

"A TRAGEDY OF SUCCESS!":  
HAITI AND THE PROMISE OF REVOLUTION

A Dissertation  
Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Cornell University  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

by  
Natalie Marie Léger  
January 2012

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Natalie Marie Léger, Ph. D  
Cornell University 2012

Dissertation Abstract

*“A Tragedy of Success!”* is a close engagement with the ongoing artistic turn to Haiti and its revolution within the Caribbean literary imaginary. It argues that twentieth and twenty-first writers of the region are drawn to the nation and its Upheaval precisely because the striking incongruity of Haiti’s revolutionary past and postcolonial present vividly discloses how the modern Caribbean experience is profoundly shaped by the ceaseless play of radical change (conquest, colonialism and anti-colonial revolution) and debilitating communal crisis. This project joins the rich conversation on Haiti, modernity and the Revolution begun by C.L.R. James, and continued by Nick Nesbitt and Sibylle Fischer, to address this discussion’s slight attention to the abundant literary production inspired by the Revolution. This dissertation therefore focuses on the ideological work of the Revolution’s repeated narration in the Caribbean, specifically, the manner in which it arouses anti-colonial aspirations. It argues that the Caribbean experience of modernity has introduced a tragic mode into literary representations of the Upheaval, causing regional writers to depict the immediate as confounded by the past. Characterized by a subtle wavering between tragic pathos and comic elation,

this mode is as much an engagement with time and its affective oscillation as it is a politics of possibility. It speaks strongly to the writers' longing for total decolonial liberation region wide. This project participates in the rethinking of tragedy, as initiated by contemporary scholars like Rita Felski, Timothy Reiss and David Scott, in order to gauge how Caribbean writers use Haiti to negotiate the difficulties and successes of the region in their efforts to portray their desire for an improved Caribbean future.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Natalie Marie Léger was born in Princeton, New Jersey in 1981. She attended Hightstown High School and upon graduating in 2000, entered Rutgers University-New Brunswick. At Rutgers, she double-majored in English and Criminal Justice and graduated with honors. Following her college graduation in 2004, she began her doctoral studies at Cornell. In the Fall of 2011, she will begin her two-year tenure as a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for the Humanities at Tufts University.

*To my mother, father and sister,  
your patience and faith has been indispensable.*

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has been a long time in the making, and had it not been for the duly needed prodding from my advisors, friends and family, it would have taken much longer. I am grateful to my chair, Natalie Melas, for dealing with my fears, insecurities and my obvious acts of avoidance, both of my work and of her, with such patience and kindness. More than that, however, I am immensely appreciative of the attention she has given my work, the comments that pushed my insights and furthered my own understanding of the issues central to my thesis. With such comments, I came to believe that perhaps I was (and am) on to something with my work, perhaps maybe that the positions I had to offer were, in fact, incisive. At a time in which I sincerely doubted the career path I had set to embark on, her comments helped me wade through the misgivings and apprehensions often confounding my scholarly production. Furthermore, had it not been for her class, “Comparative Modernities,” I would not have come to this doctoral project and thus to my intellectual development as a literary scholar. I extend again my eternal gratitude.

I am equally grateful to Elizabeth DeLoughrey, a friend and advisor. Liz set a standard of scholarly excellence I strive to meet. In the nicest and kindest of ways, she and Natalie picked apart my writing and scholarship and forced me to become a better scholar. It is through Liz that I came to be aware of what it means to be a scholar, understanding the workmanship it would take to become the literary critic I had set out to be. Jonathan Monroe is yet another warm and understanding advisor. I enjoyed poetry before attending Cornell, but I grew to love poetry with his seminar on “Postcolonial

Poetry/Poetics of Relation.” I came to see both its theoretical richness and to (however reluctantly) appreciate the manner in which form shapes not only poetic meaning but literature, more broadly. With Jonathan’s guidance I came to critically consider the significance of form and to further my scholarship with readings that were not only thematically rich but also structurally.

A new addition to my scholarly stewardship, Carole Boyce Davies proved indispensable, as she was both mentor and advisor. She provided incredible opportunities to present my work both in the United States and the Caribbean. Furthermore, she valued my scholarly insight, asking (at one point) that I lead her class in a discussion of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Tell My Horse*. What’s more, she introduced me to one of my favorite writers—Edwidge Danticat, a highlight of my graduate career. Yet another highlight was the opportunity she arranged for me to speak on a panel with the recently departed, Édouard Glissant. That I was given that chance and that she also gave me the opportunity to speak on an additional panel about Haiti following the 2010 earthquake is a testament to her faith in my abilities. Such faith and such willingness to provide outlets for my growth as a speaker and instructor furthered my increasing conviction that academia was, in fact, for me. Along with this, her easy and amiable manner made her incredibly easy to talk and relate to. As if that were not enough, she reignited the sense of excitement and fun I had lost somewhere in my graduate career and made academia a place I can no longer do without. For that I thank her very much. In addition to my committee, I must ask express the fondest of gratitudes to Biodun Jeyifo, Paul Sawyer, Eric Cheyfitz, Gerald Aching, Dag Woubshet, and Ken McClane, who at varying points in my graduate career offered guidance, assistance and enjoyment along the way.



The project offered here gained considerable precision and insight from conversations with friends and fellow graduate students, especially Tsitsi Jaji, Anthony Reed, Marcus Braham, and Kavita Singh. I must single out two, in particular, who I could always count on to help work through my ideas and read chapters that made little sense to me, but that they nonetheless and tirelessly waded through. I thank Danielle Heard and Armando García for both their friendship and colorful exhortations to just “write it already” and get on with my life. I would also like to thank Edner Xavier, Jacquenide Deravil and Ingrid Pierre for the immense help they provided in translating what I could not in Kréyòl to English, and also Max Bourjolly for his interest and attention to my work. My closest friends, Lynn Léger, Wehti Wotorson-Blackledge and Amy Liao, deserve recognition for their support and encouragement. Lastly, I extend the deepest and warmest thanks to my mother, father, grandmother, late grandfather, and Mme., family who lovingly and steadfastly endured the drama that was this dissertation’s making.

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## INTRODUCTION

### READING THE HAITIAN REVOLUTION

*We are finished, Majesty,*

*We were a tragedy of success*

—DEREK WALCOTT, *HENRI CHRISTOPHE*

Near the end of Derek Walcott's play, *Henri Christophe*, when Alexandre Pétion's troops are on the verge of conquering Christophe's Northern kingdom, the latter's chief advisor utters: "We are finished, Majesty / *We were a tragedy of success!*"<sup>1</sup> Few words speak to the essence of my dissertation more than these. In context, they attest to Baron Vastey's (Christophe's chief aide's) recognition that the royal court's accomplishments augured the seeds of the monarchy's destruction. Within my project, however, the notion that tragedy lurks within success speaks, more broadly, to the aporia that is Haiti and the Haitian Revolution within critical discussions of modernity. Walcott's play details the reign of Christophe, a Haitian Revolutionary general turned king, whose blind ambition drives him to the very atrocities he had successfully fought against— governance rooted in the harsh inequities of forced and interminable labor. The play reveals that Christophe, and the post-revolutionary leaders that would follow him, return to colonial practices in light of their need for a history of achievement. For Walcott, this desire for a history that can overshadow a past of servitude with a present of greatness attests to their continued cultural colonization. For in desiring "History" and

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<sup>1</sup> See "Henri Christophe," *The Haitian Trilogy*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 103, emphasis mine.

in seeking to avenge a past in which they were made to exist without history, Walcott finds that the post-revolutionary leaders of Haiti unconsciously yield to the racist dictates they stood against—that is, to colonial conceptions of existence where Africans were deemed to be history-less and thus lesser than Europeans. Walcott therefore reveals that the post-revolutionary leaders of Haiti strive to ultimately live as masters among their own people in order to gain “History.”<sup>2</sup> When the lines, “We are finished, Majesty / We were a tragedy of success!,” are spoken, the serfs of Christophe’s dominion are just sixteen years removed from the war of independence against the French (1802-1804). Embittered by their return to slave labor, they willingly joined the army of Christophe’s former revolutionary comrade, Pétion, attempting again to secure a free existence. Walcott’s poetic turn of phrase (“*We were a tragedy of success*”) captures a key concern within my work: did the former slaves of the Caribbean ever attain freedom as they envisioned it? Were they ever, as a whole, free from the “endless return of chains, [the] rebirth of shackles, [and the] proliferation of suffering” that was slavery and colonialism?<sup>3</sup> Have they ever been, that is, free of colonial inequity?

Walcott’s phrase equally denotes an often-unsaid assessment of Haiti and the Haitian Revolution that is critical to my work, that Haiti is a nation suffering from the unprecedented triumph and tragedy of its historic moment of glory, the Revolution of 1804. When post-revolutionary politics in Haiti deteriorated into a seemingly endless cycle of tit for tat, with the landed elite and their urban counterparts battling for power to the detriment of a laboring

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<sup>2</sup> For more on Walcott’s reading of the desire for “History” by Haiti’s post-revolutionary leaders, see my third chapter, “Laughing Back: Haiti, History and Tragedy.”

<sup>3</sup> Alejo Carpentier, *The Kingdom of this World*, trans. Harriet De Onis, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1957) 178.

mass gradually losing its ability to subsist, the colonial drama of masters versus slaves reared its head once again.<sup>4</sup> Walcott's thus prefaces Vastey's declaration, "We are finished, Majesty/We were a tragedy of success," with the poignant: "Hither a new king, and another archbishop,/Monotonies of history...," underscoring the tiring return of colonial inequity in Haiti through its elite classes and the potential for coloniality's persistence in his moment, when much of the Caribbean was anticipating decolonization.<sup>5</sup> The Revolution, far from offering the basis by which a nascent nation could start anew, can be read as bearing the seeds of Haiti's future economic and political struggles; as while it rid Haiti of its European masters it did not, as Walcott is well aware, obliterate the cultural and economic conditions for the return of masters, black or white. Tracing the nation's trajectory of unrest and economic decline following the Upheaval, politicians and artists as diverse in thought as Thabo Mbeki and René Depestre have come to similar conclusions.<sup>6</sup> Arguably,

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<sup>4</sup> For more on this see David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 60.

<sup>5</sup> *Henri Christophe* was written in 1948 when much of the colonial world was in uproar following the Great Depression, World War II and the economic hardships many colonies were facing. I discuss this moment and its effects on the Caribbean in greater detail later in the introduction.

<sup>6</sup> The former South African president, Thabo Mbeki, announced before an audience at the University of the West Indies, Kingston that the Haitian Revolution was a failure as it produced socio-political and socio-economic conditions within the nation that could not meet the standards of development achieved by the U.S. and France; see Thabo Mbeki, *Address at the University of West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica*, (30 June). In the essay, "Open Letter to the Haitians of 2004" Depestre writes: "At the beginning of the twenty-first century, it would be a collective suicide to rely on an umpteenth civil conflict, on yet another military coup d'état, on our doubly secular experience of massacres and bloodbaths; in short on the idea of revolutions à la Haitian, 'to want, to achieve something impossible! Against destiny, against History, against Nature!' ... Two hundred years after [Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Alexandre Pétion and Henri Christophe], destiny, nature, history, that is, the globalization that we are subject to, demands of Haiti—its rulers, its elites, its churches, its trade unions—that they be reborn at all costs, as adult women and men, courageously determined to break free for once and for all from the chaos of the old cycle of hatred and revenge that slavery left for us as a common, toxic heritage;" see Depestre, trans. Martin Munro, *Reinterpreting the Haitian Revolution and its Cultural Aftershocks*, eds. Martin Munro and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw (Jamaica: University of West Indies Press, 2006) 2. Though Depestre closes this assertion by pointing to slavery as the cause of Haiti's "toxic heritage", it is clear, however, that he also finds Haiti's penchant for "revolutions à la Haitian" to be an

to assess the Revolution and its aftermath is to assess a “tragedy of success”— a paradoxical union of unparalleled progress and damning stasis.

Titled thusly, with this jarring incongruity of progress wedded to stasis, *“A Tragedy of Success”: Haiti and the Promise of Revolution* directly calls to mind a historical or a social scientific effort, a work less literary in substance and more quintessentially historical, sociological or perhaps political in nature. Indeed, my interest in the socio-political and socio-economic concerns of progress and stasis firmly ties my work with Haitian Revolutionary history, modernity and Caribbean literature to an extensive historical and social scientific corpus dedicated to Haiti and its Revolution. My primary concern, however, is literary representations of the Haitian Upheaval by twentieth and twenty-first century Caribbean writers and what I find to be the tragic nature of these depictions. Reading select works from Edwidge Danticat, Alejo Carpentier, and Derek Walcott, I uncover in my project a tragic mode of reading the Revolution that in contending with the thorny conundrum that is Haiti’s “success” and its “tragedy” write the Revolution with attention to the enduring salience of the past to the present. This awareness of the continued importance of the past to a contemporary moment leads the writers within my project to complicate a linear sense of time as narrative time consists of continuous interplay between a former and current state. I argue that this oscillation between past and present results from the disconcerting nature of modernity within the region, the way in which the modern Caribbean experience consists of a perpetual play of radical transformation (conquest, colonialism and anti-colonial revolution) and devastating communal crisis. Keenly aware of modernity’s unsettling manifestation, a tragic mode gives

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equally “toxic” patrimony.

expression to the anxiety and angst a modernity experienced as such would produce by granting substantial attention to the subtle vacillation between genres and affects, tragedy (the “tragic”) and comedy (the “comic”), within Carpentier’s novel, *The Kingdom of this World*, Walcott’s collection of plays, *Haitian Trilogy* and Danticat’s short stories, “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” and “Wall of Rising Fire”. I argue that this movement between genres/affects mirrors, in turn, the non-linear, largely, circular movement of time in the texts. While a tragic mode is a close engagement with time’s spherical and affective motion, it is equally a politics of possibility driven by a longing for total liberation from colonialism. It is immensely emblematic of the Haitian Revolutionary writer’s desire for a future of political and cultural difference for the Caribbean. As such, a tragic mode is deeply concerned with the subsumed others hidden within Western historiography and the Western intellectual imaginary who powerfully call to mind alternative (non-Euro-American authorized) desires for a modern Caribbean existence.

Haiti is immensely important to understanding the analytical construct I term a tragic mode because upon facing a Haiti attesting to the mutability of “tragedy” and “success” twentieth and twenty-first century Caribbean writers of the Revolution confront the constant collision of the past and present that troubles the Western notion of progressive advancement in time. This complication of time demands new approaches to Haiti, the Revolution and a Caribbean modernity most often read through Haiti and its Revolution. For a clearer indication of what I mean regarding the temporal complications Haiti brings forth, one need only look at contemporary representations of Haiti, here a recent photo released by the associated press following the 2010 earthquake. The photo was taken of a young girl in the process of being

evacuated from Haiti for medical treatment abroad; what is striking about the image is the piece of tape placed on her forehead that reads: “ship”.



**ILLUSTRATION 1: “SHIP”. IMAGE GIVEN TO AUTHOR**

Though innocently applied, the taped message is deeply disconcerting; as it powerfully marks the present with a past of colonial inequity and thus attests to the continuous interplay of past and present I argue Haiti calls to mind. It therefore draws attention to a textual occurrence I refer to in this project as the tragic. Like Walcott’s poetic phrasing, “a tragedy of success,” this image forces the mindful viewer to recall Haiti’s colonial history— slavery, the middle passage and the Amerindian genocide— and ponder how far Haiti, the Caribbean and persons of African descent, more broadly, have come since the Revolution, since the emancipation of slavery in the Caribbean and since the largely successful twentieth century acts of anti-colonial protest in the region. Additionally, the image calls upon the viewer to question how far the West has come since the conquest and colonialism. While it was a matter of medical necessity requiring that this young girl be visibly marked as ready for travel,



that any should choose to mark this readiness with the word “ship” is saddening; it is particularly so as it is telling of the insignificance granted the colonial past that defines the very lived existence of people of color the world over for those not marked as inferior by this past or for those whose wealth or location within the advanced West lessen the burden of such a past.<sup>7</sup> Although the writers within my dissertation would not have recourse to this particular image, they do have at their disposal many historical happenings made iconic through images that instantly call post-revolutionary Haiti to mind and thus perform in a like manner, blurring past and present; for Danticat such an image would include the “boat people,” for Carpentier the rebelling anti-U.S. Occupation Cacos of 1915, Vodou practitioners and the Haitian Revolution of 1946 and for Walcott, whose treatment of the Revolution occurs from 1948-1984, a whole score post-revolutionary images too numerous to name. Yet even without these historical grounded images the writers in my dissertation offer their own fictional impressions that use Haiti to convey a sense of temporal hazy with little distinctions between an earlier moment and a present-day; in doing this, they complicate a socially and culturally progressive sense of temporal advancement to call attention to the Caribbean’s collective and constant struggle against colonialism and its vestige, coloniality.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Although, I cannot be sure who placed this tape on this young girl’s forehead as I am without the source for the photo, one can assume, however, that the label was placed at the behest of an individual within many of the foreign aid groups that helped transport ailing Haitians abroad.

<sup>8</sup> Coloniality refers to “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism[,] [patterns] that define culture, labor, intersubjective relations, and knowledge well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations,” see Nelson Maldonado-Torres, “On the Coloniality of Being: Contributions to the Development of a Concept,” *Cultural Studies*, 21. 2-3 (March/May 2007), 243.

## HAITI'S "SUCCESS" AND "TRAGEDIES"

The analytical mode I have used in my dissertation to closely engage fiction of the Revolution (the tragic) and its critical treatment of coloniality hedges on a sizeable understanding of European and U.S. imperialism and Haitian history, in fact, regarding Haitian history, a considerable knowledge of the social scientific critical work my title draws to mind. As it relates to the Haitian Revolution, this social scientific research is quite extensive; the scholarly corpus includes not only the iconic offerings of C.L.R James, Gabriel Debien and the Haitian historians, Thomas Madiou and Beaubrun Ardouin, but also the work of contemporary scholars who have by now become synonymous with Haitian Revolutionary studies in the United States— David P. Geggus, Carolyn E. Fick, Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus— and in France— Pierre Pluchon, Yves Benot, Marcel Dorigny and Pascal Blanchard.<sup>9</sup> Regarding Haiti, its history and its post-revolutionary hardship, scholars have a large body of work at their disposal with important contributions from Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Alex Dupuy, Robert Fatton Jr., Michael Laguerre, Laënnec Hurbon, Amy Wilentz, Simon M. Fass and Mathew M. Smith.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> See C.L.R James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1989); Gabriel Debien, *Les Colons de Saint-Domingue et la Révolution: Essai sur le Club Massiac (Août 1789-Août 1792)* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1951); Thomas Madiou, *Histoire d'Haïti* (Port-au-Prince: Henri Deschamps, 1989 [1847-48]); Beaubrun Ardouin, *Études sur l'histoire d'Haïti* (Port-au-Prince: Dalencourt, 1958 [1853-1865]); David P. Geggus, *Haitian Revolutionary Studies*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002); Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); Laurent DuBois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004); John D. Garrigus, *Before Haiti: Race and Citizenship in French Saint-Domingue* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Pierre Pluchon, *Toussaint Louverture: De l'esclavage au pouvoir*. (Paris: Éditions de l'École, 1799) and *Toussaint Louverture: Un révolutionnaire noire d'Ancien Régime*, (Paris: Fayard, 1989); Yves Benot, *La Démeéence coloniale sous Napoléon*, (Paris: La Découverte, 1992) and *La Révolution française et la fin des colonies 1789-1794*. (Paris, La Découverte, 1987, 1989); Marcel Dorigny, "Aux origines: l'indépendance d'Haïti et son occultation," *La Fracture coloniale: La société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial*, eds. Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel, and Sandrine Lemaire, (Paris: La Découverte, 2005); Pascal Blanchard, *La République coloniale*, (Paris: Hachette/Pluriel, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> See Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Haiti State Against Nation* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990); Alex Dupuy, *Haiti in the World Economy: Class, Race and Underdevelopment Since 1700*

Foremost in this body of social scientific research dedicated to Haiti, however, is David Nicholls' text, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*. The go-to text for a strongly researched and written account of post-revolutionary Haiti, Nicholls' work called for a more nuanced understanding of race relations in the nation. Tensions within the nation's past and present, he argued, were not simply the results of rigid divisions between blacks and mulattos, but involved cultural and regional particularities that spawned the national antagonisms shaping the direction of Haiti in the twentieth century.<sup>11</sup>

For readers unfamiliar with Nicholls work and with Haitian history, a quick synopsis of historic happenings is in order; as these occurrences not only provide the contextual backdrop for my project but I find that they implicitly shape how twentieth and twenty-first century Caribbean writers and thinkers taken by the nation's "tragedies" as its "success" imagine and discuss the Revolution. Of significance is the nation's fractured beginnings two years following its independence in 1806 with a kingdom in the North and republic in the Southwest; the nation's eventual unification in 1820; the 150,000,000 indemnity levied against Haiti for French recognition and the resulting economic stress placed upon the country; the political intrigues

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(Boulder: Westview Press, 1989) and *Haiti in the New World Order: The Limits of Democratic Revolution* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997); Robert Fatton Jr., *Haiti's Predatory Republic: The Unending Transition to Democracy*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2002); Michael Laguerre, *The Military and Society in Haiti*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993); Laënnec Hurbon *Culture et Dictature en Haïti: L'imaginaire sous Contrôle* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1979) and *Comprendre Haïti: Essai sur l'État, la Nation, la Culture* (Paris: Les Éditions Karthala, 1987), [http://classiques.uqac.ca/contemporains/hurbon\\_laennec/comprendre\\_haiti/comprendre\\_haiti.html](http://classiques.uqac.ca/contemporains/hurbon_laennec/comprendre_haiti/comprendre_haiti.html); Amy Wilentz, *The Rainy Season: Haiti After Duvalier* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990); Simon M. Fass, *The Political Economy of Haiti: The Drama of Survival*, (New Brunswick: Transactions Publishers, 1990) and Mathew M. Smith, *Red & Black: Radicalism, Conflict, and Political Change, 1934-1957*, (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> Nicholls also wrote *Haiti in the Caribbean Context: Ethnicity, Economy, and Revolt*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1985), a piece that addressed aspects of Haiti's culture and history in relation to the greater Caribbean.

within the nation leading to a rapid succession of coups and new leaders occurring in the mid nineteenth century until the early twentieth; the first U.S. Occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) and greater U.S. intrusion in Haitian affairs that followed; the revolution of 1946; the rise of François Duvalier, his rule as well as that of his son's; the resulting economic and political deterioration of the nation as well as terrorization; the arrival of "boat people" on U.S. shores; the association of Haitians with AIDS; the rise of Jean Bertrand-Aristide; the global coup leading to his fall; and the 2010 earthquake.

Understanding the "tragedy" of post-revolutionary Haiti requires, however, more than awareness of Haiti's history and what scholars have to say about that history *but* it necessitates recognition of the discursive vilification of Haiti, more generally. Since its Revolution, Haiti has been fodder for sensationalist and racist accounts in academic pieces, films, and travelogues. Thomas Carlyle, the English historian, wrote that Haiti was a "tropical dog kennel and pestiferous jungle" in his 1849 pamphlet "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question."<sup>12</sup> His compatriot, Spenser St. John, the British consul to Haiti for some twenty years, offered little better. He wrote in his 1889 memoir, *Hayti; or, the Black Republic*: "I know what the black man is, and I have no hesitation in declaring that he is incapable of the art of government, and that to entrust him with framing and working the laws for our islands is to condemn them to inevitable ruin."<sup>13</sup> Robert Lawless in *Haiti's Bad Press: Origins, Development and Consequences* historicizes this

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question* (London: Thomas Bosworth, 1853).

<sup>13</sup> Spenser St. John, *Hayti; or, the Black Republic*, 2nd ed. (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1889). xi. Spenser draws much of his theories of race from the scientific racism of the Frenchman, Arthur Gobineau, specifically, his *Essai sur l'inégalité des races humaines*. The prominent Haitian anthropologist Anténor Firmin responded to Gobineau's work with his own text, *Essai sur l'inégalité des Races Humaines*.

disparagement quite well, drawing attention to the nation's early identification with the "dark continent" (read: Africa) and hence backwardness by Euro-America and its more recent association with AIDS and poverty resulting from a cultural depravity.<sup>14</sup> Vodou was, and remains, a key point for vilification. From the film, *I Walked With A Zombie* (1943) to *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988) and finally, *The Princess and the Frog* (2000), Hollywood has had a long track record promoting the idea that Vodou is a fundamentally evil and backward impulse with sinister depictions of the spiritual practice. This artistic practice of vilification began with the First U.S. Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934. This intervention resulted in the sudden onslaught of U.S. authored travelogues on Haiti and its "dark arts" in the English speaking world, furthering the denigration Carlyle and Spenser began.<sup>15</sup>

Heirs to the demonization of Vodou, the U.S. media has often pointed to the practice as the chief cause for Haiti's post-revolutionary difficulties. Following Jean Bertrand Aristide's 2004 ousting, Bill O'Reilly of *The O'Reilly Factor* unearthed sensationalist footage from his tenure at the T.V. tabloid *Inside Edition* to posit that Haiti's constant political discord was related to the practice of Vodou. Offering video recording of the evangelical preacher Wally Turnbull denouncing Vodou as black magic with an enslaving hold on the Haitian people, he related the happenings of 2004 to the economic slavery Vodou requires for its subsistence and thus demonized both Vodou and its

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<sup>14</sup> See Lawless, *Haiti's Bad Press*, (Rochester: Schenkman Books, 1992). Haitians were banned from donating blood in 1990 without any scientific evidence indicating that was a causal link between Haitians and AIDS; for literature regarding AIDS and Haiti, see: Paul Farmer, *Aids and Accusation: Haiti and the Geography of Blame* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> See, in particular, William Seabrook, *The Magic Island*, (New York: Paragon House, 1989 [1929]) and John H. Craig's *Black Baghdad: The Arabian Nights Adventure of a Marine Captain in Haiti*, (New York: Minton, Balch & Co., 1933) and *Cannibal Cousins*, (New York: Minton, Balch & Company, 1934) among others.

practitioners.<sup>16</sup> Further telling of the “bad press” Vodou has received within the American media is Pat Robertson’s now infamous post 2010 earthquake assertion broadcasted on his show, *The 700 Club*, that Haiti suffers from an earlier pact its people made with the devil.<sup>17</sup> In *The Uses of Haiti*, a text deeply concerned with the exploitation of the poor in Haiti, Paul Farmer calls attention to the way in which the U.S. media furthers largely racist misconceptions about Haiti and obscures the hand the U.S., France and the international community has had in facilitating Haiti’s notorious poverty and suffering.<sup>18</sup> Of import here is how this vilification has worked to continue silence not only Haiti’s revolutionary past but also the efficacy and possibility of radical anti-colonial contestation. As a cautionary tale seemingly attesting to the failure of anti-colonial revolution, Haiti’s post-revolutionary state can cause countries struggling with colonialism’s enduring afterlife to resign to the inequity of Euro-American dominance.

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<sup>16</sup> See “Voodoo Keeps Haitians Poor,” *The O’Reilly Factor*, (Fox News Network), 3/1/2004, transcript.

<sup>17</sup> Robertson stated: “[S]omething happened a long time ago in Haiti and people might not want to talk about it. They were under the heel of the French. Napoleon the Third and whatever. And they got together and swore a pact to the devil. They said, “We will serve you if you get us free from the prince.” True story. And so the devil said, “OK, it’s a deal.” They kicked the French out, the Haitians revolted and got themselves free. “But ever since, they have been cursed by one thing after the other, desperately poor. That island of Hispaniola is one island. It’s cut down the middle, on the one side is Haiti, on the other side is the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic is prosperous, healthy, full of resorts, etc. Haiti is in desperate poverty. Same island. “They need to have, and we need to pray for them, a great turning to God. And out of this tragedy I’m optimistic something good may come. But right now, we’re helping the suffering people and the suffering is unimaginable.” See Myth Woodling, “Comparing the Legends of Bois Caiman: WHO SAYS WE DON’T WANT TO TALK ABOUT IT, PAT ROBERTSON?,”

<http://www.jesterbear.com/Aradia/HaitiDevilCompact.html>, 1. Despite Vodou’s vilification, it has nonetheless sparked incisive scholarship that respectfully attends to it as a serious spiritual practice. See the works of Alfred Métraux (*Voodoo in Haiti*), Milo Rigaud (*La tradition voudou et la voudou haïtien*), Maya Deren (*Divine Horsemen*), and more recently, Leslie Desmangles (*The Faces of the Gods: Vodou and Roman Catholicism in Haiti*), Laënnec Hurbon (*Search for the Spirit*), Karen McCarthy Brown (*Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*), Elizabeth McAlister (*Rara! Vodou, Power, and Performance in Haiti and Its Diaspora*), and Joan (Colin) Dayan (*Haiti, History and the Gods*).

<sup>18</sup> See Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*, (Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994).

That said, however, the story of the nation's anti-colonial "success" is still very appealing to Caribbean persons and writers troubled by colonialism's afterlife. It is particularly so for twentieth and twenty-first century writers of the region due to C.L.R James' classic text on the Upheaval, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. *The Black Jacobins* advocated anti-colonial liberation for Caribbean colonies through the story of the Haitian Revolution. The narrative it recounts of anti-colonial revolutionary possibility galvanized the Caribbean of the early twentieth century for 1804-like action and thus returned Haiti to regional intellectual consequence. For in the moment of *The Black Jacobins'* 1938 publication much of the Caribbean was besieged by the rising imperial presence of the U.S. in the region (via the Monroe Doctrine) in addition to the fixed colonial presence of France and England.

With the Monroe Doctrine (1823), the U.S. began a policy of regional management designed to protect former Spanish colonies and Haiti from their former colonizers. In practice, however, protection proved of little interest; through the Doctrine, the U.S. gained greater economic and political power in the region and began a widespread grab for control over Latin America and the Caribbean. The Roosevelt Corollary (1904) would follow the Monroe Doctrine, granting the U.S. rights to intervene in Latin American and Caribbean affairs should there be any wrongdoing on the part of a regional nation/territory. Not only was Haiti occupied by the U.S. prior to *The Black Jacobins'* 1938 publication but Cuba (1906-1909), and the Dominican Republic (1916-1924) were also subject to military interventions; the U.S. also assumed further control of Puerto Rico, a colony acquired in 1900 from Spain and made

a quasi-state in 1917 when Puerto Ricans were granted U.S. citizenship.<sup>19</sup> With much of Europe reeling from the devastating socio-economic and socio-political effects of the first World War (1914-1918), early twentieth century U.S. imperial action met with little European challenge and, as such, Haiti and much of the Spanish Antilles became subject to U.S. control.

The year following *The Black Jacobins'* 1938 publication World War II (1939-1945) began, setting the stage for increased colonial turmoil the world over. With the Great Depression (1930s-1940s) still underway and with European nations suffering from economic pressures at home now coupled with increasing interregional political strife, the colonies of the British and French empire were offered little socio-economic assistance; the absence of sustained economic assistance nourished the ever present desire for self-determination. As James was writing *The Black Jacobins*, India seized the opportunity brought on by the war and the Depression to gain greater self-autonomy. It would become fully independent following World War II (1935-1945) in 1947. Moreover, Pan-Africanism was gaining ground within Africa, spurring greater anti-colonial fervor within the British, Portuguese and French colonies on the continent. When James' text was republished in 1962, the earlier anti-colonial happenings within the postcolonial world provided the foundation for increased resistance within the Caribbean. As such, the period following *The Black Jacobins'* reissue was charged with regional calls for the end of British imperialism in the Anglophone Caribbean, for greater French Antillean autonomy and for the end of U.S. interference in the Hispanophone

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<sup>19</sup> For a concise history Puerto Rican-U.S. imperial relations, see Martin J. Collo. "The legislative history of colonialism: Puerto Rico and the United States Congress, 1898 to 1950," *Journal of Third World Studies* 12.1 (1995): 265+ and "The Legislative History of Colonialism: Puerto Rico and the United States Congress, 1950-1990," *Journal of Third World Studies*, 13, (Spring 1996): 215-232.



Caribbean; these calls were met with the gradual decolonization of the English speaking Caribbean, French Antillean departmentalization and violent resistance against the U.S. from Caribbean nations like Cuba.<sup>20</sup>

In the twentieth century, Cuba was the hotbed of revolutionary activity in the Caribbean. With its “Ten Years War” (1868–1878), the rise of the famous José Martí (1853-1895), the legendary insurgent Antonio Maceo (1845-1896) and the formidable Fidel Castro, Cuba was where Caribbean anti-colonial fury resounded the loudest. The nation’s importance is so essential to Caribbean anti-colonialism of the twentieth century that it is in Cuba, James asserts, that the region saw the rise of “the non-political writer devoted to the analysis and expression of West Indian society.”<sup>21</sup> Referring specifically to Fernando Ortiz and his *Cubanidad*, James argues that Ortiz “ushered the Caribbean into the thought of twentieth century and kept it there.”<sup>22</sup> The resounding influence of Cuba for Caribbean anti-colonial action and thought was matched with that of Haiti’s influence. In the early twentieth century, Haiti joined Cuba as a place of anti-colonial revolutionary importance. The nation garnered renewed attention within the region with its Cacos Resistance (1915-1917) to the First U.S. Occupation (1915-1934), which produced an Antonio Maceo of its own in the Cacos leader, Charlemagne Péralte.<sup>23</sup> Although the resistance was short

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<sup>20</sup> For more on decolonization within the Anglophone Caribbean see Henry Paget and Carl Stone’s edited collection, *The Newer Caribbean: Decolonization, Democracy and Development* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1983). In chapter three, “Laughing Back” of this thesis I also briefly discuss decolonization in the Anglophone Caribbean, see 125-129.

<sup>21</sup> James, “From Toussaint Louverture to Fidel Castro,” 395.

<sup>22</sup> James, “From Toussaint Louverture to Fidel Castro,” 395.

<sup>23</sup> Péralte was the principal insurgent leader of the Cacos Resistance during the first U.S. Occupation. His leadership of the resistance proved so formidable that the U.S. was forced to increase its numbers in Haiti to contain the spread of anti-U.S. dissension throughout Haiti and the Americas. Betrayed by a fellow military officer who disclosed his location, Péralte was killed by U.S. soldiers masquerading as Haitians in blackface. The U.S. would disseminate a photograph of his dead body throughout Haiti in order to crush all remaining revolutionary zeal. However, his death spouted non-violent resistance against the U.S.

lived, it inspired regional peoples; Péralte, in fact, became a Caribbean hero.<sup>24</sup> This resistance and James' text prompted an artistic rediscovery of Haiti as a symbol of anti-colonial protest by regional writers and thinkers, spawning Caribbean theories of anti-colonial overcoming inspired by the Haitian Revolution, see in particular Alejo Carpentier's *lo real maravilloso* (discussed at length in chapter two of my project) and the comic philosophy for cultural decolonization I argue in chapter three of my thesis that Walcott offers in his *Haitian Trilogy*.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to Carpentier and Walcott, the Upheaval captured the literary and theoretical interest of writers like Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, Vincent Placolý, Grace Nichols, Kamau Brathwaite, and Maryse Condé. Césaire wrote the play *La Tragédie du roi Christophe* (*The Tragedy of Henri Christophe*) and the political treatise, *Toussaint Louverture*, Glissant the play *Monsieur Toussaint*, and Placolý the theatrical piece *Dessalines, ou la Passion de*

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<sup>24</sup> Writing of the symbolic importance of Haiti within the French Antillean literary imaginary, Maryse Conde writes, "Negritude's place of birth was not just Paris and the Left Bank, but first of all Port-au-Prince and perhaps Léogane as well, where the rebel Charlemagne Péralte was crucified;" see See Maryse Condé, "Sketching a Literature from the French Antilles: From Negritude to Creolite," *Sisyphus and Eldorado: Magical and Other Realisms in Caribbean Literature*, edited by Timothy Reiss (Trenton: African World Press, 2002) 222.

<sup>25</sup> In early twentieth century period roughly spanning World War I (1914-1918) period until World War II (1939-1945), Caribbean and African-American intellectuals orchestrated a return to Africa, that is, a cultural consciousness of the significance of Africa to the Caribbean and African-American identity. This sparked both literary movements of political substance such as Indigéniste (Haiti), Negritude (the Francophone Diaspora) and Negrismo (Cuba, Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico) and political activism as represented in the iconic figures of Marcus Garvey and George Padmore. Haiti would play a pivotal part in the artistic return to Africa as its peasant culture was recognized as tellingly African in nature. If Africa proved too far, Haiti, for many thinkers, proved to be the best alternative. Haiti's peasant culture, Vodou inspired folklore and dance roused the intellectual interest of Melville J. Herskovitz's *Life in a Haitian Valley*, James Leyburn's *The Haitian People*, Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse*, and Katherine Dunham's *Island Possessed*. Haitian writers and intellectuals actively took part in this return to Africa, particularly upon feeling the sting of U.S. racism during the First Occupation, 1915-1934. Jean Price-Mars offered the important anthropological text, *Ainsi parla l'oncle* and Jacques Roumain wrote the seminal novel, *Gouverneurs de la Rosée*. Africa (or Haiti, as substitute) was an important point for the region's recharged anti-colonial consciousness.

*l'indépendance (Dessalines, or the Passion of Independence)*. In the collection of poetry *I is a Long Memoried Woman* Nichols, like Brathwaite in his poetic collection *The Arrivants*, poignantly draws attention to the Revolution with passing, yet significant, references. Lastly, Condé wrote a play concerning the Upheaval entitled, *An Tan Revolysion (In the Time of the Revolution)*. They, however, are but a few of the twentieth and twenty-first century writers and thinkers of the Americas who have turned to the Revolution. Rosa Guy has in *My Love, My Love*, George Lamming in *The Pleasures of Exile* and *Season of Adventure*, Myriam Chancy in *Spirit of Haiti*, the Columbian playwright Enrique Buenaventura did so as well in *La tragedia del Rey Christophe (The Tragedy of King Christophe)*, Langston Hughes in *Emperor of Haiti (Troubled Island)*, Eugene O'Neil in *Emperor Jones*, Ishmael Reed in *Mumbo Jumbo* and more recently Madison Smartt Bell wrote a trilogy devoted to the Revolution, among, many, many others. Many twentieth and twenty-first century writers of the Americas have creatively explored the Revolution because of the unsettling questions concerning continued colonial inequity it compels all to ask. They are drawn to the nation and its remarkable past because, as James recognized, Haiti rouses anti-colonial aspirations. That in my mind, the subtitle to my dissertation, *Haiti and the Promise of Revolution*, calls attention to the promise that is Haiti *and* that is revolution for Caribbean writers despite the many "tragedies" that may arise from anti-colonial revolution.

While my project is firmly tied the extensive historical and social scientific body of work dedicated to Haiti and its revolution, my dissertation bridges the analytical gap produced by historians, social scientists and political scientists who in exclusively studying the nation's unprecedented revolutionary "success" or the "tragedy" that has been its post-revolutionary

state, neglect the rich, gray area that is the nation's figurative incongruity: its dual *and* dueling significations as a sign of promise and inefficacy. Deeply concerned with the nation's clashing significations, "*A Tragedy of Success*" examines literary representations of the Haitian Revolution through a tragic mode concerned with the constant textual movement between the past and present to ask: how are Caribbean writers and theorists to reconcile the incongruity of Haiti's post revolutionary hardships with that of its revolutionary glory within modernity, a discourse explicitly concerned with progress? Since James' seminal 1938 text on the Revolution, *The Black Jacobins*, skillfully tied the Haitian Upheaval to the French Revolution and the liberal democratic discourses of the Enlightenment, Caribbean modernity has been overwhelmingly read as beginning with the Haitian Revolution. With attention to the importance of Haiti and the Revolution to a Caribbean literary imaginary seeking to express itself outside of the constraints of colonial domination, I argue that the lasting literary attention the Haitian Upheaval has garnered from twentieth and twenty-first Caribbean writers occurs precisely because Haiti's opposing significations (revolutionary success/post-revolutionary "failings") vividly draws attention to the way in which the modern Caribbean experience has been profoundly shaped by a perpetual play of radical transformation (discovery, conquest and anti-colonial revolution) and devastating communal crisis. More to the point, Haiti's jarring past and present powerfully discloses for many regional writers the mutability of the Caribbean's many "tragedies" and many "successes" and thus the ever present possibility of total, regional decolonial liberation. In this way, Haiti provides regional writers with the artistic means to express their firm desire to inhabit a Caribbean that exists unfettered in political and cultural difference.

## MODERNITY, MODERNISM AND ANTI-COLONIAL RESISTANCE

*Castro's revolution is of the twentieth century as much as Toussaint's was of the eighteenth. But despite the distance of over a century and a half, both are West Indian. The people who made them, the problems and the attempts to solve them, are peculiarly West Indian, the product of a peculiar origin and a peculiar history. West Indians first became aware of themselves as a people in the Haitian Revolution. Whatever its ultimate fate, the Cuban Revolution marks the ultimate stage of a Caribbean quest for national identity. In a scattered series of disparate islands the process consists of a series of unco-ordinated periods of drifts, punctuated by spurts, leaps and catastrophes. But the inherent movement is clear and strong.*

—C.L.R JAMES, "FROM TOUSSAINT L'OUVETURE TO FIDEL CASTRO"

*The impact of James' model of understanding the Caribbean's need to generate what [Édouard] Glissant would categorize as a New World opacity in the face of colonialism's refusal to accept the region's right to political and cultural difference has gone unappreciated for too long. For James, Caribbean opacity was conceived in the radical context of a global modernism. Here we are not simply using the definition of modern in terms of industrialization or technological progress; rather, it is the spirit of intellectual dissidence, imaginative restlessness, and dialectical struggle that informs the Jacobinism that James used to characterize the uncoordinated 'spurts, leaps and catastrophes' of Caribbean thought. In this regard, it is important to shift one's focus from the first moment of modernity in the Caribbean to what James sees as the far more important second moment of a Caribbean appropriation of the modern.*

—J. MICHAEL DASH, *THE OTHER AMERICA*

With the "discovery" of the Americas, the Caribbean, by many accounts, came to be modern and, as such, came into modernity. Tzvetan Todorov's *The Conquest of America* crystallizes this view; Todorov writes early in his text that no date best "mark[s] the beginning of the modern era than the

year 1492, the year Columbus crosses the Atlantic Ocean.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed this moment of Columbus’ trans-Atlantic crossing signals, as Édouard Glissant writes in *Caribbean Discourse*, the region’s violent “irruption into modernity”<sup>27</sup> and thus precipitates the “unwelcome invasion of the American spine” that was, for George Lamming, “slavery and colonialism;”<sup>28</sup> yet this moment is, as Dash reveals in the second epigraph, nonetheless, but one instance of the region’s “irruption into modernity.” Moreover, it is, arguably, the least significant for Caribbean writers.<sup>29</sup> For while this first moment of “irruption” is of immense importance in that it inaugurated, to paraphrase Glissant, a

<sup>26</sup> See Todorov, *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other*, trans. Richard Howard, (New York: Harper & Row, 1984) 5.

<sup>27</sup> See Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999) 146.

<sup>28</sup> George Lamming quoted in Simon Gikandi, *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature*, (Ithaca, Cornell University, 1992) 2.

<sup>29</sup> In his insightful study of Anglophone Caribbean modernism, *Writing in Limbo*, Simon Gikandi would argue otherwise. Focusing primarily on this first moment of modernity, Gikandi argues that whatever sentiment Caribbean writers have towards the discovery of the Americas, they have had to “redefine themselves in relation to this moment.” Reading Caribbean modernism and modernity through the European connotations of the terms root word (modern), he argues that because the modern is read and projected as a European initiative of expansion and conquest Caribbean writers “are skeptical about the liberational claims for [European] modernism and modernity;” that said, Caribbean writers nonetheless negotiate these literary and philosophical traditions because they “cannot escape [them] as [they have] overdetermined Caribbean culture.” What they can do and what, he argues, they do is re-envision modernism and modernity for their particular lived experiences. See *Writing in Limbo* 2-3. While Gikandi’s influential study is important to an understanding of Caribbean modernism’s negotiation of the first moment of modernity and this moment’s future consequences, its focus on the Anglophone Caribbean and British high modernism limit its importance to my work. The slight attention Gikandi grants non-Anglophone modernists (excluding Alejo Carpentier), leads him to ignore the second important irruption into modernity, the Haitian Revolution; in consequence, his text ignores a whole range of modernist writing J. Michael Dash persuasively argues in *The Other America* occurred in the newly independent Haiti of the nineteenth century. See, Dash, “Modernism, Modernity and Otherness: Self-Fashioning in Nineteenth-Century Haiti,” *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context* (Charlottesville, University of Virginia Press, 1998) 43-60. Therefore, while I am indebted to Gikandi’s assertion that Caribbean modernist writers are always negotiating “a modern tradition of representation [inaugurated by the discovery of the Americas] which still haunts the Caribbean,” I disagree with his relation of the self-reflectivity this negotiation produces to high modernism; see *Writing in Limbo* 2. For a concise re-articulation of Gikandi’s main point in *Writing in Limbo* applied to the broader Anglophone postcolonial world, see Gikandi, “Preface: Modernism in the World,” *MODERNISM/modernity*, 13.3 (2006): 423, particularly his concluding sentence where he states that it is only with the advent of modernism that “the space [opened through which] the other [Anglophone writers] could become a self-reflective subject.”

violent break from an African space into a “transferred [creolized] space” of neither African nor European substance,<sup>30</sup> with its exclusive attention to the European “appropriation of the modern” through Columbus’ crossing, it conceals what the second moment of the region’s explosion into modernity via the Haitian Revolution stressed—the modernity of the Caribbean as an “irruption” into anti-colonial revolutionary consciousness. It conceals, that is, the region’s ongoing “irruption” into the subversive thought through which the Caribbean came into its particular modern awareness of self. This self consciousness, for Dash and James, is grounded in the Caribbean’s awareness of its right to “opacity” and to my interest here: its right to unencumbered “political and cultural difference” from Europe and the United States.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 144-150. Concerning “opacity” and its relation to Caribbean peoples’ struggle for political and cultural difference, Glissant writes: “We demand the right to obscurity. Through which our anxiety to have a full existence becomes part of the universal drama of cultural transformation: the creativity of marginalized peoples who today confront the ideal of transparent universality, imposed by the West, with secretive and multiple manifestations of Diversity. Such a process is spectacular everywhere in the world where murders, shameless acts of genocide, tactics of terror, try to crush the precious resistance of various peoples. It is imperceptible when we are dealing with communities condemned as such to painless oblivion. The discourse of such communities (whose shadowy threads of meaning where their silence is voiced) must be studied if we wish to gain a profound insight into the drama of creolization taking place on a global scale;” see *Caribbean Discourse* 2. Opacity or conversely “obscurity” is a political and cultural desire, a “right” to be demanded by “condemned communities.” It is a right expressed in artistic and political letters, in the intellectual “discourse[s]” of Caribbean communities concerned with their creolized modern reality; such discourses include the Haitian Revolutionary fiction studied here. “Opacity” is a political and cultural demand for an existence that is not easily comprehensible and thus readily amenable to a Euro-American conception of the other. This conception, for Glissant, reduces colonized and formerly colonized persons to a transparent Euro-American likeness that facilitates tyrannical domination as it lays the conceptual and discursive grounds for colonial/neo-colonial oppression, for, that is, the West’s and North’s projection of itself as exemplar and ideal. This projection, however, is heavily contested by Caribbean peoples who Glissant finds continually struggle for their cultural and political particularity by affirming the multiplicity of their collective being. Enrique Dussel makes a similar argument concerning Europe’s projection of self as the exemplar for all in *The Invention of the America*. He draws attention to the way in which the conquest gave rise to a practice of discursive exchange that conceptually seeks out the other only to inscribe him/her with ideas that reflects sameness. He maintains that the discovery of the Americas led to a conception of the other that betrays Europe’s dominant subject positioning; in submitting the other of color to European jurisprudence, the colonizer, he contends, rationalized and legitimized his/her claim to supremacy; see Dussel’s *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of “the Other” and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber, (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995).

<sup>31</sup> Dash, *The Other America*, 15.

I preface my discussion of modernity, modernism and anti-colonial difference with the two epigraphs from James and Dash, respectively, because together they underscore what it would mean to read the modern Caribbean experience as a perpetual play of radical transformation and devastating communal crisis —the region as a site of an on-going struggle to exist in difference. The “discovery” of the Americas did not simply destroy communities in the Americas or Africa but it initiated a cycle of violent relation in which the subjugated other had to continually take part in a critically resistant consideration of the world s/he inhabited. With each subsequent “discovery” of the Caribbean sparked by the first in 1492 (the Caribbean’s shift from an imperial depot for exports in the Western imaginary to its unearthing as a colonial market to its repackaging as a lost paradise for tourists and venture capitalist alike), Caribbean peoples have had to weather political, economic and social crisis’s each discovery brought forth, necessitating, a re-consideration of who they are as a people against who they were *and* are imagined to be by the West and the North. Ana Pizarro thus writes, “Westernization had a durable destructive impact [on the Caribbean]. Nevertheless, and perhaps because of this, there emerged in the region an awareness of ethno-cultural specificity: Price-Mars in Haiti, Césaire in Martinique and Marcus Garvey in the English-speaking Antilles.”<sup>32</sup> As the Caribbean struggled with the push to be modern in a European and North American sense, that is, to accelerate in time from a linear position of cultural belatedness to a in the present position of sameness to Euro-American culture, they have had to preserve a sense of what the modern means to them. In this

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<sup>32</sup> See Ana Pizarro, “Reflections on the Historiography of Caribbean Literature,” *Callaloo*. 2.1. (Winter 1988), 174.



project, that Caribbean sense of the modern involves an acceptance of otherness. When assessing the Caribbean with attention to the radical transformations of the region's own making (anti-colonial resistance), what becomes apparent is that the Caribbean, in its efforts to be modern, has had to confront itself as other and, in so doing, accept what Dash argues the early post-revolutionary government of Haiti embraced —itself as other. Dash writes, "Haiti was the second country in the New World to declare itself independent from colonial Europe. It was, however, the first state in the New World to declare itself 'other.'"<sup>33</sup> What I want to stress in reading the modern Caribbean experience as a protracted anti-colonial struggle for "opacity" emblematic of the incongruity of Haiti's post-revolutionary difficulties with coloniality (via its elite class and the imperial presence of the U.S.) and its revolutionary success is the way in which Caribbean modernity functions, to borrow again from Glissant, as a "lived modernity."<sup>34</sup> It is a disquieting imposition (shocking in its primary manifestation and for the reversals of fortunes it continues to bring) that bore *and* bears a constant negotiation of divergent desires for existence (Euro-American wants versus Caribbean and Latin American). It is through these differing desires for existence that decolonial gains (read: "successes") invariably morph into the iniquitous "tragedies" of coloniality and vice versa, with such "tragedies" giving way to

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<sup>33</sup> Dash, *Other America*, 43.

<sup>34</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 148. Glissant contrasts this understanding of Caribbean and Latin American modernity as "lived" (that which is "abruptly imposed") with that of European modernity that is "matured," (that which is "developed over extended historical space"), 148. The lived modernity of the Americas, he writes, "overlaps with preoccupations with 'matured' modernity in other zones of culture and thought" while still maintaining a sense of itself and its identity. It does not seek to be like Europe and thus does not desire to be its heir in imperial action and literary thought. Regarding the latter, he briefly discusses how the American writers Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald are committed to "the dream of becoming European" unlike William Faulkner who being so connected to his Southern roots is quite content to be of the Americas; see *Caribbean Discourse* 149-150.

anti-colonial achievements.

James is thus key to my understanding of Caribbean modernity as a protracted struggle to exist in difference. He opens his discussion of the Caribbean's century spanning anti-colonial revolutionary struggle in "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro" with the poignant sentence, concluding the first epigraph of this section, "but the movement is clear and strong."<sup>35</sup> With this concise statement, he underscores my main point here by gesturing to the enduring drive for anti-colonial revolutionary "success" within the region despite the Caribbean's past and on-going "tragedies." These "tragedies" impel the "uncoordinated 'spurts, leaps and catastrophes'" spurred by colonialism through which Caribbean thought, as Dash indicates in the second epigraph, emerged as an intellectual counterpart to the insurgent military action of both Toussaint and Castro.<sup>36</sup> Caribbean creative and theoretical thought in the moment of *The Black Jacobins* publication and thereafter is inherently modernist in the sense that it is part of a tradition of resistance to colonial domination. It is, part and parcel, of the struggle to exist in terms derived from the region's own imagining of self.

In *The Other America*, Dash charts the modernist literary tradition of the Caribbean from Haitian Independence in 1804 to the contemporary, beginning with attention to the literature of post-revolutionary Haiti and closing with a discussion of Patrick Chamoiseau novels. As my focus is on literary representations of the Haitian Revolution that emerged in abundance in the twentieth century and thereafter, I focus on Caribbean modernist literature

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<sup>35</sup> James, "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro," *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1989) 391.

<sup>36</sup> See James, "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro," 391 and Dash, *The Other America*, 15.

limited to the period of *The Black Jacobins* publication, its 1963 revision and to the text's scholarly and literary reverberations in the twenty-first century. Keenly aware of the anti-colonial contestations leading to Haiti's rediscovery by regional writers and thinkers, my project concentrates on Caribbean writers of the twentieth century to draw an arc of anti-colonial protest from the Amerindian resistance, to the Haitian before settling on the decolonial efforts of the twentieth century (Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* and Derek Walcott's *The Haitian Trilogy*). With attention paid to the constant interaction of the past and present within the respective narratives and thus with what I term the tragic, my thesis reads these struggles as an enduring manifestation of regional efforts for an existence in political and cultural difference. I conclude my doctoral work with attention to Edwidge Danticat's *Krik? Krak!* and thus the neo-liberal, "post-racial" moment of the twenty-first century, a moment shaped by the expanding reach of U.S. imperial power.<sup>37</sup>

In addressing the Caribbean writer's turn to the Revolution as a desire to inhabit a Caribbean of political and cultural difference, my work draws on the rich intellectual contributions of scholars like, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Susan Buck-Morss, and Sibylle Fischer, who attend to the ideational salience of both Haiti and the Haitian Revolution within the moment of the Upheaval and thereafter. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Trouillot persuasively argues that the Revolution was "unthinkable" at the moment of its occurrence. It was so disconcerting for Euro-Americans that those who would thereafter chronicle the history of the Americas and "the

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<sup>37</sup> Danticat's turn to Haitian Revolutionary history is a curious affair, particularly as she differs remarkably from most Haitian writers who do not offer extended literary representations of the Upheaval. That Danticat does perhaps speaks to her positioning in the U.S. Diaspora and her cognizance of the importance of the Revolution to a Caribbean literary imaginary seeking to re-imagine itself outside of Europe.

Age of Revolution" (1775-1848) would inherit the former's cognitive dissonance and unconsciously silence and/or trivialize the Upheaval's undeniable importance to Western and Northern history. Trouillot's groundbreaking reading brought critical awareness to how the "silencing" of the Revolution contributes to the way in which historians and laypersons write and think the Revolution into being, shaping what influences and persons (namely Euro-American) scholars attend to and address. Buck-Morss' work of political theory, "Hegel and Haiti," furthered scholarly awareness of the immense silences surrounding Haiti's past and present significance. Asking and affirmatively answering whether Hegel knew of the Haitian Revolution, she reveals that his much studied dialectic emerged precisely because of the real struggle between "masters" and slaves" occurring in his time. Her work on the Revolution forced scholarly recognition of the pivotal conceptual importance of Haiti for European thinkers of the revolutionary period and, as such, pointed to its enduring ideational significance to our own work as heirs of their intellectual productivity.<sup>38</sup>

Unlike Trouillot and Buck-Morss, Fischer's concern in *Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* is not with the silences within or around the Revolution by Euro-Americans within the revolutionary period or their future academics heirs, but rather her interest lies in the conscious and unconscious disavowal of the Upheaval at the moment of its inception. This disavowal, she argues, shapes the European face of modernity, obscuring the importance of race (via a "radical politics of antislavery") to critical

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<sup>38</sup> See Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon, 1995); Buck-Morss, "Hegel and Haiti," *Critical Inquiry*, (Summer 2000): 821-865; Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990).

considerations of equality and liberty. It obscures, in this way, the “hybrid hemispheric phenomenon” that was modernity at its origins. Fischer’s work draws attention to the manner in which the Revolution’s disavowal, as its silencing, works to distance modernity proper from a colonial experience dominated by a “radical politics of anti-slavery” that would not imagine or accept the modern as European or North American. Her project is therefore an important precursor to my own as it implicitly calls for what most concerns me here: a new understanding of modernity that can bring to light “the shadow of other futures, of projects not realized and ideas rarely remembered.”<sup>39</sup> *“A Tragedy of Success!”* differs profoundly from Fischer’s work, however, in that it is deeply interested in how Haiti’s present shapes readings and fictional representations of Haiti’s past and thus produces new disavowals further bolstering the European image of modernity. Of concern to my project is how the universal dissemination of Euro-American modernity in theory and praxis—the latter via an understanding of material progress that calls for a uniformity and sameness in thought, tastes and being—obscures not only struggles for difference as the Haitian Upheaval but also the very desire for difference.

My project therefore addresses how allegiance to modernity proper trains the critical and creative eye to revolutionary figures emblematic of Euro-American thought, action and being and thus blinds it to figures who articulate and embody a radical contestation against Euro-Americanity. In this way, my work departs greatly from the work of James and other likeminded thinkers, specifically, David Scott of *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of*

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<sup>39</sup> See Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) 23.

*Colonial Enlightenment*, who have turned to Toussaint to read the Revolution, discuss modernity and offer an interpretive frame by which to read a present.<sup>40</sup> Carolyn E. Fick's *Making Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution From Below* is instrumental in this regard as it offers the basis by which to uncover the obscured persons and subjectivities within the revolutionary record that offer a rethinking of existence and thus that point to a past desire for political and cultural difference. Shifting scholarly focus from the Revolution's much noted generals of Creole heritage— slaves born on the island —Fick grounds her work on the largely unnoted African born insurgents and slave mass obscured by the immense attention granted to Toussaint L'Ouverture, Andre Rigaud, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, Henri Christophe, and Pétion (among others). Writing the Revolution from below, her work calls on scholars of the Haitian Revolution to cast a wider net than that afforded by singular attention to the French Revolution's importance to the Haitian Upheaval. Scholars are asked to acknowledge not only the African influences in the Revolutionary struggle but the distinctly Saint Dominguan/Haitian features.<sup>41</sup>

Like Fick, Colin (Joan) Dayan in her seminal text, *Haiti, History and the Gods*, re-imagines the Haitian Revolutionary record. She spends considerable time bringing Défilée-la-folle, a revolutionary heroine, into contemporary relief to draw attention to the unnoted female actors within the Upheaval. She also re-contextualizes the much-vilified Dessalines, revealing why he, before Toussaint, is so honored by the masses in Haiti. With her work, she opened the discursive space needed to think beyond the important but exhaustively

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<sup>40</sup> *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>41</sup> For a historical study also interested in lesser known revolutionary insurgents, see Jean Fouchard's *Les Marrons de la Liberté*, (Paris: Éditions de l'École, 1972), translated in English as *The Haitian Maroons: Liberty or Death* (New York: Edward W. Blyden Press, 1981).

examined Toussaint.<sup>42</sup> Other literary scholars have made important contributions as well to Haitian Revolutionary scholarship in general. Often specialists of Haitian literature and culture, the Francophone Caribbean or Caribbean literature and culture more broadly, they include Chris Bongie, Deborah Jensen, Doris L. Garraway, J. Michael Dash, Valerie Kaussen, Nick Nesbitt, Martin Munro, Paul B. Miller, and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, among others.<sup>43</sup> These scholars have added a freshness and innovation to Haitian Revolutionary studies drawing much needed attention to what Garraway terms, the “cultural afterlife of the Revolution,” to what I read as its enduring significance to critical and creative grapplings with the postcolonial present.<sup>44</sup> What’s more, they have called attention to the peculiar absence of Haiti in discussions of postcolonialism and in theorizations of Black Atlantic

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<sup>42</sup> See *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 16-29.

<sup>43</sup> See Bongie, “Chroniques de la francophonie triomphante,” and “Monotonies of History”: Baron de Vastey and the Mulatto Legend of Derek Walcott’s “Haitian Trilogy,” *Yale French Studies: The Haiti Issue: 1804 and Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 107 (2005): 70-107; Jensen, “Toussaint Louverture, Spin Doctor? Launching the Haitian Revolution in the French Media,” Ed. Doris Garraway, *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution In the Atlantic World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 41-62; Garraway, “*Légitime Défense*”: Universalism and Nationalism in the Discourse of the Haitian Revolution,” Ed. Doris Garraway, *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution In the Atlantic World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 63-90; Dash, “The Theater of the Haitian Revolution/The Haitian Revolution as Theater,” *Small Axe* 18, 9.2 (September 2005):16-23 and “Roundtable: Writing, History, and Revolution,” *Small Axe* 18, 9.2 (September 2005): 189-199; Kaussen, “Irrational Revolutions: Colonial Intersubjectivity and Dialectics in Marie Chauvet’s ‘Amour,’” Ed. Doris Garraway, *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution In the Atlantic World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 134-152; Nesbitt, “Troping Toussaint, Reading Revolution,” *Research in African Literature*, 35.2. (Summer 2004): 18-33 and “The Idea of 1804,” *Yale French Studies: The Haiti Issue: 1804 and Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 107 (2005): 6-38; Martin Munro, “Can’t Stand up for Falling Down: Haiti, its Revolutions, and Twentieth Century Negritudes,” *Research in African Literatures*, 35.2 (Summer 2004): 1-17 and “Reinterpreting the Haitian Revolution,” *Small Axe* 18, (September 2005): viii-xiii; Miller, “Enlightened Hesitations: Tragic Heroes and Black Masses in C.L.R. James’s *The Black Jacobins*,” *MLN* 116 (2001): 1069-1090; and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, “Dancing at the Border: Cultural Translations and the Writer’s Return,” *Echoes of a Haitian Revolution: 1804-2004*, Eds. Martin Munro and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, (University of the West Indies Press: Mona, Jamaica) 149-162 and “Lahens’ Revolution or the Words Within,” Eds. Martin Munro and Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, *Reinterpreting the Haitian Revolution and its Cultural Aftershocks (1804-2004)*, (University of the West Indies Press: Mona, Jamaica), 38-54.

<sup>44</sup> See Garraway, ed., “Introduction,” *Tree of Liberty*, 8

modernity.<sup>45</sup>

Apart from a small number of academic articles devoted to the fictional representation of the Haitian Upheaval by a range of writers, there exists but one large-scale literary project concerned with the fictional turn to the Revolution by an assortment of writers and artists— Philip James Kaisary's 2008 dissertation, *The Literary Impact of the Haitian Revolution*.<sup>46</sup> Kaisary's project addresses the Revolution's figuration as "a potent factor in black memory." In addition, it is deeply committed to the "political message of black agency."<sup>47</sup> The writers and artists he chooses, largely from the Caribbean and African-American literary and artistic traditions, share, he writes, "the common purpose of reconfiguring the raw materials of a common [revolutionary] history onto different aesthetic templates in order to communicate a political message of black agency."<sup>48</sup> They include: Césaire, James, Langston Hughes, Glissant, Rene Depestre, Carpentier, Walcott and Kimathi Donkor. In his far-reaching project, he also devotes considerable attention to the Haitian Revolutionary fiction of Madison Smartt Bell.<sup>49</sup> The

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<sup>45</sup> Paul Gilroy first proposed the importance of the theoretical construct, the "Black Atlantic" in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). For his silence regarding Haiti and a strong critique of his project, see Dayan, "Paul Gilroy's Slaves, Ships, and Routes: The Middle Passage as Metaphor," *Research in African Literatures*, 27 (1996): 7-14 and Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed*, 33-38.

<sup>46</sup> See Paul Breslin, "'The First Epic of the New World': But How Shall it Be Written?" Ed. Doris Garraway, *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution In the Atlantic World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 223-247; A. James Arnold, "Recuperating the Haitian Revolution in Literature: From Victor Hugo to Derek Walcott," Ed. Doris Garraway, *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution In the Atlantic World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 179-199 and Vèvè Clark, "Haiti's Tragic Overture: (Mis)Representations of the Haitian Revolution (1796-1975)," *Representing the French Revolution in Literature, Historiography, and Art*, Ed. James H. Heffernan, (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992), 237-260, among others.

<sup>47</sup> See Kaisary, *The Literary Impact of the Haitian Revolution*, diss, The University of Warwick, 2008, 300, 34. <http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/4122/>

<sup>48</sup> Kaisary 34.

<sup>49</sup> Kaisary includes Madison Smartt Bell's work in his project to address the enduring significance of the revolution in black and white memory; however, he is clear that the salacious racism and sexism of Bell's work undermines any ties it may have to promulgating the political message of black agency, 305.



socio-political nature of our works places our efforts on common ground as does our interest in contesting the ideological denigration of the Revolution; but other than our interest in twentieth and twenty-first century Caribbean literature and our close engagement with similar texts (Carpentier's *The Kingdom of this World* and Walcott's *The Haitian Trilogy*) our projects differ greatly. While the potency of the Revolution in black memory provided the material by which to undertake my project it does not condition the readings I offer; nor does it constitute the basis for my interest in literary representations of the Revolution. With my work, I am more concerned with the idea of Haiti and the idea of the Revolution, that is, with how the nation's dual *and* dueling significations provides Caribbean writers with the means with which to address the modern Caribbean experience as a protracted struggle to existence in political and cultural difference. Far more than "a potent factor in black memory," Haiti, in offering Caribbean writers the means in which to tell the story of the Caribbean in a way that underscores the agency of Caribbean peoples despite the regional "tragedies" experienced, shapes the direction of memory within the Caribbean. It grants history to a people struggling with history *and* against history.

#### **WRITING HISTORY, WRITING RESISTANCE: TRAGEDY AS LITERARY MODE**

When prominent writers and thinkers of the region turn to the Upheaval they do so firstly, because it gives them the opportunity to "check out [their] own history."<sup>50</sup> It satiates, as it were, their "quarrel with history,"

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<sup>50</sup> The quoted phrase is a recurring line in the Guyanese writer John Agard's poem of like name. The poem is broadly concerned with the Revolution and Caribbean history. See "Checking Out Me History." For audio of the poet's performance of the poem and the text: <http://www.poetryarchive.org/poetryarchive/singlePoem.do?poemId=14750>

helping to resolve the angst to be had with feeling as though one has no history of value or worse yet a history of ineffectuality. V.S Naipaul is the first Caribbean writer to openly give expression to the sense that the Caribbean has no history of worth. His now notorious 1962 remark in his travelogue *Middle Passages* that “history is built upon achievement and creation [...] and nothing was created in the West Indies,” was the spark that led regional writers and intellectuals to seriously begin to discuss what history is and what it means to Caribbean peoples.<sup>51</sup> Naipaul’s observation not only subtly drew attention to the reason why the Caribbean could be said to have no history, offered as it was in a travelogue poignantly titled *Middle Passages*, but it, more importantly, echoed the 1887 assertion made by the English historian James Anthony Froude that the West Indies is without heroes and a people of which to bear heroes. Froude wrote: “there has been ... no hero [in the West Indies] unless philonegro enthusiasm can make one of Toussaint” and “there are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and purpose of their own.”<sup>52</sup>

Derek Walcott in 1979 would respond to Naipaul with the poem “The Sea is History.” While he challenged Naipaul’s conflation of history to materiality (the gains of colonialism), he dismissed history as inconsequential due to its association with colonialism’s linear narrative of progress and thus furthered the controversy Naipaul began; for how could “history” be irrelevant when many writers, particularly in the Anglophone Caribbean of the 1970s, were, in fact, in search of history, returning to Africa in prose and

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<sup>51</sup> See Derek Walcott’s “History and Picong... in the Middle Passage,” *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. David Hamner, (Boulder: Three Continental Press, 1997), 19.

<sup>52</sup> See Paul Breslin, “‘The First Epic of the New World’: But How Shall it Be Written?” Ed. Doris Garraway, *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution In the Atlantic World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 228.

theory.<sup>53</sup> Glissant, likewise would respond to Naipaul in 1981 in *Caribbean Discourse*, advancing an understanding of history as “nonhistory”. In this view, history is conceived as such precisely because events in the Caribbean past were most often initiated by colonial power rather than Caribbean peoples themselves. This, for Glissant, results in a traumatic relation to history and in an ability of “collective conscious to absorb” the continuum of relations that an-ruptured connection to an African past would have allowed.<sup>54</sup>

At the height of the controversy sparked by Naipaul, Caribbean and Latin American writers gathered in 1976 to discuss the region’s relation to history during the Carifesta Forum in Kingston, Jamaica.<sup>55</sup> The conference was “organized around Caribbean heroes [...] Toussaint Louverture, Jose Marti, Juarez, Bolivar, [and] Marcus Garvey” and thus openly rebuked Froude’s assertion that the West Indies has no heroes.<sup>56</sup> There Edward Baugh presented a paper titled, “a quarrel with history,” giving name to the controversy thereafter critically tended to in Caribbean criticism and fiction.<sup>57</sup> When John Hearne opened the introduction to a printed edition of selected papers presented at the conference with the poignant and oft-quoted sentence, “History is the angel with whom all we *Caribbean Jacobs* have to wrestle, sooner or later, if we hope for a blessing,” he called attention to both the conference’s subject matter, “the quarrel with history,” and to the importance

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<sup>53</sup> See Walcott’s “What the Twilight Says,” *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998), 9.

<sup>54</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 61-62.

<sup>55</sup> Participants included a who’s who in Caribbean and Latin American fiction and criticism, among them were: Merle Hodge, Robin Dobru, Wilson Harris, John Hearne, René Marques, Gabriel Marcia Marquéz, Glissant, Octavio Paz, Césaire, Walcott, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Sylvia Wynter, Brathwaite, Lamming, Nicolás Guillén, Jan Carew, James, Naipaul, Rex Nettleford, René Depéstre, Gordon Rohlehr, Denis Williams, and others.

<sup>56</sup> See Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 67.

<sup>57</sup> See Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, fn 1, 60. For greater discussion of the “quarrel with history,” see Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007) 61-65.

of Haiti (via C.L.R James) to this “quarrel.”<sup>58</sup> For in clearly defining all Caribbean and Latin American peoples as “Jacobs,” he represented regional history as a history of resistance and thus as emblematic of the protracted fight against colonialism I argue characterizes Caribbean modernity. In this way, Hearne underscored the latent agency of regional peoples and thus the fact that they nonetheless *made* history despite shouldering beneath the oppressive weight of a lost past and the seeming absence of a past of achievement. Haiti, with its cadre of heroes and with its radical reconstitution of Saint Domingue into a free black state sans the imperial consent of colonial authority, ultimately offers Caribbean writers and thinkers the means with which to struggle against history, that is, to begin the task of wrestling with the past despite feeling on unequal grounds with Europe. Walcott therefore arrives to his understanding of history as inconsequential only upon first turning to Haiti in his 1948 play *Henri Christophe*, only upon embracing, as he writes, the “Jacobins” who were also “Jacobians,” “the slave-kings Dessalines and Christophe” whose Elizabethan-like “tragic bulk” was what he then conceived as the Caribbean’s sole sign of historical accomplishment, its “only noble ruins.”<sup>59</sup>

The question remains, however: if the Caribbean has, indeed, been waging a protracted struggle to exist in political and cultural difference and the Haitian Revolution is but a resounding physical component of this anti-colonial resistance: how do literary artists of the Caribbean write their history and thus write their resistance? More to the point, how do they do so while

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<sup>58</sup> See John Hearne, ed. “Singular and Collective Securities: An Introduction to Carifesta Forum,” *Carifesta Forum: An Anthology of 20 Caribbean Voices*, (Institute of Jamaica, Kingston) 1976, vii, my emphasis.

<sup>59</sup> See Walcott’s “What the Twilight Says,” 11.

negotiating a Haiti that forcefully illuminates the effects of the region's particular experience of modernity—the colonial past's continuous, and often unwanted, intrusion in the present? Following Glissant's assertion that Caribbean "historical consciousness [can]not be deposited gradually and continuously like sediment, ...[ due to the] context of shock, contradiction, painful negation and explosive forces" that is the region's experience of modernity, I argue that the writers within my dissertation write history and thus resistance by adopting a tragic mode in their depictions of the Revolution.<sup>60</sup> A tragic mode of literary engagement is profoundly concerned with a past of slavery, colonialism and revolution that, as Glissant writes, is "obsessively present" for Caribbean peoples.<sup>61</sup> It is deeply concerned with the subsumed others hidden within Western historiography and the Western intellectual imaginary, who powerfully call to mind alternative desires for a modern Caribbean existence. As such, my reading of the postcolonial present through tragedy is firmly committed to the lasting struggles to exist in difference that have been formative (however silenced and disavowed) to the Western imaginary.

Grounding my understanding of tragedy within an Athens seeking to police the mourning practices of women and thus the spiritual sense of a people, in addition to the lives of barbarians and slaves, I read tragedy within a broad holistic framework of spirituality, politics and unacknowledged epistemologies that has its roots not only in *The Theatre of Dionysus* but the cross-cultural exchange of diverse peoples in (compelled or voluntary) motion. In this way, my project negotiates what Glissant reads as the

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<sup>60</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 61-62.

<sup>61</sup> Glissant, 64.

“discriminatory” nature of Athenian tragedy, the way in which it seeks to suppress “the infinite variations of cultural synthesis” that existed within antiquity by granting “legitimacy” to a single “culture’s emergence.”<sup>62</sup> It does this by historicizing tragedy, reading it in relation to the historical happenings that led to its advent in antiquity. In this regard, my work defers greatly from that of David Scott who first sparked my interest in tragedy, modernity and the postcolonial present with his text, *Conscripts of Modernity*; Scott does not contest or acknowledge the “discriminatory” nature of tragedy and, as such, reproduces its narrow focus by reading the Haitian Revolution and the postcolonial present through a progress centered understanding of modernity that follows the trajectory of cultural advancement Europe proposed through colonialism. His use of tragedy does not trouble how an understanding of modernity grounded in a Euro-American narrative of progress reinforces the idea of Euro-American cultural superiority; accordingly, his reading cannot attend to the desire for political and cultural difference that twentieth and twenty-first Caribbean writers and theorists express with their work on the Revolution.

Understanding the “discriminatory” nature of tragedy requires, as I mentioned, a turn to ancient Athenian history. What scholars recognize as “tragedy” emerges through efforts by Athenian politicians to “[re-negotiate] practices of lamentation, mourning and the law within the workings of the democratic *polis*;<sup>63</sup>” according to Pietro Pucci in the forward to Nicole Loraux’s *The Mourning Voice: An Essay on Greek Tragedy* these “re-negotiations” began

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<sup>62</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, 86.

<sup>63</sup> See Olga Taxidou, *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004) 8. This reading is heavily indebted to Nicole Loraux’s *Mourning Voice: An Essay on Greek Tragedy*, Trans. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) and *Mothers in Mourning*, Trans. Corinne Pache, (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1998).

with the banning of female mourning in six century BCE.<sup>64</sup> Following the *polis*-sanctioned exclusion of women from communal mourning rites, there remained but two ways to publicly express grief in Athens: tragedy and state funeral oration.<sup>65</sup> Cast as an “agnostic topos within the democratic *polis*,” tragedy was thus presented as a political means in which to counter and suppress the seemingly unreasoned, emotive displays of feminine mourning.<sup>66</sup> Such displays were considered “eastern (i.e. barbarian) and feminising” for all involved.<sup>67</sup> Tragedy, however, is not wholly political. As Page duBois notes (succinctly paraphrasing Nicole Loraux), “the theater of Dionysus is not the *agora*, the market place, center of civic activity in the *polis*; tragedy is not only political, it is even [anti-political], ‘anti-politique’ in the sense that it goes beyond a city defined by practices of consensus or even by conflict. *The city seeks to limit lamentation; tragedy extends it to eternity.*”<sup>68</sup> To name tragedy as a “discourse of mourning,” then, is to acknowledge the manner in which it is of the political apparatus of its moment, how it is implicated within the move to delineate who can chronicle remembrance and thus determine who may act and exist unbridled before and within the *polis*. And while that is so, naming tragedy as a “discourse of mourning” is to also call attention to the way in which tragedy unveils alternatives to and struggles against that which is politically proper. It does this by fixing our gaze upon those whom the *polis* seeks to suppress and silence: women, barbarians and slaves.

duBois argues that once scholars of antiquity shift their gaze from

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<sup>64</sup> Pietro Pucci, “Forward,” *Mourning Voice: An Essay on Greek Tragedy*, Nicole Loraux, trans. Elizabeth Trapnell Rawlings, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2002) x.

<sup>65</sup> Taxidou, *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*, 176.

<sup>66</sup> Taxidou 8.

<sup>67</sup> Taxidou 30.

<sup>68</sup> Page duBois, “Toppling the Hero: Polyphony In the Tragic City,” ed. Rita Felski. *Rethinking Tragedy*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008) 139; my emphasis.

characters— from the great man and woman and later the every(wo)man of more recent interpretations of tragedy and thus from “the split, suffering self” of the modern —they can begin to see the “haunting” presence of women, slaves and barbarians within tragedy.<sup>69</sup> In this way, they can critically attend to their presence in Euripides’ *Hecuba* as the chorus of foreign women bemoaning their newfound existence as slaves within Athens;<sup>70</sup> their manifestation in Sophocles’ *Trachiniae*, in a wife’s sorrowful address to the chorus concerning her husband’s “gift”—a female captive that is at once slave and wife<sup>71</sup>—and within *Antigone* where the threat of rule by women is likened to that of rule by barbarians.<sup>72</sup> Tragedy, read with awareness of the other, refuses the amnesia that the political project of remembrance requires. It does

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<sup>69</sup> dubois 135, 136.

<sup>70</sup> dubois 136.

<sup>71</sup> dubois 138.

<sup>72</sup> We cannot read *Antigone*, a dramatization that critically addresses tyranny through mourning, and not notice the manner in which the threat of women shapes the drama; and, here, I do not mean the threat of a singular (read: individual and exceptional) woman’s power in that of Antigone but the very danger implicit in the essence of women, the otherness she embodies. Following Creon’s (ruler of Thebes) decree that Antigone die for defying his will, specifically, his order that her brother, Polyneices, remain unburied, the audience is privy to an intense exchange between Creon and his son, Haemon, Antigone’s betrothed. Within this discussion, we come to see the idea that is woman and thus the threat she is conceived to be. Sophocles writes:

CREON. O dastard nature, yielding place to woman!

HAEMON. Thou wilt never find me yield to baseness.

CREON. All thy words, at least, plead for that girl.

HAEMON. And for thee, and me, and for the gods below.

Creon is “woman” because his thoughts are “base,” lowly and un-informed. He is such because of his ill-conceived words, as he thinks only of his position as ruler and not of the well-being of the polis; see in particular, when he states “Am I to rule this land by other judgment than mine own?” and shortly thereafter, “Is not the city held to be the ruler’s?” He governs in his image, with awareness of his desire alone and not that of the “one voice” who elected him as ruler, the very voice that is at odds with both his decree and treatment of Antigone— Haemon thus states, “Our Theban folk, with one voice, denies it [the purported evil of Antigone’s act].” That mind, it is clear that Haemon’s intervention on Antigone’s behalf is not an intercession for Antigone only but for a *polis* and culture (“for thee, and for me, and the gods below”) threatened by an ideological invasion at odds with its sense of self and being—rule by woman and hence by an irrational foreign other, i.e. barbarian. As aforementioned, feminine acts of mourning are superseded by tragic expression because they were deemed “eastern,” i.e. barbaric, in nature the use of the female here is telling of an understanding of gender mediated as well as imagined through a foreign other, through an other that is a threat. See *Antigone*, trans. R.C. Jebb. The Internet Classics Archive by Daniel C. Stevenson, Web Atomics. <http://classics.mit.edu/Sophocles/antigone.html>.



not allow viewers to forget those through whom the *polis* re-constitutes and constituted itself. Thus while there are no women present before the *polis* playing the part of female characters, women are obsessively present within tragedy itself. As with every production, a woman and her suppressed act of mourning is named, brought forth from the margins of the *polis* to the forefront of society by the act of performance. Moreover, with every male enactment of a female character a woman's presence is felt in absence, through her projection through her male representative. So too is the absent presence of the slave and the barbarian, persons tied to the worrisome "eastern" other that a woman was deemed to be like within antiquity. With attention paid to the presence of women, slaves and barbarians, scholars can therefore heed the charged space of silence that tragedy, as a "discourse of mourning," negotiates and unveils. They can ultimately attend to the speech in silence that grounds tragic production and my understanding of tragic ideations. Through such an understanding of tragedy, I implicitly urge recognition of antiquity's globalized character, the manner in which it was deeply shaped by unnoted gender, cultural and ethnic differences.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, although the tragic may be claimed by Euro-America and thus all too easily enlisted to stand for a particular colonial ordering of existence, it need not, however, be thought solely in this manner. It can be broadened to tend to the colonial experience and thus to the positions and stances that challenge a Euro-American existence, just as how the many barbarians, slaves and women challenged an Athenian one.

As a term rooted in tragedy, and thus an Athenian tradition of male

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<sup>73</sup> For the globalized nature of antiquity see the edited collection *Connectivity in Antiquity: Globalization as Long-term Historical process*, eds., Øystein Sakala LaBianca and Sandra Arnold Scham, (Oakville: Equinox Publishing, 2006).

only dramatic performances politically proposed to displace the public practice of female mourning the *polis* deemed barbaric, the tragic is an intrinsically gendered construct. It is more so when placed in conversation with revolution, a happening that is most often conceived as solely undertaken by men who are thereafter frequently recognized as “tragic heroes”. My understanding of what constitutes a tragic mode involves then an awareness of the importance of gender to the writer’s representation of the Revolution and to his/hers respective use of tragedy as genre. Much as tragedy is charged by the subsumed presence of the unnoted (females), so too is the discourse by which scholars treat the here and now —modernity. Caribbean modernity, in particular, is driven by the absent presence of ancestors lost, languages unknown yet aurally present in Caribbean speech, and imagined, yet all too real, horrors of slavery. As such, recourse to modernity in literary efforts to depict the modern Caribbean experience through the Revolution gives rise to awareness of the circularity of time, specifically, how the unfulfilled aims and intentions of the past confounds the ease of forward progressive movement in the present. Time, as it is addressed in the texts under examination, is therefore removed from cumulative movement and is expressed through the constant interplay between a former and current state. Consequently, I demonstrate in my project how each literary text studied (from Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of this World*, Walcott’s *Haitian Trilogy* to Danticat’s “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” and “Wall of Rising Fire”) narrates the Revolution through a disjunctive sense of time, with the past and present in constant movement destabilizing the sense of present-ness and the sense of past-ness one is normally given when a historical event is recounted. I reveal that this occurs because of the jarring incongruity of Haiti’s

revolutionary past and distressing postcolonial present, which disturbs the idea of time as progressive and thus situates the tragic within the text, i.e. the steady vacillation of past and present.

In the “Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” Karl Marx writes that “Hegel remarks somewhere that all great, world-historical facts and parsonages occur, as it were, twice. He has forgotten to add: the first time as tragedy, the second as farce.”<sup>74</sup> Deeply cognizant of “world-historical facts” and the “parsonages” therein as they relate to the Caribbean, the writers in my dissertation treat modernity’s unsettling manifestation (its reversals and contradictions) through a subtle vacillation between tragedy and comedy in their works. The circular movement of time in the texts is often accompanied by an oscillation of genres/affects (“the tragic” versus “the comic”) that produces the sense that history and its players reoccur in varying ways across temporalities with tragedy giving way to comedy and comedy, in turn, giving way to tragedy. This affective movement is a means in which to heighten the jarring effect of the past’s manifestation in the present and it is a way in which to prompt the reader into critical self-reflection, leading her to question allegiances to particular ideas of existence (superior versus inferior persons) and to particular divisive habits of existence (race wars, violence against the poor and violence against those marked as other). While a tragic mode is a close engagement with time’s cyclical and affective motion, it is also a politics of possibility driven by a longing for total decolonial liberation. It is therefore telling of the writer’s desire for a future of difference for the Caribbean and, as such, it is a modernist practice of Caribbean literary engagement. It is

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<sup>74</sup> Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” *The Marx Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company) 594.

revealing then of the writer's efforts to join the protracted struggle to exist in political and cultural difference waged by Haitians in 1791. My dissertation ultimately invites literary scholars of the Caribbean to consider the tragic as a mode constitutive to and representative of the modern Caribbean experience. Furthermore, it advances studies of the Revolution, and correspondingly Caribbean modernity, by explicitly situating Haiti's sustained discord and economic downturn within literary narratives of the Revolution. In uncovering a regional mode of critical engagement in the tragic, my project urges awareness of the ways in which twentieth and twenty-first century Caribbean writers and thinkers not only attend to the ongoing salience of the past in the present, but also painstakingly negotiate the hardships and triumphs of the region in order to depict their enduring hope for an improved Caribbean future.

Chapter One of my project, "Re-Thinking Toussaint: Modernity, Tragedy & the Postcolonial Present" troubles the continued deference to Toussaint L'Ouverture in Caribbean intellectual scholarship to rethink the ideas of modernity and postcoloniality Toussaint has come to represent. Of importance in this chapter is how standard readings of Toussaint as the single force behind the Revolution obscures the radical anti-colonial nature of the Upheaval. Reading the Revolution as a protracted struggle to exist in political and cultural difference and thus as deeply emblematic of the desire Caribbean peoples have to conceive and fashion Caribbean society as they see fit, I draw attention to the anti-colonial value of the Upheaval, the way in which it ignited the long held desire by the region's people for the Caribbean's total liberation from colonialism. Closely engaging C.L.R James' *The Black Jacobins* and David Scott's *Conscripts of Modernity*, I critique James' Europe-centered

understanding of modernity and Scott's similarly focused tragic conception of the postcolonial present to argue that the prevailing use of Toussaint as the principal means through which to read the Revolution obscures the struggle to exist in political and cultural difference the Upheaval represented; it obscures, in this way, the varying ideas and longings for modernity and the postcolonial present that did exist in the revolutionary moment and that continue to exist today.

Chapter Two, "Faithless Sight: Haiti in *The Kingdom of this World*," closely examines Carpentier's efforts to offer an American (read: of the Americas) articulation of modernity through Haiti in both his novel, *The Kingdom of this World*, and his theory, the "marvelous real." Although Carpentier's text is lauded for its treatment of subaltern participants in the Haitian Revolution, his telling of the upheaval is more interested in what the insurrection can offer the New World once it is abstracted from an abject Haitian reality predicated on cyclical conflict and stunted progress, once, that is, it is removed from the masses representative of such a bleak reality. Consequently, while the tragic mode governing the text relies on Haiti's marvelous reality to unveil the ironies of human existence, through the text's movement between the comic and the tragic, Haiti vanishes by the novel's end. Its dismal reality forecloses Carpentier's investment in Revolution as a means of theorizing regional exception and potential.

Chapter Three, "Laughing Back: Haiti, History and Tragedy," critically grapples with how a promising polemic of cultural decolonization becomes marred by an inability to see and thus read Haiti as little more than a failed state. Closely reading Walcott's collection of plays, *The Haitian Trilogy*, I argue that Walcott's persistent turn to Haiti and its Revolution is telling of a tragic

impulse, one, more specifically, that reveals Haiti to be Walcott's ever turned to theoretical muse. As muse, Haiti speaks to Walcott's unshakable longing for what could have been and what could be in the Caribbean, namely, a region of self-determined difference. This tragic impulse is mediated, however, through a comic refusal of the tragic. More precisely, it is read through a particular understanding of tragedy wedded to a desire for a history of achievement that, for Walcott, limits the Caribbean's ability to think itself anew and thus exist in difference. Seeking to counter a yearning for history proper that in his estimation binds Caribbean peoples to a dreaded past of futility and a present mired by self-loathing, Walcott offers a comic philosophy. The potentiality of this philosophy to speak to and situate a realization of Caribbean communality is spoiled by Walcott's reductive and an overwhelming negative depiction of the Revolution and its leaders. Walcott's promising decolonial exegesis reproduces, I argue, the discourse of failure and abnormality that surrounds present day Haiti. Accordingly, what is left uncontested through a censorious depiction of Haiti, I argue, is a way of thinking that privileges a Euro-American, colonial, ordering of existence and thus that negates any effort to exist comically, that is, in a communality like Calaloo stew: as a hodgepodge blending of reconciled differences united by the ability to come together and "make jokes" despite being "mash[ed] up" by the colonial past and its residual effects.<sup>75</sup> This chapter therefore concludes with the following question: what hope is there really for a comedic existence when the comedy proposed laughs back and is truly tragedy as Walcott defines and understands tragedy—a mere repetition of the same?

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<sup>75</sup> Derek Walcott, *Drums and Colours, The Haitian Trilogy*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2002), 385.

Lastly, Chapter Four, “*Defilez! And the Battle Continues,*” reads Danticat’s short stories “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” and “Wall of Rising Fire” to critique the conventional narration of the upheaval. Specifically, I consider the normative telling’s emphasis on the exemplary masculine subject and the manner in which the central focus on the male, as chief actor within the Revolution’s recounting, is written to parallel the customary exposition of modernity. Like most historical accounts, James’ *The Black Jacobins* relates the story of the Revolution as that of a great man’s, namely Toussaint—an impressive, yet flawed, tragic hero. My reading of Danticat displaces the central positioning of men and asks: where are the women in these accounts? Gender, in its ability to expose alternative realities unseen in standard discourses, is used here to disclose those obscured within the prevailing telling of the uprising. With that in mind, I read the stories through a Vodou imaginary that I argue Danticat uses this imaginary to call attention to the obscured, latent oppositions to the political project of Euro-American modernity. Accordingly, of principal concern to this chapter is not only the unsung within the Revolutionary record but what the unsung offer a present in dire need of an alternative means of being—the ability to imagine a future of difference grounded not in the presumed failure of the Revolution but the possibility of its continuation.

## CHAPTER 1

### RE-THINKING TOUSSAINT: MODERNITY, TRAGEDY & THE POSTCOLONIAL PRESENT

... J'écris le mot: «Toussaint» Macaïa épelle «traître». J'écris le mot «discipline» et Moïse sans même jeter un coup d'œil sur la page, crie «Tyrannie». J'écris: «prospérité», Dessalines s'éloigne, il pense dans son cœur «faiblesse». Non, je ne sais pas écrire...

... I write the word "Toussaint," Macaïa spells out "traitor." I write the word "discipline," and Moïse without even a glance at the page shouts "tyranny." I write "prosperity;" Dessalines backs away, he thinks in his heart "weakness." No, I do not know how to write... .

—ÉDOUARD GLISSANT, *MONSIEUR TOUSSAINT*

Set in the confines of the cold and desolate prison cell that housed Toussaint L'Ouverture following his deportation to the Jura Mountains of France from Saint Domingue in 1803, Édouard Glissant's play, *Monsieur Toussaint*, offers a rich depiction of the competing interests that drove the Haitian Revolution. With persons, dead and living, haunting a Toussaint tormented by irremediable revolutionary deeds and decisions, Glissant offers a tragic representation of the Revolution, turning, as he writes in the play's original 1961 preface, to the Antillean tradition "of casual communication with the dead" to weave the past into the present and charge his drama with a sense of communal belonging beyond time, space and place.<sup>1</sup> Through this

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<sup>1</sup> Édouard Glissant, "Preface to the First Edition," *Monsieur Toussaint*, trans. J. Michael Dash and Édouard Glissant, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 16. All further citations of this preface will be made in the text. Central to this tragic depiction of the Revolution is Glissant's desire to "renew [Caribbean peoples'] acquaintance with the region's history, a history "obscured and obliterated by others" (16). With such an "acquaintance," he argues, they may "fully relish the present" (16) and thus gain a more meaningful experience of being, one devoid of the sense that their past consists of little but "darkness and despair" (15). Concerning the effects of a history concealed and partly effaced by Western racism, he writes, "for the experience of the present, stripped of its roots in time, yields only hollow delights"



conflation of past and present that I have termed in this project as the tragic, he complicates popular renderings of the Upheaval that often follow C.L.R James' lead in *The Black Jacobins* and read the Revolution as "rest[ing] on the will of a single individual", i.e. that of Toussaint.<sup>2</sup> Though deeply indebted to the work of James and Aimé Césaire, who like James engages Haitian Revolutionary history though Toussaint in an analytical text aptly titled, *Toussaint Louverture*, Glissant does not allow the reader/viewer to understand the Revolution and Toussaint as indistinct.<sup>3</sup> Routinely subject to instances of (mis)translation (like that expressed in the epigraph) and re-readings from fellow revolutionaries, some who are ghosts and others who are projections of spatially distant revolutionary insurgents fighting for Saint Domingue's liberation as Toussaint sits in his cell, Glissant's Toussaint is not a man of singular genius. On the contrary, Glissant remakes Toussaint into a man whose magnificence in war rests as much with his own abilities, as it does with the conflicting energies and actions of others. The Revolution, he makes it clear, was a joint effort; he writes in the preface to the 2005 English edition of the play, "in truth, Toussaint and Dessalines, and all the actors in this epic, are

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(16). Yet while Glissant stresses the importance of the Caribbean's knowledge of its collective past for genuine intra-cultural self-appreciation, he also recognizes that for many within the region history is a burden too great to bear. Its recovery is a "useless" endeavor for persons already unmoored in time by a past of oppression unworthy, many deem, of historical recognition (16). *Monsieur Toussaint*, as he writes, is therefore deeply concerned with the struggle "with, and in, history." As such, it sets out to "diminish the same insecurity of being" (having no history and yet having too much of a history of non-history) such a struggle produces (16).

<sup>2</sup> Édouard Glissant, "Preface to the Present Edition," *Monsieur Toussaint*, trans. J. Michael Dash and Édouard Glissant, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 12. All further citations will be made in the text.

<sup>3</sup> In the preface to the play's 1961 edition, Glissant acknowledges the importance of James' reading of the Revolution to his work and that of Césaire's in his essay, *Toussaint Louverture*. Glissant also indicates that in addition to James' *The Black Jacobins* and Césaire's essay, "the very lively biography by Victor Schoelcher" on Toussaint was also quite helpful to him when writing his play, bringing, as he writes, "together all the essential information about this heroic figure" (15).

inseparable.”<sup>4</sup> Always in commune with the spirits and projections that crowd his mind and appear in his cell, the every thought of Glissant’s Toussaint is therefore one of relation, representative of the collective communality Glissant has argued in *Poetics of Relation* typifies the Caribbean experience.<sup>5</sup> Like his lead character, Toussaint “*L’Ouverture*” (Toussaint “the Opener”), Glissant creates with his play a new opening for Haitian Revolutionary scholars, one by which to reconsider the Revolution beyond its most acclaimed participant.

I open this first chapter with an exposition of Glissant’s treatment of the Haitian Revolution to direct the reader to alternative representatives of the Revolution that in re-imagining the formidable Toussaint offer the means with which to rethink the ideas of modernity and postcoloniality he has come to represent. Of importance here is how standard readings of Toussaint as the single force behind the Revolution obscure the radical anti-colonial nature of the Upheaval. Reading the Revolution as a protracted struggle to exist in political and cultural difference and thus as deeply emblematic of the desire Caribbean peoples have to conceive and fashion Caribbean society as they see fit, I draw attention to the anti-colonial value of the Upheaval, the way in which it ignited the long held desire by the region’s people for the Caribbean’s total liberation from colonialism. If scholars can agree that the conquest gave rise to a partisan ontology of the present, specifically one that propagates imperial rule by granting a select few among mankind humanity and worth, then any struggle against imperial authority is deeply rooted in a desire for a new ontology. It is deeply rooted in an implicit desire for a difference in being,

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<sup>4</sup> Glissant, “Preface to the First Edition,” *Monsieur Toussaint*, 12.

<sup>5</sup> See *Poetics of Relation*, trans. Betty Wing, (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2006).

i.e. in how one's humanity, cultural worth, and political personhood is conceived. The Revolution, I argue, confirmed what many slaves and the free of color in the revolutionary moment long knew: they were human, they were of value and they were thinking individuals with the ability to led themselves. By providing this confirmation, the Haitian Upheaval gave expression to a regional desire for an enduring realization of difference in cultural and political being. It facilitated, that is, a longing for total revolution and the ability to envision the possibility for revolution and a future of sustained socio-political difference thereafter (i.e following a successful upheaval). Closely engaging C.L.R James' *The Black Jacobins* and David Scott's *Conscripts of Modernity*, I trouble James' Europe-centered understanding of modernity and Scott's similarly focused tragic conception of the postcolonial present to argue that the prevailing use of Toussaint as the principal means through which to read the Revolution obscures the struggle to exist in political and cultural difference the Upheaval represented; it obscures, in this way, the varying ideas and longings for modernity and the postcolonial present that did exist in the revolutionary moment and that continue to exist today.

#### **A BATTLE FOR BEING: THE HAITIAN EDITION**

On the 21st of August 1791 the slaves of Saint Domingue set the Northern plains ablaze, leaving sugar mills, manufacturing tools and the gilded homes of the plantocracy in ashes. Seven days prior, hundreds of slaves from neighboring Northern plantations met at clearing (*Bwa Kayiman*) to plan for the event.<sup>6</sup> During this meeting a Vodou ceremony was performed, of

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<sup>6</sup> Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 261, 91.

which the freedman Boukman Dutty officiated. He would later spearhead the Revolution's opening siege. Following his death by hanging, some two months after the Upheaval's onset, the slaves continued their fiery assault. Within a year, they controlled two thirds of the colony and in the year following (1793) unleashed such fury that slavery was officially abolished.<sup>7</sup> With Boukman's death, new leaders would rise and fall soon after. Jean François and Biassou would take center stage as leaders to be reckoned with as would many little noted African rebels (Nèg Kandi, Bélisaire, Ductaque, Nèg Pompée, Ti-Noël, Sans Souci, among many, many others). When Toussaint assumed the helm of the Revolution, his military skill and diplomacy safeguarded the colony from French, Spanish and British attempts to take Saint Domingue as he deftly played one colonial power against the other.

The colonists, it should be noted, put up a considerable fight, matching siege with siege. Worn by many battles and France's inability to quickly quell the Upheaval, they invited the British to enter the fray. They did so, in part, because they were enraged by the decision made by the French Legislative Assembly to give political and civil rights to free persons of color (*gens de couleur*).<sup>8</sup> Already significant competitors for the colony's riches due to their massive landholdings and plantations, these rights would grant the *gens de couleur* more influence thereby tilting the power dynamics in the colony in their favor. The colonists, as a result, offered Saint Domingue to the British

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<sup>7</sup> Laurent Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004) 94.

<sup>8</sup> A delegation of *gens de couleurs* (free people of color) had appeared before the Assembly three years prior to safeguard and acquire more political rights. Also an unsuccessful uprising led by the free mulattoes Vincent Ogé and Jean Baptist Chavannes was waged in 1790 to secure the group's diminishing rights. See James' *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Overture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1989) 67-78. All further citations are made in the text.

should it restore order, that is, return the slaves to slavery and force the free of color into a subordinate political and economic status. Spain eager as well for a wealthy colony known throughout Europe as “the pearl of the Antilles” joined the battle on the “side” of the slaves, using Jean François, Biassou and later Toussaint to further their ultimately unsuccessful aims. Spain would lose all footing on the island when Toussaint abolished slavery in what is now the Dominican Republic in 1800 and the English were driven out two years earlier in 1798 by Toussaint’s forces.

In the political intrigues that framed the slaves’ struggle for self-determination rested yet another, a burgeoning civil war between the North and South of the colony. This discord appeared as a race war with the predominantly black led North (in Toussaint, Henri Christophe and the infamous Dessalines) set against the mulatto backed South (in André Rigaud, Alexandre Pétion and Jean-Pierre Boyer). To be clear, this infighting was no war of complexions but a confrontation between two opposing ideological positions. While the North had a clear desire to rule autonomously without direct guidance from France the South did not. The region’s leaders believed the future rested not with Saint Dominguan self-determination but with a France as informal yet active steward. This thinking, in the end, would prevail, particularly as France was seen as an economic gateway to future commerce with other nations. However, such an assessment proved disastrous for the nation following independence; it led to a desire for French recognition, the massive (then 150 million) indemnity levied against Haiti for this recognition and the subsequent economic devastation of the new nation state. In the divisive milieu that was the revolutionary moment, France (through Napoleon Bonaparte) sought to put a definitive end to what it

conceived of as a mere rebellion with Toussaint's deportation in 1802. The period that followed (termed the "war of independence," 1802-1804) finally saw a united Saint Domingue with the revolutionary leadership, African rebels and the enslaved joining at last to achieve what many had long desired—the expulsion of the French, the definitive end of slavery and a new existence potentially devoid of coloniality. Dessalines would declare Saint Domingue independent in 1804 and rename the colony *Ayiti*, forging, in this way, familial anti-colonial ties to the islands original peoples who years before had fought to exist autonomously (without European stewardship) in political and cultural difference.

These African/Amerindian familial ties begin, however, several years before 1804. In 1802, Jean Jacques Dessalines christened the former slaves of Saint Domingue "Incas or children of the sun" in honor of the 1780 Inca uprising in Peru.<sup>9</sup> He also he adopted the title "Army of the Incas" for his armed forces and they, in turn, referred to themselves as "Sons of the Sun."<sup>10</sup> They later settled on the regimental title, "Indigenous Army."<sup>11</sup> With these assertions of indigenous relation, Dessalines and his army provided persons of African descent with a way in which to lay claim to the Americas as their land. For, if Africans and their American descendents are now like the Incas, as much "children of sun" as they are of the sea, in light of their respective acts of resistance, then these Incas, like the Taínos and Arawarks of Hispaniola, are no strangers.<sup>12</sup> They are brothers and sisters in struggle. The

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<sup>9</sup> Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 22.

<sup>10</sup> DuBois, *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, 299.

<sup>11</sup> Dubois 299.

<sup>12</sup> Here I refer to Edwidge Danticat's short-story, "Children of the Sea," which ties the transatlantic movement of impoverished Haitians to that of their ancestors during the Middle Passage. Both she reveals are "children of the sea." See *Krik? Krak!* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1996).

region that all newly encountered persons of color inhabit is therefore as much the continental Africans' and their New World descendants as it is the Amerindians'. To reclaim Saint Domingue from European possession and to do so stressing one's ties to native peoples is to emphasize the intimate familial relations, grounded in anti-colonial struggle, that tie the African to the Amerindian. It is to stress a deep-seated conviction that the Amerindians initiated an enduring fight for an autonomous existence (removed from European dominance) that Haitians continued as their descendents.

While formally pronouncing Saint Domingue's independence, Dessalines further solidified the familial/anti-colonial ties between Haitians and Amerindians, stating: "Marchons sur d'autres traces, imitons ces peuples qui, portants leurs solitudes jusques sur l'avenir et appréhendant de laisser à la postérité l'exemple de la lâcheté, ont préférés être exterminés que rayés du nombre des peuples libres."<sup>13</sup> Following the example of their Amerindian forebears the nascent Haitian state actively sought to re-conceive its people's understanding of the present and past. The Amerindians, in choosing death versus a loss of autonomy, could not be considered as cowards, though the Catholic teachings of their former masters might invite such thought. They did not forsake life *but* were advocates of life. For the new Haitian state, they chose a future determined and shaped by themselves, by their own desires for

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<sup>13</sup> "Let us walk down another path, let us imitate those people who, extending their concern into the future and dreading to leave an example of cowardice for posterity, preferred to be exterminated rather than lose their place as one of the world's free peoples." English translation of "The Haitian Declaration of Independence, January 1804" provided by Laurent Dubois and John D. Garrigus in *Slave Revolution in the Caribbean, 1789-1804: A Brief History with Documents*. For the French original, see: *L'Acte de l'Indépendance d'Haïti, Janvier 1804*. <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentonline/haiti.asp>, 5. Note: the French typo of "jusques" as opposed to "jusque" appears in the original document. The original declaration was recently discovered by a Duke University doctoral student, Julia Gaffield, in April of 2010 <http://today.duke.edu/showcase/haitideclaration/newsarchive.html>.

existence. Yes, it is true that this future resulted in their deaths and their very extinction from the island but it was a choice that was mobilized by their own agency. For Dessalines and the authors of *The Haitian Declaration of Independence*, this ability to choose and determine one's own direction, more precisely, one's own path for political and cultural being, is of the utmost importance. This fearless desire for self-determination at all costs is what they wanted their people to prize above all else. What they, arguably, sought to achieve by publicly venerating the Amerindians as they did was sow the seeds for a thriving decolonial consciousness among their people. They wanted to make clear to all that if there ever was an example to follow for cultural and political being it would be Amerindian in essence. Consequently, to embrace an Amerindian ontological perspective is to claim the antithesis of what the Haitian anti-colonialists regarded as a European, a colonial ontology "intoxicated with a foolish pride" and "enraptured with the self-conceit" that it alone form[s] the essence of human nature."<sup>14</sup>

In demanding a new course for existence, Dessalines' utterance during the formal declaration of Haitian Independence calls to mind the decolonial affirmations of Frantz Fanon in his seminal anti-colonial text, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Specifically, the following:

So, my brothers, how is it that we do not understand that we have better things to do than to follow that same Europe? ... [I]t is very true that we need a model, and that we want blueprints and examples. ...

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<sup>14</sup> In an 1802 proclamation inviting fleeing colonists to return to Saint Domingue the quoted phrases (authored by Dessalines, Henri Christophe and the mulatto, Augustin Clerveaux) were offered as a warning against a return grounded in the racial hubris of the past. With this warning, the generals made clear to all that if Europeans were to come to a new, free, Saint Domingue they were to do so only if they renounced their cultural conceit and thus a conception self and existence rooted in their elevated sense of racial importance; see Ada Ferrer, "Talk About Haiti," Ed. Doris Garraway, *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution In the Atlantic World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 32.



Let us decide [however] not to imitate Europe; let us combine our muscles and our brains in a new direction. Let us try to create the whole man, whom Europe has been incapable of bringing to triumphant birth.<sup>15</sup>

Through a cultural self-identification with indigeneity a nascent Haitian state strove to do exactly that. It strove for the very liberation and decolonization that fueled the creative impulses of the intellectual architect of the anti-colonial movements of the twentieth century and, in turn, the movements themselves in Fanon. C.L.R James writes in the 1962 appendix to his seminal *The Black Jacobins*, "From Toussaint L'Ouverture to Fidel Castro," that "what took place in French San Domingo in 1792-1804 reappeared in Cuba in 1958" (394). Indeed, the similarities between Fanon's utterance and that of the writers of the Haitian Declaration of Independence underscores the manner in which anti-colonial resistance in the Caribbean consists, as James noted, "of a series of unco-ordinated periods of drifts, punctuated by spurts, leaps and catastrophes ...[that are nonetheless] determined by an "inherent movement" that "is clear and strong" (391). Arguably, underwriting the Caribbean and Latin American experience is a prolonged project of anti-colonial resistance to colonialism and its vestige, coloniality. When the Haitians of yesteryear cultivated a mythos of indigenous relation, they were implicitly aware of this project, for they earnestly and fervently took up what their New World ancestors had bequeathed to them: a home to call their own and an enduring battle to keep it.

The Haitian Revolution is but a powerful resurgence of this battle. I read it as an epoch-making event not simply because it was the first successful

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<sup>15</sup> Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 312; 312-313.

slave Upheaval in modern memory but because it calls attention to an enduring post-Columbian struggle to exist in political and cultural difference. That said, scholarly recognition of the Haitian Upheaval as a protracted struggle to exist in difference is fairly limited precisely because many scholars follow the lead of James, Victor Schoelcher and others who read the Revolution as emblematic of the deeds, exploits and life of Toussaint L'Ouverture or other creole (island born) generals, typically Henri Christophe and Alexander Pétion.<sup>16</sup> Toussaint in particular, however, is a problematic figure of decolonial cultural and political difference. For many slaves and African rebel leaders who choose not to serve with a colonial power during the armed struggle (unlike the creole generals), Toussaint was little better than the French. The reason being, his rise to power did not lead to the expulsion of the French or their mores. In fact, Toussaint encouraged the life they championed. Acting, as Laurent Dubois writes when quoting Toussaint, as "'preacher' and 'dictator,'" his efforts to return Saint Domingue to prosperity involved a forced assimilation to French standards of existence.<sup>17</sup> Through violent repression, he actively sought to "civilize" subjects who he thought indolently reared their children, were "without religion," and were without a high regard for work (reluctant as many were to return to plantation labor following emancipation as he decreed).<sup>18</sup> Instrumental as he was to the colony's continued prosperity during the Upheaval and eventual independence, the former slaves and many in his entourage tellingly did nothing when he was deported to France in 1802. In light of his attachment to

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<sup>16</sup> See Victor Schoelcher's biography of Toussaint, *Vie de Toussaint Louverture* (Paris: Paul Ollendorf, 1889).

<sup>17</sup> Dubois 246.

<sup>18</sup> Dubois 248.

European culture and labor practices, he can be overwhelming read and narrated as an obstacle to an existence of political and cultural difference and thus as no more a “tree of liberty” than Napoleon Bonaparte himself.<sup>19</sup>

With awareness of the problems Toussaint poses for the radical decolonial efforts of both the early Haitian state seeking a new Amerindian grounded ontology and the twentieth century anti-colonial resisters of Fanon and James’ moment, I urge a narration of the Haitian Upheaval that recognizes it as not only a struggle for an ameliorated Euro-American existence gained through the realization of liberal democracy. The Haitian Revolution should equally be conveyed with attention to the manner in which the Revolution was undertaken, for many, as a total revolution, an all out rejection of Euro-Americanity. When the Northern slaves of Saint Domingue took up arms in 1791, they did so fully aware of the cause of their degradation—the wealth to be had in Saint Domingue. On August 22<sup>nd</sup> they began their siege, marking what Carolyn E. Fick notes as “the beginning to the end of one the greatest wealth-producing slave colonies the world had ever known.”<sup>20</sup> Burning all signs of their material oppression, many set fire to “manufacturing installations, sugar mills, [and] tools [as well as] farming equipment,” obliterating the very means in which the colony came to be “the pearl of the Antilles.”<sup>21</sup> This act of fiery rebellion attests to the manner in which, for many slaves, the opposition to slavery was, at heart, a contestation against the colonial enterprise, its means of capitalist appropriation. These

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<sup>19</sup> Upon his deportation to France, Toussaint’s famously stated: “by overthrowing me ... you have only cut down the trunk of the tree of liberty of the blacks; it will grow by the roots, which are deep and numerous;” see Doris L. Garraway, “Introduction,” *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution In the Atlantic World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 15.

<sup>20</sup> Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 92.

<sup>21</sup> Fick 97.

particular, nameless, Haitian revolutionaries did not seek then to preserve the modern technology or industry (slave labor) through which Europe and the United States grounded their notions of freedom. They did not intend to further a burgeoning liberal democracy wholly tethered to the inequity of capitalist exploitation.

Later when delegates from neighboring plantations met at a clearing (*Bwa Kayiman*) to formulate their plans, a desire for political and cultural difference and thus an existence unlike that imagined, articulated and offered by liberal democratic Europe was openly expressed. During this meeting, the delegates did not fervently espouse the *Déclaration des droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* (*Declarations of the Rights of Man and Citizen*) but gathered with a differing ideological base. Scholars can glean a bit of this foundation through the poignant rallying cry uttered by Boukman Dutty, the leader of the strategic *Bwa Kayiman* meeting that famously culminated with a Vodou ceremony. Concluding his speech, the freedman and *oungan* stated: "Throw away the image of the god of the whites who thirsts for our tears and listen to the voice of liberty which speaks in the hearts of all of us."<sup>22</sup> Notwithstanding the potential to read a liberal democratic influence in the phrase "voice of liberty," Boukman's address is a decolonial utterance, one set on a *cultural* decolonization that sees no future in Europe, its God, its culture or its exploitative conception of existence. With the concluding portion of his rallying cry, he thus urges that those who stand with him recognize this decolonial view as well. Such an utterance draws attention to the manner in which many revolutionaries did not echo the thoughts and beliefs of France. They desired something different, something other than what Toussaint

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<sup>22</sup> Boukman, qtd. in Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 93.

wanted. That in mind, it is clear that there was something else present during the revolutionary moment, something scholars may not be able to name but that they should acknowledge as equally salient to the success of the revolutionary endeavor and thus equally important to the story of the Haitian Revolution.

The narrative power of the Upheaval results then not only from the momentous fact of its account of a slave directed liberation but from what Haiti continues to name and promise: the enduring possibility for socio-political difference, for an unfettered existence in culture and political difference without Euro-American imperial stewardship. What is to be realized and stressed when offering the story of the Revolution is that from the moment the slaves of Saint Domingue challenged coloniality and waged as well as won a thirteen year struggle for emancipation and independence, Haiti entered a battle that had long been occurring, however successful or unsuccessful the anti-colonial efforts of Túpac Amaru and his people (among others) proved to be.<sup>23</sup> Once entering this battle, the nation stood as an ideation of promise for the enslaved of the Caribbean, signifying, the possibility for a lived reality of their own cultural and political making. For the former colonists, however, it was quite the opposite; it was the epitome apocalyptic horror. When the colonists of Cuba thought in all earnest that the slaves and free blacks of the colony had purchased en mass pigs of which to sacrifice following news of the Revolution's outbreak in 1791 there stood in full light the ideational power of Haiti.<sup>24</sup> For they saw in what was a typical occurrence in the colony (a shortage of meat) a collective replication of the pig

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<sup>23</sup> Túpac Amaru was the last indigenous ruler of the Inca empire of Peru.

<sup>24</sup> Ferrer 28.

sacrifice at *Bwa Kaiyman* said to have occurred during the Vodou ceremony at the strategic meeting.<sup>25</sup> In a state of immense fear concerning slave solidarity and mass reprisal, a Saint Domingue in revolt clouded the minds of many a colonist region wide. Many began to see intrigues where none were to be found. In a way, however, such intrigues were quite possible. For even as the “actual bonds of practical support” for the Revolution may or may not have existed among (for instance) the blacks of Cuba, Ada Ferrer notes that the “people of color [there] ... had a desire to imagine them.”<sup>26</sup> In fact, such imagining among educated and free blacks in Cuba and the Americas, more broadly, was sparked as much by the unprecedented events of the uprising as it was by the paranoia of colonists.<sup>27</sup>

Ifeoma C. K. Nwankwo in “Charged with Sympathy for Haiti’: Harnessing the Power of Blackness and Cosmopolitanism in the Wake of the Haitian Revolution” reveals that due to white anxiety concerning black unification and insurgency along Haitian lines, free blacks with erudition were forced to discursively and critically contend with Haiti. They had to define themselves as either transnational citizens (and thus be linked to Haitian revolutionaries) or in ways in which they could negate relation to Haiti. In the process, she maintains that blacks reassessed “intra-racial relation” to create an imagined community of black collectivity.<sup>28</sup> White paranoia paved the way then for the very ideological unity many colonists feared. Such collectivity, among the slaves and educated free of color in Cuba, spoke to the

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<sup>25</sup> Ferrer 28.

<sup>26</sup> Ferrer 30.

<sup>27</sup> For a concise summation of colonial reaction to the new country of *Ayiti*, see Paul Farmer, *The Uses of Haiti*, (Maine: Common Courage Press, 2006) 64-65.

<sup>28</sup> “Charged with Sympathy for Haiti’: Harnessing the Power of Blackness and Cosmopolitanism in the Wake of the Haitian Revolution,” ed. Doris Garraway, *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution In the Atlantic World* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008) 30.

desire they had to take part in the revolutionary struggle in whatever way they could: collectively through the much feared, through rare, acts of mass revolt or individually through what perhaps should have been feared the most, a critical reimagining of existence, rendering it and them wholly new.

No longer of a world in which there was but one option for black or Amerindian existence (degradation and inferiority to Europeans) the Saint Dominguan struggle enabled a transformative shift in thought. If the slaves of Saint Domingue could give “themselves military ranks and titles ‘with a certain air of superiority, [making it seem] as if [they, whites] needed them and [they] had to please them,’” as noted by one Cuban military officer made to fight with the slaves for the Spanish, then on what basis does the purported superiority of whites lie?<sup>29</sup> On what basis are the Africans of the New World enslaved and the Amerindians among them worthy of mass annihilation? Haiti’s making bore life altering possibilities for the enslaved and the region’s “free” of color as it unearthed unsettling questions concerning race and European dominance that many colonists and Europeans did not want to face *but* that the slaves themselves, freedmen and the demeaned of color the region over, were all too eager to pose and acknowledge. It fostered then decolonial longings and imaginings. As a result, it gave, as Selywn Cudjoe writes, “additional impetus to the resistance struggles in the Caribbean and the antislavery activities in England [as] the revolution showed the way forward to Caribbean and Latin American peoples in the struggle for total liberation.”<sup>30</sup> In “showing the way forward” the Haitian Revolution continued an inherited

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<sup>29</sup> Ferrer 25.

<sup>30</sup> See “Introduction,” *Caribbean Women Writers: Essays From the First International Conference* (Wellesley: Calaloux Publications, 1990), 11. For a comprehensive examination of the impact of the Haitian Revolution on the Atlantic region from a range of scholars see in its entirety, David Patrick Geggus’ edited collection, *The Impact of the Haitian Revolution in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001). See as well the prologue, xi-xviii.

struggle to exist unfettered in political and cultural difference; that said, however, all ought remember that the route to “total [regional] liberation” has been well-traveled, with Amerindians, Haitians, and later Cubans as well as Grenadians taking the helm. Postcolonial scholarship needs to therefore take into account the manner in which the modern, post-1492 Caribbean experience consists of a sustained struggle to exist outside of Euro-American imperial authority.

### **TRAGEDY, MODERNITY & THE POSTCOLONIAL PRESENT**

When James in *The Black Jacobins* reads the Revolution as heralding regional modernity and thus as a phenomenological extension of the French Revolution precisely because it signaled the advent of liberal democratic possibility in the Caribbean, he diminishes the extent to which Caribbean peoples have sought to exist outside of Euro-American imperial authority and thus confounds his efforts to both radically critique Euro-America and to use the Upheaval to re-imagine the Caribbean anew. Although James fully recognizes that Euro-American thought ignores the significance of the Haitian Revolution and, in consequence, the importance of race, colonialism and conquest to the very making and articulation of Western notions of equality and liberty, he reproduces the ideological parameters through which this exclusion occurs. Toussaint, his protagonist, is painstakingly crafted as an enlightened figure, a modern European in thought and being. James thus crafts a rendering of Toussaint that the Toussaint of historical of fact may very well have appreciated, recognized as the latter was as both a “preacher’ [of civility] and [a] ‘dictator’” of French cultural mores by historians today.<sup>31</sup> Key

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<sup>31</sup> See Laurent Dubois’ characterization of Toussaint in *Avengers of the New World*, 246.



to Toussaint's enlightenment is his literacy.

James, perhaps before all others in the region, makes much of this literacy, particularly calling attention to its rootedness in the liberal democratic literature of the French Revolution. He thus prefaces his discussion of Toussaint's reading ability by briefly treating the anti-slavery writings that emerged in France prior to the French and Haitian Revolutions. He moves, in his text, from Diderot and the Encyclopedists before settling on the work of l'Abbé Raynal, the man Toussaint is universally recognized as having read (24-25). Toussaint, he reveals, avidly reads Raynal's *Philosophical and Political History of the Establishment and Commerce of the Europeans in the Two Indies*, a text favored by the Leftist of the French Revolution.<sup>32</sup> His act of reading this document grants James the basis to forge a connection between Toussaint, the Enlightenment and the liberal democratic ideals of the French Revolution. For upon reading, "over and over again," Raynal's declaration that "'a courageous chief only is wanted. Where is he?'" Toussaint, James reveals, comes into revolutionary consciousness (25). Cognizant of the text's call to action and willing to heed that call, he is primed, for James, to not only act as the would be liberator of slaves but as Europe's saving grace. He is primed, that is, to be its emissary of virtue, holding Europe to its liberal democratic teachings. His enlightenment rests then with his faith in Europe, with his willingness to stand by European culture despite the global inequity it spawned.

Even as James recognizes that this enlightenment is Toussaint's "tragic flaw," causing him to fail to see the necessity of independence and thus to vacillate in the very moments when he, as commander of the anti-colonial

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<sup>32</sup> Srinivas Aravamudan, "Tropicalizing the Enlightenment," *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999), 293.

charge, should have decisively acted against the French, James wholly approves of this faith in Europe (290-292).<sup>33</sup> In fact, Toussaint is depicted as a man who had the good sense to cultivate a love European culture without appropriating its vainglorious excesses. Yet does not the fruit of the poisoned loin remain toxic irrespective of where one chooses to bite? Can, as Paul B. Miller, asks: "the material [here European culture] be valorized in its own right as a category autonomous of the ideological [moral superiority]?"<sup>34</sup> That James would choose to chronicle the Revolution through a man that he glowingly describes as declaring, "'my sons will be like that,'" upon seeing a French officer in a carriage is unsettling (246).<sup>35</sup> For what it discloses is the manner in which James' Haitian Revolution, for whatever its epoch-making potentiality, is no more than a mere revolt. It is simply an effort to gain freedom and equality as defined by a "civilization" that is conceived as (and that conceives of itself as) a "valuable and necessary thing." Where then is the Revolution of the masses who lacked the European tutelage Toussaint received? Where is the Revolution Dessalines partially symbolizes as the man who, as James observes, had little regard for Europe and its culture, and yet who led Haiti to independence (374)? Where ultimately is the Revolution that was, for many in the revolutionary moment, a vocal and audible challenge to a Euro-American ordering of existence? At issue here is the manner in which James' reliance on Toussaint to narrate the Revolution obscures the fact that, as Glissant writes in his play *Monsieur Toussaint*, Toussaint and others within the Upheaval were "not playing the same drum."<sup>36</sup> It obscures, that is, the

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<sup>33</sup> I will return to this point concerning Toussaint's "tragic flaw" momentarily.

<sup>34</sup> "Enlightened Hesitations: Tragic Heroes and Black Masses in C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins*," *MLN* 116, (2001): 1074.

<sup>35</sup> I am indebted to Miller's essay, "Enlightened Hesitations" for this insight.

<sup>36</sup> Glissant, *Monsieur Toussaint*, trans. J. Michael Dash and Édouard Glissant, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 69.

varying ideas and divergent anti-colonial longings for Caribbean existence that existed within the revolutionary moment.

What James fails to acknowledge when reading the Haitian Revolution as an extension of the French through a figure aptly representative of French culture (Toussaint) is the ideological project that modernity proper is. He neglects the manner in which a modernity conceived as arising from the French Revolution and an Enlightenment marginally interested in the liberty and equality of Africans, their New World descendants and Amerindians is fundamentally unable to fully conceive or appreciate the radical desire for political and cultural desire (sans European influence and stewardship) expressed by factions within the Haitian Revolutionary struggle. Emergent in the “Age of Revolution” (1775-1848), in the moment when the notions of equality and liberty would be envisioned through only two of the three major upheavals of the moment (the French and the American as opposed to the Haitian), modernity proper was conceived with the Euro-American experience in mind. It is deeply rooted in a particular cultural context made to appear universal through oppressive colonial action; as such, a word like “enlightenment” that denotes for James the modern fail to completely “describe the world” and the unprecedented possibility for a radical newness in existence it, once reconceived and re-made offers;<sup>37</sup> instead it “offer[s] [a] vision of the world” shaped by one cultural experience, Europe.<sup>38</sup> James, I want to suggest, is taken by a “vision of the world” as offered by liberal democratic Europe; although he is adamantly opposed to Western colonial dominance and seeks with *The Black Jacobins* to offer his twentieth century

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<sup>37</sup> Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “North Atlantic Universals: Analytical Fictions, 1492-1945,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101.4 (Fall 2002), 847.

<sup>38</sup> Trouillot, 847.

readers a stirring push toward anti-colonial action he cannot completely do so because he is hampered by his allegiance to a Europe-centered understanding of modernity, where a rupture from the past into an unprecedented present still requires the other's self-articulation through Europe and its ideas for existence ("my sons will be like that"). Once the Haitian Revolution is read through such a rendering of modernity by Caribbean thinkers seeking to offer their own localized interpretations of the discourse the radicality of the revolution is tempered. Subject to the demands of a discourse for which any challenge to its vision of existence is met, as Michel-Rolph Trouillot and Sibylle Fischer persuasively argue in their respective Haitian Revolutionary texts, with silence and disavowal, writers, like James, often unconsciously corroborate the universality of the Euro-American experience even while attempting to posit a desire for political and cultural difference with their anti-colonial readings.<sup>39</sup>

James' allegiance to a Europe centered understanding of modernity is the very reason why that some sixty years following the publication of his text his staunch anti-colonial leftism could come to implicitly signify the thought provoking, though dispiriting neo-colonial ethos offered by David Scott in *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*.<sup>40</sup> When Scott turns to *The Black Jacobins* in his close reading of the text in *Conscripts* he does

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<sup>39</sup> Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, (Boston: Beacon, 1995) and Fischer, *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); for an explication of the arguments made in each text see my introduction, 27-28.

<sup>40</sup> Scott's argument in *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) builds on the position he offered in the text he published prior, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999). Furthermore, it is reiterated in an article, "Tragedy's Time: Postemancipation Futures, Past and Present," ed. Rita Felski. *Rethinking Tragedy*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 199-217. I will paraphrase and quote from each of these texts when addressing *Conscripts*. All citations from each of piece will be made in the text.

so to critique how scholars assess a postcolonial present charged, he finds, not with the promise of successful anti-colonial revolution but with the distressing inefficacies of anti-colonial upheaval. He demands therefore a reassessment of scholarly modes of inquiry. He argues that the longing for anti-colonial overcoming or total revolution (an interpretive mode he terms “romance”) need give way to the realization that political life is not a stable environment of truth and principle but it is an ambiguous and ever wavering place of unexpected happenings (a mode he terms “tragedy”) (*Refashioning Futures* 26). As such, it is not an environ guaranteeing a steady, mounting progression toward anti-colonial triumph; rather, it is place of contingency and thus of tragic reversals. With this transition in discursive thought from romance to tragedy, scholars can come to ultimately recognize modern power as constructive. They can come to terms with the fact that it has positively shaped the terrain in which political thought and action has become possible (*Refashioning Futures* 22). Scholarly focus, he thus finds, should be on how the formerly colonized are made, like Toussaint, into conscripts of modernity. Scholars ought concentrate on how personal choices and revolutionary actions are enabled by modernity. They need then move beyond a poetic mode of inquiry in romance that posits a resolution for what has hereto remained unsolvable—socio-political inequity of colonial origin.

Closely engaging the “seven new paragraphs” James adds to the 1962 edition of *The Black Jacobins* which offer a detailed exposition of Toussaint’s “tragic flaw,” Scott grounds his argument in James’ turn to tragedy in a

literary sense (*Conscripts* 19).<sup>41</sup> Kara M. Rabbitt in "C.L.R. James's Figuring of Toussaint Louverture" first calls attention to James's dramatic figuration of Toussaint. She reveals that James' use of classic Aristotelian drama, particularly its attention to the rise and fall of a hero, creates the conditions in which readers are "made to feel ... the inevitability of [Toussaint's errors], ... [specifically] their tragic nature."<sup>42</sup> This "inevitability" and James' deliberate relation of Toussaint to the tragic heroes, "Prometheus, Hamlet, Lear, Phèdre, [and] Ahab," mythologizes Toussaint. It helps turn a historical figure into a dramatic figure (James 291). Through this process of mythmaking, Toussaint is granted the universal salience of the aforementioned tragic subjects; he is made into an exemplar, a figure by which to read the human experience. The universality Toussaint is granted through his tragic characterization allows James to read him as both the embodiment of the Haitian Revolution and as the archetype of "West Indian people," "the first and greatest of West Indians" (James 418). Accordingly, as tellingly evinced in his narrative's title, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, the historical recounting of the Upheaval cannot be divested from the life and actions of Toussaint. As such, when James writes in his epilogue that "West Indians first became aware of themselves as a people in the Haitian Revolution" (James 392) he means that "West Indians first became aware of themselves" through Toussaint. Uncritical of the singularity Toussaint is granted, Scott uses James' depiction of Toussaint as a tragic figure to provide his theory with a

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<sup>41</sup> In *Conscripts of Modernity* Scott indicates that new seven paragraphs were added to the 1962 edition (19); in his interview with Stuart Hall, "David Scott", he states eight (7) and in his article, "Tragedy's Time" he asserts six (210). As I am without a copy of the 1938 edition, I cannot verify how many there are.

<sup>42</sup> See "C.L.R. James's Figuring of Toussaint Louverture: The Black Jacobins and the Literary Hero," *C.L.R. James: His Intellectual Legacies*, eds. Selwyn Cudjoe and William Cain, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994) 123.

universality all its own: with the ability to ascribe what I read as an ethos of resignation to the postcolonial present.

Scott's argument is implicitly driven by a deep sense of disillusionment concerning anti-colonial activity, a disenchantment that Scott himself recognizes. In an interview with Stuart Hall, Scott states: "I should say, to begin with, that *Conscripts of Modernity* is not concerned with figuring out or contributing to the discussion of "what went wrong [post independence]" (and I repeat this throughout the book). But okay, true, the disenchantment you detect stems from a sharp sense that the [anti-colonial] project didn't simply run out of steam, but was, in fundamental ways, *wrong-headed*. I think this is what you are (perhaps *have been* for a while) trying to get me to face up to, to admit. So yes" (Scott qtd in Hall 3, his emphasis). Shaping Scott's reading of the postcolonial present, this "disenchantment" finds nourishment in an Euro-American cultural tradition that granted tragedy, as genre, the status of the highest form of art. It is this cultural elevation that leads to the birth of the tragic as philosophy. Scott's tragedy, however, while drawing from this philosophical tradition is more deeply rooted in the twentieth century revival of tragic drama à la George Steiner in *The Death of Tragedy*, a text Scott acknowledges as formative to his understanding of tragedy.<sup>43</sup> Steiner famously offers a reading of tragedy that envelops existence in the dark despair of powerlessness. For Steiner, tragedy is not only the highest art form driven by persons of noble bearing but it is so darkly aristocratic in substance

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<sup>43</sup> For the formative influence of Steiner's representation of tragedy and romance to Scott's work see *Conscripts of Modernity* 134-135 and Scott's article, "Tragedy's Time," 201. In addition to Steiner, Scott is also heavily influenced by Hayden White and his theory of historical narration via emplotment. White also corroborates, for Scott, Steiner's reading of tragedy and romance with his definitions of the genres; see "Tragedy's Time," 201. Scott also draws heavily from Hegel's scattered readings concerning tragedy, in particular, his idea of "tragic conflict." The latter involves, as he writes, "world-Historical collision between irreconcilable social temporal orders" ("Tragedy's Time" 211). See also *Conscripts* 12, 156; 167.

that it is thoroughly incompatible with the democratic leanings of the modern moment. Tragedy posits no resolution to injustice and thus cannot take root in modern drama, particularly, one emergent in a staunchly liberal democratic moment. Accordingly, a Steinerian understanding of the art form appreciates that “tragedy underscores the hopelessness of our attempts to remake the world.”<sup>44</sup> This in mind, Scott finds that anti-colonial fervor has been unable to nurture an existence in political and cultural difference since postcolonial leaders and thinkers have routinely “imposed a single standard of moral and civilizational value” that is no less totalitarian and oppressive for the formerly colonized than colonial rule (Scott qtd. in Hall 3). They have ultimately been unable to adequately “remake the world”.

Although Scott’s resentment is well founded (the postcolonial state and its intellectual architects have had little vision beyond colonial excesses) this overwhelming sense of disappointment, however, has unintended consequences. It spawns a tragic ethos for the postcolonial present based solely on the persons at the helm of postcolonial inequity—the “brown middle class,” the very persons Toussaint, with his vacillations, exemplifies (Scott qtd in Hall 3). I argue therefore that his argument reproduces the very limitations of vision that caused his “disenchantment” in the first place. It does so by positing a particular (in the modern ruling and intellectual Caribbean class) for a whole (the modern Caribbean experience and persons, more broadly). It cultivates a resignation to iniquity by providing the particular such discursive importance. Seizing onto James’ figuration of Hamlet as an embodiment of “a new type of human being” in the modern intellectual (James qtd. in Scott,

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<sup>44</sup> See Rita Felski, “Introduction,” *Rethinking Tragedy*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 4.



“Tragedy’s Time,” 212), the modern subject for whom “thought is his conception of action” and for whom “... the demands of social responsibility, on the one hand, and the individual commitment to freedom of thought, on the other... is at once poignantly conscious and unmasterable,” Scott interprets James’ as creating in Toussaint a Hamlet-like figure. He is paralyzed by thought and historical circumstance (Tragedy’s Time” 212, his emphasis).<sup>45</sup> As the “first and greatest of the West Indians” and thus the archetype of the modern Caribbean man of letters, Toussaint, for Scott, bequeathed to all Caribbean subjects of similar intellectual and political ilk a tragic inheritance.

With the polarizing alternatives Toussaint faced, “a return to slavery or a future without sources of enlightenment,” he revealed that the learned in the Caribbean have but Euro-America to turn to and Euro-American discursive paradigms to choose from (213). As enlightened Caribbean conscripts with firm ties to a Western and Northern civilization that “were [for Dessalines] the slenderest” (James 288), educated Caribbean peoples are fated, it would seem, to the intellectual and political tergiversations that plagued Toussaint. Following Scott, scholars can thus summarize that it is the costs of enlightenment (and hence Euro-American cultural and intellectual assimilation) that led Caribbean leaders and thinkers in the present to strive for a “single standard of moral and civilizational value” and not, for instance, visionless leadership (Scott qtd. in Hall 3). Like Toussaint, these Caribbean leaders and thinkers could not envision more, and, as such, could do no more. Consequently, those they govern would seemingly need to resign themselves to the rule of visionless conscripts. The region’s governed classes must accept,

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<sup>45</sup> James indeed does figure Toussaint and this manner. I do not contest his reading of James’ tragic characterization of James; I question the conclusions about the postcolonial present he draws from his characterizations. See *Conscripts* 16.

as it were, the region's inequity. Scholars in remaining attune to the appalling socio-political conditions of the postcolonial Caribbean must, in turn, come to read the Caribbean postcolonial experience through the only mode through which such skepticism in postcolonial leadership and a singular focus on cultured persons (via enlightened intellectuals and the ruling class of the Caribbean) makes sense—tragedy.

Tragedy, however, is by no means a poetic mode driven by such an implicit sense of socio-political disenchantment. When grounded in its historical specificity, it is particularly adept at calling to critical awareness the presence of unnoted persons and with them epistemologies that challenge the one-side exchange of epistemic influence by which one culture wholly conscripts another. As scholars of the Caribbean conscious of the historical and contemporary uses of the region to further Euro-American hegemonic authority we ought be weary of discourses that function as universal templates, applicable to all and yet concerned with a tiny proportion of all. Tragedy is one such discourse, particularly, in the way in which it is routinely and historically conceived by the West and the North in both its dramatic and philosophical sense in a discriminatory manner— as a artistic form that seeks to suppress “the infinite variations of cultural synthesis” that exist by granting “legitimacy” to a single “culture’s emergence,” the West’s.<sup>46</sup> Timothy Reiss in “Transforming Politics and Selves: Greek Antiquity, West African Modernity” thus writes:

Western thinkers have long stressed tragedy's uniqueness to Western

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<sup>46</sup> Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse*, trans. J. Michael Dash (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1999), 86. In the portions quoted from Glissant, Glissant writes primarily about the “discriminatory” nature of Athenian tragedy within antiquity; I extend his reading to the West’s appropriation of tragedy as sign of its cultural genius to underscore the modern application of what Glissant read’s as Athenian tragedy’s “discriminatory” nature.

culture, its absence from and inaccessibility to others. Against other Western practices, tragedy gives an extreme standard of judgment, a limit-case scale of comparison, a site where human freedom and fate, exaltation and angst, self and servitude, reason and unreason, individual and universe jostle each other. Against non-Western cultures, it offers a not just symbolic way to name invasive conflicts as “tragic” outcomes of fated historical processes for which the invader is thus not responsible, indeed, by which, as agent of these processes, he then “rightly” controls, even possesses, the “tragic” victims (mulatto, Indian, African, or other) of this noble “tragedy” of cultural conflict. Such notions have ruled Western thinking on tragedy since the late eighteenth century.<sup>47</sup>

Scholars who adopt tragedy as an analytical mode must be extremely critical with their uses of tragedy and therefore become attentive to its discursive misuse of subaltern others, here Haiti and its American neighbors. Even while acknowledging the manner in which European literary and intellectual traditions have profoundly shaped the actions of the colonized, they must, to cite Reiss again, think “.... without ... European traditions... because each time and place has its own horizons, possibilities, and assumptions of idea and act.”<sup>48</sup> The questions Caribbean scholars, as critics, need ask must not simply concern the constructive nature of modern power as that draws them only to the Toussaints of the anti-colonial record, those emblematic of a modernity conceived as European enlightenment, *but* they ought examine as

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<sup>47</sup> Timothy J. Reiss, “Transforming Politics and Selves: Greek Antiquity, West African Modernity,” ed. Rita Felski, *Rethinking Tragedy*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008) 263.

<sup>48</sup> Reiss 264.

well how in spite of the positive influence of modern power there still existed (and still exist) persons emblematic of “other futures, of projects not realized and ideas rarely remembered.”<sup>49</sup>

In both James’ and Scott’s text the rebelling slaves of Saint Dominigue are bit players, inconsequentially vital to the efforts of Toussaint. This, in itself, is telling of how “constructive” Euro-American power is for enamored conscripts. It forcefully reveals the way in which such power blinds the scholarly eye to the West and the North’s greatest adversaries, here: the Saint Dominguan slaves. They, for a lack of “enlightenment,” never wavered in their efforts for total liberation. Rabbitt is the first to draw critical attention to how James’ dramatic figuration of Toussaint upstages the masses he, as a Marxist, strives to privilege before all else. She writes: “His figuring of Toussaint into a tragic archetype, important for his development of the morals to be learned from the ‘story,’ precludes an in depth analysis of the ‘lesser figures’— the vital ‘chorus’— who surrounded and defined him.”<sup>50</sup> Scholars need therefore recognize that the “story” James’ wishes to convey about anti-colonial possibility is made universal through this diminution of the “chorus” just as the story of the West and North would not be possible without the Caribbean’s, Africa’s, and Latin America’s (among others) reduction. Their critical questions concerning the postcolonial present need address how inherited intellectual discourses shape who and what they see and who and what they privilege. Regarding the Haitian Revolution and Caribbean Modernity, they need question then the continued focus on Toussaint. They ought question why he before all others is so valorized in the West and the

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<sup>49</sup> Fischer 23.

<sup>50</sup> Rabbitt 128.

North. More to the point, they must seriously consider the decolonial consequences of such valorization when Caribbean writers and thinkers reproduced this valorization. If as Percy Waxman writes in 1931, “So much that is purely legendary has been written about Toussaint Louverture and so little trustworthy 'source material' exists that it is extremely difficult for one with no gift for fiction to attempt a complete story of his life,” then Caribbean scholars need consider how the legend of Toussaint furthers the story of cultural superiority the West and North offers of itself.<sup>51</sup>

Scott, I want to make clear, misreads James’ text. He grants his added tragic elements greater significance than need be, precisely because in keeping with a focus on a figure whose vacillation’s bolster Euro-America’s imperial ascendancy his questions and answers are foundationally structured to speak to Euro-America’s narrative of imperial self. That said, one cannot ignore the fact that it is James’ very work that invites such an ethos. Confounding his ability to speak to the radicality of the Upheaval and thus attend to its staunchest anti-colonial proponents in the slave mass, his allegiance to Europe-centered modernity sets him on the path to create a mythic figure of tragic substance in Toussaint. Precisely because of his Europeanity and thus “enlightenment,” Toussaint could be transformed into a symbol of anti-colonial agency *and* postcolonial impotency.

All this said, I want to make clear that I do not want to take from the significance of the work James offers I simply want to push readers to see that James’ turn to a particular discourse for his reading of the Revolution provides pasture for the cultivation of Scott’s disenchantment. What I urge that scholars recognize is that James’ allegiance to a Europe-centered modernity troubles

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<sup>51</sup> Percy Waxman, *The Black Napoleon* (New York: Harcourt, 1931), 5.

his ability to tend to the dramatic break in thought needed for a liberated Caribbean. If such a break is to occur, and if the Haitian Revolution is to continue to signify the possibility and promise of a severance of this type, scholars must come to question not only the preferred discourse through which the Upheaval is read (a Europe-centered modernity) *but* the figure through whom such a reading is possible—Toussaint. Scholars must come to question the uses of Toussaint and thus how such uses facilitate Haiti's discursive trivialization. They should ask then: what is silenced and disavowed with the shadow cast by Toussaint? What does his magnificence purposefully conceal? In answering these questions, Caribbean scholars of the postcolonial present can begin to construct questions that reflect and attend to the "series of unco-ordinated periods of [anti-colonial] drifts, punctuated by spurts, leaps and catastrophes" that has been the region's century spanning, protracted struggle to exist in political and cultural difference, that is, without Euro-American imperial stewardship (James 391).

## CHAPTER 2

### FAITHLESS SIGHT: HAITI IN *THE KINGDOM OF THIS WORLD*

*The Haitian Revolution was the crucible, the trial by fire for the ideals of the French Enlightenment.*

—SUSAN BUCK-MORSS

To invoke the Haitian Revolution and the Enlightenment in one breath is to call attention to the transformative possibilities embodied in the Upheaval. It is to address the Revolution's most enduring conceptualization: as the first realization of formerly abstract suppositions, i.e. *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. For thinkers like C.L.R. James and Nick Nesbitt who ardently tie the Haitian Revolution to the French, the Enlightenment was an absolute conviction in man.<sup>1</sup> Divested of irrationality, man could radically alter his moral and material state and herald a "New Jerusalem" with wealth, science and political equality. If the Haitian Revolution epitomized this it was only in regards to the latter. For in securing independence, in making equality a universal right, and in ultimately being the "trial by fire" for the Enlightenment, the Haitian Upheaval quite literally set ablaze that which would have drastically altered a nascent nation's material condition: arable land and thus the dreaded, but, profit-enabling plantation. From the ashes, a

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<sup>1</sup> See C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1989) and Nesbitt, "Troping Toussaint, Reading Revolution," *Research in African Literature*, 35.2. (Summer 2004): 18-33, "The Idea of 1804," *Yale French Studies: The Haiti Issue: 1804 and Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 107 (2005): 6-38 and *Universal Emancipation: The Haitian Revolution and the Radical Enlightenment*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008).

nation would rise without the economic infrastructure, willing manpower, protected coffers or stable state needed to make Haiti the “pearl” that Saint Domingue was to the Antilles.

The newly independent Haitian state had a tumultuous and fractured beginning. Following Emperor Jean Jacques Dessalines assassination in 1806 (just two years shy of the nation’s independence in 1804), Haiti was divided into a kingdom in the North and republic in the Southwest. In 1820, it was unified as a liberal democratic republic by former revolutionary general, Jean-Pierre Boyer, who would govern as president until 1843. When his rule ended, the nation experienced extreme political volatility, enduring twenty-two political upheavals, the last of which culminated in the first U.S. Occupation of Haiti (1915-1934).<sup>2</sup> Compounding this political instability was the uncertain economic horizon that lay ahead. Haiti did not have a work force willing to return to plantation labor and nor did it have the means to protect its treasury from the enormous sum France demanded for its official recognition as a nation—today, \$21,685,135,571.48.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, as Haiti was dependent on a global market driven by colonial exploitation it did not have the geopolitical

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<sup>2</sup> See U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/1982.htm>: “With 22 changes of government from 1843 to 1915, Haiti experienced numerous periods of intense political and economic disorder, prompting the United States military intervention of 1915.” This, of course, does not reveal the political motivations behind the U.S. “intervention,” namely the desire to acquire Haiti’s Môle Saint Nicolas to have a stronghold in the Caribbean and Latin America and prevent German encroachment in the region. This was also the very moment of the Monroe Doctrine: the U.S. took possession of the Panama Canal and occupied Dominican Republic, Cuba and Venezuela, among others, to “protect” independent nations in the Americas from their former European colonizers. See Hans Schmidt’s, *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* and Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Haiti and the Great Powers, 1902-1915*. For an unbiased reading of Haiti’s post-revolutionary unrest see, David Nicholls’ *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti* and Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s *Haiti: State Against Nation*.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the nation’s reticent laborers, see Carolyn E. Fick, “Dilemmas of Emancipation: from the Saint Domingue Insurrections of 1791 to the Emerging Haitian State,” *History Workshop Journal*. 46 (1998), 12-13. For more on the French indemnity, see Chris Bongie, “Chroniques de la francophonie triomphante,” Ed. Doris Garraway, *Tree of Liberty: Cultural Legacies of the Haitian Revolution In the Atlantic World*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008), fn 13 and fn 33.



footing to protect itself from the economic stranglehold France and much of the West placed it in. Without a perpetual influx of capital, the nation could not reclaim its title as the most prosperous territory in all of the Antilles. And nor should it have.

All too frequently when well-intentioned individuals discuss Haiti's current economic state they invoke this appellation to emphasize the extreme depths the nation has sunken to. The persistent comparison of Haiti's bleak economic present to its moneyed colonial past obscures, however, what facilitated its wealth in the first place—the blood, sweat and tears of slaves, on the one hand, and the dissemination of indigenous peoples, on the other. It thus ignores that for Saint Domingue to be “the pearl of the Antilles,” Africa had to be reduced to a limitless cache of chattel, Africans and their descendents to mere beasts of burden and Amerindians relics of a beyond era. Ultimately, it re-scripts the past to negate Spain and France's hand in Haiti's post revolutionary state as it concurrently obscures how its former riches while produced by the majority of its people was as its scant wealth is today—never at the majority's disposal and thus never theirs to begin with. Lastly, repeated comparison of colonial Saint Domingue to present day Haiti obscure how the burning of arable lands was a profound and much-needed act against slavery and colonialism. To ignore these factors when presently evaluating Haiti is to perpetuate the falsehood that through mismanagement the Haitian state alone is the sole cause of the nation's socio-economic difficulties. It is to willfully disregard both the difficulties Haiti faced upon declaring independence and the troubles it and its Caribbean and Latin American neighbors would continue to face upon entering a world economy on unequal grounds.

When Caribbean writers like Alejo Carpentier endeavor to use the Haitian Revolution as the quintessential sign of modernity's advent in the region (and thus as an emblem of regional possibility) Haiti's post revolutionary state poses an immense problem. How are writers to reconcile a discourse grounded in the Enlightenment's drive toward progressive moral and material development with a nation that, on the one hand, stands as a testament to its call for moral advancement in light of its Revolution and yet, on the other, seems removed from the material improvement needed to symbolize it? In other words, how are Caribbean writers to deal with the conundrum that is Haiti, its ability to reveal both the advent of Caribbean modernity in its first emancipatory act and its incompatibility with it due to the seeming absence of progress within the nation? Carpentier's famed theorization of New World modernity, the marvelous real, delicately contends with the incongruity of Haiti's revolutionary success and its post-revolutionary economic and political difficulties. As a conception of existence grounded in Afro-Caribbean spirituality, the marvelous real is presumably distinct from Western artistic/intellectual traditions because it can acknowledge all that is strange and dissimilar in the everyday and thus disclose the region's exception and potential through Haiti's disconcerting past and present.<sup>4</sup> For Carpentier, the nation's jarring past and present serves to vividly draw attention to how the modern New World experience, with its frequent reversals of fortune, socio-political crisis' and surges of radical

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<sup>4</sup> Carpentier's conception of modernity is as concerned with the Caribbean as it is with Latin America. He was raised in Cuba, a nation that politically and artistically aligned itself with Latin America. He also worked and spent much of his life in Venezuela and came of age in an era in which Haiti was widely recognized as a Latin American and Caribbean nation. His theorization thus implies both regions. It is referred to in this chapter as "New World modernity." I address both areas as the "Americas" or "the New World" to respect their mutual salience.

contestations, is ever charged with the latent possibility of profound regional change in both art and politics.

In this chapter, I closely evaluate Carpentier's confidence in New World artistic and political potentiality in relation to the difficulties post revolutionary Haiti poses to this conviction. I argue that although Carpentier can use Haiti to depict the marvelous-ness of the Americas through the spirituality of the Haitian people, he cannot see beyond Haiti's post revolutionary state. In effect, he cannot envision a theory of potential and transformation through a nation that seemingly offers little possibility for change beyond cyclical unrest. I arrive at this conclusion by reading the novel through a tragic mode, an interpretative lens that allows for a "living engagement with the past."<sup>5</sup> In reading the novel through this mode, I address tragedy in its conventional sense insofar as it allows this reading to speak to the prevailing sentiment of the nation in Carpentier's moment. The second of Carpentier's novels, *The Kingdom of this World* (*El Reino de este mundo*) was published in 1949, fifteen years after the first U.S. Occupation of Haiti (1915-1934) and three years following Haiti's second major upheaval—the Revolution of 1946.<sup>6</sup> The Haitian Revolution of 1946 was fueled by the color

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<sup>5</sup> See Page duBois, "Toppling the Hero: Polyphony In the Tragic City," ed. Rita Felski, *Rethinking Tragedy*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 140.

<sup>6</sup> Carpentier had a prolific career as a writer. Sixteen years prior to publishing *The Kingdom* in 1949, Carpentier wrote his first, largely unsuccessful, novel on Afro-Cuban spirituality, *Ecué-Yamba-Ó*. His next, and most acclaimed, novel, *The Lost Steps* (*Los pasos perdidos*) was written four years following *The Kingdom's* publication. While he wrote *The Lost Steps*, he also began the novel *The Chase* (*El acoso*), released in 1956. Thereafter, he wrote *War of Time* (*Guerra de tiempo*) in 1958. Four years later in 1962, he wrote *Explosion in a Cathedral* (*El Siglo de las Luces*), returning to the Haitian Revolutionary moment, focusing more extensively this time, however, on the French Revolution and the Enlightenment. He would go on to write four more novels, *Reasons of the State* (*El Recurso de método*) and *Baroque Concert* (*Concierto barroco*) in 1974 and *The Rite of Spring* (*La consagración de la primavera*) and *The Harp and the Shadow* (*El arpa y la sombra*) in 1978. All of his novels (excluding his first, *Ecué-Yamba-Ó*) were heavily influenced by his famous account of Cuban music, *Music in Cuba* (*La música in Cuba*) released in 1946. Carpentier stated this history of Cuban music helped prepare him "to write all the later [post *Ecué-Yamba-Ó*] novels". See Timothy Brennan, "Introduction," *The Lost Steps*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), ix.

question (black versus mulatto rule) and sparked by U.S. policy, namely its move to lighten the Haitian government through mulatto leadership. Although the U.S. no longer occupied Haiti at the time, it still dictated from afar. Then President Élie Lescot continued to abide by U.S. procedure and for the first time in Haiti's history "the distribution of power had become explicitly colorist," with mulattos solely in governance.<sup>7</sup> Carpentier's present thus saw the return of a racially motivated Revolution and an imperial power—a tragic occurrence, to say the least.

This reading pays particular attention to the way in which Carpentier's treatment of Haitian history as recurrent discord situates a universal narrative of man that effectively disassociates revolutionary Haiti from its material-historical condition. I argue that in contending with the Haitian paradox, Carpentier must obscure the image of the nation he provides—specifically, a tumultuous land of sustained abjectness, premised on a state in opposition to a nation. Once this suppression is achieved, the novel's reliance on a universal narrative of human existence facilitates an abstract rendering of Haiti. This abstraction, in turn, preserves what is of fundamental significance to Carpentier's theory of modernity: the revolutionary attempt. With the latter preserved, Carpentier elides Haiti's post-revolutionary reality, and, correspondingly, the people whose spiritual sensibility enabled the Upheaval in order to disclose the potential and exception of the New World. However, the loss of Haiti in the novel, along with its people and its grim actuality, undermines a key tenet in his conception of the present—namely, the new artistic and intellectual tradition, distinct from the West, which the marvelous

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<sup>7</sup> See Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *State Against Nation*, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), 133.

real is intended to exemplify. I ultimately argue that an abstracted Haiti returns Carpentier to the conceptual bounds he sought to move beyond: the West as originator of all things singular and worthy of replication. Consequently, the charge that Carpentier levies against the West upon confronting the New World's marvelous reality is equally applicable to himself: he perceives Haiti and yet does not see it at all.

### COMIC AND TRAGIC OSCILLATIONS

*The Kingdom of this World* is a historical narrative that offers a descriptive telling of Haitian Revolutionary history through the day to day exploits of a slave (Ti-Noël) and his lascivious master (M. Lenormand de Mézy). It begins in the mid 1700s, before the maroon and rebel François Makandal's siege of poison and later death in 1758.<sup>8</sup> It ends in the early 1800's with the fall of King Henri Christophe's reign and the unification of Haiti under President Jean-Pierre Boyer. Although the novel is framed by revolts that precede and follow the Haitian Revolution (Makandal's rebellion and the uprising against Christophe respectively), the 1791-1804 Upheaval is its principle subject. While the Revolution is the main focus, the Upheaval is largely divested of the famed leaders through which it is often told; Toussaint Louverture, Jean-Jacques Dessalines, André Rigaud and Alexandre Pétion are dealt with minimally, if at all. Carpentier does provide extensive attention to Christophe. That said, Christophe's heroic personage is not significant; his reign and the cycle of tyranny it unleashed is, however. With the intent to write the Revolution from below and thus with little attention to heroes, the

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<sup>8</sup> I am deferring to contemporary spelling of "Makandal" as opposed to Carpentier's rendering in the novel, "Macandal."

novel focuses on the nondescript slave and centers its narrative on Ti-Noël, through whom Carpentier presents the slaves' experience of revolutionary events. The Afro-Caribbean spiritual conviction grounding this experience and the history revealed is narrated via a series of magical proceedings, which, while historically accurate in many cases, appear so far-fetched and arbitrarily cobbled together that *The Kingdom* has intrigued many for not only its content but for its seeming absence of structure.<sup>9</sup>

Elusive as *The Kingdom's* structure may appear to be, it is not to say the novel is without one. In fact, the extensive presence of theater in the narrative suggests that the text is structured by the theatrical, as evinced in *The Kingdom's* oscillation between the comic and the tragic.<sup>10</sup> This oscillation conditions the tragic mode grounding this reading and thus the universal narrative of human existence foremost to Carpentier's intentional elision of post revolutionary Haiti by the novel's end. If we read the chapters "The Daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë" and "Call of the Conch Shells" in tandem, we can readily discern the novel's structure while attending to Carpentier's cyclical treatment of Haitian history. In "The Daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë," Carpentier reveals that the prosperity of the colony's capital has led to the opening of a "theater for drama and opera."<sup>11</sup> The theater's launch

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<sup>9</sup> The miracle of Makandal's execution, the haunting of Christophe by Archbishop Corneille Breille and the ceremony at Bois Caïman, as improbable as they may seem, are historical events taken from Médéric Moreau de Saint-Méry's *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique e historique de la partie française de l'Isle de Saint Domingue* (1797), Pierre de Vassière's *Saint-Domingue: La société et la vie créoles sous l'ancien régime, 1629-1789* (1909) and Victor Schoelcher's *Vie de Toussaint-Louverture* (1889). See Roberto González Echevarría, *The Pilgrim at Home: Alejo Carpentier*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 131-135.

<sup>10</sup> I am indebted to Vicky Unruth's piece, "The Performing Spectator in Alejo Carpentier's Fictional World," *Hispanic Review*, 66.1. (Winter 1998): 57-77 and Giovanni Pontiero's, "'The Human Comedy' in el Reino de Este Mundo," *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, 4.12. (1970): 528-538, for theater's salience to Carpentier's literary work.

<sup>11</sup> *The Kingdom of this World*, trans. Harriet De Onis, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1957) 57. All further citations will be made in the text.

leads to a chance encounter between the newly widowed M. Lenormand de Mézy (Ti-Noël's master) and a mediocre Flemish actress. They marry and she, desiring to always be the confidante she once played, takes her stage name as her own: Mlle Floridor (60).

Mlle Floridor is the comic centerpiece of "The Daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë." As one whose artistic ability extends only to the "phallic arts," her dramatic endeavors are seeped in absurdity (59). Carpentier writes:

There were nights when she took to the bottle. It was not unusual on such occasions for her to order all the slaves to turn out, and under the full moon, between belches of malmsey, to declaim before her captive audience the great roles she had never been allowed to interpret. Wrapped in her confidante's veils, the timid player of bit parts attacked with quavering voice the familiar bravura passages. (60)

With the dry humor of one prepping an audience for a hearty laugh, the narrator delivers the first line seriously; as her having "t[aken] to the bottle" is presented with dramatic simplicity in a concise, direct sentence. The understated tone of the sentence builds what follows, setting the stage for a comic performance: a "full moon," "belches of malmsey" and an overacting actress ("with quavering voice") performing to a "captive audience," pun intended. A chuckle, at the very least, is warranted here, particularly when we note that Mlle Floridor's dramatic ability ironically requires compelled participants.

A chuckle, in turn, may give way to laughter when we realize that the attentive audience the actress finally receives has no idea she is acting, is not completely clear what she is saying, and, perhaps more importantly for Mlle Floridor, that she is giving her all in *the* dramatic role of the era as Phèdre in

Jean Racine's tragedy of that name. "With quavering voice" she quotes Racine:

My sins are heaped  
Already to overflowing. I am seeped  
At once in incest and hypocrisy.  
My murderous hands, hot for avenging me,  
Are fain to plunge themselves in guiltless  
blood. (*The Kingdom* 61)

What little the slaves can understand of this reveals naught but infamy and grim deeds in their mistress' past: "Agape with amazement, at a loss to know what it was all about, but gathering from certain words that in Creole, too, referred to misdemeanors whose punishment ranged from a thrashing to having one's head chopped off, the Negroes came to the conclusion that the lady must have committed crimes in days gone by . . ." (61). The only crime that Mlle Floridor has (arguably) committed is subjecting her charges to such a poor rendering of the "familiar bravura passages" that brought Racine his most lasting acclaim. Yet as the slaves are not privy to this knowledge and as Mlle Floridor is also unaware of the travesty she has committed, we can be but amused by the ridiculous scene Carpentier has comically crafted. And in the course of our amusement we may, perhaps, begin to note the novel's latent structure: tragedy's all too easy shift into comedy amid discrepant cultural sensibilities.

Two chapters later, with time having passed, all amusement is lost. In "The Call of the Conch Shells" Carpentier describes the 1791 slave uprising on M. de Mézy's plantation and similarly the Revolution's advent. At the end of the chapter, we are told that Mlle Floridor's performance prompts her rape by



Ti-Noël: “For a long time now he had dreamed of raping Mlle Floridor. On those nights of tragic declamations she had displayed beneath the tunic with its Greek-key border breasts undamaged by the irreversible outrage of the years” (68). With this assertion, the novel’s structure is made more apparent as Mlle Floridor no longer embodies comic absurdity but tragic misfortune. This shift is all the more significant when we realize that Racine’s tragedy not only enables this move, but it also thematically situates the text’s cyclical rendering of Haitian history. It situates, that is, its broader narrative concerning human existence.

*Phèdre’s* presence in the novel reveals the horrific happenings that emerge from a present confounded by the past, as the history the play recounts forces its audience to acknowledge the unremitting struggles that plague human existence. In the tragedy, *Phèdre* is afflicted with incestuous longing for her stepson, Hippolytus. Her struggle against this longing as well as her desire to fulfill it consumes her, sapping her strength and will to live.<sup>12</sup> Upon reading, we are told that Venus cursed her mother, Pasiphaë, with adulterous and bestial love (1.3.51). Unlike *Phèdre*, she realizes her desire and couples with a bull to give birth to the Minotaur. When confronted with her own adulterous longing, *Phèdre* is horrified, chiefly due to the curse’s continued presence. Her dreadfulness is so severe that she experiences time as stasis, a seamless continuity of past and present. When unconsciously confessing her love for her stepson, she states: “Young, charming, drawing all hearts after him [her husband, Theseus]/.../He had your walk, your eyes, your way of speaking/He could blush like you...” (Racine 2.5.83). Her

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<sup>12</sup> See Racine, Jean, *Phèdre*, trans. Margaret Rawlings, (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), 1.3.39. All further citations will be made in the text.

memory of a young Theseus is stained by her present desire, as now it is the son that passes on to the father the attributes (“walk,” “eyes,” and “way of speaking”) that first sparked attraction. It becomes clear to both audience and reader alike that Phèdre is crippled by a present that is in turn maligned by the past. The horror therefore to be found in Phèdre’s existence is the realization that time does not protect her from past misdeeds.

With this in mind, Carpentier carefully reveals that the past dictates Mlle Floridor’s rape. Prior to the rape, in “The Daughter of Minos and Pasiphaë” we are told that in the twenty years that have passed since M. Lenormand de Mézy’s marriage, he has suffered from a perpetual erotomania, greedily and jealously lusting after young adolescent Negresses (*The Kingdom* 60). The text reveals, “he multiplied the corporal punishments meted out to the men, especially those guilty of fornication outside the marriage bed” (60). Mlle Floridor fully aware of her husband’s appetite for young Negresses and feeling deeply spurned in light of her “gifted [talents] in the phallic arts” responds bitterly to his adultery (59). She jealously “avenge[s] her artistic failure on the Negresses who bathed her and combed her hair, ordering them whipped on the slightest pretext” (60). It is significant therefore that immediately before the 1791 uprising that leads to her rape in “Call of the Conch Shells” readers are told that M. de Mézy lies in wait for a young slave girl attempting to steal tobacco for her father, preparing to barter premeditated rape for thievery (72). The particulars of Mlle Floridor’s failed artistry coupled with the events that led to her rape clearly reveal that Ti-Noël’s deed is a calculated response to the sexual brutality experienced on the plantation. Accordingly, when Carpentier describes Mlle Floridor’s “breasts [as] undamaged by the irreversible outrage of the years” (68), he relates Mlle

Floridor to M. de Mézy's victims, those subject to such "outrage," and thus quietly situates Ti-Noël's violence for the reader.

With this context, we can read Ti-Noël's violence as a product of the curse coursing through the loins of the West, embodied as man. For in Carpentier's text, women have particular roles as producers of a state (as will be addressed) and men, in turn, are recognized as its chief actors. Furthermore, the West is very much "male" in the novel, functioning as "discoverer" and as cognitive producer of American subjects through its devotion to reason, represented as female.<sup>13</sup> Like the curse in Phèdre's blood, M. de Mézy's erotomania is an expression of his own: generations of congenital racial supremacy. Consequently, his sickness not only indicates an insatiable sexual need but also tells of a will to dominate and the resulting struggle for absolute power it necessitates. Why else would he lie in wait for his victims or brandish his undeniable authority by hoarding female slaves? M. de Mézy's action, and those of all Western slave masters, initiates the cyclical struggle for power that Ti-Noël and the other slaves continue in their respective quest for authority and liberation. Moreover, it establishes the battleground on which this struggle will be waged: the female body. The rape and murder of Mlle Floridor thus represents a shift in power, the fall of one state and the birth of another.

The particular gender assignments ascribed to the West, reason and revolutionaries brings to light the gendered nuances of a tragic mode, particularly how the comic and tragic oscillations structuring the text frequently relies on normative gender narratives (the male as actor, the female

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<sup>13</sup> In the section following this one, "Concerning Opposition," I will further address these assertions in relation to Carpentier's critique of Enlightenment thought.

as acted upon) to move from one affective sensibility to another. Racine's tragedy becomes all the more significant to an understanding of Carpentier's novel and the tragic mode I discuss here, since the drama relies on the defiled female body to situate the cyclical understanding of history that is so central to *The Kingdom's* comic and tragic vacillations. If we turn to the play, keeping the unfortunate fate of Mlle Floridor in mind, what should strike readers is that a shift in power within the Athenian *polis* also occurs through rape. Recall that Phèdre's maid accuses Hippolytus (Phèdre's stepson) of raping Phèdre so as to protect her mistress from Theseus' wrath, should he discover Phèdre's incestuous longing for his son. This lie, and the implicit presence of a defiled female body, not only portends the demise of all embroiled in Phèdre's accursed desire, but it also foretells the demise of the *polis*— the tumultuous state at the heart of the tragedy's misfortune. Near the tragedy's end, Theseus creates a new state by recognizing his sworn enemy as his daughter (Racine 5.7.169). This political change, however, occurs only to convey that the civil contests, which lead to this point, initiated a cycle of senseless discord of which Phèdre, her maid and Hippolytus are its most recent victims. The play forces the audience/reader to wonder: would the characters suffer so if Theseus had not slain the Minotaur or if his father (Ægeus) had not been overthrown by his brother, whose family was, in turn, deposed by Theseus, who fought the Minotaur only to save his city from human sacrifices to Minos, Phèdre's father?

This confluence of unrest speaks volumes to the ways in which unremitting strife damns both collective and individual existence. This mutual damnation is an important point for Carpentier, particularly as the implicit presence of cyclical discord sustained through an idea of radical political

transformation dependent on the violation of the female body by the masculine subject of progress keenly ties post-revolutionary Haiti to a larger discourse of human existence. This discourse is most often typified by an ancient past lauded as the beginnings of the West's and North's intellectual existence. As in Racine's play, when the slaves of Saint Domingue enter into a struggle for power with the colonists and later France, their success creates a new state while initiating a cycle of discord of which Haiti has arguably never left. With an eye keenly focused on Haiti's post-revolutionary instability, Carpentier illustrates King Christophe's reintroduction of forced labor to create the famed fortress, the Citadel Laferrière, and the palace, Sans Souci (119-125). He then recounts the uprising led by the Republican South against Christophe, who upon unifying the nation institutes obligatory farming—reestablishing slavery in new form (176). With each depiction of strife and exploitation, he purposefully reveals that the newly emancipated experienced freedom as an “endless return of chains, [a] rebirth of shackles, [and] proliferation of suffering” (178). He plainly reveals then that as ongoing victims of autocratic rule Haitian peasants experienced freedom as a horrifying return to forced labor. If we can read *Phèdre* as tragic in light of the suffering caused by the excesses of civil strife (among other factors), then *The Kingdom*, is also tragic, as the history it relates is equally seeped in unnecessary suffering and an enduring inequity.

When Carpentier presents a comic depiction of Mlle Floridor and then thereafter tersely mentions her impending rape without so much as a droll remark or drop of lament, we experience this silence as deafening as we are confronted with the tragic: the terrible realization that we are privy to an imminent fall of which the principle subject remains ignorant. Our first

encounter with her thus heightens our awareness of the comic's easy shift into the tragic. It exacerbates the absurd's ability to overshadow transgressions in the now that will newly manifest later. Moreover, this oscillation between the tragic and the comic troubles our modern belief in a break with the past that will herald a better future. Time, rather than evolving and progressing beyond the past, reaches back to it, courting stasis. Consequently, when we read the text and feel perhaps unmoored by its thorough depiction of events, which while grounded in a historically sound progression nevertheless appear devoid of such sequential linearity, we need to keep this understanding of time as stasis in mind. Static time conditions the narrative's movement and the novel's thematic concerns, specifically freedom's elusiveness, revolution's enduring significance and change as repetition with difference. Such thematic concerns, like the novel's progression, are wedded to the tragic, namely to stasis as a horrifying actuality for Carpentier and his characters in *The Kingdom*. Time conceived as stasis attests to the way in which the past's presence in the immediate not only troubles our ability to move forward but also experience and retain an assured existence in freedom. The grim irony revealed in Mlle Floridor's rape is that even as individuals think themselves free, as Mlle Floridor, they are never free from the violence of the past and its manifestation in the present. Carpentier thus uses *Phèdre* to reveal that "human existence is enchainment."<sup>14</sup> The play discloses that all are condemned to recurring struggles for power that limit both peoples ability to attain freedom and, once captured, be eternally secure in it. In effect, it reminds readers that they are fundamentally paralyzed by their desires and

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<sup>14</sup> Simon Critchely, "I Want to Die, I Hate My Life—Phaedra's Malaise," ed. Rita Felski, *Rethinking Tragedy*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2008), 183.

their inability to achieve them, for the newly freed of Saint Domingue: freedom removed from forced labor.

In the novel, the vacillation between the comic and the tragic structures the text while concurrently situating a human narrative. The shift into the tragic brings to light a universal account concerned with the horror implicit in humanity's cyclical relation to conflict. Far from attesting to a singular Haitian reality, and in turn a New World actuality that Haiti is intended to illustrate, the narrative's comic and tragic oscillation, and hence tragic mode, speaks to an "all" broadly constructed, touching upon the commonality of human existence. In light of this, we must ask: how are we to read Carpentier's call for American singularity in his theory, the marvelous real, in *The Kingdom*—a fictional articulation of his conception, which addresses human experience in the broadest of terms, and hence as an occurrence that would negate any region's claim to unprecedented distinction? We are to read it cognizant of Haiti, of its ability to signal the newness and potential of a region because of its Revolution and its inability, for Carpentier, to signal more. We are to ultimately read it aware of Haiti's inability to demonstrate possibility removed from progress experienced as stasis, that is, temporal advancement removed from socio-political transformation. Before expounding on this through a critical examination of Carpentier's figuration of Haiti in the novel, an explication of Carpentier's theory is in order as is Haiti's significance to it.

#### CONCERNING OPPOSITION

Central to New World distinction, notwithstanding the universal currents of *The Kingdom*, is the new way of being and thinking grounded in a

belief in Afro-Caribbean spirituality the region is said to embody and that Western thought, in turn, obscures. Carpentier's theory, the marvelous real, fully explicates this notion. The theory is first articulated in the "Prologue" to *The Kingdom* in 1949 and later augmented in 1967 and 1975 in "On the Marvelous Real in America" and "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," respectively. Each piece defines the marvelous real as an actual occurrence in everyday life that is amazing and/or strangely distinct from convention.<sup>15</sup> For Carpentier, "convention" refers to established forms of Western thought and being that suppress and obscure other modalities of expression and existence. He wrote his "Prologue," and later the two more recent pieces, to celebrate and support the American writer's efforts to depict and live his particular reality, one that is largely unrecognizable by the West. It for this reason that Carpentier passionately states: "If our duty is to depict this world, we must uncover and interpret it ourselves" ("The Baroque" 106). It is also for this reason that opposition is so central to his theory and that the marvelous requires the opposing cultural and political forces we first encountered in the comic and the tragic's oscillation of *The Kingdom*, i.e. Mlle Floridor of European origin, and Ti-Noël and the slaves, Americans of African origin.

With opposition central to its articulation, the theory is designed as an artistic and political tool. In regards to the former, it is intended to give the New World artist the conceptual means to represent his/her world. Carpentier writes: "observe that when André Masson tried to draw the jungle

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<sup>15</sup> See "On the Marvelous Real in America," trans. Tanya Huntington and Lois Parkinson Zamora, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995) 85 and "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," trans. Tanya Huntington and Lois Parkinson Zamora, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, eds. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 101. All citations of the Prologue, "On the Marvelous Real in America" (hereafter, "On the Marvelous Real," and "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real" (hereafter "The Baroque") will be made in the text.



of Martinique ... the marvelous truth of the matter devoured the painter, leaving him just short of impotent when faced with the blank paper. It had to be an American painter—Wilfredo Lam—who taught us the magic of tropical vegetation” (“On the Marvelous Real” 85; Prologue 69-75). Arguably, Masson could not create because his Western origin could not prepare him for a reality it never conceived. The American artist, however, born in such a reality, experiencing it each day and thus taking in the new critical and artistic possibilities it affords, *can*. In reference to the latter, the theory’s manifestation in a baroque world situates its political dimension.

The tragic mode that structures *The Kingdom* would come to structure the baroque as a recurrent expression of undulating change and innovation. The baroque “projects forward” yet equally returns to the same, attending, in this way, to the continuous change of fortune in contests of power (“The Baroque” 98). Moreover, it reflects the heterogeneous composition of the Americas, intellectually and biologically. The baroque celebrates the many Western theoretical and artistic traditions that create the capacity to re-think the region through the marvelous. For in recognizing what the marvelous is not, we can truly see what it is. In regards to biology, Carpentier writes that the baroque is an “awareness of being Other, of being new, of being symbiotic, of being a *criollo* [as] the *criollo* spirit is itself a baroque spirit” (100). The marvelous potentiality of the region derives from an emergent self-awareness of incongruous relation, in effect from the New World’s creolized essence. Thus, it recognizes that if it is to celebrate “symbiosis” it must confront the absolute categories of existence that act to demean a multifarious reality, and hence a creolized being. The baroque, therefore, functions as a challenge to the normative West. It presides over the region to announce, produce and

sustain accounts of revolutionary divergence, transforming thought and action. Accordingly, new conceptual tools create the potential to lead to new political weapons and, in this way, new manners of engaging in the world as artist and individual. Using the baroque to critically attend to his sense of self and place, Carpentier attempts to name and express what Hernán Cortés could not in his encounter with the region—“As I do not know what to call these things, I cannot express them (“The Baroque” 104)”—the infinite possibilities for artistic and collective self-determination in the marvelous real.

As we see, the exceptionality and potential of the New World rests in its ability to express a new way of engaging and being in the world. In addition, however, Carpentier discloses we can only come to this potential and so to the region’s exceptionality through the Afro-Caribbean spirituality of the region’s peoples. He writes that the marvelous is “perceived with peculiar intensity due to an exaltation of the spirit which elevates it to a kind of ‘limit state’” (Prologue 92-93; “On the Marvelous Real” 85-86). To experience the marvelous, to be alive to its “unremarked riches,” requires a pure and simple devotion (“The Marvelous in America” 86). Haiti is Carpentier’s means of conveying this alternative existence as it best demonstrates the marvelous in light of its Revolution and spiritual practice: Vodou. With the devout realizing amazing feats from liberation —recall the 1791 Vodou ceremony at *Bwa Kaiyman*, organizing the Upheaval— to “zombification,” the marvelous real can conceivably expose the potential and exception of a region alive to a homegrown spirituality. However, the West’s positioning as reason in his theory, arguably, imposes a simplistic and pre-modern consciousness on to the pious Haitian subject. The simple conviction ascribed to those that can perceive the marvelous can be read therefore as

evidence of the nation's "backwardness." Accordingly, even as the region is celebrated through the spiritual sensibility of the Haitian people, Haiti is simultaneously derided. Our awareness of this scorn occurs, in part, because of the novel's comic and tragic oscillations, as the continual movement between the two obscures what Carpentier intentionally seeks to ridicule for critical purposes and what appears to be ridiculed in light of its close association with happenings that are deliberately derided. Some look to the famed depiction of Makandal's execution as an indication of Carpentier's distance from his subject. This distance is real but it is more complex than one might imagine, as it acts to legitimize a region's particular and singular consciousness.<sup>16</sup> Turning now to the execution of Makandal, we see the marvelous contested by reason.

Makandal was a runaway slave and Vodou priest (*oungan*) said to be "chrismed by the great loas" (or *lwas*, Haitian demi-gods) (*The Kingdom* 51).<sup>17</sup> In light of that he was thought to possess "lycanthropic powers" by the slaves ("The Marvelous Real in America" 86). He metamorphoses into birds, insects and beasts in an elaborate effort to free Saint Domingue from whites and create a nation of emancipated Negroes (*The Kingdom* 36). Carpentier relies on Makandal (more so than other characters) to reveal Haiti's marvelous reality in light of his direct relation to the *lwas* (as an *oungan*), his lycanthropic powers, and the successful siege of poison he waged. His execution is thus a means of disclosing a marvelous actuality imbued with Afro-Caribbean spiritual conviction. Before his death by fire, the devout slaves foretell his

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<sup>16</sup> See Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert, "The Haitian Revolution in Interstices and Shadows: A Re-reading of Alejo Carpentier's *The Kingdom of This World*," *Research in African Literatures*, 35. 2. (Summer 2004): 114-127

<sup>17</sup> "Loas" will be hereafter referred to as "*lwas*," in accordance with contemporary spelling.

escape. Carpentier writes: "his bonds would no longer [possess] his body [and he] would trace the shape of a man in the air for a second," which is exactly what happens: the cords fall from his body; he flies into the air and into the slaves, escaping the fire (51). Seeing this, the slaves understand that he has thwarted the efforts of the whites and remained in "the Kingdom of this World" (51-52). The narrator counters this, revealing: "very few saw that Macandal, held by ten soldiers, had been thrust head first into the fire, and that a flame fed by his burning hair had drowned his last cry. When the slaves were restored to order, the fire was burning normally like any fire of good wood" (52). In one full sweep, the narrator matter-of-factly dismisses the "hocus-pocus" that has "governed" Haiti's history and made it an anathema in much of the world.

Carpentier situates this dismissal with his framing of the execution. The scene opens with both masters and slaves in opposition. The novel reads: "The masters' eyes questioned the faces of the slaves. But the Negroes showed spiteful indifference. What did whites know of Negro matters?" (50). The answer, as will be revealed, is nothing. Immediately following Makandal's "death," M. de Mézy attempts to rationalize the apparent indifference of the euphoric slaves: "in his night cap [he] commented with his devout wife on the Negroes' lack of feelings [for Makandal's tortuous demise] ... drawing a number of philosophical considerations on the inequality of the human races which he planned to develop in a speech larded with Latin quotations" (52). Both the narrator's reasoned repudiation of the miraculous and M. de Mézy's "philosophical considerations" reveal an assured knowledge and ignorance of a people oppressed by rationality, i.e., a subjective manner of thought masquerading as reasoned objectivity. In

contemplating such a speech, M. de Mézy purports to write without knowing, and, in doing so, he invokes the Enlightenment, a practice of rational thought the narrator relies on and that Carpentier seeks to move beyond.

In *The Kingdom*, the Enlightenment is a practice of discursive exchange that conceptually seeks out the other only to inscribe him/her with ideas that reflects sameness. In short, it is a conception of another that betrays the dominant's particular subject positioning, for in submitting the former to its jurisprudence, the empowered rationalizes and legitimizes its claim to supremacy.<sup>18</sup> Accordingly, a learned corpus—"larded with Latin quotations"—uncritically and quite foolishly produces a partisan ontology of the present that propagates imperial rule. When Carpentier describes Pauline Bonaparte's condescending and vain response to her slave's sexually motivated devotion, we see this ontology's manifestation in the European's relation to an African: "she permitted the Negro [Soliman] ... to kneel before her and kiss her feet in a gesture that Bernardin de Saint-Pierre would have interpreted as a symbol of the noble gratitude of a simple soul brought into contact with the generous teachings of the Enlightenment" (95). Such sarcasm prompts the question: who is the true simpleton here? The mistress, in thinking that she "permits" this act, the slave who attends to her "with the *false meekness* of a dog well-lessoned by the lash" (95, emphasis mine), or the scholar of the Enlightenment, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, who would see only the supreme authority of the mistress and not the implicit power of a slave obtaining what he desires: a sensuous moment with the woman he is "tortured by desire" for and thus will employ dissimulation to, however

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<sup>18</sup> See Enrique Dussel's *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber, (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995).

briefly, have (95)? Deep within the comic undertones of Carpentier's sarcasm rests a starkly evident tragic actuality of slave cunning and agency unimaginable to the imperial intelligentsia. There lies, that is to say, yet another instance of the novel's structuring affective movement. For if in the humorous "tragic declamations" of Mlle Floridor resided the seeds of her unfortunate fate and imminent fall via Ti-Noel's calculated act of rape, then, here in the Enlightenment's inane interpretation of Pauline's vanity and Soliman's fidelity lies even more forcefully the lingering sense of a far greater and very more inconceivable fall to come: the collapse of colonial rule in Saint Domingue.

Jacques-Henri Bernardin de Saint-Pierre wrote the popular *Paul et Virginie*, a romantic novel inspired by his good friend Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Although the narrative diminished the harsh reality of slavery to extol the virtues of a classless society returned to nature, in dealing with it as an actuality, it treats the subject matter more forcefully than Rousseau.<sup>19</sup> As Susan Buck-Morss writes, slavery, in the latter's "philosophical considerations," simply exists as a "root metaphor, connoting [all] that was evil about power relations."<sup>20</sup> Notwithstanding this difference, both discuss slavery obliquely and tacitly accept the African's inferiority and thus subservience to the European. Rather than desiring a classless society in which all are equal, they long for a society of castes, where one rules as equals among itself and the other, as subjects of rule, exist as living embodiments of what it means to be unequal. The African as agent, as individual capable of governing

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<sup>19</sup> There is scene where, *Virginie*, the female protagonist, honorably returns a runaway slave back to his owner, securing a promise from the latter that the slave would not be harmed.

<sup>20</sup> See *Critical Inquiry*, (Summer 2000): 821. For a discussion of slavery's abstract deployment in the French Enlightenment and particularly through an assessment of Rousseau, see Buck-Morss, 828-831.

him/herself with intellect and an artful competence (as Soliman) is not thinkable least of all knowable. Consequently, both the circumstances surrounding Mlle Floridor's rape and the flirtatious play of Pauline and Soliman are framed within *The Kingdom* by an acute sense of assured white superiority that blinds Europeans to the real danger they and their world are in. With little thought to both her sexual appeal to the male slaves or the anger she and her husband arose with their sexual appetites (M. de Mézy for young Negresses, she for M. de Mézy), Mlle Floridor, confident in her whiteness, performed, night after night, in sheer attire, tempting her seemingly certain security. Likewise, Enlightenment thinkers like Bernardin de Saint-Pierre and Rousseau as New World colonists unknowingly endangered their racial autocracy by wholly believing in the false notion of the "simple" natured African despite clear evidence otherwise. Reason, it would seem, far from being "reasonable" is a cognitive means of sustaining the un-faceable "root" at the heart of all "that [is] evil in [Western] power relations"—the African as a captive being, literally and conceptually, for a hemisphere firmly attached to racial conceit yet nonetheless endeavoring to be free, equal and prosperous.

M. Lenormand de Mézy's hypothetical speech ought be read then as a manner in which to rationalize his power as master, while, in turn, sustaining the authority of his master, imperial France. It tellingly reveals an imperial bias that the narrator inherits and which his reasoned explanation serves to reinforce; as it is grounded in the abstract rationality of M. de Mézy's "philosophical considerations," hence in the Enlightenment's utmost faith in reason. It is this faith, this fundamental conviction, that the "cold steel charges" of the slaves led by the *lwa*, "Ogoun Badagri," rallied against and defeated in the Revolution, besting "the last redoubts of the Goddess of

Reason" (*Kingdom* 103). In doing this, the slaves of Haiti provide rationality, as it has manifested in the Americas, a hereto-unknown coherency as the irrational vanities of a people enamored with itself, its philosophies and its cultural being. It is therefore significant that Pauline's gesture is read through Enlightenment notions, for when she accepts the adoration of Soliman, she stands as a goddess, towering over one of lesser competence to "generously" concede her power by acknowledging his lack thereof, namely his forced impotence (literally and figuratively). Posed thus, as the "Goddess of Reason," of whom all men of cerebral substance adore, much in the same manner men lust after her in the novel and she, with equal passion, solicits, Pauline embodies a people's zealous and ardent faith in a way of thinking and being (90-95).

It thus comes as no surprise that when she takes leave of the colony, so too does "reason." Following her ridiculous foray into Vodou, (a foray involving Soliman hoping about with little else on but a cache-sex, Pauline and Soliman "baying" like dogs in sight of a "full moon," and, to cap things off, a headless rooster "fluttering" in the background), Carpentier writes: "the departure of Pauline marked the end of such common sense as still existed in the colony" (101). Immediately following Pauline and Soliman's sexual flirtation the Revolution begins and Pauline abandons the "generous teachings of the Enlightenment" she, so perfectly symbolized (95), for the teachings of Vodou in order to protect herself from the yellow fever her husband, General Charles Leclerc, had recently succumb to. With this opportunistic act, the tenuous nature of colonial power comes to light; for whereas Pauline was once representative of the enlightened, she now became, however briefly and ironically, the "simple soul" prefacing "noble gratitude" to her Vodou



enlightener, Soliman (95). That “reason” should take leave of the colony with the capricious and vain Pauline points both to the relative absence of rationality in Saint Domingue prior to and near the Revolution’s end *and* to its Machiavellian deployment by Europeans seeking to rationalize colonialism and the dehumanization of Africans and Amerindians for personal gain.

If readers are to follow the arc of affective oscillations in this section of this chapter alone (beginning with Pauline and Soliman’s mutual flirtation (95), then moving to Pauline’s turn to Vodou (100) and ending with her departure (101)), they see the comic move into the tragic (absurd Enlightenment reading versus the real threat of slave agency) to momentarily return to the comic yet again (Pauline and Vodou) so as culminate with (as will be revealed) the tragic (reason’s departure from Saint Domingue). This movement between comedy and tragedy purposefully confounds the imperial idea of temporal, linear progress, that is, one people as more advanced in time than another. Pauline’s turn to Vodou, following her husband’s passing, could be read as that of an individual who has regressed from an “enlightened” state to that of a “primitive.” Yet, for Carpentier, the point is not that Pauline has regressed it is that Pauline was never “enlightened” and hence rational to begin with. The problem is that her whiteness allow her to be automatically read and coded as rational. More to the point, the central issue, for Carpentier, is the reasoning that allows Pauline to be and remain “enlightened” (read: rational) when she clearly is not. Through this movement between comedy and tragedy, Carpentier wants his readers to question the thinking that allows for and encourages Pauline’s egotistical actions; he wants readers to question the accepted wisdom that allows mindless self-interested vanity to masquerade as reason. The comic and tragic oscillations that occur within the

novel around Pauline is a means then to ultimately point readers to an enduring, uniquely American, tragic actuality fully brought to light with Pauline's departure from Saint Domingue: reason's utter irrationality as practiced by the West in the Americas.

With this subtle movement between the comic and the tragic, Carpentier stresses that reason, in the Americas, was not guided by a pure and innocent desire for knowledge and truth, as expressed in the German Enlightenment's motto, "dare to know," but he posits it was simply another means of reinforcing one's position of power. Consequently, reason's presence, in the miraculous happenings of Makandal's execution, establishes that in critically relying on the sacred sensibility of the colonial subject, the marvelous is set against the West not simply because it represents convention. It is opposed to the West because its conventions are seeped in a rationality that has concurrently produced an absurd irrationality—here, the savage staging of death and the move to critically ascertain the other with little attempt to recognize the other. Carpentier thus responds to the Enlightenment (French or German), its enduring significance in contemporary intellectual and political thought, with three words: "dare to see." We therefore circle back to Masson and Cortés: seeing but not seeing, with the faithless rendered "impotent" and "speechless" at the actuality before their eyes.

#### **THE UNIVERSAL AND THE OBJECT**

If Carpenter desired that the Americas be seen and hence critically attend to by the West, he ironically takes great pains to make Haiti, his medium, un-seeable. He achieves this by equating Haiti's singular reality with a broader human actuality. Venturing far from the particular and the

stated interests of his theory, the narrator states,

Now he [Ti-Noël] understood that a man never knows for whom he suffers and hopes. He suffers and hopes and toils for people he will never know, and who, in turn, will suffer and hope and toil for others who will not be happy either, for man always seeks happiness far beyond that which is meted out to him. (184-185)

At this point in the narrative, the kingdom of Christophe in the North has fallen and the mulattos of the South and the West have ascended through the leadership of President Boyer. Ti-Noël has returned to the dilapidated plantation of M. Lenormand de Mézy, and in the haze of senility, experiences this “supremely lucid moment” (184). What should immediately strike us is the gradual shift in subject from Ti-Noël (“he”) to an unmodified “man.” This shift tellingly occurs in the midst of recounting the recurrent nature of conflict. Keeping in mind both the significance of Racine’s play to Carpentier’s narrative structure and the tradition of universalizing existence through Greek antiquity it brings with it, readers are moved to read “man” abstractly, as revealing of the angst and struggles of an “all” broadly constructed. Now the opposition between the West and the Americas, established convention and American innovation, and the faithless and the faithful dissolves. The passage continues towards a tragic realization: “for man always seeks happiness far beyond that which is meted out to him” and thus to *Phèdre’s* most singular disclosure—human existence as enchainment (41). Although disheartening for all who have cried “Macandal saved!” (52), Carpentier claims that life’s true beauty and joy are in the revolutionary attempt: “In the Kingdom of Heaven *there is no grandeur to be won*, inasmuch as there all is an established hierarchy, the unknown is revealed, existence is infinite, there is no possibility of

sacrifice, all is rest and joy” (emphasis mine, 185). This realization is then followed by what one could only call tragic insight: “For this reason, bowed down by suffering and duties, beautiful in the midst of his misery, capable of loving in the face of afflictions and trials, man finds his greatness, his fullest measure, only in the Kingdom of This World” (185). With the harsh contradictions that (we are often told) give life its meaning, Carpentier rounds out the stark realities of recurrent and senseless conflict, so as to remind the reader of narrative’s message by reiterating its title, specifically, that there is richness to be found in revolutionary action regardless of the results.

Together these lines form a beautiful and moving passage and yet we cannot help but feel Haiti’s absence. Carpentier writes that it is “only in the Kingdom of this World [that] man finds his greatness, his fullest measure” (185). Although this is true and revealing of the exemplary figures in the text (Christophe and Makandal) and the feats accomplished (a siege of poison, Sans Souci, the Citadel Laferrière), it is a statement devoid of Afro-Caribbean spiritual sensibility grounding the text. A broad conviction in man is demonstrated, but we do not see the spiritual fortitude that was initially linked to the title. Recall Makandal’s execution, “Macandal had kept his word, remaining the Kingdom of this World” (52). Makandal’s physical death did not negate his spiritual continuation. In fact, the slaves accurately divine that he will live on as “a buzzing mosquito ...[to] ... light on the very tricorne of the commander of the troops [and] laugh at the dismay of the whites” (51). Later it is revealed that while attempting to retake the island, General Charles Leclerc and his troops were ravaged by yellow fever, a disease carried by the

mosquito ( *The Kingdom* 95-100).<sup>21</sup> Haiti's disappearance is thus striking, particularly as it is spiritual grounding and the sense of place associated with it that sustains Carpentier's theory.

When we look closer at how this disappearance transpires, we find that Haiti's absence occurs because of the harsh reality it embodies. Returning to the first lines of Carpentier's universalizing act—"Now he understood that a man never knows for whom he *suffers and hopes*. He *suffers and hopes and toils* for people he will never know, and who, in turn, will *suffer and hope and toil* for others who will not be happy either..." (184-185, emphasis mine)—we find repeated "suffers and hopes," "suffers and hopes and toils" and again "suffer and hope and toil" (184-185). Haiti's universality rests with this recurrent advent, its reality this ceaseless suffering. The vast majority of its people, tragically, remain as "a body of flesh to which things happened" (184). Although this image of the body is passive and is connected to Ti-Noël's neglect of his African forebears, it also bears witness to the harsh reality of universal suffering and more importantly for Carpentier, the keenly American experience of failed revolution. The people of Haiti, even with untiring resistance, have remained a "body of flesh to which things happened."

It becomes important then that the novel's most animated element and most apt revolutionary participant appear abject after the Revolution is won.

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<sup>21</sup> French and English military reports (and historians) have used the spread and proliferation of yellow fever as an explanation of the slaves' victory, citing the number of French and English soldiers decimated by disease. According to C.L.R James, "to read English and French accounts of their operations in San Domingo one would believe that but for yellow fever they would have been easily victorious. But up to April there had been no yellow fever. Toussaint had lost more than half of his forces even before the campaign began. Leclerc had raised thousands of black troops, and some of Toussaint's troops had fought with him. Yet in the eight weeks of February and March 17,000 French veterans had landed, 5,000 were in hospital, 5,000 were dead, and the first period was not yet complete. The 'war of death' and the hunting down of the black generals who would not present themselves to be deported was a total failure." See *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*, (New York: Vintage, 1989), 323.

Nature is presented as beaten, as weary and “weighed” down by “so many blows, sweats, [and] revolts” (184). Referring to the state of Northern Haiti at the height of Christophe’s self-aggrandizing rule, Carpentier writes: “But around the turn in the road, plants and trees seemed to have dried up, to have become skeletons of plants and trees in earth which was no longer red and glossy, but had taken on the look of dust in a cellar” (*The Kingdom* 108). We encounter nature at its lowest point, without the beauty or luster that would attest to its normative vitality. Early in the novel, however, nature is an active presence. Its fecundity and vivaciousness are among the “unremarked riches” in the New World that lends to the region’s marvelous-ness (“The Marvelous in America” 86).

During Makandal’s revolt, nature yielded poisonous plants that “*lurked*, as though *waiting to spring*, in glasses on night tables ... in bread, wine, fruit and salt” (34, emphasis mine) and when conscripted into revolutionary service by Makandal, it appeared as “protectors of little armored beings” and experts of espionage: “to his surprise he discovered the secret life of strange species given to disguise, confusion, and camouflage, protectors of the little armored beings that avoid the pathways of ants” (23). In these images the stark and bleak existence of nature in post-revolutionary Haiti is unthinkable. We see in them an active presence imbued with life. Furthermore, through the faith-inspired direction of Makandal, we see a dynamic force that lent itself to the revolutionary will of man, as it endeavored to protect the slaves as it did “the little armored beings,” spreading poison “in glasses on night tables ... in bread, wine, fruit and salt” with efficiency and stealth (34). With the passing of Makandal’s revolt, the Revolution and with Christophe’s dehumanizing reign at its height, nature is without faith—and thus its marvelous-ness.

Lacking vigor, it is broken, passively struggling for life. Carpentier thus points to an unspoken tragedy in struggles for power, the ecological devastation it necessitates. Nature therefore becomes the battered terrain through which man seeks his freedom; as the female (“mother nature/mother earth”) it must be defiled for a change of state.

What ultimately disappears with Haiti, in Carpentier’s shift to the universal through an abstract rendering of man, is a burgeoning land in ruins and a devout people submitted to a means of governance that requires their continued subjugation. The phrase, “a body of flesh to which things happened” (*The Kingdom* 184) while made in reference to Ti-Noel’s passivity in moments that demand forthright action, must also speak to the abject state of human existence in post-revolutionary Haiti—specifically, to the forced industry of “pregnant girls” (116); to the separation of loved ones in the flight to the hills and thus from new masters in old garb (176); and finally to the very horror of a people’s endless conscription in matters of the state. What Carpentier attempts to suppress in incorporating Haiti’s tumultuous post-revolutionary state in a universal narrative of man is a woeful reality that would call Revolution’s continued salience into question, and one that would undermine his privileging of the revolutionary attempt as a means in which to radically alter man’s material and moral condition.

#### **PRESERVING REVOLUTION**

With Haiti’s abject reality elided, Carpentier can uphold an image of the Haitian Revolution as everlastingly significant and worthwhile. He achieves this by deliberately suppressing the historical figure bearing his main character’s name, Ti-Noël, and also with his cursory treatment of prominent

revolutionary leaders. Carpentier's Ti-Noël is Haiti's Jean Petit-Noël Prieur, an African born rebel leader of Northern Haiti.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the passive figure of Ti-Noël, whose boldest act of insurgency was rape, Petit-Noël Prieur was an active and fearless leader in the colony's struggle for independence. The question then becomes: what is being accomplished by this intentional repression of Petit-Noël Prieur in *The Kingdom*? More importantly, how does it preserve revolution's continued saliency for Carpentier? We can tie Petit-Noël's erasure to that of the Revolution's well-known leaders, Toussaint and Dessalines.<sup>23</sup> In the novel, Toussaint is referred to in passing as a "the cabinet maker," and Dessalines is addressed briefly as having entered into a coalition with the *lwas* to secure Haitian independence (45, 109). Those unfamiliar with the Revolution would have no indication of their significance, and those that do could feel Carpentier neglected crucial aspects of the uprising. Victor Figueroa argues that Toussaint is elided because he represents reason, the Enlightenment, and because of his anti-Vodou actions.<sup>24</sup> Focusing on Dessalines, Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert argues that his absence reflects Carpentier's sense of hopelessness concerning Haiti. She maintains that unlike other leaders, Dessalines intended to eradicate false claims to land and

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<sup>22</sup> See Carolyn Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 231; Hubert Cole, *Christophe, King of Haiti*, (New York: The Viking Press, 1967), 124.

<sup>23</sup> Carpentier was aware of Petit-Noël Prieur as a historical figure. As an avid historian whose research for the novel included seminal Haitian Revolutionary texts like Médéric Moreau de Saint-Méry's *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique e historique de la partie française de l'Isle de Saint Domingue* (1797), Pierre de Vassière's *Saint-Domingue: La société et la vie créoles sous l'ancien régime, 1629–1789* (1909) and Victor Schoelcher's *Vie de Toussaint-Louverture* (1889), he would have come across a passing reference concerning the rebel leader. Moreover, as Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert reveals, when visiting Haiti in 1943, Carpentier ran in theatrical circles and would have known of Dominique Hyppolyte's award-winning 1940 play on Dessalines titled *Le Torrent* which featured a character, of historical fact, named Ti-Noël. See Paravisini-Gebert 117.

<sup>24</sup> See Victor Figueroa, "The Kingdom of Black Jacobins: C.L.R. James and Alejo Carpentier on the Haitian Revolution," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 25.2. (Fall 2006), 62.



thus secure the people's access to it.<sup>25</sup> Both positions, however, fail to address the importance Carpentier attaches to revolution. Toussaint and Dessalines are absent from the text because they represent the origins of a state opposed to a people, and hence (to borrow from Michel-Rolph Trouillot) a state set against the nation. Christophe is included to highlight the gap already created, to expose the state's continued use of the masses as a "body to which things happened."

C.L.R James hails Toussaint as a figure of enlightenment because of his diplomacy, his cultivation of his reading as well as writing, and because he recognized that the colony's tie to the West could not be severed.<sup>26</sup> Toussaint, James argues, recognized that there was no Africa to turn back to and thus that there was only a future in the West.<sup>27</sup> Yet, while we can envision him as a figure of enlightenment for all of these things, the policies he enacted to ensure the colony's progress and continued economic growth went against the wishes of the people. He invites former planters back to the island to resume their plantations and thus re-introduced plantation labor into the colony after slavery was abolished.<sup>28</sup> To be clear, he does this to economically sustain his army and, paradoxically, to ensure the slaves' freedom from the very thing he had returned them to— forced labor.<sup>29</sup> Carolyn E. Fick has argued that the goals of the slaves prior to, during and after the Revolution were to cultivate land as they pleased and in this way to create a life for themselves on their own terms.<sup>30</sup> A slave imprisoned by a French officer, tellingly spoke to this when asked why the slaves "burn everything" in battle: "We have a right to

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<sup>25</sup> Paravisini-Gebert 123.

<sup>26</sup> James 286, 24-26.

<sup>27</sup> James 271.

<sup>28</sup> James 259-262.

<sup>29</sup> Fick, "Dilemmas of Emancipation," 12-13.

<sup>30</sup> "Dilemmas of Emancipation," 12.

burn what we cultivate because a man has a right to dispose of his own labour.”<sup>31</sup> Arguably, Toussaint ignored this right and thus the people’s vision of freedom when he reinstated plantation labor to support his troops, placed the newly freed under the care of their former owners, and governed the nation as though freedom could simply exist for the slave as a political abstraction.

Dessalines can be thought of as more aware of the needs of the people than Toussaint. He pursued a radical economic policy “aimed at diversification of exports and quick accumulation within the state sector.”<sup>32</sup> This plan could have saved the nation from future economic dependency while providing peasants greater access to land.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Dessalines still continued to broaden the gap between the nation and the state. He returned the people to forced labor through “militarized agriculture.”<sup>34</sup> In “The Haitian Revolution in Interstices and Shadows,” Paravisini-Gebert argues that Carpentier dismisses Dessalines’ significance to the Haitian people and thus ignores that unlike the other Revolutionary leaders, he was made into a *lwa* by the people.<sup>35</sup> Ultimately, she maintains that Carpentier’s text “stands awkwardly against new ways of understating the Haitian Revolution.”<sup>36</sup> These are strong charges, and as Carpentier was invested in writing the Revolution from below, we should attend to them in depth, particularly as writing a subaltern rendering of the uprising works to abstract Revolutionary Haiti from its abject post-revolutionary state.

Turning now to Dessalines’ historical actions, we see his hand in the

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<sup>31</sup> James 361.

<sup>32</sup> Trouillot, *State Against Nation*, 45.

<sup>33</sup> Trouillot, *State Against Nation*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Trouillot, *State Against Nation*, 46.

<sup>35</sup> Paravisini-Gebert 122.

<sup>36</sup> Paravisini-Gebert 126.

nation's abject reality despite his best efforts. During the War of Independence (1802-1804), Toussaint was arrested and deported to France (1803).<sup>37</sup> Of the remaining revolutionary leadership (black and mulatto), Dessalines was most opposed to the French. Nevertheless, when the other generals defected to join the French he did as well. His was a tactical decision and no real indication of his commitment to France.<sup>38</sup> During this about-face, African rebel leaders continued fighting with the masses for their freedom, Petit-Noël leading a band among them.<sup>39</sup> When the generals who defected returned to the struggle against the French, tensions between the rebel leaders and the generals were high. The generals had terrorized the rebels in the name of the French and the rebels, in turn, terrorized the generals for their loyalty to the French.<sup>40</sup> In their return to anti-colonial struggle, the generals made Dessalines their commander-in-chief, without consulting those that maintained the fight—the rebels.<sup>41</sup> The latter were asked to recognize Dessalines as their commander to ensure a united front.<sup>42</sup> Petit-Noël refused, declining to serve under Dessalines and, in particular, Christophe who was the first to defect.<sup>43</sup> So opposed was he that when an envoy (Paul Louverture) was sent to “plead unity” he was executed.<sup>44</sup> Dessalines, seeing Petit-Noël and others like him as “obstacles to freedom,” killed Petit-Noël and those of like mind that obstructed his vision.<sup>45</sup> Once all were united, he led Haiti to independence.

When one among the many that sustained the revolutionary fight

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<sup>37</sup> James 334.

<sup>38</sup> James 240, 287, 314.

<sup>39</sup> Cole, 126.

<sup>40</sup> James 352.

<sup>41</sup> Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 231; James 357; Cole 130.

<sup>42</sup> Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 231; Cole 130.

<sup>43</sup> Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 233.

<sup>44</sup> Cole 131.

<sup>45</sup> Fick, *Making of Haiti* 233; Cole 131-132.

becomes an “obstacle to freedom” we have to ask ourselves what is freedom and for whom is it intended? As Fick notes, the rebel leaders were the closest to the masses than any in the revolutionary leadership.<sup>46</sup> If these leaders become “obstacles to freedom” the people are in no way entitled to it or at the very least they are not entitled to a freedom they desire. If, as Paravisini-Gebert argues, Dessalines best exemplifies the interests of the people, in his connection to the “land, its history and the gods,” it is because no other viable alternative was afforded. Dessalines, albeit better and more significant to the masses than Toussaint and Christophe, significantly contributed to the growing fissure between the nation and the state by not accepting the rebels on their own terms and hence by not attending to a vital link to the masses.

The erasure of Toussaint and Dessalines in *The Kingdom* works to elide Haitians within the text and thus the failure of their revolutionary endeavors. It functions to suppress an abject reality predicated on past revolutionary leadership. Haitian historian Claude Moïse writes,

[f]rom the revolt of August 1791 under the direction of Boukman to the establishing of Toussaint Louverture's regime in 1801, one can trace the itinerary of a people struggling for freedom, and through this struggle one sees the new interest groups confronting each other for the conquest of hegemonic positions in the construction of the new state.... [while] the nation, the peasant masses, takes shape underneath and outside of these partisan struggles.<sup>47</sup>

Carpentier readily saw a “people struggling for freedom;” from Makandal to the mulattos’ ascendancy, the novel depicts a people ceaselessly struggling.

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<sup>46</sup> Fick, *Making of Haiti*, 233.

<sup>47</sup> Moïse qtd. in Fick, “Dilemmas of Emancipation,” fn20.

He also perceived “the conquest of hegemonic positions in the construction of the new state” in the war between the North and the South and in the historical figures elided. Furthermore, he discerned “the nation, the masses, [taking] shape underneath and outside of these ... struggles” in their flight to the hills (*The Kingdom* 176), their religion—set against the Catholicism of Christophe—and in a senile old man’s endeavor to become a goose and join a new flock, and hence new people (181-184).

Carpentier also knew the abject reality elided in the novel could not exist without the struggle for power that removed the Petit-Noëls from positions of consequence. With their deaths went the potential for a future of difference, one unlike what most had experienced in slavery. Accordingly, to acknowledge Petit-Noël is to acknowledge the failure of revolution. It is to acknowledge a present that jeopardizes Carpentier’s investment in revolution. What Carpentier saw in Haiti, its abject reality past and present, was how easily it could inspire hopeless and defeatist sentiments concerning revolutionary struggle. Carpentier consciously tries to circumvent this despondence by diminishing Haiti’s grim state and key revolutionary figures. The “awkwardness” Paravisini-Gebert recognizes in his text thus derives from his attempt to uphold the Revolution without the people and conditions that sustained it (126). In constructing a novel that does as much to discuss Haiti without discussing Haiti, Carpentier’s focus is not on Haiti per-se but on the idea of Haiti—on what it (outside of itself) can represent. For Carpentier, Haiti, as idea, represented the infinite possibilities for radical social and geopolitical transformation to be had in “The Kingdom of this World.” Ever the intellectual, Haiti was therefore more appealing to him as an abstraction.

## CONCERNING FAITH AND PROGRESS

In constructing and articulating his theory of modernity through Haiti, Carpentier had to contend with the Haitian paradox. As previously articulated, the Haitian Revolution propelled the region into the modern era; yet the nation's subsequent political and economic decline stood in sharp contrast to its singular achievement. Haiti's past and present begged the question: if progress can be understood as repetition with difference, where is the Haitian difference? Carpentier's treatment of Haitian history reveals there is no difference. The nation has "suffered, hoped and toiled" from 1791 to the novel's publication, 1949. And yet, Carpentier deliberately seeks to preserve revolution, the very thing that has arguably retarded the nation's progress. His preservation begs the question: why continue to uphold rebellion, if successfully revolution has not ensured progressive gain?

Revolution and progress are closely aligned for Carpentier and, as we have seen in his turn to the universal, success is of little consequence; what matters is the revolutionary attempt. Once abstracted from the abject and hence the failure of upheaval, Haiti embodies a people's collective belief in themselves. We must remember, "man's greatness consists in the very fact of wanting to be better than he is" (*The Kingdom* 185). New World exception emerges from the people's belief in their own potential, in their conviction that they are better than their present state and hence in their awareness of their latent greatness. It involves believing "[one has] a mission to carry out, although no intimation ... [has] revealed its nature" (171). Carpentier's attention to Afro-Caribbean spirituality is thus politically oriented. Spiritual conviction of the Afro-Caribbean kind offers an unwavering confidence in the seemingly impossible that, for Carpentier, allows a region to re-imagine itself,

and correspondingly, its own abject position in a Northern and Western-dominated present. We can see then that conviction is intrinsically tied to the region's ability to progress. Haiti's absence therefore enables futurity, a move beyond stasis.

In the very last moments of the novel, Haiti is negated completely. We return to the same—the moment of conquest and the West's singularity. Carpentier writes,

The old man hurled his declaration of war against the new masters [mulattos]... at that moment a great green wind, [blew] from the ocean ... with a loud roar. ... And all night long the sea, turned to rain . . . From that moment Ti-Noël was never seen again... except perhaps by that wet vulture who sat with outspread wings, drying himself in the sun, a cross of feathers which finally folded itself up and flew off into the thick shade of Bois Caïman. (186)

Reading this we cannot help but to recollect Makandal's prophesy. Ti-Noël states, "one day he would give the sign for the great uprising, and the Lords of Back There, headed by [the *lwas*] Damballah... and Ogoun, ... would ... unleash the cyclone that would round out the work of men's hands" (*The Kingdom* 43). The end intimates that this work is taking place now. The hurricane has directed the vulture's flight back to *Bois Kaïyman*, to the very start of the Revolution. It would seem then that Haiti, abject reality and all, reappears in the text's very last moment.

Yet we should be cautious of such a reading; the return we see is a re-arrival of the same removed from a Haitian particular. Here, time's circularity reaches its pinnacle, as not only do we return to the revolutionary moment (*Bois Kaïyman*) but we revisit the moment of conquest as well. With a veiled

reference to the Taíno Indians and their god, Hur'can/Jur'can (hurricane), the European in the parasitic vulture's "cross of feathers" and the African with *Bois Kaïyman*, the original struggle that claimed the Taínos, that made the African sub-human and the European a false god among man is invoked. We thus end the novel in the baroque, with the sensibility Carpentier had yet to fully articulate in 1949 but that nonetheless conditions his "marvelous" reading of Haiti—for we are concurrently placed at the end and the beginning, of which there is no difference.<sup>48</sup>

The vulture's presence furthers this theoretically abstract ending; in one vein, it represents the oppressor, be it European, mulatto or a black king, because of its symbolic reappearance. It reveals the struggle that would keep the American mass as a "body to which things happened" and hence in the same human conditions conquest required. Adding to this is the significance of birds to New World cosmogonies. As "privileged signs of non-occidental thought," the vulture, in another vein, addresses a new beginning, specifically a start visible in the potential of regional thought and thought-inspired action.<sup>49</sup> In addition, the vulture is naturally most vulnerable when in its Christ-like posture. It requires at minimum thirty minutes to dry its feathers before it can take flight. There is thus a chance for action; there is a small

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<sup>48</sup> We should be cautious of readings that would excise the marvelous from Carpentier's theorization of modernity in favor of the more recent baroque. To do away with the marvelous is to neglect the nascent presence of the baroque in Carpentier's early theorization of the marvelous real and in his textual articulation. Furthermore, it is to deny the inherent relation of the marvelous and the baroque. Contradictory as it may be to extol the singularity of a new artistic and political tradition (the marvelous real) in the face of a sensibility privileging the importance of many recurrent (as well as blinding) Western traditions (the baroque), they are both significant to critically assessing a political and cultural situation (brought into being by slavery as well as colonialism) that configured a tradition of thought and retarded alternative ways of envisioning the world. See Echevarría 153-154 and Luís Madureira, *Cannibal Modernities: Postcoloniality and the The Avant-Garde in Caribbean and Brazilian Literature*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 171.

<sup>49</sup> Madureira 190.



opening for change in faith-inspiring, and hence self-determining, thought. This erstwhile return to Haiti is not quite that. It is a salute to a faith-inspired realization. It underscores the importance of the revolutionary attempt and reveals the region's chance for progress.

In subsuming Haiti to an abstract rendering grounded in a broad overture to the universality of human existence, Carpentier must return to a Western particular. The title of the novel's final chapter is "Agnus Dei" (Lamb of God). Ti-Noël's death, like that of other New World people, is thus posited as a Christian sacrifice for the region. The reliance on a Western particular (Christianity), routinely touted as a universal, is troubling. The text moves from a Haitian actuality (Vodou) to offer a faith divested of spirituality only to then present that very conviction through a regionally specific spirituality parading as a human commonality. In an ironic turn of events, we find that in preserving New World exception he must acknowledge the West's. In doing so, he reenacts the conceptual limits afforded to the region by conquest—the West as originator of all things singular and worthy of replication. We are thus not only at the beginning and end of key moments in American history but we are at the beginning and the end of the region's conceptual reach. Carpentier's desire to maneuver around Haiti, its people and abject post-revolutionary reality, maligns his literary articulation of the marvelous real as regional singularity becomes no more than Europe in New World face. The tragic mode governing this novel would use Haiti to unveil the ironies of human existence through comic and tragic oscillations. In doing so, Carpentier could express with the utmost conviction the exception and possibility of the New World. Yet in not extending this to Haiti, he disclosed the narrative's greatest irony: its ability to see so clearly and, yet, not see at all.

## CHAPTER 3

### LAUGHING BACK: HAITI, HISTORY AND TRAGEDY

*Complexions only grin above the skeleton.*

—DEREK WALCOTT, *HENRI CHRISTOPHE*

*Haiti will never be normal*

—DEREK WALCOTT, *HENRI CHRISTOPHE*

If the Caribbean past were reducible to sound and sound alone, what sonorous eruption would we hear? Would it be the booming ire of Hur'can's roar, the sorrowful whimper of lost peoples and persons, or would it be the puckish chime of un-abiding laughter, the musing and bitter guffaw opened by the lingering wound of Hur'can's spiritual absence, of Amerindians, Africans, East Asians, Asians and Europeans lost and demeaned to the rise, fall and rise again of empire? For Derek Walcott, our ears would ring with the aural resonances of laughter and warm to the jokes chronicling the hilarity of the American experience, that is, the tall tales we have woven about our racial differences. These differences, he argues in his drama, *Henri Christophe: A Chronicle in Seven Scenes*, and, more broadly, in his oeuvre of Haitian Revolutionary plays *The Haitian Trilogy*, are rendered moot by the "grin above the skeleton" confronting all upon death.<sup>1</sup> This grin discloses the utter nonsensicality of racial differences torn asunder when death and its minion, humor, forces recognition of what lies beneath the civilities of modern existence: an inhuman comedy mocking the potentiality of human and

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Haitian Trilogy*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002), 60,101. All further citations of *Henri Christophe* will be made in the text.

humane relations. And yet it is not comedy that comes to mind when we think of the Caribbean past, it is tragedy. Fully cognizant of this, Walcott crafts the following lines for a character in the play *Drums and Colours*: “The history of these islands has been tragic from birth,/Their soils have been scoured, their peoples forgotten,/While the powers of Europe struggled for possession/And when that wealth has been drained, we have been/abandoned.”<sup>2</sup> Riddled with such sorrows and sufferings, and with unfulfilled hopes and dreams seemingly at every turn, many a mind are accordingly turned to the unhealed wound ironically issuing forth this laughter and thus to the bitter timbre of its paradoxical manifestation.

The Walcottian project of decolonization put forth in the chief text considered here, the collections of plays *The Haitian Trilogy*, is adamantly opposed to the overwhelming significance Caribbean critics and laypersons grant the bitter timbre of this laughter and the Caribbean past it calls to mind. Such a tragic reading of the region’s history shapes, for Walcott, how Caribbean persons think and act their present and future into being. If, he argues, the region’s much noted “quarrel with history” hedges on a bitter and self-deprecating charge of nothingness and if history’s importance rests, as Edward Baugh recognizes, with its ability to grant Caribbean persons a “glorious past to worship ... or some sorrowful past to lament,” then they will continue to think and act inequity into existence.<sup>3</sup> With such sentiments,

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<sup>2</sup> See *The Haitian Trilogy*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002), 259-260. All further citations of *Drums and Colours* will be made in the text.

<sup>3</sup> In a review of V.S. Naipaul’s work, Walcott takes Naipaul to task for the following, now infamous, utterance: “History is built around achievement and creation: and nothing *has ever been created* in the West Indies.” Walcott finds that sentiments like this concerning the past denigrates the Caribbean sense of self. For Naipaul’s quote and Walcott’s review of Naipaul’s *Middle Passages*, see “History and Picong... in the Middle Passage,” *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. David Hamner, (Boulder: Three Continental Press, 1997), 19. See Baugh, “The West Indian and the Quarrel with History,” *Tapia* (February 27, 1967) 11.

Caribbean peoples will continually cultivate self-loathing and/or self love, depending on what role they occupy in history —victor (“master”) or victim (“slave”/“indentured servant”). The majority will ultimately continue to nourish a longing for a denied superiority. Caribbean art, he finds, will all too often betray the region’s true genius consumed as it is by a past regarded with contrition or more crushingly, shame or anger. Regarding Caribbean artists of the 1970s and their turn to Africa, Walcott writes: “Pastoralists of the African revival should know that what is needed is not new names for old things, or old names for old things, but the faith of using the old names anew, so that mongrel as I am, something prickles in me when I see the word ‘Ashanti’ as with the word ‘Warwickshire,’ ... both baptizing this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian.”<sup>4</sup> In rejecting a tragic relation to history, Walcott refuses to further an ideology of existence that requires the antagonism of difference, the iniquitous drama of master versus slave. A “slave” adopting the “master’s” polarizing discourse of racial distinctions does not stop the “slave” from being in bondage but merely reinforces, for Walcott, his/her subservience. As such, Africa’s resurrection in the place of Europe by the Caribbean artists of the 1970s still sustains the supreme place of

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<sup>4</sup> See “What the Twilight Says,” *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998), 9. All further citations will be made in the text. There are echoes of Alejo Carpentier in Walcott’s work as evinced here with Walcott’s reading of the Caribbean as hybrid. This, as we know from chapter two of this project, is akin to Carpentier’s *criollo*. Furthermore, Walcott’s call for a collective conviction in Caribbean potentiality is very much like Carpentier’s own desire as expressed in his theory, *lo real maravilloso* (the marvelous real). Yet another interesting point of convergence between the two is the importance of theater to their theoretical conceptions of the American present; both make use of drama to convey the “marvelousness” and hence “nothingness” of the region. I will treat this latter point regarding “nothingness” shortly. For the magical realist convergence between Walcott and Carpentier, see David Mikics, “Derek Walcott and Alejo Carpentier: Nature, History and the Caribbean Writer,” *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, ed. Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995). For more on Walcott’s relation to Carpentier see also, J. Michael Dash, “New World Mediterranean,” *The Other America: Caribbean Literature in a New World Context*, (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998) 99-100.

Europe. The move made to restore Africa is one rooted in a desire to be like Europe and not as oneself. Through his reading of post-emancipation Haiti, Walcott suggests that what the Caribbean needs within the postcolonial present is a new politics and poetics of being. The region needs an epistemic shift from the tragic to the comic, moving from a longing for “noble ruins,” predicated on a desire to be like the West in African face to a celebration of nothingness. Caribbean peoples, he insists, should welcome the Adamic (i.e. infinite) possibilities to be had with being made (forcibly or not) Caribbean and thus anew.<sup>5</sup>

Seriously attending to Walcott’s call for a new politics and poetics of existence, this chapter reads *The Haitian Trilogy* as a polemic wholly against what Walcott views as the Haitian example of decolonization—specifically, decolonization as a violent vengeance-seeking project of racial enmity fueled by a tragic relation to the past.<sup>6</sup> Such a foreboding understanding of tragedy is opposed to the more propitious interpretations of the ethos offered in this project. In fact, Walcott’s reading poses a serious challenge to my work, as it

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<sup>5</sup> Writing of his adolescent yearning for a history of grand achievements in “What the Twilight Says,” Walcott recalls how the Haitian Revolutionary generals, Jean Jacques Dessalines and Henri Christophe, were for him the region’s only “noble ruins” (11). They were visible iconic representations of the grand exploits crowding Europe’s history books and landscape. I will return to this point later in the chapter. The term “Adamic” is yet another instance of the intellectual similarities between Carpentier and Walcott. Book Two of Walcott’s autobiographical poem, *Another Life*, is prefaced with an epigraph from Carpentier’s novel *The Lost Steps*; the portion quoted includes the phrase “Adam’s task”, signaling the immense significance of Carpentierian thought to Walcott’s own thinking. As articulated in Walcott’s essay, “The Figure of Crusoe”, “Adamic”, like Carpentier argues, speaks to the genius and potential of the Caribbean. In Walcott’s essay, it addresses this potentiality through the inventive and creative possibilities to be had with being the first man—Adam and, more controversially, Robinson Crusoe and Christophe Columbus. Each man exemplifies the sacred and hermit-like existence of the quintessential artist as they were without “things” and yet managed to create all “things” anew: Adam, peoples, Columbus, a “new” world and Crusoe (with Friday’s assistance), new “Adams” in Trinidadians; see “The Figure of Crusoe”, 33-40. See also “What the Twilight Says,” 6 and “Muse of History,” 40-41.

<sup>6</sup> Paula Burnett’s work in *Derek Walcott: Politics and Poetics*, (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2000) first brought Walcott’s stand against a tragic existence to critical attention. For a succinct rendering of her discussion on the tragic, see her chapter on Walcott’s perspective on history, 63-91.

requires that one question whether the tragic can at any time be divested from the West and thus productive for scholarly endeavors focused on unveiling alternative non-Western ways of thinking and being. Locating my understanding of tragedy within an ancient Athens seeking to police both the mourning practices of women (and thus the spiritual sense of a people), and the lives of barbarians and slaves, I read tragedy within a broad holistic framework of spirituality, politics and unacknowledged epistemologies. I read it as having its roots not only in *The Theatre of Dionysus* but also in the cross-cultural exchange of diverse peoples in (compelled or voluntary) motion. Antiquity was a cosmopolitan moment, and like our own shaped by un/mis-recognized variations in thought and being.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, although the tragic may be claimed by the West and thus all too easily enlisted to stand for a particular colonial episteme, it need not be thought solely in this manner. It can be broadened to tend to colonial and neocolonial experiences and thus to the positions and stances that challenge a Western existence like the many barbarians, slaves and women challenging an ancient Athenian. This chapter reads Walcott's continued turn to the Haitian Revolution as a tragic impulse in its own right. Walcott first treated the Upheaval in 1948 with *Henri Christophe*, the opening play of *The Haitian Trilogy*, then again in 1958 with the second play, *Drums and Colours*, and lastly in 1984 with the compilation's final play, *The Haitian Earth*. I argue that his forty year analysis of the Upheaval speaks to a desire for a life-altering instance of "ruin." That is to say, it calls attention to a yearning for a moment in time in which the colonial order of existence was in ruins, when the Caribbean could itself create a viable actuality built on

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<sup>7</sup> For the globalized nature of antiquity see the edited collection *Connectivity in Antiquity: Globalization as Long-term Historical process*, eds., Øystein Sakala LaBianca and Sandra Arnold Scham, (Oakville: Equinox Publishing, 2006).

nothing, on a razed past existence. His Haitian Revolutionary work is tragic, for it tells of a wistful longing for what could have been and what could be for Haiti and the Caribbean.

At issue in these plays is what follows regional emancipation, how the Haitian people chose to exist in freedom. *The Haitian Trilogy* can be said therefore to take up where C.L.R James' *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Overture and the San Domingo Revolution* leaves off.<sup>8</sup> It turns to Haiti not to celebrate emancipation by chronicling a path to freedom *but* to focus on the problem of liberation for colonies that have now become nations. For this reason, Walcott's persistent turn to the Haitian Revolution is not to be thought of as an engagement with Haiti and its politics, it must be regarded as a critical grappling with the postcolonial present. The collection's chief concern is with the social issues (continued inequity) that materialize when political and economic decolonization prove insufficient. Accordingly, the chief question driving Walcott's extended consideration of the Haitian Revolution is: how do postcolonial peoples think and act freedom into being and thus free their minds as they have liberated their bodies? More to the point: how are they to do so without repeating the mistakes of the past and thus without abiding by a tragic conception of existence encouraging but one means of radical decolonization—the problematic Haitian variety?

Guided by a deep commitment to total regional liberation, *The Haitian Trilogy* ought be read as one cohesive piece guided by one focused concern — the politics of decolonization. Despite the time-span between each dramatic text (ranging from nine years between the first play, *Henri Christophe*, and the

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<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to Paul Breslin for this point. See *Nobody's Nation: Reading Derek Walcott*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001) 76. There he makes this precise assertion in reference to *Henri Christophe*.

second, *Drums and Colours*, and twenty-six years between the latter and the closing play, *The Haitian Earth*), the collection's subject matter has remained constant: how the newly emancipated should exist as a collective in freedom. The spirit and fervor of decolonization binds these plays together, particularly when we note that two of the three (*Drums and Colours* and *The Haitian Earth*) were directly related to regional and national decolonization efforts. Written in commemoration of the opening of the short-lived West Indian Federation (1958-1962), the historical pageant, *Drums and Colours* (1958), offers a broad sampling of regional history through the iconic figures of Christopher Columbus, Toussaint L'Overture, Sir William Raleigh and George William Gordon.<sup>9</sup> While the feats of these heroic figures act as the basic fabric of the play, through the framing device of Carnival the lesser known and acknowledged exploits of the unheralded persons of yesteryear work as its needle and thread, uniting the distinct histories each celebrated figure supplies. This drama therefore is as much about an understanding of history as the story of great persons as it is about what such an understanding obscures—the many equally important actions of everyday, seemingly unheroic persons. In fact, the leading character of the interspersed Carnival segments, Pompey, is tellingly eulogized as “no hero,/But Pompey... the hotheaded shoemaker” (289). The play, as a whole, uses historical happenings to speak to past errors that with foresight need not be repeated. It purposely speaks to the possibility of its moment, that is, to the moment of Federation and thus decolonization. It was as much a piece of art as it was a didactic piece

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<sup>9</sup> Columbus, we know, “discovered” the Americas (1492); Sir William Raleigh famously led a failed expedition in search of “El Dorado” (1616) after unsuccessfully attempting to colonize North America (1584 and 1587); Toussaint spearheaded the first phase of Haiti's revolution (1791-1803); and lastly, George William Gordon, despite his innocence, was executed for organizing the Morant Bay Rebellion, because of his sustained efforts to provide legal rights to Jamaica's recently emancipated (1865).



of cultural instruction.

The Federation, for which it was commissioned, was “intended to bring the various peoples of the [Anglophone] region together into a political and economic union with the size and status of such dominions as Canada or Australia.”<sup>10</sup> It was endorsed as a gateway to independence for the British colonies involved.<sup>11</sup> They would still be under British rule, but after a short period of time the Federation was to become fully independent. This, as we know, did not happen; Jamaica withdrew from the coalition citing, among other reasons, the continued colonial status of the quasi-independent Federal states.<sup>12</sup> Walcott’s play was the feature act of the West Indian Arts Festival, a ceremonial fête opening the Federation. The Festival operated under the belief that theater was the “cement” joining the distinct peoples of the Federal states together.<sup>13</sup> His play reflected the optimism and hope many had in the Caribbean future. It also reflected the important place of the arts to decolonization. The arts, for Walcott and others of the period, were to have a pivotal and equally significant role alongside that of politics and economics in helping foster a people’s sense of self. The thought of the moment was that through the edifying quality of the arts a Caribbean sense of collectivity could emerge in a more real way than politics or economics could ever allow. The arts were the means by which a new culture could emerge from the detritus of an old.

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<sup>10</sup> King, Bruce, *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama: 'Not Only a Playwright But a Company': The Trinidad Theatre Workshop 1959-1993*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 126.

<sup>11</sup> These included: Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, present day Saint Kitts and Nevis and Anguilla, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and lastly, Trinidad and Tobago. The former West Indian colonies that opted out of the Federation were: the Bahamas, Bermuda, Belize, the British Virgin Islands and Guyana.

<sup>12</sup> For more on the Federation, see Carl Fraser’s *Ambivalent Anti-colonialism: the United States and the Genesis of West Indian independence, 1940-1964*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> King, *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, 126.

In a similar decolonial vein, *The Haitian Earth* was staged in 1984 in a St. Lucia, newly independent in 1979, to commemorate the 150 years that had passed since slavery's abolition.<sup>14</sup> It reflected the state's interest in cultivating a cultural remembrance with which to honor a difficult past and to avoid righting earlier wrongs in the present and future.<sup>15</sup> It was an effort of cultural decolonization of similar intention to that offered by Walcott and the organizers of the Federation's Art's Festival. The play itself is both an expansion of the Haitian Revolution segment from *Drums and Colours* and an adaptation of an unproduced television mini-series script concerning Haiti's complete revolutionary history, which Walcott had been working on since 1977.<sup>16</sup> In the Haitian Revolution portion of *Drums and Colours*, the benevolence of Toussaint and the possibility of a Haiti led in his spirit is sharply contrasted to the destructive vengeance-seeking energies of Jean-Jacques Dessalines and the divisive leadership his rule inaugurated. The time period treated is 1791-1803, from the Revolution's beginning to just before the end of Toussaint's rule. With the inclusion of the unproduced mini-series, the temporal period of *The Haitian Earth* would be broadened to treat the entirety of Haiti's Revolutionary moment (1791-1820). Like *Henri Christophe*, its main focus is the "cruel" reigns of Dessalines and Henri Christophe, or, more precisely, their trajectory from slave to "tyrant kings".

*The Haitian Earth* departs from *Henri Christophe* and adds to the work of *Drums and Colours* in that its chief focus is on the everyday individual and not the grand heroes of the former productions. Haiti's hope, we find, rests with the "earth" and the people who cultivate it. While *Henri Christophe* is not tied

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<sup>14</sup> King, *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, 434.

<sup>15</sup> King, *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, 434.

<sup>16</sup> King, *Derek Walcott and West Indian Drama*, 347.

to a political, economic or cultural effort of decolonization, it is certainly imbued with the spirit of decolonization as it is written with the subject closely in mind, revealing the dangers of a colonized mind governing a newly independent state. The tragedy dramatizes the rise and fall of Henri Christophe to critique the megalomania encouraged by racial reprisal. *The Haitian Trilogy* arguably has but one subject: decolonization, its politics and its possibility. It can be read, as it is here, as a committed and sustained engagement with a postcolonial present struggling against a neocolonialism cultivated internally (the mind/Caribbean) and externally (regional institutions/the West and North).

In the following pages, I trace the tragic contours of Walcott's trilogy, namely the dueling notions of tragedy (as theory) that inform his work and this reading. I argue that Walcott's persistent turn to Haiti and its Revolution is telling of a tragic impulse, one, that reveals Haiti to be Walcott's unnoted theoretical muse. As muse, Haiti speaks to Walcott's unshakable longing for what could have been and what could be in the Caribbean, a region of self-determined difference. The tragic impulse that is Walcott's continuous turn to Haiti, however, is mediated through a comic refusal of the tragic. More precisely, he reads it through a particular understanding of tragedy that limits the Caribbean's ability to think itself anew and thus exist in difference. As previously mentioned, in this understanding of the tragic, cultural worth is predicated on the grand exploits and achievements of the past. Seeking to counter a yearning for history "proper" that in his estimation binds Caribbean peoples to a dreaded past of futility and a present mired in self-loathing, Walcott offers a comic philosophy. This philosophy promotes a conviction in communal potentiality and brotherhood through an amnesiac relation to the

past. Having no past of which to be ashamed or to avenge, all peoples may discern and live by that “grin above the skeleton,” that smirk disclosing the very irony and nonsensicality of petty racial differences (*Henri Christophe* 60, 101).

Readers discern this “grin” by noting the importance of laughter in the trilogy. Despite its ambivalent nature, laughter provides Caribbean persons with the means to contest the inhuman comedy that is a tragic existence as it fosters, in Walcott’s view, critical consciousness. Humor is therefore offered as a remonstrance against an ordering of existence that is Euro-American-led and sustained by the Caribbean ruling elite. It is presented as a way in which Caribbean peoples may become critically and communally self-reflective. The trilogy’s comic philosophy suggests that through laughter Caribbean people may come to collectively determine what they should think (rather than whom they should think like). It would show them how they should live as a Caribbean collective. An awareness of the Caribbean’s comic actuality ultimately allows for the decolonization of Caribbean minds and grants what regional emancipation thus far has not: cultural liberation.

Noble as Walcott’s effort is to provide a philosophy (and potential guide) for cultural decolonization, it has but one overarching failing: a Haiti cast as a Caribbean pariah, a failed state of Western and Caribbean imagining. Through a largely reductive and an overwhelming negative depiction of the Revolution and its leaders, Walcott reproduces the discourse of failure and abnormality that surrounds present day Haiti. Having achieved independence in body and not in mind, Haiti remains colonized in his assessment. The nation has accepted a politics of existence premised on the tragic, on a sense of cultural degradation that necessitates a seemingly never-ending cycle of

vengeance based on violence and inequity. Haiti, as the quote in my epigraph reveals, can therefore “never be normal.” Locked in an atavistic struggle against a European culture and history that by now has become its own, Haiti is forever condemned to declare its “Négritude” in the face of its “Ameritude.”

However, the problem with Walcott’s assessment of an emancipated and yet cognitively un-liberated postcolonial present is Haiti’s seeming singularity. Scholars and laypersons can uncritically read the *Trilogy* as an indictment of Haiti and Haiti alone and not a way of modern being. Unseen is the silenced, ever-masked referent ensuring Haiti’s “abnormality”: a Euro-American modernity ensuring coloniality and emulated by not just Haitian Revolutionary leaders but all apprentices of the colonial empires (i.e. writers and critics) colonized in thought as they were in body. What is left uncontested through a censorious depiction of Haiti, I argue, is a way of thinking that privileges a colonial ordering of existence which negates any effort to exist comically in the Caribbean, that is, in a communality like Calaloo stew: as a hodgepodge blending of reconciled differences united by the ability to come together and “make jokes” despite being “mash[ed] up” by the colonial past and its residual effects (*Drums and Colours* 385). The question this chapter leaves for its reader then is: what hope is there really for a comedic existence when the comedy proposed laughs back and is truly tragedy as Walcott understands tragedy—a mere repetition of the same?

#### **HAITI, A DARK MUSE**

Packaged as a poetic recounting of the West Indian story, *The Haitian*

*Trilogy* outwardly conforms to a tragic reading of the Caribbean as it endorses the importance of historical achievement by foregrounding the events by which history proper is conventionally made—"war, conquest, and rebellion." The back cover reads: "In the history plays that compose *The Haitian Trilogy—Henri Christophe, Drums and Colours, and The Haitian Earth*—Derek Walcott uses verse to tell the story of his native West Indies as a four-hundred-year cycle of war, conquest, and rebellion." That the collection should be framed by these history-making events and that these happenings alone should be "the story of [the] West Indies" is an interesting and altogether peculiar actuality. Walcott has spent the bulk of his writerly existence seeking to debunk the enduring influence of a history requiring the antagonism of difference ("us" versus "them") events like "war, conquest, and rebellion" insist upon. His critical essays "What the Twilight Says" (1970), "The Muse of History" (1974), "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" (1974), and "The Antilles" (1992), which predate *The Trilogy* (2002) by at minimum ten years, distill his understanding of Caribbean potentiality while offering an extensive critique of history proper. Each one stresses his disdain for a history of polarities, a history by which peoples and whole regions are made to feel inferior (victims) and/or superior (victors). Why is his work packaged as such? Why has it been framed in a manner opposing his career-long fight against the continued salience of history proper?

Perhaps the chief reason for this is quite simply marketing dictates. Following his Nobel Peace Prize win in 1992, Walcott gained a broader first world audience whose understanding of Caribbean history arguably extends only to iconic figures such as Captain Morgan, a cognitive marker of rum, swashbuckling and all the adventures therein. It is conceivable that this

framing is the direct result of a desire to capture the popular interest of Euro-America. Although I feel that to be true, there is another more certain reason: Haiti. While “the story of [the] West Indies” is most certainly shaped by the history-signifying events of “war, conquest, and rebellion,” their manifestation in a cyclical manner has not been the region’s “story.” It has, however, been Haiti’s—at least what most would read as “the sad story of Haiti.” Only one of the three plays treats historical events outside of revolutionary Haiti, *Drums and Colours*. The remaining two plays, *Henri Christophe* and *The Haitian Earth*, deal exclusively with Haiti’s revolutionary past, specifically the tyranny unleashed by revolutionary generals-turned-despots following independence. This tyranny, the plays suggest, set the precedence for the political discord and social inequity maligning modern-day Haiti. The “West Indian story,” “a four-hundred-year cycle of war, conquest, and rebellion,” is thus at the heart of the story of Haiti or rather the Haiti of popular and Walcottian imagining.

The blurred lines between Haiti’s revolutionary history and the region’s collective story attest to the nation’s symbolic regional importance. Haiti speaks both to the decolonial hopes and dreams the region has for itself and to the loss of such dreams after emancipation. What publishers have divined in reading “the West Indian Story” through what is ostensibly “the Haitian story” is this symbolic importance. The issue, however, is the nature of this significance: what story of the nation and the Caribbean are we invited to read through the framework provided? The tale offered through this framework and Walcott’s plays is one of futility, explaining why the decolonial project offered in *The Trilogy* opposes his career-long struggle against history proper. This reductive reading of Haiti as cyclical unrest

nourishes a narrow representation of the region as a whole. It validates the generalizations that equate the region's history synonymous with the fantastical images conjured in the person of Captain Morgan and hence tantamount to a history by which paragons of conquest, industry and achievement shapes how the region is conceived and critically articulated. Caribbean peoples, apparently unaccomplished and thus "unsuited" to authoring their own existence, are granted little recognition in such an understanding of history. A Haiti so narrowly defined supports therefore the continued marginalization of the nation and region; in so easily defining what each is, there is little need to actually discern what either deems itself to be. Anyone familiar with Walcott's extensive work and its desire to give voice to Caribbean-ness on its own terms would find troubling this too-typical story of Haiti and, in turn, the Caribbean. Disconcerting though this may be, the reason why this occurs has as much to do with the problem that is Haiti for Walcott as it has to do with the tragic ethos he believes conditions our moment. This colonizing ethos of modernity proper is easy to condemn but immensely difficult to escape.

Although Walcott's extensive writing concerning history and Caribbean potentiality fully details his opposition to a tragic relation to the past, it is in his dramatic treatment of Haiti that these ideas first emerge. Written twenty-two years before "What the Twilight Says" (1970), "The Muse of History" (1974), "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" (1974), and "The Antilles" (1992), among others, *Henri Christophe* addresses the socio-political consequences of a past regarded with shame and anger so as to lay bare and refuse the tragic, bygone oriented, ethos underwriting modernity proper's continued regional currency. As the first play of Walcott's decolonial exegesis



*Henri Christophe* is the frame by which to read the other dramatic pieces in *The Trilogy*, as it sets the precedent for how Haiti is to be read and how we are to read the postcolonial present. Modeled after an Elizabethan tragedy, *Henri Christophe* departs from Walcott's Caribbean theatre. In fact, by his own admission, it is not a true representation of what he regards as Caribbean drama.<sup>17</sup> Nine years after its completion he would write *Ti-Jean and his Brothers*, a dramatic piece he would call his "first stylized West Indian play."<sup>18</sup> *Henri Christophe* is not "West Indian" by Walcott's standard because it betrayed an adolescent yearning for "noble ruins." It disclosed, that is, his longing for heroes of European ilk, for "Jacobins" who could also be "Jacobean." In "What the Twilight Says" he writes:

Full of precocious rage, I was drawn, like a child's mind to the fire, to the Manichean conflicts of Haiti's history. The parallels were there in my own island, but not the heroes: a black French island somnolent in its Catholicism and black magic, blind faith and blinder overbreeding, a society which triangulated itself mediievally into land baron, serf, and cleric, with a vapid, high brown bourgeoisie. The fire's shadows, magnified into myth, were those of the black Jacobins of Haiti.

They were Jacobean, too, because they flared from a mind drenched in Elizabethan literature out of the same darkness as Webster's *Flamino*, from a flickering world of mutilation and heresy. ... I can relive, without his understanding, a passion which I have betrayed. But they seemed to him, then, those slave-kings, Dessalines

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<sup>17</sup> For Walcott's extensive references to Elizabethan and Jacobean drama in the tragedy, see John Thieme's *Derek Walcott*, (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999) 47-51.

<sup>18</sup> See "Meanings," *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. David Hamner, (Boulder: Three Continental Press, 1997) 46.

and Christophe, men who had structured their own despair. Their tragic bulk was massive as a citadel at twilight. They were our only noble ruins. (11)

With his brother's suggestion that he write a play concerning the Haitian Revolution, a nineteen-year-old Walcott turned to Haiti's revolutionary past and found a history fit for fiction.<sup>19</sup> He found, as it were, the mythic and monumental achievements by which to quell the sense of "nothingness" that he describes as the "colonials ... malarial enervation" ("What the Twilight Says" 4). Wiser in years and reflecting upon his youthful "passion" for historic accomplishment, he wrote that such "enervation" emerged from the firm conviction held by many in the Caribbean that "nothing could ever be built among [the Caribbean's] rotting shacks, barefooted back yards, and moulting shingles" (4). Christophe's colossal citadel proved otherwise as did the seeming megalomania of his person. Dessalines, in turn, was an equally powerful rejoinder. What Haiti initially provided the young Walcott was the necessary credentials needed to claim legitimacy within the "mighty line[s]" of both history and literature ("What the Twilight Says" 28). And yet even as this play proved to be (as one reviewer noted) "fustian" in its Elizabethan-ness and thus an unsuccessful attempt at filial allegiance, it remained (as will be revealed) nevertheless critical of the impulse underlining a desire for "ruins."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Walcott, "Meanings," 45.

<sup>20</sup> J.S. Baker, writing for the *Trinidad Guardian* in 1954, referred to *Henri Christophe* as "fustian"; see Breslin, *Nobody's Nation*, 82, fn. 63. Perhaps nursing a still lingering wound from this critique, Walcott, some years later in "What the Twilight Says" (1970), would offer an explanation for the play's high-flown deliverance: "It is easy, twenty years later, to mock [this youthful] ambition [for tradition], to concede what a critic called its 'fustian,' yet Jacobean style, its cynical, aristocratic flourish, came naturally to this first play—the corruption of slaves into tyrants" (12). And a little later, he writes: "It did not matter how rhetorical, how dramatically heightened the language was if its tone was true..." (16).

*Henri Christophe* opens with news of Toussaint's death having reached Haiti (April 17, 1803) with the country still in a quasi-colonial state, awaiting independence. Imprisoned in the Jura Mountains of France following his deportation (1802), Toussaint is far from the revolutionary drama of Haiti but remains an inspiring force for Walcott's characters. We find, in fact, that he overwhelmingly symbolizes peace and the possibility of a territorial future devoid of coloniality in not only *Henri Christophe* but in all *The Trilogy's* plays. In the historical pageant *Drums and Colours*, for instance, Toussaint reminds all that "revenge is nothing" and "peace is harder" (241) as his generals, Christophe (less certainly) and Dessalines (more enthusiastically), eagerly await his deportation and thus the start of what Dessalines claims will be "a new age, the black man's time to kill" (240). In *The Haitian Earth*, Toussaint, before joining the revolutionary fight, proclaims "there's no strategy in vengeance."<sup>21</sup> And, a little while later, he reveals that his intent as a revolutionary commander is to "squeeze dry" the "rag soaked in blood" that is "peace" (*The Haitian Earth* 367). The Toussaint of Walcott's conception is a man averse to vengeance, a man who while driven to violence as a revolutionary general remains largely honorable and principled.<sup>22</sup>

The story of the "sainted" Toussaint is the narrative of James' *The Black Jacobins*; it is not that of Walcott's *Trilogy*. As such, "peace" ultimately proves to be ephemeral in the Haiti of Walcott's imagining, and nowhere more than

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<sup>21</sup> See *The Haitian Trilogy*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2002), 352. All further citations of *The Haitian Earth* will be made in the text.

<sup>22</sup> Walcott does recognize the problems presented by Toussaint's efforts to ensure "peace," most notably his execution of his nephew Moïse (among other acts). He devotes a scene in *The Haitian Earth* to that event, which signaled for C.L.R. James the end of Toussaint's clear-sighted rule (*The Haitian Earth* 382-384). That said, in comparison to Dessalines and Christophe, Toussaint is a much more sympathetic character in his varying manifestations in *The Trilogy* and thus more representative of the possibility for peaceful communality for the region.

in *Henri Christophe*. At the onset of the play, the audience is made aware of the colony's intense longing for concord and the instantaneous passing of that amity with the confirmation of Toussaint's death. The drama opens with:

SYLLA

This waiting is exhausting. It's almost contradictory  
That anything so sad can happen  
In broad afternoon.  
Where's Dessalines?

PÉTION

Dressing in the inner room,  
Preparing to be the valedictory  
To this peace that holds it breath, to hear  
What happened to Toussaint (*Henri Christophe* 7-8)

The veteran and aged general Sylla confirms what all know—Toussaint's passing. And yet he and the population eagerly await substantiation. They do so because what they long for is not Toussaint's miraculous survival but peace more broadly. The twisted paradox here, however, is that Toussaint's continued existence signified peace; peace then, is an impossibility in the Haiti that Walcott has concocted. Accordingly, the image of peace "hold[ing] its breath" speaks to both the precariousness of amity's advent in a war-torn society and to the very possibility for social concord embodied in Walcott's Toussaint. "Peace," like Sylla and others, eagerly awaits the impending report concerning Toussaint so that it can learn its fate and discover what influence it may wield within a soon to be independent Haiti. As its subjection is confirmed, soldiers at Christophe's distant camp experience the same sense of anticipation. One states, "I cannot wait to hear what I fear and expect,/That if

Toussaint is dead, we have lost our respect.../... I think I see/Hope failing like the sun from the empty air" (*Henri Christophe* 23). We begin the play then with the immediate sense that all "hope" is lost in Haiti for Haiti itself.<sup>23</sup> We are consumed with an overwhelming sense that Haiti is damned. We are prompted, by the drama's beginning, to thus ask: what hope can there be for Haiti (let alone any nascent nation) when leaders prove to be peace's "valedictory"—its definitive farewell address?

After evoking this question, the play moves to briefly treat the ascendancy (1804) and demise of Dessalines (1806). Dessalines would lead the colony to independence and later rule as Emperor with, as Christophe contemptuously claims, "a drunkard hand, heavily,/Knowing only a government by guile" (*Henri Christophe* 31). He reigns so dastardly that "an overpowering/stench of tyranny" envelopes the new nation. Consequently, Christophe asserts, "poverty" flowers where "peace" should (31). His characterization remains the same in *Drums and Colours* and *The Haitian Earth*. In both plays Dessaline's love of "excess" (drink and violence) paints a grotesque picture of cruelty beyond vindication. He is, we find, a man without moral bearings, the kind (as a scene in *The Haitian Earth* reveals) willing to marry a long enamored couple and then rape the bride-to-be on the very day of his offering so as to leave the couple with a "prince" or better "twins" as a "present" (414). His tyranny is inborn.

Christophe's assumption of power in *Henri Christophe* proves, however, to be as fraught with despotism's excesses as that of his rival's, Dessalines'. Following a civil war with General Alexander Pétion, Christophe is

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<sup>23</sup> A similar sentiment is expressed near the end of *The Haitian Earth* when following news of Toussaint's death the female lead, Yette, states: "Bon Dieu. Bon Dieu./Haïti fini. Haiti is finished./Haiti is finished. Look, the sun dark" (407).

legitimized as King of the northern region. Pétion would govern as president in the southern and western regions of Haiti. During Christophe's kingship, political intrigues abound; Dessalines is murdered as is the Archbishop Corneille Brelle.<sup>24</sup> In addition to these political crimes, the formerly enslaved are returned to unrelentingly toil to build his palace, *Sans Souci*, and fort, *la Citadelle Laferrrière*. Such acts lead the female lead, Yette, in *The Haitian Earth* to wage a solitary war against "kings." Using black magic as her sole weapon, she repeatedly stabs a voodoo doll in Christophe's image while chanting: "No more Kings. No more Kings. No more Kings," effectively paralyzing him (*The Haitian Earth* 428). Contrived though this may be, the correlation speaks to how little Walcott's vision of Christophe and Dessalines has changed. In the time span between 1949 and 1984 (the plays' respective debuts), Dessalines' tyrannical "stench" remains and Christophe proves to ever be an equally malodorous ruler.<sup>25</sup>

The tyranny of both Dessalines and Christophe draw viewers to a single answer to the aforementioned question *Henri Christophe* poses regarding Haiti's future possibility. To reiterate: what hope can there be for Haiti when its leaders prove to be peace's "valedictory"? It is clear from both Dessalines and Christophe's characterization that there is to be no hope for Haiti. For with the dictatorial advent, of what one character in *The Haitian Earth* called "the angry kings" (408), the nation proves destined to forever be "a tragedy of success"—damned by the very violence and angst needed to achieve freedom (*Henri Christophe* 103). Consumed with the self-love and self-

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<sup>24</sup> Brelle was a French priest appointed in Haiti by the French General Charles Leclerc; he would be ordained as Archbishop, without papal decree, by Christophe.

<sup>25</sup> Although there are more sympathetic depictions of Dessalines in *The Haitian Earth* than *Henri Christophe* and *Drums and Colours*, I would not go so far as to say that Walcott's view of the Emperor has changed. Dessalines remains as he has been cast in history proper: a butcher of whites, a lecher and fiend.

hate of minds perverted by bigotry, Walcott suggests in *Henri Christophe* (and *The Trilogy* as a whole) that the leaders of Haiti are far too enamored with the past to remake the present and future anew.

Near the tragedy's conclusion, when Christophe's reign is at its end, his suicide imminent (1820) and Pétion's conquering troops near, Walcott crafts the following exchange between Christophe and his trusted advisor, Baron Vastey, attesting to Haiti's tragic damnation:

VASTEY

In death, Henri, the bone is anonymous;  
Complexions only grin above the skeleton;  
Under the grass the dust is an anthology of creeds and skins  
Who can tell what that skull was?  
Was it for that we quarreled?

CHRISTOPHE

Yes, fool; for that Haiti bled,  
And spilled the valuable aristocratic blood  
To build these citadels for this complexion  
Signed by the sun.  
Yes, for that we killed, because some were black,  
And some were spat on.  
For that I overturned the horn of plenty,  
And harvest grey hairs and calumny;  
It is I who, history, gave them this voice to shout anarchy  
Against the King. I made this King they hate,  
Shaped out of slaves...  
What have I done, what have I done, Vastey, to deserve all this?

## VASTEY

Dessalines, Brelle,

The violent love of self that kills the self.

Cathedrals and cruelties (*Henri Christophe* 101)

The chief indictment Walcott levies against Haiti's revolutionary leaders is that in waging a war through vengeance they have yet to realize the anonymity of bone. They have yet to recognize the joke that is race and thus the trickery that is existence determined by phenotypic differences. Accepting of the "grin above the skeleton," they have created the conditions by which "the skeleton's" racelessness goes continually unnoticed by the nation's future leaders. For the quarrel of race, the antagonism of difference, that was the war has made history their present, past and future. It has made it so that they tragically relate to the past. This relation occurs because they are condemned (as Christophe) to see the "aristocratic blood" as forever "valuable" and to eternally view their own as a third-rate imitation at best. When Christophe points to how his kingship emerged, "shaped out of slaves," he betrays his true sentiments regarding himself and his race. The pride evinced in his rise to kingship emerges from the low regard he has for those who once existed as chattel. With his statement, we are meant to be impressed with his ascendancy from nothing. However, for Walcott, persons such as Christophe remain internally "slaves" despite declarations that they (as Christophe later claims) are "no slave[s], but ... king[s]" (*Henri Christophe* 103). They continue to lend credence to the racial vanity espoused by Euro-America, the very vanity that debased their sense of self and required the fury that was the Revolution.

Notwithstanding his disdain for the post revolutionary conduct of the Upheaval's generals, the Revolution remains for Walcott "a necessary



rejection of the debasements endured under a civilized empire" ("Foreword," *The Haitian Trilogy*, viii). The Haitian Uprising, as other uprisings, allow for a revolution in self-perception and thus the potential for a complete difference in a people's lived reality as it gives rise to the possibility of an ideological shift in thought.<sup>26</sup> The problem, however, is the legacy of racialized violence the Haitian Revolution bequeathed to the nation and that it can very well pass on to the region as a whole. This violence is not simply the act of one race against another, but a race against itself. For Walcott, the racial vanity that is "the violent love of self that kills the self" promotes a false sense of historical anointment. That is to say, it advances the idea of one's divine right to rule because of one's high position in history—"It is I who, history, gave..." This position encourages the misguided belief that history is a providential force granting rulers like Christophe power. A despot's political intrigues, murders and wrongdoings then have little to do with his/her ascendancy as history (conceived as fate) ensured his/her dominance. Within such an understanding, a people who rise against tyranny do so not from their own volition—and thus from a personal sense of justice—but from that of the tyrant's, whose anointment by history sanctions all, even that which would undermine his/her rule—"It is I who, history, gave them this voice to shout anarchy/Against the King" (*Henri Christophe* 101). The subjugated's agency is ultimately subsumed within that of history's favorite—kings, queens and regions of might. History, post-emancipation, remains therefore as divisive as it was before: a contest of victors and victims with the story told and written by the ever despotic victor.

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<sup>26</sup> See Lloyd Brown, "DREAMERS AND SLAVERS: the Ethos of Revolution in Walcott and Leroi Jones," *Critical Perspectives on Derek Walcott*, ed. David Hamner (Boulder: Three Continental Press, 1997) 195.

Condemned to a self-loathing wedded to a tragic and hence shame ridden relation to the past, Christophe, Dessalines and all Haitian rulers that followed, have ultimately accepted “the world [as] proposed by those who rule it” (“Culture or Mimicry?” 52). They have accepted an existence born of the self-important conceit on which Euro-American history and imperial culture subsists. Haiti is thus damned because its socio-political existence requires the “cathedrals and cruelties,” “Dessalines['] [and] Brelle[s]” of history proper. Its socio-political reality entails, on the one hand, the “citadels” and “noble ruins” on which blacks may look upon with pride (“cathedrals” and “Dessalines”). It requires, on the other, the never-ending supply of victims ensuring the erection of such “citadels” —the “cruelties” sanctioning the demise of prominent victims, the “Dessalines[']”, and lesser known, “Brelle[s]”. The tragedy’s closing with the arrival of Pétion’s conquering troops does not bode well for the nation. These troops will unify Haiti simply to promulgate the legacy of Dessalines and Christophe. They will further a “dark monarchy” (*Henri Christophe* 107) driven by the continued antagonism of difference and thus the charade of “slaves” seeking to right a past of inequity by existing as “masters.” “Success,” then, has bore only “tragedy” in Haiti; it has fathered the subsistence of the very inequality these generals and all Haitians fought against. Accordingly, *The Haitian Earth* draws to a close with a tellingly utterance directed at a paralyzed Christophe. Having Yette in custody for her black magic, he benevolently sets her husband (Pompey) “free.” To this “freedom,” Pompey poignantly asks: “free? When I was ever free?/Under you all” (432)?

There, in *Henri Christophe*, most prominently, and in *The Trilogy’s* remaining plays, lies the fodder for much of Walcott’s critical material

concerning history and Caribbean potentiality. In 1974 in "Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry" he would write that politicians "see progress as inevitability" (52). He goes on to say that they "insist on describing potential in the same terms as those whom they must serve... [and thus] talk to [their constituents] in the bewildering code of world markets" (52). They use, "in short, the calculus of contemporary history" ("Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry" 52). In these statements lie Haiti, a tragic echo of a youthful passion come to fruition. For what future have Haiti's revolutionary leaders carved for its people but that of Europe's past? What "progress" has Haiti accepted as its own but one by which Europe lies far ahead and it with its "citadels" seek to reach? Having accepted a scripted existence where they, as blacks, are victims of history (notwithstanding their glorious revolutionary achievements) they are fated to rule according to the dictates of more "advanced" others. They are fated therefore to commit the same mistakes. The "calculus of contemporary history" and the mathematicians devoted to its numerics prove to be indistinct from the pre-calculus of a bygone colonial record, and thus to its, however recalcitrant, mathematical pupils.

In 1991 when Walcott utters the following during a discussion session at the *International Writers Conference* in Dublin, there again stands Haiti: "History to me means vanity: the belief that man has belief in his destiny and I'm supposed to share, delivered from a central, focal, pivotal place. The best example is the cathedral; awe is contained in them ... I'm scared of the vanity of an achievement that's supposed to be in praise of God but could be about man praising God" (qtd. in Burnett 57-58). Is this not but a more detailed explication of what Haiti, some forty years prior to this, revealed to a young Walcott in *Henri Christophe*—"The violent love of self that kills the

self./Cathedrals and cruelties" (101)? Twenty-one years prior to his utterance in Dublin, he would write that Christophe's citadel "was a monument to egomania, more than a strategic castle; an effort to reach God's height" ("What the Twilight Says" 13). This statement at the *International Writers Conference* is therefore sparked as much by Europe (and its many "cathedrals") as it is by Haiti and what disconcerted Walcott about the nation and its Revolution: its too easy acceptance of man's destiny as constructed by Europe in its cultural vainglory, its too easy acceptance of "cathedrals" and hence "citadels" as a mark of a people, and its inability to rethink existence through its own "central, focal, pivotal place"—Haiti and the Caribbean, more broadly.

Lastly, when he writes that "what survives in the slave is nostalgia for imperial modes, Europe or Africa," in reference to the literary confusion sparked by the 1970s Black Power movement in Trinidad (i.e. which modes are properly Caribbean, African or European?), there again stands Haiti ("The Muse of History" 63). For Walcott, the single minded pursuit of purely African literary styles via a "re-discovery" of "tribal modes" ("The Muse of History" 59) or European modes is a denigration of art. It is a debasement of what is organic and innovating in its creative birth into a hackneyed copy that is a particular locality's reading of another place. It is, as it were, a move to circumvent "the mighty line" of history—and thus the absence of a literary tradition— by sustaining one's self-negating attachment to history; it is an effort to create "cathedrals" while issuing new "cruelties"—the Caribbean's continued cultural colonization. The tragic shadow haunting Walcott's critical work, his dark muse, so to speak, is not "a shawled girl ... [with] dark hair ... [and] pale flushed skin" of his professed imagining ("What the Twilight Says"

34). His theoretical “muse,” it seems, is and has always been Haiti.<sup>27</sup>

#### AN INHUMAN COMEDY

*In place of useful action, he has worked up an act. This act is his tradition, for he has no other.*

—ANATOLE BROYARD, “The Inauthentic Negro”

Haiti, as muse, sparked Walcott’s insight into the “monotonies of history,” humanity’s ability to repeat, again and again, the mistakes of the past (*Henri Christophe* 103). More importantly, however, it gave him the means with which to discern and go on to name the tragic ethos conditioning the postcolonial moment. This colonizing ethos of modernity proper is deemed an “inhuman comedy” by Walcott as it subsists on a mad logic that is comic upon discernment (51). Absurd though it may be, this logic gives rise to a perpetuation of historical ills and ensures, in this way, a tragic relation to the past. It does so by giving all an “act” for being, a “tradition” for an inhumane, divisive existence.<sup>28</sup> In the only “stylized West Indian” scene of *Henri Christophe*—“West Indian” in light of a shift from the play’s verse to the scene’s creolized prose—two assassins hired to kill the then Emperor Dessalines discuss the business of murder. In the process, they divulge the fool’s logic grounding the postcolonial moment. As an “elaborate pantomime” of the behaviors Europe sanctioned in its quest for glory and gain, the scene

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<sup>27</sup> In describing an ideal moment in time where history would not matter and one’s inspiration could be white or black, he offers the following depiction of a muse: “In the litter of the field, among black boxes of [film] equipment and yellow, sleekly wet tarpaulins, stands a shawled girl caught in that gesture which abstractedly gathers cloth to shoulder, her black hair lightly lifting, the tired, pale skin flushed, lost in herself and the breaking [film production] camps. She was white, and that no longer mattered” (“What the Twilight Says” 34).

<sup>28</sup> Anatole Broyard, “Portrait of the Inauthentic Negro: How Prejudice Effects the Victim’s Personality,” *Commentary Magazine*, (July 1950): 63.

speaks to the particular effects of colonization on the mind of the colonized, namely, the stupefaction of thought it entails (*Henri Christophe* 51). It opens with the more experienced assassin seeking to ease the trepidation of the novice by matter-of-factly detailing the ins and outs of murder. Once that is done, the veteran murderer describes the production of indignation that follows a slaying, proclaiming with much exaggeration:

“Soldiers, ladies and gentlemen! A murder has been done, murder, ladies, murder, gentlemen, against the law of the gods. Murder? We must—quiet, ladies, quiet, gentlemen—we must apprehend the killer. Apprehend him.” And then you run, your mouth open, your eyes streaming, with hounds and humans in an inhuman comedy chasing you to sanctuary... Sanctuary? What, in an abbey where they eat chicken, in a stable where they shoot horses, in gaol where they break your neck?

*(He grows quiet, impressing the young man.)*

And then they take you to treat you to the same argument they use against you. Thou shalt not kill. God has given no man right to kill, tell that to the lawyer, and the gaoler, and the warder, and particularly the rope that cannot understand logic and argument. What will the priest say... “My boy, it was murder that hung Christ like an albatross around the neck of Golgotha; my boy, you must not kill; take him away and God have mercy on his soul ...” This place is an arena, a human arena of lions and laughter; only the wicked and those who do not think can survive. What are you laughing at? (51-52; author’s emphasis)

In the exaggerated facial expressions, excited movements and contrived postures this pantomime undoubtedly required lies a critique of a Western

derived manner of being. For if readers and onlookers heed the provocative intonations of the question—"what are you laughing at"—they come to see that the laughter sure to erupt from such a scene is as much directed at the spectacle presented to them as it is at themselves. The self-reflective pause called forth by this question allows perceptive audience members viewing *Henri Christophe* to realize that they (and not Haiti and its peoples alone) are being openly ridiculed here, mocked, as it were, for an acceptance of a reprisal-based existence. All are quite literally then being jolted out of a delirium with this scene, laughed out of the frenzied thinking of a region conditioned to forever be on the run, persistently in pursuit of the monsters of its own making: the "wicked" and the unthinking.

Following the melodramatic pronouncement that a murder has "been done," the scene stages the cultivated hysteria required in a world where murder is so commonplace. Not only does the assassin murder but it seems that the farmer, stable hand and the priest do as well. Persons, as a result, must be stirred to a frenzy to experience the moral indignation individuals should feel when malfeasance occurs. The crime must be dramatically pronounced: "Soldiers, ladies and gentlemen! A murder has been done, murder, ladies, murder, gentlemen, against the law of the gods." Individuals must feign comprehension of what was clearly heard by all—"Murder?"—and the announcer must calm the crowd purposely set into a panicked tizzy with the promise of a chase: "We must—quiet, ladies, quiet, gentlemen—we must apprehend the killer. Apprehend him." Once in this heightened state of agitation, and thought abdicated for a fear-infused rectitude, the crowd is goaded by the frenzy of a manufactured indignation into committing the very crime it found so loathsome: murder. Such then is the mad, fright-laden logic

ensuring the comic banality of the “inhuman” existence typical to Haiti and its New World neighbors. As “Thou shalt not kill” is proclaimed to shame the culpable, “take him away and God have mercy on his soul” is disingenuously uttered in the same breath. And few, if any, suffer a moment’s trepidation. Such reasoning and the murderous actions it gives rise to is (as Dessalines states when facing his assassins) “so ordinary and professional,” so expertly practiced by all (*Henri Christophe* 55). In fact, Walcott suggests that this fool’s reasoning is the founding logic of the Caribbean.

In “The Muse of History,” he writes: “The pulse of New World history is the racing pulse beat of fear, the tiring cycles of stupidity and greed. The tongues above our prayers utter the pain of entire races to the darkness of a Manichean God: *Dominus illuminatio mea* [the Lord is my light], for what was brought to this New World under the guise of divine light, the sword blade and the light of *dominus illuminatio mea*, was the same iridescent serpent brought by a contaminating Adam...” (39). The fool’s logic of “Thou shalt not kill” and “take him away and God have mercy on his soul” is the brainchild of a “Manichean God” and the people (European and the newly created, Caribbean peoples) who brought him into being. It is the fruit of a poisoned loin that in offering conquest, colonialism and slavery in tandem with the rectitude of the bible muddied the line between right and wrong, leaving all with an absurd and equally amoral basis for existence. Of everlasting salience due to colonialism’s continued propagation through modernity proper, this mad logic offers the colonized longing for self-determination the means with which to remain effectively colonized. As it conceptually sanctions but one way of being in freedom, that of an incessant return to the past’s “tiring cycles of stupidity and greed.” It thus strips existence of possibility and of the much



desired *postcolonial* future emancipation and independence were to provide.

Accordingly, when Caribbean peoples tacitly accept the fool's logic that supports *lex tailonis* ("the law of retaliation") as the basis for existence, they consent, as it were, to live thoughtlessly and be led by another's writing of existence. They consent, Walcott suggests, to be led by the highs and lows of impassioned affect, the indignation of wrongdoing, the shame of a past humiliation, and the sorrow of unnecessary loss a history of unremitting tragedy instantiates. The laughter carrying the assassin's scene is ultimately a cerebral answer to the soporific effect of affect's dulling influence on the mind. It is a means to jolt Caribbean peoples out of the delirium of a tragic ethos by which such "tiring cycles" of Caribbean history subsist. More than that, however, it is way to cultivate awareness of the costs of thought forsaken for emotion.

When the newly, soon to be and long independent Caribbean nations abandon prudence and submit to be prodded into a fool's chase (like the pantomime's crowd), they give another (former masters) not only the power to dictate their lives but the power to determine their humanity. They consent, as it were, to live in the manner set forth by *lex tailonis*: as "beasts." In *Drums and Colours* a female slave proclaims: "Man is a beast. Man is a beast" (169), pointing to the ultimate price Walcott finds Caribbean persons pay when submitting to the "cycles of stupidity and greed" that is a tragic existence. Such an existence was the preferred life of the slave's husband whose love of war led to his family's enslavement (170) and that of her enslavers, who acted inhumanely for greed.<sup>29</sup> Life as a "beast," however, is but one consequence;

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<sup>29</sup> Sir Walter Raleigh also chooses this existence. A character in *Drums and Colours* seeking to dissuade Raleigh's fool's search for the fictitious Eldorado states the following: "I cannot warn you of the terrible expanse/ When men or nations turn to beasts for gold" (198).

the other is the “beast[’s]” bloodlust. In “treat[ing] [the assassin] to the same argument used against [him],” the sanctimonious at the helm of our region prove to be of the same murderous ilk. Accordingly, all are now made to be murderers. In substantiating a fool’s logic for existence that colonialism impressed upon the region and that neocolonialism bolsters, Caribbean society is condemned to the fixed and predetermined roles by which inhumane acts of violence like murder may continue without interruption. Its peoples are damned to be the victims in the grand narrative of history proper and follow but one means of decolonization: the divisive, vengeance-based Haitian variety. Pigeoned-holed by their allegiance to the mad logic underwriting the inequity of the colonial past, Caribbean persons, mouths aghast, “eyes streaming” and minds vapid with self-induced fear, are conditioned to play their given parts all too well.

Haiti’s history, it would seem, is not singular and nor is its “abnormality” instructive of failings born of it alone. For if this pantomime is telling of anything it is this: Walcott’s problem with the nation is not the country itself but what Haiti has given itself over to—the inhuman comedy that is the Caribbean’s regional theater, its colonial inheritance. Therefore, when Walcott crafts a scene in *The Haitian Earth* where Christophe ridicules a collective of mulattos stating to one in particular, “Comedian” (319), and a little later to all, “Jokers! Jokers!” (320), he is broadly addressing the region’s collective acceptance of its scripted, tragic existence. Perhaps more significantly, he is drawing attention to the importance of race in ensuring the Caribbean’s continued allegiance to such an existence.

The mad logic of *lex tailonis* implicitly functions through a cultural acceptance of hierarchical polarities, of superior and inferior persons, things

and/or actions. The chase detailed in the pantomime requires the performance of such polarities and persists through a self-inflating logic: I, as the innocent, have the right (because of my sanctity) to pursue and punish you, the criminal, for your wrong. And in so doing, I have the right and means to reveal to all how much better I am than you, for I have not sunken so low as to harm another. Of course, the individual has debased him/herself in seeking the former's death but the point is that the end game to such logic is the assumption of superiority it grants the indignant. It is this assumption that proves problematic for the colonized. With superiority as the desired outcome of this fulsome logic, racist discourse proves a critical conduit for the monotony of inequity *lex tailonis* as a basis for existence spawns. The colonized, in inheriting this basis, come also to accept racist thought even as they have suffered from such ideations. They do so because life has ultimately been scripted for a performance of antagonistic difference, of warring opposition and brutal retaliation.

The aforementioned scene involving Christophe reveals this well. The scene itself treats the pomp and circumstance surrounding the November 1790 public execution of Vincent Ogé and Jean-Baptist Chavannes, wealthy free persons of color. Together they sought mulatto rights in France and led an insurrection in early 1790 for their group's emancipation in Saint Domingue. The liberation of black slaves was not a concern and should the two have been successful, blacks would remain what they were: property.<sup>30</sup> The scene is implicitly driven by colonial reasoning's natural course. Readers and viewers are privy to a layering of antagonistic difference via a triumvirate of racially-marked groups with opposing interests (mulattos, blacks and whites). They

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<sup>30</sup> For more on Ogé and Chavannes see James' *The Black Jacobins*, 63-84.

are also offered the means ensuring this triumvirate's antagonism's continuation: a performance of racial dominance and thus virtue through the execution. It is the performance of race that gives rise to the poignant references to the comedic roles persons assume within a tragic social order that Christophe makes in *The Haitian Earth*. These references are stated while Christophe is at his pre-revolutionary place of employment, the *Auberge de la Couronne*. There, he and the mulattos attend the execution at a close distance—Christophe as a waiter and the mulattos as the establishment's patrons.

So intoxicated by death made a spectacle, the mulattos and other customers add to it their own. In the laughter, drunkenness and general amoral excess of the *Auberge*, three "graces" —the script reads, "handsome, light skinned women in republican costumes" — perform a satiric ballet around a "chained half-naked [frightened] Negro" holding a placard reading, "LA LIBERTÉ DE SAINT DOMINGUE [THE FREEDOM OF SAINT DOMINGUE]" (*The Haitian Earth* 314). They sing and dance, the proprietor reveals, so as to urge all "to forget the horror" of the execution. As this takes place, a learned mulatto, Vastey (Christophe's future aide-de-champ), and a white Student discuss the edifying instruction Europe offered the enslaved. Vastey states that it has only offered violence, "the art of atrocity, civilization./The scene of massacre" (*The Haitian Earth* 314). The Student, pontificating on the merits of Europe and how wise it was to show the world the hierarchical ordering of all things, claims violence as well. He privileges, however, its ennobling aspects. To this spectacle before him, the future revolutionary general and King, Christophe, is overwhelming disgusted. Vastey and Yette (one of the "graces") draw his repugnance for playing at being French. Consequently, as he frees the chained Negro, he ridicules Vastey for existing as a "philosophical

monkey,” Yette for wanting “white children,” and goes so far as to state that “[they] don’t want to be free,/[they] just don’t want to be black” (*The Haitian Earth* 319).

For these accusations, Christophe is assaulted with Yette’s “spit” and Vastey, knife in hand, “lunges” at him (*The Haitian Earth* 319). It is this latter act that prompts Christophe’s terse utterance, “Comedian,” for he knows Vastey’s indignation, and Yette’s is but skin deep. In fact, Yette sheepishly “looks away” after her incensed reaction and Vastey’s attack only goes so far as the initial charge. Christophe’s words cut too deep, precisely because they lay bare the iniquitous nature of Saint Dominguan freedom: liberal democratic freedom, in this colony, is achieved and experienced solely through an assumption of racial superiority. Both the execution and the spectacle of mulatto women in “republican costume” surrounding an enchained Negro made to carry the aforementioned placard reveals but one message: to be “free” one must wholly accept the notion of black inferiority. One must accept the antagonism of difference and thus willingly take part in the repudiation and debasement of blackness, just as Yette and Vastey do in finding no shame in the amoral excess of the *Auberge*. One must seek to assume the superiority in being whiteness provides through black degradation, through the very idea posited by a planter in *Drums and Colours* that “[blacks] are not people, they are [merely] intelligent animals” (218). When Walcott has Christophe accuse Vastey of acting as a “comedian” in *The Haitian Earth*, he urges all to therefore ponder how seriously any are to take Vastey’s enumerations on the atrocities of Europe when he himself sits calmly and unaffected as a human being stands chained as Vastey fully enjoys the selective Saint Domingue freedom represented by the nameless slave.

Christophe, however, clearly conceives of “freedom” differently. Freedom, for him, is the acceptance of blackness. Still committed to the role of “comedian,” Vastey states in response that he “is no animal” (hence “monkey” and, in turn, African), to which Christophe, gradually rising to a shout, states in vexation:

And those two out there, in the Place des Armes,  
Ogé and Chavannes! They are animals?  
Why don't you fucking cowards do something?

...

Jokers! Jokers!  
They should break every one of you.  
Jokers! Bloody jokers?  
... One day you will all have

To make up your minds if you're white or black. (*The Haitian Earth* 320)

To Vastey's assertion of humanity, Christophe raises the question of Ogé's and Chavannes', whether they can be rightly termed “human” treated as they are with such inhumanity. This prompts, in turn, the issue of racial fraternity as a basis for humanity: if Vastey and Yette are like Ogé and Chavannes, neither “white or black,” shouldn't they, as persons of the same ilk, stand together? Should not Vastey, Yette and the others rise to prevent the murder of their brother? That they do not so confirms for Christophe their inhumanity and their thoughtless beastlike imitation of all things white; in particular, the latter's disdain for things remotely black. In thoughtlessly accepting the degradation of another, they consent to their own and to very idea of their “sub-humanness” as persons with African ancestry.

Although Christophe's reading of Vastey, Yette and the others is

perceptive, his racially rigid reasoning betrays his own sad comedic cast. The charge that mulattoes are “jokers” due to their inability to be “white or black” is contingent on the two choices for existence meted out by Europe and sustained by the United States. The choice, however, of choosing one or the other is a fool’s task for Walcott. Haitians, and more broadly, Caribbean peoples, Walcott reveals earlier in *Drums and Colours*, are neither black or white. They simply are Haitian, St. Lucian, and thus Caribbean. The character Anton, reflecting on his mixed race heritage and the struggle he has had with it, states that “Many years ago, I was tempted to admit it,/To be what I am and not be ashamed, a Haitian” (*Drums and Colours* 227). The thought that one can be solely one without the other is the ideational work of a “comedian.” It is the work of one who, like Vastey, Yette and Christophe play at being something there are not—solely black, white or an amalgamation nearer to white than black. The syncretic nature of Caribbean culture renders such racial divisions an impossibility for Walcott. Born from “the monumental groaning and soldering of two great worlds” (three and four when we include India and China), the Caribbean is a hybrid of difference (“Muse of History” 64). It is a composite mishmash of the various cultures represented by racial designations. To claim then that one is simply “Haitian” versus black is to accept one’s innate cultural hybridity and one’s transcendence of the petty divisions of race and its corollary, culture. It is to move from a desire to disclose ones “Negritude” in the face of one’s inherent “Ameritude.”

Broadly addressing the newly emancipated’s struggle with racial identity in “What the Twilight Says,” Walcott writes that once having confronted and lain to rest a desire to be white, the Caribbean subject must face and equally lay to rest a longing to be black (19). They must, in this way,

forsake a self-conception mediated through the idea of race and thus a notion of being formed and prescribed by another. With the disavowal of racial prescriptions, the “tiring cycles of stupidity and greed” of a tragic existence can be surmounted as Caribbean peoples will begin to move away from the bygone-oriented ethos championed by modernity proper. They will begin therefore to do what colonialism and neo-colonialism refused and refuses to allow: think for themselves with their hybridity in mind and thus work to fashion their existence anew. The accusation Christophe levies in *The Haitian Earth* against Vastey and Yette, and one that is equally applicable to himself, speaks then to the conceptual bind a tragic, inhumanly comic, existence sanctions. For it allows readers and viewers to see that power hunger actions alone do not sustain the divisive cycles of vengeance innate to a tragic existence, but thought does as well. Through the unquestioned use of racial discourse, all persons, it seems, subject to the colonizing ethos of modernity proper are made to be “jokers.” Even, Walcott reveals, those like the Haitian generals of yesteryear who openly and rigorously fought not to be.

#### **A COMIC REFUSAL**

What ultimately is the Caribbean to do? How is the region to think itself out of the ideational bind colonialism bequeathed to it and that modernity proper sustains? How is it to avoid the mistake that Haiti, with “jokers” ever at its helm, typifies? The Caribbean, we find, must laugh its way out of the tragic. It must offer a comic refusal and strive to laugh its way from a present ossified with the hate-laden sentiments and actions of a bygone. It must therefore move toward a contemporary moment and future guided by the possibility of cross-cultural and cross-racial commonality.



Notwithstanding its sustained attention to the constraints of a tragic existence, *The Trilogy* is charged not solely with the inequity, madness and megalomania of such an ethos, but also with poignant moments of hilarity that encourage collectivity and critical reflection. It is charged with moments like Dessalines' assassination scene in *Henri Christophe* where the tragic cast of the text (and existence, more broadly) is decisively and humorously interrupted and called into question.

One such moment is the final scene of *Drums and Colours*. In a departure from the pageant's focus on the historical exploits related to Columbus (1492), Sir William Raleigh (1616), Toussaint (1791-1803) and George William Gordon (1830s and 1865), this Carnival scene concerns the bit players of history proper at the same time as it attends to maroon resistance. Carnival is the ideal counter to the heroic solemnity driving *Henri Christophe* and the conventional histories offered in *Drums and Colours*. The event and its production not only lightens the mood with its hilarity but Carnival also provides the means with which to think a non-antagonistic existence into being as it can briefly break social taboos. A return to this framing through the resurrection of the Carnival masqueraders who opened the play (reborn here as maroons) is a means to contrast tragedy with comedy, to sandwich the tragic portions of the pageant (its conventional histories) with comic happenings that draw our attention away from the tragic.<sup>31</sup> Set in the maroon town of Accompong, Jamaica, the scene in question treats an upcoming assault that insurgents of varying racial backgrounds and their new recruits

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<sup>31</sup> In the play, history is personified as figure of comic and tragic tendency. A "tall warrior," we are told, holds two masks throughout the pageant representing history's two casts, comedy and tragedy (*Drums and Colours* 122). This personification furthers the pageant's oscillation between the grand histories of tragedy to the seeming inconsequential past happenings of comedy.

(of equal racial variance) intend to wage against a nearby British regiment. As they plan their attack, they await their evening meal of Calaloo, a stew representative of both their multi-racial collectivity and its innate cohesion with its assortment of divergent and yet well-paired ingredients. These insurgents, we are told, are all granted the rank of “general” and made to exist as equals despite the racial antagonism conditioning their moment. Animated with spirited bursts of laughter and thus the mirth of Carnival, the scene sets readers and viewers laughing at its onset.

Both reader and viewer may chuckle or perhaps come near offering a cackle at the image of a fierce East Indian maroon (Ram) attempting to seriously contemplate war tactics while being wholly distracted by the wind playfully ventilating his rear. His shorn trousers remind him both of the indecency of his exposed backside and the efficacy of its exposure in light of newly concocted meals, like Calaloo, reeking havoc on his intestines ( *Drums and Colours* 265). As reader and viewer simmer down they find occasion to laugh yet again, confronted as they are with the absurd zeal of a new recruit of African descent. Pompey is an amusing blowhard, ever proclaiming his fearlessness. By his own admittance he is a “great calpysoldier [who] bulges... incites violence [and] tread[s] the burning zones of Arabia” (267), and yet when the time for battle approaches he is the first to panic, humorously crying out, “oh god, they coming for [me], hide me, hide me...” (275). If that were not enough, the reader and viewer are made to laugh at the maroons’ utter ineptness for war. This incompetence occurs not because the maroons cannot courageously and skillfully fight *but* because their disposition points them toward revelry and peace. Accordingly, as they prepare for battle, blunders occur every which way. To the great exasperation of the group’s tactician

(Ram) a map of strategic positions, he diligently designed, is used to fuel the fire for Calaloo. To Ram's irritation the chef (the Chinese, General Yu) tellingly states: "it is better always to make soup than war" (272). Adding to this atmosphere of comic confusion, the laundry list is somehow mistaken for the military list outlining the opposing regiments they are to face; the maroon leader (Mano) authoritatively and amusingly reads: "one pair washikongs, two pairs shirts, one underwear, two parts scallion, one part fried rice... Give me patience; Christ, this is the laundry list" (274). What's more, the military tactics themselves encourage laughter. One such tactic involves the deployment of the "vulnerable flank" of the lone female maroon's thigh (the mulatto, Yette), "sex being a great republic" (275-276).

With each chuckle, each chortle or hearty howl this scene encourages, readers and viewers are enveloped in a communality primed to heal the wounds of a past of racial inequality. The contagion that is laughter grounds readers/viewers firmly in the present and thus roots them in the giddy exuberance of a moment of possibility. It thus helps to position them beyond a bygone of division. It is therefore important that their laughter turns their attention from the racial inequity that led to maroonage in the first place. Positioned in laughter, viewers and readers care not that these instances of hilarity occur in a moment when blacks are still enslaved, East Indians and Asians with them (in their own particular servitude), their gaze and mind is fixed on the ability of such persons to exist in harmony. With laughter, Walcott deliberately turns attention to the maroons willingness to exist as equals within the tumultuous cauldron of hate that was the tense time of West Indian emancipation. That they can go so far as to accept a planter among them as a fellow maroon (Calico) speaks to the community Walcott envisions for the

Caribbean post independence. The region, as a character in *Henri Christophe* states, is to be a “federation/Of complexions” (57). It is to be a place where persons no longer “grudge” or “remember” (*Drums and Colours* 271). They simply strive to recognize that they are “all the same in the dark [and thus] all in the same descending darkness” of human existence (282). To the tragic’s obsessive devotion to the past, Walcott counters with a comic opposition that encourages a wholesale forgetting of an earlier moment. In this way, he offers a comic philosophy for being that promotes a reconciliation of races through an amnesiac relation the past. Through the comic, he pushes all to see that the Caribbean cannot be thought of as fashioned solely from an enduring war of races, but that it must be recognized as forged more from the palatable perfection of a slowly simmered hodgepodge soup. Never mind that this soup may unsettle a stomach now and again, it speaks to who persons are in the Caribbean, to what they have overcome, and to what they ultimately can be. More importantly, it attests to the Caribbean’s innate comic sensibility.

In “What the Twilight Says,” Walcott suggests that the region possesses an inherent “comic genius.” To completely reject the dark absurdity of a tragic philosophy for existence and thus to live life with full recognition of the “grin above the skeleton,” the Caribbean then must simply trust its inborn sensibility (*Henri Christophe* 60, 101). It must strive to live according to its nature. Describing the “comic genius” of Caribbean peoples, Walcott writes:

You are rehearsing *The Blacks* [a play by Jean Genet], and begin to see that their minds [actors in the Trinidad Theater Workshop], whatever the variety of their education, are baffled by this challenge of the absurd. They resist the emphatic gaiety of that dance at the edge of the abyss. ...

It may have to do with those subterranean charges that explode in their faces, for the play is mined with blinding flashes that cause a painful laughter. They catch, sidewise in the mirror of another's face, images of what they have feared, projections of their own caricatures. But their genius is not violent, it is comic. The play becomes less a satire a more a Carnival. Their joy is its root. ("What the Twilight Says" 22)

*The Blacks* dramatized the deep-seated racial prejudice haunting our views of ourselves and that of others. As a postmodern minstrel show, it pointed to and critiqued the distortions of self that occur when racial stereotypes guide human interaction. That this play should act as the backdrop for Walcott's articulation of what he finds to be the Caribbean's comic sensibility speaks to what this "joy[ful]" insight is most set against: the diminution of self to "caricature." Confronted by the racial roles shaping how they are to be read in a Euro-American world, the cast (and by extension the Caribbean minds of varying backgrounds Walcott, more broadly, addresses) refused to be a "slave ... to [their] own appearance."<sup>32</sup> They refused to play the part ascribed to their complexion and exist, however momentarily, as "jokers," demeaned persons "battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships, and ... above all: 'Sho' good eatin.'"<sup>33</sup>

It would seem, then, that Caribbean peoples are innately equipped with the means to counter a tragic ordering of existence. In refusing self deformation they are primed, like the maroons of *Drums and Colours*, to forget a past of achievement and futility to live without recollection of what their "complexion" meant (and continues to mean) to others. As history's unnoted,

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<sup>32</sup> See Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins, White Masks*, (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 116.

<sup>33</sup> Fanon 112.

they have the inborn ability to decolonize minds “disfigured” by the colonizing ethos of tragedy, and, in doing so, they may rid their world of a desire for recrimination. Resurrecting the characters of Yette and Pompey from *Drums and Colours*, *The Haitian Earth* reveals that a comic community rests with the history’s bit players. It lies with those who while “mash[ed] up” by life, like the prostitute Yette or the formerly colonized, will, with the communality of others like the peasant Pompey, “make jokes” (*The Haitian Earth* 385) and attempt to live by the “joy [that] is their root” (“What the Twilight Says” 22). Unable and unwilling to accept the “subterranean charges” of their unsavory otherness, the cast therefore turns “satire” to “Carnival” and moves towards a cultural decolonization of sorts as a tragic existence is transformed into a comic existence (“What the Twilight Says” 22). With a joyous grounding, they turn to Carnival as it offers the means with which to “make jokes” and strive for a new ontology: to be and exist in a commonality devoid of race. Thus, Carnival offers the means with which to painlessly laugh at the tall-tale of racial difference that a tragic ethos prorogates. Walcott, inspired by their comic refusal, urges his Caribbean viewers and readers to lay the tears and fury of the past to rest with a hearty tee-hee and snicker. He insists that they raucously howl away the past, its rage and angst, and thus wholeheartedly laugh the present anew.

#### **“HAITI WILL NEVER BE NORMAL”**

Moving now from the philosophical mirth of Walcott’s comic stance, readers taken by Walcott’s decolonial project encounter an absurdity he did not account for: a Haiti made pariah, a Haiti that ultimately renders Walcott’s work wholly tragic despite its comic overtures. What cannot be escaped upon

reading *The Trilogy* is Walcott's reductive reading of the Revolution and, to that end, the nation. Haiti, we find, is but a failed state of Caribbean and Euro-American imagining. The Upheaval is no more than a sordid "tyrannical" act of angst and fury ("Foreword" viii). While it fittingly provided what was so desperately needed, emancipation and independence, in Walcott's estimation it gave rise to the "tragic" state of "so many of [the nation's] subsequent regimes" (viii). Haiti's revolution only further sustained the racially-charged, mad logic of *lex talionis* (the law of retaliation) as it bore leaders consumed by the past. Haiti, accordingly, remained colonized, physically liberated but cognitively enchained.

Walcott's revolutionary favorite, Christophe, the figure whose reign opens and closes *The Trilogy* and who most speaks to the headship Walcott detests, remains firmly under the sway of the tragic and thus the colonizing ethos of modernity proper. As we have seen depicted in *Henri Christophe* and *The Haitian Earth*, Christophe both exults whiteness, abhors blackness and has a firm conviction that one must exist as either or, black or white. In fact, his mercurial characterization throughout *The Trilogy* positions him constantly at the precipice of absolute love or hate of one or the other. He never quite finds a common ground between the two. As a result, he typifies the way in which the revolutionary generals existed and ruled in opposition to the potentiality of their moment, the manner in which they squandered the opportunity to begin anew on "fertile deserts" ("The Figure of Crusoe" 40). With their acrimonious relation to the past, they essentially wasted the chance to forge an ontology absent of "citadels" (read: ruins) and thus another's understanding of achievement and existence. The hybridity of thought and being that Walcott finds most suits the region can find no footing in a country led and continually

led thereafter as such. Haiti, therefore, “can never be normal.” The nation can never aspire to its innate comic essence and laugh away its tumultuous past for a new completely *postcolonial* because it has wholly accepted another’s iteration of existence. For Walcott, what is at issue here is not just how the nation’s revolutionary leaders have conceived themselves through the past *but* also how Haiti is imagined through these leaders: Haiti as a black republic, as the place where “Negritude” first stood up. This conception impedes an understanding of Haiti as an American republic where hybridity and not blackness is called to the forefront of regional consciousness. With the latter a more favored notion, future national and Caribbean leaders will be inspired by what Walcott finds is a divisive idea of blackness. They will be drawn, then, to a tragic legacy by which to promulgate colonial inequity.

Noble-minded as Walcott’s reading is, it is nonetheless a cynic’s understanding of the Upheaval, its leadership and legacy. This cynicism shapes the one-dimensional depiction we receive of the revolutionary generals at the helm of a Haiti post independence—Dessalines and Christophe. Dessalines, as we know, is the very epitome of the “beast” that is man. He is, in fact, compared to a wild boar in *The Haitian Earth* (301-302) and referred to as “only a beast” in *Henri Christophe* (42). Thus, he can offer Haiti no more than a “beast’s” approach to existence, violence and excess. Christophe, in turn, has little depth beyond a vacillation between a dueling love and an abhorrence of blackness and whiteness. He also has little to provide a Haiti struggling to make the best of its revolutionary moment by existing in tune with the Caribbean’s composite self. Adding to a thin character development that does no more than further a reading of Haiti as abnormal, and hence forged for inefficacy due to the all too familiar claim of “inept leadership,” is Walcott’s



deliberate linear rendering of Haitian revolutionary history.

The tyranny described in each play is made to follow a linear projection that did not exist during the war of independence, let alone for much of the revolutionary struggle.<sup>34</sup> Still, Walcott crafts it so that is how his viewers and readers are to experience the Revolution. *Drums and Colours* perhaps has greater license than the other dramas for its play with the Revolution's historiography because it seeks to carnivalize history. However, the manner in which the pageant conflates the opening rebellion of 1791 with the onset of the war of independence through the arrival of Napoleon's conquering army in 1802 takes from Carnival's ability to draw attention to history's unnoted. It impedes its ability to direct viewers to the pivotal struggle for freedom tirelessly waged by a slave mass all too often obscured by the Dessalines' and Christophe's of the revolutionary record. This conflation creates a sense that the colony was steadily moving from rebellion to independence when in fact it teetered between a national struggle for independence waged by the nameless slaves and a civil war pursued by factions within the famed revolutionary leadership. The slaves were firmly invested in a future removed from Euro-American dominance quite unlike the revolutionary generals. The pageant's linear play with the revolutionary record subsumes the history of the slaves' dogged pursuit of a lasting and meaningful emancipation within that of the *grand hommes* of history "proper," those whose revolutionary intentions were often not as clearly directed toward slave liberation and cultural

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<sup>34</sup> Recall Dessalines' defection and that of the other black and mulatto generals from the majority's side during the revolution's final phase, the war of independence (1802-1804). The Upheaval's result reveals a gradual and steady progression from 1791 to 1804 towards independence, but the revolution, itself, disclosed fluctuating movement between forward movement (liberation) and regressive movement (colony). The defection, the suppressed rebels and Toussaint's diplomacy (in a moment that demanded action), were all aspects that retarded independence and confounded a linear understanding of revolutionary history.

decolonization.

If indeed *Drums and Colours* intended to carnivalize history to provide its viewers with a positive sense of themselves in the Caribbean past, Walcott wasted an opportunity to do so in his pageant. So invested in the idea of Haiti as abnormal, he elides the nation's struggle to exist alternatively through slave stewardship and presents the generals as the sole actors vying to shape the colony's future. In fact, in the dramatic piece in which the people are depicted as Haiti's only hope and granted greater textual significance (*The Haitian Earth*), their revolutionary struggle for a new future is not even mentioned. Representing the Revolution as the story of Dessalines, Toussaint and Christophe, the play is complicit with a revolutionary narratology that neglects the majority's efforts for self determination by asking early in its production: "when that big drum/The thunder shake Haiti,/.../What man does we remember"(304)? The chorus tellingly replies alternatively with the names of the aforementioned generals.<sup>35</sup> The Revolution, it seems, can only be narrated through those who ensure the nation's abnormality. It can only be told from a perspective that reinforces Walcott's unwavering conviction that Haiti is damned and has been so since 1804.

The costs of this linear narration is the sense of inevitability it inspires, essentially, an understanding between Walcott and his audience that Haiti was doomed from the start to be a failed state, guided as it was by the

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<sup>35</sup> For historical studies that examine revolutionary figures of little note, see Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990) and Thornton, John K. "I am the Subject of the King of Congo: African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution," *Journal of World History*. 4.2. 1993. 181-214. Both actively seek to revise a customary revolutionary narratology that privileges the actions of the famous revolutionary generals who are amenable to Euro-American conceptions of enlightenment and rule. In the chapter that follows this, I reveal how Edwidge Danticat does the same by unearthing the unnoted revolutionary presence and significance of women and revealing through them alternative notions of the Revolution's aims and intentions.

thoughts and actions of such men as Dessalines and Christophe. *Henri Christophe* furthers this sense of tragic inevitability. It draws to a close with Pétion's troops approaching Christophe's kingdom, ready to seize his realm and continue the "dark monarchy" (429) of Haiti's "angry kings" (377, 408). Pétion, however, had long died (1818) when Christophe's reign collapsed (1820). It is his successor, Jean-Pierre Boyer, who leads the siege against Christophe and who later unites the Southern and Northern portions of Haiti. *The Haitian Earth* retains this historical inaccuracy and ends with reference to Pétion's upcoming siege. When questioning Yette for her black magic, King Christophe asks: "Did you see victory for Pétion Eh?/For you and all the mulattos, eh? Mulatress (429)?"<sup>36</sup> This reference to Pétion's color promotes the false notion that Haiti's abnormality emerges in part from its leaders' inability to rise above race. While that is true to an extent, the feud between the black Christophe and the mulatto Pétion was not, however, because of race. Both were from the same moneyed elite group and, in this way, raceless". In fact, they treated the masses in a similar iniquitous manner as many of means do. They were ideologically opposed to each other with regard to how Haiti was to be governed. Pétion's "liberal" neocolonial republicanism found greater support in the South and West and Christophe's efforts, however autocratic as they were to cease any connection with France, were more popular in the North. The more historically accurate accusation a beleaguered Christophe would have levied against Yette would then be: "Did you see victory for Pétion Eh?/For you and all the [republicans], eh?"

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<sup>36</sup> Walcott also conflates past and present by having a soldier state to Christophe immediately prior to this that "She [Yette] prayed for victory for General Rigaud,/The enemy of our Emperor Henri Christophe" (*The Haitian Earth* 429). Rigaud was a mulatto revolutionary general who briefly succeeded from Pétion's republic before dying a year later in 1811 among many other important exploits.

Yet, this amended accusation would still be found wanting as it preserves the simplistic “good and evil” opposition underwriting Walcott’s characterization of Pétion’s advent: the unsaid notion that Pétion’s liberal democratic leanings could have saved Haiti from its decline into dictatorial excess. Chris Bongie persuasively argues in his 2005 essay “Monotonies of History” that Walcott’s “failure to clarify what exactly Pétion was doing during Christophe’s reign” not only allows him to “represent the postrevolutionary condition [of the nation] in terms of a monotonously linear succession of rulers,” but it allows him to “oppose a ‘good’ republicanism to a ‘bad’ monarchism.”<sup>37</sup> It allows him to therefore position Christophe as a scapegoat for Haiti’s future ills because he chose to rule autocratically.<sup>38</sup> What Pétion was doing in the South was furthering French neocolonialism by reinstating and ruling through colony polices. What’s more, he ruled like Christophe, autocratically. He was by no means a fair and just leader. He governed, like Christophe, despotically. Remember, they are of the same moneyed elite group with a similar superior ideation of self in relation to the

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<sup>37</sup> See “Monotonies of History”: Baron de Vastey and the Mulatto Legend of Derek Walcott’s “Haitian Trilogy,” *Yale French Studies: The Haiti Issue: 1804 and Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 107 (2005), 92. All further citations will be made in the text.

<sup>38</sup> Bongie’s comprehensive and critically incisive essay greatly shaped the direction of this chapter. In his piece, Bongie focuses specifically on the mulatto legend shaping Haitian politics and its use by Walcott. Quoting David Nicholls, he reveals that the legend was “a mid-nineteenth-century representational strategy through which Haiti’s revolutionary past was used ... as a way of explaining and justifying ‘the predominant position enjoyed by the mulatto elite’ in Haiti” (74-75). He argues that Walcott’s changing depiction of the mulatto Baron Vastey in *The Trilogy* is complicit with this legend, as it obscures the nuances of the revolutionary period while reducing the conflicts to questions of race and black autocracy versus mulatto republicanism. According to Bongie, this allows Walcott to offer an apolitical position that is in fact highly political. In Bongie’s estimation, this apolitical stance is very much charged with Walcott’s own personal issues of race and politics, as evinced in his desire to leave the past in the past while continually returning to the same past he disdains: Haiti’s revolutionary.

mass. Christophe, ironically enough, was more liberal than Pétion.<sup>39</sup>

In placing the burden of Haiti's dire postcolonial state firmly on the shoulders of Christophe, Dessalines and future Haitian leaders of similar "tyrannical" ilk, Walcott's linear reading of the *Upheaval* never once provides occasion to acknowledge how such choices of governance were made in response to the menacing presence of France, Europe and the United States. It never once allows audience members to consider the important actions of France and the international community as a whole to Haiti's purported abnormality. In this way, it fails to gesture to (and however briefly treat) what follows the end of Christophe's reign: the economic and political devastation of Haiti due not to racially-motivated violence driven by a tragic relation to the past, but to Boyer's continuation of Pétion's policies. These policies were driven by, what would amount to, a costly desire for French recognition. The nation, as we know, paid billions for this recognition. Ignoring this and the many threats of re-colonization France issued, Bongie reveals that once Walcott depicts the colony as free of the French "Dessalines' and Christophe's" Haiti is represented as being completely detached from the 'international social and economic system'" preying on the new nation

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<sup>39</sup> Regarding the civil war between Christophe and Pétion, their compatriots, and the masses, David Nicholls writes that "neither group was particularly interested in the welfare of the mass of former slaves, though both groups relied upon their support. It was necessary for the republican government to hoodwink its black masses into believing that Christophe was a tyrannical ogre who would drive the people back to work on plantations at the lash of the whip and take from them their new-found freedom, while the royal government endeavoured to persuade its black masses that republican democracy was weak and ineffective, and that Pétion was preparing to submit once more to French rule." See *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 60. Neither man was completely correct in his respective assessment of the other; Christophe's monarchy did indeed return many to the plantation, but unlike Pétion's "republicanism" that required that he rule as "president for life," there was (as Nicholls notes) a spirit of egalitarianism within the Northern Kingdom. People of all class standings could offer their opinions to those in power, the wealthy feeling no offense to the wisdom of the impoverished. Christophe's error was his reliance on plantation labor; slavery was to near a past for such a choice for his kingdom; see Nicholls 59.

(Bongie 89).<sup>40</sup> Should we credit Walcott's adolescence for this grievous and startlingly oversight in *Henri Christophe* and therefore excuse him, what allowances can we make for him in *The Haitian Earth*? Can we reasonably make any?

Walcott is famously suspicious of history. As Bongie argues, many can excuse his play with the Haitian Revolutionary record because he is famously opposed to the past's enduring salience. Moreover, he is also weary of the "political solution of art." More specifically, he is weary of "the melee that can happen [to literary texts] in democratic demands for equality."<sup>41</sup> However, everything about his literary attention to Haiti has been about the "political solution of art," i.e. Caribbean cultural liberation via an acceptance of its hybridity and inborn comic sensibility. A similar project is at work in his plays *Dream on Monkey Mountain* and *Pantomime*, where overcoming past parameters of existence forge new socio-political opportunities for cross-racial cooperation and personal self-appreciation. Walcott's representation of the Revolution and Haiti is far too complicit with the popular Western reading of the nation as a failed state suffering from some inborn cultural poverty to simply dismiss due to his aversion to the political uses and nature of history. Like Walcott's depiction, such a reading ignores the effects of neocolonial policy and actions. It ignores, to borrow from Paul Framer, the "uses of Haiti" by an international community keen on sustaining what Walcott has deemed a tragic ethos for being.

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<sup>40</sup> In *The Uses of Haiti*, Paul Farmer powerfully ties Haiti's postcolonial state to this system when writing that "bad things certainly happen, and frequently, in Haiti—but rarely in isolation from an international social and economic system of which Haiti is a part." See *The Uses of Haiti*, (Common Courage Press, 1994), 214.

<sup>41</sup> Saje, Natasha and George Handley, "Sharing in the Exhilaration: An Interview with Derek Walcott," *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature*. 32:2 (April 2001), 132.

When reading *The Trilogy* and the individual plays in isolation with an understanding of the significance of this ethos to Walcott's decolonial project of Caribbean cultural liberation, what is glaringly evident is the manner in which this reductive reading of the Revolution fosters the unsaid understanding that this collection is an indictment of Haiti and Haiti alone. What the collection ultimately encourages is the understandings that countries and persons should not seek to exist as the "mad Haitian rebel[s]" cautioned against in the final comic portion of *Drums and Colours* (272). All too easily ignored in the collection's message is a way of modern being fixing the Caribbean to its colonial past. Made singular and posited as *the* representation of the very ethos Walcott finds is stifling the nation and the region, Haiti's rendering obscures Walcott's target of criticism: a Western modernity emulated and propagated by those (Caribbean leaders and peoples) who should be in search of difference. Accordingly, what is troubling about Walcott's appraisal of Haiti is not the notion that Haiti (through its leaders) remains cerebrally colonized —indeed Haiti's leaders, as the region's, have proved to be well versed pupils of Euro-America— but the "monotony of thought" employed by Walcott when offering this reading. This recurring dearth of imaginative capability is what he reproaches the West for when it appraised (and appraises) the Caribbean. Speaking of this "monotony of thought," he states during his Nobel Peace Prize speech ("Antilles) that "history can alter the eye and the moving hand to conform a view of itself. ... it can temper the glare of tropical light to elegiac monotony in prose, the tone of judgment in Conrad."<sup>42</sup> Walcott's understanding of history has done just

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<sup>42</sup> "Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory," *What the Twilight Says: Essays*, (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1998) 75.

that here, “alter[ing]” Walcott’s “eye” and “moving [his] hand to conform [to] a view” he has faithfully cultivated. His understanding of history has lead him to the “elegiac monotony [of] prose” to a “tone of judgment” regarding Haiti. Thinking of this type condemned the region to a fated inconsequentiality, ultimately encouraging Caribbean peoples to aspire to inconsequentiality, to parodist strivings to be remade as Europe (and now America) in blackface. No comic communality can thrive with such thinking. It cannot thrive with thinking that prompts the building of “citadels” when it is detritus that Walcott urges all to want, and when it is detritus that gives rise to laughter and thus a real *postcolonial* state.

The problem with Walcott’s cynical and wholly reductive reading of the nation is that it feeds an already well-nourished censorious depiction of Haiti that entices all to Euro-Americanity lest (the not to so subtle warning goes) they become “mad Haitian rebel[s],” lest they become a Haiti. Bongie argues that Walcott’s skewed appraisal of the nation occurs because of his adolescent turn to tragic drama. He maintains that the “mimesis of tragic scapegoating [found first in *Henri Christophe* through Christophe’s autocratic hubris] ... turned into a fixed view of the world, one that continue[d] to inform the latter plays, despite their drift from any formal imitation of tragedy” (89). However, tragedy has little to do with it. Tragedy was a mere outlet for what the colonial Walcott inherited—a manner of thinking all too often conveyed through literary or philosophical hallmarks of Euro-Americanity such as tragic drama. Walcott’s reductive interpretation of the nation negates any real effort to exist comically as it sustains a “monotony” of thought that can read Haiti, and by extension, the Caribbean in but one manner: as wholly ineffectual. That *The Trilogy* can be framed by a “story of



the Caribbean” that is ostensible, “the story of Haiti” speaks to how little removed the two really are for those outside the Caribbean. It speaks to the manner in which a Haiti so narrowly defined lends greater credence to the generalizations of thought constricting the region to deficiency. Such thinking conditionally supports the idea that the region is unable to author existence within its terms, due to some cultural depravity. With this in mind, what real merit is the comic to the Caribbean if it acts as the tragic? If it creates an other of which to abhor and thus reenacts the foolish chase for self-exception underwriting modernity proper? In making Haiti a pariah, an abnormal stain of excess for both the Caribbean and Euro-America, Walcott forces all to ask: what hope can there really ever be for a comedic existence when the comedy proposed laughs back and appears in full light to be tragedy as Walcott defines and understands it—a sad repetition of the same?

## CHAPTER 4

### *DÉFILEZ!* AND THE BATTLE CONTINUES

On March 25, 2008, Edwidge Danticat delivered the second annual Toni Morrison Lecture at Princeton University, where she addressed the formative influence of politics on her work and that of other Haitian artists.<sup>1</sup> Of note is her discussion of the 1964 public execution of two members of the *Jeune Haiti* faction, a dissident youth group seeking to overthrow the dictatorship of François Duvalier.<sup>2</sup> In a move intended to curb further acts against the government, the execution was repeatedly broadcast to the Haitian public, necessitating an artistic rebuttal.<sup>3</sup> A group of young Haitians clandestinely staged Athenian tragedies, endeavoring to show “[the] young men and women who were being forced to witness [the] execution over and over ... that art could still be created in their circumstances... that words could still be written, songs still sung, stories still told.”<sup>4</sup> When new rebels (both real and supposed) were later denied a proper burial by the government and when friends, family and citizens were equally deprived of the conventional means through which to mourn their deaths, Sophocles’ *Antigone* was performed. Together, the artists and the public alike grieved in the only manner they

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<sup>1</sup> This particular lecture has recently been published as the lead essay in Danticat’s new collection of nonfiction, *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*. For the recording of the Princeton talk see: <http://www.princeton.edu/africanamericanstudies/events/toni-morrison-lectures/2007-08/>.

<sup>2</sup> For more concerning the *Jeune Haiti* see Patrick Lemoine’s *Fort-Dimanche Dungeon of Death*, (Bloomington: Trafford Publishing, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> See Reilly Kiernan, “Haitian Repression Inspires Edwidge Danticat,” *Focus: Center for African American Studies*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press) (Fall 2008), 13, an article offering a summary of Danticat’s Princeton discussion with direct quotes from Danticat. I quote in my text Danticat as relayed by Kiernan.

<sup>4</sup> Danticat qtd. in Kiernan 13.

could: through a performance that was their pain. With *Antigone*, they decried the political malfeasance that led to such senseless ends by commemorating and memorializing the lives lost. Danticat asserts that in this regard, Sophocles while having no idea that “he was writing for ... Haitians,” became for these young artists “a Haitian writer.”<sup>5</sup> He became, as it were, a comrade in the struggle for speech in silence.

Danticat’s invocation of Greek tragic production during her lecture at Princeton underscores what this project has thus far attempted to reveal: the tragic lens shaping literary consideration of Haiti. While the talk gave audience members an understanding of how art emerges from politics, it concurrently provided a tragic frame for seeing Haiti. In a nation where politics permeates all aspects of life, literary imagination is invariably conditioned by socio-political occurrences that transcend time and space. The *Jeune Haiti* incident occurred prior to Danticat’s birth in Haiti (1969), and yet it resonates as a living memory within her consciousness, an anecdote she can call upon to describe her literary influences while far from her homeland. Similarly, the Theban legend on which *Antigone* is based is as alive to the Haitian artists of 1964 as it was to Sophocles when he wrote the tragedy on or around 442 BC, years removed from the legend’s happening and 2406 years prior to 1964. The myth outlines the following political circumstances: after a devastating civil war in Thebes between Polynices and Eteocles (Oedipus’ sons and heirs), Creon (the new ruler of Thebes and the pair’s uncle) decrees that Eteocles will be honored with a stately burial for having defended the *polis*; Polynices, for his part in initiating the war and for bringing to Athens a brigand of barbarians, will not. In fact, no one is to bury and mourn Polynices.

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<sup>5</sup> Danticat qtd. in Kiernan 13.

Antigone, however, does, taking a stand against tyranny. This legend is of continued relevance not simply because the drama is a canonical piece of Western literature, but because many within the Americas have lived and re-lived these political happenings. They have lived beneath the oppressive weight of a tyrant primed to dictate all matters of life, who should be loved and mourned. I see in Danticat's anecdote—and by extension, our collective capacity for memory without temporal and spatial bounds—a tragic means of reading Haiti precisely because it directs Danticat's Princeton audience to what troubled Alejo Carpentier and Derek Walcott in their treatments of the nation: the haunting and insistent occurrence of the past in the present. This presence has led Haitian writer Louis-Philippe Dalembert to state that Haitians live "historical lives."<sup>6</sup> They live lives in which the present echoes the past so often that, as Danticat recently remarked, many can feel as though they have lived and experienced a bygone they were not apart of.<sup>7</sup> No past is more "lived," more repeated in the socio-political discord plaguing the nation and, in this sense, more tragic than the revolutionary.

While principally concerned with the Haitian Diaspora in the U.S., Danticat's short story collection, *Krik? Krak!* (1996) also turns to revolutionary history to address the socio-political and socio-economic reasons for Haitian migratory movement. The collection's composition for unnamed others (largely female) rendered inconsequential by the silences of revolutionary history and U.S. xenophobia is a testament to Danticat's keen writerly interest

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<sup>6</sup> See J. Michael Dash, "Roundtable: Writing, History, and Revolution," *Small Axe* 18, 9.2 (September 2005), 194.

<sup>7</sup> During a November 3, 2010 appearance at Princeton Public Library, Danticat discussed the *Jeune Haiti* incident in relation to her new text, *Create Dangerously*. She revealed how real it was to her, despite her distant from the event now and at the moment it occurred. She offered the aforementioned paraphrased remark as the reason why the event resonated for her in the manner that it did.

in humanizing Haitians within the U.S. popular imaginary, an interest treated extensively in her novels, *Breath Eyes and Memory* (1994), *Framing of Bones* (1998), and *The Dew Breaker* (2004), young adult fiction, *Behind the Mountains* and *Eight Days: A Story of Haiti* (2010), travel narrative, *After the Dance* (2002), family memoir, *Brother, I am Dying* and her collection of essays, *Create Dangerously* (2010). The stories of *Krik? Krak!* collectively intervene in a U.S. narrative that reads Haiti and Haitians through base sobriquets: boat people, AIDS carriers, and people of “the poorest country in the Western hemisphere.” It gives voice, name and narration to the lives of those whose humanity is concealed by ignorance, xenophobic fear, and racist thought. The collection opens with “Children of the Sea,” a story concerning young lovers who dream of nothing more than of their love, passing their university exams, and of political freedom in Haiti. Forced apart by a repressive military regime, one secures refuge in the Haitian countryside and the other takes to the sea, joining the many “boat people” who have crossed the Atlantic from Columbus onward. When we read the piece and come across the exceptionally-long name of a minor character, a name consisting of forenames alone—“Justin Moise André Nozius Joseph Frank Osnac Maximilien”—we would be hard-pressed not to recognize the manner in which Danticat intends to call attention to the nameless, past and present, within her collection.<sup>8</sup> The fact that these forenames are reminiscent of key individuals within Danticat’s own family attests to the significance of naming for Danticat. The very intimacy of relations such names indicate affirms the immense regard Danticat has for those rendered inconsequential within dehumanizing immigration narratives,

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<sup>8</sup> See *Krik? Krak!* (New York: Vintage Contemporaries, 1996), 27. All further citations will be made in the text.

the narratives that police the transatlantic movement of Haitians and of all Caribbean peoples.<sup>9</sup> To open with a story highlighting those who, when acknowledged within the U.S. popular imaginary, are subsumed within essentializing appellations is to decisively interrupt and call into question the very tenets that ground an American understanding of Haitians. What's more, it is to critique an amnesic understanding of transatlantic history. In this regard, Danticat writes *Krik? Krak!* to break through a stifling reading of Haitians within the U.S.. She offers her U.S. audience varied and nuanced stories of a people who are more than a designation, people who have hopes, dreams and aspiration like them in spite of the enormous obstacles they face.

While important to the collection, the plight and perception of the Haitian Diaspora is dealt with minimally here as that is a subject that has been extensively treated by scholars of Danticat. My interest is the tragic lens that informs how we are to understand the work Danticat undertakes regarding the Haitian Revolution and modernity. In the chapters that have preceded this one, the focus has been on male-authored and male-centered narratives of the Haitian Upheaval. In their respective struggles with the Haitian paradox, namely, the incongruity of Haiti's glorious moment of revolutionary success (signaling the advent of modernity) and subsequent political and economic turmoil (revealing a lack of progress—the every antithesis to modernity), these narratives have substantiated the gender bias at the heart of critical treatments of the revolution: the undue emphasis on the exceptional male subject. This chapter critiques the normativity of such a tendency in scholarly and literary

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<sup>9</sup> In *Brother, I am Dying*, (New York: Vintage Books, 2007) Danticat reveals that her uncle's name is "Joseph Nosius," 76; her uncle's grandchildren are named "Maxime, Nozial ...[and] Joseph" (171). She also has another uncle named "Franck" (247) and a cousin named "Maxo" (25).

expositions of the Haitian uprising. It focuses instead on the “others’ in such accounts: the unsung women of the revolution.

Notwithstanding its concern with the Haitian Diaspora in the U.S., *Krik? Krak!* is firmly committed to tending to Haiti’s “kitchen poets” at home and abroad. These “poets” are women with a rich history of unnoted creative production and military service (219, 222).<sup>10</sup> They are women who are unnoted precisely because they have existed in difference and hence in alterity due to their gender, race, class and/or experience of profound poverty. Furthermore, they are also unnoted because have equally struggled for difference, for a better Haiti for future “poets” to come. Concerning these women, Danticat concludes her short-story collection noting their pivotal presence in her life. She writes that there are “a thousand women urging [her] to speak through the blunt tip of [her] pencil” (222), inspiring her literary artistry with their efforts to control their “unruliness [and] rebelliousness” (221). As “an army ... watching over [her],” they are with her at “every step [she] take[s]” (222). Foremost to Danticat’s depiction of these poets is their experience of resistance. Accordingly, in bringing attention to their innate “unruliness [and] rebelliousness” Danticat discloses the extensive experience they have had in combative struggle and, in turn, the experience they have had in the many acts of collective discord shaping Haiti’s history. As she does this, she also brings attention to the military experience to be gained through womanhood, in particular, through the day-to-day struggles of existing as women in Haiti or as the thrice-burdened black and foreign female in the United States. These women then are “poets” not simply because their “fables ... metaphors ... and

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<sup>10</sup> The phrase “kitchen poets” was coined by Paule Marshall. See FROM THE POETS IN THE KITCHEN, *NY TIMES*, 1983

*je ne sais qoui* daily slip into [Danticat's] survival soup," (222) but because they are women warriors struggling, individually and collectively, to ensure there is soup to begin with.

When searched for in Haiti's revolutionary history, these "poets" are largely obscured by the singular attention given to the Toussaints' and Dessalines' of the revolutionary record. As "figures of enlightenment" (Toussaint) or as "avengers of the Americas" (Dessalines), these oft studied men are such because they conform to what many would like to know of existence: that men rule and do so in an Euro-American manner as the "enlightened" Toussaint or as the "barbaric" Dessalines.<sup>11</sup> Both men are readable and knowable precisely because they correspond to the familiar masculine narrative of existence authored by Europe delineating worthy revolutionary action, historical persons and forms of acceptable being as a whole.<sup>12</sup> As abstractions of such grandeur, these men and others like them overshadow the obscured female personage through whom their endeavors are facilitated and contested. Relegated to an afterthought (if at all), the *femme d'Ayiti* who "[stood] right next to their men"<sup>13</sup> during Haiti's historical struggles are the "nine hundred and ninety-nine women [and counting]"

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<sup>11</sup> After securing Haitian independence in 1804, Dessalines is said to have declared: "I have avenged America." See Laurent Dubois' aptly titled, *Avengers of the New World*, (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004) and Lysuis Salomon's commemorative utterance thirty-nine years following Dessalines' death: "Avenger of the black race, liberator of Haiti, founder of independence, Emperor Dessalines! today is your glory, the sun today burns for you as radiantly as it did in 1804." See Joan (Colin) Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 27. C.L.R James famously reads Toussaint as a "figure of enlightenment." See *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Overture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage, 1989) 288.

<sup>12</sup> Despite the controversy that surrounds Dessalines within the West and North, he still conforms to an acceptable form of Euro-American being because he fits firmly within the stereotypes of savagery and violence concerning persons of African descent in rule. He is disdained precisely because he is the very representation of black vengeance. He personifies all the fears that Euro-America has of uncontrollable black rage.

<sup>13</sup> See Beverly Bell, *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 2.



(Danticat 224) at the heart of *Krik? Krak!*, asking “for [Danticat’s] voice” and demanding to be recognized, remembered and heard (222). Heeding this call, this chapter reads Danticat’s two narratives, “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” and “Wall of Rising Fire,” with awareness of the way in which these stories are a part of a feminist “literature of revolution.”<sup>14</sup> They are apart of a literature that “search[es] for an irrevocable alteration of the status quo.”<sup>15</sup> I assess how a move to gender the discourse of the Haitian Revolution unleashes the tragic within the texts, specifically the echoes of the past in the present which enable a rethinking of the revolution, its subjects, aims and intentions.

Rethinking the Revolution requires attention to the subtle but intense dialogue carried on between “Nineteen Thirty Seven” and “Wall of Rising Fire.” Facilitated by the Vodounian imaginary guiding Danticat’s revolutionary work, this dialogue concerns revolutionary memory and the narratives of existence legitimated by modernity proper. More broadly, this discussion calls attention to the way in which modernity proper shapes Haitian Revolutionary narratology and who and what we summon to mind concerning the Revolution. This exchange between “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” and “Wall of Rising Fire” cultivates remembrance of both the Revolution’s unnoted and what has equally been hidden within the historiography of the Upheaval: the unfinished nature of the Uprising and the way revolutionary success, for many, has yet to be realized. We come to this awareness of unrealized success with attention to the battle for being set into motion by the Revolution. This battle involves a sustained effort to existence in political and cultural difference that is in opposition to the parameters for existence set

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<sup>14</sup> Myriam Chancy, *Framing Silence: Revolutionary Novels by Haitian Women*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 6.

<sup>15</sup> Chancy, 6.

forth by Euro-American modernity. We note this clash with an awareness of the narratives' rich play with histories and temporalities. Such play foregrounds the violence intrinsic to the modern moment, particularly the post-1492 period. What's more, it sheds light on the manner in which a Euro-American imagining of existence is not only male-centered, where men rule all, but it is progress-centered, driven by the notion of "development as progress."<sup>16</sup> Intolerant of difference, this notion of "development as progress" requires that all be the same, like the West in mind and being. Thus, the battle for being shaping the narratives purposefully stages how persons are forcibly made to be the same despite their efforts to exist in political and cultural

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<sup>16</sup> The phrase "development as progress" refers to a 21<sup>st</sup>-century understanding of progress derived from María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo's *The Revolutionary Imagination in the Americas and the Age of Development*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003) a text critical to my reading of Danticat's reworking of revolution, progress and modernity. Whereas the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolution reveals that progress is the means by which existence can be remade anew, laying the foundation for a free liberal democratic existence through revolution, following World War II when much of the world was in upheaval due to decolonization movements and the communist peril, Saldaña-Portillo suggests that revolution itself (be it liberal democratic or socialist) was a threat to the very existence progress-as-revolution valorized. The largely liberal democratic Euro-America had come to understand development as progress, essentially the development of the colonies so as to facilitate its personal economic growth. Accordingly, with revolution (and hence the radical re-ordering of existence) no longer the focus, increasing capital became the sole means to "progress." The decolonial struggles following World War II granted the former notion new life and hence importance to socialist and liberal democratic independence struggles. To counter this importance, the "development as progress" paradigm became regarded as necessary to the entire "human family." Such an expansion in thought, however, did not resolve the innate conflict between the two notions of progress conditioning the late twentieth century. A Caribbean nation's efforts to progress presently requires a choice between being a Haiti/Cuba (economically in ruins but a strong regional symbol of cultural nationalism) or a Barbados/Turks and Caicos (economically comfortable but symbolically impotent). As such, a nation must concede —and, in fact, ensure— its political powerlessness within the global order so that it can potentially move toward some kind of economic prosperity. The prevailing notion of progress evinced within the temporal and historical play of "Nineteen Thirty-Seven" is that of "development as progress," even while the chief moments discussed follow World War I and not World War II; the former marks a time period much like the latter, when "the United States and the Soviet Union [vying for power] expressed their desire for the liquidation of European empires on the basis of the right to self determination of peoples" and "national development" (Saldaña-Portillo 18). While Saldaña-Portillo's work is insightful and has been extremely useful to my project, it suffers from one striking deficiency —a total disregard of Haiti. The critical attention the nation garners is merely a footnote in which she acknowledges the nation's exclusion from her project and welcomes the work of any Caribbeanist who could "correct [her] limited vision" (292 fn3).

difference.

Our awareness of the Revolution as an enduring battle for being emerges with attention to the narratives' use of Vodounian thought. The latter is tragic in essence and therefore discloses the tragic nuances of Danticat's work. A syncretic belief system of the Americas, Vodou is an amalgamation of West African spiritual practices, Amerindian and European (Catholic, most predominantly). It is of immense cultural significance due to the Revolution. The latter's success is often credited to the famed 1791 *Bwa Kayiman* ceremony said to have inspired the revolution's early participants, and to the *lwa* (demi-gods) who are recognized as having interceded on the people's behalf. The practice as a whole is one of relation where one's singularity as an individual emerges from a cosmic multiplicity, from an enduring familial association with departed ancestors granted new life as divine beings. These ancestors, *lè Mò* (the dead), *lè Marasa* (twins), and *lè Mistè* ("mysteries" i.e. *lwa*), comprise the core divinities of the practice.

As inherited entities, beings passed down like genetic traits from mother and father to their progeny, these ancestors are said to reside in their descendants' blood. Persons are therefore never quite "individuals" in the Euro-American sense, as they are always implicated within a broader spiritual collectivity preserved within themselves. Their blood, married with ancestral energy, creates the conditions by which they are tragic beings. That is, persons who are simultaneously singular and plural, made of a particular's corporal essence and its present while concurrently shaped by their ancestors' respective pasts. These pasts are preserved in mind, body and spirit. Therefore, when Danticat reveals that there are "nine hundred and ninety-nine women boiling in [her] blood" and that "the women in her family never

[lose] touch with one and other," she grounds her person and text within a Vodounian imaginary. In this way, her collection is structured to be fundamentally tragic as it is wholly concerned with what lies at the heart of such an imaginary: mournful remembrance.

When persons entreat an ancestor for guidance or simply acknowledge their presence within them, as Danticat does, they take part in an act of mournful remembrance that grants the dead vitality in death and concedes the perpetuation of the past in the present. Through this act of invocation and recognition, persons engage in a tragic performance of grief that is fundamentally melancholic. It is melancholic because it is enacted and experienced as an enduring demonstration of remembrance, one that consciously preserves a loss (of a person or event) in the present. Whereas mourning in a Freudian sense interprets grief as a brief spell that can and must be overcome for one's self-preservation, melancholia as mourning places no temporal constraints upon grief.<sup>17</sup> The deceased (and thus the past of the latter's existence) can remain "steadfastly alive in the present."<sup>18</sup> A melancholic understanding of mourning fits well within a Vodounian imaginary precisely for this reason. The dead, the Freudian "lost object," never perish from existence within Vodou and are incorporated into one of the three sacred collectives.<sup>19</sup> The most honored among men and women being afforded the status of *lwa* or *marasa*. With this divine transformation, a bygone is offered to illuminate a present, permitting, as it were, "lost pasts to step into the light of a present moment of danger".<sup>20</sup> As such, the unsung's

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<sup>17</sup> Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," *Collected Papers*, (London: The Hogarth Press, 1953), 152-170.

<sup>18</sup> David L. Eng and David Kazanjian, "Introduction: Mourning Remains," *Loss: Politics of Mourning*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003) 4.

<sup>19</sup> Freud 155; 166.

<sup>20</sup> Eng and Kazanjian 6.

revolutionary past is the means with which we may tend to a Haiti of continued socio-economic and socio-political deterioration. What we have with Vodou, then, is a melancholic sensibility that in privileging mournful remembrance allows for an “ongoing and open relationship with the past—bring[ing] its ghosts and specters, its flaring and fleeting images, into [our moment].”<sup>21</sup> In being wholly aware of the persistent manifestation of the past in the present, a Vodounian and grief-driven relation to existence is fundamentally tragic in the sense I have defined. It is more so when we recall that tragedy, for all intents and purposes, is a gendered “discourse of mourning.”<sup>22</sup>

In naming tragedy as a “discourse of mourning,” we call to mind the origins of tragic production, specifically its birth as a political effort to suppress public acts of female mourning. Furthermore, in doing so, we acknowledge the manner in which tragic drama defiantly and deliberately fixes our gaze and tunes our ears to those whom the *polis* seeks to suppress and silence: women in lamentation, barbarians and slaves. Reading tragedy as a discourse of grief-stricken remembrance allows us to see the complex work of tragic productions, and therefore to see the fruitful possibilities present upon reading the tragic, the revolution and modernity in relation. Such a reading dislodges the certainty of one story and one history embodied in exception. It allows us to attend to the clamor of sound in silence. To that end, it facilitates awareness of the way in which we are being pushed to discern the physical and aural presence of the unnoted females in the revolutionary

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<sup>21</sup> Eng and Kazanjian 4.

<sup>22</sup> Olga Taxidou, *Tragedy, Modernity and Mourning*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004) 9.

record.<sup>23</sup> We are being pushed, in this way, to perceive what the obscured bring to light for contemporary peoples: the ever-present and obscure latent oppositions to the political project of Euro-American modernity. Accordingly, of principal concern to this chapter is not only unveiling the unsung females within the revolutionary record through a tragic mode of reading, but also coming to heed what the unsung (when listened to) offer a present in dire need of an alternative means of existence: the ability to imagine a future of difference, one grounded in the belief that the future need not follow the path of Westernization or Americanization. It can and will be of a locality's own

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<sup>23</sup> The text's structure and Vodouian imaginary places readers in the thick of implied utterance, in the midst, more precisely, of ancestral speech. Framing the collection is the performance convention of "krik?" and "krak!" The call and response of nature of this oral custom works to solicit multiple voices at once—here, our voice and that of unnoted others. The collection is prefaced with a poem by Sal Scalora, entitled "White Darkness/Black Dreamings," that offers a descriptive explanation for this spoken convention. Painting a scene of laughter and mirth ("somewhere by the seacoast I feel a breath of warm sea and hear the laughter of children"), it details the communal happenings of a seaside village. Merry "village children," we are told, surround "an old granny" as she recounts stories to ensure that the former "know what came before them." These stories lie at the heart of the oral storytelling tradition that titles Danticat's work. Scalora writes: "they [storytellers] ask Krik? we [participants] say Krak!" This opening, warm and idyllic (the poem ends touchingly with, "our stories are kept in our hearts"), immediately grounds readers in the performative, in a phonic oratory engagement that commands attention and participatory engagement. It welcomes and encourages our solitary utterance, our thunderous "krak!" in response to Danticat's written exposition, her equally booming "krik?".

Our "krak!", however, is not solely of one corporal immanence; it is not simply the utterance of reader-participants in the here and now; nor is Danticat's "krik?" exclusively her's and thus relegated to the temporality of its emergence. Both are part of an already existing and ever-evolving communal complex preserved in orality, in speech that performs collectivity and unearths seemingly lost realities. The oral tradition of participatory speech inscribes a tragic particularity to Caribbean discourse; as Kamau Braithwaite argues in *History of Voice*, Caribbean speech is a continuum of past and present relations, of "ancestral to creole to national to international" forms of dialogue and thus being (16). It is, at heart, a living, Vodouesque marker of the ties between the past and present; essentially, the tragic ties that bind all into a community of persons with distinct and equally important histories and lived realities worth passing on. To say, then, that we are invited into relation upon reading Danticat's collection is to acknowledge that in offering our "krak!" we agree to take part in a collective self-fashioning with the many living and deceased persons and voices in the text. We agree, as it were, to participate in a phonic performance convention that provides the space in which these voices may coalesce within the vociferous giddiness, the tense excitement and thrill manifest in the silence of anticipation that an audience would feel upon "hearing" these stories. As reader-participants, we are therefore located within a raucous silence that consciously makes the unnoted present, and that nurtures the continuation of an ancestral community forever vital in both our blood and our speech.

imagining.

#### **METHODS OF NARRATION: DÉFILÉE AND BOUKMAN**

Notwithstanding their distinct subject matters, “Wall of Rising Fire” and “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” are engaged in a subtle but intense dialogue concerning the Revolution and modernity. The stories are jointly concerned with offering an alternative view of the Revolution as a whole. As stated earlier, this unconventional view involves unearthing the Upheaval’s unsung female participants and shedding light on the battle for existence that the revolution set into motion: the struggle for an alternative modernity than the one offered by Europe and, now more pressingly, the United States. “Wall of Rising Fire” openly reproduces a revolutionary narratology that grants males center stage within the revolutionary record. In a departure from the female focus of the collection, male characters (Little Guy, Guy and Boukman) drive the action of the tale and are the only subjects who invoke the Revolution’s history. They appear, in this way, as the sole agents of revolutionary action in the text.

Despite this, the narrative nevertheless works with “Nineteen Thirty Seven” to shift the narratology’s attention from men alone. “Wall of Rising Fire” provides the contextual frame with which to question the male focus of revolutionary history. Reading both stories in tandem, we are urged to critique the narratives of being that a normative male revolutionary recounting supports and encourages; that is to say, we are pushed to question the imperial power that granted *and* grants the West a financially grounded singularity that all are compelled to desire due to the continued economic exploitation of the Global South. “Nineteen Thirty Seven” presents an

alternative female communality through a main character's (Defile) tragic rite of lamentation, which enables a questioning of the move to sameness found in both the Caribbean and Haiti's efforts for modernization mirrored in the revolution's customary narration. When this female communality is read in relation to the "Wall of Rising Fire" male protagonist's (Guy) longing for a modern, Euro-American existence in order to escape difference and poverty, readers are made to ponder the consequences of the postcolonial subject's acceptance of modernity proper's representation of existence. They are urged to do so because Guy's move to sameness repudiates the difference in thought and being that his wife (Lili) represents and, as such, replicates what occurs in a revolutionary record written in search of sameness: the inability to critically tend to women and the alternative ideations of/for the Revolution they and the unnoted had. The exchange of ideas occurring between both short stories, while lively, is largely obscured by their distinct storylines and their divergent narrative approaches to revolutionary history.

We are first given a feminist reading of the Upheaval in "Nineteen Thirty Seven." The narrative implicitly addresses the Revolution through a character named Defile, namesake and great-great-granddaughter of a revolutionary figure (Défilée) famous for her 1806 burial of the assassinated Dessalines. It also attends to the Upheaval through the genocide from which the tale derives its name: the 1937 Dominican massacre of Haitians, an event known in Haiti as *Kout Kouto-a* (the stabbing). Colloquially known as Défilée-la-folle (Défilée the Madwoman), Defile's namesake, Marissainte Dédée Bazile is a woman of little known origin. Her history, as that of most legends, is founded upon conjecture and speculation. Nevertheless, the little we can glean of her person is telling of the subsuming silence concealing women in



the revolutionary record. Of her personal life we know only that she was born in Cap Français, was a slave, was said to have had a cruel master, and was definitively acknowledged, by all, to be mad.<sup>24</sup> How she became mad is unclear. Some point to a sexual assault she suffered (perpetrated by her master), others to the loss of several brothers and sons during one offensive of the revolutionary war, and some to the murder of her parents.<sup>25</sup> All, however, acknowledge that by the time she encounters Dessalines and acts as a sutler to his army, following him throughout Haiti selling meat and, by some accounts, also freely furnishing the regiment and Dessalines with sex, she has long lost her sanity.

This madness proves the basis for her mythic importance within Haiti, as she is widely read by the country's political and literary elite as the "embodiment of the ... nation: crazed and lost, but then redeemed through the body of their [the nation's] savior [Dessalines]".<sup>26</sup> Haiti's "savior" became so through a deliberate effort by the state to memorialize Dessalines. A formidable black national hero such as the late Emperor could not only be used to question mulatto leadership, as was often the case, but he could also be deployed to sustain it, validating mulatto rule by association.<sup>27</sup> Upon his brutal assassination by dismemberment, state actors and literary scholars reveal that Défilée, in a moment of lucidity, single-handedly collected his

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<sup>24</sup> For personal details of her life see Jean Fouchar, *La Meringue: Danse nationale d'Haïti* (Montreal: Eds. Leméac, 1974) 77–80 and Octave Petit, "Défilée-La-Folle," *Revue de la Société d'Histoire et de Géographie d'Haïti* 3.8 (October 1932), 3 (Conférence prononcée au Cercle Excelsior de Jérémie, le 22 Août 1931. Lue à la Société d'Histoire et de Géographie d'Haïti le 9 Octobre 1932).

<sup>25</sup> See Petit 4, 5, Petit 6 and Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, 44, respectively.

<sup>26</sup> See Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods*, 40.

<sup>27</sup> Dayan 27-28. Following Haiti's declaration of independence (1804) and the power vacuum left open by Toussaint's deportation to France (1803), Dessalines proclaimed himself Emperor of the nation and would reign as Jacques I from 1804-1806.

butchered remains and properly buried the then Emperor.<sup>28</sup> This Antigonesque act has immortalized her within Haitian revolutionary historiography, granting her mythic status as the *mère de Patrie, mère d'Haïti* (mother of the nation, mother of Haiti).<sup>29</sup> Défilée, as it goes, acted when no one else would. When the masses and those in power, drunk from the bloodshed of the war, did nothing during the attack on Dessalines attacked — in fact, they rejoiced upon his murder— she, in madness, rose above the folly of the moment and honored a man far above the degradation of his death. She redeemed the redeemer.<sup>30</sup>

Such a reading is ironic at best and cruel at worst. The “heroics” of Défilée (read: her burial of Dessalines) is at once piteous and valorous. The savior of the “savior,” it seems, is paradoxically saved by the saved: when Défilée “comes to the rescue of Dessalines,” restoring him to human consequence through lamentation, she herself is already conceived to be in need of rescue due to her folly. Her “madness,” not her action and nor the wherewithal needed to execute Dessalines’ burial, shapes her memory for Haiti’s political and literary elite. A reading like this one requires that we at once honor her through her deed and equally pity her for the mental instability that enabled her act. This dominant interpretation, romantic and nationalistic in sentiment, does Défilée a great disservice. Not only is it clear

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<sup>28</sup> Défilée did not recover the remains of Dessalines alone, however; she had the help of a like-minded friend, the crazed Dauphin. Haitian historian Jean Fouchard, quoting a contemporary of Défilée, Joseph Jérémie, writes: “Elle enveloppa d’attention et de tendresse le corps inanimé de l’Empereur. Elle glissa dans un sac la tête de celui qui donna le jour à une nation. En essayant de porter sur ses épaules de femmes les restes de Dessalines, au même moment, tel Simon de Cyrène Dauphin, un autre fou célèbre, se présenta afin d’apporter son aide à la folle” (56). [She devotes her attention and tenderness to the lifeless body of the Emperor. She slips in a bag the head of he whom gave the nation it’s day. While attempting to carry the remains of Dessalines on her womanly shoulders, one Simon de Cyrène Dauphin, another well known lunatic, appeared at that very moment to aid the mad woman (my translation)].

<sup>29</sup> Petit 8.

<sup>30</sup> Dayan 45.

that her “redemption” rests upon a man’s salvation and that the very mythification of Défilée subsists only to restore and sustain Dessalines’ exception, it is also quite apparent that in understanding her in such a manner Défilée’s very power goes unnoted. Such a reading requires that we see Défilée, in all aspects of her existence, as irredeemable and therefore negligible because of her madness.

In spite of the scant record we have, it is clear that we must not accept such a rendering. Défilée’s lunacy does not impede her personal recognition of the Revolution’s importance. It does not detach her from critical and conscious thought. She *chooses* to be a sutler. She makes the conscious choice to align herself with the revolutionary struggle and thus to fight for the chance to exist in difference. She sincerely fought in opposition to the degradation required by Europe, and she therefore acted with reason of a kind. Joseph Jérémie, a centenarian recalling Défilée in 1916 Haiti, attests to her commitment to the uprising when he relates the origins of her cognomen, “Défilée.” He states: “As soon as the soldiers stopped somewhere to rest, Dédée also stopped. Abruptly, the madwoman raised the long stick [used for a crutch] held in her hand, and bravely cried out: *défilez, défilez* [march, march]. They obeyed her.”<sup>31</sup> This is a woman whose mind, however unbalanced, is fixed on one solitary purpose—revolutionary success. “Crazed” she may be but she is certainly not “lost.” Treating her as such obscures what can be gleamed from her existence: a mythic potency tied to communal perseverance and alterity. When we critically assess Défilée’s sparse biography and madness, what we see is not simply her devotion to the nation’s “savior,” but, more importantly, her

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<sup>31</sup> Jérémie qtd. in Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods*, 44; Petit 7. For the French original, see Fouchard 56.

ability to rally and unite a collective toward a realization of difference, towards an existence within terms they see and envision for themselves. We see, in effect, the force that Défilée quite possibly was and can be, now recalled through her own efforts.

The problem that arises and that Danticat seeks to ameliorate with her turn to Défilée in “Nineteen Thirty Seven” is that this potency cannot be seen within a contemporary moment shaped by a past in which Défilée is no more than a madwoman. Although Défilée, as Jana Evans Braziel notes, is one of the better-known woman figures of the Revolution within Haiti,<sup>32</sup> she, like the many other women of the Upheaval—Sanite Belair, who “refused to be blindfolded during her execution,” Marie-Jeanne Lamartinère, who “led the indigenes in the ... Battle of Crête-à-Pierrot,” Claire Heureuse, who “saved many of the French [her husband, Dessalines] had ordered massacred”<sup>33</sup> and the others forever lost in time— are mere footnotes within the history of the uprising. Accordingly, when “named” within contemporary Haitian culture, she (as they) are often acknowledged and attested to in silence. When *RAM*, a Haitian *rasin* band, offered homage to Dessalines in their 2008 carnival song tellingly titled “Defile,” they did so in the tradition of historians and writers at home and abroad: with an eye turned to the exceptional masculine subject.<sup>34</sup> As they praised Dessalines and bemoaned his betrayal, they snubbed the woman through whom this honoring first took place —Défilée. Nowhere is she named within the song as a historical and revolutionary figure like Dessalines. The latter, granted the affective appellation of “papa,” is honored

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<sup>32</sup> See Jana Evans Braziel, “Re-membering Défilée: Dédée Bazile as Revolutionary Lieu de Mémoire,” *Small Axe*, 18. (September 2005), 59.

<sup>33</sup> Dayan 47.

<sup>34</sup> See the “Appendix” for a transcript of the song, 204-210. The music video can be seen at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KMjn-w5i\\_0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KMjn-w5i_0).

here as founding father and as spiritual elder. Present in the duality of her namesake (*defile*), she is named in absence. Her presence is unconsciously alluded to and her importance intimated with each directive to *defile* (march), *balanse* (wave), *pran plezi* (let loose), *banboche* (enjoy one's self), and *layité* (see *banboche* and *pran plezi*), and within the interludes of instrumental revelry encouraging all to partake in these commands.<sup>35</sup>

With such direction, she emerges as the collective tie that allows Haitians to carouse in honor of Dessalines. She is what makes remembrance possible; and yet, in ensuring that we recall Dessalines and we keep him near and dear to our hearts, we are urged to forget Défilée and the revolutionary significance of her call to *défilez*, to difference in thought and being. Subsumed within his exception, she becomes no more than a cognitive springboard to Dessalines. What is made apparent therefore upon tending to Défilée within contemporary consciousness is how she is silenced in presence within revolutionary history. We see the striking consistency of thought surrounding her some hundred years following her mythification within Haiti. Thus, while she is noted before her fellow female revolutionaries, she is nonetheless also obscured within a national and transnational record devoted to the story of sameness that is told through the grandeur of Dessalines, Toussaint L'Overture, Henri Christophe, and Alexandre Pètion, among others. Men, who, for many a historian, writer and layperson, *are* the Revolution.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> *Layité* has no English equivalent. It means to give yourself over to the music so that you can let loose and enjoy yourself. It is a word that calls upon you to both *banboche* and *pran plezi* all the while imparting the importance of a relaxed body to revelry.

<sup>36</sup> Jana Evans Braziel, whose work on Défilée, Danticat and Haiti has inspired my own, offers a thorough footnote delineating the literature afforded to the revolution and the men through which it is rendered (see "Re-membering Défilée: Dédée Bazile as Revolutionary Lieu de Mémoire," fn. 2). Her essay first notes the manner in which Défilée is the mother of all within the collection, acting in this way as the "kitchen poet" through which all others subsist. Furthermore, her text allows readers to understand how Danticat's work in *Krik? Krak!* is very much about national resurrection and the re-meddling of a collective in ruins. It does this by

With Défilée as a point of entry into revolutionary history, “Nineteen Thirty Seven” is positioned to take us from the conventional means of reading and understanding the Revolution, away from its male focus and the blindness to the Upheaval’s trajectory of difference such a focus encourages. She is more primed to do this when we read Défilée’s history against that of her fictional descendant’s. The latter’s story concerns a daughter’s struggle (Josephine) with her mother’s (Defile) false imprisonment and looming death. The circumstances that lead to her incarceration involve a sick child who dies in her care; denounced as a witch when the child dies, she is incarcerated for her “crime” and later murdered by prison guards. Years’ prior to this, Defile is among the few who survived *Kout Kouto-a* (the 1937 Dominican Massacre of Haitians) by leaping across Massacre River from Dominican to Haitian soil. Like her ancestor before her, she honors the departed demeaned with horrific death through a commemorative rite of lamentation. Without remains with which to bury the deceased, she returns to the river each year, inviting other female survivors, to pay homage to those who passed, most notably, the mothers and daughters lost in the carnage. Through the story of Défilée and her descendant our gazes are turned firmly to women and their struggles, our attention then to their presence within history.

The mastermind behind Defile’s loss and that of the other survivors was the Dominican dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina. With the slaughter of 15,000-17,000 Haitians living in the Dominican Republic, Trujillo claimed to have avenged the innocent children lost during Dessalines’ post-revolutionary 1805 slaughter of the inhabitants at Moca, Santo Domingo.<sup>37</sup>

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revealing how Danticat’s Défilée is made to “re-member” the nation as she “re-member-ed” Dessalines.

<sup>37</sup> See Richard L. Turits, “A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre

Attempting to conceal the state's hand in his "act of reprisal," Trujillo required that his army and corps of civilian volunteers use machetes to facilitate the extermination of Haitians within the nation.<sup>38</sup> In this way, the massacre could appear to be a popular uprising and therefore fundamentally desired by the Dominican people should it draw the ire of the international community.<sup>39</sup> What Trujillo ironically did in ordering the use of machetes is symbolically reenact Dessalines' assassination by dismemberment. He ensured that the latter's progeny (children to the "Father of Independence") were hacked to pieces, and that the "sins" of the father (i.e., Moca and his oft criticized massacre of white colonists) were paid in full by his children. Trujillo's heinous act unwittingly provides the literary foundation for Défilée's presence in "Nineteen Thirty-Seven," as she appears within the story through mourning, through a tragic rite of lamentation that recreates her burial of Dessalines on a broader scale. As the centerpiece of the narrative's mourning rite, she is no longer symbolically tied to one lost ancestor in need of proper burial, but to the thousands lost during *Kout Kouto-a* and thereafter. Through her, we are primed to reclaim all lost in an enduring struggle to exist in difference —as a Haitian in the Dominican Republic, a black in the New World and a woman at home and broad.<sup>40</sup>

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in the Dominican Republic," *Hispanic American Historical Review*. 82. 3. (2002) 590. This massacre began as a military campaign to seize the eastern portion of Hispaniola; it was waged against the French and the Spanish to protect Haitians from re-enslavement. Prior to the campaign and subsequent mass execution, Spanish slave raiders began to secretly enter Haiti in order to facilitate this re-enslavement and to covertly attack Haitian sovereignty. See Lester D. Langley, *The Americas in the age of revolution, 1750-1850*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 193. For more on the massacre, see Turits 633-634.

<sup>38</sup> See Turits 599. David Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier: Race, Colour and National Independence in Haiti*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 167. Michelle Wucker, "The River Massacre: The Real and Imagined Borders of Hispaniola". *Windows on Haiti*. <http://haitiforever.com/windowsonhaiti/wucker1.shtml>. 3.

<sup>39</sup> Turits 615.

<sup>40</sup> Danticat returns to *Kout Kouto-a* in her 1998 novel, *The Farming of Bones*, a narrative that more extensively deals with the traumatic after effects of the massacre. In the novel, Danticat

“Wall of Rising Fire” broadly concerns the consequences of difference. Specifically, it focuses on the collective and individual repercussions of the Revolution and thus from the attempt to exist outside a dominant global norm, illustrated here as free people of color striving for a liberation understood as something more than the freedom to work. The central characters of the narrative (a family, Guy, Lilli and Little Guy) suffer greatly from the ready acceptance of this understanding of freedom as they live lives eerily reminiscent of those once endured by their ancestors, despite being free and despite their nation’s long-held independence. Upon noting the extensive play with revolutionary history in the narrative, it is clear that this occurs precisely because of the type of employment and industry they have access to in freedom: plantation labor and trades involving plantation industry.

Titled with reference to the moment when a “wall of rising fire” engulfed the famous and prosperous Gallifet sugar plantation, Danticat calls to mind with her narrative the turbulent and rage filled nature of the Revolution’s opening happenings.<sup>41</sup> Of this moment, C.L.R James broadly writes that “in a few days one-half of the famous Northern Plain was a flaming ruin. From Le Cap [the capital] the whole horizon was a wall of fire.”<sup>42</sup> At the helm of this fiery siege was the Jamaican born Zamba Boukman or Boukman Dutty, a figure resurrected in the narrative through Little Guy. The latter is cast as the national hero in a school production of the Revolution. Boukman is credited with leading the opening rebellion in 1791. Sold to a French planter for teaching slaves to read, he was among a select class of

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also draws attention to the Haitian Revolution and its enduring significance to Haitian cultural identity by interspersing her text with references to the revolutionary struggle, specifically, Henri Christophe’s famous citadel, *La Citadelle Laferrière*.

<sup>41</sup> See Dubois, *Avengers of the New World*, 92.

<sup>42</sup> *The Black Jacobins* 88.



slaves in Saint Domingue, most often non-African born, to hold privileged positions within colonial society. Boukman was at one point a slave driver and later a coachman on the Clément plantation.<sup>43</sup> In preparation for the rebellion, he and two hundred other slaves from neighboring Northern plantations met at a clearing (*Bwa Kaiyman*) on August 14<sup>th</sup> to formulate their plans.<sup>44</sup> All were “upper strata slaves in whom masters [had] placed their confidence.”<sup>45</sup> Most of the slaves, then, were drivers like Boukman. Hence, the meeting was predominantly male because all drivers were men. Yet, are we to truly believe that women were absent from this meeting? One we know, if we accept legend as fact, was not.

During this meeting, a Vodou ceremony officiated by Boukman (an *oungan*) and a *manbo* (a Vodou priestess) was performed. The identity of this *manbo* is largely uncertain. Some indicate that she was an old African woman, others a young mulatto by the name of Cécile Fatiman, and some question her very existence.<sup>46</sup> The speculation that surrounds her identity pervades the entire ceremony. Contemporary scholars like David Geggus, Laurent Dubois and Léon-François Hoffmann have questioned the veracity of accounts detailing the spiritual service, accounts which were first recorded in 1814 (twenty-three years following the revolution’s advent) and augmented upon each telling.<sup>47</sup> Others, like Joan Dayan and Carolyn E. Fick, argue persuasively for its actuality despite writerly embellishments.<sup>48</sup> Whether or not the

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<sup>43</sup> See DuBois 99; Carolyn E. Fick, *The Making of Haiti: The Saint-Domingue Revolution from Below* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990), 92.

<sup>44</sup> Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 261, 91.

<sup>45</sup> Fick 91.

<sup>46</sup> Dubois 100; Fick 265; David P. Geggus, “The Bois Caiman Ceremony,” (*The Journal of Caribbean History*) 25 (1991), 50.

<sup>47</sup> See Dubois 99-102, Geggus, “The Bois Caiman Ceremony,” 41-57 and Léon-François Hoffmann, “Histoire, mythe et idéologie: la cérémonie du Bois-Caïman,” *Haiti: lettres et l’être* (Toronto: Editions du GREF, 1992), 267-301.

<sup>48</sup> Dayan, *Haiti, History and the Gods*, 29; Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 260-266.

ceremony actually occurred is of little importance. What matters is that it is thought to have happened and that it is now mythologized within Haitian culture as the definitive ideological starting point, not only the revolutionary struggle but of a distinct cultural sensibility grounded in Vodou.

Boukman, before all others, marks the start of this sensibility and was closely associated with it by the masses then and now. Accordingly, many zealous Protestants have recently attempted to exorcise the spirit of Boukman from *Bwa Kaiyman* in an effort to evangelize Haiti and thus “solve” its problems.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, socially-conscious musical groups such as *Boukman Eksperyans* have appropriated his name to signal a new rock, rap and *kompas* (a slower moving meringue) sound rooted in Vodou rhythms. The sound is tellingly referred to as “root music” (*mizik rasin*), in light of its foundational origins in Haiti’s Vodou and revolutionary traditions. The disappearance of the *manbo* from such endeavors and popular consciousness, along with the preservation of Boukman, attest to the importance of the work Danticat is doing within her collection. While she does not specifically invoke the real or fictitious Cécile Fatiman, nor the old African woman by name, her work paves the way for others to do so and for endeavors conscious of the all too real possibility that women were pivotal within the Uprising at each stage, from the beginning (Cécile Fatiman/old African woman) to its seeming end (Défilée).

Following the August 14<sup>th</sup> gathering, bands of slaves “spread like a torrent” through the parishes of the North.<sup>50</sup> Boukman died within a year of the Upheaval, leaving an indelible mark on the Uprising as rebel leader and

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<sup>49</sup> For the exorcism of Boukman, see “Exorcizing Boukman: This Week in Haiti,” *Haiti Progres*, 11 August 1998: 5-12; <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/43a/520.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Dubois 94.

oungan.<sup>51</sup> Although his presence was short-lived, he did succeed in doing something immensely significant to “Wall of Rising Fire”: he and his bandits took the aforementioned Gallifet plantation. The Gallifet plantation was extremely prosperous prior to the slaves campaign of fire. It was so moneyed and so renowned that when describing sweetness the colonists of Saint Domingue often stated, “as sweet as Gallifet sugar,” and regarding happiness, “as happy as a Gallifet Negro.”<sup>52</sup> Such was the hubris of the colonial venture. The slaves were not “happy” and they would show the world the depths of their discontent with a fiery of fire. They would seize this plantation, destroy its means of production, and in the process transform a beacon of colonial prosperity and capitalist savvy into an anti-colonial symbol of resistance —“a camp for an army of slave insurgents.”<sup>53</sup> With such a bold move, the “happy” slaves decisively interrupted a booming sugar industry leading to the most severe drop in production the trade has ever seen.<sup>54</sup> Clearly, then, the fight for freedom must be fundamentally understood as a fight against the continuation of this commerce. That this commerce persists despite this forceful contestation is directly related to what was offered as emancipation by Euro-America and its Haitian emissaries of sameness during and following the upheaval.

The emancipation that emerged in these moments was contingent upon colonial industry’s continuation. When French commissioner Léger Félicité Sonthonax formally abolished slavery in the colony in 1793 in response to the mass insurrection of 1791, he introduced the notion of emancipation as

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<sup>51</sup> Dubois 102.

<sup>52</sup> Dubois 92; James, *The Black Jacobins*, 87

<sup>53</sup> Dubois 92.

<sup>54</sup> Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History*, New York: Penguin Books, 1986, xx.

arduous toil through a “new” and ill-fated system of plantation wage labor. Within this system, the formerly enslaved would choose a planter, return to the plantation, earn an income and secure the wealth-generating capabilities of the colony. To no surprise, this endeavor and those like it —undertaken by the likes of French General Charles Leclerc and Haiti’s own oft-noted Toussaint, Dessalines and Henri Christophe— never fully succeeded until (perhaps) today. Slaves had seen the paragon of freedom, *petit blancs* (poor whites ranging from vagabonds to clerks), living in misery without occupations and, more importantly, land by which to survive when the freedom to work proved not to be enough.<sup>55</sup> The ancestors of the “daughters” and the family could therefore clearly see through the veneer of capitalistic liberation embodied in the very idea of freedom in work. They readily realized that no such freedom existed; if it did, it did not include the freedom to eat and live. They, fittingly, wanted more. They wanted, as it were, land and the freedom to grow what labor for another could not provide: a self-sustainable existence.

Such an existence required liberation in both political *and* economic terms, and it spoke to the Revolution as a struggle to be free from both the

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<sup>55</sup> In *The Making of Haiti* Fick writes: “with the advancement and expansion of Saint Domingue’s sugar economy, the *petit blancs* witnessed the progressive closing off of their chances for property ownership, the one criterion that would guarantee their social integration [with wealthy whites] and satisfy their frustrated aspirations. In addition, they suffered increasing competition from the *affranchis* [free blacks and mulattos] and even the upper-strata slaves for jobs in the trades” (18). The grim fate of the *petit blancs* led many a slave to understand that they were not “white” in the full sense of the word, as their freedom was continually undermined by their economic hardships. Hence, slaves often referred to the *petit blancs* as *blanchet*, *faux blanc*, or worse yet, *Nègre-blanc*, thereby codifying their difference and economic inferiority to the *affranchis*, the lucky among themselves and the *grand blancs* (planters, maritime bourgeoisie, and French born bureaucrats) (Fick 18). Fully cognizant of the world they lived in, a world they themselves materially and ideologically defined through such terms as *petit* and *grand blancs*, the slaves recognized that all else besides personal land cultivation was a gamble that required too much luck, a hue most within the colony did not possess and opportunities that were jealousy guarded by new and old masters, the planters and *affranchis* alike.

chains of dehumanization and the destitute state of a “petit blanc’s” existence. Often given no more than “seven to eight boiled potatoes and a bit of water” a week for their sustenance, Saint Dominguan slaves received little nourishment for the work required of them.<sup>56</sup> Following independence, this minimal nourishment would momentarily change. A good number of slaves begrudgingly received what they desired, land and thus an agrarian society by which to live free.<sup>57</sup> With the “republicanization” of land, Haiti would experience “nearly twenty-five years of relative peace.”<sup>58</sup> The nation was

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<sup>56</sup> Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 33. The Black Code of 1685 stipulated that slaves were to be given “2<sup>1/2</sup> pots of manioc and either 2 pounds of salt beef or 3 pounds of fish per week” (Fick 33). Slaves, however, received much less. James, more generously than Fick, indicates that the slaves were given “half-a-dozen pints of coarse flour, rice, or pease, and a half-a-dozen herrings” per week. Yet, he also goes on to state that “the ration was so small and given to them so irregularly that often the last half of the week found them with nothing” (*The Black Jacobins*, 11). For an indication of the arduous labor activities of slaves, see the famous account of slave labor in Saint Domingue by the Swiss traveler Girod-Chantrons:

They were about a hundred men and women of different ages, all occupied in digging ditches in a cane-field, the majority of them naked or covered in rags. The sun shone down with full force on their heads. Sweat rolled from all parts of their bodies. Their limbs, weighed down by the heat, fatigued with the weight of their picks and by the resistance of the clayey soil baked hard enough to break their implements, strained themselves to overcome every obstacle. A mournful silence reigned. Exhaustion was stamped on every face, but the hour of rest had not yet come. The pitiless eyes of the Manager patrolled the gang and several foreman armed with long whips moved periodically between them, giving stinging blows to all who, worn out by fatigue, were compelled to take a rest—men or women, young or old. (qtd. in James, *The Black Jacobins*, 10)

Fick quotes this passage as well, translated slightly different (Fick 28). In addition, Laurent Dubois offers an extensive description of labor within the colony in his text, *Avengers of the New World*, 45-48.

<sup>57</sup> As president of the South and West of Haiti, Alexandre Pétion acquiesced to the people’s desire, “republicanizing the soil” in 1809, and again in 1814 by parceling plantations to former insurgents. Christophe, as king of Northern Haiti, followed suit in 1819 (Lacerte 459). It is not clear, however, how much land was parceled. According to Robert Lacerte, “One Haitian scholar, writing in 1888, estimated that 76,000 *carreaux* [squares] were distributed among 2,322 civil and military officers. Only 134 of them received entire plantations. The remaining 2,188 got grants of 35, 30, 25, and 20 *carreaux*. They formed an intermediate class of landholders beneath whom were 6,000 soldiers who received grants of 5 *carreaux*. Moreover, many large estates were further subdivided by sale. Unable to secure labor, the mulatto elite either sold or abandoned the land to the blacks and moved into cities where they found government posts or went into commerce. ... In the north, Christophe was forced by Pétion’s example to follow suit. In 1819 he distributed grants of land from one to twenty *carreaux* to his soldiers. After his death the division of land was accelerated, but it never completely destroyed the large estate in this region.” See “The Evolution of Land and Labor in the Haitian Revolution, 1791-1820,” *The Americas*, 34. 4 (April 1978), 457-458.

<sup>58</sup> Lacerte, 459.

therefore primed to exist in a manner vastly different than how we conceive of it today, forged as it was to exist within parameters befitting its majority's desire for existence.

That this desire is not yet a reality shapes the narrative that Danticat tells in "Wall of Rising Fire." The story depicts several days in the life of a family struggling with poverty and chronic unemployment. The scant rations of their ancestors is replicated in the narrative in the hard-to-come-by helping of cornmeal mush the family dines on as their staple evening meal (53). Despite the harsh economic existence, the family finds moments of discernible joy, in particular the son's casting as Boukman. While Lili (the wife/mother) is content with having a loving family and talented son, Guy (the husband/father) wants more from life. Disillusioned, he dreams of escape through a hot air balloon owned by the wealthy proprietors of his town's sugar mill. He seeks to break away from oppression based alterity that has confined the bulk of his people to poverty by being remade "new." He desires therefore to exist in line with a global standard for being requiring a continual restaging of colonial dominance. He states: "sometimes, I just want to take the big balloon and ride it up in the air. I'd like to sail off somewhere and keep floating free until I got to a really nice place with a nice plot of land where I could be something new. I'd build my own house, keep my own garden. Just *be something new*" (73). Guy's "dream," for what it is worth, is one of dominance, of "floating free" above the bulk of one's people; it is also one of discovery and implicit conquest. He seeks, after all, to sail off to some uncharted land to begin anew. Where have there ever been people-less lands but in the fictitious world created with Europe's ascendancy? Where have there been lands waiting for uncontested occupation but in a Euro-American

imagining of existence?<sup>59</sup> Guy's desire for "newness," as a result, resurrects decidedly old parameters for being: conqueror and conquered, master and slave.<sup>60</sup>

The hot air balloon facilitating this dream is of utmost revolutionary significance. Seven years prior to the Revolution's advent in 1791, the first hot air balloon took flight on the Gallifet plantation, the very plantation we are meant to remember when reading the narrative. Guy's dream, *Danticat* seems to suggest, is directly related to this plantation's continued presence as the only locus of gainful employment for the family and the other shanty town dwellers. On the one hand, the modernized plantation (read: sugar mill) is a god-sent because of the hunger-suppressing cane pulp tea it provides; but, on the other hand, the mill is the bane of the community's existence because it subsists through neo-slavery. Not only are jobs passed down to adult family members already on the factory's waiting list, but the mill ensures a never-ending supply of workers by allowing the names of young children to be placed on the employment register at an early age. In this way, people can

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<sup>59</sup> For more on the importance of the idea of uninhabited island to European imperial expansion, see Elizabeth DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures*, (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 10-11.

<sup>60</sup> Regarding a standard global identity, Simon Gikandi first brought this notion to light. In his piece, "Globalization and the Claims of Postcoloniality," he touches upon the allure of modernity in his thought provoking discussion of the uses of postcolonial thought in globalization theory. Writing of the postcolony in crisis, he addresses the way in which the precarious condition of postcolonial states produces, among its peoples, a longing for a global identity grounded in the logic of the Enlightenment. Postcolonial peoples long, as it were, for a standard being that many a postcolonial critic argue they transcended through their innate cultural hybridity and thus implicit desire for ontological difference (630). Gikandi offers an anecdote concerning two Guinean stowaways on board a plane set for Brussels to prove his point. The boys were found dead with a letter that concluded with the line, "be mindful of us in Africa. There is no one else for us to turn to" (qtd. in Gikandi 630). In seeking to escape, as Gikandi notes, "poverty and alterity" (631), the boys re-inscribed Europe as savior and thus master. They position themselves as lowly subjects in need of tutelage because they aspire to be like Europe; they hope to fully experience the wonders of a modern existence and thus break their chain of being that has left their people suffering, as they wrote, in "war, sickness, hunger, lack of education" (qtd. in Gikandi 630). Although my work here diverges from his argument, his analysis has greatly shaped my reading of Guy and the work with alterity *Danticat* is doing here.

avoid the bleak circumstances facing Guy, who is unemployed for months at a time and subject to working jobs few want, such as cleaning the mill's latrines.

While many in the town are assured of secured employment through the mill's employment policy, it is the kind that pays little and that requires their lives, as their ancestors', to remain dedicated to cane cultivation. Their world, Danticat suggests, seems destined for such an existence. As with the narrative proceeding it, "Wall of Rising Fire," "Nineteen Thirty Seven" reminds all that impoverished people represented in both stories remain firmly subject to plantation labor and a slave's lived existence. For should Guy, Lili or the other members of their community journey to better pastures in the Dominican Republic they would work in *batey* communities, towns created by sugarcane mills, as the victims of *Kout Kout-a*. They would be made, as it were, to journey from plantation to plantation, and like their ancestors before them, live relatively un-free and impoverished lives as they remain economically in chains. They do so not simply because Haiti is economically and politically in shambles, but because a colonial ordering of existence has remained firmly and increasingly more rigidly in tact. Haiti and much of the Caribbean have remained a large-scale Euro-American venue for plantation industries and plantation labor through structural adjustment loans and the deliberate attacks on the sovereignty of Caribbean nations by European and Northern American nations, on the one hand; they have remained as such because of the inability of Caribbean leaders to imagine more for their people than a Euro-American modernization subsisting through new forms of slavery and colonialism, on the other. Consequently, many Caribbean peoples have remained as modern day slaves for the West and the North.



The very reason why the narrative's central events are male-driven is this subtle yet persistent continuation of slavery, its subsistence furthered as it is by the search for sameness. The story is written around two men and their events: Guy's theft of, commandeering of, and subsequent suicide from the sugar mill's hot air balloon; and Little Guy's starring role as Boukman. The male-centeredness of the story, notwithstanding the importance of Lili, speaks to the quest for similarity in being that revolutionary narrotology details and replicates through its male focus. As emissaries of sameness in their socio-economic and socio-political schemas for the colony and later nation, Toussaint, Dessalines and Christophe give rise to narrations of the Revolution that preserves Euro-American singularity and the iniquitous existence offered by modernity proper. In spite of their bold acts of defiance, all allowed (however unsuccessfully) the plantation's return for economic gain and all desired to rule absolutely as France, England and Spain did in the Caribbean: "governors for life," "emperors" or "kings," respectively. In search for Europe's wealth and distinction to bolster their exception and, in part, that of a burgeoning nation, they could but see Europe when in rule and not then the latent potentiality of their own people's ideations of existence. When the Revolution is henceforth told focusing on their great deeds, what we get is story much like that offered of Guy: a narrative that displays a longing for the newness in being that grants Euro-America continued salience as the site par excellence for all things.

Danticat, however, is not interested in this rendering of existence nor of Haitian revolutionary history. Her work forces all to see that when we attempt to assess the Revolution today we would do well to recognize that the rebelling slaves of Saint Domingue fought not solely for their freedom but for

a new, *défilian* manner of being in freedom. They fought to ensure that their descendants existed in difference and did not have to suffer as they are today. What they struggled to achieve was complete break from the capitalist spirit impelling coloniality and a burgeoning liberal democracy; they repudiated the very idea that she who works less arduously and yet gains more is somehow naturally better. Thinking with an ethical imperative in mind—that the well-being of all should be more important than that of a few—, they ultimately refused a vision of existence in which the inalienable rights of individuals could, at any time, be rendered moot by a faction of others. In turn, these others could undermine the rights and existence of a majority both at home and abroad by deftly exercising their rights to “life, liberty and property” through capitalist accumulation. The revolutionary project Danticat offers in her narratives is not simply about unearthing the unnoted through their descendants, but it is deeply concerned with bringing to the forefront what their stories bring to light: a revolutionary sensibility that challenged the very efficacy of Euro-Americanity for Haiti and the Caribbean by seeking the dissolution of the unholy union between liberal democracy and capitalism grounding modernity proper. In offering this dialogue, it questions a rendering of existence that has offered Haiti and the Caribbean little in the way of “progress.” That Guy and those like him need an apparatus of dominance, like the balloon, to gain a semblance of self worth is the direct result then of the deliberate suppression of his ancestors vision of existence. It is the consequence of the consorted effort to efface such an alternative ideation for being from conscious thought.

There is a problem with the story, however. With Boukman as the centerpiece of the revolutionary history recounted in “Wall of Rising Fire,”

readers are made to experience the Upheaval through its now customary means: through famous and noteworthy male actors who elicit the story of sameness that is modernity proper's take on the Revolution (here, Guy's desire to be "new"). The methods of narration concerning the Revolution, then, cannot be any more divergent between the pieces. The question now before us is: how do we attend to Boukman and the too-typical story of male singularity and leadership he brings to bear on this reading as a revolutionary hero? More precisely, how do we do so in a chapter set out to explicitly debunk the now standard custom of male exception and sameness in being shaping the revolutionary record?

### **DÉFILEZ!**

We are to read Boukman as Danticat does: not as hero but as *lwa*. To that end, we read him as the very embodiment of tragic relation, that is, as a singularity of a specific bygone and as a cosmic multitude of many persons and many pasts. This reading requires that we return first to "Nineteen Thirty Seven," since our awareness of his tragic essence rests with that of Défilée's, particularly the persons she inspires through her ethereal narrative presence. We are alerted to Défilée's celestial presence in the piece through her descendant's rite of lamentation. Upon witnessing her mother's (Eveline) death at the hands of Dominican soldiers, Defile mourns her loss by making a yearly pilgrimage to the site of her mother's passing, Massacre River. By the time of her daughter Josephine's fifth birthday, Defile's once solitary act of mourning becomes a collective rite. The surviving women, clad in white, gather every All Saints Day (November first) to honor their mothers and reaffirm the psychic bond oft-said to be present between a parent and child.

Together the women preserve what was lost by creating the “flesh” to take its place.

Near the end of her life, when it is clear that the prison guards intend to murder her, Defile implores Josephine to keep the “weeping Madonna” that had been in their family for generations. As a gift to Défilée, the Madonna embodies the undying presence of the ancestors that have passed. With each tear, an ancestor and a past life is invoked and made “flesh” through the miracle of the Virgin’s weeping. Defile states: “Keep the Madonna when I am gone... When I am completely gone, maybe you will have someone to take my place. Maybe you will have a person. Maybe you will have some *flesh* to console you. But if you don’t, you will always have the Madonna” (emphasis mine 43). When Josephine is first brought to the river as a child, her mother takes her hand and places it in the water, stating: “Here is my child, Josephine. We were saved from the tomb of this river when she was still in my womb. You spared us both, her and me, from this river where I lost my mother” (40). With this utterance, Defile initiates Josephine into a sisterhood in which she is transformed into the “flesh” that *can* and *does* take her grandmother’s place. She becomes the mother to the daughter that has lost her mother. As flesh, she becomes an incarnate of tragic essence: like her mother and the other female survivors, she becomes a “daughter of the river” and is reborn as daughter and as mother: “when we dipped our hands, I [Josephine] thought that the dead would reach out and haul us in, but only our own faces stared back at us, one indistinguishable from the other” (40). In this respect, the dead “kitchen poets,” re-imagined here as daughter-mothers, emerge as the force that blur persons and pasts alike. Josephine is primed, then, to personify the subjects and by-gones that came before her; she is posed to live tragically, with

the past forever in her present.

This tragic existence is made possible by Defile's mourning rite and is the means in which we may call the latter a tragic act of lamentation. It is a tragic act because it grants the solace of the dead's enduring existence to those in mourning and those, like Josephine, who are soon to be in mourning. Present in their corporal absence, the dead exist within our own bodies. We bear witness to them by acknowledging the plurality inborn within our bodily composition. The narrative suggests that we need only hear ourselves if we are to attend to those muted by the manner in which the massacre was officially handled by the Haitian government, and to the females negated within revolutionary history. That is, we simply need to remain aware of the ancestors animating our existence, turning, as it were, to the force residing in our blood.<sup>61</sup>

This consanguine force, we know, is that of the spiritually potent dead "kitchen poets." They, however, are not the only spiritual entities that reside in Danticat's blood, nor ours for that matter. When Defile dies, Jacqueline, who also lost her mother during the massacre, comes to Defile's house to impart the news of her death to her daughter: "your mother is dead... her

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<sup>61</sup> The "official" response to the massacre by the Haitian government revealed a complete disregard for the dead no less the living. Regarding *Kout Kouto-a*, Richard Lee Turits writes that "Haiti did not respond militarily to defend or avenge its compatriots. To the contrary, President [Sténio] Vincent of Haiti acted in every way possible to avoid a military conflict. It was not only the army that Vincent held back. He prohibited public discussion of the massacre, and refused for a long time even to allow the church to perform masses for the dead. It appears that Vincent was constrained by fear of losing control to his domestic opponents. If troops were sent to the frontier, the palace would be left vulnerable to attack. But under increased domestic pressures due to growing evidence of the extent of the massacre, Vincent did eventually seek an investigation of the atrocities and mediation of the conflict by other countries. Unwilling to submit to an inquiry, Trujillo offered instead a sizeable indemnization to Haiti, while still refusing any admission of official responsibility. One can only speculate as to why Vincent so readily accepted Trujillo's offer of \$750,000 (of which only \$525,000 was ever paid) in exchange for an end to international arbitration" (Turits 622-623).

blood calls to me from the ground" (46). That Defile's "blood calls" to Josephine is important, as it points to the manner in which Defile's blood, now married with that of her mother's and her sisters' mothers, nourishes tragic relation, the bond between the "daughters" and the dead and the living. It sustains and cements the community created through Defile's act of mourning since the mother's blood is now a part of the ancestors through whom Haitians continually remember the past. Defile is thus posed to become like the Madonna herself: a revered ancestor, a *lwa*.

The *lwa* are the very embodiment of communal memory. Persons call upon the "principles of [their] patrimony" when they summon them, invoking an "ancestral progression which had successively borne [their communal] complex forward: the African tribes, the Indian allies, the thousands of individuals whose blood had nourished it and whose diverse personal genius had swelled and elaborated its manifold and various aspect."<sup>62</sup> Of the famed revolutionary figures routinely treated (however briefly) in Western academic circles, two have been granted the status of *lwa* by the Haitian people: Dessalines and Boukman. The former led the nation to independence and the latter began the Upheaval. In remembering them, Haitians have given these revolutionary figures the psychic power to maintain this ancestral complex forward and, to that end, the honor of safeguarding the nation. More specifically, they have given them the ability to ensure that Haiti exists as a collective in memory. They are ever conscious of not only persons and bygone past, but also the possibilities for difference each represent. This consciousness of an antecedent's hopes for a future is of critical importance as

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<sup>62</sup> Maya Deren, *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*, (New York: McPherson and Company, 2004), 81.

it can help persons re-think and re-shape a present and its future; it can re-ignite, as is the case here, revolutionary passions and help direct a beleaguered national collective toward an improved existence to come.

Keenly aware of the potentiality for difference the *lwa* exemplify, Danticat in “Ninety Thirty-Seven” does what Haitians as a collective have yet to do: grant Défilée the status of *lwa*.<sup>63</sup> Défilée is made by Danticat into an Ezili, becoming one of the many manifestations of the *mystere*, who is most commonly (and rather reductively) known as the *lwa* of love. It is no coincidence that within this narrative she is aligned with the “weeping Madonna,” with the Marian iconography through whom the Ezilis are identified within Vodou. Défilée’s revolutionary history and Danticat’s deliberate move to relate her to mothers and daughters would suggest that she is a re-imagined Dantò, a *lwa* of revolutionary origin. One of Ezilis’ three

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<sup>63</sup> Why the most prominent figure of the Revolution outside of Haiti, Toussaint, has not been deified is a question worth looking into. I suspect it has something to do with his diplomacy and the unpopular concessions he made to planters to preserve the colony’s economy. Toussaint’s openness towards whites was a sore subject for many former slaves, particularly when they were asked to return to work for their former masters in order to secure the colony’s and Revolution’s economic subsistence. The following Haitian folklore I recently came across also speaks to this: “One day some soldiers, who were tired of their martyrdom, sent a representative to God. The ambassador was eloquent in his recital of the sufferings of his brothers. With vivid imagery he pictured the cruelty of the whites and, as unimpeachable proof, he pointed to his own meager body, which was striped from blows. Everyone in Heaven was moved with pity and God became terribly angry. ‘They will be punished, these men who are abusing their power and mistreating the feeble and the innocent. Go and bring General Toussaint Louverture to me.’ Several days later, the Lord fiercely reproached Toussaint for his negligence. ‘Didn’t I create you to deliver your brothers? What have you done?’ Toussaint said, ‘Lord, I am alone and I have no arms.’ God said, ‘What, you are alone? What about General Dessalines? General Christophe? General Capois? General Maurepas? General Lamartiniere?’ Toussaint said, ‘But Lord, what can we do without arms?’ God said, ‘Take the arms of the French and exterminate all of them without pity.’ The heroes accomplished their prodigious feats, according to the legend, because of their divine protection. They successfully navigated the sea, they captured cannons without arms, and bullets could not kill them. But Toussaint had a great weakness. He spared his enemies, and the soldiers say that God deserted him ever since.” See <http://www.haitixchange.com/index.php/forums/viewthread/5688/>. The puzzle of Toussaint’s legacy in Haiti is something I will not delve into here, but it is telling of a distinct strain of cultural perception which could very well be read as implicitly anti-Western in primarily grounding itself in love of Dessalines.

principal emanations, (the other two being Freda and La Siren), Dantò's saintly guise is that of Our Lady of Częstochowa or the Black Madonna of Częstochowa, a saint first introduced into Haiti through the Napoleon's Polish regiment.<sup>64</sup> Adding to her revolutionary connection, Vodou lore reveals that as a human she fought valiantly in the Upheaval and gained a formidable reputation. Despite this valor, she is betrayed by her comrades who believed that she would disclose their location if captured; as result, her tongue was brutally cut out to silence her.<sup>65</sup> This experience shapes her divinity in such a profound way that as a *lwa* she shields those most susceptible to silencing and victimization —women and children. In fact, she goes so far as to tell their stories in order to reinforce their pivotal, though under-emphasized, social importance. She acts always as a mother, protecting her children and “mothering” remembrance of their significance for others and for themselves, should they doubt it.

Providing us with little in the way of the salacious details that cast Dessalines as a rogue and an avid and exceptional dancer, or the small biographic ones revealing that Boukman was a learned West Indian, revolutionary narratology is mum on Dantò. And yet it is clear that Dantò, as a human, was of significance to the Saint Domingans of African descent. She was worth remembrance, but why she was is something I cannot answer. Still,

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<sup>64</sup> Legend has it that most within this regiment defected, opting to fight with the slaves than with the French. They settled in Haiti, where their descendants remain today. In *Poland's Caribbean Tragedy*, Jan Pachonski and Reule K. Wilson argue that while some Poles did defect and some settled in Haiti, most did not do as such. The popularity of this legend, they argue, is the result of propaganda from Dessalines (labeled the “butcher of whites”) and the actions of the Poles themselves. They were often kinder to the slaves and the rebels, and they themselves did not care for the French. Because of their kindness, they received better treatment from Haitian soldiers and Dessalines himself. See, Pachonski and Wilson, *Poland's Caribbean Tragedy: A Study of the Polish Legions in the Haitian War of Independence 1802-1803*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 307-317.

<sup>65</sup> Katherine McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 229.



I want to suggest that in aligning her with Défilée, Danticat finds that Dantò represents the possibility of living loudly, so to speak, boisterously in difference despite silencing attempts. She represents the possibility for a life of alterity without consequence that Défilée championed with her inspiring directive—*défilez*. The *lwa* Défilée-Dantò, the narrative's "Weeping Madonna," then, is a cosmic representation of the ever-present possibility of living alternatively, of existing openly and without repercussion. She exemplifies life outside of a now standard Western means of being, here a modernized existence that ensures neocolonial conformity and sameness in thought and being.

What we cannot escape when reading "Nineteen Thirty Seven" is the characters' alterity and this inability to fit into the parameters for existence set by Euro-American. Each woman imprisoned with Defile is a victim of the Anti-Superstition Campaign of 1941-1942. On the heels of an American occupation set out to "modernize" Haiti by way of the passé practice of *corvée* (compulsory, unpaid) labor (1915-1934), the then-Haitian President Élie Lescot set out to ensure this "progress" continued with his ill-fated campaign against Vodou.<sup>66</sup> The U.S. Occupation sought to save Haiti from its persistent discord, but it was most successful in privatizing the Haitian economy for U.S. investments. Accordingly, it "modernized" the nation through roads and railways so as to facilitate the easy dissemination of U.S. imports and exports.<sup>67</sup> The history of this occupation and its temporality surfaces within

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<sup>66</sup> Although the occupation officially ended in 1934, U.S. presence and influence did not cease until 1940. For more on the U.S. Occupation of Haiti and U.S. "modernization" efforts, see Hans Schmidt's *The United States Occupation of Haiti, 1915-1934* and Mary A. Renda's *Taking Haiti: Military Occupation and the Cultural of Imperialism, 1915-1940*. For more on the anti-superstition campaign, see Nicholls, 181-183.

<sup>67</sup> See Sylvia Wynter, "The Pope Must Have Been Drunk, The King of Castile a Madman: Culture as Actuality, and the Caribbean Rethinking Modernity," *The Reordering of Culture:*

the narrative through Defile's incarceration —she is held within a prison built by U.S. Marines during the occupation and by a prison force (*Garde d'Haiti*) created by U.S. officials. The latter was so successful in providing instruction on how to use force against the masses that many a *Tonton Macoute* (Duvalier's henchmen) began his career through the *Garde*. This force was also established in the Dominican Republic during the 1916-1924 U.S. Occupation of the nation (*Guardia Nacional Dominicana*). Following U.S. departure, the chief commander of the Dominican police force was left to informally rule the country. He would do so officially in 1930, and for many years thereafter, as "Dios Trujillo".

Trujillo's Haitian extermination was like the U.S. Occupation: a move for modernization. Endeavoring to create a modern nation, the border towns of the nations posed an immense problem to Trujillo's modernization efforts. Their remote location facilitated a biculturalism manifest in fluid linguistic, ethnic and cultural sensibilities among the residents, and it gave would-be revolutionaries from both countries adequate cover to formulate subversive action.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, they fostered the notion (false to Trujillo) that Dominicans were no different than Haitians, while for Trujillo the modern Dominican subject was to be the stark opposite to what he imagined a Haitian to be. They were not to be African, not Spanish *and* Kreyol-speaking, or a *mélange* of the two, and definitely not a Vodouisant. Although brutal, the massacre did finally succeed in incorporating the border region into the entire nation. It also gave rise to feats emblematic of successful modernization—impressive roads, modern architecture, a sense of nationalism (through anti-Haitianism), and

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*Latin America, The Caribbean and Canada in the Hood*, eds. Alvina Ruprecht and Celia Taiana. (Canada: Carleton University Press, 1995), 20.

<sup>68</sup> Turits 612.

power was at long last wielded by the state alone. It was, in a sense, a success, and when critically tending to talk of the two nations today, the Dominican Republic is overwhelmingly lauded as having made something of itself precisely because of such feats; Haiti, whose violence, revolutionary and otherwise, has not been nearly as “productive,” is rarely (if ever) praised for its equally violent and repressive modernization efforts.

Lescot’s effort to eradicate Vodou was thus in line with the thinking of his day and with that of today as well. The practice is still considered backward by the international community and by many Haitians alike. It is often pointed to as one of the main reasons why Haiti has failed to adequately “progress.” An affluent character in the story, “Between the Pool and the Gardenias,” expresses this sentiment when she states: “Why can’t none of them [poor Haitians] get a spell to make themselves rich? It’s that voodoo nonsense that’s holding us Haitians back” (Danticat 95). Lescot’s campaign resulted in a year of religious terror via forced conversions and mob violence against accused witches, among other occurrences.<sup>69</sup> The victims of Lescot’s crusade were most often poor women who lived unconventionally. They lived alone or who spoke, like Defile, “of wings of flame,” and hence spoke within a mysticism too Vodouesque for a state and people struggling to “progress.” The poverty of these women furthered their potential for victimization and is the very reason why some like Defile, and many of the “daughters of the river,” made the attempt to exist in difference as a Haitian in the Dominican Republic.

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<sup>69</sup> Nicholls, *From Dessalines to Duvalier*, 181-183. While witches are not apart of Vodou popular Christian thought concerning the spiritual practice conflates Vodou with all things evil and thus with sorcery and witchery. Accordingly, a *manbo* is thought to be the same as a witch (*loupgarou*) and an *oungan* as a *bokor* (sorcerer). *Manbos* and *oungans*, however, are in the business of preserving and aiding life, *bokors* and *loupgarou* take and destroy lives. The former thus are by no means synonymous with the latter.

Despite the life-threatening consequences of their choice to make a life in a country struggling like their own to “progress” and to embrace the spiritual communality the “daughters of the river” provides, Danticat suggests that it is this attempt to live in an alterity that the nation desperately needs. More specifically, it is this latter attempt to do so in a manner set against “progress” of a Lescotian and Trujillion ilk that forges collectivity of the kind the “daughters” exemplify, the type of communality that can rebuild a nation in ruins. Through the brutality of the prison guards and the political terror relayed in “Children of the Sea,” Danticat expressly reveals that Haiti is at war with itself. It is killing its youth and its women for no other reason other than a will to power and a will to progress upon achieving power. We are privy then to a nation (an island, truly) so entrenched, on the one hand, in a particular imagining of being, so desperate to attain its semblance, on the other, that it reproduces its imperialistic violence. It lashes out against any that remotely contests such an ideation. The young persons of “Children of the Sea” who raised their voices against a military junta’s ascendancy, and the daughters who are deemed as simply too benighted for humane consideration, are this contestation.

Imbued with the cosmic energy of *Défilée*, the daughters, however unconsciously, stand together as daughter-mothers in sorrow and in defiance. Nourished from the Madonna’s tears, we are told, they drink when thirsty (44), they stand as a collective unwilling to accept their alleged benightedness. They refuse, that is, to accept the idea of their inconsequentiality modernization and its ideological counterpoint, modernity, fosters. And like the imprisoned women “who sat like statues in different corners of the cell... like angels hiding their wings” (47), they are fortified by her spirit, willing to

continue to exist in difference. The narrative, accordingly, closes with the cool smolder of their defiance. Josephine and Jacqueline stand together, awaiting Defile's flight in flame; her corpse is to be burned and her spirit released to join that of her mothers' and sisters'. Josephine, reiterating the closing salutation of her mother's collective rite, states: "Let her flight be joyful... and mine and yours" (42, 49). We are meant to recall Defile's first flight through these words. The narrative states that "she [leapt] from the Dominican soil into the water, and out again on the Haitian side of the river," glowing "red when she came out, blood clinging to her skin, which at that moment looked as though it were in flames" (Danticat 49). When Defile emerged on the other side of the water aflame, she is a new woman. For in that watery immersion she is awash in ancestral energy, charged by the tragic ichor of the slain; as she is reborn cosmically anew. Gone to *Gunin* and back in the time and space compression that is our spiritually-charged blood, she, as the many others who have been anointed in water by the *lwa*, is fortified to be what she was: a flame to inspire and embolden others.<sup>70</sup> Thus, Josephine's reiteration of this salutation is a clear indication of the "daughters'" continuation even with their organizer's death. It is telling of Défilée-Dantò's ever-presence. What's more, it is a clear indication of her deification as one who ensures remembrance of others and of their struggle to exist in difference. The story's closing, in this way, is Danticat's nod to the continued *défilez* ("march") toward alterity that her newly consecrated *lwa* championed when mortal. In a nation and region where those in power and those of means are quick to heed another's terms

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<sup>70</sup> *Gunin* is a subterranean "heaven" within Vodou. Haitian lore is full of stories of persons bathing in streams, rivers or the ocean and being abruptly submerged, taken home to *Gunin*. There they learn the arts of healing and are returned in day, week, month or year (or more) embolden with new life vigor and the ability to work as *oungan* or *manbo*.

for existence, and who are content therefore to remain colonized in mind as their ancestors were once in body, the struggle, Danticat suggests, must continue; *défilez*, she urges, *défilez*...

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At the very end of "Wall of Rising Fire," this call to *défilez* is offered yet again; Guy, we find, has accepted his benightedness and, in so doing, sought to exist in sameness. He has aspired to live as "master," an image of consequence he, as a poor Haitian man with limited opportunities, is denied. It is this choice that prompts the narrative's call to arms. Turning once again to the balloon, we see the communal costs of Guy's passion. Confessing to Lili how closely he has been watching the balloon, he discusses the apparatus in trance-like fashion and states:

"I have seen the man [Young Assad] who owns it," he [Guy] said. "I've seen him get in it and put it in the sky and go up there like it was some kind of kite and he was the kite master. I see the men who run after it trying to figure out where it will land. Once I was there and I was one of those men who were running and I actually guessed correctly. I picked a spot in the sugarcane fields. I picked the spot from a distance and it actually landed there" (67).

Propelled by a momentum of sorts, Guy's speech offers readers a play-by-play of events detailing his obsession with the balloon. Beginning with reference to the "man who owns it," to the former's flight, and moving to the men in hot pursuit and Guy's triumph as the one who "picked" the correct landing spot, his speech is a chronology of self-discovery. Driven by a momentum enabled by his awe of self, it unveils to reader and to Guy the wonder to be had with

one's discovery of imperial power. The sweeping nature of the passage discloses a Guy who has undergone a transformation of self that renders him similar to —if not wholly on par with— those who write existence into being as “masters” or as revolutionaries seeking to be “masters” for life.

This discovery of imperial power causes a gradual shift in focus from Young Assad (the balloon's owner and the son of the mill's proprietor) to Guy and his moment of distinction. In essence, this shift marks the moment in which we observe a difference in aptitude and being between Guy and the nameless men chasing the balloon. We perceive this difference first through the specifics revealing Young Assad's exceptionality, specifically the way he pilots the balloon with the grace and skill of a “kite master”; secondly, through Guy's relative insignificance (and that of the men like him) who can do no more than trail the balloon; and finally, through Guy's transformative moment of glory. This transformation creates the sense that Guy is undeniably distinct, not just from the men but from the man that he was before. Who is Guy in his everyday life but a man deemed worthy of no more than cleaning latrines (66), a man who wants desperately to prove that he, like his boy, can “do other things” (68)? When Guy, stunned by the accuracy of his prediction, repeats, “I picked a spot” (varying it only to state immediately thereafter “I picked *the* spot”), we see in his speech a man in awe of himself, of his innate capabilities and a man seeing for the very first time that he is, indeed, equal to the “kite masters” of this world. Who but a “master” in the making or one with the inborn faculty to be a “master” could determine the balloon's course, and could usurp the subject positioning of one who is already “master”? Thus, with this discovery of authorial power, Guy is positioned to act as “master” . But at what costs?

When the family takes their nightly stroll to the factory grounds early in the narrative, Guy, upon seeing the balloon, “let[s] go of the hands of both his wife and the boy” (61). He is so entranced in body and mind by this symbol of freedom that he takes this decisive step from his family. In releasing their hands, he ceases to exist in collectivity. No longer conscious of his relations and without regard for their wants, he enacts the egotism of exception endemic to modernity proper: namely, the self that knows no other and sees no other but one that is like it, a projection that is of the same mind, body and being. Fully conscious of Guy’s fascination with the balloon and the growing separation between Guy and the family such an interest spawns, Lili says that “for the last few weeks she had been feeling as though Guy was lost to her each time he reached this point, twelve feet away from the balloon” (61). He is indeed lost to her, for when she later asks, “if you were to take that balloon and fly away, would you take me and the boy” (73), Guy’s exasperated response does little to assuage her concern. His answer discloses a continued focus on the self: “first you don’t want *me* to take it and now you want *me* to” (73; my emphasis). The “me” of Guy, however, is not Lili’s focus. What matters most to her is the preservation of the family and, to that end, that he include her and Little Guy within his dreams: “I just want to know that when you dream, me and the boy, we’re always in your dreams” (73). This firm assertion to be considered worthy of active participation in a leading figure’s hoped-for future is one her sisters loudly utter with their *defilez*. Barred from access to authorial power, they, like her, are unable to offer an alternative ideation of existence. They are unable, more precisely, to voice an objection that can be heard within a social and regional setting where collectivity can be but a fleeting happening when the individual of capitalist



means and prominence is always positioned before the liberal democratic mass.

Guy, eager to become such an individual, answers Lili's earnest question in the only way he can: with an inward turn to the self. He falls asleep, completely surrendering to his unconscious and to a self that is the same (73-74). He turns to one who can appreciate his dreams and, as a consequence, bars the possibility of an alternative to his vision of a freed existence. As a result, what is stripped from his vision is not only a collective impulse, but also the women on which this collectivity has thus far expressed itself —Lili, Eveline and Defile, the "daughters of the river." Rendered inconsequential and inferior, Lili's negation signals Guy's move to exception. When he succumbs to his possession and goes on to do something heroic before taking his own life —fly the balloon as the men of the factory enthusiastically cheer him on, shouting, "'Go! Beautiful, go!'" (76) —, he becomes, however fleetingly, the self he sees in his dream: a man worthy of being (literally and figuratively) looked up to. He becomes, as it were, the same reborn as singular. In taking steps toward becoming "modern" and new, Danticat reveals that he, like Trujillo, must rid himself of those whose alterity implicitly calls into question his desired existence. In so doing, he must sadly restage and reenact the parameters of being set forth by Euro-America by assuming the posture and position of "master."

To this performance of exception a voice of contestation lividly bellows in a mannish roar: "*a wall of fire is rising and in the ashes, I see the bones of my people. Not only those people whose dark hollow faces I see daily in the fields, but all those souls who have gone ahead to haunt my dreams. At night I relive once more the last caresses from the hand of a loving father, a valiant love, a beloved friend*" (56,

Danticat's emphasis). With greater intensity it wails, "*There is so much sadness in the faces of my people. I have called on their gods, now I call on our gods. I call on our young. I call on our old. I call on our mighty and the weak. I call on everyone and anyone so that we shall all let out one piercing cry that we may either live freely or we should die*" (71, emphasis in the original). While it is Little Guy who tearfully utters these lines over his father's bloodied body, he is not the voice Danticat wants us to hear. His distressed utterance, described as a "man's grieving roar," is the literary flesh of the departed (78), offered as it is by both the boy and the *lwa* Boukman. Conceived as such, this sorrowful yet furious recitation is a call to arms for the "dark hollowed faces" of the past, and for those still seen "daily in the fields." It is a call to arms for the Guy's that have died for a false ideation of freedom. Notwithstanding its liberal democratic tenor ("live freely or we should die"), this is a cry for freedom in the terms by which Guy could have lived with a measure of consequence that did not require the diminution of others. It is a cry is for a freedom in which Guy could have lived in Défilian terms.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Although Boukman is national hero, and thus an undeniably a figure of exception, I want to suggest that as a *lwa* he is what I am terming a "Vodou hero." A "Vodou hero" is no idol in a conventional sense; in fact, the very notion of a "Vodou hero" is a misnomer. Humans as *lwás* are imperfect and, as such, heroes—remarkable individuals, who are romanticized to such an extent that they are conceived in a Christ-like fashion—do not exist. If they do within Vodou, they do so in Greek fashion as awesome yet tragically-flawed human subjects whose immortality within popular consciousness must bear the weight of the mortality of their past existence and present lives. We see this in the divine attributes and actions of Dessalines and Dantò, respectively.

When Dessalines, the national hero, is summoned as a *lwa* he rides his initiate in a manner that speaks to his life and death, revealing what Joan Dayan terms "a double play of loss and gain" (39). Concerning his corporal manifestation within his charge, she writes that "what emerges after the first moments of disequilibrium and convulsive movements is the ferocity commonly associated with Dessalines. It is as if the self is not so much annihilated as rendered piecemeal. Out of these remnants comes the image of the god or mystery who overtakes what remains" (Dayan 39). Dessalines emerges with the typical fierceness that marked his human character. This "ferocity" is tempered by his materialization in a "piecemeal" fashion, one that calls attention to the nature of his passing, his assassination by dismemberment. A demi-god is thus born from the remains of a "hero," the remnants of greatness desecrated in life and continually despoiled in the perpetuity of his mystical existence. Haitians, in granting him immortality, have done so tragically and in a way that

Written so as to amend the original Boukman's rhetoric to heroic standards, this Boukman of academic history in "Wall of Rising Fire" is linguistically crafted so as to fit the "thick book" from which Little Guy memorizes his lines (54). The narrator states early in the story that "It was obvious that this was a speech written by a European man, who gave to the slave revolutionary Boukman the kind of European phrasing that might have sent the real Boukman turning in his grave" (56). Constructed to relay the story of sameness modernity proper and the Revolution's customary narration desires of the Revolution, these lines are as a whole a less radical rendering of Boukman's famed speech. They are a rendering stripped of the fiery and fire by which Boukman initiated the *défilian* charge for difference that was the Revolution, conveyed as they are with a restrained angst more sorrowful than livid in tonality and more subdued than assertive.<sup>72</sup> Contrived as this reserved

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acknowledges his greatness (the past deeds that ensured their independence, essentially his "ferocity") while permanently inscribing within his divinity the all-too-human circumstances of his demise—his dismemberment. What we have, then, is a hero made human through divinity. The "avenger of the New World" is still an avenger, but he is merely a broken one, broken by the very self-assurance that allowed him to declare, and prove himself to be, a righter of wrongs ("Avenger of the Americas"). Similarly, when Dantò is summoned, she often calls out *ke-ke-ke-ke-ke-ke* in anger. In doing so, she obscures her speech, calling attention to her past prowess as a revolutionary warrior, her tongue-lessness, and to the injustice that led to her unintelligible utterance, as well as to the present injustice that drove her to invoke this past pain in the here and now. Her mortal death, like Dessalines', shapes her immortal manifestation and mitigates the very exception that allowed her to be defied in the first place, as her victimization is embodied within her deification. To be a "Vodou hero" is to ultimately be a subject worthy of deification precisely because one is worthy of humanization, essentially a divinity tempered by mortal hardship and the flaws that allow servitors to see divinity within themselves, the *lwas* as aspects of themselves. Boukman is certainly a hero in the conventional sense; he is even cast as one within the narrative. Yet, to read him as such, within a Western sense of the word, would greatly take from the depth and richness of Vodounian thought and Boukman's own spiritual conception within Haiti and this reading.

<sup>72</sup> The Boukman of historical fact stated:

The Good Lord created the sun of which gives us light from above, who rouses the sea and makes the thunder roar—listen well, all of you—this god, hidden in the clouds, watches. He sees all that the white man does. The god of the white man calls him to commit crimes; our god asks only good works of us. But this god who is so good orders revenge! He will direct our hands; he will aid us. Throw away the image of the god of the whites who thirsts for our tears and listen to the voice of liberty which speaks in the hearts of all of us.

Through a critically incisive reading of the revolution in relation to Vodou, Fick persuasively

language is for the narrator, Little Guy's parents are visibly stirred by it. It is so awe-inspiring that the "lightening" that erupted in Little Guy's first recitation, "*a wall of fire ... beloved friend,*" is echoed back in the "thunder" of their applause (57).<sup>73</sup> This "lightening" and "thunder" mirrors the "*krik*" and "*krak*" of collectivity that grounds this collection and re-creates, in this passing instance, the revolutionary collective that paved the way for Haitian independence. His parents, thus, stand in tragic relation to Little Guy; they emerge here as fellow insurgents, so moved that they quite literally transcend time and place and hear the first Boukman: "they felt as though for a moment they had been given the rare pleasure of hearing the voice of one of the forebears of Haitian Independence in the forced baritone of their only child" (57). This voice, cloaked though it may be beneath the "forced baritone" of Little Guy's recitation and the linguistic embellishment of the Boukman of historical imagination, is that of the *lwa* Boukman.

Little Guy is, as Haitians say, *chaj* (charged), animated and fortified by surrounding spiritual energy. The text states, Guy and Lili experienced "a strange feeling that they could not explain [upon hearing their son]. It left the hair on the back of their necks standing on end. It left them feeling much more love than they ever knew that they could add to their feeling for their son" (57). This curious mix of the uncanny and adoration introduces the unknown into the narrative, a bit of mysticism by which we are afforded the fleeting manifestation of a passing *lwa*; essentially, a *lwa* who briefly possesses an individual making his or her presence known via a small gesture or an eerie

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argues for Boukman's "Good Lord" as that of the Vodou imaginary. In her argument, she calls attention to the syncretism of slave society, specifically, the manner in which it was creolized in thought, action and being. She points to the way in which how language was a creolized expression, providing new meaning to "old" words. See Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 93.

<sup>73</sup> His recounting is described as "like the last burst of lightening out of clearing sky."

hair-raising feeling. Little Guy, for one brief moment in time, is Boukman in the flesh. Accordingly, when Lili states, “Long live Boukman and long live my boy,” following her son’s performance, she acknowledges the duality of Little Guy’s performative existence and the manner in which he, like Josephine, is a tragic incarnate. He is two in one —revolutionary *lwa* and boy, boy and revolutionary *lwa*. He, like Josephine, is an embodiment of a duality born (as we shall see) of loss, born from the past and seemingly ever-present pain of unnecessary lives lost. With this utterance, Lili attests to the eternity of Boukman’s being within the here and now while concurrently intimating that Little Guy is also of this perpetuity, an essence of the present that will be granted immortality through his future accession (upon death) with his ancestors. Little Guy’s perpetuity, however, is also of another Défiléan cast; he is primed, we find, to re-animate the past revolutionary fervor of Boukman in the present. He is, after all, the same young man who journeys to Miami in the collection’s first story, “Children of the Sea,” a student-turned-activist-turned-refugee wholeheartedly committed to a new Haiti.

That an utterance of spiritual insight such as this comes from Lili is no coincidence. Like Josephine, Defile, Eveline, and Jacqueline, she is also a “daughter of the river.” In another story within the collection, “Between the Pool and the Gardenias,” Josephine’s daughter (Marie) recalls seeing nightly “old women leaning over [her] bed,” and her departed mother introducing them to her, saying ““That there is Marie... She now is the last one of us left” (94), the “us” being the daughters who passed. Danticat writes, “There was my great grandmother Eveline who was killed by Dominican soldiers at the Massacre River. My grandmother Defile who died with a bald head in prison, because God had given her wings. My godmother Lili who killed herself in

old age because her husband had jumped out of a flying balloon and her grown son left her to go to Miami” (94). As a “daughter of the river” and a “kitchen poet,” Lili is conscious of the mysticism that pervades existence; she is fully aware of the ties between mothers and daughters, and can, in turn, be said to be aware of the connections between the *lwa* and the people that defy the finality of death and ensure tragic relation, that is, communal belonging beyond time, space and place. This awareness of death’s impermanence implicitly situates what cannot be visibly represented within Boukman’s Europeanized speech: the rite of mourning central to his deification, the very one providing the basis for the daughters’ tragic ritual of lamentation.

On the eve of the Revolution, the nuns of *The Order of the Daughters of Notre Dame of Cap Français* claimed to have witnessed the *Bwa Kaiyman* ceremony. Peering through the windows of their monastery, they offered the following account:

... barebreasted Negresses belonging to the [Vodou] sect, danc[ed] to the mournful sound of the long, narrow tambourines and conch shells, and alternat[ed] with the moaning of the sacrificed creatures. In the midst of the rebels was Zamba Boukman, urging them on to the assault on the barracks and the convent, which held a good number of young girls and other colonists.<sup>74</sup>

This testimony underscores what can and has easily been ignored within revolutionary history: the many women shaping and impelling the revolutionary struggle. Although led by Boukman, and perhaps also by the unnoted Cécile Fatiman/old African woman, these women are key players within the ceremony. Without them and the two hundred other delegates

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<sup>74</sup> See Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 266.

from the Northern plantations in attendance, there would be no ceremony to speak of, as a Vodou service does not emanate from one but from a collective acting in communion. That these women come to light through a threnodic ceremony is telling of the importance of loss and Vodou to expanding historical and theoretical approaches to the Revolution. As with an emphasis on loss and its significance to a Vodou imaginary, we begin to not only see the unnoted players within the uprising, but also gain an understanding of the significance of tragic relation to the revolutionary endeavor, to this relation as an impetus for revolutionary action.

Danticat, well aware of the importance of this relation, charges the hero Boukman's speech with sorrow and with a mournful longing for a change to right the immense losses suffered. Accordingly, it is bereavement that we feel most upon reading Little Guy's monologues; our attention is drawn to the immense "*sadness in the faces of [Boukman's] people,*" to the heart wrenching demise of those who passed in suffering —the haunting "*hand of a loving father, a valiant love, a beloved friend.*" The sorrowful tone of Danticat's heroic Boukman does not only mitigate the heated radicality of Boukman proper's speech, thereby cleansing him for his status as hero, but it situates the importance of grief to the revolutionary struggle. Such grief, set against a scene that reverberates with the "lightening" and "thunder" present when the original Boukman presided over the insurgent meeting at *Bwa Kayiman* —that night was, by all accounts, a stormy one—, fundamentally ties a tragic understanding of mourning to the revolutionary moment and to the foundational mourning rite by which this instance was facilitated.<sup>75</sup> If the

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<sup>75</sup> The stormy nature of the ceremonial night was a detail first added by Antoine Dalmas and then preserved faithfully thereafter by all other writers of the Revolution, fiction and non-fiction writers alike. Carpentier and Walcott use this detail in their respective texts. Danticat's

above account is true, the Vodou ceremony at *Bwa Kaiyman* was not merely an accord with the *lwas* to ensure revolutionary success —and hence telling of Pat Robertson’s much noted “pact with the devil,” but it was a solemn communal service for the dead. It was one that, in recognizing the risk involved in insurrection, made plain the losses to be sustained and the losses already incurred for a triumphant revolutionary endeavor. It made plain, as it were, a spiritual imaginary in which life and death, the dead and the living, are enmeshed in an intricate matrix of collective being.

The very alternation between the dance and the moans of the “sacrificial creature” reveals a profound consciousness of loss on the insurgents’ part; we see a performance telling of the give and take of life and death, where life (with the dance) is set against death, or more aptly, imminent demise (with the “moans”). This consciousness of loss is expressed through the solemnity of the “mournful sound of the long, narrow tambourines and conch shells.”<sup>76</sup> Such solemnity is indicative of past and present circumstances, the present and past that the original Boukman argued authorized “the god of the white man [to call upon] him to commit crimes”<sup>77</sup> and which led to the haunting presence of the fictitious Boukman’s “loving father, a valiant love, a beloved friend.” The insurgents’ deliberate immersion in loss manifests as a deep respect for those that will pass (the “creatures” and insurgents) and those that have passed (ancestors). It manifest, as it were, as a tragic means of relation that ensure the remembrance and thus worth of all. Their respective deaths provide the means in which all may begin, as the real

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use of “lightening” and “thunder” as a means of revealing a burgeoning collectivity is clearly a play on this now canonical detail. See Dubois 100.

<sup>76</sup> Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 266.

<sup>77</sup> Fick, *The Making of Haiti*, 93.



Boukman asserted, to decolonize the mind so as to emancipate the body: “Throw away the image of the god of the whites who thirsts for our tears and listen to the voice of liberty which speaks in the hearts of all of us.”<sup>78</sup> Attention to the mournful and tragic undercurrents of a Vodou imaginary (that is, the cosmic communality defying the clear parameters of past and present as well as life and death) allows us to see, therefore, that defiance flows not only from the weight of unwarranted subjugation, but also from the immense loss such oppression requires and thus brings into being. Accordingly, to have Lili express a sentiment that echoes the mysticism central to Defile’s collective mourning rite — “Long live Boukman and long live my boy” — is to not only point to the duality of being that reveals the *lwa* Boukman’s presence within the narrative; it is to concurrently disclose the immense importance of the dead to revolutionary consciousness. It is to forcefully disclose the way in which the *lwa* Boukman emerges through a tragic rite of lamentation that engenders his being just as Defile’s begot Défilée-Dantò’s.

The similar cosmic origin of both *lwa* reveals a desire on Danticat’s part to disclose to her readers a parallel, though hidden history of female revolutionary consequence. When we unpack Lili’s sentimental utterance, what becomes clear is that the male revolutionary dyad at the fore of her declaration (the Boukman and Little Guy duality) is only of conceptual relevance and prominence due to its female antecedent. What we are pushed to see, therefore, is not simply the foundational importance of Boukman, male leadership and action to the Revolution; we are urged to note the importance of women through this antecedent’s grounding in a revolutionary tradition of Vodou tragic relation. Our attention is fixed upon the women who thought

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<sup>78</sup> Fick 93.

the Revolution into being with their spirituality and acted it in their collectivity, who, like Boukman, were its harbingers, and, like Little Guy, its future purveyors. It is no coincidence then that the “daughters” are tellingly described in “Nineteen Thirty Seven” as the “embers” and “sparks” for the present and future (Danticat 41), nor that Defile, blood-soaked from having crossed Massacre River, is described as having “wings of flame” (34). Women, Danticat stresses, are a key part of the “wall of rising fire” that *was* and that *is* the Revolution. They, like Boukman and others, were the fire and fiery impelling the revolutionary struggle then and now. What Lili’s consciousness of the *lwa* Boukman’s multiplicitious energy does is facilitate a subtle and yet deliberate move from the masculine focus of revolutionary narratology. We are now encouraged to see the latter’s hand in the cleansing of the revolutionary past, essentially in a Westernization that seeks to rid this history of the “barebreasted Negresses” unwilling to be fully Christianized, a Boukman of fury and fire, and the “loving mother” to be mourned with equal passion as the “*loving father... valiant love, ... [and] beloved friend.*” With this push to see the unnoted, we are primed to ultimately see how such cleansing facilitates an assimilatory erasure of all that may contest a Euro-American existence, specifically the alternative ideations of being that these obscured persons exemplify.

#### **“I NEED MANY REPETITIONS”**

*It was a book famous in its time and it came into the hands of the slave fitted to make use of it, Toussaint L’Overture. ... Over and over again Toussaint read this passage: “A courageous chief is only wanted. Where is he? A courageous chief is only wanted...”*

—C.L.R JAMES, *THE BLACK JACOBINS*

*If self-interest alone prevails with nations and their masters, there is another power. Nature speaks in louder tones than philosophy or self-interest. Already are there established two colonies of fugitive negroes, whom treaties and power protect from assault. Those lightnings announce the thunder. A courageous chief is only wanted. Where is he, that great man whom Nature owes to her vexed, oppressed and tormented children? Where is he? He will appear, doubt it not; he will come forth and raise the sacred standard of liberty. This venerable signal will gather around him the companions of his misfortune. More impetuous than the torrents, they will everywhere leave the indelible traces of their just resentment. Everywhere people will bless the name of the hero who shall have reestablished the rights of the human race; everywhere will they raise trophies in his honour.*

—ABBÉ RAYNAL, *PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL HISTORY OF THE ESTABLISHMENTS AND COMMERCE OF THE EUROPEANS IN THE TWO INDIES*

Danticat's work with the Revolution urges that we push through the opening in the revolutionary record offered by the tragic's discursive attention to the unnoted, past and present and consider the Revolution's narration more plainly and for what this narration encourages and further obscures. There is a way, I find, of telling a story that encourages what we want to see of the world around us and what we want to remember. There is a way that brings a preferred existence into being. What Danticat is fully aware of is that the conventional manner of narrating the Upheaval through male actors alone facilitates an assimilatory erasure of any that challenges a Euro-American ordering of existence. It supports an idea of sameness that did not exist for all in the revolutionary moment and that still does not exist for all today. It bolsters, more precisely, the fallacy of a people's absolute conscription into modernity proper and facilitates an erasure of all that contested and continues to contest a Euro-American existence.

In 1784, the first hot air balloon took flight in the Americas on the Gallifet sugar plantation." When seeing the balloon in flight, the slaves marshaled in attendance "could not stop talking about the 'insatiable passion'

men had to 'exert power over nature.'" Witnessing the event as bound subjects, they could not help but to see their own subjugation within this feat of technological savvy.<sup>79</sup> Typical of the tragic impulse conditioning her work and its attention to the past's enduring salience to the present, Danticat resurrects this happening in "Wall of Rising Fire," and in doing so she facilitates a questioning of the upheaval's customary narration. Little in these slaves' reaction is fodder for the Revolution's standard rendering: they are not in awe of nor interested in the technological (or correspondingly intellectual) feats of the people they are beholden to. Without access to Raynal due to their position as chattel and without a desire for such access, they stand not, like Toussaint, with "a courageous chief only is wanted" ever on their mind."<sup>80</sup> Weary of the West, its ennobling influence and its "insatiable" will to power, they are not eager to be molded into the Western persons such erudition and admiration entails. They are not, more specifically, willing to enter "the house of knowledge" and prepared to submit to the ideological indoctrination by which such a sight would be regarded with wonder.

If there is one thing that colonial history has taught us well, it is that he who controls thought writes existence. He writes, in this way, the "human" need to "exert power over nature" and persons. Addressing the tie that binds the rhetoric of modernity to the brutal capitalist logic of coloniality, Walter Dignolo states that in the moment of conquest, "the control of knowledge in Western Christendom belonged to Western Christian men, which meant the world would be conceived only from the perspective of Western Christian

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<sup>79</sup> Dubois 91.

<sup>80</sup> James, *The Black Jacobins*, 25.

Men.”<sup>81</sup> Thereafter, the “house of knowledge” (as he phrases it) would be guarded by these men barring the admittance of European women, the “Creoles and Mestizos in the New World,” indigenous peoples, Arabs and Africans, any who represented difference in being and in thought.<sup>82</sup> In being barred from this “house” and from the authority to write one’s own understanding of existence, those rendered wholly different (like persons of color) were barred, in turn, from humanity.<sup>83</sup> The exclusivity of this “house” meant that one’s human worth would be determined by how well a person thinks and acts like its inhabitants.” To be of human value one must learn, then, to like and desire what the residents of this “house” want; one must become wholly like them. In their unimpressed appraisal of the balloon’s staging, the aforementioned slaves forced to stand in awe of the achievement offered by the “house of knowledge,” refuse the instruction in sameness offered to them. Critical of the move to power driving both the balloon’s construction and its staging, they refuse to accept the “house’s” writing of existence as they stand unwilling to “ohh” and “ahh” when prompted to do so. Like “the daughters of the river,” they refuse their benightedness and, in so doing, they refuse the very authority and superiority of those ruling over them.

Toussaint, however, “ohhs” and “ahhs” all too-well, as does his greatest Caribbean biographer, C.L.R James; both seek admittance into this

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<sup>81</sup> Walter D. Mignolo, “DELINKING: The Rhetoric of Modernity, the Logic of Coloniality and the Grammar of De-coloniality,” *Cultural Studies*, 21. 2-3 (March/May 2007), 478.

<sup>82</sup> “DELINKING, 478-479. Mignolo writes that “the Western Christian men in control of knowledge were also White. Thus, in the sixteenth century a concept of race emerged at the intersection of faith, knowledge and skin color. ... Whatever did not fit the religious and moral standards set by Christianity, in terms of faith and physique, was cast out of the standard of humanity” and, in this way, the “house of knowledge”. See “DELINKING” 479.

<sup>83</sup> Mignolo maintains that race “refers mainly to subjective relations among social groups and is related to the control of knowledge and subjectivity” (“DELINKING” 487).

“house” and safeguard its existence when they do so. The oft-cited act of Toussaint reading Raynal nurtures the idea that the singular Western male “perspective” is the viewpoint *of* and *for* all. For what it does is establish both Toussaint and the historian privileging Toussaint’s reading of Raynal as heirs of “Enlightenment.” It provides, in this way, the means in which both may be rendered race-less and read as Christian men of the West. Like James or the Revolution’s most recent critic (David Scott) assessing the Upheaval through Toussaint or whoever else best reflects the “perspective of Western Christian Men,” new thinkers reading their work are positioned to write as if this sameness in being was all that fueled the revolutionary moment and as if that is all that guides our own. When Danticat chooses to filter much of “Wall of Rising Fire’s” action through a male protagonist (Guy), she reveals the ideological costs of such a decision: the story of sameness modernity proper requires of the Revolution renders the Upheaval a failure. It cultivates the sense that a sameness in being is Haiti’s way out of the socio-economic and socio-political “mess” it created for itself when is sought to exist in difference.

Without access to a “Raynal” of his choosing because of his poverty and class, Danticat offers Guy the “house’s” alternative for a person of his station—a balloon to admire. In so doing, she crafts a man so weary from the hardship of sustained destitution that he is tempted by the disingenuous promise of freedom modernity proper offers. After conquering much of the Americas, emissaries of modernity proper from varying racial and cultural ilks replaced the region’s looted coffers with a Machiavellian promise: should one accept Euro-America as the standard for being, should one seek to become like it and accept all that it thinks and believes, persons would be equal in both being and goods. With access to technology (“balloons”) and virgin lands

promising a sustainable lived existence, persons can shirk their benightedness and its resulting consequence, destitution. They can thereafter be remade anew. In the grand scheme of things, Guy, Lili, the men of the factory, and the “daughters of the river” should want to be “new.” They should not live as they are with their lives tethered to cane cultivation, with their industry and poverty tied to the very existence their ancestors fought against. Danticat, however, is clear that the change they need does not rest with the promise of newness modernity proper offers. Accordingly, even as their poverty is a real problem for Danticat, the solution Guy chooses does little to alleviate it. His economically-motivated doubts concerning the Revolution must be taken lightly.

In response to Lili’s joyous proclamation, “Long live my boy and long live Boukman,” Guy counters tearfully with his own: ““Long live our supper’ [as he] quickly bat[s] his eyelashes to keep tears from rolling down his face” (57). With this reference to “supper,” our attention (and that of Lili’s and Little Guy’s) is meant to turn from Guy’s sadness and settle on an earlier lighthearted textual instance where the tragic briefly moves into the comic. During this instance, Little Guy, preparing for his first monologue, is urged by his mother to reveal what is foremost on his mind. He, in character, decisively shouts “Freedom!” and Guy, greedily eyeing the gourds of cornmeal mush awaiting the family after his son’s recitation, usurps the role of Boukman to “jokingly” state “supper” (56). This “supper”-specific banter, however, is no light utterance in both its first and last articulation, as the humor offered is tinged with bitterness. Guy’s persistent focus on his evening meal does what Lili’s declaration refuses to do: openly question a revolutionary endeavor that has left many in a state no different from the emaciated existence Boukman

railed against. Recall that the “bones” of Boukman’s speech were those of the dead *and* the living: “*a wall of fire is rising in the ashes I see the bones of my people ... whose dark hollow faces I see daily in the fields.*” Consumed with misgivings concerning the efficacy of the revolutionary endeavor, Guy’s cheerless “joke” positions a past of revolutionary glory firmly into a trying postcolonial present in order to ask: why need we, the heirs of the Revolution’s failure, remember the Upheaval and its participants?

As if called forth by Guy’s skepticism, the ancestral spirits of past and present “speak” to Guy in an effort to assuage his misgivings. When the family takes their nightly stroll to the sugar mill following Guy’s recitation, Little Guy and his father have the following exchange:

“Can I study my lines there?” the boy said.

“You know them well enough already,” Guy said.

“I need many repetitions,” the boy said. (59)

Who are we to suppose offers the first and last lines of this conversation? Little Guy, a boy concerned solely with excelling in his role as Boukman, or the persons conjured in the *lwa* Boukman himself, he who is the very embodiment of tragic relation and, as such, the past lives invoked with remembrance? The spiritual play grounding Danticat’s work would suggest the latter, as would the cryptic nature of Little Guy’s last line: “I need many repetitions.” One cannot help but to see in this line a multi-voiced utterance, as it is a speech that attests to both the boy’s need for performance excellence and the dead’s need for a rejoinder, an adamant and matter-of-fact riposte stressing the sustained effort needed for a successful revolutionary endeavor. The Revolution, it would seem, cannot be thought of as a completed occurrence. 1791-1804 and all uprisings that occurred thereafter were mere rehearsals for a



final production still ahead. The cool smolder of the “daughters” at “Nineteen Thirty-Nine’s” end, and the furious cry of revolutionary angst of the boy who is at once a *lwa* at “Wall of Rising Fire’s” closing, are an affirmation of this still ongoing battle for being. It is an affirmation for the enduring struggle for difference, without consequence, that *was* and that *is* the revolution.

Such differing and yet syntactically-similar utterances of Guy (“Long live our supper”) and Lili (“Long live Boukman and long live my boy”) are meant ultimately to parallel the dialogic exchange between the two narratives; In turn, the dialogue is a reminder that “Nineteen Thirty Seven” is the rejoinder to the customary revolutionary narrotology and its ideological baggage of sameness offered and subtly debunked by “Wall of Rising Fire.” It is a reminder of the unnoted women who stood in difference for difference, who stood with others for a new Haiti and for a revolutionary alterity of their own fashioning and imagining. That said, there is an undeniable bleakness concerning the postcolonial present that pervades the texts, a bleakness that would suggest that the battle for being driving the narratives has neared its closing stages.

The “daughter of the rivers” communality ends with the imminent death of Josephine’s aforementioned daughter, Marie. Like her grandmother Defile, she is also accused of murdering a child and will face life imprisonment and certain execution (“Between the Pools and the Gardenias” 99). Guy, we know, plunges to his death at “Wall of Rising Fire’s” end. Little Guy, abandoned by his father and infused with the revolutionary fervor for a new Haiti à la Boukman, attempts to democratize the nation, is forced into exile when a young adult, and dies at sea. Lili, without son, without husband and the “daughters of the river,” commits suicide as an old woman (94). All

this sadness outwardly points to failure alone, to the ineffectuality of the revolution, its aims and intentions. This depressing familial actuality imitates that the Haitian collective (epitomized by the family and the “daughters”) has been completely broken by a freedom of wealth and distinction that labor-as-freedom entails. The Haitian collective has arguably grown numb to the power of Défilée and Boukman. It arguably has come to see the dream of emancipation as an outmoded impulse of a time to be forgotten. However bleak the family’s present and future is, we must not take such a disheartened line. Danticat does not want us to lose hope in Haiti, in the future of difference its soldiers in arms (both in the past and present) imagined for itself. In deliberately unveiling a steady *défilez* toward revolutionary change, she challenges any who may have thought that a loss of a battle or two meant that the war had already been won. Charging her narratives with voices of dissension, she forcefully disputes the story of sameness that revolutionary narrotology advances with its male focus, and that emissaries of modernity proper champion. She offers, in this way, her own *défilez* and ensures that the battle continues.

## CONCLUSION

*"A Tragedy of Success!": Haiti and the Promise of Revolution* began as an examination of the failure of revolution. More precisely, it began as an assessment of the pivotal importance of the inefficacy of upheaval to Caribbean articulations of modernity. The foremost concern was with the lived reality of a region for which liberal democratic freedom has proved ephemeral. However, as my project emerged from beneath the shadows of influential readings concerning Haiti, the Revolution and modernity, a shift in thought occurred as my thesis developed. The problem was not the failure of revolution, per se, but the thinking that conceived of a particular revolution as a failure, the thinking that is still haunted by the horror of Haiti. My concern turned to a mode of thought troubled by the apocalyptic and earth-shattering objection to a Euro-American existence that the Haitian Revolution offered. With that in mind, the Revolution, its failure or success, became not only the focus of this study but rather Haiti itself. In consequence, a jarring realization presented itself: Haiti's post-revolutionary state determined not only how its future would be thought, but its past as well. With my thesis, I therefore sought to explore how Caribbean writers dealt with the intriguing paradox Haiti presented, namely the incongruity of its dual *and* dueling significations as a sign of possibility and inefficacy.

My project attempted to therefore evaluate how fictional depictions of the Haitian Revolution by twentieth and twenty-first century Caribbean writers were as shaped by a past of promise as they were by a present of unremitting hardship; they were shaped by what I term a tragic mode, a manner of literary representation that in contending with the thorny conundrum that is Haiti's revolutionary "success" and its post-revolutionary

“tragedies” write the Revolution with attention to the enduring salience of the past to the present. In reading the works within my dissertation through this mode, I consciously sought to add to the conversation C.L.R James began when he first read the Upheaval in relation to modernity in his seminal text, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution*. With this work, I specifically questioned the continued efficacy of reading the Revolution and Haiti through an understanding of modernity that can only attend to “enlightened” subjects, persons (like Toussaint) who reflect a desire for European acculturation. Building on Sibylle Fischer’s work with the Revolution in *Modernity Disavowed: Haiti and the Cultures of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* and Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s in *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, I sought to examine how Haiti’s postcolonial condition nourishes old intellectual silences and creates new scholastic disavowals concerning the possibility for anti-colonial resistance and change in the contemporary postcolonial present. I revealed how the nation’s dire present bolstered the European image of modernity and, in this way, obscures calls for cultural and political self-determination within the region even as the writers within my dissertation maintain these calls with their work.

Alejo Carpentier’s novel, *The Kingdom of this World*, Derek Walcott’s collections of plays, *The Haitian Trilogy* and Edwidge Danticat’s short stories, “Wall of Rising Fire” and “Nineteen Thirty-Seven” thus underscored what I read as the Caribbean’s century spanning, protracted struggle to exist unfettered (without Euro-American stewardship) in political and cultural difference. This struggle, I reveal, first commenced with the Amerindians of Hispaniola and continues today by their present-day Caribbean descendents. I argued that the texts’ respective tragic structure, that is, their movement

between the past and the present, worked to complicate a linear sense of progressive time in order to point to the manner in which the struggle against colonialism and its vestige, coloniality, has yet to cease. Caribbean modernity, far from replicating the forward advancing progressive movement said to underwrite modernity proper, was read here as functioning in a disconcerting, temporally disjunctive manner that reflects this struggle; I understood it as consisting of a perpetual play of radical transformation (conquest, colonialism and anti-colonial revolution) and devastating communal crisis. Keenly aware of modernity's unsettling, contradictory manifestation, a tragic mode, I stressed, gives expression to the apprehension a modernity experienced as such would create by granting substantial attention to the subtle vacillation between tragedy and comedy that occurs within the literary texts discussed in my thesis.

In relying on the analytical mode I term "the tragic" to closely engage twentieth and twenty-first century Haitian Revolutionary fiction, I insisted that scholars obtain a historically rich understanding of tragedy, one grounded in the political and historical context of its development in an ancient Athens seeking to police the lives of women, barbarians and slaves. In doing so, they may recognize tragedy as a mode not simply for the exceptional but as one equally shaped by the unnoted others subsumed within figures and cultures of exception. In the Caribbean context, if scholars turn to tragedy as an interpretive lens, I argued that they do so in a manner that can address those deemed *and* made inconsequential by colonialism's enduring subsistence. In the end, this project sought to call attention to how the discourses most often used to read Haiti and its Revolution cannot face Haiti or the radical nature of its Upheaval. It called on scholars to question what

their allegiances to particular manners of reading modernity may led them to, namely, the abjuration of the very thing they prize —anti-colonial radicality and a Caribbean future of unencumbered political and cultural difference, where Europe and the U.S. need not determine what is best for the Caribbean; Caribbean peoples can do so for themselves.

In the wake of the January 12, 2010 earthquake, Haiti has returned to the international spotlight. It has done so in a manner that confirms a widespread reading I am opposed to in this project, that post-revolutionary Haiti is a failed state, a site of repeated catastrophe and no more. For while the earthquake was a natural disaster, Haiti's dismal infrastructure certainly is not. It, not the earthquake, led to the deaths of so many Haitians. As I watched in horror the cataclysmic events on television, watched as my family and friends frantically attempted to contact their loved ones and relatives in Haiti, and as I heard the despair and pain in the voices of so many who searched for persons they would never hear from again, I grew angry. I thought: why does Haiti have to suffer so? What has it done to deserve such anguish? Of course, answers were readily offered to these questions; none, however sufficed. I could not and would not believe that God had it out for Haiti, that my people were cursed. I could not believe that Haiti was marked for doom and yet I could not shake the feeling that, indeed, Haiti was doomed. For how else can any explain the misfortunes that have plagued Haiti? Even with my awareness of Haitian history and the pivotal role of the international community to its present state, I still could not and cannot make sense of the sufferings Haiti has endured.

There again was a new conundrum Haiti presented. Even with knowledge to explain Haiti's present state, one cannot explain Haiti's present

state as its “tragedies” are of such enormity little sense can be made of them. This is partly why in the wake of the earthquake religious discourse has played such a prominent role in how Haiti was discussed. To be sure, racism and cultural ignorance led many to blame Vodou for the ills Haiti has suffered but that is not what I am getting at here. Even among Vodouisant, Haiti’s ills were recognized as resulting from some affront its people had done to God. In the talk surrounding Haiti following the earthquake there was a pervasive understanding that only God could make sense of Haiti, its unremitting hardships. In the future, I need to consider how the inability to make rational sense of Haiti shapes its tragic nuances. I need to therefore address the widespread reading that only “God can make sense of Haiti” so as to discern what “sense” such thinking is making of Haiti.

That I have chosen to focus on the literary offerings of Carpentier, Walcott and Danticat alone in this project (and to a lesser extent that of Édouard Glissant in *Monsieur Toussaint*) is no indication of the superiority of their work to that of others but it is merely telling of my own limited sight upon beginning this dissertation. To be clear, I chose these narratives because I enjoy them and because they stimulate my intellect. That said, I began this project without a clear understanding of the direction it would take. Upon coming to terms with its, still unsteady, course, I recognize that to gain a greater understanding of the enduring saliency of the ideational significance of Haiti and the Revolution I need broaden my scope beyond these writers and include the work of Aimé Césaire, George Lamming, Glissant and Rosa Guy, among others. Therefore, my future intent is to turn to Aimé Césaire, Jacques Stéphen Alexis and Marie Vieux Chauvet. Regarding Césaire, I aim to closely read his work on Haiti and the revolution attending to how Haiti is

imagined and deployed in his play, *La Tragédie du roi Christophe*, his poem, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, and in his theoretical piece on anti-colonialism and independence, *Toussaint Louverture*. All three pieces, I find, are permeated with the tragic, specifically in Césaire's use of tragedy as a literary genre, in the way a tragic chorus runs throughout the *Cahier*, and, philosophically, in the piece *Toussaint Louverture*, which reads Toussaint's demise as the result of a tragic flaw. In turning to Haitian writers like Jacques Stéphen Alexis and Marie Vieux Chauvet, I must also consider why Haitian writers have not offered fictional representations of the Revolution as frequently as their neighbors in the region and when they have, why they have done so in a less celebratory manner. Much work is left to be done and I am sure this project will change drastically. In the time that it takes to transform this doctoral project into a book manuscript my thinking will undoubtedly change as my initial thoughts did when beginning this work. What will not change, however, is my hope and faith in Haiti. That I will maintain, eternally.



## APPENDIX

### “DÉFILE”

Composed by RAM

#### Female Vocalist

*Nou fete lamò Dessaline, men nou pa fete lavi Dessaline.  
Se li ki banou endepandans, men noud il mési ak on komplo bann rouj.*

*Li ta la lé nou ta betwen li, li banou couraj lé nou pédi fòs.  
Men nou, Men nou pa gade déyé ... dapré jan li mennenn' nan lagé.*

We celebrate Dessaline's death but we don't celebrate Dessalines' life.  
He gave us independence but we said thank you with a plot to take his life.

He was there when we needed him, he gave us courage when we lacked strength.  
But we ... but we didn't consider how he led us in the war

#### Chorus

*Dessaline, Dessaline, Dessaline o o o o o  
Papa Dessaline, papa Dessaline, papa Dessaline o o o o o  
W'ap toujou rete yon bon general.*

*Dessaline, Dessaline, Dessaline o o o o o  
Papa Dessaline, papa Dessaline, papa Dessaline o o o o o  
Papa Dessaline, papa Dessaline, papa Dessaline o o o o o  
W'ap toujou rete yon bon emperé*

Dessalines, Dessalines, Dessalines o o o o o (twice)  
Father Dessalines, father Dessalines, father Dessalines o o o o o  
You will always be a good general

Dessalines Dessalines, Dessalines o o o o o (twice)  
Father Dessalines, father Dessalines, father Dessalines o o o o o  
Father Dessalines, father Dessalines, father Dessalines o o o o o  
You will always be a good emperor

*Pép la, Pép la, Pép la, Pép la*

The people, the people, the people, the people

**Female Vocalist**

*Pép la mande travay  
mwèn réle ala nou pa péson o o o o!!!!*

The people ask for work,  
I am yelling, I'm not afraid of anybody oooo!!!!

**Chorus**

*Di yo mwèn la yee sou kwé ya man yèn mwèn  
(twa fwa)*

Tell them I am here, if they would dare attack me  
(three times)

**Female Vocalist**

*Pép la mande travay ; mwèn rele ala non pa péson o o o o !!!*

The people ask for work; I am yelling I'm not afraid of anybody o o o  
o!!!

**Chorus**

*Di yo mwèn la yee sou kwé ya man yèn mwèn*

Tell them I am here if they would dare attack me

**Female Vocalist**

*Yo man yèn mwèn si kwé ya manyèn mwèn*

Attack me, if you dare to do so

**Chorus**

O o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o o

**Female Vocalist**

*Di manyèn mwèn sou kwé ya manyèn mwèn  
Pép la mande travay.*

Tell them to attack me if they dare to do so  
The people asks for work

*Mwen réle ala mwen pa pé péson o o o o.*

I am yelling I'm not afraid of anybody o o o o!!! (twice)

*Di yo mwen la yee*

Tell them, I'm here (twice)

**Chorus**

*Sou kwé ya manyen mwen.*

If they would dare attack me (twice)

**Female Vocalist**

*Haitian o o o!!!*

Haitian o o o!!!

**Chorus**

*Wi manman!*

Yes mama

**Male Vocalist**

*Haitian o o o!!!*

Haitian o o o!

**Chorus**

*Wi papa*

Yes papa

**Female Vocalist**

*Jodi a se jou pou nou pran plezi m'*

Today is the day to let loose

**Chorus**

*Pran Plezi w,' pran Plezi w,' pran Plezi w'*

Let loose, let loose, let loose (twice)

**Female Vocalist**

*Jodi a se jou pou nou banboché*

Today is the day to enjoy one's self

**Chorus**

*Banboché, banboché, banboché*

Enjoy one's self, enjoy one's self, enjoy one's self (twice)

**Female Vocalist**

*Jodi a se jou pou nou layité*

Today is the day to enjoy ourselves<sup>1</sup>

**Chorus**

*layité, layité, layité*

Enjoy ourselves, enjoy ourselves, enjoy ourselves  
(twice)

**Female Vocalist**

*Jodi a se jou pou nou defilé*

Today is the day to march

**Chorus**

*Defilé, defile, defilé, defile*

March, march, march (twice)

**Female Vocalist**

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<sup>1</sup> For *Layité's* meaning see chapter 4, "Defilez! And the Battle Continues!," 196, fn 35.

*Ou, ou, ou, ou, ou, ou*  
*Sagou kenbé la , kenbé la, kenbé la*

*Ou, ou, ou, ou, ou, ou*  
The music's good, keep it up, keep it up

**Female Vocalist**

*Haitian o o o!!!!*

Haitian o o o!!!

**Chorus**

*Wi manman!*

Yes mama

**Male Vocalist**

*Haitian o o o!!!!*

Haitian o o o!

**Chorus**

*Wi papa*

Yes papa

**Female Vocalist**

*Jodi a se jou pou nou banboché*

Today is the day to enjoy one's self

**Chorus**

*Banboché, banboché, banboché*

Enjoy one's self, enjoy one's self, enjoy one's self (twice)

**Female Vocalist**

*Jodi a se jou pou nou layité*

Today is the day to enjoy ourselves

**Chorus**

*layité, layité, layité*

Enjoy ourselves, enjoy ourselves, enjoy ourselves (twice)

**Female Vocalist**

*Jodi a se jou pou nou defilé*

Today is the day to march

**Chorus**

*Defilé, defile, defilé, defile*

March, march, march (twice)

**Chorus**

*Zafé yo, Zafé yo, Zafé yo, Zafé yo  
Yo w esa m'ap fé, yo paka fé sa m'ap fé*

I don't care, I don't care, I don't care (twice)  
They see what I do, they can't do what I do.

**Male Vocalist**

*Pép la ki di sa a*

The people can say it

**Chorus**

*Zafé yo*

I don't care

O oo oooooooooooooo oooooooooo ooooo

*Pép la, pép la, pép la, pép la Pép la, pép la, pép la, pép la.*

The people, the people, the people, the people.

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