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# Authority and the Occasion for Speaking in the Caribbean Literary Field: Martin Carter and George Lamming

**Raphael Dalleo**

The dismantling of the colonial system and the emerging dominance of the postcolonial in the decades following World War II mark a major passage in Caribbean literary history. In this article, I will look at George Lamming and Martin Carter, two of the most prominent writers of the West Indian literary renaissance of the 1950s, to examine how they positioned themselves and their writing in relation to colonial power and the decolonization struggles that characterized the passage to postcoloniality. As I will show, by associating their work with the anticolonial struggle, these writers gained a legitimate voice in the Caribbean public sphere, allowing them to provide a source of authority for their writing. At the same time, writing on the cusp of decolonization, these authors confront the coming of postcoloniality as a world in which the writer's role is unclear. Uncertain how to forge a new heroic literary project after independence, Carter and Lamming reveal how their confidence in the authority of their own literary discourse increasingly wavers, even as they point towards how a new, postcolonial Caribbean literature might find an occasion for speaking.

Martin Carter and George Lamming were both born in British colonies in 1927, Carter in British Guiana (now Guyana) and Lamming in Barbados. They both began their vocations as writers by publishing poetry in local journals in the late 1940s, then brought out major books in the early 1950s: Carter's poetry collection *The Hill of Fire Glows Red* (1951),

and Lamming's novel *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953).<sup>1</sup> Both authors established themselves as major figures in Caribbean literature by publishing prolifically during the 1950s,<sup>2</sup> but that production slowed considerably during the 1960s and 1970s,<sup>3</sup> and in Lamming's case, ended completely with the publication of *Natives of My Person* in 1971. Although Carter lived until 1997, and Lamming is still alive today, neither author has published any major new creative work since Carter's 1980 collection *Poems of Affinity 1978–1980*.

Why did Lamming and Carter stop publishing after such promising beginnings? In Lamming's case, the standard response of Caribbean critics has been that exile eventually took a toll on him, and that extended separation from his homeland drained him of the organic connection to his people that energized his earliest work.<sup>4</sup> In the case of Carter, critics point to precisely the opposite circumstances for his increasing withdrawal from literature: Gemma Robinson notes the standard views, that Carter's lack of access to metropolitan "publishing contracts" and his growing cynicism towards his homeland's "philistinism" made it impossible for him to continue writing.<sup>5</sup> These kinds of readings position Carter and Lamming

1. Martin Carter, *The Hill of Fire Glows Red* (Georgetown, British Guiana: The Miniature Poets, 1951); George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1953).
2. Between 1951 and 1954, Carter published four books of poems, culminating in his most highly regarded collection, *Poems of Resistance* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1954). Lamming published four novels and the classic collection of autobiographical, historical, critical, and philosophical essays, *The Pleasures of Exile* (London: M. Joseph, 1960), between 1953 and 1960.
3. After his "Poems of Shape and Motion" appeared in *Kyk-Over-Al* in 1955, Carter took a hiatus from creative writing until 1961; during the 1960s, he published two sequences of poems, *Conversations* in the journal *Kyk Over-Al* (1961) and *Jail Me Quickly* in the journal *New World Fortnightly* (1963), and in the 1970s, he published *Poems of Succession* (London: New Beacon Books, 1977), a compilation of his earlier poetry as well as some new poems. Lamming, meanwhile, published no new novels from 1960 to 1971, at which point he published his final two works, *Water with Berries* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971) and *Natives of My Person* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971).
4. In a pair of essays written during the 1950s and 1960s about exile and West Indian writing, Kamau Brathwaite typifies this view, that "no novelist, no writer—no artist—can maintain a meaningful flow of work without reference to his society and its tradition." These early essays by Brathwaite, "Sir Galahad and the Islands" and "Roots," along with statements by the writers themselves, probably made this the established, common-sense view of the effect of exile on the writer. Brathwaite cites a number of the writers, including Lamming, to support his position. Writing in 1963, Brathwaite quotes Selvon as another source: "I badly needed this school," *The Trinidad Guardian* reports Samuel Selvon as saying on his return recently to Trinidad. "I do not think that I could have written another book set in the West Indies without coming back to live among my people again." Of course, while Selvon did return to Trinidad during the 1960s, the return was short-lived; he relocated to London, where he lived until 1978, before moving to Canada, where he lived until his death in 1994. During the last two decades of his life in exile, after Lamming had stopped publishing fiction altogether, Selvon continued to publish four new novels, a collection of essays, and a number of plays. Kamau Brathwaite, "Roots," in *Roots* (1963; reprint, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 37, 33.
5. Gemma Robinson, "'If freedom writes no happier alphabet': Martin Carter and Poetic Silence," *Small Axe* 15, no. 1 (2004): 44, 53. Robinson begins by posing the same question I ask here: why did Carter move, in Gordon Rohlehr's words, "from rhetoric to reticence"? Her readings of Carter's poetry of the 1960s, *Conversations* and *Jail Me Quickly*, make a major contribution to answering this question, although the answer remains open at the end of her article.

at opposite ends of the field of possibilities available to Caribbean writers—to stay or to go—and both paths appear equally futile. Yet Caribbean writers, both at home and abroad, do continue to write; looking solely at their location thus inadequately explains the trajectories of Lamming and Carter.<sup>6</sup> Instead of focusing on their geographic locale, I will examine the many affinities between Lamming and Carter in framing their literary projects.

I will argue that the passage from colonialism to independence, and its impact on the Caribbean literary field during these years, challenged politically committed writers like Lamming and Carter with a postcolonial world to which their literary discourse could not entirely adapt.<sup>7</sup> During the colonial period, a particular configuration of literature and politics became privileged, in which literature derived its authority, its occasion for speaking, by positioning itself as the cultural equivalent of the anticolonial movements throughout the region. The social, political, and economic upheaval of the end of the colonial period—decolonization in the British islands, the Cuban Revolution, changes in status in the French islands and Puerto Rico, the intensifying penetration of North American culture in the form of audio and visual media, the opening up of the Caribbean public sphere to more black and female voices than ever before, urbanization and massive migrations from the country to the city—all worked to undermine the configuration of power and authority that had supported the literary field during the colonial period. As colonialism gave way to postcoloniality, Lamming and Carter moved away from literature and into more explicitly political roles, giving public lectures, writing speeches for political leaders, and in Carter's case, even occupying ministerial positions.<sup>8</sup> No longer able to fuse the political and the literary, both men appear to move away from the literary in order to pursue politics through other means.

6. Extended exile seems to have had no negative effect on many of Lamming and Carter's generation, who continued to publish extensively after they had stopped: Sam Selvon, V. S. Naipaul, Austin Clarke, and Wilson Harris all have written prolifically into the 1990s and beyond during their residences in London and Canada; and exile proved equally productive for slightly older writers like Edgar Mittelholzer and Jean Rhys, as well as younger writers like Caryl Phillips, Joan Riley, and Jamaica Kincaid.
7. Lamming describes this disillusionment in a recent interview in *Small Axe*: "There is a period when (I see it now as almost an innocence in a way) I believed—and I think this was shared by certain people of my generation—that the writers, the artists, were actually creating something new." He also concedes that "at some stage I had come to feel that if I had anything of relevance and value to say that could be immediately effective in however minimal a way, it would be more effectively done by that statement, by that lecture-form, than by the novel-form." See David Scott, "The Sovereignty of the Imagination: An Interview with George Lamming," *Small Axe*, no. 12 (September 2002): 161, 198.
8. In the same interview, Lamming details how as his literary activity slowed, he became more involved in political activities from the 1960s forward, particularly the Grenada Revolution, organizing conferences and writing speeches for Maurice Bishop. Much of this work appears in his two collections of *Conversations*. Carter, who like Lamming became a prolific public lecturer during the 1960s and 1970s, acted as Guyana's minister of information from 1967 to 1970 before resigning in protest of Forbes Burnham's increasingly oppressive methods. See the published version of the lecture "A Free Community of Valid Persons," in which Carter outlines his grievances against Burnham's government in: Martin Carter, "A Free Community of Valid Persons," *Kyk-Over-Al* 44 (May 1993): 30–32.

Lamming lays out his vision of the Caribbean writer most forcefully in his 1960 collection of essays, *The Pleasures of Exile*. The collection features ten essays Lamming wrote during the 1950s while he was in residence in England. For the most part, the book is a description of the old order—the institutions of the British literary field such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Institute of Contemporary Arts—along with prescriptions for how the Caribbean writer can function within that field to find an occasion for speaking.<sup>9</sup> Roughly the first half of *The Pleasures of Exile* delineates the structures of this field, particularly in the two pivotal essays “The Occasion for Speaking” and “Ways of Seeing,” both of which have become canonical essays of Caribbean and postcolonial thought.<sup>10</sup> These essays explain the conditions that lead the West Indian writer to seek consecration in England. While a great deal of significant criticism has been written about *The Pleasures of Exile*, nearly all of this criticism focuses exclusively on Lamming’s descriptions of the anticolonial Caribbean literary field, in his discussions of the three intersecting figures of Caliban, C. L. R. James, and Toussaint L’Ouverture.<sup>11</sup> What these critics have largely ignored is the ways in which *The Pleasures of Exile* begins to explore another set of questions entirely. The role of the anticolonial writer, according to Lamming, is to rewrite cultural narratives such as *The Tempest* which have been the basis for political and economic exploitation; but if,

9. The BBC’s *Caribbean Voices* program and Heinemann’s Caribbean Writers Series are just two of the British institutions that supported and consecrated the same writers, aligning themselves with anticolonial movements during the 1950s. Although the role of these institutions was often downplayed by the writers themselves, recent scholarship is reconstructing this important aspect of Caribbean literary history. For an overview of the origins of Heinemann’s interest in African and Caribbean writing, see Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 2001). For more on the crucial importance of the *Caribbean Voices* program for pre-independence Caribbean writing, see Rhonda Cobham, “The Caribbean Voices programme and the Development of West Indian Short Story Fiction: 1945–1958,” in *The Story Must Be Told: Short Narrative Prose in the New English Literatures*, ed. Peter Stummer (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1986); Glyne Griffith, “Deconstructing Nationalisms: Henry Swanzy, *Caribbean Voices* and the Development of West Indian Literature,” *Small Axe*, no. 10 (September 2001): 1–20; and Phillip Nanton, “What Does Mr. Swanzy Want? Shaping or Reflecting? An Assessment of Henry Swanzy’s Contribution to the Development of Caribbean Literature,” *Kunapipi* 20, no. 1 (1998): 11–20.
10. For example, “The Occasion for Speaking” is the essay chosen to begin the anthology *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 1995).
11. For example, see the introductions to Supriya Nair’s *Caliban’s Curse* and A. J. Simoes da Silva’s *The Luxury of Nationalist Despair*, the chapter “Autobiographical Frameworks and Linked Discourses: George Lamming’s *The Pleasures of Exile* and C. L. R. James’s *Beyond a Boundary*” in Sandra Pouchet Paquet’s *Caribbean Autobiography*, or the essays “Reading From Elsewhere” by Peter Hulme and “Caribbean and African Appropriations of *The Tempest*” by Rob Nixon. All of these critics center their discussion of *The Pleasures of Exile* almost entirely around Lamming’s rereading of *The Tempest*. Supriya Nair, *Caliban’s Curse: George Lamming and the Revisioning of History* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996); A. J. Simoes da Silva, *The Luxury of Nationalist Despair: George Lamming’s Fiction as Decolonizing Project* (Atlanta: Rodopi, 2000); Sandra Pouchet Paquet, *Caribbean Autobiography: Cultural Self and Self-Representation* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2002); Rob Nixon, “Caribbean and African Appropriations of *The Tempest*,” *Critical Inquiry* 13 (Spring 1987): 557–8; Peter Hulme, “Reading from Elsewhere: George Lamming and the Paradox of Exile,” in *The Tempest and Its Travels*, ed. Peter Hulme and W. Sherman (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 220–35.

as Lamming realizes, Britain is losing its grip as the dominant power in the region and literature is becoming less and less the primary medium of cultural domination, what does that mean for the Caribbean writer?

Lamming describes a field so configured that even while in their native lands, writers “are made to feel a sense of exile by [their] inadequacy and [their] irrelevance of function.”<sup>12</sup> He sees no role for himself in his own society because that society cannot or will not legitimate him. Lamming explains how in the colonies his occupation immediately distances him from the majority of his countrymen and women, who are “either illiterate, or if not had no connection whatever to literature since they were too poor or too tired to read” (40). The literate middle class, who he feels should be his readership, has been “educated, it seemed, for the specific purpose of sneering at anything which grew or was made on native soil” (40). With little local support or prospects of a local readership, the young author looks abroad for potential sites where his writing will be legitimated. He finds that the colonial middle class are not the only people who value only that which has been legitimated by British taste: his choice to emigrate to England begins, he admits, “with the fact of England’s supremacy in taste and judgment” (27). This unequal distribution of capital means that “each exile has not only got to prove his worth to the other, he has to win the approval of Headquarters, meaning in the case of the West Indian writer, England” (24). Only with this outside approval can Lamming hope to reach a wide local audience through the colonial schools or be accepted by the colonial elite with a taste for English cultural goods. Lamming talks about the process of becoming a writer and establishing himself in the English literary field in surprisingly straightforward economic terms. Perhaps because of his own marginality to the cultural field, Lamming understands the process by which he has become a writer as a struggle to have his talents acknowledged by those with the culturally recognized power of consecration. He candidly depicts a literary field in which the authority of aspiring Caribbean writers depends on recognition from British artists and reviewers, and which draws West Indian writers away from their homes to London to make their names.

The central chapters of *The Pleasures of Exile* lay out Lamming’s solution to this situation: rather than relying on England for consecration, the proper source of authority for Caribbean writers is the anticolonial movement in the islands.<sup>13</sup> These chapters tackle Shakespeare’s

12. Lamming, *Pleasures of Exile*, 24. Subsequent references to this work appear parenthetically in the text.

13. Selwyn Cudjoe’s *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* is the most fully developed theorization of the relationship of literary and resistance movements in the Caribbean. He contends that not only are the two activities related, but that they are actually “indistinguishable”: “in a colonial society emerging from political dependence, struggling for national liberation and searching for national identity, the fusion of both processes (politics and literature) is not only indistinguishable, it literally becomes indissoluble. In the extreme or critical stages of

*The Tempest*, and C. L. R. James's *Black Jacobins*, and *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*. In these chapters, Lamming moves between the figure of Caliban, the figure of Toussaint L'Ouverture, and the figure of the Caribbean writer, in particular C. L. R. James, in order to show the three as interchangeable. The chapter in which Lamming gives his textual reading of *The Tempest*, "A Monster, A Child, A Slave," begins with a long epigraph from Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. Césaire is one of the poets Lamming considers a descendant of Caliban who has created an "authoritative . . . new voice" (49). The challenge of Césaire and other Caribbean writers to Europe refutes "the Lie upon which Prospero's confident authority was built" (117), the myth of racial inferiority and benevolent paternalism that facilitated colonialism. More importantly, Césaire, the poet who belonged to the Communist Party, agitated against French colonialism, and became a mayor of Fort de France, brings together the two sides of Caliban whose connection Lamming wants to emphasize: taking over Prospero's library and driving a spike through Prospero's head.

The title of the subsequent chapter, "Caliban Orders History," contains a double meaning that reveals most explicitly Lamming's conflation of the figure of the writer and the revolutionary. The Caliban of this chapter's title is ostensibly Toussaint L'Ouverture. He is the revolutionary hero who managed, through heroic action, to dictate to history the course that it would take. At the same time, Lamming's interpretation of Toussaint is filtered through C. L. R. James's *Black Jacobins*. James, the writer, manages to give structure to Toussaint's story, to order history through narrative. In fact, Lamming posits the Haitian Revolution as a speech act that gave voice to the silenced slaves. He notes that the slaves, as property, "were fed, kennelled, and pushed around as ploughs may be polished, transported, and stacked for safe keeping . . . in the eyes of the owners, they had no language but the labor of their hands" (120). Thus when the revolution came, "a new word had been spoken . . . the ploughs had spoken" (125).

By equating revolution with the act of speaking the slaves' deepest desires for freedom, Lamming forges an indissoluble bond between the West Indian writer and those struggling for decolonization.<sup>14</sup> It is no coincidence that Lamming emphasizes Toussaint's ability to read (125) and write (140), and the advantages these skills gave him in organizing and carrying

national liberation, one becomes *almost analogous* to the other" (emphasis added). Note the slippage here, from the "indissoluble" to the "almost" equivalent relationship between literature and resistance. Selwyn Cudjoe, *Resistance and Caribbean Literature* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1980), 68.

14. In her study of Lamming's novels, Supriya Nair describes his literary project in terms of its relationship to social movements: "Since, in Lamming's view, the Caribbean novel has had a major role to play in giving voice to the peasant struggles that overset the predicted trajectory of dominant, that is, Western history (except in a Marxist formulation) and that were primarily responsible for challenging colonial dominance, it is not surprising that he gives precedence to the novelist over the historian." Nair, *Caliban's Curse*, 3.

out his revolution. The chapter ends by declaring C. L. R. James, Toussaint's most eloquent chronicler, as appropriate inheritor of Toussaint's lineage of Caribbean heroism: "It is wonderful that this epic of Toussaint's glory and his dying should have been rendered by C. L. R. James, one of the most energetic minds of our time, a neighbour of Toussaint's island, a heart and desire entirely within the tradition of Toussaint himself" (150). Lamming thus points to a tradition of struggle and armed resistance from which Caribbean writers may seek an alternative authority from the British literary field. In this way, Lamming establishes an indisputably authoritative position for writers in Caribbean society as privileged participants in the anticolonial struggles that defined the time period in which *The Pleasures of Exile* was written.

Although the main thrust of *The Pleasures of Exile* is to offer an alternative source of authority for Caribbean writers trapped in the British literary field, at the same time, Lamming shows an awareness that the established order is shifting and that the new technological and political order may challenge the Caribbean writer's admittedly constrained occasion to speak. Allusions to the new order occur marginally throughout the text, especially in the short, "interlude" chapters. For example, between the two "major" chapters, "The Occasion for Speaking" and "A Way of Seeing," Lamming inserts the short "Evidence and Example," a five-page chapter in which he describes the funeral of George VI. Elsewhere, appended to the end of "The African Presence," appears a short narrative of Lamming's travels within the United States. As mentioned before, these episodes are universally ignored in critical discussion of *The Pleasures of Exile*, probably because of their apparently anomalous and minor status within the overall book, appearing as short and cryptic supplementary material. Yet these marginal moments provide the sharpest insight into the emergence of a postcolonial economic, cultural, and intellectual system, and begin to reveal the limits of Lamming's discourse in assimilating this new order.

By continuing to value British taste over the North American market, Lamming betrays an attitude towards this new order that is deeply ambivalent. In "The Occasion for Speaking," Lamming mentions the United States as a site where a writer might make his reputation, only to dismiss this possibility immediately, asserting that "the book had had an important critical press in England; its reputation here was substantial; so it could make no difference what America thought" (26). The only capital that America can provide is economic, not cultural: "It was money I was thinking of to the exclusion of the book's critical reputation in America" (26). Lamming still consciously orients his writing towards a literary field based on English taste rather than the autonomy of the American market. When he later travels to New York as a Guggenheim fellow, Lamming is recipient of American rather than British patronage. As a fellow American in the broadest sense, Lamming identifies with the United States ("since

the Caribbean was only next door,” he writes, “this World was, in a sense, mine” [188]); as a native of one of the United States’ neighbors, he has witnessed firsthand the passage of domination in the region from Europe to North America; and as a black man, he admits to a fascination with Harlem and black America. All of these contradictory feelings towards the United States define the unevenly emerging field of Caribbean literature during the second half of the twentieth century, as writers come to terms with their ambivalent relationship to the passing of power from Britain to the United States.

In New York, Lamming for the first time describes meeting a female Caliban, an encounter that encodes the ways in which the entire experience of the United States upsets his artistic equilibrium and challenges his discursive certainty. He narrates this encounter very differently from the style he uses to describe his London experiences, as if the woman’s presence in the narrative disrupts his most well-established devices. During the sections in England, Lamming recounts anecdotes about Sam Selvon, Kingsley Amis, T. S. Eliot, Edgar Mittelholzer, and others he identifies by name. By contrast, he never names the Trinidadian novelist he meets in Harlem; she is called only “R.” Furthermore, while he rarely wonders whether he, Selvon, and their cohorts in England have been changed by their time abroad, he immediately observes of R. that “America had obviously taught her not to care too much if she was wrong” (191). He goes on to make a number of other observations about the effect America has had on her, comments that have no equivalent in his discussions of writers in England. It is impossible to separate whether his different approach owes to her gender or her location, both of which make her an anomaly to Lamming. If the reader assumes that these men in England have held tight to their West Indian identity, the experience of the United States appears more challenging to this essence. Furthermore, Lamming’s decision to make a woman representative of the experience of West Indians working in the North American literary field has certain implications about what he sees as the feminization of the role of the writer in this new place.

Despite the emphasis on her difference, Lamming acknowledges that R. is “a Caliban” (191) and a writer like himself. Unlike him, though, she “was a teacher” and “had left Manhattan and gone to live way out in White Plains because a couple had asked her to take care of their dog” (192). She is working on a novel, she moves in the social circles of the “upper crust of Harlem” (190), but she does not enjoy the same privileges to which Lamming is accustomed. She finds that the US literary field does not nourish the writer in the same way that London does. By using a female example to describe the process by which he comes to consciousness of changing attitudes towards writers, Lamming again emphasizes the (im)possibility of writing as a masculine and manly activity: as a writer in the United States, he mentions, “I was not seen as a professional *man* . . . ambitious and bright, perhaps, but

poor” (196, emphasis added). West Indian writing in the United States appears to be a more womanly activity than in England; as the emerging center for the Caribbean cultural field, the United States threatens the Caribbean writer with a new form of emasculation via the marketplace.<sup>15</sup>

Lamming identifies postmodern technologies and media as primary threats to the place of the writer in this new public sphere. Writers in the late nineteenth century found themselves forced to rethink the writer’s place in the face of the commercialism of the newspaper and the novel; Lamming in the 1950s is confronted with the explosion of more spectral media, such as the radio.<sup>16</sup> A major part of Lamming’s anticolonial cultural project involved appropriating and rewriting the British literary canon, in the form of Shakespeare; what role, if any, can this strategy serve if the written word is no longer the primary vehicle of cultural imperialism? Radio has become the dominant medium of Lamming’s age, and a new vehicle of cultural domination:

Prospero may have thrown away his Book; but the art of Radio will rescue his weariness from despair; immortalise his absence; remind us that poetry is a way of listening . . . the art of Radio will rescue his voice from the purgatory of the Ocean which is and may always be a neighbour to eternity. (14–15)

Lamming observes that even while radio is Prospero’s newest weapon, it at the same time heralds a new form of summoning the dead, a potential way of literally giving voice to the illiterate and disenfranchised. For now, radio is the domain of Prospero; but if the radio can rescue Prospero’s voice from oblivion, perhaps it can be appropriated by Caliban.

The BBC program *Caribbean Voices* was Caliban’s attempt at making use of the radio waves. While located in London, *Caribbean Voices* broadcast back to the islands the voices of various West Indian writers reading their own poetry and prose, as well as some of the work that was being written by those still in the islands. Lamming remarks on the irony that the

15. Belinda Edmondson divides her study of Caribbean narrative into two sections, first discussing male authors in exile, then female writers classified as migrants. While both groups tended to write from outside the region, Edmondson notes the very different forms of cultural capital each mobilizes: “If male authors base their literary authority on intellectual labor—the project of writing the Caribbean into literary existence—then the physical labor so often associated with migrant women can also be re-imaged as a basis for women’s literary authority.” Belinda Edmondson, *Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority, and Women’s Writing in Caribbean Narrative* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 6. Lamming’s observations about R. evoke this gendered division of labor in *The Pleasures of Exile*, and suggest a periodization that coincides with what Edmondson finds: the men discussed in *Making Men* come almost entirely from the generation of the 1950s and 1960s; the women who make up the second half of this study are exactly those writers who challenged the discursive monopoly of that previous generation and redefined Caribbean literature’s understanding of the political.
16. Julio Ramos discusses the effect of the rise of the newspaper on Latin American literature in *Divergent Modernities: Culture and Politics in Nineteenth Century Latin America*, trans. John D. Blanco (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001).

radio thus became simultaneously the vehicle for commerce, administration, and culture in the Caribbean: “In an island where local radio is an incestuous concubinage between commerce and official administration, these writers would look forward to that Sunday evening at half-past seven” (65). This description foreshadows the ways in which the democratization of the public sphere would coincide with the growth of the culture industry, in order to police the new medium.

The idea that radio might be the new vehicle for Caribbean literature concerns Lamming’s traditional sentiments, considering the medium’s extreme commercialism. Reflecting on radio’s privileged form of communicating information, the news, Lamming insists on his preference for literary expression:

News demands a mechanical neutrality of tone whether the voice is giving messages about dying or delight. I was a poet in those days; it is impossible for a poet to evoke sympathy from people who use words as a way of measuring time; and time as the measure of how much money. (51)

Literature here appears out of step with an audience with different values. The event that sparks these reflections, not coincidentally, is Lamming’s assignment covering the funeral of George VI for the BBC. Attending the ceremony, Lamming observes: “We were witnessing, in the present, the resurrection of a way of behaving” (51). The funeral evokes a residual structure of feeling, a form of mourning steeped in tradition, almost out of place in the present. The news can hardly muster the proper tone for this somber event; only literary language can describe it with the proper gravity and affect. Both literature and the news convey information, but Lamming suggests that each corresponds to a different mode of structuring experience.

If this moment seems to cast literature as left over from a bygone era, Lamming’s crisis when confronted with the ubiquity of British radio only foreshadows the confrontation with postmodernization, which becomes most heightened in his visit to New York. As a novelist and thus a practitioner of high culture, Lamming is overwhelmed by both the shock of the crowd, and the imposing threat of the architecture and technology of the United States. Listening to American radio, he immediately recognizes its difference from the reliable elitism of British radio: “The BBC became as remote as the Middle Ages, and no less secure” (189). While British newscasts attempt to strike a tone of decorum, in deference to a set of admittedly bygone traditional values associated with nobility and imperial greatness, the newscasts Lamming hears in New York stun him with their haphazard juxtaposition of politics, culture, and advertising. “One had to learn how to take these items of news seriously,” (189) Lamming remarks. What he cannot entirely decipher is whether this new culture industry is evidence of mass participation, or mass deception. As he listens to an advertisement for a film about the assassination of a president, he remembers his own experience passing through customs to enter the country. Thinking back on that event, he wonders how a country confident enough

to allow the production of such potentially subversive cultural forms, can be so paranoid about harmless immigrants like himself. “Either [the American government] was too secure to meddle with strangers, or it was much too insecure to take any risks” (190), he concludes. He is never able to decide whether allowing a film to be made about the assassination of a president shows the revolutionary and subversive potential of the medium, or only proves how secure the system must be to allow such subject matter.

As a *flâneur* in the city, Lamming begins to wonder whether such a world of instantaneity makes the writer superfluous. The city-space stands as testament to the possibilities of “collective enterprise” (188) and the “triumph of energy over objects” (189); the streets and buildings prove that mankind can order history and landscape. At the same time, the experience of the city also upsets Lamming’s poetic sensibility. What can be the role of the writer in such a fast-paced and technologically driven world? When Lamming walks the streets of Manhattan, he can scarcely imagine a role for literature in the shadow of this world. He writes that “literature seemed irrelevant beside the eloquence of those sky-scrapers” (188). The sublimity and shock of New York’s urban space preempt Lamming’s ability to contemplate the city: “I had not time to think who or what civilisation had built them” (188). In the face of the novelty of his experience in New York, Lamming’s usually fluid essayistic style degenerates into “notes which I made as a way of keeping my writing hand at work” (204). This fragmentary form seems to be the only way he can accommodate the new experiences of American postmodernity. This experience points towards an explanation for Lamming’s own uncertainty, writing in 1960, as to how he will adapt to the new world: “I am still young by ordinary standards (thirty-two, to be exact), but already I feel that I have had it (as a writer) where the British Caribbean is concerned. I have lost my place, or my place has deserted me” (50). These words foretold the gradual decline in Lamming’s literary output, until he stopped publishing fiction completely in 1971.

At almost exactly the same time that Lamming was achieving fame and consecration in London, Martin Carter found himself imprisoned by the British colonial government in Guyana, as a result of his participation in Cheddi Jagan’s People’s Progressive Party (PPP). After the April 1953 election brought the PPP to power, British military forces invaded the country, suspended the constitution that had granted the colony some autonomy, and overturned Jagan’s government. Many of the leaders of the PPP, including Carter, were jailed for demonstrating against the British invasion. Carter spent three months imprisoned at the US Atkinson Air Force Base.

During and immediately after this incarceration, Carter authored his best known collection, *Poems of Resistance*, a volume that explores the West Indian writer’s role in the

decolonization movement and the possibility of the writer of representing the Caribbean folk. Lamming's novels of the 1950s were all published to great acclaim by the London publishing house of Michael Joseph, which around the same time was publishing fiction by Doris Lessing and Joyce Cary, among others. *Poems of Resistance* was the only collection Carter managed to have published in England during this time period. Even this book faced limited distribution; the British colonial government initially banned the *Poems of Resistance* in Guyana for fear of its subversiveness, and the book was eventually published in London by the press Lawrence and Wishart in 1954, whose other titles featured works by Karl Marx and Ho Chi Minh. In this section, I will place this collection within the context of Carter's career, and show how his vision of poetry develops from his earliest collections, until, increasingly uncertain of how the poet might speak with authority about a postcolonial Guyana being torn apart by Forbes Burnham's authoritarian regime, Carter stopped publishing poetry in 1980.

Critics and social activists alike have read Carter's poetry as an extension of his dramatic actions in the anticolonial movement. Carter's early public career included an unsuccessful run for political office in 1953, a position in the executive committee of the PPP, and a role on the editorial board of *Thunder*, the PPP's primary publication. His activism made him an attractive spokesman for international Leftist causes as well; one critic notes that "a few of those early poems . . . have become classics of socialist literature, translated into several Eastern European and Asian languages," and it is probably no coincidence that just after Carter's incarceration in Guyana, a major international socialist press was convinced to sponsor the only poetry collection of Carter's to be published in England until his 1977 retrospective.<sup>17</sup>

It has always been tempting to read Carter's poetry as one with his political praxis. Eusi Kwayana, one of the PPP activists jailed with Carter during 1953 and author of the foreword to the *Poems of Resistance* under the name Sydney King, admires the "purity of passion" of Carter's first collection.<sup>18</sup> Kwayana privileges action as the only ethical response to colonialism: "In a colony there is no room for 'intellectuals.' Everyone must be an activist."<sup>19</sup> Carter's activities as a poet must be made to adhere to this project of struggle: Kwayana thus argues that "*The Hill of Fire Glows Red* did at the level of art what the wage earners were doing in little patches, resuming the struggles of the early quarter of the century."<sup>20</sup> Carter's poetry surely promotes this reading of the poet, as the figure who does in his art what the people do in the streets; yet from the beginning, Carter harbors profound doubts about literature's ability to participate in the public sphere.

17. Stewart Brown, ed., *All Are Involved: The Art of Martin Carter* (London: Peepal Tree Press, 2000), 7.

18. Eusi Kwayana, "The Politics of the Heart," *Anales del Caribe* 4/5 (1984–5), 370.

19. Sydney King, "Foreword to Poems of Resistance from British Guiana," in Brown, ed., *All Are Involved*, 97.

20. Kwayana, "The Politics of the Heart," 369.

In his 1951 collection, *The Hill of Fire Glows Red*, Carter lays out the most important aspects of his project in two of his earliest published poems, “Looking at Your Hands” and “Listening to the Land.” “Looking at Your Hands” insists on action: the poet avers “I will not still my voice,” “I look for fire,” and that “I do not sleep to dream, but dream to change the world.”<sup>21</sup> The poet’s voice and the cleansing fire of revolution come together as equally necessary for social change. The relationship between writing and action is dialectical; poetry is nourished by action, as action takes its impetus from poetry. His hunger to change the world comes from his knowledge of the injustice of starvation and poverty, a knowledge he acquires:

from books my dear friend  
of men dreaming and living  
and hungering in a room without light. (14)

Carter understands his poetry as an effort to further this knowledge, to press other hands into the collective action necessary for social change. A number of Carter’s subsequent *Poems of Resistance* will take up the project of creating the grounds for action. In “I Clench My Fist,” for example, the poet proclaims “Although you point your gun straight at my heart / I clench my fist above my head; I sing my song of FREEDOM!” (41). The poet, singing the song of freedom, is the modernist poet-warrior. As Carter explains in “I Am No Soldier,” “I am no soldier with a cold gun on my shoulder”; instead, he is armed instead with “my poem” (49).

The poem “Listening to the Land” approaches the poetic project from another side. While “Looking at Your Hands” projects itself into the future, suggesting the effect the poem might have on the world, “Listening to the Land” explores the source from which the poet derives his authority to sing for freedom and to dream of changing the world.

I bent down  
kneeling on my knee  
And pressed my ear to listen to the land.  
. . . I bent down  
listening to the land  
and all I heard was tongueless whispering  
as if some buried slave wanted to speak again. (15)

The poet, listening to the land, knows that the buried slave has something to tell him, but cannot understand what it is. Carter depicts this process of listening as integral to understanding the past and changing the future.

“Listening to the Land” ends by identifying these submerged whispers of the land with the whispers of the past, the deceased souls that Lamming’s ceremony of the souls conjures to

21. Martin Carter, *Poems of Succession* (London: New Beacon Books, 1977), 14. Subsequent references to this work appear parenthetically in the text.

begin *The Pleasures of Exile*. In “Listening to the Land,” the past is not silent; although the land may be incoherent, the past is not. The buried slave is not waiting to speak, but to speak *again*. The poet cannot quite hear what the slave has to say, but through listening to the land itself, the poet should be able to uncover that voice. The subaltern folk and the land are one, and it is through listening to the land that the poet will find his people’s voice and sing for freedom.

This project depends on the optimism that Carter derives from his participation in the anticolonial movement. In an essay that celebrates the poet’s “optimism” as well as his activism, Kamau Brathwaite speculates on the reasons that Carter’s poetic production may have slowly come to a halt.<sup>22</sup> Although Carter conceives the poet deriving authority from the folk and the land, Brathwaite suggests that his project fails because “Carter’s work has dealt little (directly) with his landscape: physical and socio-cultural. In formal terms, there is no nation language (dialect).”<sup>23</sup> Brathwaite, a strong proponent of poetry based on folk voices and oral form, sees Carter as too distanced from the nourishing foundation of African and Amerindian culture, an estrangement that eventually left him disillusioned and frustrated and made his poetry unsustainable. Brathwaite’s own promotion of Rastafarian poets such as Bongo Jerry in his anthology of new West Indian writing is the antidote he offers to literature’s alienation from the people.<sup>24</sup>

In general, Brathwaite is correct in seeing an absence of “nation language” in Carter’s poetry. But contrary to Brathwaite’s suggestion that Carter deals little with landscape, the landscape is a major theme and presence in his poetry.<sup>25</sup> The poems from the 1950s, especially the *Poems of Resistance*, are filled with the noises of the poet listening to the landscape: the muttering sea (31), the crowing cock (35), the groaning of the cruel wind (38), the rumbling cartwheel (37), the throbbing of brazen jazz (40). Throughout these poems, always present in the background is the constant, distant drum of African inheritance: “the beating drum returns and dies away” (35); “invisible drums are beating at my head; / I hear drum drum drum / loud drops of wax falling from time’s black candle” (22). The drumbeat evokes

22. Kamau Brathwaite, “Resistance Poems: The Voice of Martin Carter,” *Caribbean Quarterly* 23 (1977), 7.

23. Brathwaite, “Resistance Poems,” 18. Brathwaite develops his concept of “nation language” most explicitly in the essay “History of the Voice.” Nation language for Brathwaite is “the kind of English spoken by the people who were brought to the Caribbean, not the official English now, but the language of slaves and laborers.” Brathwaite, “History of the Voice,” in *Roots*, 260.

24. I refer to the “New Writing 1970,” issue of the journal *Savacou*, edited by Brathwaite among others. See Laurence Breiner’s discussion of the ideological underpinnings of the anthology in “How to Behave on Paper: The *Savacou* Debate,” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 6, no. 1 (July 1993): 1–10.

25. Four years after this initial essay, “Resistance Poems,” Brathwaite somewhat modifies his position towards Carter’s work. In the 1981 essay “Martin Carter’s Poetry of the Negative Yes,” Brathwaite writes: “This (Guyanese) dialectical perception of self and world in Martin Carter has never been properly appreciated, mainly because he has been popularly (and quite rightly) identified with prison protest, struggle.” Kamau Brathwaite, “Martin Carter’s Poetry of the Negative Yes,” *Caliban* 4, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 1981): 31.

precisely the rhythm whose absence Brathwaite laments, an African and Amerindian rooted symbolism to which Carter appeals throughout his early poetry.

Needless to say, the presence of this symbolism is never obvious or unproblematic. The poet must produce connections to the past that have been severed by colonialism. Beginning with “Not Hands Like Mine,” a poem from *Poems of Resistance*, the later volume redefines its relationship to the project set forth in “Looking At Your Hands.” As the title suggests, the more recent poem is far less certain of its ability to fulfill the task proscribed by the first one. The earlier poem is an impassioned call to other hands to join the struggle for freedom. In “Not Hands Like Mine,” any such call is much less distinct; instead, the only sounds to be heard are “a muttering sea” and “hoarse, groaning tongues,” reminders of the “mute” Carib gods, “nameless and quite forgotten”:

Not hands  
like mine  
these Carib altars knew:  
nameless and quite forgotten are the gods;  
and mute,  
mute and alone . . .  
Here, right at my feet  
my strangled city lies,  
my father’s city and my mother’s heart:  
hoarse, groaning tongues. (31)

The gods have almost been forgotten; only within the poem does any trace of them remain. Rather than foreground the poetic subject, as in “Looking at Your Hands” and “Listening to the Land,” “Not Hands Like Mine” suggests that the poem, not the poet, can record the sounds echoing down from the past.<sup>26</sup> Without the poetic interpreter, though, the sounds of the landscape, of the “strangled city,” are incomprehensible and incoherent groans and cries. The difficulty of Carter’s project will be the necessary presence of the poet as translator for the folk, a presence whose individuality threatens to marginalize and silence the people he wants to represent.<sup>27</sup>

26. Of this technique, Jeffrey Robinson writes: “In the course of *Poems of Succession*, one ceases to be addressed by a recognisable personality or persona (revolutionary or, as in “The Fourth Night of the Hunger Strike” or “I am no Soldier,” ideal sufferer) [but] by the poem itself; in other words, most of the poems after 1955 are statements that generate their own authority instead of deriving it from an implied speaker.” Jeffrey Robinson, “The Root and the Stone: The Rhetoric of Martin Carter’s *Poems of Succession*,” *Journal of West Indian Literature* 1, no. 1 (October 1986): 5. This concept, of a poetry whose authority does not derive from an implied speaker, will be one of the primary sites of contestation in what I am calling the “testimonial movement” in Cuba and Jamaica in the 1960s and 1970s.
27. Carter here anticipates the central tension of Gayatri Spivak’s famous essay “Can the Subaltern Speak”? in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313.

A number of other *Poems of Resistance* explore the noises made by the disenfranchised people themselves, apparent to the poet as he listens to the land. “Cartman of Dayclean” makes explicit the connection between the nourishing sounds of the landscape and the Guyanese subaltern subject. The cartman of the poem, the “hidden man,” makes “bleeding music” out of the rumbling of the iron wheels of his cart:

Now to begin the road:  
 the bleeding music of appellant man  
 starts like a song but fades into a groan . . .  
 His hopes are whitened with grief and pain  
 yet questing man is heavy laden cart  
 whose iron wheels will rumble in the night  
 whose iron wheel will spark against the stone  
 or granite burden of the universe. (37)

This rumble carries the same threat signified by the drums, the threat that the iron wheels will spark the cleansing fire of revolution that appears throughout Carter’s poetry. At the same time that he identifies this threat, the poet simultaneously naturalizes it, containing the cartman within the poem by making him part of his landscape. Just as the whispering slave, trying to speak again, is part of the land and needs the poet as his channel, the “questing man” becomes the rumbling cart, unable to express himself with anything more than a groan and an incoherent song. If, in Lamming’s account of *The Black Jacobins*, revolution is the collective speaking its deepest desire, the cartman of Carter’s poem fails to speak.

Carter’s most critically acclaimed poems, “University of Hunger” and “I come from the nigger yard,” are pivotal parts of his dialectical project of turning the sounds of the Caribbean landscape into poetry, and documenting the process of the people coming to consciousness. Fellow Guyanese poet A. J. Seymour gives these two poems “pride of place among Martin Carter’s poems, because they provide words, like guns, in which he speaks for all colonials everywhere.”<sup>28</sup> As in Lamming’s imaginary, Seymour considers that books play an equal part to guns in the anticolonial struggle. Carter’s words are especially valuable to Seymour because of his ability to speak for those involved in the struggle.

The poem “University of Hunger” begins with the curious and apparently ungrammatical lines “is the university of hunger the wide waste. / is the pilgrimage of man the long march” (34). This structure becomes a recurring theme in the poem:

is the dark ones  
 the half sunken in the land.  
 is they who had no voice in the emptiness

28. A. J. Seymour, “A Commentary on Two Poems,” in Brown, ed., *All are Involved*, 103.

in the unbelievable  
 in the shadowless.  
 . . .  
 is the torture of sunset in purple bandages  
 is the powder of fire spread like dust in the twilight  
 is the water melodies of white foam on wrinkled sand. (34–35)

Although the syntax of these lines does not necessarily contradict Brathwaite's assertion that Carter's poetry is devoid of "nation language," it certainly adds a more nuanced picture of the poet's relationship to non-standard Caribbean English. These lines mark one of Carter's most obvious assaults on grammatical and poetic language.<sup>29</sup>

The poem pursues the project of exploring the "formation" of "the collective mind of a people" alongside the poet's close attention to the sounds of the land. The poet records the "sea sound of the eyeless flitting bat," "the cruel wind blowing," "the shell blow and the iron clang" (35) of the plantation. These sounds create a claustrophobic world, dark and hopeless. But towards the end of the poem, "the beating drum returns and dies away . . . the cocks of dawn stand up and crow like bugles" (35). In the final verse of the poem, when the shell blows, it marks the people's coming to consciousness. Driven by the sounds of the distant drum and the crowing cock, the poem ends with the people marching out of oblivion and into the poem.

This march is the process by which those with "no voice" (34) make themselves heard. Yet who are the subjects to whom I have been referring as "the people"?<sup>30</sup> The first lines of the poem suggest an absent subject. When the subject of "University of Hunger" appears, it is named as "they." The poem has no first person narration, and the poem records no direct or indirect speech whatsoever. Despite the incorporation of non-standard language in the poem, the same formula appears as in previous poems, where the people appear as the mute landscape: "They come treading in the hoofmarks of the mule," "they come like sea birds" (34). Carter depicts the people who are marching into consciousness as silent and downtrodden; their stirring can only be represented by the poet, not enacted within the poem by the marching men themselves.

29. Barbara Lalla, in a rigorous close reading of "University of Hunger," argues that while these lines may not be a direct transcription of West Indian spoken Creole, they function as a way "to remind readers of the code they represent." Barbara Lalla, "Conceptual Perspectives on Time and Timelessness in Martin Carter's 'University of Hunger,'" in Brown, ed., *All are Involved*, 107.

30. A. J. Seymour argues that the subjects of this poem are "rural, disheartened men who have little, who are hungry, who are marching to the capital city in their multitudes to demand in confrontation some redress. . . . All they have is their hunger and deprivation, but they are men." Seymour, "A Commentary on Two Poems," 105. While the marchers are not named, Seymour's insistence that "they are men" is confirmed in the last line of "University of Hunger": "O long is the march of men and long is the life / and wide is the span" (*Poems of Succession*, 35).

One of Carter's most celebrated poems, "I come from the nigger yard," attempts to resolve this paradox of representation. The poem is narrated by a persona who is presumably one of the brethren of the silenced and oppressed marchers. The poem is narrated in past tense, meaning that the "come" of the first line "I come from the nigger yard of yesterday" can either be read as standard English or Creole. The narrator locates himself as a peripheral man, confined to the shadows of the nigger yard. The first three stanzas describe how he has leapt, crept, searched, and walked into a world that refuses to acknowledge him. These stanzas paint the dark visual landscape of the narrator's world, the "dark hut in the shadow," the "aching floor on which I crept," the "nigger yard of yesterday" (38).

The fourth stanza acts as a pivot between the discouraging past of the first section and the fiery promise of the rest of the poem. The first three stanzas emphasize the isolated suffering of the narrator in a barren land, as he has trudged towards what he still hopes will be "the wide streets of to-morrow." In the fourth stanza, we hear the distant echoes of a community:

And there was always sad music somewhere in the land  
like a bugle and a drum between the houses  
voices of women singing far away  
pauses of silence, then a flood of sound. (38)

The music, like the poem, may not be bright and cheerful, but the flood of sounds from the bugle, the drum, and the singing women have guided the narrator forward. It is through this community and these sounds that he was "born again stubborn and fierce / screaming in a slum," finding his voice "screaming with hunger, angry with life and men" (39).

In this world, where speech was restricted to "judges full of scorn / priests and parsons fooling gods with words," the man from the nigger yard was only "a dog tangled in rags"; like the dog, he had a voice, but could not use it to form words to describe his condition. The latter sections project the poem as the product of a yet unseen future, when the angry screams will have been turned into articulate poetic language. The conditions for this transformation are a time "when the whole world turns upside down" (38):

It was pain lasting from hours to months to years  
weaving a pattern telling a tale leaving a mark  
on the face and the brow.  
Until there came the iron days cast in a foundry  
Where men make hammers things that cannot break  
and anvils heavy hard and cold like ice. (39)

This revolutionary resolve, hard and heavy and unbreakable, makes it possible for this man from the nigger yard to speak his pain. Carter imagines a world in which the privilege that allows him to write poetry will be extended to the rest of society.

These poems show the poet trying to accommodate and transcribe the sounds of a subjugated population coming to consciousness. Another series of poems from *Poems of Resistance* takes an overtly scribal form. These poems, “Letter 1,” “Letter 2,” “Letter 3,” and “On the Fourth Night of the Hunger Strike,” are written as though from in prison; it is as if the space that confines the poet’s body demands the circumscribed epistolary form. Like the more orally infused poems, the prison letters are filled with the voiceless noises of Carter’s surroundings. In the poems from outside the prison, the noises of the landscape and the people give the poet life and hope; within the prison, the noises threaten him and his poetic project. As he listens to the crash of the rifle, “the stamp of feet,” and the “tramp of a soldier” (47), he realizes that these sounds make it impossible for him to listen to the land and the people. The skyscraper and the radio made Lamming wonder if literature had become irrelevant; Carter finds himself trying to write while confronted by the authoritarian side of that technology, the prison. He understands his imprisonment to be not just about disciplining his body, but also his ears: “This is all they want me to hear” (47), he realizes; the system of power wants him to hear only the martial sounds of order rather than the chaotic stirrings of the people.

During his imprisonment, the moment when the poet most clearly shows his involvement in the cause, the isolated poetic subject is also most starkly separated from his people:

This is what they do with me  
 Put me in prison, hide me away  
 cut off the world, cut out the sun  
 darken the land, blacken the flower  
 stifle my breath and hope that I die! (44)

Unlike many of his other poems, a strong first person apparently identifiable as the poet himself narrates each of these prison letters, and stands at a remove from the collective masses outside the prison walls. His thoughts are especially personal: he considers himself and his individual plight, and wonders about his son and his wife. He derives strength and hope as much from the visit from his wife and the letter from a comrade as from the thought of the struggle. In prison, the poet most readily sees that even at the moment of his deepest commitment, his poetic project will always separate him from his people.

Carter’s *Poems of Shape and Motion*, written just after the *Poems of Resistance*, show the poet attempting to regain the “purity of passion” which had allowed him to fuse his earlier poetry with collective action. “I was wondering if I could shape this passion / just as I wanted in solid fire,” the poem begins; “I was wondering if I could make myself nothing but fire, pure and incorruptible” (55), it continues. This collection marks a transition for Carter, away from the fiery optimism of the early poetry. Completely uncertain of himself, he can only wonder if his project, of shaping his passion into the poetry that can spark a revolution, can be fulfilled.

The poet cannot allow himself to be consumed by his subject; as long as his authority depends on his ability to translate for the silenced subaltern, he will not be one with them. True purity, true oneness, betrays the poet's privilege as truth speaker, as Carter shows in the first poem of 1961's *Conversations*, "Groaning in the Wilderness":

Speaking with one on a pavement in the city  
 I watched the greedy mouth, the cunning eye  
 I reeled and nearly fell in frantic terror  
 seeing a human turn into a dog.  
 Recovering, I studied this illusion  
 and made a stupid effort to be strong:  
 I nodded and agreed and listened close.  
 But when I tried to utter words—I barked! (62)

In the earlier poems, this process of listening and trying to imitate the "hardly human voices" (62) of the folk provided the poet with his songs of freedom. In "Groaning in the Wilderness," he so accurately ventriloquizes these voices that he reproduces an animalistic yelp of suffering. Without some degree of reflection and poetic distance from experience, the poet cannot produce a comprehensible discourse.

It is in this poetry of the early 1960s, collected in *Conversations* and *Jail Me Quickly*, that Carter shows his discourse breaking down as he loses faith in his earlier poetic mission. The sounds of the landscape and the people that appeared in the earlier poetry fade out; even the poem "Voices" is completely silent. One poem's title asks "What Can a Man Do More?" (72). The answer appears to be nothing. In the poem "They say I am," he acknowledges the many demands made on him: "They say I am a poet write for them" (61). By this point in his career, he no longer believes that he can be the people's poet, he who "can articulate for them their innermost longings."<sup>31</sup> He replies "a poet cannot write for those who ask / hardly himself even, except he lies." The poem continues:

Poems are written either for the dying  
 or the unborn, no matter what we say.  
 That does not mean his audience lies remote  
 inside a womb or some cold bed of agony.  
 It only means that we who want true poems  
 must all be born again, and die to do so. (61)

Carter clearly identifies what needs to occur for the people to have a voice in making poetry: they must have a voice in all other aspects of their lives, and for that to happen; they must be born again into a new world. This is the world that many, including Carter, hoped

31. Jan Carew, "Tribute to Martin Carter, 1921–1998," *Race and Class* 40, no. 1 (1998): 107.

decolonization would inaugurate. While the young Carter may have believed it his duty to listen to the folk and give them voice in his poetry, at this stage his poetry indicates that it is up to the people to speak for themselves. He can no longer convince himself of his role as a spokesman for his people, and the heroic poet of resistance of the 1950s gradually fades from the Caribbean literary scene.

Both Lamming and Carter express hope in the promise of independence, the end of colonialism, and the beginning of a better world. The years that follow Lamming's final novel would be characterized around the Caribbean by the betrayal of that promise, whether in the increasing totalitarianism of Forbes Burnham in Guyana, the political war in Jamaica between supporters of Michael Manley and Edward Seaga, the increasing alienation of intellectuals in Fidel Castro's Cuba and Eric Williams's Trinidad and Tobago, or the failure of Maurice Bishop's Grenadian experiment. The 1970s ended with disillusionment and disenfranchisement for intellectuals throughout the region, punctuated by the political murders of historian Walter Rodney in 1980 in Guyana, of Puerto Rican novelist Pedro Juan Soto's son in Cerro Maravilla in 1978, and of poet Mikey Smith in Jamaica in 1983. The position of the Caribbean writer after independence had not been as precarious since the times of slavery; literature had been exiled violently from the Caribbean political sphere.

As Caribbean postcoloniality unfolds, Carter's poetry moves away from the forceful declarations of his earliest work to an ultimate loss of faith in the ability of literature to intervene in the public sphere. Like Carter's poetry, Lamming's essays in *The Pleasures of Exile* stand precisely at the hinge between two worlds, simultaneously averring the writer's commitment to the struggle against colonialism, while expressing anxiety about what the coming of North American dominance will mean in the postcolonial era. Lamming and Carter, two of the figures who defined the Caribbean literary field and the role of the Caribbean writer during the 1950s, found that the upheavals of decolonization brought about changes that shattered their conception of literature and politics. At the same time, both Lamming and Carter hint at some of the new possibilities opened up by postcoloniality; their own reluctance to invest literature with all of their utopian impulses comes in some degree from the realization that women and "the folk" no longer need the professional writer to represent them. Increasing access to literacy and popular culture meant that the anticolonial literary field was being displaced by other public spheres; movements such as dub poetry, the Sistren Theatre Collective, or the *testimonio* became the most explicitly literary expressions of this new energy. Confronted by this new world, Lamming and Carter, the great anticolonial writers, were unable to adapt their literary discourse, and were forced to find new methods for expressing their political aspirations.