

Norval Edwards,
s, Glyne Griffith,
g, Aaron Kamugi-
iail Low, Antonia
; Denise deCaires
ezia Page, Velma
eila Rampersad,
rg, Elaine Savory,
aya Shields, Faith
alcott, and Erika

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Edited by
Michael A. Bucknor and Alison Donnell

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Introduction*

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THE IDEOLOGY OF THE LITERARY IN THE LITTLE MAGAZINES OF THE 1940s

Raphael Dalleo

The local publications founded in the West Indies during the 1930s and 1940s are frequently mentioned by critics as pivotal to the emergence of Caribbean literature in English. *The Beacon* published monthly in Trinidad and Tobago from 1931 to 1933, with one issue in 1939; *Public Opinion* was founded as a weekly in Jamaica in 1937, became a daily in 1944, and then returned to being a weekly until 1974; the Barbadian *BIM* published twice annually from 1942 until 1973, and has come out sporadically since; Jamaica's *Focus* published issues irregularly, in 1943, 1948, 1956, 1960 and 1983; and *Kyk-Over-Al* was a biannual publication in Guyana from 1945 to 1961, returning during the 1980s and 1990s. Because all of these publications were founded between 1931 and 1945, literary histories of the Caribbean often group them together as a boom in local literary publication that demonstrates the rise in Caribbean nationalism and sets the stage for the birth of West Indian literature in the 1950s (see, for example, Baugh, Ramchand, Ramraj and Sander). Critics emphasize the importance of these periodicals to the development of a locally published literature, and place them in the context of the rise of nationalist political movements and the explosion of literary outlets from throughout the region.

While all of these publications certainly responded to their social context, the responses were not identical. I argue that the journals, newspapers and magazines grouped together from this time period actually had two distinct visions. Free-wheeling newspapers founded in the 1930s like *The Beacon* and *Public Opinion* brought together political, economic and social commentary alongside literature under one umbrella; the publications initiated in the 1940s – *BIM*, *Focus* and *Kyk-Over-Al* – were more strictly literary 'little magazines' focused almost entirely on publishing poetry, plays and short stories. Examining editorial statements and contributions from these publications will show that the 1940s 'little magazines' put forward an ideology of the literary which was no less political, but achieved its political effect by figuring the

literary as detached from the everyday arguments about the shape of the nation in which *The Beacon* and *Public Opinion* participated.

Local publication of creative writing in the anglophone Caribbean did not begin in the 1930s and 1940s. After the abolition of slavery allowed literacy to become more widespread, newspapers like *The Mirror* in Trinidad and Tobago or *The Jamaica Times* began to provide places for literary work to be published locally at the end of the nineteenth century. Selwyn Cudjoe (2003) and Leah Rosenberg (2007) have uncovered the significant contributions these early publications made and Alison Donnell (2006) provides some context for why the nationalist publications of the 1930s and 1940s have become privileged in Caribbean literary history at the expense of other predecessors. All the same, the periodicals of the 1930s and 1940s occupy a mythical place in the telling of West Indian literary history because of their connection to the middle class intellectuals who became nationalist leaders during the decolonization era. In Trinidad and Tobago, the *Beacon's* editor, Albert Gomes, was elected to the colony's Legislative Council during the 1940s and became an important minister in the 1950s. In Jamaica, the group responsible for *Public Opinion* founded the People's National Party in 1938, with one of the main backers of the newspaper, Norman Manley, becoming Chief Minister of Jamaica during the 1950s. Critics have been drawn to these publications as an idealized version of the alliance of literature and politics; I want to call attention to how that alliance was never untroubled.

The Beacon and *Public Opinion* deployed publication and the literary in a way that shaped the development of both Caribbean literature and politics. Both newspapers figure their political project as indistinguishable from publication itself: the newspaper is meant to challenge the discursive monopoly of the region's established newspapers and create a robust debate about the future of the nation. Patricia Saunders mentions this aspect of *The Beacon* in her discussion of how the newspaper sought 'through public debates [...] to formulate their own systems' and 'fashion their national identities and nationalist politics' (2007: 30). *Public Opinion* positions itself in the same way, with its first issue beginning by urging 'an effective public opinion on topics of importance' ('New Wine': 1). *Public Opinion* means to be this rationalized public sphere providing a space for intellectuals to debate 'topics with a direct bearing on the welfare of Jamaica' (1). A piece appearing a few issues later addresses the reader: 'once you have made up your mind what should be done, talk about it [...] Democracy is government by discussion instead of government by brute force' ('You': 2). These newspapers view publication as the institution upon which a just and responsive government can be built.

This political project establishes the importance of writing in governance and makes possible the ideology of the literary. Putting the cultural and political beside each other on the page was an attempt to map out the nation. Indeed, the immediate predecessor to *The Beacon*, which included many of the same participants, was titled simply *Trinidad*, as if its pages were the space of the nation. The fiction included in *The Beacon* emphasizes the many kinds of people included in the national project: the poor barrack-yard blacks and East Indians of C.A. Thomasos's 'The Dougla' published in issue 2.10; the Venezuelan exile from C.L.R. James's 'Revolution' (1.2); the Portuguese

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Reinhard Sander, wl period in Caribbean lit- lific contributor of liter role as 'moral conscien the idea that the sensit and speak for the natio: in Trinidad and her ir recognize and must ask tion of the East Indiar to how he is unknowal she cannot decipher, a 1932: 19, 24, 25). The insistence on racist ide 'be firm with [servants] while the narrative nc and cooks as often as t the story is that attempt ogy prevents the Euroj husband's inability to i trope in Mendes' stori in 'Her Chinaman's W ure to closely read the suggest that the island equipped for listening

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In *The Beacon* and never easy. The edito Literary Club Nuisan attacking 'Bohemian:

small landholder and Chinese merchant in Alfred Mendes' 'Pablo's Fandango' (1.1); the rural East Indian laborers and English planters of Mendes' 'Boodhoo' (published serially in 1.11, 1.12 and 2.1). This diversity raises challenges for the consolidation of the nation, but the literary newspaper appears to be a space to attempt that project.

Reinhard Sander, whose work has been especially important to discussion of this period in Caribbean literary history, calls attention to how Mendes – as the most prolific contributor of literary work to *The Beacon* – makes a case for the writer's heroic role as 'moral conscience of his community' (1988: 48). Mendes' stories elaborate on the idea that the sensitivity of the literary class makes them best suited to understand and speak for the nation. 'Boodhoo' focuses on a white Englishwoman recently arrived in Trinidad and her inability to understand the 'strange surroundings.' She doesn't recognize and must ask the names of the island's flora and fauna. From the first description of the East Indian character Boodhoo – 'he was strange' – the narrative returns to how he is unknowable to the Englishwoman: he is 'enigmatical', speaks a language she cannot decipher, and his face has a 'nonchalant air that told her nothing' (Mendes 1932: 19, 24, 25). The obstacle to these white elites understanding the island is their insistence on racist ideology rather than close attention to reality: one woman advises 'be firm with [servants] and they are like domesticated animals. No trouble at all', even while the narrative notes that 'she didn't add, however, that she changed her maids and cooks as often as there are months in the year' (18). The implication throughout the story is that attempting to force the local setting to conform to preconceived ideology prevents the European characters from truly understanding or controlling it. The husband's inability to imagine his wife's infidelity – this shortsightedness is a common trope in Mendes' stories, like Maria's failure to anticipate Hong Wing's cruel revenge in 'Her Chinaman's Way' – means that these characters' lack of imagination and failure to closely read the situation precipitate their downfalls. The stories in *The Beacon* suggest that the island's complex mix of cultures and classes requires a sensitive reader equipped for listening to and understanding its many competing interests.

Public Opinion is less dominated by literary work than *The Beacon*, with more articles taking on explicitly political topics. But the early issues also give prominent place to the literary: fifteen of the first twenty issues feature a short story and each includes book reviews, as well as a section called 'Literary Snapshots'. The importance of the literary in governance can be understood through the political vision articulated in the article 'Bureaucracy', which critiques government functionaries for lacking connection to creativity: 'Jamaica is largely governed by officials: those officials have routine work to do: and the pressure of routine is usually so great that the head of a department has no time for constructive thinking' (1937: 1). These issues show a clear desire to give the technical and the creative equal roles within the movement towards Jamaican nationhood.

In *The Beacon* and *Public Opinion*, this balance between the political and literary is never easy. The editorial statements from issues 2.11 and 2.12 of *The Beacon* on 'The Literary Club Nuisance' show a surprising hostility to mixing literature and politics, attacking 'Bohemians' and their amateurish literary clubs, complaining that they may

'become subsidiary political bodies, whose prime function will be to supply the Legislature with idiots' (1933: 2). *Public Opinion's* longer publication history makes the ebb and flow of the tensions between the literary and the political more noticeable. For example, as I discuss in the essay 'The Public Sphere and Jamaican Anticolonial Politics', the founding of the PNP during the second half of 1938 occurs at a time when no literary works appear in twelve consecutive issues during October, November and December. In 1940 and 1941, the newspaper experiences a revival of literary publication, with authors like George Campbell, M.G. Smith and Roger Mais becoming very active, but in 1943, as the PNP begins to contest the island's first elections, creative writing again drops off the agenda: while in 1940 65 stories and 63 poems ran in the pages of *Public Opinion* and 1941 featured 41 stories and 69 poems, in 1942 that output dropped to 20 stories and 48 poems and in 1943, only 5 stories and 20 poems appeared.

Even as *Public Opinion* continued to publish, then, it became less interested in giving a place to literary work. This change provides a context for understanding Edna Manley's launch of a literary journal: having left the board of *Public Opinion*, she edited a collection of literary work and issued the first edition of *Focus* in December 1943. *Focus* features fiction, poetry, drama and creative essays but does not publish news or political debate. The writings are still framed as nationalist and political: Manley's Foreword explains this context, that *Focus* is 'the first collection of works to be published, that have sprung directly out of the great changes that have been and are still taking place' (E. Manley 1943: 1). But she presents an idea of how literature can be political that is overtly against instrumentality, as an entry in her diary explains:

What happens to me in the political world is what happens when I step out of my sphere into any other world. I start getting emotional experiences crammed down my throat through entirely foreign and wrong channels and the result is that the creative artist in me starts stifling and struggling most frightfully for air.

(R. Manley 1989: 7)

Manley here expresses the ideology of the literary as something separate from politics, and indeed, *Focus* separates out literary works from the other kinds of writing found in *Public Opinion*.

Kyk-Over-Al shows a similar move away from its initial appearance as a cultural and political review to becoming a more strictly literary journal. H.R. Harewood describes in the first issue the publication's importance as political pedagogy: 'it is upon critical reading that a democracy ultimately stands [...] on the determination of its people to disentangle the significant from the trivial, to sift the reasonable from the illogical' (1945: 25). In keeping with the goal of creating a wide-ranging literary public sphere that includes literature alongside other kinds of writing, the first issue of December 1945 features a selection of poetry along with essays that advocate for 'A Workable Democracy', as in the title of Frank Dalzell's essay, or defend local culture

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against English 'sneering' as in Celeste Dolphin's 'A Letter to Junius' (35). Despite these free-wheeling origins, by issue 1.3 in 1946 *Kyk-Over-Al* is publishing almost exclusively poetry and short fiction, along with some cultural pieces, but no longer includes explicit discussion of politics. During the 1950s, as British Guiana was undergoing a complicated transition towards independence marked by the British sending troops to overturn the locally elected government, *Kyk-Over-Al* makes no mention of these events. Issue 3.12 from 1951 begins with portraits of important West Indian figures and the editorial statement in issue 5.16 from 1953 discusses intellectuals as shapers of society, but leaders of the Guyanese anticolonial movement like Cheddi Jagan or Forbes Burnham are never mentioned. The editorial statement celebrating *Kyk-Over-Al*'s tenth anniversary in 1955 makes explicit the journal's changes: 'In 1945 there were few works of literature for us to be exclusively literary, so we began to carry the flag for excellence in every branch of art' ('Editorial': 136). The implication is that the initial goal of being 'exclusively literary', while unrealistic in 1945, was increasingly realized in subsequent years. Editor A.J. Seymour's own position, working in and eventually heading the colonial Bureau of Publicity and Information, explains some of the journal's retreat from public debate into the space of the literary. Seymour details in his autobiography, for example, how he was explicitly instructed that as government employee he was 'forbidden to take part in the public debate on Federation' during the 1950s (1982: 77). He insists that he did not allow government directives to influence his editorial work, as in the story he tells in which authorities express disapproval of his decision to publish Martin Carter's 'University of Hunger' while the poet is imprisoned. But the fact remains that although Seymour published the work of anticolonial writers like Carter, Mais and Lamming, the overall trajectory of *Kyk-Over-Al* is away from engagement in practical matters of electoral politics.

This trajectory, along with editorial statements appearing in *Focus*, *Kyk-Over-Al* and *BIM* insisting on independence from any particular political ideology, has allowed some critics to read the journals as basically apolitical, as when Ramchand lauds *BIM* for its absence of 'political affiliations' (1970: 72). *BIM*'s editorial policy supports this reading; a section of issue 3 titled 'What *BIM* Requires' focuses on formal and stylistic preferences, asking writers to 'give us something with a wide appeal' and leave aside political advocacy: 'Do not write [...] to mend the world or to elevate humanity' (76). *BIM* thus articulates a policy of valuing literature for its aesthetics rather than its (political or social) utility, leading a later editor to talk about *BIM*'s value in 'asserting no doctrine, offering no policy, making no proclamations' (Wickham 1977: iv). Yet as in the case of *Focus*' connection to the Manley family or *Kyk-Over-Al*'s publication of many anticolonial writers, this space of the literary which *BIM* stakes out apart from the everyday concerns of politics appears difficult to reconcile with the fact that *BIM* published many of the writers associated with anticolonial thinking, such as Lamming and Brathwaite. In an interview, Lamming notes the irony that editor Frank Collymore was 'completely apolitical' and thus *BIM* during the 1940s 'is not connected to a Barbadian nationalism, or a Caribbean nationalism, or any of that. It is going in fact

to become that, in spite of him' (Scott 2002: 86). Lamming makes it sound like an accident that *BIM* played a part in the decolonization movement.

Rather than reading these publications as apolitical or as pure expressions of the political movements blossoming in the West Indians during this period, I suggest that the aggressive articulation of the ideology of the literary was itself a political move. The little magazines set up creativity against bureaucracy, beauty against materialism, the literary intellectuals against the technocratic elite of professionals and civil servants. Collymore's own stories are a good example of this deployment of the literary, though critics have emphasized their universal themes of 'the dark underside of human beings' and 'issues such as alienation and loneliness' (Barratt 1993: 167), in fact stories like 'The Man Who Loved Attending Funerals' from issue 22 of *BIM* or 'RSVP to Miss Bush-Hall' from issue 35 are critiques of bourgeois society. With Collymore's protagonists drawn from the professional and political classes, revealing the 'dark underside' of these characters is part of a broader social critique that underscores the hypocrisy of their claims to rationality or morality (see Dalleo 2004 for a more detailed reading of Collymore's short fiction). Other contributions to *BIM* such as 'In All Their Glory' by A.N. Forde from issue 13 or Edgar Mittelholzer's 'The Sub-Committee' from issue 15 continue to present a bankrupt middle class. Forde's protagonist has grown disillusioned with his job in the post office where he 'was drifting further and further away from these people' among whom he had been born (1950: 26). Mittelholzer's play shows government functionaries so caught up in protocol that they don't notice a bomb set off in their building. The space of the literary which *BIM* seeks to occupy thus connects to the war of position taking place at a political level through a critique of the ruling class of the island. This sort of detachment from practical politics hardly lends itself to the political commitment typically thought of as anticolonialism, yet deploys the literary as a force opposed to instrumentality and materialism.

While *The Beacon* and *Public Opinion* aim their political projects towards governance, the little magazines seek out something more like critique and opposition. Carving out autonomy for the literary allows the creation of an outside space to offer as an alternative to the instrumentality of capitalist colonial culture. While the political project articulated in the nationalist newspapers paved the way for the transfer of governance to the local middle class, the literary project of the little magazines remained an alternative logic even into the postcolonial era. This ideology of the literary would inspire publications from the 1970s such as *Savacou*, *Kaie* and *Tapia*, as well as more recent little magazines like the *Caribbean Review of Books*.

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