

## Postcolonial Writing: Creative Assignment

Lilli Medicott

Letter One:

Dearest Inhabitant<sup>1</sup>,

It is with the most curious of hearts that I write to you<sup>2</sup>, expressing my intention and duty to scientifically<sup>3</sup> explore the land on which you occupy. A land so empty and ill defined, for no man has formally discovered its trees and blue fences, or whatever else is considered a landmark in this vast unknown<sup>4</sup>. Comparing the land to the many other places my men and I have discovered, I expect to see the usual foreign jungles amid exotic terrains, filled with mystifying people doing the most mystifying things. I am eager to uncover wonderous fruits, spikey, odd-shaped marvels that look artificially manufactured, as if nurtured under an entirely different sun. Apples shining a Union Jack red, so bright that your own reflection stares back at you<sup>5</sup>. It is only the bravest, that dare to plot their way from the Queen's England towards far

---

<sup>1</sup> The Rastafarian is immediately stripped of any cultural or geographical identity through being addressed as an "inhabitant". Miller states that the Creole community must fight for a "rightful portion" of their land (Miller, 2014, p. 3). This emphasises Orientalist ideals, and the idea that describing the East from a Western perspective often involved attempts to exert power over it. Benítez Rojo describes how the writer holds a "figure of power" when it comes to the representation of a culture, in that poets act as a "messenger" between the binary oppositions of the Orient and the Occident (BRojo, 1997, p. 138).

<sup>2</sup> Connotating that it is not a curious need for the Occident to "discover" the Orient, it is a want. This is mirrored in the line "my job is to imagine the widening of the unfamiliar" in *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion I* (Miller, 2014, p. 16). The curious and "gregarious" nature of the Occident was manifested out of fear of "the unlikeliness of a different group" which turned into a want to understand it to assert and establish dominance over it (Thomas, 1908, p. 730).

<sup>3</sup> Refers to 'The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion III', stating "What I do is science" (Miller, 2014, p, 18). The West views the Orient through an Occidental perspective, projecting bias onto cultures viewed as "the other" (Burney, 2012, p. 23).

<sup>4</sup> Links to the idea of the land he encounters being "strange" (Miller, 2014, p. 26) Demonstrating that the unknown to the West is feared and judged. This aligns with Said's theory on "colonial discourse", presenting the idea that Orientalism showcases a discourse in power (Said, 1978, p. 23).

<sup>5</sup> The association of red with the Union-Jack further demonstrates the notion of Creole culture being "dominated by the English Crown", highlighting a sense of Occidental superiority (Puri, 2004, p. 2). The connotation to the Union Jack also demonstrates the idea of the flag itself being a "pageantry of national decline" and the racism that is steeped in the flag's history and association (Gilroy, 1987, p. 24).

off lands. An entanglement of cul-de-sacs,<sup>6</sup> as noble men walk the curve from Rodez to Barcelona, Barcelona to Dunkirk, Dunkirk to the Caribbean<sup>7</sup>.

I map out the timelines of mankind<sup>8</sup>, questioning how it is that we got here<sup>9</sup>. I want to investigate all that there is on God's green earth. My men and I shall travel to your land, just as Abraham travelled to the land of Canaan<sup>10</sup>.

Do not be afraid<sup>11</sup>, we come only to aid the concerned and guide you from your wrong turnings<sup>12</sup>. Our stay will be short, as we shall miss our dampened British terrain. My men have learned not to attain an unsteady hand through passion, passion is not needed here<sup>13</sup>. We will glance at the unfamiliar and prowl through like lions, lions that will bring back to England a new<sup>14</sup>.

Yours with great curiousness,

---

<sup>6</sup> Refers to "guide you out from cul-de-sacs" from *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion I* (Miller, 2014, p. 16). "Guide" implies that the Orient needs to be stripped from its culture to best suit Western ideals. This highlights Said's ideas on Orientalism, in that there is a Western societal and cultural belief in that "Occidentals are superior to Orientals" (Said, 1978, p. 23).

<sup>7</sup> Alludes to 'Place Name' stating, "trees and blue fences and whatever else might prove a landmark" (Miller, 2014, p. 16). The apathetic nature of the phrase "whatever else" connotes a sense of Western ignorance towards the Orient, mirrored in Capen's theory in that the West "believed their civilization [to be] the highest in the world and this resulted in the stagnation of pride" (Capen, 1911, p. 735). Such ignorance was brought about by a class monopolisation of education, falsely devising knowledge equal to privilege (Capen, 1911, p. 735).

<sup>8</sup> Alludes to Kai Miller's 'Writing Down the Vision: Essays and Prophecies' in which he states, "I map out the timelines" (Miller, 2013, p. 32). This connotes a sense of mapping out time as well as mapping out geological location.

<sup>9</sup> Links to 'The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion I', stating "how did we find ourselves here?" (Miller, 2014, p. 16).

<sup>10</sup> Alludes to the Bible: "The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you" (Genesis 12:1-9). This showcases how the Occident felt religion not only justified, but "formulated and sustained" colonialist and Orientalist ideals (Fabian, 1990, p. 339).

<sup>11</sup> Alludes to the Bible: "Moses said to the people 'Do not be afraid'" (Exodus 20:20), further exemplifying themes of religious justification. This connotes how the Cartographer feels a sense of superiority over the Rastafarian through Occidental and religious means.

<sup>12</sup> Links to 'The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion I' stating, "in which you have wrongly turned" (Miller, 2014, p. 16)

<sup>13</sup> Alludes to 'The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion III' stating, "Too much passion unsteadies the hand" (Miller, 2014, p. 18).

<sup>14</sup> Alludes to the poem 'What River Mumma Knows XXVI' stating, "In time is Zion that reach to the lions" (Miller, 2014, p. 69).

Cartographer.

Letter Two:

Cartographer,

In plain English I will try to speak<sup>15</sup>, so you know dah dis place is not yours to seek<sup>16</sup>. Har, we tell “Me-No-Sen-You-No-Come”, so be warned dah dis Zion has to offer you none<sup>17</sup>. You say we are empty and ill-defined and speak hof metaphorical county lines. When you come to our country, what lines do you see? Our country, our home; dis home dah raised me. These “jungles” and “fences” with foreign terrains, what bout de Creole blood dah runs tru our veins? Blood deeper than your Union-Jack-red, it will drown you colonialists who are in hover your heads.

Your geographical venture burns a fire tru our lives, as you steal our goods from right in front hof our eyes<sup>18</sup>. Be warned noble white men, there is no mapmaking in Zion, our land sings louder than equations and science. For each white man dah seeks with false devour, will find our wonderous fruits nothing but sour.

Dis divide you see as “foreign” from “right”, is your illusion to separate all black from all white. But har, we Quashie’s celebrate de grey, those dah don’t fit in a confirmative way<sup>19</sup>. No regular rhythm, tempo or beat, no man too black or too white you will meet<sup>20</sup>.

---

<sup>15</sup> Alludes to “In plain English: Do not enter” from ‘Place Name’ (Miller, 2014, p. 26). The notion of referring to something in “plain English”, not only reaffirms the idea of conforming to Western ideals in a linguistical sense but showcases how it is the language of a “majority culture” (Crow, 1988, p. 89). “Plain English” is problematic, as it does not “equally embrace every culture and dialect”, connoting Western ignorance in a linguistical sense as well as cultural (Crow, 1988, p. 89).

<sup>16</sup> Use of ‘Nation Language’ showcases the English of those that were brought to the Caribbean (Brathwaite, 1984, p. 459).

<sup>17</sup> “Me-No-Sen-You-No-Come” taken from ‘Place Name’ (Miller, 2014, p. 26). The term highlights the notion of mapmaking and how the Occident enforces Western ideals into Black and Indigenous spaces, specifically across The Caribbean and Caribbean diasporic communities (Goffe, 2020 n.p.).

<sup>18</sup> Alludes to the notion of Western culture stealing Eastern culture and claiming it as their own. Cuthbert argues that cultural appropriation derives from the power relations of colonisation and that the Occident’s attitude towards the Orient became “unscrupulous and exploitive”, through both culture and produce alike (Cuthbert, 1998, p. 257).

<sup>19</sup> “Quashie” alludes to ‘Quashie’s Verse’. The term derives from slave names pre-emancipation, more commonly known now as slang for an expression of “all undesirable traits” (DeCamp, 1967, p. 143).

<sup>20</sup> “Too black or too white” refers to the notion of one not feeling as though they conform due to their mixed ethnicity, a common turmoil amongst Creole individuals as race within the Caribbean is viewed as a “matrix” rather than a fixed binary (Donnell, 2006, p. 181). This highlights the idea of Oriental countries feeling societal and cultural pressures to further conform to Occidental ideals, as ethnicity and race is wrongly viewed from a hierarchal standpoint (Donnell, 2006, p. 191).

But Englishman feet dun like de nyabinghi beat<sup>21</sup>. DUP-DUP-dudududu-DUP-DUP make de white man worry for his map book<sup>22</sup>. Our culture, our heritage, de ways hof our lives, are not exoticisms to marvel at in your colonialist strive. Your obsessive need to find Western order, even your feet create rhythm as you map border to border<sup>23</sup>.

You speak of Jah as if the beginning was nothing more than a shrug<sup>24</sup>, man has evolved and has made Englishman smug. Holy or not, draw me a map and what do you find? A map that is much smaller than mine<sup>25</sup>.

It is not a must or a need to untangle what you see, so close your map and let our Zion be!

---

<sup>21</sup> "Nyabinghi" alludes to 'Place Name XVII' (Miller, 2014, p. 39) meaning a "double-pulse beat of the funde drum" (Bilby, 2010 n.p.). This highlights the two opposing binaries of East and West through their difference in music, as Western rhythm is typically more structured and classical (Yang, 2007, p. 1). Yang describes how Said's theory on Orientalism has proven to be "instrumental" in both "literary and art criticism" (Yang, 2007, p. 1).

<sup>22</sup> The syllabic "DUP-DUP" alludes to 'Place Name XVII' (Miller, 2014, p. 39).

<sup>23</sup> Alludes to 'Establishing the Metre'. This idea is mirrored through the quote, "And foot, by weary foot, they found a rhythm", connoting both rhythm in a physical, musical, and poetic sense (Miller, 2014, p. 11).

<sup>24</sup> Alludes to 'The Shrug of Jah' (Miller, 2014, p. 9).

<sup>25</sup> Alludes to 'The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion IV' (Miller, 2014, p. 19).

## Reflection

The letters depict a conversation between the Cartographer and the Rastafarian, locked in a disagreement as they differ in their valuation of The Caribbean through both cultural and sociological differences. I wanted to highlight the binary opposition between the Occident and the Orient and how that affects the way the two individuals navigate a space based upon what they feel is important. The Cartographer values science and geography, whereas the Rastafarian values culture and sentimentality.

I used sophisticated vocabulary to emphasise the Cartographer's misconception that the Occident is more educated than the Orient. I wanted to demonstrate Western privilege and ignorance throughout the letter, almost through dismissing and dehumanising the Rastafarian.

When speaking through the Rastafarian's perspective, I wanted it to mirror that of Miller's poetry. To do this, I spoke through rhyme as that is how the Rastafarian is represented throughout the book. I considered nation language, for example changing the word "this" to "dis". When doing so, I ensured that any example of nation language used was solely taken from 'The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion', meaning I did not alter any English-appearing words to Creole-appearing if said word was not written as such in the book. This was to maintain both authenticity and sensitivity when writing from a different cultural perspective. I also tried to make each line match syllabically, for example "make the white man worry for his map book" against "DUP-DUP-dudududu-DUP-DUP".

I wanted the Cartographer to demonstrate his lack of understanding and appreciation, viewing 'Zion' as only something for Western culture to claim. I then wanted the Rastafarian to make an emotional stand against both Western ideals and colonialism, showcasing why 'Zion' is more than something for the Occident to dominate, appropriate or map out.

## Bibliography

Benítez Rojo, A. (1997) *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*. London: Duke University Press.

Bilby, K. (2010) Distant Drums. *The Unsung Contribution of African-Jamaican Percussion to Popular Music at Home and Abroad* [Online], pp. 1-21. Available from: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/00086495.2010.11672380>> [Accessed 11 June 2021].

Brathwaite, E. (1984) History of the Voice. *The Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry* [Online], pp. 459-460. Available from: <<https://www.scribd.com/doc/41857919/Brathwaite-History-of-Voice>> [Accessed 15 June 2021].

Burney, S. (2012) Orientalism: The Making of the Other. *Counterpoints* [Online], 417, pp. 23-29. Available from: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/42981698>> [Accessed 15 June 2021].

Capen, E.W. (1911) *Sociological Appraisal of Western Influence in the Orient* [Online] Available from: <<https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdf/10.1086/211925>> [Accessed 8 June 2021].

Crow, P. (1988) Plain English. *What counts besides readability?* [Online], 25 (1) Available from: <<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F002194368802500106>> [Accessed 13 June 2021].

Cuthbert, D. (1998) Postcolonial Studies. *Beg, Borrow or Steal: The Politics of Cultural Appropriation* [Online], 1 (2), pp. 257-262. Available from: <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13688799890174>> [Accessed 14 June 2021].

DeCamp, D. (1967) Language. *American day-names in Jamaica* [Online], 43 (1), pp. 139-149. Available from: <<https://doi.org/10.2307/411389>> [Accessed 15 June 2021].

Donnell, A. (2005) *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature: Critical Moments in Anglophone Literary History* [Online], Available from: <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leeds-beck/reader.action?docID=308550>> [Accessed 15 June 2021].

Fabian, J. (1990) *Religious and Secular Colonization: Common Ground* [Online], 4 (2), pp. 339-355. Available from: <<https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.1990.9960803>> [Accessed 06 June 2021].

Gilroy, P. (1987) *There Ain't No Black in the Union Jack*. Oxfordshire: Routledge.

Goffe, T.L. (2020) *Unmapping the Caribbean: Toward a Digital Praxis of Archipelagic Sounding* [Online], Available from: <<http://archipelagosjournal.org/issue05/goffe-unmapping.html>> [Accessed 15 June 2021].

Miller, K. (2014) *The Cartographer Tries to Map a Way to Zion*. Manchester: Carcanet

Miller, K. (2013) *Writing Down the Vision: Essays and Prophecies* [Online], Leeds: Peepal Tree Press. Available from: <<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/leeds-beck/reader.action?docID=5382737>> [Accessed 15 June 2021].

Puri, S. (2004) *The Caribbean Postcolonial: Social Equality, Post-Nationalism, and Cultural Hybridity*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Said, E.W. (1978) *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Thomas, W. (1908) The Significance of the Orient for the Occident. *American Journal of Sociology* [Online], 13 (6), pp. 729-755. Available from: <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/2762745>> [Accessed 10 June 2021].

Yang, M. (2007) Asian Music. *East Meets West in the Concert Hall: Asians and Classical Music in the Century of Imperialism, Post-Colonialism, and Multiculturalism* [Online], 38 (1), pp. 1-30. Available from: <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/4497039>> [Accessed 15 June 2021].