> Three answers have been given, in our century, to the question of how we should conceive of our relation to the Western philosophical tradition, answers which are paralleled by three conceptions of the aim of philosophizing. They are the Husserlian (or 'scientistic') answer, the Heideggerian (or 'poetic') answer and the pragmatist (or 'political') answer.
>
> **Richard Rorty**

6. The Historiography of Caribbean Philosophy

Richard L. W. Clarke

Abstract: The dominant view of philosophy in the Anglophone Caribbean, exemplified by Paget Henry's *Caliban's Reason*, is Romantic in inspiration. Using the work of Kamau Brathwaite as my guide, I attempt to 'unpack' some of the main assumptions which differentiate it from mainstream philosophy in the English-speaking world: for example, a tendency to conceive of reason as culturally-specific, of language as a vehicle primarily for self-expression, and to emphasize the literary, the social and the historical dimensions of Caribbean culture over the sciences. I suggest that Caribbean philosophy should be rethought less in terms of its origin than its impact, that is, in terms of its intervention in a dialogue with other traditions. **Key Words**: Caribbean Philosophy, Paget Henry, Kamau Brathwaite, Romanticism, Expressivism.

1. Introduction

Though an established academic discipline elsewhere, philosophy is arguably only an emerging one within the English-speaking Caribbean where it has been relatively neglected as a *formal* field of study. Since its inception as a college of the University of London in 1948, the region's main university, the University of the West Indies (UWI), has placed greater emphasis on the development of disciplines such as Economics or Spanish which have been perceived to be more relevant to the region's developmental needs. As a result, though a philosophy major has existed for some time at the Mona campus in Jamaica, it has had a chequered history with the result that even today the program is delivered by only two permanent members of staff. Philosophy has been taught only in piece-meal fashion over the years both at the St.

Augustine campus in Trinidad and the Cave Hill campus in Barbados. At the latter, a single full-time lecturer was appointed only in 1999 and a major introduced shortly thereafter amid great uncertainty concerning how exactly the field should be conceptualized.

A similar neglect is perhaps discernible in the Francophone territories where there is no philosophy program at the Université des Antilles. However, philosophy has fared somewhat better in the Hispanic Caribbean with an established department in existence for some time at the Rio Piedras campus of the University of Puerto Rico and both a Facultad and Instituto de Filosofia at the University of Havana. Though some might argue that philosophy has suffered in Cuba from the government's strict control of the education system and the imposition of a narrow Marxist-Leninist conception of the field to the exclusion of much else, it would seem nevertheless to be fairly vibrant with several research centers devoted to Cuban thinkers such as José Marti and Fernando Ortiz and a Catedra de Pensiamento Latinoamericano, among others.

The absence in the English-speaking Caribbean of an established institutional framework of this sort is responsible, I would suggest, for the dearth of *formal* philosophical research in and on the region. This situation is complicated by the persistence of linguistic barriers that even today impede the flow of information from one sector of the region to another. As a result, where the Caribbean has produced many thinkers of international import who have identified themselves as literary writers, critics, historians and so on, relatively few have either 'self-identified' or been characterized as philosophers per se. Among the latter are thinkers such as Frantz Fanon or C. L. R. James whose work has had a tremendous impact worldwide and, more recently, a number of philosophers of Caribbean extraction located, interestingly, mainly in North America such as Bernard Boxill, Charles W. Mills, and Lewis Gordon. This small cadre of professional philosophers is supplemented by a number of others who, while not normally classified as philosophers, have produced work of possible philosophical interest: Stuart Hall, for example, who is a sociologist by training and one of the pioneers of the field of cultural studies in the United Kingdom, Paget Henry, another sociologist, or Wilson Harris whose literary works are often thought to contain inklings of an indigenous philosophical tradition. Moreover, though much scholarship in areas such as Caribbean history, literature, and linguistics has been largely empirical in nature and devoted to the practical analysis of concrete historical events, literary texts and the like (some might argue that this

is the legacy of a putatively British preference for the 'pragmatic' and a corresponding suspicion of theory, especially the sort that emanates from Continental Europe), it is certainly true that some useful research on the theoretical frameworks informing such undertakings (what might be grouped under such rubrics as historiography, critical theory and linguistic theory) has been produced as well.

2. *Caliban's Reason*

Though there have been a few attempts to write the intellectual history of the region by, for example, Gordon Lewis (not to be confused with Lewis Gordon) or David Benn, Henry's *Caliban's Reason: Introducing Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* is the first to posit the existence not just of a Caribbean *philosophy* per se but, as its subtitle indicates, a specifically *Afro-Caribbean* philosophy and to sketch a history of the field to date. It forms part of a larger project, which Henry shares with Gordon, dedicated to exploring the place of Caribbean thought in a wider African diasporic philosophical tradition. Arguing that Afro-Caribbean philosophy is divisible into historicist and poeticist strains exemplified by the work of James and Harris respectively, for example, Henry's study is undoubtedly a groundbreaking work of Caribbean intellectual history and possessed of many strengths. Many, most often glowing, reviews have stressed the significance, from a cultural nationalist angle, of what he has accomplished for a people historically savaged by colonialism, slavery and racism and frequently denied even the capacity for reason.

However, there are also important lacunae to Henry's argument that threaten to dilute its philosophical content and reduce it to a mere socio-historical account. Henry most often, in my view, does not take the time to 'unpack' and, thus, to defend many of the assumptions informing his claims concerning the existence of a specifically Afro-Caribbean philosophical tradition. First and foremost, Henry does little to enlighten us as to how exactly he conceives of the concept which is at the very heart of this study: reason. Is reason a faculty universally present in humans that transcends society and history? Or is it culturally-specific because conditioned by a variety of material determinants, including race and gender? Moreover, what conceptions of knowledge and language subtended by these two very different perspectives on reason does Henry side with? Is objectivity possible, for example, and does language accordingly function basically as a transparent lens through which the referent can be perceived? Or is truth a much more prickly affair than this might seem to imply, the

quest for knowledge being necessarily inscribed by socio-historical factors and language in a medium largely for self-expression? Has Caliban, in short, been denied a place by racists like Hegel at a common table of *Reason*? Or has he been kept in ignorance of his right to his very own table at a banquet of *reasons* attended by many different guests, Prospero and Hypatia included?

Secondly, the conception of philosophy upon which *Caliban's Reason* is predicated is vague, marring his effort to differentiate *philosophy* per se from other forms of intellectual inquiry in the region. Does philosophy exist to clarify a universal and impersonal reason and, as such, does it have more in common with the natural sciences and the ideal of objectivity upon which these are founded? Or does it function, rather, to explore the specific forms which reason takes as a result of which it is arguably oriented towards the literary, the social and the historical and expressive of the personal? Moreover, if philosophy is to be oriented in either of these directions, what exactly distinguishes philosophy per se from these other disciplines? It seems to me that some attempt to address these divergent views on the scope and function of such a seemingly self-evident term as 'philosophy' (etymologically, the 'love of wisdom') is a necessary prerequisite to postulating the existence of a specifically Afro-Caribbean mode of philosophizing. Without such a theoretical basis, purists might argue, Henry's attempt to fashion philosophers out of a variety of literary writers, historians, sociologists and political scientists, and to posit an *explicit* tradition where possibly only one of implicit philosophizing (in the form, for example, of poems, novels, etc.) exists may lack justification. The inclusion of Harris in the canon assembled by Henry, for example, begs the question whether creative writers, whatever the nature or importance of their philosophical views, ought to be classified as philosophers per se. Shakespeare, for instance, was a deeply philosophical writer but I know of few philosophers per se who would count him as one of their own. Moreover, other notable thinkers with arguably better philosophical credentials such as Stuart Hall are simply left out of Henry's discussion.

Thirdly, though it is seemingly Henry's thesis that it is mainly the 'efficient cause' which distinguishes a specifically Afro-Caribbean form of philosophizing, the nature of identity and the precise relationship of the philosopher's identity to the act of philosophizing remain relatively untheorized givens in Henry's account. Race, for example, is often viewed as the crucial determinant upon identity in the Caribbean context and, given his sub-title, Henry would seem to be no exception

in this regard. However, he never makes clear exactly how *he* conceives what is, for many thinkers like Appiah, a problematic concept that runs the risk of essentializing identity, far less his thoughts concerning the role played by other crucial determinants such as class and gender in the construction of identity. Moreover, although some discussion of language and its relation to subjectivity would seem to be indispensable, Henry does little to enlighten as to his thoughts on this score. In short, Henry never makes clear precisely how a contingent mélange of geography, culture, race and class manifests itself in the theories of Afro-Caribbean philosophers in a way that earmarks these as distinctive from those produced, for example, by their white European counterparts.

Fourthly, though *Caliban's Reason* is an exercise in intellectual (or, more precisely, philosophical) history and canon-formation that inevitably consecrates some figures to the exclusion of others, Henry skirts around indispensable historical and historiographical issues. To be precise, in proclaiming the existence of an autonomous Afro-Caribbean philosophical tradition, Henry never shares his assumptions concerning the transmission of ideas from one socio-historical context to another, that is, the precise nature of the relationship linking Caribbean philosophers not only to each other but also to antecedent European, African and other traditions. He says little, moreover, about the process by which certain figures and their theories come to be canonized (while others fall by the academic wayside) and, by extension, the consequent institutionalization of philosophy as an academic discipline in the region. Thinking about such issues is vital, it seems to me, for it may lead us to examine what Raymond Williams terms the *dominant* problematics which currently inform our thinking in the Caribbean as well as the processes by which these have attained hegemonic status, to identify the *residual* frameworks concealed in their interstices, and to pinpoint those *emerging* problematics which may one day pose a challenge to those assumptions which we have accepted as self-evident truths.

Though there are other possible criticisms, it seems to me that these are the significant ones. All in all, Henry offers a vision of philosophy that is largely oriented towards the literary, social, historical and political dimensions of Caribbean culture. Though this is a conception of the field towards which many in the Continental camp might be sympathetic, it is one that seems quite at odds with the scientistic paradigm which prevails in Analytic-dominated philosophy departments in the English-speaking world in general, including the

Anglophone Caribbean. My biggest regret is that Henry most often fails to make clear and defend the assumptions informing not only *Caliban's Reason* per se but what in my view is a widespread and popular view of philosophy in the region. One way in which we might remedy this is, I would suggest, by considering the point of view of Kamau Brathwaite, one of the region's most important theorists of literature and culture and whose absence constitutes a curious omission from Henry's putative canon. I am thinking here in particular of Brathwaite's several attempts to theorize the nature of Caribbean *literary history* which illuminate, I believe, many of the unspoken assumptions that inform Henry's poeticist and historicist model of Caribbean philosophy.

3. Romanticism

Having written in at least two other places of the conception of cultural identity which is at the core of Brathwaite's conception of literary history as well as of its indebtedness to the views of thinkers like Herder in particular and nineteenth century Romanticism in general, these are not issues which I propose to rehash here in any detail. (See my "'Roots': a Genealogy of the 'Barbadian Personality'" and "Root Versus Rhizome: an 'Epistemological Break' in (Francophone) Caribbean Thought?" for further details on this score.) I will content myself with summarizing some of Herder's core ideas which, as Isaiah Berlin points out, have been so profoundly influential on modern cultural nationalism, not least in the Caribbean. Within the post-Romantic context, great value continues to be placed on the importance for the individual of expressing the specificity of her identity, however this may be construed (in national, cultural, racial, gendered, etc. terms) often at the expense of what human beings may have in common.

Herder's main ideas include, firstly, the broadly externalist view that our identity is not innate or pre-given but culturally derived, that is, shaped by the particular social configuration which we inhabit and the history which we have inherited; secondly, the view that this identity is derived *initially* from (or, figuratively, is 'rooted' in) the impact which a particular natural environment had upon the ancestors who lived in that location; thirdly, the view that this defining or 'core' identity (most often figured by means of botanical metaphors, not least in terms of 'roots') is passed on from generation to generation in more or less immutable form as long as the community in question remains in the same location; fourthly, the view that where migration (forced or

voluntary) occurs, the people of a given culture are severed from their natural 'roots' in a particular natural and social environment (they are, as it were, 'transplanted') which must be recuperated at all costs if one is to be 'true to oneself'; fifthly, the view that this core identity is *expressed* or *manifested* in all the cultural practices of that people, especially its language and art forms; sixthly, the view that each social group consequently defines itself in terms of a commonly shared history and, thus, inherited cultural identity which distinguishes it from other such groups.

Another philosophical figure who often seems to lurk in the background of Brathwaite's thinking is the philosopher who is, for most, synonymous with German Idealism: G. W. F. Hegel. Any attempt to summarize the Hegelian worldview is bound to be simplistic and unsatisfactory and my effort here is no exception. Where Herder has, for commentators like Berlin, more in common with Lockean empiricism and is situated as such in the social constructionist camp, Hegel's allegiances are to the Rationalists and, thus, his commitment is ultimately to a form of idealist essentialism. Like Herder and most nineteenth century thinkers, Hegel is aware that humans are very different from each other. However, unlike Herder, Hegel contends that each culture in their outlook and practices manifests a different attribute or aspect of a transcendental principle of rationality which informs the entire universe. (At times, this Reason appears to be synonymous with and, thus, is often personified in familiar religious terms as God himself.) To put all this another way, while we are in many ways different from each other, we also paradoxically share an underlying identity in that a universal principle of rationality is manifesting itself, albeit in different ways, through the cultural identity unique to each community.

Such thinking is exemplary of the epistemic shift which many intellectual historians believe occurred around the end of the 18th century away from the universalism, the mechanistic thinking and the ahistoricism that were the hallmarks of Enlightenment thought and towards the particularism, organicism and historicism characteristic of the Romantics. According to Lovejoy, the "ruling assumption" (Lovejoy 1936: 288) of the Enlightenment was that

> …Reason – usually summed up in the knowledge of a few simple and self-evident truths – is the same in all men and equally possessed by all; that this common reason should be the guide of life; and therefore that universal and equal intelligibility, universal acceptability, and even universal familiarity, to

> all normal members of the human species […] constitute the decisive criterion of validity or of worth in all matters of vital human concernment (288-9).

Romanticism substituted for such "uniformitarianism" (294) a particularistic emphasis on the excellence of diversity in all areas of natural life and human culture (what Lovejoy terms "diversitarianism" [294]). Lovejoy contends that if there is one factor which unites all the various manifestations of Romanticism and which has been its most enduring legacy, for good and bad, it is the "distrust of universal formulas" (293), resulting in the "cultivation of individual, national, and racial peculiarities" (293) and the "validation [...] of originality" (294).

Such particularism was complemented by an emphasis on organicism, the propensity to focus on the basic unity of objects and events by considering the mutual dependence or common purpose of all the parts and to stress their autotelic development (organisms are living entities which develop according to patterns specific to themselves and follow the life-cycle of birth, maturity, decay, death). As Anna Davies puts it, the

> …comparison with organisms, the reference to biological processes in the discussion of all human events – from aesthetic creation to the various facets of human society and its institutions – are everywhere. The contrast is between 'organisms', which carry their own motivation and their own impulse for development (which may or may not be conceived in teleological terms), and 'mechanisms', which are formed from parts artificially added up (Davies 1998: 86).

Historicism, the tendency to define the universe in terms of dynamic change and thus to conceptualize all things via genetic explanations (i.e. by understanding their historical development) was the inevitable concomitant of Romantic particularism and organicism, both Lovejoy and Abrams aver.

4. Kamau Brathwaite

Given these emphases, it is perhaps not accidental that literary history as a distinctive way of thinking about literature comes of age only during the nineteenth century. Significantly, two of Brathwaite's earliest attempts to articulate a theoretical basis for an understanding of an autonomous Caribbean literary history, "Sir Galahad and the Islands" (1957) and "Roots" (1963), are inspired by the hostility towards Romanticism characteristic of at least one important strand of Modernism. They are replete with gestures towards Eliotesque concepts such

as the 'dissociation of sensibility' and the relation of the 'individual talent' to the 'tradition'. The anxiety caused by Eliot's influence on Brathwaite is, as Bloom might put it, a subject ripe for exploration. Eliot was attempting, of course, in seminal essays such as "Tradition and the Individual Talent" to follow in Matthew Arnold's footsteps by formulating, paradoxically, an ahistoricist and author-less approach to literary history. In many ways, Eliot could be thought of as the most important forerunner of what is today called 'intertextuality'. Brathwaite's views at this stage of his career need not detain us too long, however, as it is the neo-Romantic perspective that informs a later phase of Brathwaite's thought which is particularly germane to an understanding of Henry's notion of an Afro-Caribbean philosophy.

In "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature" (1970), Brathwaite writes in opposition to a "persistent, established theory which contends that the Middle Passage destroyed the culture" (Brathwaite 1970: 191) which Caribbean people of African descent brought them. Such a view, based on "mistaken notions of culture, culture change and cultural transference" (193), is contradicted by the work of anthropologists such as Herskovits which proves that "African culture not only crossed the Atlantic, it crossed, survived and creatively adapted itself to its new environment. Caribbean culture was therefore not pure African, but an adaptation carried out mainly in terms of African tradition" (191-192). Arguing that religion was the main medium by which an intrinsic African cultural identity was passed from generation to generation in the Caribbean, Brathwaite rejects the views of sociologists like the Jamaican Orlando Patterson who contends, Brathwaite claims, that the slaves only brought with them a "religion already tending to fetish and superstition than to theology and ethics" (192) but "no philosophy, no military organization, no social life, no family structure, no arts, no sense of personal or civic responsibility" (192). This is untrue because African culture, Brathwaite claims, is an

> …organic whole. In traditional Africa, there is no specialization of disciplines, no dissociation of sensibilities. In other words, starting from this particular religious focus, there is no separation between religion and philosophy, religion and society, religion and art. Religion is the form or kernel or core of culture (194).

He admits, however, that it is difficult to "maintain that African continuities are as easily traced in our literature as in the socio-ideological world" (204).

Brathwaite contends that Caribbean literature “as truly native enterprise and expression” (208) really only begins with acknowledgement of the “African presence in Caribbean/New World writing” (204) and the emergence of a “literature of negritude and, with it, a literature of local authenticity” (204). Suggesting that we must “redefine the term ‘literature’ to include the nonscribal material of the folk/oral tradition, which […] turns out to have a much longer history than our scribal tradition” (204), he contends that “much of what we have come to accept as ‘literature’ […] ignores, or is ignorant of its African connection and aesthetic” (204). The African presence manifests itself in Caribbean literature/orature in four principal ways, he suggests, resulting in “four kinds of written ‘African literature in the Caribbean’” (211), which he lists seemingly in ascending order of importance. He characterizes the first kind as “*rhetorical*” (211) in which the

> …writer uses Africa as mask, signal or nomen. He doesn’t know very much about Africa necessarily, although he reflects a deep desire to make a connection. But he is only saying the word ‘Africa’ or invoking a dream. […] He is not necessarily celebrating or activating the African presence (211).

In general, he points out, “rhetorical literature is static, wishful and willful in nature. Although it betrays a significant instinct for Africa, the instinct is based on ignorance and often [...] on received European notions of ‘darkest Africa’” (214).

The second kind, what Brathwaite calls the “*literature of African survival*” (212), “deals quite consciously with African survivals in Caribbean society, but without necessarily making any attempt to interpret or reconnect them with the great tradition of Africa” (212). Evident especially “in the folk tradition – in folk tale, folksong, proverb, and much of the litany of the *hounfort*” (216), the mode of expression is

> …intransigent un-English or, as I prefer to call it, *nation-language*, since Africans in the New World always referred to themselves as belonging to certain *nations*. [...] [T]he tonal shape of the language, its rhythm changes, structure, contours of thought and image, erupting into song/dance/movement, make it clearly recognizable as African speech-form (219).

What Brathwaite terms “considerable metaphysical life and symbolic association” (220) are “contained and hidden away” (220) in many of the folk songs and poems which, by revealing the “folk/metaphysical

mind [...] working in concert with African symbolism" (221), offers penetrating "insights into our collective psyche" (222).

The third kind, "*literature of African expression*" (212), translates the "art of the hounfort" (236) into an "art of the novel" (236) by employing "often unconsciously, elements of African and/or African American style, content, vocabulary, custom/culture" (212). The fourth kind, the "*literature of reconnection*, written by Caribbean (and New World) writers who have lived in Africa and are attempting to relate that experience to the New World, or who are consciously reaching out to bridge the gap with the spiritual heartland" (212) involves a "recognition of the African presence in our society not as a static quality, but as a *root* living, creative, and still part of the main" (emphasis mine, 255).

5. Neo-Romantic Aesthetics

In all this, Brathwaite draws not only on Romantic conceptions of identity of the sort adumbrated earlier but, more specifically, on the most influential model of literary history in recent times: what M.H. Abrams would term the *expressive* paradigm bequeathed by the Romantics. Abrams, you might recall, argues influentially in *The Mirror and the Lamp* that there are four poles of criticism: the mimetic (where the focus is on what a work represents or imitates), the pragmatic (where the focus is on the work's effect on the audience), the objective (where the focus is on its form or structure), and the expressive (where the focus is on its author). The turn towards the author, the so-called 'expressive turn', characteristic of late 18th/early 19th century criticism is famously metaphorized by Abrams as a function of a transition in the wider episteme of that place and time from one dominant trope, the 'mirror', to another, the 'lamp'. In other words, he argued influentially, that there occurred a paradigm shift away from a tendency which had predominated since at least Plato to conceptualize things in general (and not just literature and the arts) as *reflections* of other things. (See Richard McKeon in this regard.) In this schema, for example, the physical world is often viewed as an imitation of the world of ideal forms (Plato) and literature as a mirror held up to nature. In its place, there arose a new emphasis on understanding things as the external concrete manifestation of an inner abstract essence (what some call 'expressivism' or even 'expressionism' [cf. Deleuze 1968]). From this point of view, for example, in much the same way that light irradiates outward from within a lamp or breath is exhaled away from the body, the particulars of the physical

world are now thought to be the external manifestation of a universal Reason in the process of coming to know itself (Hegel), while the literary work is considered more like a lamp than a mirror in that it is thought to express the writer's inner being.

In this scheme of things, accordingly, the literary work is thought to be inseparable from its 'efficient cause', the author, who is its ineluctable foundation or source. It is for this reason that Herder argued, in a way echoed by countless successors like Friedrich Schleiermacher or Hippolyte Taine, that "this living reading, this divination into the soul of the author, is the sole mode of reading" (quoted from Abrams 1953: 227). The formal particularities of the work (its choice of figurative language, plot-structure, and so on) is accordingly viewed as necessarily *in-formed* by and thus expressive of the contours of the author's very being. The concept of literary history rides on two overlapping meanings: it can refer to the study of the chronological succession of authors, works, conventions, genres, and techniques, as well as to the study of works as products of particular socio-historical contexts. The focus of *expressive* literary histories, arguably the most popular kind, is normally on a historical succession of individual writers who are linked by a common cultural identity and language. Literature and, by extension, all art are, from this point of view, necessarily culturally-specific. To read a work of literature, therefore, is to acquire a glimpse into the very heart of a particular culture *via* an understanding of the life and point of view of the author in question. Though space does not permit a fuller discussion of the question of language here, it should be obvious that this view of literature is predicated on a particular conception of the way in which meaning is produced: to be precise, the expressivist philosophy of language, articulated perhaps most famously by Wilhelm von Humboldt, and the view especially that the speaker's subjectivity, rather than correspondence with the referent, is the source of meaning.

This philosophy of literature is perhaps best articulated in Hippolyte Taine's *History of English Literature* (1863-64), one of the earliest and most influential attempts to write a *national* literary history. Taine's seminal triptych of race, place and period, which he viewed as the primary determinants of all creative and intellectual production, would seem to be as relevant to contemporary scholarship in the humanities and the social sciences as it ever was. Taine's thesis is that literature offers insight into the "psychology of a soul, frequently of an age, now and then of a race" (619). To be precise, each work manifests the thoughts and emotions peculiar to the individ-

ual behind it: “the choice of a word, the brevity or length of a sentence, the nature of a metaphor, the accent of a verse, the development of an argument – everything is a symbol to him” (611). The writer’s identity expressed in this way is, Taine argues, a function of three principal determinants, “the race, the surroundings, and the epoch” (613). Race, the most important of these, signifies those “innate and hereditary dispositions” (613) derived from “marked differences in the temperament and structure of the body” (614). Those who belong to a particular race form a “community of blood and of intellect” (614) unified by the particular “mood of intelligence in which it thinks and acts” (615) and which “manifests in its tongues, religions, literatures, philosophies” (614). The “regulating instincts and faculties implanted in a race” (615) are in turn “molded and modeled” (615) by the physical and social environment (one’s ‘surroundings’) as well as the times (or ‘epoch’) in which one lives.

Taine argues that all intellectual and creative production is determined by these three factors: in every epoch, a “certain dominant idea has held sway” (615) which, “uniting its effect with those of national genius [i.e. race] and surrounding circumstances, imposes on each new creation its bent and direction” (615). Taine uses a natural analogy, that of a river descending a mountainside, to describe how the “disposition of intellect soul impressed upon a people by race, circumstance, or epoch” (617) expresses itself through the dominant idea which in turn manifests itself in the “diverse orders of facts which make up its civilization” (617). The result is that all of the “religions, philosophies, poetries, industries, the framework of society and of families” (612) which comprise a given culture are ultimately “imprints stamped” (612) with the “seal” (612) of its core identity. Taine’s conception of culture, like Brathwaite’s, is clearly an organic one: all “its parts are connected with each other like the parts of an organic body” (617), he argues.

Taine figures the process by which each dominant idea necessarily cedes its place to others as the circumstances of time and place alter in organic terms of life and death, blossoming and decay: a given idea is “displayed over the whole field of action and thought; and after covering the world with its works, [...] it has faded, it has died away, and lo, a new idea springs up, destined to a like domination, and the like number of creations” (615). He also sees it in terms of cause and effect, determination and reflection: like a plant, the “one which follows has always the first for its condition, and grows from its death” (615). He views the succession of artists comprising a particular

tradition in similar terms: "the one artist is the precursor, the other the successor; the first has no model, the second has; the first sees objects face to face, the second sees them through the first" (615). For Taine, the mirror and the lamp go hand in hand: the artists that comprise a particular tradition emulate one another on the basis of a prior identification, a common identity which they each express in their works. Taine puts forward a simple model of canon formation in the light of this: the deeper the insight offered by a work into the matrix of race, place and time which spawned it, the "higher its place in literature" (619) and, thus, the more worthy of being studied.

6. Avoiding Essentialism

What Frederic Jameson terms a neo-Hegelian 'expressive causality' informs this model of intellectual history. This involves, he argues, the "construction of a historical totality" (27) and the…

> …isolation and the privileging of one of the elements within that totality [...] such that the element in question becomes a master code or 'inner essence' capable of explicating the other elements or features of the whole in question (Jameson 1981: 27-8).

According to Althusser, any 'expressive totality' consists of

> …so many '*total parts*', each expressing the others, and each expressing the social totality that contains them, because each in itself contains in the immediate form of its expression the essence of the social totality itself (Althusser 1965: 94).

Foucault argues in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* that, notwithstanding their overtly materialist premises, expressive intellectual histories are compromised by an idealism that is not immediately obvious. The 'essence' which it expresses and by which it thus unified is nothing less than what Foucault, evidently gesturing towards Hegel, terms "spirit" (Foucault 1969: 22). The notion of "tradition" (21), he argues, seeks to give a "special temporal status" to a "group of phenomena that are both successive and identical (or at least similar)" and "makes it possible to think the dispersion of history in the form of the same". The notion of "influence" refers to an "apparently causal process [...] the phenomena of resemblance and repetition" that "links, at a distance and through time [...] individuals, *œuvres*, notions, or theories". The concept of "development" (all quotes from 21) makes it possible to "group a succession of dispersed events, to link them to one and the same organizing principle" (21-22). Each of these concepts are under-

girded by the notion of a transcendental 'spirit' (what he calls elsewhere 'sovereign consciousness'): it is 'spirit' which enables us to "establish between the simultaneous or successive phenomena of a given period a community of meanings, symbolic links, an interplay of resemblance and reflection, or which allows the sovereignty of collective consciousness to emerge as the principle of unity and explanation" (22).

In other words, what unites the disparate elements that successively comprise any author-centered intellectual history, whether of a literary, philosophical, or other nature, is a common core of identity that in fact transcends that history, an ideal essence that expresses itself in unchanging form through each of the components in question. Each part resembles, reflects or repeats the others by virtue of the common essence which each manifests. It is possible to think of the relationship linking the expressive and the mimetic in terms of two intersecting axes. On the one hand, the works that constitute a particular tradition are thought to all 'express' or manifest a certain common essence, such as 'Englishness', 'West Indianness', 'Africanness', 'whiteness' or 'blackness', shared by the thinkers in question. On the other hand, the relationship of influence which particular works bear with each other is often figured in terms of a mirror-like repetition as a result of which questions of cause and effect, reflection and derivation are key. All the members of a given tradition *express* a common identity through the shared language and form of their works which, surface differences aside (due to understandable variations in genre, style and precise subject matter), are thus thought to *mirror* each other. What accordingly distinguishes one particular tradition from others is the essence of which all its members are expressive, by which they are unified, and which causes them to resemble only each other.

However, this situation is problematized in a post-imperial culture such as the Caribbean where questions of intellectual autonomy have necessarily arisen. The existence of a discrete Afro-Caribbean intellectual tradition unified by, because expressive of, a core identity that is essentially African, is complicated by the question of its relationship to antecedent European traditions of thought expressive of what some might see as a diametrically opposed identity. The heart of the tragedy that was colonialism, the argument goes, is that our creative and intellectual productions often mimic other traditions rather than express what is innate within ourselves. United by the common essence which they express and written in a form consequently unique to itself, Caribbean works ought to only mirror other works expressive

of the same identity. It is often assumed, consequently, that the two axes, the mimetic and the expressive, are often at best asymptotic and at worst mutually exclusive in the Post-colonial Caribbean context. Some have accordingly sought to efface the axis of reflection, an intertextual relationship arguably *cultural* in nature, in favor of the axis of expression, that is, the *racial* identity which a thinker is thought to 'express' through his/her works and which accordingly links him to similar thinkers. From this perspective, an Afro-Caribbean thinker is often thought to have more in common with other members of the African Diaspora, notwithstanding enormous cultural differences (albeit ones that may be rapidly eroding under the pressure of what some might call cultural imperialism), than with fellow Caribbean persons of other races. This is, in essence, the message of Pan-Africanism (what more recently has seemingly come to be called Afrocentrism) and, in Francophone territories especially, of Negritude.

United by their inheritance of a particular racial heritage but stripped of the language considered to be native to their being, Afro-Caribbean thinkers in general and philosophers in particular are often thought to be forced to function within a putatively alien vocabulary and conceptual framework whose influence, ironically, their works can often be seen to reflect even in the process of seeking to challenge such influences. I am thinking here, for example, of the many continuities between a Brathwaite and a Taine (or an Eliot), or Fanon and Freud, or, more recently, Lewis Gordon and Sartre, a recognition of which is often problematic for us in the region to deal with. This tension, if not downright conflict, between the mimetic and the expressive, the alien and the intimate, the acquired and the innate, nurture and nature, is palpable in Brathwaite especially. Notwithstanding his efforts to pinpoint the precise form in which the African presence manifests itself in Caribbean creative endeavors, he is forced to acknowledge the necessary imbrication of Afro-Caribbean intellectual production in preceding and, at least to that point, dominant European discourses. He points out, for example, in "History of the Voice" that the "forerunner" (267) of his own thoughts on what he calls 'nation language' was,

> ...*of course*, Dante Alighieri who, at the beginning of the fourteenth century, argued, in *De vulgari eloquentia (*1304) for the recognition of the (his own) Tuscan vernacular as the nation language to replace Latin as the most natural, complete, and accessible means of verbal expression (emphasis mine; 267)

On another occasion in the same essay, he admits that the mainstream West Indian poets

> …who were moving from standard English to nation language were influenced basically, I think (*again the models are important*), by T. S. Eliot. What T. S. Eliot did for Caribbean poetry and Caribbean literature was to introduce the notion of the speaking voice, the conversational tone. That is what really attracted us to Eliot. And you can see how the Caribbean poets introduced here have been influenced by him, although they eventually went on to create their own environmental expression (emphasis mine; 286-287).

The phrase 'environmental expression' is especially interesting here, smacking as it does of Herder's views.

A dilemma thereby arises: how can the plane of mimesis (where the influence of the region's European heritage is acknowledged) be reconciled with that of expression (where the African presence manifests itself in particular ways that are possibly at odds, in the view of some, with the European heritage)? At times, Brathwaite seems to posit an uneasy coexistence between these competing racial and cultural legacies in the form of the notion of 'creolisation' which he famously championed. In, for example, "Caribbean Critics", he takes an English critic, Louis James, to task for reducing the intellectual and creative output of the region to "part of the English/European tradition" (112). He responds that the Caribbean, "in spite of the operation upon it of 'the European system', in spite of – indeed because of – 'the peculiar circumstances' of its history, contains within itself a 'culture' different from, though not exclusive of Europe" (114). In place of the monologic view that culture is "some kind of unified, articulate system with a clearly defined and identified 'voice'" (114), Brathwaite advances a polyphonic model: there is "no 'one West Indian voice'" (115), he says, because Caribbean culture is a mosaic, a

> …complex of imposed 'establishment' tongues (Standard English, French, Dutch, etc.) and the mainly submerged patterns of the 'folk' – the peasants and illiterates who carry within themselves a transformed but still very real and essentially non-European tradition of Africa, Asia and the Amerindians. (115)

West Indian culture, Brathwaite argues, is the "*expression* of these *interacting* traditions, making their way out of a broadly ex-African base" (my emphases; 115).

The expressivism informing even this view of Caribbean culture ought to be obvious. That is, the various groups that comprise the

Caribbean are distinguished by their respective racial inheritances which are consequently expressed in their particular worldviews and cultural practices. Caribbean culture, from this vantage point, seems less a 'melting point' of the sort envisaged by a Harris or a Walcott, that is, a synthesis emerging out of a dialectical fusion of prior identities, than a precarious and uneasy concatenation of discrete racial groups tragically thrown together by an accident of history and inherently at odds with each other by virtue of their respective core identities that are threatened by this merger and which must accordingly be held on to at all costs. Hence, Brathwaite's tendency at other times to see Caribbean culture in essentially univocal terms and to distance himself from the notion of creolisation by emphasizing the importance of recuperating an underlying African essence. In "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature", for example, he lambastes those who raise, in opposition to the Afrocentric project advanced here, what he characterizes as a "multiracial howl" (199) designed to keep Africa "diluted, even submerged, and certainly safely out of the way" (200). The goal in so doing, he claims, is to "salvage from the cultural wreck the multiracial (creole) notion of 'Caribbean'; not totally European, nor is it purely African" (200). The recognition of cultural syncreticism sometimes seems to be in conflict with an intense nostalgia for racial purity on Brathwaite's part.

By contrast to Brathwaite, Fanon appears much more wary of the residual Romanticism which seems to dog Brathwaite's views. In the chapter "On National Culture" in *The Wretched of the Earth*, his famous attack on the essentialism that he believed both undergirded and undermined the politics and poetics of Negritude, his focus is on the difficulties inherent in recuperating a pre-colonial identity as the basis for the development of autonomous intellectual traditions in a Post-colonial context. Such histories often consist of at least three principal phases. The first consists in a period of "unqualified assimilation" (Fanon 1961: 179) during which the "native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power [...]. His inspiration is European and we can easily link up these works with definite trends in the literature of the mother country" (178-179). This is a feature of early West Indian poetry, for example, which Brathwaite himself has also mocked. In the second stage, the native intellectual such as Senghor "decides to remember what he is" (179):

> Past happenings of the bygone days of his childhood will be brought up out of the depths of his memory; old legends will be reinterpreted in the light of a

> borrowed aestheticism and of a conception of the world which was discovered under other skies [...]. We spew ourselves up (179).

However, in the third and "fighting phase" (179), such limitations are seemingly transcended: the native intellectual

> …turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature. During this phase a great many men and women who up till then would never have thought of producing a literary work, now [...] feel the need to speak to their nation, to compose the sentence which *expresses the heart of the people* and to become the mouthpiece of a new reality in action (emphasis mine; 179).

However, even at this stage, he

> …fails to recognize that he is utilizing techniques and language which are borrowed from the stranger in his country. He contents himself with stamping these instruments with a hallmark which he wishes to be national, but which is strangely reminiscent of exoticism (180).

The inclination to turn towards the racial homogeneity of a pre-colonial past ignores the complex cultural heterogeneity of the post-colonial present: native artists may

> …turn their back on foreign culture, deny it and set out to look for a true national culture, setting great store on what they consider to be the constant principles of national art. But these people forget that the *forms of thought and what it feeds on, together with modern techniques of information, language and dress have dialectically reorganized the people's intelligences and that the constant principles which acted as safeguards during the colonial period are now undergoing radical changes* (emphasis mine; 181).

What the native artist consequently embraces are the "cast-offs of thought, its shells and corpses, a knowledge which has been stabilized once and for all" (181). Fanon's express warning that a "national culture is not a folklore, nor an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people's true nature" (188) is one to which we ought to be more attentive in the Post-colonial context.

Fanon's notion here of 'dialectical reorganization' points towards what I think is a much more useful view of literary and, by extension, intellectual history: Bloom's notion of the 'anxiety of influence'. Bloom offers a psychoanalytically inflected model of literary history that avoids the principally Romantic essentialism which bedevils the views of literary historians like Taine or Brathwaite. Each poet, Bloom writes in *The Anxiety of Influence*, experiences "melan-

choly at his lack of priority" (Bloom 1973: 417) and is consequently afflicted by what he terms, in *A Map of Misreading*, a "*psychology of belatedness*" (Bloom 1976: 1187), a sense of always arriving too late on the scene. In other words, there is an anxious sense that it has all been said before. The relationship which writers consequently bear to their predecessors is Oedipal in nature: each 'strong' writer strives to carve a distinctive niche for himself by 'dethroning' influential predecessors through a process of what Bloom labels 'misreading'. Hence, Bloom's characterization of the 'poetic tradition' as taking the form of a 'dialectics'. In short, originality, so prized by the Romantics, is an illusory ideal, the writer's debt to his precursors constituting the *latent* level of meaning of his/her *manifest* text.

Bloom gives us a way of thinking of all cultures, the Caribbean as much as Africa or Europe, are haunted by an 'anxiety of influence', a belief in and a futile yearning for a prior-ity and, ultimately, an originality which can never in fact be attained in the light of the give *and* take of intellectual history. Belatedness may be the affliction that plagues all intellectual endeavors as a result of which the almost oedipal desire for Caribbean philosophy to 'usurp' the place of some putative original European philosophical paternity, a harmful obsession with denying which is the ironic consequence, is quite understandable. Any quest for originality may ultimately be doomed, any assumption that intellectual activity proceeds in a vacuum illusory, resulting ultimately in the hallucination that Bloom terms 'metalepsis' or 'transumption' in which the process of repression and revisionism finally culminates: the "illusion of having fathered one's own fathers" (340), Bloom argues, is in fact, paradoxically, the ultimate act of implicit recognition. When I first read Bloom's thoughts on this, I could not help but think that many Trinidadians view, rightly or wrongly, the claim that Barbadians invented the calypso in this light.

I have argued that the dominant view in the Caribbean of philosophy is marred by a residual essentialism derived principally from the Romantics. I have suggested, too, that it may be possible to think of Caribbean philosophy in other than expressivist terms, to be precise, less in terms of its cause than its impact on a dialogue that necessarily precedes it but which will in turn be altered by its intervention. If such a model is embraced, a very different and, I suspect, much more productive paradigm of Caribbean philosophy will begin to emerge, one not stifled by, because not mired in, an obsolete and problematic conception of identity and its relation to language.