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The Baroque Imagination of Alejo Carpentier, Derek Walcott, and Seamus Heaney: Folding the Periphery into a Center

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UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

THE BAROQUE IMAGINATION OF ALEJO CARPENTIER, DEREK WALCOTT,
AND SEAMUS HEANEY: FOLDING THE PERIPHERY INTO A CENTER

By

Carmen Chiappetta

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

May 2012

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The Baroque Imagination of Alejo Carpentier,
Derek Walcott, and Seamus Heaney: Folding the
Periphery into a Center

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In this dissertation, I define the baroque imagination as the mindset of an intellectual in the postcolonial world, grappling creatively with multiple cultural inheritances and attempting to fashion a literary oeuvre that will redefine the individual's relationship to the center and to the island culture from which he comes. Gottfried Leibniz's theories of the monad and the baroque, as interpreted by Gilles Deleuze in *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, provide the theoretical grounding for my concept of the baroque imagination as do Edouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* and Wilson Harris' concept of the cross-cultural imagination. In the works of Alejo Carpentier, Derek Walcott and Seamus Heaney, the baroque imagination concretizes the abstraction of Emmanuel Levinas' concept of the face, providing distinct features and a context that form the basis for a baroque humanism.

The first chapter traces the evolution of the baroque in Carpentier's prose and novels from a means of articulating identity, to a joyful celebration of hybridity and ultimately a self-questioning discourse as a way of articulating the marvelous reality of the Caribbean and of interrogating the myths of European superiority. The second chapter analyzes Walcott's long poems as the constitution of a new form of poetry that incorporates the epical and the lyrical and make the Caribbean a rhizomatic center of

cultural production, while marginalizing the effect of the metropolis. Chapter three examines Heaney's baroque imagination as a way to simultaneously create a cultural thickness for Northern Ireland, while opening out the definition of Irishness itself. He strives for relation between not just the colonizer and the colonized, but among all people of the world through artistic and literary engagement. The conclusion considers the ways that the baroque articulation of the self advocates a more inclusive humanism that serves as an ethical ideal.

For the Ruiz-Castañeda and Chiappetta families

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List of Abbreviations

<i>AL</i>	<i>Another Life</i>
<i>BC</i>	<i>Baroque Concerto</i>
<i>CPDW</i>	<i>Collected Poems of Derek Walcott</i>
<i>CT</i>	<i>“The Cure at Troy”</i>
<i>DMM</i>	<i>“Dream on Monkey Mountain”</i>
<i>EA</i>	<i>La Expresión Americana</i>
<i>EC</i>	<i>Explosion in a Cathedral</i>
<i>EL</i>	<i>Electric Light</i>
<i>FK</i>	<i>Finders Keepers</i>
<i>GT</i>	<i>The Government of the Tongue</i>
<i>HS</i>	<i>Harp and Shadow</i>
<i>KTW</i>	<i>The Kingdom of this World</i>
<i>LS</i>	<i>The Lost Steps</i>
<i>O</i>	<i>Omeros</i>
<i>OG</i>	<i>Opened Ground</i>
<i>P</i>	<i>The Prodigal</i>
<i>PR</i>	<i>Poetics of Relation</i>
<i>RS</i>	<i>Reasons of State</i>
<i>SI</i>	<i>Station Island</i>
<i>TH</i>	<i>Tiepolo’s Hound</i>
<i>WTS</i>	<i>What the Twilight Says</i>

Introduction: From the Baroque to the Baroque Imagination

Yo diría que cultura es: el acopio de conocimientos que permiten a un hombre establecer relaciones, por encima del tiempo y del espacio, entre dos realidades semejantes o análogas, explicando una en función de sus similitudes con otra que puede haberse producido muchos siglos atrás...Y yo diría que esa facultad de pensar inmediatamente en otra cosa cuando se mira una cosa determinada, es la facultad mayor que puede conferirnos una cultura verdadera.¹

– Alejo Carpentier, “La novela Americana en vísperas de un nuevo siglo,” 17

No imagination helps avert destitutions in reality, none can oppose oppressions or sustain those who “withstand” in body or spirit. But imagination changes mentality, however slowly it may go about this.

– Edouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, 183

Baroque can cover anything that was around in the 17th century and strikes you as exuberant, exorbitant, ornate, elaborate, theatrical, hysterical. If it’s glittery and curly-wurly, if it’s dynamic and dazzling, it qualifies.

– Tom Lubbock, “Baroque Stars,” *The Independent*, 30 March 2009

In recent years, there has been a flourishing of scholarly works that interrogate the baroque as a once discarded phenomenon that can be useful for approaching debates on modernism, postmodernism, multiple modernities and globalization. The question of modernity has been central to the formation of an autochthonous consciousness and aesthetic in the emerging nations of the third world. Conscripted into modernity by the arrival of European conquistadors and colonizers who instituted the plantation system, many postcolonial nations have nonetheless found that full participation in modernity, as the model exemplified by Western Europe, continues to elude them. This is a condition the islands share with the colonies, with the newly independent nations of Latin America

¹ “I would say that culture is: the accumulation of knowledge that allows a man to establish relations beyond time and space between to similar or analogous realities, explaining one in terms of the other that may have been produced many centuries ago ... And I would say that faculty of thinking immediately in something else when looking at a particular object, is the greatest faculty that a true culture can confer on us” (All translations of Carpentier’s and Lezama Lima’s essays are mine, unless otherwise noted. Translations from the novels are noted in the bibliography.)

and with the divided island-nation of Ireland, which all have struggled with identity formation.

Increasingly, the hegemony of the European model of modernity as an evaluative standard to which all societies conform has been challenged. Rather than the idea of a monolithic modernity that follows a singular, progressive path, Latin American, Caribbean and Irish scholars are looking to the idea of divergent and multiple modernities as a way to account for development in the postcolonial world, for example: Nestor Garcia Canclini's *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico* (1993), Roberto Schwarz's *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture* (1992), David Lloyd's *Irish Times: Temporalities of Modernity* (2008), and Monica Kaup's forthcoming *Neobarroco: Transamerican Fictions of Modernity and Counterconquest*, just to name a few.

This study on the baroque imagination traces the literary journeys of the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier and poets Derek Walcott from St. Lucia and Seamus Heaney from Northern Ireland. All three exhibit a similar approach to their multiple inheritances and the question of the modernity of the periphery. They each argue unequivocally for a re-valuation of the importance of peripheral cultures and more equitable relations with the center.² This study takes the challenge of these artists to heart and places these artists

² The idea of a center and a periphery, in postcolonial studies, derives from understanding the organization of the world as divided between areas of production, European or Anglo-American, and areas for procuring raw materials, the global South. This process is inextricably bound up with imperialism as the metropolitan centers derive their materials from their colonies. The center produces the completed material goods using the raw elements from the periphery. As such, the center controls the meaning of these goods and then exports them to the colonies. The notion of center and periphery has proved useful for theorizing relationships between metropolis and colony, not only for the metropolis, but also as a form of resistance for the colonial periphery. Dependency theory, which originates in Latin America, uses the concept of center-periphery to challenge the European liberal-national model of modernity to suggest that European nations can only be constituted as such by their relationship with their current and former colonies. However, the pervasive use of this discourse of center and periphery can tend to obscure their specific manifestations in areas termed as such. As José Elias Palti notes, "It is simplistic and misleading to speak about "centers" and "peripheries" as if they were homogeneous fixed entities—a habit that necessarily leads to abstract and generic views of "Europe," "Latin America," and their mutual relationships—that is,

of the periphery in dialogue with one another. The concept of the baroque is a paradigm that allows for a non-Eurocentric conception of modernity capable of accommodating the marvelous reality of the Caribbean and Ireland. The baroque is a function of the imagination that allows these artists the means to syncretize their hybrid histories and provide a new cultural point of departure. I coin the phrase “the baroque imagination” to highlight the contribution of the individual in forming these baroque identities. This approach differs from that of some of the seminal studies of the baroque such as Eugenio D’Ors’ *Lo barroco*, Walter Benjamin’s *Origins of German Tragic Drama*, Antonio Maravall’s *The Culture of the Baroque: Analysis of a Historical Structure* and Gilles Deleuze’s *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* which envision the baroque as a force, a structure, a reaction or a machine. While these theorists consider individual expressions of the baroque, they refrain from considering the individual artist’s choice to express himself or herself in this way.

Yet the articulation of the self for the postcolonial artist is a contested proposition. In her ground-breaking article “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, Gayatri Spivak identifies the core of the problem as an epistemological and categorical one. The constitution of the self as Subject with “no geo-political determinations” in Western discourse actually serves to hide the origins of the term within a specific European context which is also influenced historically by the practice of imperialism (66). She argues that “The clearest

as if they were objects whose nature and defining characteristics could be established *a priori*” (175). In my dissertation, I use the terms center and periphery broadly to denote precisely these misguided attempts at establishing a priori notions of Europe and Latin America. Each of these artists is responding to a specific colonial or postcolonial situation with its attendant centers and peripheries, yet they are also confronting a generalized idea about Europe or Latin America that shapes the imagining of the local political context. Caryl Phillips’ *The European Tribe* gives evidence of this imagining as he states, “I could not believe that the British were really any different from the French, or the Spanish from the Swedish. All these different nationalities were to be found in college, plus many others. They all seemed to share a common and mutually inclusive culture. Reorienting myself in Britain seemed spurious; the problem was a European one, as exemplified by the shared, twisted, intertwined histories of the European countries” (9).

example of such epistemic violence is the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other” (Spivak 76). Carpentier, Walcott, and Heaney, to varying degrees, are that Other that is constituted as the opposite of the European Self. As such they must contend with the “asymmetrical obliteration of the trace of that Other in its precarious Subject-ivity” (Spivak 76). By recovering lost histories and uncovering this Othering of the colonial subject, Carpentier, Walcott and Heaney claim self-hood, and subject status. In the face of a theoretical discourse that would define them as Other, these artists claim that they are Subjects.

The appearance of baroque aesthetics and thought structures in the work of Carpentier, Walcott, and Heaney, indicate that these authors are using the baroque to advance a decolonizing poetics based on the recognition of the full humanity of the Other. Carpentier is one of the original proponents of the neo-baroque. He consciously considered his work to be baroque and has not only written baroque novels, but has extensively written essays on the same subject. Walcott and Heaney have never explicitly stated that their work is baroque, but in reading their poetry and understanding the politics behind the poetics, I came to see an affinity in form and function with the Carpentierian baroque.

Carpentier utilized the baroque as a way to claim a unique Latin American identity, but also to lay claim to the vast cultural history of Europe as his own. Never afraid of being called a cultural usurper or a mimic, Carpentier folded the Latin American and the European into one another a way that signaled the former’s difference and continuity with the latter. Carpentier’s novels, short stories, and essays reveal that although he responds to the crisis of reason in a similar way to his contemporaries, he

never loses faith in the ability of art to represent reality and serve as a catalyzing force for cultural and social change. As Donald Shaw argues in his comprehensive study of the author: “The questioning of reality that we perceive in the New Novel has its roots in doubt—doubt about man’s ability to recognize truth of any significant kind, to make sense of the universe, to accept the human condition as other than tragic . . . Carpentier almost certainly did not harbor such doubts” (126). According to Shaw, this conviction sets him apart from his contemporaries, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Julio Cortázar, and Carlos Fuentes, “to whom reality seems at times not just extraordinary or unusual but mysterious and uncanny, if not incomprehensible” (Shaw 126). Carpentier’s belief in the fundamental communicability of human experience is one of the foundations of his baroque humanism and the basis for his decolonizing poetics. Carpentier communicates the human condition of Latin America and the Caribbean by constructing an identifiable face for the region from the materials he recovers in the archive. Walcott and Heaney share Carpentier’s attraction to European culture as a founding element of Caribbean and Irish culture respectively. They share Carpentier’s baroque humanism and belief in the fundamental communicability of experience through art.

Although Walcott’s poetics respond to similar motivating forces—a negation of the idea the Caribbean as a site of nothingness, the articulation of a specifically Caribbean identity and a claim on the cultural heritage of Europe—they have rarely been labeled as baroque.³ Part of the resistance to claiming that label comes from an inherent reluctance in the English language to using the term “baroque”, as Peter Davidson argues,

³ Carlos Fuentes does include Walcott in his catalogue of baroque writers in an interview with the Paris Review: “There is a culture of the Caribbean, I would say, that includes Faulkner, Carpentier, Garcia Marquez, Derek Walcott, and Aimé Césaire, a trilingual culture in and around the whirlpool of the Baroque which is the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico” (*Latin American Writers at Work* 194). However, this is a rare occurrence.

“English ... has always been structurally resistant to Baroque as either a word or as a concept. In English, Baroque is commonly synonymous with the tumultuous, the devious, the perverse. Anachronistically, it is identified as a manifestation of childish bad taste” (25). This same linguistic prejudice extends to Heaney whose works are not readily identifiable as baroque, yet behind the crystalline form of the poems lays a complex formation of identity that balances the specifically Irish with the universal. Claiming the label “baroque” does not serve the decolonizing project of Walcott and Heaney in the same way that it does Carpentier, for whom the baroque is identified as an intrinsic part of both Spanish and Latin American culture. The term baroque locates Carpentier’s decolonizing project within a specific geographic and historical intersection. Walcott and Heaney, on the contrary, are operating within the context of the English language in which the term baroque has been marginalized. Although their works share common assumptions about the nature of art and its aims, they do not use the term baroque. Regardless of these semantic quibbles, a baroque aesthetics and imagining can be identified in both Walcott’s and Heaney’s poetry. Their poetry contains a density of allusion, an *horror vacui*, a folding together of historical and contemporary images, and a space for the numinous.

I begin this introduction with an analysis of the different conceptions of space exhibited by both Renaissance and Baroque paintings, as space and the interconnectedness of space are orienting concepts for Carpentier, Walcott, and Heaney, and each is profoundly concerned with shaping a local identity that also participates in cosmopolitan dialogue. There is a similarity between the baroque representations of expansive space that correlates with the neobaroque expansion of what it means to be

human, which will be addressed in the discussion on Hegel and history later in the introduction. I then consider the genesis of the definition “baroque” in the Enlightenment to indicate that the pejorative definitions of the baroque are not necessarily intrinsic to its aesthetics and practice, but the result of a strategic Othering to legitimize the Enlightenment project of modernity. This Othering of the baroque as primitive with respect to eighteenth century rationality occurs concurrently with an Othering of African, Amerindian, and other non-Europeans as rationally-deficient and hence sub-human.

I then explore the modernity of the historical baroque, not as opposed to, but preceding and effectively producing, the “modern” individual. Both Carpentier and Cuban poet José Lezama Lima have argued the approach and appetite for learning of seminal baroque figures such as Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, el Inca Garcilaso, and St. Ignatius of Loyola is consummately modern. In fact, Loyola’s *Ejercicios Espirituales* serve as one of the links between the historical baroque and the baroque imagination in that they exemplify a way of assimilating all experience, sensory, intellectual and spiritual, in the process of aligning oneself more closely to God’s will. The baroque imagination functions in a similar way coalescing varied experiences in the construction of a new form of identity. The Jesuits are excellent models for the contemporary practitioners of the baroque because as Davidson notes, “the Jesuits were active and at their most brilliant as agents of the hybridization of cultures, producers of the new” (11).

The success of the Jesuits in their baroque ventures can be measured by the extent to which they were repressed in the early modern period, being expelled from the Spanish colonies in 1767. Recognizing the subversive nature of the Jesuit baroque is crucial understanding why the neobaroque emerges in the mid-twentieth century as a

postcolonial paradigm of resistance. The proponents of the neobaroque, Carpentier, José Lezama Lima, and Severo Sarduy, used it to promote a non-Eurocentric conception of modernity and identity from the perspective of the periphery.

With these historical referents in mind, I proceed to outline my concept of the baroque imagination and consider it alongside other paradigms of cross-cultural imagination that are prevalent in the Caribbean such as Edouard Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* and Wilson Harris's *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination*. Although multiple languages are spoken in the Caribbean, within the academy discourse has tended to focus primarily on single language group associations at the expense of cross-cultural connections. This dissertation attempts to bridge the linguistic gap by bringing to the fore the cross-cultural connections between the Anglophone, Hispanophone and Francophone Caribbean. While each island nation is unique, all share a common history of conquest and colonization. The legacy of colonial education, whether by the Spanish, British, or French, leaves its mark on the individual in the sense that culture is something that comes from the mother country and is imposed on the colonized. The nation-state of Ireland also shares this legacy, although its conquest and colonization predates that of the Americas. In many ways, Ireland served as a testing ground for the British government on how to subjugate and educate a foreign population.

Carpentier, Walcott and Heaney share a struggle with themselves and with their local and foreign audiences to articulate themselves as authentic producers of culture and situate their island homes as legitimate cultural centers. The baroque imagination is a response to hybridity that refuses to be marginalized.

The Baroque: Aesthetic, Concept, Practice

The historical baroque is primarily defined as aesthetics, a set of plastic conventions that predominated during the 17th century. In *The Universal Baroque*, Peter Davidson uses the term Baroque to “identify the wholeness of the arts of early modern Europe, the whole cultural system prevailing in those parts of the world in dialogue” (1). In other words, Baroque “is potentially also a word to describe a system of international discourses, a ‘way of proceeding’, a symbolic language, an agreed upon set of conventions overriding all the allegiances of religious confession or nationality which have come to seem, since the turn of the nineteenth century, unavoidable descriptors of all cultural endeavors” (Davidson 1).⁴ It is fairly easy to categorize a work of art as baroque and many quickly come to mind: Bernini’s *The Ecstasy of St. Theresa*, Tiepolo’s *Feast in the House of Levi*, and the Metropolitan Cathedral in Mexico City.⁵ All inspire a visceral response from the observer that contrasts with what is felt when viewing works such as Michelangelo’s *Pietà*, Da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*, or the Cathedral de Santa Maria in Florence. R.A. Scotti describes the difference eloquently, “The static perfection of the Renaissance was the art of the elite. The hot intense Baroque was art to move the masses” (247). These Renaissance works exude a sense of calm, repose, and established order that admits of no disruption. In contrast, the Baroque overwhelms with a sense of

⁴ I am using the term baroque in a similar way to describe the use of similar rhetorical and thematic structures by artists in the postcolonial world, although in a much more limited context. While Davidson applies the term to the entirety of cultural production in the early modern time period, I cannot use the baroque to apply as broadly in the postcolonial context. Cultural production in early modern Europe stems from a much more uniform linguistic, religious, and cultural context. However, the idea that a common literary culture could form the basis for cross-cultural connection is fruitful for my analysis of Carpentier, Walcott and Heaney.

⁵ Baroque works of literature such as Luis de Gongora’s *Soledades* are recognizable by their rich symbolic language and profusion of allusions and metaphors, but are not necessarily considered art for the masses.

multiplicity, flux, contrasting elements, ornate surfaces and a sense of expanding space. Ironically, its constants are change and disruption.

The new aesthetic commonplaces of the baroque, particularly the new conception of space, provide an avenue through which to consider the changes in the imaginary of the artists who created these baroque works. In *The Painter's Mind*, Romare Bearden describes the different conceptions of space held by Renaissance artists and Baroque artists as a response to the primary concerns of their times. For Bearden, the Renaissance emphasis on spatial depth came from a desire to know the world in its fullness and to penetrate the “physical, mechanical, and mathematical laws” that explained natural phenomena. Another central concern of Renaissance humanism, exhibited in painting, was the representation of all figures in “an essentially democratic way” (Bearden 126). The important figures (royalty, clergy, etc.) were shown to be “subject to the same physical law as the others” and not drawn larger than life (Bearden 126). The Renaissance interest in the human is also demonstrated by a close attention to detail in “the person portrayed, his clothing, his jewelry, and other ornaments ... to enlighten the observer as to his phenomenal existence” (Bearden 128). The painter thus demonstrates his skill as a scientist attuned to the finest of details.

Baroque conceptions of space are informed by the expanding view of the world caused by European exploration and discovery. As Bearden writes, “The overall space concept of this time was not one of nearness but, rather, one of great distance” (131). In *Baroque Concerto*, Carpentier makes a similar observation about the increased sense of amplitude in Baroque works of art: “artists were using sunny palettes—showing doorways in the background with curtains lifted by the heads of curious Indians, eager to

slip through into the great theater of events, who seemed copied out of an account of travels in the kingdoms of Tartary” (BC 25-26). The explorations not only widen the breadth of the world, but they introduce new subjects and objects for painting. Artists also found themselves enriched by new materials from the New World such as Mexican silver, Peruvian gold, and a variety of lumbers, exotic bird feathers, and animal skins. These new objects and materials were syncretized with European artistic forms to create highly charged baroque compositions like Tiepolo’s *Feast in the House of Levi*. In that monumental painting, we see wide vistas opening up behind a motley crew that includes Protestants, Moors, animals, and dwarfs in attendance while Jesus dines with his twelve apostles.

The dynamism of baroque arts, painting, sculpture and music, can lead one to a perception of chaos, but that would be to fall into a classic fallacy. As Bearden states, “few observers of the baroque period . . . seem to recognize the discipline of its masters—especially in their geometric organization, in the shift of great planes, and in the tight underlying structure that served to control their vertiginous designs, allowing the separate units of the painting to compose into an organic whole” (136). The structure underlying baroque works of art gives them their calculated feeling of effect and contradicts the pejorative definitions of the baroque as “degenerate.” To successfully integrate both the exotic and the everyday, the artists had to have a firm grasp of their craft as well as a clearly focused imagination.

If the baroque artists did not lack the vision of their Renaissance forbearers and had progressed in technical skill, then why are their works defined as decadent or degenerate? The answer lies in the origins of the definition. The term baroque, used to

denote a particular style of art or architecture, does not come into common usage until the late eighteenth century. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word baroque does not enter the English language until c1765. It is during the so-called “Age of Enlightenment” that the baroque is first defined as either a confused, backward notion or an expression of bad taste. The baroque became synonymous with barbarism, mysticism, and other non-progressive attitudes. For the writers and philosophers of the late eighteenth century, the baroque was a degeneration of and a bastardization of Renaissance classical values. Where the Renaissance valued order, unity, and repose in an image, the baroque encouraged movement, profusion, and multiplicity. The Renaissance is defined as the true precursor to modernity, while the baroque is a regrettable step back before the full fruition of Renaissance ideals in the Enlightenment.

The baroque needed to be characterized as a regressive form of expression that relies heavily on manipulating the emotions of the viewer, circumventing reason and allowing mysticism to flourish, in order to serve as an Other for the values of the Enlightenment: rationalism and progress. The baroque was further “Othered” as a repressive state apparatus that “is a glorification of the established powers,” one that “dominates the awed spectator and carries him or her away so that one forgets to doubt and question” thereby undercutting the ideal of the informed citizen-participant of a democracy (Simpson qtd. in Maravall 143). However, in diagnosing the baroque as confusion and bad taste, the users of that term seem to forget that the baroque was at the time a tool to manage confusion rather than an expression of the confusion itself. The baroque attempted to corral disparate elements into an intelligible whole, but refrained from passing an absolute judgment.

This “Othering” of the baroque subsequently served to hide its function behind a quick dismissal of its form, but it is in the functioning of the baroque that it becomes most useful for postcolonial artists in the twentieth century. To use John Beverley’s words, “To return to the Baroque on its own terms, that is, as something like the cultural superstructure of a non-capitalist and non-Protestant modernity, might be paradoxically also to see in it some possibilities for the future that have been suspended by the teleology of nationalism and state formation” (17). In *The Universal Baroque*, Davidson attempts to trace the international scope of baroque forms of representation and finds that “the retrospective values and assumptions of the post-nineteenth-century nation state [are] intrinsically at best suspicious of baroque internationalism, especially if that internationalism is identified, wholly wrongly, with revived Catholicism” (5). Davidson goes so far as to state “that the enemy of the Baroque . . . is the nation state” (9). The cross-cultural connections created by baroque discourse are threatening to the imagining of the nation state as one bounded geographically and linguistically. Although the nation state has provided a framework for the third-world to realize its liberation struggles politically, it all too often becomes restrictive and reductive once the nation state is established.

Carpentier, Walcott, and Heaney assert the necessity of nationalism, but look to the practice of the baroque to promote more open and inclusive ways of belonging. The baroque also serves as a discourse linking the different cultures of the third world in ways that will foster understanding between these locations on the periphery. Other possibilities for a baroque concept of cultural exchange include more equitable relations between established and emerging nation-states and a respect for the knowledges

produced in these places. It could also promote contact between cultures on the periphery that would bypass the hegemony of the center. In contrast to the linguistic and geographic identification required by the nation, the baroque focuses on the links between widely spread geographic areas and different peoples.

This sense of transnational or supranational belonging was best exemplified during the historical baroque by the Jesuits. This society of priests belonged to no particular nation-state, yet through their missionary works, scholarship, and scientific endeavors, they created a rhizomatic network of centers of learning and study. The Jesuits communicated through the lingua franca of Latin, sharing experiences from the Far East and the New World, and were subject to no national authority. Davidson argues that “axiomatically the Jesuits are therefore the bogey of the Enlightenment, with its romantic nationalism and primitivist appropriation of the pure lines and simplicities of antiquity” (9). For the Jesuits, there was no center that served as the organizing force of the peripheries, but a mutual exchange of learning, assimilation, and syncretism between outlying cultural centers.⁶

The rise of the Jesuits as organizers of knowledge and culture reveals a curious intersection between baroque culture and its impact on the individual. Iyonna del Valle identifies the Jesuit founder Ignacio de Loyola as an excellent example of the baroque mind in action: “Loyola can be seen as a personification of the Baroque, of a style, of the exercise of a will that ‘constructs’ the individual and at the same time designs an expansive plan of action which, rather than withdraw from the world, confronts it in order

⁶ One could argue that the tenets of the Roman Catholic Church and the Jesuits’ allegiance to the Pope serve as a center for their organization of the world, but the Pope’s authority at that time was limited and the Jesuits were free from control of the church hierarchy. Each mission served as its own center, and Catholic doctrine served as a common language for communication.

to incorporate, rearrange, and conquer it for what Loyola called the ‘History of Salvation’” (141). These concomitant elements, the construction of the individual and a plan for relating to the world, are of fundamental importance for the postcolonial artist in relation to the baroque. Although Loyola’s best-known text, *Ejercicios espirituales*, does not outwardly manifest the complicated and intricate style of the baroque, it does reflect a baroque way of interpreting the world. As del Valle notes, “the ‘Baroque’ features of these texts lie more in the multiple layerings or ‘folds’ of meaning than on their surface, so deceptively free of artifice” (142). Loyola’s spiritual exercises engage the imaginations of individuals in meditation on the life of Christ as they complete daily tasks in order to bring their thoughts and behavior into conformity with the Christian faith. Although on the surface, these tasks seem to subjugate the individual, they surprisingly lead to independence of thought and an engagement with the emerging forms of the world.

Del Valle argues that the Jesuits’ texts anticipate the modern world order where traditional authority accedes to the individual: “In the new order, intelligence—understood not as an accumulation of book learning but as a practice that, adapting to circumstances, learns to control and take advantage of them—becomes one of the axes of authority” (154). In this sense, the baroque is more than a style; it is a way of thinking, one that challenges existing paradigms. It places the individual as the evaluator of experience and the arbiter of value. José Lezama Lima sees the essence of the baroque in the union of the reason and the will in Loyola’s *Ejercicios*,

Si por alguien ... se ha considerado el barroco un arte de contrarreforma, como no ver en el centro de esas compañías ... a los Ejercicios, con su confianza en la voluntad para mantener la *performance* tensa en la adquisición de las vías de purificación. “Usamos los actos del

entendimiento,” se nos dice en los *Ejercicios*, “discurriendo, y de los de la voluntad afectando.” (EA 90)⁷

There is revolutionary potential in Loyola’s exercises because the imagination works in concert with the will to “incorporar el mundo, de hacer suyo el mundo exterior, a través del horno transmutativo de la asimilación” (EA 91).⁸ In so doing, the individual and particular becomes important and valuable. The individual is not expected to conform to a set of *a priori* circumstances that may have been developed in a cultural context far removed from him or herself, but to recognize, identify, and apply the particular circumstances of his or her own life to the ideal life of Christ.

This critical mindset, which identified the particularities of the local, proved to be a hindrance to the imperial/nationalist projects of Spain, France, and England as the nation-state became more powerful and established. In 1767, the Jesuits were expelled from the Spanish colonies. The building of a national consciousness was incompatible with colonial identifications of difference. The rational positivism of the Enlightenment emerged as the dominant paradigm and the baroque became its backward cousin. During the Enlightenment, scientific and technological progress proceeded hand in hand with the development of secular humanism. As Lois Parkinson Zamora writes in her comprehensive study of the baroque *The Inordinate Eye*, “The scientific discoveries referred to collectively as the Copernican revolution challenged religious certainties and unsettled the everyday experience of space. The secularization of the world had begun” (119). With God seemingly absent or at least displaced, philosophers sought to fill the

⁷ “if there is someone ... who has considered the baroque to be an art of counterconquest, how could he not see at the center of these fellows ... the *Exercises*, with their confidence in the will to maintain the tense *performance* in the acquisition of the means of purification. “We will use the acts of the intellect, “ as it says in the *Exercises*, “to meditate, and those of the will to act””

⁸ “incorporate the world through the transformative oven of assimilation”

vacuums left in the areas of history (no longer focused on salvation history) and morality. In other words, “Enlightenment thinkers rejected the religious interpretation of history but brought in their own teleology, the idea of progress—the idea that humanity is moving in the direction of better and more perfect civilization, and that this progression can be witnessed through study of the history of civilization” (Little, 2.2). Advancements in science and technology bolstered faith in progress as it continuously provided “miracles,” solving mysteries of disease and improving day to day life with mechanical marvels, such as the steam engine. One of the best examples of this comes from *The Education of Henry Adams*, where Adams describes his feelings when confronting the power of the dynamo, “to Adams the dynamo became a symbol of infinity ... he began to feel the forty-foot dynamos as a moral force, much as the early Christians felt the Cross” (XXV. 3).

Adams’ response to the dynamo exposes one of the effects of the processes of modernity, or modernization on the individual. René Jara defines modernization as the “political, technological and economic process linked to industrial revolution,” and modernity as “the modes of experience and social conditions affected by those changes” (278). Linked to industrialization, modernity then can be defined as the experience of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment Europe, when the industrial revolution caused changes to the medieval ordering of society such as mass exodus from rural areas to the cities and new organizations of labor and capital. Nestor Garcia-Canclini identifies four processes of modernity that constitute its functioning: 1. “Emancipation,” the secularization of cultural fields (35); 2. “Renovation,” cultural and social innovation made possible because of the former (36); 3. “Democratization,” greater involvement by

the people in the political process (37); 4. “Expansion,” extension of knowledge and appropriation of nature (38). In order to fully pursue this agenda, the baroque which had served as a discourse for assimilating new information about the world needed to be disavowed, as a pre-modern form of ordering the world.

However, as Enrique Dussel has astutely argued in *The Invention of the Americas*, to constitute modernity as a European phenomenon is to occlude the impact of non-Europe on its formation:

Whereas modernity gestated in the free, creative medieval European cities, it came to birth in Europe’s confrontation with the Other. By controlling, conquering, and violating the Other, Europe defined itself as discoverer, conquistador, and colonizer of an alterity likewise constitutive of modernity. Europe never discovered (des-cubierto) this Other as Other but covered over (encubierto) the Other as part of the Same: *i.e.*, Europe. Modernity dawned in 1492 and with it the myth of a special kind of sacrificial violence which eventually eclipsed whatever was non-European (12).

Hegel’s philosophy of history is one example of this myth of modernity, legitimizing colonization and the pursuit of progress as the fulfillment of the mandate of the Spirit. It bolstered scientific racism and consigned the larger portion of the world to ahistorical and, one could argue, subhuman status. Hegel’s belief in a moving spirit that would become manifest through the actions of the European nation-state became one of the most persuasive interpretations of history. It provided a teleology of history as well as a means of organizing the world that cast a favorable light on the imperial designs of Western Europe, “The History of the world is none other than the progress of the consciousness of Freedom” (12). In Hegel’s philosophy, consciousness of freedom is only fully available to the European nations. Yet the ability for this morality to provide

stability for Europe and its colonies proved to relatively short-lived, unable to withstand the tensions of its internal contradictions.

The Neobaroque: Recuperating Resistance

The baroque and the neobaroque share a common condition of being an artistic response to overwhelming social crisis. In *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, Gilles Deleuze describes the baroque as a stabilizing force in moments of ideological crisis:

But what happened in this long history of “nihilism,” before the world lost its principles? At a point close to us human Reason had to collapse ... the last refuge of principles ... but still, before, a psychotic episode was necessary. A crisis and collapse of all theological Reason had to take place. That is where the Baroque assumes its position: Is there a way of saving the theological ideal at a moment when it is being contested on all sides ... The Baroque solution is the following: we shall multiply principles—we can always slip a new one from under our cuffs—and in this way we shall change their use. (67)

In this statement, Deleuze identifies the theological crisis of Reason that occurred at the end of the Renaissance as the loss of stability offered by the Catholic Church when this was challenged by the Protestant Reformation and the discovery of the Americas. The Twentieth Century crisis of Reason, “the long history of “nihilism” to which Deleuze refers, parallels the early modern crisis of theological Reason in that the prevailing paradigms for understanding the world no longer correspond to human experience. By folding together these two historical moments, Deleuze signals the social function of the baroque that is common to both crises. The multiplicity of the baroque, its *horror vacui*, is a response to this absence of certainty.

In the early twentieth century, the Enlightenment narrative of progress no longer seemed definite. Philosophers such as Oswald Spengler, Nietzsche, and Eugenio D’Ors intimated the imminent demise of the West. With this intellectual, social, moral, and

critical vacuum now exposed, the baroque style reemerges as a way to make sense out of the chaos and reimagine the world. The cultural strategy once used to contain difference and neutralize it, now serves as the means for the unleashing of its revolutionary potential. The neobaroque, in a characteristic it shares with the Leibnizian baroque, does not jettison reason or transcendence as a means of understanding the world or accepting its meaninglessness, rather “it is the splendid moment when Some Thing is kept rather than nothing” (Deleuze 68). Instead of accepting that the old principles no longer apply, the baroque proliferates principles to adapt to the circumstances. The neobaroque assumes a position that prefigures Dussel’s stance in *The Invention of the Americas*: “Unlike the postmoderns, I will not criticize reason as such; but I do accept their critique of reason as dominating, victimizing, and violent. I will not deny universalist rationalism its rational nucleus, but I do oppose the irrational element of its sacrificial myth” (26). Dussel keeps the principle of reason but adapts it to his ideology of liberation, in a manner similar to that of neobaroque writers like Carpentier.

The ground work for the neobaroque proliferation of principles began with the work of German theorists like Oswald Spengler, who identified the moment of crisis in *the Decline of the West*, and the Catalan Eugenio D’Ors, who classifies the baroque as “a category, rather than a specific historical time period, that recurs cyclically throughout history” (Davidson 6). This enabled the baroque to be separated from its connection to the Counter-Reformation Church and absolutism, and be seen as a way of organizing knowledge. In Spain, the Generación del ’27 looked to the baroque as a means of artistic renovation and resistance to a fascist regime. This in turn inspired the most eloquent articulations of the baroque as a discourse of resistance in the works of Alejo Carpentier,

José Lezama Lima and Severo Sarduy.⁹ The European recuperation of the baroque resonated with Latin American artists looking for a fresh mode of expression because it was so close at hand and could accommodate the centuries of cultural mixing that had followed conquest.

The grand baroque cathedrals of Latin America became a symbol for the experience of transculturation. The form of the baroque, with its proliferating nuclei, permitted this reading. Looked at with new eyes, the latent Amerindian cosmologies revealed themselves on the façades of Catholic churches. Lezama Lima observed this phenomenon in San Lorenzo de Potosí: “en medio de los angelotes, larvales, de las colgantes hojas de piedra, de las llaves que como galeras navegan por la piedra labrada, aparece, suntuosa, hierática, una princesa incaica, con todos sus atributos de poderío y desdén” (*La expresión americana* 83).¹⁰ Woven within the Christian symbols, the image of an Inca princess signals that the Amerindian legends may have been defeated, but are not forgotten. The juxtaposition of indigenous and Spanish elements signals a more inclusive way forward and a way of resisting the totalizing narratives of the European nations. This resistance to European hegemony operates as a “nonbattle closer to guerilla warfare than a war of extermination ... you don’t catch your adversary in order to reduce him to absence, you encircle his presence to neutralize him, to make him impossible, to impose divergence upon him” (Deleuze 68).

⁹ Carpentier, Lezama, and Sarduy all incorporated the baroque in their fiction, but also in their essays. Carpentier’s major essays on the baroque are included in *La novela latinoamericana en visperas de un nuevo siglo* (1981). Lezama Lima’s primary theoretical exposition of the baroque can be found in *La expresión Americana* (1957) and Severo Sarduy’s writings on the baroque are included in *Barroco* (1974). Monika Kaup makes this same connection in her article, “The Future is Entirely Fabulous: The Baroque Genealogy of Latin America’s Modernity.”

¹⁰ “in the midst of chubby angels, grotesques, of hanging leaves of stone of the keys that like ships navigate the sculpted stone appears a sumptuous hieratic Inca princess with all of her attributes of power and disdain”

Lezama Lima's example of the cathedral exemplifies this cultural guerilla warfare. The image of the princess is present in the historical baroque, but gains new significance when seen from a different perspective. In the mid-twentieth century the New World Baroque "become[s] a self-conscious postcolonial ideology aimed at disrupting entrenched power structures and perceptual categories" (Zamora xvi). Lezama's emphasis on the princess's disdainful gaze suggests that the Amerindian culture is passing judgment on the one that encompasses and contains it. Differentiating the neobaroque, or New World Baroque, from its historical antecedent, Parkinson Zamora writes, "The New World Baroque is hybrid and inclusive ... its transcultural energies move in many directions" (xv). The neobaroque can also be seen as a way to challenge the idea of a single, monolithic modernity, as Monika Kaup writes: "The Latin American neobaroque constitutes such a site-specific, hybrid modernity from the global periphery, where imported European and native, modern and premodern, forms are joined to generate an eccentric New World modernity that deviates from the metropolitan prototype" ("The Future is Entirely Fabulous" 226). As Dussel's work indicates, the metropolitan prototype covers over what is Other as part of the same; New World modernity is seen as imitative or derivative of European models. However, the neobaroque seeks to overcome such designations of original and copy. New World modernity may include elements similar to those of European modernity, but in adapting them to the local situation they become a new formulation altogether.¹¹

¹¹ This is similar to Palti's assessment of Maria Sylvia de Carvalho Franco's critique of Roberto Schwarz's theory of misplaced ideas in her 1976 article "As idéias estão no lugar" (Ideas are in place): "Ideas, for her, were never "misplaced" due to the mere fact that, if they can socially circulate in a given milieu, it is because they serve some purpose in it, that is, because there are conditions in it for their reception" (154).

The neobaroque brings together the multiple strands of the New World's heritage, disavowing none. In, "Becoming Baroque: Folding European Forms into the New World Baroque with Alejo Carpentier," Kaup has also theorized that the neobaroque exercises its decolonizing strategy through a process similar to that of "becoming-minor" articulated by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*: "As a method of dealing with the legacy of foreign European input in Third World cultures, the Deleuzoguattarian notion of becoming-minor offers an alternative, indeed, opposite method to the rejection of the European in polarizing postcolonial movements such as Négritude, black nationalism, or Roberto Fernández Retamar's Calibanism ("Becoming Baroque" 129).¹² Drawing on Deleuze's work in *The Fold*, Kaup comes to identify the functioning of the baroque as a process, "a mechanism for re-creation, for it creates not out of nothing, but by disrupting and proliferating existing structures" ("Becoming Baroque" 133). This mechanism is put into place by the baroque imagination.

While I find Parkinson Zamora's and Kaup's work enlightening and helpful to my own, my study is less interested in the baroque as a mechanism or construct than as the baroque as a mindset or mode of the imagination. I was led to this line of inquiry largely by the works of Carpentier, Walcott and Heaney. Although these artists engage in a decolonizing poetics, their work does not outright reject everything that comes from the colonizers. Additionally, their work clings to the idea of the individual self, no matter how fragmented that self may be, by choosing the first person narrative or lyric poetry as its vehicle. This seems to be a conscious choice, more so than a reaction to the surrealists or modernists who came before them. In reading their works, I found myself asking

¹² Aime Cesaire exemplifies this rejection in his *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, "Because we hate you and your reason, we claim kinship with dementia praecox with the flaming madness of persistent cannibalism" (17-18).

whether or not these authors were proposing an ethics through their style? In a world faced with the unutterability of Truth, did they feel there was anything left to communicate? With no valid universal standards of justice, how could any one individual or group claim redress for present or historical wrongs? Hoping to answer these questions, my study focuses on what I call the baroque imagination, the particular mindset of an individual producing baroque works of art. To focus on the individual is to pull back from considering the baroque as primarily a structural phenomenon and consider how it is fashioned in the work of a single individual and what it allows that individual to accomplish.

Focusing on the individual also creates a space for considerations of political action and the ethical purpose of a work of art. The imagination is intimately bound up with ethics because it is intimately bound up with being human. As Richard Kearney writes in *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Postmodern*, “Whether one follows the Greek version which traces the imaginative power of making ... back to the Promethean theft of fire, or the biblical origin of the creative drive (*yetser*) in the transgression of Adam and Eve, it is striking how the origins of humankind and the imagination coincide” (2).¹³ Furthermore, the possibility to imagine, as a human characteristic, is linked to the ability to choose. In these narratives of origins, the individual may be given a set of behavioral guidelines to follow, but he or she is ultimately free to choose whether or not to eat the apple or kill the other. Creative production in turn exhibits free choice in an even more uninhibited way. Within the imaginary, all things are possible. The imagination also has a reciprocal function with ethics in that it can either promote ethical behavior or encourage

¹³ In the *Popol Vuh*, an Amerindian creation text, the creation of humanity is also linked to the imagination and creativity. The gods create humans in order to have someone who can properly compose songs and sing their praises (Lezama Lima, *La expression Americana* 67).

its opposite: “Imagination is good and evil, for in the midst of it man can master the vortex of possibilities and realize the human figure proposed in creation” (Kearney 2). Plato also saw the imagination as a dangerous faculty and so treated poet and sophist alike.

These stories of origins are ethical narratives in that they are narratives of self and community. Narrative allows individuals and collectivities to come to an understanding of themselves and their relationships with others. As Kearney argues, “it is, after all, the capacity of transcendental imagination to schematize time past, present, future—and to synthesize the manifold, which enables the self to have a sense of its own perduring identity and to open itself, in turn, to a horizon of possibilities beyond self” (246-247). Narrative is the product of an engagement with life’s circumstances, a way to order relations and pass judgment. Narrative can have positive effects in that they implicate the reader and evoke empathy for the Other (Kearney 244). Narrative also allows an individual or community to situate itself in time and space. One such example of communal narration would be the imagined community of the nation as theorized by Benedict Anderson. However, in considering national narrative as an imaginative narrative of identity, it is important to consider that not all narration emancipates or evokes empathy for the Other. Narrative can easily become complicit in a limiting of identity and a suppression of the other, especially when they are bound up with power relations, as in the colonial setting, for example.

In order to combat this possibility, Kearney suggests that “the narrative self can only be ethically responsible if it subjects its own self-constancy to self-questioning. Narrative identity, in other words, must never forget its origins in narrativity” (250). The

acknowledgement of narrativity and the constant questioning of the origins of a narrative open up another ethical question: that of the relationship of the self to other. Narrative is a way of realizing the self, but also communicating with the non-self, *i.e.* the other. The baroque imaginations of Carpentier, Walcott and Heaney constantly question their own narratives of origins to avoid lapsing into dogmatism. Kearney's description of the narrative responsibility of nations also applies to the individual, "Societies which admit that they constitute themselves through an ongoing process of narrative are unlikely to degenerate into self-righteousness, fundamentalism, or racism" (248). In the pages that follow, I will consider the baroque imagination—how it is formed in a postcolonial context and how it enacts a decolonizing poetics. I will also consider how the narrative of self serves as a counter-narrative for the hegemonic narratives of the center that constitute the periphery as incapable of cultural production, without lapsing into new dogmatisms.

The Baroque Imagination

Errant, he challenges and discards the universal—this generalizing edict that summarized the world as something obvious and transparent, claiming for it one presupposed sense and one destiny. He plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access ... the thinking of errantry conceives of totality but willingly renounces any claims to sum it up or to possess it.

- Glissant *Poetics of Relation* 20-21

Entre nosotros el barroco fue un arte de contraconquista¹⁴

-Lezama Lima, *La expresión americana*, 80

For the purposes of this study, I define the baroque imagination as the mindset of an intellectual in the postcolonial world, grappling creatively with multiple cultural inheritances and attempting to fashion a poetic oeuvre that will redefine the poet's

¹⁴ "Among us the baroque was always the art of counterconquest"

relationship both to the center and to the island culture from which he comes. The baroque imagination fashions a cultural identity, while remaining open to dialogue with other cultures and to divisions within itself. Ultimately, the baroque imagination advances a poetics of relation that valorizes the Other as a fundamental part of the self. My choice of baroque to describe the functioning of these artists' imaginations is due in part to the similarities I find between the postcolonial context and the flourishing of the baroque in the seventeenth century and also to the definition of the neobaroque as articulated in the Caribbean.

As Kearney argues, humanity can be set apart from the rest of creation because of its ability to imagine the world otherwise than what it is and to realize that vision through its creative labors. The imagination is also bound up with ethics because throughout the history of ideas, it has been seen as a potent force influencing behavior. Plato, Aristotle, and the Christian scholastics warned against the imagination as a force that can make things seem "other than they are" or that could inflame the passions (Kearney 3). Modern thinkers tended to attribute more positive characteristics to the imagination, primarily the ability to turn "the real into the ideal" (Kearney 3). However, Kearney argues that what is common to all of these treatments of the imagination is "the human power to convert absence into presence, actuality into possibility, what-is into something-other-than-it-is. In short, they all designate our ability to transform the time and space of our world into a specifically human mode of existence" (4). The imagination structures and gives meaning to the sense perceptions of the world and to relationships between individuals.

In fact, the ability to imagine has often been the touchstone through which to gauge the humanity of another. Hegel's classification of Africa as outside of history is

based on the presumption that Africans are incapable of “Universality” (110). As he writes in *The Philosophy of History*, “In Negro life the characteristic point is the fact that consciousness has not yet attained to the realization of any substantial objective existence ... there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character (Hegel 110-111). The inability to imagine oneself in regards to the universal leads to an absence of morality and the justification of slavery: “Negroes are enslaved by Europeans and sold to America. Bad as this may be, their lot in their own land is even worse, since there a slavery quite as absolute exists; for it is the essential principle of slavery, that man has not yet attained a consciousness of his freedom, and consequently sinks down to a mere Thing—an object of no value” (Hegel 114). This idea was to have far-reaching consequences, not only for the colonization and the plundering of Africa, but a continued impact on how the descendants of those slaves were considered.

The Americas are similarly dismissed as being outside of history, not because the inhabitants are incapable of imagination, but because it is “the land of the future” (Hegel 104). Hegel cannot summarily dismiss America as he does Africa, but he places it out of time, in the “not yet” of the future. America is ahistorical because it has not been realized yet, it is only an “echo” of what has happened in the Old World (Hegel 104). This has implications for the modernity of Latin America and the Caribbean. Being unable to participate in the Spirit, means that the four processes of modernity, as outlined by Garcia-Canclini, are also impossible. The New World is designated as, at-best, a copy of Europe, and at worst to be perpetually in thrall of Europe. As Hegel states, “Against the absolute right of that people who actually are the carriers of the world Spirit (the Europeans), the spirit of other peoples *has no other right*” (qtd. in Dussel 24).

In the context of Hegelian thought, the postcolonial artist faces a twin task of proving his or her humanity and arguing for contemporary relevance. In the New World, this task is compounded by the facts of transculturation and mestizaje. Not only are New World artists considered outside of history and part of the future, but their connection to Africa also makes their claims of historicity suspect. By claiming the power of the imagination, postcolonial artists declare their humanity and assert their ability to make their own myths rather than be subject to European myths. As Kearney states, “the loss of paradise in turn signaled the birth of time ... and, henceforth, the creative power of imagining would be seen as inseparable from the power to transmute nature into culture, to transform the wilderness into a habitat where humans might dwell” (2). In its creation of syncretic images the baroque imagination seeks to communicate with the reader by constructing a recognizable face for the Other. A face that will not simply cover the Other over with sameness, but reveal a basic and common humanity with the oppressor. In this way, the postcolonial artist concretizes the abstraction of Emmanuel Levinas’ concept of the Face as described in *Humanism of the Other*, by providing distinct features and a context. The Face captures the essence of Levinas’ humanism of the Other which is the profound moral obligation that the self owes the Other. Put a different way,

The dignity of the self arises in and as an unsurpassable moral responsibility to and for the other person. And moral responsibility for the one who faces leads to the demand for justice for all those who do not face, for all others, for all humanity. They too have the right to moral relations. Justice derives not from the state, which must nonetheless institute and maintain justice, but from the transcendence of the other person, the “widow, the orphan, the stranger.” (Cohen xxvii)

The variety of the baroque provides an excess of context and multiple faces that prevent the construction of a face for the Other from becoming prescriptive and limiting. In

addition, the supranational aspects of the baroque permit this Levinasian sense of justice that derives not from national citizenship, but from the act of belonging to the human race. Michael de Saint-Cheron writes that, “More than a philosopher, Levinas was a conscience, and his discourse ... carries within it ... the question of justification for human life” (*Conversations with Levinas* 7). At their core, the writings of these authors, Carpentier, Walcott, and Heaney, also serve as a conscience for the developed and the developing world. They proclaim the subject status of people who have too long been objectified and dehumanized.

Although Levinas distinctly states that the Face is not to be given individual features,¹⁵ the postcolonial artist does so in order to mediate between the transcendent aspects of the Face and its practical expression. Much like the historical baroque artists utilized extreme expressions of human emotion to invoke the divine in painting and sculptures, so too do these postcolonial artists provide vivid, accessible images for the forgotten Other. In this way, the baroque imagination articulates an ethics that takes the self’s responsibility to the Other as a point of departure. These artists challenge the violence and insularity of Western culture into a home where those from the periphery can also dwell.

The baroque reemerges as a tool for postcolonial resistance as the artist is forced to use the colonizer’s own language and culture in order to express a new way of being. As D’Ors and Carpentier have stated, the baroque recurs during moments of crisis and cannot be confined to a particular historical era. Moreover, the baroque functions in distinct ways in the imagination of artists who have experienced a silencing of the

¹⁵ In an interview with Saint-Cheron, Levinas insists that “seeing the face is not like perceiving something ... It’s not like seeing a thing, seeing a painting, not at all. It’s an immediate relation of responsibility and consequently the word of God” (*Conversations with Levinas* 33).

“native” voice by the “official” voice.¹⁶ This suppression of “indigenous” discourses and knowledges is always partial and incomplete. The attempted erasure leaves traces behind that the artist finds and incorporates into his or her work. These artists use the baroque as a means of synthesizing their multiple inheritances while at the same time avoiding the “sins of their fathers,” which imposed a new sameness upon their hybrid cultures. My understanding of the baroque imagination is influenced not only by its Cuban articulators, but also by the work of Caribbean theorists Edouard Glissant and Wilson Harris.

Glissant’s concept of Relation and Harris’ exploration of the cross-cultural imagination offer a different view on the operation of the baroque imagination. They both provide examples of a discourse that incorporates multiple perspectives and a valorization of the Other while resisting totalizing paradigms. Despite the Caribbean origins of the baroque theorists, Carpentier, Lezama, and Sarduy, the links with Francophone and Anglophone Caribbean writings are often underplayed.¹⁷ Therefore, I would like to consider the ways in which these discourses respond to the same complex of forces and how they complement each other.

Glissant, Lezama Lima, Harris and Carpentier all identify a conflict between the hybrid reality of the New World and the totalizing discourse of the imperial imagination. As Carpentier stated in “Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso,” “América, continente de simbiosis, de mutaciones, de vibraciones, de mestizajes, fue barroca desde siempre”

¹⁶ Gayatri Spivak indicates that a colonial intellectual class was specifically indoctrinated in the colonizer’s norms and manners to serve as a cultural translator: “Consider the often-quoted programmatic lines from Macaulay’s infamous ‘Minute on Indian Education’ (1835): ‘We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population’ (77).”

¹⁷ One of Lezama Lima’s few trips beyond the island took him to Jamaica and Carpentier’s journey to the baroque began on Hispaniola.

(*Ensayos* 116).¹⁸ The hybrid condition of the Americas is a result of the ideological orientation and the technological advances that made conquest, colonization, and slavery possible. However, the response of the European colonizing nations was not to acknowledge the differences within a shared humanity, but to try and contain and categorize the mixtures, as is evident in the many different racial strata that are documented in colonial texts (mulatto, quadroon, zambo, *etc.*).¹⁹ These mixtures were not seen as a positive force for society, but as contamination and degeneration. As stated previously, Hegel's philosophy of history offers one legitimation for the actions of conquest and colonialism by naming the West (Germany, in particular) as the fulfillment of the historical Spirit. It provides a schema grounded in history through which the imperial imagination orders the world.

Lezama Lima's collection of essays, *La expresión americana*, begins by positing that one of the goals of the American artist is to acquire "una visión histórica, que es ese contrapunto o tejido entregado por la *imago*, por la imagen participando en la historia" (49).²⁰ This historical vision, which is grounded in a non-linear, non-logo-centric vision of history, takes the counterpoint of images as its departure. The concept of history as "contrapunto" differs from Hegelian historicism that "concebía la historia como la exposición del espíritu (la razón o el logos) en un proceso que conduce al autodesarrollo y al autoconocimiento" (Chiampi 15).²¹ Rather than *a priori* knowledge of "what should

¹⁸ "America, continent of symbiosis, of mutations, of vibrations, of mestizajes, was always baroque"

¹⁹ In some sense this statement is an over-simplification. For theological as well as political reasons, the personhood status of African and Amerindians was hotly debated since the return of Columbus from his first journey. Nevertheless, the brutality of indenture and enslavement clearly attest to the assumption of a subhuman status by most Europeans.

²⁰ "a historic vision, that is the counterpoint or weave brought forth by the *imago*, by the image participating in history"

²¹ "conceived of history as the exposition of the spirit (reason or the logos) in a process that leads to self-realization and self-knowledge"

be,” American knowledge, informed by the landscape assimilates reality and projects a variety of possibilities—“what could be”—from the reality of mixed cultural origins (Chiampi 15). While the imperial imagination seeks fulfillment of a destiny, Lezama’s “visión histórica” seeks to determine the future from a relational perspective. The “visión histórica” expresses itself through the baroque, as it engages in the counterpoint of images and the projection of future relations.

In the *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant addresses the Hegelian hangover with a discussion of the imagination of the “root” versus the imagination of the “rhizome” that is very similar to Lezama Lima’s (11). Glissant takes his departure for this work from the Deleuzoguattarian notion of the rhizome as “an enmeshed root system” that differs from a fixed root, “a stock taking all upon itself and killing all around it” (PR 11). The root is expressed in the development of the nation-state, one that dominates other ways of belonging or understanding one’s relationship with the world. The fluctuation of borders in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance period eventually becomes fixed in “the totalitarian drive of a single, unique root” (PR 14). This root is “monolingual” and sets up a very clear definition between citizen and barbarian (PR 15). Glissant finds that this rootedness is paradoxically expressed in texts of errantry, the foundational epics of a people. However, these epics “led from a primordial nomadism to the settled way of life of Western nations then to Discovery and Conquest” (PR 16). The imperial imagination is acquisitive and totalizing, yet at its heart the imperial imagination constitutes a failure to truly see the Other.

As a counter to the imperial imagination, Glissant proposes “rhizomatic thought” as a different way of thinking about the world that he terms, “the Poetics of Relation, in

which each and every identity is extended through a relationship with the Other” (*PR* 11). I argue that the poetics of Relation is another way of conceptualizing the baroque imagination or Lezama Lima’s “contrapunto.” As elucidated by Glissant, Relation is a way of knowing the world and being in the world. It rejects any kind of totality that would lead to stasis and instead promotes the newness of the world. Relation describes the ethical ideal, the ultimate goal, and also the method of progressing toward a more equitable relationship among peoples of the world that does not privilege nation, class, or color. In this work, Relation is contrasted to Being, as imagined by Hegel and Heidegger. Being invokes filiation and legitimacy, two issues that enabled the domination, colonization, and exploitation of the Caribbean and other areas of the Third World. As Shalini Puri notes in *The Caribbean Postcolonial*, Glissant’s antillanité “is a ‘return to the point of entanglement’ to decipher the complex relation of Caribbean particularity to globality. Creolization, as transculturation, becomes a method for articulating a non-relativist conception of difference” (77). Through the concept of Relation, Glissant theorizes “initiation to totality without renouncing the particular,” thus providing a vantage point from which to engage in dialogue with the former imperial powers and other communities around the world (*PR* 55). Although Glissant disavows Being and the historical thesis of Hegel, he still wants access to what those terms offer: identity and agency. Once a Caribbean identity is defined it grants the individual artist agency in determining his or her own self definition, in effect becoming a platform from which to discuss life as a Caribbean person that presumes equality with those of the West.

Harris’s work in *The Womb of Space: The Cross-Cultural Imagination* effectively enacts Relation in its search for writers around the world who are engaged in parallel

processes of encountering the Other through literature. Harris writes, “imaginative sensibility is uniquely equipped by forces of dream and paradox to mirror the inimitable activity of subordinated psyche ... it is both a cloak for and a dialogue with, eclipses of live ‘otherness’ that seek to break through in new light and tone expressive layers of reality” (xvii). In Harris’ terms then, the baroque is the disavowed Other of Enlightenment rationality. The Enlightenment seeks to subordinate myth, heterogeneity and chaos, while the baroque revels in it. The return to the baroque reveals the cracks in the armor of modernity, exposing its own mythic beliefs in progress and universals. Instead of furthering division, “The paradox of cultural heterogeneity, or cross-cultural capacity, lies in the evolutionary thrust it restores to orders of the imagination, the ceaseless dialogue it inserts between hardened conventions and eclipsed or half-eclipsed otherness, within an intuitive self that moves endlessly into flexible patterns, arcs, or bridges of community” (xviii). These arcs and bridges result in the swirls and convolutions of baroque art, bringing together disparate elements into an organic union. Alejo Carpentier makes a similar analysis of culture in “La novela americana en las vísperas de un nuevo siglo,” “Yo diría que cultura es: el acopio de conocimientos que permiten a un hombre establecer relaciones, por encima del tiempo y del espacio, entre dos realidades semejantes o análogas, explicando una en función de sus similitudes con otra que puede haberse producido muchos siglos atrás” (“La novela...”17).²² Both Carpentier and Harris identify the ability to see similarities across cultures as the primary mechanism for enacting a Poetics of Relation.

²² “I would say that culture is the accumulation of knowledge that allows a man to establish relationships, beyond space and time, between two realities that are similar or analogous, explaining one in the function of its similarities with another that may have been produced many centuries before”

In Harris's method, the image becomes central for understanding the depths of the collective psyche revealed by the artist. He argues that "Each image, therefore, confesses to textures which make paradoxically real a universe ceaselessly subject to qualities of alteration within creator and created, a universe that can never be taken for granted as dead matter" (Harris 5). The images are alive in the artist who creates them, but also take on a life of their own in the hands of the critic, who has the advantage of time, distance, and other texts, to color his interpretation. While not naming them as such, Harris uses Lacanian terms and techniques to reveal the psyche as well as the concept of the Jungian unconscious to reveal the underlying social relations that beget and confront established social norms. Each work of literature "complexly and peculiarly revises another and is inwardly revised in turn in profound context" (Harris 127). The dialogue between literary works is unceasing and continually changes perceptions about the former works of art. As Puri notes, "Harris readily admits to the metaphysical and universalist implications of his position and to his interest in recovering transcultural and transhistorical archetypes" (75). The metaphysical and universalist implications of Harris' work reveal the "hermeneutic wager"²³ on the communicability of human experience at the heart of his argument,

To convert rooted deprivations into complex parables of freedom and truth is a formidable but not a hopeless task. The basis of our inquiry lies in the conception that one may address oneself to diverse fictions and poetics as if they are the art of a universal genius hidden everywhere in dual rather than monolithic presence, in the mystery of innovative imagination that transforms concepts of mutuality and unity, and which needs to appear in

²³ Richard Kearney uses the term hermeneutic wager to describe his bet on the communicability of human experience and the possibility of establishing standards for justice that will lead to improved relations with the other: "I am referring to that scruple of answerability to the other which cannot be dispelled in our Civilization of the Image ... Such at least has been my hermeneutic wager motivating my reading of the above thinkers (Lyotard, Kristeva, Kundera). It is my conviction that these thinkers—and others besides—are gesturing towards an ethics of alterity by reinscribing ways of imagining which elude both the prison house of mirrors or the cheerless conformity of Grand Theory" (218).

ceaseless dialogue between cultures if it is to turn away from a world habituated to the pre-emptive strike of the conquistadorial ego. (Harris 137)

Harris argues for a more inclusive approach to considering cultural expressions. He draws on the idea of a “universal genius” that is different from Hegel’s universal Spirit, because Harris sees it as a polyphonic rather than monophonic form of expression. Artists access this common genius through the particularity of their situation and thus reach across time and space to communicate their experience. Despite the “rooted deprivations” of the Caribbean experience (erasure, genocide, slavery, indenture) the creative imagination offers a wealth of insight through “parables of freedom and truth” to the world community. As Lezama Lima writes, it is the rich nature of the New World building materials (“la madera boliviana,” “la piedra cuzqueña”)²⁴ that gives the Spanish baroque “un esplendido estilo surgiendo paradójicamente de una heroica pobreza” (*EA* 101).²⁵ The New World materials have already infiltrated European cultural production, enriching its expression. Harris also believes that the cultural production of the Caribbean can enhance what it means to be human and how other cultures can relate to each other in a spirit of openness to connections that are already present. In Glissant’s terms, “The imaginary becomes complete on the margins of every new linear projection. It creates a network and constitutes volume” (199). In other words, the baroque imagination supplements trajectories of conquest with the stories of the vanquished.

However, in the division of the world imagined by Hegel and other Enlightenment thinkers, the New World is incapable of producing original culture, only derivative practices, and so is not entitled to full participation in world culture. Lezama

²⁴ “the bolivian wood” “the stone from Cuzco”

²⁵ “a splendid style surging paradoxically from a heroic poverty”

Lima combats this position by firing “*un disparo dialéctico*”²⁶ at Hegel’s distinction between reason and nature. The fertile, ever-changing New World environment is described as “a Gnostic space” and as “an incorporative protoplasm” that absorbs all of the elements of Amerindian, African, and European culture in its dialogue with the American artist. Culture in the Americas thus means something quite different than what Hegel postulated. Rather than a priori knowledge of “what should be,” American knowledge, informed by the landscape, assimilates reality and projects a variety of possibilities—“what could be”—from a mixed cultural origin. The crux of this argument rests on the definition of landscape as “una de las formas de dominio del hombre, como un acueducto romano” (EA 167).²⁷ Lezama Lima equates the construction of physical structures to direct the flow of natural resources with the construction of a mental image of nature to serve an ideological purpose. In the Caribbean, as in any postcolonial area, the reclamation of the landscape is central to resistance. Colonial administrators, artists, and writers establish a landscape in their regulations and works that supports a particular view of the colony, one that supports imperial aims. Lezama Lima seeks to take back the landscape by claiming that Nature is not inert matter but, following Schelling, is in fact the visible manifestation of the Spirit. Nature, as visible spirit, resists the imposition of a landscape that is alien to it, and instead seeks to dialogue with man and be made manifest in a new conception of landscape (Lezama Lima 167).

Nature only becomes landscape through man. Thus, when Lezama describes the “gnostic space” and the “incorporative protoplasm” of the Americas, he is not only referring to its geographic features but to the minds of those who inhabit it, in effect, the

²⁶ “a dialectic shot”

²⁷ “one of the forms of human domination, like a roman aqueduct”

baroque imagination. Lezama Lima's "disparo dialéctico" is that "dondequiera que surge posibilidad de paisaje tiene que existir la posibilidad de cultura (167).²⁸ If the artist is capable of imagining a landscape, he or she is capable of establishing culture. The mind of the American artist makes nature into landscape and in doing so identifies itself with both place and culture. In Glissant's terms, the American artist exhibits a "creative *marronage*" that "went against the convention of a falsely legitimizing landscape scenery and conceived of landscape as basically implicated in a story, in which it too was a vivid character" (*PR* 71). The baroque imagination practices creative *marronage* to conceive of a new narrative.

A firm conception of landscape is necessary for a poetics of resistance because it grounds the artist in the specificity of his or her own situation. In Glissant's terms, the artist "plunges into the opacities of that part of the world to which he has access" (*PR* 20). Particularity provides access to the universal, insofar as "this is the only universality there is: when, from a specific enclosure, the deepest voice cries out" (Glissant *PR* 74). Lezama deconstructs the assumption of Western cultural superiority by claiming that all authority comes from a relationship to nature, regardless of where that nature is located: "Lo único que crea cultura es el paisaje y eso lo tenemos de maestro monstruosidad, sin que nos recorra el cansancio de los crepúsculos críticos" (63).²⁹ This is true of New World artists as it is of European artists. It is only in adopting another's landscape as an image of one's own that the representation is false. The artist must develop a point of view that is grounded in the landscape before he or she can begin to make sense of the world and propose changes to its current order (or disorder).

²⁸ "wherever the possibility of landscape arises, there also must exist the possibility of culture"

²⁹ "the only thing that creates culture is the landscape and that we have in as a monstrous authority, without being subject to the exhaustion of critical heights"

Glissant explains this order by means of the neologisms, *chaos-monde* and *echos-monde*. These terms describe different identities of the world as seen through Relation. The *echos-monde* serves as the aesthetics of the *chaos-monde*, Glissant's vision of the world. The quote that follows describes the *chaos-monde* as well as the function of the *echos-monde* and is worth quoting at length:

For a long time we have divined both order and disorder in the world and projected those as measure and excess. But every poetics led us to believe something that, of course, is not wrong: that excessiveness of order and a measured disorder exist as well. The only discernible stabilities in Relation have to do with the interdependence of the cycles operative there, how their corresponding patterns of movement are in tune. In Relation analytic thought is led to construct unities whose interdependent variances jointly piece together the interactive totality. These unities are not models but revealing *echos-monde*. Thought makes music. (PR 92-93)

The chaotic, but ordered world that the beginning of the quote describes is the *chaos-monde*. Poetics, as Glissant has been using the term throughout, confirms this view of the world, and this has in turn been justified by science through Chaos theory³⁰ and the theory of relativity. Ideas of order and disorder can only exist in relation to each other and not as absolute values in the scheme of Relation. The *echos-monde* are specific instances of order or disorder within a given cultural context. In Lezarian terms, the *chaos-monde* would be identified with nature and the *echos-monde* with cultural artifacts. Some examples of *echos-monde* cited by Glissant are the writings of Faulkner, the paintings of Wilfredo Lam, the cantos of Ezra Pound, the architecture of Chicago, and the shantytowns of Rio. As Glissant states, "In order to cope with or express confluences, every individual, every community, forms its own *echos-monde*, imagined from power or vainglory, from suffering or impatience. Each individual makes this sort of music and

³⁰ In *The Repeating Island*, Benitez-Rojo chooses to read the Caribbean according to Chaos theory, "where we detect dynamic regularities—not results—within the (dis)order that exists beyond the world of predictable pathways" (36).

each community as well” (93-94). Thus the individual is the unit by which we can understand the flux of the world. The artist provides the point of view through which experience is mediated. Yet as Kearney reminds us, “Every story is told from a particular point of view, presupposes certain interests and anticipates certain ends” (250). By placing his or her point of view at the center of a narrative, the postcolonial artist passes judgment on the condition of dependency of the periphery.

In *La Expresión Americana*, Lezama Lima identifies countless individuals who create individual responses to the *chaos-monde* in a baroque style, but three will suffice to illustrate the *echos-monde* of the baroque imagination. Although Lezama Lima, Carpentier, and Glissant discuss the baroque or relation as an ethos, a moving spirit, or phenomenon, the evidence of such can only be discerned through the output of specific artists. For Lezama Lima, el indio Kondori, the Brazilian sculptor Aleijadinho, and Pablo Picasso are three such lightning rods for neobaroque expression. Each of these artists transcends the local by embodying it fully. The *echos-monde* of Kondori captures the confrontation between the native Inca belief systems and those of the invading Spaniards. On the columns and façade of the Jesuit church of San Lorenzo de Potosi, Kondori carved Inca symbols on equal footing with the saints of the Catholic Church. It is a moment of counterconquest, “en que todos los elementos de su cultura tienen que ser admitidos” (*EA* 104).³¹ Lezama Lima uses a musical metaphor to describe the change wrought on Spanish culture by Kondori’s audacity: “entre los instrumentos que entonan la alabanza, el charango, la guitarrita apoyada en el pecho, tenga su penetración

³¹ “in which all of the elements of his culture need to be admitted”

sumergida en la masa tonal” (*EA* 105).³² The change is not a monumental change, but a subtle one. The tone of the Spanish worship song is forever changed by the inclusion of the Other.³³ The case of the Brazilian Aleijadinho is similar but his point of reference is African culture. Born the son of an African slave and a Portuguese architect and further othered by the physical scars of leprosy, Aleijadinho nevertheless comes to embody yet another cultural touchstone for the baroque: “bate y acrece lo hispánico con lo negro” (*EA* 106).³⁴ The *echos-monde* proposed by this Brazilian artist hints at the rebellious aspects of the baroque, one that is allied with the landscape (*EA* 106). Both artists testify to the hybrid origins of the New World baroque and demonstrate how the Other speaks through this discourse.³⁵ Although this art’s full subversive potential may not have been realized at the time, it waits for the artists of a later generation to reconsider its meaning.

The example of Picasso is somewhat different from those of the American artists, and its inclusion speaks to Lezama Lima’s cosmopolitanism, but also to the idea of the baroque imagination as an avenue for changing mentalities. It seems strange that Lezama Lima would devote nearly a third of an essay titled “Sumas criticas del Americano” to the analysis of the creative genius of a Spaniard. In part it is because Picasso is “el pintor que mas influencia ha ejercido en el mundo” (*EA* 163).³⁶ Lezama Lima looks to him as a model, but also looks to deflect the criticism of mimicry as well. Picasso serves as an

³² “among the instruments that intoned the worship song, the charango, the little guitar which rested on the chest, penetrated into the tonal mass”

³³ Numerous scholars have noted the influences of transculturation: Fernando Ortiz in *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azucar* (1940), Octavio Paz in “The Flight of Quetzalcóatl and the Quest for Legitimacy,” foreword to Jacques Lafaye’s *Quetzalcóatl and Guadalupe* (1974), Tzvetan Todorov in *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other* (1984).

³⁴ “the Hispanic and the black mix together and grow”

³⁵ In chapter one of her book *The Inordinate Eye: The New World Baroque and Latin American Fiction*, Zamora explores how the Quetzalcoatl and the Virgin of Guadalupe represent repressed indigenous cosmogonies and allow the native population a means of expressing themselves within the discourse of the colonizer.

³⁶ “the painter who has exercised the greatest influence on the world”

artist with a baroque sensibility who derives his creative energy from history: “Era un tipo de creador, que podía ser al terminar su primera formación, nutrido por todo el aporte de la cultura Antigua, que lejos de fatigarlo, exacerbaba sus facultades creadoras, haciéndolas terriblemente sorprendidas” (*EA* 160).³⁷ For Lezama Lima, Picasso provides a solution to the problem of contemporary representation (*EA* 161). He is the St. Jerome of aesthetics, translating the present through echoes of the past (*EA* 164). The example of Picasso inspires the New World artist to translate the American experience in art and letters, and put forth an alternative vision of society. This vision will take the subordinated elements of the American experience (the Amerindian, the African) and unite them with the victorious elements to create “una nueva integración surgiendo de la *imago* de la ausencia” (*EA* 182).³⁸ Picasso’s originality does not derive from a break with tradition, but from a deep knowledge of the past and a deployment of its unplumbed depths: “[ha] descubierto regiones que parecían sumergidas, formas de expresión o conocimiento que se habían desusado, permaneciendo creadoras” (*EA* 161).³⁹ One could describe Picasso’s creative genius as a cross-cultural or baroque imagination that has had a profound effect on the plastic arts.⁴⁰

This is both a benefit and a predicament for the American artist. On the one hand, he or she is liberated by Picasso’s method, finding a solution for the representation of

³⁷ “He was the type of creator, who could be at the end of his primary formation, nourished by all the contributions of an Ancient culture, that far from exhausting him, exacerbated his creative faculties, making them terribly surprising”

³⁸ “a new integration surging from the *imago* of absence”

³⁹ “he has discovered regions that seemed submerged, forms of expression or knowledge that had fallen out of use, yet retained their creative force”

⁴⁰ Joyce and Stravinsky are also mentioned as equally important innovators, who operate from a similar creative perspective and have had a profound influence on their disciplines. Kiberd also makes the association between Joyce and the postcolonial practitioners of the baroque: “The modernism of Joyce was not only that of Mann, Proust or Eliot: even more it anticipated that of Rushdie, Marquez and the post-colonial artists” (339).

multiple cultural heritages. On the other hand, the American artist is accused of mimicry and a lack of originality if they find themselves inspired by Picasso's "aguijón fertilizante" (*EA* 164).⁴¹ Lezama argues that to accuse the American artist of "influencias ... picassistas"⁴² is the same as claiming that Picasso is simply a mimic for being inspired by Doric column. The New World artists are entitled to use whatever forms they find useful in the representation of their reality.

Following the parameters set forth by Lezama Lima, Glissant, Carpentier, and Harris, it is evident that the baroque imagination sets out to recreate the world in which the artist lives. This recreation is as much a political statement as it is a literary statement and it passes judgment on the cultures that came before it and the present state of the world. In the words of George Lamming, "the central and seminal value of the creative imagination is that it functions as a civilizing and humanizing force in a process of struggle" ("Carriacou" 29). The imagination is the faculty by which Relation is practiced and expressed. It translates experience from a specific point of view. What differentiates discussions of the baroque then from that of the baroque imagination is that the second term places the emphasis on the individual author or writer of a text. As Declan Kiberd writes in *Inventing Ireland*, "To realize the present, one must realize every century that preceded it and that went into its making. In the end, however, the dialectic must work through its human agents in art as in politics" (304). Although the baroque might be a social condition able to be generalized across a society or culture, the baroque imagination is a mindset, an inclination toward the inclusion of disparate elements and a propensity for metaphor, analogy, and collocation. The expressions of the baroque

⁴¹"Fertilizing sting"

⁴²"Picassist... influences"

imagination are most obviously visible in the plastic arts, yet it flourishes in literature as well. Gaston Bachelard argues that the expressions of the imagination issue forth in writing: “The imagination in us speaks ... every human activity wishes to speak. When this word becomes conscious of itself then human activity desires to write ... Literature is not therefore the offshoot of another activity. It is the fulfillment of human desire as it emerges in the imagination” (Bachelard qtd. in Kearney 108). The literature of the baroque imagination is the fulfillment of a desire to see a change in the relations between cultural center and periphery and the recognition of the basic humanity of all peoples.

One of the common tropes of the historical baroque, the image of the suffering and wounded body is shared by the baroque imagination and offers a glimpse into its functioning. The bloody, mutilated body, often that of Christ at the height of his agony, was used to move believers to temporal and spiritual action by making visible the effects of sin upon Christ’s human body. Yet, in Christian tradition, Christ’s wounds make resurrection and eternal life possible and so the wound becomes a site of communion and regeneration. As Dennis Patrick Slattery states in *The Wounded Body*: “The wound is a special place, a magical place, even a numinous site, an opening where self and the world may meet on new terms, perhaps violently, so that we are marked out and off, a territory assigned to us that is new, and which forever shifts our way of tracing in the world” (7). Colonization and colonialism likewise impose wounds upon those who are subject to them and the postcolonial artist uses the image of these wounds (and attendant histories) productively to create community and to argue for ethical relations between the metropolitan center and the postcolonial periphery. Carpentier, Walcott, and Heaney all utilize images of the wounded body as a catalyst for action. Some salient examples are

the one armed insurrectionist Macandal of *The Kingdom of this World*, Omeros' Philoctete, and Heaney's bog people. In each case, the wound serves a site of historical reckoning, a marking of place and a site of regeneration. These artists concur with Slattery when he states that "while our wounds may separate us out and highlight our individual story ... they allow us to be part of a *communitas*, retaining our individuated being ... while intertwining our lives with others" (238). The baroque imagination at all times seeks both the telling of the individual story and its connection to the greater world of literature and culture.

The baroque imagination also wrestles with the question of language as it is central to questions of both identity and modernity. Much of Glissant's work in both *Caribbean Poetics* and *Poetics of Relation* focuses on the way the Creole language emerged in the francophone Caribbean and its implications for identity. While Glissant favors the use of Creole, he nevertheless recognizes that it is at a disadvantage with the hegemonic languages of the world that are connected to the technological processes that attend modernity. The Creole-speaking person must weigh the benefits of maintaining his or her linguistic particularity, and risk isolation, or engage with the dominant languages (103). Reflecting on the Irish situation, Kiberd poses this dilemma in another way, stating: "The struggle for self-definition is conducted within language; and the English, coming from the stronger society, knew that they would be the lords of language" (11-12). The baroque imagination navigates these difficulties by speaking in the hegemonic tongue, but inflecting it with the hybrid accent of Caribbean or Irish speech. Silvio Torres-Saillant describes the formation of this language as "linguistic nativization" that,

can take place not only through morphological modification of the signified, to use the Saussurean term, but also through accentuating the

uniqueness of the signified. A new rhythmical arrangement produced by the syncretic mixture of sounds emanating from diverse cultural sources and the new substance, sociohistorically speaking, of the Caribbean world should add fuel to the furnace necessary to recast the languages of the Old World. (*Caribbean Poetics* 82)

The baroque imagination is not necessarily about creating a new language but twisting the hegemonic tongue through the periphery's experience and thus laying claim to the historical richness of both. These artists appropriate the colonizer's language for their own decolonizing ends. By demonstrating exceptional use of the dominant language, each artist testifies to the modernity of the periphery, the ability to engage in conversation, and by altering it, they lay claim to a unique regional identity. Each artist feels an at-home-ness within the dominant language that extends into a feeling of proprietorship. Their inflections on the language cause it to stretch its meanings to include the vanquished and oppressed. Heaney has taken this audacity even further with the Irish-inflected translation of the English classic, *Beowulf*. In response to the critics' claim that he was expressing a typical postcolonial response, he states: "I could also see what I myself was doing. I knew what a through-other venture the whole thing would have to be, but was happy enough to say, So, so be it. Let *Beowulf* now be a book from Ireland" (*FK* 414). Given the particularities of each artist's postcolonial situation, I look at the works of each artist separately, beginning with Carpentier and traveling across the Caribbean to Walcott before the long journey across the Atlantic to Heaney. However similarities in theme, structure, and tone arise in each and signal the trans-Atlantic character of the baroque imagination.

Alejo Carpentier and the Baroque Imagination

In the first chapter, I consider Alejo Carpentier's essays on the baroque as well as his ethnographic study of music in Cuba as the point of departure for the baroque imagination. Carpentier is often identified as a pioneer of magical realism and the neo-baroque. These literary forms provide a new way of thinking about culture and tradition that open a space for the periphery to dialogue with the center in a way that privileges the history and people of the outskirts. Through half a century of writings, Carpentier constructed his theory of the baroque, passing through various other theoretical paradigms, such as surrealism and *lo real maravilloso*, as he gave shape to his literary method. In 1975, Carpentier looks back on his work and spells out his theory of the baroque in a lecture titled: "Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso." The lecture is at once prescriptive and descriptive of Carpentier's own work of the previous decades and begins, as do most discussions of the baroque, with a series of dictionary definitions that attempt to pin down this elusive concept. Carpentier subscribes to Eugenio D'Ors' postulate that the baroque is an ever present creative force that arises cyclically throughout history.⁴³ Carpentier utilizes D'Ors' definition in order to free the baroque from its historical position and change it from descriptor to method. The work of fiction becomes a theoretical text through which to read contemporary reality. These characteristics are of particular importance to the postcolonial artist who is faced with the erasure of the native population and culture, and the competing pulls from the metropolis and the periphery. The baroque is a way of attempting to fill the gaps in the historical record and to create an identity amidst the chaos.

⁴³ "*una constante humana*" (a human constant) and "una suerte de pulsión creadora que vuelve ciclicamente a través de toda la historia en las manifestaciones del arte" (a sort of creative force that returns cyclically throughout all of history in artistic expression) (*La novela Americana* 114, 113).

In this essay, I read an implied argument for the existence of the baroque imagination as the engine of baroque creation and cultural change. Carpentier is aware of the imagination as image-maker and he deploys a phenomenological approach to understanding the Latin American condition. The phenomenological approach to questioning aptly applies to Carpentier's vision of the neobaroque because both operate from the same perspective of "a second naivete" (Ricouer qtd. in Kearney 5). Carpentier's use of the Adamic trope and his insistence that the New World is nameless (despite library shelves bursting with evidence to the contrary) is part of the same phenomenological urge to "conduct(ing) old inquiries in new ways" (Kearney 5). The baroque imagination goes beyond the literary artifacts created to constitute a mindset capable of sifting through the palimpsest of American history to craft an autonomous identity.

Although Carpentier subscribes to D'Ors definition of the baroque as a human constant, it also figures as an act of the imagination in his work. His identification of artists who are and are not baroque testifies to the existence of a baroque imagination more so than an irresistible force that overtakes individual expression. Aeschylus, Sophocles, Plato, Cicero, Racine and Voltaire are incapable of being baroque according to Carpentier. While he does not explicitly state why these artists are not baroque, the reason is clear. All of them can be identified as rationalists who ascribe to the positivist notion of ordering society according to reason. Perhaps the best example of the rationalist mindset can be derived from Plato's analogy of The Cave. Man's reality can be likened to shadows on the wall that are created by forms outside of the cave. Truth does not lie in what a man sees, but what the forms represent. The rationalist imagination constantly

strives to see beyond the surface, beyond the emotions, and beyond the particular to the complete, the perfect, and universal. In contrast, the baroque imagination revels in the shadows on the wall, choosing to enmesh itself in the particularities of reality without needing to extrapolate universal forms.

This reading of the baroque as mindset, or imagination, is further supported by Carpentier's claim that romanticism is "todo barroco"⁴⁴ (Tientos y diferencias 115). Wagner, Goethe, Lautremont, and of course, Marcel Proust write works that celebrate the physical, emotional and particular that is the essence of the baroque imagination. Furthermore, Carpentier argues that the baroque imagination is geared toward action. In contrast to the rationalist, who merely thinks of perfect forms, the romantic "fue acción y fue pulsión y fue movimiento y fue voluntad y fue manifiesto y fue violencia" (Tientos y diferencias 115).⁴⁵ The romantic imagination is geared towards action and a remaking of society. It is in this way that the baroque imagination becomes a method of resistance.

Carpentier identifies rationalism with "epocas asentadas", eras that are sure of themselves and consistent, while barroquismo is the hallmark of eras in flux. Unlike some rationalists, who begin social change with a tabula rasa, Carpentier's baroque imagination begins with the geographic, historical, and social reality of the Americas. The baroque allows him to maintain ties with the past while reordering the present and the future. Through his newspaper articles, radio programs, and most importantly his novels, Carpentier desires to rewrite the history of the continent in a way that acknowledges the mediation of Europe and the constructedness of American reality. Carpentier's idea of the baroque serves as a counter-discourse to that of imperialism and

⁴⁴ "all baroque"

⁴⁵ "was action and force and movement and will and act and violence"

simultaneously universalizes the baroque experience while claiming it as a distinctly American form of expression. He finds the speech patterns that best capture the reality of the region occur in the baroque: “Tengo que lograr con mis palabras un barroquismo paralelo al barroquismo del paisaje del trópico templado. Y nos encontramos con que eso conduce lógicamente a un barroquismo que se produce espontáneamente en nuestra literatura” (“Lo barroco...” 133).⁴⁶ The baroque translates the marvelous reality of Latin America that cannot be expressed any other way. In this sense, we can see that the baroque is a form of translation that creates an alternate reality as much as it describes one that already exists.⁴⁷ Carpentier’s use of the word “spontaneous” suggests that if the novelist responds correctly to the reality of the Latin American experience, the baroque will occur spontaneously. That is a bit disingenuous because Carpentier himself had to work at crafting his baroque expression and it is not always present in his work, as will be seen in the following chapter.

However, Carpentier’s approach to literature has been widely imitated and admired because it provides a framework through which to speak about that which seemed unutterable previously. While critics disagree on the success of these utterances, questioning whether they constitute an “authentic” voice, there is no doubt that Carpentier’s contemporaries and readers found both magical realism and the baroque to be useful formats for writing about the postcolonial experience.

This chapter will explore the emergence and aims of Carpentier’s baroque imagination from its earliest glimmers in *Ecue yamba-O* and *El reino de este mundo* to its

⁴⁶ “I have to achieve with my words a baroquism that parallels that of the tropical temperate landscape. And we find that that takes us logically to a baroquism that is spontaneously produced in our literature”

⁴⁷ As Kristeva argues, “The artist’s role is not to make a faithful copy of reality, but to shape our attitude towards reality” (*Revolt* 122).

full expression in *Los pasos perdidos* and *El siglo de las luces*, particularly the ways that these works construct an American face capable of interrogating the myths of European superiority. This chapter will also consider the ludic portrayals of the baroque in *Concierto barroco* and *Reasons of State*. It will conclude with an assessment of the effectiveness of the baroque imagination from the perspective of Carpentier's final unfinished novel, *Arpa y sombra*.

Derek Walcott and the Baroque Poetics of Decentering the Center

From Carpentier, I shift my focus across the Caribbean to the poetry of Derek Walcott. Walcott's work reflects a similar use of the baroque to define autochthonous Caribbean expression, but as an Anglophone Caribbean writer this aspect of his imaginary has often been overlooked. Walcott shares Carpentier's humanist vision of culture and has resisted identifying himself with the discourses of Negritude, nationalism or Marxism claiming instead a cosmopolitan identity that is rooted in the Caribbean. Walcott's literary career also parallels Carpentier's in that both chose to identify themselves as primarily Caribbean despite their many journeys and long residences in either the United States or Europe. Carpentier and Walcott see their work as a way of "purifying the language of the tribe" in order to communicate with a wider cultural audience as well as a way to clarify what it means to be Caribbean (*WTS* 8).⁴⁸ In this discourse, Walcott distinguishes himself by placing his own voice as that of the tribe in a much more prominent way than does Carpentier.

⁴⁸ Carpentier makes a similar statement in "Papel social del novelista," stating, "Ellos (los escritores) comprenden el lenguaje de las masas de hombres de su época. Están pues en capacidad de comprender ese lenguaje, de interpretarlo, de darle forma—sobre todo esto, *darle una forma*" "They (writers) understand the language of the masses of men of their era. They have the capacity to understand this language, to interpret it, to give it form—above all to give it form" (47).

Demonstrating many of the marks of the baroque imagination, Walcott's poetry and essays have consistently focused on repudiating colonial visions of the Caribbean as inferior and derivative and have forged a new way of interpreting the hybrid cultures of the islands. However, he has described the postcolonial imagination of Caribbean artists not as baroque, but as schizophrenic. In "What the Twilight Says: An Overture", Walcott describes the effect of colonial double vision as a "simple schizophrenic boyhood" where "one could lead two lives, the interior life of poetry, the outward life of action and dialect" ("Twilight" 4). Rather than paralyzing the artist, Walcott suggests that the writer make "creative use of his schizophrenia, [through] an electric fusion of the old and the new" ("Twilight" 17). The term schizophrenia in Walcott's work is used both positively and negatively to describe the condition of the Caribbean artist, engaging with the tensions caused by the multiple inheritances of colonial ancestry. The creative use of colonial schizophrenia can be productively refigured as the baroque imagination. Confronted with the palimpsest of cultures that is the New World and the Caribbean, the baroque imagination creates an original expression of culture through the syncretism of old and new. As Kaup notes, "Latin American and Caribbean essayists' non-linear historical schemas and the novelist's spiral form plots and designs meandering through nonsymmetrical repetitions and returns activate the liberating potential of a counterbaroque not tied to linear history" (Kaup 232).

The second chapter considers how Walcott's long poems utilize many of these same strategies in its reconfiguration of the Caribbean and History. This hermeneutic challenges conceptions of nothingness in the Caribbean and argues for full human status for its hybrid populations. Walcott's poetry is an example of the baroque imagination

-serving to consolidate identities within the framework of Relation. Rather than being jingoistic representations of national/regional pride, Walcott's long poems build the landscape as a point of reference for a communal identity that remains flexible, porous and open to change.

Seamus Heaney: Breaking the Boundaries of Identity with the Baroque Imagination

The final chapter moves the consideration of the baroque imagination beyond the confines of the Caribbean and Latin America to the green shores of Ireland. The inclusion of Seamus Heaney in the third chapter of this text may strike some as surprising, because his poetry seems crisp and unadorned, yet on closer examination it is evident that it is baroque in mindset, as are Loyola's *Ejercicios Espirituales*. By including Seamus Heaney and the Irish experience, I follow the trail blazed by Maria McGarrity in *Washed by the Gulf Stream: the Historic and Geographic Relation of Irish and Caribbean Literature*. This volume takes its departure from the geographic connections between Ireland and the Caribbean: "The comparative analysis of Ireland and the Caribbean rests on moments of historical interchange and reveals an even deeper dependence upon the circuit of the Gulf Stream, the import of which is not in the study of its explicit course but in its emblematic extension of the mutual perspectives that these isles distinctively share" (19). Nature and landscape inform writing, and McGarrity's work traces these connections, enacting a baroque criticism, that "extends a growing postcolonial impulse to pair dual margins ... and center their cultures in a critical discussion" (McGarrity 22). In this sense, postcolonial criticism is only catching up with what artists from the margin have been doing since at least the middle of the twentieth century, reading each other's works, identifying themselves in another's margin and engaging in critical dialogues that

are elided by the boundaries imposed by academic disciplines. Lezama Lima and Carpentier both cite James Joyce as a major literary influence and Walcott has acknowledged a dramaturgical debt to John Synge. Reading through Walcott and Heaney's prose volumes, one also finds that each takes an interest in the writings of other poets from the periphery, most notably Joseph Brodsky, Osip Mandelstam, and Les Murray. The critical faculties of the baroque imagination tune these artists into one another and establish networks of connection beyond those that are legitimized by the metropolitan center.⁴⁹

For Carpentier and Walcott, the baroque imagination serves as a way to build up a regional identity from the scattered elements of the past. It is a task of bringing together forgotten elements and combining them into a unified, yet open whole. Carpentier and Walcott have fewer literary antecedents to contend with in this regard than does Heaney. In this regard, their work can be considered to be closer to that of W.B. Yeats, Lady Gregory, and John M. Synge, who worked to forge a distinctly Irish culture from the echoes in the ground. Heaney's task is somewhat different and demonstrates a complementary aspect of the baroque imagination, which is the opening out of identity in a cosmopolitan way that retains its ties to the local.

As a Northern Irish poet, hailing from Ulster, Heaney grew up in a place that could be described as colonial, not yet postcolonial.⁵⁰ British policies against Catholics created a state of apartheid and sectarian violence rocked contemporary life. Historically,

⁴⁹ Declan Kiberd notes that W.B. Yeats provided the Abbey Theater as a space for Rabindranath Tagore to read his poetry.

⁵⁰ I am using the term "colonial" to designate a region under subject status. I recognize that the term "postcolonial" can also apply to the literature of a country still technically under colonial rule as postcolonial politics and poetics begin even before independence is achieved. As Declan Kiberd writes in *Inventing Ireland*, "In my judgement, postcolonial writing does not begin only when the occupier withdraws: rather it is limited at that very moment when a native writer formulates a text committed to cultural resistance" (6).

England tested out theories of governance on Ireland that it later exported to its other colonies (Kiberd 25). Like Walcott, Heaney's baroque imagination is indelibly marked by his British colonial education. In an interview with Dennis Driscoll, Heaney states that his affinity with Walcott's poetry stems from the recognition of this very circumstance:

I found myself not only admiring the amplitude of the art, but feeling at home with it. I recognized the nature of the conflicts it arose from ... In both places the writers were furnished with two languages, the vernacular of the home and the idiom of the school, and the choice between them had political implications. (int. with Dennis Driscoll 342)⁵¹

Heaney also feels at home with Walcott's art because both share a similar sensibility, the baroque imagination, and a sense of the ethical responsibility of the poet, to present a face for the Other. He delves into the palimpsest of writings on Ireland to open out the possibilities of individual identity and community belonging.⁵² In his poetry, Heaney writes to document life in Northern Ireland and engages in etymological archaeology to determine the subterranean connections between Ireland's past and present. In other words, "the attempt underlying Heaney's early poetry is ... to translate the violence of the past into the culture of the future. Heaney's early poetry is a fantastic example of the "gnostic space" of Ireland's peat bogs dialoguing with the poet, while his later poetry demonstrates an opening out of identity and a desire to make cross-cultural connections, particularly through translation.

The concept of the baroque imagination places an emphasis on the individual response to postcolonial conditions. It aspires to hold together the two contradictory

⁵¹ "The loss of Irish as the predominant vernacular ... in Ireland and the demise of African, Asian, and indigenous languages in the Caribbean affect writers who create in the requisite tongues of empire" (McGarrity 20).

⁵² While Carpentier's connection to Walcott is purely literary, Heaney's connection to Walcott is personal. Their close friendship and contemporaneous stays in Boston forge a personal link between the imaginations of these poets. Their mutual attraction and cross-fertilization is evident in that they broach similar topics in similar ways, such as the inclusion of a minor character from the *Odyssey*, Philoctetes, to signify a way forward from the violent history of colonialism.

thoughts of geo-cultural particularity and cross-cultural participation in the same mystical breath. It vividly creates a literary space for the contradictions and discursive convolutions necessary for describing the Caribbean and Ireland.⁵³ As Michael Dash states in *The Lost Body*, “The individual artist’s unsettling focus on these precarious dichotomies ultimately constitutes a tradition built around redefining the subject, reacting against cultural and psychological estrangement and, in its most visionary manifestation, creating a poetics of a fissured constantly changing space” (17). Giovanni Careri’s words on the complex nature of the baroque works of art are also applicable to these texts, “We might say of Baroque works and decors that the theory is so intimately implied by the forms and materials themselves that only the most elaborate analytical descriptions could articulate its principles.” (Careri 27). In analyzing these baroque texts, I have tried to expose the form of the works as baroque and allow the decolonizing poetics of the artists to come forth as well without overburdening my text with a direct analysis of how each novelistic or poetic iteration is itself baroque. In the following chapters, I aim to trace the manifestations of the baroque imaginations of Carpentier, Walcott, and Heaney to determine in what ways they enact a decolonizing poetics and how they postulate an ethics.

⁵³ Silvio Torres-Saillant poses this conundrum in *Caribbean Poetics: Toward an Aesthetic of West Indian Literature*, stating: “But one soon finds that no metaphor contains as many layers of signification as would be necessary to exhaust the multifaceted human experience of the Caribbean. To represent the region in all its complex amplitude one might think of devising an amalgamated image, a composite metaphor that points to the contemporaneous existence of multiple signs” (16). He continues in a way that seems to directly call for the baroque as a paradigm: “It follows from the foregoing conclusion that when approaching the cultural products of the region, the scholar must develop the rare ability to tolerate impurities, to conceive of a space of in-between-ness, where things enjoy an ontological elasticity that permits them to be neither this nor that. A conceptually flexible framework alone can manage to converse with the multiplicity of components that have gone into the sociocultural formation of the people of the region and can enable the scholar to delve into the underling congruity of visibly disparate elements” (18).

Chapter 1: Alejo Carpentier and the Baroque Imagination

Alejo Carpentier is one of the primary proponents of the neobaroque in the twentieth century. He claims the baroque as the natural language of the Americas stating, “América, continente de simbiosis, de mutaciones, de vibraciones, de mestizajes, fue barroca desde siempre” (“Lo barroco...” 123).⁵⁴ For Carpentier, the baroque is not confined to a certain historical epoch, but is a “constante del espíritu” that is characterized by “el horror al vacío, a la superficie desnuda, a la armonía lineal geométrica, estilo donde en torno al eje central ... se multiplican lo que podríamos llamar los ‘núcleos proliferantes’” (“Lo barroco...” 117).⁵⁵ The baroque is a vital force: “Es un arte en movimiento, un arte de pulsión, un arte que va de un centro hacia afuera y va rompiendo en cierto modo, sus propios márgenes” (“Lo barroco 117”).⁵⁶ This baroque that Carpentier postulates is a joyful, exuberant baroque that builds a new mythology for the Americas based on its unique history of mestizaje and transculturation. It is not the melancholic baroque of Walter Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, whose protagonists are overwhelmed by the fragmentation of the world, but a Leibnizian-Deleuzian baroque that delights in the creative possibilities of the world as it is given. As Mogens Laerke writes, “whereas Benjamin’s baroque is a world of ‘mourning’ (Trauer) and melancholy, Deleuze’s baroque is a world characterized by a certain form of joy that Leibniz terms ‘delight’” (26). It is also a transformative baroque informed by a Marxist teleology that seeks a reordering of society. Carpentier expresses the delight of the

⁵⁴ “America, the continent of symbiosis, mutations, vibrations, miscegenation, was always baroque” (Translations of Carpentier’s essays are my own. The translations of the novels are noted in the bibliography.)

⁵⁵ “spiritual constant” “a horror at emptiness, at the bare surface, at linear geometric harmony, a style where instead of the central axis ... there is a multiplication of what we could call proliferating nuclei”

⁵⁶ “It is an art of movement, an art of force, an art that goes from the center outwards, in a sense breaking through its own margins”

baroque and advocates for social change through his novels. This literary form provides a means for social action because as Carpentier argues in “Papel social del novelista,” “escribir es un medio de acción” (“Papel social...” 49).⁵⁷ Through a baroque aesthetics, his novels actively seek to bring about revolt in thought and deed, leading to a more just appraisal of Latin American culture.⁵⁸

This chapter will analyze the baroque aesthetics at work in Carpentier’s novels, but it will also trace the development of the baroque imagination through the multiple phases of his work, from its earliest glimmers in *Écue-Yamba-Ó!* to its full fruition in *Explosion in a Cathedral* and its self-critical reflection in *Harp and Shadow*. While Carpentier’s imagination has always been baroque, he comes to a theoretical understanding of it through the process of writing his novels. Carpentier’s often quoted essays on the baroque are dated much later than the actual baroque works that give body to his theories. “Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso” and “La novela latinoamericana en vísperas de un nuevo siglo” both emerge from lectures delivered in Caracas in 1975. However, his novels have been baroque since the 1940s, and his imagination even earlier than that. In this chapter, I consider the factors that shaped Carpentier’s baroque imagination, such as the philosophical influence of Ortega y Gasset, the development of the marvelous real, and his historical work in the archive while writing *Music in Cuba*.

I begin by tracing the influence of German philosophy via Ortega y Gasset on Carpentier, particularly the works of Oswald Spengler. Ortega y Gasset also obliquely introduces the Antillean intellectual to the baroque theories of Gottfried Leibniz and the articulation of the self as a unique confluence of factors: historical, social, cultural, and

⁵⁷ “Writing is a means of action”

⁵⁸ By revolt, I am referring to Julia Kristeva’s concept of revolt as defined in her interviews in *Revolt, She Said*. I will more fully explore this concept in the context of Carpentier’s work later in the chapter.

geographical, that needs to be articulated in a new decolonized form.⁵⁹ An early essay called “El meridiano intelectual de Nuestra America” and *Écue-Yamba-Ó!* are two early examples of this decolonizing urge. I then consider the influence of *Music in Cuba* for Carpentier’s development as a novelist. This non-fiction text lays the ground work for his future work on the marvelous real and the baroque. As a novelist, Carpentier’s work becomes more polished and his aim better articulated in the prologue and text of *The Kingdom of this World*. I analyze both for their articulation of the imagination as an agent for fomenting revolution in the New World and as the mode of expressing the intersection between history, the body and culture. *The Lost Steps* and *Explosion in a Cathedral*, Carpentier’s paradigmatic baroque works, express the baroque imagination in fictional form. I consider the ways that *The Lost Steps* juxtaposes the arrow-like nomadism of the narrator with the baroque reality of Latin America and critiques the isolated position of the artist. To the contrary, *Explosion in a Cathedral* is a text about relationships, relationships between individuals, the landscape and history. This text explores the distinction Julia Kristeva makes between revolt and revolution to consider why so many uprisings motivated by a desire for liberation become repressive and dogmatic. These novels postulate the baroque imagination as a way of practicing Relation⁶⁰ that constantly questions, thus preventing the reification of revolutionary ideology into dogmatism. *Reasons of State* and *Baroque Concerto* present a ludic version of the baroque in which Carpentier delights in language as a medium of social

⁵⁹ While I have yet to find any direct reference to Leibniz in Carpentier’s work, the German philosopher exercised a great influence on Ortega y Gasset’s theory of vito-rationalism that influenced Carpentier’s generation.

⁶⁰ By Relation, I am referring to the concept elucidated by Glissant in *Poetics of Relation*. As I stated in my introduction, the baroque imagination and Relation share a way of combining cultural inheritances and building up the cultural density of the periphery.

transformation. Both texts simultaneously engage in a demythification of Europe that has been at work since *The Lost Steps* and *Explosion in a Cathedral*. Coming to Carpentier's essays on the baroque at this point in the chapter, allows for a richer interpretation of their pronouncements on the baroque as a novelistic discourse. These essays were originally given as lectures in the University of Caracas in 1975 when Carpentier was already considered an established and influential novelist. The chapter closes with a reassessment of the baroque imagination from the perspective of Carpentier's final work *Harp and Shadow*.⁶¹

Carpentier is part of a generation of Latin American writers who are obsessed with ascertaining the identity of the Americas as the continent of the future that will supersede a decadent and decaying Europe. Like other writers of his time, Carpentier's intellectual framework is shaped by José Ortega y Gasset's *Revista de Occidente*, which circulated translations of German philosophers such as Husserl, Worringer, and, most importantly, Oswald Spengler. Spengler's *Decline of the West* assisted the New World artists in distancing themselves from a culturally hegemonic Europe. In *The Pilgrim at Home*, Roberto González-Echevarría states the significance of Spengler's text for the Cuban avant-garde of which Carpentier was a part: "Spengler offers a view of universal history in which there is no fixed center, and where Europe is simply one more culture ... Spengler provided the philosophical ground on which to stake the autonomy of Latin American culture and deny its filial relationship to Europe" (56). By debunking the myth

⁶¹ The only major work that I have omitted from this chapter is *La Consagración de la primavera* (*The Rite of Spring*). Although it centers on the theme of revolt, it is Carpentier's most politically motivated novel and one that does not exhibit the baroque imagination that motivates his other works. While the style is the same, the ideas motivating the work are a justification of the Cuban Revolution, rather than an exploration of the concept of revolt or the historical and geographical realities that shape the present.

of European cultural superiority, Spengler's text provided an opening for the Latin American artist to develop an autochthonous culture independent of European norms.

An early essay of Carpentier, "Sobre el meridiano intelectual de nuestra América" (1929) reveals the influence of Spengler and his early commitment to a decolonizing Latin American literature. This essay was written as a response to the literary feud between the Spanish magazine *La Gaceta Literaria* and its Argentinian counterpart *Martin Fierro* that began when *La Gaceta* published an article declaring that Madrid should serve as the cultural prime meridian for any writers using the Spanish language. Carpentier weighs in on the discussion with a brief article that reveals his early commitment to developing a decolonizing discourse and for articulating a unique identity for Latin America. He disagrees wholeheartedly with the position of *La Gaceta* because the reality of the Latin American artist is profoundly different from that of his European counterpart: "es muy difícil que un artista joven piense seriamente en hacer arte puro o arte deshumanizado. El deseo de crear un arte autóctono sojuzga todas las voluntades" ("Meridiano" 227).⁶² For Carpentier, the European artist has exhausted all literature that relates to "la definición espiritual"⁶³ of a people or their relationship to the landscape, while the Latin American artist is still centrally preoccupied with these questions. In this statement, we see the influence of Spengler's idea of the life cycle of cultures: "Man's perception and expression of nature, of the landscape, varies according to the cycle in which his culture is found at a given moment" (González Echevarría *Pilgrim* 56). For Carpentier, the Latin American landscape remains virgin territory for the artist as there are no texts which describe Latin American landscapes or the personality "types" that

⁶² "It is very difficult for a young artist to think seriously about making a pure or dehumanized art. The desire to create an autochthonous art conquers all other desires"

⁶³ "spiritual definition"

inhabit them. He concludes his essay by questioning the need for a cultural center at all, declaring that “América tiene, pues, que buscar meridianos en si misma, si es que quiere algún meridiano” (“Meridiano” 228).⁶⁴ Spain cannot be the center for Latin America because the artist’s perspective from that point of view would not be constitutive of Latin American experience.

Carpentier’s first attempts at finding a Latin American meridian focused on the Afro-Cuban world being opened up by ethnologists like Fernando Ortiz and Lydia Cabrera. *Ecue Yamba-O!* is Carpentier’s first attempt at a novel that articulates the radical difference of Caribbean culture. It is written at a point of rupture between forms of the traditional novel and those innovations advocated by the Surrealists, such as Andre Breton and Robert Desnoes, with whom Carpentier was affiliated. The novel, subtitled *Historia Afro-Cubana*,⁶⁵ tells the story of Menegildo Cúe, a young Afro-Cuban who comes of age in the countryside and flees to the city after murdering a romantic rival. In the city, Menegildo is initiated in both urban life and the political-religious culture of *ñañinguismo*⁶⁶ before he dies violently, leaving behind an unborn son. Through this experimental narrative, Carpentier aims to foreground the difference of Cuban culture and by extension that of the Caribbean and Latin America. In his efforts to find a source completely free of European contamination, Carpentier identifies the Afro-Cuban elements of Cuban culture as the source of Caribbean difference: “Solo los negros, Menegildo, Longina, Salomé y su prole conservaban celosamente un carácter y una

⁶⁴ “America must then find meridians within herself, if it is that she desires any meridian”

⁶⁵ “An Afro-Cuban Story”

⁶⁶ Ñañinguismo is a politicized form of Santería that was practiced in Cuba.

tradición antillana” (Carpentier, *EYO* 125).⁶⁷ The novel posits that the Afro-Cuban is the only guarantor of authentic Caribbean culture because he or she is by default an atavistic being protected from modernity, though he or she may be acted upon by it.

Despite the text’s focus on Afro-Cuban culture and its avant-garde influences, it betrays a Hegelian Eurocentric perspective that sees the Afro-Cuban as irreconcilably “Other” and incapable of modernity.⁶⁸ Furthermore, by claiming that the only true source of culture in the Caribbean is Afro-Cuban culture, Carpentier is effectively silencing the miscegenated reality of Caribbean history and the possibility of including his own voice in the discourse because he does not share that heritage. He is white and of European origin, as both of his parents are recent immigrants to Cuba. Eleven years will pass before Carpentier makes another attempt at publishing fiction and seventeen years will elapse before he publishes *The Kingdom of this World*. In the interim, Carpentier is engaged in his world as a journalist, radio producer, and music critic. He returns to Cuba following the ouster of Gerardo Machado, under whose regime he was imprisoned, and begins some of the most significant journeys of his career, namely the trip to Haiti with Louis Jouvét. Carpentier’s trip to Haiti provides the psychological breakthrough that results in *The Kingdom of this World* and its lauded prologue. The voyage also affects the production of *Music in Cuba*, the influence of which I will now discuss at greater length.

In order to better understand the shift that takes place in Carpentier’s fiction, it is important to look at a work of nonfiction that impacts all his subsequent work.

Carpentier’s quest in all of his writings is the articulation of an autochthonous Latin

⁶⁷ “Only the blacks, Menegildo, Longina, Salome and their progeny jealously guarded the Antillean character and tradition”

⁶⁸ Formally, the novel’s curious shape is disjointed; it includes drawings and Surrealist-inspired pictures as well as an incoherent narrative. González Echevarría describes it as “baffling” (Pilgrim 64).

American/Caribbean point of view. The history of the Americas, one of conquest, erasure, enslavement, and hybridity, is full of missing pieces, gaps, unexplained phenomena and a radically different geography. By delving into the archives of Latin America and the Caribbean, Carpentier comes to understand that these forgotten histories are part of his circumstances and that in order to truly understand his present he must delve into the past. *Music in Cuba* is Carpentier's first systematic foray into the archive. This undertaking changes his trajectory as a novelist, artist, and American critic. In this text, Carpentier uncovers a methodology of extracting individuals from the archive to emblemize historical movements. By describing both an individual and his circumstances, Carpentier is able to give a richer contextualization to the history of music in Cuba.

Instead of engaging with other scholars who have written about music in Cuba, Carpentier chooses to return to primary sources in order to unearth a new history, as he states in his introduction: "This work has been written almost entirely with primary documents. Given the shallowness or lack of seriousness in the few books on Cuba's musical history, I felt obligated to return to primary sources of information" (*Music* 61). This statement not only describes the paucity of resources about music in Cuba, but also the condition of history in general in the Caribbean. Carpentier continues, "There were early warning signs that a number of generally accepted claims made in the work of even solid foreign scholars, misled by their credulity, had been the result of the most ingenuous fantasy" (*Music* 61). These words could apply to almost any aspect of writing about the New World.⁶⁹ In writing *Music in Cuba*, Carpentier delves into the archives of

⁶⁹ Antonio Benitez-Rojo makes a similar point about the texts of the Spanish conquistadors stating: "Todos aquellos libracos (crónicas, relaciones, historias) estaban llenos de lugares comunes, como si se copiaran

the island, becoming in his own words “a scholar, a library rat, a paleographer” (Carpentier qtd. in Brennan 5) and comes up with a new method of writing about the region that goes beyond the dry technical texts that had preceded his and which were “influenced by the private sympathies or personal aesthetics of the writer, and in no way attempted to offer an overall vision of the development of the island’s music from the onset of colonization” (*Music* 61). Carpentier’s text examines the history of music in Cuba as a constant dialogue between European forms and the emerging acceptance of Afro-Cuban rhythms shaped by the unique personality of each individual composer.

The most salient feature of this writing is the introduction of individual histories and personality profiles as a way of discussing history in *Music in Cuba*. Throughout his chronicle of technical musical developments, Carpentier incorporates the stories of historical personages that he discovers in the archive. These individual stories contain within themselves examples of historical moments, movements and cross-cultural currents. By giving a face to these forgotten individuals and memorializing their stories in print, Carpentier begins to craft a history of Cuban music that is also a history of the Cuban people. As Timothy Brennan states in the introduction to the English language version of the text: “his story is about work, about everyday, normal people under conditions of extremity and demand ... Carpentier sketches in all the absent transitions as though he were a contemporaneous witness, presenting us a narrative that is deliberately like a novel” (56). The recovery of Esteban Salas exemplifies Carpentier’s archaeological

unos a otros; además, también estaban llenos de cuentos, chismes, calumnias, libelos, justificaciones interesadas, disparates, flagrantes hipérboles, inexplicables omisiones, en fin, las más reputadas crónicas, historias, diarios y relaciones, no eran más que sartaes de embustes y plagios enhenados por el cálculo.” (All those grand tomes (chronicles, relations, histories) are full of common-places, as if they copied each other, in addition they are also full of lies, gossip, calumnies, libels, self-interested justifications, falsehoods, flagrant hyperbole, inexplicable omissions, in sum, the most respected chronicles, histories, diaries, and relations, are no more than strings of lies and plagiaries covered in calculations (qtd. in Martin 21)

and personalizing method. Prior to Carpentier's text, there is little mention of him in the historical record: "the work and the personality of Esteban Salas have remained until now in the most absolute obscurity. He is not even mentioned in authoritative or officially sanctioned books or studied in conservatories" (*Music* 107). *Music in Cuba* returns Esteban Salas to the historical record and establishes the 18th century music director of the Cathedral of Santiago de Cuba as a precursor to both classical and popular music in Cuba.

Carpentier seeks to present Salas as a prototype for the Caribbean artist and demonstrates that since the earliest days of the colony, Cuban musicians were creating a legacy of Cuban music. Born in Havana, Salas learns music in his parish and is educated at the University of Havana, where he studies canon law. He comes to Santiago to fill the position of music director in 1764 where he establishes himself as a competent director whose group of musicians grows from less than twenty to "a small classical orchestra capable of performing symphonies by Haydn" (*Music* 110). However, Carpentier does not just give us his resume and an analysis of his recovered scores. The soon-to-be novelist sketches a physical and psychological portrait of Salas that reveals Cuba's history of transculturation on the individual level. Salas is described as well educated, "an angel of purity" and possibly of mixed blood, "despite his aquiline nose, his skin was quite dark and his lips were thick and fleshy" (*Music* 108-109). Salas is also presented as a leader actively engaged in the life of the community. He composes music to help raise funds to repair the Cathedral and lobbies for prompt and adequate pay for his musicians. He was also engaged in the creative life of the community composing not only masses and litanies, but popular Christmas music, *villancicos*. He also left a legacy of his

creativity by “training performers in the art of the fugue” (*Music* 110). After reading this chapter, the reader not only understands Salas’ motivations, but how the music chapel of the Cathedral figures into the life of Santiago de Cuba. Carpentier sums up Salas’ legacy in a way that indicates the author’s purpose for the text as a whole:

In sum, Salas was the classic composer of Cuban music. A classic who was not an isolated phenomenon, since he established solid connections with the European music of his time, imposed certain enduring disciplines, and for the first time brought to the island certain lasting stylistic characteristics, some of which even passed over to specific expressions of popular music. (*Music* 117)

Cuban music exists in relationship to European music, but is capable of creating its own legacy. This legacy folds together the autochthonous and the foreign with the academic and the popular. The tradition begun with Salas will culminate in the experience of Ignacio Cervantes a 19th century composer, whose work is considered to be “at the end of a nationalist musical evolution that culminates at the end of the last century” and offers “the same solution—the true and only one— ... where Cubanness is a pure emanation of the individual subjected to a particular environmental formation” (*Music* 213). This statement is the ideological thesis undergirding all of Carpentier’s fiction.

While it is tempting to consider that Carpentier’s method spontaneously evolved out of his own engagement with the archive, it is more likely that such an encounter was conditioned by a prior philosophical grounding. As usual when considering philosophy in Latin America one has to return to Ortega y Gasset. Another German philosopher who greatly influenced Ortega is Gottfried Leibniz. While Leibniz is not an explicit reference point for Ortega, his theories of the baroque are nonetheless fundamental for Ortega’s understanding of the individual as indelibly wrapped up in his unique circumstances. Ortega was writing articles on Leibniz’s philosophy as early as the 1920s and was

engaged in writing a book-length treatise on Leibniz's philosophical system at the time of his death.⁷⁰ Considering his life-long engagement with Leibniz, it is likely that aspects of his philosophy made their way into the pages of *Revista de Occidente*. The two aspects of Leibniz's thought that are most relevant for Ortega and the baroque are the concepts of the monad and the theory of perspectivism. These correlate with the central dictum of Ortega's philosophy: "the life of each one of us is a dynamic dialogue between "I and my circumstances"" ("Preface for Germans" 55). In his exposition of his theory of ratio-vitalism, Ortega claims that an entity (or self) is only a bundle of relations (Mora 29). This formulation of the entity/self sounds strikingly like Leibniz's monad, his term for the soul which is derived from the Neoplatonists, "who used it to designate a state of One, a unity that envelops a multiplicity, this multiplicity developing the One in the manner of a 'series'" (Deleuze 25). Each monad, according to Leibniz conveys the entire world in the form of an infinity of tiny perceptions, little springs or burst of force" (Deleuze 130). These intimations make up the monad although it is not consciously aware of them. In Leibniz's philosophy there are varying degrees to which monads are capable of recognizing and expressing the world that resides within them.

Ortega takes this concept and turns it into an ethical imperative: "we must make our life and be faithful to our innermost ego, to our 'call,' to our 'vocation'. This vocation is strictly individual" (Mora 49). In order to fulfill the call, "man needs to know himself and his circumstances. He accordingly needs an idea or 'interpretation' of the world" (Mora 41). This requires an intellect finely attuned to the myriad tiny perceptions which constitute the world in which the monad lives. In order to do so, the artist must ask

⁷⁰ In "Preface for Germans," Ortega remembers reading Leibniz while studying in Marburg (Ortega 33). His unfinished text on Leibniz is called *La idea de principio en Leibniz* (The Idea of Principle in Leibniz).

himself the timeless questions that Carpentier poses to himself in “El papel social del novelista,” “¿quien soy yo, que papel seré capaz de desempeñar . . . que papel me toca desempeñar?”⁷¹ but as Carpentier goes on to state, these questions do not occur in a vacuum but “en el mundo—el que circunda nuestras ambiciones e irreverentes ciudades modernas—que para decirlo francamente, conocíamos muy mal hasta ahora” (“Conciencia” 80).⁷² Ortega’s dictum will influence Carpentier’s search for identity. The novelist’s quest is primarily concerned with embedded factors such as “[el] factor económico, étnico, telúrico, de todas aquellas realidades subyacentes, de todas aquellas pulsiones soterradas de todas las presiones y apetencias foráneas” (“Conciencia” 81).⁷³ These are the tiny perceptions which are always already present in the individual, but not necessarily in a conscious way. The goal of the novelist is to make these realities evident for his readers within the text in a way that highlights their interconnectedness. In *Music in Cuba*, it is evident that Carpentier recognized the importance of the tiny perceptions of each composer that he profiled, presenting each as a prism through which the vast social, economic, historical, and cultural influences were distilled into a unique vision.

The question of man and his circumstances is also understood as a problematic of place. In Carpentier’s essay “Conciencia e Identidad de America,” he argues that it is not sufficient to merely consider man, but man in his circumstances: “y el hombre nuestro, consustanciado con la urbe, se nos hace hombre-ciudad, hombre-ciudad-del-siglo-XX valga decir: hombre-Historia-del-siglo-XX” (80).⁷⁴ The term Hombre/Man is not

⁷¹ “Who am I, what part will I be capable of playing . . . what role should I be playing?”

⁷² “in the world—the one that encompasses our ambitions and irreverent modern cities—that to speak frankly, we knew very poorly until now”

⁷³ “the economic, ethnic, and telluric factors of all those underlying realities, of all those underground forces, and all those foreign pressures and hungers”

⁷⁴ “and our man, consubstantial with his city, became man-city, man-city-of-the-XX-century it is worth saying: man-History-of-the-XX-century”

sufficient to describe the reality of Twentieth-Century-Man because his reality is qualitatively different than that of European Man:

Mientras el hombre de Europa nacía, crecía, maduraba, entre piedras seculares, edificaciones Viejas, apenas acrecidas o anacronizadas por alguna tímida innovación arquitectónica, el latinoamericano nacido en los albores de este siglo de prodigiosos inventos, mutaciones, revoluciones, abrió los ojos en el ámbito de ciudades que ... empezaban a ... elevarse, al ritmo de las mezcladoras de concreto. (“Conciencia...” 79)⁷⁵

This thought parallels Leibniz’s theory of perspectivism in which the relationship between subject and object is altered by the nature of the object. Technological modernization of the means of production mean that “the new status of object no longer refers its condition to a spatial mold – in other words, to a relation of form-matter—but to a temporal modulation that implies as much the beginnings of a continuous variation of matter as a continuous development of form” (Deleuze 20). Thus an object cannot be perceived in the same way at different moments and from different angles because it is constantly in the process of development. In Leibniz’s 17th century as well as Carpentier’s 20th century, “fluctuations of the norm replace the permanence of law” (Deleuze 20). The object cannot be considered completed at any point in time because its evolution is always in flux as is the perspective of the observer. Madrid cannot serve as the meridian for Latin America because their social and historical realities are vastly different.

Perspectivism becomes a form of relativism that is grounded in space and time and forms the basis for the baroque imagination: “It is not a variation of truth according to the subject, but the condition in which the truth of a variation appears to the subject.

⁷⁵ “While European man was born, grew, and matured amongst secular stones, Old buildings, barely increased or made anachronistic by some timid architectural innovation, Latin American man was born in the dawn of this century of prodigious inventions, mutations, revolutions, he opened his eyes in the midst of cities that ... were beginning to ... erect themselves, to the rhythm of the concrete mixers”

This is the very idea of Baroque perspective” (Deleuze 21).⁷⁶ Carpentier and other writers with a baroque imagination ground their works in both the local environment and a particular moment in history as a means of reevaluating certain historical givens, as is seen in *The Kingdom of this World* and *Explosion in a Cathedral*. Deleuze’s comparison of point of view with the mathematical concept of the point as a location in relationship to other lines illustrates the idea of perspectivism: “It is not exactly a point, but a place, a position, a site, a ‘linear focus’, a line emanating from other lines” (Deleuze 20). In other words, perspectivism is not another way of saying anything goes, (every point of view is observing the same world) but of nuancing the idea of truth. Truth is no longer absolute, but relative based on the perspective of the individual observing particular phenomena in the same world. The relational nature of truth is foregrounded in the above statement. The baroque imagination recognizes the multiplicity of lines of thought and experience that shape the individual. Identity therefore is not a given, but a malleable product, that can be manipulated to achieve certain political goals. This is a useful proposition for any artist engaged in the process of decolonization. It is through the individual’s perspective, his or her circumstances, that an individual can communicate with the world: “Ortega constantly points out that society is only the organization and collectivization of uses and opinions formerly held by individuals” (Mora 58). By enunciating his own unique perspective, Carpentier opens up new ways of being for others.

The concept of point of view also makes the body centrally important in narrative. As Daniel W. Smith notes, “Leibniz provides a deduction of the necessity of the body as that which occupies the point of view: no two individual substances occupy the same

⁷⁶ This articulation of perspectivism can be related to Mikhail Bakhtin’s chronotope, which literally means “time-space” thus foregrounding both temporality and location as concomitant elements that make up a novel, or for my purposes, the particular viewpoint of an author.

point of view on the world because none have the same clear or distinct zone of expression on the world as a function of their body” (Smith 143). The body is the locus through which all the tiny perceptions are channeled and interpreted, and in the context of the *mestizaje* of Latin America, it is also a repository of the cultural mixing that is a part of the expression of the world. The body is the means by which the events of the past are evident in the present. The body is also the point at which the monad interacts with other monads. Thus an understanding of how the body communicates with other bodies is essential for a narrative of the self.

Both Carpentier and Ortega recognize the importance of reassembling the fragments of experience into a whole that conveys meaning. The baroque provides a hermeneutic for Carpentier that allows him to decolonize the narrative of the Americas and retell it from a non-Eurocentric point of view that opens up the “realidades subyacentes” and the “pulsiones soterradas” of the continent (“Conciencia” 81).⁷⁷ With the absence of an agreed upon center, “point of view takes the place of the missing center” (Deleuze 22). By placing his point of view at the center of his narratives, Carpentier enacts a decolonizing poetics by reconstituting the world from his vantage point. As Ortega states, “Life is, therefore, task, problem, preoccupation, insecurity. It is also a drama ... We understand the meaning of life when we proceed to give a narrative of it, that is to say, when we try to describe the series of events and situations it has come up against and the vital design underlying them” (Mora 54). This is not to say narrative is inherently revealing or liberatory—Enlightenment positivism and Nazi ideology are also narratives, but narrative will allow Carpentier to articulate his vision to others.

⁷⁷ “underlying realities” “underground forces”

Carpentier first identifies the unique perspective of Latin America as the marvelous real. He stakes a claim for this articulation of reality in the prologue and text of the *Kingdom of this World*. In this novel, Carpentier comes into his own and indelibly marks the literary landscape of Latin America and the postcolonial world. He continues distancing himself from Europe in a way that privileges the American experience, yet simultaneously reveals his debt to the liberation of European norms as a prerequisite for his new way of seeing the Americas.⁷⁸ Both inheritances are a part of the Latin American vision:

After feeling the in no way false enchantment of this Haitian earth, after discovering magic presences on the red roads of the Central Plateau ... I was moved to compare this marvelous reality I'd just been living with the exhaustingly vain attempts to arouse the marvelous that characterize certain European literatures of these last thirty years. (Carpentier, Prologue 29)

Carpentier chides the surrealists for falling into formulaic presentations of the marvelous in order to incite uncanny feelings in their audience. Despite Carpentier's protestations, it is evident that the surrealist movement influenced him and that these tenets shaped his attitude toward what is unique about the American continent.

However, Carpentier's distinctions between the European marvelous and the American marvelous are important and necessary for understanding the baroque imagination. First and foremost, the marvelous real, the American marvelous, requires the use of both faith and reason by a writer seeking to represent it. These two elements are divided between the writer and the people in unequal proportions. For the people observed by the writer, faith in the marvelous is absolutely necessary, "In the first place,

⁷⁸ Anke Birkenmaier has written a book-length study on Carpentier's relationship to surrealism titled *Alejo Carpentier y la cultura del surrealismo en America Latina* (Madrid: Iberoamericana, 2006). Leonardo Padura Fuentes has also studied Carpentier's relationship to surrealism in his article "Carpentier y el surrealismo" (*Cuadernos Hispanoamericanos* 2004).

the sensation of the marvelous presupposes a faith. Those who do not believe in the Saints cannot be cured by the miracles of the saints” (30). The marvelous as Carpentier experiences it in Haiti is largely derived from seeing the absolute and fervent belief of a portion of the population in voodoo and the impact that the often disregarded religion has had on historical events, that is, the revolt spread by Macandal. The Latin American writer draws upon the faith of the people he writes about in order to rise above “the literary trick” of the surrealists, although he may not share this faith himself (Carpentier, Prologue 31).

The imagination becomes a formative part of the human psyche and Carpentier seeks to explore the intersection between individual imagination and historical event through his novels. Carpentier argues within the prologue for an intense historicism that will document the reality of the Americas in a new way:

The reader must be warned that the story he is going to read is based on an extremely rigorous documentation which not only respects the historical truth of the events, the names of the characters (even the minor ones), of the places, and even the streets but which hides under its apparently non-chronological facade a minute collation of dates and chronologies.
(Carpentier, Prologue 32)

The author, Carpentier, is not a believer in the mystical rationale for the events that transpired throughout the Haitian slaves’ long quest for liberation and he needs an empirical basis on which to ground his narrative. The historical archive provides a way of looking at the region that does not solely rely on faith, belief, and the traditions handed down by others, but also conforms to rigorous standards of historicity. In fact, much of the persuasive power of the magical real for its readers, who are largely non-believers like Carpentier, comes from the fact that the events chronicled by the writer can be verified in the historical record. In this prologue and *The Kingdom of this World*,

Carpentier accords equal value to the marvelous and the historical: “But what is the history of all the Americas but a chronicle of the marvelous real?” (Prologue 32). By claiming the historicity of the marvelous, Carpentier creates a point of intersection for faith and reason, the past and the present. The marvelous is a part of the situation of the people of Latin America. To ignore it would be to omit a circumstance that is necessarily a part of the individual experience.

The marvelous real indicates the alterity of America, celebrating its non-Europeaness in terms of faith, history, and mestizaje, but it does not suggest or create an otherness that is incommensurable with the European. The idea of incommensurability is unthinkable to Carpentier, who constantly compares elements of other cultures, times, and eras in his metaphor-driven mind. For Carpentier, the marvelous reality of Latin America is able to dialogue with the culture of Europe and generate a way of thinking that supplements and refreshes old world decadence.⁷⁹ America is the continent of the future and Europe is the continent of the past. In the marvelous real, he creates a space for considering the ways in which the conversation between Europe and America has been unequal and sets about rectifying that disparity.

In contrast with *Écue-Yamba-Ó*, the portrayal of Afro-Caribbeans in *The Kingdom of this World* demonstrates that they are historical actors and not atavistic beings. Although Ti Noel is presented as a passive witness, he is influenced greatly by

⁷⁹ Drawing on Spengler’s concept of the life cycle of cultures, Carpentier argues that the vitality and freshness of American ideas comes from their Amerindian and African myths, “Because of the virginity of the landscape, because of its formation, because of its ontology, because of the Faustian presence of the Indian and the Black, because of the revelation its recent discovery constituted, because of the fertile racial mixtures it favored, the Americas are far from having used up their wealth of mythologies” (Prologue 32). Unlike an exhausted Europe, who has used up the mythic power of the Greeks, Romans, Celts, and Christians to shape culture, the American myths are still powerful enough to move individuals and populations to perform or attempt great feats. In the freshness of these mythologies, Carpentier seeks a new and equal place for the Americas on the world stage.

Macandal, the mandingue slave who represents the voice of the African Other. Macandal carries the memory of Africa across the Middle Passage and serves as a link for an alternative version of history and power than is embodied in the Europeans.⁸⁰ Macandal is thrust forward into history when his arm is amputated by the sugar cane mill. The technological process of the mill pulls the slave out of his role as storyteller and into a new role as a fomenter of slave rebellion. Macandal's response to his amputation prefigures the way that the neobaroque will be used for postcolonial liberation. With the loss of his arm, Macandal faces an absence, a space, and an emptiness. He responds by immersing himself in nature and learning the pharmacopeiaic properties of the plants in the Haitian landscape. Macandal's baroque metamorphoses, through the animal kingdom, bind the slaves more closely to the land and change their relationship to it. The landscape is no longer an entity to be worked or fought against, but a partner in resistance, providing cover and ammunition. The mandingue's revolution of poison is a baroque revolution that causes complete upheaval in the colony. The poison seems to be everywhere at once, decentralized and untraceable: "The poison crawled across the Plaine du Nord, invading pastures and stables. Nobody knew how it found its way into the grass and alfalfa . . . the fact was that cows, oxen, steers, horses, and sheep were dying by the

⁸⁰ Ti Noel's reflections on the engravings of European kings and African chieftains in the first chapter of the novel indicate the impact of Macandal's teaching: "They were kings, true kings, and not those sovereigns wigged in false hair who played at cup and ball and were gods only when they strutted the stage of their court theaters" (*KTW* 14). For Ti Noel, the African kings embody true power, while their European counterparts only perform it within a closed stage far removed from reality. According to Macandal, power stems from a close relationship between the leader and the land, "Back There there were princes as hard as anvils, and princes who were leopards, and princes who knew the language of the forest, and princes who ruled the four points of the compass, lords of the clouds, of the seed, of bronze, of fire" (*KTW*, 15). Macandal is the griot who forges the slaves' sense of themselves as historical beings. His African stories serve as a living link between Africa and the new world, a link that is easily broken because it is oral: "The disappearance of Macandal was also the disappearance of all that world evoked by his tales" (*KTW* 29). The slaves' stories are necessary for Ti Noel's understanding of himself. The whites have their stories and their literature which is backed up by writing, but Ti Noel is left with only his memories when the griot is gone.

hundreds” (*KTW* 33). Macandal’s poison revolution is rhizomatic, requiring the participation of many slaves throughout the plantations, working under the direction of Lord of Poison (*El Señor del Veneno*) (Carpentier, *KTW* 36). This revolution sets the tone for the later uprisings chronicled in the novel, but it is the most baroque. The possibility of ending white rule energizes the slave population and fires the imagination.

Macandal’s death represents the key moment in the exploration of the imagination in *The Kingdom of this World*. The reception of the event spawns multiple interpretations and creates a mindset of possibility for the slaves. These multiple reactions are only possible in a society that is so fractured by the brutality of slavery and the mental structures necessary to keep it in place. The slaves are assembled for a spectacle intended to teach them about the planters’ supremacy, yet it is interpreted by the slaves in the opposite manner. Carpentier clearly identifies the factual events as the death of Macandal: “And the noise and screaming were such that very few saw that Macandal, held by ten soldiers, had been thrust head first into the fire, and that a flame fed by his burning hair had drowned his last cry” (*KTW* 52). However, the perception of that reality is multiple. The slaves believe that Macandal’s favor with the African deities allows him to evade the planters’ retribution, “This was what their masters did not know; for that reason they had squandered so much money putting on this useless show which would prove how completely helpless they were against a man chrismed by the great Loas” (*KTW* 51). While the whites believe that they are teaching the slaves a lesson, the slaves return home energized by Macandal’s triumph over white retribution. They believe that he has metamorphosed and come to rest on the top of the power structure as a mosquito. The planters are confounded that their spectacle has not produced the desired effect, and

instead emboldened the subjugated population. If the slaves think Macandal has evaded retribution after waging war against the whites, it is possible that further revolutions will be more successful. Carpentier drives home this point by contrasting Lenormand de Mezy and Ti Noel's reactions to the event. De Mezy philosophizes with his wife, while Ti Noel begets twins. The slaves' interpretation of begets new life while the master's discourse leads to stagnation.

The novella continues to trace the numerous revolutions that rock Hispaniola to the fantastic, though brief reign of Henri Christophe. Two death scenes, the end of Christophe and Ti Noel, serve to foreground the power of the imagination. In the case of Henri Christophe, he meets his demise when the liberated slave population rises up against him. Despite his attempts to incorporate African beliefs into his regime (the walls of the Citadel are pink with bulls' blood), Christophe does not adopt the critical imagination necessary to truly revolutionize society: "Henri Christophe, the reformer, had attempted to ignore Voodoo, molding with a whiplash a caste of Catholic gentleman" (*KTW* 148). His death is a result of a failure of the imagination. He could not envision a Haitian society that would function differently from a European state, hence he is overthrown.

Ti Noel's death mirrors that of Christophe; he dies alone, friendless, and pursued by the surveyors, but with a marvelous difference. He is granted a moment of clarity before his death. In an oblique criticism of those who would adopt European manners uncritically, like Christophe, Carpentier has Ti Noel metamorphose himself into a goose. Ti Noel's image of the geese stands for the rationalist ideal of Europe: "geese were orderly beings, with principles and systems, whose existence denied all superiority of

individual over individual of the same species” (*KTW* 182). It appears that these geese have been reading Locke, Rousseau and Montesquieu. However, Ti Noel is quickly disabused of his ideal, “it had been made crystal clear to him that being a goose did not imply that all geese were equal” (*KTW* 183). Although Ti Noel has bought into the goose way of life, he is not admitted as an equal, because he does not have a history that the other geese recognize, a similar situation to that of the Latin American artist in the context of Western culture. Ti Noel is shunned by the geese and realizes that he must make his home with his own tribe, humanity. In the same way, Carpentier seems to be indicating that the Latin American artist must take up the concerns of his people and craft a history that will be recognizable as different and still commensurable with European history. Ti Noel’s realization constitutes an ethics that is motivated by the thought of the Other:

But man’s greatness consists in the very fact of wanting to be better than he is. In laying duties upon himself ... For this reason, bowed down by suffering and duties, beautiful in the midst of his misery, capable of loving in the face of afflictions and trials, man finds his greatness, his fullest measure, only in the Kingdom of This World. (*KTW* 184-185)

One of the duties man lays on himself is precisely in knowing oneself as a being-for-others whose actions have consequences for subsequent generations. Although Ti Noel does not see the faces of those Others, he nonetheless acknowledges the humanity implicit in their aspirations: “Now he understood that a man never knows for whom he suffers and hopes. He suffers and hopes and toils for people he will never know, and who, in turn, will suffer and hope and toil for others who will not be happy either, for man always seeks a happiness far beyond that which is meted out to him” (*KTW* 184).

This is a theme that Carpentier will carry over into *The Lost Steps* and *Explosion in a Cathedral*.

The Kingdom of this World provides a major breakthrough for a distinct conceptualization of the Caribbean, yet Carpentier is not entirely satisfied with it. Although he writes about the faith that produces miracles, he does not share this belief himself. He maintains a respectful but ironic distance from the text. González Echevarría makes the point succinctly, stating, Carpentier “is unable to establish a dialogue with his culture that does not at the same time reify that culture, being unable to be autochthonous at the moment of writing” (*Pilgrim* 154). Put in terms of the Leibnizian baroque, “each monad expresses the world ... but clearly expresses only a particular zone of the world” (Deleuze 130). In *The Lost Steps* and *Explosion in a Cathedral*, Carpentier moves closer to expressing his zone of the world by writing novels in which the main character serves as a mask for Carpentier himself in the encounter with history and geography.

As Richard Kearney states, “Self-identity involves one projecting a narrative onto the world of which one is both a creative agent and a receptive actor” (248). Although Ti Noel was a receptive actor and a faithful witness, he does not creatively engage his society. This is his lament at the end of the novel and the challenge of the novelist to himself. In the texts of the 1950s, Carpentier’s “characters will at least appear to have more direct control over their destinies” (González Echevarría *Pilgrim* 154). Carpentier’s next major novelistic endeavors focus on the question of living in the kingdom of this world, and provide contradictory yet complementary ways of understanding the baroque imagination; a matter of choice, in these novels as the imagination is tied to a baroque concept of interpersonal ethics.

In these texts, Carpentier comes to the idea of the *cronista* to interrogate the way that place and imagination intersect. According to Carpentier, the *cronista* is the first writer of Latin American reality. His words, in essence, set the terms for all who are to follow. In “La novela latinoamericana en vísperas de un nuevo siglo,” Carpentier argues that the contemporary Latin American novelist in effect functions as a “Cronista de Indias,” a chronicler of the reality of the region who comments upon the present and the past of Latin America:

para el novelista latinoamericano, éste sólo podrá hallar su razón de ser en erigirse en una suerte de Cronista de Indias de su continente, trabajando en función de la historia moderna y pasada de ese continente mostrando, a la vez, sus relaciones con la historia del mundo todas cuyas contingencias también le atañen, poco o mucho. (“La novela latinoamericana...” 30)⁸¹

The position of “*cronista*” has a long and storied history in the founding of the Americas and in fact was an official position in the Spanish imperial regime. The historical *cronista* was the first to translate the New World into European terms.

Ortega’s words on perspectivism are once again useful for understanding Carpentier’s decolonizing project: “Landscape, unlike the more abstract milieu, is a function of a specific man. The same corner of earth becomes as many landscapes as there are men or nations to traverse it” (“Preface...” 71). The Caribbean has been crisscrossed by multiple *cronistas*, such as Christopher Columbus, Bartolome de las Casas, and Bernal Diaz de Castillo, who have each painted the landscape differently. These landscapes exoticize the New World and imbue it with all sorts of utopian or dystopian visions. The contemporary *cronista* tells the story of Latin America with a

⁸¹ “the Latin American novelist can only find his reason for being by erecting himself in the manner of a Chronicler of the Indies of his continent, working through the functions of past and present history and demonstrating at the same time this history’s relation with the history of the whole world whose contingencies also concern him, little or much”

twist. He is not beholden to an imperial power source, but to the place, the people, and his own perspective, finding in the local food for the universal. The contemporary *cronista* gives his view of the landscape and so provides another perspective from within: “De Bernal Diaz de Castillo a Marti, he aquí un mundo nuevo que comienza a cobrar un perfil universal a través de la mano de sus escritores” (“Papel social...” 45).⁸² Diaz de Castillo and Marti constitute the two stars which orient the contemporary writer’s quest. The *cronista* exemplifies the importance of defining the local for the Latin American artist, “Con Bernal Díaz, la función social del escritor se define en el Nuevo Mundo: ocuparse de lo que le concierne, adelantarse a su época, asiendo su imagen más justa” (“Papel social...” 44).⁸³ Marti, on the other hand, signifies the circular nomad, who elevates the local to the universal and passes judgment on historical conditions. The contemporary writer must undertake both the *cronista*’s task of translation and Marti’s critical eye, coming to know all the circumstances that formulate the Latin American “I” and pronouncing judgment upon them.

The use of the *cronista* as a model allows Carpentier to focus his text on an individual protagonist as a way of providing a face for the Caribbean. In traditional historical texts, the magnitude and impact of events such as the erasure of the indigenous populations, the struggles for freedom by an enslaved population and the enormity of political violence cannot be adequately presented through facts and figures. As Carpentier states:

los grandes acontecimientos tienen el poder de diluir demasiado la personalidad del hombre en la vastedad del acontecer histórico. Cuando

⁸² “From Bernal Diaz de Castillo to Marti, there is a new world that begins to forge a universal profile at the hands of its writers”

⁸³ “With Bernal Diaz, the social function of the writer is defined in the New World: to take up what concerns him, to anticipate his era, making its image more exact”

Plievier nos habla de centenares de miles de hombres muertos en el frente de Stalingrado, el mero enunciado de una cifra no tiene, para nosotros, todo el horror que fuera deseable. Una cifra, con toda su espantosa elocuencia, no nos muestra los rostros de las víctimas. Tenemos que fijar la vista en uno solo, tomado como prototipo, para sentir el dolor de los demás. (“La novela...” 119)⁸⁴

Statistics and body counts do not reveal the human cost behind historical events. It is only by focusing on an individual face that the humanity of the victims can be revealed. In his fiction, Carpentier finds himself obligated to return to the notion of the “Protagonista,” the protagonist/hero. This reduces a collective conflict to “la tragedia de unos cuantos” (“La novela...” 120).⁸⁵ This strategy, utilized by Carpentier since *Music in Cuba*, demonstrates a link between his historical fiction and Levinas’ *Humanism of the Other*. Levinas argues that it is in the face of the other that one’s ethical responsibility is revealed. In Carpentier’s quest for self-realization, the full knowledge and presentation of his own face, he obliges his reader to acknowledge the humanity of those, who like him, are inhabitants of the Caribbean. The side effect of this personal focus is that it narrows the field of vision “quitándonos la posibilidad de abarcar el escenario en su totalidad” (“La novela ...” 119-120).⁸⁶ Carpentier offsets the potentially narrowed focus by embroiling his characters in both history and landscape, as is evident in all of his fiction after *Écue-Yamba-Ó!*.

As a way of accessing a greater historical perspective, Carpentier structures both *The Lost Steps* and *Explosion in a Cathedral* as texts of errantry. Each postulates a different type of errantry, arrow-like or circular, as described by Edouard Glissant in

⁸⁴ “When Plievier tells us about hundreds of thousands of men killed in the Stalingrad front, the mere stating of a statistic does not hold, for us, all the horror that might be desired. A statistic, with all its horrifying eloquence, does not show us the faces of the victims. We have to fix our gaze on only one, taken as a prototype, to feel the pain of the others”

⁸⁵ “The tragedy of a few”

⁸⁶ “taking away our ability to have a view of the scene in its totality”

Poetics of Relation. *The Lost Steps* presents a contemporary version of the conquistadorial ego engaged in an “arrow-like nomadism;” (Glissant 28) while *Explosion in a Cathedral* enacts the circuitous routes of “circular nomadism” that “makes every periphery into a center” (Glissant 29). Each form of nomadism presents the baroque imagination from a different angle.

In *The Lost Steps*, the unnamed narrator exhibits a conquistadorial imagination that tries to control the baroque reality of Latin America as exhibited by its women and its geography, but finds that his possessive gaze is resisted. In *Explosion in a Cathedral*, Esteban and Sofia exhibit baroque imaginations that come to revolutionary consciousness and greater solidarity with the people through a series of peregrinations in the Caribbean during the time of the French Revolution. These two central texts in Carpentier’s oeuvre signal a shift from the marvelous real to the baroque as the primary aesthetics. Baroque aesthetics allow Carpentier to push his historical analysis further without losing sight of the individual. It is a secular faith that does not rely on the marvelous for its articulation, but is expressed in the interactions between individuals.

The Lost Steps is a novel about a man’s journey into the interior of the Venezuelan jungle in the search of pre-Columbian instruments. The novel presents the journey as a chronotope in that as the unnamed narrator moves forward in space, he appears to go backwards in time until he arrives at Santa Mónica de los Venados, a small settlement in the depths of the jungle. The narrator comes to a new understanding of himself as a man and as an artist in this milieu, but finds his conquistadorial self-narration challenged by the baroque reality of the landscape.

In this novel, the narrator is described as belonging to both Europe and the New World; his father is European and his mother is from the Caribbean. His imagination is bifurcated, although the European predominates because of his education and early detachment from the lands of the mother. Living in an unnamed North American city, likely New York City, the nameless narrator feels trapped in a futile and useless life over which he has no control. His scholarly and musical aspirations have given way to the mindless creation of music for radio and television commercials. After expressing his discontent to the museum curator, Carpentier's narrator sets off on a quest for an elusive instrument of pre-Columbian origin that will prove his theory of "*mimetism-magic-rhythm*" (LS 20).⁸⁷ Initially reluctant to go on the quest, the narrator heeds the instigation of Mouche, his mistress, and undertakes the journey, coming to believe in it wholeheartedly as a way of pleasing his intellectual father, the curator, and reestablishing himself within the constructs of a productive academic world, the narrative of filiation.

Essentially, the narrator is adopting the arrow-like nomadism described in *Poetics of Relation*. Glissant identifies arrow-like nomadism with the "invading nomadism" of "the Huns" or "the Conquistadors, whose goal was to conquer lands by exterminating their occupants" (12). In *The Lost Steps*, the narrator attempts to reintegrate himself by establishing himself in history and place and by displacing his anxieties and desires onto an objectified female presence that serves as the "Other" he can possess and control. Imaginatively, the narrator conquers the otherness of the landscape and Rosario by making them a part of his narrative of self. He is not open to dialogue with their otherness but attempts to possess it. Given the cinematographic elements of the text and its

⁸⁷ In another potential parallel with Carpentier, the novelist was engaged in similar work when he received the commission to write *Music in Cuba*, a work that brought Carpentier into his own as a novelist.

emphasis on the male's possessive gaze of the woman, Laura Mulvey's work on voyeurism and fetishistic scopophilia is particularly illustrative of the ways in which :
 "woman then stands ... as a signifier for the male other, bound by the symbolic order in which a man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of the woman still tied to her place as bearer, not maker, of meaning" (59).⁸⁸ The abstract category of Woman fits in well with Carpentier's novel of abstraction: "Whereas in his previous work there was a particular history and geography, here we have the Latin American Capital, the Jungle, the River, and an unnamed protagonist that stands for Modern Man" (González Echevarría *Pilgrim* 160). Modern Man, as González Echevarría names the narrator, seeks to forge an identity by conquering Woman and Nature.

For the narrator, women are seen as reproducers of human beings, not culture. As Sherry Ortner states, "Woman creates naturally from within her own being, whereas man is free to, or forced to, create artificially, that is, through cultural means, and in such a way as to sustain culture" (qtd. in Mulvey 77). The protagonist of *The Lost Steps* leaves the land of his mother in order to establish his own identity, but upon return, must renegotiate his status as an adult child and potential suitor. While such a position suggests Oedipal overtones, the identification of land as female serves as a way of containing and controlling the feminine with the male gaze.

Mulvey explains the power relationship between Man and Woman/Nature in terms of the gaze, "In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously

⁸⁸ Use of film theory here is particularly useful because of the ways in which Carpentier constructs his text in cinematographic ways. Carpentier uses the lush imagery of the Baroque, layering images upon images in ways that precede modern music videos. The protagonist of *The Lost Steps* is also intimately aware of the processes of cinematographic representation as his primary occupation is that of music director for a production company.

looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (63). The leading women of *The Lost Steps* are captivating as renditions of the male imagination, but are also masterful constructions that contain the seeds of resistance to the gaze. Carpentier's narrator surrounds himself with women who exude "to-be-looked-at-ness" (Mulvey 63). His wife Ruth plays the leading role in a Civil War drama and his mistress Mouche constantly manipulates situations to be at the center of attention. In their volatility and voluptuousness, the narrator finds respite from the boredom of his everyday existence, although he does not find satisfaction. Mulvey's work draws on Julia Kristeva's concepts of the semiotic and the symbolic. The narrator can be identified with the symbolic; nature and the landscape with the semiotic. In his search for origins, the narrator is looking to delve back into the maternal semiotic chora as a way of finding a new articulation of artistic production. This is fraught with uncertainty because as Kristeva argues, "In 'artistic' practices the semiotic—the precondition of the symbolic—is revealed as that which also destroys the symbolic" (Kristeva, *Revolution* 44).

Thus, the use of women to define a male position brings to the fore dangerous castration anxieties in the male that must be neutralized in the narrative. Mulvey identifies two forms of controlling the castration anxiety aroused by the identification of a male protagonist with a female object. The first avenue is "voyeurism" which "has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjugating the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness. This sadistic side fits in well with narrative" (Mulvey 65). The second avenue is "fetishistic scopophilia" which "builds up the physical beauty of the object,

transforming it into something satisfying in itself” (Mulvey 65). The narrator tries to impose stasis on Santa Monica del los Venados and on Rosario as a way of understanding himself, making them both fetishes that will bolster his own identity. As Kristeva argues, “Fetishism is a stasis that acts as a thesis” (Kristeva, *Revolution* 51). In this sense, Hegel’s division of Nature, as inert, and Spirit, as dynamic, enacts a similar division to the semiotic and the symbolic. Unable to contend with the dynamism of Nature/the semiotic within his philosophy of History, Hegel makes Nature a fetish that makes possible the actions of the Spirit. While the narrator holds to the Hegelian view, Carpentier undercuts his statements with the presentation of the landscape as another character and the Woman as figure of resistance.

Throughout the second half of *The Lost Steps*, the narrator plays at being a conquistador in a way that foregrounds his arrow-like nomadism in respect to the land and to Rosario: “I entertained myself with a childish game ... we were conquistadors who had set out in search of the Kingdom of Manoa ... My role was that of Juan de San Pedro, the trumpeter, who had taken himself a woman in the sack of a town” (*LS* 158-159). The narrator creates the game in response to the feeling of being watched and judged as inadequate by Rosario and the other men on the journey. By casting himself as a conquistador, the narrator relieves his castration anxiety at being the object of the gaze and turns that controlling and punishing look on to Mouche. His French mistress comes to symbolize all the effete manhood that he had striven for in the city, and which leads to ridicule in the elemental new world. Mark Millington notes: “The negative depiction of Mouche operates consistently through the attribution to her of all that he wishes to cast off or leave behind ... she is the repository for the cultural practices and values ... which

he vilifies” (351-352). Mouche’s intellectualism, sexual difference and promiscuity— attractive qualities for a mistress—become a threat to his manhood in the jungle. She cannot be contained and constantly changes her persona to fit the environment with varying degrees of success. A condition that becomes evident as the narrator describes his disgust for a type of literature that has “as its objective the degradation and distortion of all that might contribute, in hours of difficulty and discouragement, to a man’s finding compensation for his failures in the affirmation of his virility, achieving its fullest realization in the flesh he divides” (*LS* 99).

Mouche threatens the narrative of filiation in which the narrator is casting himself. As Glissant argues, “the hidden cause (the consequence) of both Myth and Epic is filiation, its work setting out on a fixed linearity of time, always toward a projection, a project” (*Poetics* 47). The narrator is progressing towards self-realization and although time seems to be going backward towards a primitive source, it is nonetheless linear. The return to a pre-modern sense of manhood recreates the chains of filiation and ties the narrator into that past. In support of this narrative, Rosario is described as a woman who was “all woman and nothing but woman” (*LS* 199). By divesting Rosario of all but elemental womanhood, he may then claim elemental, Adamic manhood for himself. In Rosario, he finds a woman that he can comfortably control within his gaze and makes a fetish of her. This is a process that causes him to reevaluate his thoughts and behaviors in order to make himself virile in her eyes: “I was afraid of . . . making her the object of attentions that might seem to her silly or unmanly” (*LS* 113). Rosario’s position as a fetish is evident from the fact that the narrator does not ask Rosario what would make him appear manly before her, but infers it from the landscape and the tasks he assumes

the other men to be engaged in, projecting his own conception of manhood on Rosario's desires. His contact with the Adelantado, Yannes, and Fray Pedro de Henestrosa among others leads him to fashion a vision of manhood far removed from the effete intellectual circles of Mouche's studio in New York. These men respectively found cities, dig for gold, and convert savages. The narrator tries to fashion himself into a man of action as a way of bolstering the fetishistic notion of Rosario as a subordinate woman.

However, his language almost seems a caricature as he says, "A man seemed more of a man in the Lands of the Horse ... A mysterious solidarity was established between the animal with well-hung testicles which covered its female deeper than any other and man" (*LS* 114).⁸⁹ This statement divests the narrator's desire for woman of its romantic connotations, emphasizing instead its violent and selfish nature, and pointing to an extreme castration anxiety in the sense of overcompensation. The narrator imagines a couple making love under the shade provided by the horse, affirming the man's virility and the woman's position as object. After the narrator and Rosario consummate their relationship, the narrator's words explicitly objectify and claim ownership over the woman's body: "I had sown myself beneath the down I stroked with the hand of the master, and my gesture closed the cycle of the joyful commingling of bloods that have met" (*LS* 153). The relationship between Rosario and the narrator as one of master and slave is further reinforced by the appellation she supposedly takes for herself: "She called herself '*your woman*'" (*LS* 180). The narrator attempts to give these words the appearance of naturalness by saying that they are Rosario's self-appellation, but the

⁸⁹ The image of the horse comes to Carpentier's narrator as he looks at the statue of one of the heroes of Latin America sitting astride a powerful stallion. The image of the man on horseback as the dominant influence of culture is repeated in *Omeros* when the narrator sees a "bronze horseman" at the wharf in Port of Spain and remarks that "We had no such erections / about our colonial wharves, our erogenous zones / were not drawn to power" (5.37.3).

narrator's consciousness of race nonetheless gives it a sinister connotation. His description of Rosario soon after meeting her not only reinforces this idea of race consciousness, but also gives a physical representation of years of miscegenation: "Several races had met in this woman: Indian in the hair and cheekbones, Mediterranean in brow and nose, Negro in the heavy shoulders and the breadth of hips ... this living sum of races had an aristocracy of her own" (*LS* 81). This passage seems to celebrate the idea of *mestizaje* in Rosario, but his acceptance of the Adelantado's division of the races, "'We were three men and twelve Indians,'" suggests a degradation of her personhood due to her mixed origin (*LS* 159). The relationship between Rosario and the narrator must be seen as taking place in the shadow of the horse where the woman signifies the Other.

It is evident that the narrator is able to conceive of the "thought of the Other" but is closed to the possibility of the "other of thought" (Glissant *Poetics* 154). Although the baroque reality of Rosario's background presents itself as a history to be in dialogue with, the narrator can only conceive of it as his own territory, a space on which to construct himself. As Glissant states, "thought of the other can dwell within me without making me alter course, without "prizing me open," without changing me within myself" (*Poetics* 154). The narrator is completely closed to the ways in which Rosario could provide him with an alternative way of seeing the world. He is completely immersed in himself and closed to all Relation. The narrator's imagination is not baroque because he is not open to seeing the Other on her own terms.

In one of the few sections where she speaks in her own voice, Rosario resists the narrator's attempts to control her completely when he proposes marriage: "A legal wife, in Rosario's opinion, was one for whom the husband could send the police when she left

the house where he was free to indulge his infidelity, his cruelty, or his drunkenness. To marry was to come under laws drawn up by men and not by women” (*LS* 226). She rejects the narrator’s attempts to own her on other than her own terms, and the narrator finds himself at a loss: “She disconcerted me with arguments employed by her sisters, and probably her mother, which may account for the secret pride of these women, who feared nothing” (*LS* 226). The women have learned that survival as a woman requires accommodation and evasion. The woman must make a place for the man on her own terms as much as is possible or risk its being invaded on the conqueror’s terms, a threat that is all too often realized. Rosario’s resistance to being completely conquered provides a measure of resistance for the Caribbean; she is the composite, the Other that will not be colonized completely, giving her a measure freedom and power, albeit a limited one.⁹⁰ Rosario resists the narrator’s narrative. She refuses to be a part of his story in terms that are not her own. By maintaining her independence, Rosario wants to participate in “an aesthetics that is an art of conceiving, imagining and acting” (Glissant 155). She wants to partake in “the other of Thought ... the aesthetics implemented by me and by you to join the dynamics to which we are to contribute” (Glissant, *Poetics* 155). The narrator’s imagination is shown to be limited as he cannot participate in dialogue with Rosario.

Although the narrator cannot dialogue with Rosario’s otherness, he is brought to face the otherness within himself when Nicasio, the leper, attempts to rape an eight-year-old girl in Santa Mónica de los Venados and, as retribution, Marcos asks the narrator to shoot him. Nicasio is the Other that is already there. His existence in this place predates

⁹⁰ I am thinking of the resistance described by M. NourbeSe Philip in “Dis Place: The Space Between.” “Jean, Dina, Rosita and Clementina, piti Belle Lily, Boadicea and all the other jamettes decide—if the space of silence—the silence of the space between the legs has to be fractured by massa and his word, then they would at least decide who would fracture it. / This is some progress. Perhaps” (95).

the settlement: “the Adelantado had found [him] when he got there” (*LS* 227). Thus the call of the Other, as Levinas states, predates juridical social structures. This is the first instance in which the narrator identifies with the Other: “The disgust and indignation I felt at the outrage was unspeakable; it was as though I, a man, all men, were equally guilty of this revolting attempt because the mere fact of possession, even willing, puts the male into an attitude of aggression” (*LS* 230). It is not a comfortable position for him. When he recognizes himself in Nicasio, in the outcast, he is unable to continue the game of conquistador. Once his eyes are open to the Other, he is unable to kill. When asked to shoot Nicasio, the narrator is confronted by the disfigured leper’s humanity as exemplified by his broken face. Marcos commands, “Aim at his face” (*LS* 231). The narrator confronts the face of the Other and hears humanity wheezing from it in the cry for forgiveness and reintegration after a trespass, “... fession ... fession ... the criminal was asking to be allowed to make confession” (*LS* 231). The humanity of the Other prevents the narrator from shooting the leper: “something in me resisted” (*LS* 231). Marcos reproaches the narrator with his modernity stating, “They can blast a city to pieces from the sky and can’t do this. Weren’t you in the war?” (*LS* 231-232).⁹¹ Marcos’ definition of humanity is based on the idea of a social compact that he understands as modern. By violating the social compact, Nicasio, in Marcos’ eyes, has forfeited his humanity. He thus eliminates the leper’s humanity mentally and intellectually, and then physically, after the shooting, “his distorted face had lost all human likeness. It was a bloody mass that was disintegrating, slipping down his chest like melting wax” (*LS* 232).

⁹¹ The reference to air warfare also suggests that the technological advances of modernity veil the face as violence is carried out at a distance. From the airplane, the narrator would not be able to see Nicasio’s face and would likely be able to kill him.

When Marcos asks him to shoot the leper, the narrator balks, unable to kill the man in whom he recognizes himself.

This encounter with the Other reveals the limits of a conquistadorial imagination not open to dialogue with the other. Without indicating any passage of time, Carpentier moves from the death of Nicasio to the return of modernity in the form of the plane. This plane does not destroy the village, but pulls the narrator out of his own narrative and into those told by others, as the men who rescue him inform him, “I had become the hero of a novel” (*LS* 233). His narrative of recovered elemental manhood is fractured by the realities of a wife at home and the existence of modernity itself. Once at home, he finds himself enveloped in the narrative of a happy homecoming invented by his wife, Ruth. This narrative ensnares him and mystifies him as “an exemplary person” (*LS* 241). He is being used by the metropolitan newspaper for the ends of promoting a tale “that the domestic virtues were to be found in the world of theater and art” (*LS* 241). The narrator is being co-opted into a schema that is not his own as he did to Rosario, and finds the situation unbearable.

Yet, through all of his struggles to disentangle himself from Ruth’s narrative through divorce, the narrator can only think of himself. He refuses to take part in the collective movements of the city, “I now found myself unable to adjust to these laws of collective motion”; or to participate in any social organizations, the church, the bar, the office (*LS* 250). The narrator is obsessed with condemning the derivative nature of life in the metropolitan city and with the quest for authenticity, “The Adelantado had taught me that the greatest challenge a man can meet is that of forging his destiny” (*LS* 254). The narrator no longer sees his destiny in this place and looks constantly to return to Santa

Mónica de los Venados and Rosario, where he had glimpsed a moment of artistic fulfillment and personal cohesion: “In Santa Mónica de los Venados, while my eyes were open, my hours would belong to me. I was the master of my steps, and I would set them where I chose” (*LS* 267).

Ultimately, the narrator is looking for an authenticity that is inauthentic. He looks to craft his identity in an Edenic space that ignores the demands of the Other. This reality is brought to bear at the end of the novel as the narrator is denied access to both Rosario and the town. When the narrator tries to return to Santa Mónica de los Venados, he finds that the rising waters hide the entrance. Nature is not a still, atavistic force, but constant dynamism, “One day I had made the unforgivable mistake of turning back, thinking that a miracle could be repeated, and on my return I found the setting changed, the landmarks wiped out, and the faces of the guides new” (*LS* 271). The narrator’s misunderstanding extends to Rosario. Contrary to what he had hoped, she did not wait for him; rather, she finds a husband in Marcos with whom to start a new life. As Yannes says, “she no Penelope. Young, strong, handsome woman needs husband. She no Penelope. Nature of woman here needs man ...” (*LS* 276). Rosario continues to forge her destiny, deciding her own fate instead of waiting for Odysseus. The narrator recognizes his mistake has been not acknowledging the circumstances that make up his being. He was unable to form a part of the world at Santa Mónica because “certain forces of the world he has left behind continue to operate in him” (*LS* 277). The narrator understands that his true vocation is that of the artist, “to which it is forbidden to sever the bonds of time” (*LS* 277). Artists, like himself, “anticipate the song and the form of others who will follow them, creating new tangible witness with full awareness of what has been done up to the

moment” (*LS* 278). By confronting the otherness of the Other, the narrator comes to a greater understanding of himself as part of a collective. As Julia Kristeva states, “By recognizing this strangeness intrinsic to each of us, we have more opportunities to tolerate the foreignness of others. And subsequently more opportunities to try to create less monolithic, more polyphonic communities” (*Revolt* 64).

The failure of the narrator’s quest is a victory for the idea of resistance. Rosario rejects the narrator’s control of her sexuality by refusing to marry him. The identification of the woman as Other by Carpentier and her resistance to male forms of identification and domination translate into a site of resistance for the colonial Other. Even though the resistance of the female signals the futility of the narrator’s identity quest, it is not the end of the quest for the author. In Rosario’s insistence on self-articulation, Carpentier finds an alternative form of exercising resistance in historical understanding and a fruitful avenue for change. Both woman and nature provide a model for the baroque imagination, defying the strictures of filiation for the greater freedom of affiliation. Carpentier further explores the bonds of affiliation in *Explosion in a Cathedral*.

If *The Lost Steps* is primarily the story of an individual ego seeking fulfillment in an imaginary quest through the Latin American landscape, then *Explosion in a Cathedral* is its polar opposite. This novel, perhaps Carpentier’s best, is set during the volatile years of the end of the 18th century and follows the lives of three fictional characters, Carlos, Sofia and Esteban, as they intersect with the historical Victor Hugues and the French Revolution. The novel advances Carpentier’s decolonizing project by decentering Europe, presenting the French Revolution from the perspective of Esteban and focusing on its repercussions in the Caribbean. *Explosion* is also a novel about creating identities

outside the bounds of the nuclear family or the context of romance. It presents the possibility for baroque construction of society based instead on affiliation.

As opposed to Ti Noel, whose history happens to him, or the unnamed narrator, who finds his actions frustrated, Esteban and Sofia actually “do something” in their quest for personal and social liberation. This novel provides a glimpse of Relation in action as the ideas of the French Revolution are appropriated in a Caribbean context. The novel also picks up on a theme broached, but not explored in *The Lost Steps*. As the narrator is trying to find a way back to Santa Mónica de los Venados, he finds himself smothered by the conformity of those in the city to the cultural norms that only simulate true passions: “Because here, amidst the multitude that surrounded me and rushed madly and submissively, I saw many faces and few destinies. And this was because, behind these faces, every deep desire, *every act of revolt*, every impulse was hobbled by fear” (emphasis mine, *LS* 254-255).

Carpentier takes up the question of revolt and its relationship to revolution much more seriously in *Explosion in a Cathedral*.⁹² The novel will engage in a rehabilitation of the concept of revolt as posited by Julia Kristeva in *Revolt, She Said*:

Today the world ‘revolt’ has become assimilated to Revolutions, to political action. The events of the 20th century, however, have shown us that political ‘revolts’—Revolutions—ultimately betrayed revolt, especially the psychic sense of the term. Why? Because revolt, as I understand it,—psychic revolt, analytic revolt, artistic revolt—refers to a state of permanent questioning, of transformation, change, an endless probing of appearances. (120)

Carpentier’s novel demonstrates that it is not only in the 20th century that revolution has betrayed revolt, but in its most paradigmatic iteration, the French Revolution.⁹³ The three

⁹² John Kirk explores similar themes in *Explosion in a Cathedral* in “Concientización: Keystone to the Novels of Alejo Carpentier” only he terms the dichotomy between revolt and revolution “rebellion and liberty” (110).

versions of revolution, as seen from Esteban's, Victor's, and Sofia's perspective, each present a critique of either excessive thinking, excessive action, or limited scope of action (Sofia). This story of revolution is also a story of Relation, one that proceeds by the circuitous routes of the periphery and demonstrates that European modernity is inconceivable without accounting for its Latin American and Caribbean expressions. It is the fullest expression of Carpentier's baroque imagination in its form and function. The Spanish title of this book *El siglo de las luces* foregrounds the discussion between revolt and revolution. If revolt is the shining light that rationalism and modernity promised to bequeath to the world, the title is ironic in that they also ushered in acts of extreme brutality in Europe and America.

The power of this novel lies in what Neil Larsen correctly identifies as its ability to speak to the contemporary situation, "to the extent that we, as Carpentier's readers, intuitively grasp the rightness, the poetic truth of *El siglo de las luces* in its *peripetieia*, it is because we detect in them, whether consciously or not, the prehistory of the imperialized present in settings such as the Caribbean and Latin America" (271). This is the effect of the baroque imagination that folds linear histories together to wring from them contemporary truths. By presenting a parallel narrative to the well-known story of the French Revolution, Carpentier encourages his readers to consider the simultaneity of events occurring in the center and the periphery, rather than accept the oversimplified notion that History is produced in Europe and then exported to or imitated by the colonies.

⁹³ Glissant makes a similar observation in *Poetics of Relation*, "How many revolutions, full of how many instances of going beyond, have not foundered in blind limitations, abstract principles, thus rejoining the things they have struggled against?" (200).

The aesthetics of this novel are also baroque in that they enact a circular nomadism in their presentation of events. The organizing structure of the novel is place-based and chapter breaks are determined by the movements of the characters through space. Each of the seven chapters corresponds to a different location and is bookended by the start of another journey. Through this organization, Carpentier foregrounds the situated-ness of identity and the importance of place for making meaning. Geography impacts history, it is a living force more so than an inert canvas. As Edward Soja writes in *Postmodern Geographies*, “New possibilities are being generated from this creative commingling, possibilities for a simultaneously historical and geographical materialism; a triple dialectic of space, time, and social being; a transformative re-theorization of the relations between history, geography and modernity” (12). Although Soja is referring to the current state of his discipline, his words nevertheless apply to Carpentier who anticipates these discussions and puts them into play in this novel. Esteban, Sofia, and Victor are conditioned by their place in space and time, but they determine new forms of social being that are engaged in revolutionary praxis.

The first setting of the novel, their home in Havana, poses the generational and intellectual conflicts which will recur throughout the novel. The three children are financially supported by a successful merchant father with whom they cannot identify and whom they are loathe to emulate. Carlos expresses these sentiments as he hears news of his father’s funeral: “His father’s death was going to deprive him of everything he enjoyed, side-tracking his plans, cutting him off from his dreams. He would be condemned to look after the business; he, who understood not a thing about figures” (*EC* 13). On the contrary, the death of their father and the mandatory year of mourning

actually set the children free from social conventions and allow them to remake the world according to their own imaginations.

All three engage in the creation of a world that dispenses with any filial responsibilities and becomes a baroque playground:

Day by day a labyrinth of packing cases was being built in the house; everyone had his own corner in it, his own floor ... they used to sit on a path or plateau ... reading whatever took their fancy: old newspapers, almanachs, guide-books natural history perhaps, a classical tragedy or a modern novel. (*EC* 25)

Within this baroque space, the children stress the bonds of affiliation rather than filiation by swearing they will never separate and rejecting the idea of a husband for Sofia: “the introduction of a ‘husband’ into the house was considered an abomination, as a transgression against the flesh which they all three of them held in sacred bond and which must remain inviolate” (*EC* 26). A husband would reinstitute the role of the father and re-impose order on a topsy-turvy house.

The arrival of Victor Hugues alters the state of the household, by replacing the discourse of the Basque merchant-father with that of modernity and revolution. At this point in the narrative, Hugues is depicted as a baroque figure, capable of discussing philosophy or of fixing an obscure piece of physics equipment. His language is a baroque language, a pan-Caribbean Spanish that “he had acquired in his travels in the Gulf of Mexico and the islands of the Caribbean, where words and phrases multiplied with surprising fertility” (*EC* 38). Although he organizes the disorder of the house, his invasion is not a possessive assault. He establishes an affiliative relationship with each of

the children.⁹⁴ The encounter with Hugues signals the orphans' leap out of isolation and into historical time, and its impact is foreshadowed by the hurricane that rocks Havana. The physical storm parallels the upheavals taking place in the political realm as well as the personal.

This affiliative relationship shocks the children out of their narrow bourgeois world and the greater world of Relation. Hugues is the catalyst for their transformation and embodies the Relation he preaches. He is a hybrid figure of European origins, but of broad Caribbean experience. He has traveled widely throughout the islands and engaged in the struggle for racial parity and economic liberation. He also introduces them to the first person of color that they treat as an equal, the mulatto, Dr. Ogé. Dr. Ogé, a revolutionary, is the only one able to cure Esteban's asthma. Together Victor and Ogé introduce the children to the ideals of the revolution, "*liberty, happiness, equality, human dignity*" (EC 70). At this stage of the novel, revolution is synonymous with revolt, in Kristeva's sense of the term, as the children are liberated from convention and find a more authentic way of being:

For two days they talked of nothing but revolutions, and Sofia was amazed at the passions which this new topic of conversation aroused. To talk revolutions, to imagine revolutions, to place oneself mentally in the midst of a revolution, is in some small degree to become master of the world. Those who talk of revolutions find themselves driven to making them ... Then, once the ground has been cleared, they proceed to build the City of the Future. (EC 71-72)

⁹⁴ Further evidence of Hugues affiliative relationship can be found in that he reconciles the accounts of the business, not for his own personal gain, but for that of the children. He could very well have stolen from them without their knowledge.

The discussions of revolution are especially significant for Esteban and Sofia, who have experienced personal revolutions.⁹⁵ Esteban has been cured of his asthma and Sofia's incipient womanhood has been awakened by Victor's embrace: "when all was said and done, *that*, had been the one important thing, the one private revolution, which had happened in her lifetime" (*EC* 80). They are enveloped in the liberatory aspects of revolt and do not see the danger inherent in their discourse. Esteban and Sofia idealize the idea of revolution and do not think about the human element involved in its creation or execution. The fervent belief that the revolutionaries have in their ideals permits them to accept violence against society and individuals in the service of those ideals. The "ground is cleared" by eliminating customs or people who stand in the way of the revolution ("it is so apparent that such and such a person is a villain that he is unanimously condemned to death") (*EC* 71-71). They do not yet see the way in which revolutionary violence can curtail liberty.

The reality of revolution is brought home to Esteban (not Sofia as she remains in Cuba) when he arrives in a Haiti torn by racial violence. Denied his position in the civil government because of his color, Ogé's brother, Vincent, led a mulatto rebellion against the ruling whites of Cap Français. His band is routed and Vincent and his co-leader Jean-Baptiste Chavannes are tortured and executed in the public square. In retaliation, the black and mulatto population riots, murdering, raping, and burning anything that belongs to the whites. When Ogé sees the devastation of Victor's home and business he declares, "It was well done ... you didn't deserve anything better" (*EC* 87). Victor and Ogé formerly brother-masons are torn apart by the violence that strikes each close to home.

⁹⁵ Carlos remains in charge of the family business and drops out of the narrative. However his life is changed as well as he founds a Masonic lodge as a way of disseminating revolutionary ideals.

Although Victor and Ogé part as friends, Esteban notes that “there was a new stiffness, a new seriousness, between their two bodies” (*EC* 89). The ideal of revolution might unite contraries, but the violence attendant in its practice causes greater division. The chapter closes with Victor and Esteban being made aware of the events of the French Revolution. The French Revolution parallels the revolution that occurred in the house in Havana. Just as the father is overthrown in the house in Havana, with the arrival of Hugues’ revolutionary ideals, so too is the French king decapitated by a mob that proclaims liberty from custom. The geography of the novel shifts, yet Carpentier has established the simultaneity of events.

The heart of the novel concerns the circular journeys of Esteban as he experiences the Revolution in France and then aids in its exportation to Spain and the Caribbean. Through Esteban, the reader witnesses the development of the baroque imagination as a way of assimilating competing and contradictory discourses. As he travels through these varied geographic locations, Esteban comes to a more critical understanding of revolution that enacts Kristeva’s notion of revolt as “a state of permanent questioning, of transformation, change, an endless probing of appearances” (120). Unlike the narrator of *The Lost Steps*, who continually tries to impose his own narrative on the landscape, Esteban allows himself to be changed by it. Esteban’s critical faculties are awakened by the assessment of the French cultural scene: “He felt he was surrounded by exoticism—that was the word—a much more picturesque exoticism than that of his own country with its palm trees and sugar canes” (*EC* 94). This is also a carnival of ideas, where things that cannot be said in Havana or any of the Spanish dominions are openly debated on the streets. Esteban delights in this and displays the seeds of a circular nomadism by

“‘huronading’ from group to group, from meeting place to meeting-place, as far as clubs where the Spaniards of Paris gathered ... who were actively conspiring to introduce the Revolution into the Peninsula” (*EC* 97). Esteban’s journeys through Paris lead him to join the free-masons and when he is fully initiated he feels that the chaos of his life up until this point has been ordered: “he now understood the exact significance of his bewildering voyage ... to the Future City which, for once, had not been situated in America, like those of Thomas More and Campanella, but in the cradle of philosophy itself” (*EC* 99). Through Esteban, Carpentier is using tropes that were used to define the Americas as a way to exoticize France. While it might seem that Esteban is practicing an arrow-like nomadism, his trajectory is curved by his constant and whole-hearted engagement with others. When he reaches his moment of union with the City of the Future in his Masonic initiation, he does not feel that he possesses it and instead realizes that “to perfect himself he must get to know a whole literature of which he was as yet ignorant” (*EC* 100).

Esteban moves from theory to practice when Victor asks him to work for the revolution, or so he thinks. He is sent to the Spanish border where he further develops his critical faculty as a translator of texts and acute observer of the people’s response to the revolution. Although the revolutionaries have changed the names of all the towns in the region, “Itxasson was now called “Union”” (*EC* 106), the people continue calling the towns by their original names, “Chauvin-Dragon went on being Saint-Jean-de-Luz to its fishermen, just as Baigorri was still dedicated to Saint Stephen as far as the peasant there were concerned” (*EC* 107).⁹⁶ The people’s inertia in responding to the change of names symbolizes their response to the revolution. This fact combined with his distance from

⁹⁶ Carpentier’s interest in the change of place names by conquest anticipates Seamus Heaney’s etymological archeology as will be seen in chapter three.

the center of the action contributes to a feeling of meaninglessness: “Esteban felt himself to be shrinking, diminishing, losing all individuality; he felt he was being swallowed up by events” (EC 110). The revolution through which he hoped to find personal meaning and validation is leaving him behind. Furthermore, he is starting to question the possibility of Revolution living up to his ideal of revolt. As his friend Martinez de Ballesteros states, “They make us translate a *Declaration of the Rights of Man* into Spanish, and out of its seventeen principles they violate twelve every day” (EC 111). The revolution cannot contain its own contradictions. Esteban is also troubled by the Revolution’s xenophobic stance. The Abbe Marchena, an agitator for extending the Revolution to Spain, mysteriously goes missing and a sentiment against foreigners emerges as the Jacobins gain the upper hand. This revolution is not measuring up to Esteban’s ideals of revolt, which would incorporate the Other as part of the self.

Esteban’s journeys on the sea prove to be a time of reflection and self-articulation. Thinking about his experiences with the revolution, he states, “He would like to write, to discover, by means of writing and the disciplines which it imposes, the conclusions that were perhaps waiting to be drawn from what he had seen” (EC 127). Writing is a way of articulating relation, of acting in the world. Esteban’s desire to write is an offshoot in his participation thus far in Relation, “For, though the world is not a book, it is nonetheless true that the silence of the world would, in turn, make us deaf. Relation, driving humanities chaotically onward, needs words to publish itself, to continue” (Glissant *Poetics* 27-28). Esteban’s writings would be guided by the “critical capacity” he has seen develop in himself over the past years, “which refused to allow itself to be guided by any

general criterion” (*EC* 127).⁹⁷ In any argument, he feels compelled to take up the position of the other side, “When he was with anti-clericals he became a priest, and with priests he became anti-clerical” (*EC* 128). This is more than just a contrary nature. Esteban’s ability to take the side of the other in his arguments signals his incipient baroque imagination. This openness will continue to grow as he sees the brutality of Victor Huges’ regime in Guadeloupe and as he undertakes his sea journeys as a pirate’s clerk. This critical faculty is important for Carpentier’s decentering project because through Esteban he critiques the excesses of the French Revolution and of revolution in general. Both in France and Guadeloupe, a revolution that begins as the emancipation of a people becomes its scourge, terror and jailer. Esteban laments, “I dreamed of such a different revolution” (*EC* 146). However, Esteban never puts pen to paper. He imagines writing but never actually does it.

Esteban’s experiences on the sea constitute the heart of the novel and put forth a notion of revolt that is oriented by a baroque conception of the world. This revolt would be grounded in the realities of a people in relation to their environment, but also in relation to human nature. On the sea, Esteban is far removed from the reality of the guillotine and its rigid morality. He is able to engage in more fluid conceptions of revolution and human relations inspired by the diversity of the sea and its constant flux. The moment of clarity comes when he looks at a sea shell and finds that they constitute a unity of the semiotic and the symbolic, “there appeared in these surprising shells, symbolizing in number and proportion exactly what the Mother lacked, concrete examples of linear development, of the laws of convolution . . . of tangible arabesques

⁹⁷ Again we see how Esteban as an intellectual serves as a mask for Carpentier, who likewise is engaged in writing as a means of revolt.

which hinted at all the baroquisms to come” (*EC* 180). Esteban sees in the shell an alternative to the rigidity of the laws of men and the unbounded fertility of the maternal earth. The spiral provides a means of maintaining alterity while imposing some kind of non-hierarchical order. This is possible through the baroque imagination which functions similarly to Glissant’s notion of the imaginary: “First, the imaginary. It works in a spiral: from one circularity to the next, it encounters new spaces and does not transform them into either depths or conquests ... The imaginary becomes complete on the margins of every new linear projection. It creates a network and constitutes volume” (Glissant, *Poetics* 199). While the French Revolution cannot be exported in its pure forms to the colonies or even to neighboring Spain, the idea of revolt as liberation can be because it taps into fundamental drives already present for the people. Esteban’s revolution would encounter the Other, but not subject that Other to intellectual investigation or subjugation.

The shape of the shell contrasts with the shape of the guillotine, Carpentier’s symbol for modernity in this text. As opposed to the curves of the shell, the guillotine presents right angles and a triangular blade. In a sense, the guillotine is the simplification of forms to their rational shapes. Thus, the guillotine is the epitome of French rationalism and revolutionary ideals deformed by the practice of terror. As Beatriz Pastor notes, “To Esteban the guillotine is the machine that perfectly represents the transformation of revolutionary ideals into a dehumanized, never-ending game of exclusions” (271). Although the revolution is founded on the ideals of humanism it loses sight of the human as it devolves into terror. Carpentier’s second symbol for modernity in this text is the printing press. Both are necessary for the conquest and indoctrination of Guadeloupe; one through persuasive means, the other through coercion.

The baroque imagination is capable of bringing together contradictory elements, but retains its critical function; there are limits to its ability to accommodate. In the juxtaposition of seashell and guillotine, Carpentier makes a judgment on the trajectory of the French Revolution that is expressed by Esteban's encounters with the continuation of slavery under the decree of Pluviose. When Esteban's vessel encounters a ship of slaves who have mutinied against the Spanish traders, they initially greet them with promises of food and freedom, but then imprison the men, rape the women, and sell them on a Dutch island. Esteban is horrified and claims the French decree of Pluviose as legal protection against the selling of slaves, only to find that Victor Hugues has given his personal sanction to the practice. This disillusionment continues when Esteban arrives at Cayenne, looking to secure favor for Victor and be one step closer to home.

In this chapter, Carpentier unleashes his most direct critique on the failure of the French revolution to live up to its ideals. Cayenne is the ultimate cesspool of humanity where revolutionary ideals and revolutionaries go to die. The famous Pluviose decree is derided as meaningless, "The blacks didn't wait for you, they've proclaimed themselves free a countless number of times" (*EC* 231). Esteban cannot reconcile the contradictions between revolt and revolution. The paper produced by the press is incapable of inciting change if it is not accompanied by force and there is no guillotine for the masters of slaves.⁹⁸ The final break between Esteban and the Revolution occurs in a doctor's office in Paramaribo where he sees nine slaves waiting to have their left legs humanely and scientifically amputated for attempting to escape. Esteban is moved to action by the

⁹⁸ The printing press will play a larger role in *Reasons of State* as the Dictator uses the press to manipulate his image and control the country, but also finds himself undone by unfavorable depictions in the foreign press and the insidious writings of the Student. As the Head of State says, "The printed word slips in everywhere. You can put a political enemy in prison. But you can't stop the circulation of a foreign paper even if it tells lies about your mother" (*RS* 193).

horror vacui occasioned by a double absence. The first absence is the impending physical absence of the men's left legs. The second and more disturbing absence is that of any ethical space for the Other within the Dutch colonial system. Modernizing the methods of punishment by amputation does not detract from its brutality and the absence of ethics. Esteban jettisons the Revolution for revolt. His baroque imagination finds a way of maintaining the egalitarian ideals of the Revolution, and inserting them into a different context. Instead of throwing the Dutch translations of the Decree of Pluviose into the depths of the river, as he had intended, he throws down several packages of the translation to some black fishermen, exhorting them to read the decree or have it read to them. This is Esteban's one decisive action in service of revolt. When he returns to Sofia in Havana he declares his judgment on the revolution: "I have been living amongst barbarians" (*EC* 248).

While Esteban serves as the avatar for the baroque imagination in the text, Carpentier criticizes Esteban's lack of action. His imagination is so circular, so baroque, that it precludes significant action. Victor Hugues presents the other extreme, uncritical action in the service of the revolution and his own self-interest. However, Esteban performs one more significant action in the text that reveals his baroque imagination as being for-others. When the Cuban authorities come looking for Sofia, Esteban allows her ship to sail away by relating his own engagement with the French Revolution. Through this narrative, he gives his life for the Other. Esteban is arguably the main protagonist of the text and as William John Harvey writes, protagonists "incarnate the moral vision of the world inherent in the total novel" (qtd. in Peavler 75). Esteban lays down his own life for Sofia's freedom. He has achieved a Levinasian recognition of the face of the Other by

acknowledging Sofia's alterity and ability to make her own life choices. The moral vision of this novel advocates a constantly questioning revolution that acts for the liberation of the Other; this is Kristeva's very definition of revolt.

On the contrary, Victor comes to personify Revolution betraying Revolt. Victor's commitment to the Revolution comes because it has given him a sense of himself and a sense of participating in history: "the Revolution has given meaning to my life. I have been assigned a role in the great task of our times. I shall attempt to perform it to the very best of my abilities" (*EC* 145). Hugues has committed himself to the French Revolution in order to give meaning to his life. This attachment to institutions is necessary, as Kristeva states, "the instant act of revolution has always needed to cleave to institutions that will realize it in the longer term, and they end up betraying it" (*Revolt* 41-42). Hugues loses everything that gives his life meaning prior to the Revolution in Haiti. He arrives penniless in France and so allies himself with the ruling faction in order to maintain his sense of self. Like the narrator of *The Lost Steps*, Hugues fixes the Other in history as a way of defining himself. This commitment requires a suspension of his own critical faculties as the institutions inevitably undermine the principles of the Revolution. However, as Esteban grows in a sense of openness and relation to the Other, Victor becomes more rigid and doctrinaire. His circular nomadism as an agent of "philanthropy" becomes arrow-like and rooted as he adopts Jacobin morality as "the only morality" (*EC* 101). He has suspended his own powers of judgment and docilely follows the demands of the Revolution, going so far as to model his personal appearance on that of his hero Robbespierre. As Davidson argues, "If one is looking for the origins of totalitarianism, in politics or the arts, it is not to be found in the Baroque ... It is to be found in the civic

pieties, national origin-myths and mystical nature-worship of the Enlightenment and the late eighteenth-century revolutions” (20). Esteban, the intellectual avatar of Carpentier in this novel, sees this as a weakness because Hugues is not being true to his own persona: “Esteban felt disconcerted by the incredible servility of a vigorous and lively mind, which ... refused to acknowledge the most flagrant contradictions” (*EC* 145).

Hugues role as an agent of the Revolution does not permit him to engage in Relation. In one of their last meetings before embarking on their trip to Guadeloupe, Esteban notices that Victor “had imposed on himself the first discipline required for the office of Leader of Men: that of having no friends” (*EC* 116). He can no longer engage in the baroque practice of affiliation. Due to this separation of himself from others, Hugues is able to propagate a revolution in Guadeloupe that is as brutal and repressive as the Terror in France, if on a smaller scale. His inability to admit of contradiction in the regime permits him to live the schizophrenic reality of a revolution that claims the ideals of universal humanism, yet violates the Decree of the 16th of Pluviose of Year II whenever it is financially advantageous to himself. He cannot see the face of the Other, only the principles of Revolution.

Victor manages to survive the regime changes in France and be appointed as the head of the government in Cayenne by Napoleon Bonaparte. In his conversations with Sofia, Victor justifies his actions by a maxim that he has been repeating with a few variations throughout the novel, “A revolution isn’t reasoned out, it’s *done*” (*EC* 311).⁹⁹ His emphasis throughout the novel has been on action, whereas Esteban as a scholar needs to understand, reason, and consider the purpose behind an action. Victor needs only to see it in light of the Revolution and it becomes fact. He sees the present as the City of

⁹⁹ In Chapter three, Victor says, “A Revolution is not argued about, it’s done” (*EC* 146).

the Future and is willing to use any means necessary to maintain his place in it. This includes organizing military action against the escaped slaves of Cayenne, which Carpentier presents as the ultimate betrayal of the ideals Hugues held at the outset of the novel. Unlike Esteban, whose peripatetic journeys have moved him to greater Relation, Hugues has reverted to the old prejudices he formerly sought to abolish. Neither of these trajectories seem to be satisfactory to Carpentier, which is probably why he presents a third trajectory in the revolutionary narrative of Sofia.

The third story of revolt and revolution in *Explosion in a Cathedral* combines the possibility for action with fidelity to the ideals of revolt. From the outset, Sofia has been a person inclined to action—her maxim in the novel is “we must do something!” (EC 42). She first shouts that statement in reaction to one Esteban’s violent asthma attacks, and again as she and Esteban rush out into the streets to join the people of Madrid. Sofia’s action is oriented toward the other. Her narrative also signals the importance of the body as the site of perspective. As a woman, Sofia’s world is much more circumscribed than Esteban’s or Victor’s, and consequently, her experience of revolution is much more personal. Unable to take part in the forging of revolution as Victor and Esteban have, Sofia nevertheless works within the home to motivate her brother to found the Androgynous Lodge in Havana. At the end of the novel, she is described by the Cuban authorities as the worst of the conspirators, and it is in her room that the revolutionary literature that Esteban translated is found. She is also a model of fidelity to the revolutionary ideal. Even after Esteban returns disillusioned with the Revolution, Sofia endorses to liberty, fraternity and equality. As she tells Esteban, “one could not live without a political ideal; the happiness of a whole people could not be achieved at the

first attempt ... To sum up: nothing big could be done in this world without blood being shed" (*EC* 262). She acknowledges the excesses of the French revolution, but does not allow the practice of revolution to shake her faith in revolt. Her imagination is also baroque in that she can hold together the contradictions between revolt and revolution without becoming disillusioned.

Sofia's personal engagement with revolt comes from the intimate contact that she has had with Victor and the way that encounter changed her life. He awakens her sense of womanhood at the same time that she is introduced to the discourse of revolution. In this sense, her attachment to Victor is similar to his attachment to the Revolution: "She was going to the man who had made her conscious of her own being ... There was much to be done where he was; a man of his temperament could not help elaborating great enterprises; projects in which both of them would be able to achieve their true stature" (*EC* 289). Sofia's flight from Havana to Cayenne allows her to exercise her sovereignty and flout convention. Sofia is not hindered by thoughts of propriety, but seeks her own fulfillment in a sexual union with Victor. She also hopes to realize her place in revolt through the agency of Victor who provides her access to the Historical. However, unlike Victor, she remains capable of critical judgment and holds on to her revolutionary ideals. Although she finds fulfillment in him sexually, she does not agree with his acquiescence to the reinstatement of religion and slavery within the colony. After his campaign against the maroons and his ensuing illness, Sofia leaves him because she wants "to return to the world of the living, where people believe in something" (*EC* 335). Her baroque imagination allows her to see beyond the limits of her time and gender. She remains true

to the ideals of revolt and does not succumb to the compromises of revolution, yet her final actions are not necessarily successful.

Sofia's journey does not close the novel, nor does it serve as Carpentier's final statement about revolution. If the novel were to end here, as Cesar Leante suggests it had prior to the 1959 Cuban Revolution, then the moral of the story might be one of self-realization through revolutionary ideals, but it would not be a tale of Relation.¹⁰⁰ Some critics have viewed the changes as Carpentier's attempt to stay in the good graces of the victorious revolutionary government in Cuba.¹⁰¹ However, I see this ending as the opening up of Relation through opacity, the introduction of yet another baroque element. Carpentier's experience of the success of the Cuban Revolution changed his text to account for the possibility of action, but does not pretend to be able to explicate the causes of such historical moments. This element of opacity precludes any facile understandings of the novel or of a given revolution.¹⁰² Carlos' search for answers and a definitive narrative question the ability of any story to present the complete truth of the matter. What he is able to piece together is not a coherent tale, but "a story full of gaps and unfinished paragraphs, like an ancient chronicle that has been partly restored by re-assembling the scattered fragments" (*EC* 343). This description is remarkably similar to Carpentier's comments on the paucity of historical resources when writing *Music in Cuba* that are quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Carlos' search mirrors Carpentier's own

¹⁰⁰ "En honor a la verdad, creo que Carpentier le hizo muy pocos cambios a la novela antes de darla a la publicación, y esto habla de su honestidad intelectual ... El relato terminaba en el capítulo VI, con la entrega de Sofia al oficial francés, acto que consumaba su liberación total de Hugues ... y su marcha a Bordeaux a hacer su vida, su propia vida. Este es el real término de la novela, lo que sigue es añagaza" (128).

¹⁰¹ In "Carpentier y la Revolución," Leante cites Ernesto Ayala-Dip's "La revolución desolada" as one such critic.

¹⁰² It also serves as political cover for a text that could be thought to be counter-Revolutionary and thus a threat to Castro's Cuba.

search into the archive and comments on the incomplete nature of any such endeavor. Although *Explosion in a Cathedral* is a complete text, the insertion of this moment of polyvocality and opacity causes the reader to reevaluate what has come before. All of the people that Carlos speaks to are able to give some information, but none can give an explanation as to why Sofia and Esteban launched themselves into the street on that fateful night in May 1808. The function of opacity in this text can best be understood from the perspective of the *Poetics of Relation*:

The thought of opacity distracts me from absolute truths whose guardian I might believe myself to be. Far from cornering me within futility and inactivity, by making me sensitive to the limits of every method, it relativizes every possibility of action within me. Whether this consists of spreading overarching general ideas or hanging on to the concrete, the law of facts, the precision of details, or sacrificing some apparently less important thing in the name of efficacy, the thought of opacity saves me from unequivocal courses and irreversible choices. (Glissant 192)

Opacity is opposed to understanding or comprehension in the sense of the latter being a grasping of the totality of the Other without respect for what is truly other. It attempts to categorize and understand the Other as part of the same and as such limit their revolutionary potential. The baroque imagination practices opacity through multiplicity. By presenting multiple viewpoints and insisting on the simultaneity of events, baroque works do not permit simple comprehension. Very few if any can claim to understand a baroque work in its totality. In this text, Carpentier has foreclosed reductive readings by reinstituting the concept of opacity in the final chapter. Opacity introduces polyvocality in that the story is pieced together from the perspectives of the neighbors, shopkeepers and merchants. All that is left of the two is a trace “the imprint left by a bird in the air, or by a fish in the sea” (*EC* 346). The convulsions of their personal revolutions are

subsumed into the mass convulsion of the revolution: “two individual existences seemed to have been dissolved into a tumultuous and bloody totality” (*EC* 346).

Following the publication of *Explosion in a Cathedral*, Carpentier is actively engaged in the Cuban Revolution and does not publish another novel until *Reasons of State* in 1974, the same year that he publishes *Baroque Concerto*. These two texts engage in many of the same themes that obsess Carpentier, but their difference from the other texts and their unity with each other lies in the ludic portrayal of events. It is as if, once the Cuban Revolution had succeeded, Carpentier could devote himself to enjoying the play of language and delighting even more fully in the caprices of his baroque imagination. Carpentier himself now occupies a privileged place as a founder of the marvelous real and the baroque which have served as exemplary discourses for the writers of the Latin American Boom, who are now coming to maturity.

Despite their playful nature, these two novels continue to question the primacy of Europe and argue for the importance of Latin American and Caribbean cultural forms for the historical development of European culture. As he did with *The Lost Steps* and *Explosion in a Cathedral*, the two novels of the seventies demonstrate an impulse to present the baroque imagination from the inside and the outside as it were. *Baroque Concerto* exteriorizes the activities of the baroque imagination through the allegory of the criollo returning to Europe while *Reasons of State* interiorizes the practice of the baroque within the mind of the Head of State. Deleuze’s words on allegory are useful for understanding Carpentier’s complementary narrative techniques in these novels: “Sometimes ... the object itself is broadened according to a whole network of natural relations. The object itself overflows its frame in order to enter into a cycle or series, and

now the concept is what is found increasingly compressed, interiorized, wrapped in an instance that can ultimately be called “personal” (125). The story of the criollo in *Baroque Concerto* exteriorizes the baroque history of Latin America and its contemporary abilities for liberation, while *Reasons of State* delves into the mind of the Head of State, who possesses a bifurcated imagination that appears baroque but is ultimately closed to discourse with the Other. The concurrent portrayals show Carpentier’s baroque imagination working on both a global and a personal level.

Carpentier’s baroque imagination has been concerned with properly representing the circumstances that influence identity, the marvelous reality of Latin America, the baroque reality of the landscape, and the arrow-like and circular nomadisms that affect history. However, in *Reasons of State*, Carpentier focuses on an additional circumstance that shapes man’s identity but is often overlooked in the traditional context of the novel. This circumstance is discourse, language, which shapes the structures of identity. This novel portrays the inner thoughts of a jovial, cultured, but ultimately ruthless Latin American dictator. The unnamed Head of State of a Latin American country is modeled on the enlightened despots of the nineteenth century who sought to modernize their countries by adopting European ideas and manners. In this portrait, the Head of State exemplifies Roberto Schwartz’s theory of misplaced ideas, or the out-of-placeness of Latin American discourse. The dictator’s manner of speaking continually changes to fit the persona that he chooses to adopt, whether it is the bombastic orator given to embellishing his speech with Latin phrases, or the private persona that lets loose a string of profanities in the intimate company of la Mayorala and Peralta. This novel truly encompasses the variety of discourses that have shaped Latin America as the dictator

continually reminisces about the discourses that have shaped him and adopts new ones to remain in power: Spanish colonial education, Arielismo,¹⁰³ Enlightenment thought, nationalism, Anglo-American republicanism and even mestizaje. The Head of State's discourse is constantly evolving and the situations he is placed serve as Carpentier's commentary on the context in which the discourse is uttered. Carpentier's narrative culminates with an expression of baroque discourse as the ultimate expression of Latin American reality as one of continual adaptation and revolt.

The Head of State's first conversation with the Distinguished Academician foregrounds the discourse of center and periphery that envelops conversations between Europeans and Latin Americans. The Distinguished Academician embodies Eurocentrism and displays a familiarity with the dictator that comes from a sense of superiority: "Our friend suddenly becomes serious and starts talking about literature in the deliberate and magisterial way ... trying to prove to us that the true, the best, the greatest literature *from here* is unknown in our countries" (RS 19). Carpentier undercuts this Eurocentric discourse by inserting the Head of State's thoughts parenthetically as the professor expounds, "(The Academician is unaware that for some years past ten thousand bars and warehouses in America have been called *Chanticleer*" (RS 18). The conflict between these two discourses French culture and Latin American assimilation of that culture are at odds and Carpentier demonstrates that Latin America does not simply absorb European culture, but subjects it to deformations and misappropriations. These commentaries do not serve to denigrate Latin American culture rather they show the gaps in a French culture that assumes it is universal. At work in this discussion is a multiplicity of different

¹⁰³ The Head of State's oldest son is named Ariel.

discourses about culture and dependency that lead to incomplete communications between the two individuals.

In “The Problem of "Misplaced Ideas" Revisited: Beyond the "History of Ideas", José Elias Palti critiques Schwarz’s theory of misplaced ideas on the grounds that it harbors a sense of essentialism at its heart that he is not able to overcome. If one is to judge which ideas are out of place, then there must be a standard of authenticity against which to compare. Carpentier’s text responds to a similar set of factors as Schwarz’s misplaced ideas. The baroque imagination allows him to go beyond Schwarz’s concept of misplaced ideas that suffers from what Palti calls an “epistemological contradiction” to anticipate Palti’s resolution of the problem, which is: “a mode which could account for the problematic dynamic of ideas in Latin America” (171). The novel is the space in which to consider the multiple levels of language and their contexts of enunciation. As Palti states,

Only the simultaneous consideration of the different levels of language permits us to trace significant relationships between texts and their particular contexts of enunciation, finding a link which connects the two channels of the "stereoscopic vision" (literary analysis and social reflection) proposed by Schwarz, thus rendering intellectual history a truly hermeneutical undertaking. (171)

These multiple discourses have an impact in cultural matters, and in questions of politics they are crucial. The changing discourses of the Head of State in part represent his political acumen and require an ability to understand the way discourse or language functions. In seeking to recuperate Schwarz’s theory of misplaced ideas in a more consistent way, Palti draws on Iuri Lotman’s idea of the semiosphere: “The concept of "semiosphere" indicates precisely the coexistence and juxtaposition of an endless number of codes in the semiotic space, which determines their dynamics” (172). The interview

between the Head of State and the Student foregrounds this depiction of the semiosphere in the unspoken conversation between the two adversaries. Each comes to the table with different codes about the nature of power, the political role of the people, and the future of the nation. More importantly, they come with preconceived notions of each other.

Drawing On Lotner, Palti finds that

although every code (e.g., a national culture, a disciplinary tradition, an artistic school, or a political ideology) is permanently interacting with those elements which form its semiotic environment, it always tends to its own closure in order to preserve its internal balance or homeostasis. Thus, it generates a self-description or metalanguage by which it legitimizes its particular discursive regime, demarcating its sphere of action and internally delimiting and confining the possible uses of the symbolic materials available within its boundaries. (173)

The concept of self-description or metalanguage can be interpreted as myth. Each myth does not comprise a complete and hermetically sealed whole, but is subject to interior contradictions. Both the Head and the Student have composed a mythic narrative about themselves that is amplified by the discourses of the community. These codes are fundamentally at odds with each other and also subject to internal fractures. Carpentier stages this encounter in a way that fully expresses the semiosphere in its conflict and contradiction.

When the Student is captured, the Dictator wants to counter the younger man's mythic logos by staging himself as a benevolent figure. He mandates that the Student be treated well when he is captured and carefully sets the stage for a "man-to-man talk" (*RS* 207). He pretends to be engaged in the minutiae of running the government when the Student enters. In this encounter, neither sees the other as a human being but as an archetype; the dictator embodies "the Spirit of the Bourgeoisie" and the student is "a character from folklore" (*RS* 209). The impressions each has of the other make up an

unspoken dialogue that is written in a stream of consciousness of the two twisted together. The silence between them is only broken by the introduction of the text. The Dictator carefully weighs his tone and considers which discourse he should use: “He ... opted for a deliberate, humanistic tone which by its remoteness from that world of drink and confidences, immediately created a distance greater than that set by the table separating them” (*RS* 211). Language is not portrayed as a simple transmission of messages from a sender to a receiver, but a complex performance that takes into account the codes making up the semiosphere.

There are shared elements in the conflicting codes represented by the Student and dictator. One is the language of pain as expressed through both individual’s reflections on torture. The second is economic, as the dictator tries to bribe the Student into betraying his ideals. The codes diverge in terms of ideals. The dictator privileges the practical expression of power while the Student clings to a utopian version of the class struggle. These ideals are influenced by codes that are not intrinsic to the country in which they reside but point to sign-systems that have evolved elsewhere. Although both discourses are practically in place, that is they appeal to certain sections of the population and are in use—they are each considered to be out of place by the other. When the Head of State questions the applicability of Russian style socialism in Latin America, the student responds, “It may not be the same. Here we are in a different latitude” (*RS* 214). The codes in any given semiosphere change when they are exported to another location. Ultimately, the contradictions between both codes cannot be resolved and the rupture in the semiosphere is made explicit by the bomb that tears apart the Head of State’s study.

Carpentier suggest a third way of understanding the discursive circumstances of Latin America in the baroque discourse of the American Consul who shelters the Head of State when he becomes an *Ex-dictator*. Although the Consul is a representative of the United States government, his background reveals the internal inconsistencies of the North American code of identity: “I’m a southerner ... New Orleans. White enough to pass as a white man, although my hair—well, my hair would be too frizzy if it weren’t for the pomades they make to deal with that ... I’ve ‘crossed the line’ as we say there, although in *sentimental* matters ... I only get on well with darkies” (*RS* 260). The consul’s perspective and imagination are baroque and derive from his miscegenated origins. His ability to pass demonstrates the fragility of discourses of whiteness and racial purity in the United States, while the trajectory of his career, downward since his “sentimental” preferences are known, shows the lengths taken to keep this discourse dominant.¹⁰⁴ In referring to the origins of jazz music and playing the “Memphis Blues,” the Consul demonstrates the ways in which competing linguistic codes can be assimilated. The baroque imagination is now presented as a method of resistance from within, “it’s a sort of dialogue—sometimes a battle—opposition and agreement between the female hand (the right) and the male hand (the left) which combine, complement one another, respond, but in a synchronization that is situated both within and outside the rhythm” (*RS* 261). The consul practices a different sort of resistance and his position

¹⁰⁴ Palti again refers to Lotman to understand the internal and external contradictions intrinsic to the codes that make up the semiosphere: “As Lotman remarks, even though the processes of cultural exchange do not involve a merely passive reception of “alien” elements, indeed precisely for that reason, semiotic ambivalence is inherent to them. This has two origins. First, the equivocation springing from the fact that codes, like the semiosphere at large, are not internally homogeneous: they contain a plurality of subcodes, which coexist and intercross, and tend, in turn, to their own closure, often rendering impossible their mutual translatability. Second, the very openness of the codes to their semiotic environment, which also permanently produces new internal unbalances. In order to make an external element assimilable, a system must eventually adjust its internal structure, reorganize its components, and thus destabilize its present configuration.” (174).

requires him to participate in multiple journeys through the margins of metropolitan culture. This conversation alludes to the essence of *Baroque Concerto* where music will once again stand in for the baroque imagination as process of transculturation.

The episode ends when the Consul passes judgment on the Head of State: “Do you figure in *Pequeno Larousse*? NO? ... Well then, that’s the end of you” (RS 265). The Consul seems to be suggesting that a man’s existence is summed up by his textuality. If there is no record of him in the archives then he cannot even be resuscitated out of the past, or at least that is what the Consul is intimating. The absence of a definition in *Petit Larousse* also symbolizes the difficulty in defining a discourse as unique to a region when it shares characteristics with the condition of discourse in general. This is the fundamental problem that Palti identifies in his reconfiguration of Schwarz’s misplaced ideas and in Schwarz’s ideas themselves: “In short, we must renounce the aspiration to define which ideas are ‘misplaced’ and in which sense they are so in Latin America as a whole, independently from their particular context of utterance” (Palti 179). Or as Schwarz has said about Tropicalism, “What can a formula say about Brazil in 1964 which is equally applicable, say, to nineteenth-century Argentina?” (qtd. in Palti 179) Carpentier’s use of the baroque is a way of arguing for a broad cross-temporal and cross-cultural analysis much like Wilson Harris’s cross-cultural imagination. These discourses revive the present and juxtapose seemingly dissimilar situations for the purpose of drawing connections that seem implausible, but which reveal the contemporary dynamics at work. It is up to the author to give the connection meaning for the present moment.

Palti’s identification of the problem becomes a site for opportunity when considered from the perspective of the baroque imagination. The difficulty in locating

which ideas are misplaced and the broad applicability of a paradigm such as Tropicalism, or the baroque, signals the transcendence of the human condition. Palti and Schwarz, as materialist Marxist critics, do not have room in their vocabulary for the existence of transcendence and see instead an inconsistency or a void. The idea of transcendence, which conflicts with Schwarz's commitment to anti-essentialism, exists at the heart of any artistic work. The artist places a hermeneutic wager that his or her labor will reach others in a different place and time. Carpentier and Harris have experienced the illumination of the present by comparing it with narratives that are produced in a time as different from their own as nineteenth-century Argentina is from 1964 Brazil. In reviving the transcendental, Carpentier allows his fiction to go beyond the social realities of the present.

Carpentier again takes up the question of competing codes in *Baroque Concerto*, a text about history and myth brought together through the baroque imagination in art. In this novella, Carpentier absolutely delights in his two greatest loves, literature and music, and brings them together in a sonorous and vibrant dance that does not privilege language as did *Reasons of State*. This joyful play nevertheless contains a resurgence of the familiar themes in Carpentier given new light in their ludic juxtapositioning. Two of the central concerns of all of Carpentier's work have been the importance of history for the present and "the need for life-supporting myths" (Shaw 113). Although Carpentier is not a believer himself, he recognizes the power of religious thought to give a man's life meaning, and is a theme he returns to continually whether it is the Haitian slaves in the Bois Caiman or Esteban standing before the crucifix. History is equally important for giving man a sense of himself and Carpentier takes his position as historian seriously.

The author's note that prefaces *Baroque Concerto* attests to his rigor and attention to detail. The note historically situates the events of the novel within the context of the multiple musical representations of a version of *Montezuma*. While he may take liberties with chronology, he does not deliberately fabricate dates or events in an attempt to declare war on history. In this conviction he is like the Student who declares, "We do not make use of jokes or mystifications to further our struggle" (RS 204). *Baroque Concerto* is not a joke, but it is play, the serious play of art that can bring together the historical and the mystical in a way that changes mentalities.

The novella serves as an allegory for the conquest of the New World and the cultural impact of that world on European culture. A wealthy Mexican criollo departs on a European adventure with his Indian servant Francisquillo, who succumbs to a plague in Cuba and is replaced by the black criollo Filomeno. Filomeno and the criollo travel to Madrid and Venice where they participate in Venetian carnival and partake of a carnivalesque meeting with Vivaldi, Scarlatti, and Handel. This meeting results in Vivaldi's opera, *Montezuma*, which ironically, through its historical errors and willful changes, makes the criollo aware of his Americanness. The novella closes with the criollo's return to claim the Americas as his patrimony and Filomeno's choice to participate in the burgeoning creolizations of jazz taking place in Paris. The parallels between this plot and the history of conquest are obvious. Francisquillo, the Indian servant, is quickly erased from the narrative and does not have much time to creolize European culture, while Filomeno, the black, is brought into replace him and obligates the European composers to "follow him" in the Ospedale (BC 74).

This baroque carnivalization of history induces a change of thinking in the criollo. His original thoughts can be inferred in the following episode. While Filomeno is recounting the story of the impromptu concert that follows his celebrated ancestor's defeat over the pirate Girón, the criollo exclaims "Whites and coloreds together in that revel? ... An impossible harmony! ... What an infernal cacophony it would have produced and what a great liar that Balboa must have been!" (*BC* 44). The Criollo has absorbed the Eurocentric myths of the purity of origins and cannot conceive of miscegenation resulting in harmony. Furthermore, he questions the historical accuracy of a text that contains along with the incredible account of harmonious racial mixture the appearance of satyrs, nymphs and dryads. The marvelous capacity of the Americas to include the mythical alongside the historical is discounted.

The Criollo begins to come around to a new way of thinking when he finds that the cities of Europe do not measure up to the tales he has heard of them: The Criollo is "A grandson of Spaniards who hailed from somewhere between Colmenar de Oreja and Villamanrique del Tajo" who has grown up hearing glowing tales about the homeland finds Madrid to be "drab, gloomy, and mean" (*BC* 49). Everything pales in comparison to the opulence of Mexico that he has left behind. Unable to find enjoyment in Madrid, he proceeds to Venice to take part in the Carnival. Due to the Carnival's inversion of time, norms, and measure, the Criollo comes to a different understanding of his heritage and is able to see firsthand that Balboa was not lying about the fruitful union of European melodies and African rhythms.

The prolonged bacchanal of music and culture that the Criollo and Filomeno share with Vivaldi, Scarlatti and Handel performs centuries of cross-cultural connection in the

space of one timeless evening. The reciprocal and syncretic nature of the exchange is evident in the song that surges forth when Filomeno observes the picture of the Serpent with Eve. The snake reminds him of god in the African pantheon and Filomeno begins a chant of praise “*Ca-la-ba-són, / són, són*” that is taken up by the others in the corresponding European ritual form “*Kábala-sum-sum-sum*” (BC 72). The momentum of the syncretization is of such power that the entire group joins in the snake dance with Montezuma (the criollo) at its head. The Criollo is coming to a recognition of his roots; he has chosen to become Montezuma for the carnival and now leads the dance to the union of black rhythms and European melody.

The Criollo’s complete metamorphosis occurs as he is watching Vivaldi’s opera, *Montezuma*. While pleased that Montezuma is the subject of an opera, the Criollo is continually distracted from its production by the numerous and blatant historical errors of the spectacle. Teutile, an Aztec general, has been converted into the daughter of Montezuma who falls in love with Cortes’ son, Ramiro. La Malinche has been erased in favor of the faithful empress, Mitrena, who acknowledges the falsity of her native gods in favor of the European. The comedic resolution of the opera pushes the Criollo over the edge. The conclusion betrays both the history and reality of the Americas, and instead reinforces the myth of European benevolence and cultural superiority.

The ensuing argument between the Criollo and Scarlatti reveals the difficulty of Carpentier’s narrative task. While the Criollo argues that Vivaldi has falsified history, the composer retorts that he consulted trustworthy sources and any changes were necessary for the sake of artistic integrity and the production of an opera agreeable to his audience. He also counters the charges of falsehood by claiming that he got his information from

reliable sources, “The poet Alvise Giusti, the author of this musical drama studied Solís’ chronicle, which the chief librarian of Saint Mar’s holds in high regard as well documented and accurate” (*BC* 102). The Criollo continues to protest against this historical tragedy, and Vivaldi counters by saying, “Stop giving me that historical crap. Poetic illusion is what counts in the theater” (*BC* 103). According to Vivaldi, the history of the Americas is fantastical and thus open to poetic reinterpretation without regard for historical facts. Carpentier’s baroque imagination holds itself to a higher standard of historicity, while still maintaining poetic illusion.

In the union of (a false) American history and European myths of superiority, Vivaldi’s opera has given the Criollo a new way to think about the purpose of art and the intersection of myth and history. The pathos and bravery of Montezuma cause the Criollo to become aware of his patriotic desires, not for the Spain of his forefathers, but for Mexico, the land in which he was born and which he claims culturally. Filomeno’s response reveals the power of art for Carpentier, “And of what good is the illusion of theater if not to remove us from where we are and take us where we can’t get to on our own?” (*BC* 110). Carpentier’s theater is the textual stage of the novel where he can bring together the marvelous history of the Americas together with its baroque reality in the hopes of making visible what was invisible, in the case of the Criollo, his identity as an American. Through a union of history and myth, art can change mentalities. This is one of the life-supporting myths that Carpentier as author relies on every time he puts pen to paper.

Carpentier’s novel closes with a very Leibnizian observation:

Since the anguished inhabitants of this Earth, after having reached the moon deified by Egypt, Sumer, and Babylonia, found nothing on it but a

sidereal dump of useless rocks, a trace of stony, dusty remains, predictor of greater such traces in more distant orbits, images of which already reveal to us that, after all, this Earth, so mucked-up at times, is neither such a shit hole nor as unworthy of appreciation as some maintain, and is say what you will, the most livable abode in the system. (BC 117)

In other words, this world “is the best of all possible worlds.” In Leibniz’ theodicy, this world is the best because it is the world God chose, and as such, regardless of its “mucked-up” nature, it provides the best possibilities for the realization of God’s plan. Deleuze argues that Leibniz’s position is a way of justifying God in the face of evil (68). Carpentier’s appropriation of Leibniz’s world view serves as a “supporting myth” against nihilism. Although the individual may not have a say in the world he lives in, it is nevertheless his. It is the arena in which “man ... has nothing better to do then to tend to his own affairs” (BC 117). Carlos Fuentes states in his introduction to the novel, “*Baroque Concerto* is a joyous plea in favor of a history we make ourselves” (18). This history is made by the baroque imagination feeding on fact and fable and creating new identities that are capable of questioning existing structures of belief and power without lapsing into nihilism.

It is at this point in his career that Carpentier delivers his seminal essays on the baroque. In these essays, Carpentier lays out his theory of the baroque according to what he has learned from writing his novels. These four lectures given in May 1975 in Caracas concern similar themes and are given from the perspective of an established and accomplished artist and can almost be considered as one document: “Conciencia e identidad en América,” “Un camino de medio siglo,” and “Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso,” “Problemática del tiempo y el idioma en la moderna novela latinoamericana.” These essays constitute the majority of Carpentier’s exposition of the

marvelous real and the baroque as paradigms that have influenced the trajectory of Latin American discourse. Neil Larsen notes, “Literary history leaves no doubt as to the efficacy of the Carpentierian “real maravilloso” in instituting a new vocabulary within critical and aesthetic discourse” (264). In “Lo barroco y lo real maravilloso” Carpentier accounts for this receptivity by arguing that the baroque is the natural language for expressing the marvelous reality of Latin America. He points to Carlos Fuentes’ *Terra Nostra* and the works of the other writers of the “boom” whose novels “traducen el ámbito americano, tanto ciudadano como de la selva o de los campos, de modo totalmente barroco” (“Lo barroco...” 135).¹⁰⁵ This translation is a moment of triumph for Carpentier; his project has achieved its full fruition. His confidence is evident when he states, “Hoy conocemos los nombres de las cosas” (“Lo barroco...” 135).¹⁰⁶ The baroque imagination has allowed Carpentier and others to reappropriate Latin American reality from being the Other of Europe to being its own self-actualized entity. This confidence leads him to hope for a future that holds “las más extraordinarias sorpresas” (“Lo barroco...” 135).¹⁰⁷

It is evident that Carpentier has attained canonicity; however, as seen in Carpentier’s novels, the moment of triumph is a moment for circumspection. When revolt becomes a part of the establishment it is often compromised. In “La novela latinoamericana en vísperas de un nuevo siglo,” Carpentier’s tone shifts somewhat from the joyful possibility that he sees in Latin America to the limitations facing the artist. One of Carpentier’s primary concerns in this essay is the distance between the artist as a man

¹⁰⁵ “translate the American milieu, as much in the cities as in the jungle or the countryside, in a totally baroque mode”

¹⁰⁶ “today we know the names of things”

¹⁰⁷ “the most extraordinary surprises”

of letters and the increasing technological specification of society. He writes, “El día en que los hombres pusieron pies en la luna, fue día de derrota para los novelistas del mundo entero” (“La novela latinoamericana...” 10).¹⁰⁸ This is an about face from the position he took in *Baroque Concerto*, where he finds that the lunar landing refocused men’s attention on the affairs of this world as it foreclosed utopia. Carpentier thereby questions art’s ability to provide the supporting myths for a person’s life as technology becomes more and more a part of an individual’s circumstances. If the novelist cannot account for these technologies, he risks an incomplete picture. Carpentier’s response is to draw more fully into the world of culture as historical knowledge. In other words, culture is “el acopio de conocimientos que permiten a un hombre establecer relaciones, por encima del tiempo y del espacio, entre dos realidades semejantes o análogas, explicando una en función de sus similitudes con otra que puede haberse producido muchos siglos atrás” (“La novela...” 17).¹⁰⁹ This faculty of the imagination is one of the practices of Relation that allows for cross-cultural connection. It fills a human need that science cannot, and that is the desire for transcendence. The historical faculty of the baroque imagination will continue to serve the present by looking for the genesis of the present circumstances in historical events that effectually clarify the contemporary situation. Thus, Carpentier’s solution to the problem of the writer in light of technologies he does not understand and political processes he cannot control, is the same as it was in *The Lost Steps* and *Explosion in a Cathedral*: to posit the writer as *cronista* of his times, “nunca he podido establecer distingos muy válidos entre la condición del cronista y del novelista” (“La

¹⁰⁸ “the day that man set foot on the moon was a day of defeat for the novelists of the whole world”

¹⁰⁹ “the accumulation of knowledge that allows a man to establish relationships, beyond space and time, between two realities that are similar or analogous, explaining one in the function of its similarities with another that may have been produced many centuries before”

novela...” 23).¹¹⁰ As cronista, the writer is able to deal with the problems of representing time and space in Latin America in a way that does not caricature its reality, but offer new ways of understanding it. The possibility for this understanding rests on the fundamental transcendence of the human person. This basis is evident in Carpentier’s description of time in three of his novels: “en *El siglo de las luces*, en *El recurso del metodo*, en el *Concierto Barroco*; un tiempo que gira en torno al hombre sin alterar su esencia” (“Problemática...” 156);¹¹¹ times change around the person, but they do not alter his or her essence as person. No matter what discourse or historical structures surround the person, the essence of personhood remains.

These lectures are given in the same year that Carpentier publishes *Harp and Shadow*, a novel about the first cronista, and in which he shows a greater reflexivity on the baroque imagination as a means of resistance. The novel is a simultaneously a consideration of time, language, and identity. While the former two are subject to change, in the final section of the novel, Carpentier argues for the transcendence of the human beyond time and space. *Harp and Shadow* is the last expression of Carpentier’s baroque imagination and serves as a self-reflexive critique of its decolonizing poetics, returning to the original cronista is a means of questioning the role and place of the novelist in the contemporary period. The structure of the text also indicates that it is a questioning of the foundational texts of the Americas as a blueprint for resistance against European hegemony. Carpentier studied Columbus’ diaries and letters as well as the works of many other explorers in developing his strategy of the baroque. He claimed these founding documents as a legitimate charter for developing a vital alternative to European

¹¹⁰ “I have never been able to establish valid distinctions between the position of the chronicler and the novelist”

¹¹¹ “time swirls around man without altering his essence”

hegemony, yet in this novel, he deconstructs their validity and indicates they are responsible for much of the subsequent violence on the continent. There is a parallel between Columbus' burning ambition to arrive in the Indies and Carpentier's equally ardent desire to write a new place for the Americas in human history. In *Harp and Shadow*, Carpentier's fiction retains some of its ludic tone, but its optimism is tainted. He questions both myth-making and the myth-makers.

Speaking in the voice of Columbus, Carpentier dons the ultimate literary mask for a Caribbean writer.¹¹² Columbus is the first chronicler of the Americas. He is also the perfect cipher, an unknown character with tenuous roots in Genoa and an uncertain patrimony. Even the appearance of Columbus' face is a mystery. No verifiable representations of him exist, nor can his final resting place be determined. All that remains of his body is his literary corpus. In a way, much the same can be said of any writer, particularly one who has achieved a significant degree of critical recognition. Carpentier's travels also mirror those of Columbus in that he crisscrossed the Atlantic multiple times and those of other explores in his voyage to the interior. Thus in exploring Columbus' motivations he is simultaneously considering his own. The mirror Carpentier holds up to the Admiral reflects himself and his project.

Biographical inquiries aside, *Harp and Shadow* is the ultimate expression of the baroque imagination folded in upon itself. The text is divided into three parts. The first, "*the harp*," is written in the voice of Pope Pius IX and relates the pontiff's recollections

¹¹² Carpentier is not the first, nor the last to return to Columbus as a way of questioning the literary endeavor. As Molly Metherd writes, "The contradictory nature of the Columbian documents invites not only historical but also literary revisions of both the events of the discovery and the figure of Columbus. Authors from Washington Irving to Carlos Fuentes to Salman Rushdie have taken advantage of these nebulous Columbian texts to create Columbus as an icon for their respective cultural contexts" (230). William Carlos Williams, Abel Posse and Augusto Roa Bastos also return to Christopher Columbus in their texts.

of his trip to South America as he prepares to sign the document initiating the process of canonization for Columbus. The second section, “*the hand*,” reveals Columbus on his deathbed preparing to make his confession and paging through his literary corpus. The third section, “*the shadow*,” relates the carnivalesque canonization hearing that is witnessed by the ghost of Columbus. This novel marks a return to the baroque style of *Explosion in a Cathedral* and *Reasons of State*, and a departure from the revolutionary allegiance of *The Rite of Spring*, which I have not included for reasons stated previously.

In the first section of the novel, Carpentier seems to canonize his own project by speaking in the voice of Pope Pius IX. Through the pontiff, he expresses his own desires for Latin America, “Mastai believed America’s population could forge a future that was the equal of Europe’s” (HS 27). Drawing from Spengler and Ortega, Carpentier too felt that Europe was in decline and that America would take its place as it had the necessary vitality of spirit. Pius and Carpentier also share two other traits: long careers and knowledge of both the old world and the new. The appeal that Pius sees in Columbus as a saint is essentially what Carpentier hoped to accomplish in his texts: “a saint so enormous ... that he could have one foot on the shores of this continent and the other on the banks of Europe, with a vision from above the Atlantic that embraced both hemispheres” (HS 28-29). While the young Pius envisions this saint unifying the faithful against heresy, Carpentier looks to create this bridge in order to promote his progressive politics. In essence, Columbus is to serve as the fold between two worlds.

Applied to Carpentier’s idea of the baroque, Columbus as fold between two worlds brings together the multiple inheritances of the Latin American tradition in one identifiable personality. As Carpentier did with *Music in Cuba*, the individual character

comes to stand for a period, serving as a metonym for cultural shifting cultural standards that can be located in a point or an individual. In this text, Columbus/Carpentier is the monad, the smallest unit that still expresses its world. However, this is not the traditional Leibnizian monad subject to the conditions of closure and selection, but a monad that “is in tune with divergent series that belong to impossible monads” in other words, “the monad, astraddle over several worlds, is kept half open as by a pair of pliers” (Deleuze 137). The story of Columbus told in three parts attests to the open condition of Columbus as monad. His story does not have a factual biographical center and is used for political ends by authors like himself as well as religious and political figures such as Pius IX.

In the second section of the novel, “the hand,” Columbus speaks in the first person from his deathbed, a situation that lends itself to the stripping away of artifice and the unvarnished reporting of truth. A deathbed confession can be considered the most disinterested as the moribund can hope to gain nothing by its telling.¹¹³ Yet the reader’s anticipation of such a discourse is thwarted by the nature of Carpentier’s Columbus. Instead of a final word on Columbus, Carpentier complicates the portrait of the explorer as evident in the phrases uttered by Columbus such as, “I am two in one” (*HS* 36) and “I became a tremendous and unabashed fake” (*HS* 55). As González Echevarría states in his analysis of Carpentier’s portrayal of Columbus, “This version constitutes a corrosive critique of the unity of the self and of the possible integration of such an entity with the natural or political world around it” (*Pilgrim* 278). Carpentier is questioning Ortega’s maxim of “the individual and his circumstances.” There are elements that simply cannot be reconciled. As Deleuze states,

¹¹³ Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* pivots on a similar confession: “The horror, the horror”

To the degree that the world is now made up of divergent series (the chaos-mos), or that crapshooting replaces the game of Plenitude, the monad is now unable to contain the entire world as if in a closed circle that can be modified by projection. It now opens on a trajectory or a spiral in expansion that moves further and further away from a center. (137)

Columbus's deathbed reflections move the reader further and further away from the idea of a cogent self. Columbus does not completely understand his own motivations and is powerless to control the ramifications of his words on the conquest of the Americas.

The final section of the novel, "the shadow," reintroduces the idea of ethics. The hallucinogenic trial ultimately determines Columbus to be unfit for sainthood and this decision hinges on two verifiable and unpardonable actions: "the first, extremely serious, of having a mistress ... and the second, no less serious, of having instituted an inexcusable slave trade" (*HS* 151). Carpentier seems to be criticizing the Catholic Church for equating the two sins, yet he also indicates that it is Columbus' choices in the face of his circumstances that eliminate sainthood. Columbus cannot be a saint because he did not see the face of the Other in his conquest. If he had seen the face of the Other, he could never have instituted the slave trade.

As Levinas describes the call of the face of the Other, it requires being for that Other even unto death. The claim that the Other exerts on us is also a constant. Relations may change between the self and the Other, but these are the fundamental conditions of the world. To remove this structure is to allow for philosophy without an ethics. The baroque folding and unfolding of principles, producing an excess of principles when necessary, is nonetheless bounded by the reality of the Other. In Columbus' case, instituting the slave trade was a way to save his own face by bringing back something of value to the Catholic Kings: "I have said: *as slaves*. Yes, now that I am at the gates of

death the word appalls me, but in the account that I reread it is clearly written in my large round hand” (HS 111). His commodification of people undercuts the claims of his promoters, Leon Bloy and de Lorgues, that Columbus came to bring Christ to the new world. Ultimately it is actions and not words that condemn Columbus.

Columbus’ final thoughts are about Tiphys, the helmsman of the Argonaut, words that could equally be applied to Carpentier’s fashioning of the baroque as a discourse of resistance, “*The seas subdued the victor’s law obeys...the frailest craft now dares the roughest waves...where men no more shall unknown courses measure, for round the world no “farthest land” shall be*” (HS 158 emphasis in the original). Carpentier is also like Tiphys treading the unknown waters of expression, leading the way for other Latin-American intellectuals to follow. As González Echevarría notes, in *Harp and Shadow*, “Carpentier rejects the Carpentier followed by the novelists of the “boom,” who still practiced magical realism or followed his theories on the baroque” (Pilgrim 278). He seems to be questioning whether or not he achieved his ethical ideal. Columbus returns to the obscurity of the fold, melding with the columns of St. Peter’s square. In this disappearance, Carpentier also seems to washing his hands of the future of his discourse, leaving it to go where it may.

Despite his reservations about the baroque imagination as a viable means for creating a new identity, Carpentier has nevertheless blazed a trail in Caribbean letters. His works serve as an example for other artists looking to forge an authentic identity that grapples with multiple cultural heritages. Carpentier’s narrative, along with the countless others that have followed in his footsteps, have opened up possibilities for understanding the New World and established a new meridian for Latin American letters.

Chapter 2: Derek Walcott and the Baroque Poetics of Decentering the Center

In this chapter, I read Derek Walcott's autobiographical approach to his book length poems as an expression of the baroque imagination that addresses the literary and historical dispossession of the Caribbean by constructing a recognizable, yet malleable humanist face that represents the region. Walcott counters the trope of nothingness in the history of Caribbean discourse by the assertion of his humanism. The poet's humanism, influenced by Frantz Fanon, challenges the dominant discourses of imperialism, neocolonialism, globalization, and even postcolonialism; all of which reveal underlying relations of domination and oppression yet simultaneously can obscure the individual human element in these dynamics. Walcott's long poems represent a genre innovation that provides the perfect vehicle for an analysis of the baroque imagination. The breadth and scope of the baroque imagination is given full play and engages in the thoughtful enmeshment of the individual and his environment, which embodies the complexity of the individual and the region. The long poems allow Walcott to sustain a conversation with his European and Caribbean forbears and present a variety of masks that illuminate the relationship between the poetic self and the communities he chooses to belong to. Walcott's baroque imagination brings together the multiple strands of his Caribbean heritage in order to privilege the Caribbean as a unique site of beginning. Rather than simply being a derivative place in which nothing is created, the Caribbean, in Walcott's eyes, is a unique place that determines its own meaning in an autochthonous manner, not simply as it has been given by former imperial centers or present hegemonies. Walcott's positioning of the Caribbean as a singular point of origin is a common theme throughout

all of his works that develops throughout his poetry, but most specifically in his long poems: *Another Life*, *Omeros*, *Tiepolo's Hound*, and *The Prodigal*.

One of the points of departure for Walcott's baroque imagination and the discourses of colonialism and imperialism engages with the trope of nothingness, which has been used by European writers to describe the Caribbean. Victorian writer James Anthony Froude based his conception of Caribbean nothingness on the racist interpretation of miscegenation determining that "there are no people there in the true sense of the word, with a character and a purpose of their own" (Froude, *The English in the West Indies* 306). Even modernist poet T.S. Eliot told friends he found nothing attractive in the West Indies except the weather (Pollard 2). These European views are supplemented by the Caribbean's own writings about itself. V.S. Naipaul's notorious statement in *The Middle Passage* exhibits a similar view in contemporary times: "History is built around achievement and creation; and nothing was created in the West Indies" (29). These European and Caribbean viewpoints all subscribe to a Western Hegelian view of history as linear, progressive, and teleological. The worth of nations and individuals is based upon their economic and cultural production. These teleological questions lead to ontological ones as well. As Roberto Fernandez Retamar notes in his celebrated essay "Caliban," the very question of the nature of a Latin American (or Caribbean) culture "suggests we can only be a distorted echo of what occurs elsewhere" ("Caliban" 3). Frederic Jameson makes a similar observation, going so far as to state that one of the defining characteristics of the Third World is that "none of these cultures can be conceived as anthropologically independent or autonomous, rather, they are all in various distinct ways locked in a life-and-death struggle with first-world cultural imperialism"

(68). If the region is incapable of producing art, technology or culture, then its inhabitants must lack being.

Walcott's vehement opposition to this negative idea of the Caribbean as "no place" and its people as "no people" is intrinsic to his baroque and humanist view of the Caribbean. One of the characteristics of the historical baroque, shared by the baroque imagination, is the *horror vacui*, evidenced by the profusion of ornamentation, spirals, and the abhorrence of the plain in both literary and plastic arts.¹¹⁴ Like the works of the historical baroque, Walcott's poetry and prose have oft been criticized for what critics see as an overabundance of florid language, description and ornamentation. What these critics fail to recognize is that this *horror vacui* stems from an intuited need to counter the definitions of Caribbean nothingness that serve to dehumanize the inhabitants of the region and disparage their contributions to art, culture, and modernity. In this respect, Walcott is greatly influenced by Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, a humanist work that charges Western colonialism with creating this condition: "Because it is a systematic negation of the other person and a furious determination to deny the other person all attributes of humanity, colonialism forces the people it dominates to ask themselves the question constantly: 'In reality, who am I?'" (250). In other words, "colonialism is essentially the reduction of the individual to non-human status; the dehumanization process keeps the individual in a non-ontological domain" (Vivaldi 3). Walcott's works continually revisit this question in order to move the Caribbean person from the non-ontological to the ontological plane.

¹¹⁴ David R. Castillo elaborates on the historical, philosophical, and psychological roots and effects of the *horror vacui* in his article "Horror (Vacui): The Baroque Condition" published in *Hispanic Baroques: Reading Cultures in Context* (2005) Vanderbilt University Press.

The influence of Fanon's concept of colonialism can be seen most clearly in Walcott's presentation of Makak in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*.¹¹⁵ The two acts of the play are prefaced by quotes from Jean Paul Sartre's preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, which address the effects of colonialism on the "native's" psyche. Makak, alias Felix Holbein, is one individual afflicted by the dehumanization of colonialism. Throughout the play, Makak and others refer to the *charbonnier* as "a being without a mind, a will, a name, a tribe of his own" (Walcott, *DMM* 222). Makak's dispossession is symptomatic of the greater dispossession of Caribbean society. The dehumanizing effects of racism and/or colonialism are further evident as Makak forgets his identity upon arrest: "The delirium from which he suffers is clearly connected with this inability to link himself to family or culture" (Hogan, *Colonialism* 47). The corporal, an agent of the law, in this case Western law, repeatedly calls Makak and the other prisoners animals and treats them accordingly. Yet Walcott is clear to show, as Fanon does, that colonialism does not only harm the colonist, but also the colonizer. No character in the play escapes the ravages of colonialism on his or her identity.¹¹⁶

In this play, Walcott engages with Fanon's conception of violence and differentiates himself from it. As Jean-Marie Vivaldi argues in his insightful critique of *The Wretched of the Earth*, "Fanon's view of humanism is essentially linked to revolutionary praxis" (15). Unlike the Hegelian Bondsman who achieves his ontological being through work, Fanon felt that the colonized would only be recognized by their

¹¹⁵ Kelly Baker Josephs finds that Fanon's two seminal works *Black Skins/White Masks* and *The Wretched of the Earth* serve as intertexts for Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain* in "Dreams, Delirium, and Decolonization in Derek Walcott's *Dream on Monkey Mountain*" *Small Axe* 32 (June 2010): 1-16.

¹¹⁶ Corporal Lestrade is the mulatto jailer who serves as the avatar for Western law and justice. He suffers psychic destabilization once he ascends Monkey Mountain, "My mind, my mind. What's happening to my mind?" (*DMM* 287). Tigre and Souris also undergo changes throughout the stream as does Moustique.

oppressors when speaking the language of violence. Revolution resulting in a radical overhaul of the state would be the only way for the colonized to assert themselves and make the necessary psychic strides toward mental and social liberation. Work could not be counted on for achievement because the colonized had been seen as dehumanized agents of production for so long.

In *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Walcott expresses this conundrum through the various expressions of symbolic violence in the play beginning with the attempted murder of the corporal and culminating with the decapitation of the white woman. In each of these situations, violence is criticized as a way of achieving full human status. As Makak cries after he stabs Lestrade, “Is not that what they say we are? Animals! Apes without law? O God, o gods! What am I, who thought I was a man?” (*DMM* 286). Walcott seems to be positing an alternative route to humanity, that of the mind. Even in his degraded state as a prisoner, Makak can lay claim to humanity by his thoughts and his actions. Instead of justifying himself through violence, Makak dehumanizes himself through murder. The birth of a uniquely Caribbean culture through violence is also questioned in the last scenes of the play in which Makak and his triumphant tribesmen systematically and indiscriminately condemn both the greats of Western literature and history and their fellow countrymen. Walcott’s critique of Fanon’s humanism seems to be clear. Revolutionary violence only begets greater social violence and cannot be counted on to construct a new nation or national consciousness.

While violence is an integral part of Fanon’s humanism, Walcott finds liberation in work, both physical and intellectual, as can be seen by his voluminous literary production and the work of the Trinidad Theater Workshop. He does not seek to spark a

national revolution, but an intellectual one in which the Caribbean is given the place it rightly deserves as a maker of an autochthonous culture capable of conversing with the great cultures of history, the Greek, the Roman, the British, the American, among others.¹¹⁷ One of the ways that he begins this process is through the figure of Crusoe. Walcott's Crusoe is a figure who evokes the tropes of labor and construction, while at the same time serving as a subversive figure. The image of the carpenter working at his craft symbolizes the poet at work at his. It is an image that Walcott uses in *Another Life* and also in interviews in which he describes himself.¹¹⁸ Both labor to create a house, in Walcott's case, a literary house for people to live in. Besides fixity, this construction also implies change as later in this same poem, Walcott labels Crusoe "our ocean's Proteus," able to change shape to fit the needs of a shifting reality.¹¹⁹ A protean carpenter will build structures that accommodate change and that can be molded to fit a diverse society. This Crusoe teaches the island artist "to shape from them where nothing was / the language of a race" (*The Castaway* 52).

It is in this sense that Walcott chooses him as a model for the Caribbean artist. Crusoe's reality is akin to that of the Caribbean poet who must make use of the tools left behind in the wreckage of history. As he states in "Crusoe's Journal":

... even the bare necessities

¹¹⁷ For Fanon, violence is an intrinsic and necessary part of his humanism. It alone will bring the colonized individual into the humanity of the colonizer. Vivaldi Jean-Marie articulates this point clearly in his analysis of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* stating, "that violent struggles constitute a necessary aspect of his humanism. Violent struggles are amenable to the intrinsic worth of the colonized subject within universal humanism; the colonized individual will transcend her inhumane condition only through violence to achieve global citizenship" (2).

¹¹⁸ Walcott makes the connection between physical labor and poetry in his gloss on Gregorias' depiction of Joseph, the carpenter, in the church in Gros-Ilet (*CP* 205).

¹¹⁹ Walcott also refers to Crusoe as Proteus in "The Figure of Crusoe," "It is not he Crusoe you recognize. I have compared him to Proteus, that mythological figure who changes shapes according to what we need him to be...you must allow me to make him various, contradictory and as changeable as the Old Man Of the Sea...My Crusoe, then is Adam. Christopher Columbus, God, a missionary, a beachcomber, and his interpreter, Daniel Defoe" (35).

of style are turned to use,
 like those plain iron tools he salvages
 from shipwreck, hewing a prose
 as odorous as raw wood to the adze. (*The Castaway* 51)¹²⁰

In *The Castaway*, the figure of Crusoe serves as a mask through which the poet can resist the nomenclature of nothingness and refashion the Caribbean to his own liking. As Walcott stated in an interview with Ed Hirsch, “Whether that tool is a pen or a hammer, you are building in a situation that is Adamic; you are rebuilding with some idea that you will be here for a long time and with a sense of proprietorship as well” (*CDDW* 107). This adoption of Crusoe in *The Castaway* is not an uncritical Eurocentric adoption, rather it re-imagines the terms on which the poet and the region can stand in relation to the metropolitan centers. Walcott clarifies this in his essay “The Figure of Crusoe” as a way of justifying his writing about the Caribbean and his decision to remain in the region rather than becoming an exile,

He (Crusoe) is for us, today, the twentieth century symbol of artistic isolation and breakdown, of withdrawal, of the hermetic exercise that poetry has become ... Crusoe’s triumph lies in that despairing cry which he utters when a current takes his dugout canoe further and further away from the island that, like all of us uprooted figures, he had made his home, and it is the cynical answer that we must make to those critics who complain that there is nothing here, no art, no history, no architecture, by which they mean ruins, in short no civilization. (40)

Although Crusoe arrives on the island with certain preconceptions and a few tools from the wreckage he escapes, he nevertheless needs to remake both his way of thinking and his implements when he encounters a new reality.

Further differentiating his humanism from Fanon’s, Walcott chooses Crusoe over Caliban¹²¹ as his model of a creative Caribbean being. Caliban may be a powerful

¹²⁰ Walcott repeatedly makes use of the poet-as-carpenter metaphor throughout his poetry. Most notably in *Omeros*, the wood-worker serves as a model for the word-worker engaged in the task of building culture.

metaphor for Caribbean rebellion against the metropolitan centers, but his power remains limited to destruction. As Silvio Torres-Saillant has noted in his comprehensive study of Caliban as a metaphorical figure in the Caribbean, “Too often the literature, from Fernandez Retamar and Lamming onward, portrays Caliban exclusively as a figure of resistance and cultural affirmation in the Caribbean” (235). Although “the bibliography portrays him as inherently benign,” Torres-Saillant finds that the historical legacy of Caliban as exemplified by the many Caribbean dictators (the Duvaliers, Trujillo) should give writers pause when invoking his legacy. Walcott’s *Crusoe* fills the cultural void in a much more positive and affirming way. Rather than being an exacting overlord, Crusoe is a fellow human being who shares a similar privilege and plight; he creatively possesses an island, but he is also alone in his possession.¹²²

This Crusoe is similar to José Lezama Lima’s *señor barroco*: “el señor barroco quisiera poner un poco de orden pero sin rechazo, una imposible victoria donde todos los vencidos pudieran mantener las exigencias de su orgullo y de su despilfarro” (83).¹²³ Crusoe, as Walcott’s representation of the baroque artist, emerges from the wreckage resulting from the collision of European, African, and Amerindian cultures to fashion a new hybrid culture from these fragments. He orders the fragments in such a way that does not blur the regions brutal origins, but also does not limit its potential. This move by

¹²¹ Silvio Torres-Saillant has a comprehensive study of the deployment of Caliban as a literary metaphor in colonial and postcolonial literature in the third chapter of his book *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* titled “Caliban’s Dilemma: A Disabling Memory and a Possible Hope.” In this chapter, Torres-Saillant investigates the use of Caliban as a potent and variable metaphor that is distinctly Caribbean. He also argues that a rehabilitated Caliban may be formed in the diaspora cleansed of his many vices and inclinations towards division and violence.

¹²² As Walcott states in his interview with Edward Hirsch, Crusoe is like the Caribbean artist in that he has “creative possession of the island” but he also has the “despair of being always alone ... our true condition as writers” (63).

¹²³ “the baroque man would like to cultivate a little bit of order but without rejection, an impossible victory where the conquered can maintain the necessities of their pride and their disgrace”

Walcott would seem to put him in the redemptive stream of black radical intellectuals identified by Anthony Bogues in *Black Heretics, Black Prophets* because, like the Rastafari prophets, Walcott's works use "language to describe social conditions and affirm their humanity" as well as to "'create[s] a counter symbolic world and order.' The creation of a symbolic order that then turns the hegemonic racist or colonial order is not only a semiotic challenge but also, importantly, a battle for human validation" (20). Walcott's *Crusoe* is unmistakably human both as creator and in his relationship with Friday. Unlike Prospero, "Crusoe is no lord of magic, duke, prince. He does not possess the island he inhabits. He is alone, he is a craftsman, his beginnings are humble. He acts, not by authority, but by conscience" (37). It is this sort of humanity that Walcott seeks to cultivate through his baroque imagination.

Walcott's humanism takes this autobiographical turn as a way of creating a face for the faceless, a voice for the voiceless. In this sense, his humanism is more akin to that of Emmanuel Levinas than to that of Fanon. Levinas' *Humanism of the Other* was written in part as a reaction to the perpetration of the Holocaust and the extreme dehumanization of the Jews that was revealed after the war. Levinas's humanism is "founded on the belief in the irreducible dignity of humans, a belief in the efficacy and worth of human freedom and hence also of human responsibility" (Cohen ix). It places the needs of others above any philosophical and ideological stance. Although Levinas is responding to a different situation, this work nevertheless applies to the colonial and postcolonial context, particularly his concept of the face that allows for the previously unacknowledged Other to be recognized. As Levinas states in an interview with Richard Kearney, "My ethical relation of love for the other stems from the fact that the self cannot survive by itself

alone, cannot find meaning within its own being-in-the-world, within the ontology of sameness” (24). This is similar to Glissant’s dual concepts of “thought of the Other” and “the other of Thought”:

Thought of the Other is the moral generosity disposing me to accept the principle of alterity, to conceive of the world as not simple and straightforward, with only one truth—mine. But thought of the Other can dwell within me without making me alter course, without “prizing me open,” without changing me within myself. An ethical principle, it is enough that I not violate it.

The other of Thought is precisely this altering. Then I have to act ... I change and I exchange. (Glissant 154)

Glissant’s words, though written in another context, effectively gloss Levinas’ humanism of the Other as a life- and thought-altering exchange that focuses on the moment of recognition of the other. In order for the self to find meaning, it must dialogue and exchange with other selves that are unlike it.

Conceived of spatially, this humanist concept of the “thought of the Other” joined to “the other of Thought” becomes the image of the rhizome in *Poetics of Relation*,

That is very much the image of the rhizome, prompting the knowledge that identity is no longer completely within the root but also in Relation. Because the thought of errantry is also the thought of what is relative, the thing relayed as well as the thing related. The thought of errantry is a poetics, which always infers that at some moment it is told. The tale of errantry is the tale of Relation. (18)

It is interesting to note that what directly precedes this quotation in Glissant’s text is the story of Frantz Fanon, “Sometimes, by taking up the problems of the Other, it is possible to find oneself. Contemporary history provides several striking examples of this, among them Frantz Fanon, whose path led from Martinique to Algeria” (*Poetics* 18). Walcott, like Fanon or perhaps because of Fanon, comes to know himself through his relationship to his Caribbean community. It is my contention that the humanism of Walcott’s

autobiographical method can best be understood according to these twin concepts: that of Levinas' face and Glissant's errantry of Relation. As Walcott recounts his personal encounters with the Other of himself, Western culture, and the Caribbean, he constructs a face for the Caribbean that resists the discourses of nothingness.

In *Another Life*, Walcott makes the move to the long poem and to autobiography in the same work. The long poem comes to be a signature of Walcott's style and one which he masters as a way of exercising his baroque imagination and furthering his humanist project. Unlike other historical long poems, Walcott's version finds itself deeply engaged with autobiography. *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Wordsworth's *Prelude*, and Eliot's "The Waste Land" are all precursors to Walcott's *Another Life* and *Omeros*. However, all but the *Prelude* share a social orientation, one which subsumes the individual to the movement of the poem. Walcott's long poems, on the contrary, focus on the individual and his movement through society to provide the framework and trajectory.

Walcott's work simultaneously strives to construct the poet as well as his surroundings, creating both the subject and his environment. His work moves through autobiography and personal experience to encompass worlds that he sees, reads and imagines. Walcott's baroque imagination advances relation as it secures the place of the individual and creates a literary reality for the Caribbean. Walcott's long poems create both the image of a man and of a community made up of diverse individuals who all partake in a common humanity. As Sandra Pouchet Paquet argues in her seminal work *Caribbean Autobiography*, "Walcott implants himself as an authoritative cultural source, as the one who both validates and is validated by the collective culture" (165). Walcott's

long poems engage in the creation of both an individual and a space which mutually inform each other.

Another Life looks at the beginnings of Walcott's life as an artist, the home and school that nurtured the future poet, the friends and mentors who shaped his consciousness, and the possibilities he necessarily had to leave behind. As David Scott writes, "beginnings always constitute a sort of paradox: a point of departure that—simultaneously—affirms *and* disavows, acknowledges *and* displaces, creates *and* repeats" (vii).¹²⁴ In this sense beginnings, as opposed to origins, are baroque chronotopes. Spatial-temporal locations are overloaded with significance and in a sense embody Borges' garden of forking paths. At the beginning of a life, poetic career, or journey, all paths are potentially open for travel, although some may be more accessible than others. To return to the beginning for Walcott means to re-open the Pandora's Box of the past and consider the path taken in relation to the paths not taken.

The title of the poem itself, *Another Life*, suggests precisely this reading, as do these lines on the first page, "Begin with twilight, when a glare / which held a cry of bugles lowered / the coconut lances of the inlet, / as a sun, tired of empire, declined" (*AL* 3). Twilight is a favorite time for Walcott here, as it is a time of altered meanings and possibilities.¹²⁵ In this case, it also alludes to the passing of the British Empire, a time that seemed ripe with possibility for the Anglophone Caribbean islands. Ultimately, the poet retraces his steps, revisiting his choices with the more mature, yet still searching,

¹²⁴ Interestingly, Scott uses an epigram from Walcott's *Another Life* to preface his preface on the beginnings of *Small Axe*: "I begin here again, / begin until this ocean's / a shut book, and, like a bulb / the white moon's filaments wane."

¹²⁵ As he states in his seminal essay "What the Twilight Says," "To set out for rehearsals in that quivering quarter-hour is to engage conclusions, not beginnings, for one walks past the gilded hallucinations of poverty with a corrupt resignation touched by details ... Deprivation is made lyrical, and twilight, with the patience of alchemy, almost transmutes despair into virtue" (3-4).

eyes of a middle-aged man. As a retrospective, the poem seems to be asking some probing questions: “How did I get to be this way?”, “Where is this gift taking me?”, “What has it accomplished so far?”

Another Life presents Walcott’s mind as a baroque mind—a collecting, archiving, juxtaposing, assimilating mind. In this four-part autobiographical poem, Walcott remembers his childhood from the perspective of adulthood, looking to understand his choice of poetic vocation as well as validate his culture of origins. The four parts of *Another Life* begin the process of re-centering the Caribbean by presenting the various guises of the poet in conjunction with the island in a way that forces recognition of the interconnectedness of Caribbean experience with world cultures. Walcott deepens his engagement with the Caribbean community by reconstructing his childhood milieu, recollected from the perspective of adulthood.

The first section of *Another Life*, aptly titled “The Divided Child,” describes the bifurcated Caribbean world that influenced the young poet, shaping his powers of observation as well as his worldview. The young poet is idealistic about the place and role of art, idolizes the great writers of the British canon, yet realizes that his own world is significantly different and accordingly less grand: “from childhood he’d considered palms / ignobler than imagined elms / ... / he had prayed / nightly for his flesh to change” (*AL* 6-7). Colonial education has deeply ingrained itself in the young boy causing him to value English trees above his own and whiteness above all else. Even more deeply, he recognizes the difference between the voice at home and the voice at school and feels he needs to be true to both. Walcott describes this condition as a “simple schizophrenic boyhood” in which one could lead two lives: “the interior life of poetry, the outward life

of action and dialect” (*WTS* 4). Both voices are deeply felt and the cost of aligning oneself to either is also evident to Walcott. Language signifies belonging, but also separation. However, Walcott is not anguished by this separation; he finds it is the basis for a new poetics of elation, a powerful, baroque language that encompasses the Adamic situation of the new world.¹²⁶

In his interview with Edward Hirsch, Walcott explains how the frisson between the standard language and the demotic fueled his poetic imagination:

I have a three language background: French Creole, English Creole, and English ... Once I knew the richness of Creole was as whole uncharted territory for a writer, I became excited. I also knew that it couldn't be separated from the landscape because the things I saw around me were being named by people in a new language, even if that language was being called Creole, or vulgar, or patois, or a dialect, or whatever. The metaphors that one heard from the peasants describing a tree, a flower, an insect, anything, were not like the Latin names for those things. (58)

He then gives the example of the tern, called “ciseau la mer”, scissor of the sea, as the freshness of language provided by Creole. The recognition of the possibility in Creole sets Walcott apart as an artist. He translates the experience of Creole in order to both document its existence and enrich his own use of English. He continues, “Throughout my whole youth that was happening. It was the experience of a whole race renaming something that had been named by someone else and giving that object its own metaphoric power. That was a privilege of having been born in what is usually called an underprivileged, backward, undeveloped society. It was a primal situation” (Walcott, int. with Hirsch 58). This primal situation makes the creation of poetry a natural response for Walcott: “for him metaphor was not a symbol but conversation” (*WTS* 16). The language of poetry is built into society. Yet it is only recognized by one having a baroque

¹²⁶ Walcott's use of the word is consistent with the Leibnizian delight.

imagination. As Carpentier states in “La novela latinoamericana en vísperas de un nuevo siglo”, the highest faculty of the baroque imagination is the ability to make connections between disparate objects and situations: “yo diría que esa facultad de pensar inmediatamente en otra cosa cuando se mira una cosa determinada, es la facultad mayor que puede conferirnos una cultura verdadera” (17).¹²⁷

The baroque imagination allows the poet/persona of *Another Life* to collate these thoughts and images into a social and personal narrative that promotes an intricate, complicated picture of the Caribbean that goes beyond the tropes of nothingness, or the shallow stereotypes of sand, sun, and sea. While this trait is not exclusive to postcolonial artists, *Another Life* demonstrates how the collision of a colonial education and autochthonous experience lead to the comparative, metaphorically-turned intellect that is the baroque imagination. As Charles Pollard writes, “in blending the linguistic differences of indigenous and imperial forms of speech, Walcott aspires to contribute the sound of his own accent to the common, transnational, and interethnic language of the New World” (11).¹²⁸ Simon Gikandi quoting Micheal Dash also finds that Walcott uses this discordance productively stating,

Most important, as Dash observes in relation to Glissant’s poetics, the writer who operates in the space between cultural traditions draws inventive energies from “creative schizophrenia”: speaking an androgynous idiom, this writer does not have to choose between self and community, between a private discourse and a national language, or even between the subjective experience and historical conditions. (Gikandi 13)

¹²⁷ “And I would say that faculty of thinking immediately in something else when looking at a particular object, is the greatest faculty that a true culture can confer on us”

¹²⁸ It is important to note that Walcott made these choices against the growing chorus of the black power movement and identity politics: “I was writing against the African influence during a period when the political nostalgia seemed to be a deceit ... What I think was especially irritating to me was the fact that this idea was continually being dramatized in poems offered to the masses—as an escape” (Walcott, int. with Hirsh 56).

Walcott very consciously engages with the construction of a community through the construction of a self. In “What the Twilight Said,” Walcott explains his options as an artist as three-fold: “to write the language of the people”; “write English”; “to purify the language of the tribe” (8). By purifying the language as its own element originating in the Caribbean, Walcott’s singular autobiographical language “constructs multiple spaces where the private and personal collapse into projections of a public self, where the individual is represented within the context of mutuality and commonality” (4). Walcott’s self-construction depends on the people he grew up around and the environment. His personal development is inextricable from the island and the people.

In this sense, Walcott’s autobiographical method engages with Frederic Jameson’s concept of third world allegory head on: “*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*” (emphasis in the original, 69). The poet assumes the position that the personal is political and through the elaboration of his life and influences in *Another Life*, provides another alternative for the formulation of the Caribbean. Rather than taking issue with Jameson’s position, Walcott shrewdly appropriates the playing field to further his humanist project. This multi-faceted identity is firmly rooted in the Caribbean landscape, yet capable of engaging with other cultures. Walcott presents himself as thoroughly Western and modern, but also thoroughly Caribbean. He demonstrates that his construction of self is indivisible from the construction of the community, an interdependence that goes beyond simplistic representation: “the Caribbean poet is not just a creature of language but the creator of a language that illuminates the regional quest for identity” (Paquet 159).

Walcott essentially reclaims his education and the very foundations of the English language by imagining a St. Lucian alphabet influenced by his reading of Kingsley's *Heroes* and the *Tanglewood Tales*, each in turn a British adaptation of Greek mythology. In Walcott's epic, each letter of the alphabet becomes a character in the young boy's landscape, Berthilia, "the crippled crone" (*AL* 17), Choiseul, the wife-beating chauffeur, Darnley, the blind man, and Emaneul Auguste, the singing sailor. The alphabet acquires the rhythm of life in St. Lucia and causes each letter to resonate differently for the remainder of the poem. As Walcott states at the end of his litany, "These dead, these derelicts, / that alphabet of the emaciated, / they were the stars of my mythology" (*AL* 22). The characters of the St. Lucian alphabet may share a name with their Greek antecedents, but they also gain mythical status by the comparison. These local heroes necessarily populate the mind of the young poet alongside their more famous namesakes. In this world of the Caribbean, one meaning is never sufficient.

Walcott's baroque imagination devises a placement for these neighborhood fixtures within the imaginary aura that surrounds Kingsley's heroes. Walcott's use of Kingsley's text as a touchstone also serves to underscore the assimilative and subversive use of this alphabet. Kingsley himself was a reformer whose renditions of the Greek tales would support that vision. Just as Kingsley took liberties with these Greek myths, so too does Walcott take liberties with his homegrown version. These heroes are not the perfect, gifted specimens of Greek mythology, but flawed, wounded people who nevertheless stand out to the poet because of their fortitude in the face of adversity. Quotidian afflictions, such as a club foot and poverty, achieve epic proportions in the eyes of the young artist, equivalent to the trials of the Greek Ajax.

The Creole language intervenes in other ways that disrupt the colonizing effect of English and colonial education. In chapter five, he tells a comical, yet poignant vignette that illustrates the ever present subversion that occurs simultaneously with colonial education. Walcott recalls learning about the great harbors of the world in rote fashion. The child, speaking in dialect, happily parrots back the facts thrown at him by his schoolmaster including the motto of St. Lucia: "*Statio haud malefida carinis...*A safe anchorage for sheeps" (*AL* 30). What the child also subconsciously learns is to compare his home, St. Lucia, with the rest of the world. In our time the harbor at Castries doesn't even make the top twenty.

However, this educational episode is subverted somewhat by the child's manipulation of the word ships for "sheeps." At the same time, it highlights his subordinate status, the aim of this type of education to make sheeps of the colonized, and it indicates that what the colonizer intends does not always translate exactly, allowing a space for reinterpretation and subversion. The split understanding of ships/sheeps indicates a bifurcation of the mind that undermines the colonizing effect by creating a comic or playful image. This ludic impulse, made possible by Walcott's baroque mind and Creole accent, chips away at the dignified image of British culture that is presented by his ginger-haired headmaster. These powerful ships are sheep shepherded within the hollow of the St. Lucian harbor. Certainly this interpretation could only come from a child's perspective, but the memory of the role reversal remains.

In a more serious manner, the headmaster's vision is subverted by the latent memory of the Caribs who leapt off of the rock at Sauteurs. In leaping to their deaths, the Caribs refused entry into European history, while indelibly leaving a mark on the island

where they once lived. Their mark is one of absence, one of the voids that inhabit the baroque space of the Caribbean. The poet contrasts the heroism of the British in their imperial battles to that of the Caribs in refusing to be conquered. This is part of Walcott's baroque method as every British image or conception is parried by one of Caribbean origin. This serves to simultaneously write the island into existence and to undermine the primacy of the British image by presenting it as secondary to the history of the Caribbean. The Caribs' leap at Sauteurs would have been a part of local mythology and available to the young Walcott, part of the voice from home that counters the hegemony of British historiography.¹²⁹

A second point of engagement with the tropes of nothingness in the Caribbean occurs through Walcott's validation of the landscape. Nature, specifically the baroque, fecund, ever-changing flora and fauna of the Caribbean, has always exerted a pull on Walcott and served as a basis for his Caribbean identity. As he states in "Meanings," "There is a geography that surrounds the storyteller ... Depending on how primal the geography is and how fresh the memory, the island is going to be invested in the mind of the child with a mythology" (*CPDW* 49). Walcott experiences the primal geography of the island particularly in the Pitons and in the relationship of the people to the landscape. This experience allows him to counteract the hegemonic perceptions of landscape that denote "an English landscape as both normative and ideal" (Tiffin 200).

In *Another Life*, Walcott recalibrates the pull of the English concept of language through a mystical experience that anchors him in a re-imagined St. Lucian geography. When he loses himself in the wilds above a neighbor's fields, Walcott enters the Gnostic space in which the landscape communicates to him its desires for representation. This is

¹²⁹ Harry Simmons is also known as a collector of folklore.

the Gnostic space Lezama Lima mentions in *La Experiencia Americana*, the spiritual presence of the American landscape making itself known in an unmistakable way to the artist: “el *simpathos* de ese espacio gnóstico se debe a su legitimo mundo ancestral, es un primitivo que conoce, que hereda pecados y maldiciones, que se inserta en las formas de un conocimiento que agoniza, teniendo que justificarse, paradójicamente, con un espíritu que comienza” (179).¹³⁰ Walcott’s language suggests a mystical experience. He “lost himself” and “dissolved into a trance” as the glare of noon fades into the evening. In this moment, he experiences a collapse of the ego and a profound connection to the earth and to the poor whose hovels he can see from the distance as multiple points of light. It is at once a Romantic Wordsworthian experience as well as a distinctly American one.¹³¹ He is not moved only by the raptures of nature, but by the coexistence of humanity and landscape. The landscape speaks of the experience of erasure, colonialism, and neo-colonialism, but also of the possibilities for a new and distinctly Caribbean expression. As he states in an interview with George Handley, many world landscapes are invested with meaning by the existence of literary representations —Hemingway on Spain, Wordsworth on the Lake District, Joyce on Dublin—that are lacking in the Caribbean. This “dramatic echo” of an artist’s relationship with the landscape in effect “form[s] things in the landscape” (137). Walcott aims to give each St. Lucian tree, flower, and personality a valence in the perdurable realm of art and literature, one that can be

¹³⁰ “The *simpathos* of that Gnostic space is due to its legitimate ancestral world, a primitive that knows that inherits sins and curses, and that inserts itself in the forms of a consciousness that agonizes, needing to justify itself paradoxically with a spirit that begins”

¹³¹ Edward Baugh comments on *Another Life*’s debt to Wordsworth’s *Prelude* stating, “if as verse autobiography it had no precedent but Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, like which it may also be described as a spiritual autobiography, it is nonetheless decidedly different ... The style ranges among a variety of tones, voices and poetic modes, and from relatively plain prose rhythms to a plangent and richly wrought music, from simple speech to metaphorical sophistication” (89).

introduced into a world artistic tradition.¹³² As Walcott writes, “For no one had yet written of this landscape / that it was possible” (*AL* 53). Through his depictions of Caribbean landscape, Walcott is deepening the reverberations of Caribbean space on its visitors.

Walcott’s connection with the landscape is intimate and complex. This is also the task of the baroque imagination as Lezama Lima imagines it. It is not sufficient to have a spiritual experience. The American artist must labor to create a landscape from nature. In *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, a collection of essays heavily influenced by both Walcott and Wilson Harris, Elizabeth DeLoughery et al. argue that “for composite cultures, belonging in the Caribbean landscape means engaging in historical reconstructions that may largely be an act of the imagination or a desire for wholeness that is not achievable” (21). Walcott engages in both of these reconstructions as he remembers his relationship with Anna in *Another Life*. The idealized space of first love presents an analogous situation of idealization confronting reality that is the condition of creating landscape in the Caribbean. Walcott himself makes the analogy in “Leaving School,” “Love of that kind never returns ... it is so self-content, so assured of immortality that it irradiates not only the first loved but her landscape with a profound benediction” (*CPDW* 29). The quotation by Cesar Vallejo that precedes this section, “A Simple Flame” is particularly adroit at capturing the substance of this first love. As Vallejo writes, “What continues in the house is the organ, the gerundial or circular agent ... Negations and affirmations, good and evil have scattered. What continues in the house

¹³² Walcott directly articulates this claim in his interview with Edward Hirsch, “The only possible realization in the West Indies is art. I see no possibility of the country becoming unified and having its own strengths except its art. Because there is no economic power, there is no political power. Art is lasting. It will outlast these things” (55).

is the subject of the act” (*AL* 81). Walcott seeks to “resituate the human in a positively revalued, autonomous nature” that constructs a dramatic echo that cannot be ignored or subsumed by discourses of nothingness or sameness.

One of the ways that Walcott achieves this differentiation of the St. Lucian landscape is by inscribing himself as poet upon it. He describes the process of painting as a conflation of the artist with the landscape by stating that “The mountain’s crouching back begins to ache” (*AL* 55). Obviously, the mountain can’t feel pain, but the artist’s back would ache after laboring so hard over his work. The mountain also symbolizes the task, which in this case is the artist’s articulation of himself. Translating the landscape on canvas becomes difficult for the young Walcott, but in his labors, he comes to feel the island in his very bones. Similarly in baroque paintings the human body was presented in life-like fashion and often contorted to evoke a strong emotional response in the viewer.¹³³ For Walcott as the writer of the poem, placing his body back in the landscape reinforces his Caribbean orientation although he is physically removed from it at the time of writing. Furthermore, it invests the landscape with the “dramatic echo” of a person negotiating his relationship with nature to create that landscape. For as Helen Tiffin argues, “the term landscape both denotes and connotes more than simply “land” or “earth” (199). It suggests “an observer, an attitude to land, a point of view” (Tiffin 199). By inserting himself in the landscape, Walcott provides an alternative point of view for the appreciation of Caribbean landscape one that is centered in that space, as Baugh

¹³³ Two salient examples of this trait can be seen in the *medias res* depiction of Abraham’s sacrifice of Issac and Judith’s beheading of Holofernes. Michaelangelo’s depictions of the same on the roof of the Sistine Chapel show the aggressors prior to the act, in a moment of balance and contemplation, while the baroque images stress the internal conflict and human pathos of the moment.

notes, “For Walcott, to define himself as Caribbean man is to delineate a view of the world and to locate himself in the world” (1).

The idea of laboring over a painting connects back to Walcott’s initial mystical experience. One of the tropes that recur throughout that section is the idea of labor and laboring which connects his mystical experience with the very real experience of labor as experienced by the poor of St. Lucia. In this moment, Walcott “climbed with the labouring smoke” and “drowned in labouring breakers of bright cloud,” (*CP* 184) all as a means of recognizing the lights on in the laborer’s homes. These lights serve as a link and connection between the poet and the people. Their labor occurs in the field, but his will occur in the field of art as he negotiates a place for the island in the canons of world literature. This moment is a moment of conversion for him, one that he compares to Saul’s in the Acts of the Apostle. Like Saul, he receives a new mission and a new life. The poet narrator justifies his labor as concretely important in a way similar to Heaney’s holding of the pen in “At a Potato Digging.” The ancestral, or in Walcott’s world, the communal physical labor is transformed into poetic labor, in a conscious building of society.

In a sense, *Another Life* is the artist’s self-portrait – one that contains a revealing look at Caribbean culture, but one whose focus remains on the individual. Walcott’s *Omeros* assumes a much wider vista and is written in a loose version of terza rima, invoking both Dante and the novel with its verse form and the scope of its material. Ranging from the present of the Caribbean islands to the North American past, from the realism of describing postcolonial St. Lucia to the Achille’s dreamscapes, the poem works to present the interconnectedness of the Caribbean in a powerful baroque image

that does not privilege any particular world view, neither European nor African. By widening the scope of this project beyond the understanding of himself, Walcott advances a humanist worldview of the Caribbean for “humanism, after all, is not merely the affirmation of the dignity of one person, of each individual alone; it is also an affirmation of the dignity of all humanity, the affirmation of an inter-human morality, community, and social justice” (Cohen xviii). *Omeros* moves beyond the individual to advance the humanity and centrality of the Caribbean in Western discourse.

If *Another Life* serves as a self-portrait, *Omeros* offers a multi-paneled mural of the Caribbean that focuses on the connection of landscape to history.¹³⁴ As Sara Phillips Casteel notes, “*Another Life* is a transitional work in Walcott’s self-articulation, remaining on the Crusoe/Adam axis while also anticipating the more sociological orientation of the Homeric works that follow it” (13). By reworking the epic form of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* to accommodate Caribbean experience, Walcott deepens the dramatic echoes that enliven the Caribbean landscape. The long poem engages the multiple inheritances of the Caribbean by affirming “itself as a writing upon another writing” (Santiago 34). These writings are not only the literary traditions of island and epic writings, but also the folk traditions and culture of the people of St. Lucia whose lives are affected by the history of slavery and colonialism, as well as the day to day reality of neocolonialism and tourism. In *Omeros*, Walcott’s engagement with the landscape leads to a more thorough examination of history and a quest to write the irruption of the Caribbean subject into history.

¹³⁴ Edward Baugh makes a similar comparison in his study of Walcott: “At the same time, while the narrative moves forward, it also has spatial integrity like a painting. Walcott has described the juxtaposition of segments, like panels, as making the poem like a mural” (187).

In *Caribbean Literature and the Environment*, DeLoughery et.al suggest that Walcott's critique of history begins with his engagement with the natural world, leading to an evolution of his thought that can be traced from "Isla Incognita" to the "The Muse of History" (10). I would like to follow their suggestion in order to flesh out precisely the relationship between engagement with nature/creation of a landscape and the critique of history using Edward Soja's *Postmodern Geographies* and Glissant's *Poetics of Relation* as critical guides. Soja's postmodern geographies are particularly relevant to a discussion of Walcott's method as the baroque imagination shares many characteristics that have been identified as postmodern. Soja's work reveals the fundamental dialogue at work in Walcott's most comprehensive Caribbean poem: the interplay between space and history that critically challenges the assumptions of Euro-American superiority.

Omeros reflects a more mature Walcott who has wrestled with the idea of history and determined not to be subservient to it. In the interim between *Another Life* and *Omeros*, he has published "The Muse of History," an essay that disavows history as a creative force. As Gikandi notes, "Walcott's refusal to recognize history as a creative force is really a negation of a European model of history anchored on notions of progress and temporal closure" (Gikandi 9). Walcott's epic poem charts the contemporary Caribbean in a way that echoes Hegel's notion of prehistory, yet challenges its assumption of non-personhood at the same time: "The periods—whether we suppose them to be centuries or millennia—that were passed by nations before history was written among them,— and which may have been filled with revolutions, nomadic wanderings, and the strangest mutations,— are on that very account destitute of *objective* history, because they present no *subjective* history, no annals" (Hegel 63). Walcott interrogates

the Caribbean space, one that has no history in the Hegelian sense of the term, but he does so in a way that reveals that this pre-historical time period Hegel talks about is indeed shared by the Caribbean region and constitutes its mode of being. Walcott counters the claim of pre-history, or non-history, in the Caribbean by positing the subject as one who experiences and records these displacements in his or her psyche, forging from them a new consciousness. As he did in *Another Life*, Walcott counters the claim of Caribbean nothingness by forcefully asserting Caribbean subjectivity: “unless I triangulate my travels, my self as a poet, both I and the island are lost . . . I’m webbed in its design” (“Isla Incognita” 52).

In a sense, Walcott’s text enacts “the more flexible and balanced critical theory that re-entwines the making of history with the social production of space, with the construction and configuration of human geographies” that Soja identifies. It can also be seen as a synthesis of time and space in a way that elevates the spatial to the level of the historical. *Omeros* functions as a complex chronotope¹³⁵ in which the exigencies of time are subordinated to those of space: “Simultaneities intervene, extending our point of view outward in an infinite number of lines connecting the subject to a whole world of comparable instances, complicating the temporal flow of meaning” (Soja 23). The pull of history and space on the artist are productively placed in tension with one another in order to secure a place for the Caribbean as well as question the traditional criteria that places Europe above the Caribbean in historical hierarchy.

¹³⁵ David Hart comments extensively on the chronotope in “Caribbean Chronotopes: From Exile to Agency.” (*Anthurium* 2.2, 2004).

Walcott critically begins the process of spatializing history in one of his best-known essays, “The Muse of History” in which he rejects “the idea of history as time for its original concept as myth” (*WTS* 37). Moving from history as time to history as myth allows Walcott to break free of a Hegelian concept of history that requires time for the functioning of the Historical Spirit through the dialectic. In myth, sacred space acquires the position of writing as each locus serves as a point of connection between humanity and its gods. In the New World, the natural world serves as a record of conquest, but also as a cradle of possibilities. Walcott quotes Pablo Neruda, as one of the great New World poets who recognizes the “numinous,” “elemental privilege of naming the New World which annihilates History” (“Muse” *WTS* 40). The quotation identifies the poet’s integral relationship to nature “*equinoctial stamen, lance-like purple, / your aroma rose through my roots / into the cup I drained, into the most tenuous / word not yet born in my mouth*” (“Muse” *WTS* 40). The poet understands himself through a communion with nature that results in language.

Unlike Walcott, Hegel considers nature to be bound by rational laws but unconscious of them: “The movement of the solar system takes place according to unchangeable laws. These laws are Reason, implicit in the phenomena in question. But neither the sun nor the planets, which revolve around it according to these laws, can be said to have any consciousness of them” (Hegel 34). Walcott, along with Lezama and other New World artists, argues against the designation of nature as incapable of reason. Instead they fashion a counter-reason, a baroque reason that operates according to a principle of Relation that acknowledges the interconnected nature of humanity’s

relationship to the environment. Space is not regarded as inert and subject to human domination, but as a living partner in the creation of culture.

Glissant, Césaire, Walcott and Carpentier also take issue with Hegel's conception of history which has been so influential in the advance of colonialism and imperialism. Glissant terms it a valuation of the root in the sense of identity: "my root is the strongest" ... "a person's worth is determined by his root" (*Poetics* 17) which directly relates to Hegel's understanding of man's place in relation to history and the state:

The State, its laws, its arrangements, constitute the rights of its members; its natural features, its mountains, air, and waters, are *their* country, their fatherland, their outward material property; the history of this State, *their* deeds; what their ancestors have produced, belongs to them and lives in their memory. All is their possession, just as they are possessed by it; for it constitutes their existence, their being.

Their imagination is occupied with the ideas thus presented, while the adoption of these laws, and of a fatherland so conditioned is the expression of their will. It is this matured totality which thus constitutes one Being, the spirit of *one* People. To it the individual members belong; each unit is the Son of his Nation, and at the same time - in as far as the State to which he belongs is undergoing development - the Son of his Age. (Hegel 52)

This is the impulse that Glissant attributes to filiation and which he aims to disrupt by positing the example of the Caribbean, of the rhizome. The rhizome functions through Relation and subverts the Western (Hegelian) concept of the root: "Today the ancient intolerant violence of filiation is shaken up in the anarchistic violence of clashing cultures, in which no projection imposes its line and in which—this bears repeating—legitimacy...comes undone" (*Poetics* 61).

Glissant's approach is a reworking of what Alejo Carpentier and Eugenio D'Ors had already fashioned in regards to the baroque. Like Glissant's rhizome, the baroque functions in cyclic time by affiliation rather than filiation. History is composed of the

various networks of nations and peoples that come into contact with one another rather than as the workings of a Universal spirit teleologically oriented towards progress. Walcott elaborates this point in “The Muse of History” as he states, “for them (the New World artists) history is fiction, subject to a fitful muse, memory. Their philosophy, based on a contempt for historic time is revolutionary, for what they repeat to the New World is its simultaneity with the Old” (*WTS* 37). By stressing simultaneity, the New World artist disrupts the originary myths of the Old as propounded by Hegel and suggests that the rupture, displacement, and mestizaje at the heart of the Caribbean experience also occurred in the old. Essentially, what Walcott and Glissant aim to do is disrupt the myths of purity and originality by which the Old World has claimed continuing dominance over the New as they posit a new way of understanding cross-cultural relations.

Through the varied characters in *Omeros*, Walcott explores baroque history as it is actively lived in the Caribbean. Some of these personages are actively obsessed by a Hegelian concept of history based on filiation, while others have more fluid conceptions of the past that operates through Relation, treating the landscape as a living participant. Through the characters of Plunkett and the poet-narrator, Walcott critiques the shortcomings of History, while he explores the necessity of knowing one’s past through the dream quest of Achille. The juxtaposition of these historical narratives widens the possibilities of what can be considered History and develops a theory of the proper relationship between the present and the past. Ma Kilman, Philoctete, and Maud Plunkett have a radically different understanding of history that conforms to baroque concepts of simultaneity, heterogeneity and mestizaje. It is through Ma Kilman’s healing of Philoctete and Maud’s bird quilt that Walcott comes to articulate an alternative

historiography that functions according to the rhizome. Through these multiple narratives, Walcott seeks to establish a sense of place in the Caribbean “through a cross-cultural and synchronic aesthetic that is capable of imagining competing claims, lost histories, as well as a deep attachment to the natural environment in the present” (DeLoughery et al., 21).

Returning to the use of masks as he did with *Crusoe* and *Makak*, Walcott employs a series of personae that interrogate various positions available to the artist when confronting history and landscape in the Caribbean. Walcott’s final position can be determined by weighing these competing discourses against one another, but it is useful to look at each separately. Aside from a few authorial intrusions, Walcott constructs the persona of a poet-narrator to serve as his primary avatar and mouthpiece in the poem. This poet-narrator interacts with the characters in the poem in concrete ways, while also glossing and bridging their actions. He also shares biographical traits with Walcott such as being mulatto and having a sound colonial education. One of the poet-narrator’s alter-egos is Major Dennis Plunkett, a pensioned British officer who has lived in St. Lucia since the end of the Second World War, and feels alienated from the “natives” by his color and position. Walcott foregrounds the relationship between Plunkett and the poet-narrator in one of the few direct authorial intrusions in the text:

This wound I have stitched into Plunkett’s character.
He has to be wounded, affliction is the one theme
of this work, this fiction, since every I is a

fiction finally. Phantom narrator, resume. (*O* 28)

The positioning of the quest for identity and a history for the dispossessed is at the heart of *Omeros*. Plunkett is a man without an empire whose identity as a member of a

hegemonic group is fast disappearing. His double, the poet-narrator, has never belonged to the ruling class of an empire and is now trying to formulate a history out of the silence and fragments left by the same empire. The poet-narrator's quest is to find a way to reconnect with the land after the separation caused by education and travel, which makes his position similar to Plunkett's, in that he has had access to the educational benefits of the empire. The poet-narrator's critique of Plunkett is also a critique of himself. Neither can escape the Homeric allusions evoked by Helen's name and beauty, nor can they help displacing her story with their own.

Plunkett and the poet-narrator are both obsessed with mystifying Helen by placing her within History. Plunkett and the narrator imagine narratives for Helen, narratives that simultaneously show their desire to forgive Helen for transgressions, real and imagined, and to seek her pardon and approval as well. The poet-narrator writes:

I remembered that morning when Plunkett and I,
compelled by her diffident saunter up the beach,
sought grounds for her arrogance. He in the khaki

grass around the redoubt, I in the native speech
of its shallows; like enemy ships of the line,
we crossed on a parallel; he had been convinced

that his course was right; I despised any design
that kept to a chart, that calculated the winds.
my inspiration was impulse, but the Major's zeal

to make her the pride of the Battle of the Saints,
her yellow dress on its flagship, was an ideal
no different from mine. (*O* 270)

In essence, both Plunkett and the poet-narrator are falling victim to the myth of history that Walcott describes in "The Muse of History," producing "a literature of recrimination

and despair, a literature of revenge written by the descendants of slaves” and “a literature of remorse written by the descendents of the masters” (*WTS* 37). Plunkett tries to change history to a metaphor, but that is futile, and dangerous. History has its consequences and Plunkett himself bears the wound. The poet-narrator alters the image of Helen of Troy “in self-defense” as a way of protecting himself against the weight of literature, and the absence of representation. The poet-narrator cannot but see Helen through the perspective of the Greek Helen. Yet, the father’s injunction that the narrator write about the land and the faceless people of the land speaks of the debt he owes Helen in the yellow dress and all other Helens.

Writing this history down is of paramount importance for the narrator and Plunkett. Both colonially educated men look to the written word as a way of fixing history and declaring themselves as a part of the world. Plunkett is quite clear when he finds out the true name of the island, “‘Iounalo, eh? It’s all folk-malarkey!’ ... History was fact, History was a cannon, not a lizard” (*O* 92). The natural world and the folk legends that survived the erasure of the Taino, Arawak, Carib or Callinagos do not count in Plunkett’s assessment of history. A proper history recounts the shifts in power, the battles between great empires, and the invention of technological advances.

Plunkett couches his narrative in the terms of a benevolent colonialism that places him as the giver of history to Helen at the center. In order to do so, the major reacts against a Western dialectical model of history that states that “A few make history. All the rest are witnesses” (*O* 104). In book one, Plunkett describes his motivation for finding a history for Helen as the off-shoot of pity, a way of making up for the female lack, and the lack of the subjected Other: “Helen needed a history, / that was the pity Plunkett felt

towards her. / Not his, but her story. Not theirs, but Helen's war" (O 30). As the male in possession of the written History, Plunkett validates his manhood and superiority to the subjected Helen. He is the white man, an educated soldier in the British army; as such he has access to history and can bequeath it to the underprivileged Other, still the Major is yet another faceless colonist in the history of the empire. Helen's lack of history is figured in economic terms, as the poet narrator writes "but the bill had never been paid. / Not to that housemaid swinging a plastic sandal" (O 31). Yet, Robert Hamner notes that:

Walcott makes the Major conscious of the type of Eurocentric hegemony that Edward Said warns against in *Culture and Imperialism* 'Only recently have Westerners become aware that what they have to say about the history and cultures of "subordinate" peoples is challengeable by the people themselves'. (64)

The major's consciousness of this alternate source of history stems not only from the contradictory historical documents of St. Lucian history he has found, but from his own inability to complete the task.

Plunkett finds himself thwarted in his historical task because the baroque nature of history in the Caribbean interrupts his quest. Rather than finding "Helen's History" he finds another Plunkett who died in the battles for St. Lucia and claims him as a son: "This was his search's end. He had come far enough / to find a namesake and a son" (O 94). In this gesture, Plunkett reverses the direction of filiation and makes himself father to his own ancestor. This baroque reworking of history is only possible in the imagination and because of the complex history of the Caribbean, where so many have traveled and left their mark before. Plunkett himself has been indelibly marked by his years in the Caribbean and comes to claim that as his homeland, finding discomfort at the Officer's club and ultimately turning to Ma Kilman for spiritual healing.

The search for history takes on another valence when looked at from the perspective of Achille. If Plunkett speaks to the imperial aspect of the author's heritage, Achille represents the African element. Although he may make the search for the past seem circular and moot in Plunkett, "there is really no denial of the past in Walcott" (Baugh 10). Achille's journey into history mirrors Plunkett's in that he is in search of his own ancestry, but differs in method and response. Although Walcott has written that the longing for Africa is but another misplaced response to history, in Achille's narrative it is necessary for him to return to the past to find out "who he was" (Walcott, *O* 130). This is a necessary return, or detour in Glissant's terms, that gives Achille a sense of pride in his history and a desire to know what things mean. This detour is a form of baroque history because Achille creates his ancestor in his own image: "he knew by that walk it was himself in his father" (*O* 136). This father, Afolabe, explains the importance of naming to Achille in a way that engages with the trope of nothingness. When Achille cannot tell Afolabe the meaning of his name, the father responds: "A name means something...Unless the sound means nothing. Then you would be nothing. / Did they think you were nothing in that other kingdom?" (*O* 137). Afolabe's words poignantly signal the reality of slavery in the Americas as well as the necessity of engaging the tropes of nothingness with substance from the past and the present. Knowing the history of slavery and arrival in the Caribbean is a way of giving meaning to the African fragments that have survived in Caribbean culture, traces of Relation. Without history the words are simply meaningless sounds. Achille returns from his dream quest empowered: "The king going home" (*O* 159). Because the African element has suffered the erasure of

the Middle Passage, it needs to be actively re-constructed in narrative and myth so that Caribbean society can regain wholeness.¹³⁶

The poet-narrator takes on a position somewhere in between that of Plunkett and Achille. Like Achille, his quest in part derives from exhortation of his father who urges him in a similar dream sequence to rewrite history from the position of the forgotten. The poet-narrator notes: “He spoke for those Helens from an earlier time” (*O* 73). These Helens are the coal carriers who were “not the fair, gentler sex” but “darker and stronger” and thereby denied a place in literary history. The father’s injunction to the son is that he “give those feet a voice” (*O* 76). Giving a voice to the dispossessed that neither over-romanticizes their poverty nor caricatures their flaws becomes the poet-narrator’s quest. The father’s injunction is central in this construction: “Your own work owes them / because the couplet of those multiplying feet / made your first rhyme. Look, they climb, and no one knows them; / they take their copper pittances, and your duty (*O* 75). The poet knows his vocation to realize himself as a poet is inextricably bound with bringing the Caribbean and its many voiceless inhabitants into dialogue with Literature and Culture. By naming their reality within a work of literature, the poet gives resonance to that experience, the “echo” that he felt in both Hemingway’s Spain and Joyce’s Ireland.

The poet-narrator’s inscription of Helen into his own narrative can be read as a response to Plunkett’s creation of history for the dispossessed, as the narrator identifies himself as one of the historically marginalized. The poet-narrator also hopes to claim Helen for his own, but rather than imagine her as embedded in a historical and personal

¹³⁶ Walcott’s *Omeros* is limited in that it only speaks to the European and African influences in the Caribbean. This is in part due to its setting in St. Lucia. A similar narrative about Trinidad, the East Indian element of the culture could not have been disregarded. In his Nobel speech, Walcott addresses the Indian and Asian presence in the Caribbean as also formative of its culture.

narrative, he removes her from linear time through her identification with the landscape. In Walcott's baroque imagination the landscape has no need of narrative because it speaks for itself in its own way. Similarly, Helen is granted her right to opacity: "There in her head of ebony, / there was no real need for the historian's / remorse, nor for literature's" (*O* 271). Neither position is correct as Walcott states in an interview about *Omeros*: "one reason I don't like talking about an epic is that I think it is wrong to try to ennoble people. And just to write history is wrong. History makes similes of people, but these people are their own nouns" (143). The poet-narrator relinquishes the task of imposing meaning upon the landscape by allowing the actions of each character to speak for themselves.

Ultimately these failed histories embody the tensions present in Glissant's expression of Relation. As he notes, independence is important because without it less dominant cultures can be subsumed into hegemonic cultures under the guise of cosmopolitanism or diversity.¹³⁷ These more fragile cultures, of which the Caribbean is one, must cultivate independence before fully engaging in Relation, despite the attendant dangers of such a procedure.¹³⁸ Part of what protects independencies is the right to opacity. In this case, opacity precludes the historian from having complete and total access to the object of his inquiry. Helen, like the island itself, preserves her privacy and refuses to allow any of these historians a sense of satisfaction. One by one each of the historians comes to see that they cannot possess her, except on her own terms. For that

¹³⁷ Glissant advocates interchange between cultures, but notes that the exchange must be reciprocal and not overly lopsided leading to the dependency of one culture on another: "Dependencies are infirmities of Relation, obstacles to the hard work of its entanglement. Independencies, for the same reasons, despite being uncomfortable or precarious, are always worth something" (*Poetics* 155).

¹³⁸ The danger of focusing and demanding independence is that it can lead to excessive and destructive nationalism, as in the case of the Yugoslavian genocides or Hitler's Germany.

reason Plunkett and the poet-narrator back off, while Achille agrees to raise a child who may not be his own, although he will give it an African name (*O* 318). The figurative future of the island remains in the ever-changing relationship of the people to the landscape.

In contrast to the word-bound histories proposed by Plunkett, the poet-narrator and Achille, Walcott presents the story of Philoctete as someone who lives history through his wounded condition. The story of Philoctete literally brackets all other stories in the poem and serves as a linking point for all of the characters in *Omeros*, drawing attention to the impact of colonialism on their psyches. However, the wound also carries the story of its healing and suggests a new relationship to history that can lead to social healing.

Like his Greek counterpart, Philoctete has a wound that will not heal, and it keeps him from interacting with compatriots as he seals himself off in a drunken stupor at Ma Kilman's shop.¹³⁹ Philoctete's re-integration is wished for by the community, although he despairs of it himself. However, Philoctete does not feel that his pain is solely his own: "He believed the swelling came from the chained ankles / of his grandfathers. Or else why was there no cure? / That the cross he carried was not only the anchor's // but that of his race, for a village black and poor" (*O* 19). The persistence of the hurt in his foot, signals the legacy of slavery that continues to manifest itself in inequality among the poor and black in St. Lucian, and thereby in all of Caribbean society. The condition of being wounded is also one that Philoctete shares with many other characters in the narrative, among these Major Plunkett, Maud, and the poet-narrator. Although Plunkett and the

¹³⁹ Philoctete also stands for the poet himself as he juxtaposes Philo's healing with his own, "I felt the wrong love leaving me where I stood" (*O* 249). In writing the cure for Philoctete, he finds the cure for his own European obsessions.

poet-narrator do not belong to the same social class as the wounded sailor, they are also wounded by the legacy of colonialism. Plunkett's color and status alienate him from the fisherman, Helen, and Ma Kilman while his awareness of the island's history separates him from other British ex-patriots at the officer's club. He is not considered to truly belong to either group. The poet, both Walcott and the persona of the narrator, shares in the wound of colonialism in another way. First, he is of mixed blood, African, English, and Dutch. He has grown up with the people he writes about, but has been separated by language and by geographic distance. He comes back to the island as a native, but also as a tourist. His position is uncomfortable. He loves the island, but by writing about it, he also contributes to its exploitation. His love for the islands is like Plunkett's love of Helen, tainted by the desire for possession. These Caribbean figures mirror Neoptolemeus and Odysseus in their misguided desire to possess the bow without winning over the man.

As in Sophocles *Philoctetes*, St. Lucian reality proves to be difficult terrain to navigate. Allegiances and codes of honor are not easy to discern in times of conflict, and the right course difficult to ascertain. One constant is the palpable awareness of the wound. Philoctete's sore festers and literally infects the air with its stench. It demands a resolution, but the resolution to a historical hurt seems impossible to obtain. In the Greek play, Sophocles does not offer any account of Philoctetes' healing, resolving the play with the deus ex machina appearance of Heracles/Heracles. Walcott gives the reader a detailed account of the healing of the wound. Furthermore, Philoctete's healing takes place on stage, bringing out all of the elements Walcott sees as necessary for social healing.

Ma Kilman, as the owner of the No Pain Café and a practitioner of Catholicism and obeah, is the ultimate baroque figure in the text and uniquely suited to the task of reintegrating the fractured elements of society as well as Philoctete's battered body. She syncretizes both Christian and African beliefs to affect a change in Philo that will extend to the rest of the community. It is after attending a Catholic church service that Ma Kilman becomes cognizant of Philo's wound by the pain caused to her by her own stockings, a convention imposed by observance of colonial practice as the heat of the Caribbean makes such garments unnecessary and uncomfortable. They dig into her flesh and she remembers an herb recommended by her African grandmother that will heal the pain; "her empathy is a sign that her redemptive quest is undertaken not for herself but for her people" a contrast to the quest of Achille and Plunkett (Baugh 193).

In the subsequent chapters, Ma Kilman relinquishes some of her European manners and morals in order to more closely live with the land in hopes of finding the herb. She does so when she allows her head to rub in the dirt and crawl with ants. She discards Western elements of deportment in order to commune more completely with the landscape. When she does find the herb, she uses another implement of colonial oppression, a cauldron used for boiling sugar, to boil the herbs and cleanse Philo. In a baroque gesture of return, she reappropriates a tool of oppression and uses it for healing. Through this syncretic ceremony, Philo is healed because the different aspects of the past are reconciled and made new. Philo is also healed because Ma Kilman yields to the promptings of the land. As Baugh notes, "Nature itself empathizes with the human wound it must heal" (193). Ma Kilman embodies Walcott's articulation of a living landscape because she allows the island to speak to her.

Ma Kilman also precipitates the end of the narrator's quest by healing Philoctete's wound. This healing extends from the gangrened leg throughout the island, finally reaching the poet narrator who says, "I felt the wrong love leaving me ... I felt her voice draining from mine" (*O* 249). The wrong love is the selfish need of the artist for the poor to remain the same. As the poet-narrator confesses in book six, "Didn't I want the poor / to stay in the same light so I could transfix / them in amber in the afterglow of empire, / preferring a shed of palm-thatch with tilted sticks / to that blue bus-stop?" (*O* 227). The desire for stasis is antithetical to the creative desire and growth and healing must follow death. The narrator receives official sanction for his reintegration with the community in his descent to the underworld with Seven Seas: "My light was clear, its homage to Omeros my exorcism" (*O* 294). Helen's role as the muse for the narrator gives way to that of the sea-swift as the poet narrator says, "she sewed the Atlantic rift with a needle's line" (*O* 319). In the poem, Walcott also sews together cultural rifts with his pen and verse by acknowledging them.

This is the baroque form of historiography foretold in *Omeros* by Maud's construction of the bird quilt. Maud's quilt offers an alternative historiography of the island and one that speaks spatially. Walcott's description of her quilt is lovely and contains many of the same rationales for writing a baroque history focused on the spatial. The quilt, like Walcott's rhizomatic text is inspired by nature: "Needlepoint constellations / on a clear night had prompted this intricate thing" (*O* 88). As Walcott states in "The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry?" cultures originate "by the force of their natural surroundings," in other words, "You build according to the topography of where you live" (*CPDW* 56). Maud has derived her inspiration from the cosmos and seeks to

constellate her own meaning in the form of a bird quilt as a reaction to Plunkett's cataloguing of canons (O 88). Likewise, Walcott has created his text as a way of contesting the linear, progressivist form of history that Plunkett represents. Maud, like Walcott, derives the spatial relation of the quilt by looking at the clustering of the stars at night. The constellations of birds are identified with constellations of writing as their beaks are described as "like his scratching pen's" (O 88). Walcott's collections of poetry from *25 Poems* to *The Star-apple Kingdom* can be understood as the birds that carry bits and pieces of his Caribbean identity and message throughout the literary landscape. They come together in *Omeros* "to pin themselves to the silk, and, crying their names" (O 89). Walcott's concerns in his shorter poetry receive their full expression in this epic text.

The quilt draws upon Bond's *Orinthology* for its inspiration; Maud mimics the birds drawn on its pages, but releases them from Bond's descriptions and placement. She places each bird according to where it will best complement the others on the quilt. The birds lose their "Greek or Latin tags" and assume a new meaning for the quilt maker. Furthermore, these birds once placed on the quilt are no longer silent. They sing and they peck at her hands, suggesting that once released from Bond's book, they can now freely speak and react against their creator. In much the same way, Walcott's characters in *Omeros* challenge his commonly held assumptions and bring the narrator to task for his rhetorical excesses or patronizing comments. The birds also suggest national pride as each becomes a flag on the island quilt of sea-green. Belonging and participation are unique to each individual as a flag is to the country it represents. The quilt implies an ethics, as Levinas states in *Humanism of the Other* that man "is stitched of responsibilities" to others (67). Once brought into relation on the quilt each bird is

dependent on the others for its complete meaning. Maud's and Walcott's baroque imaginations aim to capture these many cultures within the greater culture of the Caribbean to indicate the degree of difference and variety within the sun-kissed land. The up-and-down motion of Maud's hand with the sewing needle mirrors that of the sea-swift and ties the threads of the narratives together. As Walcott states at the conclusion of

Omeros:

I followed a sea-swift to both sides of this text;
her hyphen stitched its seam, like the interlocking
basins of a globe in which one half fits the next

into an equator, both shores neatly clicking
into a globe; except that its meridian
was not North and South but East and West. One, the New

World, made exactly like the Old, halves of one brain (O 319)¹⁴⁰

Like Maud and the sea-swift, Walcott has created a multi-faceted narrative that gives a face, or faces to the Caribbean. As he states, "I sang our wide country, the Caribbean Sea" (O 320). He has given the voiceless a narrative that does not seek to possess them, although it does seek to represent them in literature. By partaking in the written, through literature and myth, Walcott seeks to affect an irruption of history into History.

Omeros moves Walcott's individual and poetic projects further along the path of re-centering the Caribbean and gaining recognition for the humanity of its inhabitants. The poet considers different historical interpretations, choosing a historiography that emphasizes the importance of and reversals of baroque history over linear, progressivist History. Ultimately, *Omeros* presents a baroque canvas in which many facets of the Caribbean are explored and placed in relation to the wider world. Baugh captures the

¹⁴⁰ Walcott will return to this image of the bifurcated globe in *The Prodigal*, however, rather than identifying it as a disembodied brain, he will place himself at the center: "a light meridian of the hemispheres-- / saying to the sea and Europe, "Here I am" (P 36).

poetic achievement of *Omeros* by quoting Walcott's dear friend and fellow poet, Joseph Brodsky who states, "Walcott has immortalized the Caribbean by giving it 'a status of lyrical reality.' When the world acclaims *Omeros*, it is recognizing the Caribbean as a 'full' place in the world's imagination" (28).

In this way, Walcott's baroque imagination posits a counter-discourse to the marginalizing discourse of the center that relegates perceived inferior cultural status to the periphery. In Walcott's next two forays into the long poem, he will shift from a poetics that defines the Caribbean to one that is engaged with the project of provincializing Europe and making the Caribbean a center of cultural production. Walcott does this through the presentation of his poetic persona as an errant traveler whose worldliness is enhanced by being from the Caribbean. He contains all the experiences of his travel as well as a profound Caribbean orientation that colors all that he sees whether it is in Vienna or Vera Cruz. Travel and its influence on both the traveler and those visited play a large part in Walcott's understanding and articulation of the baroque as well as his re-centering project. While the baroque can occur in artists who remain primarily rooted in one spot, like William Faulkner, José Lezama Lima, Dunstan St. Omer, it nevertheless is necessary for Walcott's re-centering of the Caribbean. Beginning in *Another Life* and *Omeros*, Walcott describes his impressions while traveling in the United States and Europe in a way that allows him to reverse the colonizing trope in which Europeans wrote over the Caribbean with their own impressions, and signals the new direction his work will take in *Tiepolo's Hound* and *The Prodigal*.¹⁴¹ Walcott travels to Europe and, in a sense, creolizes the space by relating it to his own experiences at

¹⁴¹ Walcott's travels also feature prominently in *The Fortunate Traveller* and *The Arkansas Testament* just to name a few.

home. *Tiepolo's Hound* furthers this project by considering how Europe may have been creolized by the migrations of Caribbean artists. In effect, *Tiepolo's Hound* is a meditation on space that seeks to juxtapose Caribbean space with European space. Walcott has already filled the imaginative void with positive images of the Caribbean in *Another Life* and *Omeros* along with his plays and shorter poetry. What remains to be done is a rearticulation of the imaginative space that privileges the Caribbean as a site of origins.

Published in 2000, the long poem marks a new maturity of vision in Walcott's poetry. To a certain extent, Walcott is free from the colonial schizophrenia of his youth and has learned to assimilate the features of every ancestor (*WTS* 36). Yet, he returns to the moment of choice facing the colonial artist that he has often chronicled, most notably in *Another Life*, of whether to stay at home or to venture abroad in search of artistic fulfillment and recognition of his talent. The poem intertwines the stories of Camille Pissaro, a Sephardic Jew born in St. Thomas, who moves to Paris and becomes one of the progenitors of the Impressionist movement, and the poet, who is in search of an elusive painting in which the slash of pink that marked the thigh of a white hound represented for him absolute mastery of the artist's craft. The poem crisscrosses the Caribbean, the Atlantic, Europe, and North Africa in its quest for a superbly painted white hound and in its desire to ascertain the role of the Caribbean artist. It broadens the chronotope and presents the poet as a traveler who engages in fruitful exchange with his metropolitan Others.

Tiepolo's Hound simultaneously presents the life of Caribbean-born impressionist painter Camille Pissarro, the poet's search across the world's museums for the image of a

white hound that encapsulated for him the height of artistic mastery of craft, and the poet's choice of poetic vocation. It is instructive to return to Soja's conceptualization of a postmodern geography in order to understand Walcott's baroque imagination at work in this text. In "History: Geography: Modernity," Soja posits that "just as space, time, and matter delineate and encompass the essential qualities of the physical world, spatiality, temporality and social being can be seen as the abstract dimensions which together comprise all facets of human existence" (25). The baroque imagination is one that is aware of these three facets and sees them as indispensable for the articulation of a world view. In the juxtaposition of these two artists, who both originate in the Caribbean but ultimately choose to work in different places, Walcott explores the spatial and temporal dimensions of artistic being and the impact they have on an individual's body of work. In this book, Walcott again revisits his familiar themes, but places a particular emphasis on the possibility of not having lived out his choice of remaining committed to the Caribbean. By juxtaposing his life with that of Camille Pissarro, Walcott validates his choice and advances the notion that art and literature can center the Caribbean in the imaginary of others.

In part, Soja comes to this conclusion about space, time, and being through the work of art historian John Berger, who theorized the crisis in the novel in spatial terms. Berger states that a clear, lineal narrative is no longer possible for the novel because readers and writers are constantly aware of the "simultaneity and extension of events and possibilities" (qtd. in Soja 22). In other words, "it is scarcely any longer possible to tell a straight story sequentially unfolding in time. And this is because we are too aware of

what is continually traversing the storyline laterally” (Berger qtd. in Soja 22).¹⁴² In *Tiepolo’s Hound*, Walcott focuses on the simultaneities and extensions inherent in biography and autobiography in order to interrogate the importance of place on artistic production and fulfillment. The parallel life of Pissarro allows him to explore the impact of spatiality, foregrounding it above temporality, on the construction of the artist’s social being. In juxtaposing his choice to stay in the Caribbean with Pissarro’s choice to leave, Walcott moves the focus of discourse away from Europe and towards the Caribbean, effectually provincializing the former.

Tiepolo’s Hound is also an homage to painting, which aids in foregrounding the spatialization of history and being at work in the text. As this is the case, it is useful to consider the Baroque from the perspective of the plastic arts. In *The Painter’s Mind*, Romare Bearden and Carl Holty reaffirm the idea that the Baroque is more “than a dissolution of Renaissance style; we see today that it [the Baroque] was something else. It did no less than establish a new vision and a new space” (129). This new vision created room for the peoples and landscapes previously unknown to Europe. Ultimately, a baroque painting encourages its viewers to contemplate multiple points of view as it presents a host of figures for the viewer’s pleasure, amusement, and edification. In Veronese’s “The Feast in the House of Levi,” where Walcott thinks to have first seen the dog, the spectral white hound that haunts his imagination, the numerous characters include Moors, Germans, dwarfs, buffoons, and dogs. Thus the picture does not present merely of the rich and influential of Venetian society but the foreigners and lower classes

¹⁴² Berger’s comments on the novel are applicable to Walcott’s long poem because as Baugh suggests, “This work fashions a biography with a difference, one which is in dialogue with autobiography, while the whole is a commodious, multi-faceted novel of sorts” (209).

as well. Rather than decadence, these canvases speak of a controlled mastery of the art of painting and an innovation in imagining the relationships of the world.

Two names that recur frequently in Walcott's poem, Tiepolo and Veronese, were both great Baroque painters of the 17th century with exquisite control over form and structure. Thus it is not surprising that Walcott should find an elusive artistic ideal in these works. Comparing Walcott's poetic structure in *Tiepolo's Hound* to the structuring of baroque master-works, yields insight into Walcott's poetic method. Like Walcott's other long poems, *Tiepolo's Hound* is divided into books, which contain numbered poems that are further subdivided into sections. The different poems serve as individual but interrelated pieces that build on each other thematically, juxtaposing elements of the narrator's life with that of Pissarro.

In a deviation from the variety of *Omeros*, the poem keeps a consistent poetic structure throughout of alternately rhyming couplets that call to mind, yet deconstruct the idea of a frame around a painting, encouraging the reader to see the poem as through a jalousie window. In his comprehensive study on the poet *Derek Walcott*, Baugh finds that the versification achieves a "nice balance between pattern and flexibility," and that "depends on the discreet blending of couplet and quatrain. The lines are arranged in unrhymed couplets on the page, but each pair of couplets constitutes a quatrain" (210). By intermixing, couplet and quatrain, Walcott reframes our vision of Pissarro, painting, and the role of the artist. This rhyming pattern—slant rhyme, in many cases—suggests that every picture frame necessarily constitutes an absence; it cannot contain the totality of the subject it aims to represent, particularly if that subject is the landscape or the vocation of the artist. Likewise, it continually draws attention to the simultaneity of

events beyond the scope of the poem, encouraging a baroque interpretation of reality that continually draws the eye toward the margins.

Each chapter in *Tiepolo's Hound* can be considered one panel in an intricately constructed baroque painting depicting the stages of life of the artist. Bearden identifies these stages with the stages of the life of man: "childhood, youth, manhood, and adulthood" (217). *Tiepolo's Hound* has four books chronicling roughly the same epochs in Pissarro's life. One could assume they follow the same course, but Bearden places primary importance in the final stage in which the artist has attained the most refined control of his art; whereas, Walcott luxuriates in the first three stages, and only cursorily attempts the fourth, reserving a full treatment of that stage for *The Prodigal*. The juxtapositions of Walcott's own paintings with frames of text further blur the boundaries between artistic and poetic representation. Through these paintings, the reader is provided a glimpse into Walcott's optic sphere, a vision of what his eye sees.¹⁴³

In *Tiepolo's Hound*, Walcott revisits the choice he made to remain in the Caribbean by juxtaposing his life with that of the impressionist painter Camille Pissarro: "the meaning of the whole is a function of how the two stories inform each other" (Baugh 210). Throughout the poem, Walcott interweaves his pursuit for a painted white hound, an emblem for mastery over the craft of painting, with Pissarro's pursuit of an authentic artistic voice in the metropolitan center of Paris. Having achieved fame and garnered international accolades for his work, Walcott considers what might have been had he made the choice to depart for the metropolis rather than remain in the Caribbean. Artfully

¹⁴³ Walcott first addressed the importance of his training as a painter in *Another Life*, his first essay into the long poem; the formal requirements of painting shaped his poetic voice and gave purpose to his vow to "never leave the island until [he] had put down, in paint, in words ... all its sunken, leaf choked ravines, / every neglected, self-pitying inlet / muttering in brackish dialect" (CP 194).

juxtaposing Pissarro's marginal status in French impressionism to his own central status in Caribbean letters, Walcott reaffirms his choice to remain in the Caribbean and reasserts the viability of the Caribbean as a cultural center in its own right.

In *Tiepolo's Hound*, Walcott constructs Pissarro as a Caribbean artist, one who learned his craft among the newly manumitted slaves in Charlotte-Amalie and honed it in the baroque cities of Venezuela; thereby, effectively, if temporarily, removing him from his customary place in history, French Impressionism. Although Pissarro leaves the Caribbean never to return, in Walcott's revision, the Caribbean never really leaves him. The light of St. Thomas haunts his drawings and his provincial status echoes in every brush stroke. Walcott imagines that it is the uniqueness of the Caribbean light that in a sense helped midwife the great school of Impressionism into being as many of its masters, Cezanne and Gauguin, studied with Pissarro in Pontoise. However, despite his influence on these painters, Pissarro remains marginal and marginalized in France, repeatedly being denied admission to the Academy and failing to find a community of artists.

The impact of place is again considered as the poet and Pissarro are united in their pursuit of an artistic ideal and their provincial status as artists beyond the pale of the metropolis, but Pissarro can only think of himself in terms of French, not Caribbean geography. Whereas Walcott draws strength from the immortelle and the sea almond tree, Pissarro can only see the flora of France: "France will translate him, he will find his voice / in its hoarse lindens" (*TH* 30). Unfortunately for Pissarro, this nation cannot translate him in the ways that he had hoped. History, linear, progressivist, monument-dominated history, permeates France, a palpable and disconcerting feeling for the young artist; he

becomes stunted and paralyzed by the overwhelming presence of historical monuments and great works of art, isolating him from his own muse and genius. The translation of the metropole further marginalizes the young artist rather than providing a new language for expression. Only when a blizzard completely whites out the city can Pissarro walk out and make his mark upon it: ““Paris was a blank canvas... / He dressed, rushed out, and walked through the miracle” (*TH* 40). The miracle is that the vast force of culture has been (temporarily) erased by an act of nature. The social constructions of the space are rendered moot and the respite from culture enables the artist to create.

As a counterpoint to Pissarro’s thralldom to Parisian culture, Walcott considers the impact of metropolitan culture on the Caribbean through its series of imitations and echoes that serve to cover a landscape that he repeatedly claims is Adamic. Throughout the poem, Walcott compares Caribbean and European spaces, relating one to the other through the repetition of echoes and representations. As he states, “every landscape seemed to delight in its echo of / its French or Spanish original, down to the name ... in the maps of our faces and places ... the same, yet not the same” (*TH* 92-93). Yet in Walcott’s experience and imagination, the Caribbean is not derivative: “What did I know of Spain but the ochre echo / that hung over the roofs of colonial Trinidad” (*TH* 93). For Walcott, the Caribbean is a site of origins, one no less legitimate for echoing a European reality. As he states in “The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry,” “our society may be less complex. It is obviously powerless. What I hope to explore is that society’s validity, its reality” (*CPDW* 52). In the baroque imagination, beginnings do not have to be historical beginnings; the “copy” can also be an original: “there is no scientific distinction between

the last ape and the first man, there is no memory or history of the moment when man stopped imitating the ape ... Therefore everything is mere repetition” (CPDW 53-54).

Pissarro’s travels to the metropolis are further paralleled by the poet’s travels in Europe, which reveal the impact of an artistic being rooted in the Caribbean. Walcott’s baroque imagination provincializes Europe when he describes his visit to Venice and his continued pursuit of the white hound. Venice, a historic cultural bastion of Europe, is also a tourist destination. Walcott writes: “Venice was both itself and a catalogue of reproductions” (*TH* 117). The streets and artistic treasures of Venice lose some of their hold over the poet because they have been so often repeated out of context and imagined in relation to the poet’s own Caribbean world. In a sense, the original pales beside that which the imagination has constructed. Once immersed in the temporal and physical reality of Venice, Walcott questions the reality of the hound, wondering if it was only a figment of his imagination. Ultimately, what is valid is not whether or not the painted hound exists, but the quest that this artistic ideal has sent the poet on. “Where had it led me, the desperate, tenuous claim, / the thread that kept its labyrinthine course / ... / To History, a bellowing Minotaur / pursued and slain” (*TH* 127). History, that is, the linear progressivist history that stifles Pissarro and has marginalized the Caribbean, is killed by the artist who assumes a place among the literary and artistic canons of the world. As constructed by Walcott, Pissarro also has this opportunity, but in not proclaiming himself as such he succumbs to France’s translation and an erasure of his Caribbean self.

It is Pissarro’s erasure of his Caribbean origins that Walcott most regrets and seeks to remedy in this poem. In book four, he directly addresses Pissarro: “You could have been our pioneer / Treacherous Gauguin judged you a second-rater / Yours could

have been his archipelago, where / hues are primal, red trees, green shade, blue water” (TH 142). Pissarro’s lack of commitment to the island of his birth results in an absence: “St. Thomas stays unpainted, every savannah / trails its flame tree that fades. This is not fair” (TH 143). While the landscapes and cityscapes of Europe are over-painted by aspiring artists, the Caribbean is under-painted. Part of Walcott’s frustration with this absence is his own inability to remedy it in terms of painting. As he states in *Another Life*,

I hoped that both disciplines might
by painful accretion cohere
and finally ignite,
but I lived a different gift,
its element metaphor. (CP 200-201)

Tiepolo’s Hound brings both disciplines together in innovative and reflective ways that reaffirm the Caribbean as a valid site of cultural origins. Walcott’s paintings might not be impressionist masterpieces, but they begin to fill a visual void. Likewise his poetry seeks to create an imaginative reality for the Caribbean that can be experienced by those “elsewhere.” In writing and painting the Caribbean, Walcott “utters” the landscape, creating its literary reality.

These utterances of the landscape are even more important as one of the simultaneous narratives that laterally cross both Walcott and Pissarro’s stories are the persistent departure of so many other Caribbean artists and intellectuals. Walcott writes,

And yet so many fled, so many lost
to the magnetic spires of cities, not the cedars
as if a black pup turned into the ghost
of the white hound, but a search that will lead us

where we began: to islands, not the busy
but unchanged patronage of the empire's center. (*TH* 157)

The departures of artists who felt they could not realize themselves in the Caribbean serves as a backdrop to the conversation between Walcott's sense of place and Pissarro's. Walcott's quest for the spectral white hound in the poem has really been the quest for an artistic ideal, an ideal he still does not feel that he has achieved, but is nonetheless grounded in the Caribbean. Although it is the slash of pink that haunts him, it is inseparable from its placement within the totality of the picture. In its separation from the whole, the hound is impossible to find. By implication, the Caribbean artist who leaves the sphere of his totality also risks losing himself. Yet, the question remains, is the totality of the Caribbean artist's experience to be confined by the borders of the Caribbean Sea, the archipelago, or even his own island? Or, is the totality of the Caribbean artist the whole world which he interprets through his exact position in space and time wherever he is? Walcott's answer in *Tiepolo's Hound* would appear to be the latter. As Bearden states, "What distinguishes every great artist, in fact, is the spatial world in which he and his art exist. This spatial identity is a culmination of all the influences of his time, his life, and his way of seeing the world" (Holty and Bearden 217). In denying his Caribbean self, Pissarro denied himself the opportunity to be a truly transcendent artist. The merging of Caribbean and European forms through the baroque imagination has allowed Walcott to positively assert the Caribbean as a valid cultural center.

The final installment of Walcott's long poems, *The Prodigal*, strikes a valedictory note. In this three part text, Walcott continues the project he began in *Tiepolo's Hound* of

provincializing Europe. In *The Prodigal*, Walcott interrogates the politics of space from the perspective of the traveler. He reverses the roles typically ascribed to the Caribbean as a place traveled to, to one traveled from. Furthermore, the perspective of the traveler allows Walcott to add a Caribbean gloss to European history.¹⁴⁴ In this text, he engages in a baroque counter-discourse that completes the project begun in *Tiepolo's Hound* of marginalizing Europe and recentering the Caribbean. The poet is now an older man, about sixty years old. He has the benefit of his years to consider his career and the world in which he lives, a world that has been colored by his words. Baugh's words on *Tiepolo's Hound* also apply to *The Prodigal* and are instructive on how to approach the poet's wanderings: "there is self-awareness of the poem as fictive construct ... that the truest maps are 'maps made in the heart'" (210). While the former book more directly navigates an interior landscape, the latter projects this map outward onto the world the poet experiences as a Caribbean intellectual.

The poem opens with the quickly passing images seen from a train window, symbolizing the past parading before the narrator's eyes and setting the tone for the travelogue to follow. In the first stanza, the poet trades the lines of a book for "the paragraphs, the gliding blocks of stanzas / framed by the widening windows" (P 3). The connection between worlds and words is perhaps the most striking and baroque aspect of this long poem. In an insightful analysis of Walcott's "Spain" in *The Bounty*, a precursor to Walcott's tone and method in *The Prodigal*, Baugh finds that it

is an example of how Walcott imagines and enters countries distant in place and time through their art and literature...A poem-sequence like this

¹⁴⁴ Caryl Phillips undertakes a similar journey in *The European Tribe* and chronicles his encounters through essays that highlight the constructed nature of European culture. Walcott's approach is different but the aim is the same to provincialize the status of European culture and to reveal the crack and divisions in its monolithic façade.

is not so much about Spain as about the poet's grateful delight at the mind's capacity to make connections. It is also about the intractability with which the imagination reconstructs nature as art, and how a landscape is 'uttered' and named by its art. (206)

As a traveler in possession of a finely honed baroque imagination, Walcott's musings on European and American landscapes add to the literary thickness of these places, but also claim them for the Caribbean. Just as Hemingway comes quickly to mind for Walcott in Spain, implanting an indelible American viewpoint on the country, so too will his Caribbean-centered musings add to the understanding and interpretation of New York, Boston, Switzerland, and Italy. Each visit by Walcott introduces a parallel and lateral story of the Caribbean in each of these metropolitan centers. Walcott's face as Nobel-winning poet is recognizable, yet it stands, or so the poet hopes, for other unrecognized Caribbean faces, which may have passed there as well.

Walcott makes explicit the marginalization of the Caribbean, but also its interrelated nature, by his commentary on Velazquez's painting "The Surrender of Breda" in part two. What draws Walcott's eye in this stunning example of Baroque art is not the central scene in which Breda gives up its autonomy, but the distant image of a battle still raging. Walcott likens his own attempt at a similar Baroque-style painting of a country fete that foregrounds the simultaneity of narratives, stating:

Meanwhile, on the high corner of the fresco, look—
on some obscure hill, with the size of beetles
...
another battle is waging its own business,
inaudible and tiny, negligible;
those little figures, their separate narrative
away from but parallel to the centre
where the monumental clangour is in progress (*P* 34)

Walcott recognizes in the painting the importance of simultaneity in the presentation of space and history. Although one story has reached its climax, another remains to be resolved. Similarly, the history of the Americas and the Caribbean has often taken on a marginal role in Western conceptions of world history. Walcott writes: “We fill the same perspective...in the central mass and meaning of the world, / in the sunlit margins with our little states” (*P* 34-35). Although Walcott and others have been writing about the Caribbean for over a half-century, the place of the Caribbean remains marginal in the world’s imagination. As Soja notes, “The spatial matrix must constantly be reinforced and when necessary restructured – that is, spatiality must be socially reproduced, and this reproduction process is a continuing source of conflict and crisis” (129). Walcott must continually reassert his presence on these European landscapes in order to make space for the Caribbean.

He marginalizes Europe in his travels because his Caribbean eye/I becomes the viewpoint through which the metropolis is seen. As such he can highlight the violent, tribal nature that lies behind the cosmopolitan façade. The clearest example of this comes in his encounter with the beautiful Serbian girl on the Italian train. While the poet admires her beauty and resilience, he cannot ignore her anti-Semitic views: “it was, all war, / the fault of the Jews. Yet she said it with calm eyes” (*P* 19). Walcott’s baroque reconstruction of Europe does not show the colonial paragon of cultivation and order that he fell in love with in his youth, but a brutal and war-torn landscape that is fraught with deep divisions within itself. Other images on the train of refugees “haggard and coal-eyed” heighten this interpretation of Europe and liken it to the Caribbean, a society created of refugees and migrants, both voluntary and involuntary. Europe is shown to be

like the Caribbean, in a constant state of flux that is belied by its History and ever present monuments.

The poet questions whether all his wanderings were necessary and whether or not they have changed him beyond the point of recognition. In becoming a world citizen, has he lost touch with the Caribbean? Will these islands accept him despite his wanderings? The prodigal in Walcott seeks to make atonement for his departures: “Prodigal, what were your wanderings about?” (P 70). The answer to this question lies in Walcott’s baroque project of re-centering the Caribbean as a legitimate site of origins. In *The Prodigal*, Walcott completes the marginalization of the center for the centrality of the Caribbean. As he states in chapter thirteen:

And great cities receding, Madrid, Genoa,
and their aisles with soaring arches
in the naves of shadow, the bamboo’s basilica
the pillars of palmists, Doric and Corinthian,
no, the point is not comparison or mimicry. (P 75)

Europe has been marginalized in Walcott’s narrative of himself in the same way that the Caribbean is marginalized in the tracts of the historical European explorers. While these explorers ostensibly wrote about the lands they visited, their narratives ultimately reveal more about themselves and their European origins. Walcott goes so far as to question the validity of the European echoes that he sees in the Caribbean trees, cities, and people by having nature speak for itself: “Listen, we have / no envy of the white mountains . . . we were never emblems” (P 76). Nature, like Anna from *Another Life* or Helen from *Omeros*, does not need to be translated or explained in European terms. They simply exist and have their being in an environment that is texturally different.

However, Walcott's journey home is not an easy one. It is fraught with recriminations and self-doubt as the poet reflects on his life's work, his self-imposed quest to write the island into existence. It is one thing to be Caribbean abroad and quite another at home. As Baugh notes, "*The Prodigal's* homecoming is not a simple matter of forgetting the wanderings and saying, 'Here I am', and all questions are settled. It is a reflective, still questing and self-questioning return" (227). The poet finds that he has succeeded in fulfilling his vow in some respects, but continually criticizes his own shortcomings. Walcott works through this anxiety by constellating the vocabulary of departure, calling himself at various times a pilgrim, a prodigal, and an exile. These terms help define the voyages he has undertaken, but no single appellation seems right for them all. Walcott employs them as various masks in order to map the social and cultural trajectories that are evident in his wanderings.

Wearing the mask of exile allows Walcott to critique the Caribbean as a place worthy of love, yet still lacking in some respects. Exile in one sense suggests an intolerable homespace from which the artist must depart in order to live his art freely. As Walcott states at the beginning of "The Muse of History," "The common experience of the New World, even for its patrician writers whose veneration of the Old is read as the idolatry of the mestizo, is colonialism" (*WTS* 36). The New World artist is not appreciated by his contemporaries because the hegemonic attitude of European superiority has infected the population to the degree that they cannot prefer one of their own without the stamp of approval of the metropolis.¹⁴⁵ This is an attitude suggested at

¹⁴⁵ In *Caliban and other Essays*, Fernandez-Retamar laments this fact as he states that the writings of Che Guevara are so revered in Latin America in part because they have been highly valorized by those outside the region: "And I have the sad suspicion that if the extraordinary texts of Che Guevara have enjoyed the

the end of *Another Life* in which the poet hates to leave yet cannot stay in a society that will not appreciate its artists. As he states in *The Prodigal*, “For approbation had made me an exile” (P 79). He must leave the Caribbean in order to fulfill his vow to the Caribbean. This ironic position leads to a certain amount of recrimination and self-doubt that Walcott works through in his mask of both pilgrim and prodigal.

As a pilgrim, Walcott can express his wanderings through Europe as the search for an aesthetic ideal and as the search for artistic and spiritual graces. These wanderings always highlight the interconnected nature of world history and foreground relationships of unequal power. In his travels through Europe, the poet links himself to the great histories of the past stating, “your shadow was a footnote in some boulevard’s infinite paragraph” (P 30). The poet joins the other literary and historical luminaries who have traveled the same paths in search of artistic benediction from their forbearers. In his pilgrimages, Walcott is assuming a baroque genealogy that does not function through vertical filial relationships, rather through the horizontal affiliation chosen by the descendent. The mantra of Walcott’s pilgrim in effect would be “We read, we travel, we become” (P 31). Each page turned and each step taken leads to an encounter with a literary ancestor or place that the pilgrim can claim or disavow through his apprenticeship. In effect this grants superior life-giving agency to the descendent, which by his choice, extends the life of the predecessor. As Jeffrey Gray notes in his article “Walcott’s Traveler and the Problem of Witness,” “This mutual enfiguring of nature and language constitutes at once an irreferential play, an inquiry into the relation between "reality" and representation, and an assertion of Walcott's sense of the world as mythic ...

greatest dissemination ever accorded to a Latin American, the fact that he is read with such avidity by our people is to a certain extent due to the prestige his name has even in the metropolis” (18).

existing outside of linear history” (119). In this way, Walcott subverts the linear progressivist history that often relegates the Caribbean to a lesser status in favor of a mythic time in which relationships can be revalued.

The mask of prodigal, while mentioned in *Another Life*, *Omeros*, and *Tiepolo's Hound* rings out most forcefully in this volume of the same name. The prodigal is a baroque figure that complicates the boundary between home and elsewhere. He also brings to the foreground the importance of the imagination, as the biblical prodigal is constantly imagining another place. When he is with his father, he dreams of freedom and licentiousness, but once bereft of his possessions, he longs for home while in the piggens. The mask of prodigal that Walcott has presented throughout his writings is afflicted (or endowed) with the same condition; when at home, he chafes at the provinciality of the place, while abroad he cannot help but think about his own green island. The prodigal allows Walcott to question the relationships between home and elsewhere that pull on a poet inclined to errantry.

In his wanderings, Walcott continually longs for his Caribbean home in a gesture that speaks to the centrality of the Caribbean for his own experience and gives it a primacy above the European experience. Two particular moments stand out. The first occurs on his return to Manhattan from Italy. His Italian-descended neighbor asks why he did not stay abroad longer and Walcott pithily responds, “I have an island” (*P* 39). This is an island that Walcott has sanctified through his prose and placed on the literary map as he says of Gros Ilet, “no echo in the name Gros Ilet, / no literature, no history, at least until now” (*P* 28). The act of writing about the island, even when compared to the much overwritten streets of Venice, conveys a sense of place and face to the otherwise

anonymous island. Walcott's writing of the Caribbean as a personal place that shaped his poetic gift must continue to be rearticulated in each book of poetry to combat the depersonalizing and totalizing effects of the discourses of neo-colonialism and tourism. Soja writes of the limitations on the artist stating, "we make our own history and geography, but not just as we please; we do not make them under circumstances chosen by ourselves but by those directly encountered, given and transmitted from the historical geographies given in the past" (Soja 129). Walcott writes from his experience in a way that will give centrality to the region as it deals with the ghosts of the past.

The second moment occurs in part three after the narrator has returned home and he is encouraged to pursue further travels. Home anchors the poet to reality and orders the vast world that he has traveled:

This bedraggled backyard, this unfulfilled lot,
This little field of leaves, brittle and fallen,
Of all the cities in the world, this is your centre. (*P* 84)

Travel may broaden the mind, but it does not detach the poet from his roots. He still views the world from his rooted position as a Caribbean islander, measuring Italy against his own island.

Walcott drives this point home further by recounting a conversation with an unnamed person about the "necessity" of going to Paris. This conversation highlights two opposing world views, one that sees the Caribbean as a self-sufficient cultural space containing cultural plenitude and a Euro-centric vision of the world that continues to hold the great imperial cities of the past as apotheosis of culture. In a sense, this is a conversation Walcott seems to be having with himself. One part of his psyche longs to see the great cities of the world simply because they are there and steeped in History.

Another part feels satisfied with the history soaked into the Caribbean, the bits of Europe that have made it into the islands and creolized there, as the poet states, “I can see Martinique from here” (*P* 79). The promise and the danger of Paris are epitomized by the statement, “It will change your life” (*P* 78). The poet reflects that he sought travel as a way to change his life. However, at this point in his life and career, he is satisfied with the extent of his travels and feels comfortable in his choice of the Caribbean. He is home, as he says, “I like my life” (*P* 78). “Here” is enough. Walcott could never have made this statement as confidently or convincingly if he hadn’t traveled throughout the world. The baroque imagination, in Walcott’s case, needs travel to feed its metaphors and metonyms, but it also serves as a foundation for the choice to return to the Caribbean.

Walcott’s closing gesture in the poem is a baroque gesture of inclusion. Refusing the either/or of Europe or the New World, he writes with passion: “And are both places blent? / Blent into this, whatever this thing is?” (*P* 79). The reader is left to wonder what exactly this thing is, Walcott’s life, his poetry, a state of consciousness? Returning to the theme of creative schizophrenia, the poet continues to document the divisions in his life and the stigma he feels as an intellectual bastard, a thief in the museum of European culture. He claims it as his right, but does not do so without a sense of guilt for taking from these halls. Whether this guilt comes from outside voices or internal ones is left unclear. One thing is certain. Despite the “discord” of his emotions and intellectual inheritances, “the Atlantic’s drone, the Caribbean hum / of chaos in an ochre afternoon / the enclosing harmony that we call home” will remain (*P* 82).

Walcott’s decision to choose the Caribbean as a cultural center does not come from the provincialism of limited experience, but from the experience and careful

evaluation of alternatives. Walcott takes pride in the nomadic fugitives with “callused soles” who are his ancestors and willingly gives up “the cloaked pilgrims” of “aureate Venice” (*P* 100). Ultimately the poet finds that “you felt in your calling that from your hand / the seeded word would overrun these ruins and sprout with the fecundity of bougainvillea” (*P* 100). His baroque imagination has transformed the Caribbean from a place overwritten by others to one written by one of its own. By incorporating the multiple strands of the Caribbean inheritance, Walcott does not preclude any possibility or suggest a monologic history of the region. Instead, he cultivates a literary space in which much is possible, an optimistic, hopeful space that can contend with European and American culture on the same artistic level. Walcott has succeeded in his task of writing the Caribbean into existence on the literary plane. In consistently returning to autobiography, Walcott has also given a recognizable face to the Caribbean, one that celebrates the interconnectedness of the individual to others and demands an ethical recognition for the Caribbean Other. Walcott’s long poems are both a challenge and an invitation to future artists to continue adding to the literary landscape of the Caribbean.

Chapter 3: Seamus Heaney Breaking the Boundaries of Identity through the Baroque Imagination

Placing Seamus Heaney and the baroque in the same sentence may seem antithetical to some. Yet, both Heaney and Walcott have spoken of the affinity they felt instantly for each other and for each other's poetry and it is this connection that led me to a consideration of the baroque in the work of Seamus Heaney. These poets share an intense connection with the land and the experience of a culturally divided childhood, one spent immersed in the languages of home and school. They also share a deep sense of their poetic vocation and mission as voice of the tribe, yet neither regards their position as absolutely clear. Instead, both poets constantly question their role as spokespersons, looking to balance that with their place as individual artists crafting a unique identity. They keep in mind the ethical obligations of poetry to act as a builder of culture and not necessarily as a bolster of states. They both promote a regional identity that will have enough cultural weight to stand up to the metropolitan cultures of Europe, while remaining engaged with other second and third world voices.

Walcott and Heaney also share an affinity with the Romantic poets, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, and the modernist writers, Pound, Eliot, and later Auden.¹⁴⁶ In a sense, the baroque, a term almost completely erased as descriptor from the English language for English poetry, lives on in the Romantic poets. They exercised their poetic voice as a counterbalance to the rationalism and progressivism of the Enlightenment and sought a

¹⁴⁶ Heaney speaks of the impact of the Romantic poets in "The Fully Exposed Poem:" "In spite of a period of castigation about the necessity for 'intelligence' and 'irony', poetry in English has not moved all that far from the shelter of the Romantic tradition" (GT 45). In "The Government of the Tongue," Heaney writes about the impact of T.S. Eliot, stating: "reading T.S. Eliot and reading about T.S. Eliot were equally formative experiences for my generation" (GT 91). As I stated in the introduction, Carpentier identifies the Romantics as artists who possess a baroque imagination.

place for the non-rational, emotional and natural.¹⁴⁷ The modernists in turn also exhibit baroque tendencies in their juxtaposition of disparate elements of culture for the creation of a more complete whole.¹⁴⁸ Walcott and Heaney seek to reorder the tradition to include themselves and their island countries into the scope of world literature.

Although both poets share common traits in their upbringing and influences, Heaney's problem is somewhat different than Walcott's. In the Caribbean, Walcott must contend with history that is fraught with erasure and absence. He reconstructs a narrative from the silenced voices of slaves and indentured servants that also includes the voices of British, Spanish, and French colonizers. Heaney, on the other hand, must deal with a surfeit of history. Although the Catholic population of Northern Ireland may have been silenced by British and Loyalist forces, a discourse of Ireland stretches back to the writings of Yeats, Synge, Lady Gregory, James Joyce, and beyond that to the vestiges of Celtic culture that remain. Along with this literary heritage, Heaney also had to contend with the long history of the Catholic Church in Ireland and the narrative of the Irish nation state. While Walcott uses the baroque as a way of enfolding various diverse elements into one regional narrative, Heaney uses the baroque as a way to question existing structures and to open up possibilities for regional and national belonging.

In his study of Seamus Heaney and deconstructionism, Eugene O'Brien considers Heaney's stance on revisionism as an example of this baroque position, stating,

¹⁴⁷ Nicols Fox makes a similar observation in *Against the Machine* (2004): "If the Romantic poets had one thing in common, it was that they chafed against the confines of eighteenth century ways of thinking, especially the preoccupation with order and form that was characteristic of Bacon, Newton, and Locke. Neoclassicism had reduced nature to a set of scientific rules. The world was being sorted, ordered, prioritized, and planned in a way that began to define progress, but was really about control" (57).

¹⁴⁸ Cecilia Enjuto Rangel notes that the baroque appeared to serve a vital purpose for both Anglo-American and Hispano-American modernists, "Both Paz and Eliot use the Baroque tradition in a "historical sense" as an "objective correlative" to rethink questions of death and decay, ruinous bodies and ruined cities in post-war Europe and America" (284).

“Revisionism participates in what might be called the destruction of a monological historical narrative, bringing out the strains, fractures, aporias and antinomies that have been attenuated by the narrative sweep” (2). O’Brien continues and likens Heaney to Yeats and to the historian Roy Foster noting that all three are “keen to avoid a singular, monocular vision of Irishness and instead to embrace a more pluralistic and complicated construction of what it means to be Irish” (*Searches* 3). This vision of a pluralistic Irishness and the role of poetry in achieving such a goal are evident in Heaney’s prose writings, primarily *Preoccupations* and *The Government of the Tongue*. Henry Hart, writing nearly ten years earlier, also notes a deconstructionist streak in Heaney, particularly in *The Haw Lantern*,

Addressing such loaded terms as presence and absence, speech and writing, he deploys his deconstructive maneuvers along a *via negativa* that negates age-old prejudices in order to affirm the productive interplay of differences. In a country where one sectarian faction pretends to hold a monopoly on truth and justice and historically has chosen to kill those who oppose the “one true way,” deconstruction is not simply an abstract hermeneutic strategy designed for clever critics. It has ethical relevance for the reorganization of all aspects of culture. (7)

I argue that the deconstructionist strand in Heaney can better be identified as the baroque imagination particularly if one considers how much of Heaney’s poetry is devoted to conservation of both the Irish and English language in addition to advocating communion with world culture. To simply term it deconstruction is to forget the amalgamating and reconstructive impulses that continually well up in Heaney’s poetry. I will now examine some of these texts and consider how Heaney’s worldview correlates with that of the baroque imagination.

In this chapter, I will address the way that Heaney demonstrates his baroque world-view through his use of place name poetry or *dinnseanchas*, his use of wound

imagery in his elaboration of the bog as Irish patrimony, his articulation of a third space for poetry in “Station Island” and his continual return to translation as a way of understanding the present. Although I will come to Heaney’s translations at the end of the chapter it is useful to begin with a discussion of Heaney’s ethics of translation as a way of understanding the poet’s baroque imagination.

Translation is at the heart of the form and function of the baroque. It is one of the many tasks of the baroque, whether that translation is from one language to another, one culture to another, or even one individual to another. In effect, the baroque was born from the necessity for translation that arose from the encounter of civilizations when Columbus sailed across the Atlantic and the English arrived in Ireland. But in reality, it has been occurring much longer than that. Baroque realities have been lived across the globe and occasionally become cemented into nations that have forgotten their hybrid origins.¹⁴⁹

Translation is central to the historical baroque because even in conquest dialogue occurs along with appropriation. These appropriations and dialogues leave their mark on the language of the subject people, but also on their very landscape. Etymological archaeology is a fundamental part of Heaney’s poetic method and one that he employs to great advantage. He frequently discusses the etymology of particular Irish place-names to show how the English word really covers over a Gaelic term that has either been translated or anglicized. This aspect of translation relates to a history of violence and colonialism, but it is not the only form of translation that is available to Heaney. The poet also sees translation as a means of understanding and interpretation that is similar to what Paul Ricoeur postulates in his treatise “On Translation.”

¹⁴⁹ One particularly relevant example of this is the nation of Great Britain. The term Anglo-Saxon denotes a union of two Germanic tribes whose differences have been subsumed, not to mention the influence of the subject states of Wales and Scotland in the “United” nation.

Ricoeur's work on translation, influenced by Walter Benjamin and George Steiner, is particularly relevant to the concept of the baroque as translation. In his treatise, he determines that the desire for translation (and there is always desire in the baroque) stems from two impulses in translators: the first, "the *broadening* of the horizon of their own language" and second, "*Bildung*, that is to say, both configuration and educations, and as a bonus, if I may put it that way, the discovery of their own language and its resources which have been left to lie fallow" (21). Heaney shares these two impulses as he attempts to translate life experience into language and broaden the parameters of English. Heaney's "The Impact of Translation" attests to both of these desires as he recounts the liberating experience of hearing Robert Pinsky read a translation of Czeslaw Milosz's poem entitled "Encantation": "we were enjoying a poem which did things forbidden within an old dispensation ... the poem was ... full of abstractions ... unabashed abstract nouns and conceptually aerated adjectives" (GT 37). In translation, the world that constructed Milosz and which he is rebelling against come through and illuminate new possibilities for Heaney as he states, "what translation has done over the last couple of decades is not only to introduce us to new literary traditions but also to link the new literary experience to a modern martyrology" (GT 38). The desire to know the Other "implicitly established a bench at which subsequent work will have to justify itself," including work written in English (GT 39).

This desire to know oneself through the experience of the Other indicates a Levinasian bent to Heaney's poetic ethics and ethics of translation. Heaney, like Emmanuel Levinas, is an unabashed humanist. This term has been contested and embattled given the complications of humanism in imperialist and colonialist projects,

yet Heaney and Levinas resuscitate humanism in order to ground their ethical stance toward the Other. Like Levinas, Heaney demonstrates a marked awareness of the necessity of the Other for the understanding of the self as well as a profound responsibility for the Other. He states this in his Nobel lecture when he describes the need for the celebration of the local:

Even if we have learned to be rightly and deeply fearful of elevating the cultural forms and conservatisms of any nation into normative and exclusivist systems, even if we have terrible proof that pride in the ethnic and religious heritage can quickly degrade into the fascistic, our vigilance on that score should not displace our love and trust in the good of the indigenous per se. On the contrary, a trust in the staying power and travel-worthiness of such good should encourage us to credit the possibility of a world where respect for the validity of every tradition will issue in the creation and maintenance of a salubrious political space. (OG 425)

Heaney, like Levinas (Glissant, Carpentier, and Walcott) is advocating for an aesthetic ethics, one that recognizes the differences in cultures, but does not give up its claim to judge the rightness or wrongness of a situation or a culture. In this way, both can escape the charge of moral relativism and simple palliations (there are faults on both sides). As Levinas states in his *Humanism of the Other*, “moral standards are not embarked in history and culture. They are not even islets poking up in it, because they make all signification possible, even cultural signification, and they make it possible to judge cultures” (38). For Levinas, there is an absolute standard for human behavior. This standard is that cultures and regimes are morally deficient if they show a disregard for the Other, as an individual.

One example that Heaney states directly and that Levinas alludes to is that of the Third Reich. This is a culture that both can clearly denounce. This may seem like an easy claim to make from our contemporary perspective, but it also results from following the

logic of deconstructionism to its extreme conclusions. As Richard A. Cohen writes in his introduction to *Humanism of the Other*: “For Levinas, the dignity of the self arises in and as an unsurpassable moral responsibility to and for the other person. And moral responsibility for the one who faces leads to the demand for justice for all those who do not face, for all others, all humanity” (xxvii). In Heaney, these ethical considerations take shape in the poem “From the Republic of Conscience” and in his essays in *The Government of the Tongue*, which I will discuss later in the chapter.

Heaney’s baroque imagination derives in part from his Northern Irish upbringing. The experience of a bifurcated education both Irish and English produces a sense of double consciousness similar to what I observe in Walcott in the preceding chapter. Heaney himself recognizes this experience in Walcott and describes it in words that can equally apply to himself, “From the beginning he has never simplified or sold short. Africa and England are in him. The humanist voices of his education and the voices from his home ground keep insisting on their full claims, pulling him in two different directions” (*GT* 24). Heaney has also experienced being pulled in two directions both in literature and in life. He feels the pull of English literature and the indigenous Irish voice that demands to be spoken to a wider audience. He also feels the pull of sectarian affiliations, inescapable in Northern Ireland. Like Walcott, he “made a theme of the choice and the impossibility of choosing” (*GT* 24). In doing so, Heaney’s poetry strives to create a baroque context for its reception, one that engages with a plurality of opinions and which refuses to simplify historical complexity to political slogans. His critical stand requires recognition of the Other as an essential part of the self, one who makes a claim on the self. Heaney also makes moral judgments on the violence of Protestant-Catholic

relations in Northern Ireland. Neither side is exempted from the charge although Heaney tries to offer a *via media* through his poetry in which both sides can learn to see the face of the Other.

This *via media* requires that Heaney serve as a translator of experience and it is useful to return to the work of Ricoeur, who like Heaney, saw himself as a mediator between opposing philosophical camps, looking to find a third way after giving each side their due. Ricoeur determines that there are three parts to language: the word, the sentence, and the text. In language, the individual words derive their meaning not only from their intrinsic definition which is polysemic, but more often from context. These contexts are determined by the word's use in a sentence, which is part of a larger text. As Richard Kearney writes in his introduction to Ricoeur, "words exist in time and space, and thus have a history of meanings which alter and evolve" (xvii). In his etymological research on place names and Northern Irish vocabulary, Heaney lays bare the texts and contexts which mark the places in which he lives. He undertakes these excavations in order to bring about a greater understanding of history and the present in his poetry.

Heaney's sense of the baroque has never been one to alienate either the self or the Other, but to bring each into a greater and more comprehensive community. Translation allows Heaney to do this without sacrificing his voice as well as providing an anchor for his newly liberated self. Returning to Ricoeur, we see that he describes one of the challenges of translation to be the dream of the perfect translation. This is impossible, although it is often an ideal for many translators. Heaney, however, seems to be unaffected by this aspect of translation. He may initially feel the pressures of the historicity or untranslatability of a text, as he mentions in the preface to *Beowulf*, but it is

supplanted by a sense of “linguistic hospitality.” This idea of “linguistic hospitality” is defined by Ricoeur as the place “where the pleasure of dwelling in the other’s language is balanced by the pleasure of receiving the foreign word at home, in ones’ own welcoming house” (10). The translation of a foreign text, whether it is Gaelic, Polish, or Latin, follows the process of translating the self to the self in poetry. In both instances, the poet must make verbal aspects of each that cannot be directly translated into words with the aim of enlarging both the sense of self and “de-provincializing the mother tongue” (Ricoeur 8). This approach gives the poetry both roots and wings to perform an intricate dance with past, present, and future. Through translation, the baroque functions as a way to negotiate between regionalism and universalism. It is a provincial parochialism that recognizes itself as part of a larger network and community of other provincial parochialisms.¹⁵⁰

Heaney’s 1974 lecture, “Feeling into Words,” describes a way of thinking about poetry, approaching writing, and determining the poet’s relationship with the world that is baroque at its core. In this essay, Heaney compares the poet to a water diviner in that both practice a craft that is at the same time a gift and a learned skill. As Heaney states, “The diviner resembles the poet in his function of making contact with what lies hidden, and in his ability to make palpable what was sensed or raised” (*Preoccupations* 48).¹⁵¹ The poet as diviner is emblematic of the baroque imagination because both are able to identify fields of force that surround particular words or phrases in the English language and mine them for their life-giving potential. In this essay, Heaney gives the example of the poem “Undine” from *Door into the Dark* as one such instance when the etymology of

¹⁵⁰ Heaney discusses the question of provincialism/parochialism in his essay “From Monaghan to the Grand Canal: The Poetry of Patrick Kavanagh” (*Preoccupations* 115-130).

¹⁵¹ Heaney also uses the figure of the diviner in a poem by the same name in *Death of a Naturalist*.

the word gave way to a field of force: “With that definition, the lump in the throat, or rather the thump in the ear, *undine*, became a thought, a field of force that called up other images” (*Preoccupations* 53). The baroque imagination is closely attuned to the physicality of language and the very real resonances that words have on the body. As the example of *undine* shows, some of these resonances are unconscious, the poet felt the connection to water before he learned about the specific definition, and others must be uncovered through scholarship. These images must then be marshaled into the proper configurations to evoke a particular feeling, or set of feelings, in the reader much as the kaleidoscopic canvases of the historical Baroque did for their viewers.

One of the earliest influences on Heaney’s poetry and world view is the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins. Hopkins, as a future Jesuit priest, used St. Ignatius of Loyola’s spiritual exercises as a guide for his poetry.¹⁵² These spiritual exercises have also been identified by Peter Davidson as one of the moving forces for the imagery of the historical baroque. The spiritual exercises focus on the visual imagination as a way of communicating with God and coming into a closer relationship with him, while at the same time, providing guidance for everyday life. In essence, these exercises are a translation of the divine world into human terms and images. Heaney’s poetry also uses the visual imagination to commune not necessarily with the creator, but with a world view that does not yet exist.¹⁵³ However, by articulating this more nuanced and optimistic vision of existence, the poet hopes that it will come closer to reality.

¹⁵² In *GT*, Heaney notes that Hopkins stopped writing poetry once he became a priest. This is another form of the government of the tongue that represses; however, he also notes that religion does not have to be inherently repressive as seen in the work of George Herbert. Hopkins did return to writing poems, creating some of his best work.

¹⁵³ Henry Hart also notes that Heaney “acknowledges his familiarity with St. John of the Cross, St. Theresa, Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*,” as well as the contemporary writings of Thomas Merton, which are greatly influenced by these authors (34).

Heaney's connection with the land is best stated in his essay "Mossbawn," which finds its origins in the water pump at the family farm. This water pump becomes an image, both auditory and visual, of the omphalos, the origins of his language and poetry. Unlike Walcott, however, Heaney's family has a long connection with the land. His ancestors trod the same earth and their name is even tied through legend to the ground. He recounts the superstition in "Mossbawn," stating, "There is also a belief that sand lifted from the ground at Banagher has beneficent, even magical, properties, if it is lifted from the site by one of the Heaney family name. Throw sand that a Heaney has lifted after a man going into court and he will win his case" (*Preoccupations* 21). This intimate connection with the land does not necessarily lead to artistic greatness, but for a poet with the imagination of Heaney, the connections are inescapable.

As Michael Parker notes in his biographic study of Heaney's poetry, "The poet's concern is with a Pentecostal energy, the energy of the word generated by landscape; his imagination like Milton's Holy Spirit, broods 'dove-like' over the land, and makes it 'pregnant' with language, and each poem becomes 'a kind of love made to each acre'" (8). The poet recognizes his responsibility as a lifter of the earth and combines this with a Daedalus-like duty to articulate the national consciousness.¹⁵⁴ Heaney continually tries to balance his need for artistic freedom and fidelity against the social demands on the poet, stating: "The fact is that poetry is its own reality and no matter how much a poet may concede to the corrective pressures of social, moral, political and historical reality, the ultimate fidelity must be to the demands and the promises of the artistic event" (Heaney,

¹⁵⁴ As Heaney says in "Feeling into Words", "To forge a poem is one thing, to forge the uncreated conscience of the race, as Stephen Dedalus put it, is quite another thing and places daunting pressures and responsibilities on anyone who would risk the name of poet" (*Preoccupations* 60). This is a duty that Heaney nevertheless takes up as is evident from his words in "Digging", "Between my finger and my thumb / the squat pen rests. / I'll dig with it" (OG 3).

GT 101). These pressures are magnified for a poet living in a country torn by sectarian and colonial violence.

The connection with the land also features in Heaney's use of the *dinnseanchas*, place name poetry of Ireland. This connection with the land and with the history of the land resembles Walcott and Carpentier's interpretations of landscape. As Henry Hart states, "With Vico and Tooke, Heaney etymologizes to reveal a sense of the actual places and objects the names have veiled" (57). Echoing the belief found in Lezama that nature can only be made landscape through man,¹⁵⁵ Heaney describes the sacredness of his everyday space growing up in the shadow of St. Patrick's reputed haunts, Lough Beg and Slemish. In the opening lines of "The Sense of Place" Heaney clearly states the dual nature of landscape in the mind of its inhabitants:

I think there are two way in which place is known and cherished, two ways which may be complementary but which are just as likely to be antipathetic. One is lived, illiterate and unconscious, the other learned, literate and conscious. In the literary sensibility, both are likely to co-exist in a conscious and unconscious tension. (*Preoccupations* 131)

Heaney repeatedly utilizes this tension to his advantage when writing in the place-name tradition of Ireland. He does so through the etymological archaeology that yields up the history of colonialism and the dispossessed Celts, a history of translations and translocations. By unearthing etymological history, Heaney can baroquely juxtapose the multiple meanings of a place in a non-hierarchical way so that these "meanings interact, gesturing towards a new fusion of languages and culture" (O'Brien, *Searches* 17).

Besides making manifest a baroque reality, through his place name poetry, Heaney is also tapping into a wider, universal tradition of poets who celebrate their home-places intimately, "we have to understand that this nourishment which springs from knowing

¹⁵⁵ *La Experiencia Americana*, 170.

and belonging to a certain place ... is not just an Irish obsession ... I like to remember that Dante was very much a man of a particular place, that his great poem is full of intimate placings and place-names” (*Preoccupations* 136). These place-names locate the poet and serves as his anchoring omphalos, as Heaney states in “Mossbawn” because they constitute his point of view. This point of view is informed not only by the geographical features of the land and the way that one lives upon it, but also by the history steeped into the ground.

One of the places Heaney consistently returns to as omphalos and poetic touchstone is Mossbawn, “the first place” (*Preoccupations* 18). This first home is a literal and figurative origin for the poet. It is here that he first becomes conscious of the natural world and of poetry becoming initiated in its pools of boggy water (*Preoccupations* 19). Yet the names that mark the man-made boundaries on the natural world –Magherafelt, Aughrim Hill, Moyola, Casteldawson – tell a different story: “in their mixture of Scots and Irish and English etymologies, this side of the country was redolent of the histories of its owners” (*Preoccupations* 20). Heaney goes into greater detail on this history in his later essay, “Belfast,” where he describes the actual etymology of the word Mossbawn, itself a hybrid. Mossbawn derives from the language of two conquerors, the Scots and the Irish, but through Heaney’s knowledge of Gaelic and his lived experience, he is able to tease out another autochthonous meaning for the word: “Yet in spite of this Ordnance Survey spelling, we pronounced it Moss bann, and *bán* is the Gaelic word for white. So might not the thing mean the white moss, the moss of bog-cotton?” (*Preoccupations* 35). The word mossbawn for Heaney enacts the history of its owners and serves as a “metaphor of the split culture of Ulster” (*Preoccupations* 35).

Another metaphor for the split culture of Ulster is the baroque image of the diseased and wounded body as a site of process and transformation. The healthy body also undergoes changes, but the changes associated with illness bring to mind the lack of agency for a colonized people and a sense that the alterations made have a life of their own separate from that of the conscious mind. The use of disease and wound imagery also create a new role for the poet, that of physician or witch-doctor. In a healthy body politic, the poet can be content to be a singer of songs and a collector of history, but for the wounded body he becomes much more necessary and useful. Heaney's baroque imagination aims to be a healing and palliative force, one that can move a public beyond the harsh realities of the present by imagining an alternative future.¹⁵⁶

Heaney's use of wound imagery and the bog as a repository for Irish history has been present from the earliest days of his writing and comes to be foregrounded in a particular way in his most recent collection *Opened Ground*.¹⁵⁷ This collection of poetry brings together a wide variety of Heaney's work from 1966-1996 under a single

¹⁵⁶ David Lloyd has been one of Heaney's most vocal critics on this matter. As he states in his book *Anomalous States: Irish Writing and the Postcolonial Moment*: "Heaney's rhetoric of compensation ... uncritically replays the Romantic schema of a return to origins which restores continuity through a fuller self possession, and accordingly rehearses the compensations conducted by Irish Romantic Nationalism. But his poetic offers constantly a premature compensation, enacted through linguistic and metaphorical usages which promise a healing of divisions by returning the subject to place, in an innocent yet possessive relation to his objects" (20-21). I argue that Lloyd misunderstands the purpose of Heaney's poetry. The aesthetic achievement reached by poetry is not an end in itself, but serves as a "a threshold more than a path, one constantly approached and constantly departed from" (GT 108). Poetry "does not propose to be instrumental or effective" in the sense that poetry makes nothing happen, but it does create a space for pondering the status quo with the hope that the individual will come to see the face of the Other and through that be moved to end violence. The difference between Heaney and Lloyd stems from a difference in worldviews. Heaney subscribes to a humanist vision of society while Lloyd espouses a radical Marxist perspective more concerned with materialist historical processes than with the transcendent realms of poetry.

¹⁵⁷ Heaney's use of the term "opened ground" suggests an interesting parallel with Carpentier, who uses the image of opened ground as the closing for his short story "Viaje a la semilla" ("Journey to the Source"). After a story in which the protagonist re-lives his life backwards, all that is left of him and his surroundings: "Todo se metamorfoseaba, regresando a la condición primera. El barro, volvió al barro, dejando un yermo en lugar de casa" (Carpentier *Cuentos* 92). The broken ground is a site of regeneration and possibilities, but also an absence.

evocative heading. This is the opened ground of poetry that has been broken by the poet/diviner. *Opened Ground* is a useful place to begin looking at Heaney's poetry because it is a collection that is influenced by a mature retrospective and is more comprehensive than any other collection to date. Looking at this collection from the perspective of the baroque, we can see how Heaney unites both the past and the present within a cogent metaphor of the wound, that can be interpreted in many different ways and which unravels the tightly woven version of Irish nationalist history. The wound is also a baroque topic because degradation and decay are part of the organic processes that the baroque sought to capture in its pages and canvases. Heaney's presentation of the baroque Irish wound, the Northern Border, both displays the many facets of the conflict and seeks to find a way to heal the wounded through poetry.

*Opened Ground*¹⁵⁸ incorporates this image of the festering wound in ways that illuminate the smoldering resentments in the postcolonial experience of Ireland. The title itself comes from final line in "Act of Union," which considers the unification of Northern Ireland and England as both a violation and a rebirth. Heaney's use of the wound becomes more complex in his identifications of the opened ground in the bog poems, as well as his poems on planting, in ways that reclaim the wound as a site of regeneration and power. The rot of the wound that festers in the body becomes regenerative of life in the soil as the bodies of the dead "croppies" become food for the grain that emerges "out of the grave" (Heaney, "Requiem for Croppies" 23). The revision of the image of the wound expresses what Heaney termed, in his 1995 Nobel lecture, the

¹⁵⁸ *Opened Ground* is Heaney's most recent collection of poetry in which he culls from his prior collections of poetry under the illustrative heading of the title. The poems I analyze in the following section all come from collections prior to *Station Island: Death of a Naturalist, Door into the Dark, Wintering Out, North and Field Work*. I have chosen to look at these poems as part of Heaney's greater work and not within the specific context of each collection.

need to “make space in [his] reckoning and imagining for the marvellous as well as the murderous,” in a way that places the wound as a site of cultural origins (*Crediting Poetry* 20). The multivalent images of the wound in Heaney’s poetry reveal the poet’s making the “marvellous” out of the “murderous” by linking the image of the wound and the boglands as a new site of origins for a Northern Irish cultural identity that is receptive to changes and internal contradictions.

As the baroque brings together the personal and the social, the image of the wound becomes individual as well as historical in Heaney’s poetry in *North*, especially in his poetry about the bog people and the ancient Vikings buried in mounded graves. In “Grauballe Man,” Heaney attributes unexpected characteristics to the corpse’s death wound that demonstrate the individual and social effects of violence. The Grauballe man’s wound is described as “the cured wound / opens inwards to a dark / elderberry place” (*OG* 110). One would expect the wound to open outward, but Heaney draws attention to the effect of the wound on the individual consciousness; in the first stanza of the poem, Heaney’s description of the dead man as one who “seems to weep / the black river of himself” (*OG* 110) suggests a glimpse into the interior of the man’s consciousness, which prevents the reader from interpreting his body as merely an archaeological artifact. Heaney takes this approach even further when he speaks in the voice of the murdered Dane in “Bog Queen.” Heaney expands upon this sense of interiority by linking the vision of the Grauballe man to his memory, “but now he lies / perfected in my memory” (*OG* 111). The violence in Irish history informs the individual’s self-identity and consciousness.

However, the image of the wound also opens outward to the bog; it is through his internment in the ground that the sacrificed man begins to take on the characteristics of the soggy ground. Likewise, the baroque imagination brings together disparate elements to forge a new reality. The Grauballe man, like the other occupants of the bog “seems to weep / the black river of himself” (*OG* 110). The corpses become part of the bog as “the grain of his wrists / is like bog oak,” and “his instep has shrunk” like “a wet bog root” (*OG* 110). In their assimilation to the bog, the corpses assume a second life in a new century; a life that eerily mirrors contemporary acts of violence. Hart, quoting Tim Pat Coogan, cites the similarity of the Grauballe Man’s death to the death suffered by “scores of young Catholics [in 1972]” who “were found with hoods over their heads and bullets in their brains. Others were found ...with mutilations, throat cuttings, and every other form of atrocity” (407). These killings were answered by the IRA with a continuation of the sectarian violence and wounding of Northern Irish society. Finally, the use of the word “cured” seems to suggest, not only that the wound has been tanned by the juices in the bog, but that the bog’s restorative properties, in a way, are the cure.

In “Funeral Rites,” the idea of retribution again appears as Heaney juxtaposes a Viking burial mound and a contemporary Irish funeral,” translating a foreign experience for an Irish audience. After describing the difference between traditional familial funerals that serve as a rite of passage for the poet narrator and the surge in funerals for the victims of “neighbourly murder,” the poet steers the reader and the funeral procession through a “megalithic doorway,” signaling not only a passage to the grave site, but a move back through time (“Funeral Rites” 97). As Helen Vendler states in her book length study of Heaney, “To enter the megalithic doorway is to go underground, working back

into what seems like a bottomless pre-history, to a ‘matter of Ireland’ more archaeological than agricultural” (38). The third section of the poem elaborates on this connection by imagining those buried in the present “disposed like Gunnar / who lay beautiful / inside his burial mound” (“Funeral Rites” 97). Heaney’s characterization of Gunnar, a character from the Icelandic epic *Njal’s Saga*, continues in ways that elaborate the threat of continued violence in Northern Ireland (Hart 399). Gunnar, “though dead by violence / and unavenged,” is nonetheless “chanting verses about honour” (“Funeral Rites” 97). The grave opens at the conclusion of the poem as Gunnar “turned / with a joyful face / to look at the moon” (“Funeral Rites” 97). Gunnar’s joy lies in knowing that he will be avenged. The last lines of the poem, while seemingly peaceful and hopeful, nonetheless belie the threat of violence to come. As Henry Hart notes in his analysis of Heaney’s use of *Njal’s Saga*, Gunnar’s son, moved by the verses chanted by his dead father, “takes his words as a green light to go out and kill rather than acquiesce in Gunnar’s ‘unavenged’ death and thereby stop the feuding ... and the terrible, ludicrous cycle of butchery and futile attempts at reconciliation at the althing continue” (400). The contemporary funeral described at the beginning of the poem now reads as successor to this history of violence.

The foreigner comes home and becomes one of the people’s own. As Heaney states in “Feeling into Words,” “the unforgettable photographs of these victims [the bog people] blended in my mind with photographs of atrocities, past and present, in the long rites of Irish political and religious struggles” (58).¹⁵⁹ The “more recent” sectarian

¹⁵⁹ This is another example of the faculty of understanding one thing in the function of another that may have happened many centuries before, a characteristic of the baroque, according to Carpentier: “Y yo diría que esa facultad de pensar inmediatamente en otra cosa cuando se mira una cosa determinada, es la facultad mayor que puede conferirnos una cultura verdadera” (“And I would say that faculty of thinking

violence in Northern Ireland figures as yet another eruption of the festering wound that has existed in Ireland from time immemorial and has similarly flared during colonial and pre-historical struggles.

In exploring this national wound, Heaney does not omit its self-inflicted nature. Political violence in Northern Ireland was not confined to inter-sectarian conflict, but also had an intra-sectarian character as well that Heaney figures as part of what perpetuates the unhealed nature of the wound of sectarian violence. Both “Punishment” and “Casualty” speak to the equally tragic character of in-group reprisals for failure to conform. In “Punishment,” Heaney describes the “little adulteress” punished for threatening the security of the tribe and likens her punishment to the provisional IRA’s tarring of women who dated British soldiers. As Henry Hart notes, “the theme of self-inflicted punishment—of punishing one’s own—is at the heart of Heaney’s poem” (“History, Myth, and Apocalypse” 408). Hart goes on to say that Heaney also punishes himself for his complicity in “standing dumb” and his understanding of the “exact and tribal, intimate revenge,” although he deplores it in her case (“Punishment 113). “Casualty” again speaks to the complicity of the artist as part of the tribe, and to individual agency surrendered to the management of the tribe. This is an issue that Heaney struggles with and will reemerge in *Station Island*.

The image of the bog is conspicuously absent in this poem, evoked only by the ominous counter “PARAS THIRTEEN ...BOGSIDE NIL” (“Casualty” ll. 44-45). The urban environment is no safer than the boglands. Heaney elegizes Louis O’Neill, a victim of an IRA bombing carried out as a warning to Catholics who would not abide by the

immediately in something else when looking at a particular object, is the greatest faculty that a true culture can confer on us”) (“La novela ...” 17).

curfew or, “be braced and bound / like brothers in a ring” (“Casualty” ll. 59-60). O’Neill “would not be held / At home by his own crowd,” and so loses his life (“Casualty” ll. 61-62). The poet wonders about O’Neill’s responsibility in his own death saying, “How culpable was he / That last night when he broke / Our tribe’s complicity?” (“Casualty” ll. 79-81). As a Catholic living in Bogside, O’Neill would presumably know the potential personal and social consequences of his actions due to the need to present a united front against oppression. Nevertheless, the poet rejects the tribal violence that curtails individual choice and elegizes O’Neill saying, “I tasted freedom with him” (“Casualty” ll. 103). This theme sounds similar to the ending of the “Tollund Man,” as Daniel Tobin notes in *Passage to the Center*: “instead of praying the Tollund man ‘to make germinate’ centuries of political martyrs, Heaney prays for something of the man’s ‘sad freedom’ as he, the poet, utters the names of foreign places” (94). In asserting his own voice and refusing to conform to absolutist political credos, Heaney sides with O’Neill and refuses to participate in the vicious cycle of self-inflicted social and psychic wounds.

Exploiting the baroque’s concern with fecundity and regeneration, Heaney views the sectarian struggles and their attendant internal and external violence as the result of Ireland’s colonial experience, which he explores in the sexual “Act of Union.” Composed of two sonnets, the poem brings together the image of Ireland as a fecund mother in union with the colonizer begetting a “fifth column” of sectarian violence. Heaney understands the colonial experience as a religious war between the devotees of an Irish mother-goddess and an English male deity,

There is an indigenous territorial numen, a tutelar of the whole island, call her Mother Ireland, Kathleen Ni Houlihand, the poor old woman, the Shan Van Vocht, whatever; and her sovereignty has been temporarily usurped or infringed by a new male cult whose founding fathers were Cromwell,

William of Orange, and Edward Carson, and whose godhead is incarnate in a rex or Caesar resident in a province between territorial piety and imperial power (“Feeling into Words” 57)¹⁶⁰

However, in “Act of Union,” Heaney imagines the relationship between conqueror and conquered in consensual sexual terms, thus complicating the victim/aggressor binary. In the first section, the conqueror concedes that “Conquest is a lie,” indicating that the conqueror can never have full possession without consent (“Act of Union”120). The process of colonization can never completely consume the native culture although, the persona of the poem concedes that “my legacy / culminates inexorably” (“Act of Union” 120). Yet, the mother, Ireland, can be seen as partially complicit in the violence that continues as the “fifth column” cannot exist without her. Indeed in reading the poem, there is a sense that it could also have been written by a husband for his wife. As Daniel Tobin writes, “The poem discloses its meaning through an imaginative intercourse that connects the parliamentary act of 1800 ... to the poet’s act of conjugal union with his wife. The conqueror, as imagined by Heaney, seems regretful of his position and the violence that ultimately stems from the act of love and possession. Nonetheless, the rape of sovereignty by a male deity is evident in the second section of the poem where the man’s phallus is described as “the rending process in the colony, The battering-ram, the boom burst from within” (“Act of Union”120). Regardless, the wounding process/sexual union “sprouts an obstinate fifth column,” the child, whose “parasitical / and ignorant little fists” tear at both the mother and the father. The child not

¹⁶⁰ This is similar to the struggle between the Brazilian scholars and writers who championed literary anthropophagy and the legacy of colonialism. These writers turned to the displaced indigenous religion as a way of carving their own niche within world culture. Else Ribeiro Pires Vieira makes this point in “Liberating Calibans: Readings of *Antropofagia* and Haroldo de Campos’ poetics of transcreation”: “Cannibalism is a metaphor actually drawn from the natives’ ritual whereby feeding from someone or drinking someone’s blood ... was a means of absorbing the other’s strength, a pointer to the very project of the Anthropophagy group: not to deny foreign influences or nourishment, but to absorb and transform them by the addition of autochthonous input” (98).

only wounds the mother *in utero* and during the birthing process, but will also continue to wound father and mother throughout his life. Heaney links the child's destructive behavior with the violent nature of his parents' coupling.

The chiasmic structure of the poem places the colonial experience and all its subsequent sectarian violence at the center between two images of the wound; furthermore it establishes a field of force that produces not a dialectic, but new alternatives altogether. The first image of the wound connects the sexual act, the act of union of Ireland and England, with the image of the bog breaking open after a storm: "Tonight, a first movement, a pulse, / As if the rain in bogland gathered head / To slip and flood: a bog-burst, / A gash breaking open the ferny bed" (120). The image is tempestuous, yet pastoral, and the sexual act is described as a wounding, "a gash." The poem continues to personify and gender both Ireland and England as the poet narrator says, "And I am still imperially/ Male, leaving you with the pain" (120). The imperial male presence can remove itself from the immediate scene of the conflict, but nonetheless must watch as the second wounding, "the big pain" occurs (120). The closing line of the poem firmly links the association between wounded ground and wounded body in the opening lines of the first section. "No treaty / I foresee will salve completely your tracked / And stretchmarked body, the big pain / That leaves you raw, like opened ground, again" (120).¹⁶¹ Heaney's ambivalence about his Irish and English inheritances can be seen in the assumption of the imperial position in this poem. On some level, Heaney seeks to harmonize the two influences, English and Irish, in the description of an act that can be the epitome of love and consent, or the epitome of violence and subjugation.

¹⁶¹ This line also serves as the title of the collection, *Opened Ground*.

“The obstinate fifth column” is not the only off-spring of such a union; Heaney the poet is also the offspring of this union. The poem marks this second possibility by the pointed absence of the poet’s presence implied by the regretful position of the conqueror. By refiguring the 1800s act of union as a violent sexual encounter, his poem recalls W.B. Yeats’s “Leda and the Swan.” If this poem is imagined to exist in dialogue with Yeats’s poem, then the possibility of a silent twin in “Act of Union” seems likely. Leda’s liaison with Zeus is depicted as both consensual and involuntary depending on the intention of the author, and her offspring are figured as the twins Castor and Pollux, or Helen and Clytemnestra,¹⁶² in the female twinning, one is associated with direct violence (Clytemnestra) and the other with beauty (Helen), although the latter’s beauty also begets violence. As in the Greek myth and Yeats’ refashioning of it in “Leda and the Swan,” Heaney negotiates the multiple influences of the colonized and the colonizer on his art and on the idea of national identity.

In *Opened Ground*, Heaney follows “Act of Union” with another classical allusion in “Hercules and Antaeus.”¹⁶³ Antaeus draws his strength from the ground and in his defeated figure Heaney “finds pap for the dispossessed” (*OG* 122). Metaphorically, Heaney also draws strength from the ground and specifically the bog, as a unique figure of the Irish landscape. In “Feeling into Words,” Heaney explains how he arrived at his image of the bog as an emblem of Irishness:

¹⁶² As Helen Sword writes in her analysis of Yeats’ “Leda and the Swan,” “Leda has not always been regarded as a victim, of course, nor has her rape been consistently described as an act of undesired brutality” (306).

¹⁶³ In *Selected Poems*, Heaney had left out this particular poem on Antaeus as he moved towards a more ethereal poetry. However, in this collection he seems more comfortable with his connection to the ground and the importance of that stage in his poetic development. In his essay “The Atlas of Civilization” Heaney describes Zbigniew Herbert as “a poet with all the strengths of an Antaeus, yet he finally emerges more like the figure of an Atlas” (GT 70). Heaney seems to be striving toward the same type of relation to the “native earth” and “the whole sky and scope of human dignity and responsibility” (GT 70).

I began to get an idea of bog as the memory of the landscape, or as a landscape that remembered everything that happened in it and to it...Moreover, since memory was the faculty that supplied me with the first quickening of my own poetry, I had a tentative unrealized need to make a congruence between memory and bogland and, for the want of a better word, our national consciousness. ("Feeling into Words" 55)

Instead of the mytho-heroic implications of the national consciousness aspired to by the nationalist and paramilitary groups, Heaney searches for a figure that will encompass the true and often unheroic and defeated image of the Irish experience, yet one that is not completely bleak and devouring. In many ways, the bog can be seen as a seeping wound in the Irish landscape that represents not only the constant colonial and sectarian violence, but also the regeneration of the Irish people.

In a baroque twist, the bog can be seen as uneasy ground and a repository for violence, while it also provides fuel for the Irish people and a fertile coolness. In "Bogland," Heaney adopts the bog as national definition and as apt symbol for the state of the nation. Heaney compares the emblematic prairies of the United States with the boglands of Ireland when he writes: "Our unfenced country / Is bog that keeps crusting" ("Bogland" 41). It is a very positive portrayal of the bog that reveals a benevolent and rich history of placement in the Irish homeland as, "The ground itself is kind, black butter / Melting and opening underfoot" ("Bogland" 41). The comparison of the bogland to butter is a comforting image that implies nourishment and accommodation. It yields to human touch, but defies definition by its very nature. "They'll never dig coal here" ("Bogland" 41). The bogland also reveals a rich history as "Every layer they strip / Seems camped on before" ("Bogland" 41). This is not the bogland as it is represented in the bog people poems. It does not have the same devouring characteristics. Rather than mutilated bodies, this bogland yields up "the Great Irish Elk," a non-violent image of a prehistoric

past that intrigues instead of terrifies. The only lines that allude to the possible violence embedded in the bog are the final ones, and even they can be read positively: “The bogholes might be Atlantic seepage. / The wet center is bottomless.” (“Bogland” 41).

The indefinable nature of the bogs also represents the indefinable nature of the Irish people and the independent position of the artist. The bog as national marker and patrimony serves as an endless source of renewal capable of accommodating those of diverse tribal-religious allegiances. Heaney’s use of the word “center” in the last line of the poem suggests a dialogue with Yeats’ “The Second Coming” where “the center will not hold” (3). The dissolution Yeats fears becomes possibility for Heaney in the “Atlantic seepage” of the bog holes that connect the Irish experience to the broader world. The idea of Atlantic seepage is more ambiguous in its reflections on the Irish condition. Seepage can be positive, but it can also be considered the residue of a wound, as in seepage that comes through a bandage or through the holes in a roof or wall. Is Ireland then the seepage left over from an Atlantic rift? Or is Ireland absorbing the remains of many Atlantic battles in the ocean’s contested history? Heaney’s poetry resists a definitive answer, but both remain viable and productive possibilities, especially for a poet reluctant to choose sides. This is a baroque expression of identity because it is continually in flux. Heaney captures Irish identity in movement.

Heaney tempers his unqualified exuberance for the bog as national symbol and patrimony in “Kinship.” As Tobin notes in his study on the bog imagery in *North*, “in ‘Kinship’, the archetypal pattern of reciprocal violence gains its fullest expression. At the same time, the poem is Heaney’s most personal rendering of the bog symbol” (126). However, whereas Tobin analyzes “Kinship” as the poet’s mediation of myth and myth-

making, I contend that the poem complicates the image of the bog as the national emblem in a way that reappropriates sectarian and colonial violence as a site of origins. The structure of the poem alludes to the epic form in six sections of twenty-four quatrains each. The twenty-four quatrains as multiples of twelve mirror the Greek epics and the poem itself grapples with the mythical-historical figure of the bog. The first section of the poem lays out the relationship between the poet and the bog with imagery that recalls both the positive associations of the swampy land (“the cooped secrets / of process and ritual”) as well as its threatening aspects (“each bank a gallows drop,” “the unstopped mouth”) (ll. 15-16, 19, 21). The second section resembles a litany of names that begins with the received names in the language of the conqueror, “quagmire, swampland, morass,” which are rejected in favor of the Irish “bog / meaning soft,” and ultimately replaced with the poet’s own nomenclature, “outback of my mind” (ll. 25, 29-30, 48). The third section encompasses the poet’s encounter with the bog in ways that evoke sexual connections as well as the imagery of the wound. The poet finds a turf spade buried in the bracken that seems almost part of the bog itself. When it is lifted from the ground “the soft lips of the growth / muttered and split” (ll. 53-54). The use of the word lips highlights the sexual nature of this encounter, as do the later lines in which the poet-persona sinks “the shaft wettish” upright into the bog (ll. 59). The imagery of wounded earth continues as the poet writes that “the catkin and bog-cotton tremble” (ll. 68), as the goddess emerges from the broken earth.

The first stanza of section four again invokes Yeats in a discussion about the center: “This center holds / and spreads, / sump and seedbed, / a bag of waters / and a melting grave” (ll. 73-77). Heaney’s characterization of the center as both womb and

tomb, is a connection that he has been exploring throughout the bog people poems. The center as “sump and seedbed” recalls the agricultural base of both Heaney’s experience and the Irish connection with the land as ritual and ceremony. The center is also “the vowel of earth” (ll. 86). As Seamus Deane writes in his exploration of the bog as origin in Heaney’s poetry,

The vowel, especially the vowel *O*, is originary: but it cannot speak the emptiness it represents without the consonantal surround. Looms and honey combs, seeds splitting into root systems, interconnected deltas of archeological remains, develop their ramifications around these gaping open ground vowels, the eyes, sores, valves and wounds that are the characteristic marks of the creature who is the ultimate victim of and possessor of the ground—the buried corpse. (Deane 27-28)¹⁶⁴

Yet, the “open ground vowels” do not only belong to the corpses interred in the bog, for Heaney, the vowel, the emptiness, is central to human experience and surrounded by the rituals of everyday life, as in “Summer Home,” which recalls the much less dramatic, but nonetheless poignant wounds of family life. The atmosphere in this summer home seems foul and fetid, suggesting smoldering resentments and, “the summer gone sour, / a fouled nest incubating somewhere” (ll. 3-4). There is a rift between the husband and wife that Heaney describes as a wound, saying “Attend. Anoint the wound.” (ll. 22). The cure requires a reunification of the body, a sexual healing. But this wound is an unhealed wound that continually festers despite the healing balms placed on it and the offerings of flowers. The poem closes with the lines, “Yesterday rocks sang when we tapped / Stalactites in the cave’s old, dripping dark— / Our love calls tiny as a tuning fork” (ll. 44-

¹⁶⁴ This vowel is also the same vowel that encompasses Walcott’s *Omeros* and marks Philoctete’s healed wound. Heaney and Walcott both come to the wound as a site of origin and identity. The healed wound also presents the essence of the baroque method as the body comes together in pleats and folds that are more complex than the smoothness of untouched skin. These folds contain the memory of past trauma and provide a new topography for the future. This wound can also be likened to Odysseus’ wound which serves as a mark of identification.

46). The seeping image of the cave mirrors the unhealed wounds of the relationship between the poet narrator and his wife and links that wound to the earth in the image of the cave, an indication of Heaney's connection between the wounded soul and the wounded earth.

Returning to "Kinship," in section five, the poet particularizes the experience of the center by returning to his own childhood experience of riding with his grandfather, "god of the waggon / the hearth feeder" (ll. 107-108). Cutting the turf binds the child, not only to his nuclear family and ancestral past, but also to the community as the poet narrator remembers distributing turf with his grandfather, turf that will be burned on multiple hearths. Nonetheless, the influence of community on the individual cannot fill the void left behind by violence and the experience of colonialism. The final section of the poem opens the discussion of the center outwards, again seeking to encompass even more in this center that holds by invoking Tacitus to stand witness. History also surrounds the wounded void of Irish identity. The civility of the center that holds tradition is gone and in its place remains "our mother ground ... sour with the blood / of her faithful" ("Kinship" lines 126-128). Heaney places this soured ground, this wounded ground at the center in order to reclaim the totality of the national experience. As he stated in his Nobel lecture, "only the very stupid or the very deprived can any longer help knowing that the documents of civilization have been written in blood and tears, blood and tears no less real for being very remote" (Heaney, *Crediting Poetry* 19). The image of the bog as wounded and devouring goddess places the "blood and tears" of history and the present at the center of what it means to be Irish. The litany of naming in section two now takes on even greater significance as the word bog "meaning soft" comes to be

written in the blood and tears of the colonial experience and the pervasive sectarian violence. The primal vowel, the *O*, of Heaney's poetry is the cry of pain central to this experience of woe.

From this opening of the ground, Heaney's poetry moves to a greater concern with the position of the artist within the community. *Station Island* brings about a spiritual digging of Heaney's influences and allegiances. Heaney's collection is a triptych that reveals a poet confronting his past and contemplating his future from his position in the present. The word triptych is a particularly apt definition of this poem because the word customarily refers to the baroque altarpieces found in many Roman Catholic churches. It is also used in antiquity to denote three writing tablets strung together (OED). In his study of baroque art, John Rupert Martin describes Rubens' triptych "The Raising of the Cross" as conveying "the full diapason of tragic emotions" (109). Heaney's *Station Island* also runs through a full range of poetic emotion with the two side panels serving to reinforce and deepen the emotional power of the center-piece. Quotidian life and the draw of community form the basis of part one, while the third part represents the free flight of the imagination. The two flanks of the collection, like the supporting panels of Ruben's triptych, bolster the pathos and anguish of the center-piece. The poem is baroque in that it derives its full meaning from a relationship between the parts.

Part one begins with a poem suggestively titled "The Underground" that suggests a sense of "in-between-ness," of comings and goings as it takes place in the nebulous space of a train platform.¹⁶⁵ The poet remembers his youth when he felt like "a fleet god"

¹⁶⁵ In this poem, Heaney is invoking both Dante and Philip Larkin as quintessential poets of their age. As he states in "The Main of Light," "if Philip Larkin had ever composed his version of *The Divine Comedy* he

chasing after his lover in the darkened tunnels of the train station. The beloved could be his future wife, Mary, or poetry, a love he also chased from his youthful days. The poem is written from the perspective of middle age, youthful exuberance is gone, “bared and tense as I am, all attention / for your step following and damned if I look back” (SI 13). In his youth the poet eagerly chased the past as the key to unlocking his own and a national identity, but he currently feels betrayed by that impulse feeling that it leads to nothing. Poetry, the beloved, keeps calling him to come back, but the poet resists. Part one includes a series of poems about the present that tie him intimately to his nuclear family (“La Toilette,” “A Hazel Stick for Catherine Ann,” “A Kite for Michael and Christopher”) with brief incursions to the past (“Last Look,” “The Birth-place,” “Changes”). The poems are lighter in tone, but speak to an intimate relation with the land and the people. Tribal allegiances run strong and deep as Heaney writes in “Shelf-Life:

Glimmerings are what the soul’s composed of.
 Fogged-up challenges, far conscience-glitters
 and hang-dog, half-truth earnest of true love.
 And a whole late-flooding thaw of ancestors. (SI 23)

However, as in all of Heaney’s poetry one senses a discomfort with these sectarian connections. These family connections have their being in the past, effectively motionless. The poet feels a need to “*participate actively in history*,” as he writes in “Away from it All” (emphasis in the original, SI 16). In the context of the poet’s present this means choosing sides in the conflict of Northern Ireland. To choose sides means to preclude possibilities and the poet is not comfortable with compromising his work in that way: “*that I may escape the miasma of spilled blood, / govern the tongue, fear hybris,*

would probably have discovered himself not in a dark wood but a railway tunnel half-way on a journey down England” (GT 22). Through this baroque gesture, Heaney places himself at the crossroads between history and modernity.

fear the god / until he speaks in my untrammelled mouth" (SI 24).¹⁶⁶ The poet resists looking back, but he must if he is to understand his poetic vocation.

"Station Island," the long poem that gives the collection its name, recounts the poet's pilgrimage to St. Patrick's purgatory, a storied and heavily weighted place in Irish Catholic history with links to a pre-Christian, pagan culture. The poem shows a deep connection with the land and a renewed commitment to consider the many strands of Irish and indeed personal history. Heaney encounters both his literary and biological predecessors in a ritual way that both unites the poet with his past and frees him from it at the same time. The experience of reading "Station Island" is similar to the experience of visiting an early Christian church on the Dingle peninsula. Heaney describes his epiphany in his 1978 essay "The God in the Tree," which discusses the competing drives of the "*pagus*," the pagan, and "*Christian disciplina*," the power of a transcendent spiritual calling, in other words, the agon between St. Patrick and Oisín in early Irish nature poetry. Heaney's wonderfully evocative prose is worth quoting at length:

Inside, in the dark of the stone, it feels as if you are sustaining a great pressure, bowing under like the generations of monks who must have bowed down in meditation and reparation on that floor. I felt the weight of Christianity in all its rebuking aspects, its calls to self-denial and self-abnegation, its humbling of the proud flesh and insolent spirit.
(*Preoccupations* 189)

Heaney's oppressive experience in the church is similar to his experience of repression in Northern Ireland. Both tongue and spirit have to be governed in the face of a higher power that demands a certain attitude of obedience. However, this heavy experience of

¹⁶⁶ This quotation also comes from "Shelf-Life" which is a baroque compilation of objects that include a stone from Delphi and a chip from Joyce's Martello tower that begin a cursory interrogation into the themes that drive "Station Island." These objects function as talismans, and bring the poet to a greater understanding of himself through their juxtaposition.

darkness must occur in order for the poet to experience the lightness of emerging from it.

Heaney continues:

But coming out of the cold heart of the stone, into the sunlight and the dazzle of grass and sea, I felt a lift in my heart, a surge towards happiness that must have been experienced over and over again by those monks as they crossed that same threshold centuries ago. This surge towards praise, this sudden apprehension of the world as light, as illumination, this is what remains central to our first nature poetry and makes it a unique inheritance. (*Preoccupations* 189)

The darkness of the cave/church enhances the experience of the light much as Heaney's experience of colonialism and the Troubles led to the forging of some truly excellent poetry. Yet Heaney longs to continue in the tradition of Mad Sweeney, whom he invokes in this essay as a nature poet, "who was at once the enemy and captive of the monastic tradition" (*Preoccupations* 187). "Station Island" signals a new relationship between Heaney and his religious-national allegiances, one that remains tied to the local while declaring his independence to be a world poet. Before Heaney can get to the lightness of Sweeney, he must go through the cleansing purgatory of "Station Island."

Some have identified *Station Island* as Heaney's most Joycean work, and that in turn helps qualify it as his most baroque work as well.¹⁶⁷ The density of metaphor and allusion as well as the presence of Joyce himself bring these baroque aspects to the fore. "Station Island" syncretizes Irish, English, pagan, and Catholic elements with a vortex that both looks inward and outward. The impress of Dante, Mandelstam's Dante, must also be stressed as a baroque element that connects Heaney's work with the wider arena

¹⁶⁷ Shaun O'Connell makes this assertion in his review of *Station Island*: "Concerned with issues of silence, exile, and cunning (Stephen Dedalus's trinity), *Station Island* is Heaney's most Joycean work. Joyce even appears as a presence, meeting the poet at the end of his imaginary visit to the island of the title, a thousand-year-old site of pilgrimage in Lough Derg, Donegal" (February 1985, *Boston Review*).

of world poetry. The poem also folds together the role of the poet as both individual and persona within the poem. It is both confessional and performative, as Heaney seeks to integrate his roles as person and poet. The location of the poem and the cycle of doing the station provide an imaginative frame for the poem that brings to the fore the conflict between the self and the community. To do the station is to signal an alliance with the Catholic community in Northern Ireland. However, this is not an uncomplicated allegiance. Heaney is also aware of the pre-Christian rituals associated with this sacred ground and invokes these as he completes the required prayers. Most of Heaney's encounters are of the secular kind, meeting with those who have shaped his life and past, and those of have chosen alternative lifestyles. The twelve stations that Heaney documents serve as prisms to reflect upon his life and life choices so far. Each station provides a constellation of images that explore a particular aspect of Irish culture as Heaney experienced it.

Although most critics have focused on Heaney's experiences on Station Island as a *purgatorio* in which the poet encounters different aspects of his past, I argue that these encounters can also be considered a series of lessons for the poet from marginal figures in his past, who teach him to accept a new place for himself and his art. These outliers have negotiated a different relationship to both Catholicism and society that entail varying degrees of acceptance and distance. Through his encounters, Heaney comes to the acceptance of a new direction, a vocation within the vocation of his poetic art.

Heaney feels the pinch of sectarian claims, be they literary or religious, as an infringement on his poetic freedom and conscience. He is interested in staking out a self so that the self might have value beyond his or her usefulness to the group. The figures of

Sweeney, Mandelstam, and Carleton are thus very attractive for Heaney as guides to this personal liberation. “At a time when the atmosphere of sectarianism in Northern Ireland puts various forms of pressure on the developing poet, Heaney, through these figures, seeks a position outside society, a sort of imagined vantage point and play area, where he can be true to himself and the lyric impulse” (Hawlin 37). Heaney is led to the form and tone of this poem through Dante, as he states in “Envy and Identifications:”

The way in which Dante could place himself in an historical world yet submit that world to scrutiny from a perspective beyond history, the way he could accommodate the political and the transcendent, this too encouraged my attempt at a sequence of poems which would explore the typical strains which the consciousness labours under in this country. The main tension is between two often contradictory commands: to be faithful to the collective historical experience and to be true to the recognitions of the emerging self. (Heaney, “Envy...” 256)

Heaney wants to move beyond sectarianism to a position that values every human life for its singularity, for what it can contribute to the global song.

Heaney’s encounters with these outsiders have Levinasian echoes because it is in defining his responsibility for the other that Heaney comes to find himself. In the first station, Heaney encounters Simon Sweeney, the “old Sabbath-breaker,” who challenges and serves as the first of a series of guides who have a marginal, but essential, relationship to the community (*SI* 61). Heaney ignores Sweeney’s admonition to “Stay clear of all processions!” and in so doing encounters a historical outsider, William Carleton (*SI* 63). Carleton, as a convert to Protestantism, is doubly an outsider and an authority on doing the station, as he wrote *Lough Derg Pilgrim*. This text served a baroque function both inside and outside the Catholic community of Northern Ireland because it was written to unearth the superstition of the faith, while also chronicling a folk history that would otherwise have remained unrecorded until Patrick Kavanagh. The

poet's discussion about sectarian violence and cataloguing of the decay of the natural world prompt Carleton to interrupt his reverie with an observation on the imagination as "another life that cleans our element" (*SI* 66). In these words, one can identify the Levinasian thrust of Heaney's pilgrimage: "We are earthworms of the earth, and all that / has gone through us will be our trace" (*SI* 66). As Levinas states in *Humanism of the Other*, "The totality of being where being shines forth as signification is not an entity fixed for eternity; it requires arrangement and collection, the cultural act of man" (18). As earthworms, Heaney and Carleton move through the earth of their communities, collecting and arranging experience, to form and re-form culture. The imagination provides a way for the artist to imagine himself in the life of another and thus have a more rounded image of culture.

In reality, a person can only live one life (a fact Heaney bemoans in canto nine), but through the imagination many other lives are available to the writer. In her analysis of Heaney's alter egos, Helen Vendler writes, "I have always seen in its ["Station Island"] *dramatis personae* as a series of alter egos – men whose lives the poet, under other circumstances, might have found himself living" (93). Heaney has not chosen the traditional roles that he examines in the poem – farmer, priest, school-master, militant-activist – and in encountering these shades he comes to recognize that marginality does not only belong to the artist, but is part of all of their lives.

These shades try to translate the experience of marginality they feel in order to encourage Heaney on his own path. They ask him to reevaluate the static position within the fabric of Northern Ireland where he has placed them. These encounters become a translation of experience similar to what the poet experienced in "Making Strange." In

this buoyant poem from the first part of *Station Island*, Heaney drives a stranger around his home-space and finds that in “reciting my pride / in all that I knew,” the land that he knows becomes strange to him as he sees it through the eyes of a foreigner (*SI* 33).¹⁶⁸ As Levinas states, “Men seek one another in their incondition of strangers. No one is at home” (66). The shades he encounters on the island make an interior landscape that he thought he knew seem strange to Heaney. The fact that these encounters take place with the dead comes as no surprise because death is seen as the ultimate estrangement in the second canto. His aunt, who dies of tuberculosis in early childhood, exists only as an object, a talisman in a jewelry box, but still central to the family’s experience.

Heaney’s encounter with Terry Keenan, the “young priest, glossy as a blackbird,” (*SI* 70) is the most dramatic example of the familiar being made strange. The priest is the local embodiment of the transcendent Catholic Church, God’s temporal representative. Furthermore, Heaney sees the priest as the ultimate form of submission to the strictures of Catholicism. He appears at the moment when the poet is about to renounce the world. In his cassock and beads, the priest is at once subject to and bolster of the local pieties that maintain the status quo: “you gave too much relief, you raised a siege / the world had laid against their kitchen grottoes (*SI* 70). However, the encounter reveals that Heaney himself is short of vision and lacking in compassion for the priest. He interrupts him as he describes his harrowing experiences in the tropics, stating, “I never could see you on the foreign missions” (*SI* 70). Heaney can only picture the priest within the fabric of Ireland, never beyond its shores.

¹⁶⁸ The narration of place names that Heaney has always claimed as talismanic “began to make strange / at that same recitation” (*SI* 33). As a poet, Heaney simultaneously familiarizes his readers with the place names of his homeland and makes those same places “strange” by placing them within the context of a poem.

This failure of vision is remedied by the erotics of the baroque when spiritual fervor leads the poet into a reverie about the physical and sensual in Dante's poetry and his own life. He remembers the sensuous experience of seeing a woman's flesh through a key-hole dress: "I saw her honey-skinned / shoulder-blades and the wheatlands of her back" (*SI* 76) and this brings to mind the sensuous syllables of Dante: "So I revived in my own wiling powers / And my heart flushed, like somebody set free" (*SI* 76). The experience of sensuality, of love, breaks down the barriers of the ego and the poet is "translated, given, under the oak tree" (*SI* 76). Once these barriers have dropped, Heaney is assailed by the suffering of others. Having finally let himself be taken by beauty, he is open to the experience of pain in a new and more intimate way as revealed by his encounters with the victims of sectarian violence.

The opening in the key-hole dress symbolizes an opening in the spirit through which the shades that follow show "the vulnerability of a skin offered in wound and outrage beyond all that can show itself, beyond all that of essence of being can expose itself to understanding and celebration" (Levinas 63). The victims of sectarian violence, from the shopkeeper to the hunger striker to Heaney's cousin Colum, all appeal to the poet in their woundedness, asking that he acknowledge them and through their suffering his own responsibility to them. One of the things that the poet must struggle with is the proper way to address this suffering and these losses. His poetic response is brought under fire most harshly by his cousin: "you whitewashed ugliness . . . and saccharined my death with morning dew" (*SI* 83). The poet must do more than gild the coffins of the dead with beautiful poetry; he must aim to move the community beyond their dogmatic sectarian traditions. That is why a reading of "Station Island" as merely the agon between

the individual and society is incomplete. Heaney is not freeing himself to satisfy a selfish artistic impulse, but to move to a higher calling in his poetry.

Thus the encounter with Joyce is marked by the baroque juxtaposition of images of grounding and fluidity. The poet “sensed again / an alien comfort as he stepped on ground” (*SI* 92), indicating that he has gotten his bearings after the wash of dreams. Yet Joyce’s voice is “eddy with the vowels of all rivers” (*SI* 92). The poet seeks to be both grounded and fluid in his identity, able to broaden the definition of what it means to be Irish and a poet while remaining true to the local experience. Heaney’s new vocation “is not discharged by any common rite;” he is beholden to the ideals of poetry and to the higher call of the face of the Other, which he has seen in a new light throughout his dreams on Station Island. Joyce, a marginal artist in his own time, yet central to the Irish experience, sanctifies Heaney’s position as an outsider demanding that he “keep at a tangent” and “fill the element / with signatures on your own frequency (*SI* 93). These frequencies will serve to enrich the debate on Irish identity.

Ironically, once he gets the authority to speak in his own voice, Heaney decides to speak in the persona of another, in this case, the voice of Sweeney, the ancient king of Ireland. Why does Heaney choose another persona at all if he has just been given license to speak by none other than Joyce himself? The voice of Sweeney allows the poet to engage with the present at a tangent, removed from the flesh and blood ties he has wrestled with on the island. Heaney is now free to take on the novelist’s task of creating alternative worlds and characters that have a life of their own. As Robert Brazeau notes, Heaney “sees in the myth of Sweeney an opportunity to explore further the divergent impulses between political engagement and poetical transcendence that is central to his

writing. In his translation, then, Heaney de-emphasizes the local context of the work in order to suggest its enduring and general importance” (98). In essence, Heaney is making a turn toward the ethereal and transcendent, looking to fashion a poetry that is less territorially based. Heaney continues utilizing the baroque as a way of opening up possibilities for interpretation and relation. Conor McCarthy notes that by glossing *Sweeney Astray* through *Sweeney Redivivus*, Heaney displays a desire for a past that is open to “multiple reimaginings and reconfigurations” (45).¹⁶⁹

In the voice of Sweeney, the bird-king, Heaney turns to a sort of poetry that emphasizes the freedom of the individual poet to speak with his own voice and be true to the dictates of his own conscience. The poems in the Sweeney cycle emphasize this sense of freedom, but continue to struggle with the poet’s relationship to the land and the people. The first poem in the sequence, aptly titled “The First Gloss,” moves the reader to consider the position of the poet as critic of his own work and the works of others. The poem is brief and worth quoting here in its entirety.

Take hold of the pen.
Subscribe to the first step taken
from a justified line
into the margin. (*SI* 97)

This poem echoes “Digging” and signals as did the former a new direction in Heaney’s poetry.¹⁷⁰ Again the pen surfaces as a weapon/tool to create a new reality or represent an existing one. In a way Heaney is glossing his prior work while setting out in a new direction. Heaney has engaged in traditional literary criticism glossing other poets in

¹⁶⁹ In this way his project is similar to that of the Brazilian Anthropophagy group: “Not to deny foreign influences or nourishment, but to absorb and transform them by the addition of autochthonous input” (Vieira 98). He finds the cure in what was originally repressed by the introduction of Christianity.

¹⁷⁰ In *Seamus Heaney and Medieval Poetry*, Conor McCarthy also makes the connection between “Digging” and “First Gloss” determining that the second serves also as a gloss on the former (45).

prose, but he also engages his colleagues in in his own work. Through this two-sentence poem, Heaney shifts attention away from the absent text into the margins, the blank spaces that surround and frame the authoritative written word. This simple four-line poem constitutes an invitation and is a remarkable example of compression of meaning in a poem. Through these few lines, Heaney invokes historical images of medieval scribes copying the bible or other authoritative tomes painstakingly onto illuminated vellum. These human copy machines however provide an additional service that no modern Xerox machine can ever emulate and that is to inject themselves through pen and ink onto the text they were copying. These injections occur in the form of commentary, dissent, or simple distraction on the margins of the canonical works and provide a glimpse into the life and feelings of the copier.

“The Scribes” further elaborates this connection between the poet and the medieval scribes, while also advancing the baroque idea of human beings as writing. In the first two stanzas, Heaney describes the medieval writers as consummately human, griping about trivialities like the dryness or oiliness of the vellum, and snarling about the weather. The third stanza begins the comparison between the human and the written by suggesting that “resentment seeded in the uncurling / fernheads of their capitals” (*SI* 111). Heaney, of course, refers to the illuminated letters that headed each page, positing that they were not created out of a reverence for the text, but as a relief for the writers’ pent up anxieties. As the poet-narrator flies further away from the scriptorium in the fourth stanza, the merger between writer and writing becomes complete: “I . . . saw in my absence / the sloped cursive of each back and felt them / perfect themselves against me page by page” (*SI* 111). The Sweeney figure then emerges as some sort of tempter to the

scribes who inflames their inconveniences to encourage them to acts of disputation that will appear in the marginalia. The influence of Sweeney urges them to place their own mark on the canonical text that they are copying. The importance of this office is made clear in the final couplet: “Let them remember this not inconsiderable / contribution to their jealous art” (*SI* 111). The transcription of the scribes becomes translation when they inject their own thoughts and feelings into the work, a method Heaney will also ascribe to in his later translations that bring the voice of the Other to the center.

Returning to “First Gloss”, Heaney also uses the concept of margin and center to draw upon the postcolonial in Ireland. In colonial relations, the Irish voice was frequently marginalized by the superior linguistic and military force of English, forcing the former into the margins. In the context of this project, Heaney also seems to be advocating a turn to the margins as an equal partner in considerations for the meaning of a text. He has done this previously in his translation of *Buile Subhine* and will continue to do so in his later translation of Greek, Latin, and Old English texts. To look to the margins is a baroque impulse that encourages a reevaluation of the center from that perspective.¹⁷¹ Furthermore, “adopting the persona of Sweeney, the outcast, allows Heaney to revisit his life from the sidelines and make disputatious comments” (McCarthy 46). By situating himself apart from the community that he comes from Heaney can reevaluate his choices and reconsider the positions that he has taken. By moving to the margins of his own culture, Heaney reinvigorates the question of marginality for the postcolonial writer by focusing his attention not back on the center, but on the margin.

¹⁷¹ This is a similar gesture to Enrique Dussel’s in *The Invention of the Americas*: “I wish to disprove Habermans and Hegel, for whom the discovery of America is not determinant of modernity. The experience not only of discovery, but especially of the conquest, is *essential* to the constitution of the modern ego, not only as a subjectivity, but as a subjectivity that takes itself to be the center or end of history” (25).

This autobiographical element is most evident in the poem “The First Flight” in which Heaney describes Sweeney’s dislocations from hearth and home as the impetus for his flight. The opening lines speak of the constant warfare that is consistent with Sweeney’s medieval life, but could just as easily be about the Troubles in Ireland: “that was a time when the times / were also in spasm” (*SI* 102). The people’s allegiance is split between the old Celtic religion and emerging Christianity: “the ties and the knots running through us / split open / down the lines of the grain” (*SI* 102). These splits cause people to band together into groups for protection, but also cause narrow-mindedness and it is the hardening of allegiances that ultimately pushes Sweeney/the poet away: “I was mired in attachment / until they began to pronounce me / a feeder off battlefields” (*SI* 102). This echoes his cousin Colum’s recriminations in *Station Island* when he accuses Heaney of whitewashing ugliness and “saccharin[ing] my death with morning dew” (*SI* 83). In “*Station Island*,” Heaney seems to be reproaching himself for “feeding off of battlefields,” and essentially making his poetic reputation in the midst of, and occasionally on the subject of sectarian violence. However, in the *Sweeney Redivivus* section, the poet takes a different tack, suggesting that the closed mindedness of the community prevents him from speaking for them, and defines himself against those sectarian artists:

the people of art
diverting their rhythmical chants

to fend off the onslaught of winds
I would welcome and climb
at the top of my bent. (*SI* 103)

Instead of trying to keep difference and connection with others away through rhythmic chant, the poet finds that he thrives on the controversy. He prefers to take the harder road,

negotiating the conflict through the middle way, rather than hardening sectarian positions. This is an essential part of Heaney's baroque method, maintaining competing drives and allegiances in check in order to forge a new method of understanding the self, the community, and the past. As Hart notes, "Obsessed with such hierarchical oppositions as writing and speech, forgetting and remembering, blindness and insight, profane and sacred love, marginal and central institutions, Heaney typically reveals a dialectical relation where oppressively one-sided relations were or are the rule" (Hart 48). Heaney refuses to choose sides and forces his readers to reevaluate positions they consider absolute. As he states in "The Impact of Translation:" "It is the refusal by this rearguard minority (the poets) which exposes to the majority the abjectness of their collapse, as they flee for security into whatever self-deceptions the party line requires of them" (*GT* 39).¹⁷² The poet does not endear himself to the people in this way because, "people are never grateful for being reminded of their moral cowardice" (*GT* 39).

Heaney moves beyond sectarian identity to claim membership in a community of poets who move the people to self-consciousness. This community is described in "From the Republic of Conscience," a beautiful fanciful poem from Heaney's subsequent collection *The Haw Lantern* that has the resonance of a fairytale and signals Heaney's allegiance with a worldwide community of artists. The poem performs its baroque dance by weaving together a real world border crossing with travel to an imaginative realm. The poem is book-ended by images of borders and frontiers, staffed by the elderly who perform the usual duties of customs and immigration officers. However, unlike the usual underlying antagonism felt in such situations, these officers show him pictures of his past and ask him "to declare / the words of our traditional cures and charms / to heal

¹⁷² This is precisely what Esteban finds repulsive about Victor Hugues as governor of Guadeloupe.

dumbness and avert the evil eye” (*OG 276*). Punning on the word “declare,” Heaney is asked to reveal how much of his cultural baggage he still carries around with him. This process is repeated on his departure. He carries nothing back because, “the customs woman / having insisted my allowance was myself” (*OG 277*). Heaney describes the republic itself in the second section of the poem, and identifies it as a place where writing, speaking, listening and seeing are seamlessly intertwined and form a means of transportation: “Their sacred symbol is a stylized boat. / Their sail is an ear, the mast a sloping pen / the hull a mouth-shape, the keel an open eye” (*OG 276*). The senses most needed for poetry and understanding other people, the eye, mouth, and ear, are all part of this symbol whose movement is provided by the sloping pen, which stands as the mast, and the ear, a sail, that is moved by the winds of poetry. In this republic, elected officials are emotionally tied to the people and the values they hold. Their position is one of humility and service, not power and influence. Ultimately, Heaney emerges from this republic as a dual citizen, “a representative” who speaks “on their behalf in [his] own tongue” (*OG 277*). This is a life-long commitment, which puts into words Heaney’s attitude as a poet. He speaks for the republic of conscience as one of its ambassadors, advancing the humanist ideals of that republic along with other writers and artists that share his vision. It is a baroque republic in that it is not centralized in any one place, but operates through a loose network of affiliated ambassadors, who, as the poem states “would never be relieved” of their charge (*OG 277*).

Heaney’s concept of the government of the tongue works in concert with the republic of conscience. In the prose volume of the same name, Heaney outlines some of the concepts, which inform and guide his poetry and pays tribute to other ambassadors

that have helped him along the way to find and remain true to the republic. The government of the tongue represents an “aspect of poetry as its own validating force” (*GT* 92); this comes about “from the audience’s readiness to concede to it a similar efficacy and resource” (*GT* 93). The poet serves as a vanguard, an interlocutor, “to open unexpected and unedited communications between our nature and the nature of the reality we inhabit” (*GT* 93). Like the customs officers in “The Republic of Conscience,” “the poet taps into reservoirs of language to reveal underlying truths of human experience. The opening essay “The Interesting Case of Nero, Chekhov’s Cognac, and a Knocker” brings together the poet’s concerns about practicing art in a broken world. He feels torn between the pure joy and luxury of practicing poetry and the call of the victims of violence. Art and Life, as Heaney terms these alternatives, are deemed to be in conflict though both equally share in shaping the poetic consciousness: “He or she begins to feel that a choice between the two, a once-and-for-all option, would simplify things” (*GT* xii). This is a feeling shared by those artists that Heaney refers to in “First Flight” who try to bend the winds rather than ride the contradictory currents. Heaney uses Wilfred Owen and Chekhov as examples of engaged poets who faced the conundrum and yet chose both. Poetry is necessary for the understanding of life, and for a poet to truly feel as if his poetry is engaged with the world, he or she must face the calls of both art and life of “the poet as witness” (*GT* xvi). However, Heaney is not necessarily interested in being the poet as witness, but in bringing poetry to a higher plane. Calling upon Jung, he determines that “an insoluble conflict is overcome by outgrowing it, developing in the process ‘a new level of consciousness’” (*GT* xxii). Poetry then comes to bridge art and life by providing access to another place, a place beyond the exigencies of the moment.

The baroque gestures the poet must make to accommodate both art and life result in “an experience of release” (*GT* xxii). As Heaney states,

the tongue, governed for so long in the social sphere by considerations of tact and fidelity, by nice obeisances to one’s origin within the minority or the majority, this tongue is suddenly ungoverned. It gains access to a condition that is unconstrained and, while not being practically effective, is not necessarily inefficacious. (*GT* xxii)

Poetry offers new possibilities for the relationship between the individual artist and the community, loosening the bond of Life in order to allow the poet freedom to achieve a higher consciousness.

This poetic freedom is something to be sought after and protected, but it is also something that can overwhelm and destroy a poet. Despite the airiness and independence of the Sweeney Redivivus section of *Station Island*, Heaney continually alludes to the necessity of community and the tribe for the understanding of the individual self and as a resource for poetry. In various poems throughout *Station Island* he mentions feeling at home in “the camaraderie of rookeries, / in the spiteful vigilance of colonies” (*SI* 104). The final poem of *Station Island* brings Sweeney/Heaney into communion with the group suggesting reconciliation with the Christian community. This is more than simple faithfulness to the original; Heaney chooses to emphasize the need for community and reunion despite sundering, as Carpentier does in *The Lost Steps*. “On the Road” suggests the beginning of a new relationship and a new form of poetry in which the community will be kept in mind, but poetic freedom will remain paramount.

Heaney is arguing for a baroque conception of poetry and the world that valorizes the individual, but also engages with the wider world. The poet becomes a nodal point for the engagement of all these different voices, but must remain true to him/herself in order

not to be overrun by them. The baroque imagination provides an outlet for the lyric imagination while grounding it in a firm connection with historical and temporal reality.

One of the ways that Heaney positions himself between the individual and the communal is translation. In translation, Heaney looks to find a link with poets from other eras whose plight speaks to the modern age and to whom readers can look to find mirrors of their own humanity. Translation for Heaney serves the function of being able to get at the heart of another poet's voice and substance as well as embracing the fortuitous errors that occur through mistranslations, which returns us to Ricoeur's two desires of translation – the broadening of the parameters of one's own language and the discovery of resources buried within it – discussed at the outset of this chapter.

This is evident in the Sweeney sequence, but can be more clearly seen in Heaney's discussion of his translation of Horace's odes one and thirty-four in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks. "Horace and the Thunder" takes advantage of the word Atlantic, which means Atlas in the original, to give "the whole early Roman scenario an eerie contemporary resonance" ("Anything Can Happen" 15). Despite the age and remove of the Horatian ode Heaney notes that, "if poetry has a virtue, it resides in its ability to bring us to our senses about what is going on inside and outside ourselves" ("Anything Can Happen" 14). This can be accomplished by a contemporary poet sounding his own note, or by a translator updating the classics for a new age. In Heaney's later work, translation will become his chosen tool for addressing the questions of violence, selfhood and language.

Another aspect of translation that is significant for Heaney's work is the re-appropriation of works of the Greeks and Romans as world patrimony. In an era of

identity politics, when third world scholars were increasingly inclined to throw the proverbial baby out with the bath water, Heaney, along with Walcott and others, remained firm in their commitment to and rejuvenation of the classics. Although British culture had assumed the Roman Empire as a model and emblem, Heaney nevertheless delves into aspects of Horace and Ovid that become useful for understanding the subjugated position of Ireland. The Greeks also provide literary and historical fodder for the poet as their works speak of universal themes of exile, longing, and love. By claiming these as his own, yet changing key aspects of them in translation, Heaney gives new life to these historical documents and has them resonate for a contemporary audience.

One of Heaney's most successful and moving translations is his reworking of Sophocles Philoctetes, "The Cure at Troy." In this work, the poet returns to the image of the wound as a way to explore the connections between poet and people, individual and group. Philoctetes is an artist who must rejoin the community. Before delving into the similarities and differences between Heaney's and Sophocles' representations of the character of Philoctetes, it is valuable to consider both the plot and the context of the original text. The legend of Philoctetes is first recounted in the *Iliad*. Philoctetes receives a snake bite for transgressing on sacred territory. This wound never heals and causes great spasms that alienate the Greek forces that are embarking on the war against Troy. Odysseus and his companions strand Philoctetes on Lemnos and go on without him, only to find that the war cannot be won without him and the bow he receives as a gift from Heracles (also known as Hercules). Eventually, Philoctetes is rescued by the Greeks and the war is won. Sophocles' fifth-century play begins with Neoptolemeus, son of Achilles, and Odysseus's arrival on the island of Lemnos and highlights the divisions between the

factions in the Greek army. Sophocles' rendition mirrors the struggles taking place during a time of internal and external struggle for the city-state of Athens. As Carola Greengard writes, "The setting of the civic political strife in the context of international war is of great importance. The seesawing between factions in Athenian political life was inextricably associated with the events of the Peloponnesian Wars at this period" (15). These struggles would have been foremost in the minds of the audience as they watched the struggles between the ideology of Philoctetes and that of Odysseus for the allegiance of Neoptolemeus, the future of the Greek army and citizenry.

The impasse is only resolved by the *deus ex machina* appearance of Heracles, who reiterates the promises of the oracle. Philoctetes is thereby rejoined to the army and the Greeks take Troy. This abrupt change often appears dissatisfying and perhaps unrealistic given the vehemence of Philoctetes' prior refusals, yet it serves a purpose in the narrative beyond remaining true to the original structure of the story from the *Iliad*. Greengard writes, "Philoctetes' agonized transformation remains terrifying; it is neither tame nor is it comic in the sense of being 'funny.' However, it does recognize the important reality of change and does not exact the price of mortality. His life goes on to something new and profoundly different" (55). It is both the setting of the play as one of internecine struggles and the individual and social healing that takes place that most attracted Heaney to this character and his story.

Heaney's translator's touch is most evident in the opening and closing sequences of *The Cure at Troy*. In the chorus's opening stanzas, he stakes out a place for poetry as a mediator of human experience, stating:

The chorus
Is more or less a borderline between

The you and the me and it of it

Between

The god's and human beings' sense of things

And that's the borderline that poetry operates on too, always in between

What you would like to happen and what will-

Whether you would like it or not

Poetry

Allowed the god to speak. It was the voice

Of reality and justice (2)

This goes far beyond Sophocles' opening in which Odysseus begins to spin his webs of trickery from the first. Heaney frames the play with speeches that direct the audience to the contemporary situation of Ireland in a way that is still applicable to other conflicts in other times. Poetry is seen as an active force that can mediate the processes of violence and open hardened hearts and minds to an alternative way of living. Although Heaney mediates this opinion in the closing, as he states: "No poem or play or song / Can fully right a wrong / Inflicted and endured" (77). The traumas of the past are not erased by poetry, but verse and song can help bridge the distance between estranged parties.

In the *Cure at Troy*, Philoctetes is abandoned because his cries of pain demoralize the men and disrupt the sacred rites. In a similar way, the sectarian violence of Catholic-Protestant struggles disrupts daily life and attacks the social fabric, constantly reopening the wound. Heaney describes this cyclical violence in his Nobel lecture saying, "The violence from below was then productive of nothing but the retaliatory violence from above ... people settled in to a quarter century of life-waste and spirit-waste, of hardening attitudes and narrowing possibilities that were the natural result of political solidarity, traumatic suffering and sheer emotional self-protectiveness" (Heaney, *Crediting Poetry* 17). Philoctetes has become hard and intransigent, unable to step out of his own pain and

indeed feeding into the corruption and infection of the wound with his own bitterness. As Neoptolemeus says, “The danger is you’ll break if you don’t bend” (*The Cure at Troy* 75). This statement reveals the psychological character of the wound, which has previously been described by the chorus as “their own self-pity” (Heaney, *The Cure at Troy* 1). Philoctetes wound now emblemizes the recriminations and hardening of sectarian attitudes that are self-inflicted and worsen individual pain leading to further outbreaks of violence. Philoctetes needs to leave his island of exile in order to reunite with the body politic; only in this way will he be able to heal the wound.

As Robert Tracy notes, “Lemnos is another Station Island, where Philoctetes and Neoptolemeus must confront themselves, their powers, and the responsibilities that go along with those powers. And they must confront their wounds” (260). In a sense, the problem between Philoctetes, Neoptolemeus, and Odysseus is the problem of translation. At the outset of the play, Philoctetes has already determined that Neoptolemeus and his crew are linguistic compatriots and rejoices at their shared speech, “Oh! Hearing you talk, / just hearing you ... you have no idea” (*CT* 15). However, this linguistic similarity does not ensure that their communications will be successful. As Ricoeur states, “the other half of the problem of translation” is “translation within the same linguistic community” (24). Even among speakers of the same language there are times when a sentence or text is not understood and must be interpreted, or re-interpreted, by a speaker of the same language in an effort to explain the meaning: “Now, to say the same thing in another way – *in other words* – this is what a moment ago the foreign language translator did” (Ricoeur 25). In his translation, Heaney enacts an attempt to say in another way what he has been saying throughout his poetry, the hardening of sectarian positions

without a move towards ethical and linguistic hospitality only leads to further violence. Odysseus and Neoptolemeus are speaking at cross-purposes with Philoctetes but want to achieve the same goal.

The translation of the image of the wound in *The Cure at Troy* expresses what Heaney termed, in his 1995 Nobel lecture, the need to “make space in [his] reckoning and imagining for the marvellous as well as the murderous” (*Crediting Poetry* 20); in a way that identifies the wound as a site of cultural origins. The searing bouts of pain and subsequent psychic and creative drain on the wounded individual become representations of the way that violence continually erupts in Northern Ireland. As Hugh Denard writes,

Heaney’s version seems to suggest that the post-colonial condition produces hybrid forms of consciousness in both the colonizer and the colonist. Seen in this light, Heaney’s version represents not only a critique of colonialism and colonial attitudes, but also a route to a new post-coloniality. (Denard 6)

I would argue a baroque postcoloniality. Neoptolemeus is one of the expressions of what that new post-coloniality might look like and it is no wonder that he is the character that most resembles Heaney. As Brazeau notes, “Neoptolemeus’ injunction to Philoctete to stop obsessing over the wrongs committed against him in the past and to fix his attention on the present anticipates the title of a future volume of Heaney’s poetry: ‘Stop licking your wounds. Start seeing things’ (97). This command also echoes Joyce’s words in “Station Island:” “The English language / belongs to us. You are raking at dead fires, rehearsing old whinges at your age” (*OG* 245). The new post-coloniality must be engaged with the present and with the world, while maintaining a sense of personal and artistic integrity.

The closing speeches of the chorus reiterate Heaney's intent and his hopes for the future in lines that have since been quoted by President Bill Clinton and President Mary Robinson during the Northern Ireland peace process:

History says, *Don't hope*
On this side of the grave.
 But then, once in a lifetime
 The longed-for tidal wave
 Of justice can rise up,
 And hope and history rhyme. (Heaney 77)

History typically only promises more battles, more power struggles, and more violence. The only solace it can offer is in death, the ultimate transformation and the cessation of all struggles. Heaney's chorus hopes for more in the growing relationship between Philoctetes and Neoptolemeus. The younger soldier has refused trickery and force as ways of achieving the bow. However, this conclusion is still unsatisfactory, as their refusal of violence and adherence to a heroic code of behavior will mean the defeat of Troy and the ascendancy of Greece. Only the appearance of the god Hercules and his dictates on just war convert Philoctetes to the cause of Greece. It is in the speech of Hercules that we again more clearly hear the voice of a Northern Irish poet: "Conclude the sore / And cruel stalemate of our war. / Win by fair combat. But know to shun / Reprisal killings when that's done" (Heaney 79). Hercules speaks to Philoctetes and Neoptolemeus in order to direct the violence and heal the Greek body politic. This world is not a simple world – violence is unavoidable – but it can be limited. The wounded and the healed must move forward into a new relationship. As the epigraph from W.H. Auden describes, both Greek and Irish must learn to love their "crooked neighbors with their crooked hearts" (*CT* unpaginated). Hercules serves as that impossible third text in which translations by Philoctetes and Neoptolemeus can be compared. Hercules also serves as a

stand in for poetry since he speaks with the same voice as the chorus. Poetry, for Heaney, will provide this third way, a translation that while not yet perfect will attempt to envision an alternative not yet imagined by either side.

Ultimately, Heaney finds in the wound a site of common identity and a restorative place from which to build a new history. This is not to say that Heaney's new site of origins is a new and slightly more sophisticated version of "There are faults on both sides"—the old palliative catch-phrase that has got Northern Ireland people through embarrassing situations for years and at the same time gotten them nowhere" (*FK* 399). Instead, Heaney's vision asks for an honest look backward into history that assesses the wounds of the body politic in ways that do not romanticize the past, or seek to attach blame to one side or the other.

As Heaney says in "Crediting Poetry," "And I find it (this hopeful vision), for example, in the repetition of that refrain of Yeats', 'Come build in the empty house of the stare,'¹⁷³ with its tone of supplication, its pivots of strength in the words 'build' and 'house' and its acknowledgement of dissolution in the word 'empty'" (Heaney, *Crediting Poetry* 28). The house of the stare is built in the crumbling masonry of Thoor Ballylee. The cracks themselves can be seen as a sort of wound that speaks to the brokenness of the Irish and the post-colonial traditions of violence, nonetheless the regeneration of life speaks to the hardiness of the body that bears the wound, but does not succumb to it. New life can flourish from the cracks to create beauty and a new point of origins for understanding the postcolonial condition of Ireland. The identification of the wound with the bog and the bog as the central emblem of Irish identity suggests the creation of a

¹⁷³ This line comes from Part VI of Yeats' "Meditations in Time of Civil War." Yeats has also said that stare was an Irish word for starling. The word stare lends a particularly Irish inflection to both the wound and its healing.

more fluid identity for those living in Northern Ireland, and even in Ireland itself. This identity would find its expression in the *omphalos* of the wound and the bog, as a place where a hopeful future can be constructed that does not erase or forget the agony of the past, but rather uses the agony as a source of strength and common ground.¹⁷⁴

Heaney describes this working of the baroque imagination as the articulation of “through-otherness” in his 2001 lecture “Through-Other Places, Through-Other Times: The Irish Poet and Britain.” Through-other means “physically untidy or mentally confused” (*FK* 398) in Ulster-speak and Heaney appropriates it to describe the untidy nature of English in the British Isles that has been inflected and contaminated by Irish, Celtic, Danish, Norman, and Saxon influences, among others. He also uses it to characterize an approach to language and identity that moves beyond the postcolonial designation of “the Other” to the term “through-other” (*FK* 412). In postcolonial criticism “The Other” is the silenced minority (or majority) who is written over by the colonizing force. Postcolonial critics, such as Gayatri Spivak, have even questioned whether “the Other” can speak. In claiming that the hour of the “through-other” has arrived, Heaney gives insight into precisely how “the Other” has been speaking through the words of the colonizer. As he states, “Any account of the Irish poet and Britain must get past politics and into poetry itself, and that will involve poetry not only in English but in Irish, Welsh, Scots, and Scots Gaelic, not to mention the work done in what Edward Kamau Brathwaite calls ‘Nation Language’” (*FK* 405). The influences of these other languages exist in what Heaney calls “the under-ear activities” (*FK* 405). They constitute the deeper

¹⁷⁴ Both Hugh Denard and Oliver Taplin cite the same lines from Heaney’s *The Cure at Troy* “History says, *Don’t hope / on this side of the grave...* believe that far shore / is reachable from here” as they were quoted by Irish president Mary Robinson at the outset of her presidency and U.S. President Bill Clinton at the signing of the 1999 Good Friday Agreement in order to show Heaney’s play as visionary of a future agreement and perhaps in some ways responsible for it.

resonances of a poem and allow both poet and reader to move forward in the search for a “through-other” identity that moves beyond identity politics to a recognition of the Other as a part of the self.¹⁷⁵

Translation becomes a “through-other” and baroque enterprise that complicates the simplistic categories of identity that limit the possibilities of self-knowledge and linguistic belonging. Heaney’s translations, by the nature of their very ease and accessibility, will likely slip easily into high school, undergraduate, and even graduate curricula to become the new authoritative versions of the text. This is particularly true of *Beowulf*, a text that most high school students who study in English will have read, at least in excerpted form, by the time they have completed secondary education and one that decisively affected Heaney himself as a student. This was consciously done as Heaney writes in “Through-Other Places, Through-Other Times”:

There are those who would argue that ... in translating the poem I had studied I was exhibiting all the symptoms of the colonial subject. I can understand what such commentators are saying, but I could also see what I myself was doing. I knew what a through-other venture the whole thing would have to be, but was happy enough to say, So, so be it. Let *Beowulf* now be a book from Ireland. (FK 414)

Heaney’s appropriation of this text is subversively revolutionary and indicative of the way that he has brought a distinctively Irish sensibility to bear on the English language that will resonate globally.

Examining Heaney’s translations in this way offers a new way of thinking about the “flawed” translations Latin American artists and scholars have worked from and that Roberto Schwarz addresses in *Misplaced Ideas*.” If we evaluate the translators not as

¹⁷⁵ “What a poet can establish in the act of writing a poem is something a reader can get from the completed work, namely, a realization that as persons and as peoples we can get further into ourselves and further out of ourselves than we might have expected; and this is one of the ways that poetry helps things forward” (FK 409-410).

a ‘further language’ through which some form of transcendence can be found with respect to the relationship between self and other” (*Searches* 180-81).

However, rather than aligning himself with hegemonic forces that advocate sameness, Heaney’s comments on poetry and translation in “The Fragment” also point to an affinity between his interpretation of translation and that of the Brazilian modernists who espoused anthropophagy as a model to disrupt imperial claims to originality. As Else Ribeiro Pires Vieira notes in her study of Haroldo de Campos’ poetics of translation, “translation is no longer a one-way flow from the source to the target culture, but a two way transcultural enterprise” (106). Heaney communes with Eliot, Mandelstam, and Dante as a way of expanding Irish English and by extension all Englishes. His engagement with these texts performs an anthropophagic ritual that brings the margins to the center through the aegis of language.

Translation becomes “transcreation” in the words of de Campos : “transcreation is a radical translation praxis. To transcreate is not to try to reproduce the original’s form understood as sound pattern, but to appropriate the translator’s contemporaries’ best poetry, to use the local existing tradition” (qtd. in Vieira 110). This is something that Heaney tries to accomplish in all of his translations; in other words, “to transcreate means also nourishment from local sources, nourishment that at the same time, limits the universality of the original and inscribes the difference” (Vieira 110). Heaney’s translations work to achieve this through a re-telling of Old English, Latin and Greek texts that are inflected with the Northern Irish idiom. In doing so, he attaches another layer of meaning to both the original document and his new literary creation. Heaney’s baroque imagination, expressed in translation, unravels the easy binaries of nationalism

and religious sectarianism to create a more complex and open discussion of Irish and poetic identity. Ultimately, Heaney utilizes the baroque as a way to simultaneously create a cultural thickness for Northern Ireland, while opening out the definition of Irishness itself. He is striving for relation between not just the colonizer and the colonized, but among all people of the world through artistic and literary engagement.

Conclusion: A Baroque Humanism

Throughout this study, I demonstrate how the baroque imaginations of Alejo Carpentier, Derek Walcott and Seamus Heaney engage in a decolonizing poetics that links the universal with the particular and valorizes the Other as a part of the self. The baroque imagination is articulated differently in each text. For example, in *Another Life*, *The Lost Steps*, and “Station Island,” the focus is on the individual and his relationship to a baroque world. In *Omeros* and *Explosion in a Cathedral*, the primary concerns are the relationships between individuals or with an antecedent text, which is also the focus in Heaney’s translations of Ovid. Using the archives as founts of information, Carpentier’s narrative leads him to interrogate the myths of origins that label Latin America as reactionary and derivative, substituting a truly original narrative in their stead. Walcott’s narrative reappropriates European landscape from the perspective of the Caribbean with the aim of decentering its cultural hegemony. Heaney’s narrative crafts a self that is rooted in Irish identity, yet breaks through ego and cultural boundaries to achieve greater solidarity with poets beyond national borders. Although different in focus, each work contributes to an ongoing narrative that situates the periphery as a valid cultural center. This move toward global Relation is made possible by a firm grounding in the local. Each narrative builds up the cultural density of the periphery in order to afford it more weight in its negotiations with the metropolis. By fashioning themselves poetically as modern subjects, these artists argue for the modernity of the periphery that shaped their imaginings.

Although Carpentier, Walcott, and Heaney utilize European and autochthonous elements to construct their baroque works, they do not return to them as models to be reproduced, but transcend them to construct a more inclusive paradigm. The through-

other process of translation identified by Heaney is similar to Glissant's poetics of relation and Carpentier's baroque. It is a constitution of the self in relationship with the Other that permits the integration of both the specifically Irish or Cuban and the Western and the European. Walcott's autobiographical method, like Carpentier's protagonists-as-masks, serve to reveal the alterity within the self and preclude a reification of identity.

Ultimately, this decolonizing poetics is expressed as a baroque humanism.

Humanism is a word that is "tied inescapably to the linguistic and cultural authority (real, absent, wished-for, or fought over) of those who use it" (Davies 6).¹⁷⁶ To unite Humanism and the Baroque, another equally contested word, is to suggest that "humanity is neither a given essence, nor an achievable end, but a continuous and precarious process of becoming human" (Davies 142). The baroque humanism espoused by these postcolonial writers questions the unity of the subject and its orientation towards the self. Through their works they argue for a vision of the self that recognizes the alterity within that self and the orientation of the self as a being-for-others. Maintaining the idea of transcendence and the sacred within their configuration of humanism allows these artists a place upon which to ground their critique of imperialism, yet they radically alter the concept by placing the wounded, colonized, racialized body at the center.

Carpentier, Walcott and Heaney's view of the self is not that of the disembodied Cartesian "cogito," but rather that of Ortega y Gasset's articulation of "I and my circumstances." The creative appropriation of history is one example of how the self is

¹⁷⁶ Tony Davies discusses the origins and various uses of the word humanism in his insightful volume by the same name and finds that, "On the one side, humanism is saluted as the philosophical champion of human freedom and dignity, standing alone and outnumbered against the battalions of ignorance, tyranny and superstition ... it is synonymous with the 'culture' to which we must look as the only bulwark against the materialistic 'anarchy' of contemporary society ... On the other, it has been denounced as an ideological smokescreen for the oppressive mystifications of modern society and culture, the marginalization and oppression of the multitude of human beings in whose name it pretends to speak, and even, through an inexorable 'dialectic of enlightenment', for the nightmare of fascism and total war" (4-5).

constituted through a deep understanding of its circumstances, historical, political, ethnic and cultural. These methods of artistic production—Heaney’s archeological etymology, Carpentier’s excavation of the archive, and Walcott’s use of both—leads these writers into the recognition that one of the formative aspects of the self is the Other. This is a paradigm that needs to be continually rearticulated to achieve its decolonizing ends. Each subsequent text demonstrates a continuing process of revolt by which these authors make lateral adjustments to the hegemony of the center. As such, the baroque imagination practices “modern revolt ... in the form of trials, hesitations, learning as you go, making patient and lateral adjustments to an endlessly complex network” (Kristeva, *Revolt* 54). These artists have made a lifelong commitment to the establishment of their peripherally-located homelands into cultural centers.

In recuperating humanism as an ethical discourse and resituating it in the postcolonial world, Carpentier, Walcott and Heaney show that the error in humanism lies not in its principles, but in the limited definition of human as someone white, European, and male. The baroque serves as a means of expanding what it means to be human, and humanism serves as a valid ethical system for ordering human relations. Yet, there is an acknowledgement by these artists of the dangers implicit in this formulation. By assuming the discourse of the dominant culture, the artist risks falling into the same traps of creating an Other to serve as the foil for themselves.

While gender is not a primary concern for these artists, the presentation of violence against women in the texts (Rosario in *The Lost Steps*, Helen in *Omeros*, the personified female landscape in “Act of Union”) indicates that the authors are aware of the consequences of attempting to speak for the Other, even a discourse that purportedly

takes the Other as its reason for being can become tyrannical if not subjected to self-questioning. In this sense, the baroque imagination constitutes a continually self-renewing revolt, one that involves continually, “placing a greater demand on oneself, and treating others with more generosity” (*Revolt* 113). *Harp and Shadow*, *The Prodigal*, and *Electric Light* all signal a willingness on the part of the authors to question the paradigms that have guided their artistic creation. Even in these late works, the human is shown in the process of becoming.

The polyvocality of these texts suggest productive avenues for further study. In *Explosion in a Cathedral*, part of the uniqueness of Sofia’s perspective on revolution derives from her gender. It would be fruitful in further studies to consider how the baroque imagination might be expressed by a female artist. Novelists and poets such as Cristina Garcia, Dionne Brand, Erna Brodber, and Rosario Ferre, would provide a productive counterpoint for this study. Likewise Heaney and Walcott’s intense engagement with the landscape suggest that more detailed analysis of the artists’ relationship with nature could yield insights for eco-criticism. This study has also broadly considered the question of the center versus that of the periphery. While I find this approach to be valid in presenting the global scope of the baroque imagination, more detailed consideration of the multiple centers and peripheries within which these artists move would allow for a consideration of the social, ethnic, and political tensions that more intimately affected the creation of each poem or novel.

Further studies might also consider the ways in which later artists have reacted to the centrality of each of these authors within their cultural milieu. For example, in what ways are Carpentier, Walcott, and Heaney’s narratives co-opted, contested, or

rearticulated by contemporary writers? Do they continue to utilize a baroque poetics, or do they move into new forms of expression altogether? These questions suggest that the discussions on the baroque imagination will continue to unfold in new and uncharted dimensions.

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