

A Tribute to the Life of Nobel Laureate Derek A. Walcott

the Caribbean Writer

Where the Caribbean Imagination Embraces the World

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yet trying times in the region's history. The book is an excellent read. The story is by no means complete, there is more to be unearthed, more to be critiqued and debated. The book, however, throws new light on the 1979 revolution and it offers innovative ways to move the political, economic and socio-economic construct of the region forward.

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Jewish Caribbean/Diaspora Literary Imagination

Sarah Phillips Casteel, *Calypso Jews: Jewishness in the Caribbean Literary Imagination*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, 336 pages, cloth and ebook.

Research for *Calypso Jews*, a significant scholarly contribution, is supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada, funding that is necessary for such a comprehensive project. The cloth book is beautifully designed with care that is evident in an absence of typographical errors in the main text and notes, an extensive bibliography, and a precise, thorough index. Black and white illustrations of artwork, as well as photographs by the author, provide an aesthetic appeal that enhances the reading experience.

Sarah Phillips Casteel organizes her investigation about Jewishness in Caribbean literature in two halves according to two distinct traumas in Jewish history. Part I pertains to the resettlement of Sephardic Jews and Conversos in the Caribbean region for the three hundred years following the Iberian expulsion of the 1490s. Part II pertains to the influx of Ashkenazi Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazi Holocaust in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Further to analyzing Jewish-themed literary works by Caribbean/diaspora writers, Casteel additionally strives "to advance a larger project of rethinking master narratives of race and empire and the literary conventions these narratives support" (21).

Analyses in Part I address literary works by Derek Walcott, Myriam Chancy, Michelle Cliff, Maryse Condé, David Dabydeen, and Cynthia McLeod. Analyses in Part II address literary works by John Hearne, Jamaica Kincaid, M. Nourbese Philip, Michèle Maillet, Michelle Cliff, and Caryl Phillips. Casteel acknowledges the "globally dispersed character of Caribbean literary production" (17), which she categorizes in literary genres of neoslave narrative, plantation family saga, and the Holocaust diary. Casteel draws support for her comprehensive arguments from literary theorists, historians, and Holocaust and diaspora studies scholars, including Michael Rothberg,

Paul Gilroy, Brian Cheyette, and Jonathan Schorsch, among many others.

Most of the Jewish-themed literature Casteel discusses was written in the last two decades of the twentieth century. The significance here is the convergence at that time of public memorialization of both the Holocaust and the Middle Passage with quincenary celebrations of "Columbus's so-called discovery of the New World as well as the Iberian expulsion ... [which] coincided in the early 1990s with the height of Black-Jewish tensions in the United States" (7). But Casteel points out how Black and Jewish diaspora histories are enmeshed throughout the Caribbean in a way that is distinct from the Black-Jewish political tension in the United States. She strives to transcend this conflict by examining works that "favor a pluralistic and relational perspective rather than a separatist ethnoracial stance ... [and that] privilege the creolized condition of the Caribbean and in some cases present Jewishness as itself emblematic of that condition" (271). Overall, I believe she succeeds.

I also believe Casteel's success may be tainted by two caveats. The first relates to how she intersects the Holocaust camp diary and the slavery narrative. Some readers may object to Casteel's contention that the Holocaust serves as a surrogate issue—a means to unlock the memory of slavery and unpack colonialism. While she substantiates her arguments with ample intertextual evidence, I do not pretend sufficient expertise to analyze the validity of these claims. Rather, I invite other readers and scholars to do so on my behalf.

And before proceeding further, I disclose that this review may reflect my bias as the daughter of a Holocaust refugee, a Caribbean/diaspora Jewess, and a writer. *Calypso Jews* fuels my emerging literary production as I struggle to write my father's holocaust trajectory from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia through the Battle of the Atlantic and down to the Caribbean where I was born. I likewise struggle to confront and write my own Caribbean-diasporic dysphoria each year as winter descends on Upper Canada where I

now live. And I strive to understand and write the profound connection to my Puerto Rico birthplace despite losing my Spanish across the significant distance of miles and years.

Here I sit in Canada—globally dispersed—writing the complexity of my Puerto Rican birth, the experience of my "creolized condition" as a Caribbean Jew, and my understanding (and misunderstanding) of the political-racial tension woven into every inch of Puerto Rican society. This brings me to my second caveat, which is insufficient coverage of Hispanic Caribbean literature. Casteel acknowledges this shortcoming, and I do not fault *Calypso Jews* in this regard because she accomplishes rich depth rather than thin breadth.

But I do problematize this void because the "creolized Caribbean condition" is not an ideal; racial tension exists in Puerto Rico as well as elsewhere in the Caribbean, albeit differently than in the United States. Here I must acknowledge that the whiteness of my own skin bestows on me an unequal historical privilege. Even if I am "Trinidad white" (meaning Jew)—which perhaps situates me somewhere between white and Black in the overall racial schemata—my educated English diction and syntax is colonizing in the context of any idealized "Caribbean creole condition."

Or what is this condition, and is it even real? But I will stop here because my caveats must not detract from the scholarly contribution Sarah Phillips Casteel has gifted to us with *Calypso Jews*. This treasure will surely become a classic of Caribbean literary criticism that scholars would be wise to emulate. I am grateful for this groundbreaking exegesis of the Jewish Caribbean/diaspora literary canon. And I thank Casteel for stimulating my Jewish Caribbean/diaspora literary imagination and production.

Dr. Mary H. Auerbach-Rykov
Canada

take me home

Mary H. Auerbach-Rykov

sunlit sparkles
float like feathers
hide cruel beauty

cry when they try
to clothe me in
itchy-scratchy warm wool

cry when they try
to send me outside
to play in cold slush

frost-bitten hands and feet
tongue frozen to pipes
they say not to lick

Mama, Mama, frío! frío!
she says she knows, but
she won't take me home

Market Women

Daisy Holder Lafond

(circa 1941)

stout & sturdy
ample of bosom
market women

were harsh as their history

with attitude
but not much style

with substance
without charm

quick of mind
sharp of tongue
brash... all knowin'

what bush to brew for bruise blood
what bush to apply to a bammacoo

& when the time was right
you would hear the loud proclamation

*listen... i does wuk fo' my money
i don't whore fo' my money ...*

& they worked hard

cartin' the fruits of their labor
on mule or donkey

for miles & miles
to the nearest market or roadside

peddling okras mangoes sugar apples thyme tanya
cassava ... maubi benye & sweet potato puddin'

& they were cunning
& conning