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# The BBC's *Caribbean Voices* and the Making of an Oral Aesthetic in the West Indian Short Story

Hyacinth M. Simpson

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- 1 Official narratives of the history of modern Anglophone Caribbean, or West Indian, literature locate its origins in the “rise” of the novel in the 1950s and 1960s, which was occasioned by the publication of now canonical prose works by George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, and V.S. Naipaul, among others. Certainly, the publication, in quick succession, of novels that captured the flavor of West Indian life, addressed the region’s colonial past, and envisioned new political futures helped establish writing from the region as a recognizable and emerging category within the so-called new literatures in English. But this is an incomplete account of the history of modern West Indian literature. As a number of critics have pointed out in recent years, West Indian literary historiography can benefit from more “divergent” readings (Donnell 1) that reclaim those parts of literary history that have been suppressed or not adequately explored.
- 2 This essay undertakes such a divergent reading to argue that accounting for the development of short fiction writing among West Indians in the 1940s and 1950s during the years the BBC’s *Caribbean Voices* program was on the air provides evidence that writers were engaged in discovering and fine-tuning an oral aesthetic; and, furthermore, that this aesthetic was integral to expressing anti-colonial and nationalist sentiments, which critics argue is a main characteristic of novels of the 1950s and 1960s. In fact, the “rise” of the novel in the years immediately following the Second World War had its foundation in short-story writing. Short-story writing in the modern West Indies can be traced as far back as the turn of the twentieth century with small local publishing ventures such as the *All Jamaica Library* (1904-1909) and to “little magazines” published in the region: *Trinidad* (1929-1930) and *The Beacon* (1931-33, 1939) in Trinidad; *Kyk-over-al* (from 1945) in Guyana; *Bim* (from 1942) in Barbados; and *Focus* (1943, 1948, 1956, 1983) in Jamaica. However, publishing ventures, particularly formal ones, were few and far between; and the small, locally edited magazines were sustained

only through the dedication and sacrifice of a handful of individuals. In several instances, authors resorted to self-publishing. It was not until *Caribbean Voices*, a West Indian literary magazine produced and broadcast by the BBC from 1945 to 1958, that the West Indian short story came into its own. *Caribbean Voices* gave short story writers a wider audience, both within their own countries and across the region, and was instrumental in creating a West Indian audience for West Indian literature.<sup>1</sup> The radio program also provided a forum in which writers whose works were chosen for broadcast could have quick critical feedback and where they could begin to feel that they were part of a writing community; and it became, with a reported budget of £1,500 per year for contributors,<sup>2</sup> a significant source of remuneration for emerging authors in those years. As well, the authority that the BBC had among listeners in British colonial territories, even with the post-World War Two crumbling of the Empire, meant that West Indian writing would be taken more seriously in the region and among those interested in West Indian fiction in the metropole.

- 3 The rise of the West Indian novel was at least in part a consequence of the literary climate that *Caribbean Voices* helped to foster. Several of the writers who published novels in the 1950s and 1960s honed their skills by writing for *Caribbean Voices*; and some of the London-based authors helped support themselves by working as freelance readers and commentators on the program. Sam Selvon, for example, had stories broadcast on *Caribbean Voices* before his first novel was published in 1952; and he continued to publish novels, and a short-story collection, simultaneously with having his short fiction aired on the program. Andrew Salkey, a prolific novelist and anthologist in the 1960s and beyond, first made his name writing short stories, several of which were aired on *Caribbean Voices*. Similarly, V.S. Naipaul, who has had a distinguished international career, got his start on *Caribbean Voices*. Several of his short stories were broadcast on the program, and after leaving Oxford he worked behind the scenes as an interviewer and was editor in the last few years *Caribbean Voices* was on the air. Naipaul has recalled how he sat in a monkey crouch over a typewriter in the freelancers' room of the Langham Hotel and began to tap out what would become the first pages of *Miguel Street* ("Prologue to an Autobiography" 57-62), a series of linked short stories which he completed in 1955 although it was not published until 1959. He admitted to having "learned a lot from *Caribbean Voices*,"<sup>3</sup> and no doubt his first two novels, *The Mystic Masseur* (1957) and *The Suffrage of Elvira* (1958) were outcomes of that learning experience.
- 4 *Caribbean Voices* had a symbiotic relationship with the "little magazines" of the region. Quite a number of the short stories broadcast on *Caribbean Voices* were either previously published in the "little magazines" or were printed after they were aired.<sup>4</sup> *Caribbean Voices* actively promoted the "little magazines," thereby making the publications' existence known to interested parties far beyond the subscription lists of individual magazines. Together, the radio program and the magazines not only promoted short-story writing but spurred published and aspiring authors on to articulate a worldview where West Indian culture—particularly the voices, narrative forms and storytelling models, myths, songs, etc. of local oral contexts—would function as the basis for developing a distinctive literary tradition. The intellectual mood of the time indicated that a home-grown literature that spoke of and from West Indian peoples, rather than about them from foreign perspectives, would help create a freer society and support nationalist philosophies that advocated for more equitable social and political systems.

- 5 The close relationship established between *Caribbean Voices* and the “little magazines” meant that there was a carry-over of literary aims from the print outlets to the radio program. As well, political sentiments that contributed to the founding of the “little magazines” no doubt had an impact on the selection of pieces for broadcast and the critical outlook adopted by the program. As Reinhard Sander has pointed out, “[t]he origins of the literary movement in the 1930s and 1940s are essentially the same as those of the labour movement and the nationalist political parties” (*From Trinidad*, 7). The magazine’s editors openly embraced Independence and Federation; and the close connection between political aspirations and literary aesthetics secured the magazines’ status as harbingers of a modern West Indian literature. For example, Emilio Jorge Rodríguez has pointed out that the aims for *Kyk-over-al* “were related to the struggle for autonomy” and the magazine’s editors “hoped [it would] become the literary voice of this aspiration” (125); and in her preface to the 1943 issue of *Focus*, Edna Manly noted that “[g]reat and irrevocable changes have swept this land of ours in the last few years and out of these changes a new art is springing.”<sup>5</sup>
- 6 Particularly in the years when the Irishman Henry Swanzy was program producer (1946-1954), *Caribbean Voices* actively encouraged the writing of fiction that was expressive of West Indian realities and that utilized West Indian cultural forms. The goal was to promote the development of a regional fiction that was not derivative or imitative of either the British or the American literary tradition, both of which, by reason of historical ties and proximity, exerted a strong influence on the West Indian literary imagination. Under Swanzy’s direction, the program identified a number of aims, which included encouraging writers to have, as Arthur Calder-Marshall put it in 1948, “more confidence in the use of raw materials – a greater use of words, style and incidents of a ‘truly West Indian nature . . . [and] the words, the idiom, the rhythms to say what they as individuals, as West Indians, wanted to say.”<sup>6</sup> The use of oral traditional resources and West Indian voices would allow authors to express a West Indian worldview and reflect the ways in which their communities organize and create meaning for themselves. This development in literary practice was actively encouraged and facilitated by *Caribbean Voices*; and the emphasis on finding authentically West Indian models for the emerging literature of the twentieth century was seen as integral to the development of cultural and national pride and the recovery of a sense of history within West Indian communities at large, both of which were deemed necessary if the region and its peoples were to achieve full liberation.
- 7 These ideas were clearly articulated by West Indian writers themselves during the program “A West Indian Symposium” broadcast on 9 July 1950. Fourteen West Indian writers, men and women then resident in London, were invited to participate. Among them, Terry Burke of Jamaica pointed to the “rich beauty of the folklore” and praised Louise Bennett and others “who have broken away from the shackles of British influence and have brought out something new, that has evolved straight out of the hearts of their people,” while Doreen Goodwin of Antigua offered the following: “Perhaps in the proud march of our folklore we may bring our peasant people to the fore more readily than in the flourishing of the Union. Perhaps in the self improvement of our Carnivals we may educate the man of the street to a more sincere appreciation of music and colour, than by the imitation of the British Council dummy.” During the same broadcast, Errol Hill argued that West Indians “must consciously discard the over-crust of purely British influence on which our whole formal education has been

based, out of all proportion to its intrinsic value, and we must go back to the soil for our material,” and he called on *Caribbean Voices* to “include in its programme, and so provide an opening for, plays and dramatized versions of West Indian stories, folk tales, and so on to be broadcast and reach a wider audience.” Similarly, in their conversation that was broadcast on 21 October 1951, writer-critics Denis Williams and Jan Carew concluded that a West Indian culture from which writers could draw inspiration was rooted in the lore of the folk. In the discussion and analysis of selected short stories below, it will become clear that *Caribbean Voices* not only facilitated short-story writing but actively encouraged the development of an oral aesthetic among West Indian writers.

- 8 If numbers are anything to go by, short-story writing flourished during the years of *Caribbean Voices*. At several points during his tenure as program producer, Swanzy commented on the high percentage of short-story contributions and broadcasts relative to poetry and drama. In a review of the program aired on 11 January 1948, Swanzy indicated that he had been “totting up the figures” for the previous year’s programming only to discover that *Caribbean Voices* had aired 28 programs of short stories and sketches compared to only 13 programs on poetry, with the rest of the broadcasts taken up with “five or six Critics’ Circles” and a few special programs. Similarly, on 12 February, 1950 he began his assessment of the previous six months with:

I think the first thing worth noting is the continued development of the prose, and comparative scarcity of the poetry of which there were only about 8 collections, against 40 short stories and sketches.

- 9 On 13 August of that same year, he talked about the strength of the prose relative to the poetry; and in the following year, on 18 February 1951, he again observed the dominance of the short story: “In the last six months, we have had roughly 50 items. The greater part of these, of course, have been short stories, 22 in all.” The other 28 programs were shared among poetry, sketches about people and places, critical talks, and a couple of recounted folktales and play excerpts.
- 10 As well, in 1948, the interest in short-story writing in the region had so blossomed that Robert Herring, editor of the British monthly review *Life and Letters*, devoted two issues of the publication to short stories from the region: the first drew on writing from across the West Indies and the second focused on Jamaican fiction. As Peter Abrahams remembered it a decade and a half later, at the time “prose fiction had come into its own” to the extent that Herring “could not [find] space for all the publishable short stories he received from Jamaica” (*Independence Anthology of Jamaican Literature* iii). The Jamaican issue of *Life and Letters* was reviewed on *Caribbean Voices* on 18 April 1948 following a talk on Jamaican fiction during which the same Robert Herring praised the authors for the “vigour” with which they represented the island’s realities, expressed delight with Vic Reid’s handling of the Jamaican language in his novel *New Day* (1949)<sup>7</sup> and with Louise Bennett’s *Dialect Verses* (1942), and encouraged writers to use an idiom that sounds convincing and comes naturally.
- 11 Both the radio medium, and the length of the broadcasts (initially fifteen minutes, but expanded to half-hour in February 1948), seemed to have proved favourable to short-story writing; and the program’s collaboration with small magazines that were always mindful of space and page count meant that writers who produced shorter pieces of fiction would have a greater chance of getting published. On the face of it, poetry,

rather than short fiction, would seem the preferred genre, especially if emphasis is on shorter lyric compositions rather than longer narrative verse, or on what Swanzy described as “straightforward, declamatory”<sup>8</sup> poems. Although the numbers, at least Swanzy’s tallying indicated above, do not support his claim, Laurence Breiner argues that *Caribbean Voices*’ “emphasis on poetry is predictable enough: after drama, lyric poetry is undoubtedly the literary genre most congenial to radio, and drama was broadcast only rarely, because of time constraints and the expense of production” (98). Perhaps Breiner was thinking of *actual* numbers—close to 950 poems as opposed to around 600 short story and sketches and roughly 10 plays were aired on *Caribbean Voices* between 11 March 1945 and 7 September 1958. But the difference becomes clearer when one remembers that broadcasts were divided up into weekly programs, and that the number of *programs* dedicated to short fiction or on which short fiction were aired outnumbered those on which poetry was read. That is because several short poems could be read in just a few minutes, but a single short story (even the shorter pieces identified in program transcripts as sketches) could take up as much as half or an entire broadcast.

- 12 Whether or not one genre is inherently more suited to radio than another is, however, debatable. Some poems seemed to have lent themselves more readily to being read than others, and the same was true for the short fiction broadcasts. It is perhaps more useful to consider what it was about certain contributions that made for “good radio”; in other words what made them more amenable to successful transfer from printed text to voiced text, however “difficult” or “complicated” the subject matter or plot. For example, Swanzy described Derek Walcott’s poetry as “very complicated [...], allusive, and obscure [...and] packed with cleverness.” This description at first glance would seem to suggest that appreciation of Walcott’s work would be best served by quiet reading of the words on the page. But when excerpts from Walcott’s *Epitaph for the Young: XII Cantos* were broadcast, Swanzy called them the “main poetic event for the programme . . .”<sup>9</sup> Apart from being well wrought poetry, selections from *Epitaph* worked well with the voice, and so for radio, at least in part because Walcott based his poetic form in the canto, a type of oral poetry that was chanted or sung to a live audience. It is conceivable, then, that Walcott’s verse sounded a resonant note among listeners who were themselves steeped in a tradition of sung and spoken poetry. For a number of the short stories as well, it was a similar attention to the spoken word and to strategies for oralizing the written work by their authors that made them work well for radio and no doubt increased the impact they had on listeners.

- 13 Curiously, although he was enthusiastic about writers experimenting with form and employing techniques to bring the literature being produced closer to the West Indian “soil,” Swanzy expressed reservations about *Caribbean Voices*’ medium. He felt that the primacy given to the speaking voice over the printed page as necessitated by radio could undermine the literariness of the works broadcast. In setting a context for the program transcripts that were released to archives after *Caribbean Voices* left the air, he remarked:

Anyone consulting these files should bear in mind the circumstances under which they were made. The copies were intended mainly as reference points, in case there were enquiries from listeners. They were sent down every week, by my secretary, Miss McGlone, in rough form, just as they had been used in studio production. The corrections were often made in the studio itself, primarily for timing, but sometimes to secure clarity of hearing, and occasionally to fit in with the voice and

personality of the reader. *This is clearly not the best way to treat literary work, which is meant to be seen by the eye, but the main consideration had to be overall broadcasting effect.* (Emphasis added)<sup>10</sup>

- 14 But what Swanzy failed to see is the way in which the focus, from a radio point of view, on “hearing with the ear, as he put it,”<sup>11</sup> and the imperative to produce “good radio” and facilitate easy listening helped foster an oral aesthetic wherein the speaking voice became as central to the stories’ construction as it was to their on-air delivery and dissemination.
- 15 In a number of stories, several of which were singled out for praise in critical commentary, the authors oralized their written compositions by writing in a way that encouraged re-speaking the text rather than silent reading. In so doing, they sought to capture the speech inflections, rhythms, gestures and other non-auditory signals, etc. that constitute the totality of oral performance and to reproduce in narrative the storytelling and rhetorical strategies and forms that abound in their oral traditions. Daniel Samaroo Joseph’s “Taxi, Mister” which was broadcast on 13 March 1949 is a case in point. “Taxi, Mister” is a portrait of an expansive Trinidadian taxi driver, and the extent to which he goes in order that his customers do not cheat him provides the story’s humorous twist. The story’s strength lies in its vivid evocation of character, place, and situation, which is achieved through expert use of the conventions of the dramatic monologue. On the ride from San Fernando to Port-of-Spain, the taxi driver inadvertently reveals a lot about his character, and provides a number of cues to the reader/listener about what is happening in the car and the passengers he is transporting.
- 16 Since the dramatic monologue is a solo speech rendered in the direct speaking voice of the persona/protagonist, it lends itself very well to an exact reproduction of a rhetorical or speech event on the page. Hence, the story is written as if it were being told; and the reader is effectively transformed into a listener as the voice becomes as, if not more, important than the visually rendered word. The English critic Arthur Calder-Marshall provided commentary on the story during the same broadcast. Calder-Marshall’s comments indicate just how compatible the story’s narrative strategies were with the medium of dissemination:

“Taxi, Mister” is a slice of life . . . or rather a slice of conversation; and anyone who’s ever taken a taxi in Trinidad knows how accurate it is. The author might almost have had a Dictaphone in the back of the taxi and played the record back to get his story. It shows a magnificent disregard for academic grammar and that is excellent for broadcasting; one of the great problems of any writer who is used to the printed word is to overcome his natural desire for good grammar, for the neatly turned sentence, the paragraph that looks well in print. Broadcasting demands quite a different sort of script, a different technique; the author must write as he would speak; he must *tell* his tale, not write it. And the success of “Taxi, Mister” lies in precisely this; the author has written a spoken language.
- 17 Samaroo Joseph not only created a story that replicates the oral but also identifies that orality as distinctively Trinidadian/West Indian. When Calder-Marshall talks about “a magnificent disregard for grammar” he is alluding to the Trinidadian English, clearly “non-Standard” when compared to British English and particularly the Received Pronunciation favoured by the BBC, that Samaroo Joseph’s character speaks.
- 18 Highly vocative and dramatic, the story demands to be performed, and in the language spoken by the character. In all these ways “Taxi, Mister” shows its similarities to Louise



Bennett's dramatic monologues, poems utilizing Jamaican voices and rhetorical forms commonly used by island folk, that she wrote beginning in the 1940s. Indeed, precursors to the autonomous dramatic monologue form that Robert Browning made famous can be traced back to oral sources in both English and Jamaican traditions. Bennett read, or "performed" as the program producer described her recitations, her own and other writers' works regularly on *Caribbean Voices*, an indication that the program embraced Caribbean voices in fiction and broadcasting. Very tellingly, *Caribbean Voices* made a practice of hiring West Indians as readers so that West Indians heard their own voices sent back to them across the ocean and the airwaves by the BBC.

- 19 Swanzy, for example, thought that it was more prudent to use untrained West Indians who knew their own region and its atmosphere—he felt that they could learn through experience—as readers rather than English actors who had trained voices but were strangers to West Indian culture. The use of West Indian voices on the air and the broadcasting of work that clearly aligned itself with and sought poetic inspiration from voices and oral forms from the region's ironically put *Caribbean Voices*, and by extension the BBC, in the vanguard of legitimizing West Indian oralities. The irony is further underscored by the fact that notions about the impropriety and inferiority of West Indian languages and oral cultures were still widely held among West Indians themselves. As late as 1956, J.E. Clare McFarlane of Jamaica was still of the opinion that the "dialect [...] is a 'broken tongue' with which it is impossible to build an edifice of verse possessing the perfect symmetry of finished art" (84).
- 20 Samuel Selvon was another *Caribbean Voices* author who demonstrated, unequivocally, that West Indian oralities could function as the medium of significant art. Selvon was a particularly adept short-story writer whose skill was acknowledged by program producers; and his work was read and reviewed on *Caribbean Voices* at regular intervals from as early as 1947. Selvon became noted for writing stories in which the lilts and tones of Trinidadian English proved easily adaptable to various narrative perspectives. His narrative voices mimic the easy conversational style of the casual storyteller familiar to West Indians. He extended the calypsonian's ballad-making, characterized by bawdiness and sharp observation, into narratives that use humour as leavening for sharp social critique in both his Trinidadian and London stories. The anecdote also formed the basis of a number of his stories; and the boasting and grandiloquence that mark the telling of tall tales feature in stories where the characters' or narratives' exaggeration and excess are often revelatory of penury and hardship. Selvon's collection of short stories *Ways of Sunlight* (1957) brought together a number of the stories broadcast on *Caribbean Voices*; and his defining novel, *The Lonely Londoners* (1956), set the standard for what was later to become a normative practice among West Indian writers of drawing on the linguistic spectrum of West Indian English to shape and provide their stories' perspective and set the rhythm and tone of their narratives. Notably, Selvon read a number of his own stories on the air, thereby ensuring that listeners would hear the stories' voices exactly as the author intended.
- 21 In tandem with their literary experiments with the voice, West Indian writers also drew on other aspects of the oral tradition in crafting modern short fiction. Traditional folktales and stories, local myths and legends, Carnival and other festivals, folk religions and spiritual practices such as Myalism and Obeah, and popular musical forms were all utilized in fiction. In many instances, the use of these oral resources went beyond attempts to simply add "local colour." Special programs featuring talks on



topics such as “Folk-Lore of Jamaica” by Clinton V. Black (29 August 1948), “Origins of the Calypso” (6 January 1949) and “Carnival” (19 February 1950) by Alfred Mendes brought historical and cultural research together and signaled to *Caribbean Voices* writers and listeners that West Indian oral cultures were a serious subject and complementary to literary development. Seepersad Naipual’s “Obeah” (15 July 1951), E. R. Sewlal’s “The Moko Jumbie” (24 February 1952), S.I. Norman’s “Kalinda” (26 October 1952), Samuel Selvon’s “Calypsonian” (15 February 1953; 6 July 1958), Edgar E. Boyce’s “Carnival” (28 February 1954), and Stanley Brown’s “Pocomania” (16 June 1957), among a number of other stories, announced their close connection to the oral tradition in their titles. Discussions of critical standards also began to reflect this emphasis, with Swanzy arguing for the importance of keeping “a clear current of fresh ideas moving among [...] writers and readers alike” so as to allow for defining “a body of accepted practice”<sup>12</sup> for the emerging literature rather than expecting the writing to demonstrate British “influences.” He demonstrated the critical approach he advocated in his enthusiastic commentary on Inez Knibb Sibley’s “Terror Bull and the Taunt Song,”<sup>13</sup> a short story based on popular Jamaican ghost stories about the “rolling calf,” a dreaded apparition that accosts people at crossroads at night:

The very title lies at the quick of myth and legend. But sheshowed reallyamazing ingenuity in building up all the atmosphere of theseven-headedmonster, Gashanami, the bull. Nothing is easier than to retail anold story . . .an old story, folklore, dead as mutton! But this, one might say, wasas alive as beef. That, in my opinion, is really the vital stuff of literature . . .<sup>14</sup>

- 22 Interestingly, Knibb Sibley had made a short collection of Jamaican folk songs for *Caribbean Voices* (the songs were presented on air by Noel Foster Baker) the year before her story was broadcast, which most likely influenced her writing of the story.
- 23 In a similar vein, Andrew Salkey drew on the narrative structure of Anancy stories and those tales’ eponymous anti/hero to create modern fables that address the problems and possibilities within a region on the brink of independence, and to offer a symbol of the West Indian artistic imagination that is rooted in the culture. In “Anancy and the Ghost Wrestler” (1 June 19 1958) the spider defeats many formidable shape-shifting ghosts, but he encounters his greatest difficulty when he has to fight his own spirit, “the only conqueror of Anancy.” The story suggests that the people of the region have to conquer their own neuroses, brought on by the violence of colonialism, before they can come into their own. Modeled on aetiological tales that provide narratives of origin in oral cultures, “How Anancy Became a Spider” (9 March 1958) is a creation story that sources/locates the beginnings of the West Indian creativity and imagination not in the English literary tradition but in those oral stories that crossed the Atlantic with the African slaves who helped people the West Indies. Anancy is symbolic of the West Indian writer, and the spider’s web a stand-in for the intricate workings of the creative imagination. At the end, the storyteller/narrator cautions: “So, if you see a chance web somewhere, don’t break it too sharpish and quick without thinking about the poem it might be writing out for you.” The stories are, then, both about Anancy and creations of Anancy—in much the same way that West Indian authors recreate themselves and their world in fiction. Salkey went on to write enough modern Anancy stories for three collections: *Anancy’s Score* (1973), *The One* (1985), and *Anancy, Traveller* (1992).
- 24 Kamau Brathwaite’s story “The Black Angel” (broadcast on 11 September 1955) is a fine example of how authors reclaim the oral to present a specifically West Indian worldview and challenge received notions about inherent differences between oral and

scribal modes and the supposed superiority of the latter over the former for literary composition. If viewed purely through the lens of Western literary criticism, “The Black Angel” would be readily identified as an example of the literature of the fantastic as it seems to conform to the conventions of that genre. The story is set in an eerie fourth dimension akin to an Orwellian dystopic universe where workers toil away in an outfit run by “the Factory Committee.” A number of the workers fall prey to the mysterious powers of a newcomer who later disappears without a trace, but only after the protagonist discovers a way to protect himself and his fellow workers from further harm. But the reader is encouraged, by the ways in which the story signals that it is informed by a different paradigm, to set aside formulaic readings, or at least consider that there could be other ways of getting at the story’s meanings.

- 25 “The Black Angel” incorporates Myalism—an Afro-Jamaican spiritual practice—into the storyline and uses it as the story’s narrative and interpretive frameworks. Here, the supernatural forces at work take on meanings beyond those that can be accounted for if the story is read merely as an example of the fantastic. In the literature of the fantastic, there is uncertainty whether to ascribe natural or supernatural explanations to events, but in “The Black Angel” no distinction is made between the two. That is because from a Myalist point of view, cosmic struggles between good and evil are understood to have real world consequences. Hence, as the story unfolds, the reader begins to see that the malignant forces that attempt to decimate the factory workers are also a reference to oppressive social and political conditions in their day-to-day lives; and the eradication of those forces, in the natural and supernatural realms, is the work of myalists within the story as well as in the wider Jamaican society. Brathwaite revised and republished the story in 1994 and again in 2007 in *DreamStories* and *DS (2):dreamstories*, respectively. In these later versions, the Myalist framework is strengthened, and the author makes use of an oralized language, the Sycorax Video Style, which he invented in the mid-1980s to underscore the story’s connection to a long history of orality in the West Indies.
- 26 Long term effects of the development of an oral aesthetic among short-story writers broadcast on *Caribbean Voices* can be seen in West Indian literature up to the present moment. Even before the program went off the air, *Caribbean Voices* was having the impact program producers desired: stimulating and promoting West Indian writing among and to West Indians and the wider community, and to make the writers known among themselves. The Pioneer Press in Jamaica, for example, was founded in 1950 by none other than Una Marson, the Jamaican writer and activist whose work with the BBC in the early 1940s led to the creation of *Caribbean Voices*. Of the first four titles released in September of that year, three were short-story collections: Louise Bennett’s *Anancy Stories and Other Dialect Verse*; Laurice Bird’s *Maxie Mongoose and Other Animal Stories*; and *14 Jamaican Short Stories*. Three years later the Pioneer Press released the first anthology of regional short fiction to be published by a West Indian commercial press under the title *Caribbean Short Stories*.
- 27 By the time *Caribbean Voices* went off the air, modern West Indian literature had been firmly established; and in the decades immediately after the program went off the air, the issuing of numerous short story anthologies and the continued publication of little magazines kept both short-story writing and an oral aesthetic alive. For its part, the London-based Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM), spearheaded by *Caribbean Voices* alumni Andrew Salkey and Kamau Brathwaite along with John La Rose, proved

particularly instrumental in encouraging an oral aesthetic. CAM's founders and members aimed to "revolutionise the arts" (Walmsley 128) and a goal of the Movement's journal *Savacou* was to provide a forum in which authors could recover and utilize "submerged or 'lost' traditions"<sup>15</sup> from their oral cultures in their art.

- 28 Short-story writing, much of which was by women authors, took on a dominant place in West Indian literature in the 1980s and 1990s. The stories of authors such as Olive Senior, Velma Pollard, Lorna Goodison, and Hazel Campbell showed clear continuities with those produced during the *Caribbean Voices* years; and these contemporary writers developed on and fine-tuned the oral aesthetics of their literary predecessors. Olive Senior's "stories in the moment of performance," for example, recall earlier "voice texts" such as "Taxi, Mister" and Bennett's dramatic monologues. It is no wonder that Kamau Brathwaite, who has long championed an oral aesthetic in his own creative writing and non-fiction publications such as his influential *History of the Voice: the development of nation language in anglophone Caribbean poetry* (1984), described *Caribbean Voices* as the "single most important literary catalyst for Caribbean creative and critical writing in English"<sup>16</sup>

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## NOTES

1. John Figueroa, who was active on *Caribbean Voices* as a writer, reader, and commentator underscores just how important *Caribbean Voices* was to creating a literary community among West Indians: "The other great source of influence of which Caribbean voices possessed is very easy to overlook or underestimate in this age of TV and satellites; it was a radio programme, a short-wave radio programme. That would have been important anywhere, but it was pre-eminent in the Caribbean, where 1200 miles of sea separated Trinidad and Jamaica . . . *Caribbean Voices* brought together those who were interested from St. Lucia and Tortola and Guiana and Trinidad and Barbados and Jamaica in a way that nothing else, except cricket broadcasting, ever has. Furthermore, in a society not too well known for reading, the spoken word, by way of radio, even when it was producing literature, had an impact that books would have lacked, except among the very few" ("The Flaming Faith of These First Years: *Caribbean Voices*" 72-73).

2. In his program review aired on 21 August 1949, Swanzy indicated that "the £1,500 the BBC virtually gives each year as a subsidy to West Indian writing" helped to stimulate writers, but he also indicated in personal correspondence that the funds were not enough. See, for example, his letter to Margery Perham, 14 July 1954 in the Swanzy Archive at the University of Birmingham's library in the UK.
3. Naipaul made this comment during his last talk on *Caribbean Voices* titled "Comments on West Indian Literature," which was aired on 31 August 1958.
4. Cross-checking the list of fiction broadcast on *Caribbean Voices* against two comprehensive bibliographies of Anglophone Caribbean short stories published in "little magazines" of the region reveals the extent of the collaboration. See Reinhard Sander's "Short Fiction in West Indian Periodicals: A Checklist" in *World Literature Written in English* 15.2 (Nov. 1976): 438-62, and Samuel B. Bandara's "Caribbean Short Fiction: A Bibliography" in *World Literature Written in English* 18 (1979): 181-234. A list of the short stories, poems, plays, talks, discussions and other programs aired on *Caribbean Voices* is included among transcripts held in Special Collections at the Mona library of the University of the West Indies, Jamaica.
5. For a more sustained reading of the relationship between burgeoning West Indian nationalisms, literature, and *Caribbean Voices*, see Glyne Griffith's "Deconstructing Nationalisms: Henry Swanzy, *Caribbean Voices* and the Development of West Indian Literature" in *Small Axe* 10 (Sept. 2001): 1-20.
6. Arthur Calder-Marshall, "What I Hope to See From The West Indies," *Caribbean Voices*, 1 February 1948.
7. Herring must have seen the novel in manuscript form as it was published the following year.
8. "Critics' Circle," *Caribbean Voices*, 12 October 1947.
9. "The Last Six Months," 12 February 1950.
10. "Note By The Producer" dated 1965 among the *Caribbean Voices* transcripts.
11. Swanzy did at least make an attempt to explore the issue. On 12 October 1947 while introducing that day's "Critics' Circle," he said: "I must confess that I had an idea to deal with only one problem, and that is the effectiveness of the verse or story from the radio point of view - that is, hearing with the ear. But this line rather broke down as the circle listened to the discs."
12. Swanzy's preliminary comments to the discussion program titled "The West Indian Artist in the Contemporary World," *Caribbean Voices*, 21 October 1951.
13. There is no record of a short story of this title in the typed list of titles that accompany the *Caribbean Voices* transcripts, although other contributions by Knibb Sibley are listed. The exclusion is clearly an error as pages of the story are included among the transcripts. As well, the story was published in the third issue of *Focus* (1956): 60-67.
14. "The Last Six Months," *Caribbean Voices*, 21 August 1949.
15. From Savacou's promotional brochure dated March 1969.
16. *History of the Voice*, 87.

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## ABSTRACTS

Cet essai examine la part du programme *Caribbean Voices* de la BBC (1945-1958) — en symbiose avec les « petites revues » produites dans les Antilles — dans l'accroissement d'une esthétique orale pratiquée par les nouvellistes antillais des années 1940 et 1950. Nous affirmons que cette esthétique est la caractéristique principale d'un corpus considérable de nouvelles écrites au cours de ces années. Dès lors, le développement d'une esthétique orale est devenu l'aspect définitoire de la production littéraire antillaise. Cela étant, si après la Seconde Guerre mondiale le roman moderne des Antilles connaît un essor, c'est grâce à ses antécédents : les nouvelles et l'émergence d'une esthétique orale. À la lumière de nos études de nouvelles diffusées sur *Caribbean Voices* ainsi que publiées dans les « petites revues » telles que *The Beacon*, *Bim*, *Kyk-Over-Al* et *Focus*, nous démontrons les aspects particuliers qui identifient l'esthétique orale antillaise. Les analyses littéraires soulignent également le fait que les écrivains et les réalisateurs de programmes favorisaient une esthétique orale, la radio étant un médium idéal pour transformer l'écrit à l'oral, et que cette esthétique devient désormais la ligne directrice du développement sociopolitique d'une période dotée de l'épanouissement des ressources culturelles antillaises.

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