

Exile and Return as  
Poetics of Identity in  
Contemporary Anglo-  
Caribbean Literature



# Exile and Return as Poetics of Identity in Contemporary Anglo- Caribbean Literature:

*Becoming Home*

By

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Caribbean Literature: Becoming Home

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION: HERMENEUTICS OF RETURN AND RETURN AS HERMENEUTICS

We shall not cease from exploration  
And the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.<sup>1</sup>

The truth of a “return” does not lie in an absolute geography or an absolute history but rather through windows into a composition of reality that can never be seized even as it energizes the imagination into densities and transparencies that release other proportion or windows or doors within the protean imagination.<sup>2</sup>

The above-quoted lines from the fifth and last section of T. S. Eliot's “Little Gidding” beautifully introduce the object of this work: odysseys, homecomings, or journeys of return where the points of departure and the points of arrival simultaneously coincide and differ. Literary figurations of lifelong exiles and never-ceasing explorations of the terrains of language, literature and history (as these journeys emerge in Eliot's poem), they give shape to the imaginary, discrepant homes from which they start and in which they also end.

The words of the Guyanese writer, poet and essayist Wilson Harris that provide the second epigraph above trace the same motif of the returning exile's differing, dissonant vision of home, but in a different way. Both Eliot and Harris attribute a specific cognitive value to the motif of return. For both poets, the journey home forces an alienated, travelling self to go along

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<sup>1</sup> T.S. Eliot, “Little Gidding,” *The Four Quartets* (1943; repr., London: Faber and Faber, 1949), section V, lines 26-29.

<sup>2</sup> Wilson Harris, “Letter to the Editor 23.12.1992,” in “Return” in *Post-Colonial Writing. A Cultural Labyrinth*, ed. Vera Mihailovich-Dickman (Amsterdam & Atlanta (GA): Rodopi), no pagination.

a circular path of repatriation through expatriation, a path in which this self acquires, in its estrangement, a new capacity of seeing. For both poets, the journey home thus takes self-knowledge as its ultimate goal, although without implying conceptions of identity and belonging as stable. Yet, while for Eliot the truth of a return resides in the very possibility of ending the journey—"Little Gidding" is the last of the *Four Quartets*, the final poem of a cycle, and its main concerns are precisely how to end, the possibility of redemption, and the idea that the writer may eventually find his place within history and tradition<sup>3</sup>—for Harris the truth of a return resides in the kaleidoscopic vision that multiplies and diffracts the home to which the travelling self will come back. Harris' words are charged with the historical experience of a people whose idea of home is haunted by the memory of the deprivation of an original homeland. The uprootings, dispossessions, and forced migrations together with the violent encounters and the turbulent processes of hybridization which gave shape to the Caribbean make "home" a most complex, composite, even disturbing concept, a concept which, nevertheless, emerges as crucial in the process of articulating collective and individual identities with which Caribbean literature engages. More than the arrival *per se*, Harris emphasizes the lifelong exile which forces travellers to conduct never-ending explorations and which also protracts itself beyond the very possibility of a return. Indeed, for Harris, any return involves a different form of exile, another form of alienation from the self. In other words, it is comparable to the eerie experience of "know[ing] the place for the first time" described in Eliot's poem,<sup>4</sup> although it not related to the acquisition of knowledge, but rather to the fragmentation of experience and vision.

This study will engage precisely with the question of how, in contemporary Anglo-Caribbean literature, the intersections and reciprocal transformations of the themes of "home," "exile," and "return" envisaged in Wilson Harris' words are expedient for the construction of hybrid, post-colonial and post-modern poetics of identity. The word "poetics," from the Greek verb *poiein*, "to make," is used in this context to highlight how literature may function as a weapon of intervention upon reality, how it may serve as a privileged site to renegotiate processes of production and articulation of hybrid subjectivities, of cultural and linguistic translation, as well as of cultural exchange. This study will engage with literature as a "way of worldmaking,"

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<sup>3</sup> See Ian Cooper, *The Near and Distant God. Poetry, Idealism and Religious Thought from Hölderlin to Eliot* (London: Legenda, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Eliot, "Little Gidding," V.29.

to use Nelson Goodman's formulation,<sup>5</sup> that is, as a way of bringing into being what Harris, in the above quoted lines, calls “a composition of reality that can never be seized” and “the imagination [energized] into densities and transparencies that release other proportion or windows or doors within the protean imagination.”<sup>6</sup> Harris' words—which perfectly capture the preoccupations underlying the search for home that characterizes the artistic endeavours of many Caribbean writers—convey the idea that there is no absolute geography or history of home which precedes the artist's vision. It is the artist's task to articulate a vision of the return home against whose dissonance and polymorphous quality collective and individual Caribbean identities may be positioned, and the trauma of history, the controversial legacies of a past of uprooting, colonialism and slavery, as well as the spectres of European cultural hegemony may be renegotiated.

Harris' idea that the “truth of a return” may be attained by looking through windows that open onto “a composition of reality” which, in turn, opens onto “other windows or doors within the protean imagination”<sup>7</sup> is the inspiration for the three, interconnected main theses around which this interrogation of an Anglo-Caribbean poetics of identity has been constructed. First, the return is never a direct act, but it is always mediated. The self can come home only by taking a *detour*, by traversing the space of the *Other*, a space in which the Other functions as a mediator (as a “window,” as Harris puts it) of the vision of home.<sup>8</sup> Secondly, the issue of the return is expedient for a meta-reflection on the way the return is conveyed in literature. The idea of windows leading through to other windows evokes the image of a self-reflexive chain, of a literature talking about literature talking about literature.<sup>9</sup> The issue at stake in Caribbean homecoming journeys is a reflection on literature as the very instrument of vision through which the return is attained. Thirdly, the self—which is significantly absent from Harris' quote—does not pre-exist the vision of home but comes into being together with the articulation of this vision. The self takes shape through an act of positioning within a “composition of

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<sup>5</sup> Nelson Goodman, *Ways of Worldmaking* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992).

<sup>6</sup> Harris, “Letter to the Editor,” no pagination.

<sup>7</sup> Harris, “Letter to the Editor,” no pagination.

<sup>8</sup> On exile and the mediation of Otherness, see Angela Locatelli “‘Living at Home Abroad—Living Abroad at Home:’ Ovvero la letteratura come Altro,” in *I linguaggi dell'Altro. Forme dell'alterità nel testo letterario* (ed. Anna Maria Piglionica et al. Firenze: Leo Olschki Editore, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> See Angela Locatelli, “Intertextuality. Theory and Practice.” *Merope* VIII no.19 (1996): 1-18.

reality” which is always changing, always transforming itself, always in the process of becoming.

The first of these three theses—i.e. that the return is always mediated—introduces the issue of the *Other* as a crucial point in this analysis of Anglo-Caribbean literary returns. The aspect privileged by a Caribbean poetics of return to be scrutinised here is that of exile and return as relational activities, as activities that force the individual to explore the fragile, unstable boundaries between *Selfhood* and *Otherness*. The journey home is in fact a journey toward knowledge of the Self through a continuous interrogation of the Other. In a cultural area like the Caribbean, where so many different cultures converge and collide, the space of home emerges as a space explicitly and inevitably shaped by the presence of Otherness. Reading Eliot's above-quoted assertion that to “arrive where we started” means to “know the place for the first time”<sup>10</sup> against the backdrop of the Caribbean experience requires acknowledgement of the fact that the claim of possessing the space of the self is impossible, as this space is always-already a space that can come into being only in relation to somewhere else: to the Africa of the deported slaves whose descendants constitute the majority of the Caribbean population, to the Asia of the indentured labourers who replaced them in the plantations after the abolition of slavery, to the Europe of the colonizers, to the Americas for which the Caribbean represents a sort of geographical and cultural bridge to the Old World. To discover home, consequently, means to be ready to engage in a quest for the Other which takes as its destination cultural spaces which are linked to the Caribbean by an intertwined history of uneven, often conflicted relationships.

To traverse the space of the Other in order to come home also means, conversely, to explore the space where the self is perceived and represented as an Other. It means to explore how *home* and *Self* have been produced through multiple, discursive inscriptions of Otherness within colonialist discourse. To mediate a return home within the kaleidoscopic composition of windows mentioned by Harris also means to assume the “Othering gaze” that centuries of colonization and cultural hegemonies have imposed on Caribbean selves, in a way that is mimicking and deconstructive at the same time. There are certainly manifold cultural influences that should be taken into consideration while addressing Caribbean literature. Yet, as signalled by the juxtaposition of some lines by T. S. Eliot with Wilson Harris' passage that opens this chapter the present study will be concerned more specifically with the particular relationship that links the Caribbean to the literary tradition it has inherited from its former colonizers. Indeed, the controversial relationship to European cultural and literary tradition has

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<sup>10</sup> Eliot, “Little Gidding,” V.28-29.

been a constant preoccupation throughout the development of Caribbean literature. The choice and the necessity to resort to European literary models and genres, as well as the impossibility of disregarding a canon which has been used in the colonial educational system for hidden ideological purposes which have profoundly acted upon the perceptual framework of colonial people, has been thematized and dealt with numerous times, even by those intellectuals, such as Edward Kamau Brathwaite, who throughout their own career have advocated a rediscovery and acknowledgement of the African component of Caribbeanness.<sup>11</sup> Caribbean literature shares, in this sense, the “continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression” which, according to Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffith and Helen Tiffin, who coined the very term “post-colonial,” characterizes “all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present days.”<sup>12</sup>

Transforming the European *Othering gaze* into one in which it is possible to enter a space of return calls for a reciprocity which undermines and subverts the duality of the relationship of colonizer/colonized, cultural producer/cultural receiver. In this sense, Caribbean homecomings are comparable to the particular voyage of hybridization through the space of the Other which Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* (1994) calls the “voyage in.”<sup>13</sup> The term “voyage in” designates the movement of many Third World intellectuals, writers, and thinkers to the metropolis as well as their successful integration there. An inversion of narratives depicting journeys to the interior of Africa, and to the most obscure parts of the self, undertaken in the name of colonialism, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, Said's phrasing suggests that the way in which the exiled intellectual can “write back to the centre”<sup>14</sup> by traversing a liminal space separating the First and Third Worlds. The *voyage in* is a journey of self-discovery, but of a very peculiar kind. It is a journey outside the Self, aimed at exploring how the Self has been constituted in relation to the Other and at the same time at re-configuring this very relation by occupying the very space of the Other. It is, to put it another way, a journey of transformation and metamorphosis, in which the spaces of Selfhood and Otherness cross and mingle. To undertake a *voyage in* means to embark on a journey of

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Edward Kamau Brathwaite, *History of the Voice. The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* (London and Port of Spain: New Beacon Books, 1984).

<sup>12</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back. Theory and Practice in Postcolonial Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 2.

<sup>13</sup> See Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage: 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*.

hybridization, a journey which may have as its target the places traditionally considered as the only centres of cultural and literary production, but which in fact disrupts the Third World's history of passivity and makes it an active producer and contributor to the production of culture:

The voyage in, then, constitutes an especially interesting variety of hybrid cultural work. And that it exists at all is a sign of adversarial internationalization in an age of continued imperial structures. No longer does the logos dwell exclusively, as it were, in London and Paris. No longer does history run unilaterally, as Hegel believed, from east to west, or from south to north, becoming more sophisticated and developed, less primitive and backward as it goes. Instead, the weapons of criticism have become part of the historical legacy of empire, in which the separations and exclusions of 'divide and rule' are erased and surprising new configurations spring up.<sup>15</sup>

In the passage, the semantic field that Said uses to describe the *voyage in* is, significantly, that of war and struggle: he speaks of “adversarial internationalization in an age of continued imperial structures” and of “weapons of criticism.” As the history of colonialism shows, hybridization is not a peaceful process. Encounters between cultures usually entail a struggle for power and assertion, antagonism and violence. Coming home in a culture that is at the same time alien and familiar is certainly not a peaceful enterprise and requires an attitude of criticism and resistance.

Most importantly, what connects Caribbean journeys of return with Said's concept of the *voyage in* is that their space—as is suggested in the second thesis which introduces this study—is not just the physical space in which the migration of the intellectual takes place, but also, and above all, the space of the text. The whole of Said's work may be read as a *voyage in* to the space of the Western intellectual and literary tradition, a voyage aimed at the simultaneous retrieval and transformation of that very tradition. With his concept of “contrapuntal reading”—a word which Said borrowed from music, where the word “counterpoint” designates the technique of setting, writing, or playing a melody in conjunction with another—he configures a possibility of reading the canonical texts of English literature by taking into account intertwined histories and perspectives, developing “an awareness of both the metropolitan history that is narrated and of the other stories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts,”<sup>16</sup> and enabling a reading of the text that involves adopting the perspectives both of the colonized and of the colonizer, both with and at the same time against the presence/absence of colonial references throughout the text.

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<sup>15</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 295.

<sup>16</sup> Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 51.

Said's critical project is relevant and ethically compelling also for its capacity to turn the marginality of the colonial experience into an angle of vision and visibility from which the privileged Western outlook that informs many well-established academic disciplines and branches of knowledge is de-naturalized and de-centred.

By the same token, the journeys of return that are taken into consideration in this study engage with the possibility of developing and performing a hybrid, multi-voiced Caribbean hermeneutics that draws on the Western literary tradition. The site of the return in the voyages discussed here is often not just a geographical space, but is also embodied in artistic and linguistic artefacts, works of art and texts that have entered the canon of the European tradition. Coming home means enacting a resemanticisation which disrupts the assumed centrality of European perspectives and reconstituting the marginality of Caribbean experience as a new way of seeing and being seen. Casting European artefacts against a Caribbean experience means to perform an act of displacement, of translation, of struggle over meaning. The process of reception becomes a process of re-siting: reading European literature from the Caribbean means to read a literature that has migrated and that with this migration has changed in most interesting ways. Post-colonial re-readings which lie at the basis of Caribbean journey of return, place the artefacts with which they engage within a complex inter-textual and cross-cultural process, they enrich and revivify them through a deconstructive process which triggers off creative, ethically compelling rewritings of stories which have entered the canon of European art and literature.

T. S. Eliot's modernism has certainly exerted a significant influence on the ways in which Caribbean homecomings engage in a meta-reflection on the necessity of coming to terms with the problem of taking one's place in a shared literary tradition. Caribbean homecomings often follow in reverse the path by which tradition has been constituted and legitimized through the exclusion of the Other, in order to let Otherness emerge in ways that destabilize and put into question the issue of tradition itself. As Eliot famously wrote in his essay on "Tradition and the Individual Talent," tradition may be defined as the "ideal order" in which literature finds its meaning and its sense of historical belonging.<sup>17</sup> This order is certainly not stable, as it can be modified with the introduction of a new work of art. Yet every writer who wishes to enter the perfect order of tradition, in Eliot's view, "must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past;"<sup>18</sup> they must, to put it differently, pay their due to the greatest writers of the past whose

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<sup>17</sup> T.S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood. Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), 42-53.

<sup>18</sup> Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," 45.

works are always simultaneously present in each literary endeavour that follows them. When Caribbean journeys of return take literary tradition as a point of departure and arrival they certainly do so in a way that disrupts the ideal order imagined by Eliot's conceptualization of tradition. As tradition is implicitly white, European and mostly masculine (whenever Eliot refers to the artist, he uses the personal pronoun "he"), Caribbean writers find themselves in the uncomfortable position of seeking inclusion in a space which has served as an instrument of exclusion.

In order to make a literary tradition their home, Caribbean writers engaging with the complexity of their history and identity have to disrupt the perfect circle described by Eliot by exposing precisely what it hides; that is, the issue of the unaccommodating, often disturbing presence of the Other. Caribbean homecoming cannot ignore the fact that literature has been deeply involved in the process of Othering that has discursively marginalized the Caribbean, transforming it into a place outside history. A short analysis of the following lines from the fifth section of "Little Gidding" will outline some of the main interrogatives which the Caribbean literature of return takes up from modernism and re-elaborates in the light of a post-colonial, post-modern experience:

What we call the beginning is often the end  
 And to make an end is to make a beginning.  
 The end is where we start from. And every phrase  
 And Sentence that is right (where every word is at home,  
 Taking its place to support the others,  
 The word neither different nor ostentatious,  
 An easy commerce of the old and the new,  
 The common word exact without vulgarity,  
 The formal word precise but not pedantic,  
 The complete consort dancing together)  
 Every phrase and every sentence is an end and a beginning,  
 Every poem is an epitaph. And any action  
 is a step to the block, to the fire, down the sea's throat  
 Or to an illegible stone: and that is where we start.  
 We die with the dying:  
 See, they depart, and we go with them.  
 We are born with the dead:  
 See, they return and bring us with them.  
 The moment of the rose and the moment of the yew-tree  
 Are of equal duration. A people without history  
 Is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern  
 Of timeless moments. [...].<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Eliot, "Little Gidding," V.1-22.



These lines anticipate at least three of the meta-reflections with which the Caribbean literature of return engages. Firstly, they deal with a meta-reflection on how literature is embedded in a conception of history and on how, at the same time, it contributes to the very constitution of this conception of history. Secondly, they position the text within a chain of other texts in a way which contributes to sustaining and illuminating not just the single poem, but the whole tradition in which this poem is embedded. Finally, they assert the word as the central element onto which the whole chain of literary tradition is grounded.

The issue of the mutual intersections of literature and history presents itself as a central issue in the Caribbean literature of homecoming in terms of the problematic way in which the Caribbean has been excluded and marginalized by history as a writing enterprise. Negotiating a return home in Anglo-Caribbean literature is not just a matter of acknowledging that one belongs within the flux of time and history, but it rather implies configuring literature as a site for the development of a counter-discourse on history. If, as Eliot suggests, the truth of a literary return consists in the capacity to see the past simultaneously with the present, the problem that comes to the fore in Caribbean homecomings is that of the impossible retrieval of histories which the European discursive, written appropriations of history contributed to obliterating. The mostly unwritten memories of the histories of the native Caribbean populations who were massacred after the arrival of the Europeans, or of the histories of the Africans enslaved, deported and forced to forget their native lands, or of the histories of the millions of people who died at sea, usually appear in history books only as marginal episodes dissolved in the greater project of modernity. Eliot's lines, "A people without history/ is not redeemed from time, for history is a pattern/ Of timeless moments"<sup>20</sup> are all the more compelling because of their paradoxical pertinence to Caribbean experience. The very fact that Eliot envisages the possibility of being "a people without history"<sup>21</sup> reveals history as a discourse of exclusion, a discourse controlled by those who have the power to determine what history is. Being without history, in fact, means to have been deprived of the possibility of writing history; that is, of controlling the process through which history is given shape. The redemption from time that literature promises is a redemption that Caribbean writers may look for by following the path described by Eliot, i.e. that of the discovery of the past within the present, of being able "to die with the dying"<sup>22</sup> as well as to be

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<sup>20</sup> Eliot, "Little Gidding," V.20-22.

<sup>21</sup> Eliot, "Little Gidding," V.20.

<sup>22</sup> Eliot, "Little Gidding," V.15.

“born with them,”<sup>23</sup> but in order to do so they first have to deal with writing as an instrument of historical exclusion and silencing.

Secondly, Eliot's meta-reflection on the fact that no literary text can exist on its own also emerges as a central theme in the Caribbean homecomings scrutinised in this study. What comes to the fore in Eliot's lines is the idea of the dependence of each literary performance on the literature which came before and to that which will follow: every sentence leans on what has been written before, and “every poem is an epitaph”<sup>24</sup> to the poetry that has not been written yet. Caribbean writers carry this reflection even further. They cannot ignore the fact that literature cannot be isolated from the social, historical and political context in which it has come into being and that it is inevitably connected to a variety of discourses (political, economic, social, and so on) going beyond the space of the literary text. Caribbean texts which explicitly position themselves against the backdrop of past literature cannot ignore how literary texts are often tainted by what Gayatri Spivak has termed “worlding,” i.e., the Othering processes which attempt to disguise their own workings so as to naturalize and legitimate Western dominance at the expense of Third World experience.<sup>25</sup>

Thirdly, Eliot's “Little Gidding” also anticipates Caribbean homecomings in so far as it puts the word at the centre of its meta-reflection of literature and tradition. For Eliot, a return is accomplished when “every word is at home,/ Taking its place to support the others.”<sup>26</sup> Language is the very brick from which literature is constructed, its most basic and fundamental part. At the same time, literature is a privileged site for reflecting on language, as well as on how human experiences take shape and are ordered in language. Yet the idea that language may be at home figures in Caribbean literature in a most paradoxical way. Coming home by traversing an extraneous literature and culture means, above all, to come home in a language that is also *Other*. This study is based on the premise that language is an external, trans-personal, and historically connoted phenomenon. If a language is a bearer of a culture, a language that has been imposed as a means of domination and control cannot but openly show the taint of power, the signs of its history of violence, and the mark of its foreignness. Choosing English as a language in which to configure a journey of return—a choice which many writers consider the only viable one—inevitably requires engaging with English as a foreign language, as a language which is also a carrier of

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<sup>23</sup> Eliot, “Little Gidding,” V.17.

<sup>24</sup> Eliot, “Little Gidding,” V.12.

<sup>25</sup> See Gayatri Spivak, “Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism,” *Critical Inquiry* 12 no.1 (Autumn 1985): 243-261.

<sup>26</sup> Eliot, “Little Gidding,” V.4-5.

alien experiences and that must therefore be appropriated and revitalized through the vernacular experience of the Caribbean.

The third main thesis of this work, which is inextricably linked to these considerations on language as the central experience on which Caribbean literature reflects, asserts that the subjects of the homecoming analysed here take shape precisely by undertaking a journey through language. Caribbean homecomings are journeys of *subjectivation*—to use a word which will figure prominently in the following chapters—in which language emerges as the very site through which the homecoming subjects come into being.

The starting point of this reading of Caribbean figurations of exile and homecoming is the idea that poetry, literature and language go beyond the individual experience of the artist or of the single speaker. When, in “Little Gidding,” Eliot stresses the centrality of the word, he stresses the priority of poetry as an impersonal medium rather than as an instrument at the service of the personality of the individual writer. Eliot formulates the aim for the writing of poetry in the following terms:

to write poetry which should be essentially poetry, with nothing poetic about it, poetry standing naked in its bare bones, or poetry so transparent that we should not see the poetry, but that which we are meant to see through the poetry, poetry so transparent that in reading it we are intent on what the poem *points at*, and on not the poetry, this seems to me the thing to try for. To get *beyond poetry*, as Beethoven, in his later works, strove to get *beyond music*.<sup>27</sup>

For Eliot, the word is the fundamental instrument that poetry works through in order to reach an intensity that goes beyond personal experiences and emotions. Indeed, Eliot claims, “[t]he poet has not a ‘personality’ to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and not a personality, in which impressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways.”<sup>28</sup> While in Eliot’s view an artist has to extinguish his own personality in order to become a medium that goes beyond the individual self—“[w]hat happens to the artist is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable”<sup>29</sup>—for Caribbean writers the impersonality of the medium precedes the very possibility of articulating the personality of the individual artist. Drawing on the theories of subjectivity of the French philosophers Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault

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<sup>27</sup> Extract from an unpublished lecture on “English Letter Writers” (primarily Keats and Laurence), which was delivered in New Haven (CT) during the winter of 1933. Quoted in Cooper, *The Near and Distant God*, 145.

<sup>28</sup> Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” 50.

<sup>29</sup> Eliot, “Tradition and the Individual Talent,” 47.

and on the materialist philosophy of language that the French Marxist Jean-Jacques Lecercle bases on them, this study will engage with how the very coming into being of hybrid subjects happens precisely through the medium of language. Impersonality—the exterior, shared, trans-personal quality that language and literature have—is fundamental for the process of becoming-subject that homecoming journeys represent and enact.

Claiming that language is an external, material and shared medium, however, does not imply that language is impermeable to individual contributions. A language is not a stable system—as maintained by the fetishized conceptions of language and linguistic standards that are often connected to the global diffusion of English as a *lingua franca*<sup>30</sup>—but rather a phenomenon in a continuous state of variation, prone to being transformed through the single performances of its speakers, through its vernacular appropriations, and through continual acts of displacement. To come home in language, this study argues, means to exert a torsion on language, to become nomads in language, to embrace language as a form of radical exile which can only be traversed in ways that are never secure or stable.

The following chapter, which has been conceived as a general discussion of the broader literary, cultural and theoretical terrain, draws on a definition of what is meant by impersonality of language, writing and literature in order to cast light on *exile* as the condition in which Caribbean homecoming journeys assume their meaning and sense. Using the word “exile,” in fact, not only involves talking about the representation of the real-life experience of forcibly leaving one’s home, as in the diasporas that have shaped the demographic asset of the Caribbean, or as in the migratory waves that have concerned many people from the Caribbean, as well as many artists and intellectuals. Exile is an extremely polysemic word which includes also the epistemological conditions in which Caribbean homecoming journeys are embedded. Dealing with exile in the Caribbean also means to be able to see the self by adopting the external perspective of the other—for example by using a language that is blatantly marked by the presence of the Other.

The title of chapter 2 (“Looking for the Other in Language, Literature and Culture”) reveals that its main concern will be with the first and the second theses on which this study is based. The third thesis, on the journeys of return as journeys of subjectivation, will be anticipated, but dealt with in more detailed ways in the subsequent chapter, with reference to the specific literary figurations of return produced in each individual work. The most theoretical chapter of this book, to put it another way, will deal with the literary journey home as a journey of self-discovery which cannot leave

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<sup>30</sup> See Jean-Jacques Lecercle, *A Marxist Philosophy of Language* (Leiden: Brill Academic Pubs, 2006).

aside the issue of the Other, as well as an investigation of how Self and Other are produced through language, writing and literature. These meta-reflections on language, writing and literature as a site of otherness are certainly not only a peculiarity of Anglo-Caribbean literature. Nonetheless, in this specific, post-colonial context, they are inextricably linked to the role that writing has played as an instrument of separation, classification, and mapping: cultural operations that have supported the colonial enterprise, as well the forms of exclusion from subjectivity that have been performed against colonized Caribbean people on the basis of their ethnicity.

Michel de Certeau's reflections on *The Writing of History* will introduce some considerations on writing as a practice that is never at home, always installed in the impossible unity of reality and representation. The work of the French philosopher will address the question of how, in writing, the Other is produced as an object of knowledge and, with the same gesture is marginalized and transformed in ways that may be functional to the expansion of a system of power. Besides this, it will also show how the Other always threatens to elude the borders of representation and to reappear in the form of what has been repressed and hidden. Coming into being as Selves in the Caribbean means having to traverse the multiple inscriptions of Otherness that European writing has imposed on its colonial space of expansion. As a consequence, the chapter will show how the issue of exile is textualized—that is, how the text deconstructs processes of othering by making them visible, and by undermining the representation of self, home and identity that the literary texts taken into consideration, convey.

The theoretical chapter will also provide a brief contextualization of how the term “exile” has figured in literary and critical discourses on the Caribbean, dwelling in particular on the work of two Caribbean writers and essayists who have elected *exile* as a fundamental constituent of Caribbean identity. The first of them is the Barbadian writer George Lamming who, in *The Pleasures of Exile*,<sup>31</sup> discussed subjectivity not as an innate condition but as something *produced* through language, thus anticipating at least a decade earlier Louis Althusser's theory of ideology and state apparatuses as well as its most recent appropriation by Althusser's critic Jean-Jacques Lecercle. This chapter will show how Lamming's influential reading of Shakespeare's *The Tempest* defines the language that the colonizer has imposed on the colonized as a site of exile, and how it is precisely language that makes the colonial into a colonial subject. Yet, Lamming is able to re-semanticize the word “exile” and to transform it from a signifier for

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<sup>31</sup> George Lamming, *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960; repr. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992).

exclusion into a signifier for a different, “transformative juncture”<sup>32</sup> between colonized and colonizer, the latter of which, Lamming claims, also finds himself, unaware, in a condition of exile in language. Language, once it becomes a shared experience between both parties involved in this struggle over subjectivity, becomes the site in which new, joined possibilities for identity may come into being, new connections and new forms of mutual exchange may be envisaged. The works of the Martinican poet, novelist and theorist Edouard Glissant and of the Cuban intellectual Antonio Benítez-Rojo multiply and diffract Lamming’s idea of the “transformative juncture” replacing the duality of the relationship between colonizer/colonized with the Deleuzian concept of the rhizome. “Relation” is a term with which Glissant denotes the rhizomatic, multiple connections of the Caribbean to the rest of the world, through which, in a similar way, the text comes into being in the form of surfaces connecting to other surfaces, discourses connected to other discourses, within a machine of sense by which continuous processes of territorialization and deterritorialization determine endless transformations of sense. Glissant’s *Poetics of Relation* and Benítez-Rojo’s *The Repeating Island* will be considered alongside Deleuze’s discourse on Minority Literature and will allow us to account for how the transformation of language and literature that Caribbean journeys of return perform may be read in terms of a “becoming-minor.”<sup>33</sup>

Following the Deleuzian perspective outlined in the first chapter, the analysis of V. S. Naipaul’s novel *The Enigma of Arrival* will concentrate on how an autobiographical narrator constructs his own identity, as well as his own vision of home, through positioning the self within an ever-changing reality. The journey of a Caribbean writer who has elected the English countryside as his home will be read as a journey in which he makes England and the English Language his home by putting himself within a series of mediated representations of the landscape, i.e. of literary texts and works of art. The novel thematizes the very act of textual and artistic interpretation as the means through which the self accesses the possibility of writing. The circular structure of *The Enigma of Arrival* complements the multiple processes of revision and interpretation that the narrator superimposes in order to represent his self as something in continuous transformation.

The second novel, David Dabydeen’s *A Harlot’s Progress*, also follows a narrative structure in which a fictitious autobiographical subject constructs his self within a highly mediated reality and yet, unlike Naipaul’s novel, it

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<sup>32</sup> Barbara Pouchet Paquet, “Foreword,” in *The Pleasures of Exile*, xiv.

<sup>33</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature* (1975; trans. by Dana Polan, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).

represents homecoming in language and writing as an impossibility. A parody of eighteenth-century slave narratives, the novel explores how a hybrid subject may interrogate and undermine the structures of subjectivation which inform his epoch. A central theme of the novel is the idea of language as a means through which the protagonist is transformed into a subject and, because of his black skin, simultaneously excluded from any claim to subjectivity. His attempt to narrate and to come home is a struggle against the word of a well-intentioned abolitionist who represents the way power tries to force the story of the young man into an accommodating narrative structure which, nonetheless, is perceived by the latter as a further form of oppression.

The work of a feminist poet and novelist dealing with the issue of return from the point of view of body and affect will be addressed in the chapter that follows. While Marlene NourbeSe Philip's collection of poetry *She Tries Her Tongue, Her Silence Softly Breaks*, investigates how language colonizes and alienates a gendered, racialized body, her novel *Looking for Livingstone, an Odyssey of Silence* investigates silence as a means for reunion with the lost ancestors. The novel introduces an extended metaphor of pre-colonial Africa as the sexualized body of the narrating voice, who travels "to the interior" in order to discover her ancestors as well as her true self. The odysseys among imaginary African tribes turn into a search for the explorer Dr. Livingstone, who is accused both of silencing the African and of stealing their silence. This chapter will deal with the contradictions and the paradoxes involved in the representation of a search for an essence which, in fact, cannot leave aside the issue of the other.

Finally, the last analysis will deal with the most ambitious literary work ever produced in the Caribbean, Derek Walcott's epic of return, *Omeros*. In *Omeros* the issue of return is expedient for re-mediating a poetic mode for narrating the history of the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia. This will be discussed as a mode which subsumes, absorbs and annuls the different ways in which the history of the Caribbean has been told before, fostering a confrontation with a variety of traditions and geographical areas in a way that shows many continuities and similarities with Glissant's "Poetics of Relation." A heteroglot, polymorphous work, *Omeros* is a hybrid appropriation of a variety of texts—from the Homeric epic poems, to Dante's *Comedy*, to the classics of English and American literature, among them works by Eliot, Joyce, and Melville—as well as of a variety of extra-literary discourses on history, ethnicity, and media representations. The poem strives to inhabit, in different ways, the utterances performed about, for and against the Caribbean. In addition, Walcott's poetic rendition of history will be discussed as a poetics of immanence which, deeply influenced by Eliot's

modernism, celebrates the possibility of seeing, within a single moment, the multiple connections of past, present and future.

The texts have been chosen for their meta-reflections on language as a site of homecoming and as a site for subjectivation. While Naipaul's *The Enigma of Arrival* deals with language as a locus of mediation and, as the chapter will explain, of provisional self-translation onto an elusive, foreign landscape, David Dabydeen's novel *A Harlot's Progress* depicts language as an unequal, fallacious medium of exchange between foreign cultures whose relation is based on mutual conflict and untranslatability. Marlene NourbeSe Philip deals with the issue of language as body and affect, while Derek Walcott perceives language as heteroglossia, as a multiplicity of different, superimposed utterances. In each of these works, language transforms and is transformed; literature emerges as a site not only of reflection on those reciprocal transformations, but also as the very place in which they come into being.

The subtitle of this study, "Becoming Home," emphasizes precisely the idea of transformation that the theme of return entails. The expression "Becoming Home" indicates that home is not simply something with a fixed position that can be reached but also something always involving transformation. The transformation is not only of the place, but of the self, in what Harris, in the epigraph above, terms an act of "protean imagination." Home is thus a concept in continuous movement, a place to dwell, but also a place of exile. Coming home never results in an arrival or in the conclusion of a journey towards subjectivity, but rather in the discrepant circularity of the experience of "knowing the place for the first time."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Eliot, "Little Gidding," V.29.



## CHAPTER TWO

### LOOKING FOR THE OTHER IN LANGUAGE, LITERATURE AND CULTURE

Thou shall leave each thing  
Belov'd most dearly: this is the first shaft  
Shot from the bow of exile. Thou shalt prove  
How salt the savour is of other's bread,  
How hard the passage to descend and climb  
By other's stairs [...].<sup>1</sup>

It is a feeling of deepest grief and affliction which emerges from the famous tercets of *Paradiso* XVII, in which Cacciaguida degli Elisei prophesies Dante's exile. No more than a year and a half after his imaginary journey through the three realms of the afterlife, Dante would be forced by his political opponents to leave his beloved Florence forever and, together with his family, would have to spend the rest of his life far away from the place where he was born and to which he had dedicated himself since his youth.<sup>2</sup> The words pronounced by the soul of Cacciaguida, the ancestor whom Dante meets in the fifth Sphere of Heaven among the Warriors of the Faith, translate in an astonishingly concrete and corporeal way the feeling of intolerable pain caused by separation from the homeland. Exile is compared

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<sup>1</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy. The Vision of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise*, trans. H.F. Cary (Chicago: Thompson and Thomas, 1901), *Paradiso* canto XVII, lines 55-60.

<sup>2</sup> Dante's journey through *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso* is imagined taking place on the Easter week in the year 1300, the year of the climax of Dante's political career as well as of the first Jubilee year proclaimed by Pope Boniface VIII. Dante, a White Guelph opposing the interference of the Pope in the internal affairs of Florence, was exiled from his city in 1302, after a *coup d'état* organized by the Black Guelphs with the assistance of Charles of Valois, brother of King Philip IV of France, and the complicity of Pope Boniface. Deprived of his home, his wealth and of his objects of affection, Dante was left with a death threat hanging over his head if he ever decided to cross the borders of the city. For further information, see Richard H. Lansing, *The Dante Encyclopaedia* (London: Routledge 2010).

to a “bow”<sup>3</sup> unrelentingly shooting shafts destined to tear apart the flesh of the poet. The site of the poet's suffering is, in fact, not just his soul, but first and foremost his body. If the first shaft fired by exile—the parting with what the poet loved most dearly—may already seem cruel enough to endure, other arrows—the many humiliations suffered by having to live among strangers—will directly pierce Dante's organs. It is as if the poet, by mentioning the salty taste of other people's bread and the fatigue of descending and climbing other people's stairs, were giving a description of somatized psychological distress. The unbearable burden of exile is translated into the metaphors of a bitter taste in his mouth and of a pain in his chest coming from climbing the steep, alien stairways.

“Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience,” wrote the American-Palestinian critic Edward Said.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, exile is a territory of non-belonging stretching between the impossibility of identifying with the old homeland and the impossibility of identifying with a new one. If identities are built around nets of relations, the sudden and abrupt cutting of all ties—emotional, national, cultural, political, economic, and so on—endangers the very possibility of action that a person may have constructed throughout his or her life. One of the cruellest facts about exile is that the separation between an individual and a territory also threatens a complete loss of sense and meaning. If Dante's values strictly depended on the position he occupied within his city, it is easier to understand how the punishment that his enemies had prepared for him was a punishment aimed at stripping him of his dignity, to annihilate him to the point that all his future achievements would be forever overshadowed by his exile.

A starting point for the reflections on exile conveyed in this chapter can be found in a question that Edward Said asked in the above quoted essay: “But if true exile is a condition of terminal loss, why has it been transformed so easily into a potent, even enriching, motif of modern culture?”<sup>5</sup> Said refers to “modern” culture without really specifying the temporal limits of what he considers to be “modern.”<sup>6</sup> The adjective “modern” refers, in his

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<sup>3</sup> Dante, *Paradiso*, XVII.56.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Said, *Reflections on Exile and Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2001), 137.

<sup>5</sup> Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 137.

<sup>6</sup> The word “modernity,” as the Italian scholar Maria Cristina Fumagalli notes, has been used in many different ways: “A number of possible beginnings have been suggested: the Roman or the Imperial break, Descartes' *cogito*, the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, Galileo, the emergence of capitalism, Luther, German idealism, the ‘conquest’ of the Americas.” See Maria Cristina Fumagalli, *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity. Returning Medusa's Gaze* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 1. Simon Gikandi, author of an influential

essay, to a time which he defines as “spiritually orphaned and alienated, the age of anxiety and estrangement.”<sup>7</sup> From his perspective, representatives of modernity include Nietzsche and Freud but also, for example, the intellectuals who escaped from the Second World War in Europe and took refuge in the United States. In this context, exile figures mostly as an individual experience, as the experience of artists as wanderers across cultures who flee the horrors and the barbarism of their own society to become interpreters of a widespread unease. Exile connotes the capacity to acquire a trans-national and cross-cultural vision, a capacity which Said is also prone to attribute to exiles in ages preceding his acceptance of the word “modern.” Dante’s exile, in this sense, participates in this individualistic, almost heroic, connotation. It is precisely the bewilderment brought on by his exile which endows the poet with the vision necessary for his greatest poetic enterprise, the *Comedia*. It is exile which allows Dante to see through the social and political unrest of his time, as well as beyond the localism of his own love of his native soil, and to produce his masterpiece.

This study, instead, engages with different kinds of “modern” exiles, exiles that are not just lived, individual experiences but rather a collective trauma which has settled itself in the collective memories and in the discourses of identity of Caribbean people. Exiles, in other words, are inscribed in the site of survival, creative resistance and hybridization which Mary Louise Pratt identified as “contact zone.”<sup>8</sup> Asking Said’s question with reference to the Caribbean implies, in fact, stretching and twisting the word “modern” to include an area which, as the Italian scholar Maria Cristina Fumagalli argues, is both *excluded from* and *beyond* modernity.<sup>9</sup> It is excluded in the sense that European and Western discourses of modernity have petrified it and configured it as their Other. A necessary cog in the machine of progress—with its plantations of sugar, cotton and tobacco, the

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monograph on Caribbean literature, uses the word “modernity” and “modernism” interchangeably. See Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992). Dealing with modernity from a Caribbean experience means dealing, most of all, with a variety of discourses from which the Caribbean is partially excluded and which Caribbean literature and art strive to go beyond. On the relationship between Caribbean Literature and Modernism see also Charles Pollard, *New World Modernisms: T. S. Eliot, Derek Walcott, and Kamau Brathwaite* (Charlottesville: Univ. of Virginia Press, 2004) and “Traveling with Joyce: Derek Walcott’s Discrepant Cosmopolitan Modernism,” in *Twentieth Century Literature* 47, No. 2, (Summer, 2001). 197-216.

<sup>7</sup> Said, *Reflections on Exile*, 137.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 2008) and “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* (1991): 33-40.

<sup>9</sup> See Fumagalli, *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity*.

Caribbean provided Europe with the riches that allowed the latter to transform itself into an industrial and capitalist economy<sup>10</sup>—the Caribbean nonetheless remains outside the discourses of progress as a place of perpetual backwardness and primitivism. Yet, it is beyond modernity in the sense that the whole cultural area has been an extraordinary hotbed of accelerated globalization which has anticipated phenomena such as transnationalism, syncretism, and cross-culturalization.<sup>11</sup> Caribbean cultures are, in this sense, extraordinarily multi-lingual, hybrid and composite. From their dissonant perspective, the writings produced in the area show an

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<sup>10</sup> The prominence of the Caribbean in the passage from a mercantilist to a capitalist economy has been highlighted by many scholars and historians of the region. See Fumagalli, *Caribbean Perspectives on Modernity*. As C.R.L. James reminds us, the sole island of San Domingo, at the time of French Revolution, was the wealthiest colony in the whole world. See C.R.L. James, *The Black Jacobins* (1938; repr. London: Allison and Busby, 1982), 45ff. Antonio Benítez-Rojo describes the economic role of the Caribbean in the modern age as follows: “Let’s be realistic: the Atlantic is the Atlantic (with all its port cities) because it was once engendered by the copulation of Europe—that insatiable solar bull—with the Caribbean archipelago; the Atlantic is today the Atlantic (the navel of capitalism) because Europe, in its mercantilistic laboratory, conceived the project of inseminating the Caribbean womb with the blood of Africa; the Atlantic is today the Atlantic (NATO, World Bank, New York Stock Exchange, European Economic Community, etc.) because it was the painfully delivered child of the Caribbean, whose vagina was stretched between continental clamps, between the *encomienda* of Indian and the slaveholding plantation, between the servitude of the coolie and the discrimination toward the *criollo*, between commercial monopoly and piracy, between the runaway slave settlement and the governor’s palace; all Europe pulling on the forceps to help at the birth of the Atlantic: Columbus, Cabral, Cortés, de Soto, Hawkins, Drake, Hein, Rodney, Surcouf... after the blood and salt water spurts, quickly sew up torn flesh and apply the antiseptic tinctures, the gauze and the surgical plaster; then the febrile wait through the foaming of a scar: suppurating, always suppurating.” See Benítez-Rojo, Benítez-Rojo, Antonio, *The Repeating Island. The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective* (1989; translated by James E. Maraniss, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 5.

<sup>11</sup> In the Caribbean as “entangled space” see: Peter Hitchcock, *Imaginary States. Studies in Cultural Transnationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London and New York: Verso, 1993); Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” in *Colonial Discourse & Postcolonial Theory: A Reader* (ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993); Edouard Glissant, *Le discours antillais* (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1981); Wilson Harris, *The Womb of Space. The Cross Cultural Imagination*, (Westport (CT) and London: Greenwood Press, 1983); Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant. “In Praise of Creoleness” Trans. Mohamed B. Taleb Khyar. *Callaloo* 13, no. 4 (Fall 1990): 886-909.

amazing cross-cultural awareness of the many contradictions ingrained in discourses of modernity, the way power, as well as their constructedness and limitations, inform them in a way which may be defined post-modern *ante-litteram*.

What differentiates Caribbean exiles from the sort of exiles described by Said is, above all, the scale. Caribbean modernity began with a diaspora of a multiplicity of people from their original homelands—African, Asian, European. Exile is consequently not just an experience of individuals stripped of their familiar, social and territorial ties. It is rather an experience shared by millions of people, an experience of a time past, but at the same time an experience which, following the pattern of a trauma, has been repeating itself indefinitely.

A repetitive pattern may be found, for example, in the fact that the Caribbean, throughout the centuries, has become a land not only of *immigration* but also of *emigration*. Exile thus includes and replaces two other words which are sometimes used in connection with Caribbean literature—*diaspora* and *migration*—in order to highlight the continuity and interconnection of these two experiences. The many waves of migration *from* the Caribbean started as early as the late eighteenth century and have continued unceasingly until the present day—Alejandra Bronfman thus speaks of “transnational citizenship.”<sup>12</sup> These waves of migration seem to repeat and displace the spatial disjunction in which the culture of the Caribbean has its origins. Accordingly, the influential work of Simon Gikandi, author of the monograph on Caribbean Literature *Writing in Limbo* (1992), also reads the movement of artists, writers and intellectuals who left their native Caribbean islands as having produced what Gikandi considers “the most important documents in the Caribbean tradition: Aimé Césaire's *Cahier*, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*, C. R. L. James's *The Black Jacobins*, V. S. Naipaul's *A House for Mr Biswas*, and George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*.”<sup>13</sup>

What this study is concerned with is the textualization of these experiences of exile; that is, how they enter literary constructions of identity through singular and discrepant perspectives to (re)construct the elusive space of home. The object of this chapter, differently put, is to explore how exile can be transformed from a real experience of dispossession and a discourse of collective disempowerment into a positive foundation for a literary construction of Caribbean identity. Caribbean writers leave their homeland not to pursue a pointless flight from reality, or to find abroad the

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<sup>12</sup> See Alejandra Bronfman, *On the Move. The Caribbean Since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo*, 33.

truth of an origin which history has taken away from them. The flight becomes a search for truth which finds its realization not in the reconstruction of a bond with the territory but rather in an uprooting of the self, carried to its extremes. By the same token, literary flights from home are searches for truth aimed at deconstructing fixed ideals of home, selfhood and identity. “Exile”—a term which in the Caribbean is also inevitably connected to some of the most dehumanizing experiences in the history of the barbarism of slavery, as well as colonialism and its aftermath of political instability and totalitarianism—is appropriated to serve new notions of humanism, becoming a constitutive part of the very concept of “home.” Indeed, in the journeys described in the following chapter, exile figures as a site of critical engagement, of resignification and reconfigurations of identity, as well as of the transformation of the very concept of home. It is transformed into a significant cognitive instrument, a privileged, cross-cultural point of view of the world.

Fictions of exile and home as separated geographical and cultural spaces are, in fact, at odds with the Caribbean’s history of migration and hybridization. Exile and return, or “*déracinement* and *enracinement*,” as the American scholar Michael J. Dash argues, have been two of the major themes which traverse the literary production of the whole region since the very dawn of Caribbean writing.<sup>14</sup> “Indeed,” Dash claims, “it could be argued that the existential experience of exile and the essentialist temptation of home are inscribed more generally within a thematic of the quest for identity in all Caribbean culture.”<sup>15</sup> Dash claims that exile was introduced in Caribbean literature as the negative pole in a dialectical, mediative exercise from which new conceptions of home and identity may emerge: “Exile and the lure of home, fall, and redemption enable the individual to confront the insecurities left in the wake of slavery, colonization, assimilation, and in more recent times, totalitarian politics.”<sup>16</sup> At the root of this literary dialectics between exile and return is the idea of the artificiality of the conditions of being forced away from a ‘real’ native land—an artificiality equally thematized in the work of writers of African, European and Asian descent—as well as the failure of the creation of new, national discourses or unitarian models of national identity. Exile entered Caribbean literature in the form of a disruptive and threatening alterity, a territory of non-

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<sup>14</sup> Dash, Michael J., “Exile and Recent Literature,” in *A History of Literature in the Caribbean. Volume 1: Hispanic and Francophone Regions*, ed. Albert James Arnold (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 1994), 451.

<sup>15</sup> Dash, “Exile and Recent Literature,” 451.

<sup>16</sup> Dash, “Exile and Recent Literature,” 451.