

# Circum-Caribbean Poetics: Tracing Black Atlantic Routes in the Américas

*Jana Brazziel*  
Miami University

*Nicasio Urbina*  
University of Cincinnati

Following the brutal assassination and violent dismemberment in 1806 of Jean-Jacques Dessalines, himself considered a brute and violent revolutionary against Napoleon's French colonial forces in Saint Domingue, historically slated to become Ayiti at the end of the Haitian Revolution (1790-1804),<sup>1</sup> the new "black Republic" lamentably waged internal, civil warfare and military rivalries vied for presidential or royal power: Alexandre Pétion was elected president of the southern

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<sup>1</sup> On the legacies of the Haitian Revolution in the Americas, see all of the following: David Geggus, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2002); David Geggus and Norman Fiering, eds., *The World of the Haitian Revolution* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009); Geggus, *The Haitian Revolution: A Documentary History* (New York: Hackett Publishing, 2014); Laurent Dubois, *A Colony of Citizens: Revolution and Slave Emancipation in the French Caribbean, 1787-1804* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus, *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2006); Laurent Dubois and Julius S. Scott, eds. *Origins of the Black Atlantic* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009); Dubois, *Avengers of the New World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Jeremy D. Popkin, *Facing Racial Revolution: Eyewitness Accounts of the Haitian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Popkin, *You are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Popkin, *A Concise History of the Haitian Revolution* (London and New York: Wiley/Blackwell Publishers, 2011); and Gerald Horne, *Confronting Black Jacobins: The U.S., the Haitian Revolution, and the Origins of the Dominican Republic* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2015). Despite the obvious import of the Haitian Revolution in the Americas and in the larger Atlantic world, its history was until the postcolonial turn undervalued and silenced within historical studies, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot persuasively argues in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2005, 2015). See chapter three, "An Unthinkable History" (70-107). As Trouillot writes, the Haitian Revolution "entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened" (73); and he further reasons that "neither a single great book nor even a substantial increase in slave resistance studies will fully uncover the silence that surrounds the Haitian Revolution. For the silencing of that revolution has less to do with Haiti or slavery than it has to do with the West" (106). In the final paragraph of this chapter, Trouillot thus concludes that the "silencing of the Haitian Revolution is only a chapter within a narrative of global domination" (107).

République d’Haïti in 1806, yet he was opposed in the north by none other than revolutionary hero and “*basta la muerte*” rival Henri Christophe, later known to posterity as Roi Christophe, who presided over the north in a very divided République d’Haïti. Although Pétion died of yellow fever in 1818 and Christophe met his own demise in a death by suicide, considered historically suspect by many, in 1820, the nevertheless divided République d’Haïti became (in 1815) the island sanctuary, safe harbor, and hemispheric haven for another revolutionary American—the young Simón Bolívar. Seven years after the Enlightenment-inspired military leader waged war against the Spanish colonialists in 1808 in the northern highlands and coastal terrains of what is now the continent of South America, Bolívar first seized military and political advantage in 1814 during the chaos wrought by the Peninsular War (1807-14), itself a spillover of the Napoleonic Wars (1803-15) ravaging Europe and its settler colonies in the Americas, and eventually, thirteen bloody years later, won and declared independence in the Republic of Gran Colombia (modern-day Colombia, Venezuela, northern Peru, Ecuador, Panama, western Guyana, and northwest Brazil).<sup>2</sup> Inspired by the Haitian Revolution and the Bolívar Revolution, armed in his own struggle for a Revolución Cubana in the 1880s and 1890s, and dying on the battlefield in 1895, the insurrectionist, revolutionary poet, and public intellectual José Martí turned his own pen and sword toward a free and independent ¡Cuba!<sup>3</sup>

In 1891, four years before his death in battle, Martí issued a rallying intellectual battle cry to “¡Estos hijos de nuestra América” (these sons of Our America) to oppose those “estos desertores que piden fusil en los ejércitos de la América del Norte, que ahoga en sangre a sus indios” (deserters who take up arms in the army of a North America that drowns its Indians in blood) to themselves take up arms, including “las armas del juicio, que vencen a las otras” (weapons of the mind, which conquer all others) and form fortresses or “trincheras de ideas” (barricades of ideas), which are more valuable than “trincheras de piedra” (barricades of stones).<sup>4</sup> During the same year, 1891, Martí

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<sup>2</sup> On Simón Bolívar and the Bolívar Revolution of Gran Colombia, see all of the following: John Lynch, *Simón Bolívar: A Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006); Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007, 2009); Wim Klooster, *Revolutions in the Atlantic World: A Comparative History* (New York: NYU Press, 2009); and Marie Arana, *Bolívar: American Liberator* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013). For the full texts of the 1827 Proclamations by Francisco José de Paula Santander y Omaña and Simón José Antonio de la Santísima Trinidad Bolívar y Palacios, known to posterity as Simón Bolívar, see *Political Conflict in Gran Colombia: 1827 Proclamations of Santander and Bolívar* (Amazon Digital Services, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> See Lillian Guerra’s *The Myth of José Martí: Conflicting Nationalisms in Early Twentieth-Century Cuba* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005) and Alfred J. López’s *José Martí: A Revolutionary Life* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014). See also José Martí, *Inside the Monster: Writings on the United States and American Imperialism* (New York: Monthly Review Press Classic Titles, 1975) and Jeffrey Belnap and Raúl Fernández, eds. *José Martí’s Our America: From National to Hemispheric Cultural Studies* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, New Americanists Series, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> José Martí, *Nuestra América* (Barcelona: Linkgua ediciones, S.L., 2007). First published in *La Revista Ilustrada de Nueva York* - 10 de enero de 1891 and published later in January 1891 in *El partido liberal*

published *Versos sencillos*, his last volume of poetry to appear in print, and the poem “Yo soy un hombre sincero” (A Sincere Man), championed the simple slave who would inherit Cuban *terra y sol* (land and soil), the former slave who becomes the armed revolutionary.<sup>5</sup> The poetic protagonist declares:

Yo soy un hombre sincero  
De donde crece la palma,  
Y antes de morirme quiero  
Echar mis versos del alma.

*I am a sincere man  
Who comes from where palms grow  
And before I die I want to  
Send forth the verses of my soul.*

And these *versos del alma* are indelibly inscribed into his heart and his psyche:

Oculto en mi pecho bravo  
La pena que me lo hierde:  
El hijo de un pueblo esclavo  
Vive por él, calla y muere.

*Hidden in my brave chest  
The scar/mark that wounds me  
The son of an enslaved village  
Who lives, suffer and dies for it.*

Martí's signature line, “Yo soy un hombre sincero” (penned in 1891) ultimately became the third line in Cuba's signature song “Guantanamera,” following the opening refrain “Guantanamera, guajira, guantanamera.” Yet following the conclusion of the Spanish American War in 1898, the Spanish colonialists had been sorely defeated by U.S. hemispheric imperialists, armed and shrouded with the 1823 Monroe Doctrine, one master exchanged for another, and ¡Cuba!, *no liberada*, remained under external rule: in 1903, following the signing and ratification of the Platt Amendment in 1901, the United

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- México - 30 de enero de 1891. Full Spanish text also archived online at *Ciudad Seva: Casa digital del escritor Luis López Nieves* <[http://www.ciudadseva.com/textos/otros/nuestra\\_america.htm](http://www.ciudadseva.com/textos/otros/nuestra_america.htm)>.

<sup>5</sup> José Martí, *Versos sencillos*, edited by Miguel Ángel García-Sánchez (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2012). See also the bilingual edition: *Versos sencillos: A Dual Language Edition*, edited and translated by Pete Seeger and Ann Fountain (McFarland Publishers, 2005).

States (El Norte) seized control of Guantánamo Bay as a U.S. Naval Base and remains there to nefarious historical ends today.

*Guantanamera, guajira, guantanamera.*

*Guantanamera, guajira guantanamera*

*Guantanamera, guajira, guantanamera*

*Yo soy un hombre sincero, de donde crece la palma*

*Yo soy un hombre sincero, de donde crece la palma*

*Y antes de morir yo quiero cantar mis versos del alma*

(If you had listened carefully, Uncle Sam, or El Yanqui del Norte, you perhaps would have heard the subterranean sounds of stifled revolution simmering just beneath the melodic surface of sun, sea, salsa, merengue, Cuban cigars, Havana rum, United Fruit, and almost five and a half decades of U.S. tourists' buying and selling of the island...from one *Revolución* to a second that ultimately succeeded in 1959 in the Oriente region, home to Guantánamo, the music played on...the music plays on...)

*Guantanamera, guajira, guantanamera.*

*Guantanamera, guajira, guantanamera.*

With music composed by José Fernández (as early as the 1920s), lyrics adapted from Martí's poem by Julián Orbón, and famously recorded (on the album *Brava*) by Célia Cruz in 1967, the iconic song "Guantanamera," championing the young peasant girl from Guantánamo, became the definitive battle-hymn of the republic for an entire generation of patriotic Cubano exiles. In Cuba, for Cubanos, Martí was, as much as Castro and adopted son Che, Patron and Patria. But beyond the borders of Cuba, and even beyond the myriad scattered diasporic sites of Cubanos in diaspora, José Martí also redefined the Américas—*Nuestra América*—at precisely the moment when the U.S. was flexing its imperial muscles in the hemisphere; and Martí's influence is vast, broad, and wide not only throughout the Antilles and Caribbean, but also throughout Central and South America.<sup>6</sup>

Historians of the transatlantic slave trade and slave revolts have long noted the salient patterns of continuity and yet also discontinuity in the Americas: where the transatlantic slave trade delivered uprooted Africans, creating the monumental African diaspora, there took tangled, gnarled root from transatlantic routes the myriad languages, religions, cultures, customs, and foods of Africa: from Port-of-Spain, San Juan, Santo Domingo, and Santiago-de-Cuba to Belize City, Bluefields, Puerto Limón, Colón, and

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<sup>6</sup> Esther Allen, ed. *José Martí: Selected Writings* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2002).

Cartagena, the African diaspora defined the Américas. What Paul Gilroy defined as the “Black Atlantic”<sup>7</sup> and what Joseph Roach redefined as the “Circum-Atlantic”<sup>8</sup> were the multiple traditions created by Africa *in* América. The Américas from the late 16<sup>th</sup> through the late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were defined by European colonies, African slaves, plantation economies of sugar cane, tobacco, coffee, chocolate, spices, and other slave commodities, and deep social, political, and economic divisions that divided the American populations into free citizens and chattel slaves, human and independent *or* inhuman and bound. Armed insurrection, slave revolts, and anticolonial and anti-imperial revolutionary struggles—from Gonaïves and Port-au-Prince, Haiti in the 18<sup>th</sup> century to Santo Domingo, Caracas and Bogotá, Colombia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and on to Santiago and Havana, Cuba and Managua, Nicaragua in the 20<sup>th</sup> century—have also been a hallmark of the Américas as slaves sought to be free men and later free women.<sup>9</sup> Scattered sites of the African diaspora in the Américas have (because of this rich cross-fertilization of European, African, indigenous American, and post-abolition Asian influences as indentured servants from China and the Indian subcontinent were brought to the region) consequently created shared cultural similarities between, for example, Shango in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad, Obeah in Kingston, Jamaica, Vodou in Cap-Haïtien, Haïti, Santería in Santiago-de-Cuba, Cuba, and Candomblé in Salvador and Bahia, in Brazil; the same is true for art, music, dance, performance, and ritualized performances throughout the Américas that have been indelibly defined by African diaspora presences.<sup>10</sup> As Joseph Roach writes in “Circum-Atlantic Memory,” part of the introductory chapter of *Cities of*

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<sup>7</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993).

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia UP, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> In addition to the scholarly titles on the Haitian Revolution and the Bolívar Revolution, referenced above, see also the following: Walter LaFeber, *Inevitable Revolutions: The United States in Central America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1993); Matilde Zimmermann, *Sandinista: Carlos Fonseca and the Nicaraguan Revolution* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001); Stephen Kinzer, *Blood of Brothers: Life and War in Nicaragua* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868-1898* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); Marifeli Pérez-Stable, *The Cuban Revolution: Origins, Course, and Legacy* (Oxford University Press, 2011; 3rd Edition); Gilbert M. Joseph and Greg Grandin, eds. *A Century of Revolution: Insurgent and Counterinsurgent Violence during Latin America's Long Cold War* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010); Lillian Guerra, *Visions of Power in Cuba: Revolution, Redemption, and Resistance, 1959-1971* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2014); and Aviva Chomsky, *A History of the Cuban Revolution* (London and New York: Wiley/Blackwell Publishers, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> Read, for example, Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo's *Black Cosmopolitanism: Racial Consciousness and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth-Century Americas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2005). See also Ifeoma C.K. Nwankwo and Mamadou Diouf's edited collection *Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World: Rituals and Remembrances* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2010). Finally, see also Ifeoma C.K. Nwankwo's brilliant intellectual archive *Voices from Our America*, Vanderbilt University <<http://www.voicesamerica.org/>>.

*the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996): “As it emerged from the revolutionized economies of the late seventeenth century, this world resembled a vortex in which commodities and cultural practices changed hands many times. The most revolutionary commodity in this economy was human flesh, and not only because slave labor produced huge quantities of the addictive substances (sugar, coffee, tobacco, and—most insidiously—sugar and chocolate in combination) that transformed the world economy and financed the industrial revolution,” citing directly Sidney Mintz from *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (1985)<sup>11</sup>. For Roach, “the concept of a circum-Atlantic world (as opposed to a transatlantic one) insists on the centrality of the diasporic and genocidal histories of Africa and the Americas, North and South, in the creation of the culture of modernity. In this sense, a New World was not discovered in the Caribbean but one was truly invented there.” (Roach, 4). We would go further, because the New World was in fact discovered in the Caribbean, and it was invented there.

Shared or common histories of slavery, colonialism, revolution, and anticolonial struggle from the late 16<sup>th</sup> through late 19<sup>th</sup> centuries became further pronounced in 20<sup>th</sup> century *circum-Caribbean* migration as economic migrants and laborers moved from island to island, from islands to isthmus<sup>12</sup>: Haitian cane laborers moved into and worked in cane fields in the Dominican Republic and in Cuba, and islanders from across the Antilles migrated to Panamá in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to build first the railroad and later the great *Canal de Panamá*. Almost 15% of the Panamanian population, in fact, are Afro-Panamanians, some the descendants of slaves brought into the isthmus region but a significant proportion the direct descendants of Antillean migrants from the Caribbean islands (prominently from Trinidad and Tobago, Martinique, Guadeloupe, Barbados, and Jamaica) who now live throughout the country. Caribbean economic migrants first traveled to Panamá in the 1840s as a consequence of the Gold Rush, the largest number arriving in 1844, later working on the construction of the Panamanian railroad in 1850; later waves of West Indian economic migrants (from many islands across the archipelago) traveled to Panamá in order to build the Panamá Canal (first for the French, a failed effort, and later for the Americans and Uncle Sam from 1904-1914). The Sociedad de Amigos del Museo Afroantillano de Panamá (SAMAAP), popularly known as the Afro-Caribbean Museum of Panamá, documents these Antillean presences in Panamá, as does the Panama Interoceanic Canal Museum, in the *zona* of the Canal de Panamá. Historical legacies also leave discernible literary traces: the Antillean migratory presences in Panamá have left palpable literary traces as well documented in Sonja Watson’s *The Politics of Race*

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<sup>11</sup> Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking Press, 1985).

<sup>12</sup> Popular histories include David McCullough’s *The Path Between the Seas: The Creation of the Panama Canal, 1870-1914* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001) and Matthew Parker’s *Panama Fever: The Epic Story of the Building of the Panama Canal* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007).

in *Panama: Afro-Hispanic and West Indian Literary Discourses of Contention* (2014)<sup>13</sup> and in Luis Wong Vega's edited collection *Rapsodia Antillana: Selección Bilingüe de Poesía Afro-Antillana de Panamá* (2013), which anthologizes forty Afro-Panamanian poets.<sup>14</sup> Still, I wondered [shouldn't it be "we" here? you use "we" a few pages after], what were the discernible literary and poetic traces throughout Central America? Would we find a chartable and circumnavigable Circum-Caribbean? And one defined by a Circum-Caribbean poetics?

Other poetic and political questions persisted, particularly along the lines of Martí's legacies in the Caribbean and in the Américas: Martí's legacy—poetic, philosophical, revolutionary—has incontrovertibly defined the Américas since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and forcefully into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Martí inspired generations of poets, writers, and revolutionaries from Haiti and Cuba to Nicaragua, Panama, and Colombia, just as he himself was inspired by Toussaint, Dessalines, Christophe, Pétion, and Bolívar. But where exactly were the hemispheric and American legacies left by Martí the revolutionary fighter, the prose essayist, the exiled journalist, the battlefield orator, the armed soldier, and the lyrical poet most indelibly mapped? For the average man or woman, and not just the intellectual, scholar, statesperson, and poet: Have the legacies of Martí—and through him, the earlier and deeply intertwined Américan legacies of Toussaint, Dessalines, Christophe, Pétion, and Bolívar—marked as indelibly in the collective conscience and collective unconscious? and are they thus legible and discernable to the general public in Central America and South America as in the Antilles or the Caribbean? Who would know the legacies of Martí and beyond him other Caribbean and Central American writers and intellectuals?

The circum-Caribbean poetics we are attempting to illustrate in this issue come from a rich literature with a wide range of influences and created by a variety of individuals of different races, languages and cultural traditions. This makes the culture of the Caribbean one of the most varied, vital and unique in the world. The circum-Caribbean literatures have been created by artists of white Hispanic origin, African descent, by people of French, Dutch, or English origin, and by descendants of Asians, mainly Chinese. The literary work has been conducted in Spanish and English but also in French and Creole, Dutch and Papiamentu, Miskito and many other indigenous languages of the Central Caribbean basin. It is therefore very difficult to speak and write of the circum-Caribbean literature in unitary terms, but in the following pages we will try to offer an overview of these literatures to contextualize the articles and texts presented in this issue.

While it is true that since the sixteenth century various types of texts were published in the Caribbean, I think we can take the late 18<sup>th</sup> through mid-19<sup>th</sup> century as the origin for circum-Caribbean literatures: The earliest Anglophone Caribbean literary texts were natural histories like Griffith Hughes' *Natural History of Barbadoes* (1750),

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<sup>13</sup> Sonja S. Watson, *The Politics of Race in Panama: Afro-Hispanic and West Indian Literary Discourses of Contention* (University Press of Florida 2014).

<sup>14</sup> Luis Wong Vega, ed. *Rapsodia Antillana: Selección Bilingüe de Poesía Afro-Antillana de Panamá* (University of Panamá Press, 2013).

William Earles' novel *Obi; or, the History of Three-Fingered Jack* (1800), and slave narratives like *The History of Mary Prince* (1831). In 1839, in Cuba, Juan Francisco Manzano wrote *Autobiography of a slave*, the first text that highlights the life of a slave and the first text where that person witnesses himself through writing. Although the book was not published until 1937, we propose *Autobiography of a Slave* as the seminal text of the circum-Caribbean literature because it marks the awareness of African descent in the Caribbean, and the installation as the author of a text. Four years later we see the publication in Cuba of the novel *Sab* (1841) of Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda. In the context of literary romanticism, when the countries of the continent were already independent from Spain, and in the midst of great debate against the enslavement of African descent, this novel presents love between a slave and a white daughter of the master. The social problems that this novel showcases, as well as the intensity of the events and feelings narrated, make *Sab* also the starting point of the circum-Caribbean literature. In the Dominican Republic it is important to note the publication of the novel *Enriquillo* (1882) by Manuel de Jesús Galván, which tells the love story between an indian and a mestizo. These novels of love which Doris Sommer has called "foundational romances" serve as metaphors of the identity and development of the nation, through the fact that love unites people whose union was not tolerated by society due to social prejudice. In Puerto Rico the drama *La Cuarterona* (*The Quadroon*, 1867) by Alejandro Tapia y Rivera presents the situation of the sexualized mulatta, victim of social prejudices of the time which initiates a long dialogue in circum-Caribbean literature.

As it was implied before, the work of José Martí is, in the late nineteenth century is the greatest monument of circum-Caribbean literature. Not only his poetry and narrative, but his extensive prose work, serve as a cornerstone of Latin American identity and independence of Cuba. The seminal essay "Our America" (1891) is a statement of political and cultural independence for the continent and one of the most important texts of American literature. According to Julio Ramos, in his book *Divergent Modernities*, "Martí's speech, again, stands before fragmentation and attempts to condense the dispersed. His authority - linked, as we shall see, to [?] compensatory devices in a reuniting gesture - and look is also based on a projection of the future, in a teleology which postulates the final overcoming of fragmentation: the ultimate redemption of an organic America, purified stains that overshadowed its original fullness" (232).

In the francophone Caribbean, nineteenth-century cultural life was quite rich, but it largely was a Francophile literature, looking more to France than to Haiti. Exile was and still is one of the main issues in Haitian literature. In 1804 debuts a major drama of literature in Haiti, *L'Haitienne expatriée* by P. Fligneau. In 1829 the magazine *Abeille haïtienne* is published, and in the second half of the nineteenth century writers such as Antoine Dupré, Juste Chanlatte, and François-Romain Lhérisson arise. We have to wait until the 1940s to find writers really committed to the reality of Haiti and concerned with Haitian identity, writers like Jacques Roumain, René Depestre, Marie Chauvet, and Stephen Alexis. Today Haitian writers remain divided between the diaspora and the desperate

political and economic situation of the country. A writer like Edwidge Danticat, arguably the most famous writer of Haitian origin, returns again and again to these unavoidable issues of Haitian literature. Other contemporary Haitian authors—Dany Laferrière, Lionel Trouillot, Evelyne Trouillot, Frankétienne, Gary Victor, Yannick Lahens, Joel Des Rosiers, Louis Philippe Dalembert, Marie Cécile Agnant, and Kettly Mars have all significantly contributed to the rich literary tradition of the country and its diaspora. The most important author in Martinique is Aimé Césaire, who in his *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939), makes a wonderful argument for authentic Caribbean identity, blackness, and the cultural independence of the francophone Caribbean; and other important Martinican writers include Frantz Fanon, Édouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau. Important francophone literatures also include Simone Schwarz-Bart, Maryse Condé, and Gisèle Pineau from Guadeloupe.

In the Anglophone Caribbean we can say that the literary development began a little later. It was in the early twentieth century when writers of Jamaica began to define the identity of authors of the West Indies, and Thomas H. MacDermont was perhaps one of the first to settle as a writer and worry about the identity of the Jamaican literature. His novels *Becka's buckra Baby* (1903) and *One Brown Girl and 1/4* (1909) are the basis of a future and rich literature of Jamaica including writers like Andrew Salkey, Una Marson, Roger Mais, Peter Abrahams, J.A. Rogers, and Louise Bennett, and a wide and diverse range of contemporary writers—Olive Senior, Sylvia Winter, Michelle Cliff, Patricia Powell, Erna Brodber, Margaret Cezair-Thompson, Jean D-Costa, Lorna Goodison, Jean Binta Breeze, Makeda Silvera, Nalo Hopkinson, Staceyann Chin, Kwame Dawes, Colin Channer, Oku Onuora, Linton Kwesi Johnson, and Marlon James among many others. As proof of this rich tradition we include in this issue a story and five poems by Jacqueline Bishop, author of Jamaican origin and professor at New York University. In this issue we also include a story of Lisa Allen-Agostini, originally from Trinidad and Tobago, who contributes to a rich Trinidadian literary tradition that includes C.L.R. James, V.S. Naipaul, Sam Selvon, Eric Williams, Earl Lovelace and a prolific generation of diaspora writers like Lakshmi Persaud, Shani Mootoo, Rosa Guy, Austin Clarke and Dionne Brand. Other important anglo-Antillean writers include E.A. Markham from Montserrat; Robert Antoni from the Bahamas; Jamaica Kincaid, Althea Romeo-Mark, and Marie-Elena John from Antigua; Caryl Phillips from Saint Kitts and Nevis; Kamau Brathwaite, Paule Marshall, and Austin Clarke from Barbados; Merle Collins from Grenada; Wilson Harris, Beryl Gilroy, Jan Carew, David Dabydeen, Cyril Dabydeen, Sasenarine Peraud, and Fred D'Aguiar from Guyana.

Venezuela is a country with a large presence in the Caribbean and a high percentage of black population, yet its literature has largely avoided treating racial issues. Arturo Uslar Pietri published in 1931 *The red lances*, and Romulo Gallegos published in 1937 *Poor Black Man*, but it was always about the vision of a white writer on the life of Afro-descendants in Venezuela. Steven Bermudez Antunez offers a study of black representation in the Venezuelan story in issue number 30 of the *Cincinnati Romance Review*

(CRR). While Venezuela's first major authors were Andrés Bello and Eduardo Blanco. Other important Venezuelan writers, heavily influenced by the Caribbean, include Romulo Gallegos, Salvador Garmendia, and Arturo Uslar Pietri.

In Colombia the presence of Afro-descendants has been recognized more than in other countries, but has also been silenced both in history and in literature. The vitality of the literary production of the Colombian Caribbean coast makes it impossible not to see the multiple contributions, from the work of Manuel Zapata Olivella to Gabriel García Márquez. Alain Lawo-Sukam historicizes the concept of negritude in the Afro-Colombian literature in his article contained in volume 30 of this journal. Contributions to the circum-Caribbean poetry of writers like Arnaldo Palacios or Alfredo Vanin Romero, as well as that of many writers like Germán Espinoza, Oscar Collazos or Regulus Ahumada Zurbaran, is of vital importance for Colombian literature and for that of all the continent.

In the early twentieth century Modernism marks the literature of the Latin American countries and authors of great importance as the Cuban Julián del Casal appear, although the vision of the Caribbean was not his main concern. The Nicaraguan Ruben Dario felt firsthand the defeat of the war between the US and Spain and made it a subject of great importance in his articles. While in Cuba he wrote his poem "The Black Dominga" one of the earliest examples of black poetry, but the Caribbean is not at the center of his cultural imaginary. We have to wait until poets like Luis Pales Matos (Puerto Rico from 1898-1959) for the Antillean poetry to be fully developed in poems like *Tuntún de pasa y grifería* (1937). By that time, the Puerto Rican Julia de Burgos, born in 1914, highlights the importance of the political status of Puerto Rico and the Puerto Rican nationalism becomes subject of her literature. For more information on this topic see the article by Sonja Stephenson Watson in issue 30 of the CRR.

By 1940 the group Orígenes, with writers like Jose Lezama Lima, Gastón Baquero, Cintio Vitier, Fina García and Eliseo Diego Murraz arises in Cuba. The poetics of these writers shows another dimension of the circum-Caribbean aesthetic, revealed by an extreme baroque style, large and variegated metaphors, and deep reflections on life in Havana and the Cuban identity. In the Dominican Republic "Sorprendible Poetry" with poets like Rafael Antonio Henríquez, Flankin Menesses Birgos, and Freddy Arce emerges at this time. In Puerto Rico we have a poet like Francisco Matos Paoli, who writes between secrecy and introspection, *criollismo* and the world around him.

Nicaraguan literature has largely ignored the culture of the Caribbean or the Atlantic Coast, as it is called in Nicaragua. There is little contact between the two worlds and still today there is not a road that directly communicate both sectors. Maria Roof's article in this issue, is a big step to disseminate the rich literature that has occurred in the Nicaraguan Caribbean. Among the few texts that have previously explored this world we must mention the novel by Alberto Ordonez Arguello, *Ebano. Novel about the Nicaraguan Atlantic Coast* (1954). But really, we had to wait until the appearance of Lizandro Chavez Alfaro, born in Bluefields in 1929, and his novel *Columpio al aire* (1999) to have a story that allows us to see life in Bluefields and in the Nicaraguan Caribbean. In this issue we

include a story by Nicaraguan writer Alejandro Bravo and a selection of poems from the coast by the Nicaraguan poet and critic Carlos Castro Jo.

The literature of Costa Rica, like that of Nicaragua, has been developed without giving much importance to the Caribbean coast. Most mentions of that part of the country were accidental and almost no writer had bothered to explore the roots and culture of Costa Ricans of African descent. Quince Duncan, born in 1940, is perhaps the first Costa Rican black writer who writes about the life and culture of Limón. From his short story “A song at dawn” (1970) Duncan has developed an extensive body of work, which tells the life and the difficult conditions of the Caribbean population in Costa Rica. Duncan has not only written novels such as *Hombres curtidos* (1971), *Los cuatro espejos* (1973), *La paz del pueblo* (1978), y *Final de calle* (1980), but has also theorized about the condition of Afro-descendants in essays like “The black in Costa Rica” (1972) written in collaboration with Carlos Melendez, and “The black in the Costa Rican literature” (1975). In this issue we include an article by Silvia E. Solano on Quince Duncan’s *The Four Mirrors*. Recently, the most active writer of African descent in Costa Rica is Shirley Campbell Bar. In this issue we include three poems by her, including her famous “Absolutely black” poem, in addition to an extensive article on her work written by Silvia E. Solano and Jorge Ramirez Caro. Anacristina Rossi is the Costa Rican novelist who has been most concerned in recent years to rescue the life and culture of Limón, especially in his novels *Limón Blues* (2002) and *Limón Reggae* (2007).

In Panama the situation has been similar. The most famous writers of Panama just have not dealt with the situation of people of African descent, although because of the existence of the canal, and the proximity between the two coasts, the Caribbean presence in the country is almost inescapable. 50% of the population in Panama has African ancestry, although 80% of the population declare themselves to be mestizo. As quoted before, this situation has recently been studied by Sonja Stephenson Watson in *The Politics of Race in Panama* (2014). However, it was not until 1950 that a generation of writers write about the life and condition of the Panamanian Caribbean. Consuelo Tomás is a poet, novelist, and radio and TV host who has developed a voice based on Panamanian culture oriented to the Caribbean and to social justice, and Carlos “Cubena” William Wilson has developed a valuable work both in verse and prose. The diversity of influences in Panama is very large and there is a very important Asian population. Carlos Francisco Changmarín is the best example of a writer of Chinese descent, whose work we find a critique of discrimination and invisibility of the poor Chinese in Panama.

In Honduras the Caribbean has more presence than in the other Central American countries, partly due to the fact that Honduras has a Caribbean coast populated with major cities such as San Pedro de Sula, Puerto Cortes, La Ceiba and Trujillo. A writer as Ramón Amaya Amador in 1950 published the novel *Green Prison*, which recounts the difficulties of banana workers in Honduras, contributing greatly to the formation of the circum-Caribbean poetry we study in this issue. Amaya also left unpublished a novel titled *With the same horseshoe* on the raid in the Mosquitia in the seventeenth century, and the

drama *Black Death*. Roberto Sosa is the most important poet of the second half of the twentieth century. His work, of great social content, shows an enormous poetic sensibility although we do not necessarily identify his work with a circum-Caribbean poetic. His book of poems *The Poors House* won the Casa de las Americas Award in 1969. Julio Escoto is perhaps the most important contemporary narrator of Honduras. His work draws on indigenous myths, social problems and also makes use of postmodernist games. *Madrugada, King of dawn* (1993) is a good example.

In Belize, the situation is different for several reasons. Belize is a country newly independent (1981), with an English tradition for having belonged to the British Empire for many years, and with a great mix of languages since besides English, Spanish, Creole, Maya and Garifuna are spoken. One of its first writers was James Sullivan Martinez who published in the 1920 a collection of poems titled *Caribbean Jingles*. John Alexander Walter is another writer of the mid-twentieth century who published novels such as *Boss of Dandriga* and *Cry Among The Rainclouds*. Leo Bradley is the most prolific authors of that era, best known for his book *Belize Flavor*. Among contemporary writers we can mention Zee Edgell who has published the novels *Beka Lamb* (1982) and *Festival of San Joaquin* (2007). Glen Godfrey with his novel *The Sinner's Bossanova* (1987), and Felicia Hernandez who writes in English and has published three novels and a book of short stories. Some writers who write in Spanish in Belize are Amado Chan and David Ruiz Puga, author of the novel *Got Saif de Cuin* (1995).

In Mexico there has also been an effort to deny the presence of Afro-Caribbean poetry and silence it in their culture. Galadriel Mehera Gerardo has demonstrated this attitude in three Mexican intellectuals in his article in volume 30 of this journal. The Yucatan peninsula offers an important window for Mexico to the Caribbean, and Merida has historically been a port of entry of products, people, and cultural elements. It is therefore unthinkable that Mexico does not have a strong Caribbean influence or made contributions to the circum-Caribbean poetry. The anthology of A. Torres Diaz and Israel Reyes Larrea, *Alma cimarrona* (1999) collects anonymous and popular poems by afro-Mexicans as well as poems by Francisco J. Zarate Arango, Alvaro Carrillo, Joaquin Alvarez Añorve and Fidencio Escamilla, but Mexican intellectuals are hard pressed to come up with the name of a single black Mexican writer.

Cuba has been in the second half of the twentieth century one of the main sources of the great writers of the Caribbean and has been at the forefront of the circum-Caribbean poetry. The imprint left by the work of Alejo Carpentier and Severo Sarduy, was then transformed into authentic and wonderful poetry by Nicolas Guillen and Nancy Morejón. In this issue we include poems by Cuban writers Caridad Atencio, Rito Ramón Aroche, Reynaldo García Blanco, and the Cuban-American Achy Obejas.

Towards the end of the twentieth century Caribbean writers production increases exponentially and the quality of the works reaches stellar levels. We will not make a catalog of authors or writers since that is unnecessary. There are many anthologies and specialized studies that offer that. In Puerto Rico the work of Mayra Santos-Febres and Yolanda

Arroyo Pizarro are examples of this quality and importance (see the article by Casella Zaira Rivera in number 30 of the *CRR*). The complexity of circum-Caribbean culture today combines the work of Derek Walcott with Guillermo Cabrera Infante, V.S. Naipaul and Gabriel García Márquez, Jamaica Kincaid and Ana Lydia Vega. The mobility of circum-Caribbean writers makes chronicling the literature statically, by countries, ineffectual, since this does not account for the complexity of the diasporic phenomenon that exists. The Dominican Republic has produced writers of the stature of Juan Bosh, one of the best storytellers of the continent, or Marcio Veloz Maggiolo, prolific and versatile writer, author of over 30 books. However the best known writers of Dominican origin at this time are those who have emigrated to the United States and have excelled mostly writing in English. Julia Alvarez became famous with her novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accent* (1991) whose theme is the adaptation of a Dominican to American culture. Alvarez then returned to Dominican themes and *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994). The other paradigmatic case is Junot Diaz, who won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007). Fernando Valerio-Holguín writes a lucid article in this issue about Junot Díaz in this issue of the *CRR*. Loida Maritza Perez also addresses the issue in her novel *Geographies of Home* (1999). To demonstrate the intellectual breadth of the Dominican Fernando Valerio-Holguín, teacher, critic, poet and storyteller, we include three of his poems. Finally we also include a story of Sophie Mariñez, born in France, raised in the Dominican Republic, and currently residing in New York.

The transnational character, transgender and postmodern of the Caribbean can be seen in the articles by Kathleen Gysselle and Dawn Duke, both included in this number. The vitality, diversity and richness of the circum-Caribbean poetry as expressed in their literature is impossible to grasp in one volume. We hope that this selection will serve as an example.



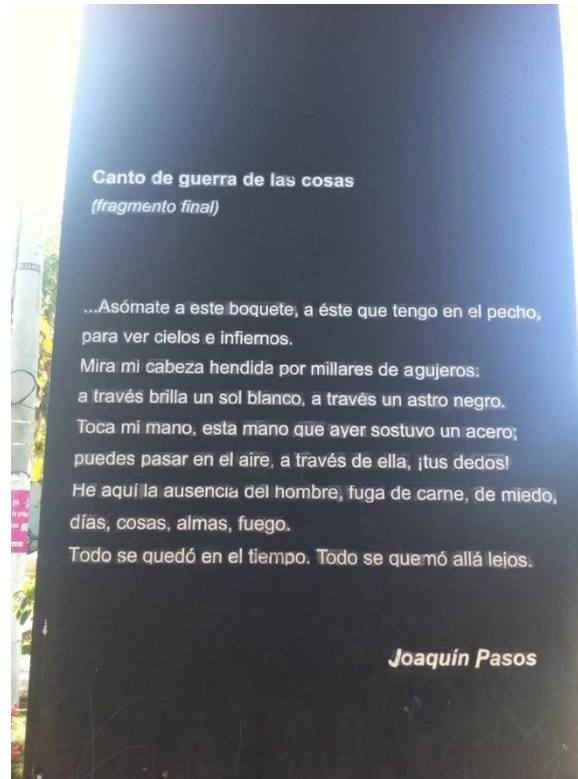
Seeking precisely such palpable poetic forms, trans-American, and circum-Caribbean traces, Jana Braziel journeyed first to Panamá in 2014 to and then to Nicaragua in 2015. Jana was looking for interregional, historical, literary, cultural, and political exchanges between the Caribbean archipelago and the countries of Central America bordering on the Caribbean Sea and Atlantic Ocean. As friends and colleagues, Nicasio Urbina, himself from Nicaragua, and Jana Braziel engaged one another in vibrant and querying dialogue about the contours of a circum-Caribbean poetics. In Panamá, Jana visited the Sociedad de Amigos del Museo Afroantillano de Panamá (SAMAAP), or Afro-Caribbean Museum of Panamá, to document these Antillean presences in Panamá, and the Panama Interoceanic Canal Museum in February 2014. Jana sought out road signs and guide posts for the myriad cultural, historical, and political traces of a Circum-Caribbean poetics in Panamá. In March 2015, Jana sojourned to Granada, Nicaragua, city of poets and annual host to the Festival Internacional de Poesía de Granada. Jana was following, of course, native Nica Nicasio, close friend and colleague, as well as a founding member of the international poetry festival in Granada, in pursuit of a *Circum-Caribbean Poetics*, the topic of this special issue. While in Granada, Jana walked with amazement through Parque de

la Poesía, a spare, minimalist, modernist, and beautiful, even haunting outdoor garden museum to *Poesía* with monuments erected to individual poets and poems. Jana and her husband passed between steel monuments engraved with poetic lines from “Soneto para Morir,” “Los Nahoas en Nicaragua,” “Canto de guerra de los cosas,” “Perfil,” “El Paraiso Recobrado,” “No Puede,” “Ventana,” and other poems. They walked between bougainvillea and hibiscus bushes through framed steel busts of poets—Claribel Alegría, Enrique Fernández Morales, Francisco Pérez Estrada, Joaquín Pasos, Ernesto Cardenal, Carlos Martínez Rivas, and Manolo Cuadra—a labyrinthine and aesthetic map of Spanish-language poetry in the Americas.









In mirrored side-by-side monuments, Jana read Claribel Alegría's poetic line "No puede conmigo la tristeza la arrastro hacia la vida y se evapora," (*"No, I cannot go with sadness, I drag it into life and it evaporates"*), and pass the spare beautiful face (cast in steel) of the still-living 91 year-old poetess (born of Nicaraguan and Salvadoran parents from Estelí, Nicaragua) who delivered this poetic line into being.



And Jana was suffused with a joy that banished all sadness with two words: “No puede” (“No it cannot”).



Alongside *Alegría*, other Nica poets stood in monumental relief: Morales, Estrada, Pasos, Cardenal, Rivas, and Cuadra. Among these Nicaraguan poets were *not* to be found a José Martí or a C.L.R. James or a V.S. Naipaul or Derek Walcott or a Patrick Chamoiseau or a Édouard Glissant or a Maryse Condé or a Jamaica Kincaid or a Kamau Brathwaite. Jana wandered to the edge of Malecon de Granada, where land gives way to the waters of Lake Nicaragua, and there I [she?] found the Great Patron of Nicaraguan national poetry, none other than Rubén Darío.



While in Granada, Jana also interviewed poet and scholar Alvaro José Rivas Gomez, who teaches at Bluefields Indian and Caribbean University (BICU) in Bluefields, Nicaragua on the eastern Antillean side and who researches African Nicaraguan literatures and cultures, and Afro-Nica poet Fernandez López Gutiérrez, whose family immigrated from Jamaica, and historian and independent scholar Rolando Ernesto Tellez. During this vibrant conversation, we exchanged ideas about the African diasporic presences, including poetic ones, in the Americas, in our América, from the southeastern United States, particularly the Gulf of México states that border on the Caribbean Sea, throughout the Caribbean archipelago, to the Atlantic and Caribbean coasts of Central America and northern South America, especially Venezuela and Colombia. What was the relationship between José Martí and Rubén Darío? Did you read Louise Bennett, Aimé Césaire, or Nicolás Guillén as part of your poetic or literary education? Have Caribbean poets like Kamau Brathwaite, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Jean “Binta” Breeze, Beryl Gilroy, Derek Walcott, or Édouard Glissant ever attended the Granada Poetry Festival? What we all discovered, slowly, lamentably, was that this vibrant poetic lineage from the Caribbean archipelago to Central America seemed to have died (or at least have been prematurely aborted) with Martí and

Darío and their generation. This special issue on *Circum-Caribbean Poetics* is, then, an audacious effort to revive and revitalize that poetic lines and circuits of literary exchange, which is simultaneously both poetic and political.



L-R: Fernandez López Gutiérrez, Alvaro Rivas, Jana Braziel, and Roland Ernesto Tellez. Granada, Nicaragua (March 2015).