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Frieda Cassin (1870-1896?)  
'Scissors and Paste' (1895)

Despite still being relatively unknown in scholarly communities, Frieda Cassin was one of the most significant players in the early history of Antigua's literary production and publishing. Born Mary Federica Cassin in Gravesend, Kent, England, Cassin moved to Antigua as an infant, and lived there for the remainder of her life, which was cut short by consumption.

Along with being credited as the author of the earliest known Antiguan novel, *With Silent Tread* (1896), Cassin served as editor of Antigua's first literary journal, [\*The Carib: A West Indian Magazine\*](#), which she founded and edited until she was too ill to continue publishing. Though *The Carib* ran for only six issues, from April-September 1895, it was a success from its inaugural issue, which was immediately received with glowing reviews in both Antigua and England. *The Carib* was a significant literary venue for numerous islands and circulated throughout the Caribbean through distribution agents on five other islands. Its popularity was not limited to the Caribbean, however; *The Carib* was a truly transatlantic journal, and had subscribers in England, the United States, and even China and New Zealand. The caliber of its literary works was also celebrated transatlantically, with papers in the United States (such as the *Waterbury Evening Democrat*) lauding the 'pioneer editress' for her literary prowess and the editorial undertakings of her journal ('A Pioneer Editress').

Tragically, Cassin died within a year of founding *The Carib*. The enthusiasm and expertise she brought to her role as editor could not be duplicated, and the journal ceased when she stepped down due to her declining health, and, in part, due to a lack of material. Without Cassin's extensive literary contributions, there simply were not enough fiction submissions to justify a monthly literary journal. Her own output for the journal was certainly prolific: one story per issue is attributed to Cassin, and she also wrote several pieces for *The Carib* under the pseudonym Peace Carroll.

Not only did Cassin have an impressive career as a self-publishing author, but she used her work to offer a firsthand examination of pertinent cultural issues specific to nineteenth-century transatlantic studies. Race relations, colonial tensions, disease, rebellion, and social critiques are just a few of the topics she explores, positioning her as a significant figure in the field of transatlantic literature.

The following article is an editorial statement Cassin published in the fourth issue of *The Carib*, which details her hopes of curating a publication venue that preserves West Indian folklore, literature, and traditions. Indeed, this was a hope that Cassin carried through in her own work; her novel and her short stories vividly portray West Indian life and offer insightful commentary on life in post-emancipation Antigua, though some comments rely on language and racial stereotypes that are unacceptable today. In 'Scissors and Paste', Cassin details the process of founding and editing a literary journal – the struggles and the triumphs – and emphasises the importance of having a truly 'West Indian' publication.

‘Scissors and Paste’

“THE SKILFUL USE OF SCISSORS AND PASTE, KNOWN IN POLITE LANGUAGE AS EDITING.”

*The Late* AMELIA B. EDWARDS<sup>1</sup>

Isn't it Artemus Ward<sup>2</sup> who tells about some primitive music-hall in Arkansas, where, over the piano, was the inscription;— “Don't shoot the pianist, he is doing his best.”?

Some suitable adaptation of this appeal the Editor<sup>3</sup> felt strongly tempted to affix to the first and second numbers of the “Carib.” Neither Editor nor “Carib” were shot, however,—not even with paper pellets, for which forbearance both beg to express their acknowledgment to the press.

The story of the struggles of the “Carib” would be both pathetic and laughable. Obstacles were legion, but whenever the project seemed to be sinking into the Slough of Despond,<sup>4</sup> a budget of encouraging letters would tumble in, with inducement to persevere which revived the flagging energy.

As regards the illustrations, a promised feature, a word in explanation of their tardy appearance is due. The April and May illustrations, which were failures, unhappily cost the “Carib” as much as if they had been successful.

The April illustration was to have been produced from a block purchased from an English illustrated paper, which, on its arrival, was found to have already seen so much faithful service that a bleared and unbeautiful impression was all it was capable of giving.

The May frontispiece was to have been furnished by the ferro-prussiate<sup>5</sup> process. The sensitized paper ordered from England not having arrived, the chemicals necessary for sensitizing ordinary paper were got from Barbados and the deluded Editor felt smilingly secure of a successful illustration. However, inexperienced Editors, like the young bears in story-land, swiftly awake to find all their troubles before them.

There was no paper to be discovered anywhere in the island, of texture sufficiently firm and close to float longer than half a minute on the sensitizing fluid, and the space necessary for its preparation being three minutes, the feeble print when produced was only one-sixth of the requisite depth of colouring.

Thus in spite of clear and excellent negatives and conscientious workmanship, that malignant sprite “Bad Luck” still presided over the May number.

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<sup>1</sup> Amelia Ann Blanford Edwards (1831-1892) was a well-known English author, journalist, and Egyptologist.

<sup>2</sup> Artemus Ward (1834-1867) is the pen name of American author Charles Farrar Browne. Ward was a humourist whose writing style influenced other prominent writers and humourists such as Mark Twain.

<sup>3</sup> The Editor referred to throughout this piece is the author, Frieda Cassin.

<sup>4</sup> The Slough of Despond is a literary allusion to *Pilgrim's Progress*.

<sup>5</sup> The process by which prints are made using paper sensitized with a solution of potassium ferricyanide and ferric ammonium citrate

As regards the literary department,—the prospect of a supply of sterling matter,—there is nothing but success to report. The faith in the unsuspected rolls of M.S.S<sup>6</sup> lying by in West Indian<sup>7</sup> desks was not unfounded, nor the confidence that wielders of a ready pen would not grudge the fruits of it to a periodical which seeks to be representative of the entire West Indies.

The only complaint one would urge against most of the “Copy” kindly forwarded to the “Carib” from the different islands, is, that it is not West Indian enough!

True, the “Carib” would wish to afford an outlet to Colonial literary talent in whatever direction it may be directed, but European or general subjects can be ably treated of elsewhere, while the West Indian tone at which the “Carib” aims can only be acquired in the West Indies and from the pens of long-resident West Indians.

The book-world is pretty liberally supplied with works on the West Indies, written, so to speak, from the outside.

One has nothing to say against that type of globe-trotter who arrives by one mail, to return by the next, furnished with materials for his, or more probably her, next book “Half Hours in the West Indies; being a History of those Islands from the Date of their Discovery.”

Provided the author does not attempt too much, his jottings and impressions have a distinct value. They hold us up, as it were, that we may see ourselves as others see us,—a wholesome oréal [sic].

The peculiarities of a certain country are only the differences between the scenery, people and customs of that country, and the scenery, people and customs of another, which differences are more quickly perceived by the experienced eye of the globe-trotter, viewing us, as before said, from the outside.

But the side of far deeper interest,—the research into the old time traditions, beliefs, the root and origin of curious customs, the whispered horrors of the slave trade, the weird operations of dread Obeah<sup>8</sup>, the legends of all spots scattered among the islands with which tales are connected, the jumby<sup>9</sup> and anansi<sup>10</sup> stories, the quaint sayings with which negro school-children and the full grown negro, who is but a bigger child, will unconsciously convulse with laughter an appreciative audience, their proverbs, their superstitions their uncountable prejudices,—this side is open only to the native and resident West Indian who will take the trouble and patience to disentangle a few threads of the odd jumble of all the above mentioned points which exist in the mind and memory of the “old time” negro.

And both trouble and patience are required, as anyone knows who from curiosity has asked for some “nancy tory”<sup>11</sup> or tale of the mysterious dealings of obeah.

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<sup>6</sup> Manuscript

<sup>7</sup> Throughout this piece, the West Indies refers to the 13 independent island countries, 18 dependencies, and other territories in the three major archipelagos: the Lucayan Archipelago, the Greater Antilles, and the Lesser Antilles. West Indians refers to anyone living within the West Indies.

<sup>8</sup> Obeah is a system of spirituality that was developed among enslaved West Indians. It focuses largely on spiritual healing and justice-making.

<sup>9</sup> Spirit, ghost, or demon in Caribbean folklore; this may also be a reference to Long Island, known as Jumby Bay, off the coast of Antigua.

<sup>10</sup> Anansi is a well-known figure in Caribbean and African folklore. He is known for his intellect and wisdom, and can change form from a man to a spider.

<sup>11</sup> Anansi story

“Dat ar all foolishness; Missis don’ want fo’ hear dat,” is all the satisfaction the enquirer is likely to get.

If West Indian oddities are ever to be preserved, it is time that by dint of everyone contributing what matter he or she can, a collection should be made. This, one cannot but think, would be best accomplished by a magazine whose avowed object is the gathering together of all odds and ends of West Indian interest. The monthly issue would prove more favourable than book form, for the simple reason that such a varied and many sided collection of facts, fictions and fancies must necessarily be fragmentary, and be sent in at intervals as the project and aim of the publication become known.

The legends and kindred subjects of interest are gradually disappearing beneath the sandhills of time, and every succeeding year makes the task of unearthing them more difficult.

A fact still more to be regretted is that the “old-time” negro is rapidly dying out.

Faithful old Dinah, with her head-handkerchief and shoeless feet and dog-like devotion to “the family,” is fast being superseded by Miss Arabella Selina who patronizes feathers, starched skirts, parasols, needlework and gentility.

The sable youths of to-day are great in creaking boots, high collars and superfine English, and are by no means anxious to claim relationship with grandfather Sambo, digging potatoes with an occasional snatch of a plantation song.

We have heard of a Scotch lady, long absent from her native land, who affected ignorance when asked if she could sing “Auld Lang Syne.”

“Oh,” she remarked, “You must mean “Old Long Since.”

One would be sorry to credit this anecdote, contrary as it is to the staunch Scottish national traits, but a similar attitude is gradually being assumed by the rising black and coloured generation.

It is becoming *infra dig*<sup>12</sup> to be well informed in the old negro tales, songs, and other oddities, and this new would-be dignity, coupled with the old distrust of the motives of the white enquirer doubles the difficulty of collecting information.

The primary object of the “Carib,” then, is one which claims assistance from every West Indian who feels any interest in the study of the country. The means by which this assistance can be rendered, are simple enough.

There is the legend about that hill, or rock, or ruin or old residence which you have known ever since you can remember. There are the stories about Tukema<sup>13</sup> and Anansi and others of that ilk which your old nurse used to tell you while she sat on the floor by your crib patiently waiting for you to go to sleep, and which you have never seen in print. There is the funny reply to some simple question which housemaid or cook gave you the other day, and which you have laughingly retailed since as a sample of negro wit. Why not jot it down before it escapes your memory and send it to the “Carib” to start a column of “Genuine Negro Sayings,” and also, by the same means, give the literary world the benefit of the local anecdotes and legends referred to, which only you, through being situated in that particular locality, can supply.

This especial brand of research, which is neither strictly historical, antiquarian, nor geological, and yet is connected with all three, possesses a peculiar fascination for all who, even lightly, engage in it. The folk-lore of all countries shows a fundamental relationship which often

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<sup>12</sup> Demeaning

<sup>13</sup> Tukema is another prominent figure, alongside Anansi, in Caribbean oral tradition and folklore.

awakens questions of intense interest. From the old Edda, the “Mother of Poetry,” the treasure-store of scandinavian [sic] mythology and philosophy,<sup>14</sup> to the mystic circle of legends clustered round the Nibelungen Ring,<sup>15</sup> with their weird problems and impossible propositions, or the tales of “Bluebeard” and “Red Riding Hood,” clamoured for in English nurseries, or the strange triumphs of animal cunning of which the Indians love to hear, or the quaint stories of Uncle Remus, we find an undercurrent of resemblance and unexpected points of identity.

No less interesting is the curious kinship of words of all languages, their meanings past and present, and the root from which they spring, which study has been called the “poor man’s museum,”—but that has nothing to do with the subjects in hand, which are, the “Carib,” its *raison d’être*,<sup>16</sup> and its prospects of continuance.

The ideal “Carib,”— which, it will not be difficult to see, differs considerably from the early numbers,—would consist almost entirely of the folk-lore, and legends of all islands, of colonial character sketches, of fiction of tropical tone, of biographical sketches and portraits of our celebrities, of illustrations and descriptive notes of our principal spots of interest in each island,—only admitting such general matter as is of interest through coming from the pen of a West Indian, or such as being the work of an author of standing would assist in maintaining good literary tone.

The monthly expenses of the “Carib” are still considerably in excess of its income, which accounts for another point of difference between the real and the ideal “Carib,” namely, its price. A friendly W. I.<sup>17</sup> newspaper, in a review of the first number, regretfully expressed a doubt that the “Carib” subscription list would even ever reach 100.

To-day the list stands at 102 which modest rate of circulation by comparison with our established English and American periodicals, cannot but raise a smile. However this very unassuming list numbers readers in Antigua, Montserrat, St. Kitts, Nevis, St. Croix, St. Vincent, Barbados, Trinidad, Puerto Rico, Dominica, Jamaica, Guadeloupe, Berbice, Demerara, Grenada, St. Lucia, Carriacou, Bahamas, China, South Africa, Queensland, New Zealand, Fiji, England and America, so that though the circle be thin, it is spread out after the fashion set by Queen Dido.<sup>18</sup>

A writer, who is himself a “public spirited man” such as our West Indies have sore need of, suggests in a recent letter—“It seems to me that a short article on every West Indian port, with a good cut, would take. Some public-spirited men in each island might pay the cost of the cut for the insertion of the article.” Such illustrations are in the plan of the ideal “Carib,” but two failures already quoted, and the low ebb of “Carib” funds, handicap the attempt. Moreover, the first effort, as soon as the “Carib” can “button its own boots,”—(to borrow the homely peasant saying of some country,—I forget which,) must be to bring down the price to a more reasonable level.

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<sup>14</sup> A reference to Norse mythology, specifically the *Poetic Edda*, a thirteenth-century book of poetry

<sup>15</sup> A reference to the German epic poem, the *Nibelungenlied*

<sup>16</sup> Reason or justification for existence

<sup>17</sup> West Indian

<sup>18</sup> The first Queen of Carthage, and a figure in Greek and Roman mythology. She moved from Tyre to Cyprus to the north part of Africa; Cassin here references Dido’s extensive travels.

The said public-spirited men might well devote a few fragments of time to the penning of some local article, or discussion of a Colonial point of interest, by way of assisting in the endeavour to present their country and its possibilities more fully and justly to the world's eye.

Our doctors, one and all, are men whose training and profession make it safe to predict that they must have many facts and experiences of interest tucked away in the pockets of their minds if only they would turn them inside out for the general benefit. It would indeed be difficult for a man to attain to the dizzy heights of M. D. without having his powers of observation and research quickened to a remarkable degree. But our doctors are busy men and do not greatly exercise their pens beyond the writing of prescriptions, or the jotting down of an article on fevers to be read at an occasional meeting of a Medical Society.

Our clergymen are naturally well accustomed to wield the pen; perhaps,—for lighter purposes,—too much so to allow their writings always to escape a “groovy” tendency.

But their constant intercourse with all classes opens up a path towards the discovery of items of interest which is free to them alone, and which must place them in possession of much worth telling and hearing.

The average modern planter is,—when due facilities are within his reach,—a wide reader. He is, in many cases, a man who has formed views and opinions on other subjects than those which constitute the routine of his daily life. His conversation is, perhaps, somewhat monotonously apt to drift back into the channels of the weather and the market-prices, but once fairly started in discussion of some question of wider interest, his shrewd conclusions would, we venture to think, considerably astonish those Englishmen who share the opinion which Grant Allen<sup>19</sup> puts into the mouth of one of his characters when describing the West Indian planter as a being whose horizon was bounded by rum, sugar, and molasses.

To the youthful and pessimistic poet and the would-be delineator of love-lornity in fiction, one would wish to point out that they are striving to make paste diamonds, while all the time they are living in an Aladdin's cave<sup>20</sup> with rare and genuine gems to be had for the picking up.

Sir Walter Besant's<sup>21</sup> notice of the advent of the “Carib” in his “Voice of the Flying Day,” the “Queen”<sup>22</sup> March 16<sup>th</sup> 1895 will be of interest to such of our readers as may not have happened to observe it.

“For the first time there is to be a West Indian Magazine. Newspapers there are in plenty, and for every island; but, so far there has not been a magazine.

The new venture is to be called “The Carib.” It is to be published in the Island of Antigua. The usual stories are promised, with the usual articles by “experienced hands.”

Perhaps one may suggest that, if “The Carib” is to become known outside the Gulf of Mexico, the Editor should remember that every West Indian Island has its own romance; its own history; its own connection with the Mother Country; that it has, besides its own scenery and its own remarkable places; that the history of negroes and the slave trade is an extremely interesting part of West Indian story; that there are in some islands still surviving tribes of Caribs; and that, by dint of continual hammering, some future for these Colonies may be hit upon,—e.g. they may

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<sup>19</sup> Charles Grant Blairfindie Allen (1848-1899) was a Canadian author, scientist, and proponent of evolution.

<sup>20</sup> An allusion to the *Arabian Nights*

<sup>21</sup> Sir Walter Besant (1836-1901) was an English author and philanthropist.

<sup>22</sup> A British women's magazine that targeted upwardly mobile or privileged women readers

become places of winter resort, or they may become the fruit market for America, if not for Great Britain.

There seems, in fact, work before the projectors of the “Carib” which as yet they do not seem to have apprehended. I recommend them, too, if they would succeed, to work on lines altogether independent of the English and American magazines.”

Sir Walter Besant, in short, furnishes us with a West Indian Editor’s vade mecum,<sup>23</sup> and his advice is such as we would with the greatest happiness avail ourselves of. But it cannot be done single-handed.

Each island must give its tithe of co-operation if the “Carib” is ever to prove of any benefit to the Colony.

A West Indian paper in reviewing the magazine laments the short-comings of our “unpatriotic West Indian public.” It continues; “The West India public would certainly like to have a magazine of its own, but it must not be called upon to pay for the upkeep, and proprietors of local papers know to their cost what shifts are resorted to by our public-spirited public to obtain a perusal of newspapers free of expense. It is a thousand pities, but “The Carib” will not pay. It ought to but it won’t. We predict “The Carib’s” early dissolution, but we should be delighted to see ourselves false prophets.”

This local quotation, then, gives us the other side of the picture. Every island newspaper naturally expects the support of its own island. A Leeward Islands<sup>24</sup> publication pre-supposes the patronage of the Leeward Islands. A West Indian magazine claims the protection of the entire West Indies.

And what benefit can accrue to the Colony through the publication of a mere magazine, even if run on the most approved principles?

Briefly this. There was once a fable told of a Lion and a Mouse. If it be decreed that we shall no longer supply the sweet tooth of the world, and if as Sir Walter Besant thinks, we must needs hammer out new channels for our energies, what is more important than that we should keep ourselves to the fore in the notice of the home public which seems so apt to forget our existence?

We cannot trust our newspapers to do this. They are of local interest only, and are as Greek to the uninitiated Britisher. But questions of moment, at home, which some fifteen or twenty years ago would have found vent only in a dry-as-dust correspondence in the columns of the “Times”<sup>25</sup> or the “Telegraph,”<sup>26</sup> are, we know, to-day, ventilated in every periodical and magazine of any pretensions to being up to date, are agitated in the novels of the day,—in short, are aired, discussed, and spread abroad through the medium of fiction.

That this medium proves a successful one is proved by its universal adoption, and,—frankly speaking,—can *we* afford to crawl so far behind the times as we have hitherto been well content to do?

The “Carib” then, has a double aim, of which one,—as regards its object this side of the water,—has already been dwelt upon in detail; the other, perhaps the more important, is to keep

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<sup>23</sup> Handbook or guide

<sup>24</sup> The Leeward Islands are a part of the West Indies, comprised of Antigua and Barbuda, Guadeloupe, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and the Virgin Islands.

<sup>25</sup> A British daily newspaper that began in 1785

<sup>26</sup> A British daily newspaper that began in 1855

the reading i.e. the thinking, English public in touch with the claims, possibilities, doings, and general life and interests of the West Indies.

Sir Walter Besant's views are somewhat similar to those expressed by Chas. Edwin Taylor M. D.<sup>27</sup> in his excellent book "Leaflets from the Danish West Indies," from which we cull the following extracts;—

"We dare say it is a matter of wonder to many, that some steps have not been taken in the West Indies to replace the sugar-cane with something more profitable to the cultivator. But the tendency in these countries is not always to stray out of the beaten track. To advance slowly seems to be the motto of the hour \* \* \* \* There are many other plants to which we might refer in order to show how they might become in a comparatively short time a rich source of income.

In connection with this we have often wondered why the making of preserves and liqueurs from our own fruits has not been started by some one more enterprising than the rest. The guava berry can be made into a delicious preserve, and in combination with rum, gives a liqueur which is not only stomachic, but delightful to the taste. We yet remember the "rum shrub" which used to be manufactured in St. Croix, and of which we hardly hear the name now. There is "Miss Blyden," a famous old time drink, compounded of sugar, rum, and juice of the prickly pear, and which they buried under the ground in bottles, to improve it. Even these could be made a source of income, properly bottled, labelled, and advertised.

To these might be added an infinity of vegetables and fruits, not to speak of innumerable orchids, in which these islands (D.W.I.)<sup>28</sup> are particularly rich. If it be remembered that in St. Thomas alone more than 1,220 plants have been catalogued, it will easily be seen how difficult it is to do justice to such a mine of natural wealth. We cannot believe that the West Indies have had their day. With improved methods of cultivation, and of extracting the greatest possible amount of sugar from the cane; with large plantations of all kinds of fruit, which by rapid modes of transit, could be put upon the markets of Europe or America in a few days, the time is not far distant when these islands will be the Gardens whence the Old World will draw such supplies."

May these hopeful words speedily come true, and may the "Carib" be there to see.

THE EDITOR

Source text:

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<sup>27</sup> Charles Edwin Taylor, a London-born physician who later moved to the Danish West Indies and practiced homeopathic remedies. He was an "anti-vaccinator," and had to pay a fine due to refusing to vaccinate his children against smallpox. He also wrote extensively on life in the West Indies.

<sup>28</sup> The Dutch West Indies: Aruba, Curacao, Sint Maarten, Bonaire, Saba, Sint Eustatius



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