
The plantation, the pirate ship, the church, the colonial courthouse, the marketplace, the pages of the literary magazine, the carnival parade, the traffic jam. Dalleo’s own examples (p. 2) imply that for him the Caribbean “public sphere” is a zone both real and imagined, one in which writers have sought to locate their aspirations, not only to reach a public but to bring one into existence. Necessarily differently configured from the European bourgeois public sphere described by Jürgen Habermas, it nevertheless claims “to represent the hopes and aspirations of the majority of the populace” (p. 4) unlike the black “counterpublic” identified by Houston Baker in the United States.

Above all, this public sphere—and therefore literature’s relationship to it—is always changing. Dalleo’s approach is determinedly historical, and his book is organized according to a three-fold periodization which he insists works well across the whole Caribbean. First, abolitionist writing which was addressed to a largely European public at a time when a specifically Caribbean public sphere did not yet exist, although by the 1850s this default location was beginning to show signs of wear. Second, anticolonialist writing in which Caribbean intellectuals (usually through an—uneasy—identification with a romantic male protagonist) aligned themselves with “the people.” (On closer inspection, this “people” turn out to be not just “middle class” but a particular segment of that class, one that defines itself as literary rather than professional or technocratic.) And third, after independence, with that professional or technocratic middle class now holding power (often with disappointing, even devastating, results), a “post-colonial” moment in which literary intellectuals seek—with varying degrees of confidence, and not always successfully—to subject this new order to critical scrutiny and imagine more just alternatives, often with a renewed interest in vernacular cultural forms such as oral testimony and popular music, while remaining alert to their increasing commodification.

Dalleo’s opening examples notwithstanding, his book—as its title indicates—is largely concerned with literature, in the most conventional use of the word; the nearly twenty texts that are discussed at length are mainly works of literary fiction or autobiography. It is especially gratifying to find
that the coverage is genuinely pan-Caribbean, as Dalleo is equally at home with English-, French-, and Spanish-language material. Historiography, poetry, criticism, and theoretical works are also examined, but other cultural forms are necessarily marginalized by this literary focus. Oral testimony and popular music, for instance, figure only insofar as they are deployed by writers, often to lend authority to their attempts to speak on behalf of “the people.” This emphasis is perhaps to be expected from a professor of English, but what is more surprising is that there is very little here on the economics and politics of publishing and broadcasting in the Caribbean or the way nonacademic readers might have selected, enjoyed, and responded to the texts examined here.

There is a certain ambiguity concealed in the “and” of the title. On the one hand the book is concerned with the relationship between a text and its audience or readership. Its relationship to a “public sphere” might be extrapolated from the assumptions it makes about (or asks of) the implied reader. For example in the discussion of Claude McKay’s *Banana Bottom* and the contributions to Barbadian, Dominican, and Martinican literary magazines of the 1940s, Dalleo insists that these texts articulate (and possibly also help to shape) the outlook of a specifically literary middle class (signified, perhaps, by the kind of publication they might have been likely to read).

On the other hand the “public sphere” also refers to the places that feature as settings in works of literature, for example the pirate ship in Michael Maxwell Philip’s *Emmanuel Appadocca* (1854) or the traffic jam in *La guaracha del Macho Camacho* (1976) by Luis Rafael Sánchez. To read these spaces as figurative displacements of their authors’ conflicted attempts to make sense of, or reimagine, the audience they seek to reach can be very illuminating, but the interpretations are inevitably more hypothetical than those that concern the institutional context in which texts are published.

That the broader historical argument requires a blurring of very different notions of “public sphere” (an actual reading public or literary marketplace on the one hand and a diegetic space in which fictional characters interact on the other) may be a sign of a structural weakness. But the readings of individual texts are supple enough not to be unduly constrained by the three-part structure in which they are placed. No book receives more than ten pages (most of them considerably less), but Dalleo always finds room to tease out the implications of certain turns of phrase or juxtaposition of
sociolects while also outlining the broader arcs of plot and character. The readings are clear, well supported, and often original, and there are many unexpected asides too that shed light on other figures who do not form part of the main narrative. I especially enjoyed the suggestion that C.L.R. James’s reading of Melville allegorizes his relationship with Eric Williams (pp. 147-48), for instance, and the teasing reference to Rachel Manley’s memoir of her grandfather and its claim that Norman Manley’s political project could “only succeed through his literal marriage to the artistic sensibility of his wife . . . Edna” (p. 94). These snippets can only hint at the many fascinating lines of inquiry that this ambitious and provocative study will surely inspire its readers to follow.

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