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Ti ponch: or, bookshelf 2002

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Widespread misinformation about the Caribbean, allowed to circulate because so many people in the United States and Europe continue to view the region largely as a place of “sea, sun, and sex,” seems to be of little concern to journalists and other casual writers. Some time ago, we were moved to write a letter to the editors of the New York Times in an attempt to correct a blithe report published in the paper’s Travel section. An article entitled “Island Report: Looking Past the Storms” (Frances Frank Marcus, November 26, 1995) had recommended that visitors to Martinique “try the petit punch, a concoction of white wine and brown sugar.” Our letter said:

This is something like describing a dry martini as a concoction of tequila and apple cider. For the record, the national drink of Martinique consists of white rum and raw sugar, with or without a zest of lime. The raw sugar may be substituted by a Caribbean plum in syrup, by cane syrup, by honey, or by molasses – “brown sugar” is not available in Martinique, white wine is rarely drunk by Martiniquans, and no alcohol but rum is imaginable in a “ti ponch.”

The Times declined to print the letter. So much for accountability when it comes to reporting on the “Pleasure Islands.”

We are pleased to announce that the annual Caribbeaanist Hall of Shame includes only four names this year. As always, we are deeply grateful to those scholars who have taken the time to provide reviews for NWIG, allowing the journal to continue to be the premier site for reviews of Caribbean scholarship. It is, however, our sad duty to list here those works that, as of press time (February 2003), have not been discussed in the journal because the scholars who agreed to review them have – despite reminder letters – neither provided a text nor relinquished the books so that we could assign them to someone else. As has become our custom, we indicate slack reviewers’ names with both initial and final letters, in an attempt to forestall
false accusations and protect the reputations of the innocent. And as in past years, we hope this may serve as a kind of backlist “books received.”

- *African America and Haiti: Emigration and Black Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century*, by Chris Dixon (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2000, 264 pp., cloth US$ 65.00) (J_n P_s);
- *Cuba's Foreign Relations in a Post-Soviet World*, by H. Michael Erisman (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000, xiii + 270 pp., cloth US$ 49.95) (A_s S_n);
- *Learning to be a Man: Culture, Socialization and Gender Identity in Five Caribbean Communities*, by Barry Chevannes (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2001, xi + 240 pp., paper US$ 25.00) (T_r P_l);

We can’t be sure, but we do have the impression that fewer and fewer academics are taking the time to write book reviews (or even to answer requests to review a book). The following pages include a large number of books for which we were unable, after several tries, to find a reviewer, as well as a smaller number of titles we decided did not merit full review. We present them promiscuously, grouped in very rough categories, with occasional comments, in this year-end wrap-up.

It is our custom to begin with works of literature (which are not normally given full reviews in this journal) and literary criticism. *Ancestors* (New York: New Directions, 2001, paper US$ 35.00) is Kamau Brathwaite’s radical recasting of his landmark trilogy, “Mother Poem,” “Sun Poem,” and “X/Self,” in the form of “video sycorax,” designed for the “intercovery” of the poet’s African/Caribbean heritage. In *Mr. Potter* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002, cloth US$ 20.00), Jamaica Kincaid returns to Antigua to lay bare the life of an illiterate chauffeur, the narrator’s father, deploying her inimitable, magical, and mordant poetics. Derek Walcott gathers two plays on North American themes in *Walker and The Ghost Dance* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002, paper US$ 17.00), the first (dedicated to the memory of Romare Bearden) about resistance to slavery, and the second (modeled on a John Ford film) about the destruction of the Plains Indians.

work, likely the first Caribbean novel published in English (1838); this welcome reprint inaugurates what promises to be an extremely useful series of little-known (mainly nineteenth-century) West Indian novels, the first four of which, like Warner, focus on Trinidad. Juanita: A Romance of Real Life in Cuba Fifty Years Ago, edited by Patricia M. Ard (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000, paper US$ 18.50), reprints an 1887 novel written by Mary Peabody Mann, a New England woman who lived on a Cuban slave plantation in the 1830s. And Sidney W. Mintz has translated César Andreu Iglesias’s novel about 1950s Puerto Rican nationalism, Los derrotados, as The Vanquished (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002, paper US$ 19.95), with an afterword by Arcadio Díaz-Quiñones.


Turning to Cuba, the most studied as well as the most populous isle in the region, there are numerous unreviewed books, ranging from Carpentier’s classic study of Cuban music to Jamail’s analysis of Cuban baseball, with large numbers on the Castro regime, its critics, and the Cuban diaspora.


The Caribbean portions of *The Female Body: Perspectives of Latin American Artists*, by Raysa E. Amador Gómez-Quintero and Mireya


Historical works on (mainly pre-Castro) Cuba include *Tragedy in Havana: November 27, 1871*, by Fermín Valdés-Domínguez, edited and translated by Consuelo E. Stebbins (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000, cloth US$ 49.95), analyzing an important incident in the struggle for independence; *Cuba in War Time*, by Richard Harding Davis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000, paper US$ 10.00), a reprint of the 1898 edition with drawings by Frederic Remington; *Spain’s 1898 Crisis: Regenerationism, Modernism, Post-colonialism*, edited by Joseph Harrison and Alan Hoyle (Manchester, UK: University of Manchester Press, 2000 cloth £ 42.50), which includes several chapters on Cuba and Puerto Rico; *Representations of the Cuban and Philippine Insurrections on the Spanish Stage, 1887-1898*, by D.J. O’Connor (Tempe AZ: Bilingual Press, 2001, paper US$ 17.00); *U.S. Protestant Missions in Cuba: From Independence to Castro*, by Jason M. Yaremko (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2000, cloth US$ 49.95); and *History of the Cuban Armed Forces: From Colony to


Four on Haiti that no one wished to review: *Culture and Customs of Haiti*, by J. Michael Dash (Westport CT: Greenwood Press, 2001, cloth US$ 45.00), a balanced, erudite, and affectionate overview; *Falcon Brigade: Combat and Command in Somalia and Haiti*, by Lawrence E. Casper (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001, cloth US$ 35.00), which is very much a retired colonel’s version of events; *Haitians and African Americans: A Heritage of Tragedy and Hope*, by Leon D. Pamphile (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2001, cloth US$ 55.00); and *Diasporic Citizenship: Haitian Americans in Transnational America*, by Michel S. Laguerre (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997, paper US$ 24.95).

Living in the French Antilles, we see more than our share of publications on the Caribbean DOMs. Two local Martiniquian works of social science merit a note. *Souffrance et jouissance aux Antilles: Essai*, by André Lucrèce (Trinité, Martinique: Gondwana Editions, 2000, paper € 19.67), is a pretentious and rather abstract philosophical/sociological gaze on modernization in the French Antilles. *Martinique: La société vulnérable: Essai*, by Louis-Félix Ozier-Lafontaine (Trinité, Martinique: Gondwana Editions, 1999, paper 139 FF), much of which is of the same platitudinous genre, does include one long and interesting section that presents an argument linking Antillean modernization/consumerism (and various forms of gambling) with practices of magic (*quinbois/kimbwa*), and analyzes the rise of father-daughter incest as part of this package. Geographically-related works include *French Anti-Slavery: The Movement for the Abolition of Slavery in France, 1802-1848*, by Lawrence C. Jennings (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, cloth US$ 54.95); *Voyage aux Antilles: De l’île en île, de la Martinique à Trinidad (1767-1773)*, by Jean Baptiste Leblond (Paris: Karthala, 2000, paper 150 FF),
which recounts among other wonders a voyage in a Black Carib canoe from Martinique to St. Vincent; *Demeures incertaines aux Amériques* (Gosier, Guadeloupe: Caret, 2002, paper € 15), another curious and intriguing little collection of Caribbeana in the “Petite bibliothèque du curieux créole”; *Les dessins de Jeanne: Le regard d’une femme béké sur la vie de l’habitation à la Martinique dans les années 20*, by Jeanne de Laguargique de Survilliers (Habitation Saint-Étienne, Martinique: Traces, 2001, paper n.p.), which presents letters and drawings from a perspective not often revealed in Martinique; *Paysages et végétations des Antilles*, by Françoise Hatzenberger (Paris: Karthala, 2001, paper € 33.50), a serious work of ecology; Jil Silberstein’s journalistic *Kali’na: Une famille indienne de Guyane française* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002, paper € 25); and *Emergences caraïbes: Eléments de géographie politique*, by Monique Bégot, Pacal Buléon, and Patrice Roth (Paris: Harmattan, 2001, cloth € 19), which touts itself as “the first geopolitical atlas of the Caribbean” and indeed contains much useful information but which never quite frees itself from its Francophone gaze, e.g., besides Nobel winners, its list of famous Caribbean writers consists exclusively of Césaire, Glissant, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, then Carpenter, Martí, and Guillén, then Bob Marley and Claude MacKay, and finally Jacques Roumain – where for example, are Lamming, Brathwaite, and Wilson Harris? Where are Luis Palés Matos, Pedro Mir, and José Luis González? The book’s bibliography holds the key: it lists fifty-seven works in French, five in English, and none in Spanish or Dutch.


Ibis Rouge (www.ibisrouge.fr), which is once again based in Guyane, continues to be the most prolific (and indiscriminate) publisher of French-language books on the DOMs. This is the most generous of all French publishers, indeed almost the only one besides Gallimard, Robert Laffont, and Maisonneuve & Larose willing to provide review copies to *NWIG*. Some of its recent books are reviewed in this and other issues of the journal.

Ibis Rouge has also sent us nine recent works on Guyane: Serge Patient’s Le nègre du gouverneur (2001, € 15), the republication of a 1978 novel...


J$ 2000.00, US$ 45.00), which is the most intellectually interesting, and provocative, of the three.


Frank Dragenstein’s 2002 University of Utrecht dissertation, published as “De Ondraaglijke Stoutheid der Wegloopers”: Marronage en koloniaal
beleid in Suriname, 1667-1768 (Utrecht: Centrum voor Latijns-Amerikaanse en Caraïbische Studies) proudly claims, allegedly in contrast to previous work on the subject, to be “based on research into archives, authentic documents and other scientific materials” (p. 305) and to “complete” the work of Price (p. 235), where “oral history” is said “to predominate.” Told strictly from a colonial perspective, it nevertheless fills in much detail, largely from the Dutch National Archives, on the early history of Saramakas as well as Ndyukas and Matawais, constituting a sort of road-map of relevant events as recorded in the archives. It is dispassionate history par excellence – very much one damn thing after another, a chronological slogging through of the documents – but it will be of interest to Suriname history buffs and serve as a useful resource for those seeking in the future to represent Suriname’s Maroon heritage more in the round. The book also symptomizes the routinization of writing about (and the representational flattening out of) supremely dramatic events, ones that continue to matter greatly to the descendants of the Maroons whom one sees only dimly through the Dutch words on these pages – see for example, the current Saramaka and Ndyuka petitions before the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights. And it exemplifies historical parochialism, claiming (pp. 18-20) that while the literature on marronage in Suriname is weak in the realm of theory, what little there is comes from Wim Hoogbergen and other Dutch or Surinamese authors; yet from an international perspective, it is rather the comparative work of non-Dutch scholars such as Kenneth Bilby (using both archival and oral materials) on the very treaties discussed by Dragenstein, or on the ethnogenesis of Maroon peoples, to name but one example among several that come to mind, that might be said to have general theoretical significance. One might have hoped that the author’s old-fashioned prejudice against history beyond the archives, and his staunchly separatist views of the historical and anthropological disciplines (see pp. 12-13), would have been mitigated by his dissertation advisors, but perhaps we are no more fully responsible for our students than for our children.

Three works on the arts in the Dutch sphere of influence: Beeldende kunst in Suriname: De twintigste eeuw/Visual Art in Suriname: The Twentieth Century, by Chandra van Binnendijk and Paul Faber (Amsterdam: KIT, 2000, cloth € 23.00), which is an updated reprint of their 1995 book; Dutch Caribbean Art/Beeldende kunst van de Nederlandse Antillen en Aruba, by Adi Martis and Jennifer Smit (Kingston: Ian Randle/Amsterdam: KIT, 2002, cloth US$ 29.95), which is a useful, bilingual, colorful introduction to the visual arts, with emphasis on recent developments; and St. Martin Massive! A Snapshot of Popular Artists, edited by Fabian A. Badejo (Philipsburg, St. Martin: House of Nehesi, 2000, US$ 25.00), which features biographies and photos of St. Martin’s “20 most popular artists” – painters, writers, and musicians – as determined by a recent poll.


We are left with a number of miscellaneous works that deserve mention. Captive Passage: The Transatlantic Slave Trade and the Making of the Americas (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2002, cloth US$

But there’s more! Two on women: Caribbean Women at the Crossroads: The Paradox of Motherhood among Women of Barbados, St Lucia and Dominica, by Patricia Mohammed and Althea Perkins (Kingston: Canoe Press, 1999, paper J$757.62, US$ 18.00); and Women’s Movements in International Perspective: Latin America and Beyond, by Maxine Molyneux (New York: Palgrave, 2001, paper n.p.), which includes materials on Cuba. Also: Creolization in the Americas, edited by David Buisseret and Steven G. Reinhardt (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000, paper US$ 16.95); Endless Education: Main Currents in the Education System of Modern Trinidad and Tobago, 1939-1986, by Carl C. Campbell (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 1997, paper J$ 900.00, US$ 25.00); The Urban Caribbean in an Era of Global Change, by Robert B. Potter (Burlington VT: Ashgate, 2000, cloth US$ 64.95); and HIV/AIDS in the


Routledge has published a three-volume encyclopedia that includes the Caribbean: Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures, edited by Daniel Balderston, Mike Gonzalez, and Ana M. López (New York: Routledge, 2000, cloth US$ 400.00). The inconsistency of the approach of the generally brief entries adds some interest to browsing. Thus, for example, the entry on Lamming (by Louis James) consists exclusively of plot summaries of the novels, while that on Césaire (by Ben A. Heller) is largely biographical. There are hidden corners throughout – from Havana’s Bodeguita del Medio to Cuffy’s Statue in Georgetown, from Sequin Art in Haiti to Trinidad Shouters – but on the whole it is difficult to see what purpose such a grand and diverse publishing enterprise serves in the era of the Internet. Meanwhile, Rebecca J. Scott, Thomas C. Holt, Frederick Cooper, and Aims McGuinness have edited a reference work of a very different kind, the sort of volume that graduate students embarking on related topics must put under their pillow immediately, Societies after Slavery: A Select Annotated Bibliography of Printed Sources on Cuba, Brazil, British Colonial Africa, South Africa, and the British West Indies (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2002, cloth US$ 65.00). This is the sort of widely collaborative project (involving a number of authorities not listed formally as editors), aimed at fellow scholars and students, that we should all cherish.