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### Recommended Citation

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Trickster-Hero and Rite of Passage: Effects of Traditionally West African Folklore

Forms on Postcolonial Afro-Caribbean Literature

A Thesis

Presented in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Arts

August, 2014

BY

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## **Trickster-Hero and Rite of Passage: Effects of Traditionally West African Folklore Forms on Postcolonial Afro-Caribbean Literature**

### *Introduction*

Since the liberation of European colonies in the West Indies, scholars have investigated and analyzed the complicated elegance of the hybrid Euro-African cultures unique to each island nation. These cultures evolved both under colonial rule and after liberation. Many have argued that what characterizes most Caribbean nations, apart from their tropical environment, is the conspicuous African cultural presence—detectable in artwork, song, dance, and countless other forms.

Accompanying a consensus of anthropologists and sociologists, literary scholars like Edward Braithwaite, Julia Cuervo Hewitt, and Catherine John agree that a hearkening back to African cultural tradition sparked drastic changes in Afro-Caribbean art after decolonization. This sense of negritude, as these three scholars all argue, inspired Afro-Caribbean writers to produce work that served as a deliberate foil to Western notions of creative composition. While scholarly research on the topic of Postcolonial Afro-Caribbean writings is both rich and abundant, scholars do not present any arguments that broach the topic of the African oral tradition—specifically, the stories told—and its relation to the literature that Afro-Caribbean writers have published since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. It is my argument that Afro-Caribbean fiction writers draw directly from the African oral tradition—specifically tricksters, heroes, and rites of passage—in order to rebel against the European cultural customs that colonizers forced upon African slaves and those slaves' descendants.

Critics of Afro-Caribbean literature like Césaire, Gates, and Bhabha—each of whom have written powerful commentary of the African, African-American, and Afro-

Caribbean situations—have not yet utilized both specifically West-African texts and Afro-Caribbean texts and drawn comparisons between the two. The closest someone has come to reckoning literature of the diaspora with the African story tradition is Gates in his book *The Signifying Monkey*, but he focuses mainly on African-American texts and dialect, and does not delve much into Afro-Caribbean work.

Unlike these scholars, I base my research heavily on texts like Harold Scheub's *The African Storyteller*. This is a compilation of dictated African oral tales from across the continent (I will only draw evidence from the stories that find their origins in Mid- to Northwest Africa). Such textual evidence is what Afro-Caribbean studies needs in order to prove that Afro-Caribbean writers have powerful, willful, confident means behind their choices as artists—to connect their undeniable shared past to their undeniable communal present.

Most Afro-Caribbean Literature scholars make arguments about the Afrocentricity of Afro-Caribbean Literature while taking for granted the apparently undeniable truth that African and Afro-Caribbean story traditions possess a connection borne from history. Though scholars like Megenny, Brathwaite, and Marshall acknowledge freely that postcolonial Afro-Caribbean literature does have an African influence, they have not investigated through close reading how that influence presents itself in the texts. To an overwhelming extent, scholars have not yet rifled through published Caribbean literary works to find any element that expresses distinctly African aesthetics or form.

Thus, the purpose of my essay is to find that formal and aesthetic connection between the African oral tradition and Afro-Caribbean literature. It is my aim to find

parallels in general story form between Afro-Caribbean and African texts or stories, and similarities in Afro-Caribbean character forms to stock characters in the African oral tradition (such as the Trickster, the Armless Bride, etc.). The evidence to support my claim will stem predominantly from textual research and close reading. I intend to compare works by Afro-Caribbean authors with the traditions of African folklore, focusing on principal characters and their ordeals, and sifting out the similarities. From there, I will interpret what I consider to be parallels and argue for their objective validity.

To encompass an argument that broaches both the precisely analytical and generally thematic levels, I intend to find and compare story forms and characters from African folklore and compare one element specifically to a similar element from a postcolonial Afro-Caribbean work. In other words, after finding a character or tale form (say, an Armless Bride character from Edwidge Danticat's collection of short stories, *Krik, Krak!*) that reminds me of a specific character form in a recorded Swahili story, "Ramaitolana" (Scheub 284), I will compare the two characters, and I will describe my findings in a chapter of my thesis dedicated to Armless Bride stories in postcolonial Afro-Caribbean works. In order to connect my research to a theme on a grander scale, I will also argue using the evidence I find in both works that the Afro-Caribbean author—in this case, Danticat—deliberately included the story in order to express a certain aspect of her culture, and to set herself apart from the Western culture thrust upon herself and her ancestors.

There is incontrovertible evidence (on which I will elaborate in the body of my thesis) of an African presence thematically and stylistically present in Postcolonial Afro-Caribbean literature. I will argue that this African-inspired content was and is deliber-

ately utilized to further distance Afro-Caribbean writers from their former colonizers—the stories are tools of rebellion. Thus, the purpose of my thesis is to argue that an implied African presence exists in postcolonial Afro-Caribbean literature. To work towards proving this statement, I will analyze both postcolonial Afro-Caribbean texts (predominantly in English, so I might retain as much of the author's meaning as possible as an English-reader) and folklore from the African oral tradition. By studying both at the same time, my goal is to uncover the common themes and stylistic elements of both traditions.

When Afro-Caribbean cultural identities began to form without being affected by colonizers' physical presence (albeit while still being critically affected by the shadow of that same now-neocolonial presence on lingual, social, and political levels), cultural change arguably manifested itself in Afro-Caribbean literature, as Afro-Caribbean writers underwent the same change in identity as others of similar heritage and cultural pasts, across the globe. I will analyze texts from the postcolonial period because Afro-Caribbean writers working during this time were (and are) further removed from Western influence than Afro-Caribbean writers from any other period. Postcolonial Afro-Caribbean writers thus are free to reconcile both their Western and their African cultural pasts by integrating African influences into their work.

I will focus on shorter works of fiction: short stories, poems, and plays. Although I will not overlook novels written by Afro-Caribbean authors, I believe that the shorter forms remain truer to the original folktale format. It is part of my argument that the writers who draw most heavily upon the African (or African-fathered Afro-Caribbean) oral tradition choose to do so in a format that most closely mirrors the structure of

the folktales that writers heard growing up.

Because there is such a wide breadth of Afro-Caribbean literature, and since time and resources are limited, I am only able to select literature available to me in print in the United States and on the Internet. However, this does include the work of some celebrated Afro-Caribbean writers: in the two chapters that comprise my thesis, I will be analyzing the work of Edwidge Danticat, Lorna Goodison, Edward Brathwaite, and Derek Walcott. Though these writers differ greatly in style and content, they all call upon their distant shared heritage, the Africanness that still holds considerable sway over their respective nations' cultures.

One theme that each of these authors concern themselves with heavily (and a theme that dominates Afro-Caribbean literary discourse) is hybridity. Like Homi Bhabha argues in *The Location of Culture*, hybridity and historic memory emerges in the literature of people whose hybrid identity resulted from a colonial past. Each West Indian nation's society is dominated by clashing binaries: white v. black, Europhilia v. Negritude, past v. present, colonization v. freedom, etc. Sometimes Afro-Caribbean people embody this hybridity physically: brown people with both European and African ancestry, or people with black skin who identify with the white colonizer.

While hybridity affects what genres and topics these writers choose, it also affects how they write. To combat a Eurocentric literary history in the West Indies, Afro-Caribbean writers purposely select African archetypes to begin transforming their work into a less purely European product: something hybrid. These authors' works become so deliberately hybrid that they become distinct, something new: something Afro-Caribbean. In the hands of these writers, characters from the African oral tradition transform

into something unrecognizable and innovative. The traditional African trickster and hero morph together to form the hybrid Afro-Caribbean trickster-hero. Death becomes a common rite of passage. Everything is turned upside down, and the traditionally African or European literary tropes are, to a substantial extent, abandoned. This is the result of the hybrid postcolonial Caribbean world: a world that is both politically free of Africa and Europe, and yet still captive of both continents' influences.



One question that could challenge the premise of my thesis might be: why choose something as far-removed as African folktales and employ them as evidence in the study of Caribbean literature? West Africans and Afro-Caribbean people share, to a great extent, an oral tradition fathered in Africa and vestigial in the Caribbean. Although some dismiss folktales as entertainment shared between mothers or grandmothers and small children, there is actually more meaning to these stories than a simple moral. In fact, there is a complexity to these tales that cannot be ignored: the story forms, the characters forms, and the customs of folktale performance all offer much more than mere child's play. In the words of Harold Scheub, these stories are works of art, and they should be treated as such (*AS* 3). In these stories, we find a tradition that survived a journey across the Atlantic Ocean, and was then kept alive for centuries—arguably, it is still alive today, in the works of professional writers. In keeping that tradition alive, what are the writers' intentions? Is it merely an attempt to immortalize African and Afro-Caribbean oral folktales, or a method of rebellion against neocolonial white culture? Could it be both? These are some of the questions that I seek to answer.



### ***Chapter One: Rite of Passage***

According to folklore scholar and author Roger D. Abrahams, a rite of passage, in the African sense, is a moment that proves a character is “making a way through life” (297). These stories primarily exist to teach those who hear them about becoming an adult, building a home, supporting a family. However, the tales are also about troubles we find within ourselves, and the struggle to find our identity. As Scheub wrote in *Trickster and Hero*, rite-of-passage tales are both present and relevant in all societies because they show characters (and, mimetically, our real selves) “moving from one state of being to another, whether cosmologically, individually, or naturally” (1). These rites of passage can also occur on a grand scale both within and outside the folktales’ realm, Scheub observes, and once we overcome our ordeals, we “stop being one kind of person or world or society, and we begin life as another person or world or society” (1).

Though these rites of passage mirror what occurs in real life, as epic revolutionaries fight for a cause on a grand scale or individuals who are cultural heroes fight for their sense of self internally, they are also mimetic on a larger scale. When a heroine in a Haitian-American writer’s story dies to herself and becomes born anew, as in “Caroline’s Wedding,” she becomes complete on both physical and psychological levels. However, when she started out, she was Haitian by blood but not culturally—at the end of the story, it is only assumed that she accepts her hybrid culture. Similarly, when Haiti became an independent state, it became black both physically and, to an extent, in its communal identity. However, the culture is still hybrid, as it is affected by both French and African roots but does not explicitly choose either. Like Caroline, Haiti is left hanging in

a state of ambivalence, and one that perhaps does not satisfy any audience or constituency: Caroline's family within the story, "Caroline's" readers without, and, taking an interpretive leap, the men and women of color in Haiti.

As a hero or heroine dies to his past, he or she transforms into another being—someone who has taken the next step on the journey to finding him- or herself. In a similar way, parents or other cultural leaders who die as heroes pass on their heroic status and duties to their successors (children or others close to the former hero), who make the passage through that death to become heroes themselves. In epic tales found around the globe (and found now in contemporary Afro-Caribbean literature), when someone dies for the cause—the cause usually being a movement to reform a nation's identity through revolution—the cause is reborn through a rite of passage to another character. The ordeal in this particular rite of passage is death; the reward is a rebirth where the successor finds his or her identity as the new hero for the same cause.

Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat published a story collection in 1995, *Krik? Krak!*, that delves into death and rite of passage in the Afro-Haitian sense. Though now an American citizen, Danticat's work is still rooted in postcolonial Haiti, a turbulent social and political world. Danticat is also close to her Afro-Caribbean roots, recalling the stories rooted in the African oral tradition that her grandmother told her when she was a child (Barsamian interview). In autobiographical stories like "We Are Ugly, but We Are Here," Danticat also reckons with her distant African roots, expressing pride toward her African "foremothers" and a respect for African-based beliefs in Guinin and "ancient spirits."

Throughout Danticat's *Krik? Krak!*, death is more than an essential theme: it is a representation of rites of passage in Haitian society. It symbolizes a transition—not only within an individual character, but also, as we will see, metaphorically, on a larger scale—from one state of being to another. When a parent character dies, it catalyzes a dramatic shift in the internal makeup of the child character. The latter transforms into a different human being; she becomes the new hero in the wake of the death of the old hero.

Scheub explains in *The African Storyteller* that, during a rite of passage in West African folklore, the point of initiation is the “passage through death to a new life” (267). Though in most African folklore, this death is simply metaphoric, there are some stories where a literal death leads to a boy's passage to manhood. For example, in the Wala tale “A Woman's Quest,” a dead boy may only be revived by the one woman in the village who knows his true name; his family's promise is that he will marry the woman who revives him (Abrahams 333). This tale might elicit Western listeners' memories of “Snow White” or “Sleeping Beauty,” both of which involve true love's kiss reviving the dead or breaking the eternal slumber. In both the West African and the European stories, the boy—or the girl—suffers a literal death during his or her rite of passage, and the battle during this point of liminality is fought not by the boy or princess, but by the character's savior. This is not to say that the boy or the princess is not the hero of the tale—it could be interpreted that there are multiple heroes. Again, as we will see, there are tales in *Krik? Krak!* where, at the time of the rite of passage, there are dead and living heroes fighting through the same rite of passage concurrently.

In Danticat's “The Missing Peace,” Lamort, whose name literally translates “death,” meets with American journalist Emilie. Emilie seeks to find her mother, a

revolutionary who lived in the village where Lamort now resides with her grandmother. During their conversation about Emilie's mother, Emilie remarks to the young Lamort, "They say a girl becomes a woman when she loses her mother" (Danticat 116). Thus, a mother's passing initiates her daughter's rite of passage into womanhood. Since Lamort's mother died during childbirth, Emilie claims that she was "born a woman" (116). Lamort never lived a childhood—she endured two major life events at once. She is at once born into life and dead to her childhood. She is immediately initiated into womanhood; this means that from early childhood she possesses by right the ability to flex her sense of maturity and independence. She is her family's hero, and thus her own hero.

After Emilie discovers that it is most likely that her mother is dead, she explains that she too has "become a woman" (121). She stitches together a quilt from scraps of fabric—physical reminders of her mother and their bond together (114). Though it was her mother's idea to make a quilt, Emilie's motion to actually sew the quilt together signifies something. Emilie is not only stitching together her past, but through her actions, she is creating a new identity for herself, from her past. As soon as she finishes the quilt, Emilie throws it around herself; it is her new skin (122). It is something she made by herself and for herself, for posterity. A product of her family's past, she has become the new hero of her bloodline, now that her revolutionary mother is dead. The suggestion here may be that, like Emilie, Haiti should stitch its past into its new identity and, from there, become heroes for their future as a nation.

Later, in "Nineteen Thirty-Seven," Josephine visits her mother in prison, each time with her mother's crying Madonna statue in tow. When the mother, a convicted witch, dies in prison from a mysterious illness, another prisoner, Jacqueline, makes a

comment on death that remarks on the process of passage: “Sister, life is never lost, another one always comes up to replace the last” (Danticat 48). One interpretation of that statement could be that, metaphorically and even literally, all Haitians are united through an everlasting cycle of death and rebirth.

Although this concept may sound mysterious on an individual level, on a broader, more comprehensive level, this death and rebirth cycle speaks to the mimetic properties of stories themselves. In this case, the “last” life is colonial-era Haiti, and the current one, which has sprung up from it, is contemporary Haiti (Danticat 48). Though these two Haitis share a history, and, to some extent, a culture, they do not share a similar identity.

Through mimesis, Danticat demonstrates to her readers, perhaps, that the Haitian women in her short story are not unlike the nation of Haiti itself: strong, Afro-centric, and rebellious. The main characters, Josephine and her Manman, embody the cultural and psychological changes Haitians are now undergoing. Manman plays the trickster for most of the story, rebelling against social norms, national law, and prison orders through practicing Vodou. Her rebellion does not result in success, however—she is imprisoned and eventually dies in her cell. In turn, Josephine, who symbolizes the new generation of Haitians, takes on her mother’s rebellion. In the final pages of the story, Josephine acknowledges her family’s violent past, tainted with massacre, and clings tightly to her mother’s crying Madonna statue (Danticat 49). However, Josephine’s rebellion, like the rebellion of Haitians today against the neocolonial presence and against the otherwise corrupt government, is different than Manman’s: unlike her mother, Josephine is free to make her internal rebellion. Like the Haiti we know now, Josephine is not bound by the

same laws as her mother was, and she carries both the physical and the spiritual liberty to rebel against her past and her present, and thus to form her identity as an individual.

Another rite of passage that, through a literal death, metaphorically expresses the death of a previous era, occurs in Danticat's "Wall of Fire Rising." Immediately after Guy jumps from the basket of the balloon to his death, his young son, Little Guy, stands above Guy's body and recites a speech attributed to the Haitian revolutionary Boukman. Though Little Guy has memorized the speech to play Boukman in a school play, the words could be a rallying cry to the Haitian people both at the time of Haiti's slave revolution and today. Little Guy, who has been reciting the speech since the beginning of the story, becomes a man after his father's death—as the words of Boukman spill from his mouth, his voice "rises to a man's grieving roar" (79).

Guy's endeavor to leave his home—a position of constant struggle, where Guy is trapped in his own unemployment and failure as a breadwinner—is an indication of a hero who is yet to find success. As the trickster-hero of the story, Guy hijacks his boss's hot air balloon in order to flee origins unfit for a hero and to start anew somewhere else. However, he cannot escape his home. He is already a man; he has already lived his life, and has undergone all of the rites of passage except for death. Thus, death is his only escape from his unfit home, from his unfit life. He makes a hero's rite of passage to the only new land that holds any possibility for success: the afterlife.

Thus, the old hero, the unsuccessful hero, disappears from the story. To take his place, the old hero's mirror—his son, Little Guy—takes on his father's struggle. He, the new hero, is young and has his entire life ahead of him. His potential for success as a hero is limitless, and he realizes his advantage. This is why, immediately after Guy's

death, Little Guy actively chooses to become a man. He is now the man of the family; the hero of his bloodline. When he recites the words of Boukman, he transforms into a man whose struggle is not only the hero's struggle, but also the rebel's struggle. He rebels against what is both his father's and his own unfit home—not only his house and his economic situation, but his people's home and economic situation. He rebels against the current Haiti, which he makes clear when his speech addresses not only his immediate family, but “everyone,” “his people” (80). Through the words of Boukman, Little Guy rallies his people to “all let out one piercing cry that we may either live freely or we should die” (80). This is no longer a struggle to break free from the chattels of slavery—it is a movement to break free from the chains we put on ourselves. Little Guy encourages his countrymen to break free from the cycle of poverty and the sense of black inferiority that are effects of French colonization. Like Boukman, Little Guy encourages Haitians to rise up and conquer—in this case, for the sake of Haitian cultural power and identity.



Danticat's first story, “Children of the Sea,” follows a group of Haitian immigrants on a boat to Miami. The story is structured in an epistolary format, in which a passenger on the boat corresponds with his girlfriend in Haiti. Both are revolutionaries, and their letters presumably never meet the recipients (just as the male speaker presumably never reaches his destination on the boat). In one of the male speaker's letters, he notes that many of his fellow passengers “see themselves as Job or the Children of Israel” (Danticat 7). This relates the passage of the immigrants to two different Biblical stories: one, the story of Moses, describes a physical transition; the other, the story of Job,

describes a spiritual one. While Moses led the Children of Israel on a strenuous journey from Egypt to the Promised Land, God led Job on a tempestuous journey to renew his faith in God and to discover his identity as a Jewish man. Interestingly, Job also had a hand in one of Moses' rites of passage: he was one of the advisors who kept silent when Pharaoh proposed the edict to kill all male Jewish babies. This led to Moses's physical passage down the river and christening into a new family, a new religion, and even a new ethnic group. Moses' transition into Egyptian royalty set the scene for the journey of the entire Jewish population of Egypt to Mount Sinai and Israel, and their concomitant rite of passage as Jews of the Promised Land.

These are two stories that deal not only with physical and spiritual transitions, but are also interlocked through a similar rite of passage. Since characters in "Children of the Sea" compare these stories to their own situation, one could allow the argument that the boat's passengers admit that, like Moses and Job, they are also going through multiple rites of passage. Relating their journey to the story of Moses, the boat's passengers draw a connection between a Biblical physical rite of passage and their own physical transition. At the beginning of his journey, the passengers were Haitian; if their journey ends successfully, they will become Haitian-American. Instead of Children of Israel, they are, per the story's title, "Children of the Sea." When the passengers compare their hardships to Job's, this implies that a revelation of their identity lies in the future. Once (or if) they reach Miami, the passengers must become members of a new people—they are no longer passively Haitian, but actively Haitian-American, and they must assimilate to that new identity.



In West African epic tales, the hero must leave an unfit home in order to make a rite of passage into adulthood (Scheub, *T&H*, 132). In the case of “Children of the Sea,” the male speaker is that hero, and his unfit home is Haiti. On the boat, he sings, “Beloved Haiti, there is no place like you. I had to leave you before I could understand you” (Danticat 9). At the time of the male speaker’s departure from his home, Haiti, as the female speaker describes, was the site of revolution and danger, and a place of political and social uncertainty (Danticat 7). In fact, one of the main reasons why the male speaker left Haiti was because he fled persecution for founding a radio station that aired broadcasts that contained messages unsympathetic to the Haitian government. According to the female speaker, all of the male speaker’s coworkers on the station were killed (Danticat 7). If the male speaker/hero did not flee his unfit home, this would have been his likely demise, too.

Scheub explains that after the hero has left home, he undergoes an intense struggle with a negative force that is “often the other side of himself” (*T&H* 132). This intimates a conflict of identity, which Scheub confirms is at the center of all hero stories (132). During this time, which Scheub calls the period of being “betwixt and between,” the hero becomes a trickster, and both his identity and the world around him become uncertain (131). This is apparent in the struggle of the male speaker in “Children of the Sea,” as he half-comically suggests that his boat is not sailing for America, but for Africa. The situation begins with him joking, after being exposed in the sun for so long on the boat, “Yes, I am finally an African. I am even darker than your father” (Danticat 11). Later on, this seemingly comical challenge of his physical Haitian identity becomes more serious and reaches deeper than the skin:

We spent most of yesterday telling stories. Someone says, Krik? You answer, Krak!  
 And they say, I have many stories I could tell you, and then they go on and tell these stories to you... I feel like we are sailing for Africa. Maybe we will go to Guinin, to live with the spirits, to be with everyone who has come and has died before us. They would probably turn us away from there too. (Danticat 14)

Here, the speaker addresses his people's past in Africa. Though his ancestors and the ancestors of everyone else on the boat likely arrived in Haiti from Africa, the speaker also acknowledges that the Haitian people have come a long way since the time the first Africans were brought over as slaves. Since then, the Afro-Haitian people have created a hybrid culture that encompasses African influences but is also far removed from contemporary African identity. The speaker realizes this gap between modern Afro-Haitian and African identities, noting that the "Africans would probably turn [those on the boat] away from there too" (Danticat 14). Here, the speaker notes that Afro-Haitians do not belong perfectly in the societies of their African ancestors or their French colonizers, both of whom make up the identity of the Afro-Haitian. Perhaps this is why he, a cultural hero, is on the boat in search of another Promised Land and a new Haitian-American identity. He has left the land of uncertainty; he did not even understand the land in which he was born. Now he travels to a land where everyone shares the experience of a hybrid identity, and they are unified by that factor.

Unfortunately, by the end of the story, it is assumed that our hero dies on the way to his destination. He perishes in the middle of his rite of passage, in a state of liminality. However, his cause does not die with him—his girlfriend, who still lives in Haiti, sympathizes with the need for a Haitian revolution. This might serve to clarify the movement of the hero's cause from the dead to his closest survivor. In this case, the female speaker

becomes the new heroine; she carries on the revolution against the current government within the old hero's group. What was metaphorical in other stories is literal in this one—the handing off of the identity revolution after death, and the hero rite of passage for the one who lives in the wake of the old hero's death. This story takes place during an actual revolution of identity for the entire country of Haiti: a revolution against the current postcolonial government, and a movement to create a Haiti that identifies with a divergent set of beliefs. From here, maybe the nation of Haiti can make a rite of passage within itself and transform into something entirely different.



Though Armless Bride tales are not traditionally told in West Africa, they do make an appearance in *Krik? Krak!*. Danticat focuses mostly on the tales she heard as a young girl in Haiti; however, chances are slim that she would have heard an Armless Bride tale passed down from her ancestors (Barsamian interview). Nevertheless, she incorporates the Armless Bride tale form in her short story “Caroline’s Wedding” in such a way that it is difficult not to notice.

Endemic to eastern Africa, all the way down to Madagascar, the Armless Bride story is a classic example of the female rite of passage. The heroine, who is robbed of her arms or another body part by a villain (normally a parent), regains her missing parts after she completes her ordeal and becomes an independent, self-sufficient woman. The rite of passage itself usually occurs through a marriage.

Since her collection of short stories is entitled *Krik? Krak!* and deals with Haiti, one would think that Danticat would have focused on folklore from her home country. Perhaps Danticat deliberately sought out a story form that empowered women, and found

one in these Eastern African tales. She could have heard the form as a European fairy tale borrowed from Haitian colonizers, or she may have discovered their presence in Puerto Rican or Brazilian lore, though it is likely that the Latin American tradition borrowed the Armless Bride form from their Spanish and Portuguese colonizers as well (Scheub 308).

Armless Bride stories usually begin with the father making incestuous advances toward the heroine. While in Danticat's story, Caroline's father never physically makes sexual advances toward his daughters, there is a theme of incest present. In accordance with Haitian tradition and superstition, Caroline's mother orders her daughters to wear red panties in order to warn the father's spirit not to climb into bed with them and make sexual advances. When Caroline and her sister break tradition and ignore their mother's interdiction and wear their black panties instead, their father's spirit does in fact climb into bed with them. However, instead of physically violating them, the spirit instead penetrates their minds and controls their dreams, leading them to acknowledge their Haitian roots and hybrid identity.

In the dreams, Caroline's father reminds her and her sister Grace of their Haitian roots: he tells them stories about his childhood and early adulthood in Haiti. The sisters try to run towards their father while he tells them these stories, but they can never reach him (Danticat 171)—this symbolizes their reaching toward their Haitian roots as Haitian-Americans. Since Caroline was born in America and Grace arrived in America from Port-Au-Prince when she was only a few years old, neither of them have many memories of the true Haiti between them. The life they live at home under their mother is traditionally Haitian; the life they live outside is culturally American. These static spaces clash

when Caroline becomes engaged to marry a Bahamian-American man. Now that Caroline has introduced a non-Haitian into the home as part of the family, Caroline's mother begins to feed her bone soup, a Haitian practice to break up unwanted relationships.

Like Caroline's mother proclaims in the story, a Haitian mother is "not like a bird:" she "doesn't just kick her children out of her nest" (164). She does not agree with Caroline's choice in husband; however, this does not stop Caroline from jumping out of the nest herself and marrying the man her mother dislikes.

Along those same lines, there is a deliberate theme related to birds throughout the story, which is directly referenced in Caroline's mother's nest comment and Caroline's comment about her stump, "If I slice myself there, I could bleed to death. Remember what Papa used to say, 'Behind a white cloud, a bird looks like an angel'" (174). The bird theme in this story holds an uncommon connection to an Armless Bride story from the Malagasy tradition, the story of Ramaitzolana (Scheub 284).

In the story, Ramaitzolana, a human girl, is born of a bird, Ravarombe. Ravarombe feeds her daughter cow's milk and dedicates her life to protecting the child from any interaction from strangers, fearing that Ramaitzolana will be taken from her. In Danticat's story, Caroline's mother acts the same way: she protects Caroline from strangers, specifically anyone who is not Haitian or Haitian-American. Like Ramaitzolana, Caroline remains trapped in her mother's nest until after she has reached legal adulthood, working the same job that her older sister works, at the same school. Caroline's family traps her in a nest that moves from work to home, until she breaks free and meets Eric, the Bahamian-American school janitor. Similarly, Ramaitzolana flees her mother's nest

when Andriambahoaka, a king from a far-off land, comes to take her for his bride.

Ravarombe removes Ramaitzolana's skin and eyes after discovering her and Andriambahoaka on their journey to the prince's kingdom, but Caroline's arm is removed much sooner. Although the mother does not remove the arm herself, the defect forms in the womb after Caroline's mother receives an injection of sedatives when she is arrested in a sweatshop immigration raid (Danticat 159). In both stories, the intense emotions of the mother catalyze the removal of the daughter's body parts, and the removal of those body parts gives rise to questions of identity and successful independence.

After both Ramaitzolana and Caroline lose their body parts, they undergo ordeals that involve both reckoning with the loss of their body parts and living a normal life. In this liminal stage, they do not allow insecurity to override their desire for self-discovery. Both are independent in one way or another: as a legal American citizen immersed in American culture outside of her home, Caroline lives her entire life as an outsider to the rest of her family. Ramaitzolana's independence is physical—she lives on her fiancé's compound in her own house, blind from Ravarombe's theft of her eyes. Andriambahoaka's other wives refuse to visit Ramaitzolana because they are offended by her ugliness; she lives in utter isolation.

The point at which the stories disjoin, as far as the story form is concerned, occurs during the ordeal itself. While Caroline fights the battle to find her identity alone, Ramaitzolana receives help from an unlikely source: the mother who stole her eyes and skin. Out of pity for her daughter, whose disjointed eyes cry every night in Ravarombe's nest, Ravarombe flies to Andriambahoaka's compound and teaches her daughter how to successfully play the part of the housewife.

It may be arguable that Caroline receives help from her parents on her journey to womanhood, since her father appears to her in dreams and reminds her of her Haitian roots, her mother encourages her to live a more traditionally Haitian lifestyle, and Grace accompanies her to work and carries out the same tasks. However, all three of these things also happen to Grace: their mother also encourages Grace to live the Haitian way, Grace works the same job as Caroline, and she even dreams the same dreams of their father on the same nights. Thus, Caroline is not really helped directly along the way by these characters, but rather in proxy. Grace is a mirror character: she serves only to show Caroline that she must break off from a family environment that prevents her from becoming independent, her own woman. This makes Caroline out to be an even more active hero, recognizing the signs in her life and following them, rather than demanding another character to guide her through her ordeal.

The next step in the puberty rite of passage is a victory during the ordeal over the old self. This self can manifest itself metaphorically, as a dragon, the devil, an ogre, a fantastically evil stepmother, a many-headed hydra, or even something realistic, like an illness. In Ramaitolana's case, her bird-mother Ravarombe represents her old self: comfort, childhood, and all that she has known thus far. Ravarombe is characterized as an anthropomorphic bird only because the bird mother's tendencies mirror the tendencies of a human mother. She protects her young, not only from danger but also from the real world. In most cases, the bird-mother or bird-like human mother finds it extremely difficult to let her children free: in the words of Caroline's mother, to "kick them out of the nest" (Danticat 164). Ravarombe and Caroline's mother are very alike in this way: they present an ordeal to their daughters by making it extremely difficult to leave that metaph-

orical or literal nest. While Ravarombe steals her child's beauty—her skin and eyes—Caroline's mother does all in her power to destroy the relationship between Caroline and Eric. Caroline's mother adheres to tradition in her negative efforts, brewing a pot of bone soup every day as medicine to cure her daughter's anti-traditional sentiments. She reminds Caroline that Caroline's father did everything he possibly could within Haitian tradition to woo Caroline's mother and to charm Caroline's grandparents into consenting to her parents' betrothal.

Ramaitzolana overcomes her mother's overprotective parenting methods by actively choosing to sneak out of Ravarombe's nest with her handsome prince. When Ravarombe steals Ramaitzolana's eyes and skin, Ramaitzolana does not go back on her decision to leave. Instead, she lives in Andriambahoaka's compound and suffers—anything to further her transformation into an independent woman.

The story of Ramaitzolana diverges from the traditional Armless Bride tale when Ravarombe offers her help to Ramaitzolana during her ordeal. Although Ravarombe stole her daughter's eyes and skin, thus catalyzing her ordeal, she notices the disembodied eyes crying in her nest. This sparks an uncommon stroke of sympathy in the bird-mother, who is usually a caricature of the protective mother, but is, in this case, a more rounded character. She flies to Andriambahoaka's compound and teaches the now-blind Ramaitzolana to cook, tend the hearth, and sew. When Ramaitzolana learns these things, she overcomes the physical disabilities imposed on her by her mother, and is just as independent as a blind, skinless woman as she could be as a physically complete woman. During this process, both heroine and villainess change. Both become more accepting of Ramaitzolana's new role as housewife and discarding the child role that the young wom-



an once held. And, when Ramaitzolana masters her new tasks, she becomes a woman, and Ravarombe restores her eyes and skin. She is at this point the most beautiful and independent woman in the world; she is highly eligible for marriage. Her transformation is complete.

Interestingly, Caroline initiates her own physical transformation after her ordeal, buying a prosthetic arm to wear on her wedding day and completing her corporeal being. This makes her as an even more independent woman than the stories usually warrant. Normally another entity reinstates the limb or hand, whether it is a mother figure like Ravarombe, a magician, or the future husband. In this story, Caroline completes herself both physically and spiritually; unlike Ramaitzolana, she needs no external force to complete her metamorphosis from girl to woman. Although her mother eventually accepts her flight from the nest, buying her lingerie to wear on her wedding night, (Danticat 193) this does not affect Caroline, as she has already arranged her own wedding and would marry regardless of her mother's thoughts.

Caroline's personal journey is internal more than it is external (that is, to complete her physical body)—it is a journey to complete oneself. Not only does Caroline complete both her physical being and her rite of passage, but, more importantly, she also completes her spiritual being. She finds her identity as a person of Haitian descent born and raised in America. She reckons with her double lives: within her mother's home, she lives a Haitian life. Outside, she lives an American one. Now that she has married a Bahamian-American, Caroline will carry on that doubleness as both man and wife carry their hybrid Caribbean-American identities to a household and marriage that they create together.

Caroline's struggle to find her identity could be interpreted as a conceit for the

Haitian struggle for identity. Like postcolonial Haiti, Caroline is born incomplete. While Caroline's incompleteness is physical, Haiti's was identity-related. Both Caroline and postcolonial Haiti reckon with a hybrid culture: while Caroline is Haitian-American, the people of Haiti juggle (predominantly) West-African and French roots.



In Afro-Caribbean literature, rites of passage do not occur solely on the individual level—they also occur en masse. This is important to the culture of Caribbeans of African descent because their distant ancestors underwent a physical passage across the Atlantic as a group. Their ancestors underwent slavery as a group. Later, they united as the majority ethnic group, earning independence from their white European rulers. Now, they fight for a rite of passage—or, in the words of Edward Brathwaite, their “Rights of Passage” (*The Arrivants*, section title)—to search for their identity as a people of common culture, history, color, and experience under the colonizers.

As Hill argues in relation to postmodernist approaches to Afro-Caribbean folklore, folkloric “activities” such as stories about one’s origins concern “stating, formulating, or redefining one’s identity and the boundaries of one’s group identity” (105). Edward Brathwaite exemplifies this argument in *The Arrivants*, a collection of poetry first published in 1973 that relates the struggle of the contemporary Afro-Caribbean individual in a postcolonial Caribbean society.

With the death of the colonial era in the West Indies, the Afro-Caribbean people were free from the grasp of the colonists, both over their culture and over themselves individually. Although they were left in a state of poverty, Afro-Caribbeans seized the opportunity and, as soon as they were free, they found strength in numbers, endeavoring

to rebuild themselves as a people.

Brathwaite articulates this struggle in *The Arrivants* which, read from cover to cover, is a manifesto for the rediscovery of a common African identity among blacks living in the Caribbean. Like both Ajayi and Brown have opined in their articles on Brathwaite, the Barbadian writer draws upon Afro-Caribbeans' communal West-African past not only as a "reclamation of [an] African inheritance" (Brown, qtd. in Kehinde), but also as a "substituting principle" (Ajayi, qtd. in Kehinde) to replace the instilled neocolonial vision of Afro-Caribbean people. Brathwaite himself stated that the experience of the "middle passage" experience, assumedly not the old slave route but a metaphorical passage of Afro-Caribbeans from the Caribbean to Africa and back, is "a pathway or channel between [African] tradition and what is being evolved on new soil in the Caribbean" (as cited in Kehinde, 184). The first of three sections in the anthology, *Rights of Passage*, introduces the theme that Afro-Caribbeans must return to their African roots before building anti-colonialist and freely hybrid black nations.

Dr. M. Ayo Kehinde argues in his article "Brathwaite's *The Arrivants* and the Trope of Cultural Searching" that Brathwaite attempts a successful reconciliation with his "original culture," African culture (182). He points out that Brathwaite's "return-to-Africa ideal" is not restricted to the speaker's self, but rather it speaks to "the entire people of African descent" (188). According to Kehinde, Brathwaite progresses through the dominant themes of African diaspora in order to explore the theme of rediscovery of the black "race" (190). Thus, Brathwaite's *Rights of Passage* is not only an aesthetic exploration of the self and of one's evolving identity as an individual, but is also a "poem of protest" in which Brathwaite struggles to "recreate the past and examine it to build a

better tomorrow for his people” (Kehinde 191). Though the argument of this paper sympathizes with Kehinde’s argument, attempts to prove the same argument will be made here through different ends. In his article, Kehinde offers a sophisticated, albeit limited, brush with close reading in reference to the poetry. This next section will expand on that close reading, offering more evidence to support the argument that there is an astounding amount of material in *Rights of Passage* that not only draws on African tropes, but also calls for a cultural revolution in Jamaica and across the Caribbean.



The first few stanzas of Brathwaite’s entire anthology describes a hot, desolate, and desert-like Africa, with camels “wrecked in their own shit,” and boulders, presumably the burden of human slaves, “dragged in now dry river beds” (Brathwaite 4-5). This scene does not take place in Africa, however. It takes place in the hearts of Afro-Caribbean slaves and their posterity.

The Africa that Brathwaite describes is not the physical Africa, but African culture. For the Afro-Caribbean, the motherland’s milk “curdles in/udder in/nipple in/mouth,” and the “dead bodies,” the dead offspring of African culture in these Caribbean souls, “settle/and quiver/given up to the blanket/that covers and warms/from the heat of the final/cold” (6). This blanket, European culture and lifestyle, is what covers the dying, quivering corpse of African culture in the Caribbean; the blanket is all the Afro-Caribbeans have to survive under colonial rule. European colonizers force the Afro-Caribbeans to abandon their ancestors’ culture. If black Caribbeans do not conform to European sensibilities, they are ordered into a class of savages, and are thus considered sub-human.

Just stanzas after the image of the (un)African desert comes an image of the lush Promised Land across the “dry gut of the river bed” (6). This place, where the trees are “cool” and “green,” and where there “burns the dream of the fountain” (7), is not the true Africa, but the Africa that burns in black Caribbeans’ hearts, just out of mind’s reach across the riverbed. Later in the same poem, this lush place is burnt down by fire: under colonial rule, the Europeans crush this dream of a new Africa in the Caribbean. The colonizers’ hate and cruelty burn wild like a forest fire. In their wake, they make all things hot, desolate, and desert-like.

The second poem in *Rights of Passage*, “New World A-Comin’,” describes just that for Afro-Caribbeans. From the ashes left behind from colonial brutality and black Caribbeans’ anger emerges “new soil,” from which “new souls” and “new ancestors” will rise up and flourish (11). The speaker of the poem admits that “it will be a long long time before we see [lush, beautiful] land again,” referring to Africa, where this new soil and this flourishing community already exists (11). At the same time, the speaker emits a rallying cry, encouraging his fellow Afro-Caribbean brothers and sisters to “fight the battle of wind in the water:” to fight what stirs up the ocean inside of them, namely the cultural, mental, and physical subjugation they once felt under the colonizers and still feel from the ghost of the white presence around them (11).

In yet another poem, “Tom,” Brathwaite’s speaker calls for a new, African-style creation story in the Caribbean—the building of a new people (13). The speaker asserts that Afro-Caribbeans must “dare to remember/the paths we shall never remember/again: Atumpan talking and the harvest branches,/all the tribes of Ashanti dreaming the dream/of Tutu, Anokye and the Golden Stool, built in Heaven for *our nation*...” (13,

italics mine). While the speaker references the Atumpan—the talking drum—to render up a feeling of African (namely Akan) culture, he goes on to create a sense of pan-African unity in the Caribbean. The speaker also brings up the “Ashanti dreaming the dream of Tutu.” Tutu was one of the warriors who founded the Ashanti Empire. The other co-founder was Komfo Anokye, who the speaker also mentions. In legend, Anokye called down the Golden Stool from the heavens during a major meeting between clan heads; the Golden Stool is now a symbol of the then-new Asante Union. This suggests that people of African descent in the Caribbean should also work to found their own people and their own sense of unified identity—their own Asante Union and their own version of the Golden Stool.

In that same poem, assumedly named after the Uncle Tom from the eponymous American novel, the speaker is that Tom. The voice of the blacks in the New World, Tom is self-admittedly “timid;” at once a “father,” “founder,” and “flounderer” (15). Tom speaks of his people’s misery, but at the same time is too “weak” to begin a revolution: no “bitter flame marks [his] wrath” (15). Tom goes on to lament about how he is somewhat of a creator god, and how his creation is worthless:

So I who have created  
 nothing but these worthless  
 weeds, these need-  
 less seeds, work;  
 who have built  
 but on silt, but on sand,  
 but on luckless salt,  
 dream;  
 who have forgotten all  
 mouth ‘Massa, yes  
 Massa, yes  
 Boss, yes  
 Baas (Brathwaite 15)

This New-World creator god has failed, under the domineering hand of the colonizers, to fashion a strong black society that publicly demonstrates pride for its roots. However, it is not the fault of either Tom or his people that their African heritage and culture did not flourish across the Atlantic. The creator god simply laments his lack of power in this new land suffocated by white cruelty, brute force, and color-naïveté. Tom had nothing to build his new kingdom upon but “silt, sand, and luckless salt,” and his people had been forced by the power-wielding colonizers to forget all language but “yes Massa” (15).

Throughout the entire collection, the speaker draws upon African names and history, both directly and indirectly. However, he also encourages his people to abandon both African and European ideology and culture: “To hell/with Af/rica/to hell/with Eu-/rope too,/just call my blue/black bloody spade/a spade...Okay? So/let’s begin” (29).

Here, the speaker suggests that the Afro-Caribbean (or perhaps pan-African-diaspora) identity must be created anew, without the influence of either of the people’s European or African pasts. He still recognizes, though, that the past is indelible and indispensable, lamenting that the New-World black man has “traveled more” and “seen more land,” and that he is a “landless, harbourless spade” (34). Therefore, you cannot call a spade a spade without reckoning past, present, and future.

From here, the speaker looks forward. He insists that the future is a rebirth, and therefore a rite of passage. To the speaker, the future cannot be won without “black sperm,” which “spews black negritude” (39). Blacks must dominate the land around them, spreading their own metaphorical seed to grow a new, Afro-centric community.

The rebirth imagery is not limited to that single instance: another image suggests that the Black Man and his pride were born when he emerged from the ocean. The speaker claims that he was born from unspecified shores, and that the “sound of the sea/came in at [his] window, life heaved and breathed in [him] then/with the strength of that turbulent soil” (57). Then, he delves into how he traveled and spread his existence across the globe.

This ocean-birth image could be interpreted as a birth at the dawn of human evolution, or the birth of the African-American as black men and women disembarked from slave ships. This would explain the consequent imagery, which describes the diasporic unfolding of the black presence in the “stoniest cities,” “lands of the north,” and “countless saltless savannas” (57). At the same time, perhaps a more contemporary explanation asserts that the true Black Man is yet to be born, and that his coming awaits the true freedom of the blacks from all white influence. Maybe the speaker in truth is hinting that the Black Man or Woman, a Poseidon- or Aphrodite-like god or goddess, lies dormant in the Atlantic Ocean, waiting to be called forward by the overwhelming strength of his or her people.

Another image of rebirth in *Rites of Passage* is that of the volcano. In “The Dust,” an unnamed volcanic island exists “miles an’ miles” away from the speaker’s home island (66). The inhabitants of this island speak such a thick patois that it is “as if they cahn unnerstan’/a single word o’ English” (66). They are blacker than the speaker, and when the volcano erupted, everything on the entire island got “black black black” to the point where the people who lived there consumed the black ash in their food and wore it on their persons, even in their eyes (67). It is assumed that every time this volcano



erupts, it creates a new layer of land. When the ash lands on the people, it even creates a new, blacker Afro-Caribbean person. Though everything is “dark” and “frightening” during the eruption, what is left is hyper-fertile volcanic soil (67). This is arguably a metaphor that every Caribbean island should in a sense become a volcanic island. The anger inside of the Afro-Caribbean people, that pent-up “ancient fury” that builds from years and generations of inner torment from a vestigial culture that would have blacks believe that they are inferior, triggers a violent, volcanic renewal (78). The aftermath of this renewal reinvents the space and people around Afro-Caribbean people to become something better, something blacker. This is the kind of renewal that the speaker implicitly suggests that Afro-Caribbean people deserve. That is both their right of passage and their rite of passage.

After this ordeal, this volcanic eruption within the people, the speaker proclaims in “Epilogue” that the “flamboyant carcass/that rots in the road/in the gutter”—that is, what was once Afro-Caribbean culture—will “rise/in the butterflies/of a new/and another morning” (82). It will be a successful rebirth, and, the speaker jokes, “you/old negro Noah/knew/the drip/of rain/and the bird’s/call after/the storm...door fly/open onto/the floodless/green” (82). What stretches before the Afro-Caribbean people will be a new land, a fertile land that is predisposed to success and a proper home for the Black Man and his culture.

Renowned folklorist Joseph Campbell stated in his acclaimed series on folklore, *The Power of Myth*, that rites of passage symbolize the binary becoming the unitary (“Sacrifice & Bliss,” 17min). During the rite of passage, one is neither child nor adult, and yet both. Male and female, young and old, all are united, whether literally or

symbolically (see how, in “Caroline’s Wedding,” father and daughter, daughter and husband work toward the same rite of passage for the title character). Like Guy jumping from the balloon in “Wall of Fire Rising,” sacrifices, whether they are self-serving or not, catalyze a transformation within the group or family (“S&B,” 23.5min). Death is, in itself, a rite of passage, not only for the dying character but also for the living: during rites of passage, death and life are one and the same (“S&B,” 17min). The death of one character, whether natural or unnatural, is a sort of sacrifice to the quest for identity. It transfers the role of hero or heroine in that quest to the next in line, whether that is the son or the daughter. In Danticat’s tales, both the dead and the living fight, sacrifice themselves, and eventually succeed in this internal war, this communal cause. On the topic of sacrifice, Campbell explains that “identity is behind it all”—that the war serves “being and becoming” the self (*Power of Myth*, “Sacrifice and Bliss”). Once the old hero perishes—once he sacrifices himself to the cause—the new hero immediately shoulders the burden. He must fight the metaphorical battle to find his people’s identity.

This close reading of Danticat’s work in this section has concluded that the death of the mother or father figure symbolizes the death of the old Haiti: whether that be colonial Haiti, or Haiti as it is now. The daughter or son, who reigns over the family as the matriarch or patriarch after the parent’s death, symbolizes a new Haiti. The old Haiti sacrifices itself so that the new Haiti can grow and prosper. This son or daughter is the new hero, or the hero born again: he is young, and his life is ahead of him. A hero usually at a young age, he is built for success; it is assumed by the end of the tale that he will be even more successful than the parent who died fighting the same battle. This battle is a battle to find success in life. Metaphorically, it is the battle for a Haiti that

succeeds as a nation, with a sense of individuality and power. A Haiti that possesses and flaunts a communal sense of identity and pride.

Like Caroline, the Armless Bride, Haiti has reckoned with itself—its Haitian-ness, its blackness, its violent past. Caroline scavenges passionately for her identity in the midst of an invisible turmoil with which only she can reckon. Haiti has also battled to find its own identity in a nationwide atmosphere confused by both Afrocentric and Francophilic pasts, wrought with violence and tumultuous upheavals. Both Caroline and her parents' nation seem to understand their pasts, but only one of these two entities helps Caroline to find her identity. Perhaps this is a suggestion that the nation of Haiti has yet to complete its rite of passage, to take advantage of its rights of passage.

In conclusion, both Danticat and Brathwaite attempt to stir up the notion that an Afro-Caribbean identity has not yet fully taken form—not in a single country, let alone across the Caribbean. Through their usage of the rite of passage, specifically with strong African overtones (and even based on folktales which themselves originated in Africa), they suggest that Afro-Caribbeans have yet to undergo a rite of passage as both individuals and as an entire people. It is not only imperative that this occurs for the sake of a strong and unitary Afro-Caribbean identity, but it is also the right of those undergoing the transition. In other words, it is a right of passage to a rite of passage.

Through these authors' writings, the identity that these nations and these people should arrive at is not made clear through explicit suggestions. However, the heavy usage of African culture—story forms, characters, terms—and negritude after a while seem to speak for themselves. The glue that unites black Caribbean men and women is an African past, an African culture, which does not hold the same negative connotations

as the more recent colonial past. Both of these authors fight for an Afro-Caribbean people that is just that, African and Caribbean, and not much more.

### ***Chapter Two: On the Contemporary Trickster-Hero***

Perhaps one of the most important characters in both the African and the Afro-Caribbean oral traditions, the Trickster is an emblem of liminality and change. He breaks rules, rejects culture, and behaves in ways both random and nonsensical. The carnival is his home; he deals strictly in the absurd. He acts predominantly on earth, among humans and, occasionally, anthropomorphic animals. Trickster is a strong-willed character, and a respected character among audiences, despite the fact that he often makes appearances as a story's antagonist.

While the best-known trickster figure in both West African and North-/Central-American African-based folklore is Anansi the spider, Trickster comes in many shapes and sizes. Most commonly in contemporary Afro-Caribbean literature, Trickster manifests himself in human form—a man or woman who disregards societal rules and may come across as a fool or fop. Trickster is either a blatant Europhile, following colonial customs in an exaggerated way, or a rebel against colonial culture who rejects whiteness altogether. Either way, he always encourages audiences to reconsider their identity as a people, and he attempts to change the Afro-Caribbean way of being.

The Afro-Caribbean trickster present in Afro-Caribbean literature is an evolved and sophisticated three-dimensional being. No longer is Trickster always immediately conspicuous (though he still is sometimes, like in some Walcott dramas): he lies within characters, sometimes as a soldier who is called forth at the right time to battle classism, sexism, or race hatred. As we will see in Goodison, the Afro-Caribbean contemporary trickster can be found commonly in both men and women. Goodison's heroes wield

sarcasm as the trickster's new weapon, a new way to vindicate their separation from the norm without having to degrade themselves with foolish tricks.

To better understand the Afro-Caribbean trickster figure, we must first understand the African trickster figure. In Scheub's words, "Trickster would have no existence, would have no meaning, would make no sense whatsoever if we did not understand the frame in which he operates. He creates theater in the world that we know, the real world" (*T&H* 30). Without a sense of context, Scheub explains, "Trickster's antics are merely obscene and silly;" within that context, those antics become "significant and eternal" (*T&H* 30).

Caribbean Religion and Literature scholar Patrick Taylor claims that trickster tales relate a "mythical conception of a world as a place of endless and ongoing struggle, of progress and regress" (145). While this is true of both African and Afro-Caribbean folktales, Taylor also delves into how the Afro-Caribbean "trickster motif, like the use of religious ritual, is of particular interest because of the sociopolitical significance of the trickster symbol in resistance against colonialism" (215). In today's works of literature in the West Indies, the trickster character exists not to directly combat European slave masters in the plantation environment, but rather to wage a new war against the invisible colonist. Contemporary tricksters resist not only against neocolonialism, but also against sexism, classism, and other major obstacles still present in Caribbean societies. Traditionally, trickster is a catalyst of change in the mythical realm: oftentimes, this change affects the social fabric. In Caribbean stories, sometimes the trickster character may fail to create any change within the story, but his revolutionary presence is still understood to be an inspiration to the audience to make that change in society themselves. Though he

is not always successful in his endeavors to disrupt and create chaos in society, Trickster is always successful at revealing the problems that lie under society's thin veil of orderliness.

St. Lucian poet and playwright Derek Walcott's sophisticated employment of African-inspired trickster characters manifests itself cleverly in Walcott's dramas. Especially in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, Walcott himself works to make these Afro-Caribbean tricksters' relationship with their African roots apparent. In Baer's *Conversations with Derek Walcott*, Walcott reveals in a 1971 interview with the *New Yorker* that Makak's dream-journey to Africa is symbolic. For his audience, a "journey back to Africa"—whether that is literal or simply metaphorical; culture- or identity-related—"can be made, but may not be necessary" (18). According to Walcott himself, Afro-Caribbean Makak rejects both a concentrated African culture and a concentrated European culture by the end of the drama, and flees to Monkey Mountain to create his own identity; to "put down roots in the new world" (18). Each of Walcott's plays deals in part with hybridity and neocolonialism: "that wrestling contradiction of being white in mind and black in body, as if the flesh were coal from which the spirit like tormented smoke writhes to escape" (Walcott *DMM and Other Plays*, 12). This African-European hybridity in culture and in identity is one of the points of liminality that Walcott's tricksters straddle.

In Walcott's tragic one-act, *The Sea at Dauphin*, the trickster character fails to make any real change within the story's environment. All the same, his presence challenges readers and playgoers to question the current way of life and the role of Afro-centric identity in the West Indies. In this story, Trickster manifests himself as Afa, a misanthropic fisherman.

Afa is middle-aged and has not yet started a family: in the words of his closest friend and fishing partner, Augustin, Afa has “no love, no time, no child,” and a “hole where man heart should be” (Walcott *DMM and Other Plays*, 51). Thus, like all African tricksters, Afa has cast off social expectations, this time by not having a family at a certain time. In addition, Afa rejects basic social customs through his hard-heartedness, even to the few men closest to him. He disdains the local religious authority, and describes God as a “big fish eating small ones” (73). Because he does not encourage his fellow townspeople to disregard social norms in the same way, he is not a textbook African or Afro-Caribbean hero. He conforms to neither the role of the protagonist nor the role of the antagonist—he simply exists in space and time. He fights for nothing but to perpetuate his way of life as a social rebel who acquiesces to nothing but his own goals and desires. Like all tricksters, Afa is a narcissist. However, at the same time, like Quashee was to the Afro-Caribbean slaves, Afa is an inspiration to his audience to rebel against social norms.

Unlike African and Afro-Caribbean folkloric tricksters, Afa’s purpose in the play is not to make the audience laugh. He is not witty or hyper-knowledgeable; he has no pretensions. He is not even playful. At the same time, his disregard for all societal rules is what keeps him within the role of trickster. He is a Scrooge, a character who in himself may make the audience laugh with his eccentric and crotchety nature, but nothing more. Like many postcolonial Afro-Caribbean tricksters (and unlike the tricksters of oral folklore), Afa is a three-dimensional character. When Augustin asks Afa why he has “no respect for man, animal, sea, or god,” Afa responds that it is not disrespect but “bravery,” and it comes from “many years of sea, many years dolour” (61). Life in postcolonial



Caribbean society has caused Afa years of pain, and that is the reason why he casts off all norms. Afa also blames his pain on God, a “white man” whose “spit on Dauphin people is the sea” (61).

Like most tragic subjects (and like many tricksters), Afa possesses a fatal flaw, which is, as fellow fisherman Gacia points out, his greed (59). Afa will do anything to make money—this includes sailing out into a tempestuous ocean that appears more white than it does blue or green, and risking his partner Augustin’s life in the process. Depressed and irritated with his own flaw, Afa claims that God cursed him to work indefatigably so that he has money to “eat for worm to get more fat” (61). He also blames the Church and the city priest for the poverty of the people of Dauphin (73).

As both tragic character and trickster, Afa’s rejection of God is perhaps another fatal flaw. After his explanation that years of pain from living in God’s society has caused him to reject everything and simply become “brave,” he sets out on the turbulent sea to meet his presumable death (61). His heroic bravery is a result of his being an Afro-Caribbean neo-trickster and iconoclast.

Although Afa is not a hero by African or Afro-Caribbean folkloric definitions, he does possess some heroic qualities. For example, his bravery and his rebelliousness cause characters within the story to call him a madman, but encourage the audience to see otherwise. Afa blames the Church for his woes and the poverty of his people in a compelling monologue at the end of the play, which carries some truth along with the madness (73). It is not all religion that Afa scorns—it is simply Christianity. When Afa calls God a “white man,” there is some truth to what he claims: he is insisting that this Christian God, this vessel of the European colonizers used to teach and to assimilate their African

slaves, is not a symbol of Divine Love and power, but rather of white force (61). Ironically, while Afa blames this God for his and his people's suffering and poverty, other characters in the play refer to Afa as a god or god-like (60). Even the priest compares Afa to Saints Pierre and Jean (75).



The Afro-Caribbean trickster character thrives in real-world situations. Normally, the African or Afro-Caribbean folkloric trickster finds joy in human distress, which he usually facilitates to further his own success. In Afro-Caribbean contemporary literature, however, Trickster frequently works toward victory not just for himself, but also for humanity. He encourages other characters (and, arguably, the audience) to rise up and create a new, independent, and culturally black Caribbean. And when Trickster works toward the benefit of a culture or a group of individuals, he becomes the trickster-hero.

The trickster-hero brings about revolution like a traditional hero, but trickery is still an indispensable part of his genetic makeup. Though his heroic qualities are obvious—his bravery, his devotion to his beliefs, and his willingness to defend his people or culture—his trickery has evolved. These new trickster characters are not simply African or Afro-Caribbean stock characters found in folklore. They are three-dimensional, and they live on the stage or in books. Afro-Caribbean writers breathe life into these characters so that Trickster is no longer a simple fool or a clever god. These new tricksters have complicated emotions and desires; thus, they can no longer be tricksters alone, though trickery is in a great part how they function.

They are knowledgeable men and women, who employ their cleverness to defy colonialism or neocolonialism in their society. Trickster-heroes are either hypermanip-

ulative or hyperintelligent, and they use these qualities to weave around people, poverty, and prejudice to reach victory. As in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, this sometimes involves a revelation of identity, a rite of passage where one finds negritude within his very being, buried under years of oppression.

Sometimes, as in *The Sea at Dauphin*, Trickster is neither manipulative nor extremely intelligent, but he is still rebellious through becoming completely antisocial and clinging to his unpopular beliefs. In this case, he is not a hero for society—like Jay Gatsby, he is a hero for himself, and that is equally important.

According to scholar Patrick Taylor, the trickster tale “orders social experience in terms of an ongoing creative process that enhances both the integrity of the community and the need constantly to reformulate and recreate that community” (145). In his book *The Narrative of Liberation*, Taylor brilliantly ties his observation to the realm of the colonial Caribbean slave plantation, remarking that the trickster tale was cleverly used by Afro-Caribbean slaves to “comment on pragmatic modes of resistance in the colonizer-colonized encounter” (129).

Just like their distant blood relatives across the Atlantic, many Afro-Caribbean slaves pretended to be lazy in order to frustrate their so-called owners, a sophisticated, cunning, and communal ruse inspired by the long-standing African-American and Afro-Caribbean trickster figures Quashee and Sambo. These two tricksters, Taylor explains, were characters “whose [faux-foolish] activity was only one step away from rebellion, for they sought to outwit and dupe the master, though in a camouflaged way, so that they would not themselves be defeated in the process” (133). In Walcott’s *Ti-Jean and His Brothers*, we will see the little boy Ti-Jean take on this naïve and bungling Quashee

stereotype as he secretly plots his victory against Old Man and the white Devil plantation owner. In the words of Taylor himself, Walcott “uses the folktale form to explore colonial tension” in *Ti-Jean*.

At the beginning of the play’s first scene, the audience is thrust into the carnivalesque world of the trickster from the moment the lights flood the stage. Stage right, a group of anthropomorphic animals groan “greek-groak”—krik-krak, the audience knows a story is coming (85). Stage left, a normal hut stands with a normal human mother sitting inside, doing her work. There is immediately a physical clash between real life and the mythical world, bound within the realm of the stage.

To some, the trickster-antagonist of the story is very real—he is the Christian Devil. Like the devil straight from the Bible, he twists his form into shapes bound to elicit human sympathy (103). He shape-shifts into a motherless child and a helpless old man, and, in these unassuming forms (which Ti-Jean and his family almost always see through), he tempts his subjects into challenges that, two out of three times, prove fatal. He is the first of two tricksters in this story—he is the clever and evil trickster-villain, and he lures his victims into his carefully crafted traps.

Trickster-villains like this Devil are not limited to Afro-Caribbean literature or folklore—they are also common in African folklore. Though these characters are not explicitly considered villains, since Trickster works in both benign and malign ways to earn a profit for himself, they work against society in a manner that scholar Lee Haring describes as “anti-social” (qtd. in Taylor, 144). In this way, Devil is a selfish, anti-social stock character who is there to serve as a deliberate foil to the trickster-hero, Ti-Jean. Because he is strictly evil (which is immediately implied by the name Devil), he is a

breed not unlike the troll under the bridge who devises impossible riddles and gobbles up passers-by, a character that is also common in West-African stories.

We discover who the other trickster-hero is early on in the play. Ti-Jean, the youngest brother out of three, shirks his duties as a productive member of the family. He is a rebel, and purposely completes none of his chores. According to his brothers, he sits “like a prince,” “useless as a bone” (92). He is Quashee even among his family: he puts on a pretense of laziness to set the bar low for their standards concerning his work. Since he has successfully evaded his duties, it implicitly seems like he has already tricked his two brothers into doing his chores for him. Though his family is tired of his laziness, his trick proves successful.

Ti-Jean’s name is also indicative of the classic Trickster role. It is a cross between Franco-Caribbean Ti-Malice and the Anglo-Caribbean John, both trickster figures. If Ti-Jean’s chore-evasion has not already convinced the audience that Ti-Jean is a trickster, his name will. Most importantly, Ti-Jean’s name will be significant to the play’s Afro-Caribbean audience, who understand who Ti-Malice and John are, and who have preconceived expectations of these characters in story. This is a play that speaks directly to Afro-Caribbean cultural knowledge, and thus to Afro-Caribbeans. Even Taylor argues that the titular character is a “classical Afro-Caribbean trickster” (215). We can assume, then, that this folktale-like story will contain a message for the Afro-Caribbean audience—just as African and Afro-Caribbean folktales each contain a distinct message for their audiences.

Later on in the play, Ti-Jean appears to become less of a passive Quashee-type trickster and more of an active, clever trickster-hero. Even though he is the youngest

child and the “David” to his adversary’s “Goliath,” he outsmarts the devil, and succeeds where his older brothers failed (136). He wins the devil’s challenge—to allow the devil to feel human emotions like frustration and anger—not through using book-knowledge or brute strength, but through intelligence and cunning.

Because Ti-Jean wins the challenge and commands the devil to revive the brothers that the villain had eaten, Ti-Jean is a classic hero. However, the method through which he won the challenge allows us to call him a trickster-hero. First, Ti-Jean willingly reconciles the worlds of fantasy and reality, which intertwine for him as soon as the devil-infant Bolom somersaults into his house. Per his mother’s interdiction, he uses “plain sense as his sword” (134). At the same time, he understands the role of the anthropomorphic animals that he comes upon when he journeys through the forest to find the devil. The animals demand that Ti-Jean compliment them, which he respects; this grants him their advice, to look out for an “old man whose name is worldly wisdom” (136).

Because he respects the animals’ interdiction, Ti-Jean can confidently trust his suspicion that the Old Man he finds in the forest is an incarnation of the devil. Through his trickery and cleverness, Ti-Jean catches a glimpse of the Old Man’s devil-leg, and forces the devil to reveal himself. He tricks the devil again by keeping his composure during the second challenge, which his brothers had both failed. When the devil becomes infuriated before Ti-Jean does, and Ti-Jean’s trickery proves more effective than the devil’s, Ti-Jean wins a victory not only for himself and his family, but for his people.

According to Patrick Taylor, in Afro-Caribbean folklore that deals with the colonial status binary, “cunning and deceit is justified in relationships with the master, for

the benefit of the oppressed community as a whole” (142). In the play, the devil, in his principal incarnation, is a white-skinned sugar plantation owner with black workers in his fields. Ti-Jean and his family can be inferred by their usage of English Creole and French Creole to be Caribbeans of African descent. As Ti-Jean endeavors to overcome the white devil, he takes control of the “poor damned souls working for the devil,” convincing them that he himself is the new foreman, and that the devil said they must burn all the crops (in a plot that mirrors the events of “Tiger Slights the Tortoise” in Abraham’s *African Folktales*, p142).

Thus, in Walcott’s tale, the cunning black child overcomes the cunning white plantation owner, in a rebellion that is just barely metaphorical. Here, the dramatist suggests a black rebellion against whites using a story form that is traditionally African (or Afro-Caribbean), the trickster-tale. In this story, the black trickster-hero overcomes the white trickster-villain, and the only white character returns to hell, from where he originated. This ending is not only humorous in its implications, but also quite serious. Afro-Caribbean audience members are encouraged not only to cast out the devil, but also to cast out the whiteness. Whiteness is literally demonized in the role of both Christian Devil and African trickster-hellion.

The hero is black, and a profane trickster—profane tricksters deal with the earthly domain, the realistic. Ti-Jean resides simultaneously in the real world, where he lives in poverty with a single mother and finds his family under the threat of a white plantation owner, and in a folkloric-style fantasy world, with talking animals offering him wisdom and a shape-shifting devil challenging him to a battle of trickery. However, his struggles occur on earth, and he is human. Audience members can more easily relate to him than

to a divine trickster or a Herculean hero whose sheer ability to succeed is a fantasy unto itself. As Taylor argues, Walcott has even “remolded” the trickster in Ti-Jean, and he claims that the trickster’s “processes of community building and of arbitrary individualism is not an issue...Ti-Jean acts in the interest of the *community* to overthrow the white planter” (216, emphasis mine).

Ti-Jean serves not as an inspiration to Afro-Caribbean watchers and readers, but rather as a what-could-be. He is, according to anthropomorphic Frog in the line that concludes the play, a “fool like all heroes”—that is, a fool like all real-world heroes, and an Afro-Caribbean trickster-hero (166). As far as a hero in the real world might go, Ti-Jean is not just a reachable objective, but an objective that should be reached. This play, through its African style and its casting out of white devils, encourages its audience to reach that standard of cultural heroism themselves—to become a hero and find the Afro-Caribbean black identity. This identity battle should not only occur on a personal level, but on a group level, Walcott seems to shout through a loudspeaker to his audience. Audience members should become Ti-Jean themselves, and succeed where their black brothers have failed. Only then can the Afro-Caribbean family be reunited, with its past and present members. Like Ti-Jean’s brothers, dead ancestors will live again, through the success of a thriving African-inspired culture in Afro-Caribbean states.

Perhaps one of the more well-known and well-analyzed trickster heroes in Afro-Caribbean literature is Makak in Walcott’s *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. Unlike in other stories, Makak is more hero than trickster in this dramatized, surrealistic folktale. Although he acts illogically when he is awake in his cell, claiming to be an African king, and although he lives alone on a mountain, normally separated from the society domin-



ered by colonizers, he morphs to become predominantly a healer of both himself and his people. He makes a transformation from a trickster who delusionally claims to be a hero into an actual hero. At the same time, he works so closely with Moustique, the embodiment of pure trickster energy, that they are mirrors of one another. Moustique is Makak's trickster energy, separating from Makak and eventually dying in the world of myth. Functioning synchronously in the mythical dream world, Makak and Moustique are facets of the same human being in the world of the living, but one does not survive Makak's rite of passage from trickster to Messianic hero.

In *Monkey Mountain's* dream world, another trickster figure from both African and Afro-Caribbean folklore makes his appearance—Baron Samedi/Legba finds himself in the role of the undertaker, Basil. Legba, a popular West African trickster god, rules over sex and death; he is a “great magician and healer; a symbol of fertility and rebirth” (Taylor 217). So, though he is traditionally a murderer of humans and a sex criminal, Legba as Basil is also a catalyst for the rebirth of Makak's identity as African king and healer of the Afro-Caribbean people. The Afro-Caribbean voodoo *loa* or god, Baron Samedi, is the complement to the West-African Legba, and he finds his Caribbean characteristics intertwined with Legba's in Basil. According to Taylor, Baron Samedi oversees death, symbolic of the past, and rebirth, symbolic of the future. Thus, when Basil undertakes the death of Makak's trickster self in the form of Moustique, he also superintends Makak's rebirth as the African savior and king. In the presence of an African and Afro-Caribbean trickster figure, Makak becomes a Messiah for the new, independent black Caribbean. Here, the trickster god Basil is a symbol for the African-

inspired culture that must go hand in hand with the revelation of the substantially African Afro-Caribbean identity.

There is another folkloric characteristic of this dramatic work that should not go ignored, and it does relate to Makak and Moustique being tricksters. The fact that the characters all identify themselves with animal names not only dehumanizes them, as scholars in the past have argued, but it also transforms them into traditional characters of African folklore. It is not coincidental that Tigre, Makak (spelt in the African way), Souris (Mouse) and Moustique (Mosquito) all appear in the same play. In fact, Monkey and Tiger often work against each other in Afro-Caribbean stories, and Mouse and Mosquito often make their way into African tales. Mosquito, like Moustique, is often a trickster, as is Monkey. However, Monkey, who, in Afro-Caribbean folklore, symbolizes the slave, often overcomes Tiger, the master figure. So, Monkey is a known trickster-hero, and he takes on this role again in a human form in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*.



The cultural hero (or, in this case, cultural heroine) appears frequently in up-and-coming Jamaican writer Lorna Goodison's 2012 short story collection, *By Love Possessed*. In these stories, heroines overcome obstacles like the neocolonial cultural presence, Anglophilic members of the Afro-Jamaican upper classes, male objectification, and traditional gender roles. The methods through which Goodison's female characters almost effortlessly sail over these hurdles frequently involve a deliberate cleverness and trickery.

In most cases, Goodison's heroines' trickery is a knee-jerk response to other characters' sexism and otherwise objectifying remarks or actions. This particular trickery

is a result of years of knowing that others consider Afro-Caribbean women lesser-than, and it is part of these women. It is a product of a well-developed cynicism—the Afro-Caribbean woman’s new form of worldly-wise trickery—that is ingrained in their very beings. It is not that these heroines are simply going through a trickster-like phase because they are undergoing a traditionally African or Afro-Caribbean hero’s rite of passage, as Scheub might argue. Furthermore, these new Afro-Caribbean heroines are not simply heroines as such. They are, like their nationalities and their cultural upbringing, hybrid entities. These female characters are trickster-heroines, a hybrid response to a hybrid culture and nation.

In the opening scene of the first story of the collection, “Helpweight,” the unnamed female main character appears to be the anti-trickster when she remains stoic in response to her once-lover’s humorously blatant Anglophilia (Goodison 1-2). Since both characters are complete foils to one another—one a firebrand Afrocentrist, the other a loyal Anglophile—they are both deviants in the extreme from the societal norm, and therefore tricksters. Though they may be believable and three-dimensional characters, and once lovers planning to marry, they are also reflections of a stock character in African and Afro-Caribbean folklore. While Nathan, a flamboyant buffoon and a source of comedy, is a more literal manifestation of the traditional Afro-trickster character, the heroine of the story strays from that definition. She is not blatantly comical or foolish, but rather cunning in an intelligent manner.

A woman scorned, the heroine is at first tempted to play a trick on Nathan by spending a substantial amount of money on an ugly floral kaftan for his white Irish bride, Deidra, when Nathan orders the heroine to take Deidra shopping for a nice dress. This

trick is not performed, perhaps because it could be interpreted as a trick on a fellow woman who is also being cheated by trickster-antagonist Nathan.

Throughout the story, the heroine proves intellectual, cultural, and verbal dominance over Nathan through her extensive knowledge of Afro-Jamaican high art, her refusal to become Nathan's "Jamaican concubine," and her constant biting sarcasm, which is at times comedic in its own right (Goodison 16). This is her sophisticated neo-trickster's craftiness. It is what completes half of her trickster-heroine character.

The nameless trickster-heroine proves her heroism every time she turns down Nathan, because Nathan is a walking manifestation of neocolonialism. He adores the colonizer so much that he actually marries one. Nathan's failure as an Anglophile allows the heroine's victory to stand out even more ostentatiously. He moves to London, but faces racism; he changes his accent to fit the norm there, but it still sounds like simply a "modified" Jamaican accent (16); he marries a white woman living in London, but we are not even sure if she moved there either from British Northern Ireland or from the seceded Republic, so she is not quite English, not quite the colonizer herself.

On the other hand, Goodison deliberately assigns the main character to be a staunch Afrocentrist, and she has experienced victory through convincing the Royal Bank to fund public access to Afro-Jamaican fine art (though the bank is technically Canadian, which is never mentioned, the heroine still conquers something that once belonged to the colonizers), through earning her success as a marketing manager, and through dating an assumedly black Jamaican doctor. She has facilitated all of this success herself, and no longer harbors any attachment to the man who has, as far as she is concerned, made a clean exit from her life. Strong and independent, she is a heroine for both Jamaican

women and for Jamaican culture; as a character she sets the bar for Afro-Jamaican reality.

There are other short stories in *By Love Possessed* that convey a pattern similar to “Helpweight.” In “House Colour,” a gorgeous and intelligent young artist, unnamed yet again, finds herself pursued by a handsome, rich, and light-skinned man who claims that he “always gets what he wants” (Goodison 97). He is, like Devil in *Ti-Jean*, playing the role of master—he is richer, more powerful, and lighter-skinned than she, and he considers himself to have an advantage over his prey. He has claimed her as his property, and one can infer that the male character expects the female character to swoon in awe and to fall at his feet in submission. However, we learn, he is in for a comically unpleasant surprise.

Though the heroine of this story never intentionally puts on a ruse to dupe the handsome man, she does consent to going on a date with the man despite her negative feelings toward him. Her motivations for doing so are left unmentioned. While on the date, the heroine acts in ways that flagrantly do not suit the role of submissive girlfriend or future trophy wife. For example, as the pair drive up a mountain road together, she climbs out of the passenger-side window and onto the roof of the car, where she sits for a while as if nothing is socially wrong with what she is doing. Unimpressed with how the man treats his dark-skinned employees, she again “slips out of herself” and wanders around the garden where the man’s laborers have been planting money trees—another powerful symbol of the handsome man’s power (Goodison 94). When the handsome man professes his love to the artist, she responds in a reverie with a comment on how beautiful the azaleas in his backyard are. At the story’s end, the handsome man expresses

how fed up he is and how he is going to leave, the woman remains unfazed and unabashedly stands up for herself after he insults her modest living situation.

The heroine's trickery does not lie in her relentless daydreaming or her ridiculous antics—rather, it lies in her bravery to retain her identity in the handsome man's intimidating presence. Her anti-social nature and her extreme eccentricity suggest that she is a trickster, while her bravery to stand by her actions and nature suggest that she is a hero both for herself and for those experiencing similar problems. The heroine stands as an exemplar for any woman who may feel eclipsed in the presence of those considered to be more privileged.

Though her trickery is unintentional, the trickster-heroine's quirky antics and her ability to effortlessly frustrate and overpower authority make us smile. She is her own woman, a charming character apt to win readers' sympathy and affection. We all have problems finding pride in our true selves, and she is an emblem of the fact that others' judgments are irrelevant in black Caribbean society. She is a trickster-hero for Afro-Jamaican women who face pressure to fill gender roles and to bow down to power dictated by gender, status, or "house color" (Goodison 98). This woman proudly waves her freak flag; she is a paradigm of those who show pride in who they are, though it may be unpopular to do so. She speaks to Jamaican women who still feel the suffocating presence of racism, cultural neocolonialism, poverty, and sexism, and is a symbol of reassurance and encouragement to suggest that affirmation of identity is conducive to independence.

Taylor has noted that the trickster tale is still relevant in neocolonial Caribbean society because, "to the extent that a black bourgeoisie has replaced the white master and

satisfied itself with an intermediary role, [the bourgeoisie] both faces the trickster's attack and itself plays the role of trickster" (149). Taylor's observation relates directly to the suitor in Goodison's "House Color," an upper-middle-class man who prides himself on being able to acquire whatever he wants, even if the "whatever" includes a human being—that is, a woman who he considers to be socially and financially below him, and thus more easily obtained (Goodison 97).

In yet another story in Goodison's collection, "God's Help," a woman fights tyranny over her sex and concomitant social status. This time, the oppression does not stem from the bourgeoisie or from the expectation to idolize men or the ex-colonizer. However, the subjugation this heroine experiences does again originate from a man in power—this time, the leader of a Christian parish.

This story's speaker refers to the fact that the trickster-heroine, Sylvie, has "smooth sambo coloring" (Goodison 79). While in the archaic sense, "sambo" signified when a person bore a slightly darker skin tone than someone who was specifically half white and half black, the modern sense of the word carries a connotation of intentional offensiveness. Because the adjective in this instance is actually intended to describe a beautiful woman in a positive and definitively unbigoted light, we may be able to form the assumption that this word could mean something greater than mixed-race. After all, it does stand out among the many less abrasive descriptors in this passage.

During and immediately after slavery in the Western Hemisphere, Sambo in the African-American experience was equivalent to Quashee in the Caribbean experience. To black Caribbeans, Quashee was a trickster character who, though he appeared lazy and did not complete the work his master thrust upon him, was exceptionally clever and

used this false laziness as a means to rebel (Taylor 133). Through his antics, Quashee proved to be a hero for his people, as story listeners adopted his trickery in real life, conforming to the already largely predisposed stereotype that black people were somehow idiotic or animalistic due to their genetic makeup. As Jamaican-born American sociologist Orlando Patterson noted, the slave “played upon the master’s stereotype for his own ends” (Comitas and Lowenthal, 43). While slavery still existed in the Caribbean, anyone who embodied the Quashee stereotype was a real-life trickster hero, for herself and for her people. Everyone who acted like Quashee was an undercover guerilla in a communal rebellion against masters and anyone else who supported slavery.

This Sambo/Quashee character actually relates directly to Sylvie, whom “many people” claimed had “no ambition” (Goodison 78). She never attends church; she does not work. In fact, the one time she agrees to attend a service near her new home in Kingston, she attends to pick up a bag of food that other parishioners donated for the poor. When the pastor deliberately calls out Sylvie and other women who “have children without a plan [because] they just think of their own pleasure,” Sylvie immediately intensifies her rebellious nature and her pride (Goodison 87). After the pastor delivers a sermon titled “God helps those who help themselves,” the trickster in Sylvie performs just the opposite (87). Instead of helping herself, Sylvie remembers to “follow her mind,” to be a heroine for herself, and to defend her actions and her beliefs (88). She refuses the food box that the pastor hands to her, and when he proclaims at the top of his voice, “God helps those who help themselves!” she responds just as loudly, “I don’t want it,” and walks out of the building (88). In this one smooth action, she has combated a male oppressor, the role of the neocolonial church, and the expected role of the dutiful



woman and mother. She has realized her identity for herself, and is a symbol of strength for other Afro-Caribbean women who read her story. Within the story world, she is a revolutionary and a trickster-heroine for all black Caribbean women. She is a sambo in perhaps the least filthy sense of the word—she embodies the Sambo/Quashee stereotype, and uses it to her advantage as a self-respecting woman who resents the neocolonial repression ubiquitous in Jamaican society.

In conclusion, each of these stories challenges the traditional notion of both trickster and hero. In each story, the oppressed character overcomes some hurdle in his life, and this leads to a revelation of identity. While each trickster-hero may not go through a rite of passage, they each change in one way or another. They each make a realization that one must remain loyal to his personal beliefs, and usually these beliefs deal with a refusal to submit to those in power. When the literary Afro-Caribbean trickster heroine overcomes his adversary, whether he is an actual person or what that person stands for, she becomes a heroine not only for herself but for people like her. Though she may have succeeded to her own benefit within the world of story, she has succeeded symbolically in the real world.

Like African and Afro-Caribbean folktales, these works of literature do not necessarily contain a moral, but they are didactic in an implicit sense. Inspired by the folkloric characters that preceded them, all of the characters that succeed in these contemporary plays and short stories set an example of what is right or what should be done; those who fail represent what is wrong with society. This is why the master-character almost always perishes or loses what he desires, and the heroine is allowed to proudly carry on as who she is, or she otherwise earns what she desires.



Scholars Paul Taylor and Harold Scheub, among other academics and anthropologists, argue that the trickster and the hero are characters that are not reconcilable with one another. However, Scheub also argues that elements of the trickster are present in the hero as the hero undergoes a rite of passage. As he states in *Trickster and Hero*, there is a “hero in the trickster as there is trickster in the hero,” and that both hero and trickster make up the “design of a society, the design of a human being” (33). For years, Scheub lectured in depth about the presence of Trickster inside the hero during his rite of passage; having sat in his classroom, it seemed to me that the trickster in the hero could never transcend this state. Even some of the most popular and respected Afro-Caribbean literature today proves this to be different. Writers know the trickster character and the hero character so well that they have produced something new and sophisticated; they have indelibly mashed these characters together. The trickster-hero provides a means for these writers to inform Afro-Caribbean readers that the new character’s energy is what is needed to revolutionize and thus reinvent Afro-Caribbean culture and society.

### *Conclusion*

As the Afro-Caribbean trickster hero Quashee has shown us, words are a powerful means of rebellion. Whether these words are spoken or written does not matter; both can lead to a successful reaction in the world outside of stories. In the works of the writers studied, trickster-heroes make their presence known, with hints of Quashee and traces of revolutionaries like Sam Sharp twisted together into one being. Rites of passage completed by average men and women suggest that readers do the same: that they step across a threshold to a new and more African identity. Like Edward Brathwaite regaled us in his folktale-ridden poetry, Afro-Caribbean readers have not only to make a rite of passage—they own Rights of Passage (*Arrivants* sect. title). Legally free from the clutches of the European empire, Afro-Caribbeans now have the right to show pride in their shared identity.

As Danticat expressed to us in *Krik? Krak!*, this rite of passage from European colonial servant to free Afro-Caribbean citizen is not restricted by sex, class, or age. Her stories sing the song of not one black Haitian person, but of her family's people. Though not all of her characters live through their rites of passage, the rite of passage is still completed by the living relatives left behind. These descendants who carry the dead hero's flag symbolize the new Haitian generation, who bear the task of forming a Haiti that is free of the vestiges of colonialism. Through the death of their predecessors, young girls become women; young boys become men. Death has facilitated their rites of passage as individuals—symbolically, the death of the old Haiti has in turn allowed the

birth of a stronger one. It is a renaissance that holds promise for the Haitian people and their culture.

Similarly, Lorna Goodison has proved that the trickster-hero defies gender boundaries and even transcends gender roles. Her trickster-heroines, though anti-social in the style of Trickster, hold their head high in pride. They are independent women who know who they are: they are black citizens who reject the English presence in Jamaica. The trickster-heroines also stand up to overbearing men, the condescending black bourgeois in Jamaica, and the colonial-instituted Christian religion. They are African in the fact that they are trickster-heroes, and they are unafraid to fully take pride in their blackness; in their African history. In and of themselves, they are the symbol of resistance against white culture: they are African-style tricksters, and they are African-style heroes. However, they are not quite African either; they are something more. They are evolved—a new character form inspired by a rich cultural past. This character, trickster-heroine, has vaulted from the realm of spoken word to the written page with mischievous glee, and she finds herself refined in the body of the female Jamaican character.

Another writer whose characters laugh in the face of the colonial God is Derek Walcott. Walcott creates a sense of gnarled, dark surrealism and literary intricacy in his trickster-heroes Ti-Jean, Makak, and Afa. Ti-Jean, whose name is an amalgamation of Afro-Caribbean trickster-monikers, defeats the white devil, and transforms into a sort of African warrior god—a symbolic victor over both evil and white men. Like the Christian God, Ti-Jean has damned the devil back to Hell and is thus a savior for his people. Makak also becomes a Jesus-like savior and miracle-worker in the dream world, which encourages him to rebel against the white tyranny on Walcott's unnamed Caribbean

island. In turn, Makak's rebellion in the realm of drama and story should symbolize the need for the audience to move the rebellion from the world of story to the real world.

Frantz Fanon once distinguished the culture of the colonized as having formed simply due to the presence of the culture of the colonizer (Taylor 96). In the age after colonialism, this could prove to be a dated falsity. Today, these Afro-Caribbean writers argue, the divergent culture should and will become the common culture. Afro-Caribbean culture should and will not remain dormant under the neocolonial presence of Europeanized mainstream culture in the Caribbean. Instead, like in these writers' works, a sense of African heritage—of *negritude*—will pervade both culture and identity. This will occur with a revolution not against the former colonizer, but against one's internal self and sense of identity. As these writers' characters exemplify, one cannot identify as being Afro-Caribbean without fighting to do so first. One must overcome very obvious boundaries that colonizers set in place and that neocolonialism now perpetuates. The traditionally European ideas of Christianity, race, classicism or the bourgeoisie, and the pan-global idea of patriarchy are all obstacles that obstruct eventual victory over one's identity.

Fanon agrees that a sense of Afro-Caribbean identity in literature should emerge not from a literature that tries to imitate the style of the colonizer, but rather a "fighting," "revolutionary," and "national" literature (Taylor 186). The writers studied in this thesis have something that unites them which transcends even the national level. It is a common sense of *African identity*—of otherness—that no longer alienates Afro-Caribbeans or creates slaves out of them, but sets all of them apart from their colonizers in a positive way, a proud way. Through a mutual usage not of European traditional story tropes but

African folkloric characters and themes, these writers enter a common discourse that springs from the Afrocentric philosophy that preceded their careers.

Unfortunately, while this discourse has been acknowledged academically, it remains underanalyzed. While I tried to take a broad cross-section of Afro-Caribbean literature, I was only able to access what literature was available to me in the United States and on the Internet. Thus, I still do not know whether or not *most* Afro-Caribbean writers purposely draw upon African folkloric tropes in their work, or even if it could be interpreted to be so. I remain aware only from the writings of scholars that most Afro-Caribbean literature deliberately diverges from European literary tradition, though many of them do not offer proof through close reading of how those works diverge. My work is also limited by the fact that I chose to analyze only works written in English. There is an abundance of material that I did not analyze in English, Spanish, and even Portuguese; if one were to include Brazil in the Afro-Caribbean literary discourse.

These limitations exist to prove that there is so much more research that must be completed on this topic. Postcolonial Caribbean literature has only existed since Haiti's independence in 1804, but it has become exponentially more abundant since the independence of almost all of the other Caribbean islands. There is so much more literature to be analyzed and so much more work that deserves to be discovered from the Afro-Caribbean literary tradition. Like the African storytelling tradition that precipitated the writings of the authors analyzed in these chapters, the postcolonial Afro-Caribbean literary discourse is rich and thriving, and it is not going to die out anytime soon.

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