Jennifer Terry

'Shuttles in the Rocking Loom': Mapping the Black Diaspora in African American and Caribbean Fiction. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2014. vii + 228 pp. (Cloth US\$89.96)

Jennifer Terry's multinational and theoretically informed study of African Atlantic fiction ranges from W.E.B. Du Bois through Maryse Condé to Caryl Phillips and from C.L.R. James through Octavia Butler to Dionne Brand. As she contends, the etymology of diaspora suggests both routes and roots; her astute study explores these writers in terms of imagined and actual movements as well as the national, local, and regional narratives and histories that inform them. She is insistent on the importance of place over placelessness in diasporic fiction, while being wary of the pitfalls of nationalism in the narrower kinds of African Atlantic criticism. Thus, she articulates a useful critique of Houston Baker's remark that "the exclusive focus on black U.S. experience can reinforce a constraining nationalism or even exceptionalism" (p. 15) that stymies cross-cultural criticism. Her study provides exactly the opposite kind of endeavor; it is open, multilingual, and attuned to the specificity of place while always making connections to other writings in the diaspora. For instance, in a sustained and incisive reading of Earl Lovelace's *Salt*, Terry demonstrates how the "fixation on departure and estrangement from the local illustrates Glissant's notion of 'transferred space,' a mapping informed by imperialist values that confer importance and indeed civilization on elsewhere" (p. 91). She shows how Lovelace's local Caribbean space is marginalized by the workings of Anglocentric hegemony.

The book's structure in four chapters—"Legacies of Slavery in the U.S. North and South," "Landscapes of the Caribbean Plantation and Interior," "Sea Changes: Middle Passages and Voyages," and "Home and City Space: Claims, Cosmopolitanisms and Dwelling"—works well, the first two dividing U.S. and Caribbean authors and the latter two melding them. All four have merits, but occasionally there is a feeling that too many authors (around thirty overall) are discussed. Terry manages to say new things about even the most critiqued novels. For instance on Toni Morrison's *Jazz* (1991), she for once looks not at the Harlem Renaissance roots, but the 1990s moment when the novel was written, showing how it engages in fruitful and critical dialogue with Francis Fukuyama's *The End of History and the Last Man* (1991), refuting his "notion that history is 'over' and insisting that the struggles that have shaped the modern world have not and will not disappear" (p. 54). Later in the study Terry uses Jamaica Kincaid's *A Small Place* (1988) to show the problematics of the apolitical in relation to contemporary realities on a Caribbean island. After describing

how Kincaid outlines the visual attraction of the island, she shows how “she simultaneously conveys a kind of alienation from landscape, using this to suggest a kind of objectification ... Kincaid’s blunt perspective thus brings about a reappraisal of the received aesthetics for the Caribbean ... demythologizing and forcing a harder look” (p. 81). Terry’s fictional mappings use this as her stepping off point for the way other Caribbean writers interpret the landscape.

Probably the strongest chapter is the one on the Middle Passage, in which she interrogates Édouard Glissant, Toni Morrison, and Paule Marshall with a wide range of secondary sources and historical contexts, showing how the “Atlantic depths are hence haunted by the presence of the drowned, their marking of a history of suffering and of spiritualised trajectories and connections proving suggestive for fictional voyages that remind and retrace” (p. 123). What Terry shows throughout this book is the way that African diasporic resilience, surviving the trauma, ultimately reveals enmeshed histories that often aptly explicate the journeys made. The importance of remaking histories to many of these narratives is something to which she constantly returns. Later, in looking at recrossings of the Atlantic to Europe, she complicates the stories, though ultimately she shows how novels by writers such as Andrea Levy and Phillips “signal the narrative of diasporan migration to be as much about securing dwelling as about movement or travel” (p. 198).

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