Nicole N. Aljoe, Brycchan Carey & Thomas W. Krise (eds.), *Literary Histories of the Early Anglophone Caribbean: Islands in the Stream*. Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. xii + 231 pp. (Cloth US\$109.00)

Literary Histories of the Early Anglophone Caribbean does more than offer a wide-ranging view of this relatively new field of study; it also articulates the central questions that underlie its work, as well as the challenges and possibilities that attend it. While individual essays will be useful to launch or support directed studies, the collection as a whole works powerfully to advance a study of the early Anglophone Caribbean, undertaken with critical consciousness. It thus marks both an arrival and an invitation: an arrival in that the broad array of texts and methods on display announce the richness of the field, and an invitation in that the questions so thoughtfully articulated here promise to promote new paths of scholarly inquiry. In their introduction, the editors note that the relative neglect of early Caribbean literature is based in part on its fraught status as an imperial literature written by “colonizers and slavers” (p. 3) that has not been reckoned with in either British or American studies, even as its status as “Caribbean Literature” is highly contentious. However, the constellation of issues at the heart of early Caribbean literature—including colonialism, race, capitalism, enslavement, environmental change—are also at the heart of the construction of the modern world. This makes the texts of the early Caribbean sites of enormous depth and complexity, even if at the same time they served as blueprints for those modern structures. Throughout, the authors are intent on reading the polyvocal in these texts, recovering almost-lost testimonies, and deconstructing strategies of representation in order to enter the intricacies of these texts without replicating their historical agendas.

The volume, which consists of an introduction and nine essays, might be seen as a series of genre studies bracketed by two essays taking on larger questions of the field as a whole: the first about memory, and the last about the modern. In “Memory, Rememory, and the Moral Constitution of Caribbean Literary History,” Keith Sandiford posits memory against historical positivism as a source of a living history that both invites imagination and aids recovery. Collective memory and countermemory can be tools, he writes, “for imagining and producing a project of literary history consistent with the cultural experiences of Caribbean peoples” (p. 30). In the volume’s final essay, Cassander L. Smith is also concerned with what kind of literary history is being produced by scholars of the early Caribbean. Is it inevitably “a critical colonization” (p. 206)? Smith finds her answers in challenging the notion that the early literature is primarily about domination, and instead offers a model of “multicultural interactions” (p. 194) and “compilations of stories and voices” (p. 202). Like Sandiford and

NEW WEST INDIAN GUIDE

© KATHLEEN DONEGAN, 2019 | DOI:10.1163/22134360-09303039

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the [CC-BY-NC 4.0 License](#).
Downloaded from Brill.com04/26/2023 12:33:13PM
via free access

Smith, the authors at large complicate colonial narratives by uncovering the complex encounters upon which they depend, and find reading strategies that allow us not only to open the archive, but also to find openings inside it.

In the essays that form the body of the volume, prominent scholars show the depth and diversity of the field, and the range of genres that still await critical discovery. Missionary tracts give us oral testimony and extensive life narratives in which the spoken is not subordinate to the written. Medical literature shows that in a world of both botanical wealth and extravagant disease, counsel toward moderation was persistently overwhelmed by the immoderate social forms of the plantation. Newspapers featuring extensive literary offerings demonstrate how stigmatized West Indian Creoles aspired toward "Englishness." West Indian piracy narratives cast women as passive characters in male dramas of vice and virtue, incidental to the pirate's masculine self-making. Creole novels privilege the white plantocracy, yet rely on stories of resistance and rebellion. Satirical writing was deployed broadly and variously as a cultural corrective to a Caribbean world seen as a site of vice. Regarding all these genres, the volume's essays both show the fine work that is possible and point to the extensive work that is still to do.

Nicole N. Aljoe's essay, "Testimonies of the Enslaved in the Caribbean Literary History," asks what is "the slave's voice" that we hope to recover. She argues that it is not singular, embodied, and authoritative. Instead, "the slave voice" found in early Caribbean literature is subaltern, conditional, and produced. It is "ephemeral, fragmentary, explicitly mediated" (p. 111) ... not so much "a slave's voice" as it is "creole testimony" (p. 112). The move toward complexity in that critical transformation is a good indicator of this volume's priorities, and of the state of this still emerging field.

Kathleen Donegan

Department of English, University of California, Berkeley

kdonegan@berkeley.edu