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Ana Pizarro; J. Ann Zammit

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REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF CARIBBEAN LITERATURE

By Ana Pizarro

Each social formation has its corresponding social imagery: just as feudalism has an imagery, so the American slave mode of production has its own social imagery. There must have been a quite specific imagery corresponding to the production of sugar, coffee and tobacco using African slaves.¹

This observation by Depestre is the point of departure for understanding a world as complex as the one we are trying to approach today. Our concern is to understand how we can formulate historical perceptions about Caribbean literature and the manner in which literatures from different cultural-linguistic regions, each historically oriented toward a different metropolis, find points of articulation and how a geographical area which is fragmented culturally, linguistically and politically manifests, through cultural discourse, a tendency toward unity.

The first consideration to take into account relates to the character of the Caribbean as a regional entity. The non-Spanish-speaking Caribbean, according to A. Ardao, is territory which belongs to Latin America by virtue of "accession," in that over time it has gradually accommodated itself to Latin America and has been adopted by Latin American and Caribbean international organizations. Thus Latin America, together with the Caribbean, is a clearly defined, specific region. During this century, and especially in recent decades, there has been a fundamental change in this respect, with the systematic breaking of colonial ties, as well as a growing awareness of the Caribbean as a specific region. The Cuban revolution, political independence in Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago in 1962, and Guyana and Barbados in 1966, and, in spite of everything, Grenada in 1974, testify to this.

A research project such as this must give prior consideration to defining or delimiting the area to be considered. The problem of defining the area covered by the term "Caribbean" is not resolved and this has political implications. There are two clear basic options. One, rooted in the existence of the Caribbean Sea, envisages the region as comprising all those territories which surround it, both islands and mainland. This has been referred to as the Caribbean Basin, which is perceived as a center of Latin American development. Another definition which is gaining increasing acceptance is one which comprises the Caribbean islands from Cuba to Trinidad, including those under Dutch dominion, and also the Guyanas. This delimitation of the Caribbean was accepted at the Port of Spain meeting of the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin

America in 1975. However, this definition has the disadvantage of omitting territories such as the Venezuelan coast and Panama, whose Caribbean character is evident. But can the same be said for Nicaragua or Costa Rica? It seems to us that there are problems in deciding what counts as the Caribbean region; in order to resolve the issue it is necessary to make reference to cultural semantics.

It is not only its fragmented, insular nature which makes it difficult to understand the region and its cultural discourse. Difficulty arises because of the need to understand a reality in which, over and above the historical conflict involved in the process of colonization, there are multiple contradictions. Westernization had a durable destructive impact. Nevertheless, and perhaps because of this, there emerged in the region an awareness of ethno-cultural specificity: Price Mars in Haiti, Césaire in Martinique and Marcus Garvey in the English-speaking Antilles. Large economic enclaves have been established in the region by the big transnational companies and yet at the same time the region has undergone the continent's first experience of socialism. Part of the Caribbean region's tragic history of slavery, piracy and tyranny is the institutionalized North-South confrontation between the USA and Europe on the one side and the Caribbean and Latin American on the other.² This situation is expressed fully in the region's culture, particularly in the literary discourse which sets the cultural agenda at various levels. Thus the region's geographical location has to a large extent constituted its continuing drama. But it has also forged its sense of dignity.

Despite this apparent dispersion, the tendency toward unity is our point of departure. At a time when the process of Hispanic-American rebellion was still in preparation, Haiti set Latin America an example with respect to independence. Leaders who were involved in making contemporary history circulated among the islands, making them common ground for those who combined thought and action in a libertarian spirit whose ties extended to the continent. Bolivar went from Curaçao to Jamaica and received support from Pétion in Haiti. Later the Dominican, Maximo Gómez, struggled to achieve independence for Cuba. José Martí broadened his own perspective in the larger countries of Venezuela, Central America and Mexico, in what we Hispanics call Our America. They laid the bases for Ramón Emeterio Betances's plan to establish an Antilles Confederation, and for later attempts to unite the English- and Spanish-speaking Antilles, or the development of the idea of a Caribbean nation.

All this was made possible by the fact that the Antilles constituted a micro-universe, an ecosystem, a system of islands with similar social and geographical features, and with a common history articulated by colonial domination which established itself on the basis of the plantation economy. To a large extent this is also what establishes the nexus with Latin American society and culture.

Despite the lack of communication between islands linked to different metropolises, this form of economic development (which was established in the region from the beginning of colonization) gave rise to a type of society which generates cultural formations that are similar in structure and, to a considerable extent, also similar in content. The heritage of different African ethnic groups was assimilated at different points in their development, as runaway slaves (maroons) were absorbed back into society. The African collective memory was traditionally preserved by the elderly, in whom the slave owners had no interest since they provided no real possibilities for economic

exploitation. Although the coercion to which slaves were subjected undermined their culture, the people of African origin developed a creative response in terms of mechanisms, themes and similar problems relating to the common experience of plunder and to common historical-cultural reference points. Any difference to be found were, above all, in the relationship with the various cultural forms corresponding to the different colonial powers.

Thus the plantation economy, through its treatment of slaves, gave rise to the cultural unity of the Caribbean during its development process. The plantation created a society with specific characteristics. At the start it was a mere collection of human beings. Its members—all less than 30 years of age and mainly people of different African ethnic origins—practically lived under a system of imprisonment. Moreno Fraginals says of the situation:

“This aggregation of humans is subjected to a responsive system which determines the useful part of their life and generally eliminates free time; dietary patterns are standardized for the economic benefit of the owners, housing is planned for economic and security reasons, clothing is produced on large-scale industrial lines; sexual life is subjected to the requirements of production; family relationships are distorted by the imbalance between the sexes and the plantation system of production.”³

The plantation is a social order and, as such, it engenders a specific cultural formation. It is a creation of European capitalism and is the tragic product of a number of practices and forms whose purpose was to perfect the system.

Sugar was the first major primary product extracted from the continent and was thus the basis of a whole economic and social formation. It was sugar which imparted dynamism to a substantial part of the Caribbean and to the European economy. It set factories, refineries, spinning mills, ports, and railways in motion. The economic success of the Caribbean and European economies depended on obtaining more slaves for the colonial markets. The largest slave market was in Curaçao, under the Dutch West Indies Company. The Caribbean thus developed a structural unity. Differences were related to the differing externally imposed cultures, but at the same time the region experienced similar socio-cultural processes. Through domination and resistance, this growing entity became cross-cultural in nature. The societies of the Antilles were transformed into creole societies.

Perhaps it was in the French Caribbean, and more specifically in Haiti, that the gradual development of a literature which embodied both an awareness and affirmation of its own cultural values was most in evidence. This was largely due to Haiti having undergone the nineteenth century independence struggles earlier than other countries in the region, having gained its independence in 1804. On the other hand, Haiti also had an early experience of intervention—that other misfortune suffered by the region almost continuously since the end of the last century. This has occurred in different forms in Cuba, Puerto Rico, Nicaragua, Haiti, Santo Domingo, Panama, and the Caribbean in general.⁴

However, these interventions and the permanent presence of the United States in

the area have also constituted a unifying factor, reinforcing anti-colonial sentiment. The 1915 intervention in Haiti led to the great unleashing of "indigenist" feelings in 1928 when a group of Haitian intellectuals published the first issues of the *Revue Indigène* in an attempt to reclaim their origins. Cultural values were already being affirmed at the beginning of the nineteenth century in scholarly literary discourse, in "civil literature," literature with a national awareness, which also emerged in the rest of the continent as an expression of the formation of nation states.

Jean Price Mars's 1928 work *Ainsi parla l'oncle* is the classic work registering black consciousness; it set in motion a continuing and systematic discourse, whose historical antecedents were to be found throughout the Caribbean in the *cimmarronadas** of the sixteenth century. This work was preceded by lectures given in 1917 and published in 1919 under the title *La Vocation d'élite*. They discussed the divisions in Haitian society and the values of Afro-American ethnicity. This consciousness was further developed in the journals *La Nouvelle Ronde* (1926), *La Revue Indigène* (1928) and *La Trouée* (1927). Its articulation as an ideological proposition became consolidated in the *négritude* movement which arose among young Caribbean blacks in Paris. Later this affirmation developed along different paths. As has been well expressed elsewhere, this movement was primarily concerned with the ethnic question, and paid relatively less attention to other important issues such as the dialectic between ethnicity and class.⁵ In any case, national awareness expressed itself in many ways, for example, in essays, in thematic propositions, and in cross-cultural literary discourse, with the gradual integration of popular literary forms in "creole" into scholarly literary forms which were subversive of metropolitan French.

In the case of the English Caribbean, sustained literary output which generated and accommodated itself to the public came later, in the twentieth century in fact. However, according to Edward Brathwaite, an important precedent is to be found in the 1827 novel *Hamel the Obeahman*, which is an early portrayal of the human dimension of black people. Throughout the Caribbean from the beginnings of colonization, the popular culture is rich in social images of collective consciousness; rooted in Africa, but restructured by the new conditions which slavery imposed, they constitute a powerful force of resistance or "cultural cimarroneo" (cultural hiding away).⁶ For Depestre these cultural expressions are the mechanisms devised to confront attempts at "zombification," a process whereby the loss of their spirit reduces colonized people to nothing more than a labor pool. As a result work songs emerged, as did religious hymns, blues, spirituals, and the many forms of popular stories to be found in the islands and on part of the continent.

The "erudite" or learned literary system developed in the twentieth century, especially with independence and the appearance of important journals. Again, it was a form of resistance and cultural assertion in response to North American invasions. Examples of this are provided by the great English Caribbean poet Edward Brathwaite in Barbados and the prose writer George Lamming. It is this cultural conditioning with all its contradictions which gave rise to a V. S. Naipaul.⁷

*maroon settlements

Dutch-Caribbean literature (or rather literatures) provide an example of regional complexity which is worth examining here. This literature exists as a combination of three literary systems, each associated with a different perspective on history, according to the specific manner of insertion in the social universe comprising the islands of the Dutch Antilles. Excluding Suriname, which we do not intend to deal with here, the Dutch Antilles comprise two groups of islands: on the one hand Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao, that is those nearest the continent, and, on the other, the islands of St. Maarten, Saba and St. Eustatius, Windward and Leeward respectively.

The literary and cultural complexity of the area is related to the historical importance of the Antilles as a center of production for the primary product, sugar, and, from a geo-political point of view, to its strategic position, as we have already indicated. Thus, these islands were the first to be colonized by the Spanish. (Discovered by Alonso de Ojeda in 1499, Curaçao features in the first accounts of the conquest of the continent.) They were then colonized by the Dutch who established an important center for slave trading there. Juan de Ampies took possession of the islands on behalf of the Catholic kings and for more than a century they remained under Spanish sovereignty. In 1634 the Dutch seized Curaçao. As elsewhere in the Caribbean, the indigenous population—in this case the Arawaks—were practically exterminated. These few references to history point to the three cultural lines which basically shape the islands' profile: the Spanish, the Dutch and the Creoles who speak Papiamentu.

There are various theories concerning the local language, Papiamentu. The earliest identified Papiamentu as a form of Spanish, and the modern authority P. Henríquez Ureña considered it a Spanish dialect. The second, that of Rodolfo Lenz (1928), considers Papiamentu to be a Portuguese dialect brought by slaves from West Africa and developed through the ongoing cross-cultural process. More recently, T. Navarro Tomás and Van Wyck have suggested that it is a form of Afro-Portuguese which constitutes a kind of proto-creole.⁸ Whatever the case, for the region's inhabitants Papiamentu is one corner-stone of their identity within the multifaceted cultural formation bequeathed them by history. The assertion of Papiamentu in the area has become an anti-colonial phenomenon. Enormous efforts such as those by the Antilles Linguistic Institute are made to introduce the teaching of Papiamentu into schools, to arrive at an agreement on its written form and to translate major works of world literature into Papiamentu. Henry Habibe, poet and founder of the literary review *Watapana*, writes:

“As someone from the Dutch Antilles, I am engaged in a search for myself, for my own identity. It makes sense to tie oneself to a situation such as this, to something which is entirely one's own. For me as a poet this something of my own is my language; Papiamentu is mine, so I search for my own identity in this language.”⁹

The Papiamentu oral (literary) tradition at times takes a written form in what are called “banderitas,” a short poetic form presented on narrow strips of paper wrapped around a small stick.* It is also expressed in popular stories of African origin, in which the

**banderitas*: literally small flags

central character is a spider. The spider and rabbit form a couple in popular tales from the West African jungle and grassland regions. A series of such stories expresses the values of both these African cultures.¹⁰ In Surinam this character is called Anansi and in Curaçao, Compa Nansi.

The novelist, critic, and literary scholar, Cola Debrot, points to two branches of literary output: the Hispanic-papiamento and the Dutch. The first two systems are the so-called "Spanish school" and the "Papiamento school," which have similar modes of expression. The Spanish system is influenced directly by the Spanish and Hispanic-American cultures and environment, owing to a shared history. For example, this is the case with the first chronicles and travel accounts written in the sixteenth century, products of the conquest and colonization. The same holds true with respect to the common history with Hispanic America, especially during the so-called Independence period in the nineteenth century during which the Caribbean provided a place of refuge for patriots and demonstrated solidarity in the struggle against the Spanish crown. This was especially so in the case of Curaçao, where Simon Bolívar himself lived for a while. And Bolívar's *Carta de Jamaica* (Letter from Jamaica)—one of the most important documents in Latin American thought—was written there. Initially geography facilitated contact and interchange although, after Dutch colonization of the islands in 1634, communication ceased for a long period. This political activity had a considerable influence on the life of the islands. For example, around 1880 there was a substantial expansion of the press, both in Spanish and in Papiamento, in which considerable space was devoted to literary matters. In addition to the *Curaçao Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, which has been the Netherlands Antilles' only paper for half a century, other newspapers in Dutch, English, Papiamento, and Spanish appeared. *Civilisadò*, *Noticioso* and *El Imparcial* were the Papiamento and Spanish language newspapers and *Notas y Letras* a literary review. The intermediary role played by the Spanish language had a dual function. On the one hand it acted as a vehicle for the romanticism of Becquer and the poetry of Campoamor. On the other, it conveyed Hispanic American effervescence. J. S. Corsen (1855–1911) was the great poet of the period. His poem "Atardi" is essential reading and is part of popular culture in the Netherlands Antilles:

Ta pakiko, mi no sa;
 ma esta tristu mi ta bira,
 tur atardi ku mi mira
 solo baha den laman¹¹

Corsen's poems convey various expressions of romanticism: there are Hispanic tones, an inclination toward French romanticism and he interprets the Dutch romantics. They combine in a curious mixture which is evidence of the historical, social and cultural plurality of the region.

Literary discourse in this century shares much with the other areas in the Caribbean. Its absorption of the surrounding environment, history and cultural peculiarities give it its sense of asserting ethnic and social claims. John de Pool (1873–1947) is one of the classic writers in this vein with his *Del Curazao que se va*, written in 1935.¹² Papiamento

is molded by two cultural influences: on the one hand there is the impact of literature in the Spanish language and, on the other, it forms part of the oral tradition (as is quite natural) for which it provides a written form. Its spirit is therefore much more rooted in the concerns of the popular imagination. Here, for example, one begins to observe expressions of ethnicity similar to those one finds in the works of Guillén or Palés Matos. This is also the case with respect to the Afro-Antillean poetry of Pierre Lauffer¹³ or Elis Juliana (1927), another significant writer in this field. Current journals in Papiamento are strongly imbued with a spirit which conveys cultural needs; they reveal an evolution toward poetic propositions with a new focus. In this respect, the Caribbean journals to which we referred above have played a very important role as disseminators of knowledge and discussion as well as of literary renewal in the area. The dialogue in our century is no longer with the Spanish literary tradition but with the Hispanic American. Whereas until recently the texts of Jorge Isaacs, José Santos Chocano or Amado Nervo acted as intermediaries, today the intermediary is contemporary Latin American literature. This is a result both of the region's relationship with the Latin American continent and of the role played by groups of intellectuals in the context of the new cultural awareness in the region.

The literary system in the Dutch language¹⁴ seems to have different characteristics according to the critic one consults, even when the interaction among the three systems is quite visible. There are in fact authors who write in all three languages. The Dutch system emerges several centuries after the others and assumes a different character. The first two are linked to popular culture and the Spanish influence within romanticism, from which they slowly detach themselves. The Dutch system, in contrast, has much more to do with the evolution of metropolitan culture. It arises from the different processes of insertion in society, corresponding to the social imagery of different groups. In relation to this diversity Cola Debrot says:

In the Spanish-Papiamento literature one finds a shifting from romanticism to realism, from the subjective to the objective. In the Dutch section just the reverse has taken place, here one finds an increasingly dominant accent on the subjective element, that comes out in a number of modern styles, expressionism, surrealism, and existentialism.

Those who write in Dutch are represented by Dutch writers who live in the Antilles or by Antilleans who have lived in Holland for a lengthy period and whose point of reference is European cultural development. In some cases this is complemented by a strong immersion in Antillean culture. This system emerges in travel writings and, according to the region's historians, specifically in the memoirs of A. O. Exquémelin entitled *De Americaensche Zee-Roovers (Bucaniers of America)* of 1678, as well as in the memoirs of one of Napoleon's officials who, on returning to Europe published *Weemoedtonent of een reis naar Curaçao (Melancholy notes or a journey to Curaçao)*.

Nowadays this literature also takes on the forms of a cultural awareness of the Dutch Caribbean. This is the case with the poet and novelist Frank Martinus (1936) who, although Dutch, also writes in Papiamento and currently devotes himself to the development and study of this language. Frank Martinus's poetry is committed to re-

claiming African roots, as is evident in his 1957 volume *Stemmen uit Afrika* (Voices from Africa) and in his later short stories. As we have observed, the literary systems of the Dutch Caribbean correspond to different expressions which have established interactive mechanisms, due to the fact that they are part of a society which is simultaneously fragmented and yet united by common historical and social ties. Nevertheless, this development increasingly marks a shift away from the somewhat picturesque “nativism” of their first reflections on themselves to a discourse which achieves a greater integration of popular imagination in cross-cultural terms, to an awareness which is both more complex and which is shaping culture and society in a more conscious way.

In the development of the discourse of affirmation, and of the history of literature as a “search for our own means of expression,” three periods can be distinguished as common cycles of evolution in the various strands of Caribbean literature. These were proposed by the author when writing on the periodization of Latin American literature in general. For reasons which we shall make clear, the periodization of the literature of the non-Spanish Caribbean (quite naturally the least known in Latin America) merits special comment. The first period starts with the discovery of the region and continues until the end of the eighteenth century. It embraces all the literature which documents the discovery and all that literature in which the “discourse of fiction” manages to find a space. It is a literature which attempts to justify the colonial undertaking and its serves to dominate and to instill a model. It is a literature which indoctrinates. However, although it constitutes the very literature of colonization, it develops a counter-discourse within itself. This literature also records and describes, with travellers telling of the New World and providing arguments in favor of colonization, in response to the models, aspirations, and failings of the metropolis. The second period marks the shaping of a society whose greatest expression at a political level is the independence of Haiti. This literature starts to become aware of the specific nature of the region, the country and the ethnic mix. At the end of the nineteenth century Martí’s voice is clear: there is an identification between the Caribbean and America both as an area divided by history and in need of action. The third period is marked by the historical case of neo-colonialism, and its cultural counterpart is the quest for self-assertion in terms of culture and society. Popular cultures and pride in ethnic origins begin to constitute a structure and a declaration, through a language based on a historical legacy and which, at the same time, takes on, or tries to assume, the real breadth and substance of society. This discourse incorporates the modernizing tendencies from within the metropolitan cultural legacy, but it is also based on the content and structures of the region’s popular imagery. The enormous impact of the Cuban revolution in the second half of the century provided literary discourse and the cultural sphere with a new watershed, which needs to be examined more closely.

A comparative historiography such as the one being elaborated for the Caribbean must also make us reflect on questions of method. First, one must ask what comparisons are to be made in the work to be undertaken. We have already put forward some proposals in this respect in earlier works and would like to return to this problem.¹⁵ From a detailed review of the themes in comparative literature, as developed in the United States and in Europe, it is clear that its evolution as a discipline—beyond ques-

tions of its inter-cultural and “supra-cultural” nature—revolves, in reality, around the literary problems of the core or central countries. Thus the relationship with the literatures from the periphery is not approached, unless it is to assess them in relation to the approved model, whereby European literature contemplates itself as in a mirror. This shows up in expressions such as “the Victor Hugo of Buenos Aires,” “the Goethe of Brazil” or “Nicaragua’s Verlaine.”¹⁶ This also frequently leads many comparatists to think that our Hispanic American connections with European literature necessarily pass through Spain. Moreover, they ignore the impact of Hispanic American modernism on the Spanish 1898 movement—“the return of the galleons”—or the importance of examples like the impetus given to Spanish “ultraism” by the Chilean Vicente Huidobro. Such scholars also ignore the whole phenomenon of present-day narrative. But above all they overlook the fact that the appropriation of metropolitan languages by Hispanic America, Brazil, and also Haiti soon creates what has been called American Spanish or Brazilian Portuguese, both of which are departure points for an autonomous textual discourse. Furthermore, the perspective employed to approach the specific problems relating to the literature of the periphery is inadequate. In our case—that of Latin America and the Caribbean—while borrowed theoretical models may prove useful in many ways, these models do not take into account the complex cultural reality within which our discourse takes place. It is therefore necessary to examine the Eurocentric and the colonial tones which have characterized this discipline. To a large extent this reflection is similar to that made in ethnology during the early days of this social science.

Thus, when talking of comparative literature in this context it is necessary to consider the problems pertaining to the literature of the countries on the periphery. It is one thing to discuss the relationship between French, English, Italian or German literature, but it is quite another to reflect on the inter-textual processes which occur between two literatures of quite different status. This is because one belongs to the sphere of discourse of domination and the other to the discourse of subordination. There are various ideological implications in the elements to be discussed: the implanted model is valued positively, while the local structures of cultural imagination are rejected. This is because of the low esteem in which popular culture, found in this type of social order, is held. A second point of contradiction in the development of the discipline (there are clear exceptions to all these objections) is to be found in what Claudio Guillén refers to as “an ethic which surpasses cultural nationalism,” which is to be found in the origins of the discipline. Clearly this ethic corresponds to the specific history of nations which are already constituted both politically and culturally. This ethic reasserted itself, rightly, after the Second World War. But the situation is different in the countries of the periphery, particularly in those where decolonization is underway. Owing to our place in history we are still constituting ourselves as nations, constructing our identity, our civilization, and this is our privilege. But let us be clear: we refer to the fact that we are constructing *a* civilization, not *the* civilization. “Supranational” discourse, and discourse with the various cultures of the world, needs to go hand in hand with the various cultures of the world, needs to go hand in hand with a discourse which asserts our identity, in a dialectic which is not easy to achieve, due to the tendency to favor metropolitan models and belittle original cultures.

The comparative analysis of literature in Latin America must be turned in a different direction, one which relates to our historical situation. It must become a study which throws new light on the process of regional integration on the one hand, and, on the other, identifies our culture with other cultural processes. Only in this way will we be able to participate in what will be truly a *Weltliteratur*. This reformulation must be the starting point, in order not to designate comparative literature simply as a field of "supra-national" studies in literature. Otherwise important basic problems will be left aside. Our countries in America, Africa, and certainly parts of Asia each comprise many ethnic groups and languages. Various cultures co-exist, generally on fairly conflictive terms, and we speak various languages. We have both oral and written cultures which are molded into differentiated discourses and which highlight the heterogeneity of which Cornejo Polar has spoken.

It seems to us that a comparative approach to our literary history requires us to pursue two basic analytical lines. On the one hand, it needs to discover how it relates internally to itself, with regard both to the points of articulation as well as to the contradictions, whether in Caribbean literature—be it Hispanic, English, French or Dutch—or in Latin American literature in general. This would facilitate an examination of the basic links in our culture and, with these, the links in our literary discourse and also an examination of the plurality of forms in which this culture exists. On the other hand, it is also a question of locating our literatures in the international sphere, particularly in the sphere of metropolitan literatures, in so far as they have imposed their style, movements and forms of expression. In the face of these, our discourse has given birth to creativity and achieved a form of appropriation of them which varies in character and which over time has shown itself to be quite specific.¹⁷ We need to reveal the tension inherent in this process in order to examine the nature of the response. But it is also important to compare the Caribbean with other literary regions, where the discourse arises in similar circumstances of colonization and decolonization. For the Caribbean in particular, and Latin America in general, examination of the discourse developed within African literature may be particularly revealing. This is not only because there are similar mechanisms but also because important parts of the social imagination are common to both.

Comparative analysis allows us to observe other processes which lie on the boundaries of those mechanisms which can be considered similar. Thus, even if it might seem unusual, Rulfo is closer to Yachar Kemal, the Turkish writer, than to Proust or Kafka; the African Sembene Ousmane nearer to the Hispanic American indigenists, or García Márquez to the Congolese Labou Tansi, in so far as their discourses are articulated by common mechanisms of "transculturation" and "appropriation" of European cultures. Beyond "content," they have common ways of seeing the world, common ways of relating to life and people (both rural and recently urban). They also hold in common a popular social imagery and ways of expression, a political attitude and a need to affirm their own history. They are in the mold of literatures which are increasingly assuming a role in establishing an identity, building a nation, in a common Third World discourse. In this comparative approach to Caribbean and Latin American literature, our analysis must not start from the vantage point of economic and political history as found in the texts and as used to organize the development

process, but from an opposite point. We need to begin with the historical development of literary discourse, at the moments of its formation, emancipation, independence, or autonomy. The history of our literature can thus be seen as "a search for our expression," as a movement from the separate parts to the whole and from the whole to the parts, which emerges from an analysis of the text. This process of assertion, which constitutes the history of our literature, and also our societies' need for specific imagery during the phases of decolonization, affirmation, and increasing unity, is textualized in the literary discourse which we are attempting to examine. This, in turn, is located in the larger "spaces," wherein the literary world finds its dynamics: that is, in the cultural, social, economic, and historical spheres in general.

Our study must therefore start with the text, where the movements and mechanisms of language unfold themselves in their historical dimensions, and where history becomes an esthetic object and delimits a specific space. In our literatures this textual space is one in which conflict occurs. This is where those strategies are designed by means of which our discourse generates its own voice, asserts itself and achieves its autonomy. The history of our literature is the history of strategies, which enter into tension in a space where they confront the contradictions of our development, namely domination—counterclaim; modernism—regionalism; popular imagination—cosmopolitanism, etc. We need to study the many mechanisms employed in this confrontation, in order to reveal the relationships between literary and cultural discourses and the general spaces relating to this history of colonization, neocolonialism and decolonization. Today, the Latin American literary imagination is an autonomous discourse which has been achieved through a lengthy learning process. Therefore, not only does it generate spaces where our culture and society can express themselves, it also contributes to the building up of this culture. This particular role played by literature is peculiar to our countries, which are immersed in a process—which is indeed encouraging—of consolidating a culture and a society, of building a civilization.

In order to examine this conflictual space, one needs to define the mechanisms which produce it. One such basic mechanism is that which has been taken up and strengthened by the late Angel Rama, one of the most knowledgeable scholars of our Latin American culture. He has developed Caribbean anthropologist Fernando Ortiz's term "transculturation" into an operational concept, which helps us to understand contemporary Latin American fiction referring to "phases in the process of moving from one culture to another," phases which Ortiz calls "deculturation" and "neoculturation." Taking this concept and making it more flexible, Rama arrives at the following conclusion, when discussing our contemporary narrative: "Loss, selectivity, re-discovery and absorption will occur. These four operations run concurrently and they are all co-determined within a general restructuring of the cultural system, this restructuring being the most creative function of a cross-cultural process."¹⁸ This mechanism, which is proper to the functioning of both our Caribbean and our Latin American cultures, is indispensable if we are to resolve the complex problems of such cultural formations, which often are all too easily resolved by using the universal term "mestizo" (mixed or mulatto). Rama has developed this term in relation to the construction of the language employed by authors who have created a literary mode of expression on the basis of the mental processes of the peasant and indigenous groups

in our societies, in other words on the structures of popular speech. Such authors include Rulfo, Arguedas, and Guimaraes Rosa, in whose work the cross-cultural interaction is located in the texts' language, structure and world view.

On the other side of the pendular process which determines the movement of our literary history — regionalism, cosmopolitanism — we find the other operation carried out by our culture. It also is part of the cross-cultural process, but it is located within a cosmopolitan function. We refer to the forms of appropriation which our literatures use to integrate European and Western culture: acceptance, rejection, modification, selection, resistance, and distancing. These are mechanisms of creative cultural response in societies with a specific social imagery. The debates which characterize our discourse thus textualize the forms and the contradictions of history and society, giving rise to literatures in which discourse is subverted by interference from cultural systems which cohabit, subsist, struggle, and impose themselves within literature. They give rise to what A. Cornejo Polar calls "heterogeneous literatures," that is literatures which present no character other than that of the segmented society which produces them. They also make way for the "ambiguity" of which Antonio Cándido spoke when naming the many different voices and means of disguise which discourse was able to assume during the colonial period. This textual space contains conflictive encounters between the discourse of metropolitan colonial domination (later to become the "erudite" system) and the discourses generated in the Caribbean from African, Indian and Asian cultural origins and in Latin America from indigenous influences. Both the Caribbean and the Latin American cultures have an oral tradition arising from a social imaging of their history. This history is a history of slavery, *cimarronadas*, pirating, dictatorship, and revolution. The imaging is rooted in quite specific relations with space and nature; it has historical depth, a vision of the future, and reveals recurring problems associated with exile, cultural conflicts, ethnic demands, and colonization. These situations are all immediate and painful and they constitute meaningful nuclei which express themselves in many esthetic forms.

It is not by chance that in a recent statement, his *Biografía de un Cimarrón (Biography of a Runaway Slave)* Miguel Barnet should have allowed a survivor from the days of slavery to speak: history is there within arm's length. Nor is it an accident that present-day Caribbean poetry should adopt a highly political tone, asserting Caribbean rights. The Caribbean is a region at the crossroads, whose peoples demand their right not to be invaded or colonized, and to be themselves, to determine their own fate. Literary discourse expresses this conflict; to write a history of literature involves revealing the processes, the ordering around different views of the world as well as the linguistic constructions and esthetic structures. It also means showing how literature and culture have the ability to create society and, by means of the imagination, to consolidate structures of our own making. Clearly, the Caribbean has not been the same since Fanon, Aimé Césaire, George Lamming, Guillén, Fernández Retamar, Alejo Carpentier, Derek Walcott and Jacques-Stéphen Alexis wrote their works. The region is both as it was before and much more, following the works of these writers, because discourse has consolidated within literature the breadth and depth of society and the right of Caribbean societies to be themselves. And it has been done in such a way that

the conflicts have been resolved boldly. We have to learn to be equally bold to write its history.

—Translated by J. Ann Zammit

Notes

1. René Depestre, "Mito e identidad en la historia del Caribe," *Casa de las Américas* 20.118 (1980). In Depestre's text the term *imaginario*, from French *imaginaire* used as a noun, refers to specific social contents and to the relations among them. Together they form a whole based upon the historical experience of social classes and groups, often with ethnic variations. English *imagination* cannot readily be stretched to take in this broad semantic field, and *imagery* alone is likewise limited. At the author's suggestion we have rendered *imaginario* as "social imagery" or as "imagery" when the social context is sufficiently clear. (Ed.)
2. Leslie Manigat in *El Caribe: un mar entre dos mundos* (Caracas: 1978) 62–65; Gonzalo Martner, "La cuenca del Caribe: futuro centro de desarrollo latinoamericano," (Universidad Central de Venezuela: CENDES, n.d.) mimeo.
3. M. Moreno Fragnals, "En torno a la identidad cultural del Caribe insular," *Casa de las Américas* 20.118 (1980). See the same author's "La plantacion, crisol de la sociedad antillana," *El correo de la UNESCO* 34 (1981): 10–14.
4. Ramiro Guerra, *La expansion territorial de los Estados Unidos*, 4th. ed. (Havana: 1975); M. Kaplan, "Big Stick (politics of)," *Diccionario de Ciencias Sociales*, vol. 2 (Madrid: 1975) 18–19.
5. The literary-historical role of the Negritude movement has been treated by René Depestre in *Bonjour et adieu à la Négritude* (Paris: Laffont, 1980); A. James Arnold in *Modernism and Negritude: the Poetry and Poetics of Aimé Césaire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981); Mario de Andrade and Mario do Ceu Carmo Reis, "Dimension culturelle de développement en Afrique," *Bulletin du Forum du Tiers Monde* (Bureau Africain), Dakar, Senegal, 7 (1987); and by J. Michael Dash in this issue of *Callaloo*.
6. René Depestre, "Bonjour et adieu à la négritude," in M. Moreno Fragnals, *Africa en América* (Paris: UNESCO; Siglo XXI, 1977) 337–362; reprinted in his *Bonjour et adieu à la Négritude* 82–160.
7. Michael Angrosino, "V. S. Naipaul and the colonial image," *Caribbean Quarterly* 1.3 (1975): 1–10.
8. José Pedro Rona, "Elementos españoles, portugueses y africanos en el papiamento," *Watapana* 3.4 (1971).
9. "Levántate Watapana," *Watapana* 3.1 (1970).
10. Aminata Sow Fall, "El niño, personaje central de los cuentos africanos," *El correo de la Unesco* 35 (1982): 24.
11. J. S. Corsen, *Poesias* (Nijmegen: J. F. Kloosterman, 1914) 112 p.
12. John de Pool, *Del Curazao que se va* (Santiago de Chile: Ercilla, 1935). Dutch translation as *So was Curaçao* in the *Antilliaanse Cahiers* 4.1–4 (1960): 406 p.
13. Cola Debrot, *Literature of the Netherlands Antilles*, trans. Estelle Reed Debrot; originally published as "Literatuur in de Nederlandse Antillen," *Antilliaanse Cahiers* 1.1 (1956): 2–64.
14. In addition to the work of Cola Debrot cited, see Donald Herdeck, ed., *Caribbean Writers* (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, 1979) 551–57.
15. See Ana Pizarro, "Sobre las direcciones del comparatismo en América Latina," *Casa de las Américas* 135 (1982), reprinted in *La literatura latinoamericana como proceso* (Buenos Aires: 1985) 50–59; also "El discurso literario y na notión de América Latina," in *le Seminário latino-americano de literatura comparada* (Porto Alegre, Brazil: 1986) 7–14; and "Pour une histoire de la littérature latino-américaine," *Nechelicon* 11.2 (1984).
16. This situation has been observed by R. Fernández Retamar, Carlos Rincón, Tania Carvalhal and by the present author in previous studies.
17. See A. Abdel Malek, "Spécificité et Endogénéité," in *Clefs pour une stratégie nouvelle de développement* (Paris: UNESCO, 1984).
18. Angel Rama, *Transculturación narrativa en América Latina* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1982) 32–33 and passim.