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### Lucy Evans, *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives*

Peepal Tree Press, 2011

Marie-Annick Montout

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## REFERENCES

Lucy Evans, *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives*, Peepal Tree Press, 2011, 356 pp

- 1 Published in 2011 by Peepal Tree Press, Ltd, *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives* is edited by Lucy Evans, who lectures at the University of Leicester, and co-edited by Professor Emeritus Marc Wyatt of the University of the West Indies and Emma Smith who works in the editorial department at Peepal Tree Press Ltd, Leeds.
- 2 The book is a collection of twenty critical essays by British academic contributors for the most part, three essays being by American academics, and two by a West Indian academic and a Caribbean writer respectively. Because the essays are overwhelmingly British, the reader sometimes feels that the interpretative lens are rather Eurocentric in tone.
- 3 The twenty essays are organized in five parts: Publishing Histories, Socio-Political Contexts, Modernity and Modernism, Folktales and Oral Traditions, and Generic Boundaries and Transgressions. While they harness different perspectives on Caribbean short stories, they fail to reach the central argument with which overlaps might have been avoided. One also regrets the lack of background information here and there. Information about the Beacon Group for instance would prove necessary for researchers not quite conversant in Caribbean studies to fully grasp and assess Raymond Ramcharitar's contention.
- 4 This being said, *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives* compares in merits with other scholarly books such as *The Routledge Reader in Caribbean Literature* insofar as it

brings lesser-known but creative writers to the fore, and targets the subject of Caribbean Literature through multiple angles.

- 5 In her foreword, Emma Smith announces that the book is a response to the observation that there was an extraordinary rich heritage of short-story writing from the Caribbean and its diaspora. The essays point to a very rich heritage indeed. As Lucy Evans puts it in her introduction, “the formation of a literary culture based in the Caribbean region in the early to mid-twentieth century is crucial to a full appreciation not only of Caribbean short-story writing, but of Caribbean literary and cultural production more generally”. The book under review deals extensively with the formation of such culture. But Lucy Evans’s warning that “there are continuities and differences in the way the short story form has been employed by Caribbean writers through time” which the essays “illuminate [...] giving readers a broad sense of the genre’s evolution” might be discussed. *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives* does not really focus on the genre proper; neither does it focus on a particular mode of writing short stories which would be definitely Caribbean. It focuses on short stories with a Caribbean background, and on short-story writers who happen to be Caribbean, and so the evolutionary path to which Lucy Evans alludes to is the evolutionary path followed by short-story writers whether Caribbean or not.

## Part 1, Publishing Histories

- 6 Alison Donnell’s comprehensive essay “Heard but not Seen: Women’s short stories and the BBC’s *Caribbean Voices* programme” provides a full, invaluable analysis of the reasons why the programme did not serve women writers’ rights as fairly as it did men writers’. Contrary to men, many women writers of the time remain unknown to date. Alison Donnell does them justice by paying tribute to works that “present an archive from which Caribbean literary history still has much to learn.” (41).
- 7 In the following essay, “The Lesser Names Beneath the Peaks: Jamaican short story fiction and its contexts, 1938-1950”, Suzanne Scafe presents writers who made distinguished, innovative steps towards a national aesthetic freed from colonial bondage and marked by the use of the Jamaican vernacular. The reader’s curiosity is aroused by names not often quoted, whether in anthologies or in other academic books. This essay resonates with others in the collection also grounded on the use of the vernacular.
- 8 The perspective offered by Trinidadian poet, fiction writer and cultural critic Raymond Ramcharitar counterpoints Suzanne Scafe’s. Raymond Ramcharitar contends that “staples of the colonial imaginary [...] were *reproduced* rather than *repudiated* in the Beacon’s fiction”. Placed just after Scafe’s essay, Ramcharitar’s essay sheds light on the editors’ attempt to delineate the jagged frame of Caribbean short story production.
- 9 Patricia Catoara’s essay “Political and Market Forces in the Cuban Short Story” spans the twentieth-century history of Cuban short-story writing. Her essay has much to do with the historical approach, and could have appeared in the next chapter devoted to socio-political contexts.

## Part 2, Socio-political Contexts

- 10 As the title does not straightforwardly suggest, each of the three essays under it provides insight into particular Caribbean short-story writers.
- 11 Abigail Ward focuses on Indian-Trinidadian writer Ismith Khan. In “Tracing significant footsteps: Ismith Khan and the Indian-Caribbean Short Story”, she explores the racial contours which shape and inform the writer’s stories.
- 12 Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw attends to “The temporal aesthetic in the short fiction of Yanick Lahens and Edwidge Danticat.” After four pages of general considerations on short-story writing and on the genre as a way of penetrating into the daily fabric of life, Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw comes to the aim of her essay and convincingly comments on Lahens’s “Le désastre banal” as the character Mirna’s failed attempt to reverse the history of Haiti’s American conquest. From Lahens’s story she moves on to Danticat’s “Seven”, laying the emphasis on the protagonists’ distance due to their time-long separation. She ends her essay by drawing two parallels between the two stories under study which are unequal in their convincing power. The aesthetical argument of characters playing the dramatic roles assigned to them by Haitian collective history is much more forceful than the political argument which appears a little far-fetched.
- 13 “The Shorter Form(s) of the Game: Cricket, Childhood and the Caribbean Short Story” is Claire Westall’s enlightening essay on six short stories by Michael Anthony, Paul Keens-Douglas, Earl McKenzie, Ismith Khan, Raywat Deonandan, and Elahi Baksh respectively in which cricket plays a key re-remembering part in the young heroes’ identity constructions.

## Part 3, Modernity and Modernisms

- 14 This part brings together four essays dealing with the influence of global trends on Caribbean literature.
- 15 Dave Gunning tries to appraise “Claude McKay, Eric Walrond and the Locations of Black Internationalism”. One fruitful way of reading Dave Gunning’s essay is to view McKay’s and Walrond’s short fiction as representing a “hemispheric conception of the modern Americas” (quote from Michelle Stephens, 148).
- 16 James Procter’s essay “To See Ourselves As Others See Us!”: Seepersad Naipaul, Modernity and the Rise of the Trinidadian Short Story” is in defense of Seepersad Naipaul’s modernity. James Procter compares two collections of short stories by the author: *Gurudeva and Other Indian Tales* published in 1943 and *The Adventures of Gurudeva* published posthumously in 1976 to show that Seepersad Naipaul is preoccupied with the intrusion of modernity into Indian Trinidadian communal life.
- 17 The essay on Jean Rhys “‘I Cut it and Cut It’: Jean Rhys’s Short Short Fiction” by Joanna Johnson tackles Jean Rhys’s short fiction with the contention that it is definitely modernist in form.
- 18 Jak Peake’s essay “Remapping the Trinidadian Short Story: Local, American and Global Relations in the Short Fiction of Earl Lovelace and Laurence Scott” painstakingly tries to drive home the idea that the fictional work of these two Trinidadian authors are modern insofar as they go against the grain. Strangely enough the three main angles

through which Jak Peake purports to make his point are announced in the middle of his first part “Remapping the local and the singular”: “the short story and novel are related forms”; “the short story need not be entirely centred upon singular or closed events”; “an open-ended continuum of effects may be more apt in describing the Caribbean and, particularly, the Trinidadian short story.” (188). So far so good, but how do these assessments relate to the second part of his essay “Remapping America”?

## Part 4, Folktales and Oral Traditions

- 19 This is undoubtedly the least unexpected title in a book dealing with Caribbean literature. However the essays collected in it are quite lively in style and luminous in content. They form a whole with the exception of the fourth and last one.
- 20 In “‘And Always, Anancy Changes’: an Exploration of Andrew Salkey’s Anancy Stories”, Emily Zobel Marshall deals with canonical writer Andrew Salkey whose fiction she approaches through the angle of Anancy stories.
- 21 Gina Wisker examines young Caribbean Canadian writer Nalo Hopkinson’s speculative stories which dip into oral tradition whether Caribbean or European.
- 22 Patricia Murray writes about “The Marvellous and the Real” atmosphere in Pauline Melville’s *The Migration of Ghosts*.
- 23 Sandra Courtman addresses Caribbean short stories which cross mental and cultural borders, as well as cultural ways of reading literature. Her essay is convincingly defended, but it appears somewhat out-of-place in a part devoted to folktales and oral traditions. Interestingly enough, Lucy Evans mistakenly locates Sandra Courtman’s essay in the second part of the collection.

## Part 5, Generic Boundaries and Transgressions

- 24 The essays found in this part could have been placed elsewhere in the book. However by shedding full light on border crossings they draw the reader’s attention to a key characteristic of Caribbean literature.
- 25 Shirley Chew is an academic critic Olive Senior knows well and values. The discussion of Olive Senior’s short story “Ballad” falls neatly within the scope of generic boundaries and transgressions, but the section on Olive Senior’s poems is more loosely related although as short forms poems do bear resemblances to short stories.
- 26 In her essay about V.S. Naipaul’s *A Way in the World*, Lucy Evans draws heavily on the metaphor of chain linking to show how the semi-autobiographical, semi-historical, and fictional elements meet in the nine narratives which compose V.S. Naipaul’s book. Again, one is closer to short form narratives than to short stories.
- 27 Andrew H. Armstrong’s essay “Liminality and the poetics of space in Mark McWatt’s *Suspended Sentences* and Kwame Dawes’s *A Place to Hide*” assesses the two authors’ cycles of short stories and comes to the conclusion that the boundary between short story and novel becomes artificial for these two books.
- 28 Basing her critical approach of Kamau Brathwaite on *Dreamstories* and its porous frontiers between prose and poetry, languages past and present, Elaine Savoy

concludes that Kamau Brathwaite re-invents “the ancient art of storytelling in postmodern style.” (325)

- 29 Being a collection of essays, *The Caribbean Short Story: Critical Perspectives* suffers to a certain extent from a lack of comprehensive structure. The collection, however, offers interesting pathways into Caribbean literary history and into innovative, creative ways of writing literature.
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## AUTHORS

### MARIE-ANNICK MONTOUT

Marie-Annick Montout teaches at the English Department of the Université d'Angers, France