

# Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal

---

Volume 10

Issue 2 *Intellectual Formations: Locating a Caribbean  
Critical Tradition*

Article 5

---

November 2013

## Texts, Texts, Texts and More Texts (With Apologies To Gabby)

Carolyn Cooper

*University of the West Indies, Mona*, [karokupa@gmail.com](mailto:karokupa@gmail.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium>

---

### Recommended Citation

Cooper, Carolyn (2013) "Texts, Texts, Texts and More Texts (With Apologies To Gabby)," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*: Vol. 10 : Iss. 2 , Article 5.

Available at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol10/iss2/5>

This Part I: First Reflections, Plenary Voices is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal by an authorized editor of Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact [repository.library@miami.edu](mailto:repository.library@miami.edu).

I'm quite ashamed to say that in May 1981, at the end of my first year of teaching at Mona, I attended the inaugural West Indian literature conference convened at the College of the Virgin Islands. I gave a paper on Marxist literary criticism, which was all very well and good. But my great act of shame, which I regret to this day, was my now-incomprehensible decision to miss Bob Marley's funeral. It was the same weekend as the conference. Now that should tell you where my head was three decades ago: up in the literary clouds. If I knew then what I know now, I would certainly not have given up Marley's spectacular once-in-a-death-time funeral for a mere literature conference, however inaugural. Marley's funeral was cultural text, writ large and performed even larger.

Apart from the visuals, there was the politics of who owned the reggae icon. Was Marley entitled to a private funeral at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, to which he had belatedly converted under the influence of his wife, Rita? Or did the Jamaican nation have the right to insist on a public ceremony at which Bob Marley's countless fans, at home and across the globe, could pay their last respects? In the end, the duppy of compromise prevailed. Marley had two funerals: a private ceremony at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church and a state funeral at the National Arena.

Marley's two-act funeral provided a model for that of other icons. In the case of Louise Bennett and Rex Nettleford, the wisdom of acknowledging the claims of both the private and public domains did not prevail. Unfortunately, in both instances the ill-considered wishes of the deceased took precedence over commonsense. For the 2008 conference on Louise Bennett, hosted by the Department of Literatures in English at Mona, I gave a plenary lecture, "Burying Miss Lou: Contested Rites of Passage in Contemporary Jamaica". Twenty-seven years after missing Marley's funeral, I could quite confidently do anthropology as cultural studies, under the guise of literary analysis.

So to answer Donette's questions less discursively, my interventions in cultural studies, reggae studies and popular culture have all been animated by literary studies. Of course: the word made flesh, in and out of the theatre of the dancehall. As I argue in the Introduction to *Noises in the Blood*, my primary preoccupation was to examine the seemingly oppositional ideology of "long head" and "book". Those metonyms are fleshed out by Old John: "'I dont [sic] know much 'bout book, but I tell you what me fren, I is a man wid a terrible long head, I can tell you, and de man dat want fe mek me a fool, mek him come'" (D'Costa and Lalla 91).

Old John is a character in Henry G. Murray's Jamaican classic, *Manners and Customs of the Country a Generation Ago: Tom Kittle's Wake*. An excerpt from the tale is republished in *Voices in Exile: Jamaican Texts of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, edited by Jean D'Costa and Barbara Lalla who tentatively date Murray's book at about 1844. Henry G. Murray was a brown Jamaican, way

ahead of his time in recognising the value of documenting the verbal creativity of those who, to this day, are often assumed to be fools because they know only the vernacular.

Having started with the word, I've ended up writing on a range of texts: fashion, furniture, art, craft, film, funerals, tourism commercials, political campaign ads, reggae festivals, male centrefolds, modelling and beauty contests, skin – bleached and tattooed (i.e. Vybz Kartel). In summary, then, I conceive and practise reggae studies, cultural studies and literary studies as a continuum of textual studies. The literary text is primarily verbal and scribal; the reggae text is verbal, oral and performative; the cultural studies text is just about anything.

I end with a quote from the introduction to the 1992 *Cultural Studies* reader, co-edited by Cary Nelson, Paula A. Treichler and Lawrence Grossberg:

Cultural studies does not require us to repudiate elite cultural forms – or simply acknowledge . . . that distinctions between elite and popular cultural forms are themselves the products of relations of power. Rather, cultural studies requires us to identify the operation of specific practices, of how they continuously reinscribe the line between legitimate and popular culture, and of what they accomplish in specific contexts. At the same time, cultural studies must constantly interrogate its own connection to contemporary relations of power, its own stakes. (13)

#### Works Cited

Nelson, Cary, Paula A. Treichler and Lawrence Grossberg, Eds. *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1992.

D'Costa, Jean and Barbara Lalla, Eds. *Voices in Exile: Jamaican Texts of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1989.