Kathleen Gyssels and Bénédicte Ledent, eds., *The Caribbean Writer as Warrior of the Imaginary/L'écrivain caribéen, guerrier de l'imaginaire*

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Kathleen Gyssels and Bénédicte Ledent, eds. *The Caribbean Writer as Warrior of the Imaginary/L'écrivain caribéen, guerrier de l'imaginaire*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, (Cross Cultures Series), 2008. 487 p. ISBN (hb): 9789042025530. € 100 / US\$ 135

- 1 This handsome bilingual volume represents an admirable project: to bridge the gap between readers of francophone and anglophone Caribbean writing by including essays on both literatures, and by offering other cross-cultural reflections on the region. It is imbued with admiration for the work of Édouard Glissant and Patrick Chamoiseau, and takes its title from Chamoiseau's celebrated account of the roles of the Caribbean writer in terms of the "word scratcher," the "surveyor of urban space" and the "warrior of the imaginary" (all translations from the French are my own). Kathleen Gyssels' French-language introduction succinctly outlines this "conceptual tripod" (xii), and suggests why the idea of the "warrior" should be the keynote for this volume: it is a term that suggests the combative and innovative nature of the Caribbean artist, "originating from vulnerable nations, small-scale cultures, societies threatened by unstable regimes" (xvi). What her introduction suggests less clearly is how this book will combat what Glissant called the balkanisation of a divided Caribbean, and promote "the Rhizome of the archipelago" (xvii).
- 2 The volume proper opens with creative work by some stellar names: haunting prose from the novelist, poet and essayist Daniel Maximin, an extract from Robert Antoni's

Carnival, a potent brief reflection by Wilson Harris on time and timelessness in fiction, and Caryl Phillips' moving account of his experience of 9/11 and its aftermath. Though Phillips sees the "targeting" of immigrants as a betrayal of what he admires about the US, the "new" people [who] bring with them new narratives" (45), he ends on a hopeful note, believing that the poetry of America will prevail over its emperors (46).

- 3 The body of the book contains twenty-five fine essays, eleven in French and fourteen in English. Most of them cover the work of established and major writers like Patrick Chamoiseau and Édouard Glissant, Daniel Maximin, Dionne Brand, Edwidge Danticat, Wilson Harris, Jamaica Kincaid, Caryl Phillips and Derek Walcott. But there are also essays that deal with less familiar figures, or take unusual angles of approach. Abdennebi Ben Beya contributes an eloquent manifesto on a "Global Ethic" (235-48) that blends the ideas of Fanon and Glissant with those of their French intellectual allies Foucault and Deleuze, as well as the ideas of Levinas on otherness and solidarity. His inspiring piece closes with "an ethical call for unconditional recognition and solidarity" and cites the words of Fanon: "All I wanted was to be a man among other men" (246). Christiane Pantke writes on the ideological and cultural links between the Caribbean and Brazilian musicians such as Gilberto Gil, and the Jamaican-born poet Mutabaruka collaborates with Werner Zips to write a dramatic account of his visit to Ghana to perform at the third Panafest in 1997, where he urged his Ghanaian audience to "Take this white Jesus off your wall!" (439).
- 4 The idea of Caribbean connections, and of breaking down habitual boundaries, runs through many of the essays, and gives the book its theme. It is there, for example, in Léon-François Hoffman's account of the way Haitian writers of fiction have represented the Dominican Republic (345-57), including George Apollon's 1997 novel *Amour, déchéance et redemption*, in which Hoffman locates "[the] only laudatory appreciation of the Dominican Republic that I have discovered" (350). The work of Glissant and Chamoiseau, cited in almost every article, provides another rich vein of cross-reference. It is notable however, that almost all the essays on single authors follow the linguistic divide: the essays in English explore anglophone writers, while francophone critics examine texts originally written in French. There are fewer cross-linguistic comparisons than one might have expected, though Michiel Van Kempen contributes a witty essay that links his extensive knowledge of the literature of Suriname with a wide range of reference to Caribbean literature and anxieties about "Caribbean authenticity" (172). Pilar Cuder-Domínguez also takes a comparative approach; her subject is the representation of Trujillo's Dominican Republic in novels by the Dominican-American Julia Alvarez, the Haitian-American Edwidge Danticat, and the Peruvian-Spanish Mario Vargas Llosa. Kathie Birat has written interestingly elsewhere on Caryl Phillips. Here she goes to the heart of his novels through their emphasis on "voice," contrasting them with the fictions of Chamoiseau and Confiant, where "the creative possibilities of creole languages create a bridge between past and present and [. . . link] the world of the reader to the Universe of the Caribbean" (304). Birat suggests that it is difficult for Phillips's characters to find such a "voice." This is an interesting idea – one that certainly applies to Othello in *The Nature of Blood*, but less obviously to Joyce in *Crossing the River*. However, the extended theoretical context in Birat's essay leaves relatively little space for the close readings that would test out her argument.

- 5 This is an important collection, notable for its distinctive readings of particular texts, but also for its breadth and ambition in taking on the geographical, linguistic and formal diversity of Caribbean writing in the light of Chamoiseau's ideas.
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Christopher RINGROSE is Research Fellow in English at the University of Northampton. He is co-editor of the *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* and Contemporary Literature Editor of the *Routledge Annotated Bibliography of English Studies*. Recent publications include essays on Kazuo Ishiguro, Ben Okri, children's literature, and New Historicism.