INTRODUCTION
Intersections:
Caribbean and British Literary Imaginaries

Geraldine Skeete

This special issue of Tout Moun is dedicated to the memory of the late Dr. Giselle Rampaul of The University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine. Our treasured staff member departed unexpectedly on Thursday February 9th 2017, leaving us surprised by loss and grief and ill prepared for the void which her absence has created. Gentle and caring, Giselle walked softly among us. Her humility and unassuming demeanor in no way pointed to the substantial range of academic projects in which she was involved and successfully brought to fruition.

Dr Rampaul, a Shakespearean scholar, was also instrumental in founding the Red Feather Journal: An International Journal of Children in Popular Culture in 2010. She co-edited The Child and the Caribbean Imagination (UWI Press, 2012) and Postscripts: Caribbean Perspectives on the British Canon from Shakespeare to Dickens (UWI Press, 2014). She published seminal articles such as “Shakespeare, Empire, and the Trinidad Calypso” and “Playing the Fool with Shakespeare: Festivity, Falsity, and Feste in Twelfth Night and King of the Masquerade” in Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation; “Caribbean Tricksters at the Crossroads: Davlin Thomas’s Lear Ananci and Hamlet: The Eshu Experience” in Shakespeare: The Journal of British Shakespeare Association; and “Shakespeare’s Mas: Performance and Recontextualisation of Julius Caesar on the Caribbean Carnival Stage” in the edited book Rewriting Shakespeare’s Plays by and for the Contemporary Stage, among others. These comprise rigorous scholarship exploring the intersections among literary, cultural, British, and Caribbean studies. She was an interviewee on the Folger Shakespeare Library podcast series episode on “Shakespeare in the Caribbean” https://www.folger.edu/shakespeare-unlimited/caribbean. Notably, she and her fellow discussant are described in this fashion: “To talk about the deep but little known history of Shakespeare in the Caribbean, we’ve invited in two of the handful of people who know about it”. It attests to the recognition and respect she had garnered among her peers.

As a leading expert on Caribbean re-readings of Shakespeare, she also partnered with the British Council and Shakespeare scholars from Barbados, Cuba and Jamaica on related projects. At the 36th Annual Conference on West Indian Literature held in October 2017, regional and international literary and cultural scholars paid tribute this fine, young academic as the British Council honoured Giselle Rampaul for her service as project consultant during the world premier
showing of the documentary film *Shakespeare in the Caribbean/The Caribbean in Shakespeare*. Barbara Lalla’s “Film as Tribute and Review as Tribute” in this collection discusses Giselle’s integral role in the film’s production and how her research and writings on Shakespeare in a Caribbean context would have further illuminated a project of this nature. In 2016, Dr Rampaul was invited by the Shakespeare’s Globe to present at its international symposium commemorating the 400th death anniversary of William Shakespeare.

Wherever she has worked, whether at the British Academy on a Visiting Fellowship, the University of Essex, or the Centre for Caribbean Studies at the University of Warwick, Giselle has left fond memories and deep regret at her untimely passing. Arguably, though, her most memorable contribution to Caribbean letters will prove to be her academic project with the widest dissemination. Giselle Rampaul initiated, produced and edited the podcast series “The Spaces between Words: Conversations with Writers” http://libraries.sta.uwi.edu/podcasts which has released interviews to date with 97 writers and poets and is affiliated with the NGC Bocas Lit Fest: The Trinidad and Tobago Literary Festival, and The Caribbean Review of Books. This open digital archive of interviews with writers in which she served as editor, producer, presenter and interviewer was established in 2011.

Giselle was eulogized in various local and regional forums and written publications in the days, weeks and months following her passing. This special issue commemorates and builds on her legacy, particularly reflecting on her research interest in Caribbean re-readings of British literature.

In addition to her teaching and work on the literary connections and reconnections underpinned by the Caribbean’s British colonial and educational history, Rampaul also designed and taught a popular undergraduate course on children’s literature as well as supervised postgraduate students in this area of study. Hence, this aspect of her academic and pedagogical output is acknowledged by the contribution of an essay in this issue which focuses on young adult literature.

This issue includes essays on fictional texts published within a broad span from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries and underscores the deep intertextual relations between Caribbean and British literature. The counter-discursive representations by authors, poets and playwrights in the Caribbean region and its diaspora rewrite and right the wrongs and negative stereotypes perpetuated by their British counterparts who wittingly and unwittingly were part of the colonial and imperial enterprise. Prequels, sequels and adaptations of British literature; metaphorical, allusive and satirical twists; insider perspective and voice; and the valorizing of creole languages as mediums of narration are among the numerous strategies and techniques whereby Caribbean writers have interrogated, problematized and sought more balanced viewpoints of the region and its peoples. In memory of Rampaul’s work, this *Tout Moun* issue celebrates the continuing and
intersecting dialogues between texts of the British and Caribbean literary traditions – each impacting the canonization of the other.

Barbara Lalla’s essay “...and accents yet unknown: Shakespeare and Other Voices” is fitting as the first in this issue. It references Rampaul’s research into Caribbean adaptations and rereadings of Shakespeare’s plays; surveys the relevance of Shakespeare studies across centuries and continents; examines how even in his time Shakespeare dealt in subversion and counter-discourse, giving voice to difference and the Other – and in so doing forecasting future trends both within societies and in the applicability and (re)appropriations of his work. This essay highlights for the reader the continued significance of the intertextual and intersectional readings and performances of Shakespearean plays in drama, theatre and fiction, for example, in Britain, the Caribbean and elsewhere.

“Death and Awakening: A Meditation on William Blake’s Tiger and the Concept of Rebirth in Wilson Harris’s The Whole Armour” by Darin Gibson typifies the issue’s focus on the intersections among Caribbean and British literary imaginaries. The essay closely examines the semantic depth afforded by Harris’s inclusion of the epigraphic lines from “The Tyger.” Gibson analyzes the parallels between the symbolic significations of Blake’s ‘tyger’ and Harris’ tiger and how the poem lends meaning to, and interpretation of, the novel. Gibson’s exploration of the dualism of the tiger – such as pertains to its life / death, natural / supernatural, and degenerative / redemptive qualities – and its role in the delineation of character, contributes to the body of scholarly work linking these two major writers of the British and Caribbean canonical traditions.

Elizabeth Jackson in “David Dabydeen’s Caribbean Postscripts to the European Canon: Rewriting Heart of Darkness in The Intended and Our Lady of Demerara” adopts an intertextual focus by exploring the ways in which Joseph Conrad’s canonical novel is reread through the lens of the Guyanese-British novelist. Jackson addresses how Dabydeen’s writing is informed by his academic career and creative impulses. She explores how through re-enactment, parody and the troping of the journey narrative, for instance, Dabydeen in his counterdiscursive, fictional texts subverts Conrad’s depiction of Africa and Africans.

Rhonda Harrison’s essay, “Refashioning the Nation: Inventing Otherness and Identity through Female Sexuality in The Jamaica Lady or The Life of Bavia”, delves into the representations of women’s sexuality and otherness in the eighteenth-century West Indian, particularly Jamaican, novel of the romance genre. She examines how it depicts English imperial discourses on identity, nation, language, power and control in relation to women’s bodies, behavior, and social positioning within a New World context. Along with addressing how sexual politics and patriarchal constructs determine the unfolding of gender relations, Harrison draws parallels among these with the silencing of women’s voices and othering of the Jamaican Creole. Therefore, there is as well an analogous relationship between representations of sexual and linguistic considerations in the novel. Harrison concludes with statements which suggest an ironic situation
in which this romance novel presents ways in which it is really not the West Indies but England of The Jamaica Lady that is ‘refashioned’ despite, and because of, its imperial agenda.

Gender, sexuality and nation are also the concerns of the following essay. The issue segues from Harrison’s focus on the depiction of eighteenth-century women’s sexuality into Tyrone Ali’s “The Search for El Dorado is the Search for Masculinity: Critiquing Afro-Caribbean Male Sexuality in Samuel Selvon’s The Lonely Londoners”. A classic novel of the West Indian canon published in the 1950s, Selvon’s discursive illustration of how Caribbean male immigrants of African descent use their sexual prowess and conquests to compensate for their subjugated masculinities and the emasculation they experience due to racial prejudice and discrimination is the subject of Ali’s essay. He explores how in their adopted city of London, these male characters from various colonized homelands of the Caribbean attain a perceived elevated reputation and agency, and a comradery which transcends their instilled geographical, linguistic and political differences.

Jarrel De Matas’s is the one essay in this commemorative issue which explicitly falls within Rampaul’s academic and research interest in children’s literature. He contributes to scholarship on this genre in Caribbean literature, as well as to the study of Caribbean noir, by coining and examining the concept of childhood noir. His “Adopting the Shadows: Caribbean Childhood Noir in Kevin Hosein’s The Repenters and Ezekiel Alan’s Disposable People” analyzes how these contemporary, postcolonial and dysphoric novels interrogate and problematize the conventional tropes of childhood, coming-of-age narratives, and of the Caribbean child. As in Gibson’s essay in which the symbol of the tiger is both subversive and redemptive, De Matas discusses how the emotional and experiential ‘darkness’ of the focalizer-protagonists is characterized in similar terms. De Matas therefore demonstrates how the authors overturn reader expectations regarding aspects such as the thematic foci of the genre of children’s literature, the portrayal of adult-child relationships, and narrative outcomes.

The review essay is by Bridget Brereton, one of the Caribbean region’s foremost historians. Brereton reviews Selwyn Cudjoe’s 2018 publication The Slave Master of Trinidad – a biographical account of William Hardin Burnley (1780-1850) which focuses on his indelible influence and impact as entrepreneur and slaveowner on the sociohistorical, economic, and political life of Trinidad. The author’s interest in Burnley is not only academic but also personal since multigenerational members of the Cudjoe family were both enslaved and free labourers on the Orange Grove estate in Tacarigua, and Cudjoe himself grew up in very close proximity to it. Brereton observes that Burnley was not supportive of the emancipation of the slaves and possessed unadmirable qualities, which may make readers wonder at Cudjoe’s dedication to his years-long research for this publication. Nonetheless, author and reviewer agree that it is the historian’s duty to address his subject’s contribution to the nation’s development. This review of The Slave Master of Trinidad emphasizes its incisive illustration of the co-dependence of both Britain as a metropolitan/imperial/colonial power and its colony of Trinidad in their progress and change, thereby depicting the interconnectedness of Trinidad, Caribbean and British histories.
Trinidadian-born, Lawrence Scott, who lives in Britain and is a Commonwealth Prize recipient and winner of other awards for his short-story and novel-writing, offers six poetic discourses in “A Season of Sonnets”. The Sonnets celebrate Trinidad’s landscape and seascape; urban and rural communities; fauna and fauna; food; Hindu and Christian religions; and music. However, Scott does not indulge in exoticization either, but underscores as well the tragic realities of environmental pollution, gender-based violence and murder which plague the island. Yet, as a whole these sonnets evoke a love and praise for Trinidad which is reinforced and symbolized in the last poem’s depiction of the repatriated persona’s memories and feelings for the English summer, in contrast to his reclaiming of and appreciation for Trinidad’s own seasonal and natural beauty.

British-born Muli Amaye sets her short story “Waiting” in the Caroni swamp of Trinidad. With a focus on a mother-son relationship and hints about its impact on son-lover relationships, the reader is left with much to infer regarding this story of abuse, fear, intimidation and regret especially, too, since Amaye also leaves us with an open-ended dénouement. The natural setting and imagery enhance the paradigmatic linkages between the environmental and psychological elements of this narrative which feature transnational connections and a British main character visiting the Caribbean.

Amílcar Sanatan’s feature is entitled “An Approach to Freedom: An Interview with Wesley Gibbings on Journalism and Activism in the Caribbean”. In this wide-ranging discussion Mr. Gibbings, one of Trinidad and Tobago’s foremost journalists, who was friends and/or colleagues with several of the country’s early postcolonial leaders, reflects on the often difficult political and material conditions under which Trinbagonian journalists practice their trade.

In tribute to Giselle Rampaul, her UWI colleague from the Department of History, Dr Jerome Teelucksingh, who fostered an acquaintance with her on the campus shared this reflection:

"Have more than thou showest, Speak less than thou knowest." -- King Lear.

Whilst researching in West Indiana, in the Alma Jordan Library, at the University of the West Indies (UWI), St. Augustine, I first encountered the petite Giselle Rampaul. She was one of the familiar faces on the third floor of the Humanities building. I did not know her name and a few weeks later realized this was the young academic who had enthralled her undergraduate students in tutorials. She had recently completed her MPhil in Literature and was heading for the University of Reading (in England) to pursue a PhD degree. She briefly mentioned her work at UWI and we discussed the grim job prospects for academics in the Humanities.

Almost two years later, I was fortunate to again cross paths with Giselle. She had begun research on children’s literature and was reluctant to speak of her pioneering study. It was
no surprise when I later learnt that Giselle, after completion of the PhD, was lecturing in Literature at UWI. And, in a strange twist of fate, I was also appointed a lecturer in History and my office was on the third floor of the Humanities.

Many have spoken and written about Giselle’s smile and warmth, but one of the most striking characteristics of this academic colleague was her humility and modesty. In our occasional chats on the corridor she never mentioned her outstanding work on The Spaces between Words: Conversations with Writers podcast series. Furthermore, she never boasted of her peer-reviewed publications and brilliant conference presentations.

One morning, whilst waiting on the third floor for the elevator to open, I met Giselle holding a small-scale model of Shakespeare’s theatre. With her usual smile, she explained the model and invited me to witness the exhibition in the Library.

In 2017, the icy hand of death left a cold space on the third floor of Humanities. It was an honour to briefly share a space with the Caribbean’s youngest Shakespeare expert.

Rampaul’s former student, St. Lucian poet, and winner of the OCM Bocas Prize for Caribbean Literature 2015, Vladimir Lucien, paid tribute to her in these lyrical terms:

_They are beings with that mark. The mark of the worker — which is to be a vessel really, for a larger work which the universe is engaged in. A cosmic worker. One is gifted with it, the ability to bear a bigger plan which includes all of creation — that grand ecology. Giselle was such a being. The character with which she bore this task was a tender one. Soft, polite. She was both about the Universe’s business and a wonderful human being. The Spaces between Words came to us because the Universe cannot bear a void — and there was a void — and Giselle gave of herself to fill it. People like her who walk amongst us fill voids — it is what they do. And hard as it is for me to believe it, to begin to accept it — as unnecessary as it seems, I tell myself that I must try not to see Giselle’s leave-taking as a void._

_I have had the strange thing happen to me of seeing— before they had died — my friends’ deaths. A kind of subtle presage which I was not altogether in control of, but was somehow aware of. It would take the form of a kind of dread that would well up inside me on the last occasion I was seeing them — though I didn’t know it would be our last moment. My last moment with Giselle was on the top floor of the Humanities Building a year ago. If that dread did well up in me, it was cast down by Giselle’s tender laughter, and soft-footed humility, and her —always— good wishes for me. Her genuine happiness for the work of others. This is how such beings are. Those workers. This was Giselle. I will miss her dearly._

_Walk good, Giselle._
It is fitting to conclude the introduction to this commemorative issue honouring Rampaul’s contribution to literature as study and practice with a short-short story she co-wrote with one of her beloved nieces who was approximately five years old at the time of writing. Tout Moun joins her colleagues, students and family in celebrating the life and work of Giselle Rampaul.

**Linda the Snake**
By Aditi Persad and Giselle Rampaul
(Not real but could happen)

Once upon a time, there was a snake called Linda and a fairy was walking by and she accidentally dropped some of her magic dust. And Linda the snake ate the magic dust and thought it was strawberry-flavoured dust. Then she began to grow these magic spots and she said a word and it turned out to be another language. And then she was so worried, she said, “Stop.” And she began to talk snake again. And she realised that she could talk any language. She was so amazed. Then a boy came by and Linda said “hello.” The boy was very shocked. He picked up the snake and he took Linda into his bedroom. His dad studies snakes. The boy brought Linda to his dad. He took Linda very gently and placed her under something but she didn’t know what it was. It looked like her normal habitat but instead the grass was plastic. And other snakes were in there. She saw a snake that looked just like her. She talked to that snake.
Linda said, “Could you talk any language?”
The other snake said, “Yes.”
Linda said, “I like your spots.”
The other snake said, “I like your spots too.”
Linda said, “What is your name?”
The other snake said, “Ariel.”
“I like your name.”
“What is your name?”
“Linda.”
“I like your name too.”
Another snake came, “Hey, Ariel, it is time to eat.”
Linda said, “Wait for me.”
The other snake said, “Go ahead,” to Ariel.
The tank suddenly shook. All the snakes said, “Here comes the food!”
The littlest snake always got food last. Linda said, “You could take my food.”
The littlest snake said, “Here comes the water!”
All the snakes hurried to one place. “Here comes bath time!”
The dad of the boy washed the snakes.
“We’re sparkly clean.”
They all slithered back into the tank. They all glided, “This is fun!”