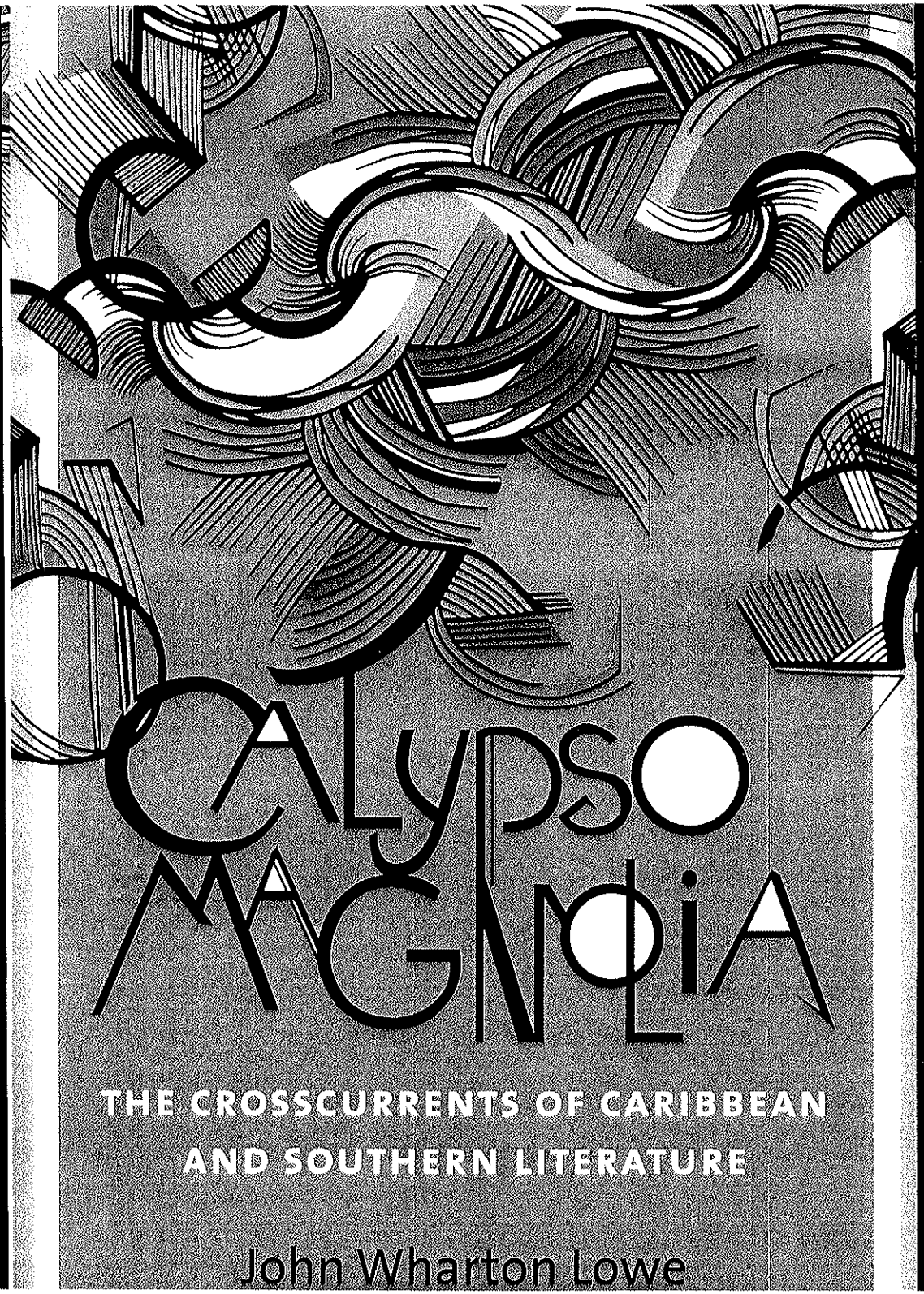

CALYPSO MAGNOLIA

THE CROSSCURRENTS OF CARIBBEAN AND SOUTHERN LITERATURE

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Contents

Introduction

What the map cuts up, the narrative cuts across.

—Michel de Certeau

The past two turbulent decades have forced much rethinking about nation and national boundaries. The rise of multinational entities and the advent of transnational markets have sharpened our awareness that cultural configurations have always ignored real and imaginary sovereign borders. This premise has often been true for regions as well, particularly the most fabled part of the United States, the South, whose permeable borders hug the former states of the Confederacy—although Kentucky, Oklahoma, Maryland, and West Virginia sometimes get thrown in too. We now recognize, however, that the U.S. South—especially the coastal states of Texas, Louisiana, and Florida—is in many ways the northern rim of the Caribbean. In this study, I employ the inclusive concept of the circumCaribbean, which takes into account the basin's islands, the Gulf of Mexico, and the rims of these inland seas, namely the Southern coast of the United States, the eastern coast of Mexico, and the northern coast of South America. Immanuel Wallerstein calls this wider South the "extended Caribbean" and maps an area reaching from Brazil to Maryland, recognizing the transnational spread of the plantation economy that gripped the New World from its inception well into the twentieth century (2011, 166–67). While I accept his premise, I prefer the term "circumCaribbean."[1] Following this geographical conception into its transnational and transcultural manifestations, this book lays out the myriad ways the "South of the South" has affected the inhabitants of the U.S. South, particularly those dwelling in the tropical and subtropical zones of the region. I will also provide illustrations of the U.S. South's effect on its southern neighbors.

The Shifting Tectonics of Culture

The age of contact, exploration, and conquest had no strict sense of boundaries; early maps were constantly morphing into new formulations. Pre-

contact southern America had broad bands of differing cultures. Powerful Native American nations in the circumCaribbean, such as the Natchez, the Choctaws, the Creeks, and, in the wider Caribbean, the Mayans, Aztecs, Arawaks, and Caribs, were drawn into complex relations and often war, first with each other, and then with European explorers and colonizers, including the French, the Spanish, the English, and the Dutch. As conquest proceeded, New World Creoles were constantly shifting identities; they often intermarried or cohabited with Native Americans, African Americans, other Caribbeans, and, later, Asian immigrants. There were, of course, ties among the subjects of the various Western colonial powers. The United States had affinities with English-speaking Jamaica and Barbados; French Louisiana had ties with Haiti, Martinique, and Guadeloupe. We now remember that before the Louisiana Purchase, whose bicentennial we marked in 2003, New Orleans was the crown jewel of a Franco-Caribbean empire that spread French culture up the Mississippi River and across the Gulf of Mexico. Spanish Florida (and then Spanish Louisiana) was administered by governors in Havana and had links with the many other Hispanic colonies of the New World. The Spanish legacy, however, was also manifest in other Southern states, especially Texas. St. Augustine is the oldest continuously inhabited town in the United States, and its vibrant city to the south, Miami, now resonates as a kind of Latino capital, where business and culture often as not are negotiated in Spanish.

The congealing of regional identities in the United States during the nineteenth century increasingly led to the identification of the South as the opposite or "other" of the North. The idea of Southerners as opposed to the shaping emphases of the Founding Fathers (even though many of those men were Southerners) had emerged earlier, shortly after the American Revolution, and accelerated in the buildup to the Civil War. Part of the process consisted of linking the South negatively with the Caribbean, which also featured a slave economy, a debilitating climate, tropical diseases and epidemics, hostile jungles, and a feudal agricultural and social system that enriched a relatively idle upper class at the expense not only of the slaves, but of the common white folk of the region as well.

Conversely, the U.S. South saw its similarities with the Caribbean in a positive light. After all, many Southerners had properties in both the coastal South and the Caribbean. The plantations of the circumCaribbean generated great wealth and, to the minds of the property owners, enabled the creation of a refined, cultured ruling class, which made New Orleans, Charleston, Natchez, St. Pierre, Cap François, Havana, and Vera Cruz sophisticated and

beautiful cities. The South was not immune to the nation's appetite for new lands, and antebellum Southerners looked to Cuba as a possible new state, whose annexation would provide senators and congressmen who would support slavery. Filibusters based in the South attempted to conquer not only Cuba but other Latin American countries too, and one of these men, William Walker, became president of Nicaragua for a time. Southerners felt ideally suited for such missions. They often had more in common with the "South of the South" than with the U.S. North, especially in terms of the transnational operations of slave economies. As explorers, travelers, and soldiers penetrated the circumCaribbean, they saw their own cultures in new ways as they contrasted them to those they were experiencing for the first time; concurrently, inhabitants of the islands and the more southern shores of the wider Caribbean began to have new ideas about *their* cultures, as contact with their northern neighbors proceeded, a process that would expand exponentially as the web of relationships grew and strengthened.

Often these encounters were martial. U.S. invasions of circumCaribbean nations, beginning with Mexico, resulted in the introduction of U.S. goods, customs, and culture, influences that grew rapidly as capitalist- and U.S.-dominated political and economic nets spread across the region. These events and their cross-cultural results helped form the idea of the circum-Caribbean, a concept certainly based on geographical realities, but also on increasingly complicated overlays of agriculture, trade (including the sale of human beings), religion, and traditions.

The rise of sugar production in the lower South after the expulsion of French planters from independent Haiti made for extensive links with Cuba, another new site for cane production. Engineers and merchants from the South and the Caribbean had myriad and beneficial influences on each other as circumCaribbean industry developed, particularly after the advent of labor-saving machinery. Similarly, cotton was always seen as a bridge between the peoples of the Americas, and the need for enslaved labor in both sugar and cotton production made the slave trade a demonic hemispheric priority.

In the decades before the Civil War, however, a real difference emerged between concepts of the South and of the Caribbean. After the forging of a common purpose in the debate over slavery and the subsequent Civil War, the South firmly believed in its own distinct history and identity, unlike the Caribbean, where centuries of imposed colonial rule made Spain, England, or France the "mother country" and the source of national myths. The longing many Southerners had for annexing the realms South of the South clearly had much to do, first, with U.S. and Southern perceptions of

"blank" territory, which supposedly lacked history and development. Such tropical topicalities were thus ripe for reinterpretation and/or appropriation, be it imaginative or literal, as areas to be read through the spectrum of Southern culture, aspirations, and projections. Southerners also perceived the many geopolitical similarities between the two realms, which for centuries were in fact contiguous, sans national boundaries, and, in the case of Spanish, French, and British imperial networks, part of the same juridical and cultural control—likewise the similarities (in spite of the myth of a bichromatic U.S. South) in hybrid populations.

The defeat of the South in 1865 put an end to Confederate dreams of an empire, but many ex-Confederates immigrated to Mexico, Brazil, and other points south, thereby creating a new network of relationships, one that would intensify as Northern capital began to force mono-crop agricultural colonization in the Caribbean, a practice that often involved Southern engineers and workmen and the utilization of important Southern ports. Emancipation did not end the need for cheap labor but rather ushered in new forms of labor exploitation, such as sharecropping, and also far more extensive circumCaribbean trade networks. As Natalie J. Ring reminds us, the 1895 Cotton States and International Exposition in Atlanta was chiefly intended to foster stronger trade relations between the South and partners throughout Mexico, Central America, and South America: as Ring writes, the exposition was a "global celebration of the South" highlighting extensive relations in the wider circumCaribbean region (2012, 101).

Postbellum U.S. military incursions into the Caribbean began with the Spanish American War, which brought Puerto Rico and Cuba into the nation's orbit of power. Later, armed invasions of several Latin American countries (including a fifteen-year occupation of Haiti) brought many Southern soldiers and sailors to the South of the South.

Boxing In the Region: The Rise of Southern Studies

As we shall see, all of these events and influences had an effect on circumCaribbean literature. The U.S. academy, fixated on a strictly defined literary canon of white, native-born, male writers, for the most part ignored circumCaribbean texts, even in the U.S. South itself. Paradoxically, the scholarly subfield of Southern Studies, which began as an effort to counter negative images of the South, in many ways mimicked patterns in American literary studies and the quickly following new field of American Studies. Both of these latter disciplines eschewed comparative study in favor of scholarship that focused on American exceptionalism and strident nationalism. Presenting an equally "exceptional" view of the U.S. South and similarly concentrating on the achievements of white men, Southern Studies took hold in Southern colleges and universities in the early twentieth century and accelerated with the advent of the Fugitives/Agrarians at Vanderbilt and the social theorists at the University of North Carolina. There were significant differences in the stances of these two groups, but all these scholars and artists were operating to counter negative concepts of the region held by dominant Northern academics, journalists, politicians, and businessmen. Nevertheless, both the Nashville and the Chapel Hill theorists proceeded to develop similarly monolithic profiles, closely adhering to white, masculine, Protestant cultures, with scant attention paid to transnational connections, influences, or histories. (There were exceptions to this, as in Andrew Lytle's historical novel concerning the Spanish in Florida, or the popular novels of the African American writer Frank Yerby, who often traced connections between the South and the Caribbean.) The emergence of William Faulkner as the centerpiece of narrowly focused notions of Southern identity seemed to crystallize the inward-looking aspect of the discipline, even though there were always transnational aspects in Faulkner's work and, for that matter, in the fiction of many of his Southern contemporaries, such as Katherine Anne Porter, Thomas Wolfe, Evelyn Scott, Richard Wright, and Zora Neale Hurston.

The Local, the Global, and New Concepts of Region

In moving beyond these narrow conceptions, I draw on theorists such as Homi Bhabha, who has stated that "counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological maneuvers through which 'imagined communities' are given essentialist identities" (1990, 300). Likewise, as Benedict Anderson has demonstrated, national boundaries are really nothing more than veritable dotted lines around imagined communities (1983, passim). Constituting the Caribbean world to include its center and rim(s) as a new kind of imagined community is in fact a counter-narrative that questions and critiques both the totalizing concept of nation, which blinds its people to the multiple connections with those outside its borders, and the subset enclosure of region, which has been employed as a stereotypical and negative rendition of what the encircling "nation" is not. Very often national powers have a vested interest in preventing these new kinds of

recognitions and extensions of cultural and topographical zones, for they may lead to efforts at secession and attempts to form new nations. In the more mundane world of "Southern-Lit-Nation," there may well be resistance to the kind of argument I am making here, as it can be read as a threat to the hegemony of the platitudes that have reigned in Southern Studies for decades. However, as I hope to suggest, we can better understand the local through the lens of the transnational and the global, and Southern literature and culture have always transcended the physical boundaries of a geographical South. While I have included references to, and readings of, many of the authors I have mentioned already, this work will provide extended readings of the following writers from the nineteenth century: Victor Séjour, William Clark Falkner, Raphael Semmes, Arthur Manigault, Martin Delany, Lucy Holcombe Pickens, Constance Fenimore Woolson, Lafcadio Hearn, and George Washington Cable; and from the twentieth century: Claude McKay, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, William Faulkner, Arna Bontemps, Richard Wright, George Lamming, Édouard Glissant, Madison Smartt Bell, Virgil Suarez, Roberto Fernández, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Ana Menéndez, and Cristina García. Why have many of these writers been ignored in Southern literary scholarship? Too often, narrow definitions of region have become blinders. Over the many decades of South watching, our notions of the South's history and culture have been circumscribed by what people have wanted and expected to see. Stereotypes have eclipsed reality, and transnational, shared cultural traditions have been ignored. As Salman Rushdie wickedly notes in *The Satanic Verses*, the trouble with the English is that so much of their history happened overseas, so they don't know what it means (1989, 264). Surely the same has been true for Southerners.

The New Southern Studies has rightly been criticized for focusing too much interest on the work of William Faulkner. While I will briefly consider his circumCaribbean aspects here (particularly in *Absalom, Absalom!*), I will not elaborate, partly because he has been closely examined from this perspective already, but also because other U.S. Southern writers have more to tell us about the circumCaribbean, and some of them have rarely been associated with Southern literature, let alone the narratives of the transnational South. While I will treat the entire basin, I will be especially interested in the history and literature(s) of Mexico, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, Barbados, Louisiana, and Florida.

Further, simply in terms of U.S. Southern literature, it is high time to quit worrying about where writers were born, how long they lived in the South, or if there is a static "Southernness" that needs attention. Culture is

always fluid and dynamic, and it pays no attention to constructed borders. I want to pursue narrative as it cuts across maps that create artificial lines around peoples and cultures. There will be no focus here on the Civil War or Reconstruction except as those events influenced the writers I present who were configuring a transnational South during and after those events. I will, however, examine the Mexican American War, which involved massive numbers of combatants from the U.S. South (many of them in command positions), but I will do so with an eye to the impressions these men received of the circumCaribbean, rather than attending to military and political history, although both these topics will be considered.

I am attempting a new direction here, but it needs to be stated that leading scholars of the U.S. South urged the methodology I now practice some time ago. In 1986, C. Vann Woodward called on scholars to break out of the deadening dichotomy of North/South studies: "Comparison . . . offers [the] possibility of redefining traditional problems, revealing what needs explanation, shaping fresh periodization, discovering unsuspected relationships, proving what seemed ordinary to be rare or unique and what was assumed to be exceptional to be common" (1986, 123). What happens if we conjoin this insight to the adjacent circumCaribbean? According to Glissant, this area

> may be held up as one of the places in the world where Relation presents itself most visibly. . . . This has always been a place of encounter and connivance and, at the same time, a passageway toward the American continent. Compared to the Mediterranean, which is an inner sea surrounded by lands, a sea that concentrates . . . the Caribbean is, in contrast, a sea that explodes the scattered lands into an arc. . . . What took place in the Caribbean, which could be summed up in the word *creolization,* approximates the idea of Relation. . . . But the explosion of cultures does not mean they are scattered or mutually diluted. It is the violent sign of their consensual, not imposed, sharing. (*Poetics*, 33–34)

Understanding the CircumCaribbean

As we do this work, we must also be mindful of the complex history that has shaped and reshaped the circumCaribbean and how the invention of national units has obscured a conception of a cultural and geographical region. As Barbara Ladd asserts, "The South's places have never been simply

geographical—especially where literature and literary criticism are concerned. . . . We might . . . reconceptualize place as a site of cultural dynamism. . . . It enables us to shift our focus from moments or sites of narrative (or historiographical) stability to moments/sites of narrative and historiographical process" (2002, 48–49). Ladd, after addressing the plantation system as circumCaribbean rather than merely Southern, suggests reading plantation narratives from across this transnational region side by side: thus far, however, she notes, "novels like Mitchell's [*Gone with the Wind*] and like Stark Young's *So Red the Rose* have not been read with novels of the Caribbean like Claude McKay's *Banana Bottom*" (2002, 49). While I don't make this comparison, I do read McKay's unjustly neglected novel side by side with Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, with an eye toward the common heritage of postslavery people of the black diaspora.

Throughout this book, I will be concerned with this African diaspora, as all the islands, states, and nations I consider were part of both the tragic history of slavery and subsequent forms of racial oppression, some of which continue to this day. On the other hand, to use Thadious Davis's helpful terminology, these locales became "black spaces" that generated startlingly creative, and occasionally joyous, New World cultures (1986, 3). As Paul Gilroy suggests in his paradigmatic *The Black Atlantic* (1993) (a term I will also employ here), the African diaspora took different forms, not only in differing states of the U.S. South and North, but also in the circumCaribbean, where the history of colonialism and imperialism—mainly executed by Spain, France, England, Holland, and then the United States—shaped the lives of African-descended people rather differently.

The circumCaribbean contains elements of other diasporas as well. The "coolies" that were brought to the area from India form part of South Asia's continuing diaspora and played an essential role in the Caribbean. James Clifford notes that diasporic discourse has proliferated because of 1) decolonization; 2) increased immigration; 3) global communications; and 4) transport (1997, 249), factors that were present in earlier ages as well. Certainly one of the most significant effects of diasporic movements on the U.S. South has been the continuing migration to the region from both Cuba and Mexico.

Again and again, we will encounter writers, often on ships, contemplating the Caribbean through the lens of their Southern background and/or experiences. In terms of the two cultures and the ways in which their confluence and overlay(s) can shape identity, T. Minh-ha has claimed that identity "lies at the intersection of dwelling and traveling and is a claim of continuity within discontinuity (and vice-versa)" (1994, 14). According to Minh-ha,

these vectors lead to a third space, one that proceeds from hybrid constructions, and this space can generate new forms of expression that differ from those of the first two spaces of *home* and *abroad*. While these concerns will surface throughout this study, they have special relevance to my consideration of the travel writers of the late nineteenth century, who capitalized on the new fascination with tropic climes.

Accordingly, I will consider some of the writers and many of the characters I have assembled here as "tropicopolitans," a term Srinivas Aravamudan employs bivalently, to refer, first, to writers who address the tropics, and second, to those who seek to create tropological change. Not surprisingly, texts that seek to explore new territories in a new way operate in both registers. Some of the writers I examine early on, for instance, employ tropological denigration of Africans and African Americans, while others attempt to change the basic trope of *blackness* as *unchangeable uselessness* (as Aravamudan explains its usage during the eighteenth century). Further, he proposes the term "tropicopolitan as a name for the colonized subject who exists both as fictive construct of colonial tropology *and* actual resident of tropic space, object of presentation *and* agent of resistance. In many historical instances, tropicopolitans—the residents of the tropics, the bearers of its marks, and the shadow images of the more visible metropolitans—challenge the developing privilege of Enlightenment cosmopolitans" (1999, 4).

You will find that many of my chapters pair texts by two different writers. In creating these couplings, I bear in mind George Handley's sense of the circumCaribbean's common roots, and his notion that "what is . . . indicative of cultural identity in the hemisphere are moments when texts resonate synchronically with one another and thereby provide telling evidence of divergent authorial and discursive agency within common sets of representational choices" (2000, 30).

While some of the texts I treat are centered in one discrete culture of the circumCaribbean, all of them, like clumps of grass, are connected to the others through a rhizome-like cultural grid that underlies the entire circumCaribbean. Glissant, expanding on the original literary use of this concept by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, explains: "The root is unique; it is a stock that takes all upon itself and kills everything around. . . . The rhizome . . . is a multiple root, stretched out in nets in the earth or in the air. The notion of the rhizome maintains the fact of rooting but challenges the idea of a totalitarian root. The epistemology of the rhizome is at the heart of what I call a cross-cultural poetics, according to which each identity extends out in contact with the other" (1997, 23).

As the ensuing chapters demonstrate, one of the most extensive rhizomic structures developed among African American writers who visited and/or wrote about the Caribbean, especially after they came into contact with migrants from the basin who came to the United States, either in person or in print. Eventually, James Weldon Johnson, Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, Richard Wright, and other black Southerners would venture into the Caribbean themselves, doing research, writing, or fulfilling diplomatic functions, like Frederick Douglass before them. There were, of course, many others comparing and contrasting areas of the circumCaribbean, including anthropologists, sociologists, engineers, diplomats, missionaries, fruit company employees, and mercenaries. Until recently, however, the most penetrating work of remapping this part of the Americas has come from heirs of the black diaspora, many of them natives of the Caribbean islands. One of them, the distinguished writer and scholar Wilson Harris, has characterized his own work in terms that I find most persuasive, instructive, and inspiring: "To convert rooted deprivations into complex parables of freedom and truth is a formidable but not hopeless task. The basis of our inquiry lies in the conception that one may address oneself to diverse fictions and poetries as if they are the art of a universal genius hidden everywhere in dual rather than monolithic presence, in the mystery of innovative imagination that transforms concepts of mutuality and unity, and which needs to appear in ceaseless dialogue between cultures if it is to turn away from a world habituated to the pre-emptive strike of conquistadorial ego" (1983, 137). Harris's reference to "rooted deprivations" offers a variant on Glissant's notion of underground rhizomes, and his subsequent remarks add urgency to the search for a circumCaribbean dialogue between cultures, which can provide a key antidote to totalizing systems of oppression, be they aesthetic or political.

Rhizomes and roots can reach under and beyond any walls erected to contain them. The boundaries of the region's interests and connections have been charted only as far as traditional geographic limits. It is time for us to understand the South, its people, and, above all, the idea of the South as seen and expressed by its writers, as connected to the world in myriad ways, but in particular to that part of the world that is contiguous—the Caribbean. We can make a start by uncovering and reading the many texts in canonical and noncanonical Southern literature that link the two heretofore separate entities and peoples. The South has long since ceased to be merely a New World garden, and in any case, as Fernand Braudel declared, "history can do more than study walled gardens" (1972, 1:22).

Beyond the Racial Binary: Reconfiguring Region as Heteroglossia

The circumCaribbean, like the Mediterranean, has been a cradle of culture and has always been multiethnic and multiracial. John Kennedy Toole's hilarious posthumous novel, *A Confederacy of Dunces* (1980), presents a tropical New Orleans that similarly connects with myriad cultures through its Creole history and its Caribbean character. The inscription to the novel, from A. J. Liebling, claims that New Orleans *is* Mediterranean, with allusions to the Greeks, the Italians, the Lebanese, and the Egyptians, a comparison that takes in three continents and the Afro-Asiatic roots of Western culture. Tellingly, Liebling goes on to subtly parallel the rim of the Old World's lake of commerce with the New World's, the Caribbean: "Like Havana and Port-au-Prince, New Orleans is within the orbit of a Hellenistic world that never touched the North Atlantic. The Mediterranean, Caribbean and Gulf of Mexico form a homogenous, though interrupted, sea" (1980, n.p.). This inscription suggests much, especially when we consider the way it annuls boundaries and ethnicity, like the humor that is the central driving force of the narrative. However, we need to ponder the more serious aspects of Liebling's claim, as in effect he insists on a criollo cultural model of coastal rims, ideally thought of as a cradle of myth and legend. Certainly Derek Walcott's *Omeros* (1990), a Caribbean refiguring of Homer's *Odyssey*, takes a similar tack. The linkage of the Greek epic to the Caribbean is hardly surprising when one considers the military and trade histories of the two seas, so often coupled with the national mythologies of the surrounding cultures. Then, too, we recall some of Homer's opening lines, describing his hero Odysseus: "Many pains he suffered, heartsick on the open sea," lines redolent of the traffic in the Caribbean in human bodies and the Middle Passage. The poet calls for the Muse to "start from where you will—sing for our time too," speaking of the continuing need for myth, one centered on "one man alone . . . his heart set on his wife and his return—Calypso, the bewitching nymph, the lustrous goddess, held him back, deep in her arching caverns, craving him for a husband" (1996, 77–78). The Caribbean has always been seen singing a siren song, and it has been sung in myriad registers. Today it seeks to lure tourists, but in earlier centuries the islands beckoned to Southerners as places where great fortunes could be made. Certainly William Faulkner's Thomas Sutpen, to name just one fictional hero, heard this call.

As we reconfigure the South and the Caribbean, we must be conscious of the fact that too many of us are unable to do work in French or Spanish,

or both. Mexico's tangled history of colonization, revolution, and natural catastrophes, all of it preceded by centuries of magnificent preconquest cultures, remains a mystery to too many. Central American countries are often merely names, whose realities are difficult to place on a mental map. And yet all the shores of the Caribbean have had an impact on Southern literature, history, and culture, and vice versa.[2]

The tangled utterances of the circumCaribbean offer a superb example of Mikhail Bakhtin's celebrated notion of heteroglossia: "At any given moment of its evolution, language is stratified not only into linguistic dialects . . . but also . . . into languages that are socio-ideological: languages of social groups, 'professional' and 'generic' languages, languages of generations, and so on . . . literary language itself is only one of these heteroglot languages—and in its turn is also stratified into languages . . . stratification and heteroglossia widen and deepen as long as language is alive and developing" (1981, 272). Attending to these myriad voices requires supporting, encouraging, reading, and appreciating comparative studies and ceasing to consider that discipline marginal.[3] We need similar work that brings in the islands and the northern coast of South America as well; we need the kind of concept for the Caribbean that Braudel created for the Mediterranean. For the Caribbean, too, as he said of his sea, "speaks with many voices; it [too] is a sum of individual histories" (1972, 1:13).

Glissant often made the point that Guadeloupe and Martinique in scholarship have all too often been sequestered from their fellow islands because they are considered a part of France, and thus "other." This case becomes relevant in a more contemporary way when we look at the exclusion of Cuban, Dominican, Mexican, Vietnamese, and Haitian Southerners from the current biracial concept of the Southern canon. Glissant's most trenchant discussion of these issues emerges in his essay "The Quarrel with History." He acutely notes the cost of the "French" identity of Martinique and Guadeloupe: "The French Caribbean people did not relate even a mythical chronology of this land to their knowledge of this country, and so nature and culture have not formed a dialectical whole that informs a people's consciousness." Considered dispassionately, this statement assigns at least partial blame for disjuncture to the folk themselves, in terms of allegiances that are counterproductive, which could in fact be true for some erstwhile Southerners such as the Cubans in Miami. But the overriding scholarly issue remains the lack of recognition among the larger community of new subsets. The ultimate effect, as Glissant notes, is unfortunate, because "the creative link between nature and culture is vital to the formation of a community"

(1989, 63). Glissant and Antonio Benítez-Rojo find a solution to the isolation of discrete islands through the element that unites them—that is, the sea. This monumental fact of nature creates similarities for cultures, both shaping and (like Glissant's aforementioned rhizomes) connecting them, particularly in terms of folklore and myth.[4]

Grappling with the Caribbean Imaginary

Before employing any of these theories of place, region, and nation, however, we must come to terms with what I will call the "Caribbean Imaginary." The presence of two Western mythologies—Calypso and Prospero/Ariel/Caliban—weave in and out of island histories, whatever the language or background. These sorcerers/spirits are powerfully evocative of the symbolic and often erotic reveries the Caribbean has conjured up in explorers, tourists, and sometimes natives of the region.[5] The various "spells" cast by the island are obviously part and parcel of the most important religious overlay, the African-inspired religions that are variously known as hoodoo, voodoo/vodoun, Candomble, and Santería. The tropical allure of the circumCaribbean has been a kind of magical imaginary for readers and romantics north of both the South and the Caribbean. In addition to the magic of spells, critic Michèle Praeger argues, the "imaginary" aspect of the Caribbean has many facets; two of the most important are those that suggest the fictional, since "imaginary" can also be defined as "conjectural, dreamlike, ethereal, fabled, fabulous, fanciful, fantastic, fictional, hypothetical, illusory, immaterial, incorporeal, insubstantial, invented, make-believe, metaphysical, mythical, non-existent, romantic, speculative, supposed, theoretical, and unreal" (2003, 1). On the other hand, Praeger writes, the term refers to the fact that "[Caribbeans] have everything to invent, as they cannot return to a particular culture or tradition. Some Caribbean writers and thinkers, Aimé Césaire in particular, have in the past been tempted by the idea of a return to Africa, but this ideology seems obsolete in the contemporary Caribbean as Caribbean writers know that their origins, like the origins of language, are irretrievable. Yet they do not see, or do not want to see, their foreclosed past disappearing irretrievably" (2003, 2).

J. Michael Dash usefully historicizes this "Caribbean imaginary" by noting that the archipelago, "conceived as an absolute 'elsewhere,' as irreducibly different, was from its very inception invented as a blank slate onto which an entire exoticist project could be inscribed," a project generated by the industrialization of Europe, which created "the need to see in the Tropics

[and here, the implications of Dash's argument would extend to Africa, Asia, and the Pacific as well] an antidote to Europe's sense of loss," and thus serve as a kind of "romantic otherness, a fetishistic opacity" (1998, 17).

Recently, people with African ancestry have discovered a common North American/Caribbean heritage, as they have come together in the great Northern cities of the United States and Canada, but also, increasingly, in those of the American South. Folklore, in particular, has been a source of connection and community, and this phenomenon demonstrates Glissant's sound observation that folklore, rather than myth, enables people to repossess historical space and to create a worldview that is both fortifying and useful for social change (1989, 83–85). Further, Benítez-Rojo has helpfully situated the concept of performative style as a distinction of Caribbean culture and has asserted that much of the power of Atlanta's Martin Luther King Jr. came from his understanding and practice of a performing art much like that of the Caribbean (1992, 24). Rogelio Martínez Furé has argued that there is definitely a "Caribbean civilization," one that includes the cultures of the islands but also the coastal rims and their cities, such as New Orleans, noting in particular that Cuba's *caringa* dance tradition, of Congo origin, has a counterpart in the *calinda,* which was performed in the Crescent City's Congo Square. Finding these links, he states, will strengthen others, "of both culture and revolutionary struggle, which unite us and make us an integral part of *Our America*" (1993, 115–16).[6]

Since Zora Neale Hurston's germinal *Tell My Horse* appeared in 1934, millions of Caribbeans—including the children of the Haitians, Jamaicans, and Bahamians Hurston studied—have immigrated to the United States. They and their progeny have written many books set in the Caribbean, or in both places. These writers include, most notably, Brooklynite, born of Barbadian parents, Paule Marshall; Haitian writer Edwidge Danticat; Antigua's Jamaica Kincaid; Dominicans Julia Alvarez and Junot Díaz; Puerto Rican Judith Ortiz Cofer; and a host of Cuban authors. Marshall, who has set many of her narratives in her father's Caribbean, lived for years in Richmond and has been influenced in important ways by Southern African American history, literature, and culture. Many of her powerful novels have Caribbean settings but constantly interbraid diasporic concerns that prominently include the American South. Edwidge Danticat has recently moved to Miami and has begun setting her narratives there. As my concluding chapter indicates, Florida in particular has become the home and/or subject for an increasing number of talented circumCaribbean writers. Inevitably, there will be more Southern/circumCaribbean writers in our future, and they must be linked with the patterns of colonization, immigration, and settlement that preceded them in connection with the history, literature, and culture of the South.

We have already begun to accept broad cultural patterns as more important than actual residence in a place as a foundation for culture-based fiction. For example, Jewel Parker Rhodes has written powerfully about Louisiana's Marie Laveau in *Voodoo Dreams* (1993), even though Rhodes grew up in Pittsburgh. The story developed, however, out of her cultural roots, specifically her grandmother's experience with conjure. As Rhodes cogently puts it, "The portrait of my grandmother redrawn in *Voodoo Dreams* speaks to my immediate community and, I think, by extension, to the larger, global village of ancestors and our intergenerational heritage and attachment," a statement that connects the South, the Caribbean, and the African diaspora.[7]

The "Inaudible Voice of It All" and the Tropical Sublime

Virtually all of the writers considered here devote much attention to limning tropical landscapes and the effect these settings have on their characters, some of whom have been shaped by these surroundings since birth, while others, thrust into these exotic realms by chance, are irrevocably changed. As I will demonstrate throughout this study, subjects such as these are quite difficult to write about, as they involve what Zora Neale Hurston called "the inaudible voice of it all," things that lie beyond language. This problem, however, has never stopped writers from attempting to wrest at least a suggestion of the unsayable from language, and one of the tools they have employed in Southern realms is the language of what I am calling the "tropical sublime," an extension of the usually Eurocentric concept of the sublime that began to be conceptualized in the classical era by Longinus, who was primarily concerned with elevated forms of rhetoric, which attempt to address the sublime. I will employ my concept of the "tropical sublime" extensively in the chapters that follow.

Despite the many works that reflect this interest, the South's concept of the sublime has been little studied. Although Rob Wilson's *American Sublime: The Genealogy of a Poetic Genre* (1991) claims a national scope, the only Southern writer who receives extended attention is Edgar Allan Poe. At least one of the reasons for this neglect has been the tendency to associate the sublime with Northern landscapes and, in particular, mountains, rather than with the tropical. Yet another might be the focus on fiction and poetry that critics have favored, to the neglect of travel writing, a popular genre in

both the North and the South in the nineteenth century. Such pieces were a big part of popular magazines such as *Harper's*, in which many of the articles focused on the topography of the U.S. South, increasingly depicted as contiguous to, and comparable to the circumCaribbean.

Warfare, Filibusters, and Insurrection

Mexico, a nation colonized by the Spanish, the French, and then the Americans, provides the setting for Chapter 1, which examines the literary legacy of the Mexican American War, using the narratives of William C. Falkner, Arthur Manigault, and Raphael Semmes.

Two states and two islands loom large in this tropicopolitan panoply: Louisiana, Florida, Haiti, and Cuba. As colonial possessions of France and Spain (at different times, Louisiana was owned by both), these entities, which form part of the circumCaribbean rim, have generated some of the most important transnational literature of the West. New Orleans often served as a launching point for filibusters, the U.S. military, and writers embarking for the South of the South. Cuba became the richest pearl of the Caribbean, taking over revolutionary Haiti's role as major sugarcane producer. Always a coveted prize for various U.S. political leaders and businessmen, Cuba also functioned as a kind of mirror image of the United States, particularly in terms of its struggles for independence, its reliance on slavery, its multiracial population, its dynamic folk cultures, and, more recently, its mythic stature as a lost homeland for the Cuban diaspora. The island appears first here in a study of Martin Delany's *Blake* and its relation to filibuster narratives of the time, which I represent with Lucy Holcombe Pickens's fictionalized account of the Narciso Lopez filibuster missions in Chapter 2.

Haiti before its bloody revolution was the richest colonial possession in the world, but at a terrible cost: thousands of enslaved Africans were literally worked to death in the production of addictive sugar. Amazingly, the uneducated but religiously inspired Africans, under the leadership of, first, Toussaint-Louverture and then Jean-Jacque Dessalines and Henri Christophe, defeated the forces of the French, Spanish, and English, achieving independence in 1804 after a brutal thirteen-year war. This revolution, the subject of one of my chapters, was inspiring and/or terrifying to millions and has been written about by an impressive array of U.S. Southern and Caribbean writers. I examine the ways in which the Haitian Revolution, always a taboo subject in Southern letters, nevertheless exerted a powerful influence between the lines of many narratives and took on central importance in

the imagination of African American writers. After a survey of early Southern literary reflections of that event, I relate those views to those of the Caribbean writers who limned the conflict in its various stages; I also consider the effect Haiti had on African American writers in the twentieth century, especially Harlem Renaissance celebrities James Weldon Johnson and Zora Neale Hurston, both Floridians who saw this new landscape through the lens of the tropical state that produced them and much of their writing. Hurston's little-studied *Tell My Horse: Voodoo and Life in Haiti and Jamaica* (1938), a nonfictional account of her anthropological trips to the Caribbean, offers one of the most arresting examples in all of Southern literature of the dramatic influence of the "indigo sea" on a Southern writer—in this case, a woman of color. Based on research Hurston did in the islands in 1936 and 1937, the book is inextricably bound up with *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), which was written in Haiti, and *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), wherein that patriarch is presented as the greatest hoodoo conjurer in history. Another writer in this school, Louisiana-born Arna Bontemps, wrote a historical novel about the revolt, *Drums at Dusk* (1939).

The Haitian Revolution would find impassioned chroniclers in the Caribbean too, including Victor Séjour, C. L. R. James, Alejo Carpentier, Derek Walcott, Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, and many others, and their works will form an important component in this chapter.

This survey of texts that treat the history and culture of Haiti culminates in a reading of *All Souls Rising* (1994), the first volume of the Tennessee writer Madison Smartt Bell's trilogy on the insurrection; his work was strongly influenced by his Caribbean predecessors, but also by his lifelong involvement with U.S. Southern letters.

CircumCaribbean Travelers: The Roots and Routes of Narrative

The aftermath of war inevitably produces exile and diaspora; it generates retrospection and also an urge to recover equilibrium through escapist literature. Citizens in both the North and the South found relief from the pressures and problems of Reconstruction through travel writing, which enjoyed a new vogue following the exciting narratives coming out of Africa during the age of that continent's colonization and exploration. Exotic areas of the United States, it was discovered, could produce similarly compelling narratives of penetration and revelation. Chapter 4 focuses on the travel writing and fiction of Constance Fenimore Woolson and Lafcadio Hearn, ponders the implications and achievements of this genre and its influence on fiction,

and demonstrates the myriad ways in which travel accounts limned a new sense of the circumCaribbean. This discussion will be complemented by consideration of key theorists of the circumCaribbean who have preceded me in thinking about new configurations of either Southern Studies or Caribbean Studies, or of both.

Chapter 5 turns to two other noted travelers, the Jamaican Claude McKay and the Floridian Zora Neale Hurston. As noted, I consider Hurston in my Haitian chapter, but I bring her back for an encore here, especially in terms of the research she did in Jamaica, which I believe included a reading of McKay's *Banana Bottom* (1933). This work has long been considered a masterwork of Caribbean literature, but in the United States it has been eclipsed by his key contribution to the Harlem Renaissance, *Home to Harlem* (1928), and more recently by *Banjo* (1929), which now constitutes a key text in the canon of the Black Atlantic. Here, I suggest that Hurston's work in Jamaica prior to writing *Their Eyes Were Watching God* included a careful and influential reading of *Banana Bottom*.

A writer contemporary with Hurston who shared her Southern background and scientific training was her sometime nemesis, Richard Wright. In the 1950s, Wright published a fascinating study, *Pagan Spain* (1957), which claimed that the Iberians, ostensibly devout Catholics, were really still pagan. Hurston makes precisely the same claim for Haitians, who are nominally Catholic but in reality "deeply pagan" (1938, 91). Wright never set a novel in the Caribbean, but he lived in Argentina for almost a year and visited Trinidad and Haiti. Later, he would write an introduction for George Lamming's moving 1954 autobiographical novel *In the Castle of My Skin*, which depicts a Barbados undergoing transformation from rural to industrial society. The effect on Lamming's protagonist is much like Wright's own life story in *Black Boy*. Chapter 6 thus explores Wright's experiences in the Caribbean and South America and demonstrate the strong relation between these two foundational texts—texts that have strongly registered with subsequent writers of the African diaspora, who have admired Wright and Lamming's delineations of the parallels among diasporic peoples.

Chapter 7 turns to a group of writers I see as part of U.S. Southern literature, the Cuban American writers of Miami and South Florida. The routes and roots of the Cuban diaspora involve contrasting attitudes toward Castro's revolution and the island homeland, and this has generated a fascinating set of texts that have many unexamined connections with U.S. Southern literature and culture. Virgil Suarez, Roberto Fernández, Gustavo Pérez Firmat, Ana Menéndez, and Cristina García are dazzling talents who have added a striking new component to Southern letters, as we shall see.

Methodology in comparative studies demands practices that are not usual in narrowly defined canonical approaches. Because I deal with writers and texts in this study who are not widely known (Faulkner, Hurston, and Wright are three notable exceptions), I have provided more plot summary than I would for, say, a study of Faulkner or Eudora Welty. Many scholars of Southern literature are unfamiliar with even major figures of Caribbean literary traditions, and conversely, until lately, scholars in Caribbean studies have rightly been concerned with their own fields of interest (frequently dictated by the language group in question) or, at most, the other traditions of the Caribbean islands. I hope that this book speaks to scholars and also to students and general readers. The issues I consider here all find expression in this eclectic but dialogic grouping of texts; and to create maximum understanding of my points, an awareness of plot's intersection with issues seems crucial. For readers who do know many of these texts, I ask patience on this issue and also understanding. Plot details are essential for close readings; we should remember that our understanding of canonical texts in every case rests on the foundation of precise readings by early scholars—like Cleanth Brooks's magisterial interpretations of Faulkner. Most of the writers I am considering, with few exceptions, have not been given this kind of scrutiny. Gustavo Pérez Firmat has issued a challenge on this point: "It is time we brought close reading out of the closet. There is no reason to avoid it, to apologize for it, or to dress it up as something other than what it is. Close reading remains the fundamental form of engagement with works of literature" (2008, 70).

By looking to the dynamic history of a circumCaribbean that is partly constituted by the Deep South, we can break through to a new and more expansive understanding of both the U.S. South and the wider Caribbean. In this respect, we are following the lead of Fernand Braudel's magnificent two-volume study, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1949). Braudel, building on the sweeping changes in historiography by his great predecessors, Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre, and the Annales school, ignored sovereign boundaries to map a history of region and culture that was based on the lives of ordinary and extraordinary individuals, public and ecclesiastical documents, trade patterns, and census reports, and tied it all together across and upon the currents of the great sea he loved. However, in his extensive revision of the first edition in prepa-

ration for the work's translation into English, he attempted to address the Ottoman Empire, which at its height controlled more than half of the shores washed by the Mediterranean; he admitted, however, that he was unable to do justice to this task, for much of the information needed was in inaccessible archives in Istanbul—documents, he neglects to say, which were written in non-Western languages.

The shores of Mexico, Central America, and northern South America are our versions of Braudel's Ottoman coast, and we stand poised to explore it. The ever-accelerating pace of travel, migration, and forced exile has shattered barriers of all kinds, including those in the academy. Many of us have begun to explore adjacent areas—disciplines, languages, cultures, texts—because all of them have made appearances in our subject realms and, often, in our neighborhoods. Operating from a dual perspective is nothing new; since shortly after the American Revolution, Southerners have functioned as both part of the nation and its stepchild, particularly after secession and the Civil War. As such, its people have had to straddle two identities. Similarly, circumCaribbeans, who have had to deal with colonial and postcolonial doubled identities, have faced this situation as well. Indeed, migrants to the South, such as the Cubans I consider in my last chapter, have had to juggle a triple identity in this respect. As Salman Rushdie, speaking in particular about exiles from India, but in reality, about immigrants in general, remarked, "Sometimes we feel that we straddle two cultures; at other times, that we fall between two stools. But however ambiguous and shifting this ground may be, it is not an infertile territory for a writer to occupy. If literature is in part the business of finding new angles at which to enter reality, then once again our distance, our long geographical perspective, may provide us with such angles" (1991, 15). It is my hope that this book provides exactly this kind of solid geometry.

Many of the writers here challenge themselves and their readers by boldly examining what at first sight seems strange, exotic, or even terrifying. All of them—and many other figures considered in this book—would understand Toni Morrison's declaration that "the ability of writers to imagine what is not the self, to familiarize the strange and mystify the familiar, is the test of their power" (1992, 15). As we shall see, the writers of the circumCaribbean have met this challenge triumphantly.

1 Crossing the Caribbean

Southerners Write the Mexican American War

As was originally the case with the U.S. colonial coastal states, tropical realms "South of the South" were often described as a new paradise by writers and visitors from northern climes during the nineteenth century. Very often, the appeal of such locales came to be expressed in terms of desire and/or matrimony, with the island or country feminized in order to be "taken" by her northern lover, the United States. Cuba, for instance, often lauded as the "Queen of the Antilles," was eroticized: she was said to admire "Uncle Sam, and he loves her. Who shall forbid the bans? Matches are made in heaven, and why not this? . . . She sits, like Cleopatra's burning throne, upon the silver waves, breathing her spicy, tropic breath, and pouting her rosy, sugared lips? Who can object? None. She is of age—take her, Uncle Sam!" (cited in May 1989, 7). Mexico, too, was seen as an appropriate "bride" for the United States, as was Nicaragua.[1]

Nowhere is this more noticeable than in the writing that developed before, during, and after the Mexican American War. The following discussion will situate that conflict as a watershed event in the relation of the U.S. South and the circumCaribbean. I will argue that when two cultures collide—especially when they are congruent—their confluence and overlay(s) can shape identity. While I will consider quite a number of commentators on the war here, I will concentrate on military/travel memoirs by Maryland's Raphael Semmes and South Carolina's Arthur Manigault and a sensationalist novel by Mississippi's William Clark Falkner (the Nobel Prize winner's great-grandfather). All three men were combatants in the war, and they clearly had read widely, including histories of Mexico and the various novels that were written about the conflict in the United States. As thousands of Mexicans, U.S. citizens, and foreign conscripts collided, the operations of the war were facilitated by repeated crisscrossing of the circumCaribbean and involved much interchange among the crucial ports of New Orleans, Vera Cruz, and Havana. We find registers of the hybrid constructions created by these seismic events in the prose and fiction that was generated during