2010-12-20

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THEATRE OF ARTS: CARIBBEAN INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE MUSE OF PLACE

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Faculty
of the University of Miami
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Coral Gables, Florida

December 2010

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

THEATRE OF THE ARTS: CARIBBEAN INTERTEXTUALITY AND THE MUSE OF
PLACE

Lara B. Cahill-Booth

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CAHILL-BOOTH, LARA B.   (Ph.D., English)
Theatre of the Arts: Caribbean Intertextuality and   (December 2010)
the Muse of Place.

Abstract of a dissertation at the University of Miami.

Dissertation supervised by Professor Sandra Pouchet Paquet.
No. of pages in text. (212)

"_Theatre of the Arts_: Caribbean Intertextuality and the Muse of Place" is a literary

geography that explores how specific environments shape imaginative interventions into

history and language. I begin by examining the unity of Derek Walcott's vision of the

sea, tracing its ties to oral history, literary canon, and personal reveries of emplacement in

Omeros and other epic-minded poems. I follow the sea to its continental origins,

examining the Guyanas, an Amazonian bioregion on the borderlands of Guyana, Brazil,

and Venezuela, as a place imaginatively remapped by twentieth-century novelists Alejo

Carpentier, Wilson Harris, Mário de Andrade, and Pauline Melville. I read these novels,

"listening" for the indigenous voice, to argue that they function as dramatic literature in

their respective engagements with an oral literary tradition. My analysis moves through

the archipelago, engaging the island trope to explore the embodied discourse of

contemporary dance. I focus primarily on Rex Nettleford's technique and choreography

for Jamaica's National Dance Theatre Company, but draw comparisons to Caribbean and

North American choreographers as well as authors, to show that his choreography

demonstrates symbolic indigeneity while also fostering ties to a cross-cultural

community. In reading across space and genre, I adopt the interdisciplinary and cross-

cultural thinking I see in Wilson Harris' idea of a _theatre of the arts_ as my point of

departure. I use performance studies to show that an imaginative engagement across the

creative arts provides a language to explore and represent experience in situ. My dissertation is most innovative in that it puts epic poetry, the novel of the Americas, and choreography in dialogue as performance texts that recover and write the embodied memories and traditions silenced by History. In the end, my project shows that the emplacement of a culture in a living artistic tradition and a living landscape nourishes a creative consciousness that discovers and activates new relationships in time and space.

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for Brian

Acknowledgements

accompanied me on my first research trip to her home, Havana, Cuba. As it turned out, I accompanied her on a more meaningful trip through the memories of her youth.

Because thanks are not enough, I dedicate this project to the love of my life, Brian Booth, a devoted partner and a welcome distraction, who inspires me to think creatively and makes sure that my incursions into the poetics of the physical environment are never contained by books or library walls.

And finally, I acknowledge my most cherished gift, Conrad Booth, for bringing immeasurable joy into my world and for motivating me to get this thing done!

Introduction

Caribbean Physical and Cultural Geographies

> What the map cuts up, the story cuts across.
> Michel de Certeau *The Practice of Everyday Life* (124)

This dissertation explores the influence of a geographical imaginary on the aesthetics and ideologies of Caribbean artistic production. I privilege the theories of Wilson Harris, an imaginative thinker and writer who finds his inspiration in what he describes as the *living landscapes* of the Caribbean and the Caribbean basin and locates his voice within the creative dialogue between nature, history, and the arts. Throughout his writing, he explores his belief that "a philosophy of history may well lie buried in the arts of the imagination" ("History, Fable and Myth" 156). In his lecture, "Theatre of the Arts," first presented as the keynote address at the 2001 conference held in his honor at the University of Liege, Harris argues that an imaginative engagement across the creative arts—including poetry, fiction, painting, dance, music, etc.—provides a language to explore and represent "the measureless spark that makes us … living works of art in the ground on which we move which moves with us" (267). The emplacement in a living artistic tradition and in a living landscape nourishes a creative consciousness that discovers and activates new relationships in time and space. In the first chapter, I discuss his construct of the *theatre of the arts* as an imaginative response to history that has its foundations in the performativity of the colonial encounter and resonates with more widely read theoretical approaches such as Kamau Brathwaite's *nation language* or Édouard Glissant's *antíllanté*. The second chapter examines the oral traditions underlying

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Derek Walcott's epic imaginary surrounding the sea, a site of the Caribbean's collective originary memories. The third chapter follows the sea to its continental origins, examining the Guyana Shield, an Amazonian bio-region on the borderlands of Guyana, Brazil, and Venezuela, as a site imaginatively remapped by twentieth-century novelists Alejo Carpentier, Wilson Harris, Mário de Andrade, and Pauline Melville, to represent the indigenous Amerindian voice buried by European scientific realism. The fourth chapter moves through the archipelago, engaging the island trope to explore the relational embodied discourse of contemporary dance, focusing primarily on Rex Nettleford's choreography for Jamaica's National Dance Theatre Company. Such breadth is valuable because it facilitates a reading across form that demonstrates the borderless thinking that Harris imagines as the key to "a wholly different theatre of the arts" (265).

Significant aesthetic and ideological shifts occur in Caribbean literature and cultural theory under the sign of geographical imagination. The critical consciousness experiences a release from the constraints of history; a veritable liberation for cultures constructed as historyless and, thereby, omitted from History, but whose movements across oceans and through islands are the basis of a collective social memory of embodiment and emplacement. Kamau Brathwaite's theory that "the unity is submarine" (*Contradictory Omens*) draws on the region's geological foundations as an underwater mountain range to explain its cultural character and has a compelling resonance with later theorizations that seek to link the region's geographical character with its cultural character. Édouard Glissant plays upon the region's "rootlessness" by referring to bio-geographical features of the region in deploying the image of the rhizome, "an enmeshed

root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently," to offer a theory of Caribbean relationality (*Poetics of Relation* 11). In yet another geographical metaphor, Antonio Benítez-Rojo characterizes the Caribbean as an island that repeats, "a cultural meta-archipelago without center and without limits, a chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly, each copy a different one founding and refounding ethnological materials like a cloud will do with its vapor" (*The Repeating Island* 9). Paradigms of spacialized discourse rely on postmodern thinking that privileges spaciality over temporality[1] and emphasize that geography *means* something.

The Caribbean's vast and varied geography, its history of conquest and colonization, and its creolized cultures have resulted in fragmented national, cultural, and natural experiences and identities that are often as similar as they are different. As Antonio Benítez-Rojo articulates, "the main obstacles to any global study of the Caribbean's societies, insular or continental, are exactly those things that scholars usually adduce to define the area: its fragmentation; its instability; its reciprocal isolation; its uprootedness; its cultural heterogeneity; its lack of historiography and historical

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[1] A spatial approach to modernity was deemed something of a solution to all of the trouble that began with the temporal approach to modernity. The West's linear timeline that was imposed upon the world was challenged by the attention to geography. For example, Fredric Jameson suggests that a preoccupation with spatial logic has replaced previous preoccupations with temporal logic. Jameson writes: "I think that it is at least empirically arguable that our daily life, our psychic experience, our cultural languages, are today dominated by categories of space rather than categories of time, as in the preceding period of high modernism" (qtd. in Keith and Pile 2). Though his perspectives are ultimately filtered through a Marxist critique of capitalism, he nevertheless makes the relevant point that space now challenges and represents, appropriately or distortedly, categories of social relations that were previously gauged by time. Hegel's categorization of Europeans as existing within history, Amerindians as existing within a pre-history, and African as existing within an ahistory then is nullified as time falls away to demonstrate the cultural diversity of the present. This fragmentation is best captured in a spatial representation, a popular postmodern analytical approach.

continuity; it contingency and its impermanence; its syncretism, etc." (1).

Indeed, scholarship's awkward imposition of modernity's temporal master-narrative and scientific and political positivism has resulted in a fundamental de-centering that produces actual and conceptual movements out of the region. For example, traditional approaches to studying Caribbean cultural history, in general terms, restrict the possibilities to a nation-state model, connect them to European, African, or Asian origins, or filter the discussion of texts through a single-language, typically of European origin. These approaches not only turn to a pre-colonial past, which is often the same as the colonial and postcolonial site of displacement, but also overlook the lived experiences and environments of the Caribbean. De Certeau's statement in the epigraph suggests that lived realities cannot be contained by territorial boundaries, thereby signaling the possible limits of study determined by nationalism and compartmentalized ethnic, racial, or linguistic identities. The trajectories embodied in the Caribbean certainly blur those distinctions, making a new kind of practice necessary to understand the complex intersections of multiple histories. I refer to De Certeau's point as an introduction to this project in order to signal that my analysis of narrative will be traced through space rather than linguistic tradition or national historiography. As such, this project participates in the discourse of literary geography, an outgrowth of cultural geography, by reading through sites of imaginative space, regardless of their national or linguistic traditions, to uncover the narratives and aesthetics of Caribbean-centered discourse. When applied to the Caribbean, this practice recognizes the region as a "postmodern critical human geography" (Soja 15-16), wherein there is a spatiality to social life and a simultaneity to

the histories of indigeneity, conquest, creolization, and nationalism. This

approach is productive because it facilitates thinking beyond the scope of the geographic,

national, and linguistic boundaries that fragment the region and the field of Caribbean

Studies.

Working in the spirit of this spatialized cultural and literary geography, this

dissertation focuses on the historical, cultural, and aesthetic processes that contribute to

the construction of Caribbean narratives of place. In postcolonial studies, the issue of

place is characterized by an actual displacement or a sense of displacement—geographic

or linguistic—and by the idea of an implicit connection between culture and the

formation of a place.[2] Postcolonial discursive practices that seek to reconcile the violence

and erasure of colonialism reclaim place through the appropriation of an original or

originating language, the retrieval of a silenced history, and the naming of a lived

environment. Place, then, is a two-part paradigm of displacement and emplacement.

Through this history of violence, servitude, erasure, and appropriation, the geography of

the Caribbean and the forcible transplantation of different people to the Caribbean present

a particularly problematic version of postcolonial displacement. Possibly more so than

any other modern socio-cultural region colonized by the West, the Caribbean has suffered

the consequences of this process. Caribbean literature proves to be no exception to this

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[2] In their introduction to the unit on "Place" in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin offer the most succinct description of what place means in postcolonial theory. They explain: '[P]lace' in post-colonial studies is a complex interaction of language, history and environment. It is characterized first by a sense of displacement in those who have moved to the colonies, or the more widespread sense of displacement from the imported language, of a gap between the 'experienced' environment and descriptions the language provides, and second, by a sense of the immense investment of culture in the construction of place" (345). Though the language they choose to explain this construct is rather muted considering the violence and erasure of colonialism in the Caribbean, they make the valuable point that place is a two-part paradigm of displacement and making place.

paradigm in its efforts to inhabit a regional landscape through assertions of a

lived history and experimentation with non-western language and discourse. It situates

the Caribbean landscape itself as the site of historical, cultural, and political entanglement

to which postcolonial discourses of place must respond.

Though this is a project about place, and the creative enterprise of making place

in the Caribbean, a region of places that are nationally, linguistically, geographically, and

culturally appropriated, I wish to further explain my use of the term place. To clarify, this

is to transition from a postcolonial understanding of place that is composed of history,

language, and environment into the more concrete articulations of space and place

presented by cultural or human geographers.[3] This project proposes a spatial

understanding of the Caribbean in an effort to respect that it is a region of distinct places

that are related. In *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience,* a pioneering text on

spatial metaphor, Yi-Fu Tuan explains that while "places are centers of felt value where

biological needs … are satisfied" and cultural identities are formed, spaces are open,

potentially limited, but also limitless (4). He continues: "If we think of space as that

which allows movement, then place is pause: each pause in movement makes it possible

for location to be transformed into place" (6). This binary in which place is specific and

space is abstract has dominated spatial discourse. Accordingly, place is championed as

authentic and local while space is deemed suspiciously universalizing, insidiously

globalizing, and ultimately imperial.

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[3] The term of space, like that of place, is a loosely defined and commonly used (and over-used) spatial metaphor. In the humanities, space and place are thrown around, nearly interchangeable, and infrequently geographically rooted. This is primarily due to the humanities' inability to commit to decisive definitions of either concept. Though such openness serves to enrich the discourse, I wish to avoid the misstep of overextending either term by clearly outlining these terms in the context of this analysis.

Feminist geographer Doreen Massey, however, has consistently offered an alternative reading of place, and in her most recent book *For Space* (2005), she disrupts the binary oppositions of place and space, space and time, and local and abstract in order to advance a relational space-based idea of place.[4] Space, Massey argues, is "the product of interrelations; as constituted through interactions, from the immensity of the global to the intimately tiny [;] the sphere of possibility of the existence of multiplicity in the sense of contemporaneous plurality; as the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist; as the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity; always under construction" (9). She borrows these spatialized concepts to revise the idea that place is a static and authentic center of experience. Place, according to this understanding of space as a social relation,

is where spatial narratives meet up or form configurations, conjunctures of trajectories which have their own temporalities. But where the successions of meetings, the accumulation of weavings and encounters build up a history. It's the returns … and the very differentiation of temporalities that lend continuity. But the returns are always to a place that has moved on, the layers of our meeting intersecting and affecting each other; weaving a process of time-space. (Massey 138)

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[4] Place, in such a contemporary context, is presented as the great authentic locus threatened by the reach of globalization: it "is the sphere of the everyday, of real and valued practices, the geographical source of meaning, vital to hold on to as 'the global' spins it ever more powerful and alienating webs" (Massey 5). However, she illuminates the potential narrowness of such a trajectory: "a 'retreat to place' represents a protective pulling-up of drawbridges and a building of walls against the new invasions. Place, [in] this reading, is the locus of denial, of attempted withdrawal from invasion/difference. It is a politically conservative haven, an essentialising (and in the end unviable) basis for response; one that fails to address the real forces at work. It has, undoubtedly, been the background imagination for some of the worst of recent conflicts" (Massey 6-7).

This spatialization of place illuminates an ever-accumulating movement of modernity, and thereby, the impossibility of a linear history. The simultaneity of experience and its embeddedness in a landscape reorients critical approaches to the politics of location. By understanding the complex intersections of multiple histories, place becomes a palimpsest of social memory.

It is such spatio-temporal thinking that Wilson Harris brings to his conceptualization of the Americas as a *womb of space* where the *measureless cross-culturalities* that simultaneously exist in *the life of the earth* engage in a dialogic relationship.[5] Harris' spatial conception of the landscape understands it as both the surface of the earth and the product of social relations. All human and animal cultures that have trod upon it, passed through it, and contributed to its material existence then become interconnected to those experiences that come before and that follow. He explains that "[t]he rigid barriers of time are partially abolished within a space that lives in its own right" (265). The conceptualization of this *living landscape*, whereby the landscape is understood as a "sentient living entity" with a life that is accessible to man's unconscious, suggests geographical historiography that disrupts the continuity and subjectivity of a single European destiny by allowing the multiple trajectories that converge to contribute to an historiography. He sees the West Indies as both a "native and phenomenal environment" and a society which can be "broken into many stages in the way in which one surveys an existing river in its present bed while plotting at the same time ancient and abandoned, indeterminate courses the river once followed" ("Tradition

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[5] These paradigms are engaged throughout Harris' *oeuvre,* and though figure prominently into some of his works, cannot be attributed to any single essay.

and the West Indian Writer" 30). The planes of sedimentation reflect the history

of the natural environment as much as they reflect human existence in it. To illustrate this

concept, Harris frequently invokes the images of a ladder or a scale,[6] an image also

commonly used by geologists who approach physical sites as "artifactual landscapes"

(Hammond 384).[7] Unsurprisingly, then, Harris' imaginative philosophy is the outgrowth

of the scientific method practiced during his experiences in the 1940s as a land and

hydrographic surveyor leading government survey parties into Guyana's forest of rivers.

But as Harris comments in several essays, science cannot explain everything; his

imaginative philosophy is rounded out by his encounter with and immersion in the

cultures of the Macusi and the Wapishana.[8] This experience provided him with unique

tools to conceptualize the histories entextualized in place, as his creative consciousness

draws from an intuitive reserve to represent the life of a landscape.

Through his literary and theoretical essays and novels, Harris experiments with

narrative form that enacts the eruption of narratives from the perspective of the earth with

those from a human perspective of it. This quantum reading of landscape and history

constructs the Caribbean chronotope as a memory theatre, where time and space are

coeval and allow for the awakening of man's consciousness to his connection to the

levels within this living landscape. Unlike Massey, who critiques a "theatre of memory"

as a construct that "understands space as a kind of composite of instants of different

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[6] Harris explains his use the term "scale" in "Tradition and the West Indian Novel," p. 144.
[7] In *Ancient Forests in a Modern World*, Hammond attributes the phrase "artifactual landscapes" to a Balee, to whom he refers as though he were well-known in his field, but offers no further citations on the reference. He writes: "Balee refers to these forests strongly shaped by past human use as 'artifactual' and suggests that they are the remnants of former agricultural regression-expansion phases driven by sociopolitical, rather than environmental, forces" (384).
[8] In his Introduction to Selected Essays of Wilson Harris, Andrew Bundy makes this point based upon Harris' novels, *The Four Banks of the River of Space* and *The Age of the Rainmakers*. p. 18.

times, an angle of the imagination which is ahistorical, working in opposition to

a sense of temporal development[; s]pace as a collage of the static" (119), Harris sees

memory theater, or what he has alternately referred to as "a theatre of consciousness"

(Bundy 3), as a imaginative exercise in spatio-temporal possibility. For Harris, space and

time are not static, but like his conception of modernity, ongoing. The "discovery" and

conquest are ongoing just as is, for example, the spirit of the Haitian Revolution. In each

moment exists the re-encounter and collaboration of man, his environment, and their

circumstances. Harris understands identities to be, as Massey explains, "relational in

ways that are spacio-temporal" (192), connected to a specific time and place, but

inextricably linked to the times and places that preceded them on the continuum of

experience.

The concept of a living landscape then deterritorializes the imagination and

validates an underlying unity that cannot be documented by any established system of

organization, such a nationalism or language. The dispossession of history, the

environment, and language, or the "place" of postcolonial studies, is no longer

exclusively processed as a loss, but rather as the foundations of a new culture and

civilization. To uncover the connections between time periods, life cycles, cultural

traditions and the landscape, Harris' fiction explores archetypes of myth and primordial

drama and memory. He says that "[t]he life of the earth needs to be seen *in fiction* as

sensitively woven into the characters that move upon it, whose history … reflects a

profound relationship to the earth, so that we may speak of a humanity whose feet are

made of mud or land or water or any other element to attune us to our being on an earth

that moves as we move upon it" ("Theatre of the Arts" 263). This rootedness in

the history and landscape legitimizes a community and its existence in a place. The

dialogic relationship he presents in his creative work constitutes a *theatre of the arts.*

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The chapters that follow are framed by three geographic features that are

geographically, historically, and metaphorically significant for the region: the sea, the

continental interior, and islands. These are the "places" that resonate in the collective

experience and hold special meaning as the archives of memory. They are interstitial

spaces that remain open to the creative impulse; they are composed of places, the

specificities of which are secondary as territorial borders are dissolved and the

imagination is free from temporal and cultural boundaries. These spaces are heterotopias

of contemporary postmodern geographies; each is a liminal space that cannot be claimed

through national, racial, or gendered paradigms, but that might be best approached

through an openness to the relational trajectories that have converged within them.

The narratives of place that emerge from this enquiry constitute what I call a

geomythography, that is, narratives of legitimacy and origination rooted in a history and

landscape. Building upon Audre Lorde's *biomythography,* a genre she established with

her metafictional autobiography, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name,* which draws on

"history, biography and myth" to present her life in archetypal terms, I use

geomythography to emphasize that it is possible to view historiography and the impulse

towards mythography from the perspective of human population as well as from the

perspective of the earth, and that for the Caribbean, it is essential to inhabiting the place.

The purpose of Lorde's usage, in part, reflects the African Diaspora's efforts to counter a collective experience of displacement and dispossession with an articulation of cultural rootedness.[9] My articulation of *geomythography* however goes beyond the egocentric aspects of the human experience to also reflect the human experience alongside the life of the earth. One of the functions of myth is to explain a cultural system: why a people are the way that they are, their beginnings, beliefs, their experiences. Myth also explains why a people represent themselves and their experience in a certain voice and in a certain form. Myth, and the repetition of this primordial collective memory through the creative representation of an originating narrative, seeks to root a people in a place. In my use of myth as an underlying concept of this coinage, I present the idea of myth as a foundational narrative of a representational cultural history and literature. This understanding of myth does not construct it as fictionalized, primitive, or separate from literary or historical writing. It does, however, emphasize myth as a category of narrative or social history that was typically excluded from History.

In Chapter 1, "Caribbean Intertextuality and The Muse of Place," I develop Harris' *theatre of the arts* as a theoretical paradigm in which the written texts and embodied practices and knowledge of the colonial encounter(s) are transculturated. Underlying this transcultural intertextuality is a geographical imaginary that goes beyond written and spoken language and into other embodied sign-systems. I draw from the

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[9] The subjectivity that Lorde takes as her primary focus is that of a black lesbian. Significantly, however, her presentation of this subjectivity is framed by her cultural and ethnic links to Grenada and her experience of Blackness in North America. Though this project is not explicitly feminist, it is important that I acknowledge here the contributions of postcolonial feminist scholarship to raising issues about the politics of location, the relationality of identities, and the release of the enviroment/landscape from the hegemonic masculine gaze. See *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*.

interdisciplinary theorizations of performance studies to emphasize that the

performance and performativity of cultural memories excluded from or re-written in the

archives are the foundations of this imaginative engagement with time and place. In

Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance, Joseph Roach writes that

"[p]erformance genealogies draw on the idea of expressive movements as mnemonic

reserves, including patterned movements made and remembered by bodies, residual

movements retained implicitly in images or words (or in the silences between them), and

imaginary movements dreamed in minds not prior to language, but constitutive of it"

(26). Following this definition, it might be said that by tracing performance genealogies

make it possible to follow the genealogy of a place. This theoretical framework serves as

a point of departure for understanding these spaces as sites of social memory. This

discussion has its origins in literary studies, and though it reads this work through

embodied knowledge and performed practices, it privileges the materiality of the text. My

objects of inquiry draw primarily from the archive, though I submit, it is an archive

transculturated by the repertoire. These constructed texts and performances are the

product of an artistic discipline doing its work, but are based upon embodied social

practices and knowledges, performances of a different kind that demonstrate the folk

cultures and histories of a place to be meaningful source material for more virtuoso

interpretations. I move broadly across forms, looking first at poetry, then, the modern

novel, and finally, dance theater, in order to highlight a unified imaginary underlying

different approaches to articulating cultural memory and emplacement.

Chapter 2, "Singing the Past, Singing the Future: Walcott's Sea and

Caribbean Mytho-History," is situated around the single most unifying geographic

feature of the region, the Caribbean Sea. This is a chapter about origins and originary

sites of the imagination. I begin with the sea because the culture of this community began

with an overseas crossing—the Middle Passage. I focus on Derek Walcott's epic-minded

poetry because epic is a genre of cultural memory and cultural destiny. Poems like

Omeros and "The Schooner Flight" demonstrate what I would call his apprenticeship to

the sea. Here, I argue that the sea inspires Walcott's poetic vision and voice. His unified

imaginary of the sea originates with his personal mythos and moves centrifugally

outward to animate a collective destiny tied to place. For Walcott, the sea is history,

quest, and muse. In the transatlantic crossing, it is the beginning of a journey. In its

vastness it is the archive of lost cultures as well as the womb of the new culture. It is the

reclamation of sea as a site of origins that motivates the meter and metaphor of Walcott's

poetry.

In Chapter 3, "'And how did I hone my skills as a narrator?': Landscapes of the

Imagination and the Novel of the Guyanas," I move into the other vast archival landscape

of the region: the Caribbean Basin. The region functions as a mystical reserve of identity

where indigenous cosmology, a force or spirit for other Caribbean cultures whose native

populations were eradicated, is entextualized in the physical place alongside the Western

chronicles that were most effective in appearing to erase everything that preceded them.

The Guyanas, then, are a liminal space: a space where encounter, cross-cultural

communication, and invariably, mistranslation occurs. Rather than perpetuating a

Western hegemony that silences and exoticizes the indigenous people, the four

novels I read, Alejo Carpentier's *The Lost Steps*, Wilson Harris' *Palace of the Peacock*,

Mario de Andrade's *Macunaíma,* and Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale,*

combine the narrative voices and practices that converge at this site. My purpose in this

chapter is to examine how these narrative approaches are negotiated in contemporary

writing that describes this place and captures the encounter that occurred upon it. I use

the work of mythographer Denis Tedlock to argue that the novel of the Americas is a

fusion of techniques drawn from a "mythic" oral literature, a "scientific" written

literature, and a discourse of nature itself, and as such, it might be best read as a work of

dramatic literature. Following the efforts of Lucía Sá, and her mentor Gordon

Brotherston, I review these four novels commonly read for their engagement with

Western canonical text, but I do so "listening" for the native voices. My analysis is

structured as something of a remapping of this literary geography in that I connect the

imaginative incursion of these authors to documented physical incursions into the

Guyanas. I trace these literary works because they use the dramatic techniques of actual

or theoretical performances as a way of knowing and as a way of showing. I am

interested here in how writing is utilized and adapted in order to accommodate and reflect

the subjects and semiotics of indigenous or native discourses. I am also interested in how

oral literatures and performance texts rely on written texts as narrative and discursive

sources.

In Chapter 4, "Islands: Jamaica's National Dance Theater Company and the

Dance of Place," I take as my point of departure Harris' idea that the body in motion, and

in harmony with the measureless flow of arts and being, gives architecture to a

space. This, he claims, is the dance of place. While the sea/forest configuration represents

two sites plumbed by artists in search of creative potentiality, the metaphor of the island

is often explored for its fragmentation and division. I use the island metaphor here in

quite an opposite way. Islands, particularly when they compose an archipelago, present a

geographical model of inevitable relationality and a material and discursive site to

explore it. To explore this metaphor, I focus on the embodied discourse of choreographed

dance, thereby suggesting that dance has its own lexicon and the capacity to speak across

boundaries created by spoken and written language. I discuss Rex Nettleford's

choreography for Jamaica's National Dance Theatre Company, translating its visual

image into a verbal description. I aim to animate these bodies in space in order to

illustrate Nettleford's technique and choreography as nationalistic in their attention to

Jamaican ways of moving through landscapes but relational in their dependence on other

traditions in their creative conception and in their ability to enact a memory theater of the

Americas.

By fixing on aspects of a specialized and relational landscape, this project traces

the "patterns remembered by bodies" (Roach 26) and the cross-cultural narratives they

write to express the experience of displacement and exile, but more importantly,

emplacement. I take a spatial approach to the structure of this inquiry by designating

these three geographic sites and allowing the texts to speak to the construction of specific

places. As I track a historiography of the trials of the imagination that move through

myth, history, oral and written literature, and dance, I focus the discussion by identifying

landscape as the stage on which this narrative develops. My methodology

offers geography as a starting point to explore a place-based narrative aesthetic that later

may be useful for exploring regional coherence without overdetermining or essentializing

national and cultural identities. My purpose is not to re-map the Caribbean but to

illuminate geographic features for their historical appropriations and their ahistorical

possibilities in postcolonial artistic production. Yet, in a way, this project is a map, a map

of what Soja might describe as "a geography of simultaneous relations and meanings that

are tied together by a spatial rather than temporal logic" (1). This approach reconfigures

the landscape so that all aspects of Caribbean epistemology can be understood as

contributing, in their own way, to the construction of the geomythographies, or narratives

of place. Though the following analysis is fully engaged with the field of cultural

production, it is not meant to essentialize Caribbean people and their cultures, nor is it

meant to articulate or prescribe a way of being. In this regard, the conclusions drawn in

this project might be considered a prologue to the specificities of Caribbean culture.

Chapter 1

Caribbean Intertextuality and The Muse of Place

In "Theatre of the Arts," Wilson Harris explains that the *theatre of the arts* is the site where "sentient earth-sculpture and Man as a living work of art" engage intuitively, unfix boundaries, limits and time, and achieve an immersion in the measureless flow of cross-culturality (65).[10] This discussion, the culmination of his entire oeuvre's theorizations about the landscape and the imagination, offers something of a closing statement in the artistic, aesthetic, and poetic philosophy Harris has explored throughout his career. Inspired by the profundity of the Guyanese interior and the complexity of Guyana's Amerindian, African, Asian, and European cultural inheritance, Harris approaches geographical space as an active arena and archive of artistic and intuitive expression. For Harris, an intertextuality exists between the natural and man-made worlds: the landscape is a text that can be "read" just as other texts and translated through a variety of sign-systems. The landscapes where these encounters occur produce the very signs through which they can be interpellated: "The landscape possessed a life, because the landscape, for me, is like an open book, and the alphabet with which one worked was all around me" ("The Music of Living Landscapes" 40).

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[10] On March 21, 2001, Harris gave the keynote address at a conference at the University of Liège held on the occasion of his eightieth birthday, the publication of what he initially claimed would be his last novel, *The Dark Jester,* and the conferment of an honorary doctorate in recognition of the greatness and significance of his work. The address was published first in a collection of essays from the conference, *Theatre of the Arts; Wilson Harris and the Caribbean*, edited by Hena Maes-Jelinek, and later as the epilogue to *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, edited by Elizabeth M. DeLoughrey, Renée K. Gosson, and George B. Handley. My citations for "Theatre of the Arts" are taken from the latter.

This chapter explores Wilson Harris' idea of a *theatre of the arts* by discussing the human bias of History, the breadth of Caribbean "textual" practice, and the ways in which Harris' poetic philosophy engages more broadly accepted theorizations of Caribbean cross-cultural discourse. In doing so, I explain and engage performance studies as a methodological lens to characterize the textual practices that developed out of European, African, Asian, and Indigenous encounter, as largely phenomenal, based in the sensory perception of the physical place, and performative, derived from embodied experiences, gestures, and memories of the people. This chapter, then, traces the embodied experiences and trajectories that intersect in the New World space, or what Joseph Roach calls "performance genealogies" (26). Such an approach allows for a nuanced understanding of what Diana Taylor refers to as the "verbal and nonverbal embodied cultural practice" (*Archive and Repertoire* 26) underlying the written and oral traditions and the value of embodied knowledge and expression in representing place.

Harris' landscape-based artistic philosophy and practice resonate with, and sometimes anticipate, the approaches of more widely read writers and theorists, such as Derek Walcott, Kamau Brathwaite, Édouard Glissant, or Antonio Benítez-Rojo. His vision, a highly imaginative philosophy articulated through fiction, essays, and lectures, presents Caribbean discourse with interesting ideas about the potential of the creative and imaginative arts to move beyond issues of ethnicity, nation, and language. Harris' paradigms register not only the range of cultures that contribute to the Caribbean's composite culture, but also the variations in which these ethnic and cultural elements manifest themselves in different geographical locations and national ideologies. They

decolonize textual practice and the imagination, appreciate the broad cultural

inheritance of the Americas, invest "native" meaning into the landscape and simply

disrupt the categorical thinking that has led artists, scholars, and statesmen to perpetuate

teleological paradigms. These perspectives then are de-centralized geographically,

nationally, and formally, while centralized spatially, historically, and aesthetically.

Textual practices inspired by aesthetics rather than ideologies capture the cross-cultural

poetics and epistemological de-centering that distinguishes the postcolonial Caribbean in

its artistic expression.

Between Texts and Textuality

The colonial machine, as it has been described, that gave Europe the power to

virtually erase pre-Columbian history and culture from the New World was comprised of

firearms, disease, and my primary interest here, writing. Both Stephen Greenblatt and

Antonio Benítez-Rojo use this idea of machination to describe aspects of colonialism in

distinct but related ways. At the foundation of his argument in *Marvelous Possessions*,

Greenblatt identifies writing as a crucial component of colonialism's systemized

violence; it was writing, guns, and disease that formed the particular machine that

dominated indigenous people and eradicated them from their land. In *The Repeating*

Island, Benítez-Rojo cites Deleuze and Guattari's concept of machination as a source for

his Chaos-based characterization of the Atlantic world as an elaborate machination that

produced material wealth, culture, and the Caribbean meta-archipelago. In his

introduction, he clarifies his understanding of Deleuze and Guattari's concept when he

explains: "every machine is a conjunction of machines coupled together, and

each one of these interrupts the flow of the previous one" (6). The very same apparatus

would enable Europe to essentially erase the history and culture of the Africans that they

forcibly transported to the region as labor. The colonial encounter between these diverse

cultures was characterized by the interpellation and fundamentally erroneous translation

of sign-systems. Europe's authoritative discourse casts this episode of world history and

the "idea" of the Americas as the continuation and fulfillment of its own civilization and

epistemology.[11] This synopsis of colonial history's epistemic violence brings into focus

the intersections between textuality, historical narratives, and the phenomenal experience

of the landscape of the Caribbean. My approach is comparative, moving freely through

historical and theoretical trajectories that converge in the region, as is necessary to

convey the social and natural relations that influenced the production of Caribbean

textuality and spatiality.

Textuality relates to the semiotics, circumstances, rhetoric, and intentions invested

in the creation of a text. The question of what exactly is a text, however, is the subject of

much theorization. The traditional or conservative definition of a text considers it as a

material object, for example, a book or a journal, which communicates in the common

sign-system of any given civilization through a system of denotation recognized and

understood by that civilization. The understanding of a text as a physical artifact

presupposes the existence and authority of a written language, which is the visual sign-

system that accompanies a spoken language. The text is thus the written representation of

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[11] Dipesh Chakrabarty writes, "[Europeans] often assumed that their histories contained the majority
instances of norms that every other society should aspire to; compared to them, others that were still
'minors' for whom they, the 'adults' of the world, had to take charge, and so on" (100).

the actual or imagined experiences of a culture, filtered through that culture's

particular way of seeing their world, and expressed in the particular sign-system through

which they communicate.

Europeans colonizing the New World carried with them an understanding of the

text as material object and the belief that writing was a component of their imperial

technology. As Tzvetan Todorov argues in *The Conquest of America*, the Europeans

genuinely attributed their superiority to their mastery of writing as they practiced and

authorized it: "They are incontestably superior to the Indians in the realm of interhuman

communication" (97). The authority of the author and the perspective he presents wield a

discursive power in the documentation of a dominant enunciative sign-system, the system

of denotation that accompanied it, and the way of knowing/epistemology that it

promulgated. In *The Writing of History*, Michel de Certeau emphasizes the materiality of

the text and spatializes textual practice when he explains that writing is "the concrete

activity that consists in constructing, on its own blank space—the page—a text that has

power over the exteriority from which it has first been isolated" (134). Following this

analogy it might be said that just as colonial writing filled blank pages, it rendered the

New World as another "blank page" to be written and filled. As a sustained example of

the spatiality of such textual practice, I go on to discuss Christopher Columbus' journals

for the power they ultimately had on popular perceptions of the New World. Such writing

constructs the Americas as an environment that presently lacks a history, a people, and a

culture, but awaits its incorporation into history. This knowledge and the manner by

which it is known are secured and perpetuated by print; through its denotation it becomes

a physical artifact that is the source for future readers and authors, who re-

inscribe its dominant discourse by repeating it in new texts.

Within this paradigm, those whose cultural expressions, experiences, and

memories are preserved through primarily enunciative forms, such as an oral tradition,

other systems of denotation, or ritual performance or gesture, are consumed by the

totalizing force of Western epistemology and sign-systems. As Todorov points out, even

the Aztecs, whom the European conquistadors acknowledged as a great civilization, were

considered inferior because they did not possess a system of denotation for their spoken

language that resembled the European technology of writing. They were what Todorov

characterizes as preliterate; they valued oration and used pictograms, but their pictoral

scripts "note the experience, not the language" (79-80). Without written representation of

their mother tongue or access to the language and system of denotation of their

colonizer's language, these groups came to exist in History primarily as they were

constructed in textual documentation.[12] This is not to say that readers and writers did not

exist among the Indigenous, Africans, or Asians, they did;[13] it is, however, to emphasize

that the dissemination of European epistemology via written accounts was able to define

these groups according to Western taxonomies. In European written accounts, the

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[12] In my use of History, I am distinguishing between *history* as a chronological record of events, and *History* as the chronological record of events as constructed by the civilized Western world, and in this case, imposed upon the people, culture and landscape of the Caribbean through colonialism. In *Caribbean Discourse*, Glissant speaks in more depth on History's problematic relationship to the Caribbean.

[13] This is a potentially contentious statement as many scholars have argued that many colonized subjects did in fact write. In *The World That Made New Orleans*, Ned Sublette attributes Africans ability to read and write to Portuguese colonialism and their missionary work in the Western coastal areas of Africa during the years preceding the beginning of the slave trade. In "Socio-Cultural Change in Jamaica," Erna Brodber indicates that Chinese in Jamaica wrote primarily for an audience in their homeland. It might also be pointed out, too, that during the early years of colonialism, the majority of Europeans were not readers or writers. Reading and writing flourished in the eighteenth century as a direct result of more people wanting to enjoy the information that was flooding their continent as a result of colonial exploration.

Indigenous were considered both savage and yielding; the Africans forced into slavery were denied humanity altogether; and the Chinese and Indian indentures comparably abused, and were orientalized and exoticized. In this instance, the textuality of the written document presupposes its own participation in the advancement of empirical knowledge and pseudo-scientific reason. It is self-referential in establishing standards of literacy, civilization, and intelligence; only those cultures with access to and participation in reading and writing qualify as literate, civilized, and intelligent. It leaves no space for other modes of keeping history, such as the embodied memories expressed in ritual performance or the collective memories transmitted in oral traditions.

It is this very imposition of the written text and its epistemologies upon people for whom written discourse was class-based and not necessarily traditional, typical, or common practice that led the fields of linguistics, anthropology and philosophy to independently begin questioning the hegemony of the written text. As of the twentieth century, the text as a tangible object was theorized nearly into dissolution while extracting the essence of the text's importance as a communicative entity. A primary concern across the humanities became the retrieval and activation of what Michel Foucault calls "subjugated knowledges" in *Power/Knowledge*. For a large portion of the world's cultures, historically and in the present, writing is not a representative form of discourse.[14] Embodied knowledge and experiences, enacted through orality and ritual

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[14] Following Edward W. Said's cautionary advice in *The World, the Text and the Critic* regarding textual practice, I make every effort to be critically conscious that the written text is not representative form of discourse for a large portion of the world's people and by no means the exclusively appropriate form for the articulation of Caribbean history.

acts, are codified representational strategies that communicate the social drama

of the culture.

Different disciplines began to approach cultural study as an investigation of the

terms of identity and expression appropriated by the culture, rather than as an assessment

of culture based on the application of Western paradigms. Working in the field of

semiotics, Roland Barthes posits in the essay "From Work to Text" that literary work

services the single sign-system of language and the authority of the author, whereas a text

possesses a greater plurality of sign-systems and therefore, a more democratic awareness

of expression. This revision opens up the notion of a text to engage a variety of

communicative sign-systems: written discourse, but also oral, gestural, or visual

discourse. In *The Interpretation of Culture*, ethnographer Clifford Geertz echoes this in

his postmodern description of his discipline's study of cultural texts by describing "[t]he

culture of a people [as] an ensemble of texts, [which are] themselves ensembles"(452).[15]

The notion of the text moves from simply being a system of denotation to being any

range of sign-systems that communicates an object of analysis or description.[16] The text

is always already meta-textual in that it denotes the enunciation of embodied experience

and is intertextual in that it works in and is produced by a dialogic relation with multiple

sign-systems.[17]

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[15] The passage reads: "The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulder of those to who they properly belong." It has been read as a particularly contentious statement because the ethnographer is positioned as an outsider "straining" to interpellate the other. It portrays, and quite correctly, the ethnographer as an unwelcome and inactive informant who voyeuristically intrudes on the cultural practice of the other.

[16] The Oxford English Dictionary defines text as "(a unit of) connected discourse whose function is communicative and which forms the object of analysis and description." See "text" at www.oed.com.

[17] I refer to intertextuality according to Julia Kristeva's coinage of the term in the essay *Revolution in Poetic Language*: "The term intertextuality denotes this transposition of one (or several) sign-system(s) into

While this general discussion of the text and textuality refers to the academy's broad fetishization of the text, it is coeval with theorizations of a similar nature coming from the Caribbean that confront the problematics of written text as both a source of colonial violence and an inadequate form for representing an experience. The questions are typically addressed when trying to find expressions of national identities and regional character. As part of the world population subjugated by the discourse of domination, cultural actors seek to expose, undermine, and disrupt the totalizing force of a European narrative and its textual practice by seeking out "native" knowledge and forms of expression that were disqualified as meaningless. There is a turn away from the exclusive authority of the written text towards what might be broadly considered folk or popular traditions—storytelling, dance, and music. Such epistemology and representation draw on the Indigenous, African, and Asian cultural components that were silenced by a hegemonic discourse and the collision of these components with those of Europe. While this approach does give voice to silenced or underacknowledged discourses, it is critical to remember that they no longer exist in their original form but have been altered by their contact with other cultures. They have been affected by their contact with Western traditions as well as other marginalized traditions. As much as the relations of the New World were a conquest, they were more significantly an encounter, the intersections

another; but since this term has often been understood in the banal sense of 'study of sources,' we prefer the term transposition because it specifies that the passage from one signifying system to another demands a new articulation of the thetic—of enunciation and denotative positionality. If one grants that every signifying practice is a field of transpositions of various signifying systems (an intertextuality), one then understands that its 'place' of enunciation and its denoted 'object' are never single, complete and identical to themselves, but always plural, shattered, capable of being tabulated. In this way polysemy can also be seen as the result of a semiotic polyvalence—an adherence to different sign-systems." See Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, p. 111.

among histories, epistemologies, and cultures. By understanding this moment

as an encounter between cultures, it is possible to understand the Caribbean text and

textuality as artifacts of the overall process of *transculturation*.

Transculturation, the concept coined by Fernando Ortiz in *Contrapunteo Cubano

del Tabaco y Azúcar* to describe the process of exchange between the region's cultures

that has been ongoing for the past five hundred years, was originally conceived of as an

anthropological term but has been appropriated and developed across the humanities to

address the social and aesthetic phenomena of American modernity. *Transculturation*

was introduced by Ortiz as an alternative term to *acculturation* that was in vogue during

the 1930s and 1940s. Acculturation refers to the hybridization of cultures yet

fundamentally implies that the minor culture is oppressed by and forced to assimilate to

the major culture. This imbalance results from a minor cultures experience of an overall

deculturation, or loss of culture, while a major culture secures the superiority and

dominance of its system.[18] José María Arquedas, a Peruvian ethnographer and novelist,

and Angel Rama, a literary critic from Uruguay, expanded Ortiz's transculturation to

address Latin American *mestizo* culture in literary and cultural theory (Taylor). Their

respective contributions to the idea of transculturation expand its terms, clarifying that

cultures, even minor cultures, are selective in choosing the elements that are incorporated

into new cultural systems (Taylor).

Transculturation, though conceived in a Caribbean context by a Cuban

ethnographer, is not generally used within comparative Caribbean literary and cultural

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[18] I borrow the descriptive terms *major* and *minor* to describe cultures in relation to one another from Diana Taylor, who explicitly defines the terms in her essay "Transculturating Transculturation," but also uses them in her book *The Archive and The Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*.

studies. The term continues to be primarily used within trajectories of Latin

American cultural theory, and any cultural or theoretical discussion related to Cuba, the

country of its origin; hence my reference to "American modernity." However, I submit

that the breadth of Ortiz's conceptualization potentially makes transculturation a more

broad-reaching and appropriate alternative to other terms coined to address cultural

exchange in the Americas. Implicit in the theorization of transculturation is an

acknowledgement of the quantity and range of factors that might contribute to the

emergence of any new cultural phenomena. Other terms, such as Brathwaite's

creolization, Glissant's *antíllanté*, or Chamoiseau, Bernabé, and Confiant's *creolité* have

been appropriated to theorize this phenomenon in very specific contexts. The value of

these terms, as Shalini Puri points out in *The Caribbean Postcolonial,* is their cultural

specificity and historicity; they allow us to speak of composite identities and cultural

practices as they are developed and practiced in specific socio-cultural and linguistic

matrices. That also means, however, that they are often too narrow or ideologically

driven to frame a discussion of circum-Caribbean relations and relational identities. I

agree with Puri that when discussing the Caribbean the contextual appropriateness of

these terms are preferable to *hybridity*, the general term frequently associated with

postcolonial studies and most commonly attributed to Homi Bhabha's *The Location of*

Culture. The academically sanctioned dehistoricized idea of hybridity is inadequate and

inappropriate in a colonial/postcolonial context that has persistently pursued the

decolonization of its identity and discourse. Invariably, however, when asking important

questions about the Caribbean's cultural collectivity and the relation of the Caribbean's

national, ethnic, and linguistic identities, none of these paradigms can serve. I find the expanded theorization of transculturation to be a contextually productive, Caribbean-centered theorization that facilitates a discussion about the cultural systems of this specific collectivity composed of such diversity. The term is appropriate not only because it was conceived in the cross-cultural context of the Americas, but also because it is broad reaching, counter-hegemonic, and imagines itself as the outgrowth of the dynamic interplay between cultures.

Transculturation is a term that I privilege in this project because it recognizes that an exchange that is at times an imbalanced, but never passive, takes place between major and minor cultures. All cultures in contact experience a certain degree of deculturation, or the loss of culture; however, transculturation suggests that rather than a minor culture being completely subsumed by the major culture as with acculturation, the contact between cultures is a process of selective exchange that actually creates new cultural systems. For example, not only was the cultural destiny of the Americas determined by the colonial encounter, but the course of Western culture in Europe was also irretrievably altered through its contact with African and Indigenous cultures.

In relation to actual cultural production, the term transculturation is also used to describe the impact of this process of representative art forms. Working in the field of Latin American theatre, Diana Taylor points to an interesting irony underlying the process of transculturation: though Western forms of representation and identification were imposed upon colonized people and their "native" ways of being were not abandoned, none of the latter were sustained unaffected either. Instead, the practice of

such culture draws from all cultural inheritance in its self-definition and

representation, looking uncomfortably Western, and often, insufficiently exotic

("Transculturating Transculturation").

The transculturation of the text is logically, though somewhat problematically,

part of the overall process of transculturation. And the expansion of textuality allows for

further investigation into the range of narrative expression. The written word, though

invariably important and powerful, is no longer the exclusive source of history,

expression and epistemology. Caribbean textuality is also an activation of the sounds and

gestures that were just as significant and influential in certain spheres of communication

as written language was in the hegemonic discourse. In the context of a Caribbean cross-

disciplinary dialogue, a text then possesses a historical materiality without necessarily

being a stable object. I work with a fluid notion of Caribbean textuality in which a text is

the vehicle for narrative that is also available for interpretation—not only a written

discourse, but also an oral discourse, a performance, and even perhaps a landscape. This

way of thinking follows Roland Barthes argument in "Introduction to the Structural

Analysis of Narratives" that narrative is "carried by articulated language, spoken or

written, fixed or moving images, gesture, and the ordered mixture of all these substances"

(80).[19] His idea, that "under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in

every age, in every place, in every society," underscores that there is a considerable range

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[19] The passage, in its entirety reads: "Narrative is first and foremost a prodigious variety of genres, themselves distributed amongst different substances — as though any material were fit to receive man's stories. Able to be carried by articulated language, spoken or written, fixed or moving images, gesture, and the ordered mixture of all these substances; narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting … under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative" (80). This 1970 essay appears in *Image, Music, Text* on pp. 79-124.

in the historical and ahistorical possibilities in the form, aesthetics, and function

of narrative (80). In negotiating the plurality of perspectives converging upon the

landscape, Caribbean cultural production communicates the intertextuality of an elaborate

exchange between sign-systems.

The Written Text in a New World Context

Christopher Columbus departed Portugal for the East Indies on August 3, 1492.

On October 12, 1492 he arrived on the north coast of a small island that he believed was

among a group of islands at the extreme east of Asia. He named the island Hispaniola.

From this initial act of naming, Columbus assumed the enormous task of translating his

visceral experience of a landscape and its people both into and from a written document.

In journal entries and letters from his first expedition, like those he would craft during his

three subsequent voyages, he catalogued the various ways that the land, its resources, and

its people are seen, understood, occupied, and made useful. The waterways are deep and

abundant, and the people are generous and yielding: "This harbour, then, is a good haven

against all the winds that blow; deep and sheltered, with good, gentle people without any

weapons, good or bad" (Columbus qtd. in Cummins 149).[20] He rendered the poetic

images of the landscape in comparison to his homeland:

> The whole region is full of enormous mountains which seem to climb to the sky.
>
> Compared to them the one on Tenerife is nothing, in height or in beauty; they are
>
> all shapely and green and wooded, with delightful plans between them. Beside

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[20] This comes from Columbus's Friday, December 21, 1492 entry, translated by John Cummins in *The Voyage of Christopher Columbus*.

this harbour, to the south, is a plain running farther than the eye can see,

uninterrupted by hills; it must be fifteen or twenty leagues long. There is a river

running through it, and it is all populated and cultivated, as green now as Castile

in May or June, in spite of the fourteen-hour nights and the land being so far

north. (Columbus qtd. in Cummins 149)[21]

The strategy of comparison allows him to draw from his intertexts to create associative

imagery that is familiar to the Spanish Crown. It both romanticizes the terrain and makes

it practical for settlement and commerce.

Columbus' inventory of the land's resources is a process of naming that imposes a

pre-determined Eurocentric network of ideologies and epistemologies. Todorov writes

that Columbus "knows in advance what he will find; the concrete experience is there to

illustrate a truth already possessed, not to be interrogate according to pre-established

rules in order to speak the truth" (17). Columbus' descriptions of the landscape perform a

rhetorical emptying-out of the land, which allows it to be re-read as a passive territory

yielding to European imperial advances. He treats the landscape like a blank page, and he

goes about filling this space with images of European thinking. He relies on this strategic

solution again to resolve the difficulty he has in representing its inhabitants, and more

importantly, his inadequately informed interaction with them.

Columbus, faced with the challenge of communicating Europe's dominion over

this New World and its people, must perform the social acts that assert Spain's authority.

In describing this attempt at discourse, Greenblatt identifies the three principle modes of

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[21] Ibid.

communication as "mute signs, material exchange, and language" (91).[22] It is

known from Columbus' journals that these exchanges were not exclusively oral, but

rather performed through gesture and pantomime. This assumes, also, that there is a

universal language that goes beyond language. The quantity and quality of much of the

information he gathered on his travels are testament to the success of these exchanges.

However, there are also accounts of less than successful exchanges, where non-verbal

communication failed him: "[Columbus] hoped to coax the natives into contact not by

addressing them or by offering objects—both of these time-honored expedients seemed

to have failed—but by displaying an art form, staging a cultural event, representing a

fiesta [with dancing and music] … The dancing that was for Columbus a token of peace

… was evidently for the natives of Trinidad an unambiguous declaration of war"

(Greenblatt 91). Columbus' ship waits offshore hoping to entice the Indians to welcome

him and his men ashore, a welcome that never comes as Columbus' employment of the

universal language of gesture and ritual proves to misrepresent his intended message. In

fact, he conveys something entirely more threatening to those with whom he wishes to

communicate (though they are wise to resist his advances). Nevertheless, Columbus, and

the Europeans that would follow his footsteps, interpret and document the response of

these "others" in service to their own desires. Their writing is not the encounter—for that

moment of exchange no longer exists—but the interpreted representation of a performed

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[22] In *Marvelous Possessions*, Greenblatt writes: "The three modes of communication — mute signs, material exchange, and language—are in turn bound up in a larger question: How is it possible for one system of representation to establish contact with a different system? And this question will lead us to reflect of certain characteristics of the European system of representation of the early modern period — its mobility, its dependence on improvisation, and above all its paradoxical yoking of empty and full, worthless and valuable, counterfeit and real" (91).

utterance. The conquistadors not only document the speech acts they

performed, but also the gestures, the exchange of material goods, and the spoken

language of the other. These accounts are a representation of voices and languages that

are structured by different sign-systems. Columbus, like the conquistadors that would

follow, cannot know with certainty what is being said. These exchanges are a series of

speech acts that fail because those to whom they are addressed cannot legitimately

receive them. Following J.L. Austen's classification of the performative in *How to do

Things with Words,* this is a misfire because there is no mutual conventional procedure

for achieving any given goal, nor is there a mutual understanding between the parties

involved to facilitate their correct and complete execution of the exchange.[23] The

meaning that is produced in this social relation is not only unequal and imbalanced, but

also effectively dispossesses this human population from their own language and

environment.

By illuminating the social, political, and epistemological contexts that informed

this creative process, Edmundo O'Gorman's *La Invención de América* (1958) locates the

cultural and geographical existence of the New World as inspired by texts that preceded

it. According to O'Gorman, there is some debate as to whether the Admiral was pursuing

a new route to the Asia documented in Marco Polo's *Orientalium regionum*, or whether

he was, in fact, pursuing an "unknown" land described to him by a nameless pilot.[24]

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[23] For Austen, who coined the term performative, the performative utterance is the act, but only if it follows certain rules to insure the transmission is felicitous.

[24] In *Green Imperialism*, Richard H. Grove footnotes an anecdote from Kirkpatrick Sale that among seven volumes from Columbus's personal collection, now housed in Sevilla's *Biblioteca Combina*, there are copies of Marco Polo's *Orientalium regionum*, Pierre d'Ailly's *Imago Mundi*, and Pliny's *Historia naturalis*. See Chapter 1 "Edens, islands, and early empires" p.31

Regardless of suggestions that Columbus' ambitions may have been more

personal, it is generally agreed upon that Polo's description of the East Indies is a source

for the account of this other Indies. The authority that Polo's document carries enables

Columbus to demonstrate to his patrons, *Los Reyes Catolicos*, that he has indeed

accomplished his goal by successfully arriving in Asia after traveling east by sea.

Columbus' interpretation of the place through the lens of Marco Polo's accounts of the

Indies emphasizes the web of intertextual signification embedded in this process; even

after it is determined that Columbus's coordinates were mistaken, his narrative goes on to

inspire the thematically related texts that would follow. O'Gorman points out it was not

Columbus who claimed the "discovery" of the New World as he was dedicated to

proving categorically that he had arrived in Asia, but rather it was one of his readers that

made this claim. It is not until some thirty years later that Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo

publishes *Sumario de la Natural Historia de las Indias* in which he refers to Columbus'

voyage as one of discovery. The re-telling of Columbus' narrative as a discovery is

particularly problematic as its asymmetrical determination goes on to become the

singular History of the modern world.

Within the field of Latin American studies, O'Gorman's scholarship was

instrumental in shifting the discussion about the origin of the Americas in Western

civilization away from the wonder of discovery and towards the discursive act of

invention.[25] This shift exposed the subjectivity of history and the influence of the written

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[25] In 1961, O'Gorman published *The Invention of America: An Inquiry into the Historical Nature of the New World and the Meaning of Its History*, an expanded and edited version of *La Invención de América* that is written in English. This distinction is significant because the former is not only a translation of the latter, but is rather, a new work that revises and expands the ideas of the first text into what he considers a

text in promulgating a Eurocentric chronotope in its narrative account of world

events. It paved the way for future scholars to raise questions about the construction of

the master narrative of History. In *Transatlantic Topographies,* Ileana Rodríguez takes

such earlier insight into Columbus's creative act of writing the Caribbean by emphasizing

the repercussions of the particular fiction he writes. She sees the rhetorical move that

separates the land and its people as one that results in the actual displacement of

indigenous people and their dispossession of the land. She writes, "[t]he arduous attempt

to disengage *tierra* (which subsequently will become nature, the sites of conflict,

jurisdictions, agrarian reforms, research and development, and nonrenewable resources)

from culture (the sites of epistemological and hermeneutical interpretations and

interpellations of people, their consciousness, performances, and differences) originates

with trying to resolve matters concerning the distinction between seeing, hearing and

interpreting, data gathering and disciplining" (xii). She re-installs a human component

onto the landscape by illuminating the encounter of cultures and the consequences of the

clash between different systems of thought. The colonizer's discourse, documented as a

written discourse for an audience of literate elite (to be passed on, of course, to the

illiterate masses), is the representation of verbal and symbolic discourse that attempts to

engage a native audience. In his representation, Columbus's written discourse not only

dispossesses the native inhabitants of the New World from their landscape, but also

silences them and the historical memory of their oral culture. Though Columbus portrays

his actions as conquering gestures, his descriptions of them are, in actuality, highly

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scientific report. Note that is was written before structuralist work, such as that done by Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan, is widely disseminated.

subjective representations of an encounter. Rodríguez emphasizes that,

"[r]epresentation, as we all know, is not solely a reflection of the social relations of

production, but also a social relation itself" (xii).

The efficacy of these early encounters that Rodríguez explores is problematic and

limited by the failure of distinct cultural and communicative systems to understand one

another. As his letter writing and journal keeping indicate, Columbus was acutely aware

of the importance of documenting experience in writing. A written account was the

testimony that made something appear to be a fact. It was the transcription of the

experience that brings the New World into existence for Europeans. The materialism of

this account is crucial to conquest and settlement. A textual artifact becomes a legally

binding contract. It is not enough that Columbus performed a linguistic ritual in front of

the indigenous people to take ownership of the land they inhabited; he must also

document that the speech act occurred with witnesses present.[26] The textual materiality of

Columbus's observations and interpretation become archived as History. These accounts

are read, re-read, and become foundational to the European imaginary, shaping the social

memory, attitudes, behaviors, and cultural production of the collective.[27]

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[26] Greenblatt notes "that Columbus took possession of the New World with a legal ritual performed in Spanish and that, after 1514, conquistadors were supposed to read to all newly encountered peoples the *Requerimiento*, a document in Spanish that informed these peoples of their rights and obligations as vassals of the king and queen of Spain" (*Marvelous Possessions* 97).

[27] Beginning with Columbus, the Americas were written and re-written in a variety of forms by explorers, travelers, landowners, and officials. These readings of the landscape and culture vary from the "discovery" of a veritable earthly Paradise in 1492 to the catalogued denaturalization of the landscape during the early modern period to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment discourse that reinvented this Garden of Eden as strategically planted space upon which Europe could socially and economically reinvigorate itself. Mimi Sheller's *Consuming the Caribbean: Arawaks to Zombies* chronicles the phases and trends of this consumption.

The exposure of fiction and imagination in history writing also exposes

the seemingly untraceable non-written intertexts of these narratives, giving plurality to

this experience and demonstrating the non-modern practices at play. As written, texts like

Columbus' journals of his trips to the Caribbean or Sir Walter Raleigh's account of his

pursuits of El Dorado, strip Amerindians of their personhood, erase their past, and

guaranteed that their present would be fleeting in significant part because of the

permanence of written texts and the impermanence of performed texts. However, in as

much as these works disappear indigenous performance practices and embodied

knowledge, they are also key to demonstrating their existence and their efficacy in

transmitting knowledge. These authors' dependence on Indigenous and African people as

informants is primarily possible through embodied expression, thereby offering which

allows modern readers some insight into what Taylor refers to as the "embodied practice

within epistemic systems developed in Western thought" (*Archive and The Repertoire*

xix). In these societies, the acts of "reading" and "writing" were no less important, of

course, but drew on a very different and diverse repertoire of representational and

communicative signs. Indigenous people provided explorers much of the geographical

and botanical information that was documented in their narratives and that allowed

Europeans to survive the harsh tropical climate. As previously discussed, the

transmission of such information and the social drama of the encounter was enacted

through gesture, pantomime, and body language—what Taylor characterizes as

"[t]heatrical encounters" (*Archive and The Repertoire* 62). Indigenous knowledge of and

relationship to the land were part of a larger tradition and cosmology that explained their

own existence. As Taylor writes, "Nature was ritualized just as ritual was naturalized" (38). Memories and knowledge, the history of a collective, were shared between generations and preserved through ritual performances of dance, storytelling, and music.

In later phases of colonialism, Africans, transplanted to the Americas by way of the triangular trade, were similarly engaged in an embodied performance of cultural memory and knowledge and served as the "native" informants to their oppressors. Susan Scott Parrish writes in *American Curiosities* that, "Diasporic Africans brought with them to the Americas beliefs in the magical potencies of the natural world and a respect for those adepts who showed knowledge and control of natural processes" (259). Though it is often said that their status as slaves put them in greater proximity to the natural world and its processes, it is primarily and more importantly the continuity of their African ancestry that directs them to seek knowledge of and belief in the efficacy of the natural world. This African worldview, or "pharmacosm," as Parrish refers to it, in which nature is "simultaneously tonic and toxic" led slaves to read their new surroundings, identifying specimens for their purposes, be it productive or poison. Africans, like the Europeans, experienced this landscape as foreigners or non-natives; in this regard, they were comparably invested in an *in situ* process of "discovery" whereby they named, recorded, and classified data. So in a similar way that Europeans read the New World landscape for how it might yield to their needs and resonate with familiar experiences, Africans read the natural world for how it might accommodate their own needs and understood it according to their previous beliefs about the environment.

The distinction in the power of these cultural discourses, of course, lies

in the preservation and transfer of this knowledge and history. Even during the later

periods of colonialism, once writing became more widely practiced, memory, belief, and

embodied knowledge continued to be transferred through storytelling, gesture, and ritual

performance. In plantation societies, oral and performative forms of discourse were key

to self-expression, identity formation, and resistance.[28]

Decolonizing History: Restaging the Past

"History," Dipesh Chakrabarty writes in *Provincializing Europe*, "is a subject

primarily concerned with the crafting of narratives" (98). The form these narratives take,

however, is a decisive factor in their ability to shape a dominant discourse, or disappear it

altogether. The fact that Europeans "preserved" their narratives in written form is a

primary reason that they were able to subjugate people and places to the degree that they

did; these groups were primarily oral societies whose narratives were preserved through

decidedly "unscientific" and un-modern oral traditions. Chakrabarty demonstrates the

conceptual possibility of decentralizing Europe in the paradigm of history by

understanding the West as an historicized situation that is already in the past. Though his

project is focused on India, and the ways in which Western thought influenced the

country's political modernity, his reading of imposed epistemology versus native

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[28] There is a lot of scholarship that focuses on the cultural dynamics and performance practices that develop out of the plantation. While this would be interesting to explore in an expansion of this project – the plantation being another "space" which serves a site of entanglement and transculturation – the topic is simply too big to address at this point. To support my statement, however, I offer carnival –its origins in plantation life, the significance of the masquerade, its ritual enactment of characters, and its deployment in asserting postcolonial national identities – as an example of this type of discourse.

epistemologies extends to a broader postcolonial situation in that he aspires to historicize Europe so that people and places colonized by Europe might also be historicized as they would wish. Though he acknowledges the importance of historicity in understanding the conditions within which texts are created, Chakrabarty raises doubts about the Marxist imperative to "Always historicize," because it roots analysis in the particularly imbalanced and unjust version of events that constitute History. He argues that to make historicization a valuable approach the power structure implicit in History with a capital H must be dismantled. He clarifies that "the capacity (of the modern person) to historicize actually depends on his or her ability to participate in non-modern relationships to the past that are made subordinate in the moment of historicization. History writing assumes plural ways of being in the world" (101). The decolonization of History, then, reexamines a range of historical memories—patterns remembered by bodies or orally passed down through generations. These narratives amplify present-day conceptions of the past by retrieving the positions and perspective that were silenced.

The chronology of the New World that begins with Columbus' discovery, and continues into the present-day neo-colonialisms of overseas territories and departments, constitute the "facts" of written History. Such "facts," however, exclude the lived reality and the experience of a place inhabited by the people subordinated by and to Western epistemology within the Caribbean. The narrative of the Caribbean, then, was modeled on textual accounts that recalled, reflected, and continued a narrative that Europe began about itself prior to its own modernity. The stories of the people and the places that survived such brutalities are not even given a place within this version of world events.

History, with a capital H, is the story of the West as a place and as an ideology; alternative histories cannot necessarily be located in its trajectory. In examining the case of Martinique, for example, Édouard Glissant explains that once such a chronology is established "the whole history of Martinique remains to be unraveled [; t]he whole Caribbean history of Martinique remains to be discovered" (*Caribbean Discourse* 3). Glissant distinguishes History from a Caribbean history, indicating that the imposition of the former was so total that the latter can only begin the process of discovering itself once it disrupts the authority of this master narrative.

Any intervention into history challenges the West Indian artist. The question, as Wilson Harris poses it is "how can one begin to reconcile the broken parts of such an enormous heritage?" ("Tradition and the West Indian Novel" 31). "What tone shall the [writer] adopt," V.S. Naipaul's asks preceding his most famous of cynical remarks that no history was created in the West Indies, as they "face their history"? (*Middle Passage* 28-29). Derek Walcott is similarly confronted by "the horror of the past" ("Muse of History" 39) in assembling "this shipwreck of fragments" into the narrative of a civilization. However, where Naipaul seeks the man-made heroes and monuments that mark the history of a civilization, and finds none, Walcott, advances a "truly tough aesthetic …[that] refuses to recognize [history] as a creative or culpable force" ("Muse of History" 37). For Walcott, like other Caribbean writers such as Glissant, History writing runs the risk of repeating or locking identities and experiences into established African, European, and Asian historical trajectories. Even V.S. Naipaul's indictment that nothing

was created in the West Indies betrays the truth that such historical thought

offers few alternatives to the heroes, monuments, and writing of the West's master

narrative.

Throughout his career, Harris has expressed disappointment in what could be

described as a failure of the imagination in Caribbean writing. He sees the realism of so

many texts as overdetermining the cultural character, committing Caribbean societies to

repeat European conventions, even if their purpose is to assert difference from these very

conventions, and following a teleological view of modernity. He sees these efforts as a

consolidation of character, rather than the *fulfillment* of character that appreciates the

connections West Indians have to the world ("Tradition and the West Indian Novel" 28).

He describes the human preoccupation with difference and with the marked changes that

occurred over the course of time as an "*immersion* … [that] has led us to conceive of

absolute ethnicities or racial compartments" ("Theatre of the Arts" 261). This immersion,

as he calls it, has disrupted the field of cultural production as art "[has] *blocked* the flow

of *measureless* cross-culturalities" ("Theatre of the Arts" 261). Instead of measuring the

Caribbean against Western standards, Harris emphasizes that the Caribbean is in fact a

new civilization based in a process of transculturation, and thereby, in need of a new

narrative that reflects this experience.

Chakrabarty's important point about the pluralization of experience resonates

with the approach to Caribbean cultural expression that seeks to go past the confrontation

with history in order to integrate and reflect the plurality of the region's cultural

inheritance. By seeking non-modern relationships to the past, that is, engaging embodied

knowledge and expression and its appropriation in the New World encounter,

Caribbean writers and artists are able to re-historicize the History imposed upon them by

installing into the master narrative the spatio-temporal and cultural realities of their lived

experience. It is at this point that a Caribbean history can be articulated. But, it is a

history invariably haunted by the embodied memories silenced under colonialism, the

sites of experience that have already been written, and the established conventions of

History. These voices and gestures retain the complications of distinct colonial and

linguistic experiences, different ethnic and cultural inheritances, varying nationalisms and

relationships to that imprecise moment of modernity, all tinged with the violence of the

middle passage and plantations societies, the linearity of civilization that is reflected in

conventional history writing fails Caribbean writers. History writing for the Caribbean

artist is a creative enterprise.

I emphasize Columbus' phenomenological narrative of the New World as

documented in his journals as a sustained object of inquiry because it demonstrates that

history is based upon imaginative writing. It is among the earliest to demonstrate the

Western epistemological habits that would subordinate landscapes and cultures in the

Americas. His account is neither the most extreme of its kind, nor the most insightful;

however, it is among the narratives that have achieved the grand proportions of "fact."[29]

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[29] In *Consuming the Caribbean: Arawaks to Zombies* Mimi Sheller explores the ways in which the Caribbean has been reinvented at different points in European colonial history and through the various tropes deployed in Columbus's early writing for various purposes. Sheller explains:

> The Caribbean has been repeatedly imagined and narrated as a tropical paradise in which the land, plants, resources, bodies, and cultures of its inhabitants are open to be invaded, occupied, brought, moved, used, viewed, and consumed in various ways. It is represented as a perpetual Garden of Eden in which visitors can indulge all their desires and find a haven for relaxation, rejuvenation, and sensuous abandon. (14)

His account of the Indies was appropriated as empirical knowledge, rather than

simply one man's imaginative and perceptive experience.[30] The encounter presents a

primordial moment in a Caribbean-centered trajectory—an incipient moment where the

social and material conditions of Caribbean culture began the process of transculturation.

It illustrates, as Bhabha writes in *The Location of Culture*, that the "[t]erms of cultural

engagement … are produced performatively" (3). The legacy of the encounter is not only

written, but also phenomenal and performative. It resides in what Taylor distinguishes as

"the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e. texts, documents, buildings, bones)

and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e. spoken

language, dance, sports, ritual)" (*Archive and The Repertoire* 19; emphasis mine). It also

involves a careful reading of the physical and natural world. It is to this episode of

encounter, and others like it, such as the transatlantic passage or the search for El Dorado,

that Caribbean artists return in order to insert the transformative histories missing from

this narrative. These episodes are replayed, and in their repetition, they become ritualized

as the foundational narratives of Caribbean cultures. The act of "restaging the past," as

Bhabha explains, "introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the

invention of tradition" (3). In this restaging process, these episodes are re-scripted so that

the socio-spatial and socio-temporal paradigms created by colonial fictions are fractured.

Her succinct commentary refers to a history that began with modernity yet continues in the present-day neo-colonial tourism industry that caters primarily to North American tourists. What is striking is that these revisions seem to always return to the motifs established in these early textual representations of the place.

[30] Foucault writes in *The Order of Things*: "If there is one approach that I do reject, however, it is that (one might call it, broadly speaking, the phenomenological approach) which gives absolute priority to the observing subject, which attributes a constituent role to an act, which places its own point of view at the origin of all historicity — which, in short, leads to a transcendental consciousness. It seems to me that the historical analysis of scientific discourse should, in the last resort, be subject, not to theory of the knowing subject, but rather to a theory of discursive practice" (Foreword to the English Edition, xiv)

The process of naming what is unnamed, or rather, only named through

European appropriation allows the narratives of Caribbean history to decolonize this

chronotope of Europe's history in the Caribbean, recuperating the pre-history of the

region's indigenous cultures and historicizing the previously ahistoricized African and

Asian presence.[31] This rhetoric takes possession over language and the environment, and

establishes the Caribbean identity of each.

To reconcile the diversity of this composite society and properly historicize the

Caribbean's existence, cultural production returns to the point of entanglement, the

colonial encounter and the multiple trajectories that intersected in that historical moment,

and to the site of entanglement, the landscape. The retelling of events, the process of

naming, is an imaginative exercise that produces new outcomes to familiar stories. In

this, there is not only the genesis of a culture or civilization, but also what Harris

describes as the genesis of the imagination. This is the process by which an artistic

consciousness taps into and lays claim to the measureless flow of cross-culturalities that

converge in the space of the Caribbean. Caribbean cultural theorists have experimented

with various concepts to represent the embodiment and emplacement of this

transculturated discourse, but among the those who geographically and formally unfix the

boundaries of their theorizations, Harris' conceptualization of *a theatre of the arts* is

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[31] This point is indebted to Glissant's critique of Hegel's taxonomies. He writes: "History is a highly functional fantasy of the West, originating at precisely the time when it alone 'made' the history of the World. If Hegel relegated African people to the ahistorical, Amerindian peoples to the prehistorical, in order to reserve History for European peoples exclusively, it appears that it is not because these African or American peoples 'have entered History' that we can conclude today that such a hierarchical conception of 'the march of History' is no longer relevant" (Glissant 64)

particularly attuned to transcending forms to create what he calls a new

conceptual language.

Just as the retrieval of subaltern pasts indicates what Chakrabarty calls "the limits

of the discourse of history" (10), the forms of expression that might accompany these

pasts signal the limitations of the traditional written text in representing history. As the

earlier discussion indicates, the conquest was a series of speech acts, the colonial

encounter was characterized by performed gesture and ritual, and the majority of the

participants, African, Amerindian, Asian, and European, alike, came from what were, at

the time, primarily oral cultures, the traditions of which they continued under colonial

rule. These "performances" are the "mnemonic reserves" that Joseph Roach identifies in

defining performance genealogies; they are the "patterned movements made and

remembered by bodies, residual movements retained implicitly in images or words (or in

the silences between them), and imaginary movements dreamed in minds not prior to

language, but constitutive of it" (26). Performance studies, and particularly the branch

that deals with postcolonial performance, offers some insight into the ways in which

Caribbean writers and theorists undermine or complicate textualities by challenging the

boundaries of form. In their reading of postcolonial theatre, Helen Gilbert and Joanne

Tompkins articulate a seemingly obvious distinction between literary and theatrical work

in their comparative introduction to postcolonial theater. In *Post-Colonial Drama:*

Theory, Practice, Politics, they write:

> In performative genres, unlike in literary modes of representation, narratives
>
> unfold in space as well as through time. Whereas words on a page must be

interpreted sequentially, theatre offers the possibility of a simultaneous

reading of all the visual and aural signifiers embedded in the text as performance.

(110)

This description attempts to distinguish between the chronotope of written texts and that

of performance texts and also distinguishes between the semiotic fields associated with

these respective textualities. It assumes a concise division between the signifiers of

written language and the signifiers of visual or oral language. However, to locate a form

of expression that disrupts the cycle of servitude and dominance and accurately expresses

the social drama of Caribbean modernity, artists from the region work at the intersections

between the written and performance texts invested in their experience.

Postcolonial cultural actors pursue writing and literature as a primary site to re-

inscribe their narratives, not only because the totalizing impact of History was only

possible because it was archived as a written text, but also because writing and language

are historical circumstances of colonialism, and as such, they are inevitably components

of the postcolonial region's transcultural inheritance. To resist further erasure and

misrepresentation through the practice of writing, however, Caribbean writers, like

Harris, Walcott, and Brathwaite, seek to re-invent writing, the written text, and its claims

to language. It is no longer the sole source of meaning, and even its purpose becomes the

representation of embodied practices such as gesture, dance, or ritual performance.

Through his fiction and non-fiction, Harris has committed himself to the written

word. However, he sees his work, as well as other efforts of artistic expression, as a series

of trials of the imagination that disrupts the authority of the written word and invests in it

"the intuitive origins of the Caribbean literary imagination" (Bundy 33).

Words, I want to emphasize, are not sensory perceptions, but rather parts of culturally

constructed linguistic codes created to translate sensory experience. Diana Loxely

describes them as "the visible and permanent sign of language" (*Problematic Shores* 42).

So while Harris's chosen medium represents a reality in words, he is acutely aware of the

limitations of "visible and permanent signs" of language in accurately or authentically

mediating an embodied experience. He sees the general inability to understand spacio-

temporal relations underlying identity formation as the reason that Caribbean cultural

production has not been truly revolutionary.

Harris investigates what he describes as "a language akin to music threaded into

space and time which is prior to human discourse" ("The Music of Living Landscapes"

40). He sees the artifacts of cultural production, or rather all texts, written, oral, aural, or

embodied, as trials of the imagination that interact as a theatre of the arts to create this

new conceptual language. He is not interested in simply describing the landscape, which

would suggest that "the life of the earth is … fixed" and "divorced from the characters

that move upon it" ("Theatre of the Arts" 263). Instead, his approach encourages an

imagistic translation of experience where musicality, choreography, and the visual arts

constitute the communicative sign-systems deployed in his imaginative interweaving of

experience. Using these theatrics as the frame of reference, he creates a written text

charged with sign-systems of all art forms. He talks about literacy as not only the ability

to read the written word, but also the ability to engage sensory perceptions for the

purpose of more broadly interpreting the written word into other sign systems; no single

artistic form is adequate to narrate the forgotten layers of memory embedded in

the place. The breadth of this literacy transcends form, culture, and language. His writing

requires that the reader draw on all of the senses and open the mind to arenas of artistic

expression not traditionally engaged in a written text. The reader must be attuned to the

syncopations of an orchestra, the vivid colors of a visual image, the movement of the

dancer, all of which are activated for the purpose of revealing the life of the landscape.

Antonio Benítez-Rojo's chaos-based performance reading of Caribbean culture,

for example, also seeks more improvisational responses and more fluid identities. Under

the sign of a repeating island, Benítez-Rojo sees the syncretism of the culture in direct

correlation with the syncretism of the text. For Benítez-Rojo, the Caribbean text is a

spectacle, an active rather than fixed form that is charges with the performances of

embodied memory and experience. The Caribbean text performs: it is " syncretic artifact

… a signifier made of differences"(21). Within this language, as Benítez-Rojo explains,

there an alternative discourse of rhythm implicit in a Caribbean orientation of the world:

> … rhythm, in the codes of the Caribbean, precedes music, including
>
> percussion itself. It is something that was *already there*, amid the noise;
>
> something very ancient and dark to which the drummer's hand and the
>
> drumhead connect on a given moment; a kind of scapegoat, offered in
>
> sacrifice, which can be glimpsed in the air when one lets himself be
>
> carried away by a battery of *batá* drums (secret drums to whose beats the
>
> *orishas*, the living and the dead, all dance)…. The Caribbean rhythm is in

fact a meta-rhythm which can be arrived at through any system

of signs, whether it be dance, music, language, text, or body language, etc.

(18)

The meta-rhythm is an extra-textual realm where embodied gesture and experience is

translated into multiple sign-systems. It implicitly refers to other sign-systems: for

example, the embodied discourse of dance is referential to the written discourse of the

novel while the written discourse of the novel is referential to the spoken discourse of

myth, and so on and so forth (21).

In an effort to abandon the European sanctioned ur-text, or what Diana Loxely

describes as the "dream-texts of English colonialism" (11) such as *The Tempest* or

Robinson Crusoe, many Caribbean artists look directly to the landscape to communicate,

and in the process, reenact the naming practices that appropriate place. The Caribbean

artist, as suggested throughout Derek Walcott's work, is the New World Adam, engaged

in a process of naming. There is a renewed engagement with the codes of the natural

environment in the historical memories of people. But for Harris, this is not simple a

reclamation of place, it is a rereading of the life of the landscape to understand the

trajectories and influences that have converged upon it. As he explains in an interview

with Michael Gilkes:

The landscape is alive, it is a text in itself, it is a living text. And the question is,

how can one find, as an imaginative writer, another kind of living text which

corresponds to that living text. There is a dialogue between one's internal being,

one's psyche, and the nature of place, the landscape. There has to be some

connection, some sort of bridge, which allows one to sense all sorts of

relationships, which one tends to eclipse, which one tends not to see at all. ("The

Landscape of Dreams")

The Caribbean landscape is designated as a common text through which to read the

variety of forms that man has explored to narrate cultural and historical experiences in

this place. This language, or languaging as it might be referred to, seeks to articulate a

mode of expression, not always linguistic, that is essentially borne of an embodied

experience of place, or the lived cultural inheritances of historical circumstance and the

phenomenal experience of the landscape.

In the Anglophone critical and literary tradition, the cultural historian and poet

Kamau Brathwaite advocates the exploration of language and culture as the foundation of

a postcolonial poetic practice that appropriately reflects the process of creolization. In

History of the Voice (1979), an early treatise on nation language,[32] he takes issue with the

poetic expression of early Caribbean writers who followed the English poets as their

models; his idea of nation language is the outgrowth of his frustration with a poetic

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[32] In general terms, nation language is conceived of as the natural language that comes from a life of rootedness in the region. It is at times linguistic and at other, poetic. It is an effort to appropriate the spoken language, typically a non-standard English or French, as the national language. Such trajectories, coming from quite distinct historical moments and circumstances, have typically emerged in the contexts of nation building but have nevertheless impacted the critical discourse of the entire Caribbean. While these language-based epistemologies frame theoretical interventions into decolonization, they are potentially limited by their emphasis on the specific national, linguistic, or ethnic positions within which they were conceived. For example, Brathwaite's nation language privileges an African orality and experience over the English written text and experience, making it particularly useful when understanding the African Diaspora in the former English colonies. He, in fact, sees it as a "continuum: ancestral through creóle to national and international, so we must be able to recognized and accept the similarly remarkable range of literary expression within the Caribbean and throughout Plantation America" (*History of the Voice* 49). They are perfectly viable trajectories for theorizing the circumstance of islands where the cultural and ethnic majorities are of African and European descent or where land and the people are retained as overseas departments of France or now succumbing to the neo-imperialist reach of North America. Because of their specificity, however, they do not necessarily address the more complex composite cultures that include Indigenous or Asian cultural identities.

discourse that rhythmically perpetuated colonial dispossession of language:

"But basically the pentameter [of English poetry/speech] remained, and it carries with it a certain kind of experience, which is not the experience of a hurricane. The hurricane does not roar in pentameters. And that's the problem: how do you get a rhythm which approximates the natural experience, the environmental experience?" (10). He looks to the natural phenomena of the hurricane to characterize the rhythm of the Anglocreole dialect and bases his discussion on trends in contemporary poetic practice that draw from the oral traditions of the people. In doing so, he creates a verbal image based upon an experience embedded in cultural and natural phenomena.[33]

In their respective articulations, all of these cultural theorists aim to demonstrate that cultural memory is manifested in the natural domain and in kinesthetic expression, and that the retrieval of place and embodied knowledge allows a Caribbean experience to be justly historicized. They integrate concepts of the theatrical arts into his literature as a way of reanimating historical episodes and encounters. In reactivating histories, they imaginatively intervene to offer new meanings and outcomes from familiar episodes and settings known through history and revise cultural memories in order to claim them. Expression, even written expression, then, takes on a spatiality and kinesthetic value in order to represent the process of dispossession and emplacement. It is through such efforts that the textual practice of the Americas demonstrates itself to be transcultural. A whole new discourse, based on the narratives and sign-systems that were "othered" by the

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[33] Brathwaite's ongoing interest in nation language also produced his conceptualization of sycorax style, in which he attempts to visually represent on the page the rhythms that his poetry would produce in live performance in order to mimic the reader's/listener's perception of it. "Namsetoura & the Companion Stranger" (2003) is an extended example of this sycorax style.

authoritative discourse of History, become avenues to a new process of

discovery. There is an ongoing dialogue and collaboration between writing, speaking,

singing, dancing, and simply being there. For a people dispossessed of their environment,

language, and history, this allows them to deal with and reclaim their particular reality

with the expression of a lived experience. The narrative of their history unfolds *in situ*,

that is, in the place and through the modes of expression representative of cultures and

contact.

The spectacle of Caribbean literary work then is a creative engagement with and

interpretation of lived, embodied, actualized experiences. It draws on the semiotic

systems of the literary, the performative, and actual performance, all of which combined

reflect the intertextuality of the colonial encounter. It relies on ancestrally rooted gesture,

ritual behavior, and movement, to perform the codified narrative of its social drama.

These are the traditions of the predominantly oral societies of origination, but also the

transculturated discourse through which people communicated in this New World. In its

interpretation of "folk" forms and culture, then, the Caribbean literary work has the

quality of being a dramatic text, which Marco de Marinis defines as a theoretical model

of an observable performance. It is the script or suggested structure of the narrative that

actors follow in order to stage a performance, which is not to be confused with the

performance text, which is the actual and unrepeatable performance event. Categorically

speaking, then, the limits of form are blurred in Caribbean cultural production; the codes

of creative consciousness extend across a range of disciplines, including visual art,

fiction, poetry, and theatrical performance. Through their creative interventions, however,

Caribbean artists do not simply repeat these traditions in an effort to celebrate

or sentimentalize the "folk," but rather reinterpret these cultural memories, demonstrating

them to be the basis for or the key to liberating a cultural imagination.

The three analytical chapters that follow might be considered case studies, or

trials of the imagination, that suggest how Caribbean artists combine the forms to which

their cultural inheritance entitles them to express the ways in which people inhabit their

place. They are organized around scenarios, specific spacio-temporal sites of enactment,

wherein encounters are revisited and restaged not only to make the past visible, but also

to suggest the characteristics and possibilities of a regional aesthetic comprised of

written, theoretical performance, and actual performance genres. In this theatre of the

arts, an all-encompassing performance of Caribbean cultural artifacts, reside the tools to

track the history of a place.

Chapter 2

Singing a Past, Singing a Future: Walcott's Sea and a Caribbean Mytho-History

> I sang our wide country, the Caribbean Sea.
> Derek Walcott *Omeros* 320

This chapter explores the sea as matter and metaphor in the Caribbean historical and literary imagination, and focuses on the epic-minded poetry of Derek Walcott as a sustained example of how the sea shapes poetic vision and voice. I discuss *Omeros*, Walcott's most celebrated epic undertaking, as well as many of his earlier poems that indicate an impulse towards the poetic vision quest, because there is an imaginative unity to his treatment of the sea that is traceable through his *oeuvre*. I borrow the term imaginative unity from Gaston Bachelard who celebrates Edgar Allan Poe as "a poet, a genius endowed with that rarest of all unities, imaginative unity" (45), precisely for his sustained poetic engagement with the sea. Throughout, I refer to Bachelard's philosophy of water's psychological and imaginative impact on poetics developed in *Water and Dreams*. His reveries on the subject are useful here because they offer a structure for understanding the aquatic imaginary, not only in a collective memory, but also in Caribbean writers' poetic and philosophic engagements with the sea. I begin by characterizing Walcott as an artist whose psyche has been shaped by his immersion in a seascape. The historical, cultural, and literary trajectories that converge in this geography contribute to the narrative of the Caribbean Sea as a place, but also to the poet's own

sense of emplacement in a sea of islands. I demonstrate that in the Caribbean

collective memory, the sea-crossing is a cultural memory and a kinesthetic memory; it is

a pattern remembered by bodies. The transatlantic Middle Passage, or in the case of the

Amerindians, the northward migration through the archipelago, marks the beginning of

the New World's transculturation. In the collective memory of these transatlantic and

circum-Caribbean movements, and in the socio-religious mythology that emerged from

such crossings, the Sea is theorized as a redemptive space of cultural rebirth. Through

close readings of Walcott's poetry, I aim to connect the vestiges the pre-literate narrative

traditions of memory and myth with poetic interventions that read and write the sea as a

site of genesis for a culture and civilization shaping both its identity and its creative

imagination. The epigraph above from *Omeros* demonstrates the influence of this aquatic

imaginary on his themes and on the form through which he chooses to explore them. In

this articulation, Walcott connects himself to an oral tradition by casting his meter as

song. Here, I explore the way that Walcott uses "[t]he sea's liquid letters" ("A Sea-

Chantey" 44-45), to compose an epic cycle around this "living" sea that is inhabited by

the myths and histories of oral memory.

The origins of Walcott's unified imaginary of the sea are shaped by his own

experience of living with the sea. In a 1992 interview with Frank Birbalsingh, Derek

Walcott famously responded to a question about his origins: "Where is my History? Go

ask the sea" (31). By deferring his response to what Margaret Cohen calls "one of the

defining chronotopes … of Western modernity" (660), Walcott evokes a specific set of

histories, cultural, literary, and oral, made possible by embodied movements through

aquatic space. The formation of the Caribbean as we know it today is the direct

result of a "[m]aritime modernity [that] can be dated to the first cross-ocean voyages

undertaken by European navigators at the turn of the sixteenth century" (Cohen 659).

This history begins with Columbus' voyage and "discovery" of the New World, a voyage

that connected the Mediterranean to a larger oceanic network and transported its culture,

as well as several other cultures, to a new geography where they underwent a "sea

change." According to Peter Hulme, this phrase first appears in Shakespeare's *The

Tempest*, when Ariel sings of a shipwreck ("Cast Away" 188).[34] In "History, Fable and

Myth in the Guyanas," Wilson Harris explains that elements of transplanted myths were

retained in the Americas, but they underwent a "sea change" that fundamentally

transformed them. Though Harris refers primarily to the "metamorphosis that African

mytho-history has experienced in its revival in the Americas" when describing the sea

change, he explains it in terms of its contact with other mythic traditions ("History, Fable

and Myth" 156). This change is not simply poetic or literary metaphor; it was felt in the

lives of real people when assessing the material conditions of their experience. It refers to

a larger process of transculturation that begins with embarkation. This sea change, as

imaginative writers conceive it, requires its own creative expression, inspired by the

reality of new cultural phenomena.

The transatlantic crossing is the unifying historical experience for all who came to

inhabit the archipelago. The circumstances surrounding this journey were tragic for the

---

[34] Ariel's song, as quoted in Hulme's text: "Full fathom five thy father lies, / Of his bones are coral made; / Those are pearls that were his eyes; / Nothing of him that doth fade, / But doth suffer a sea change / Into something rich and strange. / Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell." (1.2.397-402). I cite this here because I find it a curious passage that resonates with my later discussion of the repetition of submarine unity and that may be useful to me in expansions of this project.

African and Asian, who traveled as a slave or an indentured destined for a

brutal fate upon arrival. But even for the European, who would find a significantly better

outcome in the colonies, the journey was often made out of some desperate or

unfortunate circumstance. The violence of the crossing makes the transatlantic voyage a

particularly painful and harrowing historical memory. Enslaved Africans were packed,

shackled, and lying in their own waste in the holds of ships for the transatlantic voyage.[35]

The weak and dead were routinely thrown overboard to relieve the load and to stabilize

the ship during tempestuous conditions at sea. J.M.W. Turner's painting *Slavers*

Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying—Typhon Coming On (1840), commonly

known as *Slave Ship*, is a depiction of a red and yellow sea, tempestuous and wrathful as

it consumes the cargo unloaded from a slaver, and is among the most prominent visual

images the modern mind has for conceiving of the sea as a watery grave.[36] In

Anglophone Caribbean poetry, Kamau Brathwaite's *The Arrivants*, David Dabydeen's

"Turner," and Marlene NourbeSe Philip's *Zong* are among the most prominent

---

[35] In 1788, *The Slave Ship 'Brookes,' of Liverpool*, a now-famous diagram depicting the way slaves were packed into the cargo holds of a Liverpool slaver in order to maximize the profits of the investors, brought such practices to light for everyday people and gave particularly fuel to abolitionists' campaigns (Venning 251).

[36] Turner's painting is often incorrectly believed to depict an incident involving the Liverpool-based slave ship, *Zong*, in which the captain "deliberately drowned 132 diseased and dying slaves en route from West Africa to Jamaica in 1791, so that the shop-owners could claim insurance for them as goods lost at sea" (Venning 246). Venning states that Turner's painting didn't depict a single event because to do so would be to essentially archive such behaviors as "thing[s] of the past" (247); instead, he chose a vague incident to ostensibly draw attention to the fact that even after slavery was abolished in Britain, Africans were being enslaved and transported to the Americas, supposedly by Spanish and Portuguese slavers, but they also retained a price on their heads, so to speak, under British law. They were also being drowned at sea, and often for a price. Venning describes circumstances in which British squadrons pursued Spanish and Portuguese slavers out of the harbors of West African ports under the auspices of preventing the trade and transport of slaves, but in fact, their incentive was that they received a commission for each slave captured at sea. He refers to two incidents in 1831 in which slavers drowned the "evidence" in order to elude British squadrons seeking their own bounty for their capture (Venning 247).

explorations of how the trauma and dislocation of the Middle Passage resonate

in cultural memory.

But to continue seeing this space as a watery grave is to relive the nightmare of

History. Throughout his poetry, as well as in his essays and plays, Walcott has challenged

History, indicting this master narrative for how it has dispossessed a culture from its

ancestral homeland as well as its adopted homeland, making orphans of Caribbean

people. He personifies the problematic relationship of Caribbean people to the master

narrative of History in "The Schooner *Flight*":

> I met History once, he ain't recognize me,
>
> a parchment Creole, with warts,
>
> like an old sea bottle …
>
> …The bitch hawk and spat.
>
> A spit like that worth any number of words.
>
> But that's all them bastards have left us: words.

<center>(8-9)</center>

Not only has History robbed Caribbean cultures of a past, but it has foreclosed any sense

of destiny, too. This dilemma manifests itself in a sense of "historylessness" ("History,

Fable and Myth" 166), whereby people feel unmoored from a cultural identity or destiny,

and ultimately alienated from any explanation of creation. To my thinking, the most

poignant example of a colonized mind robbed by history of any sense of value or purpose

is V.S. Naipul's self-loathing critique that "nothing was created in the West Indies" (*The

Middle Passage* 29). I read Walcott's poetry and prose as providing a sustained, though

not necessarily explicit, refutation to such thinking. He takes "all them bastards

… left" and forges a Caribbean history, looking to the sea for inspiration.

In the poem "The Sea Is History," Walcott reads "that gray vault" (364) of the sea

for corollaries between biblical books of creation and the major movements of Caribbean

cultural formation. And though "the ocean kept turning blank pages / looking for

History" (365), the poem arrives at the conclusion that History is a fiction pertaining to a

single concept of time. In describing a field known as "maritime studies" or "oceanic

studies," Cohen explains that by "positioning the sea as history, maritime studies focuses

on how human beings are formed by the ocean rather that how the ocean might be formed

by human history" (Cohen 707). This is the very distinction, I find, that Walcott develops

in the poem; he wants to show that the ocean is not formed by the master narrative of

History, but that the ocean has impacted human experience. The sea is a space of

embodied histories that have been entextualized into the physical place. Such narratives

of place are decipherable,

> in the dark ears of ferns
>
> and in the salt chuckle of rocks
>
> with their sea pools, [where] there was the sound
>
> like a rumour without any echo
>
> of History, really beginning.
>
> ("The Sea Is History" 367)

In the poem, the recitation of events from the bible is an attempt to impose human history

on the ocean. The sound generated by the ferns and sea pools, however, is the narrative of

a Caribbean history "really beginning." It is the cultural history written by the sea. It is this type of narrative of place that allows Walcott to imagine new histories, those embodied memories that were lost in the sweep of history, but that bind a people to certain geographies. It is also a fulfillment of place, whereby the previously unpoeticized sites, sounds, and episodes of the sea are given life. Perhaps the most compelling example of Walcott's version of this dialectic between people and place occurs in the opening scene of *Omeros* where Philoctete, pointing to the trees, tells tourists the story of "how, one sunrise, we cut down them canoes" (1). The presence of the sea is so prominent that the whole environment conspires in delivering the soil-rooted trees to their destiny: "Wind lift the ferns. They sound like the sea that feed us fisherman all our life, and the ferns nodded 'Yes, the trees have to die'" (3). The trees were always meant to plow the sea. This repetition of a version of history "really beginning" in *Omeros*, a novel-like poem in which Walcott animates epic traditions in the context of St. Lucia, signals the fulfillment of a philosophy of history that is tied to the sea.

In his articulation of this theme in his discussion with Birbalsingh, Walcott's uses "my" to distinguish the history to which he refers, indicating a subtle difference from the collective history in "The Sea Is History." If the transcript were revised to read "Where is my history?," rather than "Where is my History?," then he is speaking to a personal history shaped by the sea. Walcott was born and raised on St. Lucia, a small island where the presence of the sea defines the experience of place. Immersed in this aquatic reality, Walcott's imagination develops with the sea as his companion, or his "first friend" as

Shabine describes it in "The Schooner *Flight*" (361).[37] This type of relationship

between man and matter is further suggested by the way he contextualizes Hector's

hurricane preparations in *Omeros*: "Hector was not with Helen. He was with the sea"

(50). For the poet, like his character, the presence of the sea is as formidable as any

person or character. It suggests an engagement with water that goes beyond metaphor. An

anecdote from Rex Nettleford corroborates evidence running throughout Walcott's poetry

that indicates how the sea has shaped his psyche. In our 2008 interview, Nettleford

reflected on his first visit to St. Lucia, commenting that the sea has an immediate and

constant impact on the senses. Upon arrival, he was struck by the force of this experience,

particularly as a Jamaican, a self-defined "mountain people" despite their proximity to

the sea. It seemed obvious to him from his immersion how this place had shaped Derek

Walcott's perception and poetry: "Ah, the Sea. This is it. This *is* Derek Walcott."[38]

Indeed, Walcott identifies the mark of the sea on his own character. His commitment to

the memory of the sea's impression on his imagination and character is developed in the

autobiographical poem, *Another Life*. In Book Four, "The Estranging Sea," he reveals:

> I was the well of the world,
>
> I wore the stars on my skin,
>
> I endured no reflections,
>
> my sign was water,
>
> tears, and the sea,
>
> my sign was Janus,

---

[37] Unless indicated otherwise, all poetry is cited from *Derek Walcott: Collected Poems*.

[38] Kingston, Jamaica. August 2, 2008.

I saw with twin heads,

and everything I say is contradicted.

I was fluent as water. (281)

He realizes the sea as the gateway between the Caribbean's ancestral traditions and new beginnings, and realizes himself as water, the agent of this crossing. Bachelard observes, "A being dedicated to water is a being in flux" (6). The sea is not a rupture with ancestry, but the origins of a new civilization. Walcott, marked by all of these elements, sits on the cusp of traditions and gives purpose to his artistic vision.

From understanding the sea as a gateway to new beginnings, Walcott initiates an imaginative process of infinitely expanding consciousness. He looks to the see to find his personal mythos. In an early poem, "Origins," he characterizes himself as a solitary beachcomber: "The mind, among sea-wrack, sees its mythopoeic coast … Among these shallows, I seek my own name" (14). He envisions himself as the Caribbean's first man, a role he adopts not only from biblical genesis and colonial-era castaway narratives that construct the Caribbean in the European imagination, but also from his belief in his unique privilege of "watching literature … bud and open island after island in the early morning of a culture" ("Antilles" 73). As a shipwrecked castaway like Crusoe, Walcott fashions himself as an Adamic figure appropriating the experiences and phenomena of creolized cultures in their place. As Peter Hulme writes "Nothing dramatizes the sea change better than being cast away, preferably on the kind of island, real or mythological, where metamorphoses are likely to take place" (188). What begins as a contemplation of

the sea develops into an apprenticeship to the sea. It gives him a theme and

form to materialize his poetic vision and voice. His imagination expands outward,

moving centrifugally like water itself.[39] By locating a personal and poetic identity in the

sea, he reconciles the sea change manifested in him with the internal divisions caused by

his African and European ancestry. It also allows him to locate a voice under the weight

of the "the foreign machinery known as literature" (68). In nearly every one of his poetry

collections, and many of his plays, too, Walcott returns to the site as a source of creative

inspiration, writing the sea in various ways in order to unlock what it holds. In the

opening lines of *Another Life*, he admits: "I begin here *again*, / begin until this ocean's / a

shut book …" (5; my emphasis). His ur-text is the sea, rather that the fictions of History.

He is not only writing the sea, but also reading it. Finding no corollary to his experience

in the canonical texts he admired as a youth, Walcott makes it his singular purpose to

poeticize his archipelago, this sea of islands. "If there was nothing," he mused, "there was

everything to make" ("Twilight" 4). This idea of new beginnings imagines beyond the

confrontation with history in order to adopt the innocence, or amnesia, necessary to see

this world through decolonized eyes. He dedicates his poetic practice to exploring the

images he saw written into, or entextualized, in place—all of which were visions that had

never been interpreted in his received knowledge of poetry. Through his various acts of

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[39] In the foreword to *Water and Dreams*, Joanne H. Stroud explains, "We read and return to Bachelard, and each time our imagination expands in a new way. He teaches us to read images centrifugally. He presses our interior space outward …[like] the image of ripples from a center point, constantly expanding our way of seeing" (viii). This description of the architecture of Bachelard's water reverie informs my point about Walcott's "apprenticeship" to the sea. It also parallels the structure Benítez-Rojo imagines unifying the physical and cultural discontinuities of the Caribbean.

appropriation, he sings the Caribbean into existence and conjures its past and

its future from the waters.

Walcott's geomythography of the sea is unique to the structure of his imagination,

but by drawing on the power of myth to reconcile the diverse origins of his culture he

treats the sea as a mythic archetype of origins. For Caribbean artists and cultural theorists,

the sea is a particularly compelling archetype of origins because it captures the cultural

memory of the sea crossing and the sea change as well as the culture's immersion in an

archipelagic seascape. In describing archetypes found in myth, Laurence Coupe explains

that "primordial waters were traditionally associated with the threat of chaos" (185) and it

is this very association Antonio Benítez-Rojo aims to explore, describing the Caribbean

sea as "a chaos within which there is an island that proliferates endlessly" (9). In *The*

Repeating Island, Benítez-Rojo turns to the sea as a redemptive space in reconstructing

the social formation of the Caribbean. He begins his sweeping analysis of Caribbean

literature, drama, and cultural theory under the sign of chaos and the sea, not only in

terms of cultural production, but also in the very production of culture. Creation myths

typically emerge from chaos, and in his theorization of the Peoples of the Sea, a

complement to his paradigm of the repeating island, Benítez-Rojo uses Chaos theory to

explain the primordial chaos of Caribbean societies and the repeating islands they inhabit.

Though presented as postmodern cultural theory, the use of chaos signals mythic tropes

in which chaos precedes the creation of this new civilization. In his pseudo-scientific use

of Chaos theory to develop a socio-psychic profile of the Peoples of the Sea, Benítez-

Rojo actually engages in a highly imaginative social theory linked to the sea. In

describing the region as a coincidental postmodern phenomenon of geography,

"an island bridge," his supporting evidence privileges the liquid matter surrounding the

earth's masses rather than the earth itself:

> The geographical accident gives the entire area, including its continental foci, the
>
> character of an archipelago, that is, a discontinuous conjunction (of what?):
>
> unstable condensations, turbulences, whirlpools, clumps of bubbles, frayed
>
> seaweed, sunken galleons, crashing breakers, flying fish, seagull squawks,
>
> downpours, nighttime phosphorescences, eddies and pools, uncertain voyages of
>
> signification; in short, a field of observation quite in tune with the objectives of
>
> Chaos. (2)

In describing these phenomena, it is the sea life, the weather patterns caused by the sea,

and the configurations of water that give birth to the archipelago, thereby evoking the sea

as the origins of everything. After dabbling in explanations of Chaos theory and Delueze

and Guattarian theorizations of machination, he posits the timeless mythic perspective

that "water is the beginning of all things" (11). Though Benítez-Rojo's controlling

metaphor is the island that repeats, his explanation of this theoretical paradigm prioritizes

the sea as its unifying force; his meta-archipelago is a *sea* of islands. The structure he

attributes to that "newfangled" scientific theory of Chaos resonates with the very

structure Bachelard attributes to the aquatic reverie and also characterizes Walcott's

imaginative practice.[40]

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[40] I characterize Benítez-Rojo's theorizations as an imaginative exercise, which in certain regards
undermines the scientific validity of his use of Chaos theory. However, in an early review of *The Repeating
Island*, Bruce King suggests that it is an example of creative thinking bogged down by the theoretical
trends of the academia. In an overall complimentary review, "Caribbean Conundrum," Bruce King writes:

Rather than seeing it exclusively as a loss, Benítez-Rojo reconfigures

sea space in productive terms. His analysis of aquatic movement and metaphor recalls

middle passages, but sublimates the violence of crossing by imagining the sea as a

redemptive space, a site of transformation and new beginnings. Other paradigms have

made use of such spatialized discourse, exploring the ocean as a space of diasporic

identity and figuring the sea as a redemptive space where the brutality of origins can be

refigured as the start of something new and meaningful. Paul Gilroy's *The Black Atlantic:*

Modernity and Double Consciousness, in particular, solidified the ocean as a spatial

paradigm, using "the image of the ship [in motion across the spaces between Europe,

America, Africa, and the Caribbean]—a living, microcultural, micro-political system in

motion" (4) to explore the converging trajectories and destinies of the African Diaspora.

The black Atlantic is a fundamentally redemptive space, in which crossings are fertile

ground for producing "a distinctive counterculture of modernity" (36). In an effort to

"highlight a political commonality" between "two turbulent transatlantic crossings,

African and Indian" (15), Brinda Mehta similarly theorizes the sea and sea change in

redemptive terms. In *Diasporic Dislocations*, Mehta reimagines *kala pani*, the Hindu

taboo against crossing the black sea, as the transatlantic crossing that facilitates an

empowering rupture from hegemonic oppression (5). In Hindu belief, crossing the kala

"Much of *The Repeating Island* seems a fashionable restylization of Negrismo into postmodern postures. To encrust with miscellaneous sound bites from Derrida, Deleuze, Guattari, Barthes, and chaos theory what has often been thought before and has sometimes been better said is a post-structuralist accomplishment … Benítez-Rojo appears to carry an almost equally heavy load: the attempt to succeed in the American academic system where theories and reputation rise and fall with the changing of the moon's phases…The academic profession is likely to be impressed; students are more likely to become depressed. But who writes for students anymore?" (155). All critiques of theoretical trends aside, I find Benítez-Rojo's efforts to make visible the intangible connections within the region is a creative philosophy based in imaginative practice, rather than scientific theory.

pani disrupts the cycle of reincarnation and contaminates Indian traditions and identities. Mehta's theorization is gendered, specifically addressing the feminine experience and voice and how this crossing creates a space dislocated from previous traditions and thereby open for Indo-Caribbean women to articulate experience and identity. As she explains, "The spatial transgressions by early immigrant women provided later generations of Indo-Caribbean women writers with the necessary point of motivation to initiate their own literary transgressions through orality and the written word as powerful media of self representation" (4-5). Nevertheless, the paradigm extends to an Indo-Caribbean communal identity that is frequently overlooked in discussions dominated by African and European legacies and influences.

The idea that this chapter of human geography is something altogether new has its precedent in oral histories. Walcott, like other Anglophone writers, draws from this form of cultural memory to reconstruct a mythos-epos[41] surrounding the sea. The epigraph to *The Arrivants*, Kamau Brathwaite's trilogy that includes *Rights of Passages*, *Masks*, and *Islands*, is a personal narrative from Imogene "Queenie" Kennedy, a Kumina Queen that he interviewed for his investigations into nation language and Kumina. In this epigraph, she distinguishes between her grandparents' African origins and her own Jamaican roots:

> muh ol' arrivance …from Africa …. That's muh ol' arrivants family. Muh
>
> gran'muddah an' muh gran'fadda ….[who] came out here as slavely,…
>
> …when them came now, I doan belongs to Africa, I belongs to Jamaica. I born
>
> here. (np)

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[41] In the introduction to *Selected Essays of Wilson Harris: The Unfinished Genesis of the Imagination*, Bundy defines the mythos-epos as "the epic poem, novel, or drama finding its principal resonance in mythology" (7) as a key term or concept in approaching Harris' fictional and non-fictional work.

She separates the culture of her "arrivants"—clearly the inspiration for the

edition's title—from her own, indicating that a subtle understanding of how the sea

crossing and arrival in the Caribbean figured into the formation of social memory. It also

shows that even with strong African retentions, people imagined and legitimized their

identities based on their birthplace. Between Africa, the point of departure, and landfall in

the Americas, there occurs a fundamental rupture and revival that characterizes the

process of any transculturation.

In an interview published in 1993, Jamaica Kincaid summarizes her personal

history in terms of the embodied experience common to all of her ancestors:

> What I had was my mother, my father, my mother's family, my father's family,
>
> all of that complication, my history, which, as far as I know, began on boats. I'm
>
> part African, part Carib Indian, and part—which is a very small part by now—
>
> Scot. All of them came to Antigua by boats. This is how my history begins. (81)

In her characteristic simplicity—the "just-so" tone of her narrative voice that I believe

she takes from the tradition of oral history—Kincaid articulates her own history as a

condensed version of "arrivals" throughout the Caribbean: pre-Columbian history,

including the Carib campaigns northward through the archipelago, the colonial encounter

between Amerindians, Europeans, and Africans, and generally, two-to-three centuries of

transoceanic migration, either under duress or out of desperation. Her explanation that

this history begins "on boats" suggests that Africa or Scotland or some unspecified center

of Amerindian civilization, is not a point of origin, but rather, the point of departure. In

her passing reference to "all of that complication" which her ancestry indicates, she refers

to the difficult, even violent, process of transculturation whereby the clash of cultures, languages, and people formed something new and distinct. And yet, Kincaid is uncharacteristically silent (after *A Small Place*, Kincaid is not expected to hold her tongue) about the violence that surrounded the circumstances of these movements and encounters. Instead, she focuses on the sea as the site of entanglement, a liminal space in which these seemingly divergent trajectories intersect, and go on to form a common narrative. By emphasizing that her history begins on transatlantic and seafaring boats, Kincaid deterritorializes and denationalizes Caribbean origins. The sea is the site of encounter; the genesis is in the crossing. This approach to narrative, Benítez-Rojo, would argue, is the only way to process the personal history determined by waves of decimation, slavery, and slave-owning. He describes it as a "desire to sublimate social violence through referring [social formation or renewal] to a space that can only be intuited through the poetic" (17). This sea change, then, requires its own creative expression, inspired by the reality of new cultural phenomena. The silence that allows people to sublimate the violence of their origins and reconfigure this transatlantic/trans-oceanic sea-crossing as redemptive space, or a point of revival or renewal, is not simply a symptom of New World's amnesia, it is an extreme act of imagination. These sea stories emphasize how an overseas passage shapes an individual and collective destiny.

The sea story, Bachelard contends, brings the sea into imaginative existence. He distinquishes between the sea story and myth and other water mythologies, arguing that before a myth materializes in the imagination, it is introduced by someone who has been to sea. A sea mythology is not a "primitive [water] mythology," but rather a "local

mythology," primarily serving the imaginations of those that live with or

around it, rather than functioning as an archetype of the unconscious (152). He continues,

"The sea-oriented unconscious is, from then on, a *spoken* unconscious, an unconscious

too dispersed in adventure tales … [that it] loses all it oneiric powers … [and] then, rarely

touches the origins of fable-making" (153). Walcott's epic engagement with myth and

history seeks to unite the fragments of this "sea-oriented unconscious" and the

collective's "spoken unconscious," to "start the world again" (Coupe 50), to go back in

time while remaining in the postcolonial present in order to understand the experience in

productive terms, and also to explore the narratives subverted by the particular fiction of

History. Walcott's geomythography spans the archipelago.[42] The Caribbean Sea is the

element that unifies and names this sea of islands. He forges a mythic cycle that explains

this new culture and social structure and its embeddedness in the geography of the

Caribbean. In an effort to make sense of the present, he self-consciously forges a past.

This is his way of unifying the different voices and perspectives of the region through

common historical trajectories. Walcott resists "the idea of history as time for its original

concept as myth, the partial recall of the race" ("Muse of History" 2), and instead invents

a mytho-history rooted in the actual experience of the people. It begins with the sea, but

in the present, and by following the sea it projects onto the past and into the future.

Édouard Glissant writes that, "myth anticipates history as much as it inevitably repeats

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[42] Walcott imagines a region, rather than separate nations, because he perceives himself as a citizen of the region. He lived a migratory existence through the archipelago; his roots were in his St. Lucia, he attended university in Jamaica, established a theatre career with the Little Carib Theater in Trinidad, and has traveled extensively in other islands. Walcott was among the only writers of his generation to remain in the Caribbean, while others were off to England or North America, though he did ultimately take seasonal posts at North American universities. He acknowledges his gratitude to the Caribbean for its endless and meaningful source material in "What the Twilight Says," where he acknowledges that he would not have become the poet he is if he had left the region.

the accidents that it has glorified; that means it is in turn a producer of history"

(*Caribbean Discourse* 71).[43] Myth gives order or reason to what appears to be rational

knowledge. Caribbean myth, like its history, is rooted in the process of transculturation

that began with a departure from homelands and continued upon arrival in the Americas;

based upon the ancestral legacies of Africa, Asia, and Europe, all of which were altered

by the transatlantic passage, and the actual embodied trajectories of people who came to

inhabit these islands in the sea. This both validates and undermines Bachelard's

assessment of sea mythology in that a Caribbean Sea mythology is local, rooted in the

everyday experience of living with and around the sea. Moreover, it is rooted in the

experience of being at sea—not only the collective sea story, but also the embodied

physical memory of crossing. The fact that Caribbean history begins with this crossing,

the myth can only be imagined from the lived experiences. Kincaid's personal history, for

example, depicts the collective history of the Peoples of the Sea as determined by aspects

of life for those who inhabit a sea of islands; Caribbean people are a seafaring people, if

not in everyday modern practice, then at least in an originary imagination.

As Walcott sees it, "The epic poem is not a literary project. It is already written; it

was written in the mouths of the tribe, a tribe which had courageously yielded its history"

("Muse of History" 45). The epic, a fixed form since ancient times, is a genre that draws

on the mythology and memory of a civilization and commemorates the founding of that

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[43] This follows the common logic of a primarily Western-oriented chronology in which that myth precedes history, or gives way to and shapes history. While this sequence serves Western culture well, Caribbean culture's fragmented history has no single myth to precede it; its mythic inheritance links directly back to Africa, Asia, and Europe. Instead, the development of a Caribbean history is simultaneous with the development of a Caribbean mythology.

civilization. Epics are not an exclusively Greek, or European tradition; they are

a worldwide tradition that evolves with cultures. In many cases, epics are composed as

alternative narratives to hegemonic histories and represent cultural minorities

marginalized by dominant culture (Konstan and Raafluab 5). Epic usually has an

underlying "political destiny," and while Walcott would like to distance his poetry from

overtly politicized discourse ("Reflections on Omeros" 243), the strong sense of political

destiny underlying his work relates directly to his interest in illuminating the histories of

the people excluded from History; a people whose voice is not locatable in literary

canons and whose experience is not documented in library archives, and who face the

very real possibility of continuing erasure in this realm that is threatened by the tourist

industry and the imperialism of the dollar. He characterizes this as the purpose of his

poetic vision quest:

> Though my Flight never pass the incoming tide
>
> of this inland sea beyond the loud reefs
>
> of the final Bahamas, I am satisfied
>
> if my hand gave voice to one people's grief.
>
> ("The Schooner *Flight*" 19)

This is but one articulation of Walcott's quest across the Caribbean Sea in search of the

cultural values and histories of a people. His epic journeys are not only a return home, but

also a quest to locate where that home actually is. After traveling to ancestral homelands

in Europe, Africa, and North America, or sites of cultural memory under the sea,

Walcott's poems retrace these trajectories home to a Caribbean center. They locate the

gods and heroes of a culture that seems to have none. This imaginative epic

effort in mythopoeia and history writing situates and validates embodied experiences in

their surroundings. The sea, then, determines Walcott's political and cultural geography,

as well as the common experience of this people, not only in the past, but also in the

future. Walcott sets his poems in "the sea's amphitheatre" (*Omeros* 32), suggesting his

view of the sea as an active arena of cultural performance. He constructs it as an epic

stage and deploys ritual and theatrical elements in order to animate the narratives of a

people in their place. For Walcott, the sea is a physical and psychic space, and like the

people themselves, it is "inhabited by presences" ("Antilles" 37). Walcott develops an

originary narrative shaped by the sea by forging a common and emplaced past, religion,

and value system. The purpose of his epic-minded poetry is to "put traditional materials

in canonical form" in the same way that Homeric epics solidified such cultural elements

for the Greeks (Mueller qtd. in Breslin 241).[44]

Though Walcott is careful to establish a distance between his poem *Omeros* and

The Odyssey, he cannot negate the "Homeric shadow" (*Omeros* 271) that he casts upon

the work. He is adamant that *Omeros* is not a rewriting of Homer's *Odyssey*, or any other

Greek epic; he will not let his Caribbean suffer the fate of being a "second-rate Aegean"

("Reflections on *Omeros*" 232). Though it is clear that he has taken a great deal from this

literary tradition, he seems to struggle in published talks and interviews with how to

---

[44] Breslin quotes Martin Mueller: "One may well ask whether the Greeks, who during the dark centuries colonized much of the eastern and some of the western Mediterranean, would have resisted the centrifugal tendencies of such geographical dispersion had it not been for the common past, common religion, and the common set of values that the Iliad 'created,' if only by putting traditional materials in canonical form" (241).

represent his political and literary relationship to the epic, often contradicting

his intentions or appearing Anti-Homeric (Breslin 245). For example, in "Reflections on

Omeros," a transcription of Walcott's talk at a Romare Bearden show, he critiques the

"stupid historicism of thinking" that sees *Omeros* as simply a re-writing of Homer's

Odyssey (232). Walcott certainly dabbles in mythic archetypes, naming the characters

after the heroes of Homeric epics, but complicates that by conflating their personas. The

hero-quest motif also has its origins in this tradition, but Plunkett, Achille, and the "I"

narrator, are equally invested in their respective quests, and therefore complicate the

poem's relationship to the epic hero convention. But, as Walcott's "I" narrator observes

in the poem, "Names are not oars / that have to be laid side by side, nor are legends"

(313). Walcott acknowledges his gratitude to the poet Homer, but asserts that this poem is

not just a postcolonial rewriting of a Western canonical text; it is an original work of the

imagination that engages a poetic genre known to represent cultures in transition.

In his apprenticeship to the sea, Walcott describes himself approaching his craft

"like a fisherman walking towards the white noise / of paper" (*Omeros* 241).

Accordingly, Walcott's guide in the poetic quest also appears as a fisherman. Though he

manifest in various forms and figures, Homer's most salient incarnation is Seven Seas, a

blind old fisherman in St. Lucia named for his travels as a merchant seaman. Though

blind, he is a seer, "he moved by a sixth sense,/ like the moon without an hour or second

hand" (12), and "saw with his ears" (11), and his "fingers recounting the past of another

sea, measured by the stroking oars" (12). For him, reading is a full-body sensory

experience and writing is an embodied discourse. Homer also briefly washes ashore as a

marble bust before transforming in the surf into the form of Seven Seas. In such

renderings of the poet, Walcott chooses to see Homer as a "wanderer, the beggar poet

who was not treated too well," rather than a "court poet singing what are essentially

praise songs … associating [a failing aristocracy] with heroic deeds of the past"

(Figueroa 204). Walcott's Homer is not a relic of the past, but a living voice that washes

in with the tide. This rendering of the poet-guide indicates that Walcott finds his

inspiration in local places and that he intends his own epic to be understood in local

terms. By conjuring Omeros as a common man, a seafaring drifter, rather than a court

poet, he is suggesting that this poetry is not a depiction of the glory of poverty and a

simple island life, but a mirror or reflection of that life that brings with it some sort of

justice.

Walcott's epic-mindedness extends beyond this return to sea as part of a journey

to forge the identity of a people; it also signals the orality underlying his poetry. Epic is

the most immediate descendent of the oral tradition in which performers narrated story

cycles grounded in myths and histories. As a written form, epic poetry is an act of

memory that is inhabited by myth. It is also the bridge between oral and written

traditions. For example, Homer's epics are the earliest written versions of what were

previously performed texts. In fact, the *Illiad* and *Odyssey* "mark the end of an oral

tradition" and the turning point in which epics were transcribed, and subsequently

solidified in collective cultural memory (Grethlein 123). In describing epic tradition as

already written, Walcott situates himself on the cusp of oral and written traditions, as an

epic poet as one who is simply providing a specific rendering of a known story, much

like the oral poets who performed their version of a set poem. This is the epic

of how a people inhabit a place in the present, and his text is the confluence of the

narrative traditions written into the sea. This connection is established through the

opening image of "[a] wind turn[ing] the harbour's pages back" (13). The epic form

celebrates a culture in flux, giving legibility to the region's inherited oral traditions, and

tracing the undocumented literary sources entextualized in land.

In their parallel quests, Achille and Plunkett provide two models of seeking one's

place in history in order to move towards a future. Plunkett sets out to write the history of

the island, for Helen: "Helen needed a history, / that was the pity that Plunkett felt

towards her" (30). Of course, Helen is at once the woman and the island of St. Lucia,

which was often referred to as the Helen of the West Indies. Achille, too, though not

intentionally, confronts the past in a state of despair over the Helen, the woman. Though

he loses Helen to Hector, he is also lamenting the change he sees in St. Lucia away from

traditional ways of "working with his hands and the sea" to the exploitative capitalist-

driven tourist industry that dispossess St. Lucians of a cultural identity connected to their

island. He, too, writes a history for the island, but does so in his movements through

space and time. The history he writes delivers him to an embodied present, in which

names and places mean something. This driving force is established in Book III, Chapter

IV, where the introductions of the tourist resort and Helen collide, "[a]nd all the rest

followed" (24). While Plunkett dives into archives, the collection of history's enduring

documents, Achille dives into the sea, a space remembered only by the bodies that have

traversed it. Walcott's depiction of Plunkett at work characterizes his efforts as

a reclamation of colonial machinery:

> So Plunkett decided that what the place needed
>
> its true place in history, that he'd spend hours
>
> for Helen's sake on research, so he proceeded …
>
> ……………
>
> …with his ziggurat of books, his charts,
>
> and the balsa fleet he carved with a small scalpel.
>
> (64-65)

Contemplating the technologies of maritime modernity, Plunkett maps his own history

onto St. Lucia. Achille, on the other hand, travels through the "crinkling water [that]

recorded three centuries / of the submerged archipelago" (155) while "looking for his

name and his soul" (154).

The juxtaposition of these two approaches to history writing situates the book-

length poem at the cusp of two distinct ways of preserving cultural memory. Walcott

signals the correlation between his own efforts to document this process and the Homeric

epic tradition in Chapter V and VI of Book 1. As the link to archival history, Plunkett is

also the strongest connection to literary history. Paul Breslin notes, "Walcott assigns the

most obsessive Homer-hunting to Plunkett" (271). Upon seeing Helen at the resort,

Plunkett's mind wanders:

> … the mythical hallucination
>
> that went with the name's shadow; the island was once

> named Helen; its Homeric association
>
> rose like smoke from a siege; the Battle of the Saints
>
> was launched with that sound, from what was the "Gibraltar
>
> of the Caribbean," after thirteen treaties
>
> while she changed prayers often as knees at an altar,
>
> till between French and British her final peace
>
> was signed at Versailles… (31)

His mind is firmly locked in the sweep of a version of history documented in writing. However, though Plunkett memorizes names, dates, encounters, all the "facts" of St.Lucia's past, they are haunted by the presence of alternate histories:

> One day, at high noon, he felt under observance
>
> from very old eyes. He spun the binoculars
>
> slowly, and saw the lizard, elbows akimbo,
>
> belling its throat on the hot noon cannon, eyes slit,
>
> orange dewlap dilating on its pinned shadow.
>
> ……………………..
>
> … History was fact,
>
> History was canon, not a lizard…(91-92).

But in St. Lucia, history *does* manifest itself in the form of a lizard. These lizards haunt the landscape that Maud gardens and "run down the vines of his skin, like Helen's cold smile"(93). This illustrates that even though the past might be written over, it can never be erased. The island physically retains the memory of the pre-Columbian days when it

was called Iounalao, "[w]here the iguana is found" (92), by the Aruacs; the indigenous past is entextualized into the landscape.

While Plunkett digs in the archives to locate his "ances-tree (his pun)" (87), Achille discovers his ancestry through a dream quest into and across the Atlantic to a West African village. This is an immersion in the embodied trajectories of the past, the patterns of ancestral ways of being and, of course, the violent rupture and transoceanic movement of his people. Achille becomes "his own memory," joining his tribe as one of their own, but he remains haunted by the "future [he] already knew / but which he could not reveal even to his breath-giver" (139). The episode also connects Walcott's epic-minded poetry to African orality, thereby indicating a separate non-European oral tradition from which Walcott draws. The griot's voice "was a note, long-drawn / and endless in its winding like the brown river's tongue" (148). By locating the source of this voice in the river waters of Africa, Walcott suggests continuity between the "antipodal coasts" (149) that is made possible by water's voice.

Water's voice, as Bachelard characterizes it, can be captured or represented in the movement of poetry: "Water is the mistress of liquid language, of smooth flowing language, of continued and continuing language, of language that softens rhythm and gives uniform substance to differing rhythms" (187). In this context, it can be argued that water is not only an element of contemplation, but that water actually gives form to the poetic imagination and the language of poetry. Despite his accomplishments as a playwright and theater director, Walcott admits to an artistic struggle between "the interior life of poetry, [and] the outward life of action and dialect" ("Twilight" 4). Indeed,

he is not typically read as a poet who draws on oral and performance traditions,

primarily because he is read in terms of his self-professed apprenticeship to canonical

poets like T.S. Eliot. This has often been developed as a point of creative tension between

Walcott and his contemporary, Kamau Brathwaite, a poet who acknowledges in his

autobiographical collection, *Barabajan Poems*, that he is typically read as "an African-

oriented writer—a person involved mainly with Africa" (22). Bruce King summarizes the

polarizing force of the critics when he comments that Walcott is "too concerned with the

art of high European culture in contrast to Brathwaite's use of the oral tradition and the

region's African heritage" (146). Such conflict or division is manufactured by critics who

read poetry chronologically; it does not actually exist between the poets themselves who

understand their work as simultaneous, though distinct, efforts in building a Caribbean

poetic voice. As Walcott explains, "If you think of art merely in terms of chronology, you

are going to be patronizing to certain cultures. But if you think of art as simultaneity that

is inevitable in terms of certain people, then Joyce is a contemporary of Homer (which

Joyce knew)" ("Reflections on *Omeros*" 240-41). There is no conflict between Walcott's

and Brathwaite's respective poetics, but rather a creative tension that characterizes the

struggle of Caribbean postcolonial literature as "in the early morning of a culture"

("Antilles" 73). By understanding their respective work as a poetics of simultaneity,

Walcott and Brathwaite become quite complementary. In *History of the Voice*,

Brathwaite claims Walcott as "the Caribbean's most accomplished poet/playwright" and

uses "Blues," "a wonderfully speech-textured piece" (295), to further exemplify the "very

confident movement of nation language" in West Indian poetics (297).[45]

Certainly, Walcott and Brathwaite give substance to Bachelard's statement. These poets

hear their poetry and the mythos and vernacular of their culture coming from nature,

specifically the sea.

Like Walcott, Brathwaite has extensively explored the sea as myth, metaphor, and

meter through a poetics is considered epic-minded in its quest for identification and its

diasporic consciousness. His interest in a poetics emplaced in a geography, language, and

history are theorized through nation language and his subsequent development of the

sycorax style, an integrative poetics that gives sound a visual dimension through

experimentation with word processing formatting. However, tidalectics, the dialectic

sound-space between the sea and the land, is his most salient use of the water motif on

poetic discourse. In his collection of autobiographical poems, *Barabajan Poems*,

Brathwaite shares the story of how as a boy on Brown's Beach in Barbados he catches

the tidalectic rhythm by skipping a stone across the sea:

> **It began the day I bent down for a pebble to play duck-and-**
>
> **drakes, skidding it along the water ... skip skip skip skip ...**
>
> **along the water ...**
>
> **It began the day I picked up this pebble & saw the con-**
>
> **nection: the grains & feel of sand at my feet ...**
>
> **...the pebble & sand**

---

[45] In this example, I quote from the version of *History of the Voice* that appears in *Roots*.

both from the same continent, the underwater bone of the

world ...

(117-18)[46]

In this image of the young boy skipping stones across the sea, Brathwaite appears, like

Walcott, as a companion to the sea. His imagination follows the sound and story he hears

in the skipping stone through the African Diaspora. Accordingly, his view of the sea is

preoccupied by the Middle Passage, or rather, middle passages, which he conceives of as

bridges, "the bridge of [his] mind now linking Atlantic and ancestor, heartland and

homeland" ("Timehri" 38). Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* is his first sustained example of

such mapping. In the trilogy, he looks at the material conditions of these sea changes, but

cannot find resolution in the diasporic cultures and identities of African descendents.

Though Brathwaite works within the experiences of this sea change in *The Arrivants*, he

is not nearly as comfortable as Walcott or Benítez-Rojo offering a positive assessment of

these movements, possibly because he presents them as perpetual arrivals. Though the

routes and meter are highly imaginative, the new beginnings are not romanticized. In the

"Prelude" to "Work Song and Blues," the first poem in *Rites of Passage*, Brathwaite

captures the "**skip skip skip skip**" of the stone skipping across the sea, but enters the

consciousness of the New World African by replacing these images with "Drum skin

whip / lash" (4). From this invocation of sorts, he explores the cycles of transatlantic

movement and migration in an effort to illustrate the violence, degradation, and perpetual

displacement suffered by repeated arrivals—to the New World, to Europe, to Africa, to

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[46] This is Arial 10-pont font—the closest I could find to Brathwaite's original.

North America, and back home to the Caribbean. The poems of this era depict a

people perpetually at sea, unmoored, uprooted, and ungrounded because of their socio-

political and economic conditions. The search for heroes, for models to live by and to

recognize in oneself, is portrayed as a driving force in the collection. One of the opening

poems "New World A-Comin'" expresses the state of the arrivant: "Helpless like this /

leader – / less like this, / heroless" (9). But this search still seems unfulfilled by the end.

In this sense, I would say that these poems are inspired by the colonized subject's cyclical

struggle for survival and dignity.

While Brathwaite begins with the rhythm of a solid moving over liquid, Walcott

begins with the water itself. While middle passages inform Walcott's poetry, he doesn't

assign them the architecture of Brathwaite's bridges. His vision of the sea is a

metaphorical gateway marked by the sea change which suggests that the paths to

ancestries are not so direct. Walcott exemplifies this rupture in *Omeros* when Achille

arrives in his ancestral village on the West Coast of Africa. Though they celebrate the

reunion, the ancestors are unrecognizable to one another. Achille explains to his

ancestor/father Alfolabe that, "Everything was forgotten. You also. I do not know. / The

deaf sea has changed around every name that you gave / us; trees, men, we yearn for a

sound that is missing" (137). It is this very fragmentation that allows Walcott to construct

the sea as a site of death, a gray vault where the sounds of names are lost, while

simultaneously identifying it as a gateway to cultural renewal. Paul Griffith observes that

Walcott approaches the sea as a "void; it is interval that disconnects temporally and

spatially and thus empathetically" (106). But, where "void" implies a lack, a more apt

descriptor might be found in Wilson Harris' characterization of the sea as a

womb. Harris' womb of the sea is a riff on his idea of the womb of space and offers an

alternate vision of the sea as a site of cultural rebirth. Just as "[Walcott's] own and

personal mythos unravels to the murmur of the sea" (Chioles 71), he turns to the sea to

locate the vernacular voice of the narrative and a poetic voice tied to place.

     In *Omeros*, like *Another Life*, Walcott begins, again, with the sea:

O was the conch-shell's invocation, *mer* was

both mother and sea in our Antillean patois,

os, a grey bone, and the white surf as it crashes. (14)

This is the I-narrator's re-sounding Omeros, following that of the girl who teaches him

the modern Greek sounding of the poet's name. Issued in his voice, it functions as an

invocation for the poem. This is not an invocation of the poet, Homer, but rather, an

invocation of Walcott's true muse, the sea. The figure of Homer can only recall the muse

to the I-narrator. The voice of the sea, at least in Walcott's imaginary, sounds like Homer.

Upon encountering his poet-guide, Walcott's I-narrator nearly insults him by admitting,

"'I never read it,' / [he] said. 'Not all the way through'" (283), thereby further suggesting

that any resemblance between their respective epics are not literary, but metaphorical. To

redeem himself, though, he adds,

     'I have always heard

your voice in that sea, master, it was the same song

of the desert shaman, and when I was a boy

your name was as wide as a bay, as I walked along

> the curled brow of the surf; the word 'Homer' meant joy,
>
> joy in battle, in work, in death …' (283)

John Figueroa states that "Walcott has always admired [the] clean Homeric line [of the long hexameter line], especially when it spoke of the sea, the roaring sea" (203) and finds "that what is common to Homer and *Omeros* is … the sea, the loud sounding *poluphloisboio thalassesie*, and its moods and sounds" (212). This returns, then, to Walcott, the dreamer, keeping company with the sea. His use of Homer is tangential to his unified imaginary of the sea; the association he draws between the sea and the poet's voice, and possibly the epic visions produced by his poetry, is Walcott's own private reverie based in the contemplation of water. He makes the deliberate connection between the reading and writing of the environment with the reading and writing of a written text. The sea is a text to be read as well as written, and as such, it serves as an ur-text in Walcott's mythopoeia. In *Another Life*, he also refers to the conch shell as a the vehicle for alternative historical narratives:

> that child who puts the shell's howl to his ear,
>
> hears nothing, hears everything
>
> that the historian cannot hear, the howls
>
> of all the races that crossed the water … (285)

The sounding of the conch shell brings forth the sea-stories Walcott hears in the sea. In doing so, it also provides the breath of the poem's narrative voice. Walcott establishes the rhythm of *Omeros* in time with the sea. He sustains the *terza rima* pattern established in the invocation throughout the entire poem as though the movement of sea were the

driving force of the poem. Paul Breslin remarks on Walcott's "loose

approximation of Dante's tightly woven terza rima" in which "there is no consistent

pattern of linking rhyme to bind the tercets together … [and] occasionally a word splits in

two at the line break to accommodate a rhyme" (245). He attributes these inconsistencies

in rhyme and meter to Walcott's evocation of "the texture of creole traditions, stretching

to accommodate many influences [of] both high and low [cultures]" (245). I would

suggest, however, that such rhyme and meter is consistent with the rhythmic

inconsistencies of the sea. Waves swell in the open ocean or break in shallow water at the

shore at varying speeds and intensities. This possibility is likely; the narrative of *Omeros*

ends once everyone, not only Achille, but also the I-Narrator, and Seven Seas, has left the

beach. But, as Walcott says in the concluding line, "the sea was still going on" (325). The

poem does not end because there is resolution at the level of plot, but rather because the

poet takes leave of the sea. Though the poet's rhythm is interrupted, even if only for a

moment, the sea does not break its stride.

Since "men are bound by their work" (47), as Walcott says in *Omeros*, he finds

his corollary in the fishermen, who also plumb the depths of the sea and whose lives are

thoroughly in sync with the rhythms of the sea. They were the chosen, "whom Jesus first

drew to His net" ("Twilight" 15). As such, they are the first men of Walcott's epic:

"Theirs was a naked, pessimistic life, crusted with the dirty spume of beaches. They were

a sect which had evolved its own signs, a vocation which excluded the stranger … in the

'New Aegean' the race, of which these fisherman were the stoics, had grown a fatal

adaptability" ("Twilight" 15). These types, with whom Walcott shares a common bond in

the sea, appear as the heroes of Walcott's poetry. They are humans, and take to

the sea in response to some personal struggle, most commonly the failure of an intimate

relationship or a conflict over some aspect of their composite identities. In "The Schooner

Flight," Shabine, "a rusty head sailor with sea-green eyes" (364), is a human hero, not a

god, confronting the origins of his identity and the material conditions of his existence.

His introduction in the middle of the passage "Adios, Carenage" traces the various

elements that have left a mark on his character: Dutch, African, English, colonial

education, postcolonial nationalism(s), and the sea:

> I'm just a red nigger who love the sea,
>
> I had a sound colonial education,
>
> I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me …. (346)

In this profile the sea is among the most nativizing elements of his identity. With the

eyes and spirit of the sea, the description of Shabine emphasizes the degree to which the

sea is figured as part of a genealogical inheritance as much as any other blood line. The

sea shapes his character at least as much as, if not more than any colonial institution of

learning. Incarnations of "Shabine" appear in other poems, appearing in various guises

(and often as what appears to be Walcott's alter ego) and indentifying himself by diverse

parentage of the place. Accordingly, the tool of the hero's power in "The Schooner

Flight" is his poetry. His power of action resides in his pen. Shabine's major battle is

fought on the deck of the *Flight* when a crewmate steals his notebook of poetry. His

action, however, is symbolic; it is the creative action of the poet. Achille, from *Omeros*,

is also an unlikely hero: he has no overtly heroic qualities as he is a poor fisherman,

recently left by his lover, Helen, and facing the possibility that encroaching capitalism on the island will alienate him from the sea. Like Shabine, the sea is an integral part of his identity. It is his unwavering commitment to the sea, unlike Hector who leaves the sea behind to drive a tourist taxi, that marks him for the gods. His strength to remain true to a native St. Lucian way of living with the sea gives him a unique possibility to be touched by the divine.

Walcott's fisherman-heroes are portrayed as deeply spiritual in their communion with the sea. They find faith in nature, rather than institutions. The sea for them is a sanctuary, a space of contemplation, or a submarine cathedral. Walcott poeticizes the consecration of the sea through deep-water vision-quest scenes in which the heroes' spiritual sensibilities lead them to seek the divine underwater. In "The Schooner *Flight*," Shabine narrates:

> …In the rapturous deep
>
> there was no cleft rock where my soul could hide
>
> like the boobies each sunset, no sandbar of light
>
> where I could rest, like the pelicans know,
>
> so I go raptures once, and I saw God
>
> like a harpooned grouper bleeding, and a far
>
> voice was rumbling, "Shabine, if you leave her,
>
> if you leave her, I shall give you the morning star."
>
> (II.7)

Under the sea, his soul is laid bare and he experiences rapture and a revelation

regarding his moral life. God presents himself to Shabine in the form of a grouper.

Though the language suggests a pressure-induced hallucination, this is not simply an

illusion; it is representative of a strong faith in the sancity of the space. In *Omeros*,

Achille has a similar confrontation with his spiritual self below the sea. While Shabine

encounters God, Achille's revelation is described in less overtly religious terms, though it

is equally spiritual and profound, and possibly more transcendental. With a prayer, he

descends to plunder the mythical wreckages of gold-filled galleons, "relic[s that]

converted the village / who came to believe that circling frigates hovered over the relic"

(43). Unlike God in the grouper, the galleon is an illusion; one day Achille sees its

"vaults of silvery mackerel," but by the next, "the wreck vanished with all hope of

Helen" (46). This vision is really about breaking with the mythos of historical record and

provides Achille with the understanding that his earthly needs in the present cannot be

met here: "This was a not a world meant for the living, he thought" (45). Though he

descends into these depths with the hope of plundering coins from mythical ships, it is

unattainable. The myth of History, like the myth and image of the galleon filled with

silver, is an illusion. He is not meant to pursue the false idols of this cathedral. Instead, he

comes to see the deep waters as an encounter with the horrors of crossing:

> The shreds of the ocean's floor passed him from corpses
>
> that had perished in the crossing, their hair like weeds,
>
> their bones were long coral fingers, bubbles of eye
>
> watched him, a brain-coral gurgled their words,

and every bubble englobed a biography,

no less than the wine-bottle's mouth, but for Achille,

treading the mulch floor of the Caribbean Sea,

no coins were enough to repay its deep evil.

(45-46)

By acknowledging this past for what it is, rather that its mythical allure, Achille emerges "clear-headed as the sea" (46) and focused on the present. He "lo[ses] faith in any fictional ship" (46), and becomes grounded in the place. Achille's journey to Africa, a journey across the sea that is also depicted as a descent to the sea floor, further roots him in a Caribbean present. He travels to his ancestral past, but cannot accept that this Africa is his home. Even though he found "peace / on the waveless river, … the surf [of his native St. Lucia] roared in his head" (141). In such confrontations with the sea and the human suffering entombed in the water, Walcott's mortal heroes are touched by the divine and demonstrate the sanctity of the sea as a transcendental space. While "creation paradigm [in myth] gives us the idea of facing up to primordial chaos," Laurence Coupe explains that "[t]he hero paradigm [in myth] gives us the possibility of a human protagonist acting with superhuman power" (48). In some cases, such as those created in Walcott's poetry, that superhuman power is "the power to live without regret" (Coupe 48). Achille's and Shabine's interactions with the sea do not give them superhuman powers, but rather, prompt a spiritual revelation that allows them to confront primordial chaos and act with the superhuman power to live without regret of the past.

The heroes of Walcott's poetry reveal a cosmology—part sacred, part secular—submerged beneath the sea. This cosmology is partially of Walcott's own mythic design, but is also based upon pre-existing spiritual beliefs linked to the sea. This is an important aspect of Walcott's epic-minded poetry because it brings together the geographical and religious intertexts for his place-based poetic mytho-history. Walcott explains, "epic poetry cannot exist without a religion; It is the beginning of poetry in the New World" ("Muse" 47). Caribbean religion demonstrates that the sea is central to ordering this world. Benítez-Rojo cites the supersyncretic artifact of the cult of the Virgin de la Caridad de la Cobre, the patroness of Cuba who appeared to three men in a boat off the coast, as an example of the transculturation that resulted from the intersection of Amerindian, African, and European mytho-religiosity.[47] He describes "the triptych Atabey-Nuestra Senora [de la Caridad del Cobre]-Oshun" (13) as an "originating" myth that accounts for the beginnings of a new aquatic culture of the Peoples of the Sea, and traces these three entities into earlier manifestations. The transformative processes through which Nuestra Señora and Oshun (or Yemaya, the Yoruba goddess of the sea who has her own manifestations as Nuestra Señora) become corollaries is a known history of transculturation, but the aspect of this story that connects to an even deeper time leverl is Atabey, the Taino manifestation of the Arawak mother of the waters,

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[47] This myth, based on actual events alleged to occur around 1609, describes an event in which the Virgin appears, in statue form, to two indigenous brothers and a nine-or ten-year-old slave boy as they recover their bearings at sea (off the North coast of Cuba) after surviving a tempest while on what was intended to be a brief excursion by boat to collect salt. To me, this vignette speaks to the conversion of Indigenous and Africans to Catholicism, but betrays that this conversion is incomplete: because the Virgin appears as a statue not as a women it seems that while there is a definite acceptance of the faith's iconography, the acceptance of the tenets of the faith are still in question.

Orehu, who originated in the Guyanas (13).[48] This component recalls "the

grand epic of the Arawaks; the departure from the Amazonian basin, the ascension of the

Orinoco, the arrival at the Caribbean coast, the meticulous settlement of each island until

arriving at Cuba" (13). In Vodun cosmology, the sea is also a mytho-religious geography.

As Maya Deren explains in *Divine Horsemen*, in Vodun the Island beneath the Sea is

where the "loa have their permanent residence, their primal location. To it the souls of the

dead return, taking marine or insect forms until their reclamation into the world, their

rebirth, as if the ancient myth had anticipated the statements of evolutionary science"

(Deren 36). This island beneath the sea is a non-specific place. Though it cannot be

located on a map or be physically reached, it exists in the psyche. Deren's documentary

film by the same title shows devotees preparing a banquet feast for the gods upon a raft

that they will release from a sailboat into the sea. The footage of the raft moving toward

the horizon is striking in that the raft disappears, without a trace, as soon as it hits the

horizon. It disappears quickly as through the ancestors and god on the Island beneath the

Sea snatch it from the water's surface. Such myth reveals the creative imagination of the

collective as they work out the conditions of their existence. This is the transcendental

space that Walcott's heroes face in their respective dives. In "The Schooner *Flight*," the

sailor-poet "Shabine[, sings] to you from the depths of the sea" (361). The same hallowed

ground where he finds God and infinity:

     … this Caribbean so choke with the dead

---

[48] Benitez-Rojo implies that Orehu was a single divinity, whereas Deren's appendix, the details of which are largely attributed to Hartley Burr Alexander's "The Mythology of All Races," explains that the Orehu were "water sprites, or mermaids" (274). They have a corollary in Vodun's Water People, "spirits of the Petro group, which are sometimes good but sometimes drag or entice the victim to the bottom of the water" (275).

that when I would melt in emerald water,

whose ceiling rippled like a silk tent,

I saw them corals: brain, fire, sea- fans,

dead-men's-fingers, and then, the dead men.

In singing his sea story from the watery depths, the hero joins in the chorus of drowned voices inhabiting infinity. He, too, becomes entextualized in the submarine monuments of human bone grafted to coral. The hero sings from the past, but envisions the possibilities of a future, and situates the sea as a primordial space; "first friend was the sea. Now, is my last" (361). The "primitive" religious thinking this draws from informs the human impulse towards understanding their experiences, behaviors, and practices as part of a larger cosmic or social order. This cosmology specifically draws on the geographical, historical, and material circumstances of crossing the Atlantic under duress and coming to inhabit a sea of island, a pattern well established in the very real way that Amerindians inhabited the archipelago prior to the encounter.

This visitation to the site of originary experience, a variation on the Island beneath the Sea where the gods live and the dead return, is something of a ritualized descent to the site of collective memory. This motif of the submarine monuments of bone grafted to coral, in particular, is traceable through a range of texts. It seems to have become a convention of Caribbean poetry employed in a similar manner that ancient poets relied on stock phrases. Stock phrases, such as "swift-footed Achilles," or stock images, such as the "rosy-fingered dawn," were used and revised by oral poets as a way to remember and

reinterpret stories (Konstan and Raaflaub 2).[49] Used in this context, such

phrases signal the vestiges of oral performance practices out of which the Caribbean epic

emerges. Replicating aspects of the oral tradition in which each poet rephrases the

narrative during epic recitals or performances, making it new with each re-telling. Such

repetition solidifies meaning for the collective. The earliest reference I find in Walcott's

work is in the 1964 poem "A Sea-Chantey," in which he writes:

> The histories of schooners
>
> Are murmured in coral,
>
> Their cargoes of sponges
>
> On sandspits of islets … (45).

However, an earlier articulation of this motif, a unpoeticized precedent to this image,

might be in George Lamming's *The Pleasures of Exile*, where he anthropomorphizes a

submarine geology:

> None but geologists can now conceive the years, lost by the millions, before that
>
> huge, continous family of mountains broke and fell beneath the sea. Long
>
> submerged, it has left an archipelago of peaks like a swarm of green children
>
> patiently awaiting its return. (16)

This archetypal image of Caribbean geomythography is redeployed by Brathwaite

through *The Arrivants* as a means of claiming an identity and a place. In "Caliban," a

poem in the 1969 collection *Islands,* Brathwaite examines the watery grave, but in this

case, as the origins of civilization:

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[49] Two of my sources make this same point, using the same examples in different contexts, about the use of stock images in the performance process of ancient epic poetry. See Coupe, *Myth*, p. 93 and Konstan and Raaflaub, *Epic and History*, pg. 2.

> and now I see that these modern places have grown
>
> …, out of the living bone of coral, these dead
>
> towers … (191)

Brathwaite reconfigures this motif as the frequently quoted phrase from *Contradictory Omens*: "The unity is submarine" (64). This expression refers to the underwater mountain range that connects the archipelago, but its efficacy lies in the link it creates between material geography and metaphor. Glissant interprets Brathwaite's coinage to advance a theory of relation, whereby the continuities from ancestors and traditions lost to this watery grave and those that survived the passage serve as the primordial roots of the civilization. In *Caribbean Discourse*, he explains,

> To my mind, this expression ["the unity is submarine"] can only evoke all those Africans weighed down with ball and chain and thrown overboard whenever a slave ship was pursued by enemy vessels and felt too weak to put up a fight. Submarine roots; that is floating free, not fixed in one position in some primordial spot, but extending in all directions in our world through its network of branches. (67)

The repetition of this motif moves from historical non-fiction, through poetry, into philosophy, migrating through a Caribbean discourse in such a way that it demonstrates the evolution of a memory. By claiming the historical memory of transatlantic crossings, a "patterned movement remembered by bodies" (Roach 26), Caribbean discourse transcends the dislocations and entanglements of History. It is a gesture that also

reinvests written culture with the craft of oral traditions. As Walcott explains in

"The Muse of History,"

> In an oral tradition the mode is simple, the response open-ended, so that each new
>
> poet can add his lines to the form, a process very much like weaving or the dance,
>
> based on the concept that the history of the tribe is endless. (47)

Each of these artists re-interprets and re-presents not only the oral form, but also the

mythos of the sea. Their writing is linked to an embodied practice; it is akin to a physical

activity like weaving or dance. It is telling, too, that all of these artists, regardless of the

historical context or genre of their artistic intervention, repeatedly characterize the

genesis of Caribbean culture as an experience written into the seascape if not written into

a book.

By way of conclusion, I would like to make some final statements on the

influence of the sea on Walcott's imagination and poetic process. Walcott's epic-minded

poetry is an act of memory, one that solidifies collective memory of the past in order to

create meaning in the present. All of this, he pulls from the sea. Walcott's contemplation

of the seascape produces a visual and aural energy that drives his poetry. Paul Breslin

actually finds that "what *startles*" in Walcott's poetry "is the literalness with which he

presents art as natural energy, [especially] in an age acutely aware of the artificiality of

language, and in a poem whose own Homeric analogies could hardly be more flagrantly

artificial" (271; my emphasis). But for Walcott, who has apprenticed himself to this

living sea as much as any poetic tradition, the vitality of the matter itself invigorates his

metaphor and meaning. The sea swift is the projection of his psyche. In following her

flight across the horizon, Walcott stitches together the elements that compose

the place of the sea and the muse of his poetry. The contemplation of the seascape

transports the poet, allowing him to enter the fluvial movements of mytho-history and the

imagination.

Chapter 3

'And how did I hone my skills as a narrator?': Landscapes of the Imagination and the
Novel of the Guyanas

The Guyana Shield, or the Guyanas, occupies the borderlands of Guyana, Brazil,

and Venezuela and is situated around the Pacaraima Ridge, Mount Roraima, and "the

improbable hydrography that joins the Amazon and Orinoco river systems" (Sá xv). As a

site of enactment,[50] the Guyanas are a chronotope of environmental history, Carib

philosophy and tradition, and Western conquest, exploration, and exploitation. The

sedimentation of these perspectives and experiences manifests itself in the physical place

and composes the cultural autobiography of the region. The Guyanas, then, are a liminal

space: a space where encounter, cross-cultural communication, and invariably,

mistranslation occur. Here, I discuss four novels written from this interstitial space,

Mário de Andrade's *Macunaíma* (1928), Alejo Carpentier's *The Lost Steps (Los Pasos*

Perdidos) (1953), Wilson Harris' *Palace of the Peacock* (1960), and Pauline Melville's

The Ventriloquist's Tale (1998), as works that combine the voices and narrative practices

that converge at this site. Following Lúcia Sá's efforts to recover indigenous literatures

embedded in mainstream Spanish American and Brazilian texts and Dennis Tedlock's

analysis and transcription of indigenous verbal arts as dramatic texts, I read these novels,

"listening" for the indigenous voice. By indigenous voice or presence, I mean to describe

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[50] I use the term enactment to indicate performance, according to the following definition of enact: "To
represent (a dramatic work, a 'scene') on or as on the stage; to personate (a character) dramatically; play (a
part); also *fig.* with reference to real life; …to perform." See "enact" at oed.com.

the themes of indigenous narrative and the forms that characterize Amerindian

literary practice.[51] Such narrative themes and practices are focused on embodiment, not

only the embodied discourses and memories of oral literature, but also the embodied

experiences of the Amazonian lowlands that inform Amerindian cosmology. My analysis

explores the incursions depicted in these novels as a remapping of historically

documented physical incursions into the Guyanas. In retracing the steps and discursive

interventions of the explorers of El Dorado, the naturalist-scientists, and the

ethnographer-anthropologists, twentieth-century writers seek opportunities to activate the

indigenous voice and use the dramatic techniques of actual and theoretical performance

as a way of knowing and as a way of showing. The reenactment of this journey into and

out of the forest, the repetition of the "patterned movements remembered by bodies"

(Roach 26), and the interpolation of the place practically become a ritual

theatricalization.[52] I argue that the novel of the Guyanas—a genre represented by these

four works written in different languages and from different nations—is a fusion of

techniques drawn from a "mythic" oral literature, a "scientific" written literature, and a

discourse of nature itself. As such, these novels might be read as works of dramatic

literature. My ultimate purpose is to recontextualize how these four novels are read by

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[51] My use of the term Amerindian is general because Native American literary and intellectual traditions are often inferred from the key texts of a single tribe. For example, Tedlock's *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*, is a close reading of the ancient Guatemalan text *Popol Vuh*, but his insights on narrative form and transcription of verbal arts can be extended to other Amerindian populations because all groups engaged in some form of oral literary practice.

[52] Such approaches are ultimately performative; however, each representation of these embodied intertexts reflects the aesthetic and critical trends of their respective eras and ranges from the political in *Macunaíma*, the problematic in *The Lost Steps,* the visionary in *Palace of the Peacock*, and the socio-political realism in *The Ventriloquist's Tale*.

pointing to their engagements with a body of performed indigenous literatures and a discourse of nature that seems most accessible through embodied narrative techniques.

Any intervention in the canonical literature written from the Guyanas would be incomplete without Roberto González Echevarría's seminal argument in *Myth and Archive* that the Latin American novel is based upon early non-fiction writing, primarily the hegemonic discourses of legal and scientific doctrine. *Myth and Archive* was among the first critical texts to examine the dualities of history and myth with legal and scientific doctrine in this region's novel—a form that he argues evolves from non-literary written texts that sought to document actual life. His investigation into "the etiology of novelistic forms in Latin America since the colonial period" is inspired by "the novel's malleability, which seemed … chameleon-like in its ability to blend in with other discourses" (*Myth and Archive* x). His study explores Latin American fiction's turn to the hegemonic discourses of legal documentation, modern science, and anthropology as shaping forces in a narrative of the mythic origins of the region's culture and civilization. Following González Echevarría's example, I will explore the "textual environment" (*Myth and Archive* xi) from which the novel of the Guyanas emerges. I read the genre as archival fiction, an intertextual literary form that vacillates between history and myth. However, I advance the idea that there is fluidity between written texts, the archive of enduring materials, and oral texts, the repertoire of embodied experiences (Taylor 19).[53] Scientific

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[53] In *Archive and Repertoire*, Diana Taylor distinguishes "the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e. texts, documents, buildings, bones) [from] the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e. spoken language, dance, sports, ritual)" (19; emphasis mine). In "*Theatre of the*

and legal documents report on the performed actions of encounter, but the

representations in these documents are typically biased to a European perspective.

Nevertheless, an indigenous discourse is often embedded within these texts. My interest

here lies in tracing the indigenous discourse, or rather, tracing the attempts of various

authors working in the linguistic and nationally distinct traditions that intersect in the

Guyanas to represent the indigenous discourse that is written into the place.

I build upon Lúcia Sá's *Rain Forest Literatures*, a work of scholarship that

follows the lead of Gordon Brotherston's less well-known approach to the Latin

American novel by bringing indigenous literature into dialogue with canonical texts.[54] Sá

challenges González Echevarría's privileging of legal and scientific source texts by

illuminating the largely overlooked indigenous texts and narrative practices embedded,

not only in key works of Latin American modernist literature, but also in the

anthropological, ethnographic, and scientific texts that contribute to them. Sá explains

that, despite the ideologies that shape the written versions of narratives native to the

Guyanas,[55] these fragments of a literary tradition are the most extensive archive of

information that has been otherwise preserved by memory and interpreted through

performance. According to Sá "[t]he native voice has to be listened for, and is usually

heard in the form of short dialogues, indirect quotations, speech formulas, and more

rarely, songs" (xv). One of the foundational tenets of her project reconsiders the

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Arts: Caribbean Intertextuality and the Muse of Place," I use these key terms to establish a language for understanding the simultaneity of cultural production in the Americas.
[54] See Brotherston's *The Emergence of the Latin American Novel* (1975) and *Book of the Fourth World: Reading the Native Americas Through Their Literature* (1993).
[55] Sá's scholarship focuses on Spanish American and Brazilian literature, but not Anglophone literature. The Guyanas is that spatial configuration that I have designated to bridge these linguistically and nationally distinct traditions.

categories of myth, history, and literature by arguing that Amerindian oral

traditions constitute a body of literature that is expressed through songs, speeches, and

narrative cycles. Sá limits her discussion of the oral form of these literary texts,

explaining that, for her, orality is a secondary issue; it is in their written form that their

content and the cosmogony they advance are most accessible for comparison and

analysis.

Nevertheless, Sá's efforts in archiving an Amerindian oral literature raise

questions about the aesthetics of this body of work and how it relates to the literature

rooted in González Echevarría's more commonly recognized archive. Sá's project is at

the forefront of scholarship written in English that reads across the linguistic traditions

and national boundaries of Spanish America and Brazil to expose the textual politics of

the European scientific, anthropologic, and ethnographic texts that have "written" the

region. Rather than dismiss these narratives as artifacts of an exploitative culture, she

suggests that they are valuable for what they reveal through their author's interactions

with native informants and for what they reveal about Amerindian cultural practices. Sá's

reading of canonical texts is motivated by the fact that there is still little acknowledgment

of the extent to which twentieth-century writers ransacked chronicles of exploration

looking for indigenous characters, themes, and narrative strategies. Many critics still do

not recognize European chronicles as valuable archives of an Amerindian repertoire, and

also discount the way indigenous cultures figure into the major works of Latin American

fiction, such as Andrade's *Macunaíma* (Sá xiv). The impetus for Sá's book, in fact, is that

there continues to be a lack of scholarship that reads this body of literature for its

connections to indigenous literature, instead focusing on its links to Western

texts. Sá's investigation into Amerindian texts prompts contemporary readers, like

myself, to re-read texts from this region, "listening" for fragments of this indigenous

voice and narrative.

Twentieth-century fiction from the Latin American continent is generally

characterized as a clash between the imaginative habits[56] of a Western culture and those

of indigenous culture. I use the term Western to describe a specific point of view, an

ideology; as Édouard Glissant defines it in *Caribbean Discourse*, "the West is a project,

not a place" (2). This imaginative clash, in my estimation, is situated around the difficulty

in representing the impact of an environment that overwhelms humans. In characterizing

the human response to an immersion in this landscape, John Hemming explains, "Human

beings are overawed by the Amazon. We are humbled by the scale of everything—the

volume of the rivers, the extent of the forests, the exuberance of nature in the world's

most diverse ecosystem" (325). Wilson Harris corroborates the profound impact of the

environment in describing his first expedition into the Cuyuni River interior as a

"revelation," the dimensions of which he could only sense: "multitudinous forests I had

never seen before, the whisper or sigh of a tree with a tone or rhythm I had never known,

real (it seemed) and unreal footsteps in the shoe of a cracking branch, mysterious play in

the rivers at nights, distant rain bringing the sound of approaching fire in the whispering

leaves, horses' hooves on water on rock, the barks of dogs of technology in the bruised

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[56] Carpentier uses the term "imaginative habits" in "Vision de América" to comment on the inadequacy of a Western sphere of influences in imaginatively engaging an American landscape. He writes: "The imaginative habits of my Western culture make me invoke, straightaway, Macbeth's castle or Klingsor castle. But no. Such fancies are inadmissible, since so limited, in this corner of virgin America" (276 qtd. in Sá 79).

tumult of a waterfall" (D'Aguiar). As his description indicates, Harris sees

this landscape as a "landscape of the imagination" ("The Amerindian Legacy" 174-75)

that inspires its own discourse and perceptive reality. In their respective narrative

traditions, Amerindians and Europeans are registering their responses to a discourse of

nature and attempting to locate their place in relation to it. Here, I will describe the three

distinct discourses that constitute the narrative strains of this living landscape, the

discourses of nature, Amerindians, and Europeans, in order to demonstrate the

epistemologies that converge in this theater of place.[57]

The Guyanas are possibly the most diverse zone of the Amazonian bioregion,

possessing several distinct ecosystems and holding over half of the earth's species of

flora and fauna, many of which have yet to be identified. It is an extreme environment. It

is an expanse of lowland forests, mountains, wetlands, and savannas situated between the

Amazon and Orinoco Rivers and covering nearly the entire northeast corner of South

America (Hammond 1). It is extremely dense with natural life. The foliage is so thick that

a man walking on the forest floor cannot tell if it is day or night. Mário de Andrade

describes this density in contextualizing a vignette from *Macunaíma*: "When it is daytime

above the forest canopy, it still dark as night on the ground in the midst of the forest, a

poor fellow can hardly see to walk" (124-25).[58] Multitudes of animal species, secretively

tucked into and indistinguishable from the foliage, perpetually seek refuge from predators

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[57] The discussion I develop in the following paragraphs is limited to the aspects of natural history, Amerindian literature and cosmology, and European explorers and chroniclers that are most relevant to my discussion of Andrade's *Macunaíma*, Carpentier's *The Lost Steps*, Harris' *Palace of the Peacock*, and Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale*.

[58] According to the myth cycle as presented by Andrade, this is the consequence of a terrible row instigated by a puma who morphs into a jaguar: "The songbirds were shriveled up with fright, and the night drew a deep breath and swooned," thereby leaving the forest floor dark (124).

of any kind. As Hemming concedes, "A stranger entering the forest sees none

of this profusion of fauna. Everything is too well camouflaged, or far overhead, or

nocturnal, or shy, or fast-moving" (Hemming 335). The invisible density of life in this

environment makes it appears inhabited by presences, but primarily unidentifiable ones.

Because of this profusion of life, the forest possesses almost infinite possibilities of

deception and regeneration. It quickly obscures its history, leaving only the vestigial

traces of previous eras and the inevitable repetition of events.[59] David S. Hammond

describes it as "ancient land in a modern world" because its geological origins are

traceable "to the earliest days of life itself" (1). Though the land holds geological

evidence of its past, it shows relatively "few signs of recent human modification" (1). Of

course, in the case of this ancient forest, "recent" is a relative concept. Nevertheless, its

general sustainability over the course of its interaction with its human inhabitants is

ultimately a testament to its regenerative capabilities. It has cycled through moments of

unthreatened sustenance, or what is perceived as "primitivism," "savagery," and

"decline" by Western standards of social Darwinism and commodification, only to find

itself re-conquered and exploited in the next. Its greatest defense lies primarily in its

inhospitable environment. In spite of its apparent fecundity, the Guyana Shield is "an

extremely infertile tropical landscape" which has historically "constrained" its inhabitants

to such a degree that they moved frequently and were not able "to achieve higher social

complexity" (Hammond 381). In the site's re-naturalization of itself as a response to

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[59] Interestingly enough, however, with the exceptions of the decimation of indigenous populations—a veritable holocaust, as David Stannard describes it—and the extinction of river turtles, none of these cycles has had a significant biogeographical impact on the Amazon, until now. Deforestation from mining, oil prospecting, and the logging industry is having irreversible effects on the landscape.

human efforts to denaturalize it, the interior of the Guyanas demonstrates "the essence of that which constitutes a forest ecosystem: change" (Hammond 3). This perpetual transformation gives the physical environment a presence of its own that sustains a dialogue with both its inhabitants and visitors.

This living landscape is the basis for the philosophies and traditions of indigenous people who developed their own distinct languages, lifestyles, and cultural practices, in order to sustainably exist in the Guyanas. The indigenous cultures of the Guyanas are Carib, but they are divided into culturally and linguistically distinct tribes such as Macuxi, Pemon, and So'to. Though these tribes developed independently and would come to find themselves inhabiting separate nation-states, their ancestral origins make it possible to understand a "shared experience" among between them at a deeper time level (Sá xviii). Their myths and cosmology are the outgrowth of their immersion in this place, reflecting a geographical imaginary situated around Roraima and a strong sense of adaptation that stems from living in cooperation with infertile tropical lowland. They were known as travelers who not only traversed the region, but did so as a means of sustenance. For example, the Pemon were known to walk several hours from their homes to set-up and tend to their gardens on more fertile land (Sá 32). The constant change associated with forest ecosystems and the regenerative capabilities of flora and fauna resonate in their view of origins and the importance they place on adaptability. As Sá explains, "[i]n this [tropical lowland view of the world], we find emphasis placed not on a single definitive creation … but on multiple genesis, dreamings into existence, metamorphoses and ongoing transformations of the world after its usually problematic

beginnings" (xvii). Cultural heroes, like the Pemon trickster Makunaíma, are

agents of change and celebrated for their "adaptability and capacity for transformation,"

more so than their conformity to any "rigid conceptions of bad and good" (Sá 22). The

way in which Amerindians inhabit this natural world also influences their outlook on

their place within it. Unlike Western thought which celebrates man's dominion over the

plant and animal world, inhabitants of the Amazon celebrate "human kinship with other

species rather than our absolute difference from them, communion with the great jaguars,

snakes, even plants; agriculture … and harvest; means of curing; hospitality as a social

priority" (Sá xvii). This animistic consciousness is informed by the necessity to adapt to

and blend in with surroundings for survival and a general appreciation for coexistence of

man with his physical environment. In literature, the animism of this cosmology

manifests itself in fantastic descriptions of people and situations.

  The arrival of European conquistadors, missionaries, and explorers introduced

less symbiotic elements into this theater of place. Interestingly enough, however, with the

exceptions of the decimation of indigenous populations—a veritable holocaust, as David

Stannard describes it—and the extinction of river turtles, none of these cycles has had a

significant biogeographical impact on the Amazon, until now. Deforestation from

mining, oil prospecting, and the logging industry is having irreversible effects on the

landscape. Their physical presence alone had little impact on the biogeography of the

place; however, the most significant consequence of this presence, that is, the act that

changed the course of the region's history and ecological destiny, was the discursive

intervention and interpolation of the place that would establish new, less cooperative,

attitudes about land use. In the early to mid-1500s, the Spanish began their

quest for El Dorado, embarking upon reconnaissance trips up the Orinoco looking for the

mythic city of gold, the lake around which it was built, and its famed ruler. Antonio de

Berrio best represents the mania with which the Spanish pursued this vision and quest

that was taken up by the English by the end of the 1500s when Sir Walter Raleigh began

his lifelong mission to find El Dorado. The personal records from these incursions

provide significant information about the people and nature of the place, but the

information-seeking "scientific" incursions into the forest began in earnest when

naturalists like the German Alexander von Humboldt carried out the first documented

incursion into the Guyana Shield at the start of the 1800s. He traveled the upper Rio

Negro, but, by his account, he saw nothing: no settlements, no culture, and no

monuments of past civilizations (Hemming). What he did see, however, was an

uncultivated landscape, an untamed nature—the sublime. This is particular way of seeing

established a new discourse that romanticized the Guyanas as a primal forest that housed

primitive man. The German-British naturalist Richard Schomburghk carried with him all

the romanticism of his predecessor when he revisited the site of Humboldt's journey. But

where Humboldt saw nothing, Schomburghk saw a profusion of flora and fauna to be

collected, catalogued, and commodified for colonial powers. Schomburghk's extensive

survey of the region, conducted with his brother Robert, "put to rest" any belief in a

golden city, that was still depicted as a specific site on European maps even as late as the

mid-nineteenth century (Hammond 406). Between 1838-39, Schomburghk returned to

this general area, traveling the savannahs surrounding Mount Roraima and the forested

rivers of the Rio Branco and the upper Orinoco collecting specimens and

surveying the landscape (Hemming 254). He wrote of his journey in *Reisen in Britisch-Guiana*, which was widely disseminated and translated into English by Walter Roth as *Travels in British Guiana*. Between 1911-13, German anthropologist Theodor Koch-Grünberg retraced this journey, traveling in the same manner as Schomburghk, "guided and paddled by Indians … who know every rock, rapids and bend of this labyrinth" (Hemming 254). From these native informants, in particular, two Pemon Carib Indians who were known shamans and storytellers among their people, Koch-Grünberg collected the most comprehensive collection of Pemon Carib literature. His chronicle provides the most comprehensive account of the Pemon genesis story cycle of Makunaíma, "the epic hero who felled the tree which once joined earth and sky" (Brotherston 163). However, this body of work is integrated into his travelogue and filtered through his interpretation of events, an interpretation that was published as *Vom Roroima zum Orinico* (1924).

As both the Amerindian and European engagements with the Guyanas indicate, the physical environment has a profound effect on humans and therefore comes to occupy a significant presence in their respective narratives. The Amerindians felt the magnitude of the physical environment and consequently located themselves as a single component within the symbiotic relationships that sustained it. Their will, if not subjugated by, was at least on par with that of the natural and animal life with which they co-existed. Their embodied memories tell the story of their movements though and immersions in the place. As a result of this attention to emplacement, or being in situ, Amerindian narrative offers insight into the cultural landscape of Roraima at a deeper time level. Europeans,

however, arriving in this foreign land with Western belief in man's dominion

over nature and a cosmology that places humans at the center of life on earth, had quite

the opposite reaction to the disorientation the physical environment inspired in them.

They sought to tame the flora and fauna, which, in a cruel and ironic adaptation of

Amerindian belief, included the Amerindians. They exerted power over the land through

profit-seeking exploitations as well as through their efforts to explain their experience of

natural phenomena in rational terms. Their written texts attempt to impose order and

reason on the environment through naming, collecting, and cataloging.

Andrade's *Macunaíma,* Carpentier's *The Lost Steps*, Harris' *Palace of the*

Peacock, and Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale* draw from these Amerindian and

European intertexts by actively entering the archive and the repertoire of this living

landscape and by mimicking the spatial trajectories of quest or journey narratives. The

spatial trajectories inhabited in Carpentier's *The Lost Steps* and Harris' *Palace of the*

Peacock depict outsiders traveling into the forest rivers of the Amazon and situate these

novels in pre-existing histories of El Dorado incursions into the interior. Andrade's

Macunaíma and Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale,* however, are about insiders

journeying out of the forest to engage with the metropolis. The path to El Dorado is

reversed: the journey begins in the rainforest, moving away from the perceived

primitivism of the "dark interior" and into the perceived modernity of the cosmopolitan

metropole. In reversing this spatial trajectory, these authors dismantle notions of the

primitive experience represented in travel writing and insert an interpellation of the

interior and the metropole according to indigenous cosmology. Each of these authors read

canonical interventions into this place looking for moments where the texts

reveal the voices of an unarticulated "other." However, they also engage in a process of

reading into the physical environment, searching for evidence of an indigenous presence

and seeking spaces to intuit the discourse of nature. This immersion in and reading of the

landscape presents these authors with an artifactual landscape that asserts itself as a

presence or a character in its own right. To varying degrees, Andrade, Carpentier, Harris,

and Melville create, or re-create, the poetic dimensions of this voice through

experimentation with narrative and metaphor. Harris calls such trials of the imagination

that are intended to unlock and animate the spirit of a place, ventriloquisms of the spirit

("Continuity and Discontinuity" 178). It is an actual engagement with and animation of

the voices embedded in the living landscape. The various ventriloquisms of spirit

represented in these four novels demonstrate the challenges these authors face when

attempting to represent, or transcribe the performance traditions of oral literature—a

genre that embodies the earliest narratives of this place.

 The literature of oral societies was "archived," or memorized, and "authored," or

interpreted, by designated storytellers, often shamans, who trained and specialized in the

improvisation and adaptation of the verbal arts. I use the modern categories of archive

and author to emphasize that the gestures of print cultures have their equivalent in oral

culture. Their interpretations were transmitted communally, thereby replacing the solitary

reader with a listening, often complicit audience. The interpretation of such oral

literature, as Dennis Tedlock describes it, requires that it is received and processed

according to the aural and embodied cues of theater, rather than the strictly visual cues of

the written text. Tedlock, and his contemporaries Dell Hymes and Jerome
Rothenberg, all anthropologists whose scholarship focuses on indigenous texts and verbal
arts, have been instrumental in bringing legibility to oral traditions by arguing for the
analytical advantages of treating oral narratives as dramatic literature (Tedlock 51). This
approach introduces the analysis of oral literature into the realm of performance studies.
In *The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation*, Tedlock creates a text that both
explains and models the challenges of representing oral literature through his description
of his process as a mythographer and in his transcription of the *Popol Vuh*.

Tedlock sees a disjuncture between the way oral traditions are represented and
"read" in comparison with written texts that function similarly. Oral narratives are
understood as always already "primitive" because they tend to be highly imaginative, but
also one-dimensional. Their themes give accounts of a "fantastic" reality that is a
reflection of the Amerindian worldview. These oral narratives also fail to describe in
words the emotional timbre of characters and situations because such details are
expressed through the gestures of the mythopoet in the performance of the story cycle.
He argues that when similar conventions are deployed in written texts, "we are apt to call
them not 'primitive' but 'dreamlike' or 'mystical' and to regard them as highly poetic"
(51). He therefore posits, "spoken narratives are better understood (and translated) as
dramatic poetry than as oral equivalents of written prose fiction" (55). He bases this
argument on his assessment that "[t]he content [of oral literature] tends toward the
fantastic rather than the prosaic, the emotions or characters are evoked rather than
described, there are patterns of repetition or parallelism ranging from the level of word"

(Tedlock 55). Tedlock, whose interest lies in the print representation of oral

literature and mytho-histories, positions himself as a mythographer. In doing so, he

provides a clear separation, or a distance, between the figure, function, and process of the

mythographer who studies and transcribes oral literature and the figure, function, and

process of the storyteller, or mythopoet, who interprets the verbal arts:

> … [T]his poet, or mythopoet, not only narrates what characters do, but speaks
>
> when they speak, chants when they chant, and sings when they sing. A story is not
>
> a genre like other genres of verbal art, but is more like a complex ceremony in
>
> miniature, encompassing aphorisms, public announcements, speeches, prayers,
>
> songs, and even other narratives. (3)

The mythopoet narrates with total immersion into the plots and characterizations of his

story, essentially channeling the action of the narrative through his very being. Moreover,

the action of oral stories develops simultaneously, without regard for sequential logic.

The telling of these stories is at times prompted by an event or occasion but just as

commonly by the arrival at a certain location or the discussion of a certain topic. Stories

are a part of a set mythic cycle, but are reinterpreted within the context of whatever

prompts the telling, giving them efficacy under contemporary circumstance. The creation

of oral literature, or the performance of stories, is thus a dramatic art.

In *The Semiotics of Performance*, Marco de Marinis defines a dramatic text as the

theoretical model of an observable performance. For example, a bound version of

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is a dramatic text; it offers a baseline for the scenery,

characterizations, dialogue, and stage directions for a staged performance, but it is not the

actualization of a performance event. A performance text is the actual

unrepeatable performance event, in which all of those elements are interpreted by a

director, actors, and designers in the staging, and then unique to the specific actualization.

The storyteller, poet, or mythopoet, who authors an interpretation in performance, serves

a very different function than the mythographer, "who inscribes a record of what the

storyteller does by voice" (3). The mythographer, then, is scribe, not author, who listens

attentively to capture the performance of the mythopoet. The interpretation of such oral

literature, as I understand Tedlock's explanation of it, requires that it is received and

processed according to the aural and embodied cues of theater, rather than the strictly

visual cues of the written text. He explains, "as the story is being told, the ear already

takes in a broader spectrum of sounds than the anxious ear that tried to hear how each

word might be *spelled*" (3). This differentiation between the listening ear and the spelling

ear suggests that an audience's reception of and response to oral literature is the response

to an actual performance. This differs from reader reception in that the audience is

processing multiple sign-systems by listening to the voice and understanding the gesture.

Tedlock emphasizes that "if the story is being told in a language that the mythographer

has only recently begun to learn, the ear will mostly hear the music of the voice, the rises

and falls of pitch and amplitude, the tone and timbre, the interaction of sounds and

silences" (3). This suggests, too, that the mythographer's role is suspended between

performance and literary traditions; his transcription or notation must preserve the

repeatable performance text, but with all of the ritualistic poetic properties of a specific

actualization. Tedlock's analogy between oral literature and music, and his discussion of

the process of listening as an act of reading, offers a rhythmic equivalent for modern audiences to understand the reception process of oral literature.

By distinguishing the position and process of the mythopoet, who composes oral literature, from the position and process of the mythographer, who seeks to translate the dramatic art of storytelling into print, Tedlock outlines meaningful differences between the creation of what he articulates as audible, or oral texts and visible, or print texts. These two distinct perspectives provide insight into the efforts of contemporary novelists as they attempt to recuperate an oral literature and invest its characteristics into written forms. Carpentier, Harris, Andrade, and Melville balance their intentions as authors and their inherited legacies of written chronicles and embodied repertoire between the roles of the oral tradition's mythopoet, who has special access to a deeper time level of the Guyanas' cultural landscape, and the mythographer, who remains suspended between traditions.

Carpentier's *The Lost Steps* is generally recognized as a turning point in the development of the novel of the Americas for its representation of a complex discursive field entextualized in the place.[60] In *Myth and Archive*, for example, González Echavarría identifies *The Lost Steps* as the founding work of "archival fiction" because of the way it deliberately engages the repetitions, re-discoveries, and fictionalizations of the discursive interventions that precede it. Indeed, the spatial trajectory inhabited by Carpentier's

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[60] Though a comparison between Joseph Conrad's incursion into the dark interior and encounter with the other in *Heart of Darkness* might be useful here to demonstrate how *The Lost Steps* departs from this type of narrative, I resist because Wilson Harris' interpretation of Conrad's novel runs counter to the standard postcolonial reading; he sees cross-cultural potential where others see the promulgation of racist stereotypes. See Helen Tiffen, "'Re-Trace My Steps': *Heartland, Heart of Darkness*, and Post-Colonial Counter-Discourse."

narrator-protagonist situates him in pre-existing histories, abstracted though

they may seem. Carpentier never specifies the geography of his novel, saying only in the

novel's preface that the sites depicted resemble La Gran Sabana and the Upper Orinoco.

Certain episodes of the novel, however, are lifted from or appropriations of

Schomburgk's travelogues (Sá 80-81) and thereby very clearly situates the novel's action

in and around Pacaraima (Brotherston 162-66). Carpentier's incursion into the Guyanas

intersects the trajectories of the explorers who also moved through this landscape and

Carpentier's phenomenal experience is filtered through their textual accounts. *The Lost

Steps* is a fictionalization of Carpentier's own unfinished travelogue, *El Libro de la Gran

Sabana*[61]—a text that betrays the influence of the chroniclers accounts on the novelist's

imaginative engagement with the place. Carpentier structures *The Lost Steps* as his hero-

protagonist's travelogue of his journey into primal forest and his encounter with the

sublime. The unnamed narrator-protagonist is an outsider, a composer from the city

whose enters the "dark interior" ostensibly to collect native instruments that prove the

origins of music. However, he perceives his journey into the jungle as a journey from the

twentieth century back in time to pre-creation—his journal entries are dated backwards to

equate the journey into the dark interior with a journey into this prehistory. In a state of

spacio-temporal dislocation, the narrator-protagonist begins what González Echevarría

describes as "a search … for that inscription of the earth's initials—for the writing that

precedes writing" (*Pilgrim at Home* 161). The source of this "writing that precedes

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[61] Carpentier, according to González Echevarría, had a life-long fascination with the area region that was
inspired by a fascination with his great-grandfather, Alfred Clerec Carpentier, who was among the first
explorers in Guiana. González Echevarría provides the curious and insightful anecdotal footnote, originally
attributed to Salvador Bueno, "that Carpentier's great-grandfather, Alfred Clerec Carpentier 'was one of the
first explorers of Guiana [to the High Orinoco] way back in 1840'" (*The Pilgrim at Home* 163).

writing" is nature—a nature that is intuited but difficult to represent. It is

through the discourse of nature that Carpentier intuits a "native" presence. Highly

Romantic associations with music and art mediate the narrator-protagonist-hero's

approach to nature as the source of creative discourse. He translates his awe of the jungle

into metaphors that have meaning for him: "A thousand flutes of two differently tuned

notes answered each other through the leaves. And there were metal combs, saws

whining through wood, harmonica reeds" (162). The repetition of these associations is,

on the one hand, a critique of non-native explorers who failed to understand the place

because of their appropriation of Western imagery and metaphor. On the other, though, in

advancing the idea of nature as a source text, Carpentier also seeks an alternate discourse

for representing it. It is the author's own sensitivity to the difficulty in representing this

experience according to a Western cosmology that manifests itself in his protagonist. The

protagonist's inability to articulate this phenomenological experience of the interior

inspires him to write a musical composition that, like the novel, is never completed. He

can only compose fragments, suggesting either the fragmented remains of native

discourse or the impossibility of ever accessing a complete picture of this worldview.

Though González Echevarría characterizes the narrator-protagonist's quest as a search for

the earth's initials, he notes in a separate discussion that, "*Los Pasos Perdidos* [really

only] brings us back to the beginning of writing" (*Myth and Archive* 4). Indeed, the novel

returns to writing, but not without a notable sense of frustration and futility. The narrator

is "rescued" from the jungle, and upon returning to the metropole the narrator-protagonist

abandons his musical composition, the elements of which were his intervention into the

discourse of this "writing before writing." Instead, he falls back on the pre-scribed forms of intervention into the place, by writing a series of travel articles describing his experience of the interior.

   The frustration of the text, characterized by Gordon Brotherston as an "ironic self-distancing of the author from his narrator-hero" ("Pacaraima" 161), betrays Carpentier's intertextual engagement with the cultural traditions native to the place. And, though he observes that "[a]dmittedly, in constructing the indigenous word, Carpentier has more to say about landscape than the people who inhabit it," Brotherston argues that *The Lost Steps* is really "a work of encounter, between cultural traditions, the one proper to the hero, the other to the world he enters" (161). Sá echoes this perspective, claiming that *The Lost Steps* "allows the 'dark other' to have a voice of its own, by appealing precisely to indigenous texts which include not just Carib but Meso-American cosmogonies" (xxi). Extrapolating from Carpentier's *Vision de América,* a collection of essays that indicates an awareness of indigenous cosmology and critique the narrativity of naturalists' travelogues, both Brotherston and Sá read the protagonist's romanticism and his ironic failings as evidence of the author's interest in creating a space for a native discourse. Brotherston analyzes Carpentier's choice of setting and his interest in different conceptualizations of time as evidence of the ways in which *The Lost Steps* draws on the Carib genesis. Here, I want to briefly build upon Brotherston's assertion of an indigenous presence by pointing to the manner in which Carpentier's narrator depicts the presence of oral traditions in chapters 3 and 4, "the native heart of the novel" (Brotherston 171).[62]

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[62] Brotherston describes chapter 3 and 4 as "the native heart of the novel" not only because they are the sections that enter the rain forest, but also because they both have "epigraphs taken from Maya texts—the

By using music as the novel's controlling metaphor, especially in chapters 3 and 4, Carpentier engages the unarticulated presence that he locates in the forest interior, one that he intuits, but cannot make legible, as a conflicting narrative voice. The narrator-protagonist struggles to represent what he intuits of Rosario's world. Rosario is his link to the native existence, just as his previous lovers were links to other experiences. He demonstrates the inadequacy of actual words, thereby, meditating, though not explicitly, on the conflict between orality and writing and the problematical nature of originary narratives. Through his analogy to musical composition, Carpentier demonstrates an awareness of other codes, codes of nature and codes of belief that exist beyond the purview of a western orientation to the world. However, it also implies that Carpentier too lacks the language to describe his phenomenal experience and thereby shares in this narrator-protagonist's sentimentality. What results is that both narrator and author sustain the perspective of an outsider, one who remains in awe of the place, rather than participating in it.

Carpentier positions the narrator-protagonist-composer, like himself and the men that traveled this path before him, as a man oriented to the Western world and self-consciously aware of his own limits in engaging with the place; he is destined to reenact not only the physical journey, but the perceptive journey as well. The inevitability of a place that obscures its history is that it mystifies the outsider even as he is incorporated into the narrative. The description of how the narrator arrives at this enlightened vision of *Threnody* indicates the influence of oral literature:

Book of Chilam Balam and the Popol vuh" (171). I mention this here because it is a point that may be of interest to develop in expansions of this discussion on oral literature.

> … I had seen confirmed … the thesis of those who argue that music
>
> had a magic origin … I had seen the word travel the road of song without
>
> reaching it; I had seen how the repetition of a single syllable gave rise to a certain
>
> rhythm; I had seen how the alternation of the real voice with the feigned voice
>
> forced the witch-doctor to employ two pitches, how a musical theme could
>
> originate in an extramusical practice. (200)

This suggests that he is in fact listening for the native voices, but hears in the way that

Tedlock describes the mythographer, coming to the foreign language of the mythopoet,

hears the musicality of the performance prior to understanding its meaning. Nevertheless,

he acknowledges the inadequacies of his interpretation, by emphasizing demystification:

> I thought of all the nonsense uttered by those who take the position that
>
> prehistoric man discovered music in his desire to imitate the beauty of bird-
>
> warblings — as though the song of a bird had any musical-aesthetic value for
>
> those who hear it constantly amidst a concert of snorts, screeches, splashing,
>
> running, things falling, waters rushing, which for the hunter is a kind of sonorous
>
> code, the understanding of which is part of his craft. (200)

The listening experience he describes and his impulse to notate this unwritten discourse

falls somewhere between the phenomenological processes of the mythopoet and the

mythographer described by Tedlock. The centrality of the witch doctor, or the

shaman/storyteller, in this explanation clarifies the type of event witnessed by the

narrator-protagonist. The parallel drawn between the processes of the storyteller and the

hunter signals, not simply an *appreciation* of the aesthetics of the natural world, but a full *immersion* in it.

He writes *Threnody* in the spirit of "the original conception of threnody which was the magic song intended to bring a dead person back to life" (217). Based on the novel's trajectory, the song, as the narrator romantically imagines it, is to resurrect man's primal self as it can only be intuited through immersion in nature. The composer presents himself as uniquely enlightened to the magic of this world in his process of distilling the sounds of words, alternately described as a "verbal exorcism" (217) and a "word-genesis" (215). The act of writing underlies his impulse to notate or transcribe this soundscape in which "the repetition of words themselves, their accents, … give a peculiar intonation to certain successions of words which repeated at fixed intervals … [a]nd a melody would begin to assert itself … a melody … considered music in the state nearest the word" (215). In the gesture of composing the music, he conflates the aural dimensions of music with the visual dimensions of texts, thereby producing a word painting, whereby a musical composition mimics the actions, emotions, and sounds described in a text. The idea of lost steps that inform the title of Carpentier's novel is not simply the futility of the narrator-protagonist-hero's retracing of the romantic mistranslations of the Guyanas, but also the possibility of retracing the movements through and the voices that inhabit the space on deeper time levels. While he is ultimately unable to represent the earlier layers of this palimpsest, there is not only the acknowledgment of their existence, but also a struggle with the narrator-hero to negotiate these forms of expression in his narration. Wilson Harris' *Palace of the Peacock* is similarly interested in retracing these

steps into the past, and does so in order to reveal the cross-cultural

possibilities in understanding the past as encounter. He compresses time in space to map

the various embodied incursions into the rain forest. On the most superficial level, the

narrative engages the legacies of the written chronicles and travel narrative. However,

drawing from Harris' biography, readers know that the novel is also informed by his own

journeys to the interior, during which he was confronted with an inability to express his

experience. In an interview with Fred D'Aguiar, he explains that "[t]he shock of contrasts

in river, forest, waterfall had registered very deeply in my psyche. So deeply that to find

oneself 'without a tongue' was to learn of a 'music' that was 'wordless,' to descend into

varying structures upon parallel branches of reality, branches that were rooted in a stem

of meaning for which no absolute existed."[63]

Like Carpentier's *The Lost Steps*, Harris' *Palace of the Peacock* uses musical

metaphor to access the discourse of place; thereby, suggesting that he too is an outsider

entering this space. However, where Carpentier can only perceive this discourse as

music, a distance that *maintains* his position as an outsider, Harris follows the music,

engaging it as a prompt, "a re-visionary muse" that furthers the expansion of his

consciousness and allows his to achieve greater access to the living landscape ("Living

Landscapes" 45). It is the "music of consciousness" (45) that illuminates an immersion in

place, but it does so by opening the psyche to a theatre of the arts, which is inclusive of

dramatic poetry, literature, and other artistic forms. His idea is that landscape cannot be

represented through just one of these forms; nor can just one form mediate the

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[63] This quote is taken from an interview with Fred D'Aguiar that was published in the online magazine BOMB. The interview has no page or paragraph numbers.

phenomenological experience of immersion in a physical space and represent

it as a metaphysical or psychic space with scales or levels to its histories.

Harris models how this associative, integrative, and poetic process works, by

describing his own experience of the Tumatumari falls:

> I lay in my hammock at night listening to the falls: hoofs of horses were running
>
> in the night as the rapids drove upon, slid over, pounded on rock: the high heels of
>
> invisible women clicked on a pavement and approached from the chasm of the
>
> river; there was the sudden grind of gears, there was motorized traffic: there was
>
> the back-firing of a car at Marble Arch … ("Living Landscapes" 45)

The aurality of his immersion in the place initiates a phenomenal experience of

associations, wherein the music of the falls not only inspires a vision that he translates

into his writing, but also opens pathways into the simultaneity of the past. This specific

example is made manifest in the opening lines of *Palace*: "A horseman appeared on the

road coming at breakneck stride. A shot rang out suddenly, near and yet far as if the wind

had been stretched and torn and had started coiling and running in an instant" (13). The

narrative is the product of an immersion in and awakening to the phenomenal legacies of

the Guyanas. The waters of Tumatumari, or one of the other forested rivers, narrate their

legacies, and Harris, as an imaginative writer, intuits and transcribes this narrative.

Harris' I-narrator, who describes this associative scenario, narrates in a dream state, akin

to a seer or shaman who perceives narrative entextualized in place. "I dreamt I awoke

with one dead seeing eye and one living closed eye," the narrator explains at the novel's

opening (13). This dream motif, extended and developed throughout the novel, indicates

to the reader that all conventions of realism are to be dispensed with, that this

is a quest narrative of the imagination.

As an imaginative novel that seeks to "convey a continuity of phenomenal and

psychic experiences" ("Living Landscapes" 45) Harris' *Palace of the Peacock* draws on a

repertoire of lived, sensate experiences based in the encounter, journey, and myth of El

Dorado, the city of gold known to Amerindians through their ancestral cosmology and

sought after by the conquistadors who (mis-) understood it as an actual geographic site.

Harris, however, also characterizes El Dorado as an ephemeral place or state of potential

being that is redefined in different historical contexts. In this particular rendering of the

quest, the journey actually appears at a superficial level to be one of the many

"ransoming" or slaving expeditions that began with the conquistadors and continued

through every major era of exploitation. Indeed, the impulse that motivated the search for

El Dorado led by Sir Walter Raleigh among others is comparable to the force that drives

later phases of exploitative incursions into the Amazon, such as the Rubber Boom or oil

prospecting. In *Palace of the Peacock*, the Arawaks are pursued by Donne, both a

conquistatorial and poetic presence, and his crew, the remnants of later arrivals and

exploitations, and like their ancestors, the tribes are driven from the Mission at the river's

edge into the forest to escape capture. In the layering of these phenomenal patterns,

Harris draws parallels between the Amerindian and European incursions up the

Amazon's northern tributaries, as incursions into the landscape and the psyche. This is

integrative as it begins a process of weaving these historical trajectories together. Harris'

conception of a Palace of the Peacock is native to the place, with roots in the natural

phenomena of the place as well as ties to Amerindian and European quest

narratives. In Amerindian cosmology, spirits and ancestors reside in the stars, and form a

physical map of their legacies through constellations. For example, Makunaíma, the great

hero of the Pemon genesis story-cycle (as well as the hero who appears in different

incarnation in both Andrade's "rhapsody" and Melville's novel) leaves the earthly world

to take his place the among the ancestors in the stars. Harris gives his palace of the

peacock the architecture of this space. The palace of the peacock is also El Dorado, but El

Dorado attained. It is no city of gold, but rather the vision and mystery of the Guyanas for

which Europeans were also searching. He writes at the novel's conclusion, "This was the

inner music and voice of the peacock I suddenly encountered and echoed and sang as I

had never heard myself sing before. … Each of us now held at last in his arms what he

had been for ever seeking and what he had eternally possessed" (152). The constellation

formed by the crew marks a new chapter in the epic mytho-cycle of the Guyanas, but one

based upon this consolidated cultural inheritance/character.[64]

Harris signals the compression of time and trajectory at the level of plot and

character. His depiction of his character Schomburgh, for example, the patriarch of these

forested rivers, whose "great-grandfather had come from Germany, and his great-

grandmother was an Arawak American Indian" (40), is but one indication of the immense

genealogical entanglements of the people, for the texts, and for the place. Harris recalls

the Amerindian and European presences in this landscape, transculturates them at the

level of plot and characterization, and suggests the simultaneity of experience in the

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[64] He explains: "The whole crew were one spiritual family living and dying together in a common grave out of which they had sprung again from the same soil and womb as it were" (TPP).

memory of these eras. The crew is a pastiche of the waves of indigenous,

European, and African inhabitants who represent a certain class of people who were the

first non-indigenous to learn how to truly survive in the Amazonian forests and rivers.

This group is broad in cultural terms, changing precise definition depending on the

historical and linguistic periods; but ultimately, they are identified as frontiersmen who

"took their families to isolated homesteads on the banks of the rivers, where they could

fish, hunt and farm a clearing without molestation. They became … riverbank people

who used native skills to live sustainably from endemic flora and fauna" (Hemming 124).

Their range included the riverbanks Guyana, Brazil, and Venezuela and, as the names of

Harris' characters indicate, they hail from a certain nation and they move freely through

these borders. Harris weaves curious relations between these now-native identities and

trajectories to emphasize these legacies as a haunting of place that permeates all

borders—time, space, and species—and remains embedded in the psyche of the physical

place.

The integrative practice underlying the structure of *Palace of the Peacock* is

Harris' adaptation of the inclusive philosophy of Amerindian cosmology, the narration of

which was a primary concern in their body of literature. Harris further extends that

integrative practice beyond suggestion by giving his novel the texture of poetry. *Palace*

of the Peacock, for the reasons described above, is considered to be "dreamlike" or

entrenched in some sort of "mysticism." Indeed, the novel is highly poetic prose fiction

that, I argue, is meant to be interpreted as though it were dramatic poetry. Epigraphs from

the metaphysical poets William Butler Yeats, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and John Donne

introduce each chapter, and in my understanding, offer cues as to how a reader might modify their sensibility in order to draw meaning from the novel. Each of these three poets writes under the influence of a personal-poetic philosophy that challenges logic and realism, favoring meta-realities, dislocations of language and image, and intuitive poetic meter and theme. The poet Donne, recognized among the greatest metaphysical poets in T.S. Eliot's essay "The Meta-Physical Poets," was known for challenging rational and hierarchical ideas and developing rapid, and sometimes unexpected, associations that demanded "considerable agility on the part of the reader" (247). The poet-priest Hopkins, an unlikely modernist, developed sprung rhythm, a poetic meter based upon the contemplation of the rhythms and inherent godliness of the natural phenomena or landscape. Harris' projection of the irrational, even mystical terrain of the human psyche onto the living landscape is further signaled by references to Yeats, the poet and dramatist celebrated for his commitment to the freedom of the imagination. Such references help readers understand Harris' imagistic distortions, like the cyclical temporal sequence created by the crew's multiple deaths or the character of Mariella as both woman and village, as gestures of dramatic poeticism.

Within this wide field of associations, *Palace of the Peacock* no longer functions according to the conventions of traditional novels, but instead is driven by conceit, or the complex logic of an extended metaphor typically associated with dramatic poetry, the form most suited to the translation of oral literature, according to Tedlock. Contradictory though it may seem to rely on Western canonical texts as the key to deciphering the orality of his prose fiction, creating this twinship, as Harris would call it, between

narrative traditions and forms, reveals a complexity and unity to the human

consciousness that allows it to perceive multiple realities. Tedlock explains that where

prose tells, poetry evokes. Harris does not simply tell the sequence of events of these

incursions up the forested rivers, but rather animates, or makes sensate for the reader the

physical and psychic experience as though he or she were entering this world. Harris calls

upon these poetic devices to develop his comparable effort to render states of mind and

feelings into written language the music of living landscapes. It is the character Donne

who leads this journey beyond Mariella to a second death, along which "[t]he crew were

transformed by the awesome spectacle of a voiceless soundless motion, the purest

appearance of vision in the chaos of emotion sense" (73). Through these discontinuities,

abstractions, and ritual reenactments, Harris translates the mystical, ritual, and

performative qualities of oral literature into his written text.

  In his highly imaginative transculturated novel, Harris renders the journey into the

forested rivers of the Amazon as a multidimensional experience of place. *Palace of the*

Peacock is truly visionary, and re-visionary, in the way that it perceives both the archive

and the repertoire. As an author, Harris exceeds the roles of mythographer and mythopoet

by integrating aspects of Amerindian narrative technique and cosmology into his own

interpretation. Though he challenges the subject position of the "outsider" by intricately

weaving ancestral pasts and futures into the memory theatre of the Guyanas, the

trajectory Harris traces is nevertheless steeped in conquistadorial legacies. Here, my

analysis shifts directions, conceptually and textually, in order to consider trajectories out

of the interior. While *The Lost Steps* and *Palace of the Peacock* depict the perceptive

experience and representational strategies of outsiders journeying into the

Amazon, Andrade's *Macunaíma* and Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale* capture an

"insider" perspective in their respective interpretations of the Amerindian hero-quest out

of the forest and into the "modern" world. This mapping of an alternate, though

simultaneous, cartography transculturates space, and does so in favor to the discourse of

the minor culture. In the Pemon Carib cosmology, the world is constantly being created,

re-created and changed; Makunaíma, a trickster-hero and transformative power, is

responsible for many of these changes. He can change himself, from man to animal to

fantastical beast to rock formation, moving as freely through the natural world as he does

through the man-made world. He can and does also effect change in others. Andrade and

Melville call upon Makunaíma in their novels to transform the discourse of the Guyanas.

In their respective animations, they claim the trickster-hero's story cycle, in its oral and

written forms, as an important literary intertext for the novel of the Guyanas.

Though González Echevaria celebrates Carpentier's *The Lost Steps* as the first

work of archival fiction, Andrade's *Macunaíma*, written almost twenty years before, is an

overlooked and potentially more significant turning point in the literary production of the

Guyanas. As Sá writes, "*Macunaíma* marks a watershed in Latin American literature,

both Brazilian and Spanish, in terms of its interaction with native texts" (36). In

Macunaíma, Andrade composes an archival fiction in the sense that he returns to the

chronicles as his intertexts, but in doing so, he reads through Western accounts of the

Guyanas to locate the Amerindian narratives embedded in the texts. The novel, a

significant work of Brazilian *modernismo* that was celebrated for its experimentation

with form and content, follows the tradition of Amerindian narrative practice,

in which a series of episodes are developed within an overarching plot. Andrade, who

revised the hero's name to reflect Brazilian usage, characterized *Macunaíma* not as novel,

but rather as a rhapsody. In its etymology, rhapsody refers to the act of recitation, and

commonly evokes the spirit of improvisation and the bringing together of fragmented

motifs. Though Andrade explains that his use of rhapsody was meant to describe the

novel's structure as "a mosaic [or] bricolage" (Sá 56), it is impossible to overlook the

musical associations implicit in the term. Gilda Mello e Souza describes the novel's

structure "as a combination of suite and musical variation" (Sá 56). This implies that the

narratives are representative pieces of a larger work that are arranged to suit the purposes

of a specific interpretation. Along these lines, I suggest that the analogy to music

demonstrates that the novel is working at the interstices of aural/oral and written texts and

that Andrade is working at the interstices of mythographer and mythopoet. *Macunaíma* is

Andrade's assemblage and interpretation of the traces of audible Amerindian texts that he

uncovered through the close reading of visible European texts. His purpose, in this

context, is to dramatize the acts through which indigenous culture influenced the national

character of Brazil.

Andrade's *Macunaíma* is based upon Theodor Koch-Grünberg's *Vom Roroima
zum Orinoco* (1924), which in its chronicle of the German anthropologist's travels

through the Guyanas is also perhaps one of the most comprehensive collections of Pemon

Carib literature. Koch-Grünberg collected the stories from his guides, Mayulauaípu and

Mõseuaípu, two Pemon Indians who were training to become storytellers. Shortly after

the publication of his novel, Andrade faced accusations from the Amazonian

folklorist Raimundo de Moraes that he plagiarized Koch-Grünberg's ethnographic work

(Sá 39).[65] He responded to these charges with a confession:

> … I confess that I copied, sometimes verbatim … Not only did I copy the
> ethnographers [like Koch-Grünberg's] and Amerindian texts, [but] I included
> entire sentences … from Portuguese colonial chroniclers … Finally … I copied
> Brazil … The only [original] thing left to me … [is that] my name is on the cover
> of *Macunaíma.* (qtd. in Madureira 86-87)[1]

Andrade's confession contests the idea of complete originality in Latin American

literature and points to the wide field of intertexts involved in his creative process. In the

context of Brazilian *modernismo,* which sought to "define the meaning of being modern

in a peripheral country" through metaphors of transculturation (Madureira 37), Andrade's

reactivation of the hero-trickster Makunaíma's story-cycle deploys the Amerindian spirit

of change in characterizing the adaptation and transformation of "now native" identities.

Brazilian *modernismo* sought to consolidate a national character and voice through its

representation across the arts. Like other postcolonial nationalist projects, *modernismo*

aimed to demonstrate that cultural production was capable of representing a Brazilian

character, voice, and identity independent of colonial power. In order to represent its own

modernity, rooted in the process of transculturation, the movement inverted a stigma

waged against its native ancestors, cannibalism, by celebrating anthropophagy, or the

consumption of human flesh, as a metaphor for its integration of Amerindian, European,

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[65] These allegations were presented by Raimundo de Moraes as his effort to defend the work of Andrade, but were truly the folklorist's way of undermining Andrade while at the same time presenting himself as a leading authority of indigenous tradition (Sá 39).

and African knowledge, skills, and cultures.[66] With such an approach to

interpreting its cultural agenda, *modernismo* relied heavily on the primitive or indigenous

roots of Brazil as an accessible pre-history to European "discovery." Strategic indigeneity

is a tool in many nationalist projects, but the political and social debate around

indigenous rights and protections and the fact that there were, and are still today,

uncontacted tribes makes this argument all the more viable (and problematic) in the case

of Brazil. Within this movement, Andrade's text was celebrated because it successfully

located that "authentic" voice by sifting through and cannibalizing the conquistatorial

texts that not only seemed to silence alternative perspectives, but also provided the only

textual accounts of those "pre-historical" perspectives.

Andrade's interpretation stays close to Koch-Grünberg's transcription of the story

cycle performed by Mayulauaípu and Mõseuaípu, and captures the hero, Makunaíma, in

all his "fantastic" glory. In form, Andrade's Macunaíma is both man and child. He has a

body "the size of a strapping young man[; h]owever, his head…stayed the same as …the

nasty, oafish mug of the child he had been" (13). Even in the forest Macunaíma is "an

oddity" (3). He is a member of the Tapanhuma tribe, a tribe of Amerindians with "skin

black as calcined ivory" (3). His depiction is thus marked by contact with outsiders and

the West. The blackness of his tribe implies a racialized identity that is both Amerindian

and Africa—two racial groups that Brazil was attempting to integrate. Within the first

few vignettes, the trickster-hero is already shown to be a human chameleon, transforming

his appearance to reflect the changing face of Brazil. As he embarks on his journey to

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[66] Oswaldo de Andrade (no relation to Mário de Andrade) proposed this concept and outlined the cultural
agenda of Brazilian *modernismo* in "Manifesto Antropofagico." See Sá's *Rain Forest Literatures* and
Madureira's *Cannibal Modernities*.

São Paolo, a city through which "streamed white people, whiter people, [and] people whiter than white" (34), he too changes from black to white. This, of course, has its explanation in the contact between the "civilizing" forces of Western culture and religion and the primitivism of the "dark other." He and his brothers, Maanape and Jiguê, bathe in the magic waters of a hollow that is a "footprint, a relic from the time when [St. Thomas] went around preaching and bringing the teachings of Jesus to the Indians of Brazil" (31). As surely promised by St. Thomas and the missionaries who sought to convert Amerindians to Christianity, "[w]hen the hero finished his bath he was white-skinned, blue-eyed and fair-haired; the holy water had washed away all of his blackness; there was nothing left to show in any way that he was the son of the black tribe of Tapanhumas" (31). There is not much water left after the hero's bath; one of his brothers can only achieve "the color of freshly minted bronze" while the other can only lighten the palms of his hands and the soles of his feet (31-32). Andrade's depiction of this tri-colored brotherhood is meant to transculturate and indigenize the Amerindian, African, and European ethnic and racial components of Brazil's ancestry.

The quest narrative that unifies the seemingly disconnected etiological tales is the hero's search for his amulet, "his precious *muiraquitã*" (129), which empowered Macunaíma as the Emperor of the Forest and was given to him by his wife Ci, the Mother of the Forest and a leader of the mythical tribe of warrior-women. The trickster-hero leaves his amulet in a "safe" place, where it is swallowed by a river turtle who is caught by a fisherman and then sold to the Peruvian river trader, Venceslau Pietro Pietra, a collector of Amazonian gems and rocks. The hero pursues this collector of stones, also

known as Piaiman, who turns out to be a man-eating ogre (45) all the way to

São Paolo. As I read it, the struggle between Macunaíma and Piaiman is really a battle for

dominion over the natural resources of the Amazon. Since acquiring the amulet, Piaiman

"had done well for himself and had become the owner of a fruitful estate" (29).

Macunaíma cannot comprehend the impulse to collect such artifacts because, to him, the

land is its own archive that holds a living history:

> he already had plenty of that kind of crap on his own land, on the stony peaks, on
>
> the boulder-strewn savannas, in rapids, in narrow passes and on lofty screes. All
>
> these stones had once been alive, as wasps, ticks, animals, songbirds, men and
>
> women, young women and girls, even those portions of a woman that excite a
>
> man's depravity …! (49).

Through his collecting, Piaiman consumes these traces of a living bio-history as

Amazonian artifacts emptied of meaning. I read this collecting motif running throughout

Andrade's novel as a sustained critique or comment on the interventions of the foreign

naturalist/explorer turned entrepreneur into the bioregion. Macunaíma's quest for the

amulet that brings him luck and gives him dominion over the forest is, more significantly,

a quest to reclaim the Amazon from the West. To get even with the man-eating giant, or

"take a leaf out of the giant's book" (49), he decides to start an artifact collection of his

own. His choice of artifact suggests the foolishness of such fetishization: "He would

make a collection of all the smutty words he was so fond of using … some from living

languages and those he had picked up from Latin and Greek" (49). Nevertheless, it also

suggests the implicit power of words, and languages; it situates words as artifacts that not

only provide insight into, but also define and determine certain cultures or

periods. Through his archiving of words, Macunaíma reverses the power dynamic

between Amerindian and Western cultures by cannibalizing the Western belief in the

authority of words.

The mythic hero's embodied movement through these etiological tales is a

physical mapping of the place and the appropriation of its meaning. The purpose of

etiological tales is to explain why and how things are the way that they are. In mapping

this cartography from the interior to the metropole in etiological terms, Andrade

satirically cannibalizes the methodology of the chroniclers who rationally explain

phenomena that has just encountered for the first time as a means of having power over

it. Macunaíma's journey from the forest to São Paolo begins "at the mouth of the Rio

Negro," on the island of Marapatá, where he "stow[ed] his conscience … [so] it would

not be a burden to him on his travels" (31). Andrade also satirizes the survival motif of

the travel-writing genre; Macunaíma functions easily in the rainforest, but demonstrates

his real survival strategies once he reaches São Paulo, "that huge and uncouth city on the

Tietê River" (29). The city, a place filled with "machine contraptions … made by man

and worked by electricity, by fire, by wind, by water; man making use of the forces of

nature" (35), is much more of a jungle than the "untamed" wilderness to which he is

accustomed. Along the way he appropriates what he encounters, filtering his experiences

through indigenous cosmology, thereby "brazilianizing" it. Macunaíma develops a

perspective that shows that native Brazilian history and cultural identity originates in the

Amazon. His interpretation of metropolitan society demonstrates a cosmology rooted in

the connection between man and a natural world and the belief in ongoing

regeneration, two lessons learned from living in the forest. His encounter with the

machination of society is processed within this very same paradigm. As Sá writes,

"Macunaíma discovers that the only way to dominate the machine is by telling an

etiological tale about it—to transform it" through explanation (59). He is troubled by the

machination of this world and wonders if "the machine must be a god over which humans

had no true control since they had made no explainable [story] of it, but just a world

reality" (36). According to this logic, he decides to control it by arriving at the conclusion

that "Humans were machines and machines are humans!" (36). His next act of

dominating the machine occurs when he wishes to make a phone call; he simply changes

his brother Jiguê into a "telephone contraption" (40).

Through Macunaíma's many acts of transformation, Andrade demonstrates the

extent to which the Western culture of the metropole is influenced by contact with the

indigenous culture of the interior. Andrade's animation of the Pemon hero, Makunaíma,

his attention to spoken language, and his experimentation with form indicate a conscious

effort to claim indigenous culture for contemporary audiences and locate the novel's

roots in an oral tradition. However, the unnamed narrator's explanation of how he learned

the story cycle undermines some of the more progressive insights of Andrade's

interpretation. Indeed, the narrator does not exist until the epilogue; there is only the story

cycle, activated, or re-animated, for the audience, and one brief reference to "our culture"

that indicates a difference between the time/place of the narrative voice and the hero's

travels. Andrade's narrator emerges from the narrative to explain that one day on the

banks of the Uraricoera River he encountered a green parrot, who "came

down and perched on the man's head [as] the two went along together" (168). The parrot,

who "had rescued from oblivion those happenings and the language which had

disappeared," narrates the story of a "vanished tribe" and "the far-off times when the hero

was the Great Emperor, Macunaíma" to the narrator (168). But, Andrade concludes the

rhapsody by explaining that, "[t]he story is over and its glory has faded away" (Andrade

167). Andrade disappears Macunaíma from the earth; the hero "ascends to the sky,

disappearing from the earth and leaving no descendents to perpetuate the tribe" (168).

This might be read as a commentary on the ephemeral nature of embodied or oral

literature. It also locks the story cycle firmly in the past, a gesture that dismisses the

efficacy of it mytho-history and form for contemporary audiences. The connection

between man and nature is cast as a primitive impulse that, rather than demystify

indigenous beliefs and practices, ultimately sentimentalizes indigenous beliefs and

practices. This conclusion betrays the circumstances under which Andrade revisits the

theme of the Pemon hero. According to Sá, *Macunaíma* is representative of a type of

narrative that celebrates indigenous identity as a political tool, but that ultimately sees the

narrative perspective assimilated into the discourse of the nation. In *Macunaíma,*

Andrade reverses the trajectory of encounter to show how the hero-trickster effects

change on Brazilian society, but this reversal might also be seen as way of integrating or

even assimilating indigenous people into the modern nation. Though it is a gesture of

strategic indigeneity that supports a nationalist project seeking to differentiate Brazilian

national character from a former colonizer, it also appears to be an assimilationist project

with all its connotations of erasure. The indigenous presence is so fully

cannibalized by the nation that there is "[n]o one on this earth knows how to speak the

language of this vanished tribe [the Tapanhuma], nor how to recount its flamboyant

adventures" (Andrade 167). Or, as Andrade states in the closing lines of the rhapsody,

"There's no more" (168).

In Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, however, Makunaíma, who only

alludes to his identity, is quick to "claim the position of narrator in this novel" (1). It is

"spite" he explains, that "impels me to relate that my biographer, the noted Brazilian

Senhor Mario Andrade, got it wrong when he consigned me to the skies in such a

slapdash and cavalier manner" (1). Rather than allowing another's written account

relegate him to the heavens, thereby mythifying his life and effectively disappearing his

Pemon culture, the hero appears in order to retell the incest myth that accounts for his

own origins, this time retold through the story of Danny and Beatrice McKinnon. He

steps out of his celestial post to reengage with a great narrative tradition—that of

storytelling—but does so by engaging, and subsequently rehabilitating, the contemporary

novel of the Guyanas. Melville's decision to give the narrative voice over to Makunaima

reveals indigenous narrative strategies rooted in the experience of place, but also

complicates the intertexts and authorship of the novel. The trickster's aggressive

intervention into the text signals the true extent of change the hero can effect.

The prologue and epilogue offer a frame that delineates the time/space of the

storyteller with that of the story; however, the real conditions of the novel's main

narrative, which to the uninformed reader seem to have little to do with the novel's

introduction and conclusion, are embodied by the trickster-narrator,

Makunaíma. The kinetic vitality of the storyteller collapses the time/space of his mythic

origins with the late-twentieth-century setting of the action, thereby bringing efficacy to

his story. Makunaíma is not recognizable as the primitive "tri-colored hero" (Sá 37), or

rather anti-hero required by Brazilian *modernismo*: instead, the trickster-deity's present

manifestation represents a late twentieth-century hero:

> I have black hair, bronze skin and I would look wonderful in a cream suit with a
>
> silk handkerchief. Cigars? Yes. Dark glasses? Yes—except that I do not wish to
>
> be mistaken for a gangster. But dark glasses are appropriate… A black felt fedora
>
> hat worn tipped forward? Possibly. A fast-driving BMW when I am in London? A
>
> Porsche for New York? A range Rover to drive or a helicopter when I am flying
>
> over the endless savannah and bush of my own regions? Yes. (2)

Camouflaged as a sort of contemporary James Bond, or some other generic Hollywood-

produced adventurer/businessman, he transforms from his "primitivist" depiction. His

adventures go beyond his trip between the savannahs and the Brazilian capital as his new

manifestation is marked by the transatlantic influences that not only touched him on his

travels abroad, but also reflect the modern-day network of influences impacting the

Amazon. In this guise, he is a more relevant and formidable contemporary of green

capitalism, represented by the "notorious Cosmetics Queen, the tycoon who frequently

drops in on my village searching for recipes from indigenous people"(356). This is

intended as a heavy-handed slight on the founder of The Body Shop and good old-

fashioned, earth-destroying capitalism, represented by the speculators from Hawk Oil, a

fictionalized American oil company that enjoys the special privilege of two

million acres of land in the Rupununi to look for oil (356). This modernization of the

hero and his primordial drama releases his character from the primitivism traditionally

associated with myth, thereby allowing him to evolve with the culture and remain present

in the lives of the people. By reasserting himself into the contemporary discourse of the

place, he explains and legitimates Amerindian cultural values in a present-day context. It

also illuminates contemporary threats to the place: "the plane, the chainsaw and the

bulldozer" (Hemming 289).

      In keeping with the Amerindian story-telling tradition, in which smaller stories

that show how a species has changed are included within an overarching story,

Makunaíma provides the etiological details that uncover the connections between time

periods, life cycles, cultural traditions, and the landscape. The narrator's innate aptitude

for animating narrative, according to his description of the process, is to capture and

share the phenomenal environment of the Amazon. "How did I discover that I was to play

the role of narrator?," Makunaíma inquires:

      In my part of the world there are many lakes: navy-blue lakes, blood-red

      lakes, pewter-colored lakes, black lakes. I went fishing in the lake of mud, a lake

      which is also a dump where people throw the remains of water coconut, fish

      bones, crab shells, defunct bicycles, all sorts of muck. Poking around there, I

      dredged up from the bottom of the muddy lake a word…

      …I saw that on the word were carved other words, hieroglyphics, tiny

      rows of them, and they were in a language I could not understand. But I became

aware of the noisy and voluble existence of words, an incessant

chattering from the past, and as the babble grew louder, as the throng of words

grew and approached along the forest trails, the savannah tracks, the lanes and by-

ways and gullies, the words so declaiming, some whispering, were joined, firstly

by laughter and ribald whistles, then by rude farting sounds and finally by an

unmistakable clattering that could only be the rattling dance of bones. (5)

This rattling dance of bones is the arrival of ancestors animated through the narrator's

access to the polyphony of the past. Their arrival from all ends of this vast river system

depicts a regional topography and geography that is its own sprawling archive. Melville

draws on Andrade's characterization of Macunaíma as a collector of words. Melville's

narrative manifestation of the hero expands the Macunaíma/Makunaíma's hobby of

collecting words. The word is an artifact, discarded and discoverable in the sediment

alongside the evidence of other cultures and eras. The word Makunaíma retrieves is not

only a contemporary or ancient alphabetically written text, but also one of a series of text

objects. It contains traces of other words, symbolic and spoken, all conveying the values

and practices of specific cultures, but all thrown together in this primordial sludge. The

narrator discovers his talent by attuning himself to the multiple voices, systems of

representation, and narrative cues embedded in this living landscape. The ability to read

these systems of representation and give life to this multi-lingual and intertextual past in

the present is the unique talent and primary purpose of the narrator.

Just as this larger order includes different levels of time, it also includes a broad

concept of nature that places man in a symbiotic relationship with the natural world. The

myths and cosmology native to the Guyanas are the outgrowth of an

immersion in this place and reflect a worldview based in the regenerative possibilities

and ongoing transformations of the environment. They also reflect an animistic

consciousness and sense of "human kinship with other species … such as jaguars, snakes,

even plants" (Sá xvii) that Makunaíma integrates into his storytelling. "And how did I

hone my skills as a narrator?" he asks:

> For you to understand that, I shall have to tell you a little about the art of hunting
>
> because it was through hunting that I learned to excel as a ventriloquist … We
>
> flirt with our prey like any serial killer. And here is where my sublime talent as a
>
> ventriloquist comes in. I can reproduce perfectly the mating call of every bird and
>
> beast in the Amazonas … Camouflage is the other required skill. I can efface
>
> myself easily like a chameleon – merge into the background … My gifts as a
>
> ventriloquist were spotted as soon as I began to speak. I could reproduce the
>
> flickering hiss of the labaria snake and sing the Lilliburlero signature turn of the
>
> BBC's World Service within seconds of hearing them. Sometimes my
>
> grandmother used me as an early form of tape-recorder … I can do any voice:
>
> jaguar, London hoodlum, bell-bird, nineteenth-century novelist, ant-eater, epic
>
> poet, a chorus of howler monkeys, urban brutalist, a tapir. (8)

This methodology validates the broadest spectrum of biodiversity; man is connected to all

species, as well as the multiple identities and the myriad influences that converge in the

place as a result of colonialism, Western misappropriation, transculturation, and the

diasporic lives of its inhabitants. The careful observation of repetition and gesture is key

to the narrative arts as it makes it possible for the narrator to fully embody the

subject or scenario he wishes to describe. Though he is a trickster and therefore an

unreliable narrator, he suggests that such transformations are central to the narrative arts

and that impersonation is a studied craft. These observation skills exceed those of the

naturalists and anthropologists who move through the place simply measuring, collecting,

and scribing its contents. Through mimicry and camouflage the narrator actually

transforms himself into these other species to understand how each contributes to and

changes the texture of the place. He narrates in total immersion within the plots and

characterizations of his story, essentially channeling the action of the narrative through

his being. The narrator then functions as an archive, an embodied archive, if you will,

that documents, records, and interprets histories, languages, and the changing

environment. The shift between identities as diverse as a London hoodlum, a nineteenth-

century novelist, and a tapir validates the performance of orality and lived experience as

embodied texts and displaces the written text as the definitive document of historical

truth.

In as much as Makunaíma reveals these narrative strategies of emplacement and

embodiment as the foundations of his own approach to storytelling, I want to suggest that

Melville's writing practice is also heavily indebted to this tradition. The two epigraphs

that introduce Melville's *Shape Shifter* (1990), a collection of short-stories that explores

the circumstances and lives of people in the Caribbean Diaspora, offer insight into her

perception of her role as one who shares stories:

The shape-shifter can conjure up as many different

figures and manifestations as the sea has waves.

Unknown poet

In this first epigraph, Melville, in keeping with the shape shifting of the

trickster/storyteller, presents the figure of the storyteller as one who channels and

represents identities and experiences and the act of storytelling as a performance event

that activates a memory theater.

It is a firm article of faith that the shaman or medicine-man

of the Indians of Guiana, to whom nothing is impossible,

can effect transformation of himself or others.

Walter Roth, *Enquiry into the Animism and*

Folklore of the Guiana Indians

In this second epigraph, she associates the shape shifting of the trickster with the more

tangible figure of the shaman. As Sá points out, in the narrative tradition of this region,

the shaman most commonly performs narratives. "[S]hamans," the designated storytellers

of this tradition, she explains, "are specially known for their theatrical skills … [and] the

different modes of metamorphosis and deceit expressed by the … tricksters will find

continuity in the actions of storytellers and shamans" (25). Melville places herself on the

inside of this indigenous literary tradition; rather than simply describing Makunaíma, she

sustains the "continuity" of the trickster. April Shemak's essay "Alter/natives: myth,

translation and the native informant in Pauline Melville's *The Ventriloquist's Tale*"

seems to construct the Makunaíma/Chico character as a native informant of this

"indigenous oral culture," thereby positioning Melville as the ethnographer

figure of "Western print culture" (354). Her reading is consistent with her overarching

discussion of the exegeny and exogeny that run through the novel. However, because my

interest here lies in highlighting the process by which this text is created, I find that even

though the narrative voice belongs to the trickster-hero, Melville, as the author or teller of

this tale, is the one who animates his voice and character. Andrade's narrator learns the

Makunaíma story cycle from a parrot that "rescued from oblivion those happenings and

the language which had disappeared" (168). This narrative position acknowledges the

rhapsody's roots in an oral tradition, but also locks the story cycle firmly in the past, a

gesture that dismisses the efficacy of its mytho-history and form for contemporary

audiences. In contrast, Melville "conjure[s] up" the stories and profiles; *she* is the shape

shifter or shaman who, following the example of the trickster, can transform into

different species and between different planes of existence. The position she adopts as an

author combines the shaman of the oral tradition with the scribe of written tradition. She

is not Andrade, whose narrative positions him as an ethnographer, a cultural interloper

from Western print culture, but rather an active member of this evolved tribe continuing

its literary traditions. As the shaman, whose skill and talent lie in the embodiment of the

trickster-hero and the vocalization of his narrative, Melville demonstrates that her own

literary practice engages all the theatrics of Amazonian storytelling. Recognizing that the

demands of an ever-changing culture require a reinvention of form, she merges the roles

of storyteller/ shape shifter/ shaman with author of prose fiction in order to more

effectively communicate with her audience. Her role is suspended between performance

and literary traditions; her transcription or notation must preserve the

repeatable performance text with all of its ritualistic poetic properties. Authorship, for

Melville, then, is a performance. Tedlock observes: "The speaking storyteller is not a

writer who fears to make use of the shift key, but an actor on a stage" (9). A writer like

Melville, however, combines these positions; she must use the shift key to represent the

fluctuations of a speaking voice, but she still channels the methods of a stage actor as the

first step in her creative process. Drawing from the process of the speaking storyteller,

she uses performance, rather than magic or dramatic poetry, to demystify her

translation/transcription of oral literature. In a culture that favors realism and privileges

the written text, Melville ventriloquizes Makunaíma, and all the components of the

narrative, in order to invest her interpretation of the novel of the Guyanas with the orality

of indigenous literature native to the place. The fact that she presents the main body of

the novel under the title *The Ventriloquist's Tale* suggests that her creative process is a

theatrical practice—a stagecraft. The reference to ventriloquism signals that there is a

voice embedded in the written text, and that that voice is "thrown" so that it appears to

originate from a source other than where it actually does. In this case, it is the activation

of multiple voices; in fact, the entire story that makes up the main body of the novel, as

well as that of Makunaíma. While the main body of the novel, the physical artifact that

readers enjoy might then be understood as a transcript or notation of this performance,

the prologue and epilogue offer a "behind-the-scenes" look at the storyteller's process.

     That said, the critique leveled against Melville by Albert Braz for relying on E.A.

Goodland's English translation, rather than Andrade's "original" work of *modernismo*,

demonstrates what my reading here would consider a fundamental

misunderstanding of textual practice from this place. Braz anchors his critique in the

assumed authority of Andrade's novel, presumably unaware of Andrade's own

confession that the work is complete plagiarism, challenging Melville's reference to what

he calls Goodland's "infelicitious" translation of the phrase Andrade's Macunaíma uses

whenever faced with a task: "Aw, what a fucking life!" (22). Braz claims the Portuguese

is more idiomatically translated as "Ah, I'm pooped!" or "Ah, what laziness!" (22-23),

and that Melville's use of Goodland's "(mis)translation" betrays her ignorance of the

"Brazilian" hero (23). Andrade's rhapsody, and Goodland's English translation of it, and

Melville's novel presumably rely on ancient source material that has been passed though

various channels to arrive in their current presentations. Certainly, Melville's intertexts

include Andrade's version and Goodland's translation, but the Makunaíma story-cycle

presumably exists in the cultural memory first. The dedication in Goodland's translation

is evidence supporting Melville's "right" to the narrative and evidence that she might

have received it verbally even before encountering Andrade's work. It reads:

This translation is dedicated to

EDWINA MELVILLE

who introduced me to

Macunaíma

near that mountain called

The Stump of the Tree of Life

The story is shared, orally and at a geographic and cultural site that inspires

the tale, with Goodland by a relative of Pauline Melville, who comes from a large, long

established, and ethnically diverse family in Guyana.[67] Makunaíma, then, is as much a

part of the Melville family's narrative tradition, which is a Guyanese and English-

speaking tradition, as it is a part of the narrative tradition that informs Andrade's

Macunaíma which is specific to Brazil and Brazilian Portuguese. According to tradition,

the telling of certain stories is prompted by an event or an occasion, but just as frequently,

a story is told because the mythopoet has arrived at a certain geographical location, such

as "the stump of the tree of life." These narratives are the cultural inheritance of the

space, rooted in the Carib-speaking peoples that previously populated the area, but

adaptable to any *lingua franca*. Stories are a part of a set mythic cycle, but are

reinterpreted within the context of whatever prompts the telling, giving them efficacy in

contemporary circumstance. The creation of oral literature, or the performance of stories,

is a dramatic art. Its deployment in the artistic endeavor of representing Brazilian

nationalism in one generation and socio-economic exploitation in another testifies to the

adaptability of the story-cycle and its culturally intended function.

This reading makes the Makunaíma story-cycle a potential blueprint for

interpreting the hero's way in the world. Rather than remaining a static figure and

narrative preserved in ethnographic treatises, the hero and the power of his story can be

redeployed in the context of current politics and questions of land rights, religion vs.

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[67] In the essay "Beyond the Pale," Melville describes her ethnic appearance as a manifestation of the trickster god. She is Guyanese, and part of an Amerindian, African, and European ancestry, but she appears completely "English." She interprets this according to indigenous cosmology characterized by change and multiple geneses: "I am the whitey in the woodpile. The trickster god now appears in another quise. He has donned the scientific mantle of genetics" (740).

magic, the truth of science, and the writing of history. Melville's imaginative approach to the novel and her experimentation with indigenous literary performance revives Amerindian oral traditions and the world view they encompass from myth into a body of literary texts and retrieves the Amazonian bioregion from its idealization as a pre-modern chronotope. The meta-narrative structure and the first-person narrative voice explicit in the novel's prologue and epilogue belong to storyteller is the Amerindian trickster-deity, Makunaíma, whose shape-shifting reveals a time-space continuum and coming together of nature and humanity. Melville's repetition of the Makunaíma character and his etiological tale gives efficacy to the story cycle in a modern context, staging the culture's inherent belief in the metamorphosis and adaptability of man in and with his environment and its integration into the lives of present-day non-tribal Indians. Her ventriloquism of Makunaíma, a ventriloquism of spirit, stages an intertextual clash that demonstrates not only how stories are made, but also demonstrates the performative aspects implicit in a transcultural written text from this place. This imaginative approach to the novel retrieves the Amazonian interior from its idealization as a pre-modern chronotope and revives Amerindian oral traditions and the world-view they encompass from myth into a body of literature. The multiplicity embodied in her narrative captures the cultural, racial, historical multiplicity of the Amazonian and reflects the societies inherent belief in the metamorphosis of culture and the adaptability of man in and with his environment. In *The Ventriloquist's Tale*, Melville sustains an imaginative engagement with the *theatre of the arts* to create a novel that reflects the evolutionary arc of Amazonian literary history. It not only follows in the footsteps of *Macunaíma*, but also

The Lost Steps and *Palace of the Peacock*. And though Melville's novel offers

the most up-to-date dramatization of the Guyanas as a site of enactment, it is by no means

the full performance, for as Harris suggests, "civilization never arrives at a final

performance—the final performance is itself a privileged rehearsal" (87).

Chapter 4

Islands: Jamaica's National Dance Theatre Company and the Dance of Place

The geography of the Caribbean is uniquely characterized as a sea of islands. This aspect of the region, is, as Dara Goldman writes, "at once, both the most obvious feature of the area and the element that most starkly differentiates it from the rest of the Americas" (36). The islands of the Caribbean then are distinct places, but places that are connected to other places. As matter and metaphor, islands connote isolation, fragmentation, and self-sufficiency as well as indicate dialectic relations between the land and sea and among islands and mainlands. The Caribbean's geographic circumstance and its colonial legacies have internally divided the region into island nations, divided by language and politics. In previous chapters I argue that geographic and environmental circumstance shapes the perceptive experience of place; I follow that trajectory in this chapter, by using the island as a metaphoric framework to explore how island geography simultaneously inspires a strong sense of nationalism and of cross-cultural discourse. Because the trope of the island is an embodied metaphor, I illustrate the creative tension between insularity and relation through the embodied discourse of dance. I use the duality of islands to explore how Caribbean dance technique and choreography, primarily that of Rex Nettleford and Jamaica's National Dance Theatre Company (NDTC), express an embodied language that is at once emplaced in both local and relational cultural geography. The Caribbean's geographic circumstance and its colonial legacies have

divided the archipelago into island nations or language groups; here, I suggest

that dance, and specifically, choreographed dance and its technique, is a circum-

Caribbean aesthetic practice that appropriates identities and experiences across such

boundaries.

In the Introduction of *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power*,

Susan Foster constructs dancing, "as a cultural practice that cultivates disciplined and

creative bodies, as a representational practice that explores rigorously strategies for

developing body signification, [and] as a cultural endeavor through which cultural change

is both registered and accomplished [that] provides rich resources for any study of

embodiment" (xiii). To suggest that choreography, the artistic interpretation and

composition of danced movement, typically into some sort of narrative, is itself an act of

writing, is also to suggest that the body possesses its own lexicon through which

experiences are expressed, dialogues sustained, vernaculars established, and knowledge

preserved. These propositions establish performance as an active site of transfer, where

history and memory are expressed through the body. Following this theoretical paradigm

that posits the communicative possibilities of dance, I explore the body's role in

producing postcolonial narratives of place. I posit that body kinetics and body expression

create a common "language" in which to communicate the archipelagic experience. The

text of this chapter, then, is the dance itself. I focus on Caribbean dance theatre, a genre

that interprets dances of folk tradition and popular culture for the stage, as a way to

emphasize that choreography, as the byproduct of a discipline doing its creative work,

writes the body. To this end, I focus on selections of Rex Nettleford's choreography for

Jamaica's National Dance Theatre Company and the movement and

performance genealogies that he traces in his work to discuss how the enactment of

kinesthetic memory writes place as well as tells a "tale of Relation" (*Poetics of Relation*

18). I place Nettleford's work as the outgrowth of a twentieth-century cross-cultural

dialogue in contemporary dance and the newly emerging practice of using dance as a

political tool of sorts, first for the representation of marginalized identities and then for

the representation of national identities. However, what emerges from this history is a

fertile space wherein artists seek and describe their connections. By way of comparison

with Ramiro Guerra's *tecníca cubana* and work with the Conjunto Nacional de Danza

Contemporánea, I characterize Nettleford's artistic vision and practice as establishing the

conventions of a new genre of dance.

In his Introduction to *Islands and Exiles: The Creole Identities of Post/Colonial*

Literature, Chris Bongie writes that the island is understood, "on the one hand, as the

absolutely particular, [it is] a space complete unto itself and thus an ideal metaphor for

traditionally conceived, unified and unitary, identity; on the other, as a fragment, [it is] a

part of some greater whole from which it is in exile and to which it must be related—in

an act of (never completed) completion that is always also, as it were, an ex-isle, a loss of

the particular" (18). This problematic duality of the island trope has permeated the

discourse and representation of Caribbean islands. Such constructs have their origins in

the colonial-era thinking that accompanied the expansion of empire and are perpetuated

by the mindset of the colonial and postcolonial subject confronting the legacy of such

epistemologies. Colonized islands were romanticized as utopias or Edens where

European civilization could return to a primal state.[68] This escape to an island

space was a retreat from the momentum and problems of a modernizing society. As

Richard Grove characterizes it, "The geography of the island actually offered a

contradictory set of opportunities: the social opportunity for redemption and newness as

well as an encapsulation of problems posed by the need for physical and mental survival

and health" (33). In theory and in practice, the islands of the Caribbean were always

conceived of as extensions of the European colonizer. The official languages were those

of the colonizers, the religious and social values were apprehended according to

European standards of civility, and even the imagination, closely regulated by colonial

education systems, was populated by images of European culture and aesthetics.

Caribbean engagements with the island trope, constructed from the perspective of

living on an island, also struggle with the duality. Islands, as George Lamming explains

in *The Pleasures of Exile*, are the perfect geographical feature to study the issues of exile

and insularity. The size of islands and the permeability of their shorelines keep them

related to the sea of islands around them and to their colonial metropoles across the

ocean, yet, Lamming also sees these shorelines as setting finite terrestrial boundaries. The

confines of an island, and the economic, political, and artistic restrictions that they

induce, force connection to larger continents, not only the continental Americas that

geologically connect to the Antilles, but also, because of colonialism, to the "mother"

country, such as England, or the perceived ancestral homeland, such as Africa. Kamau

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[68] Colonial era depictions constructed islands as Edens or Utopias where Europeans could either cultivate their culture or escape civilization to return to a romanticized primal state; but postcolonial constructions of what it meant to live on an island differed significantly (Grove).

Brathwaite's New World trilogy, which includes *Rites of Passage*, *Masks*, and

Islands, works within this spatialized paradigm, redeploying these themes from a

postcolonial perspective in poetry that explores the geographically and culturally

determined links to Africa, Europe, and North America, and the hazards of such

influences.

To secure shorelines, often the national borders of the island, then, is to assert

sovereignty over a way of life, a language, a cultural identity, and most importantly, to

break the cycle of subjugation and dependence imposed by colonialism. The logic of this

self-defined differentiation is topographically determined as the physical place creates its

best defense. As Dara Goldman writes, "The carving out of island-states acts as a perfect

physical embodiment of the processes of differentiation between the self and its other(s)"

(28). But to blockade shorelines is also to close out the rest of the world and to ignore

that any country, regardless of size, exists in relation to a variety of influences. This

makes it possible that the earlier ideal of the island's primal state is redeployed as a

pejorative in which island nations are backwards, un-modern, or isolated from the world.

And for the Caribbean, which is a sea of islands, this logic emphasizes the topographical

boundaries, the political differences, and the linguistic impossibility of communication,

thereby fostering fragmentation between the island nations. J. Michael Dash writes,

"Island space could … lead to terrible isolation, to a sense of shipwrecked communities

cut off from civilization and the modern world" ("Anxious Insularity" 289).

The spatialized discourse of *antillanité*, or "caribbeanness" as Dash translates it in

Caribbean Discourse, is Édouard Glissant's response to this pejorative binary and is

based upon the idea of opening up an ostensibly claustrophobic space to the possibility of relationality. In a separate discussion, Dash clarifies that "[t]he main thrust of Glissant's thought is to conceive of island space not as a site of neurosis but in terms of a relational context" ("Anxious Insularity" 296). The rhizomic thought underlying Glissant's spatialization of experience expresses itself with a poetics of relation, "in which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other" (*Poetics of Relation* 11). Relation is "a poetics that is latent, open, multilingual in intention, directly in contact with everything possible" (32). The issue of language challenges the articulation of such poetics; indeed, Glissant's theorization of relation is tangential to a highly politicized debate in the Francophone Caribbean surrounding the French of the metropole and the artistic and social elite versus the Creole of the local and the masses.

In response to the Caribbean's difficulty in balancing insularity and relationality, I suggest here that dance, "often said to be a way of expressing the unspeakable" (Roach 27), offers an embodied discourse that can represent common experiences in a cross-cultural context. The non-verbal language of the body communicates in situations where spoken languages and discursive languages fail. I discuss the island trope, a metaphor of physical embodiment, as a metaphor of relation, emphasizing that the islands of the Caribbean form an archipelago, or "an island bridge," connecting the Americas (Benítez-Rojo 3). Such geographic circumstance does not challenge the specificities of a people in their place, in fact, it allows them to flourish; however, it also presents more possibilities of imagining identity, discourse, and understanding. In *Cities of the Dead*, a study of circum-Atlantic performance histories, Joseph Roach dismisses linguistic or national

boundaries as barriers to the study of social memory, a concept he treats as conterminous with culture. He explains that "within the geohistorical matrix of the circum-Atlantic world," such finite borders are imaginary, and even though they do create meaningful distinctions to identity and sovereignty, they "[disguise] the collaborative interdependence" that exists prior to, underneath, or in spite of such divisions (xi).

Wilson Harris' theorization of the phantom limb is a way of understanding the real conditions underlying this relationality and connecting the social memories and the embodied practices of dismembered people. In this particular theorization of cultural recovery and invention, the phantom limb represents the physical memories that resonate in bodies even when the material conditions, or the limbs, are severed or no longer exist. This phenomenological understanding of memory points to the potential for embodied discourse to intervene in the narration of history. "It is legitimate," Harris explains, "to pun on limbo as a kind of shared phantom limb which has become a subconscious variable in West Indian theatre" ("History, Fable and Myth" 157). He constructs the limbo dance as the a phenomenal and metaphorical "gateway" between the Old Worlds of Africa and Europe and the New Worlds of the Americas, where bodies were dislocated and learned to inhabit new places, all the while retaining physical memories and integrating new ones (158). Harris writes, "The limbo dance therefore implies … a profound art of compensation which seeks to re-play a dismemberment of tribes … and at the same time a curious psychic re-assembly of the parts of the dead god or gods" (159). Caribbean dance theater, as the outgrowth of folk traditions, emerges from the artistic and

embodied cross-pollination within the New World, diasporic, circum-Atlantic

"womb of space," which is Harris' term for the cross-cultural creative imagination that

functions within this sphere of influences, not with the explicit purpose of representing

such connections, but certainly to imaginatively engage with and reconstruct images of

the patterns remembered by bodies.

The building of a repertoire, Diana Taylor's "non-archival system of transfer" of

embodied memories (*Archive and Repertoire* 19), is akin to reclaiming the phantom limb;

it is the transcription of memories that originated in the movement of bodies. As an

embodied expression that resists discursive practice and oral language, dance transmits a

poetic image that sensitizes or sensates lived experiences to a present audience. The

transcription of these performed images describes and interprets the sensations produced,

how people moved, how the music sounded, or how the scene looked, during a single

performance event. However, a distance is always created between artist and audience

when performances are entextualized, or descriptively translated into a written text. The

live performance, though always different from any other performance, reanimates the

meaning of the work. The animation of narratives in live performance spatializes the

experience in the sense that it is activated in real time and actual space even if it

thematically activates past traditions. It captures the kinesthetic memories of people for

whom embodied experience is a traditional and practiced way of knowing and sharing

knowledge. Dance performance thereby creates a way to write histories that were omitted

by authoritative discursive traditions. The nature of dance performance is that it does

communicate across perceived boundaries, retaining aspects of their present enactment

but also opening the possibility of re-interpretation. As Diana Taylor explains: "Performances travel, challenging and influencing other performances. Yet they are, in a sense, always in situ; intelligible in the framework of the immediate environment and issues surrounding them" (*Archive and Repertoire* 3). The development of Caribbean dance theater, in particular, demonstrates the embodied poetics of dance as a proliferating discourse that is in dialogue with other discursive forms and cultures, but that is just as capable of articulating specificity.

My transcription and analysis of Caribbean dance theatre here draws from a variety of texts based in both an archive and a repertoire. In Jamaica, I interviewed Rex Nettleford and attended live performances of *Kumina*, *Sly Mongoose—Character Sketches 2*, and *Katrina* (among others), during one weekend of NDTC's 2008 season at the Little Theatre in Kingston, Jamaica. I also reviewed undated video recordings of these and other works, such as *The Crossing*, that are intended for teaching choreography as well as Nettleford's extensive writing about his creative vision and process and the history of the company. In Cuba, I interviewed Ramiro Guerra in November 2008, but his choreography is no longer performed and images and recordings of historical live performances are difficult to access. I relied on *Historia de un ballet: Suite Yoruba*, a film based upon his piece *Suite Yoruba* that demonstrates the creative process by which ritual is interpreted for theater, and *Súlkari*, a film version of the three-part piece choreographed by Guerra's apprentice, Eduardo Rivero. The complexity of my analytical process is not unique to researchers working with living texts, particularly historical ones. My transcriptions are not of a single performance event, but rather an assemblage of

multiple performance events. My entextualization of this choreography

reflects my effort to capture the liveliness or the performative qualities of the living

performance event instead of simply summarizing the plot and theme. I was able to

develop a sense of the work's impact on audiences by participating as an audience

member in live theater performances, but by viewing recordings I was also able to

deconstruct the performance events into manageable units of analysis. My transcriptions

are not exhaustive, and should be considered within the circumstances of their respective

performance events and the context of my argument and purpose here.

A strictly postcolonial reading of dance, which I would characterize as situating

colonialism as a defining experience for understanding contemporary societies, argues for

the body's role in asserting autonomy under colonial violence. Dance was and continues

to be a powerful form of expression for people whose bodies were subjugated, and

moreover, whose bodies and the place(s) they inhabit were written over. The brutality of

slavery in the Caribbean makes this a particularly compelling trajectory because power

was quite literally established over other people's bodies. It is not the metaphor or the

gesture of the "gaze" indicted in feminist theory, but a harsh violent fact of this history of

depersonalizing and dislocating bodies. In this historical context, dancing was a way of

claiming one's corporeality, even if just in the moment of performance. Nettleford

understands dance to be "a primary instrument of survival," explaining that "[o]ne's body

belongs only to oneself, despite the laws governing chattel slavery in the English-

speaking Caribbean, which until 1834 allowed one person to be the 'property' of another"

(*Dance Jamaica* 20). In addition to this claim over one's corporality, Nettleford sees the

communicative possibilities of the body giving a voice to the individual,

granting autonomy to the enslaved or colonized (*Dance Jamaica* 20). To dance, then, is

the physical demonstration of the release from oppression, of the corporeal freedom that

was not possible under a system of chattel slavery.

However, to dance was not exclusively an act of resistance, but also an activity

that had its roots in ancestral religious and cultural traditions. Throughout much of the

Caribbean, dancing and performance were forms of expression retained from ancestral

traditions and indigenized in a Caribbean context. Performances were ritualized and

recreational, improvised and choreographed, but in all cases, they were living events in

which bodies inhabited specific times and places. They were in and of themselves a form

of communication, holding memories and transferring knowledge. A Caribbean reading

of dance suggests that dance not only expresses that which was never expressed through

written or spoken language, but also that which cannot be understood because of

differences in *lingua franca*. African retentions, and their manifestations in ceremonial

dancing or plantation revelries create a common thread in the embodied discourse,

thereby, the non-discursive language of dance, the language of the body, presents viable

pathways of cross-cultural communication within the fragmented Caribbean.

Caribbean performance, as the introduction to this project suggests, has a long and

diverse history, including ritual performance, theatrical performance, or just the

performance of everyday life. For example, Cuba has always had a solid tradition of

European classical ballet, currently represented by the Ballet Nacional, a cultural

institution over which the country's prima ballerina, Alicia Alonso, still reigns. Such

classical dance was always popular and, with the exception of a few creole-

themed ballets choreographed by Alonso, the tradition was neither significantly impacted

by nor much of an impact on an extremely vibrant ritual, primarily religious, dance

culture. Traditionally, the majority of dance in Jamaica was related to religious ritual, but

stage drama, or pantomimes, a cultural vestige of the British, have always been popular.

The Little Theater Movement, founded in 1941, was instrumental in indigenizing this

tradition, creating a venue for artists to explore local themes in local language for local

audiences. In spite of these traditions and institutions, "conscious" performing arts, that

is, performance arts that transculturated theater aesthetics that would be described as

distinctly Caribbean in form and theme, grew significantly in the twentieth century. On

an artistic level, this has much to do with modernism in general, and subsequently, on a

social level, it reflected an increasing political awareness, national independence

movements, and civil rights movements in the Caribbean and abroad. Rather than

working within the framework of European dance forms, artists sought to create and

represent a form of performed embodiment. During this process, there was significant

cross-fertilization between Caribbean and North American movement and artistry.

Katherine Dunham, the African American cultural anthropologist and dancer, was

instrumental in paving the way for black dance theater throughout the Americas. Dunham

studied dance in Trinidad, Cuba, Martinique, and Haiti from 1935 to 1936, but the

majority of her ethnographic research focused on Haitian ritual dance.[69] From this

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[69] Though her primary research focused on Haiti, Dunham also conducted significant fieldwork in Accompong, an ancestral Maroon village in Jamaica. In fact, she was one of the only outsiders to gain access to this community. Her experiences are documented in the books, *Katherine Dunham's Journey to Accompong* (1946), *Dances of Haiti* (1947), and *Island Possessed* (1969).

fieldwork she choreographed a series of works that she performed on North American tours that were primarily promoted as popular revue, rather than conscious choreography. While this was most likely the result of a social climate that relegated all "black" performances to lowbrow genres only performed on Broadway, Vèvè A. Clark concedes that the presentation of Dunham's work was also extremely didactic. Dunham was not explicit about her research process and the intentions behind her artistic interpretation of these ritual movements. It is only within a more recent critical climate that appreciates "folk" tradition and performances as texts, that Dunham's work has been widely recognized as archiving African-derived movement patterns in the Americas. Despite these perceived limitations, Dunham's research and choreography sent a clear message to the international dance world that African-American and Caribbean communities possessed a meaningful movement vocabulary that warranted exploration and artistic representation.

Though Dunham achieved artistic visibility for presenting her interpretations of Caribbean dance on stage, Beryl McBurnie of Trinidad is generally recognized as the mother of Caribbean dance.[70] Dunham and her disciple Lavinia Williams both acknowledge McBurnie's influence on their technique, and Ivy Baxter, a driving force in Jamaican dance theater, also credits McBurnie with modeling a movement language that inspired her work. McBurnie began developing her own movement philosophy based in Trinidadian folklore as a young girl, but left for intensive dance training in New York City. She captured the attention of the art world when she debuted in 1941 as La Belle

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[70] I find this to be a fair statement but acknowledge that there are several key figures in Caribbean dance. For example, Rex Nettleford also credits Ivy Baxter as a pioneer while Cuba generally recognizes Ramiro Guerra as the father of modern dance in Cuba.

Rosette, performing her signature choreography *Sango*, and thereby

introducing North American audiences to Caribbean folk dance.[71] Upon returning home

in 1945, McBurnie founded a company of volunteer dancers, Little Carib Theatre, to

continue her exploration into Caribbean folk dancing. Performances doubled as lecture

demonstrations, so as to educate audiences about the movement vocabulary and its links

to their own embodied heritage. She taught dance at the University of the West Indies,

Mona in 1957, thereby exposing the broader community of Caribbean artists to the

practice of interpreting and performing local attitudes and experiences. Her students

during those years included Derek Walcott, Rex Nettleford, Ivy Baxter, as well as many

of the dancers who would go on to become the founding members of the NDTC.

In the bourgeois cultural climate of the still colonial Caribbean that favored

Western aesthetics in art and dance, McBurnie challenged her dancers and her audiences:

"[A]re we afraid because most of the vital expression of our folk material is of African

origin?" (qtd. in Sörgel 65).[72] Audiences were under the spell of colonialism, preferring

European artistic traditions, which were perceived as "high" art, over the "savage"

retentions of African culture. Indeed, the former colonies of the Caribbean had a long

tradition of European arts and culture being dominant. However, what distinguished these

places from that hegemonic culture imposed upon them had much to do with the

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[71] Ray Funk writes that the Coffee Concert series at the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA), organized by theatrical agent Louise Crane in the spring of 1941, gave McBurnie notoriety outside of Harlem. She performed Sango with a trio of Haitian drummers. Between 1941 and 1945 she would also dance at the 92nd Street Y. See "The Flowering of La Belle Rosette."

[72] This originally appeared in McBurnie's essay "West Indian Dance," The Artist in West Indian Society, ed. Errol Hill. Kingston, University of the West Indies, Extra-Mural Studies, n.d., p. 51.

influence of African customs on the day-to-day life of people at all levels of

society. In adapting it to their own contexts, artists turned to the African elements in their

societies, creating choreography that integrated dance-forms acceptable to "respectable"

taste of a bourgeois middle-class with the African-derived ancestral movements that this

same sensibility previously dismissed as "savage." Belinda Edmondson critiques what

she depicts as a middle-class pillaging of Africanness and folksiness in *Caribbean*

Middlebrow, arguing that the intellectuals and artists responsible for claiming and

representing "national" and "folk" traditions were essentially bourgeois middle-class

types whose immediate circumstances had little to do with the real "folk." This

association was a key strategy to building a "national" or post-colonial identities in

various arenas.

Caribbean artists, taking their cue from innovations in North American modern

dance, which was envisioned as a means of asserting the originality and individuality of

American identity, experimented with what this paradigm would look like in a Caribbean

vernacular that located its "native" identity in its African roots. In general terms, modern

dance seeks a physical engagement with the immediate environment; dancers

communicate the social and material conditions of a specific, and usually contemporary,

time, place, and set of values. Martha Graham, for example, who described her

movement philosophy extensively, drew inspiration for her choreography from what she

considered man's innate primitivism. Her movements were meant to reflect the act of

pulling the earth's vital source right out of it. Its floor work demonstrated an embodied

connection to physical place while the abstracted and forceful movements introduced

alternative gestures to the forms of classical ballet. In the 1940s and 1950s,

many of the early Caribbean choreographers studied with Graham, whose technique is

based on the contraction and release of the body; with José Límon, whose technique

explores the movement of the breath through the body and how it propels the fluidity of

everyday activities; and at the Humphrey-Weidman School where Doris Humphrey

taught their fall-and-spiral technique and Charles Weidman taught pantomime and

gesture. The intentions of these movement philosophies and their actual steps resonated

with Caribbean artists seeking a movement language to express experiences common

among their people, but marginalized within their colonial societies. Modern dance

offered an embodied discourse to illustrate the emplacement of people and culture.

While this new movement language appealed to Caribbean artists because it

offered a counter-discourse to the hegemony of European dance expression, many of

these components, such as the contraction-release of the body or the attention to process

in everyday movement, were always already present in African movement. In light of

various scholars who suggest the connection between early modern dance and African-

derived movement, here I echo the suggestion that North American modern dance was

influenced by what Caribbean cultural material and artists were doing. Vèvè A. Clark

points out that Dunham is traditionally read, "as a precursor to modern black dance and

as an inventor of a mass of choreography," but "[l]ittle has been written about her artistic

contributions to *American* dance theater" (319; my emphasis). Similarly, Sabine Sörgel

raises questions about who was influencing whom. In *Dancing Postcolonialism*, she

inquires: "How much of Graham and other modern dance work had been—consciously or

not—influenced by the African Caribbean presence though? In other words,

did McBurnie's contribution of Caribbean folk elements add to the development of

Graham and Weidman as much as they had influenced her?" (Sörgel 79). Though these

are suggestions, no sources confirm the influence Dunham's or McBurnie's

interpretations of Caribbean dance on Graham or Limon, it is nevertheless important to

note the potential reciprocity in this sphere of influences.

Some of the most important Caribbean dancers emerged from this New York-

Caribbean artistic experimentation. McBurnie's exposure to contemporary dance and her

experimentation with folk traditions had a significant impact on regional and local artistic

endeavors, her most significant legacy being the one established in Jamaica by Ivy Baxter

(*Dance Jamaica* 28-29). Baxter studied dance under Hazel Johnston in Jamaica, trained

in London, and inspired by McBurnie's lecture-demonstration/performances went on to

create her own forum for the investigation of Jamaican folk movement. Her company, the

Ivy Baxter Creative Dance Group, explored Jamaican folk movement and provided a

forum for dancers like Nettleford to explore an embodied vernacular.

A significant turning point in Caribbean dance theater came when performing

groups from throughout the Caribbean met during the first Caribbean Arts Festival

(CARIfesta) which was hosted in Puerto Rico in 1952. Summarizing Ivy Baxter's

reflections on the significance of the event, Sabine Sörgel explains the impact these

performances had on cross-cultural communication and recognition for the region:

"Through eye-to-eye contact between otherwise isolated island populations, dance and

music performances easily overcame the colonial language divide in terms of a shared

performance heritage that had successfully resisted and survived imperial

oppression" (76). The timing of this festival corresponded with significant and varied

political changes around the Caribbean and emphasized the potential for dance theater to

cultivate embodied practices of self-definition and express postcolonial identities. It is

within this sphere of artistic influences and practices that I project the emergence of

Jamaica's National Dance Theatre Company and Cuba's Conjunto Nacional de Danza

Contemporanea, and their respective codifications of movement.

In 1960, the Conjunto Nacional de Danza Contemporanea was formed as an

official mandate of Castro's "new" Cuba. The Revolution created two new dance

companies, the Conjunto Folklórico Nacional, a folkloric dance troupe, and the Conjunto

Nacional de Danza Contemporánea, a modern dance group, to round-out a national

theater dominated by the classical work of Alicia Alonso's Ballet Nacional de Cuba.

Ramiro Guerra was assigned as the company's artistic director, an appointment that came

with the requirement that he develop a signature technique for the company, one that

represented a distinctly Cuban dance vernacular. Ramiro Guerra, who came to be known

as the father of modern dance in Cuba, like many other Caribbean dancers, studied with

Graham and Limón in the 1950s. He found that that while these techniques "opened new

terrain, he still felt estranged from his natural way of moving" (Mousouris 56). Naturally,

he turned to the African elements of society to articulate this difference. Because the

Revolution was responding directly to years of North American exploitation, in many

ways a continuation of colonial-era Spanish exploitation, there was a requirement that

Cuba's contemporary dance also differentiate itself from contemporary modern dance

trends. With a budget to hire twenty-four dancers, he hired twelve black and

twelve white dancers, of different dance backgrounds ranging from classical ballet,

modern, folkloric, and nightclub: "He recognized the different cultural heritages of his

dancers and sought opportunities to use the possibilities of each one. This group began to

study how the Cuban body moved, what made it different from bodies in other cultures,

and what its movement could express" (Mousouris 57).

A comparable artistic endeavor followed in service to Jamaican nationalism.

When forming the National Dance Theatre Company with Eddy Thomas in 1962, the

year of Jamaica's independence, Nettleford sought to create a lexicon that engaged the

body in a specific physical and cultural situatedness; thereby, building the repertoire of

the new country's embodied history. As a symbol of Jamaica's newly asserted

independence, the company established the following goals for its "national" project:

> … (1) to provide a vehicle for well-trained and talented dancers who wish to
>
> perform and create works of excellence, that is, works of standards comparable
>
> to those found in any other part of the work; (2) to help widen an informed and
>
> critical Jamaican audience that will be responsive to works of excellence in the
>
> theatre arts, particularly theatre-dance; (3) to experiment with dance forms and
>
> techniques of all kinds with a view to helping to develop a style and form that
>
> faithfully reflect the movement patterns of Jamaica and the Caribbean area; (4) to
>
> encourage and, where possible, conduct research into indigenous dance forms in
>
> Jamaica and the Caribbean area. (*Dance Jamaica* 40)

This was not simply a company to showcase the choreographic talents of

individual artists, but rather an effort to create a whole new genre of dance theater.

Though its scope was national, primarily interested in retrieving and interpreting the

embodied traditions of Jamaica, the project was undertaken with an awareness that it

would facilitate a dialogue between nations in the region. Caribbean audiences would

likely recognize aspects of their own nation's historical memory in NDTC repertoire and

see a means by which they could represent it; in achieving such recognition, the company

then serves as an example of how the embodied experiences of a people in their place can

be communicated across boundaries. In as much as it served the goals of the newly

formed nation, NDTC aimed to create a larger regional community based on shared

experiences in the past and present. NDTC's nationalistic agenda however reveals a

tension between the goals of the company and the state. From the time of NDTC's

founding until his death in 2010, Nettleford, as the agent of the company, resisted the

state's invitations to perform for tourists and in tourist venues. His resistance to the

commercialization and commodification of the company is a statement about the integrity

of his artistic process and the aesthetic value of the dancing.

Working in the spirit of Dunham and McBurnie, Guerra and Nettleford based

their respective movement vocabularies and choreographic works upon the raw material

they collected through a version of ethnographic inquiry. In creating the piece *Suite

Yoruba*, Guerra, and his troupe of dancers, attended actual Santeria rites in order to learn

the movements associated with the invocations of different Orishas. Likewise, Nettleford

and his dancers regularly observed and participated in Jonkunno dances and Kumina rites

to learn the standard movements of these traditional dances. Like their

predecessors, Guerra and Nettleford were always conscious not to perform the actual

ritual, for risk of provoking an onstage possession. Instead, they abstracted the

movements of these rituals, invested them with the artistic conventions of dance theater,

and made them aesthetically cohesive and appropriate for theater audiences. This creative

process is what distinguishes the performances of everyday life from those of the theater.

In his essay "Teatralización del Folklore," Guerra outlines the four stages through

which folklore and folk tradition pass as they are adapted as theater spectacle. In the first

stage, naturally, the ritual or recreational process/performance exists in the context of its

actual intent; to serve, communicate, or celebrate with the gods or within society. In the

second stage the formal elements of these performances of everyday life are distilled

from their original context; the music, gesture, symbols, and forms lose their ritual

significance and are revalorized as emblems of a culture. The third stage is the artist's

experimentation with these formal qualities and the artist's interpretation of them

according to the aesthetic conventions of his respective artistic genre, be it classical

dance, modern dance, or drama. The performance of a theater spectacle in which the

original artistic creation is shared and expressed constitutes the fourth and final stage of

the theatricalization of folklore and folk traditions (5-8).

This process, Guerra explains, is most typically seen in the context of asserting

characteristics of a cultural identity, and particularly an artistic cultural identity,

representative of the nation. It is also central to clarifying the fine line between the

creation and the intent of performances of everyday life and the performances of

theatrical spectacle. The work of artistic intent is fundamentally different from that of the folk tradition, and is strategically designed for the purpose of art or entertainment. The theatrical spectacle retains the symbols of the folk, but they are developed through an overarching narrative, situated within a constructed set, filtered through the movement language of academic dance, and organized into spatial configurations that are enhanced by the proscenium setting. A primary goal is to create a communicative context that engages the audience as active participants in the interpretation of this work.

The transparency of this process and of its intended purpose to codify movement vocabulary is what distinguished the choreography of Nettleford and Guerra from that of their predecessors. Rather than simply reinterpret rituals for the sake of asserting the presence of marginalized identities in art, these artists not only interpreted these movements within the aesthetics of concert dance and refined a technique based upon it, but also taught audiences how to understand the language of this new genre of dance. By 1962, ICAIC produced the film *Historia de un ballet: Suite Yoruba* featuring a young Guerra and the dancers of Danza Contemporanea in a stylized performance of *Suite Yoruba*. Shot in a documentary style, the film traces the theatricalization process Guerra describes, showing live footage of the dancing, drumming, and singing of ritual gatherings honoring Ogun, Yemaya, Oshun, and Chango interspersed with dancers performing Guerra's artistic interpretation of these rituals in the rehearsal studios of the National Theater and in an abstracted performance space. The film introduced Guerra's choreography to Cuba and potentially to audiences abroad, but more importantly, it

functioned as a guide, a viewer's guide of sorts, to understanding the

foundations of this dance language and how it is to be understood. Its technique was not a

return to Africa, or a direct statement in contrast to European classical conventions or

North American modern dance, but a truly transculturated discourse native to Cuba and

the Cuban body.

Nettleford, for his part, continued McBurnie's lecture-demonstration practice,

"travel[ing] with his tights," as he phrased it in our 2008 interview, to various

engagements on behalf of NDTC and the University of the West Indies, Mona, and using

a dance vernacular to represent Jamaican cultural identity and its relation to the

Caribbean.[73] Since its founding, NDTC has toured throughout the Caribbean, North

America, parts of Mexico and Central America as well as England (London) and Russia

(Moscow). The reception of the choreography was enhanced because Nettleford

improved his audiences' theatrical competence through pre-concert lecture-

demonstrations, thereby facilitating the cross-cultural communicative potential of his

work. Curiously enough, he found that the lecture-demonstration was a crucial exercise

for the interpretive cooperation of London spectators. Without it, the critics failed to see

the dancing as anything more than a folk expression. Even with Jamaica's colonial ties to

the United Kingdom, they were unable to understand the context of the performance

event. Nettleford attributes this to the fact that English culture is not a dancing culture;

pointing out that there was no communicative difficulty between NDTC and audiences in

Moscow, where there is a strong tradition of folk and classical dance. For audiences in

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[73] This is the way Professor Nettleford described it in our August 3, 2008 interview at the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica.

the Americas, however, it was a way of showing that their embodied

memories and experiences did provide the material for interpretive dance and how that

translated in a specific context.

In the case of the NDTC, what emerges through this theatricalization of folklore

and the act of codifying movement, is a total theater aesthetic engaged in the multiple

sign-systems of theatrical communication. Nettleford's technique and choreography aim

to transcribe not only the performances/rituals, but also the ancestral physical life and

memory of native Jamaican culture. He takes certain mannerisms, such as the

impassioned dialogues common between Jamaican women, and creates a scenario, often

exaggerated, around it. They are integrated with drumming and singing based on actual

folk traditions but interpreted by Marjorie Whylie, Director of the NDTC singers. The

chorus functions as a choral orchestra, creating rhythms with which the dancers and

drummers dialogue; however, for those familiar with the lingua franca of the choral

arrangements, the singers also act as a Greek chorus, providing commentary that

accompanies the physical action of the dancers. Their contributions add additional layers,

creating a polyphonic artistic expression; it is not strictly a dance performance, but a

dance theater performance. The music and the dancing sustain a dialogue; the

arrangements of traditional songs and/or ritual drum motifs speak and provoke a

kinaesthetic response in the bodies.

The "system" of movement, as the Jamaican technique is referred to by Professor

Nettleford and his dancers, combines the academic dance steps and training of ballet and

modern dance with movements derived from African ritual dance, but is essentially

plucked right out of Jamaica's cultural geography. Nettleford draws from a

range of techniques, at times from European classical ballet, American modern dance,

and African ritual dance, and much like academic modern and classical choreography,

there is great attention to the lines that the body creates in space. He is conscious, too, of

the language he uses to identify the movements, reluctant to adopt the languages of either

classical ballet or modern dance, though, admittedly, he finds that the connections

between the *lingua franca* and the movement language of the latter are a more

comfortable fit for his objectives. The lines and rhythms created, however, are "palpably

different" from those North American and European contemporary dance. They do not

move at the accelerated speed of a metropolitan city or with the direct purpose of

capitalism; instead, they capture what Nettleford describes as, "the … deceptively

lethargic movements of the still largely agricultural seabound Caribbean" (*Dance

Jamaica* 181). The highly nuanced movement can be generally summarized as:

1. earthbound movement and low center of gravity

2. usually flat feet

3. flexed foot

4. pelvis-centered movement which allows hips and pelvis to swing
   independently

5. bent arms and elbows which are typical of the African-derived broken line in
   Caribbean dance technique

6. "cool" facial expression, body gestures are expressive only

7. isolations of shoulders, pelvis, feet, hands

8. polyrhythms deriving from African dance.

(Hilary Carty qtd. in Sörgel 90)

In reflecting on the sources of the technique, Nettleford points to a socio-cultural and embodied relationship to place in order to explain that "the flexed foot is … the symbol … of the hoe and pickax … and earthiness; the arms, like other parts of the body, must be able to describe the curve of the mountains, the flow of the rivers, and the ebb and flow of oceans" (*Dance Jamaica* 181).

This movement language, as well as his choreographic themes, capture the vestiges of what Sylvia Wynter refers to as Jamaica's plantations and plots ("Novel and History"), and are thereby situated in the time/space of creolization as conceptualized by Kamau Brathwaite (*Development of Creole Society*). Though I have used the term transculturation to characterize the general process of cultural development in the Americas, creolization is the term Brathwaite coined to describe this process of cultural mixing that took place in Jamaica. The terms are not synonyms, and creolization, as defined by Brathwaite, is "a way of seeing Jamaican society, not in terms of white and black, master and slave, in separate nuclear units, but as contributory parts of a whole" (307). Much of Nettleford's choreography, the early choreography in particular, illustrates the context of creolization as the site of an original, native, or indigenous Jamaican cultural identity. He claims a broad cultural inheritance by integrating European and African dance traditions and themes to show how these elements contribute to a native Jamaican way of being. In *Sly Mongoose—Character Sketches 2* (2008), a sequel

to an earlier Character Sketches piece, for example, Nettleford studies the

gestures of Jamaicans as they interact with each other in their physical environment.[74]

Nettleford uses the pantomusical format, a Jamaican tradition that he innovated by adding

more dance in the later years of the Little Theatre Movement,[75] to translate elements of

everyday performances, such as walking and talking, to the stage. Set to arrangements of

mento tunes, the original folk music of Jamaica that itself is based upon traditional action

songs, the piece moves from choreographed dance suites depicting this action to musical

interludes where the NDTC singers express wit and wisdom in performing songs such as

"I'm a Better Woman Than You," "Shame Marjorie Murdoch," and "Moutamassi Liza."

Emphasizing in our 2008 interview that Jamaicans are a mountain people,

Nettleford choreographs the movement of *Sly Mongoose—Character Sketches 2* as a

meditation on this aspect of life. He localizes the scene of a common male-female

dynamic: three female dancers haughtily turn their backs on three male dancers playing

drunk. They move away in slow, fluid foot shuffles, with arms akimbo and defiantly on

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[74] The title of this piece comes from a song known throughout the Anglophone Caribbean. As the liner notes for a July 27, 1979 recording by Sylvester McIntosh with Joe Parris Hot Shots (St. Croix) explains "the animal and its character are used to allude to sexual liaisons between the master of the house and the cook or between the mistress and a worker." The lyrics of that particular version, which are not necessarily identical to Whylie's arrangement for the NDTC singers, read as follows:
Sly Mongoose, all the dog them know your name,
Oh, yes, sly mongoose, all the dog them know your name.
You went into the mistress' kitchen,
Take out one of she fattest chicken,
Put it into your waistcoat pocket
Sly mongoose.
See Sly Mongoose at http://www.newworldrecords.org/linernotes/80427.pdf. Accessed February 28, 2010.
[75] Prior to founding the NDTC, Nettleford and Thomas, along with many of the troupe's founding members, worked with the Little Theatre Movement producing pantomimes that incorporated dancing "in order to give them a sense of energy and movement." Nettleford choreographed *Jamaican Way* (1958) with Thomas, choreographed and co-directed *Caribe Gold* (1960) with Louise Bennett, and choreographed and directed *Banana Boy* (1961) which included the most dancing of any pantomime and seemed to pave the way for a Jamaican dance theater (*Dance Jamaica* 299-300).

their hips. The shifting action this movement creates in their hips interacts

with their full skirts to create the visual picture of ascending the mountain. Their ascent

also metaphorically mimics the flow of the river. Moving to this interior space of the

island, "a natural space of community formation," as Dara Goldman sees it (28),

Nettleford offers a picture of Jamaicans inhabiting their place and the ways of being that

come from that experience.

In this very same performance situation, Nettleford seeks to "archive" the

aesthetics of Jamaica's native ritual performances. *Kumina* (1971), part of a "ritual

trilogy" that includes *Pocomania* (1963) and *Myal* (1974), is a choreographic

interpretation of the Congo-based religious rite that developed in St. Thomas Parish

during the nineteenth century, and was subsequently banned under colonial law (*Dance

Jamaica* 145). In as much as he seeks to depict the rituals indigenized in Jamaica, his

staging of *Kumina*, like the other works in the trilogy, is committed to ethnographic

inaccuracy. It is his interpretation of the Kumina rite, staged for a proscenium setting and

accessible to an audience seeking entertainment rather than involvement with the

invisible spirit world.

Kumina King offers a libation at the water's edge in St. Thomas. Photo: Monica DaSilva (2002). Dancer: Rex Nettleford. Kumina (1971). See *Seasons of Dance*, p. 206.

There are no equivocations in locating the geography of this performance, however. Nettleford's staging of *Kumina* clearly marks the site as St. Thomas: the backdrop depicts the craggy coastline that spans the eastern part of the island, with rough seas on the horizon and angry waves crashing over the bulkhead. The low moon over these agitated waters gives the audience a strong sense of being on the waters' edge in pre-dawn hours of the morning. Even at the coastline, however, there is a sense of spatial interiority to the setting, suggesting that while the origins of Kumina may have come from Africa, its cosmology and practice reflect the relationship of its practitioners to their immediate environment.

A drum break initiates the performance as in the ritual, and the call of

Imogene "Queenie" Kennedy. n.d. Photo: Keith Morrison. Image from National Library of Jamaica Photograph Collection. Accessed at www.flickr.com.

the drums is met first by the response of the NDTC singers, who establish a rolling incantation—*Who cross the river ... I want to know, I want to know ... Only the righteous, righteous, fo sho'*—and then, by the hip-saw toe-inching shuffle of the Kumina King as he begins the ritual with a libation of white rum. The call-and-response motif already established is sustained as dancers enter in polyrhythmic progressions across the stage, arms hanging long by their side, with the elbows back in a sustained curve, lifting and opening the heart and solar plexus. Their heads stay level as their feet crawl both in response to and in order to create the sustained forward-backward contraction-release movement of the pelvis, a movement called the hip-saw. This posture and gesture is the signature stance and step of Kumina dancers. As shown in the photo of Imogene "Queenie" Kennedy, a Kumina Queen from St. Thomas during the 1930s or 1940s who was recognized as an award-winning dancer and for her contributions to cultural development in postcolonial Jamaica, Queenie's body is posed in this very position. And though the photo gives viewer a minimal sense of motion, it is clear to see how Nettleford bases his technique for the production on the traditional lines of the body performing Kumina. Comparing the photos of Queenie with those of Nettleford and Pansy Hassan as the King

and Queen performing in the 1970s, there is a strong resemblance is evident

between the way the arms curve and extend beyond the torso while holding the libation,

the baton, or the dress. In live performance, as in life, however, each dancer maintains

this posture according to the conditions of their body; no two dancers move through this

hip-saw, toe-inching in the same way.

Rex Nettleford and Pansy Hassan as Kumina King and Queen in a 1996 performance of *Kumina*. Photo: Monica DaSilva (1996). See *Seasons of Dance*, p. 184.

However, departing from the traditional pattern of the Kumina ritual, where

dancers move in a circle around the drummers, the piece is oriented to the stage where

the action is directed towards the audience. Dancers enter diagonally from all directions,

falling into choreographed breaks of their own, intersecting with the next wave of dancers

as they retreat diagonally offstage. A warwick—or stick fighting—interlude midway

through the staging disrupts the rite for the theatre audience; this is theatre, not ritual, we

are not to be inhabited by the spirits of the dead, only witness the embodied aesthetic of

ritual ancestral movement. The rapture continues with the Kumina Queen

stomping the ground from flat-footed grand degajes/extensions, driving her movements

into the earth with an indigenizing force. Individual dancers sweep across the stage,

crashing into their own improvisation-like raptures. The polyphony of drums, voices, and

bodies reaches a near frenzy, but it is really just the point at which audience members

realize that they too have been swept up. In a paper presented in 1979 at the Jamaican

School of Dance, Brathwaite describes the experience as such:

> … it was as if as audience we were being drawn by a great force … nearer and
>
> nearer into the movement of the stage no longer stage but lighted ship or island.
>
> And as a harsh shiver of voices suddenly breathed agitation of water out of the
>
> tide of drums, 'I want to know, I want to know,' it was as if we had spoken from
>
> some deep involuntary something and all this while the body is moving steadily in
>
> inexorable progress through song through sound, through thunder…
>
> Wave upon wave of dancers, diagonal entrances and exits clash…
>
> (qtd. in *Dance Jamaica* 148)[76]

Brathwaite's description conveys the rupture audiences undergo in the performance

context; the intensity of the artistic expression causes the audience to lose its mooring in

the theater and instead they find themselves tossed into the very waters of this site of

memory. The poetic sensibility of his review, his attention to the force with which the

performance evokes, or provokes, the natural force of the site, suggests to me that in

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[76] This passage originally appeared in Edward Kamau Brathwaite's paper "Caribbean Perspective: Historical Framework" which was presented at the Caribbean Dance Seminar, December 6-8, 1979, Kingston, Jamaican School of Dance.

watching *Kumina* he saw, heard, and felt the *nation language* that he had been

trying to capture in poetry.

Just as island geography sets a specific boundary around a people and their place,

carving a space for the practice of narrow nationalisms and the metaphor of insularity,

islands, most typically as parts of an archipelago, are simultaneously always already

related to other landmasses. As Diana Loxley writes, "The island's identity is *fixed*

through and by virtue of its correspondence with the known world." Indeed, Nettleford's

"Jamaican" technique is the outgrowth of a creative dialogue made possible through the

movement of people and the exchange of ideas between islands and metropoles. I return

to the island as a geographical imaginary here to suggest that the artistic practice of Rex

Nettleford and NDTC, as well as the Conjunto Nacional, which I have addressed more

briefly, is illustrative of this duality. In as much as Nettleford's choreography in *Sly*

Mongoose and *Kumina* fulfills NDTC's nationalist agenda to trace the embodied

memories embedded in the physical and cultural environment of Jamaica, Nettleford's

work at times speaks to a diasporic consciousness that challenges the politics of place.

His choreography also demonstrates a relational search for identification in the African

Diaspora and the Caribbean region, suggesting and confirming that the project of tracing

ancestral embodiment invariably leads beyond the nation. Like the island itself, which

maintains a correspondence with "known worlds," Jamaican embodied memory intersects

space and time, washing onto the shores of other islands and continents at different times.

By tracing Jamaican movement, Nettleford inevitably maps a circum-Caribbean

performance genealogy.

During the 1979-1980 season, an exchange agreement was finalized between NDTC and the Conjunto de Danza Contemporánea, whereby the two companies traded original choreography to integrate into their standard repertoires. Though Guerra had already been ousted as the company's director some ten years earlier during a particularly closed, suspicious time for artists in the Revolution, *la tecníca cubana* continued as the primary practice of the company and the national dance school. By this time, Nettleford too had codified a core movement vocabulary that he used throughout his choreography, even when themes required the exploration of additional technique such as Kumina, and that was taught at the Jamaican School of Dance. Part of this exchange, then, stipulated that the companies also share the nuances of their respective techniques.[77] *Súlkari* (1971), one of the companies signature pieces choreographed by Eduardo Rivero, a student of Guerra's and one of his dancers when founding the original company, was offered in exchange for Nettleford's *The Crossing* (1978).

Súlkari is a meditation on African sculpture in which Rivero seeks to express the visual dimensions embedded in the process of making art which he sees as an active,

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[77] Carson Cumberbatch, a former NDTC dancer, lists the commonalities between Cuban and Jamaican modern techniques:
  1. hyper-extended back
  2. Contraction-release of upper torso (which is an original African dance feature even though it became so prominent for Graham technique)
  3. ribcage shift in second position parallel demi-plié or straight
  4. spiral/cross sit, followed by fall to floor
  5. rippling back/body waves in flat back position in demi-plié
  6. spirals (three-dimensional curve, moving around central axis) around upper part of body
  7. change of back
  8. lunge (transference of weight from one leg to other)
  9. side thrust of hip
  10. slide to ground
  11. off-balance leg extension on floor
  12. stepping from one knee from a closed to an open position
  Cited in Sörgel 173.

living, active practice that extends through language, visual arts, and dance

(Rivero 50).[78] In the three-part work, six dancers, three women and three men, create the

motion between and within the static postures that punctuate the piece.[79] Contraction-

releases of the upper body, lunges, and flat-footed progressions activate these living

sculptures in space. There is no set, only sepia-toned ambient lighting. It is an abstracted

space that gives no indication of time or place, but suggests an unspecified African

primordial drama or memory. Costuming is equally abstract: both men and women wear

flesh-toned leotards that accentuate shell and bead adornments around the necks of the

women and around the necks and waists of the men. Each of the men carries a staff that is

central to the dancers' coupling and also suggests the contexts of the sculptural

enactment. Such staging brings the bodies in motion to the absolute center of the

performance and refers the choreography back to its sculptural influences. The traditional

Cuban Yoruba music shifts between the tonal chanting of women's voices and men's

voices and nearly always maintains its heart-beat in the drum rhythms. The dialogue of

the musical elements is extended to the dancers: the female dancers respond to the call of

the female voices and the male dancers to the call of the male voices. These motifs

harmonize into three vignettes: first women, then men, and then their procreative

coupling. In these three renderings of the primordial couple, common to many African

genesis narratives, the choreographer acts as a virtuoso craftsman. The three pairs of

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[78] In a first-person essay composed Fidel Pajares Santiesteban based on his interview with the artist, Rivero explains: "… Mi fuente de inspiración … siempre fue la escultura, algo que me sirviera como recurso primario para mover al bailarín. Por ejemplo: las tallas, los troncos, los cabezales. Bastones de mano, los tronos, las sillas, las puertas." See *La danza contemporánea cubana y se estética*, p. 50.

[79] My analysis of *Súlkari* is based on a film of the piece, directed by Jorge Haydu or Melchor Casals and performed by the Conjunto Nacíonal de Danza Contemporánea.

bodies move independently of each other in contrasting, yet complementary

horizontal and vertical lines; the choreography unifies them periodically, but only for a

single beat. This enactment of ancestral beginnings suggests a continuity between the

embodied experiences of the past and the cultural production of the present.

While *Súlkari* is a choreographic ode to the Caribbean's African ancestry, *The

Crossing* seeks to represent the process of becoming American (in the broadest sense of

the word) in all of its pain and productivity. It is rooted in a New World experience and

thematically addresses the experience of what Nettleford calls plantation America: "*The

Crossing* matches other spiritual-inspired Company dances, all of which are evocations of

the dynamics of plantation America, where Europe has met Africa on foreign soil and

where Europe's melody makes sense only with Africa's rhythm" (*Dance Jamaica* 156).

The opening of the piece establishes the motifs of Africa and Europe through Nettleford's

choreography and Quincy Jones' score. As in *Kumina,* drum rhythms initiate the action.

The piece opens to a dark stage with the silhouette of six figures fixed upstage center

while five dancers, dressed in tribal regalia, move diagonally downstage in progression of

upper body contractions. After this brief introduction to the cultural influences

converging in this performance event, four dancers, two men and two women, all dressed

in red unitards, erupt from the darkness, accompanied by triumphant symphonies of

West. Their movements are like the arrow of empire: forceful progressions of turns and

grand jetés. The aggrandizing melodies, and their accompanying gestures, fade into

various bird-like sounds that reincorporate the earthbound movements familiar to NDTC

and Danza Moderna. African life is portrayed as cooperative and spiritual through the

gentle rhythms and movements that build into a ritual gathering. The melody

returns. Sirens, bells, and whistles ring out interrupting the ritual to announce the arrival

of the British, a red, white, and blue embodiment of the flag, and "the complicit African,"

as Nettleford refers to the other red body with a face covered by a white mask. From

here, the staging is extremely detailed in its narrative, incorporating symbolic and spoken

language to trace a performance genealogy that begins with the separate traditions. The

transatlantic passage, the crossing itself, is a dance of dislocation: dancers shuffle in

rows, shifting directions abrubtly, en masse, to a disjointed song of sea-chanteys, water

sounds, and drum beats. Upon arrival in the Americas, the white-masked African shifts

mediation of the action over to an African American in blackface, thereby introducing a

wholly American performance practice into the discussion: minstrelsy. Under the

direction of the blackface "guide," who seems to assume various roles as the Jim Crow,

Sambo, old country man, comedian figures of the minstrel shows, the piece seems to

follow the structure of a minstrel show, prominently featuring the spirituals and folk

dances that were typical of that genre. In contrast, however, Nettleford finds no humor in

the violence of plantation society and makes a social commentary on the life of black

folks during a time when they had to remain in blackface, so to speak. Though at times,

the narrative seems slanted towards North American southern experience, particularly

during the scene during which the KKK appears, Nettleford insists on its

"Caribbeanness" and its relevance across the Americas. His interest lies in emphasizing

an aesthetic precedent in the theatricalization of folklore that is the outgrowth of the

encounter between cultures and identifiable in the minstrel theatrics. By claiming the

higly contentious theatrical tradition of minstrelsy, Nettleford makes an

important statement about the integrity of folk material as source material in the artist's

creative process.

In the performance context of this exchange, whereby Jamaican audiences

receive and interpret Cuban choreography and Cuban audiences receive and interpret

Jamaican choreography, *Súlkari* and *The Crossing* are works that can be characterized

simultaneously as "closed" and "open" according to Marco de Marinis' spectator model.

It is this duality that makes them compelling choices for exchange. These pieces are

"closed" in that they are intended for a specific, informed, audience, narrowly defined as

either Cuban *or* Jamaican. In this case, because of a similarity in each country's

development of a conscious theater aesthetic, both sets of audiences have been educated

about theme and form through film, such as *Suite Yoruba*, or lecture-demonstration, or on

a more intimate level, by integrating the technique into their own amateur or professional

dance practice. More broadly speaking, it is arguable that the aesthetically informed

Caribbean viewer might be identified as the intended audience; in which case, the

audience understands the process and the folk or popular traditions underlying the

choreography are not only culturally recognizable, but also culturally acceptable. At the

same time, these works were selected for exchange, and deliberately so, because they are

"open" according to this model; they both possess the quality that in performance they

are "intended to reach a fairly nonspecific addressee who is not too narrowly defined …

[and] that the senders do not foresee a rigidly predetermined interpretive process as a

requirement for their success, but allow the audience a variable margin of freedom

deciding up to what point they can control the cooperation" (Marinis 169).

These works thematically resonate within a greater sphere of references thereby offering

multiple points of entry for diverse audiences to interpret them according to their

respective cultural codes. *Súlkari* explores the African influences not only on art, but on

the process of making art, while *The Crossing* considers the historical conflict of

colonialism and the cultural legacies of the transatlantic passage. Both of these pieces,

however, illuminate the evolution of folk cultures and legitimize them as sources of

inspiration for more virtuoso performances. These themes are accessible to diverse

audiences, broadly and variously defined by terms such as African Diaspora, Caribbean

Diaspora, the Americas, or even African and European. This aspect of the choreography

makes it an ideal visual language for viewing in a cross-cultural context: in its ability to

overcome geographic, linguistic, and ideological barriers, the body can be translated and

interpreted freely by audiences.

The most recent of Nettleford's significant works that evokes this womb of space

is *Katrina* (2006). Choreographed to memorialize the tragedy that befell New Orleans,

North America's "Caribbean" city, in August of 2005, *Katrina* initiates the action very

clearly in New Orleans and its sphere of influences.[80] It opens with "jump n' jive" dance

party, very evocative of Jazz Age New Orleans, an important era in the cultural

development and distinction of the Diaspora. The party is interrupted, not abruptly, but

sporadically as gusts of wind, represented by individual bodies rushing forcefully across

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[80] It draws on other works of the NDTC repertoire that Nettleford contextualizes as in the cultural sphere of plantation America— *The Crossing* (1978) deals with the diasporic nature of the Americas and jazz references found in work choreographed by people other than Nettleford, including Eddy Thomas's *Footnotes in Jazz* (1962) and *Bach, Brubeck, and Company* (1968).

the stage in a series of heavy-footed jetés and arms slashing the air in

opposition, dashing between the revelers, making them lose their bearings, gradually

shedding pieces of their party costumes, until they too are completely integrated and

become the storm itself. The changing geometries mimic the patterns of Kumina;

however, danced to a Shango chant, a version that originates in Trinidad (though likely

familiar to Yoruba practitioners throughout the Americas) and arranged by Marjorie

Wylie of the NDTC singers, the ritual pays homage to the god of rains and thunder. The

intensity of the sacrifice and offering builds in the chant and the bodies' responses to it.

Arms exchange in sharp front-to-back port-de-bras. The costumes' long streamers

elongate these lines and build the intensity of the winds. As the eye of the hurricane

moves across the stage, the dancers slow their movements and open their formations,

much like the storm itself. The pace quickens, and patterns tighten again as the storm re-

intensifies and passes.

As the final winds blow diagonally down stage and off, they give way to the

rising floodwater entering up stage left. A soloist dressed in a red-sequin gown, a shadow

of the revelers from scene 1 and a foreshadowing of perilous times ahead, makes her way

with sharp extensions and développés and fluid yet insistent port-de-bras. She is

accompanied by Bessie Smith's "Backwater Blues" (1927), a track typically thought to

commemorate the 1927 Mississippi River flood that caused levees to burst in Missouri,

Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Kentucky and in which over ninety percent of the

dead or displaced were African American, though it was actually recorded two months

before the flood (Evans 17). As she advances, retreats, anguished and desperate gestures

pushing her momentarily in any given direction but never stopping her approach, she embodies the rising floodwaters and the suffering they will inflict on the people.

The hurricane, choreographed to a Sango chant, and the flood, choreographed to "Backwater Blues," set into motion a series of artistic and phenomenal (as in sensory perception) associations that inform how Nettleford wants the significance of this scene to be understood. On the level of staging, the choice to set the storm to a Sango chant connects the Afro-creole deity to this great force of nature. But his choice of a Trinidadian version of this chant recalls La Belle Rosette, Beryl McBurnie, who introduced herself to the dancing world in New York City with her own interpretation of Sango. The costuming and choreography, however, appear heavily influenced by another choreographed storm—Katherine Dunham's storm scene in the 1943 musical featuring nearly every great African American performer, *Stormy Weather*. Performed as the "break" in Lena Horne's rendition of the jazz standard "Stormy Weather," Dunham's storm scene is equally evocative of the gods in its dream-like transfer out of reality and into a psychic space. It is a somewhat jarring scene; Dunham and her dancers interpret what is ostensibly Horne's psychic state in the space that is usually reserved for the musicians to improvise on the melody. That he dedicates the work to Katherine Dunham, "It was just her kind of thing," he explained in our 2008 interview, illustrates his interest in sustaining a cross-cultural dialogue based in common experience and deepening the connection within a global Caribbean consciousness.

However, as I have emphasized in my transcription of these scenes,

the dancers truly become the storm. This embodiment of the storm and flood compels me,

as I imagine Nettleford intended, to also draw connections between the real phenomena

and consequences of these Atlantic storms, particularly the way they have impacted the

lives of those in the African Diaspora. *Katrina* has been performed in North American

concerts, as well as throughout the Caribbean, where it is dedicated to the survivors of

other storms, such as the September 2008 NDTC performance in Nassau dedicated to the

survivors of Hurricane Ike in Inagua and Turks and Caicos, and Hurricane Hanna in

Haiti.[81] The truly fantastic quality of this natural phenomena and its impact on the people

is not entirely unique to Katrina; and it is out of the specificity of this physical place and

phenomena that Nettleford takes his ballet.

The storm motif has figured prominently in the cultural production of the African

Diaspora in the Americas as a transformative force that reengages people with primordial

chaos; in each case, it takes them back to an originary consciousness wherein the

dismembered tribes are remembered.[82] From here, the body is released from a site-

specific place to enter a psychic space of the Diaspora as dancers delve into embodied

memories of slavery and Africa. Imploring arms characterize the movement of an adagio

choreographed to the traditional spiritual "Motherless Child." Isolated trios of men and

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[81] This performance information was found on the website Bahamas Uncensored where there were also photos of the performance taken by Peter Ramsey. http://www.bahamasuncensored.com/JamaicaDance/JamaicaDance0908.html. Accessed February 28, 2010.

[82] This is a point I would like to develop further in future versions of this chapter, by drawing parallels between Nettleford's storm and those of literary representation. I have two in mind: Derek Walcott's storm scene in *Omeros*, where the Gods of all cultures join in a raucous bacchanal, and Zora Neale Hurston's storm in *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* the 1928 hurricane that hit Florida, America's second deadliest hurricane "that killed over 2,500 people, most of them black migrant workers drowned when the levees holding Lake Okeechobee gave way" (Cartwright 741).

women, reminiscent of Nettleford's representations of Caribbean slave era movement, but working in a more American modern dance vernacular create a stage image that evokes the multiple dislocations, entanglements, and discontinuities of slavery. It is in the next scene where diasporic trajectories intersect. Moving further back in the diaspora's performance genealogy, Nettleford stages an Invocation of Ogun. Torsos ripple parallel to the ground, feet inch and shuffle and hips sway in a parallel position, moving in the earthbound movements and circular patterns of traditional African dance. However, as the full white skirts and headscarves indicate, this is not Africa, but an imaginative engagement with Africa and a New World encounter with the Yoruba gods.

The genealogy traced in *Katrina*'s choreography stages what certain audiences will recognize as the simultaneity of experience and marks the embodied histories of the Americas as distinct trajectories along a continuum. Through his depiction of the hurricane, a natural phenomena that resonates widely within this womb of space, Nettleford links the experiences and movements of natural and social histories and their impact on the bodies that remember them. *Katrina*, like other pieces in the NDTC repertoire, such as *The Crossing*, is deployed for the purpose of acknowledging a mutual recognition in experience. In the map I have titled "Patterns Remembered by Bodies," I identify a sphere of influences wherein I track the trajectories of some of the embodied memories implicit in this discussion of mutual recognition.

Atlantic Basin Hurricane Tracking Chart
National Hurricane Center, Miami, Florida
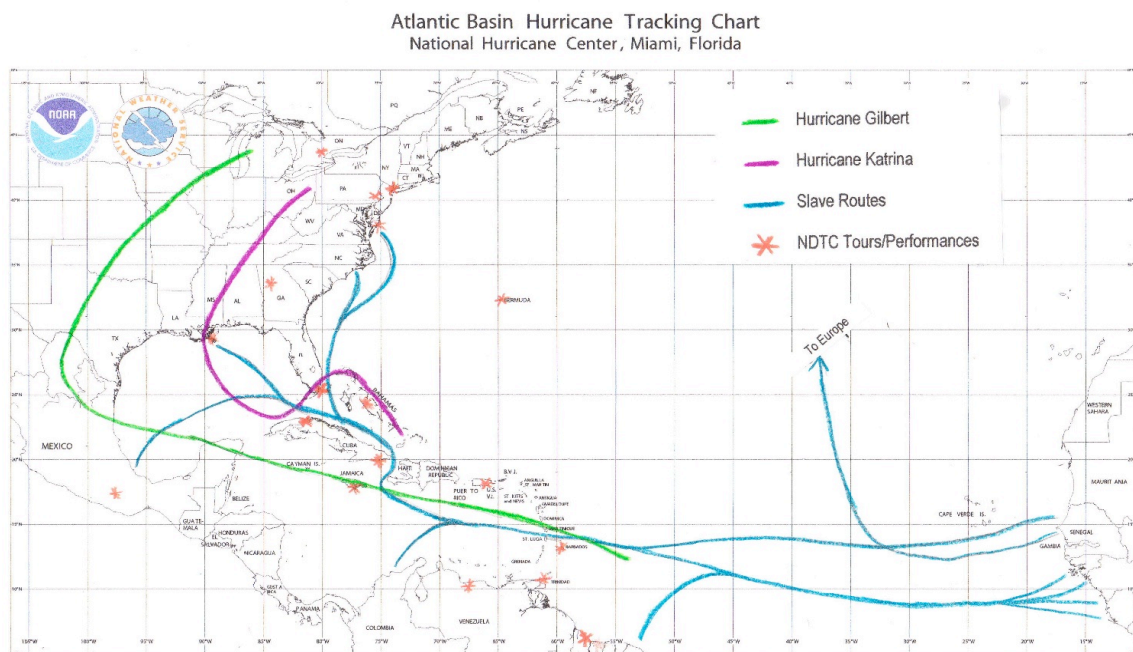
TRACKING MAP: Patterns Remembered By Bodies

I begin with a common Atlantic Basin Hurricane Tracking Chart (published by the

National Hurricane Center, Miami, FL), because it frames the exact space of a hurricane,

as it spins off the coast of Africa, strengthens or weakens on its transatlantic passage, and

sweeps through the archipelago and into southern North America. The juxtaposition

Hurricane Katrina's path with that of Hurricane Gilbert, a storm of "fantastic"

proportions according to Nettleford, suggests a corollary experience between Jamaicans

who survived and rebuilt their communities, and the residents of North America's Gulf

Coast who faced that challenge.[83] I have further modified the image to include some non-

specific slave routes in order to follow this performance genealogy of this space back to

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[83] Hurricane Gilbert ravished Kingston in 1988, leveling the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, among other things, in its path.

its African ancestry. It is the dismemberment of middle passages that

Nettleford evokes in his choreography and the promise of re-membering that characterize

many of his finales. *Katrina*, like *The Crossing*, ends on a celebratory note.

Throughout this discussion, I have characterized Nettleford's artistic philosophy

and aesthetic as intensely national while at the same time committed to advancing a

discourse of relationality. Much of his choreography offers a visual rhetoric for

imagining the embodied experiences that forge relations not only between the islands of

the Caribbean, but also between islands and other continental places. To suggest the

possibilities of how this embodied discourse might communicate to audiences beyond

Jamaica, I have added a final detail to my tracking map: the locations of NDTC

performances. This "Patterns Remembered By Bodies" map, however crude or

incomplete as it may be, serves as a visual conceptualization of this womb of space and a

spatialization of cross-cultural discourse and trajectories that meet within it. By

understanding the complex intersections of multiple histories and "the patterns

remembered by bodies," places become spatialized, sites where trajectories meet and

where the weaving and accumulation of physical encounters create a palimpsest of social

memory.

Conclusion

This dissertation takes its fundamental impulse from the belief that there is a simultaneity and a relationality among cultural expressions in the Americas that are potentially limited by divisive historical trajectories, national borders, linguistic traditions, and artistic forms. Indeed, the discussions of history writing, nationalistic discourse, literary canons, and artistic disciplines are at times exclusive in conceptualizing the parameters of ideologies and certain fields of investigation. My reading across time, space, language, and form invariably raises questions about the ways such boundaries are presently constructed and breaks down many of the absolutes of common critical practice. My purpose, however, has not been to issue an explicit challenge to many of the concerns of current critical theory, but rather to illuminate the transnational, transhistorical, and transcultural articulations of experience in Caribbean representations of emplacement. By shifting the focus of inquiry to geographical sites of cultural identity and tracing the ongoing movements of people and traditions through time and space, this project facilitates a borderless thinking that can account for the contemporary and historical migrations, diasporas, and multiplicities that characterize the region.

The purpose of art is to represent some real world phenomena. As Bachelard writes, "Art is grafted nature" (10). The nature of artifice, then, is to re-present. Wilson Harris' *theatre of the arts* provides a framework for understanding that such

representation is not simply contrapuntal to colonial discourse, but rather a

creative polyphonic discourse based in the transculturation of embodied and discursive

traditions. It is a paradigm that seeks associations between experiences and sustains

dialogues across artistic genres by claiming everything that its cultural inheritance

encompasses. One of my goals here has been to put the imaginative efforts of artists

laying claim to place in dialogue with the deeply symbolic consciousness of Harris'

theorizations. Among these artists and forms, the physical landscape is a common

intertext, and the interpretation of it and its impact on historical and contemporary

identities shape their metaphors of human experience. "[M]etaphor [is] not a symbol but

conversation," Derek Walcott writes in "What the Twilight Says" (15). I find that Harris,

Walcott, as well as Carpentier, Andrade, and Melville, and Nettleford use metaphor to

engage in a highly imaginative exchange about the creative enterprise of inhabiting

history, language, and environment. My broad reach across myth, epic-minded poetry,

the novel, and dance theater shows how artists are compelled to use art to interpret how

physical place shapes identities. I find unity in these seemingly divergent texts in that

each of these readings investigates separate trials of the imagination that seek to root

humans in a place. I bring these artists together because they imagine new relationships

to place through their respective forms of artistic representation and are attuned to the

relationalities entextualized in their environments. By understanding the conceptual

simultaneity of their endeavors, it becomes possible to trace a cross-cultural poetics of

place and to conceive of transcultural flows of performance traditions and cultural

attitudes.

Nevertheless, throughout this process, I have questioned the value of

exploring a Caribbean geographical imaginary and a poetics of place without considering

the material conditions and consequences of emplacement. Though an immersion in a

seascape produces the vision and voice of Derek Walcott's poetry, it also produces other

flights over the sea that are embarked upon out of desperation, under dangerous

circumstances, and with very little promise of redemption upon arrival. The archival

landscape of the Guyanas does retain native voices in the landscape, but at the current

rate of deforestation, there will be no trace of this site of enactment as a living landscape

in our lifetime. Alternately, Melville's recuperation of Macunaíma in *The Ventriloquist's*

Tale potentially takes on new meaning considering that around the time of its publication,

a team of activists, social scientists, and even a native informant were virtually tracking

and hunting the last surviving man from the an uncontacted tribe in the Brazilian state of

Rondônia with the illusion of bringing him some sort of justice for the alleged murder of

his tribe by local land devlopers.[84] And finally, if island geography produces a

simultaneous posturing of insularity and relation, then, does Rex Nettleford's

choreography, which balances emplaced cultural identity with circum-Atlantic

performance genealogies, only exemplify the inevitability of the departicularization of

Caribbean cultural identities as they are integrated into global economies.

These questions in no way suggest this project's short-sightedness. Quite to the

contrary, if this incarnation of "Theatre of the Arts: Caribbean Intertextuality and The

Muse of Place" might be considered a prologue to Caribbean culture, then such questions

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[84] Monte Reel's *The Last of the Tribe* relays the events that began in 1996 when government agents
investigated rumors of a lone Amerindian living in the Amazon after local farmers had murdered his tribe
in order to claim the land for themselves.

are topics of inquiry for further study that addresses the difference between local histories and cultures without denying the relation. I find that this line of thinking indicates that there are very tangible connections between the imagination and the material world. The geographical or environmental imagination is worth investigating and recuperating because only by reestablishing a connection to place, and appreciating historical memories of being in situ can we develop a sense of political responsibility. By attempting to understand natural histories and our place within them, we learn to sustain our culture and our environment. This is not to say that we always do or have to, but rather, to emphasize that the act of imagining ourselves and our culture as part of a performance genealogy emplaced in a physical space is the first step to conceiving of sustainable relationships between human cultures and their environments and negotiating the most sensitive boundaries.

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