INTRODUCTION

Il voyait, au nord du pays, le feu de la montagne Pelée bouillonner dans son secret de volcan, et les laves toucher de loin l'eau douce et l'eau salée tour à tour, et cette eau double coulait sous la terre de Martinique pour remonter dans la mangle du Lamentin, à la rencontre d'une autre eau qui descendait souterrainement depuis la montagne du Vauclin au sud [...]. Et toute cette trame refluait par moments vers des plages du sud du pays, au Diamant ou à la Petite Anse, et s'il se trouve elle courait sous la mer, par le Canal de Sainte-Lucie au sud et le Canal de la Dominique au nord, à la rencontre (au nord) des énergies de la Soufrière en Guadeloupe et de celles (au sud) de Castries et des autres mornes et montagnes qui éparpillent jusqu'aux Andes du Venezuela.[1]

As a new century of Caribbean studies begins, there is one overriding compulsion among the major theorists. This concerns the quest for a Pan-Caribbean approach to questions of culture, nation and race. Perhaps the most important figure is Édouard Glissant, the incessant negotiator of the complexities of *antillanité*. From his earlier recognition of a Caribbean-wide historical, linguistic and cultural commonality: 'langues de compromis; phénomène culturel général de créolisation; [...] persistance du fait africain; cultures de la canne, du maïs et du piment',[2] to the idea suggested above in *Tout-monde* of an opaque, submarine, secret connection between the islands (and also Latin America), Glissant has pursued the idea of Caribbean regionalism in favour of the more fragmented concept of individual, national identities within the archipelago.

Following on from Glissant, Michael Dash has written *The Other America*,[3] where he talks of 'the impossibility of grounding Caribbean territories in terms of a single national entity' (p. xi), and argues that 'a hemispheric identity is an essential mediating context for understanding the Caribbean as a whole' (p. x). Dash also refers to Antonio Benítez-Rojo's *The Repeating Island*[4] as an important work 'toward a conceptualization of the region as a whole' (ibid.). Benítez-Rojo's work, like Glissant's, draws on chaos theory, and this, he feels offers much in the quest to conceptualize the Caribbean 'as a whole':

its way of looking right at noise and turbulence to find common dynamics comes up with graphic models that allow us to appreciate that a given region's flight of textual signifiers is neither wholly disorganized nor absolutely unpredictable; rather it responds to the influx of 'strange attractors' in whose codes the dynamics tend to follow determined movements and, therefore, to draw certain regularly repetitive and self-referential figures. (p. 313)

What Glissant, Dash and Benítez-Rojo share, therefore, is the fundamental desire to see repetitions and similitudes across the Caribbean, and to formulate

these into some kind of totalizing system, however impenetrably complex this system may be. None has yet claimed to have developed such a system and, all draw attention to the failings of their projects: Dash admits that the absence of the Dutch-speaking Caribbean is a major flaw in his study (p. xi),[5] whereas Benítez-Rojo says that: 'due to the area's extremely complex cultural spectrum (a soup of signs), *no one could really claim to be a full specialist in Caribbean culture*' (p. 314, my italics). One reason for their failure thus lies in the partial nature of each's knowledge: the individual perspective can only hope to capture a glimpse of 'the whole', and only fleetingly, as the object of study, 'the Caribbean', is inherently fluid, and in a state of constant, but irregular evolution. Benítez-Rojo's metaphor of the Caribbean is particularly apposite in this respect:

> If someone needed a visual explanation, a graphic picture of what the Caribbean is, I would refer him to the spiral chaos of the Milky Way, the unpredictable flux of transformative plasma that spins calmly in our globe's firmament, that sketches in an 'other' shape that keeps changing, with some objects born to light while others disappear into the womb of darkness; change, transit, return, fluxes of sidereal matter. (p. 4)

Some of the ironic consequences of the notion of Caribbean 'oneness' (however chaotically it is presented), if it is pursued to its extreme, are that it suppresses difference, and seeks to impose a state of univocality and sameness where, in reality, history has created as many differences as similarities. Why should we want to talk of 'Caribbean literature' as a single entity or, as Derek Walcott has described it: 'one literature in several imperial languages'?[6] The idea of this 'one literature' collapses under the weight of inter-island, inter-lingual, inter-authorial differences. The objective of my study is, in part, to further problematize the idea of Caribbean one-ness. By looking at one sub-genre of 'Caribbean literature', *French* Caribbean literature — and two authors within this sub-genre, the Martinican Aimé Césaire and the Haitian René Depestre — I will show some of the very real differences which exist even here, where one might have expected the commonality of 'Caribbean literature' to be apparent. This approach is, admittedly, more 'classical', perhaps more simplistic than that of a Benítez-Rojo or a Glissant; but then again, my proposition is itself straightforward: that the reality of inter-island difference cannot be erased, or consumed by the desire to formulate a concept of synthetic Caribbeanness.

In many ways, the choice of Haiti and Martinique as the points of comparison is an obvious one, as they represent polar opposites of the Caribbean situation: the one the first independent Caribbean republic, the other a *département d'outre mer*, still politically, economically (and perhaps culturally) dependent on its former colonial metropole. Dash does recognize these differences in *The*

Other America, when he says that: 'Both societies [...] represent the extreme alternatives that, in one way or another, confront the other America, caught as they are between the poles of impoverished isolation and chronic dependency' (p. 134). One might expect, therefore, that difference should be at its most evident in the works of authors from these two islands.

Why Césaire and Depestre, why not two more contemporary figures, who might better express current realities? There are, in fact, great advantages in carrying out this type of study on 'senior' authors such as these two. Firstly, it is possible to sketch developments, changes in voice, as sensibilities ripen and positions change. Also, Césaire and Depestre have lived the conflicts and dramas which have led 'Caribbean literature' to the point it is at today (wherever that may be). They have lived the great cultural and political dreams and failures of the Caribbean of the past fifty years: Négritude, Surrealism and Marxism. And yet, despite the many points of convergence, their visions, their sense of Caribbeanness deviate on many levels. In this study, I will analyse these differences, and the factors which create them.

This study will focus on one important area: Césaire and Depestre's concepts of space and place, how they relate to their island space, to other islands, to Europe, Africa and the Americas. This is not, however, merely a question of geography or landscape, but relates more to Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin's idea of post-colonial place as:

> a complex interaction of language, history and environment. [...] characterised firstly by a sense of displacement in those who have moved to the colonies, or the more widespread sense of displacement from the imported language, of a gap between the 'experienced' environment and the descriptions the language provides, and secondly, by a sense of the immense investment of culture in the construction of place.[7]

There is in other words a critical relationship between space, language and culture. How do Césaire and Depestre negotiate this intricate relationship, and how does their sense of Caribbeanness emerge, especially in relation to the current drive to formulate a Caribbean one-ness? Also, how does their *individual* sense of self relate to their Caribbean space, given that: 'the discourse of place is a process of a continual dialectic between subject [the author] and object [the land, place]?'[8] In all of this, I will try to build up appropriate 'models' of the relationship between subject and place; that is, I will describe the *shape* of the relationship as it appears from the analysis. For Césaire, I will look at both the representation and the (literary, political and aesthetic) influence of three points: the islands, Africa and Europe, and how they interact, clash and coincide to create his sense of self and of Caribbeanness. These three points create a definite triangular shape, and, as I will show, this shape can be identified in practically every aspect of his work.

Importantly, I will not read Césaire as an isolated figure, but as part of the *Tropiques* group. The other intellectuals of the group (notably René Ménil and Suzanne Césaire) offer important insights into Césaire's work, and their contribution should be acknowledged also.[9]

In Depestre's case, I will attempt to apply the same model, the same shape, and see if it 'fits' with his sense of self and of Caribbean identity. How does his experience as a Haitian differ from Césaire's, how do the three points appear in his work, and how does he *reshape* the Martinican's triangular model? An important factor will be Depestre's long exile from Haiti, and how this affects his view of the islands, and his sense of Caribbeanness. Ultimately, the comparison will give a new (if partial) perspective on the current debate about Caribbean regional or hemispheric identity.

NOTES

1. Édouard Glissant, *Tout monde* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), pp. 223–24.
2. Édouard Glissant, *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Gallimard Folio, 1997), p. 729. Originally published 1981 by Seuil. All subsequent page references are to the Gallimard edition.
3. Michael Dash, *The Other America* (Charlottesville, VA and London: University Press of Virginia, 1998).
4. Antonio Benítez-Rojo, *The Repeating Island*, 2nd edn (Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 1996).
5. George Lang's article 'Papiamentu, the Caribbean Paradigm and Cultural Fractality', in Richard A. Young (ed.), *Latin American Postmodernisms* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1997), pp. 87–102, attempts to fill this gap in Caribbean Studies. Taking up the terms of Benítez-Rojo's work, Lang looks at the culture of Curaçao 'an island of the Netherland Antilles lying 50 kilometers off the Venezuelan coast of which the creole language Papiamentu is the vernacular' (p. 87). He describes a particularly hybridized island, with Spanish, Portuguese, Dutch and English linguistic influences existing alongside the prestigious Papiamentu creole. Whilst emphasizing the island's uniqueness, Lang ultimately seeks to incorporate it into a supersyncretic model of Caribbeanness. See also the important collection of essays from the English-, French-, Spanish- and Dutch-speaking areas, *Caribbean Creolization*, ed. by Kathleen M. Balutansky and Marie-Agnès Sourieau (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida; Barbados, Jamaica and Trinidad and Tobago: The Press University of the West Indies, 1998).
6. Derek Walcott, 'The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory' (1992), in *What the Twilight Says* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), pp. 65–84 (p. 73).
7. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995, repr. 1997), p. 391. Given the polarity of 'post-colonial' situations they represent, Haiti and Martinique's relationship to post-colonial studies, in the broader sense, is not without problems. The longevity of Haiti's independence, and Martinique's continued dependence, makes for an uneasy comparison with the states which have gained independence in the last forty or so years (India, the African countries, etc.) and which are more commonly the objects of 'Post-Colonial Studies'. In this case, however, the post-colonial concept of space is relevant.
8. Ibid., p. 392.
9. Roger Toumson and Simonne Henry-Valmore, talking about *Tropiques*, similarly argue that: 'Il faut signaler l'importance de la contribution de Suzanne, l'épouse d'Aimé Césaire, en raison de l'exceptionnelle qualité de ses articles.' *Aimé Césaire, le nègre inconsolé* (Paris: Syros, 1993), p. 75.