David Featherstone, Christopher Gair, Christian Høgsbjerg & Andrew Smith
(eds.), *Marxism, Colonialism, and Cricket: C.L.R. James's Beyond a Boundary*.
Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2018. ii + 295 pp. (Paper US\$26.95)

This fine collection of essays and reflections makes a significant contribution to the existing literature on *Beyond a Boundary* and C.L.R. James more generally. Most of the essays were first presented at a University of Glasgow conference commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of James's book in 1963. Following a substantial introduction by the four editors, the volume is organized into four parts. Part One, "Cricket, Empire, and the Caribbean," is concerned to place James's work in its sociohistorical contexts. Part Two, "The Politics of Representation in *Beyond a Boundary*," addresses the questions of voice, social formation, and world-view in James's text. Part Three, "Art, History, and Culture," takes up James's understanding of cricket as a socio-aesthetic practice and his conceptions of culture and history more broadly. Part Four, "Reflections," features contributions—by turns discriminating, moving, and politically engaging—by Mike Brearley (astute former captain of the England team), Hilary Beckles (among the most important Caribbeanist social historians of his generation), and Selma James (whose decades of involvement in antiracist, anti-imperialist and feminist struggles have brought her global renown, and who was married to C.L.R. from 1956 to 1980).

The strongest essays are those that situate James relative to other politico-intellectuals of his time and place, or that seek to take the measure of his particular imagination by thinking about who exactly he was, in the light of the social forces that made him: family, community, schooling, friends, allies, allegiances, his precise historical moment, and his politics (theory and practice). The essays by Selwyn Cudjoe, Clem Seecharan, and Paget Henry are marked by their blending of informed detail with broader perspective. Cudjoe emphasizes the importance of James's Barbadian origins to his formation, defending him against the charge (sometimes leveled by postcolonial and decolonial critics, including in this volume) that his thought was Eurocentric: "James ... was aware of the dichotomy between the suppressed aspects of West Indian life and the English culture that was imposed on West Indian people," he observes, in the course of proposing that, notwithstanding its originality, *Beyond a Boundary* "was continuing a conversation that was started by [Michel Maxwell] Philip, [Canon Philip] Doughlin, [J.J.] Thomas, and [Henry Sylvester] Williams ... each of [whom] touched on the importance of Africa in the memory of the Caribbean person, the reclamation of self, and a working through of the question of Caribbean identity" (pp. 42–43). Henry takes this trans-generational "conversation" forward in his essay, looking at Tim Hector's

NEW WEST INDIAN GUIDE

© NEIL LAZARUS, 2020 | DOI:10.1163/22134360-09401021

This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the CC BY-NC 4.0 license.

Downloaded from Brill.com04/26/2023 02:39:12AM
via free access

“extension of James’s civilizational sociology” (p. 216) in a discussion of what he (Henry), himself in dialogue with such theorists as Beckles, Sylvia Wynter, and Stuart Hall, calls James’s “poetic socio-historicism.” Roy McCree discusses the publication history of *Beyond a Boundary*, drawing attention to the significant roles played by George Lamming and by Robert Lusty and his team at Hutchinson.

The essays by Christian Høgsbjerg and Andrew Smith reach beyond the purview of their previous monographs on James. Høgsbjerg “seek[s] to demonstrate that a fundamental aim of *Beyond a Boundary* was to historically situate the rise of English cricket alongside the Industrial Revolution for the first time in order to say something new about ‘English civilization’” (p. 55). His essay introduces the problematics of representation and representativeness, further elaborated upon in the volume by Smith, Claire Westall, and Neil Washbourne. Westall and Smith both mobilize the category of mediation in their insightful reflections on James’s conception of the relationship between individual and collective. The explicit lineage here is Hegel-Marx-Lenin: Washbourne tries to argue that the “representative claim” in James is significantly informed by Rousseau’s “epistemic notion of democracy and his conception of general will” (p. 137).

The faults of the weaker essays might be laid at the door of decolonial theory, forever prone to the disavowal of political universalism on the grounds that it is not all-inclusive. Anima Adjepong takes issue with James’s claim that cricket could ever have been the bearer of national consciousness in the Caribbean. When James writes that his whole generation believes that cricket speaks for the Caribbean on the world stage, she demurs: James’s use of the word “us” is blind to gender division. But the most dispiriting essay is David Austin’s, which, failing to attend to James’s rhetoric, completely misreads his presentation of the “awful” Matthew Bondman—how is it even possible not to notice James’s irony and self-mockery: “The whole Bondman family, except for the father, was unsatisfactory ...”?—and earnestly criticizes the author for his class racism. Austin would do well to follow James’s lead and reread Thackeray’s *Vanity Fair*.

Neil Lazarus

English and Comparative Literary Studies, Warwick University
n.lazarus@warwick.ac.uk