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Utopia, Dystopia, and Caribbean Heterotopia: Writing/Reading the Small Island

This essay explores the concepts utopia, dystopia, and heterotopia in relation to literary representations of Barbados, a small coral island of 166 square miles, located east of the archipelago which separates the western edge of the Atlantic Ocean from the Caribbean Sea.¹ Barbados was first a plantation economy whose profits from sugar were made by exploiting slave labor. Colonialists often imagined it as a utopia for themselves—for slaves and those who fought colonialism and racism, it was a dystopic place. While Karl Mannheim argues that "[t]he attempt to escape... utopian distortions is, in the last analysis, a quest for reality" (98), so, however, is the attempt to escape a dystopian vision. Generally speaking, writers of Barbadian birth or origin have avoided depicting the island in either utopian or dystopian terms. Instead they imagine a diversity of responses. This might be described using Michel Foucault's heterotopia, which he theorised is the containment of all "real sites" within a culture, "simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (3). This presents a refutation of the superficial coherence of both models of utopia and dystopia.

Yet Caribbean writers have made their own complex models for thinking through Caribbean culture. Antonio Benitez-Rojo recommends that postindustrial society begin to "reread" the Caribbean in ways that permit the revelation of the region's "own textuality" (2). That textuality is complex, expressing a multiplicity of identities, as Wilson Harris has long argued.² Harris speaks of multiple layers of survivals ("shards") of historical and cultural ancestry, existing just under the surface of speech or writing. They may not be beneficial: he compares contemporary addictions (alcohol, drugs, violence etc.) to ancient addictions (the example of Aztec subservience to ritual conformity) (181). Thus Foucault's heterotopia must be understood in Caribbean space as having elements which are starkly opposed and ethically quite different: colonial, anticolonial, racist, antiracist, utopian, and dystopian. Reading these together does not make them dissolve into one.³ A Caribbean heterotopia is rather a space where both real and imagined social and political elements are experienced together, in a complex dialogue.

Writing the small island has very often been political, a major tool for establishing and disseminating colonialist and tourist ideas of the small island as a blank space on which to impose fantasies, and a way to oppose

and dislocate those fantasies through models of dystopia. Tropical islands have long been vital to the process of British expansion and the island imaginary has been key to colonisation discourse and literature. Island space has been discussed as actively inhabiting, informing, and even being a text (see Loxley and DeLoughrey). It has also been imagined as a writing tool itself. Basapoulos has adopted the term "nesologies" for the "discursive production of insularity," arguing that "islands have been at the centre of a quasi-writerly emphasis on forms graphic play (singularisation, replication, mutation, inversion, symmetry, dispersion)" (9). In her discussion of Tasmanian writing, Fiona Polack cites Michel de Certeau's metaphorical connection between "islands and the processes of writing."⁴ De Certeau specifically equates the island with a blank page, an image he suggests as the first of three stages in the creation of narratives of capitalism and conquest (see Polack 218-19). Thus the parallel is established between the writer imposing an imaginative world on a blank page and the colonial imagining of the island as a "blank page" to be written on by power. Laurie Brinklow and her colleagues, in their introduction to an anthology on small islands, observe that "islands have been prefigured as definable spaces on which to project utopian and dystopian dreams." They argue that "islanders imagine their islands... in ways that were never projected by the Europeans who saw the territories as discrete, conquerable, individual territories" (15). Though hardly likely to represent an island's identity in any real sense, the association of utopia with small islands persists even now. In 2001, Mike Austin argued with regard to the Pacific that "Utopia has always been an island," and that "erotic and sensual utopias" are manifestations of the Garden of Eden (15). But he knows that whereas foreign visitors to an island might call on the garden-utopia idea, the fantasy causes the misreading of actual island space.

So if islands are texts, then we need to ask what kinds of readerly strategies are necessary to unlock their meanings. Stanley Fish famously argued that the reader's response is not *to* the meaning; it *is* the meaning (3).⁵ He also argued that texts are likely to be interpreted in particular ways by interpretative communities: it is the reader who "makes" literature. This sounds like the rankest subjectivism, but it is qualified almost immediately when the reader is identified not as a free agent making literature in any old way, but as a member of a community whose assumptions about literature determine the kind of attention he pays and thus the kind of literature "he" makes (Fish 11).

Colonisers driven by an imperial ideology constitute an interpretative community, just as anti-colonial action is likely create a community of shared political vision. Even now, neocolonial visions persist. Benítez-Rojo observes that even contemporary experts coming from developed countries "read" the Caribbean much as Columbus did, applying "dogmas and methods" that they had found helpful at home. He refers to Roland Barthes' observation that the first reading of a text is inevitably a reading of the reader's own self—so, too, are first readings of places (Benítez-Rojo 2).

The Founding Utopia

From the sixteenth century, just as England's imperial ambitions were coming into being, English writers famously employed the small island (both actual and fictive) to project political and social possibilities, often of their own turbulent nation.⁶ As Diana Loxley and Elizabeth DeLoughrey have shown, Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (c. 1611), and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), the best-known examples of political fables located on small islands, greatly contributed to this discursive construction. Gregory Woods argues that the *Crusoe* story, the castaway on a desert island, provides "the perfect metaphoric space in which to trace the vicissitudes of coming into a Western notion of self-hood" (see Polack 220), a selfhood contextualised by the tests an uninhabited or barely inhabited small island provides.⁷

Returning to the founding fiction of utopia as an island, More's *Utopia*, is to find that the common understanding of utopia as an ideal place cannot be acquired from this text. More's island is far more complicated than its reputation: it represents more of a heterotopia (in the sense of strongly opposed elements co-existing) than a utopia. In fact, its status as a natural island is even questionable. It would not even qualify legally as an island under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea, by which an island is a naturally formed area of land, surrounded by water, and above water at high tide. King Utopus made an island artificially by having his army and citizens dig a channel fifteen miles long to enable the sea to encircle the land. This created a laboratory for his social experiment, keeping his subjects in and strangers out. The island was also fortified: one large rock in the middle of the two end points of the island had a garrisoned tower. Rocks and shoals made navigation in and out of the harbour extremely dangerous and safe channels were kept secret. Landmarks which helped Utopians negotiate the harbour could be moved. This is a sinister aspect

of the place, just as Barbados' isolation to the east of the island chain made it extremely hard for slaves to escape. Utopia is an island fortress and therefore also an island prison for anyone who is subordinated there. It has a slave population, though Robert Adams notes More's "bondage" or "slave" was not transatlantic chattel slavery (64). All the bondsmen in More's text are Christians and of course they were forbidden to enslave other Christians (Logan, Adams, and Miller 185). Thus those men in bondage are those who have committed "heinous offences": foreigners condemned to death in other countries bought cheaply (More 97), or poor foreigners volunteering. Utopian bondmen are despised most, since they have betrayed a generous society. This effectively ensures that they would not find support for resisting their bondage. But it is the island itself which impedes their escape.

More's text is highly ironical, a wise strategy for he lived in dangerous times, and was ultimately executed for refusing to aid King Henry VIII in his desire to divorce his first wife, Catherine of Aragon. Our fictional guide to Utopia is a man called Raphael Hythloday, clearly a delightful but unreliable narrator, for his surname, from the Greek, means "someone who dispenses nonsense." More encourages the reader to trust Hythloday's narrative because it seems grounded by facts such as the specific description of the island, a rhetorical trick to increase readerly acceptance:

The island of Utopia containeth in breadth in the middle part of it (for there it is broadest) 200 miles. Which breadth continueth through the most part of the land, saving that by little and little it cometh in and waxeth narrower towards both the ends. Which, fetching about a circuit or compass of 500 miles, do fashion the whole island like to the new moon. Between these two corners the sea runneth in, dividing them asunder by the distance of eleven miles or thereabouts, and there surmounteth into a large and wide sea which ... is not rough ... and to the great commodity of the inhabitants receiveth in ships towards every part of the land. (More 55)

This is far smaller than England, Wales and Scotland. George Logan and Robert Adams point out that More's island was said to be "somewhere in the New World" (Logan and Adams xi). On both counts, More's island seems not to be England, which gave More freedom to discuss issues in his own country without appearing to do so. Utopians live a radical social experiment, because their clothing and their towns are identical, something quite different from the world of rough-and-tumble adventuring and

money-making which was beginning to characterise More's own society. He tempts the reader's sense of irony and play, and if the reader allows this to happen, the hope for "truth" and perfection will be subverted.

For Utopians, sharing is valued and lust for things contained. But More, as a character in his text, mischievously comments that "men shall never live ... weathily where all things be common. For how can there be an abundance of goods or of anything where every man withdraweth his hand from labour" (More 52). More's ironical detail that Utopians use gold and silver for chamber pots, for "vessels...that serve for the most vile uses" (79), for the chains and shackles of slaves, and for the gold ear- and finger-rings of disgraced criminals, helps us realise that this society bears no relation to the capitalism of England, which was to soon establish the beginnings of an empire built on the worship of profit and on the backs of slaves. That Utopian women receive considerable respect and freedoms (with regard to divorce and even fighting alongside their husbands in war), should also be sceptically regarded. As Dominic Baker-Smith has pointed out, the Utopian custom of prospective brides and grooms inspecting each other naked comes from Plato (166). It does not signify a liberal attitude to sex; strong punishments exist for pre-marital sex and adultery, and women submit to husbands. Paul Turner argues that such restrictions might have seemed more beneficial than oppressive to More himself. This is an unstable text, in which nonsense and sense, the ideal and the real, the ethical and the tyrannical, are in constant interplay.⁵ Yet the idea of utopia as the perfect island society, of a much simpler identity, has been immensely powerful in the imaginations of those who found actual islands they wished to shape ("write on"), from the colonial adventurer to the tourist.

The Small Island: Colonial Utopia, Anticolonial Dystopia, Postcolonialising Heterotopia

Amerindian presence in Barbados was over by the time the English arrived in 1627, so this absence seemed to make a blank canvas on which their colonial imaginations could write their utopian dreams. For the colonists, creating an island as ideal profitable enterprise required the acquisition of reliable sources of cheap labour. Early European indentured workers (and free Africans and Indians) were less costly in the beginning than slaves, until the slave trade became a dominant provider of labour (Beckles 28).⁶

Barbados was the first landfall for most slave voyages coming from West Africa in the history of transatlantic slavery, because of the direction

of the "trade winds" and the island's position to the east of the archipelago. The plantation system was strongly established there by the 1650s. A coral island, Barbados is relatively flat compared to volcanic islands, providing little topography of help to slaves who rebelled or escaped. To the east lies the Atlantic and so the east coast receives rough Atlantic surf and has sharp coral rock, making seagoing escape extremely difficult. Though the west coast, in the lee of the Caribbean Sea, is much calmer and has easily accessible beaches, it was easy for colonial militias and planters to oversee. For slaves, it was thus a prison from which it was almost impossible to escape.

For planters and colonists, then, this was a small island relatively easy to control (reminiscent of More's *Utopia*). The colonists brought European indentured labour and then African slaves, so the population is almost entirely of African descent, with a tiny minority of European ancestry. That such a minority could so long oppress a majority was enabled by the topography. England, itself an island, was deforested and heavily cultivated early on. Barbados was soon similarly treated, so that it must have seemed to English colonists (and even early indentured labourers) an England in miniature, albeit with a tropical climate.

In Englishman Richard Ligon's early colonial account of Barbados in the mid-seventeenth century, the island is, for whites, a utopia in the conventional sense, a predominantly idyllic place. Ligon lived on the island for three years (1647-1650), becoming a planter and slave owner.¹⁰ Before arriving there he had been a staunch royalist and member of the court of Charles I, but the Civil War (1642-1646 and 1648-1651) resulted in Charles I being executed by Parliament in 1649 and the establishment of the Commonwealth, with Oliver Cromwell as Lord Protector (1653-1658). As soon as he arrived back in England in 1650 Ligon was imprisoned. His *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes* appeared in 1657, by which time he was free, but no doubt its few references to English politics were necessarily indirect given his imprisonment at the time that he wrote it.¹¹

Like More's unreliable narrator, Raphael Hythloday, Ligon pays attention to the size of the island, appealing to the desire to believe on the part of readers:

I desired then to know, how many miles the broadest and how few the narrowest parts might be. He told me, that he guess'd the broadest place could not be above seventeen miles, nor the narrowest under

twelve, and the length he was assured, was twenty eight miles. (39) But Barbados is not trying to be an ideal social experiment: its society exists for the sole purpose of making a profit for a small elite from sugar. Ligon tries to gain sympathy for planters by mentioning their hard work, climatic discomforts and risk of disease and famine. But he also says that "wealth, beauty and all harmony" come from good government, in which the powerful protect the less powerful who then in gratitude are faithful and obedient, in strong contrast to England, where there is "the woeful experience of these sad times we live in" (30). J. Edward Hutson thinks Ligon "ahead of his time" on the subject of slavery, in the sense that he argued for converting slaves to Christianity (planters had resisted this in order to sustain their denial of full humanity to slaves) (iii). But Ligon is hardly progressive. He simply states that Barbados has "three sorts of men, viz. Masters, Servants and Slaves" (Ligon 64). What Hutson thinks is greater empathy for the slaves is surely a self-deceiving impulse on Ligon's part to make Barbadian slavery somehow utopian for his interpretative community at home, who were willing to avoid difficult questions about what the English were doing overseas: "'tis a lovely sight to see a hundred handsom Negroes, men and women....They are happy people, whom so little contents. Very good servants, if they be not spoyled by the English" (Ligon 64).¹² In short, Ligon fashions a version of Foucault's definition of utopia, a site "with no real place...society itself in a perfected form" (3). That perfection is entirely self-deceiving, built on selective vision and entirely unlike More's own vision of Utopia.

The impulse to suppress or repackage inconvenient truths in order to make Barbados into an idyll is evident almost 300 years later in 1937, when though slavery had been over for a century, descendants of slaves suffered terrible poverty. Raymond Savage, a minor English writer, left England one dreary winter day, full of longing for a fantasy land of tropical warmth and colour, on a quest he likens to the search for Eldorado, that notorious colonial chimera. In *Barbados: The Enchanting Isle* he seeks to share his pleasure in Barbados as "an outstanding gem in a glittering crown [the crown being the British West Indies]" (17). It is "set in the Tropics, the heat is pleasant and tempered by the cool Trade Winds; there are no fevers, reptiles or foul insects, the colours are beyond description in their beauty and travel to this ideal spot is very cheap and living very reasonable" (17). He claims Barbados is "the nearest place to perfection" that he is "ever likely to find in this sad world" (16). It has the "healthiest climate in the

West Indies" and that "as a health resort it is one of the finest in the world" (47). Harsher realities occasionally intrude, as when the sight of "sugar-plumes, like soft pampas grass, swaying in the wind," is accompanied by a brief realisation of "the appalling poverty" of the majority of the population. His usage of the term "negroes" as a reductive racist category should help us evaluate his vague notice of severe deprivation. He finds the "Barbadian negro" a "quaint creature," whatever he means by that (49). Like Ligon, he sees beauty in the poor, but he pompously and offensively adds "poverty and idleness bring in their train licence and immorality, which inevitably lead to mental instability and disease" (49).¹³ For a second, he wishes to distribute "largesse," (small amounts of money, presumably), but "Authority" discourages such a thing, and so he settles for taking pictures of "these negroes" and giving them a few pence in return (81). He even wonders if "the negro population," which is "proving a very serious problem" could be moved out (though emigration schemes seem to be failing) (48). But then he realises, apparently without irony, that if that happened no "negro waiter" would attend the indolent guest who requires an "iced nogg" with rum or brandy at 8am, to be served on a tray and to be taken to the lawn to enjoy whilst sunbathing (68). Savage's account acknowledges the dystopic place Barbados was for many of the poor, but passes over it, for the important vision for him was that of the white visitor, for whom this lovely place was supposed to be perfect.¹⁴

The degree to which he had to perform serious erasure of the actual place he was visiting is indicated by the fact that in 1929, the death rate for infants was reported as 239 per thousand births in Barbados (in comparison, though also far from ideal, Guyana had 146 and Trinidad 128). In the absence of mother's milk or powdered milk, or nutritious food, babies and small children were often fed water with high amount of sugar in it.¹⁵ In 1937, the year Savage's text appeared, rioting broke out in the capital, Bridgetown. Hilary Beckles gives a detailed account of what led up to the riot: a collapse in the price of sugar, then reduced wages and lost jobs for sugar workers, most of whom earned less than a shilling a day. Workers also complained that racism was increasing. They lost a major advocate with the death of Charles Duncan O'Neale in 1936, and a young radical, Clement Payne, was prevented from becoming a new labour leader when he was tried for supposedly giving false information to immigration officials. Though the Court of Appeal overturned his conviction, he had already been deported: workers rioted in response (Beckles 163-67).

But anti-colonial dystopias, imagined by writers, are also likely to be selective in their vision. Both *The Tempest* and *Robinson Crusoe* have provoked significant postcolonial "writing back" or rereadings of the island that critique the colonial, and not all of these are dystopic.¹⁶ David Scott, writing about the Caribbean, argues that for a postcolonial world, disappointment of utopian hopes results in intensely dystopic visions. He says that "almost everywhere anti-colonial utopias have withered into postcolonial nightmares" (1-2).¹⁷ This is because, as he puts it, when anticolonial movements promise the hope of new political cultures after the formal ending of colonialism, "the 'New Nations project ... run[s] out of vital sources of energy for creativity," so instead of "vision, there is just exercise of power" (2). The solution, he argues, is to ask the right postcolonial questions, and to avoid what he calls the "romance" of well established anti-colonial stories, which react to the dystopic present by erecting their own utopian, but postcolonial, future (3; 8).

Some dystopic readings of the small Caribbean island avoid romance altogether. Antiguan Jamaica Kincaid reminds tourists in her *A Small Place* of their profligate use of water in a particularly dry island set in a salt ocean.¹⁸ Her writing condemns tourists for their carelessness and their implicit colonising tendencies:

You must not wonder what happened when you brushed your teeth. Oh, it might all end up in the water you are thinking of taking a swim in; the contents of your lavatory might, just might, graze gently against your ankle as you wade carefree in the water, for you see, in Antigua, there is no proper sewage-disposal system." (14)

Kincaid's anger is razor-sharp in response to colonialism, neocolonialism, racism, class prejudice, liberal American tourist patronage, and contemporary Antiguan management of the island. Barbara Crossette, in "Looking for Paradise," a *New York Times* article on the indifference of Western media to local people living in tourist destinations, finds in Kincaid's book a powerful ally. But Kincaid is in the end uninterested in the flawed but complicated place which Antigua is for those who live there full-time. Her anger is extremely and effectively rhetorical: "For we, as long as we have known you, were capital, like bales of cotton and sacks of sugar, and you were the commanding, cruel capitalists... As for what we were like before we met you, I no longer care" (37). But her dystopic vision is in the end, whilst provocative, extreme, so that it becomes magisterial, fully on control: "The people in a small place cannot give an account,

an exact account, a complete account, of themselves ... The people in a small place can have no interest in the exact, or in completeness" (53). The dystopic effect is total alienation. Kincaid severed connection with her homeland for a long time and became in effect a New York writer, focusing her creative energies on opposing the self-deceiving liberalism endemic in New York, whilst increasingly rejecting her natal island.

There is no Barbadian writer as negative as Kincaid is about Antigua. Austin Clarke, like Kincaid a self-exile from a young age, was quite dystopic in his early work, though his later work is far more complex in its representation of the island.¹⁹ His first novel, *The Survivors of the Crossing* (1964) portrays a short-lived labour revolt on a Barbadian sugar plantation, after which its leader, Rufus, loses all he valued. In his second, *Among Thistles and Thorns* (1965), the young boy, Milton, just wants to escape to Harlem from Barbados. *The Prime Minister* (1977) represents Barbados as a place subordinated to inadequate, venal government and the need to serve the wishes of tourists so much so that the protagonist just wants to escape back to Canada. His short story, "Leaving This Island Place" (1971), is particularly bleak. The narrator is leaving the island to go to university in Canada, having done well at the most elite secondary school on the island, Harrison College (at the time only for boys). His father is in a charity institution, an "almshouse," where he is dying. It looks out over a cricket field, central to Barbadian culture (and masculinity), but also British derived, and therefore deeply informed by class. This is where the young man has found a social space for himself, as a result of being an excellent sportsman. As he visits his father, he is on his way to a party at the cricket club, to celebrate his departure to university; there will be whiskey and sodas and "trimmed sandwiches," quintessentially colonial British middle-class cultural icons. He has not visited his father enough in his declining days; there is a lot of difficult history between them. He has heard that his mother "put the blame of [his] birth on [his father]" because at that time, his father "was a man" and that she caused him to do "foolish things" (222). For his whole life, the young man's mother and his stepfather have erased his father's name from their household. So he was already dead, in a sense, all these years, though the young man would disobey his mother and sometimes visit the reprobate, when he was affluent enough to give his father money at each visit. But the father's name not being on the report card meant embarrassment for the son at the elite school.

The painful visit to his father means the young man does not enjoy

the leaving party at the club. Afterwards his girlfriend, Cynthia, drives the two of them to the beach in her father's Jaguar. Her father is a minister which means probably Church of England and white, at the time the story is set. The young man confesses that his father is dying in an almshouse, and though Cynthia has talked previously of marriage, she now takes him quickly from the beach and does not come to see him off at the airport as she said she would. As the plane lifts off, it frees the young man from all of this painful complexity. Yet even though the story is dystopic, in its portrayal of the harsh realities of a class and race hierarchy that deeply hurts a sensitive and brilliant young man so the point that he leaves, there is something else here, based in the evident love he feels for his dissolute, wild father, and whatever made him be wild in this same confining place.

In Barbadian-American Paule Marshall's memoir-short story, "To Da-Duh, In Memoriam," an outsider's dystopic vision collides with an insider's utopian one. A young American girl visits her Barbadian grandmother for the first time. Most of the extended Barbadian family live in St. Andrew (on the east coast), though Da-Duh, the grandmother lives in St. Thomas (the fertile parish in the center of Barbados, known for its lush vegetation). After being met by her grandmother and extended family members at the port, the little girl rides with them in the back of a lorry through the city, not realising her grandmother is afraid until they leave the city behind, when she admires the cane growing on each side of the road (a telling detail, since her ancestors worked on cane-land as slaves which would suggest a far more negative response to the plant). At the grandmother's house, the little girl is quite unable to share the old lady's pride in her stately palm tree and her orchard, and instead tells utopian stories of New York City, her home. After a confrontation where the grandmother is sorely tempted to strike the child, the child in effect wins the battle, and the grandmother suddenly ages tremendously: she will soon die. Neither character sees the island in the complexity it actually possesses.

But in Marshall's novel, *The Chosen Place, the Timeless People* (1969), Vere, coming home by plane from a job in the U.S., first locates Barbados as just as one island among many in the archipelago, and then sees it has "broken rank," further east than the others. As the plane comes in closer, he can detect beaches along the shore lines, and then the main town, then canefields, and then the cliff, Cleaver's, which painfully signifies home. Vere thinks of the ways the island will bring him back to something much deeper in himself than he has known abroad: "The distances he

had traveled, the different places in which he had lived and worked—all the things he had seen and done his three years in the States were as nothing suddenly in the face of that dark steeped hill. Something vague and nameless troubled his face" (14).²⁰ Marshall's strategy immediately communicates to the reader that the island is not one homogenous space, but rather a complicated and very diverse small island, especially to its native born residents.

Ian Strachan points out that the night club Sugar's was once a slave barracks (234), and still has manacles hanging from the walls, but the nightclub, by providing distractions through music, dancing, and drinking, erases that suffering. Neocolonial political leadership expects to sell the island as a tourist destination. But the villagers of Bournehills annually re-enact slave leader Cuffee Ned's rebellion, thus keeping collective memory alive. Marshall's characters thus collectively represent a wide spectrum of experiences and responses to Bourne Island, past and present. Leesy's husband dies as a result of unsafe job conditions on the plantation. Saul and Harriet, complicated privileged white liberals, come to study the island's communities in the hopes of being useful. Merle Kibona has found the island a refuge but ultimately must leave it to heal an old wound. Thus Bourne Island is both a place for utopian hopes and dystopian suffering, a heterotopia, a fictional place which in Marshall's hands points to the need to recognise that the formally postcolonial nation is not a finished project but a diverse political and social process, an example of what Ato Quayson calls "postcolonializing" (10).

Barbadian George Lamming's first novel, *In the Castle of My Skin* (1953), depicts the island through a village on the edge of the capital, Bridgetown. The novel begins not from a view of the whole island, as in Marshall's *Chosen Place*, but rather moves in the opposite direction, from the character named "G" and his mother's house to the rest of the village "a marvel of small, heaped houses raised jauntily on groundsels of limestone" (10), and eventually to the history and culture of the whole island. This strategy makes the island seem large, indeed a country, rather than a small outcrop of coral rock in a large ocean.

Lamming commented in an interview that his portrayal of "G" and his friends conflating the British empire and the Garden of Eden "may be a pretty accurate reflection of what was a genuine popular belief among the poor at the time" ("Garden" 213), signifying that they too could believe a utopian colonial vision. But he shows the far harsher reality beneath that

illusion. In the past, the land under the village was a plantation belonging to an Englishman, whose progeny still hold onto it, renting land to villagers, sending out overseers to protect the landowners' interests, and surveying the village from the high roof of the great house. Once "G" goes to school he, like other colonial children, encounters the weight of the ideological imperative to make sure each child is a loyal subject of the Crown and the Empire: "In every corner of the school the tricolour Union Jack flew its message" (*Castle* 36), and teachers and fathers are likely to punish the boys if they evidence disrespect for it. Yet despite the hardships, there are local people who find ways to resist. The shoemaker predicts that as past empires have passed, so will the British Empire: "God don't like ugly, an' whenever these great empires starts to get ugly with the thing they does the Almighty puts His hands down once an' for all" (103). Lamming's characters also have many ways of avoiding the realisation of island smallness as confinement: thinking of the island as parishes, or towns, or villages reinforces its complex heterotopic social and political space.

In Kamau Brathwaite's work, multiple readings of the island co-exist. In "Islands" the whole island archipelago signifies many different things depending on who is looking: "history's hot / lies" or "jewels" (204). In "Pebbles," the island is a dystopic pebble which "excludes death" and "will never bear children" (196). In "Tear or pear shape," the island is a brutalised victim: "the leaves of the land" are "eaten" by tourists (31).

Brathwaite's preface to the collection *Mother Poem* explains the complexity of Barbados's cultural identity, something long denied by its self-definition as "Little England." Brathwaite explains how the collection "is about porous limestone," for Barbados is a coral island. Though it is "most English of the West Indian islands," it is also "nearest as the slaves fly, to Africa." Its language is "protestant Pentecostalism," but it is "interleaved with Catholic bells and kumina" ("Preface" n.pag.)

Throughout *Mother Poem*, topography is a trope for the cultural layering of the island: "The ancient watercourses of my island / echo of river, trickle, worn stone, / the sunken voice of glitter inching its pattern to the sea, / memory of foam, fossil, erased beaches high above the boulders of st.philip / my mother is a pool" (3). The island is identified with an African mother who sees "the males of her life have become creatures, often agents, of the owner-merchant" ("Preface" n.pag.), and who must fight for economic survival for the sake of her family and herself. Her "breadfruit is sold into foreigner factories / and returned to her sons wrapped up in tins

to be eaten as chips" (*Mother* 46). Food is in short supply: "there is more weed than food in the island" (46). She fights ceaselessly: "my mother rails against the fearures of these comforts / she stifles a dream as the whip raids her" (112) and she will endure, "for her history is long and will not always bleed on other people's edges" (112). Sometimes she seems defeated, "so she lies / mutter of echoes, folded to silence / surrounded by the multiple deaths of her children / surrendered to their ancient histories" (114), but there is always the possibility of renewal, "their hopes walking like rain across the distant water" (114). But the mother figure is also powerful and even threatening: "she is like a nut-/meg grater: rough /and aromatic: / you may stuff / her into your pocket: / she will rock / you back under a sudden / stagger of rain" (29). She, like her people, is multi-faceted, enduring, and has a long memory. Though much of *Mother Poem* is bitterly elegiac because the plantation system has robbed the island of its ability to sustain and protect its children, in the end, the mother (the island) proves indomitable: despite her suffering, "echo[es] of river trickle worn stone / until rolling downwards from softness to driftward / she knows that her death has been born" (116).

Brathwaite's Barbados realises utopian hope for the renaissance of suppressed African cultural identities in Barbadian culture and the valuing of Creole cultural diversity and creativity. But it has also a great deal of dystopian despair, caused not only by plantation slavery but recent entrenched neocolonial influences that ignore the creative energies of the poor. But Brathwaite's vision is not conventional, nor built on binary oppositions (racial, cultural, political). In *Barabajan Poems* (1994), he celebrates white Barbadian Julian Hunte's twelve day swim around the island in December 1992, an enterprise which almost cost Hunte his life but delivered a new apprehension of the island's coasts and the tides which shape them. That a white Barbadian would do such a thing, refusing a history of elite possessiveness of the island for a humbling exploration which honours its ecology, deeply impressed Brathwaite, whose vision is always interested in transforming the conventional and entrenched.² Like Marshall, he complicates Barbados, speaking of the dramatic differences between the West (Caribbean) and East (Atlantic) coasts. The calm west coast has suffered overdevelopment for tourism, Bathsheba, on the wild Atlantic coast, where the sea is dangerous, is also closest to Africa. Brathwaite's apprehension of Barbadian culture is that nothing is as it appears on the surface. Though Barbados seems, after its long plantation

history, to have erased all memory of Africa despite the fact that almost all of its people are descended from African slaves, Brathwaite hears African cultural elements underneath the English-speaking voices of a small gathering playing tambourines, clapping and singing: "no longer singing in English or Bajan, the sound of their voices has gradually gone through an alteration of orbit and pitch" (*Barabajan* 181). In Brathwaite's vision, Barbados's heterotopia is kinetic, constantly transforming its diverse elements, now revealing one cultural identity, now another: "And the stone wrinkled, cracked and / gave birth / to water" (208). Yet this small island has been particularly identified with stability, convention, and Englishness, a reputation Brathwaite does not remove but rather destabilises. His texts, like those of other Barbadian writers, refuse to locate the small island in either utopian or dystopian space, refuse even to see it as having plural identities, but rather as being infinitely complex, and infinitely changing, postcolonialising indeed.

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Notes

- 1 Even today, "small" has to be defined in relation to the island. The United Nations body SIDS (Small Island Developing States) places a formal limit of ten million in population (but both it and AOSIS, the Alliance of Small Island States, are open to islands with larger populations).
- 2 In "Literacy and the Imagination: A Talk," Harris speaks of the "uniform" ways the world is read, involving "false clarities" (15; 17). The intuitive writer, he says, can discover elements in their work which are actually the "substance of tradition," a cross-cultural tradition with ancient roots (19; 27; 29).
- 3 Ato Quayson points out that to think of postcolonialising as a process avoids having to engage with the problem of precisely dating postcolonial events, as well as the differences between types of postcolonialism (10).
- 4 Polack finds De Certeau helps in thinking about ways "both history and fiction have written Tasmania" (219).
- 5 Fish's contribution to reader-response theory has not generally been applied to colonial and postcolonial "readings," but is most useful in this context.

- 6 James Harrington's *The Commonwealth of Oceania* (1656) appeared in the turbulent period of the English Civil War, the execution of Charles I in 1649 and Cromwell's Commonwealth. The monarchy returned in a more limited form in 1660. Thus this period was rife with ideas about the ideal polity. Harrington openly grounds his ideal state in England. But J.G.A. Pocock comments that Harrington's "Oceania is not a utopia in More's...sense...What is being idealized is not a commonwealth isolated from the history of mankind, but the immediate present or imminent future" of Harrington's particular vision of England (xvii).
- 7 Woods' essay, "Fantasy Islands: Popular Topographies of Marooned Masculinities," argues that tropical island stories tend to follow "a protagonist's progression from contained and bounded self, to regressive child, back to bounded self" (qtd.in Polack 220). See also Loxley's *Problematic Shores: The Literature of Islands*.
- 8 Far from a coherent and plausible tale, the contradictions and paradoxes of More's text have attracted the attention of both Marxist Frederic Jameson and new historicist Stephen Greenblatt, two very different cultural and political interpreters, for both of whom its language usage is fascinating (Leslie 18). Marina Leslie comments that the aspect of Utopia most interesting to these two very different theorists is the text's "ability to make itself disappear, to annul its own arguments logically and rhetorically" (14).
- 9 In 1647, Barbados already depended on various kinds of bondmen and women for labour, and strong control was exerted from England. The earliest colonisers were denied freehold and paid annual wages, in effect employees of a company (Beckles 8): the island was conceived of as a business from the first. First British indentured white labour, "quite freely bought, sold, gambled away, mortgaged, taxed as property, and alienated in wills" (Beckles 17), and then African slaves, thought of as property, worked the land. By 1688, there was a strong interdependency of slavery and sugar profits. Thus the island became a utopia for wealthy planters in the boom years of sugar, and a dystopian hell for slaves, especially because it was very hard to escape, given Barbados's location and topography.
- 10 He purchased a share in a plantation, "stockt with Servants, Slaves, Horses, Cattle" (32).

- 11 English politics disturbed the comfort of the Barbados plantocracy. The Civil War, Commonwealth and Restoration of the monarchy were echoed by political skirmishes between planters, and sometimes they left the island as a result, as in the case of Nathaniel Sylvester, from Constant Plantation, who settled in Shelter Island, off Long Island, and became well know for sheltering persecuted Quakers.
- 12 He tells the disturbing story of some highly valued slaves who hung themselves in the belief that they would go home to Africa after death and be young there once more. A planter confronted the rest his slaves with the head of a dead slave fixed on a pole, and the argument that no-one could return home without their head (Ligon 73). Ligon makes no comments about this planter's behaviour, or the desperate condition of slaves who tried to kill themselves, but he seems sympathetic to the planter's loss of several of his "best slaves" to suicide.
- 13 Racist white colonials were inclined to see slaves as having better conditions of work and life than the English working class. This is most notoriously expressed in Mrs. Carmichael's two volume argument against abolition, *Domestic Manners and Social Condition of the White, Coloured and Negro Population of the West Indies* (1833). Idleness of slaves was another frequent claim: Savage is simply repeating a long habit of English observers of Barbados who had no scruples about the exploitation of the majority of the population. Ian Strachan, writing about the Bahamas, demonstrates that assumptions that local people do not have to work hard on tropical islands persists, even in a modern tourist industry's attempts to attract clients. He discusses an advertisement that has a photograph of a tourism worker with the caption "Hard work's easy in Paradise."
- 14 Savage's self-deception may be compared to that of Vincent Vaublanc, who painted landscapes which erased suffering and was so identified by C.L.R. James (mentioned in Strachan 53). Utopias such as those Savage and Vaublanc sought can only be constructed by carefully selecting what is seen, heard and understood. Such selective visions have persisted long after Savage. Maurice Bateman Hutt, born in England and married a Barbadian, published *Exploring Historic Barbados* (1981) fifteen years after Barbados's independence (when colonialism was supposed to be on the wane), making use of articles he wrote for the *Barbados Advocate*, one of the two daily newspapers.

- He mentions slavery and race only briefly, praises Barbadian planters for their "remarkable resource and resilience" in the face of sugar industry crises, but says nothing of Barbadian workers' struggles for their basic rights. He only minimally indicates the slave trade activities of notorious planter Christopher Codrington. Also, Mary Ann Harrell's chapter on Barbados in National Geographic's *Isles of the Caribbean* (1980), keen to encourage tourists, does acknowledge the brutal history of slavery but only to insist that all of that history is now erased in a "shared humanity" (67).
- 15 Charles Duncan O'Neale, a medical doctor, was, from 1924, as Beckles writes, "particularly disturbed by the colony's high and rising infant mortality rates and the generally poor health standards within the black communities" (Beckles 156). He would become an important socialist organiser of the poor.
 - 16 For an introduction to such responses, see John Thieme's *Postcolonial Con-Texts: Writing Back to the Canon* (2001), Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960) and *Water with Berries* (1971). Other notable examples include Brathwaite's "Letter Sycorax" (1987 and subsequent iterations), which references *The Tempest*, and Walcott's *Pantomime* (1980) and Coetzee's *Foe* (1986), which reference *Robinson Crusoe*.
 - 17 See, for example, V.S. Naipaul's dystopic vision of Trinidad in *The Loss of El Dorado* (first published 1969): "Port of Spain was a place where things had happened and nothing showed" (375).
 - 18 Antigua, like Barbados, is a coral island, and like Barbados has a brutal history of racial slavery. It is 108 square miles to Barbados's 166 square miles, with far less population density (approximately 72,000 compared to Barbados's 281,000).
 - 19 In *Growing Up Stupid Under the Union Jack* (1980), Clarke writes wittily, though with an underlying anger, about his generation in Barbados, who as children suffered from systematic (and obtuse) attempts by their culture and education to alienate them from themselves and make them tractable British colonial subjects. His delightfully comic and loving memoir, *Pigtails n' Breadfruit* celebrates Barbadian food, and through it Barbadian culture. Here Clarke references slavery briefly. He mentions the 1930s and 1940s, which were difficult times for Barbadians, as the time of his childhood, full of good food and family life. Thus he does not erase Barbados's painful history, though he celebrates survival through the creation of family and community

- bonds around rituals of making and eating good food.
- 20 Turner points out that some utopian narratives employ the effective strategy of gradual discovery of an island as it is approached (18). Marshall makes a most effective use of this device.
 - 21 Brathwaite draws on Hunte's account of his fifty-nine mile swim. Whereas for Brathwaite, Hunte is a heroic figure fighting to protect the island's ecology, he is termed a madman in a local paper, especially as he is a member of the clannish "Red Legs," or "poor whites," descendants of indentured labourers who have never integrated into the rest of Barbados society and are thought inbred and likely to be odd. In his celebration of Hunte, Brathwaite fractures the simplicities of racial oppositions in Barbados, whilst not forgetting their origin in white racism.

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**“Righting” the Expulsion of Diego Garcia’s “Unpeople”:
The Island Space as Heterotopia in Literary Texts
about the Chagos Islands**

Ils dirent que nous n'étions que des passagers,
des ouvriers en transit
des pêcheurs en transat.
C'est ainsi que nous entrâmes dans la fiction
Des nations de celles qui édictent les dictons.

They said we were only passengers
transient workers
fishermen in deckchairs.
That is how we entered the fiction
Of nations that impose sayings. (Torabully 12)

Decades ago, the most famous strategy game was probably *Risk*, in which the roll of the dice led armies to battle for the right to dominate the world. More recent games include the highly successful *Settlers of Catan*, which instantiates the island's status as a historical space. As players try to be the dominant force on the island of Catan by building settlements, cities, and roads, they struggle for resource production as determined by the dice. Players collect and exchange raw materials to build their “colonies,” corroborating Rod Edmond and Vanessa Smith's point in their introduction to *Islands in History and Representation* that islands, “unlike continents, look like property” (1). Many other trendy games have adopted island topology (*Kanaloa*, *Dragons of the Mekong*), and even include real names of islands such as *Jamaica*, indirectly revealing how insular spaces, because they are self-contained, are alleged to be easily controlled, demarcated, and conquerable. Furthermore, “deemed ahistorical” (DeLoughrey 2), insular spaces are conceived as *terra nullius*, topoi often deprived of any enemy faction or even population. More recently appropriated by the tourist industry, insular geography has also for centuries served “an aesthetically rather than functionally driven cartographic rhetoric” (Balasopoulos 10), inspiring Western utopias, Robinsonades, experiments in governance, metaphysical abstractions and ethnography.¹

A strategic location on the route to India, the Indian Ocean region exemplifies Françoise Vergès's observation that “If we look at the ocean as