



NATURAL HISTORIES OF SOCIAL BODIES: RETHINKING CARIBBEAN AND VICTORIAN REALISMS

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In his well-known book of essays *The Pleasures of Exile* (1960), George Lamming welcomes the West Indian novel—novels written by West Indians—as a new technology. According to Lamming, travel books, sociological studies, and economic treatises on the Caribbean “worked like old-fashioned cameras, catching what they can—which wasn’t very much—as best they could, which couldn’t be very good, since they never got the camera near enough.” In contrast to the cumbersome and compromised documentary tools of social scientists, Lamming praises the novelist for being “the first to relate the West Indian experience from the inside.” Such visionary technology, Lamming predicts, will compel “the anthropologist and all other treatises” to consult the West Indian novelist (37-38). At first glance, Lamming’s account of the novelist’s ability to probe interiority seems to fit within two closely related critical narratives. His praise of the novel’s intimate, almost invasive possibilities as a leap forward from the narrow purview of documentary renderings reads as a version of the perceived divide between nineteenth-century realism and twentieth-century postcolonial writing.¹ But Lamming’s arguably smug rhetoric about “old-fashioned cameras” also bolsters a more recent critical interest, one that traces the affinities between Anglophone Caribbean literature and modernism.² Put simply, Lamming seems invested in a modernist call to “make it new.”

I argue that Lamming’s vision of meaningfully relating experiences unexpectedly resonates with a brand of realism delineated by George Eliot in the nineteenth century. This essay thus sets out to problematize two critical commonplaces: the opposition between realism and modernism, and the famous antagonism between canonical British writing and Anglophone Caribbean literature. Placing Lamming and Eliot side by side may appear to go against the recent trend of tracing Anglophone Caribbean literature’s affinities

with modernism. But closely reading these two authors alongside one another in fact harkens back to reading twentieth-century Anglophone Caribbean literature for its attempt at authentic depictions of Caribbean life—in other words, for its realism.³ V.S. Naipaul's novel *A House for Mr. Biswas* (1961) offers the most obvious example of Anglophone Caribbean literature's echoes of a familiarly detailed and accessible realism. But Naipaul is also a troubling representative of Caribbean writing who infamously rejects local elements of Caribbean artistic practices.⁴ By pursuing instead the similarity between Lamming—an author who early on pushed back against the “sacred gang” of British literature (*Pleasures* 27)—and Eliot, I will dig deeper into their shared project of realism and at the same time offer an understanding of realism that challenges its reputation as a formally obsolete and politically naive tradition of writing.

Analyzing Lamming and Eliot through the lens of realism finds much in common with recent projects to reassess the contours of realism. With calls to see realism as “a continuing social project” with a vast “aesthetic range,” realism is increasingly understood less as a historical tradition of writing that seeks to depict the known, visible world and more as a richly variegated formal and political project of representing the often-shifting terms of what counts as reality (Robbins 225, Esty and Lye 269). As Jed Esty and Colleen Lye write in their introduction to a special issue of *MLQ* on peripheral realisms, “the literary mimesis of the past and present involves no simple reproduction of the already known and existing but always contains a future open to dynamic change” (287). Neither historically outmoded nor formally static, realism is more and more distinguished by the self-reflexivity its practitioners bring to the fore.

Lamming's *Season of Adventure* (1960) and Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* (1876) are the two novels in which I trace these authors' similarly probing, plastic realisms. Like Lamming and Eliot themselves at first glance, these novels differ dramatically in terms of geographical and historical contexts. *Season of Adventure* has a reputation as Lamming's “Africa novel” while *Daniel Deronda* is known as Eliot's “Jewish novel.” However reductive, these labels emphasize how both novels explore the journeys of protagonists who are essentially outsiders because of their social statuses. Lamming's Fola experiences color and class privilege as the light-skinned stepdaughter of a government official in a Caribbean milieu where the majority are descendants of African slaves. Meanwhile, Eliot's eponymous Daniel is an orphan who is possibly Jewish and raised by an English gentleman. The driving force of both novels involves how Fola and Daniel each attempt to recuperate their respective relationships to spiritual practices deemed “other” by their immediate families. Lamming thus stages how Fola comes to acknowledge the significance of her island's connections to Africa, while Eliot depicts Daniel's decision to embrace the Jewish heritage denied by his estranged mother.

The plasticity of realism becomes a fascinating topic within the context of such novels because Lamming and Eliot directly tackle the issue of how to represent the complexity of everyday life amid questions of spiritual experience, political commitment, and the ethics of the aesthetic. As I will show by reading *Season of Adventure* and *Daniel Deronda* alongside one another as well as in tandem with a selection of Lamming's and Eliot's essays, realism for these authors is ultimately a tool for self-reflexively contemplating art's role in making meaning of social and spiritual life. Of course, Victorian Studies has long been aware that nineteenth-century writers were already self-conscious about their realist literary practices.⁵ But it is only recently that critics working on postcolonial literatures have argued for more nuanced understandings of realism. As Simon Gikandi explains, "It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that postcolonial theory came into being as a critique of Western theories of representation and that an antimimetic bend undergirds the most prevalent view of postcolonial literature" ("Romance, Realism" 309). Yet Gikandi and others working on postcolonial realism have shown how writers from Africa, the Caribbean, and India engage with "inherited forms toward their own goals" ("Romance, Realism" 311).⁶ This may still resemble the standard narrative of postcolonial writing as literature that repeats with a difference, which in turn reveals the instability of colonial authority. But this essay instead highlights the remarkable continuity between Lamming's and Eliot's approaches to realism. Such continuity between Lamming's and Eliot's pliant realisms illuminates how the formal and political aims of so-called radical postcolonial literature and the ostensibly conservative Victorian tradition are, at times, not too drastically different.

I.

Season of Adventure imagines how a Caribbean middle class reproduces the prejudices of colonialism—particularly the devaluing of an African past. Lamming sets the novel in a fictional island called San Cristobal that draws from the histories and cultures of Haiti and Jamaica, and events in the narrative unfold during the early era of independence from British colonial power in the mid-twentieth century. The novel's political focus departs from the autobiographical aspects of Lamming's earlier works such as *In the Castle of My Skin* and *The Emigrants*; in fact, his fourth novel has been called "his most realistic, least experimental in form" as well as "prophetic" for anticipating the struggles many Caribbean islands would face with political independence in the decades following the 1960s (Brown, *Migrant Modernism* 86; Rohlehr 13). In particular, *Season of Adventure* traces how Fola, a member of San Cristobal's middle-class elite, develops an interest in what the novel frequently calls a "backward glance" to the past from which she has been alienated. Her attendance at a religious ritual called the "ceremony of the souls" where the living dialogue with the dead allows Lamming's novel to conceptualize how

representations of such spirituality could be most effectively rendered in a fictional form that avoids cheap sensationalism and the illusion of objectivity.⁷

Proposing that realism is at work within a context of ritual and the deceased may seem counterproductive. But asserting such stakes through the medium of fiction is precisely what undergirds the political and aesthetic force of Lamming's realism. After all, biased eighteenth-century historians from the Caribbean planter class such as Bryan Edwards identified "rites of a darker superstition" in the religions of the enslaved, while ethnographic writing in the twentieth century portrayed Afro-Caribbean spirituality as a cannibalistic magic to be feared (16). What is immediately striking about Lamming's depiction of the ceremony of the souls is the degree to which he emphasizes the ordinariness and banality of the ritual and the people involved.

The ceremony takes place in an area of San Cristobal known as the *tonelle*, which is described as "an ordinary meeting place, a clean perimeter of earth partitioned by the night" (21). Here, a bamboo pole with "seven feet of shaven joints" stands in for "mythical stairs down which the invisible gods would soon descend," and "[a] thick, white line of maize marked a circle round the pole, leaving an area of ground untouched by the women who danced around it." As the narrator explains, "No one could trespass within the circle until the gods had arrived" (22). In another area of the *tonelle*, flambeaux illuminate the darkness and reveal a tent and several rows of benches, which are soon to be filled by a crowd that "gaz[es] towards the bamboo pole" (22). In *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming writes about the metaphorical cameras of social scientists that "never got the camera near enough" to its subjects. Here in *Season of Adventure*, Lamming takes his fictional camera as novelist to an ostracized spiritual ceremony, and the footage captured is notably subdued. In another example, the *Houngan*, a priest-like individual who attempts to conduct the dialogue between the living and the dead, is described as "a short, black man, narrow around the waist, almost fragile in the spareness of his arms" (31). When the *Houngan* begins speaking to a soul in the tent, "[t]he details were ordinary as the names of streets" (34). The narrator even adds that the *Houngan* will attend Catholic Mass at sunrise the next day.

When the living and the dead begin to dialogue, what transpires is a quotidian social event where outstanding practical debts are settled, such as a dead man who confronts his sister for scheming to steal the diamonds with which he was buried. The ritual soon culminates with communal dancing to celebrate the liberatory closure attained after the conversations between the living and the dead. Then, as if learning through the very process of description, the narrator offers a tentative conclusion about the spirituality of those who participate in the ceremony: "their faith was, perhaps, a ground of being which balanced every variation of belief" (41). Lamming's intimate yet understated depiction of the ceremony neither replicates the cold distance of empirical observation nor traffics in a sweeping romance of exoticized Caribbean magic.

Instead, Lamming crafts voyeuristic yet patient observations that bring to mind the realism delineated by Eliot in the nineteenth century.

Eliot's fiction was central to the development of realism yet she is also inextricably linked to the aesthetic practice of revealing the very fictionality of realism. Her narrator in *Adam Bede* (1859) famously promotes the "difficult" aesthetic project of drawing "a real unexaggerated lion" over the "delightful facility in drawing a griffin" (160). But Eliot describes her concept of purposeful realism at more length—and more politically—in her earlier essay "The Natural History of German Life" (1856), a review of the works of the German journalist and novelist Wilhelm Riehl. She criticizes conventional depictions of peasants merely enjoying life and bristles at how "the typical moment to represent a man in a smock-frock is when he is cracking a joke and showing a row of sound teeth." Eliot calls such "unreality" a detriment to the role of art, particularly if the painter or novelist has moral aims (108, 110). Later in the essay, she even makes a claim that would feel at home in *The Pleasures of Exile*—that "a wise social policy must be based not simply on abstract social science, but on the Natural History of social bodies" (131). Similar to Lamming's critique of the "old-fashioned cameras" of social scientists, Eliot recognizes how well-meaning representations of people—in this case, the peasantry—carry the risk of perpetuating fantasies rather than offering viewers the opportunity to develop transformative understandings. For both Lamming and Eliot, realist portrayals are not meant to be palatable; instead, realism involves a strategic project of selection and inclusion because fiction can often inform civic relations. When Eliot therefore asserts that "a wise social policy" must draw from the metrics of social science and the insights of realist representation, she stresses that taking aesthetics seriously can develop an emotional pedagogy that holds the potential to transform society for the better.

Oddly enough, *Season of Adventure* and *Daniel Deronda* focus on characters that could be thought of as middle or upper class even though ideas of "the folk" and "the peasantry" preoccupy Lamming and Eliot in their essays. It is thus through Fola that Lamming builds upon the realist ethics he sketched out in the ceremony of the souls and probes more carefully the relationship between forms of representation and the political possibilities of viewers' responses. While attending the ceremony of the souls, Fola experiences trepidation and anxiety. She feels like "a stranger within her own forgotten gates" and experiences her muscles tightening and eventually relaxing without her knowledge until she feels "[d]rip by drip, then free as a drizzle, her urine" gathering as "a noiseless puddle" beneath her (22, 34). The following day, Fola becomes engrossed in photographs within her family's home. She is first seized by a photograph of Charlot, a teacher from her all-women's college who is ridiculed by San Cristobal's black community as a white "stranger man" (21). Ironically, it was Charlot who had encouraged Fola to attend the ceremony of souls in order to draw links to San Cristobal's African history.

Looking at Charlot's photo now, however, Fola only registers the gap between the representation rendered in the image and the reality of her interactions with him. In the photograph, Fola sees Charlot as a loving companion with a "handsome, sunburnt face." Following Charlot's paternalistic behavior at the ceremony—he had explained the ritual as if it were merely a chapter from a textbook—Fola understands him as a "spy" who from his first meeting with her family several years prior was merely "the stranger" granted "a natural superiority of judgment" within San Cristobal's neocolonial class (66, 69). Fola's scrutiny of Charlot's photograph following the ceremony and its evocation of San Cristobal's West African connections ultimately equips her with an alternative form of knowledge—one that is, as evidenced by her wetting herself, deeply embodied rather than coldly transmitted by a figure of authority.

Fola's characterization of Charlot as a spy reads, on one level, as another instance of Lamming adopting the trope of the pupil Caliban rejecting the teacher Prospero. But Fola's interfacing with photographs also suggests Lamming is interested in going beyond the "mis-use" of language to think about how to represent the Caribbean.⁸ Fola looks upon her past "framed upon these walls" and realizes that snapshots fall remarkably short of capturing reality (68). Charlot may come from a mixed background, but the fact that his skin resembles "pale cream" yet appears with "a smooth, dark tan" in the photograph reveals how the medium of the captured image essentially allows Charlot to pass (66). Fola ends up dropping the photograph of Charlot and questioning the politics of her former teacher's interest in highlighting San Cristobal's African connections. Shortly thereafter, another image seizes Fola's attention, one of a young girl named Liza she had seen dancing at the ceremony:

But she felt a little free of Charlot now. She didn't reflect on the past to satisfy his curiosity. It was the terrible birth of the child's dance in the *tonelle* which worked a deeper influence on her memory. Liza was the seed from which another world beyond these picture frames had sprung. (75)

Earlier, the narrator of *Season of Adventure* carefully established a stable spiritual reality that "balance[d] every variation of belief." Here, Fola's intensifying affiliation with Liza through the inescapability of memory shows that Lamming is as committed to an interiorized, emotional realism as he is to one faithful to direct observation. Lamming thus suggests that Eliot's proclamation regarding judicious social policy and "the Natural History of social bodies" could be taken further: for Fola, even "another world beyond" that of curated images can prove transformative.

Underlining the "world" of historical memory enables Lamming to simultaneously question photography as a form of knowledge and accuracy and strive for a way to render a transformative interior realization on the page.

Immersed in her mind's image of Liza, Fola attempts to remember herself at the young girl's age, but quickly realizes that Liza has held up a mirror that diminishes the value of an exact numerical correlation: "The difference [in age] seemed unimportant beside the weight of that memory which Liza had imposed upon her" (75). Critics such as Supriya Nair have explored how Lamming "uses the mechanism of the realist novel only as a point of departure" in order to position "fiction as a liberation from the tyrannical constraints of history as it has been used in the Caribbean" (8, 9). Realism, in Nair's account, falls short for Lamming because it risks replacing one grand narrative with yet another. But the realism I have so far highlighted in *Season of Adventure* is more invested in a crucially selective depiction of reality rather than a totalizing one. Fola's awakening is private and individual, but it is also the result of engagement with a community at the ceremony of the souls. Lamming thereby achieves a realism that carefully portrays the folk and the elite as objects *and* as subjects.

The tensions between an individualized and totalizing representation of reality are also purposefully negotiated by Eliot in a novel that, like *Season of Adventure*, studiously explores the inheritances of spiritual history in daily life. *Daniel Deronda* is set from 1864 to 1866 and takes place in real and fictional Italian and German cities, as well as in London and a country region the novel's narrator calls Wessex. The name Wessex is ripe with symbolic connotations: it was an Anglo-Saxon kingdom in Britain prior to the development of an English state in the tenth century. It thereby represents a kind of nostalgic nationalism even though the narrator only names it in the novel's early chapters. Jewishness, however, emerges as Eliot's central intellectual concern in this sweeping novel. Her title character is an empathetic and ambiguously "exceptional" young man whose "curly head" marks his otherness within English high society (164). Like Lamming's novel, *Daniel Deronda* yearns for knowledge about a parental heritage vilified by the ruling elite.⁹

Before examining key scenes in *Daniel Deronda*, it is worth returning to Eliot's essay "The Natural History of German Life" to better grasp the particular aims of the author's self-conscious approach to realism. At one point in the essay, Eliot seems to praise Charles Dickens for being "gifted with the utmost power of rendering the external traits of our town population." As she continues, however, she pinpoints the fatal flaw of Dickens's persnickety preoccupation with details:

But while he can copy Mrs Plornish's colloquial style with the delicate accuracy of a sun-picture, while there is the same startling inspiration in his description of the gestures and phrases of "Boots," as in the speeches of Shakespeare's mobs or numskulls, he scarcely ever passes *from the humorous and external to the emotional and tragic*, without becoming as transcendent in his unreality as he was a moment before in his artistic truthfulness. (111, emphasis mine)

Crafting accuracy—the idea of realism often associated with Victorian novels in general—is precisely what Eliot sees as fiction’s most deleterious possibility. Without an “emotional” or “tragic” element, realist style is deemed vacuous in Eliot’s eyes. Critics have studied Eliot’s relationship to realism through photography and painting, with Daniel Novak explaining how the author’s realism sought “new techniques of totalization” and Ruth Bernard Yeazell underlining how Eliot admired Dutch art for its privileging of moralism “rather than a slavish submission to nature” (29, 93). Regardless of medium, it is clear that Eliot is a staunch proponent of the seemingly paradoxical idea for which she gives Dickens a measure of praise in the quote above: “artistic truthfulness.” In lieu of the “delicate accuracy” associated with the technology of a “sun-picture,” Eliot promotes a realist ethos defined by a fabricated authenticity shot through with plasticity and breadth of style as well as transparent emotion.

The manner in which Eliot crafts unadorned representations of the rituals tied to Daniel’s Jewish awakening thus both enacts the author’s realist vision and anticipates the politics of the similarly selective realism I have already illuminated in Lamming’s novel. The character Mordecai, an enigmatic Jewish scholar who inspires Daniel to begin studying Hebrew and then eventually settle in the East, has primarily been analyzed for adding mystical dimensions to Eliot’s novel.¹⁰ Indeed, the content of Mordecai’s speeches regarding the Jewish as “a nation” where “religion and law and moral life mingled as the stream of blood in the heart and made one growth” are delivered with “hectic brilliancy” and promote a passionate claim to spiritual community (531, 533). But the material world in which Eliot situates the character is decidedly less prophetic and showcases the author’s careful curation of surface details. Mordecai and a group of “poor men given to thought” called The Philosophers convene in a pub room that, like Lamming’s *tonelle*, is markedly rough-hewn in appearance (521). The space is described as a “little parlour, hardly much more than fifteen feet square” where “[h]alf-a-dozen men of various ages... all shabbily dressed” smoke pipes and discuss social and intellectual matters “not prevalent even among the privileged heirs of learning and its institutions” (522, 523). Each member of the club is allowed to bring one guest, and when Daniel joins Mordecai, his presence is enough to demand “a re-arrangement of seats in the too narrow semicircle round the fireplace” (522).

Eliot withholds from drawing the scene at large as exceptional even though attending the club’s meeting is transformative for Daniel’s spirituality. After Mordecai forcefully outlines his vision of a Jewish state, the band of poor philosophers efficiently exits the small room after exchanging parting words for the night. The details concerning the austere pub room emphasize the banal quality of the men’s conversations—even if Daniel is in turn ignited by the night’s discussion. Similar to Lamming’s rendering of the ceremony of the souls and Fola’s transformative response, Eliot’s depiction of Mordecai’s regular ritual maintains a selective voyeurism in order to obviate any embellishment

that could be mobilized for accusations of exotic cultural otherness on one hand or a novelist's creation of "unreality" on the other. And much as Lamming turns to the medium of photographs to stage the shift in Fola's relationship to her African background, Eliot conveys Daniel's awakening through an analogy that evokes the rousing possibilities of performance and poetry. For the rest of the group assembled in the pub room, Mordecai's argument that "[t]he business of the Jew in all things is to be even as the rich Gentile" is received as "a dramatic representation which had some pathos in it, though no practical consequences." But in Daniel's mind, Mordecai stands "like a poet among people of a strange speech, who may have a poetry of their own, but have no ear for his cadence, no answering thrill to his discovery of latent virtues in his mother tongue" (529). By likening Mordecai's speeches to theatrical performance and poetry, Eliot purposefully works to add a dimension of "the emotional and tragic" to her otherwise arguably Dickensian attention to the external details of the physical space where The Philosophers meet. It is thus the co-existence of seemingly tedious details about the pub room's threadbare state and powerfully suggestive comparisons to other forms of representation that allows Eliot to craft a sense of "artistic truthfulness" around Daniel's internal reclamation of Mordecai's words as his "mother tongue."

Eliot also shows the importance of a selectively realist depiction of spiritual matters in a scene earlier in the novel where Daniel visits a synagogue in Germany. Daniel's experience in the synagogue initiates his profound curiosity about Jewishness that only intensifies when he meets Mordecai. By hearing the chants of Hebrew liturgy and observing "the devotional swaying" of bodies within "the very commonness of the building," Daniel is able to apprehend "one expression of a binding history, tragic and yet glorious" (367-68). As in the depiction of Mordecai's club, Eliot's narrator here resists spectacle and calls attention to the "shabbiness of scene" and the liturgy's plain "transitions of litany, lyric, proclamation, dry statement, and blessing" (367). The material details of the scene once again underline how Daniel is ultimately observing a routine exercise in devotion. But the fact that Daniel is moved by such rote procedure shows how Eliot also essentially invites readers to absorb the scene of spirituality with a similar feeling of respect and modesty. Where Dickens might have an eye similar to "the delicate accuracy of a sun-picture," Eliot prefers a much more ductile approach to realism as an aesthetics not of the comprehensive, but rather of intentional exclusion.

Eliot began to outline her working definition of realism as a project of strategic judiciousness in her 1856 review of the third volume of John Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. "The artist," she writes, "should include the largest possible quantity of truth in the most perfect possible harmony. *All* the truths of nature cannot be given; hence a choice must be made of some facts which can be represented from amongst others which must be passed by in silence" (371). Just over a century later in *The Pleasures of Exile*, Lamming recommends in a

more pithy manner a similar mode of representation: “Indeed, any method of presentation may be used. There is one exception. Don’t tell lies. From time to time, the truth may go into hiding; but don’t tell lies” (12). For both novelists, realism is evoked as a process of representation that hinges on the choices artists make. Furthermore, neither Eliot nor Lamming proposes that an artist’s decisions—however careful they may be—necessarily supply convenient access to truth; after all, Eliot stresses that “[a]ll the truths of nature cannot be given,” and Lamming concedes that “the truth may go into hiding.” When placing Eliot’s and Lamming’s reflections on realism alongside the experiences of spiritual awakening depicted in *Daniel Deronda* and *Season of Adventure*, a shared project emerges across the Victorian and postcolonial divide: a political investment in creatively delimiting the scope of mimetic possibilities in order to modestly demystify an underlying idea of truth or authenticity.

II.

Assembling selected parts into a meaningful whole rather than purporting to capture a self-evident sum characterizes the formal thrust of Lamming’s and Eliot’s realisms. Both authors furthermore probe the political possibilities of a self-conscious realist aesthetic through characters in their novels that are themselves artists. In *Season of Adventure*, Fola seeks out a man named Chiki to help learn the identity of her biological father. Her motivations for turning to Chiki could be explained by his background: Chiki attended yet was expelled from San Cristobal’s elite all-boys college and now lives among the working class as a painter. Fola arguably perceives the “unjustly ugly” man to be an interlocutor who has more legitimacy for her “backward glance” than Charlot (214). In contrast to Charlot’s interest to explain the ceremony of the souls as a historian, Chiki had once attempted to complete sketches of a similar ritual. Though Chiki “worked liked a lunatic” as he sketched, he ended up conceding to the limits of his art and exclaimed, “It aint enough to understand what they are doing, and it aint enough to change it either” and walked away from the ceremony (49). For Chiki, the opportunity to convey truth that Lamming and Eliot value in representations remains all too elusive within his medium of visual art. Yet when Chiki tells Fola, “I can help you search...but I can’t promise to help you find,” he aligns with a critical realist project to craft a representation of reality without necessarily offering it with the promise of self-contained answers (233). Chiki has his own vision of the aesthetic’s possibilities, but he also acknowledges that audiences ultimately do what they wish with the representations they consume.

Chiki experiments with this democratized possibility of aesthetics for seemingly deceitful purposes later in the novel when he produces a portrait of Fola’s supposed father. The portrait, which oddly “gave no evidence of complexion, height or size,” is displayed all over San Cristobal because Fola claims her father is responsible for the recent murder of the island’s vice

president (293). In reality, Fola makes this claim as part of her “backward glance” to provoke self-reflection and subsequent political upheaval within San Cristobal. Chiki had painted the portrait before the murder took place; he merely “invents a face” of a man prior to his first formal meeting with Fola (234). Knowing that her stepfather, who is the island’s chief of police, will raid the working-class communities near the *tonelle* in order to find someone to blame for the killing, Fola shows her allegiance to Chiki’s world by positioning the portrait as an essential clue to identifying the murderer. Working together, Fola and Chiki use the vice president’s murder as an opportunity to compel San Cristobal’s citizens to think critically about the very act of interfacing with representations in a quotidian context.

The lesson implicit in Chiki’s art is that the complexity of aesthetics named “real” can be put up for debate to intervene in everyday politics.¹¹ When children look at poster reproductions of the portrait, the image “played curious tricks on their staring” (293). Chiki and Fola’s trickery is thus in fact an exercise in how to make meaning of the aesthetic. This is not equivalent to didacticism, but rather to a concept of art as a kind of raw data that audiences must interpret. If Lamming urges social scientists to learn from novelists in *The Pleasures of Exile*, Chiki’s work as a painter offers a model for how aesthetics can similarly extend forms and practices of knowledge to onlookers.

Chiki’s insistence on an intimate connection between teachers and artists highlights another intersection of Lamming’s and Eliot’s broader interest in realist aesthetics as a form of social knowledge. The painter tells Fola that “[t]o fertilise a fact with life and not betray its precise importance” is fundamental not only to the teacher, but also to the artist (241). Chiki therefore articulates an investment in conveying the cohesion of the aesthetic and the knowable rather than a preoccupation with epistemological uncertainty and instability that conventionally accompanies understandings of postcolonial poetics. To be sure, the painter agonizes at times about his chosen craft—as he did when attempting to sketch a ritual. In contrast to the static photographs that capture Fola’s attention earlier in the novel, Chiki’s canvases are described as frustratingly avant-garde and impressionistic. Such may be the result of what Chiki identifies as his chief skill as a painter: his ability to render “movement.” He prides himself on his knack for making “the surface of a canvas crawl like any crab, or gallop with tons of colour like a horse” (230). Once working together with Fola, movement intensifies from a style on a canvas to a political position about how aesthetics can literally move or compel communities to rethink the world they inhabit. Chiki’s role as a surrogate father to Fola therefore activates his conviction in the broadly social and particularly generational viability of the arts.

In addition to Chiki’s facilitation of Fola’s self-discovery on the level of plot, Lamming powerfully foregrounds the relationship between sociability, heritage, and the arts at the end of *Season of Adventure*. The novel’s closing

paragraph depicts the musician Gort teaching children of the *tonelle* how to play the drums. Liza, the young girl from the ceremony that arrested Fola's attention, sits on Gort's knees as he stresses the importance of remembering the drums. The reappearance of Liza at the end of the novel suggestively circles back to Fola's spiritual awakening at the beginning of *Season of Adventure*. By placing such symbolic weight on Liza as San Cristobal's next generation, Lamming presents a microcosm of the spiritual ritual that opened the novel. Indeed, the novel's opening depiction of the ceremony of the souls emphasized details such as the organization of objects in physical space and the devotion of the ritual's participants. But in *Season of Adventure*'s closing paragraphs, Lamming distills the meaning of aesthetic and spiritual ritual into an intergenerational music lesson. With the painter Chiki "grown more melancholy" following the turmoil that ensues after the vice president's murder, drummer Gort takes center stage (365). Gort has been the object of Chiki's envy; although Chiki is proud of his talents as a painter, he feels "the magic of Great Gort's drum" contains a purity that the "artifice" of his paintings lack (242, 241). Lamming thus seems to betray his own anxieties as a novelist with a conclusion that emphasizes neither the practice of self-reflexive fictionality nor the visual artistry of painting:

In the evenings [Gort] will assemble the children and teach them how to play. It is the only way of proving what he argues. He admits he is no prophet. He cannot name tomorrow; but hoisting Liza as example on his knees he begs simply to say, Gort will say: as a child treads soft in new school shoes, and a man is nervous who knows his first night watch may be among thieves; so the rhythms are not sure, but their hands must be attentive: and so recent is the season of adventure, so fresh from the miracle of their triumph, the drums are guarding the day: the drums must guard the day. (367)

In addition to paying homage to Caribbean musical culture, the scene's emphasis on the drums in the context of Lamming's realism also crucially reiterates the political yet probing edge of realist fiction even if it does not seem self-reflexive at first glance.¹² Just as Lamming envisioned the West Indian novel as an innovative camera that would get "near enough" and ultimately "inside" its subjects in order to teach historians and social scientists, Gort embraces his art as a form of knowledge that "is the only way of proving what he argues." Politically-committed art for both Lamming and Gort therefore entails an always-tentative yet sincere process of attempting to share knowledge with audiences. The omniscient narration even turns to literary language to convey the contemplative caution around the rhythms of Gort's drums: the thoughtful similes likening Gort's slow, almost virtuous caution in playing the drums to that of a young schoolchild and a new surveillance officer evoke how a transformative realist aesthetic hinges on a humble attempt to describe the world rather than a totalizing one of "nam[ing] tomorrow."

Daniel Deronda also ponders the extent to which aesthetics, knowledge, and everyday life can inform one another yet similarly concludes with a statement on art's political efficacy. Daniel's mother, who he learns late in the novel is a world-class singer named Leonora Halm-Eberstein, contributes to Eliot's cautionary tale about the dangers of conflating a method of representation with life itself. For Leonora, living itself has become acting, which the novel's narrator reveals in the following description of how she manifests emotion:

[T]his woman's nature was one in which all feeling—and all the more when it was tragic as well as real—immediately became matter of conscious representation: experience immediately passed into drama, and she acted her own emotions. In a minor degree this is nothing uncommon, but in the Princess the acting had a rare perfection of physiognomy, voice, and gesture. It would not be true to say that she felt less because of this double consciousness: she felt—that is, her mind went through—all the more, but with a difference; each nucleus of pain or pleasure had a deep atmosphere of the excitement or spiritual intoxication which at once exalts and deadens. (629)

Leonora's simultaneous consciousness of the "feeling" she represents as well as the "drama" she creates results in a surprising contradiction: her acting both thrills and rings hollow. This critique of Leonora's art supplies a crucial addendum to Eliot's realist manifestos. By delineating how Leonora's craft is too accurate, Eliot underlines that a "faithful representing of commonplace things" needs to take creative liberties in order to have a transformative impact on audiences (*Adam Bede* 162). Such prioritization of aesthetic flair is important for two reasons. First, it shows how the flattened portrait of nineteenth-century realism to which twentieth-century postcolonial literature is often opposed in fact already demonstrates formal and political qualities more commonly associated with modernism such as self-reflexivity and recognition of language's possible shortcomings. Second, Eliot's suggestion that art only meaningfully generates emotion when it balances faithful representation with selective style resonates with Chiki's ethos of remaining committed to producing art even if it means his work "aint enough to understand" what he seeks to represent. For Lamming and Eliot, Chiki and Leonora illustrate opposing ends of a realist spectrum. Lamming characterizes Chiki as an ostracized painter whose talents and politics are renewed when a young woman begins a spiritual awakening. By contrast, Eliot positions Leonora as an artist so immersed in the arts that she is unmoored from all meaningful relationships in addition to experiencing a "spiritual intoxication" that both "exalts and deadens" (629). Whereas Chiki and Fola work in tandem in Lamming's novel, Leonora and Daniel stand in tension with one another. On one level, their tension does not necessarily prove an obstacle to the novel's Jewish plot: Leonora confirms her Jewish background, which Daniel embraces. But on the level of the novel's contemplation of the relationship between aesthetics, politics, and spirituality,

the strain between Leonora and Daniel constitutes a critique of art's danger to create self-serving quotidian experiences of isolation. Put more simply, Leonora may enjoy a life as a famous and successful singer, but Eliot seems uncomfortable that her art is not anchored in a larger social project. Chiki, on the other hand, lives a life of obscurity yet attaches his art to a citizen's uprising prompted by a woman who does not at first glance seem like an ally.

Like Lamming's novel, *Daniel Deronda* also concludes with commentary on the simultaneous promise and doubt of intergenerational relationships. Leonora sends her son a letter commanding him to "[w]ait for me" (617). Daniel obeys, and the novel intensifies its rhetoric around Leonora's interrelated aesthetic and spiritual vacuity; as Daniel waits, he realizes "he had lived through so many ideal meetings with his mother, and they had seemed more real than this!" (625). In the meeting that follows, Leonora provides her son a more detailed account of her decision to free herself of both the obligation to a child and the Jewish faith her father attempted to instill in her. Leonora lashes out at Daniel and tells him that he will never know "the slavery of being a girl" and describes how she "cared for the wide world" rather than the gendered and religious circumscriptions her father promoted (631, 630). There is, of course, a powerful feminist politics pulsating through Leonora's conversation with Daniel.¹³ At the same time, Leonora's rationale to pursue the life of an artist in a social world only idealized as "wide" reveals the danger of her cosmopolitanism. In being unable to accept the *political* possibilities of her Jewishness, Leonora's life as an artist amounts to a dead spectacle. When Daniel comes to see her during their final conversation, Leonora is even suggestively funereal in appearance, "with black lace hanging loosely from the summit of her whitening hair" (624). Leonora is thus a character that uses a form of hyper-accurate performance to trap herself in precisely the kind of Dickensian "unreality" that Eliot cautions against.

Leonora's use of her singing and acting talents to sever ties and pursue what she sees as the ultimate freedom—freedom from responsibility to others—is a striking contrast to how her son perceives the relationship between arts and everyday life. In a key scene earlier in the novel, conversation during a luncheon broaches news of the 1865 Afro-Caribbean uprising in Morant Bay, Jamaica. By referring to this event, which sprung from mounting tensions between Afro-Jamaicans and a colonial government indifferent to the island's economic troubles, the scene achieves what Roland Barthes called "the reality effect" of supposedly "useless details," or an intentional correspondence between reality and representation that does not necessarily serve the fiction's plot (141-43). Eliot uses this reality effect to reveal Daniel's surprisingly empathetic politics. Daniel's companions describe Afro-Jamaicans as "a beastly sort of baptist Caliban"; Daniel, however, admits that "he had always felt a little with Caliban, who naturally had his own point of view and could sing a good song" (331). To some extent, Daniel's praise of Caliban's singing abilities is reminiscent

of the exhibition of black bodies for European anthropological entertainment earlier in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ But the ability to sing well also signals precious cultural capital within the world Eliot has built in the novel. Julius Klesmer, for example, is described as a mix of “the German, the Slave, and the Semite”—undoubtedly markers of otherness in Victorian Britain. But as a music instructor, Klesmer actually serves as the novel’s gatekeeper for identifying talent (47). Klesmer even tells the beautiful but vapid Gwendolen Harleth that her singing choices indicate “a puerile state of culture” (49). When Eliot therefore depicts Daniel, who has commanded “a fine musical instinct” since boyhood, connecting with the “Calibans” of Jamaica through song, the novel posits a radical affiliation across racial and geographical boundaries (168). If the arts in Lamming’s novel recuperate obfuscated generational links across color and class as between Chiki and Fola, the arts in *Daniel Deronda* hold the promise of forging unexpected alliances between different outsiders such as the Jewish Daniel and the Afro-Caribbean Caliban.

Eliot also foregrounds her optimism in the cross-cultural possibilities of the arts in the very last scene of *Daniel Deronda*. Mordecai has just passed away, and Daniel and his new wife Mirah hold him as the novel closes with a quotation from John Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* (1671):

Nothing is here for tears, nothing to wail
Or knock the breast; no weakness, no contempt,
Dispraise or blame; nothing but well and fair,
And what may quiet us in a death so noble. (811)

Milton combines Greek drama and a figure from the Old Testament to draw Samson—whose death the play’s chorus is lamenting in the excerpt above—as a tragic figure. By punctuating Mordecai’s death with the quotation, Eliot seems to both pay respect to the character and remind readers of the multiple genealogies that underlie the canonical Milton tragedy. In turn, she suggests that there is a place within the British literary arts—and British society more generally—for *Daniel Deronda*. For Lamming and Eliot, meta-narrative techniques such as analogies to other arts and allusions to Milton do not undermine their realisms. Rather, such obviously fictional strategies are central to these authors’ visions of reinforcing the meaningfulness of the novel form in daily life.

III.

Lamming and Eliot furthermore craft fiction in the name of social knowledge by using a particularly candid strategy: their famous authorial interruptions. After chapter 17 of *Adam Bede*, the self-reflexivity of Eliot’s narrators becomes subtler over the course of several novels. In *Daniel Deronda*, the narrator only makes a brief but crucial direct address to readers early on.

When contemplating the marriage prospects of Grandcourt, the man whom Daniel's potential love interest Gwendolen eventually weds, the narrator remarks, "Some readers of this history will doubtless regard it as incredible that people should construct matrimonial prospects on the mere report that a bachelor of good fortune and possibilities was coming within reach." Yet the narrator quickly delimits the story being told: "But, let it be observed, nothing is here narrated of human nature generally: the history in its present stage concerns only a few people in a corner of Wessex" (91). This statement seems to belie the astonishing scope of *Daniel Deronda*; the novel, after all, charts its titular character's spiritual journey alongside his encounters with the spoiled Gwendolen and the complicated marriage she enters in order to save her family from financial ruin.¹⁵ The unabashedly blinkered focus on "a few people in a corner of Wessex" furthermore shows how Eliot's interest in realism is not limited to the grittiness associated with the working class. The narrator's empathy toward the aristocratic elite thus reinforces a central tenet of Eliot's realism: that the "history" being recounted is always already selective but no less meaningful so long as it is honest.

A three-page section titled "Author's Note" after Fola's final appearance in *Season of the Adventure* constitutes Lamming's own notorious use of an authorial interruption. The note elaborates on the background of the drummer Powell, a man who responds to Fola's attempt at solidarity across color and class lines with frustrated violence. In the note, the narrator explains how he and Powell came from similar backgrounds: as half-brothers, they attended school together until the narrator accepted "a public scholarship which started my migration into another world." The narrator goes on to admit that he "forgot the *tonelle* as men forget a war," which he believes implicitly "drove Powell to his criminal defeat" (332). This instance of authorial interruption is similar to those of Eliot in *Adam Bede* and *Daniel Deronda* in the way it directly reminds readers that the reality at hand is being crafted by a selective narrator. But Lamming's "Author's Note" raises the epistemological stakes of Eliot's investment in refusing "unreality" in his insistence that the author who speaks in the passage is not the fictional narrator of the novel *Season of Adventure*, but in fact Lamming himself. The "Author's Note" has understandably fascinated and perplexed critics throughout the years, which is why Lamming's elaboration to a question about the passage in a 2002 interview is worth quoting in full:

I felt now that I wanted to *personalize* that total statement, to say that it is *me* also that I am talking about, not me as any author but me as a man called "Lamming" who is caught up in that ambivalence about directions, and who has daily to question himself about the nature of his relationships, to question himself about the kind of commitments he has made here and there about this and that, and that as a matter of fact I have not really gone as far as my instinct of rebellion is ordering me to go. So I wanted that to be known that I am talking about *me* here and not just describing.¹⁶ (160)

In personalizing the meaning of Powell's fate by imagining the character as his own blood relation, Lamming demands a realism that critically probes the material and emotional realities of not just the subjects of a narrative, but also of the creator of those subjects. As I have shown, Lamming and Eliot raise questions about the aesthetic's political possibilities by presenting readers with characters who commit their livelihoods to creative production. In his "Author's Note," Lamming blurs the distinction between fiction and nonfiction in such a way that remains true to the plot of the novel at hand—it reveals the identity of the vice president's murderer—as well as to his broader project of contemplating the role of the novel in Caribbean social life.

In addition to providing a coda to Powell's whereabouts, the "Author's Note" also reflects on the methodological tools of representation that preoccupy Lamming and Eliot. Lamming explains that he "doubts whether any writer, foreign or native to San Cristobal, historian or otherwise, is likely, at this time, to recover the truth" behind Powell's turn to violence and subsequent disappearance from the island. In a manner that echoes Lamming's and Eliot's thoughts on novelists vis-à-vis social scientists, he delineates two groups of storytellers that have attempted to make sense of Powell's actions. For "historians and analysts," Powell is drawn as an individual who approached "freedom as an absolute" and thus forcibly took what was not being given to him (330). But for "novelists and poets"—Lamming has essentially created a fictional afterlife for Powell wherein he is a folk hero—the drummer is understood in a "melancholy light." For these writers, nostalgia rather than freedom was the absolute that drove Powell; it was furthermore a nostalgia "trained by habit and the force of need to thrive on a memory which had never happened." Neither framing wholly convinces Lamming yet he nonetheless commends historians and novelists alike for dedicating their lives to pursuing such work. Lamming then finally reveals his yearning for "another way to the truth of Powell's defeat" and outlines his personal connections to the drummer (331). With its simultaneous resistance to and reinforcement of the fictional and the nonfictional and the novelistic and the personal, the "Author's Note" is perhaps most effectively understood as Lamming offering himself bare as both novelist and Caribbean intellectual to readers and critics. Such somber vulnerability is a stark contrast to the ostensible naivety of Victorian realism on one hand as well as to the playful but politicized experimentation of postcolonial modernism on the other.

My aim has been to show that the broader traditions of postcolonial and Victorian literature share surprisingly similar aesthetic-political aims regarding the possibilities of a mimetic yet pliable realism. Lamming and Eliot, I have argued, strive simultaneously to explore and deem valuable experiences of the spiritual and the aesthetic. *Season of Adventure* and *Daniel Deronda* thus participate in a forgotten meaning of realism as "a method of theorizing artistic mediation" (Esty and Lye 277). Both authors in their essays push readers to

take seriously the epistemological stakes of artistic representations. The lesson therefore implicit in their respective novels studied here is that storytelling—however seemingly fictional and capacious—demands a political weight in social life just as much as any other so-called natural history.

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NOTES

¹ Realist modes qualified with terms such as *marvelous* or *magical* are the realisms thought to adequately accommodate the political visions of postcolonial thought in general and Caribbean literature in particular. Ashcroft, Gates, and Tiffin list “allegory,” “magic realism,” and “discontinuous narratives” as distinctive features of postcolonial writing (28). Dash has drawn from the writings of Jacques Stephen Alexis and Wilson Harris to posit “marvelous realism,” an approach where authors embrace a “composite of the past” in fiction (68). Zamora and Faris’s collection traces the origins of “magic realism” to German post-expressionist art and also discusses magical realism as a recurring mode within Spanish and Latin American literatures.

² Gikandi, Emery, Kalliney, and Brown are some of the critics who trace a relationship between Anglophone Caribbean literature and modernism. Gikandi connects modernism to a violent modernity that originates with Columbus’s encounter with the Caribbean in 1492 (*Writing in Limbo*); Emery reconsiders European modernist readings of Jean Rhys from the perspective of Caribbean traditions such as carnival; Kalliney excavates an ambivalent relationship of affiliation and tension between interwar modernists and Caribbean writers in London; finally, Brown builds upon Kalliney’s study of metropolitan London to show how using modernist styles could be seen as politically advantageous for Caribbean writers. For more on this flourishing body of work, see Brown, “Modernism and Anglophone Caribbean Literature.”

³ Brathwaite’s landmark 1967 essay “Jazz and the West Indian Novel” sets out “to outline an alternative to the English Romantic/Victorian cultural tradition which still operates among and on us” (72-73). Edmondson unpacks the influence of Victorian literary manhood that Brathwaite reveals in his early essays, and she also delineates how—precisely because of the circumscriptions of nationalism that come with Victorian manhood—Caribbean women writers such as Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid have more in common with African American feminist writing than the Victorian canon that Brathwaite sought to reject even as he emulated it.

⁴ Naipaul’s *The Middle Passage* is filled with statements of vitriol toward the Caribbean, including this rejection of Trinidadian steel drum culture: “the steel band used to be regarded as a high manifestation of West Indian Culture, and it was a sound I detested” (34).

⁵ Levine defined realism as “an attempt to use language to get beyond language, to discover some non-verbal truth out there.” But he was influential for noting that “[t]he history of English realism obviously depended in large measure on changing notions of what *is* ‘out there,’ of how best to ‘represent’ it, and of whether, after all, representation is possible or the ‘out there’ knowable” (6).

⁶ Andrade and Anjaria, critics of African and Indian writing, respectively, argue for more nuanced understandings of realism in their fields. Andrade emphasizes that realism is a mode that strives for mimeticism yet nonetheless has been pursued through different approaches in different historical contexts. Anjaria proposes that realism must be understood in Indian fiction to self-consciously grapple with indeterminacy even in light of its interest in representing “the real.” Elsewhere, Robinette studies Lamming’s complex realism, although he focuses on the author’s second novel *The Emigrants* to show that “Lamming insists upon an artistic intention that (without negating his obvious debt to modernism) recalls the realist project” (14). By placing Lamming’s fiction alongside Eliot’s, I show that Lamming’s commitment to “the realist project” is much stronger than critics have let on.

⁷ This ritual and the *tonelle* are drawn from Lamming’s experience in Haiti. Lamming describes, albeit in a much more documentary manner, a “ceremony of the Souls” he “witnessed” just outside Port-au-Prince in his introduction to *The Pleasures of Exile*. Comparing the account of

the ceremony from that text with its depiction in *Season of Adventure* highlights how Lamming mines the ritual for its “universal significance” regarding attempts at dialogue across cultures in the former, and how, conversely, he fictionalizes the ceremony for the much more specific purpose of linking Fola to an African spirituality in the latter (9-10).

⁸ Although perhaps more apt for poetry, Brathwaite pointed out how British education in the Caribbean produced a discordant situation where “we haven’t got the syllables, the syllabic intelligence, to describe the hurricane, which is our own experience, whereas we can describe the imported alien experience of the snowfall” (*History of the Voice* 8-9). Brathwaite earlier wrote, “It was in language that the slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master; and it was in his (mis)-use of it that he perhaps most effectively rebelled” (*Development of Creole Society* 237). Realism in this context therefore prioritizes oral verisimilitude.

⁹ Benjamin Disraeli, who was born into Judaism yet converted to Anglicanism as a boy, might have been prime minister during the publication of *Daniel Deronda*, but anti-Semitic stereotypes about Jewish greed and financial manipulation remained fixtures of the Victorian cultural landscape. A cartoon in the November 9, 1867 edition of *Punch*, for example, depicts Disraeli as Fagin, the Jewish antagonist from Dickens’s *Oliver Twist*.

¹⁰ See Baker for more on Eliot’s engagement with Kabbalistic mysticism. Eliot makes two direct references to “Cabbala” in the novel: Mordecai speaks about “the doctrine of the Cabbala” and how it explains that “souls are born again and again in new bodies till they are perfected and purified” (540). The narrator earlier foreshadows this belief regarding souls in new bodies when speaking of “the notion of the Cabbalists” (473).

¹¹ I therefore agree with Emery’s reading regarding how Chiki’s portrait allows a democratization of art insofar as it invites the people of San Cristobal to exercise a critical practice of looking. See Emery, *Modernism, the Visual, and Caribbean Literature* 170.

¹² Emery’s study of visual art in twentieth-century Caribbean literature argues that sound cultures receive a surfeit of critical attention. But given how visual and musical artists play significant roles in *Season of Adventure*, it is clear that both mediums are crucial to Lamming.

¹³ Dever reads the deferral of Leonora’s appearance to late in the novel as evidence of the mother “radically disrupting the world of her son and formal conventions of contemporary fiction” (171). This approach thus frames Leonora’s sudden and scene-stealing appearance as a political gesture on Eliot’s part to compel readers to think critically about the demands made of women.

¹⁴ In 1810, Sarah Baartman—better known as the “Hottentot Venus”—was taken from South Africa for exhibition in London. The singing abilities Daniel associates with Caliban also link to minstrel shows that were popular throughout Britain and the US at the time.

¹⁵ Leavis famously proposed that *Daniel Deronda* requires “simple surgery” in order to jettison its title character and foreground Gwendolen’s ostensibly more tragic story (66).

¹⁶ Paquet writes that the “Author’s Note” “interrupts the flow of the novel” (75) while Ramchand posits that the passage “seems in theory to break the fictional illusion but in fact serves to strengthen it” (15).

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