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*Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy - Revue de la philosophie française et de langue française*, Vol XX, No 1 (2012) pp 22-38.

Vol XX, No 1 (2012)  
ISSN 1936-6280 (print)  
ISSN 2155-1162 (online)  
DOI 10.5195/jffp.2012.539  
[www.jffp.org](http://www.jffp.org)



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# Between Stephen Lloyd and Esteban Yo-eed

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## Locating Jamaica Through Cuba

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*What is a Jamaican? In another place I have expressed it that “any people that has seen its generations come and go on the same soil for centuries is, in fact, a nation, and I find no reason to change that definition. A man or woman born here is in a very real sense a Jamaican and not an Englishman, no matter what may be the political relationship of the Island with the British Commonwealth. He is entitled to national pride in the achievements of the gifted among his compatriots.*

*I have never felt in the least Anglo-Saxon....<sup>1</sup>*

In their oft-cited manifesto, the Martinican Creolists exhort Caribbean people to forego their continuing allegiances to the “mythical shores” of various old worlds, and to affirm instead the “alluvial Creoleness” that binds (or that ought to bind) them to each other, and to other communities across the globe with a similar plantation history: “Neither Europeans, nor Africans, nor Asians, we proclaim ourselves Creoles; “[the Creole language] is the initial means of communication of our deep self, or our collective unconscious, of our common genius, and it remains the river of our alluvial Creoleness.”<sup>2</sup> Despite their qualifications – “Creoleness is an open specificity,”<sup>3</sup> for example – they have been chided for simplifying the complicated socio-political histories of the region. Maryse Condé, for example, has noted that the opposition of colonizing French language and resisting Creole language ignores the extent to which plantation heterogeneity and negotiation rendered Creole a language of both “unity and compromise.”<sup>4</sup> On what terms can alluvial relationships that can

undercut imperial and diasporic ties be uncovered? What does the idea of a Creole unconscious solidify, restore, revivify, and for whom?

In what follows, I am interested in a Jamaican-born novelist's use of Cuba's second war of independence in the 1890s to critique Jamaican complacency about British colonialism after the Second World War. Cuba, and a "Creole Latin" world more generally, allows him, on my reading, to proffer hispanophone and francophone plantation histories as a model for anglophone sensibilities in the region. The "Creole Latin" affirmation of nationalism, revolutionary struggle, and strong affective ties to the land and to personal relationships, are uncontaminated by the domineering spirit, legalistic prejudices, bureaucracy and commerce, and negotiated concessions that typify anglophone Protestant modes of life. Since the *scene* of these ideas in this case is the nineteenth century plantation, then we might ask if the social and political inequities are not reinforced, or whether the pleasures afforded by the romance make such considerations moot. Not only was Jamaica an actual refuge for Cubans fleeing political turmoil through the nineteenth century, but, as the following verse by Thomas MacDermot suggests, Jamaicans were inspired by the Cuban struggle:

*Cuba*  
(*What the heart of the Jamaican said to Cuba in 1895*)

Sister! the sundering Sea  
Divides us not from thee;  
The Ocean's homeless roar  
May sever shore from shore.  
Beneath the bitter brine,  
Our hand is locked in thine.  
Cold custom chides us down  
And stills us with a frown;  
But we like lovers twain  
Are one in joy and pain,  
Whose mutual love is known  
But may not yet be shown.  
With clasped hands we convey

The love we may not say.<sup>5</sup>

The love that dare not speak its name here is on Jamaica's end: the colony is still too enthralled to British colonial power, the poem implies. Certainly, this interest in Cuban politics was not merely romantic. Writing in 1909, the Jamaican editor H. G. De Lisser noted that as the Panama Canal was being completed, Jamaica and Cuba commanded the "Windward Passage," on its Atlantic side, and thus "those two islands must reap directly most of whatever benefit there is to be derived from the opening of the Canal."<sup>6</sup> As he moved around Cuba, De Lisser noted that everyone thought, erroneously, "that Cuba, like the British West Indies, is a land of black or dark-coloured men, whereas it is for the most part a country of white and light-coloured men, and is steadily becoming whiter." The streets of Havana have "swarthy Cubans" but little evidence of the "thirty thousand" "negroes" said to be in Cuba.<sup>7</sup>

I will return to such racial comparisons between the two territories, but for now I want to note that MacDermot's poem is in keeping with a more regional literary interest in Cuba specifically, and with hispanophone political insurgency more broadly. The figure who returns from Cuba or Panama territory to (usually) *his* rural community with money, technical expertise, ambition, and who is regarded with suspicion and or admiration, can be found in Claude McKay's *Banana Bottom* (1933), Jacques Roumain's *Les Gouverneurs de la rosée* (1946), and Michael Thelwell's *The Harder They Come* (1980). The Barbadian writer George Lamming talks about the experience of going to teach English in Venezuela in the 1940s as "a kind of blessing because it [put] me in touch with the Americas in a way that now became part of my agenda.... And it is there then that I also became aware of the political figure as monument in a people's consciousness. Because the way those Venezuelans spoke of Bolivar! I had never heard of anyone spoken of in the world of politics and struggle and war in the way they spoke of Bolivar. And if you'd make a mistake and uttered the slightest irreverence about Bolivar, you were only playing with your life. That kind of figure in the national consciousness was completely new to me."<sup>8</sup> While Latin America offered "a continuity of war and fighting," the long "lulls" and "imperial settlements" in the anglophone context diffused moments of possibility.<sup>9</sup>

It is a of Jamaican literary history that for artists in the late 1930s to 1950s, whether from the black, brown, white or functionally-white intellectual class, nationalism meant privileging or finding some way to celebrate the black rural or urban working class. What intrigues me about W. Adolphe Roberts' *The Single Star*, first published in 1949 and republished in 1956 by the Kingston-based Pioneer Press, in a series edited by Roberts and Una Marson, is the way that he shares the fascination with hispanophone political struggle as a model for nationalist and anti-

imperialist struggle in the anglophone context, but is completely uninterested in non-white political autonomy in Cuba or Jamaica.<sup>10</sup> As a white Jamaican novelist, Roberts exhibits nothing of what Kenneth Ramchand, borrowing a term from Frantz Fanon, has called the “terrified consciousness” of the white Caribbean imaginary; in Phyllis Shand Allfrey’s *The Orchid House* (1953), Geoffrey Drayton’s *Christopher* (1959), Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966), and J. B. Emtage, *Brown Sugar* (1967) “White West Indians,” as Ramchand calls them, experience the same radical structural change that their non-white counterparts desire but as a “terrifying future,” in which the landscape is experienced powerfully and nostalgically beauty co-exists with terror, and the white female is “a suffering, vulnerable agent.”<sup>11</sup> What Roberts produces by contrast is a text that castigates the complacency of the white Jamaican plantocracy with the stirring example of Cuban anti-imperialism – a Cuba imagined as essentially white, for a North American readership also imagined as white. Perhaps it is the *creole romance* that allows Roberts to circumvent any potential contradiction caused by asserting anti-imperialism in an anti-racist political climate in the mid twentieth century with his racially stereotypical depiction of a late nineteenth-century independence struggle that had historically included a searching examination of social and racial inequities.

## Creolization’s Romance?

Orlando Patterson has said recently that as a concept, *creolization* always struck him as lacking “tension” and friction.<sup>12</sup> His *Sociology of Slavery* was a path-breaking attempt to show that plantation slavery in the Americas, and in particular the Jamaican context, involved total chaos for the enslaved – “natal alienation” as he would term it in a later study, *Slavery and Social Death*. Utilizing some of Patterson’s data [Edward] Kamau Brathwaite showed that the “seasoning” that enslaved Africans acquired under the tutelage of already-creolized counterparts on Jamaica’s plantations facilitated the terrible process of being worked to death but also the process of accommodation to life in the Americas. *Seasoning* and *creolization* press on the seam that separates life in the new space of the Americas, on the one hand, and life elsewhere – the space of one’s past, or of the parents’ past. Both, it seems to me, stress the horrific, soul-destroying contexts of plantation labor, and even the creation of a new creolized society by the interaction of enslaved African and Afro-Caribbean people on the one hand, and between black enslaved and white slaveholding constituencies.<sup>13</sup> Something about the *survival*, or the survival as other than totally brutalized, irks Patterson, and it may be the assumption that contact and creation suggest a lack of tension. But as Nigel Bolland has noted, “Creolization is not a homogenizing process, but rather a process of *contention* between people who are members of social formations and carriers of cultures, a process in which their own ethnicity is continually re-examined and

redefined in terms of the relevant oppositions between different social formations at various historical moments.”<sup>14</sup>

There is another way that the process of creolization is portrayed as enabling, and even sweet. It is the romance of the plantation story narrated in the context of a comparison between *Anglo* and *Latin*, *Protestant* and *Catholic* – often in the context of eastern Caribbean societies that experienced both English and French slaveholding cultures, if not colonial regimes. We hear it, for instance, in the comparison that nineteenth-century Trinidadian John Jacob Thomas makes between warm Latin planters who treated everyone on the plantation like family, and English planters and colonial authorities whose coldness matches their Yankee counterparts.<sup>15</sup> It is not that Thomas celebrates slavery as a happy experience; he was in fact very well known for critiquing nostalgic appeals to plantation slavery that were used to justify the continued denial of political agency to the descendants of enslaved people. But it is striking that such a repudiation can withstand, or might be deeply connected to, a contrast between anglophone and francophone creole modes of experiencing plantation slavery – though arguably the duration and severity of Jamaican slavery, at least, made such a comparison with Trinidadian slavery appropriate. Jean Rhys’ *Wide Sargasso Sea* is a damning comparison of not just English and Caribbean values, but cold, legalistic Protestant values as expressed in Spanish Town, Jamaica, and the humanity of a francophone world identified with Christophine and Annette, born in the eastern Caribbean (Martinique). This is recovered when Antoinette moves with her husband to a social space that is suggestive of neighboring (British-ruled and francophone-identified) Dominica, where Rhys herself was born.<sup>16</sup>

But if Brathwaite could be accused of being overly optimistic in his account of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jamaican society’s capacity to absorb black and white in the process of creolization, perhaps ironically it is also Brathwaite who uses *Wide Sargasso Sea* to suggest the limits of white creolization: “White Creoles in the English and French West Indies have separated themselves by too wide a gulf and have contributed too little culturally, as a group, to give credence to the notion that they can, given its present structure, meaningfully identify, or be identified, with the spiritual world on this side of the Sargasso sea...”<sup>17</sup> In her reading of Jamaican fiction written in the wake of the 1865 Morant Bay Rebellion, Sylvia Wynter outlines a “dichotomy of attitudes”: on the one hand, a “creole colon plantation structure” shaped by exchange value, an eye to profit, and its exploitative relationship to another economic system and world view – “indigenous plot values,” where the plot of the dispossessed is utilized for food, and only secondarily for the market, “in response to a human need.” Wynter quotes Miguel Angel Asturias, who defines, “the indigenous peasant who accepts that corn should be sown only as food, and the creole who sows it as a business, burning down forests as precious trees,

impoverishing the earth in order to enrich himself’.”<sup>18</sup> In the 1960s and early 1970s, a moment of both recent independence and of the recalibration of historiography and literary history, Brathwaite and Wynter can be read as repudiating the plantation romance that I am suggesting Roberts is sustaining.

In Roberts’ fictional and autobiographical evocation of the plantation, it is precisely “creole colons” (settlers) who are represented as having a restorative relationship to the land, shaped by their own cultivation of and respect for it. As the novel opens, Stephen Lloyd, a son of the Jamaican planter class in rural, western Jamaica, is hunting, in a deeply felt connection to and comfort with the landscape. Standing at an elevation, he pauses to look down at his family’s plantation and the adjoining plantations, all identified by the name of their respective owners. All the land that he can see, for miles around, is owned by either his family or a neighboring family. Property-ownership and surveillance shape and reinforce each other, in what Nicholas Mirzoeff would term *visuality*: the all-powerful, albeit contested, “exclusive claim to be able to look” authorized by the slave plantation in the Americas, where the all-seeing overseer reports to the sovereign. For Mirzoeff this can be contrasted with, say, “the right to look,” which is shaped by mutuality and respect, “each person inventing the other” for the sake of “political subjectivity and collectivity,” rather than “individualism or voyeurism.” Stephen Lloyd’s vista is empowered by his ongoing recognition of his family’s and caste’s ownership, and the confidence engendered by it. (Rhys’ characters, by contrast, do not have such confidence, at least the female ones, and this is at once a denial of any power that they do have, particularly in relation to non- or to not-quite-white characters, and a recognition of the extent to which any status and privilege is limned by sexual and gendered relationships to white male owners.)

How does Roberts’ use of Cuba in *The Single Star* enhance and occlude Jamaican conceptions of whiteness, land-ownership, freedom, and how is revolutionary Cuba romanticized, flattened, made into a Latin creole romance when Cubans themselves were struggling to engage with and critique that romance (at least during the period of the revolutionary war)? Louis Pérez notes that while the first of Cuba’s two nineteenth century independence struggles (from 1868 to 1878) had a patrician leadership and was directed mainly at Spanish colonial rule, the second (1895-1898) was led by downwardly mobile “impoverished gentry,” professionals from a “disgruntled and displaced creole petite bourgeoisie”, working-class-backgrounds, “burgher ranks,” and merchants, “with forty percent of senior leaders being men of color.” The major opponent was now the “creole bourgeoisie” -- the plantation class and economy. Roberts’ novel presents us with burned-out plantations that indicate both the cruelty of the Spanish and the necessary tactics of the Cuban forces, but it sidesteps the rethinking if

not achievement) of social and racial hierarchy that Pérez suggests was underway, and with which José Martí, so lionized in the novel, was identified. In an early scene, as Stephen meets Miguel Carmona, exiled in western Jamaica with his family, a bull attacks, headed for Miguel, stranger: “but it was plainly thrown into confusion by the familiar presence of Stephen.”<sup>19</sup> Stephen calls the animal by its name and manages to ward it off without killing it. This establishes him as calm in a dangerous situation, and not prone to indiscriminate slaughter; later, in Cuba, he is a revered sharpshooter in the cause of the revolution, directing his fury at the Spanish colonial authorities, and treating animals with great affection. When Miguel thanks him for saving his life, Stephen responds: “In this country no white person is considered a trespasser on any plantation.”<sup>20</sup> Thus is white friendship solidified on the hallowed ground of the plantation by the current plantation scion, and the Cuban who has lost his plantation in eastern Cuba. The incident pushes Miguel to invite Stephen into the bosom of his exiled family and to share their family’s secret guerrilla activity. Together, the Cuban and the Jamaican are whites, anti-imperialists, fellow-nationalists, and keepers of a plantation hearth.

By contrast, we may consider the use of the hunting or killing of an animal in the rural landscape to delineate white racial identity in two subsequent Jamaican novels. In 1956, the same year that *The Single Star* was re-published in Kingston as a “British Caribbean” edition, John Hearne’s *Voices Under the Window* was published in London. When the protagonist, Mark Lattimer, rescues a child who is in danger of being trampled by a crowd during a scene of political unrest in Kingston, he is cursed – “Put him down, you white bitch” – and stabbed.<sup>21</sup> Most of the novel consists of his extended reflection over his whole life, as he bleeds to death as a consequence of his wounds. His first memory might be read as a scene of racial comeuppance for which the stabbing is then a sort of retributive justice. As a young boy, he spends a day displaying excellent marksmanship with his uncle’s rifle as he shoots doves with other boys. He returns home to a scene of domestic order: three servants are ironing, cooking, gardening, “working and laughing together as they worked” Described as black they thus define Mark and his young friends as not-black. When one of the servants notes that since he is hunting out of season he could be arrested he demurs, noting that police “don’t trouble white people”: “Something cold and bad came on to the verandah.”<sup>22</sup> To his great consternation, one of them tells him that he is not white, but “brown” like his parents. Here, racial recognition is prompted by his own ugly use of race to separate, and a black character has the capacity to destabilize him.<sup>23</sup> In Hearne’s nationalist 1950s, this capacity is related to (if not always shown as justified by) Jamaica’s racially hierarchical and antagonistic past.

In Michelle Cliff’s *Abeng*, functionally-white Clare Savage, resentful that she is left out of the ritual of hunting that crosses lines of race and class

to consolidate masculine superiority, persuades Zoe, her reluctant companion, to hunt down a hog. Cliff tracks both racial and gender hierarchy in Jamaica, using the rural landscape to specify hunting and land use as highly contested throughout Jamaica's history – by planters, enslaved, runaways, and Maroons.<sup>24</sup> Zoe, part of the rural black peasantry, accuses Clare of being self-indulgent, but accompanies her. Not finding the hog, they take a swim, and while resting naked on the riverbank they are espied by a man. In response to his exclamation, Clare takes up her rifle to defend them, dropping her patois to “speak *buckra*.”<sup>25</sup> She accidentally shoots Old Joe, a neighborhood bull, whom she must now kill to end his suffering, underlining the extent to which for her, hunting might be initially desirable as a way of setting gender inequities, but is ultimately distasteful because of its violence. The scene echoes one in *Wide Sargasso Sea*, where Tia and Antoinette eat boiled green bananas, the food associated with Tia's enslaved black society, and then recline in a “bathing pool.”<sup>26</sup> Like Antoinette and perhaps Rhys herself, Clare seeks solidarity with a black female counterpart in a utopic friendship that can transcend divisions of enslaved and owner, plot and plantation.

Roberts' description of his childhood in rural Jamaica reflects his investment in anti-colonial nationalism, his impatience with the philistinism of the Jamaican planter class, and his strong psychic identification with the agrarian and occasionally militaristic values of landed gentry globally. Describing a family tree that was native to Jamaica for several generations, he names Celtic, Welsh, and Scottish forbears in his ancestry. Referring at one point to Anglo-Saxon blood, he declares, “but the inoculation did not take. I have never felt in the least Anglo-Saxon.” He gives a very richly imagined sense of his life on an estate in rural central Jamaica, where he is intensely connected to the natural world, and where he is, in effect, home-schooled by a father who didn't have the money to send him to England as would have been expected for someone of his class, and who encourages him to read voraciously and non-canonically, and to write short stories to try to get them published. Roberts recalls that the “real work” on the estate was done by a Pitts, a black “peasant landholder whose wife and numerous progeny cultivated for him while he did odd jobs more to his taste.... My father had an illegitimate child with one of his daughters, which infuriated my mother by was taken carelessly by Pitts, who neither presumed on the fact nor complained about it.” Here, social relations are depicted as understood by all parties (except one of the mothers), and marked by custom and mutual understanding rather than brute force. There is no danger that the “illegitimate child with one of his daughters” is also “my sister” since the child is only a Pitts not a Roberts: the understanding all round that there will be paternity without kinship keeps social relations intact.

Roberts has childhood memories of the Cuban war of independence, and of his father impulsively enlisting to join Máximo Gómez, who had lived in Jamaica as a refugee; “but some sort of crisis existed at home” and his father, who got as far as Kingston, is reluctantly persuaded to return to his family. “If I had favored the Cubans before,” Roberts tells us, “I was not their enthusiastic partisan.” He has strong memories of the Boer War’s powerful impact on him. He recalls that as a twelve-year-old, around 1899, he was an uncritical supporter of Queen Victoria: “The newspapers uttered jingoistic sentiments which I endorsed.” But as he realizes that the Boers were “stock raisers and planters with a similar background to that of my own family,” and as he follows the reports of “fathers and sons reporting together for war by taking down their rifles from the walls, mounting their best horses and proceeding to a rallying point,” he joins his father in rooting for their cause.<sup>27</sup> Here the Boer War and the Cuban independence struggle share a repudiation of imperial rule, in which the planter class and other landowners are the beleaguered colonized entity. We can see this as shaping the portrayal of francophone slaveholding planters and a USA dominated by its own anglicized “north” in Roberts’ fiction and non-fiction. In a historical novel written in 1946, *Brave Mardi Gras*, the protagonist Blasé Lamotte watches with disapproval as the Yankees begin to descend on New Orleans in 1861. In his study of the French West Indies published four years earlier, Roberts declares the French to be more humane slaveholders than the English, and traces their journeys to eastern Cuba, Jamaica, Mexico and Venezuela in the wake of the Haitian Revolution. He closes by noting that the USA would prove to be an important influence for the French Caribbean territories, but that hopefully they would not become too Americanized.

Roberts’ fictional portrayal of Jamaican and Cuban planter alliances can thus be seen to be shaped by a strong sense of a regional history, a fascination with nationalist struggles of the planter class, that included francophone (he says in his autobiography that he wished that he had settled in New Orleans rather than the USA as a young man when he left Jamaica) and US Southern families, a strong sense of the inevitability of US power in the region, and the keen sensitivity to historical topics that would interest publishers and the reading public that his editorial practice had given him.

For the researcher trying to pin Roberts down, especially before the 1950s, he seems to be everywhere at once. Some Google sources identify the white Jamaican as the author of the first mystery novel in the USA written by an African American, *The Haunting Hand* of the mid 1920s. (Roberts appears to have helped the real author with the story line, and then the publishers refused to publish it under any other name but Roberts’). As the editor of *Ainslee’s Magazine* in New York City just after the First World War he publishes Edna St. Vincent Millay’s poetry (and also her short fiction under the pen-name “Nancy Boyd”) before she appears in more prestigious

publications. There he is at a 1956 luncheon of the Poetry League in Kingston, at which the African American sculptor Richmond Barthé was the guest speaker, or inspecting a collection of African paintings with Edna Manley at the Institute of Jamaica. Those are his feature articles in the San Francisco Sunday papers on life in Noguales on the Arizona border; or eliciting thousands of dollars from sympathetic readers with his article for a New York paper on a survivor of the Titanic in 1912. There he is sitting with John Butler Yeats, (father of William) as part of a group of regulars at the Petipas Café in New York City, or meeting Emma Goldman, Max Eastman, Margaret Sanger and others at the lectures, dances and strikes sponsored by an assortment of radicals in New York City in the decade before the First World War. A Google entry even links him romantically to Margaret Sanger. When that war breaks out he is a twenty-eight-year-old Paris correspondent of the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*. He is touring trenches as part of a contingent of North American journalists escorted by the Bureau de la Presse when they narrowly missed being shelled by the Germans, and he attends the dedication of monuments in Paris and in Washington Square, New York City, dedicated to his friend, the poet Alan Seeger, who died in the war. His editorial stint at *Ainslee's* led to Harper and Brothers inviting him to publish a new periodical, *Brief Stories*, which folded in a year. He also edited, from January 1926, *The American Parade*, which folded after four issues. As a New York-based journalist he was also attending the parties sponsored by a burgeoning motion picture industry attuned to a new potential market for gossip journalism, and he published film reviews and interviews with film stars, and became friends with film stars such as Norma Talmadge. Referring to "this wasteful period of my life," he notes in his unpublished autobiography, "I found myself taking this or that editorial post until I swear I had no standing except as a caterer to the latest hysterics in entertainment."<sup>28</sup>

Roberts is known in the Jamaican context as one of the founders of the Jamaica Progressive League in New York in the 1930s, and as someone who encouraged the nascent nationalist movement to push for independence from Britain. Attracted to Fabian socialism as a teenager in Jamaica, especially as embodied in the charismatic British Governor Lord Olivier who offended Jamaica elites committed to the *status quo*, Roberts did not join his peers who gradually accepted of such positions, and we may attribute his sojourn of many decades outside of the colony, especially in the USA. He used his alliances with African American and Irish nationalists in New York to push for universal suffrage and removal of property qualifications for the vote in Jamaica, and he made a strong case to nascent political party movement in Jamaica to push for self-government.<sup>29</sup> In the 1950s and 1960s when he returned to live in Jamaica, he was constantly in the newspapers – as a founding member of the Bolivarian society, encouraging the erection of a statue to memorialize Bolivar, and reminding Jamaicans about Bolivar's connection to Jamaica; as a member of the board of institutions including

Institute of Jamaica; as a co-founder, with Una Marson, of Pioneer Press, which published or re-published some of his own books, including *The Single Star*, and *Six Great Jamaicans*.

But most of his books were published in the USA, for American readers interested in the Caribbean – *The French in the West Indies* (1942), *Havana: The Portrait of a City* (1953), *Lands of the Inner Sea: The West Indies and Bermuda* (1948), but also on American topics – Louisiana-related historical fiction and history, and a biography of the confederate officer Admiral Semmes. In *Lands of the Inner Sea*: he states that it is “a record of intimate impressions by one who was born and raised in Jamaica and knows some of the other islands almost as well, who has swung around the circuit several times and has just completed vagabond trip to virtually all of them. The object is to tell the prospective traveler not only about the things he cannot very well miss, but those that he should go out of his way to see. Postwar conditions affecting lodging, food, and amusements are set forth, in so far as permanent changes appear to have been brought about.”<sup>30</sup> This is the keen reader of history, the regionalist and the savvy editor alert to a postwar interest in travel and tourism. His book *Havana* traces that city’s history from the beginning of Spanish settlement, details its role in the war of independence and its political fortunes after 1898, and gives prospective travelers tips about sports, monuments, and the quirky of names of streets. It appears as if he visited Havana many times, and in the early 1930s we find him posing with the editor of the US publication *Dance Magazine*, Paul Milton, the US painter Perfield, and the editor of *SOCIAL*, a periodical published in Havana. He and Milton wrote a short story in Spanish that appeared in two issues of *SOCIAL* in late 1930. There is a tantalizing reference in Roberts’ unpublished papers to a 1949 Spanish original of *A Single Star*, and in 1950 he received the *Carlos Manuel de Cespedes Order of Merit* from the Cuban Government.

So we have here a robust and quirky combination of experiences: Roberts finds himself in the company of anarchists and radical causes, and in journalistic contexts that privilege speed, expediency, profitability, and in which anxiety about literary consecration is thus a luxury. His time away from Jamaica allows him to maintain and even strengthen his youthful anti-elitist orientation rather than making the concessions that life in the colony would surely have required; from the point of view of life in the USA, life without British imperialism was desirable and plausible. Roberts’ very interesting life and his publishing choices have to be seen in the context of his editorial savvy. At the same time, as I have been arguing here, there is an investment in the plantation, in the familial relations that undergirded it, and also in its Latin quality, and we can see Louisiana and Cuba, for instance, being used to critique anglophone dominance or lack of style. As I have also been trying to trace out, the hispanophone and francophone

elements are used to invoke a white settler world under duress, whose nationalist spirit is a model for others.

In *The Single Star*, Roberts' anti-colonial nationalism is perfectly in sync with a casual delegitimation of black political claims: black people are present in his work, as are brown, but not to make a fuss over. Throughout the novel, for the most part, "negroes" and "browns" and "coloureds" are duly noted and referred to when they need to be acknowledged as present, and are clearly marked off from the range of characters who, sometimes described as "white" but mainly as "Cuban" or "Jamaican," are normative. Characters who cannot be described as white are not ignored, but not privileged at all; and the exception here would be leaders of the Cuban revolution who are beloved by white Cubans: so hours after Stephen arrives secretly in Cuba news arrives of the death of Antonio Maceo, the Bronze Titan, whose brother, Jose had been killed earlier that year:

He was a superb commander. History did not show his equal among generals of Negro blood, and few of any race that could be called his superiors. In losing him the Cuban cause had suffered a terrible blow. More than half the soldiers of the troop were coloured. Stephen noted, however, that the whites expressed themselves with intenser feeling about the genius of the mulatto chieftain, the Negroes hesitating as though they feared they might be accused of praising him simply because he had been coloured.<sup>31</sup>

Now surely this concern about being perceived as racist is in line with, say, José Martí's exhortations about a *Cubanidad* that could not afford to be race-conscious, and the way that we can see this as *both*, on the one hand, an affirmation of a usable melting pot, but also an attempt to sweep unsettling issues of hierarchy under the carpet? Aline Helg captures these tensions in the Cuban war in *Our Rightful Share*. What interests me here about this moment in Roberts' novel is that it typically finds a way to cast white characters as confident social actors in relation to "coloured" uncertainty, and recognition of and deference to white authority. So this is a crucial source of the ties that bind (white) Jamaicans and Cubans in the novel. So what does Cuba offer Roberts? What does he need Cuba to be and do? What does Cuba give him a chance to disavow? Stephen Lloyd notices two strangers in town one day, who turn out to be a brother and sister whose parents have escaped to Jamaica after being attacked by the Spanish forces in Cuba; this brother and sister have been smuggling arms and operating a hospital for wounded guerillas. He immediately figures out what they are up to and identifies himself as someone who has been following their cause as far as he can do so in the Jamaican newspapers.

Here Stephen establishes himself as very different from other Jamaicans and this is related to his cattle-ranching parents: his father is a Texas-born Confederate soldier, and his mother the daughter of a French

Creole family in New Orleans – presumably, then, they understand what it is like to fight against the odds for one’s land and country. The Lloyd’s neighbors are unconcerned or opposed to events in Cuba, and this is in keeping with their lack of interest in books, and their social materialism and crassness. Their quarrel with the British colonial authorities seems to come down to their own classed concerns for their power and status, whereas Stephen’s immediate and total commitment to the Cuban revolutionary forces signals his opposition to imperial authority and commitment to political independence.

That he is drawn to this brother and sister, Miguel and Ines, signifies his strong sense of adventure, in a Jamaica that is resigned to things as they are; and also, his admiration for and romantic interest in the sister. His training at McGill University explains his fluency in French, and he quickly picks up Spanish as he returns with them to Cuba and throws himself completely into the struggle. This allows him to pose as French at crucial moments when he has to enter Santiago in disguise to collect money from an upper-class Cuban who is secretly supporting the cause. Just as Miguel’s studies at Cornell University means that he speaks English with an American accent, then, Stephen has a linguistic flexibility that confounds and delights Cubans and draws them to him immediately – they admire his ability to kill Spanish soldiers with his Winchester, his ability to fit in easily. This also in keeping with the cosmopolitanism of the Cuban struggle, when Haitians send arms and smuggle themselves in to fight, when Bahamians send arms, and North Americans – white – enlist in the Cuban cause as officers. This flexibility is reflected in the nicknames that allow him to move in and out of very different social worlds: he is Captain Lloyd, Captain Dixie or Esteban Yo-eed, Jerome Beaulieu, El Inglesito, just as the Carmona brother and sister are Miguel or Captain Madrugada and Ines or La Estrella.

La Estrella allows for an extended reflection on the dynamic role played by women in the revolution and the way that the insecurity of military leaders about this; on the role of sexual energy in a struggle such as this, the way that her commitment to her cause allows her to see clearly that she cannot afford to expend this, and also that long-term commitment to a partner is incompatible her commitment to the revolution; so that Stephen doesn’t like this, but he is the kind of man who has the self-control to bear this – unlike the dissolute Jamaicans that we see in his own world. La Estrella and her sister also exemplify the sort of womanhood that is held up to us as worth fighting for: beautiful, white, proud, humble, virtuous. And we can compare these both to the type of brown breasty waitresses in Jamaican inns, and to two other types of women: the woman through whom many men traffic; the ethical prostitute-spy who receives and passes on information and money at a brothel in Santiago. And the woman who passes from space to space: the spy, for the other side: Henrietta Costello, an elderly white woman who moves from home to home in western Jamaica turning

up just in time for dinner and then moving on again. She has lived in Jamaica for as long as anyone can remember, acting as governess for young ladies when she was younger – her origins are uncertain. Throughout the novel no-one can figure out how the movements of Stephen and others are known to the Spanish authorities, and she turns out to be a major spy. When he gets a chance to look at her file he sees that she “engages in espionage for mercenary reasons, but is indifferent to the mount paid as long as she is supplied with drugs.” She “does not sympathize with either the Spanish or Cuban cause and has no political opinions.”<sup>32</sup>

Roberts’ novel presents us with burned out plantations that indicate both the cruelty of the Spanish and the necessary tactics of the Cuban forces. But I am interested here not so much how Stephen Lloyd becomes Estaban Yo-eed, but how Estaban reverts to Stephen. That is, what would the landed revolution underway in Cuba mean in Jamaican terms, and how would it square with Roberts’ use of New Orleans and Texas as a way of linking Jamaica to the US south in a familial way. So that the creole nationalist radical’s parents are confederate defenders of the old US South?

Carolyn Vallenga Berman points out that readers of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, including James Baldwin, ignore or “discard” characters who exceed non-white and non-US categories. These characters have a French or Spanish heritage, or pass themselves off as such. These “blurry figures in French and Spanish,” including Cassy, allow the novel to “dismantle the ‘patriarchal institution’ and ‘imagine and American nation free of slavery’” -- Americans not American, blacks who are not black, and white who are not white – in Louisiana.<sup>33</sup> Stowe is both drawn to their challenge to (US Anglo) slaveholding institutions, and threatened by them – threatened because nationalism is traced through claims to land rather than personal genealogy. They are barred from both whiteness *and* land-ownership, with freedom and citizenship implicitly attached to both. Stowe’s castigation of whites fathers for selling their enslaved children down the river justifies the nullification of these children’s claims to US American identity and to the USA as a physical location: recall that George and his family leave for Liberia. French- and Spanish-speaking characters are disturbingly associated with slave revolts, mixed racial inheritance, and strong ties to place. “[Stowe elides the] Creole component of national identity: the importance of being raised locally, regardless of genealogical descent.”<sup>34</sup> Vallenga Berman also usefully glosses “creole”: “from the old Portuguese word *crioulo*, or *raised*,” which distinguished a domestic animal raised at home from one purchased at the market. Slaves bred in the colonial “home” rather than imported from the international slaver market – as well as settlers “bred” by colonial families – came to be called “Creole” by extension.<sup>35</sup>

Cuba in Roberts’ *The Single Star* offers struggle and dignity as the source of an anti-imperialism that both puts Jamaica to shame and offers it

inspiration. But it also portrays Jamaica as a refuge for anti-imperialist freedom-fighters, a place to which others *come* – and this at a historical moment when many writers were *leaving* the British Caribbean to write their nationalist narratives in London. The novel portrays a virile, radical, multi-lingual sharp-shooter – a Jamaican male who embodies the creole colon. If the novel was popular among US readers as a romance, then it shows the appetite for this in the late 1940s. If it was popular in Cuba, in a Spanish version or otherwise, then this has interesting implications for the differences between the 1890s and the 1940s. If Jamaicans enjoyed the 1956 edition, did they separate out what I am reading as its outmoded racial stereotypes from its guerilla nationalism? Or were these all of a piece and acceptable in a liberal climate that hadn't yet made the stark oppositions of the late 1960s and after? Perhaps the romance smoothes over these dissonances. The novelist, anthropologist and social historian Erna Brodber, whom I would call self-consciously Afro-centric, has said, "I want to know what the Irish, the Scottish, the Welsh gave to the Creole mix as much as I want to know: is it the Ibo, Fulani, what particular part of Africa is my heritage?" The missing Anglo here might be a sign of its ubiquity and power. Roberts, too, sought to trace out the contours of an other-than-white-Protestant identity; in this novel, at least, he is unconcerned about the second part of Brodber's query. Roberts drew on Cuba for its revolution to radicalize his Jamaican (fictional) contexts, even as Cuba also gave him the resources for perpetuating a plantation romance.

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<sup>1</sup> The first quotation is from Roberts, *Six Great Jamaicans* (Kingston: Pioneer Press, 1951) and the second from his unpublished autobiographical papers.

<sup>2</sup> Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *In Praise of Creoleness*, M.B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris: Gallimard, 1989), 88, 75, 104.

<sup>3</sup> Bernabé, et al, *In Praise*, 89.

<sup>4</sup> Maryse Condé, "On the Apparent Carnivalization of Literature from the French Caribbean," in *Representations of Blackness and the Performance of Identities*, ed. Jean Muteba Rahier (Westport, CT: Bergin and Garvey, 1999), 95. Also, see Faith Smith, "Can Anything Good Come Out of Cedros? 'Nation Language' in Nineteenth Century Trinidad," *Shibboleths: A Journal of Comparative Theory* 1, no. 2 (2007).

<sup>5</sup> In Roberts, *Six Jamaicans* 92-93. The poem's initial publication is unclear. This poem is also anthologized in Paula Burnett, *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse* (New York: Penguin Global, 2006). Thomas Macdermot, writing as Tom Redcam, published novels set in Kingston in the early twentieth century. On Cubans in late nineteenth-century Jamaica see Howard Johnson, "Cuban Immigrants in Jamaica, 1868-1898," *Immigrants & Minorities* 29, no. 1 (March 2011): 1-32.

<sup>6</sup> H.G. De Lisser, *In Jamaica and Cuba* (Kingston: Gleaner Co., Ltd., 1910), v.

<sup>7</sup> de Lisser, 9.

- <sup>8</sup> David Scott, "The Sovereignty of the Imagination: An Interview with George Lamming," *Small Axe* 12 (September 2002): 87.
- <sup>9</sup> Scott, "Sovereignty of the Imagination," 89.
- <sup>10</sup> For a recent analysis of this novel in the context of eastern Cuba, see Peter Hulme, *Cuba's Wild East* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012).
- <sup>11</sup> Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and its Background, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition* (London: Heinemann, 1983), 231
- <sup>12</sup> At the Caribbean Epistemologies Seminar, "Orlando Patterson in Conversation with David Scott," CUNY Graduate Center, May 4, 2012.
- <sup>13</sup> Compare, for instance, Fernando Ortiz (*Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trs. Harriet de Onís [Durham: Duke University Press, 1995]) on transculturation, with "an unbroken stream of white immigrants...transplanted to a new world where everything was new to them, and where they had to adjust themselves to a new syncretism of cultures"; and "a steady human stream of African negroes...snatched...their own cultures destroyed and crushed under the weight of the cultures here, like sugar cane ground in the rollers of the mill." (98)
- "The whole gamut of culture run by Europe in more than four millennia took place in Cuba in less than four centuries. In Europe the change was step by step; here it was by leaps and bounds." (99)
- <sup>14</sup> Nigel Bolland, "Creolization and Creole Societies: A Cultural Nationalist View of Caribbean Social History," in *Intellectuals in the Caribbean, Volume One*, ed. Alistair Hennessy (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 72
- <sup>15</sup> John Jacob Thomas, *Froudacity: West Indian Fables by J.A. Froude* (London: New Beacon Press, 1969), 188; Faith Smith, *Creole Recitations: John Jacob Thomas and Colonial Formation in the Late Nineteenth-Century Caribbean* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), 107.
- <sup>16</sup> See, Peter Hulme, "The Locked Heart: The Creole Family Romance of *Wide Sargasso Sea*," in *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory*, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 72-88.
- <sup>17</sup> Kamau Brathwaite, *Contradictory Omens* (Mona: Savacou Publications, 1974), 38.
- <sup>18</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "Novel and History: Plot and Plantation," *Savacou* 5 (June 1971): 96. Wynter does not provide the citation for Asturias. I am grateful to Evelyn O'Callaghan for reminding me of the relevance of Wynter's essay to discussions of the plantation. She uses it to discuss representations of the plantation by John Hearne.
- <sup>19</sup> W. Adolphe Roberts, *The Single Star* (Kingston: Pioneer Press, 1956), 23.
- <sup>20</sup> Roberts, *The Single Star*, 24.
- <sup>21</sup> Roberts, *The Single Star*, 18.
- <sup>22</sup> Roberts, *The Single Star*, 35-36.
- <sup>23</sup> I thank Kim Robinson for pointing out to me that Lattimer is not, technically speaking, "white." On my reading, because he is white enough to believe that he is, he is at the very least a functionally white Jamaican. Robinson discusses this passage in her *Out of Order* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2006), 37.

- <sup>24</sup> Interestingly, *Abeng* has a poem by Roberts, “Maroon Girl” depicted as Arawak, white and black, regal: “She is Jamaica poised against attack.” (See Michelle Cliff, *Abeng* [Trumansburg, New York: The Crossing Press, 1984], 91.)
- <sup>25</sup> Cliff, *Abeng*, 122.
- <sup>26</sup> Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1982), 21.
- <sup>27</sup> See Bill Schwarz’ discussion of the Boer War and racial identification in *Memories of Empire, Volume I: The White Man’s World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- <sup>28</sup> W. Adolphe Roberts, “The Tides of Spring” and “Moonstone and Harvest.” Unpublished typewritten autobiography, parts one and two. MS 353, Box 2B, National Library of Jamaica, manuscript page 326.
- <sup>29</sup> See Birte Timm, “Caribbean Leaven in the American Loaf: Wilfred A. Domingo, the Jamaica Progressive League, and the Founding of a Decolonization movement for Jamaica,” *GHI Bulletin Supplement* 5 (2008): 81-97.
- <sup>30</sup> W. Adolphe Roberts, *Lands of the Inner Sea: The West Indies and Bermuda* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1948), xiii.
- <sup>31</sup> Roberts, *The Single Star*, 91-92.
- <sup>32</sup> Roberts, *The Single Star*, 295. It is tantalizing to consider that this character could have been based on the charismatic union leader and later Premier of Jamaica, Alexander Bustamante. I thank Annie Paul for suggesting this connection. Roberts’ notes make it clear that he despised Bustamante as an illiterate demagogue, and he notes that he (Roberts) made a point of doing research in Havana to investigate the exploits that Bustamante claimed to have had in his travels: he claimed to have been in the Spanish Foreign Legion, but was never in Spain; to have been a station manager of a street car system in Panama, when he was in fact a conductor in Panama; to have been a dietician at a hospital in New York City, when he was an orderly. Significantly Roberts says that Bustamante claims to have been a member of Machado’s secret police in Cuba, but Roberts checked when he was in Havana and found that he had been a special policeman for a few weeks. I find this detail particularly significant in light of the portrayal of Miss Costello. Stephen’s last act in the novel is to aim his gun, to kill her, in a parallel of the hunt for a mongoose at the beginning of the novel. Mongooses are an imported menace, a blight on the landscape, just as Miss Costello is. Stephen takes aim, but cannot bring himself to shoot her, and decides that she would be better off in a mental facility.
- <sup>33</sup> Carolyn Vallenga Berman, “Impersonating the Creole: The American Family and its Lines of Flight,” in *Just Below South: Intercultural Performance in the Caribbean and the U.S. South*, eds. Jessica Adams, Michael Bibler, and Cécile Accilien (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007), 27.
- <sup>34</sup> Vallenga Berman, “Impersonating the Creole,” 39.
- <sup>35</sup> Vallenga Berman, “Impersonating the Creole,” 48.