A VOYAGE IN THE WEST INDIES: JOHN AUGUSTINE WALLER'S "FAMILIAR VIEW OF THE WEST INDIA ISLANDS"

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Introduction

One of the greatest challenges in early Caribbean research continues to be the accessibility of early primary West Indian texts for scholarly research. While bibliographies abound with citations and references to the vast array of historical and popular descriptions of the West Indies, access to the original texts continues to be limited. Instead, research about the pre-Emancipation or discovery and settlement periods in the Caribbean region tends to center on excerpts and highly editorialized interpretations of the primary texts. Consequently, scholarship related to the early West Indies reflects the contentious and fragmented ideologies of island histories and politics.

Figure 1 Title page and map from Journal

In an effort to increase access to primary texts and examine how West Indian residents viewed themselves in relation to the various colonial empires, my research centers on *digital scholarship:* how access through digital representations of literary artifacts enhances scholarship in and about early Caribbean peoples. In particular, as a member of the advisory board of the Digital Library of the Caribbean (Dloc), our common goal is to provide a technological framework in which the rhetoric of popular literature, such as the newspaper and personal accounts, may be examined. Published in 1820, ten years after his return, John Augustine Waller's account of travels in the West Indies from 1807 -1810 operates as both a case study for this type of scholarship within the context of the Dloc and as the subject of

scholarship about the West Indies during a period where the islands were struggling with conflicting views of their role within the British empire.

Interestingly, Waller writes in his preface that he did not write for publication or the historical record, but rather he wrote to entertain his friends with observations of living topics." Therefore, his account should be studied as a personal narrative reflecting the precision of a surgeon combined with the curiosity of a keen observer of people and events. The result is a first-hand glimpse of a typical voyage to Barbados with subsequent excursions to other islands adjacent to Barbados. In contrast to many other travelogues of the time, Waller's journal displays a blend of detachment and intimacy that parallels the syncretism of West Indian life in the period leading up to the Abolition of slavery. In order to deal with the multiple tensions between competing powers, travelers to the Caribbean were often torn between conflicting loyalties and the seduction of tropical beauty. Uncovering these tensions makes for interesting reading and holds promise for new scholarship related to popular literature. These popular writings are not usually included in anthologies, so that without the digital facsimiles stored in databases such as the Dloc, this interesting journal would have remained inaccessible to most Caribbean scholars. Consequently, Waller's role in Barbados and West Indian history would most likely have remained unstudied and unappreciated. However, in order to grasp the importance of digital facsimiles in the evolving field of digital humanities and scholarship it is useful to define how digital technologies engage traditional archival research and expand the possibilities for making new connections. Without the possibility for making new connections between popular, historical and literary writings, scholarship becomes a moot issue and research stagnates and becomes repetitive.

Caribbean Scholarship in the Digital Age

What is digital scholarship and what makes this type of research different? The short answer is that digital scholarship is simply a form of archival research that utilizes digital facsimiles and incorporates multiple modalities within a virtual space or environment. This "virtuality" enables the researcher to view texts, art, music, and other artifacts through a cultural prism and examine the many cultural relics comprising a specific historical experience. The artifacts being researched are not necessarily "new" or "born digital", however, they can be represented digitally and located within a common unified or "virtual" space. Study then takes place in such a manner that the researcher benefits from viewing texts or artifacts in multiple dimensions from multiple perspectives; the rhetorical implications of each are then examined as relative to the whole. This allows for a more performative experience and analysis of events that is typically associated with drama. For instance, in previous writings, I have noted an interesting parallel between the obviously fragmented nature of Caribbean geography and the not so obviously fragmented representations of its

historiography in writings about the discovery and settlement periods. While some of this may be attributed to the entanglement of cultures, ethnicities, and powers permeating Caribbean history, much of what I will call "The Great Caribbean Conundrum of Identity" seems to have been unwittingly perpetuated by linear two-dimensional formats of traditional scholarship that repeat a stereotyped view of early Creoles as either master or slave. Unfortunately, because the first was the primary writer of the histories and popular literature, while the latter was the object/subject of debate, writing from the "other" peoples is conspicuously absent. Consequently, we have little scholarship about the pre-1800 period of Caribbean history that examines the many "other" peoples who provided the genetic seed for modern Caribbean peoples. Their writings, music, art and other cultural artifacts, have for the most part remained either lost and forgotten, or subsumed into mainstream genres. In order to rectify this, my research combines traditional archival methods within a digital framework. The following table is an attempt to demonstrate how this digital framework for this type of archival study utilizes the socio-historical context in order to determine the rhetorical agendas at work. Only by building a digital framework and engaging in a more archeological approach to historical artifacts can we hope to uncover any trace of these unappropriated[1] people.

Archival Research	Socio-Historical Context	Rhetorical Analysis
Physical access to texts/ artifacts	Chronology of events = Time	Genres – print literatures/ art/ music
Digital representations	People/events = Action	Multiple modalities
Research methods = horizontal vs. vertical	Geography of author/archive/researcher = Place	Virtual spaces = electronic delivery

Figure 2 Rhetorical Framework for digital scholarship

The unique nature of digital scholarship stems from its geography within a virtual common space that allows us to re-examine and re-center the focus by comparing the multiple modes of communication used by early Creoles and their English cohorts. Ironically, this orality and multimodality of the early Caribbean has traditionally been explicated by the two-dimensional technologies of print-based formats or art that collapse the oral, the visual, the performative, the spiritual . . . into the "flat" confines of print text and graphics that are then delivered out of context as discrete parts of a

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[1] Jerome Handler first coined this phrase in his book *An Unappropriated People: the Freedmen in the Slave Society of Barbados* to identify freed blacks in Barbados. The term is taken from its legal meaning of "not appropriated or included" in the legal system, e.g. not having full or equal civil rights. Here I appropriate the term to mean not having full or equal historical coverage.

particular Caribbean history. This individual focus on discrete artifacts conforms nicely to our rational western European notions of centeredness and canons of literary scholarship, but does little to convey the "other" components of Caribbean identities, the irrational, the spiritual, e.g. the African, Asian, Indigenous, Celtic and East European, to mention only a few. Thus, while traditional scholarship is valuable in preserving the human record and has led to some interesting and valuable academic work, it has not been successful in improving access or understanding to a vast body of Caribbean heritage harvested from colonial outposts or early settlements and later shipped to locked archives in metropolitan centers. Hence, it is reasonable to speculate that much of our early Caribbean patrimony is still held hostage – far from the very people who could most benefit from the relics of their ancestors in order to untangle the web of a culturally tangled past.[2] This begs the question of "How do we untangle this web and begin to re-center history in a more appropriate context for the contemporary audience?"

A decentralizing or academic discussion of digital scholarship should focus on how digital technologies have opened new possibilities for the preservation of and virtual access to documents, images, music, dance and art, as well as how they have offered new ways to combine the multiple modes of our human record for a broader evaluation of events. However, this process can be problematic since it introduces a rhetorical aspect to utilizing digital and visual media which in turns posits several challenges for scholars – who, when, where, and how do we use technology? Who will manage the archive? How and when should technology be used for scholarship? Where will the digital representations be stored and how will virtual access be managed? Will the digital repeat the problems of the physical real-time archives, and will the virtual become as exploited as the physical? What is the teleological shape of digital archives? Will the new rhetoric of the virtual world repeat the hegemony of the physical world? Or, will the digital serve as a leveling force and break down the canonical hierarchies sometimes perpetuated by plantation legacies. Hence, my research attempts to address those issues as part of the rhetorical aspect of digital technologies and humanities scholarship. The subsequent "journey" into uncharted scholarship provides new perspectives on old notions of subject and agency in the field of literary historiography.

When first embarking on the digital journey, the project is always threatened with derailment by the repeating question of "What, other than the multiple modalities involved, makes digital scholarship different from 'traditional' scholarship?" Although mentioning the use of technology states the obvious, it is not just the use of digital technologies that changes humanities scholarship. The human element is also at

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[2] This concept was part of an earlier paper, "Digital Scholarship – New Options for Globalizing Caribbean Resources", presented at the Eastern Caribbean Conference in Antigua, 2003.

play in how events are recorded. In order to understand how this engages the digital, it is helpful to accept that all scholarship relies to a certain extent on memory and representations of an original event or artifact, regardless of the mode used in examination. Thus the outcome may be somewhat altered by the rhetorical agenda of the observer. In Waller's case, his account was published ten years after his return from the West Indies and one could argue that his descriptions may have been altered by time and frequent retellings. After all, memory is subject, object, not agent; and its subjects may become [mis-]representations shaped by rhetorical agendas. To counter this, the rhetorical framework created by technology offers an interesting virtual space from which we may examine, manipulate, and challenge those agendas safely, without compromising the original. For instance, more traditional approaches to archival research are necessarily limited by physical access to texts and artifacts. This results in what I will term a "vertical" research of discrete items housed in a particular archive or archives. Each artifact is examined in depth, separately; each is annotated, evaluated, and then examined independently outside of its physical context. On the other hand, digital representations allow for what I call a "horizontal" approach
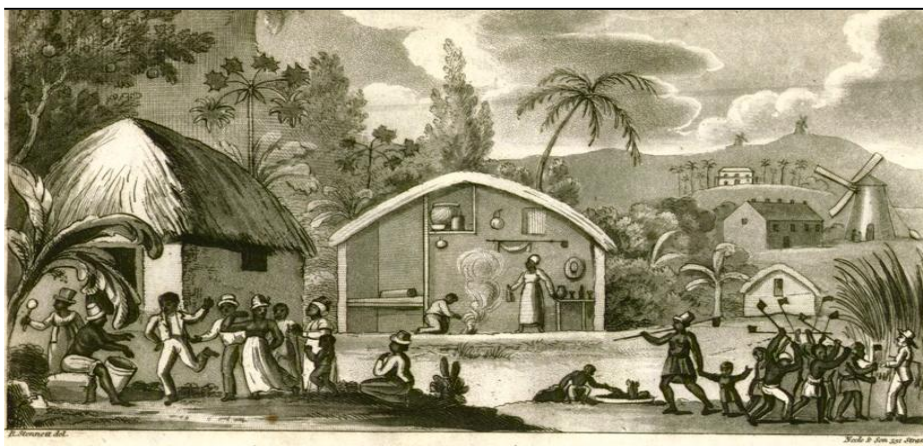
Figure 3 Plate depicting slave life in Barbados

providing access to multiple archives, databases, and artifacts from within one virtual space. This horizontal approach to scholarship allows for the laying out of a historical continuum with individual representations of artifacts located in nodes and related to the whole before individual examination. Thus, while the vertical approach provides an in-depth study of one or several artifacts or events, the horizontal approach links the artifacts and events in multiple dimensions of time, geography, context and modes of communication; thus increasing the possibility of making new and perhaps unlikely connections. Ultimately both approaches are necessary to preserve the cultural record, fully grasp the nuances of events and more closely represent the artifact and understand its context within a historiography of the Caribbean that us usually viewed from the outside with what Mary Louis Pratt has so appropriately termed "imperial eyes."

Waller's *Familiar Voyage . . .*

In previous research, I have attempted to layout this horizontal continuum of people in Barbados and adjacent islands in order to engage in a literary archeology of writing in Barbados during the eighteenth-century. This approach has uncovered representations of power in Barbados that are not usually mentioned in canonical literature. As a result, the digital facsimiles of popular literature in pre-emancipation Barbados serve as prototypes in order to test my theory of texts as artifacts and the people as both subject and Subjects. As subject, Waller and his journal provide a rich variety of descriptions about the various islands and their inhabitants. As Subject, Waller the surgeon offers a unique study in perspective that is both objective and subjective simultaneously – somewhat akin to the syncretism of Creoles and their societies, both English and "different" at the same time. This "sameness" and "difference" was the inevitable result of shifting powers, complex politics and competing ideological agendas.

The world was a complicated place in 1808. By the time Waller was assigned to a hospital in Barbados, the slave trade had been abolished, but slavery continued and the emancipation debates were raging hot and heavy on both sides of the Atlantic as everyone weighed in on the fate of the enslaved population. On one side of the Atlantic, West Indian planters filled periodicals, letters, and histories with arguments that enslaved peoples were happy, childlike peoples incapable of living without the righteous authority of their owners. On the other side, metropolitan interests had grown tired of subsidizing plantations and a sugar economy debilitated by slave rebellions, hurricanes, corruption, and a collapsing sugar market. While Parliament, clergy and West Indian planters debated endlessly on the subject of emancipation and appropriate compensation for lost property, France licked the wounds of the Haitian revolution by trying to conquer every major European power; and Spain was preoccupied with its economic woes and struggled to maintain a semblance of its former power in Latin America and the Spanish Caribbean.

In the midst of this confusion, the American plantation colonies quietly tried to repatriate freed slaves to Liberia[3] and absolve guilt over the fact that their economies flourished and depended on slave labor. In London, Englishmen had become increasingly occupied with the evolving Industrial Revolution and its effects on domestic life – often relegating West Indian issues to philosophical discussions over tea imported by the East India Company and sweetened with sugar from the West Indies. This was the scene as Waller sailed through the Caribbean islands and,

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[3] The American Colonization Society was created in 1816 to address the issue of freed slaves. This group actively campaigned to force manumitted slaves to repatriate to Liberia where they were 'seasoned' for six months and then, if they survived, given land and fifty dollars. Unfortunately, many died and most were terribly homesick.

logically, could be the reason he so pointedly states that his intention is not to publish, but to entertain his friends with living topics. In a complicated world, lively descriptions of tropical places offered a refreshing change from the heavy debates at home.

Only at the end of his journal does the reader glimpse his conflicting emotions. At this point, one obvious question is: how does Waller's account specifically engage digital scholarship, since his journal appears to be one more travelogue in a long series of travelogues about the West Indies? The answer lies in two facts: first, Waller's artifact is not part of the mainstream British or Caribbean "canon" and has limited availability through the William L. Bryant Foundation *West Indies Collection* in Florida. Second, and in contrast, the digital facsimile is publicly available online through the Digital Library of the Caribbean. The first limits any first hand research to a very few who visit the collection. The second provides free and easy access to anyone with an Internet connection. This points out one important lesson for researchers – without digital representations, access trumps research.
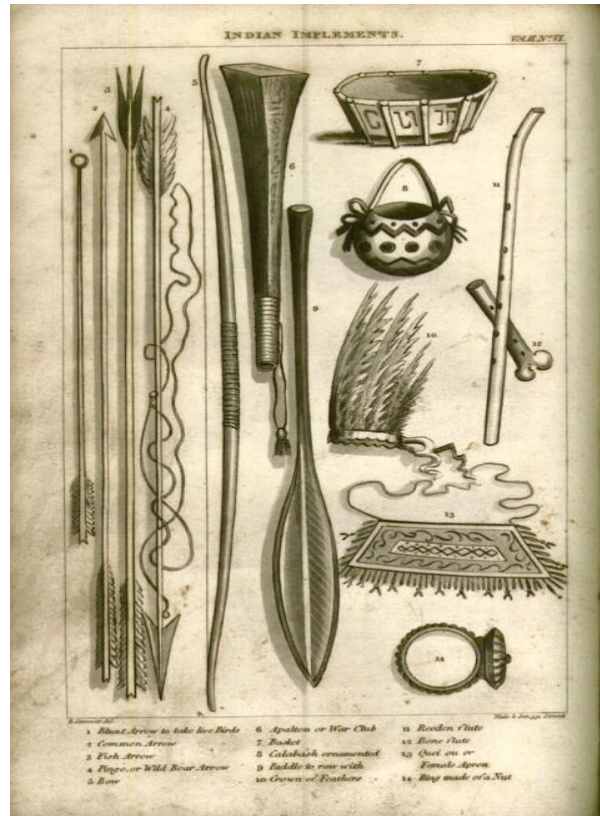

Figure 4 "Indian Implements"

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Since access often hinges on economic resources necessary for travel, lodging, food, etc., one might also argue that digital representations are a leveling factor that provide a more democratic approach to scholarship and thus remove elitist academic constraints frequently associated with scholarly research and the availability of travel funds. The far ranging effect of this is that through inclusion of a broader base of researchers and genres, prevalent literary canons might possibly be challenged and re-ordered according to multiple and more democratic perspectives. For instance, while Waller's journal is fortunately catalogued as part of the *West Indies Collection*, many other artifacts about the West Indies are buried in colonial libraries and archives where they might never be "discovered" or connected to their original historical contexts.

On another level, Waller's *Familiar View* is also interesting in how it interweaves descriptions and artistic plates from the era to both condone and contest stereotypes of

the West Indian islands as either exotic or degenerate. Interspersed with these descriptions are meticulous drawings of indigenous artifacts and artistic renderings of everyday life in each island. These descriptions offer a refreshing view of the people in each island that rediscovers and focuses on the human geography as integral to the physical geography of each island. For instance, Waller contrasts the muddied streets surrounding the harbor in Barbados with the broad streets of Surinam "planted with double rows of orange and lemon trees on each side, thickly covered with fruit, and forming an agreeable shade over the walks beneath them" (p. 61). He then continues with a description of the "suburbs of the town" and the Indians, "both men and women, entirely naked, except a narrow piece of coarse cloth which was attached behind to a string tied round the waist, and passing between the legs" (p. 61). This image of a lush landscape and naked Indians contrasts sharply with entries such as the one on Guadeloupe and Dominica where he briefly mentions a battle between two French men-of-war and a British sloop. Earlier in the voyage, his description of Martinique writes a landscape that is "very high and picturesque, but the country appears rather barren" (p. 3). The reader is left wondering if it is the landscape that is barren, or if the effects of war have left the island barren of people. An interesting conundrum Waller never explains.

The journal ends with a diary of the rough voyage back to England in 1810. His sober account of this voyage is unlike the eager descriptions of his trip from England to Barbados as he relates the sad tale of a sick sailor whose mates refuse to care for him, robbing him of his clothes, refusing to share food, until Waller orders them to provide a blanket and care for the sick man. Unfortunately, after several days Waller is awakened in the middle of the night by the splash of water as the poor soul, still alive, is tossed overboard by his reluctant caretakers. Thus both the journal and the voyages convey conflicting views of Waller's experiences and the ambivalence of his roles as traveler and surgeon in an area of the world where being English in Barbados and the West Indies was much different from being English in London. As audience, we the casual readers can only speculate and simulate our roles as Waller's friends and be entertained. As scholars we can bring together the fragments of Waller's journal as history and hope to inform.

Conclusion: The Virtual Possibilities for Waller's Journal
While Waller's journal is well preserved and provides detailed plates and drawings, the digital facsimile provides a more efficient research technology (see Fig. 2). From the archival perspective, once a researcher establishes his search criteria and efficiently finds all references in the text, the next step is to determine which areas merit further investigation. For example, digital archival research provides the means to search various databases for related events, artifacts, or commentaries that can be

used to contextualize Waller's journal and make the connection to other works of the period or verify his descriptions. From a rhetorical perspective, the fact that Waller was transported from the relatively homogeneous high context culture of England to the diverse low context cultures[4] of the West Indies raises some interesting cultural questions. Consequently, digital scholarship might bring various artifacts from the period into the unified virtual space to examine how his choice to entertain and not inform would serve both his own agenda as the surgeon/traveler and his later agenda as writer/entertainer. What were the contemporary issues and debates between 1808 and 1810? Were his descriptions and "familiar view" written in order to avoid addressing these debates that centered on slavery, war, and imperial politics, or was he simply doing as he stated in his "Advertisement", avoiding the repetition of scientific details and natural histories previously published and writing to entertain his friends? Regardless of the answers, the ability to place digital facsimiles, hyperlinks, commentaries, and other modalities within one unified virtual space is promising in its interesting twist on the Neo-classical interpretations of Aristotle's unities of time, place and action. A twenty-first century view of the digital performance is less confining and views the unities not in terms of the actors and the stage, but in terms of context and audience. Both entertain, both inform; however, unlike the rigid Neo-classical notions of performance that continue to infiltrate colonial and postcolonial representations of the Caribbean, and often chain West Indian peoples to a binary tragi-comedy of black-white relations, the virtual performance has no boundaries and thus offers the possibility to unchain Caribbean identity from the tragedy of its past and celebrate the hybridity and syncretism of today's West Indian peoples.

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[4] Here, high context and low context are used according to Emily Thrush's definition of the anthropological views of culture, e.g. "in a high context culture most members share the same religion, education, ethnic or national background and history . . . and assume that other members of their culture think the same way. In a low-context culture, members are very different in all of the ways listed above, so they may have different values and different ideas about all areas of life" (p. 33).

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