Nick Nesbitt, *Caribbean Critique: Antillean Theory from Toussaint to Glissant*, Liverpool U.P., xiii + 346 pp., is a landmark study by a leading scholar of French Caribbean literature. N. proposes that ‘Caribbean writing in French is grasped in its most essential characteristics when conceptualized as a practice of critique’ (xi). He argues that while Antillean writing is varied, and includes genres such as letters and novels, histories and polemical tracts, poems and theoretical works, ‘the unifying characteristic of the outstanding texts from this tradition is their status as works of critique—as writings, that is, that cry out in insubordination and aversion to the state of their world’ (xi). In particular, N. emphasizes the critique of plantation slavery and colonialism. The study as a whole not only provides insightful, highly original readings of the best-known writers of the French Caribbean, but also demonstrates these writers’ contributions to post-Kantian critical theory, reading them not only as authors but as philosophers, and constantly linking his analysis of their texts to philosophical traditions. According to N., French Caribbean thinkers have forged their own brand of critique that borrows from European philosophers such as Rousseau, Marx, and Sartre, while emphasizing the experiences of the Middle passage, slavery, and Vodun and African traditions. ‘Introduction: The Caribbean Critical Imperative’ (1–28) is a significant theoretical work in itself, in which N. explains the notion of ‘Caribbean Critique’, which he writes with capital letters throughout the book, showing his desire to coin it as a new term for discussing theoretical thinking in the Caribbean. He states that from its very first iteration, in letters about the Haitian Revolution, ‘Caribbean Critique appears concerned not with individuals or with classes but with a series of abstract, universal concepts of relevance to all human beings and not to any specifically regional, racial, or gendered experiences’ (1). In various sections of the Introduction, N. explores Marxist influences, proposes the work of Alain Badiou as a theoretical framework, and argues for the fundamental place of a ‘politics of principle’ in Caribbean Critique. The book is divided thematically into three parts. Part I, ‘Tropical Equality: The Politics of Principle’ examines the relationship between Caribbean writers and politics. Chapter 1, ‘Foundations of Caribbean Critique: From Jacobinism to Black Jacobinism’ (29–65) considers French Jacobinism and its defence in the political writings of Kant, in order to argue that 1789, Jacobinism, and Robespierre stand in refutation of Michel-Rolph’s famous assertion that the Haitian Revolution was ‘unthinkable’. In this chapter, in part through an examination of Spinoza’s original concept of absolute democracy, N. proposes to determine the precise relation between the French and Haitian Revolutions. Chapter 2, ‘Victor Schoelcher, Tocqueville, and the Abolition of Slavery’ (66–85) performs a comparative study of T. and S., whom N. considers a key figure of Caribbean Critique. While both thinkers condemned slavery, T. believed that slaves were not prepared for freedom and should be enfranchised gradually, and S. took a more human rights-centred approach, demanding immediate liberation of all slaves. Chapter 3, ‘Aimé Césaire and the Logic of Decolonization’ (86–117) explores Césaire’s struggle to define a ‘politics of principle’, by analysing his explicit references to the legacy of Jacobinism, the Black Jacobinism of Toussaint Louverture, and S.’s radical abolitionism. N. then demonstrates the
relationship between these references and C.’s particular form of critical thinking and politics in
the period of decolonization and departmentalization. Chapter 4, “‘Stepping Outside the Magic
Circle’: The Critical Thought of Maryse Condé’ (118–32) approaches critique in Condé’s work,
which N. calls ‘a violent gesture that shatters the force of the magic incantations we tell ourselves’
(119). N. is correct to point out that C.’s critical texts form a neglected part of her corpus, a gap
he successfully fills through his close readings of five short books from the late 1970s and a
number of shorter pieces from the 1990s. Chapter 5, ‘Édouard Glissant: From the Destitution
of the Political to Antillean Ultra-leftism’ (133–58) focuses on G.’s most overtly political texts,
his 1958 first novel La Lézarde, his 1961 Les Antilles et la Guyane à l’heure de la décolonisation,
and the critique of post-1848 French colonialism in the Caribbean in his 1981 Discours antillais,
which N. calls the ‘most incisive, original, and developed single work in the entire tradition
of Caribbean Critique’ (133). Part II, ‘Critique of Caribbean Violence’ analyses the question of
violence in revolution for Caribbean authors. Chapter 6, ‘Jacobinism, Black Jacobinism, and the
Foundations of Political Violence’ (159–72) examines both the critique and defense of violence
in French Caribbean writing, drawing from C. L. R. James’s Black Jacobins, and using Walter
Benjamin’s ‘Critique of Violence’ as a theoretical framework. Chapter 7, ‘The Baron de Vastey
and the Contradictions of Scribal Critique’ (173–91) considers the figure of the Baron de V. (Henri
Christophe’s scribe), whose writings illustrate the extent to which Haiti, of any Caribbean nation,
upheld the most the ideals of France’s 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen. N. argues
that V.’s writings constitute ‘another privileged site of response to the real threat of military
intervention by France’ (174). Chapter 8, ‘Revolutionary Inhumanism: Fanon’s On Violence’
(192–215) argues that F.’s anticolonial humanism is best understood ‘as the thinking through
of Kojève’s reading of the Hegelian master-slave dialectic as a revolutionary emancipation of
the oppressed’ (193). N. discusses the nature of the absolute in Les Damnés de la terre, in order
to propose a reconsideration of F.’s ideas on violence. Chapter 9, ‘Aristide and the Politics of
Democratization’ (216–30) is a brief chapter providing commentary on two books about the post-
Duvalier era in Haitian politics: Alex Dupuy’s The Prophet and the Power: Jean-Bertrand Aristide,
and the Politics of Containment and Peter Hallward’s Damming the Flood: Haiti, Aristide, and the
Politics of Containment. Part III, ‘The Critique of Relation’ examines the concept of relation, so
central for N. to Caribbean Critique in the postcolonial era. Chapter 10, ‘Édouard Glissant: From
the Poétique de la relation to the Transcendental Analytic of Relation’ (231–50) argues that two
models of relation have characterized the field: G.’s discussion of relation from the 1990s onward,
primarily as an aesthetic; and the model found in Césaire, Sartre, F. and early G. (in the Discours
Antillais) which describes relationality as alienation and subalternality. Chapter 11, ‘Césaire and
Sartre: Totalization, Relation, Responsibility’ (251–61) is a brief essay reflecting upon S. and C.’s
influences on each other, especially with regard to S.’s writings on the Algerian War and C.’s
Discours sur le colonialisme. Chapter 12, ‘Militant Universality: Absolutely Postcolonial’ (262–70)
performs a reading of Hallward’s landmark work, Absolutely Postcolonial: Writing between the
Singular and the Specific, drawing attention to two central theoretical ‘excurses’ in the book. In
‘Conclusion: The Incandescent I, Destroyer of Worlds’ (271–87) N. reflects broadly on the legacy
of some of the writers of his study—especially Césaire—as well as the field of Francophone
postcolonial studies more generally.

Valérie Loichot, The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean Literature, Minneapolis,
Minnesota U.P., xxxvii + 243 pp., another major work by a leading scholar, examines the interplay
between gastronomy and literature in the French Caribbean, focusing primarily on Guadeloupe
and Martinique, but also utilizing Haiti as a crucial point of comparison. In ‘Introduction: The
Cannibal and the Edible’ (vii-xxxvii) L. proposes to analyse food ‘not only as a basic need but