



**Journal  
of the Short Story in English**  
Les Cahiers de la nouvelle

**64 | Spring 2015**  
**Special Section: The Modernist Short Story, and Varia**

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**Electronic version**

URL: <http://jsse.revues.org/1585>  
ISSN: 1969-6108

**Publisher**

Presses universitaires d'Angers

**Printed version**

Date of publication: 1 March 2015  
ISBN: 978-2-7535-5056-8  
ISSN: 0294-04442

**Electronic reference**

Andrew Armstrong, « Narrative, Itineraries, and the Negotiation of “Domestic” Space in Cherie Jones's *The Burning Bush Women* », *Journal of the Short Story in English* [Online], 64 | Spring 2015, Online since 01 March 2017, connection on 15 October 2017. URL : <http://jsse.revues.org/1585>

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# Narrative, Itineraries, and the Negotiation of “Domestic” Space in Cherie Jones’s *The Burning Bush Women*

Andrew Armstrong

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- <sup>1</sup> In his study of “spatial stories” in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Michel de Certeau, in his association of stories with the Greek term for mass transportation—*metaphorai*—states: “Every day, they [stories] traverse and organize places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories [...] Every story is a travel story—a spatial practice” (115). I am taking the Greek *metaphorai* as metaphor in English and linking it to the use of language as a vehicle to convey meanings and interpretation. The story then becomes a vehicle for creating space, especially if we point to de Certeau’s use of space as associated with “vectors of direction, velocities, and time variables [...] composed of intersections of mobile elements” (117). Thus, as de Certeau concludes, “space is a practiced place” (117). Stories are thus involved in the transformation of place into space and vice versa (de Certeau 118). If I understand de Certeau correctly then, creating stories is closely linked to mapping and crafting itineraries. Therefore stories as spatial practice are crucial to our understanding of human relations and social structures. We may view the story or narrative as one such social structure; one that “set[s] in place” (de Certeau 124) or narrates human conduct. The story functions then, within certain borders, even as it marks out its own boundaries; this is what we may call, following LeFebvre, *the production of space*. Concomitantly, the short story, my focus in this paper, in its compressed poetics, occupies an enclosed space, as Andrew Levy points out when he states that “[a]mong prose genres, it is most like an enclosed space, most concentrated in form. Among *all* genres, it is most ‘locked,’ requiring the synthetic closure of an impact-filled beginning and a dramatic conclusion” (65). Although the latter phrase is not true of all short stories, Levy’s statement may be taken to represent the general trajectory and itinerary of the short story.

- 2 A collection of short stories by Barbadian writer Cherie Jones, *The Burning Bush Women* (2004) thematizes "home" and "away"—migration, identity formation, travel and exile—as dominant themes and is structured to bear out a concern with space as a category for the exploration of gender relations, place and the social lives of Caribbean women at home and abroad. The collection demonstrates the idea of the story as vehicle or spatial practice and its counterhegemonic potential in creating other spaces for the enactment of female subjectivity. Jones's sixteen stories are written in two sections entitled "Homes" and "Aways" containing nine and seven stories respectively. In my reading of the construction of the physical and psychological spaces of the female protagonists, I prioritize spatiality over temporality and demonstrate thereby short fiction's capacity to engage in a poetics of space that emphasizes the layering of the text (text and subtext) or what may be called "'the architexture' (structure and texture)" (Gretlund 151) of the short story. The formal organization of the collection moreover, with its "homes" and "aways" emphasizes not only the plurality of both home and away but also this architexture and illustrates the importance of journeys and itineraries as central to the stories. I mention journeys and itineraries because, in a sense, reading "follows a route and unfolds in time" (Psarra 67); so that narrative is central not only to the ways in which the object is described, but also to the form of the narrative itself (Psarra 67). Thus, in the design of the short story collection, like the architectural design, we may speak of "spatial drama and heighten suspense" (Psarra 67). This is the case in the reading experience of the collection studied here; a collection that utilizes (and thematizes) rooms, streets and other "domestic" spaces. We may therefore see the short story collection as "an unfolding world that is experienced in sequence, piece by piece" (Psarra 68), and at the end, as a complete reading experience. Thus, we understand the role of such paratextual devices as the table of contents as locating each part, each compartment, and justifying the placing of the parts in a specific order (which may not however, be read in this order). Reading may therefore be construed as a "structuring experience" (Psarra 68); for stories, like buildings, "contain and influence human knowledge and culture" (Psarra 89).
- 3 It is my contention here that the architectural motifs seem more suited to short story cycles and collections than to the novel form. In the collection or cycle, each story may be viewed as a compartment of the whole, separate, yet connected. In the cycle we have the frame, the main areas, nooks, alveoli and so on: there are pre-texts, texts, intertexts, paratexts, where the writer, and perhaps the editor as well, may be seen as a kind of architect, one who designs texts. This may be what Alice Munro is pointing towards in her foreword to her own short story cycle, *The View from Castle Rock* (2006), in mentioning two "facts" about some of her short story collections. Firstly, the "making" of stories—taking material and shaping it according to the writer's purpose; secondly, the "fact" about writing stories as "exploring a life [...] but not in an austere or rigorously factual way" (x), the need to write searchingly about the self. Hence, in these brief remarks, Munro discloses two important features about the short story; one, that it can be *made*, thus employing the metaphors of architecture or the creation of space; and two, the story may be developed as a journey, following an itinerary. These may be linked, as Munro states, to "two streams" (x), which more often than not, can come together in a single collection, sometimes in a single story. The matter of design here may thus be seen as "a mental activity concerned with arranging forms, spaces, programmes, material" (Psarra 67), linked to the whole matter of formal organization. The collection's formal

organization is governed by a dominant theme and the delineation of a particular community.

- 4 The structure of Jones's *Burning Bush Women* "indicate[s] an organizing concept that acquires depth and resonance as the collection unfold[s]" (Kennedy ix). As James Nagel points out in his study of the contemporary American short story cycle, "it is this central idea of coherence, of narrative congruence, that presents greater complexity in the short-story cycle than in the novel" (106). Thus, in analyzing stories in a cycle or collection, any discussion of form is vital to an understanding of the stories both as individual stories and as parts of a collection or cycle. This is central to understanding the relationships between the various characters and the spaces they inhabit within these stories' fictive worlds. All the stories in Jones's collection stress the negotiation of place as they write the itineraries and journeys of their protagonists in their construction of the homes, houses, gardens, offices, workplaces, churches and streets, the relationships between spaces and between humans in their various activities. The collection also demonstrates the ways that space is produced through human activity.
- 5 In the stories in the section titled "Homes," the narrators articulate the various ways that home is experienced by the women while at the same time highlighting the varied and shifting registers of female subjectivity. These stories demonstrate that being at home can be sometimes an alienating and painful experience, as is the case with Josie in "Child of a Lesser God," Jane in "Stranger in my Garden," the unnamed young wife in "The Illusion of Raiment," the returning daughter in "My Mother Through a Window, Smiling," the abused fifty-year-old mother of four, Ethelene Elvira Ransom in "A Day of Deliverance," and "a mad English professor in love with a car-washing rasta man" (86) in "Luther." In the section, "Aways," the stories are connected by the central idea of finding place and creating a space for expression and productive living. The stories here dramatize the many ways that one can be "away": away from a familiar place as in "Blind;" from intimate relationships as in "The Doll;" or from oneself as in "Anonymous."
- 6 Although each story in the collection could stand on its own, each attains additional meaning through its interaction with others in the collection. The stories all revolve around the title story with its poetic, mythic, even mystical threads. In an email interview held with the author, Jones bore this latter point out when she commented that:
 

In terms of the story ["The Burning Bush Women"], I had an image in my mind of a community of women who shared a number of physical characteristics and magical or spiritual powers related to their hair ... the women in my mind were linked by flaming red, unruly hair, which was simultaneously the source and the evidence of their mystical or magical powers. (Jones 2014)
- 7 It is this idea of a community of women that is dramatized in the many thematic concerns in the collection, such as mothering/motherhood, female sexuality, madness (especially as a discursive strategy). This is reinforced further in the interview when she states her interest "not only in how we identify ourselves as women, and by our apparent collective understanding of what it means to be a woman but how we as women and as part of a wider society observe, impose and project those characteristics in and on ourselves and others" (Jones 2014). There thus seems to be a more global outlook, or more global itineraries in this collection than a concern only with the lives/issues of Caribbean women. This is illustrated in the various "aways" in the second part of the collection. In addition, all the stories problematize easy identification with specific locations or settings

thus drawing attention away from mere parochial readings to more open, productive ones.

- 8 In terms of individual stories however, "Bride" is probably the most intense of the stories and derives its force not only from its brevity, but from its style of the mother as "word-bearer" giving marital prescriptions to her daughter. Thus, there is a discursive note that derives from the mother's voice as law-giver in her litany of *do nots*. The collection fittingly ends in "Anonymous" with Dolores, a surviving Josie perhaps, breaking away from the prescriptive world, smashing the tablets, the *thou shalt nots*, of the law-givers and divesting herself of old names and old identities.
- 9 In "Child of a Lesser God," the story of Josie Melon (the almost eighteen-year-old child-woman), told in a spare, fragmented prose, the young woman is stifled (ultimately) to death by the over-protectiveness of her church-going mother. She is an outsider both in and outside of the church. Here, home is constructed as a prison-like, stultifying place, where the exterior vistas that would give the young girl a sense of freedom, are denied her, or rather, she is told to keep away from them. Josie is figured as a mere spectre, a ghost-like figure among the other inhabitants of the village. When we first "meet" her, she is a spectator to the life going on on the outside as she peeps "from between two curtains so light she don't even feel them touch her face" (11). Imprisoned in her world and in her buried self, she watches a foreign world as a mere shadow of a self, distant and separate. The young woman looking out the window construes a sense of loss, an absence of involvement, coexistence and intimacy, longing for participation in human interaction. As a child of a lesser god, Josie lives in a monotonous world of speechlessness and deafness, a world of non-sense, symbolized by the Dick and Jane basal reading pattern which both begins and ends the story:

See Josie.

See Josie watch.

See Josie watch the men.

See Josie watch the men come home.

See her watch them from between two curtains so light she don't even feel them touch her face when she peep. (Jones 11)

See Josie.

See Josie watch.

See Josie watch the men.

See Josie watch the men come home.

[...] Hear her singing.

A whispered melody as soft as the wind through a window.

A little song of hope and freedom. (19)

- 10 This monotonous pattern at both beginning and ending of the story depicts a world in which Josie is trapped—trapped within a cycle of nursery images and non-sense. But these repetitive patterns also act as a framing device for the story, and delineate a world of entrapment, that smothers the young woman to death. The invitation to "[s]ee Josie" and "see Josie watch" encapsulates the idea of framing as involving both being observed and observing. Thus as Kim Dovey observes "'Framing' implies both the construction of a world and of a way of seeing ourselves in it—at once picture and mirror" (1). Here, the ambiguities of framing are demonstrated. And as Dovey continues: "The ambiguities of 'framing' reflect those [power relations] of the nexus between place and practices of power" (1). Josie looks out on the world of the men and the other young women, some of whom are carrying their young babies in their arms. In a real sense, she internalizes this "outside," bringing it into the interior. But Josie is literally *infans*, speechless and without

her own concept of the world. She lives, as the Dick and Jane readings are meant to convey, in a pre-verbal world of childish observation, with her mother functioning as word-bearer,<sup>1</sup> the bringer of language, and law, and ultimately in the mother's excessive use of her power. This theme is also demonstrated in "Bride" and to a lesser extent, "My Mother Through a Window, Smiling." As Piera Aulagnier (1975) points out, "every subject is born into a 'speaking space'" (71) which is designed to "offer the I a habitat suitable for its needs" (71). Within her habitat, Josie is denied subjecthood, the opportunity to speak. She functions as object throughout the story; never taking on the subject position. Even while at the window "seeing," she does so as object and objectified. Thus, the home, the physical house, is not the space in which Josie "can come about" (Aulagnier 73) or realize her self-actualization; instead, she is stifled.

- 11 In "Child of a Lesser God," the Dick and Jane primer also functions as a kind of master narrative that pre-scripts the life narrative of Josie. The ideological script of this master narrative is seen in Jones's collection in the other "girlhood" stories, "Stranger in my Garden" in the Carol Sanders's *Every Girl's Garden* book and in the mother's prescriptive advice to her daughter on her wedding day in "Bride" where the mother in both cases functions as "word-bearer" (Aulagnier 72). The mother in "Child of a Lesser God," instead of producing an intimate, "felicitous" space within the home, according to Gaston Bachelard, instead, through the over-protective policing of her daughter creates or produces a carceral, dangerous space that ultimately results in death. In "Child of a Lesser God," home is reduced to the prison-like space of the "child," linked to an oppressive religion and domestic culture, where the mother discourages any meaningful interaction with the outside. In this childish world there is no real room for growth unless the young woman breaks out of it. In this enclosed world Josie is a kind of erased figure, whose tangible presence is constantly being ghosted. Hence, we notice that windows and curtains are effective images in the narrative; the window becomes the place of the specular (and the spectral), of watching and being watched, yet not participating. In the same way that the Dick and Jane readings frame the story, the small space of the window frames the body and person of Josie. Thus framed, Josie is partially represented; presented in miniature. Here, her existence or exist-stance (that sense of having being within a space conceived as either spiritual or physical) is minimized by the law of the mother. When Josie finally does break out of her confinement, the price for doing so is her life. She becomes pregnant by Primus Parris, the young unicycle rider who "wore his tight, stonewashed jeans [and] blue polyester shirt starched and pressed and open almost to his waist" (12), and brings disgrace to her strict, church-going mother, and a sense of gratification to the other church women: "When the truth about Josie came out with her belly, the good married women of the community, whose cotton girdles guarded their virtue, felt a guilty gratification. Her mother had rejected the longings of their brothers and uncles (and husbands)—without even a twist of her tongue to show a little 'perhaps'" (17). The reaction of Mary Melon, Josie's mother, to the revelation of her daughter's pregnancy is also the moment of the story's disclosure and climax:

It was a rainy Lenten Friday. [...] at some point during the service Miss Melon recognized that Josie was gone; that she left before the end of the sermon, eyes furtively checking each pew on her way out to try to locate her daughter [...] it was only when she reached her gate and saw her daughter kissing a man, whose feet pedaled back and forth on a unicycle to keep him at her lips, that she realized that there was a peculiar rosiness about her daughter's cheeks, a familiar roundness about her belly that had nothing to do with spiritual rapture. (18)

- 12 This revelation of the young girl's pregnancy, ironically on a Good Friday, leads to the death of both mother and daughter in mysterious circumstances: "The two bedrooms were charred, the bodies burnt beyond recognition. The rest of the house was virtually untouched" (19). But we notice a glimmer of hope in the story's parting image, where, in the closing basal reading, the verb changes from "see" to "hear" (19). Josie has now become the spectre or spirit that she was portrayed as in the earlier part of the story. We are invited now to "hear her singing. A whispered melody [...] a little song of hope and freedom" (19). The change from the ocular to the aural may be seen as one from distance/separation to interrelation, coexistence, even intimacy. This of course, underscores the role that the senses play in the quest for freedom.
- 13 This theme of the quest for freedom for the growing young woman is repeated in the next story "Stranger in My Garden" where two leitmotifs are employed to useful effect to dramatize the narrative's concerns: the garden and the book. The garden functions in this story positively as a symbol of the outside, exterior space; a world of creativeness and education. But there is another symbol of education in this story; the book—"Every Girl's Garden by Carol Sanders" (20); a book of rules or guidelines for the young teen's behavior—another master narrative, where Carol Sanders functions as a word-bearer in the sense given above. Unlike Josie however, Jane, the protagonist and narrative voice of this story is no mere elusive shadow, but a vivid and compelling character who is fully in control of her retrospective narrative (the story is actually told in retrospect by an adult voice looking back on the year she turned thirteen). Unlike Josie also, the thirteen-year-old Jane participates in the story as both narrator and principal character. She has the positive guidance of Chasseyman, the unconventional mother figure to move her away from the entrapment of Carol Sander's prescriptive, hegemonic text, the cool indifference of her mother, and the brokenness in her home. For example, Jane notices that Chasseyman does not observe Carol's "four cardinal rules of make-up for girls" (22) and she does not wear a bra. Jane's response to the latter observation is: "My mother says no decent woman should be without a bra, even under lots of clothes" (23). Jones constantly dramatizes the ways that women's/girls' behavior is circumscribed and policed by the many laws/texts of these prohibitive spaces; Jane lives in a world of "Carol says" or "my mother says" (22, 23). This is why stories like "Luther," "Warress," "The Burning Bush Women" and "Anonymous" which either foreground varied forms of madness as a theme and structuring device or use a mythical prose, are so important to the construction of female resistance and the negotiation of space in this collection. Jones here employs the architectural images of "inside" and "outside" to great effect in underscoring the importance of space and its effect on human relationships. *Inside* the house, the young Jane is confronted by the fragmenting world of her parent's relationship; the once happy household is falling apart and the young woman, Jane, is caught in the dangerous middle. However, on the *outside*, in the garden, where she encounters Chasseyman, she is in a place of freedom with the potential to grow.
- 14 In "Stranger in My Garden," "the white psychology major" (26), English born mother, of the young narrator, Jane, decides to leave her West Indian doctor husband, the once "dashing young black medical student" (26) in this small Caribbean island and return home to England, ostensibly to finish her studies, but in reality to return to a life with which she is more comfortable. Reflecting on life with her mother and father before the break-up, Jane remembers a world in which she felt "cocooned in the warm spot they created for me" (25), and cannot understand why her mother needs to leave her: "In



those times it never occurred to me that my mother was anything but happy just being what she was" (26). However, the mother's abandoning of the young girl does not mean the end of the mothering process for Jane; from then on Chasseymen, the young woman who comes to tend the garden among other things, plays the role of mother. In the absence of the birth mother, Chasseymen, the young woman who does not look or act like a "woman," mothers Jane until Jane leaves to join her mother in England. Jones thus investigates the many aspects of mothering, and the various ways, in Caribbean society, that women have mothered (and fathered) their children. In this story, as in "My Mother Through a Window, Smiling," "Blind," "The Undoing," and "The Burning Bush Women," Jones dramatizes the various attitudes to mothering (and motherhood) by constructing mothers and daughters who are less than perfect in their relationships with each other. She refuses to deify motherhood and mothering as the essential features of what it means to be a woman and in so doing refuses to construct the house, the domestic sphere, or any other designated *feminine* or feminized space as the determining place for the exercise of female subjectivity.

- 15 In the construction of place in "My Mother through a Window, Smiling" the collection dramatizes, through an ironic mode, the house as "the focal point of [the] narrative in order to comment on gendered social relations and on relations between humans and landscapes" (Castor 139). The "failed" daughter returning from study abroad, where she went to study "Voice ... training" (67), is met, on her approach to the house, by a scene of unfamiliarity: "The fallen branches of every tree I have watched grow for the first eighteen years of my life die at my feet as I walk my baby home" (64). The familiar world of her childhood is made strange by the "murder of the garden" (67). Within the story's spatial poetics the cutting of the trees and shrubs, the altering of the familiar landscape, symbolizes the severing of roots, perhaps even routes, for the return "home" is to a non-place, a place of unbelonging. Added to this is the hostile reception of the mother, whose first words to her returning daughter (an aside from the telephone conversation she is carrying on at the time of the arrival) are: "Well, I see you are not dead" (65); making the title an ironic one. For within the story's narrative itinerary, the daughter's return home is really to an "away"—away from the comfort and welcome of a "smiling" home. Home is after all, in the LeFebvrian sense, a *produced space*, it must be *made*.
- 16 But there is another disturbing aspect in the story of the returning daughter—that of the mother's demeaning narrative that seeks to make the daughter's stay abroad irrelevant. This is best dramatized in the nonsense song that the mother sings to her grandson in an attempt to put him to sleep:
- Big rat had a spree  
L'il rat went to see  
Big rat take up l'il rat  
And throw him in the sea ... (66)
- 17 What we have here in the mother's nonsense song is an example of symbolic demeaning where we have less the loss of meaning than the occlusion of obvious meaning or interpretation. The mother's song, although on the surface a nonsense song sung to her grandson, can be read as a not too subtle jibe at her daughter's failure in returning "home" with a baby boy instead of the degree she went to pursue. But in a story that foregrounds irony as its chief mode of narrativity, the song may function to demonstrate, in the Derridean sense, the "tremors, effects and ruptures well beyond social intent and recognition" (Colebrook 123). In the use of dramatic irony within the story, the daughter, while she can find an image for "Big Rat"—"My mother says Big Rat like it is someone



that she knows. It could be a neighbor. A friend. It could be she herself" (66)—cannot impute meaning to the mother's use of L'il Rat: "[N]o image presents itself for L'il Rat" (66). However, when the reader links this part of the short story to a later section where the mother tells her daughter: "Your old friend Mellie has gone to Cuba ... on scholarship to study Doctor-work" (68), the song's possible meaning may be seen. For to this statement the daughter imputes the meaning: "Loosely translated it would read something like, 'Mellie is making something of her life and learning something people can use'" (68). Thus, while the daughter cannot recognize the meaning of the song, the reader can, however, link the song to the mother's attitude towards her failed daughter. Within the mother's demeaning narrative it is not too far a stretch of the imagination to see the daughter's failed academic sojourn overseas as "L'il rat" being present at "Big rat ... spree."

- 18 While the predominant literary mode of this collection is realism, stressing the importance of the urgency in telling stories easily accessible to their readers, there is some "magical" prose that emphasizes Jones's stylistic/artistic range. While in her realist stories Jones's portrayal of women as mothers is largely negative, in her magical writing, the image of the mother is more positive. As Amy Levin says on mothering and the metaphor of maternity, "this touch of the supernatural indicates that the [author's] aesthetic interests are not limited to depicting the 'depressing' nature" (Levin 87) of life for these women. But why are the women more positively represented in the non-realist narratives than in the realist ones? One possible answer could be that Jones wishes to link mothering to a more indigenous frame of reference that has its roots/routes in an African cultural past. But even these stories are shot through with realist strands that ground them referentially within an identifiable locale with believable characters. Moreover, in all the stories studied here the various female voices combine to produce a collective enunciation of women's place, space and subjectivities. By this I mean that stories such as "Warress" and "The Burning Bush Women" dramatize recognizable issues which have affected Caribbean women in their struggles for recognition and autonomy within their societies: issues such as respect in the home and workplace, freedom of self-expression, and reproductive rights among others.
- 19 In the magical prose of both "Warress" and "The Burning Bush Women" Jones plumbs the depths of Caribbean oral and hybrid storytelling traditions to once again dramatize the struggle of women against the norms of patriarchy and social violence, whether physical, psychological or linguistic. It is here that we encounter what Kamau Brathwaite, in his introduction to the collection calls "mathemagical" prose—an "ambush" (vi) against the ways that we think about women and writing. In these stories, Jones explores the "true" magical zones of Caribbean textuality. In "Warress" the refrain "My Nanan says" underscores not only the oral nature of the story but also its deep mythological, mythic and fabulist roots/routes. The story is both an act of telling and of recitation - reciting, re-siting; as the narrative voices place the story elsewhere (or away), someplace outside of the conventional frame of storytelling—as Jones foregrounds the alternative knowledge of the subterranean roots/routes of her ancestry:
- For an inattentive lover use two drops of rose oil and one of the sap of love grass slow-cooked over a red candle with three strands of your lover's hair and a special prayer. For an inattentive parent there is no cure. (55)
- To make a loved one return to you, draw their face in the dust, then take the dust home and put it in a jar facing East. After three days take the jar to a four-cross

junction and face West and call the person's name and turn around and throw the dust over your left shoulder. (60)

- 20 In both "Warress" and "The Burning Bush Women," Jones's magical narratives move towards a reclaiming of this alternative knowledge—located in the folklore and folk rhythms of the community. In these stories, and in the collection as a whole, this re-appropriation of alternative knowledge stresses the need on the part of these women to remember and reclaim their "ancient properties" (Levin 87). We see this also in the story of Dolores in the final story in the collection, "Anonymous," where Jones embraces the discourse of madness to interrogate the facile/docile subjectivity of women as merely objects of male fantasies. As Cathy Helen Wardle posits, "madness serves as a powerful metaphor for the symptoms or the result of the exclusion of chaos and of the universalisation of logos; it is a refusal to accept the identity that the logarchy of our culture assigns to us" (41). But instead of reading madness as strictly limited to the feminine, it should be read rather as "a chaotic discourse, a protest against the rigid structures of logos, a voice for the *amourante* and those who bear the burden of chaos" (44). In *Woman Version: Theoretical Approaches to West Indian Fiction by Women*, Evelyn O'Callaghan, citing Marie-Denise Shelton, points out that "this condition [of madness] is a result of the characters' inability to find a place in their societies" (37). Quoting directly from Shelton, she highlights "the contradictions and tensions characteristic of feminine existence in the Caribbean" (qtd. in O'Callaghan 37). While not glorifying or exceptionalizing madness as an existential condition, we may see it in fiction as a powerful trope of creativity, flexibility and freedom.
- 21 In "Anonymous," for example, Dolores sheds the burden of her former selves in an act of "decolonization" to finally become Mapusa Tiye, "Queen of the Sahara Nomad Tiyes of the tribe of Pasi-Pasi [...] of the broad forehead and the tiny lower lip, the big bones and feet, child of Africa and sister of the quiet left hand, proud mother of modern civilization" (158). In a story of shifting narrative perspectives, oscillating between first and third person points of view, our protagonist moves from Isabelle, the stripper with the trademark "feather bikini" who "went to war every night on top of a bar table in her painted mask and a wide red smile" (154) to Dolores, the fat, docile typist, the "privately weepy bonafide do-gooder of the self-deprecating variety. Miss frumpy-full-of-ordinary-days" (152), and finally to the "mad," assertive and independent Mapusa. Mapusa, the chaotic one, disrupts the order of the repressive logarchy that had earlier included Isabelle as exotic object and Dolores as supine thing (thus excluding even as it included).
- 22 In fact, in "Anonymous" and the other story that foregrounds madness, "Luther," through her characterization of her two protagonists, Jones's narrative may perhaps be seen as embracing the Celtic notion of "awayness" in relation to the self. For the Irish, the person who is "away" is, as Jane Urquhart points out, "someone who has been touched by the supernatural world" and cannot come back (qtd. in Letissier 10). This is the creation of another space—a larger space caused by the break out of a restricted world. Here, break is closely linked to the whole business of psychic break/down experienced by both Dolores and the unnamed "mad English professor in love with a car-washing rasta man" (86), within their male-centred, male-dominated worlds. Jones constructs many of her women and girls in dangerous, stifling, at times deathly, spaces to show not only a social

reality, but also the need for newer, wider, more open spaces for the exercise of female subjectivity—a place where these women can “come about.”

- 23 According to Amy Levin on Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*, there is a valuing of independence for women “rather than their being controlled by men” (87). This is important in the context of this paper when we remember that, even when headed by women, the house rules are decidedly patriarchal and aimed at maintaining control over the female body; creating a logarchy that produces the abusive behavior of Carson in “A Day of Deliverance,” Harry, the child molester in “The Undoing,” the uncaring father in “The Doll” and the indifferent husband Arlen in “The Promised Land.” In these stories, the women’s struggle for self-repossession, which sometimes leads to death as in “The Undoing,” means confronting or escaping the confining and oppressive logos of the father as figure of authority. This latter observation is dramatized in Odetta’s story in “The Promised Land,” where Odetta, a fifty something year old wife and mother of six sneaks away from her husband to have an abortion. This valuing of women’s independence is at the root of all the stories in Jones’s collection. Hence, as Levin points out, there is a privileging of women’s solidarity as crucial to the building and strengthening of families as a key to the survival of women and their families. The finest example of this is of course the title story where Jones constructs a community of women around the image of the red hair that grounds them not only within community but also to a genealogy that stretches back to an ancient past. It is not fortuitous either, that in Jones’s stories, her women are all represented within families and structures that necessitate negotiation and decision making.
- 24 It is this matter of negotiation that draws attention to the idea of the itinerary or agenda as a plan or layout for a journey, be it physical or psychological. Thus, I return in my conclusion to the idea of the story as a spatial practice; especially in the ways that Jones’s collection de-emphasizes the notion of both “home” and “away” as essential physical locations, and instead locates both “home” and “away” within a paradoxical space that is both limiting and liberating, and at times, more of one than the other. In this, the need and ability to tell stories is paramount.

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## NOTES

1. As Aulagnier states, the term word-bearer "defines the function given to the mother's discourse in the structuring of the psyche" (71).

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## ABSTRACTS

Le recueil de nouvelles publiées par l'écrivaine barbadienne Cherie Jones, *The Burning Bush Women* (2004), donne à l'« ici » et l'« ailleurs » – migration, formation identitaire, voyage et exil – une place dominante. Le volume est structuré de sorte à faire de l'espace une catégorie pour explorer les relations entre les genres, les lieux et la vie sociale des femmes caribéennes chez elles et à l'étranger. Dans ce recueil, le récit est un véhicule ou une pratique spatiale et son potentiel contre-hégémonique crée d'autres espaces pour que se révèle la subjectivité féminine. Dans cette lecture de la construction des espaces physiques et psychologiques des protagonistes féminins, l'accent est placé en priorité sur la spatialité plutôt que sur la temporalité pour souligner la capacité de la fiction brève à élaborer une poétique de l'espace à partir de l'articulation du texte (texte et sous-texte) ou ce qui peut être appelé « l'architexture (structure et texture) » (Gretlund 151) de la nouvelle. De plus, l'organisation formelle du recueil avec ses « ici » et « ailleurs » insiste non seulement sur la pluralité de l'ici et de l'ailleurs mais aussi sur l'architexture, démontrant l'importance des voyages et des itinéraires dans les récits.

## AUTHORS

### ANDREW ARMSTRONG

Andrew Armstrong is a lecturer in literatures in English at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, Barbados. His PhD research and thesis were devoted to contemporary African Literature and Film (1980s to 2000). His research interests include the contemporary African novel; Black Atlanticism; the history of the novel and the Caribbean short story. He may be reached at [andrew.armstrong@cavehill.uwi.edu](mailto:andrew.armstrong@cavehill.uwi.edu), or [ahpa44@hotmail.com](mailto:ahpa44@hotmail.com).