to the uninitiated reader. Also the Jamaican bond between culture and politics is illustrated by the fact that most of the writers did not perceive see themselves as full-time creative artists. They were writing to live and to transform the quality of their lives,

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[76]'In Search of the Lost Body: Redefining the Subject in Caribbean Literature' in *After Europe* (Coventry, 1989), p. 19.

rather than living to write - the conventional European view of the artist as a somehow inspired and therefore alienated individual detached from everyday life.

This disparity between Modernism in Britain and Jamaica in terms of cultural politics clearly did result in significant differences between the two projects. European Modernism in its search for forms of representation found naturalism and realism to be inadequate vehicles and so sought new forms through which language and art became acutely self-conscious. For anti-colonial or post-colonial writers, art could not afford the luxury of becoming self-referential but rather remained culturally as well as aesthetically relevant to the social projects of an emerging nation (thus escaping the barren aestheticism which increasingly flawed Modernism). Jamaican writers were also crucially different in their efforts to reach out to the majority of the population through cultural forms, whereas European Modernism was often informed by a desire to consciously cultivate a literary élite or intelligentsia.

Perhaps one of the most important uniting factors between Modernist writers from the two cultures is that they both possessed the outsider's eye to tradition. Pound, Eliot, Stein and H. D. (as Americans) and Yeats and Joyce (as Irish writers), also had an oblique relation to the English Literary Tradition - the hallmark of literary innovation and achievement according to C. L. R. James.

> So when you look at English literature in this century, it is foreigners who are important, men who know the language and can take part in the civilisation, but are not part of it, who are outsiders and are looking at it from outside...And it is when you are outside, but can take part as a member, that you see differently from the ways they see, and you are able to write independently.[77]

However, if Modernism represented intellectual freedom from a false sense of universal value and objective, shared reality, to some this enabled a pursuit of an individualist ethos, but to others it offered an opportunity to express a different consciousness of common purpose. Modernism related to Marson's work in particular through the influence of the Harlem Renaissance, which could be argued to be the beginning of African American modernism. Brown identifies this link to an emerging cultural tradition in her blues poems where 'she attempts to combine Jamaica's rural folk language with the black American's blues tradition'.[78]

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[77]C.L.R. James, p. 244.
[78]Lloyd Brown, p. 37.

Indeed, if we associate Modernism solely with the T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound school of thought, then clearly the work of these women poets would be outside of the movement, even antithetical to it. Pound's determination to separate art from life and emotion from poetry, as well as his fierce suppression of gender differences - his insistence that Hilda Doolittle assume the more gender anonymous title H. D. and sign herself 'Your brother' - makes him a most incongruous contemporary. Yet if we look behind the figures who have been constructed as the prime exempla of Modernism within the Anglo-American canon, then another version of the Modernist aesthetic can be discovered. As Suzanne Clark has researched, Modernism as dominant literary histories have portrayed it is a staunchly masculinist version which actually had the effect of reversing 'the increasing influence of women's writing'.[79] Of particular relevance to this project, is Clark's analysis of the way in which Modernism's 'disconnection from social consequence, from history, has everything to do with the gendering of intellectuality...the rejection of narratives that have explained and legitimated feeling'.[80] Indeed, her analysis offers an explanation behind certain male critics' uneasiness with terms such as feeling and sentiment and the embarrassment within academic circles concerning the acknowledgement of the emotional valency of certain writings.

If we attempt to reconstruct Modernism without this gender bias, we can appreciate the many female Modernist writers who share certain aesthetic practices with Marson. Writers such as H. D., Dorothy Richardson and Gertrude Stein all pioneered and participated in Modernist movements and yet did not adhere to Eliot and Pound's rigid prescriptions or believe that the expression of personal experience was taboo. In their works, the concepts of art and life were united, they 'lived as they wrote, lived what they wrote, wrote what they lived'.[81] As recent feminist scholarship on gender and Modernism has revealed, female Modernist writers did not harbour politically reactionary tendencies, but rather translated their experimental and provocative textual strategies into lived unconventionality.

According to these principles, the works of Una Marson and the women Creole poets reveal significant links to modernist writing beyond a shared historical crisis of faith. This is particularly notable in Marson's poetry which confronts the same awareness of the female self as always in flux, and shows an interest in what might constitute a gendered consciousness. These female

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[79]Suzanne Clark, *Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Bloomington, Indiana, 1991), p. 1.
[80]Ibid, p. 3.
[81]Handscombe and Smyers, *Writing For Their Lives* (London, 1987), p. 10.

Modernists' experiments with the re-invention of self and expression of a multiplicity of desires and selves certainly links to Marson's poetry in its contrasting but coexisting images of womanhood. Indeed, these Modernist women writers went beyond their male counterparts' fracturing of conventional forms and linguistic experimentation - both stylistic rejections important to Marson too - in order to find ways of inscribing gender into the text.

The relation which Marson's work bears to the women writers of the Modernist period is both an interesting and important discovery as it counsels us not to accept the canonical image of literary movements as this so often distorts or obscures certain members for reasons of gender and ethnicity. Whilst Marson evidently did not strive to produce the concentrated, obscure texts identified with canonical Modernism, her work testifies that she did join in a movement to re-define her-self and her society for her own modern time.

Gender and Poetry

It is only by unearthing the gender bias of the literary history of Modernism and tracing the specific links between women's writing practices that we can tangibly link these Jamaican women poets to the concerns of the Modernist movement. Yet if a consideration of gender so alters the axis of this discussion, does it not also change the terms of the debates over colonial influences, received notions of the poetic, aesthetic criteria and cultural affiliations? It is crucial to be aware that while these women were subject to many of the same influences and held many beliefs in common with their male counterparts, we should not underestimate the differences in perspective and in poetic practice which their gender precipitates and even necessitates.

In keeping with the recent sketching of female literary traditions, which have emphasized the additional obstacles confronting a female writer in the quest for voice, publisher and recognition, we may assume that women were less likely to write, or to be aware of current trends in literature. My last chapter has highlighted that this is actually not the whole story as far as Jamaican women's poetry during this period is concerned, but it is nevertheless important to be aware of the creative limitations imposed by the terms of their gender, as well as their colonial, socialization.

It was in looking for suitable role-models to follow in their creative lives that women poets in Jamaica were confronted with various constraints. The

problem of an enabling literary heritage was even more problematic for women writers as the canon of English Literature imported by colonialism was virtually entirely male, as well as white. Indeed, it is interesting to consider that what was taken to be 'mainstream' literature at this time was actually very much 'minority' literature in terms of its white male origins. While some Jamaican women poets did take male poets as suitable models (often in terms of cultural identification), others endeavoured to show the significance of a female role model through their poetry, as has already been discussed with the example of Elizabeth Barrett Browning.

Perhaps, the high percentage of pseudonyms adopted by these women poets is indicative of the difficulties they encountered in assuming, or being granted, literary roles. R. J. Owens has suggested that a heightened consciousness over artistic identity is characteristic of Jamaican writing. To him, there is

> a disturbing awareness one has of the self-consciousness of so much of the verse. It is as if the poet were all the time aware of himself being a poet, with one eye on his performance, one eye on his audience's reaction, and none to spare for whatever it is he is trying to express.[82]

The presence of difference and often of de-naturalization in relation to notions of the poetic has already been discussed and it is possible that in an effort to overcome anxieties and even prejudices concerning authorial life, these women used pseudonyms. This strategy presents a way to separate everyday and creative personae, but interestingly the pseudonyms are generally female and therefore suggest a means to assume an enabling mask but do not signify the need to hide a disabling female face.

The fact that few of these women needed to be acknowledged in their own name or thought of themselves as poets or writers in the sense of ego or vocation would seem to endorse concepts of the female socialization . Yet while the fact that none of these women was a full-time poet may link with the Jamaican ethic of writing to live, it is also related to the fact that as women they were often also responsible for the time-consuming roles of wife and mother. In this sense the politics of literary production are also affected by gender. One insight into the real limitations maternity exerts may be gleaned by Albinia Hutton's contributions to the BBC Caribbean Voices programme. A fairly regular contributor until December of 1947, she does not submit any poems until June of 1950 when a poem appears under her married name of Albinia Hutton-Davis entitled 'The Harassed Mother', and it is not until 1951 that her contributions become regular again.

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[82]R. J. Owens, 'West Indian Poetry', p. 120.

However, a woman poet cannot escape gendered evaluation by finding the time and confidence to write, or by simply writing; as a female poet she is always prone to particularly persistent modes of analysis. If we turn to J. E. C. McFarlane again, we can trace two of the prevalent icons of the woman poet which predetermined, if not prevented textual discoveries. In his discussion of the work of Eva Nicholas, McFarlane first draws attention to the superior poetic achievements of her brother and then comments that 'it is hardly to be doubted, even were the truth not known, that much of what is excellent in the work of Arthur Nicholas was brought to fruition by the kindly influence and loving understanding of his sister'.[83] McFarlane's evaluation, which discusses Eva Nicholas's worthiness before her work, plays upon the archetype of the woman writer as supportive and deferential - the familiar sacrificial 'Dorothy Wordsworth' figure whose own literary talents are forsaken in the cultivation of male talent and are consequently never granted equal critical attention. In the same volume, McFarlane turns his critical skills to an analysis of Tropica's poetry. '"Dainty" is the word for Tropica. Her poetry is delicate, like a scent drifting from afar. Her eternal theme is the beauty of Jamaica's hills and valleys and flowers and sunny skies and palm-skirted seas'.[84] His elision of poet and poetry, and more particularly here of feminine quality and poetic quality, is a well-documented trend in the criticism of women's poetry. This strategy enables the critic to deflect attention away from women's their textual capabilities onto their personal, here excessively feminized and non-threatening, qualities. Indeed, it is particularly interesting that McFarlane discusses Tropica's poetry in these terms as her poetry offers the most sustained engagement with the everyday lives of Jamaica's black working population amongst the Creole poets, even if it does so somewhat patronisingly. This fact is never addressed in McFarlane's estimation of her work, which concentrates only on her nature poetry. This strategy of representing the woman poet as a suffering saint of sensibility is also demonstrated in his description of Constance Hollar:

> Her life, as far as I knew it, was one long overcoming. She found cause for thanksgiving and exultation where others would feel disappointment and resentment; she won out of sorrow and suffering unspeakable joys and benefits whose value cannot be computed; she found courage and hope where many would find despair; she exhibited strength where weakness would have been more natural; she found the world almost unbearably lovely in spite of its misery and pain.[85]

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[83] *A Literature in the Making*, p. 26.
[84] Ibid, p. 64.
[85] J. E. C. McFarlane, 'Constance Hollar', *A Literature in the Making*, p. 41.

As these examples reveal, difference is not only attributable to the demands upon writing time, but also to the quality of reception. Any comparison to male poets in terms of profile, status, publishing access and academic attention will testify to the gender politics being operated. In simple terms, the gendering of literary reputations can be traced by the fact that virtually all readers of Caribbean literature would be familiar with Claude McKay's poetry, whereas very few would know about the work of Una Marson, although in many ways they are comparable figures. Gender is also an important consideration because women clearly experienced restricted access to both the reading and writing of poetry due to their limited educational and social opportunities.

However, in many respects the main obstacles preventing an acceptance of the creative writer in Jamaica were ethnicity and class more than gender. With the hierarchy of imperialism seemingly more active than that of patriarchy, it was more likely for a middle class white or coloured woman to become a poet than for a lower class black man. As the amount of volumes and poems written during this period testify (29 volumes by women were published between 1900 and 1945, with many other unpublished works), access to poetry was clearly in no way prohibited to white women. As part of the social and educational élite, white women were probably fostered to regard poetry as a suitable leisure activity. Its colonial reputation as purely aesthetic dalliance, both effectively private and apolitical, almost certainly governed the expectations of the white women's verse as genteel and domestic, but not their right to write it.

For the black women poets, Una Marson being the only one under consideration here (although it is crucial not to forget the talent and success of Louise Bennett), it would seem that additional restrictions did apply in some respects. The problem of a literary heritage was even more acute for a black Jamaican woman, who did not share as much culturally as the Creoles would have done, and not as much in terms of gender identification as black male poets. As we now know, the problem of a suitable literary heritage was not one of existence but rather one of visibility. Marson's literary grandmothers, like Ellison's protagonist in his novel *Invisible Man*, were simply over-looked or hidden from sight in cellars of bigotry. Although even at this time women writers and black writers had substantial artistic heritages to behold, it has taken academics with the time and money to unearth the surviving fragments of such traditions from the authorized arrangements of knowledge with patriarchal and colonial societies. For Jamaican women writing in the 1930s and 1940s the chain

between writers and writing which we can now trace with the privilege of retrospection, was as yet unformed.

However, literary value is always historically relevant and it is interesting to note that while during this period the colonial authorities chose to select predominantly white male role models, at present the prominence accorded to post-colonial and feminist criticism means scholarship is often focused on black women's writing. It is in this context that interest in Una Marson is being restored, she is now being referred to in books about and by black women writers as the literary grandmother whom Alice Walker identifies as historically denied by slavery: 'Did you have a genius of a great-great-grandmother who died under some ignorant and depraved white overseer's lash?'[86] and whom Elizabeth Barrett Browning perceived as a notable absence in her lifetime as a female poet writing within a patriarchal tradition: 'England has had many learned women...and yet where are the poetesses?...I look everywhere for grandmothers and see none'.[87]

Evidently, because of the intersection of influences exercised upon them due to their ethnicity and gender, black women poets were subject to a different politics of reading and writing than white women or black men. Some critics have suggested that this reading should be informed by the fact that black women poets are confined to a state of 'double colonization', in having to break free of the physical and psychological bonds which judged them as 'other' on two counts - both non-white and non-male. Yet I would challenge this notion as it seems likely that in Jamaica the overwhelming difficulties in gaining any recognition as a non-European creative artist and the increasing momentum in the drive for a national literature distinct from that of the imperial culture, might have weakened any specific prejudice against black women's access to and involvement in literary circles and production (although Una Marson's rather unique position does indicate the severity of those obstacles facing the black woman writer).

Having considered how gender and the intersection of gender, ethnicity, culture and class affect a poet's self-determination and opportunity to create, it is important to realize how these issues can affect the nature of the poetry produced. While these women were engaged in the primary struggles to nationalize Jamaican literature along with their male contemporaries, their directions and means were often different. The practice of keeping scrap books

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[86]'In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens' in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (London, 1984), p. 233.

[87]*The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett-Browning* edited by Frederick G. Kenyon, 2 vols, (New York, 1899), I, pp. 231-232 quoted in Gilbert and Gubar, *Shakespeare's Sisters* (Bloomington, 1979), p. 65.

with local news items, letters and picture postcards pasted next to poems, reveals little of the genre snobbery which one might associate with a colonial notion of poetry. Although this practice may be seen as characteristic of women's writing as more provincial and introspective, contrary to expectations concomitant to such a notion of the feminine in many ways these women poets were more radical in their approach than the men and the details of popular events offer a refreshing insight into the relation between Jamaican art and life.

Indeed, rather than being doubly prone to imitation and Victorianism, as their experience of the constraints of gender as well as colonial socialization might make it logical to assume, the women's poetry written during this period is in many respects more inventive and innovative. It is possible that their experience of both the cultural panic button (made prominent by the rise of nationalism), and the gender panic button (activated by the suffrage movements and the mobilization of women into the workforce in wartime Europe), placed them at the cutting edge of creative perception. Certainly Marson's poetry displays an awareness that at a time of crumbling discursive boundaries it was essential for discourse to be seized by all.

In some respects the literary development of women poets during this period was in sharp contrast to that of the men. In her analysis of male poetic activity during this period, Rhonda Cobham-Sander suggests that it was the white writers with closer cultural links to Europe who could maintain the roles of artistic pioneer and nonconformist and the black poets who had to acquiesce to accepted literary standards in order to be acknowledged. As far as the women's poetry is concerned, it is clear that it is the Creole women who supported the received aesthetic trends (possibly because this was their social role to maintain colonial dignity) more than Marson, the black poet, who was unmistakably experimental and iconoclastic in her approach.

Also, while Cobham-Sander relates how white patrons directed the black writers under their influence to write in ways which consciously conveyed their ethnic identities and that this aspect of their verse actually stopped when they wrote independently of them, Marson developed her own female black aesthetic through her beliefs in an assertion of racial pride and condemnation of racism, rather than the cited male 'wish to perform well in the eyes of such prestigious patrons'.[88]

I wish to suggest that it is precisely the contentious and undecidable nature of their aesthetic and cultural statements which secures their worth as critical

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[88]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 27.

subjects. Their poetry provides a vital commentary on both the theories and practices of Jamaican literature at a time when old concepts of literary and cultural value were being questioned but new ones were not as yet enshrined. These poets pursued particular aesthetic and nationalist goals, which from a historically and culturally specific point of view make a consideration of their work worthwhile. Whatever status we finally attribute to them as Caribbean or Jamaican writers, we must acknowledge that they were writing poetry in notion and that this presents an interesting archive or analysis during a time when notions of poetry were in ferment.

The interest in studying the poetry of the white Creoles lies in the insight to be gained into the cultural and gender tensions present within the poetry. This same line of enquiry proves fascinating in an investigation of Una Marson's poetry, which further testifies to how, as a black woman poet, she was able to employ a language created by and imbued with a paternalistic and patriarchal ideology in order to write poetry which exposed and exploded the mythologies constructed to support racism and sexism. Her awareness of herself as a black woman within a Jamaican society, where oppressive ideologies were still operated and perpetuated, provides the reader with a poetry which probes the dimensions of 'self' beyond the nationalization of consciousness which has come to mark the literary achievement of this period.

Poetry on Poetry

I wish to briefly examine a few selected poems by these women poets which discuss notions of poetry and the poet in order to map out dominant conceptions and the departure from these which Una Marson's poetry makes.

In the penultimate poem of *Tropic Reveries*, 'The Poet's Heart', Marson presents us with a fairly conformist picture of the poet, representative of much of the poetry written by the Creole women on this subject. Her description of the poet as differing from others only in heightened perceptual and emotional capacity: 'More deeply feel all that they see', seems to support the popular Romantic belief in the poet as 'a man speaking to men: a man it is true endued with a more lively sensibility' which is also endorsed in Stephanie Ormsby's 'The Poet'.

> The seeing eye, and the hearing ear, and the understanding heart:
> ...
> The hearing ear is open to the music of the spheres
> The wind hath tales for its harking, or ever the earth began.

> The singers and sages have brought it the wisdom of all the years;
> And far in the woods it follows the lure of the pipes of Pan.
> But hid in the ripple of music it catches the minor strain,
> And under the mirth of the children creation's endless pain.[89]

Also in common with her Creole contemporaries, Marson adopts a male persona as poet in this generalized thesis.[90]

> He knows that many hearts are sad
> That need someone to make them glad;
> ...
> His poet's heart goes out to these,
> Their sorrows and their woes he sees
> By words of comfort oft he frees[91]

Yet, it is curious that the poet should be gendered male when the version of the poet's mission is quite other than the conventional phallocentric concept of creativity. The image of the poet as a benevolent creator, placing his talent and vision at the service of his people seems to advocate an ethic of altruism and nurture which are often conceived as particularly 'feminine' qualities. It is perhaps by adopting a male persona that Marson hopes to validate and objectify her own aesthetic beliefs. However, within a Jamaican context this ethos of poetic purpose also suggests a specific cultural responsibility which the poet holds towards his/her people. In this sense, although the poem presents a somewhat simplistic Romantic notion of the poet as man among men, it is significant that this relationship between poet and people is not the willing condescension of an 'unacknowledged legislator of the world', but rather a sense of purpose and non- elitism which redefine the intellectual and egotistic figure.

Nevertheless, the poem's final lines return the poet to a more traditional frame of reference.

> Oh soul that mid earth's darkest hours
> Still sings of hope among earth's bowers,
> Sing on: thy songs bring richest showers
> Of blessings unto me.

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[89]'The Poet', *Voices from the Summerland* edited by J. E. C. McFarlane (London, 1929), pp. 250-251. McFarlane offers this commentary: 'And in 'The Poet'...she gives us a description of the nature and office of the poet which leaves little room for wonder that with such a conception of her high calling she has so well achieved', *A Literature in the Making*, p. 62.
[90]See Albinia Hutton, 'Words', *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses* (Kingston, 1932), p.108.
[91]'The Poet's Heart', *Tropic Reveries* (Kingston, 1930) p. 87.

This is an representation of the poet which bears some comparison to other works. The same classical world is evoked in R. Hope McKay's (Claude McKay's daughter) 'O For A Heart To Sing'.

> Would I were a poet with a voice divine!
> A song sublime would greet the world today-,
> A sacred love-song from this heart of mine.
> ...
> Beneath some woodland bower I recline
> And list, in fancy, to the birdlings lay.[92]

Albinia Hutton's 'Poet-Song' figures the poet as a blessed vehicle of God's prophetic voice.

> We did not choose ourselves to sing Thy songs,
> We are Thy chosen. Ah, may this proud thought
> Uplift us, so there creep no discord in,
> No note unworthy of Thy song sublime![93]

Constance Hollar's 'Poetry' offers a more abstract and exaggerated version of poetic inspiration as both angelic and natural in order to present an image of divine and earthly beauty.

> She comes to me down a ladder of light
> To a shining floor of mother of pearl-
> Brightly glimmering wings about her curl-
> The spirit of poetry comes at night
> Surrounded by gulls this glittering sprite- [94]

It is evident then that Marson does work with the same dominant notions of poetry as fanciful, morally worthwhile and spiritually inspired as many of her Creole contemporaries here, and that her emphasis upon the poet's heightened sensibility and capacity for feeling are characteristic of received notions of the poet's nature. However, the poem does also suggest a strategically ambiguous gendering of the poetic gift and it is her increasingly explicit exploration of the gendering of poetics and of the cultural status of the poet which is of particular interest.

The emphasis upon poetry as accessible and empathetic is continued in *The Moth and the Star* with 'To Be A Poet'. This poem also commences with a traditional image of the poet, here in the pastoral Arcadia, idealised and twee. However, as a conditional meditation on 'If I were a poet', the poem allows itself

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92'O For A Heart To Sing', *Year Book of Poetry League of Jamaica 1940*, p. 42.
93'Poet-Song', *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses*, p. 33.
94'Poetry', *Year Book of Poetry League of Jamaica 1940*, p. 66.

a certain freedom to experiment with different roles. From the rather unchallenging 'I would watch the fleecy clouds as they pass', to the more socially engaged 'I would plead with the wealth and high of birth', and then to the committed advocate 'That peace must reign in the world for all time', Marson seems to be holding our notion of the poet up to scrutiny within this poem, questioning the nature and purpose of the poet under the guise of questioning her ability to match up to this role.[95]

The powerful and confident lyric 'Love Songs' presents a positive voice which articulates the fusion of the poet's gendered and creative consciousnesses.

> I am a woman
> So I sing of Love
> I sing of Love
> Because I am a woman[96]

Although these opening lines of the poem could be construed as unproblematically confirming woman as essentially altruistic and selfless, in Marson's poetry 'woman' (as a universal) is often evoked within a context which interrogates and subverts the cultural limits placed upon women. In this poem, the relationship between women, love and poetry is re-cast as an affirmation of female aesthetics which stands in direct opposition to the belief that it is precisely women's 'emotional' nature which makes them incapable of writing 'serious' verse. Indeed, if we accept that the love 'songs' are poems - as other poems would seem to suggest: 'Tempt my heart to sing' and 'My songs must flow to thee' - then we must acknowledge that this aesthetic and this poem, have reconciled a fundamental contradiction facing women in patriarchal cultures who must choose either to love (and hence to give themselves over to emotions) or to create.[97] A song or a poem created by womanly love defies this patriarchal imperative to choose between 'love - womanly, maternal love, altruistic love - a love defined and ruled by the weight of entire culture: and egotism - a force directed by men into creation, achievement, ambition'.[98] Therefore the simple relation between gender and creativity presented here is not an 'essential' view of the female imagination, but is rather a womanist re-view of a specifically female capacity for creativity which is not alienated from her femininity but which embraces her feminine identity as a central animating force within her aesthetic, rather than a

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[95]'To Be A Poet', *The Moth and the Star*, p. 9.
[96]'Love Songs', ibid, p. 42.
[97]'Dreaming', *Heights and Depths*, p. 33 & 'Respite', p. 56.
[98]Adrienne Rich, 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing As Revision', *On Lies, Secrets and Silences* (London, 1984), p. 46.

conflicting or prohibiting one. The disruptive potential of this voice is imagined by Hélène Cixous.

> The Voice sings from a time before law, before the Symbolic took one's breath away and reappropriated it into language under its authority of separation. The deepest, the oldest, the loveliest Visitation. Within each woman the first, nameless love is singing.[99]

The self-fulfilling argument, which both commences and concludes the poem, stands in opposition to the unfulfilled female subject who characterizes the romantic quest, reflecting a symmetry of reason and a balance of form resulting from the synthesis of the female creative identity which it expresses. It is interesting that the relation between gender and genre strongly articulated in 'Love Songs' is also expressed by Constance Hollar in her foreword to *Flaming June*. She rejects 'Poet-ess - hateful word - which should be thrown into the discard forever' but does not do so in order to erase gender but rather to figure it, not diminutively, but proudly as 'woman-poet'.[100]

However, it is in the Nature section of *The Moth And The Star* that we find Marson's most interesting poem concerning the issue of inscription and the role of the poet. 'Winged Ants' was criticized by Philip Sherlock for the very reason that Coleridge criticized Hamlet, he felt that it displayed 'a disproportion ...between the experience and the feelings it aroused'.[101] However, I wish to argue that this is not a poem of sentimental self-indulgence, but a brilliant allegory of the relationship between authority (here of the writer) and power. The gesture of cruelty which informs the poem, when the poet strips an ant which has flown on to her page of its wings, is charged with powerful emotions because it conveys to its author the terrifying irresistibility of power 'a sudden impulse/ An irresistible desire', (a fear made more real in 1937 by the rise of fascism).[102] It is clearly significant that the executioner of power in this instance is the 'author', and the maiming which occurs on the page within the poem does call into question the notion of authorial power. It is the act of writing which has empowered our poet, and it is an authorial power which she is aware of having abused as the fragments of the ant's wings upon her blank page begin to re-write the text of her own history, in which suffering and oppression also appear in black and white.

Now I repent in grief

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[99]'Sorties' in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman* translated by Betsy Wing (Manchester, 1986), pp. 63-132, p. 93.
[100]Author's Foreword to *Flaming June*, p. iv.
[101]Introduction to *The Moth and the Star*, p. xiii.
[102]'Winged Ants', ibid, p. 36.

For, little creature
You will fly no more
And now I feel your woe;
Has not life's hard caress
Forced from me glad wings

The feelings of guilt and regret experienced by the poet may initially seem 'disproportionate' to the value of the insect wings, but when we consider that the origins of these emotions are traced to an identification with the victim of careless cruelty, and thus to a context of colonialism, they acquire a different significance. The distress which she feels towards her own action is clearly linked to her knowledge that such actions have been performed upon her. The small gesture of cruelty becomes a metonym of the possibility for and attraction towards violence which power brings (even to the powerless), and it is not incidental that the act should take place literally on her paper as it suggests the power and violence of inscription.

The destruction of wings also suggests the denial of transcendence, transcendence above limitations and above suffering: I wanted to rise, but the disembowelled silence fell back upon me, its wings paralysed'.[103] The ants may survive their mutilation 'leaving their precious wings', but their 'loss', their 'grounding', is permanent. When the poetic persona chastises herself because she 'should have known that wings/ Are frail and delicate unearthly things', she suggests her own sense of cultural loss which can never be restored. The tensions between authority and empathy, cultural status and cultural deprivation which 'Winged Ants' stages, and of which Marson's poetry is often self-conscious, are also those tensions which make Marson's position as a black woman poet both precarious and interesting.

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[103]Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, p. 140.

CHAPTER 4

CULTURAL POLITICS

> The Caribbean is not an idyll, not to its natives. They draw their working strength from it organically, like trees, like the sea almond or the spice laurel of the heights. Its peasantry and its fishermen are not there to be loved or even photographed; they are trees who sweat, and whose bark is filmed with salt, but everyday on some island, rootless trees in suits are signing favourable tax breaks with entrepreneurs, poisoning the sea almond and the spice laurel of the mountains to their roots.
>
> (Derek Walcott)[1]

> Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'.
>
> (Stuart Hall)[2]

The relationship between literature and national identity has been the interest of much post-colonial criticism for, as Edward Said has outlined, 'Literature has played a crucial role in the re-establishment of a national cultural heritage, in the re-instatement of native idioms, in the re-imagining and re-figuring of local histories, geographies, communities'.[3] Certainly Said's suggestion of the imagination as a location for the creation of a post-colonial world is especially pertinent to Caribbean societies in which there was no pre-colonial or established indigenous culture which can be revived and re-valued in order to resist the colonising culture. Although one might argue that this absence made the role of imaginative forms more vital during periods of nationalist struggle, it also made their relationship to the projects of cultural nationalism less easily defined. I have already discussed how the production of poetry relates to various projects aimed at establishing a Jamaican national culture and the often ambivalent relationship that such efforts held to the instituted colonial culture. Both the cultural politics and the cultural forms which need to be discussed with reference to early Jamaican literature are

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[1]'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory', Nobel Lecture (The Nobel Foundation, 1992), p. 14.

[2]'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' reprinted in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial theory: A Reader* edited by Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (Hemel Hempstead, 1993), p. 395.

[3]'Figures, Configurations, Transfigurations' in *From Commonwealth to Post-colonial* (Coventry, 1992), p. 3.

complex; there was no single nationalist ideology in Jamaica during this period, and writers were often sitting uncomfortably between ideas of a colonial nation and a potentially non-colonial or anti-colonial homeland. Certainly the expressions of the need and desire for a distinctly Jamaican culture did not cohere in any easily definable manner during this period, and the lack of consensus over what properly constituted culture in Jamaica, or more contentiously Jamaican culture, during this period can be read through the poetry produced, as well as through the various debates and positions staged in newspapers and lecture halls.

In order to establish a model for this reading which attends to the complex negotiations between cultural identity and modes of representation within the specific Caribbean focus of this thesis, I wish to draw extensively on Stuart Hall's article 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora'. In this piece, Hall, a cultural critic, puts forward two theories of cultural identity which he sees as pertinent to an analysis of contemporary cinema of the Caribbean. His insights are, however, instructive to a reading of the poetry under consideration here both in the problems and in the solutions which they highlight. In his first definition, Hall discusses

> cultural identity' in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared ancestry and history hold in common...This 'oneness', underlying all the other, more superficial differences is the truth, the essence, of 'Caribbeanness, of the black experience.[4]

As Hall's final comment here makes clear, this conceptualization of cultural identity is one most relevant to the black, (previously) colonized population within the Caribbean, whose lives have been subject to deculturization at the hands of the colonizing powers. It is a version of cultural identity recognisably situated within theories of nativism (significant to an analysis of many 'early' post-colonial texts) which seek to establish authentic identities in terms of ethnicity in order to empower the formerly powerless. However, the difficulty of this theory within the Caribbean context is that the only fully 'shared history' of its people is that of slavery and colonisation, a history which still holds them within the paradigm which they ultimately wish to deny as creating their subjectivities and cultural identities.

Moreover, this version of cultural identity has limited application within this study which seeks to examine the writings of Creole women and therefore

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[4]Stuart Hall, p. 393.

needs to address the complex matrix of cultural identifications and identities amongst different ethnic groups. In this project, Hall's second model of cultural identity is far more helpful.

> Cultural identity...is a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power.[5]

This formulation, which foregrounds the contingent and changeable nature of cultural identity, is certainly more relevant with reference to the context of Jamaican society in the first half of the twentieth century when the status of colonial as well as alternative cultural histories began to be renegotiated, and the essentialized past of Britain as well as that of Africa was under question. Hall's theory of cultural identity also relates to the issue of representation in his advice that

> instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation.[6]

This proposal that cultural identity is not only reflected in, but also constituted by, modes of representation will be explored in my analysis of Jamaican women's poetry which aims to trace the various modes of cultural identity which are produced, and to explore how the continuum of these cultural identities relates to issues of nationalism and colonialism.

An exploration of cultural identity is a fascinating line of enquiry within the poetry of Una Marson, whose writings are clearly those positioned most crucially on the cusp of colonial / post-colonial representations. A growing awareness of the need to shape national subjects from colonial subjects and Caribbean homelands from imperial motherlands finds strongest articulation in her work, whereas in the work of many of the Creole writers, whose very presence on the island signalled the negotiation of two cultures, the cultural boundaries between these were less clearly defined and there was little, if any, contradiction between these concepts. Nevertheless, my readings of the poems by Creole women is particularly interested in the ways in which these writers (whose cultural identities could be seen to be as hybrid and as fragmented as

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[5]Ibid, p. 394.
[6]Ibid, p. 392.

those of the colonized populations) demonstrate an interest in the issues of origin, displacement and belonging which are so often perceived to be relevant to colonized peoples, but somehow believed to be stable 'givens' within settler populations. I am also concerned to examine how a range of poets, across ethnic groups, position their poetic voices in relation to certain concepts key to nationalist thought, and to suggest the cultural politics indicated by these various positionings.

Representations of Jamaica

In this section I not only wish to address in what ways the poetry written during this period attempts to represent an authentic Jamaica, but also to question how any notion of an 'authentic Jamaica' may have been conceived and mapped out given the constant recourse to culture (even for representations of Nature) and the saturation of British (colonial) cultural forms. In addition, I am interested in how certain representations of Jamaica are coded by literary discourses which are also, in their colonial orientation, discourses of power.

Certainly the presence of colonial discourse cannot be ignored within this poetry, and within critical evaluations contemporary to its publication. In his introduction to *Voices From The Summerland*, the first published anthology of Jamaican verse, David M. Mitchell proudly declares that

> Once more our restless sea-bourne race has explored the wine-dark ocean and founded new homes for its children over not one but many seas. And of its ever loyal cherishing of our English poetic tradition this volume is proof.[7]

The confident assertion concerning the achievements of 'our race' which Mitchell makes here suggests an almost supremacist attitude and a clear relation between the cultural form of this poetry and the cultural politics of Empire. Furthermore, his argument based on 'our race' shows no recognition of the ethnic diversity of the writers whose work is published within this volume (poems by both Claude McKay and J. E. C. McFarlane, the volume's editor, appear), and certainly no engagement with the fact that work by 'colonial subjects' is represented as part of Jamaica's poetic tradition. The clear eurocentrism of this introductory comment is further corroborated by the title

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[7]David M. Mitchell, Introduction to *Voices From The Summerland* edited by J. E. C. McFarlane.

of this volume; it is only when defined within a European conceptual framework that Jamaica is a 'summerland'. However, this particular representation of Jamaica within the cultural reference system of Europe is not an isolated, or incidental, means of codification. In several poems ostensibly 'about' Jamaica it is possible to trace the way in which European myths are relocated within the Caribbean. In much of the Creole poetry Jamaica is exoticized, transformed into a jewel, a glittering vision of the 'Isle of Beauty', 'God's Hills' and 'this island a fairy dream'.[8] However, it is my aim to explore the more interesting representations of Jamaica and its people (the two are often hard to disentangle) in this chapter.

Possibly the most persistent eurocentric myth to be inscribed onto Jamaica is that of Eden, the prelapsarian paradise. The historical significance of this as a myth of conquest is discussed by Lowenthal.

> The West Indies share the reputation of tropical islands everywhere for beauty and physical comfort. Images of Eden kept alive in medieval gardens and embellished by travellers from the Orient aroused expectations for the Caribbean that Columbus and his followers were happy to confirm. And the islands did conform to preconceptions of paradise...Ignored or forgotten are less attractive aspects of West Indian nature.[9]

Certainly the status of this representation as a projection of European fantasy makes its cultural politics fairly straightforward, but the enduring life of this myth as an explanatory narrative for the extreme natural beauty of the islands (even in the 1990s the Caribbean is represented in this way by tourist companies) appears to have naturalized the image of Eden, obviously expedient to cultural domination and appropriation, so that it emerges as a short-hand for expressing the magnificence of the island's landscape even in the work of those whose decolonizing strategies are well-known. Representations of Jamaica which refer to the island within the frame of this myth surface in the poetry of Una Marson to rather interesting effect.

The allusion to an Edenic vision first appears in *Tropic Reveries* in 'Jamaica'. In this poem the Jamaican landscape is first presented as a positive inversion of the English landscape: 'No fields and streams are covered o'er with snow, | But one grand summer all the year through'[10] The difficulty and ambivalence inherent in the task of representing Jamaica in comparison to England can be

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[8]Lena Kent, 'Isle of Beauty', *The Hills of St Andrew* (Kingston, 1931), p. 43, Albinia Hutton, 'God's Hills', *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses*, p. 13 and Tropica, 'Blinkeys', *The Island of Sunshine* (New York, 1904), p. 47 respectively.
[9]David Lowenthal, *West Indian Societies*, p. 14.
[10]'Jamaica', *Tropic Reveries*, pp. 60-1.

traced in this one statement. Marson's opening poetic gesture which celebrates the absence of snow can certainly be read as a positive representation given Brathwaite's observation that 'in terms of what we write, we are more conscious of the falling snow...than the force of the hurricane'.[11] However, the fashioning of the Jamaican climate as 'one long summer' again returns the island to an anglocentric gaze. Equally, although the poem refers to the neglect of Jamaica as poetic subject: 'What tribute has the Muse to pay to thee?', it does not offer any representations of an indigenous Caribbean landscape, and remains within problematic a frame of reference which although praising Jamaica, 'earth seems a Paradise', does so only through the same paradigm of European interest which could be perceived to have licensed its neglect. The fact that the representations of both the British and the Jamaican landscapes resort to a 'picture postcard' vocabulary seems to suggest that the mutual mythologizing of these nations (in which landscape functions as a figurative and evaluative means of representation rather than a literal one) has resulted in nature being abstracted from geography and its representations becoming highly dependent on cultural forms and on culturally specific (but not indigenous) myths. A vision of natural opulence which balances on the very edge of stereotype, also appears in Marson's 'Jamaica' of *Heights And Depths*. Although adventurous in its acrostic style, the representation of Jamaica here is a conventional, even twee, portrayal of a tropical retreat: 'Just a lovely little jewel floating on fair Carib's breast'.[12]

However, 'In Jamaica', in the same volume, offers a self-conscious representation of Jamaica as prelapsarian world. The poem is emotionally complex, as it mingles bitterness towards the perverted perception of her home-land with a genuine affection for its beauty. The ambivalence of the first stanza: 'It's a lazy life that we live here, | Tho' we carry a fair share of work;' develops into a clearly defined picture of a society ethnically and economically divided.

> O, it's a wonderful life in Jamaica
> For the tourists who visit this shore,
> ...But it's a dreary life for the beggars,
> And the large slums are all pretty rough.
> ...
> It's a gay life for the children
> ...whose skin is light,
> But the darker set are striving

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[11]Edward Kamu Brathwaite, *History of the Voice* (London, 1984), p. 8.
[12]'Jamaica', *Heights and Depths*, p. 19.

And facing a very tough fight.[13]

This poems makes a far more significant gesture of comparison, as Marson draws on a duality of perspective in order to redresses the focus of attention from the Jamaica of dreams, to that of reality; from the island paradise to the island home. The explicit references to the divide which exists between tourists and slum dwellers, and between black and white Jamaicans reveals the image and experience of Jamaica as a toil-free, exotic island to be dependent upon the very material realities of its social and ethnic hierarchies. This poem, which addresses the politics of cultural positioning, draws upon familiar representations of Jamaica in order to de-naturalize and de-familiarize them. Although it authenticates the possibility of a paradise island it firmly situates this ideal within a more 'authentic', socially real, representation of an island divided by colonisation, and its help-mate tourism.

In 'Heartbreak Cottages' Marson dislocates the Edenic version of Jamaica by focusing on precisely those 'less attractive aspects of West Indian nature' which Lowenthal refers to above. 'But Nature's exquisite landscape has blots; | On the peasant's miniature housing plots | Are heartbreak cottages never designed.'[14] The representation of the homes of the poor in this poem is not a disinterested one, and the voice of the poem questions 'O you that live in homes that are grand - How can you permit this disgrace in your land?' By foregrounding those elements of the Jamaican landscape which cannot be accommodated within an Edenic aesthetic, Marson points to social demarcation of the island and issues a demand for social change alongside an inclusive appeal to national interest.

An awareness of the way in which the Jamaica of Jamaicans is always already culturally mediated is the subject of 'Home Thoughts', written in England and published in *The Moth and the Star*. As poet, the poetic persona of this piece confronts the problems of writing about her homeland.

I might sing of fragrant Myrtle blossoms
Whiter than snow and sweeter than honey,
...
But the flaming Poinciana
Calls me across the distance.[15]

The description of an English landscape to which she finds herself drawn linguistically, is not only a result of her residence in England, but also has its

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[13]'In Jamaica', ibid, p. 82.
[14]'Heartbreak Cottages', *The Moth and the Star*, p. 28.
[15]'Home Thoughts', ibid, p. 22.

origins in a colonial education in which representations of the natural world were both clichéd and culturally specific. By drawing attention to her attraction towards the English landscape as poetic subject, the poem exposes the conflicts established between the creative and the cultural identities of a Caribbean poet, as well as demonstrating the struggle to establish modes of representation through which a Jamaican cultural identity can be inscribed. Although the poem does look to Jamaica as the focus of love and pride, the portrait of the island is fraught with ambiguity, and is at times almost in jeopardy of conforming to the earlier 'paradise of privilege' vision. The description of a 'sun-kissed isle', and the image of natural exuberance are reminiscent of a colonial archetype in the style of a Keatsian ode. However, the benign imagery of the Flaming Poinciana is strangely transformed as the petals become:

> ...blood drops on the sod,
> That thou mayest bring forth
> Mighty pods of fertile seed
> ...
> Fruit that may enrich the race
> And are anew inspired
> With hope and loyal longing[16]

In this nostalgic reconstruction of Jamaica, even the image of blood, so evocative of the reality of the colonial encounter, is figured romantically as a site of fertility and cultural regeneration. The representation of Jamaica in this poem is certainly a site of complex cultural affiliations and overlapping discourses, with the very sentiments of colonialism, 'hope and loyal longing', being directed in a final call for nationalism: 'O pride and glory of our tropic isle...In love and loyalty I shall aye be true'.[17] However, this pledge, made to Jamaica from England, reverses the centrifugal thrust of British colonialism, to the centripetal force of Jamaican nationalism which can provide the scattered people of the Caribbean diaspora with a sense of cultural belonging.

An expression of nationalism can also be identified in 'To the Hibiscus', which combines the gesture of naming the landscape, with an implicit allegory of the Caribbean people and their history. The fragile flower stands for the Jamaican (and other colonized) people, who have experienced the physical and psychological damage of imperialism, and, like them, it also holds the promise of flourishing through liberty alone: 'Picked and prisoned fast thou diest! Free

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[16]Loc cit.
[17]Loc cit.

thou growest without care'.[18] The poem further employs this national symbol in order to suggest an equality which can be achieved through natural, in contrast to social, forms: 'Bringing joy and cheer and brightness | To the peasants lowly door'.[19] The flower is a poetic emblem of poetic justice in a poem which, despite romanticising the poor, does address social injustice and the need to consider not only the aesthetics of the natural world but also, as in 'Heartbreak Cottages', the relationship between aesthetics and politics.

As these poems testify, there is no simple expression of a Jamaican cultural identity to be located within Marson's poems about Jamaica; the unresolved tensions between, and of blurring of, cultural frameworks and discourses serve to highlight the instability and plurality of the points of identification (through which Hall theorizes cultural identities) in her work. Nevertheless, the level of her engagement with cultural issues, as well as cultural icons, may be revealed by a comparison of her poem 'To the Hibiscus' with Constance Hollar's poems which also take Jamaican flora as their subjects. In 'Mangoes', the fruits are completely abstracted from a cultural context, in a description which centres on their aesthetic and sensual qualities.

> A dish of mangoes dripping light. It serves
> To charm my fancy, light this sombre room:
> So rich in colour and deep powdered bloom,
> All bashful beauty and seductive curves.[20]

In a similarly acultural approach, 'Cassia' only draws upon the image of the Jamaican tree as an imaginative trigger for a whole string of mythic associations (including the Golden Gates and Sheba's Queen) which bear no relevance to a Caribbean landscape.

> Laburnum gold shining 'neath Tropic skies
> Or Jason's fleece in Colcis' leafy halls.
> This weeping gold from dazzling azure eyes
> Cascades of primrose charmed before they fall[21]

However, this is not to suggest any absolute division of interests between writers of different cultural strata, indeed, a more interesting engagement with Jamaican geography can be found in Tropica's 'The Undertone'.

> The far faint cry of wounded slaves in chains;
> The struggle of some falling soul alone;

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[18]'To the Hibiscus', ibid, p. 35.
[19]Loc cit.
[20]'Mangoes', *Flaming June*, p. 73.
[21]'Cassia', ibid, p. 93.

The blood that darkens with its crimson stains
A girlish hand - these are the undertones.

The sins and sorrows of these far-off times
Whose echoes are to us so faintly blown;
The cruel deeds beneath the flowering limes
(As fair as now) - these are the undertones.[22]

One of a series of poems in which she describes a plantation culture which seems at times to be the Southern states of America and at times to be Jamaica (although a shared history of plantation life usually means that they are relevant to both), 'The Undertone' foregrounds a violent history of slavery, and declares its interest, not in the obvious beauty of nature, but in the less visible and less reassuring histories which this focus might conceal.

In Tropica's work, the focus on nature, which J. E. C. McFarlane highlights in order to praise her work, is often set alongside an interest in the island's human population. However, the human crimes which have blotted the perfection of the landscape, are significantly represented as a historical phenomenon, and her work does not engage with suffering or crimes against the Jamaican people of her own time. Certainly, this cultural 'blind-spot' is fascinating and a feature of several Creole poems which I wish to return to.

Jamaican people

Certainly, those poems by Creole women which seek to represent the majority black Jamaican population present particularly interesting material for a discussion of cultural politics. However, when examining the cultural politics of their work, it should not be overlooked that certain peoples and voices are not represented.

In Tropica's *The Island of Sunshine* (1904), the earliest volume to be studied here, there is a sustained interest in the geography, history and peoples of Jamaica which is unrivalled by any other volume written, or anthology composed, by a Creole writer. This thin and carefully presented volume also includes photographs of black people at work and of Jamaican scenes printed alongside the poems.

In 'The Heart of the Island', nature is not separated from the human population and to find the heart of the island is to appreciate its natural beauty but also the beauty of its people.

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[22]'The Undertone', *The Island of Sunshine*, p. 26.

He has never known the island who never has truly known
And felt the simple people, as if they were his own;
Who has never talked with the woman bearing her market load,
And heard yam-diggers singing at night on a lonely road.[23]

While this recognition of the value of Jamaica's black population to be found in Tropica's poetry is clearly not insignificant, the representations are often deeply problematic and do not escape a voyeuristic aesthetic through which the subjects of the poetic gaze become 'simplified' and objectified.

Rhonda Cobham-Sander's general observation that 'poems about the lower-class tend to use female personae more often than male ones and in both types of poem the woman is usually presented in her working environment rather than a domestic setting' is certainly verified by Tropica's 'Nana', about which Cobham-Sander comments that the individuality of the black woman is not acknowledged and that she is only represented in terms of her 'usefulness'.[24] This poem, set alongside a picture of a black nanny holding a white child, laments the passing of nanas from white families with the advent of an increasingly modern society and clearly is interested in the black subject's functional identity (as are all of Tropica's poems). However, as well as raising the more obvious issue of the loss of practical care (which enables the white mother to enjoy a more leisured life), this poem draws attention to the cultural traditions which will fade away with the nana's passing, .

The strange "Anancy" stories,
And legends weird and old
Which after patient coaxing
Were in the twilight told
To breathless, wide-eyed children
...
A cup of Nana's "bush-tea," -
And all would soon be right.[25]

While an acknowledgement of these traditions (African retentions) is interesting, the description of these 'weird' stories and remedies suggests that they have a 'curiosity value' more than any clearly defined cultural value, and it is important to be aware that this elegy on the passing of Nana is also implicitly an elegy on the house-based society and economy which secured the

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[23]'The Heart of the Island', ibid, p. 6.
[24]Rhonda Cobham-Sander, 'The Creative Writer and West Indian Society: Jamaica 1900-1950' (1981), p. 198.
[25]'Nana', *The Island of Sunshine*, pp. 39-41, p. 40.

loyalty and devotion of this black woman to 'Massa' and the white children in her care.

Several other of Tropica's poems take the working-class man as their subject. In 'Busha's Song', the figure of the plantation overseer is excessively romanticized.

> Give me the lunch snatched gaily
> Down by the wayside hut;
> The roasted yam, the water
> Fresh from the great green nut;
> ...
> These are the simple pleasures
> That are life to the busha's soul![26]

The implied message of this poem is that the busha has taken the job simply because he is a lover of nature, and questions of economics or of the hierarchical structuring of a plantation society are notably absent. Within the poetic frame the busha becomes a pastor, but the fact that plantation life is not an innocent, simple, carefree existence is never addressed.

In two poems published in the early 1940s, nearly forty years after her volume *The Island of Sunshine*, Tropica again writes of the working people of Jamaica. In 'The Workers', her awareness of the working-class subject is severely limited by an insensitive approach which, in its playful inversion of privilege, fails to account for the material reality and economic oppression which govern their 'real' lives.

> I have a picnic seldom-
> Trice yearly, let us say;
> But the workmen of Jamaica
> Have a picnic every day!
> ...
> Envy no one, happy workmen;
> Just be glad that you were born![27]

However, her 1940 poem 'Jamaica (After Walt Whitman)' is a far more interesting piece of work as it moves from observation to an empathetic engagement. This sense of 'oneness' with Jamaica is expressed by Clara Maude Garrett in 'Caribbean Sonnets No. 2: One'.

> O I am one with the banana tree
> And I am one with every swaying palm;
> In thunder of the hurricane or calm

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[26]'Busha's Song', *Voices From The Summerland* edited by J. E. C. McFarlane, p. 293.
[27]'The Workers', *Year Book of the Poetry League of Jamaica, 1942* (Kingston, 1942), p. 8.

I am as one with my Caribbean Sea.[28]

Nevertheless, Tropica's mode of identification is far more radical as it is focused on working-class Jamaican women and men, rather than on an absent picture of the natural world.

I love thee Jamaica. There is nothing about the
place I do not love.
...
I follow the motion of women's arms breaking
stones by the roadside;
I am those women; I feel the shock as the stone
shatters-
I grow tired with them - I talk and laugh with them.

I see the workmen digging yams on the hillside;
I feel the sweat on my brow as the hoes sinks into
the ground.
I hear the men singing weird songs after the
digging is over;
I sing with them; I feel how good it is to have
the work done.[29]

While the poem clearly seeks to express a communion with these people at some level, it actually establishes the distance and difference between the poet and her subjects more extremely. The fact that 'talking and laughing with them' can only be achieved through an empathetic engagement with their lives rather than through any 'real' contact actually serves to affirm the social and ethnic hierarchies between the observer and the observed which the poem seeks to elide. Indeed, it is interesting that this poem declares itself to be 'after Walt Whitman', as its safe and patronising mode of empathy, which demonstrates no real desire to engage with the conditions of the 'otherness' being represented, but wishes just to 'feel' it via an appropriation of their lives, has been similarly identified as the style of Whitman's democratic poetry.[30]

In the poetry of other Creole writers, representations of Jamaica's black population are scarce, with several poems alluding almost obliquely to the human presence within the landscape. The title of Constance Hollar's 'Driftwood (Port Royal)' offers a seemingly straightforward reference for the

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[28]'Caribbean Sonnets No. 2: One', *A Treasury of Jamaican Poetry* edited by J. E. C. McFarlane (London, 1949), p. 32.
[29]'Jamaica (After Walt Whitman)', *Year Book of the Poetry League of Jamaica, 1940* (Kingston, 1940), p. 33.
[30]See David Simpson, 'Destiny made manifest: the styles of Whitman's poetry' in *Nation and Narration* edited by Homi Bhabha (London, 1990), pp. 177-196.

subject of the poem. However, images of the natural world are evoked in order to effect a description of black women in this poem.

> These old grey women hardy as the rocks-
> Preserved by salt and blown by sea-winds are
> A dauntless band - firmly they meet Life's shocks-
> They greatly do and also greatly dare.[31]

This representation of the aged black women as stoic and heroic figures, although positive in some senses, is uncomfortably close to a stereotype of the long-suffering black woman which naturalizes her oppressed position. This de-personalizing tendency is further confirmed by the troubling elision between black women and nature here.

Another comforting representation, or perhaps projection, of the working population can be found in Eva Nicholas's, 'A Country Idyll'.

> Fragrant loads of green pimento
> On the barbecue,
> Crushed green leaves among the berries
> Giving perfume too;
> Voices mellowed by the distance,
> Sounding sweet and low;
> Gay pimento pickers moving
> Briskly to and fro.[32]

Not only does this idyll present working life as a pastoral indulgence, but it also suggests a romanticized simplicity of the 'folk'. Moreover, the mediation of the Arcadian frame means that no direct attention or access is given to the pickers who emerge in this impressionistic work only as bodies and voices, written over by a predetermined mode of representation.

Although Albinia Catherine Hutton's 'Christmas' does represent the voice of a black woman directly, the status of both the woman and her utterance is clearly inferior, if 'touching'.

> And they bring us the orange's golden ball
> And the cane-flag's graceful feather
> With a "Missis, see something fe dress de wall,
> Lark, mine how you climb pon dat ledder!"[33]

Nellie Olson's portrait of 'The Banjo-Man' concludes by drawing this figure back into a Westernized frame of reference.

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[31]'Driftwood (Port Royal)', *Year Book of the Poetry League of Jamaica, 1941* (Kingston, 1941), p. 15.
[32]'A Country Idyl', *Voices From The Summerland* edited by J. E. C McFarlane, p. 217.
[33]'Christmas', *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses*, p. 80.

Mixed the music with our dreamings;
  Dulcet like the pipes of Pan;
Faintly down the sleepy highway,
  Vanishes the banjo-man.[34]

The allusions to Pan and 'our' (as opposed to 'their') dreams suggest that this poem has no real interest in cultural difference, but rather offers a comfortable engagement with a 'stock figure' which translate the Caribbean world back into an established mythical and classical paradigm. This same process, in which the European mind-set reconstitutes itself through a representation of a 'cultural other', can be traced in her poem 'Diving Boy', discussed earlier.

Ebon brown, with nymph like grace,
Lithe of limb, each sculptured line
Is a curve of classic beauty;[35]

The persistent emphasis upon bodily presence in these representations, although in some senses a validation of the most vexed area of 'otherness', functions as a means of denying or neglected the psychological dimension of African Jamaicans. Even Lucy Norman's 'Market Women' which is perhaps the least coded representation of Jamaica's black population in terms of cultural politics, and the most free from any obvious intervention of Western value, offers a physical portrait.

They start in the heart of the night
    rhythmic, slow.
    Women go
from the hills in the chill of fore-dawning,
with proud head they pass over stones, over
    grass
    and the beat
    of their feet
softly fall on the path in the light
    of the morning.[36]

This poem, although engaged, is still, crucially, a **representation** of Jamaican women and not an attempt to give them subjectivity.

Indeed, from an analysis of these cross-cultural representations, it would appear that a voyeuristic and objectifying approach to both the island and the people is the norm. The recourse to either stereotyped or europeanized representations of the black Jamaican population within this Creole poetry

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[34]'The Banjo-Man', *Voices From The Summerland* edited by J. E. C McFarlane, p. 227.
[35]'Diving Boy', *Pondered Poems* (Kingston, Jamaica, 1956), p. 50.
[36]'Market Women', *Year Book of the Poetry League of Jamaica, 1940*, p. 36.

would seem to suggest no means of understanding or representing their subjectivities independent of essentialist views or established (colonial) modes of representation, possibly suggesting the limitations of representation as a mode of signification, as well as the cultural politics which informed cross-cultural perspectives. Although the representations draw attention to cultural difference (often in corporeal terms) they do not show any engagement with the cultural values of the black population and do not attempt to give any textual space over to an expression of the subjectivities of their 'cultural others'.

Cultural Geographies

The cultural ambivalence which informs notions of the homeland in Creole works finds clear articulation in J. E. C. McFarlane's estimation of Tom Redcam's poetry.

> The ruling passion of his verse [is] loyalty to Britain and love for Jamaica. In the pattern of his soul and of his poetry these two affections so blend into a harmony of sound and colour as to be incapable of a separate existence. Here we are reminded of an ideal whose outlines have been blurred by the clamour and short-sightedness of these opportunist years. Amidst the menacing shadows we have lost the faith we knew, and the vision no longer seems true.[37]

Indeed, Redcam's '"O, Little Green Island Far Over The Sea"', written when the poet was ill in London, expresses exactly McFarlane's designation of England as the site for 'loyalty' (political belonging) and Jamaica for 'love' (emotional belonging).

> For England is England, brave, patient and true.
>
> But my little Green Island, far over the sea,
> At eve-tide, Jamaica, my heart turns to thee.[38]

This version of nationalism which looks in two directions with the blending (or blurring) of the sentiments of loyalty and love is certainly relevant to a consideration of the Creole women's poetry on the subject of homelands and cultural placings.

Probably the clearest statement of cultural politics within this poetic archive can be found in Constance Hollar's title for her 1932 anthology, *Songs*

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[37]J. E. C. McFarlane, *A Literature in the Making*, p. 8.

[38]Tom Redcam, '"O, Little Green Island Far Over The Sea"', *Songs of Empire* collected and arranged by Constance Hollar (Kingston, 1932), p. 30.

of Empire. Sir William Morrison's Foreword to this anthology declares its colonial allegiances in an unqualified manner.

> The songs themselves although pitched in various keys and from different outlooks all express unbounded loyalty and devotion of the People of Jamaica to Their Majesties the King and Queen and to the Members of the Royal family and the intense love which all the inhabitants of this ancient and loyal Colony bear to the Motherland.[39]

While the commitment to Empire as both idea and reality does find strong expression in many of the poems written by Creole women during this period, it is not uncommon for works to offer more complex representations of nationalist sentiment.

Clara Maude Garrett's 'Jamaica's National Anthem', which was published in *Songs of Empire* and perhaps not insignificantly promoted through the Poetry League of Jamaica (and set to music by Astley Clerk), is fairly straightforward in its cultural politics, although it has a divided subject. As a 'song' of and for the nation, the poem does refer to the 'tropical flowers', the agricultural labour and the geographical vulnerability of Jamaica, but the cultural geography which is mapped onto this representation reveals itself to be anglocentric, rather than centred in the Caribbean. The poem ends quite emphatically with the benediction of the colonial monarch and a confirmation of the strong Christian faith represented by the throne.

> Bless our beloved King,
> Keep him our Island's King
> From year to year...
>
> May Peace and Virtue reign
> On every hill and plain,
> And knowledge spread.
> Help us, Oh Lord, to be
> Nobel and brave and free,
> Sons of the Western Sea
> Christ for our head.[40]

In Albinia Catherine Hutton's 'The Empire's Flag', the Union Jack is given space to voice its achievements, transformed into an oracle of patriotic interest.

> "Grown too large for my birthplace they bore me thence afar
> Over the distant seas and 'Neath many a stranger star,

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[39]Sir William Morrison Kt, Foreword to *Songs of Empire* collected and arranged by Constance Hollar.

[40]'Jamaica's National Anthem', ibid, p.10.

> Seeking the lands that lay far over the silver bar.
> Bought once for all with life-blood, courage that could not flag
> ...
> "I fly where'er the birds fly, where'er the sun doth shine,
> I've sons of every colour, in every land and clime
> I witch them all with beauty and make them forever mine
> Crowning earth's highest mountains, Queen of the boundless sea,
> Proudly they walk beneath me, they who are truly free,
> I am the Flag of Freedom where'er my children be.[41]

While the image of the flag bursting through geographical boundaries with the 'progress' of Empire and the attendant expansion of British cultural boundaries (signalled by the references to paternity and possession) may be a clear indication of this poem's cultural affiliations, the suggestion of this emblem as a banner of liberty is less easy to read. Yet, this same image in which the flag of Empire is figured as the flag of freedom surfaces in Constance Hollar's 'Welcome'.

> See the Meteor Flag of Duty
> Streaming in its matchless beauty!
> Sun-kissed banner of the free![42]

Again, the possible contradiction between a dedication to Prince of Wales and Prince George and emphasis on loyalty to Britain, and a representation of the Union Jack as a symbol of freedom is not entertained within the poem. Against a background of rising fascism in Europe, the fact that freedom is associated with Britain and the Union Jack is perhaps not surprising, but the conflation of ideologies suggested by formulations such as 'colonial nationalism' and 'colonial freedom' nevertheless foregrounds the complicated and involved pattern of nationalist thought amongst the 'cultural elite' at this time.

Rememoried Motherlands

In her 1912 collection, *Poems by Albinia Catherine Mackay*, Mackay presents several poems which focus on Scottish nationalism and look back to the Jacobite rebellion as a moment of particular historical interest. 'The Jacobite Exile's Lament' which tells of a man who decides to leave Scotland because of the defeated rebellion, but still swears his loyalty to it, is written in a Scottish idiom.

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[41]'The Empire's Flag', *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses*, pp. 23-5, p. 24.
[42]'Welcome', *Songs of Empire* collected and arranged by Constance Hollar, p. 2.

Now I maun leave the land I l'oe best,
To wander in distant lands
Wi ma father's banes mine canna rest,
But be buried by strangers' hands.

But I shall l'oe my country still,[43]

The inscription of a vernacular voice, here Scottish nation language, is an implicit acknowledgement of the significance of language in the formation of cultural identities. Also, the position of being bodily absent but culturally tied to an ancestral homeland is analogous to that of many ex-patriots and Creoles. However, despite such points of common interest, a recognition of the possible relevance in terms of cultural politics of this poem (written in the Caribbean) is notably absent.

Two poems about the Jacobite rebellion, 'Caledonia' and 'The Prayer Before The Battle Of Bannockburn', are particularly interesting to this line of enquiry as they place Scotland as a victim of oppression, needing to muster its might against invading powers. In 'The Prayer Before The Battle Of Bannockburn' the voice of the poem implores God to empower the Scottish people in their fight for liberation.

"Help us to set this our dear country free,
The land that to our sires was given by Thee.
Lay the usurper low, and let the right
Again arise triumphant over might."[44]

'Caledonia' praises Scotland and the bravery and loyalty of the Scottish people.

Like the wild storms that on thy mountains rave,
Thy children's feelings boil within their breasts,
The race who ever loyal, tru and brave,
Will sonner die than be by thrall oppressed,[45]

The impassioned representation of the injustice done to the Scottish people, and their ability and right to resist in these poems is clearly historically and culturally specific. Although both involve a direct engagement with the issues of violent encounter, political usurpation and cultural domination so pertinent to the colonisation of Jamaica, as well as of Scotland, there is no suggestion of any parallels to the colonial condition of Jamaica. It is both engaging and perplexing that this denial of any correlation between historical oppression and current oppression can be located in a number of poems by Creole writers. The

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[43]The Jacobite Exile's Lament', *Poems by Albinia Catherine Mackay*, p. 13.
[44]'The Prayer Before The Battle Of Bannockburn', ibid, p. 19.
[45]'Caledonia', ibid, pp. 14-15, p. 15.

presence of parallels with the Jamaican situation (slavery, oppression, rebellion and freedom are all mentioned) is obvious to a contemporary reader, and yet the absence or refusal of any such acknowledgement within the works is clear. These confident, even naïve, ventures may be explained by the fact that such terms had a very different meaning for these women than for the anti-colonial nationalists of this time, but they may equally be explained by a repression of any consideration of Jamaica's unfree.

In her later poem, 'Why?', the then Albinia Catherine Hutton writes of Scotland's landscape which continues to preoccupy her imagination, although never seen in reality.

> Far hills of Scotland I shall never see,
> Why do you call across the sea to me?
> My spirit, in imagination's flights,
> Visits full oft your purple, mist-crowned heights;
> ...
> The matchless glory of those grandeurs steep;
> But I, I know them not, have never trod
> My forefathers's loved heritage from God.
> Why do you call across the deep to me,
> Dear hills of Scotland I shall never see?"[46]

This same subject surfaces in Hutton's 'The Unseen Mother (To Great Britain)', although the fierce loyalty to a local cultural identity is obviously absent from this poem.

> We have never seen thee, O, Mighty Mother,
> To us thou art but a name and a dream,
> Yet we are thine only, thine, and no other
> Can steal our allegiance, O, Mother Unseen![47]

These nostalgic 'rememoryings' of the ancestral motherland in Hutton's verse are particularly interesting as they focus on geographies which are only known through cultural (and other forms of) representation, and not through any actual encounter. The status of Scotland and Britain as 'imagined nation's within these poems indicates that they are as prone to mythologizing and the processes of cultural mediation as Jamaica, and possibly confirming that for Jamaicans all homelands at this time were notional and more tangibly located in representations than in the 'real world'.

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[46]'Why', *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses*, p. 97 & 98. This poem was also published in *Chambers's Journal*, Edinburgh, June 1932.
[47]The Unseen Mother', ibid, pp. 85-6, p. 85.

Constance Hollar is another poet who writes of lost homelands. In 'England' Hollar describes her memories of her 'original' homeland and her longing to go there again.

> I bare my soul to all thou art
> For of thyself I am a part:--
> Against my heart I come in dreams to rest
> England, soft, cool, grey mother of the West.[48]

In two poems written during the war, 'Wings over England' and '"There Will Always Be An England"', Hollar writes of the enduring worthiness and justice of her 'motherland'. Signalling her unconditional allegiance to England, Hollar declares: 'We cry to Thee, Thou wilt not say us nay- |
Give England hosts of angels, Lord we pray.[49] In "There Will Always Be An England"', a poem which clearly announces its affiliation with Ross Parker and Hugh Charles's popular morale-boosting patriot song of 1939, Hollar celebrates the unique and glorious quality of the land.

> We did not build with clumsy brick and stone;
> We built with burning thoughts and flaming deeds:
> With glittering words we shaped Eternal creeds
> Till like the sun our England blazed alone.[50]

In both poems the use of 'We' functions as a gesture of identification through which Hollar establishes her sense of cultural belonging as strongly English. Certainly, it would appear that the advent of war not only increased patriotism, but also moved Britain back as a geographical centre of attention within Creole poetry. Indeed, a striking example of the distance between possible positions in relation to colonial loyalty during this time of crisis can be perceived by a comparison of these verses with Roger Mais's anti-British 'Now We Know' published in 1944, for which he was imprisoned.

While these poems which praise England and Scotland and their particular qualities may be seen to reinforce the anglocentric bias of the Creole poets' perspectives, they could alternatively be read as a need to explore and reinforce their own ethnic and cultural identities. Indeed, this focus upon questions of origin, ethnicity and cultural identity within poetry by these Creole women is of particular interest, as it is often assumed that these crucial and contentious areas are relevant only to colonized subjects whose 'identities'

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[48]'England', *Songs of Empire* collected and arranged by Constance Hollar, pp. 43-4, p. 43.
[49]'Wings over England' *Year Book of the Poetry League of Jamaica, 1940*, p. 7.
[50]'"There Will Always Be An England"', *Year Book of the Poetry League of Jamaica, 1941*, p. 22.

have been confused and denied by colonialism, and not of interest to white writers for whom such questions of identity are assumed to be clearly established.

Gendered States

In certain poems the representations of the homeland are specifically gendered female, presenting a Motherland. To refer to Albinia Hutton's 'The Unseen Mother (To Great Britain)' again, it is significant that the attachment and loyalty are directed at the maternal image of Great Britain.

> Dost thou say in surprise, O, Mighty Mother,
> "When and where were these children born unto me?"
> In unknown countries thy sons discover,
> In distant lands far across the sea.[51]

The gender codification of the nation as female here seems to connect with the emotional nature of the bond being referred to, as the image of a fatherland is often employed to figure power and authority and that of a motherland to represent comfort and belonging. In her most famous poem, 'The Empire's Flag', the flag itself becomes the colonial mother in the poem's final stanza, evoked in order to praise the protection and glory which the flag affords.

> When with one voice thy children their loyal homage bring
> Draw around us, O, Mother, thy mantle's ample fold,
> Let it ne'er leave us naked, out in the dark and cold,
> God keep us 'neath thy banner as we have been of old[52]

This same figuring of Britain as 'mother' appears in Hutton's 'A Plea'. In the absolute antithesis of a call for independence, this poetic persona asks not to be called Colonials, but, in return for their loyalty, 'The Britons Overseas'.

> Britain our Mother, lend to us, thine ear,
> Listen to our petitioning to-day!
> We are descendants of thy children dear,
> Though born in far-off lands, and living there
> For generations, love thee, even as they.
>
> We pray thee do not call us "Colonies"
> Nor even say "The Empire," nor speak
> About "Colonials," knowing well how these,
> Taught by their fathers, love thee on their knees;

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[51]The Unseen Mother', *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses*, pp. 85-6, p. 85.
[52]The Empire's Flag', ibid, pp. 23-5, p. 25.

O, Mother, let us love thee cheek to cheek!
...
Give us thy name in filial pride to wear;
And from that loved but distant land, thy throne,
Extend thy sceptre to thy kindred here;
We know thou wilt not sell thy children dear,
That we are irrevocably thine own.[53]

This trope of the mother as caring custodian works in nationalist terms to signal (or appeal to) the nature of the motherland as guardian, a construction which demands loyalty and attachment as well as offering security and recognition. The image of a powerful and yet compassionate mother within this colonial nationalist rhetoric inscribes an interesting image of maternity and womanhood.

It is not clear whether Hutton calls for this acknowledgement for all colonial subjects or only those white 'descendants', however, the notion of subjects being children, somehow 'natural' dependants, which appears in both of these poems by virtue of the maternal allegory, is also strangely reminiscent of a kind of romantic racialism which suggests colonial subjects (like cultural other and women) are children by virtue of their innate simplicity and inferiority. Again, a crossing over of cultural discourses and an indeterminacy in terms of cultural politics can be identified.

The gendering of nationalistic sentiment is figured rather differently in two poems written by men. Tom Redcam's 'Jamaica's Coronation Ode' focuses on both the masculinity and the muscularity of Jamaica's path of progress (although it remains within the colonial realm).

We are marching to conquer the Future
We are sons of Jamaica the free,
We are true to our King and our Country.
We are heirs of the ages to be.[54]

This emphasis upon an aggressive movement, although here more explicitly of a colonial force rather than of nationalist campaign, is also suggested by the refrain of J. E. C. McFarlane's 'The Fleet of The Empire (Reflections on the visit of the Special Service Squadron)'.

For dauntless, undismayed as they,
Forward, whatever tempests sweep,
Our Empire plunges thro' the deep

53'A Plea', ibid, pp. 100-101, p. 100.
54'Jamaica's Coronation Ode', *Songs of Empire* collected and arranged by Constance Hollar, pp. 13-4, p. 13.

Into the dawn of greater day. [55]

Reading this poetry written by Creoles as a contemporary reader its cultural politics are often difficult to decode. The absence of clear attempts to differentiate the Jamaican nation from the imperial mother-land and to authenticate a language and experience of its people which have been denied, is notable. However, poems which foreground the Creole's own position within the Caribbean as one of dislocation from both literary and ethnic origins provides an interestingly different perspective on issues which have become almost standard areas of enquiry within post-colonial criticism. Moreover, the fact that poetry written by Jamaica's Creole writers does not present any neat trajectory of emergent nationalism, may be less puzzling than the fact that it forwards nationalistic ideas at all.

Poems of Protest and of Pride

In comparison with the work of her Creole contemporaries, Una Marson's poetry offers a far more challenging and critical engagement with the issues of cultural politics and racism. In her conscious attempts to forge an alternative aesthetic and in her clear engagement with issues of cultural nationalism and black experience, Una Marson imagined and represented both cultural and national identity in a quite different manner.

'Another Mould', published in *Heights and Depths*, is Marson's first poem to confront the racist construct of a social hierarchy of colour and beauty. The poem challenges the 'photo pose' image of a Caucasian baby:

> You can talk about your babies
> With blue eyes and hair of gold,
> But I'll tell you 'bout an angel
> That's cast in another mould.
>
> She is brown just like a biscuit
> And she has the blackest eyes
> That don't for once remind you
> Of the blue of tropic skies.[56]

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[55]'The Fleet of The Empire, *Voices From The Summerland* edited by J. E. C. McFarlane, pp. 138-9.

[56]'Another Mould', *Heights and Depths*, p. 77.

It is interesting that the poetic persona refers to the black baby as 'an angel', appropriating an iconography on to which whiteness is very firmly inscribed. The poem also stakes an interest in the implications of iconography with its reference to the 'blue of tropic skies'. The fact that it is blue eyes which are naturalized in this manner within the Caribbean reinforces the uniqueness, 'for once', of the representation put forward here, and the pervasiveness and normalization of the white icon. Moreover, Marson's commentary on the clichéd representation of the baby is also a commentary on an equally clichéd representation of the Caribbean, the two being linked by their denial of a black Caribbean perspective, their denial of an 'other' which Marson affirms through the poem. Nevertheless, the black mother in the poem is careful not to comply with this policy of exclusion or to indulge in racism in reverse, but rather to acknowledge difference without imposing a hierarchy of value.

> O, little ivory babies
> Are as sweet as they can be,
> But give me my brown skin cherub

Marson spent the six years which elapsed before the publication of *The Moth and the Star* mainly outside of Jamaica. This period gave her a chance to experience the reality behind the expectations and promises of the 'mother-land' and to re-view Jamaica with a more distant perspective. In England, working as a secretary for the League of Coloured Peoples and later for HIM Haile Selassie, she was involved and committed to the promotion of anti-racist philosophy.[57] However, Jamaica remains a strong presence in the poetry of this volume (as I have already discussed) and, being published in Jamaica in 1937, it is inevitably imbued with the strong sense of nationalism generated at this time, and conveys both the contemporary problems and the future potential of a society striving to define itself. Certainly, in this volume Marson's poetry reflects a new sense of urgency and a more direct engagement with the issues of cultural politics and of racism.

The one poem, known to have been written and published during Marson's time in England, powerfully communicates her awareness of racism. 'Nigger', which appeared in *The Keys,* the magazine published by the League of Coloured Peoples, in July 1933 forcefully voices the feelings of the victims of racial abuse, it is a poem which expresses a pitch of anger and fury unique within her work.

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[57]The biographical facts which inform this paragraph are taken from Erika Smilowitz's 'Una Marson: A Woman Before Her Time'.

What makes the dark West Indian
Fight at being called a Nigger?
What is there is that word
That should strike like a dagger
To the heart of Coloured men
And make them wince?

You of the white skinned Race,
You who profess such innocence,
I'll tell you why 'tis a sin to tell
Your offspring Coloured folks are queer,
Black men are bogies and inferior far
To any creature with a skin made white.

You who feel that you are "sprung
Of earth's first blood," your eyes
Are blinded now with arrogance.
With ruthlessness you seared
My people's flesh, and now you still
Would crush their very soul,
Add fierce insult to vilest injury.[58]

The word 'nigger' is repeated thirteen times in the poem, literally forcing itself brutally and painfully upon the reader, linguistically rehearsing the hurt and damage of racial abuse. However, the repetition of 'you' is equally important in the poem as it serves as a substitute term of denigration. It is not the 'nigger' who must answer to accusations of inferiority or bestiality here, but 'you', the white population, who must respond to questions which take them into the consciousness of a black person, which question their rights, and moreover which remind them ('you') just who must claim a contemptible past.

We will not be called "Niggers"
Since this was the favourite curse
Of those who drove the Negroes
To their death in days of slavery.

Marson traces the word 'Nigger' to a discourse of power and of hatred established through the fatal history of her people. In this way, the poem links the present taunt with the past history of genocide, making the links between actual violence and the violence of language and of inscription explicit. Marson appropriates the racist term 'Nigger' in order to force her readers' awareness on to the fact that their ('your') language and behaviour reduces them to the status of brute and places their souls in jeopardy, thus deflecting the tirade from the racist, to the racist.

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[58]Una Marson, 'Nigger', *The Keys*, July 1933, pp. 8-9.

However, there is a tonal shift at the end of the poem, as the voice turns to prayer.

> God keep my soul from hating such mean souls,
> God keep my soul from hating
> Those who preach the Christ
> And say with churlish smile
> "This place is not for 'Niggers'."
> God save their souls from this great sin
> Of hurting human hearts that live
> And think and feel in unison
> With all humanity.

Having purged the bitterness, this spiritual plea reasserts a calm belief in 'right' and in 'self' beyond the battle waged by the 'you' of the poem. Indeed, although we now conceive of equality more as an issue of human rights than of spiritual ones, it is important to note that from Equiano to Luther King, religion has provided a persuasive and politic platform in the struggle for 'racial equality'. Certainly, for Marson, her religious beliefs and her anti-racism work were not in conflict with each other as her role within the League of Coloured Peoples suggests. Indeed, the belief in the equality of all mankind and the vision of global unity, powerfully articulated in many of her works, imbue her 'protest' poetry with a particular poignancy as well as an incisive critique of oppression.

The poems which discuss and express ethnic identity also assume a new significance and scope within *The Moth and the Star*. Poems which expose both the mechanisms of racism and its effects upon the individual, and which therefore take cultural hegemony as their point of reference, appear alongside poems which explore alternative Jamaican cultural forms and traditions.

In two poems which expose the racism of white society, Marson reconstructs the innocent and inquisitive voice of the child. In 'Little Boys', the boy's naïveté and his utter incomprehension of his victimization draw attention to the lack of any explanation for racist behaviour.

> Why should they tease me, Mother
> Because my skin is black?
> ...
> Why do they call me "nigger",
> And laugh at me, Mother?[59]

The confusion of the child and the negative manner in which a sense of ethnicity is forced upon him is presented in a consciously emotional manner which leaves little space for an unsympathetic response. The tone of moral

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[59]'Little Boys', *The Moth and the Star*, p. 78.

purity is further emphasized by the boy's refusal to condemn: 'Some of them are gentle to me'.

In Little Brown Girl', a title which travesties Blake's 'innocent song' 'The Little Black Boy', the questions are directed at the child subject. The poetic voice which commences the poem is that of a white 'English' person.

> Why do you wander alone
> About the streets
> Of the great city
> Of London?
>
> Why do you start and wince
> When white folk stare at you?
> ...
> Why did you leave your little sunlit land
> ...
> What are you seeking,
> What would you have?[60]

The questions posed may seem simple enough, but in fact they demand answers and raise issues which probe the complex history and ideology of colonialism. The persistent questioning also creates a sense of hostility and intimidation, disrupting the antiphonal structure anticipated by the questions, with a monologue of conflated curiosity and prejudice. Yet the confident tone of the white voice cannot conceal its acute ignorance. The belief that the Caribbean is a playground paradise, a 'little sunlit land', the misapprehension of one colony which is blurred in the conceptual vision of Empire 'Africa, or India | ...from some island | In the West Indies, | But isn't that India | All the same?', and the assumption that the English language is exclusively 'possessed' by the 'English' 'How is it that you speak | English as though it belonged | To you?' all reveal that to white people of the motherland, her colonial subjects are undifferentiated and insignificant 'others'. Although Marson employs the dominant presence of this English voice in order to disclose the dangerous and damaging stereotypes upon which racism relies and thus ostensibly to condemn the little brown girl for her trespass upon greatness, the voice actually condemns itself to a cultural vacuum.

Within the poem, the 'little brown girl' (a name which could also denote the racist practice of infantilization) cannot answer the questions, her experiences cannot enter into the space of colonial discourse which the questioner projects. However, it is significant that the questions do remain unanswered, as the need to explain and to understand their answers lies outside of the poem with the

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[60]'Little Brown Girl', ibid, pp. 11-3.

readers, who must explore their own history and society for the answers. Indeed, it becomes clear that the white interrogator is an expedient persona whose questions Una Marson, the black woman poet, is able to redirect at a white readership.

When the voice of the little brown girl does emerge, it speaks an alternative monologue rather than a response, disturbing rather than fulfilling the assumptions of the original discourse. The absences generated by the unanswered questions are transformed by her words into the absences within British society.

> No pretty copper coloured skins
> No black and bronze and brown
> ...
> No friendly country folk
> ...
> No heavy laden donkeys
> And weary laden women

Her words reveal that far from being overwhelmed by the shops, the theatres, the 'great heart' of the motherland, she is dismayed at its 'lack', not only of familiar sights but more significantly of community. Isolated in the 'white, white city' of 'coated people', she appropriates the discourse of prejudice in a conscious act of retaliation.

> White, white, white,
> And they all seem the same
> As they say the Negroes seem.

However, the purpose of this poem is not only to deflect racism, but also to disarm it. Both the white man and the brown girl have been subject to the false promises of colonisation and of cultural belonging (whether in the happy homeland or the sunny paradise) and neither can reconcile the complex relations of cultural sameness and cultural difference which the 'other' represents. The futility of his questioning, and of her questing both testify to the cultural politics of colonisation which represented fictionalized 'motherlands' and 'children' which served only the cause of willing subjection and never the reality of encounter or the possibility of cross-cultural communication.

Towards the Stars published in England is clearly able to bring many of the poems in *The Moth and the Star* which discuss racism and cultural politics to a white audience. Nevertheless, there is one new poem in this volume in which the deflection of stereotypes and the re-vision of the English text becomes

sharply distilled. One of her most economical verses, 'Politeness' offers an alternative commentary on Blake's poem, this time an ironic inversion of its 'liberalism'. Blake's poem, which allows its black subject to plead for equal recognition on the basis that 'I am black, but O! my soul is white,' is responded to sharply and directly by Marson's version.[61]

> They tell us
> That our skin is black
> But our hearts are white.
>
> We tell them
> That their skin is white
> But their hearts are black.

The inverted logic on which the poem is premised invites us to read 'Rudeness' for 'Politeness', challenging the graceful approach to racism and offering a 'rude' awakening for the white liberalist approach.

However, although the parodic voice can powerfully counter tradition and authority (as my reading of Marson's matrimonial parodies in chapter five will confirm), the presence of the original discourse, often a necessary background onto which to opposition is inscribed, can limit the deconstructive potential of this genre. As Linda Hutcheon points out

> Nevertheless, parody's transgressions ultimately remain authorized-authorized by the very norm it seeks to subvert. Even in mocking, parody reinforces; in formal terms, it inscribes the mocked conventions onto itself, thereby guaranteeing their continued existence. It is in this sense that parody is the custodian of the artistic legacy, defining not only where art is, but where it has come from.[62]

In 'Politeness' the intertextual engagement does not only lead to a perpetuation of formal characteristics, but more importantly to an implicit guardianship of colonial signifiers (and values), and therefore an ideological legacy. Benita Parry's analysis of the problems attendant to an anti-colonial appropriation of colonial discourse can be helpfully employed in a reading of 'Politeness'.

> a procedure identifying the loaded oppositions used to organize colonialism's discursive field does demystify the rhetorical devices of its

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[61]William Blake, 'The Little Black Boy' *Songs of Innocence and Experience* (1789) introduced by Sir Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford, 1970), pp. 9-10. In *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (Princeton, 1954), Erdman gives a reading of this poem which re-thinks the implications of the black skin: 'To aviod a chauvanistic interpretation Blake explained that any skin colour is a cloud that cannot obscure the essential brotherhood of man in a fully enlightened society, such as Heaven...If the Negro is to be free of his black cloud, the little English boy must be likewise free from his "white cloud", which is equally opaque.', p. 221.
[62]Linda Hutcheon, p. 75.

> mode of construction; however,...a reverse discourse replicating and therefore reinstalling the linguistic polarities devised by a dominant centre to exclude and act against the categorized, does not liberate the 'other' from a colonized condition where heterogeneity is repressed in the monolithic figures and stereotypes of colonialist representation.[63]

Indeed, although Marson writes against the liberal (colonialist) stereotype of inner whiteness, she remains within its signifying framework and more crucially within its metaphysics which translates physical differences of colour into metaphysical states of otherness, confirming and naturalizing 'black as bad' - associated with sin, immorality and spiritual darkness.[64]

While the challenge which Marson launches against the mythologies and institutions of racism is a crucial element of her later verse, in *The Moth and the Star* her interest in the lives and values of the black population also finds expression in poetry which positions itself beyond the paradigm of colonial discourse and conflict.

'Black Burden' bridges Marson's exposition of racism and her focus on the black person's ability to thrive outside of racist ideology. It powerfully articulates the problems of claiming and expressing a self which is always already defined, but it also works towards this process. The first two stanzas of the poem reveal the tensions and pressures facing a black woman struggling to break free of the 'white' definitions of her-self. The possibility of any authentic self-expression is consistently denied by the colonial society which defines black people only according to the white ideal or the black stereotype.

> I am black
> And so I must be
> More clever than white folk,
> More wise than white folk,
> More discreet than white folk,
> More courageous than white folk.
>
> I am black...
> I must not laugh too much,
> They say black folk can only laugh,
> I must not weep too much,
> They say black folk weep always,[65]

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[63]Benita Parry, 'Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse', *Oxford Literary Review*, 9 (1987), p. 28.

[64]The same metaphysical codification of white and black appears in many of the Creole poems. Mrs H. G. Gauntlett's 'The White Comrade' in 'An Offering On Behalf Of The Belgian Relief Fund' (Kingston, 1917), p. 7-8, which describes Christ's visit to a battlefield relies on this colour's spiritual connotations. In Albinia Catherine Mackay's poems 'Light' and 'Teach us to Know' in *Poems by Albinia Catherine Mackay*, p. 43 & p.41-2 respectively, blackness is synonymous with the loss of faith.

[65]'Black Burden', *The Moth and the Star*, p. 93.

The fact that she must deny her humanity in order to defy dehumanisation effectively communicates the impossibility of negotiating of stereotypes and of claiming a positive black subjectivity when your 'self' has already been mapped out by your enemy. However, as in her romance lyrics (discussed in chapter five), Marson transforms the space of seemingly finite definition, as the black girl begins to re-claim herself.

> Black girl - what a burden-
> But your shoulders
> Are Broad
> Black girl - what a burden-
> But your courage is strong-
> Black girl your burden
> Will fall from your shoulders
> For there is love
> In your soul
> And a song
> In your heart.

Referring to herself in the third person, the black girl appropriates her objectification in order to resist the burden of definition. The 'I am black' which prefaced the nature of her struggle and explained her behaviour is now no longer necessary as she focuses on identity as a whole, as a creative and emotional person whose subjectivity cannot be stifled or suffocated by racism.

In 'Quashie Comes To London', the first nation language poem in the volume, the focus shifts from a colonial version of black people's experience, to Quashie's Jamaican perspective of English society. This poem is an early example of 'letter home' poems, now a major tradition within Caribbean poetry. Quashie's long missive discloses the drama of delight and surprise which London and its inhabitants present.

> I gwine tell you 'bout de English
> And I aint gwine tell no lie,
> 'Cause I come quite here to Englan'
> Fe see wid me own eye.'[66]

Rehearsing the voyeurism of colonial exploits, he writes with both benevolence and bravado of his life in the 'motherland'. It is not incidental that Marson chooses Quashie for her poetic subject, as this name identifies a 'type' defined from the slave culture as artful and plausible, a reference which confirms that even his declaration of sincerity is part dissimulation. In what is a familiar

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[66]Quashie Comes to London, ibid, p. 17, 1-4.

rhetoric of necessary success, Quashie lists the excitements and triumphs of life in the metropolis for his friends 'back home'.

> I know you wan' fe hear jus' now
> What I tink of dese white girls,
> Well I tell you straight, dem smile 'pon me,
> But I prefer black pearls.[67]

Although eager to report good news and present himself as the urbane traveller, Quashie's humorous tone fails at the end of the poem, when the feelings of homesickness, hinted at above, break through the surface sparkle of his language. Recalling the 'pigeon feed' which leaves him hungry, he signs off with a sense of a more profound deprivation.

> It's den I miss me home sweet home
> Me good ole rice and peas
> An' I say I is a fool fe come
> To dis lan' of starve and sneeze.
> ...
> It not gwine be anoder year
> Before you see me face,
> Dere's plenty dat is really nice
> But I sick fe see white face.[68]

The poem ends with the cultural hunger which Quashie experiences, reasserting Jamaica as 'home' and London as the temporary but exciting venue for entertainment (a colonial encounter in reverse).

While the poem takes England as its subject matter, it is clearly not anglocentric. Quashie's language boldly declares his cultural identity, not only through nation language but also through metaphors and images which confirm his imagination and perception as indigenous to the Caribbean: the English policeman is tall 'Mos' like a coconut tree' and the summer park-goers 'sit like flies in Mango time | Under de lovely trees'. Although neither colonialism or cultural nationalism are referred to directly within the poem, Quashie's re-vision of England in nation language marks a crucial breaking away from the colonial devotion to the twinned powers of the 'mother-tongue' and the 'mother-land'.

Indeed, it is often Marson's poetry which validates the experiences and voices of the Jamaican people, marginal within accepted cultural forms at this time, which has earned her the respect of critics. Seen as a positive step towards an anti-elitist and anti-colonial poetic tradition within the Caribbean,

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[67]Loc cit, 21-4.
[68]Ibid, p. 21, 157-60 &165-9.

these poems mark Marson out as interested in the possibilities of making new traditions, as well as of fracturing the authority of old ones.

Certainly, it is interesting to compare Marson's poems which describe the working class population of Jamaica to those which allow a (construction of) their voices unmediated access to the page. In 'Going to Market' and 'The Banjo Boy' the positive and sympathetic portraits of the old woman who must work to survive and the talented young boy do represent attempts to bring the reality of Jamaican life into literature. However, although these poems do not sentimentalize their black subjects in the same fashion as much of the Creole poetry, there is a sense in which, as detached observer, the narrator does translate their hardships into acts of poetic and moral inspiration:

> Maybe you are hungry,
> Maybe your shirt is going
> Maybe you are not worth a gill,
> But what do you care?[69]

The focus of 'Going to Market' is also on stoicism rather than on the social conditions which necessitate such a poor standard of living: 'Old lady, I love you | For the courage you bring | To life - for your goodness'.[70]

Moreover there is clearly a discordance between subject and form in these poems which speaks of the alienated observer. In 'The Banjo Boy' the question

> Where did you get that rhythm?
> ...I have it too,
> I can feel it going through me,
> But I can't express it like you.

almost functions as a metafictional comment, as the rhythms of the poem cannot render the spontaneity of the boy's music, nor its standard English create a sense of the Jamaican street life to which she refers.

In contrast, the aesthetic possibilities of creating new traditions through Jamaican speech rhythms are explored in Marson's 'blues' poems which draw on the African-American challenge to anglocentric meters and forms. In 'Canefield Blues', a worker whose partner dies in the fields laments her death.

> Bury me Mandy,
> By de garden gate,
> Bury me Mandy,
> By de garden gate,
> Now dere's nothing lef' for me,

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[69]'The Banjo Boy', ibid, p. 68.
[70]'Going to Market', ibid, p. 89.

What a cruel fate.[71]

The stylized pathos of the blues offers a means of expression for the immense emotional torture of the plantation worker's life (and a sharp contrast to Tropica's 'Busha's Song'). It is significant that the poem does not focus on the woman's death but on her partner's distress, as it is the emotional life of the workers which is denied by the employers (and white society) who perceive them merely as work units. In 'Lonesome Blues' the more mischievous aspect of the blues appears. The 'lone' female subject of this poem ends her song not with despair but with humour.

It's kinda hard
Being a lonesome gal,
It's kinda hard
Being a lonesome gal,
But I bet it's worse
Wid a no good pal.[72]

Indeed, it is crucial that the unpredictable, contingent nature of the blues form provides a space not only for expressing but also for transforming the suffering and negative consciousness of the oppressed subject. In these poems, Marson is able to give voice to both oppression and resistance and, most importantly, to give voice to a culturally specific language which articulates a people's emotions and thoughts in their own terms.

'The Stone Breakers' also offers direct access to Jamaican women's voices as they communicate the sense of mortal pain and futility which constitutes their lives as a white man's work machine.

Me han hat me,
Me back hat me,
Me foot hat me
...dough de work is hard
I will has to work fe pittance
Till the good Lard call me.[73]

Their capacity for resilience and endurance is not emotionally indulged in this poem, as the women's words reveal work to be more than a spiritual bargain: 'But whey fe do,... | Me haf fe buy frack fo de pickney dem'. The everyday pain and practical necessities of sustaining their children not only implicates the exploitation of the poor by the wealthy, and the black population by the white,

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[71]'Canefield Blues', ibid, p. 94.
[72]'Lonesome Blues', ibid, p. 96.
[73]'The Stone Breakers', ibid, p. 70.

but also the self-indulgence of the men: 'Dem wotless pupa tan roun' de bar | A trow dice all de day-'. Indeed, the poem makes it clear that the cultural oppression which dictates their misery is only made more intolerable by the sexual oppression of their own partners. The absence of a narrator who might act as a cultural mediator, or softener, produces a powerful expression of both real suffering and real social problems which leaves no space for the reader to draw comfort or inspiration from.

In 'My Philosophy', the ethic of female solidarity is again spoken by Jamaican women. The simple philosophy of equality uttered by the women: 'For dere is nobody better dan me | And I is not better dan nobody' presents a stark contrast to the complex hierarchies of difference constructed by colonialism which dictate their lives.[74] In both poems it is the direct deliverance of the spoken voice onto the page which is significant as it represents a value and worth being given to people whose lives and thoughts have been systematically neglected and silenced. The use of speech marks in 'The Stone Breakers' and the dramatic form of set and character in 'My Philosophy', denote that Marson is consciously assuming fictive personae, for although she claims a relation to the experience of the women within these poems, the aim is to provide a forum for these voices to speak for themselves, to be heard as a Jamaican aesthetic, without the need for cultural intervention. Indeed, in both of these poems, Una Marson is able to grant her 'foremothers' the public voices, and subjectivities, which history sought to deny them and which the Creole women writers were unable to give them.

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[74]'My Philosophy', ibid, p. 71.

CHAPTER 5

GENDER POLITICS

> But in the love poetry of every age, the woman longs to be weighed down by the man's body. The heaviest of burdens is therefore simultaneously an image of life's most intense fulfilment.
> (Milan Kundera)[1]

> Without the heart to guarantee femininity, feeling and truth, the imagination enters a world of sceptically disordered moral and linguistic reference. While the aesthetic possibilities of such disorder are seductive, the moral cost, especially for women, is high.
> (Angela Leighton)[2]

> Discredited by modern opinion, love's sentimentality must be assumed by the amorous subject as a powerful transgression which leaves him alone and exposed; by a reversal of values, then, it is this sentimentality which today constitutes love's obscenity.
> (Roland Barthes)[3]

In this chapter I wish to analyse the gender politics of Una Marson's work, and the work of some of her Creole contemporaries. It is my aim to represent voices speaking from a variety of positions, and therefore not only to look at those poems which address issues of gender directly or in an overtly politicized manner, but also to explore poems which, in their concentration upon romantic love and conventional and stylized female personae, are ostensibly not so comfortable or appealing to a late twentieth century reader in terms of gender-based analysis. I shall offer readings of the ways in which certain love poems reveal a complex engagement with both their inherited poetic tradition and received notions of romance. However, I am not only interested in those readings which demonstrate resistance to this genre but also in those which help us to question why women's love poetry has been such a discredited genre and to explore the possibilities for creative expression which the genre presents.

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[1]*The Unbearable Lightness of Being* (London, 1984), p. 5.
[2]*Victorian Women Poets: Writing Against the Heart* (Hemel Hempstead, 1992), p. 3.
[3]*A Lover's Discourse* (New York, 1978), p. 175.

The Romance of Love and of Poetry

As I have already stated, criticism to date has attempted to either suppress, dismiss or devalue the love poetry of these Jamaican women writers. As these approaches strongly suggest, such poetry is commonly considered to be a saccharine sub-genre of gendered verse and embarrassingly bourgeois and colonial. In its assumed demonstration of (emotional and literary) dependency, immaturity and excitability such poetry has failed to offer either aesthetic or cultural statements helpful to post-colonial or feminist readers, and consequently it remains uninterrogated. Within the Jamaican context then, 'A Lover's Discourse' is not only 'unwarranted' (to quote Barthes), but 'unwanted'. The sentimental and sacrificial subject which emerges very powerfully in the love poetry to be discussed presents a particularly treacherous territory for the post-colonial feminist critic, for whom such poems occasion a fighting back both of charges of excessive femininity and of unquestioned coloniality and eurocentricity. It is my project here to read such poetry carefully in order to re-think these assumptions, and the notions of acceptable poetry and gender identities which they promote.

Clearly, the gendering of literary taste and of what constitutes serious, 'great' poetry has played no little part in creating a climate of embarrassment around the reception of love poetry. With the emergence of 'scribbling women' in the nineteenth century, and the contemporaneous cult of female sensibility, there appeared a new agenda for the evaluation of sentiment within literature (an antagonistic attitude which Clark argues was most starkly crystallized with the advent of Modernism). As Louise Berkinow has observed,

> It is interesting how the preoccupation with love, in life or literature, has been turned against women. When love poetry was an exclusively male occupation, it was respected and exalted; when women came to accept the terms and follow the Provencal poet's lyre, the genre was deflated. Most poetry written in the nineteenth century by women dealt with love and was treated by the (male) arbiters of taste as maudlin and banal, less for its literary style than for its 'sentimental' content. The heightened states of emotion out of which male poets were creating poetry were praised as revolutionary; the heightened states of female emotion were denigrated and dismissed as second-rate.[4]

The need to reconsider the preconceptions and value judgements concerning love poetry has been argued by several feminist literary critics working on women's writing. Angela Leighton's research on Victorian women poets offers a

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[4]Introduction to *The World Split Open: Women Poets 1552-1950* edited and introduced by Louise Berkinow (London, 1974), p. 5.

fine model of reading women's poetry (often neglected and critically undervalued) against the grain of both established critical approaches and their inherent value systems. As it is almost certainly the abundance of love poetry written by the Jamaican women poets under consideration here which has made the links to Victorian verse so tenacious and the lack of interest in this poetry so enduring, it is relevant to consider her findings in order to re-think how a Victorian aesthetic may be worked with constructively when generating readings of these poems (it is also important to remember that a small proportion of this poetry was written, although not published, at the end of Victoria's reign). While previous suggestions of Jamaican women's poetry being more Victorian than Modern(ist) have been implicit criticisms of the apparent lack of formal invention and engagement with the realities of twentieth-century life, in the light of Leighton's persuasive reading of the subversive strategies and political inflections of Victorian women's poetry, possible links become more interesting and intellectually worthwhile.

Certainly, given the zealously pursued moral mission of Jamaica's colonial apparatus to preserve and promote a sense of female devotion and sensibility (most commonly associated with a Victorian notion of womanhood) into the twentieth century, and with McFarlane's depiction of the women poets as saintly sufferers in mind, Leighton's analysis of the politics which inform the icon to which Victorian women were admonished to conform is not irrelevant to the dominant ideal of femininity within the Jamaican context of this period.

> The struggle against feeling for its own sake is a struggle against a whole, essentially Victorian ethic of womanhood. The need to keep women weeping and not thinking, feeling and not questioning, suffering and not writing, carries a strong social and moral purpose, which ensures that the trembling, ill-used goodness of the female heart remains part of 'the woman's sway' in purifying the new age.'[5]

While the gender politics informing this 'ethic of womanhood' and the attendant push towards the seemingly apolitical genre of love poetry for the woman poet are interesting issues, it is Leighton's aim, and mine here, to explore how the women poets actually work within an aesthetic and ethic of 'feminine feeling' that was designed to be a clear statement of patriarchal interest. In this way, Leighton's reading of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's poetry, the admiration and influence of which has already been mentioned, is of particular interest as she illustrates that, far from acquiescing to the model of femininity considered appropriate for the Victorian woman (poet), she 'takes the woman poet off the

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[5]Angela Leighton, p. 64.

stage of isolated self-appreciation, and gives her real work to do in society. No longer a poetry of 'love and love', hers is a poetry which constantly asks about the conventions of power which lie behind love, and which affect the improvised expression of the heart.'[6]

In the light of both previous refusals to read and recent re-readings of women's love poetry, I wish to engage in a detailed exploration of these poems tracing the subtleties and ambiguities which underlie Marson's, and many other women's, 'conventional love poems'. It is my argument that by locating her poetry within what appears to be a 'natural' genre for a woman, Marson is able to exploit dominant expectations of love literature without endorsing them, and to carve out a space from which to explore the workings of love and the politics of romance. As Robin Dizard argues in her analysis of Christina Stead's stories,

> sentimental love is a major Western cliché. Its icons and gestures are common property. Having the status of second nature, it is taken for granted, and as such not expected to tangle with serious pursuits like business, politics and the life of the mind. This intellectual prejudice, aided by sexual prudery, makes love an ideal subject for a woman writer. She can examine conventions, what everyone knows, as an insider, yet she writes down what 'nice girls' don't talk about or even know, so she is a social outlaw.[7]

Tropic Reveries, Marson's first volume of poetry offers the most concentrated exploration of romantic love, formulating attitudes towards and definitions of love which remain characteristic throughout the development of her work. The quest for romantic love is situated in both a classical framework and a Christian one, and is constant in its craving for an intimate and ultimate bonding. It is almost certainly not incidental that *Tropic Reveries* is the one volume of Una Marson's poetry which is most neglected by critics, and indeed by the poet herself in her final selected work, and yet paradoxically is also the volume from which they seem to form their most lasting impressions - predominantly of despair and immaturity. Certainly, Marson does make sadness a Muse and pathos a powerful aesthetic within this volume, but her poetry is equally interested in joy and bathos and therefore defies an interpretation which takes woe as her single poetic statement.

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[6]Ibid, p. 80. Poems by both Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Christina Rossetti appear frequently in *Singers Quarterly*. Albinia Catherine Hutton's *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses* includes a poem 'To Mrs. Browning', p. 102. In the 'Foreword' to *The Hills of St Andrew* Lena Kent tell the reader that '"The Silent Land' was suggested by Christina Rossetti's "Day-dreams," and "If" by the fourth stanza of the exquisite poem "Gone Before," by the same writer'.

[7]'Love Stories' in *From Commonwealth to Post-Colonial* (Coventry, 1992), p. 399.

It is perhaps not surprising that the most interesting engagement of these attitudes towards romantic love are to be found in the sonnets of *Tropic Reveries*. Certainly the sonnet has provided tradition's most tested poetic model for the expression of love, and it is an inherited form which Marson explores with both daring and decorum. I would suggest that in this volume Marson offers the reader a sonnet sequence (although it is not explicitly presented as such) which leads us through the development of the love relationship, revealing the plot of the romantic quest from the need and desire for love, into the complex web of expectation and fulfilment, and beyond the encounters with the lover - and therefore beyond the conventional consummation - into a contemplation of love as an ideal.

Although 'In Vain' is the first poem to appear under the section entitled 'Sonnets', the first sonnet of the volume is 'Renunciation', which appears towards the end of the lyric section. Perhaps this anomaly was simply a printer's error but, in a volume which is structured according to formal categories, it is certainly a curious one. Whether a mistake or a deliberate device, this dis-placement from its formal positioning serves to fragment the structure of a 'sequence' which can be identified by shared anaphora, form and a 'progression' of ideas. Certainly, if we bring 'Renunciation' back to its correct formal placing, we have a series of poems which, when viewed as a cycle, offer a striking lens through which to perceive the intimate and intricate developments of the love relationship.

The first four sonnets of this sequence deal with emotions expressed towards the lover before he actually enters the romance situation. I wish to focus in some detail on the first two poems in order to explore how their adoption of a stylized language system highlights the processes and politics involved in reading a Jamaican woman's love poems.

In 'Renunciation', the poetic persona (the positioning of the subject revealed at the end of this sonnet suggests a female persona) holds a wondrous mirror up to nature, only to dispel its beauty as utterly worthless in a universe where her love remains unreciprocated. The three quatrains of the sonnet personify the natural world, celebrating the vivacity and vitality with which it responds to her. The use of rhyming couplets and of unifying alliteration, which links each quatrain as well as each line, establishes a sense of energy and harmony.

> For me the sunbeams dance and dart
> And song birds sing with merry heart,
> For me the winds are whispering low
> And laughing flowers in hedges grow.

For me the brook runs merrily
With soothing song to seek the sea,
For me Diana sheds her light
And steadfast stars shine through the night.

For me the waves of ocean sigh
Or dance with sunbeams darting by,
For me the shades of twilight fall
And beauty doth the earth enthral:[8]

The anaphora is used here to stress that this natural performance is personally directed: 'For me...For me...For me' and is a wonderful example of pathetic fallacy, with nature animated, indeed transformed, by the force of her love.

However, while the emotions which she projects onto the natural world return to her with equal power, the final couplet denies this ethic of mutuality as the relationship to nature is revealed as a conceit for her desired relationship to the lover. The twinned stressed syllables and hard sounds of 'But not' break the lilting rhythms and sense of generosity established within the poem by harshly qualifying the final 'For me'. The idealized picture of nature is evoked and dismissed to disclose the real inspiration and situation of romantic love. While nature fulfils her need in its virtually symbiotic relationship with her, the 'bond' of romantic love clearly remains unformed:

But not for me what most I crave,-
To call thee mine,-to be thy slave.

The desire which the poem finally articulates directly is both solution and paradox, for the balance of mutual possession is tipped by the ultimate power divisions of slavery. When reading this poem, which dramatically draws its curtains on an image of female solitude and sacrifice, it is interesting to consider Leighton's comment that 'Renunciation, rejection and despair are thus gestures loaded with inherited, mythic meaning for the woman poet'.[9] Certainly the language of this sonnet and the scenario of renunciation, when examined alongside those of 'In Vain', the second sonnet, seem to evoke significant cultural myths which Marson both draws on and draws our attention to.

'In Vain' begins from the final image of 'Renunciation' in order to more powerfully reiterate the absence of female fulfilment through the imperialism of romance.

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[8]'Renunciation', *Tropic Reveries*, p. 20.
[9]Angela Leighton, p.5.

In vain I build me stately mansions fair,
And set thee as my king upon the throne,
And place a lowly stool beside thee there,
Thus, as thy slave to come into my own.

In vain I deck the halls with roses sweet
And strew the paths with petals rich and rare,
And list with throbbing heart sounds of thy feet,
The welcome voice that tells me thou art near.

In vain I watch the dawn break in the sky
And hope that thou wilt come with coming day:
Alas, Diana calmly sails on high,
But thou, king of my heart, art far away.

In vain one boon from life's great store I crave,
No more the king comes to his waiting slave.[10]

The realization of imbalance is latent throughout this poem, and the couplet here merely confirms a picture of sadness and loneliness, rather than destroying one of happiness. The repetition of 'in vain' functions as an echo which reverberates around the hollow shell of the poem, signifying an absence which becomes more pronounced with each quatrain. The lover's quest, within the classical and imperial framework, is characterized by a pervasive sense of futility.

The mirrored rhymes of the final couplets of 'In Vain' and 'Renunciation', which link the desire to be loved with the impulse towards self-sacrifice in the 'slave I crave' association, clearly bid for further analysis in a project focused on gender and cultural politics. The fact that slavery appears as a field of signification with a 'love' poem written by a black Jamaican woman is clearly troubling in some senses and demands reference to several literary and social contexts.

The language and imagery of imperialism, which surfaces in a number of Marson's love poems, could evidently be traced to the Elizabethan sonneteers. Living in a time contemporary to the continuing 'discovery' of the 'New World' and the strict hierarchy of courtly love, for these poets the image of the slave was possibly an expedient and effective emblem of submission to 'love'. Certainly, it is an image which appears within the romance poetry of the Elizabethans, Shakespeare writes 'Lord of my love, to whom in vassalage I Thy merit hath my duty strongly knit', but nevertheless there is a crucial difference between images of willing slavery which are mainly to love in the

[10]'In Vain', *Tropic Reveries*, p. 27.

abstract within the poetry of 'free' white men, and images of desired bondage which are to the lover in particular within the poetry of a black female colonial subject.[11] Also, whereas the true nature of the Elizabethan verse was 'not Christian but pagan and, in the literal sense Aphrodisiac', Marson's poems, perhaps informed by her own strong Christian beliefs, seem to oscillate between and conflate the Classical and Christian worlds.[12] This is significant as the image of sacrifice and the notion of self-sacrifice and the victim complex exist at the very heart of Christian doctrine, not only in the utter devotion which must be shown towards God, who is also significantly called Lord, but more fascinatingly by an identification with Christ as the essential and innocent (feminized) victim and the redemptive sacrifice. Many of Marson's early sonnets do employ conceits whereby the romantic devotion to the man evokes an image of religious devotion to Christ; the lowly stool assumed in 'In Vain' being a common symbol of Christian humility.

However, although its utilization of classical language and imagery, particularly of imperialism, is probably the most striking feature of 'In Vain', I wish to offer a reading which takes us beyond the intertextual and contextual complexity of this sonnet to argue that its textual workings actually disrupt the assumption that a poem written in a form as conventional as a sonnet will be proportionately reliant on that structure's eurocentrically gendered system of signification. The poem may hold many echoes of Elizabethan love poetry, of Biblical rhetoric (the powerless as the powerful) and of the power-play of slavery, but its meaning is not equivalent to any of these.

While 'In Vain' does offer the same classical framework of courtly love poetry to be found in Spenser's *Amoretti* and Sidney's *Astrophil and Stella*, in which the lover is apotheosized with the characteristic blurring of religious and amatory imagery, Marson inverts the paradigm; here it is the man who is unattainable, placed on a throne rather than a pedestal, and the woman who is actively, and inevitably unsuccessfully, wooing.

The frustration of fulfilment (all is 'in vain') could be seen as mere convention - the portrayal of necessary cruelty and indifference on the part of the lover - by inverting the gender roles, Marson brings new meaning to the genre. The politics of such masculinist courtly love poetry exists in the space between art and life. Hélène Cixous's discussion of the ambivalent positioning of woman within this paradigm is interesting to consider.

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[11]William Shakespeare, 'Sonnet 26', lines 1-2.

[12]Lever, *The Elizabethan Love Sonnet* (London, 1956), p. 2.

> Courtly love is two-faced: adored, deified, assimilated to the idol that accepts homage, she has the rank and honours of the Virgin. Conversely, and the same position, in her powerlessness, she is at the disposition of the other's desire, the object, the prostitute. Under these conditions, what is a woman's desire?[13]

Certainly, the adoration of woman and her fictive ability to wield power through indifference and abstinence which appears within male courtly love poetry is revealed as playful and even derisory, since the real power structures of society frustrate any such notion of female power, an issue especially pertinent in the Caribbean. Whereas, in Marson's poem, it is the relation between the art and life of a black woman which makes the 'slave image' such a disturbing, difficult and fascinating one. Both sonnets strikingly call the gender and cultural orientations of romance and of certain poetic genres into question, challenging the universal currency of love and poetic conceit. In this sense Marson, like Elizabeth Barrett Browning examines 'the conventions of power which lie behind love'.[14] However, while 'In Vain' obviously provokes a consideration of the power politics of eroticism and relationships within heterosexual, patriarchal, colonial societies, I would suggest that it takes us beyond a commentary on what has elsewhere been termed 'the pornography of Empire'. Cixous's suggestion that woman's desire is written out of this scenario is an interesting one to pursue, as it is by appropriating this paradigm from a woman's perspective that, I believe, Marson is able to centre poems on the question of woman's desire.

The proposition of the first stanza that submission and servitude represent an opportunity 'to come into my own' undermines any static notion of conditioned feminine self-sacrifice or cultural masochism. At the point of submission the slave should be owned; it is a moment which traditionally signifies the denial of subjectivity, not the acquisition of it. By calling the issue of ownership into question, Marson's poem reveals how taking control of submission can be an act of transgression. The 'slave' in this sonnet serves to question the preordained cultural significance of the slave as both the sign of possession of another's self within the context of a society built upon slavery, and as the surrender of the self within the context of European love sonnets. Marson's use of this image highlights the semantic instability and multiple possibilities of this sign within a colonial, patriarchal language system and therefore discloses its ultimate lack of authority over meaning. The poem also

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[13]'Sorties' in Hélène Cixous and Catherine Clément, p. 117.
[14]Angela Leighton, p. 80.

foregrounds the political inflections of this sign, revealing that usually it is the possessor who writes and thus 'uses' the slave.

Thus, by rehearsing a position of servitude - to poetic convention as well as to the lover / master figure - this poem is able to articulate a space in which the subject can position itself even within the structure of slavery, which might be seen as a place of no resistance and no agency. By operating within convention, the poem explores but does not endorse the surrender of self, which might be seen as the traditional destiny of the feminine and colonial subject. Indeed, we might wish to extend this principle to a consideration of Marson's poetics here and suggest that by consciously crafting a poem in which subordination is undermined any relationship of 'In Vain' to the European sonnet tradition is similarly subverted.

From such an arresting image of desire, the sequence continues the expression of emptiness and sadness experienced at the absence of the lover. 'Incomplete', as its title denotes, relates a sense of longing for the loved one. The abundance of festivities and loving gestures, which constitute the main body of the poem, hold no potential happiness or consolation, but rather only serve to exaggerate her own state of emotional solitude: 'What matters it tonight that all is bright / ...What matters it though friends be gathering round / ...What matters it though gifts be strewn on me'.[15] This repeated question of significance is finally answered by the couplet, which places her in a position of absolute importance: 'though the great wide world lay at my feet', with the assonance of the long vowel sounds and alliteration emphasising the scope of her possibility. The imperial imagery of the previous two sonnets is overturned here, with the female subject in the position of the conquistador, rather than of the slave. However, it is a role which she exposes as worthless, unable to bring the personal romantic fulfilment which she needs: 'Without your smile my life is incomplete'.

In 'I am Content' the level of emotional dependence becomes more pronounced as the female subject assumes a position of utter passivity and devotion.

> I am content to love you to the end,
> To have you fill my thoughts both night and day,
> ...
> I am content to listen for your call,
> To hasten or delay at your behest,[16]

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[15]'Incomplete', *Tropic Reveries*, p. 28.
[16]'I Am Content', ibid, p. 29.

The sense of disproportionate devotion and selfless love remains, but the desire for self-sacrifice as a means to romantic fulfilment becomes replaced by an acceptance of love as unfulfilled. The emotional momentum of her love exists without reaction, and although ostensibly this seems to be a negative change - as the worthlessness of life without the lover becomes transferred onto the worthlessness of her-self: 'though not on me your fondest love you spend' - it is, in a sense, a positive one, as it creates a self-sufficient female romance plot in which the presence of the lover is dispensable. The sacrifice to the lover becomes more of a surrender to an ideal which embraces an acceptance of unrequited emotions, as 'love' achieves an abstract rather than a personalized quality: 'Oh love, I am content, although I know | The years will bring but emptiness and woe'. The sequence opens then with an extended expression of the desire for romantic love which remains unrealized, evoking images of a possessive, obsessive love which is focused on the idea of the lover, but does not embrace the possibility of his presence.

This situation suddenly shifts in 'Vows', a poem addressed to the lover within the context of the reciprocated romance relationship. The title of the poem elicits a notion of Christian promise and the eternal love of marriage, but the poem itself inverts our expectations by presenting a more secular framework where love is transient and temporary: 'Make me no vows against the coming years | For who can tell what changes they may bring'.[17] Indeed, the poem denies the need for vows, insisting only upon the need for intense love: 'Make me no vows, so that you love me now | With all the ardour of your loving soul', heightening the craving for present fulfilment, rather than future promise. However, there is also a sense in which the fundamental nature of the romance relationship has changed now that it exists in the real rather than the ideal. The woman within the poem does not directly reveal her own emotions, but the insistence which she displays in dissuading her lover from promising eternal love seems, not only to convey the present urgency of a traditional *carpe diem*, but also to impart a sense of awe, even apprehension, at the actual prospect of intense emotion and 'true' love, which was craved for earlier. The couplet of this sonnet twins the archetypal *carpe diem* philosophy of romantic love poetry with the more modern anticipation, not of death, but of separation: 'Oh love me while you may, for who can tell | How soon the time may come to say farewell'.

However the controlled expression and acceptance of love as a temporary state is less cerebrally realized in 'I Cannot Tell', which speaks from the reality of the previously envisaged farewell. The repetition of 'I cannot tell' as the

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[17] 'Vows', ibid, p. 30.

opening refrain of each quatrain and the couplet creates a sense of amazement and disbelief at her own actions, a conflict between the mental process of preparation and the emotional one of experience. It also paradoxically communicates a realization of the impotence of language to reveal the complexity of that experience: 'I cannot tell why I should wish to die, | Now that the time has come to say goodbye'.[18] However, the actual parting is expressed in strongly neutral terms, the presence of the lover prefiguring his absence as powerfully as his absence prefigured his presence, with 'time' as the final disinterested judge, and the verb in the infinitive without a subject.

This anonymity is resolved by the next two sonnets, as the 'subject' of these poems gradually emerges. In 'Love's Lament', the complete and one-sided devotion offered by 'I Am Content' is set in the context of a real romance, and emerges as too frail to endure and too fragile to bring contentment: 'I cannot let you hold me in your arms | And listen while you talk of trivial things'.[19] The whole structure of the devotional poem is inverted, with the pain previously associated with the lover's absence now caused by his presence: 'your presence brings me bitter pain'. The tension between her poetic persona's longings for a 'true love' and her awareness of the lover's inadequacy, places her in an emotional limbo incapable of either ending or preserving the relationship: 'I cannot bid you stay, | Though as you go you take my life away'. The real context of romance marks a loss of innocence on her part: 'daily from my heart your image slips', signalling the 'fall' of her archetypal ideal and slippage from the prescribed boundaries of the feminine lover which this precipitates. Moreover, this poem which articulates the inability to be fulfilled by the lover functions as the clearest disclosure of the way in which the focus of the romance, and thus of the poems, is her own desire rather than the lover. Such a focus would seem to suggest a way of reading the altruism of the female subject within these sonnets, as evidenced by such extreme devotion and sacrifice of self, rather differently. Perhaps this 'emotional impulse' needs to be reconsidered as a conscious device which serves to conform to the masculinist icon of womanhood only in order to find an acceptable mode through which female emotional autonomy can be achieved.

Indeed, in 'Love's Farewell', an ironic version of the valediction poem, the female persona seizes the active role. Arguing for separation, as a gesture of rational insight, and yet unable to face the experience of parting, this sonnet

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[18]'I Cannot Tell', ibid, p. 31.
[19]'Love's Lament', ibid, p. 32.

becomes a literal instrument within the romance relationship rather than a literary vehicle through which to express it.

'Tis best that we should say farewell for aye,
And never meet again in fond embrace;
Away I go, some thousand miles away,
And I may nevermore behold your face.

'Tis best that we should part; let us forgo
The farewell hour, oh love, I cannot hear
Those words fall from your lips altho' I know
I nevermore may see your face so dear.

Oh please forgive this coward heart of mine,
That cannot meet the pain in your dear eyes,
And rest my trembling hands once more in thine
And stem the tears that in my heart arise.

Oh love, I know you would not have me go,
But be content, the Fates have willed it so.[20]

It is ironic that the most direct engagement with the lover occurs in order to effect disengagement and, again, the rehearsal of the acceptable 'tears' may be read as a strategy of 'feminine masquerade' in order to achieve the unacceptable status of female control within romance. Significantly, the repetition of 'Tis best' and the turn of destiny manoeuvred by the Fates neutralizes the situation, abnegating her of any responsibility for this parting. Moreover, while the poem ostensibly seeks to reassure the lover of her pain and therefore his significance, the distance which will intervene between them is not one which elicits the pain of absence or of solitude, but rather one which solicits the space for imaginings and the romance of poetry and of emotional life, if not of a 'real' romance.

It is not insignificant that the sequence progresses by a realization of this very space in 'I Know Not'. As distance displaces the small realities of the lover's life: 'I know not where thou lingerest tonight, | Or where thy footsteps strayed the livelong day', she is able to concentrate again on her own emotions and imagination.[21] Space deflects the threatening presence of 'time', which constantly prefigured the inevitable end of romance in the earlier poems, and this poem works towards a couplet which re-situates romance within an archetypal hyperbolic scale: 'But this I know, my love shall follow thee | Throughout all time into eternity'. The freedom of emotional life engendered by the release from the real romance situation signals the significance of love to

[20]'Love's Farewell', ibid, p. 33.
[21]'I Know Not', ibid, p. 34.

be quite separate from the significance of the lover. The poem ends with a new gesture of supreme devotion through which, liberated from the mortal time scale and unspoiled by the temporal reality of the lover, her love regains perfection.

While 'Absence' seems to take us back the opening point of the sequence with desire for the lover being so great that it obscures any sense of her own existence, the poem paradoxically meditates on the abyss of each day fulsomely and self-indulgently. Inverting a masculinist model of romance poetry, Marson overturns the *carpe diem*, in order to convey the way in which time lengthens as it is stretched over the distance of separation and thoughts of the day that can never be seized: 'What shall I do to bribe the hours of day | And long, long hours of night to hasten on'.[22] Although the sonnet is a lament for the loss of the lover, it is the sense of lament rather than of the lover which pervades the poem, making the discourse of love rather than the lover himself the *raison d'être* of the work. Time returns as a taunting reminder of her past, and she wishes it away, not seeking to remember the insubstantial reality of her romance, but rather invoking an ideal which emerges at the very end of poem as if conjured from her need for emotional life: 'And never, night or day, will be at rest | Until once more I hold thee to my breast'. The sonnet sequence could be read as ending then, not with union, reunion or consummation, but rather with a projection of love beyond the restrictive dimensions of space, time and being, into the imagination.

While Marson's sonnet sequence does explore the conventional placing of woman within the romance sphere of devotion and dependence, the cycle as a whole inverts convention in order to establish and explore the reality of woman's experience of love and thereby create an aesthetic icon of the male lover. From the indifferent and insubstantial figure of reality, the male lover is metamorphosed into a Muse, a 'model' man who does not taint her perfect love with his imperfect presence. Thus, the romantic quest becomes a poetic and intellectual adventure through which the female persona finds not her 'master lover' but the traces of her own desire and her poetic inspiration. In this sense, Marson's sonnet sequence illustrates Adrienne Riche's belief that: 'The most revealing and life-sustaining love poetry is not actually about the lover but about the poet's attempt to live with her experience of love, to fathom how she can order its chaos and ride out its storms'.[23]

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[22]'Absence', ibid, p. 35.

[23]*On Lies, Secrets and Silences*, p. 251.

I have already argued that this sequence operates within masculine expectations of female destiny without necessarily promoting these, and I would further suggest that it also works within expectations of a (sonnet) sequence without endorsing this structure in any conventional sense. I am interested in the ways in which these twelve sonnets disrupt the notion of sequence as logical progression, working against a teleology of heterosexual romance which in its fulfilment in marriage or union secures masculine fulfilment and lineage. Perhaps even more fundamentally than this, Marson's cyclical and multi-climatic structure, which defies any direct linearity and 'logos', may represent a distinctly female engagement with the master narrative of love leading to social integration and hence a stabilization of female sexuality and emotion. Kristeva has pointed to the fact that 'female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity*', and it is these two qualities which persist throughout this sonnet cycle.[24] Most crucially then, this sequence which presents the voice of extreme female devotion, even martyrdom, within the framework of conventional poetic form, might be read as a strategic positioning of female subjectivity at a seemingly safe point from which to explore the possibilities for female fulfilment and aesthetic re-invention. In this sense, Marson seems to approach a strategy within this sequence which both addresses and begins to answer the 'urgent' question which Julia Kristeva believes women face.

> If the social contract, far from being that of equal men, is based on an essentially sacrificial relationship of separation and articulation of differences which in this way produces communicable meaning, what is our place in this order of sacrifice and / or of language? No longer wishing to be excluded or no longer content with the function which has always been demanded of us...how can we reveal our place, first as it is bequeathed to us by tradition, and then as we want to transform it?[25]

As Kristeva and Marson both alert us to, there is a relationship between the sacrifice to men and to language, a relationship (to patriarchy) which secures women's (subordinate) place in the symbolic order. I would argue that these sonnets powerfully reveal the politics of the place bequeathed to women within linguistic and social structures while simultaneously transforming this place by taking creative control and reversing the gender roles and consequently the gender politics of romance. It is also interesting to note that Marson offers us a very different, but equally gendered appropriation of an established poetic form

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[24]'Women's Time' in *The Kristeva Reader* translated by Margaret Waller and edited by Toril Moi (Oxford, 1986), p. 191.
[25]Ibid, p. 199.

in order to effect this 'problem as solution' strategy in her matrimonial parodies, to be discussed later.

In the work of Hélène Cixous, the feminine act of giving (in a sense, of sacrifice) is theorized in an attempt to write of a feminine subjectivity and a feminine practice of writing.

> But all the difference lies in the why and how of the gift, in the values that the gesture of giving affirms, causes to circulate; in the type of profit the giver draws from the gift and the use to which he or she puts it...
>
> How does she give? What are her dealings with saving or squandering, reserve. life, death? She too gives *for*. She too, with open hands, gives herself - pleasure, happiness, increased value, enhanced self-image. But she doesn't try to "recover her expenses."[26]

The feminine 'gift' as an act not dependent on exchange creates an emphasis upon excess, an extravagance which cannot be contained or constrained by the masculine order. In Marson's work this theory might help us to approach the clearly excessive devotion to the lover which can never be limited to him, but which rather both feeds and fulfils her desire to desire. Cixous's theory, in its relation to writing, also suggests a presence which exceeds structures and categories, possibly reminiscent of the more fluid structure of the cycle which is refuses to be contained by genres or tropes, or ideas of succession.

My reading of this sonnet sequence which suggests that in Marson's work romance (poetry) may be a route to intellectual and emotional fulfilment and a means through which to sustain an intensity of love which is otherwise translated into a normative social structure through union, can be further substantiated by other of her 'love poems'. In *Tropic Reveries* the poems of most exhilarated and perfectly realized love project a future vision of romantic love, as yet unrealized. 'If You Were Mine' offers a consciously archaic framework of wooing and courtship in which love is ideally mutual:' If thou wert mine beloved. I And I were thine', but significantly possessive.[27] By projecting the fulfilment of the romance into future time, with the use of the conditional, the poetic persona is placing love in the realm of hopes and wishes and subsequently offering the female imaginings as a favoured state in which love may remain conceptually pure. The miscellaneous section of this volume also offers two accounts of the romantic love situation, 'Questioning' and 'Folly', printed alongside each other, provide differing interpretations of the search for

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[26]Hélène Cixous, p. 87.

[27]'If You Were Mine', *Tropic Reveries*, p. 16.

a reciprocal love. In the first, 'Questioning', the lover moves from the future into the past as the poem reveals the extreme devotion which would willingly be offered in order for their romantic history to be translated into present possibility: 'I'd give the world, beloved one, to know | ..You give to me a little thought that's kind'.[28] The poetic voice betrays an obsessive focus on the former lover: 'For all my thoughts are centred now on you', which again emphasizes the significance of a consciousness consumed by love as much as it does the importance of the lover himself. Indeed, in 'Folly' when her attention is now centred on the present lover, her thoughts remain restless, manufacturing acts of infidelity on the part of the lover: 'other hands and hearts | Will minister to thee...your kiss will linger on other lips than mine'.[29] The imagined inadequacy of the lover releases her to search for a perfect love, once more suggesting the desire for a form of romance which can function as an intellectual utopia.

Romantic love and the quest for a 'dream lover' remain a central concern of *Heights and Depths*, published only one year after *Tropic Reveries*. As the title poem 'Heights and Depths' denotes, the landscape of the 'Poems of Love' in this volume still testifies to the proportional relation between extreme happiness and extreme sadness which *Tropic Reveries* had established, with an exaggerated emphasis upon the union of antithetical emotions. Also rooted in the Elizabethan rituals of courtly love, as established within Petrarchan conceits, the paradoxical pairing of 'pleasure in pain' and 'death in life', which denote the unbearable sorrow of the rejected lover with the traditional dilemma of 'How long shall this lyke dying lyfe endure' is rehearsed in 'The Heart's Cruelty' as 'For life is death the while I feel this ache'.[30] However, in this volume the poetically demanding and extravagant suffering endured by the female lover often results in the courtship of death, as an awareness of the innate inadequacy of mortal love pervades these poems.

The first poem in the love section, 'The Captive', develops romance as an imperial narrative within a more consciously fictive, even 'fairy-tale' world. It is a long narrative poem in which references to slavery appear as a conventional metaphorical framework through which to express the power of 'love' which has, in the magical form of imps,

> stormed my heart,

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[28]'Questioning', ibid, p. 48.

[29]'Folly', ibid, p. 49.

[30]Edmund Spenser, 'Sonnet XXV', *Amoretti* (1595) in *The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser* edited by J. C. Smith and E. De Selincourt (London, 1912), p. 566 and Una Marson, 'The Heart's Cruelty', *Heights and Depths*, p. 41.

Torn down my battlements,
and caused me thus
To live in bondage, like a fettered slave![31]

However, the situation of captivity and the language of slavery are not incidental to this poem, as the woman's literal bondage to the king serves as a sustained allegory of her emotional devotion to the distant lover. As the poem's narrative logic unfolds it appears to promote a deeply conventional and foreboding destiny for women, holding up a familiar masculine heroic sequence in which the woman achieves equality and happiness through willing submission.

"O King, thou wilt not, wilt not set me free?"
I ceased, my heart o'erwhelmed with anxious thought,
And, for reply, he raised me from the earth,
And kissed my lips with such sweet tenderness
That in his arms I swooned.

However, once again, it is by evoking a familiar situation which we recognize and feel we understand, that Marson unsettles and de-familiarizes our assumptions about romance and female destiny. The central paradox of the poem, that it is through willing slavery that women achieve satisfaction and freedom: 'O! in that bondage there was life for me, | And in my freedom death', evokes both the clichéd belief that love transforms power relationships (eloquently expressed by Shakespeare in *The Tempest* : 'My heart fly to your service; there resides, | To make me slave to it;') and the Christian doctrine of service as perfect freedom. Yet, as with the previous slave image in the sonnets, the appropriation of a signifying system here is again used to potentially ironic and subversive effect.[32]

Although Marson embraces many of the classic motifs of fairy-tale romance in this poem, she does not guarantee the masculinist power of the heroic sequence. Conventionally, it is the majestic male who liberates the lady from the sadistic deprivation of a tyrant and makes her his queen, here it is the king who enslaves her. 'The Captive' also overturns the romantic epitome of the 'Sleeping beauty syndrome' as the female subject loses consciousness, rather than regaining it, at his kiss. Perhaps most significantly, the female subject here denies the tyrant king his satisfaction by flourishing in her bonds rather than pining away: 'as captive I had stormed the gates | Of heaven'. Indeed, it is the power of her love and the relationship of her love to power which are the

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[31]'The Captive', ibid, p. 27.
[32]*The Tempest*, Act 3, sc 1, lines 65-6.

focal points of the poem, and it is not a poem which suggests only the king's power to denigrate her, but also her power to glorify him: 'Mark thou proud visage which my love transforms | To something Godlike'. Certainly, by designing these emblems of male heroism and centring the poem on the transforming power of female love, Marson realigns the 'moral' of the story, which is clearly directed at the king. While the woman within the poem is inherently aware of the power play which informs love and the neurosis of dependence which conditions women's lives within patriarchy, the king is ignorant of his role in this plot, and must come to realize that it is only by realising and empowering the woman that he can ever truly 'possess' her. The final image of the poem, of marital fulfilment, both confirms and confounds the role of women within romance; certainly the woman gains male approval and is integrated into the power system as queen, and yet it is a power system proved to be absurd by the narrative logic which shows all women to be slaves in love, and all slaves to be potential and competent equals.

This poem is clearly deeply ambiguous, a hallmark of many women's subversive poems, but perhaps it is only by setting us right on the edge of convention that Marson is able to expose and challenge our expectations. The allusions to imps, angels, kings and blushing maids recall the eurocentric fairy-tales which Marson re-tells, but these coded poetic presences more pointedly signal her engagement with narratives of female socialization and normalization, and with accepted archetypes of female behaviour.

The fierce adherence to the ideal of a perfect lover and the powerful drive towards romantic love still characterizes the love poetry of *Heights and Depths*, although now the necessity for a constructed, fictive lover becomes far more self-consciously present. In 'Resignation', a title which again plays with familiar or mythic notions of Victorian womanhood, the female subject must resign herself to the fact that 'love' is not the same consuming force for her lover, as it is for herself: 'Play bridge! When each fibre of my aching heart | Yearned just for the touch of your hand'.[33] The impingement of a brutally trivial reality on to her hyperbolic emotional state forces her to acknowledge the true plane at which her love attains fulfilment 'only in dreams you are mine'. As in *Tropic Reveries*, the imagined presence of the lover clearly exist independently of any 'real man'. Even though the final stanza reiterates a giving over of self to the lover: 'out of the great world I have chosen you | And set you as king upon my throne', it is clear that the elected king is not the real

[33]'Resignation', *Heights and Depths*, p. 43.

man of the poem, to whose banal nature she has failed to show submission, but rather the fanciful creation designed to give meaning to her otherwise undirected, and therefore excessive, love.

In 'To--', this central problem in the quest for romantic fulfilment is neatly disclosed: 'I love you for what you could be | I hate you for what you are', a stunning reflection on, and gender inversion of, Christina Rossetti's perception of the female subject within male art: 'not as she is but as she fills his dreams'.[34] Again the woman's love resides in the image of the lover transformed by her imagination - an ideal which seems to be identified as eternally unattainable within reality, the twinning of alternate long and short lines in this poem representing the inability of the real to equal the ideal.

In 'To Poesie', the unnamed lover is replaced by poetry itself. With the extreme vision of devotion now directed at her writing, it is almost as if, in its personification, poetry itself takes over the central stage which the lover absents, becoming her haven from the dullness of the world and her access to the extremes of emotions which the lover's presence failed to fulfil: 'to Thee | and there abide in painful ecstasy?'.[35] The excessive devotion shown to poetry and the apotheosis of it in her desire to 'turn again from life's absorbing mart | To bless Thee, | Love Thee, serve Thee evermore' appears to substantiate the reading of poetry as a preferred (substitute for the) lover, the ultimate vehicle through which a loss or denial of self can result in expression and fulfilment.

In the six years before the publication of Una Marson's next volume of poetry, *The Moth and the Star* in 1937, she became increasingly involved in the evolving forum for the issue of sexual politics. Her active membership of women's organizations, and her experience of speaking at the first ever International Women's Congress suggests that she was interested in issues of gender and eager to gain a wider understanding of women's experience throughout the world.[36] Certainly the poems which appear in this third volume are more directly engaged with the issue of gender politics, and particularly with the intersecting oppressions of colonialism and patriarchy.

However, while realistic representations of women's relationships to romance and society's demands for a stable social fulfilment of love are powerfully articulated within this volume, love poetry does retain a significant

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[34]'To-', ibid, p. 51 & Christina Rossetti, 'In an Artist's Studio', *New Poems by Christina Rossetti* (London, 1896), p. 14.

[35]'To Poesie', *Heights and Depths*, p. 76.

[36]The biographical facts which inform this paragraph are taken from Erika Smilowitz's 'Una Marson: A Woman Before Her Time'.

presence with the need to love and the impulse towards expressing and creating emotionally both emerging as continuing preoccupations.

The imaginative creation of the lover is wonderfully evoked in 'My Beloved'. The feminine impulse towards altruism and self-sacrifice is re-presented here as a creative excess.

> I will play for thee
> Music divine;
> I will comfort thee
> When thou art weary;
> I will cheer thee
> When thou art sad,[37]

The excessive and extreme gestures of giving articulated in this poem signal a female libidinal economy which serves to fulfil its female subject more than the imagined male object in the creation of a (projected) perfected lover.

> And all-
> And more than all
> Thou askest,
> I will do for thee-
> I will make thee my Beloved.

Although, this pattern of emotional coercion defies the conventional eurocentric expectations governing the spontaneous and mysterious origins of love, the poem clearly fulfils its own agenda, in the evocation of a Beloved whose proper name denotes his abstract rather than actual presence. In this way the poem re-presents the ethics of female devotion as the aesthetics of female invention.

In 'My Need' the sense of incompleteness and dependence on the lover may seem to echo from the sonnets of *Tropic Reveries*: 'Speak to me- | For when you speak | I am strong and well and awake', but this need is now sharply qualified by the final ironic twist: 'But love me not | Lest naught be left | In life worth my desire'.[38] The 'not' which had previously signified her passive state of not being loved is here actively imposed upon the plea of 'love me', so ubiquitous within Marson's romance poetry. The sentiment behind the power of many poems in *Tropic Reveries* and *Heights and Depths* in which the female subject ultimately elects to retain the ideal, in favour of the consummation of the real, is now revealed. The true emotional void is not precipitated by unrequited love, which brings a significance to solitude, but by the act of reciprocation which, in its achievement of balance, cancels out its motivating desire. Also the emphasis

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[37]'My Beloved', *The Moth and the Star,* p. 41.
[38]'My Need', ibid, p. 53.

on **My** Beloved' and '**My** Need' foregrounds that love is not directed outwards towards the lover, but inwards towards the fulfilment of the female subject.

'Reasoning' further explores the sense in which unfulfilled love now becomes desirable. The poem establishes a mirror image between the indifferent male and the impassioned female: 'There is no love in your eyes | I would have seen it' is compared to: 'There is love in my eyes | You have seen it'.[39] However, the asymmetry of the reflections is not an imbalance which leaves the woman in pain or misery but rather a womb of emotion which arises *de profundis*, and houses the phoenix of her desire.

> Your coldness will feed my fire
> For love reciprocated burns away
> And only the ashes
> Of dead desire remain.

The paradigm of romantic love is fulfilled, and its female subject has transformed the tragedy of inevitable loss into the drama of perpetual pleasure, a transformation which robs the lover of any power.

In *Towards The Stars*, a 1945 volume which relies heavily on previously published material, most of the love poems are selected from the preceding volume. There are few new poems in this final volume, and in these the lover persists as a necessary ideal created by the imagination to sustain the pure state of desire. Indeed, throughout Marson's love poems it is the female poetic persona who creates the male romantic subject, but significantly this is not effected in order to bring love to a point of mutual fruition, but rather to enable an endless deferment of consummation through which the woman can entertain her own emotions without compromise. Certainly, if we consider this creation of a perfect male subject (who although represented as masterful is actually impotent within the poems), the anti-teleological structure of the romance relationship and the creative excess of the woman's love as evidenced in Marson's love poems, it becomes hard to argue for them as conventional presentations of feminine destiny or of poetic models. Furthermore, these qualities mark out the subversive relationship which such poetry can bear in relation to a symbolic order which demands exile from, rather than return to, the imaginary and subordination to, rather than invention within, language. Although the female subject in these poems, like the (black) woman living in a patriarchal and colonial society, must adopt a position within the (symbolic) order of that society, she cannot be denied desire and imagination as sites of

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[39]'Reasoning', ibid, p. 57.

resistance and of sustenance, and it is these spaces within a psyche which the love poetry of these volumes most strongly maps out.

Parodies Against Patriarchy

However, in addition to these love poems which present an interesting version of the female lover's discourse, there is evidence of a more overtly politicized discussion on the nature of romantic love and women's lives within Marson's poetry, one which exposes the socialization of femininity and gender roles with a Western model of society. Expressing a woman's vision of the world, these poems expose the reality behind the idealized romance situation and celebrate the qualities of women which enable them to resist oppressive colonial and patriarchal structures, re-viewing the notion of female fulfilment outside of this context.

Indeed, it is in *Tropic Reveries*, the volume most densely populated by the seemingly self-sacrificial love poems, that we also find the most acerbic attacks on 'matrimony' - the expected epitome of heterosexual romance. In this volume Marson re-models two of the 'sacred' speeches of English Literature - Hamlet's soliloquy 'To be or not to be...' and Kipling's poem 'If' - playfully shifting the poetic axis from a discussion of 'man's condition' to an exploration of woman's. Indeed, although much of the text of these two poems in terms of language and structure is taken directly from Shakespeare and Kipling, the effect of the poems as a whole is far from mimetic. In both, reconstruction at the levels of diction and form serves to facilitate deconstruction at the level of ideas. These poems engage with clear examples of patriarchal (and, in 'If', colonial) writing in order to explore the female social role of wife and the state of consciousness demanded by this role; it is possibly no coincidence that marriage was an institution which was fiercely advocated for women by the patriarchal and colonial culture dominant in Jamaican society during the early twentieth century period.

'To Wed Or Not To Wed' re-presents Hamlet's profound procrastination on the dilemma of human existence in the form of an extended equivocation on the dilemma of marital destiny for women.

> To wed, or not to wed: that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
> The fret and loneliness of spinsterhood
> Or to take arms against the single state

And by marrying, end it?[40]

Retaining form and sustaining tone in order to attain equal linguistic power, Marson's adoption of 'perfect pitch' here serves not to confirm her confinement within a stifling and inauthentic language system, but rather to illustrate her ability to employ a parodic voice which is 'both a re-creation and a creation, making criticism into a kind of active exploration of form'.[41] Trespassing within the formal territory of an 'English master', Marson's parody critiques both marriage (the immediate subject) and by implication the speech and values of the subject whom it writes over.

The substitution of women's consciousness in this poem displaces the sublime with the sobering, and the eternal torment with the everyday trauma While the effectiveness of this parody undoubtedly rests in its surface wit, it yields a more subtle reading when viewed as a palimpsest in which the original text exists as a constant frame of reference, subsumed but not erased.[42] The initial humour of this poem exists in its mock-heroic subject matter and the comic comparison between Hamlet, the intellectual hero and 'sweet prince', and the undistinguished, single female. However, given the moral pressure exerted on women to marry and thus gain respectability it may not be extravagant to perceive 'The fret and loneliness of spinsterhood' to be a 'sea of troubles'. Furthermore, the fact that Hamlet's sense of himself as essentially different to the rest of his society, which breeds in him justifiable paranoia, is voiced here by the single woman who is constantly segregated and alienated within patriarchal society, makes us question the relation between an assumed high and lowly subject, drawing attention to the gender politics inherent in perceptions of value.

The need to re-assess given value systems is also highlighted by the poem's implicit comparison between Hamlet's 'whips and scorns of time' and the woman's 'joys of wife and mother'. Ostensibly offering a more optimistic meditation, Marson's poem goes on to list these 'joys', which include 'the pleasures of devotion, of sacrifice and love', not only confirming the altruistic role of woman within heterosexual romance but also revealing the restrictive relation which she bears to her husband. Indeed, on closer examination, the assaults of eternity facing the isolated Hamlet now seem friendlier than the demands of self-denial facing the prospective wife. Through the parody of such

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[40]'To Wed or Not To Wed', *Tropic Reveries*, pp. 81-2.
[41]Linda Hutcheon, p. 51.
[42]For Hamlet's speech please refer to William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, iii. 1. 56-89 edited by Harold Jenkins, The Arden Shakespeare (London, 1982), pp. 277-280.

a familiar speech, Marson is not only able to satirize the expectations which govern marriage but also the expectation that male problems and decisions are innately more serious and worthy than female ones. This question of relative and gendered significance is also illustrated by reference to the 'consummation-devoutly to be wish'd' which both Shakespeare and Marson make. For Hamlet, the desired consummation is a final end to his psychological turmoil, whereas for our female protagonist, it is the sexual consummation which follows marriage. Playing on the archetypal association between sex and death, Marson joins the titular link between 'to be' and 'to wed', hinting at 'to bed' as woman's true marital fate. However, this comparison goes beyond the insinuation that marriage is simply a legitimation and aggrandizement of sexual gratification, to explore the relation which exists between these two versions of consummation. Hamlet's contemplation of death is implied within the woman's contemplation of marriage; Marson uses the intertextual links here to question whether marriage is not a kind of ending, of death? It is not incidental then that both dramatic soliloquies end in a retreat from action, with Marson's poetic heroine, like Shakespeare's, concluding that doubt is safer than 'doing'. By allowing her poetic persona to enter the masculine domain of serious contemplation in order to play out a specifically female decision, Marson is possibly employing the fictional space of the poem in order to rehearse the significance of domestic decisions, as well as parodying the earnest and protracted nature of self-indulgent contemplation open to men. The poem's final counsel to withdraw from marital life which comes after the imaginative rehearsal of a wife's world, also redefines non-action on the part of women within a patriarchal society, passivity becoming strength against the prescribed tide of wifely action.

The parody of Kipling's 'If', the grand recipe for manhood, has an interesting subtext with reference to him as colonial writer which reinforces the 'contratextual' impulse of the intertextual link, but I wish to concentrate here on gender politics. While Kipling's poem inscribes the ethos of imperial masculinity *par excellence*, Marson's parody carefully and consciously appropriates this framework in order to communicate the consciously anti-heroic role of a 'wife worth-while'.

> If you can keep him true when all about you
> The girls are making eyes and being kind,
> If you can make him spend the evenings with you
> When fifty Jims and Jacks are on his mind;
> If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
> Or when he comes at one, be calm and sleep,
> And do not oversleep, but early waking

Smile o'er the tea cups, and ne'er think to weep.

If you can love and not make love your master,
If you can serve yet do not be his slave,
If you can hear bright tales and quit them faster,
And, for your peace of mind, think him no knave;
If you can bear to hear the truth you tell him
Twisted around to make you seem a fool,
Or see the Capstan on your bureau burning
And move the noxious weed, and still keep cool.

If you can make one heap of all he gives you
And try to budget so that it's enough,
And add, subtract and multiply the issue,
So that the Grocer will not cut up rough;
If you can force your dress, and hat, and stocking
To serve their turn long after they are worn,
And pass the "sales," and do not think it shocking
To wear a garment that has once been torn:

If you can walk when he takes out the Ford
And teaches girls to drive before you learn,
And list to tales of tyres without a wry word,
And let him feel you're glad for his return:
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds work and prayer and smile,
Yours is the world and everything that's in it,
And what is more you'll be a wife worth while.

(*With apologies to Kipling.*)[43]

The trials which mark a boy's rite of passage into manhood are travestied by the domestic obstacle course which faces a prospective bride. In the poem, the initiation into matrimony is revealed to be an exercise requiring practical skills: 'early waking | Smile o'er the tea cups', dissimulation: 'let him feel you're glad for his return' and self-delusion: 'for your peace of mind think him no knave'. Marson's poem is a cautionary tale of woman's destiny to become, what Virginia Woolf termed, 'looking glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice his natural size'.[44] Indeed, although Kipling writes of maturity and Marson of matrimony the ultimate subject of both poems is significantly the same, in terms of a discussion of masculine fulfilment, and yet crucially different. Marson's poem effectively re-defines and re-aligns the status of this achievement, again raising a question mark over established notions of value. The references within the third stanza of the poem point to the very real problems of budgeting, but also suggest that

[43]'If', *Tropic Reveries*, pp. 83-4.
[44]*A Room of One's Own*, p. 35.

to be contented and worthwhile a wife must learn to play with the concept of value. The manipulation of figures which the wife must learn standing figuratively for the creative accounting with her own happiness which she must perform in order for her marriage to balance emotionally.

In both poems, Marson acknowledges and 'plays off' the primary texts with critical awareness, thus making the ideological inflections of both versions far more explicit. To undervalue parody as either a sign of the writer's inability to escape received models (a potential post-colonial reading) or of a penchant for apolitical play (a potential postmodern reading) would be to miss the radical relationship which these poems establish between different models of experience and different participants within an established discourse. As Helen Tiffin has pointed out:

> Pastiche and parody...offer a key to the destabilisation and deconstruction of a repressive European archive. Far from endlessly deferring or denying meaning, these same tropes function as potential decolonizing strategies which invest (or reinvest) devalued "peripheries" with meaning.[45]

It is woman and domestic politics as periphery which Marson addresses in her parodies. As Linda Hutcheon points out, parody 'establishes difference at the heart of similarity. No integration into a new context can avoid altering meaning, and perhaps even value'.[46] Indeed, it is crucial that the transcontextual act becomes transvaluative as the issue of sexual difference is written into Marson's versions.

Rhonda Cobham has described Marson's parodies as 'of slight literary merit...probably written while Marson was still at school for the entertainment of school friends'.[47] Although this suggestion that the poems are the result of commonplace schoolgirl activity is purely speculative it might be interesting to pursue this line of enquiry a little further. Rather than indicating the lesser value of these poems (Cobham-Sander's comment implies that they are somehow inconsequential and aesthetically immature), this idea that the poems were produced in the context of, and as a direct response to, the colonial educational system serves to highlight their inherently subversive quality. The pedagogic imperative for repetition which was instilled by this system is here radically revised through parodies of high literary discourses. By choosing to travesty such well-established texts, Marson is able to demonstrate her

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[45]Introduction to *Past the last post: theorizing post-colonialism and post-modernism* edited by Ian Adam and Helen Tiffin (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991).
[46]Linda Hutcheon, p. 8.
[47]'The Creative Writer and West Indian Society: Jamaica 1900-1950' (1981), p. 218.

knowledge of tradition, whilst asserting a counter-discourse via the substitution of woman's experience.

The apologies to Kipling and to Shakespeare at the end of the parodies do not signal the filial relationship with indifference. Marson deliberately foregrounds the 'original creators' and texts and thus ironically references the consciously disobedient nature of these poems through a gesture of mock-humility. Although such explicit intertextuality may suggest that the meanings in operation here can only come into 'play' because of their textual (and colonial) antecedents, the counter-textuality of these poems illustrates that Marson's relationship to tradition is not passive or derivative in nature. The playful appropriation of colonial discourses, evidenced by Marson here, is often theorized a particularly 'post-colonial' linguistic strategy. As W. D. Ashcroft explains, the post-colonial writer is aware that language is not value-laden in any static way.

> The theory of language which post-colonial experience confirms is the kind of relational view of meaning which Kristeva has developed from such theorists as Volosinov. That is, languages are not conceived as structures or systems, and thus cannot be seen to be either sexist or imperialist per se but in the way they are utilised with the socio-historic dynamic of oppression.[48]

While Cobham-Sander seeks to give agency to the education system, with Marson simply in the role of reactor, my reading seeks to highlight how these poems actually reclaim agency from an institution founded on a belief in the hierarchy of discourses in order to communicate a consciously non- (if not anti) elitist perspective. Far from being any incidental act of verbal play, these parodies present ideological rivalry, presenting Marson with an opportunity to radically dislocate tradition from authority and to question the gender politics of such authoritative texts.

Indeed, far from reading these parodies as insignificant experiments with poetry or as 'miscellaneous' works unrelated to the volume as a whole, I wish to propose that Marson's parodies be read as paradigmatic texts for an analysis of the tensions between imitation and creation within much of her work where intertextuality operates more subtly. Parody with its possibility for split signification works both within and against the colonial imperative to mimic, making a double demand on meaning which I would suggest is also operating in some of Marson's 'love poems' on a less explicit level.

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[48]'Intersecting Marginalities: Post-colonialism and Feminism', p. 25.

With these links in mind, it is interesting to consider the element of self-parody to be found within *Tropic Reveries*. In 'To Wed Or Not To Wed' Marson ironizes women who 'pine and sigh under a single life', an agenda which an less generous critic may accuse her love poems earlier in the volume of fulfilling and in 'If' she seems to satirize 'In Vain' with the counsel to 'serve yet do not be his slave'. Perhaps then, having arrived at the parodies, which are the penultimate poems of the volume, we can laugh at these earlier poems as unenlightened, if that is the parodies give us anything legitimate to laugh at? Perhaps we should laugh at the wonderful sense of contradiction which is embraced by Marson within one volume? Would this be an embarrassed laughter at the fact that Marson failed to spot her own discrepancies, or at the fact that no single version is more 'true' even though they may appear to be mutually exclusive?

If we laugh at these parodies, I think that it should be because they dare to confront paradox, embrace their constructed 'other' (the slave sonnets), and thereby tell the 'whole truth' which is necessarily partial. By communicating both versions of female destiny, Marson is able to disclose the multiplicity of identities, breaking free of the fiction of a 'unified self', to reveal the complex and contradictory constitution of a black woman's subjectivity within a colonial and patriarchal society. Perhaps given Marson's playfulness with the accepted versions of female fulfilment with this volume, its title, *Tropic Reveries*, might be construed rather differently from the obvious romantic and climatic interpretation. Indeed, we might wish to consider this volume as a dreaming up of alternative tropes for the Caribbean woman (writer), and read it as a series of poems which engage in irreverent reveries concerning dominant tropes.

Certainly, in the light of her poetic technique as revealed in the parodies it becomes necessary to re-read the sonnets in order to open up the possibilities for intertextual readings which they present. In some ways the sonnets in *Tropic Reveries* may be read as equally evocative of an existing language system as the parodies, although whether this is used playfully or uncritically is obviously, and crucially, less easy to decide. While the skilfully rendered ventriloquism and carefully engineered counter-textuality of 'To Wed or Not To Wed' and 'If' facilities easy apprehension of their parodic nature, the sonnets are not so clearly referenced in terms of their ideological valency. Nevertheless, taking Julia Kristeva's model of intertextuality does enable us to consider the implications of the linguistic presence within the sonnets.

> The new signifying system may be produced with the same signifying material...If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its 'place' of enunciation and its denoted 'object'

> are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. In this way polysemy can also be seen as the result of a semiotic polyvalence - an adherence to different sign systems.[49]

If we examine the sonnet 'In Vain' with this concept in mind, it becomes evident that by drawing on the established signifying material of Elizabethan love sonnets, Marson creates a signifying system which by the very nature of its transposition operates on several levels, thereby challenging the seeming conformity and conventionality signalled by her 'imitation'. Indeed, I wish to focus on 'In Vain' here in order to read against Rhonda Cobham-Sander's conclusion that the use of out-dated English literary forms constrained Jamaican poetic meanings and modes of resistance.

> Among the better educated Jamaicans who nonetheless had acquired their standard English locally, language was also biblically influenced, but together with biblical phrases, other dead forms of English usage were acquired, such as the stylised literary diction of eighteenth century England and the official language of the law courts...[which] contained limited resources for expressing dissatisfaction with a European-derived political and cultural system.[50]

The reading of 'In Vain' which I have already offered presents the way in which this sonnet demands an acknowledgement of the polysemic status of 'slave' and plurality of signifieds, utilizing the way in which poetic discourse is constrained or pre-determined by conventions and assumptions in order to open up different fields of meaning and their political resonances. Furthermore, the instability and openness of all language systems, which Kristeva points to, is heightened here by the highly-charged cross-cultural and cross-gender nature of this transposition.

In this sonnet, a poetic code of Elizabethan romance, which employs images of bondage within a discourse of love, reappears within the poetry of a black Jamaican woman whose ancestors were subjected to the brutal and inhumane reality of slavery. The cultural discensus which separates these two contexts has an implicit effect on the availability of meanings within the poems. While the formal framework of the sonnet, the thematic significance of romance and the ideological implications of the slave trade all offer some kind of boundary to the meaning of this poems, the very plurality of these boundaries points to the plurality of texts and thus of different possible meanings which the work offers. Although we may pursue these individually within the poem in order to achieve

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[49]'Revolution in Poetic Language' in Toril Moi, p. 111.
[50]Ronda Cobham-Sander (1981), p. 128.

meaning they cannot be disentangled without reducing the innate complexity of the text and the powerful intertextual connections. To concentrate on the poem as a love sonnet and not discuss the significance of the startling imagery of slavery would be as misleading as to construct a reading of the poem as a clear critique of the eroticization of the female slave without mention of engagement with traditional high literary forms and language codes. Indeed, in this sense Marson's poem provides a consummate example of what the cultural theorist, Roland Barthes, would describe as a text.

> The Text is plural. Which is not simply to say that it has several meanings, but that it accomplishes the very plural of meaning: an *irreducible* (and not merely acceptable) plural. The Text is not a co-existence of meanings but a passage, an overcrossing; thus it answers not to an interpretation, even a liberal one, but to an explosion, a dissemination.[51]

Indeed, the excess of signifiers explodes the possibility of a single referent or fixed meaning; it is the co-existence of the highly conventional aesthetic rendition of the lover's plight and the highly politicized references to slavery within 'In Vain' which forces us to perceive the limits which certain ways of reading seek to exert upon meaning. Marson's text confirms Barthes's observation that

> a text is not a line of words releasing a single theological meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture.[52]

However, more than simply illustrating the inevitable intertexuality of all writing, Marson's poem signals that the 'tissue' of a text is not arbitrarily formed and that the collision of discourses and cultures can be instructive in helping to form, as well as to deny, meanings. The matrix of conformity and critique which the poem offers in relation to love and slavery cannot be fixed to prove a sincere or an ironic poem, it can only be described in its multiple formations and through this description reveal the compromises involved in each possible evaluation, and the significance which a particular 'tissue' may have upon a system of signification.

Nevertheless, while 'In Vain' provides an interesting example of Barthes theory, it does not necessary endorse his thesis concerning the death of the author in support of which he forwards this idea. Clearly, the political

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[51]'From Work to Text' (1971) in *Image - Music - Text* selected and translated by Stephen Heath (London, 1977), p.159.
[52]'The Death of the Author' ibid, p. 146.

inflections of 'killing' the Caribbean woman author (who has rarely been accorded the status of author, and never the status of God) are rather different to those of killing the European male author. Taking the power to determine meaning away from an African Jamaican woman hardly represents any radically new programme for the study of colonial and post-colonial literatures, especially as it usually results in the empowerment of the reader (possibly a European man) . Indeed, in this situation, I would suggest that 'To give the text an Author' is not 'to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing' but to effect the opposite because, as I stated earlier, it is the relation between the art and life of a black woman which makes the 'slave image' such a fascinating and multi-accentuated one.[53] Clearly, any transposition from psychological reality of the author to fictional representation is fraught with problems and I do not aim to invoke the author in order to fix the meaning of this sonnet according to biography, but rather to suggest that as readers we need to be aware of the complex process of achieving meaning across an author | text | reader dynamic. Indeed, I believe that we must consider the fact that these texts are authored by a black Jamaican woman and the implications for achieving meaning which this presents if we are to fully appreciate and explore the continuum of meaning which they offer.

I am aware that the plurality of meaning, the denial of any fixed subject positioning, the flattening out of apparent dichotomies (colonial | post-colonial, feminine | feminist, imitation | parody) which I have demonstrated to be at work within Marson's poetry (both within single poems and within the volume as a whole) might seem to suggest that she is a postmodern writer before the event. However, it might be more apt to suggest that it is only in the light of the intellectual developments of post-modern and post-structuralist theory that European (trained) readers have a theoretical approach sophisticated enough to read Marson's texts. It is certainly not my aim to argue for Marson to be embraced by any particular genre of writing or school of criticism, as this would be to return her work to established and Western-oriented lines of enquiry (albeit more self-consciously troubled ones). Rather, I wish to illustrate the range of ways of generating meaning which her work offers and in this sense to benefit from the tolerance of crisis, difference and contradiction which postmodernist and post-structuralist ways of reading have advocated, but to retain an awareness of the cultural specificity of Marson's texts and therefore guard against 'neo-universalism' which through foregrounding 'the so-called

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[53]Ibid, p. 147.

'crisis of (European) authority' continues to reinforce European cultural and political domination'.[54]

Sonnets to Sorority

A more oblique engagement with the issue of a gendered social structure appears in *The Moth and the Star* with a series of sonnets which acknowledge the importance of female friendship and of women's contributions to society. In 'To C. K.', the love which develops through friendship, unlike romantic love, is able to defy distance, and retain its strength :'So warm and kindly has thy friendship been | And has remained thou mighty seas divide',[55] and in 'Platonic', friendship is able to transform even in the foreboding face of temporality which so shadowed the search for the romantic lover: 'Friendship with time grows sweeter like wine | And never can know decay'.[56] The value and affection which Marson expresses towards her friends signals a break away from the patriarchal structure which admonishes woman to seek support and love solely through heterosexual success.

In addition, in this volume, Marson presents two poems which give praise and acknowledgement to the creative and social achievements of fellow women. In the sonnet 'Winifred Holtby', Marson writes an elegy for her friend, who died in 1935 at an early age, which clearly praises her achievements within both personal and public life.

> O valiant woman, author, speaker, friend,
> With sympathies as wide as they were true;
> Thy heart was like a fount where all might bend
> To drink, and find their faith in life anew:[57]

It is interesting that Marson singles out emotional generosity as the special gift of Holtby, who was best known for her involvement in campaigns for rights and for peace. The celebration of her feminine nature alongside her feminist actions signals Marson's perceived compatibility between emotional strength and resistance to oppression. Indeed, this voice which seeks to glorify, rather than to devalue, conventional 'feminine' qualities interestingly echoes Elizabeth Barrett Browning's sonnet in praise of George Sand.

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[54]Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back* (London, 1989), p. 173.
[55]'To C. K.', *The Moth and the Star*, p. 80.
[56]'Platonic', ibid, p. 84. This poem is not a sonnet.
[57]'Winifred Holtby', ibid, p. 79.

True genius, but true woman!
...and while before
The world thou burnest in a poet- fire,
We see thy woman-heart beat evermore[58]

In 'To The I.A.W.S.E.C.', a sonnet addressed to a women's rights association, Marson offers grand praise to her fellow women who campaign 'For women's rights, yet not for women's fame', commending their quest for equality, but also asserting the value of the conventionally 'feminine' virtue of modesty. Certainly, the final couplet appears to evoke a picture of traditional femininity: 'For lands can only reach the greater good | When noble thoughts inspire sweet womanhood', but there is an irony here because for Marson these 'noble thoughts' are those of equality, and the poem seems to suggest that personal qualities of women provide the model for public, rather than private, morality.[59] It seems important to acknowledge that to Marson, the belief in absolute equality could still encompass the necessity of difference. The belief that women are anti-egotistical, emotionally generous and empathetic, which is strongly expressed in many of her poems, could be viewed as deeply conventional, and yet it emerges as radical in its ability to subvert the 'authority' and basis of patriarchy, as well as of colonialism. In this sense, these poems might be termed womanist as they articulate distinctly 'womanly' qualities to be strengths.

Creole Poetry

In the Creole women's poetry there is very little engagement with issues of gender, even obliquely, and the love poetry of these women is clearly less experimental than that of Marson. However, while the work of these poets does not address the issue of gender politics directly, there are several poems which make interesting subjects for gender-based analysis.

The issue of female destiny is most frequently discussed within their romantic love poetry. A helpful comparison to illustrate how this narrative of female fulfilment is treated differently within the Creole poetry can be drawn between Marson's sonnet sequence (discussed above) and that of Constance Hollar in *Flaming June*. Hollar's poems are technically accomplished and

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[58]'To George Sand: A Recognition' (1844) in *Aurora Leigh and other poems* introduced by Cora Kaplan (London, 1978), p. 391.
[59]'To The I.A.W.S.E.C.', *The Moth and the Star*, p. 80.

littered with classical references, as one might expect of a classics teacher, however from the printed extracts of her forty sonnet sequence, 'Wedded', it is evident that her relationship to poetic tradition is far less inventive. The first poem, 'Wedded (1)', makes the gender of the poetic persona evident.

> The organ peals and you are shimmering here
> Beside me like a lily sliver white
> ...I veil my heart
> As you have veiled your face from eager eyes[60]

The fact that the poems are addressed from groom to bride sets the use of chivalric and imperial imagery within a more conventional framework, as does the fact that such devotion as is shown in 'Wedded (18)' is directed at love in the abstract.

> I did not know that Love could be so great
> Its lyric beauty takes away my breath.
> It is the very flower of Life and Death:
> It is the herald and the King of state.
> I am beaten to my knees and overcome
> By onrush of its shining swords and plumes.
> Fettered I am and powerless. It assumes
> Complete control and bears me captive home.
>
> But I am such a willing slave.[61]

The orthodox appropriation of English literary models in Hollar's sequence is not open for a 'resistant reading' as it does not establish any distance from either established notions of love or love poetry in the way in which Una Marson's sequence does.

In 'Commonplace Love' Albinia Catherine Hutton's female poetic persona, like Marson's, engages with the ideal of the perfect lover and the inability of life to fulfil her expectations of the 'dream man'.

> How she kept her heart clean-swept and sweet
> To be worthy the tread of his lordly feet;
> How fondly she cherished her dear ideal,
> And prayed some day God would make it real.
>
> 'Twas a world of sorrow and doubt and sin
> That men and women were living in;
> How mean and sordid the real life seemed,
> How different to all that she had dreamed;
> How she shrank from contact with lesser men

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[60]'Wedded (1), *Flaming June*, p. 96.
[61]Ibid, p. 97.

Than her great ideal had pictured then;[62]

However, unlike Marson's poetry which goes on to explore the aesthetic possibilities which can evolve for women from this autonomous state, Hutton's poem focuses on the problems caused by the ideal of romance within women's cultural imaginations and consequently ends her poem with an act of divine intervention (and implicitly of social integration), as God sends her female subject a companion who is ordinary but 'good'.

Although, there is little to demonstrate any real interest in gender politics, several poems by Creole women are written in praise of female relatives and friends, and also fellow women-poets. In *Flaming June*, Constance Hollar, includes a poem 'Mount Everest' dedicated to 'Miss Constance Renshaw the gifted Yorkshire poet'.[63] In *The Hills of St Andrew*, Lena Kent presents a lyric, 'A Singer', to Clara Maude Garrett, a fellow Creole poet who had left Jamaica for Canada some time before the volume was published, and in *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses*, Albinia Catherine Hutton writes 'To Mrs. Browning'.[64]

Belov'd and honoured minstrel, thou to whom
I owe so many hours of delight
Since first thy magic cast a wond'rous light
Over my youth's dull pathway, and the bloom
Of unseen flowers sweetened all the gloom!
O, woman-soul, who understood aright
By sister women, lend'st to their dull sight
Thy glowing vision,--whose great heart had room
For all the world's woes! Never thought of thine
But we may echo; never thought of ours
But we find in thy pages, grown sublime.[65]

The poem's references to 'woman-soul' and 'sister-woman' foreground the significance of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's influence as a fellow woman and the significance of her poetry which did not erase her gender but rather sought to express it. It could be argued that this poem is concerned with finding role models who are inspirations both in terms of their literary abilities and their womanly qualities in the same way as Una Marson's sonnet 'Winifred Holtby'.

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[62]'Commonplace Love', *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses*, pp. 93-4.

[63]'Mount Everest', *Flaming June*, p. 79.

[64]'A Singer', *The Hills of St Andrew*, p. 10.

[65]'To Mrs. Browning, *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses*, p. 102. In this volume, Hutton dedicates three more poems to other women. 'To C. H.' (Constance Hollar) celebrates the manner in which she was able to overcome personal suffering and trauma to give comfort and love to others, pp.72-3. An elegy 'To My Mother -1931' states her unwillingness to trade the loss of pain for the loss of her memory, pp.73-4, and another 'To My Beloved Godmother, Miss Albinia O'Sullivan' talks of the release of her youthful spirit from her aged body through death, pp. 75-6.

Certainly, the significance of female support, whether creative, emotional or practical is communicated by many of the Creole women poets. Indeed, from reading the individual volumes and anthologies it becomes evident that there was a community of women who did offer each other both good company and comfort (perhaps suggesting that the plethora of poems describing loneliness and courting death are also stylized and bid for less literal readings). While this does not lead to any radical critique of patriarchal social structures (present Marson's poetry) it nevertheless reveals a value in sorority which can also be identified in her work.

Among the Creole women poets, I would suggest that the most interesting material for a discussion on gender politics is to be found in the work of Albinia Hutton (née MacKay). In her first volume, *Poems by Albinia Catherine Mackay*, published in 1912 when she was only eighteen, a sense of impending war seems to govern a series of conventional love poems in which romance is thwarted by either exile or death (Think of Me' and 'Forget-Me-Not' are good examples).[66] This is not an uncommon trait among the love poems of these volumes in general which often concentrate on the spiritual redemption which will relieve the pain of earthly love. A useful example of this type is Lena Kent's 'The Companion' which, although addressed to the literal companion, focuses on the constant companionship of pain to earthly love.

> In the land where we abide
> Pain walks ever at Love's side.
> In the land we hope to gain
> Love shall bid farewell to Pain.[67]

However, in Albinia Hutton's next volume, *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses*, published twenty years later in 1932, there is more direct treatment of issues concerning women's role. The discussion of love shifts from a concentration on the feelings of the lovers to a statement of the place in which such love can be properly located. In 'The Wedded' the heterosexual romance relationship is figured as a ship which begins in friendship, moves through 'Love' and 'Youth's Delight' to anchor in the 'still, calm lake of Wedded Love'.[68] The implication of this poem is that maturity delivers woman from her vulnerable and excitable condition as an emotional subject to her resting place (emotionally and socially) as wife. In this sense it works almost in opposition to Marson's poetry which traces the maturation of female feelings beyond any conventional matrimonial

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[66] *Poems by Albinia Catherine Mackay*, p. 8 & p. 31 respectively.
[67] 'The Companion', *The Hills of St Andrew*, p. 3.
[68] 'The Wedded', *Hill Songs and Wayside Verses*, p. 65.

fate. The idea of women achieving fulfilment through men is clearly articulated in this volume. 'His All' presents a young wife who is so moved by the fact that her husband presents his complete pay packet that she asks

> "Am I the keeper of your purse, my Heart?"
> "My purse? Nay, Dear, the Keeper of my soul!"[69]

While this poem may raise the issues of women's standard economic disempowerment through marriage, the final response of the husband confirms the belief that woman are the moral and spiritual guardians and for this reason can be trusted.

This ethos is most powerfully conveyed in 'And Dost Thou Lean?'.

> And dost thou lean on me, O, man o' mine?
> Thou, strong Protector? Thou most brave, true Knight,
> Mail clad and sword-begirt to face the fight
> Of life which frightens me? Nay I resign
> All attributes of strength, no e'er repine,
> For woman, to my mind, should lean her slight
> Soft form on her man's arm, a burden light
> To the strong shoulders which her arms entwine.
> Lo, this poor woman-body, all too weak,
> Too delicate to share the blows of life,
> I am physically no peer of thine;
> And yet thou sayest: nay, my Dearest, speak,
> I am thy true helpmeet? No useless wife?
> My soul is strong, thy spirit leans on mine?"[70]

Although the poem concludes with an argument for woman's spiritual strength, and therefore her equality through difference, as a whole it is dedicated to cataloguing the positive qualities of man, with woman almost functioning as synonymous with invalidity, not only in the face of physical trials but also the 'fight' and 'blows of life'. While the poem works to establish a definition of heterosexuality as mutual dependence, it does so by a clear confirmation of gender roles as essentially determined. Moreover, the constant questioning of the woman's voice marks the hesitancy and frailty of her nature and the very fact that she must ask him to tell her of her worth suggests that she, unlike he, has no intrinsic value. Consequently, while both may have different but equal strengths, the value accorded to these is clearly not equal, leaving an impression of the woman as useful only in her unwillingness and inability to act as this confirms her virtue.

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69 'His All', ibid, p. 102-3.
70 'And Dost Thou Lean?', ibid, p. 69.

A more oblique, but interesting poetic engagement with issues of gender and woman's nature can be found in some of Hutton's ostensible 'nature poems'. The issue of marriage is quite differently discussed in 'The Day Dies Not', which images sunset as the day (a figurative bride) yielding herself up to night, and the heterosexual union is more sensually realized in 'The Mountain To The Rain'.[71]

> And hold my breath to listen for the fleet
> Advance of they far footsteps, thrill to greet
> Once more thy fond caresses. O, to-day
> Pass me not by, beloved!...
> ...delicious Coolness; my parched brow
> Awaits thy silver crowning, - come, my own.[72]

The implicit gendering and eroticization of the natural world which occurs here, and elsewhere in the Creole poetry (Arabel Moulton-Barrett's 'Fire' is another interesting example), could be read as a displacement of emotional intensity and concerns about sexuality and the female body onto the more conventional and morally safe area of nature poetry.[73] Rhonda Cobham-Sander makes the point that 'the transference of overtly sexual references from poems dealing with human love to poems dealing with sensations not directly related to women' was probably as a result of

> the new standards of morality within Jamaican society for those women whom it affected most directly - the black and coloured women who did not marry and whose moral conditioning prevented them from seeking sexual fulfilment outside of marriage as their mothers and their grandmothers had done.[74]

While I endorse Sander's association of the need to disguise such expressions of female sexuality to a repressive social code governing women's behaviour, I have found these representations as common in Creole women's poetry and would suggest that acquiescence to social strictures was probably just as crucial for the white women of Jamaica, who were charged with the guardianship of the island's moral health.

Although the cultural orientation of the majority of the poetry discussed in this chapter has been implicit, in their different approaches to the culturally endorsed traditions and tropes of British literature and the possible re-construction of the female subject which poetic creativity permits, the poetry

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[71]'The Day Dies Not', ibid, p. 16.
[72]'The Mountain To The Rain', ibid, p. 14.
[73]Arabel Moulton-Barrett, 'Fire', *Year Book of the Poetry League of Jamaica, 1940*, p. 47.
[74]Rhonda Cobham-Sander (1981), pp. 213-4.

of Marson and of Hollar and Hutton testifies to the way in which attitudes to gender and culture cannot be separated. I wish to preface my discussion of some of the most exciting of Una Marson's poems, which explore the crossover of gender and cultural politics in the expectations governing black women's lives and poetry, with an insight into the perceived relation between gender and cultural identity for the Creole population. In *Life in Jamaica*, published in London in 1930, Albinia Hutton sketches 'A Day in Jamaica' which traces a woman, such as herself, through a day of household duties. In its attempt to record the speech and habits of the 'country people', the vegetation and the animal life, and most notably in its eurocentric superiority, the piece approximates a crude, but nevertheless revealing, example of amateur ethnography.

> The cook comes to inform me that a lady wants to see me.
> "A lady, Ruth! What kind of lady?"
> "A lady selling yam, mam."
> "Oh! You mean a woman. I do wish you would call things by their proper names! Send her here."[75]

Black Womanist Poems

In Una Marson's *The Moth and the Star* a poetic dealing with the oppression of women by the structures of patriarchy is united with Marson's now clear sense of racial oppression. The volume presents three poems which explore the interaction of gender and cultural politics in order to trace how the two structures of colonialism and patriarchy are intimately enmeshed and involved in the constitution of the black woman as social subject.

In the poem 'Kinky Hair Blues', Una Marson confronts the way in which a black woman's sense of 'self' is constantly disfigured by the white male ethos of sexuality which a colonial and patriarchal society projects. The poem evokes a characteristically colonial social structure, in which shades of colour denote levels of social acceptability, revealing the physical and psychological damage which results from the idealization of white physical beauty. The persistent and pernicious influence of this ideal is recorded as late as 1972 by David Lowenthal.

> A secondary school survey reveals that Jamaicans of all shades favour long, blond, straight or wavy hair and straight noses; those who lack them are dissatisfied with their own looks...The preferred complexion is

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[75]'A Day in Jamaica', *Life in Jamaica*, p. 27.

> in any case far lighter than the typical West Indian dark brown, as far from the norm as are the desired straight hair and noses from the usual Jamaica. 'These early adolescents have been growing up at a time when racial equality is extolled,' the survey concludes, 'yet their concept of beauty is to a great extent congruent with the ideas of beauty reported...during the 1940s when colour discrimination was commonly evidenced.[76]

It is significant then that the black female subject of this poem, written during the period of fierce discrimination, is keen to express that she does not feel inherently unhappy with her own appearance.

> I hate dat ironed hair
> And dat bleaching skin.
> But I'll be all alone
> If I don't fall in.
> ...
> I like me black face
> And me kinky hair.
> But nobody loves dem,
> I jes don't tink it's fair.[77]

She is nevertheless forced to perceive herself as a physical aberration by the pressure of male indifference: 'The boys pass me by | They say I's not so swell'. Within a colonial society, our protagonist is made aware that 'right' equals 'white', and that the only promise of 'correction' lies in the beauty shop where the trappings of a white physical ideal can be purchased. This correction prescribed for black women constitutes an effective erasure of their ethnic features with 'dat ironed hair' and 'dat bleaching skin' representing an attempt to Europeanize the African face. It is a bizarre ritual of self-humiliation and deformation which our heroine clearly knows to be unjust. The rhyme scheme which associates the 'fair-ness' of the white girls and the 'un-fair' nature of the submission to which she must subject herself, and the choice of the verb 'fall in' to denote her conformity both affirm her awareness of this practice as damaging and morally injust.

However, while she might not have internalized the ideal of white beauty, retaining her preference for her natural features, the ironic twist at the end of the blues tells how she finally acquiesces to the patriarchal version of her destiny, succumbing to the need for male approval.

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[76]*West Indian Societies*, p.98. The survey to which Lowenthal refers is Errol Miller, 'Body Image, Physical Beauty and Colour Among Jamaican Adolescents', Social and Economic Studies, Vol. 18, (1969), pp. 72-89.

[77]'Kinky Hair Blues', *The Moth and the Star* also reprinted in *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English* edited by Paula Burnett (Middlesex, 1986), pp. 158-159.

I's gwine press me hair
And bleach me skin.
What won't a gal do
Some kind of man to win.

This conclusion clearly does evoke the mingling and reconciliation of joy and sorrow which we associate with a blues - sorrow at the mutilation of her natural 'black beauty' and joy at the prospect of male approval. As a woman in a patriarchal society, the process of physically assuming an alien and conflicting self-image may be hateful to her, but the prospect that she might otherwise 'die on de shelf' is even more so. At this stage resistance exists only internally within the black female consciousness which, although strong, cannot sustain her within the patriarchal, colonial order in which she lives and in which she must therefore integrate.

By exposing the manner in which her protagonist is forced to trade within the white masculinist economy of sexual fulfilment, Marson leaves no doubt that this degrading and damaging process is fuelled by a colonial patriarchal **capitalist** society. Indeed, although the link between economic exploitation and racial difference was merely expedient at the beginning of slavery, its (negative) power over the subjectivities of the African Caribbean population cannot be overestimated.[78] Indeed, colonialism's project to keep the African Caribbean population with poverty and with poor self-esteem makes the poem's unveiling of the economics at the heart of racism and the price it claims even more pertinent. Nevertheless, while the female voice of the poem may pronounce the words of submission, the language and form through which she speaks sustain her identity as valuable, although different. The use of the Jamaican vernacular re-shapes the English language to provide a more authentic discourse which allows our black female subject to challenge the power of 'authority' within a semantic framework, if not a social one. In both its strength of voice and its social critique, 'Kinky Hair Blues' can be seen as part of a wider tradition of women's blues poetry (best known as an African American tradition promoted by Bessie Smith and Ma Rainey), a tradition which Hazel Carby perceives to be 'a discourse that articulates a cultural and

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[78]As Ron Ramdin points out: 'The reason for the origin of negro slavery then, was economic, not racial; it was the cheapness of the labour rather than the colour of the labour that was decisive. features such as hair and colour were the subsequent rationalisations to justify the simple economic fact that to fill the vacuum of colonial labour requirements, African labour was resorted to becuase it was the cheapest and the best'., *The Making of the Black Working Class In Britain* (Aldershot, 1987), p. 4. In this work, Ramdin further discusses the relationship between capitalism and colonialism, see p. 59.

political struggle over sexual relations: a struggle that is directed against the objectification of female sexuality within a patriarchal order'.[79]

'Cinema Eyes', from the same volume, also confronts the pressure which black women face to conform to the false icon of white beauty, although now the source of perversion moves from the shop to the cinema, from the crude commodification of needs and desires to the glamorous indoctrination of them. The poem takes the form of a matrilineal cautionary tale with the mother revealing to the daughter her own unquestioning assimilation of white as physically desirable within her own life, a message clearly projected by the all-white movie screen.

> My ideal man would be a Cinema type-
> No kinky haired man for me,
> No black face, no black children for me.[80]

The narrative of the poem relates her rejection of a 'handsome youth' who 'was black and not my fancy' and subsequent marriage to a light skinned man. However the anathema felt towards black skin returns with the birth of their 'dark' child, whom the father rejects. For the mother, the birth of her child provokes a re-valuation of her 'cinema mind' and she begins to perceive the beauty of black people and think back to her former suitor. The gendering of this strengthening of black consciousness is particularly interesting. It is her experience of maternity which admonishes her to value 'My instinct [which] told me he was good and true' over her reason. Although the feminization of instinct is problematic, by positioning the feminine as the area of resistance against racist propaganda, Marson is again pointing to the twinning of patriarchy and colonialism and moreover to the power which black women in particular possess to subvert their damaging influence.

With this return of the former suitor, the narrative itself assumes the dimensions of a movie scenario:

> Soon this black god came from far
> And called to greet me.
> My husband, in fury and in drink,
> Watched us as we talked-
> And as he rose to go
> Followed him calmly out,
> And shot him, ere he reached the gate.
> Another bullet sound,
> And he too was gone;

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[79]'It Jus Be's Dat Way Sometime: the sexual politics of women's blues' (1986) in *Feminisms* edited by Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (New Jersey, 1991), pp. p. 749.
[80]'Cinema Eyes', *The Moth and the Star*, pp. 87-88.

And we were left alone.

The rehearsal of a Western-type macho killing which the mother depicts confirms the drastic consequences of movie mimicry. In the face of the inevitably insidious influence which the idolatry of white stars and scenes precipitates, the mother not only dissuades the daughter from subjecting herself to this, but also provides her with an ideological awareness of the cinema as a racist institution. Yet, although the poem dramatically stages Fanon's question: 'to what extent authentic love will remain unattainable before one has purged oneself of that feeling of inferiority',[81] it ends on a note of optimism, as the mother looks forward to the day

When black beauties
Are chosen for the screen;
That you may know
Your own sweet beauty

Indeed, although the poem centres on an exploration of the cinema's promotion of white beauty, it does not aim simply to expose but also to counter this ethic, by promoting black beauty.

I saw no beauty in black faces,
The tender light and beauty
Of their eyes I did not see;
The smoothness of their skin,
The mellow music of their voice,
The stateliness of their walk,
The tenderness of their hearts

The panegyric representations of the African Caribbean physical presence are evidently disproportionate to the 'no' which prefaces this eulogy. The poem is therefore able to offer a positive sense of self and particularly of the body which is fundamentally denied by both the beauty shop and the cinema.

In both of the above poems, the female subject was compelled to sacrifice any belief in her own physical beauty before the act of integration into the heterosexual racist society could take place. In 'Black Is Fancy', it is the false icon of white beauty which is sacrificed. The heroine of this poem turns away from the reflections projected by the white portrait of her mistress and gazes instead into 'This nice looking glass | I began to feel real proud | Of my own self'.[82] The poems represents a genesis of self identity in which the young black

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81 *Black Skins, White Masks* (London, 1986, first published in English 1967), p. 42.
82 'Black is Fancy', *The Moth and the Star*, pp. 75-76.

woman sees herself, and as a consequence begins to believe in herself - claiming an uncompromized subjectivity.

The image of the white mistress which had previously seemed so powerful becomes insubstantial, indeed lacking, besides the vibrant and confident image which the black woman now has of herself

> But now I am glad I am black,
> There is something about me
> That has a dash in it
> Especially when I put on
> My bandana

With the bandana confidently signifying cultural difference, Marson evokes the white icon / black servant relationship in order to foreground how her subordination to an individual within the context of a colonial society results in cultural as well as self denigration.

> This white lady's picture
> It used to make me ashamed,
> And all black folk
> Seemed ugly.

The acquisition of a black female subjectivity which occurs through the looking glass is consolidated by the young woman's relationship with a black man, with whom she can form a bond of mutual admiration, love and respect because of, rather than despite of, their physical natures: 'He loves me...And I love him / For he is young, and strong and black'. The male figure in this poem has rejected the 'white wash' girls created by the demands of social conformity in 'Kinky Hair Blues' in favour of the proud and self-assured black female protagonist.

Within all three poems the suggestion that women are more vulnerable to ethnic denial and disfigurement because of the additional power exerted on them by patriarchal expectations is implicit. However, while seeming to advocate the need for black women to be conscious of the oppressive structures within which they live, all of the poems promote a non-racist heterosexual relationship as the desired goal. Certainly the need for a communal acknowledgement of self-worth is made evident in the poems, as the isolated consciousness, although inherently resistant, is figured as unable to effect any social change or opposition. Furthermore the idea that a stable hereosexual relationship offers freedom to black women, and the attendant suggestion that black men are not agents of patriarchy, possibly points to the

fact that work against cultural domination is the most urgent task facing a black woman living in a colonial society.

However, it is not only in these poems which map out the particular nexus of cultural and gender oppression that Marson is able to address the process of achieving subjectivity. Indeed, I would argue that it is only when taken as a whole that her work concerning female experience can be fully appreciated, as it is only from this perspective that we are able to perceive the plural possibilities for fulfilment and expression of a (black) female subjectivity which are presented. Employing a range of different cultural forms, different spaces in which woman is constructed and different ways of reading (and living) these, Marson's poetry seeks to explore 'woman' and the gendering of experience and to find ways in which this exploration can locate itself outside of the constraints of colonialism and patriarchy, but also of feminism and of the discourses all of these have produced.

CONCLUSION

There can be no simple conclusion to a piece of work which declares its opposition to totalizing narratives. Indeed, in a sense this project works against conclusions, most simply against those of previous readers to whom the work of these women poets appeared insubstantial and insignificant, but perhaps more importantly against the sort of conclusions which are suggested by prescriptive reading strategies or which secure the attribution of absolute value and deny the constant negotiation which underlies all attainments of meaning. It has been my aim, in this thesis, not only to illustrate the contradiction, even crisis, which surrounded notions both of the 'poetic' and of Jamaica during this period, and which emerges in much Jamaican poetry, but also to suggest the contingency of reading strategies and theoretical apparatuses.

During the course of this project I became very interested in ways of reading as my plan to offer a re-evaluation of Marson's work necessitated a re-evaluation of the methods of enquiry which had licensed its long neglect. By establishing new contexts and different considerations for a reading of this material, I have illustrated the ways in which narratives which have been inscribed after that of Empire (and which place themselves in opposition to its goals) can still seek to categorise and suppress certain modes and areas of expression. The demands which Marson's poetry places upon received critical methodologies, including feminist and post-colonial theory, to re-think their own orthodoxies is of enormous value, and can be shown by her sustained engagement with 'romance' and 'love poetry' and the embarrassment which previously surrounded these poems. I have also demonstrated how these texts show creative resistance to these new cultural authorities, both by refusing to comply with any clear conclusions (woman is both oppressed and liberated, even liberated through oppression in Marson's work), and by 'theorizing back' (the self-conscious parodying of eurocentric works alongside the constant working within, but refusal to comply with, eurocentric forms functions to re-theorize the relationship between form and content, as well the issue of what is aesthetically and culturally valid).

One of the central aims of this thesis has been to offer a substantive analysis of Una Marson's poetry which argues for its significance and value. It is my belief that Marson's career as a poet was significant, although short, and that her poetry merits further, and more widespread, attention. However, my reading of her Creole contemporaries is not directed at a comparative study which exposes the interest and radical nature of her work against the banality and conformity of theirs. Rather, I have offered readings which foreground the complex and challenging aspects of their work, with a particular focus on the Creole poetry which destablizes comfortable assumptions about cultural identities and helps us to re-think how these might be constituted both by and within the highly charged and overlapping (if competing) discourses of nationalism and Empire.

As I have already discussed, little critical attention has been given to this archive, or to the 'early' period of post-colonial literatures in general. Nearly all attention remains focused on those writers and works which show an obvious disengagement from colonial culture either through a geographical distance (writings of exile and migration being particularly popular) or through a historical one (certainly much contemporary post-colonial literature is exciting). Writings which are distanced from colonialism in this way often offer models of identity formation and of aesthetic innovation which can be identified as emerging either 'after' or 'outside' of colonial paradigms. In other words they are more comfortably 'post' than they are colonial. The work of Marson and her Creole contemporaries cannot be easily accommodated in this school of post-colonial criticism because the cultural politics and aesthetic strategies of their poetry sit uncomfortably close to those of the colonial culture. Nevertheless, I would suggest that they provide a stimulating subject for post-colonial critics precisely because they force us to question our ways of reading post-colonial texts and our desires for particular conclusions (often of resistance and opposition), and, by doing this, they take us beyond established critical boundaries. Indeed, the archive which I have examined in this thesis is certainly not one which lends itself to 'problem-free' post-colonial or feminist analysis, however I hope to have shown through my readings that it is the very 'problems' which these works generate in relation to these theoretical models that provide the most significant and interesting areas of enquiry.

In this way, and in all of the areas of enquiry mentioned above, I would suggest that, although this thesis focuses on a very specialized archive, many of the questions which it raises about ways of reading will be relevant and helpful to critics of other post-colonial women's texts. I also hope that I have also been able to share my own experience as a reader of this material, and to show that the ambiguity and undecidable nature of much of the poetry can be a source of intellectual excitement, rather than frustration.

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