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## George Lamming's "The Boy and the Sea" : A Littoral Artist's Experimentation with Language and a Postcolonial Examination of the Self

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Lamming's "The Boy and the Sea" epitomizes the ways in which the littoral as trope,<sup>1</sup> especially one's placement in the waters bordering the shore, has the potential to symbolically impact an author's text and his development of the character's (and his own) coming into voice. In reflecting on this early poem, one can gain some insight into Lamming's imaginative process for crafting an authorial language, a voice that exhibits the author-critic's discernment of an adolescent rise to consciousness and self-actualization on (or through) the shorelines of Barbados. Using a postcolonial gaze that is informed by phenomenology, this paper presents the opening images, along with a close-reading of the poem, in an effort to show how moments at the beach reflect a symbolic catalyst Lamming employed to discover and then articulate the sense of autonomy one can gain within and against the social constraints imposed by the empire and colonization.



Figure 1 (left) Figure 2 (above)

These photos of Lamming<sup>2</sup> suggest the representative social and critical inferences a reader might make when interpreting Lamming's use of littoral

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<sup>1</sup> The term "littoral" is synonymous with "seashore" or "coastal region" ("littoral" *American Heritage Dictionary* 793, *Oxford English Dictionary*). It can be interchangeably understood as "shore, coast, strand, or beach" ("littoral" *Roget's International Thesaurus*) and has particular scientific connotations within the fields of biology, zoology, and geology ("littoral" *Oxford, Roget's*). Scientists, for example, are especially intrigued by the diversity of species and land formations they find when studying what is termed "the littoral zone," a region sixteen to thirty-three feet below the low-tide level (Jones (2000)). In addition to the conventional definitions, *Roget's International Thesaurus* provides the following adjectives for "littoral": "bordering, marginal, borderline, or frontier." These terms suggest the greater implications that the littoral terrain holds within the context of postcolonial thought, for they represent "borders," a concept that is theorized within postcolonial studies. Thus, this project will consider the relevance of some of the "border" inferences of postcolonial studies, emphasizing how they provide open possibilities and fluid constructions for the figures on the beach as they engage in anti-colonial and postcolonial revisions of identity.

<sup>2</sup> These two images can be found on Banyan's website accompanying the article, "Transcript of Interview with George Lamming." <http://www.pancaribbean.com/banyan/Lamming.htm>

imagery in his work. Captured in the videotape *Footprints* (1992) and posted on Banyan's website, the photographs were taken during a 1989 interview and exhibit George Lamming standing on the east coast of Barbados. In the first image (Figure 1), Lamming smiles at the camera as he looks inland. In the second (Figure 2), he faces the Atlantic Ocean, pointing to the horizon and the continent of Africa, as he explains in the transcript attached to the photographs ("[Transcript](#)" par. 31). Underscoring the initial "journeys" he took across the Antilles before traveling abroad to Europe, Lamming reveals how his (e)migrant identity informs his corpus:

[T]here is a number of journeys. . . . [For him the] most critical one was the journey from Barbados to Trinidad . . . . [because his] particular relation to the Caribbean region was to a large extent formed and shaped in Trinidad through the Trinidad experience that got [him] to realise that there was a cultural area – a unit that was just not Barbados. It was the whole region . . . [a region of islands connected by the sea]. ("[Transcript](#)" par. 1-2)

Consequently, when he left Trinidad for London, a "seed was . . . firmly planted" that "blossomed" in the metropole; he would "[learn] to be a Caribbean person," appreciating those cultural and historical aspects that united the peoples of the region, not only to each other but also to Africa and other areas ("[Transcript](#)" par. 5). Thus, when he returned to the Caribbean in the 1950s, he could better understand how people in these archipelagoes were "reshaped by this landscape" despite their different cultural traditions ("[Transcript](#)" par. 7). This initial epiphany, concerning a regional identity, occurred as a result of Lamming traversing the littoral terrains that link the islands of the Caribbean archipelago, and this movement from shoreline-to-shoreline planted a subliminal seed that would bear fruit in his work.

Thus, with his statement about "journeys," traversing from one island to another and then abroad, Lamming not only emphasizes the inextricable relationship a writer can have with his people, with the land, and with his country's cultural history (or in this case the linked histories of the countries in the Antilles), but he also invites a discussion of his symbolic and political use of littoral imagery. This paper aims to analyze three distinct ways in which Lamming employs the placement of his protagonist on (or in) the strand. On the one hand, the use of the littoral as trope helps to isolate and define how moments at the beach can serve as intermediary moments for personal discovery to occur. On the other hand, the littoral image represents an "in-between" space that is apt for a Caribbean subject to reflect upon and define his/her postcolonial, (e)migrant (or exile) identity as a scholar and creative writer – a self-reflective examination

Lamming undertakes through his characters when he positions his protagonists within the strand. Finally, through the image of the individual on the brink between land and sea, the author experiments with the language necessary to vocalize a unique, anti-imperialist Caribbean perspective.

Arguably, Lamming explores each of these tropes in much of his corpus (ex., *Castle* (1953), *The Emigrants* (1954), *Of Age and Innocence* (1958), *Season of Adventure* (1960), *Waters with Berries* (1971), and *Natives of My Person* (1972)), but for the purposes of this essay, I will only analyze one of Lamming's earliest poems, "The Boy and the Sea" in an effort to introduce readers to the potential ways in which his use of the littoral as trope can be observed fulfilling the above functions. Important features worth noting are: one, how Lamming highlights an alienated or lone figure's location on the strand; two, the ways in which the character articulates some introspection about his social condition during this moment he spends at the beach; three, how a boy (or young man, as is the case with the poet) demonstrates a mediation of personal and/or cultural consternations during his placement in this "in-between," "border-space" (the strand for the boy in the poem, the lecture-stage for Lamming when he reads the poem in England), for it is in the midst of this "border" space that the boy/man negotiates the apprehensions and/or contradictions he must reconcile in order to gain self-awareness;<sup>3</sup> and four, how the written text reflects the author's experimentation with language undertaken in an effort to find and vocalize a self-actualized, anti-colonial perspective.

Not only is the boy in the poem awakening to a subaltern identity, but the author, too, confronted the political and social ramifications of his colonial experience when he read the poem to a British audience. Originally published in the December 1951 edition of *BIM* (Paquet, "George Lamming" par. 4), the poem appears again in the essay, "A Way of Seeing," which forms part of *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), the seminal text in which Lamming refigures Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. In *Pleasures*, Lamming sheds light on his invitation to read at the Institute of Contemporary Art (I.C.A.) when he visited London in the 1950s (*Pleasures* 59-63). Thus, with "The Boy and the Sea," not only does Lamming demonstrate an early experimentation with littoral iconography, but he also uses the trope also as a vehicle for expounding early, anti-hegemonic ideals

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<sup>3</sup> My use of the term "border" here is intentional. For the concept of the "border" has been articulated in postcolonial theory, particularly within the scope of "border theory," as examined by Gloria Anzaldúa (1987), Renato Rosaldo (1989), Hector Calderón and José David Saldivar (1991), Walter Dignolo (2000), Elizabeth Wilson (1990), Scott Michaelsen and David Johnson (1997). In my estimation, "border theory" is relevant for this essay in that it suggests the ways in which a "border" space provides open possibilities for fluid constructions, constructions that inform and shape a "border," or mediating, consciousness by which an individual expresses his or her awareness of the cultural tensions s/he negotiates in the juncture--in this case the strand--where representations of power or dominance and disenfranchisement or subordination meet.

about his own, fledgling literary voice and craft – first achieved through the poem, itself; second when he read the piece before a British audience; and, finally, when he later incorporated the text into *Pleasures*. I will analyze the poem, initially, followed by a discussion of Lamming’s subliminal message, underscoring why this message, and the trope used to convey it, should resonate with us today. By subliminal message, I mean the embedded meaning(s) in the poem as well as the message Lamming imparted when he read the poem at the I.C.A..

In “The Boy and the Sea,” Lamming writes about a boy who experiences an awakened fascination with discovery during a day he spends at the beach, a “day of discovery” quite similar to the one experienced by “G” and his boyhood friends in *Castle* (Paquet, “George Lamming”).<sup>4</sup> Written in free verse, the poem provides a Caribbean boy’s consciousness of place along with characterizations of the ways in which he feels marginalized within his Caribbean homeland:

More punctual and deliberate than bird carol at dawn  
While water’s wedding to the wilted weeds  
In crystal accents screamed across the lawn  
*I would awake* with a child’s wild wandering will . . . .  
I dashed through the dawn descending day  
To bear my body on the broad bay. (1.1-4, 1.22-23, *my emphasis*)

Riding through eternity’s green tears  
That cut the coral of my rock’s red face,  
I wrought on the slipping scape of waves . . .  
The ardour of my nine bright years,  
And tossed on the outward tide of the bay (2.1-6)

The water, the birds, the weeds, grass, and lawns (1.1-27), all call attention to the picturesque nature of the Barbadian environment. The coral, the fish, the sun shining, waves crashing on the shore, the wind blowing across the coastline, and the boy’s joy in bathing at dawn (2.1-24), all present a celebratory description of this physical landscape. Thus, the person in the poem voices pride in his homeland, especially the fishing boats or “wooden spectacles of pride” he sees as he looks out towards the horizon “[n]ear yet far” away (2.29).

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<sup>4</sup> See Paquet’s 1993 biography of George Lamming in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* as well as her *The Novels of George Lamming* (1982). In “Blurred Genres, Blended Voices-George Lamming’s *In the Castle of My Skin*,” of *Caribbean Autobiography: Cultural Identity and Self-Representation* (2002), Paquet describes “[t]he beach [a]s a site of discovery and [place of] magical transformations” (121).

Despite the ardor he feels (2.5), he cannot avoid the distractions antithetical to the native, proud boats as he continues to “[swim] leisurely on the elegant tide” (2.31). It is in the process of swimming in the waters that border the Caribbean archipelago that the boy “wept. . . [d]reaming to [his] woken self” (2.34-35). He comes into his own, realizing an affinity for his homeland while also noting a disruptive, interloping presence. Why weep? Is he overcome with exhilarating joy in swimming in these waters, or is he unwillingly affected by the paradox of his Caribbean experience? It is important to note these interlopers appear as parenthetical: “(Weathering yachts and the hilarious club)” (2.31). Apparently, however subtly, the boy realizes, as he wades in these waters, looking at the idyllic landscape that he has just traversed in order to bathe in the sea, that his country’s environment is being tainted by a foreign presence, and only after swimming beyond the yacht club, can he express a sense of revelation (2.35) and a budding awareness that he is a colonized subject. Thus, the statement about “[d]reaming to my woken self” (2.35) demonstrates a burgeoning consciousness the boy will need to develop as a Caribbean man, a consciousness that uses one’s sea- and land-scape as its muse.

In “The Boy and the Sea,” then, Lamming suggests ideas of an individual’s psychic link with the natural environment as well as that same individual’s anti-colonial response to exploitation and hegemony while swimming near or walking the strand, ideas given greater credence if considered in terms of phenomenology. Several lines describe the physical merging of the boy’s body with sky and seascape or landscape. The boy dashes through the dawn (1.22), bearing his body on the bay (1.23); his body is “tossed on the outward tide” (2.6). He wades through driftwood and weeds (2.11); his physical and mental wanderings are paralleled with “. . . the will of the winds . . .” (1.19); and his incomplete prayers are carried on his lips as he dashes through this incomplete day, symbolized by the dawning sky making its transition from night to day (1.21-23). The boy describes a unity between his physical body and the physical make-up of his surroundings. Moreover, it is within this littoral space that he is overcome with the ecstasy and power of this communing moment with Nature; the boy weeps “with the wobble of a wind driven wave” (2.33). With lines such as these, the poem suggests, then, a phenomenological link between the boy and his immediate environment. These words also imply an adolescent rise into consciousness that begins during this moment of swimming off the shore.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka’s “The Aesthetics of Nature in the Human Condition” (1985) is helpful in elucidating this point in that she uses this introduction to a larger study, *Poetics: The Sea*, as a means for contextualizing how life on the littoral edge can present a “. . . spectrum of forms [that can be] employed by the human . . . creative genius” (4), forms that position the artist, consciously or unconsciously, in the center of a natural panorama from which s/he can denote the development of a human consciousness (5-6, 14). Other phenomenologist of note, who

Later, Lamming will use these images to challenge the cultural and artistic assumptions of the British Institute of Contemporary Arts.<sup>6</sup> When he reads the poem at the I.C.A., he is able to subversively exhibit his talent as a writer as well as his individuated perspective as a Caribbean man. During the recitation, Lamming invites his audience to experience his own consciousness through the zeal a Caribbean boy has for his homeland. Lamming also belongs in this natural landscape. He is a product of this environment and consequently has nationalistic attachments to the region. He will always remember his physical and emotional connection with the environment of his homeland, refusing to lose his Caribbean identity in order to be accepted in a British literary circle. Although he has traveled from the West Indian region, he retains a perspective that enables him to honor the images and feelings suggested in the poem. Thus, in reading “The Boy and the Sea” to a predominantly white Western audience, Lamming also enacts a subversive gesture. Similar to the boy’s awakening consciousness, the writer also begins to understand his position as a colonized subject. However, he will not allow imperialism to suffocate his creative and scholarly insights.

To summarize, before continuing to discuss the pertinence of this recitation, it is important to note that in “The Boy and the Sea,” the littoral signifies a number of related issues. First, it presents Lamming’s view of the shoreline as a bridge or “border” space: that is, a space that allows a Caribbean person to negotiate, literally and figuratively, his impression of England and its relationship to Barbados (literally, by his reading the text at the I.C.A., figuratively through the images conveyed in the poem). Second, the coast symbolizes an adolescent space of transition, one where the prepubescent youth in the poem can grow into awareness and one through which a young artist can mature as he begins to understand the complexities of inserting his voice into a hegemonic discourse. Third, the shoreline as a “border” space signifies phenomenological processes, ways by which people realize, define, and come to better understand their own state of being as the result of an ontological relationship with Nature.

Thus, the littoral as trope provides a masterful means for discovering Lamming’s authorial voice, a voice that speaks to postcolonial and phenomenological aims. Placing the boy on the water’s edge, he articulates the acknowledgement of a sense of self that is being colonized. In stanza one, where particular attention is given to paying homage to the natural beauty of his homeland, the narrator states that he was “Born on a rock islanded by wild waves / That conceal the lost continents of legend . . . (1.24-25). Albeit an understatement, the narrator reveals with these phrases an awareness that his

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established the school of theory, are Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1979) and Edmund Husserl (1999).

<sup>6</sup> See *Pleasures* pages 57-63 and Dalleo (2011).

history (the stories of his island's past) have been obscured by what postcolonial theorists, and Lamming, himself, have disclosed as a colonial gesture to disempower particular groups in order to privilege and entitle Europeans and their descendants. Lamming writes:

[T]ossed on the outward tide of the bay  
Signed my alliance with the sun  
For a day that signals to my rock's red face  
The season of the sea's salt eggs  
And the blue scaled fish that flies (2.6-10).

For me, these verses and their references to sunlight, seasonal change, birth (eggs), and liberation in flight (or freedom in being airborne) can be read to infer connotations about the narrator's (and poet's) budding awareness of his affinity with home while discovering the leverage one can monopolize through writing – how the very act of scripting a text can give birth to a new language and how the expression made available in a postcolonial/anti-imperialistic moment can be revealed in a poem or written text. Note the speaker's declaration of an "alliance with the sun" (2.7), his connection with the bright, beautiful, scenic nature of his Caribbean environment. Furthermore, the speaker in the poem affirms his ownership of his country of birth, stating that this is "[his] rock's red face" (2.8). Finally it is useful to pay attention to the speaker's metaphorical description of a flying fish, which creates a powerful image of soaring freedom. If the fish cannot be bound by its environment, then, why should the boy not also embrace his ability to soar above the constraints of his surroundings? In addition, the reference to "[t]he season of the sea's salt eggs" connotes the possibility of new beginnings, continuity, and impending change and maturation (2.9). Just as the eggs will grow and develop, eventually spawning their own eggs and thus evolving the species, so, too, will the boy need to grow, adapting to his environment, if necessary, in order to survive.

Subsequently, by articulating these images and ideas, Lamming, as a poet, exhibits the process through which language and self-analysis can take shape on or be inspired by the shore's edge. He concludes the first stanza expounding: "My natural lesson in child's learning years / Was the ritual of seabathe at dawn (1.24-25). There are insights he gains not only about his homeland but also about himself when he writes about trekking through the island's interior en route to the shore. When he arrives on the shore, bathing in the strand, he truly begins to understand the wealth of imagery his homeland makes available to him.

In stanza two, the boy enters the water's edge, and as he describes his body moving through the waves found close to the coast, readers can see Lamming's initial experimentations with voicing independence, possibility and

promise beyond this birthplace. In this moment, during this day, the boy/poet imagines the possibility of new beginnings (seasonal changes and new births of the eggs) while also conceptualizing power and liberation in flight of the flying fish. Moreover, it is in this physical movement of swimming “[u]nder and out of the cunning sea” (2.37) that the hero of this text and his human experience reflects “. . . the measure of all flesh” (2.36). His experience and expression need not be restricted to the provincial strictures of his country of birth, a country that has been colonized by English domination.

Therefore, with evocations from the poem, “The Boy and the Sea,” as discussed in the above paragraphs, Lamming draws attention to a lexicon that reflects a burgeoning voice. The young poet identifies and plays with a language he needs to express a nativism he will come to nurture, advance, and develop as a seasoned writer, and such a step is ironically taken during the presentation of the poem to a British audience. The poem, itself, demonstrates the essence of a littoral, “border” space that the writer experiments with in the poem.

Furthermore, in reading the poem at the Institute of Contemporary Art, one can imagine Lamming’s position in a marginalizing, “border” space: he is a Caribbean emigrant in England, fashioning his authorial voice within both a Caribbean and a British context. Raphael Dalleo analyzes such a dynamic in *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere*, calling attention to a commodification of alterity Lamming realizes and takes advantage of during this first visit to the I.C.A.:<sup>7</sup>

The crowd grants Lamming the authority of alterity. His authority to speak . . . cannot be challenged because it depends on his place of birth and his skin color, forms of capital none of his audience possesses . . . . Yet despite this “impression of authority” that Lamming’s reading earns, not engaging the young poet with questions is another way in which the British literary field contains his challenge. (Dalleo 158)

Dalleo’s reading is intriguing and not one I wish to negate. However, I will offer a different interpretation of the audience’s inability to engage with the poet. I don’t see this moment solely as a colonizing gesture of containment. Rather, I choose to proffer Lamming’s anti-hegemonic gesture of establishing terms of engagement that are unfamiliar to these members of the empire. Thus, a

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<sup>7</sup> Worth noting is the fact that this was not Lamming’s only invitation. When advertising his appearance there again in 2002, he memorializes moments from his initial visit to England in the 1950s. Although he does not mention his first reading at the I.C.A., he does give particular attention to the support he and other West Indian writers received from the B.B.C. (See Lamming “Sea of Stories.”).

challenge is not necessary or even possible because this European audience lacks the vocabulary required for such a discussion. The poem, then, is important because it enables Lamming to insert and assert his Caribbean experience and perspective within a British intellectual context, at an event where English subjects are typically the readers. In being asked to read this poem at the Institute, he realizes the token gesture members of the Institute make towards him, and yet he takes advantage of the opportunity to be subversive as “simply an anonymous West Indian emigrant who could read and who, mysterious as it might seem, *had even trespassed on the territory of the literate* who made fame by writing” (*Pleasures* 60, *my emphasis*). The fact that the poem was reprinted in the *Pleasures of Exile* reveals this significance.

In *Pleasures*, Lamming theorizes Anglophone Caribbean language and identity and his own intellectual and artistic role as a Caribbean writer who explores these issues within the context of his status as a Barbadian émigré. Through reflections on his personal experiences, including his journeys in Europe and Africa as a Caribbean migrant and exile, Lamming revises interpretations of Caliban and Prospero in *Pleasures*; they become metaphors for a Caribbean consciousness and English domination, respectively (Lamming, *Pleasures* 15,95-117). He also rewrites the linguistic relationship between Caliban and Prospero, resisting imperial domination and voicing his alternative perception of the world. By revising Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a play that deals with sea journeys and the conquest of an island space, Lamming calls attention to the history, geography, and politics of the Caribbean region. In so doing, he highlights important issues involving the littoral as trope that are present in Shakespeare's original construction of the play: being marooned or stranded on what is believed to be an uninhabited island (the European context not the Caribbean concept), finding oneself needing to survive following exile from one's homeland (maintaining sustenance and a sense of identity), discovering the inevitable conflicts that arise when the “Other” comes into conflict with (An)Other (the Caliban-Prospero dyad), espousing the failures and successes of an imperialist project to the framing of universal themes about love, parent-child relationships, and the handling of one's inheritance (Miranda/Prospero's, Ferdinand/Alonzo's, Caliban/Sycorax's, and Ariel's, for example). These are only a few inferences one can draw from *The Tempest*. Certainly, Shakespeare's original play examines these issues within the confines of the littoral topography of an island space, its surrounding seascape, and the perimeters of the shorelines that link these areas.

Lamming's interpolation of the play in *Pleasures* is to disclose how the interloping imperialist (Prospero) colonized the language and mind of the individual he dominated and oppressed (Caliban). However, for my purposes, the littoral iconography inherent in the play is also useful in linking “The Boy and the Sea” to the larger intention of *Pleasures*. It, too, invites a postcolonial

consideration of islands as open, or “border,” spaces in which forms of exploration, exploitation, and resistance to hegemony contend, a site from which a writer may shape tools for de-centering imperialistic politics and discursive practices. Lamming, himself, explains in *Pleasures* that he used the poem to mystify and control his audience with “black courage in the face of language. . . pure black magic; and magic, black or white, is not easy to accept” (60-61). Consequently, islands – in this case Barbados and other countries in the Greater and Lesser Antilles – as exhibited in “The Boy and the Sea,” and *The Pleasures of Exile*, can be considered enthralling, emblematic spaces for transformation, locations and/or symbolic realms through which a Caribbean person may reflect upon and aspire to give meaning to his/her Caribbean reality.

In the interview that accompanies Figures 1 and 2, taken from Banyan’s website, Lamming articulates this discursive mediation and reflection, contextualizing his notion of physical and intellectual “journeys” but also wedding his West Indian identity to Africa. At the transcript’s conclusion, he explains that he is pointing towards this continent. Thus, for him, the littoral space is one from which he might identify his awareness of an African past that inevitably has informed his Caribbean present. He states: “If it were possible to put bricks or something right across here, right across the Ocean, the first piece of land that you would touch would be Dakar in Senegal” (“Transcript of an interview,” par. 31). In pointing to Dakar at the end of this interview, Lamming situates his cultural identity within African-Diasporic terms, acknowledging his Caribbean link to slavery, Africa, and the Middle Passage. He explains, “[the African] influence has deepened . . . in Caribbean consciousness . . .” (15).<sup>8</sup> He further states that “. . . a concretization of the Afro-Caribbean connection . . . will expand. It won’t contract. From here on, it is likely to get wider and wider” (qtd. in Birbalsingh 15). In essence, Lamming acknowledges his geographical, cultural, psychic, and social position within what Paul Gilroy refers to as the “Black Atlantic.” He recognizes that he is the product of a historical phenomena that has influenced his Caribbean subjectivity and Diasporic consciousness, a consciousness that is directly tied to the Middle Passage that can certainly inform a backdrop for his anti-colonial sentiments.<sup>9</sup> In pointing to Africa in Figure 2,

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<sup>8</sup> In “George Lamming: Africa and the Caribbean” interview transcribed in Frank Birbalsingh’s *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature in English* (1996)

<sup>9</sup> This is an awareness that he shares with other Caribbean writers (Brathwaite (1974, 1984, 1988, 2001), Césaire (1969), Conde (1999), Fanon (1961), and Johnson (1998), as well as to scholars who have unveiled ties in literature and literary criticism that link a Caribbean worldview with that of a larger African-Diasporic consciousness. Extensive work has been done on establishing an epistemological link many Caribbean writers have sought to establish with African hermeneutics and the larger African Diaspora. See, for example, Brathwaite (1974 and 1984), Booker and Juraga (2001), Gikandi (1992), Griffith (2001), Paquet (1993 and 2002), Patteson (1998), Ramchand (2004), Wilson-Tagoe (2004), to name just a few scholars that have analyzed

then, one can infer that Lamming affirms such a discourse, for the gesture alone reminds onlookers of his Afro-Caribbean inheritance from this ancestral motherland, an inheritance he became aware of during his Transatlantic journeys to, from, and across the shorelines bordering the Middle Passage.

But Lamming's attention to the Middle Passage is not limited to notions of an African-Diasporic collectivity, solely. For him the Middle Passage also serves as a trope of the ways in which Caribbean people of all ethnicities and races continue a pattern of travel and migration from the Caribbean to Europe, Africa, and the mainland Americas often in search of ways to overcome colonial deprivation.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the Caribbean, itself, is characterized by a heterogeneous meeting and intermixing of peoples and cultures that is precipitated by the movement across shorelines. Moreover, the open, "border," spaces of those Caribbean countries that are islands have facilitated the crossing and re-crossing of colonizers and tourists to the Caribbean. The island landscape, then, demarcates possibilities of flux, as Caribbean people have also crossed the coast in their migrations between the sea and the island interior, between the islands of the archipelago, and between the islands and the American mainlands (and vice versa).

Many Caribbean writers and scholars have defined this migratory lifestyle in terms of a sea-topos or what E. Kamau Brathwaite described as "tidelectics," "a way of interpreting our life and history as sea change, the ebb and flow of sea movement" (Morgan 169-70). The following discussion is intended to give some context to the ways in which Caribbean artists/writers have explored some variant of "tidelectics" in their work. I present the information, briefly, as a means, only, for revealing how Lamming's use of the littoral as trope engages with a larger, more established Caribbean discourse, one which highlights the sea instead of the coast--albeit, of course, that these realms are connected.

Derek Walcott in many poems, including "The Sea is History" (1986), and E. Kamau Brathwaite in his "Conclusion" to *Contradictory Omens* (1974) and in his poems "Littoral" and "Islands" (which appear in the trilogy *The Arrivants* (1988)) explore the sea-related trope in both political and cultural terms. Antonio

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Lamming's and other West Indian writers' employment of Africanisms, drawing particular attention to symbols that remind one of the voyage of Black bodies across the Middle Passage. These writers have all produced literary or theoretical works that explore a cultural connection to Africa while stressing the ways in which Black peoples throughout the Diaspora continue to resist colonization.

<sup>10</sup> For more information on this topic of migrancy across and within the Antilles, see Bonham Richardson's "Caribbean Migratons, 1838-1985" (1989), Curdella Forbes's *From Nation to Diaspora* (2005), Frank Birbalsingh's *Frontiers of Caribbean Literature* (1996), Glyne Griffith's *Caribbean Cultural Identities* (2001), Richard Patteson's *Caribbean Passages* (1998), E. Kamau Brathwaite's *Contradictory Omens* (1974), Carmen Gillespie's "Deep Blue Sea" (2001), and Christine Prentice's "Out of the Pre-texts of Imperialism" (2000).

Benítez-Rojo and Édouard Glissant rely extensively on linking littoral spaces across the sea in *The Repeating Island* (1992) and in *The Poetics of Relation* (1990), respectively. In “The Sea is History,” Walcott uses the sea as a metaphor for the site of historical erasure. The poem’s persona responds to an interlocutor’s sarcastic question “Where are your monuments . . . your tribal memory?” (1.1-2), saying it is in the “gray vault” which “has locked them up” (1.1-4); “It’s all subtle and submarine . . .” (11.1-12.2). Brathwaite also is imaginatively drawn to what he construes as the “submarine” voices that constitute the Caribbean. In his “Conclusion” to *Contradictory Omens*, he writes that “The unity is submarine” (64), alluding to a need to redefine the “historical continuum of movement and interruption” that has shaped the creolized culture of the Caribbean archipelago (63-64). Here Brathwaite and Walcott use the sea as a trope of the complex nature of Caribbean reality, a trope for the hybridizing nature of the Caribbean, better thought of in “Littoral” and “Islands.”

Similar to my focus on Lamming’s epistemology, Brathwaite hones in on shoreline imagery as central to his hermeneutics. In the third section of “Littoral,” for example, he describes a Quaker’s approach to an island shoreline during the times of slavery. With images such as “islands resolving from water / steep steps of blue” (3:1.3-3:2.1), Brathwaite points to the fluid nature of the Caribbean archipelago and how closely linked many of the islands are by water and more significantly, by their histories due to colonization. The narrator in the poem, the Quaker slaver, travels presumably from island to island, “buying/ a new world of negroes, soil-/ing the stars” (3:9.1-3), a mission he can only accomplish by crossing the littoral landscape or seascape: “scuffed sand at my feet, / stone, roots of grass, / crushing scuttle sea shells, / claws of crabs / the soil shallow” as he exits his boat in order to step onto the land (3:4.3-3:6.1). “Islands” reads quite similarly to Walcott’s “The Sea is History.” In this poem, the Caribbean islands map “history’s hot / lies” (1.3-4), and if one were to “[to look] through a map / of the Antilles, you see how time / has trapped / its humble servants here” (2.1-4). Collectively, the islands tell a similar story: one of splintered hope, rape, hidden secrets, and the taint of slavery (3.3-19). Thus, “[t]he island’s jewels: Saba, Barbuda, . . . Antigua, will [always] remain rocks, dots, in the sky-blue frame of the map” (3.19-23). Again, Brathwaite reflects a marine, sea-topos that links or in this case, “frames” a collective consciousness across the islands based on this connection of culture, history, and experiences in the Antilles that encapsulates the crux of a unified, Caribbean identity, one that can be acknowledged not only due to a sea-topos but also as the result of attention to a writer’s use of the littoral as trope.

Benítez-Rojo and Glissant explore these marine or sea-related typologies in terms of the littoral in their theorizing about the construction of Caribbean identity and culture. Glissant, in “The Open Boat” from *Poetics of Relation*

speaks of the “One way ashore, a thousand channels” (3), alluding to unity in the hybridized make-up of Caribbean communities that is fluid and liberating in its possibilities and which he sees as emblematic of the concept of a world culture based on “relationality” (Glissant 5-9).<sup>11</sup> For Benítez-Rojo, the Caribbean is a “meta-archipelago,” and its subject are “Peoples of the Sea.” This idea conveys his notion that Caribbean culture is distinctly recognizable yet fluid; it is “polyrhythmic” and “supersyncretic” (28). His title *The Repeating Island* highlights the nature of islands and the Caribbean islands, in particular, as in-between spaces, “border” or bridge spaces for negotiating hybridity. John Lowe compares Benítez-Rojo’s thesis with Glissant’s, arguing that they “find a solution to the isolation of discrete islands through the element that unites them – that is, the sea” (57). But why focus solely on the sea with its shifting tides and moving currents? My predilection is to call attention to the beach because, although this space is aptly affected by sea-changes, it truly is a fixed, albeit fluctuating, location that transforms through high- and low-tides and shifts in seasons. Thus, I would argue that the use of coastal imagery in a Caribbean text provides a stabilizing metaphor for examining a Caribbean alterity that is grounded in notions about living in flux, how the fusion of cultural and social forms has created the heterogeneity of the region, and the ways in which artists and activists from these archipelagoes use the endemic nature of their hybridization to resist imperialism.

Some of these concepts, as explored by the aforementioned artists and theorists – fluidity; “borders”; open possibilities for exchange, creation, sublimation, and dialogue; subversion of European ideas through the rewriting of a Caribbean person’s history and destiny – are apparent in Lamming’s use of the littoral. As shown in my discussion of “The Boy and the Sea,” Lamming utilizes the littoral as trope to represent and reflect upon his exiled consciousness as a Caribbean subject. His use of littoral imagery has resonances with the work of several other Caribbean writers and theorists, who also use allusions to coasts to trope the concept of Caribbean identity, especially concepts of transformation that can suggest the implications of migrancy to and from the island homeland. Lamming addresses these issues with “The Boy and the Sea,” employing shoreline imagery and a boy’s zeal in swimming at dawn to initially express affection for country while observing the disruptive presence of colonizers. As a young poet, visiting England, he uses the poem to defy an intellectual hegemony that he is quickly becoming aware of. He better develops such an anti-hegemonic intention in *Pleasures*, where he publishes the poem. Thus, with this poem, Lamming presents his early experimentation with strand imagery, symbols and themes he will employ throughout his corpus. He returns to the use of shoreline

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<sup>11</sup> “Relationality” is my interpretative term for Glissant’s concept.

iconography in much of his fiction, continuing to examine the cultural, anti-colonial, emotional, and/or phenomenological insights he first demonstrated in this early poem.

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