“With Strips from the Full Moon” and Other Ways of Knowing: (Re)presentations of the *New* Human

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> *We are the women/ who ban our bellies/ with strips from the full moon/ our nerves made keen/ from hard grieving/ worn thin like/ silver sixpences.*

Lorna Goodison, “We Are the Women”, 1986[1]

> *The fundamental feature of the chattel enslavement of blacks in the Caribbean was their legal reduction to the status of non-persons property and real estate, to be precise with no right to life.*

Hilary Beckles, *Britain’s Black Debt*, 2013[2]

> *I want to think “care” as a problem for thought. I want to think care in the wake as a problem for thinking and of and for Black non/being in the world.*

Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 2016[3]

This discussion draws attention to diverse literary *ways of knowing*, the lack of awareness of the singleness of subjectivity reflected in teaching within the Humanities, and action towards a process for unsettling the “overrepresentation” of limited and skewed ideas of the human in Humanities classrooms.[4] Despite the enormity of the task, I shall attempt, through a focus on literary knowing and knowledge-makers who are seldom drawn upon in our classrooms, to highlight black women’s writing, specifically the richly fertile, though largely marginalised writing by black women such as that of Caribbean poet Lorna Goodison, signified in the first epigraph above. Goodison’s deeply resonant poetry, “rooted in her Caribbean heritage and upbringing” has been

honoured most recently through the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry 2019.[5] In her acceptance speech for the prestigious award, Goodison states that, "love and justice, hope and possibility, healing and redemption are the themes I've always turned to."

Regardless of such highlighting of universality, Humanities colleagues particularly within Literature attending conferences in European countries, including the UK, can readily confirm that for students of Literature access to writing such as Goodison's, with the distinctive subjectivity that it represents, remains rare. I argue that exploration of this field is particularly rich for the urgent action required to redress the situation of large-scale absence of black subjectivity in the literary classroom, to reconfigure literary subjectivity more fully and to alter our understanding of the human for the better.

Sylvia Wynter argues that the West's "overrepresentation of Man" functions as a theoretical blind spot, which was absorbed and developed in humanist consciousness as an expression of civilised order, and that it "can and does continue to haunt human relations", as follows:

> The struggle of our millennium will be one between the ongoing imperative of securing the well-being of our present ethnoclass (i.e. Western bourgeois) conception of the human, Man, which overrepresents itself as if it were the human itself, and that of securing the well-being, and therefore the full cognitive and behavioural autonomy of the human species itself/ourselves.[6]

At the same time, Wynter has been clear about that which she refers to as "a second self-assertion" of the human (as opposed to merely the Western bourgeois) that undertakes the task of "altering of our systems of meanings, and their privileged texts.[7] She draws on perspectives of Walter D. Mignolo and Aníbal Quijano who emphasise that "colonialism was a product of systematic repression", which "fell, above all, over the modes of knowing, of producing knowledge, of producing perspectives."[8] What remains barely perceived currently is that colonial repression, which always included imposed ways of reading the colonised, continues in European classrooms with the effect of excluding or inhibiting intellectual and artistic participation by black students. Quijano and Mignolo's Latin American focus indicate a movement towards decoloniality. From the viewpoint of the European university, the question is how to halt the slide of confusion between decolonising and decoloniality. Furthermore, to allow the process towards decoloniality, what action may assist the process, and what is it that selected texts may contribute?

Arguing from a different position concerning the absence of literature by women in the classroom nearly half a century ago, feminist literary scholar Judith Fetterley insisted on the reminder that "Literature is political" and that "power is the issue in the politics of literature".[9] Such bluntness in relation to women's writing was not received well at the time. A similar message in relation to minoritised black women's writing of belonging in European classrooms half a century later is likely to be even more sceptically perceived. However, the situation for black writing or ways of knowing is not only well overdue, but, for many students, the situation looks dire. In too many Humanities contexts, black students continue to find themselves co-opted into the study of artistic representation from which they are effectively excluded. That this remains normative and functions to reaffirm, if not exacerbate, the on-going marked absence of literary voices minoritised by dominant literary teaching practices is of central interest here.

Equally, it seems significant that black writing remains still little shared or interrogated in the Literary Humanities in Europe. This is particularly important, since, as frontrunners in the current coloniality/decoloniality debate

Quijano and Mignolo emphasise, Europe's role in the establishment of deeply divisive and persistent colonial practices figured through ideas of race remains undeniable. Moreover, Quijano asserts that a crucial outcome of such colonial practices is that the idea of race has functioned as "the most efficient instrument of social domination invented in the last 500 years."[10] That this malignant colonial residue remains to be grappled with in terms of the Literature classroom might be gauged by the question posed by Les Back and myself in our 2008 article with reference to the UK: "Black British Literature in British Universities A Twenty-first Century Reality?"[11] In other words, the teaching of Black British Literature as a programme of study in UK universities today remains decidedly precarious.

For these reasons, I return to questioning the pronounced absence vis-à-vis *the* human that is habitually read in the Humanities classroom. In the process, I foreground voices of a figure that I refer to as the *new* human, as indicated in an earlier paper, "Towards a Post-Western Humanism Made to the Measure of Those Recently Recognized as Human".[12] I am specifically continuing my engagement with considerations of what may be gained by all students and colleagues, as well as the wider community through access to the reading of a fuller representation of that to which Wynter refers as "genres of being human".[13]

Although the *new* human found herself forcibly transplanted in a number of places, she is considered here in that space known today as the Caribbean. I am borrowing from Mignolo who, citing O'Gorman, emphasises that America is an "invented space" rather than one "discovered" as is popularly believed.[14] I do so to suggest that the Caribbean might similarly be considered an "invented space". Known by a variety of names during Europe's colonial adventure, it was once "invented" as a series of plantations and a kind of hell, particularly to produce wealth for (Western) European nations its sovereigns, elite classes, merchants and so on. Just over two hundred years ago in line with decisions of the respective colonial powers the uniquely hellish process was aborted and the world fell to forgetting the more traumatic details of that history of transatlantic trade in black bodies. While the territories have been re-invented more recently as holiday islands, or paradise itself, the details of the longer and very disturbing history link to questions about the human and dominant practices legitimised to constrain racialised others and, in the process, to suppress their voices.

In *Britain's Black Debt*, the eminent historian Sir Hilary Beckles emphasises that the Caribbean, in its different guises, has been made to mask many problematic features, central to which is violence including genocide, persistent and unrelenting human exploitation, family decimation, racism, enforced silencing and more. I am highlighting that such horrors and their meanings become forgotten, lost, rendered invisible or disregarded other than at rare moments such as that of George Floyd's recent murder, which is directly linked through the "afterlives" of slavery[15] which, in the midst of a pandemic, many found themselves witnessing. Though such gross injustice might be dismissed by the most privileged, Floyd's killing goes to the heart of the formative and still influential moment of colonial slavery and its "afterlives", linked to concerns reaching the heart of the Humanities. Thus, to consider altering our current modes of literary teaching and learning, it seems important to ask: which human do we teach about *and* who is doing the teaching? In relation to that, which *new* genres of the human are we concerned to teach about and how? Or, borrowing from Fetterley, if "to make possible a new effect is to provide the conditions for changing the culture that the literature reflects", how might we proceed with such change?[16] Additionally, drawing on Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, how might Literature be made to "observe and mediate this [Black] un/survival?"[17]

While many universities teach a sampling of postcolonial Literatures, I urge those concerned with understanding more about how humankind has been conceived to delve into Caribbean Literature, a corpus markedly attuned to a fuller range of "genres of being human", even as it (re)presents humans long treated as "sub-" or

"non-"human. That the literature, arising out of an early, though largely unappreciated moment of globality, frequently returns to history is no coincidence. Key to that moment, as Beckles reminds us, in the space of the Caribbean, Britain's enslaved African populations were *not* allowed to claim the status of human. Rather, for hundreds of years such peoples were considered property and c(h)attle. Such was the severity of their condition of existence, as bodies to be trafficked and relentlessly abused, that, as Beckles reinforces, they never *re*produced their numbers before finally being allowed recognition as humans, only after 1838. That is, in the nineteenth century, when recognition as human would come *only* following their slave masters being compensated for loss of their property. Those are the bodies that would become the *new* human and to whom Goodison's poem gives voice. Whether or not that voice will be heard depends in large measure upon our classrooms, and how prepared we are to question and to put change in motion.

In the collection *I Am Becoming my Mother* (1986), Goodison's poet-persona, speaking for black women in the poem, "We are the women", states:

> *We are the women*
>
> *who ban our bellies*
>
> *with strips from the full moon*
>
> *our nerves made keen*
>
> *from hard grieving*
>
> *worn thin like*
>
> *silver sixpences.*

The performative action of the verb to "ban" or bind is central to Goodison's image of women who must effectively bandage their stomachs the better to bawl out and, in the process, *feel* the "hard grieving" to which the poet refers. Moreover, their unrelenting grief, worn thin like/ silver sixpences" relate directly to the less-than-human treatment they must daily endure, such that they hope to find relief by turning to remembered cultural practice like that of "ban[ning] their bellies". Even so, they must first reach and tear apart "strips of the full moon" to begin their healing. Hence the reader finds in the poem the kinaesthetic feel of unmistakable grief that requires a sharing, specifically to render it visible or shown.

In some cultures, it is the norm to hold grief in, to not show it; to maintain a show of equilibrium at all costs. In other cultures, it is customary to shout it out and, in that sounding, to gather around the one who is grieving others who, in varying degrees, share that grief and signify the grieving as collective, so that by amplifying it healing becomes a community project. Questions that arise in relation to the classroom include: which of the two practices is more likely to be assumed primitive, and which normative? Furthermore, if the group of people noisily immersed in collective grieving are black women, how likely is it that that behaviour is considered primitive and/or indicative of behaviours of "the other?" I shall return to this question below.

The technologised word of Western culture has given to readers a range of clues concerning normative, civilised

behaviours. By "technologised word", I refer primarily to the printed page of an earlier historical moment. Beckles emphasises that "the English presented the most detailed and sustained literary and ideological effort" to deny African peoples their right to be recognised as human beings.[18] In light of such "effort", as Goodison intimates, the "we" women of her text can best achieve what might have been the group's normative action, given the depth of their hurt and loss, by reaching for the moon. Only "strips of the full moon" can effectively begin to quell their needs.

In this sense, the epithet "new" also refers to the legal recognition of being human as such, only in the nineteenth century with the abolition of Atlantic slavery, and contextualised here within "the play of a certain proximity" that less than two hundred years of such recognition allows.[19] My concern lies with that which is available in print for public access, whether it chimes with Mignolo's "modernity/coloniality of knowledge" with its "entanglement and power differential" and its "strangling of knowing and knowledges in the colonies",[20] or indeed the counter-writing and counter-poetics of the "new human," as illustrated in this essay.

Three main strands of thinking underpin the discussion: namely, that of Mignolo and Quijano's decoloniality, Wynter's concern with the "overrepresentation of Man" and more representative "genres of being human," as well as that of the historian Beckles, who foregrounds the region's reparative justice project. In the light of these perspectives, my concern is to consider how we might proceed towards change in the Literary Humanities. To reiterate, I am attempting to draw on these overlapping threads of thinking while keeping in view a certain gap between the intense moment of colonial enslavement of Africans, and the present moment of willed decoloniality. Although colonial slavery is, firstly, the enormous crime against humanity with its atrocities linked to some 350 years of brutal trafficking and devastating exploitation that the world has been willed to forget this discussion points to a second potential injustice compounding the first. That is, collusion in disregarding the enormity of the crime and its ongoing repercussions in terms of racist practices and the mattering of black ways of knowing, including within our classrooms. Importantly, a remedy to the second lies partly in the hands of those of us with responsibility for educating another generation of humans. It is our action regarding the world that we teach in Literature and the wider Humanities, and above all, how we change it, that will make a difference.

Some transparency about why this matters will serve to contextualise this essay's urgency. I am a descendant of peoples enslaved in the Caribbean myself. This project is therefore not merely an intellectual exercise: it carries with it the weight of deep affect and a related urgency. Also, appreciating that the rest of Europe is inclined to believe perhaps *hope* that given its diverse population, the UK is ahead of the game in its higher education practices, I highlight the following: to date, I am one of only 25 black women Professors in the entire United Kingdom. I have yet to find another whose field is the Literary Humanities, although there are a few black Professors who teach Creative Writing. The first black woman Professor of History was appointed in 2018, and to reiterate, I am the first black woman Literature Professor in the UK. All this is to indicate that the Humanities in UK universities are far from diverse. Moreover, I suspect that this picture holds for much of Europe.

The academic year 2015-2016 witnessed the first cohort of students ever to undertake an MA in Black British Writing at a UK university. Alongside another colleague not in the Literature department I was involved in achieving that momentous change. Such change involving Humanities Departments in an English Higher Education Institution was unprecedented, not least because the stereotype of "white, middle-class female students" of Literature had always prevailed.[21] Perhaps for this reason the following question was often asked: who would want to learn about Black British Literature (even if such a thing existed)? Seven years earlier, in a conference attempting to explore the need for change, I had charged: "Because of the evident lack of diversity

among its students, English departments should be working harder to attract more ethnically diverse students and a place to start might be with curriculum change." Positioning myself "within the borderlands of Literary Studies and Pedagogy", and despite the reservations that I had articulated in discussion of "the literary space as a site of struggle" in which "still too few Others are engaged", I was centrally involved in that historical change.[22] Subsequently, the change has confirmed for me that despite the rhetoric suggesting otherwise, black students do opt to study Literature when they can expect to see themselves reflected on the page, and when they feel sufficiently confident that their ways of reading and ways of knowing will be sensitively handled. In other words, the representation of a broader subjectivity inclusive of black voices is urgently required in our Literature classrooms, and with it a demonstrable shift away from the continued message that universality is only reliably to be found in published writing by white canonised writers, or already overrepresented Man.

In 2015 I was still the single black colleague in an English Department in a university located in south-east London, with demographics underscoring the need for change towards a more representative curriculum and teaching faculty. Black and ethnic minority students were demanding change. My department, however, continued to be preoccupied with the teaching of literature as period courses such as Victorians, Moderns and so on. As a department, we appeared to remain resistant to the threat of more contemporary Literature. How, though, do colleagues remain blind to the significance of contemporary Literature for black students' particular meaning-making? Most significantly, since the enslaved were rendered voiceless and formally prohibited from or denied access to learning, and have only recently been recognised as human, contemporary Literature is of particular importance. In effect, as black students confide, canonical literature as the most privileged focus can all too readily lead to black exclusion and a problematic co-option.

Mignolo notes "when the Renaissance was compounded with European commercial expansion, knowledge and education piggybacked on it."[23] As a result, the once widely considered sub-human black is either rarely represented in period literature or represented in a problematic manner. Therefore, the focus on canonical texts overwhelmingly excludes black voices, since this group was not allowed a public voice, with few exceptions. Yet, *minority literatures*, I had discovered, could play a crucial role alongside the canonical, requiring students to re-think how knowledge including critical and theoretical knowledge is produced, by whom, and how it comes to be valued. Please note that this is not a question of either the canonical or another; Black British Literature, a contested field, promised to open up many related questions, not only about the values of the Literature classroom but also about knowledge itself.

While there is an overlap between Black British Literature, my focus is on writing that comes out of the Caribbean world, which is one that, as Beckles highlights, "received the majority of enslaved Africans in the seventeenth century", and that "was designed and designated as a place where no constraints, other than those protective of property, were considered necessary in the exploitation of Africans."[24] Furthermore, argues Beckles, "[a] mountain of published materials was produced supporting this justification of slavery."[25] Therein lies the central distinction to be drawn between my attempt at positioning Caribbean Literature within the body of Literature considered in the European classroom, in comparison to Fetterley's argument regarding American women's literature in the American classroom. Notably, Fetterley writes about exclusion "from a literature that claims to define one's identity".[26] While such a description was never intended to reference the context of African-Caribbean heritage students, it nonetheless affords a space to reflect momentarily on the complexity related to belonging that calibrates the position of black students, specifically African-Caribbean heritage students in an English Literature classroom. That is, students who must live their lives, including their academic lives, in the face of what Sharpe calls an "insistent Black exclusion, this ontological negation",[27] a situation exemplifying the kind of powerlessness that Fetterley describes, as well as the endless negation of the self as

not white and not present in a recognisable or preferred manner.

“Thinking needs care”, Sharpe writes in *In the wake: On Blackness and Being*. This essay extends an invitation to those of us whose thinking is centred within the field of the Humanities to think critically, not only about our own practice, but also to *care* enough to extend our reading and change our teaching. This may well include caring for the contemporary, as the samples of reading that are offered in this discussion suggest. The extract from Goodison allows important access into the contemporaneous project of (re)presenting the self within a necessarily intercultural and transcontinental modernity, one that is replete with unequal practices, producing the subject already prone to being misread. My larger project involves the argument that before such crucial self-(re)presentation very broadly since the twentieth century the Western technologised word grossly, criminally (against humanity) and ultimately for reasons implicated by financial gain, personally or nationally, misrepresented black people as a sub-human species best accommodated within coloniality, unmistakably at the bottom of the order of colonial difference.

We should ask: who did this benefit and who continues to benefit? We are reminded, too, that the technologised word propagated ideas of primitivism in relation to enslaved Africans. My earlier question, relating to expression of grief and ideas of the primitive, links precisely to such knowledge that, as Goodison presents it, already frames what is readily considered known about her black women subjects. It is useful to assess the impact of such *knowledge* in relation to different temporalities: then, now, in a moment of unprecedented immigration, and so on.

Goodison, however, mentions “Nanny” in the first stanza. The reference is to Nanny of the Maroons, the figure of the eighteenth-century maroon woman warrior in Jamaica, a leader in rebellious wars against the English. An exceptional figure, unlike most of those considered “sub-” or non-humans during the period of Atlantic slavery, Nanny is visible in the archives. While details about her remain to be found, the countless “sub-” or “non-”humans are usually recorded anonymously, as the example, below, from Beckles’s “Lowther Plantation paper” indicates.[28]

Increase and decrease, 1825
9 Negroes born 9 Negroes died 40 calves dropped 2 horses and 3 cattle died
Increase in value of livestock, 1829
balance £75 9 Negroes born and 8 died balance £50 10 cattle born and 5 died Total increase £125 Sum

Such a stark representation of the plantation process of dehumanisation, though seldom considered by literary readers, nonetheless determines the lived experience of Goodison’s “we-women”. At the same time, while

Goodison's poem holds the emblematic black woman warrior figure, Nanny of the Maroons, in view, she is juxtaposed against the everyday enslaved women of the plantation. It is the enslaved who must endure, like in the fourth stanza, waiting "for the bodies of our men", or the trial of being "under massa" in everyday, enforced rape, and "under massa table/for the trickle down of crumbs", emphasising the group's vulnerability.

Furthermore, their unspeakable loss includes being brutally torn away from their homes, their countries and families, a continent away women, men and children in chains being forbidden to use their languages, their religions, their cultural patterns. Being subjected to round-the-clock surveillance and torture, being denied any right to ordinary relationships. The women are also denied their family, specifically the children born of their flesh. That is because a final injustice was that any offspring born to them was designated not theirs, but their slave masters'. In summary, in the new place, they found themselves denied all rights to being human. Designated sub-human, they had no recourse to human justice.

Goodison's poet-persona's giving of voice to the enslaved woman is part of the larger project by African-heritage writers across the Black Atlantic: determined to bear witness on behalf of those who were not permitted to have a public voice and to share, through their creative output, the stories that the world had refused to acknowledge for hundreds of years. My own writing, particularly the neo-slave libretto, *Imoinda*, is part of that project.[29] In "The Power of the Neo-Slave Narrative Genre", Maria Helena Lima and I note that the genre redresses "the gaps and misrepresentations of dominant history through narrative", to fulfil what Clarisse Zimra describes as "the ethical imperative of inventing a past that would otherwise disappear".[30] We consider that "gaps and silences" nevertheless remain, that "reflect the fact that part of the history of slavery is irretrievable."[31] In addition, we consider that, from a British perspective, the neo-slave narrative genre is particularly relevant:

> since most received historical accounts have downplayed, or completely ignored, Britain's role as a slaving nation. If slavery is remembered, as Abigail Ward writes, "the focus falls on the abolitionists, so Britain's role in this past is remembered only in terms of ending, rather than perpetuating, the trade."[32]

Writers including Fred D'Aguiar, Caryl Phillips, Grace Nichols, David Dabydeen and Andrea Levy, to name a few, have imaginatively returned to the past of slavery in order to (re)present the enslaved human. In the process, the texts produced also revise the way in which British history is understood and remembered. Crucially, such writing alerts readers to the continuing legacies of slavery into the twenty-first century and helps us to understand the "afterlives" of slavery or its impact today. That I have stayed with slavery for much of this text is exactly for these reasons: the impact of Atlantic slavery continues to shape the present, including current Humanities teaching practice.

Space does not permit the two further samples to be treated in much detail. They are offered nonetheless, in the hope that the differences and similarities that they suggest will stimulate further thought concerning change. The first is an extract from Erna Brodber's *Myal* (1988), through which I aim to raise a few questions about belonging. Should the Literature classroom represent a space of belonging? If so, on what basis? A yet broader question is: what kind of belonging does the black student represent in the Literature classroom? This leads to the final extract, taken from Jacob Ross's short story, "Ku-Kus: De Laughin Tree" (1999), through which I would like to return to the question of universality and perceived barriers to its recognition posed by a reluctance to accept the literary validity of Englishes (plural), perhaps best considered an outcome of Empire. This particular challenge, one regularly posed by Caribbean Literature, is skilfully crafted in the sample from Ross's writing,

below, and adds crucially to the diverse ways of knowing central to the body of writing.

Like much Caribbean writing, Brodber's fiction engages with Caribbean history and historiography to reflect upon the present. The first date referenced in the extract below is 1919, which cues the reader in to the post-slavery colonial era and its key players in the novel, including representatives of different branches of the Christian church left over from an era preoccupied with Christianising and civilising the creolised Africans still considered heathen. In the extract, Maydene, the Reverend's wife, is reflecting on his similarity to a young girl she has recently met at a school concert in which the girl recites Rudyard Kipling's colonialist poem, "White Man's Burden".

> Listening to that little girl and watching her as she recited was what set Maydene to thinking of William and his brother. Funny. In the middle of that child's recitation, she ceased to see her and saw William instead. There was good reason. William was of the same kind of mixture as this girl. That was one of the first things William told her about. Innocent and beautiful, just like that little girl, he had faced the congregation that Sunday at Linton as a student at Cambridge. Her father had been impressed by his erudition and his exoticism and invited him to tea. It was the strength of his spirit, its beauty and passion that had attracted her. Right away he told them of his origins. An invisible mother. Possibly half caste. Very like the kept woman of somebody important. She had died giving birth to him. He had been cared for, after age ten by a large settlement from his father whom he did not know; had been brought up by a negress supervised by a Methodist minister, now dead, and by his father's very worthy attorney who saw to his financial needs.[33]

The extract suggests a realistic colonial world and a questioning of belonging that is familial, though masked from the world that William inhabits. An important clue is the unknown, white colonial father. However, since William is "the same kind of [racial] mixture" as the little girl, he remains an "exotic" in his wife's world in Cambridge. Many questions may be raised with reference to William's "origins" and his "exoticism", allowing his wife to know and yet not know him. At the same time, my initial concern remains to open up questions of belonging, a theme within the novel in which this Caribbean story-world is preoccupied with "spirit thievery", which itself might be considered to echo concerns with exclusion and "un-survival" in the Literature classroom.

The final extract is from Ross's collection of ten short stories, *A Way to Catch the Dust*, published by the small Mango press. Although Ross lives in England, his fiction short stories and novels, including award-winning crime fiction are all set in the Caribbean. Ross's use of Caribbean English or Creole is a distinctive feature of his oeuvre. It also offers a studied resistance to colonialism in its rejection of the language, standard English, that was drilled into British subjects as the language of literary art. I highlight this, as I am well aware that for the uninitiated such language might appear to challenge the potential for universality that Standard English implies. Much has been written about voice and the region's literature, and Edward L. Brathwaite's *History of the Voice*, a seminal text on the subject, is important to an understanding of the diverse dynamics at play. It is the use of orality/aurality features in the extract, that I would like to underline as crucial to Ross's literary art.

The narration is presented from the point of view of a young girl, Feather, and there is much that the, sometimes verbally precocious, girl protagonist does not understand. While Feather and her grandmother are strong allies, the irony of their situation is tellingly played out when Granny, a local, uneducated, old woman gets Feather to be their mouthpiece in what is revealed as a persistent and unequal negotiation between a white entrepreneur trying to trick Granny into selling her land for his beach enterprise. The family is the last to hold out against

exploitation, and the foreigner has no intention of being bested. At the same time, neither the old woman nor the child understands the official document about ownership of the disputed land. That the narrative is written in Caribbean English and presents literary art wrought from language once dismissed as debased is significant to the region's literary ways of knowing. Ross's heightened orality/aurality is precisely what I consider to merit particular attention:

> Is when Missa Coleridge come back de next time and she ask me to show im de paper but don let im touch it dat tings really turn sour. Granny tell me long time afterwards when tings was comin to a end dat nutting in Missa Coleridge worl make him prepare for people like we to refuse him anyting. It have people who tink dat dem own everyting, like if dem entitle to it long before dem born. Dat dem teach deir children to believe something is deirs even before dem know what owin mean. Dat for people like we to tell dem no, is worse dan steppin on dem big toe o spittin in dem eye. Is a belief dat dem born inside of same way dat a fish o tadpole does born surround by water.
>
> Mebbe dat was why Missa Coleridge get on like dat when I point de paper in he face an show im de stamp o de candleblood.
>
> De man blow like a lambi shell, tellin we how we silly; how we is ignoramus (I write dat down), how Granny cantankerous (I write dat down too) how everybody move and we ignorant not to accept de money an move too, how we obstructin progress; how de govment give im rights an we hambuggin dem rights; how he wish de little chicken coop of a house fall down on we and kill we (yes he say dat!); an how it ain got nobody who goin help we when we dead, jus wait an see. An if we tink dat we goin spoil he plans, we soanso see!
>
> I get so vex I nearly put some words to he, but I member what Granny say bout big words and little meanin, an even if I didn agree wid she, it sort o throw cold water on mih tongue, so I constraint mihself. An I have to say, I did find it flippin flabbergastin.[34]

Taking the extracts together interestingly, all published by small presses, indicative of the status of Caribbean literature only a few decades ago I want to argue that despite pockets of teaching that are open to writing of Wynter's "genres of being human", all too often there is a narrow range of writing that is drawn upon as worthy of scholarly attention within the Literary Humanities. That range is always dependent on endorsement (critical reviews/scholarly writing) by those already firmly included within the Humanities debate and who often know best and feel most secure with the canonical. Until very recently, such literary scholars have been disproportionately, privileged, white, elite-educated men. Wynter's "Overrepresentation of Man" applies.

I hope to have begun to show how even the small selection drawn from Caribbean literature and commented upon thus far, begins to open up questions of the human and to claim a textured space of being for absent black voices. Ross's Granny, for example, though uneducated, reveals a store of knowledge that runs deep. With reference to Brodber's *Myal*, is spirit possession a psychological state that is part of the human condition that we might recognise today? Or is it primitive mumbo jumbo, or merely human imagination at play? How and why do we humans deploy religion?

I would also like to suggest that displacement, especially involving descent from human to sub-human, could usefully be explored through texts that readily open up to consideration of the political, itself usually considered

off limits in the Literary Humanities. Texts such as those shared above, render visible the actual process of shifting or displacing that was so effectively achieved in colonialism. Countering that, the Humanities can, I think, engage roles relative to considerations of human justice. They can show how difficult it is to defend those rights, how our instincts and learnt behaviours can lead us away from them, how hard it may be even to define them in certain situations, how problematic and illusory they may be. They can defamiliarise us so that we are encouraged to ask more questions of the text concerning humankind, landscape, ecology, setting and more.

To conclude, at the core of this text is the practice that I currently engage in. I teach and produce some Caribbean-focused writing, and my university career began with the teaching of Caribbean women's writing. I find Wynter, who similarly once wrote fiction and theatre, a provocative companion to travel with. Meanwhile, Mignolo, following Quijano, offers pointers that I find important to the bigger project. His writing about decolonial reading, decoloniality, and decolonial thinking and doing offers clear directions at times. "Decoloniality", he suggests, "drives us (engaged practitioners) to delink from the narrow history and praxis of Western (i.e., west of Jerusalem) knowledge and brings to the foreground the coexistence (denied by the rhetoric of modernity) of stories, arguments, and *doxa* ignored by Euro-centered languages."[35] Similarly, Goodison's poem optimistically registers in the final stanza that "we are uncovering our hope." While as a project this might well feel like reaching for the moon, out of these suggested beginnings the challenge is to get to know *that past*, the one that is rendered and represented sometimes all too painfully in Caribbean literature. In the UK, like in much of Western Europe, *that past* is also our shared past. To get to know it discomfort and all and then dare to make a difference, will lead to making possible ways of inclusion, rather than the persistent exclusion that still scars the Humanities. As Covid-19 isolation has helped us to glimpse, *that past* is also our transglobal, transcultural present.

Footnotes

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17. Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 14.
18. Beckles, *Britain's Black Debt*.
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20. Mignolo, "Decoloniality and Phenomenology", p. 364.
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24. Beckles, *Britain's Black Debt*, p. 19.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
26. Fetterley, "Introduction: On the Politics of Literature", p. 565.
27. Sharpe, *In the Wake*, p. 14.
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