Islands offer a unique space within which to construct the most fantastic worlds imaginable – ones that offer limitless adventures for young travelers in children’s books. This phenomenon, however, is certainly not unique to children’s literature. In fact, within Caribbean studies, island images continue to be important literary and theoretical, discursive spaces in which to identify wider issues of (post)colonialism particularly in relation to representation. With the few but significant contributions in children’s literature scholarship dedicated to the critical analysis of island symbols, the historical/literary continuity with ‘adult literature’ and its symbolic system is evident. These images have been both sustained and challenged by native Caribbean authors in both adult and children’s literature.

An interesting context emerges in the contemporary transculturation of island tropes, particularly how US Caribbean authors have attempted to subvert the aggressive agenda of popular culture and both contemporary and classical representations of islands. The works of several contemporary US Caribbean authors stand out as exemplary contributions to this discussion. Judith Ortiz Cofer’s collection *An Island Like You* (1995), Anílú Bernardo’s *Jumping Off to Freedom* (1996), George Crespo’s *How the Sea Began* (1993) and Julia Alvarez’s *The Secret Footprints* (2000), offer a panorama of diverse approaches to subverting and rearticulating images of islands. Their stories address popular images and narratives and make room for the complex experiences of a young Diaspora. In a time of rapidly changing demographics and increasing youth consumer power, mass culture on the whole is forced to meet the demands of this constituency and strategically consider politics of representation.
Traditional islands and postcolonial appropriations

For many critics, multicultural children’s books perform a dual function. From their viewpoint, authors attempt to provide a source for imagining and reflecting heritage and for validating a unique culture. These books are a window into another’s world, a means of gaining knowledge and understanding of peoples different from themselves. Consequently, it is important to consider what it is that the island trope has represented in children’s literature, how and why it has become a set of images that is contested, particularly for writers of the Diaspora.

First, it is important to understand the contexts from which the trope of islands as sites of encounters with strangeness and adventure emerges in children’s literature as well as ‘adult’ literature. Islands may be constructed in terms of a geography of isolation and self-sufficiency, depending on ideas of an autonomous self and isolation as a human condition. Island heroes may be seen to discover their identities apart from a society or community. Island stories come in many genres, but are also related through this production of islands.

The most influential and imitated island story is Daniel Defoe’s 1719 classic, *Robinson Crusoe*. Versions of this story proliferated to the point where the term ‘Robinsonnade’ came to define a new literary genre. Perhaps the second most influential island story is by Robert Louis Stevenson, a Robinsonnade writer who followed the tradition of Defoe in *Treasure Island* (1883). In Stevenson’s adventure, however, the island is not uninhabited. The hero chooses to go to the island and the focus of the story is on finding a treasure versus the Robinsonnade objective of survival. Rooted in the imagery of the civilized and primitive exposed by postcolonial theorists, the island imagery in these texts can be explained through the exploration of the trope’s historical context.

Images of the New World in general and the Caribbean in particular around the time of The Conquest emerge as an exoticist discourse developed in Europe. This allowed an *avant-garde* of writers and intellectuals to escape to strange places and romanticize the liberating otherness of new colonial possessions. Perhaps the single most important text in relation to this theme in postcolonial criticism is Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. *The Tempest* became one of the most important sources used to establish a paradigm for postcolonial readings of canonical works. Specifically, the character Caliban, the half-human, half-beast offspring of a witch (original inhabitant of an island) who was forced into servitude by Prospero and his shipwrecked crew has become representative of conquest and transformation to establish some kind of order. Although there is no direct reference to the newly encountered world in Shakespeare’s last play, it was within this imaginative space that the Americas were essentialized and a pattern of cultural and moral dichotomies was established.