

**2019 CONFERENCE OF THE AUSTRALIAN
ASSOCIATION FOR CARIBBEAN STUDIES (AACS)
THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY,**

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The Australian Association for Caribbean Studies (AACS) held its thirteenth biennial conference in Sydney from 7 – 9 February 2019. It was hosted by the University of Western Sydney (UWS), and was organised under the leadership of the current President, Dr. Ben Etherington of UWS. Dr. Etherington thanked the members of his team for their valuable work in helping to organise the many aspects of the conference: Sienna Brown, Dashiell Moore, Kit Candlin, and Mike Griffiths. He also thanked the outgoing leaders of the AACS for their support, Dr. Laurence Brown and Dr. Consuelo Martinez-Reyes, academics at the Australian National University and Macquarie University, respectively, who had been elected as co-presidents at the 2017 AACS conference in Canberra.

At the 2019 AACS conference, 60 papers were offered, and papers were presented over three days. Gatherings over dinner each evening were memorable for the joyful bringing together of people passionate about Caribbean studies.

Conference website: <http://www.formsofworldliterature.com/caribbean-meridians/>

Conference Program: [Download the AACS 2019 Program.](#)

About the AACS and its relevance to the study of Education

The AACS was founded in Brisbane in 1995, under the leadership of literature specialist Professor Helen Tiffin of the University of Queensland, as an interdisciplinary group of academics, postgraduate students, and others interested in the Caribbean region. The first conference took place in Brisbane in

1995, and since then it has been held biennially at universities around Australia. The biennial conference, and the annual AACS newsletter, together constitute an important platform for members and friends of the society to share their research and knowledge about Caribbean culture.

The AACS does not focus on the field of Education as a discipline, but its conferences are highly relevant to Education specialists who wish to analyse education as one of the dimensions of a complex society. The AACS conferences promote the study of Caribbean society in an interdisciplinary forum. Specialist papers consider the conference theme in their own discipline, presenting research or creative work side by side, across fields. It has turned out that over the years, by far the most papers have been offered in the field of Caribbean literature. Literary analysis at these conferences is mind-opening for educators seeking to understand how the ‘emic’ or interior nature of a society relates to the ‘etic’ framework that shapes it. Besides literature, the conference papers, in various years, address themes from history, geography, the natural sciences, the social sciences, education, politics, architecture, law, poetry, art, drama, dance, music and film – all contributing to a holistic understanding of the multidimensional cultures of the Caribbean.

Another reason why the AACS is relevant to readers of *Postcolonial Directions in Education* is that a postcolonial ethos characterises the work presented at AACS conferences. Most papers analyse the culture and society of the Caribbean as a postcolonial region – politically independent, except for a few countries still linked to large, formerly colonising societies, culturally unique, but distinctively influenced by colonial / imperial histories with often problematic legacies, engendering efforts to challenge and tackle them. Education can be better understood within this framework.

The themes of the AACS conference are richly productive in stimulating unusual ideas and approaches to thinking about Caribbean culture. ‘Caribbean Meridians’, the 2019 theme of the AACS conference, encouraged presenters “to think about the lines of connection that spread from the Caribbean”. In 2015, the Wollongong conference took as its theme “Land and Water”, particularly apt in the venue of a coastal city. The 2017

Canberra conference, with its theme of 'Interiors', is the only inland site at which the AACS has held conferences, one in 2001 and another in 2017.

Caribbean Meridians: The 2019 Conference of the AACS

The theme 'Caribbean Meridians' invited participants to explore the lines of connection that bring Caribbean cultures into interaction and sometimes alignment with different cultures. While most of the participants in the conference were Australian scholars working in different aspects of Caribbean culture, a number of the participants came from the Americas, including Caribbean-born scholars from Grenada, Belize, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, and working in the USA and Canada. Abstracts of the papers are available online at the 'download' link provided above.

A literary meridian linking Australia and the French Caribbean

Conference organiser Dr. Ben Etherington, of the University of Western Sydney, had organised a conference talk between two globally famous novelists, Australian Aboriginal novelist Alexis Wright from Waanyi country in the Gulf of Carpentaria, and novelist Patrick Chamoiseau from the French Caribbean island of Martinique. Unfortunately, Chamoiseau became ill and could not make the long journey to Australia. However, Ben Etherington stepped into the timeslot and talked with Alexis Wright about her work and the influence on it of the literature of Patrick Chamoiseau. Ben wrote, in the conference guide:

It is in the spirit of their coming together that we decided on the conference theme of 'Caribbean meridians'. The conference will explore the often unexpected lines of connection that can bring quite different worlds into alignment. Wright was deeply influenced by Chamoiseau's work when writing her Miles Franklin winning *Carpentaria* (2006). For his part, Chamoiseau accepted the invitation to travel across the world because he saw in Wright's work and thinking vindication of his idea, gleaned from Edouard Glissant, of *tout-monde*.

The following abstract written by Ben Etherington, orients the audience to the discussion that he had with Alexis Wright on the second day of the conference.

Alexis Wright and Ben Etherington in conversation on the theme: ‘Warriors of the Imaginary: Alexis Wright on the influence of Caribbean writing on her work’

Few writers have had as profound an impact Alexis Wright’s work as the Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau. When writing *Carpentaria*, her Miles Franklin-winning contemporary classic, Wright read a review of Chamoiseau’s novel, *Texaco*. Intrigued, she ordered a copy to her place in Alice Springs and consumed it in a weekend. The linguistic inventiveness and the epic scale of *Texaco*, itself a celebrated classic of contemporary French Caribbean literature, was fuel for Wright’s similarly epic ambitions. In this session, which takes its title from Chamoiseau’s resonant phrase ‘Guerrier de *L’Imaginaire*’, Wright will discuss with Ben Etherington the meridian line that connects the literary imaginaries of the Caribbean and Indigenous Australia. This will lead to a broader consideration of the role of literature as a medium of cultural renewal in the aftermath of colonialism.

Alexis Wright, a member of the Waanyi nation of the Gulf of Carpentaria, is the author of the novels *The Swan Book*, winner of the ASAL Gold Medal, and *Carpentaria*, which won five national literary awards in Australia in 2007, including the Miles Franklin Award. Her work is published internationally including the US, UK, China and India, and translated into several languages. Her other books are *Grog War*, a study of alcohol abuse in Tennant Creek, *Take Power*, a collection of essays and stories celebrating twenty years of land rights in Central Australia, and *Tracker*, stories of the Aboriginal visionary leader Tracker Tilmouth, which won the Stella Prize. She has written widely on Indigenous rights, and organised two successful Indigenous Constitutional Conventions, ‘*Today We Talk About Tomorrow*’ (1993), and the *Kalkaringi Convention* (1998).

Ben Etherington is Senior Lecturer in the School of Humanities and Communication Arts and a member of the Writing and Society Research Centre at Western Sydney University. Recent publications include *Literary Primitivism* (Stanford, 2018), and *The Cambridge Companion to World*

Literature (2018, co-edited with Jarad Zimbler). His current project is a history of creole verse in the Anglophone Caribbean from slavery to decolonisation.

The ‘Caribbean Meridians’ theme in the three Keynote papers.

The abstracts below are those sent by the three keynote speakers (listed in alphabetical order by surname) who presented on each day of the AACS 2019 conference.

Keynote paper: Michael Bucknor (University of the West Indies, Mona campus)

Diasporic Intimacies: Caribbean Meridians and Literary Histories.

Laurence Breiner, noted American critic of Caribbean poetry, asked in his 2002 *JWIL* article: “How shall the history of West Indian Literature be told?” He identified “reconstructive [literary histories] that situate writers in their times,” bibliographic literary histories, and literary histories told through “canonical anthologies” (39-40). However, Breiner cautions against “progressive” or “prescriptive” myths of literary production and he begins to expose the complications of Guyanese/Canadian critic Frank Birbalsingh’s use of “transnational” as a conceptual lens for constructing Caribbean literary histories. Yet, the very nature of Caribbean societies has been rooted/routed in transnationalism – an umbrella concept that can accommodate multiple lines of connection, invoking meridian alignments.

While Breiner’s caution is noteworthy, I still want to take up Paul Gilroy’s transnational theory of the Black Atlantic for its proposal of such concepts as “circuits of connection” and “diasporic intimacies,” as a way of remapping Caribbean literary histories and meridian conceptions. While Windrush accounts of Caribbean literary production link Bridgetown (Barbados), Kingston (Jamaica) with London (England) through the BBC, not much work has been done on the CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) as a generative and transnational source of Anglophone Caribbean

cultural production. In this project, I am interested in the airmail and airwave circuits above the waters of the Atlantic that recover Canada as a central node in the post-Windrush production of Anglophone Caribbean literature, thereby recognizing other Caribbean worlds of literary production.

In this regard, meridian conceptions of literary histories would not be linear lines of connection, but more entangled wires that crisscross and circulate through different continents, cultural institutions and human subjects, whose affective friendships re-orient the accepted co-ordinates of Caribbean literary history. How do transnational friendships and media exposure shape literary histories? How do Black Atlantic literary histories nuance conceptions of the meridian? How do waves trouble lines?

Dr. Michael A. Bucknor is an Associate Professor of the Department of Literatures in English, and the Public Orator, of the Mona (Jamaica) Campus, University of the West Indies. He serves on the editorial boards of the journals *Caribbean Quarterly*, *Issues in Critical Investigation* and *Lucayos*, and is Senior Editor of the *Journal of West Indian Literature*. He was Chair of the Association of Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies (ACLALS) from 2010-2013. He is co-editor (with Alison Donnell) of *The Routledge Companion to Anglophone Caribbean Literature* and carries out research on Austin Clarke, Caribbean-Canadian writing, postcolonial literatures and theory, diaspora studies, masculinities and popular culture. He is completing a book manuscript entitled *Transnational Circuits of Cultural Production: Austin Clarke, Caribbean/Canadian Writing and the African Diaspora*.

**Keynote paper: Raphael Dalleo (Bucknell University, USA)
Haiti, Harlem, Hamburg: Anticolonialism's Rhizomatic
Roots.**

The rise of national identity and nationalist literature in the Anglophone Caribbean during the 1920s and 1930s is usually read in relation to British Empire. The Beacon group in Port of Spain and the Drumblair group in Kingston are seen as two of the dynamic

intellectual spaces where a modern, nationalist Caribbean literature and politics took form alongside the labor uprisings of the period. In the spirit of drawing connections to other worlds and other meridians, I want to offer another, transnational site: The Communist International, particularly as it connected Harlem and Moscow, and sprawling out to Germany, France, London, and back into the Caribbean. The pivot for this black internationalism, I will argue, was Haiti.

Scholarship frequently takes into account how emergent West Indian nationalism turned to Haiti as a representative of an epic revolutionary past and “authentically” black culture. But from 1915 to 1934, Haiti was occupied by U.S. marines. Beginning in the 1920s, Communists in the U.S. – many of whom were from the West Indies – led the opposition to the occupation of Haiti. The African Blood Brotherhood, led by Nevis-born Cyril Briggs, used the role of Wall Street banks in Haiti’s occupation to refine and popularize the Communist critique of imperialism and finance capital. George Padmore, W.A. Domingo, and other later participants in Caribbean anticolonialism during the 1930s and 1940s were directly influenced by these critiques, while creative writers such as Claude McKay and Eric Walrond developed their own literary voices in relation to activism against the occupation of Haiti. This presentation will point to what we gain from reading West Indian cultural and political history in connection to these sometimes far-flung routes through which Haiti travelled.

Raphael Dalleo, professor of English at Bucknell University, is author of *American Imperialism’s Undead: The U.S. Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism* (University of Virginia Press, 2016), which won the 2017 Caribbean Studies Association award for best book about the Caribbean. His other books include *Caribbean Literature and the Public Sphere* (University of Virginia, 2011) and *The Latino/a Canon and the Emergence of Post-Sixties Literature* (co-authored with Elena Machado Sáez, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and edited collections *Haiti and the Americas* (University Press of Mississippi, 2013),

and *Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies* (Liverpool University Press, 2016). Email: prdalleo@gmail.com

Keynote paper: Anna Cristina Pertierra (University of Western Sydney)

Tracing the Transpacific: Media and Digital Cultures, from the Caribbean to Asia.

An alternative title to this talk would be ‘How Cuba taught me to think about the Philippines’. Reflecting upon seemingly disparate research projects on media, consumer culture and digital technologies across Cuba, Caribbean Mexico and the Philippines, I explore a number of ways in which contemporary cultural research across transnational regions owes a particular debt to thinkers writing on and from the Caribbean region. Across the humanities and social sciences, it was from the Caribbean that longstanding assumptions determining whose spaces should be seen as ‘world centres’ began to crumble, and newly apparent transnational trajectories of capitalism, consumption and globalised popular culture were revealed.

This intellectual legacy continues to generate excitement in the study of other world areas, including the Asia-Pacific. But in more specific ways, shared histories of transnational modernities, migration and media expansion offer great opportunities to explore how contemporary cultural practices – among them the watching of television and the use of digital technologies – can be thought through together, as across my own field sites in Asia and the Americas. Thinking through places together, I propose, is a process that is looser than strictly comparative analysis, yet perhaps more productive.

Anna Cristina Pertierra’s research uses ethnography to examine every day social practice, with a particular interest in media, consumption and material culture, and urban modernities. Regionally, her work focuses on Cuba, Mexico and the Philippines. Prior to joining Western Sydney University, Anna was a Lecturer in Anthropology and an ARC Postdoctoral

Fellow at the Centre for Critical and Cultural Studies, both at the University of Queensland. Her most recent book is *Media Anthropology for the Digital Age* (Polity, 2017).

Scholarly and Cultural Diversity of Conference Papers addressing the theme ‘Caribbean Meridians’.

At the conference, the theme “Caribbean Meridians” was productive in eliciting ways in which Caribbean peoples and cultures connect with their counterparts around the world. Conference papers were grouped into a diversity of categories discussing this interconnectivity historically, geographically, musically, socially, and through literature, summarised here as follows:

- Migration and Belonging
- Asian-Caribbean Meridians
- Feminism
- Laws and Outlaws
- Writing Gender and Sexuality
- Hurricane Poetics
- Music and Sound
- Global Haiti
- Australian-Caribbean Meridians
- Transatlantic Meridians
- Edouard Glissant
- Cities and Tourism
- Translations and Crossing
- Slavery and Rebellion
- Geographies and Geopolitics
- Creative Meridians

At this conference, there was only one paper on Education – the one that I presented, entitled “Musical Meridians: Socio-cultural themes in Jamaica’s experience of European classical music”. I discussed European music as one aspect of Caribbean immersion in British education in the colonial period, an immersion that later contributed to postcolonial, Caribbean-oriented expression in art music as the region developed politically independent of the British in the second half of the 20th century. Using examples of Jamaican music teachers, music professors and performers, including some working overseas, the ‘musical meridians’ of my paper illustrate several aspects of Caribbean socio-cultural history and global connectivity through themes of social class, careers, models of education, colonial influence, postcolonial assertion, and cultural hybridity.

Launches of recent books on the Caribbean

An interesting feature of AACS conferences is the launching and profiling of Caribbean-related books ranging from academic scholarly works in many disciplines to novels, plays, poetry, journals and children's books. A Caribbean presenter at the 2019 conference was Kim Robinson-Walcott, editor/ director of *Caribbean Quarterly*, a literary journal produced and published at The University of the West Indies, Mona, and also the editor of *Jamaica Journal*, published by the Institute of Jamaica. Kim profiled these two important Caribbean journals for conference members, and displayed several current and past copies of the journals. The 2019 conference also displayed the following books recently authored by AACS members, all of whom were present to introduce their book:

Sienna Brown:

Master of My Fate

(Penguin), 2019.

Review: William Buchanan lived an extraordinary life: born a slave on a plantation in Jamaica, he escaped the gallows more than once, took part in the rebellion that led to the end of slavery in Jamaica, was transported to the other side of the world as punishment, tried his hand at robbing stagecoaches, and finally won true freedom on Australian soil....Told through William's voice, this is a lyrical, historical coming of age story about learning to fight for your rights – and finally becoming the master of your own fate. (*Fantastic Fiction website.*)

Sienna Brown, born in Jamaica and raised in Jamaica and Canada, is a professional dancer, film editor and documentary director. While working at Sydney Living Museums, Hyde Park Barracks, she first came across William's story. She is currently working on her second novel.

Raphael Dalleo:

American Imperialism's Undead. The Occupation of Haiti and the Rise of Caribbean Anticolonialism.

(University of Virginia Press), 2016.

Review: *American Imperialism's Undead* boldly and powerfully uncovers the crucial, if unintentional, role the United States' imperialist occupation of independent Haiti played in the rise of radical anticolonialism throughout the Atlantic world in the first half of the twentieth century. With

outstanding scholarship and searing prose, Dalleo shows how the U.S. occupation of Haiti has been systematically disavowed not only, as one might expect, in mainstream historiography but in a field of Haitian revolutionary studies eager to construct an unambiguous narrative of revolutionary liberation. A pivotal and long-overdue contribution. (*Nick Nesbitt, Princeton University, author of Caribbean Critique: Antillean Critical Theory from Toussaint to Glissant.*)

Consuelo Martinez-Reyes:

Not the Time to Stay: The Unpublished Plays of Víctor Fragoso

(Centro Press), 2018.

Review: *Not the Time to Stay* brings to light for the first time the marvellous work of Puerto Rican playwright Víctor Fragoso. Eight plays, edited and translated by Consuelo Martínez-Reyes, portray the socio-cultural issues Fragoso sought to expose: the choice and difficulties of migration, the clash between American and Puerto Rican societies, the oppression suffered by Latinos in the USA, homelessness, and domestic violence, among others. Fragoso played a key role in the New York City theatre scene in the 1970s, and in the overall interrogation of Puerto Rican and Latino identities in the USA. This new generation of Latinos will certainly find, in their rediscovery of Fragoso's work, a visionary of social themes, literary and theater practices. (*Hunter College, City University of New York*).

Anna Cristina Pertierra:

Media Anthropology for the Digital Age

(Polity Press), 2018.

Review: In this important new book, Anna Pertierra.... recounts the rise of anthropological studies of media, the discovery of digital cultures, and the embrace of ethnographic methods by media scholars around the world. Bringing together longstanding debates in sociocultural anthropology with recent innovations in digital cultural research, this book explains how anthropology fits into the story and study of media in the contemporary world. It charts the mutual disinterest and subsequent love affair that has taken place between the fields of anthropology and media studies in order to understand how and why such a transformation has taken place. Moreover, the book shows how the theories and methods of anthropology offer valuable ways to study media from a ground-level perspective

and to understand the human experience of media in the digital age.... will be of interest to.... anyone wanting to understand the use of anthropology across wider cultural debates.

Kim Robinson-Walcott (author/illustrator):

Pat The Cat

(LMH Publishing, Jamaica), 2018.

Summary: This is a Caribbean story in verse for children by Kim Robinson-Walcott, editor/ director of *Caribbean Quarterly*, editor of *Jamaica Journal*, and author of scholarly articles, book chapters, short stories and poems published in a number of journals and anthologies. Her previous children's book is *Dale's Mango Tree*.

Bonnie Thomas:

Connecting Histories: Francophone Caribbean Writers Interrogating Their Past

(University of Mississippi Press), 2017.

Review: "Bonnie Thomas's *Connecting Histories* examines memory and trauma in Caribbean self-writing. Conversant with the fields of trauma theory and Caribbean thought, Thomas's book makes us read anew prominent contemporary writers Patrick Chamoiseau, Maryse Condé, Edwidge Danticat, Dany Laferrière, and Gisèle Pineau. Built in the mode of the quilt, her crystal-clear monograph will be indispensable to students and scholars of Caribbean literature and memory studies alike." Valérie Loichot, professor of French and English at Emory University in Atlanta and author of *Orphan Narratives: The Postplantation Literature of Faulkner, Glissant, Morrison, and Saint-John Perse* and *The Tropics Bite Back: Culinary Coups in Caribbean Literature*.